



**Boulder County  
Land Use Department  
Publications**

# Site Plan Review Standards

**Land Use Department**  
Courthouse Annex Building  
2045 13th Street  
PO Box 471  
Boulder, CO 80302

**Planning Division:**  
Phone: 303-441-3930  
Fax: 303-441-4856  
Email: [planner@bouldercounty.org](mailto:planner@bouldercounty.org)  
Website: [www.bouldercounty.org/lu](http://www.bouldercounty.org/lu)

**Office Hours:**  
M, W, TH, F 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Tuesday 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

## Site Plan Review Standards

Site plan review is an administrative review procedure for certain proposed developments which are considered likely to significantly impact important ecosystems, agricultural lands, surrounding land uses and neighborhoods, and infrastructure needs and demands, and which may be unsafe due to natural hazards. This site plan review process for proposed new development will allow any significant adverse impacts on the environment, agricultural lands, surrounding land uses and neighborhoods, and infrastructure to be identified, evaluated, and avoided or acceptably mitigated through the imposition of reasonable conditions.

A site plan review application shall be reviewed in accordance with the following standards, which the Director has determined to be applicable based on the nature and extent of the proposed development.

### Site Plan Review Standards - Article 4-806 of Boulder County Land Use Code

1. To provide a greater measure of certainty as to the applicable neighborhood relevant for comparison, the following definition of neighborhood shall be used to review proposed Site Plan Review applications:
  - a. For applications inside platted subdivisions, which have seven or more developed lots, the neighborhood is that platted subdivision.
  - b. For applications within the mapped historic townsites of Allenspark, Eldora, Eldorado Springs, Raymond, and Riverside, the neighborhood is defined as the mapped townsite.
  - c. For applications outside of platted subdivisions with seven or more developed lots or the townsites of Allenspark, Eldora, Eldorado Springs, Raymond, and Riverside, the defined neighborhood is the area within 1,500 feet from the applicable parcel. The neighborhood shall not include any parcels inside municipal boundaries, platted subdivisions with seven or more developed lots or the townsites of Allenspark, Eldora, Eldorado Springs, Gold Hill Historic District, Raymond, and Riverside.
2. The size of the resulting development (residential or nonresidential) must be compatible with the general character of the defined neighborhood.
  - a. In determining size compatibility of residential structures with the defined neighborhood, it is presumed that structures of a size within the larger of a total residential floor area of either (1) 125% of the median residential floor area for that defined neighborhood or (2) of a total residential floor area of 1,500 square feet in the mapped townsites of Allenspark, Eldora, Eldorado Springs, Raymond, and Riverside, or 2,500 square feet for all other areas of the County, are compatible with that neighborhood, subject also to a determination that the resulting size complies with the other Site Plan Review standards in this section 4-806.A.
    - (i) The Boulder County Assessor's Records will be the base source of data to determine both the median size within that defined neighborhood as well as the existing residential floor area on a given parcel, as verified by Land Use staff for the subject parcel.
    - (ii) Median floor area will include the total residential floor area, as defined in Section 18-190.

- b. Either the applicant or the Director may demonstrate that this presumption does not adequately address the size compatibility of the proposed development with the defined neighborhood.
    - (i) Factors to be considered when determining the adequacy of this presumption and whether it can be overcome include:
      - (A) The visibility of the proposed development from other private parcels within the defined neighborhood, as well as visibility from either public roads or open space both within and outside that defined neighborhood.
        - (1) The proposed development must be minimally visible from the above-listed areas. Mitigation of visibility impacts may be achieved by:
          - (a) the use of natural topography to screen the proposed development, or
          - (b) underground construction to screen the proposed development; existing underground residential floor area may be considered, or
          - (c) distance of the proposed development from other private parcels, public roads and open spaces.
      - (B) The distribution of residential floor area within the defined neighborhood, taking into consideration the sizes (a minimum of two) adjacent to the subject property.
        - (1) If the proposed development is able to overcome the size presumption due to the adjacent sizes, the size of the resulting development may not exceed the median residential floor area of those adjacent to the subject property that are over the size presumption.
      - (C) For properties which are encumbered by a Boulder County conservation easement that specifies an allowable house size on that parcel, that specified home size is a factor to be considered in rebutting a size presumption which is smaller than the house size defined in the conservation easement.
      - (D) Significant adverse impacts demonstrated according to Standards 3 through 16 of this Section 4-806.A.
      - (E) Demolition and rebuilding of legally existing residential floor area that is not in conflict with the other standards set forth in this Section 4-806.
      - (F) Retrofitting of an existing structure for purposes of making a demonstrated energy efficiency improvement.
      - (G) Existing residential floor area that already exceeds the size presumption and has not been limited through a prior County land use approval.
        - (1) Up to a one-time maximum of 200 square feet of residential floor area may be granted under this factor.
      - (H) Historic structure(s) that are landmarked or otherwise protected cause the residential floor area to exceed the size presumption.
3. The location of existing or proposed buildings, structures, equipment, grading, or uses shall not impose an undue burden on public services and infrastructure.
4. The proposed development shall avoid natural hazards, including those on the subject property and those originating off-site with a reasonable likelihood of affecting the subject property. Natural hazards include, without limitation, expansive soils or claystone, subsiding soils, soil creep areas, or questionable soils where the safe-sustaining power of the soils is in doubt; landslides, mudslides, mudfalls, debris fans, unstable slopes, and rockfalls; flash flooding corridors, alluvial fans, floodways, floodplains, and flood-prone areas; and avalanche corridors. Natural hazards may be identified in the Comprehensive Plan Geologic Hazard and Constraint Areas Map or through the Site Plan Review process using the best available information. Best available information includes, without limitation, updated topographic or geologic data, Colorado Geologic Survey landslide or earth/debris flow data, interim floodplain mapping data, and creek planning studies. Development within or affecting such natural hazards may be approved, subject to acceptable measures that will satisfactorily mitigate all significant hazard risk posed by the proposed development to the subject property and surrounding area, only if there is no way to avoid one or more hazards, no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable Site Plan Review criteria.
5. The site plan shall satisfactorily mitigate the risk of wildfire both to the subject property and those posed to neighboring properties in the surrounding area by the proposed development. In assessing the applicable wildfire risk and appropriate mitigation measures, the Director shall consider the referral comments of the County Wildfire Mitigation Coordinator and the applicable fire district, and may also consult accepted national standards as amended, such as the 2003 Urban-Wildland Interface Code; NFPA / 80A, 299, 1231; 2003 International Fire Code; and the 2003 International Building Code.
6. The proposed development shall not alter historic drainage patterns and/or flow rates or shall include acceptable mitigation measures to compensate for anticipated drainage impacts. The best available information should be used to evaluate these impacts, including but not limited to hydrologic evaluations to determine peak flows, floodplain mapping studies, updated topographic data, Colorado Geologic Survey landslide, earth/debris flow data, and creek planning studies.

7. The development shall avoid significant natural ecosystems or environmental features, including but not necessarily limited to riparian corridors and wetland areas, plant communities, and wildlife habitat and migration corridors, as identified in the Comprehensive Plan or through the site plan review process. Development within or affecting such areas may be approved, subject to acceptable mitigation measures and in the discretion of the Director, only if no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or only if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable site plan review criteria.
8. The development shall avoid agricultural lands of local, state or national significance as identified in the Comprehensive Plan or through the site plan review process. Development within or affecting such lands may be approved, subject to acceptable mitigation measures and in the discretion of the Director, only if no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or only if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable site plan review criteria.
9. The development shall avoid significant historic or archaeological resources as identified in the Comprehensive Plan or the Historic Sites Survey of Boulder County, or through the site plan review process. Development within or affecting such resources may be approved, subject to acceptable mitigation measures and in the discretion of the Director, only if no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or only if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable site plan review criteria.
10. The development shall not have a significant negative visual impact on the natural features or neighborhood character of surrounding area. Development shall avoid prominent, steeply sloped, or visually exposed portions of the property. Particular consideration shall be given to protecting views from public lands and rights-of-way, although impacts on views of or from private properties shall also be considered. Development within or affecting features or areas of visual significance may be approved, subject to acceptable mitigation measures and in the discretion of the Director, only if no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or only if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable site plan review criteria.
  - a. In reviewing development proposals in the Peak-to-Peak Scenic Corridor Area, special attention will be paid to the visibility of the development from the Peak-to-Peak Highway, with the intent to ensure development is minimally visible from the Highway.
  - b. For development anywhere in the unincorporated areas of the county, mitigation of visual impact may include changing structure location, reducing or relocating windows and glazing to minimize visibility, reducing structure height, changing structure orientation, requiring exterior color and materials that blend into the natural environment, and/or lighting requirements to reduce visibility at night.
11. The location of the development shall be compatible with the natural topography and existing vegetation and the development shall not cause unnecessary or excessive site disturbance. Such disturbance may include but is not limited to long driveways, over-sized parking areas, or severe alteration of a site's topography. Driveways or grading shall have a demonstrated associated principal use.
12. Runoff, erosion, and/or sedimentation from the development shall not have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding area.
13. The development shall avoid Natural Landmarks and Natural Areas as designated in the Goals, Policies & Maps Element of the Comprehensive Plan and shown on the Zoning District Maps of Boulder County. The protection of Natural Landmarks and Natural Areas shall also be extended to their associated buffer zones. Development within or affecting such Landmarks or Areas may be approved, subject to acceptable mitigation measures and in the discretion of the Director, only if no other sites on the subject property can be reasonably developed, or only if reasonably necessary to avoid significant adverse impacts based upon other applicable site plan review criteria.
14. Where an existing principal structure is proposed to be replaced by a new principal structure, construction or subsequent enlargement of the new structure shall not cause significantly greater impact (with regard to the standards set forth in this Section 4-806) than the original structure.
15. The proposal shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, any applicable intergovernmental agreement affecting land use or development, and this Code.

