



I. Introduction

The existing use, area, height, and placement standards found in Chapter 55 of the City Code of Ann Arbor were first adopted in 1963 as the Zoning Ordinance and remain largely in place as originally written. Other land development regulations such as parking, landscaping and screening, streets and access, stormwater management and soil erosion, natural features, signs, fences, and outdoor lighting, were first adopted as separate chapters of the City Code between 1963 through the 1990s.

The nine City Code chapters dealing with land development were combined and lightly revised for consistency in 2019. Each chapter was repealed and a new Chapter 55 Unified Development Code (UDC) was adopted. The UDC currently provides minimally cohesive, outdated regulations in a modern framework which the City now seeks to fully rewrite, including updating the Zoning Map, with best practice standards and regulations to implement the future land use recommendations of the Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan 2050 (Plan), adopted on March 16, 2026.

II. Background

The 288-page UDC divides the City into 33 traditional zoning districts, dozens of PUD (Planned Unit Development) districts, several districts with adopted and incorporated conditions, and 10 overlay zoning districts. It provides the permitted uses, use specific standards, development standards, procedures, and enforcement for all new construction. It is a single Word document maintained by Planning staff, converted to PDF format for downloading from the City's website.

A. Project Goals

The City seeks to substantially rewrite the content of Article II Zoning Districts, Article III Use Regulations, Article IV Development Standards, Article V Administrative Bodies and Procedures, and Article VI Nonconformities of its UDC to implement the future land use recommendations, specifically the recommended zoning plan, of the Ann Arbor Comprehensive Plan 2050.

Additional amendments and updates to other Articles and Sections for consistency are assumed and expected.

The project goals below are a summation of the policy direction provided in the Plan and it is imperative that the selected firm read and understand the Plan's goals and strategies toward achieving a city that is more affordable, sustainable, equitable, and dynamic. Major highlights include the following:

- Increase the supply and diversity of housing types by changing dimensional standards to allow for more density in all districts.
- Promote complete neighborhoods with retail and service hubs.
- Expedite processes for needed uses.
- Mitigate the displacement of vulnerable residents.
- Diversify the economy to grow the non-residential tax base by offering flexibility in land use and regulations in key locations.
- Encourage a variety of commercial and industrial spaces to provide affordable opportunities for local entrepreneurs.
- Promote redevelopment of car-oriented shopping centers to create more downtown-like environments.
- Foster connections between transportation and land use systems, developing and aligning context-based land use and development standards.
- Protect, enhance, and manage natural features or open space that provide ecological benefits.
- Reduce stormwater runoff volume and flood occurrences.
- Support the transition to clean energy through land and investment.
- Coordinate and align utility infrastructure investment needs with land use and growth.

B. Specific Objectives

The rewritten UDC should be:

- Logically and intuitively organized.
- Provide clear and concise language.
- Provide well-defined applicability and objective, measurable standards.
- Use graphics to convey information and requirements as much as feasible.
- Accessible to all users.
- Able to be printed as a hard copy and hosted by online codification services.

Specific objectives for each Article include:

- Article II Zoning Districts
 - New districts created to fulfill the Comprehensive Plan 2050 future land use recommendations: Hub, Transition, Residential; replacing most or all existing residential, mixed-use, and non-residential and special purpose districts [with notable exception of PL Public Land district].
 - Each recommended land use category should have the fewest number of districts as appropriate to minimize exceptions, alternatives, and additional area, height, and placement standards meant to achieve compatibility.
 - Evaluate eliminating character overlay districts.
 - Advise on better integrating PUD districts and their adopted Supplemental Regulations into the chapter.
- Article III Use Regulations
 - New permitted use regulations are provided for current and relevant land uses.
 - In general, each district permits the fullest range of uses as appropriate.
 - Residential districts permit local neighborhood commercial uses.
 - Determine dimensional standards for three-family dwellings/triplexes and townhouses with three units as primary uses.
 - New use specific standards are provided for permitted uses where necessary that address context and performance standards.
 - Examples may include design standards for two-family/duplex, three-family/triplexes, and townhouses for consistency with scale of existing neighborhoods.
 - Nonresidential uses permitted in Transition districts for compatibility when next to or near residential uses in Residential districts.
 - Certain permitted uses, and corresponding appropriate use specific standards, must be specifically addressed, including group housing (fraternities and sororities, housing cooperatives). A detailed list will be provided.
 - Consideration should be given to using the same use category and use type terms and phrases in applicable building codes.
- Article IV Development Standards
 - New area, height, and placement standards are provided for each zoning district.

- Provide new streets and access standards, addressing shared access requirements and access management.
 - Revise stormwater management applicability to promote infill development, better align standards with floodplain management regulations and best practices, and maintain design standards per Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's rules and guidelines;
 - Revise soil erosion standards for consistency and coordination with the rest of the Article, maintaining compliance with state requirements.
 - Provide new outdoor lighting standards for dark sky principles.
 - Provide new fence standards with emphasis on improved graphics.
 - Condense, streamline, and simplify natural feature standards for consistency and coordination with the rest of the Article with consideration for increasing applicability, protections, and mitigation standards for highest quality natural features.
 - Provide clear applicability requirements for each section using consistent language, terms, and references to procedures and approvals.
 - Identify where and how sustainable features can be incentivized.
 - Identify and address gaps in current development standards.
- As time and budget allow for Article IV:
 - Provide new parking standards for vehicles, maintaining no minimums and considering maximum limits, with provisions for EV parking, and revising bicycle parking standards for consistency and coordination.
 - Provide new landscaping, screening, and buffering standards focused on shading impervious surfaces, promoting stormwater management, and buffering districts and/or land uses.
 - Consider introducing rules of interpreting and applying development standards.
 - Identify redundant, outdated, and no longer relevant standards and where standards may exceed minimum requirements of State codes.

- Article V Administrative Bodies and Procedures
 - Provide straightforward, easy-to-follow, efficient procedures with preference for administrative approvals unless otherwise required by law.
 - Provide clear, succinct, relevant standards for the following:
 - Approval for all procedures. Consolidate or eliminate procedures as necessary to minimize barriers and introduce new, more efficient procedures as appropriate.
 - Amendments and modifications.
 - Requirements to minimize barriers to redevelopment, promote efficient review, and align with standards of approval.
- Article VI Nonconformities
 - Provide best practice regulations for nonconforming uses, lots, and structures.
 - Provide for minor, mid, and/or major nonconforming designations with corresponding regulations on continuing, expanding, altering, and discontinuing.
 - Eliminate special standards and date-specific status for nonconformities wherever possible.
- Zoning Map
 - Create parcel-based zoning layer and a polygon-based zoning boundary layer.
 - Reflect new zoning districts.

C. Community Engagement and Participation

Using the IAP2 Spectrum, some form of community participation is expected for each task in the scope of work. The form of community participation should be appropriate for the task. Expectations are provided below. City staff will lead engagement events but will rely on the selected firm to design the materials.

D. Project Schedule

The City expects a final draft code and zoning layer to be completed within 24 months and the new code text and layer to be effective no more than 12 months after that, for a total project completion timeframe of 36 months.

E. Desired Qualifications

- Familiarity with Michigan’s enabling laws and other relevant legislation.

- Firms that have prepared zoning ordinances that eliminated exclusive single-family zoning districts.
- A local presence to readily attend in-person meetings, if necessary
- A firm that can dedicate a full-time person to manage the project, maintain momentum for an accelerated timeline, and keep all changes and references updated. This person would be a single point of contact with Ann Arbor staff.
- Experience with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliance.

III. Scope of Work

A. Analysis and Recommendations

The existing code should be compared to the future land use recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan 2050 and best practices for traditional zoning regulations to prepare recommendations for rewriting the text. The existing Zoning Map should be assessed for areas to be rezoned.

- Review existing materials:
 - Chapter 55 UDC.
 - Zoning Layer.
 - City Parcel Layer.
 - Comprehensive Plan 2050.
 - Downtown Design Guidelines.
 - Reimagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study.
- Review other applicable codes, standards, policies, and reports such as:
 - Public Services Standard Specifications.
 - Public Services Utility Comprehensive Plan Reports.
 - Solid Waste Regulations.
 - Downtown Street Design Manual.
 - International Fire Code.
 - A2ZERO (Carbon Neutrality Plan).
 - Comprehensive Transportation Plan.
 - Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan.
 - Michigan Planning and Zoning Enabling Act.
- Research best practices and noteworthy codes of comparable and peer jurisdictions.

Staff Support:

- Identify and provide materials to share with the selected firm.
- Share a staff diagnostic of UDC sections that require major or minor revisions, if helpful to the selected firm.
- Fulfill requests for additional materials and data to the extent possible.
- Dedicate staff to answer technical questions and clarifications as needed.
- Assist in organizing meetings.

Deliverable Expectations:

- Hold a kick-off meeting and provide meeting minutes to staff.
- A template that tracks detailed progress for each scope item and the percentage of the budget spent.
- A report of findings that summarizes key issues, where zoning can better align with city's policies, noncompliance with state requirements, barriers to development, and approaches to modernize and streamline the text. This includes any metadata used during this process.

Community Engagement Expectation:

Inform. The planning department will share the report of findings through its established channels and project page for the public and at a Planning Commission meeting.

B. Draft Preliminary Code and Zoning Layer

- Prepare a complete preliminary code and zoning layer.
- Deliver Articles and/or Sections individually or grouped logically for staff review regularly. It is estimated that for each Article, there will be at least three meetings with staff to discuss the consultant's proposed amendments.
- Provide ESRI GIS based Zoning Layer.
- After meeting with staff, attend Planning Commission and City Council meetings to share drafts and seek input where feedback is needed on important decision points. It is estimated there will be a minimum of 10 meetings with the Planning Commission during this step (two meetings per Article) but may require more depending on the content. Staff may meet with Planning Commission more regularly for feedback.
- Develop and use a system to document feedback received, requested revisions, and how they will be (or were) addressed in the final draft.

Engagement Expectations: Involve. During the drafting of the preliminary code and map, engagement is expected. For higher impacts changes to the UDC, staff recommend, but are open to other suggested approaches, the following engagement methods (a reminder that staff will lead engagement but rely on selected firm to plan for and design materials):

- Break the code: An event to stress test the drafted language with the development community to hear feedback on unclear language or potential barriers to development.
- Focus groups/working groups: Select a targeted group of residents, boards and commission, business owners, and other relevant stakeholders to discuss specific areas of the UDC that will directly impact them.
- Walking tours: Determine areas of the city that could benefit from a visual tour with a selected audience to photograph concerns or areas for improvement.
- Survey: A series of short surveys for rapid feedback on specific issues with a feedback loop to share the results.

Staff Support:

- Conduct basic background research on the relationship between land use categories to existing zones.
- Post drafts for public access.
- Support research on other communities' ordinances.
- Distribute and coordinate draft for review to internal stakeholders.
- Host in person engagement sessions.
- Present Article drafts to the Planning Commission.
- Summarize and share feedback from staff-hosted events and assist in prioritizing in event of conflicts.

Deliverable Expectations:

- Agendas and minutes for all meetings with staff.
- Complete preliminary code draft in Word document that shows track changes made to the current UDC; or if starting a new document, provide the UDC source or an indication of when new text is included.
- Zoning Layer files.
- Minimum of monthly written updates to city staff on project's progress.
- Presentation(s) to city staff.
- Develop presentations, graphics, and text for engagement sessions and the Planning Commission and City Council meetings.

C. Final Draft Code and Zoning Layer

The final zoning code and zoning layer shall meet the following:

- Optimized for web presence with clickable bookmarks, internal links, and navigation panels.
- All defined terms in this document must display their definitions via tooltip on hover.
- One version of the document does not exceed 20 MB, if possible.
- Screen-reader accessible and complies with the most recent updates WCAG, Level AA.

D. Adoption and Implementation

Prepare ordinance(s), with transmittal or summary reports for:

- Staff in preparing for adoption and implementation.
- Planning Commission public hearing and recommendation.
- City Council first reading, second reading, and public hearing, and adoption.

Staff Support:

- Schedule meetings and notice public hearings.
- Prepare meeting agendas and packets.
- Attend meetings.

Deliverable Expectations:

- An editable version of the final draft and all previous drafts.
- All research conducted to be provided in an easy-to-access platform, including original files.
- All graphics provided separately from the final document.
- A final Zoning Layer and modified City Parcel Layer with attribute field denoting the Zoning District value of each parcel.

E. Optional and Additional Services

Optional and additional services may arise during this process. Please submit the cost of each of item below, if not already included in the submitted budget.

- Coordination with a codification service for online hosting of the UDC.
- Staff orientation and training.