



# RESHAPING THE CITY

## Zoning for Equity, Resilience, and Sustainability

Current zoning requirements often promote negative outcomes for cities, people, and the environment.

Many policies lead to development patterns that contribute to air pollution, raise housing costs, prevent walkability, exacerbate the effects of climate change, and fail to address the legacy of racist land use regulations, among other consequences.

Cities across the United States are updating zoning to address these issues and promote increased quality of life.

### Potential Benefits of Updating Zoning

- **Creating more livable and equitable places.** Updating zoning can promote development patterns that support healthy and sustainable mobility, housing affordability, climate resilience, and other positive outcomes.
- **Creating opportunities to meet the demand for sustainable, resilient, and healthy development.** Updating zoning can allow, incentivize, or require development types, uses, and features that are aligned with market demand for healthy, sustainable, resilient, and energy-efficient developments—which are often not possible by right under traditional zoning.



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- **Providing consistency and predictability in zoning.** Outdated zoning policies can make development projects that would support resilience, sustainability, health, and equity goals illegal or difficult, time intensive, and costly to complete. Updating zoning can lessen these barriers.

# Selected Types of Zoning Approaches and Policy Examples

ZONING TECHNIQUE	OVERVIEW	POLICY EXAMPLES
<p><b>Comprehensive overhauls:</b> Creation of new zoning policies to replace previous codes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes extensive outreach processes and creation of guiding documents, such as comprehensive plans</li> <li>• Can simplify complicated zoning policies, determine community priorities, and integrate land use strategies throughout all policies and geographies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Buffalo, New York:</b> Promoting walkability and eliminating minimum parking requirements</p> <p><b>Baltimore, Maryland:</b> Promoting healthier development</p> <p><b>Stamford, Connecticut:</b> Strengthening and encouraging greener buildings</p> <p><b>Norfolk, Virginia:</b> Comprehensively addressing community vulnerabilities</p>
<p><b>By-right zoning:</b> Policies that allow projects that comply with certain zoning standards to obtain approvals and building permits through relatively simple administrative processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can expand the types of projects allowed in specific zones or citywide</li> <li>• May streamline the development process—potentially resulting in lower project costs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Minneapolis, Minnesota:</b> Allowing increased residential density by right by eliminating single-family zoning</p> <p><b>Denver, Colorado:</b> Allowing lower parking ratios by right for affordable housing</p> <p><b>Boston, Massachusetts:</b> Adopting net zero carbon standards through strengthening low-carbon building requirements</p> <p><b>Summit County, Colorado:</b> Minimizing losses from wildfire damage</p>
<p><b>Overlays:</b> Special districts placed over existing zones that include provisions in addition to those already present</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used to protect features or to encourage certain types of projects, such as affordable or mixed-income housing and developments that account for future climate risk</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for additional oversight through site plan reviews and other processes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Indianapolis, Indiana:</b> Promoting healthier, more equitable development by zoning overlay</p> <p><b>Northampton, Massachusetts:</b> Creating a sustainable growth district through overlay zoning</p> <p><b>Stonington, Connecticut:</b> Using overlays to achieve scalable flood hazard mitigation</p>
<p><b>Floating zones:</b> Zones that delineate conditions that must be met before the area is approved for a given set of zoning rules</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can promote local priorities while allowing for flexibility</li> <li>• Can be written to facilitate urban development that regulates both form and use</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cambridge, Massachusetts:</b> Facilitating green, resilient, and flexible development</p> <p><b>James City County, Virginia:</b> Creating a planned unit development for conservation and community resilience</p>
<p><b>Zoning incentives:</b> Incentives to make it more attractive or financially feasible for developers to provide certain public benefits by offsetting the cost of providing such features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can help municipalities obtain a public good at low or no cost</li> <li>• Can be used to promote affordable housing, support elevation in flood-prone areas, promote low-carbon building practices, and more</li> </ul>	<p><b>New York, New York:</b> Promoting healthy food access</p> <p><b>Arlington County, Virginia:</b> Advancing carbon neutrality through density bonuses</p>