CITY OF MERCED
Development Services

TO: Bicycle Advisory Commission
FROM: William R. King, Principal Planner
DATE: June 28, 2011
SUBJECT: Cancelling August 23, 2011, Bicycle Advisory Committee Meeting

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ACTION REQUIRED: Information Only

IMPLICATIONS OF NEW CITY BUDGET

The budget approved by the City Council, which goes into effect on July 1, 2011, will affect the service capacity of the Planning Department. A direct impact of the budget is the loss of two staff members, which is in addition to the loss of two staff members from prior budget adjustments. Taking these staff losses into account, as well as a shifting of duties of remaining staff, the size of the Planning Department has shrunk from twelve (12) to seven (7) since 2009. This reduction could have been greater, but the Department has supplemented its support funds through use of state and federal grants in order to maintain two (2) planners.

The primary focus of these planners is on grant-related work, and not current or long-range planning. Thus, for all practical purposes, the Department has five staff to manage "normal" operations, i.e., non-grant work. Two of these staff members are support staff, leaving three (3) planners: 1) a manager/long-range planner; 2) a planning technician focused on front-counter, permit services, all general public information inquiries, Design Review and Bicycle Planning; and, 3) a planner working on current planning such as conditional use permits, general plan amendments, sign permits, and site plan review.

Given the reduction in annual budgets and dramatic changes in staffing levels, equitable adjustments to services are necessary. Through a reasoned approach, the Planning Division must implement changes to rebalance staffing and service capacities.

An essential function of the Planning Department is to maintain operation of the front-counter. This job was previously manned by three planners on a rotating basis. Kim Nutt is now fully responsible to provide this essential service, and is only provided back-up in case of illness or vacation. Her secondary essential duty is permit issuance and the review of minor use permits. These two functions consume the majority of her time.

Mark Hamilton, one of the two employees that were eliminated from Planning and transferred to other departments, was the Planning Department's lead BAC planner.

Given the above changes to staff levels and Planning Department priorities, adjustments to all commissions and committees that we serve will be affected. Please note that the Planning Department routinely cancels Planning Commission and Design Review Committee meetings due to lack of projects. With regard to the BAC, significant changes to BAC support staff have occurred. Therefore, changes to agenda content and need for meetings must be adjusted to reflect current capacity and Department practice.

BAC FOCUS

Though the reality of the situation sets before us a tremendous challenge, be assured that the Planning Department will take all reasonable efforts to support the core purposes and functions of the BAC. These roles include:

1. To review and advise the City on the design of Capital Improvement Projects;
2. To review and advise the City on the bike-related policy;
3. Promote bicycling as a viable form of transportation;
4. Assist in the development and dissemination of bicycle-safety information; and
5. Be a community voice to the City.

ADJUSTMENTS

To account for changes made through the budget that affect our capacity to provide service, the BAC agenda content and need for meetings need to be adjusted. BAC meetings will now occur when actions related to roles 1 and 2 above are necessary. The need to call a meeting solely based on roles 3, 4, or 5 is not possible with the current staffing and service thresholds required by the Council.

Upon review of the list of pending capital improvement projects, there are currently no bicycle-related projects in the design phase that will be ready to review in August. Additionally, there are no new or amended policies that need to be reviewed in August. Therefore, the August BAC meeting will be cancelled.

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