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From: nancenumber1

Sent: 12/03/2008 10:34 AM EST

To: Elaine Forbes

Subject: DR letter for 12-11-08 Planning Comm. Mtg.

December 2, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING COMMISSION

RE: Discretionary Review Reform

Dear Commissioners:

The proposed broad sweeping changes for the Discretionary Review process are premature at this time, and some are ill advised.

1. The use of the Residential Design Committee (RDC) in effecting positive changes in the design stages of a project has yet to be evaluated. Resolving potential problems before the 311/312 even goes out could avert the need for a DR. Strengthening the preapplication process between project sponsor and neighbors also starts a needed dialogue. Please give the RDC a chance to work before making radical changes. To this end, I support transparency of the actions of the RDC by making their recommendations available online and part of the project file.
2. Installing a single person Hearing Officer to rule on DR applications, where the 7 person Commission used to rule, is not an improvement in the public process. It is likely to be a disservice to all concerned. It will be impossible to convince everyone that the person is immune from bribes in one form or another, uncorruptible, totally knowledgeable and objective. This position "creates the potential for inappropriate financial exchanges" that was a concern of the present system between sponsor and neighbor.
3. If the planner is not involved in mediating between conflicting parties, who will do this? How will compromise between sponsor and opponents be achieved without the planner educating all concerned, and backed by the weight of the Planning Commission to arbitrate disputes? Who will foster development that is reasonable?

4. Our practices are “inconsistent with best practices in other jurisdictions.” How similar are these other jurisdictions with San Francisco? Are they bounded by water on three sides with no place to grow? Are these places both a city and a county? Are their “development - antidevelopment forces” as active as this city has? San Francisco IS unique. We need to preserve the right to debate planning issues before the Planning Commission, not be sidetracked to another bureaucratic process. This would not be a good practice for SF.

5. It is suggested that there are cost savings to be achieved with this DR reform. There is no detailed information available on the proposed savings the reform would achieve. I would like to review these data before accepting the statement that there will be a financial benefit to the Planning Department, especially since there will be new administrative costs to create the Hearing Officer’s office.

Sincerely,

Nancy Wuerfel