

**COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT**
Professional. Thorough. Responsive.

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Guide to Development

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KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

City Manager's Office

Andrew Kuk, City Manager | (269) 659-7234 | akuk@sturgismi.gov

Community Development (Building Inspector)

Will Prichard, Director | (269) 659-7235 | wprichard@sturgismi.gov

Electric Department

Chris McArthur, Electric Super | (269) 659-7298 | Mccarthur@sturgismi.gov

Public Services (Including Water Supply)

Tom Sikorski, Director | (269) 659-7286 | tsikorski@sturgismi.gov

Wastewater Treatment

Brandon Schrader, Supervisor | (269) 659-7281 | bschrader@sturgismi.gov

Engineering

Barry Cox, City Engineer | (269) 659-7249 | bcox@sturgismi.gov

City Clerk

Kenneth Rhodes, City Clerk | (269) 659-7229 | krhodes@sturgismi.gov

Economic Enhancement

Jeff Coney, Community Dev Specialist | (269) 659-7233 | jconey@sturgismi.gov

Assessor

Dale Hutson, City Assessor | (269) 659-7247 | dhutson@sturgismi.gov

Mechanical, Plumbing, and Electrical Inspections (State Resource)

- State Mechanical Inspector: 269-252-3612
- State Electrical Inspector: 269-312-3300
- State Plumbing Inspector: 269-348-4386

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

City Commission

2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month, 6 p.m. at City Hall

Staff Contact Ken Rhodes, (269) 659-7229

Planning Commission

3rd Tuesday of each month, 5:30 p.m. at City Hall

Staff Contact Will Prichard, (269) 659-7235

Zoning Board of Appeals

Meets by request, at City Hall

Staff Contact Will Prichard, (269) 659-7235

Sturgis Housing Commission

4th Tuesday of each month, 5 p.m. at Maple Towers

Executive Director Tim Hill (269) 651-8772

Downtown Development Authority

1st Wednesday of the month, 8 a.m. at Chamber of Commerce

Staff Contact Jeff Coney, (269) 659-7233

Board of Review

Meets Twice in March, at City Hall

Staff Contact Dale Hutson, (269) 659-7247

APPROVAL AUTHORITY TABLE

It is important that developers and residents understand the different local authorities who will approve, or decline submitted applications. While the application and approval process will be discussed with the Zoning Administrator at pre-application meetings, this table provides a general view of what local authorities will be reviewing their applications.

APPROVAL AUTHORITY TABLE	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	PLANNING COMMISSION	ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS	CITY COMMISSION	STATE LEVEL REVIEW
Zoning Permit	X				
Site Plan Review	X				
Site Plan Review (Official)	X Recommend	X Approval			
Special Land Use		X			
Rezoning Ordinance Amendment		X Recommend		X Approval	
Variance			X		
Appeal			X		
Building Permit	X Approval				
Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing Permit					X

1. Overview

The City of Sturgis Community Development Department created this guide for architects, engineers, or developers planning on expanding or building a new commercial building in the City.

The term “commercial building” refers to almost everything that isn’t a 1 or 2-family residential home. This includes buildings for commercial, industrial, or institutional use, multi-family residences like apartments and mixed-use buildings. It also includes development or redevelopment of parking lots and other major site improvements.

What do we mean when we say expanding or building a new building?

- The area that you want to build something was previously vacant;
- There is a building there, but you are tearing it down and starting over; or
- You are expanding the footprint of an existing building.

If you are renovating an existing building (and not expanding its size) the process will be slightly different; you will want to check out our guide for [Commercial Building Renovations](#).

So, if you’ve made it to this point, you are expanding an existing or building a new commercial building. This guide will walk you through available planning resources and what is necessary to get approvals for your project, get permits for the work, complete the inspection process, and get the Certificate of Occupancy you need to open for business.

2. Planning your project

Whether you are a seasoned developer, or this is your first time working on a project, it's normal and expected to have lots of questions during the early stages of a project. As your idea is taking shape, we welcome you to call, email, or schedule an informal meeting to ask any questions you may have. We will give you an opportunity to describe your project, ask questions, and get answers in a casual setting.

At this point in the process, we are working with you to better understand your needs. Depending on what those needs are, we may recommend a meeting with our [Business Development Team](#).

Business Development Team

The Business Development Team, ([BDT](#)) is a group of staff from the City and some outside organizations covering various areas of expertise in the development process. By getting you and the right staff together in the room at the same time, we can talk through

your project, identify issues and challenges, and answer your questions so your project can move forward as smoothly as possible.

While BDT meetings may be utilized throughout the project, at the planning stage they can be especially helpful - the earlier the better. For a first-time business owner or developer, purchasing property, developing sites, or starting a business that is brand new (or new to Sturgis) and the regulations, rules, and processes of government may be totally unknown, complex, or confusing. Meeting with the BDT will provide an opportunity to talk through your project and get feedback and more ideas on how to make it work.

For seasoned developers, projects may have special challenges or require difficult decisions about the layout of buildings, parking, utilities, and public infrastructure on the site. Those with experience working with local government may not have difficulty complying with zoning and building regulations, however the reality is that every city, state, township, or county may have different requirements and even the most experienced of developers may have questions. Each project is different, and the BDT can be a way to identify, discuss, and address issues and challenges before they become problems. Even seasoned developers can benefit from a BDT meeting.

The most important part of a BDT meeting at the planning stage is that it is informal. We understand that you are here to ask questions and for us to learn about your project. These questions are for everyone to better understand the project and to help you move it forward.

The BDT meeting (or meetings) will give you an opportunity to discuss all aspects of your business. Team members will likely include the Community Development Director, Economic Development representatives, and the Chamber of Commerce Director. Other team members (such as from City utilities, Engineering, and the Fire Department) may be added to the meeting depending on your needs.

Please contact the Community Development Department at 269-659-7230 or comdev@sturgismi.gov to set up a meeting.

It is always a good idea before you get the City involved in the planning process to have a location or a couple locations to discuss and a clear idea of what you want to do as part of your project. It is highly encouraged to start working with a State of Michigan-licensed architect or engineer as soon as possible. These two professions are part of group called **design professionals**. The State of Michigan requires licensed design professionals for all commercial projects. They are the ones who are trained and licensed to help you through each step of the design and construction process.

Other groups to plan with other than the City of Sturgis. While we will mostly be discussing the processes and approvals needed from the City of Sturgis, there are several

other organizations or agencies to discuss your project with on your type of project. These may include:

- Branch Hillsdale St. Joseph Community Health Agency,
- St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner for Soil Erosion,
- Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)
- Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- St. Joseph County Road Commission
- Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDARD)
- State of Michigan Marijuana Regulatory Agency

The groups listed above are just a handful of entities that you may want to speak to or from whom you may need additional approvals for your project. We will be able to provide you with the contacts for these organizations or agencies if requested and discuss when the ideal time in the process is to have discussions or submit applications.

PLANNING AND ZONING

What is Zoning? Zoning helps promote growth and redevelopment in the City. It provides a set of regulations (also known as [ordinances](#)) that projects must comply with.

Throughout the City there are many different types of [zoning districts](#); these are areas where similar properties are grouped together under the same regulations and uses. For example, one district may be designed for all single family residential, another district may be designated for retail businesses, and a third district may be designated for manufacturing. Districts are designed this way so that everyone can enjoy and use their properties as best as possible while considering the needs of all property owners and the community as a whole.

How Does Zoning Impact your Project? By understanding the zoning district of the property, you are intending to use for your project, you will know if your project is possible at that location, and if it is, the regulations under which you can use the property. The [pre-application site plan meeting](#) will allow us to understand the lay of the land or the way you would like to use this particular piece of property, but the first step of the process is to determine that your type of business is allowed to be at the location you are considering.

Zoning Uses and Special Land Uses. Remember that communities each have a number of different zoning districts; broadly, the City of Sturgis has around 15 zoning districts, separated into four general categories:

- **Residential:** designated by R-“something”, for things like houses, apartments, duplexes
- **Business:** designated by B-“something”, for things like retail, offices, restaurants, etc.
- **Manufacturing:** designated by M, for manufacturing and other industrial businesses
- **Special Districts:** various designations, these include stand-alone parking and special project areas

Each zoning district has several [permitted uses by right](#) and [special land uses](#); these are approved by the Planning Commission. So, first things first, we must check and make sure that what you want to do fits where you are. Let’s get a better understanding of the types of uses.

A **permitted use** would be something that is considered a natural fit for the zoning district and its rules. For example, if it were a Residential zoning district, one would expect a house or duplex would be a permitted use, but a department store probably doesn’t fit. In a Business zoning district, a department store, a restaurant, or a business office may all be permitted uses, but a single-family house probably doesn’t fit and would not be included.

A **special land use** is one that maybe appropriate in a zoning district, but because they are not a perfect or natural fit, special conditions may be necessary to be able to function properly in this area. It might be a duplex in an area that is populated by single family homes or an automobile repair shop in certain business districts (for example due to the

additional noise that may be created). Special land uses must be approved by the Planning Commission. See flow chart at end of guide for more details.

Now that you have your plan and know your use is acceptable at a particular location it's time to see how your plan compares to the requirements of your zoning district.

3. What is zoning? Is my type of business allowed?

Now that we know the scope of the project and you have a location in mind, you will need to understand zoning and whether or not you meet the zoning requirements. Many of these questions will be answered in the Planning phase of your project, especially if you meet with the Business Development Team.

4. Schedule a Pre-Application Site Plan Meeting

This meeting is designed for you to understand the site plan process. A **site plan** shows the anticipated development, existing structures, parking areas, water, and sewer lines, lighting, and landscaping details. The site plan is reviewed to determine if your project is in compliance with the City's zoning requirements. By this point in the process, you should have talked with a design professional (a State of Michigan-licensed architect or engineer) and developed a first draft of your site plan. You may have done a first draft yourself for this meeting but note that the final site plan must be completed by a design professional and the earlier you can get them involved, the better.

Since we have first talked about your project something may have changed and the Pre-Application Site Plan meeting allows us to discuss it more in detail. This is a great opportunity to talk about ideas before they are finalized by your design professional.

You may have questions about vehicle access or pedestrian crossings. Maybe you don't know what types or sizes of water supply lines are available to your site. There may be other things that you don't know about the site that we may be able to provide some additional information on. As with the BDT meeting in the Planning Phase, a number of staff members from various areas will be present to help address these questions. The difference now is that we are finalizing details as your project moves towards a formal review.

While some of these issues may be addressed in the Planning phase, there are a number of things that may be discussed at this point in the process, now that details of your project are coming into focus. This may include:

- Site constraints such as setbacks from the property lines or areas that you can or can't park.
- Environmental concerns with the property.
- Issues surrounding storm water retention.

- Potential incentives for the project.
- Availability of infrastructure like water, sanitary sewer, natural gas and telecommunications.

After this Pre-Application Site Plan meeting, you should have the information necessary to develop your final site plan with your design professional. While it is required to include the same information as what you probably included on your first draft, this should be the most refined version possible with all the needed details so it can be adequately reviewed by City staff for approval.

5. Site Plan Review and Approval

Now that your final site plans have been completed by your State of Michigan-licensed design professional, they must be submitted to the Community Development Department for final review and approval. You or your design professional will submit three (3) hard copies and one (1) electronic copy of your final, sealed site plan to the Department along with a payment for a Commercial/Industrial Site Plan Review ([Fee Schedule](#)).

The first step in the site plan review process is that City staff reviews the plans to verify compliance with various ordinances, rules, and regulations; if you have gone through a BDT meeting and a Pre-Application Site Plan Review, most if not all potential issues have already been revealed and discussed. Staff from the building, zoning, engineering, wastewater, police, fire, and electric departments will closely review your site plan and be sure that your project meets the requirements of their area of expertise.

After this process if there are any questions or issues with your plan, your design professional is contacted to go over anything that may need additional information or to discuss any problem areas identified. Once these issues are resolved, staff will advance them to the next step of the process.

After your plans have met all the requirements of the staff review, your site plan will be placed on an upcoming agenda of the Planning Commission. The **Planning Commission** is a group of citizens appointed by the City Commission under the State of Michigan Planning and Enabling Act. They serve as the final stamp of approval for your site plan, which means that it meets all zoning requirements. The Planning Commission meets the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 5:30 in City Hall.

In rare situations, we may also direct you to additional boards or commissions for review and recommendation or approval. The most common such review is from the Design Review Committee. The **Design Review Committee** is a three-person citizen group that verifies exterior design elements are in compliance for buildings and structures in the Central Business District (B-C). The B-C Zoning district covers the area surrounding downtown. If necessary, their review and either recommendation or approval takes place before the Planning Commission for consideration.

Once your site plan is formally approved by the Planning Commission, you and your design professional will start the construction plans process. See flow chart at end of guide for more details.

6. Preparing your construction plans

Construction plans, sometimes referred to as "prints" or "blueprints" are documents that describe the design, location, and physical characteristics of a proposed new structure or changes to an existing structure or property.

What is included in the construction plans? All the information on how to construct your building. They detail out the specifics of your project including footing and foundations and how to frame walls and roofs as well as the plumbing, electrical, mechanical and fire suppression specifications.

Full construction plan sets will include building plans, electrical plans, mechanical plans, and plumbing plans as well as fire suppression and fire alarm plans if applicable.

For commercial building projects you will need to create and submit three (3) full sets of hard copy construction plans with your Building Permit application and one (1) electronic copy. Michigan state law requires that construction plans for commercial buildings be signed and sealed by a design professional (architect or engineer) licensed in the State.

Once you have your plans ready, the next step is to submit them for formal review and approval.

7. Plan Submittal and Permitting

You will submit full construction plans to the City of Sturgis Community Development Department, who will oversee your entire project. Different parts of these plans, however, will also need to be submitted to trade specific inspectors for review. A list of plan sections and who will review them (if they are required) is provided below:

- **Building plan:** Permitted & reviewed by the City of Sturgis (no additional submittal needed)
- **Electric plan:** Permitted & reviewed by State of Michigan Electrical
- **Plumbing plan:** Permitted & reviewed by State of Michigan Plumbing
- **Mechanical plan:** Permitted & reviewed by State of Michigan Mechanical;
- **Fire Suppression plan:** Permitted & reviewed by State of Michigan Mechanical
- **Fire Alarm plan:** Permitted & reviewed by the City of Sturgis

While you, your design professional, or project manager will be responsible for applying for plans review and supplying the needed plan sections, the City of Sturgis will be working with the State of Michigan inspectors to ensure these plans have been properly submitted and reviewed.

Getting your permits. You may not begin construction until you have received all necessary permits. We recommend that you wait to get your permits until after your site plan has been approved by all relevant boards and commissions. Otherwise, you risk wasting time and money if plans need to change or the start of work is delayed.

For most projects, you'll need one or more building permits, multiple trade permits, utility connection permits, and a right-of-way permit; links to permit applications are below:

City of Sturgis Online Permit Interface (Camino)

- [Online Permit and Payment option.](#)

Building Permits (City of Sturgis; application submitted with plans)

- [Commercial Building Permit](#)
- [Demolition Permit](#)

Trade Permits (State of Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs - LARA)

- [Electrical Permit](#)
- [Mechanical Permit](#)
- [Plumbing Permit](#)

Utility Connection Permits (City of Sturgis)

- [Apply for a Water Connection Permit](#)
- [Apply for a Sewer Connection Permit](#)
- [Apply for Electric Service](#)

Right-of-Way Permits

- [Apply for a Right-of-Way Permit \(City of Sturgis\)](#)
- [Apply for a Right-of-Way Permit \(St. Joseph County Road Commission\)](#)
- [Apply for a Right-of-Way Permit \(State of Michigan Department of Transportation\)](#)

Depending upon your project some or all of these permits may be required. During the review and approval process you will receive more guidance about the specific permits you will need for your project.

8. Building Permit

Building permit applications are submitted to the Community Development Department. Your full construction plans must be submitted with a completed [building permit application](#). See flow chart at end of guide for more details.

Keep in mind:

- We review plans to make sure proposed construction complies with current State of Michigan construction codes. Michigan bases its construction codes on standards published by the International Code Council (ICC) and updates them every three

(3) years. The Michigan Building Code (MBC) covers all types of commercial construction. City of Sturgis ordinances and policies apply to other aspects of the development.

- For projects that require extension of water or sewer utilities, you will need approval from the Engineering Department. Contact the Community Development Department with any questions.

Review Process. Most reviews take up to 30 business days to complete but may take longer during the busy spring and summer months or for major projects. During this process we will identify any additional approvals required and what permits are necessary before you may begin work. If your plans are approved and no further approvals are required, you will be notified that a building permit is ready to be issued.

Clarification and corrections. If parts of your proposal are unclear, incorrect, or incomplete, you may need to provide clarification or corrections and re-submit your plans for a second review.

With all changes, please include a letter that summarizes the changes. Also, call out changes to plans with a "cloud" or other standard markings to help expedite the second review. For help during this process, please contact the Community Development Department. Once sufficient clarifications or corrections are made, you will be notified that a building permit is ready to be issued.

Concurrent permitting requirements. In some cases, permits from trades like plumbing, mechanical, or electrical may be required before a building permit can be issued. In these rare cases, City staff will talk through these requirements to ensure you can adequately plan the timing of your project.

Payment. Once you have been notified that your building permit is ready to be issued, payment must be submitted. The amount of your permit will depend upon your project; payment calculations are included as part of the building permit application. Once payment is received your permit will be formally issued and work may begin.

Expiration and renewal. Projects must begin within 6 months of receiving the permit. They are valid as long as the work is proceeding. If the work is halted or abandoned for a period of 6 months or more, the permit is invalid. Extensions may be granted under certain circumstances. If you suspect you will need an extension, submit a written request prior to your permit's expiration.

Now that work has been permitted, it must be constructed, inspected, and approved. Each necessary inspection must be performed prior to work proceeding to the next phase of construction.

9. Scheduling inspections

Any work that requires a permit must be inspected and approved. The contractor is responsible for scheduling inspections at the appropriate times. Remember, each necessary inspection must be performed before work proceeds to the next phase of construction.

The City of Sturgis conducts inspections Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. To schedule an inspection, please contact the Community Development Department at 269-659-7230.

Mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire suppression inspections must be scheduled through the State of Michigan inspectors; contact information is below. It is beneficial for you to have your permit number for the trade permit you are calling on ready.

- State Mechanical Inspector: 269-252-3612
- State Electrical Inspector: 269-312-3300
- State Plumbing Inspector: 269-348-4386

Final Inspection and Certificate of Occupancy Approval. A Certificate of Occupancy is official documentation that the building is safe for people to use. (It is also a legal requirement before you can open a new commercial development to the public.)

Before we issue a Certificate of Occupancy, the final building, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and other required inspections must be completed and approved.

Before a final inspection can be scheduled, a certificate of occupancy request application must be completed.

The contractor may want to keep a copy of these Certificates and then present the originals to the property owner. We recommend that you store these documents in a safe place along with the deed to your property, mortgage papers, etc.

10. Misc. Resources

Financial Assistance and Incentives

Follow the link to [Financial Assistance Tools](#) available in the City of Sturgis.

Fee Schedule

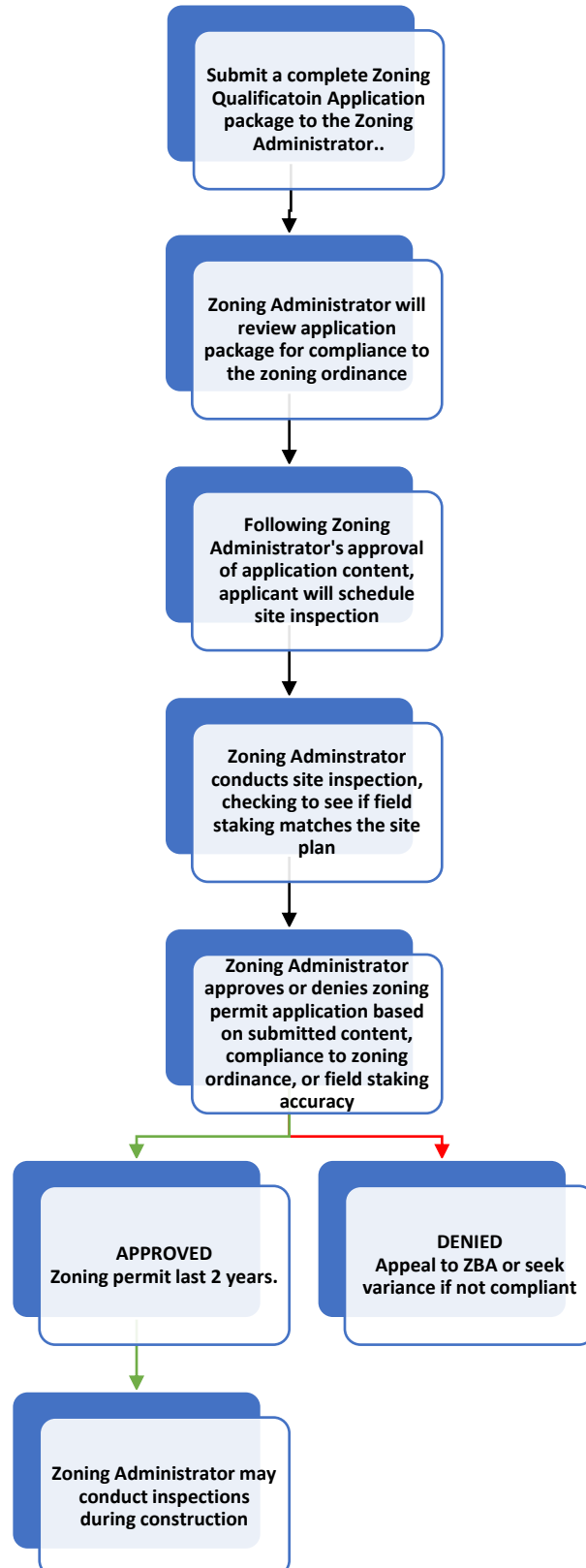
Follow the link to find the [Fee Schedule](#).

Master Plan

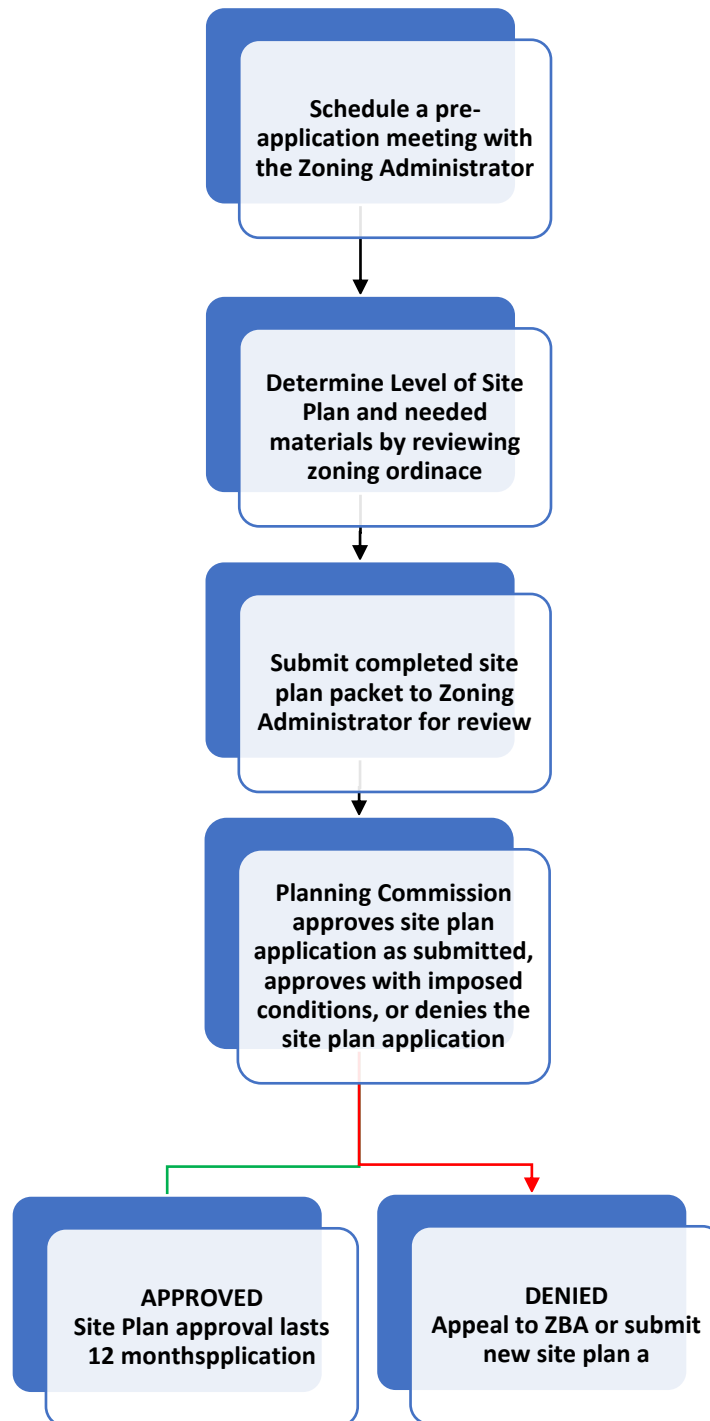
Follow the link to explore the [Sturgis Master Plan 2020](#).

Flow Charts

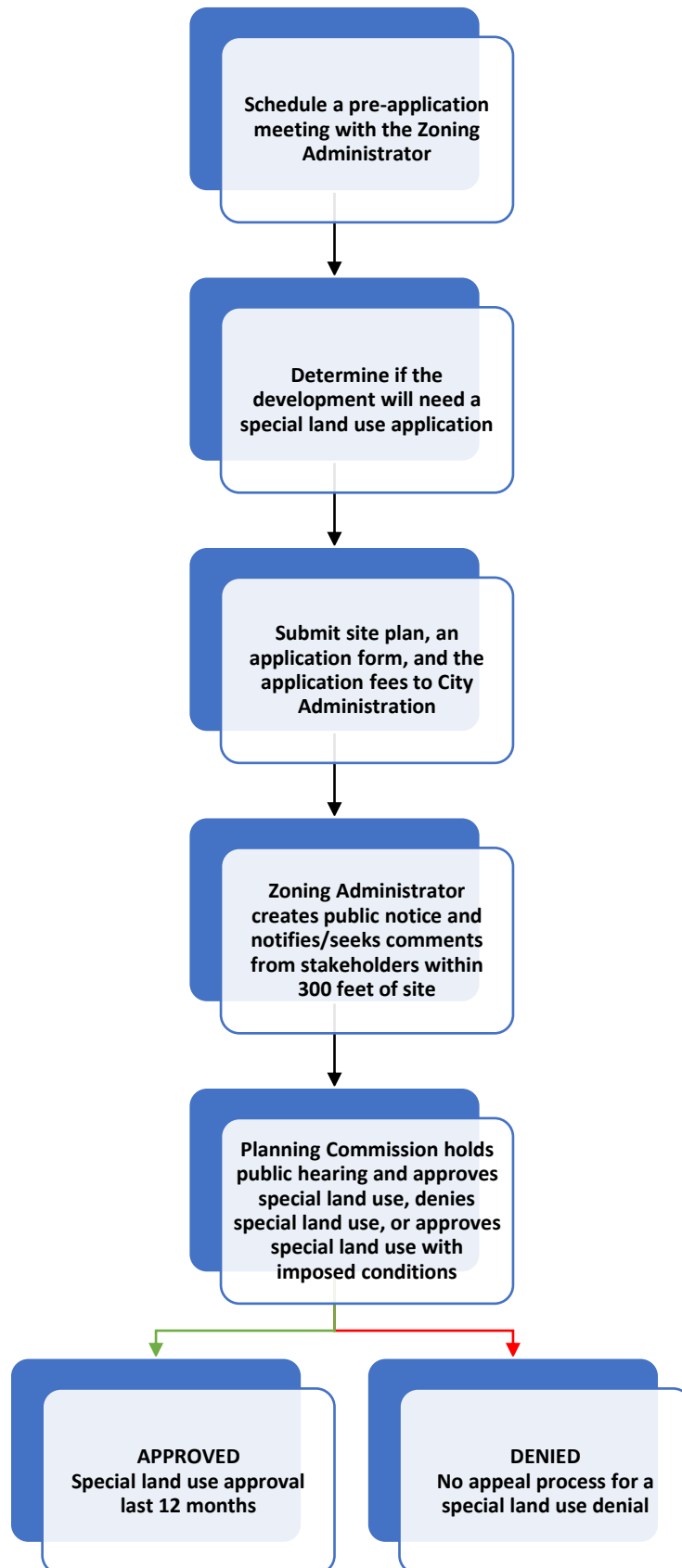
Zoning Qualification Application (1-2 Weeks)



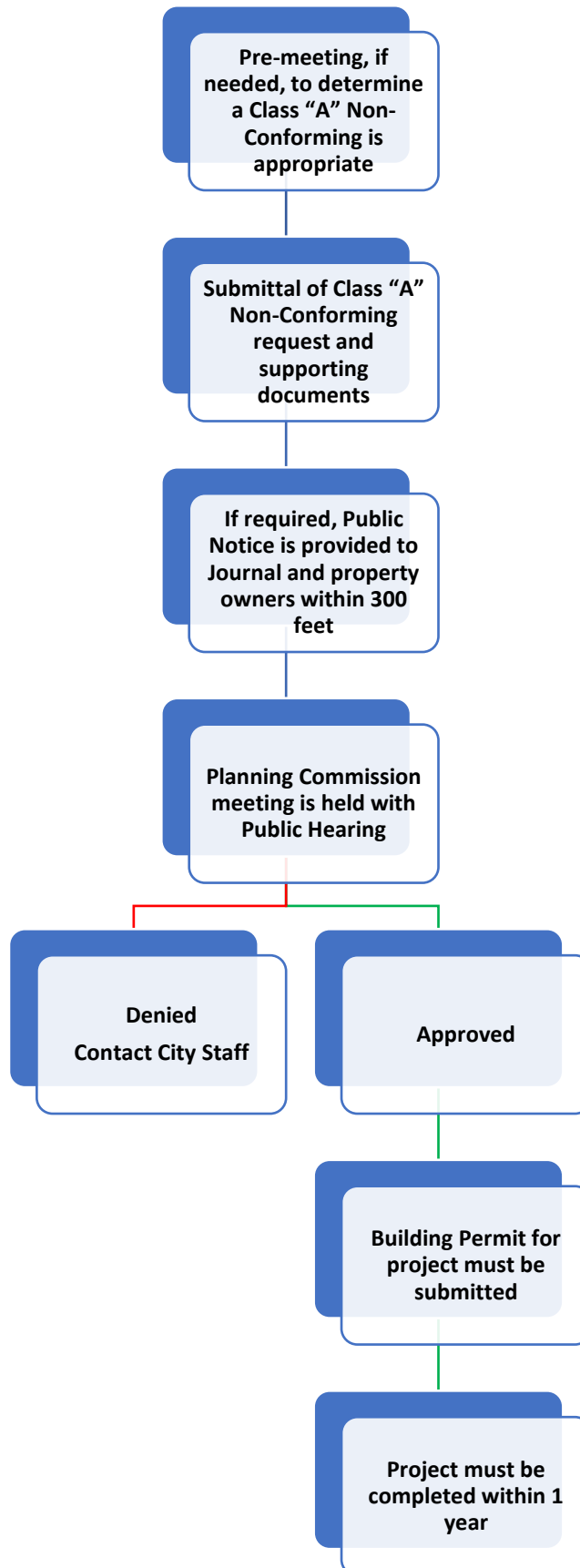
Site Plan Review (1-4 weeks)



Special Land Use (5-8 Weeks)



Class "A" Non-Conforming (1-4 Weeks)



Zoning Variance Request (3-5 Weeks)

