



County of Santa Cruz

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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ALVIN D. JAMES, DIRECTOR

November 27, 2000

Agenda: December 5th, 2000

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, California 95060

SUBJECT: Report on Planning Automation Projects and Various Procedural Issues

Members of the Board:

On October 17th, 2000, your Board considered a comprehensive report on Planning Department operations and adopted a series of recommendations to improve our level of service to the public. In response to issues raised by the public and by individual Board members at that time, your Board further directed the Planning Department to report back on the following items on your December 5th agenda:

- Putting the County Code on-line;
- Making permit application tracking data available on-line;
- Continuing focus group meetings with the development community;
- Improving the Development Review Group (DRG) process; and
- Providing earlier notification about development applications to the public.

Our report today will respond to these additional directives.

COUNTY CODE ON-LINE

A working group of representatives from the Planning Department, County Administrative Office, Clerk of the Board, and Information Services have been meeting to evaluate various approaches for placing both Volume I and Volume II of the County Code on the Internet for public use. Based on our analysis of the cost, time required for completion and the County staff resources available, we have developed an approach that we are pleased to be able to recommend.

As you know, Book Publishing Company (BPC), has been maintaining the hard copy version of Volume I of the County Code for many years and has an excellent service record. BPC also provides services for on-line formatting of the county codes and currently provides internet access services for Santa Barbara County, Los Angeles County and several cities in California. BPC has indicated that the existing hard copy version of Volume I that they maintain and the mainframe version of Volume II that the County maintains can be converted to a consistent internet format which could be available through a link on the County's homepage. The system could include a key word search capacity to maximize the ease of use for the public. Updates would be added to the on-line codes on a regular basis and hard copies would be available as necessary. BPC has indicated that the conversion can be completed at an approximate one time cost of \$18,000 and the codes could be available on-line by mid-April, 2001. Funds are available in the current year budget for this purpose. We plan to bring a contract amendment to our BPC agreement to include these services to your Board on December 12, 2000.

APPLICATION TRACKING INFORMATION ON-LINE

The possibility of communicating permit application status to the public via the Internet was raised at your October 17 meeting. As your Board may recall, the Planning Director and Information Services Director have been previously directed to report to your Board on January 9, 2001 with a status report on GIS Internet accessibility. Since our goal with the GIS Internet is to integrate it into the Planning Department's Web site, we plan to address application tracking as a part of the January 9th report back.

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS WITH THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

From time to time, we have hosted informal meetings with the development community to discuss concerns that they have regarding our land use development process and related issues. These have been productive sessions, and provide a valuable opportunity to hear from individuals who work with our Department on a daily basis. These land use professionals have an important perspective, because they work with a broad spectrum of our community, and have insights as a result of their experiences working with our Department and other planning agencies. In addition to hearing directly about their concerns and suggestions about how to improve our services, it is also an opportunity for us to inform them about changes in the Planning Department, upcoming hearings, and important policy changes.

I attended an open meeting with representatives of the development community in October to discuss various concerns related to the Department's development processing services. I attended a second meeting with the same group on November 27th to discuss progress in implementing measures approved by your Board on October 17th.

The Planning Department was invited to have another meeting with the development group

in either December or early next year, after we have filled more of our vacancies, organized our geographic teams, implemented our telephone improvements, and implemented the pilot "One Stop" permit program at our North County Permit Center. These meetings have provided a good opportunity to solicit feedback from these individuals on the recent changes in addition to any other general issues or concerns. Over the long term, we expect that our Quality Assurance/Quality Control program will be designed to include ongoing feedback from this customer group.

IMPROVING THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW GROUP (DRG) PROCESS

As your Board is aware, the DRG process is a pre-application process for larger development projects which provides an applicant with an opportunity to hear directly from the various Land Use reviewing agencies and departments about their issues and requirements regarding a specific development proposal. Equipped with this information, an applicant can amend project plans, or provide additional information to respond to the concerns raised by the reviewing agencies.

While the overall value of the DRG process was acknowledged, a concern was raised during public comment about the reliability and consistency of the DRG process. After discussing this matter with staff who participate in this process, it is clear that the process can be improved. In the coming weeks, my Office will coordinate a meeting with the DRG participants in other County Departments to discuss the shortcomings in the process and to identify and implement changes to improve the DRG process. We will provide your Board with an update on our efforts in our next quarterly report.

EARLIER NOTIFICATION TO THE PUBLIC

As your Board is aware, the County Code requires public notification for certain development applications. Applications processed at Level 4 (Public Notice) require noticing by mail within ten calendar days following receipt of an application to the owners and occupants of all property within 300 feet of the exterior boundaries of the property involved in the application. In addition, there is a second cycle of noticing that occurs prior to final action on a Level 4 permit application. The County Code requires mailed notice to the same parties not less than ten calendar days prior to issuance of permit. In addition, the ordinance requires a published notice in a newspaper of general circulation, and posting of the property, again within ten calendar days of issuance of the permit. These direct mailings provide the public with an opportunity to review the plans and the project file, ask questions of the project planner, provide comments to the planner regarding their concerns about the proposed development, and finally to file an appeal if they do not agree with the permit decision and wish further review.

Unlike Level 4 applications which require noticing upon receipt of an application, applications processed at Level 5 (Zoning Administrator), Level 6 (Planning Commission) and Level 7 (Board of Supervisors) do not require direct mailed notice until ten calendar days prior to the required public hearing. In addition to direct mailings, Level 5-7 applications also require published notice in a newspaper of general circulation and posting of the property within ten

calendar days of the hearing. There was some interest expressed during public comment and by your Board to provide earlier notice to the public than under the current system. Staff were directed to report back on this issue.

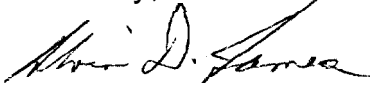
The advantages of earlier notification to the public regarding a development application are fairly obvious. Individuals would learn of development proposals at an earlier stage, and could engage in the process long before the public hearing. There are likely to be additional processing time and cost considerations associated with an earlier public notification process, both for the support staff who prepare mailings, and for the planning staff. Amendments to the County Code would be required. A system would need to be developed for forwarding public correspondence to an applicant which results from early notification.

For these reasons and others, staff believes that this issue requires further analysis before we can provide your Board with a recommendation. We will contact other planning jurisdictions regarding their notification requirements and practices to determine whether there is an industry standard for initial notification. We will also review the relevant planning literature on this subject and analyze the potential costs associated with additional noticing requirements. In view of the significant pending development application workload and policy terms already in the queue, it is our recommendation that this be deferred to next year's work program.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that your Board:

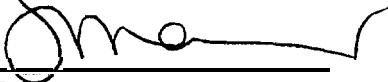
1. Accept and file this report;
2. Direct the CAO and Information Services to report back on December 12, 2000 with a contract with Book Publishing Company for placing and maintaining Volume I and Volume II of the County Code on the Internet.
3. Direct the Planning Department, in conjunction with the Information Services Director, to provide your Board with a report on application information availability on the Internet on January 9th, 2001;
4. Direct the Planning Department to meet with the interested members of the development community early next year following implementation of the various public service improvements set forth in our October 17, 2000 report;
5. Direct the Planning Department to include a summary of improvements to the DRG process in our next quarterly report; and
6. Direct the Planning Department to include a report back on earlier public notification in our FY 01-02 Work Program.

Sincerely,



ALVIN D. JAMES
Planning Director

RECOMMENDED:



SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
County Administrative Officer