

Fort Collins Land Use Code Updates

Spring 2025 Outreach Summary

Overall Themes and Takeaways

Approach

The City of Fort Collins is updating its 1997 Land Use Code (LUC or Code) to meet the community's evolving needs. The first set of updates focused on housing, reorganization, and moving to visual representations of code standards, away from a fully text-based code. City Council adopted these updates in May 2024. The second set of updates is centering on commercial and mixed-used corridors.

A first round of outreach on commercial and mixed-used corridors took place in January and February 2025, to identify how the LUC can enable outcomes that align with the City plan's values and priorities; understand perspectives on the existing Code and ideas for changes in the new Code; and understand how the LUC is or is not supporting interests and desired outcomes, need for clarity, and pain points. Feedback from that initial round of outreach shaped the changes proposed in this Spring 2025 outreach.

Kearns & West, a neutral facilitation firm, facilitated four topical work sessions and one general focus group in June 2025. The topical work sessions focused on the Change of Use Process, Transit-Oriented Development, Harmony Corridor and Employment Zone Districts, and Building Types and Design Standards. These sessions, as well as the general focus group, offered participants the opportunity to learn more about and share additional feedback on proposed changes before a draft updated Code is shared with City Council and for public comment.

Participants

Focus group participation was by invitation and referral from invitees, prioritizing frequent Code users who were involved in the first round of public engagement in Winter 2025. A total of 19 individuals participated across all sessions, with six to nine participants per session. Most participants were architects, designers, developers, or consultants, along with two small business owners.

The City of Fort Collins will initiate a public comment period on the proposed Code changes in Summer 2025.

Summary

This summary captures high-level feedback received through each of the topical work sessions and the general focus group.

Change of Use Process

Participants in this work session expressed support for the proposed Code change that would allow an applicant to move straight to building permit if no changes are needed to a building to

occupy it, noting that this will help small businesses. However, one person noted that this could leave more discretion in the hands of the building department instead of the planning department.

Continuity and training of City staff was raised as an issue. Some participants suggested that it would be helpful to have a designated staff person who can help ensure that comments are resolved before they go back to the applicant and address (or facilitate in-person addressing of) outstanding conflicts between City departments.

Overall, participants agreed that flexibility and proportionality are key principles with regards to the Change of Use process, including which changes are subject to minor and major amendments, and some discretion on the part of the Director will still be necessary.

Transit-Oriented Development

Participants acknowledged the value of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) while struggling with timing. Some suggested that it is unrealistic to eliminate parking and autocentric uses and assume people will use transit before Fort Collins gets denser and the transit system gets more robust. In the meantime, incentives and other tools can be used to privilege transit-supported development and density.

Support for limiting autocentric uses in the TOD overlay was tepid overall. Most supported minimum distances between gas stations and/or limiting where on a street they can be.

All were supportive of eliminating parking minimums for commercial buildings, noting that the market will determine how much parking is needed. They also supported maximums on surface parking for commercial buildings. Some encouraged more parking around the Max line stops to encourage use of the line.

With respect to both parking and certain building types in the TOD, the group discussed form. Parking and certain building types are much more palatable if they are designed for a more dense, urban environment (e.g., parking structures or underground parking, drive-throughs artfully incorporated into buildings). Participants were also open to more public and shared parking.

In the longer term, the City may want to consider segmenting within the TOD overlay since there is so much diversity within it.

Harmony Corridor and Employment Zone

Participants shared that to move in the right direction in the near term, it would be beneficial to:

- Adjust the ratio of primary and secondary uses in the Harmony Corridor Employment Zone to allow for more secondary uses (e.g., from 75/25 to 50/50), allowing the secondary use limits to be exceeded if the development meets core City goals or provides certain public benefits.

- Review the primary and secondary use lists and move some of the secondary types to primary (especially housing).
- Clarify how the ratios are being calculated.
- Change the definition of light industrial to allow outdoor storage to be some portion of the site.

In the longer term, the group suggested that the amount and purpose of Employment Zones should be revisited to see if they need to be redefined, if some zones need to be re-zoned, or if the category of Employment Zones is needed at all.

Building Types and Design Standards

Participants expressed a general sense of frustration with the proliferation of “bad design” and/or buildings with a similar look across Fort Collins, especially in downtown. Some said that Fort Collins’ LUC does not allow for creative and beautiful architectural design.

All appreciated the move to a form-based code, while struggling with how to balance the need for clarity and predictability while allowing flexibility in building design and encouraging architectural diversity. Some were concerned that architects end up building exactly what is diagrammed in the form code, even if it is only intended to be *an* example of what works. If flexibility is encouraged, the code should offer a few different diagrams and/or photos of representative buildings and/or make abundantly clear that flexibility is allowed. In other words, the Code should provide clarity on limits/hard requirements as well as on the purpose of the examples.

Specific concerns surfaced around the requirement for street-facing entrance doors; one participant encouraged flexibility placement of the entrance door so long as parking is hidden and the street-facing part of the building is well designed.

While the group did not discuss Article 5 standards in detail, some acknowledged that a lot of the content is unnecessary and does not need to be carried over into the new code.

General Focus Group

Participants in the general focus group session largely echoed themes heard in the topical work sessions.

Change of Use Process

- Having “small businesses” defined in the code could add clarity.
- Low Impact Development remains one of the biggest challenges for additional square feet. Additional clarification is needed regarding when it can be waived.
- Participants appreciated the attempts at streamlining, but noted that more clarity is needed on how some issues will be addressed.
- Flexibility is key.

Transit-Oriented Development

- It could be useful to segment out the TOD since there are diverse neighborhoods within the area.
- There was some support for eliminating parking minimums. The City should consider eliminating minimums outside of the TOD.
- In general, participants did not support limiting drive-thrus.
- The City should consider adjusting the TOD boundary to match the state transit plan in the future, once transit has been extended there.
- Keep parking maximums as they are because of market demands (i.e., developers are currently asking to exceed these maximums so reducing them will lead to more requests for exceptions).
- For arterial/arterial intersections, consider limiting uses to corner frontages.
- Consider how to promote shared parking, including cooperating with adjacent properties so that there are fewer parking spots per business but a higher utilization rate.

Harmony Corridor and Employment Zone Districts

- There was support for adjusting ratios and potentially allowing secondary use limits to be exceeded if the development is meeting City goals or providing public benefits.
- Consider which secondary uses could be moved to primary.
- Clarify how primary/secondary ratios are being calculated.
- Some observed that mixed use development might not be feasible in Harmony Corridor, in part because it isn't financially viable. Standalone residential would be a bridge to reach the walkable neighborhood goal. The City could also rezone some of the area to allow other uses.

Building Types & Design Standards

- Less restriction on creative design will help projects pencil and prevent undeveloped sites from sitting around.
- Move from subjective to objective design standards.
- Clarify that architects don't need to design exactly what's shown in the diagrams. It would be helpful to offer more photos and diagrams as examples.

Next Steps

City staff will be sharing its proposed changes and stakeholder feedback with City Council during a work session on July 8, 2025, as well as soliciting input from Boards and Commissions members. A draft code is expected to be ready around the July 8 work session. The draft Code will be posted for public comment later in the summer.

Participant Appreciation

Kearns & West is very grateful to the individuals who shared their time and expertise to inform these LUC updates. We offer a hearty thank you to everyone who participated.