



Agenda Report Reviewed by:
City Manager: 

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY COUNCIL
AGENDA ITEM

Meeting Date: July 16, 2019
To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director 
Subject: Approval of Job Description - Associate Planner
Recommendation: Receive Staff Report, Approve Revised Job Description and Authorize Staff to Recruit/Hire for Position
Funding: Currently Budgeted: Yes _____ No _____ N/A
Net General Fund Cost: _____
Amount: \$

BACKGROUND:

The Planning Department has one staff planner in addition to the Planning Director and technical/administrative staff. Historically, the Department's staff planner was an Associate Planner position. However, during the Recession, when this position was vacated due to a resignation, the Department's staff planner position was changed to an Assistant Planner position (one level down from the Associate Planner level position). This was seen as appropriate at that time due to the low level of development applications being submitted, and the type of development activity the Planning Department was seeing during this time. The lower level of activity allowed the Planning Director to have more time for oversight of applications (the number of applications received in 2018 was 105, compared to 53 in 2011). The Department has received 61 applications as of July 1, 2019.

This agenda item is to reinstitute the Planning Department's staff planner at the Associate Planner level, and to update the job description for this position.

DISCUSSION:

The City of Sebastopol is seeing increasing development activity, which is likely to continue. It is critical for the Planning Department to be staffed at a level that has the resources and sophistication to respond appropriately to these pressures, and guide development in a thoughtful way that is aligned with the community's vision.

The Planning Department has received several large applications with multiple entitlements (including subdivisions with multiple entitlements, such as the Davis Townhomes; Huntley

Square subdivision on Bodega Avenue, and various Cannabis and other use permit applications). These types of applications are typically processed by an Associate or Senior Planner due to the complex nature of the applications. Preliminary discussions with other property owners indicates this trend is likely to continue.

The 'levels' of professional planning staff, from least experienced/skilled to most, is:

- Planning Technician (typically an entry level position with Planning degree but little/no experience)
- Assistant Planner (typically has a Planning degree and minimum 1 year of experience)
- Associate Planner (Planning degree and a minimum of 2 years of experience, typically 2-4 years experience)
- Senior Planner (may have an advanced [Masters] degree in Planning or related field in addition to Bachelor's degree, and minimum of 5 years of experience)
- Principal Planner (typically only in larger organizations, this position is a supervisory / managing planner position, in some organizations this is called a Planning Manager)
- Planning Director (sometimes with deputy directors in larger organizations)

The Associate Planner is differentiated from an Assistant Planner based on experience, and ability to utilize judgement to process applications more independently than an Assistant Planner. An Associate Planner will have a higher skill/knowledge and understanding of regulations for more complex application types (variances, subdivision, environmental review, etc.). Additionally, Associate Planners often have experience or capacity to work on "advanced planning" topics such as policy updates and zoning ordinance updates. These skills will help the Planning Department be more proactive in modifying and creating policies that align with the General Plan and Council Goals, rather than being reactionary to applications.

Most Planning Departments are 'top heavy' in terms of staffing due to the type of work produced, and the desire to review applications in-house with staff familiar with the goals and vision of the community, as opposed to utilizing consultants who are not as familiar with the community. Planning staff in Planning Departments of surrounding communities include (not including administrative/technical support):

- Cotati: Community Development Director; Senior Planner
- Cloverdale: Community Development Director; Associate Planner
- Windsor: Community Development Director; Associate Planner
- Sonoma: Planning and Community Services Director; Associate Planner
- Healdsburg: Planning and Building Director; Housing Specialist; Senior Planners (two); Assistant Planner (Note, Healdsburg includes planning and building in one department)

FISCAL IMPACT:

The pay difference between the Assistant Planner position and the Associate Planner position can be accommodated in the currently approved Planning Department Fiscal Year 19/20 budget,

as the Associate Planner will likely reduce the need for consultant services to accomplish components of the Department's work load and work plan due to the increased skill set of an Associate Planner. Salary schedule for this position would be per Agenda Item 6.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approved the revised Associate Planner job description; and, approve position for hiring.

ATTACHMENTS:

Associate Planner job description

City of Sebastopol
Job Description

Job Title: Associate Planner
Division: Miscellaneous (Mid-Management)
Department: Planning
Location: City Hall
Shift: As Assigned
Reports To: Planning Director
Prepared By: K. Svanstrom
Approved By:
Approved Date:
FLSA Status: Exempt

SUMMARY

Under the general direction of the Planning Director, performs various complex, professional-level office and field planning work related to current and advanced municipal planning, including review of development and land use applications, zoning, site plans, and environmental documents; provides professional advice and assistance to the public on planning, zoning, permits, and environmental review; provides complex professional staff assistance to the Planning Director, other departments, and the public. This position requires the ability to exercise sound judgement in the interpretation, application and explanation of a wide variety of City policies, procedures and regulations as well as applicable local, State and Federal laws.

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS

This is a professional-level planning position and is distinguished from the Planning Director in that the latter has overall responsibility for all planning functions. The Associate Planner is further distinguished from the Assistant Planner position in that the Associate Planner will have more experience, be able to operate more independently; work on more complex professional-level work; may attend regional or local committee meetings in the Planning Director's absence; and will provide indirect supervision of technical and administrative support staff in the Planning Director's absence.

SUPERVISION RECEIVED AND EXERCISED

General direction is provided by the Planning Director; in the absence of the Planning Director, may exercise indirect supervision over Planning Department technical and/or administrative support staff.

EXAMPLES OF ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

Essential and other important responsibilities and duties may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Provide information to the public on questions relating to the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and other City regulations, such as; explaining provisions of the Ordinance, including zoning and subdivision procedures, rezoning, use permits, variances, lot line adjustments, and minor and major subdivisions.
- Provide primary staffing and caseload management for the Design Review Board and Tree Board.
- Review and process development projects, Zoning and General Plan amendments.
- Prepare or supervise the preparation of CEQA documentation (initial studies, etc.).
- Perform plan check reviews of building permit applications.

- Perform field checks at sites to ensure consistency with City regulations and project conditions.
- Assist the Planning Director in coordinating with other City Departments on planning matters, such as application review, park projects, policy studies, policy development, and other topics.
- Analyze various professional planning studies including, but not limited to, demographics, traffic, biological assessments, and arborist reports. Conduct data collection and research in support of planning projects or policies.
- Attend, along with the Planning Director, (evening) meetings of the Planning Commission and other bodies. Prepare and present staff reports for the Tree Board, Design Review Board, Public Art Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council on planning matters.
- Represent the City and attend meetings of various committees and special projects, such as the County Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.
- Coordinate, manage, and oversee consultant work related to planning, parks, and public art projects.
- Provide supervision of technical and administrative support planning staff as needed.
- In addition to the duties listed above, under the direction of the Planning Director, the Associate Planner will be assigned a combination of current planning projects and/or advanced planning/policy updates, depending on experience and qualifications (such as, updates to design guidelines, policies/procedures, zoning ordinances, etc.).
- Perform other duties as assigned.

QUALIFICATIONS

To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

EDUCATION and/or EXPERIENCE

The Associate Planner should have knowledge and/or experience with a wide variety of current and/or advanced planning projects and issues, possession of a Bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university in City Planning or a closely related field; a minimum of two (2) years of professional planning experience or an equivalent combination of education and experience. Municipal or regional planning experience preferred but not required. A Master's degree in a relevant field may substitute for up to one year of experience.

Ability to interact in a positive and helpful manner with members of the public, City staff, and other agencies; possession of a strong work ethic and sound organizational skills.

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Ability to read, analyze, and interpret professional journals, technical procedures, and governmental regulations. Ability to write clear, concise, and effective reports, business correspondence, and procedure manuals. Ability to effectively present information and respond to questions from groups of managers, customers, and the general public.

MATHEMATICAL SKILLS

Ability to calculate figures and amounts such as proportions, percentages, square footages; area, circumference, and volume. Ability to apply concepts of basic algebra and geometry.

REASONING ABILITY

Ability to solve practical problems and deal with a variety of concrete variables in situations where only limited standardization exists. Ability to interpret a variety of instructions furnished in written, oral, diagram, or schedule form.

CERTIFICATES, LICENSES, REGISTRATIONS

Possession of, or ability to obtain, a valid California Driver's license; possession of AICP certification a plus.

OTHER QUALIFICATIONS

Ability to communicate clearly to the public on matters related to Planning; perform research under minimal direction; write clearly and concisely; read basic site and building plans and maps, such as Zoning Maps, Assessor's Parcel Maps, and similar planning-related maps. Need to be able to type, use PC-based word-processing software, and have basic computer skills. GIS or other permitting or planning software skills a plus.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an employee to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of this job, the employee is frequently required to sit and talk or hear. The employee is occasionally required to stand; walk; use hands to finger, handle, or feel objects, tools, or controls; reach with hands and arms; and climb or balance. The employee must frequently lift and/or move up to 10 pounds and occasionally lift and/or move up to 50 pounds. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, color vision, depth perception, and the ability to adjust focus.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

The work environment characteristics described here are representative of those an employee encounters while performing the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of this job, the employee occasionally works in outside weather conditions and is occasionally exposed to wet and/or humid conditions. The noise level in the work environment is usually moderate.