



ZONING TYPOLOGIES FOR LAND USE CODE DEVELOPMENT

A Capstone Report prepared for Dr. Carrie Makarewicz, Associate Professor & Department Chair of the Urban and Regional Planning Department at CU Denver.

Corey Cicci | Master of Urban and Regional Planning | 2026

March 5, 2026

Student:
Corey Ciccì

Faculty Advisor:
Nan Ellin

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Client:

Dr. Carrie Makarewicz
Associate Professor & Department Chair
Urban and Regional Planning Department
CU Denver

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1. Executive Summary

This report develops a practical guide for understanding zoning districts as a set of recurring typologies. The project addresses a simple problem: zoning is one of the main tools local governments use to shape the built environment, but zoning codes are often dense, technical, non-standardized, and difficult to visualize. A person may be able to read a use table or dimensional table and still not understand what kind of place those standards actually produce. That disconnect is especially difficult for planning students, community members, and small developers.

The purpose of this project is not to create a universal zoning code or suggest that all communities should adopt the same zoning districts. Zoning should always respond to local conditions, including infrastructure, housing demand, environmental constraints, economic goals, and community priorities. This project instead identifies common zoning district types and organizes those types into an accessible format. This project is accompanied by a booklet (Appendix C) that lists those common district families, summarizes typical uses and dimensional standards, and pairs those standards with visual examples and planning considerations. The intent is to make zoning districts easier to understand, compare, evaluate, and adapt.

The project was developed for use in the Urban & Regional Development course at the University of Colorado Denver. The course introduces students to the mechanics of land use regulation, including how zoning works, how residents and developers interact with the code, and how planners interpret development standards. While the immediate client and use case is academic, the project is also intended to have applied value

beyond the classroom. Smaller jurisdictions or communities beginning a code update may also find the typology booklet a helpful place to start when determining what zone districts they need. This booklet could also be helpful in providing a quick, visual reference to those new to how zoning impacts the built environment – people like involved community members, new City Council members, or people just curious about urban planning.

The background research recognizes the broad history and evolution of zoning in the United States, and how that relates to the development of the booklet. Early zoning practice began with segregating harmful uses (particularly, industrial uses that produced significant noise, dust, vibration, or other negative impacts on their surroundings) from other uses, which became the basis of Euclidean zoning. Over time, zoning codes became more complex, incorporating dimensional standards, performance standards, form-based elements, overlays, incentive zoning, and other tools.

The report also acknowledges the major critiques of traditional zoning, particularly the ways Euclidean zoning has contributed to exclusionary development patterns. Large-lot single-unit residential districts, minimum lot sizes, setback requirements, parking requirements, and restrictions on multifamily housing have often limited housing diversity and affordability. The report recognizes that these standards are often seen as neutral defaults, but may not actually represent best practices of inclusivity and flexibility.

The background research also reviews model codes and classification systems, including the Land-Based Classification Standards, Smart Codes, and the Colorado

Department of Local Affairs Template Land Development Code. Many model codes provide code language or implementation guidance, but they do not look deeply into how to choose, combine, simplify, or understand zoning district types.

The methodology for this project consisted of a comparative review of base zoning districts from recently adopted zoning codes. The sample included 14 jurisdictions and 276 total zoning districts. Jurisdictions were selected because their codes were publicly available, district-based, modern, and provided variety through different geographies, populations, and contexts. The analysis focused on base zoning districts rather than overlays, planned developments, or highly customized special districts.

Each district was assigned to a standardized district family so that they could be compared across jurisdictions, even when local naming conventions differed. The district families used in the analysis were Residential, Mixed-Use, Commercial, Office/Employment, Industrial, Agricultural, Public/Institutional, Parks and Open Space, and Other. For each district, the analysis recorded selected permitted uses and dimensional standards, including minimum lot area, minimum lot width, minimum front setback, minimum side setback, minimum rear setback, and maximum building height.

Several findings from the comparative analysis directly informed the typology booklet.

The number of districts varied substantially across jurisdictions, from 6 districts at the low end to 35 at the high end, with an average of about 20 districts per jurisdiction.

Residential districts accounted for the largest share of all districts analyzed, making up 34.1 percent of the total. Mixed-Use districts were the second largest category, making up 27.9 percent. Traditional Commercial districts made up only 9.1 percent, suggesting

that many new codes are relying less on conventional stand-alone Commercial districts and more on Mixed-Use districts that allow for a broader range of uses.

The dimensional standards analysis showed that different district families rely on different regulatory tools to shape form. Minimum lot area remains especially common in Residential, Agricultural, and Industrial districts, while Mixed-Use districts often have small minimum lot areas or no minimum lot area at all. Minimum lot width follows a similar pattern, with wider lots in rural, agricultural, and lower-intensity residential contexts and narrower or absent width requirements in mixed-use areas. Front setbacks emerged as one of the clearest indicators of intended form. Mixed-Use districts frequently allow or require buildings to be built close or up to the sidewalk, often with zero-foot front setbacks, while Agricultural and Industrial districts tend to require large setbacks to help minimize impacts on the surrounding area. Height standards were also an important form indicator, with Residential and Agricultural districts generally having lower limits and Downtown, Industrial, and Transit-Oriented Development districts allowing greater heights.

The use analysis also showed several important patterns. Single-unit detached housing was the most commonly allowed use category, appearing in 56.2 percent of all districts analyzed. Missing middle housing appeared in 44.2 percent of districts, while multifamily housing appeared in 41.7 percent. This pattern reflects both the continued dominance of single-unit residential zoning and the increasing inclusion of broader housing types in mixed-use and higher-density residential districts. Office uses appeared in 42.0 percent of districts and were found across several district families, not only in Office or

Employment districts. Food and beverage, service, childcare, and retail uses were especially common in Mixed-Use districts, reinforcing the role of Mixed-Use as encouraging walkable and dense development patterns where the daily needs of residents are met in close proximity.

The primary deliverable of the project is the zoning district typology booklet. The typologies are organized by district families. Within those families, the booklet identifies more specific district types. Each typology includes a short purpose / intent statement, common uses, and typical dimensional and development standards. There are several recurring considerations across district types. Communities should avoid creating unnecessary district distinctions where the standards produce only minor differences in actual form. Low-density residential districts, for example, can often be consolidated rather than multiplied into several nearly identical districts. Communities should also consider allowing ADUs, duplexes, and other missing middle housing types where they can increase housing variety without undermining the intended character. In mixed-use and downtown contexts, communities should align dimensional standards with walkability by allowing smaller lots, minimal front setbacks, active ground floors, and reduced parking expectations. In industrial, agricultural, and heavy commercial contexts, the focus should be less on aesthetics and more on buffering, access, environmental impacts, operations, and compatibility with nearby uses.

The typology guide ultimately translates the project's research into a usable teaching and reference tool. For students, it provides a way to understand zoning districts as recognizable patterns rather than isolated code sections. For community members and

decision-makers, it helps connect abstract standards to real-world development outcomes. For jurisdictions updating their codes, it offers a menu of common district types and associated considerations that can be adapted to local conditions. The overall recommendation is not that communities copy these typologies directly, but that they use them as a practical starting point for evaluating whether their zoning districts are clear, necessary, flexible, and aligned with the places they are trying to create.

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview

Local governments across the United States use zoning ordinances, also referred to as land development or zoning codes, to shape the built environment and regulate land use. These codes dictate the location, type, and nature of housing, businesses, offices, parks, and other land uses. They may also integrate rules on streetscaping, landscaping, lighting, parking, and drainage. When combined, all of these regulations play a major role in how communities develop and evolve, which in turn shapes the everyday life of the community's residents. Nearly every municipality relies on these codes to guide development alongside community goals, often in conjunction with a comprehensive plan, historic preservation, economic development, tourism, or other guiding plans.

By nature of zoning codes being legal texts, they are usually dense, highly technical, and generally not easy to understand, particularly for those unfamiliar with zoning. Regulations are often found sprinkled throughout the code in multiple chapters, tables, and lists, which can confuse even the planners who work in that municipality. Beyond

being difficult to interpret in a functional sense, it can be hard to fully visualize how these regulations translate into development. One may know the minimum lot size, maximum height, massing requirements, and allowed uses for a district, but still have difficulty grasping how that translates to the built form and experience of that district. Furthermore, zoning codes are not standardized across municipalities. Just because a planner is very familiar with one jurisdiction's zoning code does not mean they will have an easy time interpreting the code of a different area. All in all, when it comes to learning about zoning codes, it can be difficult for residents, developers, government officials, and even planners to fully understand their zoning regulations.

This project seeks to lessen the learning curve for those new to learning about zoning regulations. Specifically, it looks at zoning districts – some best practices, commonalities and differences across jurisdictions, broad trends and existing conditions, and how all of these actually translate to the built environment. While districts are not the only part of a zoning code, subdividing land into districts has been the backbone of modern land regulation since its conception. Therefore, understanding zone districts is the first step in understanding zoning. Zone districts look very different across history and geography, but there are some common threads. High-impact industrial uses should be separated from dwellings. Agricultural land requires more space than a city duplex. Historic downtowns look different from shopping centers, even though both are primarily commercial-focused.

Despite the differences across land regulations, it was the common trends and themes I found across regulations that inspired this project. While working as a land use

consultant, writing codes for communities around the country, I began to identify district similarities across most of the codes. For instance, the *LD – Low Density* district in one municipality will probably allow similar housing types, lot sizes, and building heights as the *R1 – Single-Family* district in a different part of the country. The same was true for neighborhood commercial areas, mixed-use corridors, and industrial zones. Even when communities had very specific districts to serve unique purposes, like a historic or lake district, these core districts tend to look similar across municipalities. It raised a simple question - if so many zoning districts share common characteristics, can they be presented as a set of typologies?

This capstone develops these zoning district typologies through a combination of comparative analysis, professional experience, and research on contemporary trends and best practices. The result is a collection of zoning district typologies, or “families,” that can serve as a helpful resource to those looking for a better understanding of how zoning district regulations translate to the built environment. Each typology is grounded in empirical data drawn from existing zoning codes and includes common uses, typical dimensional ranges, and visual precedents illustrating the forms of development these districts tend to produce. While rooted in observed practice, the typologies are not purely descriptive. Each one incorporates targeted recommendations that address common challenges in zoning, synthesizing current data, my professional experience, and research on contemporary planning trends.

The overarching goal of this project is not to prescribe a universal zoning code or suggest that all communities should adopt the same districts. Zoning should always

respond to local conditions, including geography, infrastructure, housing demand, economic context, and community priorities. This project is instead intended to serve as an accessible introduction to zoning district types. It outlines the major families of zoning districts, provides representative examples, and illustrates how these districts function and vary in practice.

I designed this resource to be useful at multiple levels. For planning students, small developers, and community members, it offers a clear framework for understanding how zoning districts are structured and how they shape the built environment. It may also prove useful to smaller jurisdictions or those undertaking code updates, serving as a practical reference that allows users to identify, adapt, and assemble a set of districts aligned with local goals and conditions.

2.2 Terms and Definitions

The remainder of the report will sometimes refer to industry terms that may be unfamiliar to the reader. These terms are defined below.

15-Minute City

A planning idea where people can meet most of their daily needs, such as groceries, schools, parks, transit, and basic services, within about a 15-minute walk, bike ride, or transit trip from where they live.

Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)

A smaller, secondary dwelling on the same property as the primary home. ADUs take

many forms, and could look like a basement apartment, garage apartment, backyard cottage, or tiny home.

Administrative Determination

A formal decision made by planning staff about how a rule applies to a specific property, project, or situation. These are for small decisions deemed to have minimal impact on the surrounding properties, and allows the applicant from having to take the issue to a public hearing.

Bulk

The three-dimensional space, size, shape, and volume of a building. Bulk represents the physical envelope of the structure.

By-Right Use

A land use that is automatically allowed in a zoning district if it meets all applicable code requirements. For example, if a duplex is allowed by right in a Residential district, a property owner can build one so long as the project complies with the zoning and building code. However, just because a use is permitted by right does not mean the developer is exempt from submitting any required applications or permits. This may also be referred to as a permitted or allowed use.

Conditional or Special Use Permit

A permit for a use that may be appropriate in a zoning district, but needs extra review because of the potential impacts on nearby properties. These are almost always approved or denied at a public hearing, where residents have a chance to ask questions

or voice concerns. Approval of the permit may come with specific conditions beyond what is mandated by code.

Development Standards

Rules that guide how a site or building is developed. Common developmental standards in land use codes are parking, landscaping, outdoor lighting, connectivity and access, building design, stormwater, and environmental standards.

Dimensional Standards

Zoning rules that control the size and placement of buildings and lots. Common examples include setbacks, lot size, lot width, building height, and lot coverage.

Euclidean or Use-Based Zoning

A traditional zoning approach that separates land uses according to the activity allowed to take place on that lot.

Floor-Area Ratio

A ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of lot/parcel it is built upon.

Form-Based Zoning

A zoning approach that focuses more on the physical form of the building than the use.

Incentive Zoning

A zoning tool that allows a developer to receive a benefit, such as extra height or density, in exchange for providing a public benefit, such as affordable housing, open space, or improved streetscape.

Micromobility

Small, lightweight transportation options used for short trips, such as bicycles, e-bikes, and electric scooters.

Missing Middle Housing

Housing types that fall between single-unit dwellings and large apartment buildings.

Examples include duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, cottage courts, and townhomes, and may sometimes include small apartment buildings.

Mixed-Use

Development that includes both a residential and non-residential component, such as a neighborhood with homes, stores, services, and civic uses all in the same district. A building is sometimes consider to be a Mixed-Use building if it contains both residential and non-residential, often taking the form of residences located above commercial or office uses.

Model Code

A sample or template code that a planner or planning staff can use as a reference for writing, updating, or understanding regulations.

Overlay or Overlay Zone

An additional zoning layer that applies special rules to a specific area, on top of the base zoning. Overlays are often used for historic districts, floodplains, downtown design areas, and airport safety zones.

Performance-Based Zoning

A zoning approach that focuses on the impacts of development rather than just the type of use. Noise, traffic, dust, pollution, and vibration are some of the things a performance-based code may try to regulate.

Sight Triangle

An unobstructed area at an intersection or driveway that provides drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians a clear line of sight to approaching traffic. Objects like signs, fences, or landscaping may be limited in this area.

Stepback

A feature of a taller building where, after a certain number of stories, further stories must be recessed, helping reduce the building's visual impact from the street.

Transparency

The amount of windows or glass on a building façade, especially at street level. Some codes may include doors or window trim when calculating transparency.

Use-Specific Standards

Extra rules that apply to certain uses, even if they are allowed in that district by right, meant to address the specific impacts of that use.

2.3 Background and Context

Planning Context

Zoning ordinances, most of which rely on traditional, Euclidean-style regulations, remain the primary tool for regulating land use in the United States. Most jurisdictions regulate

land use through an ordinance that divides land into districts and establishes what uses are allowed in that district. It may also include other design or development standards for each district, like building form, parking, outdoor lighting, landscaping, and other elements of site design. Although zoning frameworks have evolved over the past century, most jurisdictions continue to rely on a Euclidean (use-based) or Euclidean-hybrid structure organized around distinct districts and use-based restrictions.

The legal and conceptual foundations of zoning in the United States are rooted in nuisance law and the exercise of police power to protect public health, safety, and welfare. Early cases such as *Hadacheck v. Sebastian* upheld the ability of local governments to restrict land uses, even where such regulations significantly limited property value, establishing that separating incompatible uses served a legitimate public purpose. This principle was further solidified in *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, which formally validated zoning as a constitutional exercise of local police power. Together, these cases established the legal framework for dividing land into districts based on use, forming the basis of what is now commonly referred to as Euclidean zoning. At the same time, these legal foundations cannot be separated from the ways zoning has historically been used to reinforce racial and economic exclusion. From its early implementation, zoning was often employed, both directly and indirectly, to segregate communities and limit access to certain neighborhoods (Rothstein, 2017). Modern planning practice has increasingly acknowledged this history and is working to address these inequities through more inclusive approaches to land use regulation.

Modern zoning codes are often far more complex than their early counterparts and incorporate a range of regulatory approaches beyond use restrictions. Many include performance-based standards that address external impacts such as noise, vibration, or emissions. Others incorporate form-based elements that regulate building form, massing, and the relationship between structures and the public realm. Most contemporary codes are hybrid systems, blending use-based, form-based, and performance-based approaches, and may also include overlays, incentive zoning, or special district provisions. Despite these variations, the zoning district remains the fundamental organizational unit of most ordinances.

In practice, zoning codes function as both technical and conceptual documents. At their best, they translate community goals, often articulated through comprehensive or area plans, into enforceable standards that shape development patterns over decades. However, while zoning is foundational to land use planning, it is often not the primary focus of those first engaging with the field. Students, emerging practitioners, engaged community members, new members of city councils, and people just generally curious about city planning are typically drawn to more visible and aspirational planning concepts, such as walkable neighborhoods, multimodal transportation, historic preservation, or popular concepts like the “15-minute city.” While these concepts are important, they are ultimately enabled, implemented, and constrained through zoning district regulations.

As a result, there is often a disconnect between the goals of planning and the regulatory tools used to achieve them. New planners may understand that regulation is the first

step in shaping the built environment, but may not fully appreciate the extent to which zoning districts, through use permissions, dimensional standards, and development constraints, determine what ultimately gets built. Similarly, residents and small-scale developers may have limited familiarity with zoning beyond its most basic function, despite its significant influence on property rights and development outcomes. Even experienced municipal planners, while familiar with the structure of their own code, may have limited exposure to how different regulatory approaches across jurisdictions translate into distinct patterns of development. When looking to write or update their code, local planners, developers, and community members may not know the best way to translate their needs and goals into regulation.

Addressing this gap requires a clearer understanding that zoning is not simply a collection of tables and standards, but a system that directly shapes the built environment. By examining how zoning districts are structured across jurisdictions, how they translate into real-world development patterns, how they have resulted in unexpected pitfalls or problems, and current trends and best practices, this project seeks to make the underlying mechanics of zoning more legible and accessible to a broader audience.

Academic and Applied Context

This capstone project was developed for Dr. Carrie Makarewicz, to serve as a resource within the Urban & Regional Development graduate course at the University of Colorado Denver College of Architecture and Planning. This course introduces students to the fundamental mechanics of land use regulation - how zoning works in practice, how to

interpret and navigate codes, and how residents and the development community interact with zoning.

Students in introductory planning courses often begin by learning zoning conceptually and broadly, in terms of Residential vs Commercial vs Industrial or rural vs suburban vs urban, but these concepts in practice are rarely as neat. Municipal zoning structures vary widely in naming conventions, dimensional standards, use permissions, and district counts. The comparative framework of my project analyzes which differences and similarities are structural, and which are more stylistic. It seeks to frame zoning districts not as static or rigid, but as repeating archetypes that, while they may contain minor variations, share overall structural characteristics.

Although developed initially as an academic project, this work has applications beyond the classroom. It can serve as a resource for community members seeking a better understanding of zoning, while also functioning as a practical reference for jurisdictions updating their codes. Used in conjunction with model code resources, such as the Colorado Department of Local Affairs Template Land Use Code, this booklet can help guide communities in identifying and shaping the types of zoning districts needed to support their desired patterns of development.

Problem Statement

Even with the ubiquity of zoning in American planning practice, zoning regulations remain difficult to interpret, compare, and apply purposefully. Zoning codes are often highly technical, non-standardized, and structured differently across jurisdictions, making it challenging for students, community members, and even practitioners to

understand how districts function and how they differ in practice. While a user may be able to read a table of dimensional standards or permitted uses, it is far less straightforward to visualize how those regulations translate into real-world development outcomes.

Many codes include legacy (and often exclusionary) standards, such as large minimum lot sizes, setbacks, or parking requirements, that are treated as defaults rather than deliberate policy choices, even when they may not produce the intended form of development. Similarly, jurisdictions frequently accumulate multiple Residential or Commercial districts with only minor distinctions, resulting in an unwieldy number of overly prescriptive or restrictive districts. When looking to understand, update, or draft zoning district regulations, it may be difficult to identify what constitutes a typical or effective district, what alternatives exist, and how different regulatory approaches shape the built environment.

Core Question

How can modern zoning district typologies be synthesized into a practical framework that helps students, community members, and jurisdictions understand, evaluate, and select zoning districts that support desired patterns of development while maintaining adaptability as needs and visions change?

Why This Matters

The Urban & Regional Development course could benefit from a tool that more effectively bridges the gap between theory and regulatory practice, particularly one that graduate students can use beyond the classroom as they begin their careers. This

project provides a reference that helps students recognize patterns across jurisdictions, understand how dimensional standards scale, compare regulatory structures, and identify common and emerging best practices in modern zoning, all in an accessible and easy-to-use format. In the classroom, it's not possible to expose students to dozens of different jurisdictions' zoning codes, but the graduates will inevitably land a job in a community not covered in the course. By understanding the nuts and bolts of all zoning codes, students will be prepared to quickly understand, navigate, and apply any code they encounter in the future.

This resource also has practical value beyond the classroom, particularly for small or rural communities that may lack the staff capacity or budget to undertake comprehensive zoning updates. Even when model codes are available, jurisdictions must still determine which districts are appropriate and how they should be structured to achieve local goals. By providing a comprehensive overview of potential zoning district typologies, this project can help communities identify appropriate districts, avoid unnecessary complexity, and better align zoning regulations with desired patterns of development. It can also support more informed decision-making by staff, planning commissions, and community members by grounding those decisions in both real-world examples and established practices.

Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to develop a set of common zoning district typologies that include information on typical uses and development standards, along with visual representations of these district types. While this resource is primarily

intended to support graduate students in the Urban & Regional Development course, it is also designed to be applicable beyond the classroom as a reference for communities, practitioners, and others seeking to better understand zoning in practice.

2.4 Remainder of the Report

The remainder of this report is organized into three sections. First, a literature review provides context on the history and evolution of zoning, common critiques of traditional Euclidean zoning, contemporary planning issues, an overview of model regulatory frameworks, and an analysis of district-specific best practices. This is followed by a methodology section describing the research approach used in this project. The final section presents the primary deliverable of this project - the collection of zoning district typologies.

3. Background Research

3.1 Academic Literature

History of Zoning

Zoning district regulations are the backbone of American zoning. Understanding how and why districts developed the way they did clarifies why modern codes still organize using this method, and how later additions like performance standards, buffering, and form-based controls, were largely layered onto the existing district framework instead of replacing it.

In the United States, the authority to regulate land use is grounded in state police power. Police power is the inherent power of the state government to enact restrictions on private property to protect public health, safety, morals, and general welfare. States will usually delegate some or all of this power to municipalities via state enabling statutes or home-rule authority, thus allowing cities and counties to adopt their own zoning ordinances tailored to their specific community needs. Courts will generally uphold these regulations as valid uses of police power as long as they have a rational relationship to legitimate public purposes and are not arbitrary.

Early land-use controls were based on the principle that a lawful activity can be restricted based on location because of its surrounding impacts. These controls were an extension of nuisance law. In *Hadacheck v. Sebastian* (1915), the City of Los Angeles had an ordinance that prohibited the operation of brick yards/kilns within specified limits. The city had to enforce this ordinance against a brickyard operator who argued that the restriction reduced his property's value, thereby amounting to an

unconstitutional taking. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the ordinance as a valid exercise of police power, emphasizing that while a use may not inherently be a nuisance, the government may treat it as a nuisance if it poses a public welfare concern (*Hadacheck v. Sebastian*, 1915). This landmark case legitimized place-based restrictions on certain activities, even where the result is substantial economic loss to the owner.

Zoning ordinances were further solidified as a valid use of police power in the 1920s by the U.S. Department of Commerce under Secretary Herbert Hoover through the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act (SSZEA). It authorized local governments the power to establish a planning commission, enact a “master plan,” control the private subdivision of land, and divide land into districts (*American Planning Association, Standard State Zoning Enabling Act and Standard City Planning Enabling Act*). The first widely recognized comprehensive zoning ordinance in the United States is New York City’s 1916 Building Zone Resolution. This resolution formalized the district concept and paired it with extensive bulk and open-space regulations. The intent of this resolution was to prevent tall buildings from restricting access to light and air on the surrounding buildings, and it did this by limiting massing at certain heights, regulated open space, and imposed setback standards (*City of New York Board of Estimate and Apportionment*, 1916).

In *Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.* (1926), the Supreme Court upheld a comprehensive zoning ordinance as constitutional under the police power. The ordinance divided land into six use districts, three height districts, and four area districts

(*Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.*, 1926). The Supreme Court held that there was a legitimate government interest in regulating land uses to maintain the character of a neighborhood. The court claimed that certain uses “may be merely a right thing in the wrong place—like a pig in the parlor.”

After *Euclid*, municipalities used the district framework to regulate things beyond uses. As zoning matured through the 20th century, many communities expanded their codes to include increasingly detailed standards. These regulations were often in response to new technologies like the automobile, environmental concerns, and aesthetic expectations.

Performance-based controls emerged as a critique of vague nuisance language and use-based controls. Specifically, industrial professionals claimed that industrial impacts had changed, and the “light” vs “heavy” use categories were difficult to define and may no longer be applicable. A 1951 American Society of Planning Officials report argued that industrial zoning often relied on outdated qualitative standards and proposed replacing those with quantified, measurable performance standards for the following impacts: noise, smoke, odor, dust and dirt, noxious gases, glare and heat, fire hazards, industrial wastes, transportation and traffic, aesthetics, and psychological effects (American Society of Planning Officials, 1951). Performance standards represent a significant criticism of use-based zoning, which is that the use does not always reflect the inherent impacts to the surrounding uses. Considering that industrial impacts have been mitigated through growing environmental regulations, industrial uses may not require the level of segregation from other uses as they once did.

Another major response to traditional Euclidean zoning is the increased use of form-based zoning, which regulates how development occupies a site rather than relying only on the separation of land uses. New York City's 1961 zoning revision is an early example of this shift. The 1961 resolution moved away from the older three-map system and incorporated Floor Area Ratio (FAR) as a core measure of development intensity (New York City Planning Commission, 1961). This allowed the same amount of development to be arranged in different forms. The 1961 handbook emphasized that floor area, open space, and density controls alone could not protect light and air, so the code paired FAR with additional design controls intended to give architects and builders flexibility, while preventing buildings from blocking air circulation or light. It also established an early form of incentive zoning by allowing additional floor area in certain districts when developers provided public amenities such as plazas, plaza-connected open areas, or arcades (New York City Planning Commission, 1961).

Euclidean Zoning Criticisms

Zoning in general is not without its critics, and, if the aim of the project is to create a reference based on Euclidean zoning, one must understand its pitfalls and limitations. From the beginning, some have argued that zoning is an inherent infringement on property rights. Others point to zoning as the reason for the current climate of auto-dependency, and others find that zoning limits the ability of the free market to respond to market demands (Pendall, Lo, & Wegmann, 2022). While zoning has been justified under police power authority to promote health, safety, and welfare, scholars and practitioners have increasingly recognized how its structure has produced rigid, racist, and otherwise exclusionary and detrimental landscapes. Indeed, some of the earliest

supporters of zoning were those who recognized zoning's exclusionary powers as a way to protect their property value by prohibiting certain uses (and the people who are typically associated with those uses), from locating near their properties. This pattern of regulating "neutral" land uses to exclude certain populations predates formal zoning, as seen in cases such as *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, where local ordinances governing laundromats were applied in a discriminatory manner to target Chinese-owned businesses. Though they were framed as public safety regulations, these measures functioned as early tools of exclusion that foreshadowed later zoning practices (*Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 1886).

Many early twentieth-century cities adopted racial zoning ordinances that explicitly prohibited Black residents from occupying homes in majority-white neighborhoods, until the U.S. Supreme Court declared such measures unconstitutional in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917). In response, jurisdictions shifted toward regulatory tools that were legally race-neutral but continued to produce segregated outcomes, most notably through the use of single-unit zoning, minimum lot sizes, and restrictions on multifamily housing (Rothstein, 2017). These mechanisms functioned to limit access to certain neighborhoods by increasing the cost of housing, thereby favoring higher-income households, which, due to systemic exclusion from educational and economic opportunities, were disproportionately white.

In the United States, race and income remain closely correlated, meaning that zoning districts requiring larger lots or higher-cost forms of development can systematically exclude lower-income households, who are disproportionately people of color.

Contemporary zoning patterns continue to reflect these historical dynamics, with restrictive Residential districts remaining prevalent in many metropolitan areas shaped by past exclusionary practices. Scholars have demonstrated that zoning decisions play a significant role in determining who can afford to live in particular neighborhoods, often reinforcing patterns of concentrated wealth and disinvestment (Lens & Monkkonen, 2016). Recognizing this history is essential when evaluating contemporary zoning district typologies, as the structure of districts, particularly Residential districts and particularly large-lot single-unit zones, can continue to produce exclusionary outcomes.

Large-lot single-unit zoning remains a dominant feature of many zoning codes in the United States. Most jurisdictions include at least one single-unit residential district, with many adopting many such districts differentiated primarily by minimum lot size or dimensional standards. While these distinctions may appear meaningful within the code, they often result in limited variation in actual housing form while reinforcing low-density development patterns. These regulatory structures constrain the development of a broader range of housing types, including multifamily housing, townhomes, duplexes, and smaller single-unit homes often referred to as “starter homes.” When combined with additional requirements, such as minimum parking ratios, setback standards, lot size mandates, and extensive landscaping or design regulations, these districts can significantly restrict achievable density, even in areas with demonstrated demand for more diverse housing options.

The widespread application of low-density residential zoning has been identified as a contributing factor to the broader housing affordability crisis, as it limits the supply and

diversity of housing in high-demand areas (Elliott, 2025). These patterns also have implications for environmental sustainability, as low-density development is typically associated with increased land consumption, automobile dependency, and higher per-capita infrastructure costs. Furthermore, these zoning constraints can limit housing options for changing household demographics. Smaller households, including students, childless couples, and older adults seeking to downsize, may find few opportunities to transition into more appropriately scaled housing within their existing communities. As a result, zoning districts designed to preserve neighborhood character may inadvertently reduce housing flexibility, limit lifecycle housing options, and constrain the ability of communities to adapt to evolving social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Contemporary Zoning Issues

To develop zoning district typologies that are both functional and adaptable in the modern world, it is necessary to examine the contemporary challenges associated with zoning. These challenges reflect broader structural issues within modern zoning, particularly the rigidity of use-based regulations, constraints on housing diversity, and the difficulty of translating planning goals into feasible development outcomes.

One of the most widely discussed issues in modern zoning is the restrictive nature of use-based regulations. Conventional zoning codes frequently rely on narrowly defined use categories and limited permitted uses within each district, which can constrain both housing development and small-scale economic activity. On a broad scale, these restrictions have contributed to the national housing affordability crisis by limiting the supply and diversity of housing, particularly in areas dominated by single-unit residential

zoning. In many jurisdictions, housing types such as duplexes, townhomes, and small multifamily buildings, commonly referred to as “missing middle” housing, are prohibited based on a perceived impact to neighborhood character, as opposed to demonstrable impacts (Wegmann, 2020).

The exclusion of these housing types reflects a broader regulatory assumption that they are inherently incompatible with single-unit development, even though research and practice suggest this incompatibility is far overblown. As a result, large portions of residential land are restricted to low-density development, limiting opportunities to increase housing supply, improve affordability, and accommodate changing demographic needs.

While allowing a variety of dwelling types in Residential zone districts is a first step, the type of allowed housing is not the only issue. As Gallagher (2026) notes, development feasibility and affordability are also shaped by dimensional standards like lot size, setbacks, and parking requirements, as well as infrastructure capacity and neighborhood context. Without corresponding adjustments to these standards, nominally permitted housing types may remain difficult or infeasible to construct. A narrow collection of allowed uses has impacts beyond affordable housing, often limiting commercial and mixed-use activities, particularly for small business owners.

Beyond use restrictions, conventional zoning has also been criticized for shaping development patterns that are inconsistent with contemporary planning goals, particularly those related to walkability and sustainability. The concept of the “15-minute city” has gained prominence as a framework for creating compact, mixed-use

neighborhoods where daily needs can be met within a short distance (Moreno et al., 2021). However, traditional zoning practices, including strict use segregation, minimum parking requirements, and large setbacks, often inhibit the development of such environments. In response, many jurisdictions have introduced Mixed-Use districts, overlay zones, and form-based components to better support walkable, integrated land use patterns.

Finally, a growing body of research points to a lack of flexibility and feasibility in some modern zoning standards. These standards are generally intended to direct a very specific type of development, but being overly rigid may have unintended consequences. Rigid or narrowly tailored districts can limit a community's ability to respond to changing conditions and needs, and may accidentally prohibit desirable development. Studies such as Quattro and López Ochoa (2025) demonstrate how more flexible regulatory tools, such as San Antonio's Infill Development Zone, can facilitate incremental development by reducing barriers associated with conventional dimensional and use-based standards while maintaining a level of regulatory oversight.

Model Codes and Typologies

Model codes and typologies exist because zoning is legally consequential, politically sensitive, technically complex, and time-consuming to implement and enforce. As such, this is not the first attempt to make the process easier for communities looking to update their codes or for students seeking to understand what a "good code" looks like. There have been model codes – some that provide examples and direction for an entire zoning ordinance, and others with specific guidelines or example language for specific

areas, like environmental or lighting standards. However, when it comes to model ordinances and other classification efforts, planners must strike a balance between descriptiveness and flexibility.

The Land-Based Classification Standards (LBCS), developed by the American Planning Association, provide a standardized framework for classifying land uses based on multiple characteristics rather than a single use label. The system was created to address inconsistencies in how land use is categorized across jurisdictions and to support more precise data collection, analysis, and sharing. Rather than assigning a single use designation to a parcel, LBCS classifies land across five independent dimensions: activity, function, structure type, site development character, and ownership (American Planning Association, 2001). The intent of this framework extends beyond improved taxonomy. The LBCS was designed to function as a flexible, database-oriented system that allows jurisdictions to classify land use across multiple fields. This multidimensional approach allows users to adapt the classification system to different planning contexts while maintaining consistency for regional or national comparisons. The LBCS is not typically used as a regulatory tool within zoning ordinances, but it has been applied in land-use inventories, GIS analysis, and planning research. I mention the LBCS as an example of an effort to classify and standardize land use, while explicitly recognizing that land use and zoning are complex and multidimensional. Similarly, this project seeks to organize and clarify zoning district typologies, while still acknowledging

that zoning districts are inherently context-dependent and cannot be reduced to a single universal model.

Land-Based Classification Standards			01-Apr-2001
LBCS Color Codes for 1-Digit Level Coding			
Red, Green, Blue Values	Color*	LBCS Code	Activity
RGB(255,255,0) RGBHex(FF00FF)	yellow	1000	Residential activities
RGB(255,0,0) RGBHex(FF0000)	red	2000	Shopping, business, or trade activities
RGB(160,32,240) RGBHex(A0F020)	purple	3000	Industrial, manufacturing, and waste-related activities
RGB(0,0,255) RGBHex(00FF00)	blue	4000	Social, institutional, or infrastructure-related activities
RGB(190,190,190) RGBHex(BEBEBE)	gray	5000	Travel or movement activities
RGB(47,79,79) RGBHex(2F4F4F)	dark slate gray	6000	Mass assembly of people
RGB(144,238,144) RGBHex(9090EE)	light green	7000	Leisure activities
RGB(34,139,34) RGBHex(22228B)	forest green	8000	Natural resources-related activities
RGB(255,255,255) RGBHex(FFFFFF)	white	9000	No human activity or unclassifiable activity

Figure 1: A sample page from the LBCS Tables. Source: American Planning Association.

There are a variety of different model codes to aid planners in writing sustainable and effective codes. These include the Planning Advisory Service report *Smart Codes*:

Model Land-Development Regulations (Morris, 2009), which provided model ordinances and commentary that local governments could adapt for multimodal transportation, infill development, affordable housing, and predictable development review. There is also the similarly named *SmartCode*, which uses form-based principles based on the urban-rural transect framework (Center for Applied Transect Studies, n.d.).

Beyond model codes, planners have also developed similar typologies for land use. For instance, Stephen M. Wheeler developed a typology centered on metropolitan landscape forms, with a particular focus on street, block, and building patterns (Wheeler, 2015). He argues that understanding these forms helps decision makers and the public make more informed choices about regional futures, which aligns with the intent of this guide and the new version of the MURP core course, *Urban & Regional Development*, which has been renamed from *Urban Development*, to include regional planning and regional economic development.

Colorado provides a particularly relevant example of a model regulatory framework designed to support local code development. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) produced a Template Land Development Code as a modernization effort intended to reflect current best practices and to support compliance with recent state land-use legislation (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, n.d.). The template is designed to function as both a model unified development code for Colorado municipalities and counties and as a source of recommended best-practice approaches on specific topics, including accessory dwelling units, telecommunications, and parking. Importantly, the framework recognizes variation in local conditions by providing multiple

versions tailored to different jurisdiction types, including county and municipal formats, each with annotated and streamlined variants. This structure allows jurisdictions to reduce drafting burdens while maintaining flexibility to adapt the code to local needs, rather than prescribing a single, uniform regulatory approach. In addition to the code template itself, the model is supported by a broader suite of implementation resources, including a best-practices companion guidebook and a user guide. The state has also provided regulatory guidelines for related topics like hazard mitigation and electric vehicle infrastructure.

Section 3-304. Subdivision Level Access and Connectivity

Some aspects of connectivity within a development need to be addressed during the initial platting of a subdivision. If the basic layout of lots, parcels, streets, and trails is not addressed at this stage as required to implement comprehensive plan goals, it is difficult to improve connectivity later. In addition, connectivity within platted parcels, particularly those containing multiple primary structures, can be addressed at the time when a site plan for the lot or parcel is approved. Those site-level aspects of connectivity are listed in Section 3-403, Site Level Access and Connectivity.

A. Applicability

These standards apply to review and approval of major or minor preliminary plans and final plats for the subdivision or resubdivision of property into individual lots for development. Additional access and connectivity standards that apply at the time development occurs on platted lots and parcels are found in Section 3-403, Site Level Access and Connectivity.

B. General

Each subdivision design shall comply with the standards for access and connectivity in this section that ensure safe and convenient travel for motor vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, service vehicles, and emergency services, including persons experiencing disabilities, within and between all residential, mixed-use, and nonresidential developments.

C. Consistency with Adopted Plans

The road and street systems shall be in conformance with applicable provisions of the comprehensive plan and any intergovernmental agreements with municipalities that affect the applicant's property.

D. Vehicle Access

Vehicular access to subdivisions shall be provided through a public street system having a surface that is constructed to the town/city road standards, and that is designed to accommodate the present and anticipated traffic volumes and wheel loads of heavy vehicles.

E. Basic Roadway and Access Design**1. Compliance with Town/City Standards**

The design and construction of all streets, sidewalks, trails, and related infrastructure shall comply with all town/city road and street alignment, design, and construction standards.

2. Accommodation for Future Subdivision

- a.** When an unsubdivided parcel is proposed to be subdivided into larger parcels than ordinary building lots, and further subdivision of the parcel is required or anticipated before development of the land, the boundaries of such parcels shall be arranged to allow:

Figure 2: A section of the DOLA Model Land Use Code showing a section on Subdivision Level Access and Connectivity, including helpful annotations for users that are separate from the model code language.

Source: <https://dlg.colorado.gov/land-use-codes>

This guide can complement the DOLA model code and similar resources by helping users more fully understand what zoning districts they want or need, how those districts

may look in practice, and what standards can shape them, while providing a broader set of district examples than those included in the DOLA template.

3.2 Zoning Districts in Practice

Modern zoning codes are often far more detailed and nuanced than their early predecessors, with districts differentiated well beyond the traditional Residential, commercial, and industrial categories. They often contain a wide variety of standards and controls, located in different sections of the code – which can be overwhelming to a student, new planner, or community member. For instance, the City of Denver’s form-based code has several components to each district. The first letter notes where the district is located in the city, e.g., center, urban, suburban, or edge, the second set of letters denotes the type of use allowed in this location, e.g. single unit, multi-unit, mixed-use, and the third variable, usually a number, denotes the number of stories allowed. Based on a combination of my own professional experience working as both a municipal planner and a consultant drafting land use codes, as well as research conducted for this project, I have found that most jurisdictions generally provide the following sections to describe each of their zone districts, and it is recommended that they have these sections:

- Purpose or Intent Statements;
- Uses;
- Dimensional Standards; and
- Development Standards

Purpose or Intent

Most zoning districts include a purpose or intent statement or section that describes the overall vision and role of the district. This section outlines what the district is intended to achieve, such as intended development type, desired character, and how the district fits within the broader zoning framework and the jurisdiction as a whole. Intent statements generally serve as a guiding principle, rather than a legally enforceable regulation.

However, in cases where the code is ambiguous or does not clearly address a specific proposal, the purpose or intent statement can provide direction in determining whether a proposed development aligns with the district's overall goals. Despite many codes' best attempts to be all encompassing of every possible development, there are occasional instances where it is not clear if a use or design style is allowed in a certain district.

Take the following example:

A planner in a rural city receives an application for “Bleats & Barley Brewing,” a craft micro-brewery with small, onsite goat farm, located in the Heavy Commercial District. In addition to the brewery and farm, they intend to have a taproom for the on-site consumption of their products, a small retail section to sell beers, merchandise, and homemade goat-milk soaps, and an outdoor patio where they host frequent “yoga with goats” events. This application encompasses industrial, retail, restaurant, and fitness uses, and is probably not fully covered under the section of allowed uses. Thus, the planner turns to the district purpose/intent to see if this use is compatible with the surrounding area.

The district intent is listed as: *The Heavy Commercial (HC) District is intended to serve as a transitional zone between Commercial and industrial zones, allowing for high-intensity or large-lot commercial uses and limited industrial uses. It is intended to support limited manufacturing, warehousing, distribution, indoor entertainment, vehicle and animal related businesses, and general commercial and service uses on large lots.*

The planner and related staff assess the purpose, along with the related use, dimensional, and development standards, and determine that the proposed use is compatible with this district.

Uses

The regulation of permitted uses is the basis of Euclidean zoning. Even form-based codes tend to have some amount of use-based controls, even if they are not the primary regulatory tool. For example, a form-based code may allow a broad range of residential, office, retail, and light commercial activity within a given building form, while still prohibiting heavy industrial uses, adult businesses, drive-throughs, auto-oriented uses, or other activities that may be incompatible with the intended character of the district. There are several ways jurisdictions present permitted uses within their codes. Some simply list the allowed uses directly within each district's description or intent. Others may include a use table within the district description, instead of just listing the uses. However, the most common and, in my opinion, effective approach, based on both professional experience and research, is to include a dedicated section or chapter for uses. In this format, uses are typically organized in a matrix, with zoning districts as column headers and individual uses as rows. Each cell indicates whether a use is

permitted, often through designations such as “P” (permitted), “A” (allowed), or checkmarks.

15-3-40 Use Table

Table 15-3-1: Use Table							
P = Permitted S = Special Use							
Zoning Districts	R-1	R-2	MU-1	C-1	C-2	D	Use-Specific Standards
Residential							
Household Living							
Dwelling, Single-Unit Detached	P	P					15-3-50(a)(1)
Dwelling, Single-Unit Attached (Townhome)	P/S	P					15-3-50(a)(2)
Dwelling, Duplex	P/S	P	P				15-3-50(a)(3)
Dwelling, Triplex or Fourplex		P	P	P			15-3-50(a)(4)
Dwelling, Cottage Court		P		P			15-3-50(a)(5)
Dwelling, Multiunit		P	P	P			15-3-50(a)(6)
Dwelling, Live/Work				P	P		15-3-50(a)(7)
Dwelling, Mixed-Use			P				
Manufactured or Tiny Home Park		S					15-3-50(a)(8)
Group Living							
Continuing Care Facility		S					
Group Home	P	P	S				

Figure 3: An example of a Use Table. Source: Town of Silverton Land Use Code.

Jurisdictions vary widely in how specific they get when defining and categorizing uses. For example, one code may include a broad category such as “animal-related uses,” while another may subdivide that category into more specific uses such as kennels, doggy daycares, veterinary clinics, pet stores, and grooming services. There is no universally correct level of specificity, rather, the level of detail should reflect a conscious policy choice about how much control and discretion a jurisdiction wishes to retain in the review process.

Communities that prefer greater flexibility may choose to adopt broader use categories, thus allowing planning staff and decision-making bodies more discretion in interpreting how a specific development proposal fits within the district. For instance, even if “animal-related uses” are not permitted in a downtown district, a pet store may be interpreted as a retail use, a veterinary clinic as a medical office, or a grooming business as a personal service, all of which may be more contextually appropriate. In contrast, a large boarding kennel would more clearly fall within an animal-related use category and may be considered incompatible with that setting. This approach can be effective in smaller jurisdictions or contexts where staff have the capacity to evaluate proposals on a case-by-case basis and where there is a high degree of trust in administrative discretion.

Alternatively, jurisdictions may choose to define uses more narrowly and include a comprehensive list within the use table. This approach recognizes that uses such as kennels, grooming services, and pet stores can have wildly different impacts and should therefore be regulated separately. While this results in a larger and more complex use table and requires specific definitions for each use, it can streamline the review process, reduce ambiguity, and maintain a stance of impartiality and legal defensibility. When new or unlisted uses are proposed, jurisdictions may address them through administrative determinations, which are often not captured directly in the code, or through formal code amendments that create a record for future applications. This approach may be preferred in larger communities or in jurisdictions that seek to limit discretionary interpretation and increase transparency. It can be difficult, however, to capture one-off examples in the code and that may be why some jurisdictions approve

unique uses in certain districts administratively rather than doing a formal, legal, amendment to the official zoning code.

Use Definitions

Regardless of the approach, all uses and use categories included in a zoning code should be clearly defined within the code itself. However, the level of specificity and rigidity within those definitions may vary depending on the regulatory approach.

Jurisdictions that rely on broader use categories may adopt definitions that allow for a degree of interpretation, enabling planning staff to evaluate proposals in context. In contrast, jurisdictions that prioritize a more prescriptive and legally defensible framework must ensure that use definitions are clear, specific, and internally consistent, allowing planners and decision-making bodies to rely directly on the code when determining whether a use is permitted. In these cases, well-crafted definitions are essential to support consistent application and to reduce the risk of ambiguity or legal challenge.

In some cases, jurisdictions are moving away from highly specific use categories and instead relying on broader classifications supplemented by use-specific standards. For example, a code may allow animal related uses in downtown district, subject to use specific standards. In those standards, it might specify that no animal-related use in the downtown district may provide overnight boarding for animals, nor have an outdoor space for pets. Under this approach, a code may allow “animal-related uses” within a district while applying targeted standards to address potential impacts. This approach provides flexibility by accommodating a range of uses while ensuring that contextually incompatible aspects are mitigated.

Dimensional Standards

Much how a form-based code, which is premised on dimensional standards, will likely contain some use-based standards, in addition to building form standards, a use-based code will probably contain some dimensional standards to regulate building form.

Dimensional standards are used to regulate how development is physically arranged on a site and the shapes and bulk of buildings permitted. These standards typically include requirements such as minimum or maximum lot area, lot width, building height, setbacks from the property lines, and lot coverage.

These standards recognize that the impacts of development extend beyond land use alone. For example, a neighborhood of single-unit detached homes may have a significantly different character depending on whether the minimum lot size is 2,000 square feet or one acre. A downtown or central business district may allow significantly taller buildings, while Residential districts often impose lower height limits, such as two or three stories, to maintain a particular scale and character. These standards are typically presented in a table format, either within the individual district description or in a consolidated table that applies across multiple districts.

Dimensional Standards

Lots	Detached	Attached	Accessory
Lot size, min. (sf)	5625 4500 ⁽¹⁾	3000 2500 ⁽¹⁾	NA
Lot frontage, min. (ft)	37.5 30 ⁽¹⁾	20	NA
Residential density, max. (sf/primary unit)	3000 2500 ⁽¹⁾		NA
Residential density, min. (sf/primary unit)	16,875		NA
Structure coverage, max.	45% 50% ⁽¹⁾		45% 55% ⁽¹⁾
Uncovered parking/access area, max.	20%		NA
Landscape area, min.	35% 30% ⁽¹⁾		NA
Setbacks, min. (ft)			
A Front	15		15
B Side	5		3/5 ⁽⁴⁾
C Rear ⁽³⁾	10		10
Height, max. (ft)			
D Building height ⁽²⁾	28/35		25

Figure 4: An example of a dimensional standard table. Source: City of Salida Land Development Code.

Development Standards

In addition to use and dimensional regulations, most zoning codes include a range of development standards that address how a site is designed to ensure development is compatible with the surrounding context. These standards are generally more form- and performance-based, and may regulate things like building materials, roof form, parking configuration, landscaping, fencing, and outdoor lighting. While use standards determine what activities are permitted and dimensional standards govern the basic scale of development, development standards shape the character, functionality, and overall quality of the built environment – though there are disagreements about what level of controls are necessary, desired, or helpful when it comes to development.

Two developments with the same use and similar dimensional characteristics may have very different impacts on surrounding properties depending on how they are designed and operated. For example, requirements related to building materials or roof pitch may be used to maintain architectural character, while parking and circulation standards influence site functionality and traffic patterns. Similarly, landscaping standards often address standards including yard requirements, required street trees, and interior parking lot landscaping. They might also regulate buffers (via fences, open space, or landscaping) that can mitigate visual impacts, noise, or potential safety concerns. Development standards might also address outdoor lighting, regulating things like fixture type, height, brightness, and light spillover onto adjacent properties. It also looks at fences and berms, and may address height, materials, and placement, particularly at property boundaries or along streets.

These standards are typically organized in a separate section of the zoning code, rather than repeated within each individual district. In many cases, codes include dedicated chapters or subsections for specific topics, such as landscaping, parking, signage, or lighting, which apply across multiple districts. However, the applicability and intensity of these standards may vary by district – an urban or historic district may have much more stringent development standards than an Industrial or Agricultural district. The scope and specificity of development standards vary widely across jurisdictions and are influenced by a range of factors, including community size, development pressure, administrative capacity, and local preferences regarding regulation and design control.

Table 4-B: Off-Street Parking Spaces Required	
Residential Uses	
Household Living	
Dwelling, Single-Family (Detached)	1 per unit
Dwelling, Single-Family (Multiple Principal)	1 per unit
Dwelling, Duplex	1 per unit
Dwelling, Townhouse	1 per unit
Dwelling, Multi-Family (3+ units)	1.5 per unit + 1 guest space per 4 units IH: 1 per unit
Dwelling, Co-Housing/Cottage Housing	1 per unit
Dwelling, Live/Work	1 per unit
Manufactured/Mobile Home (HUD)	1 per unit
Manufactured/Mobile Home Park (HUD)	1 per unit 1 guest space per 5 units
Recreational Vehicle (Long-Term Occupancy)	1 per unit
Group Living	
Continuing Care Retirement Facility	1 per 400 sq. ft.
Group Home, Large	1 per 400 sq. ft.
Group Home, Small	1 per 400 sq. ft.
Dormitory	1.5 per unit + 1 guest space per 4 units
Public, Institutional, and Civic Uses	
Community and Cultural	
Civic or Community Building	1 per 300 sq. ft.

Figure 5: An example of a parking table, one of the most common developmental standards. Source: City of Salida Land Development Code.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

To better understand how contemporary communities approach and organize their base zoning districts, I conducted a comparative review of recently adopted zoning codes.

The purpose of this survey was to supplement my own professional experience and knowledge of zoning codes and to challenge any starting assumptions I may have, as well as to identify any recurring patterns in district structure, dimensional standards, and permitted uses that would be helpful when building the typology set.

This research was not intended to produce a statistically representative national survey of zoning codes. Instead, it was designed as a selective comparative review of land use codes that could provide useful examples of how different communities organize and regulate zoning districts. The review focused on identifying common approaches, recurring district families, and notable variations across jurisdictions with different geographies, populations, development patterns, and regulatory contexts. It also served the purpose of challenging any assumptions I may have acquired while working as a consultant, such as assuming certain things were “common” in all codes, when in actuality they were just common to the firm’s codes.

Research began with the collection of zoning ordinances from cities and counties across the country. For each jurisdiction, I reviewed the base zoning district structure and recorded information on district names, district families, selected permitted uses, and selected dimensional standards. The final list of jurisdictions can be found in

Appendix A.

4.2 Sampling Framework

Jurisdictions were generally selected based on the following criteria:

1. The zoning code was publicly available online, making it easier to collect the data.
2. The code had been adopted no earlier than 2013. While many cities have older codes, a significant aspect of this guide is to reflect modern zoning practices.
3. The code used a district-based zoning framework, as opposed to a primarily form-based structure.
4. The jurisdiction offered useful variation in geography, population, or community context.
5. The code included district-level use and dimensional information that could be compared across jurisdictions.

4.3 Data Collection

Data collection focused on base zoning districts. Overlay districts, planned development districts, and other specialized regulatory tools were noted when relevant, but were primarily left out of the analysis because the project focus is on the structure and function of base districts. For each jurisdiction, I reviewed the base zoning districts and recorded the district name, general district type, selected permitted uses, and selected dimensional standards.

Each district was assigned to a standardized district family to allow comparison across jurisdictions with different naming conventions. The district families used in the analysis were Residential, Mixed-Use, Commercial, Office/Employment, Industrial, Agricultural, Public/Institutional, Parks and Open Space, and Other. After sorting each district into the appropriate district family, I noted which uses from a predetermined list were allowed in that district.

I also recorded selected dimensional standards where available, including minimum lot area, minimum lot width, minimum front setback, minimum side setback, minimum rear setback, and maximum building height. These standards were selected because they are commonly used across zoning codes and provide a useful way to compare the scale, intensity, and development pattern associated with different district types. The dimensional standards table can be found in Appendix B. The collected data was then used as a reference point for developing the zoning district typologies included in this guide.

5. Findings

Introduction

Reviewing the data yielded several observations that aided in the creation of the typology booklet. I analyzed 276 districts across 14 jurisdictions. While I recognize this sample is not statistically representative of US jurisdictions overall, it does provide a targeted cross-section of modern district-based zoning approaches and standards.

District Families

The following table shows the number of districts in each family, in each jurisdiction, showcasing the differences in number and allocation of districts across different areas.

Municipality	Total Districts	Residential	Commercial	Mixed-Use	Industrial	Agricultural	Other
Boise	17	4	0	7	3	1	2
Bozeman	15	1	0	11	2	0	1
Chelsea	13	3	0	3	2	0	5
Dover	13	6	1	0	2	0	4
El Paso	35	14	4	9	3	1	4
Las Cruces	17	9	3	0	2	0	3
Loudoun (County)	28	10	3	6	3	5	1
Mobile	27	7	3	13	3	1	0
Mount Pleasant	27	7	4	4	3	3	6
Portland	24	8	6	3	3	0	4
Pueblo (County)	15	5	1	2	2	3	2
Silverton	6	2	0	2	1	0	1
St. Louis	12	5	0	6	0	0	1
Tulsa	27	13	0	11	3	0	0

While the average jurisdiction had about 20 districts, the range was substantial, with the lowest jurisdiction having only 6 districts and the largest having 35 districts. There was an average of 6.7 Residential Districts per jurisdiction, while Mixed-Use districts averaged 5.5. Industrial districts remain largely the same across all jurisdictions, with

the overwhelming majority having two or three districts, and none having more than 3. There was also a wide range of special districts, with some jurisdictions having none and others having five or six.

Table 2: District Count Summary			
Metric	Average	Median	Range
Total districts per jurisdiction	19.7	17	6 to 35
Residential districts per jurisdiction	6.7	6.5	1 to 14
Mixed-use districts per jurisdiction	5.5	5	0 to 13
Industrial districts per jurisdiction	2.3	2.5	0 to 3

Residential and Mixed-Use districts make up the largest share of total districts, with Residential accounting for 34% of districts, and Mixed-Use making up almost 28%. Traditional Commercial districts only accounted for only 9% of all districts, suggesting traditional Commercial Districts are being swapped out in favor of Mixed-Use districts. This aligns with a trend I found both in the literature and in my own professional experience, which is a push for more flexibility in zoning districts, especially in ways that allow for more housing.

Table 3: Number of Districts by Family		
District Family	Number of Districts	Share of Districts
Residential	94	34.1%
Mixed-Use	77	27.9%
Industrial	32	11.6%
Commercial	25	9.1%
Agricultural	14	5.1%
Office / Employment	10	3.6%
Parks and Open Space	9	3.3%
Other	8	2.9%
Public / Institutional	7	2.5%

Dimensional Standards by District Family

The following tables summarize each dimensional standard by district family.

District Family	Number of Districts	Number with No Standard	Minimum (sf)	Maximum (sf)	Median (sf)	Mode (sf)	Mean (sf)
Residential	94	16	1,000	43,560	5,550	4,000, 10,000	8,344.7
Mixed-Use	77	49	1,600	15,000	4,000	4,000	4,936
Commercial	25	14	5,000	43,560	10,000	5,000, 10,000, 30,000	17,230.9
Office / Employment	10	2	5,000	43,560	7,500	5,000	11,695
Industrial	32	20	2,500	87,120	34,280	43,560	33,118.3
Agricultural	14	0	5,000	1,742,400	36,780	20,000, 43,560	250,905.7
Public / Institutional	7	4	2,500	20,000	12,000	None	11,500
Parks and Open Space	9	5	7,500	1,742,400	31,780	None	453,365
Other	8	4	10,000	2,178,000	15,000	10,000	554,500

Establishing a minimum lot area standard is a common regulatory tool for Residential, Agricultural, and Industrial districts. Mixed-Use districts often have small minimums for lot area or lack them entirely, reflecting their inherent diversity and their context-specific nature. Residential districts intended for more urban development, that allow a range of dwelling types, will sometimes establish a minimum lot area by dwelling type, again recognizing the different needs of different use types. In more suburban and rural areas, Residential districts tend to have much larger minimum lot sizes. Agricultural districts have even larger minimum lot size standards, often requiring multiple acres per lot, which help maintain a low-intensity form that prioritizes rural preservation and agricultural land.

Table 5: Minimum Lot Width by District Family

District Family	Number of Districts	Districts with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Residential	94	17	18	150	50	50	56.5
Mixed-Use	77	48	15	150	30	25	39.6
Commercial	25	18	50	200	60	60	107.9
Office / Employment	10	3	40	100	60	60	64.3
Industrial	32	16	30	200	67.5	60, 100	83.4
Agricultural	14	1	50	300	100	100	135.4
Public / Institutional	7	4	50	100	80	None	76.7
Parks and Open Space	9	6	50	60	55	None	55
Other	8	3	30	600	75	None	171

Much like minimum lot sizes, minimum lot widths are used to control the density and character of district. Rural Agricultural and Residential districts will have large lot widths, while Mixed-Use tends to be much narrower or doesn't require a minimum width at all.

Table 6: Minimum Front Setback by District Family

District Family	Number of Districts	Districts with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Residential	94	8	0	50	20	20	17.8
Mixed-Use	77	13	0	30	5	0	7.1
Commercial	25	8	0	30	15	0, 15, 30	16.2
Office / Employment	10	0	12	30	20	15	20.7
Industrial	32	2	5	50	20	15	20.9
Agricultural	14	4	15	50	27.5	25	33
Public / Institutional	7	1	5	30	25	30	21
Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	40	20	20	22.5
Other	8	2	0	60	17.5	None	22

The front setback is a clear indicator of form and almost all districts I analyzed mandated a certain minimum front setback, with some also including a maximum front

setback as well. Front setbacks have a strong influence over development form, as they directly influence the relationship between buildings and the public realm, shape street enclosure, walkability, and the perceived intensity of development. Mixed-Use districts again lean towards a denser, street-oriented development pattern with most of them having a required front setback of zero feet. Residential districts typically require some degree of front setback, even in higher-density areas, though the specific standards vary widely by district. Agricultural and Industrial districts tend to require the largest front setbacks overall.

Table 7: Minimum Rear Setback by District Family

District Family	Number of Districts	Districts with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Residential	94	8	0	30	20	20	17.4
Mixed-Use	77	23	0	35	10	10	10.2
Commercial	25	10	0	15	15	15	11.8
Office / Employment	10	0	5	30	15	15	16.7
Industrial	32	6	0	50	15	15	17.4
Agricultural	14	0	10	50	25	25	24.3
Public / Institutional	7	1	5	25	15	15	14
Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	60	25	20	31.7
Other	8	2	0	60	15	10	20.8

Table 8: Minimum Side Setback by District Family

District Family	Number of Districts	Number with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Residential	94	24	0	25	5	5	8.1
Mixed-Use	77	24	0	10	4	0, 10	4.2
Commercial	25	6	0	12	5	5	5.2
Office / Employment	10	3	0	15	5	5	7.1
Industrial	32	11	3.5	50	15	10	16.2
Agricultural	14	2	8	25	15	15	15.2
Public / Institutional	7	2	0	10	6.8	10	5.9

Table 8: Minimum Side Setback by District Family							
District Family	Number of Districts	Number with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	10	10	10	10
Other	8	2	0	25	10	10	11.2

Rear setbacks are more variable than front and side setbacks, especially in Residential Districts, as they may respond to things like alley access or a desire for large backyards. Side setbacks are relatively small in Residential and Mixed-Use contexts, but larger in Industrial and Agricultural contexts.

Table 9: Maximum Height by District Family							
District Family	Number of Districts	Number with No Standard	Minimum (ft)	Maximum (ft)	Median (ft)	Mode (ft)	Mean (ft)
Residential	94	16	30	65	35	35	37.9
Mixed-Use	77	23	35	200	45	45	55.8
Commercial	25	6	35	100	45	35	54.4
Office / Employment	10	1	35	100	45	35	50.6
Industrial	32	6	30	200	60	60	67.6
Agricultural	14	3	35	40	35	35	36
Public / Institutional	7	3	30	40	40	40	37.5
Parks and Open Space	9	2	35	45	40	40	40
Other	8	2	40	75	47.5	40	52.5

Along with front setbacks, height standards are among the most common ways to regulate the built environment. Residential and Agricultural districts tend to have lower limits, while Industrial districts tend to allow much higher buildings. Mixed-Use and some Office and Commercial Districts (particularly those located in Downtown areas) will regularly have very high limits or have no height limit at all. The highest limits are

tied to these downtown districts, or to specialized locations like maritime industrial docks, heavy industrial plant or factory districts, or transit-oriented development.

Allowed Use Categories

The following table of allowed uses shows which broad use categories appear most frequently across the collected districts.

Table 10: Selected Allowed Use Patterns Across All Districts			
Use	Districts Allowing Use	% of Districts Allowing Use	Primary District Families
Single-Unit Detached	155	56.2%	Residential (83), Mixed-Use (52), Agricultural (13), Other (4), Parks and Open Space (2), Office / Employment (1)
Missing Middle	122	44.2%	Mixed-Use (58), Residential (53), Commercial (6), Other (3), Office / Employment (1), Agricultural (1)
Office	116	42.0%	Mixed-Use (64), Commercial (20), Industrial (15), Office / Employment (10), Residential (3), Other (3), Public / Institutional (1)
Multifamily	115	41.7%	Mixed-Use (71), Residential (35), Commercial (7), Other (2)
Food and Beverage	98	35.5%	Mixed-Use (62), Commercial (20), Industrial (10), Other (3), Office / Employment (2), Residential (1)
Service Uses	97	35.1%	Mixed-Use (60), Commercial (18), Industrial (7), Office / Employment (5), Residential (4), Other (3)
Childcare	92	33.3%	Mixed-Use (51), Residential (16), Commercial (10), Office / Employment (5), Industrial (4), Other (4), Public / Institutional (2)
Retail	79	28.6%	Mixed-Use (49), Commercial (17), Industrial (7), Other (3), Office / Employment (3)
Light Industrial	57	20.7%	Industrial (31), Mixed-Use (13), Commercial (10), Other (2), Office / Employment (1)
ADUs	38	13.8%	Residential (25), Mixed-Use (9), Other (1), Office / Employment (1), Agricultural (1), Industrial (1)
Agricultural	28	10.1%	Residential (14), Agricultural (13), Mixed-Use (1)
Heavy Industrial	18	6.5%	Industrial (13), Mixed-Use (2), Other (2), Commercial (1)

Single-unit detached housing was by far the most common use category, appearing in 56.2 percent of districts. Missing middle housing, which includes triplexes up to large multi-unit uses, appeared in 44.2 percent of districts, while multifamily housing appeared in 41.7 percent. Part of the reason single-unit detached housing dominates most jurisdictions is because there is almost always at least one district dedicated almost solely to single-unit detached housing. These districts may allow schools or parks, but no other housing types. Contrarily, higher density zone districts may *allow* dwelling types like townhomes and small apartments, but single-unit detached housing is almost always a permitted use in these districts as well. Single-unit detached housing is often allowed in every district, including in the highest density districts in some cases. This also showcases how, with so much land allocated to single-unit housing, allowing things like duplexes and ADUs in these low-density districts can add a lot of housing.

6. Typologies

This section presents the zoning district typologies in a similar manner to how they are presented in the booklet (Appendix C). Each typology provides a purpose / intent section, common uses, dimensional standards, development standards, and any key considerations for implementation. The typologies are organized by broader district family.

Residential



Residential Rural

This typology is intended as a transitional zone between fully residential and agricultural areas, allowing for rural living and light agricultural uses. Dwellings are generally single-unit detached houses, often on multiple acres and accompanied by accessory structures like barns and stables. Agricultural accessory uses that would generally be inappropriate for more suburban districts, like large chicken coops, horse stables, small farms, large greenhouses, and farm stands are commonly found in these district types.



Figure 6: Rural farmhouse.
Source: Brett via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 7: A rural house with horses.
Source: flownaksala via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

The primary use in this district is residential, generally in the form of a single-unit detached dwelling. Agricultural uses are broadly allowed on an accessory level, including uses like hobby farms and greenhouses.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 11: Residential Rural Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	1 to 5 acres
Minimum lot width	150 ft
Maximum height	35 ft
Minimum front setback	25 to 40 ft
Minimum side setback	15 to 20 ft
Minimum rear setback	20 to 40 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Fencing, landscaping, and driveway standards should allow barns, stables, hobby farms, trailers, and other agricultural accessory activities while still protecting sight triangles and emergency access.
- Address animal keeping, manure or compost storage, farm stands, greenhouses, and accessory structures through targeted standards for placement, setbacks, screening, and parking rather than prohibiting these uses outright.
- Preserve rural drainage patterns, wildlife movement, and open land character by limiting unnecessary grading, large, paved areas, and ornamental landscaping requirements.
- In some communities, these districts may also function as a temporary or “holding” district for newly annexed land where a more specific development plan has not yet been established.

Large Lot / Estate

This typology is characterized by very low-density single-unit residential development with large yards and substantial distance between structures. This typology prioritizes spaciousness and privacy over housing efficiency. Unlike Residential Rural districts, this typology is primarily residential and suburban in character and is not intended to support active agricultural operations. Lots are generally large enough to provide substantial yards, increased privacy, generous setbacks, and separation between structures.



*Figure 8: Low-density suburban residential with large lots.
Source: bilanol, from Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 9: Large estate house.
Source: Iriana Shiyan via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*

Common Uses

Uses generally consist of single-unit detached dwellings. Accessory structures like sheds and detached garages are common, as are small structures for limited accessory agricultural uses like beekeeping or gardening. Allowing ADUs and duplexes can help increase housing diversity and availability while maintaining district character.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 12: Large Lot / Estate Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	20,000 sf to 1 acre
Minimum lot width	100 to 150 ft
Maximum height	35 ft
Front setback	30 to 50 ft
Side setback	15 to 25 ft
Rear setback	25 to 40 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Large, attached garages are common in this district, but detached accessory structures are usually kept to sheds, pergolas, greenhouses, and other small structures. Large barns or detached garages are uncommon.
- Setbacks, fences, and screening should be used to address any possible noise, odor, or sanitation issues from limited animal keeping and gardening.
- Wildlife-friendly fencing, low-impact lighting, and limits on large opaque walls may be more appropriate than urban or suburban streetscape standards.
- This district may be appropriate in areas where septic limitations, wildfire risk, steep slopes, coastal hazards, or sensitive resource concerns can be mitigated through large lots and low density. These concerns should also be directly mitigated through access, drainage, defensible space, and resource-protection requirements.

Low-Density

This district type is defined by single-unit detached homes with a suburban feel, generally including wide driveways and multi-car garages, strict fencing and landscaping standards, and yards meant to invoke a family-friendly feel. This is often the “default” residential district in most municipalities, making up the majority of residential zoning. Municipalities may have multiple districts that would all be considered Low-Density Residential, with only small variations in minimum lot sizes or setbacks. This typology is less land intensive than Large Lot or Estate zoning, but is still detached unit oriented and suburban in nature.



Figure 11: Suburban Homes.
Source: Elenathewise via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 10: Suburban House.
Source: FRANKLIN via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Low-Density Residential districts generally only allow single-unit detached homes, but may also parks, schools, and religious institutions. Allowing duplexes and ADUs can increase housing diversity and availability without having significant impacts to the suburban character or feel.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 13: Low-Density Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	5,000 to 8,500 sf
Minimum lot width	50 to 70 ft
Maximum height	35 ft
Front setback	25 ft
Side setback	5 to 10 ft
Rear setback	25 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Controls preventing garages from taking up a certain percentage of the front façade (often 40 or 50 percent) or requiring the garage be set back from the front façade can garage-dominated streetscapes.
- Larger setbacks may be appropriate on corner lots to prevent structures, fences, or large plantings from interfering with the sight triangle.
- Where a code has multiple similar low-density districts, consolidating standards where possible and use flexible dimensional ranges rather than maintaining many near-duplicate districts.
- Many codes have multiple low-density districts with little variation. Allowing a flexible range of dimensional and development standards avoids the need for multiple districts, allows for more diverse and interesting neighborhoods, and makes the code less bulky and more readable.

Compact Single Unit

Compact Single Unit districts still support a traditional neighborhood design and detached house character, while encouraging more dense and walkable development. This type of residential district is often found in older suburban areas, sometimes called “streetcar” suburbs, or historic residential neighborhoods. This district is categorized by much smaller lot sizes and widths than typically found in a Low-Density Residential district.



Figure 13: Small lot home.
Source: Iriana Shiyan via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 12: Compact single family homes.
Source: James via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses in this area are primarily single-unit detached dwellings, but may also include duplexes, cottage courts, community recreation centers, and parks.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 14: Compact Single Unit Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	2,000 to 4,000 sf
Minimum lot width	20 ft
Maximum height	35 ft
Front setback	5 to 15 ft
Side setback	3 to 5 ft
Rear setback	10 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Front-loaded garages are rare and may not be allowed in these districts. Parking can be accommodated in a variety of ways, including alley-loaded garages, tandem parking, and on-street parking.
- These districts promote a denser and more walkable neighborhood, so the pedestrian experience is particularly important. Wide sidewalks, street trees, front porches or stoops, pedestrian-scale lighting, and short, connected blocks all contribute to a pedestrian friendly neighborhood.
- Locating transit next to these neighborhoods eases parking demand and increases walkability and the use of micromobility.

Medium-Density

Medium-Density residential districts allow for a broader range and scale of residential development that supports missing middle housing. This typology can address housing availability and affordability, while still maintaining a neighborhood residential feel.

These districts are inclusive of a wide range of housing types, from single unit detached dwellings on smaller lots to small apartments, meeting the housing needs of a variety of households.



Figure 15: A row of townhomes in a walkable development.
Source: Kristina Blokhin via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 14: Cottage court development.
Source: Urbanize Atlanta (2024).

Common Uses

Uses in this district should consider density while maintaining a neighborhood feel. This might include single family homes, duplexes/triplexes/quadplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and even small apartment complexes. Other neighborhood serving uses could include parks, transit infrastructure, and community recreation centers or clubhouses.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 15: Medium-Density Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	2,000 to 6,000 sf, depending on housing type
Minimum lot width	20 to 50 ft
Maximum height	45 ft
Front setback	5 to 15 ft
Side setback	5 to 10 ft
Rear setback	10 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Tailor dimensional standards by housing type rather than applying one detached-house standard to duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small apartment buildings.
- Building entries, façade articulation, common open space, courtyards, and shared green areas work wonders in creating a pleasant neighborhood feel at higher densities.
- Locate parking, trash, recycling, mail, and service areas can sometimes be consolidated in a common space, with screening and pedestrian connections between units and the street.
- Use height transitions, landscape buffers, and lighting controls when medium-density buildings abut lower-density residential areas.

High-Density

This district typology focuses on dense urban development intended for large, multi-unit apartments and residential buildings. These districts are generally located near downtowns, transit corridors, or campuses. High-Density Residential districts often, but not necessarily, support a dense, walkable environment, and may abut Commercial and Office districts that support a Mixed-Use area.



Figure 17: Example apartment complex.
Source: Volodymyr Kyrylyuk via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 16: High Rise Apartments.
Source: Elena Alex via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

High-Density Residential zoning is usually associated with apartment complexes, but there are other housing types and ownership options that fall into this typology, including condominiums, townhomes, retirement and assisted living facilities, and dormitories, each of which has its own needs and considerations. Other uses may include parks, schools, religious institutions, and childcare facilities.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 16: High-Density Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	3,000 to 10,000 sf, depending on housing type
Minimum lot width	50 ft
Maximum height	75 ft
Front setback	0 to 15 ft
Side setback	5 to 15 ft
Rear setback	10 to 20 ft
FAR	1.5 to 4.0

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Massing standards, upper-story setbacks, tower spacing, or façade articulation can reduce scale impacts, shadowing, and blank-wall conditions.
- Private open spaces, such as usable open space, courtyards, balconies, gyms, pools, playgrounds, and dog parks ensure functional and livable spaces.
- Manage parking through shared, structured, underground, or rear/side parking rather than large front-facing surface lots. Bike parking, micromobility, and transit access can reduce parking demand. Areas near major transit stops, campus housing, and assisted living facilities do not need as much parking as other high-density residential uses.

Historic Residential

Historic Residential districts are intended to preserve a specific neighborhood character of historic significance. These neighborhoods often showcase a period specific or distinctive design style, like federalist or mid-century modern, and often reflect older platting patterns like smaller lots and traditional building placement.



Figure 19: A historic home.

Source: Landon via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 18: A historic neighborhood.

Source: James via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses are generally single unit detached dwellings, but may also include ADUs, missing middle housing types, and parks. Some districts also allow commercial and office uses to operate from buildings with a residential form, which can help create a walkable and urban feel without losing the historic character. One might also find live/work buildings where the bottom floor is used for commerce and the upper floor(s) are occupied by the owner of the business.

Suggested Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards vary from district to district and should be pulled from historic and surrounding context to ensure compatibility.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Communities may use a variety of regulatory tools to address historic preservation concerns, including national or local landmark designation, locally designated historic districts, historic preservation overlay districts, and design review standards. Each tool may establish different review procedures and levels of oversight. Depending on the structure of the local code, exterior alterations may require compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, review and approval by a historic preservation board or commission, additional design review, sign review, or other preservation-specific approvals before permits may be issued.
- Design standards in historic districts are often among the most involved of any district type. Alterations, additions, and new construction may be subject to controls related to roof form, porch design, window proportions, materials, building orientation, ornamentation, paint colors, and tree preservation.
- Keep parking subordinate to the building and historic streetscape. Rear, side, or alley-loaded parking is preferable; new front-yard parking areas should be limited, if not prohibited.
- Ensure fences, lighting, signs, landscaping, and accessory structures are compatible with the historic district and do not overwhelm character-defining features.

Commercial



Neighborhood Commercial

This typology is centered around small-scale commercial intended to serve nearby residents. It is usually associated with walkable, lower intensity residential or mixed use neighborhoods. Storefronts are small and emphasize convenience and daily needs as opposed to destination retail.



Figure 21: A corner store serving a small neighborhood
Source: William A. Morgan via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 20: A coffee shop neighboring a residential area.
Source: Zenstratus via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses should be those that support the neighboring residential areas, such as grocery stores, cafes, and small-scale retail. It could also include small professional offices, or service uses like salons. These areas might also be helpful in providing services for family members, like childcare, adult daycare, or dog grooming. Uses that generate a lot of late-night noise, like bars or clubs, are generally considered incompatible given this district's integration with residential districts.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 17: Neighborhood Commercial Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	2,000 to 10,000 sf
Minimum lot width	25 to 60 ft
Maximum height	45 ft
Front setback	0 to 10 ft
Side setback	0 to 10 ft
Rear setback	10 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Orient buildings to the sidewalk with minimal setbacks, primary entrances facing the street, pedestrian-scale signage, awnings, lighting, and ground-floor windows.
- On-street, shared, side, or rear parking is preferable to parking lots. Drive-thrus would generally not be considered compatible.
- Screen trash, loading areas, outdoor storage, rooftop equipment, and service areas, especially where the district abuts residential neighborhoods.
- Use noise, hours of operation, outdoor seating, and lighting standards to maintain compatibility with nearby homes.

General Commercial

This typology revolves around large-scale commercial that serves the broader community and generally involves more intensive retail and services uses than Neighborhood Commercial. This district may contain a variety of commercial building types, including drive-thrus, strip malls, and shopping centers. This area is generally separate from the downtown, and exists in pockets outside of residential zones and along heavily trafficked roads.



Figure 23: A typical strip mall.
Source: ehrlif via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 22: A drive-thru restaurant.
Source: Joseph Hendrickson via Adobe Stock (2019).

Common Uses

This commercial category is associated with retail, restaurants, services, professional offices, and entertainment. It may also include some light industrial, office, lodging, and even auto-oriented uses. Drive-thrus, strip malls, and big-box stores are also common.

Suggested Dimensional Standards

Table 18: General Commercial Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	10,000 to 20,000 sf
Minimum lot width	75 to 100 ft
Maximum height	45 to 60 ft
Minimum Front setback	10 to 25 ft
Minimum Side setback	10 to 15 ft
Minimum Rear setback	15 to 25 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Requiring internal circulation, cross-access between parking lots and structures, driveway spacing, and safe pedestrian routes from sidewalks, parking areas, and transit stops to building entrances can provide a nicer experience for pedestrians and automobiles.
- Parking lot designs should address landscaping in buffers, islands, divider medians, and end caps. Requiring lots of plantings, especially shade trees, helps to mitigate the heat island effects large parking lots can create.
- Trash receptacles, loading areas, outdoor storage, rooftop equipment, and service areas should be screened through fences, walls, buffers, or similar measures.
- These districts may warrant greater allowances for outdoor lighting, including brighter lighting levels at night where necessary for safety, security, and site circulation.

Corridor / Highway

This district typology is for Commercial districts oriented towards major roadways with high traffic visibility. It is generally more intense and auto-oriented, serving large numbers of people and designed around access, visibility, and vehicle movement.



*Figure 25: A highway rest stop.
Source: ungvar via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 24: A fast food restaurant off a highway.
Source: Martijn via Adobe Stock (2025).*

Common Uses

These types of districts are generally a good place for less aesthetically pleasing or higher intensity developments, such as fuel stations and drive-thru restaurants. It may also allow for some large-scale retail. Considering these districts found along major highways or corridors, hotels, motels, and auto-oriented uses are also appropriate uses.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 19: Corridor / Highway Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	10,000 to 30,000 sf
Minimum lot width	100 ft
Maximum height	45 to 60 ft
Minimum front setback	15 to 30 ft
Minimum side setback	10 to 20 ft
Minimum rear setback	15 to 25 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Pole signs, billboards, and electronic signs are common in this area. Often, a district of this type is the only place these sign types are allowed, if they are allowed at all. These signs are also often allowed at far greater heights than in other Commercial districts, so the signs can appropriately advertise to people driving on the highway or interstate. Some jurisdictions allow signage to be painted onto the building itself, also to be visible to drivers.
- These districts do not generally prioritize pedestrian accessibility; however, safe pedestrian and bicycle connections should be included where feasible, especially as routes to and from transit stops.
- Landscape buffers, stormwater facilities like retention ponds, and frontage landscaping can be used to soften large paved areas and reduce runoff from parking-heavy development.

Heavy Commercial

The Heavy Commercial typology serves as an in-between for Commercial and Industrial districts. It may serve as a physical buffer between Commercial and Industrial districts, easing the transition between the two, or may just refer to a district that contains uses that fall in between commercial and industrial in terms of intensity, impact, or size.

These districts often consist of large lots with development standards that mitigate surrounding impact.



Figure 27: A high-impact entertainment use.
Source: Joseph Hendrickson via Adobe Stock (2019).



Figure 26: Industrial brewery with outdoor seating.
Source: FH Beerworks. (n.d.).

Common Uses

This district type encompasses commercial uses that have impacts closer to an industrial use. This includes large entertainment uses like trampoline parks, movie theaters, and mini golf courses. Artisanal manufacturing or artist warehouses would also be appropriate in this district, as would breweries or distilleries with both a manufacturing and restaurant / tasting room component. Auto oriented uses, like car

washes and vehicle repair, are also appropriate in this context, as are large animal related uses like kennels and dog daycares.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 20: Heavy Commercial Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	10,000 to 30,000 sf
Minimum lot width	75 to 100 ft
Maximum height	45 to 60 ft
Minimum front setback	10 to 25 ft
Minimum side setback	10 to 15 ft
Minimum rear setback	15 to 25 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Performance standards for noise, odor, dust, vibration, glare, outdoor activity, hours of operation, and vehicle circulation can be implemented through use-specific standards, or by requiring new development acquire a conditional or special use permit.
- Stronger screening and buffering requirements for outdoor storage, workshops, dog yards, loading areas, equipment yards, service bays, and refuse areas can mitigate impacts to surrounding areas.
- Parking lot designs should address landscaping in buffers, islands, divider medians, and end caps. Requiring lots of plantings, especially shade trees, helps to mitigate the heat island effects large parking lots can create.

Mixed-Use



Neighborhood Mixed-Use

This typology is categorized by small-scale commercial development integrated into residential neighborhoods. The intent of this district is to bring daily needs closer to housing and to promote denser and more walkable areas. Mixed-use in these districts is generally at a lower intensity than a downtown or Commercial district to remain compatible with the surrounding residences.



Figure 29: Small-scale mixed use.
Source: ApartmentAdvisor (n.d.).



Figure 28: Neighborhood commercial development.
Source: Boylan (2025).

Common Uses

Uses include a variety of residential uses including single unit dwellings, missing middle housing, multifamily, and residences located above ground-floor non-residential uses. Commercial uses include things like small grocery stores, cafes, salons and barbers, childcare, and other uses tailored to everyday community needs.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 21: Neighborhood Mixed-Use Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	2,000 to 10,000 sf
Minimum lot width	25 to 60 ft
Maximum height	35 ft
Minimum front setback	0 to 10 ft
Minimum side setback	0 to 10 ft
Minimum rear setback	10 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Keep commercial uses neighborhood-scaled through limits on building footprint, hours of operation, and use-specific standards.
- Buildings should be oriented and built up (or close to) to the sidewalk. Ground-floor transparency requirements, frequent entrances, small storefronts, shade structures, plantings, and pedestrian-scale lighting all contribute to a walkable neighborhood that is pleasant for customers, visitors, and residents.
- On-street, shared, side, or rear parking is preferable to parking lots. Drive-thrus would generally not be considered compatible.
- Screen trash, loading areas, outdoor storage, rooftop equipment, and service areas, especially where the district abuts residential neighborhoods.

Historic Downtown / Main Street

This typology is characterized by a traditional mixed-use core, strong street frontage, and historic character. These areas generally developed before the proliferation of the automobile, resulting in a dense, walkable urban form built generally at a human scale. These districts are lively, charming, and representative of community history and identity. Historic Downtowns and Main Streets serve as the downtown or core of many small and mid-sized cities. Larger cities may have multiple of these district types, each serving a different neighborhood.



Figure 30: Park City downtown.
Source: SeanPavonePhoto via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 31: Example of main street development.
Source: nejdetduzen via Adobe Stock (2019).

Common Uses

These areas traditionally developed as walkable mixed-use centers, and they continue to function that way today. Ground floors are typically occupied by commercial uses, including but not limited to retail, restaurants and bars, salons and barbershops, tattoo parlors, cafés, professional offices, and art galleries. Upper floors are often used for residences, such as apartments or condominiums, as well as offices and other commercial uses. These districts may also contain larger civic and community-serving uses such as churches, libraries, courthouses, parks, and theaters.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards vary from district to district and should be pulled from historic and surrounding context to ensure compatibility. Generally there are no minimum front or side setback standards to ensure maintain that Historic Main-Street feel. Height limits are often set at 35 ft (or three stories) but this standard should be tailored to be compatible with the existing historic structures.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- A common requirement in these district types is maintaining a continuous street wall through build-to lines and zero or minimal setbacks. Narrow storefronts, active ground floors, and high storefront transparency are also hallmarks of these districts.
- Communities may use a variety of regulatory tools to address historic preservation concerns, including national or local landmark designation, locally designated historic districts, historic preservation overlay districts, and design review standards. Each tool may establish different review procedures and levels of oversight. Depending on the structure of the local code, exterior alterations may require compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, review and approval by a historic preservation board or commission, additional design review, sign review, or other preservation-specific approvals before permits may be issued.
- Design standards in historic districts are often among the most involved of any district type. Alterations, additions, and new construction may be subject to controls related to roof form, porch design, window proportions, materials, building orientation, ornamentation, paint colors, and tree preservation.
- Place parking behind buildings, on-street, in shared lots, or in structures. New front-facing surface parking lots should be prohibited or strongly discouraged.

Downtown Core

The Downtown Core typology consists of high-intensity development with tall building heights and strong vertical mixing. The intent is to concentrate housing, jobs, retail, entertainment, and civic activity all within the same district, providing all daily needs within a walk or transit ride. It is more urban than Neighborhood Mixed-Use and more intense than Historic Downtown / Main Street. Lots are larger to accommodate the taller buildings, but the streets are still walkable.



Figure 33: Chicago downtown core.
Source: SeanPavonePhoto via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 32: Des Moines downtown core.
Source: mandritoiiu via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses in a Downtown Core should prioritize dense, urban living. This includes multi-unit housing via apartment and condominium buildings, often with ground floor commercial uses. Office towers are also common. Theaters, restaurants, bars, and nightclubs are commonly found in these areas. Civic uses like museums, libraries, courthouses, and transit station hubs can be found in these districts and are often historic buildings.

Green space is provided through a variety of parks, courtyards, and plazas, usually on a smaller or “pocket” scale.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 22: Downtown Core Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	None
Minimum lot width	25 ft
Maximum height	None
Minimum front setback	0 ft
Minimum side setback	0 ft
Minimum rear setback	0 to 15 ft
FAR	2.0 to 10.0

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- These district types prioritize active ground floors, transparency, frequent entrances, pedestrian-scale lighting, shade structures, transit access, and high-quality streetscape design.
- Shared parking districts, structured parking, underground parking, and transit and micromobility access should be prioritized over large surface parking lots. If surface parking is included in a development, it should be on the side or rear of a building. Parking maximums are growing increasingly more common, and can help eliminate parking lots and encourage other transportation modes.
- Massing standards, upper-story stepbacks, tower spacing, or façade articulation can reduce scale impacts, shadowing, and blank-wall conditions.
- Plazas, pocket parks, wide sidewalks, protected bicycle lanes, micromobility parking areas, street trees, green infrastructure, and other public-realm improvements should be incentivized, if not required.

Transit-Oriented Development

This typology encourages compact and walkable mixed-use areas by providing housing, jobs, and daily needs in a cluster around frequent transit access, designed to support ridership and decrease automobile dependence. It is more transit-focused than traditional mixed-use, and provides for nodes of high density outside of a Downtown Core.



Figure 35: Transit-oriented development centered around light rail. Source: Federal Transit Administration (n.d.).



Figure 34: Transit-oriented development. Source: Washington State Department of Commerce (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses in these districts generally include high-density residential, office and employment uses, and daily needs-serving commercial uses such as childcare, grocery stores, personal services, cafes, and restaurants. Civic uses, small parks, plazas, entertainment, recreation, and lodging may also be appropriate in more intense transit-oriented nodes. Low-density residential, auto-oriented commercial uses, large surface parking lots, outdoor storage, and heavy industrial uses are generally inconsistent with transit-oriented districts.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 23: Transit-Oriented Development Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	None
Minimum lot width	25 ft
Maximum height	55 to 120 ft, depending on transit context
Minimum front setback	0 to 10 ft
Minimum side setback	0 to 10 ft
Minimum rear setback	0 to 15 ft
FAR	2.0 to 10.0

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Use parking reductions or maximums, bike parking, and micromobility facilities to support transit ridership and reduce automobile dependence.
- Require strong pedestrian, bicycle, and micromobility connections to stations or stops, including wide sidewalks, shade structures, protected crossings, wayfinding, and direct routes through large sites.
- Calibrate height and density by distance from transit, with the highest intensity closest to the station and transitions at the edges of adjacent neighborhoods.

Office & Employment



Office Park / Campus

This typology consists of campus-style arrangement of offices, research facilities, light industrial, and flex spaces. The park may be occupied by one employer, such as a corporate campus, or a variety of employers in a similar industry with similar needs.

These parks are typically master-planned, with an emphasis on coordinated site design, internal circulation, and landscaping. Compared to more urban employment districts, this typology is more horizontal in form and is primarily accessed by automobile, although some may include pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connections.



*Figure 37: Office park.
Source: The Wall Street Journal (2013).*



*Figure 36: Nike headquarters in Oregon.
Source: Hrach via Adobe Stock (2026).*

Common Uses

The primary use of these district types include professional and corporate offices, research and development facilities, laboratories, and flex employment uses such as light assembly, fabrication, or warehousing. Supporting uses may include small-scale retail, food service, fitness facilities, and other employee-serving amenities.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 24: Office Park / Campus Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	20,000 sf to 1 acre
Minimum lot width	100 ft
Maximum height	45 to 65 ft
Minimum front setback	20 to 30 ft
Minimum side setback	10 to 20 ft
Minimum rear setback	15 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- These districts are often significantly regulated through a master-plan that ensures coordinated building placement, internal roads, pedestrian paths, signage, open space, and shared infrastructure.
- Structured or shared parking should be encouraged or required to avoid large expanses of surface parking. Office parks may also provide opportunities for shared parking agreements with nearby uses that have different peak parking demands like restaurants, entertainment venues, or high-density residential. Because these uses typically require parking at different times than office uses, shared parking can reduce the total amount of parking needed while still meeting demand.
- Use landscaping, stormwater facilities, tree canopy, and preservation of natural features to create a cohesive campus while avoiding excessive ornamental lawns or unused open space.
- Shaded tables or picnic areas, water features, benches, gardens, and other features for employees should be encouraged.

Office

This typology is intended to accommodate office and employment uses, often as a standalone office building or group of office buildings, including professional, administrative, and medical offices. In many places, offices are incorporated into Commercial or Mixed-Use districts. A separate Office district is often used to designate specific parcels for office development, including sites surrounded by broader Commercial or Mixed-Use zoning.



*Figure 39: Standalone office building.
Source: BCFC via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 38: Office building.
Source: Cathleen via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*

Common Uses

Office districts tend to accommodate only office uses, though it may extend to uses like financial institutions or laboratories. Supporting uses, like food service and retail, may also be included.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 25: Office Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	7,500 to 20,000 sf
Minimum lot width	50 to 100 ft
Maximum height	60 ft
Minimum front setback	15 to 20 ft
Minimum side setback	5 to 15 ft
Minimum rear setback	15 to 20 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- These districts may come with specific access management needs, like internal circulation, drop-off areas, and pedestrian routes, especially for medical or financial offices with frequent visitor turnover.
- Structured or shared parking should be encouraged or required to avoid large expanses of surface parking. Office parks may also provide opportunities for shared parking agreements with nearby uses that have different peak parking demands like restaurants, entertainment venues, or high-density residential. Because these uses typically require parking at different times than office uses, shared parking can reduce the total amount of parking needed while still meeting demand.
- Use building orientation, entrance visibility, lighting, signs, and landscaping to make standalone office buildings more legible and pedestrian-friendly.
- Generators, service areas, dumpsters, and mechanical equipment should be well screened, particularly where offices abut Residential districts.

Central Business District

This zone district type serves as the core commercial and urban center of many cities, containing the highest concentration of business and civic activity. This typology is categorized by tall buildings, generally offices, and is accessed by pedestrians, cars, and public transit.



Figure 40: Toronto financial district.
Source: Emad Aljumah via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 41: Example Central Business District.
Source: EJRodriguez via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

While often referred to as an Office district, a Central Business District generally allows a broad mix of uses, including retail, commercial, lodging, entertainment, bars and restaurants, civic uses, and government offices. Compared to a downtown core, these districts are often more oriented toward the needs of commuters, office workers, and daytime employment activity. Residential uses are less common than in other downtown or mixed-use areas, though they are not unusual.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 26: Central Business District Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	None
Minimum lot width	20 to 25 ft
Maximum height	45 to 75 ft, higher in larger cities
Minimum front setback	None
Minimum side setback	None
Minimum rear setback	0 to 15 ft
FAR	2.0 to 6.0

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- The importance of a diverse mix of uses in these districts became especially clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many companies shifted to partial or full-time remote work, contributing to increased office vacancies and reduced daytime activity in office-oriented centers.
- Street-level design is particularly important given the amount of sidewalk traffic these districts experience. Standards for storefront transparency, pedestrian lighting, awnings, signage, entrances, and other public realm improvements are common and encouraged.
- Manage commuter demand through transit access, bike facilities, micromobility infrastructure, structured parking, and shared parking.

Industrial



Light Industrial

This typology is intended to accommodate industrial and employment uses that have a limited, low impact on the surrounding environment. Development within this district typically includes warehousing, contractor shops, and light manufacturing uses, often in single-story or low-rise buildings with associated loading areas and accessory offices. These districts are generally less intensive than heavy industrial areas and may be located near other employment or commercial uses.



Figure 43: Low impact industrial warehouse.
Source: hansenn via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 42: Modern manufacturing development.
Source: Brian via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Uses in these district types are industrial and manufacturing uses with minimal off-site impacts, including printing, food production, contracting and workshop spaces, storage, warehousing, data centers, and wholesale. Light industrial uses may include office buildings or sections, but minimal customer-facing infrastructure. Auto-oriented uses, like vehicle repair shops and car washes, may also be appropriate in this district type.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 27: Light Industrial Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	20,000 to 40,000 sf
Minimum lot width	100 ft
Maximum height	50 to 75 ft
Minimum front setback	15 to 25 ft
Minimum side setback	10 to 15 ft
Minimum rear setback	10 to 15 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Factors like the noise, odor, dust, vibration, glare, outdoor activity, and truck traffic generated by the use are helpful ways to distinguish between low-impact industrial uses from heavier industrial uses. Many modern industrial uses have less surrounding uses than they used to.
- Outdoor storage, loading docks, dumpsters, utility areas, and equipment yards should be screened and buffered from streets and adjacent non-industrial districts.
- Design truck circulation, driveway widths, loading areas, and turning movements so large vehicles do not conflict with employee parking, pedestrians, or nearby neighborhoods.
- Focus landscaping along street frontages, district edges, and stormwater facilities.

Heavy Industrial

This typology is intended for uses that have significant impacts on their surroundings, including noise, vibration, emissions, heavy-truck traffic, and large-scale infrastructure. These districts are home to large factories, major utility infrastructure, landfills and recycling centers, and other waste storage and processing facilities. These districts are almost always auto dependent, particularly because they are located far from Residential districts.



*Figure 45: Chemical processing plant.
Source: Shinonome Studio via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 44: Cement plant.
Source: leungchopan via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*

Common Uses

Heavy industrial uses encompass uses that have significant impacts on the surroundings and/or require large buildings and/or produce heavy traffic. This includes steel mills, chemical manufacturing and processing, petroleum refining, large food processing plants, landfills and waste processing, freight terminals, water and wastewater treatment plants, and maritime industrial facilities.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 28: Heavy Industrial Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	1 acre
Minimum lot width	150 ft
Maximum height	75 to 120 ft
Minimum front setback	20 to 40 ft
Minimum side setback	15 to 30 ft
Minimum rear setback	20 to 40 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- These districts require substantial separation or buffering from sensitive uses, including residential neighborhoods, schools, parks, and health-care or elder-care facilities.
- These districts typically require additional review, permitting, and cross-referencing with applicable environmental regulations due to their potential off-site impacts. Standards should address emissions, dust, vibration, hazardous materials, spill prevention, wastewater, noise, odors, and other operational impacts.
- Design freight access, truck routes, queuing, loading, and emergency access to keep heavy vehicles out of neighborhoods and reduce off-site traffic impacts.
- Height exceptions or special standards for industrial accessory structures such as smokestacks, towers, silos, cranes, and similar operational equipment may be needed. These can be permitted outright or permitted through a special approval process.

Agricultural



Agriculture

This typology is intended for agricultural production and related rural uses. Agricultural production and land preservation are the primary district goals, though limited dwellings are also allowed. This district type is characterized by large, multi-acre lots intended for crop or animal production. The intensity of the uses is relatively low, and is compatible with neighboring Residential districts, parks, and open space. Where in Residential Rural districts, agricultural is accessory to dwellings, in an Agriculture district, dwellings are accessory to the agricultural production.



Figure 47: Crop farm.

Source: Andrii Yalanskyi via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 46: Farm with silos.

Source: james_pintar via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

The primary uses in these district types are agricultural, including crop, animal, tree, and dairy farms. Accessory uses like agricultural processing facilities, silos, and barns are also allowed in these districts. Allowed residential generally consists of single-unit detached dwellings – sometimes called farmsteads or homesteads, but may also allow manufactured housing or farm labor housing. Other allowed uses include equestrian

facilities, farm stands and farmer's markets, parks and campgrounds, wineries, and event venues.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 29: Agriculture Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	5 to 40 acres
Minimum lot width	300 ft
Maximum height	35 ft, with higher limits for barns/silos
Minimum front setback	30 to 50 ft
Minimum side setback	20 to 50 ft
Minimum rear setback	30 to 50 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Fencing, landscaping, and structure design standards should be minimal and reflect the agricultural character. Suburban aesthetic standards should not be applied, even though there are dwellings in these districts.
- These districts often require a lot of accessory structures like barns, silos, greenhouses, corrals, farm stands, equipment storage, and stables. Limits on the number of allowed accessory structures on a single lot should be high, or not limited at all.
- Use buffers or setbacks between agricultural operations when abutting a more urban context. Standards for animal areas, manure storage, pesticide application areas, and outdoor storage can mitigate impacts to surrounding properties.
- Farmland can also be preserved through conservation overlays, conservation easements, cluster options, limits on non-farm subdivision, and limits on unnecessary impervious surfaces.

Heavy Agriculture

This typology is intended for more intense agricultural uses that have significant impacts, often having a more industrial character than traditional Agricultural districts. These districts involve heavy animal and crop processing, and produce odors, truck traffic, dust, and noise that make it incompatible with residential areas.



*Figure 48: An example of a feedlot.
Source: Bob via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 49: Grain Elevator.
Source: dima90 via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*

Common Uses

Uses in these district types are agricultural or rural in nature, but have greater impacts than standard farms. This includes lumber mills, grain elevators, slaughterhouses, feed lots, equipment yards, and packing and distributions. Large solar and wind farms are also common in these district types, as are some water and waste processing and treatment facilities.

Common Dimensional Standards

Table 30: Heavy Agriculture Common Dimensional Standards	
Minimum lot area	5 to 10 acres
Minimum lot width	150 ft
Maximum height	50 to 75 ft
Minimum front setback	50 ft
Minimum side setback	25 to 50 ft
Minimum rear setback	50 ft

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Standards for runoff, manure or nutrient management, dust, odor, wastewater, and groundwater protection should be applied in these district types.
- Large buffers or separation from Residential districts, schools, parks, water bodies, and other sensitive receptors should be required because feedlots, slaughterhouses, grain elevators, and similar uses generate substantial impacts.
- Design truck access, loading, queuing, internal circulation, and emergency access for heavy vehicles and agricultural equipment.
- Renewable energy facilities are common in these districts, and use specific standards can address the glare, habitat disturbance, and decommissioning concerns that come with these uses, while still encouraging more renewable energy facilities.

Special Purpose



Park

Park districts are intended for active recreation or the passive public enjoyment of green space. These districts include public access to natural features like lakes, rivers, sand dunes, forests, mountains, or plains, including facilities like docks, hiking trails, and restroom facilities. More active recreation uses include play or shade structures, gardens, splashpads, golf courses, sport courts, and lawns.



Figure 51: Playground.

Source: Olga Sapegina via Adobe Stock (n.d.).



Figure 50: Park with river access.

Source: Marcus Jones via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Common uses may include picnic shelters, grills, trails, athletic fields, sport courts, playground equipment, splashpads, gardens, exercise equipment, and boat launches. Larger or more programmed parks may also include amphitheaters, sculpture gardens, concession stands, off-leash dog areas, pools, recreation centers, or other outdoor recreation facilities. The appropriate mix of uses should depend on the park's purpose, scale, surrounding context, and intended users.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards for park districts are typically limited and should be scaled to the type of park. A 35-foot height limit may be appropriate for many park structures to maintain an open character, though taller structures may be necessary for recreation centers, lighting, amphitheaters, or specialized facilities.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Standards for lighting, fencing, landscaping, amenities, and public access should be contextual to the type of park. A riverfront park, urban playground, dog park, sports complex, and passive neighborhood park will each have different operational and design needs.
- Parks should provide safe and accessible public access where appropriate, including ADA routes, trails, sidewalks, bike parking, wayfinding, transit connections where available, and safe crossings at park edges.
- Landscaping should generally be integrated into the overall park design rather than treated as a separate development requirement.
- Park standards should address hours, noise, special events, restrooms, trash, concession areas, and safety lighting where park programming may affect nearby neighborhoods.

Open Space

Open Space districts are intended to remain largely untouched, undeveloped, and minimally improved. This space is intended to be less active than a park, but still may include hiking trails or other access to natural features. Open space districts may be used in conjunction with floodplain, wetland, beach, or other conservation areas or overlay districts. Structures in these areas are kept to a minimum, but may include fences or unobtrusive utility infrastructure.



*Figure 53: Open space for floodplain.
Source: Goran via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*



*Figure 52: Wetland open space.
Source: Linda via Adobe Stock (n.d.).*

Common Uses

Open Space districts are intended for unimproved or minimally improved natural areas and are different from the required open space within private developments. Open Space districts are generally intended for conservation, preservation, habitat protection, floodplain management, and passive recreation. Appropriate uses are typically limited to trails, overlooks, habitat restoration, and other low-impact improvements that support public access or resource protection.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards in Open Space districts are typically minimal since buildings and active development are limited. Where structures are allowed, standards should greatly restrict building size, height, lot coverage, paving, and grading to preserve the district's natural or conservation-oriented function.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Communities may use Open Space zoning, overlay districts, or a combination of both to protect wetlands, floodplains, riparian corridors, habitat areas, steep slopes, erosion-prone areas, and other sensitive resources.
- Structures, paving, grading, lighting, and active recreation facilities should be limited. Allowed improvements should generally be low-impact and directly related to conservation, maintenance, passive recreation, or public access.
- Lighting should generally be avoided except where necessary for safety at access points. Wildlife-friendly fencing, careful trail placement, and limited maintenance access can help protect habitat and natural movement corridors.

Public / Institutional

This typology encompasses a wide range of development types intended to accommodate government, civic, institutional, and other public-serving uses. These districts often include facilities such as government offices, museums, courts, city halls, libraries, and community or cultural institutions. Due to the diversity of uses within this category, site design elements such as building scale, parking, landscaping, and access can vary significantly and are often addressed through flexible or case-by-case standards. In some communities, these uses are organized in clusters or corridors connected through plazas, courtyards, parks, or pedestrian networks.



Figure 55: The Salvador Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida. Source: SeanPavonePhoto via Adobe Stock (2016).



Figure 54: Lake Charles City Hall. Source: travelview via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Public and Institutional districts are intended for civic, governmental, educational, religious, cultural, and community-serving uses. This often includes city halls, courthouses, libraries, schools, museums, places of worship, community centers, public

safety facilities, hospitals, government offices, and similar public or quasi-public facilities.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards in Public and Institutional districts swing widely depending on the needs, function, and context of the intended use and should be flexible to accommodate the specifics of the development. A small neighborhood library, school, courthouse, museum, hospital, and major government campus may each require different standards for height, setbacks, lot coverage, parking, and site design. Larger facilities may require additional setbacks, buffering, or separation when located near lower-intensity residential areas.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Smaller-scale civic and institutional uses, such as small libraries, historic sites, or neighborhood museums may also be appropriate in Residential, Commercial, or Mixed-Use districts, depending on their scale, design, and operational impacts, and may not require specific Public / Institutional zoning.
- Civic and institutional buildings are often intended to serve as public landmarks, so architecture, materials, landscaping, plazas, and public gathering spaces should generally reflect a high level of design quality.
- Site design should prioritize safe and accessible public access, including pedestrian routes, ADA access, wayfinding, transit connections where available, drop-off areas, bicycle parking, and clear connections between buildings, parking areas, and public spaces.

Educational Campus

This typology is intended to accommodate large educational environments like colleges, universities, and other school campuses. These areas typically consist of multiple buildings arranged within a unified site, including academic buildings, administrative offices, student housing, recreation facilities, and supporting services. Development is generally guided by a master plan rather than individual parcel-by-parcel standards. These campuses often function as self-contained environments while also serving as major activity centers within the broader community.



Figure 57: University of Chicago campus.
Source: bennnn via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

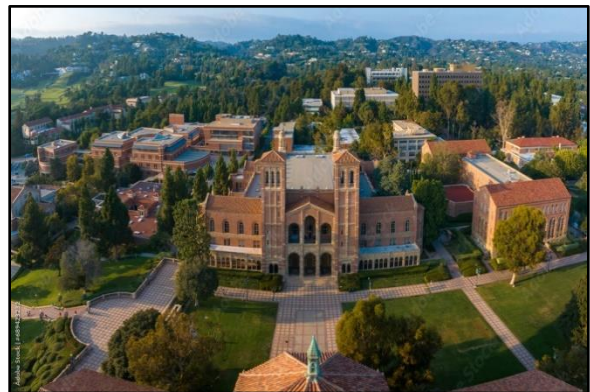


Figure 56: UCLA campus.
Source: Aerial Film Studio via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Educational Campus districts are intended for colleges, universities, schools, and similar campus-based institutions. Common uses may include academic buildings, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, student housing, dining halls, recreation facilities, athletic fields, performance venues, administrative offices, student services, plazas, greens, and other gathering spaces. Depending on the campus, supporting uses such

as bookstores, cafes, small retail, health clinics, childcare, transit facilities, and structured parking may also be appropriate.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards should be flexible and are often guided by a campus master plan or similar review process.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Campus design should prioritize pedestrian, bicycle, micromobility, and transit connections between academic buildings, housing, recreation areas, parking, and nearby Commercial or Mixed-Use districts, particularly because many college students do not have access to a car.
- Some campuses are self-contained, while others are integrated into surrounding downtown, commercial, mixed-use, or residential areas.
- Campus edge standards should address compatibility with adjacent neighborhoods, including noise, lighting, parking spillover, building scale, and transitions to residential areas. There can sometimes be resident pushback about allowing student housing, fraternity, or sorority houses in the surrounding residential areas.
- Parking and access for large events, such as sporting events, graduations, performances, and conferences, should be addressed by adding standards and guidelines for transit access, rideshare zones, emergency access, wayfinding, and shared or structured parking.

Amusement and Recreation

This typology is intended to accommodate large-scale entertainment, recreation, and event-oriented uses such as stadiums, arenas, amusement parks, and waterparks.

These developments are typically designed to accommodate a large numbers of visitors in a concentrated time period and may include a mix of indoor and outdoor facilities.

These areas tend to be regional destinations as opposed to neighborhood or community focused.



Figure 59: Elitch Gardens.
Source: jzehnder via Adobe Stock (2024).



Figure 58: MetLife stadium.
Source: MMPhoto21 via Adobe Stock (n.d.).

Common Uses

Amusement and Recreation districts are intended for high-intensity recreation, entertainment, and event-centered uses that draw large numbers of visitors. Common uses may include stadiums, arenas, amphitheaters, amusement parks, waterparks, fairgrounds, racetracks, exhibition grounds, convention or event venues, and similar large destinations. In some cases, these facilities may also serve secondary civic

functions during disasters or emergencies, serving as emergency sheltering, resource distribution centers, temporary housing, or command-centers.

Common Dimensional Standards

Dimensional standards for these districts should be specifically tailored to the size and specialized design of the venue or facility. Standards may need to address building height, setbacks, lot coverage, signage, lighting, parking, landscaping, and crowd circulation based on the specific use. Larger setbacks or buffers may be needed where these districts abut residential areas or other lower-intensity uses.

Other Development Standards and Concerns

- Traffic impact studies, and subsequent traffic mitigation plans, should be required for all venues that will produce large amounts of event traffic. Transit, rideshare, pedestrian, bicycle, and overflow-parking strategies should be included in the mitigation plan.
- Noise, lighting, fireworks, hours of operation, amplified sound, and late-night activity are considerations for these district types, and use-specific standards, buffers, landscaping, and other strategies should be used to mitigate these impacts, especially where these uses are located near Residential districts or other sensitive areas.
- Site design should account for crowd safety, emergency access, evacuation, service access, and wayfinding.

7. Conclusion

Zoning codes shape how housing, businesses, industrial areas, agricultural land, and public spaces look, feel, and interact with the fabric of the urban realm. At the same time, they are usually written as dense legal and technical documents, with regulations spread across use tables and standards, dimensional tables, definitions, district overviews, and development standards. For someone new to zoning, and sometimes even for people who work with zoning regularly, it can be difficult to go from “this is what the table says” to “this is the kind of place the code is trying to reflect, maintain, or create.”

The objective of this capstone was to make that relationship clearer by developing a booklet of common zoning district typologies. Through synthesizing background research, analyzing existing codes, and incorporating professional experience, this report identifies recurring patterns across modern district-based zoning codes and organizes them into a visual guide.

The typology booklet is intended to serve as both a teaching tool and a practical reference. In the Urban & Regional Development course, it can serve as a visual and practical aid for students in understanding the basic mechanics of zoning and connect regulatory standards to physical development patterns. Beyond the classroom, it may help community members, staff, planning commissions, and smaller jurisdictions evaluate their own district structures. It can also help identify where a code may have too many districts, where standards are overly rigid, where district intent and

dimensional standards do not align, or where a community could allow more flexibility without abandoning its overall vision.

There are also clear next steps for implementation. For classroom use, the typology booklet could be paired with exercises asking students to compare an unfamiliar zoning code to the typology framework, identify where a local district fits, or evaluate whether its uses and dimensional standards support its stated purpose. For applied use, the booklet could be published alongside model codes like the Colorado Department of Local Affairs Template Land Development Code. Future work could expand the dataset, add more jurisdictions, refine the typologies with additional visual examples, and develop more detailed recommendations for specific development standards such as parking, landscaping, lighting, design, and buffering.

By organizing common district types into a clear, visual, and descriptive guide, this project helps reduce the learning curve of zoning and supports more intentional conversations about how regulations shape the built environment. It helps users see zoning not as a maze of disconnected standards, but as a set of tools that can be understood, evaluated, and adjusted to better serve community goals.

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8. Appendix A

Table 31: District Count Breakdown by Municipality								
Municipality	Population	Total Districts	Residential	Commercial	Mixed Use	Industrial	Agricultural	Other
Boise, Idaho	240,000	17	4	0	7	3	1	2
Bozeman, Montana	60,000	15	1	0	11	2	0	1
Chelsea, Michigan	5,500	13	3	0	3	2	0	5
Dover, New Hampshire	33,000	13	6	1	0	2	0	4
El Paso, Texas	678,000	35	14	4	9	3	1	4
Las Cruces, New Mexico	116,000	17	9	3	0	2	0	3
Loudoun County, Virginia	420,000	28	10	3	6	3	5	1
Mobile, Alabama	201,000	27	7	3	13	3	1	0
Mount Pleasant, South Carolina	98,000	27	7	4	4	3	3	6
Portland, Maine	69,000	24	8	6	3	3	0	4
Pueblo County, Colorado	169,000	15	5	1	2	2	3	2
Silverton, Colorado	1,000	6	2	0	2	1	0	1
St. Louis, Missouri	280,000	12	5	0	6	0	0	1
Tulsa, Oklahoma	412,000	27	13	0	11	3	0	0

9. Appendix B

Table 32: Dimensional Standards by District								
Standard	District Family	Number of Districts	Number with No Standard	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode	Mean
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Residential	94	16	1,000	43,560	5,550	4,000, 10,000	8,344.7
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Mixed Use	77	49	1,600	15,000	4,000	4,000	4,936
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Commercial	25	14	5,000	43,560	10,000	5,000, 10,000, 30,000	17,230.9
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Office / Employment	10	2	5,000	43,560	7,500	5,000	11,695
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Industrial	32	20	2,500	87,120	34,280	43,560	33,118.3
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Agricultural	14	0	5,000	1,742,400	36,780	20,000, 43,560	250,905.7
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Public / Institutional	7	4	2,500	20,000	12,000	None	11,500
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Parks and Open Space	9	5	7,500	1,742,400	31,780	None	453,365
Minimum Lot Area (sf)	Other	8	4	10,000	2,178,000	15,000	10,000	554,500
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Residential	94	17	18	150	50	50	56.5

Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Mixed Use	77	48	15	150	30	25	39.6
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Commercial	25	18	50	200	60	60	107.9
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Office / Employment	10	3	40	100	60	60	64.3
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Industrial	32	16	30	200	67.5	60, 100	83.4
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Agricultural	14	1	50	300	100	100	135.4
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Public / Institutional	7	4	50	100	80	None	76.7
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Parks and Open Space	9	6	50	60	55	None	55
Minimum Lot Width (ft)	Other	8	3	30	600	75	None	171
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Residential	94	8	0	50	20	20	17.8
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Mixed Use	77	13	0	30	5	0	7.1
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Commercial	25	8	0	30	15	0, 15, 30	16.2
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Office / Employment	10	0	12	30	20	15	20.7
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Industrial	32	2	5	50	20	15	20.9
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Agricultural	14	4	15	50	27.5	25	33

Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Public / Institutional	7	1	5	30	25	30	21
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	40	20	20	22.5
Minimum Front Setback (ft)	Other	8	2	0	60	17.5	None	22
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Residential	94	8	0	30	20	20	17.4
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Mixed Use	77	23	0	35	10	10	10.2
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Commercial	25	10	0	15	15	15	11.8
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Office / Employment	10	0	5	30	15	15	16.7
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Industrial	32	6	0	50	15	15	17.4
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Agricultural	14	0	10	50	25	25	24.3
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Public / Institutional	7	1	5	25	15	15	14
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	60	25	20	31.7
Minimum Rear Setback (ft)	Other	8	2	0	60	15	10	20.8
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Residential	94	24	0	25	5	5	8.1

Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Mixed Use	77	24	0	10	4	0, 10	4.2
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Commercial	25	6	0	12	5	5	5.2
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Office / Employment	10	3	0	15	5	5	7.1
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Industrial	32	11	3.5	50	15	10	16.2
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Agricultural	14	2	8	25	15	15	15.2
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Public / Institutional	7	2	0	10	6.8	10	5.9
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Parks and Open Space	9	3	10	10	10	10	10
Minimum Side Setback (ft)	Other	8	2	0	25	10	10	11.2
Maximum Height (ft)	Residential	94	16	30	65	35	35	37.9
Maximum Height (ft)	Mixed Use	77	23	35	200	45	45	55.8
Maximum Height (ft)	Commercial	25	6	35	100	45	35	54.4
Maximum Height (ft)	Office / Employment	10	1	35	100	45	35	50.6
Maximum Height (ft)	Industrial	32	6	30	200	60	60	67.6
Maximum Height (ft)	Agricultural	14	3	35	40	35	35	36
Maximum Height (ft)	Public / Institutional	7	3	30	40	40	40	37.5

Maximum Height (ft)	Parks and Open Space	9	2	35	45	40	40	40
Maximum Height (ft)	Other	8	2	40	75	47.5	40	52.5