



## Site Plan Review in the City of Muskegon

### What is a Site Plan?

Most Michigan communities have some form of site plan review. The State of Michigan "*City and Village Zoning Act*" defines the site plan as "*the documents and drawings specified in the zoning ordinance necessary to insure that the proposed land use or activity is in compliance with local ordinance, and state and federal statutes.*"

### The Benefits of Site Plan Review (SPR)

The whole point of reviewing a site plan is to make sure the site functions well, is attractive and safe for the public. Poorly designed sites that are cramped, inconvenient, unsafe and unattractive can hurt a business and impact on neighboring properties. It can also make a site more difficult to sell, lease or reuse. When reviewing a site plan staff members imagine themselves on the site and visualizes such things as: how vehicles and people will circulate on the site, how the rainwater will set or run off the site, where utilities will connect, how emergency vehicles will access the site, and how the development will impact it's neighbors. In addition to making sure the site plan meets the standards of the zoning ordinance, staff is available to assist the owner or developer and can often make suggestions that may help the developer utilize the site better, which can reduce costs, keep future development options open, and enhance the resale value of properties.

### What Kind of Development Needs Site Plan Review?

All multi-family, commercial and industrial development needs site plan review and **approval before the land can be cleared and before a building permit can be issued**. Changes to drives and parking lot configurations, and expansions of parking areas also need site plan review. Larger projects (expansions and new development of over 10,000 square feet or 2 acres in size and multi-family developments of over 8 units) must go before the Planning Commission for review. Smaller developments only need staff review. Staff reviews every site plan and will forward comments and recommendations to the Planning Commission as appropriate.

### The SPR Process

1. The process starts with the Zoning Administrator (ZA), who coordinates the SPR process with other city departments.
2. The ZA takes the application and appropriate fee. All SPR applications must be filled out completely and accurately by the applicant in order to be accepted. Applications must be signed by the owner of the property, unless an applicant has a signed agreement with the owner giving them permission to apply for zoning approvals. Applications for **staff review** must be accompanied by **6 copies** of a complete site plan. Applications for **Planning Commission review** require **15 copies** of the site plan. A site plan review application must be accompanied by a \$100.00 fee for a minor review (small addition or parking area), or a \$200.00 fee for major (new development or large addition) or Planning Commission review.

*\*City staff offers free conceptual plan reviews upon request.*

3. The ZA circulates copies of the site plan to the Engineering, Public Works, and Police Departments, and the Fire Marshal. They route comments back to the ZA for compilation. Target turn-around for staff review is approximately one week. It may be possible to perform the review in less time if all relevant information and details are included and if the proposed development complies with all ordinance requirements.

4. Planning Commission SPR takes place at their monthly meeting. The ZA compiles all comments about the application into a staff report, which is sent to the Planning Commission (PC) members with a proposed recommendation of approval, or approval with conditions. The staff report is also sent to the applicant at the same time the packet is sent to the PC members. If the design of a particular site plan is seen as a problem to the point where it may not receive approval, staff will work with the applicant to rework the plan before bringing it to the Planning Commission. If staff is proposing any conditions to an approval, these will also be listed in the staff report.

A note on conditions recommended by staff: Sometimes applicants will want to address proposed staff conditions before the date of the PC meeting. *Don't worry!* Staff presents proposed conditions to the PC that they may change, omit, or add to. Unless the project is large, complicated, and the changes are significant, the Planning Commission generally approves the site plan with conditions and permits the ZA to review the resubmitted site plan and give a final administrative approval. That means it does not have to go back to the Planning Commission and the applicant is saved time and expense on both ends by not having to provide several iterations of a site plan if the PC changes staff's proposed conditions at the meeting. Staff is always available to discuss any questions or concerns with proposed conditions or ordinance requirements before the PC meeting if the applicant wishes.

5. Once the site plan gets final approval, it's good for 12 months from that date.

### **What Should the Site Plan Include?**

Sections 2330, 2331 and 2334 of the Zoning Ordinance address site plan review, landscaping, screening, lighting and signs (respectively). Copies of these sections of the ordinance are available from the Planning Department, second floor City Hall, 933 Terrace, (231)724-6702. The full zoning ordinance can also be purchased for \$25 or found on our website [www.shorelinecity.com](http://www.shorelinecity.com) by selecting "Zoning" under "Your Community".

To help sift through the technical language more quickly, below is an interpretation of the City's requirements. **They are in a checklist form so that items can be checked off when addressed.**

### **Basic Information**

Every site plan should have "the basics" so anyone reviewing it can understand where the site is and what is being proposed. The sooner staff gets oriented, the quicker the review will be. The basics include such things as:

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Arrow                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Road right-of-way line(s)                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scale   | <input type="checkbox"/> Name(s) of the street(s) the property fronts on             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Name of the site plan preparer                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Building footprint(s) for all existing structures           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property name and address and legal description | <input type="checkbox"/> Building footprints for proposed additions or new buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project description (may be on application).    | <input type="checkbox"/> Building setbacks from all property lines and the road ROW  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Property boundaries, dimensions and lot size    | <input type="checkbox"/> Existing/proposed utilities within a property.              |

### **District Requirements**

Each zoning district has basic dimensional requirements to check. Requirements for each zoning district are listed in the district's regulations, and are also shown on Table I of the Zoning Ordinance.

- Percentage of lot coverage by \_\_\_\_\_ buildings and \_\_\_\_\_ pavement
- Percentage of usable open space (if applicable, associated with residential developments only)
- Width to depth ratios (a lot can't be more than 3 times deeper than its width)
- Maximum and minimum building heights (some downtown areas require at least 2 stories)
- Maximum setbacks (some areas have a maximum setback to prevent large expanses of unused parking)

Please note that a zero lot line may be used for buildings (i.e., no setback) on the rear property line and/or one side property line under certain conditions.

### **Development Data**

SPR regulations enable staff to ask for a variety of information to facilitate review. All of this information is not necessarily needed for all projects. It's best to talk to staff ahead of time in order to help streamline the process. Items that are often necessary include (ordinance section numbers are included for reference where applicable):

#### **Engineering and Utility Information**

- Spot grades or topographic lines and finished grades. (Section 2330-8-f-3)
- Stormwater runoff calculations and a stormwater management plan. If possible, stormwater should be retained in an on-site detention area. Required setbacks can be swaled to hold stormwater. (Section 2302 & Section 2330-11-f)
- Site-specific utility service info. such as on-site manholes, clean-outs, connection points, etc.

#### **Parking, Access and Circulation** (to be sure site circulation is efficient and safe)

- Sidewalks** are required to be provided both within the development and along the road right-of-way (generally only for commercial and residential developments) (Section 2330-11-m)
- Adequate numbers of parking spaces** must be provided. Provide number of employees and usable floor space for parking calculations. Shared parking agreements must be included if used for parking allotments. They need to be irrevocable to protect everyone's current and future interests. (Section 2326)
  - Check to see if the property is located in the Downtown Parking Overlay District (Section 2326-12)
  - Parking requirements vary according to the proposed use, see Section 2326 for details.
- The **minimum size for all parking spaces** is 8 feet by 18 feet. (Section 2326-11)
- Safe and well-marked drives** cannot be too close to neighboring drives. Shared drives may be required, and if so, a permanent access easement tied to the land must be provided. (Section 2330-8-f-14 & Section 2330-11-k)
- Maneuvering** lanes are required to be a minimum of 22 feet in width for two-way traffic and 12 feet in width for one-way (angled parking) traffic. (Section 2326-11)
- Parking and loading areas must be **paved and striped**. A site plan note acknowledging the requirement helps. Parking areas should also be defined by curbing or curb stops. Curbing extends the life of pavement, can help direct stormwater, and prevents damage to landscaped areas and fences. (Section 2326-7 & Section 2330-11-l)
- Fire lanes** and adequate hydrant access are required. Note fire lanes and hydrant or standpipe locations. (Section 2330-11-i)
- Landscaping islands or bump-outs** are required for each 5,000 square feet of parking lot. Creative design of parking lot landscaping is encouraged. Landscape islands/bump-outs must have 1 canopy tree and 3 shrubs per island. (Section 2331-8)
- All commercial and industrial uses must have a designated **loading area** for delivery trucks (at least 10 feet x 50 feet). Maneuvering areas must be contained on the parcel to prevent safety hazards in public streets. (Article II-5, Section 2326-9 & Section 2330-11-l)
- Stacking spaces** for drive-thru facilities need to be provided.

## Natural features, Landscaping, Screening and Lighting

- The site plan needs to show an indication of where prominent **natural features** are, such as existing trees, streams & hills. (Section 2331-2-d, Section 2330-8-f-10 & Section 2330-11-d)
- The **floodplain** line and elevation above floodplain needs to be noted on the site plan. (Section 2330-8-f-11, Section 2330-11-h, & Section 2323)
- Existing vegetation** must be marked as either to be preserved or to be removed. Existing vegetation is required to be saved if practical, and can reduce new landscaping obligations (Section 2331-2-d, Section 2331-4, e, f, & h)
- All sites are required to be **landscaped** with 1 canopy tree, 2 understory or evergreen trees and 2 shrubs for every 30 feet of frontage. Landscaping should be staggered or clustered and may located in any setback area on the property. Native species are recommended for durability, as is mixing up the species of landscaping materials. Staff can provide a reference list upon request. (Section 2331-5-a&b, Section 2331-4-c, & Section 2331-3-a)
- At least 50% of the required **front setback** must be landscaped and adjacent to the road right of way (it may meander to allow for design flexibility for drives and parking, but remember to keep larger plants away from drive entrances and signs so they don't block views). (Section 2331-5-a)
- All required **rear and side setbacks** must be landscaped unless zero-lot line is used for the building or a fire lane. (Section 2331-5-a)
- Canopy trees need to be at least 12 feet high and a **minimum caliper** of 2 inches at 4 ½ feet above the ground. Evergreen and understory trees need to be at least 6 feet high at planting. (Section 2331-5-c)
- Landscaped areas are required to be **irrigated**. (Section 2331-6-b)
- If adjacent to a residential use or zone, commercial or industrial uses (especially parking and loading areas) must be **screened** by a fence, wall and/or heavy landscaping. Chain-link fence with vinyl slats is an acceptable screening method. It is recommended to put curbing or curb stops by fences and required setbacks to keep cars from damaging them. (Section 2331-7 & 9)
- Fencing** for screening must be at least 4 feet tall and may be required up to 6 feet. Fencing can't be over 8 feet high and barbed wire is prohibited in the City. Front yard fencing over 4 feet must be behind the required front setback. Fences can go right on the property line. Fences may not be in the waterfront setback area. (Section 2331-7, 12-15, & 18)
- Outdoor and rooftop **mechanical equipment and outdoor storage** must be screened unless an industrial use abuts another industrial use. (Section 2331-10 & 11)
- Dumpsters** must be at least 5 feet from a building, out of public view, and screened. (Section 2331-11)
- Provide information on **outdoor lighting** indicating height, fixture type and locations. Fixtures and poles may be no more than 25 feet high and should be "cut-off" type to prevent light from bleeding or glaring onto roadways or adjacent properties. (Section 2331-20)

## Helpful Hints

1. Of course, if all the information and details necessary are provided on the site plan as originally submitted, and if the plan meets all ordinance requirements, approval can be received very quickly. City staff likes to be able to say "yes!" on the first go-around with a site plan.
2. Remember, the site plan is a contract with the community and should not leave out information. Site plan notes assuring staff that you know what your responsibilities are help a speedy approval. For example, the ordinance requires that existing trees be preserved if practical. Less tree removal saves you time, money and may reduce landscaping requirements. It also makes the site more attractive and helps stormwater runoff. If you have noted the trees on site, also note which ones are going "to be protected".
3. New developments should give reference points for adjacent development like driveways or buildings to help with orientation and evaluation.

4. Once you get a conditional approval, **be sure to get an updated site plan back as soon as possible to the ZA addressing those conditions.** We have seen projects held up because a developer did not follow-up on the conditions of the approval. Remember that you cannot apply for any building permits until you have received **final** site plan approval.
5. Staff is here to help facilitate the development process--use our resources and ask for help if you need it!

### **Signs**

Although you don't have to provide information on signs on the site plan, if you know what you want, you may get initial sign approvals as part of the site plan review process.

In general, total wall signs may be up to 10% of the front building face in size and may be placed on any face of the building (but not the roof). One pole sign is permitted, the size and height of which are tied to the size of the frontage of the development (the bigger the frontage, the bigger the sign permitted). See Table II in the zoning ordinance. Note: Sign permits will still be required at the time of sign placement because many of them have electrical hook-ups.

### **Performance Guarantees**

Both the staff and the Planning Commission have the right to require a performance guarantee in the form of a letter of credit, escrow deposit or a bond. Guarantees are required for such things as ensuring the placement of sidewalks, protection of existing trees, or completion of landscaping requirements.

### **Other Approvals**

Sometimes developments are in a floodplain or critical dune area or they may involve altering a wetland and dredging or filling navigable waters. These activities fall under state and/or federal law and often need state level permits. The city also has locally and nationally designated historic districts and buildings. If a project involves one of these sites, it may need Historic District Commission approval. Site Plan approval is often conditioned upon getting these other approvals. Copies of such approvals should be provided to the ZA for the project file.

### **Contact Information**

Zoning: Zoning Administrator, Office (231)724-6702, Fax (231)724-6790,  
E-mail: [planning@postman.org](mailto:planning@postman.org)

Fire Department: Major Metcalf, Office (231)724-6793, Fax (231)724-6985,  
E-mail: [major.metcalf@postman.org](mailto:major.metcalf@postman.org)

Engineering: Mohammed Al-Shatel, Office (231)724-6707, Fax (231)727-6904,  
E-mail: [mohammed.al-shatel@postman.org](mailto:mohammed.al-shatel@postman.org)

Public Works: Kelly DeFrench, Office (231)724-4100, Fax (231)722-4188,  
E-mail: [kelly.defrench@postman.org](mailto:kelly.defrench@postman.org)