

## **Let's Avoid Deja Vu in 2030!**

*Priscilla Walton*

2020 has been quite a year for all of us! But despite the fractious local and national politics, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the historic fires we have just experienced, our community has pulled together to support and help one another. As Carmel Valley residents, we can be very proud of our community.

We will continue to face some of the same challenges into 2021 and beyond. However, it seems that we do have one real ray of light on the local horizon, guided by the recent report that reviewed the Monterey County Resource Management Agency (RMA) prepared by Citygate Associates, LLC. The report finds and describes some of the same issues and problems memorialized in the grand jury report of 2005. This new report found that some of the same issues identified back then continue to exist today. The report included 76 recommendations for improvement in four areas that included the following:

1. Establishing trust to applicant and stake holder satisfaction
2. Calibrating workforce with workload
3. Managing performance
4. Realigning the organization

The CVA board was interviewed in depth by Citygate, and over 100 members of CVA responded to the stakeholder's survey. Our comments and those of the members who responded were included in the information that resulted in the findings.

The Carmel Valley Association identified the following issues based on its years of interacting with RMA:

### **Policy and Leadership Level**

- The disconnect between county policy and project approvals
- The use by leadership of the administrative approval process to fast track and/or bypass both policy and legal requirements
- The high number of exemptions from The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) contrary to CEQA requirements
- Special interest influence in planning decisions and ethical issues within the work context and related to external parties
  - Poor executive management that fosters a dysfunctional planning environment
  - Understaffing and poor allocation of resources to implement policy

### **Staffing Level**

High rate of staff turnover  
Low morale in the department  
The low professional quality of work in planning  
The qualifications of planning staff

Inadequate staffing levels

The inordinately slow and inefficient process implementing policy

## **Enforcement**

- The general lack of enforcement and funding for it
- The backlog of work not implemented since the 2010 General Plan
- Lack of condition compliance monitoring
- No balance between policy and its implementation (enforcement)

## **Public Involvement**

- Lack of, and/or inconsistent public notification process, thereby reducing public input
- The reduction of Land Use Advisory Committee's input in the areas of the community planning process
  - Minimizing the role and importance of the Carmel Valley LUAC, resulting in more flawed projects and more subsequent lawsuits

All of these problems have affected the timeliness and the quality of work. As an example, it should not take seven years to develop a short-term rental ordinance, and then have the planning commissioners throw up their hands in response to an incomprehensible, poorly written and unenforceable document. Nor should it take ten years to develop the Development Evaluation System (DES) that is required to evaluate projects developed in specific areas of unincorporated Monterey County. The above have led to the rendering of many policies and ordinances completely ineffective, thereby encouraging a scofflaw attitude by the public.

The most far-reaching recommendation of the Citygate report was that RMA should be reorganized and split into two new stand-alone departments-- (1) A Community Development and Housing Department that would include planning, building inspection, and housing; and (2) A Community Services Department that would include public works, parks, and facilities. Each department would be headed by a department head reporting to the County Chief Administrative Officer.

CVA's Land Use Committee has developed a better working relationship with some planning staff members, most notably Brandon Swanson and John Dugan. Our monthly meetings to review CVA residents' concerns, issues, and problems have helped us address some problems.

Our greatest concern going forward is that while the reorganization is taking place, the same leadership is essentially in place. Without a substantive change in leadership at the top, we may just be reorganizing the deck chairs on the Titanic. We hope that there will be an open selection process that considers new leadership for both new departments without delay. Otherwise, it might just be déjà vu all over again ten years from now.

Finally, the Citygate report includes a work plan and time line for addressing its 76 recommendations. We urge the CAO's office to assure its implementation with quarterly reports to the Planning Commission.