

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNCIL
City Council Agenda
February 6, 2008

TO: City Council

FROM: Robert Flint, Chairperson, Planning Commission

SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Planning Commission

DATE: January 17, 2008

SUMMARY: Pursuant to Government Code Section 65400, the following is the annual report to the City Council. The following format corresponds to the discussion items established in the City Resolution No. 201-07, dated August 16, 2000.

DISCUSSION:

- 1) **Progress on Goals:** The attached table gives details on project applications that were processed through current and long-range planning activities during calendar year 2007. The Planning Commission reviewed a total of seventeen projects during this time; ten of the 2007 projects required Planning Commission action. As shown in the attached table, several of the more complex projects were reviewed over multiple Planning Commission hearings. A total of 21 regular meetings and 3 special meetings were conducted during calendar year 2007. The number of meetings held in 2007 was less than the number of meetings that were held in 2006; this was attributed to the conclusion of the first phase of the Land Use Code update process by the Planning Commission.

The City of Arcata 2007-2008 Budget includes an ongoing task to replace the Land Use and Development Guide (LUDG) with a new Land Use Code (LUC). The Planning Commission began their review of the proposed LUC with the consultants at a meeting on February 12, 2002. Since that time, staff has been working with the consultants and the Planning Commission on the proposed LUC, and it has been considered as the priority project for staff during 2007. A total of 6 public hearings were conducted in 2007 on the various articles, chapters, and sections of the proposed LUC. The special meeting of March 6, 2007 marked the phase one completion of the Planning Commission review of the proposed Land Use Code, and it represented the 77th public hearing on the development of this document.

In other Community Development Department priority projects, as identified in the 2007-2008 Budget, include the unfreezing of the Planning Technician position and to increase Department staff levels. This issue was realized

during the drafting of the LUC and the balancing effort of existing staff to process current and long range planning activities simultaneously. Another LUC related priority that emerged in the 2007-2008 Budget has been the identification of completing a City-wide Historic Resource Assessment and to update the Historic Preservation Guidelines.

Other Planning Commission goals include:

- Field review of prior project approvals and evaluating adherence to conditions of approval.
- Obtaining feedback from developers, neighbors, special interest groups and other Committees and Commissions (this has been accomplished somewhat through the Land Use Code update process).

2) How Community/Citizen needs are being met: The Planning Commission is concerned with meeting the needs of the community as a whole as well as the individual needs of each applicant and members of the public who come before the Commission. The Planning Commission is responsible for reviewing discretionary projects and acting in a manner consistent with applicable laws, that takes into account the needs of the applicant, the neighborhood, and the community as a whole.

During calendar year 2007, the Planning Commission approved six projects, denied three projects (i.e., Merry Point PD, Creek Side Homes Annexation, and Barstow PDA), and continued one project as shown in the attached table. A majority of the projects included public notices printed in the local newspaper and mailed to surrounding property owners. Many of these projects required balancing of the needs of the applicant, neighbors and the community as well as the environment.

Each Planning Commission agenda includes a scheduled opportunity for public input, and the Planning Commission always provides the maximum opportunities for comments from the public. And in order to encourage public participation, the agenda time for Oral Communications is located at the beginning of each meeting, immediately following approval of the minutes. The Planning Commission meetings are televised live for the benefit of the public. All agendas are provided to local newspapers and posted on the City's web-site, in addition to the direct mail and other legally required public notices.

Other departmental staff members often attend Commission meetings for consultation on projects. The Planning Commission also discussed scheduling a joint Study Session with the City Council on the topic of Annexations to which a meeting took place on September 25, 2007. The Planning Commission was also afforded the opportunity to attend a workshop on Historic Preservation in relationship to the California Environmental Quality Act which took place on December 10, 2007.

3) How the responsibilities of the Commission are being fulfilled: The Planning Commission reviews projects as either a quasi-judicial body or as an advisor to the legislative body. It is also responsible for advising the City Council on issues as may be referred by the Council. The Planning Commission advises the City Council on the adoption of plans and ordinances (legislative matters) and it is also responsible for taking action on discretionary permits (quasi-judicial matters). The Planning Commission must review discretionary projects to determine if they are in conformance with General Plan policies, local ordinances such as the LUDG and the balance of the Municipal Code, and State laws like the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Coastal Act, and the State Subdivision Map Act. Each member of the Commission provides valuable input in his or her area of expertise, as well as thoughtful input in the other features of each project, especially in analyzing impacts and mitigation measures associated with environmental documents. The Commission has shown a willingness to work with applicants to fulfill their goals while approving projects that conform to the General Plan, the LUDG, and other local and State laws, and which incorporate the desires and needs of the neighborhood and community. The Commission, however, has encountered difficulty in having to review projects based on an outdated LUDG and trying to balance decisions between a Coastal Commission recognized 1985 General Plan and the Arcata General Plan: 2020.

4) The effectiveness of the policies and procedures: Currently, in addition to the "Committee, Commission, Board and Task Force Handbook (Revised May 20, 2005)," the Planning Commission uses the "Planning Commissioners Handbook, 2004 Edition" produced by the League of California Cities as a guide for policies and procedures. It has also been an objective of the Planning Commission to develop their own ground rules that everyone can follow and know what to anticipate from a procedural standpoint; this process began in October of 2000.

The Commission recognizes the challenges of the community and staff in applying the policies of two General Plans (1985 General Plan for Coastal Zone areas and the Arcata General Plan: 2020 for inland areas). In addition, there have been questions in the interpretation of the policies of the Arcata General Plan: 2020 with regards to the standards of LUDG. The Commission looks forward to assisting in the development of a comprehensive development code to allow for a clear implementation of the goals and policies of the Arcata General Plan: 2020. This revision process will also allow for some minor amendments to the Arcata General Plan: 2020 so that the two documents can be consistent with one another.

5) Goals for 2008: The Planning Commission has the following recommendations:

1. Make the Land Use Code update the highest priority for the Planning Commission and the Community Development Department.
2. Assist new members of the City Council in understanding the General Plan and Land Use decision-making.
3. Conduct a field review of approved projects.
4. Provide local training for Commissioners.
5. Meet with other staff and other planning commission members in the region.
6. Conduct study sessions on regional planning issues that affect Arcata.