

City of Westland

Guide to Development



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Introduction

This guide provides a general overview of the City of Westland's development approval process. It is designed to help residents, developers, and investors understand the steps involved in taking a project from initial concept through final occupancy—regardless of project size. Written from the perspective of an investor, the guide is relevant to both single-family homeowners and professional developers. Contact information for City departments is included throughout the document for convenience.

Please note that this guide is intended for general reference only and does not replace the need for direct communication with City staff or consultation with professional advisors. Every project is unique and may require adjustments to the general process described here.

The City of Westland's website offers access to application forms, relevant documents, program details, and links to helpful external resources.

The guide is organized into the following sections:

- General Information
- Land Use Applications
- Construction Permits
- Incentive Tools

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Getting Started: Connect with Key Staff

The first step in deciding to invest in the City of Westland is to speak with the appropriate staff members. Depending on the nature and phase of your project, the main point of contact may vary. For example:

- **Planning and Zoning staff** can assist with site plan reviews.
- **Building staff** manage permits and code compliance.
- **The City Clerk** handles business licensing.
- **The Department of Public Works (DPW)** oversees utilities and road infrastructure.

Below is a list of key staff members involved in the development process, along with their roles and contact information:

Alex Garza

Director of Economic Development

Leads efforts to attract and retain business opportunities within the City of Westland.

City Liaison to:

- Economic Development Corporation (EDC), also serving as the Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) and the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)
- Downtown Development Authority (DDA)
- Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA)

📞 Phone: (734) 793-9300

✉ Email: agarza@cityofwestland.com

Mohamed Ayoub

Director of Planning & Building

Oversees the intake and review process for site plans, special land uses, rezoning's, land divisions/combinations, planned unit developments (PUDs), and other land development projects.

City Liaison to:

- Planning Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

📞 Phone: (734) 467-3219

✉ Email: mayoub@cityofwestland.com

Roger Shifflett

Building Official

Responsible for enforcing building and construction codes and ensuring compliance throughout the City of Westland.

📞 Phone: (734) 467-3218

✉ Email: rshifflett@cityofwestland.com

Boards and Commissions

The City of Westland's zoning ordinance outlines the procedures for development applications. Depending on the type and location of the project, multiple boards or commissions may be involved in the review process. All meetings are open to the public and conducted in accordance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act. Meeting schedules are available on the City's website.

Economic Development Corporation (EDC)

The EDC promotes and facilitates economic and business development through programs and public improvement projects that generate economic opportunity, support entrepreneurship, and preserve property values.

The EDC reviews tax incentive requests submitted by the administration and makes recommendations to the Westland City Council. EDC members also serve as the Board of Directors for the following entities:

- **Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA)**
Facilitates development within the TIFA District through programs and public improvements that enhance economic opportunity, support business growth, and maintain property values.
- **Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)**
Supports the revitalization, redevelopment, and reuse of underutilized or contaminated properties. The BRA meets following the submission of a Brownfield Redevelopment Plan and provides recommendations to the City Council.

Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The DDA promotes and implements plans that drive continued development, redevelopment, revitalization, and reuse of properties within the DDA District.

Local Development Finance Authority (LDFA)

The LDFA encourages local development by addressing conditions of unemployment and fostering economic growth within the LDFA District.

Planning Commission

The Planning Commission reviews and makes recommendations to the City Council on the following:

- Zoning ordinance and zoning map amendments
- Special land use applications
- Site plan approvals
- Planned unit developments (PUDs)
- Land divisions and combinations
- Street and alley vacations
- Other land use-related applications

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

The ZBA interprets the City's zoning ordinance and official zoning map. It has the authority to grant variances for projects that deviate from established zoning regulations.

Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance

Master Plan

The Master Plan is the City's primary policy tool for guiding future land use decisions. It outlines a long-term vision for the physical, economic, and social development of the community and provides a coordinated framework for informed decision-making.

Prospective developers are strongly encouraged to review the Master Plan to determine whether their proposed project aligns with the City's goals and planning objectives.

Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance is the primary regulatory tool used to govern land use within the City. It establishes detailed requirements related to:

- Permitted land uses
- Building size and placement
- Parking layout and access
- Landscaping and screening
- Design standards
- Signage

The Zoning Ordinance is intended to implement the land use vision set forth in the Master Plan. Reviewing the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map should be one of the first steps when considering the development or redevelopment of any property. This review is often part of the initial conversation with City staff.

Land Use Applications

This section provides an overview of the various types of land use applications within the City of Westland. It is important to note that this overview does not override or replace any provisions in the City's zoning ordinance.

Re-Occupancy

The purpose of a re-occupancy determination is to ensure that the proposed use of a building, structure, or lot complies with the requirements of the zoning ordinance prior to occupancy or re-occupancy.

Steps:

1. Submit a Re-Occupancy Application to the Planning Department.
2. Planning and Building Director confirms the Zoning Classification for the proposed use.
3. Inspection of the site is scheduled and conducted.
4. If approved—obtain a Certificate of Occupancy.

Site Plan Review and Special Land Use

Developers should consult the zoning ordinances Table of Uses and meet with the Planning and Building Director to identify potential issues before submitting an application.

Application Requirements:

- Refer to application requirements
- One (1) copy of the completed application
- Ten (10) full sets of development plans
- PDF copy of all plans

Rezoning

A rezoning application is required when a developer proposes to use land in a manner not currently permitted under the existing zoning classification.

Application Requirements:

- Refer to application requirements

- One (1) copy of the completed application
- Ten (10) full sets of survey
- PDF copy of survey

Land Division

This application is required when a property owner or developer wishes to divide an existing parcel into two or more parcels.

Application Requirements:

- Refer to application requirements
- One (1) copy of the completed application
- Ten (10) full sets of survey
- PDF copy of survey

Steps to Obtain Land Use Application Approval

Site Plan Approval Process

Step 1: Conceptual Meeting (As early as 48 hours)

- Developers should prepare a conceptual site plan or be prepared to verbally describe the proposed land use.
- A preliminary meeting with the Planning & Building Director is strongly encouraged. This meeting:
 - Identifies visible zoning and site issues early in the process.
 - Allows developers the opportunity to make revisions before proceeding further.
 - Provides a tentative overview of the development process schedule and next steps.

Step 2: Administrative Development Review (Within 2 Weeks—as needed)

- The proposal is reviewed by the Administrative Development Review Committee (ADRC), which includes:
 - The Mayor
 - Deputy Mayor
 - Planning & Building Director
 - Economic Development Director
 - Building Official
- The ADRC assesses potential administrative issues and ensures the proposed development aligns with the City's goals and policies.

Step 3: Application Submission (By Applicant)

- After administrative review, formal applications must be submitted to the Planning Division.
- Required materials include:
 - Completed applications with original signatures
 - Required application fee (as set by City Council)
 - Ten (10) copies of the site plan
- Variance requests must be filed separately with the City Clerk.

Step 4: Joint Site Plan Review (Timeline Varies)

- The submitted site plan is reviewed by several administrative departments:
 - Assessing Department
 - Building Division
 - Economic Development Department
 - Department of Public Service
 - Fire Department
 - Police Department
 - Engineering

- Planning Division
- Each department submits written approvals or concerns to the Planning and Building Director.
- If needed, a meeting may be scheduled to address any issues or concerns.
- The Planning and Building Department prepares the plan for Planning Commission review.

Step 5: Planning Commission Review (Meets Monthly)

- The Planning & Building Director presents a detailed analysis, including:
 - Site characteristics and surrounding zoning
 - Relevant case history
 - Compliance with ordinance requirements
- The Planning Commission:
 - Reviews the plan
 - Accepts public comments
 - Votes to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application
- Special meetings may be arranged, subject to quorum availability and compliance with the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Step 6: City Council Approval (Special Land Use Only) – 1 to 3 Weeks

- In most development cases final approval is required from the City Council.
- The Council may:
 - Approve the site plan as submitted
 - Approve the site plan with conditions
 - Deny the site plan
- In cases involving requests beyond basic site plan approval, the Council's decisions are guided by specific review criteria in the Zoning Ordinance.

Variance Request Approval Process

Step 1: Identify Need for Variance

- A variance need is typically identified during the Site Plan Review process.

Step 2: Administrative Development Review (Within 2 weeks—as needed)

- As with site plans, the ADRC reviews the variance request to evaluate its alignment with the City's vision and policies.

Step 3: Application Submission (By Applicant)

- Applications must be submitted to the City Clerks office.
- Required materials include:
 - Completed applications with original signatures
 - Required fee (as set by City Council)
 - 12 (twelve) copies of the site plan

Step 4: Zoning Board of Appeals Review (Meets Monthly)

- The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) reviews the variance request, with a formal presentation by the Planning & Building Director.
- The ZBA will approve or deny the request based on:
 - The presence of an undue hardship to the property owner
 - Compliance with the standards outlined in the Zoning Ordinance

Building Process

Step 1: Submit Construction Documents and Applications

- Submit all required construction documents outlining the full scope of work to the Building Division for initial review.
- After review of the construction documents, submit all required permit applications to the Building Division.
- If any issues or omissions are identified in the application, the applicant will be required to revise and resubmit.
- Application forms are available on the Building Division website.

Step 2: Inspections

- Once applications are approved and payment is received, the initial inspection will be scheduled.
- City inspectors will evaluate all relevant work for compliance with applicable codes, including:
 - Structural
 - Electrical
 - Mechanical
 - Plumbing

Step 3: Certificate of Occupancy

- After all inspections have been successfully completed and all work complies with code, the City will issue a Certificate of Occupancy (CO).
- The CO confirms that the building is safe for use and complies with all applicable regulations.

Business Licenses

The following types of business activities require a license issued by either the City Clerk's Office or the Police Department, as specified:

Licenses Issued by the City Clerk's Office:

- Animal-related Businesses (e.g., kennels and pet stores)
- Christmas Tree Sales
- Collision, Bump, and Paint Shops
- Going Out of Business Sales
- Junkyards
- Massage Parlors – *Renewal Only* (subject to a temporary moratorium)
- Massage Parlor Personnel:
 - Employee
 - Practitioner
 - Instructor
 - Apprentice
- Mechanical and Electronic Amusement Devices
- Pool and Billiard Rooms
- Public Entertainment
- Soliciting, Canvassing, and Peddling
- Street Vendors
- Temporary Sales / Temporary Structures
- Used Car Dealers

Licenses Issued by the Police Department:

- Precious Metals and Gems Sales
- Secondhand Dealers

Liquor Licenses

Businesses seeking to sell alcoholic beverages in Westland must obtain approval from both the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) and the City of Westland.

Licensing Requirements

To operate legally, applicants must:

- Obtain a liquor license from the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC)
- Receive local approval from the City of Westland, in accordance with the City's Liquor Licensing Policy

Development Incentive Tools

Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA)

Public Act 381 of 1996

The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority (BRA) allows municipalities to create local financing tools to promote redevelopment of challenging sites. These sites may be contaminated, functionally obsolete, or blighted. The BRA offers financial and tax incentives to encourage cleanup and redevelopment, expanding the local tax base and stimulating private investment.

Investor Incentive

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds may reimburse developers for eligible costs outlined in a Brownfield Redevelopment Plan. Reimbursements are subject to approval by the BRA, legislative body, and, when applicable, the State of Michigan. Tax capture is limited to the years required to recoup eligible activity costs.

Eligible Uses

- Environmental remediation
- Structure demolition
- Lead/asbestos abatement
- Infrastructure improvements (e.g., utilities, parking)
- Non-response site preparation
- Redevelopment of obsolete structures

Application Process

1. Initial Contact

Developer contacts the Economic Development Department to present the proposed project and request financing support.

2. Site Plan Approval

Obtain site plan and special use approvals from local authorities.

3. BRA Review

BRA reviews the development plan and reimbursement agreement and recommends approval to the legislative body.

4. Public Hearing & Approval

Legislative body conducts a public hearing and acts to approve, modify, or deny the plan and reimbursement agreement.

5. Reimbursement Agreement

BRA enters into a reimbursement agreement outlining terms for cost reimbursement.

6. State Approval

Submit the approved agreement to the State Tax Commission for final authorization.

Note: If school taxes are captured to reimburse costs, a PA 381 Work Plan must be approved by EGLE and/or the Michigan Strategic Fund.

Plant Rehabilitation & Industrial Development Exemption

Public Act 198 of 1974

The City of Westland may offer tax abatements to qualified manufacturers to assist with renovating or expanding facilities, constructing new ones, or establishing high-tech operations.

Investor Incentive

An Industrial Facilities Tax Exemption (IFE) allows a property to be exempt from ad valorem real and/or personal property taxes for up to 12 years, as determined by the City. Upon approval, a formal agreement between the developer and the City will outline the terms.

Eligible Projects

- Manufacturing or processing plants
- Office, R&D, warehouse, or distribution centers related to Michigan manufacturers
- High-tech facilities and communication centers
- Must be located in a designated Industrial Development District (IDD) or Plant Rehabilitation District (PRD)

Eligibility Notes

- Existing buildings/equipment prior to construction are not exempt.
- For rehabilitation, pre-existing value is exempt from taxes but serves as the base for the IFT.
- Additions made after project completion are fully taxable.
- Land is not eligible for exemption.

Application Process

1. District Creation

A PRD or IDD must be established before project initiation.

2. Application Submission

Submit application to the municipal clerk.

3. Local Review & Hearing

The governing body must act within 60 days and hold a public hearing.

4. State Review

Approved applications and contracts are forwarded to the State Tax Commission for final approval and certificate issuance.

Evaluation Criteria:

- No substantial negative impact on the City's operations
- No impairment to taxing unit financial health
- Applicant is not delinquent on any related taxes or fees
- Abatement contributes to job creation in Westland
- Total SEV of abated property does not exceed 5% of the City's SEV

Commercial Redevelopment District

Public Act 255 of 1978

This tool incentivizes the restoration, replacement, or new construction of commercial property by reducing property taxes for up to 12 years.

Investor Incentive

- Investors pay a Commercial Facilities Tax instead of standard property taxes.
- For restored facilities: Taxable value is frozen at pre-restoration levels.
- For new or replacement facilities: 50% reduction in ad valorem taxes (excluding SET). The State Treasurer may exempt 50% of the SET for up to 6 years, limited to 25 projects per year.

Eligible Projects

- Commercial, mixed-use, and high-density residential buildings
- Properties in zones classified commercial or industrial for at least 3 years before June 21, 1978
- Properties cleared due to fire or designated as blighted
- Excludes casinos, casino-owned properties, and land/personal property

Definitions:

- **Replacement Facility:** Substitutes obsolete property with upgrades
- **Restored Facility:** Involves renovations exceeding 10% of the property's true cash value

Application Process

1. Legislative body creates a Commercial Redevelopment District by resolution and conducts a public hearing.
2. Property owner submits application to the local clerk.
3. Legislative body holds a hearing and must act within 60 days.
4. Approved applications are sent to the State Tax Commission for filing.

Commercial Rehabilitation District

Public Act 210 of 2005

This incentive supports the rehabilitation of commercial buildings by freezing taxable value and reducing taxes for up to 10 years.

Investor Incentive

- Investors pay a Commercial Rehabilitation Tax instead of property taxes.
- Freezes the building's taxable value; new investments are exempt from local taxes (SET and school operating taxes still apply).
- Land and personal property are not eligible.

Eligible Projects

- Multifamily or commercial properties at least 15 years old and 3+ acres
- Vacant or recently used commercial properties
- R&D, office, warehouse, distribution, and qualified food retail spaces
- Cannot include stadiums or casinos

Rehabilitation Includes:

- Structural repairs, floor/wall replacements, improved HVAC, lighting, foundation work
- New construction on previously demolished sites, if it provides local economic benefit

Application Process

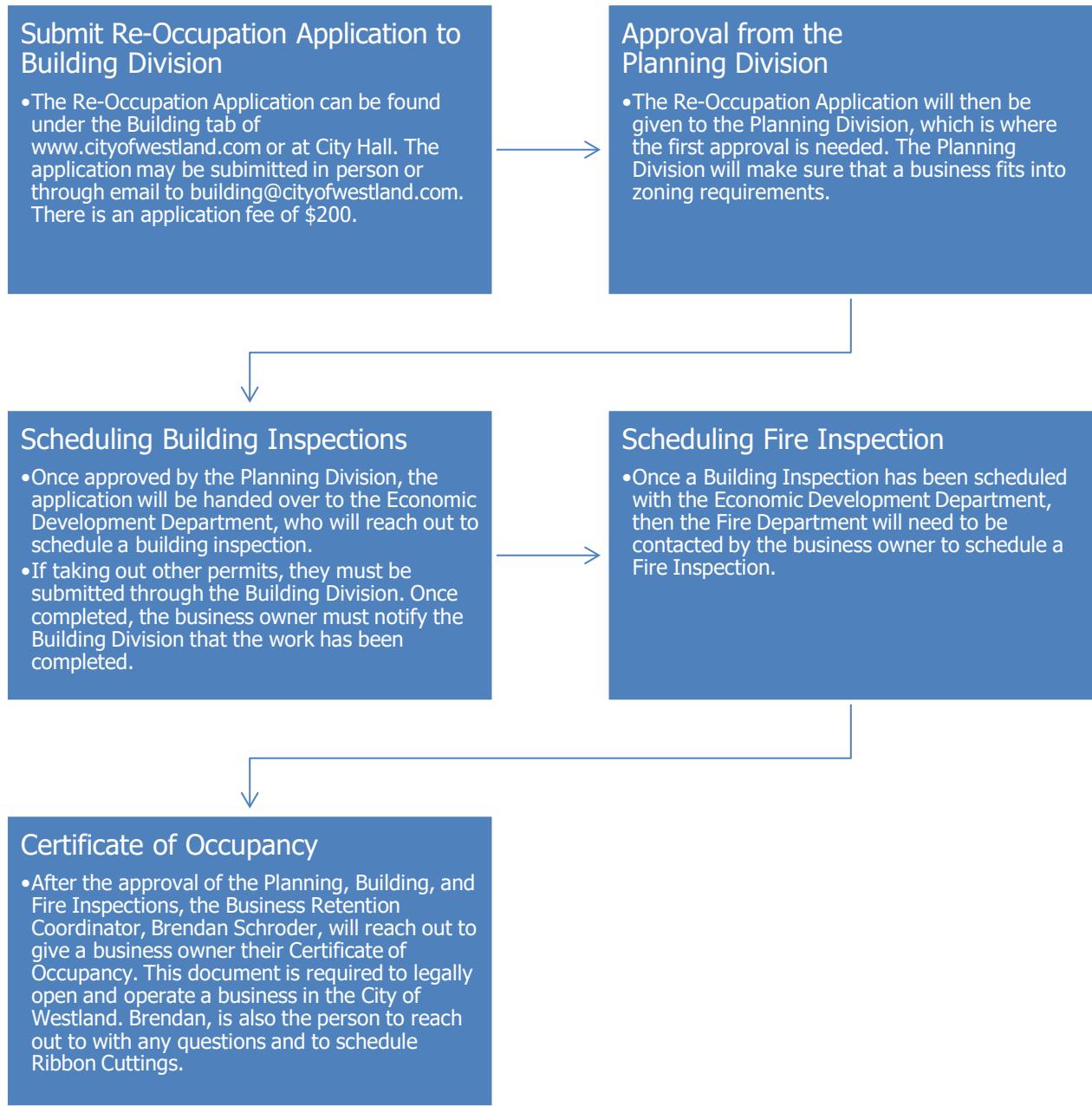
1. Legislative body establishes a Commercial Rehabilitation District (public hearing required).
2. Resolution is submitted to the county for approval (within 28 days).
3. Applicant files with the local clerk using Treasury-supplied forms.
4. Public hearing is held; legislative body acts within 60 days.
5. Approved applications are submitted to the State Tax Commission.
6. Upon state approval, the Commercial Rehabilitation Certificate is issued.

Application must include:

- General facility description
- Proposed use
- Scope of rehabilitation
- Equipment list

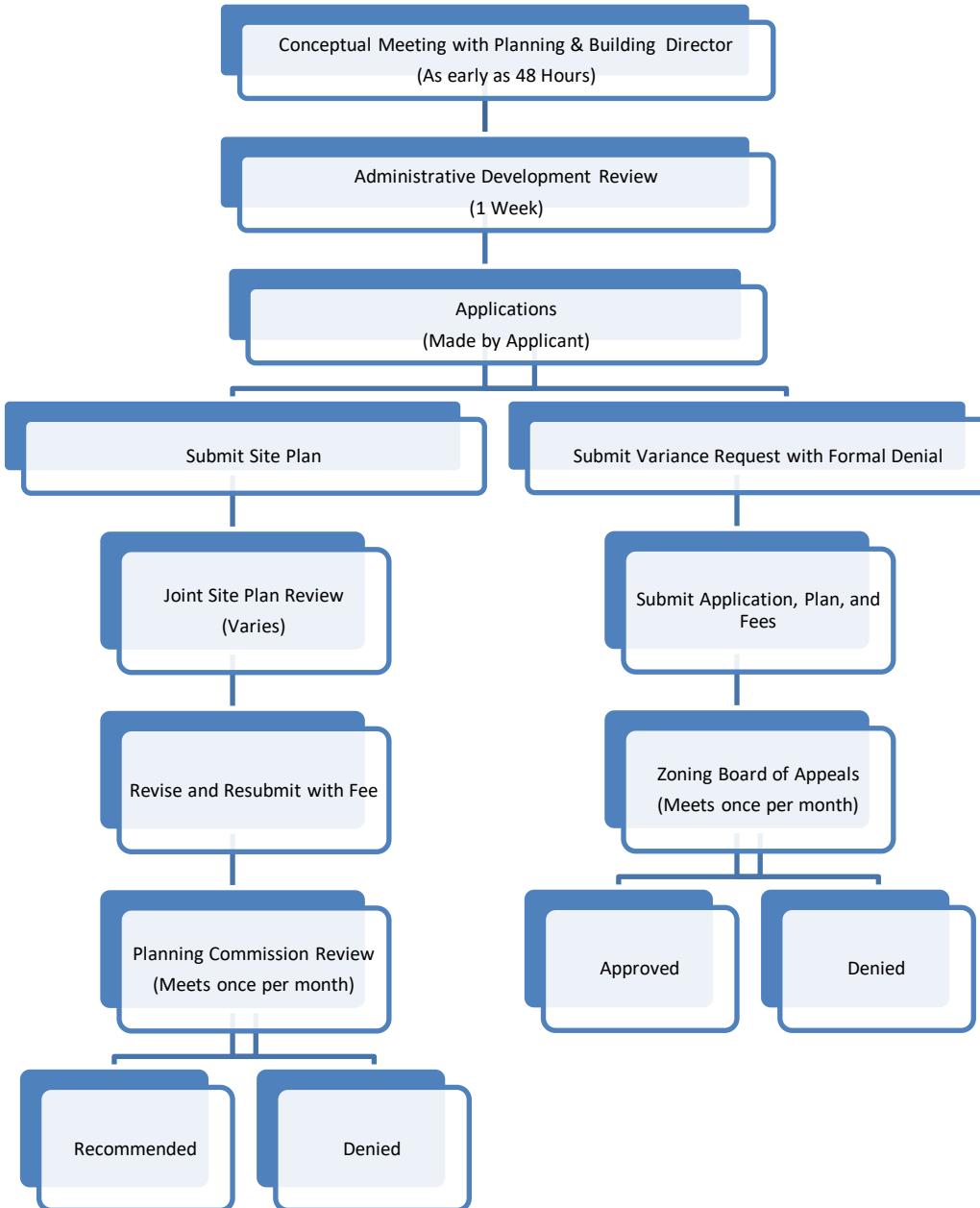
Re-Occupation Process Flowchart

Estimated Process Length: 1-4 weeks



Site Plan and Variance Request Approval Process Flowchart

Estimated Process Length: 6 Weeks



Building Process Flowchart

Estimated Process Length: 1 – 2 Days for Residential; 2 for Commercial

