

Memorandum



Date: April 20, 2012

To: Honorable Chairman Joe A. Martinez
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: Carlos A. Gimenez
Mayor 

Subject: Status Report: Resolutions on Starting a Business in Miami-Dade County

The Board has adopted several resolutions aimed at facilitating new businesses within Miami-Dade County:

- Resolution No. R-1201-10 directed the preparation of a report identifying federal, state and County requirements, permits, and fees necessary to begin operating a business in Miami-Dade County, including recommendations for elimination of redundant requirements and permits so as to help and not hinder business creation in general, and small business start-ups specifically.
- Resolution No. R-254-11 directed the preparation of a report outlining the requirements and costs involved in opening a new business in Miami-Dade County.
- Resolution No. R-368-11 directed the preparation of a report outlining the best methodology and implementation schedule to create a virtual or physical one-stop information center for opening a new business in Miami-Dade County.
- Resolution No. R-315-12 directed the development and implementation of a physical one-stop information and processing center for opening a new business in Miami-Dade County.

Starting business operations is expensive and challenging in many aspects – including obtaining numerous governmental approvals. Federal, state, county and city governments all have business start-up jurisdiction in Miami-Dade and all review different applications. In many jurisdictions, including our own, there is neither a process road map nor a governmental approval process advocate to facilitate the process. Compounding this situation is the lack of centralized communication with the businesses as they negotiate governmentally-required steps, essentially leaving start-ups on their own as they wade through various governmental applications, processes and fee payments. In essence, while the business is on a linear governmental approval path to start-up (however unclear that path may be), the approving governments, and offices within governments, are too often fragmented silos that, because of these above conditions, unintentionally further slow down start-up approval.

Reorganizational Effort

In an effort to begin to consolidate the fragmentation in Miami-Dade, on March 7, 2012, I appointed Deputy Mayor Jack Osterholt as the Director of two existing departments (Sustainability, Planning and Economic Enhancement (SPEE) and Permitting, Environment and Regulatory Affairs (PERA)). This dual appointment was a deliberate interim measure to provide business continuity until the Board considers their merger into a Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources later this year. As I explained at the time, the recommendation to house all of the County's regulatory and economic resources under unified leadership was the first of what I expect to be a series of initiatives that will streamline business processes in Miami-Dade County and ultimately facilitate economic development in this region. As detailed below, I have deliberately organized this effort administratively as a two-pronged approach within the structure of the new Regulatory and Economic Resource Department: the first will center around streamlining and expediting the regulatory functions of this government in the land development process; and the second will focus on the creation of a business affairs division tasked with pursuing and facilitating economic development initiatives.

Regulatory Resources –Land Development:

One-Stop Shop at the Permitting and Inspection Center

Economic growth in this community has historically centered on land development, and it has become apparent that, while this County has long attempted to create a “one-stop shop” for permitting functions, this has never truly become a reality. The Permitting and Inspection Center (PIC) in West Dade has made great strides in physically consolidating many of the entities involved in the permitting process, but this location has never truly housed them all, nor, more importantly, have these entities ever reported to a single Director who would be responsible and accountable for expeditious delivery of all of the service elements involved in permitting and land development. Hence, as part of the merger of the former SPEE and PERA Departments, sections for Environmental, Public Works, and Water and Sewer plan reviews will be realigned to report through the new department. As the Board is aware, time to construction is the number one complaint from our development community; while these plan review sections have always played a significant role in the County's permitting function, having them report directly to one supervisor at the PIC is key to improving our turn-around times for permitting. This move is the most effective control that this County has in assisting the development community perform its function. It is my hope that this consolidation will truly and finally make the PIC the “one-stop shop” that it was always intended to be.

Development Services

Hand in hand with the consolidation at the PIC is the creation of a Development Services division to expedite land development activities at the pre-construction phase. This group will contain our former Zoning and Community Design services but will also expand to include the functions for Platting and Concurrency currently housed in Public Works and Waste Management (PWWW). Like the plan reviewers at the PIC, platting and concurrency reviews are instrumental in the land development process. Consolidating the reporting relationships of these sections under a “Development Manager” will make the Development Services division the perfect counterpart to the PIC as the “one-stop shop” for all pre-construction land development activities. Like the PIC, this group will be directly accountable for improved turn-around times for zoning and concurrency reviews.

In my March 7, 2012 memorandum, I also advised the Board that members of the land development community were working with County staff through an informal Development Process Advisory Group to propose amendments to Chapter 33 for the Board's consideration that will compress outdated administrative and hearing requirements. On March 7, 2012, I also held a preliminary meeting with the County's municipal partners on permitting processes. The group preliminarily agreed to approaching streamlining with a view towards code fixes, delegations of authority to cities as appropriate (and vice-versa), and information technology solutions. Together with the administrative re-alignment of the reporting relationships, these changes will improve our development communities' time to construction, thus further optimizing the economic benefits to this County associated with land development activities.

Economic Resources –Business Affairs

But even as we seek to enhance land development processes, this industry's cyclical booms and busts remind us of the importance of diversifying our local economy. The creation of SPEE had already merged the County's small business, consumer services, and economic development and trade activities. Within the new department, these groups will continue to be housed under one Business Affairs division tasked with reviewing the obstacles to getting into business in Miami-Dade County –a long standing priority of the Board. The FY 2012-13 proposed budget will include recommendations for repurposing existing positions within the Business Affairs division so that the County's role can be optimized as a facilitator of business in this region.

In the meantime, the County has already taken significant steps to consolidate information to assist business start-up efforts online. The Department of Community Information and Outreach (CIAO)

launched the new "Business Express" portal (www.miamidade.gov/businessexpress) late last year. This site provides a virtual "one-stop" repository for businesses with centralized information and pertinent links to the County's business development partners, business incentive information, and even business opportunities with the County. Staff conducted research on these topics, reviewed other government websites that have a similar web presence and used information obtained from applicable departments in order to populate the web pages. Ultimately this site will serve as the complete virtual one-stop shop for start-ups and businesses looking to relocate to Miami-Dade.

The CIAO has continued its work on the site and is developing a pilot "wizard" tool geared towards new businesses who would like to open or relocate to Miami-Dade County. The tool will ask the user questions about their business and its proposed location and provide a checklist of registrations, permits, or certificates that need to be obtained and their estimated cost, or a list of agencies that may need to be contacted for approvals and other administrative actions. This was made possible by a grant from the Economic Development Administration for \$100,000. The pilot is approximately 30% complete and is planned for completion by end of June 2012. Staff will continue to seek funding opportunities that will allow for the expansion of the pilot wizard; in the interim, the top 7 types of businesses that are opened in Miami-Dade County will be available within the wizard.

The Business Affairs group has also already launched a series of free workshops to educate the public on the steps required to open a business. The first workshop was held on April 4, 2012 and offered 75 slots, all of which were completely booked. The workshop reviewed the basic steps required to open a small business in Miami-Dade County and included topics on local business tax receipts and federal and state tax requirements; obtaining a certificate of use; licensing, permitting and registration, including industry specific registration and licensing requirements; information on organizational structures available to business owners; and workers' compensation insurance requirements.

As a future initiative and in addition to educating the public, Business Affairs will launch an educational series for County employees involved with the business permitting and approval process. County employees will be required to attend a workshop to increase their awareness of the various processes, both within and outside of the County, with a view towards making them more efficient and helpful resources to the public as they perform their daily duties.

I anticipate more sophisticated initiatives to come out of the Business Affairs Division as it evolves, specifically aimed at improving linkages and consolidating the efforts of the multiple business development entities and stakeholders that already exist in this community.

We will continue to apprise the Board of our progress. Please do not hesitate to contact Deputy Mayor Jack Osterholt, or me directly, should you have any concerns.

c: Robert A. Cuevas, Jr., County Attorney
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Office of the Mayor Senior Staff
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