

PRE-APPLICATION SERVICES



County of Santa Cruz
PLANNING DEPARTMENT
www.sccoplanning.com
(831) 454-2580

Introduction

The Planning Department's website (www.sccoplanning.com) is the initial point of contact for information regarding land use and permits. Should you have additional questions after reviewing that information, staff at our Zoning and Building counters can help you. There are instances when counter staff will advise you to apply for a more detailed review. Depending on the type of information you require, they may suggest one or more of the following.

Project Planning Consultation

Consultations are an opportunity to discuss your particular project with a planner before investing in detailed plans or a formal Discretionary or Building application. You may request a consultation to answer a specific question or to evaluate the general feasibility of a project. Early information on the feasibility of a project prior to an investment in complete architectural or engineered plans or the purchase of property, allows for early prob-

lem solving and the avoidance of delays. Consultations provide planning-related feedback only and are not routed to other agencies.

Development Review Group (DRG)

The DRG is similar to a consultation except that in addition to the project planner, other agencies such as Public Works, Fire and Environmental Planning review the project. DRGs are appropriate for more complicated projects such as subdivisions and large commercial projects.

Once you submit your plan sets (and any other materials you want reviewed), they will be routed to the same agencies that would review the project in an actual permit application. Your project planner, in consultation with you, will then schedule a meeting at which the reviewers will present their feedback to you.

Having the reviewers at the meeting is an excellent opportunity for you to ask questions and develop solutions. If a reviewer cannot attend the meeting, they will provide written comments.

Pre-development Site Review (PDSR)

A PDSR is a useful tool for property owners, potential buyers, and others that are interested in the site standards, constraints, and

permit/technical requirements of a given parcel prior to investing in project plans and engineering studies. The PDSR has three parts.

Part 1 is completed by a planner using in-house resources to provide specific parcel information such as site development standards (setbacks, height limits, lot coverage, etc.), basic access and parcel legality review, and whether a discretionary permit such as a Coastal or Residential Permit may be required.

Part 2 is completed by a resource planner who performs a site visit and evaluates the proposed building site and access road relative to environmental constraints, geologic hazards, the presence of protected areas (e.g. riparian corridors), and protected plants and animals. The PDSR will list what reports (e.g. soils or biotic reports) may be required. A Geologic Hazards Assessment, not a PDSR, should be applied for to determine if a geologic report will be required.

Part 3 of the PDSR report is a list of the next steps to be taken to prepare for a building or discretionary permit submittal.

Geologic Hazards Assessment (GHA)

A GHA may be required for any construction, grading or land division located in an area

where a potential hazard has been identified such as an earthquake fault zone, flood plain or steep/unstable slopes. When submitting a GHA application, you must provide at least:

- (1) A site/topographic plan indicating the proposed development, all access ways to buildings, and the septic location(s);
- (2) Any soils or geologic reports that may have been prepared for the site, even if it is outdated; and
- (3) Any preliminary building plans.

County staff will then visit the site, review hazards maps and any other relevant information, and write an evaluation of the site conditions and any permit requirements necessary to ensure that the development will be safe, including if a soils or geology report will be required.

Recommendations and requirements are site-specific and can include such things as modifying the project location, elevating the structure, or filing a declaration of geologic hazards with the County Recorder.

Riparian Site Review

When planning a new development near a year-round or seasonal stream or body of water, it may be helpful to apply for a preliminary riparian site inspection (riparian pre-site). Riparian areas and other bodies of water provide floodwater storage, water quality benefits, fish and wildlife habitat and open space.

Once you apply, a resource planner will review your application and s/he may contact you to discuss the review if there are any questions about the property or project proposal. S/he will then perform the field investigation and send you a letter summarizing the results. The letter you receive will include a delineation of the riparian corridor and, if applicable, the associated buffer. This information will help you locate your project and avoid disturbing sensitive areas.

The riparian corridor may not be developed or disturbed unless specific “findings” for a Riparian Exception can be made. If you have a site plan, or there are other constraints on your property (e.g. steep slopes, limited access), the letter will also include a preliminary opinion about whether the necessary “findings” can be made to allow encroachment into the riparian corridor and/or buffer.

Biotic Site Review

There are a number of sensitive habitats in Santa Cruz County that are legally protected, such as areas that support threatened or endangered species. A Biotic Site Review is a service provided by a resource planner to help you determine whether a sensitive habitat exists on a parcel, and if so, how to avoid or minimize impacts to the habitat. It is best to have a review done before

developing your site plan, so that you can use the information from the Biotic Site Review to design your project. But, if you already have a conceptual site plan, submit a copy when you apply for the Biotic Site Review.

Once you apply, a resource planner may contact you to discuss the review if s/he has any questions about the property or project proposal. S/he will then perform the field investigation and send you a letter summarizing the results. In some cases, the resource planner may recommend further evaluation by a qualified expert. Identifying sensitive habitat early in the planning process is beneficial because it allows applicants to site and design their projects appropriately, before incurring the expense of plan preparation.

Other Resources

www.sccoplanning.com: In addition to information about permit requirements, our website provides links to the County Code and General Plan; brochures on a range of building, environmental, historic and policy topics; a link to our Geographic Information System (GIS), and much more.

The County’s GIS provides information on zoning, General Plan designation, mapped resources such as riparian corridors and hazards such as steep slopes and fault zones.