

Planning & Zoning Commission

Annual Report 2011

The end of the year report is a look back at 2011 and the work of the Planning and Zoning Commission. While the report captures the number of meetings, types of cases, and training sessions the Planning and Zoning Commission attended, the true intention of the report is to move beyond each case and review the effect they have had on the city as a whole. This report will analyze the following:

- Cases reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Commission
- Review of the 2011 work plan including current and long range planning initiatives and training attended
- Permits issued, including valuations
- Annual highlights
- Upcoming projects
- Development trends that are unfolding in San Marcos
- Goals the Planning and Zoning Commission set at the March 2011 P&Z retreat.

The report will also touch on accomplishments and changes of the Planning and Development Services Department. In accordance with the stated Council goal of being more “Customer Friendly”, several changes in process have been made in both the Planning and Permit divisions. These changes will be covered in more depth later in the report.

A Quick Glimpse Back At 2011

- **Number of Planning and Zoning Commission Meetings:** 24
- **Cases:** 153 (compared to 97 in 2010)

Case Type	2011	2010
Subdivision Plat	40	23
CUP – General	9	18
CUP – TABC	10	14
Plat Variance	5	7
Land Use Amendment	29	13
Zoning Cases	43	16
PDDs	13	2
Street Name Change	0	2
Qualified Watershed Protection Plan	4	2
	153	97

- **Annexations:** 51.14 acres (Five Mile Dam soccer fields and park)
- **Commissioners:** Commissioner Carter Morris replaced Commissioner Jim Stark.
- **Training Sessions Attended by Commissioners:**
 - Yearly Planning and Zoning Commission Retreat (March 2011)
 - State APA Conference (October 2011)
 - Training on Systemic Development of Informed Consent

Zoning

As identified in the “Quick Glimpse” section of the report, the Planning and Zoning Commission has made recommendations on 29 land use map amendments, 43 zoning cases and 13 Planned Development Districts resulting in the following:

- acres of new commercial property: 6.56
- acres of multi-family property : 119.48
- acres of mixed use property: 0.23
- acres of planned development district property: 904.94
- acres of single family property: 104.41
- new multi-family units: XXX
- new single family units: 179
- new residential units

Zoning Trends and Highlights

The Planning and Zoning Commission and staff were kept busy this year with 56 more cases than were processed last year. Several major projects were also completed, or begun. Some of the highlights of this past year include:

- Adoption of the SmartCode in April, 2011
- Implementation of MyPermitNow in December, 2011
- Creation of a Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) in December 2011
- Implementation of a new, more transparent CIP process in Spring 2011
- Dream San Marcos – a citywide visioning and idea-gathering tool, which is ongoing
- Two extensive revisions to the LDC
- Successfully negotiated Interlocal Agreements with Guadalupe, Comal and Caldwell Counties
- Firm hired for Downtown Implementation Plan to implement the Downtown Master Plan
- Drafting Architectural Standards for development within the SmartCode area
- Drafting the Hopkins Street Overlay District to provide for a broader range of uses
- Request for Proposals for Horizons Master Plan update issued, submittals in final review
- Permit Center Renovation & Open House, October 2011
- New Mobile Food Vendor permitting process
- Homeowner’s Improvement Incentive program
- New Renewable Energy permitting process

Zoning trends this year included a continuation of the previous years’ trend of multifamily district requests, particularly near Texas State University and existing multifamily. While not as many units were built this year, many more were entitled than in previous years. Staff expects an increase in the number of multifamily permits during the next year. To date, xxx units have been entitled, and since 2006, 4,747 units with 11,829 bedrooms are in consideration, under construction, or occupied.

The number of multifamily district requests has raised concern among some sectors of the City. Currently, San Marcos stands at about 74% rental, 26% home ownership, far below neighboring communities but fairly typical of college towns. The majority of apartments being built are intended to serve the student population, and one of the concerns raised is that not enough housing is being provided to encourage the students to stay after graduation, or to house young professionals who would like to

locate in the area. As we work on our Horizons Master Plan update and ongoing LDC revisions, this will likely become a major point of discussion.

The City saw a reduction in requests for Commercial zoning and building permits, however, there are still numerous commercial spaces to be filled in existing centers.

2011 was the first year requests could be filled under the new SmartCode. More permits for infill building were also issued, reflecting a trend for construction and redevelopment in existing neighborhoods. Some of the infill projects entitled include additional units to be built in an existing apartment complex; a new bar and grill with Low-Impact Development elements in its landscaping; and redevelopment on the site of a former restaurant and bakery.

Nearly twice as many plats were filed this year, compared to last year. Plats filed included large industrial sites adjacent to IH-35, large-lot single-family residential off Lime Kiln Road and in Blanco Vista, and numerous replats and amendments throughout existing neighborhoods. Because of the desire to live in existing, historic neighborhoods, and because plats in those neighborhoods may never have been done, the plat amendment process was made more streamlined to facilitate infill redevelopment.

Conditional Use Permits

The conditional use permits made up 12% of the cases the Planning and Zoning Commission has reviewed. Of the 19 conditional use permit cases the Commission reviewed, 10 were TABC conditional use permits and 9 were general conditional use permits. Staff anticipates a much higher number of TABC CUPs to be processed in the coming year, as we strengthen our enforcement program and initiate renewals of expired CUPs.

Building Report

The following is a breakdown in the building permit valuation, new commercial square footage permitted and new multi-family units permitted.

- Total Value of Building Permits Issued: \$70,143,915 (compared to a 2010 figure of \$175,759,417 – the Hays County Government Center accounts for most of the difference between 2010 and 2011)
- Infill Building Permits Issued: 20 (compared to 11 in 2010)
- New Commercial Square Footage: 145,106 (compared to a 2010 square footage of 237,753)
- New multi-family units permitted: 187 (compared to 458 units in 2009 and 1,141 in 2010)
- Building permits for single family residences: 184 (including one duplex) (compared to 153 in 2010)

Work Program Accomplishments

At the beginning of each year the Planning and Zoning Commission establishes goals and a work program that includes current and long range projects for the year. The goals and work plan are established at the annual retreat, and help guide the Commission and staff throughout the year. Large planning projects that are anticipated to begin or are underway are also discussed at the retreat. This

past year, discussion items included updating the Horizons Master Plan; Low Impact Development (LID) practices; the SmartCode; and the recently adopted Parks Master Plan. The Commission gave the staff direction on the Horizons Master Plan update, summarized below:

- Establish a vision and set benchmarks and goals to implement the vision
- The new plan should delineate utilities, and be proactive. Development should occur where there is existing or planned infrastructure
- A Citizens' Advisory Committee will be a key component of the process, to help ensure all voices are heard and that public trust is gained and maintained throughout the process
- Sustainable building and site design practices, such as LID and LEED, should be encouraged

One of the reasons for taking a look back at 2011 is to keep the goals established at the Planning and Zoning Commission retreat active. The following is a list of the goals established last February and a look back at how they were accomplished or how we can continue to work towards them.

Focus on cleaning up the Local Development Code

Since the annual retreat, staff has taken a number of revisions to the Local Development Code through the hearing process. These changes include:

- The creation of a Vertical Mixed Use district to encourage infill
- Relief from lot width to depth requirements for Townhouse lots
- The creation of an Administrative Approval process for certain standards of the code, for changes under 10%
- Standards for renewable energy systems
- Revisions to fence standards
- Revisions for recycling facility standards
- Refinement of the Watershed Protection Plan process
- Clarification of the Site Preparation Permit process
- Revision of development standards in the MF-12, MF-18 and MU districts
- Creation of a standards section for streetlights
- Revision of the sidewalk requirements
- Clarification of definitions

Customer-Friendly process

The first step toward a more customer friendly process was the renovation of the permit center. This transformation provides more professional, efficient and inviting surroundings to our visitors and customers, while also allowing our staff to have pride in their work place. Our Open House in October not only gave the public the opportunity to view the physical changes to the office, but also to hear about other upcoming development goals and initiatives.

Our new permitting and planning program, MyPermitNow, went live as of January 3, 2012. Staff worked to customize, test and train on this software during the last quarter of 2011. MyPermitNow is a web-based permitting system that allows applicants, staff and the general public to track the status of all permitted projects within the City. All permitting and planning information is available 24 hours a day to anyone who creates a customer account. Other convenient features include the applicant's ability to upload plan sets online, desktop plan review by staff and real time inspection results provided to the contractor by phone.

Professionalism – provide clear information and recommendations to the Commission and public

Staff has been working internally to present more consistent maps and staff reports to the Commission, and to improve public speaking.

Clarify the charge

As part of the drive for transparency, staff has been including sections of the LDC in staff reports, with citations. The MyPermitNow system also provides a high degree of transparency and ease of use to the planning and permitting process for both customers and staff.

Work on the Horizons Master Plan Update

Staff issued a Request for Proposals for the Master Plan update and the Transportation Master Plan update in late October. Ten firms responded, and four firms were shortlisted. Staff anticipates making the final selection and beginning work on the Plans in January.

Ensure a clear and understandable CIP process

Staff initiated a new and more transparent process, both internally and externally, for the CIP. The process included several meetings and open houses, and a Map Book which showed where all of the projects were proposed, how much was requested, and which Departments were involved.

Department Accomplishments

The annual work program of the Planning and Development Services Department is closely aligned with the stated mission and priorities of the City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission. The department's activities include support of the Council's priorities through the following on-going activities of the department:

Training Sessions Attended by Planning Staff

- 1) SmartCode Advanced Training in El Paso
- 2) TXAPA in Austin
- 3) CNU in Madison
- 4) MyPermitNow training
- 5) Attended LEED GA Training Class
- 6) Attended AICP Training Class
- 7) Achieved CNU-A accreditation