

Nationwide Zoning and Planning Scam Targeting SLTT Residents

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TLP:GREEN

Executive Summary

The Center for Internet Security (CIS) Cyber Threat Intelligence (CTI) team is publishing this product to advise State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial government entities (SLTTs) about a scam in which threat actors masquerade as local and county planning and zoning departments to extract illegitimate land use application renewal payments from local businesses and residents. CTI has observed widespread examples of this activity across the United States, wherein threat actors masquerade as the legitimate SLTT entity targeting victims. For further examples across the country, agencies can run a simple search engine query including the terms “scam zoning and planning email” to find a volume of direct agency notices. SLTTs should consider disseminating messaging about this activity to their constituents, noting their official government email domain for correspondence.

Email Format Example

In all examples CTI has observed, threat actors leveraged a variant of the email syntax: planning.[SLTT-Identifier]@usa[.]com and urged the victim to issue the renewal payment exclusively over email. In at least one example, impacted agencies identified threat actors had targeted businesses and residents who were actively in the renewal process and believed the threat actors may have found victims’ renewal status through publicly published meeting notes. In the examples CTI has observed, threat actors tailored the email and associated attachments to appear as official correspondence and likely used the usa[.]com domain due to its similarity to many official SLTT emails leveraging a [.]us email domain. Threat actors can simply register these emails through mail[.]com, which is a flexible web-based email provider that enables users to register customized emails to email domains like usa[.]com with little additional verification (see figure 1 below).

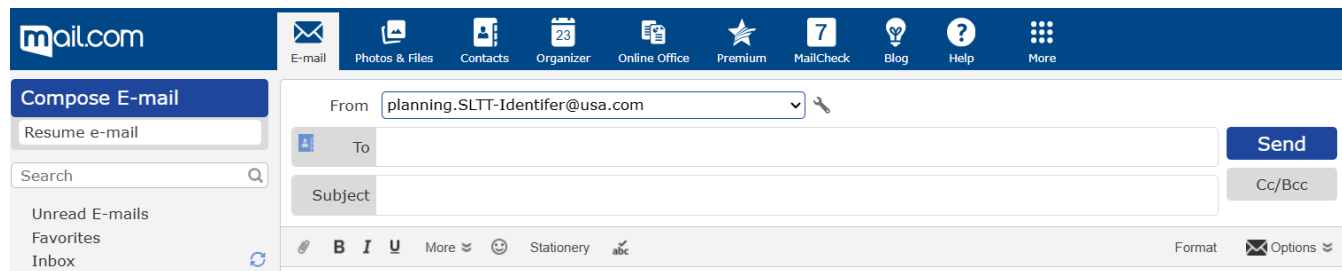


Figure 1: CTI was able to register this email in minutes through mail[.]com, which did not require phone number verification.

Note: “SLTT-Identifier” is a placeholder for the given SLTT’s county or municipality name.

Indicators of Compromise

Email Domain Format

planning.[SLTT-Identifer]@usa[.]com

- Emails will leverage the above syntax, wherein the SLTT identifier is the associated county or municipality name.

MITRE ATT&CK Patterns Observed¹

Resource Development

T1585 - Establish Accounts

Initial Access

T1566.001 - Phishing: Spearphishing Attachment

Recommendations

- Consider disseminating messaging about this activity to your constituents, noting official government email domain for correspondence. Specifically prioritize businesses and residents currently undergoing land use renewal applications.
 - Note common red flags include urging victims to issue payment over email.
 - Further advise that threat actors appear to be identifying targets going through renewal, based on publicly available documents and notices.

Appendix: Email Format Example²

Note that specific email content appears to vary across samples, but the below example captures the intended lure associated with samples CTI has observed:

From [SLTT] Planning and Zoning Commission < planning.[SLTT-IdentiFer]@usa[.]com >

Date

Subject: Application Review for Rezoning Request at

To: [Resident]

SLTT Planning and Zoning Commission

[Address]

Dear Resident,

We hope this message finds you well

This email pertains to your recent application submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission regarding the property located at [address] currently measuring approximately [#] acres. As noted, your request involves a proposed **reasoning of the property form from Residential Agriculture (RA) to Highway Commercial (HC)**.

To proceed with the formal review and consideration of your reasoning request, we kindly request that you **settle the attached invoice**, which reflects the **Application Review and Approval Fee**. This fee is essential to initiate the formal evaluation and ensure your application is scheduled for inclusion in the Commission's agenda.

Importance of the Application Review and Approval Fee:

The payment of this fee supports the vital functions required for the review and approval process, both at the department and state level. Your contribution helps to facilitate:

- Detailed evaluation of rezoning implications on surrounding land uses, traffic impact, environmental considerations, and long-term planning goals.
- Coordination of public hearings, including notifications to nearby property owners and stakeholders as required by law.
- Engagement of qualified planning experts and legal counsel to assess rezoning criteria, statutory compliance, and long-term development strategies.
- Process and verification of property and zoning data against municipal and county records.
- Compensation for contract staff and consultants tasked with technical evaluations, mapping, and zoning impact assessments.
- Preparation and inclusion of your application in the Planning and Zoning Commission agenda for discussion and decision-making.
- Maintenance of clear, auditable records in accordance with city and state transparency and accountability standards.

To maintain accurate documentation and facilitate seamless processing, all correspondence and submissions must be conducted via email. This ensures that your application and related materials are properly logged and available for reference in official proceedings.

Next Steps:

1. Reply to this email to request the official wire transfer instructions for payment of the Application Approval Fee.
2. Settle the invoice using the provided wire information.
3. Return a copy of the wire receipt to this same email thread for confirmation and to finalize inclusion in the Planning and Zoning Commission agenda.

We appreciate your timely attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or require clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us via this email address.

Best Regards,

[Director name]

SLTT Planning and Zoning Commission

[Address]



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East Greenbush, NY 12061
SOC@cisecurity.org - 1-866-787-4722

**TLP:GREEN**

Sources may use **TLP:GREEN** when information is useful for the awareness within their wider community.

Recipients may share **TLP:GREEN** information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels. Information in this category can be circulated widely within a particular community. **TLP:GREEN** information may not be released outside of the community. If the community is not specified, assume the cybersecurity/defense community.

<https://www.cisa.gov/tlp>

Endnotes

¹ <https://attack.mitre.org/matrices/>

² <https://rockinghamcounty-nc.municipalone.com/files/images/image1425012150100825pm.png>