

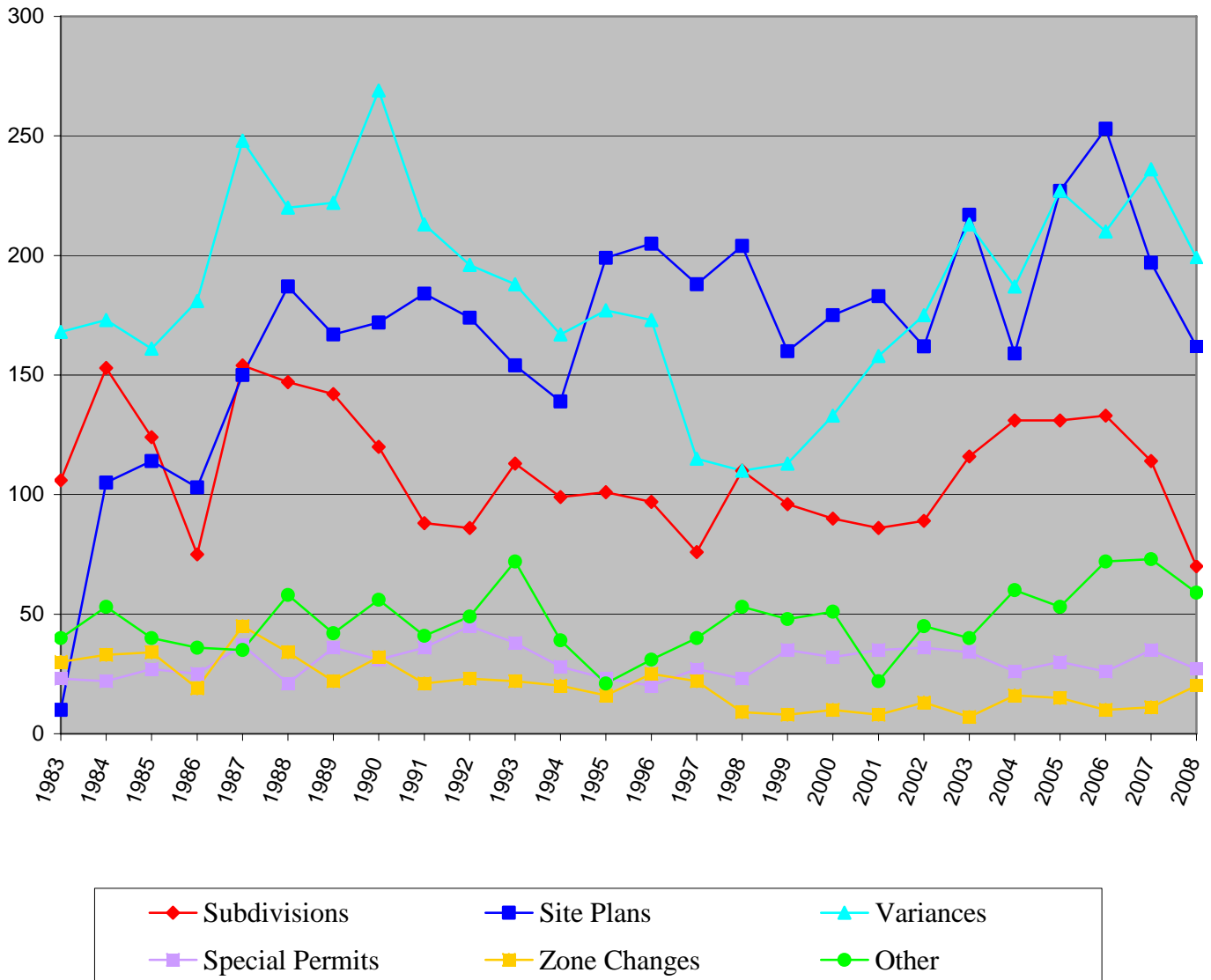
Line Graph by Year

The line graph in Figure #2 illustrates the number of each type of application reviewed by the planning department in the last twenty-six years. The major categories of reviews include subdivisions, site plans, variances, zone changes, special permits, and other (such as zoning code amendments). Subdivisions had a steady decline since 1987 through 1992, reflecting the economic downturn during that period and the decrease in prime lands to develop. From 1993 through 2002, the number of subdivisions reviewed remained fairly constant, then increased in numbers from 2002 to 2006. The increase from 2002 - 2006 may be attributed to the lower interest rates and the improvement in the economy, as well as the numerous small subdivisions (two-lots) in which a single-family parcel is subdivided to help offset the high taxes while taking advantage of the increased land value. Beginning in 2007 and continuing to a greater extent in 2008, both the real estate market and the economy were on a downward trend, reflective in the great decrease in the number of subdivisions reviewed. Developers are waiting for the economy and real estate market to improve before constructing new buildings and expending their investment. This downward trend in subdivisions may continue through 2009 or until the real estate market rebounds.

Site plan applications rose steadily from 1983 to 1998, and then began a downward trend from 1998 through 1994, paralleling the downward subdivision trend. The earlier increase in site plans to 1988 reflects the continual growth in the County. However, as mentioned above, the late eighties and early nineties witnessed an economic recession with interest rates climbing. Development slowed down during this period reflecting the tentativeness of the market. In 1995 the number of site plan applications increased to over 200, and then continued to fluctuate between 150 and 200 applications per year. Site plan reviews in 2003 rose 34% from those reviewed in 2002 (162), dropped again to 159 for 2004, and then started to climb to a record high in 2006 of 253 applications. The consistently lower interest rates, an increase in the number of senior housing facilities proposed, and the selling off of the State surplus lands (Letchworth Village and Rockland Psychiatric Center) could account for this jump in site plan reviews. In addition, the need for senior housing played a major role in the number of site plans reviewed. However, as with the subdivision trend, site plan applications began to decline in 2007 and continued in 2008, reflecting the downturn in the real estate market. Our Department is aware of many projects that have received either site plan or subdivision approval, but have since come to a halt in the development process, because of the decline in the economy. This downward trend may continue until the real estate market and economy recover.

Variances on the other hand, were on the rise from 1985 to 1990 and experienced an all time high of almost 275 applications in 1990. The rising interest rates and increased housing prices of the late 1980's and the scarcity of prime vacant land available for new development explains much of this fluctuation. Residential building additions requiring variances became more commonplace as new development responsible for most site plans and subdivisions declined. However, a drastic change was seen in 1997 when these numbers plummeted to only 168. Perhaps this was a reflection of more reviews meeting the criteria for the waiver agreements, or the residential population returning to the past ways of buying larger homes instead of building additions since the economic conditions and interest rates were in their favor. Variances have continuously increased since 1998 reaching levels seen prior to the 1997 drop, fluctuating only slightly in 2004. The downward economic trend for 2008 was also reflected in the reduction in the number of variances. The Town of Ramapo continued to have a high percentage of the variances countywide with 37% of the total, and 65% for the town itself.

Figure 2. Number of GML Applications by Type and Year Reviewed by the Rockland County Planning Department 1983-2008



Prepared by the Rockland County Planning Department - January 2008

The number of special permits and zone change applications has remained fairly constant since 1983. There has been a slight decline in zone change applications since 1983, but since this number is relatively small overall, the decrease is insignificant. However, there was an 82% increase from 2007 to 2008 in the number of zone changes; mostly from the rezoning of land to some sort of active adult residential zoning district. This category was also the only type of land use action that saw an increase in the number reviewed from 2007. The “other category”, which includes zoning code amendments, review of performance standards, review of building permits, official map changes, and interpretations to the zoning ordinance, has been fairly constant from 1983 through 1992. However, this category increased in 1993 before declining in 1994. Since 1994, except for the drop in 2001, the number of “other” reviews has been steadily increasing, perhaps reflecting the zoning ordinance changes that have been made by many municipalities in attempt to keep their codes updated. The highest number of “other” applications was attained in 2007 with 73 reviews. This figure dropped slightly in 2008, decreasing by approximately 20%.