



# DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

Updated September, 2014 (CB-33-2014)

## INTRODUCTION:

Howard County's Subdivision and Land Development Regulations are intended to promote the health, safety and general welfare of County residents. The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) is responsible for processing and approving all subdivision and land development plans within the County with assistance from the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC), an advisory group of County and State departments that make comments and recommendations on all development plans as part of their plan review responsibilities.

The attached "Subdivision and Land Development Review Process" chart illustrates the various steps involved in review and approval for proposed development plans. The type of plan submissions required depends on the zoning, the type of development proposed, and the number of residential units to be created. Subdivision approval is required for the creation of any new lots. Condominium and rental units do not involve subdivision and begin with the site development plan.

Information on how interested citizens can monitor the development review process, and submit comments to the Department of Planning and Zoning is provided below.

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC STAGES TO SUBDIVIDE OR DEVELOP LAND?

There are two processes which a developer may choose from for major subdivisions:

### **PROCESSING STAGES –**

#### **Standard Plan Submission:**

Sketch Plan\* → Preliminary Plan → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

#### **Alternate Plan Submission:**

Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan\* → Final Plan → Site Development Plan

\*An Environmental Concept Plan (ECP) must be submitted with the Sketch Plan or with the Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan and prior to submission of a minor final subdivision plan and site development plan.

- An **Environmental Concept Plan (ECP)** is the first of three required plan approvals that includes the information necessary to allow an initial evaluation of a proposed project.

The ECP plan includes a conceptual design for storm water management, erosion and sediment control and the delineation of environmental features. The pre-submission of an ECP to the Department of Planning and Zoning is required for proposed storm water management facilities to demonstrate how the environmental site design is achieved to the maximum extent practicable.

- A **Sketch Plan** informs the County of the intent of the property owner or developer to subdivide, the proposed timing for development and the design concept. It displays information such as density, road network, lot layout, an environmental analysis of the property and may include green neighborhood site design considerations. The sketch plan process also familiarizes the developer with County and State plans and regulations which may affect the subdivision, such as the General Plan, Adequate Public Facilities testing, the Capital Improvement Program and Forest Conservation requirements, etc.
- A **Preliminary Plan** presents preliminary engineering to implement the approved sketch plan. The preliminary plan addresses the lot and road arrangement, traffic and noise conditions, forest conservation, environmental impact, sewage disposal, water supply, drainage, storm water management and proposed grading.
- A **Preliminary Equivalent Sketch Plan** is an alternate plan process which includes all the information normally required with both the sketch and preliminary plan submissions on one plan. Although this combined submission is optional for major subdivisions using public water and sewer, it is required for major subdivisions in certain zoning districts.
- A **Final Subdivision Plan** is the culmination of the subdivision process. The final plan submission includes a final subdivision plat which will become the official record of the subdivision of land into lots, parcels and public road right-of-ways. The submission also includes construction drawings for roads, water and sewer, storm water management and any other infrastructure items. For minor subdivisions which create four or fewer lots for residential or agricultural purposes, a final subdivision plan is the only stage required for subdivision processing.
- A **Site Development Plan (SDP)** is a detailed engineered drawing required for commercial, institutional, industrial and most residential development. Generally, an SDP includes existing and proposed structures, green “LEED” certified buildings and green neighborhood site design considerations, if applicable, paved areas, pedestrian walkways, topography, drainage and storm water management, sediment and erosion control measures, utilities, easements, 100 year floodplain, wetlands, streams, forest stand delineation, forest conservation easement areas and landscaping.

#### **PRE-SUBMISSION COMMUNITY MEETINGS:**

- The pre-submission community meeting process is for the developer to provide information to the community regarding the proposed residential or non-residential development and to allow community residents the opportunity to ask questions and make comments about the development proposal.
- Pre-submission community meetings are required for all new residential development. The meetings are only required for non-residential development if the development is located

within 200 feet of a residential zoning district. This applies to all new non-residential development and existing non-residential projects where new floor area is expanded 25% or more.

- Minutes of the meeting and written responses to all questions not answered at the meeting are prepared by the developer, provided to the Department of Planning and Zoning when plans are submitted, and sent to citizens attending the meeting or anyone unable to attend the meeting who contacted the developer requesting a copy.

#### **INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM DPZ:**

- Be advised that DPZ has no information on development proposals until plans are formally submitted to the County. Once the **initial** plan (as defined in the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations) has been submitted for residential projects, the property will be posted with a poster to advise interested parties of the file number, name, and number of proposed units/lots. Non-residential and subsequent residential plans (final subdivision plans for major subdivisions, and site development plans for associated subdivisions) do not require posting.
- Concerned citizens may also check DPZ's website (<http://gis.howardcountymd.gov/gsearchplans/gsearchplans.asp>) under "Search Development Plans and Meetings" to determine whether the plans have been submitted and to determine the file number and project name (this is critical to track status).
- The plan file is available between 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the DPZ Public Service Desk located in the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City MD 21043.

#### **COMMUNICATION WITH DPZ:**

- Each new plan submitted is assigned to a Planner and an Engineer within DPZ for project management.
- Written comments addressed to DPZ with the file name and number, will be forwarded to the appropriate Planner and/or Engineer for their consideration during their review of the development proposal.
- DPZ staff is available by telephone, e-mail or via a meeting to answer citizen questions after the plans have been submitted (410-313-2350). E-mail address contacts are available on the DPZ website. Citizens may request a meeting with DPZ staff to review the initial plan submittal after the plan has been formally submitted to DPZ.

#### **PLAN REVIEW PROCESS:**

- The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) administers the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations and is responsible as the central processing agency for approving all subdivision and land development plans with assistance from the Subdivision Review Committee (SRC). All development plans are circulated to the SRC, an advisory group of County and State departments, for their review and recommendations. The attached flowchart summarizes the development review process

in Howard County. More detailed information about the subdivision and site development plan review process is available on DPZ's website.

### **DECISION MAKING:**

- The County's development regulations (Zoning, Subdivision and Land Development, Adequate Public Facilities, Landscaping, Forest Conservation, etc.) are all available on the DPZ website.
- Plans which comply with County and State regulations must be approved. In some situations, two regulations may be in conflict. In such instances, DPZ must decide which regulation will take priority, however, in most cases the more restrictive requirements will govern.
- In some cases, a waiver or an alternative proposal to a particular regulation may be requested. The SRC will evaluate the waiver justification, any adverse impacts, and whether granting a waiver serves as a better alternative proposal to the overall intent of the County's development regulations. Based on a recommendation by the SRC, the Director of DPZ will approve or deny requested waiver applications.
- Citizens may request to be copied on all correspondence between DPZ and the developer by calling 410-313-2350 to leave contact information, the file name and number. If there is a great deal of community interest, it is helpful to DPZ for the community to designate a single person as the primary contact to be copied on correspondence who will share this information with others in the community.

### **AVAILABLE DPZ WEB RESOURCES:**

The following informational items are available on the DPZ website:

- The Pre-Submission Community Meeting informational video
- The Development Review Process summary and flowchart
- To search for scheduled pre-submission community meetings
- To search for plans in process
- The Subdivision, Land Development and Zoning Regulations, Landscape Manual, and Forest Conservation Manual
- Informational brochures explaining the subdivision and land development process, the site development plan process, the minor subdivision process, the forest conservation program, the adequate public facilities act and the waiver petition process

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