


Design & Development Department

DEPARTMENTAL POLICY

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REVISIONS: 1st Version	
ISSUED BY: Suzanne Schulz	SIGNED: 

SUBJECT: Community Engagement for Development Projects

SCOPE: Design & Development Department, Planning Commission Applicants, Board of Zoning Appeals Applicants, Historic Preservation Commission Applicants

PURPOSE: This policy is to clarify development project types for which a neighborhood meeting is recommended between the developer and neighboring residents and businesses. The purpose of the meeting is to inform neighbors about the proposed project and to seek their input at or before the start of the Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, or Historic Preservation Commission application process. The meeting provides an opportunity for the neighborhood to implement its vision and values in collaboration with the developer. Applications for projects of the types described herein historically have been tabled by the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, or the Historic Preservation Commission when the developer is not able to substantiate that adequate opportunity for neighborhood input has been provided. While the developer is responsible to organize the meeting (often in partnership with the neighborhood association or other civic organization), City staff may be able to attend in an advisory capacity upon request.

POLICY:

I. **Authority**

City Code: Chapter 61 (Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance), Article 12, Sec. 5.12.04:

“A. *Purpose.* The purpose of a neighborhood meeting is to educate occupants and owners of nearby properties about the proposed development application, receive comments and address concerns about the development proposal; and resolve conflicts and outstanding issues,

where possible. The meeting is intended to result in an application that is responsive to neighborhood concerns and to expedite and lessen the expense of the review process by avoiding needless delays, appeals, remands or denials.

B. *Applicability.*

1. A neighborhood meeting is strongly recommended for any project that may have an impact on neighboring properties, such as a Special Land Use, Variance or Zone Change (map) request and where a public hearing is required. A neighborhood meeting is not expected for small, individual requests (e.g. a variance for a porch). However, neighbor-to-neighbor discussions are encouraged.
2. The Planning Director and/or Planning Commission may direct an applicant to conduct a neighborhood meeting if the proposed project is expected to have significant land use, appearance, traffic, public facility or other impacts on neighboring lands.
3. Failure to hold a neighborhood meeting shall not stop or delay the review process; however, such an omission may result in the tabling of a request.

C. *Recommended Procedure.*

1. Notice of the meeting shall be given to neighbors and neighborhood and/or business association representatives within a reasonable timeframe.
2. The meeting shall be held in a neutral location after 5 p.m. on a weekday.
3. At the meeting, the applicant shall explain the development proposal, answer any questions, and respond to concerns. Proposed ways to resolve conflicts, if any exist, should be discussed.
4. It is recommended that a sign-in sheet and summary addressing issues and discussions from the meeting be supplied to the Planning Director prior to the public hearing. This information shall be supplied to the Board or Commission hearing the matter.
5. City staff may attend the neighborhood meeting for purposes of advising the attendees regarding applicable provisions of this Chapter, but shall not serve as facilitators or become involved in discussions at the neighborhood meeting.
6. The applicant is responsible for all costs associated with the neighborhood meeting.”

Grand Rapids Master Plan: Sec. 1.3, “Guiding Principles”:

- “...*Partnership:* We make decisions and accomplish our plans in an open, inclusive and collaborative manner. We empower people to contribute their ideas, work toward consensus and take responsibility for achieving a shared vision of the future. We work in partnership – neighborhoods, businesses, investors, non-profits, schools, city government and surrounding

jurisdictions – to capitalize on the synergy of pooled resources and expertise....”

- “...*Balance*: We recognized the importance of maintaining a balance between economic (and job) growth, neighborhood preservation and environmental stewardship. We are committed to protecting and improving the valued characteristics of our central city while encouraging change that will make the best use of vacant and under-used land and buildings....”

II. **Applicability Criteria**

This policy is applicable to projects for which Planning Commission or Board of Zoning Appeals approval is required if they include any of the following characteristics, which have been found to have a substantial likelihood of “impact upon neighborhood properties”:

- A new or expanded bar or nightclub,
- A new or expanded assembly use,
- A drive-thru or other auto-oriented use,
- Demolition of existing residential units,
- A significant increase in residential units,
- An assisted or group living center,
- A zone change, or
- A use variance.

Projects may be exempted from the above stated criteria where any of the following exemption criteria has been met:

- Properties with frontage along 28th Street,
- Properties located within the TN-CC (City Center) zone district, or
- Properties located within the SD-IT (Industrial / Transportation) zone district.

Additionally, this policy is applicable to projects for which Historic Preservation Commission approval is required if they include any of the following characteristics:

- Demolition of a main building,
- Demolition of a carriage house,
- Construction of a new building, or
- Construction of a substantial outbuilding

Notwithstanding the listed characteristics and exemptions, the Planning Director may require compliance with this policy for other projects based upon:

- Increase in gross floor area;
- Increase in the intensity of use;
- Increase in parking requirements; or
- Other significant potential impact upon neighborhood character, health, safety, or welfare.

III. **Recommended Community Engagement Process**

The Grand Rapids Zoning Ordinance characterizes a neighborhood meeting as “strongly recommended” for any development project that “may have an impact on

neighboring properties,” which this policy clarifies as a project meeting the applicability criteria in Section II above. Historically, the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, and the Historic Preservation Commission have implemented this provision through a high likelihood of tabling a request for a project meeting these criteria when the developer has not contacted the neighborhood and/or business association and followed the neighborhood meeting process identified by the association(s). Tabling of such requests is based upon the Zoning Ordinance review standards related to neighborhood compatibility, minimization of adverse effects, etc. A neighborhood meeting provides greater assurance for the decision-making body that such factors have been identified and considered. (Sec. 5.12.08(D)(2)(e); 5.12.12(E)(2)(a-d); and 5.12.13(E)(2)(b, e); and 5.12.14(E)(2).)

To minimize the likelihood of tabling of a request for a project that meets the applicability criteria, the developer should follow this process prior to submitting an application for Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, or Historic Preservation Commission review:

1. *Contact the Neighborhood and/or Business Association.* Many areas of the City have an active neighborhood association and/or business association (some of these groups have overlapping boundaries). Neighborhood meeting(s) should be coordinated with the active association(s) where applicable. The associations typically are led by elected boards, and some also have a paid staff member. Some associations have a “development review” (or similarly named) sub-committee to which they refer development-related requests. The developer should contact the association(s) prior to submitting an application for Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, or Historic Preservation Commission review. Otherwise, there may not be sufficient time to organize a neighborhood meeting prior to the public hearing.

Some areas of the City do not have an active resident association or business association. The developer should engage with existing neighborhood institutions (i.e., churches, non-profits, schools) and hold a neighborhood meeting in partnership with those institutions where possible.

City staff will assist the developer in connecting with the existing association(s) or other institutions upon request.

2. *Schedule and Invite Neighbors to Neighborhood Meeting(s).* The developer is responsible to schedule a location and time for neighborhood meeting(s), in coordination with the neighborhood association and/or business association where applicable. The meeting(s) may coincide with the association(s) regular meeting(s) or may be a separate meeting.

The developer is responsible to send notification of the neighborhood meeting(s) to the owners and occupants of properties that may be impacted by the proposed development project. Upon request, City staff will provide an electronic mailing list for properties within a defined radius of the

proposed development site. The developer is responsible for preparing, printing, and mailing the notification (including postage).

While neighborhood and/or business associations may maintain email distribution lists of association members and other residents, this list should not be considered complete, and the sending of an email to distribution list recipients is not adequate on its own for purposes of this policy.

3. *Hold Neighborhood Meeting.* The neighborhood meeting should be held in the neighborhood where the development project is proposed. A sign-in sheet should be used to record attendance; the City may provide a sign-in sheet template upon request. A person should be designated to record meeting notes. At the start of the meeting, the developer should introduce the parties who are present in connection with the proposed project, and should explain their interest or role in the project. The developer should explain the proposed project and present any plans, renderings, or other pertinent information. The developer should answer questions, respond to concerns, and explore ways to address any conflicts. If significant concerns or conflicts remain at the end of the meeting, consideration should be given to scheduling a follow-up meeting.
4. *Send Meeting Summary and Attendance Sheet to Planning Staff.* The attendance sheet and meeting notes should be included as an attachment to the application for Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, or Historic Preservation Commission review. (Upon request, the Planning Director may approve this as a deferred submittal, to be provided in advance of the public hearing.) This information will be added to the board or commission agenda packet, to confirm the neighborhood meeting was held and to summarize the meeting contents.

IV. Period of Effectiveness

This policy has ongoing effect.

V. Appeals

Initial requests for exemption from this policy shall be communicated in writing to the Planning Director. Appeals of the Planning Director's determination shall be made to the Planning Commission, the Board of Zoning Appeals, or the Historic Preservation Commission during the course of the scheduled public hearing.

VI. Modifications

This policy may be modified by the Managing Director of the Design & Development Department.