

ACTUAL TIME: 2:13 P.M.

A. ZONING INFORMATION REPORTS - PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The purpose of this public hearing is for the Planning Commission to receive the recommendations of the Zoning Information Report (ZIR) Working Group and forward recommendations to the City Council on potential ZIR process improvements and Zoning Ordinance amendments.

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Susan Reardon, Senior Planner, gave the Staff presentation. Bettie Weiss, City Planner, was also available to answer the Commission's questions.

Ed Fuller, President of the Santa Barbara Association of Realtors (SBOAR), summarized comments of appreciation to the Commission on behalf of the Association and asked for continued improvements on reliability and accountability. Additional remarks were made by Adrienne Schuele, SBOAR/Realtor.

Chair Schwartz opened the public hearing at 2:45 P.M.

The following people commented on the project:

1. Jarret Gorin, Van Guard Planning, LLC, acknowledged that within the past year ZIR's were being completed sooner. Remained concerned with the burden of proof being on the owners when discrepancies are found.
2. Steve Engels shared his personal experience of going through the ZIR process and receiving allegations of illegal window and door movement on his property. Expressed concern with having had to spend substantial money to clear the allegations and prove innocence.
3. Jeff Havlik echoed a similar experience of the prior speaker. Three prior ZIR's did not reveal violations that were found.
4. Steve Epstein, Realtor, stated the city's policy is "guilty until proven innocent." Stated that the ZIR is a worthless document in the hands of buyers and sellers. Appreciates improvements made to the ZIR process, but find that it is too little, too late.
5. Ann Harkey shared her son's experience in selling his house and the ZIR process that leaves room for many assumptions made by City Staff with the burden on the seller. Questioned the use of the term "appears to be" on a recent ZIR.
6. Jan Banister, Realtor, spoke about discrepancies between ZIR's done on the same property. Accountability and reliability are strongly needed and missing.

7. Erik Taiji spoke for the rights of the consumer to appeal a violation. The ten days given are insufficient when a consumer needs time to make contacts to correct the violation. Also, there is currently no closure on an appeal.

With no one else wishing to speak, the public hearing was closed at 3:04 P.M.

Scott Vincent, Assistant City Attorney, provided clarification of the term 'grandfathering.' It is a term given to the concept of legal nonconforming, meaning that the improvement was legal, based on zoning, at the time the improvement was made and because of zoning changes, the improvement then became non-conforming to the new zoning requirements. Illegal construction, whether discussed in a ZIR or not, is still a zoning violation. Mr. Vincent recommended against a process to grandfathering zoning violations. He stated an error in a ZIR should not legalize a zoning violation. The people that would be most affected if the violation were to be legalized without proper City approvals would be the neighbors who would have to suffer the consequences.

Chair Schwartz called for a recess at 4:20 P.M. and reconvened at 4:30 P.M.

Commissioner's comments:

1. The Planning Commission acknowledged the work done by the ZIR Working Group and the improvements made to the ZIR process. The Commission recommended City Council initiate an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance for the Administrative Zoning Approval process and direct staff to implement the revised ZIR template and identified changes the ZIR process.
2. Commissioners Thompson and Lodge want to see inspectors better trained so that fewer mistakes are made.
3. Commissioner Lodge supports keeping ZIRs as a requirement.
4. Commissioner Pujo supports ZIRs as a process, good tool, and beneficial. and listed areas that could be improved further:
 - a. Agrees with Staff about the idea of potentially pushing ZIRs back to after the time of sale to the next building permit would only push any potential issues down further and not benefit all parties, especially the buyer of the property.
 - b. The Working Group did a good job of sorting Major/Minor violations and she supports additional staff revisions before going to Council, especially for Item 2 under Major Violations that needs further clarification of square footage being discussed.
 - c. The ZIR template changes are a major improvement in clarity and are more simplified by the inclusion of attachments.
 - d. The Work Program outlined in the Staff Report is good.
 - e. Discrepancies fall under Oversights or omissions. The City cannot later overlook something that exists.

- f. The work that is being done with proposing administrative zoning approvals both under ZIR and the NZO review are good stream lining tools and should be welcomed by the development community.
 - g. Under the non-conforming section, recommends that Staff be absolute and if a non-conforming determination cannot be made within the ZIR, then it needs to be clear that it is not a final determination and with referral for a process of how the information could be verified.
- 5. Commissioner Thompson agrees with improvements made, especially the administrative zoning approval, new ZIR report format, and improved timeliness. Encourages that the Working Group continue to work to improve the process and possibly reconvene in a year. In a perfect world, he would eliminate the ZIR, but understands that it will not happen so we want make the ZIR process the best possible so that it provides a good service to citizens of the City.
- 6. Commissioner Campanella said that disclosure is a major overriding factor for the seller and the buyer. He also added:
 - a. A continued discussion should take place on when do minor violations have to be remedied, to what extent, and justification for conforming/non-conforming. Continuing to clearly express when a violation needs to be abated can put a buyer at ease that this is not a pressure to close.
 - b. Suggested the Work Group look at unbundling violations for a permit, depending on the type of permit, such as an exterior permit that does not impact the interior of the house.
 - c. The new ZIR reports are designed much better, are easier to understand, are more descriptive, consistent, and tell you what you can do and when. The combination of forms and the feedback from realtors have improved the process.
 - d. Buyer disclosures are required and ZIR's are one way to accomplish this protection for the buyer. We have to be more reasonable on when the corrections need to be made on the minor side and making sure that we are getting good feedback and the process is working for the buyer and seller.
- 7. Commissioner Schwartz acknowledged significant progress made by the Working Group on the forms, the content of the forms, the consistency, and the clarification of terms. The topic of outsourcing this function has come up and would still require the responsibility of overseeing the quality of the work, all of which would require the cost of human resources to manage the outsourcing. Her research shows that the cost of outsourcing is in line with the fees charged by the City. Areas that still need work are:
 - a. Terms used are still too vague to be used in a report with a physical inspection that carries the weight of a ZIR, such as "might", "appears to be", "there is evidence of" without further detail and clear explanation. Concerned with the implications and consequence for the buyer and seller created by the vagueness.

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- b. Based on the continued volume of community concern, we still have a long way to go in improving our ordinance and the tools we are using and the way we are having Staff utilize these tools, which is why training is questioned. Agrees with Commissioners Campanella and Pujo on identified work efforts.
- c. Asked Staff to continue to look at improvements that could be incorporated into the appeal process.
- d. Encouraged more work on a program for greater public outreach, public education, notification which could help engage, educate, and build community confidence to bring in violations to the City and result in fewer violations in the City.

Mr. Vincent clarified that the language in ZIRs is not “vague” when the language is qualified. He recommended that the language used in ZIRs inform the reader what information was evaluated in reaching a conclusion regarding a violation.

Ms. Weiss will have the Council confirm interest in greater outreach and education of the public. Staff may request additional funding from the Council to support that effort.

Krista Pleiser, SBOAR, thanked the Commission for the open communication and working toward improvements on the ZIR process. Commissioners Campanella, Pujo, and Schwartz were members of the Working Group.