


Agenda Report Reviewed by:
City Manager: 

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM

Meeting Date: February 18, 2020
To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director 
Subject: Discussion and Consideration for a Design Guideline Subcommittee
Recommendation: That the City Council discuss and provide direction to staff
Funding: Currently Budgeted: _____ Yes _____ No N/A

Net General Fund:

Amount: \$

Account Code/Costs authorized in City Approved Budget  (verified by Administrative Services Department)

INTRODUCTION:

This item is to request the City Council establish a joint Design Review Board - City Council Design Guideline Subcommittee to guide updates to various City Design Guidelines. Draft Guidelines will then be reviewed by the Design Review Board (DRB) and Planning Commission, followed by recommendation to the Council for adoption.

BACKGROUND:

The City's Design Guidelines were last updated almost a decade ago (May 2010), and include both commercial and residential guidelines. The City worked, through a Council subcommittee, on potential Downtown Design Guidelines in 2014-15, although these were never adopted.

With increased development pressure, new state legislation, and pressing concerns related to sustainability / climate change, staff believes updates to the City's design guidelines, starting with the residential design guidelines, is critical.

The City is well-positioned, with a strong DRB, staff, and potential grant funding through the State's SB2 Planning Grant (submitted in late November), to update the residential design guidelines, particularly multi-family and mixed-use design guidelines. Updates to the City's downtown/commercial design guidelines would follow, provided funding and/or staff workload allows (commercial design guidelines are not eligible for the SB2 grant).

DISCUSSION:

There have been significant changes in both state law related to housing, and in the economic climate for commercial/business uses since that time. Particularly, the State Legislature passed SB35, which requires streamlined review of certain housing applications. This includes ministerial (staff level) approval of multi-family housing and mixed use projects when at least 2/3 of the project is housing. Projects requesting this streamlined process must be consistent with all zoning standards and any “objective design standards” a city has adopted. The City’s current design guidelines are, like most guidelines, subjective and open to interpretation.

For example: “minimize retaining walls” is a subjective design guideline; “retaining walls shall be a maximum of 6 feet, with a minimum of 5 feet between retaining walls” is an objective design standard.

Given this, it is critical for the City to update residential / mixed-use design guidelines. Through this process, staff anticipates updates that will also be relevant to commercial development, which could be incorporated as a next step.

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to Establish a Design Guideline Subcommittee and, select a member of Council to serve on the subcommittee. The DRB would nominate and vote on their own representatives to the subcommittee.