PLANNING COMMISIONER PERSPECTIVE

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES

PLANNING COMMISSION 101: THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF PLANNING

Planning Commission Chair

- Anders Hauge
  - BS City and Regional Planning, Cal Poly SLO 1971
  - Public Experience
    - Bangor, ME / Woodland, CA / Calif Tahoe Regional Planning Agency / Town of Breckenridge, CO
  - Private Experience
    - Quad Consultants / Parsons / Hauge Brueck Associates
  - Notable Experience
    - General Plans/Codes: Bangor, Breckenridge, Woodland, Nevada County, Mariposa County, Auburn, Sutter Creek, Moraga and Loomis
    - Complex Projects: Heavenly Ski Resort Master Plan, Arizona Military Land Use Compatibility Plan, Southern Nevada Water Authority In-State Projects, Lake Tahoe Airport Master Plan, Santa Rosa Long-Term Wastewater Project, El Plan de Desarrollo de Petroleos de Venezuela, Dominican Republic Strategic Plan
Learning Objectives

- Role of the Planning Commission
- A Good Planning Commissioner
- How a Commissioner deals with the information received
- Questions that I ask myself
- A Commissioner’s perspective
- How a Commissioner works with others
- How I address the information and questions

Role of the Planning Commission

- Creation Process
  - Participate in the development of the General Plan, Housing Element, and/or Zoning Code
  - Facilitate community engagement
  - Conduct study sessions and other forums
Role of the Planning Commission

- Approval/Amendment Process
  - General Plan Elements.
  - Specific Plans and other specialized plans.
  - Zoning Code.
  - Review.
  - Conduct public hearings.
  - Make recommendations to the Council.

Role of the Planning Commission

- Implementation Process
  - Individual development project review
    - Site and Architectural Permits
    - Conditional Use Permits
    - Other
  - Consistency with the General Plan and Zoning Code
  - Public hearings

- Project approval (Quasi-Judicial Action)
A Good Planning Commissioner

Know your community and bring special expertise to the Commission

A good Commissioner should have:

- An open mind to listen to new ideas.
- An ability to see both the strengths and weaknesses of proposals.
- Critical thinking skills leading toward finding solutions when working with others.
- Willingness to spend the time required to study materials and attend regularly.
- Commitment to making the process fair to all.
- Faith in the future and the ability of the community to shape that future.

How a Commissioner deals with the information received:

- Educating myself
  - Read the staff report
  - Read the environmental documentation
  - Read the mitigation monitoring program
  - View project site on-line
  - Visit the site
  - Read the comments
  - Research prior projects
  - Understand the findings

- Have meetings (as appropriate)
  - Staff
  - Applicant
  - Stakeholders
  - Community
How a Commissioner deals with the information received:

- Reviewing large volumes of information
  - Start with the straightforward projects
  - Review the staff report
  - Review the CEQA summary, read the detailed analysis as appropriate
  - Identify the key issues, focus my review on those topics

- Tips
  - Sort out emotion from facts
  - Apply the scientific method – Create Hypothesis, test, adjust
  - Don’t review in one setting, if you do your head might explode
    - Letting your brain work overnight helps focus on the key issues

Questions that I ask myself:

- Is the proposal in compliance and consistent with the General Plan?
- Is the proposal in compliance with the Code?
- Does the environmental documentation disclose the impacts?
- Is the analysis thorough and correct?
- Do the Mitigation Measures work?
- Are there Mitigation Measures that work better?
- Are the Mitigation Measures flexible enough to adjust to changing conditions?
- How will the Mitigation Measures be enforced?
- What is best for the community?
- What would I do if this Project impacted me?

- Tips
  - Break down the project into manageable pieces (pizza pie approach)
    - Make decision on each piece, then build your final decision
  - Pretend you’re the applicant, take a different view of the project
A Commissioner’s perspective:

- You are the Decision Maker
- You have local knowledge
- You have knowledge of prior decisions
  - Make consistent decisions
  - Use approaches that work
- Identify when a policy or approach needs to change
  - Changes in technology, economics, politics, culture
    - California Housing Legislation
    - Self driving cars
    - On-line shopping
- **TIP**
  - Have confidence in your decision

Working with staff:

- Resource of knowledge (technical, policy, process, history)
- Resource to identify solutions
- Resource to understand options and consequences
- Make requests to staff to include information in staff report & presentation
- Request staff to consider modifications to the General Plan & Code when appropriate
- Provide staff with clear and concise requests and direction

- **Tip**
  - Close coordination with staff can give you confidence in your decision and back you up
Working with the Community:

- **Resource of knowledge**
  - Undocumented local knowledge and history
  - Ideas for practical implementation
  - Understanding of the practical issues
- **Commissioners are educators**
  - On how the process works
  - On how to comment effectively
  - On what points are important in the decision process
  - Explore options that work
- **Information gathering**
  - Listen and observe to identify the real issues
  - Explore options that work
- **Tips**
  - Decisions are to be made only at the Commission Meeting
  - It is OK to have different opinions

How a Commissioner works with:

- **Commissioners**
  - Resource for past decisions
  - Resource for the history of policy direction
  - Test ideas while mindful of the Brown Act
- **Elected Officials (Council Member, Board Member, Supervisor)**
  - Understand their policy and what are the drivers to their decisions
  - Discuss ideas and options that will work in the community
  - Memos identifying how I made my decision on major issues
  - Have staff keep you appraised on the decisions by Council
- **Tip**
  - Comply with the Brown Act (less than a quorum)
How I address the information and questions:

- The Commissioner's owns the burden
  - Decisions impact the quality of life
  - Decisions impact individuals and the community
  - Decisions impact economics
- Focus on facts
- Seek to verbalize (or identify) understand the unspoken concerns and/or questions
- Summarize relevant points and how my decision is reached

Tips
- Stay cool and calm.
- The Commissioner is helping identify and understand the issues for the community that does not have the time to research the project.