

You Paid For It: 3 hour waits at the Hillsborough Tax Office



By [Mark Douglas](#) Published: April 5, 2017, 6:49 pm

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, Fla. (WFLA) – If you’ve visited the Hillsborough Tax Collector’s office in the past week or so, you may have noticed a problem.

Customer wait times in a number of cases have exceeded two or three hours, compared to minutes in neighboring Pinellas and Pasco Counties.

“I respectfully disagree with what you’re saying, assuming our wait time is three hours,” Hillsborough Tax Collector Doug Belden told 8 On Your Side. “It’s not.”

The trouble is, it seems to be, and that’s exactly what Belden’s [own website has been reporting online](#) at least since Friday when this was brought to our attention.

Belden insists his staff is doing an award-winning job of pleasing customers and chalks the long wait times up to a temporary fluctuation in demand for service due to a rush at the end and start of the month.

“We collect over 80,000 comment cards per year of good and excellent we’re at 98 percent which obviously means we’re doing something right,” Belden said.

Maybe so, but the office hasn’t made a fan out of customer Jackie Jacobson, who told 8 On Your Side she spent hours waiting in Belden’s Drew Park service center on Wednesday.

“I have a job to go to and I’ve been here literally for almost two hours now,” said Jacobson.

She was Facebooking expressions of her annoyance on her cellphone while waiting for her number to come up a second time after some paperwork issues went awry on the first go around.

During a previous visit she simply gave up. “I literally came here waited an hour and a half and went to Pinellas and got better service and faster service,” Jacobson said.

During the past five working days, Pinellas Tax Collector Charles Thomas and Pasco Tax Collector Mike Fasano reported wait times ranging from 13-21 minutes instead of three plus hours in some locations in Hillsborough.

Belden insists that wait times are not the only measuring stick for customer service. “I’ve had people say they’ve waiting two hours and they don’t mind because they got such professional service,” Belden said.

He also called the recent customer backups in his offices a “snapshot” that doesn’t fairly represent what customers can expect at a Hillsborough Tax Collector office. His staff sent us statistics indicating that wait times in all of 2016 averaged about 35 minutes and slightly higher, 42 minutes so far this year.

During that same period in Pasco County, Tax Collector customers waited an average of 13 minutes and only 9 minutes in Pinellas according to data received from those agencies. Belden doesn’t believe the numbers given to us by Fasano and Thomas’ staff.. “When you’re talking about minutes I very much question that,” Belden said.

If nothing else, Belden insists that his county can’t be compared to smaller counties because more than 4000 customers walk through the doors of his offices every day.

“We’re approaching 1.4 million people to serve which takes a lot longer obviously,” said Belden. But his \$31 million budget , approved by the Florida Department of Revenue, is also proportionately larger than his counterparts in Pinellas and Pasco where the population is smaller.

Whatever the reason, there are some strategies to reducing wait times in Hillsborough. Make an appointment, use the mail, go online or to another county where lines are shorter.

Wednesday, at least one customer at Belden’s Drew Park service center walked away happy. After hearing about the three hour wait times earlier in the week Kristin Oliviera was tickled to spend only 50 minutes or so waiting in the Tax Collector’s lobby before her number—B614- came up. She was out by

noon with a new Florida driver license and plenty of free time left on her day off of work. "Success," Oliviera said with a smile as she headed back to her car.

Meanwhile tax clerks continued to call customer numbers over a loudspeaker that was clearly audible in the farthest edge of the parking lot.