



SCAM ALERT

Planning & Zoning Fraud

Targeting NY Municipalities

A nationwide email scam targeting applicants before planning and zoning boards has officially reached New York. Scammers are exploiting public information to defraud local residents and developers of thousands of dollars. Recent incidents have been reported across the country.

HOW THE SCAM WORKS

1. Scammers scrape applicant email addresses and specific project details from application materials posted on municipal websites.
2. Fraudsters send emails—often from addresses ending in "@usa.com"—claiming to be municipal officials.
3. They issue fake invoices for "fees" or "escrow deposits" (typically \$4,000-\$5,000) and demand payment via wire transfer.
4. To appear legitimate, these emails often feature accurate project details and stolen municipal logos.

Check Before You Wire. A simple phone call to the Clerk's office can prevent residents from losing thousands to digital imposters.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To protect applicants and maintain the integrity of your boards, please implement the following protocols:

1. **Redact Public Information:** When posting application materials online, redact or omit applicant email addresses and personal contact information.
2. **Post Website Warnings:** Add a banner to your municipal website clarifying that you will never request payment via email links or wire transfer.
3. **Notify Current Applicants:** Proactively reach out to those with pending applications to inform them of official payment procedures.
4. **Standardize Protocols:** Document specific procedures for fee collection and ensure all staff are trained to communicate these only through official channels.

Reminders: (1) Official municipal emails will only originate from @[yourmunicipality].gov addresses. (2) Payments must be made in person at municipal offices or through the official payment portal.

If a Scam is Reported, advise them to contact local law enforcement and the NYS Attorney General's office at 1-800-771-7755 or online at ag.ny.gov/consumer-frauds-bureau.

NYMIR IS HERE TO HELP

For any questions or additional support, contact our Cyber Risk Specialist, Elisabeth Dubois
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