

Belvidere Planning Department FY 2024 Annual Report



BELVIDERE, ILLINOIS

Established 1881

**Gina DelRose, Community Development Planner
Kim Whitt Administrative Assistant**

CITY OF BELVIDERE

City Council

Mayor Clinton Morris
Alderman Tom Porter/Clayton Stevens 1st Ward
Alderman John Albertini 1st Ward
Alderman Natalie Mulhall 2nd Ward
Alderman Dan Snow 2nd Ward
Alderman Sheryl Prather/Sandra Gramkowski 3rd Ward
Alderman Wendy Frank 3rd Ward
Alderman Mike McGee 4th Ward
Alderman Matt Fleury 4th Ward
Alderman Marsha Freeman 5th Ward
Alderman Ric Brereton 5th Ward

Planning and Zoning Commission

Carl Gnewuch, Chair
Paul Engelman, Vice-Chair
Daniel Druckrey
Art Hyland
Robert Cantrell
Brad Anderson/William Bieber
Alissa Maher

Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission

Sonya Dobberfuhl, Chairman
Claudia Colla, Vice Chairman
Alexandra Omiotek
Dawn Brooks
David Larson
Barbara Volk/Vacant
Kim Coniglio

Planning Department Overview

The Belvidere Community Development Department includes the Planning, Building and GIS Departments. The Planning Department provides professional municipal planning services pertaining to land use and comprehensive planning for the City of Belvidere. The planning staff serves as liaison to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission. The planning department is a member of the technical committee of the Region 1 Planning Council (R1PC). Additionally, the planning department advocates and coordinates the implementation of the region's established planning goals and objectives as expressed through various plans, policies and ordinances.

Planning and Zoning Commissions

The Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) is made up of seven members appointed by the Mayor with the consent of City Council; the members meet once a month on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00pm. The PZC functions as both the City of Belvidere's Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals. In addition to making recommendations on matters based on their consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, the PZC functions as the public hearing body for planning and zoning applications related to map amendments, text amendments and special use permits. The PZC holds the public hearings, adopts findings-of-fact and makes recommendations to the City Council based on standards set forth within the City of Belvidere Zoning Ordinance and guidance from the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the PZC hears variance requests and appeals to the City of Belvidere Zoning Ordinance.

Belvidere Building, Planning and Zoning Committee of the Whole

The City of Belvidere has the Committee of the Whole (Building, Planning and Zoning Committee) consisting of each member of the City Council to discuss and focus on the issues regarding planning and zoning matters. To reduce review time of city planning cases, the cases go directly to the City Council for review on the third Monday of the month. If the City Council has questions or concerns regarding a planning case, the case is referred to the Committee of the Whole on the fourth Monday at 6:00pm. The Committee of the Whole reviews the case and forwards their recommendation to the City Council for final action.

Belvidere City Council

The City Council consists of eleven elected officials, including the mayor; two aldermen are elected from each of the five Belvidere wards. The City Council determines the final decisions on all planning cases other than variances and appeals. The types of planning cases that the City Council rules on include: annexations and pre-annexation agreements; map amendments; special use requests; text amendments; and subdivisions. The City Council members formulate their decisions based on the recommendations from the planning staff and of the Planning and Zoning Commission, the outcome of the public hearing, the standards set forth in the City of Belvidere Zoning Ordinance and the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission

The Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) consists of seven members appointed by the Mayor with the consent of City Council; the members meet once a month on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 5:30pm. The (HPC) is tasked with reviewing certificates of appropriateness, conducting surveys, performing community and educational outreach regarding historic preservation, and other preservation-related matters.

Growth Dimensions and the Region 1 Planning Council (R1PC)

The planning staff collaborates with Growth Dimensions, a non-for-profit economic development agency funded in part by the City of Belvidere and Boone County and the R1PC on various projects. When requested, staff will attend Growth Dimensions' committee meetings such as their community group and R1PC's committee meetings. The planning staff is expected to provide assistance to Growth Dimensions on future projects by providing data for RFPs, directing development inquiries to them and attending project meetings.

The Belvidere Planning Department Year End Summary

The Belvidere Planning Department began the 2024 fiscal year with a positive outlook based on the amount of speculative conversations staff participated in. The Planning Department consists of the Community Development Planner and an Administrative Assistant that is shared with the Building Department. The Administrative Assistant has three key functions, Transcriber for the Planning Department (PZC minutes), Administrative Assistant to the Community Development Department and Permit Technician for the Building Department.

Funding for the department is provided by the City of Belvidere. The department receives revenue through application fees for zoning petitions and subdivision reviews, the creation of zoning verification letters and any printed maps, scanned plats or copies of ordinances purchased by the general public.

The projected revenue for the department for the 2024 fiscal year was \$21,000; \$20,000 in application fees and \$1,000 in miscellaneous fees (letters, contractual services, etc.). The actual revenue for the 2024 fiscal year was \$6,910.00; \$5,825.00 in application fees and \$1,085.00 in miscellaneous fees. Revenues were down due to a mix of fee waivers and a decline in cases. However, staff remained busy with several large projects and all of the other department's responsibilities. The planning department's actual expenses were below projections as well.

The planning department processes the various zoning applications for the City of Belvidere. The department is responsible for the preparation of agendas and minutes for two commissions in addition to participating in five other boards, commissions and committees. The planning staff works closely with the public to answer questions regarding zoning, development, setbacks, addressing, etc. The planning staff continues to work with the 911-board to update the addresses for the city and coordinates with other municipal staff and governmental agencies regarding planning, zoning and technical issues.

Land Development Cases

The planning department processed seventeen planning cases during the 2024 fiscal year (May 1st to April 30th). Staff generally has in-depth phone conversations or meetings with applicants before they submit a zoning petition. Planning and Zoning Commission meetings and Belvidere City Council meetings occur after regular business hours.

Application fees pay for the newspaper publication, Commissioners' meeting per diems and staff time involved in processing the request.

Map Amendments

Map amendments rezone a property from one district to another. The Comprehensive Plan is a guiding tool when determining map amendments.

Belvidere map amendments require a public hearing before the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission prior to city council. Notifications for map amendments are done by posting a sign on the property, notifying property owners within 250 feet and publishing the public hearing in a local paper.

Variances

Variances are deviations from specific bulk regulations of the Zoning Ordinance such as the square-footage of a sign, setback of a building or paved area, height of a structure, etcetera. A hardship must be proven to allow a variance.

Belvidere variances require a public hearing before the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission. They are not decided by the city council. Notifications for variances are done by posting a sign on the property, notifying property owners within 250 feet and publishing the public hearing in a local paper.

Special Uses

Special Uses are land uses that are generally acceptable in a zoning district but at times may need conditions put in place to make them appropriate. The Zoning Ordinance decides what uses are permitted, what are allowed by special use and which ones are prohibited.

Belvidere special uses require a public hearing before the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission prior to city council. Notifications for special uses are done by posting a sign on the property, notifying property owners within 250 feet and publishing the public hearing in a local paper.

Text Amendments

Text Amendments are changes to the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance and/or the Comprehensive Plan. Text amendments can be requested by staff or the public.

Belvidere text amendments require a public hearing before the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission prior to city council. Notifications for text amendments are done by publishing the public hearing in a local paper.

Subdivisions

Subdivisions create new lot lines and right-of-ways. There are three kinds of subdivisions; a preliminary plat is the approved draft of a development; a final draft which can occur in phases makes the preliminary plat official; a replat alters properties that have already been final platted.

Belvidere subdivisions do not require a public hearing but are reviewed by the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission prior to going before the city council. Since there is no public hearing, notices are not required.

Annexations

Annexations occur when land is incorporated into the limits of the annexing municipality. This can occur for multiple reasons such as needing municipal services or wanting to develop under the municipality's zoning ordinance.

Annexation requests do not go before a Planning and Zoning Commission. Their public hearings and determinations are conducted by the City Council/Village Board. The State Statutes outline notification requirements which are not handled by planning staff.

Temporary Uses

Typically, the Building Department processes temporary uses. However, if the temporary use is expected to occur outside of daylight hours than it must be approved by the City Council. In such cases, the planning department sends out a request for comments and compiles a brief staff report to present to the City Council.

During the 2024 fiscal year, staff processed one temporary use request.

Site Plan Review

The planning department is responsible for site, landscaping and lighting plan review for construction projects that are commercial or industrial within the City of Belvidere. Once a construction project is completed, the planning staff inspects the site to insure that the site is improved according to the submitted and approved plans.

Some of the larger projects reviewed in the 2024 fiscal year include Project Yukon, MRS, Club Car Wash and Midland States Bank's drive-through lanes.

Downtown Overlay Review

The planning department is responsible for the administration of the Downtown Overlay District according

to the requirements of the Belvidere Zoning Ordinance. The intent of the Downtown Overlay is to preserve the character of the historic downtown while encouraging additional development in harmony with existing buildings. Any building façade improvements or signage in the Downtown Overlay District require plan review and approval by the planning department prior to the issuance of a building permit. However, if a building permit is not required for the work, a review does not always take place. The planning department discontinued using the multi-part application process in order to make the submittal and review process easier for downtown business owners.

Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission

The Commission held its eleventh annual awards program to recognize organizations and individuals that had completed outstanding renovation projects. The program was held at the Ida Public Library on October 19, 2023 and recognized eight property owners and/or individuals. A booklet was designed highlighting the projects with advertising sponsorship received from local businesses and supporters of the preservation efforts. The event was well attended and appreciated by the recipients and the community.

The Commission designed a 50/50 matching grant program with the funds raised from the various fundraising events held each year (tours, dinners, ad space, book sales, etc.) and royalties from the Images of America book sales as an incentive for restoration projects. Landmark property owners are eligible to apply for project reimbursement for up to \$2,500.00 each year that funds are available. In the 2024 fiscal year, one grant was awarded for a total of \$350.00. Unfortunately, the project did not move forward.

Fundraisers in the 2024 fiscal year were difficult due to numerous scheduling conflicts and storm damage hindering an anticipated garden walk. A commissioner wrote a book called A Walk For All, South State Street edition that is for sale. The book has surpassed sales expectations and a second edition is expected to be released in the future.

There were no certificates of appropriateness requested in the 2024 fiscal year. No new landmarks and districts were approved, however, staff continues to discuss the possibility of applying for national register status with several property owners. Staff completed the Certified Local Governments annual report

The commission continued its community outreach programs. The Boone County Museum of History provided the Commission a table during Hometown Christmas so commissioners could sell books and hand out literature. Staff administers the Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission's Facebook page which is monitored during and outside of office hours. Staff continues to meet and communicate with the Historic US Route 20 Association, which has highlighted Belvidere in several of their promotional events.

Other Duties

Digitizing all case files and linking them to GIS is a continued project. The digitization of the case files had made the research of parcel history and the popularity of a land uses much easier. A future goal of the department is to finish completing the older misplaced files (missing maps, ordinances, minutes, etc.) digitize, link the files to GIS and close out the paper files in fiscal year 2025.

Planning staff continues to assist the Boone County Recorder's Office by digitizing their plats so that they can be searchable by the general public. Scanning and printing of plats and large plans is available to the public as well for a minor fee. Some departments have the ability to scan their own documents as well.

The planning staff issues both zoning verification letters and addressing letters. Zoning verification letters are often-times requested by financial institutions representing a buyer. The letters state whether a property is conforming, legal non-conforming or non-conforming. The status of a property can impact its value. Buyers will also request the letters in order to confirm that their intentions for the property are allowable. Staff charges a minimal fee for this service. Address letters are issued when there is new construction or an existing structure needs an additional address or corrected address. Staff works closely with 911 and the fire department regarding addressing matters and will issue an official address and notify all utilities and governmental agencies so they can update their records. There is no cost for this service.

The City Council adopted the Downtown Façade Improvement Grant in the 2020 fiscal year. This grant is a 50/50 matching grant (up to \$5,000-\$7,500) for façade work and exterior improvements to the property and is funded by video gaming revenue. It is administered by the Planning Department and reviewed by the Belvidere Historic Preservation Commission and Belvidere City Council. In the 2024 fiscal year, letters were sent out to 113 property owners announcing that \$26,462 was available in grant funds. A total of 12 applications were received and reviewed and nine of the projects were awarded grant funds, five of which have been fully completed, one is partially completed and three have yet to begin. Although extensions were granted for the remaining projects, \$9,462.00 has not been rewarded. The projects that have not begun will be eligible to reapply for the grant. The total amount of available grant funds in fiscal year 2025 is \$27,060.

In 2019, The Illinois Housing Development Authority awarded the RIPC a grant to form the Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority. This Land Bank services Boone and Winnebago Counties in addition to select municipalities, such as the City of Belvidere within those counties. Planning Staff, upon request, assists with data collection and provides lists of potential properties for the Land Bank.

Comprehensive Plan Review

Houseal Lavigne Associates was awarded the contract for the City's new Comprehensive Plan. Several stakeholder interviews, open houses, meetings with city staff and presentations to the Belvidere Planning and Zoning Commission and Belvidere City Council were conducted. A public hearing was held by the PZC on April 9, 2024 and the Plan is expected to be decided upon by the City Council on May 6, 2024.

Community Events

Heritage Days

The department is active in many community events. For Heritage Days, staff is part of the organizing committee and is in constant communication with vendors and other organizers making sure all logistical matters are taken care of. Staff assists with fundraising efforts such as applying for grants and tie-dyeing over 100 t-shirts at home to be sold during Heritage Days and the Boone County Fair. Staff's involvement with marketing includes radio interviews, advertisements and administration of the Belvidere Heritage Days' Facebook page which is monitored during and outside of office hours. Staff also participates in creating the City Hall float, walks in the parade and is present during the entire festival to monitor events and assist where needed. Planning for the festival is a year-round responsibility.

Belvidere Area Chamber of Commerce's Hometown Christmas

Throughout the years staff has taken a lead role in the Belvidere Area Chamber of Commerce's Hometown Christmas festival and now is part of the organizing committee. Due to the Chamber's efforts to restructure themselves, staff has become more of a position of support than lead organizer. In fiscal year 2024, staff assisted in handing out approximately 1,000 cups of hot chocolate at the Belvidere Fire Station. Staff also assisted with verifying logistics, the tree lighting and setting up selfie-spots. Staff is present during the entire festival to monitor events and assist where needed.

Community Outreach and Support

The Belvidere Area Chamber of Commerce's Chili Cook-off is a good community outreach event and staff participates in creating the City of Belvidere's booth space, preparing food and drinks and serving the public.

The Belvidere Area Chamber of Commerce's Downtown Trick or Treat is another fun event that staff enjoys participating in. City Staff decorated Little City Hall and handed out candy and toys to over 2,000 children downtown.

Another community outreach event that staff participates in is the Boone County Fair; a booth is manned by Belvidere staff as well as many others.

Staff served as a panelist for both the ACE Conference and Expo and one the Belvidere Area Chamber of

Commerce's Breakfast Before Business events.

Staff assisted with organizing and participating in the Jeff Smith Memorial event held at the VFW.

Staff assisted a representative from the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience in regards to meeting with businesses impacted by the March 2023 tornado and distributing information.

The Boone and Winnebago County Community Action Agency meets bi-monthly and offers funding assistance and outreach services to residents of both counties. Planning Department staff represents the City of Belvidere on the Agency's Board and also participates in their annual scholarship review committee. In fiscal year 2023, two Belvidere residents received college scholarships from the Agency.

Staff is a member of and participates in events for the Boone County Committee of the Family Violence Coordinating Council.

Training

Staff attended the Watershed Stewardship for Leaders Program

Staff attended the Best Practices in Festival Security presentation by the Illinois Park and Recreation Association.

Appendix Tables

- I. Population Estimates
- II. Land Development Cases
- III. Site Plan Reviews
- IV. Downtown Overlay Reviews
- V. Plat and Large Plan Scans
- VI. Zoning Verification Letters
- VII. Address Letters
- VIII. City of Belvidere Zoning Petition Flow Chart

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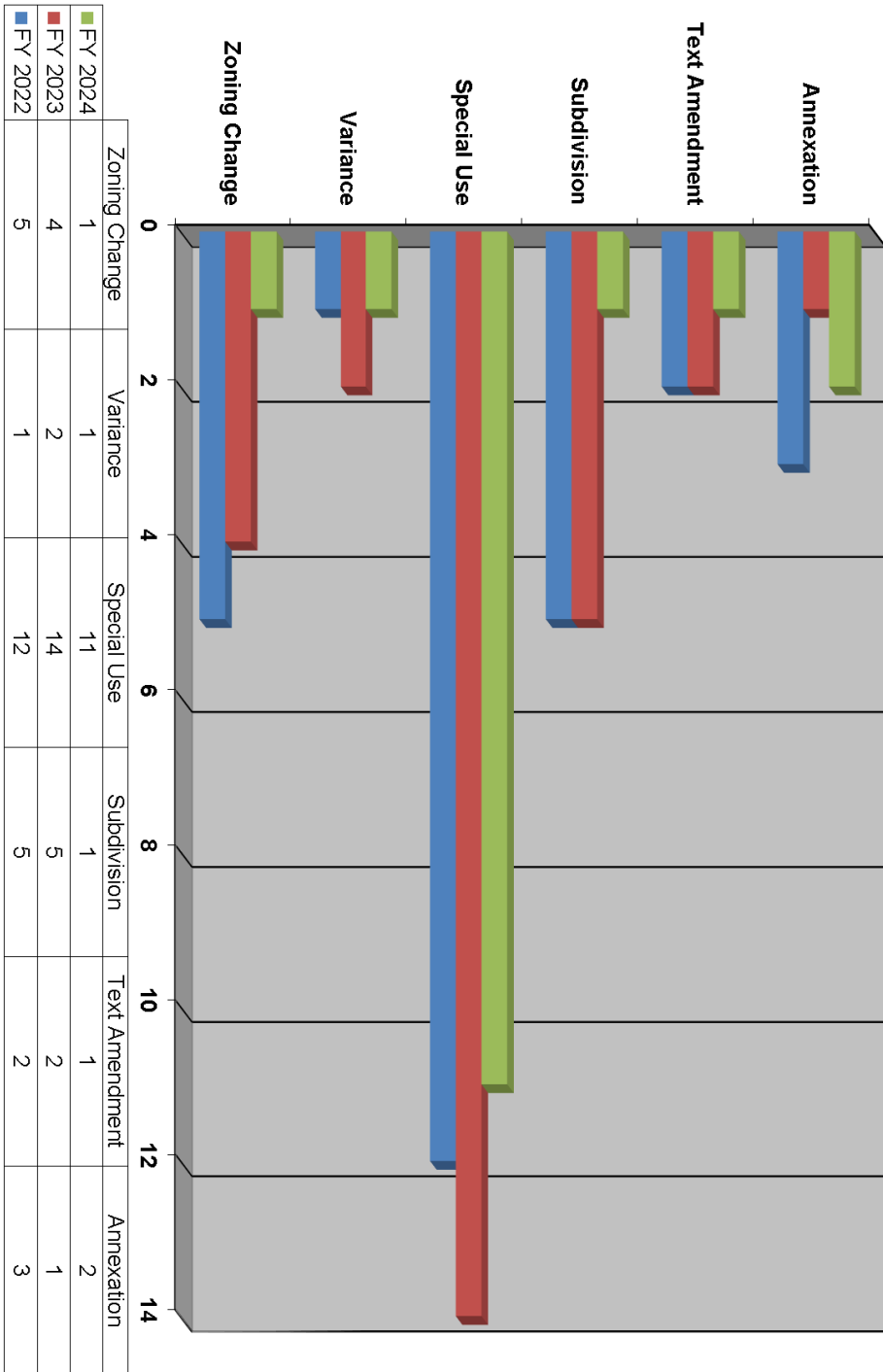
	<i>*Estimated Population</i>														
	2010	*2011	*2012	*2013	*2014	*2015	*2016	*2017	*2018	*2019	2020	*2021	*2022	*2023	*2024 to date
Belvidere:	25,588	25,603	25,666	25,701	25,716	25,734	25,755	25,773	25,791	25,797	25,339	25,513	25,618	25,624	25,684

* The estimated population numbers were based solely on the amount of building permits granted for single family residential structures and multi-family units and did not take into account fluctuating vacancy rates.

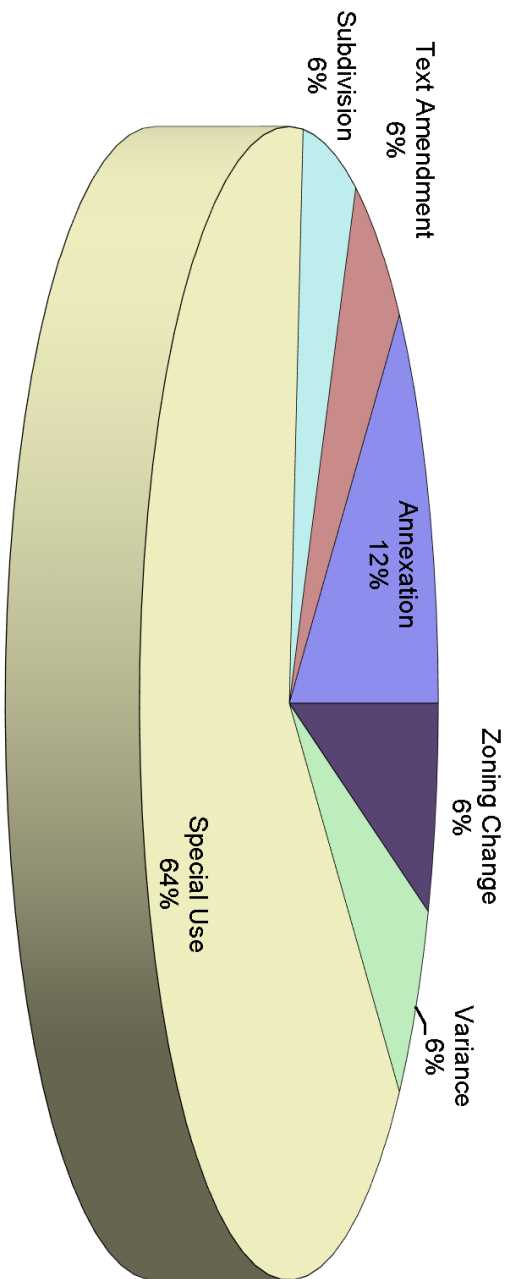
	<i>*Census Estimates</i>														
	2010	*2011	*2012	*2013	*2014	*2015	*2016	*2017	*2018	*2019	2020	*2021	2022	2023	2024
Belvidere:	25,588	25,680	25,371	25,339	25,282	25,092	25,070	25,181	25,194	25,143	25,339	25,134	25,169	n/a	n/a

	<i>*Percentage of Growth</i>				
	2000	2004	2010	2015	2020
Belvidere:	0	13	8.7	-1.9	0.9

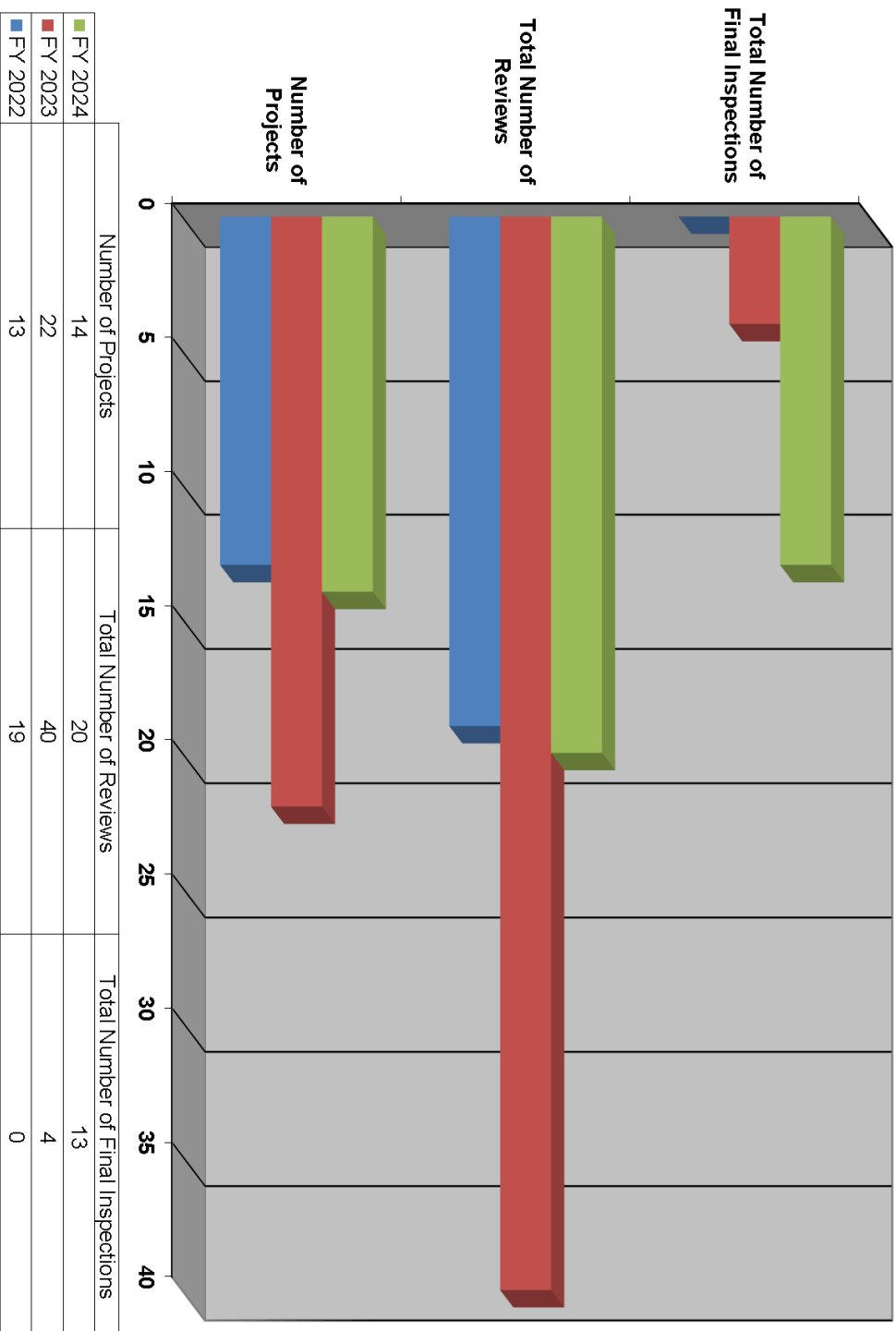
II A FY 2022-2024 Zoning Cases



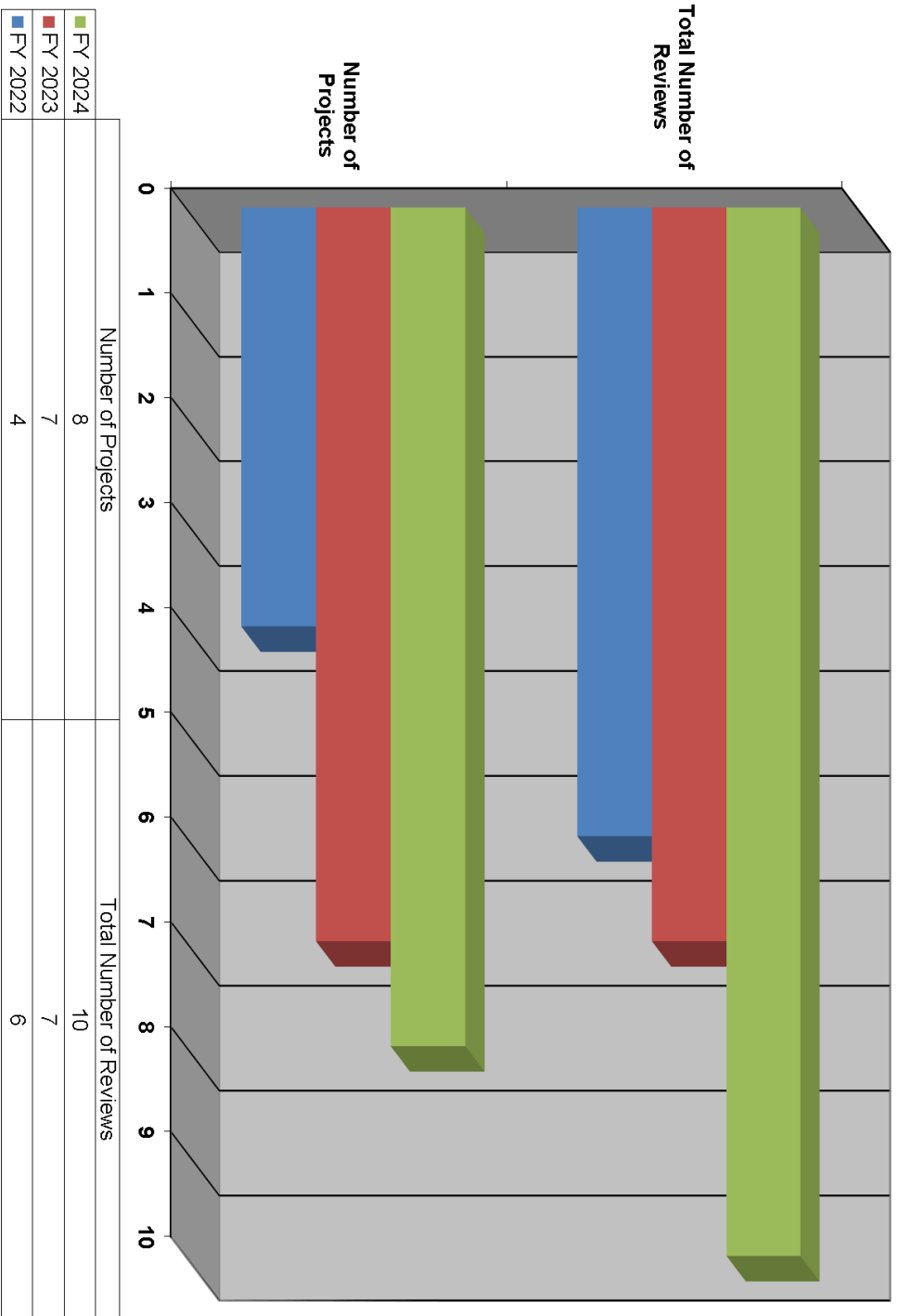
II B FY 2024 Zoning Case Summary



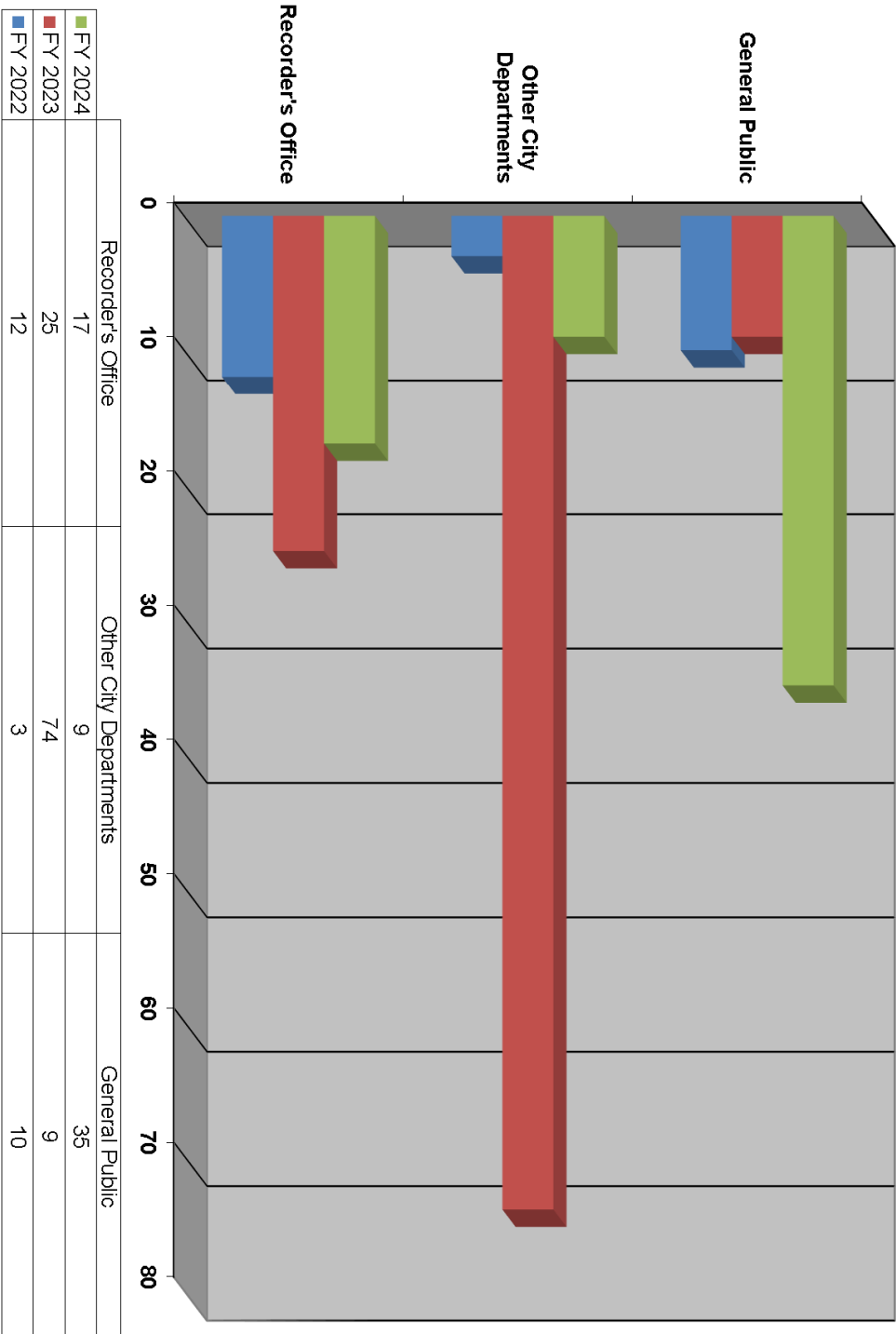
III FY 2022-2024 Site Plan Reviews



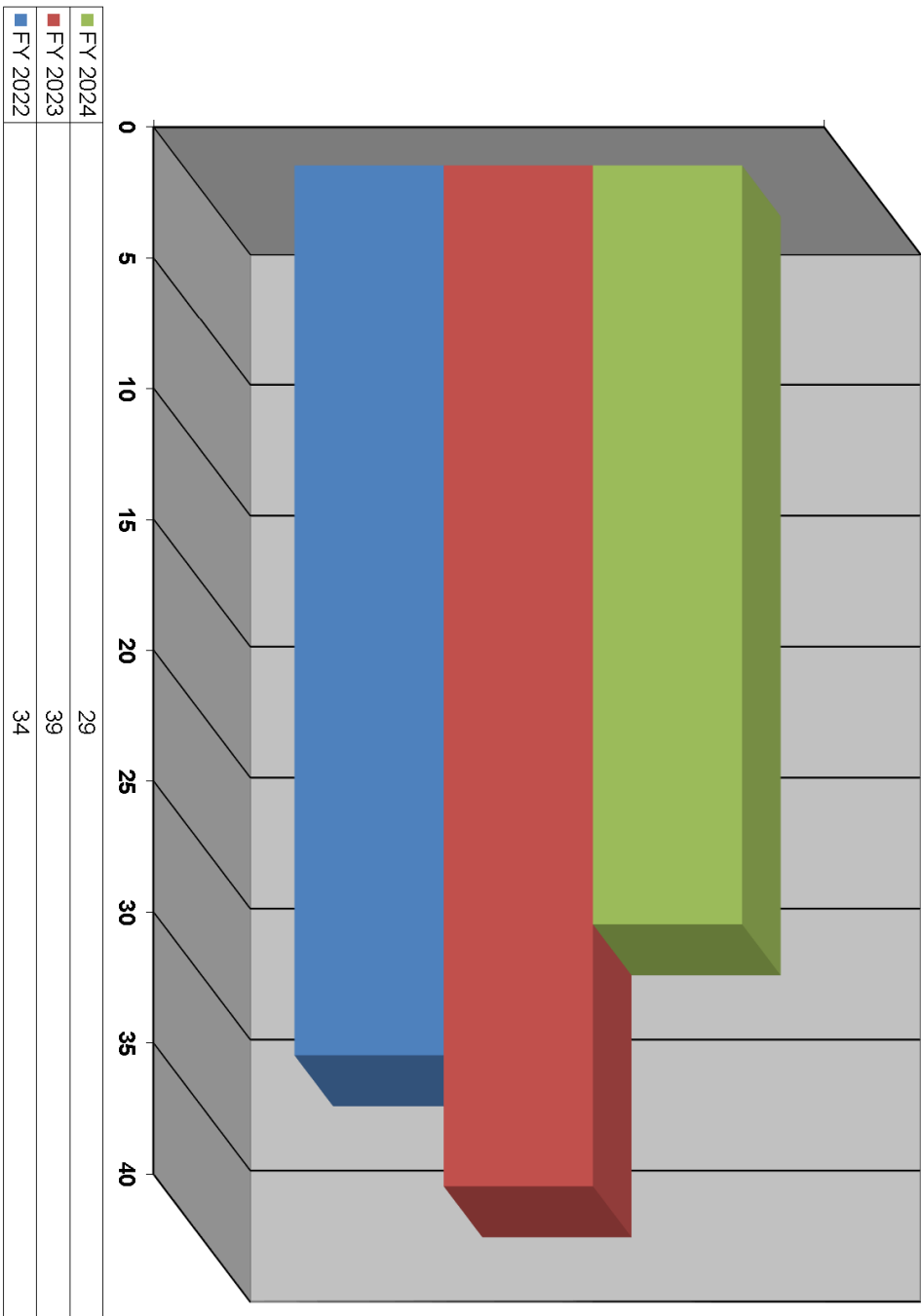
IV FY 2022-2024 Downtown Overlay Reviews



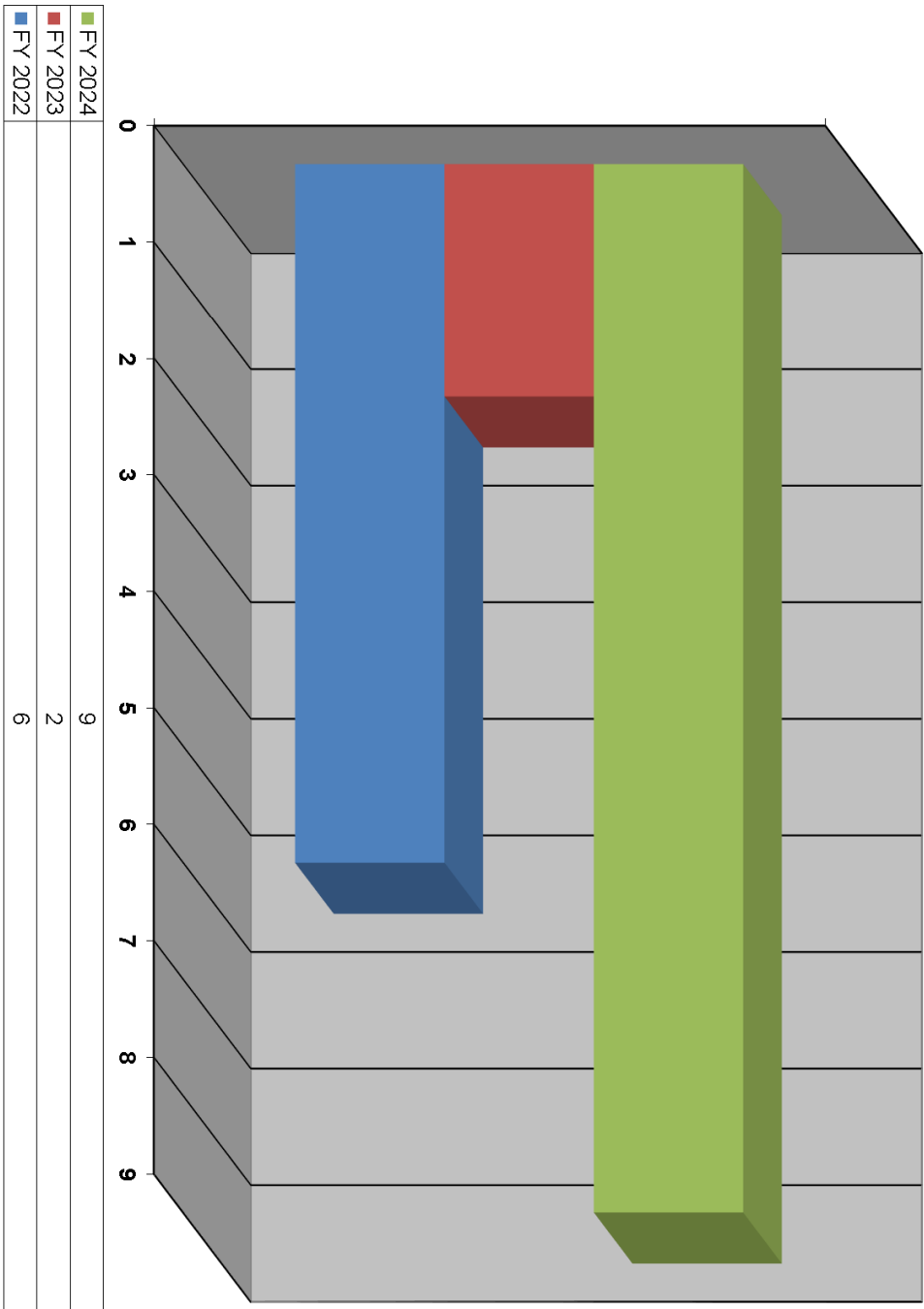
FY 2022-2024 ^V Scanned Plats

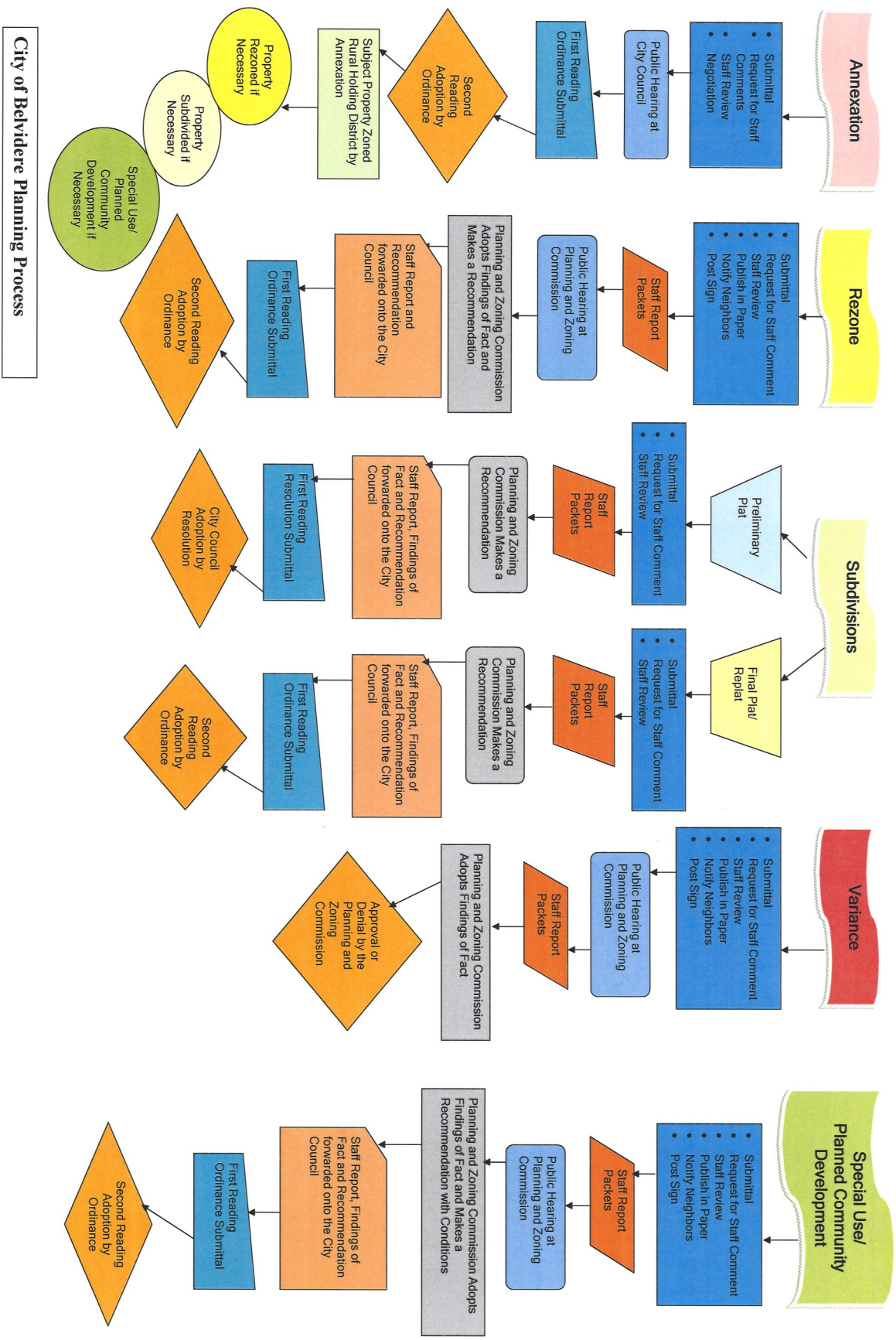


VI FY 2022-2024 Zoning Verification Letters



VII FY 2022-2024 Address Letters





City of Belvidere Planning Process