



# City of Plainwell Development Guide



"The City of Plainwell is an equal opportunity provider and employer"

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## About the City of Plainwell

Plainwell is located on the southeastern end of Allegan County in southwest Michigan. The City is just east of U.S.131 at the intersection of M-89 providing easy access to Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Richland, and Allegan, our County Seat. Our City is primarily bordered by Gun Plain Township and to the west by Otsego Township. Our City is well-situated within a region that has enjoyed a more stable economic atmosphere than many other Michigan communities.

Plainwell is fortunate to have miles of waterfront being located on the Kalamazoo River with the Millrace encircling much of the town making it known as “The Island City”.

## About the Development Guide

This guide provides a general overview of the City of Plainwell’s development approval process. It is meant to help residents, developers, investors, and others understand the review and approval process for any size project from concept through occupancy. Consultation with staff and/or outside professionals is recommended for most projects. You can learn more online at [Plainwell.org](http://Plainwell.org)

## Key Administrative Staff

Department	Key Contact	Title	Telephone # (269)	E-Mail Address
<b>Administration</b>	Justin Lakamper	City Manager	685-6821	<a href="mailto:jlakamper@plainwell.org">jlakamper@plainwell.org</a>
<b>Public Works</b>	Robert Nieuwenhuis	Superintendent	685-9363	<a href="mailto:rnieuwenhuis@plainwell.org">rnieuwenhuis@plainwell.org</a>
<b>Public Safety</b>	Kevin Callahan	Director	685-9858	<a href="mailto:kcallahan@plainwell.org">kcallahan@plainwell.org</a>
<b>Water Renewal</b>	Bryan Pond	Superintendent		<a href="mailto:bpond@plainwell.org">bpond@plainwell.org</a>
<b>Clerk/Treasurer</b>	JoAnn Leonard	City Clerk	685-6821	<a href="mailto:jleonard@plainwell.org">jleonard@plainwell.org</a>
<b>Community Development/ Zoning/Permits</b>	Denise Siegel	Community Development Manager	685-6821	<a href="mailto:dsiegel@plainwell.org">dsiegel@plainwell.org</a>

## Outside Agencies

Additional agencies may hold jurisdiction on particular developmental issues within the City depending on the projects. Most commonly involved outside agencies are:

Agency	Phone	Website
Allegan County Road Commission	269-673-2184	<a href="http://www.alleganroads.org">www.alleganroads.org</a>
Consumers Energy	800-477-5050	<a href="http://www.Consumersenergy.com">www.Consumersenergy.com</a>
Michigan Department of Transportation		<a href="http://www.michigan.gov/mdot">www.michigan.gov/mdot</a>
Miss Dig	1-800-482-7171	<a href="http://www.missdig.org">www.missdig.org</a>

## Boards and Commissions

Most development applications are considered by the Planning Commission. Other boards or commissions may become involved in your application if appeals, variances, rezoning, text amendments, or incentives are involved. Staff can direct you to the appropriate boards for your particular case.

<b>City Council</b>	Staff: Justin Lakamper	Meets: 2 <sup>nd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup> Mondays @ 7 p.m.
<b>Planning Commission</b>	Staff: Denise Siegel	Meets 1 <sup>st</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays @ 7 p.m.
<b>Zoning Board of Appeals</b>	Staff: Justin Lakamper	Meets as Needed
<b>DDA/BRA/TIFA</b>	Staff: Denise Siegel	Meets 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tuesday @ 7:30 a.m.
<b>Parks and Trees Committee</b>	Staff: Bob Nieuwenhuis	Meets Thursday after the 1 <sup>st</sup> Council Meeting of the month @ 5 p.m.

## Master Plan

The Master Plan is the primary tool for making decisions that affect the future land use of the community. It is a broad-based policy document for the physical, economic and social development as it relates to land use and has a long-range vision providing a coordinated approach to making important decisions. The current Master Plan was adopted in 2023. [City of Plainwell Master Plan](#)

## **Zoning Ordinance/Map**

[City Zoning Ordinance](#)

[City Zoning Map](#)

The Zoning Ordinance regulates the use and development of land within the Plainwell city limits. Standards are in place that apply both citywide and in each specific zoning district. You are encouraged to review the zoning ordinance and consult with staff before initiating any change of use or construction project within the City.

## **Redevelopment Programs**

[Plainwell Paper Mill Property](#) - Progress is certainly happening! The City of Plainwell continues to pursue funding for additional demolition of obsolete structures.

## **Incentives**

[Development incentives](#)

A variety of development incentives are available for local business startups. The City has a Tax Increment Financing Authorities (TIFA's), a Brownfield Plan and other opportunities to help make your project a reality.

## **Notification Procedures**

The City of Plainwell meets or exceeds the notification requirements of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (P.A. 110 of 2008, as amended). The City of Plainwell publishes notices in the Union Enterprise or the Shoppers Guide and mails notices to all persons owning property and occupants of property within 300 feet of the boundary of the property for which approval is requested at least (15) days before the hearing.

## Land Use Applications

This section is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of each type of land use application. This overview does not preempt or supersede any regulations contained within the City of Plainwell Zoning Ordinance. Most land use applications are circulated to other reviewers outside of Planning and Community Development for comment.

The table below demonstrates the role of the various review entities regarding the approval of the various Planning/Zoning applications outlined in the document.

	Planning Commission Recommendation	Planning Commission Approval	Governing Body Approval	Zoning Board of Appeals	Administrative or Building Department Approval
Rezoning	*		*		
Planned Unit Development	*		*		
Special Land Use	*		*		
Site Plan	*	*			
Zoning Compliance					*
Variance	*			*	

## Zoning Compliance

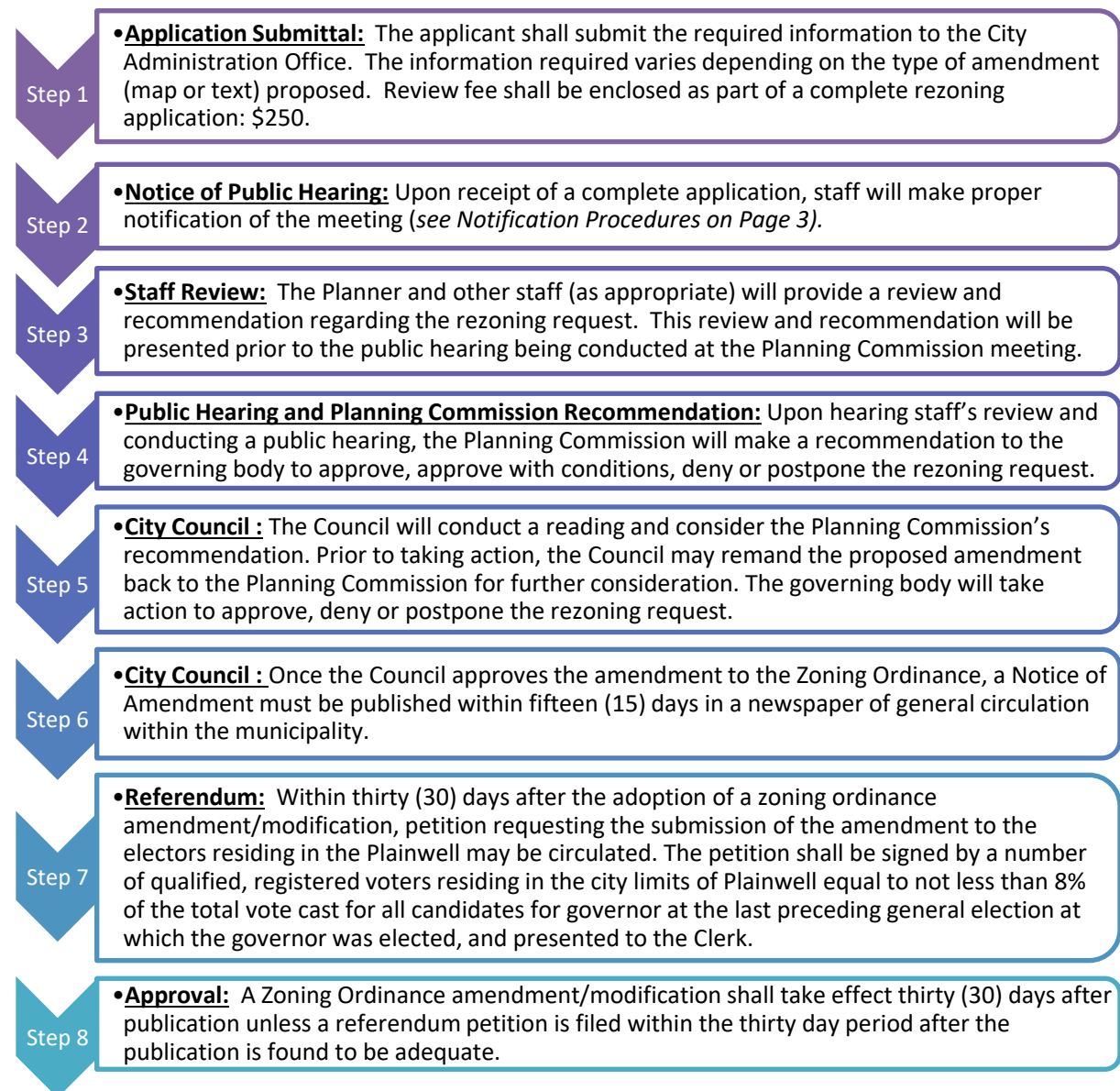
Prior to considering any alterations to an existing structure or use, you are strongly encouraged to consult with the Planning and Community Development Department to confirm that the structure and/or use proposed conform to the requirements of the zoning ordinance. Upon request, the City will provide a zoning compliance letter.

## Pre-Application Meeting

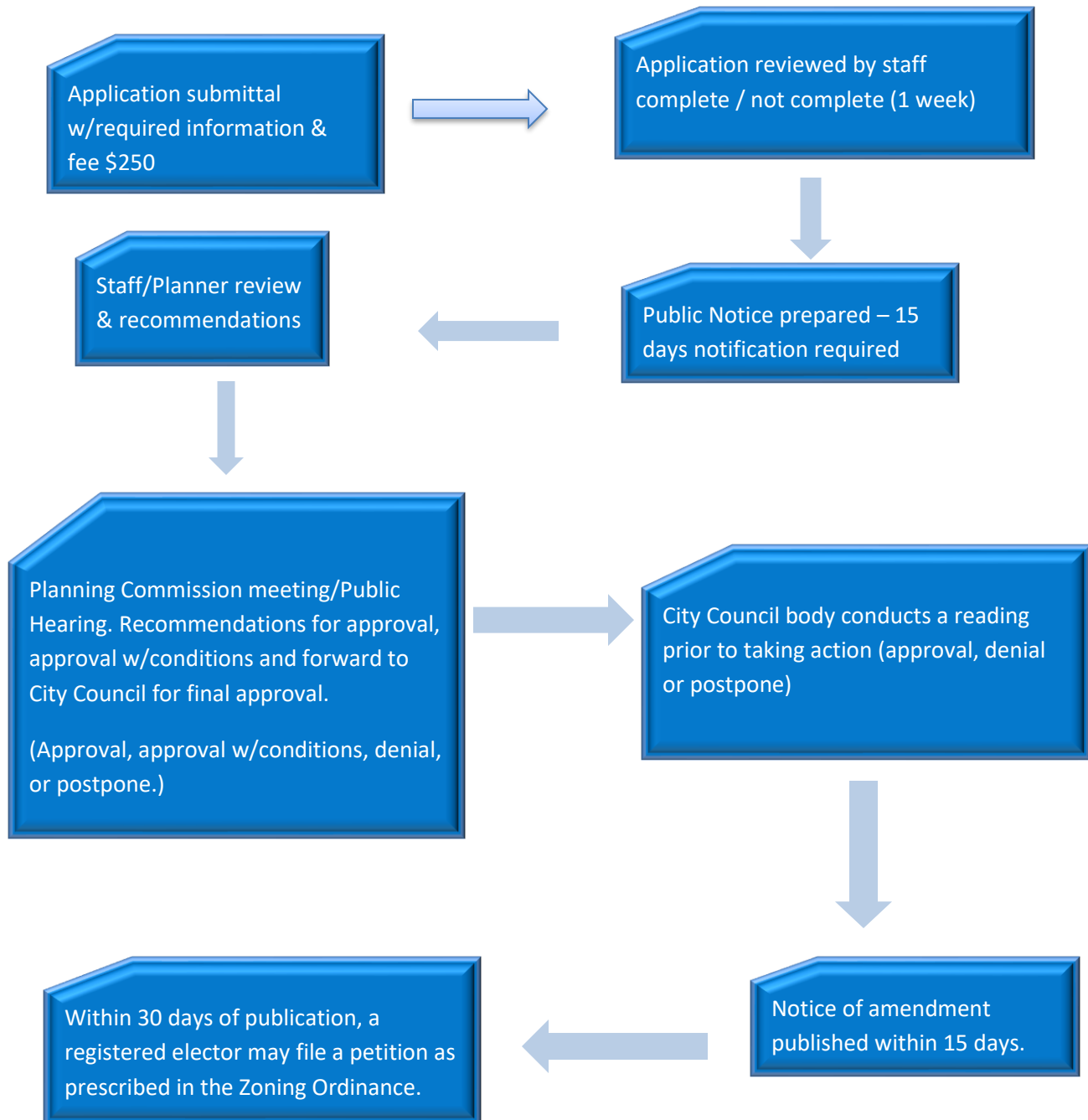
A pre-application meeting with City staff is required prior to submitting any application to the Planning Commission. At this meeting, staff will provide a preliminary review of the site plan, explain zoning requirements, and discuss project timelines. Pre-application meetings often address circumstances that would otherwise result in an application being postponed. Depending on the project scope and timing, multiple pre-application meetings may be necessary. Please call (269) 685-6821 or email [dsiegel@plainwell.org](mailto:dsiegel@plainwell.org) to schedule an appointment.

## ZONING AMENDMENTS

Zoning divides land into categories according to their use and sets regulations for these categories. When a property owner wants to use land in a way that is not permitted by the zoning of the property, the owner must request to rezone the property to a classification which permits the desired use. A rezoning is a legislative process that will amend the zoning map and/or text of an existing zoning code. The governing body (with recommendation from the Planning Commission) has the authority to approve or deny rezoning requests. The governing body may of its own motion, or shall upon petition signed by the owner(s) of a property proposed for rezoning, prepare an ordinance amending or changing the district boundaries or the district regulations.



**REZONING FLOW CHART – Timeline is approximately 4-6 weeks.**



## SPECIAL LAND USE

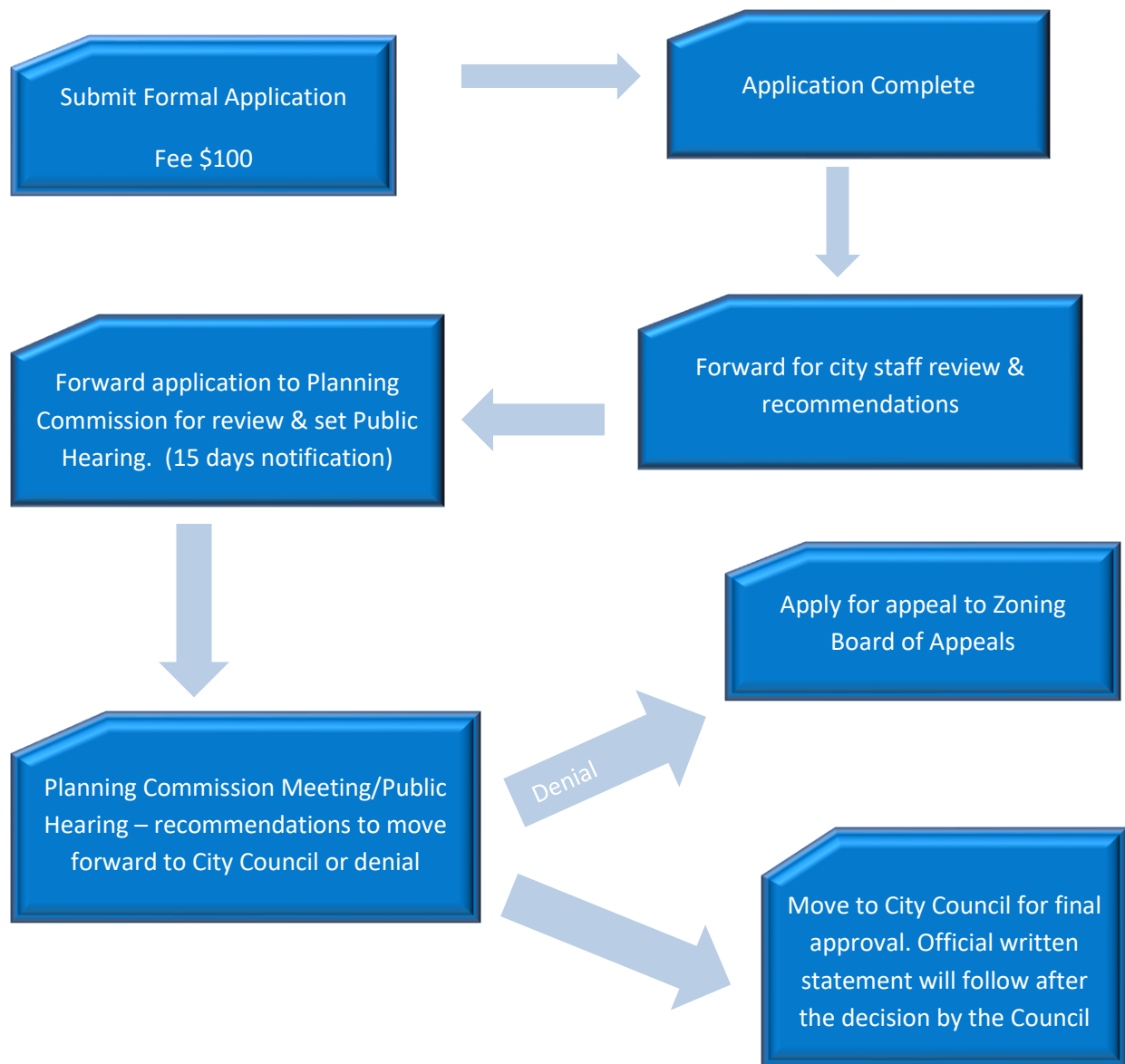
In each zoning district, certain specified, mutually compatible uses are permitted by right. In addition to permitted uses, there are certain other uses which are essential or desirable for the welfare of the community. Such uses are appropriate and are not incompatible with the uses permitted by right in a zoning district, but not at every or any location, or without conditions being imposed because of special problems presented by the use or its particular location in relation to neighboring properties. These uses are identified as special land uses. No special land use shall commence until a Special Land Use Permit is issued in accordance with the City of Plainwell's Ordinance.



The City Council will make the final decision, the basis for the decision and all conditions imposed shall be described in a written statement and provided to the applicant.

Approval is issued if the application conforms to all applicable policies and regulations. Approval with conditions is issued to make certain the application complies with policies and regulations. Denial is issued if the application does not comply with local policies and regulations.

**SPECIAL LAND USE FLOW CHART (Timeline 4-6 weeks)**

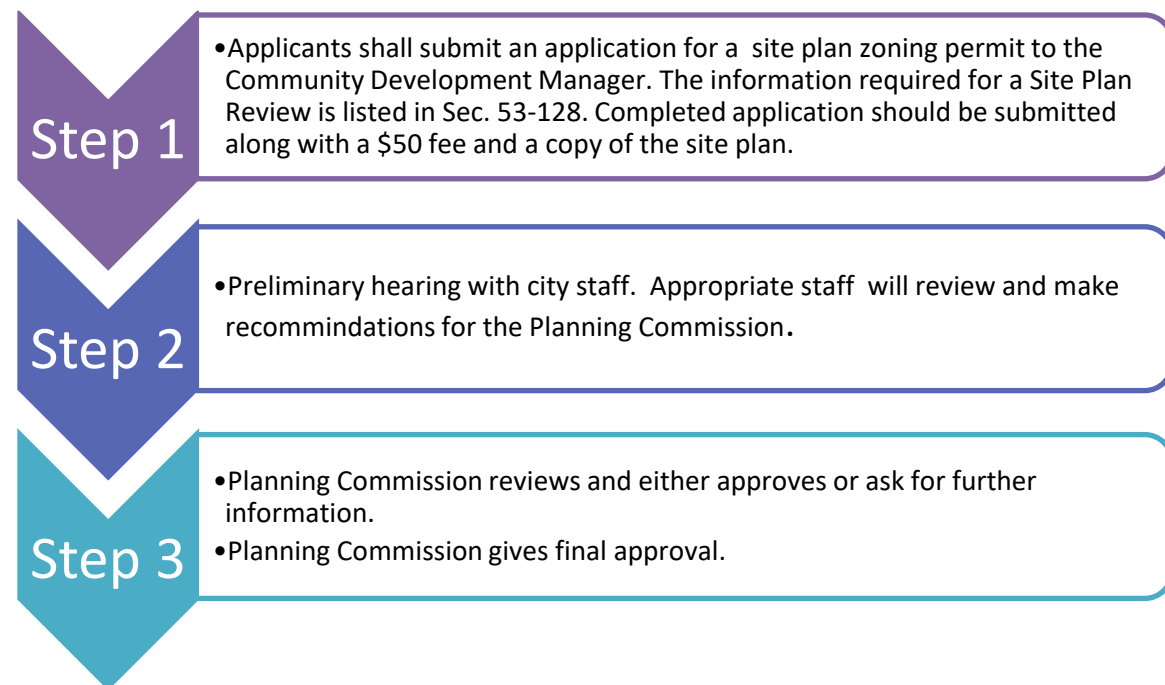


## SITE PLAN REVIEW

Site Plan Review and approval of all development proposals with specific zoning districts is required to ensure that the City develops in an orderly fashion in accordance with the Master Plan. It is recommended that all potential projects (with the exception of individual single-family homes) consult with city staff regarding compliance with Sec. 53-128.

Approval is issued if the application conforms to all applicable policies and regulations. Approval with conditions is issued to make certain the application complies with policies and regulations. Denial is issued if the application does not comply with local policies and regulations.

If the Final Site Plan does not comply with the Preliminary Site Plan, the Final Site Plan must be processed as indicated in Sec. 53-128. Upon approval of a final site plan, appropriate staff may issue required construction permits in accordance with other applicable codes and procedures. (Refer to Construction/Occupancy Permit Section.)



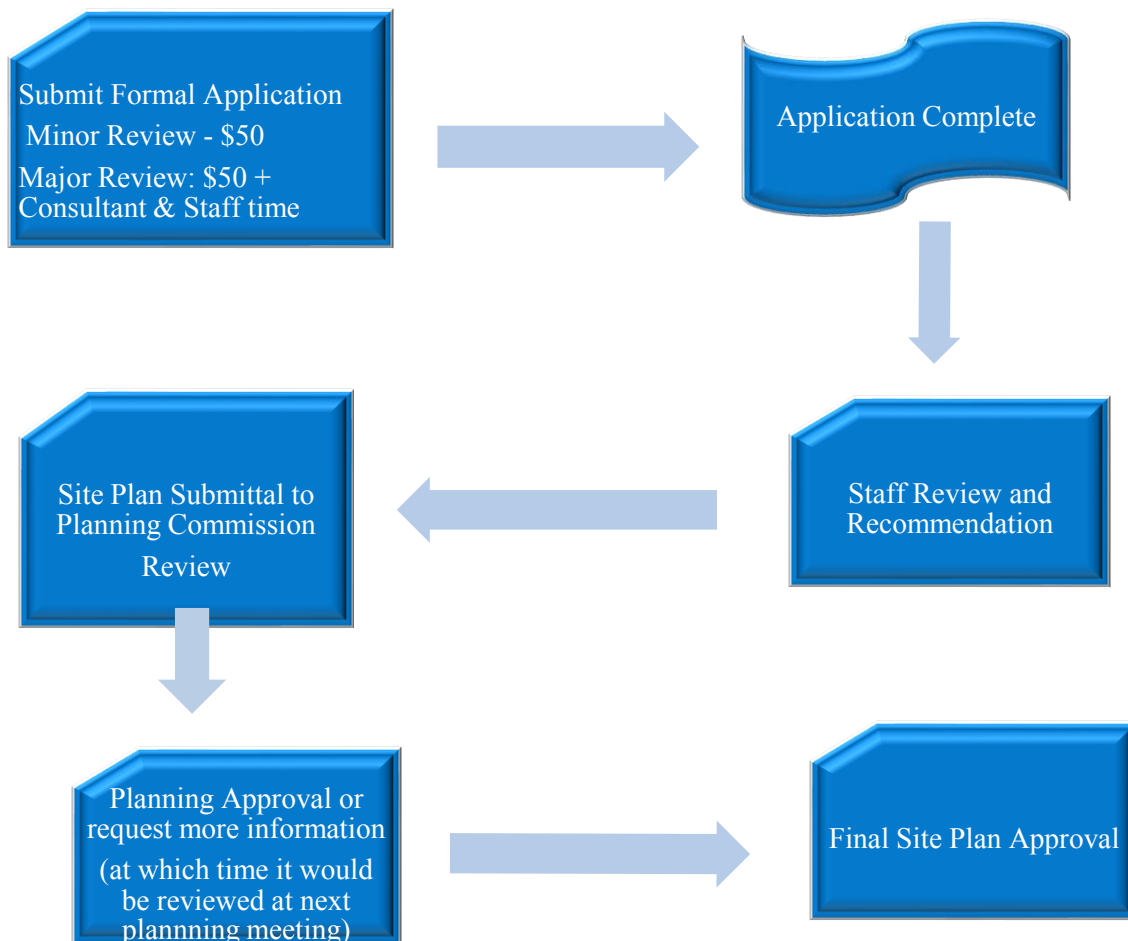
**Administrative Site Plan Review:** Less complex site plans and minor modifications to approved site plans may receive administrative approval from designated staff. All codes and ordinances shall be met to gain approval. Applicable municipal departments and consultants may provide review and comment when necessary.

**Revised Site Plans:** A request to revise, modify or change an approved site plan must be approved by the City Council. Incidents and minor variations of the approved site plan with the written approval of the Building Inspector shall not invalidate prior site plan approval, as in accordance with ordinance 53-128 A – 3.

**Time Limit of Approval and Work Completion:** A Final Site Plan approval remains valid for 6 months from the date of approval. Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis by the City Manager.

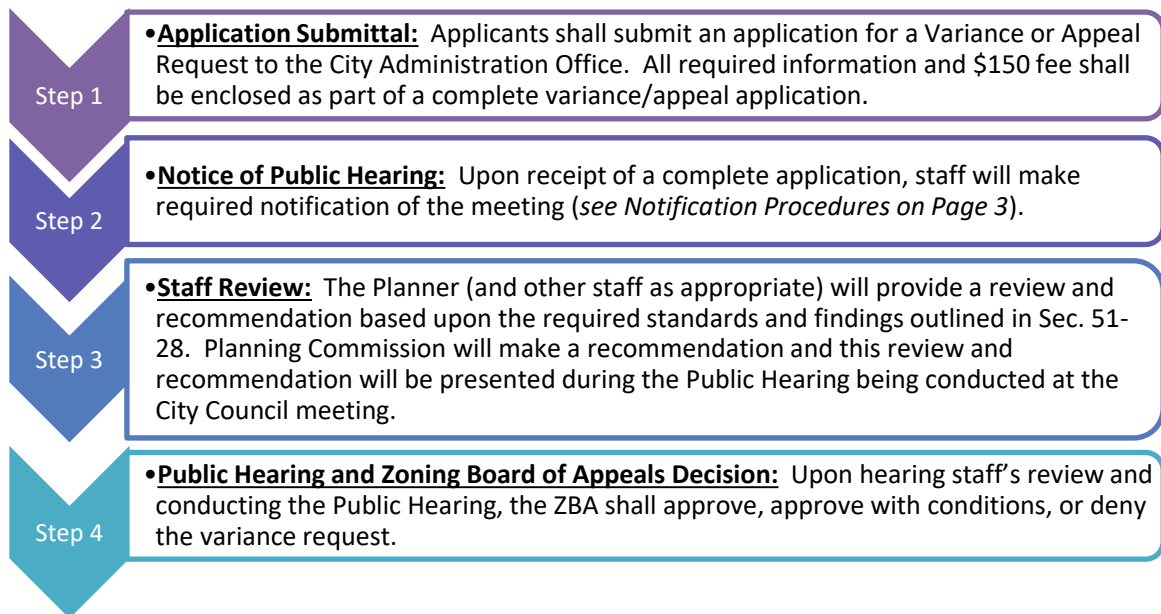
[Applications, Forms, Permits.](#)

**SITE PLAN REVIEW FLOW CHART (approximately 3-6 weeks)**



## ZONING VARIANCES AND APPEALS

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is the legislatively appointed body that can permit variances from the Zoning Ordinance. The most common variances are dimensional such as lot area and width, building height, bulk regulations, setbacks, and off-street parking and loading requirements. The Zoning Board of Appeals can also consider special uses of land and hear and decide questions that arise in the administration of the zoning ordinance, including the interpretation of zoning maps and zoning language.



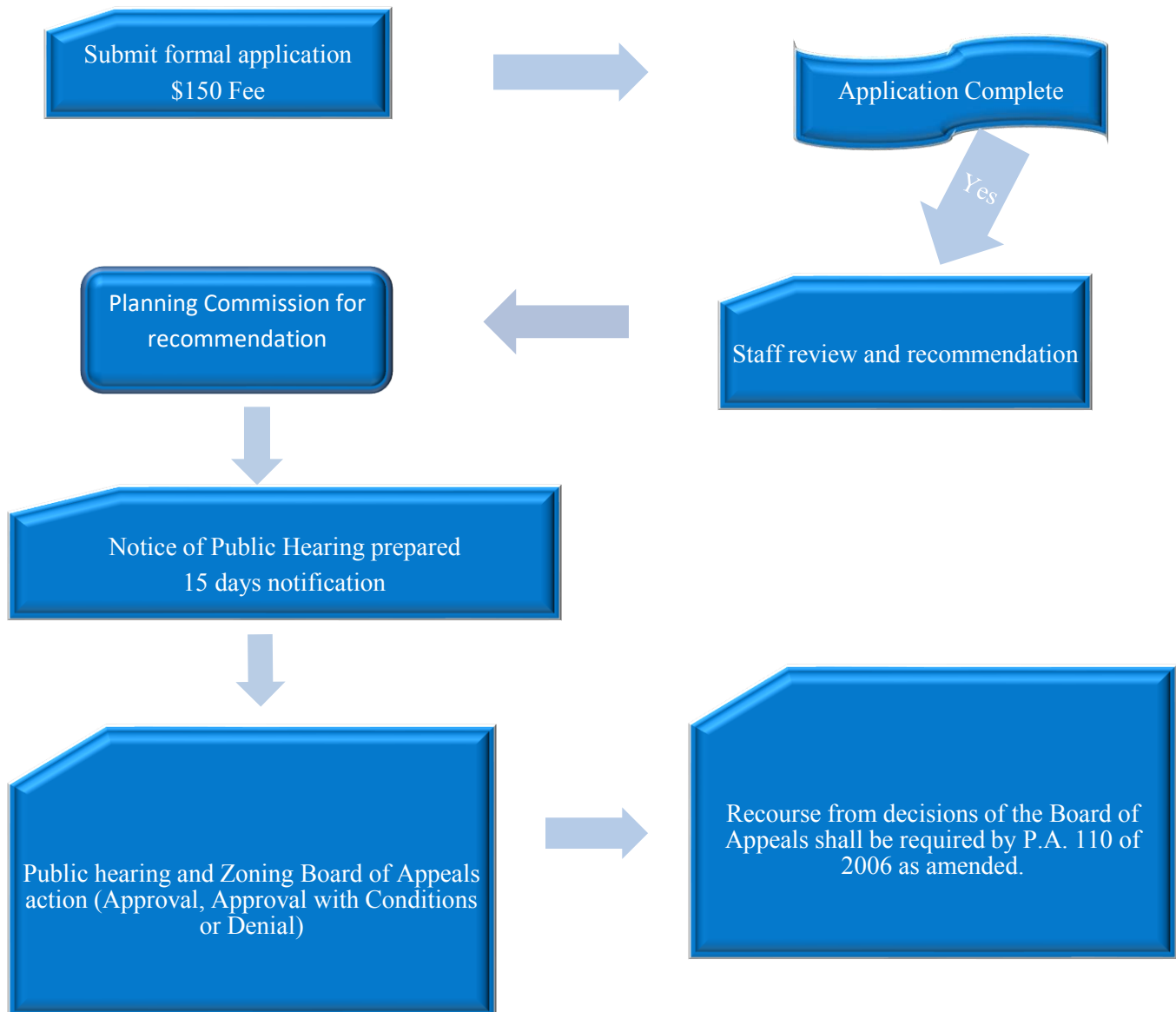
In granting a variance, the board may grant a lesser variance or specify, in writing, conditions regarding the location, character, landscaping, or other treatment that will, in the board's judgment, be reasonably necessary to the furtherance of the intent of the Zoning Ordinance and the protection of the public interest. The breach of any condition shall automatically invalidate the permit granted.

Each variance granted under the provisions of the Zoning Code becomes null and void after 6 Months from the date of granting unless the construction or occupancy authorized by such variance or permit has commenced and is being pursued diligently to completion.

The Zoning Board of Appeals may grant an extension for a period not to exceed 6 Months for an approved variance. This is done on case by case bases and could result in starting the process the over if significant changes are being made.

After a variance has been denied in whole or in part by the board, then no application shall be resubmitted for a period of one year from the date of the last denial; provided, however, that a denied variance may be reconsidered by the board when, in the opinion of the planning and zoning official, or the ZBA, newly discovered evidence or changed conditions warrant such reconsideration.

## VARIANCE FLOW CHART (Timeframe 4-8 weeks)



## Residential & Commercial Construction Projects

### [Building permits](#)

To learn more about projects involving single- and two-family homes please consult our building project guide below. Please note that new construction of a two-family dwelling or conversion of a single – family dwelling to a two-family dwelling requires approval of a special use permit.

Commercial projects, including multiple-family residential housing, require licensed contractors to perform construction and most repairs. A contractor must apply for a building permit for any of the following activities: new construction, additions, demolitions, interior/exterior alterations, or signs.

Contact the Community Development Manager, at City Hall, 269-685-6821 and they can assist with the process.

All required zoning approvals must be obtained prior to application and issuance of any construction permits.

### [Applications and Fee Schedule](#)

**Step 1.** Application Submission: The applicant is required to submit two complete sets of plans signed and sealed by a licensed architect or engineer, along with one electronic copy, with a completed application. The completed applications are submitted to the Administration Office. Building plans must include all work to be performed and meet the following requirements: minimum scale of one-inch equals forty feet, for a larger project one inch equals 100 feet. All dimensions must be shown. Site Plans must include:

1. A scale of not less than one-inch equals 40 feet if the subject property is less than three acres and one-inch equals 100 feet if it is three acres or more
2. Date, north point, and scale
3. The dimensions of all lot and property lines, showing the relationship of the subject property to abutting properties
4. The siting of all structures on the subject property and abutting properties
5. The location of each proposed structure in the development area, the use or uses to be contained therein, the number of stories, gross building areas, distances between structures and lot lines, setback lines, and approximate location of vehicular entrances and loading points
6. The location of all existing and proposed drives and parking areas with the number of parking and/or loading spaces provided
7. All pedestrian walks, malls, or open areas
8. Location and height of all walls, fences, and screen planting, including a general plan for the landscaping of the development and the method by which landscaping is to be accomplished and maintained; (Plant materials shall be chosen and installed in accordance with sec. 53-124.)
9. The location and right-of-way widths of all abutting streets
10. Types of surfacing such as paving, turf, or gravel to be used at the various locations

11. A grading plan with topographic elevation of at a minimum of two-foot contours in the area, showing method of storm drainage into the city storm sewer system through catch basins, of addressing the storm drainage on-site through retention or detention ponds
12. Size and location of proposed sewer and water lines and connections
13. The number of proposed units for multiple-family developments
14. Significant environmental features such as wetlands, streams, woodlots, existing trees and vegetation
15. Information as may be required by the City Manager, the Planning Commission and City Council to assist in the consideration of the proposed development.

Larger projects may require height and area computations, allowable floor area, allowable area increases, height increases, and automatic fire sprinkler increases, number of means of egress, capacity of egress calculations and travel distances, fire-rated assembly details and fire resistive requirements, structural design calculations, and soil, footing, foundation, masonry and concrete minimum bearing capacities and design standards. Additional information may be required based on the complexity or size of the building project. The Building Official may waive specific requirements depending on need.

**Step 2.** Plan Review: Plans are reviewed by Professional Code Inspections for compliance with the building code, electrical code, mechanical code, and plumbing code compliance. The safety of the intended inhabitants is essential. The review of a complete plan submission is generally completed within 45 days of receiving the site plan. Depending on the project, the applicant might need to apply for and receive a soil erosion permit through the [Allegan County Health Department](#) before a building permit is issued. If the application is incomplete, the reviewer will ask the applicant for additional information. The letter will include any corrections or conditions imposed on the building permit. A plan review letter is issued citing approval, conditions imposed on approval, or necessary corrections. Requested plan corrections require the applicant to submit new or revised plans for review.

**Step 3.** Permit Issuance: The applicant will be contacted to come to pick up the building permit and pay the permit fee. Building permits are issued when all required approvals have been obtained and applicable fees have been paid. The applicant must post a copy of the permit on the job site until final approval is issued. Electrical, mechanical, and plumbing permits are generally not issued until the building permit is approved. Compliance may be determined at the time of the inspection for less complex projects. More complex projects will require review by the applicable trade inspector. An approved Certificate of Occupancy or Certificate of Compliance is required prior to occupancy or use of the such project.

MISS DIG System, a free service, at 1-800-482-7171 must be contacted at least 3 working days before excavating to identify the location of underground utility lines. The MISS DIG System member utilities will mark the approximate location of their underground public utility lines at no charge. If Miss Dig is not notified and damage occurs, liability for repair costs may occur. Permit Validity: Permits shall lapse and cease to be in effect when authorized work has not started within 6 months following the date of issue or when work has been abandoned for a period of 6 months as evidenced by failure to make substantial progress or lack of inspections.

**Construction Progress:** As construction progresses, Professional Code Inspections will inspect the work to verify that the building plans are being followed. Permit holders are required to schedule appropriate inspections throughout the process, and get appropriate approvals before moving on to the next construction phase. The permit holder is responsible to notify Professional Code Inspections when the stages of construction that require an inspection are reached.

Electrical, mechanical or plumbing permit final inspections must be completed before the final building inspection. Similarly, Fire Marshal, Allegan County Health Department, Department of Public Works and Michigan Department of Transportation (if applicable), must review and issue their own final permits. The structure must be complete and ready for use and occupancy. After all of the above inspections have been approved and if final building inspection is approved, the certificate of occupancy or certificate of compliance can be issued.