

## **STREAMLINING THE PROJECT REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS TO BE OPEN FOR BUSINESS**

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Communities have been processing applications for land use approval for decades, encountering new challenges and difficulties, and crafting solutions to each one when encountered. Because of this, many communities have developed their land use approval processes, standards, and forms incrementally over years, resulting in an inefficient process. In many municipalities, the land use review and approval process has become hard to understand, time consuming, and expensive, in some cases preventing developers from undertaking priority economic development projects.

Typically, the basic local project review and approval process must adhere to several requirements defined by state law. The decisions of local land use boards generally must be made in an open and fair manner, by impartial board members, and must be based on reliable evidence that is contained in the record of the board's deliberations. This record should be detailed enough to ensure that board decisions are not arbitrary, capricious, or an abuse of discretion, and local boards should allow public access both to their meetings and to governmental records, such as reports and files. Many community planning boards and commissions simply enforce the required standards and follow the legally prescribed steps in their review and approval process, but this may not prevent a review board from asking an applicant to accomplish something the standards do not require if given appropriate policy approval. If authorized by state law, review boards may streamline required process steps by including informational sessions with applicants, preapplication workshops, and technical assistance. In addition, municipalities can remove unnecessary steps in the process, simplify and clarify applicant materials, and reduce process length.

When municipalities streamline their land use review and approval processes, they save applicants time and money and help expedite priority development projects. A locality with streamlined approval process



applications and, whenever possible, allow for concurrent, not additive or sequential reviews. Simultaneous reviews allow different steps in an application to be reviewed together as a package or at least during the same timeframe, reducing review

should collect all the applicant and project information the planning board, zoning board, and other local boards will require for all review and approval processes.

To break down informational silos, a locality should consolidate, as appropriate, the roles of municipal officials and staff, local boards' secretarial staff, and boards with overlapping or related functions. Consolidating staff who enforce building and zoning codes makes it easier to track a project for the duration of its life, ensures that administrative staff are aware of each project's building code and zoning issues and can address these issues in context, and frees remaining staff to focus on other important roles. Consolidated secretarial staff for local boards saves money, ensures projects are tracked properly as they shift between board reviews, and reduces miscommunication. The same staff can support all land use boards, shepherding an application between reviews. Additionally, consolidating local boards that share functions also helps speed the approval process. Some municipalities have achieved efficiencies by combining related boards like a shade tree commission, conservation advisory council, and waterfront advisory committee into a single environmental advisory board.

Municipalities can further consolidate the review process through an interdepartmental review committee and cross-trained staff. A locality can create an interdepartmental review committee with a designated coordinator to help coordinate reviews by multiple departments and

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ment standard, determining street type, and relevant parking requirements.<sup>8</sup>

To further clarify the project review and approval

current zoning, note existing certificates of occupancy, and describe necessary approvals, process steps, and requirements that the applicant must achieve and meet to obtain permits.

Westchester Municipal Planning Federation directs municipalities to a variety of training resources.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to trainings required by state law, all

s/Clerk/Level\_3 - City Council/2012/04Apr/2012-04-03 Item 02 Ords 7229-7232.pdf.

<sup>16</sup>N.J.S.A. 40:55D-23.3; N.J.A.C. 5:87-1.3.

<sup>17</sup>Seminars, NJPO, [https://njpo.org/NJPO\\_Seminars.php](https://njpo.org/NJPO_Seminars.php).

<sup>18</sup>NY Town Law §§ 267, 271; NY Village Law §§ 7-712, 7-718; NY General City Law §§ 27, 81. For more information about the NYS training requirement, visit Annual Training Requirement Information, NYS DOS, [https://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/lut/mandatory\\_training.html](https://www.dos.ny.gov/lg/lut/mandatory_training.html).

<sup>19</sup>NYPF Training, NYPF, <http://nypf.org/nypf-training/>.

<sup>20</sup>Links to Training Resources, WMPF, <http://www.wmpf.org/education/links-to-training-resources>.

<sup>21</sup>Land Use Leadership Alliance Training Program, Land Use Law Center at Pace Law School, <https://law.pace.edu/land-use-leadership-alliance-training-program>.

<sup>22</sup>Redevelopment Ready Communities, Best Practices 12 (2019), <https://www.miplace.org/49a85d/globalassets/documents/rrc/rrc-best-practices.pdf>.

