MODERNIZING YOUR ZONING CODE

For The Community You Want

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Between 2013 and 2015, the Mon Valley Initiative, a coalition of volunteer-led Community Development Corporations in the Monongahela River Valley, sharing a professional staff, led or began community-based efforts to rewrite zoning ordinances in six of its twelve member communities – some of which hadn’t seen updates in over 50 years.
Zoning is the process of planning for land use by a locality to allocate certain kinds of development in certain areas. Zoning also includes restrictions in different zoning areas, such as minimum lot sizes, height of buildings, lot coverage, density, use of lots, definitions of uses, parking requirements and regulation of signage. Zoning law requires that all uses be permitted somewhere in each locality. If a particular use is not permitted, it is considered exclusionary.
Residents Wanted a Say in What their Own Community Would Look Like

Our zoning ordinances were rewritten with local input and discussion – residents, business owners, elected and appointed officials and all age groups and interests. Included in our process were site visits and walks to reacquaint residents with their own communities so that they could develop their own solutions and responses.
You might need new zoning if:

- In Braddock, the traditional street grid, lost over generations as a hospital grew, was restored upon the demolition of the hospital. New housing, echoing patterns of the existing neighborhood required 46 variances to construct.
You might need new zoning if:

- 1928 was a year of innovation and advancement:
- The first air-conditioned office opened in the USA
- Scotch Tape was first marketed by 3M
- North Braddock Borough adopts zoning

- Air conditioning still keeps you cool
- Scotch Tape is still sticky
- North Braddock’s zoning remained unchanged until 2014 – which was great if the most advanced use contemplated was a telephone exchange.
Districts
Use Concentration: Common Challenge
Use Concentration: Strategies

- Consider impacts of use concentration in establishing permissible uses
- Allow as “Conditional” or “Special Exception” uses with criteria to minimize impacts
- Separation distances between uses
- Activity restrictions (hours of operation, outdoor activity, etc.)
Single Use Dist.: Common Challenge
Communities must provide for every “legitimate” use

Consider the context of the district when determining appropriate uses

Consider uses in alternate districts to accomplish the desired vision
  - Does the CBD need a drive-thru bank, pharmacy, restaurant?

Use of overlay districts
Riverfront Perception: Common Challenge
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Riverfront Perception: Strategies

- Creating the vision
- Access and connectivity
- Appropriate use mix & compatibility
- Market potential
Commercial Dist. Size: Common Challenge
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Commercial Dist. Size: Strategies

- Understand the contextual background – how/why was the district originally built
- Explore the differences - how are services delivered differently today?
- Understand the market –
  - Market Study
  - Retail gap analysis
  - Niche markets
  - What are the realistic opportunities
- Rightsizing for today’s market reality
Non-conforming Uses – Adaptive Reuse of Historic Neighborhood Anchors: Common Challenges
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Non-conforming Uses – Adaptive Reuse of Historic Neighborhood Anchors: Strategies

- Establish intent of reuse strategy
- Clearly define criteria when provisions apply
- Use considerations (typically different from base district)
- “Conditional Use” & “Special Exceptions” establishing criteria
| Lots |  |  |
Lot Coverage: Common Challenge
Lot Coverage: Strategies

- Floor Area Ratios (FAR) min/max
- Coverage ratio min/max
- Setback strategies
  - Building envelope location
  - “Build to” line
- Greening strategies
- Street wall requirements
Buildings
Building Setback: Common Challenge
Building Setback: Common Challenge
Building Setback: Strategies

- Consider suburban vs urban context
- “Build to” line vs. minimum setback
- Street wall
- Block averaging
- Building orientation
- Lot coverage considerations
- Compatibility with existing community
- Parking requirement impacts
Contextual Design: Common Challenge
Building Height: Common Challenge
Contextual Design/Height: Strategies

- Minimum & maximum story height
- Façade requirements
- Allow for variation but plan for contextual consistency
  - New buildings compatible with existing architecture
- Overlay district requirements
- Streetscape requirements – can “unify” the feel of the street
Service Areas: Common Challenge
Service Areas: Strategies

- Common area placement
- Enclosure & screening requirements
- Service frequency
Parking
Parking Quantity: Common Challenge
Parking Quantity: Strategies

- Parking analysis
  - Public parking availability
- Shared parking analysis/strategies
- Use mix considerations
- Reduction/credit for existing and proposed uses
Drive Through: Common Challenge
Drive Through: Strategies

- Consider the appropriate context/location
- Out right prohibition
- Alternative access strategies (alley, side streets)
- Setback considerations
- Design standards
Signage: Common Challenge
Signage: Strategies

- Establish intent & purpose: identification vs advertising
- Temporary vs permanent
- Design based on street type & function
  - Speed, # of lanes, etc.
- Streetscape considerations
- Establishing clear criteria
  - Number of signs
  - Sizing ratios
  - Glazing requirements
- Coordinated signing efforts
Urban Agriculture: Strategies
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- Principal vs accessory use
- Activity considerations
  - Planting
  - Poultry and livestock
  - Bees
- Support structures (coops, barns, sheds)
- Processing considerations
- Location considerations
- Intensity of use considerations
  - Lot size/area