



Planning Commission Delays Action

By [Danielle Gillespie](#), Staff Writer

10-21-2010

After a number of Los Angeles residents asked for more time to review various proposed changes to the zoning code, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission voted unanimously last Thursday to wait three more months before approving any modifications.

Pacific Palisades Community Council member Jack Allen was among those residents to ask for the extension during the Commission's regular meeting at City Hall in downtown L.A.

'Obviously this extensive ordinance is being rushed through before the public and the neighborhood councils have adequate opportunity to review and consider the impacts that this ordinance will have on their neighborhoods,' Allen said, noting that the Palisades Council has not had an opportunity to study the ordinance and therefore has not taken an official stance.

The L.A. Department of City Planning hosted informational meetings about the proposed changes in September and the first week of October, which did not give residents time to offer feedback, Brentwood resident Donald Keller said.

Two years ago, the Planning Department launched an initiative to rewrite selected provisions in the city's zoning ordinance in an effort to simplify the document, according to City Planner Tom Rothmann. The zoning code outlines the criteria for when an entitlement (variance, specific plan exception, adjustment or site plan review) is necessary and the procedures and findings required to make a determination.

The zoning code went into effect in 1946 and has been amended so many times that it has grown from 84 to more than 600 pages. The entire zoning code needs to be rewritten but because of budget constraints, resulting in a lack of personnel, the department's staff has identified nine problem areas to revise instead. The nine areas identified will be modified and presented separately to the Commission for approval over the next two years.

Last Thursday, Planning Department staff proposed the first of the revisions, which is to the 'core findings.' When making a land-use decision, zoning administrators must explain how a project complies with specific core findings. For example, a core finding for many entitlements requires that administrators articulate how a project will relate to the size and scale of surrounding properties. Administrators must explain their rationale and use evidence when making their determinations, which serves as a record in the case of future litigation.

There are 349 findings in the zoning code for 113 procedures and entitlements. The staff has rewritten 39 findings, deleted 37, and relocated seven; the remaining 266 are unchanged.

'The proposed ordinance consolidates common findings that have the same intent but different phrasing, clarifies ambiguous finding language, deletes duplicative findings, deletes unnecessary findings and moves findings to more appropriate places in the zoning code,' according to the recommendation report.

In response to the proposed changes, the L.A. Neighbors United, founded by Cary Brazeman, took out a full-page advertisement titled 'The City of L.A. is About to Gut the Zoning Code and Our Neighborhoods' in the Los Angeles Times on October 12.

The advertisement alleged that the Planning Department plans to override existing zoning by allowing taller and bigger buildings that are not compatible.

Rothmann, however, countered that the proposed revisions would not weaken or change any of the current policies or procedures. The goal was to strengthen the language and make it clearer.

Commission President William Roschen added that he is certain the department's staff did not propose any changes with malicious intent. Commissioner Spencer T. Kezios echoed that sentiment, saying, 'We all want to have a beautiful city.'

Brentwood resident Wendy-Sue Rosen, representing the Brentwood Residents Coalition, told the Commission that her group would like some of the wording changed in the proposal.

'While the Planning Department's current draft is generally excellent, we believe that further revisions are necessary to achieve the department's goal of clarifying the mandated findings without changing the substance of those findings,' the coalition wrote in its letter.

Rosen, who served as Brentwood Community Council chair from 2006-2009, founded the coalition with her husband, Thomas Freeman, and resident Donald Keller in November 2009 with the purpose of preserving and enhancing the environment and quality of life in Brentwood. The coalition teams with other community organizations on issues of concern.

Prior to Thursday's meeting, about 20 Westwood and Brentwood community leaders met twice with city staff to discuss the proposed ordinance. The coalition identified seven areas where they would like the wording modified.

For example, they asked that the traffic provision be changed from 'That the project will not create an adverse impact on street access or circulation in the surrounding neighborhood' to 'That the project will not impair access, ingress or egress to or from the project site or create traffic congestion or an adverse impact on street access or circulation in the area or surrounding neighborhood based on data provided by the City Department of Transportation or by a licensed traffic engineer.'

The Planning Department will host community workshops to hear similar suggestions until January 13. To review the proposed ordinance, visit cityplanning.lacity.org/Code_Studies/Other/CoreFindings.pdf. The workshops will be announced at a later date.