



September 13, 2005

Honorable Judge Anderson  
Santa Barbara Superior Court  
1100 Anacapa Street  
Santa Barbara, CA. 93101

RE: An Ounce of Prevention Toward a More Transparent and Responsive Planning and Development Process.

Dear Judge Anderson:

The Solvang City Council considered the Grand Jury Report and offers the following comments:

**FINDING #1: Mission statements, when available, were often outdated and did not list customer satisfaction as a primary goal.**

**Grand Jury Recommendation:** *Planning departments should have mission statements specific to their department. These mission statements should have customer satisfaction as a primary goal.*

**Response:** The City Council agrees that a Mission State for the Planning & Community Development Department is warranted.

**Implementation:** The City Council has adopted the following Mission Statement for the Planning & Development Department.

*“To promote public accessibility and customer service, while fairly administering and implementing the land use and planning laws, and local ordinances enacted by the City Council.”*

**FINDING #2: Planning departments did not have basic customer satisfaction procedures in place.**

**Grand Jury Recommendation #2:** *To increase customer satisfaction, each planning department should publicly post the agency’s mission statement, post timelines and mitigating*

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*factors. Provide easy access to all relevant forms with adequate explanations as to their use, post a list of key personnel involved in completing an application and clearly define the complaint process. In addition, handouts should be provided to each customer explaining the application and complaint process.*

**Response:** The City Council approved a Mission Statement to be posted at the front counter. The Planning Department can provide easy access to all of the most-requested forms and applications, including a complaint form, with explanations to their use. Standard timelines can be posted for the most common application types. The department will continue to provide hands-on assistance to customers with a friendly, personal approach. There are only two (2) full-time staff persons to assist customers with completing an application. Business cards are available on the counter. Customers do not need an appointment to speak with a planner. Staff has prepared informational handouts for Second Residential Units and for Signs, which are available on the front counter. If necessary, dissatisfied customers always have the option to appeal to the City Council, or speak with the City Manager to resolve disagreements.

**Implementation:** Planning staff will post the Mission Statement at the front counter. The Planning Department will provide easy access to all of the most-requested forms and applications, including a complaint form, with explanations to their use. Standard timelines will be posted for the most common project types. The department will continue to provide hands-on assistance to customers with a friendly, personal approach. Business cards listing the Planning Department's two (2) staff planners will be available on the counter.

**FINDING #3: Notification of changes to land and property use in most jurisdictions was limited to mandated State *minimum* requirements to owners *only*, and within 300' from the borders of the property site.**

**Grand Jury Recommendation#3:** *Notification of land use changes should include the owner and occupants within at least 500 feet of the border of the property site.*

**Response:** The City Council feels that noticing for projects within 500 feet is too large an area for the size of the City, and would unnecessarily notice too many people for projects that they may not be interested in. It would also be a substantial increase in cost that would be borne by the applicant. Currently, for controversial projects, the City notices property owners within 1,000 feet, while maintaining the State required 300 feet for non-complex projects. The Council feels that the required 300 feet noticing and the City's policy of expanding the noticing to 1,000' for controversial projects is adequate. They are not in favor of including "occupants" in the noticing. City Attorney Jencks also indicated that "noticing 'occupants' could create expectations to renters that the law does not give property rights to."

**Implementation:** The City Council has no plans to change current practice.

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**FINDING #4: The complaint process in most jurisdictions was not designed for quantifiable analysis and could not be used to find strong and weak points in the planning process.**

**Grand Jury Recommendation #4:** *Planning agencies should track all complaints and conduct random quantifiable surveys of the 10% of the customers who have used their services. Agencies should use the results of these surveys to make the planning process more customer-friendly. The results should also be added on a quarterly basis to the department website for public viewing.*

**Response:** The City Council agrees that feedback is important for process improvement. The City Council feels that mailing a survey to all ministerial and discretionary applicants after the final decision has been made on their project will provide more valuable feedback than a random survey. The survey would include a self-addressed stamped envelope for the customer to return the survey.

**Partial Implementation:** Planning staff will mail a survey to all ministerial and discretionary project applicants with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Sincerely,

Ed Skytt  
Mayor

cc: Grand Jury Foreperson  
Solvang City Councilmembers