



SOSNA Zoning Committee Protocols

Scheduling of SOSNA Zoning Meetings

The Zoning Committee, a standing committee established by the SOSNA Board, holds monthly meetings to discuss all applications for variance (a variance is required by the City whenever the proposed size or use of a property does not confirm with the standard zoning and building codes). Zoning applicants should contact SOSNA at **215-732-8446** for information and request to be placed on the next possible zoning meeting calendar.

The purpose of the zoning meeting is to obtain direct input from affected neighbors into the decision-making process and to give them the opportunity to express support or non-support for all zoning projects and requested variances in their immediate proximity.

Before putting applicants on its meeting agendas, SOSNA asks all applicants to deliver to the attention of the Chair of the Zoning Committee (or another designated Committee member), one month before the date of the meeting, copies of the same documents that must be presented at City of Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustment hearings, namely:

- Deed or agreement of sale
- Plans/blueprints showing all proposed construction and uses
- Site plan showing relationship of application site to neighboring properties and structures
- Photos of the site (relevant facings)
- Zoning refusal, listing number and type of proposed variances
- Date of scheduled ZBA hearing, if known

Prospective zoning applicants are strongly encouraged to contact SOSNA as early as possible in order to minimize continuances. If a timely meeting date cannot be met, SOSNA encourages the applicant to ask the ZBA for a continuance directly. If an applicant refuses or cannot be contacted, SOSNA will ask the ZBA directly for a continuance stating that fact and the need for a meeting. SOSNA also submits requests for continuances to the ZBA if a

zoning applicant has not requested a meeting with the SOSNA zoning committee and the community.

Meeting Notice

SOSNA distributes leaflets notifying all neighbors in a 1 to 2 block area of the proposed zoning site, indicating date and location of the meeting, nature of construction and, if possible, all requested variances. If the property involved is a corner property, both adjoining blocks as well as the affected block, EW and NS shall be leafleted. If the property involved is situated within the center of a block, both sides of the affected block, at least half of the adjoining blocks, as well as both side blocks will be leafleted. Meeting information as well as meeting agendas are also placed on the SOSNA Website at www.southofsouth.org and the SOSNA Events Calendar (link).

Individual residents receiving the leaflets are encouraged to ask their neighbors to attend; however, SOSNA will not solicit attendance based on a viewpoint.

Meeting Procedures

The Chair will open the meeting by explaining that the purpose of this meeting is to obtain input from neighbors affected by the requested zoning variance(s), especially those living in close proximity to the property involved. The results of this meeting are not the final outcome. The City of Philadelphia Zoning Board of Adjustments makes the final decision with respect to variances.

An attendance sheet will be distributed for each zoning request on the agenda. All attendees, including committee members and applicants, will be asked to sign in, giving names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses on the attendance sheet. At the end of each individual meeting, attendees will be asked to indicate their support or non-support on this sign-in sheet. A copy of this attendance sheet will be forwarded to the councilperson, verifying support or non-support for the project by neighbors.

The order in which applications will be heard at the meeting will be predetermined by the Chair and indicated on the agenda, normally based on the expected length of time needed for adequate discussion. However, all participants are invited to stay and engage in discussion on all items on the agenda.

The Chair will introduce each applicant, read aloud the refusal explaining the variances sought, and ask the applicant to give a brief description of the proposal. At least one owner of the property must attend the meeting if a final agreement is to be reached. The Owner is encouraged to bring his/her architect and attorney when applicable.

Questions and comments from the floor will be encouraged, moderated by the Chair. Emphasis is placed and efforts will be made to solicit opinions from immediate neighbors and those closest to the application site. Committee members may offer their own opinion on the requested variances, in order to enable neighbors to understand the zoning issues involved.

SOSNA Board members and/or zoning committee members may comment on applications directly concerning them (if they are immediate/close neighbors); in those cases, their opinions will weigh no more nor less heavily than any other neighbor's.

Meeting Outcomes

Every effort will be made to come to a general agreement between the applicant and the neighbors. The Chair may propose provisos (special limitations specific to a case) based on suggestions from the floor. If an agreement is reached, a letter will be written by the Chair directly to the ZBA chair, with a copy to the applicant and the district councilperson, stating SOSNA's support of the application and including any provisos.

In those cases where immediate neighbors are not in attendance (e.g. renters, blighted/unoccupied properties, etc.) the opinion of those neighbors in attendance will be considered in the outcome. The Chair will inform the ZBA that due to lack of interest or non-attendance by immediate neighbors, an agreement was reached with those in attendance, including members of the SOSNA zoning committee.

If the general consensus of neighbors is that no agreement can be reached, the Chair will inform the applicant that SOSNA, on behalf of the neighbors, opposes the application; the Chair will write a letter to the ZBA stating this opposition with reasons.

If no consensus on provisos can be reached at the meeting, but there is clear willingness on the part of all parties to continue discussion, the Chair will ask the applicant to return to the next SOSNA zoning meeting and get a continuance from the ZBA if needed.

In some unusual cases, the Chair may write a letter to the ZBA stating that SOSNA has no opinion in the matter at hand, leaving the decision to the discretion of the ZBA and existing zoning codes.

Members of the SOSNA Zoning Committee may appear at any ZBA hearings to reinforce SOSNA's position on applications. In addition, all neighbors are advised that they have the right to appear at the ZBA hearing to speak for or against any application, whether or not a consensus agreement is reached at the SOSNA meeting.

At all times, the goal of the SOSNA zoning meetings will be to inform both neighbors and applicants of the zoning issues involved, their rights, and the potential consequences of reaching agreement or not doing so.