

## 2. Questionable Interdepartmental Transfers

*Assertion: We have documented numerous instances of building permit fees being diverted to seemingly unrelated expenses:*

- *\$264,910 budgeted in FY 2023 for "Building Fire Expense" despite no fire review requirements for single-family homes*
- *Fire Department representatives have stated they do not receive the fire plan review and inspection fees collected through permitting*
- *The FY 2023 fire budget was amended to \$419,930 to cover hurricane-related emergency pay, an inappropriate use of building permit fund*

The assertion above intimates that building permit fees are being diverted to seemingly unrelated expenses, which are alleged to be costs associated with providing fire inspection fees to new commercial construction. Section 553.80 of the Florida Statutes authorizes building permit and inspection fees to be utilized for those costs associated with enforcement of the Florida Building Code, which recognizes that the statutory definition of "enforcing the Florida Building Code" expressly includes "fire inspections associated with new construction."

Therefore, fire inspection costs that are properly characterized as "fire inspections associated with new construction" (e.g., plan review or final fire inspections required as part of a building permit) may be charged to the Building Fund. From FY 2019 - FY 2022, these costs were lawfully charged to the Building Fund which is permitted by the Florida Statutory Law.

In FY 2023, the City determined to migrate such costs, along with any hurricane related emergency pay identified above, to the Fire Department (costs continue to remain in this Department). This was clearly disclosed in the City's monthly report which was provided directly to the Building Industry Oversight Committee.

Attached to support response:

- Section 553.80 of the Florida Statutes
- Building Fund Statement of Revenues, Expenses & Changes to Fund Balance, September 2023, which shows the budget and actual costs associated with fire inspections for new construction being reclassified out of the Building Fund.

# The Florida Senate

## 2020 Florida Statutes

<u>Title XXXIII</u> REGULATION OF TRADE, COMMERCE, INVESTMENTS, AND SOLICITATIONS	<u>Chapter 553</u> BUILDING CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS  <u>Entire Chapter</u>	<b>SECTION 80</b> <b>Enforcement.</b>
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### **553.80 Enforcement.**—

(1) Except as provided in paragraphs (a)-(g), each local government and each legally constituted enforcement district with statutory authority shall regulate building construction and, where authorized in the state agency's enabling legislation, each state agency shall enforce the Florida Building Code required by this part on all public or private buildings, structures, and facilities, unless such responsibility has been delegated to another unit of government pursuant to s. [553.79](#)(9).

(a) Construction regulations relating to correctional facilities under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice are to be enforced exclusively by those departments.

(b) Construction regulations relating to elevator equipment under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Elevators of the Department of Business and Professional Regulation shall be enforced exclusively by that department.

(c) In addition to the requirements of s. [553.79](#) and this section, facilities subject to the provisions of chapter 395 and parts II and VIII of chapter 400 shall have facility plans reviewed and construction surveyed by the state agency authorized to do so under the requirements of chapter 395 and parts II and VIII of chapter 400 and the certification requirements of the Federal Government. Facilities subject to the provisions of part IV of chapter 400 may have facility plans reviewed and shall have construction surveyed by the state agency authorized to do so under the requirements of part IV of chapter 400 and the certification requirements of the Federal Government.

(d) Building plans approved under s. [553.77](#)(3) and state-approved manufactured buildings, including buildings manufactured and assembled offsite and not intended for habitation, such as lawn storage buildings and storage sheds, are exempt from local code enforcing agency plan reviews except for provisions of the code relating to erection, assembly, or construction at the site. Erection, assembly, and construction at the site are subject to local permitting and inspections. Lawn storage buildings and storage sheds bearing the insignia of approval of the department are not subject to s. [553.842](#). Such buildings that do not exceed 400 square feet may be delivered and installed without need of a contractor's or specialty license.

(e) Construction regulations governing public schools, state universities, and Florida College System institutions shall be enforced as provided in subsection (6).

(f) The Florida Building Code as it pertains to toll collection facilities under the jurisdiction of the turnpike enterprise of the Department of Transportation shall be enforced exclusively by the turnpike enterprise.

(g) Construction regulations relating to secure mental health treatment facilities under the jurisdiction of the Department of Children and Families shall be enforced exclusively by the department in conjunction with the Agency for Health Care Administration's review authority under paragraph (c).

The governing bodies of local governments may provide a schedule of fees, as authorized by s. [125.56](#)(2) or s. [166.222](#) and this section, for the enforcement of the provisions of this part. Such fees shall be used solely for carrying out the local government's responsibilities in enforcing the Florida Building Code. The authority of state enforcing agencies to set fees for enforcement shall be derived from authority existing on July 1, 1998. However, nothing contained in this subsection shall operate to limit such agencies from adjusting their fee schedule in conformance with existing authority.

(2)(a) Any two or more counties or municipalities, or any combination thereof, may, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 163, governing interlocal agreements, form an enforcement district for the purpose of enforcing and administering the provisions of the Florida Building Code. Each district so formed shall be registered with the

department on forms to be provided for that purpose. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to supersede provisions of county charters which preempt municipal authorities respective to building codes.

(b) With respect to evaluation of design professionals' documents, if a local government finds it necessary, in order to enforce compliance with the Florida Building Code and issue a permit, to reject design documents required by the code three or more times for failure to correct a code violation specifically and continuously noted in each rejection, including, but not limited to, egress, fire protection, structural stability, energy, accessibility, lighting, ventilation, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and gas systems, or other requirements identified by rule of the Florida Building Commission adopted pursuant to chapter 120, the local government shall impose, each time after the third such review the plans are rejected for that code violation, a fee of four times the amount of the proportion of the permit fee attributed to plans review.

(c) With respect to inspections, if a local government finds it necessary, in order to enforce compliance with the Florida Building Code, to conduct any inspection after an initial inspection and one subsequent reinspection of any project or activity for the same code violation specifically and continuously noted in each rejection, including, but not limited to, egress, fire protection, structural stability, energy, accessibility, lighting, ventilation, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and gas systems, or other requirements identified by rule of the Florida Building Commission adopted pursuant to chapter 120, the local government shall impose a fee of four times the amount of the fee imposed for the initial inspection or first reinspection, whichever is greater, for each such subsequent reinspection.

(3)(a) Each enforcement district shall be governed by a board, the composition of which shall be determined by the affected localities.

(b)1. At its own option, each enforcement district or local enforcement agency may adopt rules granting to the owner of a single-family residence one or more exemptions from the Florida Building Code relating to:

a. Addition, alteration, or repairs performed by the property owner upon his or her own property, provided any addition or alteration shall not exceed 1,000 square feet or the square footage of the primary structure, whichever is less.

b. Addition, alteration, or repairs by a nonowner within a specific cost limitation set by rule, provided the total cost shall not exceed \$5,000 within any 12-month period.

c. Building and inspection fees.

2. However, the exemptions under subparagraph 1. do not apply to single-family residences that are located in mapped flood hazard areas, as defined in the code, unless the enforcement district or local enforcement agency has determined that the work, which is otherwise exempt, does not constitute a substantial improvement, including the repair of substantial damage, of such single-family residences.

3. Each code exemption, as defined in sub-subparagraphs 1.a., b., and c., shall be certified to the local board 10 days prior to implementation and shall only be effective in the territorial jurisdiction of the enforcement district or local enforcement agency implementing it.

(4) When an enforcement district has been formed as provided herein, upon its registration with the department, it shall have the same authority and responsibility with respect to building codes as provided by this part for local governing bodies.

(5) State and regional agencies with special expertise in building code standards and licensing of contractors and design professionals shall provide support to local governments upon request.

(6) Notwithstanding any other law, state universities, Florida College System institutions, and public school districts shall be subject to enforcement of the Florida Building Code under this part.

(a)1. State universities, Florida College System institutions, or public school districts shall conduct plan review and construction inspections to enforce building code compliance for their building projects that are subject to the Florida Building Code. These entities must use personnel or contract providers appropriately certified under part XII of chapter 468 to perform the plan reviews and inspections required by the code. Under these arrangements, the entities are not subject to local government permitting requirements, plans review, and inspection fees. State universities, Florida College System institutions, and public school districts are liable and responsible for all of their buildings, structures, and facilities. This paragraph does not limit the authority of the county, municipality, or code enforcement

district to ensure that buildings, structures, and facilities owned by these entities comply with the Florida Building Code or to limit the authority and responsibility of the fire official to conduct firesafety inspections under chapter 633.

2. In order to enforce building code compliance independent of a county or municipality, a state university, Florida College System institution, or public school district may create a board of adjustment and appeal to which a substantially affected party may appeal an interpretation of the Florida Building Code which relates to a specific project. The decisions of this board, or, in its absence, the decision of the building code administrator, may be reviewed under s. [553.775](#).

(b) If a state university, Florida College System institution, or public school district elects to use a local government's code enforcement offices:

1. Fees charged by counties and municipalities for enforcement of the Florida Building Code on buildings, structures, and facilities of state universities, state colleges, and public school districts may not be more than the actual labor and administrative costs incurred for plans review and inspections to ensure compliance with the code.

2. Counties and municipalities shall expedite building construction permitting, building plans review, and inspections of projects of state universities, Florida College System institutions, and public schools that are subject to the Florida Building Code according to guidelines established by the Florida Building Commission.

3. A party substantially affected by an interpretation of the Florida Building Code by the local government's code enforcement offices may appeal the interpretation to the local government's board of adjustment and appeal or to the commission under s. [553.775](#) if no local board exists. The decision of a local board is reviewable in accordance with s. [553.775](#).

(c) The Florida Building Commission and code enforcement jurisdictions shall consider balancing code criteria and enforcement to unique functions, where they occur, of research institutions by application of performance criteria in lieu of prescriptive criteria.

(d) School boards, Florida College System institution boards, and state universities may use annual facility maintenance permits to facilitate routine maintenance, emergency repairs, building refurbishment, and minor renovations of systems or equipment. The amount expended for maintenance projects may not exceed \$200,000 per project. A facility maintenance permit is valid for 1 year. A detailed log of alterations and inspections must be maintained and annually submitted to the building official. The building official retains the right to make inspections at the facility site as he or she considers necessary. Code compliance must be provided upon notification by the building official. If a pattern of code violations is found, the building official may withhold the issuance of future annual facility maintenance permits.

This part may not be construed to authorize counties, municipalities, or code enforcement districts to conduct any permitting, plans review, or inspections not covered by the Florida Building Code. Any actions by counties or municipalities not in compliance with this part may be appealed to the Florida Building Commission. The commission, upon a determination that actions not in compliance with this part have delayed permitting or construction, may suspend the authority of a county, municipality, or code enforcement district to enforce the Florida Building Code on the buildings, structures, or facilities of a state university, Florida College System institution, or public school district and provide for code enforcement at the expense of the state university, Florida College System institution, or public school district.

(7)(a) The governing bodies of local governments may provide a schedule of reasonable fees, as authorized by s. [125.56\(2\)](#) or s. [166.222](#) and this section, for enforcing this part. These fees, and any fines or investment earnings related to the fees, shall be used solely for carrying out the local government's responsibilities in enforcing the Florida Building Code. When providing a schedule of reasonable fees, the total estimated annual revenue derived from fees, and the fines and investment earnings related to the fees, may not exceed the total estimated annual costs of allowable activities. Any unexpended balances shall be carried forward to future years for allowable activities or shall be refunded at the discretion of the local government. A local government may not carry forward an amount exceeding the average of its operating budget for enforcing the Florida Building Code for the previous 4 fiscal years. For purposes of this subsection, the term "operating budget" does not include reserve amounts. Any amount exceeding this limit must be used as authorized in subparagraph 2. However, a local government which established, as of

January 1, 2019, a Building Inspections Fund Advisory Board consisting of five members from the construction stakeholder community and carries an unexpended balance in excess of the average of its operating budget for the previous 4 fiscal years may continue to carry such excess funds forward upon the recommendation of the advisory board. The basis for a fee structure for allowable activities shall relate to the level of service provided by the local government and shall include consideration for refunding fees due to reduced services based on services provided as prescribed by s. [553.791](#), but not provided by the local government. Fees charged shall be consistently applied.

1. As used in this subsection, the phrase “enforcing the Florida Building Code” includes the direct costs and reasonable indirect costs associated with review of building plans, building inspections, reinspections, and building permit processing; building code enforcement; and fire inspections associated with new construction. The phrase may also include training costs associated with the enforcement of the Florida Building Code and enforcement action pertaining to unlicensed contractor activity to the extent not funded by other user fees.

2. A local government must use any excess funds that it is prohibited from carrying forward to rebate and reduce fees.

3. The following activities may not be funded with fees adopted for enforcing the Florida Building Code:

- a. Planning and zoning or other general government activities.
- b. Inspections of public buildings for a reduced fee or no fee.
- c. Public information requests, community functions, boards, and any program not directly related to enforcement of the Florida Building Code.

d. Enforcement and implementation of any other local ordinance, excluding validly adopted local amendments to the Florida Building Code and excluding any local ordinance directly related to enforcing the Florida Building Code as defined in subparagraph 1.

4. A local government shall use recognized management, accounting, and oversight practices to ensure that fees, fines, and investment earnings generated under this subsection are maintained and allocated or used solely for the purposes described in subparagraph 1.

5. The local enforcement agency, independent district, or special district may not require at any time, including at the time of application for a permit, the payment of any additional fees, charges, or expenses associated with:

- a. Providing proof of licensure pursuant to chapter 489;
- b. Recording or filing a license issued pursuant to this chapter;
- c. Providing, recording, or filing evidence of workers’ compensation insurance coverage as required by chapter 440; or
- d. Charging surcharges or other similar fees not directly related to enforcing the Florida Building Code.

(b) By December 31, 2020, the governing body of a local government that provides a schedule of fees shall create a building permit and inspection utilization report and post the report on its website. The information in the report shall be derived from relevant information available in the most recently completed financial audit. After December 31, 2020, the governing body of a local government that provides a schedule of fees shall update its building permit and inspection utilization report before making any adjustments to the fee schedule. The report shall include:

1. Direct and indirect costs incurred by the local government to enforce the Florida Building Code, including costs related to:

a. Personnel services costs, including salary and related employee benefit costs incurred by the local government to enforce the Florida Building Code.

b. Operating expenditures and expenses.

2. Permit and inspection utilization information, including:

a. Number of building permit applications submitted.

b. Number of building permits issued or approved.

c. Number of building inspections and reinspections requested.

d. Number of building inspections and reinspections conducted.

e. Number of building inspections conducted by a private provider.

f. Number of audits conducted by the local government of private provider building inspections.

- g. Number of personnel dedicated by the local government to enforce the Florida Building Code, issue building permits, and conduct inspections.
- h. Other permissible activities for enforcing the Florida Building Code as described in subparagraph (a)1.
- 3. Revenue information, including:
  - a. Revenue derived from fees pursuant to paragraph (a).
  - b. Revenue derived from fines pursuant to paragraph (a).
  - c. When applicable, investment earnings from the local government's investment of revenue derived from fees and fines pursuant to paragraph (a).
  - d. Balances carried forward by the local government pursuant to paragraph (a).
  - e. Balances refunded by the local government pursuant to paragraph (a).
  - f. Revenue derived from other sources, including local government general revenue.
- (c) The governing body of a local government that issues building permits may charge a person only one search fee, in an amount commensurate with the research and time costs incurred by the governing body, for identifying building permits for each unit or subunit assigned by the governing body to a particular tax parcel identification number.

(8) The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is not subject to local government permitting requirements, plan review, or inspection fees for agricultural structures, such as equipment storage sheds and pole barns that are not used by the public.

**History.**—s. 11, ch. 74-167; s. 3, ch. 75-111; s. 5, ch. 77-365; s. 3, ch. 85-97; s. 805, ch. 97-103; ss. 50, 51, ch. 98-287; ss. 85, 86, ch. 2000-141; ss. 34, 35, ch. 2001-186; ss. 3, 4, ch. 2001-372; s. 87, ch. 2002-1; s. 27, ch. 2002-20; s. 12, ch. 2005-147; s. 64, ch. 2006-1; s. 15, ch. 2008-191; s. 37, ch. 2010-176; s. 127, ch. 2014-17; s. 276, ch. 2014-19; s. 23, ch. 2014-154; s. 21, ch. 2016-129; s. 10, ch. 2017-149; s. 7, ch. 2019-75; s. 3, ch. 2019-121.

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