



Thornton Development Information

This summary has been prepared to provide a source of information for builders, contractors, developers and residents about City procedures for development of property under the City's Development Code.

Meeting City requirements for land development in Thornton requires an understanding of four basic elements. These are: zoning, conceptual planning, subdividing (also called platting), and development permitting. Zoning determines allowable land uses. Conceptual site planning establishes a concept for development of the property. Subdividing establishes legal building sites. Development permitting establishes that the site plan, architecture, landscaping, and certain other development aspects meet all City Codes.

The summary and the specific application sheets for any proposal are meant to be used in conjunction with the Development Code (Chapter 18 of the Thornton City Code), as a parallel source of information. If there are inconsistencies or conflicts that arise or are implied, then Chapter 18 controls.

A planner in the City Development Department will provide additional information and help you become familiar with the Development Code and the various processing procedures.

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Annexation Summary

Annexation is the process whereby land is brought into the jurisdiction of the City of Thornton. When land is annexed, it becomes eligible for all municipal services and is subject to City laws, regulations, and taxes. Annexation and the annexation process must conform to Title 31, Article 12 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, "The Municipal Annexation Act of 1965, as Amended", as well as the City of

Thornton annexation policies and other applicable City requirements. The annexation process is completed with the recordation of an annexation map and approval ordinance with the County Clerk and Recorder. Initial zoning of property, upon annexation, is generally done concurrent with the annexation actions.

Annexations are approved by the City Council after a public hearing, and after the publication of four consecutive notices of annexation, the first notice is published 30 days prior to the City Council's public hearing.

The applicant for annexation can negotiate an annexation agreement with the City prior to the submittal of the "application for annexation". Any agreements, and the proposed zoning for the property to be annexed are a part of the annexation process.

If the property to be annexed is proposed to be zoned concurrent with annexation, a public hearing on the zoning is held by the City Council.

Comprehensive Plan Amendments

The Thornton Comprehensive Plan is an overall vision of how development should take place in the City, painting of picture of how the City will grow and where future development or redevelopment will occur. On September 11, 2007, the Thornton City Council adopted a new Comprehensive Plan. The 2007 Comprehensive Plan replaces the 1997 Plan, creates the vision for the future and establishes a strategic plan to implement this vision. Section 3.1 - Future Land Use and the Future Land Use Map describe and illustrate the locations of the future land use categories.

To be successful, comprehensive planning must be an on-going activity, and to reflect changing conditions in the community, the Comprehensive Plan may be amended from time to time. Plan amendments should be very carefully evaluated in terms of their overall significance to achieving Plan goals. A Comprehensive Plan amendment may be initiated by the City or property owners. Upon submittal of an application to the City and the publication of notice, the City Council shall hold a public hearing on the proposed amendment. The City Council may approve, deny or amend the proposal, based on the following criteria:

There has been a change in the area or in the conditions on which the current designation was based which warrants the amendment;

The density and intensity of the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment is sensitive to the existing land uses and is compatible with the existing adjacent land use designations;

The amendment will provide for orderly physical growth of the City, and foster safe, convenient and walkable neighborhoods and shopping districts;

There are or are planned to be adequate transportation, recreation, utility and other facilities to accommodate the uses and densities permitted by the proposed Comprehensive Plan designation;

The proposed change is in substantial conformance with the core Plan goals, major strategies or key policies;

Consideration of City Subarea Plans and Master Plans; or

The proposed amendment is consistent with current zoning of the site unless a zoning change request is under concurrent review.

Following City Council action on the proposed amendment, a Resolution shall be adopted accepting or denying the proposed amendment as an addition or change to the Comprehensive Plan.

Conceptual Site Plans

The Conceptual Site Plan Review Process establishes the framework for development on a site. It also allows for the City and the Applicant to create unique criteria for development on a specific property.

Conceptual Site Plan review and approval is required prior to or concurrent with the approval of zoning or rezoning or when a Subdivision Plat is required. The approved Conceptual Site Plan is valid for a period of three years after City Council action.

The review and approval of the Conceptual Site Plan is to ensure:

Compliance with zoning and other development regulations of the City;

Establishing performance criteria and standards adopted by the City Council; and

Achieving quality development on the ground through the review and use of a Conceptual Site Plan that will represent the actual development to occur on the site.

The Conceptual Site Plan identifies the site plan, architecture, landscaping, etc.

Development Permits

A Development Permit is a review of the site plan, landscape plan and architectural design that ensures compliance with the zoning and design sections of the Development Code.

A Development Permit is required before a building permit can be issued for any new construction or most renovation of buildings, with some limited exceptions.

The exceptions include buildings or additions with an area less than 480 square feet, manufactured homes located in the Manufactured Home zoning district, retaining walls under four feet in height, swimming pools, decks, fences, flagpoles or paving that does not change the non-permeable coverage of a site by more than five percent.

Otherwise, a Development Permit is required before a building permit can be issued that significantly changes the size, height, floor area, building materials, or architectural character of any existing building.

Development Permits are approved by the Development Permits and Appeals Board, without review by the City Council, except under appeal. A Development Permit is valid for three years and construction must begin within that time period, or the permit becomes invalid.

With only very limited exceptions outlined in Chapter 18, land must be subdivided prior to granting a Development Permit. When the land proposed for development is not already subdivided, the applicant for a Development Permit can apply for a Development Permit and Subdivision Plat concurrently.

Minor Development Permit

A Minor Development Permit Process exists and can be used if:

- a. The application is for a TUP as defined in [Section 18-53](#).
- b. The application is for new construction that:
 1. Is a new nonresidential building or addition of between 480 square feet and 1,000 square feet in floor area;
 2. Is a new residential accessory building of between 480 square feet and 768 square feet in area; or
 3. Is for a private accessory community center building.
- c. The application is for a renovation project which:
 1. Is for an existing site under 20,000 square feet or an existing building of between 480 square feet and 5,000 square feet;
 2. Does not change the essential character of the existing development;
 3. Does not involve a change in existing building height or nonpermeable coverage of the site by more than 20 percent;
 4. Does not involve a change in use that would require an SUP; and
 5. Does not substantially alter a feature of a project to which the board, in a previously approved development permit, has attached a particular condition or requirement.
- d. The application is for the renovation of an existing building that significantly changes the architectural character of the building, including but not limited to:
 1. Changes in exterior building materials;
 2. Increasing or decreasing the openings in the building's façade by more than ten percent; and
 3. Changes to the cornice line or slope of the roof.
- e. The application is for a renovation project that includes façade changes such as replacement of fascia or exterior façade covering, or a change of the exterior colors as opposed to normal

building maintenance.

f. The application is for the amendment of any approved minor development permit or major development permit that does not:

1. Change by more than ten percent the maximum density for any residential use area, floor area ratio for nonresidential development, or height for any allowed structures or buildings;
2. Reduce the minimum setbacks or yards required by more than ten percent;
3. Decrease the amount of required off-street parking by more than ten percent;
4. Reduce the size of or number of plantings within common open spaces, landscaping, or buffering by more than ten percent;
5. Change the size of the approved development or use by more than ten percent;
6. Significantly modify a condition imposed by the board or city council; and
7. Significantly affect the character of the development or significantly impact neighboring property.

Pre-Application Meetings

Pre-Application meetings are offered as an informal step in the Land Use application process to applicants and/or their representatives, potential developers and property owners. The meeting provides the opportunity to meet with City staff to discuss a land use proposal before making a formal application submittal to the City. The purpose of the meeting is to inform City staff about the proposal and the staff to explain the review process, offer the City's perspective, and provide handouts, guides and application forms.

To schedule a Pre-Application meeting, please submit the following documents electronically via email to developmentsubmittals@thorntonco.gov or by CD to the City Development Department:

A Cover Letter: The cover letter should explain what you wish to do on the property, anticipated uses, identify the number of units, show the sq. ft. of the building, identify the types of businesses, number of employees, hours of operation, number of acres, etc... Also, provide the names, telephone numbers and addresses of the property owner(s), applicant representatives or potential developers.

A Vicinity Map: A vicinity map showing where the property is located within the City of Thornton.

A Proposed Site Development Plan: This graphic should be drawn to scale and include a north arrow, building footprints, parking and landscape areas, access points, streets, potential park and open space areas and rights-of-way. Also identify existing buildings on the site, natural features of the property which we should be made aware of, and easements affecting the property.

Additional items that would be helpful:

Building elevations, identifying building materials, types of construction and setbacks contemplated for the use.

Occupancy classification, total square footage, and any subdivision lot arrangements.

The more information you provide, the more detailed information we can give back to you.

When to make a submittal:

The above documents need to be submitted to the City by 5pm on Monday of any week to schedule a meeting for the following week on Thursday. If all meeting times are already reserved, the meeting will be scheduled for the next available date and time.

The date and time for your meeting will be scheduled at the time we receive your submittal.

At the meeting:

You are welcome to bring anyone you wish to the pre-application meeting to discuss site development issues.

City representatives in attendance usually include a planner, development engineer, fire protection engineer and landscape architect. Building Inspection or Business Development staff may attend as appropriate.

City staff is committed to providing top-notch customer service and information to help you make decisions about your project.

*If you have any questions please contact our **Administrative Specialists** at **303-538-7295**.*

Residential Architectural Review

The Architectural Review Design Guidelines passed by City Council on October 25, 1999 control the design of future residential development in the City of Thornton. The standards require all subdivisions to provide a variety of different home styles and materials.

All residential developments (single-family homes, townhomes, and apartments) are covered by the ordinance. Builders of entire subdivisions as well as the builders of a single home need administrative approval from the Current Planning Division prior to obtaining a building permit. Single-family homes and duplexes must meet a minimum standard in six different areas of the home's design. Those areas are intended to provide flexibility of design, but also encourage more neighborhood-friendly architecture.

Front facades of each home must vary from model to model. A percentage must meet masonry requirements and covered front porch requirements. Corner lots must meet additional standards that address the street facing side as well as the front facade. All corner lots must meet strict masonry requirements.

Windows and doors must be clad in masonry or 4" wide trim. Windows must meet standards for size, design and construction while doors must emphasize the front entrance if not opening to a covered front porch. Roof color, pitch, overhangs, as well as materials are regulated. The rooftop regulations address the location as well as the color of rooftop equipment.

Carports are no longer allowed on single-family detached homes. Garages must meet both design and material standards that will integrate the garage into both the house and the neighborhood.

Homes that back onto public streets and landscape areas are required to meet height requirements depending on the grade of the property.

Every home must provide a minimum of four quality enhancements from a list of twelve. Some of those quality enhancements include house size, additional masonry, and garage door windows.

Architectural review for multi-family buildings (apartments and condominiums) is conducted in conjunction with the Development Permit.

Subdivision Plat

A Subdivision Plat is a legal document that describes a tract/parcel of land by bearing and distances, locates and defines easements, and dedicates the necessary rights-of-way for streets and easements for utilities. A Subdivision Plat must conform to the City's subdivision regulations and Title 38, Article 51 of Colorado Revised Statutes. A Subdivision Plat is recorded with the County Clerk and Recorder.

Although there are some exceptions, most lands within the City of Thornton are required to be subdivided. A Subdivision Plat, recorded with the Adams County Clerk and Recorder, is usually necessary prior to or concurrent with approval of a Development Permit. Similarly, building permits cannot typically be issued for any new building construction or for building additions until the Subdivision Plat is recorded. Related public improvements must be in place or promised to be in place with a Developer's Agreement prior to recordation of the subdivision.

If the lands have not been previously subdivided, application must be made for a Subdivision Plat. A Subdivision Plat is reviewed and approved administratively by City staff.

An approved Subdivision Plat is valid for three years, during which time a Developer's Agreement must be drafted to ensure completion of public improvements. Once the Developer's Agreement and Subdivision Plat are finalized they are recorded with the County Clerk and Recorder.

If the land proposed for development has been previously subdivided, the subdivision has been recorded, the dwelling unit density is not being increased, and no dedication or vacation of land is required, then application can be made for a Subdivision Plat Amendment. A Subdivision Plat Amendment is approved administratively, not requiring public hearings.

Temporary Use Permit

The Temporary Use Permit provides a means for allowing certain uses in locations where they would not be appropriate on a permanent basis, to provide for those uses that are temporary in nature, and to provide for development standards appropriate for such temporary uses.

Variance

Appeals to the Development Permits and Appeals Board include denial of a building permit or an interpretation, exception, or request for a variance from the regulations outlined in the City's Development Code.

1) The Board shall not grant a variance to the Development Code which:

- a. Permits a land use not allowed in the zoning district in which the property is located;
- b. Is in the public right-of-way or on public property;
- c. Alters any definition of the Development Code;
- d. Is other than the minimum variance that will afford relief with the least modification possible to the requirements of the Development Code;
- e. Is based on physical conditions or circumstances of the property so general or recurring in nature as to reasonably make practicable the formulation of a general regulation to be adopted as an amendment to the Development Code; or
- f. Is based exclusively on findings of personal or financial hardship.

(2) In order to grant a variance to the Development Code, the Board shall find that all the following have been satisfied:

- a. There are unique physical circumstances or conditions such as irregularity, narrowness or shallowness of the lot, or exceptional topographical or other physical condition particular to the affected property;
- b. Because of these unique physical circumstances or conditions, the property cannot be reasonably developed or used in compliance with the provisions of the Development Code;
- c. Due to such unique physical circumstances or conditions, the strict application of the Development Code would create a demonstrated hardship;
- d. The demonstrable hardship is not self-imposed;
- e. The variance if granted will not adversely affect the proposed development or use of adjacent property or the neighborhood;
- f. The variance if granted will not change the character of the zoning district in which the property is located;
- g. The variance if granted is in keeping with the intent of the Development Code; and
- h. The variance if granted will not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of the citizens of the City.

(3) Convenience, profit or caprice shall not constitute undue hardship.

Zoning Amendments

The zoning district classification of a property outlines the various land uses allowed for the property. If a use is not listed within a specific zoning district, then the proposed use is not allowed. Sections 18-186 through 18-201 of the Development Code give descriptions of the requirements for the zoning district and list the uses allowed in each district. If there is a conflict between the use chart in Section 18-230 and Sections 18-186 through 18-201, then Sections 18-186 through 18-201 control.

Amendments to the zoning of a property may be proposed by City Council, City Staff or a property owner. Zoning Amendments may include a request to change the zoning district classification, for example a change from Single-Family Detached to Community Retail, or a change in the zoning district boundary. If the property is currently not within the City boundaries and is proposed for Annexation, a Zoning application is required to be processed concurrently.

Zoning Verification Letter

The City Development Department provides research for any property located within the City of Thornton. You can obtain this information by requesting a Zoning Verification Letter.

To obtain a zoning verification letter, a completed application and a \$45.00 fee per parcel address are required. Once a request is submitted, the letter takes approximately 2-3 business days to complete. For more information, please call 303-538-7295 or email citydevelopment@thorntonco.gov.

Zoning Verification Letters can be requested through mail or email, and fees can be paid either by check or call by credit card to 303-538-7295.

Submit requests by regular mail to:

City Development
9500 Civic Center Drive
Thornton, CO 80229

Submit requests by email to:

developmentsubmittals@thorntonco.gov