



PROMOTING HEALTH AND EQUITY

Zoning Strategies and Approaches

Outdated zoning policies perpetuate and exacerbate public health threats such as physical inactivity, obesity, and racial and economic segregation.

Updating zoning can promote healthy and equitable development. And zoning and government incentives, policies, and regulations can drive adoption of health- and equity-promoting practices by the real estate industry.

Common health and equity goals of zoning updates follow:

- **Reducing the expense and impact of excess parking requirements;**
- **Encouraging the development of multifamily and “missing middle” homes and accessory dwelling units;**
- **Increasing access to healthy food and neighborhood assets like parks and green space;**
- **Promoting walkability;** and
- **Prohibiting potentially harmful uses** (i.e., liquor stores in residential neighborhoods, hazardous waste sites) in certain zones or requiring discretionary reviews for their approval.

Examples of zoning updates to promote health and equity include the following:

- **Comprehensive zoning overhauls** can prioritize health-promoting land uses (pedestrian-oriented design, community gardens, etc.) and can align policies across geographies to ensure equity is prioritized.
- **By-right zoning** can make health-promoting land uses the default rather than the exception and can define what potentially harmful uses require discretionary reviews rather than being allowed by right.
- **Overlays** can promote healthier development in specific areas (e.g., near transit) and can advance equitable development goals—such as increasing healthy food access.
- **Floating zones** offer opportunities to set health-promoting standards that must be met before a zoning district is approved.
- **Zoning incentives** can encourage health-promoting features, including mixed-use development, parks, and walkability.

Supporting Health and Social Equity through Zoning

PROFILE: Promoting Healthy Food Access through Zoning Incentives in New York City

New York City's Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program was established in 2009 to bring grocery stores to underserved New York neighborhoods.



Specifically, the program goals include the following:

- Giving zoning incentives to property owners by allowing them to construct slightly larger buildings in certain districts if they include a supermarket; and
- Allowing grocery stores by right in light manufacturing districts, which increases the number of areas where they can be built.

A 2021 update to the FRESH program made changes, including the following:

- Expanding the program to include 11 additional lower-income districts and updating zoning rules to prevent clustering of FRESH supermarkets; and
- Reducing building renovation requirements for projects that aim to transform existing buildings into supermarkets and reducing parking requirements.

PROFILE: Promoting Healthier Development through Comprehensive Zoning Overhaul in Baltimore

In 2016, Baltimore adopted a comprehensive update to its 45-year-old zoning code called TransForm Baltimore.



Major goals of the new code included the following:

- Creating more pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods;
- Streamlining the development process and simplifying approvals for transit-oriented developments and urban farms; and
- Strengthening regulations on potentially unhealthy uses.

Selected TransForm Baltimore provisions follow:

- Removing barriers to creating mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods;
- Encouraging adaptive use of historic structures, thereby supporting local economic development; and
- Making certain project uses subject to discretionary review—for example, new bail bonds and check-cashing businesses must be approved by the city council.