

Reviewing Caroline's Development Guidance Laws

Introduction:

Both the Site Plan Review and Subdivision Review Local Laws contain "Review Criteria" and "Design Guidelines". How do these two sections work within these local laws?

Review Criteria describe specific thresholds that must be met by proposed development. These criteria are based on existing state, county, and town laws or require a statement from a service provider as to the effect the proposed development would have on their ability to provide service.

Design Guidelines exist as questions. Their genesis is from the Town's Comprehensive Plan and community input when the law was developed. Developers and the "Review Board" are required to discuss these guidelines as part of the review process.

Why are we reviewing these two local laws now?

There are several reasons of no particular priority:

1. The Subdivision Review law was adopted 17 years ago. Many local laws that impact subdivision are not referenced in the review criteria.
2. Court cases have made water withdrawal language in the water quality section of SPR law incorrect.
3. The State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) has been changed to include re-view of energy usage and sustainability.
4. Tompkins County has amended their 239 l & m review (mandated by NYS Law) to include specific review of energy efficiency.

Because of the enduring nature of large-scale developments, it is critical that new developments incorporate guidelines that take advantage of features that will minimize environmental impacts on the community. Our development guidance local laws are very good, reflecting the attention in crafting them to making them consistent with our community's goals. But it has become unavoidably clear that we have a responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible to avoid catastrophic effects of climate change, and to build resiliency by careful attention to our water resources. New York State, Tompkins County, and the Town of Caroline have all acknowledged this reality. We must roll up our sleeves to ensure that our development guidance local laws help accomplish this goal. The good news is that this is not a moon shot. The technologies are readily at hand. Ensuring that we design and build new developments to address these goals will benefit both our bottom lines and our environment. It is incumbent upon us to consider whether we can improve these guiding laws to ensure that we accomplish our goals.

What is our process?

On July 1, 2017, we instituted a 180-day Moratorium on review of Subdivision and Site Plan Review applications began in order to provide an appropriate pause for this work. Our plan is to hold several meetings like this one during August and September to identify opportunities. By October 31 we plan to have draft revisions of Subdivision and Site Plan Review Local Laws which would be introduced at our November Town Board Agenda Meeting and a public hearing would be held at our November Town Board Business Meeting.