

Zoning Rewrite Fact Sheet

February 2017

How will the County's Development Standards Change?

About the Zoning Rewrite

Prince George's County's zoning code is 50 years old, over 1,000 pages long, and filled with obsolete and inconsistent provisions. The County needs a completely new zoning code to attract jobs, facilitate economic development, and protect the quality of life in County neighborhoods. Under the direction of the County Council, the Planning Department is drafting a new, 21st century code. Our competitors in the region have already reformed their codes, and we want ours to be the very best. This is one of a series of fact sheets discussing major issues the Council must consider to create a better code.

What This Fact Sheet Covers

This fact sheet outlines the 15 proposed elements that are intended to increase the design quality of new development in the County. These include how new development should be compatible with existing neighborhoods, building form and design standards, parking and connectivity requirements, green building standards, and open space requirements.

Protections For Existing Neighborhoods

Neighborhood compatibility standards are designed to protect the character of existing single-family detached neighborhoods and provide for a smoother transition between neighborhoods and new multifamily, nonresidential, and mixed-use development that may be built next door. These standards help to establish and maintain vibrant pedestrian-oriented communities where differing uses can operate near one another, like a shopping center next to a residential neighborhood. New developments would have to comply with standards regulating building heights and setbacks, the location of trash collection and parking and loading areas, and hours of operation among others. These standards are intended to help new development be "better neighbors" to single-family communities.

Required Form and Design Standards

Form and design standards help shape the public realm. Mandatory form and design standards for new nonresidential, mixed-use, industrial, and multifamily development will help to improve the County's overall level of design quality, as well as provide a predictable expectation of how new development would impact the surrounding community. Proposed design elements to be regulated include the placement of buildings on a lot, location of off-street parking areas, the shape and massing of buildings, and the percentage of a building that should contain windows and doors.

Modernized Parking Requirements

Today, developed sites generally have more parking than needed even in the worst-case scenario – shopping on Black Friday. This excess parking is costly to build and maintain. In terms of impacts on the environment, it creates unnecessary impervious surfaces that could be reconfigured and used for improved stormwater management or creative public spaces. Proposed parking standards vary by density, so that more urban areas with greater access to transit would require less

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parking. Additional reductions in total parking would also be achieved by expanding the use of shared parking and allowing for more off-site parking depending on the location and pedestrian and transit access of the proposed use.

Greater Connectivity and Mobility

The new Zoning Ordinance encourages a multimodal approach to moving both vehicles and people throughout our communities – pedestrians, bicycles, transit, and cars all treated equally. To help accomplish this goal, a “street connectivity index” has been created to determine how connected a single-family residential development should be by calculating the number of blocks and intersections. The street connectivity index helps to determine how many paths a person can take to get to any destination in a development. The result will help improve circulation throughout a community by improving cross-access, creating a more defined street grid, and reducing congestion at access points to main roadways.

Updated Landscape Manual

The County's Landscape Manual includes a number of new and updated landscaping requirements that better address the different development characters within Prince George's County: urban, suburban, and rural.

Improved Cyclist and Pedestrian Infrastructure

There are several recommendations meant to help improve the safety and mobility of pedestrians and cyclists throughout the County. These include required bike parking facilities at schools, multifamily housing, and nonresidential properties; mandated construction of sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths in new developments; new safe pedestrian accessways through large parking areas; and design standards that will help create more attractive and easier to navigate streetscapes.

Green Building Standards and Incentives

Modern zoning ordinances address the increasing desire for sustainability and environmental protection. The new green building standards will result in development that promotes healthy lifestyles, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and protects our natural resources. Implemented through a scoring system, applicants would have to select from a list of green practices to satisfy the minimum point requirement to get an approval or permit. Also proposed are green building incentives that could yield additional density, height, lot coverage, or reduced (or increased) parking spaces in exchange for including additional sustainable elements.

Usable Green Space

While it may be hard to tell, your local shopping center is full of green space. It just usually happens to be scattered throughout the development site. New “open space set-aside” standards would work to reconfigure those green pieces and create larger, more functional publicly-accessible green spaces. Open space set-aside standards establish minimum private open space requirements for new residential, nonresidential, and mixed-use development. These requirements can be met by providing natural areas, paths, trails, gardens, squares, plazas, stormwater management facilities designed as amenities, or vegetated walls. These regulations are in addition to the mandatory dedication of land to the Department of Parks and Recreation at the time of subdivision.

Other Development Standards

New standards have also been proposed to strengthen noise regulation and ensure compatibility between new development and existing farms. There are also updated standards for signage, fences and walls, and exterior lighting to accommodate new and emerging technologies.