



Planning Commission Hearing Process

Purpose

This overview explains the major steps and scheduling targets used to prepare land use projects for a Planning Commission hearing. It is intended to improve transparency and predictability for applicants, agents, and the public while accounting for statutory noticing, environmental review, and agenda-production requirements.

Process at a Glance

Step	Milestone	High-Level Overview
1	Application submitted	The applicant submits the required land use application materials. Staff conducts an initial intake screening, creates the project record, and assigns a case number.
2	Fees paid	The Department issues a fee estimate or invoice. Payment and the Real Time Billing Agreement initiate the formal completeness review.
3	Completeness review	Staff and participating agencies review the application within the applicable 30-day review period. The project is accepted for processing or an Information Hold Letter identifies required revisions.
4	Resubmittal, if needed	The applicant provides revised materials. Staff reviews each resubmittal during an additional review period. Prompt, complete responses help avoid delays.
5	Environmental review	The planner determines the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pathway, applicable fees, and whether technical studies or additional information are required.
6	Hearing preparation	Once the project is sufficiently complete, staff applies the appropriate hearing track and works backward from a prospective hearing date to establish readiness, notice, and agenda milestones.
7	Hearing and NOFA issued	The Planning Commission considers the application and may approve, conditionally approve, or deny it. Following the Commission's action, a Notice of Final Action (NOFA) is issued, and final environmental filings and outstanding fees are completed, as applicable ¹ .

Scheduling Framework

Planning Commission hearing dates serve as the scheduling anchor. Milestone dates are calculated backward from each adopted hearing date based on the project's environmental review and noticing requirements. Overall processing estimates describe the broader review period; hearing-readiness targets identify when a project should be sufficiently complete to enter final notice and agenda preparation.

Important Scheduling Considerations

Processing times vary based on project complexity, site conditions, environmental impacts, technical studies, agency coordination, and the completeness and accuracy of applicant materials. In many cases, a land use permit requiring a public hearing may take approximately six to twelve months to process. Applicants can help reduce avoidable delays by submitting complete materials, clearly describing the proposal, responding promptly to information requests, and avoiding or addressing environmental impacts early.

¹ Appeal periods and applicable procedures may vary depending on whether the project is located within the Coastal Zone and whether the action is appealable to the California Coastal Commission.

Overall Project-Processing Estimates

Environmental Pathway	General Planning Estimate
California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exempt	Approximately 60 days
Negative Declaration (ND)/Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND)	Approximately 180 days
Environmental Impact Report (EIR)	Approximately 365 days or longer

Actual timelines may be affected by:

- Application completeness and the quality of submitted materials;
- Project complexity, site constraints, and environmental impacts;
- Required technical studies, agency consultation, and legal review;
- Information Hold letters, project revisions, and applicant response time;
- Public comments, expanded noticing, or additional environmental analysis;
- Staffing, agenda capacity, hearing availability, holidays, and office closures; and
- Other project-specific statutory, regulatory, or policy requirements.

Public-Facing Hearing Tracks

Milestone	10-Day Notice Track	30-Day Notice Track
Generally, Applies to:	CEQA-exempt projects	Projects requiring an environmental document, including ND/MND and EIR projects
Target Project Ready	Approximately 45 calendar days before the anticipated hearing	Approximately 70 calendar days before the anticipated hearing
Public Notice/Review	Minimum 10 calendar days before the hearing	Minimum 30 calendar days before the hearing; earlier posting may be required
Staff Report and Agenda	Publicly posted approximately 10 calendar days before the hearing	Publicly posted approximately 10 calendar days before the hearing

How Hearing Dates Are Evaluated

Determine the appropriate hearing track. Staff identifies the applicable environmental review and public-noticing requirements.

Establish key milestone dates. Project-readiness, public-notice or review, and agenda-publication dates are calculated based on the anticipated hearing date.

Evaluate scheduling requirements. Staff considers legal requirements, holidays, staffing and agenda capacity, and project-specific coordination needs.

Adjust the anticipated hearing date, if necessary. If required milestones cannot be met, staff evaluates the next available hearing date to allow adequate time for review, noticing, and agenda preparation.

Planning Tool Disclaimer. The matrix and milestone projections are for planning purposes only. They do not establish guaranteed hearing dates, mandatory deadlines, vested rights, or entitlement approvals. Meeting a target does not guarantee agenda placement. The Department may adjust a projected hearing when additional review, information, coordination, capacity, or legal compliance is required.