



## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

### GUIDE TO THE PLANNING PERMIT REVIEW PROCESS

Applications for “discretionary” development permits (permits requiring Planning Commission 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 include the following:

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

Careful adherence to the City’s land use regulations and development requirements should reduce the permit review processing time. The above materials and information are available through the Department of Planning and Community Development.

## **II. FILING AN APPLICATION**

### Pre-applications:

It is strongly recommended that all new development projects be submitted for pre-application review. During a pre-application review, Planning staff reviews the general project description, site plans, elevations, and other project information submitted by the applicant to determine a proposed project's consistency with City requirements, appropriateness in relationship to adjacent land uses, and responses to community design considerations. 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.

### Formal Application:

A complete checklist of the required submittal materials is available for your use. The City accepts only complete applications. Applications missing any required items, or containing items not completed according to the instructions will not be accepted.

All plans submitted as exhibits must be prepared by a licensed architect or civil engineer. Landscape plans must be prepared by a licensed landscape architect.

## **III. PROJECT PLANNER ASSIGNED**

Approximately one week after an application is filed with the Department of Planning and Community Development, it will be assigned to a project planner. This planner will review the file and will be responsible for processing the application through the environmental and code compliance review.

## **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. These agencies include, but are not limited to the Fire Department, Sheriff's Department, Flood Control District, Water District, Telephone Company, Post Office, City Engineer, Department of Public Works, and the Department of Community Services.

## **V. DETERMINATION OF COMPLETENESS**

City Code and State-mandated time requirements for processing an application start when an application is deemed "complete" or when all required information has been furnished. Within thirty (30) days after submittal, the applicant will be notified by the project planner as to whether the application is deemed complete. If the application materials lack information in some respect, the applicant will be advised by the project planner as to what additional information is needed. Lack of complete or missing information on plans and application forms, and missing 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 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 under City’s direction at the applicant’s expense.

## **VII. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

The City of Agoura Hills encourages citizen participation in their city government. As project applications are filed, the Department of Planning and Community Development notifies the appropriate Homeowners Association chairperson, depending on the location of the project. The Homeowners Associations are invited to discuss any questions with the assigned project planner and to advise the Planning Commission or City Council of any concerns they may have. The Homeowners Associations and any other interested citizens are encouraged to provide their comments through the established policies for public input, such as at public hearings. They may also contact project applicants directly or hold neighborhood meetings to discuss proposed projects. We recommend that the applicant involve the appropriate Homeowners Association with the proposed project prior to formal submittal of the application.

## **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, Blasting Permits, and Appeals of any decision made by the Planning Commission. The Council is five-member body which meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of the month, at 7:00 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, Mobile Home Permits, 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 and Community Development 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 and Community Development Director which acts as an advisory body to the Planning Commission on design issues including project site plans, architecture and landscaping. They meet on an as-needed basis.
- D. Development Review Committee: The committee is comprised of the Director of Planning and Community Development, the City Engineer/Director of Public Works, Building Official, and representatives from other City or County Departments that may be involved with the development application. This committee provides comments on all Site Plan/Architectural Reviews, Conditional Use Permits, and Variances that relate to new development. The committee, whose purpose is to notify the project planner of any issues that should be initially addressed, meets when applications are assigned to the project planner.
- E. Zoning Administrator/Director of Planning and Community Development: Subject to appeal to the Planning Commission, the Director of Planning and Community Development may approve administrative Site Plan Architectural Reviews, Yard Modifications, Lot line Adjustments, etc. The Director makes also the staff findings on the environmental effects of a request.

## **IX. REVIEW BY CITY CONSULTANTS**

The City contracts with outside consultants to assist in the review of geotechnical and geological reports, Oak Tree reports, archeology reports, biota reports, and landscaping plans. The applicant will be required to deposit with the City the estimated cost of their review. 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 Geologist, Geotechnical Engineer, Civil Engineer, and Landscape Architect review the Guidelines for Preparing Geotechnical and Geological Reports; the Oak Tree Preservation Guidelines; the Guidelines for Landscaping, Planting, and Irrigation Plans; the Grading Ordinance and applicable Building Code requirements prior to submittal of information.

## **X. PROJECT DESIGN REVIEW**

All development projects undergo design review by the City's Architectural Review Panel (ARP). After the application has been deemed complete, 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 development; 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 will inform the applicant of the Panel's findings in writing after the meeting. If the applicant requires further clarifications of the recommendations, the applicant may request a meeting with the Panel to discuss any issues further.

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 the City consultants and comments from other City departments, the Architectural Review Panel 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 Commission's policy that the Department of Planning and Community Development answer questions and resolve disputes concerning staff recommendations and conditions of approval, at the staff level. This policy enables the Planning Commission to direct its attention to the overall land use proposal and design in an expeditious manner.

## **XII. ADMINISTRATIVE PERMITS**

All administrative permits are reviewed by the Director of Planning and Community Development. 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 Notice will be published in the local newspaper and mailed to a specified radius of neighborhood property owners. The Department of Planning and Community Development will also send a Public Notice to applicable Homeowners Associations. The City will have a sign posted on the property, to give 10 day advanced notice of the meeting. 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 is made to the City Council 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.

### **XIV. AFTER PLANNING COMMISSION APPROVAL**

After the Planning Commission or City Council has approved the project and after any appeal period has expired, plans may be submitted for building permits within two (2) years of approval. Construction may begin after plan check and approval of the building plans and issuance of building and grading permits.

The Department of Planning and Community Development will send the applicant a copy of the Planning Commission or City Council resolutions approving or denying the project. This resolution is evidence that the City has acted on the applicant's project application. Resolutions of approval include all conditions of approval. Unless the resolution states otherwise, the approval goes with the land. That is, if the applicant sells the property, the new owner is required to comply with the conditions of approval contained in the resolution.

### **XV. ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE**

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

Building and Safety:	(818) 597-7370
City Engineer/Public Works:	(818) 597-7329
Planning and Community Development	(818) 597-7309