CITY OF WHEATLAND

CITY COUNCIL MEETING
STAFF REPORT

SEPTEMBER 10, 2019

SUBJECT: Wheatland City Council discussion on the potential suspension of the Wheatland Planning Commission.

PREPARED BY: Tim Raney, Community Development Director

Recommendation

The City of Wheatland staff requests the City Council discuss and provide direction on the potential suspension of the Wheatland Planning Commission and the appointment of the City Council to serve as the city's Planning Agency.

Discussion and Background

The City of Wheatland has maintained a Planning Commission for a significant number of years in order to review land use and design related issues in the city. For program and policy related items, such as general plan and zoning amendments, the Planning Commission has served in a review capacity making recommendations to the City Council. For other planning requests, such as conditional use permits and architectural and design review, the Planning Commission has served as the final authority. The purpose of the Wheatland Planning Commission is identified in Municipal Code Section 2.20.020, which states: "A planning commission for the city is established to promote and insure the comprehensive and adequate planning of the city." It should also be noted that the Wheatland Municipal Code Section 2.20.050 states that all members of the planning commission serve at the pleasure of the City Council and may be removed from office without cause at any time by a majority vote of the City Council.

In the past, during active development periods, the Wheatland Planning Commission has played a vital role in the processing of new development applications in the city. When the city has experienced significant volumes of planning applications, the Planning Commission has provided a relief to the City Council workload. In addition, the Planning Commission has provided another opportunity for the public to provide input into the planning approval process.

The current Planning Commission members have been dedicated to their roles and have provided a valuable service to the City of Wheatland. The City of Wheatland, however, has struggled to keep the five seats of the Planning Commission filled over the past several years. This has caused some issues in achieving a quorum on regular Planning Commission dates

and puts additional pressure on the current Planning Commission members to attend all Planning Commission meetings.

In addition, due to the economic downtown over the past decade, the City of Wheatland has experienced a significant reduction in the number of planning related applications to the City. This slowdown has resulted in a fewer number of agenda items that require a determination from the City's Planning Commission. Therefore, the City of Wheatland has cancelled more than half of the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meetings due to a lack of agenda items. This provides a struggle for the Planning Commissioners as they have two scheduled meetings each month that often do not occur, but must keep their calendars free. The lack of meetings also reduces the opportunities of the commissioners to improve their skills and understanding of planning issues related to the City of Wheatland.

Whether the Planning Commission meetings are scheduled or canceled, the management and operation of the Planning Commission continues to require staff time and costs. The City must maintain the Planning Commission schedule, public notices, agendas, meeting cancellation notices, and required State of California filings. Most of these tasks would be eliminated with the City Council serving as the City's official planning agency.

As an example, for an agenda item seeking a recommendation from the Planning Commission to the City Council on a proposed Development Agreement, city staff must complete the following tasks at a minimum. Each identified task below also provides in parenthesis the appropriate city staff members required to complete the task.

1) Prepare and publish a public hearing notice (staff: Clerk, Planner)
2) Contact commissioners to ensure availability of a quorum (staff: Clerk)
3) Prepare and publish a meeting agenda (staff: Clerk)
4) Prepare, review, edit, and publish a staff report (staff: City Manager, City Attorney, Planner, Clerk)
5) Address questions from applicant, public, and commissioners prior to public hearing (staff: City Manager, City Attorney, Planner, Clerk)
6) Set up, attend, record the public hearing and provide staff report to the commissioners (staff: Clerk, Planner)
7) Prepare meeting minutes and formally file the Planning Commission resolution (staff: Clerk)

These staff efforts for a single agenda item can cost the city up to 40 hours of staff time. If the Planning Commission was to be suspended, these staff hours could be reallocated to other required duties. In addition, for items that require a City Council hearing for final action, the elimination of the duplicative staff efforts would save project applicants significant time and money.

Fiscal Impact

As a direct cost savings, each Planning Commission member currently receives a stipend of $50 per month, which is allowed by the Wheatland Municipal Code (Section 2.20.090: Each member of the Planning Commission shall be paid a salary in the amount of fifty dollars per month). The suspension of this stipend will save the City of Wheatland up to $3,000 per year.

The City of Wheatland may experience some minor additional cost savings due to reduced staff and consultant time dedicated to the Planning Commission. If the City Council were to serve as the city's Planning Agency, then any items requiring a planning recommendation would be completed in a single action by the City Council. However, the City Council may experience additional agenda items to handle any planning actions that the Planning Commission would have made the final determination. More important than a direct fiscal benefit, city staff time would be reallocated and more efficiently used as more time may be available to work on other necessary city business.

Attachments

None.