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Leggett Announces Cross-Agency Effort to Streamline Building and Land Development Process

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett today announced a major cross-agency effort to further streamline County government operations. This latest initiative will make meaningful changes to the development application process by streamlining reviews and inspections. As an initial streamlining step, the County is consolidating construction inspections currently being done by the Department of Permitting Services (DPS) and Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Services (MCFRS). The Montgomery County Planning Board (MCPB) is kicking off this effort with a change to the way in which it reviews DPS issued building permits. All three agencies, along with others, have committed to collaborate to make their customer service more business-friendly, and make it easier to navigate the development process and obtain building permits.

“Currently, it takes from one to three years to get through development review and zoning approvals, and obtain building permits. This lengthy time frame ultimately impacts the costs of housing and commercial space and affects residential and commercial end users,” said Leggett. “Our objective is to eliminate redundant and inconsistent reviews and to shorten the time it takes to navigate the process without compromising quality. Making government operations more efficient and cost-effective has been a goal of my administration and I am committed to looking at other areas of government that can be streamlined, resulting in cost savings to our customers, to the government agencies and ultimately to our taxpayers.”

“This reorganization has already paid dividends in expedited reviews and certainty for builders and the community,” said Montgomery County Planning Board Chair Francoise Carrier. “With the economic challenges we face it is an especially good time to review our processes to make it simpler for applicants while keeping our high level of public engagement. We look forward to working with other agencies and the public as we move forward.”

“I am grateful to the County Executive for spearheading this effort to streamline our regulatory process and for inviting me to join him here today,” said Council President Roger Berliner. “It is essential that we find ways to become more nimble as a government so that doing business in our county— whether you are an individual homeowner, a small business entrepreneur, or a large scale developer – is less cumbersome. Making progress in this area is essential to maintaining our competitiveness in the region and more generally, to making local government work for the residents we serve. I look forward to seeing the results of these efforts as improving the regulatory process in our County is high priority for me and many of my colleagues on the County Council.”

“This initiative is an excellent example of the County responding nimbly and creatively to community concerns,” said County Councilmember Nancy Floreen, who chairs the Council’s Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee.

The streamlining initiative kicks off with:

- Collaboration between the departments of Permitting Services and Fire/Rescue Services to transfer the inspection of fire protection systems in connection with new building and renovation construction to DPS. Previously, both MCFRS and DPS inspected new construction and customers had to schedule and await separate inspections and pay for multiple inspections. This new approach will result in construction project time and cost savings through a more complete “one-stop shop” approach. Inspections will be performed by DPS inspectors trained in the National Fire Protection Codes and Standards. This change will take effect February 1, 2012.

- Modification of the process for the MCPB’s review of building permit applications. Building permits are issued by DPS, but Planning Board staff also reviews these applications and performs field inspections related to approved forest conservation plans. Inspections associated with an approved forest conservation plan will still be required, but they will no longer be required prior to issuance of a building permit. Implementation of the approved plan will be addressed in the field in the ordinary course of inspections – just as adherence to other approved plans is addressed in the field. This will help to streamline the permit issuance process without compromising the requirement that developers adhere to approved forest conservation plans. This change is effective immediately.

- Schedule a series of public forums on the topic of streamlining development, hosted by representatives of all agencies involved in this initiative. The public and users of the services of agencies involved with real estate development will be invited to identify points where plans and permit reviews and inspections can be consolidated; redundant reviews minimized; and inconsistencies eliminated. The first forum has been scheduled for February 14, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Another has been scheduled for March 9, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Both forums will be held in the Executive Office Building, Lobby Level Auditorium, 101 Monroe St., Rockville. A cross-agency panel will receive comments, observations and recommendations about experiences with development approvals in getting a project from idea to occupancy. In addition, a dedicated website is being created to receive comments and information on streamlining the development approval process.

For more information about this initiative, or about building permits, call 311.

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