

UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

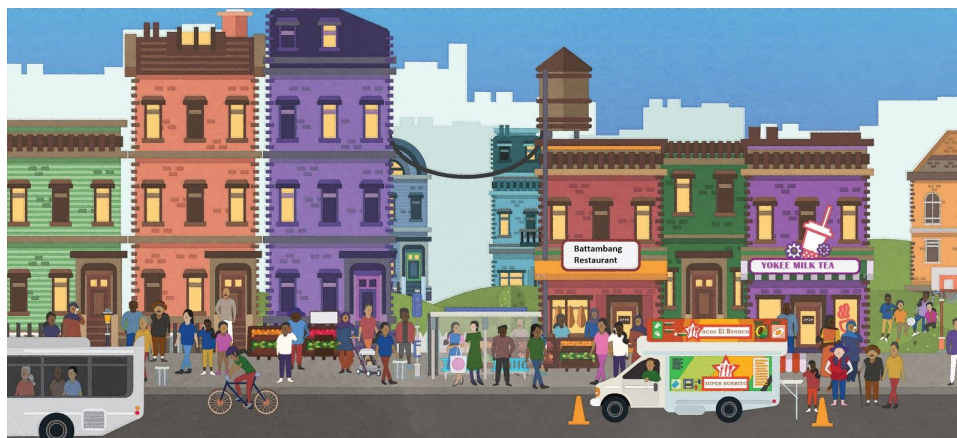
Timeline for Land Use Review Process

If you're organizing a campaign in opposition to a new development in your city, remember that it may be going through a proposed zoning change or some other form of approval. If it is, you'll need to understand that process as thoroughly as possible so you can try to influence it.

While every city is different, here's an example of how this process works.

Proposed Changes to Development

The land use review process will begin when a developer proposes changes to the zoning to accommodate their development project. They will formulate a proposal for a site and submit a proposal to the city to change or amend the zoning for the development site.



Environmental Review

Every development proposal has to include an Environmental Impact Statement, listing the impact of a development to its local environment. Depending on your city, the

environmental review process may have more rigorous state or local requirements. The Federal Environmental Review Process isn't usually very rigorous.

The developer's Environmental Impact Study is also submitted as part of public record, so you can access it to see how thorough that study and review process was.

Once the plans have been submitted to the city, a land use review process will begin. While these processes differ from place to place, every city has different players who are either able to give input on a development project or approve a proposed development project.

Potential Players Who May Review Land Use Changes

Neighborhood Council

In some cities, there are neighborhood councils composed of community stakeholders that make recommendations or give input on how proposed developments affect a community. Examples where this is the case include New York or Washington D.C.

If there is a neighborhood council that weighs in on zoning proposals in your city, a long term strategy for your organization could be organizing to put more people onto the council from your neighborhood who agree with your interests. Keep an eye on how much the neighborhood council's opinion is included in the planning process. While it's unlikely that they alone will be able to kill a development proposal, most of the time, they will be taken seriously.



Planning Commission

Most cities have an appointed commission that reviews developments in the city. Usually these are political appointees, who are appointed by the Mayor or possibly other elected officials. Usually these appointees are in favor of developments interests, and because they aren't directly elected, they are harder to influence.

They still respond to political pressure, because they have to report back to the person who appointed them.

Include who is part of the commission, and whether there are any commissioners who are friendly to your cause in your power analysis.

City Council

There is usually an elected body that approves changes to zoning law during the land review process - it could be your city council.

Because the development is taking place in your neighborhood, it's likely that other city council members will look to your city council member to see if the proposal will be good for your neighborhood. Your city council member is most often the primary target for your demands, and the most important person in this process.

Mayor

While how much power your city's Mayor has will vary, most cities will have a Mayoral veto, which means the Mayor will usually have the power to block a development proposal that they disagree with.

Understanding the sequence of events is important. It allows you to map out each opportunity there is to provide public input through public hearings or the ability to submit public comments on the record. As part of your campaign strategy, you will want to mobilize as many people you can in opposition to the proposed development at times where there is opportunity for public comment.