



**SANTA VENETIA COMMUNITY PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Summary Minutes**

Tuesday, January 7, 2014  
7:00-9:00 pm  
Marin County Civic Center, Room 315  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

**Members Present**

Giselle Block  
Bonnie Monte  
Jane Brand  
Roger Heller  
Tami Hull  
Gary Robards  
Oscar Segura

**Staff**

Jack Liebster, Planning Manager  
Christine Gimmler, Senior Planner

**1. Summary Minutes**

The Advisory Committee accepted the summary minutes from December 3, 2013 with several minor corrections.

Before moving to Agenda Item #2, staff and the committee briefly discussed the status of the Countywide Plan policy matrix that the committee has been reviewing over the past several meetings. Staff agreed that it would be helpful to wrap up the policy discussion with a handout that summarizes the status of the various issues, identifies what tasks remain to be done by the committee, and describes “where we go from here”.

Gary Robards also noted that another meeting of the “traffic committee” was tentatively scheduled for some time in January and that he would provide an update at the next meeting.

**2. Land Use/Community Character**

**a. Community Character and Design – Single-family Residential Design Guidelines**

To begin discussion of community character and design issues, staff distributed a summary of selected guidelines from the Marin County Single-family Residential Design Guidelines. Before reviewing the specific guidelines, committee members raised several general questions about how and when the guidelines are used. A brief summary of staff’s responses is provided below.

The Marin County Single-family Residential Design Guidelines were adopted in 2005 to establish clear and comprehensive design recommendations for single-family development. Staff’s intention in distributing a summary of the guidelines is to help

committee members become familiar with the range of issues covered by the document as well as with the guidelines themselves. While reviewing the guidelines, the committee should consider if there are issues unique to Santa Venetia which are not already covered, or whether additional guidance is needed on any particular topics.

In general, the Design Guidelines are applicable to “discretionary” projects (i.e. development applications that have to go through Design Review or other similar application processes that involve review by the Planning Department and notification of the public). Projects in areas governed by “planned district” zoning (such as RSP - Residential Single-family Planned or RMP - Residential Multi-family Planned) are always subject to Design Review (although very minor project sometimes qualify for an “exemption”). However, many portions of Santa Venetia are governed by what is referred to as “conventional” zoning districts. In conventional districts (such as R-1, R-A, and A-2:B-2) development is governed by specific numeric rules (maximum height and floor area ratio limits and minimum yard setbacks). Typically, if development conforms to the rules of that district, Design Review is not required. However, there are several situations that “trigger” Design Review regardless of the zoning. For example, a proposal to build a house over 4,000 square feet in size or 30 feet in height, or construction on a property less than half the size required by zoning would require Design Review approval even when the construction otherwise met all zoning requirements. Due to the complexity of this issue, staff offered to prepare a handout explaining the various Design Review “triggers” as well as a map showing which areas of Santa Venetia are governed by planned zoning districts requiring Design Review.

When a project goes through Design Review, a decision is usually made “administratively” which means that notices are mailed out and the public can comment, but no public hearing is required. However, an appeal process exists which allows staff’s decision to be re-considered at a public hearing before the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors if neighbors have strong objections that cannot be worked out in a mutually agreeable way. In this way, the approval process for smaller non-controversial projects can proceed more quickly than controversial projects which generally end up being decided in a public hearing setting.

Many of the guidelines use the word “should” rather than “shall”. For example, “buildings *should* be sited to minimize privacy impacts.” This terminology is preferred because it provides flexibility to balance competing goals and avoid unintended consequences. For example, on a certain property, siting a building to minimize privacy impacts on a neighbor might result in other effects, like increased tree removal or grading. In this case, County decision makers would need to determine an appropriate balance between the goals of maintaining privacy, reducing tree removal, and minimizing grading. This is more difficult to accomplish when a guideline is written as a mandatory requirement (i.e. “shall”). Use of the word “should” indicates something is strongly recommended, but also allows some flexibility to address the specific characteristics of each situation.

Committee members also discussed design issues associated with the raising of residences to comply with FEMA requirements. Homes that only need to be raised a few feet would likely not have a significant effect on community character. However, in lower lying areas where height increases could be more significant, proposals to raise houses could have a more noticeable impact. In some cases, a property owner may decide to add living space or even a second floor as part of the project. Committee members commented that efforts by residents to comply with FEMA requirements

should be supported (and may be required in order to obtain affordable flood insurance rates). However, it may be appropriate to consider the design implications of this issue in more detail as well as its impact on the character of Santa Venetia over time.

Due to time constraints, discussion of the Single-family Residential Design Guidelines will be continued at the next meeting.

### **3. Next Meeting**

The committee discussed moving regularly scheduled committee meetings from the first Tuesday of the month to the second Tuesday in order to avoid a scheduling conflict for committee member Giselle Block. Staff agreed to contact members not in attendance at tonight's meeting regarding the proposed change. Assuming there are no objections, the next committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 11, 2014.

### **4. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.