



MENDOCINO COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

NEWS RELEASE

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STATUS OF THE PLANNING AND BUILDING SERVICES

On December 29, 2008, Nash Gonzalez began his career as the new Mendocino County Planning and Building Services Director. The Director's duties are overseeing the Planning, Building, Code Enforcement and Cartographic functions of the Department, which includes a satellite office located in Fort Bragg that provides services to the coastal residents of the unincorporated areas of the County.

Mr. Gonzalez is very much aware of the many issues facing the County and, like many planning directors around the State; he too is trying to do more with less these days. Re-organizational changes and improvements have been implemented due to Mr. Gonzalez currently reviewing and evaluating existing procedures and looking for ways to progress the department.

His main focus is customer service. In order to allow the public greater access to the Department, as well as the ability for customers to download application materials who would otherwise be unable to come into the office during regular office hours, the Planning & Building Services website has been updated – there the public will find links to: Application Forms; Board and Commissions information; Adopted Plans, Ordinances, and Guidelines; General Information About the Department; What's New; Frequently Asked Questions and Permit Handouts; Office Closures; and other pertinent information.

Two areas of organizational change have been: Code Enforcement staff is now supervised by the Chief Building Inspector allowing for more interaction and collaboration between these two divisions; and the Planning Team (which had been established in 2006 with a focus on comprehensive and long range planning efforts rather than on current or development review) was transitioned out of the Executive Office to become the Long Range Planning Division of Planning and Building Services.

Under the leadership of Mr. Gonzalez, the Long Range Planning Division is engaged in the completion of the County's General Plan Update, which has been ongoing since 2001 and will be completed by this summer. Additionally, Planning and Building Services is concurrently working on: completion of the Ukiah Valley Area Plan (UVAP); implementation of the Housing Element, which also includes the preparation of an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance; and the preparation of the next Housing Element, which provides for the next planning cycle (2009 through 2014).

One of the priorities that Planning and Building Services is facing is the State law requiring the Housing Element to be completed and certified by August of this year. Mr. Gonzalez notes that with the State and County currently experiencing a downturn in housing, completing the Housing Element still serves as a very useful planning tool for assessing the needs of housing for all economic groups in the County, as well as laying out programs to meet those needs.

Other projects on the horizon for the Department include updates to the Mendocino Town Plan and the Local Coastal Program (LCP).

Having oversight of both Planning and Building functions, the new Director is also very enthusiastic about working with staff to establish a Green Building Program in the County, which would incorporate four basic principals: 1.) Conservation of natural resources; 2.) The wise use of energy; 3.) The improvement of indoor air quality; and 4.) Planning for livable communities.

In the immediate future, Planning and Building Services staff will be offering a seminar for contractors and owner builders that would provide an overview of the permit process. Currently staff is working on the format and anticipates that it will be held in late spring/early summer, with topics to include: application and material submittals; plan specifications; zoning; and other clearances required for building permit and plans submittal. The purpose of this seminar would be to provide information to interested individuals about requirements for submitting a building permit application, thus allowing for a smoother process. According to Mr. Gonzalez, the seminar would be presented both in Ukiah and on the Coast so as to reach as many people as possible.

In order to achieve the many tasks and projects ahead of him, Mr. Gonzalez has been working with his staff by building a team approach, with the main theme of "think positive" and "have a positive attitude". As the Director of a department of 32 staff members, he wears many hats including that of a coordinator, encourager, evaluator, information seeker, information giver, initiator and summarizer.

According to Nash Gonzalez, he is very fortunate to work with such enthusiastic, outgoing, well qualified staff, who works as a team, which will make it possible for him to achieve the goals and targets of the Planning and Building Services.

Released by: _____


Tom Mitchell
Chief Executive Officer

