



DATE: June 10, 2011

TO: Mayor, Councilmembers
Laurel M. Barcelona, City Administrator

FROM: Council Appointed Single-Purpose Committee

SUBJECT: List of Recommendation/Suggestions

The City Council Formed a Single Purpose Committee (SPC) to review the City's Building, Engineering, and Planning Development Review and Permit Procedures. The SPC was to return recommendations to the Council to improve procedures where the City has control and can simplify a process to the benefit of the customer. The SPC met nine (9) times and has formulated the following recommendations for Council review.

The Single Purpose Committee (SPC) has been honored to explore the process of improvement opportunities within the Lompoc City Development areas. The SPC exploratory process centered on history, current issues, and reasonable possibilities for improvement. The SPC is honored to recognize evidence of change by entrusting this committee with the responsibility to recommend solutions that could greatly improve development level business interactions in the City of Lompoc.

It is important to recognize that Applicants choose to do business in Lompoc. Most persons who seek City of Lompoc development services recognize the authority of government, and desire to follow the rules. These Applicants can be residential homeowners, small business owners, or developers. Each Applicant comes to the City with different needs and expectations, but each hope for a timely, consistent, and fair process.

1. Customer Applicants are Top Priority

The initial impression of Applicants and the service they receive at the City should be a top priority to the City Council and all those that work for the City. Toward that goal, it is recommended that:

- A. The City Council adopt a policy "Charter of Excellence and Service" that clearly defines the Customer Service mandate throughout the City. Adopt language that encourages all staff to help Applicants find solutions and make their project work in the complicated world of federal, state, and local regulations.

- B. The City Administrator directs the implementation of the Charter and enforces this policy throughout the City.
- C. Evaluate City staff cooperation and enforcement of the policy by incorporating “Charter of Excellence and Service” policy into the annual staff review process.

1) Communication is Key

Under the recommendation of “Charter of Excellence and Service” concept, it is important to consider the public perception of the City of Lompoc. Toward that end, the SPC recommends the City implement the following items:

- a. **EMPOWER STAFF.** Often delays occur waiting for the right person. Empower Staff to make decisions at the lowest possible level.
- b. **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS.** Telephone and email can be an efficient way to convey information. Those avenues of communication, when appropriate, should be encouraged. Create a standard operating policy to return phone calls and emails promptly, even if only to convey that the message is received and staff will get back to the caller as soon as possible. “Out of Office” messages for both phone and email shall be provided when staff members are knowingly unavailable.
- c. **REVIEW STANDARD.** Create a Review Policy. Acknowledging that each project is different, create a process that provides the Applicant a schedule that all involved will work by, allowing the Applicant the ability to plan resources and other project tasks. The review policy should establish and ensure a maximum period of time that a project will be in review in any particular City department. When a project must be reviewed more than one time, the Policy shall ensure the project is reviewed by the same reviewer, providing consistency thereby avoiding further unnecessary delays.
- d. **TAKE OWNERSHIP.** City leadership shall encourage all staff to “take ownership” of a project, commit, and then follow through.
- e. **FIRST IMPRESSIONS.** First impressions are very important. The existing City Hall lobby layout creates

confusion for the individual seeking to conduct business with Lompoc City Hall. The City of Lompoc needs to project a welcoming attitude to those seeking service. A professional review of the lobby layout and customer derived functionality is recommended to improve the lobby's usability.

- f. **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.** Encourage all staff to invest themselves socially in the community.

2. Revise City Ordinances, Policies and Procedures:

A. Planning Commission Review

The Planning Commission often considers non-controversial, routine projects having little or no community interest. The Planning Commission process adds time and Applicant expense as well as additional work for the limited staff.

B. Zoning Administrator Text Amendment

The Zoning Administrator Text Amendment was reviewed by the Single Purpose Committee and appears to simplify and expedite the planning process for smaller projects. Creation of the Zoning Administrator (ZA) function to specifically review minor and non-controversial projects allows the normal checks and balances to remain in the place without unnecessary delays and increased cost. If a member of the public or the Applicant is not satisfied with the determination of the ZA, those actions can still be appealed to the Planning Commission and ultimately, the City Council. Since creation of the ZA would resolve a number of long-standing issues, the SPC remains in favor of the proposed Text Amendment and recommends it be adopted by the City Council. If the Planning Commission and/or City Council are uncomfortable with the proposed ZA process, the SPC recommends the ZA process be instituted for a one year trial basis and subsequently re-evaluated. After the first year the Amendment can be dissolved, further amended or adopted by City Council. It is the recommendation of the SPC that the City Council adopt the Zoning Administrator Text Amendment.

C. Negative Declarations

The City's existing Environmental Review Guidelines encourage the use of Negative Declarations where the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) provides for the use of Categorical Exemptions. The preparation of Negative Declarations requires substantial staff time and makes the planning process unnecessarily longer and more expensive for Applicants. The increased use of Exemptions would decrease overall project processing time, free-up staff time, and reduce unnecessary expense to Applicants. It is recommended that the City Council direct a review of the

existing Environmental Guidelines and look for opportunities provided by CEQA to exempt Discretionary projects where appropriate.

D. Use Existing Technology to Improve Status Tracking

The City currently operates a project workflow tracking system named Trak-it to document the status of projects. By design, the system offers project tracking capabilities to internal users, as well as external users with administrator-provided access. If the external process were open to project Applicants, the Applicant and their project consultants could use the system to electronically track project status online. Doing so would likely eliminate inquiring phone calls and emails to the City, allowing the Applicant current information such as project conditions or plan review issues within the City review process. Allowing the Applicant to review their project status online provides an opportunity to directly contact the plan reviewer (Engineering, Building, Planning, Wastewater, Water, Electrical, Solid Waste, Airport/Transit,) and discuss identified project issues while still in the reviewing department. Sharing such information could provide huge schedule efficiencies while avoiding further costly review cycles by both the City departments and the Applicant. The SPC recommends immediate adoption of the online project tracking system to provide the following:

- Secure access for Applicant and assigned professionals (Architects & Engineers).
- Departmental review information updated daily, by a mandated time, ensuring the most up to date information available to the Applicant.
- City reviewer contact information (email address, phone number(s)) posted, allowing the Applicant access to the reviewer.

3. Electronic Plan Submittal

A. The recently instituted BroadSpec process provides for the electronic submittal of plans by the Applicant. Incorporating such a process would be a huge advantage to all concerned considering time, shipping/handling cost, paper expense, etc. The SPC recommends implementation of electronic plan submittal and review.

4. Staff and Consultant Support

A. The SPC recognizes that budget constraints, furloughs, and the elimination of staff positions are necessary results of the poor economy and lack of development revenues to the City of Lompoc. While it is important to acknowledge this low period resulting in lower revenue, the

SPC encourages the City to be prepared for a future increase in activity. The City Council must be willing to respond with appropriate staffing levels commensurate with eventual increases in work-load, and have forethought on how this will best be accomplished. Using outside consultant resources is feasible if such consultants are in place, familiar with the Lompoc environment, and able to engage the City of Lompoc needs quickly. If not prepared, the ineffectiveness of an overwhelmed system will be apparent to all.

Outsourcing talent is often convenient but can come at a local cost. The SPC recommends the City Council consider the short and long term possibilities for the City, City Staff, and the Applicants.

Summary

Promoting a stronger sense of “working together” as we strive to make Lompoc the best community possible is the genesis of the SPC’s efforts. As the SPC studied the issues and created these recommendations, all efforts were made to create reasonable recommendations, with minimal cost impact, and with the ability to be executable immediately.

As a general theme, the SPC recommends that the City, lead by the City Administrator, promote a culture of continuous review toward improvement in providing City services. The SPC further recommends that the City initiates a method of soliciting customer feedback and consider the comments toward future process improvements.

It is the opinion of the SPC that if these recommendations are implemented, measurable positive change will be realized almost immediately.

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