

January 14, 2026

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

202600074

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager

Subject: **Department of City Planning and Engagement Zone Change Process Time**

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### **REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202501273**

The City Council, at its session on June 17, 2025, adopted the following item:

**MOTION**, submitted by Councilmember Owens, WE MOVE that the administration prepare a report by October 2025 that outlines the average time that it takes for the following permitting and development processes:

- Zone Change Applications
  - *This should represent the full development process through the approval of the Final Development Plan by the City Planning Commission.*
- Coordinated Site Review
- Historic Designation
- Sale or Lease of City-Owned Property
- Acquisition of Financial Assistance with Development
- All relevant permits in the development process

FURTHER WE MOVE that the administration prepare accompanying documents to visualize these timelines and identify barriers to greater efficiency.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of City Planning and Engagement (DCPE) is responsible for facilitating all changes in zoning within the City of Cincinnati (reflected in the first and third bullet point in the above Motion). Zone changes encompass any amendments to the Zoning Code text or changes to the Zoning Map, and include:

- A map amendment modifying the zone of a parcel/parcels
- A map amendment to establish or modify an Overlay District
- A map amendment to establish a Planned Development District
- A Major Amendment to a Planned Development District
- A text amendment to the Zoning Code, modifying language that describe the zoning regulations

A request for a zone change may be initiated by a petition to City Council, a petition to the City Planning Commission, or by a member of City Council. The application for a zone change was previously a paper form available on the DCPE website, to be submitted as a hardcopy or via email with all relevant documentation. As of January 13, 2025, applications are now submitted online via ezTrak. The zone change application process includes preliminary actions, three standard steps, and two additional steps depending on the type of zone change. DCPE advises applicants to expect roughly

4 to 6 months until final approval. The full process is outlined in the zone change application packet, and is explained in depth in the following section.

## **ZONE CHANGE PROCESS**

### *Preliminary Actions*

Preliminary actions are those that DCPE staff expects to be completed prior to an application for a zone change. There are three preliminary actions: the Zone Change Consultation, a Coordinated Site Review, and Community Engagement. The Zone Change Consultation consists of a conversation with DCPE staff, and is meant to determine the appropriate review process. A Coordinated Site Review (CSR) at the Development Design Level, conducted through the Department of Buildings and Inspections, should be completed prior to applying for a zone change. This review allows all city departments and reviewing agencies to understand the project and identify potential issues. If a CSR is not complete at the time of submission, the applicant will be directed to apply and undergo review before the project can be scheduled for City Planning Commission. This process concludes with a Coordinated Site Review letter.

Engagement with the community to discuss the project, including adjacent residents and property owners and the recognized Community Council for the property, is strongly encouraged for all applicants prior to applying for a zone change. This recommendation, as well as contact information for all Community Councils, is outlined in the Coordinated Site Review letter. Some Community Councils will request a formal presentation and conduct a vote at a meeting of the Community Council, often resulting in a letter of support or objection. Failure to complete or a delay in this step can cause delays later in the process.

### *Application Acceptance*

When an application is received, DCPE staff review it for completeness. An application cannot be deemed complete until all required plans and documents are provided and a successful payment has been processed. The amount of time between when an application is submitted and when it is accepted is dependent on the contents of the submission by the applicant. Some projects take longer than others to assemble the full set of required application materials after the initial application has been submitted.

### *Step 1: Public Staff Conference. Approximately 3-4 weeks.*

Once an application is accepted, DCPE staff will schedule a Public Staff Conference to discuss the zone change and gather information. A notice for the meeting is mailed to the applicant, all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property, and the relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations if applicable. Email notices are sent to the applicant and relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations. Per §111.1 and §111.5, notices are sent no later than 14 days in advance of the meeting. The project is also posted on the DCPE website and online calendar, and registration is open to all who are interested.

The Public Staff Conference is typically conducted via Zoom, due to the format's accessibility, in the early evening. The format of the Public Staff Conference is to allow the applicant to explain their request, answer questions, and listen to comments. The Public Staff Conference is conducted by DCPE staff, who facilitate the meeting, ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to speak or ask a question. Staff emphasizes that the Conference is informational only and that no decisions are made at that time. Staff also answers all questions about the zone change process and questions about the Zoning Code. In some cases, a second Public Staff Conference may be necessary.

### *Step 2a: Historic Conservation Board (Historic Designations and Final Development Plans within a Historic District Only). Approximately 6-8 weeks.*

A public hearing and vote by the Historic Conservation Board is required for all Historic Designations, which are considered a Map Amendment, and all Final Development Plans that are wholly or partially located within a Historic District. A written staff report including the project summary and exhibits, statements, staff analysis and recommendation is prepared for the Board. A notice for the meeting is mailed to the applicant, all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property, and the relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations if applicable. Email notices are sent to the applicant and relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations. Per §111.1 and §111.5, notices are sent no later than 14 days in advance of the meeting.

*Step 2: City Planning Commission. Approximately 4-6 weeks.*

Public testimony and a vote by the City Planning Commission is required for all zone changes. A written staff report including the project summary and exhibits, statements, staff analysis and recommendation is prepared for the Commission. A notice for the meeting is mailed to the applicant, all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property, and the relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations if applicable. Email notices are sent to the applicant, relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations, and all who participated in the Public Staff Conference or sent correspondence related to the application. Per §111.1 and §111.5, notices are sent no later than 14 days in advance of the meeting. The project is also posted on the DCPE website and online calendar, and participation is open to all who are interested.

*Step 3: City Council. Approximately 4-6 weeks.*

An Ordinance from the City Solicitor's Office is required for all zone changes, excluding Final Development Plans and their Amendments, which stop at City Planning Commission. Ordinance preparation can take 2 – 4 weeks. Once complete, DCPE staff will transmit the Ordinance and City Planning Commission recommendation to City Council and request a public hearing and vote. The transmittal and scheduling process can take between 2 and 4 weeks.

The official public hearing takes place at a Committee Meeting of City Council, currently the Equitable Growth and Housing (EGH) Committee. The Clerk of Council is responsible for posting notice of the public hearing in the City Bulletin and mailing notice to individuals who were notified of the previous public meetings 14 days in advance of the hearing. The Committee will vote on a recommendation to the full City Council, which will typically take the vote the following day. The zone change goes into effect 30 days after the approval of the Ordinance by City Council, unless it is passed as an Emergency Ordinance, in which case it goes into effect immediately.

*Step 3a: Final Development Plan (Planned Developments Only). Approximately 2-6 weeks.*

Zone changes to a Planned Development District require a return to the City Planning Commission for public testimony and vote on the Final Development Plan. Another Public Staff Conference is also required. It is also strongly recommended that the applicant reach out to the Community Council and impacted residents and property owners. A written staff report including the project summary and exhibits, statements, staff analysis and recommendation is prepared for the Commission. A notice for the meeting is mailed to the applicant, all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property, and the relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations if applicable. Email notices are sent to the applicant and relevant Community Councils and Community Development Corporations. Per §111.1 and §111.5, notices are sent no later than 14 days in advance of the meeting. The project is also posted on the DCPE website and online calendar, and participation is open to all who are interested.

## RESEARCH

### *Background*

DCPE staff reviewed all applications for zone changes that were heard by the City Planning Commission between the dates of January 1, 2020 and July 18, 2025. Applications under “zone change” included the following:

- Standard Zone Changes
- Standard Zone Changes Resulting from Zoning Studies
- Historic Designations
- Notwithstanding Ordinances
- Planned Developments:
  - Establishment
  - Final Development Plan
  - Major Amendment to the Concept Plan
  - Major Amendment to the Final Development Plan

A total of 130 applications were reviewed. Zoning text or map amendments resulting from a Motion from City Council, such as Connected Communities, were not included in the research. The breakdown is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of Applications by Type**

Application Type	Number of Applications
Zone Change	28
Zone Change Study	2
Historic Designation	10
Notwithstanding Ordinance	22
Planned Development Establishment	21
Final Development Plan	29
Major Amendment to the Concept Plan	11
Major Amendment to the Final Development Plan	7

Applications were evaluated for the amount of time in days between each step in the process. The key dates identified for each application included the following:

- Application Submitted
- Application Accepted
- Public Staff Conference (could be multiple)
- Historic Conservation Board (when applicable)
- City Planning Commission (could be multiple)
- Council Committee
- City Council

Dates for “Application Submitted” were identified as the earliest documented date on the application. Dates for “Application Accepted” were most often identified as the documented date of receipt of payment. Dates for the Public Staff Conference, Historic Conservation Board, City Planning Commission, Council Committee, and City Council were all identified as the dates of their respective meetings. Not all key dates were able to be identified for every application. Those fields were left blank in the dataset, and blank fields were omitted from the data calculations and representations.

### *Findings – Total Time*

The average time for any application to reach City Council is 112 days, or 3.74 months. The average time for any application to reach the final City Planning Commission meeting is 76 days, or 2.52 months. The data breakdown is shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2: Average Time from Application Accepted to Planning Commission by Type**

Application Type	Avg. Days (Months)
All Application Types	76 (2.52)
Zone Change	80 (2.68)
Zone Change Study	216 (7.18)
Historic Designation	83 (2.76)
Notwithstanding Ordinance	30 (1)
Planned Development Establishment	103 (3.42)
Final Development Plan*	62 (2.07)
Major Amendment to the Concept Plan	76 (2.53)
Major Amendment to the Final Development Plan*	31 (1.02)

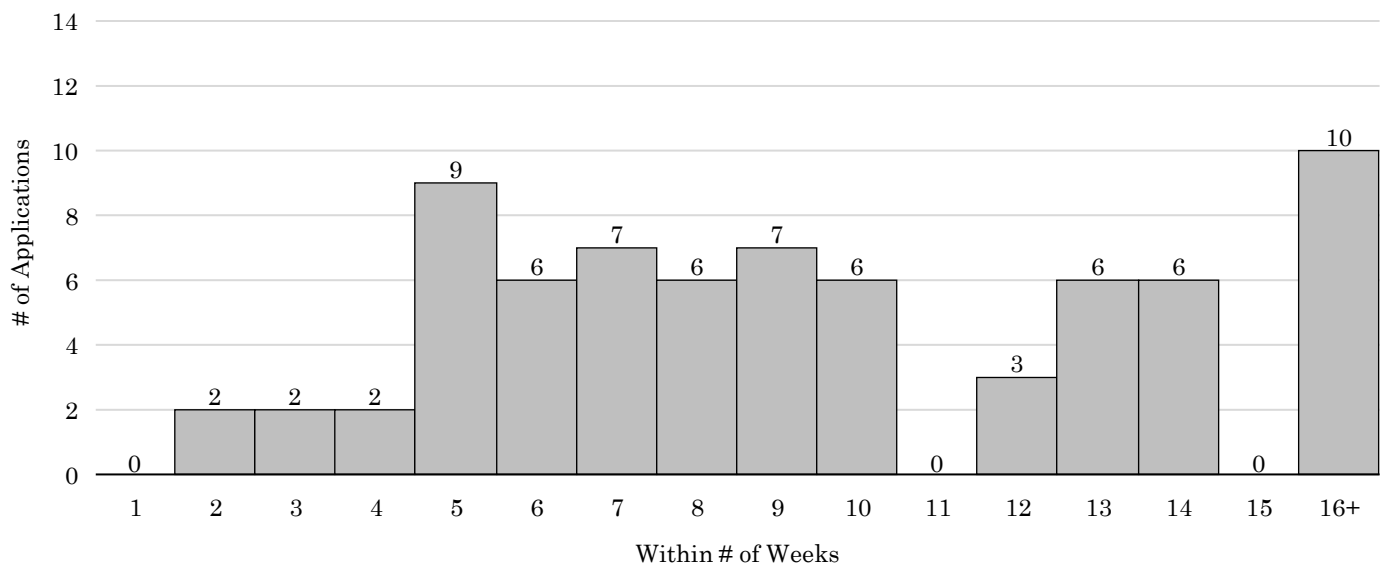
\*Applications are not reviewed by City Council.

**Table 3: Average Time from Application Accepted to City Council by Type**

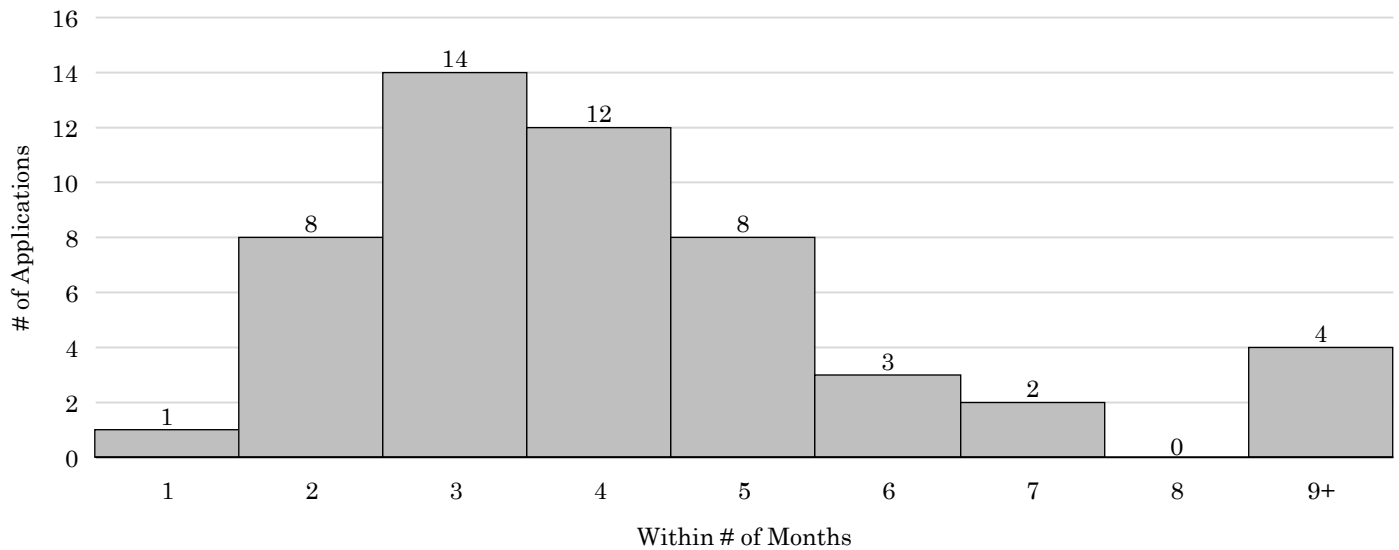
Application Type	Avg. Days (Months)
All Application Types	112 (3.74)
Zone Change	96 (3.20)
Zone Change Study	336 (11.20)
Historic Designation	124 (4.13)
Notwithstanding Ordinance	53 (1.77)
Planned Development Establishment	124 (4.14)
Final Development Plan*	
Major Amendment to the Concept Plan	123 (4.10)
Major Amendment to the Final Development Plan*	

\*Applications are not reviewed by City Council.

Graphs 1-2 illustrate the distribution of time for applications to reach both City Council and the final Planning Commission meeting.

**Graph 1: Distribution of Time from Application Accepted to Final City Planning Commission**

**Graph 2: Distribution of Time from Application Accepted to City Council**



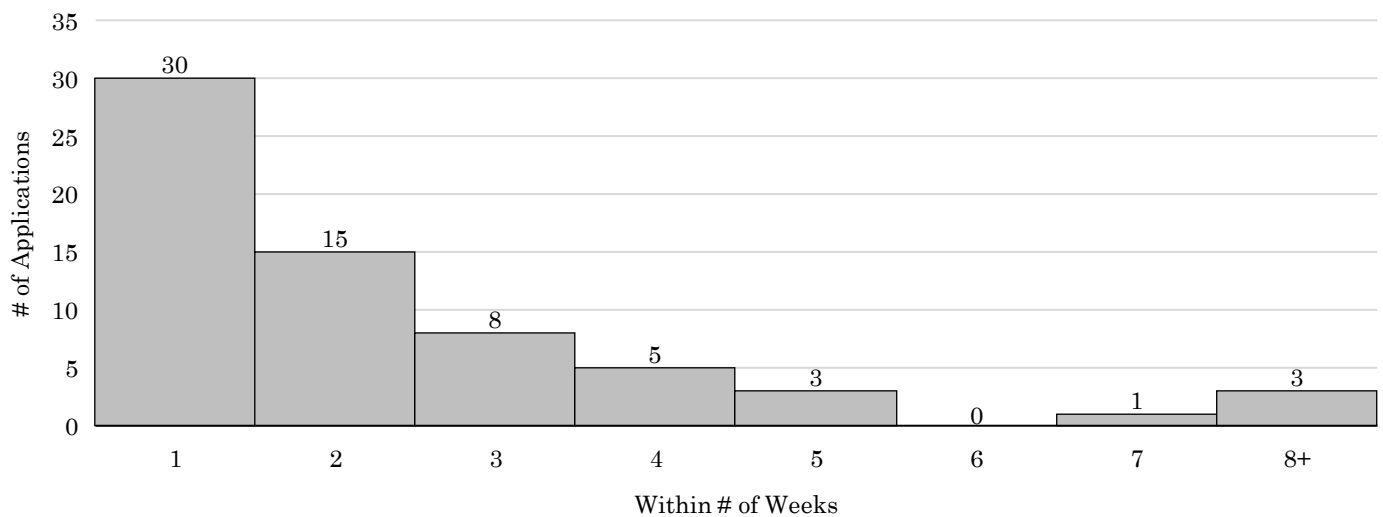
*Findings – Time Between Steps*

Staff also analyzed the time taken between each step of the process. Table 3 shows the average time between each step, and Graphs 3-7 illustrate the distribution of time for each of these steps.

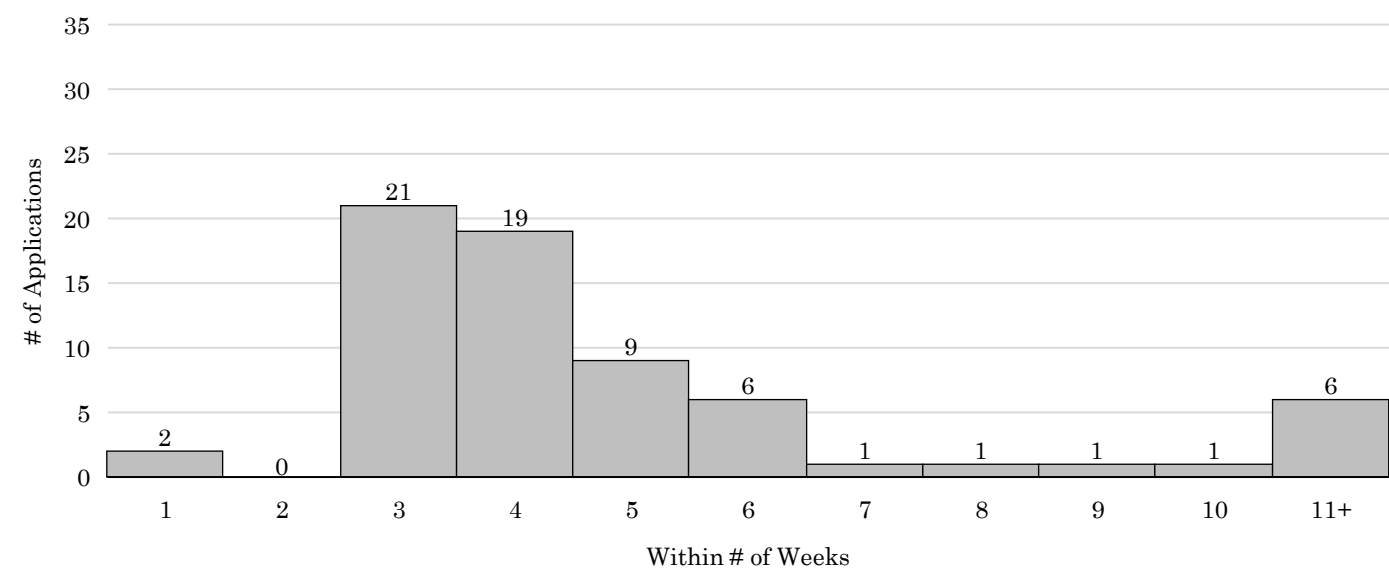
**Table 3: Average Time Between Steps**

Step	Avg. Days
Total Average Between Steps	32
Application Submitted and Application Accepted	23
Application Accepted and 1 <sup>st</sup> Public Staff Conference	32
1 <sup>st</sup> Public Staff Conference and 1 <sup>st</sup> City Planning Commission	37
Historic Conservation Board and 1 <sup>st</sup> City Planning Commission	31
Final City Planning Commission and City Council	38

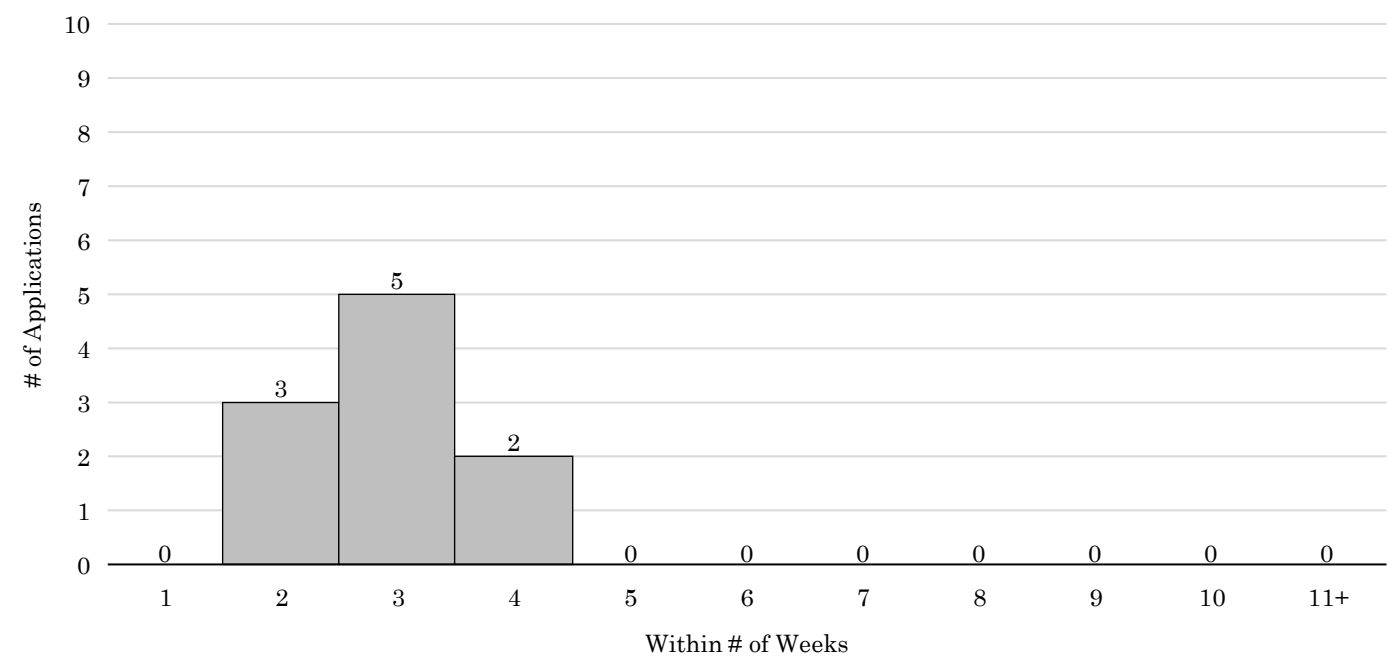
**Graph 3: Time from Submission Date Until Application is Accepted**



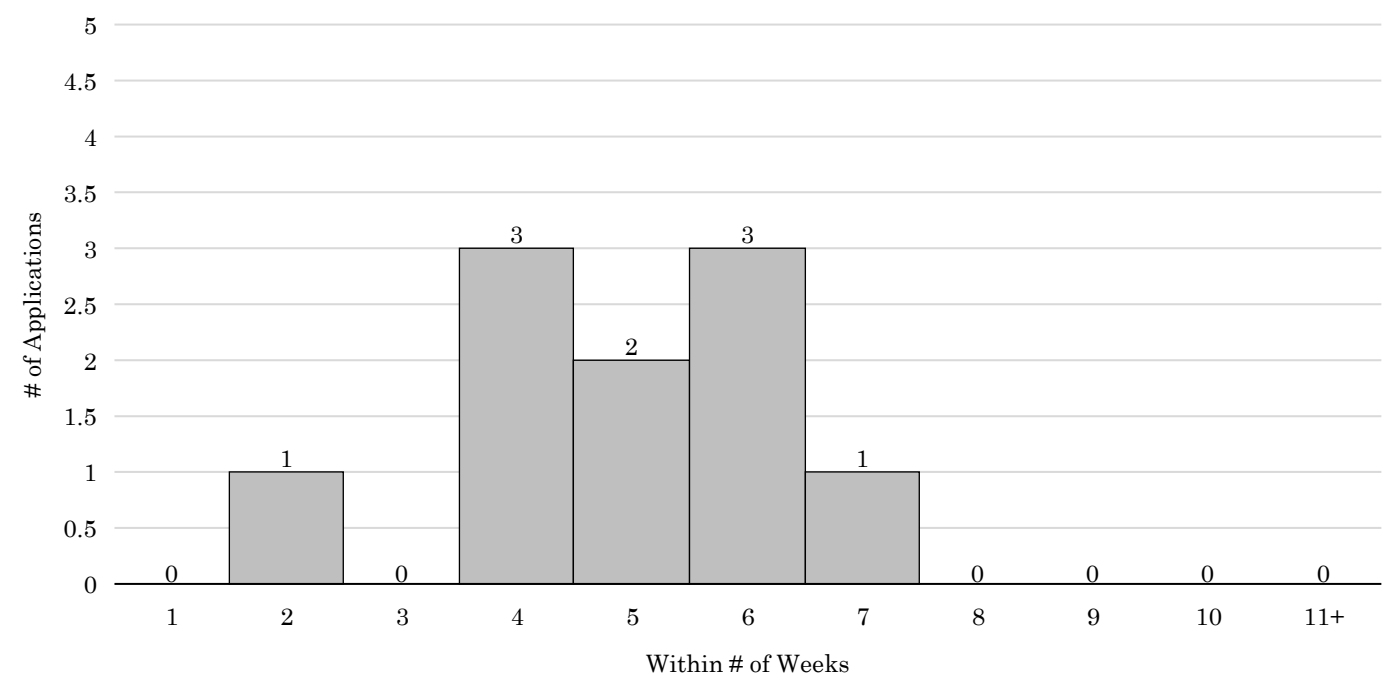
**Graph 4: Time from Application Accepted to First Public Staff Conference**



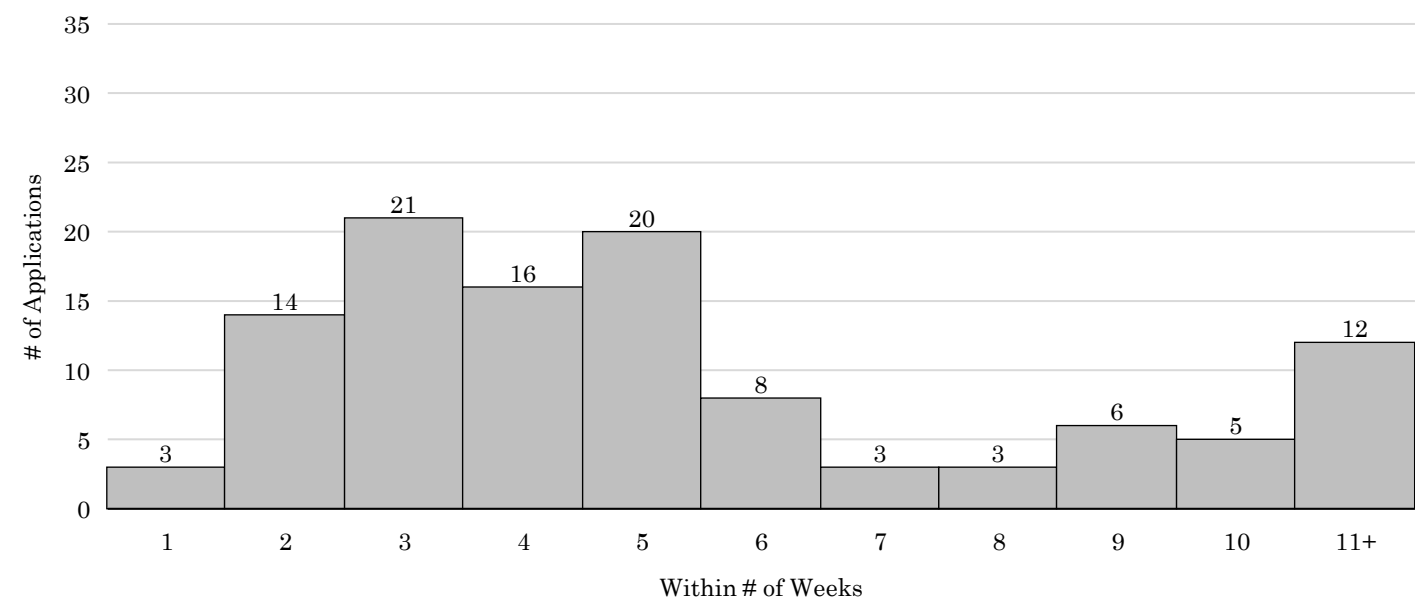
**Graph 5a: Time from First Public Staff Conference to Historic Conservation Board**



**Graph 5b: Time from Historic Conservation Board to First City Planning Commission**

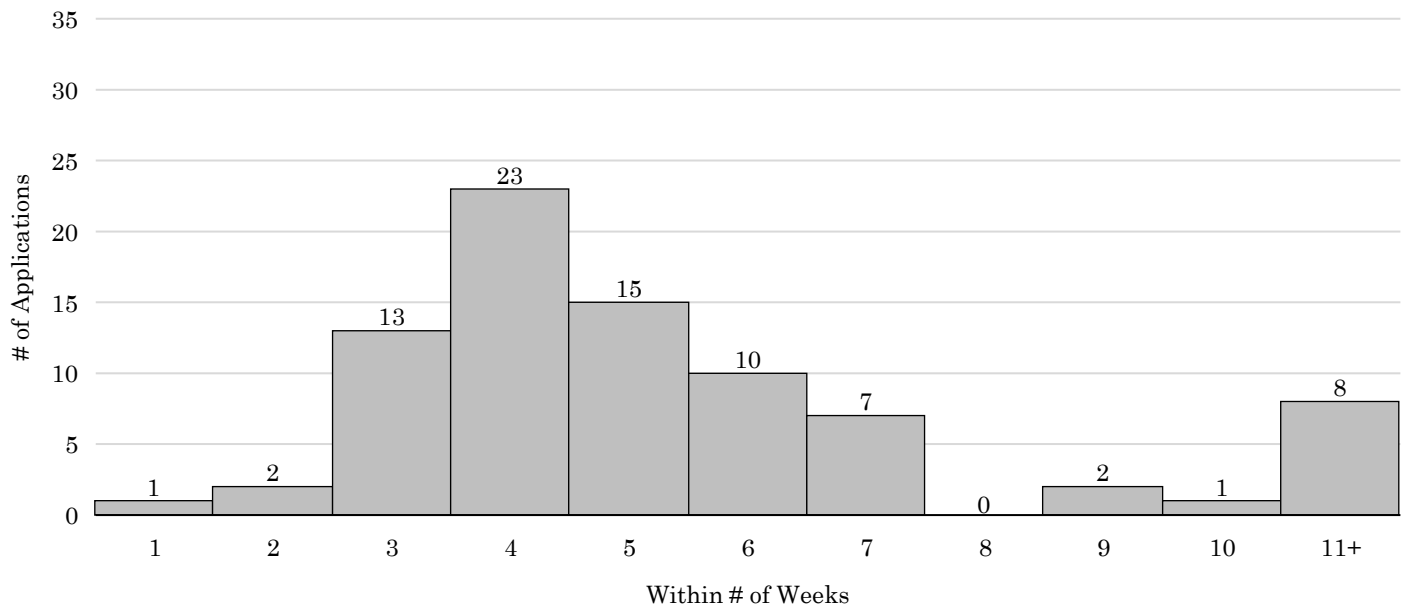


**Graph 6: Time from First Public Staff Conference to First City Planning Commission**





**Graph 7: Time from Final City Planning Commission to City Council**



### *Outliers*

There are eight outliers in the data for time until the final City Planning Commission, and four outliers for the time until City Council. Tables 4 and 5 outline the breakdown.

**Table 4: Outliers in Time from Application Complete to Final Planning Commission**

Application Type	# of PSCs	# of CPCs	# of Days (Mos.)
Zone Change**	3	1	445 (14.83)
Zone Change Study†	1	2	246 (8.20)
PD Establishment§	1	2	233 (7.77)
PD Major Amendment to the Concept Plan‡	1	2	232 (7.73)
Zone Change Study*	1	1	185 (6.17)
PD Establishment	1	1	182 (6.07)
Zone Change	1	1	168 (5.60)
PD Establishment	1	1	161 (5.37)

\*†‡§ Indicates the same application/project.

\*\* This application was denied at City Planning Commission and the applicant requested it not move on to Council, hence why it is missing from the table below.

**Table 5: Outliers in Time from Application Complete to City Council**

Application Type	# of PSCs	# of CPCs	# of Days
Zone Change Study*	1	1	379 (12.63)
Zone Change Study†	1	2	293 (9.77)
PD Major Amendment to the Concept Plan‡	1	2	279 (9.30)
PD Establishment§	1	2	259 (8.63)

\*†‡§ Indicates the same application/project.

### *Minimums*

There are no lower-range outliers for the dataset. However, analysis of the lowest numbers on the dataset provide valuable context for the minimum time for the process. Tables 6 and 7 outline the breakdown.

**Table 6: Shortest Time from Application Complete to Final City Planning Commission**

Application Type	# of PSCs	# of CPCs	# of Days (Mos.)
Notwithstanding Ordinance*	0	1	11
Notwithstanding Ordinance†	0	1	11
Notwithstanding Ordinance‡	0	1	18
Notwithstanding Ordinance	0	1	18
PD Final Development Plan	1	1	22

\*†‡ Indicates the same application/project.

**Table 7: Shortest Time from Application Complete to City Council**

Application Type	# of PSCs	# of CPCs	# of Days
Notwithstanding Ordinance*	0	1	23
Notwithstanding Ordinance†	0	1	37
Notwithstanding Ordinance‡	0	1	37
Notwithstanding Ordinance	0	1	41
Zone Change	1	1	48

\*†‡ Indicates the same application/project.

## CONCLUSIONS

The average time for a general zone change application to go through the full process to City Council is approximately 112 days, or 3.74 months. The official Zone Change application and DCPE guidance for applicants suggests a 4 to 6 month process. 64% of applications in the analysis reached City Council within 4 months, and 88% of applications reached City Council within 6 months.

The applications with the highest average time until City Council are Zoning Studies, at 336 days (11.2 months). However, the data for this application type is limited with only two points, both of which are outliers in the broader dataset. This is followed by Planned Development Establishments and Historic Designations, with a tied average of 124 days (4.14 months). This standing reflects the higher level of complexity associated with Planned Development projects, as well as the additional public hearing required for Historic Designations. All of the applications with the highest average time to the Final City Planning Commission are items that also go on to City Council.

The average time between each step in the process is approximately 32 days. The step with the longest average time is going to City Council, at 38 days on average, followed by going to the first City Planning Commission meeting, at 37 days on average.

The outliers in the dataset reveal that the major drivers of increased process time are complexity and/or controversy, with both of the only zoning studies in the dataset, typically significantly complex projects, occupying the top number of days until City Council. Other outlier projects included highly controversial projects and projects in which DCPE Staff recommended denial.

The minimum values reveal that the fastest projects are those that require the fewest number of steps, in this case Notwithstanding Ordinances which do not require a Public Staff Conference. The PD Final Development Plan, which is the second-lowest time application type, is not required to go to City Council. The shortest process time for a standard zone change application, which goes through all the required steps, is 48 days (within 7 weeks, or 1.6 months), establishing the floor for all other applications. 67% of all applications made it to City Council within a range of days 1.5x above this value (96 days). 81% of applications made it to City Council within a range of days 2x above this value (144 days).

Ultimately, these findings illustrate that the time between scheduling each step is fairly consistent, and the majority of applications finish within the DCPE anticipated timeline. Each step is defined by a meeting or public hearing that is preceded by a 14 day minimum notice period, and the minimum expectation for a standard process can be no fewer than 48 days, with an average expectation of 112 days. Extremely long processes that take longer than 6 months to reach City Council, or 7 weeks to pass City Planning Commission, are uncommon. The reason for long processes in the outlier cases is primarily due to extended back and forth between either the applicant and DCPE staff on complex projects, or the applicant and the community on controversial projects.

The Department of City Planning and Engagement is committed to reviewing all applications in a timely manner but is also dedicated to ensuring community engagement and following all guidelines related to notification. The Zone Change process must balance both of those priorities.

cc: William “Billy” Weber, Assistant City Manager  
Katherine Keough-Jurs, Director, Department of City Planning and Engagement