



CITY OF MERCED ZONING ORDINANCE UPDATE FOCUS GROUP MINUTES

Merced Civic Center
First Floor Sam Pipes Room

678 W. 18th Street
Wednesday, July 31, 2013
8:15 a.m.

Mission of Focus Group

Update the Zoning Ordinance to be more user-friendly and easier to understand for the Community.

A. CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chairperson Gonella called the meeting to order at 8:21 a.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Jim Abbate, Christina Alley, Ann Andersen, Todd Bender, Kenra Bragonier, Ron Ewing, Loren Gonella, Forrest Hansen, Flip Hassett, Jack Lesch, Elmer Lorenzi, Guy Maxwell, Carole McCoy, Michelle Paloutzian, Garth Pecchinino, Mike Salvadori, and Brandon Williams

Members Absent: Tony Dossetti, Bruce Logue, Joe Ramirez, and Stan Thurston

Staff Present: City Manager John Bramble, Director of Development Services David Gonzalves, Planning Manager Espinosa, Director of Economic Development Frank Quintero, Associate Planner Julie Sterling, and Housing Program Specialist II Mark Hamilton

C. APPROVAL OF ACTION MINUTES

M/S Lorenzi-Hassett, and carried by unanimous voice vote (4 absent), to approve the Minutes of July 17, 2013, as submitted.

D. ITEMS

1. Follow-Up Items from Last Meeting - Any questions about the existing ordinance or binder materials? Any examples of other Cities' ordinances that you like?

Ms. Andersen reviewed other cities' ordinances and advised that it's not about the content, but the navigation of the document (ordinance) that concerned her noting that web access and searchability needs to be user friendly. There was also some discussion on improving the "Definitions" of the Code and placement in the document whether it is located in the front or back of the Code.

2. Overview of Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance Update and Why It is Important (Continued from July 17)

Director of Development Services Gonzalves gave an overview of information discussed at the July 17th meeting advising that the current code has been frustrating to staff (and others) and that this is the City's opportunity to change the Code and streamline the development process. The Update would also give developers and property owners more certainty of what would be required to develop in Merced, taking away the fear of the unknown.

3. Overview of Existing Zoning Ordinance (Part 1) (Continued from July 17)

Planning Manager Espinosa gave examples of current problems including tracking "Land Use Determinations" (explaining that they are not amendments to the Code, but have been adopted by Resolution); having land uses that are not addressed in the current Code; and having outdated definitions.

Ms. Espinosa advised how streamlining certain projects through site plan review (a staff process) instead of a conditional use permit (a public hearing before the Planning Commission) would save both time and money. She added that the simple use of tables, photos, and diagrams will minimize pages of written (and often complicated) text making the new Code more user friendly.

Mr. Lesch spoke favorably about the staff level design review and site plan review. It was explained that in the past some applicants received entitlements from the City Council (i.e., general plan amendments, zone changes, etc.), but were not ready to proceed with a conditional use permit (CUP) and construction. Mr. Xu stated that other developers have detailed plans and must go through an additional process (public hearing for the CUP) costing time and money. Mr. Salvadori suggested a window of time be attached to quicken the process for those who are ready to develop immediately as opposed to those who wait a few years.

4. A Planner's Confessions...The Top Ten Things about the Zoning Ordinance That Drive Me Crazy - A.K.A. "Do These Zoning Regulations Still Reflect Our Community Standards or Should We Consider Changing them?"

Ms. Espinosa gave examples of certain land uses requiring a CUP and what issues to consider if CUP's are not required. One such use discussed was churches. While Mr. Lesch felt that there should be a CUP process for them in residential zones, but not in commercial zones, Mr. Hassett felt that churches should not be encouraged within the downtown area. There were also comments from Mr. Pecchinino and Ms. McCoy that churches don't pay property tax, and if it's a small church (under 50 people) and parking is not impacted, it should be allowed. [Secretary's Note: Due to the time, the subject matter will continue on August 22, 2013, beginning with page 4, #9-Outdoor Displays of the presentation].

E. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m. to the next meeting on Thursday, August 22, 2013, at 8:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ David Gonzalves

DAVID GONZALVES, Secretary
Zoning Ordinance Update

APPROVED:

Loren Gonella, Vice-Chairperson
Zoning Ordinance Update