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Management of the complete permitting and approval process

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Barry S. Porter & Associates, Inc. (BSPA) was founded in 2001 to provide planning, zoning, permitting and project management services to our clients. Located in Braintree, Mass., with offices in Orlando, Fla. and Columbia, Md., BSPA's clients include national retailers, architects, civil engineers, and local governments. To best meet the needs of our clients, our corporate team includes, planning professionals, licensed construction supervisors, permit managers, and commercial real estate professionals.

One of our key services at BSPA is management of the complete permitting and approval process. Quite often, obtaining necessary approvals for a project can involve a lot of give and take between the project's proponents and the local jurisdiction. Due to the emotions and tensions that may run high on both sides, this give and take has the potential to become adversarial, which can lead to unforeseen project delays. In order to avoid that unfortunate situation, we recommend utilizing a comprehensive team based approach to the approval process to collectively manage a project through site development, building design, construction and certificate of occupancy. This approach requires strong coordination between the client, the design and construction team, and the permit manager. By utilizing a permit manager, as opposed to a "permit expeditor," our approach allows for management of the entire approval process. Through these methods the manager can provide high-quality service, delivering project approvals ahead of schedule and under budget, without compromising the project.

After receiving a job from a client, our first step is to complete an initial review of the project we are going to obtain permits for. This review encompasses both an analysis of the actual project, i.e. project scope, as well as of the approval process within the local jurisdiction. Knowing about the project's scope allows our professionals the opportunity to review project details and better prepare for discussions with the local government entities. By thoroughly researching the project and the site's history, we have an understanding of outstanding code or operational concerns that may cause red flags to be raised. This allows the manager to prepare to meet with local officials and know beforehand what to expect for a realistic schedule for completion.

Following our initial reviews, our next step is to begin communicating with the approving authority for the project. We believe in communicating directly with the local officials and staff as a means of creating an open dialogue with the community. While many communities allow plan submissions electronically, complex commercial developments still require face to face communication early on. This is particularly true when the design team is located out of state. Reading the code is not always the same as understanding the intent of the code or the workings of a local community. These meetings allow our team the opportunity to learn additional project specific information about the entitlement process within the jurisdiction and start the actual process of submitting necessary forms and documents. Additionally, through these first meetings, our team is able to share a more human

connection with the governmental authority. Local staff and officials learn who we are and what we are trying to do, and in turn, we can work with them to smoothly move through the entitlement process.

From that point on, having already developed a working relationship with local staff and reviewing officials comes to fruition as the permit manager is able to negotiate, assist, and resolve concerns that might arise during permit reviews. This ability to interact with the officials in a positive manner, and effectively serve on behalf of our client, helps to separate a true permit manager from the traditional "expediter." A permit manager needs to truly understand both the project and process, coordinate that process, and ensure that steady communication is maintained throughout. By maintaining communication and working with all parties throughout the review, the manager can obtain the necessary approvals for his/her client in a more cost efficient manner, and continue to assist the client with any issues through to project completion.

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