

White Paper: New Zoning Districts

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Policy Direction:

The 2030 General Plan includes new land use designations that recognize urban form, and urban development standards including mixed use, minimum levels of intensity, and higher intensity development, particularly near transit and commercial centers.

Purpose:

There is a need for a more robust zoning code to implement the new General Plan land use designations. New zoning districts would synch up better with the General Plan, and would result in projects that would require fewer entitlements when found consistent with the General Plan.

Background:

The current zoning districts date back to the 1960's. They promote relatively low intensity development, single use zoning, and suburban development standards. Often times the current zoning code requires numerous planning entitlements and exceptions to allow urban infill development, even when consistent with the underlying General Plan land use designation.

The Problem:

The current zoning code districts have been amended and appended over time to "fit" the General Plan.

Context

The districts describe and regulate specific development types (retail, housing, industrial etc.), as opposed to neighborhood and district types identified in the General Plan (e.g., traditional neighborhoods, traditional corridors, urban centers etc.). The same commercial zone (i.e., C-2) applies to a suburban corridor as might also apply to an urban center.

Intensity and Use

There are several categories of commercial zoning that can be used to implement the General Plan, but they provide narrow ranges of development intensity. Often times, a development intensity allowed by a specific zone district does not allow for an appropriate level of use (or mix of uses). As an example, commercial development in a commercial corridor would be allowed by right in the C-2, General Commercial zone, but housing in the same zone is subject to a special permit entitlement. The Central Business District (C-3) zone allows housing by right, but at a level of intensity not appropriate for most corridors.

Development Standards

As with use and intensity, development standards are typically a "one size fits all" approach in the current zoning district. For example, the Standard Single Family (R-1) zone requires significant setbacks for front, side and rear yards, regardless of location. Similarly, the height limit for the General Commercial (C-2) zone allows the same maximum height, whether in the Central City, or a suburban shopping center.

Recommended Solutions and Associated Challenges:

There are several options for solutions, including:

- creation of new zones, consistent with General Plan land use categories;
- creation of new zones that allow for a broad range of urban infill development (not necessarily modeled after the General Plan format);
- modification of existing zoning definitions and descriptions; or
- creation of new zones to supplement the existing zones.

The creation of new zones would be ideal. They could incorporate urban land uses and development standards and be tailored to implement the variety of new General Plan land use designations. The new zones would allow development consistent with the General Plan to occur with fewer entitlements. This approach, however, would require that each parcel in the City be “rezoned” to the new zoning classification. This process would require extensive noticing and outreach to each and every property owner in the City. In addition to the work involved in this outreach process, there would be significant opposition to any changes to existing zoning (even where it would benefit a property owner in terms of development flexibility).

Modification of existing zones would introduce new development standards and land use allowances, without triggering the rezone process. There may be more time spent fixing an existing code (as opposed to crafting it from scratch), but the long term time savings would be beneficial in the long run. This effort might be supplemented by the creation of new zones to fill in the “gaps” between the limited number of existing zones and the total number that would be required to adequately implement the General Plan. The new zones could be applied to properties as they are developed or planned for new development. In this situation, the property owners would be supportive of this form of rezoning.

Discussion Questions:

1. Should the City pursue a more comprehensive approach to the zoning code update by adopting an entirely new zoning classification system?
2. Can using the existing system, with modifications to the base zones, effectively implement the General Plan?
3. If the City takes the hybrid approach by creating a short list of new zones, should these be applied immediately, or should they be applied on a project by project basis?