

LAND USE PLANNING

10 RULES FOR HANDLING LAND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Guidelines Will Help Townships Cover All Bases When Processing Applications

Townships should make good use of this handy guide, which ensures that supervisors and employees know exactly what to do each and every time someone submits a land development plan.

BY PETER EISENBROWN, P.E. / VICE PRESIDENT, LUDGATE ENGINEERING CORP.

Your township's subdivision and land development ordinance may thoroughly outline requirements for developers, but have you established guidelines to help officials and employees process these applications properly?

If you haven't, you're not alone. The following rules, however, will help everyone understand what they need to do

and how to protect the township when presented with development plans:

1. Verify fees.

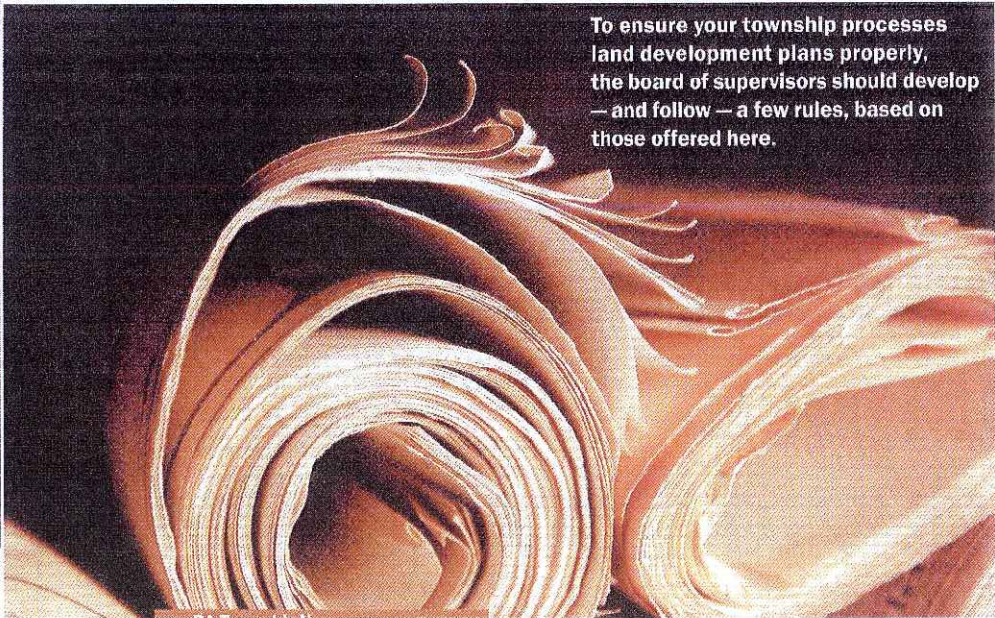
Townships should always verify that the fees developers are submitting are accurate based on the municipal fee schedule. To avoid confusion, some municipalities establish escrow accounts for these fees to eliminate the need to invoice applicants.

2. Make sure the application package is complete.

Townships should only accept plans that are accompanied by completed application forms, appropriate fees and permits, the correct number of plan copies, traffic and hydrogeologic studies, stormwater and wetland delineation reports, and anything else your subdivision and land development ordinance requires.

3. Require a municipal improvements agreement.

Townships should also be sure that they get a copy of a signed municipal improvements agreement. These agreements between the township and the developer, which must be executed before plans are released for recording, outline all improvements that need to be installed at the site. A form of



To ensure your township processes land development plans properly, the board of supervisors should develop — and follow — a few rules, based on those offered here.

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financial security must also accompany the agreement.

4. Never release a plan prematurely.

Development plans should only be released for recording after they have been approved and all fees have been paid. Therefore, before releasing a plan, townships should get in the habit of checking with consultants, including the engineer, to determine if the developer owes any additional fees.

5. Secure a copy of approved and recorded plans.

Since most subdivision and land development ordinances require applicants to submit copies of approved and recorded plans, townships should be certain to follow through on this

step, which guarantees that records are complete. At a minimum, a signed copy of an approved plan, preferably one that has been recorded, should also be submitted to the township engineer. The township solicitor can advise the supervisors on how to best enforce this policy.

6. Allow ample time for plan reviews.

Traditionally, most subdivision and land development ordinances require development plans to be submitted two weeks before a planning commission meeting. However, a deadline of three weeks would benefit both the township and, in particular, its consultants, who would then have ample time to review the plans, develop a response, and share information with planning commission members before their meeting.

7. Don't sign a plan until the review has been completed.

Townships should make certain that the engineer and solicitor have reviewed all conditionally approved plans

that have been revised and resubmitted. Likewise, these consultants must review all final plans for accuracy before they are signed and recorded. These steps guarantee that the plans have met all township regulations and requirements.

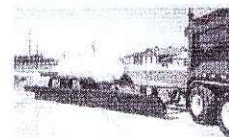
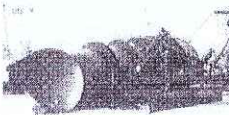
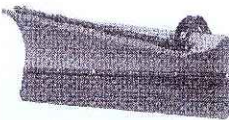
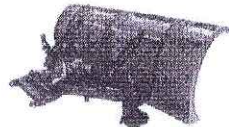
8. Keep an eye on the 90-day review clock.

When granted a 90-day extension to review land use applications, the township is responsible for securing a letter of extension from the applicant and for watching the clock. Keep in mind that your township must act within this 90-day time frame or the plan in question will be deemed approved.

9. Require developers to submit a letter of credit.

Township supervisors should require a letter of credit, which allows the township to seize available funds if a developer is unable to complete a project. The guaranteed credit line should cover all facets of construction, including inspections and contingencies.

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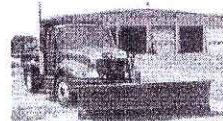
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In addition, if your township has a standard letter of credit, the board of supervisors should review it each year to ensure that the required funds are sufficient. After a developer requests a reduction in the letter of credit, the township engineer should inspect the site to verify that the work has been completed.

10. Encourage developers to discuss their plans with the planning commission before submitting them.

Holding informal discussions before plans are submitted allows major issues to be addressed, speeds along the review process, and lets applicants know where the board of supervisors and planning commission members stand. ♦

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About the author: Peter Eisenbrown has been with Ludgate Engineering Corp., a multidisciplinary consulting engineering firm based in Reading, for 19 years. He is a former municipal engineer.

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