

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 their 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 and Special Services Districts² qualify as RCOs upon submission of a complete application to the Planning Commission. Ward Committees qualify as RCOs upon submission of a complete application, and 4. and 5., below.

Other organizations – including volunteer organizations, Pennsylvania nonprofit corporations, and unincorporated associations – may qualify as RCOs if the organization submits a complete application that includes copies or descriptions of:

1. An 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. A copy of meeting announcement disseminated publicly 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 at regularly scheduled elections.

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 within 250 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.

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 see the end of this document for suggested templates.

¹ An improvement districted 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.

Property Notification Diagram



All properties within 250' of the boundaries of the applicant's property must be notified.

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.

Templates for Zoning Applicants

The following pages are suggested letter templates for Zoning Applicants.

The Planning Commission staff will provide **zoning applicants** with the contact information for all parties they must notify. This includes:

- Each applicable RCO including the RCO that acts as the “Coordinating RCO”, which is responsible for scheduling and hosting the public meeting
- Each property owner on the same block, across the street and within 200 ft of the subject property. (Notification must be via regular mail or hand delivery.)
- The District Councilmember
- The Zoning Board or Civic Design Review Committee, as applicable.

Templates suggested for Zoning Applicant:

1-Notice from Zoning Applicant to RCOs and Neighboring Property Owners (Coordinating RCO **Has** scheduled the public community meeting). **Please try to schedule a meeting with the RCO as quickly as possible so that you can use this first template.**

2-Notice from Zoning Applicant to RCOs and Neighboring Property Owners (Coordinating RCO **Has Not Yet** scheduled the public community meeting)

TEMPLATE 1 – Notice from Zoning Applicants to RCOs and Neighbors
(Coordinating RCO Has Scheduled the Public Community Meeting)

[Name of Applicant]
[Address of Applicant]
[City, State ZIP Code]

[Date]

Re: [Property Address]

ZBA Appeal File Date: _____
OR
CDR Referral Date: _____

Dear Registered Community Organization or Neighbor:

This is a notification of a **PUBLIC MEETING** to discuss the project described below. All Registered Community Organizations that have geographic boundaries containing the project property and all community members are welcome to attend.

Property Description:

[Add a description of the property by general vicinity, street address, size, nearest cross street, and the zoning district in which the property is located.]

Project Description:

[Add a description of the nature, scope, and purpose of the application. If the hearing is a Zoning Board of Adjustment hearing, describe the type of special exceptions and variances being sought. Indicate where copies of the zoning application and any related information can be obtained.]

Summary of Refusal: [Summarize or Attach a copy of refusal]

[Insert Name of Coordinating RCO] as Coordinating RCO has scheduled a **PUBLIC MEETING** in advance of a public hearing to discuss the project at the following date, time and location:

Public Meeting Date & Time: [Date] [Time]

Location: [Address, City, State ZIP Code]

Please review the zoning posters for the date of the **PUBLIC HEARING** to be held by the City of Philadelphia [Zoning Board of Adjustment or Civic Design Review Committee] **located at** 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19102 on the issue.

For reference, contact information for all affected Registered Community Organizations and the District Councilperson is provided as follows:

[District Council Office contact information]

[Each Registered Community Organization's contact information]

[The following sentence must be included and worded as follows.] If you have received this notice as the owner, managing agent, or other responsible person at a multi-unit building, you are requested to post this notice at a prominent place in a common area of your building.

Sincerely,
Name of Applicant

[The law requires that the following receive copies of this notification]

cc: District Council Office contact

Planning Commission - rco.notification@phila.gov

Each affected RCO including the Coordinating RCO

ZBA at rcozba@phila.gov or Civic Design Review Committee at CDR@phila.gov

TEMPLATE 2 – Notice from Zoning Applicants to RCOs and Neighbors

(Coordinating RCO **Has Not Yet** Scheduled the Public Community Meeting)

[Name of Applicant]

[Address of Applicant]

[City, State ZIP Code]

[Date]

Re: [Property Address]

ZBA Appeal File Date: _____
OR
CDR Referral Date: _____

Dear Registered Community Organization or Neighbors:

This is a notification of an upcoming **PUBLIC MEETING** to discuss the project described below. All Registered Community Organizations that have geographic boundaries containing the project property and all community members are welcome to attend.

Property Description:

[Add a description of the property by general vicinity, street address, size, nearest cross street, and the zoning district in which the property is located.]

Project Description:

[Add a description of the nature, scope, and purpose of the application. If the hearing is a Zoning Board of Adjustment hearing, describe the type of special exceptions and variances being sought. Indicate where copies of the zoning application and any related information can be obtained.]

Summary of Refusal: [Summarize or Attach copy of refusal]

[The following sentence must be included and worded as follows.] A public meeting to discuss this proposal will be convened by [Insert Name of Coordinating RCO], but the date, time, and place of that public meeting has not yet been set. Please contact [Insert Name of Coordinating RCO] or your District Councilperson for more information about the public meeting.

Please review the zoning posters for the date of the **PUBLIC HEARING** to be held by the City of Philadelphia [Zoning Board of Adjustment or Civic Design Review Committee] **located at** 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19102 on the issue

For reference, contact information for all affected Registered Community Organizations and the District Councilperson is provided as follows:

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[The following sentence must be included and worded as follows.] If you have received this notice as the owner, managing agent, or other responsible person at a multi-unit building, you are requested to post this notice at a prominent place in a common area of your building.

Sincerely,

Name of Applicant

[The law requires that the following receive copies of this notification]

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ZBA at rcozba@phila.gov or Civic Design Review Committee at CDR@phila.gov