

Site Search Checklists

Zoning and Building Ordinances

A zoning ordinance is a community's principal means of controlling land uses and preventing incompatible uses from occurring next to one another. Zoning ordinances include a written ordinance and an official map and regulate the height, bulk, and density of development within each zoning district. They can also require dedications, reservations, or exactions for public services that may be required to support the proposed development.

These regulations also regulate the size and shape of lots and blocks, and the width, length, and intersection of streets. They contain construction standards for streets, curbs and gutters, sewers, water mains, and sidewalks.

Checklist for Zoning Ordinances

1. Get a copy of the current regulations. Read and understand them. Discuss the implications, in the group and with your consultants. Check the zoning map—determine in which zoning district the proposed site is located.
2. How do the following restrictions affect your project?
 - density restrictions (units per acre, for example)
 - height limitations
 - parking requirements
 - setback requirements (distance from buildings to lot lines)
 - floor-to-land area ratios (F.A.R.)
 - land dedications (for example, open spaces and parks)
 - land reservations (for example, future school sites,)
3. List and evaluate the standards for lots:
 - minimum area
 - open-space requirements
 - clustering units and zero lot line housing
4. Determine if the plan will meet these standards on the proposed site.
5. Determine if you can obtain a variance, exception, or revision of standards that pose problems.

Rezoning

If rezoning is required, your group will need to do the following things. In fact, many of the steps below will be required even without a rezoning:

- Make a list of and carefully follow the procedures for providing public notice, holding public hearings, providing notice to adjacent landowners,
- Find out the schedule for submittal dates, hearings and public meetings
- Get copies of the application forms; fill them out carefully and make sure your drawings and other documents are well prepared.
- Pay the required fees.
- Consider an alternative zoning you could live with. Is it consistent with the comprehensive plan?
- Meet with the planning and zoning staff, adjacent property owners, and neighborhood

groups to determine the specific issues of concern and the likelihood of obtaining rezoning.

- Design a solution that responds to the issues raised by the planning and zoning staff and neighborhood groups.

Streets

1. Understand the standards for streets: widths, cul-de-sac dimensions, traffic control signals, sidewalks, stormwater inlet design, paving materials, rights-of-way, easements.
2. Determine if these standards can be met on the proposed site with the plan you envision. If not, can you obtain a variance, exception, or revision to standards that pose problems. How much time will it take?
3. Is a traffic study required?
4. Do you need to improve or extend the existing roadway system to the site?

Local Comprehensive Plans

Comprehensive plans, sometimes called master plans or neighborhood plans have three common characteristics: First, they contain physical plans or a guide to the physical development of the community. Second, they are long range, usually covering five or more years. Third, they include a policy statement that indicates how the community intends to control its character, location, and rate of growth. The comprehensive plan is a guide to decision making both for the developer in determining optimum building locations and government officials in evaluating new development proposals.

Checklist for Compliance with Comprehensive Plans

1. Review the comprehensive plan and highlight its goals, objectives, and policies. Understand the long-term vision for the city or region.
2. List every feature of your project that supports a goal, objective, or policy in the plan. Be specific.
3. List every feature of your project that is inconsistent with a goal, objective, or policy in the plan. Again, be specific and outline a reasoned explanation of why your project cannot meet the objective or policy.
4. Evaluate those project features that are inconsistent with a provision in the plan to see if the project can be redesigned to eliminate the inconsistency.
5. List the direct economic and social benefits the project will provide to the local and regional economy and population, e.g.: dedications for open spaces, housing diversity, real estate taxes.

Checklist for Utilities

Water

1. Is public water available on site? If not, how far will the main have to be extended? Is the main big enough to meet the projected need?
2. Where are/will fire hydrants be located? How many are needed?
3. If public water is unavailable, are private wells allowed? Will groundwater provide an adequate supply and quality of water if wells are drilled?
4. What are the costs involved?

Sewer

1. Is public sewer available on site? Is capacity available at a treatment facility? Is common trenching of utilities allowed?
2. Are alternative on-site waste treatment systems allowed? At what point in the process must designs be prepared and application made for approval?
3. What are the costs involved?

Gas, Electricity, Telephone, Cable, and Television

1. Is the utility required to extend service?
2. Are utility lines allowed to be buried? Required to be buried?
3. At what point do utilities connect to the property?
4. What are the costs involved?

Other Concerns

1. What erosion and sediment control practices are required? What are the design and construction standards for them?
2. Does the site have any steep slopes of 10 percent to 15 percent or greater?
3. What is the design storm for stormwater drainage facilities? Do you have to retain all or a percentage of stormwater runoff on the site?
4. Does the site contain floodplains as designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers? Check the FEMA and state floodplain maps to document floodplain boundaries. Is the project in a community participating in the National Flood Insurance Program?
5. Have you checked for federal, state or locally regulated wetlands on the site?
6. Does the site contain any special or unique types of vegetation that are prime habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered species? Are there any rare, threatened, or endangered species present?