

Plan emerges to eliminate city boards

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

The Environmental Task Force and Public Arts Task Force are among those city staff are recommending be allowed to expire under a plan unveiled earlier this month.

Staff are also recommending the Architectural Review Board, which has struggled lately to draft a revised city code to help enforce city design standards, be merged into the planning commission and be renamed the Planning and Architectural Review Commission. The new board could possibly include three members from the current Planning Commission, three from the ARB, and one member from the Environmental Task Force.

Some functions of the Environmental Task Force, which expires in February, will be merged into the Historic Preservation Board and Parks and Recreation Board.

The Public Arts Task Force, which expires in May, would be merged with the Historic Preservation Board and reconfigured into the Historic Preservation and Public Art Board. Staff are recommending the board consist of three members from the retired Public Art Task Force and four members from the retired Historic Preservation Board.

The Parks and Recreation board would be reconfigured into a new board called the Parks and Recreation Environmental Board.

The Economic Development Task Force, which struggled for three years to gain favor with former Mayor Ed Martin, will continue on. It was scheduled to expire in April.

Holic asked staff to evaluate the boards for duplication of functions, whether they can be combined with other boards or commissions or accomplished by staff, whether they can be eliminated without adversely impacting the city, if they require intensive staff support, and whether their functions “unnecessarily complicate the review process prior to going to council.”

Nancy Woodley, assistant city manager, and Tom Slaughter, general manager of development services, met with city council members who act as liaisons of the existing task forces and reviewed their functions and the council criteria for keeping them before coming up with their recommendations.

Woodley said the ARB and planning commission “each share similar functions and meeting frequency.”

“An examination of the code of ordinances finds similar duties. Each administers two architectural overlay districts and each meets twice a month.”

What appears to have sealed the decision is the lack of work for each board.

“Within the past two years, more than half of each respective board’s regularly scheduled meeting have been canceled due to lack of development review petitions,” Woodley said.

The ARB board had difficulty in board member attendance and maintaining a quorum, according to the memo.

Slaughter said additional public input provided through its Partnering 4 Success initiative identified processing delays of up to a month.

“Our user groups considered these delays to be too costly in light of any value-added contribution,” Slaughter said. “Application materials for site plans, building architectural elevations and drawing and material samples, which typically cost thousands of dollars for each board, were also identified as a financial burden.”

Woodley said the consolidation should reduce red tape in city operations.

Also recommended for elimination is the Citizens Stormwater Committee, which has five members.

The Citizen Bond Oversight Committee will expire at the end of this fiscal year when the debt service is retired. The city recently refinanced a series of utilities bonds with a bank loan, retiring the bond.

The Citizen Tax Oversight Committee, Police Pension Fund Board, Fire Pension Fund Board, Venice Housing Authority and Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals are mandated by local ordinance or resolution and cannot be discontinued until their purpose ceases or city council takes further action, Woodley said.

If council follows through on staff recommendations, the number of task forces and boards could be reduced from 14 to 10. Council could consider the consolidations at either of two meetings in January.