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THE NEW DOB: FASTER AND FRIENDLIER, BUILDINGS COMMISSIONER LANCASTER TELLS BOMA/NY PROFESSIONALS

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NEW YORK, NY --- Covering a long list of improvements from the adoption of the International Building Code to the use of hand-held computers for departmental inspection staff, New York City Building Department Commissioner Patricia Lancaster told an audience of more than 300 at the May BOMA/NY luncheon that a “renaissance and revolution” was taking the department from “foe” of the building owners and management industry, to “friend”.

With many of the changes involving upgrades in equipment to improve turn around time and accuracy, Lancaster noted that as a result of the new efficiencies, permit reviews should take one day, Certificates of Occupancy only four, and violation reviews are estimated to be completed within five working days. Site inspectors, including PIPES (Plumbing Inspectors Portable Entry System) field workers, are now armed with hand-held computers to allow them to make more visits per day and maintain more accurate records.

And as for record-keeping, she said, the Department is “turning over every rock” and eliminating old practices such as handwritten objection sheets, and replacing them with word-processed forms containing more precise data, which are then e-mailed to the appropriate party.

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Even appointment making has been overhauled, she said, with 80 call takers instead of four, the elimination of “phantom” or duplicate appointments and the confirmation of all appointments by e-mail. Assignments have been realigned to deal with the personnel shortage—900 staff to 9,000 buildings—by using “SWAT” teams doing sweeps to check on the safety of homes being built.

High on the Department’s list of priorities is the adaptation of the International Building Code to the New York City marketplace, a major initiative “which BOMA/NY has lobbied us to adopt”, Lancaster said. Currently, more than 72 subpanels are working to review every aspect of the code, which she characterized as a “framework upon which to hang revisions.” By September the Commissioner hopes to put into effect the “non-controversial” portions of the code, with those portions requiring discussion/modifications coming on-line in 2005. While she expressed the hope that it will be from “10 to 20 % cheaper” to build under the new code, Lancaster stated firmly that “if it turns out to be more expensive, we will not enact it.”

Input from members of the industry is welcome, she added, and commentary can be sent to the Department via their website, www.nyc.gov/html/dob/home.

Ending on a cautiously optimistic note, Commissioner Lancaster stated she felt the real estate market was improving as borne out by recent statistics: residential values are up 15%, the City gained 24,000 new jobs so far this year, and more than \$40 billion in new construction is slated to come on line over the next 10 years.

BOMA/NY is the greater New York area Association of BOMA International, with more than 805 members active in all areas affecting the industry—from continuing education to advocacy to codes & regulations updates. It is the sponsor of the real estate’s industry most prestigious awards, the Pinnacle Awards, recognizing excellence in operations and personal

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contribution to the Association. BOMA/NY is a major source for continuing education and the exclusive provider of the BOMI coursework required for the RPA, SMA, SMT and FMA professional designations. In recent years, BOMA/NY has become an increasingly influential voice at City Hall, the State House in Albany and in Washington, DC, lobbying for issues as diverse as air quality protocols to security personnel certification.

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