



**County of Marin
Regulatory Improvements Advisory Committee
Meeting 3: Building and Fire Permit Review**

Meeting Date/Time: January 10, 2012, 1:30 – 3:30pm

Location: Marin County Civic Center, Administration Building, Rm 410B

Attendance:

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

Other: Brian Crawford (CDA Director), Tom Lai (CDA Assistant Director), Jeremy Tejirian (CDA Planning Manager), Bill Kelley (CBO), Eric Steiger (DPW), Jason Weber (Fire Chief, Marin County Fire Department), Lisa Wise (Lisa Wise Consulting, Inc.)

Meeting Summary:

Logistics

1. Review of notes from December 6, 2012, meeting. Several comments and clarifications were made to the notes from the December 6th meeting. These will be incorporated into the notes and redistributed to the Committee.
2. The Committee continued discussion from December 6th on Planning Permits (results of that discussion are incorporated in the Findings/Recommendations below).
3. In terms of the final report, the Committee recommended that the report be organized as follows:
 - o Description of the components of the regulatory process that have the greatest opportunity for improvement.
 - o Evaluation of the changes and improvements underway in the CDA (and other agencies, as appropriate).
 - o Prioritization of RIAC recommendations.
4. Next meeting: January 30th (Wednesday) at 1:30 pm, Civic Center, Room 410B (Topic: CEQA)
5. Consider inviting guest speakers (e.g. CDA applicants for planning and building permits) to one or more meetings.

Discussion Items/Staff Presentation

Staff provided an overview of the building and fire permit review process and reviewed the package of information previously distributed to the Committee. The key items covered in this presentation were:

- Service delivery model
- Most common customer complaints

- Permit reform strategy
- CDA building permitting reform initiatives underway, including 3rd Party Plan Review, Express Permitting, Overtime Plan Review and Inspection, Electronic Inspection, Alternative Construction Compliance, and Online Permits

A discussion of the process ensued. Key findings and recommendations identified by the Committee are described below.

Findings/Recommendations

1. **Streamline building permit review.** The Building and Safety Division has implemented or partially implemented a number of meaningful reform initiatives in the last few years to enhance customer choice and improve the user experience. These initiatives include: 3rd Party Plan Review, Express Permitting, Overtime Plan Review and Inspection, Electronic Inspection, Alternative Construction Compliance, Online Permits, and Reexamining Local Green Building and Road Impact Mitigation Requirements. Additional initiatives that should be considered to continue to improve customer service include:
 - a. Complete a thorough review of the building permit review process and identify the area(s) that most often bottleneck the process and opportunities for concurrent review.
 - b. Refine the system of routing permits to department specialists (i.e. Planning, Building, Environmental Health Services, Public Works, and Fire) to a system with “generalists” that can perform several functions. For example, for a site plan review on a residential addition:
 - Instead of Planning reviewing the zoning, EHS reviewing the septic/leach-field impacts, DPW reviewing the grading and drainage, and the Fire Department reviewing vegetation clearance considerations, a site plan generalist would review the site plan, floor plan and exterior elevations. Under this scenario, four reviews are reduced to one performed by a planner or land development engineer. (Note: This is one step of many on a residential addition, and could be replicated for building plan review and inspections.)
 - c. Under the Express Permitting initiative, a customer can request to have their plans reviewed and/or inspections provided while they wait for certain types of smaller projects (e.g. standard retaining walls, rooftop PVs, non-structural interior remodels). This initiative could be expanded or tiered so that projects that meet a slightly larger threshold (e.g. xxxx) could be processed in five business days. For example, if you drop off the application on Monday by 9:00 am, it would be processed by Friday at 5:00 pm.
2. **Electronic building permit application submission.** Currently a building permit requires three sets of hard copy plans – one set goes to the Assessor’s Office and the other two sets stay together and are routed through the approval process (e.g. DPW and Planning, as needed). Of the two sets that are routed for approval, one goes to the building site and one stays in the Building and Safety Division.
 - a. Consider establishing an electronic building permit application process that enables applicants to submit plans and documents electronically to the County for review using the PDF file format. This initiative would reduce costs, reduce the amount of paper generated during the permitting and plan review process, and expedite the process. (Large screens would be needed for plan review in CDA.)

3. **Require project managers to proactively process applications.** CDA recognizes that property owners, design professionals, engineers, and others perceive that the County permitting process is difficult and cumbersome to navigate. In order to overcome systematic inefficiencies that result in low customer satisfaction, the CDA is implementing Project Management Procedures for Development Review Services (July 2011). The purpose of this program is to reinforce the Agency's commitment to excellence in client service by establishing procedures for delivering effective and efficient project management services by the Current Planning section. The program has cycle time targets for project reviews (first, second, and subsequent).
 - a. Review these procedures, meet with project managers, and evaluate cycle time objectives to ensure that the goals of this program are achieved. The focus should be on ensuring that applicants feel confident that they have knowledgeable County contact that is advocating for their application.
4. **Public relations campaign.** The Committee feels that there is a negative perception of the CDA, which may be based on a small number of high profile cases.
 - a. Consider developing a public relations strategy that identifies the most significant sources of negative perceptions and identifies a multi-faceted public relations campaign that highlights the importance of customer service, the role of government, the ongoing improvements at the CDA, and opportunities for the public to get involved.
 - b. Consider developing material for the new website that reinforces the capabilities of the Agency, creates positive perceptions about the Agency, and mitigates negative publicity. The web material could promote CDA streamlining initiatives and other customer service enhancements.
5. **League of Women Voters of Marin County.** The Transportation/Land Use/Housing Committee prepared a number of recommendations for the RIAC to consider as the RIAC develops its report. These recommendations should be evaluated individually and considered at the appropriate time(s) throughout the process. (See Attachment A.)

ATTACHMENT A

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MARIN COUNTY TRANSPORTATION/LAND USE/HOUSING COMMITTEE SUGGESTIONS TO REGULATORY IMPROVEMENTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

1. The most important mechanism to reduce red tape for affordable housing is to have rezoning in place.
2. The next is to evaluate public processes and reduce the duplications in the review process. We need to deal with Marin County's unusually high number of conditions of approval on housing developments; many have to do with secondary policy goals, which, while worthy, create a cumulative impact in an already complex and daunting process that makes affordable housing much more difficult to achieve.
3. Save much red tape by designating sites and zoning for multifamily use, such as already been done for mixed-use sites.
4. Mixed-use and multifamily housing need to have already-established design standards that are appropriate to the building requirements.
5. Traffic modeling is old fashioned and limited in that it doesn't account for lower traffic generation in all transit-oriented development (TOD) and affordable and senior housing.
6. There is much data on parking that needs to be taken into consideration for affordable housing and TOD; reduced parking requirements make designs better and less costly.
7. Mandates for transportation infrastructure improvements need to be funded from other sources than affordable housing.
8. We need a sustainability model: e.g., attached, smaller units have lower water and energy use, and residents are more likely to use public transit, etc. Without this, the traditional approval process misses essential aspects of a proposal.
9. An EIR must be focused on relevant studies. The county tends to expand the cost and time requirements of EIRs by unnecessarily adding additional studies not in line with the nature of the site or the proposal in response to issues raised by opponents.
10. Last, but not least, require a community acceptance plan with all proposals. Lack of adequate effort in building support and preparing to respond to neighborhood concerns in advance leads to unnecessarily longer and more contentious meetings and extra time spent by the planning commission and the BOS.