

Dear all,

Today's agenda item provides two criticisms of the current makeup of the planning commission.

1. That the "optics" are bad. and 2. That it is "unusual".

In response to the first criticism, I would hope that just reading the word "optics" would make anyone who cares about good policy cringe. Every middle schooler learns that once you start making decisions based on what others might think of you, you're in trouble. As for the second criticism, the argument that our county should endeavor to become more "in line with other counties" should be based on evidence of success those other counties are having due to the makeup of their commission.

We should, of course, remain vigilant that special interests do not impose undemocratic influence on our democratic and technocratic processes. However, there seems to be no argument that this is currently the case. Instead, the concern is that the "optics" might lead uninformed people to think that it is the case.

Since we are, then, arguing in the complete abstract, it is worth pondering the opposite causal theory: Perhaps providing specific appointees from industries that have a massive impact on land use in this county *decreases* problems with undue influence from these sectors by freeing the other, district-appointed commissioners to focus on the many other planning challenges we face. As a rancher, I think that it would appropriate for my 1st District commissioner to pass on my agricultural concerns to the Agricultural Commissioner. In my estimation, this clearly decreases undue influence, while increasing the potential for agricultural expertise.

As for the interest on the part of other industries to have representation on the Planning Commission, it seems perfectly reasonable that if that industry or interest is playing an outsized role in land-use decisions in this county, it would be helpful to include an expert to aid in Planning Commission recommendations. However, if those industries' interests are already being mediated through the interests of homeowners and landowners, I would consider them to be represented by the district-appointed commissioners. The question I would ask would be: "does this industry represent a large number of parcels and acreages that do not include residences or retail buildings?" This is certainly true for ag and forestry, where there are tens of thousands of acres in our county owned and managed under an economic and regulatory regime that the average volunteer citizen commissioner will not, and need not, understand. For example, conservation organizations devoted to the purchase and restoration of wildlands do not currently have a voice on the Planning Commission. If they are acting, or sometime in the future begin acting as a major force in land use in our county, they should.

In the meantime, let us do better than our neighboring counties. If Mendocino County is going to base our decisions on the "optics" of being "unusual", we're in big trouble.

If there is interest and energy behind improving the Planning Commission, don't let it go to waste. Here are a few ideas that might more directly address the calcification and inertia of the current situation:

1. Consider moving PC meetings to a time after a normal workday, allowing for broader participation.
2. Consider term limits for commissioners.
3. Consider providing [education](#) for commissioners.
4. Consider providing a stipend to commissioners in order to allow for a greater diversity of participants. For example: "[High workload and low pay leave Planning Commission roles out of reach for many](#)"
5. Consider debating the role that a strong planning philosophy framework could play in structuring the planning commission's approach. For example, "[Strong Towns Academy](#)".

All the best,

Kyle