To: Plan Commission

From: Daniel Ritter, AICP, Community Development Director

Date: November 12, 2026

Re: Discussion of Text Amendments to City of Crest Hill Zoning Ordinance for Certain Use Types – Section 2 (Definitions), Section 8 (General Standards and Regulations of Uses), Table 3 & Table 4 (Index of Permitted and Special Uses).

Background

City staff periodically reviews the Zoning Ordinance and other development regulations to ensure they remain effective in advancing the City's goals related to economic development, land use compatibility, community appearance, and overall quality of life. Through the ongoing administration of the Zoning Ordinance, staff has identified opportunities to improve how certain business and land uses are regulated. Staff has also received feedback from residents, businesses, property owners, and City officials regarding the concentration of certain uses in commercial areas, concerns with specific business operations, and opportunities to make the City's regulations more business-friendly.

Based on this feedback and staff's experience administering the Zoning Ordinance, staff has identified several potential amendments to the use table, which establishes where different uses are permitted throughout the City's zoning districts. Before preparing specific text amendments, staff is seeking input and direction from the Plan Commission regarding these proposed changes, as well as any additional uses or concerns that should be considered as part of a comprehensive review.

Understanding Use Classifications

The use table identifies whether a particular land use is permitted, requires special use approval, or is prohibited within each zoning district. The classifications are intended to provide an appropriate balance between accommodating development, protecting surrounding properties, and advancing the City's planning and economic development goals.

1. Permitted Uses (P) – "This use is appropriate here." These uses are considered generally compatible with the zoning district and may proceed through the applicable administrative review and permitting processes without additional discretionary zoning approval.

2. Special Uses (S) – "This use may be appropriate, but it requires additional review." These uses may be appropriate depending on their location, site conditions, operations, and potential impacts. They require discretionary, site-specific review and approval by the Plan Commission and City Council.

3. Prohibited Uses (Blank) – "This use is generally incompatible here." These uses are not allowed within the applicable zoning district and cannot be requested through the special use approval process.

Summary of Proposed Text Amendments for Discussion

The Plan Commission should review the entire use table in conjunction with other applicable sections of the Zoning Ordinance, including the definitions (Section 2) and specific use regulations (Section 8). While staff intends to review the overall allocation of uses throughout the zoning districts, the following items represent recent or ongoing concerns and opportunities that staff would like the Commission to discuss and provide direction on.

- Tobacco Stores (More Restrictive)
  Tobacco stores are currently classified as a Special Use in the B-1 District and a Permitted Use in the B-2 and B-3 Districts. An ongoing concern is the increasing concentration of these establishments throughout Crest Hill, particularly within certain commercial areas. Dedicated tobacco stores can have unique operational and land use considerations related to hours of operation, customer activity, signage, and proximity to sensitive uses such as schools, parks, and residential neighborhoods. Additional zoning standards could provide the City with greater flexibility to evaluate proposed locations and address potential compatibility concerns.

  Potential amendments could include reasonable separation requirements, location restrictions, or requiring special use approval in additional zoning districts. Staff should also consider establishing a more specific definition of a "tobacco store" to distinguish businesses primarily dedicated to tobacco sales from other businesses that offer tobacco products as an accessory component of their operations, such as gas stations and grocery stores.

- Discount/Rummage Stores (More Restrictive)
  The Zoning Ordinance currently distinguishes between several types of businesses, including pawn shops, resale dealers, and secondhand stores/rummage shops. Resale dealers are classified as Special Uses in all Business Districts, while secondhand stores/rummage shops are permitted in all Business Districts. A particular concern has developed with the increasing number and concentration of secondhand stores, particularly along Plainfield Road. Some of these establishments operate using a bin-style retail model, offering bulk quantities of returned or overstock merchandise from online retailers. These operations can generate significant customer activity during specific days and hours and may contribute to an unorganized retail environment that detracts from the appearance and overall commercial character of an area.

  Establishing reasonable zoning standards and requiring additional review where appropriate could help prevent an overconcentration of discount-oriented retail uses, encourage a more diverse mix of businesses, and preserve opportunities for higher-quality and complementary commercial development. Additional review could also provide an opportunity to evaluate the proposed business model, site conditions, traffic patterns, property maintenance, and compatibility with surrounding businesses.

- Battery Storage (New Definition/Use)
  The City has received several inquiries regarding battery energy storage systems proposed for properties of varying sizes and locations. The Zoning Ordinance does not currently provide a sufficiently specific classification for these uses, creating a need to establish a definition and determine appropriate zoning allowances and standards. Battery energy storage facilities, particularly larger-scale operations, can present unique considerations related to fire protection, thermal events, noise, emergency response, and compatibility with surrounding properties. Specific zoning standards could establish appropriate locations, setbacks, screening, safety requirements, and separation from sensitive land uses.

From an economic development and land use perspective, these facilities also present a question regarding the City's priorities for its remaining developable land. Battery storage facilities generally do not provide the same direct community benefits as uses that expand commercial services, generate retail activity, or provide services that improve quality of life for Crest Hill residents. With limited developable land remaining, the City should carefully consider whether dedicating valuable property to these uses advances its long-term economic development objectives. Staff is seeking direction on whether these facilities should be permitted, subject to special use approval, or prohibited within certain or all zoning districts.

- Data Centers (New Definition/Use)
  At its July meeting, the City Council directed staff to establish a specific definition for data centers and determine where these uses should be permitted within the City. Based on staff's preliminary review, staff recommends prohibiting data centers throughout all zoning districts. Data centers can require substantial amounts of land and infrastructure and may introduce operational and site considerations that are not necessarily compatible with the City's remaining development opportunities. Available properties within Crest Hill are generally located along heavily traveled commercial corridors or near existing residential areas and residentially zoned properties.

  Similar to battery energy storage facilities, data centers do not directly advance several of the City's primary economic development objectives, including expanding retail opportunities, increasing commercial services, and improving quality of life for residents. Staff believes that preserving available property for uses that more directly support these objectives is a priority. If technology, market demands, or the potential community benefits associated with data centers change in the future, the City can revisit the classification and allowances for these uses. For the current review, staff recommends establishing a specific definition and prohibiting data centers in all zoning districts.

- Tattoo Parlor, Body Piercing Establishments (Less Restrictive)
  Tattoo parlors and body piercing establishments are currently classified as Special Uses in the M-1 District and Permitted Uses in the M-2 District. Restricting these establishments primarily to industrial zoning districts is outdated and does not reflect the current nature of these businesses or their acceptance as commercial services. Unlike traditional industrial uses, tattoo and body piercing establishments primarily serve individual customers and are generally better suited to commercial areas that provide appropriate parking, pedestrian access, lighting, and other customer-oriented amenities.

  Locating these businesses within industrial areas can also create unnecessary conflicts with truck traffic, heavier industrial operations, and other potential life-safety concerns. Updating the use table would allow these businesses to locate in more appropriate commercial settings while maintaining reasonable zoning oversight. Staff recommends allowing tattoo parlors and body piercing establishments as Special Uses in the B-1 and M-1 Districts and as Permitted Uses in the B-2 and B-3 Districts.

- Landscaping Contractor Office uses, with no outside storage (New Definition/Less Restrictive)
  The Zoning Ordinance should more clearly distinguish between contractors who operate primarily from an office or indoor workspace and contractors who utilize their property for substantial outdoor storage of equipment, materials, vehicles, and supplies.

Many contractors operate with a relatively small office or indoor storage area and do not require any outdoor storage. These businesses have substantially different land use impacts than contractors who use an entire property for outdoor equipment and material storage.

Landscaping and contractor-based businesses are currently classified as Special Uses in the B-3 District and Permitted Uses in the M-1 and M-2 Districts. Staff recommends establishing separate definitions and classifications for contractor businesses with and without outdoor storage. This would allow contractor offices and businesses that operate entirely within an enclosed building to be permitted more broadly in the B-2 and B-3 districts, in addition to M-1 and M-2, reducing unnecessary special use requirements and making the City's regulations more business-friendly. Contractors utilizing outdoor storage could continue to be subject to additional zoning restrictions and review appropriate to their operations.

- Storage Garage (More Restrictive)
  The current definition and allowances for storage garages raise several questions regarding the intent and appropriate application of this use, particularly within the M-1 and M-2 Districts. One concern is the lack of a clear definition of a "unit" and the broad interpretation of what constitutes "personal storage." In practice, personal storage is rarely limited to an individual property owner storing their own belongings. The current language can create opportunities for multiple individuals or businesses to rent or utilize portions of industrial buildings for storage purposes without the property being classified or reviewed as a traditional self-storage facility.

  This creates challenges when evaluating properties with multiple buildings or industrial facilities that are owned by business entities rather than individual property owners. It can also result in valuable commercial and industrial building space being used for unregulated personal storage rather than business and employment-generating activities. If a property owner wishes to operate a business that rents individual storage spaces to others, the appropriate classification would generally be a self-storage facility, which can be reviewed through the applicable special use process. This would allow the City to evaluate the proposed operation, site layout, access, and other relevant considerations. Staff is seeking direction on whether personal storage garages should be prohibited within the M-1 and M-2 Districts or allowed only through special use approval.

- Outdoor Storage of automobiles (including trucks/trailers) (Clarify Definition/More Restrictive)
  The City has experienced an increase in properties being utilized for substantial outdoor storage of trucks, trailers, automobiles, shipping containers, and other similar items. In some instances, these activities have resulted in large portions of industrial and commercial properties being dedicated primarily to vehicle and equipment storage.

  The Zoning Ordinance should more clearly define and distinguish between typical outdoor storage associated with an active business operation and properties being utilized primarily for vehicle, trailer, or container storage. Staff recommends establishing additional definitions and standards to clarify where these activities are permitted and what requirements should apply. Potential standards could address:

  - Required maintenance and upkeep of outdoor storage areas.
  - Site and storage/stacking plans.
  - Approved surface materials and paving requirements.
  - Maximum allowable lot coverage or percentage of the property dedicated to storage.
  - Screening, landscaping, and buffering requirements.

- Limitations on the types and quantities of vehicles, trailers, and containers stored.

The intent is to ensure outdoor storage activities remain accessory and appropriate to the primary business or industrial use of a property, rather than allowing valuable commercial and industrial land to become primarily dedicated to vehicle and equipment storage.

- Business and Professional Offices (Less Restrictive)
  Business and professional offices are commonly located within industrial areas, particularly when their operations do not require frequent customer visits or significant public access. Additionally, some businesses operate as subsidiaries or provide specialized services in support of other businesses and industries. The current restrictions on these uses within the M-1 and M-2 Districts appear overly limiting, particularly when office operations can be accommodated within existing buildings without creating additional land use impacts.

  All office spaces would still be required to comply with applicable building, fire, and life-safety codes based on the proposed occupancy and use. Staff recommends allowing business and professional offices as Permitted Uses in both the M-1 and M-2 Districts.

- Park/Playground (Less Restrictive)
  Parks and playgrounds are currently classified as Special Uses in all residential zoning districts and prohibited in all other districts. These uses generally provide significant community benefits and are appropriate in a variety of settings, including public parks, schools, churches, private developments, and homeowners' associations. Requiring special use approval for parks and playgrounds within residential areas can create an unnecessary regulatory burden, particularly for minor improvements, expansions, or modifications to existing facilities.

  Staff recommends allowing parks and playgrounds as Permitted Uses in all residential zoning districts and as Special Uses in Business Districts Districts. This approach recognizes the general community benefit and compatibility of these uses within residential areas while maintaining an opportunity for additional review when proposed within commercial areas.

- Additional Uses & Considerations
  Staff is also seeking direction regarding other uses currently listed in the Zoning Ordinance, as well as uses that may not be specifically identified or adequately defined. The Commission may identify additional opportunities to make the Zoning Ordinance more business-friendly by allowing certain uses more broadly, or may identify uses that warrant additional restrictions due to compatibility concerns, operational impacts, or the City's long-term economic development objectives.

  The overall goal is to ensure that the use table accurately reflects the City's current planning priorities, provides appropriate flexibility for desirable development, and establishes reasonable protections against uses that may negatively impact surrounding properties or the community.

Staff Recommendation

Provide direction to staff to complete the necessary research and prepare proposed text amendments to the Zoning Ordinance, including revisions to the use table and applicable definitions and specific use regulations, for consideration at a future Plan Commission public hearing.

The Commission should also provide feedback on any additional uses or proposed changes it would like staff to research and incorporate into the review.

Note: Depending on the number, complexity, and scope of the proposed amendments, staff may bring the changes forward as one comprehensive text amendment or as separate proposals for consideration.

Attachments

- Exhibit A – Table 3 Index of Permitted & Special Uses – Residential Uses and Table 4 - Index of Permitted & Special Uses – Non-Residential Uses of the Crest Hill Code of Ordinances (Current)