



**ADMINISTERING
TOWNSHIP ZONING:**

**A BASIC GUIDE FOR
CITIZENS AND
LOCAL OFFICIALS**

2nd Edition

**MICHIGAN STATE
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ADMINISTERING TOWNSHIP ZONING: A BASIC GUIDE FOR CITIZENS AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

2nd Edition

Prepared for the
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FORWARD

This is the second edition of **Administering Township Zoning: A Basic Guide for Citizens and Local Officials**. It has been updated by Mark Wyckoff and Kristine Williams based on statutory and case law changes since the first edition, prepared in 1979, and contains information through the July 1990 legislative session.

The first edition of **Administering Township Zoning** was edited and supplemented by Mark Wyckoff from a text originally prepared by Ronald Lee, when he was a planner at the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (at this writing he is City Manager of Grand Ledge). It was published jointly by the Division of Land Resource Programs, DNR and the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission in Grand Rapids with additional printings by MSU Cooperative Extension Service. CES is jointly publishing this second edition with the Michigan Society of Planning Officials. The guidebook borrows thoughts, ideas, phrases, and graphics liberally from other similar documents prepared by public planners in many other states over the past thirty years. Any errors of fact or misinterpretation remain my responsibility. I hope you find it helpful.

Mark A. Wyckoff, AICP

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DEDICATION

This guide is dedicated to the countless citizens and local officials of Michigan's townships who constructively seek to understand and apply zoning to implement local community plans. May this guide further enhance your ability to *effectively use zoning as a tool to manage the growth and redevelopment of your community.*

MICHIGAN ENABLING STATUTES REFERRED TO IN THIS GUIDE

STATUTE	ACT NUMBERS as amended thru July 1990	MICHIGAN COMPILED LAW NUMBER
Township Rural Zoning Act	P.A. 184 of 1943	MCLA 125.271-125.301
Township Planning Act	P.A. 168 of 1959	MCLA 215.321-125.333



INTRODUCTION

It is very easy for people who encounter zoning for the first time, to get confused or lost in a maze of unique zoning terms and procedures. This is true for both new township officials and for citizens seeking to, or opposing, changing the use of land. If you are a recently appointed member of the zoning board, planning commission, or zoning board of appeals, or are a citizen with concern about zoning, this guide is designed to help you.

While zoning is only one tool for carrying out a community's comprehensive land use plan, it is a very important and rather complex one. This guide identifies *who does what* in township zoning matters and *how they do it*. It discusses the basic responsibilities of each body or official exercising common zoning tasks as well as the basic procedures associated with these tasks. This guide is not a substitute for a zoning ordinance. It is limited to questions that commonly arise in the administration of township zoning and does not address other related matters or procedures such as those involved in township planning programs, capital improvement projects, or subdivision regulations. It is a companion publication to the **Community Planning Process: A Guide for Planning Commissioners in Michigan**, available from the Michigan Society of Planning Officials.

This guide assumes that your township zoning ordinance is consistent with the Township Rural Zoning Act, P.A. 184 of 1943, as amended thru 1988 (MCLA 125.271 - 125.301). It assumes your ordinance has been properly adopted and is consistent with a land use plan and studies used to develop the ordinance. Consequently, this guide is not designed to resolve problems associated with antiquated zoning regulations, poorly drafted provisions, or an improperly adopted zoning ordinance. It can, however, help quickly orient you to township zoning and if you are a township official, to aid you in getting a firm grasp on how the growth and land resource management tool known as zoning, is designed to work.

If you find after reading this guide that there are procedures, roles or responsibilities described within that differ from those contained in your township zoning ordinance, or as practiced in your township, then you should

bring the inconsistency to the attention of the zoning board or the planning commission (if the zoning powers have been transferred) for their study. It may be necessary to seek technical assistance from qualified planners and legal counsel in preparing any proposed changes to the ordinance that are necessary to insure it remains in conformance with state law.

A glossary of terms and bibliography of other reference materials are provided in the Appendix. Further questions can be directed to the Michigan Society of Planning Officials at the address on the title page.

Planning Commission is Assumed

Most Michigan townships with a township zoning ordinance have a planning commission. This guide assumes the statutory power to develop and carry out zoning have been transferred from the zoning board to the planning commission (as authorized by Section 11 of the Township Planning Act, P.A. 168 of 1959, as amended). Therefore, the terms planning commission or planning commission/zoning board are used nearly interchangeably in this guide. The term means planning commission only if the powers of the zoning board have been transferred. If this transfer of powers has not occurred in your township, then references to the planning commission should be interpreted as zoning board (established by Section 4 of the Township Rural Zoning Act, P.A. 184 of 1943, as amended).

Chapter One

UNLOCKING THE SECRET OF THE ZONING MAZE

Zoning and other public regulatory tools are frequently described as “confusing”, “puzzling” or “like a maze”. This is especially true for the citizen or local official encountering a zoning procedure for the first time. It is unfortunate that this sentiment exists since zoning procedures are designed to insure fairness and equal treatment to all property owners and to thereby prevent arbitrary and capricious regulation of private property. The remedy to this confusion is to improve citizen and local official understanding of township zoning by unlocking the secrets of the zoning maze.

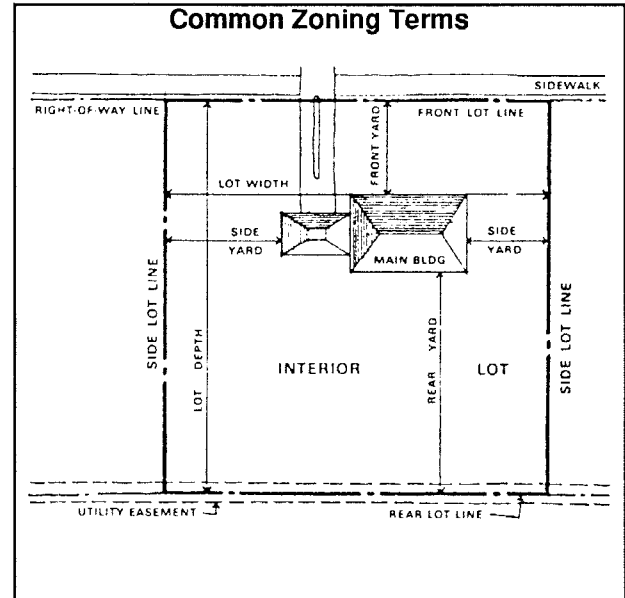
What is the Key?

Clue: Zoning originated in the minds of people concerned with the concepts of consistency, orderliness, certainty, step-by-step progress, fairness, and rational thinking. Notably, these are attributes of the attorneys and planners who greatly influenced early development of zoning.

Clue: Zoning typically seeks to identify appropriate locations for various types of land use and to provide minimum standards for insuring compatibility between adjacent uses of land.

WHAT IS ZONING?

- Zoning is regulation of the **use of land**
- Zoning is a **means of avoiding land use conflicts** between one neighbor and another.
- Zoning is a **tool** used to insure that new uses and structures will have characteristics generally compatible with others in the area in which it is located. It is a means for promoting the welfare of the community by guiding its growth along orderly lines.
- Zoning is a **method** of implementing official township community development policies.
- Zoning is a **legal, enforceable document** which is prepared by a planning commission or zoning board and adopted by the legislative body (the township board).



Clue: There are in reality, only three or four basic procedures which guide the entire range of most township zoning activities. It is the characteristics of the form and function of these activities and not their names which identify them.

These clues suggest that the key to understanding zoning and unlocking the secret of the zoning maze is contained in the old adage:

There is a place for everything and everything must be in its place.

If you feel you've been handed a key you don't know how to use, then journey with us through the zoning maze and find the meaning to this key.

Defining Zoning

Zoning is an important tool used to bring about orderly development of communities. It is public regulation of the *use of land*. Its name derives from the division of land within the community into *zones* (also called *districts*), each of which permits certain uses of land according to specific standards. Objectives to be achieved through zoning include:

- conserving and protecting property values by preventing incompatible land uses from locating in a given area;
- facilitating adequate and economical provision of public improvements;
- providing for orderly community development;
- insuring the needs of the state's citizens for food, fiber, energy and other natural resources;
- limiting overcrowding of land and congestion of transportation systems and other public facilities; and
- when necessary, developing special programs to achieve specific land management objectives and avert or solve specific land use problems.

These objectives are advanced by controlling land uses, density, building height and bulk, lot sizes, yards and open spaces, setbacks, accessory uses, parking, loading, and signs. Different regulations may be established to carry out specific purposes stated for each zone, although within each zone similar properties must be treated similarly. Typically, the ordinance establishes "uses by right," "special land uses," (conditional uses), and perhaps "prohibited uses," in each zone.

Protecting the Public Health, Safety & General Welfare

Zoning is considered a *police power* regulation. That means it is one of a number of laws (such as building and health codes) which are adopted to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare. A zoning ordinance consists of

two distinct parts—the district or zone *map* and a written *text*. The text sets out the purposes, uses, and district regulations for each district; the standards for special land uses; and procedures and standards for administration of the ordinance.

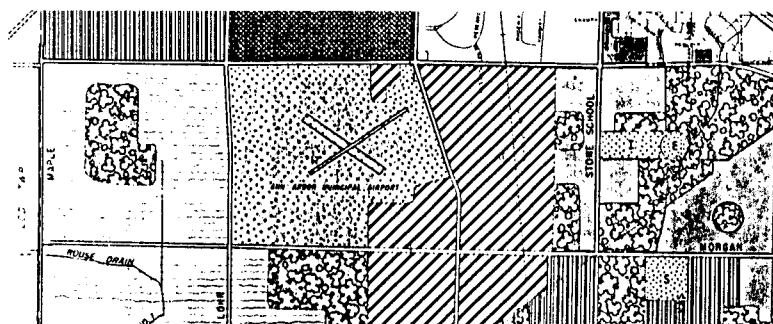
Zoning typically seeks to achieve its objectives by grouping compatible uses within a district and thereby separating incompatible uses. Uses of land are typically considered incompatible if the characteristics of the use of the land under normal circumstances could have a negative effect on adjacent uses. These negative nuisance-like consequences could include noise, dust, odors, excessive traffic, or smoke. Decisions on land use compatibility require careful planning.

ZONING MUST BE BASED ON A PLAN

- Absence of a legally adopted plan puts zoning decisions at *risk of invalidation* if challenged.
- Once a master (or comprehensive) plan and zoning ordinance are adopted, all future rezoning decisions and changes to district language should be *consistent* with the plan.

Section 3 of the Township Rural Zoning Act requires that:

"The zoning ordinance shall be based upon a plan designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare..."



LAND USE PLAN

- RURAL-AGRICULTURAL
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
- PARKS, PUBLIC & PRIVATE OPEN SPACE
- PUBLIC AND SEMI-PUBLIC
- E ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- I INTERMEDIATE HIGH SCHOOL
- S SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
- COMMERCIAL
- OFFICE AND RESEARCH
- INDUSTRIAL
- COMMERCIAL, OFFICE RESEARCH, AND INDUSTRIAL MULTI-USES

Section 1 of the Township Planning Act defines the "basic plan" which must be prepared by a Township Planning Commission as:

"... master plan, general development plan, guide plan, or the plan referred to in Act No. 184 of the Public Acts of 1943, as amended, being sections 125.271 to 125.301 of the Compiled Laws of 1948, being the basis on which the zoning plan is developed."

Thus, a township zoning ordinance must be based on a plan, whether the ordinance is prepared by a zoning board or a planning commission. Failure to base the zoning ordinance on a plan undermines the presumption of validity that otherwise is extended to a community. This puts zoning decisions at great risk of invalidation if they are challenged.

Typically, this plan is called a *master plan*, *future land use plan*, or *comprehensive plan*. It is usually prepared and periodically updated by the planning commission. The master plan typically serves as the legal foundation for all development regulations and infrastructure decisions in a community and not merely those regulated by the zoning ordinance.

Together, community plans and zoning should establish an orderly land use pattern related to transportation facilities, utilities, other public facilities and services. Land should be zoned based on the natural suitability of the land for the intended purposes and compatibility with adjacent land uses. An appropriate balance of various land uses within the community is also sought. Likewise, grouping land uses with similar needs, or direct relationships one to the other, helps maximize efficiency and min-

WHAT ZONING CAN DO

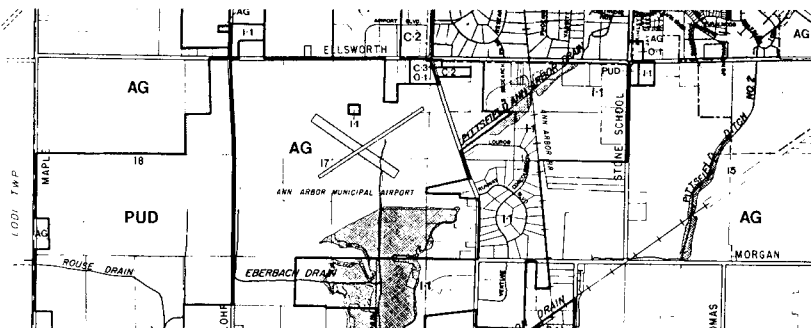
Zoning can:

- Help stabilize and preserve property values by controlling or separating incompatible land uses;
- Control development densities so that areas considered appropriate for development can be economically serviced when necessary with roads, sewer, water, electricity, fire and police protection, schools and recreation;
- Stabilize and protect the character of neighborhoods, developed areas, and rural areas;
- Help conserve energy with compact land use patterns;
- Help promote appropriate redevelopment in transitional areas of the community; and
- Help control the rate, location, and timing of new development.

HOW CAN ZONING DO THIS?

A zoning ordinance is a legal document which prescribes and controls the...

- use of buildings, land, and natural resources for trade, industry, residence and conservation;
- location, height, and bulk (yards and setbacks) of uses, buildings, and other structures;
- area or size of a lot (and that portion of the lot which may be occupied or left for open space); and the
- density of population and intensity of development.



ZONING MAP

RC	RECREATION CONSERVATION
AG	AGRICULTURE
O-I	OFFICE
W-I	WHOLESALE & WAREHOUSING
R-D	RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
I-1	LIMITED INDUSTRIAL
I-2	GENERAL INDUSTRIAL
PUD	PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT
PSC	PLANNED SHOPPING CENTER

imize friction, while protecting land values, amenities, and reducing public service costs. For example, schools and parks may be good neighbors for residential areas; intensive commercial or industrial development may not be.

Zoning regulations do constrain the uses to which a property owner may put land and the arrangement of those uses on a single parcel. However, at the same time, zoning protects each property owner from the uncontrolled actions of others. Without zoning, uses of land such as junkyards, and asphalt batching plants could be developed adjacent to your home. While these land uses provide valuable services to the community, their appropriate location is not adjacent to residential areas.

Zoning is not merely a "negative" act—aimed at keeping certain land uses out of a community—but also is a "positive" one—creating desirable and harmonious places for people to live, work and play. It is based upon local goals and helps insure that the future envisioned in community plans is built, piece by piece. Thus, zoning controls are a *means to an end* and not an end in themselves.

Two Common Misconceptions

There are two common misconceptions about zoning. The first is that zoning is an authorization that is given to a person to do something on a property and that when they stop the activity or sell the land the zoning approval stops. On the contrary, all zoning restrictions run with the land, not with the owner.

- If a property changes hands, the current zoning approvals go with the transfer; however
- The new owner must use the property within the scope of the original zoning approval; and
- Any conditions previously in effect still apply.

All zoning restrictions run with the land, not with the owner.

The second misconception is that zoning can be approved for a temporary period and then at the discretion of the municipality either extended or terminated. On the contrary, Courts have approved temporary approvals only when the use itself is temporary. For example, Christmas tree sales are a temporary use and could be

authorized for a temporary period. However, most land uses are established for an assumed permanent period and must be authorized as such. It is acceptable to condition authorization of a land use on its being initiated within a specified time period, say within 6-12 months. Once initiated however, that land use is authorized to continue as long as it remains in conformance with the terms of the zoning permit under which it was authorized.

EXCLUSIONARY ZONING PROHIBITED

The Township Rural Zoning Act provides that:

"A zoning ordinance or zoning decision shall not have the effect of totally prohibiting the establishment of a land use within a township in the presence of a demonstrated need for that land use within either the township or surrounding area within the state, unless there is no location within the township where the use may be appropriately located, or the use is unlawful." (Sec. 27a., P.A. 184 of 1943, as amended).

Zoning is Constitutional

Zoning has been the subject of a great volume of litigation, but courts long ago upheld the constitutionality of the valid exercise of zoning in a community. This includes both the U.S. Supreme Court in 1926 in the case of **Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.**, 272 US 365 and the Michigan Supreme Court in 1928 in the case of **Dawley v. Ingham Circuit Judge**, 242 Mich 247. In the celebrated case of **Padover v. Township of Farmington**, 374 Mich 622 (1965), two Justices of the Michigan Supreme Court had the following to say about zoning:

"Surely the function of zoning is to plan a modern day community for continuance and growth over a period of years. The growth cannot possibly come at once any more than a seed can spring into a tree overnight. Unless the pattern is set and followed, proper growth can never materialize. The alternative is to pay the price in crime, juvenile delinquency, inadequate sewers, inadequate roads, inadequate schools, inadequate parks, and worst of all, inadequate human beings—a pattern that has been all

too clearly evident upon the American scene. A city, village, or township is entitled to work out a better destiny for itself under such statutory authority."

Statutory Authority

A township is authorized to adopt zoning by state statute. The Township Rural Zoning Act, Public Act 184 of 1943, as amended, permits, but does not require a township to zone. Under the Act, zoning may promote the public health, safety and general welfare through reasonable regulations which are adopted and implemented in accord with the statute. These regulations are contained in the Township Zoning Ordinance. Zoning is not retroactive and does not prevent uses of land which do not conform with the regulations of the district in which they are located. Zoning must provide for reasonable use of land and cannot be arbitrary or confiscatory. The ordinance must be adopted in accordance with the procedures stated in the Township Rural Zoning Act and after adoption must be administered consistent with statutory procedures.

Once enacted, a zoning ordinance is not static. Changes can be obtained in several ways. An amendment to the text of the ordinance or a rezoning of the map can be adopted by the township board of trustees. Permission to establish a special land use may be obtained after a review of a proposed site plan by the planning commission to insure conformance to the standards stated in the ordinance. Appeal of an administrator's decision or a request for a variance due to a practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship can be sought from the zoning board of appeals. These various actions can be confusing. Which is the appropriate action in a particular situation? This and other questions will be addressed in the following sections of this guide.

Chapter Two

WHO DOES WHAT IN TOWNSHIP ZONING

Different bodies and officials carry out zoning responsibilities and it is important to understand *who does what* and *what they do*. Unfortunately, if the wrong body takes action on a matter which properly is in the realm of another body, then the legal status of that decision is in jeopardy if challenged in court. Public confidence in the local zoning program may also be eroded.

Three Basic Zoning Functions

Three basic functions are inherent in the operation of every zoning ordinance. They are *legislative*, *administrative* and *quasi-judicial*. These terms describe the basic characteristics of each function as it should be exercised.

The *legislative* function of zoning refers to adoption of the original zoning ordinance itself as well as any subsequent amendments to the text or zoning map. These actions can only be taken by the township board of trustees, the

elected legislative body. The township board is the policy making body for the community and acts on zoning matters after receiving the recommendation of the planning commission.

The *administrative* function of zoning relates to the day-to-day activities involving administration of the procedures and requirements of the zoning ordinance. The zoning administrator (often the building inspector) and planning commission frequently share in the administrative tasks. The administrative function includes the zoning activities with which property owners get involved when seeking zoning approval.

The *quasi-judicial* function refers to appeals, interpretation of, and variances from zoning provisions. The board of appeals carries out this important function. Although this function is not purely judicial and not conducted in a court of law, it is established to ensure equal justice outside of the formal court system.

A variance process is necessary because situations will arise when the strict enforcement of the zoning ordinance may create *practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships* on a property owner. The zoning board of appeals may grant a variance if the property owner sufficiently demonstrates a problem worthy of relief. Improperly granted variances can quickly undermine the integrity of the entire ordinance. An appeal of a decision of a board of appeals is taken directly to Circuit Court.

These three basic functions are summarized on the following page on Chart One. Reference is given to the appropriate section of this guide which presents the procedures used to process these types of zoning activities.

In addition to these three basic zoning functions, there is an important supplemental element which can be called the technical element. This involves fact finding, technical assistance in processing requests and receiving advisory opinions related to the land use issue(s) at hand. The variety of professionals which a township may employ for zoning (and planning) technical assistance are the township attorney, community planners, engineers and other ex-

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER LAND REGULATIONS

A zoning ordinance **is not** a...

- *Building Code*. Zoning is not meant to be the main device to control the internal materials and manner of constructing a building.
- *Land Subdivision Control Ordinance*. Zoning does not directly regulate the individual design and layout of land division into lots, streets, etc.
- *Health Code*. Zoning cannot directly regulate the design and layout of septic systems other than to require locational standards and compliance with health codes.

Zoning regulations should be coordinated with building, health, subdivision, and other local land regulations. This helps ensure that public policy is consistently implemented and prevents unnecessary delays and additional development costs which a land developer can easily incur from uncoordinated development review procedures.

CHART ONE: PRINCIPAL ZONING ACTIVITIES**THE ZONING MAZE**

WHO	DOES WHAT	HOW
Zoning Bodies & Officials	Zoning Functions/Activities (Statute Reference)	General Procedures - See Page __ of this Guide
Township Board, after reviewing recommendations of Planning Commission/Zoning Board and County Review Board	Legislative: Zoning Ordinance adoption and amendments (Sections 7,9,10,11 and 14)	8 and 15
Zoning Administrator	Administrative: Zoning Permits (Sec. 24) Certificates of Occupancy (Sec. 24) Zoning Violations (Sec. 24)	19, 21 & 31
Varies-typically Zoning Administrator and Planning Commission/Zoning Board, Township Board ¹	Site Plans (Sec. 16e)	23
Varies-may be Administrative Official, Planning Commission/Zoning Board, Township Board	Special Land Uses (Sec. 16b)	25
Varies-may be Administrative Official, Planning Commission/Zoning Board, Township Board	Planned Unit Developments (Sec. 16c) ²	28
Board of Appeals	Quasi-Judicial: Appeals, ³ ordinance interpretation, variances (Sections 19-23)	34
An Administrative Official, Planning Commission/Zoning Board, Township Board	Conducts public hearings	38

1. Planning Commission/Zoning Board - means Planning Commission if the powers of Zoning Board have been transferred, or if the powers have not been transferred, or there is no Planning Commission, then it means Zoning Board.

2. Planned Unit Developments may also be handled as amendments requiring legislative action by the Township Board.

3. Appeals of decisions on special land uses or planned unit developments may be taken to the Board of Appeals only if so specified in the ordinance.

perts. Depending upon the size, need and economy of the township, professional planning assistance can be obtained by either (1) hiring a township planner; (2) retaining a professional consultant or firm by contract; or (3) seeking advice, when the need arises, from a county, regional, or state planning agency.

The Public Officials Who Carry Out Zoning Functions

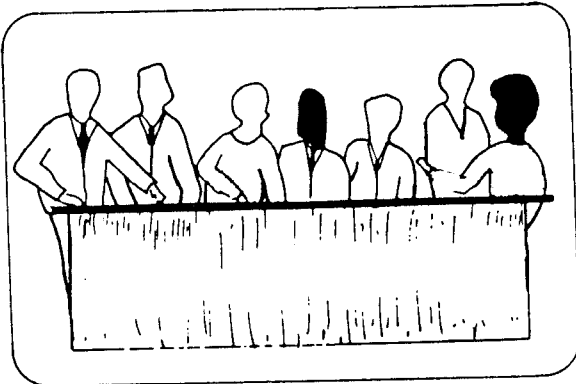
The township officials responsible for advising on or deciding various zoning requests are described in the following three sections.

Legislative Body TOWNSHIP BOARD

The township board of trustees is the legislative or governing body of the township. All the members, including the supervisor, are elected by the citizens. As the local legislative body, only the township board has the authority to formally adopt a zoning ordinance and amendments to the text and zoning map.

Responsibilities

When township zoning is first contemplated, the township board, under Act 168 of 1959, may create a zoning board pursuant to Section 4 of the Township Rural Zoning Act, or may transfer this responsibility to the planning commission. This body researches, studies, and proposes a draft ordinance according to a plan, for consideration by the township board. The process of developing the ordinance, holding the required public hearing, having the draft ordinance reviewed by the county, and resolving



Legislative Body

initial public concerns is generally carried out before the township board formally receives the proposed ordinance.

The township board reviews and considers the text, map, and all public comments. It looks to see how or if public comments were adequately resolved. At its discretion or at the written request of property owners, the township board may hold additional public hearings and may also refer suggested ordinance changes back to the planning commission for a further report. Thereafter, at any regular meeting or a special meeting called to consider the proposed ordinance (or amendment), the township board may adopt it. A majority vote of the entire membership of the township board is required. Once adopted, the township board may also give the ordinance immediate effect. A notice of adoption must be published in a newspaper of general circulation within 15 days after adoption.

The role of the township board in district boundary map changes (rezonings) or amendments to the text is the same as in adoption of the original zoning ordinance. However, amendments which are made in order to conform to a decree of the court may be adopted and published by the township board without referring the amendment to any other body or agency. The zoning ordinance and zoning map can only be changed by official action of the township board. No other township official or body has this authority.

Should a need to protect the public health, safety and general welfare of the township arise while the planning commission is first preparing a draft ordinance, the township board may direct the planning commission to prepare and submit a draft interim zoning ordinance. The planning commission would conduct a hearing and then refer the interim ordinance to the county for review. Afterward, the township board may adopt it. An interim zoning ordinance is only temporary, being valid for one year with renewal not to exceed two additional years. An interim ordinance may not be adopted if a permanent zoning ordinance is already in effect. See Section 15 of the Act for details.

In addition to the township board's legislative role described above, the township board is also permitted by state statute to perform an administrative role in certain activities, providing the local zoning ordinance so specifies. This administrative role may apply to all or specific

WHAT ZONING IS NOT OR SHOULD NOT BE

Zoning is not a medium or cure for all urban and rural ills; it is not intended to lend public support to economic, racial and religious sanctions; it is not an enforcer of private deed restrictions; nor is it a device for intervention in neighborhood feuds or personal quarrels. It does not guarantee an Eden untouched by machines, wandering dogs, or other noisy participants of the urban scene.

Zoning is not a magic potion to stir in with the tax base for cure of past fiscal mistakes. It is not designed to suppress individuality, or to increase tax revenues by making construction of housing as expensive as possible. It should not be used as a device for enforcing narrowly parochial views on style, color, texture, or shape.

Zoning does not assure development. It merely permits it. Thus, excessive commercial zoning does not mean that commercial development will take place; it merely removes the land from purposes for which it might more logically be used.

Zoning is not a means for artificially reducing the value of land so that it can be acquired for public use at reduced price.

Zoning is not a weapon to be used in the political arena to assist supporters or punish opponents. Neither is it a scale on which the thumb rests in favor of friends and to the detriment of strangers.

Zoning is not a popularity contest. Where well-considered planning requires an action, it should be taken even in the face of anguished outcries at public hearings. Head counts don't help; reasonable debate does. In such cases, the answer should be conversion where possible. It should never be capitulation.

Adapted from: **"ZONING: A Special Report to Appointed Local Planning and Zoning Officials"** by the Florida Planning and Zoning Association, Inc., Tallahassee, Florida.

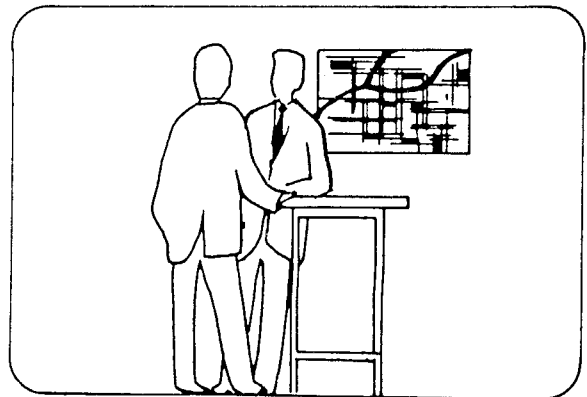
special land uses and planned unit developments as defined by the state enabling act. However, the township board does not have authority to hear appeals of an administrative zoning decision or action, and may not overrule a decision of the board of appeals. Nor for that matter, may the board of appeals review a decision by the township board denying a rezoning or text amendment. An appeal of a decision by the township board regarding an amendment to the ordinance goes directly to Circuit Court.

Administrative Bodies and Officials

Administrative zoning responsibilities are generally shared between the zoning administrator and the planning commission (or zoning board if the powers have not been transferred). Typical responsibilities of the zoning administrator and the planning commission are described in the following pages. These duties generally include review and approval or disapproval of requested zoning permits, site plans, special land uses, and planned unit developments.

ZONING ADMINISTRATOR

On the township level, it is common for a building inspector to be delegated the responsibility for administering the zoning ordinance. Under that arrangement, the building inspector is more appropriately called the zoning administrator. Other titles are sometimes used; such as zoning inspector or zoning enforcement officer. Although not all townships designate the building inspector as the zoning officer, the vast majority do for the sake of local coordination of zoning with building approvals. Also, some rural townships use a part-time administrator or may



Zoning Administrator

share the services of one with neighboring townships, or may even use a county administrator (by contractual agreement).

Normally, when applying for zoning approval, the zoning administrator is the official whom the applicant would see first. The zoning administrator is specifically assigned the task of reviewing applications and inspecting sites for zoning compliance. This task is generally carried out **before** a zoning and/or building permit is granted and the process is usually specified in the zoning ordinance.

Depending on how an individual ordinance is written, the zoning administrator may also carry out directives of the board of appeals and the planning commission. If there is a question regarding the meaning of the zoning ordinance, then the zoning administrator would obtain an interpretation of the ordinance from the board of appeals. A common example arises when a person applies for a land use not clearly provided for in the ordinance. The zoning administrator asks the board of appeals to interpret the ordinance and to determine whether the ordinance can be read to permit the use in a particular district or subject to the same regulations as a similar class of use. When the board of appeals rules on matters under their jurisdiction, the decision is usually carried out by the zoning administrator. Once designated, the districts in which that use was permitted and the standards required for that use would be applied. When the board of appeals rules on matters under their jurisdiction, they may issue directives to be carried out by the zoning administrator.

The zoning administrator may also seek out the planning commission or zoning board for advisory comments and recommendations in the processing of individual zoning applications where questions of community planning, land use impacts and site conditions arise which may be of broad concern to the public health, safety, and general welfare.

Responsibilities

The duties and responsibilities of the zoning administrator should be clearly specified in the zoning ordinance. The zoning administrator's primary responsibility is to **administer the ordinance precisely as it is written**. There is no authority to deviate from the ordinance, nor to modify its requirements. In general, the duties

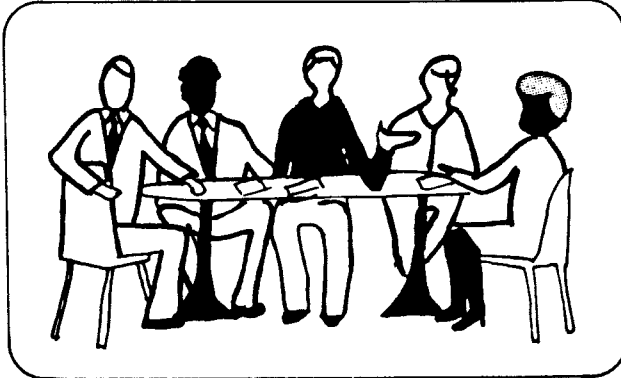
of the zoning administrator are comprised of the following:

- Assist citizens in determining what zoning forms and procedures apply to proposed zoning requests and land use changes.
- Assist citizens in the completion of required permit application forms.
- Review and investigate permit applications to determine compliance with the provisions of the zoning ordinance.
- Issue the appropriate permit when all provisions of the ordinance have been complied with. If the proposed use is not in compliance with the ordinance, the applicant is notified and assisted with an appropriate alternative procedure or appeal procedure, if the applicant so chooses.
- Perform inspections to insure proposed land use changes are and will remain in compliance with the ordinance.
- Identify, monitor, and control nonconforming uses.
- Investigate alleged violations of the ordinance and enforce corrective measures when required.
- Keep the zoning map, text and office records up to date by recording all amendments, and retaining a copy of all pertinent official documents.
- Periodically report to the planning commission or zoning board, and township board on the status of township zoning operations.
- Propose solutions to any problem encountered in administering the zoning ordinance.
- Establish and administer rules of procedure within the office.
- Provide information on zoning to citizens and public agencies upon request.
- Perform other duties as specified by local ordinance.
- Help develop and conduct, in conjunction with the planning commission or zoning board, a continuing program of public education on zoning matters.

PLANNING COMMISSION

For many townships, the planning commission serves as the zoning board. The Township Planning Act authorizes the planning commission to prepare township plans and studies, to review and improve proposed public improvements, and to carry out responsibilities of the zoning board if this power is transferred to them. By carrying out zoning responsibilities in addition to preparing plans, the zoning ordinance can be monitored to ensure it continues

to help guide community development consistent with township plans. This is especially true when the zoning ordinance is based upon an up-to-date land use plan and appropriate physical development policies.



Planning Commission

Once a zoning ordinance is adopted by the township board, the planning commission typically has both advisory and administrative responsibilities. It advises the township board on amendments to the ordinance text or zoning map. It also assists in those aspects of ordinance administration specified by the ordinance itself. These responsibilities often include review and approval of proposed site plans, special land uses, and planned unit developments.

Responsibilities

(P.A. 168 of 1959)

Where zoning powers have been transferred to the planning commission by the township board, the statutory authority and requirements for the planning commission in terms of zoning administration are fairly explicit as highlighted below. (The composition of a zoning board differs in some respects and is described in the following section.)

1. A minimum of four regular open meetings must be held each year.
2. The planning commission must prepare and adopt a basic (land use) plan to guide development in unincorporated portions of the township.
3. In matters of zoning, the planning commission may prepare and recommend to the township board a zoning ordinance having a text and map showing proposed zoning district boundaries.

The commission must:

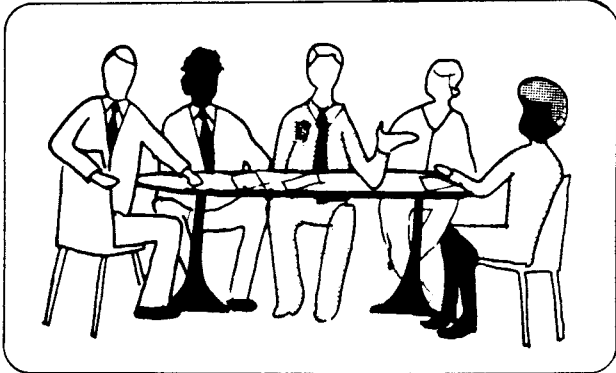
- (a) Specify who shall administer and enforce the ordinance.
 - (b) Conduct at least one public hearing on the proposed ordinance.
 - (c) Send the proposed ordinance (after the hearing) to the county zoning commission (or county planning commission or county zoning coordinating committee depending on which body exists in the county) for review, unless review is formally waived by the county board of commissioners.
4. The planning commission must also advise and make recommendations to the township board concerning future amendments, changes, additions or departures from the ordinance.
 5. Periodically, a report must be presented to the township board concerning the operations of the zoning ordinance with comments and recommendations for possible amendments.

Membership & Guidelines

(P.A. 168 of 1959)

The membership of the planning commission and its operating guidelines are identified in the Township Planning Act:

1. The planning commission may contain between five and nine members who are appointed by the township board.
2. One member of the township board must serve on the planning commission.
3. Terms of office are three years, except for initial members appointed who must serve staggered terms.
4. The planning commission must elect its own officers and establish its own rules of procedure.
5. The planning commission is authorized to prepare an annual budget and use outside technical and professional expertise.
6. Members of the planning commission may be compensated.



Zoning Commission

ZONING BOARD

If zoning powers are not transferred to the planning commission, the zoning ordinance is prepared by a zoning board appointed by the township board of trustees. After ordinance adoption, the primary function of the zoning board is advisory and administrative.

Responsibilities

(P.A. 184 of 1943, Sections 4-13)

The statutory responsibilities of the zoning board are outlined below:

1. A minimum of two regular, open meetings are required to be held each year.
2. The zoning board must prepare and recommend to the township board a zoning ordinance (for the unincorporated parts of the township) having a text of regulation and a map showing proposed zoning district boundaries, and must:
 - (a) Specify who shall administer and enforce the law.
 - (b) Hold at least one public hearing.
 - (c) After the public hearing, refer the tentative ordinance to the county zoning commission (or county planning commission or county zoning coordinating committee depending on which body exists in the county) for review, unless review is waived by the county board of commissioners.
3. The zoning board must also advise and make recommendations to the township board concerning amendments, changes, additions to, or departures from the ordinance.

4. Periodically, a report must be prepared for the township board on the operations of the zoning ordinance with comments and recommendations for possible amendments.

Membership & Guidelines

(P.A. 184 of 1943, Sections 4-6)

The membership of the zoning board and its operating guidelines are authorized by statute.

1. The zoning board may contain between four and seven members appointed by the township board.
2. Terms of office are four years, except for the original members who serve staggered terms.
3. Vacancies are filled by the township board.
4. Elected officers of the township and their employees shall not serve as a member or an employee of the zoning board.
5. The zoning board must elect its own officers.
6. The zoning board is authorized to prepare an annual budget and utilize outside technical and professional expertise.
7. A budget may be developed and funds appropriated annually in advance by the township board.
8. Members can be removed by the township board based upon written charges of misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance in office, and after public hearing.

Again, please note that where the term planning commission is used in this guide in the context of zoning responsibilities, it means zoning board if there is no planning commission in the township.

Quasi-Judicial BOARD OF APPEALS

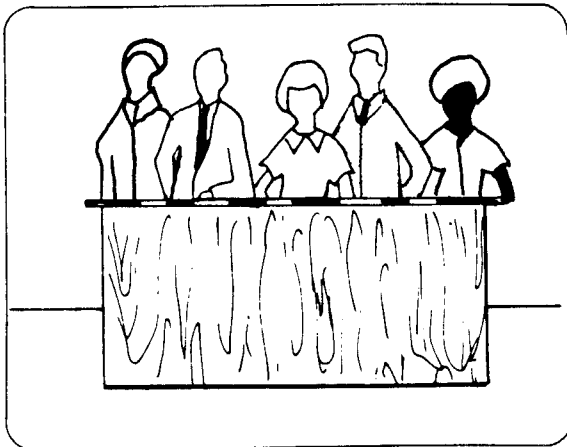
The board of appeals is the only body at the township level to hear appeals on various zoning matters. When decisions are made in connection with administering the ordinance, it is possible that they will be appealed. The most common reasons for requests for action by the board of appeals are:

- Compliance with the required yard and setbacks or other dimensional standards

on a particular parcel create a practical difficulty in using the property.

- Strict application of zoning regulations to a particular property creates a situation where an applicant claims no reasonable use of the property remains.
- There is a need to interpret or clarify a zoning regulation in order to apply the ordinance.
- A decision or requirement of the zoning administrator has been made which a property owner feels is inconsistent with the ordinance requirements.
- A use is not specifically provided for in the ordinance and ordinance interpretation is necessary to determine which use stated in the ordinance is most similar in character to the proposed use, and in which districts it is located.
- If permitted by the ordinance, to review a decision made by an administrative body or official on a special land use or planned unit development.

The township board of appeals, therefore, serves as the first level or step for an individual to appeal a decision, seek a variance from an ordinance standard as applied to his/her property, or to request an interpretation of the ordinance. When a point of controversy cannot be resolved at this step, the next step is to proceed through the state court system, beginning with Circuit Court. No local body, including the township board, can override a decision of the board of appeals, as long as the action taken was within the board's authority.



Board Of Appeals

Responsibilities

(P.A. 184 of 1943, Sections 18-23A)

The statutory responsibilities of the board of appeals as cited in the Township Rural Zoning Act appear below in summary form. The board of appeals:

1. Adopts rules of procedure (bylaws) to govern its actions as an appeals board.
2. Hears and acts upon all questions that may arise from the administration of the zoning ordinance, including ordinance interpretation, review of standards, and the zoning map.
3. Hears and acts upon appeals made from a review, order, requirement, decision, or determination made by a body or official administering the zoning ordinance.
4. Hears and acts upon requests for variances, keeping in mind the spirit of the ordinance, public safety, and justice.
5. May hear appeals with regard to special land uses and planned unit developments, only if expressly authorized in the local ordinance.
6. May impose reasonable conditions upon an affirmative decision.
7. Must state the basis or grounds for its decision. It must identify the facts which support the conclusions reached on the cases before it.
8. Conducts all meeting in public. Formal hearing of any appeal must be set within a reasonable time and conducted as a public hearing with due notice given to the parties. Specific notification requirements of the local ordinance must also be adhered to. A decision must be made within a reasonable time.
9. Has all the powers of the (administrative) officer or body from whom the appeal is taken.
10. Can rehear a case, if ordered by Circuit Court (or if so provided by ordinance). The court must find that the records are inadequate for proper court review, or that there is additional pertinent evidence which was not presented to the board of appeals. In rehearing a case, the board of appeals must review their decision and either modify or affirm its original findings and decision.

An appeal stays all proceedings unless the officer or body from whom the appeal is taken certifies a stay would cause imminent peril to life or property, in which case proceedings are not stayed unless by a Circuit Court restraining order.

Membership & Guidelines

(P.A. 184, Sections 18 and 19)

Membership on the board of appeals and its operating guidelines are prescribed in the Township Rural Zoning Act. Supplementary regulations may be found in the local zoning ordinance.

1. The total size of the board of appeals must be specified in the zoning ordinance and be in accordance with the following statutory requirements:
 - a) Township with a population of 5,000 persons or more— there shall be a minimum of five members.
 - b) Township with a population of less than 5,000 persons— there shall be a minimum of three members.
2. The first member shall be a member of the planning commission (zoning board if there is no planning commission). The remaining members shall be appointed by the township board from among the electors of the township residing outside of any incorporated areas. Membership shall be representative of the local population including the various interests located in the township. One member may be a member of the township board.
3. No elected officer of the township shall serve as chairperson.
4. No employees or contractors to the township board may serve on the board of appeals.
5. Terms of office are three years, except for those serving as representatives from the planning commission or township board. For such representatives, terms are limited to the period of membership on their respective boards or commissions. Of those appointed to the original township board of appeals, terms may be for less than three years in order to stagger individual terms of office.
6. Successive members shall be appointed within one month after the preceding member's expiration date.
7. The board of appeals is authorized to prepare an annual budget.
8. Members may be removed by the township board for nonperformance of duty or misconduct in office, based on written charges and after a public hearing.
9. A member shall disqualify himself or herself from a vote on which the member has a conflict of interest. Failure to do so constitutes misconduct in office.
10. A majority of regular members is required in order to conduct business.
11. Not more than 2 alternate members can be appointed by the township board for the same term as regular members.
12. An alternate member may be called as specified in the zoning ordinance to serve as a regular member of the zoning board of appeals in the absence of a regular member if the regular member is absent from or will be unable to attend 2 or more consecutive meetings or is absent from or will be unable to attend meetings for a period of more than 30 consecutive days. An alternate member may also be called to serve as a regular member for the purpose of reaching a decision on a case in which the regular member has abstained for reasons of conflict of interest. The alternate member appointed shall serve in the case until a final decision is made. The alternate member has the same voting rights as a regular member of the zoning board of appeals.

Chapter Three

GENERAL ZONING PROCEDURES

This chapter describes general procedures for administering the principal zoning functions in Michigan townships. Each function is described in terms of the following: when zoning approval is necessary; people involved; general procedural steps; and sample checklist to guide decisions.

Most communities use standard forms to facilitate review and approval of zoning requests. If your township does not use standard forms, it will be valuable to develop some. If they are in use, they should be reviewed to ensure they contain the necessary information to effectively implement zoning procedures.

Likewise, it is important that fees be adopted by the governing body to help defray the costs of processing zoning requests. Many communities set fees based on actual costs. Actual costs usually include any required notices, meeting expenses, per diems, and staff or consultant reviews. The applicant is usually required to pay into an escrow account an amount equal to the estimated cost. Where outside technical reviews by professional planners or engineers are necessary, these costs can be quite high. However, unless the community chooses to subsidize these expenses, it is only fair to pass them along to the applicant.

Once an application for zoning approval is determined to meet ordinance requirements, zoning approval must be granted.

There are generally three broad phases through which all zoning requests must pass: application or submission; investigation-evaluation (fact finding and analysis); and final action. Throughout each phase in the process, proper and defensible zoning administration requires: (1) responsible communication, (2) diligent record keeping, and (3) consistent adherence to all specific procedural requirements and standards found in the local zoning ordinance and the Township Rural Zoning Act. Once an application for zoning approval is determined to meet ordinance requirements, zoning approval must be granted.

As a guide to insuring proper zoning decisions are made, sample checklists of review considerations are provided.

These include sample checklists to:

- Guide Decisions on Zoning Amendments
- Guide Decisions on Zoning Permit Reviews
- Guide Decisions on Site Plan Reviews
- Guide Decisions on Special Land Uses
- Guide Decisions on Planning Unit Developments
- Guide Decisions on Variances

Guidelines for conducting public hearings and maintaining hearing records are also provided.

Specific land use and facility design criteria, or performance standards commonly applied to individual land uses are not discussed here, but are no less important. To some extent, such location and design criteria, as well as performance standards may be obtained from source books published by the particular trade or industry involved. These may also be available from planning, engineering, and architecture professionals in private firms and public agencies. Of course, local standards should also be developed and incorporated into the zoning ordinance as is appropriate.

Legislative Zoning Procedures

ZONING AMENDMENTS

The zoning amendment procedure is initiated when a property owner, the community, or township officials seek a change in the provisions, rules, or requirements of the zoning ordinance (*text change*) or a change in the mapping of district boundaries (*rezoning*).

People Involved

Petitioner(s), zoning administrator, the planning commission, the county zoning review agency, and the township board.

General Procedural Steps

Amendments, as legislative actions, must follow the same route required for the adoption of the original ordinance. This means that the

proposed amendment should be considered carefully alongside adopted township land use policies and plans. The review should establish the compatibility of the proposal with adopted community policies, plans, and both existing and future land uses.

However, the one exception to the normal amendment process occurs where the court has adjudicated a zoning dispute and mandates an ordinance change. In that situation, an amendment for the purpose of correcting a provision of the zoning ordinance in accordance with a decree of the court may be adopted by the township board with only a notice of the adopted amendment published, and without referring the amendment to any other board or agency provided for in the zoning ordinance. (P.A. 184 of 1943, Section 14)

The general procedural steps for proposing zoning changes are as follows:

1. Applicant:

- (a) Inquires of the zoning administrator (or other designated officer) how one must proceed and obtains the application form(s).
- (b) Completes and files the application form(s) along with any required fee (and other supporting documentation) to the zoning administrator. If the application originates from an official township body, the fee is usually waived.

2. Planning Commission/Zoning Board:

- (a) Reviews amendment application and studies the appropriateness of the proposed amendment. Review is based on established planning and zoning criteria, as set forth in the zoning ordinance and community plans.
- (b) A public hearing on the request is scheduled.

3. Opportunity for Public Comments:

By law, the planning commission must hold a public hearing before submitting its recommendation to the township board. The public hearing requirements are as follows:

- (a) One public hearing is mandatory (additional public hearings may be required by local ordinance or charter).

- (b) There must be two public notices in a newspaper of general circulation in the township for each public hearing. The first notice is given between 20 and 30 days prior to the hearing date. The second notice is given within eight days of the hearing date.

- (c) Not less than 20 days notice of the time and place of the hearing shall also be given by mail to each electric, gas, pipeline, and telephone public utility company, and to each railroad operating within the district or zone affected, that registers its name and mailing address for the purpose of receiving the notice.

- (d) If an amendment involves rezoning of an individual property or several adjacent properties, notice of rezoning must be transmitted in person or by mail at least eight days prior to hearing to: 1) The owner of the property in question; 2) All persons who are assessed for real property within 300 feet of the property in question; 3) All occupants of one and two family dwellings within 300 feet of the property in question.

- (e) If notices are sent by mail, an affidavit of mailing must be filed with the planning commission as proof that the proper persons were notified within the proper number of days.

- (f) Public input is considered and evaluated.

4. Planning Commission (upon completion of the public hearing):

- (a) Refers the rezoning petition to the county zoning review body (county zoning board, planning commission or zoning coordinating committee delegated to review local zoning proposals). The county review body conducts an independent review and makes (advisory) recommendations to the township planning commission. Referral to the county takes place after the public hearing by the township planning commission. The county has 30 days within which to respond. However, county review may be waived by the county board of commissioners. If the county does not respond within 30 days, their approval may be presumed.

by accomplished in another, more appropriate fashion? Is it a new response to new problems not addressed in the zoning ordinance?

d) Is the proposed text change easily enforceable?

3. For rezoning requests to change, create, extend or reduce a mapped zoning district, it is appropriate to determine:

- a) Are there substantial reasons why the property cannot be reasonably used as currently zoned?
- b) Is the use desired to be established in the new district more appropriately handled as a special land use in the existing district or another district?
- c) If a zone change is proposed, is it supported by the adopted township master plan?
- d) Would a change of present district boundaries be compatible with existing land uses in the area? Will it adversely affect property values?
- e) Are adequate sites available elsewhere that are already properly zoned to accommodate the proposed use?
- f) Would the rezoning constitute a *spot zone* granting a special privilege to one landowner not available to others?
- g) Was there a mistake in the original zoning classification?
- h) Has there been a change of conditions in the area supporting the proposed rezoning?
- i) Would the change severely impact traffic, public facilities, and the natural characteristics of the area, or significantly change population density? Is the change consistent with the purposes for which zoning is adopted?
- j) Is the proposed change out of scale with the needs of the community?
- k) If the change is approved, what will be the probable effect on stimulation of similar zoning requests in the vicinity? Would this secondary affect negatively impact community plans and public services?

l) Is the proposed change precedent setting?

m) Is the proposed boundary appropriate?

When faced with a rezoning request, ask yourself: "Is that an appropriate location for all the uses which would be permitted under the requested district or zone?"

As a general rule, basic township concerns regarding a rezoning are embodied in the following question: "*Is that an appropriate location for all the uses which would be permitted under the requested district or zone?*"

Answering this question requires looking beyond the use the applicant wants to establish on the property, to all the possible uses that could be built there if it is rezoned. The proposed use may be OK, but many others in the new district may not be appropriate. In answering this question, consider the following factors:

- Would rezoning be consistent with other zones and land uses in the area?
- Would the new district be consistent with the development trend in the area?
- Would other uses in the proposed zone be equally or better suited to the area than current uses?
- Would the proposed rezoning be consistent with the policies and uses proposed for that area in the master or comprehensive plan?

If a specific land use is proposed to be established if the rezoning is granted, it is also appropriate to establish whether the land uses permitted in the *existing zone* are reasonable. This is important because if the existing zoning is reasonable, then a denial of a rezoning won't likely result in an adverse "takings" decision if litigation ensues.

But, if the existing zoning district does not permit a reasonable use of the land (i.e. it is not economically beneficial to use the land for uses permitted in the existing zoning district), then the zone must be changed. That does not mean, however, that it must be changed to the district requested. Sometimes it is more prudent to amend the text of the ordinance to permit the desired use as a use by right or by special use permit in the *existing zone*. That would be done if it is a compatible use. Alternatively, another

BEWARE OF THESE ZONING EXCUSES

"Sad but true, far too many hearings on rezoning cases resemble a horse trading affair being carried out in a comic soap opera fashion.

Some of the more ridiculous excuses offered for granting rezoning follow such lines as:

- *What is proposed is better than what is there.*
- *The lot is only a weed patch, this will clear it up.*
- *You can't keep a man from using his land.*
- *This will bring in more revenue.*
- *The owner of the land can get more money for the land if it's rezoned to commercial.*
- *There are more vehicles on the street than when he built there or bought the property.*
- *I promised the people if I were elected I would keep taxes down.*
- *I am sure he would build something good.*
- *They are too big an outfit, we can't deny the rezoning.*
- *Her husband is overseas fighting for our (country) how can we deny it?*
- *He is just an old man trying to make a living; this won't really hurt anyone.*
- *Service stations provide quick urban renewal.*
- *We have to bring commerce and industry in today, not worry about a plan of tomorrow.*
- *I promised the people if I were elected I would bring commerce and industry into our city and this will be a start.*
- *We approved the commercial rezoning for the other fellow, how can we deny this one?*
- *We don't have any right to say where commercial or industrial developments should go.*
- *He invested a lot of money in this land and these proposals thinking the rezoning would be granted. How can we deny it?*
- *There is commercial zoning on the other corner. How can we deny it on this corner?*
- *Like his attorney said, it's probably 'unconstitutional', and we don't know for sure.*
- *We don't want to have to go to court, after all it really doesn't look so bad."*

Adapted from Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission Newsletter, December, 1967.

zoning district that permits the requested use may be more appropriate. If so, it would be advisable to advertise that two options (rezoning to one of two districts) will be considered when the original newspaper notice is published. This way the public will be aware that the property proposed for rezoning will be considered for two different zoning classifications (only one can be ultimately selected).

If these factors are carefully considered and sufficient data are available for evaluation, a sound recommendation will result. In some cases, it may be necessary for special studies and surveys to be made in order to obtain enough information to answer these questions. Where this is true, the planning commission should not hesitate to investigate, making certain that professional technical assistance is used whenever possible. In the case of a major rezoning, such as for a shopping mall, a good technique for ensuring that the above points are thoroughly explored is to perform an environmental impact assessment. Large scale zoning changes can have tremendous environmental, social, fiscal, and public utility implications. These may greatly affect the community's master plan and the ability to provide public services and should be evaluated carefully.

Administrative Zoning Procedures ZONING PERMITS

Land development which is consistent with the township zoning ordinance is monitored by a zoning permit system. The two most commonly used ways are: (1) by issuance of a separate zoning permit, or (2) as an element of the requirement for a building permit. The zoning permit is very important if the township does not handle the building permit process. Either review approach is workable, however, one should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of both as outlined below.

Township Zoning Permit as a Separate Permit

Advantages:

- separate review process;
- can handle all zoning situations dealing with uses, structures, and lots;
- may be necessary if there is a county building permit in place of township building permit;

- ensures proper record keeping and documentation practices;

Disadvantages:

- creates an additional permit requirement for the builder/developer;
- creates an additional administrative expense if building permits are issued by the township.

SPOT ZONING

Occasionally an applicant will desire a zoning change which raises the specter of spot zoning. Spot zoning is the practice of rezoning a lot or parcel into a zoning classification quite different from and incompatible with the use of surrounding lands. It serves to benefit an individual land owner rather than the broad public interest, and is inconsistent with the master plan. Typically the lot or parcel singled out for this special treatment is small in size compared to lands around it, or to the size of the district around it. Spot zoning is considered an illegal practice and can be invalidated if challenged in court.

Township Building Permit With Zoning Compliance Checkoff

Advantages:

- one combined permit process, less "red tape".

Disadvantages:

- difficult to enforce all zoning regulations related to changes in use when no construction is involved (and hence, no building permit is needed);
- record keeping and documentation practices necessary for zoning administration are apt to be subordinated to building permit records.

When Zoning Approval is Necessary

Unless a particular use or structure is specifically exempted, zoning approval, either as a zoning permit or as part of a building permit, is typically necessary:

1. Prior to construction of a new structure, or addition to a principal structure or use, or to an accessory structure.

2. Prior to changing from one use of land to a different use.
3. Prior to moving a prebuilt structure onto a parcel.
4. Prior to changing certain accessory uses of land such as parking areas or signs.

Note: A change in occupancy or ownership of a parcel or structure where the same land use is to be maintained in the same fashion and to the same extent, does not usually require a zoning or building permit. However, the zoning ordinance should specify when zoning permits are necessary.

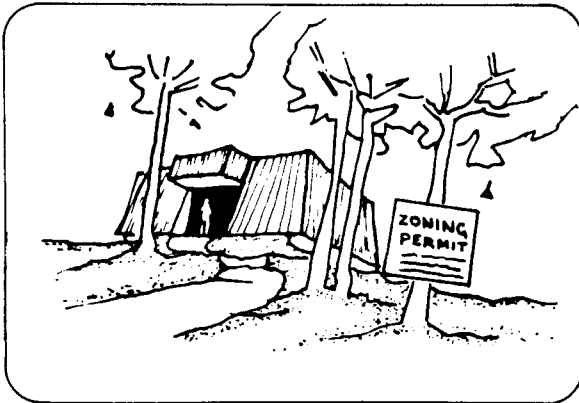
People Involved

Applicant, zoning administrator, and possibly the planning commission.

General Procedural Steps

1. Applicant:
 - a) Inquires about the ordinance requirements pertaining to his/her proposed use of land with the zoning administrator (or perhaps township clerk) and obtains the proper application forms.
 - b) Completes and submits application along with fee and other supporting documentation to the township zoning administrator.
 - c) If a site plan approval is required by the zoning ordinance, the site plan would also be submitted.
2. Zoning Administrator:
 - a) Reviews the application:
 - 1) To make sure that it is the proper application for the zoning action requested.
 - 2) To see that all required information is submitted.
 - 3) To determine zoning compliance.
 - b) Takes one or more of the following preliminary actions:
 - 1) Requests from the applicant that any omitted or pertinent and necessary information now be submitted.

- 2) If necessary, requests the board of appeals to interpret an unclear ordinance provision.
 - 3) Reviews the submitted site plan according to site plan review standards as set forth in the zoning ordinance.
 - 4) If required by the local ordinance, discusses the application and site plan with the planning commission for advisory comments or approval (depending upon ordinance authorization).
 - 5) Makes a site inspection to verify accuracy of the application and to gather additional information.
- c) Takes final action:
- 1) Approves application (and site plan) if the proposed use complies with all ordinance requirements and if no special review procedures (such as with a planned unit development) are required. A zoning permit is issued or checked off on a building permit.
 - 2) Disapproves and rejects application (and site plan) with reasons given in writing.
- d) A decision of the zoning administrator may be appealed to the board of appeals.



Sample Checklist to Guide Decisions on Zoning Permit Reviews

When reviewing an application for a use or structure, the zoning administrator will consider a number of physical aspects about its

development in relation to the zoning ordinance. However, because the review generally involves a simple check for zoning compliance and no discretion is involved (except if there is a requirement for site plan review), the zoning administrator will particularly look at certain key elements. Many administrators, especially those in urbanizing townships, have developed these key elements into a standardized or systematic review format. Shown below are some of the common key considerations contained in such a format.

All proposed uses and structures to be developed within any zoning district are reviewed to ensure compliance with each of the following ordinance requirements:

1. That the proposed use is permitted either by right, by special use permit, or by other reviews and approval procedures provided for in the ordinance for the district in which the proposed use is to be located.
2. Minimum site area requirements of the district (lot size, lot width, lot coverage, required yard setbacks, setbacks from water bodies and streams, maximum building height, etc.).
3. Minimum building requirements, if any (required area).
4. Minimum dimensions of parking space and required number of parking spaces.
5. Sign requirements.
6. Required lighting, fencing, screening or buffer strips, if any.
7. All public structural or development easements where such exists.
8. All special standards and conditions applicable to the proposed uses or structures which are specifically provided for in the ordinance.
9. All general provisions of the zoning ordinance applicable to the proposed use or structure(s).

CERTIFICATES OF OCCUPANCY

The certificate of occupancy (C.O.) is a permit which is required before a new or old structure is occupied or used, and is usually granted after an inspection. The major purpose for a C.O. is to ensure zoning compliance. It is not uncommon to discover changes in design or

use that were not authorized when conducting a C.O. inspection. Without the C.O. process this knowledge would not have been uncovered. It is essential to identify such violations before occupancy or enforcement is much more difficult. For example, the C.O. helps to make sure that:

1. After construction, a new structure is of the same size, location and setbacks as the one for which a zoning permit was granted.
2. Before occupancy, the use is the same as the use for which a zoning permit was granted.
3. Both the structure and the use comply with all zoning requirements (and any conditions previously imposed).

It should be noted that because of the similarity to the zoning permit, the use of a certificate of occupancy is not common in rural townships where the pace of development is slow to moderate and a second separate permit is not really necessary to insure ordinance compliance. However, C.O.'s are especially useful (1) in developing suburban townships where active zoning compliance is critical to the welfare of the community, and (2) in some areas where there are no township zoning permits or building permits. In this instance, the county issues building permits contingent upon conformance to township zoning ordinances. In both situations, the C.O.'s are used as local follow-up compliance tools for township zoning.

When A Certificate of Occupancy is Necessary

This is a matter of local preference and procedures are established in the zoning ordinance. Generally, a certificate of occupancy can be required:

1. Prior to occupying a new structure.
2. Prior to using land in a manner different from the previous use.
3. Prior to occupying an existing structure with a "new" type of use other than what presently exists there.

Note: Certificates of occupancy are sometimes used to document lawfully existing nonconforming uses and nonconforming structures.

People Involved

Applicant, zoning administrator.

General Procedural Steps

1. Applicant:

- a) Notifies zoning administrator that the structure and use are ready for inspection.

2. Zoning Administrator:

- a) Contacts applicant to establish a mutually agreed upon date and time for inspection.
- b) Researches and reviews any known public records relating to the site in question.
- c) Inspects for compliance with zoning requirements and with previously imposed conditions, if any.

(If occupancy permit review is combined with building permit review, the zoning administrator also inspects for compliance with building code.)

3. Zoning administrator takes final action:

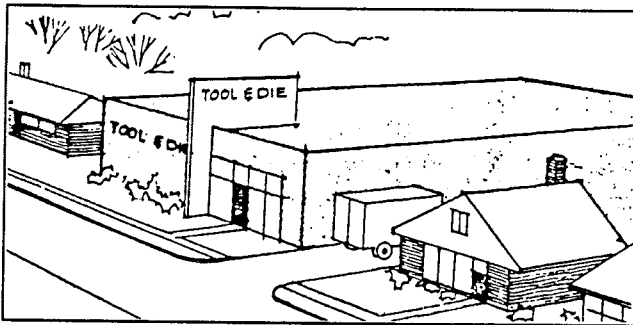
- a) Grants the certificate of occupancy.
or
- b) Delays subject to completion or alterations necessary to achieve full compliance and follow-up inspection.
or
- c) Denies a certificate of occupancy in writing based on inspection findings of non-compliance with the ordinance and initiates enforcement action pursuant to ordinance requirements.

The certificate of occupancy procedure requires no discretionary decision. It is simply an inspection by the zoning administrator to determine compliance with the requirements of the zoning ordinance and adherence with any conditions previously imposed by a township body or official during the course of the zoning process. A certificate of occupancy permit may not be denied if there is compliance with all ordinance requirements.

NONCONFORMING USES

A nonconforming use is a use of land legally in existence prior to the adoption or amendment of the ordinance which made it nonconforming. They are also sometimes called "grandparented uses". The term nonconforming use includes both preexisting land uses and nonconforming structures such as those with

inadequate setbacks or excessive height or bulk. Nonconforming uses may continue in the future to the same extent and in the same manner as they existed at the time they became nonconforming. A nonconforming property can be sold and the new owner is permitted to continue to use it in the same fashion as the previous owner without any new zoning approvals. However, if a change in a nonconforming use or structure is proposed, it must conform with ordinance requirements. The ordinance must establish standards and procedures for treatment of nonconforming uses. The basic objective is gradual elimination of nonconforming uses. The three most basic types of regulation relate to enlargement or expansion, substitution, and reconstruction.



ENLARGEMENT of nonconforming uses is generally very restricted as it is usually contrary to the intent of the ordinance. Many communities prohibit any enlargement of nonconforming uses.

SUBSTITUTION of one nonconforming use for another is usually allowed if the change is "more conforming" (a terrible standard). It is better to require it be "no less conforming".

RECONSTRUCTION of a nonconforming use is usually prohibited if damage is greater than 50%.

The Township Rural Zoning Act now allows *classification of nonconforming uses* and the application of different standards to different classes. This technique can add important flexibility to the treatment of nonconforming uses, while still providing the necessary basis for eliminating those nonconforming uses which have significant negative impacts.

Most nonconforming use provisions are administered by the zoning administrator

and/or the board of appeals. However, there is no prohibition against planning commission involvement in this area. Ordinances vary dramatically with regard to nonconforming use requirements. As a result, it is important that the reader become familiar with the unique requirements in your township ordinance.

SITE PLANS

Most ordinances require that a site or plot plan or at least a sketch be submitted as part of the application for a particular land use. The site plan is used to insure ordinance compliance and to study both on-site and off-site impacts from proposed development. These impacts include ingress/egress, interior/exterior traffic flow, storm drainage, erosion, grading of land, landscaping, lighting, and parking. A site plan can vary in detail depending upon the size and complexity of the project, and the administrative needs of the local government. Some site plans are highly detailed blueprints while other site plans may be nothing more than simple sketches affixed to the backside of zoning permit forms.

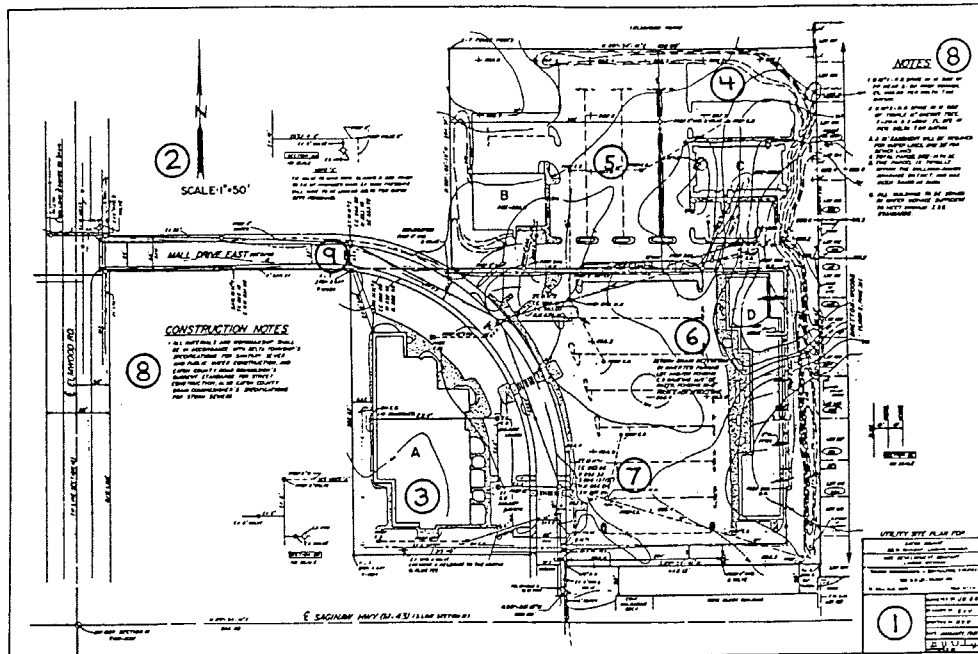
The importance to the zoning administrator of having a site (or plot) plan to review cannot be overstated. The final site plan effectively documents that the applicant is knowledgeable of the regulations and is in compliance with them. Also, once a permit is granted based upon the final site plan, the approved site plan then serves as an enforcement tool. For further infor-

SITE PLAN ELEMENTS

A typical site plan is a drawing that shows:

- Property boundaries
- Existing and proposed buildings
- Topographic relief
- Existing and proposed roads and utilities
- Existing zoning
- Existing natural features
- Setback lines
- Auto ingress and egress
- Parking and loading areas
- Landscaping
- North arrow
- Scale
- Who prepared drawing
- Preparation date

KEY ELEMENTS OF A BLUEPRINT



- ① Title Block

② North Arrow & Scale

③ Structure
- ④ Topography

⑤ Parking

⑥ Stormwater Detention
- ⑦ Utility Lines

⑧ Notes

⑨ Transportation Access

mation see **Site Plan Review: A Guidebook for Planning and Zoning Commissions** listed in the bibliography in the Appendix.

charged with reviewing site plans and granting approval."

When Zoning Approval is Necessary

Site plan review is most often part of another review process, such as review of a zoning permit application for a special use permit, or in relation to a variance request. When a separate procedure is specified in a township zoning ordinance it must be followed. Site plan review is required by statute relative to special land use and planning unit developments. Section 16e of the Township Rural Zoning Act provides the authority and requirements for use of the site plan review technique.

General Procedural Steps

Procedural steps for site plan review vary tremendously from community to community. The statute requires, however, that the zoning ordinance specify *"the procedures and requirements for the submission and approval of site plans."* Site plans should not be accepted for review by the zoning administrator if they are incomplete. Decisions rejecting, approving, or conditionally approving a site plan must be based upon requirements and standards stated in the ordinance. If a site plan complies with the ordinance requirements, it must be approved. Once approved, the site plan becomes a part of the record of approval and *"subsequent actions relating to the activity authorized shall be consistent with the approved site plan, unless a change conforming to the zoning ordinance receives the mutual agreement of the landowners and the*

People Involved

Typically, the zoning administrator and/or the planning commission are involved in site plan review. The statute requires that the zoning ordinance *"specify the body, board, or official*

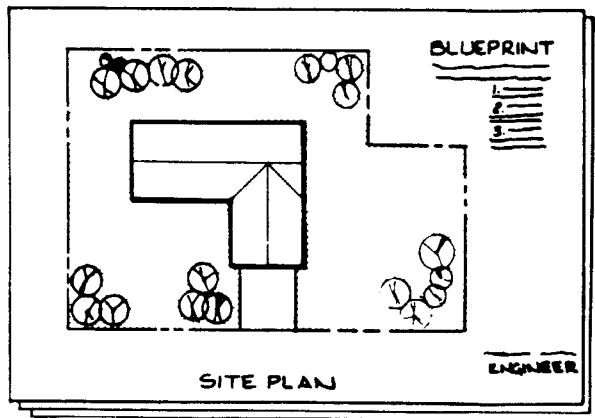
individual or body which initially approved the site plan.”

Sample Checklist to Guide Site Plan Review Decisions

In making rational, defensible decisions and in setting forth conditions for permit approval, uniform review criteria should be employed. Following is an example of typical criteria currently in use. These criteria presume that an ordinance contains standards similar to those cited, which must be complied with to gain zoning approval.

The site plan is reviewed in order to determine:

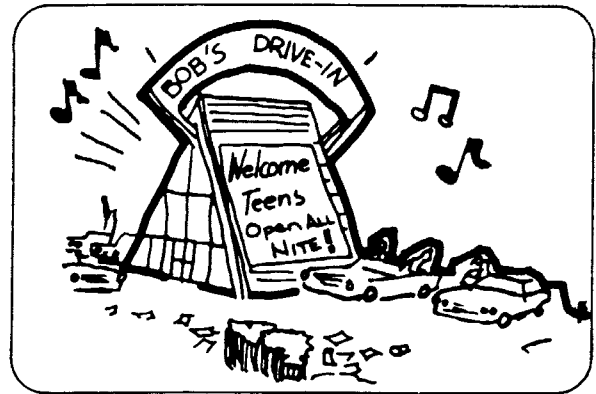
1. That the proposed use conforms to the uses permitted in that zoning district.
2. That the dimensional arrangement of building(s) and structure(s) conform to the required yards, setbacks and height restrictions of the ordinance.
3. That the proposed use conforms to all use and design provisions and requirements (if any) as found in the zoning ordinance for specified uses.



4. That there is a proper relationship between the existing and proposed streets and highways within the vicinity in order to assure the safety and convenience of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
5. That the proposed on-site buildings, structures and entry ways are situated and designed to minimize adverse effects (upon owners and occupants of adjacent and surrounding properties) by providing for ade-

quate design of ingress/egress, interior/exterior traffic flow, storm drainage, erosion, grading, lighting and parking, as specified by the zoning ordinance or other county or state law.

6. That natural features of the landscape are retained where they can enhance the development on the site, or where they furnish a barrier or buffer between the project and adjoining properties (used for dissimilar purposes) or where they assist in preserving the general safety, health and appearance of the neighborhood (i.e. controlling erosion or the discharge of storm water, etc).



A Special Land Use?

7. That adverse effects of the proposed development and activities upon adjoining residents or owners are minimized by appropriate screening, fencing, or landscaping (as provided or required in the zoning ordinance).
8. That all buildings and structures are accessible to emergency vehicles.
9. That the site plan as approved is consistent with the intent and purposes of the zoning ordinance which is to promote public health, safety and general welfare, to encourage the use of lands in accordance with their character and adaptability, to avoid the overcrowding of population, to lessen congestion on the public roads and streets, to reduce hazards of life and property, and to facilitate existing municipal land use and development plans.

SPECIAL LAND USES

Special land uses are typically described as those uses of land which upon special review are determined to be compatible with permitted land uses in a zoning district. They are also

known as conditional uses, special exception uses, special approval uses and special uses. Standards are included in the ordinance to assure that the characteristics of the use under consideration are compatible with adjacent land uses, the natural environment of the site, and the general character of the area, including availability of public services and facilities.

Typically, a special land use permit is issued to identify compliance with the special land use requirement. A use permitted by special permit in one district is often allowed by right in another. Common special land uses include junk yards, mobile home parks, race tracks, TV and radio towers, home occupations, hospitals, churches and schools. The Township Rural Zoning Act grants authority for townships to use the special land use technique in Section 16b. The statute requires that uses permitted as special land uses be identified in the ordinance. The body or official responsible for reviewing and approving special land uses as well as the review procedures and standards upon which approval will be based must also be stated in the ordinance.

When a Special Land Use Permit is Necessary

A special land use permit is typically necessary prior to development of (or conversion to) a use which is listed in the zoning ordinance as a special land use.

People Involved

The applicant, zoning administrator, and the body or official responsible for reviewing and approving special land uses are involved in special land use requests. The review and approval body or official may be either the zoning board, the planning commission (if the zoning powers have been transferred), an administrative official or the township board. An appeal of a decision on a special land use may be taken to the board of appeals *only if* it is so specified in the ordinance; otherwise, an appeal would go to Circuit Court. *The board of appeals is not authorized to be the body responsible for original review and approval of special land uses.*

General Procedural Steps

1. Applicant:

- a) Inquires about requirements with the zoning administrator or township clerk and obtains the proper application forms.
- b) Completes and submits the application along with a fee (and other supporting documentation) to the township zoning administrator or the official responsible for receiving special land use applications.
- c) Submits a required site plan for approval (Act 184 of 1943, as amended, Section 16e(4)).

2. Zoning administrator:

- a) Reviews application package:
 - 1) To make sure that it is the right application for the zoning action requested;
 - 2) To see that all required information is submitted; and
 - 3) To make sure that the proposed use is permitted in a particular district by special land use permit.

TWO TYPES OF STANDARDS

There are two basic types of zoning standards: discretionary and nondiscretionary.

DISCRETIONARY: Judgement is used to determine compliance. For example:

- *"The project shall not alter the essential character of the area."*

NONDISCRETIONARY: The standards are measurable or otherwise certain to establish. No judgement is used. For example:

- *"A steel mesh fence eight feet in height shall surround the perimeter of the property."*

Most ordinances contain both types of standards. There are usually *general standards* which are discretionary and apply to all special land uses and *specific standards* which are nondiscretionary and apply only to a particular type of special land use.

b) Takes one or more of the following actions:

- 1) Requests from the applicant that any omitted or necessary information now be submitted;
- 2) If necessary, seeks an ordinance interpretation from the board of appeals; and/or
- 3) Forwards the complete application to the body or official designated to review and approve special land uses.

3. Special land use review body (or official):

- a) Reviews the site plan according to site plan review standards, as set forth in the zoning ordinance.
- b) Reviews the proposed special land use according to standards for special land use permits, as set forth in the ordinance.

4. Opportunity for public comments.

If the standards for special land use permits are such that a discretionary decision is to be made, the reviewing body or official must mail or deliver a notice to property owners and occupants within 300 feet of the property in question and must do so between five and 15 days before the date on which the application is to be considered. An affidavit of mailing or delivery of notice must be maintained. In addition, the reviewing body or official must **either**:

- a) Give public notice in a newspaper of general circulation of official receipt of an application for a special land use permit which:
 - 1) Describes the nature of the special land use request,
 - 2) Indicates the property in question,
 - 3) States the time and place where the special land use request will be considered,
 - 4) Indicates when and where written comments will be received concerning the request, and
 - 5) Indicates that a public hearing on the proposed special land use may be requested by any property owner or occupant of any structure located within 300 feet of the boundary of the

property being considered for a special land use permit.

or

- b) Give public newspaper notice of a scheduled public hearing. This hearing notice includes items 1) through 4) above. It is also mailed or delivered to property owners and occupants within 300 feet of the property in question. These public hearing notices must be made between five and 15 days before the public hearing date. An affidavit of mailing or delivery of notice must be maintained.
5. All public input is considered and evaluated. A summary of the public comments should be retained in the record of the meeting.
 6. The special land use review body (or official) takes final action and either:
 - a) Approves the special land use permit application and final site plan. The zoning administrator is directed to issue the permit and ensure development consistent with the approved plan.
- or**
- b) Approves the special use permit application and final site plan subject to conditions which are imposed in order to ensure the special land use complies with standards stated in the ordinance. The zoning administrator is directed to issue the permit and ensure development consistent with the approved plan.
- or**
- c) Disapproves application and final site plan.

Note: All decisions must be accompanied with a concluding statement citing the reasons for the decision and any conditions which may be imposed. The facts presented in the application, staff report (if any) and from public comments should be specifically related to the standards required for approval. If the facts show that the ordinance standards are not met, the application must be denied. If all ordinance standards are met, the application must be approved.

Sample Checklist to Guide Decisions on Special Land Uses

A site plan is required for submission and approval of all special land use permit applications.

An important concern in reviewing special land use requests is whether or not the proposed site is appropriate for the land use in question. A special land use is usually a unique use which may have particular intrinsic or design characteristics that could create potential problems for adjacent property owners. For this reason, a special land use may be appropriate in one place, but not in all locations throughout the particular zoning district. A classic situation is a proposal to build an all-night gasoline service station or car wash near a predominantly residential intersection, even though the subject property is zoned for commercial uses. Rational judgements and conditions may need to be imposed to protect adjacent lands and the overall character of the area from adverse changes and impacts. The following checklist is suggested for considering the appropriateness of a special land use in a particular area:

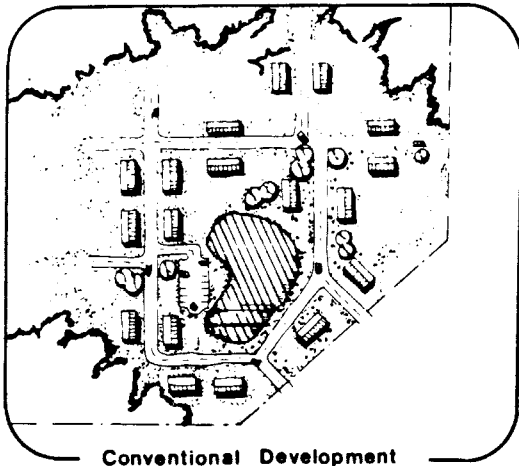
1. Relationship to the general safety, health and welfare of the community-at-large. This includes:
 - accessibility of the property in question to fire and police protection;
 - traffic conditions (especially adding to a hazardous situation);
 - transportation design requirements, if any, which will be needed to accommodate any traffic impact from the use intended; and
 - appropriateness of the location, nature and height of the proposed use to the size, type and kind of buildings, uses and structures in the vicinity and adjacent properties, including the safety and convenience of people therefrom.
2. Any potential decrease in the market value of adjacent buildings, uses and structures which are permitted by right under current zoning, if the proposed special land use is approved.
3. Harmony with the township master plan. This considers whether the location and size of the proposed use, the nature and intensity of the activities involved, the size of the site with respect to existing and future streets (giving access to it), parks and drainage systems, will be in harmony with the township land use plan, and the character of land use which is intended by the comprehensive plan for the area or district in question.
4. Impact from the applicant's proposed use, its location and intensity and the height of its buildings, wall, fences and other structures upon the appropriate character of development existing or planned for the area.
5. Any hazards arising from storage and use of hazardous or flammable fluids.
6. That the operation in connection with any special use is not environmentally objectionable to nearby properties by reason of noise, fumes, pollution, vibration, or light to an extent which is more than would be expected of any use permitted by right for the district in which the special land use is proposed.

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENTS (PUD'S)

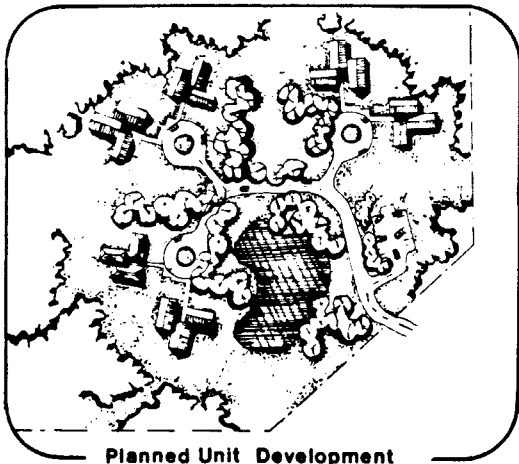
The planned unit development, or PUD as it is frequently known, is a modern, flexible application of zoning. The PUD zoning concept is employed by some communities to encourage innovative and imaginative project design. Sometimes it is called cluster zoning, a community unit plan, or planned residential development. Its use has become popular all over the country. In Michigan, township use of the PUD approach has been given statutory recognition in the Township Rural Zoning Act (see Section 16c).

What is a Planned Unit Development?

"Planned unit development (PUD) is a device which allows a development to be planned and built as a unit and which...permits variations in many of the traditional controls related to density, land use, setbacks, open space and other design elements, and the timing and sequencing of the development. PUD, therefore, is both a type of development and a regulatory process. As a development type, PUD permits flexibility in site design that allows buildings to be clustered; mixtures of housing types such as detached houses, townhouses, or garden apartments combining housing with such other ancillary uses as neighborhood shopping centers; better design and arrangement of open space; and retention of such natural features as flood plains or steep slopes. It offers greater opportunities for providing lower-cost housing along with conventional housing." Michael J. Meshenberg, the "Administration of Flexible Zoning Techniques", **Planning Advisory Service Report No. 318** (Chicago: ASPO, June 1976), p. 19.



Conventional Development



Planned Unit Development

Comparative Site Layout

Often communities define PUD's as large sites developed as a single unit combining a variety of structures and perhaps uses, in which ownership is retained by a single individual, partnership, corporation or association. Because of the trend to conserve and protect open space, sensitive land resources and the natural environment, a PUD may be the only feasible type of development where particular site conditions (e.g....flood plain, steep slopes, wetlands poor soils) demand clustering or grouping of structures on only part of the site.

Ways to Provide for a PUD in a Township Zoning Ordinance

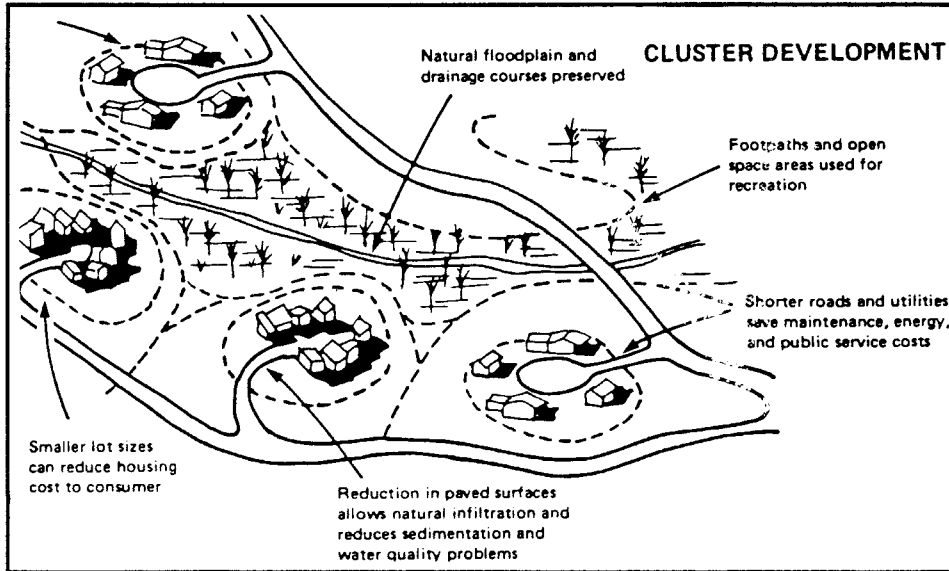
Development of land based on a PUD concept is permitted only if the zoning ordinance expressly permits and provides for such development. In developing PUD provisions, the planning commission and the township board:

1. Defines the term "*planned unit development*" for zoning purposes,
2. Specifies who shall be the designated review and approval body or official,
3. Determines eligibility criteria,
4. Establishes standards for approval,
5. Develops public hearing procedures, and
6. Sets forth the PUD review and approval process (which must include site plan review).

The eligibility criteria (provision 3 above) is perhaps the most important. Because the community is offering the developer so much flexibility in developing his/her land, the community should be getting demonstrable benefits in return. These could include better exterior building design, more open space, a better layout, special environmental protection measures and so on. These need to be identified as standards in the ordinance and verified at the beginning of the review process to establish project eligibility for PUD development.

With respect to provision 6 above, one of two basic ways to provide for PUD's in the township zoning ordinance are: (1) like a special land use, and (2) as a separate zoning district. Processing PUD's via the same procedure used for special land uses is the simplest of these methods, if special land uses are already provided for in the township zoning ordinance. The only extra requirement prescribed by state statute for PUD's are: (1) a public hearing is required for PUD's in contrast to the public notice option provided for single-purpose special uses; and (2) special standards and eligibility criteria must also be provided specifically for review of PUD's. Under this alternative, the body or official charged with review and approval of special land uses becomes the approving body for PUD's.

A separate PUD zone or district is an approach wherein the mandatory criteria, standards and requirements are contained in a separate PUD district, just as for any zone. The local ordinance would have to include provisions which satisfy the above mentioned six features. Of course, in this instance, the land would actually have to be rezoned to permit a PUD if the land was not already zoned as such. Under this option, the township board of trustees thus becomes the approval body.



When PUD Approval is Necessary

When an applicant desires to establish a PUD in a district in which PUD's are permitted as a special land use or when a special PUD district rezoning is requested then PUD approval is necessary.

People Involved

The applicant, zoning administrator, and the PUD review body or official are involved in the decision process. The PUD review body or official must be specified in the zoning ordinance as having the power to approve PUD's. The reviewing and approval body or official may be either the planning commission/zoning board, an administrative official or the township board.

General Procedural Steps

If the PUD is permitted like a special land use, then the procedures for processing special land uses are followed; *except that* a public hearing must be conducted (it is not optional as with certain special land uses). It is also permissible, if the ordinance so provides, for *pre-application conferences* to be held between the applicant and township officials before submission of *preliminary* site plans before the public hearing.

If the PUD is permitted as a separate zoning district, the ordinance amendment process

is integrated with the PUD review and approval process.

When a PUD application and site plan is found to satisfy all the criteria, standards, requirements and conditions for approval stated in the ordinance, the application must be approved. An appeal of a PUD decision may be taken to the board of appeals only if so specified in the zoning ordinance, otherwise it goes to Circuit Court.

Since reviewing a PUD application requires review of a site plan via a process similar to that for special uses, the decision guides previously presented should be reviewed as well as the following sample list of standards:

Sample Checklist to Guide Decisions on PUD's

1. Is the minimum PUD area requirement of the ordinance met? (Some communities have no area requirements). Are the densities appropriate for the area?
2. Is the location of the proposed PUD appropriate?
3. Are the proposed uses of the PUD permitted in the zoning district in which the PUD is to be located?

4. Is the PUD to be developed in multiple stages? If so, which parts are to be developed when?
5. Are all community water and sewer service requirements of all state, county and local agencies complied with?
6. Is all common property proposed in the PUD clearly provided for? Common property is a parcel or parcels of land, a privately-owned road or roads, together with the improvements thereon, the use and enjoyment of which are shared by the owners and occupants of the individual building sites. When common property exists, the ownership of such property may be either public or private but should be specified in writing and approved separately. When privately owned, arrangements must be made for the improvement, operation, and maintenance of such common property and facilities, including private streets, drives, service parking and recreational areas.
7. Are necessary public easements on common property which is privately owned adequately granted? When common property exists in private ownership, the owners should be required to grant easements, over, under, and through such property (to the township), as may be necessary for specified public purposes, prior to final approval.
8. Are all site design standards complied with? These standards typically include:
 - lot area and yard requirements
 - height limitations
 - access
 - building areas (to be in harmony with PUD objectives)
 - boundary setbacks and buffer areas
 - off-street parking and loading
 - residential dwelling unit density (gross density)
 - landscaping
 - other local design limitations
9. Have any necessary performance guarantees been collected to insure required public improvements are installed?
10. Have all conditions required for approval been documented and incorporated into the PUD permit approval?
11. Have a statement of findings and conclusions relative to the PUD proposal been specifically listed and retained as a part of the record?

Note: Final approvals may be granted on each phase of a multi-phased PUD if each phase contains the necessary components to insure protection of natural resources and the health, safety and welfare of the users of the PUD and the residents of the surrounding area. In establishing PUD requirements, the township may also incorporate by reference, other ordinances or statutes which regulate land development. Violation of the terms of an approved PUD is a violation of the zoning ordinance.



Zoning Violation

ZONING VIOLATIONS

There will come a time in every community when the zoning ordinance is violated. Whether this is intentional or unintentional is of little importance. The credibility of successful zoning lies not only in the ability to administer it reasonably and fairly, but in the ability to enforce zoning requirements when violations occur. Many violations of zoning are voluntarily reported by concerned citizens and public officials. Following is a discussion of two ways of enforcing zoning and handling violators.

When Necessary

1. When a suspected zoning violation is reported to the zoning administrator or,
2. When the zoning administrator identifies what appears to be an ordinance violation.

People Involved

Suspected violator, zoning administrator, township board, and township attorney.

General Procedural Steps

This section discusses two alternative approaches to dealing with zoning violations. The first is an example of a general approach with several opportunities for correction prior to court action. The second approach is a zoning summons approach which can be used where violations may be too numerous, costly and time consuming to prosecute using the first approach. The basic authority and procedure for either or both of these approaches should be specified in the local ordinance.

A. General Approach:

1. A suspected zoning violation is reported or identified.
2. Zoning administrator:
 - a) Makes a preliminary visit to the site to identify a zoning violation. If no violation is found, the matter is documented and the case closed. If a person contacted the township about the supposed violation they should be contacted about the outcome.
 - b) If a violation is found, it is documented as are the facts supporting this conclusion. A photo showing the violation and containing the date, time, place and signed by the observer should be made and retained.
 - c) Meets face to face with the landowner to discuss the violation.
 - 1) The zoning violation is explained.
 - 2) Remedial measures to correct the violation are concretely identified for the landowner.
 - d) Issues a notice of violation (after the meeting) to the violator with one copy to be filed.

The notice documents:

 - 1) The zoning violation,
 - 2) The meeting,
 - 3) Measures to be taken to correct the violation, and
 - 4) A (uniform) period of time given within which to correct the violation.

- e) Reinspects the site, upon expiration of the time period. If compliance is shown, the zoning administrator so signifies on the file copy and the violator's copy of the notice of violation. The matter is resolved.

However, if the zoning violation still exists after the expiration of the time period, the zoning administrator may proceed in the following manner:

- f) Schedules a hearing to be held by the township board (or other body if so designated in the ordinance).
- g) Issues a second notice of violation to the violator. The notice:
 - 1) Advises that a hearing before the township board has been scheduled.
 - 2) Gives the date, time and place of the hearing.
 - 3) Requires that the violator or his/her agent appear in order to show cause as to why the township should not proceed in court to prosecute the violation, and
 - 4) States that correction of the violation prior to the hearing date will automatically void the requirement of a hearing before the township board.

3. Township board (or other designated body):

- a) Hears the violator's "show cause" response as to:
 - 1) Why compliance with zoning has not been met, and
 - 2) Why the ordinance should not be enforced against the violator.
- b) Directs the zoning administrator and the township attorney to proceed with a formal complaint in Circuit Court if the violator or his/her agent fails to appear, does not give valid reasons for noncompliance or does not give valid reasons against enforcement of the ordinance.

Where the violation involves unlawful construction or illegal usage, either of which may be of a critical nature as specified in the ordinance, a Circuit Court injunction can be an added enforcement action and may be necessary to proceed with immediately.

Upon conviction, the violator usually pays a fine and certain legal costs (optional). Many local ordinances also state *"each day of conviction, and during which a violation continues shall be deemed a separate offense"*. Remedies are also usually cumulative.

B. Zoning Summons Approach

The zoning summons approach is a popular alternative used by some communities. It is a good intermediate technique which often resolves the problem, and reduces the number of times the township attorney or a court has to be relied upon. *Please note: in order for a ticket to be accepted in court, the court must first approve the form and contents of the ticket.* The following is a general description of how this approach is used:

1. A suspected zoning violation is reported or identified.
2. Zoning administrator:
 - a) Makes a preliminary visit to the site to identify if a zoning violation exists. If no violation is found, the matter is documented and the case closed.
 - b) If a violation is found, it is documented along with the facts supporting this conclusion. A photo showing the violation and containing the date, time, place and signed by the observer should be made and retained.
 - c) Meets face to face with the landowner to discuss the violation.
 - 1) The zoning violation is explained.
 - 2) Remedial measures to correct the violation are concretely identified for the landowner.
 - d) Issues a *"warning ticket"* (after the meeting) to the violator with one copy to be filed. The ticket states:
 - 1) The zoning violation,
 - 2) The meeting,
 - 3) Measures to be taken to correct the violation, and
 - 4) A (uniform) period of time allowed within which to correct the violation.

- e) Reinspects the site, upon expiration of the time period. If compliance is shown, the zoning administrator so signifies on the file copy and the violator's copy of the warning ticket. The matter is resolved.

However, if the zoning violation still exists after the expiration of the time period, the zoning administrator generally proceeds in the following manner:

- f) Issues a *"zoning summons"* to the violator. The summons:
 - 1) Cites the zoning violation;
 - 2) Gives the date of the first meeting and when the warning ticket was first issued;
 - 3) Repeats the original measures specified in the warning ticket that were to be taken to correct the violation;
 - 4) Indicates the fine as may be previously specified by ordinance or other action by the township board, payable to District Court. *Where the violation involves unlawful construction or illegal usage, either of which may be of a critical nature as specified in the ordinance, Circuit Court injunction might be a better enforcement action;* and
 - 5) Specifies the date and the time by which the fine is to be paid to the District Court or at which a *"not guilty"* plea is to be entered, usually 5-7 days.

In most cases, compliance will be gained at this point. But if not, the zoning administrator:

- g) Issues a separate zoning summons for each day (or week) after the date the first summons was issued.
- h) Reports to the township board about any violators who have accumulated repetitive summons for the same violation.

3. Township board:

- a) Directs the zoning administrator and the municipal attorney to proceed with a formal complaint to Circuit Court for injunctive relief.

As with zoning permits and certificates of occupancy, the enforcement process requires no

discretionary decision on the part of the zoning administrator. The administrator simply follows adopted procedures and documents what s/he witnesses and what actions have transpired. Inspections are made according to the township zoning ordinance requirements.

Quasi-Judicial Zoning Procedures

APPEALS - ORDINANCE INTERPRETATION - VARIANCES

The basic responsibilities of the board of appeals include hearing appeals of administrative decisions, interpreting the zoning ordinance, considering requests for variances and such other duties delegated by ordinance. The basic procedures and people involved are roughly the same in each case, but the criteria employed by the ZBA are different.

When Action by the Board of Appeals is Necessary

1. When a citizen appeals a decision made by the zoning administrator or by an administrative review body or official from which an appeal to the board of appeals is authorized by ordinance; or
2. When an interpretation of the zoning ordinance or map is requested by a citizen or public official;
3. When a variance from specific ordinance requirements is formally requested.
4. When other duties established by ordinance are delegated to the board of appeals, such as requests for expansion of nonconforming uses.

Note: Decisions on special land uses and planned unit developments may not be appealed to the board of appeals unless specifically stated in the zoning ordinance. Likewise, decisions by the township board on amendments to the zoning ordinance (text changes or rezonings) are not appealable to the board of appeals.

People Involved

Any aggrieved citizen, or any officer, department, board or bureau of the township, county, or state.

Zoning administrator or an administrative review body (or official).

Zoning board of appeals (and its staff).

General Procedural Steps

1. The person (or public agency or official) who makes the appeal:
 - a) Inquires of the local zoning administrator (or other designated officer) as to how one must proceed and obtains the appeal form(s).
 - b) Completes and files the necessary form(s) with any required fee to the board of appeals or official responsible for receiving such application. On some matters, this must be done within a specified time, as prescribed by ordinance or the rules of the board of appeals. Township bodies and officials are usually exempt from paying a fee if they initiate the appeal on behalf of the municipality.
 - c) A copy of the appeal is transmitted to the official or body from whom the appeal is taken. Likewise, this official or body must then transmit to the board of appeals all documentation and records upon which the appeal was based.
2. Board of appeals:
 - a) Reviews the appeal form(s):
 - 1) To make sure that it is the proper form for the requested action, and
 - 2) To see that all required information is submitted.
 - b) Schedules a hearing within a reasonable period and gives notice thereof to the parties affected in accord with ordinance procedures and any adopted rules.
 - c) If required by the local ordinance, notice of the appeal is also given by mail or personal delivery to the property owners and occupants of single and two-family dwellings within a specified distance of the premises in question.
 - d) Formulates its decision. The board of appeals considers the merits for the individual appeal based on standards and considerations established in the statute and as may be embodied in the ordinance.

3. Board of appeals takes final action:

The board of appeals has all the powers of the officer or body from whom the appeal was taken and may issue or direct the issuance of a permit. The board of appeals either:

- a) grants the appeal wholly or partly;
- or**
- b) grants the appeal wholly or partly with conditions attached;
- or**
- c) denies the appeal;
- or**
- d) when a variance is requested and there is just cause to grant such request due to practical difficulties or unnecessary hardship, the board of appeals may reasonably vary or modify specific local zoning requirements so that the *spirit of the ordinance is observed, public safety secured and substantial justice done.*

The board of appeals must state the reasons and facts supporting their decision. These must be written in the record. A concurring vote of a majority of the members of the board of appeals is necessary in order to take an action on a matter properly before the board of appeals.

4. Further appeals in Circuit Court (P.A. 184 of 1943, Section 23a)

Should an appeal be taken one step further to the Circuit Court, the Township Rural Zoning Act prescribes guidelines for court review of the record and decision of the board of appeals. The Court reviews the decision to ensure that it:

- a) Complies with the constitution and state statutes.
- b) Is based on proper procedure.
- c) Is supported by competent, material, and substantial evidence of the record.
- d) Represents the reasonable exercise of discretion granted by law to the board of appeals.

Should the court find that the record of the board of appeals is inadequate to make the above review, or that additional evidence exists which was not presented to the board of appeals, the court can order the board of appeals to conduct further proceedings. The board of appeals may then change or stand by its original

decision. The supplemental records and decision must be filed with the court.

As a result of court review, the court may affirm, modify or reverse a decision of the board of appeals.

Appeals

When reviewing an appeal from an action of the zoning administrator, the board of appeals reviews the facts and ordinance requirements and comes to its own conclusion as to the correct action. Similarly, if the township zoning ordinance permits appeal to the board of appeals of actions of special land uses or PUD requests, the board of appeals is limited to reviewing the facts as presented to the reviewing body or official and then determining if all ordinance standards were properly applied. In so acting, the board of appeals has no more power than the body or official from whom the appeal is taken. The most important point to remember in either case, is that another official or body has already acted and that the role of the board of appeals is not to review the matter as if nothing has previously occurred. Rather, it is the job of the board of appeals to establish whether the previous decision, based on the facts in the record, is warranted. If so, it would be upheld, if not, it would be overturned.

Interpretation Questions

Occasionally the text of the zoning ordinance may appear to have more than one meaning or a portion of the zoning map may be ambiguous. The zoning board of appeals has the responsibility to make interpretations of the zoning ordinance. Their decision remains the official ordinance interpretation unless modified by a court or the ordinance is amended by the governing body. Text interpretations are typically the most problematic. If not carefully considered, requests for interpretation can open a Pandora's box by creating a plethora of new problems.

Sample Checklist to Guide

Decisions on Ordinance Interpretation

Using the following guidelines when making a decision on an ordinance interpretation question will help reduce the chance of bad decisions, reduce the amount of litigation and prepare the necessary record for court action and future decisions.

1. Research the ordinance and supporting documentation carefully.
2. Carefully consider a questioned provision in light of the whole ordinance, and not simply the section in which it is found.
3. Consider the interpretation in light of the intent of the ordinance as it is written, not merely as it may have seemed to the people who drafted it.
4. Seek the advice of planning and legal counsel whenever it is needed.
5. Make the decision on narrow grounds and limit the scope of an interpretation so that other unintended consequences do not result from the interpretation.
6. Document in writing the interpretation decision and the rationale for the decision.
7. Remember that the decision of the ZBA on an interpretation question is final, until or unless the interpreted provision is amended by the township board or overturned by a court of law.
8. Good record keeping and cross-referencing of decisions is critical to a consistent application of interpreted provisions (staff and ZBA members change over time, the decision making process and factors considered in an interpretation decision should not).
9. Write clear and simple zoning ordinance provisions and define all key terms and phrases carefully, and use them consistently throughout the ordinance. This will greatly reduce the likelihood of a ZBA having to interpret particular provisions.
10. Review the zoning ordinance periodically with an eye to identifying unclear provisions and correct any deficiencies.
11. Include statements of clear legislative intent at the start of each zoning district and zoning process (such as special land uses).
12. Where the legislative intent is unclear and the facts cannot be clearly read to support only one interpretation of questioned provisions, the benefit of doubt should be extended to the property owner.

Source: "Zoning Ordinance Interpretation" by Mark A. Wyckoff, **Planning and Zoning News**, October, 1986, pp. 7-9.

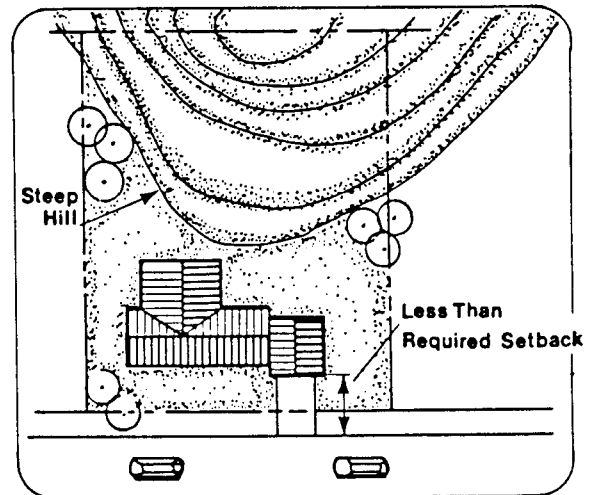
Variations

A variance is the grant of specific authorization by the board of appeals to utilize a parcel or structure in violation of ordinance requirements when certain findings have been made. In effect, a variance is a license to violate a specific ordinance requirement. Clearly variances need to be carefully considered and under normal circumstances should be rarely granted. Improperly granting variances can quickly undermine the integrity of the entire zoning ordinance.

In effect, a variance is a license to violate a specific ordinance requirement

There are two types of variances: *use* and *nonuse*. A nonuse variance is often called a *dimensional* variance and usually deals with setback, height or area requirements. A use variance permits a use of land on a parcel that otherwise is not permitted by the zoning ordinance. Michigan townships have no express statutory authority to grant a use variance and some township ordinances expressly prohibit them. Many zoning scholars also consider use variances illegal, because in effect, they *rezone* without going through the rezoning process, thereby usurping the power of the governing body.

Improperly granting variances can quickly undermine the integrity of the entire zoning ordinance.



A Typical Variance Situation

There is, however, one instance where the township may be advised to grant a use variance. This is when the applicant demonstrates that no reasonable use may be made of a parcel as it is presently zoned (i.e. that it cannot be used for any of the uses permitted in the existing zoning district) and that reasonable efforts to get the property rezoned or to obtain special approval (such as by a special use permit) have all been rejected. Failure to grant a use variance under these facts could be tantamount to a taking, which under recent U.S. Supreme Court pronouncements, would require compensation. Townships are not advised to grant use variances under any other circumstances.

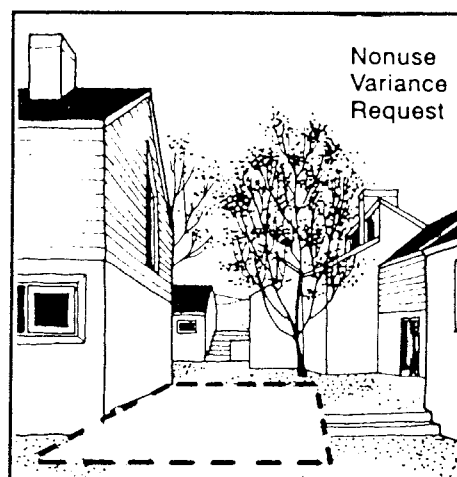
When a board of appeals considers a variance request, it is important that they keep in mind that the variance authority is designed to provide relief to a property owner from an ordinance requirement that is uniquely affecting a particular property. It is not designed as a technique to grant special favors to some persons or as a tool to solve a problem shared in common with other properties. When a problem is common, the appropriate solution is amendment of the text of the ordinance so all similarly situated property owners are treated equally. Often people will claim that a variance will allow them to make more money from the property. However, this is not a legitimate argument, since zoning is not intended to be used merely to permit the most profitable use of land, although reasonable use of property must be permitted.

Sample Checklist to Guide Decisions on Dimensional Variances

The most common appeals deal with requests for a variance from specific ordinance standards such as dimensional requirements of the ordinance including: yard requirements, setback lines, lot coverage, frontage requirements and density regulations.

Where there are practical difficulties preventing a property owner from conforming with the strict letter of the ordinance, the board of appeals has the power to grant dimensional variances. Typically, the following circumstances must exist:

1. Dimensional zoning requirements cannot be met on an existing lot due to narrowness, shallowness or irregular shape, or the topography or natural characteristics of the site (such as a wetland, flood plain, bedrock con-



dition, etc.) inhibit the lawful location of a principal or accessory structure (such as septic system, garage, shed).

2. The problem creates a practical difficulty which is unique (because of the above or similar reasons) and is not shared by neighboring properties in the same zone. If the board of appeals finds that the problem is not unique, but common, amending the ordinance or a rezoning should be pursued.
3. The practical difficulty was not created by an action of the applicant and either existed at the time of adoption of the requirement from which the variance is requested, or is necessary as the result of governmental action (such as a road widening). A self-created hardship is not typically a valid basis for a variance.
4. The appellant presents information usually showing that the requested variance:
 - a) Will not be contrary with the intent and purpose of the zoning ordinance;
 - b) Will not cause a substantially adverse affect upon adjacent properties;
 - c) Will relate only to the property under control of the appellant;
 - d) Will not essentially alter the character of the surrounding area;
 - e) Will not increase the hazard from fire, flood or similar dangers; and
 - f) Will not increase traffic congestion.
5. The variance is the minimum necessary to permit reasonable use of the land and build-

ings for activities permitted in the zoning district.

The Michigan Court of Appeals has applied similar principles (widely recognized in many state courts) in recent variance cases:

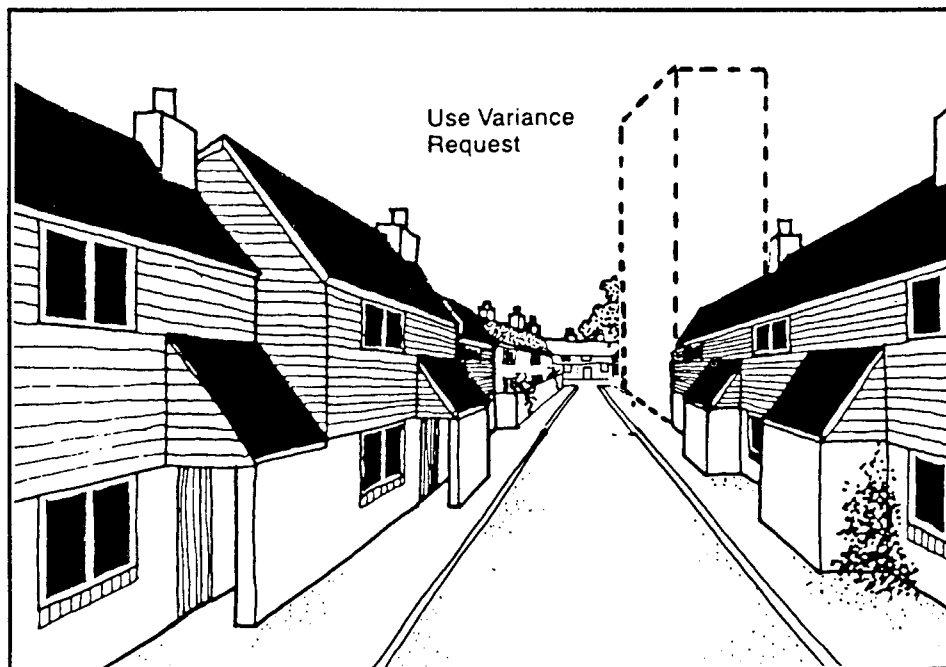
1. To obtain a dimensional variance, the applicant must show "practical difficulty" by demonstrating:
 - a) Whether strict compliance with area, setbacks, frontage, height, bulk or density would *unreasonably prevent* the owner from using the property for a permitted purpose, or would render conformity unnecessarily burdensome;
 - b) Whether a variance would do *substantial justice* to the applicant as well as to other property owners in the district, or whether a lesser relaxation would give substantial relief and be more consistent with justice to others;
 - c) Whether the plight of the owner is due to *unique circumstances* of the property;
 - d) Whether the problem is self-created.
2. The ZBA must insure that the "spirit of the ordinance is observed, public safety secured and substantial justice done".

Note: Typically this means if D. is true, the decision is NO. If D. is false, and B. and C. are true, decision is probably YES (in this case, A. is probably also true). If applicant only meets A. and the problem is not self-created (D.), the decision is NO. See: National Boatland v. City of Farmington Hills, 147 Mich App 380 (1985).

The need for public confidence in the honesty and integrity of the hearing body dictates that if any of its members has even a remote conflict of interest in the outcome of a proceeding, he or she should disqualify themselves from participation in the hearing.

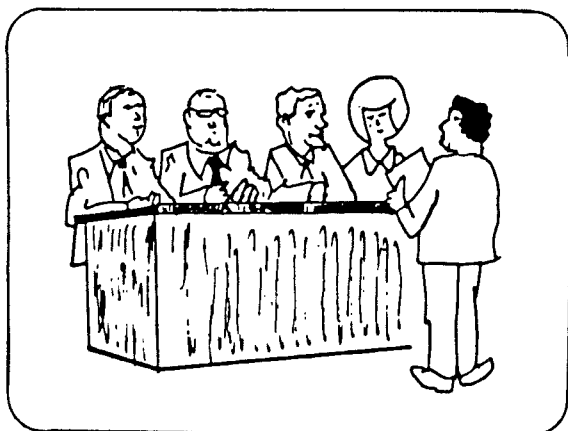
PUBLIC HEARINGS

One of the most important steps in amendment, special land use, PUD, and variance procedures is the public hearing. Public hearings provide the principal opportunity for citizens to be heard on zoning matters that may affect their interests. It is absolutely essential that required notices of public hearings be published/distributed as specified in the zoning ordinance and the Township Rural Zoning Act. At public hear-



ings, it is very important that every interested person be given the opportunity to be heard. But this does not mean the process is spontaneous. A hearing should be conducted in a consistent and orderly fashion.

The hearing body should not have their decision governed by the public applause meter. The hearing body should not be interested simply in whether neighbors are in favor or opposed to a given proposal, but rather in why they feel that way—what relevant information do they offer within the context of ordinance requirements to assist in making a decision? The primary purpose of the hearing is, of course, to gather facts and information relevant to making a decision on an applicant's request. Thus, a hearing process must be established that insures an open, objective atmosphere exists for orderly presentations. It need not be one of paralyzing formality, it is not a court proceeding.



"Presenting His Case"

The need for public confidence in the honesty and integrity of the hearing body dictates that if any of its members has even a remote conflict of interest in the outcome of a proceeding, he or she should disqualify themselves from participation in the hearing. Obvious conflicts of interest would include a financial interest in the outcome or a close business or family relationship with the applicant, his/her attorney or any expert witness. The member with a conflict of interest should disqualify him/herself at the outset of the hearing (or sooner if the conflict is identified earlier). It is not sufficient to participate in the hearing and merely abstain from voting. The general rule to follow if there is a doubt about a conflict of interest is: When in doubt—step down.

General Hearing Procedure

The following general hearing procedure is suggested as a guide to developing one in your community. Whatever procedure is developed, the procedure should be made clear to all in attendance and consistently adhered to. A simple handout sheet or large board visibly displaying the hearing procedure will serve this purpose well. Hearings should begin precisely at the time advertised in the notice although they may simply be one element of the agenda. Typically, the hearing procedure is as follows:

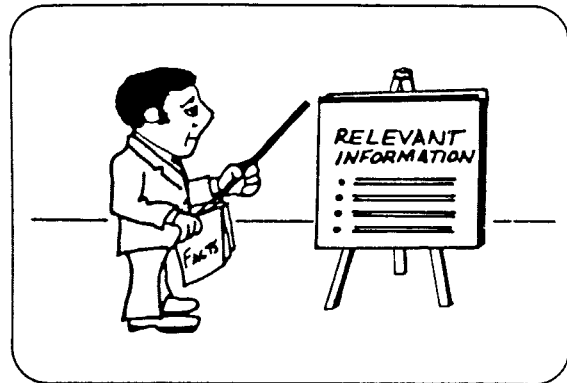
1. The chairperson announces the subject of the public hearing, as advertised.
2. The public hearing procedures are summarized for all present by the chairperson. A suggested opening statement might be:

This public hearing to receive public input on the following matter _____ in accordance with official notice, is now open. The (name of hearing body) would like to make clear that it is bound by rules and laws when making a decision on this application. In order to conduct the hearing within a reasonable time and to keep to the subject at hand, you are asked to observe the following rules:

- *After the staff presentation, the applicant will state his/her case fully and furnish us with pertinent information concerning the property.*
- *Those who favor the proposed change will be heard next, and those opposed will be heard last.*
- *Each person making a statement will be asked to state their name and address.*
- *Please refrain from repeating what has been said before you, and please do not make comments on personalities or the character of any person involved.*
- *Be as factual as possible.*
- *We (name of hearing body) reserve the right to question any speaker.*
- *All statements or questions must be directed to me (the chairperson).*
- *We (name of hearing body) will (or will not if that is the case) make a decision on this matter at today's meeting following the close of the hearing.*

3. The staff is then asked to present the substance of the application and of any staff reports and to answer technical questions of the hearing body.

4. Individuals wishing to speak in support of the subject of the hearing are recognized by the chairperson beginning with the applicant(s) or their representative(s).
5. Individuals wishing to speak in opposition to the subject of the hearing are next recognized by the chairperson. (If there are numerous people in the audience who would like to participate on the issue, and it is known that all represent the same opinion, it is advised that a spokesperson be selected to speak for the entire group. That person should be permitted to speak for a reasonable length of time, and to present a complete case. If this arrangement cannot be made, it may be necessary for the chairperson to restrict each speaker to a limited time in order that all may be heard. If so, this must be done according to previously adopted rules. The hearing body must permit comments from all interested or affected individuals and organizations (regardless of where they live or are located), and it should be stressed that consideration will be given to all comments or suggestions made. Irrelevant and off-the-subject comments should be quickly and forcefully ruled out of order by the chairperson.)
6. The chairperson may, within reasonable limits, allow questions, cross-examination or rebuttal. All comments should be addressed to the subject of the hearing through the chairperson and not be directed to any other individuals. The hearing body should refrain from debating or arguing with persons commenting. However, they should ask any pertinent questions at this point. The function of the hearing is to gather facts— not to carry on an adversary relationship.
7. The chairperson should upon his/her motion or the motion of any member, announce the close of the public portion of the hearing or announce the continuation of the public hearing to another specified date, time and place if the hour is late or additional pertinent information must be obtained.
8. The commission then deliberates on the matter. All deliberations must be conducted in an open public meeting.



"Stating The Facts"

Deliberation and Fact Finding

Deliberation typically involves fact finding and discussion before a motion is made. Facts are nothing more than information that is pertinent to making a decision. Important *sources of facts* include:

- The application
- Ordinance requirements
- Physical characteristics of the lot and adjacent parcels
- Staff reports and agency reports regarding impacts on:
 - Public services
 - Natural resources
 - Character of area
 - Streets, parking & traffic
- Neighbors

Discussion

The purpose of discussion is to review pertinent facts from all information presented and to seek a majority viewpoint. In doing so remember:

- All *discussion must be in public*.
- The public is not involved in the discussion unless you bring them into it (not a good idea).
- The discussion should focus on insuring *conformance with ordinance standards*.

The discussion should proceed long enough for someone to feel confident in proposing a complete *motion* that embodies most of the important findings. *Alternatively*, action can be taken on *findings of fact* first, and then a separate motion would be made to approve, deny or approve with conditions.

Motions

The motion to approve, deny or approve with conditions should state the conclusion, and the rationale for the conclusion. That is, it should indicate how the facts support the conclusion that was reached.

In some communities, either staff or legal counsel prepare a motion or several motions in advance with space for additions/deletions. *This is not a good idea.* It is too difficult for staff to accurately anticipate relevant information that will appear at the public hearing.

This action may have to withstand scrutiny by a court and should be carefully prepared. Be sure conditions are detailed so the zoning administrator knows what is expected.

Conditions

Conditions may be imposed providing...

- They are *designed to protect* natural resources, the health, safety and welfare; and the social and economic well being of people.
- They are *related to a valid exercise of the police power.*

DECISION MAKING CONSIDERATIONS

In making zoning decisions it is important to always remember the following responsibilities:

- To *fairly and consistently apply* all adopted standards and regulations.
- To look out for the *best interests of the entire community*, not just the people at a public hearing, or an applicant or an opponent. In other words, decisions should not be made based on the *ap-
plause meter.*

Additionally, decisions must not be *exclusionary* of lawful land uses and must not result in irresponsible environmental degradation. Under the Michigan Environmental Protection Act (PA 127 of 1970), planning commissions and township boards have the same responsibility as any other administrative body to ensure that their decisions do not have the effect of unlawfully *polluting, impairing, or destroying* the air, water, and other natural resources of the state and the public trust therein.

- They *are necessary* to meet the intent and purpose of the zoning ordinance, *are related to the standards established in the ordinance for the land use or activity under consideration, and are necessary to insure compliance with those standards.*

This last point is especially pertinent. It is not appropriate to impose conditions unrelated to specific ordinance requirements. The figure at the top of the following page illustrates how conditions should relate to ordinance standards.

Performance Guarantees

The community can collect a performance guarantee to insure required *improvements* are built. Choices include:

- Cash deposit
- Certified check
- Letter of credit
- Surety bonds

Improvements includes roadways, lighting, utilities, sidewalks, screening, and drainage. They do not include the value of the entire project.

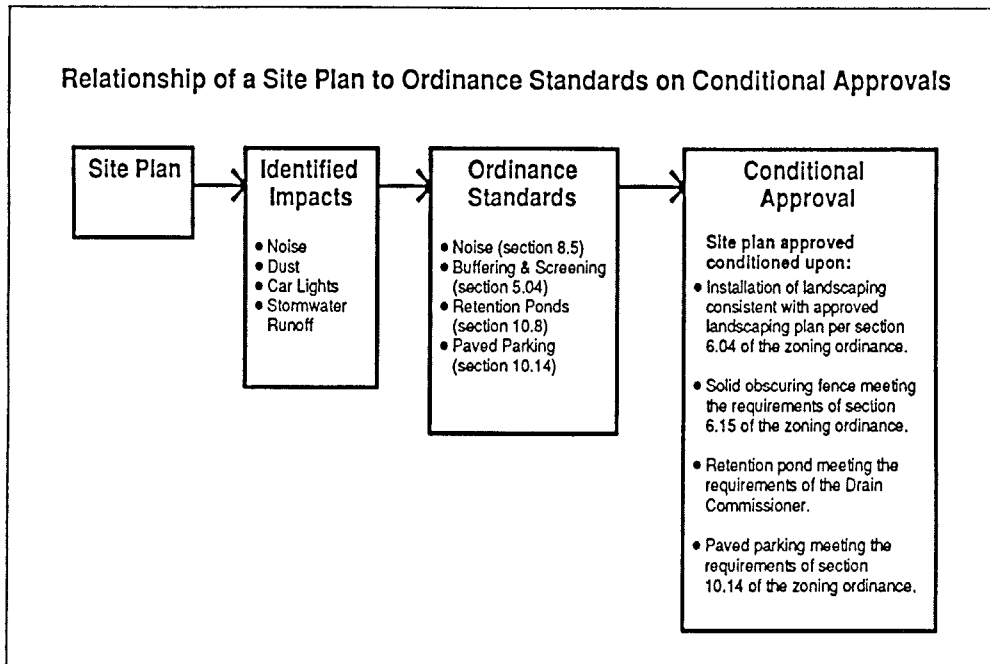
Any money collected must be rebated in proportion to the ratio of the work completed. The ordinance should detail the standards for collection, use and return of performance guarantees.

Hearing Records

The point that a hearing record is necessary is indisputable; the question which arises is how such a record should be made. Obviously, the most complete record is verbatim, using a court stenographer; however, this is very costly. Many communities have adopted the practice of tape recording each meeting. If so, it is essential that speakers identify themselves in order to determine at a later time who said what. The extensive notes taken by a secretary or clerk to the hearing body should also be retained and be made a formal part of the record, after their review and correction if necessary, by a vote of the hearing body.

A complete record of the hearing will typically contain the following:

1. The applicant's request on a properly completed form.



2. The records of any action on this request by an administrative official or body including all past records regarding the property (such as an earlier request for variance, special land use approval, or a record of nonconforming status).
3. Records that verify due notice to the appropriate parties and to neighboring property owners has been given. Any newspaper notice and the affidavit of publishing thereof must also be retained.
4. Any relevant maps, drawings, or photographs presented as evidence, or as a part of the application.
5. Copies of any correspondence received or sent out with regard to this request.
6. A complete record of all public input made at the hearing.
7. A record of what the hearing body saw on any visit it made to the property in question and a summary of any conversations between the hearing body and parties with an interest in the application.
8. A copy of references to relevant ordinance requirements.
9. The findings of fact, the conclusions reached and the recommendation or decision made on the request by the hearing body.

10. A copy of any other correspondence to or from the petitioner regarding the decision.

The crucial element of this record is, of course, the findings, conclusion, and decision (or recommendation) of the hearing body. The decision must be in writing and include all conditions that may be associated with the decision. The decision or recommendation should not be a mere conclusion or a statement. Each decision should be accompanied by specific findings of fact. These findings should be related to the specific standards stated in the ordinance which the applicant must satisfy. It is not sufficient, for example, for a board of appeals to merely repeat the general statutory requirements that a *“practical difficulty or unnecessary hardship exists”*—this is not a finding, it is a conclusion. The facts which led the board to reach this conclusion consistent with ordinance and statutory standards must be identified to support the conclusion reached.

These decisions run the chance of having to stand up in a regular court of law, where detailed findings of fact must be presented, and the conclusions of law based upon those facts must follow. Clear and uniform hearing procedures assist a hearing body in properly carrying out their responsibilities. On occasion, however, the assistance of the township attorney is needed. It should be sought when needed. Likewise, before adopting any rules of procedure or

public hearing rules, the advice of the township attorney should be sought.

TEN COMMON ZONING PROBLEMS

Among typical kinds of problems growing out of lax zoning administration, improper granting of variances and inappropriate amendments are the following:

1. There are many spot zones, comprising only one or two lots, whose location is not in accordance with a land use plan and which is inconsistent with adjacent land uses.
2. The board of appeals grants too many variances without adequate scrutiny. Rather than "hold the line", their motto is "move it as requested".
3. The zoning administrator has issued permits for uses that do not meet ordinance requirements, or has failed to make use of occupancy permits to regulate changes in use, or has failed to carry out an active program to detect and prosecute zoning violations.
4. The zoning administrator and board of appeals tend to rely on complaints or the consent of neighboring property owners as the principal basis for action rather than consistent application of ordinance standards.
5. The community haphazardly copies another community's ordinance provisions without careful review and adaptation.
6. The community prepares or adopts the ordinance or amendments without obtaining or consulting the "public pulse" (the prevailing values and attitudes of the public).
7. The community fails to utilize available technical assistance in making rational decisions in the development of zoning regulations.
8. The zoning administrator, planning commission, township board and board of appeals fail to make uniform and consistent decisions on similar matters.
9. The zoning map is made to look just like a 20 year master plan, rather than reflecting a land use pattern appropriate to just the next 3-5 years of expected development in a manner consistent with the plan.
10. The zoning decision bodies fail to adequately state the facts which substantiate the conclusions they have reached in the record on the matter.

GUIDELINES TO AVOID LIABILITY

- Find good reasons for acting and discuss them in public.
- Know your rules of procedure & follow them.
- Know the limits of your authority.
- Review your insurance policies.
- If sued, hire competent legal counsel.
- Correct immediately any situations which could be/are found liable.
- Keep informed.
- Don't try to steal or extort property by zoning, buy it.
- You must act within the scope of your authority and with "good faith" in order to minimize your liability.

Adapted from "Common Deficiencies", by Robert M. Leary, which was printed in **Principles and Practice of Urban Planning** by William I. Goodwin and Eric C. Freund, (Washington, D.C.: International City Managers' Association, 1968), pp. 419-420.

DECISION MAKING REMINDERS**General reminders to aid decision making:**

1. When in doubt— check it out! But,
2. Don't delay when the decision can be made.
3. Remember that permits, approvals and zoning districts run with the property and not the owner.
4. When all standards stated in the ordinance have been met, the permit must be issued.
5. Consistency is very important, but mistakes should not be perpetuated.
6. Permits are of little value if there is no monitoring to insure continued ordinance compliance.
7. At least one member of the body on which you serve should be an expert on the ordinance requirements and on past decisions made.
8. The planning commission and zoning board of appeals should adopt rules of procedure (bylaws), follow them, and keep them current.
9. A simple public hearing procedure should be adopted, clearly pointed out to citizens at each public hearing, and consistently adhered to.
10. Good records of all meetings of the body on which you serve should be maintained.
11. All decisions must be documented. The facts uncovered in the process of reviewing the application, making the analysis and those presented at the public hearing should be explicitly related to ordinance standards and documented along with the conclusions reached on the matter.
12. If a procedural error is made, such as publishing a required newspaper notice or failing to notify appropriate persons, the process should be stopped and begun again with the deficiencies corrected.
13. No decision on a zoning request should be made by vote of less than a majority of the total membership of the decision body (a majority of those present leaves the decision at risk of invalidation if challenged).
14. When technical assistance of the township planner, township attorney, consultants, or other professionals is needed, get it.
15. Remember your job is to protect the public interest as embodied in the zoning ordinance. Required procedures and standards must be adhered to. If the zoning ordinance is inadequate to the task, then it should be amended. As a general rule, the zoning ordinance should be thoroughly reviewed and updated at least once every 5 years. Annual updates are even better.

Chapter Four

THE END (OR IS IT THE BEGINNING?)

In Chapter One of this guide, basic zoning procedures were described as resembling a "maze" to the citizen or official with limited zoning contact. Chapters Two and Three proceed thru the maze by identifying "who does what" in township zoning and generally "how they go about their business". This descriptive method illustrates that zoning is comprised of relatively few sets of functions. Each zoning function or activity has its own statutory and ordinance procedures which are followed to ensure that the rights of citizens are protected as the community regulates the use of land. Most of these procedures have similar characteristics, but the details and the differences are very important. Equally important is the basic issue of which body or official is responsible for acting on certain zoning functions and what standards or guides do (or should) they use in making decisions. Thus, Chapters Two and Three describe the basic zoning functions and procedures to help you understand how zoning works.

Chapter One suggested that the key to understanding zoning was related to the old adage that:

There is a place for everything and everything must be in its place.

A zoning ordinance clearly identifies which uses of land are permitted in which zoning districts. But it goes further when those districts are mapped, because then particular land uses have locational characteristics which may be generally described in the ordinance but which assume specific characteristics once mapped. A township zoning ordinance should reflect the whole host of land uses reasonably expected and needed within the township and should adequately provide for them. Attempts to exclude needed land uses from the community may be fraught with legal consequences and may unnecessarily place a costly burden on a community which could be avoided by foresightful action.

Zoning can have an influence beyond the locational/use relationships. Flexible zoning techniques such as PUD and special land uses are very important in helping a community man-

age its growth and development. These techniques and the traditional zoning functions of amendment, appeals, and variances together provide a tool, which when properly used, can achieve many public objectives while enhancing the use and enjoyment of private property. With appropriate use of these techniques in conjunction with a planning program, a community should be truly able to find "a (proper) place for everything". The process for reviewing and approving changes in the use of land is thus every bit as important as the actual change itself.

Zoning is Worth Doing Well

Zoning is a job worth doing, as the benefits can be great, and thus, is worth doing well. Consequently, everyone involved in zoning decisions should be knowledgeable of their responsibilities and zoning procedures, and the zoning ordinance and community plans must be kept current.

Efforts should also be made to orient each new zoning official and township board member

EFFECTIVE ZONING

Zoning can be successful if:

- it is based on a sound understanding of the community's needs and reflects the citizens' desires and concepts of what the community should be;
- competent legal and other technical assistance is sought as needed;
- it is based on a properly structured and enacted zoning ordinance;
- it is consistently, fairly, and impartially administered and enforced;
- it is administered in strict compliance with procedures required by statutes and all procedures specified in the township zoning ordinance;
- it is periodically reviewed and updated (at least once every 5 years);
- it is understood and supported by the public; and
- it is an integral part of the mechanisms adopted by the community to implement community plans and growth management programs.

THE NEED FOR PERIODIC ASSESSMENT

A land use plan and zoning ordinance begin to grow old and dated from the time of adoption. In rapid growth communities, they often become outdated sooner than expected.

How does a community keep the land use plan and zoning ordinance from becoming obsolete? The best way is through periodic assessment every three to five years, by the planning commission. At that time, the following questions would be asked:

1. To what extent is the land use plan being actively implemented...
 - through zoning?
 - through public improvements?
 - through other efforts?
2. Is implementation taking place as scheduled? If not, why not?
3. Does the settlement pattern of recent development actively coincide with the land use plan map and the recommended land use intensities? If not, why not? What should be done—change the map or increase enforcement of the law?
4. Do the goals and policies still reflect the township's major concerns? If not, what should be changed? Is change realistic?
5. Are items identified in the land use plan as desirable, being adequately protected by zoning?
6. Are unexpected land use conflicts being created by the zoning ordinance which are not addressed by the land use policies?

Based on the answers to the above questions, the planning commission must decide if there is a need to revise the land use plan. If the plan needs to be revised, then after the revision is made, the zoning ordinance and map should also be reviewed and amended as needed. However, many land use plans and zoning ordinances are updated and amended on a "stop-gap" basis when faced with what appears to be a "crisis". Periodic reassessment will reduce the need to react in this manner and provide a mechanism whereby a community can maintain control of its future.

procedures. The Michigan Society of Planning Officials offers annual training programs to help meet this need. When technical planning or legal assistance is necessary, it should be sought. There is no reason to perpetuate zoning mistakes from the past. Proper planning and zoning can be used to build a future that township residents can look forward to.

Glossary of Terms

ADMINISTRATIVE - certain responsibilities delegated to a specified body or official to exercise pursuant to various procedures and standards that are specified in the zoning ordinance. They usually include zoning permits, site plan review, special land uses, and enforcement matters.

APPEALS - any person denied approval of any administrative zoning matter can appeal the decision. In most cases, appeals go first to the zoning board of appeals; from there they go to circuit court.

BY RIGHT - see USE BY RIGHT.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP) - this is a listing of physical public improvements (roads, streets, sewers, etc.) that are planned to be constructed over a multi-year period (usually 6 years), including where they are located, when they are to be built, and how they are to be financed. A CIP is a very important mechanism for insuring that public works are built in a manner consistent with a local comprehensive plan.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN = MASTER PLAN = BASIC PLAN = FUTURE LAND USE PLAN - These are all terms for the plan created by the planning commission to guide the future growth and development of the community. It is used as the basis for zoning regulations/decisions, subdivision regulations and capital improvement programs.

CONDITIONAL USE - see SPECIAL LAND USE.

DISCRETIONARY STANDARD - this term refers to general standards in the ordinance which are used in review of site plans, PUD's and special land uses which serve as the basis for determining whether a land use proposal is compatible with adjacent uses of land, natural resources and public services as regulated and defined in the zoning ordinance.

LEGISLATIVE - refers to zoning functions which are exclusively in the domain of the legislative or elected body. These include adoption of the original zoning ordinance, as well as subsequent amendments to either the map or text.

MASTER PLAN - see COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

NONCONFORMING USE - a use of land or building that was lawfully in existence prior to the adoption of the zoning ordinance and which is therefore permitted to continue in the future even though current zoning regulations applying to that parcel would not permit it to be established anew.

NONDISCRETIONARY STANDARDS - are criteria which specifically indicate a measurable numerical or performance standard that must be met or complied with in order to get zoning approval. For example a setback, height or bulk regulation is a "nondiscretionary standard". Anyone can readily measure or calculate whether a proposed structure or site plan conforms with this type of standard.

ORDINANCE INTERPRETATION - a power of the zoning board of appeals to determine what an unclear provision in the zoning ordinance means, or where an ambiguous line or district actually falls on the zoning map.

PERFORMANCE GUARANTEE - a collection of a financial security by a community from a land developer/owner to insure that required public improvements are actually constructed. Several forms are common including cash, surety bond, and irrevocable bank letter of credit.

PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT (PUD) - a flexible zoning technique that allows a land developer much

more creativity in how land is utilized without sacrificing public concerns for compatibility with adjacent uses of land and often with greater protection of significant environmental features.

PLANNING ENABLING ACT - this refers to the three state statutes that authorize the establishment of local planning commissions and the preparation of local comprehensive plans.

PRACTICAL DIFFICULTY - a term that applies to decisions by a zoning board of appeals on nonuse or dimensional variance requests (e.g. setbacks).

QUASI-JUDICIAL - decisions by a zoning board of appeals on matters including variances, ordinance interpretation and appeals from administrative decisions.

REZONING - the name of the process for changing a zoning district from one classification to another (eg. from R-1 single family to C-2 commercial).

SELF CREATED - a term referring to a zoning problem created by action of the applicant himself. A self created problem is not grounds for a variance.

SITE PLAN REVIEW - the process of reviewing site plans (drawings) that illustrate the layout of land and structures, for conformance with ordinance requirements.

SPECIAL LAND USE = CONDITIONAL USE = SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE - these are all terms for a class of land uses permitted in particular zoning districts when use specific standards stated in the zoning ordinance have been met. Special land uses have characteristics that make them potentially incompatible with adjacent uses of land unless special care is taken during the review process.

STANDARDS/CRITERIA - these are either general or specific requirements stated in the ordinance which must be met in order for a proposed land use to be established on a parcel. They may be part of a discretionary or a nondiscretionary review process.

SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS - regulations related to how land is divided to insure consistency with ordinance requirements and basic public service concerns.

UNNECESSARY HARDSHIP - a standard which an applicant must prove has been met in order to gain approval for a "use variance" in a city or village.

USE BY RIGHT - a use permitted in a particular zone without any special hearing or review procedure, provided minimum lot size, height, setback, bulk, parking and accessory use requirements are met. A single family home in a low density residential district is typically a use permitted by right.

USE VARIANCE - the grant of a variance by a board of appeals allowing a use of land on a parcel that otherwise is not permitted by the zoning ordinance. Clear statutory authority exists only for cities and villages. Many zoning scholars consider most use variances illegal, because they in effect "rezone" land without going through the rezoning process. A use variance may be appropriate where an applicant proves no reasonable use of the property exists under the present zoning classification.

VARIANCE - the grant of specific authorization by the board of appeals to utilize a parcel or structure in what would otherwise be a violation of ordinance requirements when certain findings have been made. There are two types of variance, "use" and "nonuse". A nonuse variance is often called a dimensional variance and usually deals with setback, height or area requirements.

ZONING ENABLING ACT - the state laws authorizing local units of government to adopt and administer zoning regulations. Without such laws, local governments would have no authority to use the zoning power to regulate land use.

ZONING ORDINANCE - a local ordinance adopted by the legislative body upon the advice of the planning/zoning commission to regulate the use of land in the community.

Bibliography of Publications for Michigan Planning Commissions and Zoning Boards of Appeal

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Michigan Society of Planning Officials (MSPO)

David T. Downey, Executive Director
414 Main St., Suite 211, Rochester MI 48397
810/651-3339

Michigan Planner - *Anna Hampton, Editor*

Each issue of this quarterly magazine focuses on a single topic which is illustrated with several articles including case examples from Michigan communities.

News from MSPO

A bi-monthly newsletter geared to issues of current concern. Its primary focus is on the "how to" of planning and zoning.

The Community Planning Process: A Guide for Planning Commissioners in Michigan

by Ken Verburg (1986)

Helps new planning commissioners become active, contributing members in a short time. Covers becoming an effective planning commissioner, the historical development of planning, the legal basis for planning, the community planning process, major tools for implementing the community plan and key terms used in planning and zoning.

Planning Commission Guidelines: By-Laws, Public Hearing and Conflict of Interest

by John Donohue, Larry Nix and Stanley Woodhouse (1989)

Written for planning commissions, zoning boards, and the public. Knowing how to structure a set of by-laws and conduct public hearings is important for an effective planning commission. How conflict of interest can best be addressed by appointed members of commissions is an important focus.

Community Planning Handbook: Tools and Techniques for Guiding Community Change

by the Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. (1991)

Presents over 80 tools and techniques designed to help those involved in local planning to better manage change in their communities.

This comprehensive reference book on planning in Michigan includes with each technique: a description; legal basis; planning considerations; resources; advantages, disadvantages and limitations; extensive references; and a case example of how it is applied to a local community.

Additional Tools for the Community Planning Handbook *by MSPO*

Thirteen new techniques were prepared for the 1992 Level II Workshop. Topics include six different types of plans, one condominium regulation and six impact analysis techniques.

Workbook for Preparing or Updating a Master Plan and/or Preparing a Growth Management Plan *the Planning & Zoning Center, Inc. (1992)*

Companion to the *Community Planning Handbook*. It provides local communities with a methodology for both analyzing the existing Master Plan and updating the plan. Includes a number of checklists and worksheets to help lay planners establish their needs and prepare, adopt and implement the plan.

Notebook for Improving Community Appearance *by MSPO (1994)*

Many Michigan municipalities realize that how they look is important to prospective companies, industries and residents who wish to locate within their boundaries. If your community is assessing its appearance and character, this notebook, developed for the 1994 MSPO Advanced Workshop, can help with your appraisal. The notebook covers: defining community character; visual issues; development guidelines; environmental protection issues; street design; circulation and links; utilities; volunteerism; legal considerations; and sources of professional assistance. It also contains an extensive bibliography.

Site Plan Review: A Guide for Achieving Good Site Design in Your Community

by Mark A. Wyckoff (1988)

This publication explains basic site planning principles and the relevant health and safety aspects of common standards. Guidelines are presented for reviewing your ordinance to identify design that is more harmonious with the natural characteristics of a site and adjoining lands than traditional standards will allow.

Sign Regulation: An Overview of the Issues and Alternatives by Mark A. Wyckoff (1989)

A comprehensive book on sign regulation. Covers legal considerations, types of signs, approaches and principles for local sign controls and ordinance components and variances. Covers key elements of 1989 Level II Training Program.

Land Division and Access Controls

by Kristine M. Williams, Timothy J. McCauley and Mark A. Wyckoff (1990)

This publication covers legal considerations, regulatory tools and techniques and how to develop a land division and access control program.

Growth Management: A Question of Balance

Michigan Society of Planning Officials (1995)

This video tape illustrates several Michigan communities' responses to growth pressures from changes in population and employment. Growth management techniques are used to preserve community character while accommodating new development. Through proactive community initiatives, communities in the video use many growth management techniques including growth management planning, purchase of development rights, urban and general service districts, rural clustering and open space zoning, development agreements, regional review development, concurrency and official maps.

Community Planning and Zoning for Groundwater Protection in Michigan: A Guidebook for Local Officials by Lillian Dean and Mark A. Wyckoff (1991)

Provides a process for developing a local groundwater protection strategy. Best management practices serve as the basis for sample ordinance language for implementing a local groundwater protection program. Used in the 1991 Groundwater Protection GEM Workshops.

Using Groundwater Protection Data to Improve Planning and Zoning Decisions by Lillian Dean, David Lusch and Mark Wyckoff (1995)

The publication covers policy development, vulnerability factors, water quality data, soil data, county soil surveys and water well records.

Reinventing Government for Groundwater Protection: The Need for County-Local Partnerships by Lillian Dean (1995)

Highlights both the need for protecting our groundwater and the means for counties and local government to work together resolving future groundwater issues. It includes a listing of state agencies, Michigan's laws for groundwater protection, state level initiatives, an overview of typical programs and innovative county programs.

Michigan's Trend Future Study

by MSPO (1995)

This series of eleven working papers, a videotape and the final report focuses on land use changes in Michigan. The study looks at the development trends in Michigan over the past thirty years and projects the implications if these trends continue.

The working papers include: agriculture; demographics; institutional structures for land use decisions; land use issues; jobs and the built environment; minerals; natural resources and the environment; public lands and forestry; sewer, water and other infrastructure; tourism and recreation and transportation. The final report is titled *Patterns on the Land; Our Choices Our Future*. Supplements to the working papers include *Michigan Counter Trends: Case Studies, Public Opinion Survey* and *Michigan's Last Frontier* video.

Michigan Chapter of the American Planning Association

David Birchler, President/Arroyo
3005 Berkshire, Birmingham, MI 48010
810/543-0690

Michigan Consultant Directory

Lists firms in Michigan offering professional planning and zoning services. A brief description of available services and personnel is provided (no charge).

Planning & Zoning Center, Inc.

Mark A. Wyckoff, President
302 S. Waverly Rd., Lansing, MI 48917
517/866-0555

Planning & Zoning News - *Mark Wyckoff, Editor*

A monthly magazine covering current topics. It is a practical guide which reports on court decisions, attorney general opinions and legislation. Each issue explains how statutory or case law changes may affect your planning and zoning operations.

Feature stories explore current topics in depth and offer guidelines and sample zoning language. Articles are authored by professional planners, attorneys and others with expertise. Many planning commissions and zoning boards of appeals subscribe. Call or write for subscription information.

Michigan State University Extension

Bulletin Office, 10B Agriculture Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1039
517/355-0240

City & Village Zoning: A Basic Guide for Citizens and Local Officials, 2nd edition

by *Mark A. Wyckoff* (1989)
Extension Bulletin E-1740.

Administering Township Zoning: A Basic Guide for Citizens and Local Officials, 2nd edition

by *Mark A. Wyckoff* (1990)
Extension Bulletin E-1408.

Administering County Zoning: A Basic Guide for Citizens and Local Officials, 2nd edition

by *Mark A. Wyckoff* (1985)
Extension Bulletin E-1739.

Publications cover the basic zoning techniques authorized under Michigan Zoning Enabling Acts. They identify the responsibilities of each body or official exercising various zoning tasks, the procedures associated with these activities and step-by-step instructions.

MSU Department of Resource Development

Kenneth Verburg, Professor
312 Natural Resources, E. Lansing, MI 48824
517/353-1909

Michigan Townships Planning and Zoning Handbook by *Robert Hotaling and Geoffrey Moffat* (1986)

Describes the planning process, the development and implementation of comprehensive plans for townships, zoning ordinances and enforcement, subdivision controls, capital improvement programs and the legal sources of authority to regulate land use in Michigan townships. Includes statutory and case law reference and index. *Planning Update* (see below) are free with book purchase or may be bought separately.

Planning Updates (*see above*)

Issued periodically to keep the text current. Entries include page/line reference, summarize the change in the law, and cite the relevant statute, attorney general opinion or court decision

The Michigan Local Planning Commissioners Handbook by *Robert Hotaling* (1988)

Discusses organizing a local planning commission, basic planning concepts, planning studies, the comprehensive plan, planning controls and the roles of citizens and professional planners.

Michigan Laws Relating to Planning

Nancy Gendell - editor (1989)

Includes the full text or relevant excerpt of eighty key planning acts, a topical index and brief description of these acts and a listing by title and MCL number of other Michigan laws that relate to planning.

Michigan Laws Relating to Economic Development and Housing

Nancy Gendell - editor (1991)

Includes full text or relevant excerpts of forty-six key economic development and housing acts, topical index with brief descriptions of these acts and a listing by title and MCL number of all other Michigan laws that relate to economic development, housing, planning and zoning.

Ten Guidelines for Effective Local Zoning

1. Determine the appropriate review unit of government before taking action on any zoning request.
2. Check to see if all necessary procedures have been followed.
3. Zoning runs with the land, not with the owner. If property changes hands, whatever zoning approval is currently in place carries over to the new owner.
4. There is no authority to grant approval of a land use for a temporary period of time unless the use itself is temporary. A good example is a gravel pit that will be in existence only as long as there is gravel to extract.
5. "Is that an appropriate location for the *zone*?" is the most important question to answer on rezoning requests. Any of the uses permitted in a particular zone may be erected once approval for the zone is granted. The primary criterion to consider is conformance with the master plan.
6. "Is that an appropriate location for the *use*?" is the most important question to answer on a special land use request. Only the degree to which the special land use characteristics conform with specific ordinance standards are in question.
7. If an applicant demonstrates that his or her petition meets all the ordinance requirements for a site plan or special land use request, approval must be given.
8. In order to grant a use variance that shows unnecessary hardship, facts must be presented to the zoning board of appeals by the applicant. To qualify for a nonuse variance, the applicant must show practical difficulty. In either case, problems the owner faces must be created by a circumstance unique to the property and not shared by surrounding parcels. The problem can not be self-created.
9. Deviation from the terms of a zoning permit, site plan, special land use permit or variance is a violation of the ordinance and should be prosecuted accordingly.
10. The objective of prosecution for a violation is to achieve ordinance conformance--not to impose fines, penalties or imprisonment. If an ordinance violation isn't enforced every time (or amended to eliminate the source of the violation if in the public interest), then the community may lose the right to enforce the ordinance in the future.



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