

October 25, 2007

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Jonathan
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MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Richard Mitchell
Director of Planning and Building
From: City of Richmond Design Review Board

Sharon DBloom

We, the members of the City of Richmond's Design Review Board write to bring to your attention issues which are causing great concern among Board members and which cause an application log-jam resulting in angry applicants.

On numerous occasions members of this Board have pointed out to you and other Planning staff that **the applications presented to the DRB are often incomplete**. Why applications should come to us that way is hard to understand since we know that you and your staff explain what a complete application for Design Review should include and that those directions are clearly spelled out on the Design Review Application (see copy attached). Finding incomplete materials in our meeting packets is a constant source of frustration. It appears that Planning Staff are not checking to ensure that the directions you give and that appear on the Design Review Application have been followed.

Too often the Board is presented with little more than a sketch of an idea with no material call-outs, incorrect or incomplete drawings, free-hand sketches, incorrect zoning information, and sloppy review of the plans. Some Board members spend long, unpaid hours reviewing and grooming applications so that design reviews will be thorough and efficient. Those are tasks the Planning Staff should be doing but there seems to be no follow-up at the moment of submitting an application.

All of us are here to serve the public. If an applicant is told by City Planners that an application is complete and the DRB tells them it is not and directs them to come back again, well, applicant frustration and anger soon follow. That is a bad situation. **To improve the process, applicants might be given access to materials exhibits, color boards, or a video/DVD detailing an application. Examples of completed applications could be available as well. The staff might provide a checklist to applicants to be used as a basis for reviewing an application before it moves to the DRB.**

Finally, **we need a City Architect**. Staff work hard and cannot be expected to have training as architects or landscape designers. Nor should we expect the architect members of the DRB to shoulder that job. With an architect as part of the Planning staff, the entire process will be streamlined.

CC: Mayor McLaughlin
City Councilors
City Manager Lindsay
Planning Commissioners

Robert A. Walker

Notice to Applicant About Neighborhood Councils
Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact their neighborhood council prior to submitting an application to be reviewed or heard by the Design Review Board and/or the Planning Department. Neighborhood council contact information is available at the Planning Department's information website.