

Summary of Planning Board Site Plan Review

January 22, 2015

Site plan review - Generally

Site plan review is a locally developed and administered process for reviewing nonresidential (e.g. commercial, industrial, municipal, etc) and multi-family residential development proposals of a certain scale. In general terms, site plan review deals with how a particular development is designed. When a developer proposes a project, that project must be reviewed by the Planning Board to assure that the development meets certain basic standards adopted by the Town. The provisions are in the Zoning and Site Plan Review Ordinance with reference to applicable standards in the Subdivision Ordinance.

Examples of site plan review standards

Site plan review standards address issues related to public health, safety, and environmental factors. Examples include provisions for pedestrian and vehicular circulation, layout of parking areas, water quality, erosion control, sewage disposal, garbage disposal, snow storage traffic, and stormwater management, among others. Some site plan review standards address minimizing impacts of a development on neighboring properties. Some examples are provisions for buffering/screening, exterior lighting, and other external impacts. Finally, certain site plan review standards address how projects fit into the context of the community. Examples include provisions for architecture, landscape design, signage, and relationship of parking areas and buildings to the street.

Master plan purpose and effect on site plan review

In some instances, the Town Council has approved master plans to guide the look and pattern of development for certain large-scale projects. West Falmouth Crossing, the redevelopment of the former elementary school site, and Tidewater Farm/Village are examples of sites where the Council has approved master plans. Master plans supersede and/or work in conjunction with underlying zoning and site plan review standards. In general, a master plan articulates an overall development concept for a site and provides a more structured framework for site development. Many times, a master plan will provide developers greater allowances for development than might otherwise exist in an underlying zone (e.g. density, building height, setbacks, etc.) in exchange for greater design control over other aspects of the development (e.g. placement or orientation of buildings, restrictions on allowed uses for individual buildings, requirements for open space, etc.).

Developers who propose projects on properties governed by a master plan are bound to follow the terms of the master plan and have limited flexibility to design a project that deviates from the terms laid out in the master plan. Master plans provide the Town Council with a greater level of design control over development sites than the Council would otherwise have in the absence of an approved master plan and, correspondingly, reduce the flexibility of developers/the Planning Board to propose/approve developments that deviate from the specifics of a master plan.