



## MEMORANDUM

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To: Development Services Staff

From: Gene F. Delauro, Building Official *GFD*

Date: August 14, 2018

Subject: Building Code Determination for Palapa Construction

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**Issue:** Palapas are being constructed at residential and commercial properties without building permits using natural thatch roof coverings. Natural thatch is not an approved roof covering per the City's adopted 2015 International Residential Code or International Building Code. Natural thatch is a highly combustible material. Therefore, minimum setback requirements to property lines and separation distances to other structures must be adhered to for the protection of property, structures and building occupants.

**Background:** A Palapa is an open-sided structure in the style of a dwelling with a permanent thatched leaf, composition or metal roof. They are commonly found in beachfront communities, but may be located anywhere in the City. Building Code regulations require all roof coverings to meet minimum requirements with respect to flammability. To ensure minimum requirements are met, manufacturers of roof coverings certify their products through evaluation and testing performed by recognized independent testing agencies.

**Conclusion:** All Palapas constructed in the City of Corpus Christi requires a building permit where the structure exceeds 200 square feet in area for residential properties and 120 square feet in area for commercial properties. Windstorm certification is required for the structural frame as well. Setback and separation requirements shall be a minimum of five feet to any property line and ten feet to any adjacent structure. The Palapa may be located closer to adjacent structures if synthetic thatch is used having an ASTM E84 rating and possessing a minimum Class C or III flame spread property per the manufacturer.

The use of field applied fire retardant to treat natural thatch roofing is strictly prohibited for use when located within five feet of any property line or within ten feet of any adjacent structures. Residential and Commercial Palapas not requiring a building permit due to square footage below the minimum footage specified, must still be constructed in accordance with all City building code requirements, including minimum setback and separation requirements specified herein.