Date: October 30, 2020  
To: Contractors and Permit Holders  
Re: 2020 Fall Department Memo

The Department is providing this 2020 Fall Memo to provide an update on the following topics:

- Staff Changes
- Inspector Zones
- COVID – 19 Policy
- Application Submittals
- Plans Submittals
- Electronic Plan Submittal
- Fee Calculations and Payment
- Contractor Licensee Registrations
- Inspection Requests
- Posting of Addresses
- Fireplace Inspections

**Staff Changes** - We are pleased to announce a few additions and changes in the department staff that have occurred over the past few months. Please welcome our new team members if, and/or when you interact with them.

In June of 2020 an administrative staff position was changed from part time to full time. Part time team member Becky Pettenger opted to leave the department when this change occurred. The new full time position was filled by Travis Johnson. Travis is eager to assist department customers in any way that he can and is a welcome addition to the team.

The department again has two electrical inspectors on staff. In June 2020 Dale Mazzoline joined the department filling an open electrical inspector position that has been vacant since March 2020. Dale brings a wealth of knowledge with him from his many years working as an electrical installer and contractor.

In August of 2020 long time team member Sharon Wagar retired from the department. Sharon had a combined 46 years with Emmet County, most of which were building department related. While Sharon is missed by team members and customers alike, we wish Sharon well in her future.

With Sharon’s retirement, a position of Plan Reviewer needed to be filled. Terence Frank joined the department to fill the Plan Reviewer position. Terence has been involved in several aspects of construction and has been doing a great job reviewing plans for code compliance. While plan review is Terence’s primary responsibility, in the future Terence will also be trained to perform building inspections, and will serve the department as a back-up building inspector, filling in for other team members as needed.

The last staff change relates to the mechanical inspector position that has been vacant for the past year and a half. At the end of September 2020, Keith Olsen returned to the department as an inspector. Keith has the ability to perform inspections for multiple trades including mechanical, plumbing and building. Keith’s return is welcomed by the department team, especially by those inspectors involved in the plumbing and mechanical trades.

**Inspector Zones** - With the open positions of electrical and mechanical inspector filled, the need to inspect the county by zones can be relaxed. As many know, at the beginning of summer 2019 the department split the county into a north and south zones, limiting inspections in the electrical and mechanical field to specific days of the week. With sufficient inspection staff available we are now able to better serve our permit holders and customers. There may be limited times when we may still be shorthanded such as vacations and leave time. In such instances, inspection zones may still be applied, however that will occur only when necessary.
COVID-19 Policy - Since the end of March 2020, the department has operated within the guidelines set by the Emmet County Administration. In May 2020 the department implemented the Emmet County restricted access policy for entry to the internal area of the PZ&CR offices. Members of the public are only allowed access if they have completed a health assessment form and wear an approved mask within the building. In an effort to improve customer service during this time, we have installed an intercom at our interior entry door. This intercom allows communication between office staff and those wishing to enter and see department staff. Directions for use of the intercom are provided on the department entry door in simple to follow instructions. Directional signs are provided in the corridor and the office area. We ask that you follow these signs which are posted in compliance with the Emmet County COVID-19 Policy. Your cooperation in this is effort appreciated. For your benefit, we continue to promote the use of email as a primary means of communication. A secure drop box is available at the lower level exterior entry. We have added a secure drop box at the interior entry door as well. These boxes are checked several times daily in an effort to keep paperwork flowing and up to date. The department also asks that you follow safety and health guidelines on your jobsites. Inspectors do have the right to refuse to perform inspections should they consider a site to be a threat to their health and well-being.

Application Submittals - All department applications were last updated in June 2019. Occasionally we still receive outdated permit applications that were used prior to our revision date. Outdated permit applications that are submitted for processing are being returned to the permit applicant, along with the currently used applications, for completion and resubmittal. Please delete the old forms you may have and download the most up to date forms at [https://www.emmetcounty.org/officials-departments/planning-zoning-and-construction-resources/](https://www.emmetcounty.org/officials-departments/planning-zoning-and-construction-resources/).

Permit applications need to be completed fully and include all requested information that may pertain to a project. All applications are required to include a “description of work”. The work description should give sufficient information for the permit processor and inspector to know what construction or installations are being performed under the permit. Additionally, the work description gives the plan reviewer and inspectors some guidance on what the scope of the project is. Applications without a clear work description will be returned to the applicant for completion and resubmittal.

Some line items on the electrical and mechanical permit applications indicate a requirement of submittal of design manuals and/or load calculations. This typically applies to heating and cooling appliances and equipment. This requirement comes from the energy code, and is necessary to confirm that the appliance and/or equipment is properly sized for the building or structure into which it will be installed. Applications for generator installations require submittal of electrical load calculations. This requirement comes from the electrical code, and is necessary to confirm adequately sized equipment to provide the electrical needs of the building or structure in which it will be installed. Failure to provide these documents will delay the issuance of the permit being applied for. Please submit these requested documents with your permit applications to avoid delays.

Building permits for alteration projects need to include the “alteration cost”. Failure to provide the alteration cost amount will cause the application to be returned to the permit applicant for completion and resubmittal.

Due to issues in the past, where the permit applicant was not the contractor with whom the owner had a contract with all building permit applications require the owner signature at the bottom of page one. This requirement was added to the Emmet County Building Permit application a number of years ago at the suggestion of the Attorney General’s office. By requiring the owner signature, the department considers that signature as verification of the owner having knowledge of who is applying for the permit for their project and gives approval to issue the permit to that party. Failure to provide the owner signature will cause the application to be returned to the permit applicant for completion and resubmittal.

The above items reveal a pattern. Permit applications that lack required information and completion will be returned to the permit applicant for completion and resubmittal. Incomplete applications will cause delays in the submittal of permits, thereby delaying the work to take place under these permits.

Plans Submittals - Plans depicting the scope of work to be performed are required for all new construction, additions and extensive alterations. 2 sets of plans are required to be submitted for purposes of plan review; a set for the department file, and a set to be returned to the building permit applicant as a field copy for reference on site. Plans should be drawn on sufficient sized paper to be clear and legible, drawn to scale, and show sufficient detail to confirm code compliance with the intended construction. The plan requirements are detailed and described in the codes. The department policy for plan submittal is taken directly from the code. We ask for nothing more than what the code requires.
Electronic Plan Submittal – The department’s COVID – 19 closure in the spring has opened the door slightly to consideration of electronic plan submittals in place of hard copies. While not a common practice in the past, we are now more open to this option and will explore the option of reducing the number of sets of plans required to be submitted with permit applications in the future. The department is still somewhat hesitant to allow this as a replacement for plan submittal since the regulations on records retention remain a bit vague on digital copy reproduction of hard copies when necessary. Until we know more about our options, two copies of plans are still being required. Since plans are being digitally added to our permit files, we are requesting that large plan sets be provided to us digitally as well. Should you have a large project coming up, feel free to contact us to discuss the submittal of plans in a pdf format, or providing us an online location where we can download plans into the permit database.

Fee Calculations and Payment - Specific to electrical, mechanical and plumbing permit applications, fee calculations can easily be determined by following the line items on page two of those applications. Each line item has a dollar value associated with it. By simply adding each of those applicable dollar values down the page, the applicable fee for that permit can be determined. Some applications are being submitted with fees in excess of the line items on the applications. Past policy has been to process these applications and refund the excess amount. The refund process is time consuming for department staff as well as the Emmet County Accounting Department, as staff has to submit a written request for refunds, then accounting has to process the check and send it out to the applicant. Due to an increase in application submittals with excess fees, the department will begin returning applications and fee payments when excess fees are paid, with a request for the fee to be paid in the correct amount. This will cause delays in issuance of those permits so please double check your math when submitting electrical, mechanical and/or plumbing permit applications.

In addition, please include all applicable line items on your permit applications. Items installed that are not included in the permit application are considered as outside of the scope of work for which the permit has been applied for and issued. As such, items not included in the application can be considered as work without permits. Additional fees do apply to work or installations found without a valid permit. Being thorough in the completion of your application will help you avoid added costs and delays later in the project.

Contractor Licensee Registrations - The department started a Licensee registration program 3 years ago. This program pertains to electrical, mechanical and plumbing contractors. 2016 PA 407, also known as the Skilled Trades Act, allows local jurisdictions to require licensees in these trades to register their license with the jurisdiction. In the past we have required licensees to register annually. Starting in 2021, we will shift to a three year registration cycle. Those contractors to whom this program applies, who are applying for permits in 2021, will be required to register and pay a $15.00 registration fee. This registration will be good for a three year cycle. Those registering in 2022 will be able to do so at a rate of $10.00 and that registration will be good for two years. Those registering in 2023 will be able to do so at a rate of $5.00 and the registration will be good for one year. In 2024, the three year registration cycle will start over. Having a three year registration cycle will eliminate the need to register annually; and will reduce the number of registrations to be entered into the permit database in years two and three. The cost will be no different than the current $5.00 fee annually while eliminating the need to apply yearly. This change was presented to the Emmet County Board of Commissioners in October of this year, and was supported and approved at the Board of Commissioners Meeting on October 22, 2020.

Inspection Requests - In an effort to serve as many permit holders as possible, the inspection request policy continues its policy that inspection requests are to be received by the department no later than 4:00 p.m. on the day prior to the desired date of inspection. While this policy does not guarantee an inspection the following day, inspectors can better arrange the next day’s inspections in an efficient route and serve the maximum number of permit holders possible.

The department does ask that contractors not stockpile projects that need inspections, and then request numerous inspections all at once. This practice causes delays in getting those inspections done in a timely manner. Once you have completed your project please call and arrange the inspection as soon as possible. This will allow inspectors to better serve you as swiftly as possible without extended delays.

If your project requires department staff to contact the owners for access, please notify your customers that inspection staff will be contacting them and why. Also remind your customers that some flexibility in scheduling will likely be necessary. Inspectors have numerous stops to make daily, and delays at any of those stops is possible, which affects the remainder of the stops on an inspector’s schedule. Permit holder cooperation in these requests is appreciated.
**Posting of Addresses** – A requirement of the codes, as well as an Emmet County ordinance, indicates that the site address is to be clearly marked and visible from the road. For that reason, when building permits are sent out, a temporary address card is provided for posting at the jobsite. For building permit holders, please make sure these address cards are posted, along with your building permit. This aids inspection staff in finding the location of your project. For electrical, mechanical and plumbing contractors, please verify that an address is provided at locations where you will be performing installations that require permits. Posting on a building or mail box are acceptable as long as they are visible from the road. The lack of address posting and property identification can cause delays in obtaining inspections and approvals if the inspector cannot verify the location where an inspection is to occur. Your cooperation in proper identification of properties by posting, or verifying the existence, of an address is appreciated.

**Fireplace Inspections** - Factory built fireplaces have become the subject of numerous discussions between trade inspectors over the past several months. There seems to be a trend of fireplace installations being completed without all of the necessary approvals. Some fireplaces installations had to have finish materials removed for inspection, which caused delays in project completion, as well as additional and unnecessary expenses to be incurred. Making sure all approvals are obtained prior to cover up is essential. While factory built fireplaces require a mechanical permit, there is also some responsibility on the builder’s part to construct framing, chases, hearths, mantles and trims in a manner that can be approved. There may also be electrical installations in walls and chase ways surrounding fireplaces and chimneys that need to comply with inspection approvals. A cooperative effort is necessary between all contractors involved, with cooperative communication with the inspectors involved in the affected trades.

In an effort to alleviate some of the issues that inspectors have been seeing on projects, the department has added to its required inspections list for factory built fireplaces. For builders, these fireplaces will require a “fireplace framing inspection” and a “fireplace cover up” inspection approval before finish materials are installed. For mechanical contractors, the “fireplace rough inspection” as well as a “fireplace cover up” inspection approval are required prior to the installation of finish materials. We are developing an approval sticker specific to fireplaces that will likely be applied to the framing in the fireplace area. Prior to cover up, all required inspections listed on the approval sticker will need to be signed off by the inspectors. These added inspections can occur at the same time as other inspections on the project, however separate inspection reports related to the fireplace will be sent in addition to the normal frame and rough inspections. Failure to have all required trade inspections will result in the need to remove finish materials for inspection. Photos will not be accepted in place of inspections.

Inspectors will also require that the fireplace installation manual be available on site for reference during all required fireplace inspections including the final inspection. Each phase of the fireplace installation has specific requirements that need to be met, and these requirements are typically detailed in the installation manual. Therefore, the manual will need to be referenced for each required inspection.

**Wrap Up** – Each of these update subjects has been included so that we, as a department, can better serve our customers. The information, requests and guidelines within each section are based on observations and experiences with our customers, and how together, we can improve our policies and procedures for efficiency and improved service.

Working together, we, the department team, and our customers, the permit holders, can achieve what should be a common goal. That goal is a safe and code compliant building, structure, or installation that can serve property owners, tenants, visitors and future members of our communities for years to come. If we all do our part in the construction process, while staying within the code and regulation requirements, cooperatively, we can easily succeed in achieving that goal.

Should you wish to have discussion on the contents of this memo, or have other concerns or ideas that you wish to call to the department’s attention, feel free to contact us by phone or email. We will be happy to listen and discuss with you.

Thank you for your time and attention, The Planning, Zoning and Construction Resources Department Team