



The Planning Process in the Netherlands

Urban planning in The Netherlands is a complex process, which can only be summarized here in broad lines.

The urban planning process has its basis in the Law on Spatial Planning, in Dutch de Wet op de Ruimtelijke Ordening (WRO) The Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment is politically responsible.

Urban policy is prepared by the Ministry and put down in structural outlines for the country, structural plans on the national level and White Papers. In order to put the policy into practice, the Government may take a "Concrete Decision", describing which developments are to be undertaken.

Based on the governmental Concrete Decision, the Provincial government (the Netherlands has 12 provinces) prepares the provincial policy, based on investigations of desired and possible developments. The results are put down in regional or provincial plans, Apart from a planning programme, it may prescribe the desired platform for further development and reflection, the desired integration of interests, and the framework for testing and execution of the policy goals.

The emphasis in the urban planning process is with the municipalities. Based on the concrete decisions and the provincial plans the City Council prepares the structural plan. It describes the developments in broad lines and it is a framework of how to transform the national and provincial policy into concrete plans. It describes the backgrounds of the desired developments and the results of investigations, research and consultations of groups of interest.

The nucleus of the planning process is the Zoning Plan. It is the legal "translation" of all the interests in the spatial planning into a balanced and co-ordinated form. The zoning plan contains the goals and aims, maps, the prescription of the use of the building (dwellings, retail, cultural, industrial etc.) building construction (height, depth, width, shape of the roof, exact location, and it may even prescribe the architectural appearance, although not in detail. Furthermore the zoning plan prescribes the digging and piping works, and the boundaries of use, of urban and of architectural design.

After approval of the zoning plan, the urban design is made by the municipal services or on behalf of the municipality by urban planning offices. The urban plan describes amongst other things in detail the infrastructure and the preconditions for the building design. It may prescribe the energy performance, sustainability aspects, etc. It is the detailed concretisation of the municipal policy. As the provincial plans, the structural plans and the zoning plans have been discussed already with the interest groups, the utilities have been involved already. They are not just confronted with the urban energy policy, without being consulted and without being a discussion partner.

This is also prescribed in the approval procedure of the zoning plan, which is summarised in the second figure.

In the preparation process, the municipality co-ordinates the plans with the province and the water management authorities. The Draft Zoning plan is publicly announced and open for inspection to everybody for six weeks. A correction may follow if eligible objections have been brought in. The draft-zoning plan is fixed by the City Council, having seen the objections. Then it



is goes into the procedure of approval by the provincial government. During this procedure objections may be put in again, including previously rejected ones, sometimes resulting in a requirement for the municipality to adapt the plan. Finally, rejected objections can be submitted to "the Crown" (Council of State). No new objections can be submitted. The Council of State controls if the objections have been considered in the right legal procedure. If not, the zoning plan has to be adapted.

