

City of San Diego Development Services Department

Development Process: Step by Step

See also [Municipal Code - Chapter 11: Land Development Procedures Definitions](#)

A

Agricultural Zones – See Zoning Types

Assessed Value (AV) is the amount used by the county tax assessor to value real property for tax purposes. Assessed value is usually the market value of the property. Assessed value multiplied by the tax rate is the property tax.

B

Business Improvement Districts (BID) imposes assessments on downtown businesses in order to undertake promotional activities, such as public events, and improve the overall surrounding environment. The business self-assessments enable the business community to enhance and promote its unique urban characteristics. BID's include City Heights, Downtown San Diego, North Park, Mission Hills, and numerous others.

C

Certificate of Occupancy is a certificate that is issued by the zoning officer to indicate that, after construction of a building has been completed or a use in an existing building has been changed, the purpose for which the building was constructed is being carried out in accordance with the terms of the zoning ordinance.

Commercial Zone - See Zoning Types

A **Community Plan** provides long-range physical development guidelines for elected officials and citizens engaged in community development. Land use proposals and development guidelines cannot, however, be implemented unless appropriated zoning controls are adopted. Community Plan recommendations and guidelines are implemented through the zoning that is placed on the land.

Comprehensive Zoning is a zoning ordinance and map, based on sound comprehensive studies and investigations and a master plan for the municipality. It is founded on comprehensive studies dealing with land use, population, traffic circulation, the economy, and municipal services and facilities, as well as a project future land-utilization plan.

Conditional Use Permit (CUP) is given to certain classes of land use that are not permitted by right in some or all zones of the City, but are nevertheless recognized as being desirable to the full function of the City under appropriate circumstances. The purpose is to provide a means whereby proposals for such land uses may be examined on a case by case to determine whether, and under what conditions, these uses may be approved at a given site.

D

Development Impact Fees (DIF) is a fee or charge imposed on developers to pay for the costs to a community by providing infrastructure and services to a new development. It is a means of providing a fund for financing new public improvements without resorting to deficit financing.

Development Rezoning refers to the attachment of special conditions to a zoning code which are not spelled out in text of the ordinance. Along with other devices to ensure compliance, it may bind the developer to the conditions filing a covenant.

Development Rights is a term applied to a broad range of less-than-fee-simple ownership interests mainly referring to easement. Thus the owner can retain complete or absolute (fee simple) rights to his/her land use and sell the development rights to another. The owner would keep the title but agree to continue using the land as it had been used in the past with the right to develop resting in the holder of the development rights.

Downzoning refers to a change in the zoning classification of land to a classification

permitting development that is less intensive or dense, such as from multifamily to single-family or from commercial or industrial to residential. A change in the opposite direction is called upzoning.

Discretionary Permit is a permit which requires the exercise of judgment or deliberation when the public agency decides to approve or disapprove a particular activity, as distinguished from situation where the public agency merely has to determine whether there has been conformity with applicable statutes, ordinances, or regulations (Ministerial Permit). Discretionary uses are reserved for projects where it is difficult to prescribe satisfactory standards and conditions without seeing details of the project

E

Entitlement is the granting of approval for a specific site to be able to carry out a specific action. This generally involves a discretionary review during the early stages of land development, and grants the right to carry out the specific action at that site, subject to the specific findings of the grantor that is delineated in a written document. The actual performance of the action may require additional ministerial approvals or permits.

F

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is defined as the ratio of the size of the structure on a parcel compared to the size of the lot. FAR regulations give developers great flexibility in deciding whether to build a low building covering most of the lot or high building covering only a small part of the lot so long as the total allowed is not exceeded. Some zoning ordinances offer an incentive in form of higher FAR in order to reduce site coverage and thus encourage provision of plazas and other spaces on ground level.

H

Highest and Best Use for property will bring its owner the greatest profit it offered for sale. In theory the economics of the real estate market establish a maximum value for each parcel of land at any given time. Except in developed areas or along transportation corridors where there is pressured to develop this "highest and best use" is likely to be agricultural or residential. For example, while a gas station built on particular site might give the owner the greatest return zoning might only allow for single-family homes. Thus one purpose of zoning is to prevent the "highest and best use" where it is inappropriate.

I

Infrastructure consists of public improvements which support development, including street lighting, sewers, flood control facilities, water lines, gas lines, telephone lines and more.

L

Land Use Plan refers to the proposed or projected utilization of land resulting from planning and zoning studies. This is usually presented in map form indicating areas in which it would be most desirable to have residential, commercial, industrial, or other types of usage occur.

M

Manufacturing Zones – See Zoning Types

Market Value is what a willing seller could reasonably expect to receive if he/she were to sell the property on the open market to a willing buyer.

Master Plan is comprehensive plan for physical, social, economic, and environmental development of the municipality, including studies of land use, circulation, etc.. And a report presenting the objectives, assumptions, standards, and principals that are embodied in the plan. A Master Plan is usually a composite of mapped or written development policies for the municipality which is adopted by the Planning Commission after a public hearing.

Ministerial Review Permit involves only the use of set standards, codes and regulations in deciding how a project should be carried forth. Common examples include automobile registration; dog licenses; and marriage licenses. A building permit is ministerial if the ordinance requiring the permit limits the public official to determining whether the zoning

allows the structure to be built in the request location, if the structure meets the strength requirements, and the applicant has paid his/her fee.

Mixed-use Zoning describes zoning that permits a combination of usually separate uses within a single development. More recently the term has been applied in a more limited way to loosen up narrowly defined districts to permit appropriate mixtures, such as local shopping in residential areas and therefore more interesting and their livelier neighborhoods.

N

Nonconformities relate to lots uses of lots and structure and characteristic of uses that are prohibited under the terms of the zoning ordinance but were lawful at the date the ordinance's enactment. They are permitted to continue or are given time to become conforming. The continuation of such Nonconformities is based on the principal that laws cannot be applied retroactively unless there is a compelling reason - such as imminent danger to health - to do so.

O

Open Space Zone – See Zoning Types

P

Performance Standards state the minimum or maximum allowable limit on the effects or characteristic of a use. A building code for example, might specify a performance standard referring to the fire resistance of a wall, rather than specifying the construction materials. Performance standards in zoning might describe allowable uses with respect to smoke, odor, noise, heat vibration, glare, traffic generation, visual impact, and so on.

Permitted Use is a use by right that is specifically authorized in a particular zoning district. It is contrasted with special permit or conditional uses that are authorized only if certain requirements are met and approved by the City Council.

Planned Unit Development (PUD) described a form of development usually characterized by a unified site design for a number of housing units, clustering building and providing common open space; density increase; and a mix of building types and land uses. It permits the planning of a project and the calculation of densities over the entire development, rather than on an individual lot-by-lot basis. It also refers to a process mainly revolving around site-plan review, in which public officials have considerable involvement in determining the nature of the development. PUD allows the unified, and hence potentially more desirable and attractive development of an are based on a comprehensive site plan.

Principal Use is the main use of land or structures as distinguished from a secondary or accessory use. A house is a principal use in a residential area: a garage or pool is an accessory use. Zoning ordinances will often establish a general rule that only one principal structure or use will be permitted on each lot.

Project Area refers to the area which is designated in the redevelopment plan for redevelopment and revitalization.

R

Rehabilitation is meant to improve, alter, modernize or modify an existing structure to make it safe, sanitary and/or bring it up building code standards.

Relocation is the effort to assist and facilitate rehousing of people, businesses or organizations who are displaced due to redevelopment activities.

Residential Zone – See Zoning Types

Rezoning applies to both zoning amendments and zoning revisions. It is the commonly accepted term that refers to any change in the zoning ordinance. Rezoning can apply to a small area, a large portion of the municipality, or the entire community.

S

Special Permits allow uses of unique nature to be permitted in a zone in which it would not

ordinarily be a permitted use because of the additional safeguards that need to be placed in the special requirements.

Solid Waste Local Enforcement Agency (LEA) is a program within the Development Services Department, Land Development Review Division that is certified by the California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) to implement and enforce State solid waste laws and regulations at solid waste facilities in the City of San Diego. Regulated facilities include landfills (active and closed), transfer facilities, composting operations, burn ash sites, waste haulers, and waste tire generators. The LEA is also a reviewer on some development projects.

U

The **Underlying Zone** is a zone that is placed on a property which regulates the permitted use, bulk, and yard requirements. Underlying zones assume that everyone of the many areas of the city is similar to every other similarly zoned area. Many neighborhoods in San Diego have characteristics that are unique or have problems that are special but may not be apparent from study of the text of the zoning ordinance. Therefore, the **Overlay Zones** were established and put down on top of (overlapped) the Underlying (basic) Zones. Specific areas are singled out for special treatment because of their unique feature.

V

Variance is a device that grants a property owner relief from certain provisions of a zoning ordinance when, because of the particular physical surroundings, shape, or topographical condition of the property, compliance would be a hardship upon the owner. A variance may be granted for example to reduce yard or setback requirements, or the number of parking or loading spaces, or to increase the permitted size of a sign.

Z

Zoning is a legislative means of ensuring that land uses of community are property situated in relation to one another. The Zoning Ordinance regulates the use of all land. It outlines the kind of activity (uses) that can be established (permitted) in each zone. **Zoning** influences the kind of neighborhood people live and work in Zoning also influence the development potential and preserves the value of property. **Zoning** controls the type and intensity of development so that property can be adequately serviced by public facilities such as streets, schools, parks, water, and public services.

Zoning Amendments can change or revise the zoning ordinance or map. This must be done by legal process establishment by the enabling legislation of the particular municipality.

Zoning Appeal is an appeal filed by an individual who has applied to the zoning officer for a zoning permit and who has been turned down for noncompliance with the requirements of the ordinance. The appeal must also be filed on appropriate forms that have been adopted as part of the zoning policy.

Zoning Ordinance together with zoning map(s), spells out the terms and conditions of zoning within the municipality. It is put together as a written document setting forth all of the standards, procedures and requirements and is placed in legal form to be adopted, after a public hearing by the City Council.

Zoning Types

There are many different types of zone within our City, but generally the ZONES fall into five major categories:

AGRICULTURAL ZONES

Areas now used for agricultural and farming purposes which may be developed for urban use sometime in the future. It also includes military property.

COMMERCIAL ZONES

Areas intended for business which provide consumer goods and service and wide variety of commercial, retail, office and recreational uses.

MANUFACTURING ZONES Areas intended for research and development, factories, warehousing, and other industrial uses.

OPEN SPACE ZONE Areas identified for public recreational uses or to be left in a generally natural state.

RESIDENTIAL ZONE - Areas designated for single and multi-family residence.