

City of Watertown Zoning Code Rewrite

Land Use and Bulk Dimensions Meeting 9.22.25

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.

Today, the City has residential and nonresidential bulk dimensional requirements for many zoning districts, in addition to many density and intensity standards for each district. There are a host of conflicting standards within the existing ordinance and this system is overly complicated. The proposed new approach is to streamline and simplify the standards, in addition to providing greater flexibility than today's standards to accommodate modern development formats.

Discussion Items

1. **Density Guided by Bulk Dimensions:** The existing code requires maximum gross density, minimum lot area per unit, minimum landscape surface area ratio, maximum building coverage, minimum dwelling unit core dimensions, maximum number of floors, maximum floor area ratio, maximum building size, and maximum buildable area, in addition to setbacks, lot requirements, height, and land use unit maximums to regulate density.
 - o The alternative approach is to utilize maximum impervious surface, lot requirements, setbacks, and height to regulate density.
2. **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.
 - 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.
3. **Increase Height:** The existing code has very limited maximum heights for multi-family, commercial, and industrial development.
 - o The alternative approach is to increase height for multi-family incrementally (MR-2: 3 stories, MR-3: 4 stories), allow for taller buildings within mixed use districts (downtown: 4 stories, corridors: 4 stories, institutional: 4 stories, and neighborhood commercial: 3 stories), and allow for taller buildings within industrial districts (light and heavy: 4 stories).
4. **Residential Accessory Structure Heights:** The existing code has a maximum height of 15 or 18 feet for residential accessory structures. It also has a provision that a Conditional Use can be used to increase heights beyond those maximums.
 - o The alternative approach is to no longer offer the Conditional Use option and instead allow for 15' building heights if accessory setbacks are met, 24' building heights if principal setbacks are met, and limit all accessory structures to be no taller than the principal structure on the site.

Draft New Bulk Dimensions

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

5. **Residential Density:** The existing code limits multi-family density to either 3-4 units per building or 5-24 units per building.
 - o The alternative approach is to allow up to 12 units per building within the smaller-scale mixed residential district (MR-2) and have no unit cap per building within the larger-scale mixed residential district (MR-3). This district would instead have density be regulated by only the bulk dimensional requirements.
6. **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.
 - o 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.
7. **Institutional Residential:** The existing code allows institutional residential (monasteries, dorms, assisted living, hospice, rehab centers, homeless shelters, nursing homes, etc.) as a Conditional Use in all of the residential districts and the neighborhood business and office districts.
 - o The alternative approach is to utilize only the new institutional zoning district to permit this type of residential development. This would more frequently require a Zoning Map Amendment, but provide greater control over these types of uses.
8. **Personal Storage:** The existing code allows personal storage (mini-warehouses) as a Conditional Use in the business zoning districts with certain requirements for distance from other existing uses of the same kind.
 - o The alternative approach is to only permit personal storage within the industrial zoning districts so that the commercial corridors are reserved for commercial development and not future storage uses.