



May 30, 2018

San Francisco Planning Commission
c/o Jonas Ionin, Commission Secretary
1650 Mission Street, Room 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Process Improvements, 2018-004633PCA

Dear Commissioners,

Important legislation designed to help the Planning Department eliminate extraneous process and streamline approvals (especially for 100% subsidized Affordable Housing developments) is actually before you! We're finally getting serious about addressing our overgrown mishmash of rules for housing entitlement. Don't waste this opportunity for major positive steps — with local control, at that.

We ask you to honor Mayor Ed Lee's legacy by approving this legislation. With his executive directive to improve our processes and get San Francisco to build 5,000 units a year, Mayor Lee put this in motion, getting us closer to addressing our massive housing need.

This legislation falls into 4 basic categories: streamlining Affordable Housing, eliminating downtown redundancies, improvements to historic and landmark buildings, and standardizing neighborhood notifications.

The most critical aspect of this legislation is the streamlining of Affordable Housing. Doing this is uncontroversial and should have been done years ago. We obviously support reducing the number of hearings for Affordable Housing. We hope that this streamlined (though not by-right) process will also include the normal handful of variances that most Affordable Housing projects need, especially outside of the more recent area plans.

Creating consistency between large projects in the Eastern Neighborhoods Plan and downtown is wonky but will help eliminate redundancies in the Planning Department. Freeing up valuable planning staff time is a worthy goal.

The improvements to historic preservation review, eliminating hearings for non-substantive changes, is literally the least we can do. Much more major reform is needed of our entire system of historic preservation decision-making. This is a good start, but limited in scope.

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YIMBY Action empowers community stakeholders to advocate for affordable and market rate housing, with the goal of bringing down the cost of housing in San Francisco and the Bay Area.



Standardizing and reducing the paper requirements for neighborhood notification is a small but important step towards a more efficient process. This simplification of notifications into a single, straightforward notification system — throwing out the patchwork nightmare of our current notification system — would save countless hours and more than three tons of paper annually. This is a critical step towards a more environmental system. Our neighborhood organizers struggle to keep up with the flood of paper that hits their mailbox. A single postcard with a link to the project documents, organized and up to date — a dream come true!

Nested within this is a major improvement for code-compliant rear-yard bump-outs, which are critical for adding much needed bedrooms and accessory dwelling units. We have already made the decision as a city that these rear-yard additions are something we think building owners should be allowed to do. Less than 5% of rear-yard additions result in complaints. It's time for us to follow the rules we pass, instead of wasting time making decisions on a case-by-case basis.

When we make decisions on a case-by-case basis, rather than following objective standards and rules, we get unintended consequences. First and foremost, these non-objective processes empower those who are able to navigate a complex system: those with time, money and connections are able to make their voices louder. Second, we add unpredictability to the system, costing time and money to project sponsors. Many give up or never start because they cannot be sure what they'll get at the end of a painful process.

Last, when we make decisions on a case-by-case basis, we disempower those who do not feel they can make their "case" before a public body, forever on the record. Those with unconventional lifestyles, "boomerang" kids, or just run-of-the-mill introverts will not feel like they can come before you and beg for a bedroom. When the rules vary case-by-case, we end up demanding people display the sympathetic grandmother or young children to prove they are worthy of what is legally allowed. It's dehumanizing and unjust to those who don't feel comfortable outlining their lives in a public forum.

The money and time saved by the Planning Department and Planning Commission with these process improvements will be significant. Simply reforming the neighborhood notification process will save two full time staff positions annually! Commissioner Fong and Melgar have already taken the step of advocating for a Western Neighborhoods Plan, and we need staff time in the department to begin that work.

The Planning Department and Commission should be spending their time on the big, important policies, not make-work. In short, move this legislation forward and start writing the next batch!

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Sincerely,

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