

CITY OF PIEDMONT
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SUBJECT: Site Visits
SECTION: Planning

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to Planning Commissioners, staff and residents concerning appropriate site visit procedures for applications subject to Staff or Planning Commission review.

POLICY: It is the policy of the Planning Department to establish the following procedures concerning site visits related to Planning Commission and staff applications.

PROCEDURES FOR PLANNING COMMISSION AND STAFF: For every application subject to Planning Commission and Staff Design Review, all Commissioners and staff are expected to make a site visit to the subject property. Commissioners and staff shall leave their business cards whenever they enter onto a subject or neighboring property, and nobody is home.

Subject Properties:

1. For purposes of this policy, the term “site visit” does not necessarily mean entering onto a property. In some instances, it is possible to assess the impacts of a development without stepping on the subject or neighboring property (for example, a fence design review application proposed for the front property line). However, the Commissioner or staff member shall enter onto the property if it is necessary to understand the application and surrounding context (for example, a proposed rear deck that cannot be easily seen and understood from the street).
2. Understanding the property and context is critical to the design review decision-making process. Staff members may not take action on a Staff Design Review application until a site visit to a subject property has been made.
3. If any Planning Commissioner member is unable to make a site visit to the subject property prior to the Planning Commission hearing, he or she shall recuse himself or herself from the discussion and action on the application.
4. In almost all cases, it is not necessary to see the inside of the subject residence. From the exterior, Commissioners and staff shall assess the relationship of the proposed construction and its possible impacts to the existing site, the adjacent properties and surrounding neighborhood. At their discretion, Commissioners and staff may request permission from property owners of adjacent properties to make a site visit in order to assess potential impacts.

Neighboring Properties:

1. When a neighbor of a property subject to Planning Commission or Staff Design Review requests a site visit in accordance with the procedures below, Commissioners and staff shall make a site visit, as defined above, to the neighboring property to view the story poles and understand the context.
 1. If specifically requested in writing, Staff shall visit the interior of the requesting neighbor’s house. Planning Commissioners are encouraged, *but not required*, to visit the interior of the

requesting neighbor's house. The Commissioners shall use their discretion about the necessity of viewing a project from the interior of a residence that is not near the proposed construction, or where it is clear that there is little impact. In general, applications that propose additions close to property lines, large additions, and new second stories are likely to have more of an impact on adjacent properties than small additions, or those just affecting the first story.

2. In order to avoid Brown Act violations, no more than two Commissioners may visit any site at the same time.

PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANTS AND NEIGHBORS: Planning Commissioners often have 10-15 applications per month, involving site visits to each subject property. In general, they must fit numerous site visits into very busy work and family schedules during the weekdays and weekend days just prior to the meeting, including site visit requests from neighboring properties.

Applicants:

1. Since Commissioners and staff rarely need to see the inside of an applicant's property, applicants only need to make the exterior of their property available. However, applicants shall take appropriate measures to ensure access to the exterior portion of their property subject to review, such as unlocking gates and keeping dogs indoors.

Neighbors:

1. Neighboring residents who request Staff site visits to their properties, shall do so by returning the Staff Design Review Application Comment form mailed with the notice of the application, by the deadline provided on the form.
2. Neighboring residents who request Planning Commission site visits shall do so in writing as early as possible, but by at least *noon*, the Thursday prior to the Monday meeting.
3. Neighboring residents who request site visits shall take appropriate measures to ensure access to the exterior of their properties (i.e. unlocking gates, keeping dogs indoors, etc.).
4. Neighboring residents who request Commissioners to view the proposed development from the interiors of their residence, shall do so only when it is clear that the proposed development will have an adverse impact on the interior of their residence. They must make themselves available to provide access to the interior of their residence during the last five days prior to the meeting, or designate someone (neighbor, etc.) who can provide access on their behalf.
5. Neighbors may state their objections as part of the public process in writing prior to the hearing and may do so verbally during the public comment period at the hearing, but shall not use the site visit as an opportunity to privately lobby Commissioners members outside of the public process.
6. Objecting neighbors who do not make their property conveniently available for site visits shall not later claim lack of site visits as a basis for appeal.

INITIATED: City Council

APPROVED: March 7, 2005

COMPUTER FILE: f:\planning\policies\Site Visit Policy