

Focus & Recommendations

Zoning Code & Subdivision

Regulations Rewrite

(incorporates Memos 3 & 4)



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Introduction

From the RFP:

After a multi-year effort, the Common Council adopted an updated comprehensive plan in October 2023 that is guided by one of the following goals: Complete a comprehensive review and update of the City's zoning code to evaluate barriers to development that include minimum lot size and setbacks, design standards, and permitting of ADU's. The Future Land Use section in the comprehensive plan is based on the "Neighborhood, District, and Corridor Framework" (NDC), a system devised by the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU). The intent of the NDC model is to encourage walkable, compact communities that are rich with amenities and celebrate the history of the built environment and the preservation of natural features, all while respecting the fabric of communities. The La Crosse 2024 Housing Study that is guided by the following overarching action: Complete a comprehensive review and update of the City's zoning code to evaluate barriers to development.

The Zoning Code It has not been completely updated since the 1980s. Significant issues include:

- *Inconsistencies with State Statutes.*
- *Amendments that may not be consistent with other chapter in the code*
- *Outdates design standards*
- *Disorderly arrangement leading to missed requirements*
- *It lacks options for mixed-use districts*
- *Key components of the code are difficult to understand by the public*
- *The entire code perpetuates suburban-styled development that impedes opportunities to promote dense urban development and lacks the ability to achieve either traditional or modern development patterns in City's varied neighborhoods and corridors*

- *Challenges to infill walkable urban development*
- *It is not user-friendly and lacks consistent graphics to improve readability*
- *Many of the requirements do not reflect existing conditions, creating a large number of nonconforming properties; This has led to frequent variance requests, zoning code amendments, requests to rezone to Planned Unit Developments, or requests for exceptions to design standards*
- *Lack of specificity or common sense that makes administration difficult*
- *Consistency with the City's recently updated Comprehensive Plan.*

Steering Committee

Steering Committee: City Plan Commission

- Aron Newberry, Council Member
- Elaine Yager, Citizen
- Jacob Sciammas, Citizen
- James Cherf, Citizen
- James Szymalak, Citizen
- Matt Gallager, City Engineer
- Olivia Stine, Council Member
- Shaundel Washington-Spivey, Mayor
- Jennifer Trost, Park Board President; Vice President/Council

Planning Staff

- Andrea Trane – Director of Planning & Development
- Tim Acklin – Project Manager, Deputy Director
- Jenna Dinkel – Associate Planner

Consultant Team

- MSA Professional Services
- Michael Lamb Consulting
- ZoneCo
- All Together Studio
- River Travel Media

1 Progress to Date

Since December 2024 the consultant team has conducted a review of the current city plans & policies, zoning code and subdivision regulations as summarized in Memorandums 1 and 2. A Built Form Study, based on the NDC model, was completed and used as the basis for identifying representative character areas for the city. The City Plan Commission was briefed along the way at strategic dates and all the diagnostic and review data has been provided to date. The team also conducted monthly staff coordination meetings virtually and, at times, facilitated staff workshops with multiple departments represented.

Public engagement has included a community survey and a more saturated information and education campaign beginning with Housing Week (April 28-May 3), presented by Habitat for Humanity of the Greater La Crosse Region. This milestone also kicked off the community survey that at date-of-close (mid July) counted about 800 responses. Shortly after staff began holding neighborhood information meetings that were then followed by a series of invited stakeholder interviews with about two dozen companies, agencies and departments participating.

Process

Review & Diagnostic		Engagement
Existing Conditions	Existing Zoning Districts	Staff Issues & Comments
Plans & Policies	Allowed Uses	Stakeholder Responses
Built Form Study	Urban Standards	Surveys
Lot Analysis	Design Standards	Interviews & Focus Groups
Character Areas	Zoning Map	Neighborhood & Stakeholder Meetings
Downtown Character Area	Administration & Approvals	
Variances, CUP's & Changes		Public Open House

Recommendations	Draft Document	Adopt
Code Approach	Zoning	Public Hearing
Annotated Outline	Signs	City Plan Commission
Residential Districts	Subdivisions	Public Hearing
Commercial/MXD		Common Council
Industrial		
Other Districts		

work completed to date: approx. 9-10 months

For discussion Sept 16th

Engagement



2 Policy Focus



2040 Comprehensive Plan

The Plan organizes the city into the NDC model - neighborhoods, districts and corridors and defines desirable, allowable and undesirable land uses for each of the areas. Land Use Categories were then identified for all the areas of the city.

The Comprehensive Plan outlines several goals and actions aimed at addressing these housing challenges, many of which will require adjustments to the zoning code to support the desired outcomes:

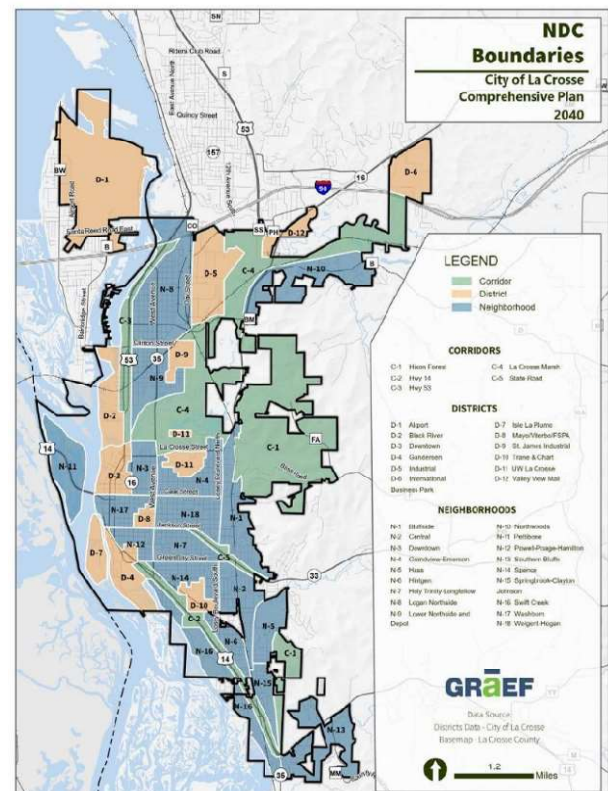
- **Affordable Housing Expansion:** Remove zoning barriers to housing development, including revisions to off-street parking requirements, minimum lot sizes, setbacks, and ADU regulations.
- **Infill Development:** Adopt zoning amendments to better support townhomes and small-scale multi-family housing (4-16 units) as transitional infill adjacent to larger apartment complexes, commercial areas, and transit corridors. Also, identify underutilized properties, such as surface parking lots and vacant office spaces, for potential development.
- **Innovative Housing Solutions:** Support flexibility for prefabricated housing and

alternative construction methods in zoning code.

- **Demolition Oversight:** Consider adopting a demolition delay ordinance to protect existing housing stock.
- **Property Condition Oversight:** Investigate and document the condition of dilapidated rental properties, while increasing building code enforcement for noncompliant properties to improve rental housing conditions.

Comments & Recommendations

- The analysis and diagnostic scope of worked from this model to prepare a 'Built Form Study' that highlights key physical development patterns which was used to help map the city into a series of "character areas".
- The approach confirms and/or establishes zoning districts that generally align with the character areas of the city and the land use policy guidance from the Comprehensive Plan.
- Residential land use categories include low, medium and high density housing as well as low and high intensity mixed use.



Imagine 2040 Downtown Plan

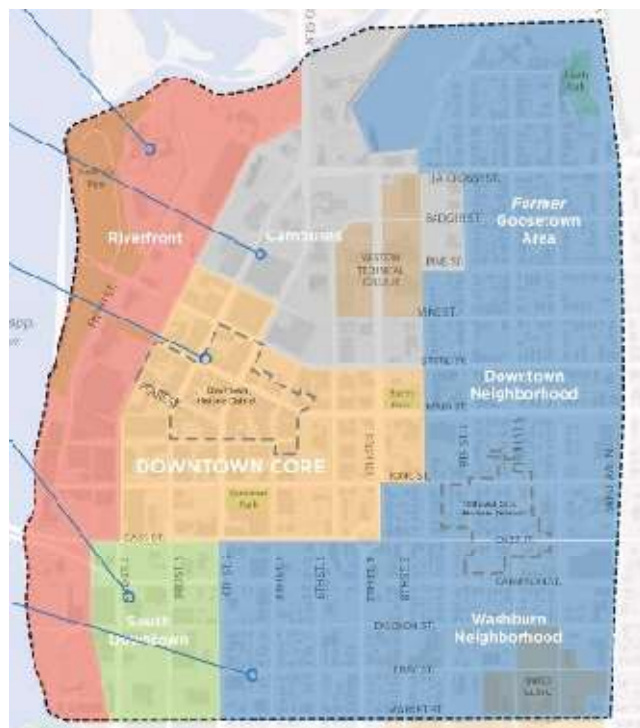


The Downtown Plan talks about downtown being a neighborhood and identifies a number of sub-areas including the “downtown core” and the downtown historic district. The Plan suggests a number of opportunity sites including the potential development of surface parking lots, the Post office site and Core Gateway. Prototype development diagrams illustrate high and medium intensity development much of which is anticipated to be housing. A number of blocks are shown supporting attached single family development

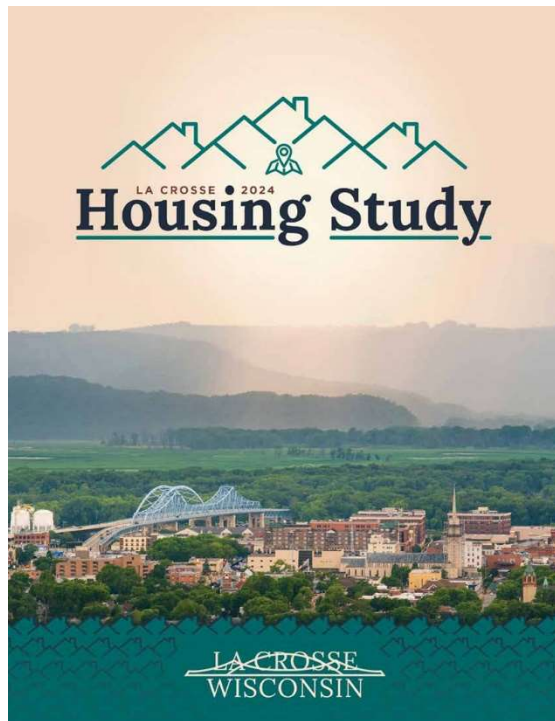
(townhouse and rowhouse) as well as small and medium scale multi-family types.

Comments & Recommendations

- Updating the zoning code to allow for mixed-use developments on current surface parking lots will enable the transformation into commercial, residential, and office uses.
- The update can facilitate the redevelopment of the post office site ensuring that any new development meets the community's vision and regulatory requirements.
- The update can define the types of developments allowed in the Core Gateway area, promoting mixed-use and/or civic-oriented facilities.
- Updating the zoning code to support long-term redevelopment in Houska Village will allow for the creation of a major neighborhood development with diverse housing options and improved connectivity to the riverfront.



La Crosse 2024 Housing Study



The La Crosse 2024 Housing Study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive review and update of the City's Zoning and Subdivision Code to address barriers to housing development. The detailed zoning code amendments recommended in the study on pages 68-75 are summarized and edited below.

Recommendations

Code Item A: Allow More Residential Use Types and Variety Across All Residential Districts

- Expand Allowed Residential Use Types:

Code Item B: Allow Mixed-Use Building Types More Broadly

- Add a Definition for Mixed-Use:
- Permit Mixed-Use Structures by Right without requiring additional approval procedures.

Code Item C: Adjust Residential Bulk Standards

- Minimum Lot Size, lots widths and setbacks

Code Item D: Lessen Nonconformity Restrictions

Code Item E: Reduce Minimum Parking Requirements

Code Item F: Multifamily Housing Design Standards

- DRC Procedures: Clarify meeting times, review timelines, and allowable exceptions for the Design Review Committee.
- Design Materials: List all prohibited materials instead of allowed materials for easier evaluation.

Code Item G: Evaluate Planned Development (PD) District Approvals

- Review Past Modifications for repeat exceptions; allow by right as an option

Code Item H: Evaluate Exceptions and Modifications Granted in Established Neighborhoods

Code Item I: Review Procedures

- Approval Timelines: Evaluate and reduce approval timelines for rezonings, subdivisions, and administrative design review to a maximum of 30 days from a completed application.

Code Item J: Make It Easier to Determine Everything That Applies to a Property/Project

- Consolidated Summary Sheets: Create summary sheets of code requirements, exceptions, and places to build residential uses like duplexes, townhomes, multiplexes, and multi-family uses.

Code Item K: Be More Clear on the Intent of Residential Districts and Seek Consolidation

- Consolidate Zoning Districts: Reduce the number of residential zoning districts and include an intent statement for each district aligned with the comprehensive plan future land use districts.

Code Item L: Avoid Subjective Decision-Making Criteria

Code Item M: Code Clarity

- Clear Language: Rewrite the code in clear, modern terminology.
- Cross-References: Add section text titles to cross-references for better understanding.
- Images and Illustrations: Include extensive use of illustrations in the code update.

Code Item N: Miscellaneous Items

- Shipping Containers: Consider allowing shipping containers for homes and accessory dwellings
- Mobile Home Parks: Maintain existing mobile home parks and eliminate outdated standards.
- Alleys in Residential Districts: Allow alleys to provide access to ADUs or other smaller units.
- Street Design Standards: Reduce local residential minimum right-of-way and pavement widths.
- Renewable Energy: Adjust standards to allow small-scale solar or wind energy systems on more properties in residential districts.

- Definitions: Review and update definitions to meet housing goals and create consistency, avoiding the term "family" in zoning regulations.

Other Plans & Policies

- US Hwy 53 Corridor Study – in particular consider using the plans around the George Street intersection and Bridgeview Plaza as a template for mapping mixed-use and residential zoning requirements via a 'regulating plan'.
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- Climate Action

3 Approach, Best Practices & Recommendations

A number of regulatory improvements have been identified in previous plans and studies and/or becoming more common practice with how cities define and regulate zoning requirements.

Recommendations

Character-based districts

- Align zoning districts with existing character and context of neighborhoods, districts and corridors as documented with the Built Form Analysis. (refer to General Character Areas ppt April 23, 2025)

Form-based standards

- Apply form-based standards in highly defined areas like the downtown pedestrian shopping environment and residential development that relates to the predominate scale and character of the area (regardless of number of units within building).
- Form-based standards can replace some of the multi-family and commercial design standards.

Mixed use districts and corridors

- Mixed use districts can apply in a less intense (height and density) neighborhood areas (George St and La Crosse St) and more intense locations like downtown, strategic redevelopment areas & centers, and near established sub-areas around UW Milwaukee, Mayo and Gunderson hospitals.
- Mixed Use Centers can utilize a 'regulating plan' map approach to better guide development in specific locations
- Anticipate downtown would include at least two districts; one that would focus on the walkable shopping/entertainment area and

one that emphasizes a mixed use pattern nearer to the river and provide standards for how surface lots can be developed.

Conventional single use zoning in geographic locations

- There are many areas and subdivisions that contain a suburban development pattern as a response to single use zoning; it is anticipated that these areas would maintain this character with a consistent (single use) residential district.

Multi family & Commercial Design Standards

- Review and calibrate standards to new districts; use and edit language that is objective and direct versus vague or loosely defined requirements that are more open to interpretation.

Structure

- Organize districts to affirm what uses are allowed vs. defining uses that are not allowed.
- Update urban standards per new/existing districts with user-friendly language and graphics.
- The current code and subdivision regulations can benefit from a more streamlined organization that reduces redundant or hard to find requirements.
- Approach is to make the content and organization more user friendly and intuitive.
- The approach will include diagrams, graphics and easy to read summary tables.
- Update, refine and consolidate definitions; locate near the rear of the code outline as more of a reference section.

4 Proposed Districts

Residential Districts

OSR: Open Space/Reserve - Primarily for agricultural use; lot area of 5 acres or greater

BSR: Bluffside Residential Neighborhood – single family detached units typically on larger lots and located at the toe of the bluff and other select area; lots are typically 10,000 sf or greater up to 5 acres

NSD: Neighborhood Residential – residential use to allow up to three units per lot with standards that guide for single family form and character; typical lots of 5000 to 7500 sf

NSD/EG: Neighborhood Residential/End Grain – single family units allowed on smaller lots that front onto east west side streets at the end of a block; lot sizes allowed in the 1500 to 4500 sf range

TND: Traditional Neighborhood Development – specific standards for street, block, lot, use and open space arrangements for new development 10 acres or greater in size.

MXR: Mixed Residential Neighborhood – this would allow any residential use permitted in all the residential districts and residential uses/types in the Neighborhood Mixed Use district, with height limits.

MRN: Modular Residential Neighborhood – maybe this allows typical mobile home development at a minimum site size (5 acres?)

MRC: Modular Residential/Compact – tiny homes under 500 SF allowed based on specific site plan standards and a maximum development area of .5 acre.

Mixed Use/Commercial Districts

NMU: Neighborhood Mixed Use - discrete areas in neighborhoods that allow a mix of residential and commercial uses with limits on height (no more than 4 stories (4th floor requires setback) and up to 10,000 sf commercial/retail space);

e.g., George Street, Calendonia, West Ave, La Crosse St., etc....

UMX: Urban Mixed Use – similar to NMU but allows more height and amount of ground floor SF; design standards need updating to apply (probably use design standards from the River North district as a start; allow some light industrial uses...??)

CMC: Commercial Corridor – typical highway commercial that allows large format as well as quick service and drive thru uses; (do we consider “Complete Commercial Corridors” that allow residential as well as large format retail and drive thru uses.....???; allow some light industrial uses...???)

DMX: Downtown Mixed Use – similar to urban mixed use district but may be subject to a level of design standards, heights and parking configurations more suited to downtown (can this be or should this be UMX???)

DMS: Downtown Main Street – very specific area that is well defined, walkable shopfront character area with a form-based standards the approach to code the built environment

Industrial, Institutional & Other Districts

INS: Institutional- Instead of public semi public? (or include these uses in all residential districts??)

IND: General Industrial – combines light and heavy into one industrial district; small industrial/assembly uses may be addressed in other districts

CON: Conservancy (no change anticipated)

PU: Public Utility – can this be Institutional or needs to be a stand-alone district?

PDD: Planned Development District

Overlay Districts

FLD: Floodplain Zoning
Historic District Overlay

Zoning Districts: Existing vs. Proposed

Existing	Proposed
Basic Zoning Districts	
A1, Agricultural District	Delete, combine w/EA into Open Space/Reserve
EA, Exclusive Agricultural District	Convert into Open Space Reserve
R-1, Single Family Residence District	Bluffside Residential District
R-2, Residence District	Neighborhood Residential & End Grain
R-3, Special Residence District	Neighborhood Residential & End Grain
R-4, Low Density Multiple Dwelling District	Mixed Residential
R-5, Multiple Dwelling District	Mixed Residential
R-6, Special Multiple Dwelling District	Neighborhood Mixed Use
WR, Washburn Residential Neighborhood District	Neighborhood Residential & End Grain
Commercial	
C-1, Local Business District	Neighborhood Mixed Use
C-2, Commercial District	Downtown Main Street
C-3, Community Business District	Downtown Mixed Use
	Commercial Corridor
	Urban Mixed Use
M-1, Light Industrial District	Combine into one General Industrial District
M-2, Heavy Industrial District	Recommend combine into one General Industrial District
UT, Public Utility District	retain
PL, Parking Lot District	not used or mapped – recommend delete
PD, Planned Development District	retain
PS, Public and Semi-Public District	transition as Institutional District
CON, Conservancy District	retain
Overlay Zoning Districts	
NC, Neighborhood Center Overlay District	Only mapped in one location; keep?
Historic Zoning Overlay District	5 districts – retain , no change

Proposed Regulating Plan Areas

A 'regulating plan' is a mapping tool that defines development in a more specific manner that may include proposed public ROW, public open space, and where buildings and parking should be located to create a more walkable, connected pattern.

- Downtown
- Hwy 53
- 19th & Hwy 33
- Losey & Hwy 33
- Houska Village

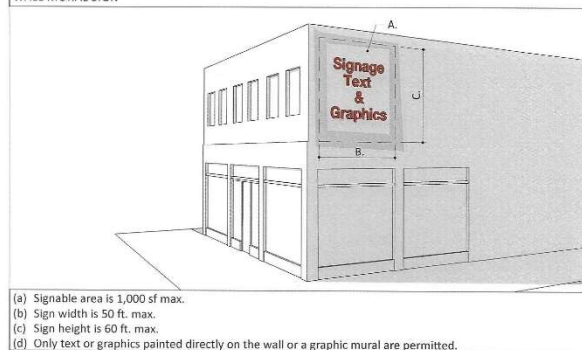


5 Signs

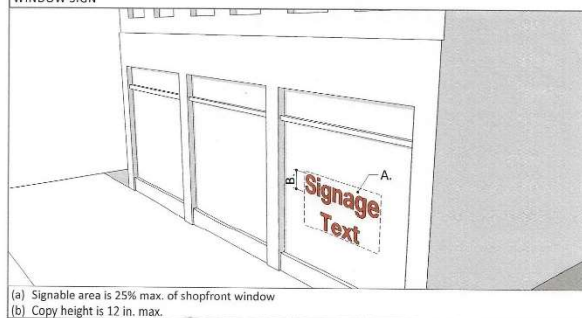
Recommendations

- Incorporate into Chapter 115 as a separate, new article.
- Reorganize and streamline contents; move administrative details and related requirements toward the back of the outline.
- Review definitions, edit for applicability and move toward the back of the article
- Review sign type and improve/expand with graphics as shown here
- Review proposed language for off premise signs including billboards and electronic billboards.

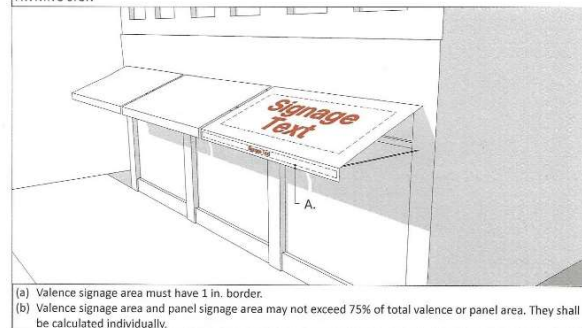
WALL MURAL SIGN



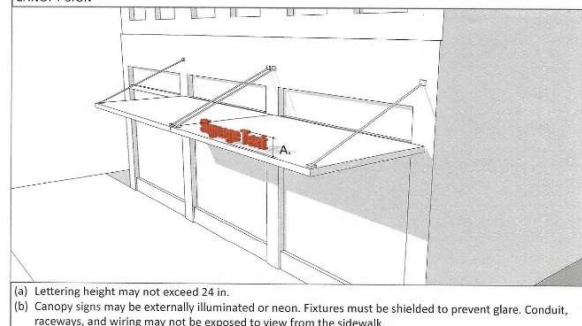
WINDOW SIGN



AWNING SIGN



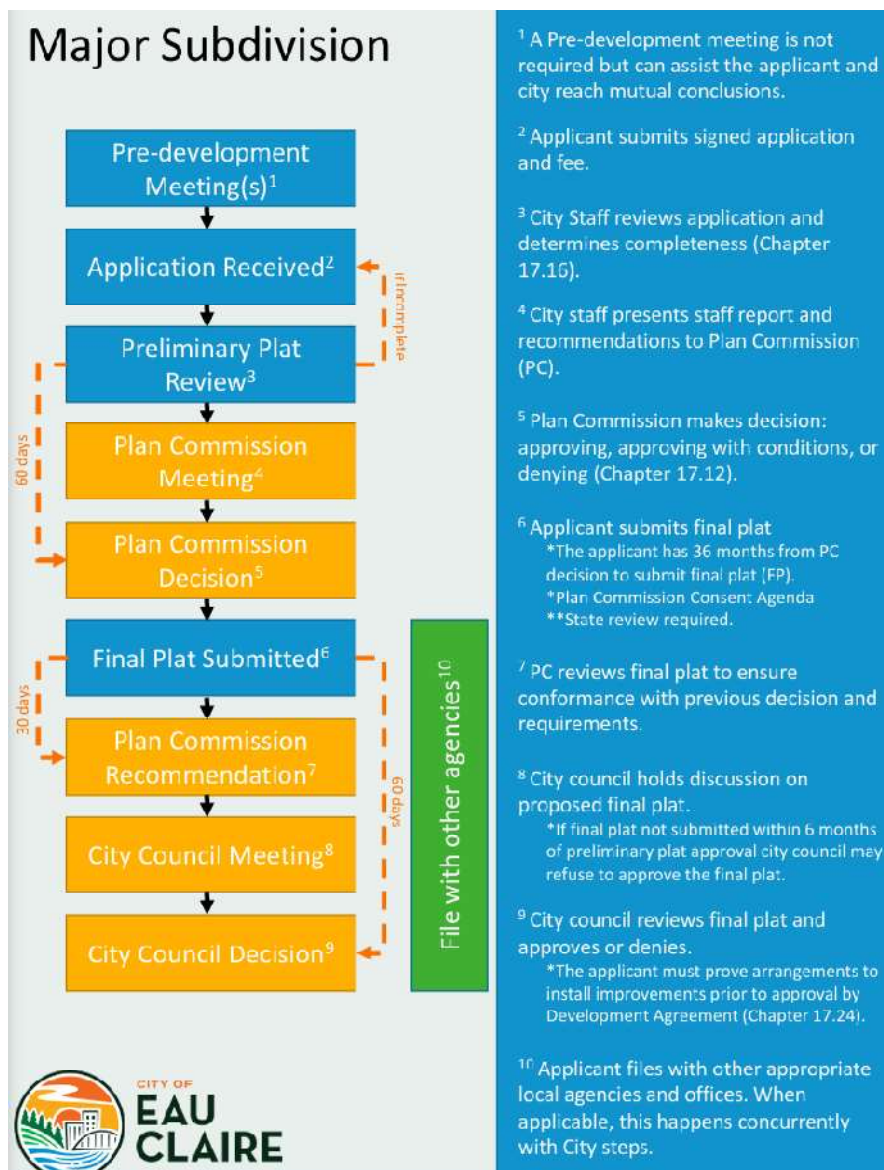
CANOPY SIGN



6 Subdivision Regulations

Recommendations

- Reorganize and streamline contents; move administrative details and related requirements toward the back of the outline.
- Review and edit definitions for applicability, delete ones based on staff comments; and move toward the back of the article.
- Incorporate staff comments as submitted.
- Add new definitions per staff comments.
- Erosion and sedimentation controls compare to Storm Water Ordinance for redundancy.
- Platting requirements should be in alignment with WI state statutes.
- Insure clarity and transparency for approval process: pre-plat, prelim. Plat and final plat.
- Review design standards.



7 Administration & Procedure

Preliminary Recommendations (review still in process)

Administration

- Rationalize zoning and subdivision standards that respond to the adopted city policy (Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, and others) so requirements are clear, concise and less open to interpretation.
- Clearly define requirements and standards that apply across all departments
- Find best practices to provide a seamless process for applicants (common checklists, etc.)

Procedure & Process

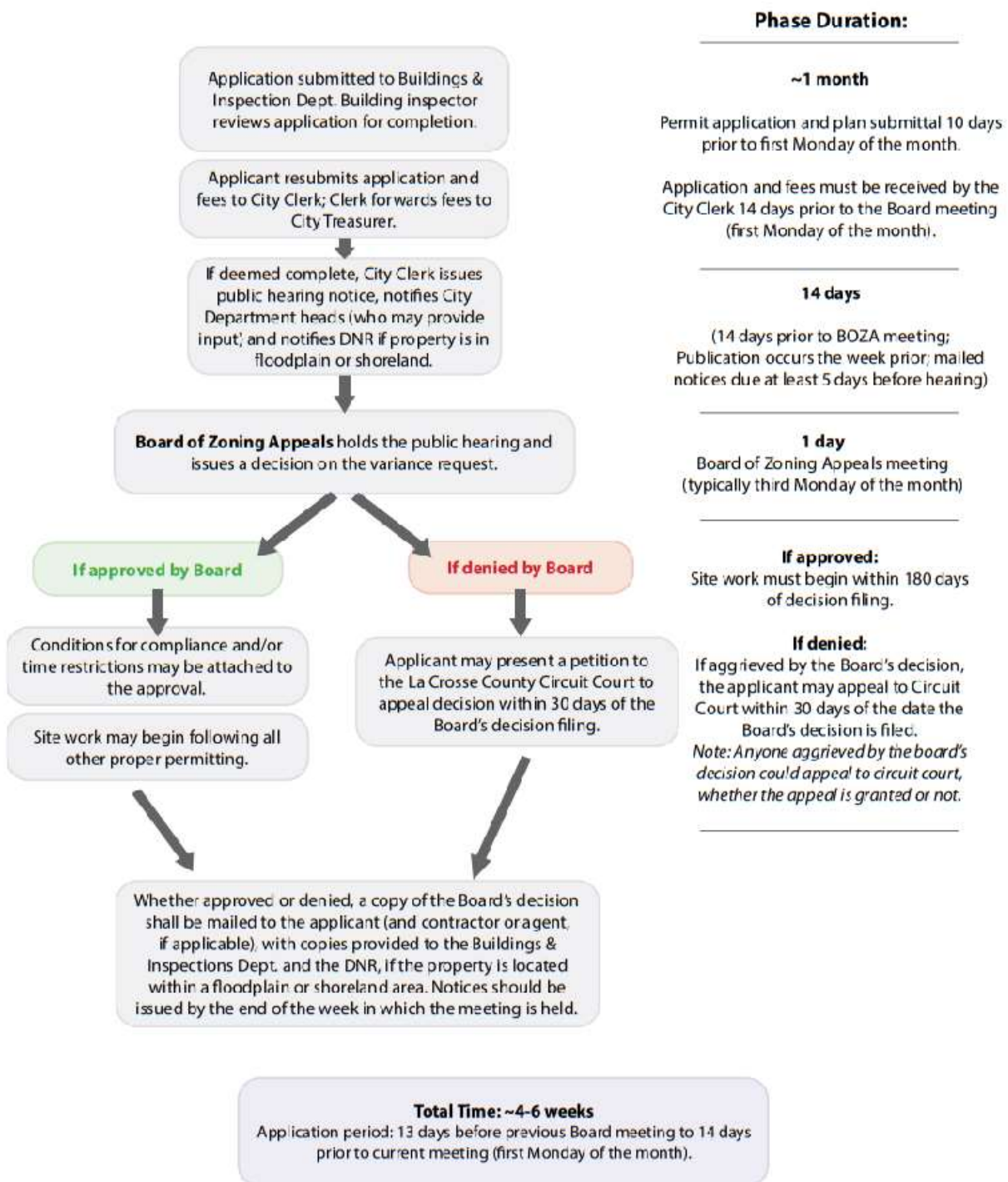
- Define communication channels throughout all inter-departmental procedures related to development
- Clarify/improve approval process for minor applications
- Streamline approval process for all other applications; consider reducing approval time line as needed and allow more 'by-right' and staff administrative approvals.

Boards & Committees

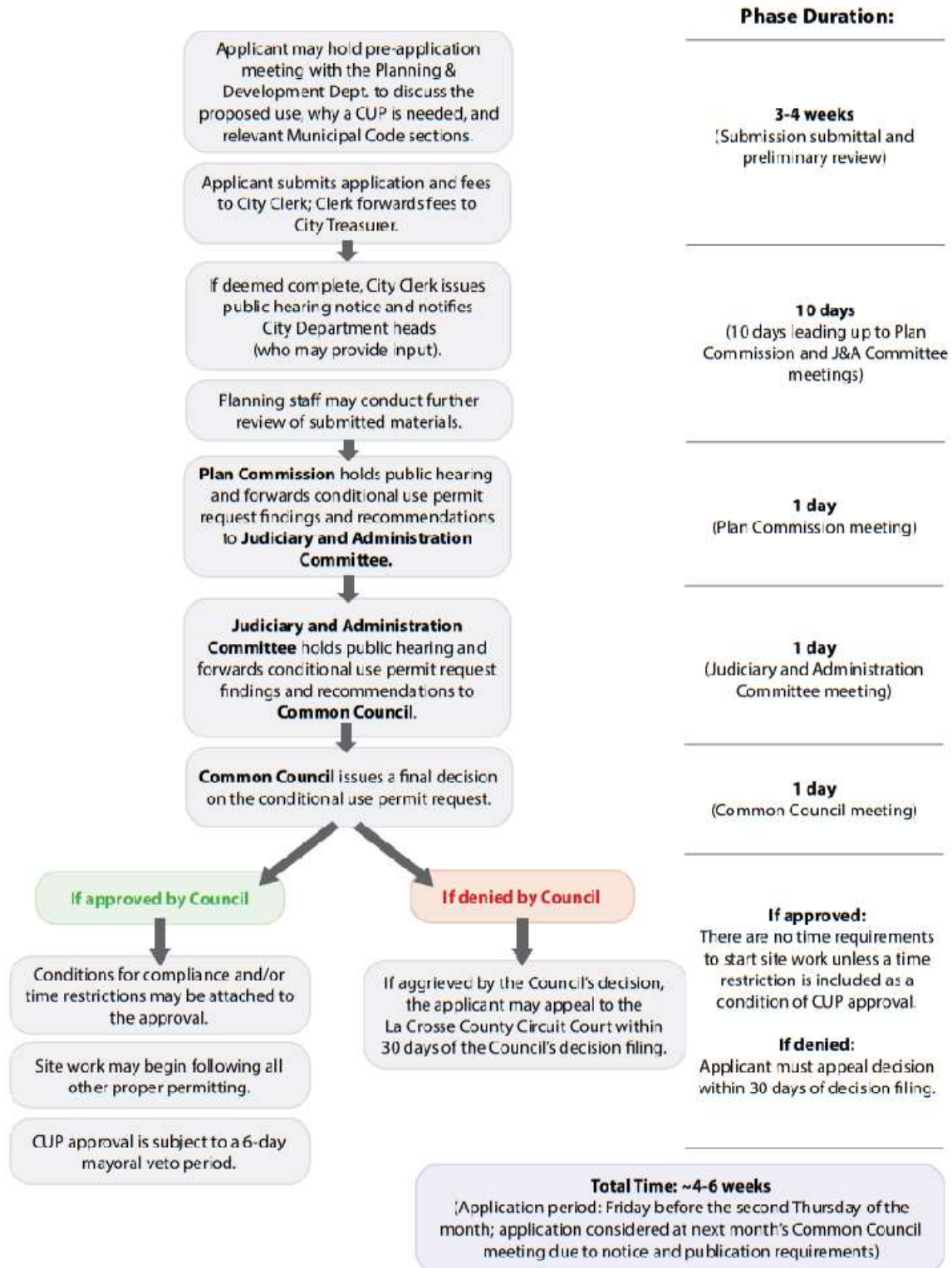
Design Review Board
Neighborhood Revitalization Commission
Heritage Preservation Commission
Floodplain Advisory Committee (Council Districts 1, 2, 3, & 7)

Process Diagrams (attached for reference)

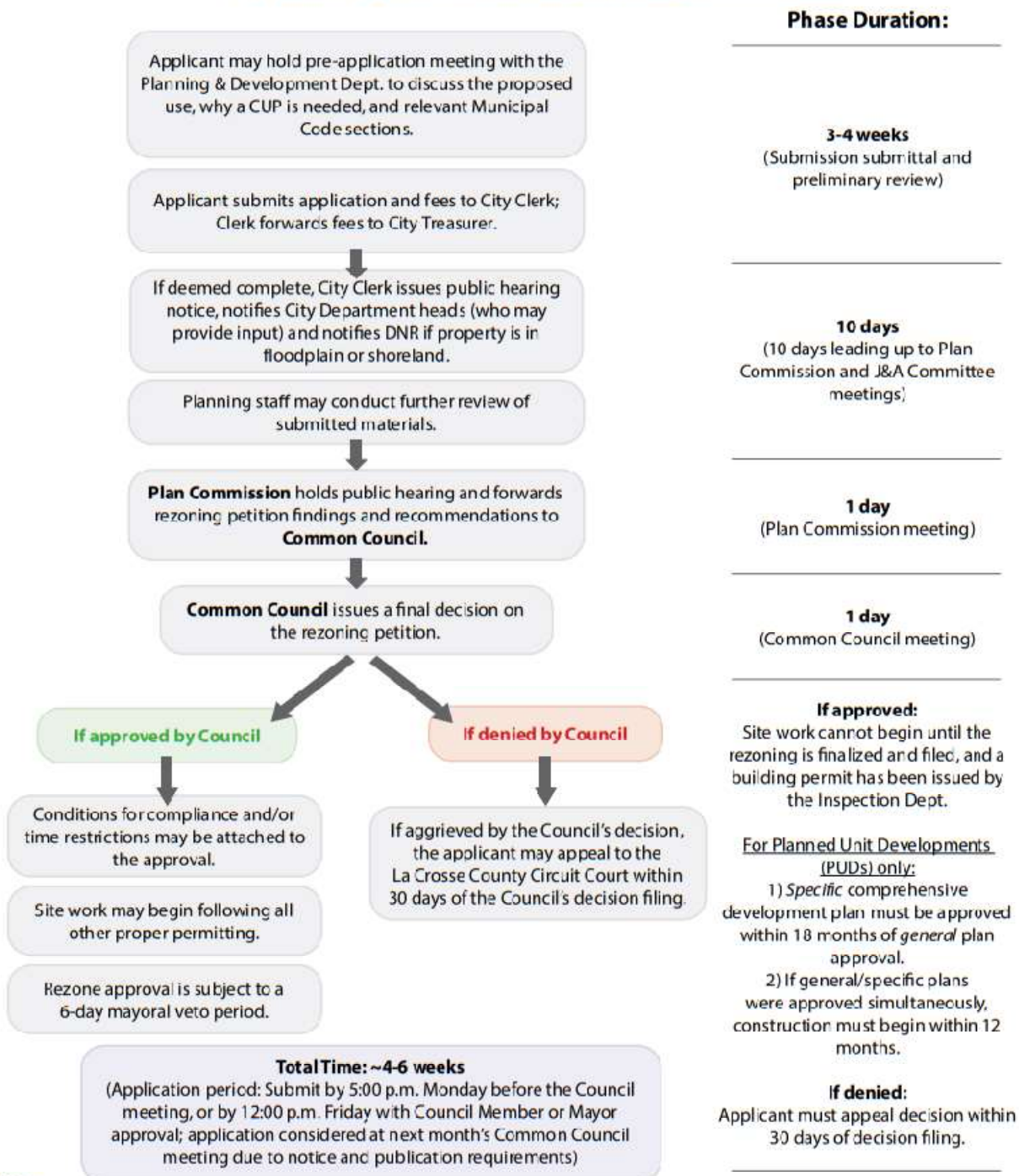
City of La Crosse, WI Variance (Board of Zoning Appeals) Process



City of La Crosse, WI Conditional Use Permit Process



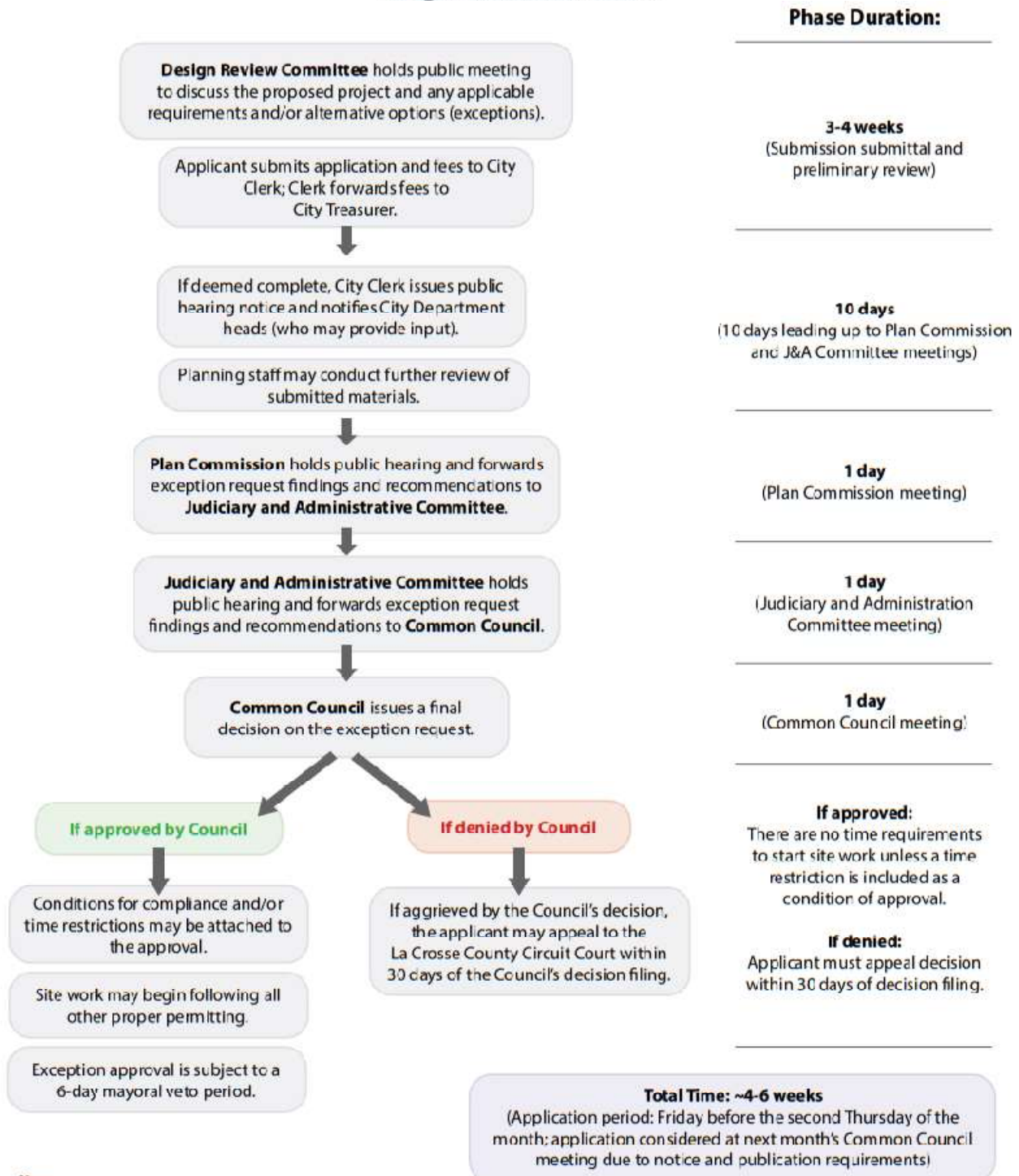
City of La Crosse, WI Petition for Zoning Amendment (Rezoning) Process



Note:

1. Petition for zoning amendment may be initiated by one or more property owners of the property within the area proposed to be changed.
2. Petitions to change any flood district boundary or floodplain regulation may require technical data, including aerial maps, flood elevations, and development details, as determined by the Fire Department - Division of Fire Prevention and Building Safety and DNR.
3. Floodplain zoning amendments require approval from the DNR and FEMA before becoming effective, except for map changes tied to the La Crosse River Valley Floodplain Study.

City of La Crosse, WI Request for Exception to Multi-Family Housing or Commercial Design Standards Process

**Note:**

1. Ch. 11 Art. VII Div. 3, Multi-Family Housing Design Standards.
2. Ch. 11 Art. VII Div. 4, Commercial Design Standards. The applicant is encouraged to meet with City staff at the schematic stage, the design stage, and at the submittal stage. Members of the Design Review Committee will be encouraged to attend the pre-application meeting to facilitate the development review process. Developers are strongly encouraged to obtain Design Review Committee approval prior to submitting plans to the State for State review and approval.