



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

November 2, 1987

TO THE BUILDING INDUSTRY:

Buildings Commissioner Charles M. Smith, Jr., and I are aware of the concerns expressed by some owners and builders, architects and engineers over the purposes for which fees are paid to expeditors who are often retained to do little more than stand in lines at the Buildings Department. The concerns are worthy of broader discussion, and we want to inform the industry of measures taken to simplify and shorten the building application process.

We were astounded by a recent disclosure that an expeditor sought a fee from a client expressly for the purpose of paying a bribe to a Buildings Department employee. This is an outrageous, arrogant act which, had the fee been allowed willfully or unwittingly, could have made the owner or applicant party to corruption. The likelihood, however, is that the bribe was never intended to be paid and would have been pocketed by the expeditor because it is all part of a subterfuge against the client to extort higher fees. Owners must carefully scrutinize the purpose for which fees are paid and demand a full accounting. You have our guarantee that we will promptly investigate any wrongdoing reported to us.

For our part, the City Administration has made eliminating red tape a top priority in order to shorten the processing time for building applications. You may choose to use expeditors who provide legitimate services, but we want

you to know what the Department of Buildings is doing to ease the cost of doing business in the City.

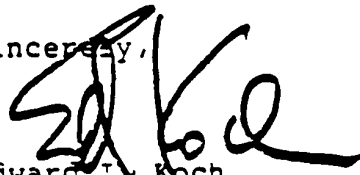
- o A long-term project has been initiated to develop and implement a computerized building information system to facilitate the Department's procedures and operations. Plan examination procedures will be among the first to be computerized, including information storage, initial plan checks and issuance of objections. Also, computerized records will be maintained for inspections and other documentation required for the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy which will, in turn, be computer generated.
- o A consultant has been retained to completely revamp all forms used by the Department. Old forms will be eliminated, consolidated or streamlined and redesigned in an easy-to-use format. This project is expected to be completed within approximately six months.
- o A "standing committee" of architects, engineers and other industry representatives has been created to identify and recommend ways to improve Department procedures. This committee has been instrumental in developing a Standardized Checklist of objections for use by plan examiners which ensures uniformity and completeness, and cuts processing time and paperwork. The committee also contributed to developing the Department's "Guide to Filing New Building and Alteration Applications" which has been distributed to the industry.
- o Appointments with plan examiners are now made by telephone, eliminating waiting lines at borough offices. This system is being continually monitored in order to adapt to changing demands.
- o A system has been instituted on a pilot basis in our Manhattan borough office, whereby applicants may "drop-off" written responses to plan examiners' objections and receive a mailed response from the Department within a week. This will reduce the need for appointment scheduling and personal appearance by applicants.

- o Plan examiners and inspectors receive comprehensive classroom and on-the-job training. In addition to basic instruction to new employees, examiners are kept abreast of recent amendments to the Zoning Resolution and Building Code and inspectors are briefed on local law enforcement and other Code amendments.
- o A plan examiner squad system in Manhattan and Brooklyn has speeded first review, reduced backlog and assured better quality examinations. A "first review" can be completed within 48 hours.
- o The Manhattan plan examination section has moved to new quarters at 60 Hudson Street which has better facilities both for examiners and the public doing business with the Department. Lines at the plan desk will be shortened in the near future by internal transfer of a file to the examiner prior to an appointment. In addition, staffing has been increased at the plan desk to handle more files.

The Department of Buildings will constantly review and refine procedures to make the application and permit process as smooth and efficient as possible, with minimum contact time between applicants and the Buildings Department. Waiting lines should diminish and final approval should, if all objections are resolved, be accomplished in a timely, efficient manner.

We will continue to seek ways to improve our service to the public and to seek your help in doing so. We urge you to let us know when fees are demanded for illegal purposes. You can depend upon a prompt investigation.

Sincerely,



Edward I. Koch
M A Y O R



Charles M. Smith, Jr.
COMMISSIONER