



**STAFF REPORT**  
**CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS**

**For the Design Review Commission**  
**Meeting of December 15, 2010**

**TO:** Architectural Commission

**FROM:** Shena Rojemann, Associate Planner

**SUBJECT:** Architectural Review Process Streamlining

**Introduction**

As part of the Planning Division's Work Plan for the current fiscal year, the City Council has directed staff to streamline the architectural review process. This is inclusive of both the Design Review and Architectural Commissions.

The streamlining effort is in part a response to reduced resources and the need to align the administrative functions of both Commissions. This effort is also in response to comments the department has received from users of the architectural review process and from Commissioners.

The purpose of the streamlining effort is to strengthen architectural review in the city, protect neighborhood character, and ensure quality materials are used in construction. Additionally, it is the intent of this effort to provide a greater degree of predictability into the process for applicants and reduce the amount of time and number of meetings an applicant must spend on the process.

**Discussion**

Currently and for the past year, the average time to process a project through the architectural review process is three months. A goal of the streamlining effort is to reduce the zoning clearance review time and have projects acted by the Commission in an average of two meetings.

Over the past couple of months staff has discussed the contemplated changes with the Chair and Vice Chairs of both commissions. More recently, these discussions have expanded to each Commission in their entirety. These changes include:

- Modified application
- Better evaluation of application completeness (before the item goes to the commission)
- Modified staff reports, including format, analysis and incorporation of approval / denial resolutions, standard / project specific conditions of approval
- Reduced timelines for conceptual code compliance review
- Reduced timelines for (re)submittal (to get scheduled before the commission)
- Review and modification of commission 'Rules of Order'

- Changes to the agenda format (to improve communication between commission, staff and the public)
- Amend application fee structure to incentivize complete and more responsive resubmittals
- Evaluations of project preview process

While many of these changes will occur over the next several months, it is anticipated that immediate benefits can be achieved by implementing the first three bulleted items over the next two to three months.

### **Application Changes**

Staff is currently working on refinements to the application to require the 11" x 17" plan sets as requested by the Commission as well as other changes. The purpose of the changes are to reaffirm the minimum requirements for submittal. In doing so, there will be a greater expectation among applicants that if they provide the specific information in a legible and professional presentation, projects would, on balance, not be continued for items routinely asked for by the Commission. This would not preclude the Commission from seeking additional information or rejecting a concept because of the design or quality proposed. However, it would minimize the need for one month continuances for items like a window detail and material sample, for example.

### **Evaluation of Completeness**

Once the changes to the application have been made, staff can then be in a better position to help guide applicants through the architectural review process. Importantly, once there is staff and Commission agreement on what reasonably ought to be expected on the submittals, staff can require that information on the applicants before the matter is scheduled for a hearing.

To implement this change, staff would establish an application submittal appointment schedule. The staff planner working with the Commission would accept or reject applications based on a review of the checklist compared with application material. To assist applicants, sample completed applications, material boards, etc., will be available at the public counter and on the website.

With the acceptance of only complete applications and other changes described below, staff will be able to reduce the submittal deadline from from 30 days to approximately 15 days. Complete applications would be promptly scheduled before the commission; incomplete applications would not be accepted.

### **Staff Report Modifications**

Staff is evaluating the most efficient way to communicate project information to the Commission. This includes a preliminary code compliance assessment, understanding of the architectural materials and colors used, as well as typical and atypical architectural details. Staff will communicate changes or revisions directed by the Commission to the applicant and how those comments were addressed in resubmittal projects. In communicating the above information, staff will review and transmit aspects of the newly revised application that details this information as part of the report transmittal.

In evaluating process efficiencies, staff has identified design analysis as one of the least valuable and one of the more time consuming aspects of report preparation. There are no urban designers or architects on staff to understand and interpret the design aspects of the

plans at the same level as applicants or the Commission. Additionally, in the past, staff has received mixed comments from the commission and, on occasion, disagreement with some staff conclusions regarding design. Eliminating this aspect of the report would also enable staff to reduce the application submittal deadline noted above. And, while paragraph descriptions of the design would not be included in reports, important information about the design that enables the commission to make informed decisions must clearly be maintained. Staff will illustrate how this can be accomplished at the meeting.

Further changes to the report will be the inclusion of draft resolutions of approval and denial for each project. This will be a new process for the Architectural Commission. The adoption of a resolution would provide a formal record of the Commission's actions. The approval resolution will include a list of standard conditions. A separate attachment of special conditions that the Commission has on occasion applied to projects will be available and can be added at the Commission's discretion to any project, as appropriate.

The reason for bringing both an approval and a denial resolution for each project is that it will enable the Commission to take a final action at any hearing when a project is presented and it mitigate the need for an applicant to be delayed another month. This would have a significant time and cost benefit for the applicant. It also improves the administrative record and clearly establishes the timeline for which projects can be appealed.

#### **Future Discussions**

It is staff intent that this report and the scheduling of this item on the agenda, as discussed at the last meeting, will serve as a spring board for additional public discussions and refinement of the process in ways that help applicants, preserve neighborhood character, improve application processing and advance the important work of the Commission. Staff will continue to have a dialogue with the Commission on the other proposed enhancements and looks forward to recommendations and input from the Commission. It is anticipated that the discussion on December 15 will focus on the three items discussed in this report and, in particular, the aspects of the architectural application.

  
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Associate Planner