



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MEMO

DATE: October 2, 2014
TO: Members of the Planning Commission
Interested Parties
FROM: John Rahaim, Planning Director
RE: Changes to Preliminary Project Assessment Process

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In light of the current backlog and extremely high volumes of new Preliminary Project Assessment ("PPA") applications, the Planning Department is making some temporary changes to the process, as well as some minor permanent amendments. Specifically, the Department has made the following changes:

Temporary Changes

- Environmental Evaluation ("EE") applications will be accepted for filing concurrently with PPA applications, rather than only after PPA letter issuance. EE applications submitted prior to PPA letter issuance should be amended, to the extent appropriate, to address input from the PPA letter.
- PPA response letters will be issued within 90 days of the date of application, rather than 60 days.

Permanent Changes

- A PPA is now required for any project that creates 7 or more dwelling units, rather than 6 units. A PPA is also now required for any project that results in new non-residential buildings or additions of 10,001 square feet or more, rather than 10,000 square feet. This has been done in order to be consistent with Section 15303 of the *CEQA Guidelines* so that projects that qualify for a Class 3 exemption would not be required to submit a PPA application.
- A PPA is now required for changes of use of 25,000 square feet or more.

These changes apply to all PPA applications received on or after October 2, 2014; temporary changes will be reviewed on a twice-yearly basis. If a project is currently undergoing a preliminary project assessment, the sponsor can elect to file the EE application prior to receiving the PPA letter.

Since the inception of the PPA process in February 2011, the Department has seen a dramatic increase in the volume of applications due to the City's economic recovery and construction boom. The number of entitlement and building permit applications under review by the Department is higher now than at any time in the last 13 years. In 2011, the Department received 34 PPA applications; this increased to 54 applications in 2012, 92 applications in 2013, and a projected 114 applications in 2014 (80 filed to-date). This represents more than a 300% increase in PPA applications over 4 years.

The Department has been successful to-date in responding to PPA applications within the original 60-day timeframe. However, increased application volumes have made compliance increasingly difficult and have impacted response times on other important applications.

In order to respond to the increased volume of PPA applications and other application types, and to continue ensuring thorough and consistent PPA letters, 30 days have been added to the original 60-day timeframe.

At the same time, the Department recognizes prohibition on filing an EE application during the expanded 3-month PPA timeframe would pose challenges to a project's overall entitlement schedule. Accordingly, and in a departure from past practice, the Department will allow the concurrent submittal of an EE application along with the submittal of the PPA application. Even when accounting for the expanded PPA timeframe, this change is expected to result in an overall time-savings of approximately two months.

In addition to providing a procedural road map of a project's entitlement process, PPA letters are intended to highlight aspects of a project that may require revisions (e.g. changes in design, changes to address Planning Code compliance, etc.). Thus, to enable the time savings described above, project sponsors are strongly encouraged to amend their EE applications post-filing (and typically before assignment to a planner) in order to reflect changes made in response to the PPA letter.