

Comp plan gets state OK

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

It's been more than three years since the city of Venice has been in compliance with a 1985 state mandate to have an approved comprehensive plan.

This week the city received the long awaited news — it's back in compliance. The plan, which sets height and density in the city, among other things, was approved by the Department of Community Affairs on Wednesday.

Technically, the DCA issued a notice of intent to find that the "remedial comp plan amendment" adopted Oct. 26 does meet statutory requirements. Any affected person may file a petition to challenge the plan with the agency within 21 days, or before Dec. 22.

A plan was nearly approved by city council in 2007, but council held off adopting a final plan due to public sentiment over height limits. City council spent more than 50 workshops and meetings over the next three years revising the plan.

Under former Mayor Ed Martin, council lowered densities and put a height limit in place.

Already, under new Mayor John Holic, some council members are calling for changes to the plan. Council can make amendments twice yearly to the plan.

Holic and council members Bob Daniels and Jeanette Gates — all elected in November — were the most vocal about scaling back the 70 studies called for in the plan.

More than \$500,000 was budgeted this year alone for consultants to help implement the plan by revising the city's land-development regulations, and for the studies. Revising the LDRs is a daunting task that council members expect will consume a huge chunk of their time.

The plan, revised every seven years, is essentially a blueprint for future growth and development in the city over the next 25 years. A key element is preserving the character of the community through design, architecture, master planning and building standards reflected in John Nolen's original 1926 plan for the city.

New this year was the meshing of smart-growth principles into the plan, which include focusing future growth toward existing development, or "infill"; promoting green building practices; promoting alternative transportation methods and pedestrian connectivity; and minimizing impacts on the environment.

The plan underwent a complete overhaul, drawing citizens into the discussion over how much development they want in the city, and how to control it.

When the plan was revised for the last time and sent back to DCA for a compliance review, the agency said it encouraged urban sprawl. The city wouldn't back down from the low densities it set for some areas in North Venice, especially the areas identified for future annexations currently under county control.

A compromise was ironed out, with the city agreeing to withdraw those areas from future annexation.