

What is a Site Plan?

Most Michigan communities have some form of site plan review. The State of Michigan "*City and Village Zoning Act*" defines the site plan as "*the documents and drawings specified in the zoning ordinance necessary to insure that the proposed land use or activity is in compliance with local ordinance, and state and federal statutes.*"

The Benefits of Site Plan Review (SPR)

The whole point of reviewing a site plan is to make sure the site functions well, and is attractive and safe for the public. Poorly designed sites that are cramped, inconvenient, unsafe and unattractive can hurt a business, impact on neighboring properties, and can also make a site more difficult to sell, lease or reuse. When reviewing a site plan staff members visualize such things as: how vehicles and people will circulate on the site, how the rainwater will run off the site, where utilities will connect, and how the development will impact its neighbors. In addition to making sure the site plan meets ordinance standards, staff is available to assist the owner or developer and can often make suggestions that may help the developer utilize the site better, which can reduce costs, keep future development options open, and enhance the resale value of properties.

What Kind of Development Needs Site Plan Review?

Most land uses, new construction and uses, or additions to existing buildings in the RM-1, OS-1, B-1, B-2, I-1 and P-1 zoning districts need site plan review and approval by the City's Planning Commission (PC) before a building permit can be issued. Exceptions are one and two-family dwellings, temporary buildings and uses and accessory uses or structures. All special land uses or uses subject to special conditions in any zoning district, and site condominiums in any zoning district, also require site plan review. Any use which does not specifically require Planning Commission SPR is subject to review by the Zoning Administrator to ensure that Zoning Ordinance requirements are met.

The City of Belding offers two types of Site Plan Review. Preliminary site plan review is available if an applicant wishes to have discussion about the development with the Planning Commission before incurring extensive engineering and other costs necessary for a final site plan review. Preliminary site plan review is optional – you may apply directly for final site plan approval if you wish.

The SPR Process

1. Before an application for a SPR will be accepted, the applicant must have already met (within the previous 6 months) with City staff, the Ionia County Drain Commissioner, the County Road Commission, and any other relevant agencies or consultants in a 'pre-application conference'.
2. The application process starts with the City's Zoning Administrator (ZA), who coordinates with other departments and consultants.
3. The ZA takes the application and appropriate fee. All SPR applications must be filled out completely and accurately by the applicant in order to be accepted. Applications must be signed by the owner of the property, or their authorized agent and must be accompanied by 15 copies of the site plan, the required fee, and a legal description of the property (including the parcel number and a boundary survey map). Other materials such as a traffic study or environmental impact assessment could also be required.

4. The site plan is reviewed by relevant departments and consultants and comments and recommendations are forwarded to the PC. If it is a preliminary site plan, the PC will make recommendations to the applicant as to how the plan can be brought into compliance with the review standards of the ordinance. If a final site plan, the PC will approve the site plan, deny it, or approve it with conditions. If a conditional approval is given by the PC, they often will allow the Zoning Administrator to review the revised site plan and give final approval if all of the conditions that the PC placed on the site plan have been met.
5. Once the final site plan has been approved, the Chairman of the PC signs 3 copies of it. One copy becomes part of the City's files, one copy is forwarded to the Building Official so that a Building Permit can be issued, and one copy is returned to the applicant.
6. Once the site plan gets final approval, construction must start within one year after the date of approval, unless an extension granted by the PC if reasonable evidence is provided to show that the development encountered unforeseen difficulties beyond the control of the applicant and if no requirements and standards of the Zoning Ordinance reasonably related to the development have changed. If the original year goes by with no construction started and no extension has been applied for, the site plan will be null and void.
7. Amendments to an approved site plan may be allowed with ZA approval as long as the changes are considered to be minor. An amendment not considered to be minor would need to be submitted to the PC for their review and approval.



What Should the Site Plan Include?

Chapter 16 of the Zoning Ordinance addresses site plan review, off-street parking and signs. Copies of this section or of the full ordinance are available from the City at the address below or can be found on the City's website at www.ci.belding.mi.us. To help sift through the technical language more quickly, below is an interpretation of the City's requirements. They are in a checklist form so that items can be checked off when addressed.

Basic Information:

Every site plan should have "the basics" so anyone reviewing it can understand where the site is and what is being proposed. The sooner the PC gets oriented, the quicker the review will be. The basics include such things as:

North Arrow and scale*	Small sketch of streets and land uses within ¼ mile
Date of preparation/revision	Parking lots and access points
Names of streets the property fronts on	Existing/proposed streets & curb cuts within 100 feet
Name, address, phone # of the applicant	Name, address, phone # of the site plan preparer
All lot lines with dimensions	Building setbacks from property lines and the road ROW
Existing/proposed utilities for the property	Dwelling unit densities by type, if applicable.
Existing and proposed buildings and man-made features, including existing buildings or uses within 100 feet of the property.	

*A preliminary site plan must be at a scale not greater than 1" = 100', while a final site plan's scale cannot exceed 1" = 50'.

District Requirements:

Each zoning district has basic dimensional requirements to check. Requirements for each zoning district are listed in the district's regulations.

Minimum lot size: _____
 Front Yard Setback: _____
 Side Yard Setback: _____
 Rear Yard Setback: _____

Minimum lot width: _____
 Maximum building height: _____
 Percentage of lot coverage: _____

Development Data:

SPR regulations enable the City to ask for a variety of information to facilitate review. Each item is required unless specifically waived by the Planning Commission. It's best to talk to the City ahead of time in order to help streamline the process. Items that are necessary include (ordinance section numbers are included for reference where applicable):

Preliminary SPR Requirements	Final SPR Requirements
Engineering and Utility Information	
<p>General topographical features including existing contours at intervals no greater than 2 feet. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-viii]</p> <p>Proposed method of providing storm drainage. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-xii]</p> <p>Proposed method of providing sewer/water service, and other public/private utilities. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-xi]</p> <p>Specific utility requirements are mentioned in the ordinance for manufactured home developments. [Section 8.5-H]</p>	<p>Existing/proposed topography of the site at min. 2' contour intervals and its relationship to adjoining land; proposed grading, showing 2' contour intervals. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-iii and vii]</p> <p>Location, sizes, type of drainage, sanitary sewers, water services, storm sewers, detention/retention, fire hydrants. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-viii]</p> <p>Easements, if any. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-xii]</p>
Parking, Access and Circulation (to be sure site circulation is efficient and safe)	
<p>Acreage allocated to each proposed use and gross area in building, structures, parking, public/private streets/drives, and open space. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-ix]</p> <p>Written description of the computation for required parking. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-xiii]</p> <p>In all zoning districts, sidewalks are required on all sides of the property which abut a public street. [Sections 4.4, 5.4, 6.4, 7.4, 9.4, 10.4, 11.4, 12.4 and 13.4] Sidewalks are also specifically required for manufactured home and site condominium developments. [Section 8.5-G-11 and Section 2.26-D]</p> <p>For non-residential districts or uses, except in the B-1 district, parking areas need to be either on the same lot or within 300 feet of the building or use they are intended to serve. In the B-1 district, parking needs to be on the same lot as the use, unless the property adjoins or has access to a community or common parking lot. [Section 16.3-A-1]</p> <p>Adequate numbers of parking spaces must be provided. Provide number of employees and usable floor space for parking calculations. [Section 16.3-C] Each lot in a manufactured home community needs to provide a minimum of 2 off-street, paved parking spaces. [Section 8.5-G-12]</p>	<p>Street ROWs, indicating proposed access routes, internal circulation, relationship to existing ROWs, and curb cuts within 100' of the property. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-vi]</p> <p>Proposed parking areas/drives. Parking areas to be designated by lines showing individual spaces, conforming to ordinance provisions. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-xi]</p>

- Parking requirements vary according to the proposed use; see Section 16.3-C for details.
- For Special Uses, check for specific parking requirements for each use in Section 17.6.

The **minimum width for all parking spaces** is 9 feet. The **minimum length** is 20 feet for a 76-90 degree angle parking pattern, 21 feet for a 30-75 degree angle parking pattern and 25 feet for a parallel parking pattern. [Section 16.3-B-1]

Drives, streets and other circulation routes need to be designed to promote safe and efficient traffic operations within the site and at ingress/egress points. [Section 16.1-D-1-b]

Maneuvering lanes are required to be a minimum of 18 to 24 feet in width for two-way traffic and 12 to 15 feet in width for one-way (angled parking) traffic, depending on the parking pattern. [Section 16.3-B-1]

Parking areas must be **paved with a durable and dustless surface**. A site plan note acknowledging the requirement helps. Parking areas should also be defined by curbing or curb stops. Curbing extends the life of pavement, can help direct stormwater, and prevents damage to landscaped areas and fences. [Section 16.3-B-3 & 4]

Any use involving the receipt or distribution of vehicles, materials or merchandise must have a designated **loading area** for delivery trucks. Loading areas are required to be paved with either asphalt or a Portland cement binder to provide a permanent and durable surface. [Section 16.3-D]

- B-1/B-2 Districts: at least 10 sq. feet per front linear foot of building, located in the rear yard.
- OS-1 District: at least 5 square feet per front linear foot of building, located in the rear yard.
- I-1 District: 10 feet x 50 feet or at least 500 square feet, in size, minimum 14 feet high, at least 1 loading space located off the street and in rear or interior side yard.

Stacking spaces for drive-thru facilities need to be provided - see specific requirements in Special Use standards in Section 17.6.

Natural features, Landscaping, Screening, Lighting and Signs

Proposed buffer strips or screening. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-iv]

Location, sizes, and types of fences, landscaping, buffer strips, and screening. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-ix]

Location of any signs not attached to the building. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-vi]

Location, sizes, and type of signs and on-site lighting. [Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-x]

Significant natural features/other natural characteristics on the property, such as open space, stands of trees, wetlands, brooks, ponds, floodplains, hills, and similar natural assets. Also any wetland, brook, pond or similar water feature within 250 feet of the property boundary. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-v and Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-xiv]

Existing vegetation must be marked as either to be preserved or to be removed. Proposed **landscaping and vegetation** needs to be shown on the site plan as well. Vegetation may only be removed or altered if deemed reasonably necessary to develop the site in accordance with ordinance requirements. [Section 16.1-C-2-a-(2)-(b)-v, Section 16.1-C-2-b-(1)-(b)-xiv & Section 16.1-D-1-d]

Any proposed use needs to be adequately **buffered** from other uses and from surrounding public and private property. The PC may require that landscaping, buffers or greenbelts be preserved or provided to ensure this. [Section 16.1-D-1-d and Section 16.2-C & I]

Trash dumpsters, designated outdoor **storage areas** in the I-1 district, and loading/unloading areas or hospital emergency rooms are all required to be screened with a solid, sight-obscuring fence or wall 6 feet high. [Section 16.2-E & F]

Greenbelts are required within the front setback area in the OS-1, B-1, B-2, P-1 and I-1 districts and also around any nonresidential parking lot abutting or within 100 feet of a residential district, and within any parking lot which has at least 50 spaces. [Section 16.2-G] Greenbelts need to meet the standards in Section 16.2-H & I.

All parking lots need to have adequate **lighting**, which needs to be shielded so as to prevent light from spilling onto adjacent properties. (Section 16.3-B-5)

All proposed signage needs to meet the requirements of Section 16.4.

Helpful Hints

1. Of course, if all the information and details necessary are provided on the site plan as originally submitted, and if the plan meets all requirements, approval can be received very quickly. The City likes to be able to say “yes!” on the first go-around with a site plan.
2. Remember, the site plan is a contract with the community and should not leave out information. Site plan notes assuring the City that you know what your responsibilities are help a speedy approval. For example, less tree removal on your site saves you time, money and may reduce additional landscaping requirements. It also makes the site more attractive and helps stormwater runoff. If you have noted the trees on site, also note which ones are going “to be protected”.
3. City staff is here to help facilitate the development process - ask for help if you need it!

Performance Guarantees

As a condition of approval of a site plan review or special use, the Planning Commission can require a financial guarantee to assure the installation of features such as roadways, curbing, landscaping, fencing, walls, screening, lighting, drainage facilities, sidewalks, driveways, utilities, and similar items. Any performance guarantee will need to be 100% of the cost of materials and installation for the required improvements, plus engineering and contingency costs. A performance guarantee can be in the form of a cash deposit, certified check, irrevocable bank letter of credit, or surety bond acceptable to the City. The process and requirements for performance guarantees are explained in Section 19.3-B.

Other Approvals

Sometimes developments are in a floodplain or may involve altering a wetland. These activities fall under state and/or federal law and often need state level permits. Site Plan approval is often conditioned upon getting these other approvals. Copies of such approvals must be provided to the City for the project file.

Contact Information

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