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REPORT NO. 2025-21

TO: Barry Burton, County Administrator

FROM: Melissa Dondero, Inspector General/Chief Audit Executive *md*
Division of Inspector General

DIST: The Honorable Chair and Members of the Board of County Commissioners
Tom Almonte, Assistant County Administrator, County Administration
Kevin McAndrew, Director, Building and Development Review Services
Jim McKillen, Building Official, Building and Development Review Services
Ken Burke, CPA, Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

SUBJECT: Investigative Review of a Building Permit

DATE: October 14, 2025

This memo serves to inform you that the Division of Inspector General (IG) completed an investigative review of the processing of a building permit (Permit).

Our investigative review was conducted in compliance with the Quality Standards for Investigations found within the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General* as published by the Association of Inspectors General and *The Florida Inspectors General Standards Manual* from The Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. Accordingly, it included such tests of records and other procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

In July 2024, the IG received an anonymous complaint that the Permit was not processed appropriately by Building and Development Review Services (BDRS). The Complainant made no specific allegations of fraud, waste, or abuse, and therefore, the IG opened an investigative review into the Permit without any specific allegations. The Complainant did not provide any documentation, but stated a review of the permit documentation in Accela Civic Platform (Accela), the County's permitting software, would show the permit was not processed according to standard operating procedures.

Background

During our preliminary review of the complaint, we learned that the Permit was related to a school that was attempting to change the use of the building and bring the building into compliance with the Florida Building Code (FBC) requirements. The BDRS Director had issued a letter to the school on January 4, 2024, which was signed by the School President, indicating the school could continue operating with deficiencies, as long as all deficiencies were corrected by July 1, 2024. Since the time period in the letter had elapsed, and the Complainant reported no life safety concerns, the IG focused its initial efforts on monitoring the Permit.

In February 2025, the IG contacted the Development Review Services (DRS) Project Manager for an update on the Permit, and the DRS Project Manager reported concerns that the school was open and should not be since there was no Certificate of Occupancy (CO), and the building permit had been expired since November 2024 after 180 days with no activity. There had been an agreement for the school to occupy only the first floor until the life safety issues on the second floor could be addressed.

On March 6, 2025, the IG requested the Current Building Official to perform a site visit at the school with the IG. During the site visit, the school was operating with students and teachers inside, on both the first and second floors of the building.

The Current Building Official noted several concerns, including life safety issues. For example, the fire escape from the second floor was a staircase attached to a second-floor window that did not meet FBC requirements (see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below).

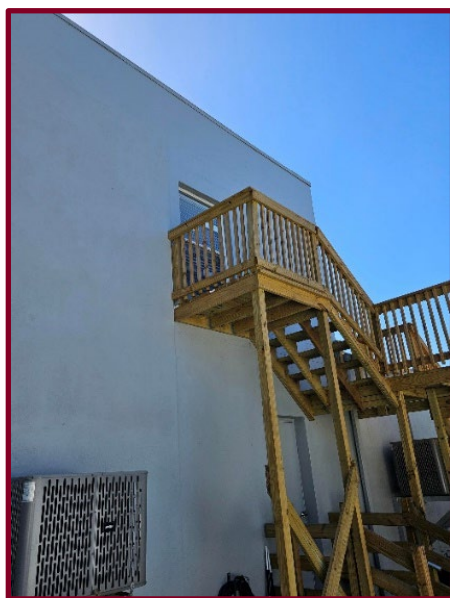


Figure 1

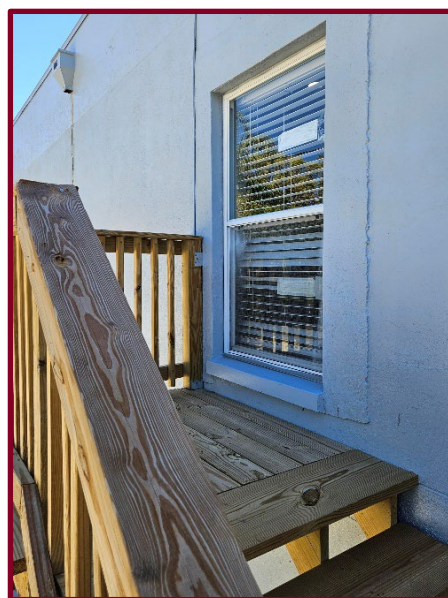


Figure 2

Due to the life safety concerns noted during the visit, on March 7, 2025, the IG notified the County Administrator of the site visit and that the Current Building Official noted the following issues during the site visit:

1. The second floor fire exit was a window that led out to a staircase for escape; however, the exit was not proper. The window sill was too high and the top of the window was too low to be used as an exit. In addition, the stairs that were constructed needed to be tightened.
2. Fire Walls – Since many walls were already completed and not inspected while in progress, the Building Official could not confirm if the fire walls were appropriately rated for fire safety.

On March 7, 2025, BDRS issued a Notice of Violation (NOV) for the property being in violation of FBC Section 111: Certificate of Occupancy and required the school to vacate the building by March 10, 2025. FBC Section 111.1 Use and Occupancy states:

"A building or structure shall not be used or occupied, and a change in the existing use or occupancy classification of a building or structure or portion thereof shall not be made, until the building official has issued a certificate of occupancy therefor as provided herein."

On March 26, 2025, the IG conducted another site visit at the school to meet with the School President. As the IG investigators approached the school door, the School President exited the building and met the investigators outside. The School President stated that the outstanding building deficiencies had not been resolved, and the Current Building Official had extended the deadline to come into compliance with unresolved deficiencies, but that the building was still not supposed to be occupied.

The IG heard children in the school while talking to the School President, and asked if the school was open. The School President stated that, even with the time extension, there was no way they would be able to comply with all unresolved issues. The School President stated that the school was open and students were in the building. After leaving the school, the IG informed the Current Building Official that the building was occupied, and the Current Building Official confirmed the NOV was still in place and the building was not supposed to be occupied.

As a result of the IG's notification, on March 26, 2025, BDRS staff visited the property with a Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) deputy. When BDRS and PCSO arrived at the school, the school was occupied. Because the school day was nearly over, BDRS staff and the PCSO deputy agreed to let the students finish the school day and reminded the School President that the building could not be occupied.

BDRS staff visited the school again on March 28, 2025, and noted that students and staff were outside the building. BDRS staff informed the PCSO and PCSO reminded the School President the building could not be occupied.

The school's Facebook page included several posts after the NOV was issued with pictures of students inside and outside the building doing various activities. On March 29, 2025, the Facebook page included several posts indicating that the day before, the students participated in an "egg drop" game, and showed various students standing at the top of the staircase that was deemed a life safety issue (see Figure 3 below).

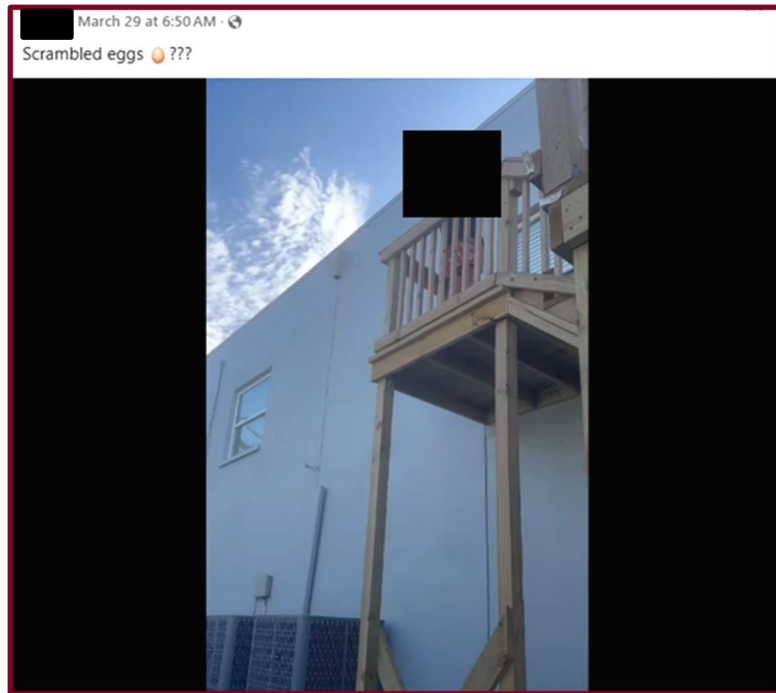


Figure 3 - Staircase with Student

Standard Permit Process

BDRS is responsible for evaluating development projects, construction plans, and land development proposals in compliance with relevant building codes and Pinellas County's (County) land development code (LDC) for properties within the unincorporated areas of the County. BDRS issues permits and performs related inspections for development activity.

The following is the typical flow of a building permit:

1. Permitting

- LDC Sec. 138-176. – *Uses requiring Site Plan Review* defines when a site plan is required. When there is a "change of use" proposed, as per the case of the school, Section 138-176(a) (6) states, "*Change of use to development that is more intensive than the previous use, as determined by the county administrator or his or her designee.*" This process starts with a building permit application which is referred to the project management team. The project management team reviews the application and makes the determination as to whether the change of use is a standard building permit or requires a site plan processed through the Development Review Committee.

- The BDRS project management team helps the applicant (contractor or owner) understand which permits are required for the project and in which order they should be processed. Some permits can be processed simultaneously.

2. Plans Review

- Some permits require plans examiners to review and approve the plans before work can begin.
- Once plans are approved, the permit is paid for and issued. Then the applicant completes the work.

3. Inspections

- Depending on the type of permit, inspections occur at different times while work is being completed. The applicant must request BDRS to perform inspections at specific intervals until all required inspections have been approved. Final inspections may include the following trades:

- i. Mechanical
- ii. Electrical
- iii. Building
- iv. Plumbing

DRS also performs inspections for some permit types.

- When the final building trade inspection is scheduled, the building inspector will notify the appropriate fire district that the final fire inspection can be scheduled. Once all final building code inspections, the Fire Marshal's inspection, and DRS inspections are approved, BDRS can issue a CO or Certificate of Completion.

Accela is a web-based workflow management system that automates the permitting process from application to project completion. The County uses Accela to manage and track its building permits. Citizens can create an account to access and view their permits and see real-time status updates.

Investigative Activity

In order to understand how this permit was processed and how a school was operating with life safety issues present, we reviewed the following documentation related to this complaint:

- Accela permitting documentation
- BDRS policies and procedures
- Seminole Fire inspection reports
- Florida Statutes
- Florida Building Code
- Emails and calendar details
- Payroll and personnel records

We also interviewed BDRS staff, the Permit Contractor, the School President, the Prior Building Official, and the owner of the building the school was occupying (the Building Owner). We attempted to interview Seminole Fire and the County Attorney's Office (CAO) to better understand their involvement in the permit, and they both declined to participate.

Permit History

In December 2023, the School President submitted an online customer service form in reference to a permit for fire sprinklers. The item was forwarded to the BDRS Director for processing. During an interview with the BDRS Director, they indicated they contacted the customer (the School President) since the Prior Building Official was on vacation. The BDRS Director learned that the School President was trying to obtain Department of Education (DOE) funding for their school and needed to obtain fire inspections in that effort.

The BDRS Director consulted BDRS staff to see if a right-of-way utilization permit (RUP) could be issued so the school could energize water lines for fire sprinklers, which were already installed. This would allow the school to obtain DOE funding and continue operating. In January 2024, an agreement letter was executed between the School President and the BDRS Director, which allowed the issuance of the RUP. The agreement stated:

"Pinellas County is providing you until July 1, 2024, to come into compliance with outstanding requirements. Failure to come into compliance with either FBC requirements or LDC requirements would result in the initiation of violations, and any other legal action necessary to achieve compliance."

The BDRS Director explained to the IG the purpose of the letter was to facilitate a Temporary CO (TCO), giving the School President until July 1, 2024, to fulfill the minimum requirements to keep the business operating safely and still require the school to come into compliance with the conditions needed. The agreement allowed the School President to occupy the building without a CO while making repairs.

As noted in the Background section above, all elements of a building permit would typically be completed before completing the fire permits; however, because the school was already being occupied, the sequence of the permits was changed in order to facilitate the RUP, which would allow the fire sprinklers to be energized. As of October 14, 2025, the building permit, as well as a site plan permit have not been completed. In August 2025, the School President reported to the IG that they moved their school to another location.

Permit Timeline

We have included an Appendix with a detailed timeline of events from April 27, 2023, through August 19, 2025 at the end of this memo. As shown in Figure 4 below, there were several permits processed at the same time for the school property: a building permit, a right-of-way utilization permit, a fire sprinklers permit, a fire alarm permit, and a site plan permit. Figure 4 illustrates the time period each permit was open, the status of each of the permits as of August 19, 2025, and the color key for each permit as referenced in Appendix A.

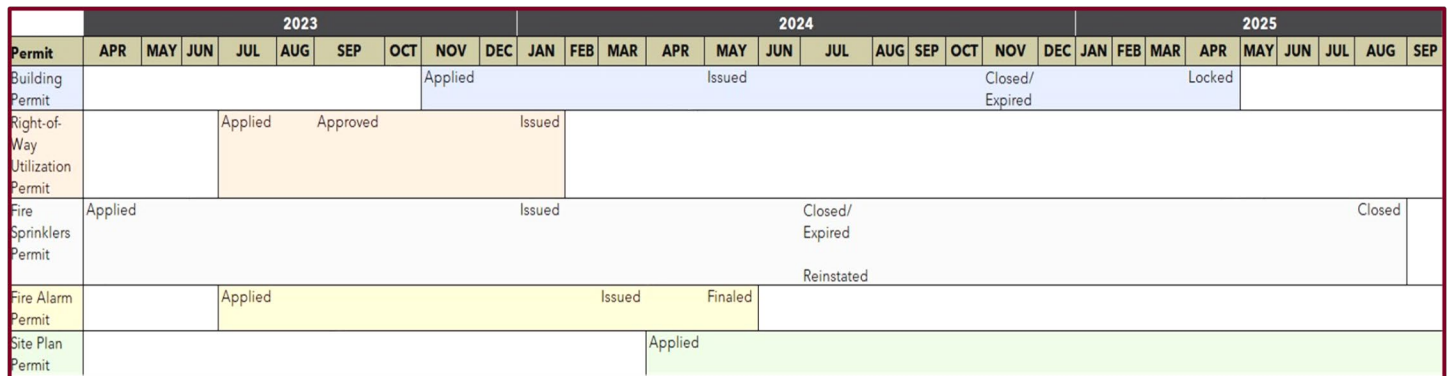


Figure 4 - Permit Processing Timeline

See below for a description of the permit statuses included in Figure 4 above:

- Applied - The applicant has completed a permit application.
- Approved - The permit application has been reviewed, and BDRS staff have determined the project meets the minimum compliance requirements to move forward.
- Issued - The applicant has paid the required permit fees, and the permit has been issued.
- Finaled - Required inspections have been completed.
- Closed/Expired - The permit has been closed due to inactivity (occurs automatically after 180 days of no activity).
- Reinstated - The permit has been reopened after being closed/expired.
- Locked - The permit is restricted, which can not be accessed.

The status of the five permits listed in Figure 4 above as of August 19, 2025, is listed below:

- Building Permit - Locked
- Right of Way Utilization Permit - Issued
- Fire Sprinklers Permit - Closed
- Fire Alarm Permit - Finaled
- Site Plan Permit - Applied

As mentioned above, further details for each permit are provided in Appendix A.

Conclusions

Permit Processing

Typically, the permitting process would be as follows:

- Site Plan
- Building Permit
- Additional permits as needed
- Trade Inspections
- Fire Inspections

The Permit was initiated due to open fire sprinkler and fire alarm permits. BDRS issued an RUP to facilitate the fire permits and then worked toward processing the building permit and site plan permits. Therefore, we determined the Permit was not processed according to standard operating procedures.

School President

On August 4, 2023, BDRS staff met with the School President, and on August 7, 2023, sent an email reiterating the discussion. The email stated that there were several requirements for changing the use and occupancy of the building that the school planned to occupy. On August 8, 2023, the School President confirmed receipt of the August 7, 2023, email and asserted that they had already received the Health Department certification for group care in a private school. The School President asked BDRS staff to reach out to the Building Owner's company to review additional life safety requirements.

The DRS Project Manager reached out to the School President and the Building Owner on August 9, 2023, to provide additional details on the FBC requirements specific to schools. The School President confirmed to the IG that on August 10, 2023, the School President opened the school for students to start the school year. The school's Facebook page featured posts from August 2023 and September 2023 stating the school was open. On September 6, 2023, the DRS Project Manager followed up with the School President on their inquiries related to the RUP permit, and reiterated that, "There are many more requirements to utilize the property as a school, as I stated in the attached email." The DRS Project Manager attached the prior thread of emails from August 7, 2023.

On September 11, 2023, the School President emailed BDRS that the school would not be able to open in time for the school year, even though they were working on getting a new architect. On September 12, 2023, the School President emailed the DRS Project Manager, stating, "I will have 53 students as soon as I can get this taken care of."

The School President indicated to the IG that in the summer of 2024, they worked to correct outstanding deficiencies before the new school year started. Since the School President knew they could only occupy the first floor due to life safety concerns for not having a second floor exit, they had friends and family help build a staircase off of a second floor window. The School President thought building the staircase was the final step in being able

to occupy the second floor. The School President indicated they did not realize they needed a permit for the work since they were processing a change of use with BDRS.

We determined that throughout the permitting process, BDRS communicated building requirements to the School President. In addition, the School President's actions did not always align with their communications to BDRS. We also noted that in March 2025, when BDRS issued an NOV, the School President did not comply with the BDRS directive to vacate the school for the students' safety.

Prior Building Official

The Certified Building Official (CBO) in an organization is responsible for enforcing permitting and inspection to ensure compliance with the FBC and any applicable local technical amendments to the FBC. The CBO has the authority and the responsibility to enforce violations and take action in cases of non-compliance.

Section 468.604, Florida Statutes (F.S.), states:

"It is the responsibility of the building code administrator or building official to administrate, supervise, direct, enforce, or perform the permitting and inspection of construction, alteration, repair, remodeling, or demolition of structures and the installation of building systems within the boundaries of their governmental jurisdiction, when permitting is required, to ensure compliance with the Florida Building Code and any applicable local technical amendment to the Florida Building Code. The building code administrator or building official shall faithfully perform these responsibilities without interference from any person."

The terms building code administrator and building official are used synonymously as defined by § 468.603(2), F.S. shown below:

"'Building code administrator' or 'building official' means any of those employees of municipal or county governments, or any person contracted, with building construction regulation responsibilities who are charged with the responsibility for direct regulatory administration or supervision of plan review, enforcement, or inspection of building construction, erection, repair, addition, remodeling, demolition, or alteration projects that require permitting indicating compliance with building, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, gas, fire prevention, energy, accessibility, and other construction codes as required by state law or municipal or county ordinance. This term is synonymous with 'building official' as used in the Florida Building Code."

We interviewed the Prior Building Official about their involvement with the Permit. They indicated they were first made aware of the Permit in April 2024, when the BDRS Customer & Permitting Operations Manager (CPOM) emailed them because Seminole Fire was questioning the fire sprinkler permit for a property that did not have a change of use permit.

Seminole Fire was concerned that they were being asked to inspect a fire sprinkler system, but the building permit which included a change of use, was not rectified with the County.

The Prior Building Official stated that they learned at that time that in January 2024, the BDRS Director wrote a letter to the School President, as described earlier in this memo. In April 2024, the Prior Building Official performed an inspection at the school, and on April 22, 2024, issued a letter to the school, indicating the school would need to come into compliance with outstanding deficiencies by April 26, 2024, or vacate the school.

After the Prior Building Official issued the letter, they worked with Seminole Fire and the School President to ensure life safety issues were resolved. On May 1, 2024, BDRS issued the Permit, with the condition that the school could not occupy the second floor. This would ensure there were no life safety issues and the School President could work with BDRS on the site plan. When the site plan issues were resolved, the School President was expected to continue working on the building issues on the second floor and eventually come into full compliance. The Prior Building Official indicated they discussed this multiple times with the School President.

From May 1, 2024, through September 2024, when the Prior Building Official resigned from County employment, they indicated they did not have involvement in the Permit. They assumed the School President was continuing to work with BDRS staff to process the site plan.

During our interview with the Prior Building Official, we notified them that we reviewed multiple emails from January 2024, in which the BDRS Director copied the Prior Building Official on correspondence about the school, and the Prior Building Official indicated they did not recall those emails. The Prior Building Official reiterated they first learned about the school in April 2024.

Although the Prior Building Official indicated they were not aware of the Permit and associated activities until April 2024, the emails from January 2024 conflict with that statement. The emails were sent before the BDRS Director entered an agreement with the School President.

We determined the Prior Building Official had the ultimate authority and responsibility to mitigate risk through enforcement of the FBC.

BDRS Director

The BDRS Director issued a letter in the spirit of a TCO, which is a CBO responsibility. The BDRS Director was not a licensed CBO. FBC Section 111.3 Temporary occupancy states:

"The building official is authorized to issue a temporary certificate of occupancy before the completion of the entire work covered by the permit, provided that such portion or portions shall be occupied safely. The building official shall set a time period during which the temporary certificate of occupancy is valid."

The BDRS Director was assisting a customer in the Prior Building Official's absence and indicated it was their intention to ensure the school was safe and that dozens of students were not displaced in the middle of the school year. However, we determined the BDRS Director did not have the authority to coordinate a TCO or similar agreement without the approval of the building official.

TCO Process

As noted above, the letter the BDRS Director issued in January 2024 was in the spirit of a TCO. The IG issued a report on August 7, 2024, related to a different permit, and the IG's recommendation at that time was to implement a formal TCO process so that BDRS staff processed them consistently with proper follow-up. We verified that BDRS implemented a TCO policy on July 10, 2024, during the IG's review. The BDRS Director issued the letter to the school prior to the IG's recommendation and BDRS's implementation of the TCO policy. Therefore, BDRS did not have a TCO policy to follow at that time. The IG is not recommending further action with regard to a TCO policy since BDRS has addressed the issue already.

Based on our investigative activity described above, we are referring this matter to County Administration for review and take any action deemed necessary. We appreciate the cooperation shown by the staff of BDRS during the course of this investigative review.

MD/JP/DE

Appendix A

Date	Activity
4/27/2023	Fire Sprinklers Permit - Permit application was received.
6/7/2023	Right-of-Way Utilization Permit - Permit application was received.
7/10/2023	Fire Alarm Permit - Plans package was received.
8/7/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President the following regarding a meeting they had on 8/4/2023: -There are many additional requirements to changing the use/occupancy of the building with 65 students. -A site plan review is required along with a building application for change of use. -Schools have specific requirements that may need to be addressed before a change of use is approved. -There are specific requirements for drop-off/pick-up queuing on a neighborhood street where the school is located. -The access to the roadway may also need to be assessed and improved to meet Public Works requirements for commercial use. -There are Health Department requirements, which can be reviewed on the Florida Health website.
8/10/2023	First day of school - The School President confirmed the school opened for students.
9/6/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President in response to the School President's inquiry about an RUP and fire line connection. The DRS Project Manager indicated there were still several items needed to utilize the property as a school, with steps as follows: -Submit a site plan for review prepared by a design professional. -Submit a Building Change of Use application, which would include an assessment of FBC compliance, including Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility standards.
9/8/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President's Civil Engineer the following information: -A traffic study is needed to account for vehicles during drop-off and pick-up times. -The building itself may not be feasible for a school as-is, and many alterations may be necessary to meet FBC requirements. -The second floor is only accessible by stairs, so it is not ADA-compliant. -There are specific requirements for student/faculty restrooms. -A building permit application for the change of use is required, with a life safety plan, showing safe exit paths based on the occupancy load of a school with 65 students.
9/11/2023	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager that they were working on getting a new architect to help, but the school would not be able to open within the time frame necessary for the school year. The School President requested information about the current use of the building, "Work/Live," so a new business opportunity could generate revenue to pay the monthly lease. The DRS Project Manager replied that the owner of the property or the leasing tenant must live in the building, and provided the LDC section requirements for 138-3215(c)(4), which included the following: -Up to one-half of the unit area can be used for retail sales and service, office, and/or educational purposes. -The nonresidential operations shall be conducted in part by at least one occupying resident. -Nonresidents are permitted to be employed at the live-work unit. The nonresidential component must meet the zoning district's use requirements. The uses shall have shared connections and amenities. The School President requested confirmation that they could live in the upstairs portion of the building and use the first floor for educational purposes.

Date	Activity
9/12/2023	The DRS Project Manager replied to the School President the following: -The previous approval for Live/Work was for a contractor's office. -To change to educational, a site plan would be required, even if less than 60+ students attended. -The ADA accessibility standards and life safety of the space being used for educational business would still be assessed by BDRS. -Planning/zoning would need to know the hours of operation and student counts. -The RUP would also need a site plan to move forward. The School President replied that there would be 53 students waiting to start and the program hours would be 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The School President asked if the site plan, ADA accessibility standards, and life safety plan should be submitted to the DRS Project Manager or with the change of use permit.
10/3/2023	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager with a revised site plan and life safety plan attached. The School President noted they were awaiting the traffic report and would provide it as soon as possible.
10/4/2023	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager the traffic assessment report. The School President also requested that the DRS Project Manager expedite the RUP so water can get to the building so the fire inspections can be completed and school can start.
10/4/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President the following information: -The submitted site plan is not sufficient for the change of use. It is a markup of the previously approved site plan for the Live/Work office, and no data specific to a school/educational use was included. It was not certified by a professional engineer which is required. Only electronic reviews through the public portal are accepted. -The fire safety plan looks to be a fire sprinkler layout, which is not a life safety plan as required for the building review for the change of use. The main function of a life safety plan is to show exit routes specific to the proposed occupancy load of the building, to be used in the event of a fire or other life safety event. The plan has to be certified by an architect licensed in Florida. The DRS Project Manager attached an example life safety plan and additional information about life safety plans.
11/2/2023	The School President emailed a life safety plan to the DRS Project Manager.
11/6/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President acknowledging receipt of the life safety plan and indicated the Building Plans Examiner must determine if any revisions are needed.
11/17/2023	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager a site plan and indicated it would be submitted soon with the change of use application.
11/20/2023	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager stating the following: "I just left you a voicemail about some questions I have in reference to christian school requirements. I know you mentioned something about christian schools and exemption status. We are christian based and teach a christian curriculum so I would like to know how that might affect our current status with the county." The DRS Project Manager replied that their understanding was exemptions were for schools directly affiliated with a church and on church property and that the exemptions are mostly ADA accessibility standards within the FBC. The DRS Project Manager indicated the School President's architect would be aware of the specifics, and a site plan was still a requirement.
11/21/2023	The School President and the DRS Project Manager exchanged several emails regarding how the general contractor could submit an electronic application for a change of use. The School President indicated the Building Owner was also the general contractor. The Building Permit application was received, and the site plan and life safety plan were uploaded to the building permit by the digital plan room.

Date	Activity
11/21/2023	The DRS Project Manager emailed the School President that site plan review can take 3-4 weeks, and then any issues would be released for the School President, the Permit Contractor, and the engineer to address and resubmit.
11/29/2023	Building Permit - The building record was deemed complete and distributed to BDRS staff.
12/21/2023	The School President submitted an online customer service form through the Pinellas County website requesting information about office closures for zoning/code enforcement offices because they attempted to visit the zoning office on 12/20/2023 and the office was closed. The School President wanted to follow up on the fire sprinklers permit. The BDRS CPOM emailed the BDRS Director that the DRS Project Manager was working with the School President, but the sprinkler was dependent on issues related to the fact that the School President did not submit a change of use for the property.
12/22/2023	The BDRS Director emailed the BDRS CPOM that they were pursuing issuing an RUP for the fire service as long as any remaining items were addressed so the school could still operate. The DRS Project Manager emailed the BDRS Director and the BDRS CPOM that Seminole Fire approved the fire sprinklers in June, but denied the fire alarm in September since the use as a school was not approved.
12/29/2023	The School President emailed the BDRS Director following up for approval of getting water to the school sprinkler system.
12/29/2023	The BDRS Director emailed the School President stating a BDRS staff meeting was scheduled for the following Tuesday morning to facilitate the permit for the water service installation ahead of the building permit/site plan items.
1/2/2024 9:47 a.m.	The BDRS Director emailed Seminole Fire and copied the Prior Building Official requesting a Microsoft Teams call regarding the school between the BDRS Director, the Prior Building Official, and Seminole Fire. The BDRS Director wanted to provide Seminole Fire with an update and obtain any Seminole Fire updates.
1/2/2024 12:09 p.m.	The BDRS Director emailed the CAO, and copied the Prior Building Official and the DRS Division Manager the following information: -The school is a private school registered with the DOE as a religious private school that has been operating since September without the change of use and associated permits. -The BDRS Director would like to facilitate an RUP being issued before a building permit so that the installed sprinkler system could be energized with a new fire service. -The school operator is aware that the RUP issuance would not relieve the associated building and site requirements. -The BDRS Director would like to draft a form that states the above and obligates the open items to be addressed by a defined date.
1/3/2024	The BDRS Director emailed the CAO, and copied the Prior Building Official and the DRS Division Manager the following information: -BDRS is finalizing a couple of items to enable the issuance of the RUP for the fire service installation. The two items are: 1. Obtaining an installation cost from the school's engineer to assign a bond amount that will need to be posted (or a letter of credit) for the fire service installation prior to issuance of a permit. 2. A signature that holds the school responsible for compliance with FBC and LDC requirements by a defined date.
1/4/2024	The BDRS Director created a letter to the school stating the school had until 7/1/2024 to come into compliance with outstanding items. The School President signed the letter on 1/5/2024.
1/16/2024	The School President emailed the BDRS Director, a DRS Division Manager, and one other BDRS staff member to inform them they had delivered the signed and sealed bond, and asked for confirmation of receipt and the permit status. The BDRS Director replied and confirmed receipt of the bond.
1/17/2024	Right-of-Way Utilization Permit - Permit was issued.
1/31/2024	Fire Sprinklers Permit - Permit was issued.

Date	Activity
2/5/2024	Building Permit - Accela generated an email to the School President and the Building Owner with staff comments; revisions were needed before the application could be approved. The School President emailed Seminole Fire a list of County contacts who have been working on the project.
2/14/2024	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager that Seminole Fire advised them a second story floor plan was needed to complete the fire inspection. The School President attached a floor plan from an architect, and asked if it was what was needed. The DRS Project Manager replied stating Seminole Fire likely needed a life safety plan to address the lack of life safety exit paths for the second floor. The DRS Project Manager also stated this was an outstanding item with the Building division. Note: In an interview with the IG on 3/13/2025, the School President indicated the architect that worked on the plans scammed them and the relationship was discontinued. The School President then hired the School Architect to work on this project.
2/28/2024	The BDRS Director emailed the School President to inform them one of the permits would be ready that day based on fees being assessed and paid. The BDRS Director also asked if they had retained a consultant (architect) to process updated building plans and site plan. The School President informed the BDRS Director they had contracted a consultant and they were already working on the issues.
3/1/2024	Fire Alarm Permit - Permit was Issued.
3/6/2024	The BDRS Director emailed the Prior Building Official the chain of emails from 2/28/2024 and referenced an earlier conversation between them about the school and one of the permits. The BDRS Director requested the Prior Building Official let them know if there were any concerns with inspections.
4/2/2024	The School President emailed Seminole Fire indicating both the fire alarm and fire sprinkler companies were planning to request inspections three days later.
4/5/2024	Seminole Fire did two inspections. The Inspection Report indicated a sprinkler rough in and pressure test were performed and passed with no violations, but in an email dated 4/16/2024 (see below), Seminole Fire noted multiple life safety deficiencies in the structure. Seminole Fire emailed the School President fire code standard for stairs.
4/9/2024	Seminole Fire emailed the School President that they spoke to the BDRS CPOM and until the change of use permit was closed or rectified with the County, a final fire inspection could not be conducted. The School President replied that they were permitted to complete the fire requirements for the school and that the BDRS Director would speak to the BDRS CPOM.
4/9/2024 4:02 p.m.	The BDRS Director emailed the BDRS CPOM that the school could operate until the end of the school year.
4/9/2024 7:05 p.m.	The Prior Building Official emailed the BDRS Director that they would have to take control of the project, and that there could not be a known violation and continued operation without a CO.
4/9/2024 7:57 p.m.	The Prior Building Official emailed the BDRS Director that they were not okay with the situation, that they were never consulted on FBC compliance, and asked who determined the life safety requirements.
4/10/2024	The BDRS Director met with the School Architect.
4/11/2024	A Building Plans Examiner emailed Seminole Fire a new life safety plan.
4/12/2024	The BDRS Director emailed the School Architect requesting the change of use drawing documentation they discussed during their meeting on 4/10/2024. The School Architect replied with the plan. The Building Plans Examiner sent Seminole Fire the life safety plan again and stated that BDRS discovered the original use of the building was commercial storage and there were no change of use permits to a residential home. The Building Plans Examiner also stated BDRS would treat the building as educational.

Date	Activity
4/12/2024	The School President emailed the BDRS Director a picture of the Building Owner's business card.
4/12/2024	The BDRS Director emailed the School President stating that per the Prior Building Official, the contractor needed to file a building permit that day for a "Remodel/Change of Use to an Educational Facility." The School President replied that they thought a change of use was done. The Building Plans Examiner clarified the one that was done was for Live/Work. The School President replied that the Building Owner forgot their license only covered residential and the School President was working on a solution.
4/15/2024	The School President emailed the Building Plans Examiner and stated a new contractor has taken over the project (Permit Contractor).
4/16/2024	The Seminole Fire Marshal notified the Seminole Fire Chief the following via email: - On 4/5/2024, Seminole Fire went to the school to perform inspections for a fire sprinkler and fire alarm, both of which were filed under educational use. - The Building Permit is open with the County for change of use since the property is currently listed as office space/storage. - During the inspection, the School President requested a courtesy walkthrough of the building. The Fire Marshal and Fire Inspector conducted a courtesy inspection. There were multiple life safety deficiencies observed that would need to be corrected before operating as educational. During the inspection, the building was occupied by 40+ staff and children. Seminole Fire advised the School President the building shall not operate as educational until proper steps taken. - Seminole Fire advised the facility is not to be occupied. This email was forwarded from the Fire Chief to an attorney, who forwarded it to the CAO who forwarded it to the BDRS Director and the Prior Building Official. The CAO asked the BDRS Director if they would like to meet to discuss.
4/17/2024	The School President emailed the Building Plans Examiner requesting a call and stated Seminole Fire wanted this issue resolved the following week. The BDRS Director forwarded the email to the CAO and the Prior Building Official.
4/17/2024	Per an email on 4/18/2025, the Seminole Fire Chief and Fire Marshal met with the School President.
4/18/2024	The Building Plans Examiner emailed the Permit Contractor and told them they needed to submit a new Central Permit Form with their name and license to be added to the Building Permit. The BDRS CPOM added that they also needed the subcontractor form for all trade work.
4/18/2024	Seminole Fire emailed the School President the remaining unresolved life safety issues.
4/22/2024	The School President emailed Seminole Fire a list of items that had been addressed and an update on other items.
4/22/2024	The Prior Building Official issued a letter to the School President stating the following: - During a courtesy walkthrough on 4/5/2024, Seminole Fire noted multiple life safety deficiencies in the structure. - The Building Permit for a change of use to educational use from office space and storage is still pending and will need to be completed prior to completing the fire finals for the fire sprinkler system and the fire alarm. - Until the deficiencies are addressed and the open Building Permit is finalized, the building shall not operate as educational use. - A time extension has previously been granted to allow for compliance but due to life safety concerns, the risk of life loss, and non-compliance with permitting determined by Seminole Fire and the Prior Building Official, effective 4/26/2024, the building cannot be occupied.

Date	Activity
4/23/2024	The School President emailed the Prior Building Official referencing a phone conversation they just had, as follows: -The half-dozen building items that were addressed in their meeting with the BDRS Director, the Building Plans Examiner, the Seminole Fire Marshal, and the School Architect are the only things needed to be addressed to obtain a CO for an educational facility. -The School Architect and Permit Contractor advised the planning package would be uploaded that day. The County will immediately review it and any comments will be sent to the Permit Contractor, the School Architect, and the School President. Once the comments are received and addressed, the BDRS Director will schedule an inspection and once cleared, a CO will be issued. -Seminole Fire scheduled all final inspections for Friday (this email was written on a Tuesday) as long as the change of use is finalized by the County. The Prior Building Official replied with points of clarification: the Permit Contractor would need to request the inspections and once all inspections were approved, and any fees paid, the CO would be issued.
4/24/2024	Fire Alarm Permit - Seminole Fire emailed the School President stating Seminole Fire has a fire alarm final inspection scheduled with the alarm company on 4/26/2024, but plans have to be submitted and approved for change of use by the County before the final fire inspection can be done.
4/25/2024	The Permit Contractor worked with BDRS to submit new plans and confirmed only building trade changes will be made (not mechanical, electrical, or plumbing).
4/26/2024	Site Plan Permit - Application was submitted.
4/26/2024	Building Permit - A note was added to the permit by the BDRS CPOM: "This permit will not include SITE WORK. All Site plan review under separate permit...this is for building review/life safety for change of use." This note was added indicating it was per the BDRS Director/Prior Building Official.
4/29/2024	Building Permit - The School President emailed the Prior Building Official and stated they saw things were being reviewed in Accela and asked if the review would be completed that day and asked for a phone call from the Prior Building Official.
4/30/2024 9:35 a.m.	The School President emailed the Prior Building Official and Seminole Fire to let them know they had two portable toilets and asked if they could both do their inspections that day.
4/30/2024 1:29 p.m.	The School President emailed Seminole Fire and stated the school was added to the Florida Department of Financial Services Division of State Fire Marshal online reporting site and that they would send the Fire Escape Plan shortly.
4/30/2024 4:20 p.m.	The School President emailed a receipt to the BDRS CPOM in reference to the permit labeled "zoning receipt" to show payment after a previously unsuccessful payment attempt.
4/30/2024	Seminole Fire inspection reports show two annual inspections that passed with no violations.
5/1/2024	Building Permit was Issued.
5/1/2024	The Prior Building Official emailed the BDRS Director, the BDRS CPOM, and a DRS Division Manager stating they wanted to issue a TCO for 60 days and needed to include outstanding DRS items. The Prior Building Official asked if 60 days was enough time. The BDRS CPOM replied that DRS did not have a list because there had not been a comprehensive site plan submittal. The BDRS Director asked the Prior Building Official to note on the TCO that the site would need to be brought into compliance through a minor site plan and to keep the same timeline referenced in the letter.
5/1/2024	Building Permit - Per Accela, a building inspection was done, with the following inspector notes: "Egress doors need panic hardware, stairs need graspable handrails, met with Seminole fire marshal and fire inspector."

Date	Activity
5/6/2024	The Prior Building Official emailed the BDRS CPOM stating they were meeting with the School President later that day and asked for outstanding site plan comments to share with them. The BDRS CPOM referred the Prior Building Official to the BDRS Director for DRS input and emailed the BDRS Director to let them know that no DRS reviews had been done.
5/14/2024	Fire Alarm Permit - Permit Closed/Finaled.
5/21/2024	The Prior Building Official emailed the Building Inspector Manager and asked if the school had complied with deficiencies since their last inspection and noted it had been well over the allotted time to comply with the FBC. The School President emailed the Prior Building Official and stated their contractor was requesting inspections that day and that they were not aware there was a time frame to come into compliance with FBC deficiencies.
5/21/2024	Building Permit - Per Accela, a building inspection was done, with the following inspector notes: "Left voicemail with Seminole Fire for fire final 3:10 p.m. Final inspection, result - approved"
7/10/2024	An anonymous complainant reported to the IG that the Permit was not processed appropriately and should be reviewed.
7/29/2024	Fire Sprinklers Permit - Permit Closed/Expired.
7/31/2024	Fire Sprinklers Permit - Permit Issued (reinstated).
8/27/2024	Site Plan Permit - Revised site plan was uploaded.
8/29/2024	Site Plan Permit - BDRS sent an email to the School President, the School Architect, the Permit Contractor, and the Building Owner indicating revisions were needed to the submitted documents.
9/19/2024	Site Plan Permit - Revised site plan received.
9/20/2024	The Prior Building Official resigned from employment with the County.
10/4/2024	Site Plan Permit - Revised site plan was distributed for review.
10/18/2024	Building Permit - Accela sent a system-generated email to the Permit Contractor stating the permit would expire in 30 days.
11/2/2024	Building Permit - Accela sent a system-generated email to the Permit Contractor stating the permit would expire in 15 days.
11/17/2024	Building Permit - Permit Closed/Expired.
11/21/2024	Site Plan Permit - Review was provided to applicant with required revisions.
1/31/2025	Site Plan Permit - Revisions were uploaded to record.
2/4/2025	Site Plan Permit - Site Plan submittal was in review.
2/12/2025	The IG interviewed the DRS Project Manager to determine the status of the property and if further review was required. The DRS Project Manager stated the building permit expired due to lack of activity by the School President and the site plan was in its second round of review with the County. The DRS Project Manager said there was an agreement for the school not to occupy the second floor, but there was a lack of urgency since the school was authorized to use the building before coming into compliance. The DRS Project Manager expressed concern that the site was not designed to be a school.
2/19/2025	Site Plan Permit - The County requested revisions.
3/6/2025	The IG conducted a site visit at the school with the Current Building Official.
3/7/2025	BDRS notified the School President they must vacate the building by 3/10/2025.
3/13/2025	The School President filed a complaint with the IG (see Report # 2025-20)
3/26/2025	Site Plan Permit - Revised plans received.
3/26/2025	The School President's attorney authored a letter to the Current Building Official that all communication must go through the attorney.
3/26/2025	The IG conducted a site visit and noted the school was operating and notified the Current Building Official. BDRS notified the School President they had to vacate by the end of the day.
4/1/2025	The School President emailed the Current Building Official stating they were not occupying the building but asked about the verbal extension given with a date of 4/7/2025.

Date	Activity
4/2/2025	The Current Building Official replied to the School President reminding them that the attorney said all communication must go through the attorney.
4/2/2025	The School President emailed the Current Building Official stating that effective 4/2/2025, the attorney no longer represented school and the County communication should go directly to the School President.
4/4/2025	The School President visited the County and requested an extension/reinstatement of the permit; the DRS Project Manager approved the extension. Later that day, BDRS put a lock on the permit.
4/16/2025	Site Plan Permit - The County requested revisions.
4/21/2025	Site Plan Permit - Revised plans received.
4/24/2025	The School President emailed the DRS Project Manager and stated they had a new builder and inquired if they needed a new permit.
4/25/2025	The School President followed up on their email sent on 4/24/2025 stating they did not get a response.
4/29/2025	Site Plan Permit - The County requested revisions.
8/15/2025	Fire Sprinklers - After the IG asked BDRS why this permit was open with no activity since July 2024, BDRS closed the permit.
8/19/2025	The School President informed the IG that they moved their school to a new location and were working on getting it opened.