RCOs: A Philadelphia Model for Community Input in Planning

Registered Community Organizations

October 12, 2014
2:30pm-3:45pm

2014 Annual Conference
PA Chapter of APA

Citizens Planning Institute
Panel

- Eleanor Sharpe, AICP, LEED AP, Deputy Executive Director-Legislative Affairs, Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC)

- Andrew Meloney, Senior Planner - PCPC

- Donna J. Carney, Director-Citizens Planning Institute - PCPC

- David Goldfarb, East Passyunk Crossing Civic Association, Zoning Committee Chair
1. Philadelphia Zoning Code Reform
2. Role of Registered Community Organizations
3. Implementing the Process - Lessons Learned
4. Training & Support
5. RCO Best Practices
6. Q&A
Zoning Code Reform - 2007-2011

- Why was Reform Necessary?

- Last major zoning code revision in 1962

- Voter referendum 2007- Zoning Code Commission
The Zoning Code Commission (ZCC) was formed through a charter change in 2007.

- 31-member Zoning Code Commission created to reform and modernize the zoning code.
- New code adopted on December 22, 2011.
Reasons to Update the Code

Last major code revision in 1962. Common criticisms:

- “Too confusing”
- “A broken system”
- “Unpredictable results”
- “Outdated”
Citizen Engagement

Over 3,400 citizens were involved in the zoning code rewrite effort:

- 50 Zoning Code Commission public meetings, aired on television
- 2 public hearings in City Council chambers
- 7 Stakeholder X-Changes
- 36 community-based meetings
- Dozens of presentations to community groups
- Interviewed 125 professional zoning code users
- Surveyed nearly 2,000 individuals on components of the proposed new zoning code.
Objectives of Zoning Code Reform

- Provide consistency and understandability of the zoning code
- Make future construction and development more predictable
- Encourage high quality, positive development
- Preserve the character of existing neighborhoods
- Involve the public in development decisions
Under prior Zoning Code:

- No standard procedure for zoning applicants to notify civic associations.
- Contention between neighborhood groups that claimed jurisdiction over overlapping areas.
- Informal system was unfair to groups with less resources/less ability to organize.
Chicago:
- Team of planning staff works within geographic district

Miami:
- Open & public planning process; residents can track their feedback

Atlanta: *Neighborhood Planning Units*
- Open membership, overseen by City planner, non-overlapping boundaries, advisory body

Denver:
- Registered Neighborhood associations (RNOs)
- Registration with the City is required

New York City: *Community Boards*
- First stop for civic associations to voice concerns
- Too formal for Philadelphia
Registered Community Organizations

New citywide system for registering community organizations with the Planning Commission
1. Formalizes the role of community organizations in the development process (RCO’s);

2. Creates a standard for notice and meetings;

3. Applicable when application requires either:
   - **Zoning Board approval** (variance/special exception)
   - or
   - **Civic Design Review**
Registration is not needed to attend or submit testimony to Zoning Board hearings.

Anyone may attend or testify at a Zoning Board hearing.

Registration is not needed to be a civic or neighborhood association in Philadelphia.

Registration does establish greater influence over Zoning Board decisions.

Registration is not notification of all development projects, just appeals to zoning refusals by L&I.

Zoning Board considers multiple factors in determining hardship.
Independent agency of L&I appointed by the Mayor:

- Grants dimensional and use variances
- Grants special exception approvals
- Hears appeals of zoning decisions made by L&I
Civic Design Review

Review of LARGE Projects that are likely to have a significant impact on the "public realm"

- Developer
- Community
- General Public

Process is mandatory—recommendations are advisory.
The Civic Design Review Committee

- 7-person committee, including 6 permanent and one rotating seat. Mayor appoints the permanent members:
  - 4 specified design professionals
  - 1 developer/builder
  - 1 civic association representative
  - Rotating seat(s) filled by up to (2) RCOs

- Chaired by a member of the City Planning Commission
Registered Community Organizations

Qualifying Criteria:

• An adopted statement of purpose.

• Geographic area with no more than 20,000 parcels and boundaries set forth in the organization’s governing rules.

• Regular meetings that are publicly-announced (hard copy or electronically) and open to the public.

• Open meetings held on a regularly scheduled basis.

• Leadership chosen by membership-at-large by elections.

• Status valid for 2 years.
Registered Community Organizations

**Responsibilities:**

1. Alert membership of ZBA hearing cases and Civic Design Review cases.
2. Agree to meet with applicants within 45 days.
3. If selected as a “Coordinating” RCO, schedule and host public meeting with applicant.
5. Representative sits on CDR committee for projects within boundaries.
Benefits

- Community involvement in development as advisory entity
- Burden on communities and applicants, not on the City
- Improved coordination between developers and communities and greater accountability
- Some areas that didn’t have representation before, have it now.
Lessons Learned???

- Burdensome transition for PCPC and applicants
  - Registration and Notification
- Notification requirements = burden for small projects
- Enforceability
- “Political” organizations, such as Ward Committees, qualify as RCOs
- Criteria and minimum qualifications for RCOs
- Coordination between overlapping RCOs
Training & Support

Education & Outreach for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Citizens Planning Institute
Zoning Code Trainings & RCO Workshops

- 45 classes & workshops
- over 750 participants in 2 years!

- Train the Trainer sessions (5)
- Public Zoning Training series (29)
- Community Workshops (6)
- RCO Clinics - [regulation changes] (3)
- RCO Workshops (2)
June RCO Workshops

Agenda:
- Welcome
- Recording Questions
- Part 1: Development & the Approvals Process
- Part 2: The Role of RCOs & Best Practices
- Resources
Neighborhood Notice & Meetings

- Day 1
- *Day 7
- *Day 17
- *Day 45

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<tr>
<th>ZBA Appeal File Date</th>
<th>Applicant Notifies RCOs and Affected Property Owners</th>
<th>Neighborhood Meetings held and documented</th>
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*Number of days reflects maximum notification windows of time

“Affected Properties” = within 200’ radius of applicant’s property; On the same blockface; On the blockface across the street.

Citizens Planning Institute
Attracting & Keeping Volunteers

Station WIIFM*

*What’s in it for me?

Graphic Credit: Lisa Whited
Resources & Tools - ZBA Appeals

- www.phila.gov/li/Pages/default.aspx
- Zoning appeals list - filter under “region” to show council districts
- Click on appeal# to find detailed info about case
- www.phila.gov/map scroll down to “Violations” map
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<tr>
<th>Item of comparison</th>
<th>East Passyunk Crossing Civic Assoc. &amp; Town Watch (EPX)</th>
<th>GENA- Girard Estates Neighbors Association (online)</th>
<th>South Kensington Community Partners (online)</th>
<th>South of South Neighborhood Assoc (SOSNA) (online)</th>
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<td><strong>Purpose / Mission:</strong></td>
<td>Planning &amp; Zoning committee mission statement; reviews all applications for variance, certificate, CDR, liquor transfer, etc.</td>
<td>Provide a public forum of discussion &amp; review of all zoning variance applications; provide a means for direct neighborhood input</td>
<td>Zoning Committee purpose to facilitate a public forum for discussion and review of zoning variance requests through community vote for all applications...and convey the vote at ZBA hearings for variance requests.</td>
<td>“Zoning Committee Protocols” – provides a public forum for discussion and review of all zoning variances within the SOSNA area; residents can register their opinion on voting sheets forwarded to Councilperson’s office</td>
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<td><strong>Committee member roles &amp; responsibilities:</strong></td>
<td>Nominated and approved by the Board</td>
<td>Members named; terms, nominated by general membership; approved by Committee</td>
<td>Neutrality; facilitation at zoning meetings; notifications; monitoring projects re: provisos; attend ZBA hearings; non-voting</td>
<td>9-member Committee appointed by SOSNA Board of Directors; Chair &amp; Vice-Chair; term limits; Chair presides &amp; writes opinion</td>
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<td><strong>Applicant submission requirements:</strong></td>
<td>List of documents that must be submitted (no deadline)</td>
<td>Submit 2 weeks prior; electronic, if hard copies- (9) copies</td>
<td>Submit 1 week prior to DRC mtg; prefer electronic</td>
<td>List of required documents must be submitted min. 10 days prior to mtg; (6) copies</td>
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<td><strong>Decision-making process:</strong></td>
<td>Discussion with opinions of community welcome; straw poll of support or opposition; Committee votes following the public meeting; reviewed by Board</td>
<td>Public comment, Committee deliberates in closed session and votes 4 Positions: Support, Non-Opinion, Deferral, Opposition</td>
<td>Community ballots - 1 per project; 1 vote from DRC; Letter of support, Support with Provisos, Opposition, or Continuance</td>
<td>Attendees (must be resident within area) indicate ‘support’ or ‘non-support’ on voting sheets; Zoning committee tries to reach consensus on (1) position: Support, Non-opposition, Deferral, Opposition, or No Opinion</td>
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<td><strong>Meeting Procedures:</strong></td>
<td>Step by step (all cases)</td>
<td>Step by step (all cases)</td>
<td>Outlined for each type of review process; “Proviso process” - conditions to statements of support;</td>
<td>General “Guidelines”; Committee桌上者 and moderates; option for mediation in the case of ‘opposition’;</td>
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<td><strong>Meeting Notification:</strong></td>
<td>5 days prior to meeting, post flyers in prominent locations; email list, EPX operated internet sites</td>
<td>GENA website, newsletter and South Philly Review; coordinate with other RCOs if property within shared boundaries</td>
<td>Website, weekly e-newsletter, monthly zoning e-newsletter; newspapers; flyers posted at project site &amp; public locations; delivered to addresses within 500’ of project</td>
<td>Monthly meetings on 3rd Wednesdays; projects to be reviewed posted on website “events calendar”</td>
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