

Archeological Review in Ann Arbor, MI

Ann Arbor is a town of slightly more than 100,000 people, located in the southeast corner of Michigan. Since 1983, the Ann Arbor Planning Department and the Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan have collaborated in a program of archeological review, recording, and mitigation. This review process encompasses all development within the corporate limits of the city that requires Planning Department permitting, regardless of funding source.

The Review Process

Under the impetus of massive growth at the fringes of the city, The Great Lakes Range of the Museum of Anthropology received funding from the Michigan Council for the Humanities to pursue a program titled *Archaeology in an Urban Setting*.¹ The goals of this initiative were to provide a baseline of archeological information for Ann Arbor and to develop a process for incorporating archeological review into the Natural Features portion of the city's Municipal Land Development Regulations.

Archeological review is initiated when a site plan is submitted to the City Planning Department. As part of the normal site plan approval process, the city planner evaluates the parcel in terms of three archeological 'trip wires':

- Is there a known site in the vicinity?
- Is the parcel in a high probability zone?
- Is the parcel greater than five acres in size?

Criteria one and two are based on predictive maps prepared for the city by the Museum of Anthropology. These maps are overlain on a city base map of sufficient scale to allow easy evaluation by planners, but not so detailed as to compromise the safety of known sites.

If one or more of these criteria are met, the site plan is forwarded to the Museum of Anthropology for a file review. Given the nature of the 'trip wires', any parcel sent for file review should have a high probability of containing archeological sites. The primary function of the file review, therefore, is to ascertain whether there are reasons not to require a field reconnaissance, such as previous archeological investigation or prior site disturbance. In the event that a field reconnaissance is recommended, the Museum also provides guidance as to the appropriate survey requirements for the particular parcel.

Armed with these recommendations, the city can then require the developer to conduct the recommended archeological field reconnaissance as a precondition for site plan approval. The written report of this reconnaissance is forwarded to the Museum for evaluation. In the event that archeological resources are identified, the Museum staff provides advice to the city regarding the potential significance of the finds and, in the event of significant site finds, make recommendations for avoidance or appropriate mitigation.

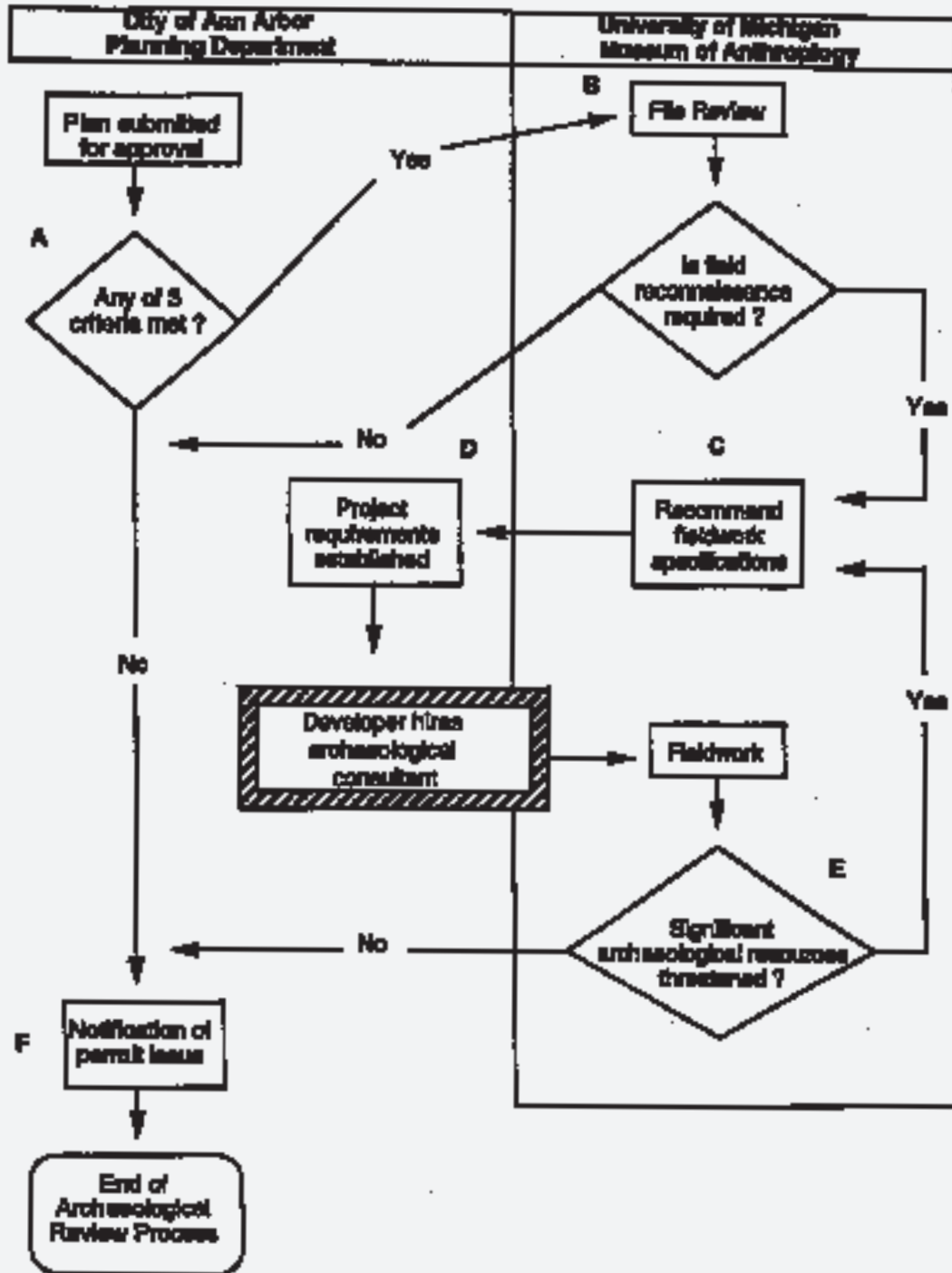
An important feature of the review process is the clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the Planning Department and the Museum. It should also be noted that there are no additional costs to the city for the archeological review, which is performed by the Museum as a community service. The costs associated with field survey and potential mitigation are borne by the developer.

Since the review program has been in place for more than a decade, it is possible to get a good sense of its operation by considering the number of times each of these steps has been invoked. These figures represent the review activity between 1983 and 1996.² During this 14-year period, 52 new sites were recorded within the city, of which 43 (83%) were the result of city mandated archeological survey. These 43 new sites constitute 13% of all recorded sites within the county. It is also interesting to note that sites arising from these surveys tend to be in locations and of types infrequently represented among the previously known sites.³

Of the more than 2,000 plans reviewed by the Ann Arbor Planning Department during the period 1983-1996, 324 involved new ground projects of which 56 (17%) met one or more of the trip wire criteria. Of the 56 plans reviewed by the Museum of Anthropology, field reconnaissance was recommended in 46 instances (82%).

Of the 46 recommendations for field reconnaissance, 34 surveys were conducted. The difference in these values reflects projects that have been abandoned or postponed. These 34 field surveys resulted in the reporting of 43 new prehistoric sites, of which 5 required specific mitigation. This represents an average site recovery of 1.3 sites per survey, and the identification of significant sites that require mitigation in 15% of the surveys conducted.

Ann Arbor File Review Flow Chart



Flow chart of the archaeological review process as implemented in Ann Arbor, Michigan (after Kotila, et al., 1998).

Figure 1

These figures can be compared with figures reflecting rates for federal projects on a national basis.⁴ Nationally, 5%-7% of all projects required fieldwork and 10%-15% of the surveys conducted result in the identification of significant sites requiring mitigation. The Ann Arbor review process required fieldwork in 10%-14% and identified significant sites requiring mitigation in 15% of the surveys conducted. In other words, while the Ann Arbor review process is more inclusive than the Federal mandate (since it includes all development and not solely projects receiving federal funding) and entails fewer steps, it produces very similar results in terms of the identification of significant prehistoric sites.

In looking back over our experiences with archeological review in Ann Arbor, the acceptance and continued success of the program can be related directly to the long-term stability of the participants and to its predictability. City-based programs tend to promote stability among the players in the review process. Developers, planners, and archeologists all find themselves in something akin to a prisoner's dilemma, in that everyone knows they will make repeated passes through the process. As such, everyone has a long-term interest in being reasonable and in making the process work. This was brought home to me early in the program when I asked a planner if he was worried that a contractor might not comply with the requirements. I was told that the contractor would keep his agreement because he knows he will be back in the Planning Office next year with another project.

For the city, the review process enables the Planning Department to fulfill its mandate under the Municipal Land Development Regulations at a minimum cost in time and dollars. The straightforward evaluation process and the clear delineation of responsibilities have enabled the review to become a routine step in the site plan process.

For the Museum, the archeological review process ensures that important archeological information is salvaged in advance of development. It also reflects the University's recognition that it has a responsibility to the community in which we live.

For developers, the predictability of the process has been crucial. After strong initial opposition, most developers now view archeological review as just another regular step in the site plan process. The cost and time parameters have become predictable as developers have passed repeatedly through the process. We even have begun to see the phenomenon of advanced clearance, where developers seek assessment, and even mitigation, prior to the submission of a site plan.

A key element in maintaining the predictability of the system has been the Museum's willingness to act as a surveyor of last resort. This is not a role we envisioned for the Museum, nor did we anticipate its importance in maintaining the confidence of local developers in the process. When the city notifies a developer that a field reconnaissance is required, the developer is supplied with the list of State approved archeological contractors. Yet, the small size and short timelines for many of these surveys sometimes makes it difficult to find a contractor willing to do the work. This has been a serious concern voiced by the developers from the beginning. We have only been able to allay this fear by agreeing to do work in-house as a last resort. When the Museum does undertake field reconnaissance, it is done on a cost basis by MA level graduate students from the archeology program so as to put as much separation as possible between the survey and the evaluation roles of the Museum.

The program of archeological review developed for Ann Arbor does provide a model that can be adapted to other municipalities. Obviously, the existence of a large research museum in Ann Arbor is an important element, but many municipalities have access to a pool of trained archeologists attached to universities, museums, and, increasingly, to governmental agencies. It is, rather, the predictability of the review process and clear delineation of responsibilities that have been critical. These are the factors that have enabled the program to work and to gain broad community acceptance.

Notes

- ¹ J. O'Shea, M. Shott, and J Krakker, "Archaeology in an Urban Setting: A Pilot Program for Ann Arbor, Michigan," Ann Arbor: Planning Department, 1984.
- ² P. Kotila, W. Parkinson, and J. O'Shea, "Archaeological Review in Ann Arbor, Michigan: Fourteen Years of Cooperation," *The Michigan Archaeologist*, 1998.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ G. Shaffer, "Using National and State Databases to Demonstrate Value and Efficiency of Federal Archaeology Programs in the United States," *Society for American Archaeology Bulletin*, 14(4): 32-5, 1996.

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