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Marin County RIAC Workshop 1 Notes
March 7, 2013

On Thursday, March 7, 2013, from 6:30pm – 8:30pm, the County of Marin held the first of two public workshops to garner public input to help guide the Marin County RIAC in its ongoing efforts to assess and improve the development review process. The public workshop was held in the Planning Commission Chambers at the Marin County Civic Center Administration Building.

Approximately 60-70 people attended, including most of the RIAC members and County staff (25 people used the sign-in sheets). The workshop was structured to provide one hour and fifteen minutes of the two-hour meeting for public comment. Planning Director Brian Crawford opened the meeting with an overview of the goals and objectives of the RIAC project. Henry Pontarelli, representative from the consultant Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc. (LWC) then provided a PowerPoint presentation with a more detailed outline of the project, including progress to date, initial findings of the RIAC and what final outcomes are expected. The presentation included having each RIAC member stand up and introduce themselves and indicate which constituent group they represented.

Subsequently, the floor was turned over to the public which lasted for about an hour and half. The goal was to gain input from citizens to help inspire, lead, and guide the RIAC in improving the efficiency of the County's development review process. Some common concerns that were voiced:

- The planning process is complicated and applicants sometimes get the "runaround." Speakers mentioned that they sometimes get different answers from different planners, therefore making it difficult to navigate through the process and find accurate and reliable information.
- Lack and ease of access to up-to-date information was a recurring issue. It was brought up that some areas of the County website are out-of-date or not functioning altogether.
- Community plans are often outdated and conflict with other guiding documents (Countywide Plan).
- Many people stated that if a project is consistent with the community plan, the process should be expedited.
- Some speakers had the impression that if a streamlined process evolves, the environment (and CEQA) might be compromised or circumvented.
- Many speakers mentioned that they should not be referred to as "customers" of the County, but rather stewards of the environment in Marin County, and streamlining the planning process might open the door for "bad" development.
- Several respondents stated that that they believed high density was not appropriate for Marin County.
- Several respondents offered that the process should take a two-tiered approach:
  - One path should accommodate people/developers that are familiar with the process.
  - The other path should accommodate people that are less familiar or first-time applicants to provide more "hand holding" throughout the process.
- One speaker mentioned there should be a contact person that helps people throughout the process to ensure accurate information the first time and to direct the applicant throughout the process.
- If the Planning Department makes a mistake, refunds (ie: planning fees, impact fees, etc.) should be considered.

Conclusion

Much of the discussion at the meeting added to the general dialogue on improving the development review process. Many respondents' comments augmented and supported the initial findings of the RIAC and will help define the priorities on which the final recommendations will be based. As is typical with public meetings, speakers, some of whom spoke twice or three times, took the workshop as an opportunity to discuss "hot-button" topics not directly related to the subject at hand. Based on the input gathered at the meeting, the following points should be considered as the RIAC process continues:

- On the CDA website, consider keeping information up-to-date and search and storage options properly functioning. (Note: The website update is underway.)
- Consider the option of creating a position that is dedicated to helping applicants and serves as a point of contact for the public for information and assistance throughout the development review process.
- Develop a "pre-application" option to ensure that an applicant has all necessary paperwork and knows the likelihood of their project being approved. (Some speakers mentioned they invested money after having been led to believe that their project would be approved, only to find out it wouldn't be.)
- Develop a process that assigns one planner to a given project. Providing a single point of contact to an applicant ensures consistency and eliminates the need for them to talk with a new planner every time.