



Understanding the Technical Requirements of Platting



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Understanding the Technical Requirements of Platting

When a developer buys a large tract of land and subdivides it into multiple plots for resale, the process is called platting. The result of platting is a final map in which each lot has been accurately marked. Platting provides an easily accessible and understandable record of the property as a whole and the future plans for that property. In addition to the creation of individual lots, a finished plat may include street improvements and other areas for public use.

Platting is a requirement when developing land in most municipalities whether they are townships, cities or counties. Plats help committees informatively review land proposals and make sure that they conform to local, state and federal codes.

Plats can be interpreted quickly and easily by those who are experienced with them. However, it usually takes a combination of education and experience before an individual understands the technical requirements of platting. Research of all local regulations is also required because these exact technical specifications may change drastically from one municipality to another.

What is Platting?

Platting is a land survey mapping method developed in the 19th century for the lot and block land survey system, which came into widespread use during this period in the

United States and Canada. The lot and block survey system is also known as the recorded map survey system and the recorded plat survey system.

As cities began to grow and encroach on the surrounding farmland in the 19th century, a system of recording plans for the land that was standardized and easy to read was required. Today, platting is still used in this manner for suburbs and subdivisions, but it is also widely used when redeveloping existing metropolitan areas.

The legal description of the lot and block system describes what elements must be included in a plat. For a plat to be considered complete, it must include all of the following:

- Individual lots must be identified.
- Lot location must be identified by existing and proposed streets or blocks.
- Each lot must be referenced to a subdivision or an independent phase of a subdivision.
- If individual lots are detailed on separate maps, references to the general plat map must be included.
- A plat map is not complete without the description of the place where the plat was officially recorded.

Plats begin as preliminary plats, and after approval by local officials, they are known as final plats. A preliminary plat shows the shapes and sizes of all lots, existing and planned streets, locations of public improvements and locations of other land dedicated to public use. Preliminary plats are first used internally by developers to

appease shareholders and attract investors. In most locations, a preliminary plat must also be delivered to adjacent property owners and presented at a public hearing. After making any necessary changes, the preliminary plat is submitted to local officials, such as the city council, for approval. Once the officials have signed the approval, it is up to the developer to officially record the plat with the local records department where it can be accessed by the public.

When Platting is Required

Platting is required in most municipalities in the United States for new land development and when land is designated for redevelopment. In most cases, platting is done by agents of the developer. However, in some cases of redevelopment, platting may be required for individual lots. In addition, whenever the owner of a large lot wants to split it into smaller lots, platting may be necessary.

Platting is not always a requirement for selling property. Municipalities may allow lots to be bought and sold, but permits for services or construction may not be obtainable without a plat. Permits for which plats may be needed include the following:

- Electrical work or connections to the power grid
- Water and sewer
- Telephone service
- Heating and air conditioning work
- Building
- Sign

Even if services had previously been established or permits granted for the land, if new platting is required, these services may be disconnected until the plats are approved by the local planning and zoning commission.

Not all lots within a city have to be platted. In addition, partial ownership of lots does not have to be registered on plats. Following are a few common exceptions to platting requirements:

- When the dimensions of a lot are reduced after portions of land are claimed by a government agency through eminent domain, the lot does not need to be platted.
- If public property is sold and becomes private property, it does not always need to be platted.
- Property that is listed as a lot of record does not require platting.

A lot of record includes any lot that was established before platting requirements were implemented. All lots with boundaries that were officially recognized prior to this date are grandfathered into the municipality and do not require platting unless substantial changes are made to the boundaries or the property. In addition, a lot of record may be sold without a plat as long as the property will not be subdivided during the sale. However, this benefit may only apply to residential lots or lots that are not located near main traffic arteries. Each municipality may limit platting requirements and exceptions as it sees fit.

Submitting Platting for Approval

Platting is usually carried out by registered land surveyors or engineers. These platting specialists are aware of the technical aspects of platting and construction, and they have knowledge of local regulations, such as permitting requirements. A large part of platting is in understanding what sort of improvements and service extensions need to be made in order to comply with the law.

Before a preliminary plat is sent to city officials for approval, it is usually reviewed internally or by a third party. After this initial review, a chance must be given for the public to review the plat. In some municipalities, adjacent property owners must be notified, and in other municipalities, owners of property within a certain range of the platted land must be notified and given copies of the plat.

Before preliminary plats are approved and become final plats, city commissions may require additional research, such as traffic studies. When the studies are complete, the commission may then set conditions that must be met for a plat to be approved. Commissions may limit access to and from the land or propose other provisions to keep the community running smoothly. In addition, plats may not be approved unless all back taxes on the property are paid.

After a plat is approved, the period of approval may be limited. On average, plat approval is valid for 18 months. The plat must be officially recorded by this time, but it may be possible to receive an extension.

Platting and Zoning

Plats must conform to established zoning regulations before they can be approved. Zoning regulations control several aspects of real estate and its uses, including the types of buildings that may be constructed, building height, signage and fencing. Some common types of zones to which platting must conform are as follows:

- AG – Agricultural zone
- B-1 – Limited business district
- B-1R – Mixed district with limited business and residential
- CBD – Central business district
- M-1 – Light manufacturing zone
- M-2 – Heavy manufacturing zone
- MXD – Mixed-use development zone
- R-S – Residential suburban zone
- R-1 – Single-family residential zone
- R-1-MH – Single-family, manufactured housing zone
- R-O – Mixed district with residential and office

If the intended use of the property being platted does not meet zoning regulations, then the municipality must be petitioned to change the zone or make an exception, which is known as legal non-conforming use. Nearby property owners will have a chance to weigh in on the proposed changes, and the city planning commission may make recommendations. Even if the planning and zoning commission approves a zone change, it must still be presented to and approved by the city council. The city council may also require a public hearing and review before a final decision on the zone change is reached.

If the zone change is denied, a new application may be submitted after a waiting period, which is usually six months.

Other considerations for platting that involve zoning and municipal planning are as follows:

- Land use – If legal non-conforming use is granted by the municipality, then all conditions of the zone and the non-conforming use must be met. If the legal non-conforming use is granted but that use is not implemented or discontinued, then the exception may be automatically revoked.
- Parking – Zoning regulations may set a specific number and type of parking spaces that must be made available. Parking requirements vary by the type of zone.

- Fire hazards – In areas designated as fire hazards, special precautions may need to be taken.
- Flood zones – Building may be limited in areas susceptible to flooding, and buildings that are permitted may be required to have flood insurance.
- Special use permits – Several types of properties require special use permits, such as salvage yards, mobile home parks and gas stations.
- Landscaping – Landscaping elements may be restricted or mandated by zone.
- Irrigation and sprinklers – Irrigation and sprinkler systems may also be restricted or mandated by zone.

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