

Implementing Pre-Application Neighborhood Meetings in Prince George's County – A Discussion Paper

Prince George's County Planning Department

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Introduction

This discussion paper focuses on the pre-application neighborhood meeting and the meeting's importance in public participation during the development review process. Specifically, the paper identifies the requirements for pre-application neighborhood meetings in various jurisdictions and the proposed requirements for a pre-application neighborhood meeting in Prince George's County.

What is a Pre-application Neighborhood Meeting?

Pre-application neighborhood meetings are a common form of public participation in jurisdictions throughout the country. In practice, a pre-application neighborhood meeting is a community meeting for an applicant (or the person who is proposing a new development), residents, municipalities, business owners, and neighbors of an affected community to discuss a proposed development.

During these meetings, attendees are typically given basic information about the proposed project and written information that clearly explains the next steps in the process and how to remain engaged. Pre-application neighborhood meetings are often required for larger proposed development that would require a discretionary hearing or presentation in front of a development review entity. Meetings are held prior to an application being accepted by a local planning department. Applicants are responsible for notifying the public, facilitating the meeting, and recording community input. In some jurisdictions, staff planners are present to answer questions about the review process. While feedback from the neighborhood is not binding on the applicant, an open and collaborative dialogue is expected. A clear understanding of the project and potential issues and opportunities will benefit both applicant and neighbors alike during the application review process.

Why is a Pre-application Neighborhood Meeting Important?

Public participation increases with the use of pre-application neighborhood meetings. A pre-application neighborhood meeting provides residents, municipalities, business owners, neighborhood associations, and other interested parties with the opportunity to become aware of proposed new development projects and to provide input on the conceptual design of the project. Applicants can share their concepts with interested parties and can make adaptations to the project based on neighborhood feedback. This community dialogue takes place entirely outside of the formal public hearing process and in advance of incurring major detailed design and engineering expenses, making the applicant more willing to incorporate changes. The early discussions can help reduce stakeholder anxiety by providing them with clearer guidance on the proposed development.

Pre-application neighborhood meetings are common components of the development review process in many communities. Although some developers choose to hold at least one such meeting, there is no provision requiring an applicant to meet with the community prior to submitting a development application under Prince George's County's current Zoning Ordinance. In many cases, this leaves residents and neighbors uncertain about pending development and unaware of new development until a notice sign is posted 30 days before a public hearing. This lack of communication can foster mistrust and frustration from all parties involved. To remedy these concerns, Clarion Associates, consultants for the Prince George County Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Rewrite, have proposed that the modernized Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations incorporate requirements for pre-application neighborhood meetings for major applications—meaning those that would have the most potential impact on an existing community.

How Will Pre-Application Neighborhood Meetings be Implemented in Prince George's County?

Clarion Associates' recommendations would require pre-application neighborhood meetings prior to the submission of applications for Zoning Map Amendments, Special Exceptions, Major Detailed Site Plans, and Major Departures, and establish procedures for how the pre-application neighborhood meeting would be conducted. Pre-application neighborhood meetings are also encouraged for other application types. Clarion's proposal includes procedures requiring:

- Written notification of surrounding land owners, municipalities, and affected neighborhood organizations that is sent a reasonable period of time before the meeting.
- Meetings(s) to be held in close proximity to the affected neighborhood or land, within the affected municipality, or at a convenient location to the residents.
- Applicant to explain the development proposal and provide neighbors an opportunity to ask questions, provide comments, and voice concerns.
- Applicant to record and respond to community input to, ideally, resolve major outstanding issues.
- Provision of written information clearly explaining the next steps and informing the community on how to remain engaged.

The proposal requires that pre-application neighborhood meetings be held after 6:00 p.m. on a weekday at a location that is convenient and generally accessible to neighbors. However, staff have received feedback from community stakeholders and have directed Clarion to add Saturdays between the hours of 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. as acceptable times for a community meeting.

Applicants would be responsible for notifying the Planning Director, municipalities within a mile of the proposed development site, and land owners in the general vicinity of the land subject to the application, about the meeting. Additionally, a sign must be posted on the property to notify the community of the pre-application meeting. These notifications would be required at least 10 days prior to the meeting. Planning Department staff have heard from stakeholders that a 10-day notification period is not sufficient, and have directed Clarion to increase this to 30 days, pursuant to County Council direction. Staff recommends consideration be given to providing 15 days of notice in order to streamline the development procedures and timeframes.

The new Zoning Ordinance provides guidance for when a pre-application neighborhood meeting is required, the timing of notifications, and who is to be notified. Specific details of the conduct of the pre-

application neighborhood meetings will be outlined in the Applications (formerly Procedures) Manual. Staff has prepared a list of recommendations in this discussion paper that can be incorporated in the Application Manual to assist with the consistent facilitation and implementation of pre-application neighborhood meetings. This information is identified in three categories:

1. Information Provided by the Planning Department to the Applicant

- Requirements for what is to be included in mailing.
- Requirements for what is to be included on the posting.
- How to obtain mailing information/addresses.
- Suggested list of meeting locations.
- Samples/template documents:
 - Notice of pre-application neighborhood meeting.
 - Posting signs with minimum dimensions.
 - Meeting sign-in sheet.
 - Summary of discussion from the pre-application neighborhood meeting.
 - Application forms for informational mailings/community organization registration.

2. Information the Applicant Should Provide to Participants of the Pre-Application Neighborhood Meeting

- Map of the proposed development site clearly indicating site location and streets in the vicinity.
- Illustrations depicting the layout and design of the proposed development, existing conditions, and the neighborhood context.
- A development fact sheet that includes, but is not limited to, the size of the proposed project, proposed land uses, number of dwelling units, density of the project, building heights, and parking requirements.
- Information explaining the development review process and how members of the public can participate.
- Sign-in sheets that include the meeting date, meeting time, meeting address, project address, property owner name, project sponsor/representative, and space for participants to include their name, organization, address, phone number, email, and an option to have the applicant send them copies of plans.

3. Information the Applicant Should Submit to the Planning Department with the Application

- A copy of the letter mailed to neighbors and neighborhood organizations.
- A letter with postmark as proof of mailing.
- A list of persons and neighborhood organizations invited to the meeting.
- A copy of the sign-in sheet.
- Copies of materials distributed during the pre-application neighborhood meeting.
- A summary of the meeting and a list of any changes made to the project as a result of the neighborhood comments.

A summary of pre-application procedures from other jurisdictions follows.

Appendix: Pre-Application Meetings in Various Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Applicability	Notification	Conduct of Meeting
	When is a Pre-Application Meeting Required?	Who Gets Notified & When?	What Information is Provided at the Meeting?
Currituck County, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zoning map amendments ▪ Conditional rezonings ▪ Planned developments ▪ Use permits ▪ Type II preliminary plats of 50 lots or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to Planning Director and all property owners 200 feet away at least 10 days prior to the meeting. ▪ Posted Notice placed on land at least 10 days prior to the meeting, using a sign with a minimum size of 6 feet by 6 feet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explanation of the development proposal and application. ▪ Information about the review process.
Daytona Beach, FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Map amendments, e.g. site-specific or historic zoning district amendments ▪ Planned developments ▪ Special use permits ▪ Public or semipublic use permits ▪ Comprehensive plan amendments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to city staff, land owners, and registered persons or organizations within 300 feet of the site for map amendments, planned developments, or special use permit applications, or 150 feet away from the site for all other applications, at least 10 days prior to the meeting. ▪ Posted Notice placed on land at least 10 days prior to the meeting, in a form established by city staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explanation of the development proposal and application. ▪ Information about the application review process.
Fayetteville, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Map amendments ▪ Conditional rezonings ▪ Planned developments ▪ Site plans or subdivision plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to the city manager and all landowners 500 linear feet away from the site, at least 10 days prior to the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explanation of the development proposal and application. ▪ Information about the application review process.

Jurisdiction	Applicability		Notification		Conduct of Meeting	
	When is a Pre-Application Meeting Required?		Who Gets Notified & When?		What Information is Provided at the Meeting?	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Posted Notice placed beside each existing street or street stub connection at the site, at least 10 days prior to the meeting. 			
Rock Hill, SC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planned developments ▪ Land development 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to the city council or planning commission, all owners and occupants of land within 150 feet of the site, and registered persons or organizations, at least 10 days prior to the meeting. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explanation of the development proposal and application. 	
Pompano Beach, FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A neighborhood meeting is encouraged, but not required, before submittal of any application for a development permit reviewed under the code. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to the development services director and the owners of all properties adjoining or directly across the street from the site at least 10 days prior to the meeting. ▪ Posted Notice placed on the land at least 10 days prior to the meeting. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explanation of the development proposal and application. ▪ Information about the application review process. 	
City of Bellingham, WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some land use permits ▪ All comprehensive plan amendments 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to all persons on the mailing list at least 10 days before the meeting. ▪ Posted Notice placed on the project site in a location where it can be read from an abutting public street, at least 7 days prior to the meeting (14 days for a Type VI application). 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform residents about the proposal. ▪ Use maps and graphics to show where the property is located and what is proposed, including handout copies. ▪ Ensure technical advisors, such as an engineer or architect, are present to provide information and listen to comments. 	

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	When is a Pre-Application Meeting Required?		Who Gets Notified & When?		What Information is Provided at the Meeting?		
City of Burlington, Vermont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construction of 5 or more dwelling units through adaptive reuse ▪ Substantial rehabilitation of 15,000 sq. ft. or more of gross floor area of non-residential development ▪ Land disturbance of 1 acre or more ▪ Site improvements of 50 or more parking spaces ▪ Site improvements on parcels with designated wetlands or natural areas of state or local significance ▪ Site improvements on parcels seeking a waiver under “Brownfields” redevelopment ▪ Multiple projects by the same applicant within any consecutive 12-month period on the same property or on a property within 1,000 feet of the subject property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to all abutting property owners and occupants, or those within 400 feet of the project site, at least 15 days in advance of the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conceptual site plans showing the location of proposed buildings, roads, parking areas, landscaping, land uses. ▪ Conceptual building designs. ▪ A “development fact sheet” including the size of the proposed project, proposed land uses, number of dwelling units, density of the project, building heights, parking requirements, etc. ▪ Information about the formal development review process and how the public can participate. 				
San Francisco, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New construction ▪ Vertical addition of 7 feet or more ▪ Horizontal addition of 10 feet or more ▪ Decks over 10 feet above grade or within the required rear yard (excludes roof decks) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mailed Notice must be sent to all relevant neighborhood organizations, abutting property owners, and owners and occupants of land within a 300-foot radius of the project site, at least 14 calendar days before the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preliminary plans that include the height and depth of the subject building and its adjacent properties, and dimensions must be provided to help facilitate discussion. 				

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	When is a Pre-Application Meeting Required?	Who Gets Notified & When?	What Information is Provided at the Meeting?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All “Formula Retail” uses subject to a conditional use authorization Small business priority processing program On any project, but only at the request of department staff 		

Proposed for Prince George’s County

Jurisdiction	Applicability	Procedure	Meeting
	Mandatory for these zones	Who gets notified & When?	What documents are needed?
Prince George’s County, MD (Proposed, as modified by Council and stakeholder comments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parcel-specific map amendments Planned development (PD) map amendments Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Overlay Zone map amendments Special exceptions Major site plans Major adjustments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mailed Notice sent to the Planning Director, any municipality in which the land is located and every municipality located within 1 mile (5,280 feet) of the land subject to the application, property owners within 500 feet of the site, and registered civic associations, at least 30 days prior to the meeting date. Posted Notice placed on the land subject to the application at least 30 days before the date for the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of the development proposal and application, Information about the application review process.