

And NOW for Something COMPLETELY Different!

Happy Sunday, Concord! Let's talk a little bit about PERMITS, shall we?

Ever since I reached the age of reason and became cognizant of the fact that we have a government I came to realize that there were a limitless number of things about it that I absolutely detested. Since space is limited, I'm only going to talk about one of them today - and that will be permits. I find it sadly ironic that the one aspect of government I resent most I am now responsible for administering for the Township.

Usually, when humans get to the age of about two or three, we begin to resent being told what to do, and how, when, where and why we should do it. That grows with us into adulthood, it most certainly did with me. Let's face it: we all think we know what's best for us, our families, homes, farms and businesses, and we are also pretty darn sure we are best capable of acting in our own best interests. Right? Of Course! And it stands to reason then, that if there is something one of us wants to do with his or her property, well, it's gotta be OK because... WE want to do it!!! And we'd never do anything that was in any way wrong or improper...now would we? And besides, it's our property and so it's none of anyone else's business, or so the thinking goes.

Up until about 1971, (when I went into industrial construction) that's pretty much what I thought and how I acted. But then I came to learn a couple of very important facts:

1. Not everyone who acts in their own best interests acts in the best interests of their neighbors, and
2. Not everyone who thinks they are acting in their own best interests, really are.

Since I was elected Supervisor, I have come to understand that codes and ordinances and the permit process that supports them are what polite societies use to promote civility and harmony amongst citizens. Fact #1 is precisely why we have Zoning Ordinances and the plethora of permits that go with them, and as civilization goes they are absolutely indispensable.

Let me give you a couple of quick examples: Let's say we have a secluded, quiet, beautiful country tract that has, over 10 - 15 years, developed into a nice, well appointed community of retirees and young families. Let's say the average homestead in it is 5 acres and the average buy-in price is around \$400,000.00. Now let's say YOU buy one of those homes and you work hard to make it your dream home - because that's what good people do. Then, about 3 years later, someone comes along and buys a 100 acre tract due west of you and decides to create - a landfill - a garbage dump. Or they decide to build a slaughterhouse or maybe an asphalt plant.

Or, let's take the exact same scenario but instead of the landfill, let's say your next door neighbor begins to haul in old appliances, radiators, siding, farm implements, fencing, worn out Prius's and empty soup cans and pile them up in his yard near your new pool. Or your deck. What happens to your investment? Your property values? Your quality of life? The quiet enjoyment of your property? All of that - and much, much more - is why we have zoning ordinances.

Now let's address Fact #2: why we have building codes and the permits that go with them. Along about 3000 BC, they had the "Code of Hammurabi" which is the great-great granddaddy of all permitting systems. There was a segment in it which said that if a person built a house which later fell down and killed the resident, the builder would be put to death. Another that said that if a builder built a wall that later shifted, the builder had to make it right out of his own pocket. Those were the epitome of accountability standards for the construction trades. Things are a little different today, and it could be argued, considerably more enlightened. It's a lot easier for builders to get insurance, in any case.

So, for a guy like me who has always vigorously resisted any government intrusion into my personal affairs, it is really hard to swallow the fact that if I want to build a new barn, for example, I need an absolute minimum of four (4) permits PLUS an application fee just to get started. And that's only if I don't wire, plumb, insulate, finish or heat it. But not only do I have to secure and complete those permits, now I'm responsible for making sure you do, too. Some days it just sucks to be me.

But let's say I don't bother getting those permits and I just build it. I don't need a foundation or footings if I'm not going to have it inspected, right? So I don't bother with them; I just pour a slab and up she goes. Then we get a wind storm that whips up 60 MPH winds (geez, could that happen?) and my barn winds up in your yard. On top of that gal - what was her name? Or maybe just the roof of my barn winds up in your yard. Are you getting my drift here?

I could probably come up with several hundred dozen examples without much effort, but if you're still with me at this point, I'm going to count my lucky stars and quit pretty quick. Suffice it to say, because we have a duty to care about our citizens - all of our citizens - and we are responsible for the health, safety and welfare of everyone, the law requires that each and every construction or building repair project be appropriately permitted. That way everyone can be reasonably sure they won't get any unexpected thrills in the neighbors' hot tub, and the toddler won't get his head stuck in the new railing.

I've been working to get all of our application, building, zoning and permitting processes loaded onto our website and as this goes to post, everything that's been done since last September is there. If you're thinking of building, remodeling or repairing one of your structures, please visit us at: <http://www.concordtownshipmi.org/docs.html> then download and complete the necessary applications forms and bring them into the office. Or, just come on in during our office hours and we'll help you get up and running.

It's always better safe than sorry!