



MEMORANDUM

TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY

TO: Mayor and Members of the Town Council

FROM: Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager

DATE: February 15, 2006

RE: Green Building Practices

Recently Carol Borck, Tom Vlasic and Leslie Lambert met with Mayor Toben to discuss ways to encourage homeowners, architects and builders to incorporate green design features in their projects. Mayor Toben is very interested in the Town promoting more green building into design and development of residential, commercial and town projects, as well as green policies as they relate to procurement practices for the Town.

Background

In March 2004 a presentation was made to the Town Council, Planning Commission and ASCC on the San Mateo Countywide Guide for Sustainable Buildings. The information provided was to encourage a discussion with the Council, Commissions and staff regarding the adoption of an ordinance or policy at a jurisdictional level to encourage green building practices in design of private, commercial and municipal buildings. The Council and Commissions were provided copies of the 2004 San Mateo Countywide Sustainable Buildings Guidelines and Checklist for review and discussion.

As a result of this joint meeting, staff has provided architects and homeowners with copies of the Guidelines and Checklist for their review and use. Staff requests that the architects and homeowners begin to use the guideline and checklist and that they complete the checklist as part of the submittal on applications that require ASCC and Planning Commission review. This has been a submittal requirement since June 2004. This was an important first step for the Town to take and now it is time to analyze the experience we have had with the green design checklist.

The next steps in moving green building practices forward would include an analysis of how architects and homeowners have responded to the checklist, what aspects of the checklist have been taken into consideration with their design and what aspects have actually been undertaken. Since starting this program, we have received 52 completed checklists, staff should make contact with the architects, homeowners and contractors on their general reaction to the program. We could find out what was incorporated into their projects and what their experience was with the materials, use and costs associated with implementing the products into their completed projects.

Another way to encourage more outreach on green building practices, is to further the communication between architects, homeowners and ASCC. Mayor Toben and staff have discussed the possibility of adding a green design discussion to all staff reports for the ASCC, based on the applicant's responses to the checklist. Staff is supportive of incorporating this new feature into the ASCC staff reports. This would provide the ASCC with an opportunity to ask questions about green design and have a dialogue with the architect and homeowner.

In addition to including this new feature into the ASCC reports, staff will involve the architect and homeowner in discussions early on in their design stages. Carol Borck has a continuing series of green building articles available at Town Hall and on the Town's Website. Carol has also completed the attached draft pamphlet "Planning your project with green in mind." Staff will engage the architects and homeowners in discussion on green building at pre-application meetings, application review, the incorporation of the green feature into the ASCC staff reports, at preconstruction meetings and building permit review and during construction. An important message will be delivered to local architects, homeowners and builders that the Town is committed to sustainable development by promoting the use of green building products.

The Conservation Committee can also provide their perspective on application reviews and provide appropriate input and comments to assist the ASCC during the course of project review.

At their February 13th meeting, the ASCC considered the tracking of green building plans and incorporation of the feature into the ASCC staff reports. All ASCC members were supportive of including a review of green building proposals as part of the staff report/review of projects. It was understood this was for the purposes of encouraging consideration of green building practices and not to mandate them. ASCC members were generally excited about the opportunity to use the architectural review process to begin a dialogue with applicants on green building possibilities and then tracking projects to see which green building elements were actually implemented.

Below is a summary of the comments from the ASCC members:

- Commissioner Warr offered caution that in some cases building codes that are used locally actually include provisions that make some desirable green building practices difficult to pursue. It was noted that one result of the "tracking" and "dialogue" might be Town identification of code modifications that should be considered to facilitate broader application of green building opportunities.
- Commissioner Warr noted some green building elements or objectives may actually conflict with other Town design or aesthetic goals. Some examples cited include significant removal or trimming of trees to obtain maximum solar access for panels, mounting solar panels on a highly visible slope, or canting them on a highly visible flat roof.

- Commissioner Warr also commented that the most effective “incentives” for green building would, however, likely be economic. These could include competitive prices for green building materials, quicker time frame for payback associated with any added cost, reductions in local building fees for “green” projects.
- Commissioner Gelpi noted that many very effective green building elements may not be as “big” or “visible” as, for example, a large array of photovoltaic panels, but should be encouraged because of their cumulative, long term benefits.

ASCC members agreed that by providing for the suggested dialogue much can be gained and learned both by applicants and the Town; and, in the long run, this knowledge could be significant in taking future actions to encouraging sustainable construction practices.

ASCC members also offered praise for the Town’s Planning Department efforts to share the San Mateo County sustainable checklist with all applicants and, particularly, for Carol Borck’s efforts to develop effective handouts on specific sustainable building opportunities.

On March 1st, staff will be attending a Countywide Green Building Committee meeting to address items that will be of interest to the Town as we continue to move further into the green design. The discussion will include new regional residential guidelines and a point system, and exploring how to incorporate this into the program that we currently have. The meeting will include input on what is needed within the county to encourage or support green building efforts.

At this time, the Town is a leader in promoting and encouraging the use of green design, by providing the guidelines and checklists to architects and applicants. Other jurisdictions in the County do not provide incentives, fast tracking, or reduction of fees. As we pursue this program, staff will work closely with the ASCC and Town Council on direction in these areas.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this program.

Approved: _____
Angela Howard, Town Administrator

Attachments: Sustainable Buildings Checklist
Sustainable Building in Portola Valley – Planning your project with green in mind

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING NO. 688 FEBRUARY 22, 2006

ROLL CALL

Mayor Toben called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Howard called the roll:

Present: Councilmembers Davis, Driscoll and Merk, and Mayor Toben
Absent: Councilmember Derwin
Others: Town Administrator Howard, Town Attorney Sloan, Planning Manager Lambert and Deputy Clerk Hanlon

REGULAR AGENDA

COUNCIL, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(6) Green Building Practices

Ms. Lambert reviewed her memo of 2/15/06 on the green building program in Town, including ASCC comments on green building practices. She added that Carol Borck had been doing an excellent job in putting together handouts and writing articles for the website.

Mayor Toben said a modest move forward at this point was to create a new section in the staff reports that would cite the measures that the applicant intended to incorporate in the project and provide for some follow-up by the Building Official to see what had been done. He noted that the ASCC members he spoke with were enthusiastic about the prospect of incorporating more green building practices in projects.

Councilmember Merk said all five ASCC members were in support of a green building program. With respect to changing local building codes, he felt there were a lot of things that could be looked into. Additionally, on the 52 projects that had filled out the checklist, he questioned whether there was enough staff time to go back to these people and see what had been incorporated in the projects, costs associated with implementing green practices, etc. Ms. Lambert agreed it would take some time to gather the information, but the planning staff was excited about participating. She said a form letter might also be sent to the architects/owners asking about their experiences. There would also be follow up conversations. She did not feel it would be too burdensome.

Council thanked the planning staff for their efforts in the green building program.

