

Subdivision FAQ's...

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What defines a minor subdivision? a major subdivision?

A minor subdivision involves the creation of four lots or less, and, a major subdivision process involves the creation of five lots or more.

What is the minimum lot size required for subdividing?

The minimum lot size depends on the zoning district the property is in. For R-1 and R-2 zones, the minimum square footage is 8,000 s.f. Low density zones require a minimum of 15,000 s.f., while commercial zones require a minimum of 6,000 s.f. The minimum lot size for island properties is one acre.

If I want to sell a portion of my lot to my neighbor, do I still need a subdivision plat?

Yes. A recorded subdivision plat is required that goes through the Boundary Line Adjustment process. This plat looks like a regular subdivision plat. It will show the new square footages of your lot and your neighbor's lot. While the plat has to be prepared by a registered land surveyor, it does not have to receive approval from the Planning Commission. The Planning Office can walk you through the steps.

After I've made the decision to subdivide, what's the first step I need to do?

It is suggested you or your representative first meets with the Planning Director to uncover any potential problems with the development of the planned subdivision.

After you have met with the Planning Director, you will need to contact a surveyor to have the plat and general topographic information prepared.

If I want to combine two lots, what process do I go through?

The combination of lots would fall under the category of a subdivision replat. After speaking with the Planning Director, you would be required to contact a surveyor to have the replat prepared. Once prepared you would submit the application and plat copy and then go before the Planning Commission.

Who are the surveyors in Sitka?

Sitka has one surveying firm – O'Neill Surveying & Engineering. Their phone number is 747-6700. They are located in the three story building across from the new Fire Hall on Lake Street.

Stragier Engineering is no longer operating.

This all sounds very complicated, where can I get quality help in subdividing my lot?

Your surveyor can be a source of invaluable assistance.

The Planning Office will also take some of the mystery out of the process and will try to make it go as smoothly as possible.

Other than a surveyor, is there anyone else I am required to contact?

Yes. You will need to contact the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and submit the necessary information for their review. If the property is along Halibut Point Road or Sawmill Creek Road, you may want to contact Alaska DOT about a driveway permit.

What will my survey costs be?

Survey costs vary from project to project so your surveyor needs to give you an idea of the costs.

How wide must easements be to serve back lots?

Access easements for driveways must be at least 20 feet wide. They may need to be wider on properties with steep terrain.

The width of utility easements is variable. Access and utility easements are often combined in the same location.

How steep can the driveway be that serves a back lot?

Maximum grades for driveways in private easements of 20%. Grades in excess of 15% shall only be allowed in exceptional circumstances. A surveyor is required to certify that the driveway is built to the grade approved during the subdivision process.

What types of easements are required for island properties?

Access easements are required for island properties and potential moorage sites must be identified on the plat.

Decisions on how the access easements will be developed and used have to be made during the subdivision process.

The easements have to be developed to the agreed upon standards within one year of the recording of the plat.

If I subdivide my lot and the lot is part of a municipal Local Improvement District, do I have to pay off all the LIDs?

Yes. Although this issue does not surface very frequently, it may be something you want to check on.

Do all the property taxes on my lot have to be current before the property is subdivided?

Yes. All the property taxes have to be paid up to date prior to the recording of the plat.

Who installs the utilities on the lots after the property is subdivided?

The developer who subdivides the lots or the new owners of the properties install the utilities. In the case of a minor subdivision, it is really up to the applicant's preference.

In major subdivisions, all the utilities have to be installed and accepted by the municipality before a lot is sold.

In all cases, the utilities have to be constructed to municipal standards.

How is drainage handled in an area with as much rain as Sitka?

The subdivider is responsible for developing a drainage site that does not adversely affect the adjacent properties.

The municipality may require a drainage plan be prepared that is approved by the Public Works Director.

What is a Planned Unit Development?

A Planned Unit Development or PUD, is a group or combination of dwellings developed as a functional unit under conditional use and site plan approval procedures.

When do I need to have my application submitted?

Complete applications and all supporting materials must be submitted by noon on Tuesday, two weeks prior to a scheduled Planning Commission meeting. These meetings are normally held on the first and third Mondays of each month. If a meeting is to be held Monday August 18th the application and materials need to be submitted by noon on Tuesday August 5th. Adhering to this time frame allows the municipality to review the applications, send out notifications, and run the required advertisements in a timely fashion.

What kind of supporting materials do I need to submit with my application?

To show proof of ownership you will need to submit a copy of the deed and provide a copy of the plat.

Is there a fee associated with the subdivision process?

Yes. For either a minor or major subdivision , there is a non-refundable fee of \$50 plus the current city sales tax.

How long does a subdivision or replat process take?

If there are no immediate concerns or issues the Planning Commission needs to research, most likely a minor subdivision will go before the Planning Commission twice. Once for the concept plat and once for approval of the final plat.

Plat modifications such as combining two lots; generally require one or two meetings.

The major subdivision process is a bit more involved and may take longer. A concept plat, preliminary plat, and final plat need to be approved by the Planning Commission and then forwarded on to the Assembly for final approval.

After approval, the plat will need to be recorded. The surveyor submits a mylar copy to the Planning Department and then the Planning Department collects the necessary signatures for recording.

Why are your rates so low?

Glad you asked. Our rates haven't been updated for 15-30 years and are roughly a third of those charged other similar Alaska communities. They may increase in 2004.

How do your review times compare with other communities?

We take pride in the fact we are able to process requests quickly. Generally the time frame is four weeks for a variance request and six to eight weeks for a conditional use permit request or subdivision. In most cities, the processing time is much longer.

I've been thinking about this project for two years and I have a contractor ready to go. Why do I have to go through the Planning Commission process now?

All projects that fall outside of the normal zoning code standards must go through the Planning Commission for approval. Contractors for the most part will understand, as they are familiar with the procedures.

Do I have to speak at the Planning Commission and Assembly? I'm uncomfortable with public speaking.

The week before the Planning Commission each board member receives a packet of information, which describes each request on the agenda in detail. Board members may or may not have questions for you. If they do, the questions are generally very simple.

How long does it take to get a building permit if everything is approved at the Planning Commission or Assembly?

Approximately four to five days for residential structures.

Does the Planning Office inspect my property before the meeting and, if so, should I make an appointment so I can be there?

The Planning Office does not formally “inspect” your property so there is no reason to make an appointment. Before the board member packets are prepared, the Planning Office staff visits each site to visually see the request as this aids in the full understanding of the proposed request.

Can someone else represent me at a meeting if I’m going to be out of town?

Certainly. Many folks have their contractor, surveyor, family, or friends represent them when they are out of town.

Will I get a reminder before the meeting?

No. The only “reminder” per se will be a copy of the informational letter that goes out to your surrounding neighbors a week before to notify them of your project. On the notice is the meeting date and time. The Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday before the meeting, there is a notice in the newspaper as well as the day of the meeting.

What gets mailed to my neighbors?

Your neighbor receives a copy of the meeting’s agenda, a vicinity map showing the location of your project as well as any maps, drawings, and narratives.

If this process still seems a little confusing, don’t worry. The Planning Office will make every effort to help where needed and make it go as smoothly as possible.