

July 8, 2005

The Honorable Judge Anderson
Superior Court
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report: "An Ounce of Prevention"

Dear Judge Anderson:

In response to the grand Jury Report entitled "An Ounce of Prevention," the City of Buellton provides the following comments:

Finding 1

Mission statements, when available, were often outdated and did not list customer satisfaction as a primary goal.

Recommendation 1

Planning Departments should have mission statements specific to their department. These mission statements should have customer satisfaction as a primary goal.

Response to Finding and Recommendation

The City agrees that planning departments should have mission statements specific to their department. The City is of the opinion, however, that the public health, safety and welfare and effective public service for the benefit of the general public are the primary goals and that customer satisfaction is a subordinate goal.

Finding 2

Planning departments did not have basic customer satisfaction procedures in place.

Recommendation 2

To increase customer satisfaction, each planning department should publicly post the agency's mission statement; post timelines and mitigating factors, provide easy access to all relevant forms with adequate explanations as to their use, post a list of key personnel involved in completing an application, and clearly define the complaint process. In addition, handouts should be provided to each customer explaining the application and complaint process.

Response to Finding and Recommendation

It is difficult for the City to understand how the posting of a mission statement leads to customer satisfaction. It is also our opinion that posting timelines may be too confusing and too voluminous due to the complexity of the planning process. In order for the City to comply with the Grand Jury's recommendation, however, we will publicly post the Planning Department's mission statement in a conspicuous location. Applications are processed according to time lines set forth in the City's Municipal Code and as required by state law. The City's Municipal Code is available on the City's website. All relevant forms with explanations as to their use are available on the website as well as being available at the Planning Department. Key personnel and their roles are identified on the website and a list of the Department personnel and their positions are posted in the Planning Department. The complaint process is also posted on the website and posted in the Department and complaint forms and related information are conveniently available for public use.

Finding 3

Notification of changes to land and property use in most jurisdictions was limited to mandated State *minimum* requirements to owners only, and within 300 feet from the borders of the property site.

Recommendation 3

Notification of land use changes should include the owner *and occupants* within at least 500 feet of the border of the property site.

Response to Finding and Recommendation

Notification requirements are implemented according to state law. Without this uniform process, there would be a lack of consistency from city to city and county to county, especially regarding the 500 feet notification recommendation. This leads to potential confusion for out of city or county persons and possible legal challenge. Additional noticing is also a cost that would be passed on to the customer, who may be less satisfied as a result.

Finding 4

The complaint process in most jurisdictions was not designed for quantifiable analysis and could not be used to find strong and weak points in the planning process.

Recommendation 4

Planning agencies should track all complaints and conduct random quantifiable surveys of 10% of the customers who have used their services (*See Appendix A for an example of a possible customer satisfaction survey*). Agencies should use the results of these surveys to make the planning process more customer friendly. The results should also be added on a quarterly basis to the department website for public viewing (*See Appendix B for an example of how to display the results of the customer satisfaction surveys*).

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Response to Finding and Recommendation

It appears that the Grand Jury's research was oriented to cities larger than Buellton with far different populations and needs. We agree that complaints should be tracked and a follow-up procedure should be in place but with a very small staff it is unrealistic to afford the necessary time to conduct random quantifiable surveys of customers who use our services. In addition, because of the size and limited staff some aspects of the planning process are contracted to other public or private agencies, thereby further complicating the process of determining customer satisfaction. I can assure the Grand Jury that customers of the City of Buellton who are not happy with the services provided have almost immediate availability to the Planning Director or City Manager, thereby negating the need for surveys and survey results.

The City appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury Report.

Sincerely,

Steven L. Thompson
City Manager

cc: Foreperson, Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Buellton City Council