



# Commercial Site Review

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## Purpose

The purpose of the Commercial Site Review process is to ensure that proposed commercial developments comply with applicable zoning regulations, design standards, and infrastructure requirements prior to issuance of any building permits. This process is intended to address site-specific considerations such as access, parking, zoning district dimensional and design standards, circulation, landscaping, stormwater management, utility placement, and compatibility with adjacent land uses.

The City of Helena has always required a site plan review and approval in conjunction Building Permit review and approval. The city now has separated these reviews for certain commercial and multi-unit residential projects allowing for the site review to take place prior to building permit application. The intent for having site plans separately reviewed and considered is to allow project applicants, design professionals, engineers, the development community, and city staff to:

- Identify and resolve issues early in the planning and design process to avoid costly changes later on;
- Provide more timely and certain feedback to project developers and design professionals without holding up a building permit review;
- Improve coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of city processes and regulations and our reviewing departments and staff;
- Facilitate a quicker and more efficient building permit review and approval process

City of Helena staff will review commercial site review submittals for conformance to city policy, regulations, and standards (zoning, parking, access, site design, landscaping, traffic engineering, site circulation, utilities, stormwater) and will act on the submitted plans prior to the submittal or approval of building plans or permits. Concurrent Building and Commercial Site reviews are permitted but a Building permit will not be issued until the site review process has concluded successfully.

Staff began working on this updated site review process early in 2024 with an individual pilot plan review in September 2025. We will continually review the effectiveness of application procedures and make adjustment as needed. Feedback from applicants and our stakeholders is encouraged.

## Applicability

Commercial Site Review will be required for:

- All new commercial developments - both single building developments as well as multi-building, multi-phased projects
  - All multi-unit residential developments of three (3) or more units
  - All additions, alterations, renovations, or remodels of any commercial or multi-unit residential building that increases the size of the existing building by 25%, changes the use of the existing building, or which alters the zoning compliance of the site relative to parking and/or landscaping
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## Timing

Commercial Site Review must be completed **prior to submission of a building permit application (including all foundation only permit requests)**. Building permit issuance shall be conditioned upon approval of the commercial site plan by the Planning Division.

Site review and building permit reviews may run concurrently, however, building permit issuance will be held until such time site plan approval has been granted.

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## Submission Requirements

For **Single Building Reviews**, submittals must include, at a minimum:

- A **Commercial Site Plan** showing conformance with commercial site requirements. The plan must show:
  - 1. Legal description, property address, and zoning analysis including zoning district, setback requirements, lot coverage (both required and proposed with percentage), building height permitted and proposed.
  - 2. Property boundary dimensions and distances to the street curb and public sidewalks
  - 3. Easements, covenants, or other use restrictions
  - 4. Size and location of proposed and existing structures and setbacks/distances to property boundaries
  - 5. Site topography with grade elevations at site corners, building corners, and finished floor.
  - 6. Location of all site utilities, sizes of water and sewer services to the main, water entrance diagram to the structure(s), and fire hydrants being

- proposed or existing in the vicinity. (Utilities can be shown on a separate plan for clarity if needed).
  - 7. Required on/off street parking (with dimensions) and loading areas along with a narrative/analysis of minimum required and number proposed.
  - 8. Life Safety and Fire Access including all internal designated fire lanes w/dimensions, apparatus turning movements/radii based on largest truck, and distance to the nearest hydrant, and locations of all hydrants within 400 feet of all property lines.
- **A Landscape Plan** that shows both the general landscaping and required parking lot landscaping, including:
  - 1. Location of proposed general and parking lot landscaping drawn to scale
  - 2. Location and dimensions of all existing and proposed buildings, project boundary, parking lots, roadways and rights-of-way, delineation of sight distance triangles, walking and nonmotorized paths, and above ground utilities.
  - 3. Location, installed size, species, and quantity of proposed trees, bushes, shrubs, or other vegetation, and organic and inorganic materials proposed.
  - 4. Estimated date of completion of all landscaping.
  - 5. Boulevard landscaping must also be shown.
  - 6. Calculations related to required and provided landscaping coverage must be affixed to the plan.
- **A Site Lightening Plan** that shows location and types of lightening fixtures proposed for the site that are not affixed to a building (i.e. parking lot lighting). A photometric plan will also be required providing the light spread and performance of these fixtures.
- **Transportation Civil Plans** depicting all street and site access improvements including new and existing vehicular access points, curb cuts, and approaches, boulevard sidewalk details for both existing and new installations, including general placement of all new and existing boulevard trees, and other information as may be required by Transportation Systems to demonstrate compliance with the City's Engineering Standards for site access design and construction.
- **A Traffic Impact Study** if the use or building will generate more than 200 ADVT.
- **Stormwater Plans** - SWPPP, Erosion and Sediment Control, Hydrologic Analysis and Design, Conveyance System Design, and Run-Off Control plans meeting the requirements of Chapter 4 of the City's engineering Standards, the City of Helena Stormwater Ordinance, State of Montana Law, and Federal Law.

- **Other Plans** – depending on the nature of the project and access to public utilities (water and sewer), a set of civil utility plans may be required. See note about utility plans for the Multi-Building, Multi-Phase project requirements.

For **Multi-Building/Multi-Phased Project Reviews**, applicants shall submit:

- A **Commercial Site Plan** showing conformance with commercial site requirements. The plan must show:
  - 1. Legal description, property address, and zoning analysis including zoning district, setback requirements, lot coverage (both required and proposed with percentage), building height permitted and proposed.
  - 2. Property boundary dimensions and distances to the street curb and public sidewalks
  - 3. Easements, covenants, or other use restrictions
  - 4. Size and location of proposed and existing structures and setbacks/distances to property boundaries
  - 5. Site topography with grade elevations at site corners, building corners, and finished floor.
  - 6. Location of all site utilities, sizes of water and sewer services to the main, water entrance diagram to the structure(s), and fire hydrants being proposed or existing in the vicinity. (Utilities can be shown on a separate plan for clarity if needed).
  - 7. Required on/off street parking (with dimensions) and loading areas along with a narrative/analysis of minimum required and number proposed.
  - 8. Life Safety and Fire Access including all internal designated fire lanes w/dimensions, apparatus turning movements/radii based on largest truck, and distance to the nearest hydrant, and locations of all hydrants within 400 feet of all property lines.
- A **Landscape Plan** that shows both the general landscaping and required parking lot landscaping, including:
  - 1. Location of proposed general and parking lot landscaping drawn to scale
  - 2. Location and dimensions of all existing and proposed buildings, project boundary, parking lots, roadways and rights-of-way, delineation of sight distance triangles, walking and nonmotorized paths, and above ground utilities.
  - 3. Location, installed size, species, and quantity of proposed trees, bushes, shrubs, or other vegetation, and organic and inorganic materials proposed.
  - 4. Estimated date of completion of all landscaping.
  - 5. Boulevard landscaping must also be shown.

- 6. Calculations related to required and provided landscaping coverage must be affixed to the plan.
  - **A Site Lightening Plan** that shows location and types of lightening fixtures proposed for the site that are not affixed to a building (i.e. parking lot lighting). A photometric plan will also be required providing the light spread and performance of these fixtures.
  - **Transportation Civil Plans** depicting all street and site access improvements including new and existing vehicular access points, curb cuts, and approaches, boulevard sidewalk details for both existing and new installations, including general placement of all new and existing boulevard trees, and other information as may be required by Transportation Systems to demonstrate compliance with the City's Engineering Standards for site access design and construction.
  - **A Traffic Impact Study** if the use or building will generate more than 200 ADVT.
  - **Stormwater Plans** - SWPPP, Erosion and Sediment Control, Hydrologic Analysis and Design, Conveyance System Design, and Run-Off Control plans meeting the requirements of Chapter 4 of the City's engineering Standards, the City of Helena Stormwater Ordinance, State of Montana Law, and Federal Law.
  - **Sewer Infrastructure Plans** - Civil plans depicting all sewer system improvements including profiles of all mains and outfalls, lift station and force main details, typical manhole construction details, and other information as may be required by Public Works to demonstrate compliance with the City's Engineering Standards for sewer system design and construction.
  - **Water Infrastructure Plans** - Civil plans depicting all water system improvements including profiles, water mains, fire hydrants, valves and other appurtenances, and other information as may be required by Public Works to demonstrate compliance with the City's Engineering Standards for water system design and construction.
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## Review Process

The review process will essentially be unchanged from the process as it existed when combined with the building permit review. There is now a separate fee schedule for the site plan review. No longer will the site work valuations need to be included with the building permit contractor's valuation calculation...reducing the overall fee costs for projects.

1. **Pre-Development Consultation** (optional but recommended): Applicant meets with requested City of Helena staff on a set, designated schedule to discuss relative city requirements.

2. **Formal Submission:** Applicant submits complete site plan package to the Planning Division via Civic Access.
  3. **Interdepartmental Review:** Plans are circulated to Public Works, Transportation, Fire, Police, and other relevant agencies.
  4. **Comment & Revision Cycle:** Applicant addresses staff comments and resubmits revised plans.
  5. **Final Approval:** Planning Division issues a **Site Plan Approval Letter** or provides an **Approved stamped set of plans**, which must accompany any building permit application.
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## Standards for Review

The review shall consider:

- Compliance with zoning and design guidelines.
  - Adequacy of vehicular and pedestrian circulation and access.
  - Stormwater management and grading.
  - Landscaping and buffering.
  - Impacts on adjacent properties and public infrastructure.
  - Public safety access and site circulation
  - Access to adequate public water and sewer infrastructure
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## Relationship to Building Permit

No building permit shall be issued until the Commercial Site Review process is complete and the site plan has been approved. Building permit review will focus on structural, mechanical, and life-safety code compliance, separate from site design considerations.

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## Relationship with other Permits or Reviews

Based on the project and its relationship to required public infrastructure, there may be other reviews and permits required of your project outside of but triggered by the Commercial Site Review process, i.e. water and or sewer system development review and fees, water tap and meter reviews and fees, sewer connection fees, street opening/closure permits, etc. It will be the responsibility of the contractor/applicant to contact Public Works and/or Transportation Systems to inquire what additional reviews will be required.