



**MARIN COUNTY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

ALEX HINDS, DIRECTOR

**STAFF REPORT TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING FOR DRAFT SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES**

Item No: 6.
Project Area: Unincorporated Marin County
Planner: Christine Gimmler, Senior Planner
 Brian Crawford, Deputy Director of Planning Services
Hearing Date: March 28, 2005

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Conduct a public hearing focusing on the revisions presented in the March 2005 Revised Public Review Draft Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines), provide staff with direction regarding the need for further revisions to the document and continue the matter to the April 25, 2005 public hearing, at which time staff will present a resolution recommending adoption of the Design Guidelines by the Board of Supervisors.

BACKGROUND

The Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines (Design Guidelines) have been prepared to establish a clear and comprehensive set of design principles and criteria for evaluating new single-family residential projects in Marin County, particularly those involving larger homes and development in hillside areas. The Design Guidelines are also intended to minimize confusion in the Design Review process that can occur when applicants are not aware of the issues that planning staff and local design review boards typically consider when reviewing projects. The guidelines were prepared with the assistance of a consultant to the County, Dan Hillmer, and a technical advisory committee composed of County residents representing a variety of relevant interest groups and professions.

In September 2004 the Planning Commission conducted a public workshop to review and comment on the Draft Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines (Public Review Draft - April 2004), which included revisions to an earlier draft version of the Design

Guidelines that was reviewed and commented on by the Planning Commission in November of 2003. (See Attachments 2 and 3.) Following the September 2004 public workshop, staff has prepared further revisions to the Design Guidelines that are now being presented in the March 2005 Revised Public Review Draft document. Community Development Agency staff has been using the Design Guidelines on an informal basis to review Design Review applications and other discretionary permits involving design issues.

REVISIONS

The revisions proposed in the March 2005 Public Review Draft reflect for the most part written comments made by the Planning Commission in connection with the September 2004 public workshop, and to a lesser extent other changes prompted by public comment and additional staff review. The current revisions are shown in underline and strike-through symbols so the reader may easily distinguish those portions of the Design Guidelines text that have changed since the September 2004 workshop on the April 2004 Public Review Draft Design Guidelines.

In general, the revisions do not propose substantive changes to the Design Guidelines reviewed by the Planning Commission in September 2004. The text edits clarify, correct or expand upon the previously reviewed Design Guidelines. One notable exception to this are the proposed revisions to Section II.B.7.e (Planting and Defensible Space for High Fire Hazard Areas, p. 104) and the fire hazard matrix and standards for managing vegetation in Appendix G that were recommended by the County Fire Department staff in response to the Commission's suggestion to incorporate existing fire safety regulations. In addition, some of the photographs have been changed to better illustrate general design concepts or principles. The graphics depicting the building step back zone have also been amended to clarify their basic application. Suggested revisions to excerpts from the Development Code or Countywide Plan were not made in the interest of avoiding inconsistencies between the Design Guidelines and already adopted policies or standards. Other recommended changes have been deferred since they relate more directly to implementation procedures that would be undertaken as Development Code amendments following adoption of the Design Guidelines.

Although the proposed revisions have improved the clarity of the Design Guidelines, the document would benefit from additional formatting, improved graphic, and editing, particularly in the area of reducing redundancy between the general and hillside guidelines. However, staff is recommending that the overall quality of the Design Guidelines is sufficient for adoption and the benefits that the County and public would derive from being able to implement the document in a more timely manner outweigh the value of further substantive revisions. In addition, adoption of the Design Guidelines would allow the Community Development Agency to move forward on

implementing procedural changes to the Design Review process. Therefore, staff is recommending that any further revisions to the document be limited to those that can be made in advance of a continued public hearing on April 25, 2005, and/or revisions that can be forwarded directly to the Board of Supervisors with the Planning Commission recommendation. It should be noted that the Community Development Agency has requested funding in the fiscal year 2005-06 budget for to improve the format, organization and readability of the document as a second phase of the Design Guidelines program initiative.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission: 1) review the proposed March 2005 Revised Public Review Draft Single-Family Residential Design Guidelines; 2) allow public input on the document; 3) provide staff with direction regarding any further revisions; and 4) continue the public meeting to April 25, 2005 to consider adopting a resolution recommending approval of the Design Guidelines by the Board of Supervisors.

Attachments:

1. March 2005 Public Revised Review Draft – Single Family Residential Design Guidelines*
2. Minutes of September 13, 2004 Planning Commission Public Workshop
3. Planning Commission staff report, September 13, 2004 public workshop
4. Comments from Commissioner Barner, undated
5. Comments from Commission Berland, undated
6. Comments from Commissioner Greenberg, July 3, 2004
7. Comments from Commissioner Holland, September 5, 2004

*Note: Copies of the March 2005 Public Review Draft of the Design Guidelines were distributed to members of the Planning Commission prior to release of this report. Copies of document may be obtained at the Marin County Community Development Agency Planning Division, Room 308, Civic Center, San Rafael (415 499-6269).

The Public Review Draft of the Design Guidelines can be viewed online at <http://www.co.marin.ca.us/depts/CD/main/comdev/CURRENT/resDesign.cfm>.