

# Memorandum



**Date:** April 29, 2025

Agenda Item No. 2(B)(2)  
May 20, 2025

**To:** Honorable Chairman Anthony Rodriguez  
and Members, Board of County Commissioners

**From:** Daniella Levine Cava *Daniella Levine Cava*  
Mayor

**Subject:** Report on the Recommendation Relating to Assistance, Information, and Orientation for Homesteaded Homeowners Who May Wish to Pursue a County Zoning Application - Directive No. 240632

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## **Executive Summary**

This report is in response to Resolution No. R-412-24, sponsored by Commissioner Danielle Cohen Higgins and adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, directing the County Mayor or County Mayor's designee to prepare a written report detailing the assessment and recommendations relating to assistance, information, or orientation for unrepresented homesteaded homeowners who may wish to pursue a Miami-Dade County zoning application. Such assessment and recommendations shall consider, at a minimum, the feasibility of: (1) providing orientation or informational sessions to homeowners who may wish to pursue a County zoning application; (2) facilitating a list of interested zoning lobbyists or lawyers who may wish to volunteer to assist homesteaded homeowners who may not be able to afford to hire such professionals; and (3) creating a program similar to the existing Homeowner and Small Business Permitting Assistance program to guide homesteaded homeowners through the zoning process. This report has been prepared by staff of the Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources (RER), Development Services Division (Development Services).

Although zoning staff currently provide information, guidance, pre-application consultations and public hearing assistance to all applicants, these resources could be more consistently coordinated to assist homeowners who often face unique challenges when attempting to understand and navigate local zoning laws. This report recommends optimizing assistance by enhancing existing resources and providing coordinated, targeted support. This includes restructuring information available through existing web portals to better serve the homeowner audience, in addition to creation of new outreach tools and materials and a zoning program similar to Homeowner and Small Business Permitting Assistance Program that already exists for the building permit process. As required by the directive, a web link will be posted to the local attorney bar association or other zoning professionals who may be available to assist homeowners through the process should residents wish to solicit such support.

## **Background**

Miami-Dade County is one of the largest counties in the United States and faces unique challenges in managing its diverse urban, suburban, and rural neighborhoods. The county's unincorporated area of over 1.2 million residents is divided into many zoning districts, each with specific regulations governing the use of land, building height, density, and other development standards. Zoning codes guide development by specifying maximum density by zoning district, promoting utilization of mass transit and curbing sprawl, promoting the development of adequate infrastructure and providing for neighborhood compatibility. Therefore, zoning policies play a critical role in shaping the future of growth of

neighborhoods, balancing development with environmental protection, economic vitality, and quality of life.

The tables below depict the total number of applications reviewed by zoning staff throughout a period of two years. Table 1 illustrates that 15% of all public hearing applications were submitted by homesteaded homeowners. Tables 2 and 3 break down the homesteaded applications by type public hearing or administrative. Three quarters of these applications are administrative, typically for building setbacks.

**Table 1**  
**Public Hearing Applications Submitted by Homesteaded Homeowners**

Year	Total of All Public Hearings Applications	Public Hearings "Homesteaded Homeowners"	Total Percent of Public Hearings "Homesteaded Homeowners"
2023	364	62	17%
2024	397	52	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>15%</b>

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Homeowner Applications and the Number that Were for a Public Hearing**

Year	Total applications reviewed for "Homesteaded Homeowners"	Public Hearings "Homesteaded Homeowners"	Percent of Public Hearing Applications submitted for "Homesteaded Homeowners"
2023	224	62	28%
2024	218	52	24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>26%</b>

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Homeowner Applications and the Number that Were Administrative Adjustments**

Year	Total applications reviewed for "Homesteaded Homeowners"	Administrative Adjustment Applications "Homesteaded Homeowners"	Percent of Administrative Adjustment Applications submitted for "Homesteaded Homeowners"
2023	224	162	72%
2024	218	166	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>74%</b>

### **Zoning Challenges for Homesteaded Homeowners**

Zoning laws can be complex and vary significantly by jurisdiction, making it difficult for homeowners to understand what is permissible neighborhood by neighborhood. Homeowners may face challenges when gathering documents for zoning applications that typically require site plans, surveys, and impact studies. Gathering and preparing this documentation can be overwhelming for those unfamiliar with the process. It often involves interacting with multiple government agencies, attending public hearings, and potentially facing opposition from neighbors or community groups. Depending upon the complexity of the application, applicants must consider the cost associated with their requests. These may include fees for legal advice, surveys, and architectural plans which can be significant and may deter homeowners from pursuing their home improvements. Applications soliciting zoning variances for legalization of illegal construction can also be particularly challenging. Homeowners would benefit from enhanced customer assistance.

### **Zoning Enhancement Strategies with Existing Resources**

Since the adoption of Resolution No. R-412-24, staff have worked diligently to enhance communication and assistance with applicants. The zoning website is being updated to provide a more user-friendly experience and to ensure homeowners can easily access important information regarding zoning regulations. Additionally, a general email ([rerzoninginfo@miamidade.gov](mailto:rerzoninginfo@miamidade.gov)) has been created to streamline communication, allowing for better assistance and quicker responses to inquiries when applicants have any type of specific requests. These improvements will be further enhanced with the additions noted below to support and provide comprehensive guidance for homeowners navigating zoning matters. All improvements are expected to be implemented by the end of the calendar year.

- Post a user-friendly process chart on the RER webpage for a visual overview of the process, including a frequently asked question (FAQ) webpage with instructional videos and related content.
- Facilitate zoning forms access by relocating and reorganizing the zoning website links, content and streamlining of forms.
- Provide link to licensed professionals, such as planners, surveyors and architects on the zoning webpage.

In addition, zoning staff will work with other County agencies to increase collaboration on applications through a restructured intake and customer service team. This group will be modeled after the existing Homeowner and Small Business Assistance Program housed within the Construction Permitting Division of RER. This group has helped thousands of building permit customers since its launch in 2019 with personalized assistance, acting as a bridge for customers to resolve their building permitting needs, geared to home and business owners unfamiliar with the permit process. Customers are directed to staff who query them on project goals. Staff then research and assess specific property history and conditions ahead of a pre-consultation meeting. Customers then continue to receive assistance from the same staff member through application submittal, review, and approval process, offering a constant contact and source of support within the County. Follow up support is also provided as needed after permit issuance as needed. Staff assigned to this program assist applicants in navigating the process at no additional cost to the regular permit fees, and service is provided in person at the Permitting and Inspection Center (PIC), over the phone or via videoconference at the customers election.

In order to provide more personalized assistance to homeowners through the zoning approval process downtown, this program will be replicated within Development Services housed within the Stephen P. Clark Government Center and integrated as needed with existing services provided at the PIC (since homeowners requiring zoning entitlements downtown typically also require follow-up building permitting services). It is anticipated that this program will be able to be offered through a restructuring of existing staffing resources, which are being aligned to provide more targeted support between the existing Zoning Information Counter, Intake and Hearings sections downtown. A key component of enhancing service to homeowners is the expansion of RER's formal appointment system known as "Meet Q". This appointment scheduling system supports the existing Homeowner and Small Business Permitting Assistance Program. It is a self-service appointment scheduling widely used to support customer service via RER's online queue portal. A pilot assistance program in Development Services will be established later this year.

The County's acquisition of the office building located at 9250 W. Flagler Street will create further opportunities for enhanced collaboration between PIC staff and Development Services staff. Consolidating resources such as administrative support, meeting spaces, and technological tools will reduce redundancies and enhance overall productivity. By sharing resources, both programs will be able to operate more cost-effectively while improving the quality and speed of their services. Consolidating resources at the 9250 location is expected to further amplify benefits to customers as all land development, permitting and licensing support for homeowners, businesses, and the land development industry alike are collocated in one facility. In the interim, staff will continue to support customers using technology and deployment of appointment systems that provide access to staff for customers no matter what their location.

### **Conclusion**

Supporting homesteaded homeowners through the zoning application process is crucial for enabling them to make desired changes to their properties while ensuring compliance with Miami-Dade County regulations. Establishing assistance programs, providing comprehensive information resources, and offering orientation and legal support will improve homeowners' chances of successfully navigating the zoning process.

In accordance with Ordinance No. 14-65, this report will be placed on the next available Board meeting agenda. If additional information is needed, please contact Lourdes M. Gomez, Director, Department of Regulatory and Economic Resources, at [Lourdes.Gomez@miamidade.gov](mailto:Lourdes.Gomez@miamidade.gov) or at 305-375-2886.

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