

Successfully managing your hurricane restoration project

By Ben Bailey

It's hard to believe it's already been six months since Hurricane Ian struck our community. Many of us are still picking up the pieces of our lives and trying to put them back together. Whether it's finding temporary housing, negotiating with insurance companies, finding reputable contractors or tracking down building supplies, the battles seem never ending at times.

If the moon and stars aligned and you're fortunate enough to have an insurance check and a contractor willing to do the work, there are some things you should know. Contractors from all over the nation descended upon Southwest Florida after the hurricane to find whatever work they could. It's very important to make sure those contractors are properly licensed and insured in Florida and registered with the county. Rolling the dice with an out-of-state contractor may mean having to pay twice for your restoration if the contractor wasn't licensed and didn't obtain proper building or roofing permits.

One of the best resources you'll have in managing your restoration project is the Community Development Department information on Charlotte County's website, www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov. Once you're on the home page look for the Community Development Department under Departments. There you will find helpful links and information to guide you in all areas for your restoration project, like consumer guidelines for working with contractors, finding out what work needs a permit, locating the necessary permitting forms or using the Citizen Access Portal. The website is a one-stop shop for information about all aspects of construction and permitting.

The Citizen Access Portal on our website (www.CharlotteCountyFL.gov/citizenaccess) is a great additional feature that allows the public to search contractors to verify licensing and complaints as well as provide information about building permits. A homeowner can verify if a contractor actually submitted a permit to the county and then track it through until completion. Homeowners can also check the status of permit approval, read staff comments and track inspections by entering the address into the search. With current phone wait times at the Building Department reaching an hour, this online portal will not only save citizens time but also lessen the amount of phone calls coming into the department.

Another tool that should be considered is our new VuSpex inspection portal. Here roofing contractors can speed up the roofing inspection process by following the virtual inspection guidelines set up by the department, which allows final roof inspections to be completed within a couple days as opposed to 4-5 weeks. Having processed close to 26,000 roof permits since the hurricane, there are more than 1,700 pending roof final inspections from the 150 roof permits we receive each business day. Complete guidelines for download and set up are available on the website for VuSpex by searching "virtual inspections."

Having the necessary tools is vital for any project, so I encourage everyone to check out our website as it is a wealth of information and may save you a lot of time and energy. It will be years before our county is rebuilt and back to normal and our patience will be tested, but I wish everyone the best in their restoration.

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