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December 4, 2022

To: City Council

Re: Updated Planning Commission Guidelines (Resolution)
(December 6, 2022 Council Agenda, Item 5)

Mayor Rowse and Council Members,

Allied Neighborhoods Association appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed updated Planning Commission Guidelines.

Eliminate Regular Lunch Meetings. This is definitely a move in the right direction. *"Regular lunch meetings have been eliminated to increase transparency and accessibility;"* (CAR, pg.1) and Substantial Conformance Determination (SCD) requests that warranted Planning Commission feedback will be shifted to regular Commission meetings.(emphasis added)

The scope of the regular lunch meetings was very, very broad. Standard boiler plate language for these twice a month lunch meetings was: "*An update on status of long-range projects, new legislation, zoning enforcement items, status reports and previously-approved projects, and future agenda items"*. In addition, there were also specifically identified agendized items, such as AUD status updates, SCDs, and General Plan Implementation, Climate Action Plan Implementation, Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) Community Indicators, Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Mitigation Monitoring, and much more.

Special Meetings. We have a couple of concerns regarding the new special meetings (Resolution, pg.1):

***"1.5 Special meetings for Training and Routine Administrative Items**. To the extent possible, training and routine administrative items will be held as a special meeting at 12:00p.m. on the first Thursday of every month in City Hall, Room 15, pursuant to the noticing and public meeting requirements set forth in Section 1.4, above." (emphasis added)*

Training. We've appreciated the televised trainings (at regular Planning Commission 1pm meetings) since the beginning of the pandemic; it's been an opportunity for the public to learn about pertinent topics, such as the Conditional Use Permit training (2/18/2021), Zoning Basics training (4/15/21), the Brown Act or State housing legislation. As Room 15 is not set up to televise the new special meetings (nor probably set up to zoom live) the planning staff and attorney staff time and expertise will basically just be training the 7 planning commissioners. If a topic is important enough to spend these staff resources, we should also be making the trainings easily available to the general public (televised, zoom - and archived for future viewing as are regular 1pm meetings). Having the trainings easily available to the public would also help the public be more in step about what's going on and informed about planning topics, recent legislation or other topics that warrant a training.

Routine Administrative Items. What are considered "routine administrative items"?

Current Planning Commission agendas include, at the very end of each agenda, the Administrative Agenda.

A. Committee and Liaison Reports
    1. Staff Hearing Officer Liaison Report
    2. Other Committee and Liaison Reports

Is this the scope of "routine administrative items"? If not, please elaborate by providing a list of what would be included in "routine administrative items".

The public appreciates hearing about the progress of different planning efforts that individual planning commissioners attend as liaison. Progress on De La Guerra Plaza, Objective Design Standards, State Street Master Plan, etc. Apparently, this information will no longer be shared with the public at the regular televised 1pm Planning Commission meetings.

The language in 1.5 (of the Resolution) states - to the extent possible having routine administrative items, and trainings, at a special meeting in Room 15 every first Thursday of each month. This starts to sound a lot like a regular lunch meeting (in Room 15, at noon, before a regular scheduled 1pm PC meeting across the hall, not televised), with a different name.

It appears the public is losing the Planning Commission trainings and the liaison reporting (and maybe more, depending on the definition of routine administrative items). **Why is it necessary** to have Room 15 special meetings for training and routine administrative items? This seems to run counter to increased transparency and accessibility.

We are not aware that other local jurisdictions have a regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting before a televised regular PC meeting. (Is this happening in Goleta, Carpinteria, at Montecito PC or County of Santa Barbara?)

1**.4 Special Meetings.** Hopefully this is a little used provision. Getting the word out about a, at least 24 hour in advance noticed meeting, will require some effort - and as described in 1.4, doesn't seem like it will necessarily be that effective.

In closing, during the pandemic we have appreciated that all Planning Commission work and business has been in full public view.

A lot has changed since 1997 (the year our current Guidelines were adopted), including public expectations of greater transparency and accessibility.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,
Allied Neighborhoods Association

Cc: Allison De Busk
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