



CITY OF
TALLAHASSEE



Zoning Spotlight

Site Plans and Subdivisions

Growth Management Department
December 19, 2023



Introduction

Welcome to Zoning Spotlight! This issue of Zoning Spotlight focuses on site plans and subdivisions. It's designed for citizens who would like to learn more about the development process.

There are also two tools on the Growth Management Department website that will help you better understand how site plans and subdivisions fit into the overall development process. First, the video [Permitting from Start to Finish](#) will walk you through the entire development process from beginning to end. Second, our website also has [flowcharts](#) that provide a detailed road map of the residential and commercial building permit process.

For now, think of development as having three big-picture stages. Stage 1 focuses on land use and includes both the [Future Land Use Map](#) (see page 26 of the hyperlink) and the [Zoning Map](#). This first stage just defines what land uses are allowable on a site. Stage 2 includes site plans and subdivisions. As will be explained in this report, they define how a particular land use will be arranged on a site, with emphasis on features outside the building like height, setbacks, parking, grading, stormwater, and more. Finally, stage 3 is the building permit, which documents the nuts and bolts of exactly how a building will be built.

The 3 stages described above build on each other and become more precise and detailed as a project proceeds. Keep in mind that as each stage is approved, subsequent stages cannot be used to revisit the prior approvals. For example, if the site of an office building has the correct land use approvals on the Future Land Use Map and the Zoning Map (stage 1), its site plan review (stage 2) isn't used to question whether an office may be built there. That review already occurred.

While reading, please keep in mind that if a conflict is ever identified between the Tallahassee Land Development Code (TLDC) and an issue of Zoning Spotlight, the Code takes precedence. The Zoning Spotlight reports don't replace the TLDC.

Site plans

You can think of a site plan as the bridge between the land use approvals and the building permit. For example, if a site is zoned for office, that simply tells you the allowable land use. It doesn't say where the office will be located on the property, how it will be landscaped, how many parking spaces are needed, or where it will be served by utilities. The site plan sets the stage, so to speak, for the detailed construction drawings in the building permit. Several frequently asked questions concerning site plans are answered below.

1. What types of projects need to do a site plan?

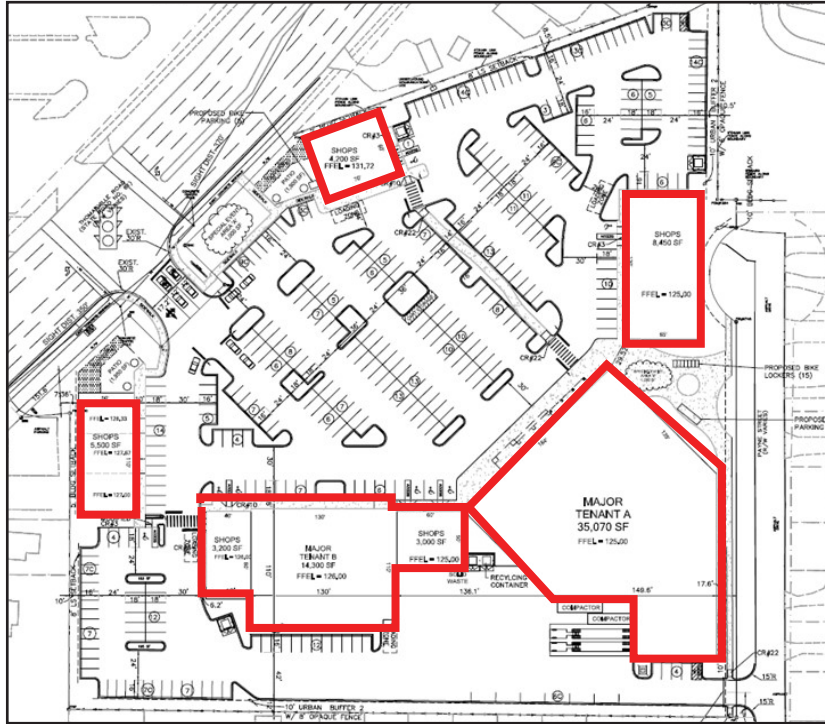
Generally, a site plan is required for any non-residential project bigger than 2,500 square feet and any residential project larger than a triplex. Site plans may also be required for other relatively uncommon circumstances.

2. What is the scope of a site plan review?

By the time a site plan application is filed, the appropriate land use on the Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map would already be in place. The land use would have been approved in an earlier public meeting. Therefore, the land use is not part of the scope of a site plan review. Instead, the site plan review focuses on whether the project meets the development standards in the TLDC.

Generally speaking, those standards zero in on where the new building is located on the site (e.g., setbacks





Site Plan for Whole Foods at Miracle Plaza



Aerial Showing Completed Whole Foods at Miracle Plaza

and height) and how it will be served by infrastructure (e.g., parking, grading, stormwater, utilities, landscaping, and so forth). When a site plan receives final approval, that means the land use is allowed, the location of the building is approved, and the site infrastructure that will support the proposed building has been identified.

3. *What does a site plan application look like?*

In the past, site plans were submitted on paper. Today, they are submitted electronically through the City's online permitting portal as PDF files. They always include multiple pages to address the individual issues listed in the answer to the next question. One of the site plan pages for the Whole Foods on Thomasville Road is shown above as an example, along with an aerial that illustrates how the finished construction matches the site plan.

4. *What must be included in a site plan application?*

Our website describes the [application requirements](#) for a site plan. Look for the headers labeled Type A and Type B site plan review for details. Also, [Sec. 9-152\(b\)\(3\), TLDC](#), includes a detailed list of the pages required in a site plan set. Some of the highlights include a grading plan, an off-street parking plan, a vehicle and pedestrian circulation plan, a utilities plan (e.g., drainage, potable water, sewer, stormwater, etc.), a landscape and open space plan, and various statistical information that describes the project.

5. *Can a developer build a structure that is different from what the site plan allows?*

Per [Sec. 9-191 and 9-192, TLDC](#), the only way a change can occur is if a site plan modification is approved. Minor modifications are available to (a) Move a road, walkway, or

building by not more than 20 feet; (b) Reduce open space or yard area by not more than 5%, provided minimum code standards are met; (c) Modify minor site features like the shape of landscape islands, open space, structures, or parking areas, and (d) Change fencing materials or the exact location of utilities. If a change doesn't qualify as a minor modification, then it must be resubmitted as an amended site plan.

6. *Are there different types of site plans?*

Yes. [Sec. 9-154 to 9-157, TLDC](#), creates four types of site plans, which are summarized below.

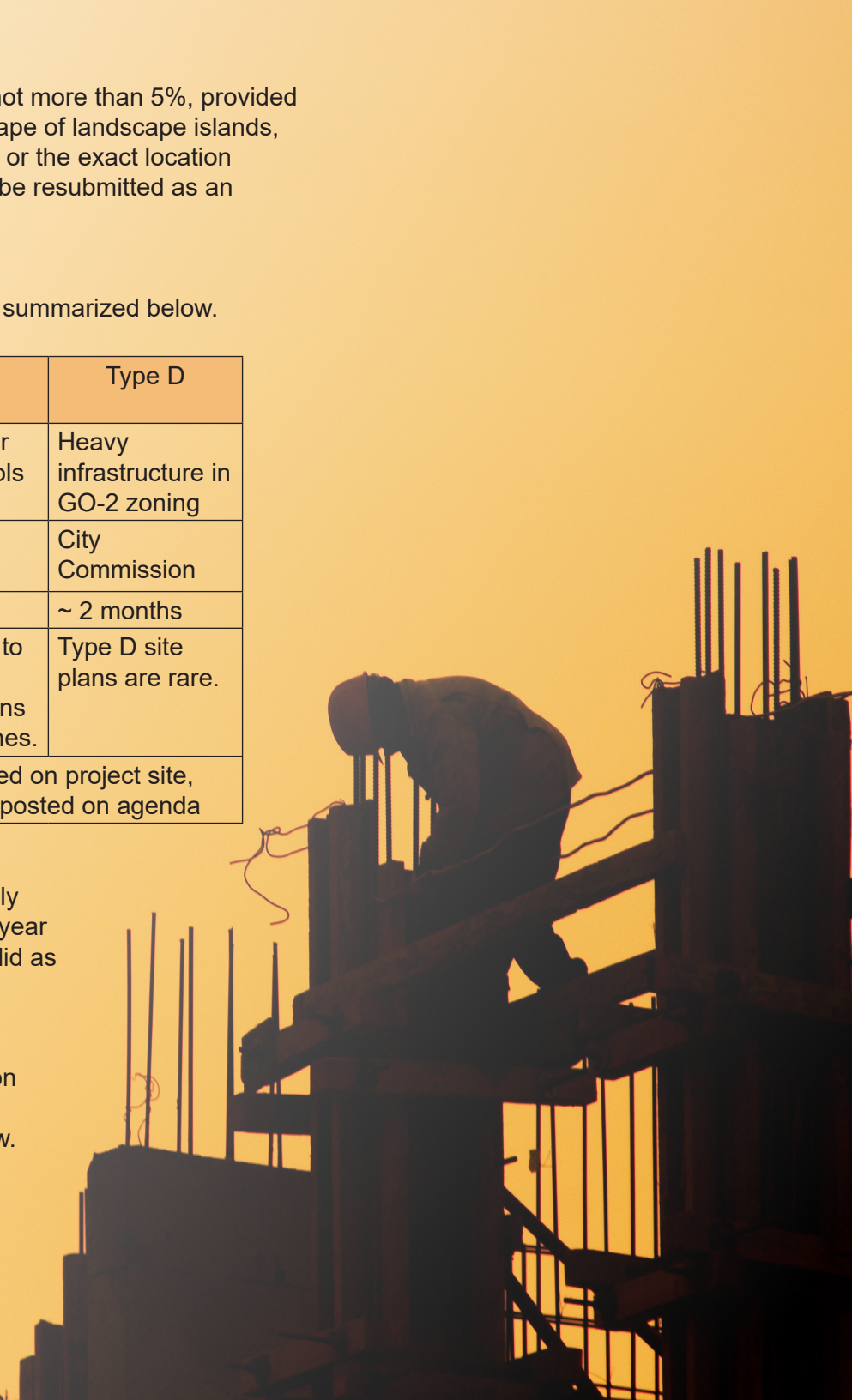
	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D
Type of project	Deviation from Land Development Code not allowed	Deviation from Land Development Code considered	New public or private schools	Heavy infrastructure in GO-2 zoning
Approving body	Site plan reviewers	Development Review Committee	Planning Commission	City Commission
Review time	1 week	1 month	~ 2 months	~ 2 months
Notes	Review is expedited to encourage code compliance.	If deviation is denied, site plan also denied or continued to future meeting	Only applies to new schools, not expansions to existing ones.	Type D site plans are rare.
Public notice	Posted on weekly agenda	Mailing to neighbors, sign posted on project site, newspaper advertisement, and posted on agenda		

7. *Does a site plan expire?*

Site plans are valid for 3 years from the date of approval. They automatically expire if no permits for on-site development are issued by the end of that 3 year period. When permits are issued, the site plan then continues to remain valid as long as the permit is active.

8. *Why are site plans typically approved conditionally after the first review?*

Staff from multiple departments review the application. The initial application typically results in a conditional approval, which means that the applicant must make a correction to the site plan and resubmit it for a follow up review. A site plan never receives final approval until all City staff comments are resolved.



Subdivisions

A few pages ago, this report described a site plan as a bridge between the land use approval and the building permit. A subdivision serves a similar purpose. Let's say that there are 100 acres in the City with a Future Land Use Map designation of Residential Preservation and a Zoning Map designation of Residential Preservation-1 (RP-1). The Future Land Use Map allows a potential density of up to 6 units per acre, but the TLDC fine tunes that further by allowing 3.6 units per acre, or a total of up to 360 units on 100 acres. Knowing that single family residential is allowed at up to 3.6 units per acre doesn't provide sufficient detail to issue building permits on individual lots.

At this point, it isn't known where the individual lots are located, how they will be accessed by roads, or how they will be served by needed utilities. That's where a subdivision enters the picture. It answers all of those questions and provides the detailed framework for issuing building permits for specific lots. There are three different types of subdivision applications, as shown by the table at the right. Also, several frequently asked questions concerning subdivisions are provided below.

1. *What types of projects need a subdivision?*

A subdivision is necessary if the goal of the development is for each lot to be under separate ownership. The subdivision is the legal instrument that creates the individual lots.

	Limited Partition	Preliminary or Final Plat	Technical Amendment
Type of project	≤ 10 single family residential lots or ≤ 5 duplex lots	> 10 lots (See "Notes" below.)	Intended for minor changes to lots not part of recorded plat.
Approving body	Development Review Committee	Development Review Committee	Land Use Administrator
Review time	1 month	1 month	1 month
Notes	See Sec. 9-91, TLDC for more criteria.	See Sec. 9-92, TLDC for more criteria. May have new streets and water/ sewer.	See Sec. 9-97, TLDC for more criteria.
Public notice	Mailing to neighbors, sign posted on project site, newspaper advertisement, and posted on agenda		NA





2. *Are subdivisions only needed for residential development?*

No. They're often needed for commercial development. For example, an office park would typically require a subdivision to sell each building on individual lots to separate owners.

3. *Does a subdivision take the place of a site plan?*

No. A subdivision creates multiple lots, whether for nonresidential or residential use. Once the subdivision is approved and the lots are created, each nonresidential project larger than 2,500 square feet and each residential project bigger than a triplex also requires a site plan. The subdivision creates the lots, but the site plan determines how buildings will be sited and designed on each lot.

4. *What is the scope of a subdivision review?*

The scope of review for subdivisions is found in the TLDC. First, [Chapter 5](#) defines standards related to environmental preservation and stormwater management. Second, [Chapter 9](#) focuses on required utilities like water and sewer. Finally, each zoning district

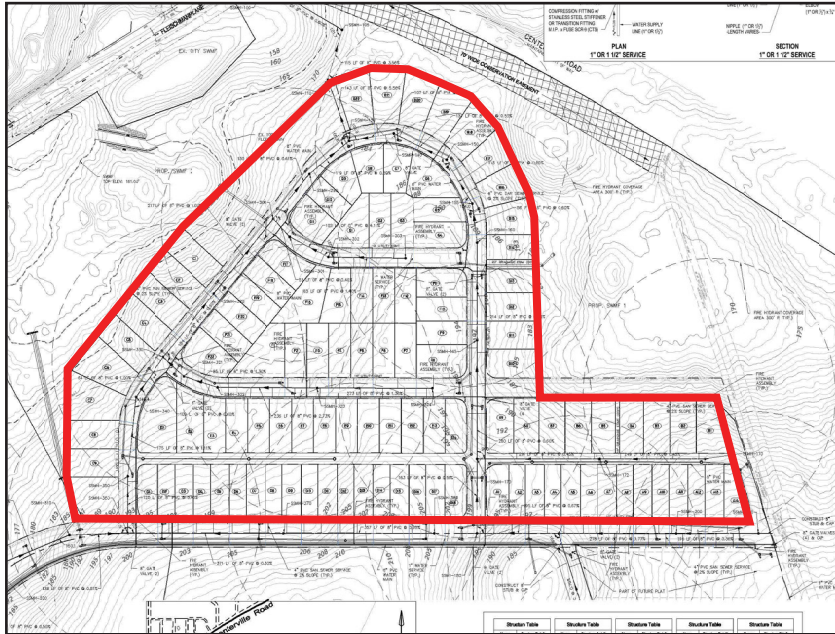
in [Chapter 10](#) provides minimum standards for density, lot size, and similar features.

5. *What must be included in a subdivision application?*

The submittal requirements for a subdivision are found in [Sec. 9-92 and 9-93, TLDC](#), and on the City's website [here](#). Highlights from the list of requirements for the preliminary plat include a vicinity map, a boundary survey, all roads, an environmental analysis, open space, lot lines with dimensions, and conceptual plans for stormwater management, water, and sewer.

6. *What does a subdivision application look like?*

The answer is basically the same as was mentioned above for site plans. In the past, subdivisions were submitted on paper. Today, they are submitted electronically through the City's online permitting portal as PDF files. They always include multiple pages to address the individual issues listed in the answer to the previous question. One of the subdivision pages for the Canopy



Plat for Subdivision in Canopy Development



Aerial of Completed Subdivision in Canopy Development

neighborhood along Welaunee Boulevard is shown above, along with an aerial that illustrates how the finished construction matches the subdivision.

7. *What is a plat?*
[Chapter 1, TLDC](#), defines a plat as “A map or delineated representation of the subdivision of lands, being a complete exact representation of the subdivision and including other information as required by the applicable laws of the state and chapter 9, pertaining to subdivisions, and which has been placed in the official records of the county.” In other words, a plat is a subdivision application that fully complies with the TLDC, has been approved by the City, and has been recorded in the public records.
8. *What’s the difference between a preliminary plat and a final plat?*
 A preliminary plat shows the location of the lots, the roads, the stormwater ponds, and all other infrastructure, but nothing is yet

built. The final plat must be consistent with the preliminary plat. At the final plat, however, all improvements from the preliminary plat must either be installed or guaranteed. If the improvements are installed, the approval of the plat is the City’s acceptance of the improvements and the public lands. If the improvements are guaranteed, collateral is required (as defined in the TLDC) that covers 110% of the cost of the improvements, which must be completed within 12 months. Also, the final plat must be consistent with the Florida Statutes, recorded in the public records, and approved by the City Commission.

9. *Do small and large subdivisions follow the same process?*
 No. Small subdivisions are eligible for an abbreviated process known as a [limited partition](#) if they meet the following criteria (a) The site is an unrecorded residential lot on an existing street; (b) The subdivision is no more than 10 single family detached lots, 5 single family attached lots, or 5 duplex lots; (c) The zoning district’s density will not be exceeded; (d) No new driveway to an

arterial road or a major collector road is allowed; (e) No new street is created; (f) Extension of water and sewer mains is not allowed; and (g) No prior limited partition was approved on the site. Likewise, a technical amendment doesn't create new lots, applies only in limited circumstances, and is therefore reviewed by staff.

10. Who has the authority to approve a subdivision?

Subdivision approval goes through two approval bodies. The Development Review Committee meets twice per month and approves limited partitions and preliminary plats. The City Commission approves final plats.

11. Can changes occur to a subdivision after it is approved?

Changes to a recorded subdivision typically require a new preliminary and final plat. The final plat for an approved subdivision can't be changed after it's recorded in the public records. That's why a new plat is typically required if changes are proposed. As detailed in [Sec. 9-97, TLDC](#), technical amendments are the exception. Technical amendments are only an option if the following criteria are met (a) It isn't a recorded plat; (b) No new lots or streets are created; (c) The new lots still meet zoning standards; (d) The orientation of a lot next to a street doesn't change; (e) No streets are vacated; and (f) The change doesn't require a hearing.

12. How long does it take for a subdivision to be approved?

The Development Review Committee meets twice per month.

The meeting is typically scheduled about 30-45 days after an application is submitted, depending on when it was filed. The City Commission meeting is typically scheduled about 30 days after the City Engineer certifies that all improvements have either been completed or guaranteed by collateral.

13. Does the approval of a subdivision expire?

A preliminary plat expires 3 years after it was approved by the Development Review Committee, unless permits for on-site development are issued. Also, the final plat must be submitted within 3 years of the preliminary plat's approval. The TLDC allows extensions for just cause.

14. Why are subdivisions often approved conditionally at the first review?

Typically, the applicant must make a correction to the subdivision and resubmit it for a follow up review. A subdivision never receives final approval until all City staff comments are resolved.

Conclusion

Thanks for reading this issue of Zoning Spotlight! If you have questions, please let us know. You can reach our planning staff by calling (850) 891-7001, extension 4, or by email at zoning@talgov.com. We're located on the third floor of the Renaissance Building at 435 North Macomb Street in downtown Tallahassee.

