



**MINUTES OF THE SIGNIFICANT ECOLOGICAL AREA
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEATAC)
MEETING OF 2 April 2012**

(Minutes approved by electronic mail on 26 April 2012)

PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE:

SEATAC MEMBERS

Dr. Jonathan Baskin (absent)
Dan Cooper
Ty Garrison (absent)
Robb Hamilton
Michael Long
Dr. Thomas Scott (teleconference)
Dr. Cheryl Swift

REGIONAL PLANNING STAFF

Dr. Shirley Imsand (Biologist,
SEATAC coordinator)
Joe Decruyenaere (Biologist)
Mitch Glaser (Planner)
Emma Howard (Planner)
Adam Thurtell (Planner)

COUNTY PARKS

Joan Rupert jrupert@parks.lacounty.gov 213-351-5126

PAGINATION:

- A. Approval of SEATAC minutes for 6 February 2012 and 5 March 2012, p.1
- B. Discussion of revision of SEA ordinance and SEATAC procedures and guidelines, p.2
- C. Public comment pursuant to Section 54954.3 of the Government Code, p.4

NOTE: SEATAC meetings are informal working sessions, open to public for observation and brief comment related to biology. Members are appointed volunteers in an advisory capacity. Minutes are prepared by planning staff from notes and tape. Visitors are advised to take proper notes and/or record the session. Issues not discussed by SEATAC do not imply tacit approval. New or clarified information presented in subsequent submittals may raise new issues and may require further analysis. Minutes are generally approved at the next SEATAC meeting. Draft minutes may be requested but are subject to revision.

**MINUTES
2 April 2012**

OLD BUSINESS

- A. -Minutes of the SEATAC meeting of 6 February 2012 were approved by electronic mail on 26 March 2012. Mickey Long moved for approval and Dan Cooper seconded the motion.
-Minutes of the SEATAC meeting of 5 March 2012 were approved by electronic mail on 2 April 2012. Mickey Long moved for approval and Robb Hamilton seconded the motion.

**B. Presentation of the draft of the Significant Ecological Area ordinance for the new General Plan implementation and coordination of the SEATAC Procedures and Guidelines
by Ms. Emma Howard, Planner for Department of Regional Planning**

Presentation by Mitch Glaser, Supervisor of Santa Clara Valley Plan and SEA Program, and Emma Howard, Planner for SEA Program

-Issues of organization and protocol have been drafted in the 30-day report to the Board of Supervisors (BOS), documents forwarded to SEATAC. Department of Regional Planning (DRP) welcomes any comments SEATAC wishes to make on these.

(Outline references below are to the 30-day report outline.) Planner comments are in regular type, SEATAC comments in bold type.

SEATAC RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS:

1. Procedural Improvements

- (1) **SEATAC states that one of the primary concerns is that SEATAC reports still be accurate, and that this not be overlooked in the revisions for speedy processing of applications. This needs to be done before reports get to SEATAC.**
- (2) **A long process of review is necessary to collect data needed on the diverse environments and ecosystems. Review of the BCA and then Biota Report has been a good process for getting accurate reports, but getting the required sufficiency in three meetings has been problematic. Simplistic solutions can ultimately create problems for efficiency. If accuracy of reports is overridden by concerns for rapid processing, this will be counterproductive in that it will take many meetings to get a sufficient report for setting up and advising on appropriate mitigations. Many phenomena addressed by SEATAC only occur during one season of the year, and surveys may need redoing if missed or done the wrong way. Site analysis needs to be the basis of reports. This should include easement analysis, as the region of the project is important to SEATAC analysis.**
- (3) **Coordinator suggested that a preliminary “one-stop” meeting with staff biologist present after staff biologist does a site survey will facilitate applicant’s knowledge of what is expected in SEATAC review. Such a meeting should be conducted shortly after submission of a SEATAC application. Checklist of BCA & Biota content could be handed out and discussed.**
- (4) **When information in reports is not credible, then applicants have no defensible conclusions. Quality of reports is the biggest problem in the current procedure. This cannot be resolved by negotiation. The reason for most protracted reviews is that applicant fails to provide adequate review/analysis in the reports. The process would go rapidly through SEATAC if the reports were adequate and reviewed the items outlined in the BCA-Biota description in the SEATAC procedures.**
- (5) **The BCA review by SEATAC is needed to “red-flag” issues and assess a preliminary plan for the footprint of the project. The BCA is a scoping document. Most applicants do have a preliminary plan; very few applicants actually wait to plan based on the BCA results.**
- (6) **To properly guide the discussion, the applicant needs to make a preliminary (non-detailed) proposal for where they would like the footprint of the project. It should be a conceptual design. The applicant needs to realize this is subject to change depending on the results of the BCA surveys.**

1.a Improved comment documentation by checklist

- (7) **A checklist covering specifics for all environments in Los Angeles County will be unwieldy and difficult to make comprehensive. A checklist for report preparation that lists sections in the report seems appropriate for the initial review by staff biologist. It can form the basis of the SEATAC discussion with the applicant.**
- (8) **Coordinator suggested that for staff biologist to do a more comprehensive review of biology, the reports need to be given to staff more than three weeks in advance of the SEATAC meeting of presentation. Three weeks is the current requirement.**
- (9) **A recommendation is to have a first tier of review by an outside panel of experts that receives an honorarium. This might be handled through adjustment of the fees. If it develops that there are very many projects to be reviewed at one meeting, preliminary review could be done in the form of a “consent calendar.” This is the procedure used by NSF. A committee of outside experts reviews proposed projects, sends review to an editor (could be staff biologist). The staff editor prepares a “consent calendar” of the projects approved by the review committee. The SEATAC committee then**

receives materials on all projects in the consent calendar and votes on the whole of the consent calendar at the next meeting. If any SEATAC member has an issue, he/she states it, and that item receives discussion. Public is asked if any person has (biological) reasons for opposing project. Then the vote is made excluding projects that need further discussion or review. One reviewer would not be sufficient. This needs to be done by a panel.

1.b Ruling of compatibility

-Documents for planners must be provided that explain compliance with SEA program in language for lay people. More attention is needed to explain the compatibility concept.

- (10) SEATAC suggests this can be achieved using examples of minutes that have a decision on compatibility. SEATAC positive and negative statements about a project are all related to the judgment of “compatible.”

1.c-d No comments were made on c) nor any on d).

1.e SEATAC Member and meeting frequency increases

- (11) Additional SEATAC members need not be biologists. Other expertise that would be helpful includes hydrologists, civil engineers.
- (12) Number of meetings/month deliberations should consider the continuity needed for report analysis by SEATAC. SEATAC members that have reviewed a report in the past need to review it through the process.

2. Ethical standards

- (13) The ethical standard looks good, and specific statements on when recusal is needed should be made.

3. Technological improvements

3a.-d. No comments were made on measures a) through d)

3.e. Public SEA CUP maps

- (14) SEATAC would appreciate access to some kind of synthesis map (GIS product) of current projects and state of each SEA. This is important to judging cumulative impacts.

3.f Archival scanning

- (15) SEATAC has long approved of an archive for its scanned documents, minutes, BCA, Biota Reports. Digital text availability is important.

4. Forthcoming changes

Applicant should have received SEA CUP and SEATAC process materials and discussion in initial project appraisal

- Above See 1.(3) suggestion for one-stop process revision; 1.(5) Review of BCA by SEATAC after staff biologist review; 1.a)(8) Time needed for staff biologist review; 1.a)(9) Review by outside panel
- c) Incentive of foregoing SEATAC review if submittal complies with certain standards
- (16) SEATAC has reservations about exemptions, for example, allowing Single Family Residences (SFRs) to have no requirement for biological review. An SFR can eliminate a small, very sensitive resource such as a vernal pool.

Resources that could be made available to SEATAC members were discussed. Ms. Howard said she would investigate provision of SEATAC members with further resources: 1. WIFI connection for members during the meeting; 2. California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB); 3. The current, up-to-date SEA map.

(17) SEATAC requested the up-to-date SEA map be available for cumulative impact analysis.

(18) SEATAC states that for the SEA map it should be relatively straightforward to identify (a) areas that are extremely unlikely to be developed due to topography or condition such as being a drainage, (b) areas that are good for development—flat and already greatly impacted, and (c) areas in the “bicker zone,” that can be developed but are natural. This might be a very useful analysis. This could identify priority parcels for development, and avoid repetitive discussion, which is time consuming [and therefore expensive]. The Riverside HCP found only 20% of lands needed to be set aside as having great risk for harm to sensitive species from development.

-Ms. Howard stated that out of 645 thousand acres in the SEA program, only 88 thousand were unconstrained—could reasonably be built upon. The other 557 were chiefly too steep, unstable, or in a floodplain.

-Ms. Howard gave further description of the SEA program elements in the general plan, but discussion on these will take place at the next meeting.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comment was made at the meeting.
