

Public Participation Guidelines for Land Use Decisions

Municipal planning and zoning decisions allow for public input and feedback, although the role, format, and timing of public input vary considerably depending on the circumstances.

Master Plan, Redevelopment, and Changes to Zoning Laws

Public input has its opportunity for greatest impact when a municipality is reviewing and/or revising its Master Plan or initiating a redevelopment process.

A Master Plan is the [blueprint for a municipality](#) that depicts current land uses, and guides decisions for both growth and conservation in a community. It can identify suitable districts for commercial or housing developments; farming, open space, recreational areas, and environmental resources; historic and cultural resources; and transportation corridors and utilities. Under New Jersey state law, municipalities must formally review their Master Plan every ten years, and the process allows for public input.

The public has formal input, as well, into [redemption projects](#) initiated by a municipality to rebuild or restore an area that is in a measurable state of decline, disinvestment, or abandonment. The goal is to transform an underutilized or distressed area into an economically viable and productive part of the community.

Both the Master Plan and Redevelopment processes can lead to changes in zoning that impact not only individual landowners but also the broader community, long into the future. Montgomery Township encourages individuals and organizations to weigh in during these decision-making processes.

Review Process for Individual Development Processes

Developers, businesses, homeowners, and other landowners are generally required to come before municipal land-use boards to seek approval prior to undertaking projects to build, expand, demolish, or otherwise make improvements or changes to their properties.

The Planning Board generally deals with larger projects involving subdivisions of land commercial site plans, and bulk variances associated with a subdivision or site plan, while the Zoning Board of Adjustment typically deals with smaller-scale projects that solely involve variances to land use laws, but also, from time to time, use variance applications. Some

projects will also involve consultation with other township boards and committees, such as the Landmarks or Environmental Commissions.

Both the Planning and Zoning boards perform quasi-judicial roles in evaluating projects and therefore must follow strict guidelines; decisions generally are subject to judicial review. Public testimony is subject to cross-examination by the applicant's attorney. In some cases, owners of neighboring properties will retain their own attorney. Township land-use attorneys and board chairpersons will provide guidance intended to direct the public to limit comments to topics that the board is allowed to consider. Written statements, emails, or letters from individuals who are not present, petitions, or speaking on anyone else's behalf are not allowable. Unsolicited communications sent to elected officials or board members generally cannot be included in the public record and are discarded.

If you have questions about participation in land-use decision-making, contact the Montgomery Township Planning Department.