

Planning Department Recommendations Permits

Summary: Efforts to expand broadband would benefit businesses, residents and students in Santa Cruz County. To assist providers in deploying new and improved infrastructure, the County could support a number of changes to its regulatory and permitting processes.

1. Allow the installation of equipment within public right of ways, subject only to "time, place and manner" of access, through the County's encroachment permit process.

The Department of Public Works already evaluates projects within the public right of way in this manner through the revocable encroachment permit process. Existing land use regulations require a land use permit for certain broadband facilities (i.e., boxes, cabinets, wireless facilities) within public rights of way, as well as on private property. The Planning Department is working on proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinance in order to remove any requirement for a discretionary land use permit for facilities within public rights of way. These changes will take into account the Board's interest in maintaining a public process. In addition, fees for any building permits that are required will remain in place. The Planning Department will provide more information on these amendments in March 2014, and the proposed ordinance, after CEQA review and a Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation, will be ready for Board consideration in June 2014.

2. Streamline the application process and ensure permit fees are based on actual costs.

The Planning Department reviewed its fees, as part of the County Unified Fee Schedule update in December 2013, and determined that discretionary planning permits for broadband activity are already charged at cost. This practice will continue per your Board's direction.

The Planning Department is working on proposed amendments to land use regulations in order to streamline the application process, include new definitions as needed, and reflect compliance with the 2006 Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act (DIVCA). The Planning Department will provide more information on these amendments in March 2014, and the proposed ordinance, after CEQA review and a Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation, will be ready for Board consideration in June 2014.

3. Draft amendments to County regulations that facilitate the deployment of broadband technology.

The Planning Department is working on proposed amendments to land use regulations in order to remove any requirement for broadband infrastructure within the public right of way to obtain a discretionary land use permit. The proposed amendments to regulations will also streamline the application process, include new definitions as needed, and reflect compliance with DIVCA. The Planning Department will provide more information on these amendments in March 2014, and the proposed ordinance, after CEQA review and a Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation, will be ready for Board consideration in June 2014.

The Planning Department continues to support efforts of the Department of Public Works and the Information Services Department to present new specifications for broadband deployment, including methods and conduit requirements. The Planning Department will also be present, as requested, at quarterly meetings that the Department of Public Works holds with service providers, and will assist

Public Works as needed with its efforts to create a yearly coordination letter to all utility companies and service providers.

4. Work with broadband providers on economic development opportunities.

The Planning Department's Economic Development division will coordinate meetings three times a year with all service providers to provide education and information regarding new projects and planning efforts that are being undertaken to support economic vitality and development projects. The first meetings are scheduled to take place in February 2014.

The Planning Department will ensure that the proposed Economic Vitality Strategy includes goals, policies and actions supportive of the broad deployment and public access to broadband technology. In addition, areas identified as opportunities in the County's Economic Vitality Strategy planning process will be incorporated into a Broadband Master Plan per your Board's direction. The Planning Department will work with the Information Services Department on establishing this plan and reporting back to the Board in March 2014.