

To: Mayor and Ross Town Council
From: Gary Broad, Town Manager, and Christine O'Rourke, Project Planner
Re: Ross Advisory Design Review (RADR)
Date: July 12, 2007

I. Project Summary

Town Council consideration of the framework for Ross Advisory Design Review (RADR) as recommended in the new Town of Ross General Plan 2007-2025.

II. Background

The new Town of Ross General Plan 2007-2025 includes Program 3.A, "Establish Ross Advisory Design Review (RADR)" and directs the Town to "develop a process for incorporating design review of development proposals utilizing an advisory group of local volunteer design professionals to provide technical assistance to staff."

The Town Council also adopted as one of its five goals for this fiscal year to "establish the Ross Advisory Design Review program." Staff has accordingly been working with Council member Durst who is shepherding this goal on RADR implementation.

Staff provides this report to solicit Council and public feedback on our first take at a process for RADR review.

III. Existing Design Review Process

The municipal code does not provide for a process to resolve design issues and neighbor conflicts before the planning application is reviewed by the Town Council. As a result, conflicts are sometimes aired during the public hearing and in a setting that is not conducive to dialogue or pro-active problem-solving. Staff has attempted to rectify this problem by instituting some application review protocols.

Presently, applicants are encouraged to meet with staff early in the design process to discuss zoning regulations and general plan policies pertinent to the property and to receive information on design review. Approximately 90% of applications for large projects receive some sort of pre-planning consultation. During this initial meeting, applicants are advised to discuss the proposed project with neighbors and to address their neighbors' concerns in the project's initial design.

Applicants are required to provide proof of neighbor acknowledgement ten days prior to the Council meeting. Applications that have unresolved design issues are usually continued, and it can take several public hearings before a mutually acceptable design is approved. In the process, applications can be stymied for several months, staff is burdened with the preparation of multiple staff reports, and neighbor conflicts can become so acute that they leave a lasting impression on the neighborhood.

IV. A New Design Review Paradigm

In order to address the deficiencies in the current design review process, the general plan proposes the establishment of an independent design review committee that reviews applications early in the design process and provides advisory recommendations to the Town Council. The goal of RADR is to achieve design excellence, while providing a forum for the property owner, design professionals, neighbors and town staff to exchange information, identify issues, and whenever possible, work through mutually agreeable solutions. Staff views RADR as an opportunity to create a collaborative design review process, which not only provides design excellence, but allows residents to work together and create community through mutually resolving issues.

As conceived, RADR will provide applicants with design advice in a forum that relies upon neighbor input and feedback, professional design suggestions, and collaborative problem-solving. RADR is intended to produce better quality design and a smoother, more efficient, and less stressful design review process.

V. An Outline of the RADR Process

Staff has given much thought to how the RADR process could work. Summarized below are some of our initial approaches to the organization of RADR:

Organization:

- A town resident, perhaps a former Council member, could serve as RADR administrator to handle committee coordination, such as assigning RADR members to projects, and not to serve as a design member.
- RADR committee's design professional members could include up to 6 residents with design backgrounds, who are not working professionally in the community during their RADR term, appointed by the Council to a 2-year term.
- RADR committee could include up to 3 other residents of the community, appointed by the Council to a 2-year term.
- Three RADR members could be assigned to each project along with a staff planner. It would be feasible to have two RADR hearings conducted simultaneously if necessary based on the number of applications. The committee and its members would have to comply with the Brown Act.
- RADR applications and material would be due in the planning department one month prior to the Council meeting (same as for all Council applications.)
- RADR hearings would be held at Town Hall on the Tuesday two weeks before the Council meeting (16 days prior.) This would allow an application to go through RADR review AND still be heard at the Council meeting if no significant unresolved issues exist.

- Applicants would be required to notify neighbors of the application and RADR hearing date. The Town would notify all residents on our Information by Email list of all projects being considered at each RADR hearing.
- RADR hearings would be collaborative. Applicants would be allowed to explain the project, neighbors allowed to articulate concerns, and RADR members and town staff able to provide input and suggestions to applicant.
- A standardized form would be completed by staff focusing on articulated project concerns, recommendations and changes or conditions agreed to by the applicant. These meeting minutes would be appended to the staff report.
- Council would receive meeting minutes and could consider input from the meeting, but would have authority to make its own decision regardless of the RADR hearing outcome.
- RADR items could include preliminary applications, projects submitted for Council review and landscape projects. Staff could exempt minor projects from RADR review.
- A RADR fee of \$250 would be collected, however, this amount would be credited toward the cost of any application filed for Council review.

III. Recommendation

The above framework is intended to give the Council a very basic idea of the type of RADR approach being considered. Staff recommends that Council give any input it may have on this first take for a possible RADR process.