

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: February 16, 2010
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Authorize Professional Services Contract with DMH Land Use Planning for Planning Services

REPORT BY: Ann Chaney, Community Development Director

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize the City Administrator to enter into a contract with DMH Planning to augment the City's planning staff by working on larger scale development projects on an as-needed basis. Compensation to DMH would be paid through the receipt of specific project application fees.

BACKGROUND

In late 2009 Albany's Associate Planner, Amber Curl, resigned to pursue a new career. Due to budget uncertainties for 2010-11, this position is not being filled at this time. As a result Planning and Building Manager, Jeff Bond, is currently reviewing and processing all planning applications through the Planning & Zoning Commission. In addition to home additions, small commercial projects, use permits, sign permits, etc., the City is currently processing applications for several larger projects (e.g., University Village commercial/senior housing, Safeway, Saint Mary's High School Master Plan). These projects are more complex because they typically require expanded environmental analyses, and generate greater public comment.

DISCUSSION

The action being recommended is to enter into a contract with Diane Henderson (DMH Planning) to work on these larger planning applications on an as-needed basis. Similar action has been taken by Council in the past with the hiring of Ed Phillips to update the Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Henderson is the sole owner of DMH Land Use Planning, and has extensive experience in the planning field. She has worked for a number of cities, has served as Planning Director, Interim Director of Planning and Building, and Interim Community Development Director for a number of cities. In 1990 she formed her own consulting firm. As a consultant, she has primarily been hired by local governments to work on complex projects such as a 14-dealership auto center and a large retail/commercial/and hotel project in the City of Salinas; a 424 unit residential project in the City of Novato; a senior housing project in the City of Pinole, and

another at Larkspur Landing Circle; and redevelopment of the former sanitary district facility in the City of Larkspur to include a new city corporation yard, a 100-room hotel and 126 unit multi-family residential project.

Current Albany staffing levels do not allow sufficient staff time to properly address and process the current level of applications. Without additional staffing, potential consequences are likely to include substantial lag times in the approval process, and cursory reviews that could result in oversights of important issues or requirements. This can lead to frustration and possible legal challenges by project opponents or proponents. Applicants, the general public, as well as decision-makers, deserve a fair and thorough review and analysis of development projects. The experience that Diane Henderson brings would help maintain the City's commitment to good customer service.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Contracting with DMH Planning will not significantly contribute to carbon emissions or other aspects of climate change, in that much of her work can be performed at Ms. Henderson's office in San Rafael. Travel to Albany will be necessary however, in order to conduct site visits and attend meetings. During the review of any application, potential environmental impacts are evaluated and conditions imposed where appropriate to mitigate such impacts.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

No costs to the City would be incurred by hiring DMH Planning. For larger projects, the City would enter into an agreement with the applicant to reimburse the City for work performed by DMH Planning. Thus, the cost of hiring DMH would be paid indirectly and fully by the project applicant.