

Rules for Registered Community Organizations and Neighborhood Meetings with Zoning Applicants – What You Need to Know

The City of Philadelphia Zoning Code outlines a process for a zoning applicant to notify and meet with RCOs and nearby residents to discuss the proposed development when the proposal requires a special exception, a variance or Civic Design Review. Key elements of the law include minimum qualifications for RCOs, required notices from the City Planning Commission to zoning applicants informing them of their responsibilities, notification requirements for zoning applicants to RCOs and neighboring properties, and procedures for convening neighborhood meetings with zoning applicants.

Does My Organization Qualify as an RCO?

Neighborhood Improvement Districts¹, Special Services Districts², and Ward Committees automatically qualify as RCOs upon submission of a complete application to the Planning Commission.

Other organizations – including volunteer organizations, Pennsylvania nonprofit corporations, and unincorporated associations – may qualify as RCOs if the organization has:

1. Adopted a statement of purpose for the organization concerning land use, zoning, preservation, or development AND
2. A geographic area with no more than 20,000 parcels, AND
3. Governing rules/by-laws, which include a description of boundaries, a definition of their membership, and a description of their leadership selection process, AND
4. Publicly announces meetings through hard copy or electronic notices, AND
5. Open meetings on a regularly scheduled basis, AND
6. Leadership chosen by the membership of the organization at large.

I am a Zoning Applicant – Whom Should I Notify?

The Planning Commission provides the Applicant with the contact information of all parties that he or she is required to notify as follows:

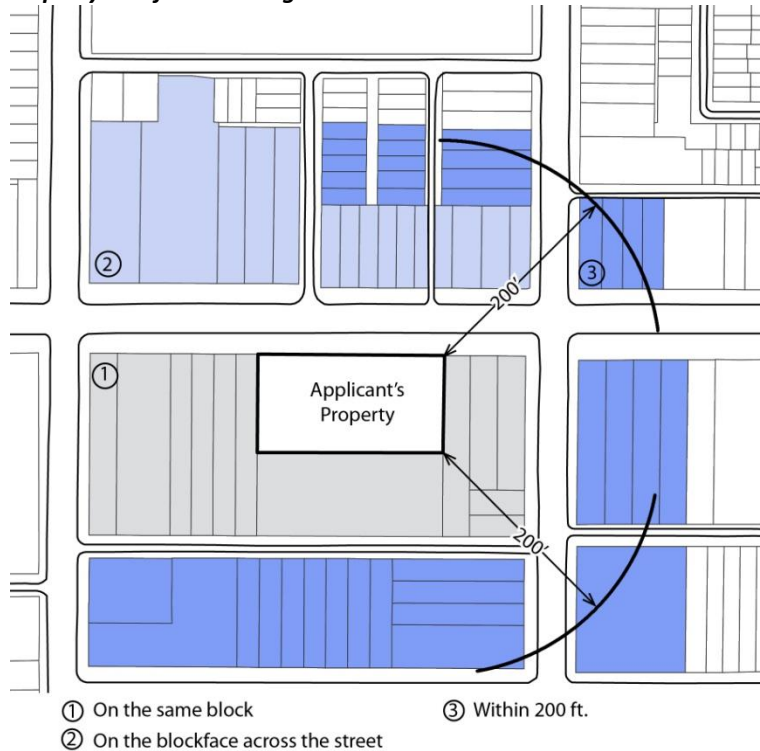
- Each affected RCO including the RCO that acts as the “Coordinating RCO.” The Coordinating RCO, which is selected after consultation with the District Council office, is responsible for scheduling and convening the public meeting regarding the Applicant’s proposal;
- Each property that the Applicant must notify via regular mail or hand delivery. These properties are on the same block, across the street and within 200 ft. of the subject property (see Property Notification diagram);
- The office of the District Councilmember;
- The Planning Commission; and
- The Zoning Board or Civic Design Review Committee, as applicable.

¹ An improvement district created under the Pennsylvania Community Economic Improvement Act for a specific geographic area where an assessment is levied for improvements or services.

² A district, typically created under the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Act, with a fixed boundary in which supplemental services are provided, funded either by a mandatory tax or fee, or by voluntary contributions made by property owners, institutions, or businesses within the district.

The Applicant must send written notice to all of the above within 10 days of receiving the contact information from the Planning Commission. By law, this notice must include certain contact information, details about the zoning proposal, and information about the public meeting. Please check www.phila.gov/cityplanning for suggested templates.

Property Notification Diagram



How is the Public Meeting Convened?

The Coordinating RCO consults with the Applicant and any other affected RCOs to set the public meeting date, time, and place to discuss the Applicant's proposal. This date must be scheduled within 45 days after the Applicant filed the appeal to the Zoning Board or has been notified by L&I that the project requires Civic Design Review.

The Coordinating RCO must provide a written meeting summary to the Zoning Board or Civic Design Review Committee (as applicable), to the Planning Commission, and to the District Councilmember. If no meeting was held, written documentation of the efforts made to schedule the meeting must be provided. Please check www.phila.gov/cityplanning for suggested templates.

Neither the Zoning Board nor the Civic Design Review Committee will hear an Applicant's case until they have received this documentation or until 45 days has lapsed since the Applicant filed the appeal to the Zoning Board or has been notified by L&I that the project requires Civic Design Review.

Have More Questions?

Please submit your inquiries to RCO.notification@phila.gov or 215-683-4685.