



March 22, 2020

To the local County Commissioners, County Managers, Mayors, Councils, City Managers, Economic Development Directors, Community Development Directors, and Building Officials of the OMB region:

Olympia Master Builders (OMB) is writing this letter in reference to the ever-evolving situation surrounding COVID-19. OMB represents 500 member companies who are industry professionals that are committed to building, remodeling and maintaining homes at attainable price points, even in times of uncertainty. We are writing this letter to request that your jurisdiction implements items in this permitting action plan so that necessary housing can still be built and maintained.

State of Emergency

Some local jurisdictions may consider a declaration of a state of emergency and some already have a local declaration of emergency. We request the following to accompany State of Emergency Declarations:

- Permit approval extensions for permits expiring between March 1 and, at minimum, June 29, 2020. *(See attached files for an overview of precedent for actions such as this that occurred during the Great Recession as well as sample ordinance language to help expedite staff efforts and adoption.)*
- Permit approvals for structures with previously approved designs as well as a post-construction verification and create a process to verify compliance once the state of emergency restrictions is lifted.
- Construction activity be considered essential services in the case of a “shelter in place” order, just as the City of San Francisco’s Public Health Order on March 16, 2020 and the City of Everett’s Mayoral Directive on March 20, 2020 allowed for. Please consider looking at either of these directives for sample language to include should your jurisdiction issue a “shelter in place” order.
- Financial institutions, including title and escrow operations, also to be considered essential services in the case of a “shelter in place” order.

Permits

For jurisdictions with online submission, we ask that you ensure permitting offices have a designated a point of contact, even if the local staff are working remotely or not available face-to-face. For jurisdictions without online submission, we request a physical no-contact permit drop off so staff can process permits remotely. We also request emergency adoption of an online permit portal system.

Further we recommend that if you have not already done so, establish a baseline of your pre-emergency rates of permit issuance so that we can continue to monitor the situation with a data-driven approach. This will allow us to tie additional emergency actions to specific thresholds, if your permitting process slows considerably.

Inspections

We ask for the establishment of a formal on-site, no contact protocol. This can be achieved in several ways, including the following:

- Inspectors calling the project site contact from their vehicle and doing an inspection with no one else on site and a phone debrief after inspection.
- Video or delayed, ex post facto, inspections. These can be live and/or builder recorded video of the various stages of construction which could then be used real time or in a post-construction permitting process for compliance.
- For jurisdictions that already have an e-inspection program, we request that you immediately begin examining its scope and identify permit-types that the existing program can be expanded to cover to minimize risk to inspection personnel.

Fees, Enforcement & Occupancy

- Suspend all ongoing code enforcement activities and defer new code enforcement until after conclusion of COVID-19 emergency unless directly related to public health, safety, or welfare.
- Defer collection of impact fees until Certificate of Occupancy is issued or until sale, for specified period.
- Allow occupancy of structures with previously approved designs without inspection as well as a post-construction verification or permit process can be created to verify compliance once the state of emergency restrictions is lifted.

Advocacy

OMB knows that construction plays a vital component in health and human safety, especially as our community is urged to stay at homebound. Moreover, home building can spur quick economic growth and reinvigorate the economy after the restrictions and quarantines are lifted. In order to provide both of these public services, the builders need to have approved permits in hand. We ask local governments to delay implementation of new/upcoming regulations in this current time of emergency. For example, we ask that you request the governor to delay implementation of all building codes set to be implemented on July 1, 2020.

To help incentivize small-business recovery in the local community, please also consider an abatement of local B&O taxes for business in certain integral categories or under certain personnel thresholds for a period no less than 180 days after restrictions on public gatherings are lifted. We ask that you request that the governor take these actions at the state level, as well.



Conclusion

OMB understands that the situation is ever changing, however, chief among these requests is that construction and financial institutions be allowed to continue their work as “essential services” should “shelter in place orders” emerge. We ask that your jurisdictions keep permitting and inspection avenues open so that we can work together reinvigorate the economy. Delaying implementation of the new building codes will also guarantee predictability as everyone tries to adapt to the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. Thank you to your consideration to these ideas. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions.

Always,
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