

Q. Should planning departments be receptive to the construction of new self storage facilities? Why?

More and more we are seeing planning and zoning departments denying the construction of storage facilities in developing areas. I think that this is often due to an improper understanding of what most newer facilities look like and how they operate. It is important that you do your homework, and spend some time promoting your facility to the right people. I always suggest that you have a professional architectural rendering of your facility to “show off.” Highlight the low traffic impact, the security, the landscaping, etc. Some jurisdictions require that other materials such as brick or stucco be used on exterior walls, in lieu of metal panels. If this is the case, then your rendering should show compliance with these requirements.

It is important to keep in mind that most planning and zoning decisions have little to do with rules, regulations, ordinances, or common sense. You are dealing with politics and egos and need to proceed accordingly. A wise old developer taught me several years ago that the key to a successful zoning change or planning approval is to be sure that the answer is going to be ‘yes’ before the public meeting or hearing ever begins.

On the other side of that coin, most jurisdictions do have established ordinances and requirements for self-storage facilities, and all commercial construction in defined areas. The applicable building code for your area will also have some additional requirements, as well as A.D.A., and especially “Life Safety Codes.” I always recommend that you not only meet with planning and zoning officials, but with the construction permitting, and fire marshal’s office as well. Your best bet is to define and clarify all of the rules, and plan on abiding by them. You can try to change them but do so at your own peril. Always remember, don’t expect “common sense” to be a determining factor.

Articles have been written about how to successfully deal with planning and zoning boards. If you don’t already, I would highly recommend that you subscribe to the industry publications as well as our Blog - <https://www.makosteel.com/blog>

These magazines are a great resource if you are looking to get into the self-storage industry. Take a look at the following resources and many other helpful articles by experienced industry leaders that cover all aspects of the storage business.

Mini-Storage Messenger, <http://www.ministoragemessenger.com>
Inside Self Storage, <http://www.insideselfstorage.com>
SSA Globe, <https://www.ssamagazine.org/Magazine>