



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS    Agenda Number:  
AGENDA LETTER

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
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Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
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Department Name:    Planning & Development  
Department No.:    053  
For Agenda Of:    03/06/2007  
Placement:    Departmental  
Estimated Tme:    60 Minutes  
Continued Item:    No  
If Yes, date from:  
Vote Required:    No Vote Required

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TO:            Board of Supervisors  
FROM:        Department Director    John Baker, Planning & Development (805)568-2085

SUBJECT:    **Significant Accomplishments and Upcoming Projects**

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**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: N/A

**Other Concurrence:** N/A

As to form: N/A

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board receive a report on the significant accomplishments made by Planning and Development during the 2006-07 fiscal year and consider key projects proposed for the upcoming 2007-08 fiscal year.

**Summary Text:**

In 2003, Planning and Development began a comprehensive review of the then existing permit process and made recommendations for meaningful improvements. In May 2005, the Board of Supervisors adopted a set of priorities for process improvement geared toward making the process easier to navigate and more time efficient and cost effective, yet maintaining the quality of development within the County.

At the start of the 2006-07 fiscal year, the Department identified three broad focus areas for improvement to further the priorities set out in 2005: Continuous Process Improvement, Technology Enhancements, and Customer Service Relations. Significant achievements have been made this past year and an outline of the accomplishments is listed below under each focus area. In addition, the Department has also identified several key projects that will be undertaken in the upcoming fiscal year in harmony with these adopted goals. Finally, policy modifications that would improve permitting efficiency are presented for Board consideration.

**Background:**

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On May 24, 2005, the Board of Supervisors set out five priorities for process improvement as endorsed by the Process Improvement Oversight Committee: Ministerial Permits, Appeals, Agricultural Permits, Customer Service, and the Zoning Ordinance Reformatting Project. Accomplishments were made under each of these five priorities subsequent to their endorsement by the Board and the Department began transitioning from a process improvement perspective to a continuous improvement approach.

Beginning in FY 2006-07, the Department consolidated these five priorities into three identified focus areas that foster continuous improvement. Improvement projects were identified and grouped under the three focus areas – continuous improvement, technology enhancements, customer service relations – and significant progress has been made in each category. Several projects have been marked for FY 2007-08 consistent with the three focus areas.

Modifications to existing policies will also be considered. In addition to the County's General Plan, the County also has numerous implementation policies that require individual analysis by staff on applicable projects. Many of these implementing documents contain the same or similar policies as set forth in the General Plan, often making staff analysis duplicative with a potential for policies to conflict with one another. The adoption of the new Land Use and Development Codes under the Zoning Ordinance Reformatting Project has made significant strides in consolidating some of the implementation documents (Articles I, II, III, and V) into a standardized document. More work is needed to analyze the remaining implementation documents and attempt to standardize them into sensible documents. This will enhance staff efficiency and ensure a more meaningful and effective review on all projects. Other existing policies will also be evaluated for their effectiveness consistent with the overall goal of making the process easier to navigate and more time efficient and cost effective.

### **I. Significant Accomplishments for FY 2006-07**

#### *Continuous Process Improvement*

- Changes are underway to provide customers with project time estimates from application completeness to decision-maker determinations with status information to be available on-line.
- Changes have been proposed to the follow-up permit process for Conditional Use Permits and Development Plans thus eliminating the second opportunity for a second public notice and appeals, thereby making the process more time efficient and less redundant. This action requires Board action to complete the process. The Planning Commissions will be reviewing ordinance amendments to implement the changes later this month.
- Revisions have been proposed to the Coastal Development Permit processes associated with discretionary projects which eliminated the potential for multiple appeals paths on a single project. The revisions will require Board and Coastal Commission action to complete the process.
- Permits for minor developments, e.g. one story SFD additions, barns, storage sheds and demolitions, are in development to shift from a Land Use Permit requirement to a Zoning Clearance process to increase efficiency. They will be presented to the Planning Commission before the end of the fiscal year.
- Staff completed the Zoning Ordinance Reformatting Project, incorporating Articles I, II, III, and V into the newly adopted County Land Use and Development Code. Article IV has also

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been reformatted into the Montecito Land Use and Development Code for the inland Montecito area.

- The Coastal Zoning Ordinance is in the process of being integrated into the Montecito Land Use and Development Code making it a fully integrated document for the Montecito area. The Montecito Planning Commission, Board and Coastal Commission will need to act on the change before it will take effect.
- The level of information provided to the public has been increased significantly via the re-designed Planning and Development website. Additional service/process handouts are also available at the counters as well as on the Department's website.
- A new Petroleum Ordinance that tightens the regulatory activities and provides a fee structure to ensure quality monitoring has been vetted with industry representatives and will come to the Board for approval before the close of the fiscal year.
- Staff has worked with the Oversight Committee and the Agricultural Advisory Committee on various proposals related to agricultural development. Proposed changes have been brought to the Planning Commission for a workshop and have been temporarily placed on hold pending a cumulative analysis in the Housing Element EIR. Proposals include:
  - Downshifting permit process for minor agricultural structures and uses;
  - Reducing the permit requirements for farm-worker units;
  - Providing a permit path for residential second units in all agricultural zones; and
  - Increasing the threshold for triggering a Development Plan requirement on large agricultural parcels.
- The Oversight Committee and staff have focused efforts on process improvement efforts on ministerial permitting, appeals processes, agricultural permitting, customer service and the zoning ordinances. The Department will continue to focus on these areas under the Continuous Process Improvement umbrella.

### Technology Enhancements

- Phase I of the Accela Permit Management System upgrade project has begun. This upgrade will improve project tracking and accountability and allow for applicants to follow project permitting progress.
- Use of the Virtual One Stop Counter has also been expanded to enable project applicants to simultaneously interact with staff from several departments involved with the review of development permits via a video link. This is expected to make the process easier to navigate and more time efficient for the project applicants.
- The level of management information available has also been expanded as it relates to permit processing to increase accountability and management oversight.

### Customer Service Relations

- Computers have been provided at the counters for public access.
- The Land Use Development Codes and the Permit Procedures Manual have been completed to provide better tools for staff and customers.

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- Regulatory Ethics training will be completed by all department staff in regulatory positions by the end of the fiscal year.

## **II. Recommended Key Projects for Upcoming Fiscal Year**

The Department will continue to focus on these identified areas to enhance the services provided to the public in the upcoming fiscal year. These recommended projects are in line with the overall goal of making the process easier to navigate and more time efficient and cost effective, while careful not to compromise the quality of development within the County.

### Continuous Process Improvements

- The Department will review the current decision-making responsibility of the Director, Zoning Administrator, and Planning Commissions to identify opportunities for shifting the decision-making to the most appropriate level. Minor changes and modifications to conditions of approval shall be shifted to the Director level.
- A comprehensive review of the Zoning Enforcement and Permit Compliance programs will be conducted and recommendations for improvements will be implemented as appropriate.
- Inconsistencies between regional Boards of Architectural Review (BAR) will be eliminated by clarifying definitions for BAR exempt projects, adopting a checklist form for subsequent BAR hearings following initial review (similar to one proposed for use by the Montecito BAR), and considering a new fee for projects that continually return to the BAR after numerous hearings. The trigger number for this new fee must be determined prior to the implementation of the fee.
- Planning and Development will continue to coordinate with the other departments involved in development review in order to provide an integrated permit process. Responsibilities for project management oversight of all aspects related to the development review process will be shifted to Planning and Development staff as appropriate to enhance customer service and effectiveness.
- Coordination with applicants on conditions of approval will be improved, ensuring that each condition is clearly understood and complied with by the applicant. Planning and Development staff will be charged with the chief oversight of satisfaction on all conditions of approval prior to the attainment of applicable clearances.
- Several internal prototype documents used by staff will be upgraded in an effort to reduce staff time, ultimately reducing costs billed to the applicants. Preparation of staff reports to the Planning Commission will also be improved to eliminate redundancies and duplicitous analyses.
- Conceptual Review processes will be streamlined at the Planning Commission, making the process more useful to commission members, applicants, and staff. The goal is to reduce the appellant's time from project initiation to Planning Commission approval.
- A Time and Motion Study will be prepared to support the changes in the Building and Safety fee structure and to potentially identify other areas for process improvement.

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- Phase II of the Zoning Ordinance Reformatting Project will begin with the prioritizing of substantive ordinance amendments identified during Phase I. Proposed ordinance amendments will be addressed in order of descending priority.
- The Department will also work to finalize ordinance amendments in process for agricultural housing and development pending the completion of the Housing Element EIR.
- The Department is currently drafting and will complete the Financial Assurance Rules for Energy Facilities. These rules will ensure the removal of oil and gas facilities when these operations permanently cease.

### Technology Enhancements

- Phase I of the Accela Permit Management System upgrade will be completed during this upcoming fiscal year. The upgrade will provide a single system to manage the land development permit process for all county departments and the ability to submit and track permits via the internet. This upgrade will provide staff access to increased information and tools to enhance efficiency. Improvements will allow for customer access to project status.
- The Department will begin upgrading the current GIS system in order to fully utilize the Accela Permit Management System. This upgrade is needed to provide our staff with valuable tools in order to enhance our level of customer service. Phase II of the Accela upgrade is also dependent on a fully functional GIS system.
- The Department is looking to improve its document management systems to make records more readily accessible, as well as improving the quality of the records stored.

### Customer Service Relations

- Several Process Improvement Bulletins and Newsletters have been distributed to the public as a means of supplying information on services provided by the Department as well as information relating to the changes being made to improve services. The Department will continue to regularly produce these bulletins as a service to the public.
- Improvements to the permit management and tracking system will be expanded to provide on-line services to customers.
- Customer surveys will continue to be distributed in application packets, online, at permit issuance, and in other general and specific correspondences to the public in order to gauge the level of service provided by the Department. This could potentially include random phone calls to permit applicants.
- A true "One Stop Facility" to house all development review departments in a single location to better serve our customers is proposed. This project is in the proposed Capital Improvement Program, but funding has not been identified.

## III. Proposed Policy Modifications

From time to time during Board hearings on planning issues or during one on one discussions with Board Members have raised questions and/or concerns regarding ways to reduce applicant processing time and costs. During the November 14, 2006 Board of Supervisors hearing on fee increases, staff was specifically asked what actions might be taken to increase staff efficiency for processing development

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permits. The Director indicated at that time much of the work performed by planning staff revolves around land use and community plan policies that can be modified by the Board. In response to that comment, the Board indicated a willingness to consider policy changes that would result in processing efficiencies. The Director stated he would return with suggestions for Board considerations. Listed below are possible modifications to policies that would decrease the amount of time, and therefore costs, to applicants. It should be noted that no staff work has been completed on any of these items and there will not be any initiation without specific direction by the Board to proceed.

1. Eliminate policies in the community plans and general plan that protect individual oak trees in the urban areas outside the coastal zone. The focus of protection would be on oak woodland habitats and oaks within the coastal zone.
2. Modify the grading ordinance to establish volumes of grading that trigger a permit as a ratio to the parcel size.
3. Standardize design guidelines throughout the County to develop consistency through the following:
  - Standardize or eliminate floor to area ratios (FAR) and standardize the method of calculating FARs.
  - Standardize the methodology of measuring height.
  - Combine the existing design guidelines countywide into a single design guideline document.
4. Standardize the community plans to ensure consistency with the General Plan, as included in the Comprehensive Planning Work Program
  - Eliminate duplication of policies between the Comprehensive Plan Elements and the Community Plans.
  - Standardize the layout of the Community Plans.
  - Standardize policy language between community plans on standard issues such as noise, archaeology, etc.
  - Limit future community plans to issues such as Land Use that require a unique treatment in communities.
5. Remove private view consideration from the permitting process by clarifying visual resources policies in the Land Use Element and Community Plans, and by revising the design guidelines to eliminate private view consideration.
6. Modify County thresholds and policies regarding evaluation of historic resources and change the criteria for triggering historic reports from 50 years old to a longer period.
7. Modify the permit appeal fee for projects that are redesigned during the appeal process to require the permit applicant to pay the costs for review.

Over the next several months, assuming Board acceptance, further review of policies will be pursued with the idea of bringing forward additional ideas for consideration to achieve permitting efficiencies. As the Department considers possible changes, the quality of resulting development will always be foremost in our minds.

Planning and Development is committed to serving the public by providing quality planning, permitting and inspection services through a thoughtful, collaborative and professional process. With support, the Department is ready and capable of accomplishing the goal of making the process easier to navigate, more time efficient and cost effective, while maintaining the quality of development within the County.

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### **Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Budgeted: Yes

### **Staffing Impacts:**

N/A

### **Special Instructions:**

### **Attachments:**

N/A

**Authored by:** John Baker, Director, Planning and Development

### **cc:**