

Working with Intention, Purpose, and Due Process

Recently there have been some concerns expressed about the balance Ojai maintains regarding its residents, local businesses, and visitors. This balance is a major priority, and something we strive to achieve every day. In addition to the Council and City Staff, this important work is taken on by Ojai's Commissions and Committees. Each Commission (Planning, Historic Preservation, Public Safety, Arts, Parks and Recreation) and Committee (Budget Review, Disaster Preparation) has its own area of responsibility and advises the City Council.

When openings for Commissioners occur, members of the community apply and are then interviewed. A unanimous recommendation from a selection committee, made up of a rotating Council member, the Mayor, and the Chair of that Commission, is then sent to the City Council for approval. It's an important and thorough system and requires a great deal of dedication and volunteerism from the community member. At public meetings, Commissioners and City staff have valuable, prescribed roles within the process. As Commissions review individual applications (e.g. for a new business, a new public art proposal, or building expansion), each are considered based upon applicable requirements, zoning and ordinances, and government best practices. While the process can be slower than we might like, each phase is valuable and allows for critical public input and transparency during the review. This public system is one of the ways balance is sought.

In addition to these public meetings, City departments work closely with applicants to guide them through the process, explaining the requirements along the way. While some may find these conditions burdensome, they exist to preserve Ojai's character and values, and to strike an equilibrium, as much as possible, between competing goods. The partnerships with the Ojai Valley Chamber of Commerce and Ojai's nonprofit organizations are additional ways the City seeks to support its businesses, services, and cultural resources, and to value them as true partners in our community flourishing.

But we can do better, and we must strive to do so. The City Council has recently tasked our legal firm with reviewing our critical ordinances for consistencies, alignment, and mapping to best practices. We also take feedback seriously. The City of Ojai should not be overly hard to work with, and sometimes it still is. We are constantly working to improve that.

Balance is an ongoing activity, and community conversations and initiatives continue to be needed. We have to thoughtfully respond to change and opportunity, and deliberative processes help us all do that. We are extremely grateful to those who volunteer to make this happen. Significant hours are needed every week, not just in preparation but in meeting attendance and in collaboration. We are in this together and it takes all aspects of

our community to participate, including the guidance and feedback that helps us be as effective and responsive as we can.