

For Immediate Release

Date: May 13, 2015

Santa Barbara County Grand Jury

Contact: Sandi Miller, Foreperson
568-2291

**City of Santa Barbara's Zoning Information Reports Have Outlived Their
Usefulness**

The City of Santa Barbara's Zoning Information Reports (ZIR) no longer serve their original purpose of preventing illegal housing units and ensuring adequate off-street parking, according to a recently released 2014-15 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Jury) investigative report.

In addition, it found that while over 80 percent of the ZIR's call out violations, an alarming number of these prove to be unfounded as the City of Santa Barbara (City) relies on often incomplete files to investigate the permitting process, creating serious discrepancies from one ZIR to the next. The City's Community Development Department (CDD), which issues the ZIRs, admits that over the years, files pertaining to property records have been lost, misplaced, destroyed or taken and not returned. Should records not be found in the file, the seller of a residence is required to provide proof that no violation occurred. Total costs to the homeowner can easily escalate from the \$465 for the ZIR to thousands of dollars, including City fees, creation of new plans, and consultant's and attorney's fees. Allegations of violations can also affect the selling price of the house. The report cites several examples.

The Jury was also concerned that sellers and buyers cannot rely on a current ZIR. One clean ZIR is no guarantee of the future, and the report again provides examples.

The CDD contends its vigorous pursuit of zoning and building violations protects the health and safety of the buyers. As the State now requires sellers to provide a Transfer Disclosure Statement to the buyer, the Jury concluded this more adequately provides information on health and safety issues than do the ZIRs, and therefore recommends the ZIRs become voluntary and for reference only.

The entire report, "City of Santa Barbara Zoning Information Reports: Inconsistent and Unreliable" can be accessed at www.sbcgj.org.

The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury is a basic part of California government within the judicial branch. The Grand Jury is charged with keeping watch over county government as well as cities and districts operating within the county.

#####