



# HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING

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## ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE PROCESS

Plan Submission Updates

*Effective, September 1, 2021*

The Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ) will begin accepting plan submissions for Electronic Signatures. The development review process will remain the same with modifications to the current process occurring after at the Technically Complete (TC) stage. This process will be implemented for Sketch plans, Preliminary Equivalent Sketch plans, Preliminary plans, Final plans, and Site Development Plans (SDPs) that have not received TC status as of the date of this new process. Be advised, this does not apply to plans recorded in Land Records (Plats and Final Development plans) and Environmental Concept Plans (ECPs), Simplified Environmental Concept Plans (SECPs), Water & Sewer plans or Redlines.

### **Submission of Electronic plans for Signatures:**

1. Plan Review Process:

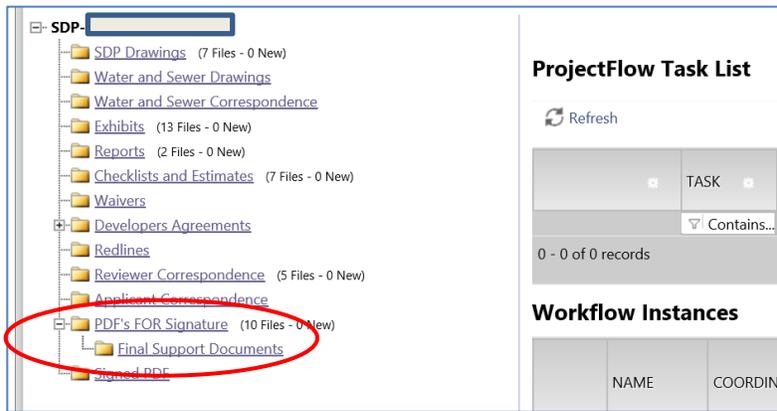
- a. Applicant submissions with PDox and Agency review processes remain the same.

2. Technically Complete Approval:

- a. Technically Complete (TC) status will be issued only when all Agency comments have been addressed and any outstanding items are minor drafting or corrective in nature. Outstanding comments that may result in plan changes/re-alignments will require additional plan submission and will not be issued TC approval status.
- b. DPZ will issue the TC approval letter and any minor outstanding items will need to be addressed on a direct plan submission (directs). The TC letter will provide directs to those agencies who have remaining comments. Directs must be resolved with those agencies within two weeks. Applicants must receive confirmation from the Agency that the comments have been addressed and that confirmation must accompany the submission of the electronic plan PDFs for signature (confirmations can be emails from Agencies or dated meeting notes).

3. Submission of Electronic Plans:

- a. Prior to scheduling the intake appointment, applicants must upload final version of the plans as individual PDF Sheets to PDox. A new folder has been created in the project's PDox folder set specifically for the finalized electronic plans – 'PDFs for Signature'.



- b. Electronic drawings requiring seals and signatures of State licensed individuals must meet the overall criteria for digital signatures provided in the Code of Maryland Regulations 09.23.03.09 and be verified or 3<sup>rd</sup> party verifiable.
- c. All supplemental information/documentation/Agency confirmations from TC Directs must be uploaded to PDox in the new nested folder – ‘Final Support Documents’.
- d. Applicants will schedule and intake appointment with DLD to review submission materials and pay fees.\*
- e. At the appointment, DLD Intake will review the TC letter and ensure all required information is uploaded to PDox or provided via hardcopy.
- f. Intake will write receipt and accept fees.
  - i. Please note there are additional fees for electronic mylar printing and paper copies noted in the TC letter.

#### 4. Review of Electronic Plans:

- a. Once Intake process is complete, DLD staff will begin Electronic Review process. Agencies will have 7 business days to review plans for conformance with TC approval and Directs comments.
  - i. If there are discrepancies found at this stage, processing will be stopped until Agency comments are addressed, and revised plans are uploaded to PDox.
- b. Following successful completion of this review period, Plans will be circulated for electronic signatures.
- c. Applicants will be notified when final signature process is complete via letter.
  - i. This process is estimated to take 3-4 weeks for all signatures to be complete.

#### \*Process modifications during COVID:

1. Applicants may choose to use the DPZ Drop Box to process materials and payment.
2. Applicants will upload documents to appropriate PDox folders and will submit required check through the Drop Box.
3. DLD staff will check upload documents, confirm material submission, cash check, and upload receipt to PDox folder. Once complete, staff will send confirmation email to applicant that the intake is complete and DLD staff will begin Electronic Review process. If an issue is identified with the submission, DLD staff will schedule a date/time with the team to review the submission once they receive the check through the Drop Box.

### **Process electronic signatures for plans with current TC status**

1. Plans that have received TC prior to instituting this new process, may be eligible for this process, only if outstanding comments were minor/drafting modifications and don't require plan revisions. DPZ, in consultation with other Agencies, will have full discretion in this determination.
2. To request electronic plan submission after TC, apply in writing to DLD Chief requesting to submit technically complete plans electronically in PDoc instead of as a mylar submission. If approved, DPZ will issue a letter to the applicant outlining Electronic Submission process and any additional fees that need to be added to those outlined in the previous TC letter.

### **Limited use of special exceptions by action of the Director**

The introduction of the Electronic Signatures process is intended to efficiently review and sign plan submissions to reduce the overall processing time between plan and permit submission stages. The current physical routing of mylars is often a lengthy process due to the need for physical signature of officials in different locations and the need to transport mylars in sequence to each signatory. COVID related restrictions have lengthened time further. Consequently, process 'work arounds' have become more standard practice to keep projects on a path forward. The new digital signature process is intended to alleviate that extended time thereby eliminating the need for these work arounds. As such, applicants should anticipate the standard, sequential processing of plans through electronic signatures to meet the Subdivision and Land Development regulations.

#### **Early submission and routing of SDP's while the Plat is still being recorded may only be permitted by special exception.**

The Subdivision and Land Development Regulations require the SDP to be submitted for review **after** the Plat has been recorded and the applicant has added the plat reference numbers to the SDP. DPZ staff will not be able to route the SDP for review/signatures until those number are on the drawings and will not have the ability to add those numbers to the drawings being electronically signed. Therefore, any permission to submit electronic SDPs prior to the recordation of the Plat will be limited and at the discretion of the Director of Planning and Zoning following a written request explaining the exceptional circumstances.

#### **Early release of Grading Permits with HSCD signatures only on certain plan sheets may only be permitted by special exception.**

As per the regulations, Grading Permits will be issued after the final signatures on the SDP or Final Plan have been obtained. All drawings in the set will be reviewed and signed electronically. The new digital signature process requires plan sheets to remain together in digital format. Therefore, any permission to process grading sheets outside of the full electronic signature of SDP process will be limited and at the discretion of the Director of Planning and Zoning following a written request explaining the exceptional circumstances.

Developer/Community/Website published notice:

**Electronic Signature Process**

To accelerate and modernize processing of plans, DPZ is excited to begin accepting plan submissions for Electronic Signatures. The development review process will remain the same up to the Technically Complete (TC) stage. Plan submissions will be uploaded electronically through ProjectDox (PDox) and routed to all Agency reviewers electronically for signatures. This process anticipates a 3 week turn around for all signatures from date of submission. DPZ anticipates, in some cases, a savings of 4-6 weeks from the current physical signature process.

Eligible Plans:

The following plans are eligible for electronic signature, so long as they have not received TC status as of September 1, 2021:

Sketch plans | Preliminary Equivalent Sketch plans | Preliminary plans | Final plans | Site Development Plans (SDPs)

Ineligible Plans:

The following plans are NOT eligible for electronic signature at this time:

Plans recorded in Land Records (Plats and Final Development plans) | Environmental Concept Plans (ECPs) | Simplified Environmental Concept Plans (SECPs) | Water & Sewer plans | Redlines

By Request:

Plans that received TC prior to instituting this new electronic signature process on September 1, 2021, may be eligible for this process only if outstanding comments were minor/drafting modifications and do not require plan revisions. The request for electronic plan submission after TC must be sent to Anthony Cataldo, Chief of the Division of Land Development at [acataldo@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:acataldo@howardcountymd.gov). If approved, DPZ will issue a formal letter to the applicant outlining the Electronic Submission process and any applicable additional fees.