

Explained: The Mechanism for Issuing Zoning Plans

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Zoning plans transform makeshift, informally built neighbourhoods into organised areas—that is, from zones with building violations where construction is not legally permitted into areas where builders can obtain construction permits, allowing for services to be delivered. Zoning plans are the mechanism through which the laws and decrees of real estate development and zoning are implemented, and informal residential areas are eliminated.

Legislative Decree No. 5 for 1982, known as the “Urban Planning Law”, clarified the main concepts that should accompany zoning plans, including: The foundations of urban planning, which are the unified principles that regulate the process of planning residential areas. They include the steps and stages that must be followed when preparing a zoning program, which in turn determines the immediate and future needs of a residential area based on population, population density, the type and number of services and the public construction needed.

From the foundations of urban planning, a general zoning plan should be put in place that clarifies the future vision for the residential community and its expansion by determining the urban boundaries, main road network and all uses of the land within it. While the detailed zoning plan is based on the zoning program, it specifies all the details for the main and secondary road networks, pedestrian pathways, public spaces, and other details for development of lands according to their decreed usage.

The process of developing and approving both general and detailed zoning plans goes through the following phases, according to Legislative Decree No. 5 for 1982: First, the [Ministry of Public Works and Housing](#) sets the foundations for urban plans to meet the population’s needs within the capabilities of the comprehensive regional plans for the country, which takes into account the geographical dimension of the development process in all governorates. Then the administrative unit (governorate council or municipal council) sets a zoning program within the scope of the urban planning foundations.

This means that the [Ministry of Public Works and Housing](#), through the regional planning process, determines that a governorate needs to be expanded by a specific area based on the increase in its population. Then, the administrative unit begins to produce initial conceptions of the general zoning plan, based on the area proposed for development. Decree No. 5 for 1982 did not specify a mandatory timeline for the administrative units; the process may take years.

The completed general zoning plan is submitted to the Ministry of Public Works for approval, or to receive requests for amendments.

After that, the administrative unit prepares the general and detailed draft plans, then announces them together via its town hall, without being bound by a timetable, as Decree No. 5 did not delineate the need for one. People are then notified in person or through newspapers, and they may raise objections to the plans within 30 days from the date of their announcement.

Residents then submit their objections to a regional technical committee formed and headed by the governor and composed of eight members representing various relevant bodies, such as the governorate’s director of technical services, the director of antiquities and the roads official within the Directorate of Technical Services.

While the administrative unit is responsible for developing the general zoning plan in accordance with Decree No. 5, the [General Company for Engineering Studies](#) (GCES), which

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is affiliated with the [Ministry of Public Works and Housing](#), is responsible for developing the detailed plans, according to Law No. 12 for 2019. However, given that the task is greater than the company can handle, it is customary for it to hand over the responsibility to private, licensed engineering offices at a flat rate, on the condition that those offices include engineers from all disciplines.

The Minister of Public Works and Housing must be given a copy of any general or detailed zoning plan within 15 days from the date of its release by the administrative unit. The minister then has 45 days after recording the decree to halt its implementation in cases where it violates the principles of urban planning. If those 45 days pass with no objection from the minister, then the decree becomes final. If there is an objection, it is deliberated by the Council of Ministers.

Consequently, general zoning plans for cities are issued by decree from the Minister of Public Works and Housing, based on a proposal from the Governorate Executive office where the city is located. Again, there is no timeline set for implementation of the plan.

The zoning plans should then be announced again one year after they are first issued, with objections allowed once again. If the plans are not implemented, they are subsequently announced again once every three years, with objections allowed once more. The administrative unit may make amendments to the plans in line with the public interest.

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