

How Do I Obtain a Special Permit? The Planning and Zoning Commission meets twice a month to hear and act upon requests for Special Permits. In order for your Special Permit request to be placed on the Planning and Zoning Commission's meeting agenda for a public hearing, you must first file an application with the Board. This is done at the Land Use Office, which is located on the ground floor of Stafford Town Hall. The Land Use Office acts as the administrative arm of the Planning and Zoning Commission and is responsible for processing all Planning and Zoning Commission applications; the staff there will provide you with the necessary application forms, offer assistance and advice, and try to answer your questions. The Land Use Office is open from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Wednesday and till 6:30 on Thursday. The telephone number is (860) 684-1793.

Filing the Application: An application for a Special Permit consists of a completed application form, copies of a map or plan, the filing fee and, on occasion, other additional information.

Application Form: The application form, available at the Land Use Office, is largely self explanatory. The Land Use staff can assist you with filling out the form and provide you with certain technical information you will need to complete it, such as the Assessor's Map and Lot numbers, zoning district, and type of Special Permit. A couple of important reminders:

- (1) The application form must be signed by each and every owner of the property (e.g., both you and your spouse, if you own the lot together);
- (2) The completed application form is going to be copied and distributed to Board members for their review and thus needs to be legible. So, when filling it out, please print or type all required information!

Map: The map or plan should show the existing features of your property (e.g., lot lines, location of all structures and distances to lot lines, driveways, well, septic fields), the proposed activity for which the Special Permit is needed (e.g., location and size of the proposed garage), and the location and extent of the proposed Special Permit (e.g., the shortest distance between the proposed garage and the side property line). The map or plan should be drawn by a design professional such as a surveyor or an engineer. An existing plot plan of your property, brought up to date, may be acceptable; check with the Land Use Office.

Fee: The application fee(\$310.00) is payable at the time you file your application with the Land Use Office. The fee helps defray the cost involved with processing your application (staff time, legal notices, etc.). Checks should be made payable to "Town of Stafford". Please note that the fee is generally not refundable or waivable.

Other Information: Occasionally, a Special Permit is requested for a situation that cannot be shown on a map or plan—for example, a height Special Permit for a garage or a size Special Permit for a sign. If you are applying for this type of Special Permit, you should submit additional explanatory materials such as

measured drawings or sketches which clearly illustrate the type of Special Permit you are requesting. Again, check with the Land Use Office.

A Practical Guide to the Special Permit Process “They told me I need a Special Permit. What do I do now?”

Each Planning and Zoning Commission meeting has an application filing deadline associated with it; the deadline falls approximately two and-a-half weeks before the meeting. In order for your Special Permit application to be heard by the Board at a particular meeting, you must submit your completed application to the Land Use Office no later than 12:00 noon on the filing deadline day for that meeting. There are no exceptions to this rule. The Land Use Office maintains a list of the Planning and Zoning Commission’s meeting dates and filing deadline days for the current year.

Before the meeting, at least 12 days before the hearing on your application, you will need to post a “notice of Special Permit” sign on your property which informs the public that your property is the subject of a Special Permit request. The sign must be posted for this entire period, which does not include the day the sign is posted or the day of the meeting. If the sign is posted improperly (or not at all), the Planning and Zoning Commission will not hear your application as scheduled and will postpone the hearing until its next meeting. The Land Use Office will provide you with a sign.

Before the meeting, at least 12 days before the hearing on your application, you will need to mail letters to the property owners within 100 feet of your property informing them of the meeting. A sample letter is attached to this packet. A list of these owners can be obtained from the land use office. These letters need to be mailed either “certified” or via a “certificate of mailing”. You will need to bring the proof of these mailings to the meeting or given to the land use office prior to the meeting. Your application will not be heard if you do not provide the proof of mailing.

The land use office will publish a legal notice in a local paper two times before the hearing. The first notice will be published 11 days before the hearing and the second notice will be published 3 days before the hearing. About one week before the hearing on your application, you will receive a copy of the meeting agenda from the Land Use Office. (The Planning and Zoning Commission usually meets on the first Thursday of the month at 7:00 PM in the Veterans Meeting room on the first floor of Town Hall.)

At the meeting, the Planning and Zoning Commission usually hears the applications in the order in which they appear on the agenda. When your application is announced, you (or your representative) should step up and address the Board. Speak clearly and give your name and address; then briefly explain to the Board what it is you propose to do, why you need a Special Permit, what your hardship is, and any other information which will give the board a full understanding of your request. During the hearing, Board members may ask you questions about your application. When you have finished, the Chairman will give the public the opportunity to speak either in favor of or against your application. If anyone speaks against it, you will be given the opportunity to respond to their comments. When all parties have spoken, the Board will close the public hearing on your application. Sometimes, however, the Board may feel that it needs additional information regarding an application; if so, it may choose to leave the

hearing open and continue it to the following month's meeting, to allow the additional information to be provided and entered into the record of the public hearing.

After the public hearing is closed, the Board will discuss your application and take a vote to either approve or deny it. Once the hearing is closed, no member of the public, including yourself, is allowed to address the Board regarding the application. Your application needs four affirmative votes of the Planning and Zoning Commission in order for your Special Permit to be approved. In approving your Special Permit, the Board may attach conditions that it feels necessary to protect the public health, safety and welfare. The Planning and Zoning Commission's Timetable By State law, the Planning and Zoning Commission operates within the following **Timetable**: The Board has 65 days from the "day of receipt" of your application to begin the public hearing. The day of receipt is the day of the next regular meeting of the Board after you have filed your application with the Land Use Office, or 35 days after filing, whichever is sooner. The Board must schedule and open the public hearing within 65 days of the "receipt" of application. The Board has 35 days in which to complete the hearing. Once the public hearing is closed, the Board has 65 days in which to make a decision. Usually (but not always), the Board tries to make a decision on your application right after the close of the public hearing. The Board has the right to extend these time limits but needs your consent in order to do so.

After the meeting you will receive a letter from the Land Use Office stating the outcome of your application request: approval, denial, withdrawal, postponement or continuation. The decision will be published in a local paper. If your application was approved, you will also receive a Special Permit document with the letter of decision. This form, which describes the approved Special Permit, must be filed on the land records in the Office of the Town Clerk in order for your Special Permit to become effective. There is a 15 day period from the date of the publication of the notice of decision wherein an aggrieved person may appeal the decision to Superior Court. There is a \$60.00 recording fee for this filing.

If your application was denied, you may appeal the Planning and Zoning Commission's decision to the Superior Court or file a new application for hearing by the Board. A court appeal is a legal matter, and you should consult your attorney about it. If you file another application, you should be aware that, under State law, the Board is not required to hold a public hearing on the same or substantially the same Special Permit request if your previous application was decided upon within the past six months.

Some Tips: • At any time during the process of obtaining a Special Permit, you may represent yourself or have someone else represent you, such as an attorney. That decision is entirely up to you; there is no requirement that anyone else represent you. • Your hardship cannot be self-created or based upon economic or financial considerations. • You should bring anything to the public hearing that you think might help clarify or support your application, such as letters from neighbors or visual aids such as photographs.