



Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL DATE: OCTOBER 8, 2007
FROM: CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: Amendment to Design Commission Chapter in Municipal Code (Ch. 2.80)
for Reviews of Public Projects

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council direct the City Attorney to prepare a code amendment (within 60 days) to amend the procedures for design review of Public projects to match those required for private projects including:

- 1) Public projects requiring design review at the Commission level will include a) new construction of more than 5,000 square feet and b) major rehabilitation or significant alteration of existing structures of more than 10,000 square feet;
 - 2) Public projects will be required to proceed through the same stages of design review required of private projects including preliminary, concept and final design, or consolidated review when allowed under the code;
 - 3) Where the actions of the Design Commission regarding public buildings are currently only advisory to the City Council, actions in the future will be final decisions (as they are for private projects), with some exceptions. In cases where the Design Commission action would impact budget or schedule, or in cases where the Commission action and the neighborhood request are not compatible for the site, the case would automatically be referred to the City Council for final action.
 - 4) As with private projects, staff (the applicant) would have the ability to appeal the decision to City Council or for Council to call-up a decision.

It is also recommended that regarding historic structures the specifications in §2.80.110 be amended to match the more current provisions in §17.62.020, which does not limit design review to a specific list of buildings or interiors but instead applies review to “historic resources” as defined elsewhere in the PMC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Current code language is outdated, unclear, and inconsistent regarding design review of public projects. Staff recommends that the code be amended to require a design review process for city buildings similar to that required for private buildings. The recommended revisions will ensure that the Design Commission has an early and meaningful role in the development of City projects. The revisions also clarify the design review procedures for City projects by coordinating them with the existing and recently updated procedures in §17.61.030, the design review chapter of the zoning code, and Chapter 17.62, historic preservation.

BACKGROUND

The City has required design review of public projects for over 25 years. These reviews, which are advisory to the City Council, include new construction (e.g., expansion of Pasadena Conference Center, new office building for Water & Power Department on Mountain Street) and major renovations of existing facilities (e.g., Levitt Pavilion in Memorial Park). During the past five years, the Commission has reviewed 46 projects from City departments.

The design review procedures for public projects are set forth in Title 2 of the Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC). New procedures would improve the design review process and provide better information to the City Council.

Currently, the code specifies that the Commission shall “[r]eview plans of all publicly owned structures, whether federal, state, county, district or city, including water and power, to be constructed or altered in Pasadena, and to make recommendations thereon to the council.” This provision applies to exterior reviews of alterations and new construction and to historic properties owned by the City. It does not, however, specify when design review should occur. As a result, staff has been inconsistent in its implementation of the ordinance and the Commission often reviews projects at the end of design development. This constrains the Commission from recommending changes that might burden a project with unbudgeted costs for architectural services and delays in construction schedules.

The existing provisions in the code also do not specify the outcome of recommendations from the Design Commission to the City Council on City-sponsored projects or what occurs, for example, if Commission advisory comments are not supportive of the design. There is also no statement about the responsibility, if any, of a City agency to follow the advisory recommendations from the Design Commission.

In addition, some of the provisions in the Code are outdated. One provision allows the Commission to delegate reviews of City projects to a three-member sub-committee (“design review committee”), which has not met for nearly 20 years. Elsewhere it lists City-owned buildings of historic significance that require design review. This list, however, is incomplete and outdated. A separate list specifies design review of

“alterations” to interiors of several properties (City Hall, Civic Auditorium, Wrigley Mansion, Pacific-Asia Museum, Central Library, and Rose Bowl). This list has no threshold for alterations, and it identifies rooms (e.g., “Planning Department reception area” in City Hall) that are now in a different building.

Design Review Thresholds & Procedures

Staff recommends that public projects be reviewed under the same set of thresholds and guidelines that are applied to private projects. Specifically, projects requiring Design Review at the Commission level would include 1) new construction of more than 5,000 square feet and 2) major rehabilitation or significant alteration of existing structures of more than 10,000 square feet (the design threshold for the Central District). In addition, public projects would be required to proceed through the same stages of design review required of private projects including preliminary, concept and final design, or consolidated review when allowed under the code. Where the actions of the Commission regarding public buildings are currently only advisory to the City Council, staff is recommending that actions in the future would be final decisions as they are for private projects, with some exceptions. In cases where the Design Commission action would impact budget or schedule, or in cases where the Commission action and the neighborhood requests are not compatible for the site, the case would automatically be referred to the City Council for final action. As with private projects, staff (the applicant) would have the ability to appeal the decision to City Council or for Council to call-up a decision.

Historic Structures

The PMC requires further amendments to clarify which historic buildings require design review. Both §2.80.110 and §17.62.020 require design review of historic buildings owned by the City. §2.80.110 lists six City-owned buildings of historic significance and requires design review of selected interiors in these buildings. Staff is recommending that the specifications in §2.80.100 should match the more current provisions in §17.62.020, which does not limit design review to a specific list of buildings or interiors but instead references the term “historic resources”.

The code defines a historic resource as: “a district, landscape, object, sign, site, or structure significant in American archeology, architecture, culture, engineering, or history that is either designated or eligible for designation under City, State, or national significance criteria.”

FISCAL IMPACT

Adding more meetings and requiring more submittals may increase the cost of architectural services for capital improvement projects and other undertakings by the City. This additional expense, however, should be limited because it applies only to new construction over 10,000 square feet. Conceivably, too, bringing the Commission into the formative stages of design development may expedite reviews of City projects and minimize the expense of paying for multiple presentations by architects.

Respectfully submitted,


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