

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COUNCIL
City Council Agenda
January 17, 2007

TO: City Council

FROM: John Graves, Chairperson, Planning Commission

SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Planning Commission

DATE: January 5, 2007

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 during the year 2006. The Planning Commission reviewed a total of ten projects during this time; seven of the 2006 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 20 regular meetings and 12 special meetings were conducted during the year 2006. The number of meetings held in 2006 were very similar to the number of meetings that were held in 2005; this was attributed to the Land Use Code update process.

The City of Arcata 2006-2007 budget includes an ongoing task to replace the Land Use and Development Guide (LUDG). The Planning Commission began their review of the LUDG revision 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 code update, and it has been considered as the priority project for staff during 2006. A total of 25 public hearings were conducted in 2006 on the various articles, chapters, and sections of the proposed Land Use Code. Several Commission members also provided their assistance in helping staff rewrite various chapters within the proposed Land Use Code.

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 the year 2006, the Planning Commission approved five projects and continued two projects 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 Neighborhood Conservation Areas and Design Review issues. However, it was determined that the Planning Commission should first complete the review of the Historic Resource Preservation chapter in the proposed Land Use Code before scheduling a Study Session.

- 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 revisions to the zoning ordinance to allow clear implementation of the goals and policies of the Arcata General Plan: 2020. This revision process may also allow for some minor amendments to the Arcata General Plan: 2020 so that the two documents can work concurrently.

- 5) **Goals for 2007:** The Planning Commission has the following recommendations:
1. Make the Development 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 city planning commission members in the region.
 6. Conduct study sessions on regional planning issues that affect Arcata.