

From: [Lindsay Lara](#)
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Letter of objection to DRB changes - Cheryl Douglas
Date: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 7:23:49 PM

Hi Amy - do you wish for me to read these comments aloud?

Lindsay Lara, CMC, CPMC | [City of San Rafael](#)

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From: Amy Likover [REDACTED] >
Sent: Tuesday, September 8, 2020 7:16 PM
To: Lindsay Lara <Lindsay.Lara@cityofsanrafael.org>
Cc: Gary Phillips <Gary.Phillips@cityofsanrafael.org>; Kate Colin <Kate.Colin@cityofsanrafael.org>; John Gamblin <John.Gamblin@cityofsanrafael.org>; Maribeth Bushey <Maribeth.Bushey@cityofsanrafael.org>; Andrew McCullough <Andrew.McCullough@cityofsanrafael.org>; Paul Jensen <Paul.Jensen@cityofsanrafael.org>
Subject: Letter of objection to DRB changes - Cheryl Douglas

Re: DRB recommendations from City Staff

I received this letter earlier today

Thanks,

Amy Likover

Hi Amy,

I can't thank you enough for all your conscientious work, shepherding the Federation. I'm just not able to do those things at present.

I am also grateful that you made me aware of what I see as an important and unfortunate proposed change to the SR Municipal Code which staff and the Council are proposing to vote on tonight. I do not understand the necessity of this push to essentially dissolve the Design Review Board. I just checked with two current members of the Board and they did not even know this proposal was in the works. I believe this is being done without appropriate citizen input.

We hear so many long-time San Rafael residents bemoan their increased perception that the city and lifestyle they valued and worked to maintain here is fast slipping away. The governing powers talk a good game about involving residents in the process, about making things more transparent. But now they are shutting off the best avenue that exists to have a public process, a process that includes public meetings held during evening hours (when more people can attend). Not even the newspaper will be covering upcoming development negotiated behind closed doors at City Hall.

Design Review Board meetings are the earliest and best opportunities for the public to actually see what developments are proposed, to have direct interaction with design professionals from all sides, and to help shape projects to reflect community values. The PC is charged with big picture issues that the DRB is not allowed to involve itself with, like zoning, traffic or land use. And the PC also serves as the ultimate approval body. However, the PC is a commission with few design professionals on it, the DRB does the heavy lifting of analyzing the minutia of how a project works and how it looks. Planning Commission approval has always been heavily influenced by recommendations from the DRB, because the two groups bring very different skill sets to the process. By the time a project is taken to the PC, plans can be rather difficult to influence.

The City of San Rafael has been the fortunate recipient of many thousands of hours of free expert advice and brainstorming from the licensed professionals that sit on the DRB. Individual members hear from citizens they encounter on site visits, and people who speak from the audience during meetings. DRB members have even successfully championed public opinions that had been flatly rejected by staff. Projects get better because of their contributions. Why would we not want that?

If Council thinks that the approval process takes too long, they need to look at where the delays really are. As someone experienced in the permitting process all over the state, the worst delay I ever had getting in the cue was a month, out of a design and permitting process of nearly two years. A month is not too long to wait to be sure we are building good projects, which are as successful for all parties as we can make them.

This seems to be a committee without even a regular meeting schedule. May the public attend? Will there be minutes posted? Yes, the original DRB meetings require staff to prepare an evaluative report for the DRB (and public) and require staff to attend a maximum of two night meetings a month; but that seems a small cost for an excellent long term return on that investment. If the DRB is not doing its analysis, then staff will have to somehow pick up the slack.

During COVID, without public meetings and normal routines, many of us have simply lost touch with what the city is doing behind the scenes. I am hoping there are others who will speak out tonight. I wish I had more lead time to spread the word so we could tell the Council that we do care about what they are doing, and do not like having even more of our opportunities to influence stripped away.

As design professionals, the Design Review Board simply contributes an exceptional skill set that is not provided by staff, the PC nor City Council, and five heads are that much better than two.

Thank you,

Cheryl Douglas