

# WORKING WITH PEOPLE!!

Kay Lutze,  
Shoreland Policy Coordinator  
Dean Johnson,  
Marathon County Zoning

They may forget what you said,  
but they will never forget how  
you made them feel.” – **Carl W.  
Buechner**

- ▣ *“Regulators, under unprecedented pressure, face a range of demands, often contradictory in nature: be less intrusive – but be more effective; be kinder and gentler – but don’t let the bastards get away with anything; focus your efforts – but be consistent; process things quicker – and be more careful next time; deal with important issues – but do not stray outside your statutory authority; be more responsive to the regulated community – but do not get captured by industry”.* Professor Malcolm Sparrow (2000)

# Overview

- ▣ Clarify your role
- ▣ Regulatory Integrity
- ▣ Accountability and Transparency
- ▣ Need to establish these core principles in order to effectively communicate and deal with people.
- ▣ Tips on working with people
- ▣ Document your conversations
- ▣ Lessons learned

# Clarify your Role

- ▣ The purpose of your role should be clear.
- ▣ KNOW THE PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE.
- ▣ Know the purpose of the regulation.
  - What is the reason for the rule??

# Regulatory Integrity

- ▣ Decision making is objective, impartial, consistent.
- ▣ Avoid risk of conflict, bias or improper influence.
- ▣ A high level of integrity improves the outcome of regulatory decisions and your own self –preservation and job satisfaction.



# Accountability and Transparency

- ▣ Decisions need to stand up in court of law.
- ▣ How you arrived at the decision should be transparent.
- ▣ Consistency and transparency provide enhanced stakeholder confidence in the regulator.

# Tips on Communicating

- ▣ Listen!!
  - Let the property owner describe the proposed project or his complaint. Repeat back to the property owner your understanding of the situation.
- ▣ Ask clarifying questions!!!
  - The PO may have forgot to mention or did not properly describe something.
  - How is the addition going to be used? Is the addition 1 story or 2? I see there are sliding doors but you don't show a deck – do you intend on building a deck?
- ▣ Worth spending additional time upfront – cover alternatives
- ▣ Remove yourself from the equation.
  - I can't allow that, I can't issue that, I will have to deny the permit, etc.



# Tips continued:

- ▣ Replace “I” with appropriate ordinance section, statute or code.
  - Section X of the ordinance requires....
  - The statute recently adopted prohibits.....
  - The purpose of that section is to prevent.....

# Tone and Content

- ▣ **Be Honest, Kind and Respectful.**
  - Avoid phrases such as “you just aren’t getting what I am explaining”. Consider that maybe you aren’t explaining it all that well or the way you are isn’t working. Try something else. Draw a picture!
  - **Be Professional and confident.**
- ▣ **Communicate Directly and to the point.**
  - Avoid using the “well, let me see if I can think of another way to make this work and I will call you in a day or so” if you already know that the decision is negative.
  - Educate without talking down. Don’t say “well, there is a 75’ setback for a good reason !!”
- ▣ **Lose the need to be right in a conversation.** Your tone/volume does not need to match the customers tone/volume. You may need to end the conversation or start over.

# Don't bluff your way through

- ▣ If you don't know the answer to a question – be honest. Let them know you will find out and get back to them.
- ▣ Don't provide an answer that might be wrong and make a mistake just because someone needs an answer this very minute!!!
- ▣ End goal – you want the client to walk out feeling good about the contact even if they did not receive a permit or can't proceed with a project.

# Document the conversation

- ▣ Document your phone and your counter conversations and place the summary in the parcel file. Why is this important?
  - Provides a history of the contact and the answers to proposed projects.
    - ▣ Useful for future property owners and potential future violations.
  - You may have to give the same answer to 4 more contractors in the future. Provides consistency for the contractor and internal consistency in the office.
  - Make it easy by printing out the AS400 property owner page if you utilize that system.

# Example

- ▣ 1/5/2017 Spoke with Dean Johnson, contractor.
- ▣ Proposed 24' X 28' detached garage for J. Brown.
- ▣ Told him permit required and setbacks of 75' from OHWM, 20' from side lot lines and 65' from ROW.
- ▣ Garage can be for storage purposes only and no living quarters allowed.
- ▣ Plenty of room on property for project to work.
- ▣ Sent application in mail on 1/5/2017.

# Lessons learned!

- ▣ Don't assume that your conversations are private: with surveyors, contractors, property owners, etc. You will get burned! Don't say or share something that you don't want shared with others.