

Guide to Development

City of Big Rapids

October 2019



The guide to development includes a snapshot overview of the development review process in the City of Big Rapids. The guide explains the review processes, policies, steps, and other relevant information for applicants. Links to web pages and contact information are provided throughout the document for easy access to the most up-to-date forms, applications, and additional information.

This document is not intended to include all the requirements of the City Ordinances or Codes, nor is it a replacement for the Zoning Ordinance or other local ordinances. Applicants should review the specific ordinances and talk to responsible staff about their development projects.

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Contact Information

The City of Big Rapids [website](#) contains maps, applications, the City’s Zoning Ordinance, and Master Plan, as well as many other relevant documents.

The Big Rapids City Hall is located at:

City of Big Rapids
 226 N Michigan Avenue
 Big Rapids, MI 49307

City Hall is open Monday–Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Contact Quick Reference

General Development inquiries Zoning and Planning Economic Development	Paula Priebe Neighborhood Services Director	231-592-4035	ppriebe@cityofbr.org
Downtown	Josh Pyles DBA Director	231-592-4038	jpyles@cityofbr.org
Building permits	Aaron Holsworth Mecosta County Building	231-592-0105	aholsworth@mecostacounty.org
Work in city's right of way	Simone Smith-Politz Admin. Assistant Public Works	231-592-4015	ssmith@cityofbr.org
Water and Sewer mains			
Electric Utility			
Natural gas utility			
Business license	Tammy Gillis City Clerk	231-592-4020	tgillis@cityofbr.org
Sidewalk permit			
Busker license			
Rental certificates	Cindy Plautz	231-592-4036	cplautz@cityofbr.org

The Development Review Process

The Guide to Development describes the relevant reviewing bodies for planning and development projects in the City and includes estimated timelines for such proposals. It outlines the planning and zoning approval process and the applications and other materials needed. This is followed by an overview of the approval process of other permits and licenses necessary throughout the development project, including building and construction permits, rental licenses, and building licenses.

The flowchart on Page 4 outlines the review processes for planning and zoning applications. These applications require a multi-step review process which may include steps such as staff review, various commission and board reviews, public hearings, Planning Commission review, City Commission review, and action. In addition, the flowchart includes the building and construction permits that need to be obtained in order to implement the approved project. The City of Big Rapids contracts with Mecosta County for all building inspection duties.

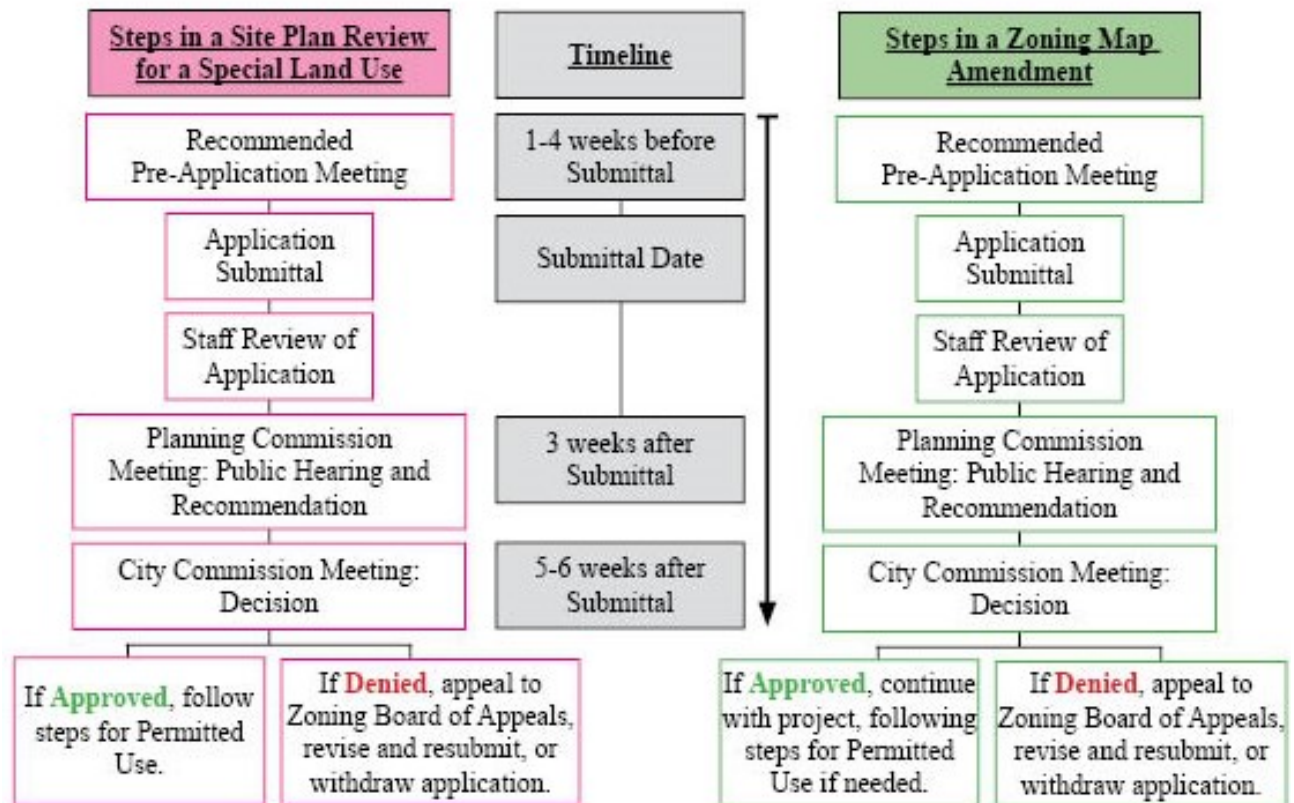
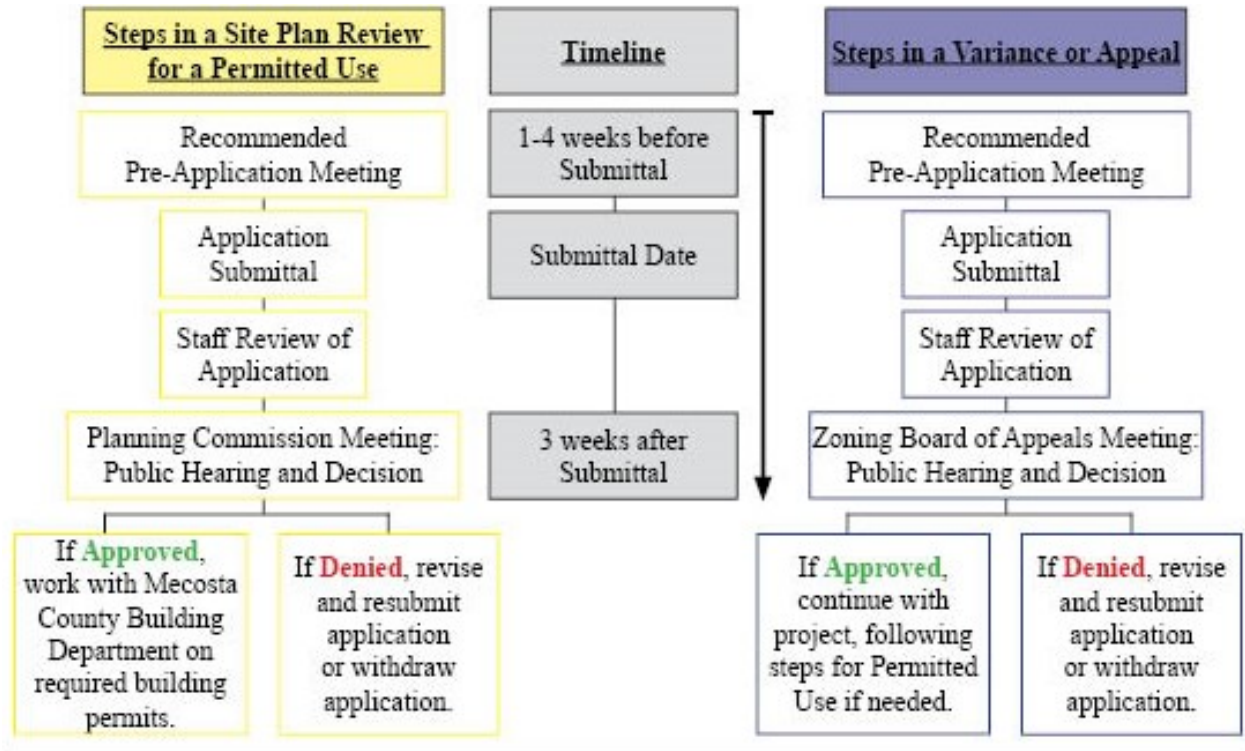
The flowchart sketches the development approval process followed in the City of Big Rapids. The diagram includes required and recommended meetings and actions, and outlines the boards and commissions required to review development applications. Depending on the nature of the project, multiple city departments will review the proposed project.

In general, most building constructions and land modifications require a site plan application and depending on the use may also require a special land use permit. A special land use permit could also be required where a simple change of use is proposed for a building where no construction is occurring. A single project could require both a site plan and special land use permit application or just one or the other.

The [fee schedule](#) for the Neighborhood Services Department can be found on the City of Big Rapids website. Please visit the Mecosta County [Building Department](#) for their fee schedule.

Development Review Process Flowchart

Steps and general timelines for the four primary approval processes are below.



Reviewing Bodies for Development Applications

The City's Zoning Ordinance outlines the procedures for development applications. Depending on the nature and location of the project, select City boards and commissions will review the project. These groups are advisory boards to the City Commission and provide recommendations to the City Commission. The relevant boards and commissions are described below, including meeting dates and times. Meetings take place at City Hall, 226 N Michigan Avenue, Big Rapids, MI 49307.

- Planning Commission creates and updates the Master Plan and reviews rezoning requests, site plans, special land use permits, and other land use applications.
 - Third Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.
- Zoning Board of Appeals interprets and grants variances from provisions of the Zoning Ordinance; conducts hearings and resolves disputes regarding decisions of the Zoning Administrator.
 - Fourth Thursday at 7:00 p.m., as needed
- Brownfield Redevelopment Authority assists development projects that encounter economic challenges due to environmental constraints.
 - Third Tuesday at 3:00 p.m., as needed
- Downtown Development Authority manages ongoing maintenance, security and promotion of economic activity and continual operation of the downtown district.
 - First Thursday in Jan., April, July, and Oct. at 8:00 a.m.

The timeline for the approval process of development applications depends on the schedule of each board and commission that needs to review the project, the public notice requirements in each case, and the publication time for media release. In general, the approval process for a site plan application will take between 21 to 90 days from application to decision.

Pre-Application Meeting

The prospective developers or representatives of an entity wishing to develop or redevelop a property in the City is encouraged to meet with the City's Neighborhood Services Director prior to the official application being submitted. Contact Paula Priebe at 231-592-4035 to schedule a pre-application meeting.

Depending on the type and scale of the project, it may be helpful to submit conceptual drawings to the Neighborhood Services Department two (2) weeks prior to the conceptual meeting for staff to review in advance. Drawings may be dispersed to other appropriate departments, such as fire and Public Works, for review and comments. Applicable staff from other departments may also attend the conceptual meeting.

During the meeting, the developer may outline the proposed development idea and any initial conceptual architectural designs available. The staff will provide the developer with background information on the site, previous plans submitted, the community vision for the site, an overall opinion of the proposed idea, and a description of the approval process and timeline.

During the pre-application meeting, especially for larger projects, the City staff may encourage the developer to seek the opinion of the community most affected by the proposed project. City staff can provide contact information for relevant neighborhood associations and other groups of interest. Staff may attend those meetings in order to answer questions from the community with regard to zoning regulations and the Master Plan as it relates to the proposed project.

Community Vision: The Master Plan

The Master Plan is one of the primary tools used by the City of Big Rapids to make decisions affecting the future land use of the community. A Master Plan is a broad-based policy document for the physical, economic, and social development of the city as it relates to land use. It has a long-range perspective that provides a coordinated approach to making important decisions. Prospective developers the City's Master Plan to make sure the proposed project helps fulfill the goals of the plan. The [Master Plan](#) can be accessed on the City's website.

Additional plans have been created to supplement the Master Plan:

[Public Participation Plan](#)

[Big Rapids Downtown Blueprint Update 2016](#)

[Big Rapids Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2012](#)

Zoning Information

Information regarding zoning in the City of Big Rapids can be found in the City's [Zoning Ordinance](#) and the [Zoning Map](#). For general questions related to zoning, contact Neighborhood Services Director Paula Priebe at (231)-592-4035 or ppriebe@cityofbr.org.

The following zoning applications can be found on the Neighborhood Services Department webpage:

- Site Plan Review applications
- Zoning Request applications (for Special Land Use Permits or Zoning Amendments)
- Zoning Board of Appeals applications

Zoning Permits

A Zoning Permit is required prior to the erection, demolition, moving, reconstruction, extension, enlarging, altering, or the changing of building use or change in land use. Smaller projects in the City are exempt from Site Plan Review and can be approved administratively through submitting one (1) copy of a zoning permit application and all accompanying documentation for approval.

The list below details the projects which require a zoning permit for approval.

- New Construction
 - Single or two-family dwelling
 - Any non-residential building, structure, or use under 1,000 sq. ft.
- Expansion or Modification to Existing Buildings
 - Expansion of single or two-family dwellings
 - Expansion of existing structures under 1,000 sq. ft.
- Change in Use
 - Reuse of an existing building where no building expansion is proposed, if the Neighborhood Services Director determines the new use is similar to or less intense in terms of parking, traffic generation, drainage, utility needs, noise, aesthetics, and other external effects.
 - Temporary uses, buildings, and structures
- Accessory Structures and Site Improvements
 - Accessory structures and buildings
 - Change in building height that does not add floor area
 - Infrastructure and paving improvements including sidewalks and pathways
 - Single and two-family parking areas
 - Construction, relocation, or erection of signs, screening walls, waste receptacles, sidewalks, lights, poles, and mechanical equipment
 - Modifications to comply with accessibility requirements

Site Plan and Special Land Use Permit Review Process

Requirements and Applications

Site Plan and Special Land Use permit applications require submission of the following documents to Neighborhood Services:

- Four (4) copies of the completed application form
- The required application fee
- Twelve (12) copies of the proposed site plan
- Proof of property ownership
- The required written information
- A complete legal description of the property

Applications must be received at least twenty-one (21) days prior to the date of the Planning Commission meeting in order to be placed on the Commission's agenda. Plan submission requires twelve (12) sets of plans and a digital copy of all application materials. Plan documents must be accurate and legible, drawn to a scale no less than 1" = 20' for a development not more than three (3) acres and a scale of not less than 1" = 100' for a development in excess of three (3) acres.

The required site plan elements are detailed in the application form. Consult Article 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to determine when a project requires site plan review. Some projects may qualify for administrative review.

Special Meetings

Special meetings for the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Brownfield Redevelopment Authority can be requested by contacting Neighborhood Services at (231)-592-4035.

Review Process

After the completed application is submitted, the Neighborhood Services Department will distribute site plans to the following City departments for review and comment: Fire, Police, Public Works. Plans may be submitted to additional internal and external agencies such as DTE, MDOT, or Consumers Energy.

The City Commission, Planning Commission, and Neighborhood Services Director have the authority to review and to approve, approve with conditions, or deny site plan applications in accordance with the table below.

Uses Requiring Site Plan Review

The table below details the projects which require a Site Plan Review:

Activity/Use	Planning Commission	City Commission
New Construction		
Multiple-family dwellings (3+ units)	Approve	
Any non-residential building, structure or use over 1,000 sq. ft.	Approve	
Subdivisions (requiring land divisions)	Recommend	Approve
Special Land Use Permit	Recommend	Approve
Planned Unit Development (PUDs)	Recommend	Approve
Expansion or Modification to Existing Building		
Expansion of Multi-family dwellings	Approve	
Expansion or intensification of a Special Land Use	Recommend	Approve
Change of Use		
Change of land or building to a more intensive use, as determined by the director, that may involve substantial change in parking, traffic flow, hours of operation, public services, or substantial alteration of the physical character of the site.	Approve	
Change in use to a Special Land Use	Recommend	Approve
Accessory Structures and Site Improvements		
Outdoor storage	Approve	
Commercial parking lots	Approve	

Planning Commission Review and Action

The Planning Commission can approve, approve with conditions, or deny a site plan. After reviewing the staff report and hearing public comment, the Planning Commission will determine whether additional information is needed in order to provide the City Commission with a recommendation, if needed to be approved by them. Completed site plans need to be submitted twenty-one (21) days prior to a meeting to be considered for the agenda.

The Planning Commission will review the site plan application and may suggest and/or require modifications to the proposed site plan or require additional information, which must be completed and resubmitted for approval.

City Commission Review and Action

Special Land Use Permits

After the Planning Commission takes action and makes a recommendation, the City Commission shall do one of the following:

1. Approve the Special Land Use Permit and Site Plan
2. Approve the Special Land Use Permit and Site Plan with conditions
3. Deny the Special Land Use Permit and Site Plan

No application for a Special Land Use which has been denied wholly or in part by the City Commission shall be resubmitted for a period of one (1) year from the date of said order of denial, except on the grounds of new evidence or proof of change or conditions found to be valid by the Planning Commission and the City Commission.

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

A Sketch Plan is a required component for approval. Whenever any PUD is proposed, the developer shall apply for and secure approval of a Special Land Use Permit.

Time Limit of Approval and Work Completion

The Site Plan or Special Land Use Permit approval remains valid for twelve (12) months from the date of its final approval. If construction has not started in the one (1) year approval timeframe, the applicant may apply to the Planning Commission for an extension up to eighteen (18) months for Site Plan approval. In any case where a Special Land Use has not been established within one (1) year after the date of granting such use, or when the use is abandoned for twelve (12) consecutive months authorization of that use shall automatically be null and void without further action by the Planning Commission or City Commission.

Variance Review Process

Dimensional, Use and Sign Variances are permitted in the City of Big Rapids. Variance requests are subject to a specified set of requirements identified in Article 13 of the Zoning Ordinance.

To apply for a variance, complete the [Zoning Board of Appeals application](#).

Rezoning

The requirements and process for rezoning property (Map Amendment) can be found in Article 14 of the Zoning Ordinance. Property owners may initiate a rezoning process by applying for a Zoning Ordinance Map Amendment. All proposed amendments shall be referred to the Planning Commission for public hearing and recommendation prior to consideration by the City Commission.

To apply for a rezoning, complete the [Zoning Request application](#).

Permits

For all permits and applications, please visit the Neighborhood Services [Permits, Applications, and Guides page](#) on the City's website.

Incentives and Resources

The City of Big Rapids continuously looks for ways to improve processes, streamline review timelines, complete public infrastructure projects, apply for grants and identify potential incentive programs that can lead to projects that mutually benefit both the developer and the community.