



PLANNING DEPARTMENT

GUIDE TO THE PLANNING PERMIT REVIEW PROCESS

Applications for “discretionary” development permits (permits requiring the Planning Director’s or the Planning Commission’s review) require a thorough review process, which is divided into the following basic stages.

I. PREPARATION AND RESEARCH

All applicants should begin by reviewing the appropriate City documents for information that will affect the ultimate design of the project. Documents that should be examined by the applicant prior to submitting a formal application include the following:

- A. The City of Agoura Hills General Plan
- B. City Adopted Specific Plans Development Standards
- C. The Zoning Ordinance specifically zoning regulations for the zone in which the project is located (i.e. RS, CRS, BP-M), including use restrictions, and site improvements minimum standards.
- D. Special Overlay Districts and Hillside Regulations
- E. Parking, landscaping, and signage requirements contained in the Zoning Ordinance
- F. Public Works plans for sewage, drainage, water, and traffic circulation
- G. Architectural Design Guidelines
- H. Oak Tree Preservation Guidelines
- I. Grading and Retaining Walls Requirements
- J. Applicable fees (i.e. Arterial System Development Fees (TIF), Fire District Development Fees, Water and Sewer District Fees, School District Fees, Park Dedication fees, and other mitigation fees)

Careful adherence to the City’s land use regulations and development requirements and timely response to the revisions requested should reduce the project review processing time. The above materials and information are available on-line and/or at City Hall.

II. FILING AN APPLICATION

Pre-applications:

Some new development projects may benefit from a pre-application review. During a pre-application review, Planning staff reviews the general project description, concept plans, and other project information submitted by the applicant to determine a proposed project's consistency with City policies, and compatibility with adjacent land uses. A pre-application serves to expose potential issues best addressed prior to the formal submittal of an application. This process allows an applicant and the City to assess these issues prior to committing to the expense and time of filing a formal application and revising the project design. The result of the process is a non-biding comment letter summarizing the comments from all applicable departments.

Formal Applications:

A complete checklist of the required submittal materials for each type of entitlement is available for your use. The City accepts only complete applications. In an effort to process application in a timely manner, applications missing any required items, or containing items not completed according to the instructions will not be accepted. Please note that all plans submitted as exhibits must be prepared by a licensed professionals.

III. PROJECT PLANNER ASSIGNED

Approximately one week after an application is formally filed with the Planning Department, the project will be assigned to a project planner. This planner will review the submitted documents and will be responsible for processing the application and verifying compliance with the City Municipal Code and adopted State regulations.

IV. REVIEW BY OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

After receiving the application, the project planner will send a copy of the plans to other City departments and appropriate public and private agencies for review and comments and/or conditions. These agencies include, but are not limited to the Los Angeles County Fire Department, Environmental Health, Public Works, and Sheriff's Departments, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, the utility companies serving this jurisdiction, and environmental agencies serving the area and immediately adjacent areas.

V. DETERMINATION OF COMPLETENESS

Within thirty (30) days after submittal, the applicant will be notified by the project planner as to whether the application is deemed complete or if the project plans and reports must be revised or additional information must be provided in order to be deemed complete. Application forms and plans missing data, or delay in responding to the requested revisions to the materials will delay the processing of the application.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

One of the most important parts of every local planning process is the environmental assessment and review that State law requires every public agency to complete before approving a development proposal. This requirement is governed by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). After an application is submitted, the project planner reviews the “Initial Study” to determine whether the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), Negative Declaration, or Categorical Exemption is appropriate.

For projects that will not have a significant effect on the environment or that have “potentially significant effects on the environment”, staff will prepare or contract to prepare a Negative Declaration, or a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Planning Commission’s consideration.

For projects that may have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared to assess the potential impacts and to identify mitigation measures. Environmental Impact Reports are prepared by a third party under City’s direction at the applicant’s expense.

VII. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The City of Agoura Hills encourages citizen participation in its review process. As project applications are filed, the Planning Department contacts the appropriate Homeowners Association representatives, depending on the location of the project to obtain comments and notify them of an up-coming public hearing on the matter. Project applicants may contact directly or hold neighborhood meetings to discuss proposed projects prior to submitting to the City or early on in the review process.

Please consult the *Guidelines for Development Project Public Forums* (City Council Resolution No. 18-1866) and *Story Pole Procedures* (City Council Resolution No. 18-1862) to determine project applicability. The *Guidelines for Development Project Public Forums* identify required public forum meetings and additional items that must be included in the project application. Story poles are to be installed prior to Planning Commission and/or City Council review of the project.

VIII. REVIEWING BODIES

Any land use related request is reviewed by one of the following:

- A. City Council: They are the final reviewing body on General Plan Amendments, Zoning Ordinance Amendments, Specific Plan Amendments, Zone Changes, Final Parcel and Tract Maps, Development Agreements, and Appeals of any decision made by the Planning Commission. The City Council is a five-member body elected by the community, which meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.

- B. Planning Commission: Unless their decisions are appealed, the Planning Commission is the final reviewing body for Conditional Use Permits, Variances, Parcel Maps, and Site Plan/Architectural Reviews. They are advisory to the City Council on items listed under Section (A) above and they consider any appeal of a decision made by the Planning Department staff. They are a five-member body appointed by the City Council, which meets on the first and third Thursdays of the month, at 6:30 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.
- C. Architectural Review Panel: This is a two-member panel, appointed by the Planning Director. The Panel acts as an advisory body to the Planning Commission on design issues including project site plans, architecture and landscaping. The Panel meets on an as-needed basis.
- D. Development Review Committee: The committee is comprised of the Case Planner, the Engineering/Public Works staff, the Building Official's representative, and at times, may include the applicant. This committee provides comments on all Site Plan/Architectural Reviews, Conditional Use Permits, and Variances that relate to new development. The committee's purpose is to alert the project planner of any issues that should be initially addressed before the project is deemed complete and conditions of approval are prepared.
- E. Zoning Administrator/Planning Director: Subject to appeal to the Planning Commission, the Planning Director may approve administrative Site Plan/Architectural Reviews, Modifications, Lot line Adjustments, Large Family Day Care Permit, Outdoor Dining Permits, Minor Conditional Use Permits and zoning clearances. The Director's decision may include environmental determinations.

IX. REVIEW BY CITY CONSULTANTS

The City uses consultants, as an extension of staff, to assist in the review of geotechnical and geological reports, oak tree reports, landscaping plans, and traffic analyses. Occasionally, staff contracts with environmental consultants to assist in the review of and/or the preparation of environment reports, which may include archeology reports, biota reports, air quality and noise studies, and traffic reports. The applicant will be required to deposit with the City the estimated cost of their review in addition to the Planning fees. If the review exceeds the estimated cost, the applicant will be billed for the remaining amount. In turn, if the total cost of their review is less than the amount deposited, the remaining balance will be refunded.

This review is often the most time consuming part of the application process. In order to shorten the review process, it is suggested that the applicant's consultants review the City of Agoura Hills Municipal Code, Specific Plan Development Standards, Architectural Design Standards and Guidelines and applicable adopted Building Code requirements prior to submittal of information.

X. PROJECT DESIGN REVIEW

Almost all development projects undergo design review by the City's Architectural Review Panel (ARP). The project planner will schedule a review of the project by the ARP. This review is typically scheduled after the City receives comments from City consultants and outside agencies.

The ARP reviews the plans and bases its recommendations to the Planning Commission on the following criteria:

- A. The City Architectural Design Guidelines;
- B. Generally accepted principles of architecture and design related to both site planning and building design, particularly in terms of scale, bulk, mass, color, texture, and form;
- C. Formal and informal City policies and criteria related to site planning, architecture, landscaping, signage, and site improvements; and
- D. Review of proposed development in the context of the surrounding land use structures.

The project planner will notify the applicant of the ARP meeting date and the applicant will be invited with his consultants to discuss the design with the Panel members. The project planner will provide the applicant the Panel's findings in writing after the meeting. It is not the ARP's intent to redesign projects or to provide design services for project applicants. Rather, it is the intent of the Panel to assist City's staff and applicants in achieving quality site design and architectural designs that are consistent with the City's policies.

XI. PREPARATION OF STAFF REPORT AND CONDITIONS

After receiving tentative approval from City departments, the Architectural Review Panel, City Consultants, and outside agencies, the project planner will complete the staff report and draft resolution recommending either approval with conditions, or denial.

It is the Planning staff's role to answer the Planning Commission's questions during the public comment period and during the public hearing concerning staff recommendations and overall project conditions of approval. This process enables the Planning Commission to deliberate with accurate information and in an expeditious manner.

XII. ADMINISTRATIVE PERMITS

All administrative permits are reviewed by the Planning Director. The Director may approve, conditionally approve, or deny the application. The decision of the Director may be appealed to the Planning Commission within fifteen (15) days of the Director's decision.

XIII. PROJECTS REQUIRING A PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING

Once the staff report is complete, the permit application will be scheduled for one of the Planning Commission's bi-monthly meetings, and a public hearing notice will be published in the local newspaper and mailed to a specified radius of neighborhood property owners. The Planning Department's staff will also send a public notice to applicable Homeowners Associations and interested parties. The City will contract to install a public hearing sign on the subject property, to give at least 10 days of advance notice of an upcoming scheduled public hearing meeting to the public at large. The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the permit application and render a decision. For most permits (i.e. Conditional Use Permits, Site Plan/Architectural Reviews, and Variances), the Planning Commission's decision is final unless an appeal to the City Council is filed within fifteen (15) days. For other requests that involve legislative actions (i.e. Zoning Ordinance Amendments, General Plan Amendments, and Zone Changes), the Planning Commission's decision is advisory to the City Council, and a public hearing before the City Council will also be required with the same noticing requirements.

XIV. AFTER PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVAL

After the Planning Commission or the City Council has approved the project and after the 15-day appeal period has expired, plans may be submitted for building permits within two (2) years of the project approval date. The project planner will provide the applicant a copy of the Planning Commission or City Council resolution(s) approving the project with conditions or a resolution denying the project. This resolution is evidence that the City has acted on the applicant's project application. Unless the resolution states otherwise, the approval is tied to the land and in the event the project is sold, the development must comply with the approved conditions. Construction may begin upon issuance of grading and building permits.

XV. ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

The following departments may be contacted directly to help answer applicants' development related questions:

- Building and Safety Department: (818) 597-7370
- City Engineer/Public Works Department: (818) 597-7329
- Planning Department: (818) 597-7339