



Highlights

Why OCA Did This Study

In accordance with the Office of the City Auditor's Fiscal Year 2018 Audit Work Plan, we conducted a performance audit of the Community Planning Groups. The objectives of this audit were to determine if Community Planning Groups (CPGs) have an effective control environment, if they are in compliance with key elements of Council Policy, and if they are a contributing factor to permit approval delays.

What OCA Recommends

To address the issues identified in the report, we made five recommendations, two of which are for the Planning Department to propose updates to Council Policy 600-24 to help ensure transparency, compliance, diverse community representation and performance. The proposal should include, but not be limited to:

- Requiring annual training for all CPG members, not just new members;
- Expanding the components for the Annual Report to include a member summary and an overall summary of project reviews;
- Including election results in the record retention requirements;
- Defining Board representation to include a distinct category for renters and consider setting a minimum number of seats for that category;
- Making Membership Applications mandatory and subject to record retention requirements;
- Identifying deadlines for CPGs to provide the Planning Department with rosters, minutes, and annual reports;
- Ensuring that the CPG rosters, annual reports and meeting minutes contain all the required elements as described in Council Policy 600-24;
- Developing a formal mechanism for recording and posting CPG project review recommendations; and
- Establishing a due date for receipt of Community Planning Group recommendations by DSD.

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Performance Audit of Community Planning Groups

The City Can Improve Transparency and Compliance of Community Planning Groups and Can Better Monitor Performance and Communicate Their Role to the Public

What OCA Found

The City Council adopted Council Policy 600-24 in 1976, establishing criteria for recognition of Community Planning Groups (CPGs). The Council Policy was created to establish minimum standards and provide guidance for these groups operating as self-governing advisory bodies. CPGs are integral components of this planning process and provide citizens with an opportunity for involvement in advising the City Council, the Planning Commission, and other decision-makers on development projects and land use matters, general or community plan amendments, rezoning and public facilities.

Finding 1:

The City's limited oversight, guidance, and training of CPGs may be contributing to CPGs' lack of transparency, inconsistent records retention, and potential non-compliance with Council Policy and the Brown Act. Specifically, we found:

- CPGs lack transparency because they are not consistently submitting or retaining documents required by Council Policy;
- We could not verify that members had not exceeded their term limits due to incomplete rosters and ambiguous guidance on retaining election results; and
- Due to the Council Policy 600-24's broadly defined eligibility requirements, there is a risk that renters may not be adequately represented within CPG membership.

Finding 2:

We also found that a lack of oversight of the CPGs development project review process has made it difficult to analyze their performance and influence. In addition, the data is insufficient to determine whether the CPGs' review of development projects caused delays in the process. Specifically, we found:

- Records are insufficient to determine whether Community Planning Groups caused delays in the project review process;
- City guidance for CPG project recommendation deadlines is unclear, yet CPGs risk losing their rights to represent their communities if they do not provide recommendations in a timely manner;
- The role of CPGs, the process of CPG review, and how it impacts overall project review is not adequately communicated to applicants/developers;
- The City review process proceeds independent of CPG reviews, but applicants may be under the impression that CPG review delays the City's permitting process;
- Applicant level of effort and time spent presenting projects to CPG groups is not known by the City; and
- The City does not provide sufficient training to CPGs and developers and does not provide feedback to CPGs regarding their recommendations and the City's final decisions.