



THE CITY OF
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June 28, 2017

The Honorable Kelly V. Simmons
Judge of the Marin County Superior Court
Post Office Box 4988
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Jay Hamilton-Roth, Foreperson
Marin County Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 275
San Rafael, CA 94903

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report “Overcoming Barriers to Housing Affordability”

Dear Honorable Judge Simmons and Mr. Hamilton-Roth:

This letter explains in detail the City of Novato’s response to the Grand Jury Report dated April 6, 2017. The Report directs the City to respond to Recommendations R1, R2, R3, and R6.

Recommendation R1. *Each planning department should begin regularly scheduled meetings at which developers can speak, early in the process, with all relevant members of staff to discuss impacts of proposed development and potential solutions to problems.*

Response: This is a good suggestion, and one that has been implemented for many years in Novato. Staff routinely holds pre-application meetings with applicants for housing developments which includes staff from both Community Development and Public Works. When requested by applicants, the City also has a Technical Advisory Committee process which allows developers to meet with City representatives along with staff from the Novato Fire Protection District, Novato Sanitary District and North Marin Water District to review conceptual proposals.

Recommendation R2. *Each planning department should develop a proactive community outreach strategy for any project that might be considered potentially controversial (including going beyond legal noticing minimums and initiating outreach efforts as early as possible in the development cycle).*

Response: This also is a good idea, and one that Novato has mandated as part of its Zoning Code since 2008. Applicants for larger projects (including multi-family proposals) are required to host a community meeting shortly after filing of an application to provide early notification of a new development proposal and for the applicants to receive early feedback. The City provides mailing labels for these community meetings, typically sending mailed notices to property owners within 1,000 feet of a project site (a notice area of 72 acres).

The City also utilizes a Conceptual Design Review process whereby the Design Review Commission provides design feedback to applicants early in the review process prior to detailed plans being prepared. This process allows applicants to obtain design and public feedback prior to investing significant funds in preparing detailed architectural and engineering plans and in advance of preparing environmental studies.

Recommendation R3. *Each planning department should use succinct “plain-speak” to convey issues in their outreach.*

Response: Last year the City of Novato analyzed and upgraded its community outreach efforts, which included modification of its public hearing notice format to improve its readability and clarity. The City also requires on-site signage to inform the public of new major development applications and created individual webpages for each major project to better inform the public on development proposals.

Recommendation R6. *Each jurisdiction should adopt procedures so that low-income housing projects are fast-tracked through the planning and permitting process.*

Response: It is rare when the City processes application for low-income housing projects. Two such applications have been processed over the past decade. Most multi-family housing proposals include both market rate and required “inclusionary” affordable units. The City processes all development applications as expeditiously as possible. Attempting to fast-track applications for low-income housing would likely run afoul of Finding 7 of the Grand Jury Report that “proposals to build low-income affordable housing create immediate neighborhood opposition.” Public opposition would be exacerbated if residents have the impression that the public review process is being short-changed.

Rather than fast-tracking applications, the City has sought to streamline the approval process for new housing options that would have limited and distributed impacts on surrounding neighbors, including making approvals of Accessory Dwelling Units and Junior Accessory Dwelling Units a ministerial, rather than discretionary, processes.

The City of Novato City Council reviewed and approved this response on June 27, 2017, at a duly noticed and agendaized public meeting. If you have further questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Denise Athas
Mayor

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

City of Novato

Report Title: Overcoming Barriers to Housing Affordability

Report Date: April 6, 2017

Public Release: April 12, 2017

Response By: Mayor and City Council

FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: N/A
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: N/A (see attached for portion of the finding that is disputed and explanation of the reasons therefor)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations R1, R2, R3 and R6 have been implemented, see summary regarding the implemented action attached.
- Recommendations N/A has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, see attached timeframe for implementation.
- Recommendations N/A require further analysis, see attached explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion, which timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
- Recommendations N/A will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, see attached explanation.

Date: 6/28/17 Signed: Denise Athas
Denise Athas, Mayor

Number of Pages Attached: 2