IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA

GEORGE GRAMATIKAS,

Appellant,

Appellee

CASE NO.: 2006-CVA1-000017-O LOWER CASE NO.: 2006-CEB-47024Z

v.

CITY OF ORLANDO, FLORIDA

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Appeal from Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law from the Code Enforcement Board, February 8, 2006, City of Orlando, Florida.

John R. Hamilton, Esquire Foley & Lardner LLP for Appellant.

Victoria Cecil, Esquire Assistant City Attorney for Appellee.

Before ADAMS, DAWSON, and STICKLAND, J.J.

PER CURIAM

FINAL ORDER AFFIRMING FEBRUARY 8, 2006, FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW OF CODE ENFORCEMENT BOARD

On January 6, 2006, the City of Orlando ("Appellee") cited George Gramatikas ("Appellant") for allegedly violating eight provisions of Appellee's Code and sought \$120,000 in fines. Thereafter, on January 11, 2006, a hearing was held before the Code Enforcement Board ("Board"), which found Appellant in violation of five provisions of

Appellee's Code and imposed \$60,000 in fines. The Board issued its written *Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order* on February 8, 2006. Appellant timely appealed to this Court, and this Court has jurisdiction pursuant to section 162.11, Florida Statutes (2006) and rule 9.030(c)(1)(C), Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure (2006). We dispense with oral argument.

Factual and Procedural Background

Appellant is the owner of certain real property located in the Lake Lawsona Historic District at 915 E. Washington Street in Orlando, Florida, and the property is zoned R-2-AT-HP. The house or structure located on the property prior to January 6, 2006, was approximately ninety years old and considered a contributing structure to the Historic District. On January 6, 2006, a neighbor reported that a backhoe was seen on the property demolishing the house. That same day, Appellee's Code Enforcement Officer issued a stop work order, but the house was totally demolished with the exception of the chimney and a few other minor pieces. The destruction of the ninety-year-old historic home gave rise to the allegations before the Board.

Prior to January 6, 2006, Appellant engaged in a two year process to construct a new rear addition¹ to the existing home and to build a new two-story garage apartment on the property. Appellant's property is located in a Historic District, and, therefore, a condition precedent to receiving a building permit for any additions, alterations, new construction, or demolition requires a Certificate of Appropriateness ("CA") from the Historic Preservation Board ("HPB"). Ch. 62 § 200, City Code of Orlando. In addition, the property must conform to various zoning requirements or the land owner must seek a

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¹ The back third of the home was not part of the original structure, and, therefore, the new proposed addition called for demolishing the old addition and then building a new addition to the existing structure.

variance from the Board of Zoning Adjustment ("BZA"). Ch. 65 § 381, City Code of Orlando.

Appellant first applied for a CA from the HPB on May 5, 2004, seeking to demolish only the rear addition and construct a new rear addition and a two-story, two-car garage apartment. Appellant's plans called for, among other things, adding 1,900 square feet to an existing structure that already contained 1,150 square feet. Appellant's application was ultimately denied by the HPB. Appellant then filed a second application for a CA from the HPB on June 2, 2004, seeking to demolish the rear addition, construct a new rear addition, raise the roof, and to construct a new two-story, two-car garage apartment, but reducing the overall square footage of the addition by nearly 300 feet. The minutes from the HPB meeting reflect that the scope of demolition was discussed, and the HPB approved Appellant's application for a CA.

On July 27, 2004, in BZA case number VAR2004-00069, Appellant sought two variances from the BZA in order to construct the new rear addition and two-story garage apartment because the conditions imposed by the HPB on the approved CA application called for Appellant to build the garage apartment within the fifteen foot rear yard setback. The staff report for the BZA meeting clearly indicated that Appellant's plans called for demolishing only a "portion of the principle structure," and the new additions would only add to the principle structure that was constructed in the 1920's. (AB App. 2, 9.) The BZA granted Appellant variances based on the plans he submitted and the conditions required by the HPB in the approved CA application².

 $^{^2}$ Appellant sought another variance from the BZA on June 28, 2005, VAR2005-00056, but this variance request was denied.

Appellant then applied for and obtained a Building Permit ("BP") on October 19, 2004. The application called for "additions and renovations" to the subject property. (IB App. 10.) The Scope of Work on the application called for temporary shoring of existing walls and for demolition costs of \$3,500.00. The plans submitted with the application showed that the rear third of the property would be demolished. The BP that was issued, BLD2004-09752, called for a "[p]artial demolition of [an] existing residence in preparation for new Addition & Alteration per scope of work." (IB App. 18.) The BP also stated that "[w]ork performed must conform to all City Ordinances regulating the use and construction of structures and the work authorized by this permit." (IB App. 18.) The permit expired on April 17, 2005. The record does not indicate whether a CA was ever issued prior to the 2004 BP.

On March 22, 2005, Appellant was issued the CA from the HPB that was approved in July of 2004. Appellant then sought another BP, BLD2005-02124, on October 20, 2005. The 2005 BP was pulled by a different contractor than the 2004 BP, and stated that it was for the "[a]ddition of second floor with alterations to existing family residence." (IB App. 90.) Again, the permit stated that all work performed under it must conform to all City Ordinances. The permit also referenced the approved 2004 variances from the BZA.

On October 20, 2005, when Appellant's architect and contractor went to pull the BP, a conversation allegedly took place between the architect, the contractor, and Appellee's Historic Preservation Officer. According to Appellant's contractor, Domenic Macaione, he and the architect were concerned that the plans approved by the HPB and BZA would not support the existing walls. Allegedly, Macaione and the architect asked

the Historic Preservation Officer how they were supposed to complete the approved construction without any support for the existing walls. According to Macaione, the Historic Preservation Officer responded that he did not care how they did it. Thereafter, Macaione and the architect went about their business.

Then, on January 6, Appellee received notice that a backhoe was demolishing the entire home. A stop work order was issued by Appellee's Code Enforcement Officer, and Appellant appeared, on that same day, before the HPB. Later that same day, Appellant received a Statement of Violation and Notice of Hearing before the Code Enforcement Board. Appellee cited Appellant for violating eight³ provisions of the City Code. The hearing before the Board took place on January 11, 2006. The Board heard testimony from Appellee's staff, Appellant's contractor, the Chairman of the Historic Preservation Board, Appellant, and the Recording Secretary of the Historic Preservation Board. Additionally, the Board heard arguments from Appellant's counsel and Appellee's Code Enforcement Division Manager. Thereafter, the Board deliberated upon each alleged violation individually and ultimately found Appellant in violation of five⁴ sections of the Code⁵. The Board also found that each violation was irreversible and irreparable pursuant to section 162.09(2)(d), Florida Statutes (2006), and imposed fines

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³ §§ 58.103, 62.200, 62.201, 62.207, 65.381, 65.472, 65.479, and 65.730, City Code of Orlando.

⁴ §§ 58.103, 62.200, 65.381, 65.472, and 65.479, City Code of Orlando.

⁵ The Board did not find Appellant in violation of § 62.201 because that section of Appellee's Code applied to the HPB and because that particular violation was covered under § 62.200. The Board did not find Appellant in violation of § 62.207 because Appellant was improperly noticed and that particular section does not exist. The proper citation would have been § 62.707. Finally, the Board did not find Appellant in violation of § 65.703 because it would have been a double violation for the same act of demolition and because the criteria contained with § 65.703 appeared to be directed towards the HPB.

totaling \$60,000⁶ against Appellant. This appeal followed. For the reasons stated below, we AFFIRM.

Standard of Review

Pursuant to section 162.11, Florida Statutes (2006), a circuit court's review of a quasi-judicial decision of an enforcement board is not a hearing de novo, but is limited to a review of the record before the Board. *City of Deland v. Benline Process Color Co., Inc.*, 493 So. 2d 26, 27 (Fla. 5th DCA 1986). An appeal from the Board is governed by a three part standard of review: (1) whether procedural due process is accorded; (2) whether the essential requirements of law have been observed; and (3) whether the administrative findings and judgments are supported by competent substantial evidence. *City of Deerfield Beach v. Vaillant*, 419 So. 2d 624, 626 (Fla. 1982); *Orange County v. Lewis*, 859 So. 2d 526, 528 n. 1 (Fla. 5th DCA 2003). The circuit court is not entitled to make separate findings of fact or to reweigh the evidence. *Haines City Cmty. Dev.*, *v. Heggs*, 658 So. 2d 523, 529 (Fla. 1995).

Discussion

Appellant argues on appeal that the entire order of the Board should be set aside because it lacked substantial, competent evidence and the Board ignored other facts that showed the actions taken on the property were authorized. Appellant argues, moreover, that it proved the elements of equitable estoppel against a governmental entity. Additionally, Appellant argues that even if the entire order is not reversed, the individual findings of the Board should be reversed because they are improperly duplicative, redundant, and overlapping or erroneous as a matter of law.

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⁶ §§ 58.103 - \$15,000; 62.200 - \$15,000; 65.381 - \$10,000; 65.472 - \$15,000; 65.479 - \$5000.

Appellee argues on appeal that the Board's order should be affirmed because it is supported by competent, substantial evidence and because Appellant's estoppel claim improperly rests entirely on hearsay statements. Appellee also maintains that the Board properly interpreted those hearsay statements to require Appellant to abide by the Code. Additionally, Appellee argues that even if the alleged statement was made, Appellant could not reasonably rely on a statement that was contrary to specific provisions of the Code. Finally, Appellee argues that the individual violations should be affirmed because each is supported by competent, substantial evidence.

Appellant argues that three undisputed facts⁷ were totally ignored by the Board:

(1) all plans and drawings approved by the HPB allowed for the demolition of the existing home; (2) Appellee's Historic Preservation Officer expressly approved the demolition; and (3) that no one ever informed Appellant that he needed further approval before undertaking the disputed action. According to Appellant, these facts "precluded the Board from making its Draconian findings," and warrant reversal. (IB 25.) However, Appellant has misconstrued what the "competent, substantial evidence" standard means.

Appellant argues that ". . . the plans and drawings could reasonably be read, construed, understood, and interpreted as not prohibiting the action that occurred at the property," and ". . . the evidence before the Board was undisputed that the plans and drawings were also subject to an altogether different interpretation." (Reply Brief 1-2.) In appellate proceedings, however, "competent, substantial evidence" means "such evidence as will establish a substantial basis of fact from which the fact at issue can reasonably be inferred. . . ." *Duval Utility Co. v. Fla. Public Serv. Comm'n*, 380 So. 2d

⁷ A review of the record actually indicates that Appellant's purported *undisputed facts* were actually very much in dispute and the Board, ultimately, construed them contrary to Appellant's position.

1028, 1031 (Fla. 1980) (quoting De Groot v. Sheffield, 95 So. 2d 912, 916 (Fla. 1957)). In other words, it is "such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind would accept as adequate to support a conclusion." De Groot, 95 So. 2d at 916. It is irrelevant if the record on appeal also contains competent, substantial evidence that would support a different result. Dusseau v. Metro. Dade County Bd. Of County Comm'rs, 794 So. 2d 1270, 1275 (Fla. 2001) (quoting Fla. Power & Light Co. v. City of Dania, 761 So. 2d 1089, 1093 (Fla. 2000)). Additionally, a different appellate panel of this Court has also held that an appellate court "is not entitled to quash the lower tribunal's final order simply if contrary substantial evidence existed" at the hearing below. Cross v. Dep't of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles, 14 Fla. L. Weekly Supp. 209a (Fla. 9th Cir. Ct. 2007). Therefore, even if this Court were to find Appellant's *undisputed facts* persuasive, this Court is powerless to reverse the Board's order on such a basis because doing so would constitute impermissibly reweighing the facts. Cross v. Dep't of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles, 14 Fla. L. Weekly Supp. 209a (Fla. 9th Cir. Ct. 2007); see also Haines *City Cmty. Dev. v. Heggs*, 658 So. 2d 523, 530 (Fla. 1995).

Next, Appellant argues that the evidence submitted at the hearing below established the elements of equitable estoppel against a government agency and, therefore, warrants reversal of the Board's order. Appellee, on the other hand, argues that the elements of equitable estoppel against a government entity have not been established because they are based solely upon hearsay statements. This Court resolves the issue without examining whether the alleged statements constitute hearsay or, if they do, whether hearsay statements alone may satisfy the elements of equitable estoppel against a government agency in a quasi-judicial code enforcement hearing.

The traditional elements of equitable estoppel are: (1) a representation as to a material fact that is contrary to a later-asserted position; (2) reliance on that representation; and (3) a change in position detrimental to the party claiming estoppel, caused by the representation and reliance thereon. State v. Harris, 881 So. 2d 1079, 1084 (Fla. 2004). If a party is seeking estoppel against a governmental agency, then two additional elements or "exceptional circumstances" are also required: (1) conduct by the government that goes beyond mere negligence and that will cause a serious injustice; and (2) a showing that the application of estoppel will not unduly harm the public interest. Associated Insurance Co., Inc. v. Dep't of Labor & Employment Security, 923 So. 2d 1252, 1255 (Fla. 1st DCA 2006).

The third element of traditional estoppel requires the party claiming estoppel to have been *induced by the representation* to *change a previously held position*. *L.L. Alderman, Jr. v. Stevens*, 189 So. 2d 168, 170 (Fla. 2d DCA 1966) (*quoting* 12 Fla. Jur., Estoppel & Waiver § 24.) In *L.L. Alderman, Jr. v. Stevens*, 189 So. 2d 168, 169 (Fla. 2d DCA 1966), property owners sought to build an accessory building in their yard and obtained preliminary oral approval conditioned upon a five foot setback from the main building. After beginning construction, the Building Inspector informed the property owners that he would require a fifteen foot setback. *Stevens*, 189 So. 2d at 169. However, members of the Board of Adjustment reviewed the situation and determined that a twenty-five foot setback was actually required, but if the property owners agreed to go ahead with a fifteen foot setback the Board would take no official action. *Id.* Thereafter, the property owners changed their position in reliance on the statements of the Board and began construction based on a fifteen foot setback. *Id.* Later, the Board

issued a stop work order and cancelled the building permit after the property owners had expended considerable financial resources in reliance on the Board's earlier express approval. *Id.* The Second District Court of Appeal held that the City was equitably estopped from revoking the building permit because it had induced the property owners to change their previously held position. *Id.* at 170.

Similarly, in *Florida Companies v. Orange County*, 411 So. 2d 1008, 1009 (Fla. 5th DCA 1982), the county granted preliminary approval for a subdivision plat that called for the building of a sewage treatment plant. After seventy percent of the sewage plant and accompanying lines had been completed, and the property had to submit a second plat approval, the county denied approval unless the subdivision used individual septic tanks. *Florida Companies*, 411 So. 2d at 1010. The Fifth District held that the county was equitably estopped from denying the subdivision plat based on the failure to include individual septic tanks because it had induced Florida Companies to build a sewage treatment plant based on its initial approval. *Id.* at 1010-12.

In the instant case, Appellant did not assert at the hearing below or on appeal that he ever *changed* a previously held position. Appellant has consistently maintained that the plans he submitted to the HPB, BZA, and, ultimately, the Board always called for and allowed the demolition that occurred. Regardless of whether or not statements were made by Appellee's Historic Preservation Officer, or whether those statements were properly interpreted by the Board, Appellant has failed to allege or prove that he changed a previously held position. In other words, he always intended the action that in fact occurred. Unfortunately for Appellant, the Board found as a matter of fact that the plans submitted, and at all stages of the approval process, did not propose nor allow for the

action that occurred. Thus, Appellant has failed to establish the necessary elements of traditional equitable estoppel, and this Court need not reach the two additional exceptional elements.

Turning to Appellant's remaining issues, he argues that even if this Court does not reverse the Board's order in its entirety, it should reverse the individual violations for various reasons. First, Appellant argues that the Board erred as a matter of law by finding a violation of both section 62.200 and section 65.472 because they are improperly duplicative, redundant, and overlapping. Section 62.200, City Code of Orlando, states:

After the designation of an historic district, no exterior portion of any building or other structure, ... nor above ground utility structure nor any type of outdoor advertising sign shall be erected, altered, restored, or moved within such district until after an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness as to exterior features has been submitted to and approved by the Historic Preservation Board, as provided in Chapter 65, Part 4B, or approved by the City Council upon appeal from a decision of the Board. After a designation of an Historic Preservation Overlay District, no building or other structure shall be demolished within such district until after an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness as to exterior features has been submitted to and approved by the Historic Preservation Board, as provided in Chapter 65, Part 4B, or approved by the City Counsel upon appeal from a decision of the Board.

(emphasis added.) The Board found the testimony of Recording Secretary of the HPB compelling as to the procedure Appellant was required to follow if he intended to demolish the entire structure. The Board found Appellant failed to apply for a CA that specifically called for demolishing the entire structure, and, therefore, Appellant was in violation of section 62.200 to the extent that ". . . no building or other structure shall be demolished within such district until after an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness . . . has been submitted and approved by the [HPB]." Accordingly, the

Board's Chairperson stated that, "I agree, based on the property owner's experience with the Board before, he was fully informed, that he should have gotten a Certificate of Appropriateness" if he wanted to demolish the entire structure. (Tr. 231.)

Section 65.472, City Code of Orlando, states:

Any change in work proposed subsequent to the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness shall be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Officer or his designee. If the Historic Preservation Officer or his designee finds that the proposed change does not materially affect the historic character of the structure(s) or the proposed change is in accord with approved guidelines, standards, and Certificates of Appropriateness previously approved by the Historic Preservation Board, the officer may issue a supplementary Certificate of Appropriateness for such change. If the proposed change may not be in accord with the guidelines, standards, or Certificates of Appropriateness previously approved by the Board, a new application for a Certificate of Appropriateness shall be required.

Appellant correctly points out that the Board did discuss whether it was violating Appellant, "[t]wice for the same thing." (Tr. 254, 250-60.) However, after that question was raised, the following exchange occurred:

A MALE VOICE: To me there was a violation there [§ 65.472]. The first one [§ 62.200] has a specific reference to demolition and we dealt with it. But, in my mind, there were - - there were other variations from that original certificate that showed up in those final plans that weren't addressed, either.

A FEMALE VOICE: Oh, which is good point. So you're saying, aside from the just the fact that they should have gotten a [CA for demolition] and gone through that process, that that in fact was their goal, regardless, the plans that were reviewed by the [Appellee] were so different from the original, that, an entirely separate violation, those deviations would have required compliance with 65.472, changes in approved Certificate of Appropriateness.

A MALE VOICE: Right.

A FEMALE VOICE: That's logical.

A FEMALE VOICE: Instead of being exclusive they would build on top of each other. That makes sense.

A FEMALE VOICE: Yes. He's saying one's a demolition of one, because the plan had changed so much and they didn't go back to the [HPB] with the significantly revised drawing, which might have in fact kept them from being here.

A MALE VOICE: Right.

A FEMALE VOICE: It's a separate violation.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Crystal?

A FEMALE VOICE: I'd have to agree.

(Tr. 255-56; emphasis added.) A short time later, another exchange occurred between Board members.

A FEMALE VOICE: Well, I believe that - - so you're saying that because the initial . . . Certificate of Appropriateness was not - - was given and they did not come in front of the HPB again, that this violation is for the second time they didn't come back. Am I getting that right?

A MALE VOICE: Yes, I would say there was an evolution in the extent and the scope of the work. In other words, that the first Certificate of Appropriateness dealt with what appears to be a very limited scope of work.

A FEMALE VOICE: Uh-huh.

A MALE VOICE: And in the final analysis, with that final set of plans, it was a different project from the one they [HPB] presumably had seen. There was not a new - - the statute and the code required that a new application be submitted.

A FEMALE VOICE: Yeah, I think that's fairly accurate, because I think the evidence that the City presented with

respect to the drawing that had the northernmost portion blacked out, which was the original demolition, I mean, to me that's a much different scope of a project, get rid of the old - - get rid of the addition, the prior addition, because that wasn't as Historical in nature, added sometime subsequent to 1915 or thereabouts, and replace with another type of addition, as opposed to what we actually saw the drawings for.

THE CHAIRPERSON: So, Crystal, as part of the Board [HPB], do you issue more than one [CA]?

A FEMALE VOICE: Sometimes it does happen.

THE CHAIRPERSON: Okay, that's what I need to know.

(Tr. 257-58.) Thereafter, the Board voted to find Appellant in violation of section 65.472 and imposed a \$15,000 fine. The Board did not find Appellant in violation for the same action twice, but based on the evidence before it, found two separate violations. The violation of section 62.200 occurred when Appellant demolished the entire structure without a CA, and the violation of section 65.472 occurred when Appellant failed to seek a supplementary CA due to the substantial changes in the scope of the project in addition to the demolition issues. Thus, the Board's findings as to sections 62.200 and 65.472 were not redundant, overlapping or duplicative, and are supported by competent, substantial evidence.

According to Appellant, the Board failed to follow the essential requirements of the law when it found a violation of section 58.103, because that section of the Code is a general section that is covered specifically in sections 62.200 and 65.472. Appellee, on the other hand, argues that section 58.103 constitutes a separate and specific requirement that Appellant conform to the zoning regulations in the Historic District. Appellant is correct that a specific statute or ordinance covering a particular subject matter controls

over another statute or ordinance that is more general. *Florida Home Builders Ass'n. v. St. Johns County*, 914 So. 2d 1035, 1037 (Fla. 5th DCA 2005) (*citing Maggio v. Florida Dep't of Labor and Employment Security*, 889 So. 2d 1074 (Fla. 2005)). While Appellant points to general provisions of section 58.103 that do relate to other provisions of the Code, Appellant fails to recognize that section 58.103 also contains a specific requirement that:

No person, firm or corporation shall erect, construct, enlarge, alter, repair, or convert any building, structure, or land, or cause the same to be done without first obtaining zoning approval for said building, structure, or land from the Planning and Development Department. . . .

§ 58.103, City Code of Orlando. The Board specifically found Appellant structurally altered his home without obtaining prior zoning approval from the Planning and Development Department. Thus, the Board did not fail to follow the essential requirements of the law when it found a violation of section 58.103.

Next, Appellant points out that the Compliance Schedule accompanying the Notice of Violation incorrectly referenced BZA case number VAR2005-00056 for the alleged violation of section 65.381, City Code of Orlando. Appellant argues for the first time on appeal that the failure to include the correct BZA case number, VAR2004-00069, in the Compliance Schedule is a violation of his due process rights and warrants reversal. However, Appellant did not raise this specific issue at the hearing below, and, therefore, it has not been preserved for appeal. *See Anderson v. School Board of Seminole County*, 830 So. 2d 952, 953 (Fla. 5th DCA 2002) ("Due process concerns were not presented during the [hearing] and, thus, any objections must be deemed to have been waived precluding the right to raise the issues for the first time on appeal.")

Finally, Appellant argues that section 65.479, an ordinance prohibiting an owner in an Historic District to allow a property to fall into a state of disrepair, does not apply to him because "[h]ow could [he] fail to maintain or repair a property that did not exist." (IB 45.) However, the Board heard testimony that the home was a contributing structure in the Lake Lawsona Historic District. Appellee correctly points out that once an historic structure is removed from the city's inventory, any new structure on the land will not contribute to the historic district. By demolishing the home, Appellant failed to maintain its historic nature. Thus, the Board had competent substantial evidence to find Appellant in violation of section 65.479.

Based on the foregoing, it is hereby **ORDERED** and **ADJUDGED** that the February 8, 2006 *Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law* of the Code Enforcement Board for the City of Orlando is **AFFIRMED**.

DONE AND (nbers at Orlando, Orange County, Florida	ounty, Florida, this	
_10 day of	March	,,2	2008.
		/S/ GAIL A. ADAMS Circuit Court Judge	
_/S/ DANIEL P. DAWSON		_/S/_ STAN STRICKLAN	
Circuit Court Judge		Circuit Court Judge	

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that a true a	and correct copy of the foregoing has been
furnished via U.S. mail to John R. Hamilt	on, Foley & Lardner LLP, 111 N. Orange
Avenue, Suite 1800, P.O. Box 2193, Orlan	do, Florida 32802; and to Victoria Cecil,
Assistant City Attorney, Orlando City Hall,	400 S. Orange Avenue, Orlando, Florida
32801 on this _10 day ofMarch	, 2008.
_	/S/
J	udicial Assistant