

Planning Commission Workshop



Harris & Associates

July 2026

Presented by: Amy Rossig



Table of Contents

PART 1 –
Why are we here?

PART 2 –
Role of the Planning
Commission

PART 3 –
Legalities

Planning Framework in California



General Plans

Outlines a jurisdiction's long-term vision for future development through policy statements, maps and goals.



Specific Plans

Provide detailed development standards tailored to a particular geographic area.



Zoning Ordinances

Precise detail over land use, site layout and design regulation.



Other Planning Documents

Include Master Plans, Area Plans, Vision Plans, etc., but these are not defined in the law.

General Plans



State Requirement

Mandated by California state law.



Foundational Document

Serves as the bedrock of planning, development and conservation efforts – often referred to as the "constitution" for local planning.



Long-Term Vision

Establishes a 20-30 year framework for community growth and development.



Planning Framework

Sets the rules and expectations for future development.
Identifies key issues and reflects the community's values and goals.
Guides local land use decisions and informs other policies and programs.

Zoning



Implements the General Plan



**Regulates land use and
development Standards**

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Goals

- Inform decision-makers about environmental effects.
- Identify ways to avoid environmental damage.
- Prevent avoidable environmental damage.
- Disclose to the public why a project is needed, even if it results in environmental degradation.



Types of CEQA Documents

Exemption

- Available when project meets one of many criteria found in State law

Negative Declaration (ND)

- If a project found to have no significant effect on the environment.

Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)

- Specifies revisions to project plans that can avoid or mitigate effects.

Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

- If project would have significant unavoidable effects that cannot be eliminated through redesign or mitigation.

Role of the Planning Commission



Long Range Planning



Current Planning

Role of the Planning Commission

Long Rang Planning

- Review General Plan, Housing Element, and Zoning Code
- Conduct a public hearing
- Make a recommendation to City Council
- City Council Adoption (Legislative Action)

Role of the Planning Commission

Current Planning

Individual development project review



Approval is a **Quasi-Judicial Action**

Meeting Best Practices



Meeting Management

Roles and responsibilities of the Chair and members.
Managing meetings.
Parliamentary procedures.
Maintaining decorum and managing public input.



Decision-Making

Gathering and evaluating information.
Making findings of fact.
Applying standards and criteria.
Communicating decisions clearly.

Procedure for Handling a Motion

Consideration of the Motion

- Members can debate the motion.
- **Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion.**
- Debate can be closed only by order of the commission (2/3 vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.

Procedure for Handling a Motion

The chair puts the motion to a vote

- The chair ask: *Are you ready for the vote?* If no one rises to claim the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.
- The chair says: *The vote is on the adoption of the motion that...*
 - *As many as are in favor, say 'Aye' (Pause for response)*
 - *Those opposed, say 'Nay' (Pause for response)*
 - *Those abstained, say 'Aye'*

Procedure for Handling a Motion

The chair announces the result of the vote

- *The ayes have it, the motion carries.....* (indicating the effect of the vote)
- *The nays have it and the motion fails*

The meeting
is the tip of
the iceberg.



Before the Hearing

- **Application Review, Revise, Review, Revise, Review**
 - Getting to YES – it's a process!
 - It's also a partnership with the applicant and neighbors: *How can we tweak this?...balancing what the owner and market want, the code allows, and what the community desires*
 - CEQA – *It's a LONG and expensive process.*



At the Hearing



- **Tips from Staff (for a smooth process)....**
 - Use staff as a resource before the hearing (ask questions!)
 - Stay within the four corners of the project and findings required
 - Thinking of a different motion / modification?
 - Ask Attorney / staff for process / requirements.

After the Hearing

Is Planning Commission final approval?

- Conditions of Approval
 - Enable staff to continue working with the applicant on specific aspects of the project
 - May include other agreements like Inclusionary Housing Agreement
 - CEQA Mitigation
- Appeal Period
- Tracking Annual Review requirements

Brown Act

- Applies to any gathering of a:
 - Local legislative bodies – Board of Supervisors, City Councils, school boards
 - Bodies created by formal action – commissions, committees, task forces
- Any gathering of a majority of the members of the legislative body to:
 - Hear
 - Discuss, and/or
 - Deliberate

Exceptions to Brown Act

Conferences and similar gatherings which are open to the public.

Open and public meetings held by another person or organization.

Open and noticed meetings of another legislative body.

Purely social or ceremonial occasions.

Proved that a majority does not discuss County business among themselves.

Actions to Avoid

Discussing business outside a meeting is generally prohibited

- Majority may not discuss or transact business (personally or through staff or technology) outside of a properly noticed meeting.
- "Polling" of members by another member (personally or through staff or technology) is strictly prohibited.

Quorum

- A quorum is the minimum number of members who must be present at the meeting for business to be legally transacted.



Adding an Item to the Agenda

- After the agenda is posted, an item may ONLY be added if one of the following occurs:
 - Emergency
 - Newly arising item requiring immediate action
 - Continued item

More Meeting Requirements

Meetings cannot be held in a place that discriminates.

Cannot be held in a place that charges a fee or requires a purchase.

Must be held in a place that complies with the protections and prohibitions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Public's Right to Comment

On any issue
("open mic" part of the agenda)

AND

On each agenda item before or during
the body's consideration of the item



Reminder!

- Make sure to allow public comment *before* taking action on an agenda item.
- No action shall be taken by secret ballot.

Beware of e-mail



- Prohibited: use of e-mail among a majority of the members of a body to reach a shared view.
- E-mail may not be used among a majority of the members to discuss, deliberate, or take action.
- Practice tips:
 - “reply all” + substantive discussion = Brown Act violation. Beware of potential for serial meetings via “reply all” or email chains.
 - Use of email for scheduling is ok

Legal and Procedural Responsibilities

- **Follow the rules.**
- Be mindful of the Brown Act.
- Be mindful of due process.
- Parliamentary procedures are your friend.
- Take trainings and file forms in a timely manner.
- **State law is not optional.**



Preparation for Decision-Making

Always be prepared.

Review the agenda materials prior to the meeting

Visits the site
(if applicable)

Meet with the applicant
(if you'd like)

Meet with residents and community groups
(if you'd like)

....do not forget the Brown Act and due process.

Preparation for Decision-Making

1

**Set staff up
for success.**

2

Ask clarifying
questions in
advance.

3

Raise
concerns in
advance.

4

Be mindful of
the burden of
your requests.

Constructive Decision-Making

- **Leave personal opinion** out of decision making.
- Be objective.
- Be data driven.
- Provide clear and solutions-oriented feedback.



Remember!

01

**Represent your
city.**

02

Be professional.

03

Be respectful – to
staff, to the public,
and to each other.

Resources



California Attorney General

<http://ag.ca.gov>

The Brown Act: Open Meetings for Local Legislative Bodies, 2003

<https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/the-brown-act.pdf>



League of California Cities

www.cacities.org

Open & Public VI, A User's Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act, 2024

https://www.cacities.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/open-public-vi-revised-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=2f412f0d_3



Institute for Local Government

Understanding the Basics of Local Agency Decision-Making, 2009

https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/rp_-_local_agency_decision-making.pdf?1498252437

