CITY of BOISE

CITY PLANNING HANDBOOK
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

Communities grow and change over time. To ensure they remain places people want to live, work and play, new developments must be carefully reviewed and take into account the needs, concerns and interests of both the property owner and the broader community.

Boise’s Planning and Development Services Department (PDS) is tasked with ensuring new developments and other land use changes throughout the city help Boise achieve its goal of becoming the most livable city in the country. To achieve this, the department utilizes this shared vision for the built environment:

- **ENERGIZE OUR NEIGHBORHOODS**
  Create centers of neighborhood activity and energy

- **CONNECT THE COMMUNITY**
  Serve all modes of transportation

- **REDEFINE DOWNTOWN**
  Expand Downtown as the city’s center

- **EMBRACE OUR EDGE**
  Plan for a sustainable pattern of development

- **LEVERAGE LANDHOLDINGS**
  Utilize City of Boise properties as a catalyst for new development

This handbook is an overview of the resources and processes the City of Boise uses when reviewing new developments. It details how community members can provide input during the review process and lists city departments and partner agencies that review development projects.
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Boise’s Comprehensive Plan, **BLUEPRINT BOISE**, establishes a broad vision for growth in Boise. The plan breaks the city into geographic planning areas and provides policy guidance for each. A series of master plans and neighborhood plans provide more specific guidance.

The plan, which was adopted in 2011 after extensive outreach that included citizen input and community workshops, is based on seven key principles:

1. Environmental Stewardship
2. A Predictable Development Pattern
3. Stable Neighborhoods and Mixed-Use Activity Centers
4. A Connected Community
5. A Community that Values its Culture, Education, Arts and History
6. A Strong, Diverse Economy
7. A Safe, Healthy and Caring Community

ZONING ORDINANCE

While the Comprehensive Plan establishes an overall vision for the city and provides the general policy guidance to achieve it, **ZONING** is the tool used to implement that vision.

Boise’s Zoning Ordinance establishes allowed and prohibited uses for every property in the city, as well as uses that are allowed under specific conditions. It also specifies dimensional standards such as height and setbacks. While the city has 23 unique zoning districts, properties are generally classified as residential, office, commercial and industrial. There are also open land and special purpose zones.

Allowed uses are almost exclusively regulated by the zoning ordinance. Discretionary permits (rezones, planned developments, conditional use permits, etc.) are influenced by the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

What Does That Mean?

**BLUE WORDS** are listed in the glossary at the back of the booklet.
There are also overlay and specific plan districts that establish additional standards or allowances for specific areas of the city.

A complete list of the zoning and overlay districts and their unique standards is available at CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PDS.

**DECISION-MAKING BODIES**

**THE PLANNING DIRECTOR OR STAFF MEMBER** are authorized to provide ordinance determinations. They issue final decisions on minor applications (such as duplexes, accessory dwelling units, home-based businesses, child care facilities and smaller design review and historic preservation applications). Administrative application review is primarily based on objective review criteria. Any administrative decision can be appealed to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

**THE PLANNING AND ZONING (P & Z) COMMISSION** makes the final decision on conditional use permits, planned unit developments and most variances. They also review appeals of administrative decisions and make recommendations to City Council on rezones, annexations and amendments to the ordinance and Comprehensive Plan. Any P & Z Commission decision can be appealed to City Council. The P & Z Commission meets on the 1st and 2nd Monday of the month.

**THE DESIGN REVIEW (DR) COMMITTEE** reviews the aesthetics of multi-family residential, commercial, office and industrial projects located in the DESIGN REVIEW OVERLAY DISTRICT. Their oversight includes architecture, landscaping and site design. Their review is limited to projects that have allowed uses or have been previously approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission. They also review appeals of administrative design review decisions and make recommendations on ordinance amendments to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council. Any DR Committee decision can be appealed to the Planning and Zoning Commission. The DR Committee meets on the 2nd Wednesday of every month.

*Learn more about the Design Review process*  
CITYOFBOISE.ORG/DESIGN- REVIEW
THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION reviews the aesthetics of projects that are within HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICTS. While they are independent of the Planning and Zoning Commission and similar to the Design Review Committee, they do not make decisions regarding the use of properties. They review appeals of administrative historic preservation decisions and make recommendations to City Council on ordinance amendments. Any decision of the Commission can be appealed to City Council. The HP Commission meets on the last Monday of every month.

CITY COUNCIL is the final legislative authority on zoning and land use decisions. They make decisions on rezones and amendments to the ordinance and comprehensive plan based on recommendations from the Planning and Zoning and Historic Preservation Commissions. They also review appeals of those board’s decisions. City Council meets every Tuesday.

Hearing times are contingent upon holidays and other events.

HOW DECISIONS ARE MADE

Each application is analyzed against a set of review criteria.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEWS

Decisions are generally based on objective standards. Depending on the type of application, input from partner agencies and city departments is required. Decisions are usually made within two weeks.

HEARING-LEVEL APPLICATIONS

While decisions use some of the same objective criteria as administrative reviews, hearing-level applications are also reviewed against the comprehensive plan’s more subjective elements. Decisions are based on a recommendation from the Planning Team, input from partner agencies and public testimony (written and verbal). Decisions are rendered at the conclusion of the public hearing.
THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT’S ROLE

The Planning Team is responsible for helping both the public and applicants navigate the hearing process, regardless of the ultimate decision. They can provide guidance for filing applications and submitting both written and verbal testimony.

City planners prepare a **STAFF REPORT** and make recommendations to the decision-making bodies at public hearings. Recommendations are based on specific review criteria outlined by applicable law, the requirements of any commenting public agency, and correspondence received from the public.

THE PUBLIC’S ROLE: GET INVOLVED + INFLUENCE DECISIONS

There are multiple opportunities throughout the development process for the public to ask questions, state concerns and help shape the nature of a project. Although the **APPROVAL CRITERIA** are unique for each application, they generally consist of the following:

- Consistency with the comprehensive plan and related policy documents
- Compatible with adjacent uses
- Adequacy of infrastructure/ability to provide services
- Compliance with applicable zoning regulations

**Tips on Providing Testimony**

- To provide effective public testimony, it is important to provide comments that generally align with the approval criteria.
- Focus comments on facts and specific project details.
- The Planning Team is always available to explain their analysis and answer questions in advance of the public hearing.
- There are multiple opportunities for public input throughout the entire application process.
THE APPLICATION PROCESS

BE HEARD! There are many opportunities in the review process to make your voice heard.

Pre-Application Phase

PRE-APPLICATION MEETING*
The applicant meets with city planners to discuss the project’s details and receive direction on materials and permit requirements.

PUBLIC NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING*
The applicant must hold a public meeting to review the project and answer questions with owners, occupants and neighborhood associations of properties within the designated outreach area. Property owners and residents may ask questions, state concerns and request changes.

Depending on the type of feedback received, the developer may opt to redesign the project and hold an additional neighborhood meeting before submitting to the City.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION
The applicant submits the project application. Applications are due the last Tuesday of each month.

*Not required for Design Review
Review Phase

4 PROJECT REVIEW
Once the application is submitted to the city, it is assigned to a member of the Planning Team for review. They base their review on Development Code requirements, guidance of the Comprehensive Plan, comments from partner agencies and other city departments, and comments received from the public.

As part of the process, the city sends the application to the relevant neighborhood association for review. Many associations post information about the development proposals on their websites or send emails to their membership lists. Boise’s neighborhood associations are listed at ENERGIZEOURNEIGHBORHOODS.ORG.

5 PUBLIC NOTICE
For most applications, property owners and residents receive a mailed notification 15 days prior to the public hearing. Notice is also posted on-site and published in the newspaper 15 days before the hearing. The notification provides details about the project, contact information for the assigned planner and directions to find more information on the city’s PDS Online system at CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PERMITS.

6 PUBLIC COMMENTS
The public may submit written comments (including email) any time after the application is received and up to 5 p.m. the Thursday prior to the public hearing. Comments may be submitted to the assigned City Planner, or emailed to zoninginfo@cityofboise.org. All comments submitted within this time-frame will be added to public record for the project. However, providing comments two weeks prior to the scheduled hearing for the project ensures that staff will have time to review them before turning in the staff report. Any comments received after this deadline must be provided in the form of public testimony at the hearing.
Decision Phase

7 STAFF REPORT
Planners make recommendations based on the development code, comprehensive plan, public agency comments and comments from the public; however, the final decision is made by the hearing body.

Staff reports are available one week before the public hearing. Go to CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PUBLICMEETINGS.

8 PUBLIC HEARING
Public hearings are held in Boise City Hall, 150 N. Capitol Blvd.
In general, the hearing proceeds in the following order:

- The Planning Team presents their recommendation.
- The applicant makes their presentation.
- There is a brief Q & A to clarify any aspects of the project before public testimony begins.
- Registered neighborhood associations speak first. They may take as much time as the applicant, up to 30 minutes.
- Members of the public each have three minutes to comment on the project.
- The applicant has an opportunity to rebut.
Next, the review body makes a recommendation or final decision (known as “findings”). It may include **CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL** to ensure compliance with the zoning code. In general, approval or denial of a project is based on:

- Consistency with the comprehensive plan/policy documents
- Compatibility with adjacent uses
- Adequacy of infrastructure/ability to provide services
- Compliance with applicable zoning regulations

**Appeal Phase**

Anyone providing comment, either in writing or as public testimony, is considered a “**PARTY OF RECORD**.” This qualifies them to appeal any decision or condition for a project to the next level of review. The appeal period closes 10 days after a decision is made.

**APPEAL**

There are three levels of appeals:

- Appeals of Administrative decisions are heard by the respective commission (Planning & Zoning, Design Review or Historic Preservation).
- Appeals of Committee/Commission decisions are heard by City Council.
- Appeals of City Council decisions are heard in District Court and then State Supreme Court, if necessary.
PARTNER AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS

City planners seek input from other city departments and partner agencies in making recommendations and decisions. These are the most common agencies that provide input.

ADA COUNTY HIGHWAY DISTRICT (ACHD) has jurisdiction over and is the decision making body for all public right-of-way within the City of Boise and Ada County and is responsible for the design and maintenance of all streets, including curb, gutter, sidewalk and bike facilities. ACHDIDaho.ORG

BOISE POLICE DEPARTMENT (BPD) specifically comments on projects per the guidelines of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which focuses on how changes to the built environment can deter criminal behavior. CITYOFBOISE.ORG/POLICE

BOISE PUBLIC WORKS is responsible for reviewing drainage, street lights, solid waste, sewer, floodplain, hillside grading and pressurized irrigation. CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PUBLICWORKS

CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT (CDHD) ensures essential public health services are made available to protect the health of all citizens in Boise and the Treasure Valley. CDHD comments on centralized water and sewer systems for new development, and environmental health regulations regarding food establishments and child care facilities. CDHD.IDAHO.GOV

BOISE FIRE DEPARTMENT (BFD) is responsible for providing emergency services throughout Boise. BFD reviews new buildings and projects for compliance with the International Fire Code, emergency access and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) compliance. CITYOFBOISE.ORG/FIRE

BOISE PARKS AND RECREATION (BPR) maintains, designs and provides programming for Boise’s parks, Foothills trails, Greenbelt pathways, hundreds of acres of open space, Zoo Boise, two golf courses, six outdoor pools and a number of community centers. Large-scale developments often work with BPR to dedicate new park land and create new connections to Foothills trails and the Greenbelt. CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PARKS
IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPT (ITD) has jurisdiction over the state highway system, including the design and maintenance of sections of State Street, Broadway Avenue, Front Street, Myrtle Street, Chinden Boulevard and Eagle Road. ITD.IDAHO.GOV

SCHOOL DISTRICTS. The Boise School District and West Ada School District are responsible for the oversight, development and maintenance of the public education system in Boise and the Treasure Valley. The school districts review new developments to determine impacts on public schools, in terms of new student demand and safe routes to school. BOISESCHOOLS.ORG and WESTADA.ORG.

VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSIT (VRT) is responsible for the public transportation system that serves Boise and the Treasure Valley. VRT reviews new developments for impacts to existing or planned public transportation routes, including the need for improvements, such as additional bus stops, bus shelters, etc. VALLEYREGIONALTRANSIT.ORG

IRRIGATION DISTRICTS. There are several irrigation districts throughout Boise and the Treasure Valley. New developments within irrigation service areas must coordinate with Public Works and irrigation districts on the protection, use and maintenance of irrigation company facilities.
APPLICATIONS AND REVIEW AUTHORITY

CITY COUNCIL
- Annexation
- Comprehensive Plan Amendment
- Rezone
- Subdivision

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
- Conditional Use Permit
- Planned Unit Development
- Variance

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
- Certificate of Appropriateness

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE
- Design Review
RESOURCES

PDS WEBPAGE

PDS.CITYOFBOISE.ORG/PLANNING

• Zoning Code
• Zoning Districts
• Blueprint Boise (Comprehensive Plan)
• State Code (Local Land Use Planning Act)

BOISE CITY CODE

CITYOFBOISE.ORG/CITY-CODE
GLOSSARY

APPROVAL CRITERIA
Also referred to as “Findings,” are the specific principles or standards that must be followed or incorporated into any development based on the associated entitlement. These typically include compatibility of the proposed project to the surrounding uses and/or neighborhood; compliance with the Development Code and Comprehensive Plan; and level of impact to public services and facilities.

BLUEPRINT BOISE
Boise’s Comprehensive Plan. It establishes an overall vision for the city and provides the general policy guidance to achieve it. It breaks the city into geographic planning areas.

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL
These are conditions attached to an approved entitlement that form part of a mutually accepted contract between the City and the applicant, property owner, or future property owners that state specific actions required to allow a use to commence or how it will operate into the future. These may include hours of operation, landscaping/screening requirements, improvements to public services and facilities, etc. (Source: Christopher Netherway PPT - https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/1167)

DESIGN REVIEW OVERLAY DISTRICT
Design Review Overlay Districts are intended to encourage building and site designs that enhance the surrounding environment, are compatible with nearby properties, and are consistent with the goals of the City.

HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICTS
Design Review Overlay Districts are intended to encourage building and site designs that enhance the surrounding environment, are compatible with nearby properties, and are consistent with the goals of the City.
GLOSSARY

OVERLAY ZONES

An Overlay Zone is a zoning district which is applied over one or more previously established zoning districts, establishing additional or stricter standards and criteria for covered properties in addition to those of the underlying zoning district. (Source American Planning Association)

PARTY OF RECORD

Anyone who submits written or verbal testimony at a public hearing. Only someone designated as a “party of record” can file an appeal of the decision.

STAFF REPORT

The report that city planners present to the relevant decision-making body. The report has a recommendation for approval or denial that is based on specific review criteria set out in the Zoning Ordinance, Blueprint Boise, area master plans, neighborhood plans, etc. The report also includes the requirements of other public agencies that reviewed the project, as well as correspondence received from the public.

ZONING

Boise’s Zoning Ordinance governs land use within the city. It establishes allowed and prohibited uses (as well as uses allowed under specific conditions) for every property in the city.
APPLICATION TYPES

ABBREVIATIONS

• CAA – Staff Level Permits
• CAR – Annexation/Rezone
• CFH – Floodplain/Hillside Permit
• CPA – Comprehensive Plan Amendment
• CSN – Sign Permit
• CUP – Conditional Use Permit
• CVA – Variance
• CZC – Zoning Certificate/Zoning Verification Letter
• DRH – Design Review/Historic Preservation
• PAC - Pre-Application Conference
• PUD – Planned Unit Development
• ROS – Record of Survey
• SOS – Subdivision Other Stuff
• SUB – Subdivision
• ZOA – Zoning Ordinance Amendment
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<td>Open Land, Reserve</td>
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<td>Single Family Residential, Suburban</td>
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<td>R-1C</td>
<td>Single Family Residential, Urban</td>
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<td>R-1M</td>
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For more information visit: cityofboise.org/zoning-districts