Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead

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Director

September 23, 2015

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REPORT ON BOARD MOTION REGARDING INTERDEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION AND TREE IMPACTS (JUNE 23, 2015, ITEM 3)

At your June 23, 2015 public hearing, the Board instructed the Departments of Regional Planning (DRP), Public Works (DPW) and Fire (FD) to report back in 90 days on options to improve the coordination of the various County land development reviews impacting trees. Specifically, DRP, DPW, and the FD were tasked with providing the following:

1. Recommendations for one-stop counseling options to facilitate coordinated tree reviews up-front, including troubleshooting potential conflicts in fuel modification plan review, drainage and grading plan review, site plan and landscape plan review for both ministerial and discretionary case reviews;

2. Recommendations for designating a lead agency (quarterback) tasked with facilitating timely, coordinated reviews and eliminating the roadblocks to a more streamlined process; and

3. Options for ways to improve the overall plan check experience so that trees are addressed up front and protected appropriately throughout the process.

This report, as directed by the Board motion, summarizes the existing land development review processes and recommendations for improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DRP, DPW and FD recommendations to improve the coordination of land development reviews impacting trees are as follows:

1. **One-Stop Counseling:**

   Currently, the County offers one-stop counseling to prospective developers that are proposing a land division or other type of improvement that involves a discretionary action. This type of counseling allows the applicant an opportunity to obtain valuable feedback on the requirements and potential issues that could be encountered with their project design. Given that the County encourages the use of sustainable practices, including the planting of trees onsite and within the public right of way, discussions involving this topic are already occurring, albeit limited due to the preliminary nature of the project, during the one-stop counseling meetings.

   Recommendations:

   a. Utilize the existing Land Division and Zoning Permits one-stop counseling to discuss possible challenges that a prospective developer may encounter regarding the County's tree planting and removal requirements. While discussions regarding the site plan, grading, drainage, road, and landscape review processes are currently discussed during one-stop counseling meetings, the discussions can be expanded upon to incorporate all new requirements involving tree planting and removals.

   b. Inform applicants of one-stop counseling availability during pre-application counseling for discretionary and ministerial projects that may require the planting or removal of trees.

   c. Produce summaries of one-stop counseling meetings to provide documentation of requirements pertaining to trees.

2. **Lead Agency:**

   It is recommended that:

   a. DRP be the designated department to facilitate timely and coordinated reviews and eliminate roadblocks to a more streamlined process. This will be accomplished by making developers aware of the onsite tree planting requirements during pre-application conversations with applicants, coordinating and facilitating one-stop counseling meetings, and anticipating potential issues and informing the other County departments when their input is necessary.

   b. The Development Review Committee (DRC) be utilized as necessary to help facilitate the above tasks. The DRC is comprised of representatives from DRP, DPW, Fire, Public Health, and Parks and Recreation and was

established as a means of discussing policy issues and to coordinate potentially complex projects.

3. Plan Check:

Presently, there are a number of checks and balances in place between the County departments, specifically between DRP, DPW, and the FD, that allow for a comprehensive review of project plans. It is recommended that these critical processes remain in place to ensure adequate review of the plans, including those that involve tree placement or removal, is maintained. Following are project types that are currently referred to the DPW or the FD during the entitlement stage:

Project Type	FD	DPW
Discretionary Projects		
• Conditional Use Permits: New and renewals, excluding ABC Permits	YES	YES
• Non-conforming Reviews (new and renewals)	YES	YES
• Parking Permits (new and renewals)	YES	YES
• Oak Tree Permits (with concurrent plot plan)	YES	YES
• Oak Tree Permits (without concurrent plot plan)	YES	
• Subdivisions	YES	YES
• Projects located within Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ)	YES	
• Minor Conditional Use Permits	YES	YES
• Lot line adjustments	YES	
Ministerial Projects		
• New commercial/industrial project • Those involving new multi-family residential units (three attached units or more) • New buildings on previously developed commercial and industrial lots • Any tenant improvement or/change in use that involves schools • Those involving changes to parking lots that have the potential to adversely affect the public right-of-way or the	YES	YES

onsite fire lane • Those involving new curb cuts • Those involving the need for highway and/or alley dedications		
• Projects located in a FHSZ or State Responsibility Area when: o Parcels one acre or larger and the minimum 30 foot setback for buildings and accessory buildings from all property lines and/or the center of a road is not met o The property is less than one acre in size	YES	

a. Site Plan Review:

During the site plan review of the above projects, DPW currently:

- Provides comments relating to the location of existing or proposed onsite trees if the line of sight to the public right-of-way is adversely impacted; and

- Recommends conditions that require a developer to plant street trees along the property frontage, within the public right-of-way, if they can be accommodated using accepted spacing, setback, and line of sight standards.

DPW will continue to provide this level of review upon receipt of plans submitted by or referred by DRP.

During the site plan review of the above projects, the FD currently,

- Provides comments relating to any impacts a required fire apparatus access road may have on the location of any existing or proposed trees;
- Ensures adequate clearance is maintained for firefighting operation between any existing or proposed structures and the location of any existing or proposed trees; and
- Provides comments relating to oak tree preservation or mitigation.

The FD will continue to provide this level of review upon receipt of plans submitted by or referred by DRP.

b. Drainage and Grading Plan Review:

- Currently, the applicant is required to obtain a clearance of the drainage and grading plan from both DRP and the FD prior to approval from the DPW.

- During this clearance process, DRP will continue to verify that the grading and proposed land use is in conformance with Title 21 and Title 22 of the County Code as appropriate and is consistent with the approved plot plan or tentative map. This entails verification that all tree plantings and removals are meeting zoning or subdivision code requirements and that the necessary permits have been approved for any encroachments into the protected zone of an oak tree.

- The FD will continue to provide clearance of the drainage and grading plan relating to adequate access to all proposed structures on the site. This includes verification that any permeable pavement along a fire lane that is being proposed in lieu of required parking lot trees can support a 75,000 pound load.

c. Landscape Plan Review:

- Currently, the applicant is required to obtain clearances from both DRP and the FD prior to approval from DPW.

- During this clearance process, DRP will continue to be responsible for approval of the planting palette (for discretionary projects only) and the FD will continue to be responsible for clearance of the fuel modification plan (for projects located in a FHSZ). DPW will continue to provide a water efficiency review of landscape plans to make sure the plans are consistent with the requirements of State Assembly Bill 1881.

4. Additional Recommendations:

By providing an enhanced one-stop counseling meeting session, designating a lead agency that will facilitate the review process, and maintaining the existing clearance protocols outlined in Section 3, the overall customer service that a developer will receive should be elevated. Below are additional recommendations that should provide a prospective developer with an even higher level of satisfaction:

a. Develop revised DRP applications, including the one-stop counseling meeting application, to include additional information pertaining to the

County's tree planting requirements. The revised applications will not only make reference to the County Code but will also indicate what needs to be shown on the proposed site plan and any materials that need to be submitted with the initial application.

b. Enhance all applicable department websites to clearly indicate tree planting requirements and review procedures pertaining to trees.

Both of the above recommendations are aimed at providing applicants with pertinent information up front to assist them in understanding and navigating the County's tree planting requirements and plan check process.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Carmen Sainz at csainz@planning.lacounty.go or Dean Edwards at dedwards@planning.lacounty.gov or (213) 974-6425.

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