



City of Thousand Oaks

BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE (BR)

April 14, 2009

The Acorn Room

2100 Thousand Oaks Boulevard

Summary Notes

Call to Order by Ashish Vaidya (Vice Chair) at 8:10 a.m.

Roll Call: Present: Ashish Vaidya (Vice Chair), Cheryl-Lee Brown, Ed Garnett, Madeline Hess, John La Rocca, Suzanne Luce, Susan Murata, Dan Overton, Joel Volk, Denis Wilson

Staff: Gary Wartik, Economic Development Manager; Mark Towne, Deputy Community Development Director; John Shepherd, Division Manager; Mary Lech, Assistant Analyst

Absent: Phil Koonce (Chair)

Public Comments:

Jan Smith, Thousand Oaks/Westlake Village Chamber of Commerce, Director of Governmental and Economic Affairs reported on the following: After Five Mixer/Taste of Italy, 101 Westlake Boulevard, April 15, 2009, 5:30 p.m.; Networking Breakfast of Champions, Los Robles Greens Banquet Center, May 1, 2009, 7:00 a.m.; Chamber Trip to China, October 11-19, 2009, \$1,799 per Chamber member.

Roundtable Discussion Regarding Development and Permitting Process

Review of the City's Permit Processing system has been ongoing. The purpose of this April 14, 2009 panel discussion is to discuss potential additional improvements.

Panel members included: Tom Cohen, Attorney; Francisco Behr, Behr/Browers Architects; Gary Heathcote, Heathcote & Associates; Larry Carignan, Carignan Construction.

Deputy Community Development Director Mark Towne reviewed current Permit Processing procedures. Planning Division Manager Jon Shepherd reviewed the Permit Processing flow chart (handout). City staff stated they are dedicated to good customer service, to working with applicants to find solutions to project issues; comments from Roundtable members and Panel are welcome.



Panel members made the following comments for consideration by the BR and City:

- Establishment of a City Council sub-committee that would review certain projects early in the planning process to provide input before the applicant becomes too invested in the project.
- City needs to maintain a clear overall “vision” of City development to help guide development decisions; the City of Ventura has created numerous regulations as part of its effort to create a “vision”, however they may also slow the process.
- Subjective design criteria can be frustrating for applicants, and can lengthen projects because of numerous reviews and discussions between applicants and Staff. Design standards should be objective and specific wherever possible. In certain parts of the City, a Specific Plan would be helpful in establishing unique design standards relevant to that area.
- Subjective concepts such as “style” and “neighborhood compatibility” should be avoided where possible. For example, encouraging compatibility may cause repetition of poor design, limit uniqueness, or eliminate the ability to “bring a sense of place” to a project. Staff noted that focus is usually on building articulation and details, rather than a specific architectural style.
- It may be helpful in some cases for an applicant to present a project (especially larger/more complicated projects) to Planning staff to allow questions and answers early in design review. This would bring planners “up to speed” on the project quickly.
- Applicants want clear, consistent direction and input from Staff early in the process in order to avoid “surprises” later in the process.
- Small businesses sometimes have a challenge working with the permit modification process. It was suggested they meet with planning staff on the small business projects. Smaller projects are typically handled by the Permit Processing section and through Administrative Hearings; Planning Commission review is not necessary unless an appeal is made.
- A panel member commented that some clients may be unreasonable and may be confused through a lack of understanding of City Codes and legal requirements. Education of property owners on why decisions are made is important.
- As the City is nearing build-out and we have reached our redevelopment phase, it is time for a review of our guidelines and standards. Standards must be kept manageable or small business owners will not upgrade their buildings. A “rehabilitation/redevelopment” ordinance may be helpful to address redevelopment needs.



Staff noted that Community Development continually works to develop refine City Codes and policy resolutions such as Architectural Design Guidelines and Precise Plan of Design Guidelines.

- An architectural review committee has been used in other cities to deal with design standards and review. Such as a committee is beneficial in some cities but adds to confusion and processing delays in others.
- There is a dynamic balance point between community compatibility vs. individual design; areas evolve over time.
- Layers of review should be avoided where they exist and can be eliminated. The panel also suggested encouraging builders to share information with their clients.
- Early review of projects in the entitlement process is appropriate, including Planning, Public Works, Fire, etc. Staff noted that the City has a pre-application process where such input is provided formally to potential applicants, and that involves multiple departments and agencies.
- Panel members indicated that Community Development front counter staff are good, and that projects can be delayed through subsequent steps in the entitlement process. At this time, the City does not have an Ombudsman available to shepherd projects.

9:45 a.m. – Ms. Murata left the meeting.

- ADA compliance can be a significant and expensive issue for small Thousand Oaks Boulevard businesses, and can inhibit upgrades. The City should review this issue in terms of how it can advise and help small business owners meet such requirements.

Encouraging positive, helpful interactions between Planning staff, architects, builders, and applicants will bring beneficial results for all parties. Planner's intentions are good; their comments are meant to be helpful for the project and the applicant.

Panel Members were invited to return to the Business Roundtable in June to continue discussing City procedures. Staff attending may also include representatives from the Fire Department and Public Works.

In July, it is anticipated a representative from the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Association will attend the Business Roundtable meeting to discuss the Thousand Oaks Boulevard Specific Plan that was initiated by the City Council on May 5, 2009.

Current Sub-Committee Reports/Action:



Building/Living Green Sub-Committee

City staff is in favor of “Green” standards. These standards can be expensive and tying them to small business modifications could be too costly for the small business owner. City staff is developing Green standards but the State will be the lead agency to dictate Building Codes for large scale projects. State Codes are expected to be completed by the end of 2009, some changes will be voluntary.

City efforts in going Green will be at a lower level. The goal is to promote these changes by keeping them affordable and reasonable.

A Business Roundtable memo will be provided to City Council explaining the State’s Green standards; will result in our standards being completed by the end of summer.

Community involvement is vital in creating a successful Green program. The suggestion was made to include a “Going Green” component on the City website advising that the State is the program lead, highlight the City’s efforts to encourage this program, and provide information on low-cost opportunities. Agencies and cities are already contacting the State to obtain information on future funding opportunities.

Small Business Report – Report on-hold until May 2009.

Thousand Oaks Blvd. Specific Plan - Report on-hold until May 2009.

Permit Processing – Report on-hold until Mid-2009.

Parking - Report on-hold until May 2009.

Building Heights - Report on-hold until May 2009.

Roundtable Comments and Open Forum:

Roundtable Members expressed their appreciation to Suzanne Luce for her service to the Business Roundtable during her terms of service.

Adjournment: 10:00 a.m. to May 12, 2009, 8:00 a.m., Acorn Room.

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