



**Michigan Association of Planning
A Chapter of the American Planning Association**

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Site Plans

What is a Site Plan?

Most communities require site plans for all development projects that are reviewed by local officials. A site plan is a detailed graphic and written document that shows how a site will be developed. It is a legally binding, professionally prepared proposal for the use and development of a parcel of land. Many zoning ordinances have an entire article devoted to site plan review. If a site plan conforms with all zoning standards, it **must** be approved.

Site plan review is the process of reviewing documents and drawings required by the zoning ordinance to ensure that a proposed land use or activity meets zoning ordinance standards as well as state and federal statutes. A site plan includes existing and proposed man-made features, as well as natural site characteristics.

Site Plan Review and the Zoning Ordinance

The statutory requirements for site plan review are identified in the zoning act, which require the following provisions be specified in the zoning ordinance:

- The use or activities requiring site plan review. The zoning ordinance must state which land uses or activities require site plan approval and the conditions under which a site plan will be reviewed. For example, the zoning ordinance may require that all uses permitted by right require a site plan review or a site plan review may be required for all projects over a certain square footage or acreage. Site plan review is also required for all special land uses and Planned Unit Developments (PUD).
- The requirements and standards upon which decisions for site plan reviews will be based.
- The procedures and supporting materials required for application, review and approval.
- The bodies or officials responsible for review and approval (for example, the zoning

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administrator, the planning commission, the zoning board and/or the legislative body).

When is a Site Plan Review Needed?

Ultimately, it is up to the community to decide what zoning districts or type of uses will require review. Typically, single and two-family dwellings on individual lots and accessory buildings are not subject to site plan review. However, when reviewing special land uses (SLU) or PUDs, there should be separate motions, one for the approval of the PUD or SLU, and a separate as well as approval of the site plan.

What Should Be Considered During the Site Plan Review?

The zoning act does not include specific review standards for site plan review. Typical standards address traffic circulation, landscape preservation, the adequacy of public facilities, drainage, lighting, and other similar items. However, the statute does require that the standards used to make a decision on a site plan must be identified in the zoning ordinance. If the plan conforms to these standards and other requirements of the ordinance, it **must** be approved.

The zoning ordinance should describe the minimum application requirements, which will normally be the same as those for other zoning reviews. Review policies should establish a submittal requirement to allow the reviewers sufficient time for site visits, etc.

A final site plan should be as complete as possible, including details on utilities, driveway design, drainage, signs to ensure compliance with the ordinance and other community regulations. An application for review should not be accepted without ensuring that the items required by the ordinance are on the plan. A checklist is helpful for this review.

Site plans are reviewed by the planning commission at a public meeting, however, the zoning acts do not require a public hearing for site plan reviews. If a hearing is held, the ordinance should specify the notice procedure to be used. At a minimum, the notice should contain a description of the property, the proposed use, the time and place of hearing, and where the plan may be reviewed and/or comments submitted.