Remaining Key Policy Discussion

On November 9, 2026, the Plan Commission will receive a complete draft of the proposed Watertown Zoning Code (dated November 3, 2026), draft Official Zoning Map, and draft supplemental Overlay Zoning Map. On November 23, 2026, the Plan Commission will discuss the full draft.

Note that all prior Plan Commission PowerPoint presentations can be viewed on the City's website at the following link: https://www.watertownwi.gov/page/zoning-ordinance-rewrite

The following items have been identified by the staff team to be reviewed again with the Plan Commission for either confirmation of the proposed direction or for potential discussion of alternatives.

1. **Data Center Regulations (Article III):** Review the alternative regulatory approach provided in the separate attachment.
2. **Recreational Vehicle Parking (Article VI):** Review proposed regulations for parking recreational vehicles in residential zoning districts. Language was updated to reflect Plan Commission discussion, which continues to allow up to two RVs parked in rear/side yards on grass and one RV in a paved front yard driveway.
3. **Fence Heights (Article VI):** Fence heights for residential and non-residential were updated to reflect continuation of existing regulations (4 feet in all front yards, 6 feet in street side yards if the vision triangle standards are met, and either 8 or 10 feet in the interior side and rear yards depending on the zoning district. Industrial districts have a higher fence allowance.)
4. **Building Design Standards (Article VIII):**
    - Confirm the requirement for a minimum 40-inch-high durable base material. Language was revised to require such material along at least 60% of the façade length for multifamily and commercial buildings. This applies to only the street facing or parking facing facades.
    - Confirm that Class IV materials are permitted on residential accessory buildings (e.g., metal siding on sheds). The prior CUP process is no longer applicable.
    - Numerous "waivers" or "special exceptions" are built into the design standards, landscaping standards, and parking standards sections that will allow Plan Commission to make adjustments during site plan review rather than triggering Conditional Use Permits. These reflect prior Plan Commission discussion with at least one minor revision:

    - Rear *or side elevations* not visible from public streets, as determined by Plan Commission, may use Class IV materials (commercial buildings)
5. **No Ground-Floor Residential in DMU District:** Ground-floor residential uses remain prohibited in the new DMU (Downtown and Riverfront Mixed Use) District. Fully residential buildings may be accommodated in the new DRR (Downtown and Riverfront Residential) District, with appropriate locations guided by the Comprehensive Plan (not yet mapped). The intent is to protect the downtown historic commercial core by not allowing ground floor residential in key locations.
6. **Multifamily Recreational Space:** Removed the on-site recreational space requirement for multifamily buildings containing more than three dwelling units.
7. **Sign Setbacks (Article IX):** Reduced the minimum sign setback to 5 feet from the right-of-way, replacing the previous requirement for a setback equal to the height of the sign.
8. **Pylon Sign Height (Article IX):** Pylon signs up to 35 feet in height are permitted within the Sign Overlay Area. The Plan Commission may grant a waiver for up to 10 additional feet based on site conditions, surrounding development, roadway characteristics, or visibility constraints. This replaces the previous open-ended Conditional Use Permit approach.
9. **Number of Wall Signs (Article IX):** Changed to 1 sign per business per street frontage*, plus 1 additional sign on a side or rear façade visible from a public street or parking area*.
10. **Parking Maximums (Article VI):** Removed maximum parking requirements for all land uses per Plan Commission feedback. Confirm this remains the preferred approach, particularly for commercial uses.
11. **Vacant Buildings Regulations (Article X):** After Plan Commission feedback, the timeline thresholds regarding enforcement of maintenance of vacant buildings were shortened from 1, 5, and 10 years, to 1, 3, and 5 years.
12. **Downtown Setback Flexibility for Pavement/Garages (Article IV):** The existing Watertown code has a targeted flexibility allowance for older residential development particularly related to driveways and garages. This flexibility has been retained and added to the Bulk Dimensions table for residential land uses. This area still needs to be mapped and will be called the “Downtown Residential Setback Adjustment Area.”