

What is Zoning?

The following is an excerpt from one of MAP's latest publications, *The Planning Commission: Tools and Resources for New Planning Commissioners*.

The zoning ordinance is a set of adopted laws which implement your community's master plan. The zoning ordinance includes specific standards for the development and use of property within the community. The planning commission has an advisory role in the creation of the zoning ordinance. Like all ordinances, the zoning ordinance is ultimately adopted and amended by the community's legislative body. The zoning ordinance establishes zoning districts, standards for individual land uses, and generally includes the regulation of building placement on a property (setbacks, build-to lines, etc.), lot coverage, parking, landscaping, and other site elements.

A variety of approaches to zoning exist and the popularity of those approaches has changed over time. Traditional zoning – also known as Euclidean zoning after a foundational U.S. Supreme Court case which upheld the City of Euclid, Ohio's zoning ordinance in 1926 – established use based districts in which few uses may be permitted in the most restrictive district (such as single-family homes) while most use of the other districts may be included in the least restrictive district (residential, office, commercial, etc.). This approach is much less common than it was in the earliest days of zoning. Conventional zoning, like traditional zoning, focuses on the separation of uses as the fundamental principle. Unlike traditional zoning, mixed uses are typically not a feature of conventional zoning except in limited circumstances (such as a traditional downtown area).



Conventional zoning is very common. Performance-based (or impact-based) zoning uses the relative impact of each use to determine compatibility in a particular district. This approach is less common than the others.

Finally, form-based zoning emphasizes the relationship between the private development and public spaces (such as a street) while generally deemphasizing use as compared to other ordinance types; it is growing in popularity, particularly in urban or new urban areas. Most typically, local zoning ordinances include some elements of each approach.

Most zoning ordinance Include the following chapters:

- Definitions
- Sections for each zoning district (residential, commercial, industrial)

- General provisions that apply in all zoning districts (e.g. parking, signs)
- Review processes like site plan, zoning changes, subdivisions, planned unit developments (PUD)
- Administration and Enforcement

A zoning ordinance also includes a zoning map. The zoning map classifies properties into one of many districts identified in the zoning ordinance.

The Michigan Planner and the companion E-Dition provide up to date planning news and techniques to MAP members. Did you know that MAP authors a wide variety of publications including Zoning Administration, Planning and Zoning Essentials, Planning Commission Toolkit, and (the sequel) Zoning Board of Appeals Toolkit. MAP members receive a substantial discount. They can be ordered online and delivered right to your door.