

§ 160D-403. Administrative development approvals and determinations.

(a) Development Approvals. – To the extent consistent with the scope of regulatory authority granted by this Chapter, no person shall commence or proceed with development without first securing any required development approval from the local government with jurisdiction over the site of the development. A development approval shall be in writing and may contain a provision requiring the development to comply with all applicable State and local laws. A local government may issue development approvals in print or electronic form. Any development approval issued exclusively in electronic form shall be protected from further editing once issued. Applications for development approvals may be made by the landowner, a lessee or person holding an option or contract to purchase or lease land, or an authorized agent of the landowner. An easement holder may also apply for development approval for such development as is authorized by the easement.

(b) Determinations and Notice of Determinations. – A development regulation enacted under the authority of this Chapter may designate the staff member or members charged with making determinations under the development regulation.

The officer making the determination shall give written notice to the owner of the property that is the subject of the determination and to the party who sought the determination, if different from the owner. The written notice shall be delivered by personal delivery, email, or first-class mail. The notice shall be delivered to the last address listed for the owner of the affected property on the county tax abstract and to the address provided in the application or request for a determination if the party seeking the determination is different from the owner.

It is conclusively presumed that all persons with standing to appeal have constructive notice of the determination from the date a sign providing notice that a determination has been made is prominently posted on the property that is the subject of the determination, so long as the sign remains on the property for at least 10 days. A posted sign shall contain the words "Zoning Decision" or "Subdivision Decision" or similar language for other determinations in letters at least six inches high and shall identify the means to contact a local government staff member for information about the determination. Posting of signs is not the only form of constructive notice. Any sign posting is the responsibility of the landowner, applicant, or person that sought the determination. Verification of the posting shall be provided to the staff member responsible for the determination. Absent an ordinance provision to the contrary, posting of signs is not required.

(c) Duration of Development Approval. – Unless a different period is specified by this Chapter or other specific applicable law, including for a development agreement, a development approval issued pursuant to this Chapter expires one year after the date of issuance if the work authorized by the development approval has not been substantially commenced. Local development regulations may provide for development approvals of shorter duration for temporary land uses, special events, temporary signs, and similar development. Local development regulations may also provide for development approvals of longer duration for specified types of development approvals. Nothing in this subsection limits any vested rights secured under G.S. 160D-108 or G.S. 160D-108.1.

(d) Changes. – After a development approval has been issued, no deviations from the terms of the application or the development approval shall be made until written approval of proposed changes or deviations has been obtained. A local government may define by ordinance minor modifications to development approvals that can be exempted or administratively approved. The local government shall follow the same development review and approval process required for issuance of the development approval in the review and approval of any major modification of that approval.

(e) Inspections. – Administrative staff may inspect work undertaken pursuant to a development approval to assure that the work is being done in accordance with applicable State and local laws and the terms of the approval. In exercising this power, staff may enter any

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premises within the jurisdiction of the local government at all reasonable hours for the purposes of inspection or other enforcement action, upon presentation of proper credentials, so long as the appropriate consent has been given for inspection of areas not open to the public or an appropriate inspection warrant has been secured.

(f) Revocation of Development Approvals. – In addition to initiation of enforcement actions under G.S. 160D-404, development approvals may be revoked by the local government issuing the development approval by notifying the holder in writing stating the reason for the revocation. The local government shall follow the same development review and approval process required for issuance of the development approval, including any required notice or hearing, in the review and approval of any revocation of that approval. Development approvals shall be revoked for any substantial departure from the approved application, plans, or specifications; for refusal or failure to comply with the requirements of any applicable local development regulation or any State law delegated to the local government for enforcement purposes in lieu of the State; or for false statements or misrepresentations made in securing the approval. Any development approval mistakenly issued in violation of an applicable State or local law may also be revoked. The revocation of a development approval by a staff member may be appealed pursuant to G.S. 160D-405. If an appeal is filed regarding a development regulation adopted by a local government pursuant to this Chapter, the provisions of G.S. 160D-405(f) regarding stays apply.

(g) Certificate of Occupancy. – A local government may, upon completion of work or activity undertaken pursuant to a development approval, make final inspections and issue a certificate of compliance or occupancy if staff finds that the completed work complies with all applicable State and local laws and with the terms of the approval. No building, structure, or use of land that is subject to a building permit required by Article 11 of this Chapter shall be occupied or used until a certificate of occupancy or temporary certificate pursuant to G.S. 160D-1116 has been issued.

(h) Optional Communication Requirements. – A regulation adopted pursuant to this Chapter may require notice or informational meetings, or both, as part of the administrative decision-making process. (2019-111, s. 2.4; 2020-3, s. 4.33(a); 2020-25, ss. 9, 51(a), (b), (d); 2021-88, s. 1(b).)