

Printed on page A1

# City goes paperless with new process

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WINTER HAVEN - The development permitting and review process is becoming easier and more cost effective for both the developers and engineers who submit plans and the city staff members who review and approve them.

As of Monday, city staff members and customers will use a Web-based browser to access a centralized, online site through which development plans and building permits will be submitted, reviewed and approved.

"The new system and process will completely change the way customers - whether they're a developer, or a customer looking for a building permit - do business with the city," said Joy Townsend, the city's spokeswoman.

The system, ProjectDox, will automatically alert applicants by e-mail when their site development plans and building permits have completed a stage in the process and staff comments are available for viewing online.

It also allows city staff members to access comments made by other employees, compare original submittals with follow up submissions, plan approval and online access to approved plans.

"It's going to be wonderful," said Dave Dickey, the city's community development director. "If you can get things electronically instead of a roomful of stored paper plans, it's going to be more efficient. And it's going to be more efficient as far as staff time.

"All those hard copies have been eliminated. We are able to review electronically and any changes are made electronically," he added.

Dan Lewis of the Lakeland-based Ridge Professional Group, a firm specializing in civil engineering and land planning, attended a 2 1/2-hour training session for ProjectDox recently offered by the city. The new system, he said, is user friendly.

"It seemed to be very clear cut and you can track where the plans are with different reviewers," Lewis said.

Lewis said he believes the system will save the company time and its clients money.

"We won't have to submit umpteen sets of plans, we can do that digitally. It will save our clients money," Lewis said, adding that the average printing costs involved in a typical subdivision review run about \$1,000. This is because new sets of plans must be submitted during each of the three stages of the process. Now, plans can be revised and resubmitted electronically, alleviating the need to make expensive copies.

For the engineers and planners, it eliminates repetitive calls to the city to check on the status of a review.

"You can see who has reviewed the plans," Lewis said. "That will save us time. It gives everybody from the project manager to the developer a more accurate picture of what is happening."

Dickey said ProjectDox cost the city about \$150,000 for software, servers and new computer monitors. He said currently customers are not being charged extra because of the switch, although city staff members are looking at a nominal fee - \$2 to \$3 - to offset the expense.

Dickey said there will be a learning curve for those using the system - city staff members and customers - but this is a good time to implement it.

"With the slowdown in the development industry, it's been the perfect time to implement this program," he said. "Over time the ProjectDox will allow the city to expedite its development review process."

As of Monday, all plans must be submitted to the city electronically through ProjectDox. However, for those lacking Internet access, digitalized records and a computer will be available for public use in the Community Development office at City Hall and the Building Division office at the City Hall East Annex, both located on Third Street, N.W.

Other governments currently using ProjectDox or are in the process of implementing the program include the cities of Tallahassee, Palm Coast, Cape Coral, Gainesville, Sanford and West Palm Beach, and the counties of Leon, Miami-Dade, Martin, Lee, Osceola and Polk.

For details, call the City of Winter Haven Planning Division at 863-291-5600.

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This story appeared in print on page A1

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