



City of River Rouge

Development Handbook

A Step-By-Step Guide to Development

April 2023

Introduction

Opening Statement

The City of River Rouge wants to encourage commercial, creative, and industrial investments that will build sustainable and equitable economic development opportunities for the city. The City of River Rouge Development Handbook is part of this strategy to increase the number of small business owners in the city. Its intent is to help business owners and developers understand the review and approval process (i.e., the City's policies, goals, and timelines), from concept through completion. In doing so, this Handbook will break down informational and financial barriers to getting involved in small business ownership.

Objectives for the City of River Rouge's Development Handbook

- Collect and simplify the laws, documents, and applications that are a part of the River Rouge development process.
- Explain how local, county, and state officials are involved in the development process, and give advice on when their input is needed.
- Highlight current local and State financial incentives, as well as workforce development programs.
- Convey information in a clear and concise way.

How to Approach the Handbook

The Handbook is written from an investor's viewpoint, whether you are a first-time business owner or a professional developer. It outlines the review process for starting a business and renovating or constructing a building. The Handbook is, however, not a replacement for city, county, state, or federal laws, ordinances, requirements, and guidelines. This guide is general, and investors are still responsible for seeking professional advice from City staff, staff from other levels of government, and from outside professionals. Each case is unique and may require modification of the general process. Contact information, website links, and related documents will be linked throughout the document. [The City of River Rouge's website](#) is available to provide accessible forms and documents, program descriptions, and links to outside sources that investors, developers, and new owners of small-to-medium sized businesses would find helpful.

How to Use the Guide to Development

This Handbook provides developers with a comprehensive set of resources to help make the development process in River Rouge as smooth as possible. Before diving into the technicalities of the development process, we explore the different ways in which River Rouge is a great place to invest, from its strong and resilient community to its riverside location, affordable real estate, financial incentive programs, and supportive and qualified City staff.

We then provide a series of key resources to facilitate the development process. Those resources include key contact information (phone numbers and emails), the location of key documents (e.g., the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*), land use definitions, information about the roles and meeting times of different City Boards and Commissions, as well as a few resources (online reports, web pages, etc.) on how to get a small- or medium-sized business started.

From there, we provide a detailed step-by-step breakdown of the development process from the pre-purchase phase to the licensing phase. Throughout these sections of the Handbook, as well as through our accompanying appendices, we provide everything from phone numbers and email addresses of individuals or departments to contact with any questions you may have during the development process, to flow charts, lists, web links, call out boxes, a glossary of terms, and a summary of River Rouge's 2021 *Target Market Analysis*. The purpose of these various tools is to simplify the development process into an easy format.

We conclude this Handbook with a list of financial incentives and workforce development programs to support your River Rouge investment journey.

We are excited to welcome you into the River Rouge community and are looking forward to your development! Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions as you read through this Handbook.

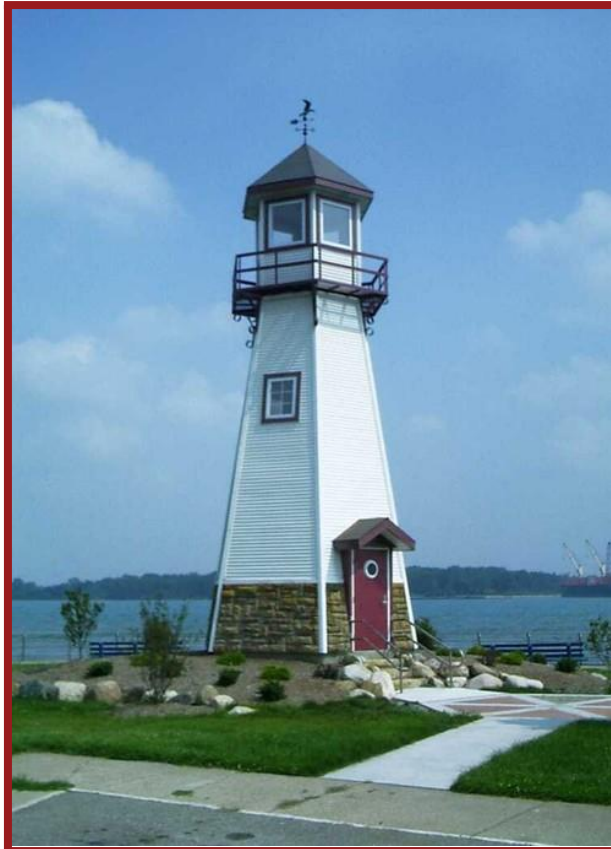


Downtown billboards (2017)

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River Rouge Belanger Park (2017)

1. Why River Rouge is a Great Place to Invest



Rouge Days (2017)

*“River Rouge residents envision a growing city that maintains its small town feel, with **state-of-the art facilities, bustling sidewalks, and a family-friendly atmosphere.** River Rouge will have **housing** formats that support all stages of life, **clean, high paying jobs, and a reliable and efficient transportation system.**” - Community vision featured in the River Rouge Master Plan (2017)*

City of River Rouge Key Assets

Downriver communities, notably the City of River Rouge, are described by residents of the area as “the lifeblood of America and the lifeblood of the City of Detroit” ([Michigan Radio](#)). River Rouge covers 2.65 square miles and is home to industrial giants such as United States Steel. 60% of the land in River Rouge is industrial, and one-third of River Rouge residents continue to work in manufacturing. The city is linked to Detroit in many ways; in addition to sharing a border, the two cities are connected via West Jefferson Avenue, River Rouge’s main road, and the Detroit River. The City of River Rouge is home to 7,200 residents and is well situated regarding highway access. One mile west of the city lies I-75, and farther west lies I-94, which provides access to north-south freeways (I-75 and I-275). River Rouge is also only approximately 20 miles east of the international Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport.



River Rouge aerial view (2017)

What Makes River Rouge a Great Place to Invest

River Rouge’s riverside location and deep community ties make the city a prime location for commercial and creative investment. For these reasons, River Rouge is prioritizing innovative solutions to encourage small-scale commercial, creative, and industrial investments to kickstart sustainable and equitable economic development. This Development Handbook is your guide to locating your business or building in River Rouge, and its goal is to guide you through the steps to responsibly and successfully invest in River Rouge. Before diving in, we want to share some of the things that make River Rouge a great place to invest.

Connected and Affordable

River Rouge is adjacent to multiple key transportation networks, including the Rouge River, the Detroit River, multiple highways and the up-and-coming Gordie Howe International Bridge (GHIB), which is expected to bring business to River Rouge. Investing in River Rouge also comes with a wide variety of potential financial incentives, such as local industrial incentives from the City of River Rouge, the [Michigan Community Revitalization Program \(MCRP\)](#) from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), [Small Business Pollution Prevention \(P2\) Loans](#) from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE).

Warm and Welcoming

The City of River Rouge is here to help you successfully invest in the City. In an interview about developing in River Rouge, staff at the Wayne Metro Community Action Agency said that “When

it came to developing our site, River Rouge welcomed us with open arms in a way that other cities didn't, and City staff helped us every step of the way.”

Community-Centered and Forward-Looking

Residents take pride in the city's stable homeownership trends, long-lasting housing stock, and school system, as well as its cultural vibrancy, with events like Rouge Days and Music in the Park. Our community celebrates River Rouge's history of resilience and shares aspirations for the future. Those include small and medium scale developments that meet residents' needs. Residents envision a mix of retail services, good-paying jobs, a strong youth population, and a healthy environment, all of which honor the small town and family-friendly feel of the city.

Vibrant and Spirited

River Rouge celebrates its racial, ethnic, and economic diversity and is seeking to develop a downtown area that serves and strengthens its creative and multicultural community. There are many downtown development opportunities, such as food stores, entertainment spaces, and retail, which can be carried out in partnership with the City and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA). The City is actively working to attract artists and foster creative spaces to spur development projects.

Collaborative and Motivated

The City of River Rouge is proactive about building intra- and inter-city collaborations. River Rouge routinely collaborates on grants and events with neighboring cities and actively pursues economic development programs such as [Project Rising Tide](#), a statewide initiative to provide at-risk communities like River Rouge with tools to build a successful economic framework. When it comes to hiring workers for your development, River Rouge is located near various workforce development and job placement programs, such as the [Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation](#), which is one of 16 Michigan Works! Agencies located around the State. See Section 12: Financial Incentives & Workforce Development Programs for more detail. River Rouge looks forward to collaborating with you and to helping connect you with other agencies to make your project a success!

Hopeful and Full of Potential

River Rouge's industrial districts, which surround the downtown core, are perfectly poised to take advantage of the industrial future. These sites can be leveraged to spur the development of the “Green Economy,” which includes novel industrial projects like battery storage, solar panel and wind turbine manufacturing and installation, material recycling, and other sustainable manufacturing initiatives. These areas are complementary to the many business types that make up the “New Economy,” such as start ups, artisan-owned businesses, and creative small

manufacturing. Such economic growth could be combined with job creation opportunities in areas related to manufacturing, such as logistics, marketing, and administration. As the City pursues its redevelopment, there are many placemaking opportunities, such as developing public spaces, pedestrian-friendly environments, open storefronts, and ground-floor signage, to create desirable places where people want to live.

Community Vision for Economic Development in River Rouge



River Rouge Master Planning Community Engagement Event (2017)

In 2017, the residents of River Rouge spoke out and shared that the current business mix was not right for them – the community was saturated with gas stations, liquor stores, and fast food restaurants, but it lacked access to local grocery stores, medical facilities, good-paying employment, and retail opportunities. Residents’ economic development priorities include business recruitment, business retention, physical improvement of the West Jefferson business corridor, business training programs, and collective marketing.

The City’s community engagement efforts with residents and 2021 *Target Retail Market Analysis* confirm that there is a high demand for the following types of businesses in River Rouge:

- Electronics and appliance stores
- Grocery/specialty food stores (e.g., a seafood or fish market, bakery, meat/ butcher/deli, sweet shop, and small grocery store with ethnic imports)
- A full-service restaurant
- Clothing stores
- A movie theater
- General merchandise and department stores
- Health clinics

River Rouge’s goal is to become its own champion for redevelopment. The City’s holistic approach to economic development focuses on improving the vibrancy of downtown, attracting young people and artists into the city, cultivating local business, and training the next generation to be successful professionals in a variety of fields. See Appendix A for more information or ask the City staff for the City of River Rouge’s full *Target Market Retail Analysis* (more details in Section 3: Where to Find Key Documents on pages 12-14).



Commercial property for sale (upper left); Soul Set Salon Barber Shop (upper right); Zenith Lunch restaurant (lower left); Building at the corner of W. Jefferson Ave. and Haltiner Street (lower right) (all taken in 2023)

2. Key Contact Information

Your project will require approval from a number of different departments and commissions before, during, and after construction. Contact the following departments with any questions during different stages of the development process. The City of River Rouge staff is here to help!

Department Name	Key Contact	Telephone Number	Email
Building Department	Troy L. Newman, Jr.	(313) 842-4209	building@cityofriverrouge.org
City Clerk's Office	Patricia Johnson (Clerk) Bridgette Bowdler (Deputy Clerk)	(313) 842-5604	bbowdler@cityofriverrouge.org
Community Development Department	Karl Laub	(313) 842-4203 ext. 224	klaub@cityofriverrouge.org
Planning Department	Nani Wolf (McKenna)	(248) 596-0920	nwolf@mcka.com
Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)	Dan Gough	(517) 281-8253	GoughD1@Michigan.gov
Wayne County Construction Permit Office	Hikmat Kessem, PE	(734) 858-2774 (main line) (734) 858- 2757	dpspermits@co.wayne.mi.us
Wayne County Department of Public Services	Marley	(313) 224-3620 (main line) 1-888-762-3273 (24/7 Call Center)	esghelp@waynecounty.com

3. Where to Find Important Documents

Many documents are important to the development process. Below, we explain the purpose and location of each document. The [Community Development page](#) of the City of River Rouge's website is a good resource for locating these documents. **Come back to this page if you come across a document and want to understand its purpose.**

River Rouge Master Plan (2017)

- The *Master Plan* is the City's vision guide for future growth and development. Potential small business owners and developers should review it to understand how their development plans fit into the City's vision and goals.
- To obtain a copy of the *Master Plan*, please visit the City of River Rouge [website](#) or email Karl Laub, Community Development Director, at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

River Rouge Zoning Ordinance

- The *Zoning Ordinance* explains what is allowed on your property and the approval process.
- To obtain a copy of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*, please email Karl Laub, Community Development Director, at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

River Rouge Zoning Map

- The Zoning Map will help you determine whether your desired use is permitted.
- To obtain the most recent Zoning Map, please email Karl Laub, Community Development Director, at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org. Please contact Nani Wolf at nwolf@mcka.com for any questions about the Zoning Map and/or how your property is zoned.

Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Boundaries Map

- The DDA develops projects that promote economic growth in Downtown River Rouge. The DDA Boundaries Map will help you determine if your property lies in the DDA's boundaries.
- To receive a copy of the DDA Boundaries Map, please contact Nani Wolf at nwolf@mcka.com.

Site Plan Application Packet

- All proposed development will require site plan approval. The site plan application packet provides the required information to include in your site plan.
- To discuss the site planning process and receive an application packet, please email Community Development Director Karl Laub at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

Special Land Use Packet

- If your plan proposes a unique land use that would not otherwise be permitted in your zoning district, a special land use application may be required.
- To discuss the special land use process and receive an application packet, please email Community Development Director Karl Laub at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

Rezoning Application Packet

- If your proposal would require a change to the current zoning of the property, a rezoning application may be required.
- To discuss the rezoning process and receive an application packet, please email Community Development Director Karl Laub at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

Conditional Rezoning Application Packet

- If your proposal requires a change to the current zoning of the property, a conditional rezoning application may be required.
- To discuss the conditional rezoning process and receive an application packet, please email Community Development Director Karl Laub at klaub@cityofriverrouge.org.

Building Permit Applications

- Before beginning construction, you will need to submit permitting applications and necessary plans and construction drawings to the Building Department.
- River Rouge Building Ordinances and all building permit applications can be found on the [Building Department webpage](#) of the City of River Rouge website. Any questions about the building permitting process can be directed to the Building Department at (313) 842-4209 or building@cityofriverrouge.org.

Business License Application

- If you wish to open a business once you receive your Certificate of Occupancy, apply for a business license. You can find the business license application on the [City Clerk's webpage](#) of the City of River Rouge website or pick it up in person at the City Clerk's office at River Rouge City Hall.

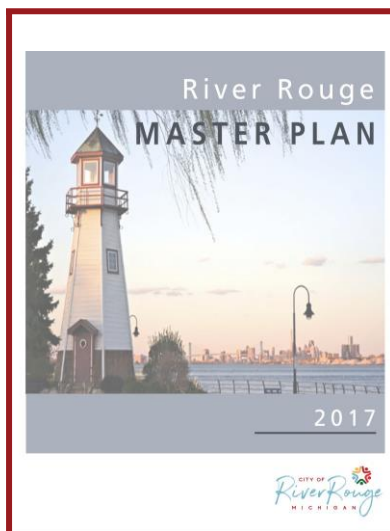
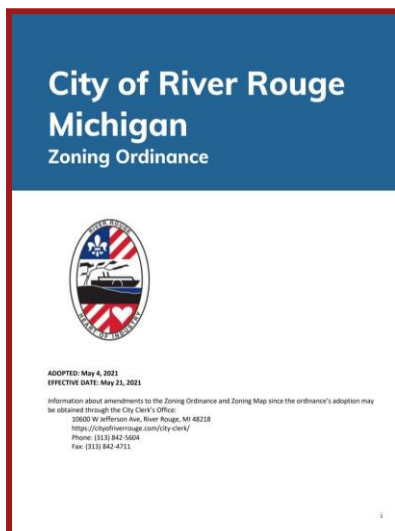
- If you have any questions regarding the business licensing process, please contact the City Clerk's Office at (313) 842-5604.

The City of River Rouge, Michigan Retail Target Market Analysis

- The retail market analysis from LandUseUSA provides location and planning strategies, retail potential, and a retail inventory for the City of River Rouge to encourage economic development in the city.
- To obtain a copy of the *Retail Target Market Analysis*, please contact Nani Wolf at nwolf@mcka.com.

The City of River Rouge, Michigan Residential Target Market Analysis

- The residential market analysis from LandUseUSA provides location and planning strategies, potential household demand, and an inventory of existing housing supply for River Rouge to encourage diverse housing developments in the city.
- To obtain a copy of the *Retail Target Market Analysis*, please contact Nani Wolf at nwolf@mcka.com.



4. Land Use Definitions and Compliance

“Land use” is a term used to describe the activities that occur on a piece of property. For example, the land use for a school would be “education,” while the land use for a clothing shop would be “retail.” Cities control where different land uses can be located to ensure that incompatible land uses do not end up next to each other. For example, a cement factory and a day care are incompatible and should not be next-door neighbors. Ensuring compliance with River Rouge’s land use regulations is key to developing successfully in the city.

The City regulates land uses by grouping them into “zoning districts.” Every piece of property in the city is assigned to a zoning district, and each zoning district has a list of the land uses that are allowed or prohibited. **It is very important to check the zoning designation of a property as the first step toward development, to make sure the land use you want is allowed on the property.**



A Neighborhood Resident District (NR)



A Downtown Mixed Use District (DMU)

The following are zoning districts listed in the City’s *Zoning Ordinance*:

- **Neighborhood Residential District (NR):** This district allows single-family dwellings, plus other uses such as schools, parks, religious institutions, and certain public facilities that serve residents of the district.
- **Multiple Family Residential District (MFR):** This district allows multi-family dwellings, such as apartment buildings, and associated accessory uses.

-
- **Neighborhood Mixed Use District (NMU):** This district allows a mixture of commercial, office, and residential uses at a neighborhood scale, which creates convenient access to goods and services.
 - **Downtown Mixed Use District (DMU):** This district allows traditional downtown developments, such as retail shops and restaurants, and residential uses on upper floors.
 - **Commercial District (C):** This district allows more intensive uses that offer a broad range of commercial goods and services, as well as some automotive-oriented businesses.
 - **Light Industrial District (LI):** This district allows activities relating to the manufacturing, compounding, processing, packaging, assembly, and/or treatment of finished or semi-finished products from previously prepared material.
 - **General Industrial District (GI):** This district allows more intense industrial uses than the LI district, such as the manufacturing, processing, and compounding of semi-finished or finished products from raw materials, handling and storing hazardous materials, and power generation.
 - **Recreation/Conservation District (RC):** This district allows uses that have a clear public benefit or purpose, such as parks, schools, libraries, non-profit facilities, governmental facilities, religious institutions, and nature preserves.

For more information on permitted and special uses within individual zoning districts, please refer to the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*, Article 3 Section 3.2. To see which land use your property is zoned for, please look at the Zoning Map, which can be obtained by contacting the Community Development Director.



A Neighborhood Mixed Use District (NMU)



A Recreation/Conservation District (RC)

5. Boards and Commissions

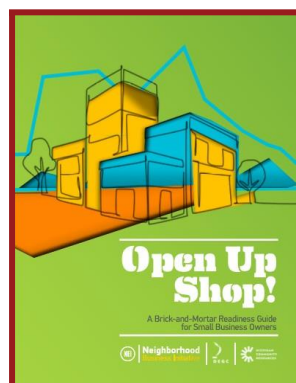
Some applications to the City are approved administratively by City staff, but most are reviewed by one or more government boards and commissions. **Meeting dates, times, and locations for these Boards and Commissions are subject to change.** Please contact the City Clerk's office at (313) 842-5604 for City Council and DDA meetings, the Economic Development Corporation at (313) 842-4200 ext. 221 for Economic Development Corporation meetings, and Karl Laub at (313) 842-4203 ext. 224 for Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings, to confirm meeting details prior to attending.

Board/Commission	Responsibility	Meeting Date/Time/Location
City Council	Approves proposed special land uses, rezonings, and changes to the zoning ordinance	1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month; 7:30pm; River Rouge City Hall
Downtown Development Authority (DDA)	Develops programs and projects for downtown River Rouge and other selected districts, including new business development, business recruitment and retention, downtown beautification, and public improvements	4th Wednesday of each month; 5:00pm; River Rouge City Hall
Economic Development Corporation	Promotes River Rouge as a good place to invest through economic development projects and assists small businesses in developing successful growth strategies	2nd Tuesday of each month; 6:00pm; River Rouge Historical Museum
Planning Commission	Creates and updates the Master Plan; approves site plan applications; reviews rezonings, special use permits, and other land use applications	4th Monday of each month; 4:00pm; River Rouge City Hall
Zoning Board of Appeals	Interprets and grants variances from provisions of the <i>Zoning Ordinance</i> and conducts hearings on some types of disputes	Meets as needed. Please contact Karl Laub at (313) 842-4203 ext. 224 for more information.

6. General Resources for Starting and Sustaining a Small- or Medium-Sized Business

While this Handbook primarily focuses on the site identification, planning, and development phases of business ownership, it is also important to consider how to start your own business. Additional educational resources are listed below to support your efforts to start and manage a successful small- or medium-sized business in River Rouge.

- [Michigan Economic Development Corporation](#) (MEDC) offers resources and tailored support to help you start a new business in the State of Michigan, including:
 - Small business counseling and courses
 - [Michigan Small Business Development Center's Guide to Starting A New Business](#)
 - Connections to small business leaders and organizations
 - Information about in-state financing incentives
 - **For developers:** [MiPlace's Developer Toolkit and Build MI Community initiative](#)
- ["Open Up Shop! A Brick and Mortar Readiness Guide for Small Business Owners"](#) by The Neighborhood Business Initiative (NBI) is a guidebook for potential new small-business owners. It includes educational information about every step of early business development, including:
 - Developing a vision and strong business plan
 - Drafting a business budget
 - Establishing a team of legal, administrative, and design experts
 - Researching neighborhood needs and compatibility
 - Engaging with community
 - Launching and marketing your small business



Cover of *Open Up Shop!* (2021)



MEDC Logo

7. Before Purchasing the Property

7.1 Explore Your Options

As you begin to consider developing a property in River Rouge, you must go about the following key steps:

1. Visit the Site (aka property)

2. Contact the Owner or Real Estate Agent

- a. Doing so will allow you to find out about the history of the property, its price, its current conditions, etc.

3. Ensure Zoning Compliance

- a. Prior to considering any project, call or email the Planning Department to confirm that the structure and/or use you are considering complies with local laws (the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*). Upon request, the City will provide a Zoning Compliance letter for the property. This letter will summarize all the relevant parts of the Zoning Ordinance and state whether or not your proposed land use is allowed.
- b. Call (313) 842-4203 ext 224 or email klaub@cityofriverrouge.org to get more information on zoning compliance.

4. Conduct Background Research

- a. Title search: The title search is typically performed by a real estate company, which will identify all legal documents associated with the property (master deed, easements, development history, liens, etc.).
- b. Local records: Call River Rouge City Hall to obtain all records of that property from the Assessing, Planning, and Building Departments to learn more about the history of the property.
- c. County records: Visit the Wayne County Register of Deeds Office (400 Monroe St, Detroit, MI 48226) to obtain the most recent records for the property. The County maintains records on past sales and may even have a recent survey of the property.

5. Assemble your team of experts

- a. Being a developer will require you to wear many hats: those of the strategist, tactician, logician, financier, etc. All of these roles require focus, creativity, problem solving, and leadership.
- b. To navigate the complexities of land development, you must seek out and enlist a team of experts who will support you throughout the process. You will be the leader, but your team will help you get to the finish line by helping you implement the various components of your plan.
- c. While the uniqueness of each parcel of property determines which team members may have greater roles in the development, an engineer always plays a prominent role. Hence, finding a good engineer is an important first step. An architect, who can help you draw up the plans for your land development project, will also be a central member of your team.
- d. If you do not have an architect or engineer on your team already, get to know the local companies who provide these services. Check out resource blogs like the Home Advisor’s [“How to Hire an Architect.”](#) You could also ask your municipality and/or other developers in the area for a list of architecture and engineering firms that have submitted projects over the last year.
- e. As you begin to hire the members of your team, be sure to connect with your community contacts, colleagues and fellow developers to find out the following:
1) Do they have a good track record? 2) Is your type of project within their area of expertise? 3) Are they affordable and cost effective?
- f. Please see the table below that describe the roles of the team members you need to make your project a reality:

Team	Role Description
Civil Engineer	Designs the grading and soil management plans, as well as all the utilities (i.e., stormwater, water, roads, and waste water management plans) for the development.
Land Use Attorney	Handles legal issues associated with the Development, including protecting property rights and assisting in processing entitlements.
Architect	Designs the building plans for your development, and is often responsible for preparing the concept plan in the early stages of the project.

Marketing Specialist	Researches the needs and preferences of consumers in the market to determine marketable project designs and features, forecast market absorption of a product, and create a marketing plan. For example, this team member can identify development opportunities by identifying an underserved marketplace niche or avoid costly mistakes by detecting an oversaturated market segment.
Soils Engineer	Conducts studies to determine if the soils are suitable for the proposed development.
Environmental Specialist	Conducts environmental impact assessments to determine if there is any contamination on the site. An unsatisfactory environmental impact report could help you decide not to purchase an unsuitable parcel. Some jurisdictions insist on hiring the environmentalist as their agent – even though the developer must pay for the specialist’s services.
Landscape Architect	Designs the landscaping plan for your development. Effective landscaping may be your most important sales tool.
Arborist	Evaluates the value of the trees on a property and recommends tree preservation techniques for the project. The municipality may require an arborist’s services to determine tree replacement requirements.

7.2 Due Diligence (60-90 days)

1. Purchase Agreement:

- a. Before purchasing your property, you will enter into a Purchase Agreement, which is an agreement between a buyer and seller that documents the legal terms of a real estate transaction. This is a contract to purchase a property. In addition to including basic information like the property address and price, the document will outline any contingencies that must be resolved before the sale is binding. The Purchase Agreement also specifies the rights and obligations of the buyer and seller.
- b. Every Purchase Agreement includes a due diligence period, which is a set number of days that you have to get everything sorted before you purchase the property. Due diligence typically lasts 60-90 days and starts when you sign the Purchase Agreement.
- c. For example, if you are uncertain about whether the City will allow the land use required for your small business, the Purchase Agreement will specify that you will purchase the property on the condition that you acquire a rezoning or other special land use permission (these terms are explained in following chapters). If the City denies the rezoning, you are not obligated to go through with the purchase of the property.

2. Pre-Application Meeting

- a. You must attend a pre-application meeting with City staff before submitting any application (site plan, special land use, etc.). See Section 8.3: Normal Site Plan Development and Approval Process for more detail on pre-application meetings.

3. Environmental Assessment of the Property

- a. You will need an environmental assessment only if the property is contaminated. To test the property for contamination, you will need the consent of the property owner. If they are supportive of this process, they will help and/or authorize you to test the property to determine the level of contamination on the site and even allow you to carry out a topographic survey. If they are less supportive of this process, they will allow you to test the property, but will likely impose a stricter timeline for you to complete your testing within the due diligence timeframe. This stricter timeline might prevent you from carrying out a more comprehensive environmental assessment of the property.
- b. To perform an environmental assessment, you will need to contract an outside entity by researching Phase 1 Environmental Assessment companies online.

4. Having the Property Surveyed

- a. To create a site plan, you will also need a survey of the property. Check with the [Wayne County Register of Deeds](#) to see if a current survey already exists. If not, you will have to hire a licensed and insured surveyor to examine the property. Michigan has a professional society for land surveyors - you can look for certified surveyors on the [National Society of Professional Surveyors website](#). You can also ask local real estate agents for their recommendations.



River Rouge City Hall (2023)

8. The Development Process in River Rouge

Summary of Procedures and Decision-Making Bodies

The table below summarizes the role of the various staff, boards, and commissions that will control the approval of your application.

X= Approves R= Recommends				
	City Staff	Planning Commission	City Council	Zoning Board of Appeals
Site Plan	R	X		
Site Plan (Qualified for Admin Review)	X			
Special Land Use	R	R	X	
Rezoning/ Conditional Rezoning	R	R	X	
Zoning Ordinance Text Change	R	R	X	
Zoning Compliance	X			
Variance	R			X
Variance/Due Process Appeal	R			X
PUD	R	R	X	

8.1 Introduction to Site Plan Development

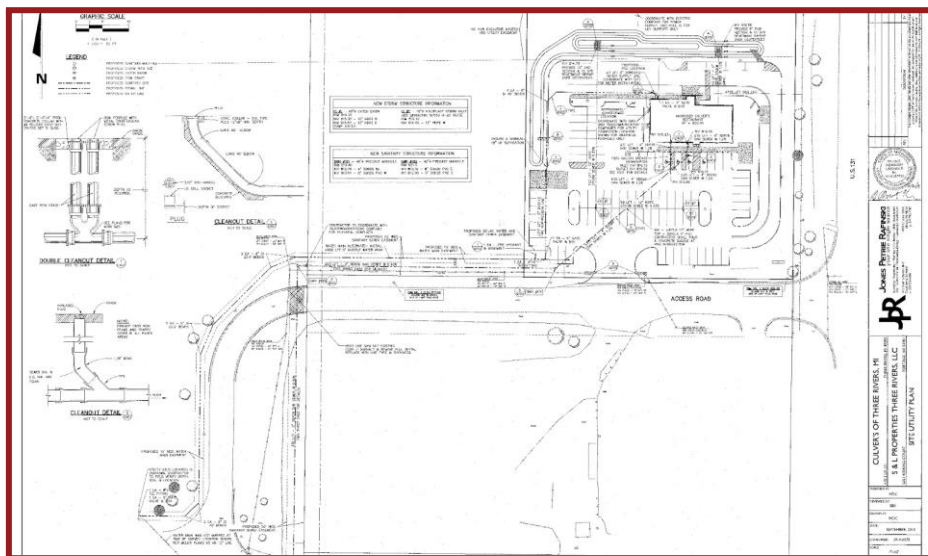
New developments require approval from the City of River Rouge to ensure that development aligns with local laws and policies. Whether it's a new building, an addition, or an expansion of a parking lot, your project will require City review and approval.

What is a Site Plan?

This approval process begins with the development of a **site plan**. A site plan is a document that details your site's current conditions and your proposed changes. A site plan is a detailed map of the property that typically includes:

- A scaled drawing of the property
- Property lines
- Location of existing trees and vegetation
- Existing and proposed buildings
- Driveway entry and exit locations, roadways, and sidewalks
- Utility poles and power lines
- Fencing
- Other on-site structures, such as sheds, generators, etc.

Most importantly, a site plan is a technical document and should always be prepared by an architect or engineer.



Top-down view of a commercial site utility plan by the City of Three Rivers, MI (n.d.)

Do I Need a Site Plan?

A site plan IS required if your proposed development includes any of the following:

- Any development that would establish multiple principal uses on a lot, such as a single family site condo where a single lot is developed, to include two or more sites for detached single family dwellings.
- Development of non-residential uses or multi-family uses in the Neighborhood Residential (NR) district.
- Residential developments that will include five or more dwelling units.
- The development or construction of any accessory uses or structures, except for uses or structures that are accessory to a residential use in the NR district.
- Establishment, expansion, or enlargement of any regulated use, unless expressly exempted in the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*.

A site plan is NOT required* if your proposed development includes any of the following:

- Constructing, moving, relocating, or structurally altering a principal residential structure in the NR district, including any customarily incidental accessory structures.
- Excavating, filling, or otherwise removing soil, provided that such activity is normally and customarily incidental to single-family uses described in this subsection.
- A change in the ownership of land or a structure.
- A change in the use of a structure to a similar use, following all regulations that apply in the zoning district in which it is located.
- Residential developments that will include four or fewer dwelling units.
- Permitted home occupations.
- Additions or expansions of existing conforming uses that do not increase the amount of additional impervious surface by one thousand five hundred (1,500) square feet or thirty percent (30%), whichever is less.

****Even if you do not need to submit a site plan, you will still need to apply for a building permit.*** See Section 9.2: Building Review/Permitting of this Handbook for more details.

8.2 Overview of Site Plan Process

1. Pre-Application Meeting with the City of River Rouge

- a. Once you have your team assembled, schedule a pre-application meeting with the City. This meeting will include you, your architectural and engineering team, and City staff. Bring a rough concept plan to the meeting and talk through your plan with City staff and officials. Be sure to take notes.
- b. A pre-application meeting is a chance for you to sit down with staff from City Planning, Engineering, and Fire and talk through your project to identify any obstacles that might arise. Staff will provide a preliminary review of a concept plan, explain zoning requirements, and discuss project timelines. Pre-application meetings are free!
- c. Pre-application meetings often address circumstances that would otherwise result in an application being postponed or denied. Depending on the project scope and timing, multiple pre-application meetings may be necessary. Please call Karl Laub, the City's Community Development Director, to schedule an appointment. See Section 2: Contact Information of this Handbook for more details.

2. Conceptual Review (Optional)

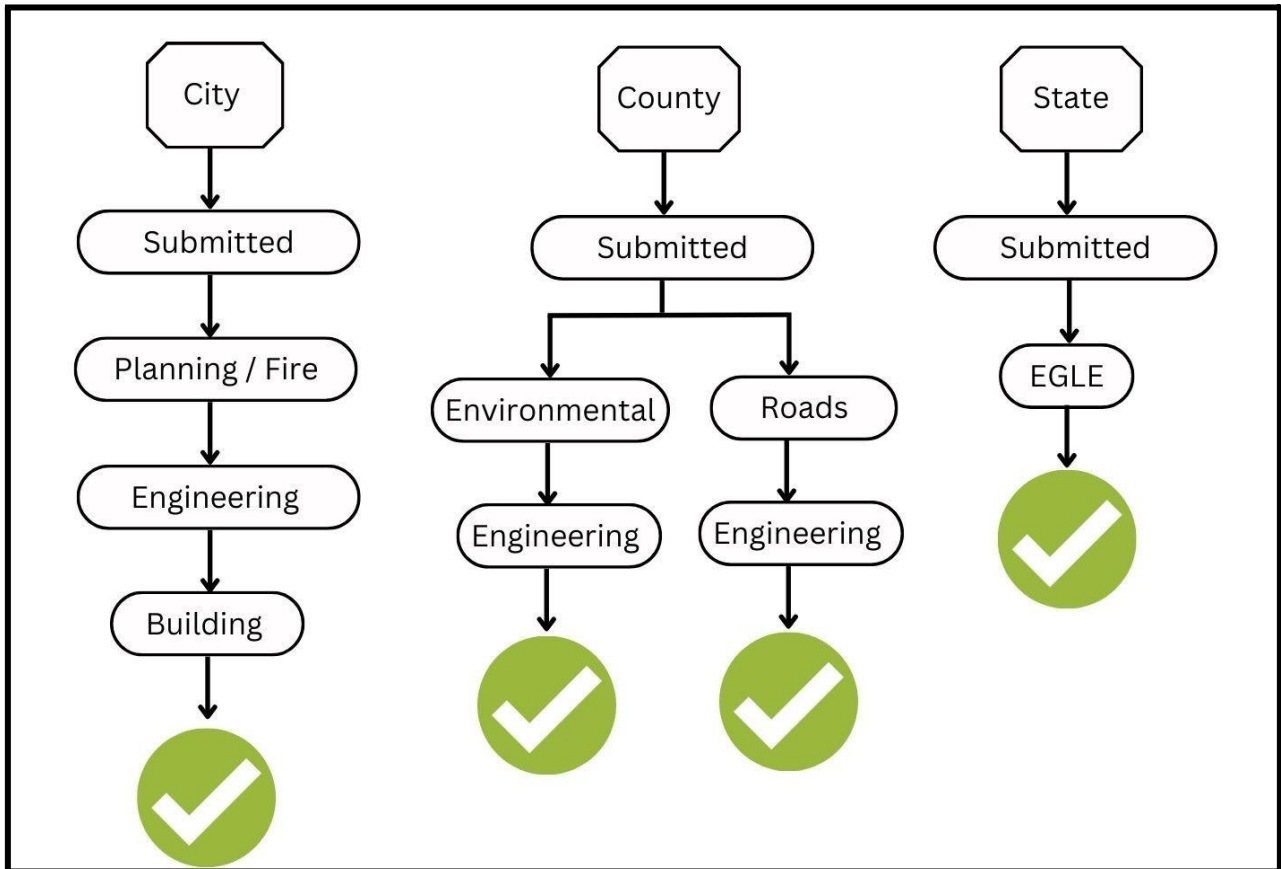
- a. After a pre-application meeting and before you formally submit your site plan review application, you may submit an application for conceptual review with the Planning Commission.
- b. The purpose of this meeting is to gather feedback on the proposed land use and potential requirements of the Planning Commission. The feedback provided to you by the Planning Commission under a conceptual review is non-binding, is subject to change, and is not to be construed as a guarantee for approval. This feedback is meant to guide your site plan application.

3. Site Plan Development and Application

- a. Have your architect/engineer prepare the full site plan, using the City's Site Plan Application Packet as a guide. A copy of this Packet can be found on the [Community Development page](#) of the City of River Rouge's website.
- b. Your site plan application will include a detailed and labeled site plan, a landscaping plan, and a stormwater management plan, among other specific information, descriptions, and plans.

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- c. All site plan application requirements are listed in Article 8.4 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*. Once your site plan application is complete, submit it to the City, along with the required fee.
 - d. In addition to receiving approvals from the City, you may be required to obtain permits from the [Wayne County Construction Permit](#) and [Environmental Permit](#) offices, the [Michigan Department of Transportation \(MDOT\)](#), and the [Michigan Department of Energy, Great Lakes, and Environment \(EGLE\)](#). Please submit your site plan to these organizations at the same time as your site plan submission to the City to ensure prompt review and feedback on your site plan. See Section 8.4. County and State Site Plan Review & Approval Process of this Handbook for further detail.

Summary: City, County, and State Approval Process



8.3 Municipal Site Application Review and Approval Process

1. Elements of a Site Plan Application

- a. When reviewing your application, City staff will assess if your site plan meets all of the City's criteria, including the adequacy and accuracy of the information you provided, the site design characteristics and appearance, compliance with zoning district requirements, and other infrastructural, environmental, and safety criteria. All criteria are outlined in Article 8.3 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*.
- b. You must submit the following information to the Community Development Director 30 days prior to the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting:
 - Ten copies (please fold) of the site plan
 - Ten copies of the site plan application form
 - Ten copies of the completed preliminary site plan data checklist
 - Payment of all applicable fees
- c. Your plan should include engineering data to establish the feasibility of proposed utilities. However, detailed engineering plans are optional at this stage.

2. Review of Application

- a. Your site plan is reviewed by City staff, who let you know if it does not comply with elements of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance* or other laws.
- b. Your architect/engineer updates the site plan to address the comments from City staff.
- c. You then resubmit the plan and City staff review it again. This process repeats until all outstanding items are resolved.

If your project meets the criteria for administrative approval, then the Planner issues a stamp of approval on your plans. You then move onto the final engineering and building review process. See Section 9: Final Engineering and Building Review Process of this Handbook for more details.

FAQ: "Does my site plan qualify for administrative approval?"

Yes, if:

- The use is permitted by right in the established zoning district.
- Your plan has less than 1,500 square feet of new development or construction.
- Your use will generate fewer than five hundred (500) trip ends per day, based on the most recent edition of the Trip Generation Manual published by the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

If your project does not meet the criteria for administrative approval, it must be reviewed by the Planning Commission.

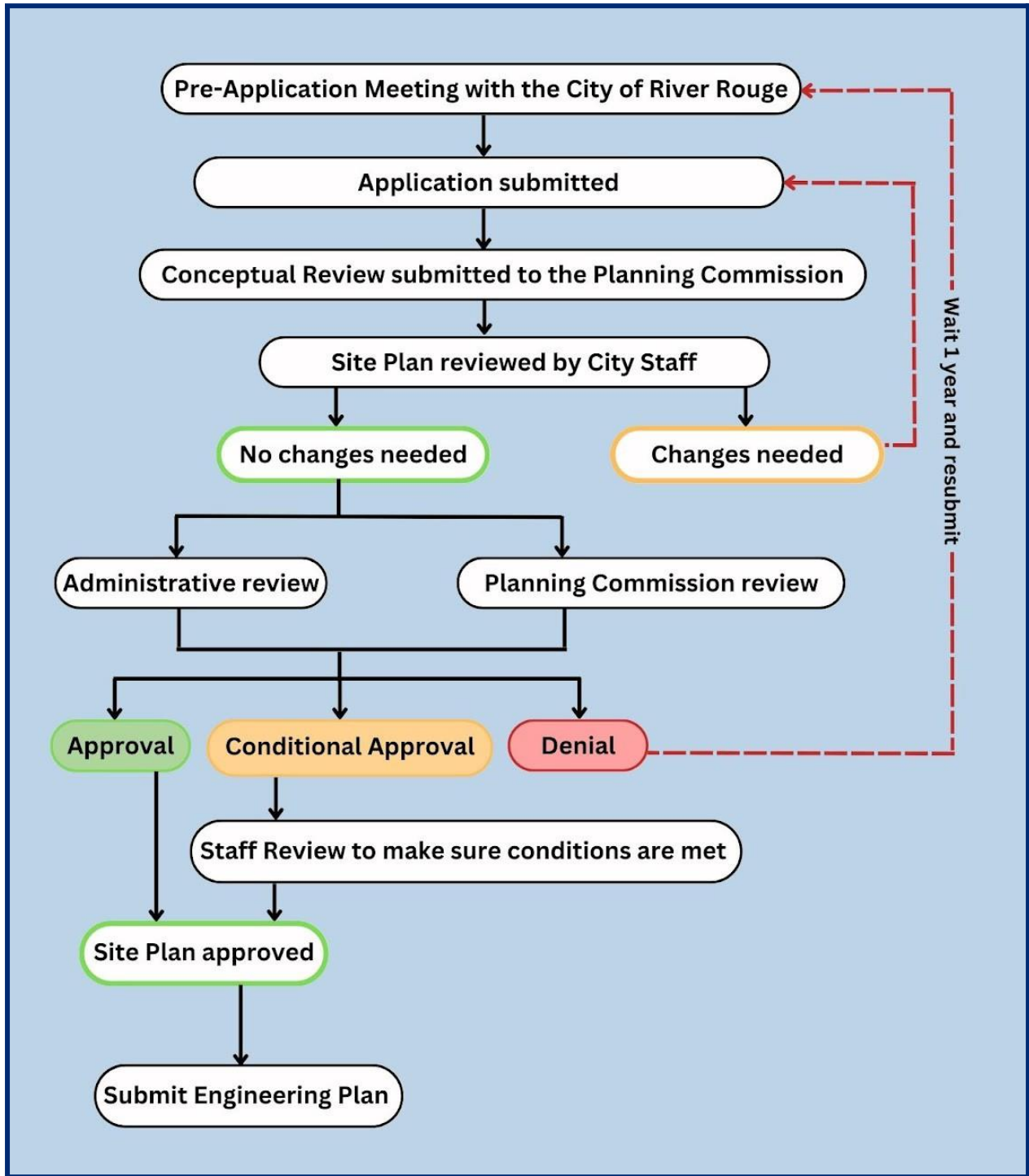
- Staff schedule your application for the next available Planning Commission meeting date.
- At the Commission meeting, the Commissioners review your application and the comments provided by staff.
- The Commission either tables (postpones) your application to a later date (if major revisions are needed) or makes one of the decisions explained in the next section.

3. Decision on Application

The Planning Commission will vote to proceed with your final site plan in one of three ways:

- Approval:** If the site plan follows the *Zoning Ordinance*, other applicable City planning documents and laws, and state and federal statutes, your site plan will be APPROVED and it will be indicated in the plan. You may then move on to the next step – Engineering Review.
- Conditional Approval:** The Planning Commission may determine that your plan complies except for minor required revisions, or it may decide that you need to meet certain conditions such as obtaining a variance or obtaining approval from other agencies. In that case, your site plan will be CONDITIONALLY APPROVED. You will have to make revisions that will be stated in writing, and your architectural/engineering team must address them. You may then submit your engineering plan, provided that the required changes are incorporated in the final site plan. See Article 8 Section 8.6.2 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*, for more information on Conditional Approval.
- Denial:** If you need to make extensive revisions to the site plan to meet applicable standards and requirements (e.g., if the site plan does not meet the standards of the *Zoning Ordinance* or will damage public health, safety, welfare, or orderly development of the City), site plan approval will be DENIED, and you must provide an alternative site plan. In this case, “DENIED” will be written on the plan, and the reasons for denial will be indicated in writing. If you decide to prepare an alternative plan, you will follow the procedures outlined above. If your final site plan is denied, you may not resubmit a new site plan until one year after the denial of the first site plan.

Site Plan Process Flowchart



8.4 County and State Site Plan Review and Approval Processes (2-6 months)

At the same time as your City site plan review and approval, you should start discussions with Wayne County and the State of Michigan to determine if other agencies need to review your plans as well.

Wayne County Review

If your development is on a Wayne County road and/or impacts stormwater runoff as defined by the [Wayne County Stormwater Control Ordinance web page](#), you must submit your site plan to Wayne County.

County Site Plan Review Timeline

- The County can take up to six months to review your site plan. The earlier you submit it, the faster it can be approved.

Stormwater Process

- When contacting Wayne County about the stormwater permitting process, here are some good questions to ask:
 1. *At what point does a site qualify for stormwater review?*
 2. *What percentage of impervious surfaces qualifies for stormwater review?*
 3. *If a project does not qualify for stormwater review, does the developer need a letter from the County stating that it is not required?*
- Please review the [Wayne County Stormwater Management, Stormwater Control Ordinance](#), and the County Drains webpages for more detail.
- As stated on the Stormwater Control Ordinance webpage, “Wayne County Stormwater Control Ordinance and Administrative Rules are implemented through the existing review and permit processes of the Permit Office of the Wayne County Department of Public Services, Engineering Division. Copies of the ordinance, rules, and standards manual are also available through the Permit Office located at 33809 Michigan Avenue, Wayne, MI 48184.” The phone number is (734) 858-2774 and the email is dpspermits@co.wayne.mi.us.
- For more detail on when a construction permit is necessary and how to apply for a construction permit, please visit the [County’s Construction Permit Office web page](#).

Roadway Process

- When contacting Wayne County about the roadway permitting process, here are some good questions to ask:
 1. *A new building qualifies for a new review from the Road Commission, but for an existing building, what types of permits do developers need to seek from the Road Commission to start a new business?*
 2. *Do developers need a permit to put in trees, move a dumpster, change a driveway location, make an entrance one-way versus two-way, etc.?*
 3. *Do developers need a letter from the County if they don't qualify for roadway review?*
- For more detail on when a construction permit is necessary and how to apply for a construction permit, please visit the [County's Construction Permit Office webpage](#). The phone number is (734) 858-2774, and the email is dpspermits@co.wayne.mi.us.

State of Michigan Review

Determine if the Site is Contaminated

- Use the [Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy \(EGLE\)'s online mapping tool](#) to determine whether there are any underground storage tanks on the property.
- If there is an underground storage tank, you will need to contact EGLE to obtain a permit to remove it. For more information, visit the [Michigan Underground Storage Tank Authority's webpage](#).

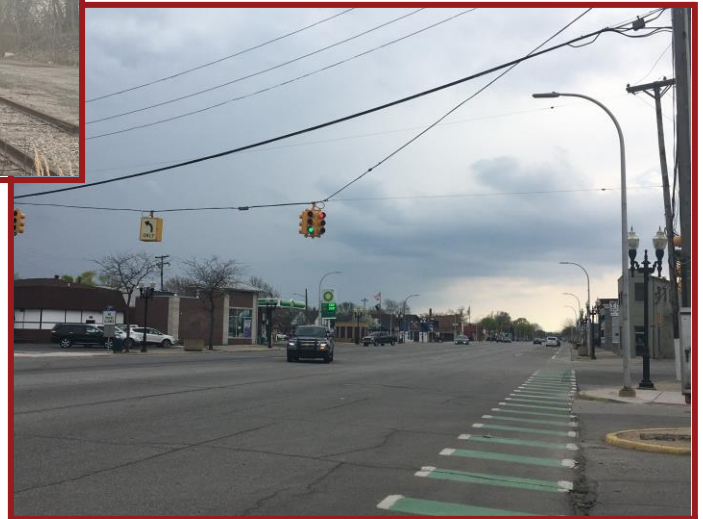
If the Site is Contaminated

- If your Environmental Engineer conducted an assessment of the property (sometimes called a Phase I or Phase II assessment) you should know if there is any environmental contamination. If it is a contaminated site, you will need to submit your site plan to EGLE for their review. This is also a good time to ask EGLE about funding that may be available to help you clean up the property.
- Contact Dan Gough at EGLE about brownfield remediation at (517) 281-8253 and his email is GoughD1@Michigan.gov. See Section 2: Contact Information for this information.
- When contacting EGLE, here are some good questions to ask:
 1. *At what point in the development process should I reach out to EGLE regarding brownfield redevelopment or underground storage tanks?*
 2. *What are the steps to remediate a brownfield?*
 3. *What are the current financial incentives and/or grants available to small businesses owners or developers through EGLE?*

Make Updates to Your Site Plan as Needed

Remember, County and State approvals take place at the same time, so it is important to submit your site plan to Wayne County and/or EGLE as soon as possible.

- If the City of River Rouge provides comments and recommended changes before Wayne County or EGLE does, you will be able to make updates to your plans and then submit those new plans to the County/EGLE, while still keeping your same “place in line” with the County/EGLE.
- Similarly, if the County or EGLE provides comments and recommended changes before the City does, you will be able to make updates to your submission with the city of River Rouge. You must resubmit physical and digital submissions to Community Development Director Karl Laub. See Section 2: Contact Information for more information.
- Remember, you are not limited by your first site plan submission. You can continue to make changes to it even after submitting it.



River Rouge train tracks and City signage (upper right); West. Jefferson Ave. (lower right) (2023)

8.5 Other Development Approvals That Occur before/at the Same Time as the Site Plan Process

8.5.a Rezoning

What are Zoning and Rezoning?

Zoning is the process by which a city divides land zoning districts. Each zoning district has a list of the land uses that are allowed and prohibited, and every piece of land in the city is assigned to a district. See Section 4: Land Use Definitions and Compliance of this Handbook for more information and a list of zoning districts.

If you want to use your land in a way that is not permitted under the current zoning regulations, you must ask to change the zoning district applied to your property to a different zoning district that permits your desired use. For example, say you have a property that is zoned SFR (single-family residential), but you would like to build a duplex. To do this, you would need to apply for a rezoning to the MFR (multi-family residential) zoning district, in which duplexes are allowed. This is often called a **rezoning or a zoning amendment**.

A rezoning occurs through a legislative process: the property owner requests a rezoning, the Planning Commission reviews the request, and the City Council approves or denies the request. This process is outlined in detail below. You may also refer to Article 13.1 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance* for a more detailed description of this process.

How do I Apply for a Rezoning?

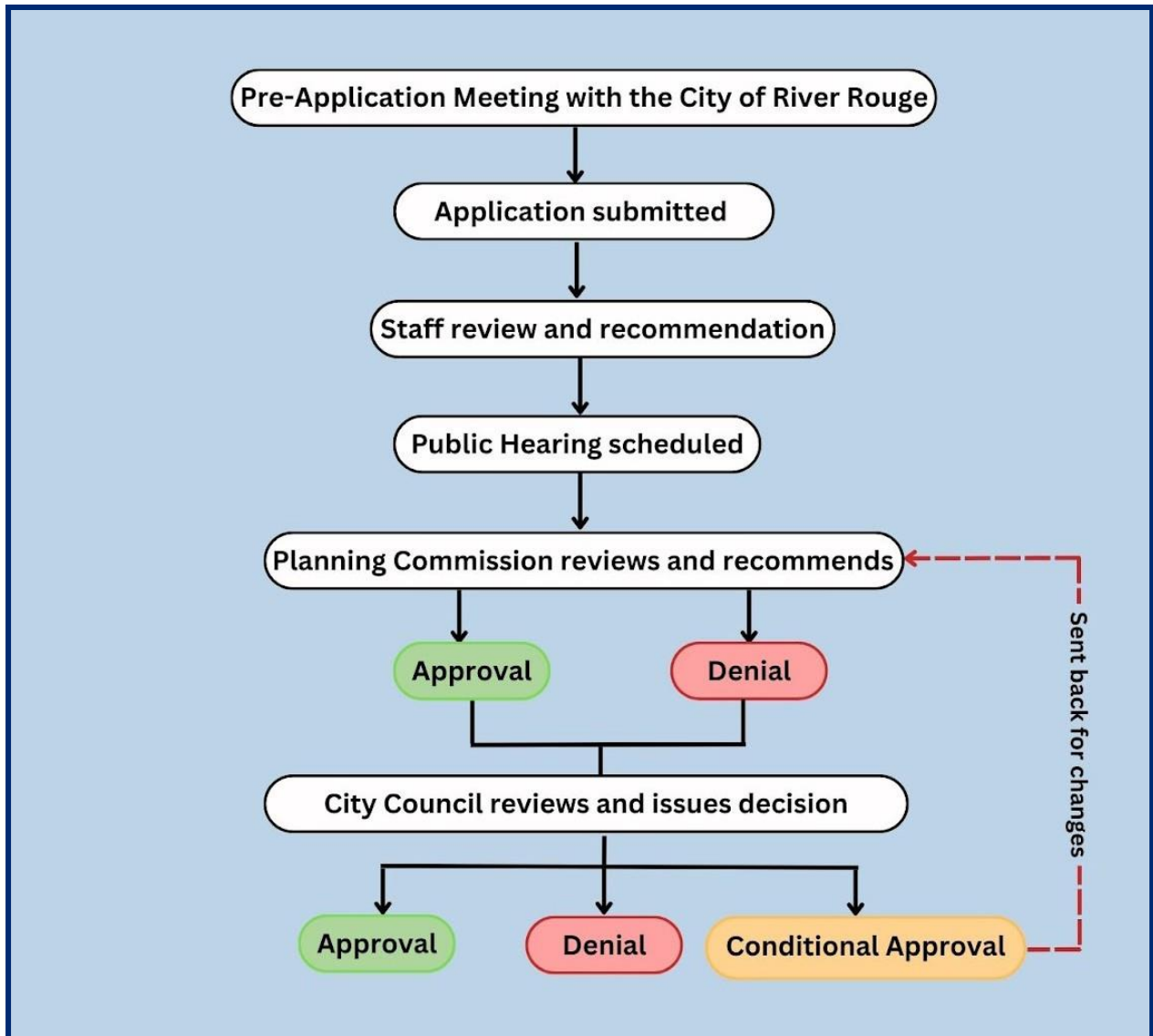
1. First, you request a rezoning of your land by filling out a Rezoning Application and by paying a fee. For more information, see Section 3: Where To Find Key Documents of this Handbook, or the [Community Development page](#) of River Rouge's website. This request must include the following information:
 - a. A legal description and street address of your property, as well as a location map identifying your property in relation to surrounding properties.
 - b. The name and address of the owner of the property, and a statement of your interest in the subject property, if you are not the owner.
 - c. The existing and proposed zoning district designation of your property and the existing zoning district designation of the surrounding properties.

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- d. A written description of how your request meets the criteria stated Section in 13.1 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance*.
 2. The application is reviewed for completeness and accuracy by the Zoning Administrator. The Zoning Administrator will share the application with relevant departments and consultants, as needed, prior to sending the application to the Planning Commission.
 3. The request formally moves to the Planning Commission, who is required to hold at least one public hearing before making a recommendation to the City Council. This hearing will be scheduled by the City and advertised to neighboring residents within 300 feet of the proposed development, as required by state law.
 4. At the Planning Commission meeting, the Commissioners will discuss your proposal. They will also hear comments from the public on your proposal. They will then issue a recommendation on your application, which is sent to the City Council in the form of a report. At their next available meeting, the City Council will approve or deny the request for rezoning, or recommend changes to the request and send it back to the Planning Commission for further review.



Example of Downtown Mixed Use zoning on W. Jefferson Ave. (2023)

Rezoning Process Flowchart



8.5.b Conditional Rezoning

If you wish to use your land in a way that is not permitted under the current zoning regulations, one of your options is to apply for a rezoning. See Section 8.5.a: Rezoning above for more detail.

There are certain instances where you might wish to petition to change the zoning of your property, or where it would be in the best interest of River Rouge and property owners to change the zoning district designation of a piece of land with some constraints. In these cases, you must volunteer to condition the zoning amendment to restrict the use of your land to only a specific certain land use. For example, you might restrict development to an ice cream store rather than a gas station or all other possible land uses in a commercial district. This is called a **conditional rezoning**.

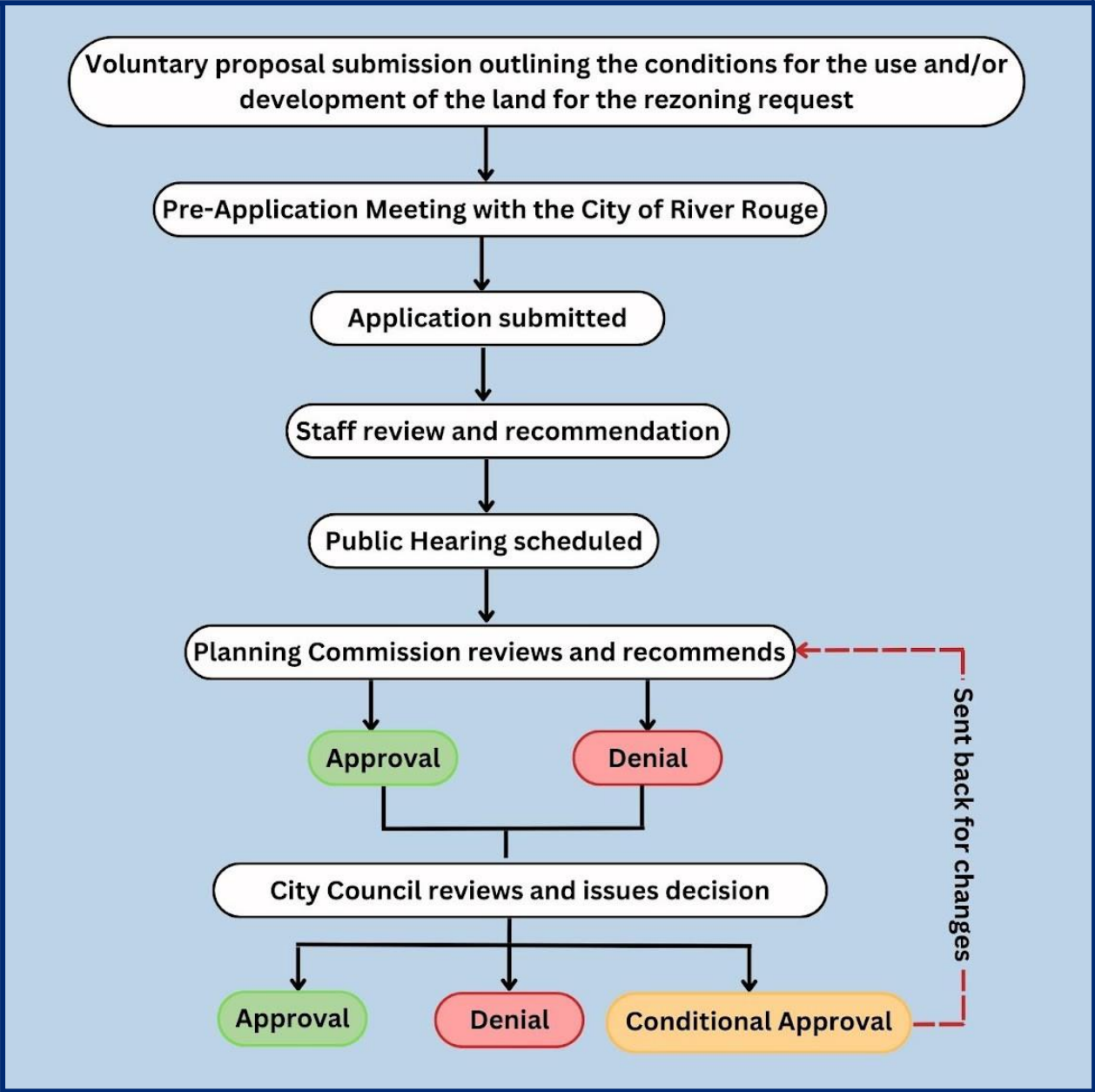
What is Different about the Conditional Rezoning Process?

To achieve a conditional rezoning, a property owner must first voluntarily offer conditions relating to the use and/or development of land for which a rezoning is requested in writing. The property owner may make this offer when the application for rezoning is filed or later during the rezoning process. See Section 3: Where To Find Key Documents, or the [Community Development page](#) of River Rouge’s website. See Section 8.5a: Rezoning of this Handbook for an overview and graphic representation of the rezoning application process, which mirrors that of the conditional rezoning application process. You may also refer to Article 13.2 of the *River Rouge Zoning Ordinance* for a more detailed description of this process.



Wayne County Metro development in River Rouge (2023)

Conditional Rezoning Process Flowchart



8.5.c. Special Land Use

What is a Special Land Use?

A **special land use** is a use that has the potential to negatively impact neighboring properties if it is not properly controlled. For example, childcare centers are special land uses in the city's residential zoning districts because they have the potential to generate traffic jams during pick-up/drop-off times. This does not mean that special land uses are prohibited, but it does mean that they require more scrutiny before being approved.

Both the Planning Commission and City Council review special land use applications to ensure the proposal is located, designed, and operated in a manner that is harmonious with neighboring developments and does not adversely affect public health, safety, and general welfare. The City Council will issue a Special Use Permit if they find that the use is compatible and follows the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

What Material is Needed to Apply?

A special land use plan includes:

- A one-page concept plan that shows – with accurate proportions – where your building will go, where your internal roads will go, and what screening/buffering there will be between the use and other neighboring properties.
- Any additional site plan pages that staff identify as necessary to evaluate your application.
- Fee for the application.
- A written justification for the special land use request.

What is the Process?

Special land uses must be technically feasible once they get to a site plan stage. Thus, we recommend submitting your application for a special land use and your application for a site plan at the same time. The processes are the same as for the site plan review. See Section 8.3: Municipal Site Application Review and Approval Process of this Handbook for more details.

FAQ: “Should I apply for my special land use and site plan at the same time?”

Some people choose to apply for special land use review first, then apply for site plan review after they have received their special land use permit. Some people choose to apply for special land use review and site plan review at the same time. The best option for you will depend on how much time you have, and whether or not you are ready to invest in the full site plan set.

FAQ: “What if I am re-occupying an existing building? Do I still need a full site plan as part of my special land use application?”

Call the Zoning Administrator to discuss what you will need. It may be possible to waive some of the required information.

Are there Additional Steps?

Yes, there are a few additional steps that will occur:

1. During the Planning Commission meeting, the Planning Commission will take the following actions:
 - a. Hold a public hearing to hear comments from residents. This hearing will be scheduled by the City and advertised to neighboring residents within 300 feet, as required by State law.
 - b. Discuss whether your proposal satisfies the standards for special land uses and all other applicable standards of the *Zoning Ordinance*.
 - c. Submit a finding of fact and make a recommendation to City Council to approve, conditionally approve, or deny the special land use permit.
2. During the City Council review, the City Council will take the following actions:
 - a. Determine if your proposal satisfies the standards for special land uses and all other applicable standards of the Zoning Ordinance.
 - b. Determine whether to hold an additional public hearing at their discretion, or refer the application back to the Planning Commission for further consideration.
 - c. Approve, conditionally approve, or deny your application.

What are the Potential Outcomes and Next Steps?

1. **Approval**

- a. If your application is approved, you can move on to the typical site plan review process. Your special land use approval will be valid for one year. If you do not finish the site plan approval process within this timeframe, your special land use permit will expire.

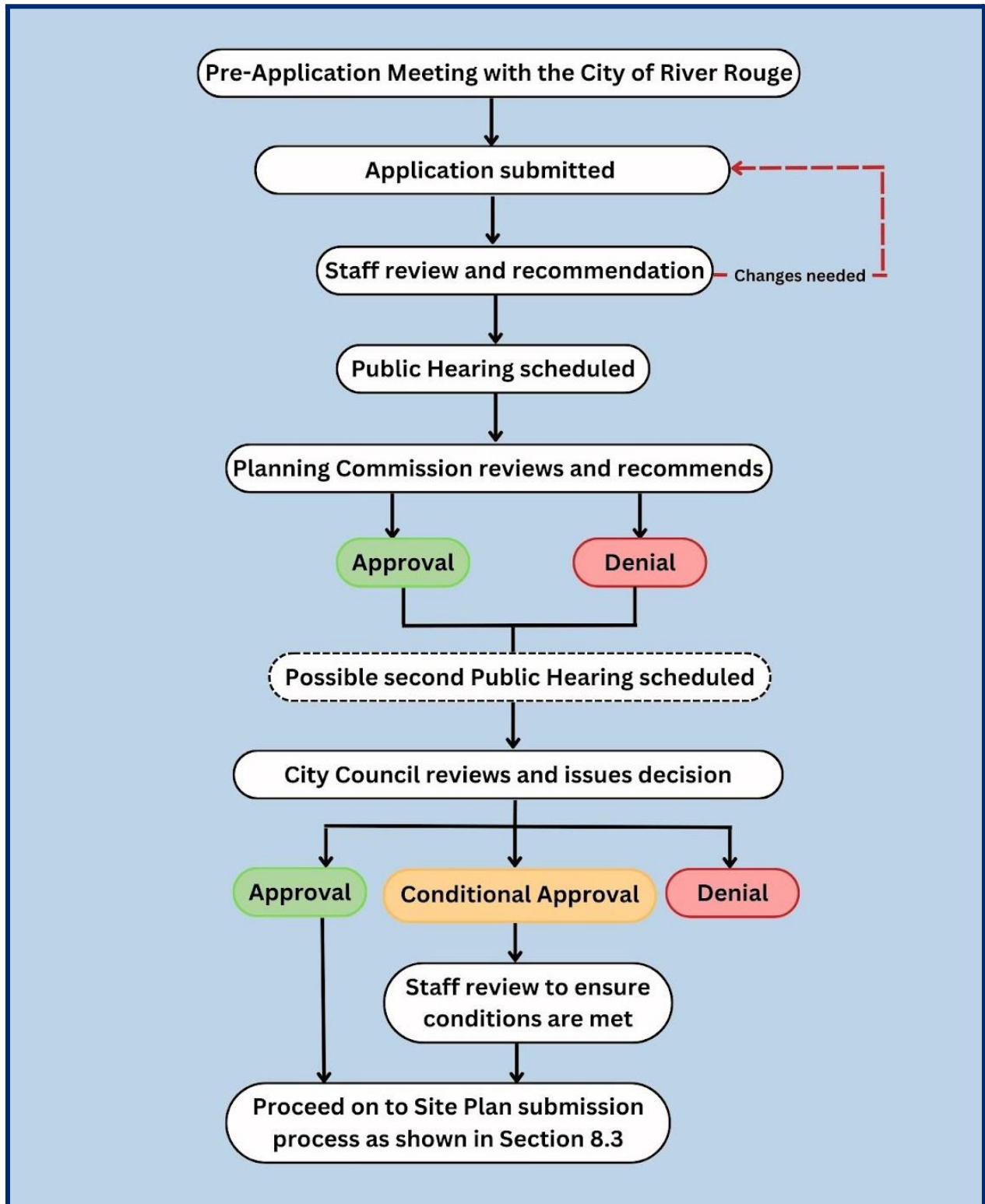
2. **Conditional Approval**

- a. If your application is approved with conditions, you must make the required revisions to meet these conditions. Staff will review your plans to ensure the conditions have been met.
- b. You can then move on to the typical site plan review process.

3. **Denial**

- a. If your application is denied, you will receive a written explanation for the denial. This explanation will also clearly be stated in the official minutes from the meeting.
- b. When a special land use is denied, you must wait one year to re-apply.

Special Land Use Process Flowchart



8.5.d Variance

What is a Variance?

A variance is a legal mechanism that allows property owners to request an exemption or relaxation from a section of the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is responsible for reviewing variance applications. Variances are granted **ONLY** when the strict application of the zoning code would result in unnecessary hardship. There are two kinds of variances: **Dimensional Variances and Use Variances**.

FAQ: “Do my personal finances count as a form of hardship?”

No – you cannot use your personal financial situation as an argument for a “hardship.”

If you can demonstrate **all five** of the following, you may be eligible for a **dimensional variance**:

1. Strict compliance with restrictions governing area, setback, frontage, height, bulk, density, or other non-use matters, will unreasonably prevent you from using the property for a permitted purpose or will make conforming unnecessarily burdensome.
2. The variance will do substantial justice to you, as well as to other property owners.
3. The requested variance is the smallest possible deviation required to give you significant relief or fairness to other property owners.
4. The need for the variance is due to unique circumstances particular to the property and not generally applicable in the area or to other properties in the same zoning district, and it cannot be solely based on economic reasons.
5. The problem and resulting need for the variance has been created by strict compliance with the Zoning Ordinance, not by you or your predecessors.

If you can demonstrate **all four** of the following, you may be eligible for a **use variance**:

1. The property cannot be reasonably used for any purpose permitted in the zoning district without a variance.
2. The need for the variance is due to unique circumstances that are specific to the property and not generally applicable in the area or to other properties in the same zoning district.
3. The variance will not alter the essential character of the area. In determining whether the effect of the variance will affect the character of the area, the established type and pattern of land uses in the area and the natural characteristics of the site and surrounding area will be considered.
4. You did not create the problem that requires the variance (i.e., it is not self-created).

What Materials are Needed?

- A completed variance application form
- A fee for the variance application
- Proof of ownership
- A diagram of the property showing your request, if you are requesting a **dimensional variance**
- Photographs of the property
- A written justification for the variance request
- Evidence of the hardship or special circumstances that justify the variance
- If other materials are needed to fully understand your request, the Zoning Administrator will contact you.

What is the Process?

1. You contact the Zoning Administrator to get advice on which type of variance you need and what materials you should provide.
2. You submit an application to the Community Development Director.
3. City staff place your application on the next available ZBA meeting agenda.
4. City staff schedule the public hearing and advertise the meeting to all neighboring residents within 300 feet of the proposed development, as required by state law.
5. The ZBA public hearing takes place:
 - a. To listen to comments from the public.
 - b. To consider your request and evaluate it based on the criteria of the *Zoning Ordinance* and State law.
 - c. For the ZBA to make a decision on your application.

FAQ: "What comes first, variance or site plan?"

If you need a "make or break variance," (i.e., a variance that is absolutely necessary for your project to be possible), you should apply for the variance before working on your site plan.

If you need a minor variance that won't fundamentally restrict your ability to function if it is denied (e.g., a change in fence height), then you can apply for your variance before or after the site plan process. The Zoning Administrator can help advise you on whether you should submit your variance request before your site plan.

What are the Potential Outcomes and Next Steps of a Variance Application?

1. Approval

- a. The ZBA approves your variance.
- b. You have one year to begin construction or start the use for which you were granted a variance. If you do not start within one year, your variance approval will expire.

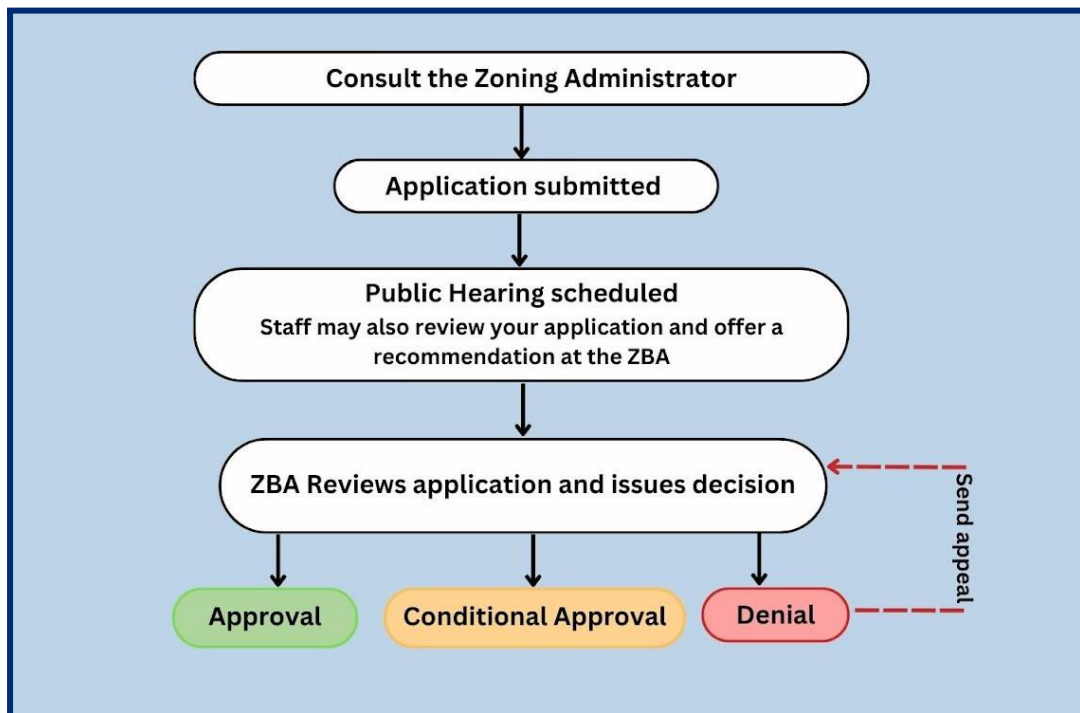
2. Conditional Approval

- a. The ZBA approves only a portion of your variance request.
- b. You have one year to begin construction or start the use for which you were granted a variance. If you do not start within one year, your variance approval will expire.

3. Denial

- a. The ZBA denies your variance request.
- b. You may appeal the decision of the ZBA. The ZBA will nullify a decision only if they find that the original decision was arbitrary or capricious; was based upon an erroneous finding of a material fact; constituted an abuse of discretion; or was based upon an erroneous interpretation of the Zoning Ordinance.

Variance Process Flowchart



8.5.e Planned Unit Development

What is a Planned Unit Development?

A **Planned Unit Development (PUD)** is a type of zoning designation that allows for more flexible and creative land use planning than traditional zoning. PUDs are often used for large, mixed-use developments that incorporate a variety of uses such as residential, commercial, and recreational. A PUD is essentially a contract between a developer and the city – the developer is allowed to design the project in a more flexible way in exchange for providing a public benefit or amenity.

PUDs allow flexibility in land development by encouraging innovation. The goals of a PUD are:

- To provide variety in design and layout.
- To achieve economy and efficiency in the use of land, natural resources, energy, and public services and utilities.
- To encourage useful open spaces suited to the needs of the lot in question.
- To provide proper housing including workforce housing.
- To provide employment, service, and shopping opportunities suited to the needs of the residents of the City.

If your project meets these goals, you might consider requesting a PUD.

PUD Applications have **two basic phases**:

1. **The PUD Option** – During this phase, you are applying for the *option* to have a PUD on a certain property. The City will review your application to see if it meets the requirements for a PUD. This phase is more general – it is the screening phase for all PUD projects.
2. **The Full PUD** – If you make it through the PUD Option phase, you will then move on to submit your Full PUD plans. This consists of both a development plan (aka a detailed site plan) and a development contract, which outlines any special agreements between you and the City.

What Materials are Needed to Apply for a PUD Option?

The materials needed are the following:

- A document describing your proposed project, which explains how you believe it meets the qualifying standards for a PUD.
- A conceptual land use plan containing enough detail to explain the role of open space;

the location of land use areas, streets providing access to the site, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the site; dwelling unit density and types; and buildings or floor areas contemplated, as applicable.

- A plan to protect natural features and/or provide open green space
- A stormwater management plan that is consistent with the Wayne County Stormwater Management Program and that incorporates low impact development (LID) water quality technologies, such as rain gardens, rooftop gardens, vegetated swales, cisterns, permeable pavers, porous pavement, and filtered stormwater structures.

What is the Process for a PUD Approval?

The PUD process follow four primary steps:

1. You request a pre-application meeting with City staff to discuss your proposal and talk through the steps of your project.
2. PUD Option
 - a. You submit all the required materials for the PUD Option.
 - b. City staff review of your application to make sure it is complete.
 - c. If it is complete, they then perform a technical review of your application and prepare a recommendation for the Planning Commission.
 - d. Your application is scheduled for the next available Planning Commission meeting. The Commission either approves or denies your application. If it is approved, you move on to submit the Full PUD.
3. Full PUD
 - a. You submit all the required materials for the Full PUD (you can find the full list in Article 10 of the *Zoning Ordinance*).
 - b. City staff perform a completeness review of your application. If it is complete, they then perform a technical review of your application and prepare a recommendation for the Planning Commission.
 - c. Your application is scheduled for the next available Planning Commission meeting, which includes a public hearing. City staff schedule the public hearing and advertise the meeting to all neighboring residents within 300 feet of the proposed development, as required by state law.
 - d. The Planning Commission holds the required public hearing, during which residents have the opportunity to comment. The Commission then discusses your application and recommends that the City Council approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.
 - e. Your application is scheduled for the next available City Council meeting. City Council reviews the staff reports, the Planning Commission's recommendation,

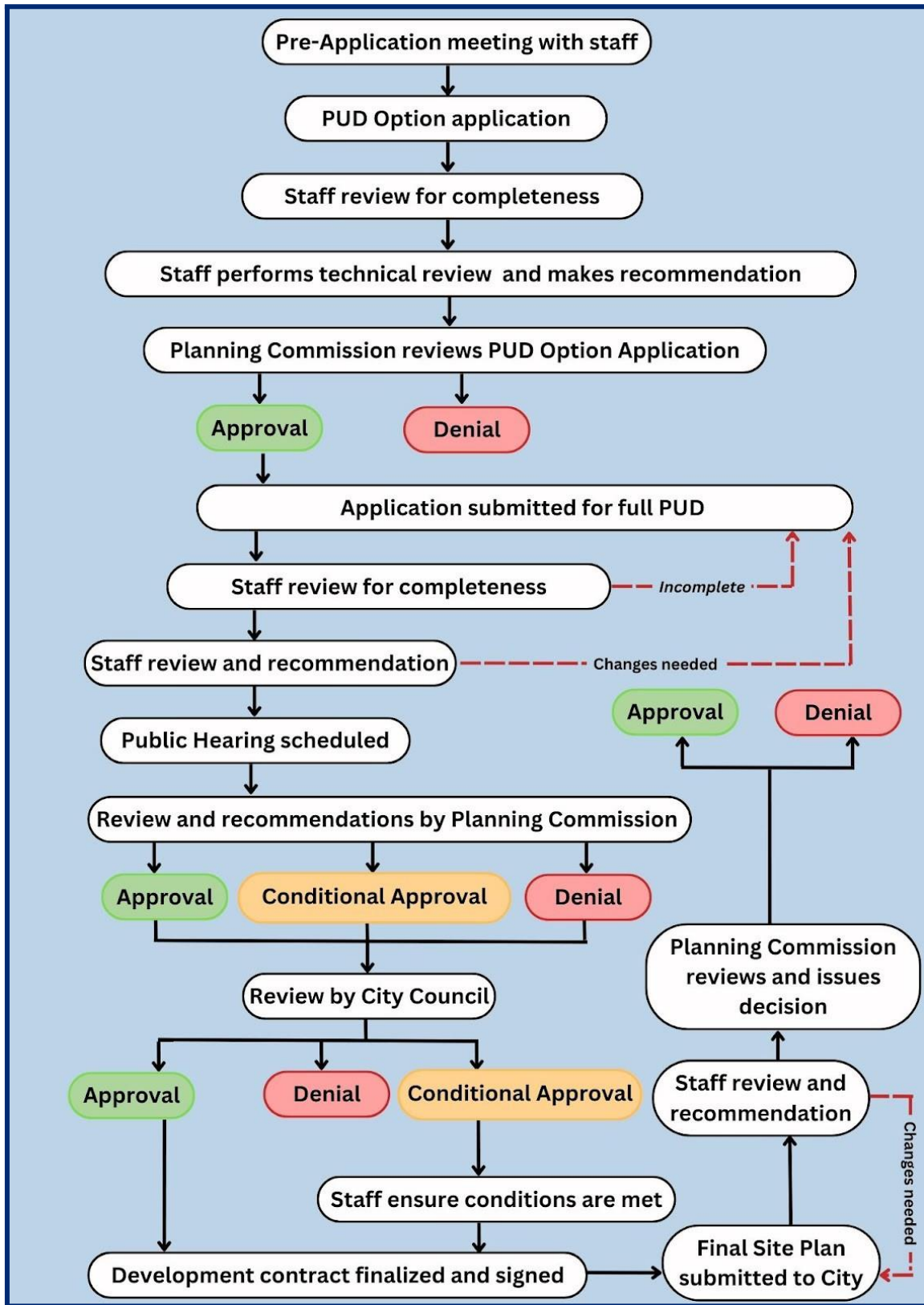
and public feedback. The Council then votes to either approve, approve with conditions, or deny the Full PUD.

- f. If it is approved, you then finalize the development contract through negotiations with the City Attorney. Both you and the Mayor sign the agreement.
4. Final Site Plan Review
 - a. You submit the final version of your site plan to the City.
 - b. City staff perform a technical review of your site plan and prepare a recommendation for the Planning Commission.
 - c. Your application is scheduled for the next available Planning Commission meeting. The Commission either approves or denies your final site plan.
 - d. If it is approved, you move on to submit engineering plans for engineering and Building Department review.



A Planned Unit Development example: Sumby Senior Housing in River Rouge (2023)

Planned Unit Development Process Flowchart



9. Final Engineering and Building Review Process

9.1 Engineering Review

Engineering plans are similar to site plans but include much more detail, such as calculations for how the soil will support the building, information on utility capacity, specific pipe measurements and diagrams, etc. Your engineering plans will be reviewed administratively by the Engineering Department and Fire Department to ensure that they meet all applicable engineering and safety standards. Please contact the Community Development Director Karl Laub at (313) 842-4203 ext 224 or klaub@cityofriverrouge.org for more information about the engineering review process.

Any development built along a County road right-of-way must also obtain additional engineering approval from Wayne County. While going through the City of River Rouge's engineering review process, you should submit your engineering plans to the [Wayne County Construction Permit Office](#). For more information on Wayne County's engineering review process, please call the Wayne County Construction Permit Office at (734) 858-2774 or email dpspermits@co.wayne.mi.us.

9.2 Building Review/Permitting

After completing your engineering review, you will need to submit your complete construction plans to the Building Department – this is the first step toward obtaining permits. The City's building ordinances and all building permit applications can be found on the [Building Department page](#) on the City of River Rouge website, or at the Building Department in River Rouge City Hall on 10600 W. Jefferson Avenue. The Building Department uses the most current [Michigan Building Code](#) when reviewing applications. You should contact the Building Department at (313) 842-4209 or building@cityofriverrouge.org to discuss any permits your project may need and the requirements of each permit application before submitting your building permit applications. You will need to obtain all building permits prior to starting construction.

FAQ: "Can my project go straight to Building Review and Permitting?"

Refer to **page 26** of this Handbook to see if you are eligible to go straight to Building Review.

The Building Department will review your full construction plans and let you know if any issues need to be corrected. Once your plans have been revised and approved by the Building Department, you can apply for construction permits.

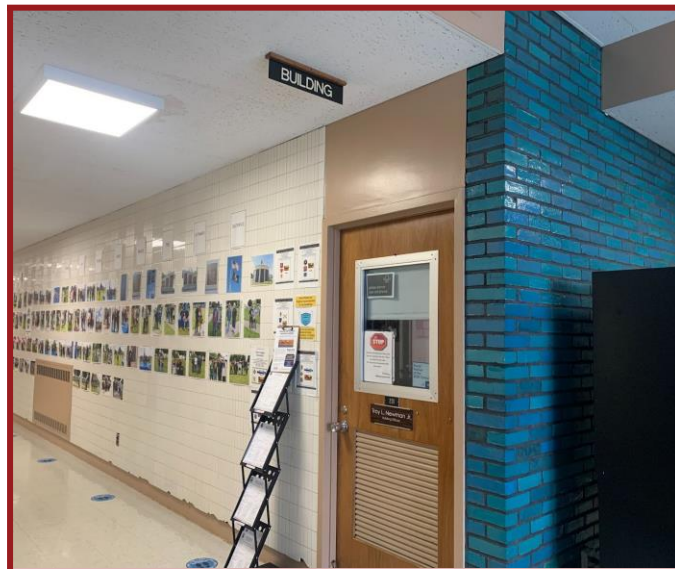
9.2.a Required Permit Application Materials

To submit a permit application, you must provide:

- The application form, signed and dated by the property owner and the agent.
 - Indicate which of the following two options applies to your project:
 1. All residential one- and two-family construction
 2. **or** all other construction (commercial, industrial, or all other construction: commercial/industrial/multifamily).
- A copy of the approved construction plan.
- An application fee paid to the Building Department. The fee amount depends on the value of your construction. You should provide the value of all construction work, including all finished work.

9.3 Michigan Utility Notification Center (MISS DIG 811)

Prior to starting construction, it is important to know where underground utilities may be located on your site. Call 811 or (800) 482-7171, or go to www.missdig811.org, to request service to locate underground utility lines.



City of River Rouge Building Department Office (2023)

10. Construction Process

10.1 Construction

Once you have secured all permits and have identified the location of your underground utilities, you can begin the construction and inspection process. As you move through the different phases of your construction, you will need to obtain various temporary permits from the City and County, such as a permit to temporarily occupy part of the road. City and County staff are available to help guide you through this process.

10.2 Inspections

The City's Building Department will schedule a final site compliance inspection at a mutually convenient date and time (circumstances permitting) and inspect the site for compliance with the approved plan set. Any minor changes made in the field will be approved by the City's Building Department. If any major changes are required, you will need to apply for revised review and approval.

The Building Department will issue a final site compliance inspection report within a week from the date of inspection. If you meet all requirements, the Building Department will work with the Building Official and Fire Department to issue the Certificate of Occupancy. For further information, please contact the River Rouge Building Department at (313) 842-4209 or building@cityofriverrouge.org.

11. Licensing

Make Sure You Get All the Required Business Licenses Before Operating!

Business licenses are issued by the City Council and help the City track which businesses are open. **All** operating businesses must have a business license.

What is the Process?

1. Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy

- a. You must obtain a certificate of occupancy from the Building Department prior to submitting an application for a business license. This certificate indicates that the building where your business is located meets all the necessary safety and structural requirements. Without this certificate, your application cannot be approved.

2. Submit a Business License Application

- a. The next step in obtaining a business license is to fill out a business license application, which can be found online at the [City Clerk's page](#) of the City of River Rouge website or by picking up a physical application from the City Clerk's office at River Rouge City Hall.
- b. You must pay a \$200 application fee at the time of submission to the City Clerk's office. This fee will cover the licensing fees for two years, after which you will need to renew your license.

3. City Review

- a. Once the application is submitted, it will be reviewed by the Building Department, Fire Department, and City Council to ensure that your business complies with all relevant regulations.
- b. Even though the application can be obtained online, the majority of applicants still prefer to pick up a physical copy from the office and speak to City Clerk's office staff to learn more about the application requirements. Please contact the City Clerk's office at (313) 842-5604 for more information about the business licensing process.

Starting a Business in the Cannabis Industry

In Michigan, cannabis businesses are required to obtain licenses for health and safety from the State. The type of license you need will depend on the type of business you're planning to operate, whether it be a grower, retailer, or another type of cannabis-related business. It's essential to research and understand which licenses are necessary for your specific business model. You can get more info by visiting the Cannabis Regulatory Agency's website: <https://www.michigan.gov/cra>.

The City of River Rouge is one of the many municipalities in Michigan that issues licenses for cannabis businesses. Keep in mind that you need three separate approvals to start a cannabis business in River Rouge:

- State of Michigan licensing approval
- River Rouge licensing approval
- River Rouge site plan approval (and any other planning approvals, such as special land use or rezoning approval, if they are needed for your project)



River Rouge City Hall building hallway (2023)

12. Financial Incentives for Development and Workforce Programs

There are many ways to make your development more affordable and efficient in River Rouge. Please take a look through the financial incentives offered by the City, County, and State.

12.1 City of River Rouge Property

If you are willing to move and invest in River Rouge, the City may be willing to sell you downtown business lots or other property at a reduced price. If you are interested in this incentive, contact the Community Development Director to set up an initial discussion and kick off the administrative processes.

12.2 Public Act 198 of 1974

Every city, township and village in Michigan is eligible to grant tax abatements under Public Act (P.A) 198, also called the “Industrial Facilities Exemptions Act.” P.A. 198 of 1974, as amended, is the primary tool local units of government use as an incentive for companies to renovate and expand aging manufacturing plants or to build new plants in Michigan. The legislative body of the city, township, or village in which the facility will be located grants the abatement.

This process can reduce property taxes by roughly 50% on new plants. In the case of a rehabilitation project, the obsolete SEV (State Equalized Value) is frozen, and the investment on improvements is 100% exempt from property taxes. Abatements cover both real and personal property and can run from one to twelve years, at the discretion of City Council. Since it was passed in 1974, Act 198 has accounted for over 16,500 projects, representing 1.3 million jobs retained, 500,000 jobs created, and \$81 billion invested.

Eligibility:

- Eligible businesses include industrial plants that manufacture or process goods or materials by physical or chemical change. Related facilities of Michigan manufacturers such as offices, engineering, research and development, warehousing or parts distribution are also eligible for exemption. As defined in the Michigan Economic Growth Authority (MEGA) Act, qualified high-technology business activity is also eligible,

including advanced computing, advanced materials, biotechnology, electronic device technology, engineering or laboratory testing, medical device technology, product research and development and advanced vehicles technology.

- To learn more about the eligibility, application, and approval process, please refer to the [Michigan Department of Treasury's P.A. 198 webpage](#).

12.3 Wayne County Economic Development Incentives

The Wayne County Department of Economic Development offers a list of local, county, and state incentives that small business owners and developers can apply for. **These incentives are subject to change.** To view a current list of incentives, please visit the [Small Business Hub page](#) on the Wayne County website. For more information, please contact the Economic Development Manager listed for River Rouge on the [Contact Us page](#) of the Wayne County Department of Economic Development website.

For Brownfield Redevelopment incentives, please visit Wayne County's [Brownfield Redevelopment web page](#) and contact Hassan Sheikh at hsheikh@waynecounty.com.

12.4 Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Incentives

The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) aims “to protect Michigan’s environment and public health by managing air, water, land, and energy resources.” EGLE offers financial incentives to help developers remediate environmental issues on site. **These incentives and their points of contact are subject to change.** To view a current list of incentives, please visit the [Grants and Financing page](#) of the EGLE website.

Small Business Pollution Prevention (P2) Loans

This program provides loan financing to small businesses for reducing on-site waste, conserving water, and promoting environmental reuse and safe recycling. More information on this program can be found on the [Small Business Pollution Prevention \(P2\) Loans webpage](#) on the EGLE website.

Eligibility

- Must be an existing independently owned and operated small business with 500 or fewer full-time employees.
- For more information, please contact Devan Dodge at (517) 275-0894 or DodgeD1@michigan.gov.

Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund

This fund provides up to \$1,000,000 of reimbursement funding to remediate contamination caused by releases from petroleum underground storage tanks. More information on this program can be found on the [Michigan Underground Storage Tank Authority](#) webpage on the EGLE website.

Eligibility

- Must own and operate an underground petroleum storage tank.
- A spill must be discovered and reported after December 30, 2014.
- For more information, please contact Bob Reisner at (517) 599-1625 or ReisnerR@Michigan.gov.

12.5 Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Incentives

To support economic development in Michigan, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) offers technical assistance and gap financing to help support the development of your small business. To receive consideration for awards under MEDC programs, initial contact should be made with the River Rouge Economic Development Corporation and the River Rouge Community Development Department in the due diligence stage to discuss the community benefits of your project and additional financing that can be secured. See Section 7.2: Due Diligence of this Handbook for more information. **These incentives and their points of contact are subject to change.** To view a current list of incentives, please visit MEDC's [MIPlace website](#) and the [Business Incentives webpage](#) of the MEDC website.

MEDC's [Building Strong Communities](#) brochure provides an overview of some of the technical assistance programs and financial incentives you may qualify for. It includes eligibility requirements for all place-based community development incentives. Please consult this brochure for more information on MEDC's Community Development Incentives.

Michigan Community Revitalization Program (MCRP)

This program provides community development grants and loans to promote historic preservation and reduce blight and environmental contamination. More information on the MCRP can be found on the [MCRP webpage](#) of MEDC's MIPlace website.

Eligibility

- Projects are evaluated based on their local and regional impacts and how the project merges with the surrounding neighborhood, other place-based considerations, and other committed sources of financing. Please refer to the Michigan Community Revitalization Program Guidelines for more information on eligibility guidelines.
- The MCRP application process can take approximately three to six months from intake to approval.
- For more information about the MCRP, please contact MEDC Community Development Manager Dominic Romano at (313) 407-2361 or romanod@michigan.org.

Build MI Community Grant Initiative

This program provides gap financing for small-scale redevelopment projects that revitalize underused spaces. It also encourages participation from developers and property owners with limited experience. More information on this program can be found on the [Build MI Community Grant Initiative webpage](#) on MEDC's MIPlace website.

Eligibility

- Projects are evaluated based on their local and regional impacts, how the project merges with the surrounding neighborhood and other place-based considerations, and other committed sources of financing. Please refer to the Build MI Community Grant Initiative Guidelines for more information on eligibility guidelines.
- For more information about the Build MI Community Grant Initiative, please contact MEDC Community Development Manager Dominic Romano at (313) 407-2361 or romanod@michigan.org.

Transformational Brownfield Development Plans (TBP)

This program provides gap financing brownfield plans that have a positive impact on economic development, community revitalization, and has a positive fiscal impact for the State of

Michigan. More information on this program can be found on the [Transformational Brownfield Development Plans \(TBP\) webpage](#) on MEDC's MIPlace website.

Eligibility

- Your project will require a minimum level of capital investment based on the population size of the community your project is in. Please refer to the Transformational Brownfield Plan Program Guidelines for more information on eligibility guidelines.
- For more information about the Build MI Community Grant Initiative, please contact MEDC Community Development Manager Dominic Romano at (313) 407-2361 or romanod@michigan.org.

12.6 Workforce Programs

There are many opportunities for developers looking to invest in River Rouge to recruit workers through the many workforce development and job placement programs in the surrounding area.

Michigan Works!

This is the “first statewide, unified workforce development system in the country. Our members serve as private sector leaders and partners whose work drives economic activity and strategic growth in their communities” ([Michigan Works Home page](#)). Michigan Works! One-Stop Service Center number is 800-285-WORKS (9675). The Michigan Works! offices nearest to River Rouge can be located through:

- The [Detroit Employment Solutions \(DESC\)](#) web page: “DESC provides job placement, search, training, career advice and other supportive services to tens of thousands of Detroiters every year.” A list of service centers can be found on the DESC web page.
- The [SEMCA web page](#): “Since 1996, SEMCA has been a leader in talent development programs and partners with various community organizations and contractors to serve residents in Wayne and Monroe counties, excluding the city of Detroit.” A list of service centers can be found on the SEMCA web page.

Henry Ford College Technical Education Program (M-TEC)

[Henry Ford College Workforce and Professional Development \(WFPD\)](#), which is located in the Michigan Technical Education Center (MT), provides peer-centered training in the areas of

manufacturing education and skilled trades; supply chain and logistics; business and computer technology; energy and construction technology; health sciences; industrial sewing and pattern making. Learn more on WFPD's [Workforce Classes and Training](#) webpage. You can contact WFPD at 313-317-6600 or via email at mtec@hfcc.edu.

Wayne RESA: Wayne County Workforce Development Inventory Initiative

[Wayne RESA](#) (Regional Educational Service Agency) is Wayne County's "one stop shop for career preparation resources." The Workforce Inventory Project's main goal is to "ensure that all students have access to available programs and services, so that students in Wayne County are college and career ready." You can contact the program through the [online submission form](#).

Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) Small Business Resources

MEDC offers a number of resources to support your small business' growth, including business retention trainings, crowdfunding resources, and service provider contact information. Please visit the [Small Business page](#) on MEDC's website for more information about these resources. To learn more about MEDC's Community Development Small Business Services, please contact Chelsea Beckman at beckmanc1@michigan.org.



Attending a conference to develop their careers by Cecile Arcures (2019) - [iStock by Getty images](#)

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13. Appendices

12.7 Appendix A - Businesses and Services in Demand



Example of Downtown Mixed Use zoning (2017)

According to a [Target Retail Market Analysis \(2021\)](#) carried out by LandUseUSA, 63% of retail expenditures among local resident shoppers are being exported to destinations outside of the city. The city can therefore add new stores, with the exception of gas stations, auto repair shops, tobacco/cannabis, and drinking establishments, fast food restaurants, and barber shops, without worrying about oversupply or market saturation. According to the LandUseUSA's Market Analysis, other businesses, for which there would be growth opportunities in River Rouge, would include:

- Pharmacies and drug stores
- Furniture stores
- Hispanic, soul food, and/or Mediterranean restaurants
- Fashion accessories and apparel stores
- A microbrewery and an ice cream parlor
- A shoe store
- A beauty supply store
- One more personal care salon (hair, nails, etc.)

-
- A laundromat
 - A home improvement store
 - A cleaning services provider
 - A lawn and garden supplies store
 - An office supplies store
 - An Arts/gifts/novelty store
 - Art studios
 - A Music store
 - A Crafts/games/hobby store
 - A sporting goods store;
 - A pet supplies store

There is also an opportunity to create:

- Co-working spaces with a business center
- A human resources center
- Complementary types of marketing and small business services

The city should also consider creating a makerspace facility that could accommodate:

- Local artisans
- Small merchants
- Arts, gifts, craft, game, music, pet, and other novelty stores

In the entertainment and recreation industries, there are also niche opportunities for a:

- community center
- Fitness center or gym
- Martial arts studio
- Yoga studio
- Dance studio
- Skate park
- Billiard hall and/or bowling alley
- Bounce house and/or arcade
- Senior center
- DJ and/or recording studio
- Membership club(s)

If some of these venues can be successfully added, then they will help generate support for a boutique hotel, bed and breakfast, or similar types of overnight accommodations.

12.8 Appendix B - Glossary

Key Term	Definition
Administrative Approval	Approval for a site plan granted by City staff for minor site plan and design changes to new or existing buildings and properties.
Brownfield	A property that was formerly developed and the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of a brownfield may be complicated by the presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.
Brownfield Remediation	A clean-up of a brownfield site. Revitalizing and redeveloping these properties protects the environment, reuses existing infrastructure, minimizes urban sprawl and creates economic opportunities.
Building Permits	A type of authorization that must be granted by a government or other regulatory body before the construction of a new or existing building can legally occur.
Conditional Rezoning	A type of rezoning where a property owner offers to place conditions (restrictions) on the rezoning to make the rezoning more compatible with the city and neighborhood..
Dimensional Variance (Physical Variance)	A deviation from the dimensional requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.
Due Diligence	A buyer’s investigation of the various aspects of a property, either before making an offer or (more often) within a specific time frame between entering into the contract and closing. This time frame is known as a due diligence period. If any defects in or around the property are discovered, most real estate contracts contain language that specifies what the buyer and seller will do to remedy the problems so that the transaction can continue toward closing. In some cases, you may be able to cancel the purchase and have your binder deposit returned in full.
Environmental Assessment	A process of evaluating the environmental liability of a real estate asset. The Environmental Site Assessment or ESA process includes a site inspection, a review of

	historical records of the property, and research of records available at government agencies.
Land Use	A term used to describe the activities that occur on a piece of property. For example, the land use for a school would be “education,” while the land use for a clothing shop would be “retail.”
Master Plan	A document and policy guide designed to help communities create a vision of what they want to look like in the future. Master Plans help guide communities in their decisions on land use development and preservation. Master Plans are written and adopted by a local Planning Commission and might also be adopted by a local legislative body.
Planned Unit Development (PUD)	A type of zoning designation that allows for more flexible and creative land use planning than traditional zoning. PUDs are often used for large, mixed-use developments that incorporate a variety of uses such as residential, commercial, and recreational. A PUD is essentially a contract between a developer and the city – the developer is allowed to design the project in a more flexible way in exchange for providing a public benefit or amenity.
Property Survey	An assessment to determine or confirm land boundaries, such as the plot of land a home or structure sits on, and any sub-surface improvements, like a septic tank or well. A survey also identifies other types of restrictions and conditions that apply to the legal description of a property, including easements or encroachments.
Purchase Agreement	An agreement between a buyer and seller that documents the legal terms of a real estate transaction. This is a contract to purchase a property. In addition to including basic information like the property address and price, the document will outline any contingencies that must be resolved before the sale is binding. The Purchase Agreement also specifies the rights and obligations of the buyer and seller.
Rezoning (Zoning Amendment)	An application to change the zoning district of a property to a different zoning district.

<p>Site Plan</p>	<p>A document that details your site’s current conditions and your proposed changes. A site plan is a detailed map of the property that typically includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A scaled drawing of the property ● Property lines ● Location of existing trees and vegetation ● Existing and proposed buildings ● Driveway entry and exit locations, roadways, and sidewalks ● Utility poles and power lines ● Fencing ● Other on-site structures
<p>Special Land Use</p>	<p>Land uses that are conditional within a specific zoning district. These land uses are authorized by the issuance of a special land use permit, which contains conditions and safeguards necessary for the protection of the public welfare, community and general welfare of the environment.</p>
<p>Title</p>	<p>A document that shows legal ownership of a property or asset. A title might show ownership of property rights of an individual or business, which is the ownership of resources whether they're tangible (physical in nature) or intangible. Titles can be obtained by purchasing a property or inheritance as an estate.</p>
<p>Use Variance</p>	<p>A deviation from the use restrictions set by the Zoning Ordinance.</p>
<p>Zoning</p>	<p>Zoning is the process by which a city divides land zoning districts. Each zoning district has a list of the land uses that are allowed and prohibited, and every piece of land in the city is assigned to a district.</p>
<p>Zoning Ordinance</p>	<p>A local law setting land use regulations that specify the type and dimensions of buildings and activities that can occur in a particular area.</p>

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