



New City Process Keeps Tallahassee Building

Home is more than where the heart is these days. It is the center of our worlds due to COVID-19. Local homes must be structurally and mechanically sound to help keep residents safe. This is partially ensured by inspectors with the City of Tallahassee's Growth Management department, who are taking a solution oriented approach to overcome challenges related to COVID-19. With a commitment to protecting customers and employees, new, innovative processes have been established to ensure vital building inspections and permits continue.

"This is a time that is critical for our economy, and we must find ways to keep construction and development moving forward," said Karen Jumonville, Growth Management director for the City. "Our team developed a program that allows us to continue providing inspection services while also meeting the number one priority right now – protecting the health and safety of our staff and customers."

To minimize physical contact, the City has implemented virtual, online building inspections for mechanical change out inspections, gas inspections and window/door inspections in existing, occupied residential homes. Virtual inspections help protect human health through social distancing and ensure that customers receive efficient, effective service at a time that is critical to our economy and health.

For a virtual inspection, the contractor uses a smartphone or tablet to visually connect with a City inspector who directs the contractor on how to move around the site and showcase specific elements. Results are given immediately and entered into Growth Management's online system to help move the project forward.

Shifting to virtual inspections is a massive change for both the inspectors, who typically get hands-on with measurements and materials on site, and contractors. This new process relies on technology, video conferencing and collaboration between both parties. So far, the reception to the new process has been positive.

"I like the video conference option because it helps keep costs down, saving a lot of travel time for both the inspector and our plumbers. I'd like to see this process remain," said Jay Wolfe of Capital Plumbing. "Plumbers have to be in people's homes every day, despite what's going on, and we need to do our best to protect them, our customers and the inspectors. This offers a great benefit for that, too."

"This new inspection process has allowed our department to complete the required inspections while minimizing personal contact between contractors, the public and our inspectors," said Chris Pope, Deputy Building Official for the City. "The added convenience of being able to complete the inspections from any physical location has increased our efficiency in an effort to continue to provide great customer service during this time."

These inspections can total more than 60 each week. Keeping pace on the first day the new process was implemented (April 6), City inspectors had already conducted four virtual inspections well before lunch.



“Construction activity is continuing throughout our community, and we are actively inspecting these sites on a daily basis,” Jumonville said. “We are open for business and providing all of our plan review and inspection services to the public. Our team continues to find ways to be flexible in the way we deliver services during this unique time.”

Virtual building inspections are a helpful step toward protecting human health while also working to keep our economy moving. As the process is refined, it may be expanded to other service areas and, ultimately, become a permanent part of how the City operates. COVID-19 presents extraordinary challenges, but it also offers an opportunity for local government to innovate. The City of Tallahassee is focused on remaining a national leader in the delivery of public service during the COVID-19 crisis and well after. Learn more at Talgov.com.