

Date of Hearing: June 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 963 (Laird) – As Amended March 9, 2026

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 13 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill sets certain time limits for the California Coastal Commission (Commission) to identify and review necessary data, newly (“de novo”) review, and hold a public hearing when a coastal development permit (CDP) issued by a local jurisdiction is appealed to the Commission and the Commission determines a substantial issue exists.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Requires an appeal of an action by a local government on a CDP application pursuant to existing law be considered properly submitted if the appealing party or parties submit to the Commission’s executive director a completed, signed copy of the appeal form provided by the Commission within the applicable timeline established in Commission regulations, as specified.
- 2) Requires the appealing party or parties to provide in writing the specific grounds for the appeal and requires the appealing party or parties, in describing the grounds for the appeal, to identify the specific features of the proposed development and how those features do not conform to the standards set forth in the certified local coastal program (LCP) and the public access policies in the Coastal Act, as specified.
- 3) Requires the Commission, if it determines that a substantial issue exists with respect to the grounds on which the appeal has been filed, after the substantial issue hearing, to provide for de novo review and a public hearing on the CDP application consistent with relevant deadlines and procedures.
- 4) Requires the executive director, within 30 calendar days after the Commission determines that a substantial issue exists, to provide the permit applicant with a complete description of the information needed for the Commission to complete a de novo review and hold a public hearing on the CDP application.
- 5) Requires the executive director, when the applicant submits the requisite information, to review the submitted information and, within 30 calendar days, either notify the applicant in writing that the submittal is complete or, if necessary, provide a complete description of any remaining information needed.

- 6) Requires the Commission, once the executive director has received a complete submittal, to hold a de novo public hearing and act on the CDP application within 180 calendar days and authorizes that time limit to be extended, as specified.

#### **FISCAL EFFECT:**

The Commission anticipates any costs associated with processing de novo appeals under the deadlines set forth in the bill to be minor and absorbable.

#### **COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

If a local jurisdiction has a certified [LCP], they are responsible for issuing a CDP for a new development project in a coastal zone. In some cases, developers and other stakeholders may appeal the local agency's decision on a CDP to the Commission. While the purpose of the appeals process is to ensure that projects in the most sensitive areas of the coast are in compliance with the local coastal program and the Coastal Act before they move forward, appeals can sometimes add delays in the permitting process, creating uncertainty for developers who are working to meet housing and infrastructure needs in coastal communities. SB 963 will reduce delays and uncertainty for developers while upholding our commitment to coastal protection and access.

- 2) **Background.** The Commission administers the Coastal Act and regulates proposed development along the coast and in nearby areas in the coastal zone. Generally, any development activity in the coastal zone requires a CDP from the Commission or local government with a certified LCP. In jurisdictions with certified LCPs, local governments issue CDPs with detailed planning and design standards.

Additionally, under specified circumstances, the applicant for the CDP or any "aggrieved person" may directly appeal to the Commission a permitting decision made by a local government with an approved LCP. In reviewing the permit, the Commission generally must defer to standards outlined in the LCP. For projects for which the Commission finds no substantial issue, the Commission rejects the appeal and the local approval stands. For those appeals that raise a substantial issue, the Commission considers the project in its entirety. In this "de novo" phase of the review, the Commission may either approve or deny the project with additional conditions necessary for compliance.

It takes the Commission, on average, two to three months to decide on an appeal that does not raise a substantial issue and six to eight months to decide on an appeal that raises a substantial issue. According to the Commission, it does its best to process appeals as quickly as possible, generally in the order they are received. Informational needs, complexity of issues, extent of public interest, applicant responsiveness, and staff workload all affect the timing of the appeal process. According to the author, the lack of statutory timelines governing de novo hearings increases costs and complicates project financing. The author argues this bill provides more certainty to anyone navigating the Commission appeals

process by establishing clear timelines and ensuring that appealed projects move through the process in a standardized and timely manner.

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