



City of Columbus officials say keeping new construction and other development moving through the approval process is a top priority

April 17, 2020

The City of Columbus is open for business (remotely) to accept and review zoning, site plan, and permit applications and issue approvals. That was the message to zoning and development applicants and other interested parties during a conference call on April 17, 2020, hosted by City Council, Building and Zoning Services and the Development Department. City officials said applicants should be explicit about their zoning deadlines in their applications to assist in timely processing and approval.

Not surprisingly, City of Columbus Building and Zoning Services Director Scott Messer said that his department has seen a 25 percent decrease in volume of work since the COVID-19 pandemic began, including a 35 percent decrease in new permit applications. On the bright side, 65-75 percent of new construction and other development, which is considered “essential business” under Ohio’s stay-at-home order, is still moving forward.

With the exception of occupied residential properties, Messer said all building inspections are being conducted as usual with safety protocols in place for inspectors. Occupied residential inspections are being conducted on a case-by-case basis.

Messer said it is “important to keep the economy, development and construction moving forward.” Columbus City Council Zoning Chair Priscilla Tyson reiterated by referring to developers as “important partners for the City of Columbus.” One participant said it was the first status call that she is aware of in any municipality or other jurisdiction in any of the 15 states in which her company is active.

Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin said City Council will begin holding virtual meetings every other Monday, most likely through the end of May, beginning with its first virtual meeting on April 20, 2020. Tyson said 10 zoning applications are on the agenda for April 20, and council will continue hearing zoning applications at the virtual meetings. Messer said his office has 20 zoning applications and variances that are in the pipeline for approval, an additional 20 applications that are ready for review and 20 more cases that are ready for review by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

The speed at which the city’s 21 area commissions and other civic associations, including historic districts, are back in operation to issue necessary project approvals was a primary concern raised on the call. One developer said there is a logjam at the area commission and civic association level. Most April meetings have been cancelled, and city officials said equipping those bodies to conduct virtual meetings in May is a top priority. Several participants expressed concern that financing could fall through on projects if area commissions and civic associations are not operating to issue project approvals. Messer said that his department has written and is willing to continue writing letters to lenders explaining where the project is in the approval process, and in the past those letters appear to have helped allay concerns about approval status.

Authors



Matthew L. Strayer

Associate

Columbus

614.227.2345

mstrayer@bricker.com