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STAFF REPORT

Item # 4

To: Lemoore City Council & Planning Commission
From: Holly Smyth, Planning Director HS
Date: January 12, 2011
Subject: Examples of Site Plan Review since the 2030 General Plan Adoption

Background:

Since May 2008, planning staff has been reviewing new development projects utilizing the policies contained in the 2030 Lemoore General Plan, as it is the overall guiding policy document for the City. Some of the policies in the General Plan do not have specific implementation direction in the Zoning Code and therefore the review process has been more difficult to implement. In order to better understand what level of review is involved and what policies are utilized in the review of various Site Plans, attached are six examples of projects submitted and a summary of key approval points.

Most projects that are "Categorically Exempt" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) are approved by the Planning Director while higher threshold projects are reviewed by the Planning Commission. Appeals are available to all applicants to the next higher approving body. Over the last ten (10) years, only one appeal/revisiting of a project application has occurred from all the staff, Planning Commission, or City Council approvals (which was on the Hauck church conditional use permit Council decision).

In order to better serve the business community, staff has tried to utilize the Categorical Exemption under CEQA as often as possible to avoid the $2,000 plus fee required to be paid to the County and forwarded on to State Department of Fish and Game and the additional time to process. Categorical Exemptions take about 2 weeks to process versus a 6-week minimum to process a Negative Declaration under CEQA due to minimum review periods. Staff generally processes projects that are Categorically Exempt as "Administrative Site Plan" reviews rather than "Site Plan Review" reviewed by Planning Commission which saves both time and money. Planning Commission reviews take 45-60 days before a Commission meeting for a decision/approval versus 30 days or less for a staff approval. Fees for Site Plan Review before Planning Commission are at least $355 more expensive than the staff administered approval.

One of the most challenging aspects of the review conducted by the Planning Department is ensuring that the small town community character is maintained or enhanced. This concept is embodied in the General Plan through the Land Use and Community Design Elements (which were developed by the consultant team based on community feedback and a survey of resident's) and is also one of the City Council's Long Term goals which reads "Preservation: Our Small Town Character". Additionally, planning staff is charged with helping to provide a "high quality of life" as defined in a portion of City Council's mission statement and further embedded in the General Plan and Zoning Code.

Small town character policies are generally found in the Community Design Element and are often based on a relative balance of design elements including streetscape, proportions and correct placement of circulation corridors, scale/massing/placement of buildings within their surrounding environment. The implementation of this character requires good design consistently implemented from good plans and clear/well calibrated standards which the Zoning Ordinance Update intends to incorporate.

Budget Impact:

None.

Recommendation:

For discussion purposes only.