



San Diego County DPLU News

Summer 2009

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IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES FOR ADVANCE PLANNING:

- July 1: Public review begins for revised General Plan Update, Draft EIR and draft General Plan documents.
- July 17 Planning Commission: Medical Marijuana Dispensaries
- July 22 Board of Supervisors: Second reading: Extending Building Permit Expiration Dates.

For more information and additional upcoming meetings, please visit the Calendar on our Web Site at: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/index.html.

From the Director

Hello everyone,

Welcome to the summer edition of our department-wide Customer Newsletter. We have lots of exciting things to tell you about, from the improvements we've made to our building permit process to our reaching a critical milestone on the County's General Plan Update. We're proud of the work we're doing here at the County to serve our customers. As always, we're striving to become the best land use agency we can be.

Until next time,

- Eric Gibson, Director, Department of Planning and Land Use

Advance Planning News

General Plan Update - Public Review Begins!

The County has completed a critical step in its General Plan Update. The plan's draft environmental impact report (DEIR) has been released for a 60-day public review and comment period, beginning July 1, 2009 and ending at 4:00 pm, Augusts 31, 2009. We have also released for public review the revised draft General Plan Regional Elements; draft Community/Subregional Plan revisions; the draft Implementation Plan; and responses we have written to the comments we received on the draft General Plan when it was released in November 2008.

All these documents; information about how to submit comments; and contact information can be found on the [General Plan Update Website](#). The latest draft of the proposed Conservation Subdivision Program and supporting documents are also on the website. The General Plan Update remains on schedule to be presented to County Supervisors for consideration in Fall 2010.

Progress Reports to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors

Our staff presented progress reports on the General Plan Update to the Planning Commission on May 8, 2009 and the Board of Supervisors on May 13, 2009. These reports are available on to the [General Plan Update website](#) and video from the Board of Supervisors hearing is available from the [Clerk of the Board's website](#).



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Advance Planning

Did You Know?

That the history of General Plans in California dates back to 1927?

That was the year that the state Legislature authorized local governments — cities and counties — to form planning commissions and directed those commissions to create “master plans” for their communities.

In 1937, California started requiring all cities and counties to adopt master plans, making it one of the first states in the U.S. to do so.

In the 1955, California started requiring local governments to prepare specific “elements” of study in master plans, that today include: land use, circulation, conservation, housing, open space, noise and safety.

In 1965, California officially changed the name of master plans to “general plans.”

Policy and Ordinance Development

Prohibiting Medical Marijuana Dispensaries

On July 23, 2008, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to draft a County Zoning Ordinance amendment that would prohibit illegal medical marijuana dispensaries within the unincorporated County. Staff is scheduled to present the draft amendment to the Planning Commission on July 17th. (Staff Contact: [Joe Farace](#))

Farm Employee Housing

Advance Planning staff is working on “cleanup” changes to make the County’s Farm Employee Housing regulations consistent with State law. The draft Zoning Ordinance and General Plan Amendments can be seen on Advance Planning’s [PODs Web page](#). Our staff is scheduled to present the changes to the Board of Supervisors Aug. 5. (Staff Contact: [Matt Schneider](#))

Landscape Ordinance Update

Looking to improve local water conservation, the Board of Supervisors directed DPLU on Oct. 15, 2008 to report on regional efforts to create a “model landscape ordinance”. The public can see our draft update to the County Water Conservation Landscape Ordinance on Advance Planning’s [PODs Web page](#). Staff is currently waiting for the State Department of Water Resources to finalize their model ordinance before proceeding to County decision makers. (Staff Contact: [Dixie Switzer](#))

Extending Permit Expiration Dates

The Board of Supervisors directed DPLU in May to amend the County Building Code and extend the expiration date of building permits from one to two years. Approved on June 24, 2009, the amendment is scheduled for final consideration July 22. The extension would provide County customers with economic relief during the recession, giving them more time to start building projects. If adopted, the amendment would take effect August 21, 2009. (Staff Contact: [Joe Farace](#))

2009 Zoning Ordinance Update

The Policy and Ordinance Development Section is currently processing a clean-up to the County Zoning Ordinance to clarify regulations and make it easier to read and understand. The 2009 Zoning Ordinance Amendment will be available for public review in July and can be viewed at the DPLU Public Review [webpage](#). (Staff Contact: [Heather Steven](#))

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Building Division News

New Hours:

Ruffin Road's Land Use counters now operate Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m., closing for 45 minutes at lunch.

The new hours have shortened customer wait times by ensuring that land use counters are always fully staffed during operations, rather than operating at reduced staffing during the employee lunch hour.

Did You Know?

That Building Codes appear in some of the World's oldest known texts?

For example, one of the first known building codes is found in one of the ancient world's most famous texts, the "Code of Hammurabi."

Discovered by a French archaeologist in 1901, the Code of Hammurabi caused an immediate sensation because it represented the first known set of laws that preceded the Bible.

Known for its "eye for an eye" philosophy and named for the Babylonian king who created it, the Code of Hammurabi dates back to 18th Century B.C., two to three thousand years before Christ.

One of the laws in the Code is considered one of the world's earliest known building codes. It reads: "If a builder build a house for some one, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built fall in and kill its owner, then that builder shall be put to death."

Permit Process Improved

Fewer lines. Less waiting. Fewer visits to County offices. Faster permit reviews. Those were just some of the customer service improvements DPLU's building division created by rethinking its building permit process.

Introduced in May, the improvements have already made the permit process faster and easier to navigate for the thousands of developers and homeowners who apply every year to build homes, subdivisions, home additions or replace water heaters, roofs and other features. Important changes included:

- **Fewer lines:** We cut both the number of lines customers had to wait in, and the amount of time customers waited, by reducing how often we transfer customers from one land use counter to another.
- **Start Reviewing Applications Faster:** Customers can now submit building permit applications into formal review before plot plans get their final check-off.
- **Less Walking, Clearer Process:** Land use counters have been reorganized so customers move in a more logical "cafeteria style" progression, rather than bouncing around the lobby.
- **Better Projects, Better Outcomes:** Building permit applications will now be reviewed earlier by the Department of Environmental Health, preventing the possibility of discovering sewer and septic system problems late and having to start over.

Ring that Bell!

If you've visited DPLU's Ruffin Road offices recently, you may have heard one of our most popular new features — our "Ye Olde Permit Issuance Bell." Now, every time a customer gets issued a permit, the counter staff gets to ring the 7 1/2 inch brass bell in celebration. It's just another way to remind our customers that we care about them and what we do. And that getting their permits issued to them is just as important to us as it is to them. So far, the bell is proving to be a big hit. "Customers keep asking me to ring it again!" one staff member said.



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Important Building Division Telephone Numbers

Building Offices: (858) 694-2960

Toll Free: (800) 411-0017

2003, 2007 Wildfire Survivors:

(858) 694-3876

Online, not In Line

DPLU and the Building Division have created several Web-based tools to help customers by reducing wait times and offering new services people can use without coming to County offices. Here are some of those!

Research building permit and property histories:

<http://landinfo.sdcounty.ca.gov/Index.cfm>

Apply for some building permits:

<http://sdcounty.luegepay.com/kivanet/citizen/>

Estimate your permit cost:

<http://sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html#feest>

Find building forms:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html

Answer zoning questions:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/444.pdf
www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/zoning/index.html

Check average counter wait-times:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldg/bldg_waits.html

Building Division News

Service First

Continuing to find ways to improve our processes for customers, the Building Division has updated more than 40 forms and some building templates, making them more informative and easier to understand and use. The division also created several new forms.

The forms include everything a customer would need to know to be able to build projects that would conform to current County codes and laws, from residential patio covers, to carports, decks, masonry fireplaces and other features.

Using the forms can greatly speed up the permitting process for customers. Because the forms are based on County standards, if customers use them as their plans, they wouldn't require as many corrections or reviews. In addition, customers wouldn't need to submit additional structural plans and details.

The Building Division also updated DPLU's Grading AutoCAD and Plot Plan templates to include the most current Stormwater Best Management Practices legend. In addition, the division created an AutoCAD template that includes the County Minimum Construction Specifications that apply to most projects. These templates can be easily downloaded, printed out and made part of building plans.

Getting Help Early — Pre-intake Assistance

Another improvement the Building Division recently introduced to its permit process is its "Pre-intake Assistance Conferences." Based on the Pre-Application meetings offered by DPLU's Project Planning Division, the pre-intake conferences gives building permit customers a chance to get help before they submit their permit applications.

Through the process, customers can meet with land use professionals from DPLU and other departments before they submit to identify issues, ask questions and get a better understanding of the building permit process.

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Multiple Species Conservation Program

Featured Species:

The bald eagle

Even though they are rare visitors to San Diego County, you can occasionally see bald eagles during the winter at lakes in our foothills and mountains, especially Lake Henshaw. Selected as our country's national symbol in 1782, the bald eagle is a powerful raptor — unmistakable because of its white head and tail — that can weigh up to 14 pounds and have a wingspan ranging from five feet to 90 inches. That's about as long as Yao Ming, the giant center of the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets, is tall! Although protected by federal law since 1918, the bald eagle became endangered in the mid-to-late 1900s in the contiguous United States. Its habitat was destroyed, it was hunted illegally and its food sources were poisoned largely by the now-banned pesticide DDT. However, with the banning of DDT and increased protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the bald eagle's populations have recovered enough to remove it from the ESA. In the wild, bald eagles can live up to 30 years and are known to mate for life.

South County Plan

The County Board of Supervisors received the 2008 Annual MSCP Report June 17. Board Chairwoman Diane Jacob praised the MSCP as a huge success. The South County Plan has set aside roughly 66,000 acres to be conserved in just 11 years. Another 12,000 acres could be preserved into the program if and when development occurs. All together that would represent 79% of the 98,379 acre goal the 50-year plan set when it was approved in 1997. The MSCP group plans to hold the Annual Report Workshop this summer. For more information about the South County Plan, how we continue to acquire land and monitor the plan, go to: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/sc.html. To see the plan's annual reports from 1998-2007, go to: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/ar.html.

North County Plan

The draft North County Plan was released for public comment from Feb 19 through April 6. The MSCP group is now preparing responses to the comments and will use submissions to revise the draft plan. The plan, its appendices, the public comments and more information are available for review online at: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/nc.html. You can also see how your property may fit within the North County Plan by using an interactive mapping tool we created. The tool can be found at: <http://gis.co.san-diego.ca.us/imf/sites/mscp>.

The County and its consultants have started working on the North County Plan's environmental report. We expect to release the revised North County Plan and its draft environmental impact report/environmental impact statement by the end of 2009.

East County Plan

A lot of collaborative work has gone into the development of the East County Plan, including the release of a preliminary draft map in December 2008. Unfortunately, County budget constraints and staffing reductions have caused a significant slowdown in the East County Plan's progress and will continue to do so until mid-2010. Once the budget and staffing constraints are resolved, development is intended to resume.



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Multiple Species Conservation Program

Did you know?

- California has the second highest level of endangered species in the U. S., after Hawaii.
- San Diego County is one of the most biologically diverse counties in the contiguous U.S. with more than 400 rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species.
- San Diego County is home to 1,573 native plant species, 26 of which are unique to the area.

The County wants to thank all the parties who have taken part to date in working on the East County Plan. We appreciate your time, interest and efforts. The input and feedback provided by the Steering Committee, community groups, the public and other interested parties has been invaluable. The MSCP group looks forward to continuing to work on the East County Plan with these groups in the future. We will continue to notify interested people about the status of the East County Plan as news breaks.

To find more information about the East County Plan and to see the preliminary draft preserve map, please go to:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp.

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly / Amending the South County Plan

The County is pursuing coverage for the Quino checkerspot butterfly. To that end, the MSCP group is working to complete a policy paper and management and monitoring paper, which are expected to be presented to stakeholders this summer. The County is also working with state and federal wildlife agencies to update data and maps to show where the butterfly exists.

For more information, please go to:

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/quino.html.

San Diego County Farming Program Plan

The Board of Supervisors in May accepted a memorandum updating them about the San Diego County Farming Program Plan. The plan represents the next step in implementing County policy that says farming in the county is valuable and should be supported and encouraged. The plan aims to promote and protect San Diego County's agriculture industry in several ways, including streamlining the regulatory environment for farmers and increasing dialogue between farmers and County agencies.

To get more information, go to: www.sdfarmingprogram.org.

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Project Planning

Award Winner!

The County won a 2009 National Association of Counties (NACO) Achievement Award for the Department of Planning and Land Use's first-of-its-kind, comprehensive groundwater study of the San Diego County region.

The study consisted of a month-to-month evaluation over a 34-year period of 86 individual groundwater basins across a 1,900 square-mile area.

The study detailed how groundwater supplies have increased and decreased over time to predict whether each basin could yield long-term sustainable supplies to meet potential development demands.

The results will give the County an unprecedented ability to compare the various land use alternatives proposed for the County's General Plan Update.

The GP Update has "plugged in" projected population densities from various GP Update maps to predict how those land uses will affect the vast areas in San Diego County that rely upon groundwater supplies.

The County is already using the groundwater study to analyze how individual developments will affect groundwater-dependent areas.

Conditions Clearinghouse

Project Planning's new Condition Satisfaction Clearinghouse is expected to go online on DPLU's Website in July. The Clearinghouse will create an online venue where anyone can track the progress of projects that are submitted to the County for consideration by seeing whether applicants have completed the conditions set for their projects. The book of conditions that is the key to the new service received its final approval June 19. Currently, when people submit projects to DPLU seeking approval, those projects must meet conditions set by different County land use departments to make sure they're safe, livable and comply with local, state and federal regulations and laws. To track how proposed projects are meeting those conditions, applicants and others have to visit or call each land use department. The Condition Satisfaction Clearinghouse will change that and create a cumulative online checklist that anyone can access by computer. By doing so, the clearinghouse will improve how we serve all our customers, from developers, homeowners and planners to the general public, communities, groups and interested parties.

More Online Services

Looking for more ways to make life easier for DPLU's customers, Project Planning has recently introduced a number of other new online services, including:

- A [Developer Deposit's Accounts Website](#) where homeowners and builders can check their accounts with the click of a mouse. When people bring development proposals to the County, they're charged an upfront deposit to cover the County's estimated processing costs. Customers used to have to call County agencies to keep track of the accounts in between monthly statements. Now they can check those balances anytime online.
- A [Developer Deposit Billing Explanation Page](#) that lists and explains what goes into many of the items that appear in customer's monthly Developer Deposit bills.
- A [Discretionary Project cost and timeline page](#) where customers can see how long discretionary projects, such as Tentative Parcel Maps (simple Lot Splits), major and minor use permits, take to process and how much they could cost, based on previously-processed cases.

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Code Enforcement by the Numbers:

Complaints Responded to: 696 (March-May)

Did You Know:

- That County Code Enforcement Officers responded to nearly 3,000 complaints (all within 24 hours) in the 2007-08 Fiscal Year.

Code Enforcement

Service Issue Resolution

Customers are responding positively to Code Enforcement's new Service Issue Resolution program, which was introduced in February to give some unhappy customers the chance to sit down with senior-level managers to talk about their cases.

Through June, the division had already successfully completed two issue resolution meetings that customers had requested and had three more meetings scheduled.

Modeled after Project Planning's Project Issue Resolution meetings, the new process could be used in cases where a customer had not been able to resolve an issue with their Code Enforcement Officer. For example, in instances where a customer wanted more time to comply, or when they disagreed with the officer's interpretation of the code.

The meetings won't give customers a venue to appeal a decision already handed down, to ask to have fines waived or to argue a case involved in litigation.

Forms and directions for how to request the meetings have been posted on the Code Enforcement Web page at www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/ce5/index.html.

Quicker Cleanups

Code Enforcement officers will be able to clean up messy properties faster and save taxpayers' money at the same time because of an agreement to deputize County lawyers as district attorneys. The deputized County Counsel will be able to criminally prosecute property owners who don't remove junk, waste and garbage from their land.

Until now, Code Enforcement Officers would remove trash using taxpayers' money and hope for reimbursement. Or, they could let the district attorney's office file criminal charges, a process that often took longer than unhappy neighbors liked.

This new agreement will allow County Counsel to prosecute criminal cleanup actions faster. In addition to speeding up the cleanup process, criminal judges can make offending property owners pay for the cleanups as a condition of their probation --- meaning taxpayers won't be left with the bill.

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