Housing Zoning Code Tune-up

Information Packet - Nov. 2026

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City of Milwaukee | DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT

What is the Housing Zoning Code Tune-Up?

The Housing Zoning Code Tune-Up is putting Milwaukee's Housing Element into action. This "tune-up" builds on our two years of collaborative community engagement to adopt the Housing Element. The Housing Element is the chapter of our Comprehensive Plan that sets a shared vision for how Milwaukee can support the housing needs of residents. The Housing Element laid the blueprint; this zoning tune-up is how we begin turning that blueprint into rules that make sense for our neighborhoods.

What is Zoning?

Zoning is the set of local rules that guide how land can be used and how buildings can be designed. Every property in Milwaukee is a part of a zoning district. These districts determine what kinds of homes or businesses can be built, how large buildings can be, and where they can sit on a lot.

This update won't change the zoning map. Instead, it will focus on making sure the rules themselves reflect how Milwaukee neighborhoods function today, and how they can continue to thrive in the future.

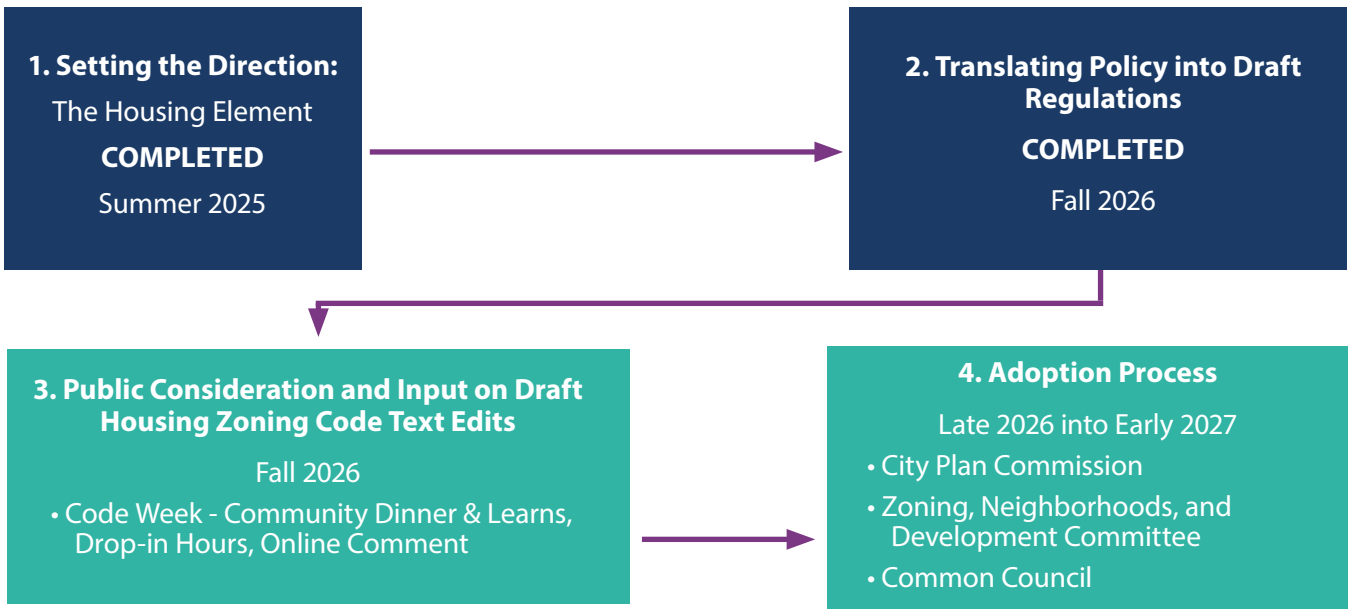
What are the Goals?

The Tune-Up has two main goals: increase housing choices in more neighborhoods and reduce unnecessary barriers to housing development.

That could mean clearer rules for homes like duplexes, townhouses, small multi-family buildings, and other neighborhood-scale housing types. It also means looking at standards for lots, building height, design, and how new housing can fit with existing homes.

What Does the Process Look Like?

The City is currently working on the implementation phase of the Housing Element, including this Zoning Code Tune-Up. This fall, we encourage public input on the Draft Housing Zoning Code text edits. We invite the public to attend a community meeting, review materials online, and provide comment. Once we are ready, these Zoning Code updates will begin the formal review and adoption process before both the City Plan Commission and Common Council. To learn more and follow the process, visit engage.milwaukee.gov/housing-zoning-code-tune-up.



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Zoning 101: Regulating Land Use

What is Zoning?

Zoning is the set of rules that tell you what you can or cannot do with land in the city of Milwaukee. It includes both a written document of rules and a map that shows what zone each piece of land is part of.

By the early 1900s, the boundaries of the City of Milwaukee were approximately Capitol Drive to Oklahoma Avenue and Sherman Boulevard to Lake Michigan. Much of this area had been developed without any rules. Officials decided that the city needed rules to better plan for the city's future development. In 1920, Milwaukee adopted its first Zoning Code.

Zoning in Milwaukee

- **1920** – The City of Milwaukee created its first Zoning Code and Zoning Map (see image)
- **1951** – A new Zoning Code with more regulations
- **1960s** – Newly annexed areas zoned for low densities
- **1985** – Updates made to the 1951 Zoning Code
- **2002** – A new Zoning Code & Zoning Map was adopted
- **2002-2022** – The Zoning Code text has been updated through ongoing technical updates. Periodically, more in-depth updates have been made based on Comprehensive Plan recommendations.
- **2025** – After two years of engagement, the Housing Element of Milwaukee's citywide comprehensive plan was adopted. This set the direction for housing-related updates to the Zoning Code.

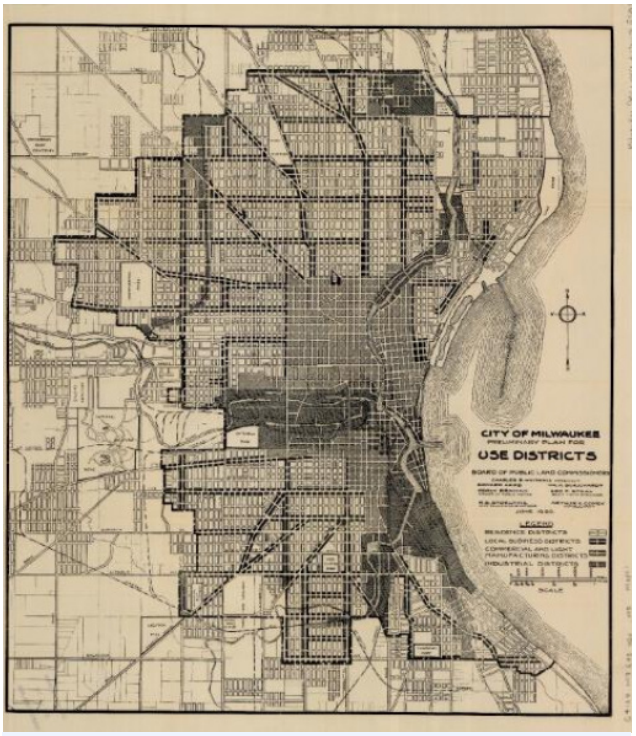


Image: City of Milwaukee's first Zoning Map

In the past, zoning has been used to exclude more affordable housing types and the people who live in them from certain neighborhoods.

Zoning regulations attempt to answer *a few big questions* about development in the city:

1. ***What*** type of activity can happen on a property? (Land Use)
2. ***Where*** in the City can those activities happen? (Zoning Districts)
3. ***How much*** space can that activity take up? (Bulk Standards)

Zoning 101: Regulating Land Use cont'd

Land Use: What types of activities can happen on a property?

Land use describes how a property is used.

- **Residential Uses:** Places to live such as houses, apartments, etc.
- **Commercial Uses:** Places to work and shop such as stores, offices and restaurants etc.
- **Industrial Uses:** Places to work and produce or store goods, like factories and warehouses
- **Educational & Community-serving Uses:** Places to learn or gather in the community such as schools, libraries, places of worship, etc.
- **Entertainment and Recreation Uses:** Places to play and enjoy time with others such as parks, festival grounds, sports centers, and theaters.
- **Mixed-Uses:** Places to do a combination of these things like mixed-use apartments with commercial on the ground floor.





Zoning Districts: Where can those activities happen?

A **Zoning District** is an area on the Zoning Map where certain land uses and building types are allowed. Not every land use is allowed everywhere.

The **Zoning Map** shows which zoning rules apply to each property.

Zoning districts:

- Group land based on similar land uses and building forms
- Have associated written rules that guide land uses and sizes/shape of buildings

Zoning districts organize Land Use to:

- **Manage the burden on shared resources,** like transportation and public utilities.
- **Reduce conflicts** between different types of uses. For example, heavy industry may impact the health and safety of nearby residents.
- **Give residents and businesses clarity** of how properties can be used now and in the future.

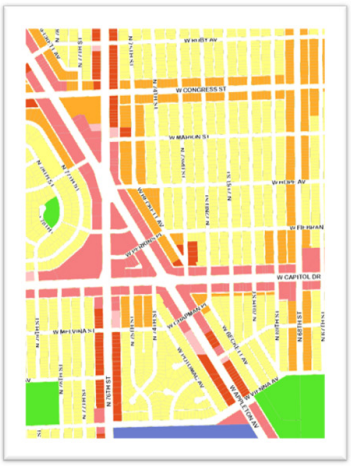
The Housing Zoning Code Tune-Up is only *tuning up* the written rules for the zoning districts. The Zoning Map is NOT changing.

Zoning 101: Regulating Land Use cont'd

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ZONING MAP



Zoning 295-501

SUBCHAPTER 5 RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

295-501. Purposes. The regulations of this subchapter are intended to promote, preserve and protect residential neighborhoods. These regulations allow for some non-residential uses, but not to such an extent as to detract from the overall image and character of the residential neighborhood. The development standards work together to promote desirable residential areas by addressing aesthetically pleasing environments, safety, privacy and recreational opportunities. These standards preserve the character of neighborhoods by providing 6 different zones with different densities and development standards. The site development standards allow for flexibility of development while maintaining compatibility within the city's various neighborhoods. In addition, the regulations provide certainty to property owners, developers and neighbors about the limits of what is allowed in a residentially-zoned area. These regulations are also intended to reinforce desired development patterns in existing neighborhoods while accommodating the need for future growth. The purposes of the individual residential districts are as follows:

1. SINGLE-F AMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS. a. RS1-RS5 Districts. The purpose of the RS1-RS5 districts is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended for single-family dwellings and having a character slightly more suburban than the RS6 district. These districts require larger lots, larger setbacks and a smaller lot coverage than the RS6 district. The neighborhoods found in these districts feature a regular platting pattern and a more uniform pattern of development than those of the RS6 district. These neighborhoods were platted and developed, in large part, in the mid- to late-1900s, with some areas recently developed.

b. RS6 District. The purpose of the RS6 single-family district is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended primarily for single-family dwellings with traditional urban character. This district allows smaller lots, smaller setbacks and a higher lot coverage than the other single-family districts. The neighborhoods found in this district were platted and developed, in large part, in the late 1800's and early 1900's. This district also allows traditional corner commercial establishments commonly found in more urban neighborhoods.

2. TWO-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS. a. RT1-RT2 Districts. The purpose of the RT1-RT2 districts is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended primarily for one- and 2-family dwellings. Properties in these districts typically have larger setbacks and smaller lot coverage than those found in the RT3 or RT4 districts. Commercial uses are not allowed in these districts. The neighborhoods found in RT1 and RT2 districts feature a regular platting standard and a more uniform pattern of development than those of the RT3 district. These neighborhoods were platted and developed, in large part, in the mid- to late-1900s, with some areas recently developed.

b. RT3 District. The purpose of the RT3 district is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended primarily for two-family dwellings with a traditional urban character. This district, much like the RT4 district, allows smaller lots, smaller setbacks and a higher lot coverage than the RT1 and RT2 districts. However, it does not allow the establishment of new, multi-family buildings. The neighborhoods in this district were platted and developed, in large part, in the early 1900s and tend to be more uniform than those of the RT4 district.

c. RT4 District. The purpose of the RT4 district is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended primarily for 2-family dwellings while also permitting a mixture of single-family dwellings and small multi-family dwellings of 3 or 4 units. This district, much like the RT3 district, allows smaller lots, smaller setbacks and a higher lot coverage than the RT1 and RT2 districts. The neighborhoods found in this district were platted and developed, in large part, in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This district also allows traditional corner commercial establishments commonly found in urban neighborhoods.

3. MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS. a. RM1-RM2 Districts. The purpose of the RM1-RM2 districts is to promote, preserve and protect neighborhoods intended primarily for low- to medium-density multi-family uses with a more suburban character. These districts require larger lots, larger setbacks and a smaller lot coverage than the RM3 district. The neighborhoods found in these districts feature a regular platting pattern and a more uniform pattern of development than those of the RM3 district. These neighborhoods were platted and developed, in large part, in the mid- to late-1900s, with some areas recently developed.

ZONING TEXT

Bulk Standards: How much space can that activity take up?

Each zoning district has a unique set of rules that guide the shape of a development on a property. **Bulk standards** are rules that help determine the size and shape of buildings and the land they sit on.

This creates buildings of different size, shape, and placement. Examples are included below.

Size and Shape

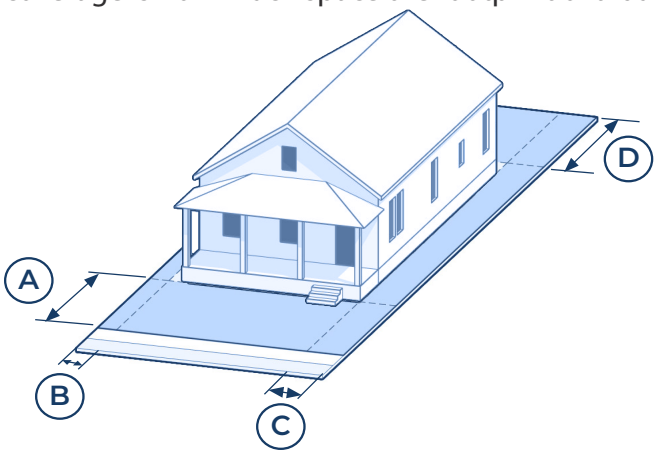
The illustration shows a 5-story mixed-use building. The Zoning Code limits this building's shape because it cannot be taller than 5 stories.



Zoning 101: Regulating Land Use cont'd

Placement

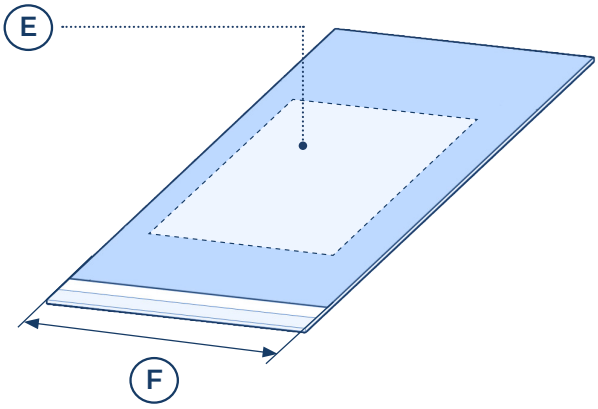
The illustration below shows how a single-family home is limited in its placement on a property by side setbacks, a front setback, and a rear setback. Placement of a home on lower-density residential properties is also limited by maximum lot coverage. Lot coverage is how much space the footprint of a building takes up on a property.



A: Front Setback

B & C: Side Setbacks

D: Rear Setback



E : Building Footprint

F: Lot Width

More details on bulk standards are available under the Density & Bulk Standards section and under the Lot Standards section.

Why guide building size, shape, and placement?

Zoning standards help to manage shared resources, including:

- Natural light
- Fresh air flow
- Storm runoff
- Open space / sense of space
- Room for public services (e.g., utilities and access)

Zoning standards also help balance relationships between surrounding buildings:

- Preserve neighborhood consistency
- Protect privacy
- Reduce shadows and enhance public safety

New Home Types

What is allowed today?

The Zoning Code currently defines the following housing types: Single-family dwelling, Attached single-family dwelling, Two-family dwelling, Multi-family dwelling, and Accessory Dwelling Unit.

Note: A dwelling is one housing unit.

The Zoning Code uses charts called "Land Use Tables". These charts show what kinds of homes and uses are allowed in each Zoning District.

In Milwaukee's Zoning Code, Subchapters 5 through 9 have one or more land use tables. The land use tables include the same uses in each subchapter, but the zoning districts at the top change from Subchapter to Subchapter, corresponding to the districts each subchapter regulates.

Right now, the land use tables list single-family homes (single-family dwelling) and duplexes (two-family dwelling). The next category is multi-family housing (multi-family dwelling). This means any building with more than two housing units is called a multi-family dwelling in the Zoning Code.

So, there is a need for housing types like three-unit homes (triplexes) and four-unit homes (quadplexes) to be classified. A triplex is not the same as a five-story apartment building on a busy street, or a tall residential tower downtown. The code should treat these types of housing differently. Smaller building types can often fit well within neighborhood settings.

Here is a snapshot of the current residential section of the land use table in Subchapter 5, the Residential Subchapter. See how housing types like a three-family dwelling (triplex) are missing?

Table 295-503-1 Residential Districts									
Y= Permitted L = Limited Use S= Special Use N- Prohibited	RS1-5	RS6	RT1-2	RT3	RT4-RT5	RM1-RM2	RM3-RM7	RO1	RO2
Single-family dwelling	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Two-family dwelling	L	L	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Multi-family dwelling	N	N	L	L	L	Y	Y	Y	Y
Permanent Supportive Housing	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

How to Read This Table

Land uses are listed in the left-hand column. Uses are grouped under gray category headings, such as Residential Uses.

To find out whether a use is allowed in a zoning district:

1. Find the land use you are looking for in the left-hand column.
2. Find the zoning district at the top of the table.
3. Follow the land-use row across to the zoning-district column.
4. The letter where the row and column meet tells you whether the use is allowed:

New Home Types cont'd

Y = Permitted Use - With approval from City departments, this use can happen in an existing or new building as long as it meets design rules and Building Code health and safety standards.

L = Limited Use - With approval from City departments, this use can happen in an existing or new building as long as it meets design rules, Building Code health and safety standards, and Limited Use standards. Limited Use standards vary from use to use.

S = Special Use - Requires a Special Use Approval from the Board of Zoning Appeals (BOZA) and a public hearing. City staff review Special Use requests based on past planning recommendations and the surrounding environment. Staff make a recommendation to BOZA, and BOZA votes to approve or deny a request.

N = Prohibited Use - This use is not allowed in that zoning district. A property owner or tenant of an existing or new building can propose a Prohibited Use. They would need to show preservation of intent, unusual circumstances, preservation of property rights, absence of impact to the public interest, and undue hardship. This would be a request for a Use Variance, and it is reviewed by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Definitions for all Housing Types with images are included in the glossary.

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed changes would:

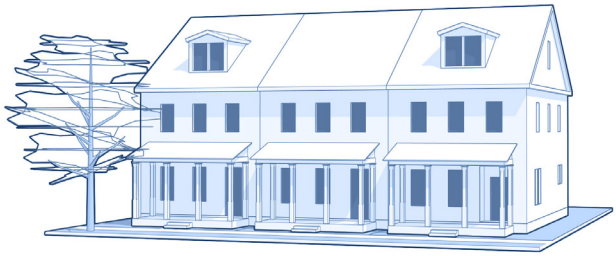
- Update definitions for some existing housing types, to reflect changes happening in the code.
- Add new housing types (see illustrations below):
    - Cottage Courts – a cluster of small homes around a shared greenspace.
    - Three-family Dwelling – a building containing 3 housing units
    - Four-family Dwelling – a building containing 4 housing units.
    - Small Multi-Family Dwelling – a building containing 5 to 8 housing units.
    - Multi-family Dwelling – a building containing 9 or more housing units.
- Allow Single-Family Attached Dwellings in more zoning districts. Attached Single-Family Dwellings are townhouse-style homes on separate properties. (When townhouse-style buildings are on the same property, they are considered a multi-family building)

When new definitions of land uses are added to Subchapter 2, each land use table in all the subchapters of the Zoning Code are updated to include them. This set of changes would be updated in all use tables of the Zoning Code. This set of updates splits the "Multi-Family" land use into land use categories with different scales, updates definitions, and expands where Single-Family Attached homes can be located.

New Home Types cont'd

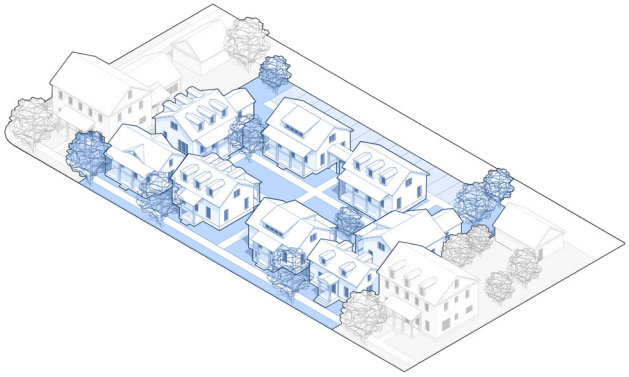
Attached Single-Family

Attached Single-Family Homes can come in various styles, and the Zoning Code sets how many homes can be attached based on the Zoning District.

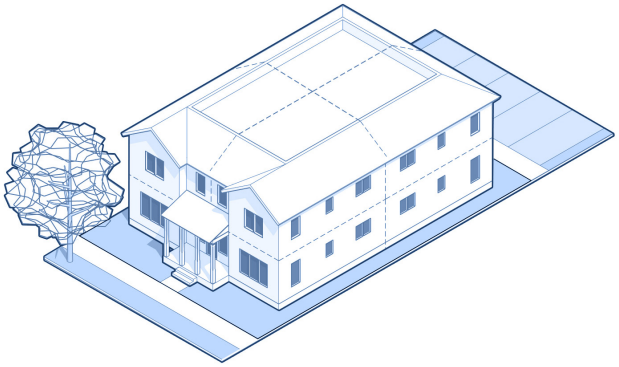


Cottage Court

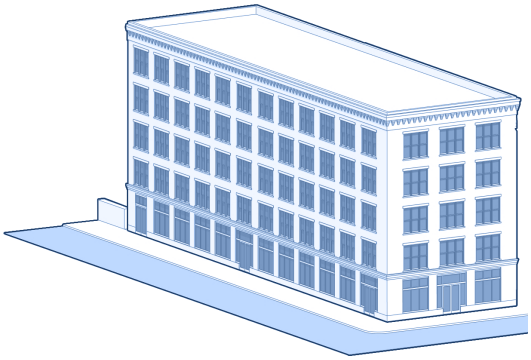
(See Cottage Courts section for more information)



Small Multi-Family (5-8 housing units)

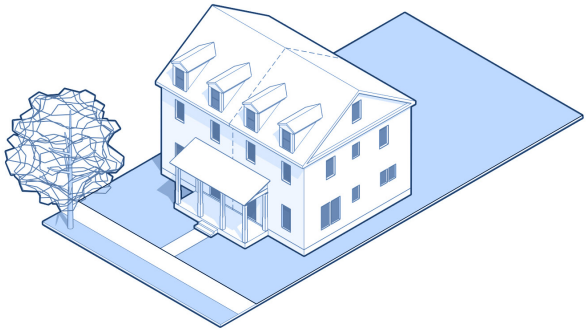


Multi-Family

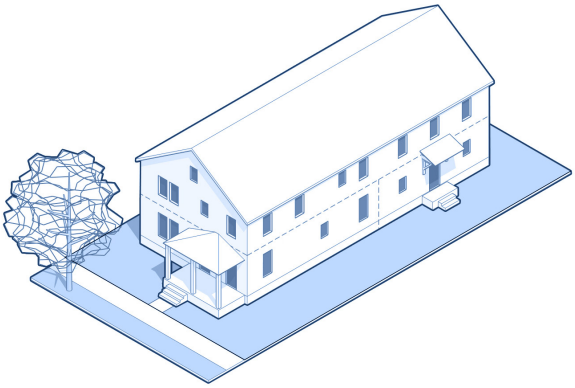


New Home Types cont'd

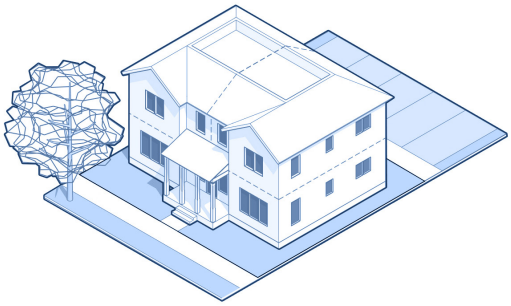
Duplex



Triplex



Fourplex



These new categories would also allow the Zoning Code to set standards that better match the size of each building. Smaller buildings could have standards that reflect their neighborhood scale. Larger buildings would have rules that match their size. This change would provide more detailed design standards for housing types in the Zoning Code.

New Home Types cont'd

The Single-Family Attached Dwelling definition is proposed to be updated to something similar to better match modern construction technology. The new definition will likely be similar to the following:

- *Single-Family Attached Dwelling: A building containing one or more single-family attached dwelling units located on separate lots. Each dwelling unit must be directly adjacent to another single-family attached dwelling unit and must either be attached by common walls extending from foundation to roof or have a wall that abuts the wall of an adjacent dwelling unit. Each dwelling unit must have its own ground-level entrance. No dwelling unit may be located above or below another dwelling unit. This housing type is commonly known as a townhouse or rowhouse. A single-family attached dwelling may include an accessory dwelling unit, provided the accessory dwelling unit meets the applicable use and design standards in this chapter or is approved by the Board.*

The limited use standards for single-family attached dwellings will need to be adjusted in the Residential subchapter (subchapter 5) to accommodate this change.

In simpler terms, a single-family attached dwelling is a single-family home that shares walls with the neighboring house. Each house is owned independently and located on its own individually owned property. When many are in a row, they are often called townhouses or rowhouses. When only two are attached, they are often called twin-homes.

Single-family attached dwellings would be permitted in all residential zoning districts. Lower-density zoning districts would be limited to only 2 attached. Higher density districts could go up to 5 attached.

Why it matters.

These changes would make the Zoning Code clearer and easier to use. They would also give the City more flexibility to set design standards for different types of housing.

For example, a three-family home may need different standards than a larger building with nine or more homes. Separating these housing types would allow the Zoning Code to better reflect those differences.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Single-Family Attached Dwellings would be allowed throughout the city. The number of attached homes allowed in one building would vary by zoning district. For instance, RS1 would allow two attached homes, whereas RT4 would allow up to 5 attached homes.

Please see the section on Cottage Courts for more information about that housing type.

The other definition updates are intended mainly to improve clarity. They would have little effect on where those housing types may be located.

New Home Types cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2 (295-201):

- **Cottage Court:** Add a definition; a residential development with 3 or more detached dwelling units arranged around a shared open space.
- **Single-family Attached Dwelling:** update the name from "Attached Single-Family Dwelling" to "Single-family Attached Dwelling" and expand on the add definition to include the townhouse/rowhouse type.
- **Three-family Dwelling:** Add a definition; a residential building containing 3 housing units.
- **Four-family Dwelling:** Add a definition; a residential building containing 4 housing units.
- **Small Multi-family Dwelling:** Add a definition; a residential building containing 5 to 8 housing units.
- **Accessory Dwelling Unit (295-203):** Revise the definition so a two-unit principal structure is classified by "meeting required bulk standards" rather than "meeting required lot area per dwelling unit standards," and remove it through topic-specific edits.

Update the Land Use Tables to include the new housing types in all Subchapters 5 - Residential (295-503-1), 6 - Commercial (295-603-1), 7 - Downtown (295-703-1), 8 - Industrial (295-803-1), and 9 - Special Districts (295-903-1):

- Add rows for "Three-family Dwelling", "Four-family Dwelling", and "Small Multi-family Dwelling (5-8 units)", each with a permitted/limited/special use mix calibrated by district. Each should be a permitted or limited use based on what was permitted or limited previously for any size multi-family.
- Add a row for "Cottage Court"
- Update the name to "Single-family Attached Dwelling" and make it limited use in the RS1-RS6 and RT1-RT4 districts. The proposed limited use standards would limit the number of units attached and these would vary by zoning district. Permit Single-family Attached Dwellings in RT5
- Relabel the Multi-family Dwelling row to include "(9 or more units)"

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-c** – Update the number of allowed attached dwellings based on zoning district. RS1-RS6 would be limited to two attached dwellings, RT1-RT4 would be limited to five attached dwellings, and RT5 would be limited to 8 attached dwellings.
- **295-505-2-i** - Add building type standards
    - Single-family Attached: each unit on its own lot, separate primary entrance, etc.
    - Three-unit, four-unit, and small multi-family: Individual entries vs. common lobby.

New Home Types cont'd

Commercial and mixed-use zoning districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- **295-603-2-a** - Extend the residential limited use standard to cover the new housing types.
- **295-605-2-a** - Update design standard cross-references so that single-family through four-family dwellings follow the residential design standards of Subchapter

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These changes add definitions for a wider range of housing types, updating use tables to reflect the new home types, and allowing Single-family Attached Dwellings in more zoning districts. *(Housing Element Near-Term strategy #1, Actions #1-6)*

Cottage Courts

What is allowed today?

The Zoning Code does not currently define a Cottage Court. As a result, the Code does not include standards for how cottage courts should be designed or reviewed.

A cottage court is a group of small and detached homes that are arranged around a shared greenspace or courtyard. The shared space gives the homes a common front-door area and supports a walkable, neighborly layout.

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposal would add cottage courts to the Zoning Code definitions and allow them in residential zoning districts through a Special Use review process.

New rules would establish design standards for the shared green space, building fronts, access, and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. The Zoning Code rules would also regulate the cottage court as one development site.

In other words, setbacks, lot width, and lot coverage would be measured at the outer edge of the full cottage court site, not between individual cottages. This allows cottages to be placed in more unique configuration than other homes in the area. At the same time, the full development would still fit the size, spacing, and rhythm of the surrounding neighborhood.

> Cottage Courts would become a defined use in the use table and be considered a Limited Use. They would also have their own design standards added in section 295-505-2 to ensure neighborhood compatibility

Why it matters.

Cottage courts create more small-home options on larger lots. They can support homeownership, downsizing, and smaller households while maintaining a compatible scale next to single-family and two-family homes. Cottage courts can also deliver more affordable homes at a gentle density.

Existing Zoning Code rules are intended for one main building on each property. Because of this, cottage courts are generally not allowed without several variances. A variance is a request for permission to depart from a zoning rule.

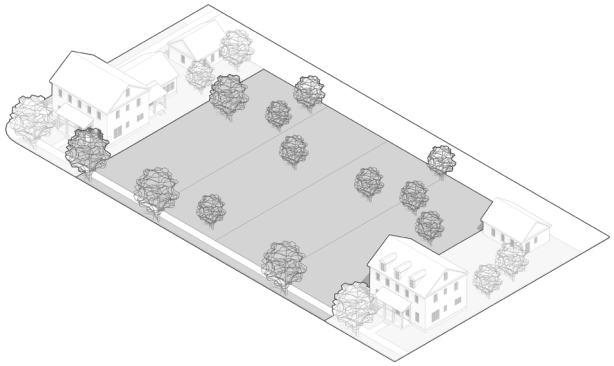
Other proposed Zoning Code rule changes, such as lot width and minimum home size, would also support cottage courts. Cottage courts will still need to meet rules for layout, shared open space, building placement, access, and building fronts. These standards would help ensure that cottage courts fit in with the surrounding block.

Cottage Courts cont'd

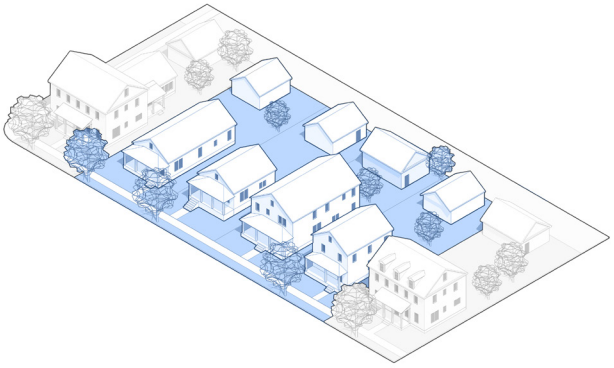
What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Cottage courts would most likely be developed on several adjacent vacant lots that can be planned and developed together or on large vacant lots. They would be allowed as a Special Use in Residential Districts (RT1-RT5, RM1–RM7, and RO1–RO2). Building Code rules (which are determined by the state government) and utility requirements will also impact a cottage court's layout and cost. These requirements may affect whether a project is financially feasible.

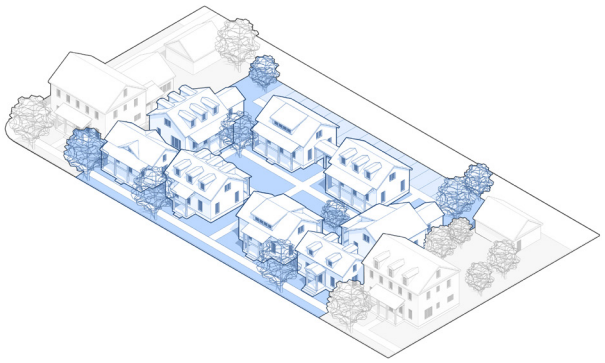
EXISTING TODAY: This example shows is a neighborhood street with four adjacent vacant properties and alley access.



ALLOWED TODAY: Under current rules, four residential buildings could be built, with or without garages.



PROPOSED CHANGE: The proposal would allow smaller homes to be arranged around a shared green space. This could create more housing opportunities in the same area. The 4-house design allowed today would still be an allowed as well, but new options would be available to those interested in smaller homes.



Cottage Courts cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2 (295-201):

- **Cottage Court: Add a definition** – a residential development with 3 or more detached dwelling units arranged around a shared open space.
- **Development Site:** Add a definition – a single tract within a single block designated to be used, developed, or built upon as a unit. This allows a cottage court to be regulated at its outside edges, even if there are lot lines within the site.

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT1-RT5, RM1–RM7, and RO1–RO2):

- **Table 295-503-1** – Cottage Court would be a special use in all residential districts.
- **295-505-2-i-3 [NEW]** – Cottage court standards would include:
  - Regulating the cottage court as one development site regardless of internal lot lines
  - Exempting individual lots from minimum lot width rules
  - Allowing more than one main residential building on a development site
  - Applying setbacks only at the outer edge of the development site
  - Allowing 3 to 12 housing units, with a maximum of 2 stories
  - Requiring a minimum amount of shared open space
  - Requiring units facing the street to have entrances from the street
  - Requiring interior units to have entrances from the shared open space
  - Providing pedestrian access to the street
- **Table 295-505-2** – Change the row "Multiple principal residential buildings permitted?" from no to yes in the RM1-RM7 districts to allow cottage courts and similar configurations.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These updates would make the Zoning Code easier to use and would make cottage court development more feasible. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #1, Action #3)*

Density and Bulk Standards

First, let's define density and bulk

Density is how many homes (housing units) are in a certain amount of space. For example, a larger property with one single-family home has a low density. If the same large property had a multi-family building with 30 housing units, it would be a higher density.

Bulk is how big a building can be on a property and where it is placed. Bulk standards include rules maximum lot coverage, minimum setbacks, and maximum height. These each regulate how big a building can be and where it can be built on a property.

Bulk is looked at differently for larger multi-family & mixed-use buildings versus smaller neighborhood scale buildings. Below is a bit more information.

Bulk Standards for Larger Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Buildings:

SETBACKS: The distance a building must be from the street, alley, or neighboring properties.

A: Lot Boundary

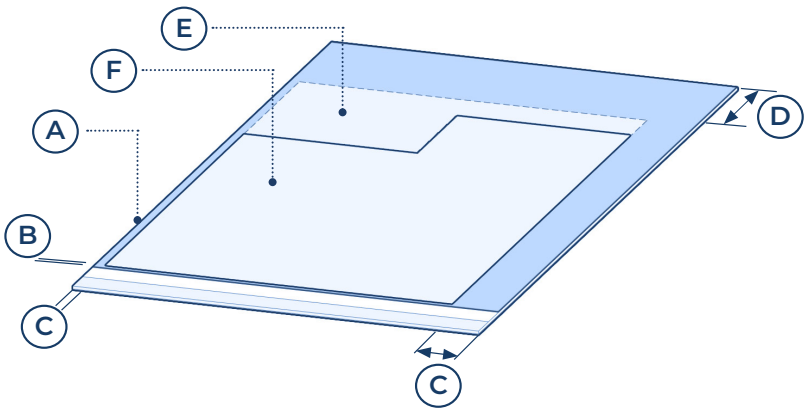
B: Front Setback Area

C: Side Setback Areas

D: Rear Setback Area

E: Buildable Area

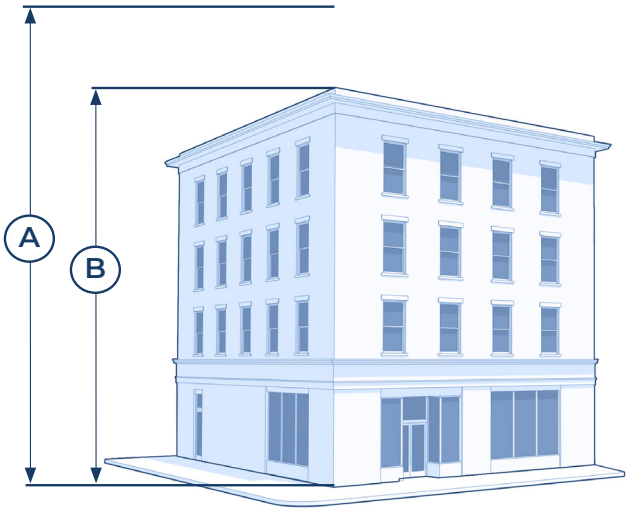
F: Example Building Footprint



MAXIMUM HEIGHT: The number of stories a building is allowed to have.

A: Maximum Height

B: Example Building Height



Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

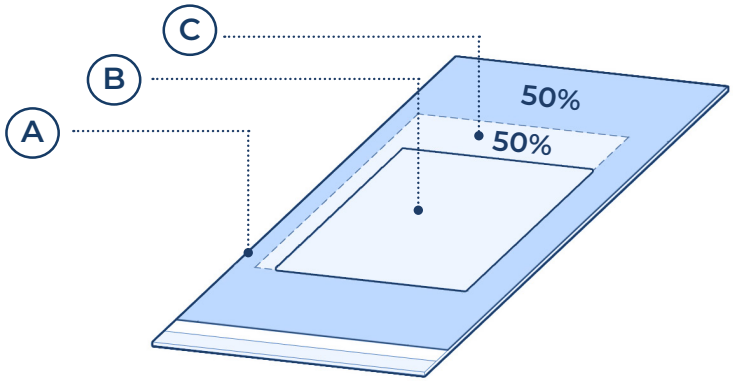
Bulk Standards for Smaller Neighborhood-Scale Buildings:

MAXIMUM LOT COVERAGE: The amount of property that can be built on.

A: Lot Boundary

B: Maximum Lot Coverage

C: Example Building Footprint



SETBACKS: The distance a building must be from the street, alley, or neighboring properties.

A: Lot Boundary

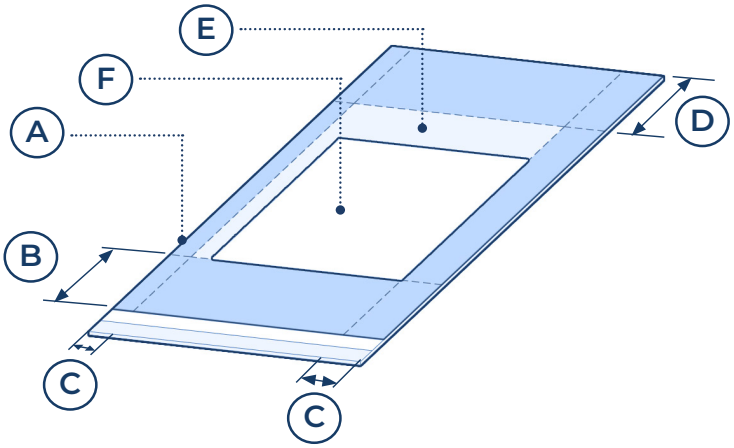
B: Front Setback Area

C: Side Setback Areas

D: Rear Setback Area

E: Buildable Area

F: Example Building Footprint



MAXIMUM HEIGHT: The number of stories a building is allowed to have.

A: Maximum Height

B: Example Building Height



Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

What is allowed today?

Right now, the Zoning Code has a mathematical rule for how many housing units can be on a property based on the size of the parcel. This rule is called "Lot Area per Dwelling Unit" (LAPDU). It requires a certain amount of land area for every housing unit located on the property. Different zoning districts have different lot area per dwelling unit requirements.

The equation to calculate the allowed number of housing units is:

Land Area / Permitted Lot Area per Dwelling Unit = Allowed Number of Units.

For example: In the Zoning Code, a mixed-use zoning district called LB2 has a lot area per dwelling unit rule of 1,200 square feet per housing unit. Imagine you have an LB2 zoned lot which has an area 28,800 square feet, or approximately half the size of a football field. To calculate the permitted number of dwelling units you would use the above formula:

28,800 / 1,200 = 24

The LB2 parcel would be allowed to build 24 units.

The Zoning Code currently regulates residential density through a Lot Area per Dwelling Unit (LAPDU) mathematical equation, and the maximum LAPDU varies by zoning district. These standards are located in the Principal Building Design Standards tables in Subchapters 5 and 6 (Tables 295-505-2 and 295-605-2). Downtown zoning districts use a different density calculation (see Floor Area Ratio information). The Zoning Code regulates the physical size of building (the bulk) through standards like lot coverage, setbacks, and height. These standards are also in the Principal Design Standards tables in Subchapters 5 and 6.

This mathematical rule does not regulate the size, location, or appearance of a building. It only limits how many housing units may be included in a building.

You could build a 1-story building that takes up the entire lot. Or you could build a building with a smaller footprint and multiple stories. Or some mix of the two. As long as you have 24 units or less and stay within the zoning's bulk standards, the number of units does not tell help predict anything about the building's size or shape.

In this example, a building that contains 24 units would not be allowed to be built to whatever size. There are limits on the size of buildings called "bulk standards" within the Zoning Code. More information is provided on bulk standards above.

Typically, the most cost-effective way to build a building is a few stories with a modest sized footprint. This means a lot of developable land goes unused because of the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit rule.

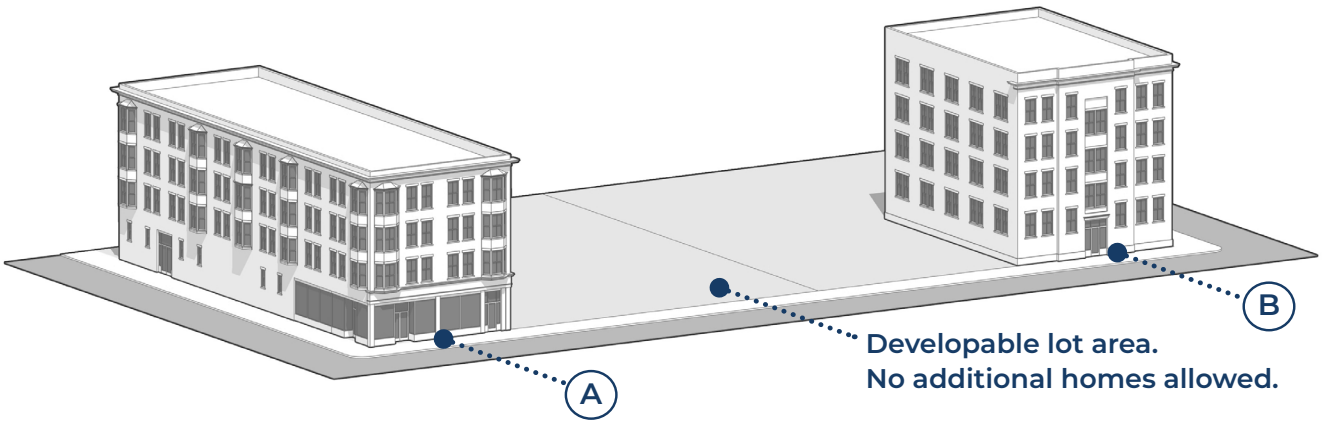
Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

ALLOWED TODAY: Today, a new building with more housing units must have enough land to meet the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit requirement. This can lead to older buildings being demolished and part of the property being left vacant to provide enough land for the proposed number of housing units, such as the illustration to the right.

A: This property is 28,800 sq. ft. and only allows 24 homes.

B: This property is 24,000 sq. ft. and only allows 20 homes.

In both examples, there is "extra" developable land.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

Remove Lot Area per Dwelling Unit rules from all residential and commercial districts that allow housing.

All zoning districts already have bulk standards. With the proposed removal of Lot Area per Dwelling Unit in the Zoning Code, staff is recommending fine-tuning the bulk standards to result in better design, neighborhood compatibility, and predictable outcomes. These adjustments would still permit the flexibility needed for unique design and architecture. This change impacts both larger multi-family buildings and smaller neighborhood scale buildings. The differences are explained below.

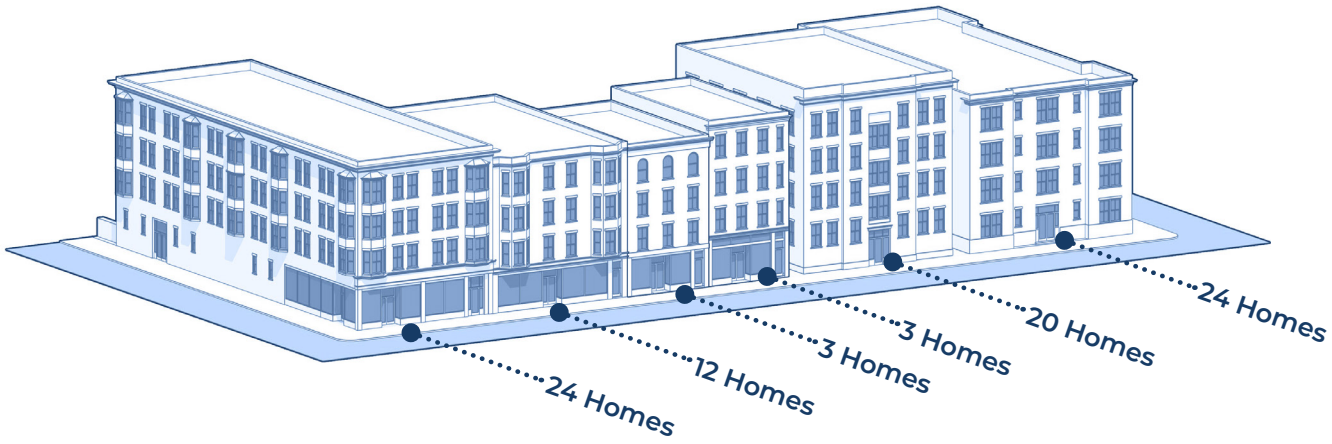
Larger Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Buildings:

For multi-family and mixed-use buildings this means that new buildings could be built to an allowable maximum size. There would be no minimum or maximum number of units in the building set by zoning rules. Instead, the number of units would be determined by other factors such as physical limitations, building code, and bulk standards.

The City would continue to regulate the size of and placement of buildings through bulk standards including height, setback, and other requirements.

Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

PROPOSED CHANGE: The illustration shows examples of the range of housing units that can fit within buildings allowed by bulk standards. New buildings would still need to meet requirements for height, setbacks, other bulk standards, with parking included as required by the Zoning Code. This could allow new development to better match the scale and pattern of historic, and walkable streets.



One example of fine-tuning bulk standards is the relationship between lower density residential zoning districts and districts which allow larger buildings:

- Currently, there is no setback between single-family and two-family districts (RS and RT) and the zoning districts that allow larger multi-family (RM + RO) and the commercial districts.
- Picture a case where a property that is zoned RT4 (two-family) is next to a property that is zoned LB2 (Mixed-Use/ Commercial). Currently a mixed-use multi-family building could be built on the LB2 property up to the property line.
- Proposal: When a zoning district that allows larger multi-family buildings is adjacent (next to) a single-family (RS) or two-family (RT) zoning district, a new multi-family building would need to be setback a minimum 10 feet from the property line of the adjacent single-family (RS) or two-family (RT) district.]
- Additionally, take a look at the Height Transitions & Setbacks section for another proposal to improve the transition from higher-density areas to lower-density neighborhoods.

For larger buildings these changes mostly impact Tables 295-505-2 and 295-605-2 in the Zoning Code. It applies to the RM and RO districts (Residential Multi-family and Residential-Office) in Subchapter 5 and to the Commercial Districts in Subchapter 6. The IM District references the design standards from Subchapter 6.

The above proposal is also discussed in the Height Transitions & Setbacks section.

Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

Smaller Neighborhood Scale Buildings:

In lower density zoning districts, such as single-family (RS) and two-family (RT), Lot Area per Dwelling Unit would be replaced with a clear maximum number of units on a property. Many of the RS districts have duplexes that are legal non-conforming, meaning they were built before the current Zoning Code was in effect, and do not meet current zoning rules.

Zoning District	Current Lot Area per Dwelling Unit Rule	Proposed Change to Maximum Number of Housing Units in the Same Building
Residential Single-Family (RS1-RS5)	RS1-RS5 = None (only 1 unit is currently allowed)	1 housing unit*
Residential Single-Family (RS6)	RS6 = 3,600 sq. ft. per dwelling unit	1 housing unit*
Residential Two-Family (RT1-RT3)	RT1-RT3 = Range of 1,800 to 3,600 sq. ft. per dwelling unit with a maximum of 2 units	2 housing units*
Residential Two-Family (RT4)	RT4 = 1,200 sq. ft. per dwelling unit with a maximum of 4 units	4 housing units*
Residential Two-Family (RT5)	RT5 = 800 sq. ft. per dwelling unit with a maximum of 8 units	8 housing units*

*Accessory Dwelling Units are allowed on properties with owner-occupied single-family homes or duplexes as long as standards are met. The Zoning Code currently exempts them from the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit rule and the proposed update would continue to exempt them from the Maximum Number of Housing Units rule.

Bulk standards would continue to apply. For more information on updates to bulk standards for neighborhood-scale residential, take a look at the sections about **Minimum Home Size** and **Lot Standards**.

Why it matters.

The existing rules around Lot Area per Dwelling Unit can make it difficult to build housing in the housing styles already found throughout Milwaukee. The rules can also make each housing unit cost more. The need for a developer to have a larger lot so that there is enough lot area for a number of units, can also result in the unnecessary demolition of older buildings. These factors can limit the amount of housing and housing variety in the city.

Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

Removing Lot Area per Dwelling Unit requirements makes it easier for homeowners and property owners to understand what they can do on their property. These changes will make it clearer how to build new housing of all scales - from duplexes to multi-family buildings of all sizes.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

- Two-family homes on smaller lots in RT districts. Staff have found that several of the RT Districts, especially RT3, have existing duplexes that do not meet the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit standards. This means a property owner is not able to build a duplex legally even though the property is zoned to allow duplexes.
- Multi-family and mixed-use buildings on commercial corridors.
- Multi-family buildings in areas of the city where they are already permitted such as RM districts.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2:

- **Accessory Dwelling Unit (295-203):** Revise the use definition, replacing a reference to "lot area per dwelling" with a reference to "required bulk standard."

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS6, RT1-RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **Table 295-505-2 -** Delete the "Lot area per dwelling unit, minimum" rows, the "Lot area per dwelling unit, permanent supportive housing" rows from both the single/two-family and multi-family tables, along with the related footnotes.
- **295-505-2-n -** Delete the proration formula that allocated lot area between permanent supportive housing and other units; it is no longer needed with the Lot area per dwelling unit removal.
- **Table 295-505-2 -** Add a "Maximum Number of Dwelling Units" line to the table with RS1-RS6 at 1 unit, RT2-RT3 at 2 units, RT4 at 4 units, and RT5 at 8 units in the Density standards section. Replace the text at the bottom of the chart that excludes ADU's from lot area per dwelling unit standards to say "Accessory Dwelling units shall not be included in maximum number of dwelling units calculation"

(See other sections including Lot standards and minimum home size to understand proposed changes related to bulk standards for lower-density housing.)

Commercial and mixed-use districts in subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- Table 295-605-2 - Deleted the "Lot area per dwelling unit, minimum" row, the "Lot area per dwelling unit, and permanent supportive housing" row. Consider reducing the "Lot area per roomer or transitional housing client" row for more consistency across districts. Rooming House and Transitional Housing uses would remain special uses in all commercial districts.

(See other sections including Height Transitions, Height by Story, and the design category to understand the proposed changes related to bulk standards)

Density and Bulk Standards cont'd

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These changes simplify how **Residential Density Ratios** are measured by removing Lot Area per Dwelling Unit requirements, which are a complicated way to restrict density. The current mathematical formula-size formula that can limit the number of homes even when a building meets standards for height, setbacks, safety, and site design. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #2 & Action #8).*

Home Size

What is allowed today?

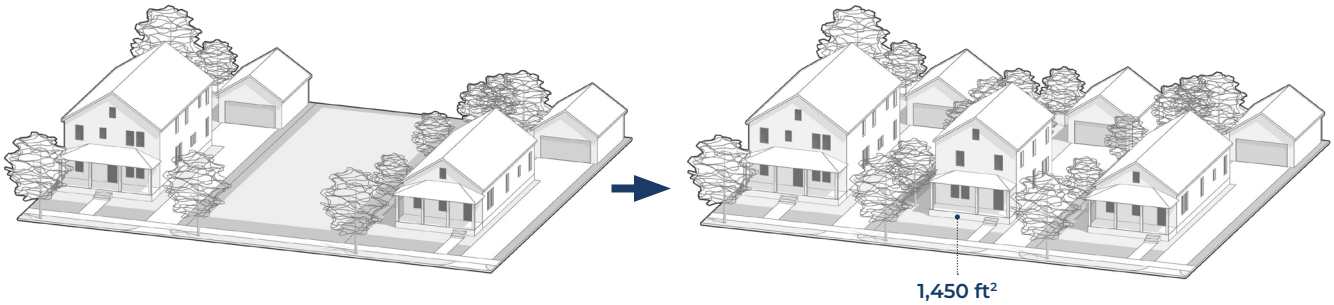
Today, in some areas of the city, a new home must be at least a certain size, even if a smaller home would fit on the lot and meet all other zoning rules. For example, in the RS4 zoning district, a new one-story home must be at least 1,200 square feet. A two-story home must be at least 1,450 square feet.

For the RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5 zoning districts, the Zoning Code includes a large chart, that specifies the minimum building front facade, the minimum number of stories, and the minimum building height – all based on the width of the lot. Essentially, the minimum home size is determined by the size of the property the house is on. For example, homes located on lots wider than 35 feet are required to be at least 20 feet wide. As the lot width increases, so does the minimum home width, all the way up to requiring 40-foot wide and 2-story home on a 60-foot lot. Beyond 60 feet the rule changes to a calculation, where the home's front facade must be as wide as 65% of the total lot. For example, a 100-foot-wide lot would require as 65-foot-wide home.

Along with the facade width requirement, all homes in RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5 are required to be at least 20 feet tall, and homes located on lots that are over 45 feet wide, are required to be at least 25 feet tall and two stories.

These rules make one-story homes and smaller homes difficult to build in much of the city.

The minimum facade width and height standards for RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5 can be found in table 295-505-2-i of the Residential subchapter of the Zoning Code. The minimum home size requirements for RS1-RS5 are located under "floor area" in Table 295-505-2 in Subchapter 5.



ALLOWED TODAY: Smaller homes are prohibited. A new home must be at least a certain size, even if a smaller home would otherwise fit on the lot and meet applicable standards.

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed change removes the minimum floor area requirements for the RS1-RS5 single-family zoning districts, so smaller homes are legal. Removing the minimum home-size rule would not change:

- Where a home can be built on a lot
- Setback, height, or lot coverage rules
- Other construction, safety, or building-code requirements

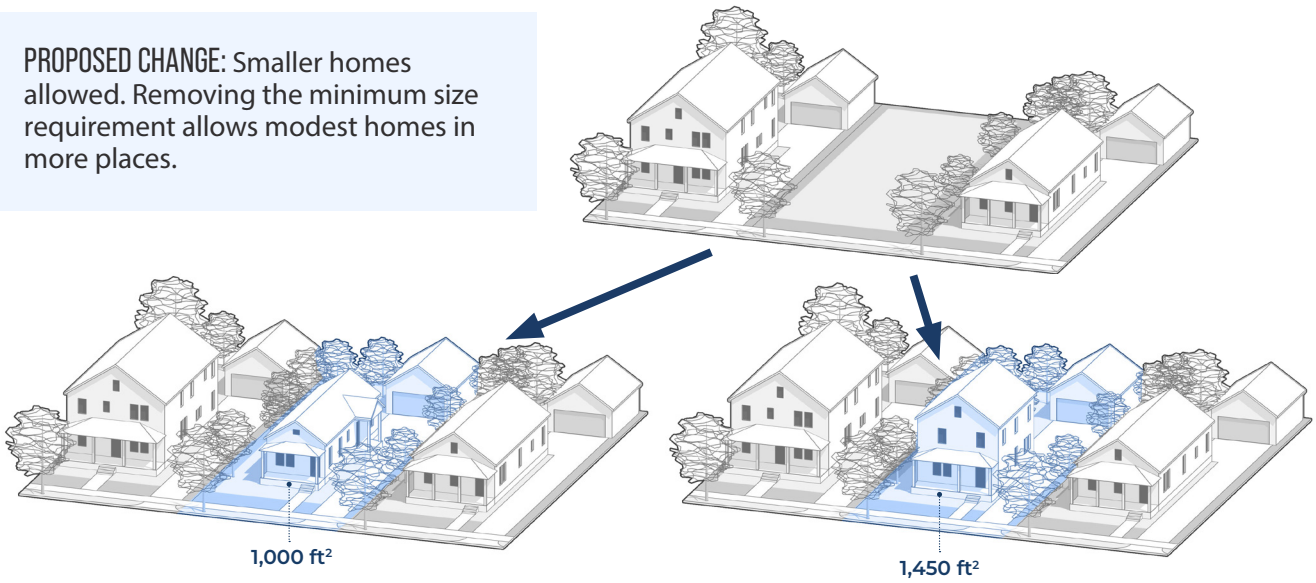
Home Size cont'd

The proposed changes also reduce the facade width rules in RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5. Rather than using a series of defined lot widths followed by a formula, the new rule would use a simple percentage to define how wide a home needs to be. The rule would require the front facades of homes in these districts to be equal to at least 55% the width of the lot. Height and story minimums would be removed for all lot sizes.

These changes keep the rhythm of buildings on a block feeling consistent within neighborhoods while providing additional flexibility to those seeking to build smaller homes. Removing height also makes it easier to build accessible homes for those who are unable to climb stairs.

This set of changes will remove "Floor Area, Minimum" from Table 295-505-2 and Table 295-605-2 in the **Residential** and **Commercial** subchapters of the Zoning Code. It would delete table 295-505-2-i in Subchapter 5 and replace it with the simple rule of lot width times 0.55 can open a lot of potential for more flexibility in home construction.

PROPOSED CHANGE: Smaller homes allowed. Removing the minimum size requirement allows modest homes in more places.



Why it matters.

This change could allow a wider range of home sizes. Smaller homes may also cost less to build, use less energy, and provide more affordable housing options. For example, reducing the size of a home by 100 square feet may lower its construction costs by about $20,000.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Removing minimum floor area would allow smaller homes in areas that are primarily developed with single-family homes such as residential zoning districts RS1-RS5.

Reducing and simplifying facade width rules in RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5, as well as removing minimum height requirements, allows smaller homes in areas that are primarily developed with a mix of housing types.

Home Size cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS6, RT1-RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **Table 295-505-2** – Delete the "Floor area, minimum (sq. ft.) one-story structure" row (900 to 1,500 square feet depending on district) and the "split-level or taller" row (1,200 to 1,900 square feet) from the single-family and two-family standards.
- **Table 295-605-2** – Delete the corresponding minimum floor area rows in the multi-family table (which contained no numeric standards).
- **295-505-2-i-2** – Simplify minimum front facade width: in RS6 and RT3 through RT5, the front facade must be at least 55% of the lot width, rounded down to the nearest whole foot, replacing the old lot-width lookup table (table 295-505-2-i is deleted). Applies to single-family through small multi-family dwellings.
- **295-505-2-i** – Delete table 295-505-2-i, which regulated minimum building height and width by lot size, and replace it with a single minimum building width regulation in RS6, RT3, RT4, and RT5.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

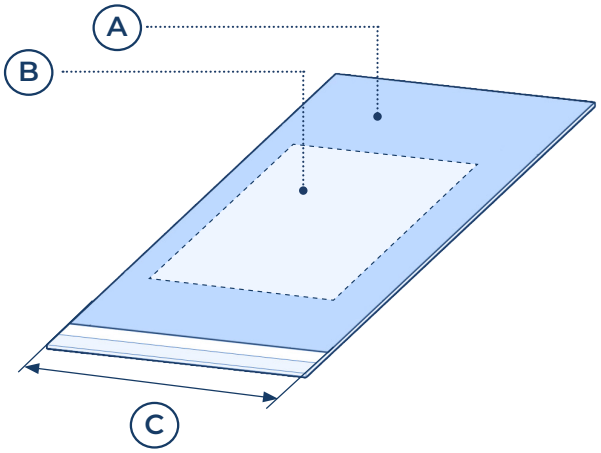
Implements allowing flexible home sizes and simplifying how residential density is restricted by eliminating an outdated rule that required homes be a specific, minimum size. *(Housing Element Action #24 (Floor Area) and Action #13 (Facade Width)*

Lot Standards

What is allowed today?

Today, the allowed size of a lot is set through the following standards: **minimum and maximum lot area, maximum lot coverage, and minimum lot width.**

- **Lot Area (A)** rules control the size of a lot. The city has already been divided into lots, so these rules are no longer needed.
- **Maximum Lot Coverage (B)** is the amount of a lot (or property) that can be built on. Lot coverage along with setback rules help manage the size and placement of buildings on a property.
- **Lot Width (C)** is how wide a lot is along the front of the property.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The recommended update replaces lot area minimum and maximum rules with minimum lot width. Minimum lot widths would also be reduced to more closely match the pattern of existing streets and to enable flag lots. Removing the lot area rule also enables flag lots, cottage courts, and other new housing arrangements discussed throughout this project.

Zoning District	Current Minimum Lot Width	Proposed Minimum Lot Width
RS1	100 feet	80 feet
RS2	100 feet	80 feet
RS3	75 feet	55 feet
RS4	60 feet	48 feet
RS5	50 feet	48 feet
RS6	30 feet	30 feet (unchanged)
RT1	60 feet	60 feet (unchanged)
RT2	40 feet	30 feet
RT3	30 feet	30 feet (unchanged)
RT4	24 feet	24 feet (unchanged)
RT5	24 feet	24 feet (unchanged)

Lot Standards cont'd

The proposed changes also raise residential lot coverage maximums to reflect the footprints of the existing homes.

The update would also add lot coverage rules in some Downtown zoning districts where they do not currently exist. These rules would replace floor area ratio, or FAR, as the measure of how much of the lot may be covered at ground level. See the Floor Area Ratio section for more information.

These changes will require updates to lot area and lot width in Table 295-505-2 of the **Residential Subchapter** of the Zoning Code. This change will also require updates to the lot coverage in Design Standards Tables in the **Residential and Downtown Subchapters** of the Zoning Code.

Why it matters.

Lot area rules impact both a lot's width and depth. This can make it difficult to create new lots behind existing homes, including flag lots, and this can reduce opportunities for homeownership. Instead, Lot width minimums help protect the historic rhythm of neighborhoods (which lot area is what was intended to regulate).

Lot coverage rules are often too restrictive. In some cases, they would not allow much of the existing and historic housing stock to be built today. The proposed change standardizes lot coverage rules regardless of lot size.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

These changes would apply to new neighborhood-scale housing, such as single-family, two-family, and smaller multi-family buildings. The changes would remove lot area rules, make small adjustments to minimum lot width, and allow moderate increases in lot coverage. Additionally, new buildings downtown will have to follow new lot coverage rules in place of floor area ratio (FAR).

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS6, RT1-RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **Table 295-505-2** - Delete the "Lot area, minimum" and the "Lot area, maximum" rows for detached housing and attached housing. Adjust current lot width dimensions based on the size of existing properties in each zoning district and common building material dimensions.
- **295-505-4-B [NEW]** - Add lot size section regulating minimum and maximum lot width based on Table 295-505-2. Add the lot dimension standards for flag lots so they are governed by width and depth rather than raw area.
- **Table 295-505-2 (single-family and two-family)** - Increase maximum lot coverage in residential zoning districts. For example, maximum coverage in many RS and RT districts increase from 30% to a range of 35% to 50%. In the densest districts, lot coverage increases from 70% to 75%, with corner lot standards raised correspondingly.

Lot Standards cont'd

- **Table 295-505-2 (multi-family - RM-X & RO-X)** - Increase maximum lot coverage, for example, from 30% to 50% and from 50% to 60% on interior lots, with corner lot values raised from 60% to 70%.
- **295-505-2-i-3 and i-4 (delete)** - Remove the current rule that lowers the allowed lot coverage for lots that are more than 1.3 times larger than the average lot on the block face.
- **295-505-2-i-3 [NEW]** - Include lot coverage applicability for flag lots.

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9G):

- **Table 295-705-1** - Add maximum lot coverage limits by zoning district. Limits would generally range from 70% to 90% in downtown districts, while some districts would continue to have no limit. These rules would replace FAR as the measure of building coverage at ground level.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

Implements **Lot Size and Lot Coverage** updates to balance the size of properties for their neighborhood by removing lot area restrictions to focus on lot width minimums. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #2 & Action #9-13)*

Flag Lots

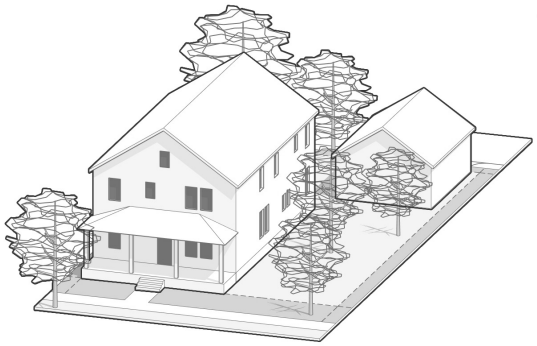
What is allowed today?

The Zoning Code rules are currently written for rectangular properties (or lots). In some cases, a home may be allowed behind another home. With the current zoning rules, the rear home must remain part of the same property and cannot be sold separately.

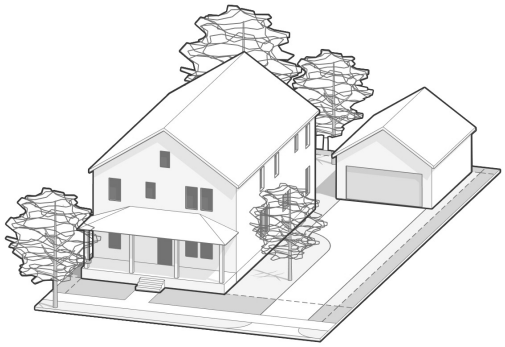
The Zoning Code does not currently define any kind of rear lot, such as a flag lot. If a property owner wants to divide one property into two properties with one lot in the front and one in the back, they would need to seek special permission through a variance process.

The Zoning Code can make rules about how lots are laid out in each zoning district. Currently those rules provide very little flexibility for unusually shaped lots. Flag lots are not defined in the current Zoning Code.

ALLOWED TODAY: One deep lot with one ownership option.



One deep lot ***with*** an alley



One deep lot ***without*** an alley

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed Zoning Code updates would allow flag lots in residential zoning districts. Flag lots are a type of front-back property arrangement. The updates would create rules for flag lot layouts. **There are two types of flag lot configurations, a "front flag lot" and a "reverse flag lot".**

A **front flag lot** allows a home behind another home to sit on its own distinct property (a separate lot). The rear lot connects to the street through a narrow side strip of land, called a pole. The pole can provide access for pedestrians, utilities, emergency services, and vehicles where needed.

Flag Lots cont'd

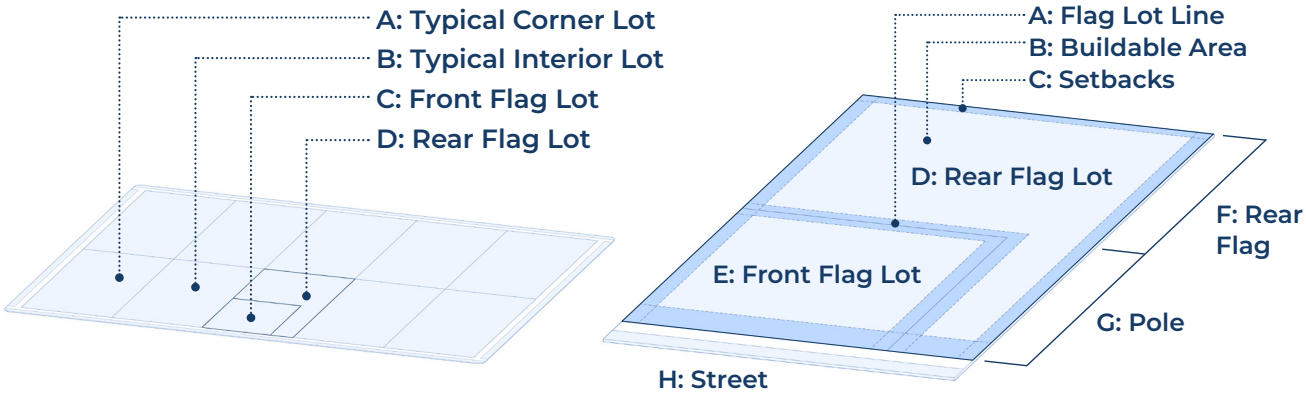
What is proposed? How would the rules change? (cont'd)

A **reverse flag lot** allows an alley-served home behind another home to be located on its own lot. Vehicles would access the rear home from the alley. A narrow side strip, or pole, would still provide pedestrian access and space for utilities from the street. Because the rear home already has legal access from the alley, this does not require a new driveway or curb cut from the street. The front lot keeps its street presence, while the rear lot is accessed from the alley instead of across the pole.

This change would require defining new dimensional requirements in the Residential Subchapter (subchapter 5) to set minimum pole widths for flag lots and define how setback regulations work on flag lots. New definitions will also be added to subchapter 2 to support this change.

Proposed Change - Flag Lot: Two smaller lots / separate ownership possible

A deep lot could be divided so the front home and rear home may be owned separately as long as required standards are met. This illustration shows an example without alley access.



LEFT IMAGE: Front Flag Lot configuration - a pair of interior lots that include a front flag lot and a rear flag lot.
A: Typical corner lot
B: Typical interior lot
C: Front flag lot
D: Rear flag lot

RIGHT IMAGE
A: Flag lot line
B: Buildable area
C: Setbacks
D: Rear flag lot
E: Front flag lot
F: Rear flag
G: Pole
H: Street

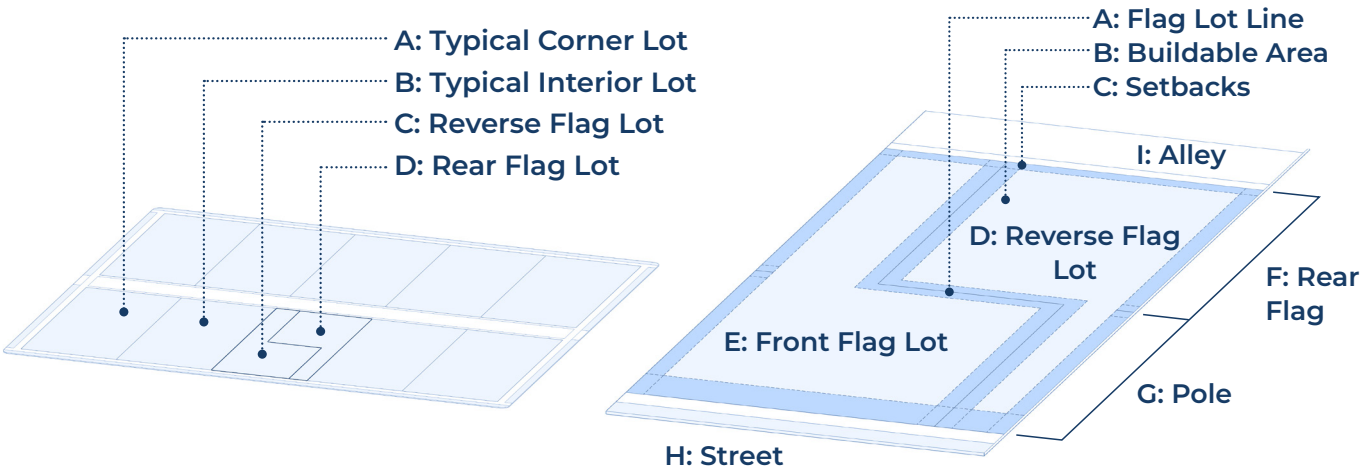
Flag Lots cont'd

Proposed Change - Reverse Flag Lot:

Two smaller lots/separate ownership possible

A deep lot could be divided so the front home and rear home may be owned separately, with the rear home gaining access from the alley instead of a shared pole. The rear lot's utility access would come from the street through the pole.

The new lots would be subject to setbacks and design standards just like any other property. They would also need to have a wide enough pole to allow for access and utilities.



LEFT IMAGE: Front Flag Lot configuration - a pair of interior lots that include a front flag lot and a rear flag lot.
A: Typical corner lot
B: Typical interior lot
C: Front flag lot
D: Rear flag lot

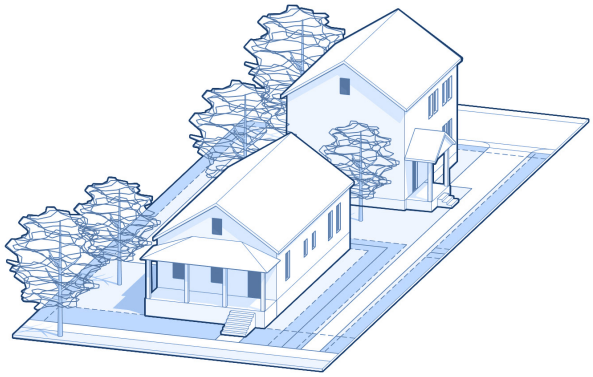
RIGHT IMAGE
A: Flag lot line
B: Buildable area
C: Setbacks
D: Rear flag lot
E: Front flag lot
F: Rear flag
G: Pole
H: Street

Flag Lots cont'd

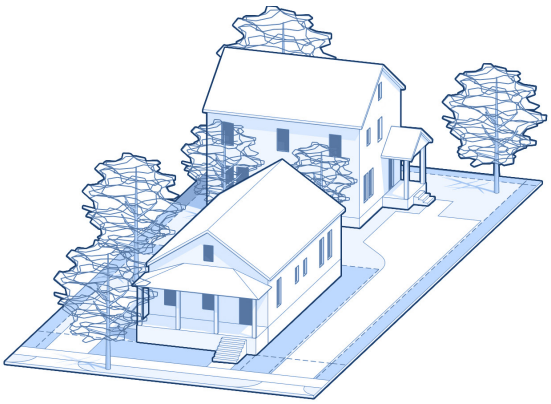
PROPOSED CHANGE:

Two Smaller lots / Separate Ownership

A deep lot could be divided so the front home and rear home may be owned separately as long as required standards are met.



With alley



Without alley

Why it matters.

Flag lots can create a small-scale way to add homeownership opportunities on deep residential properties. They would allow a front home and a rear home to be owned and sold separately, including the land beneath each home. This creates more attainable homeownership options without requiring large buildings or major changes to the neighborhood pattern.

Flag lots would still need to meet all applicable requirements for setbacks, lot coverage, utilities, fire access, stormwater management, and parking or vehicle access, where required.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Flag lots would support neighborhood-scale housing in areas that are primarily developed with single-family homes and duplexes. They would be most feasible on lots that are both wide and deep enough to accommodate the required pole, utilities, separation between homes, and other zoning rules.

Flag Lots cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2 (295-201):

- **Flag:** Revise the definition so that lot-related use of the term refers to the definition of "flag lot."
- **Lot, Flag:** Add a definition.
- **Lot, Flag Configuration:** Add a definition to refer to the different flag lot layouts.
- **Lot, Front Flag:** Add a definition to refer to a lot in a flag lot configuration. This lot does not include a pole.
- **Lot, Rear Flag:** Add a definition to refer to the lot behind another lot. This lot has a pole connecting it to the street.
- **Lot, Reverse Flag:** Add a definition for a lot along the street that includes a pole connecting to the rear lot line. This layout is generally used for alley or utility access.
- **Rear Lot Line:** Revise the definition to account for the new term "flag lot line."
- **Flag Lot Line:** Add a definition for the line shared by the front and rear lots in a flag lot layout. The line runs in the same direction as the front lot line.
- **Lot Width:** Revise the definition to explain where the width of a rear flag lot is measured.

Residential Zoning Districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS6, RT1-RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2 -** Add minimum sizes for flag and pole. Minimum pole would be wide enough to permit utilities from the street to the flag. Minimum flag size would right sized to ensure enough buildable land is created within setbacks.
- **295-505-2.b-3-e -** Add standards for determining the "front" of a rear flag lot. Other flag lot components would use the standard method for determining lot frontage.
- **295-505-2.f -** Add setback standards for flag lots. The update would also prohibit projections, such as certain building features, into required flag lot line setbacks.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These updates would increase flexibility by creating rules for new buildable lots with limited street frontage. *(Housing Element Action #11)*

Adaptive Reuse

What is allowed today?

Institutional buildings include schools, churches, convents, hospitals, and similar uses.

Most of Milwaukee's historic institutional buildings are in residential neighborhoods. This makes them easy for nearby residents to reach. Schools, for example, are allowed in all residential districts. A school may even be located in an area zoned single-family residential.

However, older institutional buildings do not always work well for modern schools, churches, or institutional uses. If one of these buildings is zoned single- or two-family, there may be few options for reusing it when the original owner leaves.

This leaves large institutional buildings empty in neighborhoods and difficult to reuse the building for a new use. Vacant buildings can fall into disrepair and may eventually be demolished.

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed change would create a special option in single- and two-family residential districts for institutional buildings. It would allow institutional buildings to be converted into multi-family housing.

The new rules would allow multi-family housing in former institutional buildings, but they would also protect the building's appearance and the neighborhood.

Key requirements include:

- Street-facing building facades could not be largely removed or changed. Demolition or alteration would be limited to 25% of the street-facing facades.
- New additions and exterior changes would need to meet the zoning standards that apply in that residential district.
- Parking for the new housing would need to be located away from the street when possible, reducing its visual effect on the neighborhood.



Adaptive reuse of the former McKinley School into 39 affordable apartments.

- A vacant institutional building could still return to its original institutional use, if that use is allowed in the zoning district.
- Many institutional parcels of land include a lot of open space – the former school or church yard – that may be appropriate for new infill development. Any new development on the parcel of land would require a Special Use permit by the Board of Zoning Appeals, unless it meets the rules of the base zoning district.

The proposal does not require institutional buildings to become housing. It simply gives owners another option when an institutional use is no longer practical.

Adaptive Reuse cont'd

Why it matters.

Reusing old institutional buildings is difficult. They are often much larger than other buildings in the neighborhood.

Allowing multi-family housing can help save these important buildings from vacancy, neglect, and demolition. It can also add housing while keeping the building's historic appearance and the neighborhood's overall look and feel.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Institutional buildings, such as schools and churches, in single-family and two-family neighborhoods.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS5, RT1-RT5):

- **295-503-1-b-4 [NEW]** - Add that a multi-family dwelling may be established within an existing institutional building in the RS1 through RS6 and RT1 through RT5 districts, limited to the existing building. Demolition of more than 25% of the street-facing exterior wall would require a Special Use permit; additions would need to comply with district setback, height, and lot coverage standards and would not be able to exceed the existing building height; principal street entrances are retained where practicable; surface parking would not be able to be placed between the street-facing facade and the front lot line; assembly and other non-residential operations would require independent permission; and non-compliant proposals would fall back to special use review.
- **295-505-2-L-2-b** - Adaptive reuse buildings would be exempted from the multi-family primary entrance orientation requirement, since their doors are where history put them.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change supports the **adaptive reuse of former institutional sites**, such as former schools and hospitals, within neighborhoods into multi-family housing and limited neighborhood services. *(Housing Element Goal #II, Policy #B.2)*

Height Transitions and Setbacks

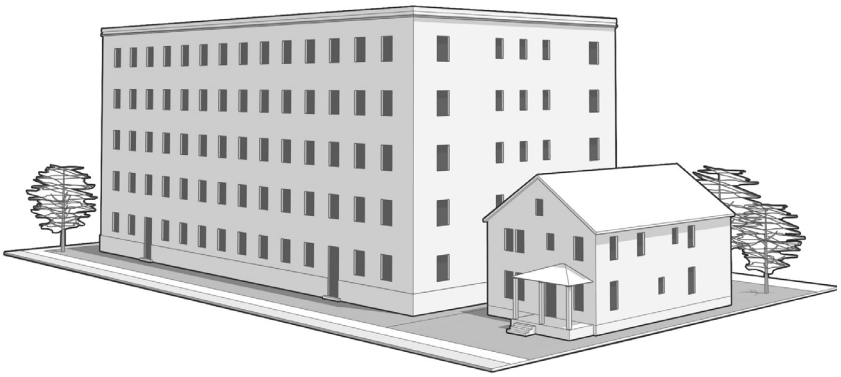
What is allowed today?

There are currently no rules about how far away tall buildings need to be from single- and two-family zoned properties.

For example, a commercially zoned property could build a 5-story building along the property line shared with a house in a two-family zoning district.

Height transitions are not currently in the Zoning Code. Single- and two-family zoned properties include the RS1-RS6 and RT1-RT5 zoning districts (see map).

ALLOWED TODAY: This illustrations shows that taller buildings may be built close to single- and two-family zoned properties, creating an abrupt change in building height.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

Two new rules are proposed to create a more gradual transition between shorter and taller buildings.

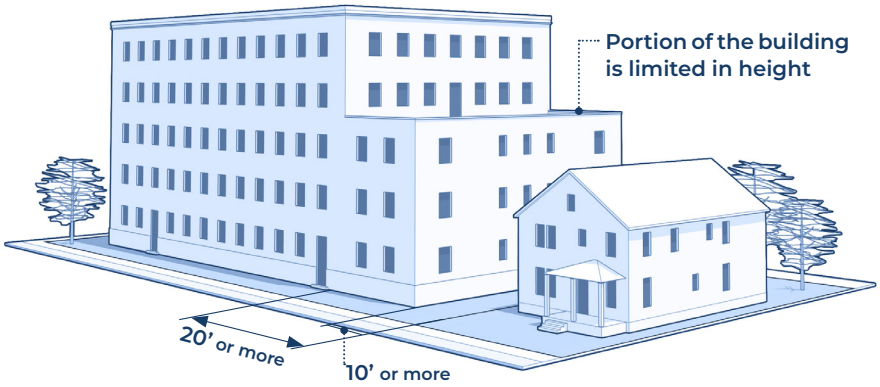
First, buildings on a commercially or multi-family zoned properties would need to be set back 10 feet from a shared property line if the neighbor is in a single- or two-family zoning district. The building would also need to be set back at lease 4 feet from an alley to help accommodate traffic.

Second, taller buildings would be required to step-down in height near single- and two-family zoned properties. In the step-down area, the maximum building height would match the maximum height allowed in the neighboring zoning district.

This change would update the residential and commercial building design standards (sections 295-505-2 and 295-605-2 of the Zoning Code). It would also create downtown design options for facade composition (section 295-705-5 of the Zoning Code).

Height Transitions and Setbacks cont'd

PROPOSED CHANGE: This illustration shows how taller buildings would be limited in height near single- and two-family zoned properties.



Why it matters.

Step-downs and setbacks help larger buildings fit more comfortably into existing blocks. The rules reduce the visual impact on neighboring properties while still allowing needed development in appropriate locations.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Taller commercial, multi-family, and mixed-use buildings next to single- and two-family zoned properties.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-h-3 [NEW]** - Height transition rule: where RM lots are adjacent to, or sit across an alley from, lots zoned RS or RT1 through RT4, limit buildings to the maximum height of the adjacent district for a specified distance from that lot.
- **Table 295-505-2** - Increase setbacks to 10 feet for RM and RO zoned lots next to RS and RT1 through RT4 zoned lots. These setbacks apply to the entire building.
- **Table 295-505-2** - Increase setbacks to 4 feet when a property line is next to an alley.

Height Transitions and Setbacks cont'd

Commercial and mixed-use zoning districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB2, RB1-RB2, CS):

- **295-605-2-f-3 [NEW]** - Height transition rule: where commercial lots are adjacent to, or sit across an alley from, RS or RT lots, limit buildings to the maximum height of the adjacent district for a specified distance from that lot.
- **Table 295-505-2** - Increase setbacks to 10 feet for RM and RO zoned lots next to RS and RT1 through RT4 zoned lots. These setbacks apply to the entire building.
- **Table 295-505-2** - Increase setbacks to 4 feet when a property line is next to an alley.

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9G):

- **295-705-5.8-e-4 -** an upper-story step-down is proposed to be recognized as one of the acceptable facade "top" termination elements under facade composition.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change implements **Building Height Transitions (upper-story setbacks)** by requiring tall buildings near lower-density districts to step-down in height. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #3 & Action #28)*

Height by Story

What is allowed today?

Zoning codes can measure building height in feet or in the number of stories. Currently, Milwaukee uses a height limit in feet. A height limit in feet can be precise, but it can be hard to picture. Many people can more easily tell the difference between a 3-story and a 5-story building.

Currently, several subchapters of the Zoning Codes set a maximum building height in feet. These requirements appear in the Design Standards sections in the Residential, Commercial, Downtown, and Industrial subchapters (subchapters 5, 6, 7, and 8).

ALLOWED TODAY: This illustration shows that buildings built within a 60' height limit. Because of the 60' height limit, the buildings have a very uniform roof line, and there is limited flexibility for floor heights and architectural variety.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed updates change how building height is measured from feet to stories. For example, a zoning district could allow a building up to five stories rather than setting a 60-foot maximum height.

This change will require updating the Residential, Commercial, and Downtown, and Industrial subchapters of the Zoning Code (subchapters 5, 6, 7) to adjust maximum height rules and set maximum story heights. New definitions would be added to the Definitions in Subchapter 2.

PROPOSED CHANGE: This illustration shows that height by story measurements do not substantially alter the height of buildings. The new rules also allow more interesting looking buildings that are similar to historic Milwaukee neighborhoods.



Height by Story cont'd

Why it matters.

Measuring height by stories makes the rule easier to understand. This change sets clear expectations for what a future building could look like for the community.

Also, when height is measured only in feet it can lead to developers trying to squeeze as many floors into the height as possible. This can lead to short first floors which do not complement the existing architecture of Milwaukee, or shorter floors than typically desired for commercial spaces, to avoid shorter upper floors. This rule also allows variation in roof lines, floor heights, and architectural details, which is consistent with the city's traditional main street and neighborhood commercial buildings.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

This change impacts low-rise multi-family (2-4 stories), mid-rise multi-family (5-8 stories), mixed-use, and high-rise buildings on commercial streets and in neighborhoods where multi-family buildings are allowed by zoning (RM – residential multi-family districts).

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2:

- **295-201 -** Add definitions for "attic" and "mezzanine" to enable height by story.
- **295-205** - Add rule for measuring building height by stories. These rules address basements, sloping lots, and stories that are taller than normal.

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT4, RM1-RM7, RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-h -** Rewrite section. Height as story limits specified in table 295-505-2 (update); stories exceeding 14 feet count as one story per 14 feet or fraction thereof.
- **295-505-2-h** - Delete itemized height exceptions, such as chimneys, and move to s. 295-205.
- **Table 295-505-2 (two-family)** - Adjust maximum height in RT5 from measurement in feet to stories. Retain height in feet for all RS districts and RT1-RT4.
- **Table 295-505-2 (multi-family)** - Convert maximum height from feet to stories. For example, 45 feet becomes 3 stories, 60 feet becomes 5 stories, and 85 feet becomes 8 stories, depending on district.
- **Table 295-505-2 (multi-family)** - Delete minimum height rows.

Height by Story cont'd

Commercial and mixed-use zoning districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- **295-605-2-f** - Rewrite height rules. Ground floors could be up to 24 feet tall. Upper stories would be limited to 16 feet. A story that exceeds these limits would count as two or more stories. Most stories are generally 10-12 feet.
- **Table 295-605-2** - Convert maximum height from feet to stories across the districts: 45 feet becomes 3 stories, 60 feet becomes 5, 75 becomes 7, and 85 becomes 8. Staff proposes reducing the maximum height of NS2 to reflect its intent - Neighborhood Shopping and differentiate this district from LB2.

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9G):

- **295-705-5 [NEW] -** Add building height section with the same story height caps by use (residential 14 feet; other ground floors 24 feet; upper stories 14 to 16 feet by use).
- **Table 295-705-1 -** Add "Building height, maximum (stories)" rows by district, replacing the old feet-based rows (which were mostly "none"). Some districts remain unlimited; whereas others receive story caps.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change refines how building heights are measured by changing from a measurement by-foot of building height to a measurement by-story, such as a 2- or 4-story building. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #3, Action #23)*

Floor Area Ratio

What is allowed today?

Floor Area Ratio, often just called FAR, is a set of mathematical equations mostly for the downtown area and zoning districts. FAR sets a rule that a building may only have a certain amount of floor space based on the size of the lot.

In its simplest form the mathematical equation for floor area ratio is:

Building floor area / lot area = Floor Area Ratio.

For instance, a building with 70,000 square feet of floor area on a 10,000 square foot property has a floor area of 7, which we can find out by using the above equation:

70,000 / 10,000 = 7.

You can find all the existing FAR equations in Table 295-705-1. For instance, the formula for determining the permitted floor area of a property zoned C9A with 40% or less open space is: 2(W) + 7.5(X) + 4(Y), where W is the size of the property, X is the amount of open space on the property and Y is the roof-top deck area.

FAR can be unpredictable. Imagine you have the 10,000 square foot property. You know you want 70,000 square feet of floor area. If you build a 7-story building where each floor has 10,000 square feet or a 14-story building where each floor has 5,000 square feet both would have the same FAR of 7.

The way FAR rules are written in Milwaukee's Zoning Code today is even more confusing. Often the mathematical equation gets more complex and adds additional bonus floor area for amenities such as roof-top decks, public atriums, and open space.

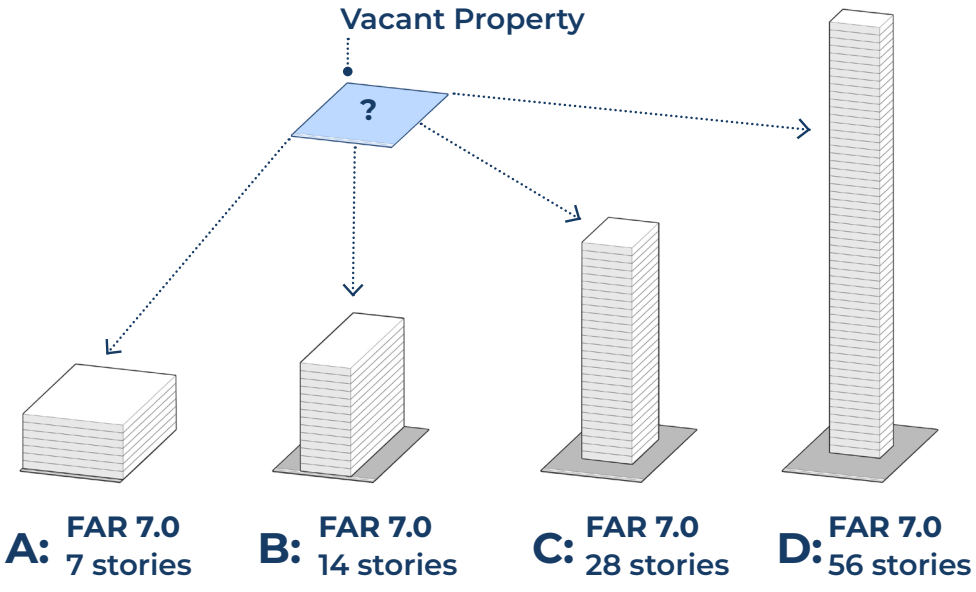
These rules tell someone very little about what shape or size a building can be built as on a downtown property.

A: 7 stories

B: 14 stories

C: 28 stories

D: 56 stories



Floor Area Ratio cont'd

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The new rules would remove floor area ratio as the main way of controlling building size in downtown. Instead, downtown would have bulk standards like other commercial zoning districts. Lot coverage, setbacks, and height limits would all apply in downtown zoning districts.

Removing FAR does not drastically change how the downtown will be developed. It just creates clearer rules for what can and cannot be built.

The core districts of downtown currently do not have height limits. This would stay the same. Parts of downtown closer to neighborhoods would be limited in height.

Why it matters.

Floor area ratio is complicated. It is impossible to predict how tall or wide a building will be based on floor area ratio. By updating the standards to be more like other districts, Downtown residents and developers can better understand what is allowed to be built and how big it can be. Design and bulk standards will still apply to make sure new buildings have a positive impact on the streets, businesses, parks, and homes downtown.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Buildings in downtown zoning districts of all shapes and sizes would have clearer rules.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7: (C9A-C9H)

- **295-705-4** - Re title from "Calculation of Permitted Floor Area" to "Bulk and Height Standards"; buildings would now comply with the setback, lot coverage, and building height standards of table 295-705-1.
- **295-705-4** - Remove the entire premium apparatus: the four-variable formula system (development site size W, surface open space X, rooftop open space Y, atrium or mall space Z), the qualifying criteria for each variable, and the floor area bonuses for skywalk-connectable atriums.
- **Table 295-705-1** - Delete the three "Permitted floor area" formula rows per district and replace with "Building height, maximum (stories)" rows. Some districts could remain unlimited; and others could receive story caps. For example: C9A(A), C9B, C9C, C9F, and C9G could be capped at 8, C9F at 6, and C9A(B) at 4 stories. Add "Lot coverage, maximum" rows.
- **295-705-1.5-a -** Rewrite the purpose statement to cite lot coverage rather than floor area as a design parameter that varies by district.

Floor Area Ratio cont'd

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change would **remove the Floor Area Ration (FAR) requirements in downtown zoning districts**, consistent with recommendation 40 from the Connecting MKE: Downtown Plan 2040. *(Housing Element Near Term Strategy #2 Action #7)*

Frontage Features

What is allowed today?

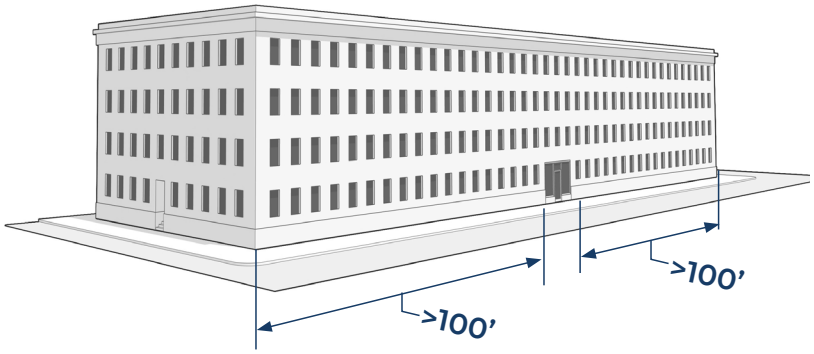
Frontage features are parts of a building that connect it to the sidewalk. They help people enter a building and make the street feel more welcoming.

Examples include: porches, stoops, wide stoops, recessed entries, projecting entries, forecourts, corner entries, corner plazas, and pedestrian passages.

In the current Zoning Code, there are very few requirements for frontage features. A building could be constructed of any size and only be required to have a single door facing the street.

Currently, the Zoning Code only requires one door visible from the street for each building (of any size), and no other frontage features besides windows. This requirement is found in the Principal Building Standards sections subchapters 5 and 6. Subchapter 7 references the standards of Subchapter 6.

ALLOWED TODAY: Large buildings may only need a few sidewalk entrances. In some cases, entrances are only required for safety and emergency exits. This can leave long stretches of building wall with few doors or windows.



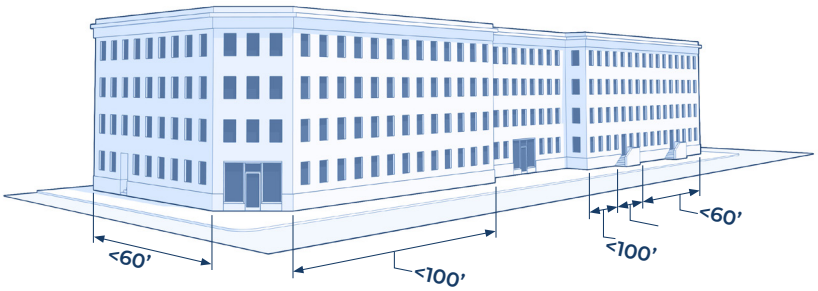
What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposal would require large new buildings to include entrances and other frontage features at regular distances along a sidewalk. These features would help large buildings:

- Feel smaller and easier to walk past.
- Provide clear, convenient entrances from the sidewalk.
- Balance privacy for residents with a stronger connection to the neighborhood.

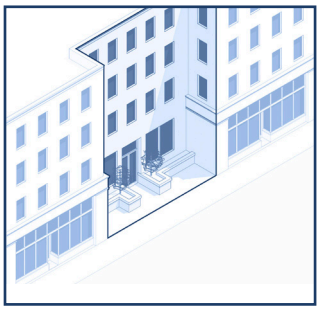
This change will require updating the Residential, Commercial, and Downtown, and Definitions subchapters of the Zoning Code (subchapters 5, 6, 7).
(Keep reading on for more information)

PROPOSED CHANGE: Entrances and frontage features are required at the walkable intervals shown above, so large buildings feel smaller and better connected to the sidewalk.



Frontage Features cont'd

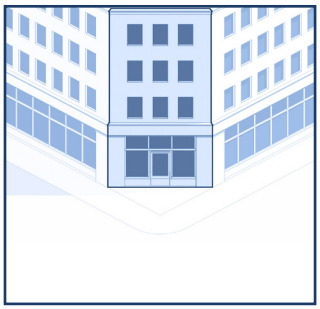
Types of Frontage Features



Recessed Entrance

A recessed entrance is set back from the front of the building.

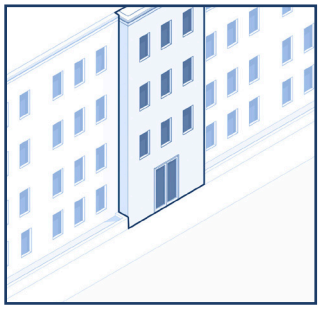
It creates a small buffer area between the sidewalk and the door. A recessed entrance can serve one or more homes or businesses. It gives people a place to wait, meet, or pause before entering the building.



Corner Entry

A corner entry is located where two sides of a building meet at an intersection.

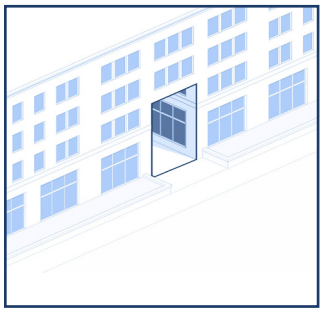
It makes the entrance easier to see and helps visitors find the building at an intersection. A corner entry can serve one or more homes or businesses.



Projecting Entrance

A projecting entrance extends outward from the front wall of a building.

It makes the entrance more visible from the sidewalk and can help visitors find the door.



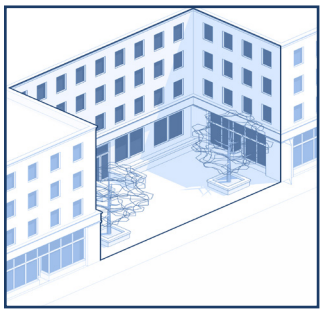
Pedestrian Passage

A pedestrian passage is an opening through part of a building. It is not an entrance by itself.

A passage allows people to walk from the sidewalk to a rear yard, courtyard, shared outdoor space, or parking area without entering the building. It can make a building feel more open and provide a place where neighbors and visitors may meet.

Frontage Features cont'd

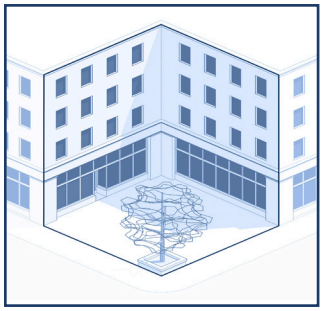
Types of Frontage Features



Forecourt

A forecourt is a larger open area between the sidewalk and a building entrance.

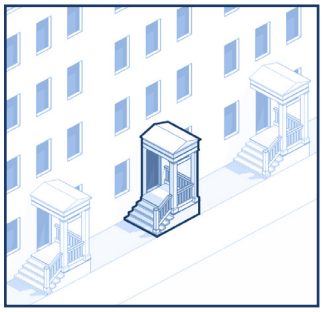
It often serves several homes or businesses. It can provide shared space for people to gather, wait, or walk through before entering the building.



Corner Plaza

A corner plaza is an open outdoor area at a building corner, usually at an intersection.

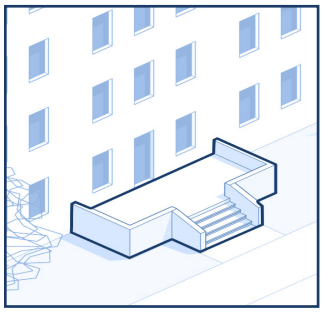
It provides more space than a corner entry. It can create a welcoming place for people to gather and can help ease the transition between the public sidewalk and the private building.



Stoop

A stoop is a small, slightly elevated platform at a single entrance, either covered to provide some protection from the weather, or simply a landing.

Because it serves just one door, a stoop must be sized so a person can move comfortably in and out with enough room to open the door, step through, and turn around.



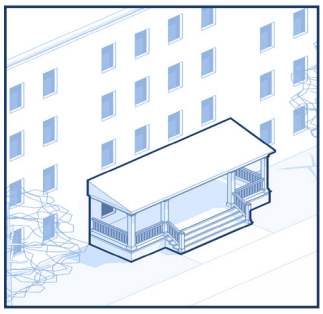
Wide Stoop

A wide stoop, sometimes called a terrace, is an elevated, open-air platform in front of one or more units.

Unlike a porch, it has no roof, and unlike a stoop, it isn't limited to a single doorway. It can be small, or large enough to function as a shared dining or social space, such as an outdoor café. It still needs enough room for comfortable movement to and from the door.

Frontage Features cont'd

Types of Frontage Features



Porch

A porch is a larger, covered version of a stoop, sized to serve one or more units rather than just a single door.

Like a stoop, it sits at a slight elevation above the sidewalk and shelters visitors from the weather, but it also needs enough room for a sitting area, a place to relax that connects the entrance to the street.

Why it matters.

Long buildings with few entrances can feel too large and unpleasant to walk past.

More frequent entrances and frontage features can break up long building walls to make sidewalks feel safer and more inviting. They also give people clearer ways to enter a building, help large buildings fit better into the neighborhood, and create places where people can pause, meet, or pass through.

Many older Milwaukee buildings are large, but they still feel welcoming because they have several doors, porches, entry courtyards, and other features along the street.

The proposed rules would help ensure that new large buildings include these people-focused features instead of long, blank walls.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

The proposal would apply to all new buildings, but the exact requirements would depend on:

- The zoning district (residential, commercial, or downtown zoning districts).
- The width of the building along the street.

Larger buildings would have to provide more entrances or frontage features than they do today. Smaller buildings, such as traditional storefronts or single-family homes, would not be impacted by the new rules.

Frontage Features cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2:

- **295-201** - Stoop, Porch, Terrace, Entry Courtyard, Primary Entrance: add definitions so the frontage element standards below are measurable and enforceable.

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-L-2** - Update entrance door orientation: every principal building needs a primary entrance facing a public street or a courtyard with pedestrian access to one; the exception is narrowed to genuine site constraints and requires defined frontage elements (porch, stoop, or entry courtyard visible from the right-of-way.)
- **295-505-2-L-3 [NEW]** - Require for frontage features for buildings over 60 feet wide: at least one of a recessed or projecting entrance, stoop, porch or wide stoop, entry courtyard, pedestrian passage, or corner entry, provided within the first 60 feet and every additional 100 feet of facade, with no wall segment exceeding 100 feet without one. Minor offsets and material changes do not comply. Rear flag lots are exempt.
- **Table 295-505-2-j [NEW]** - Add frontage element dimension minimums (depth, width, and height above grade for each element type).

Commercial zoning districts in Subchapter 6 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB2, RB1-RB2, CS):

- **295-605-2-i-2** - Rewrite entrance orientation: primary entrance facing a public street or connected courtyard; on corner lots, on the primary street or at the corner; small multi-family added to the multi-family entrance standard; adaptive reuse buildings exempted.
- **295-605-2-i-7 [NEW]** - Require for large building frontage: buildings with street-facing facades over 100 feet must provide an entrance, forecourt, pedestrian passage, or outdoor seating area for every 100 feet of facade.

Frontage Features cont'd

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9H):

- **295-705-5.6 [NEW]** - Add street-facing entrances: at least one functioning pedestrian entrance on a primary street frontage, at intervals not exceeding 75 feet along active frontages; residential units may use individual entrances, stoops, porches, or courtyard entries; recessed entrance; entrances may not force pedestrians across drive aisles or parking.
- **295-705-5.7 [NEW]** - Add blank wall limitations with a purpose statement: no blank segment over 25 feet between 2 and 10 feet above sidewalk grade, and no more than 40% of any ground-floor street facade may be blank; a menu of qualifying treatments is provided; back-of-house spaces are directed away from primary frontages.
- **295-705-5.9 [NEW]** - Add window depth: street-facing windows recessed at least 2 inches, with exemptions for curtain wall, storefront, and an alternative compliance path for adaptive reuse, historic, and civic buildings.
- **295-705-5.10 [NEW]** - Add ground-floor active frontage: at least 60% of the primary street frontage occupied by street-activating uses (40% in C9A and C9H); parking, storage, and mechanical areas do not count; bicycle rooms may count if equipped with a visible repair stand and pump.
- **295-705-5.12 [NEW]** - Add large building frontage: facades over 150 feet wide must provide an entrance, entrance courtyard, pedestrian passage, or outdoor seating for every 100 feet or fraction thereof, with exemptions for civic, public safety, adaptive reuse, and C9H industrial buildings.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change implements basic building design standards through **Frontage Features** to manage wider buildings along streets by requiring facades to integrate ground floor elements when buildings are large. *(Housing Element Near-Term Strategy #3 & Action #22)*

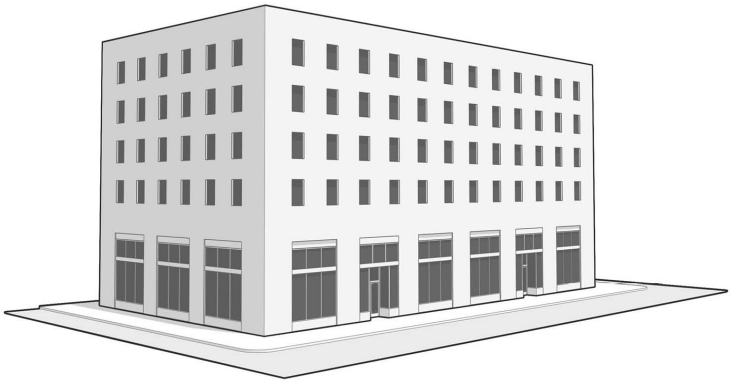
Facade Composition

What is allowed today?

A facade is the face of a building. Facade composition describes how the street-facing side of a building is organized. Many buildings have three main parts: a base, a middle, and a top. Currently, the Zoning Code does not have rules for facade composition.

Today, buildings do not need to include a distinct base, middle, or top. A building may have one large, uniform wall facing the street. These tall unbroken walls can feel unpleasant to walk beside. (See example below).

Currently, there are no rules in any Zoning Code subchapters that regulate the vertical organization of a facade.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

The proposed updates would apply to new larger buildings that face the street. These buildings would need to include a distinct base, middle, and top. The rules would not impact smaller buildings like single-family homes or duplexes.

The proposed code language will include options for a building design to meet these rules.

The new rules would require three recognizable parts for new buildings:

- A base near the ground, where the building meets the sidewalk;
- A middle that makes up most of the building; and
- A top that gives the building a clear ending at the roof line.

These new rules would be added to the Design Standards sections in the Residential, Commercial, Downtown, and Industrial subchapters (subchapters 5, 6, 7, and 8) of the Zoning Code.

Facade Composition cont'd

PROPOSED CHANGE: Require a distinct base, middle, and top, so the facade is divided into recognizable parts.

A: Base

B: Middle

C: Top



Why it matters.

A well-organized facade makes a building feel more welcoming at a street level. It can help avoid large, flat, generic walls and support a more comfortable experience for people walking along the street.

The proposed facade composition rules also help new buildings fit in with the look and feel of older buildings in Milwaukee.

The proposal would not require one architectural style. Buildings could still use different designs, materials, and architectural details. The rules would set basic expectations for organizing a building's street-facing facade. These rules would help new development fit Milwaukee streets and neighborhoods while allowing a variety of building types and architectural styles.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

The proposed updates would impact larger buildings that face the street. Larger buildings are allowed in the following zoning districts: Multi-family districts (RT5, RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2), Commercial Districts (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, and CS), Industrial-Mixed (IM), and Downtown Districts (C9s).

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RT5, RM1-RM7, and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-L-9 [NEW]** - Summary – For buildings with street-facing facades three stories or higher, vertical facade composition would be required. This would include a base (expressed by material change, coursing change, projecting sill or water table, or plane change); a middle; and a top termination element (parapet with coping, cornice, or integrated frieze). The standards would require facade elements to project or recess by at least 2 inches. The top of the building would need an 8-inch minimum termination element. This section would also include a purpose statement. Single-family through four-family buildings would be exempt.

Facade Composition cont'd

Commercial and mixed-use districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- **295-605-2-i-8 [NEW]** - Similar or the same standards as described above for Subchapter 5 would apply.

Downtown districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9G):

- **295-705-5.8 [NEW]** - Similar or the same standards as described above for Subchapter 5 would apply.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change would add building-design standards that support walkable neighborhoods and improve the appearance of new development. It would require a basic division of the facade into a base, middle, and top. This type of building organization is common in historic buildings and most contemporary buildings. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #3, Action #14)*

Required Glazing

What is allowed today?

"Glazing" means clear or see-through glass, such as windows and glass doors, on the outside wall of a building. Current zoning rules require windows mainly on the ground floor of buildings. These rules help storefronts face the street and help the street feet activated and safe. However, there are few rules for windows on upper floors.

The current rules also apply the same window standards to ground-floor homes and storefronts. This can be difficult because homes need more privacy than shops, restaurants, and other commercial uses.

This change will require updating the Residential, Commercial, and Downtown, and Definitions Subchapters of the Zoning Code. This includes adjusting the definition of "street-activating use area"

ALLOWED TODAY: Only ground-floor rules apply for glazing; limited upper-floor standards.

A: Side Street - No glazing required on upper floors and limited blank wall rules.

B: Side Street - 15% glazing is required on the ground floor

C: Front - 60% glazing is required on the first floor



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

Windows connect buildings to the street. The update would set more complete street-facing standards.

- Strong storefront glazing stays for commercial ground floors.
- A separate lower standard for ground-floor residential uses that need privacy would be added.
- New minimum upper-floor glazing rules and explicit blank-wall limitations would help connect all parts of a building to the street.

This change will require updating the Residential, Commercial, and Downtown, and Definitions Subchapters of the Zoning Code.

Required Glazing cont'd

PROPOSED CHANGE: More complete street-facing standards.

A: Side Street - 25% glazing required on upper floors, 30 feet max. for blank wall

B: Side Street - 15% glazing required on the ground floor

C: Commercial Use Front - 60% glazing required on the first floor

D: Residential Use Front - 25% glazing required on the first floor



Why it matters.

Windows help buildings feel connected to the street. They make sidewalks more comfortable, support storefront visibility, and reduce the impacts of long blank walls.

The proposed change also recognizes that homes and storefronts are different. A shop or restaurant benefits from large display windows, while a ground-floor residence needs more privacy.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

These standards would apply primarily in Local Business and Downtown zoning districts, where they would keep the strongest requirement. Residential ground floors would have more flexible requirements.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Definitions in Subchapter 2:

- **295-201** - Street-Activating Use: rename from "Street-Activating Use Area"; supports the interior space requirements behind required glazing, term simplification assists with use in context.

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RS1-RS6, RT1-RT4, RM1-RM7, RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-L-8 [NEW]** -Add street-facing transparency standards for residential buildings: blank wall length limitation, minimum glazing, glazing distribution, and other residential glazing rules.

Required Glazing cont'd

Commercial zoning districts in Subchapter 6 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB2, RB1-RB2, CS):

- **295-605-2-i-3** – Re-title "Street-Facing Openings" and extend to all new buildings and additions rather than principal buildings only.
- **295-605-2-i-3-b** – Lower maximum sill height for the commercial glazing zone.
- **295-605-2-i-3-c** – Adjust transparency requirements.
- **295-605-2-i-3-d [NEW]** – Add blank wall limitation for street-facing facades.
- **295-605-2-i-3-e [NEW]** – Facade depth: add requirements that street-facing windows must be recessed from the exterior wall surface.
- **295-605-2-i-4** – Remove alternatives: clerestory and low-window credits, display case credits, "wall design" substitutions on secondary frontages, and credits for bus shelters and ATMs in place of real windows. Non-transparent windows still count at a reduced rate.
- **Table 295-605-2** – Add new "Maximum blank wall length" row.

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9H):

- **295-705-5.5** – Add purpose statement, adjust measurement of storefront glazing, ground-floor non-residential use requirements are separated from ground-floor residential uses, and add upper story glazing requirements.
- **295-505-5.10** – Adjust ground-floor activating use standard language to ensure it aligns with glazing standards.
- **295-705-5.5-e & f** – Adjust transparency requirements.
- **295-705-5.5-g** – Add standards for security grilles: security grilles must be mounted inside the glass and maintain at least 70% openness.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

This change implements the **Windows and Transparency** actions by creating a stronger connection between buildings and streets by requiring more windows on upper floors of buildings and limiting long blank walls. These changes build on existing rules for windows and active ground-floor spaces. *(Housing Element Near-Term Strategy #3 & Action #18,19, and 21)*

Ground Floor Residential

What is allowed today?

In some commercial areas of Milwaukee, the first floor of buildings must include uses that appear active from the sidewalk. These uses may include stores, restaurants, apartment lobbies, or fitness areas.

These spaces must also have large windows and be visible from the sidewalk. These requirements can make ground-floor housing units difficult to build and may make them less private or comfortable for residents.

To build ground-floor housing units, most new buildings must receive a Variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals.

The minimum glazed area standards in table 295-605-2 of the commercial subchapter create the most difficulty for ground-floor residential in the current code.

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

Create design standards for ground-floor housing units along mixed-use and commercial streets. These standards would help ensure enough space between the public sidewalk and ground-floor homes through landscaping, setbacks, and elevated first floors.

Ground-floor housing may not be appropriate in every commercial area. Ground-floor units facing the street would require Special Use approval from the Board of Zoning Appeals, allowing each proposal to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Section 295-603 of the Commercial subchapter would be updated to create additional standards for ground-floor residential Special Use approval, as well as design standards in 295-605-2.





Ground Floor Residential cont'd





PROPOSED CHANGE: These illustrations show potential designs for ground-floor housing units with individual entrances. These designs create private homes and comfortable sidewalks by combining different design features such as front setbacks and first-floor elevation. Ground-floor units without individual entrances would also have setback and/or elevation standards.

Why it matters.

Some commercial areas of the city have always had housing units mixed with businesses along the street level. Making it easier to build housing units in these areas will increase housing supply while still protecting areas better suited for active ground floor businesses and uses.

The Special Use requirement will ensure ground-floor housing units are only approved where they support planning goals, fit in with the surrounding area, and provide adequate privacy and comfort.

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Multi-family buildings along commercial corridors that have a mix of commercial and housing.

Ground Floor Residential cont'd

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Commercial and mixed-use zoning districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- **Table 295-603-1** – Change multi-family uses to a limited use in commercial districts. Add limited use standards requiring special use approval for ground-floor residential units.
- **Section 295-603** – Add additional special use standards for multi-family uses with ground-floor residential units, including standards for portions of the ground floor with no residential units, standards for adequate separation of units from the public way, and alternative compliance options to design standards.
- **Section 295-605-2** - Add standards for buildings with ground-floor residential, including front setback maximum and minimums, side and rear setback minimums and standards (295-605-2-d-2), windows, design standards for options to provide separation and privacy from the public sidewalk.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These changes implement **increasing street level flexibility** to allow ground-floor residential in some business areas by limiting the locations that ground-floor commercial standards (windows and activation) are required in the LB2, LB3, and NS2 zoning districts, and setting alternative design standards for ground-floor residential. *(Housing Element Near-term Strategy #3 & Action #20)*

Parking Facade

What is allowed today?

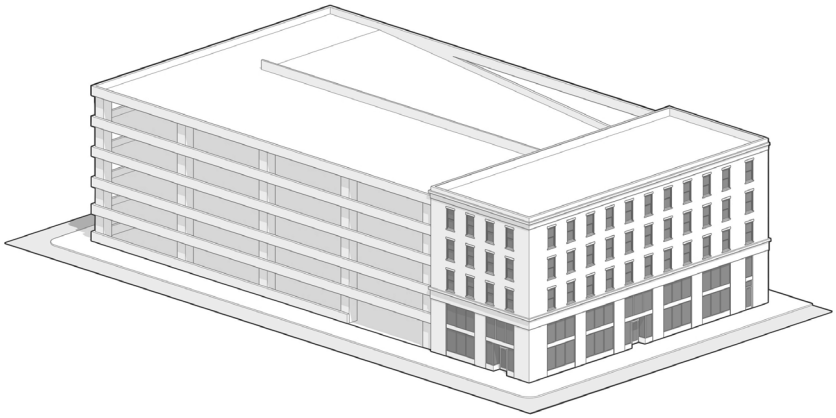
Providing parking for larger buildings in busy areas typically requires building a structure. Sometimes these structures are part of the main building and sometimes they are separate. Often, larger buildings are designed with the first several stories as a parking garage, and the rest of the floors above contain residential units.

Right now, parking garages are not treated any different than other buildings. This means that the first floor in commercial areas must be surrounded by active uses, however other parts of the parking garage can be left blank or open.

These relaxed rules can result in large openings, inactive street frontages, and visually unappealing parking areas.

Accessory Parking Structures are a limited use in RM3-RM7, RO2, NS2, LB2, LB3, and all Downtown districts, subject to additional requirements regarding street activating uses. These limited use standards will not change.

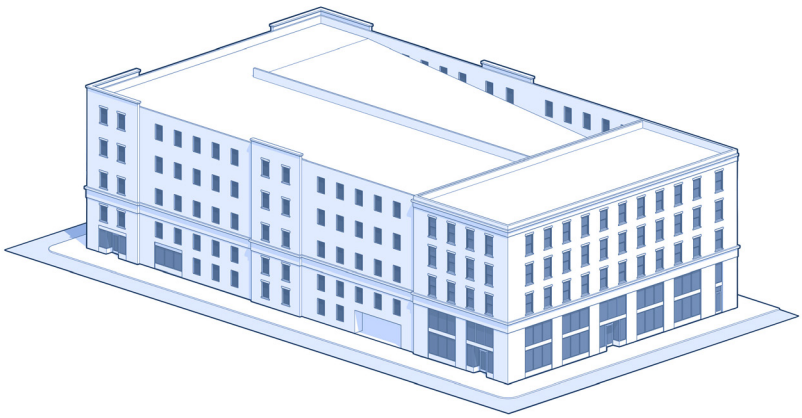
ALLOWED TODAY: A parking garage under the current code.



What is proposed? How would the rules change?

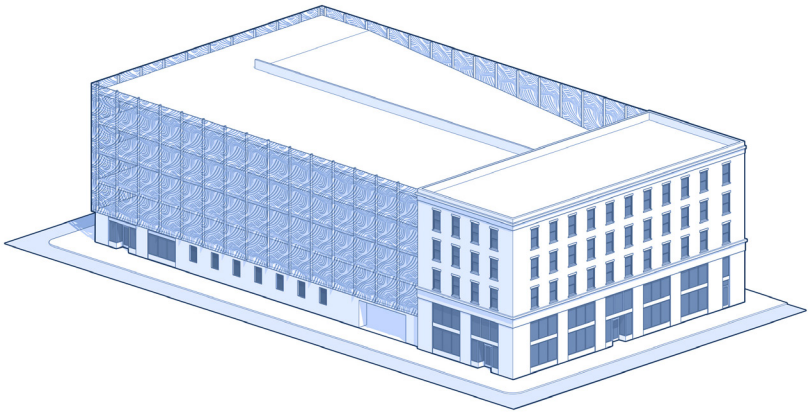
Provide options for minimizing the visual impact of enclosed parking. The preferred option will continue to be completely wrapping the parking area in other uses, such as housing units or office space. However, other options would include:

OPTION 1: Design the garage facade to resemble an occupied building, with regular openings/ windows, limited vehicle entries, and active uses along the street level. This helps make parking structures look like buildings to neighbors and pedestrians.



Parking Facade cont'd

OPTION 2: Design garages with screening materials such as metal panels while limiting entries and requiring active uses along the street level. This helps minimize the visual impact of garages, so they do not detract from surrounding architecture.



Why it matters.

Garages are a necessary part of many buildings. However, garages are big storage spaces, and do not contribute to the activity of a neighborhood. Reducing the visual impact of garages, protecting the active street fronts of buildings, and maintaining human scale all improve the pedestrian experience of new buildings.

Providing options for how parking facades are handled gives necessary flexibility to designers while ensuring high-quality design.

These changes would be made in the design standards sections in the Residential, Commercial, and Downtown subchapters (Subchapter 5, 6, and 7).

What type of new buildings are impacted by this change and where?

Multi-family and mixed-use buildings providing structured parking.

What sections of the Zoning Code would be updated?

Residential zoning districts in Subchapter 5 (RM1-RM7 and RO1-RO2):

- **295-505-2-L-4** - Recommended addition: street-facing overhead doors must be recessed 4 feet from the facade (with porch and window-based exceptions) and may not occupy more than 40% of the street-facing facade width.

Parking Facade cont'd

Commercial and mixed-use zoning districts in Subchapters 6 and 8 (NS1-NS2, LB1-LB3, RB1-RB2, CS, and IM):

- **295-603-1-r** - Delete the old parking structure limited use standard (50% of the street level occupied by other uses) and replace with the design standards below.
- **295-605-2-j [NEW]** - Add parking structure street frontage standards for LB2 and LB3: ground-floor active uses to a depth of 15 feet along at least 80% of the facade; vehicular openings capped at 24 feet wide, one per 150 feet of frontage, separated by at least 50 feet, and no more than 20% of the facade width; upper parking levels screened to conceal vehicles and structure, with openings capped at 50% of each level, horizontal openings interrupted every 30 feet, vertical openings limited to two levels, 6-inch screening depth, and continuous open spandrels prohibited.
- **295-605-2-i-5** - Extending the 4-foot garage door recess beyond the previous four districts to garage doors facing any street.

Downtown zoning districts in Subchapter 7 (C9A-C9H):

- **295-705-5.11 [NEW] -** Parking structure design for principal and accessory structures: street-facing facades designed as building facades; the same opening size, number, separation, and frontage caps as the commercial districts; where a garage is integral to a larger building, frontage occupancy is measured against the full facade; structural columns may serve as the required vertical interruptions; screening elements are themselves subject to the window depth, facade composition, and blank wall standards.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These changes improve Parking Facade design standards for street-facing facades of parking structures to retain pedestrian-friendly and human-scale quality. They also mitigate pedestrian and vehicle conflicts by controlling Parking Access. *(Housing Element Near-Term Strategy #3, Actions #30 & #31)*

Definitions & Housekeeping

What is proposed? How would the rules change?

Subchapter 2 of the Zoning Code includes definitions of terms and rules of measurement used throughout the Zoning Code. Changes to definitions support the proposed changes to the Zoning Code in subchapters 5, 6, 7, and 8.

The proposed changes in Subchapter 2 include additions of missing and new terms needed to enable recommended code updates and new building types to expand housing access. These updates expand the section on height measurement to reflect concepts such as an attic and mezzanine. Frontage elements are added and defined to reflect added design requirements for large buildings in commercial districts. Flag lot terms and definitions are also added to support its introduction in residential districts. Existing terms are proposed to be modernized, and conventions and are corrected. See individual code change sheets for more detail.

What sections of the zoning code would be updated?

Housing Types (295-201 and 295-203)

- **Cottage Court:** Add a definition – a residential development with 3 or more detached dwelling units arranged around a shared open space.
- **Single-family Dwelling, Attached:** Add definition for the townhouse/rowhouse type.
- **Three-family Dwelling:** Add definition - a residential building containing 3 dwelling units.
- **Four-unit Dwelling:** Add definition -a residential building containing 4 dwelling units.
- **Small Multi-family Dwelling:** Add definition - a residential building containing 5 to 8 units.
- **Two-family, Three-family, and Four-family Dwelling:** Add use definitions in s. 295-203 to match the new use table rows.
- **Accessory Dwelling Unit (295-203):** Revise the use definition, replacing a reference to "lot area per dwelling" with a reference to "required bulk standard".

Height and Building Form (295-201 and 295-205)

- **Attic:** Add definition to allow measurement of height by story.
- **Mezzanine:** Add definition to enable measurement of height by story.
- **Story:** Add definitions to enable measurement by story.
- **Building Height (295-205):** Revise to enable both measurement by feet and by story. Height exclusions such as chimneys and small rooftop enclosures are consolidated here, replacing repeated lists in Subchapters 5, 6, and 7.
- **Floor Area Ratio:** Delete the FAR measurement rule (295-205-7-11), consistent with replacing downtown FAR with physical bulk standards.

Definitions & Housekeeping cont'd

Frontage Elements (295-201)

- **Stoop:** Add definition - an exterior stair and landing.
- **Porch:** Add definition - a covered platform projecting from a facade.
- **Terrace:** Add definition - an elevated outdoor platform near the front lot line.
- **Entry Courtyard/Forecourt:** Add definition - a recessed entrance condition enclosed by building walls.
- **Primary Entrance:** Add definition - the main entrance and door associated with the address.
- **Street-Activating Use:** Rename from "Street-Activating Use Area" with the definition carried forward.
- **Blank Wall:** Add definition.

Lots and Site (295-201)

- **Development Site:** Add a definition - a single tract within a single block designated to be used, developed, or built upon as a unit. This allows a cottage court to be regulated at its outside edges, even if there are lot lines within the site.
- **Flag lot family of definitions:** Add new definitions to enable and regulate flag lots: Lot, Flag; Lot, Flag Configuration; Lot, Front Flag; Lot, Rear Flag; and Lot, Reverse Flag adds.
- **Flag lot related adjustments:** Revise Rear definitions. Revise Lot Width definition to explain where the width of a rear flag lot is measured. See the Flag Lots summary for the full set.

Housekeeping

- **Modernization -** Update the definition of "Family" to reflect contemporary household arrangements and clarify the definitions of "Roomer" and "Rooming House."
- **Corrections -** District labels RO1 and RO2 are corrected (previously typeset with zeros), renumbering and cross-reference updates throughout the five subchapters.

How is this related to the Housing Element?

These adjustments to definitions support most other code changes. Each code change summary lists the specific Subchapter 2 updates.