

# St. George wants a higher standard. Developers want 'common sense'

By Dillon Lowe



After installing new double-pane windows in a St. George house, Elliott Grand expected his renovation project to be nearing completion. Instead, city inspectors determined that some of the windows did not meet the energy-efficiency standard St. George was enforcing and would have to be replaced again.

Grand, co-founder of the real estate investment firm [SHP Companies](#), says the windows were the most energy-efficient models readily available at Home Depot in the sizes he needed. Some met St. George's standard, while others missed it by a very narrow margin.

Replacing the windows will cost thousands of dollars, according to Grand, who has become one of the most vocal critics of St. George's permit office.

"We've got the best windows in the neighborhood and they're making us replace them," Grand tells *Daily Report*. "It doesn't make any sense."

To St. George Mayor Dustin Yates, the episode is a reflection of the city's commitment to enforcing a higher construction standard. To Grand and other members of the local development and real estate communities, it's illustrative of a permitting system that too often applies stringent technical requirements without practical judgment.

The disagreement is just one flashpoint in a still-simmering tension between St. George and the people who build, renovate and invest within its boundaries.

Earlier this year, appraiser Tom Cook [said](#) developers had described the new city as "horrible," "ridiculous" and "very hard to deal with." He said the development community was "going nuts because they can't get anything done." St. George [responded](#) with statistics showing it was issuing hundreds of permits a month and was in fact processing permit-related matters quickly.

Grand does not necessarily dispute St. George's figures. He argues that they do not paint the full picture.

A single new-construction project can require separate building, electrical, mechanical and plumbing permits, he says, meaning total permits do not reflect the number of unique properties moving through the system. Nor do average processing times capture requirements applicants consider unreasonable.

Yates flatly rejects the notion that the city's figures are misleading.

"A permit's a permit," he says. "Whether you have 10 permits pulled in one house or one permit pulled in one house, every permit is a permit. Every permit is something that requires an inspection. So how exactly is that misleading and how is that different from any other municipality or parish in the state of Louisiana?"

In April, Grand and more than a dozen other real estate professionals sent St. George officials a signed letter calling for a change in the permit office's leadership and a review of its enforcement practices.

The letter argued that the city's permitting process—particularly when it came to renovation work—was inconsistent and lacked transparency. It asked St. George to

release more detailed permitting data and examine whether large contractors, smaller investors and individual property owners were being held to the same standards.

Grand, who organized the letter, says his window dispute led him to question whether St. George was enforcing its rules consistently across the broader renovation market.

He submitted public records requests seeking stand-alone HVAC and window replacement permit data. In reviewing the records provided, he says he identified only two mechanical change-out permits issued to Accutemp between Jan. 1, 2025, and June 15, 2026, and zero window replacement permits issued to Window World over the same period, though he acknowledges that the city's data was difficult to interpret and that the city has not confirmed his analysis.

He now believes smaller investors are facing strict scrutiny while the region's largest contractors appear to be routinely performing replacement work without pulling permits.

Grand tried to challenge St. George's decision on his windows through a formal appeal only to learn that the city had not yet established a board to hear permitting disputes, which he believes is required by state law. Yates confirms that the city's board of appeals was established only a month ago, saying Grand was the first person to seek a formal appeal and that inspectors had previously resolved disputes directly with applicants.

Greg Hammonds, owner of [Scout Properties](#) and one of the letter's signatories, shares Grand's concern over unequal enforcement.

Hammonds says Window World replaced all of the windows at two houses he owns in St. George and that a prominent HVAC contractor replaced the AC systems. To his knowledge, no permits were pulled and no final inspections were performed.

By contrast, when Hammonds sought occupancy permits for the properties, each house failed inspection at least three times.

He says inspectors would identify several deficiencies, return after they were addressed and then identify new problems. Among the deficiencies he viewed as particularly impractical were missing foam behind an exterior outlet cover at one house and a missing interior dryer vent cap at another. The dryer vent cap was something he could not even find commercially, leading him to fashion one from Styrofoam and duct tape to satisfy inspectors.

Hammonds says the process delayed the projects by several weeks and cost hundreds of dollars in reinspection fees. His experiences were limited to two houses, but he describes both as “comically bad.”

Xcel Development owner Nathan Kimbrough, though not one of the letter’s signatories, offers a similar account.

Kimbrough says it took three attempts to restore power at a rental property in St. George after a tenant moved out. Among the deficiencies identified was the size of the house’s exterior address numbers, which were a fraction of an inch smaller than what inspectors said was required.

He acknowledges that inspectors were trying to follow the rules. His frustration was with what he viewed as a lack of “common sense” and a lack of give-and-take when evaluating an otherwise habitable property. He says he and other small investors have done much to rehabilitate blighted properties across East Baton Rouge Parish, and he believes St. George is making their work unnecessarily difficult.

“I had to jump through like 18 hoops backward and sideways and beg for mercy just to turn power back on. ... They’re making it hard on the people who are trying to better the community when they’ve got people who are just slipping through the cracks and they’re not doing anything about it,” Kimbrough says. “It’s almost like favoritism.”

Yates rejects any suggestion that St. George intentionally gives larger companies preferential treatment. HVAC swaps and window replacements require permits, he says, and the requirements apply to everyone.

Whether contractors actually pull those permits is up to them, Yates says, but if the city becomes aware that work was performed without one, it will take action.

It’s worth noting that not every one of the letter’s signatories believes St. George’s current operation is quite as troubled as Grand suggests.

One of the signatories, a representative of a high-volume homebuilder who spoke to *Daily Report* on condition of anonymity, says his company was initially burdened by slow response times, strict enforcement of minor technical requirements, arbitrarily delayed inspections and a difficult-to-use permit portal but that conditions have greatly improved in recent months. He says he signed the letter only to encourage further improvement

and did not personally support the call for a leadership change. The city is no longer holding up his company's construction.

Yates points to that kind of improvement as evidence the city is listening.

The mayor readily acknowledges that St. George experienced "growing pains" as it stood up its permit office but says constructive criticism has helped it find more stable footing. He also rejects claims that development has ground to a halt, pointing to a slew of active industrial, office and residential projects across the city.

St. George has denied only one major subdivision proposal, he says, and that was because the project raised drainage and public safety concerns.

He says St. George will continue evaluating and improving its processes going forward, but he sees no need for a change in the permit office's leadership and remains unapologetic about the standard the city is trying to set.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with having a high standard," Yates says. "The goal should always be to strive for perfection."

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