

Strawberry Design Review Board
118 E. Strawberry Drive, Mill Valley, CA 94941
Strawberry Recreation Center
November 20, 2017

SUMMARY

The meeting was called to order at 7:37 by Joe Sherer, Chair

Members Present

Joe Sherer
Julie Brown
Rebecca Lind
Penna Omega
Matt Williams

1. Open Time and Minutes

Josh Sale provided a recap of the Planning Commission action on the North Coast Land Holdings project and advised the Board that an appeal of the Commission action was filed for hearing before the Board of Supervisors December 12th. He urged Board members to attend. Chair Sherer clarified that this issue is not on the agenda.

The minutes from the prior meeting were continued to the next regular agenda.

2. Discussion with Planning Staff about the SDRB Role and Effectiveness

Tom Lai and Curtis Havel from the Department of Community Development and Maureen Parton from Supervisor Sear's office were in attendance.

Joe Sherer explained that the Board requested this meeting because members are concerned that Board recommendations are not followed by staff in making decisions about projects. In some instances the Board's request that an item be continued to allow further Board/community review was not followed, in other cases the conditions recommended were not implemented. Examples of these applications were sent to county staff and Supervisor Sears as part of this meeting request and include 29 N. Knoll Rd, the North Coast Project, Strawberry Rec Center lights, Porche dealer lights, and West Elm sign among others. The Board is seeking clarification of its role and is looking for ways to become more effective.

Board members discussed a broad range of applications generally expressing frustration that the outcome of application review and final decision is not transmitted back to the Board, and that no explanation is provided for why Board recommendations are not implemented. Board members expressed their understanding that Board recommendations were generally accepted by Staff but felt that recently recommendations for both large and small projects were not followed. Board members also explained that because County staff does not attend Board meetings the Board is making an effort to send a meeting summary of actions directly to the project planner through the Board's chair within a week of the Board meeting but that this effort does not seem to be improving Board effectiveness.

Tom Lai stated that the Planning Department prepares an annual performance plan that aligns with the County budget and sets goals for the department. Staffing for the Design Review Boards is addressed in this plan, and the expectation is that the managing planner would discuss this performance plan with

the Board through the Chair. Currently the Planning Department has reduced staffing and high staff turnover which makes it more difficult to provide staffing to the design review boards. In instances where the project planner does not concur with the Board recommendation for a project the management expectation is that the Board chair be notified by telephone.

Board members who have been appointed and serving for multiple years indicated that they had never been consulted about a performance plan nor contacted by staff about differences between Board recommendations and staff decisions.

Mr. Lai stated that he has inquired but was not able to find out why project planners did not get back to the Board about recommendations. He stated that as the Board is a recommending body there is no assurance that the recommendations will be followed and that on some occasions there are legal procedural or other reasons the decision is different. He also stated that moving forward he would recommend that county staff attend the Board meetings.

Mr. Lai explained that the Board's primary goal is to advise on a project's consistency with the community plan and to be able to make findings to support discretionary permits.

Board members responded that many applications referred to the Board involve detailed project level design review issues that are not addressed in the community plan, which is generally out of date. In addition staff is not present to give guidance on what aspects of the project comply with code or other issues, and that level of information is not included in the project summary. Members also gave examples of instances when the accuracy and quality of the information transmitted to the Board from County staff was inadequate making it difficult for the Board and community members to review the proposals. Issues of concern include:

- Lack of accurate addresses and property owner information,
- Incomplete project summary,
- No copy of the actual application,
- Lack of guidance about whether a proposal conforms to County code,
- Lack of notification of when an application is included in a master plan development which may have particular requirements in addition to or replacing the typical zoning and design review standards.
- Incomplete records on the webpage where application materials are posted.
- Enforcement of conditions

The Board members and staff discussed these issues and several members of the general public in attendance also participated. Staff stated that while project conditions could be implemented in a building permit, once the final is issued and the file closed long term enforcement is difficult. Chairman Sherer proposed the following list of possible actions that could be taken to improve the Board's effectiveness.

1. County staff to attend meetings.
2. If staff cannot attend, at a minimum staff should respond to Board comments.
3. Staff should notify the chair if/ when Board recommendations are not followed.
4. Require applicants to provide all documents electronically.
5. All documents to be posted on the website, including the application form, technical studies, letters and plan modifications.

6. The Board members should subscribe to each project page to receive e-mail notification of submissions and actions.
7. The County should provide a map showing the location of all applicable master plans in the Strawberry Planning Area.
8. The project address is to be included on all referrals.
9. An accurate project summary should continue to be sent to Board members via mail.

3. Discussion of Updating the Strawberry Community Plan

Community members and the SDRB are recommending that an update be undertaken to the Strawberry Community Plan. The recommendation was made as part of the Board's recommendation on the North Coast Land Holdings project.

Tom Lai explained that there are two ways to initiate a Community Plan update.

- 1) Initiated by the Board of Supervisors. This type of community initiated community plan update is referred to the Community planning staff team. To begin a work program of this type the update request would need to be included in the Department Performance Plan. Current County commitments to General Plan work programs include a Countywide Plan Update which is a focused update and does not include community plans, and a Sea Level Rise Update.
- 2) A private application can initiate a community plan amendment/update through permit review. In this case the proposed changes to the community plan are processed as part of the development permit and are reviewed by the current planning staff.

Board members, community members present in the audience, and County staff had a general discussion about these two approaches. Board members and members of the public also discussed the "District Vision" effort initiated by Supervisor Sears several years ago and how it may or may not relate to either of these methods. Members of the public expressed concern about a private amendment process which only includes narrowly focused "strike out language" serving "particular project needs". The Board discussed generally what the broader public role and potential Board role might be in a process of this type and members of the public expressed caution about a process that did not include broader public input. Members of the public and the Board noted that the application by the North Coast Land Holdings is an example of this type of Plan amendment addressing the Seminary property. Board members asked County staff if further Board comment to the County on this issue could be appropriate if it was included on the next Strawberry Design Review Board agenda.

As a result of the Board members agreed to include the following two agenda items on the next Design Review Board agenda.

1. Discussion of a possible Strawberry Design Review Board approach to a potential Community Plan Amendment addressing a general update and/or possibly one focused on the Seminary property.
2. Discussion of possible Board participation in the Board Supervisor's appeal hearing on the North Coast Land Holdings application.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30

Notes prepared by Rebecca Lind