

Valley Center Design Review Board

Approved Minutes: Feb. 14th, 20112

Joint meeting with the VCCPG General Plan Update Subcommittee

DRB Members present: Montgomery, Moore, Herr, Splane,
Robertson, absent
(VCDRB non-voting Volunteer: Michael Mahan

VC Planning Group GPU Subcommittee Members present:

Rich Rudolph
Michael Karp
Andy Washburn
Brian Bachman

Visitors:

Gary Wynn, Jon Vick, John Halac

4:00 PM Meeting was called to order
There were no speakers for Public Forum.

Susan Moore moved that the minutes from the previous meeting, January 10, 2012, be approved. Herr seconded and the minutes were approved 4-0.

Joint meeting between the VC Planning Group and the DRB to review S.D. County's proposed "Single Family Residential Design Guidelines" was kicked-off with Lael Montgomery providing an overview of what was to be reviewed during the meeting. Lael passed out an outline and proceeded to describe how the new Conservation Sub-Division Program was designed to work. She went on to briefly explain that the new General Plan mandated the "clustering of homes" in Semi-Rural and Rural sub-divisions with underlying density 1 dwelling on ten or more acres. She explained that a Conservation Subdivision requires that a prescribed percentage of the property must be set-aside as conservation land or agriculture, housing units are "clustered" on much smaller lots than the underlying density indicates, and other particular criteria are required for site and lot design. She said that Conservation Subdivisions in Village and other Semi-Rural areas designated for 1du:4 acres or smaller were not required but are available as an option, and that property owners also have the option in these areas of building a conventional subdivision. Lot sizes in a conventional subdivision are set by the designated density, eg 1du:2 acres. It was decided that two subjects should be addressed First, the kind of projects that should be subjected "design guidelines", and secondly, what modifications (if any) the combined groups would propose for content. . .

The following are comments and suggestions for revisions:

Application Issues:

- 1) The document should be re-titled “Design Guidelines for Conservation Subdivisions”. It must be used to review conservation subdivisions and must not be used in the review of conventional residential subdivisions or single lot projects.
- 2) It is misleading (and confusing) to present these guidelines as voluntary design ideas for any residential project when these design approaches are required collectively to compose a “conservation subdivision” and many of them are superfluous to conventional subdivisions and single-lot projects.
 - a) In SR-10 and Rural Areas the use regulations mandate Conservation Subdivisions, conservation design approaches are required.
 - b) In other Semi-Rural and in Village areas, the GP allows either a conventional layout or the option of a clustered “conservation subdivision” Again, the clustered option requires a conservation design – doesn’t it?
- 3) We agree that micro design ideas about lot-design, structure orientation and architectural form, for instance, can be cherry-picked and used individually in conventional subdivisions and single-lot projects. However, this document can be distributed as a reference without implying in the text that these ideas are preferred for all projects.
- 4) Comprehensive design direction is essential for clustered projects but adds a layer of confusion to the review process for conventional subdivisions and single lot projects.

Content Issues:

1. Design Guidelines for Conservation Subdivisions should recognize, explain and illustrate that different CONTEXTS require different FORMS. The current draft presupposes that one-form-fits-all-contexts, exactly the idea we are trying to escape.
2. The whole point of design guidelines for Conservation Subdivisions is to produce new development that fits into its context. Design approaches that create a Rural feel are different from design approaches that create Semi-Rural or Village areas. Each of these areas is characterized by different FORMS.
 - a. Diversity and irregularity (of topography, development pattern, lot size and shape, structure location and arrangement, setbacks, housing type, architectural form and everything else) are hallmarks of unincorporated communities.
 - b. Uniformity and regularity that characterize conventional mass-production building techniques will destroy San Diego County’s small towns faster than most people can imagine.
 - c. If San Diego County’s Conservation Subdivision Program is to be successful in its protection of community character, the design guidelines that implement the program must be explicit in favoring diversity over sameness and irregularity of natural forms over “cookie cutter” geometry.

- d. It is not enough to say “look around and emulate what you see.” The document needs to explain and illustrate what the developers understand least: the concept of irregular pattern.
- 3.
4. This document should apply to all Conservation Subdivisions.
 - a. It should discuss and illustrate more explicitly that design approaches vary significantly across RURAL, SEMI-RURAL and VILLAGE forms.
 - b. For example, rural and rural adjacent semi-rural design approaches should vary and mix lot sizes and shapes, use organic not geometric forms, and locate clusters according to the natural topography.
 - c. Rural lots should NOT line-up like teeth in rows on both sides of straight roads. Urban forms destroy rural landscapes.
 - d. Semi-Rural areas are in-between RURAL and VILLAGE areas. Design in these areas should lean toward the adjacent form.
 - e. Rural Village design can incorporate more linearity and geometry with irregular natural forms. The idea is to enhance what we have, not to obliterate it and impose a faux model.
 - f. Extremely helpful would be to add info about how to handle additional elements of design (streets, pathways, vegetation/landscaping) in a way that contributes to a RURAL FORM. (Urban approaches, eg curbs, gutters, wide straight streets and so forth, destroy country settings.)

Review Issues:

1. “Design” is a complex subject that speaks to the integration, hopefully the successful integration, of many different elements. Good design is critical to the success of these projects, so critical that the County needs staff with design credentials to review these projects against a set of criteria that designers are trained to recognize and understand.
2. There are a lot of reasons to prefer flexibility over rigid standards. However, it is only possible to be “flexible” AND to create a “good design” if a reviewer knows the rules of good design well enough to bend them when bending creates a better project. Reviewers without design training and experience are stuck with rigid applications because they don’t have the knowledge or experience to do otherwise.
3. Reviewers who are trained and experienced designers will MAKE THE ENTIRE PROCESS FASTER, AND A BETTER PRODUCT WILL COME OUT OF IT.

The group agreed that Lael would write and submit a letter to the County DPLU from the meeting notes after circulating it to DRB members for our approval

Montgomery closed the meeting at 5:30 PM