

REGISTERED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

What role does SOSNA play as an RCO?

What is an RCO?

Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) are community groups that are concerned with the physical development of their community.

SOSNA is a designated RCO. We renew our status every 2 years!

What is the Zoning Committee of SOSNA?

A group of community members with a background in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning. All members apply through an application process and lead the community meetings regarding the proposed development.

What can an RCO do?

- Get advance notice of projects that will be reviewed by the Zoning Board of Adjustment or the Civic Design Review Committee.
- Organize and conduct public meetings where community members can comment on planned developments in their neighborhood.
- Host community meetings whenever a project:
 - Requests a zoning variance or special exception
 - Development requiring [Civic Design Review \(CDR\)](#)
- During the community meeting, the Zoning Committee provides comments and allows community members to provide comments. A community vote on a proposed project occurs and SOSNA writes a letter identifying the outcome of the vote and comments to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Please note that the SOSNA letter is advisory and may have no impact on the ZBA decision.

Does an RCO review all proposed developments in the neighborhood?

No, our RCO is only eligible to review proposed developments that do not follow the Philadelphia Zoning Code i.e., if a property is zoned for a single-family home but the applicant wants to create another unit to make it a multi-family unit, our RCO will review this project with a community meeting.

Projects that are built to code are not required to present the project to SOSNA Zoning Committee and the community.

If you have concerns about a project that seems out of place or doesn't seem to be following their posted permits, you can report it to 311 for inspection. You can view all zoning and building permits on [Atlas](#), select the Licenses and Inspection tab once you enter an address.

Why are developments allowed to go against the existing zoning code?

The zoning code regulates developments according to certain rules for each zone. As such, the code is somewhat of a one-size-fits-all within any given zone, and may not always be appropriate for each individual property within the zone. Therefore, the code allows for zoning variances - exceptions to certain rules, subject to approval by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). Any project requesting a variance in our neighborhood must first be reviewed by the SOSNA Zoning Committee in a public meeting. The committee then provides a letter to the ZBA reflecting the response of the committee and neighbors who attend the meeting (our letters to the ZBA are **non-binding** and may not reflect the final decision of ZBA).

Zoning is the legislative process of dividing land into zones for different uses. Zoning laws are the laws that regulate the use of land and structures built upon it. Accordingly, zoning laws are created for the simple purpose of protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of the people as relates to land use.

A **variance** request is made when an applicant submits a proposed development to the city that does not meet the adopted codes to seek relief. Generally, the applicant must prove that the denial of the variance would result in unnecessary hardship, and that the unnecessary hardship was not created by the applicant. The variance must be the minimum variance (the least modification possible) that will afford relief. Some reasons variances should not be granted: increase congestion in the streets/transit, burden public facilities, endanger the public welfare, affect the implementation of a neighborhood plan, injure the adjacent properties (including supply of light and air), or create significant environmental damage.

What rights do I have as a near neighbor in this process?

Any members of the community can provide feedback on a project through the following:

- Attend the SOSNA Zoning Committee meeting (advisory)
- Attend the Zoning Board of Adjustment Hearing (formal City Decision)
- Appeal the Zoning Board of Adjustment's decision

Near neighbors are encouraged to ask questions and testify at the SOSNA Zoning Committee meeting and have a vote to approve or oppose the project. They may also testify at the Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting and, if dissatisfied with the ZBA's decision, file an appeal to that decision.