

Understanding the Appearance Commission Review Process



Appearance Commission Rules of Procedure and Application

City of Park Ridge

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Rules of Procedure

City of Park Ridge Appearance Commission

A) Introduction

The City of Park Ridge is distinguished by its unique buildings and architecture, commercial districts, residential neighborhoods and open spaces. These assets help make Park Ridge an attractive community in which to live, work and play. The purpose of the Appearance Commission review process is to preserve the existing physical character of neighborhoods, as redevelopment occurs throughout the community. Whether building projects involve alterations or new construction, they have the potential to impact aesthetics and property values in the areas in which they are located. These projects are evaluated for compatibility with adjacent buildings and the surrounding area, through a review of the exterior design.

The Rules of Procedure for the Commission are intended for use by homeowners, business owners, architects and developers. These Rules are intended to provide an overview of the Commission and the review process. Originally adopted by the Commission in 1991, they are revised from time to time.

The Rules are to be used in conjunction with other documents pertaining to the Commission. One is the Appearance Code (Article 15, Chapter 7 of the Municipal Code, adopted in 1989). The Code describes the purpose of the review process, and the membership and duties of the Commission. The other is the Urban Design Guidelines (adopted by the City Council in 1991). The Guidelines identify design considerations for the development of residential, commercial and public spaces, and how to make these projects compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods. Applicants are responsible for reviewing all of the above documents when preparing applications for the Commission.

The Commission was created in 1989, in accordance with the provisions of the Appearance Code. The Commission consists of five volunteers, all residents of Park Ridge. They are appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Council. A majority of the members are design professionals, such as architects and landscape architects. The Commission generally meets the fourth Wednesday of the month (unless otherwise noted) to review applications submitted to the City. Commission approval of applications is final and does not require action by the City Council.

The Commission is charged with reviewing a variety of plans to evaluate residential, commercial and public or institutional projects. Because Park Ridge is an established (built out) community, how projects blend into existing neighborhoods is critical. The Commission reviews projects that will be visible from the street. They will be examined in relation to their compatibility with adjacent structures and the surrounding neighborhood. The following is a list of projects that require Commission review:

- Residential - new construction and alterations;
- Commercial - new construction and alterations;
- Residential and Commercial – significant changes to the exterior elevations, as a result of a conversion from an addition to new construction;
- Public space - new construction and alterations; and
- Wall and ground signs - new and replacement panels.

In some cases, minor projects may be exempt from Commission review. Small building alterations may be compatible with the existing structure and surrounding properties or may not be visible from the street. The Department of Community Preservation and Development is responsible for making

these determinations. The following are examples of projects that typically do not require Commission review:

- Additions at the rear of buildings that do not extend beyond the side elevations or above the existing roofline;
- Additions that extend to the side of the structure by five (5) feet or less and are compatible with the existing structure;
- Porch extensions on residential projects where the roofline blends with the existing house;
- Dormer additions;
- Room or garage conversions; and
- Building material changes.

Timing to complete the Commission review process varies. Typically, a complete application that meets all the necessary requirements and guidelines can be approved at the first meeting. Occasionally, a case will take additional meetings if significant changes are required.

The Commission review process is outlined in the proceeding pages.

B) Pre-Submittal Consultation with Planning Staff

Prospective applicants may contact the Department of Community Preservation and Development with questions they may have about the review process prior to submitting a formal application. Typically, applicants want to know whether a proposed project requires Commission review or whether a proposed design may be generally compatible with the Urban Design Guidelines. While staff will try to offer guidance on how the Commission has ruled on past cases, only the Commission has decision-making authority. The review process deals with many aspects of design and the intent of the City in regulating appearance that only the Commission is qualified to review.

C) Other City Board Reviews

Some projects may require approvals from City boards, such as the Planning and Zoning Commission or the Zoning Board of Appeals, in addition to the Appearance review. Applicants should contact the Community Preservation and Development Department if they believe additional reviews are necessary and to obtain the specific requirements for those boards.

The following issues require review by other City boards.

- Subdivisions: Dividing a property into one or more lots of record may require City review and approval. Front and corner side yard setbacks are established as part of this process. The most common subdivision is to create a single lot of record. The easiest way to determine if a single lot subdivision is necessary, is to check the legal description for exceptions or include parts of separate lots. A lot may include a certain area “except” for a certain part of a lot, or may contain parts of 2 separate lots.
- Site Plan Review and Special Uses: The Planning and Zoning Commission reviews issues concerning the potential impacts of a certain use on the neighborhood, traffic, on-site parking and drive-through, refuse disposal areas, stormwater drainage. Most common requests are for Site Plan Reviews for restaurants and Special Uses for drive-through facilities. Special Uses require additional approval from the City Council.
- Zoning Variances: The applicant may need to request relief from Zoning Ordinance requirements. Variances are necessary when either an existing or proposed condition on a property does not comply with zoning requirements. Relief is sometimes requested for such issues as insufficient lot

dimensions, setbacks or number of parking spaces. Review and approval is required by the Zoning Board of Appeals and, in certain cases, the City Council.

D) Timing of Appearance Commission Submittals

The Commission meets the fourth Wednesday of every month, except where there is an occasional conflict with a public holiday. The applicant should submit all required application materials to the Department of Community Preservation and Development two (2) weeks prior to a meeting (refer to the Commission meeting schedule). If the package is complete, the case will be placed on the next available meeting agenda.

Staff may delay placing an application on the regular agenda or recommend that a case be placed on the pre-application agenda for submittals which are incomplete, poorly prepared or incompatible with the Urban Design Guidelines. Staff will contact the applicant when additional information or corrections are necessary to proceed with review of the project.

E) Pre-Application Reviews by the Appearance Commission

Applicants may want input from the Commission on conceptual designs for a project prior to submitting a regular application. These discussions are known as pre-application reviews and will take place at the end of the Commission meetings after the regular cases have been reviewed. The purpose of this review is to grant the applicant an opportunity to obtain preliminary guidance from the Commission, as to whether a plan is consistent with the Urban Design Guidelines and the Appearance Code. All comments made by the Commission at this time are non-binding. The applicant must submit all appropriate application materials at least two weeks prior to a meeting (refer to the Commission meeting schedule for the “continuation” submittal date).

F) Commission Meetings

It is strongly recommended that the applicant and design professional (e.g., architect) be present at the Commission meeting when the application is heard. Meeting agendas are only sent to the applicant. This will be the only notification of the meeting that the applicant receives.

Upon review, cases may be approved, denied, continued with the permission of the applicant, or withdrawn at the request of applicant. Approved cases may proceed through the building permit review process. If a case is denied and the applicant wishes to present new plans to the Commission, the applicant must submit a new application and materials. If a case is continued, the applicant should return to the Commission with revised plans or materials at a subsequent meeting.

G) Consent Agenda

The consent agenda allows the Commission to approve a group of cases together at the beginning of the meeting. Staff will recommend cases for the consent agenda, which can only be approved by the Commission in a motion at the beginning of the meeting. There is no guarantee that cases will remain on the consent agenda, until the agenda is approved by the Commission at the beginning of the meeting. Commissioners can request that any case be removed from or that any case be added to the consent agenda. If a case is removed, it is considered along with the other regular agenda items in the order in which it appears on the agenda.

Items typically considered for the consent agenda include:

- Minor alterations to existing structures that are compatible with the Urban Design Guidelines, the existing structure and the surrounding neighborhood;
- Revised building plans consistent with conditions approved by the Commission;
- Revised building materials and landscape plans continued from previous meetings.

H) Notice of Commission Action

After the meeting, the Department of Preservation and Community Development will issue a letter for each case stating the action taken by the Commission. The letter will indicate whether the case was approved, denied, continued or withdrawn. It will also identify conditions that must be satisfied prior to Commission approval or prior to a project being submitted for a building permit.

The Department of Community Preservation and Development maintains summaries of all proceedings of the Commission meetings. These summaries contain the points of discussion for each case and a record of all Commission decisions.

I) Building Permits and Zoning Certificates

Once applicants receive Appearance Commission approval, they may apply for a building permit for construction and demolition work or a zoning certificate for signs. Plan review for either a permit or certificate cannot begin until Commission approval is received because the Commission sometimes makes changes to a project that must be reflected in the construction drawings.

Applications for building permits and zoning certificates are available at the Building Division of the Department of Community Preservation and Development. Applications must be submitted with all required documentation. Review time varies depending upon the type of project and the completeness of the application. Demolition, construction, sign installation or other activity, may begin once the necessary approvals are obtained by the Building Division and any conditions established by the Commission are satisfied.

Approval by the Commission does not grant authority for activity in violation of the City's Code or Ordinances. Furthermore, separate review and approval is still required for building permits or zoning certificates.

J) Submittal Requirements

All Applications

All applications submitted for Appearance Commission review shall consist of:

- Ten (10) collated copies of the application and all submittal requirements, including the original;
- Submittals sizes should be either eight and one-half (8 ½) by eleven (11) inches or eleven (11) inches by seventeen (17) inches;
- One (1) set of building materials on foam core board, if applicable; and
- It is strongly recommended that architectural drawings be prepared by a licensed architect, as the Building Division will require signed and sealed drawings for most building permits.

Submittal requirements vary depending upon the type of project and are listed below. Incomplete applications may result in the case being returned to the applicant or delayed until a later meeting.

New Construction – All Uses

- 1) **Application.** The application form must be complete and include all required signatures.
- 2) **Plat of Survey.** The survey must show all existing structures.
- 3) **Site Plan.** The plan must show:
 - a) Layout of the entire project, and its relation to surrounding properties and structures;
 - b) All existing structures to remain and proposed construction;
 - c) Both proposed and required zoning district standards (including setbacks, lot coverage, open space and floor area ratio requirements);
 - d) All existing and proposed streets;
 - e) All existing and proposed access points, and on-site vehicular and pedestrian circulation;
 - f) All paved areas, including off-street parking and loading facilities, sidewalks and patios;
 - g) Refuse storage areas;
 - h) Air conditioning condenser units, utility meters and boxes; and
 - i) Parking lot lighting, with catalog cuts of all new lighting fixtures.
- 4) **Landscape Plan.** The plan must show:
 - a) Existing and proposed plantings, including the species, quantities and installed sizes (show existing trees with diameters of three (3) inches or more and large clump trees); and
 - b) All existing and proposed walls and fences, including height and type of materials.
- 5) **Building Floor Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and adequately show the layout of all affected areas measured from the exterior walls.
- 6) **Elevation Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and identify all proposed building materials and colors (similar to the materials on the sample board and in the rendering).
- 7) **Color Rendering.** This must be drawn to scale and show the street-facing elevation(s). The rendering should reflect the types and colors of proposed building materials.
- 8) **Street Elevation Drawing.** This must be drawn to scale and show the street-facing elevation of the proposed structure in the center and the street-facing elevations of the first existing building on either side. For corner properties, two (2) drawings are necessary; one (1) for each affected street-facing elevation and the street-facing elevation of the first property to each side.
- 9) **Color Photographs.** These must show the street-facing elevation of the existing structure at the subject property and the street-facing elevations of the three (3) buildings on either side. In the case of corner properties, the photographs must show both street-facing elevations for the subject property and the street-facing elevation of first property on either side. Color photocopies of the photographs must be used. Polaroids or black and white photocopies are not acceptable.
- 10) **Building Materials.** Provide one (1) sample board on foam core (no larger than eleven (11) by seventeen (17) inches) that shows the proposed primary exterior building materials (refer to example of the sample board). Materials and colors must be similar to those on the elevations and rendering and should include the following, where applicable: roofing material, brick and range of color, siding, E.I.F.S., trim or others. Color copies of materials may be substituted, as long as a copy is in each packet and the actual materials are brought to the meeting.

Alterations – All Uses

- 1) **Application.** The application form must be complete and include all required signatures.
- 2) **Plat of Survey.** The survey must show all existing structures.

- 3) **Site Plan.** The plan must show:
 - a) Layout of the entire project, and its relation to surrounding properties and structures;
 - b) All existing structures to remain and proposed construction;
 - c) Both proposed and required zoning district standards (including setbacks, lot coverage, open space and floor area ratio requirements);
 - d) All existing and proposed streets;
 - e) All existing and proposed access points, and on-site vehicular and pedestrian circulation;
 - f) All paved areas, including off-street parking and loading facilities, sidewalks and patios;
 - g) Refuse storage areas;
 - h) Air conditioning condenser units, utility meters and boxes; and
 - i) Parking lot lighting, with catalog cuts of all new lighting fixtures.

- 4) **Landscape Plan.** This is required only if extensive modifications to the front of the building will result in the removal of existing landscaping. If applicable, the plan must show:
 - a) Existing and proposed plantings, including the species, quantities and installed sizes (show existing trees with diameters of three (3) inches or more and large clump trees); and
 - b) All existing and proposed walls and fences, including height and type of materials.

- 5) **Building Floor Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and adequately show the layout of all affected areas measured from the exterior walls.

- 6) **Elevation Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and identify all proposed building materials and colors (similar to the materials on the sample board and in the rendering).

- 7) **Street Elevation Drawing.** This must be drawn to scale and show the street-facing elevation of the proposed structure in the center and the street-facing elevations of the first existing building on either side. For corner properties, two (2) drawings are necessary; one (1) for each affected street-facing elevation and the street-facing elevation of the first property to each side.

- 8) **Color Photographs.** These must show the street-facing elevation of the existing structure at the subject property and the street-facing elevations of the three (3) buildings on either side. In the case of corner properties, the photographs must show both street-facing elevations for the subject property and the street-facing elevation of first property on either side. Color photocopies of the photographs must be used. Polaroids or black and white photocopies are not acceptable.

- 9) **Building Materials.** Provide one (1) sample board on foam core (no larger than eleven (11) by seventeen (17) inches) that shows the proposed primary exterior building materials (refer to example of the sample board). Materials and colors must be similar to those on the elevations and rendering and should include the following, where applicable: roofing material, brick and range of color, siding, E.I.F.S., trim or others. Color copies of materials may be substituted, as long as a copy is in each packet and the actual materials are brought to the meeting.

Pre-application Review

- 1) **Application.**

- 2) **Plat of Survey.**

- 3) **Site Plan.** The plan must show:
 - a) Layout of the entire project, and its relation to surrounding properties and structures;
 - b) All existing structures to remain and proposed construction;
 - c) All existing and proposed streets;
 - d) All existing and proposed access points, and on-site vehicular and pedestrian circulation; and
 - e) All paved areas, including off-street parking and loading facilities, sidewalks and patios.

- 4) **Landscape Plan.** Optional.
- 5) **Building Floor Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and adequately show the layout of all affected areas measured from the exterior walls.
- 6) **Elevation Plans.** Plans must be drawn to scale and identify all proposed building materials and colors.
- 7) **Street Elevation Drawing.** Optional.
- 8) **Color Photographs.** These must show the street-facing elevation(s) of the existing structure at the subject property and the street-facing elevations of the three (3) buildings on either side.
- 9) **Building Materials.** Optional.

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