

City of Watertown Zoning Code Rewrite

Draft Part 1 Review Meeting 1.26.26

Content Included in Part One of the Draft Zoning Code

Part 1 of the draft Zoning Code establishes the City's new zoning districts, land use regulations, bulk and dimensional standards, and regulations governing nonconforming situations. The initial draft Part 1 has been completed, has undergone preliminary staff review, and is now being presented to the Plan Commission for review and feedback.

To facilitate a focused and efficient discussion, this memo identifies ten high-level policy topics for Plan Commission consideration related to the overall approach. City Staff and Vandewalle & Associates Staff are available to provide additional clarification or to address other topics the Plan Commission may wish to discuss beyond these key issues.

This draft is grounded in concepts previously reviewed by the Plan Commission. In particular, it reflects the proposed zoning districts, permitted and conditional land use framework, and the bulk dimensional standards that were presented in table format at the September 22 Plan Commission meeting.

Following that meeting, consultant staff prepared the full draft of Part 1 and conducted an iterative review process with City staff, resulting in refinements and updates based on those discussions. In addition, a stakeholder Focus Group met to provide targeted feedback. That has been summarized and incorporated into the current draft of Part 1.

Part One Discussion Topics

1. Downtown and Riverfront Zoning & Land Use Framework (Pg. 8, 21-27, 95-97)

The existing zoning code includes confusing approaches related to downtown residential development, including the "Central Business Apartments" classification. In addition, the city has completed a planning process to guide land use and development along the Rock River Corridor, which includes properties located within and adjacent to the downtown area.

Feedback obtained through the zoning code audit, early phases of the zoning code rewrite, and stakeholder focus groups has consistently emphasized the importance of protecting the core downtown from the encroachment of ground-floor residential uses. The proposed framework addresses those concerns while also providing appropriate opportunities for residential development in river-adjacent areas.

Downtown is intended to use a zoning district called DMU (Downtown and Riverfront Mixed Use). No ground floor residential is allowed. A new district is created called DRR (Downtown and Riverfront Residential). This district is intended for areas outside of the core downtown where residential character could be appropriate including locations along the riverfront. This district could accommodate projects such as the Oxbow or similar developments along Water Street. At this stage, the district would be created. In future stages, we will review the zoning map where this could be applied.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

2. Cottage Court Zoning District and Land Use (Pg. 33-34)

Feedback obtained in this process suggested considering a new zoning district for a form of residential development commonly referred to as Cottage Courts. Cottage Courts are often comprised of smaller residential buildings (usually detached) which front on a common open space. They are often developed on lots as condo units that front on a common open space. The proposed approach creates a zoning district for Cottage Courts along with specific regulations that would allow for this form of development.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

3. Data Center (Pg. 54-55)

The existing zoning code (like most peer zoning codes) do not adequately address regulations for the emerging land use of hyperscale data centers. The proposed approach creates a land use definition with built-in regulations designed to ensure the City receives sufficient information to evaluate potential impacts associated with these facilities. Additionally, the proposed framework allows such land uses to only be considered in the HI (Heavy Industrial) and IOA (Intensive Outdoor Activity) zoning districts and a Conditional Use. In most cases, a project would first need to secure a rezoning to one of these districts (subject to legislative discretion and Comp Plan consistency review by the City) and then obtain a CUP. Notably, a land use distinction is created for minor data centers (less than 20,000 sf in size and less than 5MW of energy use). These minor data centers are treated as light industrial land uses and are permitted in zoning districts where light industrial land uses are allowed.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

4. Institutional Residential (Pg. 53, 23)

The existing code allows institutional residential (monasteries, dorms, assisted living, hospice, rehab centers, homeless shelters, nursing homes, etc.) as a Conditional Use in all the multi-family residential districts, neighborhood business and office districts, and downtown. The proposed approach is to continue allowing such uses in the downtown zoning district as a Conditional Use and in the Institutional as a Permitted Use.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

5. Accessory Dwelling Units (Pg. 73-74)

The existing code allows ADUs (550-56(AA)) in the SR-4 and TR-6 district but requires a Conditional Use Permit and has regulations that are potentially confusing and outdated compared to peer communities and evolving planning practice. The draft code allows ADUs as a permitted use in residential zoning districts. ADUs are a separate accessory dwelling located on the same lot as a principal residential unit, either in the same building or in a detached building. This is different than In-Family suites, which are located inside an existing dwelling and intended for the family (this accommodates things like a finished basement suite). The draft ADU regulations include:

- a. A maximum of one ADU per lot that's limited to one family and must meet all bulk dimensional standards of the lot (setback, height, impervious surface, etc.).
- b. An ADU within a detached structure can only be located in the rear or side yard, must meet principal building setbacks, and must have a paved walkway or driveway connection to it from the street.
- c. An ADU may not be sold separately from the principal dwelling unit on the lot and must not exceed 75% of the gross floor area of the principal dwelling unit up to a maximum of 1,000 sf.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Proposed Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

6. Detached Residential Accessory Building (Pg. 76)

The existing code allows CUPs to exceed the 1,000-sf limit, exceed the max accessory building coverage of the district, and allow more than 3 residential accessory structures. The proposed approach changes the definition so that attached garages are not included in this definition. It also adds a sliding scale that allows a larger building square footage for larger lots over one acre. The goal of the proposed approach is to eliminate the need for CUPs.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

7. Industrial Building Height (Pg. 55, e.g.)

The proposed code limits industrial building heights to 60 feet. However, an allowance is made in the industrial land use definitions to permit a taller building height of up to 130 feet if the portion of the building exceeding the standard height maximum is setback from all property lines a minimum distance of 75% of its height. All building heights must comply with the limitations of the Airport Overlay zoning district. This is proposed to accommodate changing industrial building needs and technologies. One example is where indoor cranes are used inside buildings.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

8. Porch Setbacks (Pg. 93, e.g.)

The proposed code allows unenclosed porches to intrude into the front yard, beyond the setback of the principal house. In the SF-1 district for example, the front yard setback for the house is 20 feet, while porches may be located as close as 10 feet to the front property line. Porches may not be enclosed, heated, or used as livable space (see definition of Porch). Allowing porches to be located closer to the street provides flexibility in home design and supports neighborhood patterns that encourage outdoor activity and informal interaction. Front porches create a comfortable transition between the home and the public sidewalk, making it easier for residents to spend time outdoors, engage with neighbors, and maintain visual presence on the street.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

9. Group Development (Pg. 18)

The existing code requires a CUP for Group Developments where there is more than one principal building per lot, when there are more than two principal land uses per lot, and in other situations. The proposed approach attempts to greatly simplify this approach. Under the proposed code, Group Developments only apply to where there is more than one building per lot, and exempts all districts except the single-family districts, corridor mixed use, and downtown. When a Group Development CUP is required, additional standards apply and the buildings must show they can be divisible in future situations (by complying with setbacks, etc.). When more than principal land use occurs on a lot, it may be allowed if it's Permitted or Conditional in that district, if it complies with the standards for that use and obtains the CUP if needed.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____

10. Personal Storage (Pg. 59, 24)

The existing code allows personal storage (mini-warehouses) as Conditional Use in the General Business zoning districts. The draft code prohibits this use in the new Corridor Mixed Use (CMU) zoning district which replaces prior commercial/business zoning districts and will cover areas such as the Church Street/Hwy 26 Corridor. Instead, personal storage is allowed (permitted) in the LI (Light Industrial), HI (Heavy Industrial), and IOA (Intensive Outdoor Activity) districts. Existing land uses will continue as legal non-conforming uses.

Please circle your opinion on the proposed approach:

Keep Approach

Remove Approach

Need To Modify Approach

Comments: _____
