

From: Bettie Weiss, City Planner, City of Santa Barbara

Subject: Comments on SB226 CEQA Streamlining Proposal

Hello - thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on proposed guidelines and standards to implement SB226. For the City of Santa Barbara we have found that we have limited use of the Statutory Exemptions or the new processes under SB375. The most consistent streamlined exemption for us has been the Infill Exemption per CEQA Guidelines Section 15332.

We agree it is a good idea to promote compact in-fill development by further streamlining CEQA for the reasons stated, such as climate & sustainability & housing & transportation & agricultural land/open space/bio resources & health. The approach of finding that previously analyzed effects (e.g. in a General Plan Program EIR or other) and to consider effects addressed by standard development policies are not subject to CEQA is good and should be applicable in many instances. The procedures could somewhat streamline an ND or EIR process, but we think it would be better and more simple just to broaden the in-fill Exemption procedure.

Our Specific Comments:

p. 7-9 Tables 1 & 2 comparison items show that in some ways at least, the guidelines should be broadening the application for in-fill exemptions.

p. 10-11 Table 3 Eligibility Project site-why should it have to be surrounded on 3 sides by urban, vs. 2 or some other characterization? SB375 consistency - this table doesn't address the timing issue when our 375 plan won't be in effect for a long while. The actual draft Guidelines (b)(3) (A) provide that if no 375 plan yet, project must have density of at least 20 units per acre or commercial FAR of at least .75. We suggest that the guidelines allow for item (A) or (B) - which is to meet definition of small community walkable project per subdivision (e)(6) - 8 du/ac or .5 FAR - but would have to change definition to not have to be outside an MPO. Project type - why "Public" office building only? Also of note for Santa Barbara in particular, we have limitations on new non-residential growth and in many instances our mixed use projects have less than .50 FAR of non-residential floor area.

p. 12 Procedures - 4th par. - We are not sure how this would work. The approach of a "mitigated exemption" is how it should occur, similar as we now might use the current in-fill exemption with a traffic study backing it up.

It says if project may cause a new effect, the streamlined CEQA analysis focuses on that impact. If less than significant or mitigated, agency completes checklist to document. "It would then circulate an ND, MND, or sustainable communities environmental assessment for public review"? Not much streamlining. Should just put these items into revised In-fill exemption.

Please clarify that all VMT measurements for commercial buildings are based on the RESIDENTIAL VMT generated in the traffic analysis zone of the proposed commercial project.

The VMT performance measures will not be a useful or meaningful indicator of appropriate placed land uses in our city because the MPO's area average VMT is so high. Any residential or commercial project proposed within the City Limits is expected to meet the less-than-75% standard.

Overall we have yet to determine if this new exemption will be of value in our community. Given that we already do a fair amount of background analysis of issues before we determine that a project is exempt, and because other exemptions often fit for proposed projects we review - the jury is still out for us if this new process would be beneficial in streamlining our review process. If the FAR standard is not changed for the non-residential area, we will likely not be able to meet the 0.50 or 0.75 standard.

We look forward to learning more about the comments you receive and your next steps.

Thank You,

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