



Evaluation and Recommendations Report

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Evaluation and Recommendations Report?

The Evaluation and Recommendations Report is a comprehensive analysis of the County's current Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations that was produced by Clarion Associates for the Prince George's County Planning Department. The report contains Clarion's review of the problems with today's regulations; as identified by the residents, business and property owners, developers, elected officials, and other interested Prince Georgians; proposes comprehensive recommendations for revising the Prince George's County Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations; and contains a proposed annotated outline for how the new Zoning Ordinance should be rewritten. The Evaluation and Recommendations Report provides a catalyst for continued conversation with the community to help the County decide how to proceed in the preparation of new zoning and subdivision regulations.

It should be emphasized that the Evaluation and Recommendations Report contains consultant recommendations drawing on best practices that are in-place and effective for many jurisdictions across the country facing similar issues as Prince George's County, but none of these recommendations have been endorsed by Planning Department staff, the Prince George's County Planning Board, or the Prince George's County Council, and not a single word of the new Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations has yet been written.

What will be the drafting order of the revised Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations?

In the Evaluation and Recommendations Report, Clarion has proposed the following Zoning Ordinance Structure:

- Division 27-1 General Provisions
- Division 27-2 Administration
- Division 27-3 Zones and Zone Regulations
- Division 27-4 Use Regulations
- Division 27-5 Development Standards
- Division 27-6 Nonconformities
- Division 27-7 Enforcement
- Division 27-8 Definitions

Once the direction to proceed has been provided, staff will work with the Clarion team to determine how best to approach the drafting order of new zoning and subdivision regulations. A common approach is to look on a Zoning Ordinance update in three main parts: zones, development regulations, and administration. This approach is likely to be adopted in this effort but no final decision has been reached.

Does the Evaluation and Recommendations report propose any changes to community input in the development review process?

Yes. The Evaluation and Recommendations Report seeks to increase community input for major projects. Clarion Associates recommends establishing a mandatory pre-application neighborhood meeting for projects that would be subject to either a minor or a major site plan. This type of meeting is envisioned by the Clarion team to be an interactive and productive back-and-forth conversation that allows community input to influence the design of the proposed development before final architecture and engineering drawings are prepared. This leads to greater understanding, reduces development costs, and increases community trust and sense of certainty—what we see will be what we get. Increasingly, across the country, mandatory neighborhood meetings are held to reduce the time-delay associated with the development review process.

Smaller projects are proposed as subject to a by-right process—if the zoning allows the use and the developer conforms to the development regulations established by the Zoning Ordinance, these projects should, in Clarion’s recommendations, be permitted to proceed to the building permits stage. At this time, the threshold between minor and major site plan projects has not been established—this should be determined through continued outreach with the residents, elected officials, and other stakeholders within the County. Community input is important to determine this threshold and to ensure development regulations for future development are appropriate.

How does the Mandatory Neighborhood Meeting work with multi-phase projects?

At this time, we have not developed guidelines for the Mandatory Neighborhood Meeting, but we would love to hear your suggestions! We encourage you to submit your ideas to: zoningpgc@ppd.mncppc.org.

Have the new Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations been drafted?

The new Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations have not been drafted.

I don’t have time to read the entire Evaluation and Recommendations Report; what are the most important topics I should know?

We strongly encourage everyone to read the entire Evaluation and Recommendations Report in order to gain the best understanding of the suggestions that Clarion has proposed. With that said we recognize that the document is long and may seem very daunting. Here is a list of eight things you should know about the Report.

- 1. Zone structure is proposed to be significantly reorganized.** Through consolidation, deletion, or addition, our current zoning structure is reduced from 73 zones (33 Euclidean, 26 floating, 14 overlay) to 43 zones (25 Euclidean, 7 planned development, 11 overlay). In many instances, a zone consolidation or deletion is recommended because zone structures are duplicated or are no longer in use. In some instances, planned development zones are added to implement Plan Prince George’s 2035 and County priorities.

The proposed changes to the zone structure will not affect the current use of your property.

If these proposals are accepted by the community, and are later approved by the County Council, then all buildings and uses in place at the time the new regulations take effect are expected to be grandfathered under the new regulations. However, significant changes to existing structures may be subject to the new regulations.

To view all of the proposed changes to the zone structure, please read the table “Current and Proposed Line-Up of Zones” on page VI-19 in the Evaluation and Recommendations Report.

2. Changes in authority of the District Council, Planning Board, Zoning Hearing Examiner, and Board of Zoning Appeals. Clarion has proposed significant shifts in decision making and appellate authority in the Evaluation and Recommendations Report. The intent of these changes are to encourage economic development and to reduce the amount of uncertainty that exists in the development review process. The proposed changes recommend that an increased number of decisions happen at the administrative level in accordance with national and state best practices.

To view all of the proposed changes in authority for decision making in the development review process please read “Table 1: Current Development Review Procedures, Prince George’s County” on page II-7 and “Table 2: Suggested Development Review Procedures, Prince George’s County” on page II-12 in the Evaluation and Recommendations Report.

3. Reorganization and consolidation of the use classifications and addition of accessory and temporary uses. Under current practice, if a use is not listed in the Zoning Ordinance, it is not permitted. The result is a Zoning Ordinance that lists thousands of uses—many with overlapping definitions, some obsolete and very few that reflect 21st century land development practices. The Evaluation and Recommendations Report proposes that the County move away from this practice, and define uses in broader terms.

4. Neighborhood compatibility standards. Neighborhood compatibility standards are proposed to protect the character of single-family communities from potential adverse impacts of adjacent multifamily residential, mixed-use, or nonresidential development. Neighborhood compatibility standards could address site layout, building façade, building dimension, site design, parking and driveway access, loading and refuse storage areas, exterior lighting, signage, open space, and operations.

5. Mandatory neighborhood meetings required prior to submittal of development applications. Mandatory neighborhood meetings are not a formal part of Prince George’s County’s development review process. However, they are being used by an increasing number of local governments to provide an opportunity for the developer to get together on a more informal basis with neighbors/land owners surrounding a proposed development. The expectation is that during these meetings an applicant would (1) educate the neighbors about the project, (2) hear neighbor concerns, and (3) hopefully resolve these concerns in an informal setting, before the public hearing process begins.

Clarion proposes that mandatory neighborhood meetings be held for the following types of applications: zoning map amendments, planned developments—with basic plans, special exceptions with over 50 residential units and/or 25,000 square feet of nonresidential development, preliminary plans for major subdivisions, and major site plans.

6. Creation of formal pre-application meetings and completeness checks.

Pre-application conferences are meetings between potential applicants and staff to discuss application requirements, prior to submission. With this recommendation, all necessary aspects of an application would need to be completed prior to acceptance for review. These meetings allow for potential applicants to receive staff input prior to submittal of an application and help to address issues and procedural requirements before significant time and expense are invested in preparing or processing applications. While staff currently performs informal pre-application conferences, the current Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations do not include any formal requirements for this form of meeting.

7. Combining Conceptual and Detailed Site Plans to consolidate site plan review. Site plans are key to the development review process. In Prince George's County, there are two types of site plans: Conceptual Site Plans and Detailed Site Plans. Conceptual Site Plans (CSPs) focus on the general site development concepts, whereas Detailed Site Plans (DSPs) show how the plan for the proposed development complies with all site development standards and other relevant regulations. Over time, Conceptual Site Plans began to incorporate more specific and detailed information, and are no longer truly different from Detailed Site Plans. Clarion Associates has proposed a consolidation of the Conceptual and Detailed Site Plans and recommend that the new zoning ordinance include a two-tier approach to site plan review.

Under this approach, the site plan review would be distinguished by Minor Site Plans and Major Site Plans. While size thresholds to distinguish these two types of site plans have not been developed, it is proposed that Minor Site Plans would be reviewed by the Planning Director and appeals made to the Planning Board, then the Circuit Court. Major Site Plans would be reviewed and decided by the Planning Board; appeals would be made to the District Council, and then to the Circuit Court.

8. Creation of an Application Procedures Manual. The current Zoning Ordinance contains hundreds of pages of application procedures and submittal requirements. Clarion Associates recommends removing this information from the Zoning Ordinance and instead placing it into an Applications Procedures Manual that the Planning Director is authorized to prepare and amend as deemed necessary. Moving procedures and application submittal requirements into a separate Procedures Manual not only makes the Zoning Ordinance easier to read, it allows administrative procedures, like application content requirements, information about application fees, schedules for the processing of applications, and staff review processes to be updated relatively easily without formally amending the Zoning Ordinance or Subdivision Regulations.