



MEMORANDUM

9-A

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CITY OF SANTA MONICA PLANNING DIVISION

DATE: February 03, 2020
TO: The Architectural Review Board
FROM: Planning Staff
SUBJECT: Item 9A. Streamlining Architectural Review Board (ARB) Process

As discussed in a special meeting on September 25, 2019 the Board expressed interest in broadening staff level review in order to streamline the ARB process. (See memo and minutes attached). As a point of clarification, SMMC Section 9.55.120 enables this action:

“...the Board under authority of Section [9.55.070](#) of this Chapter, may, by resolution, authorize the building officer or other official to approve applications for building permits for minor or insignificant development of property which would not defeat the purposes and objectives of this Chapter.”

Further, from a process standpoint, pursuant to SMMC Section 9.55.050, the resolutions adopted by the Board shall be submitted for review and approval by the Planning Commission.

At the September 25 meeting, the Board provided input to staff to regarding how the staff resolutions may be revised:

1. **Façade remodels:** Board members generally agreed that staff level review for façade remodels that utilize quality materials and appear similar or as an enhancement to the existing building is appropriate.
 - a. Proposals to remodel properties on the Historic Resources Inventory would continue to be reviewed by the Board. Staff and the Board agree that HRI properties should be reviewed with special attention. We are proposing to maintain the current approach to reviewing HRI properties. Staff would continue to review minor modifications that clearly maintain the resource and comply with the Secretary of Interiors’ Standards for Rehabilitation. More significant changes will continue to go to the Board.
 - b. Façade remodels that are not consistent with the existing design on the Promenade and in the Main Street Commercial District would continue to be reviewed by the Board.
2. **Increase area of new or replacement landscape:** Board members expressed interest in staff level review for certain areas and expressed concern about staff level review for large areas of landscaping visible from the street. Based on a review of previous examples, staff is proposing increasing the staff level review to 1000 square feet.

From prior experience, applicants have often reduced the amount of landscape area below 150 square feet, sometimes resulting in awkward and partially landscaped areas in order to remain under possible staff approval authority. We suspect many more projects do not come before staff or the Board and remain outside of any review process. Additionally,

often façade remodels are accompanied by modifications to existing landscape. Often the 150 square feet limitation on staff level review requires a project to go to the Board when it would otherwise be reviewed at the staff level.

Alternatively, the Board may wish to consider different thresholds for different conditions:

- a. Areas not substantially visible from a public street
- b. Areas along the street frontage
- c. Replacement vs. new landscaping

In no case will staff have authority to approve landscaping that is not compliant with the Santa Monica Water Efficient Landscape and Irrigation Standards. The Office of Sustainability also has resources available on their website:

https://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Landscape/Landscape_Requirements.aspx

3. **Signage:** The Board agreed that staff can review signage that complies with the Zoning Code, including compliant Sign Programs. The staff resolution still includes the provision of 18" height and 25 square feet for individual signs to ensure signage remains properly sized.
4. **Additional Units Behind Existing Buildings:** The Board agreed that detached units that are behind existing buildings/at or toward the rear of the property could be reviewed at the staff level, with the exception of buildings on sloped lots. This would be consistent with review policies for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

In addition to the items discussed at the September 25, 2019 Study Session, staff would also like to bring forward to the Board consideration for expanding staff authority to approve building additions visible from the public right-of-way. ARB Resolution 95-001 includes a limit of 500 square feet.

5. **Building additions:** There are very few additions to buildings that are visible from the street. However, there is at least one example of such a project that could easily be reviewed by staff. The Board may wish to consider expanding staff review authority beyond 500 square feet currently included in the resolution.
 - a. Downtown buildings: The Downtown Community Plan has expanded available FAR and reduced the amount of open space required in a courtyard. There are a number of considerations here including
 - i. Courtyard not visible from the street (usable open space)
 - ii. Visibility from the street- consistent with existing design and massing
 - b. Citywide except Downtown – size, matching or improving design
 - c. Additions to HRI properties would continue to be reviewed by the Board.
6. **Awnings:** The current resolution allows new awnings to be review if such awnings are “constructed with an opaque canvas material and are not backlit.” The Board may wish to consider expanding materials allowed for awnings that may be approved administratively.

Attached:

September 25 memo and minutes

ARB Resolution NO.95-001

ARB sign resolution 04-001

PowerPoint presentation