

City of Elk Grove

Ad Hoc Committee for Comprehensive Review of City Services

March 26, 2007 Public Meeting Summary

Overview of Meeting Purpose/Attendees

To obtain feedback from its customers, the city of Elk Grove conducted a workshop to obtain customer input about the forthcoming business services review of the planning, public works and building functions. **This document is a summary of the workshop themes; transcriptions will be provided as an appendix to the city council report.** Comments that fell outside the scope of the workshop purpose are not included.

The meeting was publicized in local newspapers and through a stakeholder mailing to groups such as the chamber of commerce, neighborhood associations, developers, builders, community organizations, etc. Flyers were also available at all the public counters at various city departments and online.

An outside, impartial facilitator was retained to lead the meeting. The facilitator described the meeting purpose as the first step in the business services review process. She explained that the city was soliciting customer input into what they felt the scope of the business services review should cover – in other words, the parameters of the review. She also explained that the city wanted to focus on the programs and services offered by the departments but not specific personnel or contracting companies.

Almost 30 attendees completed a simple survey prior to the start of the workshop. The survey showed that the majority of respondents had lived in the city more than seven years (the city incorporated in 2000), with almost half having lived there for more than 15 years. About half had coordinated with Public Works or Planning/Building more than 10 times, with the other half coordinating with those departments about half as often. The attendees interfaced with the departments for many reasons including the general plan, specific road projects, home additions and rural road standards. Of those who attended, about half reported good experiences when interfacing with the planning, public works and building department personnel while the remaining respondents had not.

Many who attended were members of the Sheldon Community Association, Greater Sheldon Road Estates Homeowners Association, Fallbrook Neighborhood Association and Elk Grove Coalition Advocating Proper Planning. Others represented groups included the Business Industry Association, Elk Grove Chamber of Commerce, Old Town Elk Grove Association, Laguna Creek Watershed Council and Elk Grove Community Connection.

Some of the services that reportedly worked well for attendees were the issue-specific workshops held by staff (e.g. zoning codes, rural road standards) and responsiveness of planning and public

works staff. Some areas noted for improvement were coordination between departments, communication with the public and staff turnover.

Items to Consider for the Scope of the Business Services Review (applicable to all functions or overall services review)

- Review city's adherence to the general plan land use policies and regulations
- Make sure business review is a GAAP audit
- Determine if a request for proposals for contracting firms has been conducted; define how renewals take place
- Determine the process for management recruitment
- Identify departments responsible for enforcing conditions of approval and provide specifics
- Conduct follow through regarding enforcement of city regulations/rules (e.g. after hours work)

Public/community involvement:

- Include public as much as possible where appropriate
- Analyze whether public involvement is encouraged, necessary or helpful early in planning process; define whether or not there is an effective process in place
- Consider city's role in encouraging developers to conduct public outreach
- Define how the city can best communicate opportunities for public input (public hearings, planning commission, city council, etc.)
- Create a citizens advisory group, perhaps under the umbrella of planning
- Involve residents early in planning and public works process
- Make sure it is necessary to have early public involvement
- Reassess how city chooses to decide what is best for public/community first, then work with developers after citizen input
- Evaluate the timing of public outreach and have it earlier in some cases
- View and use public as a helpful resource (all input should be respected from residents because of their knowledge and experience)
- If project meets certain criteria, there may not need to have project vetted through the public process early on
- Improve citizen notification within area of proposed site (e.g. used to send out postcards)
- Conduct charettes for large projects that will affect any neighborhood

Financial:

- Develop cost breakdown (in lay terms)
 - Compare current services/personnel with cost of in-house staff
 - Obtain a cost comparison from a similar contracting company
- Identify if any projects funded with federal money would be in jeopardy if contract staff was not in place or if all in-house staff was in place
- Delineate the best service possible for the money spent
- Determine whether contract services is the most cost effective model
- Ascertain whether the community is getting the best service dollars can buy
- Define and clearly track where monies are dispersed
- Analyze the cost of city service to it's citizens and business community

General customer service:

- Create a resource where you can go to get answers to the status of project/conditions rather than being sent from department to department
- Enhance coordination between staff, departments, community and county agencies (i.e. emergency services)
- Analyze staff transitions/amount of time on job to reduce turnover
- Enhance telephone customer service including politeness/ability to work with public
- Determine if it would make a difference if contractors reported to staff-held lead positions
- Send personnel from all three groups to training to educate about customer service and how residents can be a helpful resource
- Change management from contract personnel to become city employees
- Consider hiring some level of permanent staff
- Be more transparent in all proceedings
- Be proactive rather than reactive (e.g. add additional street surface, drainage and lighting surveillance to catch problems before citizen reports)
- Promote factual, accurate responses
- Review timeliness of responses to inquiries

Building Services

- Determine the best avenues to communicate codes/regulations and permit requirements to the individual homeowner
- Create public access for codes and ordinances (chapter and verse)
- Compare approval times to like-sized jurisdictions (consider best practices)
- Review liability for contractors

Public Works

- Define span of authority for contract employees
- Determine whether there are opportunities for conflict of interest
- Define what safety standards are in place for public works construction projects
- Assess in lieu construction fee
- Consider public works date-specific review process

Planning

- Ensure that staff refers to major documents of city (e.g. general plan and all SPAs) before starting projects
- Conduct project coordination meetings (esp. regarding permit condition review)
 - Hold meeting at least three weeks in advance of hearing
 - When held, ensure all city decision makers are there to avoid further delays for follow up after meeting
- Consider more pedestrian-friendly developments (e.g. wider sidewalks)

Contractor/city employee analysis:

- Determine whether management should be on city payroll (some feel strongly they should be)
- Determine whether planners be full-time city employees

- Define whether city should determine the staffing threshold to promote continuity in planning staff
- Determine whether incentives are needed to keep planners on staff (turnover is high)
 - Could city employee model better respond to fluctuations in market place? Is hybrid model more effective (does it allow for more flexibility in staffing)?
- Make sure there is consistency in comments, criteria
- Ensure there is consistency in interpretation of conditions
- Make sure staff has knowledge of local area

Permitting process:

- Determine whether it is user friendly and streamlined (both for lay and professional customers)
- Streamline permitting process for average citizen
- Ensure personnel at counters know and understand the permit process
- Analyze time frame of permit processing
- Ensure there is continuity throughout departments; commit to permit turnaround time
- Ensure full disclosure of special circumstances to permit applicants (i.e. alert permit applicants who are going to be first-of-a-kind for a particular type of permit)
- Cross reference plan review process to building permit process
- Organize and streamline permit issues and structure fees appropriately
- Create online permit tracking to determine status to allow for proactive follow through; include employee's name so follow up can take place
- Define when and how are fees disclosed
- Conduct an on site review of proposed site
- Create a checklist for special planning areas to provide when application is pulled/requested
- Analyze whether there is consistent application of policies/practices/standards
- Determine the process/avenue for the public/customers to communicate concerns/suggestions; should there be an individual responsible for responding to customer concerns?
- Study permit/planning processes for the do-it-yourselfer/homeowner to determine whether or not they're appropriate for lay customers
- Determine whether requirements are consistent with needs

Best practices:

- Compare processing time and policies to like-sized jurisdictions
- Analyze how city assesses effectiveness of policies, performance

Conditions of approval:

- Ensure that conditions are not changed after approval is granted
- Don't allow last minute changes by staff prior to planning commission meeting; once on agenda, do not have any changes; continue to next meeting if last minute changes must be made
- Ensure that conditions are followed (e.g. for mitigation)

Addendum 1
Elk Grove Contract Services
March 26, 2007 Public Workshop
Verbatim Flip Chart Notes

The following includes the list of verbatim flip chart comments that were recorded during the public workshop. These comments, along with the questionnaire results, were used to develop a recap of themes from the workshop.

Small Group
Building Services

- Is contract services the most effective delivery model? (contract v. city inspectors)
- Is contract services the most cost effective model?
- What avenues are used to communicate codes/regulations and permit requirements to the individual homeowner?
- Concerns about retention of staff
- Compare approval times to like-sized jurisdictions
- Review liability for contractors

Public Works

- Factual, accurate responses, timeliness of responses to inquiries, public outreach, follow-up (community relations)
- Span of authority for contract employees
- Have we limited opportunities for conflict of interest?
- Safety standards for public works construction projects? What standards are in place?
- In lieu construction fee

Planning

- Should management be on city payroll?
- What process is in place for management recruitment?
- Should city determine staffing threshold to promote continuity in planning staff?
- Should planners be full-time city employees?
- What incentives are needed to keep planners on staff? (turnover is high)
- When and how are fees disclosed?
- Efficiency: Consistent application of policies/practices/standards
- Coordination between staff, departments, community and county agencies (i.e. emergency services)
- Could city employee model better respond to fluctuations in market place? Or is hybrid model more effective (allow flexibility in staffing)?
- What is the process/avenue for communicating concerns/suggestions? Should there be an individual responsible for responding?
- Is public involvement encouraged, necessary, helpful early in planning process? Is there an effective process in place?

- Study permit/planning processes for the do-it-yourselfer/homeowner to determine whether or not they're appropriate for "lay" customers
- Requirements are not consistent with needs
- Compare processing time and policies to like-sized jurisdictions (best practices)
- Consider city's role in encouraging developers to conduct public outreach
- How can the city best communicate (by what methods) opportunities for public input (public hearings, planning commission, city council, etc.)?
- How does city assess effectiveness of policies, performance?

Large Group

Building, Public Works and Planning

- User friendliness of the permitting process
- Need departments to talk to each other (esp. regarding ordinances)
- Permitting process needs to be streamlined for average citizen
- People at counters need to know permit process; entire process needs to be examined
- Time frame of permits
- Ensure politeness/ability to work with public
- Review effectiveness of department to get the job done
- Telephone customer service needs better training
- Permit review process should have continuity through departments; commitment to permit turnaround time
- "First time" permit applicants should be alerted that they are "guinea pig"
- Look at staff transitions/amount of time on job
 - Top level should be city employees
- Contract service providers
 - Need to make sure there is consistency in comments, criteria
 - Consistency in staff
 - Consistency in interpretation of conditions
 - Staff need knowledge of local area
- Staff rollover is a concern
- Staff should refer to major docs of city (e.g. general plan and all SPAs) before starting projects
- Project coordination meetings (esp. regarding permit condition review)
 - At least three weeks in advance of hearing
 - When held, decision makers must be there
- Public engagement plan – evaluating the timing; have it earlier in some cases
- Involve residents early in planning and public works process
 - Through planning citizens' advisory committee
- Training for everyone in departments to use public as a resource rather than a "thorn in their side"
- Ensure that conditions are not changed after approval
- Ensure that conditions are followed, specifically mitigation (make sure that it happens)
- Create a resource where you can go to get answers to the status of project/conditions rather than being sent from department to department
- Public involvement

- If you meet all criteria, may not need to have project vetted through the public process early on
- Make sure it is necessary to have early public involvement
- Create public access for codes and ordinances (chapter and verse)
- Permit tracking online to determine status to allow for proactive follow through – include employee’s name so follow up can take place
- No last minute changes to conditions of project – once “agendized” on planning commission, no changes; continue to next meeting if last minute changes are made
- Developers, planners, public works, public/residents – all input should be respected from residents because of their knowledge and experience (e.g. of what DO want – zoning code)
- Conduct charettes for large projects that will affect any neighborhood
- Identify departments responsible for enforcing conditions of approval
 - Provide specifics
- On site review of proposed site
- Better job notifying citizens within area of proposed site (e.g. used to send out postcards)
- Public works to consider date–specific review process
- Follow through regarding enforcement of city regulations/rules (e.g. after hours work)
- Re-assess how choose to decide what is best for public/community first then work with developers after citizen input
- Checklist for SPA to be provided when application is pulled/requested
- What if the best service for money spent?
- Will directors become city employees? They should be.
- Will it be a “review” or full blown audit (GAAP – must meet this standard)
- RFP for contractors – has this been put out to bid? How renewed?
- Cost breakdown = all in lay terms
 - Current services/personnel
 - Alternate cost with similar company
 - All in house staff
- What projects funded with federal money
 - City employees v. contract employees – money would get from DC for each type of personnel model

Concerns/Comments via E-mail

Email 1

- Hello Cody Tubbs and Gary Davis,

While I am not able to attend tonight's workshop on service delivery, I offer my comments on specific instances that could be used to demonstrate the need for change.

1) Bell South development at the corner of Elk Grove-Florin and Bond

Road: A contracted city planner, to remain nameless, allowed a sub-standard proposal to go forward for a prime corner property that could have been the jewel next to Laguna Creek for the residents of the area. Many residents commented judiciously throughout the planning process begging for some other type of development other than a strip mall, but instead we got Rite Aid, an Autozone and a poorly designed Starbucks with no patio seating.

Many residents voiced concerns over and over about the incompatibility of an Auto Zone and the adjacent creek, but our concerns went unheard. Even though there is supposed to be a runoff

treatment system, the property owner made a curb cut along the southern portion of the curb containment of the parking lot next to Autozone and now the parking lot drains straight into the creek with no treatment. With the recent death of a couple beavers that inhabited the down-stream containment of Camden Lakes, I wonder if this property is an appropriate neighbor. If the residents' concerns were considered, there would actually be a nice balcony restaurant and other similar businesses overlooking the wonderful Laguna Creek along with a small town center-community center at this location. Both the City and the CSD were not heavily lobbied for their desire to purchase this previously state-owned property.

2) Light pollution and the allowing of illegal lighting at businesses: Somehow the lighting on commercial buildings has been allowed to change without much notice or input from citizens. Both the Raley's Mervyn's shopping centers and the CalFit back parking lot now have lights - strong halogen - that are not appropriately installed in conformance with light pollution restrictions. There are lights that shine directly towards neighborhoods and open space areas to the north of both commercial centers.

These light sources crept up and were somehow allowed to be placed unchecked, and when residents complained to the planning department, nothing was done. These lights should NOT be allowed, or their throw should be restricted and not aimed towards residential development. All commercial lighting should aim the throw of the light towards the ground and not at an angle that would impact the night sky. We are beginning to look like LA and the San Fernando Valley with light pollution totally blocking the natural night sky. Please help!!

3) Sheldon Road widening project between Elk Grove-Florin Road and Power Inn:

I attended the early planning meetings for the Road widening project and thought that I could trust the design and implementation of the widening. However, similar to Bond Road, I found that the City's engineers and the subcontractors operate in the dark ages with the ultimate design that got built. For instance, in Roseville, any new roads built, even at the expense of the City, are constructed with six to eight foot wide sidewalks well back from the curb with landscaping separating the pedestrians from the traffic along main thoroughfares. Further, Roseville's engineers ensure that the utility poles and signs do NOT interfere with their sidewalks, even at intersections. Conversely, both Bond Road and Sheldon Road widening projects constructed sidewalks directly next to the curb with numerous utility poles built right into the sidewalk. On Bond road there are additional impedances with the improper placement of signs poles and barrier poles. Additionally, both projects did nothing to increase the width of the sidewalks in order to encourage more pedestrian use. In fact, the sidewalks are just as narrow as those designed in the 1960's. It almost looks like the technicians are simply using old standards without any innovation. I am greatly disappointed because we had a chance to "get it right" with our own design by the city, when in fact, the County actually did a better job (see Laguna and its wide sidewalks set back from traffic).

4) Suggestions to improve the Bond Road overcrossing and East Stockton intersection: I sent a few emails to City Public Works that explained prior negotiated understandings for the Bond Road overcrossing and the East Stockton Intersection with Bond Road. Originally during the 1990's when I served on the Elk Grove Planning Advisory Council (County PAC), Robert Sherry and the County's traffic engineers explained the temporary nature of the Bond Road overcrossing design along with the temporary nature of the Bond Road/East Stockton intersection while it was first being built. When I queried the current City staff about going back and finishing the overcrossing

design and the intersection, I was told that I had to produce the actual minutes of the meeting or gather statements and notes from those meetings that occurred in the nineties. These City folks stated that they could not act on my information. I disagree. The overcrossing and the intersection are the MOST ugly in town with asphalt medians and poor designs. We were promised to have a decent intersection along with overcrossing/street median beautification once the final parcel along Bond Road got built out. That parcel is now built out with Toys R Us and Islands Burgers. I would like to see the City take action and work to improve the design and aesthetics of the overcrossing and intersection. The current design of the overcrossing doesn't include premium lighting, quality striping for bike lanes and if one is traveling east bound over the freeway, the lanes suddenly shift from 3 lanes to 2 in a poorly constructed merge.

There is ample room to deal with other options to avoid that merge and to get rid of the ugly yellow poles along Bond Road near East Stockton that separate the left turn lanes from oncoming traffic. Again, we were supposed to get a total redesign of that intersection, and I recommend that it get on the books.

In addition, I've asked that Bond Road get resurfaced with rubberized asphalt, but again the City PW staff told me it would be nearly impossible to include that task in a plan. If I'm not mistaken, the Bond Road widening project was supposed to include a complete resurfacing of Bond Road from Hiway 99 to Waterman. The noise pollution has increased exponentially over the past 10 years in my neighborhood (north of Bond road) from the exponential increase in traffic along a poorly surfaced Bond Road.

Service delivery? I'm not happy with what we've been offered and I sure hope that this meeting can identify some of the City's needs and begin the process of resolving service delivery shortcomings.

My note would not be complete without giving kudos to some outstanding staff within the contracted firms - Gary Grunwald, Senior Engineer, happens to be very effective in working on projects as well as John Smoley in the Planning department. Keeping these staff would be a top priority!!!! I fully believe that the City should have a core staff of City employees in all departments with the ability to contract for services as needed so that we don't end up with an abundance of City employees when service needs decline. City staff can be used to manage contracts AND provide core service directly.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts in a non-threatening environment. Keep up the good work and I look forward to watching us make positive changes.

Email 2

➤ To all,

I too would like to echo Ms. Anderson's concerns about the lack of forethought seemingly missing on the projects mentioned. It would appear that, in several cases, the Council set certain guidelines for completion and then, the contractors, and/or the owners went ahead and "modified" the Council's wishes without the Council's knowledge. The Bell South development appears to be just such an example.

I see that we are soon to be overtaken by yet another project spearheaded by the County sewer department. I'm referring to the so-called "Interceptor" project that will run through our

community. As we all know, this was a MAJOR issue some years ago. There can be no question that this city will be disrupted by the project, once it begins.

I can only hope that the City monitors this project carefully and mitigates the disruption to neighborhoods, traffic, etc. Is Sheldon Road going to be the focus of attention for this project? What fun it will be to try to maneuver this thoroughfare especially if the Sheldon overpass @ 99 is being widened at the same time!

Infrastructure is one of the main areas that the city can control. I truly hope that the city continues to seek the input of the community, especially those neighborhoods that are directly affected by road projects.

Addendum 2
Elk Grove Contract Services
March 26, 2007 Public Workshop
Questionnaire Results

The following includes the answers to a brief questionnaire that was distributed to meeting attendees as they entered the city council chambers. The questionnaire responses, along with the flip chart notes, were used to develop a recap of themes from the workshop.

Name

Angee Wangsgard
Ardie Zahedani
Beverly Adams
Bill Fargo
Bill Reeves
C. Kerwin
Connie Conley
Dave Kalemba
Doug Keith
Francis Adams
George Murphy
Howard Shiner
Jason Daniel
June Coats
Karl Ortiz
Kathy Lee
Ken Allred
Leo Fassler
Linda Ford
Pat Sandefur
Russell Shields
Sarah Johnson
Scott (no last name given)
Sharon Lynes
Shirley Peters
Ted Oien
Tom Shine

Occupation

12 retired persons (some listed former professions including PG&E, farmer, engineer tech, teacher)
2 homemakers
Lobbyist
Jackson Construction
Librarian

Association Executive
 Home Builder
 Manager
 General Contractor
 Law Enforcement for Sac Co.
 Civil Engineer
 Self-employed
 Librarian

Years Lived in City		Number of Times Coordinated with City	
Less than 7:	3	1 – 2:	3
Between 7 – 15:	10	3 – 5:	6
Over 15:	8	6 – 10:	2
		More than 10:	12

Community Groups Associated With

- Sheldon Community Association (7)
- Greater Sheldon Road Estates Homeowners Association (3)
- Fallbrook Neighborhood Association (3)
- Elk Grove Coalition Advocating Proper Planning (EGCAPP) (3)
- Old Town Elk Grove Association (2)
- Laguna Creek Watershed Council (2)
- Elk Grove Community Connection (2)
- Elk Grove High School Baseball Boosters
- North State Building Industry Association
- Chamber of Commerce
- BIA Coordinator with City
- Elk Grove Historical Society
- Marine Corps League
- Quail Ranch Estates Association
- SCCRG

Purpose for Coordinating with Public Works, Building or Planning

- Sewer drainage zoning code
- Planning projects road fees, connector, etc.
- General plan
- Zoning code
- Road and planning issues
- Wal-Mart/High Density House
- Building permit
- Road standards
- Speed limits

- Several neighborhood projects – housing development and commercial building projects
- Rural roads standards
- Neighborhood association issues
- Bond Road, landscaping, traffic
- General plan, zoning, fees, process associated w/ business development and shelter provision
- Planning for the city
- Community work
- Build barn-propane tank
- Bond Road improvements, Sheldon Road
- Road issues and building permit
- Advocacy
- House additions
- Street signs, street repairs
- Planning department review plans
- Land development and entitlements
- Rural area concerns/road policies
- Zoning code
- Property damage
- Library building
- Building/land development
- To build or repair residential homes

Experience During Contact

- Not too favorable with some, slow and delay in getting info
- Varied – excellent to unsatisfactory
- Very good
- Poor to excellent
- Not too professional – sent from one counter to another
- PW seemed sufficient, but not going above and beyond
- Not really interested in my view
- Various
- Ranges from poor to good
- Good!
- Bad!!
- Contract employees were changed too often and had to start all over
- Not too favorable
- Positive
- Good
- Generally positive
- Decisions were made before public had any input

- Ranging from good to unsatisfactory
- Bad
- All city folks have been fantastic, great people
- Generally reachable
- Frustrating trying to understand what was exactly required when working on projects

What Services Have Worked Well

- Meeting with developers ahead of process on one project
- Zoning code workshops
- Rural road standards workshops
- Public works
- Public works willingness to attend neighborhood meetings
- Returned call in same day
- Very few
- Having contact list developed over many years so I know who can actually accomplish something
- Meeting since Danielson was hired to be in charge of public works
- Inspectors
- Building permit
- Planning/review
- Street works
- Parks, one on one meeting on specific topics
- Responses to phone calls have been prompt
- Planners are very helpful
- Majority of the time have been treated respectfully

Suggested Improvements

- Hire OWN people and eliminate contract employees
- Department directors should be city employees
- Directors must be city employees
- More coordination between planner and various city departments
- Planning department does not usually return phone calls in timely manner
- Citizens need to be notified early on, especially regarding development
- For the departments to talk to each other
- City staff directly employed; drop most of the contract service providers
- Communicate more with the public
- Need to keep same people to enhance collective history
- Better coordination between departments
- Hire more city employees as permanent staff; contract for special projects but have them report to city staff
- Get rid of staff and develop user friendly system

- Communication on development
- Cross reference planning review projects to building permits
- Continued increase in communication among departments
- Stay with the land use general plan
- City employees
- To organize and streamline the permit issues and structure fees appropriately

Other Items to Consider as it Develops the Business Services Review

- Include public as much as possible where appropriate
- Are we getting the best our dollars can buy
- Contractors report to staff-held lead positions
- A citizens advisory group, perhaps under the umbrella of planning
- All three groups need training to educate employees about customer service and how residents can be a resource instead of a thorn in the side
- Listen to the people who live in the city
- Management to be city employees
- Cost of city service to its citizens and business community
- Public input
- Consider hiring some level of permanent staff
- Be more transparent in its proceedings
- Additional street surface, drainage, lighting surveillance – catch problems before citizen reports
- Keep rural region of Elk Grove intact
- Include industry in the city in a well thought out plan
- Define and clearly track where monies are dispersed