



DESIGN REVIEW GUIDE

Planning and Zoning Commission

Waukegan is well known as a city with a high quality of life, small and cohesive neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown and waterfront – all within a spectacular setting on the shores of Lake Michigan. This deserving reputation is due in part to the City’s small size, entrepreneurial spirit, civic-minded citizens and activist government. One of the many factors that make Waukegan such a great place to live, work and visit is the community’s attention to detail, and respect for its setting, heritage and quality urban design.

Waukegan’s Design Review process strives to protect the city’s unique qualities and strong sense of place by carrying out citywide development and design objectives. The purpose of this *Design Review Guide* is to help applicants in preparing projects to be reviewed by the Development Review Board and the Waukegan Planning and Zoning Commission. Through materials such as this, the Department of Planning & Zoning seeks to make information available well before the final design of a project saving the applicant, and the city, time and money.

The Planning and Zoning Commission is responsible for making decisions on a range of development projects in Waukegan. But what does it mean to you, and how can you get involved? This edition of the *Waukegan Design Guides* gives a brief overview of the permit review process, and how interested citizens can participate.

WHO’S WHO?

The Planning and Zoning Commission was created by combining the development review functions of the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Commission into one board. The Planning and Zoning Commission makes decisions on subdivisions, map amendments, conditional uses, variances and planned developments. The Planning and Zoning Commission is made up of 9 citizens appointed by the City Council. They are citizens with an interest in development and design. Annually, the Planning and Zoning Commission reviews about 110 projects. The Planning and Zoning Commission meets once a month and the meetings are open to the public. The Board is supported by staff in the Planning and Zoning Office, and expert advice may be offered by other city departments, independent consultants, and the Development Review Board.

Department of Planning and Zoning

It is The Department of Planning and Zoning’s responsibility to follow an application through the review process providing a consistent voice to the Board and to the applicant. It’s the Planning and Zoning staff that first review the application, and consider how well it meets the ordinance requirements. Their role involves providing information - to the applicant, Planning and Zoning Commission, and the public - and representing the Planning Department at meetings. They respond to public inquiries, and coordinate communications with other departments.

THE REVIEW PROCESS IN A NUTSHELL

How do you learn about a proposed project? Look for the required public notice. This is big yellow cardboard sign that must be hung in a visible location on the site for which someone has applied for a zoning application. It is intended to make people aware that a zoning application has been filed for that site. It doesn’t mean that the project has been approved, nor does it offer any details. When you see the yellow cardboard sign, you can visit the Planning and Zoning Department or give them a call. Staff can explain to you what is being proposed, show you the plans, and tell you about any future public meetings. Another way to find out about proposed projects is through the mail or on the web. The Planning Department typically mails Planning and Zoning Commission agendas to all property owners within 250 feet of the subject property, and all meeting agendas are posted in City Hall and in The News-Sun.

Staff Comments/Findings of Fact

Staff comments are provided to the applicant and the Planning and Zoning Commission prior to the meeting. That way, all parties, including the public when interested, have background information on the proposal and a sense of how it addresses the requirements of City development regulations.

Depending on the complexity of the project, staff comments may be only a page or two, or in the form of ‘Findings of Fact’ for bigger or more complex projects. “Findings” are a detailed explanation of how the project compares to each of the various requirements of applicable ordinances. Findings include site and permit history, and an evaluation of the project under each of the review criteria. Both include recommendations for conditions of approval or reasons for a denial.

Before the meeting...

Before the meeting, the Planning and Zoning Commission receives information for all the projects on the agenda. Included are copies of applications, drawings, information submitted by the public and others, and the staff comments. Board members visit a site to better understand a project and its surroundings. Sometimes these site visits are scheduled and warned as a public meeting. If you see a Board member on a property, it's OK to talk to them and answer their questions, but it's **NOT OK** to try to lobby them about a proposal. Your opinions should be expressed at a public meeting (or in writing) so that all parties with have the benefit of the same information.

At the meeting...

Planning and Zoning Commission meetings are held in City Hall's Council Chambers. At each meeting, applicants and members of the public wishing to testify are sworn in. Everyone must speak into the microphones as all meetings are recorded, and sometimes meetings are televised by the local cable access TV. These are public meetings where important decisions are made. Therefore, a certain level of formality is necessary to protect the interests of the applicant and the public.

As projects come up on the agenda, applicants give an overview of their project after which the Planning and Zoning Commission asks questions. The Chair will then ask for public questions or comments. Comments should be kept short and to the point. Decisions must be based upon the ordinance. Therefore it is best to frame comments around applicable zoning criteria. If the Planning and Zoning Commission doesn't feel it has enough time or information to take action, they may choose to "table" the application and consider it again at a later meeting.

Making a decision...

After all of the questions and comments, the Planning and Zoning Commission will deliberate and take action. This can be at the same meeting, or at a separate meeting depending on the Commission's schedule. During the deliberations, neither the applicant nor the public is allowed to speak. The Commission can act to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.

The staff recommendations are typically where the Commission starts their discussion, but they are free to make their own decisions. However, decisions must be based, by law, on criteria found in city ordinances. The Commission can't approve or deny an application simply because they like it or not.

A decision has been made....

After a decision has been made by the Planning and Zoning Commission – either approval or denial - an appeal period takes effect ranging from 15 to 30 days. Only the applicant, the City, an adjacent property owner, or a group of any 10 Waukegan citizens are eligible to appeal a Planning and Zoning Commission decision. If the project is approved, the Planning and Zoning Commission will include a set of conditions. These are the administrative requirements for

every zoning application addressing how long the permit is valid, maintenance requirements, requirement for a Certificate of Occupancy, etc. Additional permit conditions may also be included that are project-specific and outline the Commission's basis for approval. These may include changes to the site plan, parking, building height, etc. The applicant can pick up the approved permit after the appeal period has expired. If the project is denied, the specific reasons for the denial will be outlined in writing, and the applicant will be informed of their right to appeal the Board's decision.

Finally, with the local zoning permit in hand, the applicant can apply for any other permits that may be applicable to their project.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

General information, regulations & zoning applications

Department of Planning & Zoning

100 N. Martin L. King, Jr. Avenue

Waukegan, Illinois 60085

847.625.6878

Prepared by the Department of Planning and Zoning ©2012