



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

PLANNING DEPARTMENT

701 OCEAN STREET, 4TH FLOOR, SANTA CRUZ, CA 95060
 (831) 454-2580 FAX: (831) 454-2131 TDD: (831) 454-2123

TOM BURNS, PLANNING DIRECTOR

March 3, 2008

AGENDA : March 18, 2008

Board of Supervisors
 County of Santa Cruz
 701 Ocean Street
 Santa Cruz CA 95060

SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY

Members of the Board:

Over the past three years, your Board has dealt with the issue of neighborhood compatibility -- both within the context of specific development proposals and in a larger policy context. This is a common concern that has occurred in desirable communities throughout the country, as owners, often new to the area, are interested in improving their properties. The question is how to balance the property owner's desire to upgrade their property with surrounding neighbor's interests in neighborhood integrity. As part of those discussions, staff has presented you with a range of policy options -- most recently in March 2007 -- and you have taken a number of actions. Because this effort has been accomplished through a number of separate actions, you directed that staff return at this time with an overall progress report on various efforts regarding neighborhood Compatibility.

Ordinance Amendments

After considerable public and Board discussion, in December 2006 you adopted a package of ordinance amendments to address the following issues:

- o Allow front yard averaging for residential parcels;
- o Increase allowed lot coverage from 30% to 40% for parcels 5,000 to 15,000 square feet in size; and
- o Amend the definition of "Net Site Area", limiting the credit given for coastal bluff, beach and submerged lands.

These amendments became effective outside of the Coastal Zone in January 2007 and are pending certification by the Coastal Commission for properties inside the Coastal Zone.

Several applications for new houses or additions utilizing front yard averaging were submitted this past year. There have also been a number of applications submitted showing increased lot coverage, thereby, reduced second-story components.

Staff continues to believe that, once fully implemented throughout the County, these regulatory changes will be an effective component in our effort to bring about more compatible designs in existing neighborhoods.

Pleasure Point Neighborhood Compatibility

One area where the issue of compatibility has been debated the most is the Pleasure Point neighborhood in Live Oak. Therefore, another key response to concerns about neighborhood-compatible designs was initiating a special community planning process in that area. The community input stage of that process has been completed, with staff anticipating bringing a plan before your Board later this summer. A key challenge of this planning process has been to forward the goals of improving compatibility standards without increasing the level of discretionary permit review. Through community discussions, we believe that this balance can be achieved through adopting special design standards for this neighborhood that can be administered through the building permit process. If this model is successful, it can be reshaped for other interested neighborhoods over time.

Staff Review of Discretionary Applications

As reported previously to your Board, for the past two years an informal staff group (including the Planning Director, several managers, the Urban Designer, and project planners) has met to review residential discretionary applications subject to neighborhood compatibility findings through the discretionary permit process. The purpose of the review is to ensure consistency in staff review and to inform the applicant of any concerns early in the process. We believe that this process has brought about significantly improved consistency in the review of such projects and resulted in clearer standards for the public. We intend to continue that review process for at least the next year.

Neighborhood Compatibility Guidelines

As a result of the review of discretionary residential applications, staff came to believe that it was appropriate to create written information to serve as a guide to staff, designers and the general public with regard to the meaning of current compatibility regulations. In consultation with staff and a subcommittee of neighborhood residents and architects, a brochure was prepared that set out compatibility and neighborhood context factors. The resulting brochure was presented to your Board in March 2007 and it was made available to the public beginning in April 2007.

Subsequently, a lawsuit was filed claiming that the process for enacting the informational brochure was flawed, requiring formal Planning Commission review and your Board approval of the guidelines. Much to our surprise, the Court agreed with that argument and we were ordered to withdraw the brochure from public access. Because we continue to believe that the brochure provides a valuable educational purpose for the general public and design community, we will be bringing the brochure before the Planning Commission in late April and the matter will then be forwarded to your Board for formal action, allowing us to again share this useful design tool with the public.

Summary and Recommendation

We believe that considerable progress has taken place this past year with regard to the issue of compatible design in the context of existing neighborhoods. In the next year we anticipate further progress through adoption of the regulatory changes by the Coastal Commission, action on the Pleasure Point Plan, ongoing in-house consistency reviews, and once again being able to share the compatibility guidelines with the general public and design community. Finally, we believe that the concept of neighborhood-specific design standards that will be forwarded through the Pleasure Point Study will have potential application to other neighborhoods where residents are concerned about the compatibility of changing neighborhood character.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that your Board accept and file this report.

Sincerely,



Tom Burns
 Planning Director

RECOMMENDED:



SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
 County Administrative Officer

cc: Mike Guth
 Matthew Thompson
 Hugh Carter
 Architects Association of Santa Cruz County
 Cove Britton
 Patricia E. Curtin
 Martin Hess
 Burnie Thomason
 Susan and Barry Porter
 Lauren Greene and Glen Ceresa

TB:GH\G:\Board Letters\Pending\3-18-08

CBD BOSMAIL

From: CBD BOSMAIL
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2008 4:00 PM
To: CBD BOSMAIL
Subject: Agenda Comments

Meeting Date : 3/18/2008

Item Number : 41

Name : Cove Britton

Email : cove@matsonbritton.com

Address : 728 N. Branciforte
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Phone : 425-0544

Comments :

Dear members of the Board,

In my opinion, Planning Director Tom Burns comments may be misconstrued in regards to the process and relevance of the neighborhood compatibility guidelines that were quashed by the court.

In Rio Del Mar bluff neighborhoods and on the sand, of the 28 projects that our office designed, either built or in-process, not one of those clients, or their supporters, or for that matter our office, were consulted in regards to the design guidelines.

In Pleasure Point, of the 13 projects that are either built or in process, not one of those clients, or their supporters were consulted in regards to the design guidelines.

With all due respect, of those neighbors that were consulted, they were the minority opinion. The Architects Association of Santa Cruz County was not consulted, nor did it support the design guidelines. In addition, those Architects that were consulted, also did not support the design guidelines. Clearly the opinion of those who supported the adoption of these guidelines opinions should be respected, but ignoring the input of the rest of the community seems completely inappropriate.

As the suit presented, not only was the process not followed that allowed for the appropriate community input, the guidelines themselves are not consistent with the existing ordinances and expand upon the ordinances.

Based on this, I believe it would be difficult to state that the brochure is a helpful public tool...

Please consider directing that the Planning Department arrange meetings that are more inclusive, and provide specific information on how these guidelines "line up" with existing ordinance, prior to any presentation to the Planning Commission of the proposed design guidelines.

Thank you for the Board's consideration.

Sincerely,
Cove Britton
Architect
Matson Britton Architects

3/18/2008

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CBD BOSMAIL

From: CBD BOSMAIL
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2008 1:42 PM
To: CBD BOSMAIL
Subject: Agenda Comments

Meeting Date : 3/18/2008

Item Number : 41

Name : Jim Tucker

Email : jktucker@comcast.net

Address : 33 Rockview

Phone : Not Supplied

Comments :

Please do not accept and file the progress report on neighborhood compatibility issues as suggested by the Planning Director. Doing so gives the report a sense of approval and legitimacy it does not warrant.

As a resident of Pleasure Point, I do not feel the report or the guideline brochure offered last year reflect the feelings of the community at large but, rather, the interests of a minority who are attempting to foist their ideas onto the citizenry.

This thing, since it will have the effect of going from guideline to law, must have further airing and agreement between citizens, professional designers, and local government. As it stands, the Planning Department's report reflects the opinion of only a small portion of the people it intends to represent.