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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Supervisors Vote to Establish a Third-party Plan Check Program

June 27th, 2023 - The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors voted to establish a Third-party Plan Check (TPC) program that will give permit seekers the option to get their plans reviewed primarily by a consultant they hire, rather than county staff.

The program proposed by Supervisors Manu Koenig and Bruce McPherson aims to address the long wait time for permits at the County Planning Division today. As of June 6th, 2023, the average processing time was 107 days for a remodel permit and 197 days for an ADU permit.

The wait is in large part due to a shortage of planning staff. Key positions like Planning Technician, Planner III, and Senior Building Plans Checker currently sit vacant. The extremely high cost of housing in the area makes it just as hard for county government to recruit workers as any other business. The result is a housing Catch-22: staff shortages slow down the permitting of new housing, while the housing shortage hinders staff recruitment.

“Third-party Plan Check will bring more resources to the table and speed up approval of new housing,” said Supervisor Koenig. “We’re the least affordable rental market in the whole country, which means we have a moral imperative to speed up permitting of new homes. This program will increase public and private sector collaboration to address our community’s greatest need.”

Supervisor Bruce McPherson stated, “a successful Third-party Plan Check program will enhance efficiency, support Planning staff, and alleviate the County’s permitting backlog.”

The proposal is modeled on Marin County’s Third-party Plan Check program, which facilitates many pre-permit clearance and plan review processes for less complex permits like remodels. On average, Marin County sees 350 permit applicants per year take advantage of the third-party option. This equates to roughly 30% of all eligible permit applications. Marin’s Chief Building Inspector credits their program with significantly reducing their remodel permit processing times and increasing customer satisfaction.

The Community Development and Infrastructure Department (CDID), which includes the Planning Division, will have 90 days to develop the program, including an application form, an approved list of Third-party Service Providers, and any necessary amendments to the County Code and Unified Fee Schedule. Once launched, all eligible permit applicants will be notified of their right to utilize independent plan-check services.

For more information about the Third-party Plan Check program, please contact Manu Koenig at Manu.Koenig@SantaCruzCounty.us or call 831-454-2200.