



Terra Linda Homeowners' Association

P.O. Box 6167  
San Rafael, CA 94903

October 6, 2020

Honorable Mayor Phillips and City Council members  
1400 Fifth Avenue, Room 203  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: Policy Resolution on Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC)

Dear Mayor Phillips and Councilmembers,

Representatives of Terra Linda Homeowners Association attended the 9/8 and 9/21/20 City Council meetings where proposed changes to the Design Review Board were discussed.

We are aware of the benefits of scheduling "Planning Commission First" to allow the Planning Commission and the public to address major aspects of a project (including compliance with City plans, ordinances and policies on issues such as project size, land usage, environmental impacts, traffic, and other impacts) before consideration of design matters (such as architecture, mass, bulk, site planning, site improvements, colors, materials, and landscaping). We support this change in order of review because it allows public review and debate of the most critical aspects of a project and any necessary alterations to the project before design aspects are considered.

However, we have a number of questions and concerns regarding the proposed one-year pilot project substituting the smaller Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) for the full Design Review Board (DRB) for design evaluation of proposed development projects. While this change may provide streamlining incentives to project developers, we are concerned that valuable input from the DRB professionals and from public comment will be diminished, particularly in review of larger projects that have larger presence and impacts on surrounding communities. Our main concerns are the following:

**Inclusion of the “hybrid” DRAC/DRB model in the pilot project** -- The proposed pilot project does not include Planning Commissioners’ previous suggestion of “using a tiered Design Review Board, allowing a subcommittee of the Board (DRAC), to review smaller projects, and requiring that larger/more complex projects be referred to the full, five-member board.”

**We strongly believe that is in the City’s best interest to retain the authority of the full five-member Design Review Board to evaluate design aspects of larger, critically located or more complex projects.** The five DRB members have different areas of expertise and often differing viewpoints which allow evaluation of details in project design and fuller response to public comment. Complex projects have many aspects that need to draw on the expertise of five trained individuals with different specializations (i.e. environmental, landscaping, architectural, engineering, etc.) With only two to three people on the DRAC, their expertise will be less likely to overlap and therefore the quality of review will be impacted. It is possible that the City will receive applications for one or more of these larger projects during the pilot period and it is very important that these projects receive adequate design consideration.

We also request that the DRAC resolution to be presented to the City Council include clarification on the following items:

**Composition of DRAC:**

- 1) How many people will “voting members” on the DRAC? Does the alternate also get to express opinions and “vote” on recommendations?
- 2) How will these members be selected?
- 3) Will DRAC be governed bylaws, similar to the DRB Bylaws?
- 4) What will be the role of the remaining two to three DRB members who are not appointed to DRAC?

**Jurisdiction and Operation of DRAC:**

- 5) Who will determine what projects are referred for DRAC review?
- 6) Will DRAC review projects under consideration by the Zoning Administrator as well as projects referred to the Planning Commission?
- 7) What criteria or guidelines (project size? location? etc.) will determine which projects receive DRAC review? Will these criteria be publicly available?
- 8) What happens if DRAC members do not agree on their recommendations? Will other DRB members be consulted?

**Authority of DRAC:**

- 9) Will DRAC recommendations and public comments be considered by the Planning Commission before final decisions on project approval are made? How will this be done?

**Public Noticing and Participation:**

The current DRB procedures include evening meetings for which agendas and proceedings are publicly posted. The proposed pilot is supposed to include procedures for public participation and a Zoom format similar to the Zoning Administrator meeting format. [There seems to be no information on the City website about the Zoning Administrator meeting format.]

- 10) How will DRAC meetings be agendized and noticed?

- 11) Will the public have the opportunity to review plans and to submit written comments before the DRAC meeting?
- 12) How will public comments be received at DRAC meetings?
- 13) Will the meetings occur in the evening, rather than in the daytime, to accommodate residents who work during the day?
- 14) Will videos and/or minutes of the DRAC meetings be publicly posted?

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and questions.

Sincerely,

Terra Linda Homeowners' Association Board of Directors

Gina Daly  
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