

GUIDE TO ZONING



What is Zoning?

Zoning is a tool that localities use to govern the physical development of land and the kinds of uses allowed on individual property. Zoning may also regulate the dimensional requirements for lots, buildings, and structures; the density of development; and how development relates to its surroundings, including other buildings, open spaces, and the street. Zoning is regulated under **Virginia State Code §15.2, Chapter 22, Article 7.**

Zoning Text vs. Zoning Map

A zoning ordinance has two parts: Zoning Text and a map, known as the Official Zoning Map. The Zoning Text serves two important functions. First, it explains the zoning rules that apply in each zoning district. These rules typically establish a list of land uses permitted in each district plus a series of specific standards governing lot size, building height, and required yard and setback provisions. Second, the text sets forth a series of procedures for administering and applying the zoning ordinance. The Official Zoning Map shows the location of the established zoning districts within a community. Zoning districts are applied directly to parcels and are legally binding.

Typical Content of a Zoning Ordinance

- Purpose & Authority
- Administration
 - Permit & Application Procedures
 - Review Bodies Powers & Procedures
 - Enforcement & Appeals
- Zoning Districts
 - Establishment of Districts
 - Dimensional Standards
 - Allowable Uses (By-Right, Conditional, Temporary, Accessory)
- Design & Use Standards
 - Signs, Landscaping, Parking, Utilities
 - Supplemental Standards for Specific Uses
- Non-conforming Uses
- Definitions



Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan

The zoning ordinance is the primary tool through which a locality implements its Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is a high-level policy document that is used as a decision-making guide for a locality. The plan contains a Future Land Use Map and policies that show the desired, future location, character, type, and density of development throughout a community. Zoning ordinances and development regulations directly control the location, form, and character of private projects. When a development or rezoning project comes before a locality's decision making body they must ensure the project meets the specific standards of the ordinance and the overarching vision of the Comprehensive Plan. Zoning ordinances and development regulations should be reviewed annually to ensure they achieve the goals of the plan and amended as necessary.

Comprehensive Plan ↔ Zoning Ordinance

Future Land Use Map	Official Zoning Map
Makes recommendations regarding physical, social, and economic development.	Primarily regulates physical development.
Broad — dealing with concepts and policies.	Specific — dealing with individual parcels and projects.
Looks to the future.	Deals with development happening now.
A policy guide.	Regulation.

Zoning Can

- ✓ Divide land into districts for different uses, such as industrial, commercial, and residential.
- ✓ Regulate the size and type of building that can be constructed in each district.
- ✓ Require development standards, such as screening and setbacks, to minimize impacts on adjacent property.
- ✓ Protect sensitive resources from inconsistent or harmful use.
- ✓ Enhance community character with signage, parking, and landscaping standards.
- ✓ Support affordable housing and economic development goals.

Zoning Cannot

- ✗ Change or correct land use or buildings already in existence.
- ✗ Guarantee that development will take place.
- ✗ Assure that land uses will be permanent.
- ✗ Treat similar uses differently within a district.
- ✗ Ensure property is maintained. (This is accomplished through other means, such as Virginia Maintenance Code and Blight Abatement.)
- ✗ Guide public or private investment in infrastructure.