



City resolves Chefs' Express permit problem

DON MANLEY • don@misuntimes.com • October 20, 2010

A fight to obtain an electrical permit from the city of Marco Island has ended successfully for the owners of the Chefs' Express restaurant.

The city released the permit to Chef's Express' owners, the Feinman family, on Tuesday afternoon.

An unexpected sewage system impact-fee bill of \$64,000 was the stumbling block that prevented the Feinmans from receiving the permit.

It was that delay that led Anne Feinman, who co-owns Chef's Express with her husband, Rick, and daughter, Lauren, to make an impassioned plea about the situation to the Marco Island City Council on Monday night.

On Tuesday, after the matter was resolved, Anne Feinman called the solution "amazing."

The impact fee stems from the restaurant's move to a larger unit at The Shops of Old Marco that has more seating space.

A new electric meter has to be installed as part of the move.

When Rick Feinman went to the city building to pick up the permit in September, he was told about the impact fee and that it would have to be paid first.

However, it's North Marco Utilities — not the city — that provides service to The Shops of Old Marco.

Anne Feinman outlined the family's hard work in growing the business.

"We're a family — three of us trying to build a business," she said about the restaurant, which opened in early 2005.

Chefs' Express began operating from the larger unit in January and the city sent a letter in May, stating impact fees ranging from about \$20,000 to \$64,000 could be assessed.

That was the only notification the family received, Anne Feinman told the council.

Chefs' Express started as a carry-out deli, where diners would sit at tables in the adjacent courtyard. It now has indoor seating for 40 and outdoor seating for 44 persons.

Craig Woodward, the Feinmans' attorney and owner of North Marco Utilities, then notified the city by letter that the strip mall was served by his company.

"I do feel it's kind of like blackmail to hold up Chefs' Express for an electrical permit," Woodward told the council.

Vip Grover, president of the island's chamber of commerce, called the fee amount "obscene."

"Do you know how many meals have to be sold to cover \$64,000?" Grover asked council.

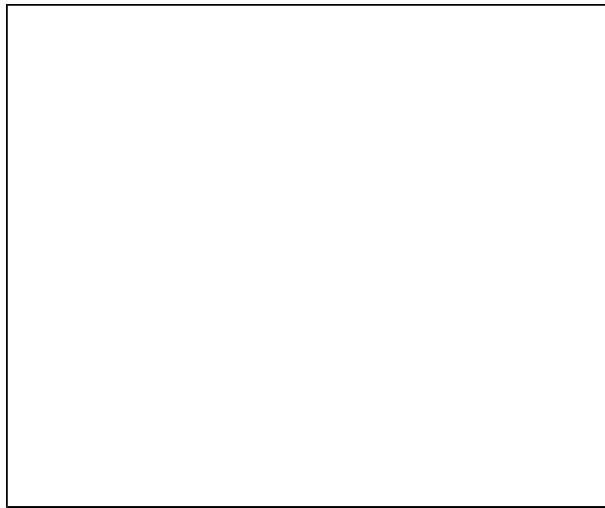
When Rick Feinman asked when the permit would be available, council vice chairman Jerry Gibson asked city manager Jim Riviere to investigate the situation.

Gibson also directed Riviere to provide the Feinmans with an answer by noon Tuesday.

Anne Feinman was pleased and relieved on Tuesday afternoon.

"It's amazing," she said of finally receiving the permit. "Craig kind of said it best, 'Why are you holding it hostage?'"

The council also directed city staff to look into the ramifications of temporarily waving commercial impact fees.





Councilman Larry Magel made the motion to study lowering the fees.

Magel also called for staff's suggestions on how to reduce the fees to foster business expansion and growth, and on how to make the fee structure more equitable.

"I'm looking for a way to jump-start business activity on the island," Magel said.

Several councilman said they'd like to see the study completed as soon as possible.

"If we have businesses that are looking to expand and they can't because there's a prohibitive impact fee, I'd like to see us act quickly," Magel said.

