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City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Staff Report

Meeting Date: March 10, 2020
Agenda Item: 8A
To: Planning Commission
From: Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director 
Subject: Design Guideline Subcommittee
Recommendation: Receive Staff Report and Nominate a Planning Commission member to serve on the Subcommittee

Introduction:

The City is establishing a Design Guideline Subcommittee to work on updates to various Design Guidelines. The City Council authorized the formation of this subcommittee at its February 18, 2020, Council meeting, to include: one member of City Council, one member from the Planning Commission, and two members of the Design Review Board, plus staff. Mayor Slater was selected as the Council's representative on this subcommittee. The Design Review Board will need to discuss and nominate two representatives to serve on this subcommittee.

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 on potential Downtown Design Guidelines in 2014-15 through a Council subcommittee (two councilmembers but no DRB representatives), however 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, particularly multi-family residential and mixed-use design guidelines, is critical.

The City applied for grant funding through the State's SB2 Planning Grant (submitted in late November), to update the multifamily residential design guidelines to include 'objective design standards'. This would be the first project by this subcommittee. 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 funding by 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; while “retaining walls shall be a maximum of 6 feet, with a minimum of 5 feet between retaining walls” would be considered an objective design standard.

Given this legislation, 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.

The Design Guideline Subcommittee will guide updates to various City Design Guidelines. The draft Guidelines will then be reviewed by the Design Review Board (DRB) and Planning Commission, followed by recommendation to the Council for adoption. Staff anticipates the subcommittee will meet monthly starting in spring 2020, and lasting throughout the year for the development of Objective Design Standards for multi-family and mixed-use development.

General Plan Consistency:

The General Plan Community Design Element includes policies related to updating design guidelines. The related Action in the General Plan Implementation Plan is Action CD 1b:

Develop and update urban design guidelines to include design standards and goals for key districts, areas, or types of development throughout the community, including, but not limited to, the Downtown, Gravenstein Highway (north and south), as well as single family and multifamily types of development. Design guidelines should include provisions that enhance and support the unique qualities of areas, as well as supporting the character of residential neighborhoods. The

*design guidelines should allow for creative design solutions and architectural diversity.
Consideration should be given to incorporating form-based code components into the design
guidelines.*

Recommendation:

Nominate a Planning Commission member to serve on the Subcommittee