

WHAT IS PLANNING & ZONING?

Planning

Physical planning by municipalities for the future development and redevelopment of their communities has long been accepted as an important function of local government. Planning is a legal means of deciding how best to provide a proper arrangement of land uses, efficient circulation, desirable environmental features and general amenities of community life.

Development of a comprehensive master plan for the community should consider all elements influencing its growth: population changes, land use, transportation, recreation, education, utilities and economic structure. A comprehensive plan should contain a statement of strategy or a statement of community development and timing of future development. This statement may also serve as the community development objectives required to enact a zoning ordinance.

Comprehensive planning attempts to assure orderly development of community facilities, eliminate uneconomic land use, reduce traffic hazards and regulate building locations and land uses.

The creation of a planning commission by ordinance is the best action for a planning program. Members are appointed by the governing body of the local unit. The commission is authorized to employ planners, engineers and other personnel within budget limits. Maps showing the physical features of the community including streets, property ownership, public buildings, open spaces, transportation facilities, land use and proposed changes are basic tools for planning. Surveys and studies of various problems may be made and recommendations for action may be submitted to the governing body. The planning commission may also be asked to make recommendations regarding the location of public buildings, changing the street system, parking facilities and otherwise altering the physical structure of the community. Municipal planning commissions should review land use ordinances and regulations governing development of land no less frequently than it reviews the comprehensive plan. It may also be required to approve plans for building lots and developments.

Zoning

Zoning is the power of a local unit to establish reasonable requirements to guide and coordinate the present and future land use of the community. Zoning regulations must accommodate reasonable overall community growth, including employment growth, and the opportunities for development of a variety of residential dwelling types and nonresidential uses. Some other purposes of zoning are to lessen street congestion, secure safety from fire hazards, prevent overcrowding on land, facilitate adequate provision for community services and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the community.

With the zoning powers given to them by law, municipalities may regulate and restrict the height and size of buildings and other structures, their construction, the percentage of lot they may occupy, the size of yards, courts and open spaces, the density of population, and the location and use of buildings, structures and land for trade, industry, residence and other purposes.

To do this, the community may be divided into usage districts, and in each district the municipality may by ordinance regulate and restrict the erection, construction, alteration, repair or use of buildings, structures and land. All such regulations must be uniform within each district, but may vary from district to district; thus there may be residential, commercial and industrial districts each allowed a different pattern of land use.

Zoning Hearing Board

A zoning hearing board is appointed to hear and determine appeals from the zoning regulations, to decide on special exceptions and to authorize variances from the terms of the ordinance not contrary to the public interest.