

Midcoast Community Council
P.O. Box 64
Moss Beach, CA 94038

An elected Municipal Advisory Council of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
Serving 12,000 Coastal Residents

November 27, 2000

President Richard Gordon
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063

Dear Supervisor Gordon,

At our meeting of October 25, 2000, the MidCoast Community Council reviewed a number of issues regarding current development and notification procedures presented by our Planning and Zoning Committee. We also discussed the growing number of "after-the-fact" permits and code violations occurring in the MidCoast area. Specific problems were noted in the areas of:

- Notification of the surrounding neighborhood for tree removal
- Inadequate site inspection for well drilling permits
- Onsite notification and posting of permits for approved development
- Responsibility and consequences for code and permit violations

The problems outlined here have arisen as a result of the increased rate of development on the coast over the last two years. There are a number of possible explanations for these difficulties: the actions of over-anxious builders, landowners who are unsure of current procedures and requirements and a lack of monitoring by inexperienced County staff with ever increasing work loads. Whatever the cause, we believe that these issues require immediate attention and a coordinated effort by the various County departments involved to reach an effective resolution. The Council voted to forward the following recommendations to your office and to the appropriate County Departments and personnel:

- 1. Recommendation to County planning that the notification procedure for tree removal be expanded to include mailings to all property owners within a 300' radius, with MidCoast Community Council participation in the development of any new notification procedures.**

Multiple instances have been reported to the Council regarding tree removal permits that have passed through the approval process in such a way that members of the community were not sufficiently notified. The posting of individual trees, which may be removed from the street or blocked by traffic, parked vehicles, fences, construction or other activities, appears to be inadequate. After conversations with County Planning management, it was suggested that the MCC P&Z Committee forward a proposal to the County which would outline steps to improve the notification procedure for tree removal permits. A 300' notification radius, equal to that required for new project applications, is an initial suggestion.

2. Recommendation to County Planning, Environmental Health, and Public Works Departments to conduct coordinated on-site inspections for well permit applications.

Permitted well sites have been discovered where unpermitted grading, creek and drainage disruption, and tree removal have occurred as a result of the well installation. There is a lack of coordination between current Environmental Health site inspection procedures and reviews by other County departments. A multi-departmental approach could identify conditions on a site requiring more extensive review and permitting prior to installation of the well. It is recommended that there be a coordinated review of the site by all of the agencies involved, whether separately or together, to note potential impacts caused by the selection of the site and the access required for equipment.

3. Recommendation to the County to require on-site public noticing for all permitted development activities.

Permitted development sites (grading, tree cutting, clearing, construction, well drilling, or other activities) should be noticed upon approval of the application, with the notice remaining in place until the project is finished. This notice should include a description of the extent of the work to be done, approximate start and end dates for activity, days and hours during which activity is allowed and expiration dates of permits.

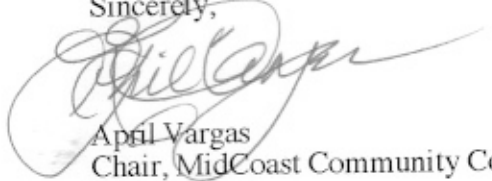
With increased residential activity and the recent discovery of various un-permitted activities, there is justifiable concern that development activity in neighborhoods be properly permitted and reviewed. Current construction sites are not noticed in a way which allows neighbors to determine that activity is legal and has the proper permits. This lack of reliable information can lead to unpleasant interactions between residents and builders. The expanded noticing procedure, as recommended above, would verify that activity on a site has the proper permits and is proceeding legally.

In addition, the MidCoast Community Council voted to begin an investigation of the County's existing provisions and potential powers to assess fines and impose other penalties for code and permit violations. In the MidCoast, we are seeing a growing number of "after-the-fact" permit actions, involving tree removal, grading and construction. We understand that some allowance should be granted for residents who are unaware of regulations concerning development activities, but often these violations occur because there is no real penalty in place to discourage illegal actions. Even the extended fees charged in these cases can amount to little more than a manageable financial risk, a "cost of doing business."

Our Council is committed to working with the County to develop a fair set of rules which can govern development in our communities while protecting our coastal and community resources. It is in everyone's best interest that: 1) developers and builders know and understand the rules and 2) residents have confidence that these rules are being followed and will be enforced.

We appreciate your careful consideration of the issues and recommendation presented and welcome any questions or comments you might have.

Sincerely,



April Vargas
Chair, MidCoast Community Council
P.O. Box 64
Moss Beach, CA 94038
650-728-5215

cc: Marcia Raines, Director, Environmental Services Agency
Dean Petersen, Director, Environmental Health Department
Neal Cullen, Director, Public Works Department
Terry Burnes, Planning Administrator
Jim Eggemeyer, Development Review Services Manager