

Optional Plan Review



Optional Plan Review is an alternative process by which the Planning Commission may evaluate and approve aspects of a development project that cannot otherwise comply with Zone District requirements for site layout, building placement, and design elements. The intent is to permit flexibility, encourage innovation and variety, and successfully integrate the proposed project with the surrounding neighborhood. Conditions of approval may be attached to a decision.

An Optional Plan Review (OPR) may only be used in the following districts:

TN - City Center
SD - Institutional Campus
OD - East Beltline Overlay

TN - Transitional City Center
SD - Planned Redevelopment District
OD - Grand River Overlay

An OPR may also be used to establish a Planned Sign Program in any District.



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Property Address _____
Parcel Number _____ Zone District _____
Lot Size Frontage: _____ ft Depth: _____ ft Area: _____ Acres/Sq Ft ☐ Rectangle ☐ Irregular
Current use of property _____

This application is requesting: (check all that apply)

- ☐ Optional Plan Review Waiver(s) for Site Layout, Building Placement, or Building Element Requirements
☐ Planned Sign Program (Section 5.15.05. of the Zoning Ordinance)
☐ Other _____

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1. Applicant

Identify the person or organization requesting the Special Land Use:

Name _____ Cell Phone _____
Organization _____ Business Phone _____
Mailing Address _____ Fax _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____ E-Mail _____

2. Applicant Interest

The applicant must have a legal interest in the subject property:

- ~ Property Owner ~ Purchaser by Option or Purchase Agreement
~ Purchaser by Land Contract ~ Lessee/Tenant

3. Property Owner ☐ Check here if Applicant is also Property Owner

Identify the person or organization that owns the subject property:

Name _____ Cell Phone _____
Organization _____ Business Phone _____
Mailing Address _____ Fax _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____ E-Mail _____

4. Agent

Identify any person representing the property owner or applicant in this matter:

Name _____ Cell Phone _____
Organization _____ Business Phone _____
Mailing Address _____ Fax _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____ E-Mail _____



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- ☐ **1.a. Waiver(s) for Site Layout, Building Placement, or Building Elements** (Use letterhead if possible.)
For waivers of Site Layout, Building Placement or Building Elements, provide a written description of the specific requirements to be waived, describe the alternative design proposed, and explain why the development cannot comply with the minimum standards of the Zone District.
- ☐ **1.b. Waiver(s) for a Planned Sign Program** (Use letterhead if possible)
For a Planned Sign Program, identify the number of tenants or buildings on the site and the existing sign inventory and proposed new signs. Also provide a written explanation of what is unique about the property when compared to other properties in the Zone District, and why a deviation from sign requirements of the Zone District is needed.
- ☐ **2. Site Plans, Building Elevations and Floor Plans**
Enclose site plans, building elevations and floor plans required on the Site Plan Review Checklist.

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The applicant must read the following statement carefully and sign below:

The undersigned requests that the City of Grand Rapids review this application and related required documents and site plans as provided in Article 13 of the Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance. The applicant further affirms and acknowledges the following:

- ☐ That the applicant has a legal interest in the property described in this application.
- ☐ That the answers and statements contained in this application and enclosures are in all respects true and correct to the best of his, her or their knowledge.
- ☐ That the approval of this application does not relieve the undersigned from compliance with all other provisions of the Zoning Ordinance or other codes or statutes, and does not constitute the granting of a variance.
- ☐ That the applicant will comply with any and all conditions imposed in granting an approval of this application.
- ☐ If also the owner, the applicant grants the City of Grand Rapids staff and the Planning Commission the right to access the subject property for the sole purpose of evaluating the application.

Applicant Name (printed)

Date

Applicant Signature

Date

If the applicant is not the property owner, the property owner must read and sign below:

The undersigned affirms and acknowledges that he, she or they are the owner(s) of the property described in this application, and:

- ☐ Is/are aware of the contents of this application and related enclosures.
- ☐ Authorizes the applicant to submit this application and represent the undersigned in the matter being reviewed by the City of Grand Rapids.
- ☐ Grants the City of Grand Rapids staff and the Planning Commission the right to access the subject property for the sole purpose of evaluating the application.

Property Owner Name (printed)

Date

Property Owner Signature

Date



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In addition to the Site Plan Review Standards of Section 5.12.08.D., the Planning Commission shall consider whether the proposed Optional Plan Review meets the following standards.

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Describe how the proposed project is consistent with the purpose and intent of the *Master Plan* and Zoning Ordinance, including the Zone District.

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U' Describe how the project will be compatible, harmonious and appropriate with the existing or planned character and uses of the neighborhood, adjacent properties, and the natural environment.

V'' Describe how potentially adverse effects arising from the proposed project on the neighborhood and adjacent properties will be minimized through the provision of adequate parking, the placement of buildings, structures and entrances, as well as the location of screening, fencing, landscaping, buffers or setbacks.

W' Describe how the proposed project will not be detrimental, hazardous, or disturbing to existing or future adjacent uses or to the public welfare by reason of excessive traffic, noise, smoke, odors, glare, visual clutter, and electrical or electromagnetic interference.



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X" Describe how the proposed project will not adversely affect the walkability of the neighborhood, impair pedestrian circulation patterns, disrupt the continuity of the urban street wall or otherwise hinder the creation of a pedestrian-oriented environment.

Y" Explain how the project will not significantly modify the basic standards of the Zone District nor will it negatively alter the established or future character of the neighborhood.

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Describe how the proposed project will retain as many natural features of the landscape as practicable, particularly where the natural features assist in preserving the general character of the neighborhood.

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U" Describe how adequate public or private infrastructure and services already exist or will be provided at no additional cost, and will safeguard the health, safety, morals, and general welfare of the public.



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V’’ Explain how the proposed project will not be detrimental to the financial stability and economic welfare of the City.

W Describe how the proposed project will comply with all other applicable City ordinances and policies and all applicable State laws.

X’’ Describe how the project will provide urban open space, Grand River edge walkways, or other amenities that serve a public purpose.

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Explain how the request is not necessitated by a condition related to the site or structure, and is not a means to reduce cost or inconvenience.



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1. General Information

An Optional Plan Review (OPR) approval is an alternative process by which the Planning Commission may evaluate and approve a development project that cannot otherwise meet the requirements of the Zone District. The intent is to permit flexibility, encourage innovation and variety, and successfully integrate the development with the surrounding neighborhood. Conditions of approval may be attached to a decision.

2. Pre-Application Consultation

A pre-application meeting with Planning staff is recommended prior to the submission of the application. Such a meeting helps ensure a smooth application process.

3. Applicability

An Optional Plan Review may be requested in the TN-CC, TN-TCC, SD-IC, SD-PRD, OD-EBL and OD-GR Districts. The Zone District standards form the basic framework in evaluating a proposal, but an OPR permits modifications to site layout, building placement, and design element requirements. An OPR may also be used to request a Planned Sign Program (in any District) as permitted in Section 5.15.05.

4. Neighborhood Meeting

A neighborhood meeting is strongly recommended for an Optional Plan Review application. The purpose of a neighborhood meeting is to inform nearby stakeholders of the proposed project, receive comments and address concerns about the proposal, and whenever possible resolve conflicts in advance of Planning Commission review. Failure to hold a neighborhood meeting may result in a tabling of the request. Recommended procedures are found in Section 5.12.04.

5. Application

An application packet for an Optional Plan Review is available from the Grand Rapids Planning Department, located on the third floor of 1120 Monroe Avenue NW or at the Planning Department's website www.grcity.us/planning under Forms and Applications. You may also call 616-456-4100.

A complete application must be received at least one (1) month prior to the Planning Commission meeting. The project description is a very important part of the application. See www.grcity.us/planning

for the schedule of Planning Commission meetings and application deadlines.

6. Staff Review

The application will be reviewed by Planning staff prior to submission to the Planning Commission. A Planner may contact the applicant with questions or with a request for additional information, or may advise the applicant on recommended changes or revisions to the application and submittals for the purpose of clarity.

7. Notice of Public Hearing

Following the staff review, the Optional Plan Review request is forwarded to the Planning Commission for a public hearing. A notice of the public hearing is published in the Grand Rapids Press 15 days prior to Planning Commission meeting. Property owners and residents within a 300 ft radius of the subject property are notified by post card. Interested persons may submit a letter or speak at the public hearing.

8. Planning Commission Meeting

Each public hearing item for consideration is assigned an approximate start time. The Planning staff introduces and explains the request to the Planning Commission. The applicant is then asked to present information on his or her proposal. The Planning Commission may ask questions of the staff and/or applicant. The Planning Commission then allows public comment on the application, and a chance for the applicant to respond to any concerns or questions. The public comment period is then closed and the Planning Commission deliberates on the request in open session. The Planning Commission may approve, approve with conditions, deny, or table the OPR application.

9. Written Notice

The applicant will be provided with a letter and resolution that documents the decision of the Planning Commission, including any conditions of approval.

10. Appeal of Denial

If the Planning Commission denies an application for an Optional Plan Review, the applicant may appeal the decision to the Board of Zoning Appeals. The appeal must be filed with the Planning Department within 15 days for the decision. Conditions of approval cannot be appealed.

General Plan Requirements

- ❑ Project Info: Project address and name, scale, north arrow, location map, date(s) of submission/revisions, sheet number, name, address, phone number, and email of the designer(s) who prepared each plan
- ❑ Scale:
 - For less than 3 acres, 1" = 50'
 - For more than 3 acres, 1" = 100'
- ❑ Site Plans, Elevations, etc:
 - (1) Full size (24" x 36") set of plans
 - (2) Copies of plans on 11" by 17" paper
 - (1) Digital copy of plans on a CD/DVD, with an individual PDF file of each drawing, plan or other document.

Site Data

- ☐ Existing zoning of property and all abutting properties
- ☐ Property dimensions and gross acreage or square footage (including width, length, and frontage)
- ☐ Net acreage or square footage, minus rights-of-way and submerged land
- ☐ Existing and proposed topography of the property and within 100' of the property at 2-ft intervals
- ☐ Existing lot lines, lot dimensions, building lines, structures, parking areas, and other improvements on the property and within 100' of the property
- ☐ Proposed lot lines, lot dimensions, building lines, structures, parking areas, and other improvements on the property and within 100' of the property
- ☐ Existing and proposed easements, including type

Access, Circulation and Parking Plans

- ☐ Dimensions, curve radii and centerlines of existing and proposed access points, streets, rights-of-way, or access easements
- ☐ Existing driveways and street intersections within 250 feet of the property
- ☐ Dimensions of acceleration, deceleration and passing lanes
- ☐ Cross section details of proposed streets, driveways, parking lots, sidewalks and non-motorized paths, with materials and thickness
- ☐ Traffic regulatory signs and pavement markings
- ☐ Designation of fire lanes
- ☐ Existing and proposed parking and loading areas, including location and size
- ☐ Calculations for the required number of parking and loading spaces
- ☐ Dimensions of parking spaces, landscape islands, circulation aisles, and loading zones
- ☐ Existing and proposed sidewalks or pathways within the site and in the right-of-way

Landscape and Screening Plans

- ☐ Locations, sizes, and types of existing trees 6 inches in diameter, measured at 3½ ft off the ground, including what is to be removed and what is to be preserved

Landscape and Screening Plans (cont.)

- ☐ General location of all other existing plant materials, identification of the plant material, including what is to be removed and what is to be preserved
- ☐ Existing and proposed lawns and landscaped areas
- ☐ Location and type of all proposed shrubs, trees, and other live plant material
- ☐ Planting list for proposed landscape materials with caliper size or height of material, quantity, botanical and common names, and method of installation
- ☐ Details on screening
- ☐ Location, size, height, and construction materials for all fences, walls and berms

Building and Structure Plans

- ☐ Location, height, and exterior dimensions of all proposed structures on the property
- ☐ Building floor plans and total floor area, including number and height of stories
- ☐ Building elevations for all sides, at an appropriate scale
- ☐ Description of all exterior building materials and colors (samples may be requested)
- ☐ Calculations of transparency requirements

Drainage and Utility Plans

- ❑ Location of existing drainage courses, floodplains, streams, wetlands, and other water bodies
- ❑ Existing and proposed water mains, water service, storm water loads and fire hydrants
- ❑ Stormwater retention/detention ponds, including grading, side slopes, depth, high water elevation, volume and outfalls, and calculations
- ❑ Site grading, drainage patterns, and other stormwater management measures
- ❑ Underground storm sewers and drains, including location and size
- ❑ Existing and proposed, above and below ground gas, electric, and telephone lines
- ❑ Transformers and utility boxes, including locations and dimensions

Other Site Features

- ❑ Location, height, and dimensions of storage facilities
- ❑ Waste receptacles and transformer pads and enclosures/screening
- ❑ Extent of any outdoor sales or display area
- ❑ Existing and proposed building and site lighting
- ❑ Photometric plan with: 1) foot candle readings at 10' intervals or less, 2) table showing minimum and maximum lighting levels, and maximum to minimum illumination ratios, and 3) location and mounting heights of fixtures [If the project is located in the East Beltline Overlay District, see Section 5.8.04.F.]
- ❑ Size, height, and method of shielding for all lighting on the building and the site
- ❑ Location, size, height, and lighting of all proposed signs on the building and the site



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The following items are required for a complete Optional Plan Review (OPR) application. Please note that Site Plan Review is part of an OPR review. Incomplete applications will be returned.

☐ **Signed Application Form**

Complete pages 2 - 3 of the OPR application form. The application must be signed by the applicant and the property owner (if different).

☐ **Response to SLU Review Standards**

Complete pages 4 - 6 of the OPR application form, use additional paper if needed.

☐ **Waiver(s) for Site Layout, Building Placement, or Building Elements**

For waivers of Site Layout, Building Placement or Building Element requirements, provide a written description of the specific requirements to be waived, describe the alternative design proposed, and explain why the development cannot comply with the minimum standards of the Zone District. (Use letterhead if possible.)

☐ **Waiver(s) for a Planned Sign Program**

For a Planned Sign Program, identify the number of tenants or buildings on the site and the existing sign inventory and proposed new signs. Also provide a written explanation of what is unique about the property when compared to other properties in the Zone District, and why a deviation from sign requirements of the Zone District is needed. (Use letterhead if possible.)

☐ **Site Plans, Building Elevations and Floor Plans**

Enclose site plans, building elevations and floor plans required on the Site Plan Review Checklist.

☐ **Neighborhood Meeting Sign-In Sheet**

Enclose the sign-in sheet from the neighborhood meeting. Include the date, time and location of the meeting. Failure to hold this meeting may result in tabling of the application.

☐ **Fee (FY2026): \$2,570**

Payment options:

Check (payable to City of Grand Rapids)

Credit card in person at Development Center

Credit card by phone by calling (616) 456-4100

☐ **Plan Submittal**

One (1) digital copy in PDF format (CD, flash drive, cloud storage, or email to planning@grcity.us)

Additional Information

In the course of reviewing the application, the Planning Department staff may request additional information from the applicant.