

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF
THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND
ENERGY CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Torrance Environmental Quality and Energy Conservation Commission convened in a regular session at 7:02 p.m. on Thursday, December 1, 2011 in the West Annex meeting room at Torrance City Hall.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present: Commissioners Cunningham, Gobble, Reilly, Robbins, Watson, and Chairperson Griffiths.

Absent: Commissioner Chim.

Also Present: Environmental and Planning Manager Lodan, Senior Environmental Quality Officer Jones, Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan, Environmental Quality Officer Sheldon, Environmental Quality Officer Hill, Environmental Quality Officer Colclasure, and Environmental Quality Officer Tedford.

MOTION: Commissioner Reilly moved to grant Commissioner Chim an excused absence for the December 1, 2011 Commission meeting. Commissioner Gobble seconded the motion; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval.

3. SALUTE TO THE FLAG

Commissioner Watson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. POSTING OF THE AGENDA

MOTION: Commissioner Robbins, seconded by Commissioner Gobble, moved to accept and file the report of the secretary on the posting of the agenda for this meeting; a roll call vote reflected unanimous approval (absent Commissioner Chim).

5. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

6A. MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 3, 2011

MOTION: Commissioner Watson moved for the approval of the November 3, 2011 meeting minutes as presented. Commissioner Gobble seconded the motion; a roll call vote reflected unanimous approval (absent Commissioner Chim, Commissioner Cunningham abstaining).

7. ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

7A. ENVIRONMENTAL STAFF CODE ENFORCEMENT PRESENTATION

Senior Environmental Quality Officer Jones introduced the item and reported that the City's Environmental Quality Officers are responsible for code enforcement of a variety of issues that concern the community. She stated that the Division consists of five Environmental Quality Officers, two senior staff members, one part-time member, and one permit technician, all who report to Environmental and Planning Manager Lodan. She described the four areas of the City and introduced staff members responsible for them. She stated that the Division is reactive to complaints and described the process of verification and notification, noting that staff members exhaust every resource they can to resolve issues before resorting to citation or prosecution.

With the aid of slides, Environmental Quality Officer Sheldon provided information about violations concerning property maintenance. She showed examples of trash and debris, hoarding, improper composting, and overgrown vegetation that can lead to rodent and vermin harborage, noting that the City provides dumpsters to facilitate cleanup. She stated that lack of vegetation is also a problem due to blowing dust and runoff, and that vacant commercial properties attract vandalism and illegal dumping.

Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan discussed the problem of inoperative, wrecked, or long-term storage of a variety of vehicles in public view and at times parked on lawns or landscape areas. She stated that owners are given the option of removing the vehicle, getting it fixed, or putting it in a garage. She described how staff often works with the Police Department's Community Lead Officers to resolve issues of improper occupancy, unsafe conditions, and illegal activities.

Environmental Quality Officer Colclasure provided a slide presentation regarding garage conversions, unpermitted construction of habitable elements, habitation in garages, and stagnant swimming pools and spas that attract mosquitoes. She explained how staff works with owners to bring conversions back to garage status due to health and safety reasons.

Responding to Commissioner Watson's inquiry, she advised that the City offers programs and provides assistance to seniors and low-income residents.

With the aid of slides, Environmental Quality Officer Hill discussed the problem of non-conforming and home-based businesses in residential neighborhoods. He stated that these uses often contribute to an abundance of commercial vehicles, odors, noise, pollution, parking problems, and employees on site.

Environmental Quality Officer Sheldon provided information about weekly yard and garage sales that are challenging because the City does not have an ordinance to address them. She also discussed signage code enforcement of non-conforming signage that includes signs placed on public property, vehicle billboards, portable ground signs, bow and flag banners, electronic window signs, merchandise utilized as signage, and political signs placed on private property without the owner's permission.

In response to Commissioner Cunningham's inquiry, she advised that advertising on buses, bus stop benches, and shelters are handled by the Transit Department.

Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan presented a report on the Noise Abatement Center and community noise. She showed a map of the six noise monitors surrounding Torrance Airport that monitor noise levels seven days a week, 24 hours a day. She discussed how aircraft are identified and how notices of violations are sent out, noting that transient pilots and not Torrance-based pilots are the major violators.

In response to Commissioner Watson's inquiry about Robinson Helicopter test flights, she stated that it is not necessarily Robinson Helicopter but the flight schools at the Airport.

Commissioner Gobble raised the issue of large aircraft over-flights when LAX changes its flight patterns and Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan advised that the FAA has jurisdiction over aircraft altitude.

She discussed commercial and residential community noise problems that include equipment noise, early morning and late night deliveries, gardening, trash pick-up, heating and cooling, and parking lot sweeping.

Responding to Chairperson Griffiths' inquiry, Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan stated that complaints about leaf blowers are occasionally received but that the Municipal Code does not cover it, noting that 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. is "quiet time."

Commissioner Gobble, with Chairperson Griffiths concurring, inquired if staff could research leaf blowers and Environmental and Planning Manager Lodan advised that they could do so with direction from City Council.

In response to Commissioner Reilly's inquiry, Senior Environmental Quality Officer Duncan stated that smoke and odor issues are regulated by the Air Quality Management District. She added that open fire pits and trash burning are illegal and are turned over to Fire Prevention.

Senior Environmental Quality Officer Jones provided information about the six oil wells in non-conforming locations, three year extensions reviewed by the Commission, and annual site inspections. She discussed staff's duties for Plan Check that include reviewing plans for set-back requirements, addressing potential nuisance issues, and conducting final inspections prior to release of Certificate of Occupancy.

In response to Commissioner Reilly's inquiry, Senior Environmental Quality Officer Jones stated that the City is fortunate that there have not been many vacant properties. She noted that the majority of complaints are property maintenance issues and garage conversions and that these cases have been increasing since the economic downturn.

Commissioners expressed their appreciation to staff members for their dedication, passion, and taking time out of their busy schedules to educate them.

9. ORAL COMMUNICATION

9A. Commissioner Gobble discussed the holiday light exchange at City Hall, noting that LED lights are safer, use less energy, and should be put on timers. Commissioners Reilly and Watson also attended the exchange.

9B. Commissioner Robbins expressed interest in pursuing the issue of leaf blowers.

9C. Commissioner Reilly requested an excused absence for the February 2, 2012 Commission meeting.

MOTION: Commissioner Watson moved to grant Commissioner Reilly an excused absence for the February 2, 2012 Commission meeting. Commissioner Robbins seconded the motion; a voice vote reflected unanimous approval (absent Commissioner Chim).

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: At 8:35 p.m., Commissioner Robbins moved to adjourn the meeting to February 2, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. in the West Annex meeting room. Commissioner Watson seconded the motion and, hearing no objection, Chairperson Griffiths so ordered.

Approved as Submitted February 2, 2012 s/ Sue Herbers, City Clerk
