



DATE: April 15, 2010
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Planning Manager
SUBJECT: Planning Commission Best Practices

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission reads and comments on this report.

BACKGROUND

The Planning Commission is a permanent committee made up of seven individuals who have been appointed by the City Council to review and act on matters related to planning and development. Most planning commissioners are lay people without any previous land use experience.

The Planning Commission plays a central role in the planning process in three important ways. First, it acts as an advisory board to the Council on all planning and development issues. Second, the Commission assures that the General Plan is implemented by reviewing development applications on a case-by-case basis. Third, the Commission functions as the decision-making body for many proposals.

DISCUSSION

Because of its central role, the Planning Commission has expressed the desire to discuss the means of being more effective. The Commission will discuss the following, and related, elements of an effective Planning Commission:

- Focus on the Big Picture – Focus on the big picture before you; avoid being distracted by personalities, groups or issues that do not have anything to do with the merits of the present agenda item.
- Meeting Procedures – Established rules and procedures keep meetings on track. The chairperson and staff should have defined responsibilities. In addition, rules for testimony should be clear and widely available at all meetings.

- Follow the Law – Keep legal requirements in mind. When in doubt, ask legal counsel for advice. Before approving an application, you should be able to answer the following questions in the affirmative: Is the proposal consistent with the General Plan? Does it meet all applicable zoning and subdivision requirements? Are the environmental impacts reduced or eliminated by the conditions of approval, or are there overriding considerations? Is the Commission’s decision supported by findings of fact based on substantial evidence in the record?
- Stay Informed – Prior to the hearing, commissioners should have read the agenda packet and supplemental reports. It is also a good idea to review the portions of the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance that are relevant to each agenda item.
- Open Communication – Each commissioner shares responsibility for the free flow of ideas and discussion among everyone present at the meeting, including applicants, staff, members of the public, and the commissioners themselves. Be objective, listen and ask questions.
- An Efficient Pace – The chair should recognize when testimony must be closed for deliberations. Commissioners should hold their motions until the discussion has concluded. Both the chair and the other commissioners should know whether to continue a hearing or to make a decision.
- Effective leadership – An effective chairperson assists the flow of ideas and helps keep the proceedings on track.

Prepared and Recommended by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Patenaude', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Richard E. Patenaude, AICP, Planning Manager