

# Town of Reading Site Plan Review Basics



## What is Site Plan Review?

The purpose of Site Plan Review is to promote development that will be beneficial to the community and to protect the community from potentially harmful impacts, by determining the most appropriate use of the land consistent with the Zoning Bylaw and the Reading Master Plan. Site Plans show the layout, design, and construction of buildings, structures, utilities, accessories, paving, walkways and plantings on a site. Elements that must be addressed in a Site Plan include:

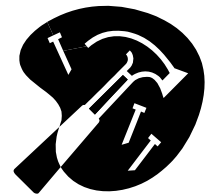
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Emergency vehicle access</li><li>• Utility &amp; drainage connections</li><li>• Existing trees, slopes, stone walls</li><li>• Wetland areas &amp; plants</li><li>• Storm water control</li><li>• Soil erosion control</li><li>• Air and water pollution controls</li><li>• Groundwater protection</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pedestrian and vehicle safety</li><li>• Impact on scenic views</li><li>• Screening with landscaping or fencing</li><li>• Light intrusion on adjacent properties</li><li>• Architectural character and building scale</li><li>• Compliance with Zoning By-Laws</li><li>• Landscaping and site amenities</li><li>• Impact on neighbors</li></ul>
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All of these elements should be handled in ways that protect the public's interest in safety and economy and protect against some of the possible bad outcomes of site development. Site Plan Review is performed by Town Staff and the CPDC in a series of meetings and public hearings.

## Development that Requires Site Plan Review

Site Plan Review is required for most construction that is not a one or two-family house. For any institutional, commercial, industrial, or multi-family structure with four or more dwelling units, Site Plan Review is required prior to:

- Initial construction or substantial reconstruction
- Exterior alteration or expansion over 300 ft<sup>2</sup>
- Change of use category (e.g. commercial to retail)
- Construction or expansion of a parking lot



Site Plan approval must be obtained before a building permit is issued.

**Exemptions** generally apply to:

- Maintenance or repairs of existing buildings
- Exterior work affecting less than 300 gross square feet
- Interior work affecting less than 1,000 gross square feet
- Work involving internal electrical, plumbing, or mechanical systems

Site Plan Review is not required in the above cases.

**Waiver** may be granted by the CPDC, with or without conditions, for:

- Interior-only renovation of an existing space, AND the renovation will not have negative impacts (*see below*).
- A change of use within the same use category, AND the change will not have negative impacts.
- The property has been through Site Plan Review in the past five years.

A Site Plan Review Waiver requires submission of a plan and a scheduled meeting with the CPDC.

Flooding, light glare, erosion, traffic hazards, obstruction of scenic views, noise, traffic, trash, contamination or aesthetic problems sometime affect the areas adjacent to development. The Site Plan Review procedure gives the community some control over development impacts by working with the property owner or builder to shape the development in the best manner possible, and to place certain conditions on the development.

### What does the CPDC look for?



The Reading Zoning By-law (Section 4.3.3.6) tells the CPDC and the property owner that Site Plans and the CPDC's written Decision must specifically ensure:

1. Adequate provision of access for fire and service equipment
2. Adequate provision for utilities and storm water drainage
3. Minimize cut and fill of existing slopes
4. Minimize mature tree removal (6" caliper size or larger)
5. Minimize removal of all or part of existing stone walls
6. Minimize wetland vegetation removal or alteration
7. Minimize storm water flow from the site
8. Minimize soil erosion on and adjacent to the site
9. Minimize the threat of air and/or water pollution
10. Minimize groundwater contamination from on-site disposal or runoff of hazardous substances
11. Maximize pedestrian and vehicle safety
12. Minimize obstruction of scenic views
13. Screen parking, storage and outdoor service areas through landscaping or fencing
14. Minimize headlight glare and light intrusion on adjacent areas
15. Ensure that character, materials and scale of buildings is not an "unreasonable departure" from the surrounding area
16. Ensure compliance with the Reading Zoning By-Laws
17. Maximize property enhancement with landscaping and other site amenities
18. Minimize impacts on adjacent property through limitations on hours of operation, deliveries, noise, rubbish removal and storage



### **How long does it take to get approval of a Site Plan?**

Once a complete application is received, an application for Site Plan Review is usually heard within five weeks. A legal notice has to be published and abutting property owners must be notified by mail two weeks before the meeting. A minor project can be decided in one meeting if enough information is given about the project, and the concerns listed above are all addressed. Larger developments, for example construction of a new store or restaurant from the ground up, may take two or three meetings or more. The CPDC usually meets the second and fourth Monday of the month except for holidays and during Town Meeting months.

### **How long is it good for?**

A Site Plan Decision will lapse after 2 years unless “a substantial use” of it has been made, except for good cause. Extension requires application to the CPDC.

### **Can an approved Site Plan and Decision be changed later?**

Yes. The CPDC will consider applications for minor modifications or major modifications to approved Site Plans, and issue a written Decision, with or without conditions.

### **Can I meet informally first?**

Applicants are invited and encouraged to submit a sketch or draft plans to the CPDC for comment before applying for a Site Plan Review. Also, Town Staff meet together early with applicants, at their request, as a Design Review Team (DRT) to comment informally and advise on best approaches to site design and permitting.

### **For More Information**

Visit the website at [www.ci.reading.ma.us](http://www.ci.reading.ma.us) and click on “Departments,” then click on “Planning,” then click on “Zoning By-Law” link and Site Plan Review is Section 4.3.3.

Applications for Site Plan Review and for Waivers of Site Plan Review are available in the Community Services Department at Town Hall and can be downloaded from the Town’s website.

Applicants or potential applicants are encouraged to discuss their concept plans with Town staff (the Town Planner – 781-942-6612) as soon as possible. This will expedite the process and make the best use of resources.