

**CITY OF BELMONT  
MEMORANDUM**



**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** Carlos de Melo, Community Development Director

**SUBJECT:** February 7, 2008 Planning Commission Meeting – Agenda Item 7A  
Priority Calendar – Spring 2008

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**Summary**

Based on Council direction, staff created a biannual “Priority Calendar” process for reviewing and prioritizing current and proposed Council policy items. Priority calendar items are special projects beyond the scope of day-to-day service that require significant staff study and are eventually placed on the Council agenda for action.

The main goal of the process necessitates the Council to clearly state their priority for study. This prevents issues from arising randomly throughout the year and overwhelming staff without a clear sense of what is most important to the community. With this greater ability to do effective workload planning, staff will be held to a higher level of accountability for timely deliverables on the calendar.

The Commissions also serve as “eyes and ears” of the community, and typically review many of the policy issues that ultimately go to Council. Thus, it is important to involve Commissions in the development of the Priority Calendar. Council has directed that Commissions provide input annually, during the Spring review. This memo provides background and outlines a role for the Commissions.

**Background**

In October 2001, the Council adopted the following general process:

- ◆ Any Council Member could continue to introduce an Item 9 at any time.
- ◆ Item #9’s that meet the threshold for priority calendar issues (or other major projects requested by Council or the City Manager) would have a Project Description Form (PDF) developed and be added to a “proposed” list as they are suggested.
- ◆ Council would review the proposed list as well as all pending items twice a year.
- ◆ Council would review and approve the “revised” master list to see that the proposed timelines and scopes are appropriate.
- ◆ *For Item 9’s that are time sensitive*, a vote by a majority of the Council can request that it be take up “out of order” (before the biannual review). A majority vote would lead to staff developing a PDF and a report to Council with any other relevant background information such as impact on workload. (This specific provision was amended in August 2006)

- ◆ If, after being presented the PDF and background, the Council wanted to move forward with the item prior to the biannual priority-setting, it would require a majority (three votes) to request staff proceed with the study.

The criteria used for priority calendar items are studies or implementation activities that:

- ✓ Require at least 40 hours of staff time
- ✓ Are one-time in nature
- ✓ Have been directed by Council or the City Manager through specific action, including the budget
- ✓ Do not reflect the routine provision of City services
- ✓ Are mandates imposed by the state or federal government, or other funding agencies
- ✓ Are major capital improvements

Council and Commissions must always keep in mind the first priority of staff is the daily provision of quality services to the community, so the ability to take on special projects is limited. In order to ensure that all issues are captured, while recognizing the limited resources available to undertake priority calendar studies, a “below the line,” category of projects was created. These are items that are not expected to be started at the time they are proposed. PDFs are created for these issues, with the descriptions and estimated hours/cost, but the milestones are not detailed. These items are not acted on, but are kept on the master list for the next biannual review by Council. Should Council desire that staff address an issue earlier than proposed, other projects might need to be adjusted or additional resources secured.

### **Council Priority Calendar Process**

One of the key purposes of the Priority Calendar is to ensure Council, staff and the community is on the same page with regard to the intent of a project and what it takes to complete it to Council’s satisfaction. As such, the PDF’s summarize the scope of the project, the estimated staff hours, the cost beyond staff time, and the major milestones and timeline.

Generally, staff will make “No Recommendation” as the purpose of this process is for Council to set priorities and provide clear direction to staff. However, in some cases, staff will make a recommendation, in which case there is usually a brief explanation in the “Comments” section at the bottom of the PDF.

Developing the Priority Calendar is a two-step process for the City Council:

#### **First Meeting (March 11, 2008)**

- Staff reports on Priority Calendar accomplishments of the past year.
- Staff presents current list and new projects that have been proposed to date (with draft Project Description Forms), including Commission recommended rankings.
- Public input is solicited.

- Council reviews and seeks clarification on the current issues.
- Council reviews, discusses and seeks clarification the items to be ranked.
- A vote is taken to remove or modify any current item on the list.
- A vote is taken to remove or modify any new item on the list.
- Council will then rank all the remaining new items, by department.
- Staff tabulates the results and reports back to Council at the April 8, 2008 meeting. As part of the review of the Council-ranked list, staff will determine how many new items can be taken on given existing budgets, staffing and workloads - and what timelines are realistic for achieving them.
- Council will have the opportunity to review and revise the list, and then adopt the Priority Calendar. "Below the line" items will be re-ranked at Council review next Spring.

#### Second meeting (April 8, 2008)

- Staff will bring back the list of what we feel can be accomplished, within each department; along with completed PDFs, milestones/timelines, and a 12-month Priority Calendar outlining when these and other known items will be presented to Council.
- This step is in preparation for the Budget setting process.

#### **Commission Role**

As an advisor to the City Council, the Planning Commission has a valuable role to play in prioritizing issues you think are worthy of study. There are three important steps for the Commission to fulfill in this process:

1. Review the list of current issues
2. Propose new issues for the Council to consider ranking
3. Prioritize all of the above the items for ranking that fall within their purview

Staff recommends that at this meeting, the Planning Commission complete Steps 1 and 2, as described above. It is requested that the Commission review the attachments and provide the following:

- Any questions regarding the definition/status of current projects (See Attachments B & C)
- Additional new projects or initiatives individual Commissioners would like to offer

The list of "Completed Projects" by staff in 2007 (and early 2008) is as follows:

- Permit Efficiency Task Force (Completed in October 2005 – staff continues to implement ongoing recommendations/improvements)
  
- Zone Text Amendments – Single Family Parking Upgrades/Nonconforming

Structures/Signage in Residential Districts (This was not an item on the Priority Calendar but was directed for completion based on past inquiries from the Commission & Council).

- Emmett House Entitlement Review & Relocation Phase

The list of “Existing Projects” that staff is currently working on (and available for Commission discussion) includes:

- Emmett House Remodel/Reconstruction Phase
- Revision of Zoning Ordinance Definitions
- 1365 Fifth Avenue Planning (Currently being addressed as part of Economic Development Strategy – Firehouse Square Policy Amendments)
- Grand Boulevard (i.e. “Transforming El Camino Real”)
- General Plan Update
- Residential Design Guidelines
- Solar Access Ordinance (Potential Amendments to Project Scope currently under discussion)
- Master Parking Plan for Downtown "Village Districts" (This item to be completed in conjunction with General Plan Update Phase focusing on Economic Development Target Site Land Use/Policy Amendments)
- Historic Preservation Ordinance & Inventory
- Downtown Specific Plan Reformat (This item to be completed in conjunction with General Plan Update Phase focusing on Economic Development Target Site Land Use/Policy Amendments)

Previously reviewed, “Below-the-Line” topics for Commission review include:

- General Security Standards
- Hardscape & Lot Coverage Standards/Requirements
- Landscape Plans - Section 13A Revisions
- Parking Lot Lighting & Screening Standards & Security
- Recognition Program – Commercial Properties
- Sign Ordinance & Real Estate Signs (Forwarded for preparation in conjunction with City Attorney’s Office)
- Tree Ordinance Revisions

The Project Description Forms (PDF’s) for all of the above-described projects are attached.

The Council reviews all of the projects in two broad categories: current items and new items (those proposed since the last review as well as those “below the line”). Only the new items will be ranked, but Commissions can recommend, and Council can direct, changes to current items. Thus, the first thing the Commission should do is review the list of current issues and recommend any desired changes. Should the Commission wish to have the Council direct staff

to change course on any of the current items (drop, postpone, expedite, etc.), a majority vote is required.

Staff recommends that at this meeting, the Commission discuss any items they would like to add to the list for Council ranking. A majority vote of the Commission is required to propose an item. Please keep in mind that placing an item on the list, or even a favorable Council ranking ensuing for such item, does not guarantee it will be taken up immediately – staff will need to assess the work capacity, given current projects and ongoing responsibilities.

After developing any new items on 2/7/08, the Commission will prioritize all of the new items (Step 2) on 2/19/08. These will include any existing Priority Calendar items for which no work has yet begun (in this case, all of the existing “below-the-line” items), and new items suggested by Staff and the Commission. The ranking process will be the same as is done by Council. If a majority of the Commission does not think an item should even be considered, they should vote to drop it. Of those remaining on the list, each Commissioner should rank the items, with a “1” being the top priority. All Commissioners rankings will be added up, with the lowest “raw score” translating to the highest priorities. The rankings will be shared with Council at their meeting when they begin the process so they have the benefit of your recommendation.

Based on the discussion at this meeting, staff will return on 2/19/08 with a “ballot” for the Commissioners to review and prioritize.

*Attachment A* describes the adopted Priority Calendar (April 24, 2007)

*Attachment B* is a list of the Priority Calendar projects that staff is currently working on. This is not necessarily the entirety of the Community Development Department’s projects, and certainly not the bulk of staff’s workload.

*Attachment C* is the list of currently proposed “below the line” issues from the last ranking that are under the purview of the Commission.

#### Attachments

- A. Current Priority Calendar
- B. Project Description Forms for “Current Issues” being worked on by staff
- C. Project Description Forms for new (Below the Line) issues relevant to the Commission

**PLEASE NOTE: Attachments A, B, and C are not included as part of this document. Please contact the Community Development Department at (650) 595-7417 for more information on viewing these attachments.**