

MINUTES
ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPING REVIEW COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING
WITH THE PLANNING COMMISSION

A Special Meeting held at the La Quinta City Hall
78-495 Calle Tampico, La Quinta, CA

March 10, 2009

6:02 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. This special meeting of the Architecture and Landscaping Review Committee with the Planning Commission was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairman Alderson who asked Committee Member Ronald Fitzpatrick to lead the flag salute.

B. Present: Committee Members Ronald Fitzpatrick and Ray Rooker, Commissioners Katie Barrows, Paul Quill, Mark Weber, Robert Wilkinson, and Chairman Ed Alderson.

Absent: Committee Member Jason Arnold

C. Staff present: Planning Director Les Johnson, Planning Manager David Sawyer, Assistant City Attorney Michael Houston, Principal Engineer Ed Wimmer, Principal Planner Wally Nesbit, Principal Planner Andrew Mogensen, and Secretary Monika Radeva.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT:

III. CONFIRMATION OF THE AGENDA:

IV. DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Chairman Alderson said the purpose for the Joint Meeting was for the Commission and the Committee to discuss different areas of concern. The results of the discussion would be used in the review of projects in the areas of water conservation, green building and sustainability features.

1. Water conservation policies

Chairman Alderson said La Quinta City Council and Planning Commission are a leader in water conservation in the Coachella Valley. The Planning Commission has been particularly strict on water usage, turf, and irrigation. He said the Commission would like to find out if the Committee shared the same views on this issue.

Chairman Alderson asked Committee Member Fitzpatrick to express his thoughts on the current water conservation policies.

Committee Member Fitzpatrick said the makeup of the Committee consisted of two architects and a landscaping contractor. He encouraged staff and the Commission to take advantage of the expertise the Committee could offer in those two areas. He said as an Advisory Committee they were limited to one review of the project. The second the time the Committee could comment on the project was at the Final Landscaping Plans stage. As a result of the limited reviews, the Committee does not get the opportunity to address sustainability, green buildings, LEAD certification, renewal energy, wind power, solar power, etc.

Commissioner Quill joined the meeting at 6:08 p.m.

Chairman Alderson asked Committee Member Fitzpatrick to comment on the water conservation policies.

Committee Member Fitzpatrick said a lot of emphasis was being put on water conservation, but that energy conservation was just as important. He stated his main concern in reviewing a project was to make it people friendly by creating green space with seating, street scenes, to take away from the hostile environment of acres of paved asphalt and vertical stucco walls. He applied this to both residential and commercial developments.

Chairman Alderson asked Committee Member Fitzpatrick if he was referring to the use of water and fountains within commercial developments where people could sit around. Committee Member Fitzpatrick replied he was primarily referring to fountains because he considered them to be an enhanced architectural feature to the project and not an intrusion. He noted there were lakes in residential developments that were not user friendly and served no purpose, other than for aesthetics, but he said there was a practical way to use architectural features. He commented that commercial centers presented a limitation to creating a people friendly environment and

having a fountain or any kind of a water feature was a good enhancement. He noted that a shaded seating area with a little bit of grass around it is inviting to patrons and is a nice break in the sea of asphalt.

Chairman Alderson asked Committee Member Fitzpatrick what his thoughts were on the use of grass and sod versus artificial grass. Committee Member Fitzpatrick replied he would be in favor of either one as long as it looked inviting and provided an outside seating space with possible low level lighting, etc. With regards to water conservation for residential developments, he stated developers should be required to install smart irrigation control designs, limit the amount of turf to a certain percentage of the property.

Chairman Alderson talked about Commissioner Quill's perception of the use of turf. He said if there were multi-uses for the turf then it could be justified, but the Commission did not support installing turf merely for aesthetics.

Commissioner Quill talked about the different ways a water feature could be utilized to perform several functions besides the aesthetic, such as being the reservoir for irrigation, or it has a recreational component, or it is part of a park setting. He said the Commission did not support the use of water elements without additional functions not only because of the water shortage, but also because of sustainability standpoint due to the costly additional resources needed to keep it running.

There was discussion regarding the use of water elements within commercial developments and the different methods that could be implemented to do that in a conservative manner.

Commissioner Barrows asked staff if the current water ordinance could be amended to include some definitive general guidelines letting applicants know what would be encouraged in their water element designs.

Planning Director Johnson said staff could revisit the city's water provisions and amend them, but the City's conservation methods needed to be at a much more global level. The City would have to establish more definitive policies in regards to sustainability, water and electricity related conservation measures, and the issue of energy efficiency with buildings. The City would further have to decide how much the State's requirements could be exceeded. He said the reason being for this was because all of these elements and features collectively would make a difference. He stated staff would be proposing policies to address sustainability in the next few months to the Commission and Council for comments and feedback.

Commissioner Quill talked about the issue of over-parking in commercial developments. Assistant City Attorney Houston said the Planning Commission had the authority to not allow developers to install additional parking spaces above the code requirements. Staff suggested a good way of dealing with such issues is to include a maximum number of parking spaces allowed in the code in addition to the minimum.

Chairman Alderson commented on the public's perception of the great amounts of water and electricity used by commercial developments without any conservation attempts.

Chairman Alderson said establishing sustainability policies would make it much easier for staff to point applicants in the direction supported by the City's officials.

Commissioner Weber discussed the state's leading conservation measures and the need to raise awareness within consumers and to establish the policies that would help create a sustainable community.

2. Green building and sustainability techniques

Chairman Alderson complimented the ALRC for reviewing all projects so thoroughly for offering their architectural and landscaping expertise and evaluations and asked Committee Member Rooker to share his thoughts on the use of excess power and its relation to utility conservation.

Committee Member Rooker said that building an efficient building was through good architecture in terms of paying attention where the sun would be, where roof overhangs would be applicable, having recessed openings versus flat boxes. He talked about the often encountered applicants' concern to install a lot of trees due to possible signage obstructions.

Commissioner Quill said the ALRC should be the body that thoroughly reviewed the architecture of the projects and suggested modifications be made because by the time the project was presented to the Planning Commission it was too far into the process.

There was discussion regarding awnings, buildings' exposure to the sun, and other architectural features.

Committee member Fitzpatrick talked about water conservation versus the complete elimination of water features and how overall conservation could

be achieved through alternative methods, such as LEED certified buildings, energy conservation, etc.

Commissioner Barrows said she would appreciate the Committee's recommendations on projects on how to keep proposed water features and still be conservative in resource use. Discussion followed on the many possible applications of water features and the people-friendly environment they create.

There was further discussion on establishing policies that would mandate applicants to design sustainable projects with green buildings. Commissioner Weber talked about LEED certification.

Chairman Alderson asked Commissioner Wilkinson to talk about energy conservation and the solar impact and heat transfer of windows directly exposed to the sun.

Commissioner Wilkinson talked about the relation of LEED certification to Title 24, the California Energy Commission standards, and the use of environmentally friendly building materials being used such as asphalt versus concrete, etc. He said energy conservation was more related to the installation of SEER (Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio) rated air conditioning units, door and window sealing, air filtration, solar, etc. He noted energy conservation came at a price that might not be affordable to many consumers and requiring a developer to build this way might impose fiscal difficulties in trying to build a product that would be within the price range of the targeted buyers.

Commissioner Quill said there would be many new requirements dictated by the state that would address sustainable building and would be incorporated into the building and safety code. Commissioner Weber added the water and energy agency providers would be incorporating fiscal penalty provisions to target unconscientious users based on a tier rate.

Commissioner Weber said sustainable building must be a combination of the installation of conservation measures with already efficiently constructed buildings. He talked about establishing some basic principles that would be shared between all parties, the Commission, Council, and Staff to help guide the future development of the community and address the concerns for water and energy conservation, over-parking, pedestrian access, public transportation, the design and quality of the buildings.

Chairman Alderson asked Committee Member Rooker if he wanted to add anything to the discussion. He replied the use of turf had not yet been addressed.

Committee Member Rooker said he found the use of desertscape throughout in a development to be too harsh, especially during the hot summer and high-wind seasons. He agreed in some instances too much grass had been used, but he favored the right balance between grass and desertscape to maintain the oasis-like environment in the desert. He noted he was not very familiar with the application and maintenance related to the use of artificial grass, but would be inclined to use it instead of desertscape.

Chairman Alderson said the Commission very much appreciated the comments and suggestions provided by the ALRC in regards to landscaping.

Commissioner Weber talked about the Commission's view on the use of turf. He said the amount had to be reasonable for the proposed use and it had to be accessible.

There was discussion about the use of grass in medians and the repetitive maintenance costs incurred due to the damage caused by the watering of grass to streets, curbs, sidewalks, etc.; possible limitation policies were mentioned.

Staff said there were efforts underway that were trying to address some of the existing problems of overwatering and extra turf such as the programs available through CVWD and IID to convert turf to desertscape, others promote upgrading to more sustainable equipment and provide for a fiscally sound way of achieving that.

Commissioner Quill suggested the Commission make a motion to have a joint meeting with the ALRC again in six months.

Commissioner Quill said he would like to make a motion as a recommendation to Council or Staff to establish basic sustainability guidelines for the City of La Quinta. Planning Director Johnson said the Commission has the authority to always direct staff to look into matters such as basic sustainable principles and practices. Staff talked about the different ways this could be approached.

There being no further discussion it was moved and seconded by Commissioners Quill/Barrows to make a joint motion of the ALRC and the

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Planning Commission recommending that staff begin working on a set of sustainable principles and guidelines for the City of La Quinta. Unanimously approved.

Chairman Alderson asked staff to arrange another meeting between the Commission and the ALRC in six months.

IX: ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, it was moved and seconded by Commissioners Wilkinson/Quill to adjourn this special meeting of the Architecture and Landscaping Review Committee with the Planning Commission to the next regular Planning Commission meeting to be held on March 10, 2009, at 7:00 p.m. This special meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m. on March 10, 2009

Respectfully submitted,

Monika Radeva, Secretary
City of La Quinta, California

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