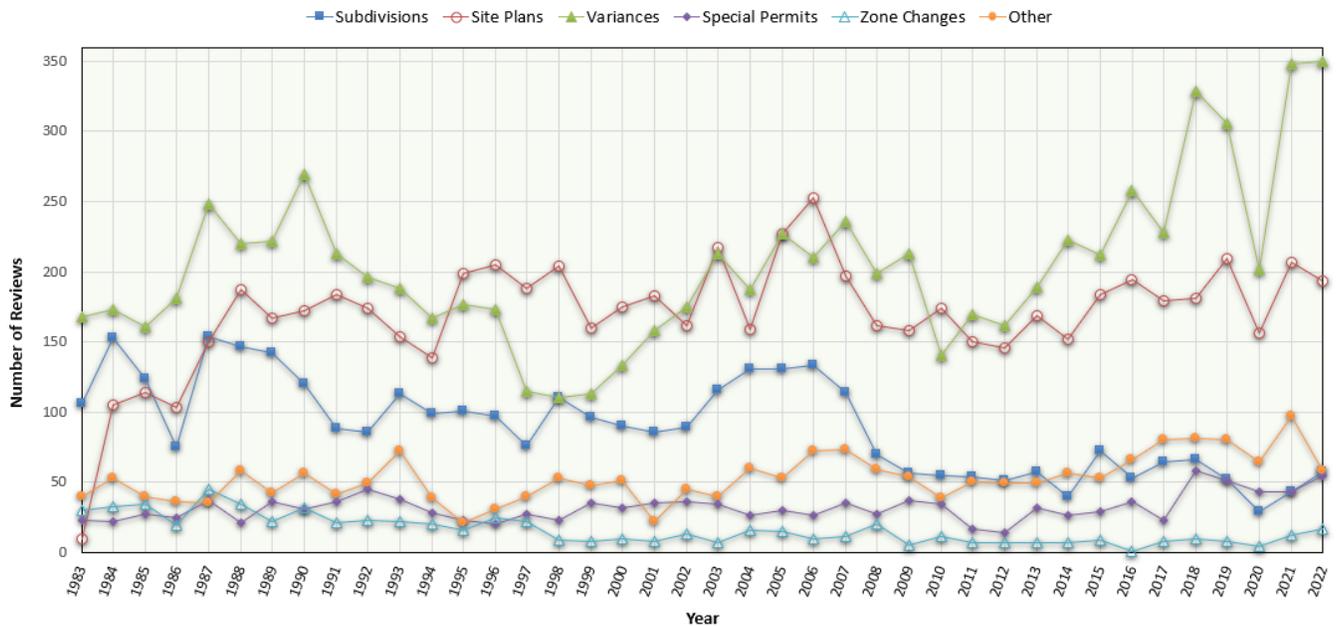


Line Graph by Year

Figure 2. Number of GML Applications by Type and Year Reviewed by the Rockland County Planning Department 1983-2022



Source: GML Access database maintained by the Rockland County Planning Department, Land Use Unit
Prepared by the Rockland County Planning Department - January 2023

The line graph in Figure 2 illustrates the number of each type of application reviewed by the Planning Department in the last 40 years. The major categories of reviews include subdivisions, site plans, variances, zone changes, special permits, and “Other” (such as zoning code amendments). The number of subdivisions declined steadily from 1987 through 1992, reflecting the economic downturn during that period and the decrease in prime lands to develop. From 1993 through 2002, the number of subdivisions reviewed remained generally constant, then increased in numbers from 2002 to 2006. The increase from 2002 to 2006 may be attributed to the lower interest rates and the improvement in the economy, as well as an upturn in the number of small subdivisions (two-lots) proposed, in which a single-family parcel was subdivided to help offset high taxes while taking advantage of the increased land value. Beginning in 2007 and continuing through 2012, both the real estate market and the economy were on a downward trend, shown by the great decrease in the number of subdivisions and site plans reviewed. Developers were waiting for the economy and real estate market to improve before constructing new buildings and expending their investment funds in the development process. Subdivisions hit a low in 2014. Fortunately, 2015 saw an 80% increase from the previous year as the real estate market continued to recover. This trend in subdivisions, however, did not continue, as 2016 saw a return to numbers similar to the 2009 to 2013 period. This decrease may be the result of the natural limits on the number of available parcels that have the potential to be subdivided, and not necessarily reflective of the county real estate market, as increases in site plan reviews, variances, and special permits point to continued strength in the market. After a nearly 25% increase from 2016 in 2018, the number of subdivisions decreased in 2019, until they hit an all-time low in 2020, with only 29 subdivision applications reviewed by staff. This is likely a direct result of the COVID pandemic, and the shutdown related to it. As the market began to recover, the number of subdivisions increased to 43 in 2021 and then 57 in 2022.

Site plan applications generally rose steadily from 1983 to 1998, fluctuated between 1998 and 2006, and then began a downward trend from 2006 through 2009, paralleling the downward subdivision trend. The earlier increase in site plans through 1988 reflects the continual growth in the County. However, as mentioned above, the late eighties and early nineties witnessed an economic recession with interest rates climbing. Development slowed down during this period reflecting the tentativeness of the market. In 1995, the number of site plan applications increased to over 200, and then continued to fluctuate between 150 and 200 applications per year. Site plan reviews in 2003 rose 34% from those reviewed in 2002 (162), dropped again to 159 for 2004, and then started to climb to a record high in 2006 of 253 applications. The consistently lower interest rates, an increase in the number of proposed senior housing facilities, and the sale of State surplus lands (Letchworth Village and Rockland Psychiatric Center) could account for this jump in site plan reviews. However, as with the subdivision trend, site plan applications began to decline in 2007 and continued through 2009, reflecting the downturn in the real estate market. In 2010, there was a slight increase in the number of site plans reviewed, as well as in the overall percentage, but the trend did not remain on the upswing in 2011 as the number of site plans declined 13%. Site plans fell slightly more in 2012 to 146. At this point, the overall trend for site plans seemed to parallel the subdivision trend. In 2016, however, the number of site plan applications numbered 194, an increase by 33% from the low in 2012. In 2019, there were 209 site plan applications, an increase of 28% over the 181 applications in 2018. Yet, the number of site plan applications reviewed fell to 156 in 2020, a 25% decrease from the previous year. Again, this is a direct result of the shutdown that occurred due to the COVID pandemic. After loosening of lockdown restrictions, development began to pick back up, with 207 site plan reviews completed in 2021. 2022 saw a 6.8% decrease in site plan applications, bringing the number in line with what was seen in the mid-2010's with 193 reviews.

Variances, on the other hand, were on the rise from 1985 to 1990. The rising interest rates and increased housing prices of the late 1980's and the scarcity of prime vacant land available for new development explains much of this fluctuation. Residential building additions requiring variances became more commonplace as new development responsible for most site plans and subdivisions declined. However, from 1991 through 1998 the number of variances continued to decline to a record low of only 110. Perhaps this reflected more reviews meeting the criteria for the waiver agreements, or the residential population returning to the past ways of buying larger homes instead of building additions since the economic conditions and interest rates were in their favor. An upward trend began from the low in 1998, reaching 236 in 2007, and meeting the levels seen prior to the late 80's and early 90's. This upward trend in variances coincides with the more than doubling in the number of applications reviewed in the Town of Ramapo, of which 78% were for variances in 2009. The number of variances took a dip in 2010 with only 140 submitted, before steadily rising to 239 submissions in 2018. The number of variance applications submitted to the Planning Department dropped to 306 in 2019 and 201 in 2020, a 39% decrease from 2018. This downward trend did not continue into 2021, where a record number of 348 variance applications were received, only to be beaten by 2 in 2022, with 350 variance submissions. The five-year average for variances was 306 reviews, and the amount reviewed in 2022 was about 41% greater than the average reviewed over the 40-year period. The Town of Ramapo continues to have the highest percentage of variances out of all municipalities, with over one third of all variance applications coming from the Town. In 2022, Ramapo submitted 123 variance applications alone, nearly as much as the next municipality's total (Spring Valley submitted a total of 137 applications).

Until 2011, the number of special permit applications remained relatively constant since 1983. However, the number of these applications dropped 50% from 2010, and again almost 18% from 2011 to 2012. 2012 saw the lowest number of special permit applications, with only 14. However, 2013 saw a 128% increase

to 32 applications. This number remained relatively stable until 2018, which had the highest number of special permit applications, with 58 applications. This is more than double the previous year and represents a 152% increase when compared to the 23 from 2017. The Planning Department reviewed 43 special permit applications in both 2020 and 2021, until the number jumped to 55 in 2022, approximately 77% greater than the 40-year average.

Since a high of 45 in 1987, the number of zone change began to decline, but since this number is relatively small overall, this decrease is insignificant. However, there was an 82% increase from 2007 to 2008 in the number of zone changes, mostly from the rezoning of land to some sort of active adult residential zoning district. In 2009, the number decreased by 75%, from 20 zone change reviews to only five. In 2010 the number of zone change applications increased by 110% to 11 reviews, before stabilizing at seven from 2011 to 2014, 9 in 2015, and then dropping to only 1 in 2016. 2016 appears to be an outlier in the trend of the last few years as there were 8 zone change reviews in 2017, 10 in 2018, and 8 again in 2019. In 2020, there were only 4 zone changes reviewed by staff. As previously noted, this slight dip is likely directly related to the halt in development that occurred due to the COVID pandemic, as the number increased to 12 in 2021 and 17 in 2022. The increase in the past two years can also be attributed to the fact that several municipalities adopted updates to their Comprehensive Plan, which provide new or continued visions for growth.

The "Other" category, which includes, but is not limited to, zoning code amendments, review of performance standards, building permit applications, official map changes, Comprehensive Plan reviews, and interpretations of the zoning ordinance, had remained relatively constant from 1983 through 1992. However, this category increased in 1993 before declining in 1994. Since 1994, except for the drop in 2001, the number of "Other" reviews steadily increased through 2007, perhaps reflecting the zoning ordinance changes that have been made by many municipalities in their attempt to keep their codes updated. In 2008, the "other" category decreased by approximately 19%, reflecting the overall slowdown in the economy. This figure continued to drop in both 2009 and 2010. However, the number increased by 28% in 2011 and had remained relatively the same through 2015. 2016 saw a significant bump of 24.5%, increasing to 66 from the 53 in 2015. There was another large increase 2017, with the "Other" category increasing to 80, a 21% increase. In 2020, there were only 64 applications that fell into the "Other" category. At 97 "Other" applications, 2021 saw a record high. The majority of these were Local Laws. This number then dropped to 58 in 2022, a 40% decrease.