

Helpful Hints for Approaching the Planning Commission

1. Do Your Homework

Too often applicants before the Planning Commission do not come prepared and “ad-lib” responses to pointed questions put forth by citizens during the public hearing. We recommend to applicants that they attend meetings to see how the Planning Commission works and to gain an understanding of the process and type of questions raised by citizens and the members.

We urge all applicants to prepare for the meeting and come ready to answer questions. We also suggest that large “display-sized” drawing and maps be prepared and used to illustrate the key points of the applicants request.

2. Understand the Communities Growth Policies

Every community views growth and development differently. We recommend applicants take time to discuss their proposal with local officials. These discussions usually identify whether the proposal conforms with the general intent of the **Master Plan** and “unwritten” desires of the Planning Commission and community.

The closer the proposal conforms to the “written and unwritten” growth policies, the greater likelihood of acceptance of the proposal. Crafting a development proposal which conforms to the intent of the community growth policies, obviously, will receive a more favorable consideration than one which doesn't.

3. Identify How the Project Will Benefit The Community

In the fiscally constrained local governmental financial environment of today, many local governments examine the financial merits of every new development proposal. They assess whether the cost for municipal services and infrastructure will exceed the tax revenue generated by the real estate property, sales and income taxes the community will receive as a result of the new development.

4. Go The Extra Mile Attitude

Gaining approval of a new development today is often a negotiation process. Developers, realizing that communities do not have to approve a request, spend more money and time in the preparation of the application for approval. Applicants who are ready to “go the additional mile” are received with enthusiasm and have the greatest chance to secure approvals.

5. Know Your Legal Position

Development is governed by number of local ordinances, state laws and regulations. In addition there can be private restrictions in the form of deed restrictions, easements and “clouded” ownership. Applications sometimes are submitted without completing research of permits and restrictions which may alter the development proposal when discovered.

We recommend that property title research be completed and that applications for “curb cuts,” water/sewer connections, storm water systems, floodplain alteration, and wetland permits be submitted as needed, as early as possible in the concept development process. This knowledge assures that required permits can be obtained and no legal objection to the development of the proposed concept will be encountered, once presented to the Planning Commission.

We also recommend applicants know the rules prescribed by the zoning ordinance for the subject property. This knowledge gives a base line density determination for the property and a measurement tool for any negotiated changes.

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6. Don't Overlook The Opportunity For Innovation

Innovative planning techniques such as traditional neighborhood development, zero lot line development, transit orientated development, cluster development and the like are being discussed as means to achieve Smart Growth and reduce "urban sprawl." We encourage developers to recognize that communities are willing to consider innovative development, sometimes of higher density with less development costs, where a carefully crafted development plan fulfill local community development goals. Obviously, in cases where an application supports a desired innovative development concept, the application approval process is likely to be easier.

7. Be Willing To Scale Back

Developers seek to maximize their return on investment in land, often seeking to build the greatest number of housing units (or other buildings) as permitted by the zoning ordinance. We recommend applicants take a "hard look" at the development opportunity in light of the community plan and unwritten development polices before finalizing any concept plan for a specific project. Proposing maximum density of development for a site viewed as a lower density development site by the Planning Commission, will almost always give rise to lengthy debate and review.

8. Trade Density For Open Space or Cost Reductions

Applicants should recognize the overwhelming desire expressed by citizens for more open space. Innovative design which clusters development allowing greater sized open space areas are viewed positively by most communities. We encourage developers to consider asking for additional density for provision of larger land areas left in open space especially with creative designs which provide access to the open space through the total development.

9. Listen and Show Respect for Local Officials

This is another obvious statement, however, we have found that many times an applicant will bluster in to a community demanding prompt approval due to a "short deadline." It must be recognized that Planning Commissioners must deal with residents concerns and need time to review and complete their job. Applicants who rush the process and "push" the decision process without regard for the Planning Commission members time and need for review seriously hinder a respectful dialogue. The proper way to address commissioners is "Commissioner _____" or "Chairman _____".

10. Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say

We have attended meetings where applicants "promise the world" and conveniently forget the promises once the development is completed. We caution applicants to be honest in their commitments and fulfill their promises. Please remember, if the site plan is approved, the project may not deviate from the approved plans.

Information taken from:

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