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## **Fairfield County Warns Residents and Businesses of Phishing Scheme Impersonating Local Officials**

**LANCASTER, OH** — Fairfield County officials are alerting residents, businesses, and contractors to an emerging phishing scheme in which criminals impersonate city and county officials to solicit fraudulent payments for planning and zoning permits.

According to information distributed by the County Commissioners' Association of Ohio (CCAO) and a recent warning from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), scammers are targeting individuals and companies involved in permitting processes. The criminals use publicly available permit information to identify potential victims and make fraudulent communications appear legitimate.

In these scams, perpetrators contact victims—often by email—posing as local government staff and request payment for planning or zoning permits. The fraudulent messages may include official-looking language or documentation in an attempt to convince victims to send payments or redirect funds.

Officials also note related cyber risks involving fake county auditor websites and payment redirection scams targeting county governments and other public entities.

Ohio Auditor of State Keith Faber recently underscored the growing threat of cybercrime against local governments.

“Every week we find out more and more local governments, more and more entities are being hit by ransomware, by vendor redirects,” Faber said in a recent interview. “And the numbers that come across my desk aren’t small. They’re in the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

Fairfield County officials encourage residents and businesses to remain vigilant and take the following precautions to protect yourself:

- Do not assume emails are legitimate based on the use of city or county letterhead, seals, names of officials, or proper spelling and grammar.
- Verify the email address, including the domain name, matches the email address of the official with whom you are corresponding and does not contain extraneous characters or misspellings.
- Check the city or county official website for notices about ongoing impersonation schemes.
- Call the city or county government, using the phone number listed on the official website, to verify outstanding fees.

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*Founded in 1800 (three years before Ohio became a State), Fairfield County was the 8th county formed in the Northwest Territory. Today, more than 900 employees serve, connect, and protect the more than 158,000 citizens of Fairfield County, providing high-quality services and outstanding customer service at exceptional value to taxpayers. Fairfield County fosters economic and fiscal sustainability and works to enhance the County's reputation as a high performing, learning, and caring organization. For more information about the county, its services and employment opportunities, please visit <https://www.co.fairfield.oh.us/>*

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