

**THE PLANNING BOARD**  
**DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS**

**An Abutters Guide**

The Planning Department has prepared this guide to explain what you, as an abutter to a proposed development project, can expect during the review process of a project requiring approval from the Planning Board. It is intended to help you understand how to participate in hearings, get information and best communicate any concerns you may have. To reach the Planning Board, please contact our office at 781-762-1240 X164. We are located on the ground floor at the Town Hall.

**Why Am I Receiving a Certified Mail Notice?**

You are receiving a public hearing notice because you are an abutter (as defined by law) to a proposed development that will be reviewed by the Planning Board. The notice is required by State Law to let you know that a public hearing is being held on the project.

**What is the Planning Board?**

The Planning Board has five elected members. The Board has the responsibility to review proposed development projects and make decisions on them in accordance with state statute and local bylaws. The Board holds its hearings on Monday evenings. Board members have a variety of backgrounds and volunteer their time to serve the Town. They are assisted by professional staff that works in the Planning Department office during the day.

**How Can I obtain Information About the Proposed Development Project?**

An application, plans and supporting materials are on file in the Planning Board office located in Town Hall, 566 Washington St., Norwood. You are welcome to review this information and may pay for copies of any information you would like to keep. Copies cost 20 cents/page. It is best to call and make an appointment to ensure that staff will be there.

**Planning Department Hours**

Monday – Friday 8:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

**What Should I Expect At the Public Hearing?**

The public hearing notice you received in the mail will tell you when and where the public hearing is scheduled. It is also published in the legal notices in the Norwood Record.

At the first hearing, the applicant will present their plans and explain what is proposed for the property. The Board will ask questions, and there will be an opportunity for those in the audience to ask questions or offer opinions. Comments may also be submitted in writing.

Since the Board often has multiple projects on their meeting agendas, public hearings are allotted a specific period of time. At the end of this time, the hearing may be either closed or continued to another night at specific date and time.

Occasionally, for simple projects, hearing can be completed in one night and are closed, meaning that no further public testimony is taken. More often, public hearings are continued with a request by the Board to the applicant to revise their plans or provide additional information that is needed to complete the review of the project. Continued hearing may be several weeks in the future depending on how long it will take the applicant to generate the requested information and the Board's workload.

### **How Can I Make My Concerns Known if I Cannot Attend?**

Comments can be submitted in writing prior to the close of the public hearing. Copies will be provided to the Board members. As with all testimony, it is most helpful to raise concerns early in the process. All written comments or information submitted to the Board should include the name and address of the person submitting these comments.

### **What Happens after the Hearing?**

After the public hearing is closed, no new information can be submitted. The Board deliberates and directs the staff to draft a decision for the Board to consider at the next Board meeting. The Board generally, either approves a plan with conditions or denies it if it does not meet the Town's Zoning Bylaw or other regulations. After the public hearing has been closed, interested individuals are welcome to attend and listen, but may not make further comments. The decision is voted on and filed with the Town Clerk by the decision deadline.

### **What Issues Does the Board Consider?**

The scope of issues that the Board can consider in reviewing projects is defined by State law, Town Bylaws and Regulations. In presenting testimony, (oral or written) it most helpful to focus on these issues within the Planning Board's regulatory Jurisdiction. The Planning Director is available to explain the applicable State and local Bylaws to help residents understand the Planning Board's regulatory jurisdiction.

### **Will I Be Notified of the Decision?**

Copies of subdivision decisions and adequate access decisions are not sent to abutters. Copies of Special Permit decisions are required by law to be sent to all abutters within 300' of the development property.

### **How Can I Appeal?**

Appeals may be made to Superior Court and in some cases Land Court. For subdivision decisions, there is a 20 day appeal period, from the date the decision is filed with the Town

Clerk. There is a 20 day appeal period for Special Permit decisions. You will not receive notice of any appeals filed by other parties (such as the applicant).

### **Suggestions for Presenting Testimony at Public Hearings**

1. You should stand and state your name & address for the record each time you speak;
2. Feel free to use the proposed plan to point out concerns you may have and try to stand so that the Board can see the area to which you are referring;
3. Try to state all of your questions or concerns at once and then allow the next person to speak;
4. Be polite and respectful of differing opinions;
5. While you may have questions for the applicant you should address them to the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman may direct the applicant to keep a record of questions asked and answer them all at once;
6. Avoid personal attacks – stick to issues relating to the project and within the scope of the Board’s review;
7. Don’t ask to speak again until all have had the opportunity to be heard;
8. It is fine to just say “I agree with Mr. Smith about traffic” rather than restating the same concerns;
9. Comments made at a public hearing do not need to be repeated at subsequent hearings unless they have not been addressed;
10. Remember that you will not be notified by mail of any continued public hearings. If you are interested you should call the Planning office for the date of the continued hearings.

### **Subdivisions**

The Board is charged with acting on subdivisions plans based on the regulatory authority in the Massachusetts Subdivision Control Law (MGL Ch. 41 S81) and local Subdivision Rules and Regulations, adopted by the Board. Plans must comply with these requirements or the applicant must request a waiver to alleviate them from complying with the applicable regulation. The Board has the discretion in acting on waivers to consider those that are in the best interest of the design of the project and of the Town. Subdivisions must also comply with Town Zoning Bylaw. The Board will focus on issues relating to the subdivision roadway construction such as drainage, grading, erosion control, sidewalks and curbing. The Board will also consider traffic safety and development of an overall interconnected road network.

### **Adequate Access Plan**

The Board acts on Adequate Access plans following the process outlined in the Rules and Regulations Governing Subdivisions, Section 3.6. This is an optional process that applicants may follow to create frontage on paper (unconstructed streets) and unimproved (dirt roads).

In reviewing plans, the Board will ensure that minimum road construction standards are met, ensuring adequate access to new homes and businesses, on paved roads with adequate drainage. The Board cannot consider impacts of the proposed development on an individual house lot.

### **Special Permits**

The Zoning Bylaw, Section 3, Use Regulations specifies the types of development that requires a Special Permit issued by the Board of Appeals or the Planning Board. The Planning Board is the Special Permit granting for all Major Projects. Section 7.4 of the Zoning Bylaw contains the regulations for Major Projects.

### **Site Plan Approval**

The Zoning Bylaw, Section 10.5 Site Plan Approval, sets forth the zoning regulations for projects that require Planning Board Site Plan Approval. Real estate development projects that exceed certain triggering thresholds, such as, increasing the size of the building by 3,000 square feet or by constructing 10 or more new parking spaces, are required to submit a Site Plan for Planning Board approval. Any questions regarding the need for Planning Board Site Plan Approval should be directed to the Building Inspector or the Planning Director.