



**City of Del Mar**



**PRELIMINARY LIST  
OF PROBLEMS & CONCERNS  
REGARDING THE DRB**

**Del Mar Ad Hoc Development Review Process  
Citizens' Advisory Committee  
Harold Feder, Chair**

**Approved January 20, 2016**

**Del Mar Ad Hoc Development Review Process  
Citizens' Advisory Committee**

City Council Liaisons:  
Don Mosier and Dwight Worden

Harold Feder, Chairman  
Richard Jamison, Vice-Chairman  
Anne Farrell, Secretary

Nancy Banning Doyle  
John Giebink  
John Graybill  
Arthur Olson  
Kelly Kaplan  
Dean Meredith



## Ad Hoc Committee Meetings To Date

- 7/8/2015
- 7/21/2015
- 8/4/2015
- 8/18/2015
- 9/1/2015
- 9/15/2015
- 10/6/2015 – **Workshop with architects & builders**
- 10/22/2015 – **Joint meeting with Design Review Board**
- 11/3/2015 – **Workshop with those who have gone through DRB process**
- 11/17/2015 – **Public Workshop**
- 12/1/2015
- 1/5/2016
- 1/20/2016
- 2/9/2016 – **Joint meeting with the Planning Commission**

Based on the extensive public testimony received since the **Del Mar Ad Hoc Development Review Process Citizens' Advisory Committee was formed in July 2015**, there is a perception among some neighbors and applicants that the Design Review Board could be more effective in its deliberations and that DRB processes and procedures should be improved.

Specifically, the Ad Hoc Committee, based on this extensive testimony, has observed the following nine distinctive problem areas that could be addressed by the Council now.



### **(1) COMMUNICATION, TRANSPARENCY, PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE DRB PROCESS WORKS**

Many residents/members of the public do not understand how the DRB works nor do they grasp how the City's design review process operates.

Many members of the public, in their testimony, noted how helpful it would be to have some sort of design review guidebook, written in lay language, that could help both neighbors and applicants understand the DROs and the review/approvals process for residential projects; the clear meaning of architectural and planning terms; how to read architectural plans; and other important aspects of the process.

Members of the public also expressed a need for some sort of ombudsman to provide guidance and support to members of the public in contentious situations or communication breakdowns between neighbors.



### **(2) NEED FOR IMPROVED INFORMATION ELECTRONICALLY**

A number of Del Mar citizens who testified at Ad Hoc Committee meetings commented on the need to expand the functionality of the design review pages of the City's web site at [www.delmar.ca.us](http://www.delmar.ca.us).

Informational and visual enhancements to these pages could help clarify the DRB process, making it more transparent, comprehensible, and open to everyone. It was felt that the design review pages were not particularly user-friendly nor were they taking full advantage of the web's capabilities as a communications medium.

There is also a need for ongoing project tracking information that could be available to the public online once an application has been submitted.



### **(3) DRB PROCESS DOESN'T ALLOW ENOUGH TIME FOR ADEQUATE REVIEW**

Neighbors and other members of the public expressed that the DRB process did not allow for adequate review time, especially in the period after story poles are installed and before the DRB packets are finalized prior to a DRB meeting (the Thursday prior to the following Wednesday meeting).

This short time-frame results in an excessive number of “red-dot” letters and inadequate time for DRB members or the applicant to thoroughly consider all comments made by neighbors in response to their project.

Moreover, for members of the public, access to project information is relatively restricted during this time period, as full architectural plans are only available for review during the week by visiting City Hall during the limited times when the Planning Desk is open.



### **(4) NEED FOR LESS SUBJECTIVITY IN DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS**

Members of the public as well as the architecture and building community expressed the need for less subjectivity in the design review process. Many support the development of a set of clear community-based Design Guidelines that would illustrate design priorities and standards, thereby reducing the current subjectivity in the process that many find problematic.

While public perception is that the existing process may be too subjective, there is also resistance to adopting guidelines that are excessively prescriptive and could undermine Del Mar's unique character. However, community-based design guidelines have been used successfully in many distinctive California cities. An inclusive and professional process is paramount to community acceptance and support.



**(5) DRB SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS ARE NOT ALWAYS CONSISTENT OR STANDARDIZED**

Members of the public expressed concern that project submittal requirements are not always consistent or standardized, which can lead residents to feel that the process lacks transparency when projects are being publicly deliberated by the DRB. This also makes it harder for the Board to render decisions, and for members of the community to understand what the “finished product” will look like, or what its impact on neighboring properties will be.

Photo documentation of view issues is also not consistent or standardized and there is a need for the applicant to present accurate and sufficient information about their project that members of the public, as well as the DRB, can clearly and fully understand, such as 3-dimensional models of projects, or virtual 3-D computer-generated modeling/renderings to more clearly show important elements.



**(6) DRB DELIBERATIONS NEED TO REMAIN FOCUSED ON THE DROs**

So that deliberations are as objective as possible, debate by the public, applicants, and Board members at DRB meetings needs to remain focused on the Design Review Ordinances.

There should be ways for the observing public to know which DROs are being discussed during these Board meetings (such as the DRO stated on a video screen during that point of deliberation).



### **(7) THE CPP PROCESS NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED**

While many-expressed support for a CPP-type process, all parties seem to feel that the existing process needs to foster better neighbor-applicant communication.

There is need for more common understanding of proposed developments.

There must be a way to encourage more open dialogue and transparency between all parties from the earliest stages of a design project.



### **(8) THE DRB COULD BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION**

While the amount of work and time required by DRB members is recognized and appreciated, members of the public felt that the DRB could benefit from an improved training protocol and continuing education for its members after their appointment.

Moreover, if there were training videos online, for instance, that could be helpful for current and future DRB members to refresh their knowledge but could also help applicants or neighbors to better understand the process.



**(9) TO ENHANCE NEIGHBOR COMMUNICATION & UNDERSTANDING, THE CITY COULD CAPITALIZE ON THE EXPERTISE OF FORMER DRB MEMBERS & THE DRB EX-OFFICIO MEMBER**

It was also expressed that the City could take better advantage of the broad base of experience that exists among former DRB members, who might be called upon to mentor new Board members, or help to facilitate and enhance communication and understanding between neighbors when a project is under review.

Moreover, there could be a more expanded role for the ex-officio architect.

