

# The Need for Speed

Speed is an imperative in auto racing for winning, but should not be the main criteria in creating the rules of governance.

In auto racing you meet that goal successfully through good engineering, a trained driver and a careful study of the track. In essence, not much different than the approach we should be taking in creating new codes and the procedures to implement them.

At this time, while our sub-committee and Commission have only reviewed the Staff's initial proposals we have not yet even reviewed or commented on their final proposals made here today. I do not feel that the proper and necessary full discussions have taken place to implement the code changes being requested. While Staff's report states a criterion for the applicant's material submittals will be presented at our next meeting there is much more than that necessary to make this a successful program.

Presently, there are established procedures for oversight that have been stopped because of "budgetary restraints". Yet we are asking Staff to take on even more responsibilities that should require Architectural Commission oversight. It is not clear to me how Staff can expect to keep their usual high standards on these new rules when they aren't able to keep their high standards on previously existing rules.

It is also difficult to understand why so much attention and so many resources are being paid to an item with such a limited effect upon the whole process of review. Restaurant reviews of the kind being discussed, according to staff, only occur once per month – maybe.

This all may actually be the starting point for a complete revision of the approval process. If so, I believe it deserves more thoughtful attention and consideration than it is presently being given. With continued citizen oversight using solid procedural recommendations and very clear implementations the Architectural Commission is always found to be a willing and able partner with Staff in making the necessary changes to speed up the approval process.

The Architectural Commission has shown its desire to do its part to help speed up the process as requested. Through letting Staff approve, on its own volition, certain selected items with no overt oversight, and, in the Architectural Commission's desire to meet as often as is necessary to accommodate the process of shortening the time an applicant spends with the Commission.

Not enough is being done to clearly insure that there will be a constant, respectful and speedy process of Resident oversight. I come to this conclusion because too much of how these rules are to be implemented has been left out and not enough has been done to maintain and insure the Architectural Commission's (Resident's) oversight.

I also think that it would be more valuable to the process and the Community to allow an additional 45 days to further discuss this Code revision request and fully vet Staff's latest proposals and discuss its implementation. After all, the Architectural Commission had maybe, one hour to discuss the initial Staff proposal at the end of our August 17th meeting. While I think most of Staff's suggestions are well considered I do believe a full reading to the Architectural Commission should, at the very least, be had to allow our Commission an opportunity to give its full input to the latest proposed changes.

If an extension is given I also would highly encourage a joint special meeting of the Architectural Commission, Planning Commission, Staff and Council liaisons. This would allow us to all be on the same page and craft a unified process which can be control tested over the next 6 -8 months, after implementation. After that period, we could then do a review of the process and consider letting it logically grow in scope to cover other possible expedited approval scenarios.

The Architectural Commission was formed to be the "citizen's visual oversight" of the community's development. You should not readily begin to hand over this trust to Staff without very careful consideration of its implications. While some developers may find us an impediment to their desires it is only because we are doing right by the community and not simply acceding to the applicant's wishes.

More often than not you will find that our Commission has not delayed a project's approval without just cause. More often the applicant compliments us for our input and the serious consideration of their designs. Often times we are even being told we have actually improved the project through our input.

This is not because of the need for speed, but rather because of the need for quality on all projects – whether large or small, and, our continued dedication to achieving it.

## Items Staff No Longer Accommodates the Architectural Commission with:

1. Bus Tours
  - a. Afforded a Commission overview on the ride to projects being reviewed. At this time overt code violations were reported to the staff member from enforcement who was also on the ride with us.
  - b. Allowed a visual of a project as a group and because we asked questions on site it did reduce the time spent in meetings doing the same thing.
2. Monthly reports of Staff approvals
  - a. Every month we were given a report in our packet that allowed us to review Staff's project approvals.
3. Timely responses to requests for information regarding code violations
  - a. We have certain items that we have requested information on that for over 10 months and have not received the courtesy of a response or disposition on. Most relate to code enforcement some relate to projects being worked on that have not gone through the Planning department,
4. Staff Recommendations missing from Packet
  - a. When we get our packets each application used to have a clear staff recommendation based upon code application. Presently, there is only a basic statement without any recommendation (i.e.: boilerplate).
5. Sufficient meeting times
  - a. Our meetings have been reduced to 4 hours whether we have 6 applications to review or if there are 16. If there is a heavier load of applications we need to be able to meet earlier or longer. But, in no case should we have to arbitrarily rush through an application because there is not enough time. Every one deserves a fair hearing.

## Ideas for Better communications - Staff and the Architectural Commission.

1. Have the counter person attend the last half hour of our meetings (when we have meeting reviews) so they are able to better understand our thinking on issues and we are better able to understand the projects they are reviewing and in turn relate this to the applicants in a clearer way.
2. Have staff submit a "punch list" to us that we supervise the creation of so that when an application is presented to us it conforms to our needs for information. This one item alone could cut a great deal of the time spent in meetings. This has been in process for two years that I know of and finally we are getting a preview in our Sept. meeting.

3. Have staff create a brochure for an applicant that is handed out at the time the application is made. This would be to inform the applicant of the “punch list” of items necessary for a successful application. It would also be a way to inform them of the process and how we are ready to expedite their requests if they conform their information to our needs.
4. Have staff create a brochure for an applicant that informs them of their responsibilities once their business is open so that they do not run afoul of code enforcement. This would be an area to clearly inform applicants of the allowed signage, etc. over and above that allowed by either Staff approval or Architectural Commission approval.
5. If Staff does make an over the counter approval it MUST be verified within 30 days of completion as to conforming to what was approved. Whether by an Architectural Commission subcommittee or code enforcement it makes no difference. A significant percentage of over the counter and Architectural Commission approvals are not completed as approved and this causes more work due to having to go through code enforcement.
6. If staff receives a request from a member of the Architectural Commission regarding potential violations it should be noted in the agenda of the next formal meeting. This way the commission can better verify the flow of information through the process and identify potential problems faster.
7. When creating sub committees at least one “seasoned“ commissioner would always be with one new commissioner, etc. so that the inexperienced commissioner can be brought up to speed faster. It might even be more helpful if the subcommittee members were appointed on a monthly or even quarterly basis so that the commissioners could help predict their schedules.
8. I also think that depending on the issues at hand the commission has been very successful in the past in having the sub committee meetings via telephone and using PDF materials – thus not necessitating a physical meeting. Which might create a better “conversation” or dialog about a project as it works its way to the commission or in the review process after a meeting by allowing multiple “conversations” as the project heads to completion.
9. It should be made clear that the Architectural Commission’s input should be sought early and often in all the processes where it will ultimately have comment.
10. A concierge style response to all large or special projects. ie.: Staff, Architectural Commission, Planning Commission, Traffic, etc. representatives should all be reviewing projects at the earliest stages so as to minimize problems as the applicant winds through the process. This will help alleviate problems by keeping communications at a high level between commissions and staff. I also think that the Architectural Commission should always be previewing projects before they get to the Planning Commission so as to alleviate any design concerns at the get go. The best example where this format could have created a big win for the city was Priscilla of Boston.
11. Implement a strong gate-keeper scenario where an applicant is greeted with a staff member who is well versed in what is expected by the Architectural Commission for a successful application. If the applicant does not (cannot) perform as instructed the “gatekeeper” has the right to inform the applicant that they have a choice. Either go back and re-submit their application or face possible rejection by the Architectural Commission.

Also, in forwarding an application to the Architectural Commission it should be clearly notated in our packets that the application either conforms or does not conform to our information request. The commission can then make a quick and necessary decision to hear, reject or move forward for further study. This can substantially reduce a large percentage of cases that hold up the meeting process due to our having to explain to applicants why their materials are insufficient.

Signage – But I digress...

It is related because, unless I am mistaken, it is not clear what the rules of the road are to a new applicant or even an existing business owner. None of us signed up to be the “sign police” but it is under the purview of the Architectural Commission. Since staff is not pro-active it is up to citizen complaint, Architectural Commission member intervention, etc. to bring an item up for review by code enforcement. I have taken enough images and presented them to staff over the last year to show that the image of Beverly Hills in our minds is vastly different from the reality on the street.

I think a determination is needed to either let the code violations go on without intervention or the offenders be made to bring all signs into conformance and in a way that is neither offensive nor punitive (think “Friendly City”). I think that tent signs and other free-standing signs should be made to conform and to be uniform in size, style and allowed placement. I also think they should go through a licensing process as well.

I also think a careful review of the sign code should be made to determine if we do want neon in the windows and if LCD/LED screens in the windows should be allowed. These are issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we have a code that is a patchwork of rules on 20<sup>th</sup> century technology that clearly needs to be updated.