

Policy Issues
City of Knoxville Zoning Code Update
Non-Residential Issues

Application of Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Plan Recommendations to Non-Residential Districts

The City of Knoxville adopted the Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Plan (HRPP), which identified methods for limiting development on steep areas and ridgetops by reducing density and grading activity, in December 2011. The recommendations of this policy document were not codified in an ordinance. At City Council direction, the recommendations of the HRPP have been codified in the draft the updated zoning ordinance. The updated code would impose density and grading limitations on all undeveloped properties in the City with a grade in excess of 15%, with the limitations increasing as the grade increases. Such a provision would mirror the recommendations of the HRPP. Properties with a grade in excess of 15% would be designated on the updated zoning map as being within the Hillside Overlay. Undeveloped properties for which a development plan is submitted would be reviewed for applicability of the HRPP standards and development potential could be limited for properties with grades in excess of 15%.

The impact of this proposed provision on non-residential properties is the limitation on grading imposed on properties with grades in excess of 15%. The proposed limitation on grading has raised concerns that the application of the HRPP recommendations to non-residentially zoned properties may limit the opportunity for commercial development.

Adjusting Standards for Landscaping

The landscaping standards proposed in the updated zoning ordinance incorporate the parking lot landscaping requirements adopted as part of the updated parking ordinance. The draft updated zoning ordinance also establishes standards for landscaped buffers between non-residential and residential zones and other basic landscaping requirements. The landscape requirements state that parking lots of 10,000 SF must have perimeter landscaping between the lot and rights-of-way of abutting streets. The width of the perimeter landscape area can be reduced from 10 feet to 6 feet for parking lots of less than 20,000 SF. Interior landscaping, consisting of the landscaping of terminal islands and an interior island to break up runs of 15 or more parking spaces, is required for parking lots of more than 20,000 SF. A number of comments have been received requesting that the threshold for requiring perimeter landscaping be reduced to 5,000 SF. Also requested is that parking lots between 10,000 SF and 20,000 SF have a graduated landscape requirement. Comments on the landscape requirements request that parking lots of more than 20,000 SF have an interior landscape island when a run of parking spaces exceeds 10 rather than when the run exceeds 15 spaces as currently required.

Other comments regarding the landscape requirements advocate for a bonding requirement to ensure installation and maintenance of landscape materials; referencing an invasive species list; including shrubs, ground covers, etc. on the recommended species list; and ensuring adequate staffing to enforce the landscape requirements.

Landscaping associated with development provides a number of benefits, including screening, stormwater mitigation, reducing heat islands, and aesthetics. It is recommended that the impact of the current parking lot landscaping requirements, and the buffer requirements proposed in the draft updated zoning ordinance, be evaluated before any steps are taken to increase landscaping requirements. No changes in the parking lot landscaping requirements are proposed in the current draft of the updated zoning ordinance. The purpose section of the landscape section has been revised to note the benefits of landscaping in the urban environment.

Design Standards/Limitation on Materials/Build-to Zones

The draft code proposes the imposition of minimal design standards in exchange for the greater intensity (greater height) permitted in certain commercial districts (CN, CG-2, CG-3, CH-2, CR-2) and the O district. These standards address façade design (blank walls, entrance on primary façade, articulation), fenestration, pedestrian access, and basic site design. The design standards are seen as a reasonable tradeoff for the increased intensity of development permitted in the commercial zones. The standards proposed for the CN and O zones enable development in these zones to better mesh with the adjacent residential zones.

The limitation on materials in the draft code would apply to the same districts and limit the use of certain materials to 25% of the façade facing a public right-of-way (other than alleys) and residential districts. The limited materials are plain concrete block, metal siding (not including metal wall panels), T-111 siding, exposed aggregate concrete, vinyl, and plastic. The material limitations are considered a reasonable tradeoff for the increased intensity of development permitted in the commercial zones. The material limitations proposed for the CN and O zones enable development in these zones to better mesh with the adjacent residential zones.

In two commercial zoning districts, CG-2 and CG-3, the draft ordinance proposes a build-to zone of 0' to 20' (25'). A build-to zone means that a portion of the building frontage (50% in CG-2, 70% in CG-3) must be located within this zone. The goal is to encourage a more pedestrian friendly development pattern along the corridors and within the nodes identified as opportunity areas for more intense development and designated CG-2 and CG-3. The trade-off for this requirement is the more intense development (greater height) permitted in CG-2 and CG-3.

Building Size Limit in Office Zone

Buildings in the Office district are limited to a gross floor area of 10,000 sf unless the building meets certain standards:

1. The development maintains the privacy of adjacent residential lots through techniques such as decreased height, additional landscape and screening measures, building massing and design to mitigate adverse impacts of noise and lighting, and increased setbacks above those required from adjacent residential lots.
2. Building design elements incorporate pedestrian-scale features, such as awnings and storefront windows.
3. The design of the site's circulation system provides adequate and safe access for both motor vehicles and alternate modes of transportation, including pedestrians and bicyclists. The design must minimize potentially dangerous traffic movements and points of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians or bicyclists.

The O district is often used as a transition district between higher intensity commercial districts and residential districts. The size limitation, and the standards that would enable larger buildings, are seen as means to ensure that the O district serves as a good transition between these districts.

Transition Zones

One of the comments made during the Recode testing design charrette was that the new code and the associated zoning map need to make better use of transition zones to accommodate and lessen the impact of changes from more intense districts to less intense districts. The draft code proposes districts, both non-residential and residential) that scale up in intensity, providing the tools needed to enable smooth transitions between districts. While a goal of the creation of the new zoning map was to accommodate transitions, the greatest challenge in addressing transitions through mapping of the zones is the existing pattern of development. The need to accommodate existing development patterns often

superseded the desire to provide for smooth transitions between districts of different intensities. As new development and redevelopment occurs, opportunities likely will arise for the use of the transition zones.

Zoning of Older Industrial Areas

Having developed as an industrial city, Knoxville has a number of older industrial areas that no longer function as initially developed. In addition, the 1960's zoning of the City designated property adjacent to railroad tracks as industrial even if the property had constraints (access, topography, etc.) that restricted its potential to be used for industrial purposes. Some of the industrially designated property adjacent to railroad tracks is accessed through residential neighborhoods, meaning that industrial use of these properties could be detrimental to the residential neighborhoods.

The designation of these properties in a manner that would permit appropriate development has been thought provoking. Correctly designating these properties is important to preserve areas for industrial development, to permit appropriate (re)development of property, and to protect adjacent properties. The Industrial Mixed Use (IMU) zoning designation has proven to be good tool for some of the properties as it permits manufacturing, retail, and residential uses, thereby allowing flexibility in the (re)development of these properties. The designation of some undeveloped industrially zoned properties is proposed to change to permit development of uses more compatible with adjacent properties. The following guidelines have been used by staff in the designation of current industrial areas on the draft updated zoning map:

- Active industrial sites are designated as an appropriate industrial category based on intensity and type of use, access, and compatibility with surrounding area;
- Older industrial sites that represent opportunities for redevelopment are generally designated IMU; and
- Inactive and undeveloped industrial areas that have constraints are designated so as to minimize the impact of (re)development of the property.
- Areas used for residential purposes often have been assigned a residential zoning