

City of Columbus Zoning Code Rewrite

Land Use and Bulk Dimensions Meeting 11.13.25

Draft New Bulk Dimensions

Attached are a draft set of new bulk dimensional requirements associated with the new draft zoning districts for review and discussion. This includes the existing standard in black and the proposed new standard in red. *Italicized black* shows

Discussion Items

1. **Reduced Setbacks and Lot Sizes:** The existing code has larger setbacks and lot size requirements than some of the existing development within the community and has required customized PUD zoning for new development to reduce the size of lots and setbacks and has created many nonconforming lots/structures (which can limit renovations and rebuilds).
 - o The alternative approach is to reduce setbacks and lot sizes to provide greater opportunities for existing landowners to utilize their property and better align with modern, new development formats – reducing the need for PUDs in the future.
2. **Simplify Standards:** The existing code has many overlapping requirements for development including minimum floor area, lot size per unit, and unit count.
 - o The alternative approach is to remove these regulations and instead use lot area, setbacks, and height to regulate build out potential of a lot. This also suggests removing minimum lot depth (row 13) and using overall impervious surface ratio instead of buildable area (row 9).
3. **Increase Height:** The existing code has limited maximum heights for multi-family, commercial, and industrial development.
 - o The alternative approach suggests increasing height limits to accommodate modern construction needs.
4. **Residential Accessory Structures:** The existing code is straightforward but has special exceptions for taller heights and more lot coverage. We want to avoid special processes and CUPs and instead build in predictable standards with more flexibility overall. Alternative approach:
 - Eliminate special processes and CUPs
 - Default to the building code for building separation. Use of fire walls can allow separations of less than 10 feet. (more flexibility than existing code)
 - Continue to prohibit in front yards. (same as existing code)
 - Permit within the side yard when behind the principal structure. (more flexibility than existing code)
 - Remove 35% lot coverage for accessory structures and use total lot *impervious surface standard* instead. This is often combined is max square footages for accessory units which will be discussed further into the process. (more flexibility than existing code)
 - Height is 20' across the board now. Retain this for structures meeting the accessory setbacks. Those that meet the principal setbacks, the height could increase provided it is shorter than the principal structure. (similar to existing code)
5. **Add Setback-Related Design Considerations (Porches and Garages):** The existing code does not regulate garage location or width and does not allow porch encroachments.

- Regarding garages, the alternative approach is to require limits on garages protrusion to avoid thrust garages (snout houses). There are multiple variations of what this regulation could look like. This type of regulation encourages a more people-friendly neighborhood character.
- Regarding porches, the alternative approach is to allow them to protrude into a required front yard setback (coming closer to the street). This provides flexibility for unenclosed building areas and can encourage a more people-friendly neighborhood character.

6. **Reduce CUP Reliance for Bulk Dimension Flexibility.** The existing code relies on CUPs for land uses as well as for establishing bulk standards in many cases. Act 67 set a higher level of scrutiny for denying a CUP, so the recommended approach is to avoid using them where possible.

- The alternative approach removes CUP options in many cases including a large change in the institutional district standards. The existing code has no standards. Minimum standards are now added for increased predictability and defensibility.

Draft New Land Uses

Attached are a draft set of land uses associated with the new draft zoning districts for review and discussion. This includes the existing standard in black and the proposed new standard in red.

Today, the City regulates many land uses through a Conditional Use. This is no longer the recommended approach because the state has changed the Conditional Use requirements to limit a community's ability to deny them if all requirements are met. The proposed new approach is to make more land uses permitted by-right and also limit some land uses to specified zoning districts. This will create simplified processes for applicants, but also may result in additional Zoning Map Amendments to allow for certain desired land uses. A Zoning Map Amendment has much greater flexibility for approval or denial than that of a Conditional Use.

Discussion Items

7. **Land Use Definitions.** The existing code uses specific definitions/words for each land use. When a use is not listed in the code, it is presumed to be prohibited. Using very specific land use definitions can lead to extensively long lists to try to accommodate everything and can lead to interpretation challenges when something isn't listed and doesn't exactly match one of the uses but is similar.

- The alternative approach replaces all land uses with more generalized groupings. For example, religious assembly, school – elementary or secondary, school – specialty or personal instruction are separate today but would be combined into "indoor institutional" in the new code. The City may wish to pull out certain land uses (i.e. Data Center). There are pros and cons to this that we will discuss.

8. **High Intensity Zoning District.** The existing code relies on CUPs for high intensity uses.

- The alternative approach is to move them into a separate zoning district. For example, quarrying is a conditional use in many districts today. Instead, it would be a permitted district in the Intensive Outdoor Activity zoning district only.

9. **Mixed Use:** The existing code allows mixed-use (residential above commercial within the same building) as a permitted or conditional use in the downtown and business districts.

- The alternative approach is to allow mixed-use as permitted by-right in all mixed-use zoning districts and further customize the requirements for ground floor residential permitted within each specific zoning district. Ex. main street = no ground floor residential, other districts = some ground floor residential permitted.

10. Accessory Land Uses. The existing code's discussion of accessory land uses is limited to facilities like drive throughs, and parking structures.

- The alternative approach is to expand the list of accessory uses to accommodate the reality of development and avoid difficult interpretations. Many of these will have more detailed policy discussions such as how the City wants to handle Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), Chickens, Beekeeping, etc.
- Minor accessory structures (see attachment) won't be listed in the table – there are too many. Instead this will be included in the narrative of the code text to help the zoning administrator with interpretations.