

TOP TEN EXPECTATIONS OF COUNTY PROJECT MANAGERS AND SPECIALISTS

- 1. GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.** Identify project issues up front to avoid project delays later. Also, when commenting on documents, be specific and give direction to consultants instead of simply asking questions or being a critic. Identifying issues and providing clear direction up front will help streamline the process of obtaining a legally adequate project.
- 2. AIM FOR ADEQUACY NOT PERFECTION.** The overall goal of project managers is to obtain a technically and legally adequate document as quickly as possible while keeping costs to a minimum. Perfection is not necessary for legal adequacy.
- 3. CONSIDER THE CONSULTANT PART OF YOUR TEAM.** Project documents should be viewed as a collaborative effort between the County and the consultant not as “us vs. them.” Your goal is the same as the consultant goal - to get the project through the process as efficiently as possible. Maintain open communication with consultants and work as a team.
- 4. KNOW APPLICABLE REGULATIONS AND FOLLOW WRITTEN GUIDANCE.** Understand project CEQA requirements, applicability of County Plans and Ordinances, Community Plans and Design Guidelines, and other regulations applicable to the project. It is essential that County staff follow established guidance, including Guidelines for Determining Significance and Report Format and Content Requirements. Knowing applicable regulations and policies is essential to obtaining a legally adequate document as fast as possible.
- 5. COMMUNICATE EXPECTED TURN AROUND TIMES.** County project managers need to be up front with consultants on expected around times, even if the responses will be late. Timing is everything for consultants (and their clients). The County project manager is responsible for determining if a project review will be late, finding out the expected turn around time for specialist reviews, and communicating turn around times to the project consultant. Do not blame lateness on others. Consultants need to be informed of project timelines so they can communicate project expectations to their clients.
- 6. STREAMLINE PROJECT REVIEWS.** Always consider ways to streamline project reviews. This could involve making a phone call to the consultant to clarify an issue or making comments directly into a document in track changes format, for example. When you find ways to streamline reviews, the amount of time and money spent on the project is minimized for both the consultant and County staff. Often, a simple phone call or email to the consultant can save hours of time during technical reviews, can prevent miscommunications and misunderstandings, and can cut down on document iterations. If an issue is very complex, request that the applicant/ consultant contact us for direction instead of writing a treatise.
- 7. MAKE SURE THE COMMENT MATTERS.** Do not make comments that aren't necessary to satisfy the requirements of statutes, ordinances, or County policies and plans. This point should not be confused with the level of detail required; sometimes it is necessary to be very detailed to be legally adequate. Ask yourself, “Does this issue make the document legally or technically inadequate or does it have a material effect on what ends up on the ground?” If the answer is “No” then don't make the comment unless there is some other very compelling reason to do so.
- 8. BE A PROBLEM SOLVER.** Always be vigilant for potential project issues and solve problems as soon as you are aware of them. Don't put off a problem because you don't have a quick solution. Use critical thinking skills and seek help if you need it.
- 9. IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND ALL PROJECT ISSUES UP FRONT.** Project applicants/consultants need to know if there are any project killers or other major project issues as early as possible in the discretionary permit process. Front loading the process is essential to streamline project reviews. In order to “get it right the first time”, it is essential that the County project manager fully understands the project implications of specialist and other County comments. Always ask if you need clarification about a specialist comment and understand how the comment will affect the project.
- 10. CONSTANTLY SEEK A BETTER WAY.** Ask yourself, “Is there is a faster, better and cheaper way to address the project issue?” Do not assume the approach taken by the applicant/consultant, or the approach that has always been taken, is correct. Use your knowledge and expertise to identify ways to address project issues more efficiently, ultimately improving the discretionary permit process.