

## McMillan, Acquanette (Netta)

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**From:** Bert Newton >  
**Sent:** Monday, July 15, 2024 3:39 PM  
**To:** PublicComment-AutoResponse  
**Subject:** Item 12. APPRIOVE ZONING CODE AMENDMENTS: 1) PROJECT ENTITLEMENT TIME LIMITS AND EXTENSIONS; AND 2) MISCELLANEOUS UPDATES

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Dear Mayor and City Council,

The Zoning Code amendments recommended by staff are meant to "streamline" housing production. I appreciate this effort since we are in the midst of a long-running housing crisis and any delay in housing production exacerbates the crisis. However, I think that one of the main obstacles to producing affordable housing is being overlooked, and that is the process of design review.

The Ramona Street project (100 units of affordable senior housing) languished for 2.5 years in design review, resulting in an increase in cost of the project amounting in the millions of dollars. In addition to sharp increases in production costs during this time, and the cost of repeatedly redrawing the plans and spending time in city meetings, I understand that the developer missed funding deadlines because of this lengthy delay.

I know construction in the civic center is exceptional, but even for the civic center, 2.5 years should be unacceptable. It not only drove up the cost by millions of dollars, it has also delayed much needed housing for people who need it, contributing to displacement and possibly homelessness in our city.

Here are some recommendations to keep anything like this from happening again:

- Design Commission could be limited to only 2 reviews instead of 3.
- Design Commission could be required to complete the process within 90 days.
- Alternatively, the city could establish objective design guidelines, and all multi-residential housing could be exempt from review by the Design Commission because California law actually requires cities to limit design review of multi-unit residential buildings to objective standards ([SB 330](#)), so the review would be ministerial not discretionary. (The Design Commission could then focus on commercial construction).

So I appreciate what the staff have tried to do with their recommendations, but if the Design Commission is allowed to delay projects by 2.5 years, then they may not only delay, they may actually stop projects. Developers, especially affordable housing developers who contend with tight budgets, may walk away from projects when the costs soars due to extremely long delays.

Thank you for considering my comments and recommendations.

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Rev. Bert Newton

Making Housing and Community Happen

My Podcast

"Blessed are God's poor ones, for they will inherit the land." Matthew 5:5 EWN Translation