

Simplifying the Chicago Zoning Ordinance

Prepared by West Town Neighbors Association January 2017

Helpful Websites

City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development

<https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/dcd.html>

Second City Zoning

<https://secondcityzoning.org/>

Chicago Cityscape

<http://www.chicagocityscape.com/>

General Information

Zoning is a set of rules that control the use of land for the protection and betterment of the city. The Chicago Zoning Ordinance was passed in 1957 with primary focus on guidelines to protect the value of residential property by preventing the development of undesirable uses. A major revision was made in 2001. The zoning ordinance is both the explanation of the zoning districts and a continuously updated map of all the zoning districts in the City of Chicago. The ordinance is enforced by Department of Housing and Economic Development's Office of Zoning Ordinance Administration.

Four Types of Zoning "Relief"

- 1) administrative adjustments for minor deviations from zoning criteria (such as setbacks)
- 2) variances for slightly more significant deviations (such as easing of parking requirements)
- 3) special uses to allow certain uses within a given zoning district (such as liquor stores within a "B3" business district)
- 4) changing to different zoning districts when one of the previous reliefs are not able to accommodate a development

Definitions

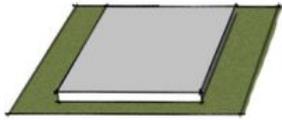
Zoning is about **land use** (what you can do with a property) and **density** (how big the building can be).

Each zoning district has rules ("bulk and density requirements," in zoning-speak) that restrict the density of buildings you can build on properties within the district. These rules have exciting names like 'maximum height requirements', 'floor-area ratios', and others. They're all explained below.

Floor area ratio Zoning code section 17-17-0305

A building's total floor area - that is, the square footage of every floor - divided by the area of the parcel of land it's built on. Controls a property's density.

For example, if you build a building on a property with an floor area ratio (FAR) of .5, as some detached houses do, then the total area of the building's floors must be less than half the area of the parcel. On the other hand, if the property has a FAR of 2, then the area of the building's floors will be double that of the parcel's area, and the building will have to be multi-story.



FAR of 0.5



FAR of 2.0

In other words, a small floor-area ratio suppresses a building's density, and a large FAR increases it. Suburban properties tend to have low FARs (less than 1), and downtown properties large ones (7-16.)

Lot area per unit Zoning code section 17-17-0304

The amount of lot area required for each dwelling unit on the property. Like floor area ratio, controls a property's density.

For example, if a 3,125 square foot lot has a minimum lot-area-per-unit standard of 1,000 square feet, you could only build 3 dwelling units on the property. So the smaller the number, the denser the zoning district, because each building in it can have more units. Large apartment and office buildings tend to cluster in zoning districts with low minimum lot area per unit requirements.

Maximum building height Zoning code section 17-17-0311

How tall your building can be. While a building's FAR and Lot Area per Unit regulate its density, max building height works in concert with setback requirements to control its bulk.

Front yard setback Zoning code section 17-17-0304

The required distance between a building and its lot's street-facing edge. Basically, how big your front yard needs to be. Controls a building's bulk.

Side setback Zoning code section 17-17-0308

The required distance between a building and its lot's side property line. Basically, how much room you need to leave between buildings. Controls a building's bulk.

Rear yard setback Zoning code section 17-17-0307

The required distance between a building and its lot's rear property line. Basically, how big of space you need behind your building. Controls a building's bulk.

Rear yard open space Zoning code section 17-17-0307

The amount of lot area required to be preserved as open space within the rear yard. Only applies to buildings in some residential districts, except for RM-5.5, RM-6, and RM-6.5. Basically, how big your residence's back yard needs to be.

On-site open space Zoning code section 17-17-0308

Amount of usable, on-site outdoor space big apartment buildings must provide for residents.

Zoning Districts

Residential

Single-Unit Detached House—RS1, RS2, RS3

Accommodates the development of detached houses on individual lots, in areas where the land-use pattern is characterized predominantly by detached houses on individual lots or where such a land use pattern is desired in the future.

Two-Flat, Townhouse, Multi-Unit—RT3.5, RT4

Accommodates detached houses, two- flats, townhouses and low-density, multi-unit residential buildings at a density and building scale that is compatible with RS districts, in areas characterized by a mix of housing types (also intended to provide a gradual transition between RS districts and higher density RM districts).

Multi-Unit—RM4.5, RM5, RM5.5, RM6, RM6.5

Accommodates detached houses, two-flats, townhouses and multi-unit residential buildings, with primary emphasis on moderate- to high-density, multi-unit residential buildings in areas where such development already exists or where it is desired in the future.

Business and Commercial

Neighborhood Shopping—B1

Accommodates a broad range of small-scale retail and service uses, residential dwelling units above the ground floor, in compact nodes at the intersection of two or more major streets or in a cohesive linear fashion along relatively narrow streets that have low traffic speeds and volumes (intended to exhibit the physical characteristics of storefront-style shopping streets that are oriented to pedestrian, special designation given for “pedestrian streets”).

Neighborhood Mixed-Use—B2

Adds to B1 district by providing a greater range of development options for those streets where the market demand for retail and service uses is relatively low, allows residential dwelling units on or above the ground floor, in compact nodes at the intersection of two or more major streets or in a cohesive linear fashion along relatively narrow streets that have low traffic speeds and volumes.

Community Shopping—B3

Accommodates a very broad range of retail and service uses, often in the physical form of larger buildings like shopping centers, generally destination-oriented with a larger percentage of customers arriving by automobile, allows dwelling units above the ground floor (intended for large sites that have primary access to major streets).

Neighborhood Commercial—C1

Accommodates a very broad range of small-scale, business, service and commercial uses, especially more intensive, more auto-oriented commercial use types, allows taverns and liquor stores by –right, permits residential dwelling units above the ground floor, in compact nodes, at the intersection of two or more major streets, or in a cohesive linear fashion along streets.

Motor Vehicle-Related Commercial—C2

Accommodates the highest intensity business, service and commercial uses, in large sites that have primary access to major streets.

Commercial, Manufacturing, Employment—C3

Accommodates retail, service, commercial and manufacturing uses, serves as a buffer between M-zoned areas and other B, C and R-zoned areas, does not permit residential dwelling unit.

Notice

Written Notice for a Variation: An applicant for a variation shall, not more than thirty (30) days before filing said application with the Board, serve written notice either in person or by first class mail on the owners or taxpayers of record of all property within 100 feet in each direction of the property lines for which the variation is requested. Land occupied by public roads, streets, alleys, and other public ways is to be excluded in computing this 100 feet as prescribed by Section 17-13-0107-A of the Zoning Ordinance.

Written Notice for a Special Use: An applicant for a special use shall, not more than thirty (30) days before filing said application with the Board, serve written notice either in person or by first class mail on the owners or taxpayers of record of all property within 250 feet in each direction of the property lines of the subject property for which the special use is requested. The number of feet occupied by all public roads, streets, alleys and other public ways shall be excluded in computing this 250 feet requirement.

Noise Ordinance

Loading and unloading operations 11-4-2830

No person shall undertake or cause the loading, unloading, opening, closing or other handling of boxes, crates, containers, building materials, garbage cans, dumpsters or similar objects between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 7:00 A.M. in such a manner as to cause a noise disturbance within a residential district or within a noise sensitive zone.

Construction, repair or demolition equipment 11-4-2835

(a) No person shall use or cause the use of any mechanical equipment or tool operated by fuel or electric power in building, construction, repair or demolition operations between the hours of 8:00 P.M. and 8:00 A.M. within 600 feet of any residential building or hospital.

(b) The limitation of this section does not apply to any construction, demolition or repair work of an emergency nature or to work on public improvements authorized by a governmental body or agency.

(c) This section may be enforced by designated employees of the departments of police, buildings, business affairs and consumer protection, fire, public health, revenue, streets and sanitation, transportation and zoning and land use planning, who are authorized to issue citations for violations.

Complaints/Concerns About Construction

Permit Posting

Call 911 if in the moment, 311 and Alderman's Office