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**Public Works/
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Staff Report

SS ITEM 3

To: Lemoore City Council
From: Judy Holwell, Project Manager 
Date: July 12, 2013
Subject: Planning Update

Discussion

It has been a little more than two months since Council, in an effort to reduce the City's budget, voted to eliminate the Planning Department. So that Council and the public has an opportunity to gauge where we are with regard to the number of applications received and processed, phone call and counter assistance provided, and the cost to date to provide such services, staff has been asked to provide an update.

Immediately following the elimination of the Department, there was a period of approximately two to three weeks in which there was no staff assigned to assist the public with their planning needs. However, this did not prevent our dedicated City staff in the Public Works and Building Department from continuing to provide excellent customer service to anyone needing planning assistance. Since that time, David Wlaschin, our Public Works Director, has been appointed as Planning Director; Quad Knopf (Quad) has been appointed as City Planner, with Steve Brandt being our main contact; Jennifer Scarbrough, full time Office Assistant in the City Manager's office, now assists with planning services four hours per day; and 30 percent of my time has been allocated to the performance of planning functions, with 70 percent being allocated to economic development and Successor Agency functions.

All staff performing planning functions work under the direction of the Planning Director and are assigned to the Public Works Department. Staff's emphasis is focused on providing high quality, prompt customer service. When applications are received, if they can be handled in house, they are typically approved within a couple of days. If they are more technical in nature, they are given to our City Planner, and the typical turnaround time is less than five working days. The response time may take somewhat longer when staff is working on other items with deadlines. However, our goal is to stay well within the amount of time allowed by law so that development can proceed as quickly and seamlessly as possible.

The following is a list of applications received and processed over the past two months:

	Received	Processed
Administrative Review	1	1
Administrative Site Plan Review	1	1
Assigned Addresses	11	11
Boundary Line Adjustment	1	0
Home Occupations	8	8
Plot Plan Review	17	17
Sign Approval	1	1
Temporary Use Permit	2	2

Staff has also assisted members of the public and developers, both at the counter and through phone calls, by answering various questions regarding permitted uses on properties, public records request, setbacks, conditions of approval, placement of accessory structures in yards (e.g. carports, out-buildings, pools, patio, awnings, potential signage, etc.), and other planning related inquiries. The turnaround time in answering these questions is typically one to two days.

As you know, on June 4, 2013, Council approved a contract with Quad Knopf to be the City Planner. The contract was separated into two categories – \$100,000 for technical planning services and \$30,000 for a zoning update. During the month of May, prior to approval of the contract, the City used Quad’s services to assist with planning functions. Below is a breakdown of the cost for Quad to provide the planning services and Zoning Ordinance revisions through June 30:

May Technical Planning Services	\$4,432.32	
June Technical Planning Services	<u>\$4,683.06</u>	
		\$9,115.38
June Zoning Ordinance Revisions	\$2,287.62	
		<u>\$2,287.62</u>
Quad Knopf – Total Expenditures		\$11,403.00

Thus far, the reallocation of functions has produced the desired savings. With the current level of applications being processed and public assistance being provided, staff anticipates that planning will end the 2013-2014 Fiscal Year under budget. That being said, the cost will rise if development in our community increases substantially. If the cost goes over budget, the number of applications processed and the complexity of the projects approved will validate the need for the additional expenditure. Even if costs increase, the City expects to continue to enjoy savings since the amount for planning staff salaries alone was \$18,580 per month.

The City Planner has begun working on updating the Zoning Code. The new Code was adopted April 17, 2012. After working with it for a while, the prior planning staff had made several notations to clarify usage and proposed potential changes. Upon reviewing the Code and the prior staff’s recommendations, Mr. Brandt noted that a significant amount of text included in the Code is commentary. He recommended that

the commentary be removed and placed in a separate procedures manual. The benefit to keeping the commentary separate from the actual law is that if a procedure needs to be changed, it can be presented to Council for approval and it would take effect immediately. Whereas, when the Code is changed, it takes 60 days to become law and there is a cost involved.

Staff has received many positive comments from developers and community members alike. Previously, when planning applications were received, if they lacked any items, planning staff would return the application, along with any attachments, to the applicant with a letter indicating that the application was deemed incomplete and it would list the items that were still needed in order for the application to be able to be accepted. This process was only performed by the Planning Department. When construction plans are submitted to our Building Department, the application is accepted and the applicant is notified if additional items are required. The application and supporting documents are not sent back to the applicant. They are held until the remaining documentation is received, which is much more efficient. Now, building and planning use the same approach and our community members and developers appreciate the customer service they are receiving.

Budget Impact

None.

Recommendation

Accept the progress report and direct City Manager to continue to monitor and report progress every three months.