

VALDOSTA-LOWNDES COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS POSITION STATEMENT

Position Issue: Pro-Business Priorities

Summary: The following pro-business priority issue areas were identified by the Chamber's SORT Committee during meetings held with 25 business leaders, including business owners, general contractors, developers, Realtors and builders in August and September 2010.

Priority Issue Areas:

Issue #1: Plan Review Process

- 1) Complicated and burdensome process to acquire approval to start projects
- 2) Approved plans are not honored as final
- 3) Intimidating and unhelpful "First Step" and "Pre-App" processes

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Develop defined timelines:
 - a) Initial plan review comments within five days of submittal
 - b) Final building permit within 10 days of submittal
 - c) Utilize existing technology to expedite inter-departmental communication
 - d) Empower document gatekeeper that is accountable for enforcing deadlines and all communication
- 2) Re-structure "First Step" and "Pre-App" processes:
 - a) Appoint advocate or goodwill ambassador for potential business owners to welcome and help them through the process
 - b) Refer potential business owners to the Chamber SEEDS Business Resource Center before attending "First Step" or "Pre-App" meetings
 - c) Provide potential business owners with a checklist by which they may pursue proper permitting
- 3) Hold departments and employees accountable for decisions associated with plan review and final approved construction documents

Issue #2: Customer Service

- 1) Consistent "pro-business" attitude is needed in all situations

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Initiate a top-down culture change that champions the business owner, encourages business development and focuses on the perspective that time lost is money lost
 - a) Encourage employees to explore ways to accommodate business owners to help them open on time and complete review process within the defined schedule
 - b) Create a regular, mandatory customer service training schedule that encourages employees to always seek to help potential and existing business owners with a "can-do" attitude

- c) Appoint a goodwill ambassador or pro-business advocate to help minimize red tape, hold-ups, road blocks and time required for project completion
- d) Survey all customers to acquire feedback on how their needs can be met

Issue #3: Inconsistent Information and Enforcement of Codes, Rules and Ordinances

- 1) Conflicting information from different employees within same department
- 2) Lack of communication or miscommunication among departments, inspectors and other employees
- 3) Complicated and burdensome regulations and processes

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Appoint easily-accessible individual in charge of consistently interpreting, enforcing and communicating rules, requirements and codes across all departments
- 2) Commit that departments and employees will respond efficiently to inquiries/requests within 24 hours (or next business day)
- 3) Honor documents that have been previously approved (unless major safety issues or changes arise) and empower employees to stand behind the approval decision
- 4) Allow inspectors to grant leeway or grace periods when encountering minor inspection issues (instead of automatically shutting project down)
- 5) Develop a condensed guide/brochure with simplified policies and information for contractors, business owners and homeowners
- 6) Educate employees on ordinances, rules and codes which may generate frequent questions, and develop a consistent policy for communicating those to the public

Issue #4: Ineffective, untimely or no recourse for business owners who encounter obstacles

- 1) Lack of accountability for departments and employees who make decisions that cost business owners unnecessary time or money
- 2) Lack of timely method for appealing discrepancies or mid-stream changes made by departments or employees after final plan approval
- 3) Fear of retribution for business owners who question process, procedures or decisions

Potential Solutions:

- 1) Develop policy that holds departments and employees accountable for decisions made and allows them to make changes when conflicts occur
- 2) Create an independent rapid response team that works with local governments, business owners and developers to respond to obstacles in the business development process (SORT)

Committee Action:

Adopted by SORT* on September 21, 2010

Sue Cox, Chairman

Richard Hill

Allan Dear

Al Turner

Bill Slaughter

Chuck Smith

*Dean Blevins is also a SORT Committee member but was unable to attend this meeting.

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee met with Sue Cox, Chairman of SORT for a thorough update on September 10. In an e-mail vote on September 22, 2010, the Executive Committee voted to refer this important business development issue to the full Board of Directors for consideration at a special called Board meeting.

Board of Directors Action:

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors unanimously voted to adopt the Pro-Business Priorities Position Statement at a special called Board meeting at the Chamber of Commerce. There were 15 Board Members present.

Date of Action:

September 28, 2010



Myrna H. Ballard, President

September 28, 2010