



# Site Plans

applicant user guide

County of San Diego, Planning & Development Services | May 9, 2022

## **WHAT IS A SITE PLAN?**

A Site Plan is a type of discretionary permit that is required prior to the construction of a project. Required by the Zoning Ordinance, Site Plans show the physical site design, vehicular and pedestrian access, and the interrelationship of these elements. They also establish conformance with community design guidelines and Zoning Ordinance regulations such as parking, setbacks, height, signage, and landscaping. Site Plans are reviewed for conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to determine if the project may have any impacts on the environment. Typical topics reviewed for CEQA include biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and traffic.

Planning & Development Services (PDS) is the department responsible for analyzing and processing Site Plans and other privately initiated land use projects. As part of the permit process, Site Plans are also routed to the Community Planning Group and Design Review Board for their review and recommendation. Unless a Site Plan application is being processed with another discretionary permit that requires approval from the Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors, they are approved by the director of PDS. If approved, Site Plans may contain conditions that are required to be satisfied as part of the development process and must be approved before a new use can be established, and before any building or grading permits can be issued.

PDS is committed to helping customers navigate the Site Plan permit process and ensuring customer satisfaction; applicants can request a Project Issue Resolution (PIR) Conference at any time in the process to discuss issues with executive management and County project staff that were not able to be resolved with the project manager.

## **WHEN DO YOU NEED A SITE PLAN?**

There are many different circumstances when a Site Plan is required; below is a list of some of the most common:

- Development within an Open Space, or S80, zone.
- Implementation of requirements from an adopted Specific Plan.
- Installation of community identification signs.
- Certain projects if the property's zoning contains a "V" setback designator or one of the following special area designators: "B" (Community Design Review Area), "D" (Design Review), "G" (Sensitive Resource), "H" (Historic/Archaeological Landmark or District), "J" (Specific Historic District), "R" (Coastal Resource Protection Area), "S" (Scenic Area) and/or "V" (Vernal Pool Area). A special area designator is the last element of the zone box, which is designated with a letter and is meant to establish specialized regulations for certain areas within the County.

In some circumstances, the Zoning Ordinance allows for exemptions from the Site Plan process pursuant to Section 5757. The first type of exemption is referred to as a Site Plan Design Review Exemption Checklist and can be used when a project is within a design review area and the proposed development is consistent with the checklist criteria that have been established for the community. The second type of exemption is commonly referred to as a Site Plan Waiver and may be possible if PDS staff determines that the proposed development is minor in nature. Requests for Site Plan Waivers are processed during building permit plan check and are sent to the local design review board, or community planning group if the area does not have a design review board, for a recommendation. A copy of the design guidelines and Site Plan checklist for each community can be found here: [Design Guidelines and Checklists](#).

To determine which guidelines apply to your project and to determine if your project qualifies for a waiver, please contact the Zoning Counter at 858-694-8985.

## **CONSISTENCY WITH POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS**

In order for a Site Plan to be approved, the following criteria must be met:

- Zoning Ordinance: The proposed development meets the intent and specific standards and criteria in the Zoning Ordinance.
- General Plan: The proposed development is compatible with the San Diego County General Plan.
- Design Guidelines: The proposed development meets all applicable design guidelines.



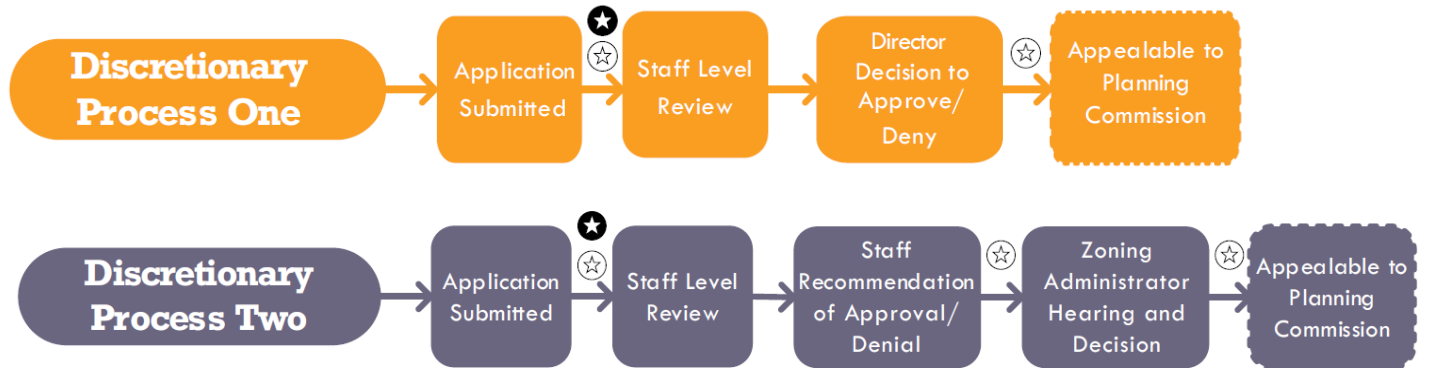
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## DECISION AND PUBLIC INPUT

The Director of PDS is the decision maker for Site Plans. However, in some cases a Site Plan requires preparation of a CEQA document which requires a public hearing, commonly referred to as a CEQA 15183 Exemption. This would require a Zoning Administrator hearing. Please work with your project manager to determine which process your project may follow.



Key

- ★ Application sent to Community Planning Group/Design Review Board
- ☆ Public notice within 300 feet of project (and at least 20 different property owners)

Note: All CEQA determinations can be appealed to the Board of Supervisors (Section 86.401 of the San Diego County Code of Regulatory Ordinances).

## TYPES OF SITE PLANS

There are four different types of site plan processes, each with a different workflow. The type of application required will depend upon the zoning for the property and what is proposed. The four types of processes and a link to a flow chart that depicts the typical permit process for each is below. PDS staff is available to assist you in determining the correct application for your project. To find out more information or determine which process is correct for your project, please call or visit the [Building Service Zoning Counter](#).

1. **Site Plan Waiver** – Site plan waivers do not require a separate application and are processed with a building permit. In order to qualify for a waiver, the project must be considered minor in nature, as defined by Section 7156.b of the Zoning Ordinance. Typical projects that are considered minor are improvements not visible from any street, no additional parking spaces are required, additions not exceeding 500 square feet, replacement of a permitted sign, minor façade improvements, and other similar improvements.
2. **Site Plan Design Review Exemption Checklist** – This process is a streamlined application for projects within a design review area with a "B" special area designator. The project must also be consistent with the [design review checklist for the community](#).
3. **Minor Site Plan** – The minor site plan permit process is for all site plan applications that do not qualify for a site plan waiver or site plan checklist but will be exempt from CEQA. Typical projects that qualify for minor site plans are most single-family residences and applications on properties that have been legally developed that propose less than 5,000 square feet.
4. **Major Site Plan** – The major site plan permit process is for all site plan applications that do not fall under one of the other processes.



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## **APPLICABLE ORDINANCES**

The following Ordinances may apply to your Site Plan application:

- Zoning Ordinance
- County Fire Code
- Landscape Ordinance
- Biological Mitigation Ordinance
- Private Road Standards
- Public Road Standards
- Stormwater
- Flood Damage Prevention
- Multiple Species Conservation Plan
- Building Code
- Park Land Dedication Ordinance

## **OTHER JURISDICTIONS & DEPARTMENTS**

During the review process, PDS will route the proposal to various internal departments and external agencies, depending upon the proposed development and potential impacts. A determination will be made by PDS on which Departments and jurisdictions will need to review the proposal during the scoping process for the project. Some examples of common departments and agencies that may be involved in the development process include:

### **Internal:**

- Department of Public Works (DPW) Traffic Division
- DPW Flood Control
- Department of Environmental Health (DEH)
- Air Pollution Control District (APCD)
- Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)
- County Fire Authority

### **External:**

- Local Fire District
- Caltrans
- Airport Authority
- Water and Sewer Districts
- School Districts
- Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
- Regional Water Quality Control Board

## **APPROXIMATE COST AND TIMELINE**

PDS strives to process all permits efficiently to keep costs down and to work with the community and applicants to resolve issues. The cost and timeline for processing a Site Plan varies on a project-by-project basis. The type of environmental document, size of the development, and potential opposition can play a significant role in a project's cost and timeline.

On average, Site Plan Waivers and Checklists take three to four months to process, Site Plans that are exempt from CEQA take six to eight months to process, and more complex Site Plans can take a year or longer to process. These timelines are based on several assumptions, including that projects require a maximum of two resubmittals, and that resubmittals are returned to PDS within 45 days.

Our [discretionary permit cost guide](#) provides a ballpark figure of the total costs required for the County to process a permit. Applicants can also submit for an optional [initial consultation meeting](#) to obtain more detailed cost and time estimates.



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## HOW DO I SUBMIT A SITE PLAN?

