

Memorandum



Date: March 9, 2026
To: Downtown Design Review Committee
From: Kristen Gundersen, Planning and Community Development Director
Subject: **Unified Development Code (zoning ordinance)**

Background

The City Commission adopted the Unified Development Code (UDC) in November 2025, and it became effective in December 2025. The UDC has elements of a form-based code which provides additional language for the design of buildings to help maintain built environment characteristics found in the different districts. UDC documents can also include all regulations associated with the development of land including stormwater and engineering design standards, subdivision regulations to name others.

Attached is an excerpt from the UDC as it relates to development in the D Downtown District:

- Article III – Section 71-14 Zoning districts – establishes zoning districts
- Figure 71-A – Zoning Map
- Section 71-16 – General Requirements
- Table 71-F Downtown D Standards – provides setback and glazing requirements
- Section 71-17 – Façade requirements – language pertaining to façade regulations
- Table 71-F Façade Types – provides information regarding Shopfronts, Awning or Canopy and Common Entry
- Article 4 – Administration – Section 71-33 Review and decision-making bodies

Section 71-33.E Design Review Committee

1. Powers and duties. The design review committee is the decision-making body for applications subject to downtown design review standards unless the proposed work qualifies for administrative approval under Section 71-36H Downtown Applications.
 2. The Design Review Committee meets on an as-needed basis when discretionary review is required.
- Section 71-36.H Downtown applications – provides language for staff review and approval

The previous zoning ordinance had three references to Façade Building Review - Section 22.07 Planning Commission Review of Façade Plan as found in the amended 2003 zoning ordinance stated, “The Planning Commission shall review the building façade plan and make recommendations to the applicant based on façade design and aesthetic standards established by the Downtown Development Authority and approved by resolution of the City Commission.” The standards were not incorporated into the zoning ordinance.

In addition, the Downtown Design Standards from 2007 established 6 goals with 7 areas of review and provided the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Changes to Section 11.04 of the zoning ordinance were attached and approved by the City Commission in December 2007. Section 11.04 references the Design Review Committee and process.

Discussion

The Planning Commission is reviewing other sections of the UDC to address concerns that have arisen since its adoption. The intent is there will be several sections amended at one time with remaining sections reviewed later. At this time, staff is requesting the Design Review Committee review language found in the UDC and determine if any changes are necessary. Staff have the following discussion items:

- Section 71-33.E.
 - Subsection 2. Meeting dates. It can be difficult for the property owner/tenant, applicant, committee members and staff to schedule meetings on as needed basis. The webpage associated with the committee referred to the first Wednesday of each month. Staff created a meeting date and deadline handout for 2026 to help those going through the process understand when the committee meets. City staff can easily cancel meetings and let the members know as soon as possible.
 - Review of other boards includes reference to how appeal of decisions are handled. There should be an established appeal board/commission if an applicant determines the step is necessary. Options included: Zoning Board of Appeals or Planning Commission.
- Section 71-36H Downtown applications
 - Review of existing design standards for inclusion in the UDC. This will help people find all necessary documents in one document and would be in keeping with similar requests reviewed by either the Planning Commission or ZBA. An example of the language associated with the Special Use Permit process was included in the excerpt.

Next Steps

Review and discuss the information provided along with the supplemental information and the 2007 Downtown Design Review Standards. If the Committee concludes changes are needed to the UDC, direct staff to work on drafting changes for review at a future meeting.

Excerpt from Unified Development Code pertaining to Downtown Design Review and Committee

Language associated with Downtown Design Review highlighted in yellow

ARTICLE III. ZONING

Sec. 71-14 Zoning districts

The zoning districts listed in [Sec. 71-5 Zoning districts established](#) are created by this chapter. [Table 71-B](#) indicates the consolidation of zoning districts upon adoption of this chapter.

- A. Official zoning map. The location and boundaries of each of the districts are shown on the official zoning map and the map is a part of this code, see [Figure 71-A Buchanan Zoning Map](#). Whenever amendments or changes are made in district boundaries, the amendments or changes must be made by ordinance and recorded on the official zoning map. The official zoning map located in the office of the planning department is the final authority in determining current zoning status.
- B. Zoning districts summary table. [Table 71-B](#) generally shows the City of Buchanan's previous zoning districts in relation to this chapter's zoning districts.

TABLE 71-B ZONING DISTRICT SUMMARY			
Previous district		New district	
R1-A	Single-family residential	NE	Neighborhood edge
R1-B	Single-family residential		
R-2	Two-family residential		
R-3	Multi-family residential		
R-4	Multi-family senior residential	NC	Neighborhood center
C-1	Neighborhood commercial		
C-2	Commercial	SC	Suburban commercial
C-3	Central business	D	Downtown
I-1	Light industrial		
I-2	Heavy industrial		
PUD	Planned unit development	Archived	
		NP	Neighborhood plan
CD	Cluster residential	Deleted	

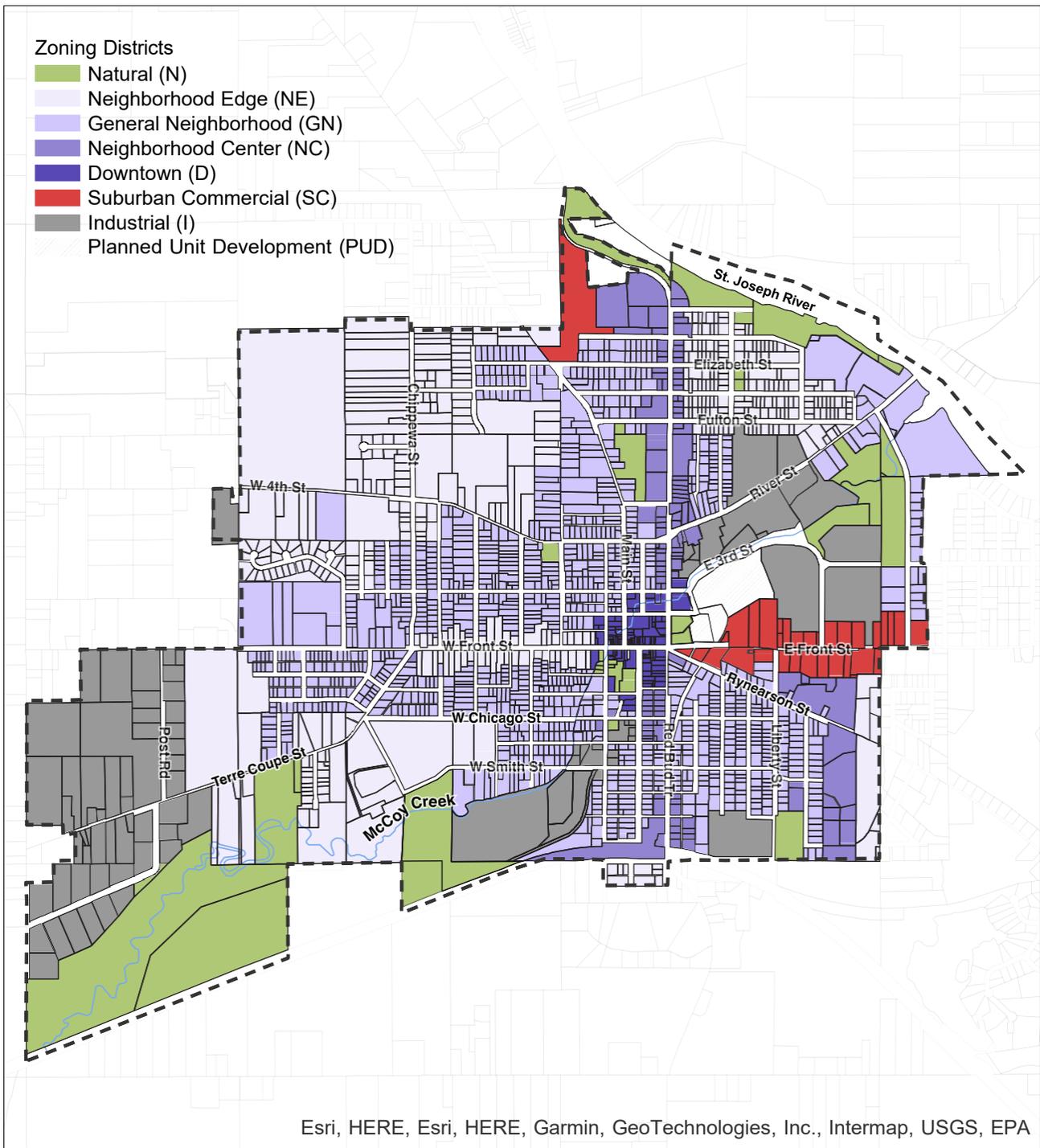


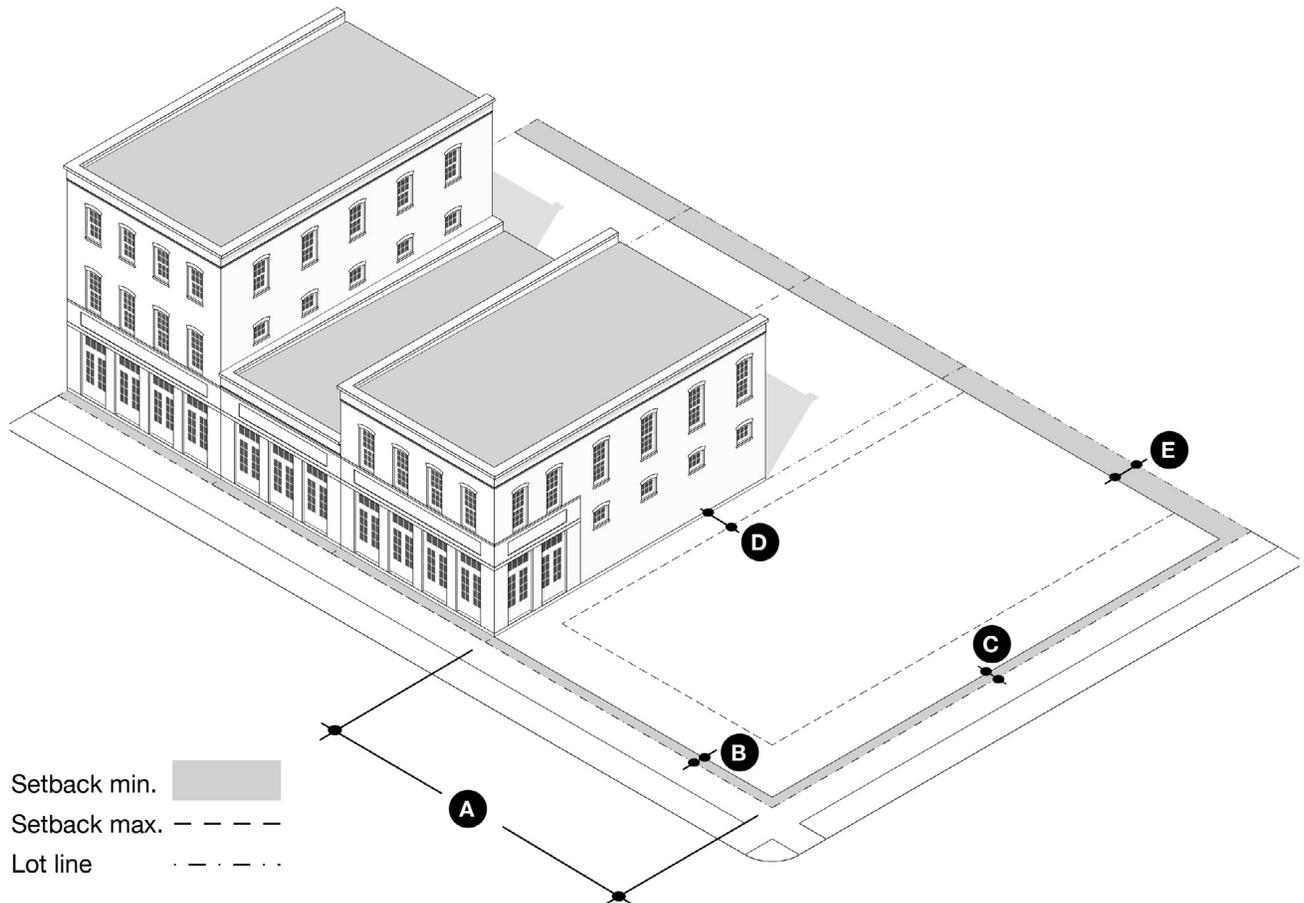
Figure 71-A Buchanan Zoning Map

Sec. 71-16 General requirements

The following requirements apply to all zoning districts and neighborhood plans.

- A. Buildings and Yards.
 - 1. Building placement. Structures must be set back from lot lines as specified in [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#).
 - 2. Elements that project from facades are permitted to encroach into setbacks as specified in [Sec. 71-17 F](#).
 - 3. Buildings and covered structures are limited in the total area they may occupy as a percentage of the net lot area as specified by lot coverage in [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#).
 - 4. Outdoor dining on private property is permitted in all districts. See [Sec. 71-17](#) for use of public sidewalks.
- B. Building height.
 - 1. Building height is limited according to [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#), measured as follows:
 - a. Building height is measured in stories above sidewalk grade adjacent to the principal building entrance;
 - b. Stories are measured from finished floor to finished ceiling;
 - c. Stories are limited to 14 feet high, except a first floor non-residential use may be a maximum of 20 feet high;
 - d. Stories exceeding 14 feet are counted as one story for every 14 feet;
 - e. Below ground stories do not count toward building height provided they do not extend more than 4 feet above sidewalk grade; and
 - f. Height limits do not apply to attics, masts, belfries, clock towers, chimney flues, water tanks, or elevator bulkheads.
 - 2. Height exception. Chimneys, cooling towers, communication towers, and other necessary structures in the industrial district (I) may exceed the height limitations if they are set back from the adjacent lot line the same distance as their height.
 - 3. Rooftops are habitable in all zones except Neighborhood Edge (NE).
- C. Facade requirements are established in [Sec. 71-17](#).
- D. Travel trailers. The occupancy of travel trailers may not exceed seven days as a temporary dwelling.
- E. Storage of recreational vehicles. Unoccupied recreational vehicles may be stored on a lot as long as it is stored in the area designated for parking according to [Table 71-C – Table 71-H](#).

TABLE 71-F DOWNTOWN (D) Standards



Lot Occupation		Accessory Structures	
A Lot Width	See Sec. 71-11 C	Front Setback	B + 20 ft. min.
Lot Coverage	Not applicable	F Sidestreet Setback	0 ft. min.
Buildings		G Side Setback	0 ft. min.
B Front Setback	0 ft. min., 12 ft. max. ²	H Rear Setback	6 ft. min.
C Sidestreet Setback	0 ft. min., 12 ft. max.	H Rear Alley Setback	15 ft. min. from centerline
D Side Setback	0 ft. min.	Height	2 stories max.
E Rear Setback	10 ft. min.	Parking, Loading and Storage	
E Rear Alley Setback	15 ft. min. from centerline	Front Setback	B + 20 ft. min.
Height	3 stories max.	Sidestreet Setback	6 ft. min.
Ground Floor Glazing	50% min. ³	Structure Height	n/a
Upper Floor Glazing	20% min.		
Entry Frequency	50 ft. min.		

1 Front Street, between S Red Bud Tr and S Oak St has a 0 ft. setback maximum.
See [Sec. 71-17 D.](#) for additional glazing requirements

Sec. 71-17 Facade requirements

This section applies to the building facade and any attachments.

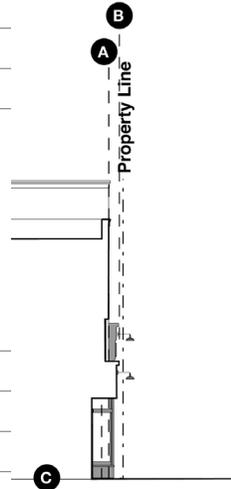
- A. Facade requirements regulate the following:
 - 1. Building facades nearest the front and side street lot lines; and
 - 2. Elements that project from the building facade into front and side street setbacks such as eaves, porches, stoops, awnings, canopies, and bay windows.
- B. A facade type according to [Table 71-I Facade Types](#) must be specified for each building facade facing a street as follows:
 - 1. Multiple facade types may be used sequentially along a facade; and
 - 2. A shopfront facade is required for all ground floor retail uses and all buildings in the following locations:
 - a. Front Street between Oak Street and Red Bud Trail,
 - b. Red Bud Trail N between Front Street and E 3rd Street,
 - c. Main Street south of East Dewey Street, and
 - d. Days Avenue north of Roe Street.
- C. Buildings located within 30 feet of streets and civic spaces must comply with the following:
 - 1. Building entries must be provided from streets and civic spaces at the minimum frequency specified in [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#); and
 - 2. Buildings on corner lots are exempt from entry frequency requirements along the shorter facade if it is less than 75 feet in length.
- D. Facades must meet the minimum clear glass requirements of [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#) and as follows:
 - 1. Glass percentage is calculated individually for each facade and is measured between two and ten feet in height above grade along the length of the facade;
 - 2. The entire frame and structure of doors, windows, and storefront systems are considered glass for this calculation;
 - 3. Shopfronts must have a minimum of 60% clear glass;
 - 4. Secondary frontage glazing minimum is 50% of the requirements of [Table 71-C through Table 71-H](#); and
 - 5. Tinted, mirrored and reflective glass, and glass covered by screening sheets, white, or UV protection film are prohibited.
- E. Blank walls visible from the public sidewalk must not exceed 50 linear feet. Walls along interior side lot lines with a zero setback are exempt from this requirement.

- F. Encroachments. Facade elements may encroach as follows:
1. Minor facade elements.
 - a. Eaves, cornices, window and door surrounds, and other facade elements may encroach into setbacks up to 2 feet beyond the structure they are attached to; and
 - b. Minor facade elements must not encroach into rights-of-way.
 2. Major facade elements.
 - a. Major facade elements may encroach according to facade type as specified in [Table 71-1 Facade Types](#); and
 - b. Major facade elements include bay windows, display windows, balconies, stoops, porches, awnings, and canopies.
 3. Ground floor retail uses may utilize the public sidewalk for seating, dining, displays of merchandise, and other business related activities provided a 5 foot clear pedestrian path is maintained.
 - a. Retail sales furnishings, such as a-frame signs and sales racks must be stored inside between 12 AM and 6 AM.
 - b. A right-of-way use permit is required for public sidewalk use.
- G. All outdoor electrical, plumbing, and mechanical equipment must be located behind the front facade or concealed from street view with a screen or wall. These facilities may not encroach into any setback.
- H. Drive-through facilities and lanes must be located behind the building relative to sidewalks.
- I. Awning facades must meet the following requirements:
1. If transom windows exist, awnings must be installed between the transom and the shopfront;
 2. Awnings must be fabric;
 3. Awnings may be movable;
 4. Awnings must extend a minimum of six feet from the building facade;
 5. Awnings must be set back from the curb a minimum of two feet;
 6. A minimum of eight foot clearance must be maintained above the sidewalk; and
 7. Awnings must span the shopfront area up to 80% of its width without gaps, except between tenants.

Table 71-I Façade Types

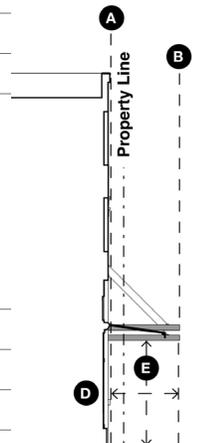
Shopfront

Zones	NC, D, SC, I
Combinations	Awning or canopy
A Max. Setback	By district
B Encroachment	Seating by permit; bay and display windows to lot line; awning and canopy by element
C Entry Condition	At grade entry
D Horizontal Clear.	N/A
E Vertical Clear.	N/A
Special Conditions	Band, window, or blade sign required



Awning or Canopy

Zones	GN, NC, D, SC, I
Combinations	Shopfront
A Max. Setback	N/A
B Encroachment	Awning or canopy to within 2 ft. of curb
C Entry Condition	N/A
D Horizontal Clear.	6 ft. min.
E Vertical Clear.	8 ft. min.



Special Conditions Awning must be fabric and exclude side panels.

Common Entry

Zones	NC, D, SC, I
Combinations	Awning or canopy
A Max. Setback	By district
B	Bay windows or raised planter to lot line; awning by element
C Entry Condition	At grade entry
D Horizontal Clear.	N/A
Special Conditions	Planters must contain

Sec. 71-33 Review and decision making bodies.

- A. City Commission. – language removed.
- B. Planning Commission. The Planning Commission establishment, organization, powers and duties are enumerated in Chapter 70 of the City of Buchanan Code of Ordinances.
- C. Community Development Director/Zoning Administrator. Language removed
- D. Zoning Board of Appeals. – language removed
 1. Powers and duties. The Zoning Board of Appeals has the following powers and duties under this chapter:
 - a. Variances. To review, hear, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove variances.
 - b. Appeals of administrative decisions. To hear, review, consider, and affirm, modify or reverse any decision or interpretation of the zoning administrator.
 2. Appeals. An appeal of a decision by the Zoning Board of Appeals must be filed with the Circuit Court within 30 days after the decision in writing, or within 21 days after the board approves the minutes of the meeting.

E. Design Review Committee.

1. Powers and duties. The design review Committee is the decision-making body for applications subject to downtown design standards unless the proposed work qualifies for administrative approval under Sec. 71-36 H. Downtown applications.
2. The Design Review Committee meets on an as-needed basis when discretionary review is required.

Sec. 71-34 General Provisions

- G. Timing of notice. Unless otherwise provided in the Michigan statutes and laws or this chapter, notice will be provided as shown in Table 71-U.

TABLE 71-U NOTICE TIMING		
Application	Notice Required	
	Written	Published
Text amendment		Planning commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
		City commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Zoning map amendment	Planning commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing	Planning commission: Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
	City commission: reasonable time prior to public hearing	City commission: not less than 15 days prior to public hearing
Special use permit	Not less than 15 days prior to public hearing	
Variance		
Appeal		

Sec. 71-36 Specific standards for development approval.

A. General. [Table 71-V](#) summarizes the development review procedures for all types of applications.

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES						
Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	
Text amendments	R	[R]		[DM]		N
Zoning map amendment	R	[R]		[DM]		W, N
Special use permit	R	[DM]				W, N
Variance	R		[DM]			W
Appeals of administrative decision			[DM]			W
Administrative adjustments	DM		[A]			
Site plan review	DM					
Sign permit	DM		[A]			
Temporary use permit	DM		[A]			
Certificate of zoning compliance	DM					
Downtown application	R				DM	
Interpretations	DM		[A]			

TABLE 71-V DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES

Procedure	Authority					Notices
	Staff	PC	ZBA	CC	DRC	
<i>Key</i>						
Planning Commission		PC				
Zoning Board of Appeals			ZBA			
City Commission				CC		
Design Review Committee					DRC	
Review & Recommendations					R	
Decision Making Body					DM	
Appellate Body					A	
Public Hearing Required					[]	
Published Notice					N	
Written Notice					W	

C. Special use permit. – **LANGUAGE TO BE USED AS EXAMPLE FOR FORMAT**

1. Purpose. Special uses are uses that may have a greater propensity to adversely affect surrounding uses and require special review of their location, design, configuration, and intensity to ensure compatibility, public facility adequacy, natural resource protection, and the public health, safety and welfare of the residents of the city.
2. Authorization.
 - a. General. The planning commission will review, consider and approve, approve with conditions or disapprove special use permits.
 - b. Uses authorized. Only those uses authorized as special uses in [Table 71-J](#), may be approved as special uses. The designation of a special use in [Table 71-J](#), does not constitute an authorization that the use will be approved.
3. Standards. The planning commission will approve a special use permit if it finds all of the following are met:
 - a. Compatibility. The proposed special use is appropriate for its proposed location and compatible with the surrounding land uses.
 - b. Location and design. The location and design of the proposed special use minimizes adverse effects, including visual impact of the proposed use on adjacent lands by:
 - i. Avoiding significant adverse impact on surrounding lands regarding service delivery, parking and loading, odors, noise, glare, and vibration, and does not create a nuisance;
 - ii. Retaining, to the greatest extent possible, the natural features of the landscape where they provide a barrier or buffer between the proposed special use and adjoining lands;
 - iii. Locating buildings, structures, and entry ways to minimize impact; and

- iv. Providing appropriate screening, fencing, landscaping, and setbacks.
 - c. Minimizes environmental impact. The proposed special use minimizes environmental impacts, and conforms to all relevant environmental protection standards of this chapter, or any other state or federal laws.
 - d. Road ingress and egress. The proposed special use is designed to ensure safe ingress and egress onto the site and safe road conditions around the site.
 - e. Impact on other public facilities. There are adequate potable water, wastewater, solid waste, park, police, and fire/EMS facilities to serve the proposed special use.
 - f. Other standards of this chapter. The proposed special use complies with all applicable provisions of this chapter.
4. Conditions of approval. The planning commission may impose conditions on approval of the proposed use as it determines are required to prevent or minimize adverse effects from the proposed use and development on surrounding lands.
 5. Recording. The planning commission may require the applicant to record the special use permit with the County Register of Deeds. The special use permit is binding upon the landowners, their successors and assigns.
 6. Expiration. Unless otherwise specified in the special use permit, an application for a construction permit must be applied for and approved within two years of the date of the approval of the special use permit or the special use permit is invalid. Permitted time frames do not change with successive owners.
 7. Extension. Upon written request, one extension of one year may be granted by the planning commission for good cause.

H. Downtown applications. EXISTING LANGUAGE

1. Applicability.

- a. This subsection applies to all proposed exterior work in the D Downtown District subject to the Downtown Design Standards, including new construction, façade alterations, cosmetic upgrades, and signage.

2. Administrative approvals. The community development director may approve proposed work when all of the following criteria are met:

- a. The work does not involve the addition or removal of architectural features that define the character of the building, including but not limited to cornices, transoms, storefront configurations, or decorative masonry.
- b. The work is consistent with the City of Buchanan Downtown Design Standards, including any applicable design guidance or previously issued staff interpretation
- c. The work is located on a non-primary façade or is minimally visible from the public right-of-way, unless the proposed materials and design match the existing conditions.

- d. The work is limited to repainting, signage, awning replacement, lighting, window or door replacement of the same size and material, or similar minor treatments.
 - e. The proposal does not require interpretation of discretionary design guidance or involve requests for exceptions to adopted standards.
3. DRC referral. The community development director may refer any application to the DRC when the proposed work is unusual, precedent-setting, or potentially inconsistent with the Downtown Design Standards.
 4. Effect of noncompliance. Proposals determined not to comply with Downtown Design Standards may not proceed until amended to achieve compliance and receive approval from the appropriate review authority.