

Planning Commission/Board and Board of Appeals Training Course

Frequently asked questions

Rev 11-18-09

Why are we doing this?

The Smart Green and Growing – Smart and Sustainable Growth Act of 2009 requires that all members of a local jurisdiction’s planning commission or planning board and board of appeals to complete an education course by July 1, 2010.

Why is MDP involved?

The Maryland Department of Planning was charged by the General Assembly to develop an online training course to make compliance easier. MDP is required to have the course available by January 1, 2010.

The course builds on prior efforts by MDP to provide professional training to planning commissioners, planning board and board of appeals members in conjunction with the University of Maryland.

What meaning of planning commission/board applies?

For the purposes of this requirement, a planning commission, planning board includes a planning commission or planning board established under Article 66B, Article 25A or Article 28 of the Annotated Code of Maryland. In other words, if you sit on a commission or board in a jurisdiction that has planning and zoning authority, you must fulfill your education requirement.

What meaning of board of appeals applies?

For the purposes of this requirement, a board of zoning appeals or a board of appeals or zoning board of appeals means a board established under Article 66B, Article 25A or Article 28 of the Annotated Code of Maryland.

How long do I have to complete the course?

Incumbent or sitting planning commission/board and boards of appeals members on January 1, 2010 have 6 months to complete the education course, or until July 1, 2010. Planning commission/board and board of appeals members appointed after January 1, 2010 shall complete education course within 6 months after the date of appointment.

Do I have to take the MDP course?

No. A local jurisdiction may develop an education course for members of the local jurisdictions' planning commission/board and board of appeals members in lieu of the Department's education course.

Do I have to take this course each time I'm appointed?

No. You only have to take this course or a local course once, but there will be other supplemental courses and training opportunities available to you.

What topics are covered?

The Bill (SB 280) stipulated that certain topics be covered, specifically the role of the comprehensive plan, standards for special exceptions and variances, and zoning, planned development and subdivision ordinances, and other ordinances and their respective regulations as may apply.

How was the course developed?

The Bill directed the Task Force on the Future for Growth and Development in Maryland to provide recommendations on the education course by July 1, 2009. These recommendations are included in the curriculum. The course will also include links to additional websites for further study and recommendations for learning more about your local programs that may have an impact on your deliberations as a planning commissioner, planning board member or board of appeals member.

How long is the course?

The course is designed to take approximately 6 hours to complete for planning commissioners, planning board members; about 4 hours for board of appeals members. There will be links or recommendations for further study or reference on topics that may be of interest to you.

How much will it cost?

There is no charge for the MDP course.

What if I don't want to, or cannot take the online course?

We will mail a hardcopy package to you.

Can I take a course through the Maryland Planning Commissioners Association (MPCA)?

MPCA has collaborated in offering training courses in the past, and may develop any training course or program it wants. If a local jurisdiction wants to partner with MPCA to develop its own education course, that's okay. For the time being however, only local jurisdictions can offer their own versions of the course, in lieu of this course.

What happens if I don't take the course, or if I start it and don't finish?

While the law states that failure to complete the course may not invalidate a decision of the commission, or be construed to create a private cause of action by any person, you still must complete the course within the allotted time. The law is the law.

Doesn't this just make it more difficult to attract people to serve on planning commissions/boards and boards of appeals?

Well, one could say that it raises the bar and enhances the importance of serving on a planning commission/board and board of appeals. Maryland joins 9 other states that already require training for planning commissioners: New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, New Jersey, Kentucky and Louisiana.

Is there a passing or failing grade?

No. There is a review at the end of each section, but the results are not graded or collected. A graduation 'certificate' will be e-mailed or mailed to you upon completion of the course.

If I have any other questions, who can I ask?

Contact Steve Allan by phone at 410-767-4572, or by email at:

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