



**County of Marin
Regulatory Improvements Advisory Committee
Meeting 1: Introductions and Overview**

Date/Time: October 31, 2012, 1:30 – 3:30pm

Location: Conference Room 410B, Marin County Civic Center Administration Building

Attendance:

Committee Members: Charles Ballinger, Bob Brown, Nona Dennis, Elida Doldan-Schujman, Robert Eyler, Wade Holland, Richard Kalish, Klif Knoles, David Smadbeck, Kim Thompson, Jan Alff Wiegel

Other: Lisa Wise (Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc.), Kim Obstfeld (Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc.), Brian Crawford (Director, Community Development Agency), Steve Kinsey (Supervisor), Kate Sears (Supervisor), Debra Stratton (Senior Secretary, Community Development Agency), Eric Steger (Assistant Director, Public Works), Berenice Davidson (Senior Civil Engineer, Public Works)

Meeting Summary:

Opening Remarks and Project Overview (Supervisor Kinsey, Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc., and Brian Crawford)

- Project goal is to reward applicants who propose projects that are consistent with the Countywide Plan and other planning documents while not weakening our environmental protections.
- The Committee is an outgrowth of an ongoing initiative of the County to improve the efficiency of its permit review process.
- The Community Development Agency has been working on internal review improvements (through the Permit Efficiency Group) and zoning code amendments over the past few years. The RIAC was selected to bring together diverse points of view from external interest groups to identify appropriate efficiency measures.
- The RIAC will address permit review, CEQA, Countywide Plan implementation and fees in regular meeting through next summer. Recommendations will be compiled in a Findings Report.
- Relevant documents will include the Marin Countywide Plan, Marin County Development Code, Marin County Environmental Review Guidelines, and the Community Development Agency Fee Ordinance.

RIAC Comments

Issues to address:

- Sustainable balance – economic, social, environmental.

- The environment is the playing field, without it, there is no business or social equity. If good projects are in bad locations, will not work.
- Online tracking for projects.
- Should not leave building permit out – big part of issue.
- Bumps or road blocks often occur early in process (due to lack of preparation). If on either side of table “project continued” is worst thing you can hear. Continuance is costly.
- “Sitting” needs to be erased – need to know it is moving forward. Everyone’s projects are important.
- Costs
 - Repair jobs can be 45 to 50% more expensive due to fees – people can’t afford it.
 - Expense of fees for entitlement, both explicit (fee) and implicit (time).
- Communication (Staff to Applicant)
 - Needs to close gap between counter and private owner.
 - Transparency can be improved – how to get from A to B.
 - Drawings go in to black hole – never know what’s going on behind the scenes.
 - Need someone in planning who invested in project (regardless of size) from the beginning who understands spirit of project and background. Need information and feedback.
- Perception and Communication (with Public)
 - Perception that business interests are separate from community interests. Business interests are essential to a healthy community. If targeted industries take root it will be in everyone’s interest. Business creates funds for special interests. Planning processes should coordinate the other important objectives of supporting targeted industries. Need good jobs and businesses to create life for families in the community.
 - Public perception – sometimes the problem is not one of processing but one of communication. Misinformation is abundant.
 - Changes to how people learn about what’s going on in County. Communication tools (internet) have changed the pace and amount of information (good and bad). People should know what the regulations are and how process works. Work on public understanding.
 - Communication to public including neighborhoods is very important. They don’t know what’s going on with projects until reach Planning Commission. They come to the table at the last minute because it’s not in front of them. Public needs transparency – just applicant does.
 - Need to do outreach, extra effort to push information not just make it available.
 - Do an analysis of how projects have been covered in the media – how are things be slanted or reframed. How can we use this? Outcome should be a positive message to take out to public.
- “NIMBYs” who take extreme measures to cost thousands of dollars to projects.
- Regulations are difficult and the community is litigious.
- Large number of unpermitted projects (many second units) – address public health and safety issues with this. Work done by unlicensed contractors. Result of an expensive (lots of impact fees) and onerous process.
- Ways to expedite the permitting process.

- Expedition of certain projects similar to the color code system for homeland security – think about level of review. Certain steps can be taken for different projects.
- Decision-making on which projects get priority – decision-making process.
- Planning should be stewards, not driving projects.
- All projects should be subject to same scrutiny.
- Coordination (hard to do this on an island without water, fire, etc.). Change will be marginal if not done with others.

Desired outcomes:

- Produce something reassuring for the public. The term “Streamlining” has a bad connotation with the public now. Ensure that “streamlining” does not impede public access to process.
- Change the public perception of the CDA staff. There is already a great group of people, if can pull it together will be one of the best.
- Define and communicate what it is that can get through the process with minimal resistance. Applicants should know up front what types of projects will be easiest to get through – they will go that route.
- Reduce bureaucracy – the process is more onerous than the fees.
- Improve service for all projects, rather than giving special attention to just a few.
- Hope to see explicit changes as a result of this process.

Relevant examples:

- San Francisco has an online system. Users can go on and see assigned planners and find direct contact information.
- Santa Rosa permitting process (made some significant changes).