



City of Waukesha
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City of Waukesha Cover Sheet

Committee: Plan Commission	Meeting Date: 10/29/2025
ID Number: ID#25-02431	Ordinance/Resolution Number (if applicable): N/A
Department Submitting: Community Development	Submission Date:
Agenda Item Title: Zoning Code Update – Review the Design Standards, Development Standards, Access and Mobility Standards, Landscape and Natural Resource Standards, and Sign Standards – An opportunity for Commissioners, Council Members, and others in attendance to provide input on the recommendations for the Zoning Code Update.	

Issue Before the Council: Several draft sections of the proposed new zoning code for review and discussion.
Options & Alternatives: The Plan Commission, Council members, and anybody else in attendance who wishes to speak should provide input and ask questions. No vote should be taken at this time.
Additional Details: City staff and consultants from Houseal Lavigne and Birchline Planning have been working since 2024 on a full rewrite of the City's zoning ordinance. The project started last year with analysis of the current code, the Comprehensive Plan, and the City's needs and conditions, along with a community engagement process. Earlier this year, in May and June, the Plan Commission reviewed the first draft sections of the code, District Standards and Use Standards. Now we have the second of three batches of code sections to review. This section includes Design Standards, Development Standards, Access and Mobility Standards, Landscape Standards, and Sign Standards. Design, Development, and Landscape Standards are closely related to one of the main functions of the Plan Commission – review of site design and architecture for commercial development. The new code will significantly change the way these types of reviews happen. Currently the zoning code includes broad standards for development, which note the types of questions the Plan Commission should consider, but do not necessarily provide specific ways



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to answer those questions. Developers and City Staff rely on the Plan Commission's Design Policies, which are published separately from the zoning code, to determine how to design their buildings and sites. The Design Guidelines leave significant room for interpretation, and it is sometimes difficult to predict how they will be applied to a given project. The current code also requires all commercial development, including small projects such as construction of storage sheds and fences, to be reviewed by the Plan Commission, frequently leading to unnecessary delays.

The intent of the new code is to apply objective standards to all development review projects that come before the City. In many cases, projects that meet those standards will be approved administratively, without direct input from the Plan Commission. The Design and Development sections are those objective standards. It is important for the Plan Commission to understand the standards now, and to provide input as to whether they will result in the quality of site and building development the City expects to see.

The draft adds significant detail to the Landscape Standards as well. The consultants are proposing a point system for evaluating landscape plans. Developments will need to meet a certain point total for landscaping, which will vary depending on the size and scope of the work. They will be able to apply various types of landscaping in specific parts of the development (such as parking lot landscape islands, foundation plantings, or screening) to meet the required point total threshold. The standards will also reflect recent findings from the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin Extension regarding the best planting and maintenance methods for native species in the region.

Access and Mobility Standards will replace section 22.53 of the current code, which covers parking and access requirements. As the Plan Commissioners know, the current standards call for many more parking spaces than developments usually need, leading to frequent requests for exceptions and reductions. Some communities have done away with parking standards altogether, allowing developers to provide the amount of parking they feel the market requires. That was presented as an option in the recommendations report, but staff felt that it is more prudent at this point to maintain minimums but to bring them into line with industry standards.

The Sign Standards will replace much of Chapter 27 of the current code. They will include some new methods for determining the proper size and locations of signs, but the intent is to maintain the same basic framework as the current code, with City staff approving most signs and the Plan Commission reviewing occasional appeals.

At this point these code sections are very much in draft form. They have been updated to reflect Planning staff input, but discussions are still ongoing between staff and the consultants. They will also need to be reviewed by the City Attorney's office, and by Engineering Department staff, who have a significant interest in how development happens. And of course, input from the Plan Commission and Council members will result in changes as well. Staff anticipates presenting an updated version of these sections at the Plan Commission meeting.



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on November 19th.

The final batch of code sections to review will include Administrative Procedures, Planned Development Standards, and Definitions. Staff expects to have drafts of those sections available for the Plan Commission and Council to review in December. Final submission of the whole zoning ordinance for review and approval is anticipated in late winter/early spring of 2026.

What is the Strategic Plan Priority this item relates to:

People-Centered Development

What impact will this item have on the Strategic Plan Priority?

These proposals will allow for more orderly development throughout the City.

Financial Remarks: No direct financial impact to the City.

Executive Recommendation: The Plan Commission should take no action on this draft at this time, but should discuss it and provide input.

Recommended Motion: No motions should be taken at this time.

Reviewed By:

Reviewer #1 Name & Title	Reviewer Signature
Reviewer #1 Name & Title	Reviewer Signature
City Administrator	Reviewer Signature