

Comparison between Michigan Site Condominiums and Platted Subdivisions (Homeowner Associations)

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COMPARISON BETWEEN MICHIGAN SITE CONDOMINIUMS AND PLATTED SUBDIVISIONS (HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS)

The site condominium is a form of development that closely resembles the more traditional form of land subdivision known as a “subdivision” or a “plat”. Although both types of development have the same basic characteristics, site condominiums are a newer form of development and are not, therefore, as familiar to homebuyers and neighbors as the more customary plats. An important concept related to any type of condominium development is that condominiums are a form of OWNERSHIP, not a type of physical development.

The following summary is intended to compare and contrast the two types of development.

1. **Comparisons between site condominiums and plats.**
2. **Statutory Basis** – Site condominium subdivisions first became possible under the Michigan Condominium Act, which was adopted by the Michigan Legislature in 1978. Plats are created under the Michigan Land Division Act, formerly the Michigan Subdivision Control Act of 1967.
3. **Nature and Extent of Property Ownership** – An individual homesite building in a platted subdivision is called a “lot”. In a site condominium, each separate building site or homesite is referred to by the Condominium Act as a “unit”. Each unit is surrounded by “limited common area”, which is defined as common elements reserved in the master deed for the exclusive use of less than all of the co-owners”. The remaining area in the site condominium is “general common area”, defined as the common elements reserved in the master deed for the use of all of the co-owners. The nature and extent of ownership of a platted lot and a condominium unit, with the associated limited common area, are essentially equivalent from both a practical and legal standpoint.
4. **Compliance with Zoning Ordinance** – Both site condominiums and subdivisions are required to comply with the minimum requirements of the City of Troy Zoning Ordinance for area and bulk, including minimum lot size, lot width, setbacks and building height. Essentially, site condominiums and subdivisions in Troy must “look” similar.

5. **Creation/Legal Document** – A site condominium is established by recording in the records of the county in which the land is located a master deed, bylaws and condominium subdivision plan (“plan”). A platted subdivision is created by the recording of a subdivision plat (“plat”), usually coupled with a declaration of easements, covenants, conditions and restrictions. The plan depicts the condominium units and limited and general common areas, while the plat defines the lots. Both have substantially the same geometrical appearance and characteristics. The master deed and bylaws on the one hand and the declaration on the other have essentially the same functions with respect to the site condominium or platted subdivision, namely, establishment of: (i) building and use restrictions; (ii) rights of homeowners to use common areas; (iii) financial obligations of owners; and, (iv) procedures for operation of the subdivision.
6. **Home Maintenance and Real Estate Taxes** – Each unit and lot, as respectively depicted on a condominium plan or subdivision plat, together with any home located thereon, are required to be individually maintained by the owner. Likewise, separate real estate taxes are assessed on each condominium unit or platted lot and paid individually by each homeowner.
7. **Roads and Utilities** – In most plats, roads are dedicated to the public and maintained by the county road commission or the municipality in which the subdivision is located. Site condominium roads can be either public or private. Sanitary sewer and water supply are public in both. Storm water detention can vary between public and private dedication in both platted and condominium subdivisions.
8. **Common Areas** – In a site condominium, general common areas, such as open space, entrance areas and storm drainage system, are owned by condominium unit owners in common as an incident of ownership of each unit. In a platted subdivision, legal title to common areas is owned by a homeowners association. In both forms of development, a homeowners association administers the common areas for the benefit of all homeowners equally.
9. **Homeowners Association** – It is important in both types of development to incorporate a homeowners association comprised of all lot owners or unit owners, as the case may be, to maintain common areas, enforce restrictions and regulations, collect assessments and otherwise administer the common affairs of the development. Because the Condominium Act confers special enforcement powers upon homeowner associations, which are not characteristic of platted subdivision associations, it is generally thought that the condominium form is superior from the standpoint of enforcing rules and regulations of the private community.
10. **Financial Obligations of Homeowners** – In both types of development, the homeowners association is given the power to assess property owners to pay for maintenance of all common areas and other expenses of administration. Failure to pay give rise to a lien on the defaulting owner’s homesite thus providing financial security that the common areas will be properly maintained for the benefit of all homeowners.

11. **Public Relations** – The same types of public health, safety and welfare regulations apply to both forms of development. Procedurally, the methods of applying for and obtaining plat or condominium plan approval are similar at the municipal level.
12. **Unique Characteristics of Condominium Unit Purchase** – The Condominium Act provides special benefits for site condominium unit purchasers: (i) a 9-day period after signing a purchase agreement within which a purchaser may withdraw without penalty; and (ii) a requirement that all condominium documents, supplemented by an explanatory disclosure statement, be furnished to all purchasers at the time of entry into a purchase agreement. There are no similar benefits to purchasers provided under the Land Division Act.
13. **Local and State Review** – Both development types require City Council approval, following a recommendation by the Planning Commission. Unlike subdivisions, site condominiums do not require the review and approval of the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services. For this reason it can sometimes take a substantially shorter period of time to obtain necessary public approvals of site condominiums than platted subdivisions.
14. **Reason for choosing one form versus another.** Developers and municipalities often prefer the site condominium approach because of better control of market timing. It should be emphasized that the site condominium choice never sacrifices any public protections that would otherwise be present in the case of a platted subdivision under similar circumstances.
15. **Conclusion.** The platted subdivision approach and the newer site condominium technique are two different statutory methods of reaching essentially the same practical and legal result of dividing real estate into separate residential building sites. Both methods are required to meet substantially the same public health, safety and welfare requirements. The site condominium is sometimes chosen over the platted subdivisions because of perceived benefits to purchasers, homeowners, and developers.

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