

## Chapter 32: Development Review Process

A zoning ordinance or subdivision regulations will set forth the process for reviewing a proposed development project. Typically the process will consist of the following steps:

1. First, if necessary, the applicant requests a comprehensive plan amendment, annexation, a water and sewer plan amendment, or a change in zoning.
2. If the project requires a special exception, conditional use permit or a variance then a decision is made as to whether these approvals will be granted. In many cases a formal hearing is held.
3. A concept or sketch plan is submitted so staff and/or the Planning Commission can determine if there are any basic issues which would make eventual project approval unlikely.
4. Following concept or sketch plan approval, a more detailed preliminary plan is submitted along with various supporting documents such as a traffic impact study, stormwater management analyses and plans, architectural drawings, etc.
5. If preliminary plan approval is granted then the applicant proceeds with submission of the even more detailed plans required for final development/subdivision plan approval.
6. If the final development plan is approved then the applicant proceeds to the issuance of the grading and building permits required to actually break ground and start construction.

Many jurisdictions will combine similar steps in the process. For example, preliminary plan approval may be considered simultaneously with special exception-conditional use permit review. This is because both require a similar analysis and it is more efficient to carry out the analyses at the same time.

If you are grappling with a project which is so poorly conceived that the impacts cannot be resolved, then your best opportunity to defeat it will be at the first two steps in the development review process. In other words, you must start early and convince final decision-makers to deny the comprehensive plan amendment, annexation, a rezoning request, a special exception, the conditional use permit, or a variance. If a project is consistent with zoning and does not need a special exception, conditional use permit or a variance, then it is very likely that it will eventually be approved, as it should be. Your best opportunities to win changes that resolve project impacts will be at the first four steps in the process described above.