

The
**Unified
Zoning
Ordinance**

What Will it Do?

www.unifiedzoning.org



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Unified Zoning Ordinance Background

Established in 1955, the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) is the land planning and zoning agency for the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County. In this capacity, the MPC has been tasked with updating and unifying the existing city and county zoning ordinances.

So what is a zoning ordinance and why is it being updated? Simply put, a zoning ordinance regulates how land and buildings are used. It is guided by the Comprehensive Plan and, where available, by small area or master plans. Zoning ordinances are not written in stone. As times change, zoning regulations sometimes must change as well.

Developing a new ordinance has largely been an in-house project of the MPC. Staff from the Special Projects, Development Services, Comprehensive Planning, Natural Resources, Historic Preservation and Transportation departments have participated.

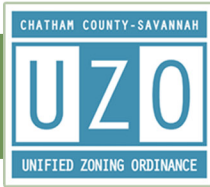
Additionally, MPC staff has worked closely with City and County staff in developing each section of the UZO draft. The draft has been refined by a Technical Committee consisting of approximately 30 individuals representing

various private and public sector entities. Areas represented by the private sector include: engineering; architecture; natural resources; historic preservation; landscape architecture; law; and home-building.

Following the Technical Committee's refinements, an Advisory Committee reviewed and provided comments on the first draft, prior to the public comment period. This expanded group included some Technical Committee participants as well as other individuals representing a broader cross-section of the community, including 33 neighborhood organizations.

A public comment period will take place from June 28th thru September 30th, prior to review and adoption by City Council and the Board of County Commissioners. The UZO draft is available for public review and comment at www.unifiedzoning.org.

The MPC encourages you to participate in this important process. For the most up-to-date information, please visit www.unifiedzoning.org and our Facebook page ("Chatham County—Savannah Unified Zoning Ordinance"). You can also call the MPC UZO Hotline at 651-1499 or email us at uzo@thempc.org.



What Will a New Zoning Ordinance Do?

Update and Unify the Existing Zoning Ordinances

The Unified Zoning Ordinance, or UZO, will update and unify the existing zoning ordinances for the City of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County. Savannah's ordinance was adopted in 1960; Chatham County followed in 1962.

Create an Ordinance that is Easy to Use and Predictable

All zoning regulations will be located in one ordinance instead of two. The vastly improved format will help readers find information much more quickly and will reduce the chances that they overlook pertinent standards. Readers will also benefit from a step-by-step explanation of the review and approval process for each zoning-related review, such as a site development plan or rezoning. Together with improved standards, a more predictable process will save time and money.

Serve as an Implementation Tool for the Comprehensive Plan

The UZO is the major implementation tool for the Chatham County-Savannah Comprehensive Plan which was adopted by the City of Savannah and Chatham County in November, 2006. The Comprehensive Plan serves as a policy guide for the following community elements: Community Facilities; Economic Development; Historic and Cultural Resources; Housing; Land Use; Natural Resources; and Transportation. The UZO will help

to implement the zoning-related goals that were established for these various elements.

Support a Variety of Housing Options

Housing needs vary by life stages, income levels and personal preferences. The UZO addresses this by facilitating the provision of a variety of housing types, including but not limited to single family, townhomes, apartments, upper-story residential and accessory dwelling units. Allowable housing types and the residential density (the number of dwellings per acre) will vary by zoning district.

Help Chatham County Become the Greenest County in Georgia

Building upon the natural resources goals in the Comprehensive Plan and the goals of the Chatham Environmental Forum's "Road Map for Chatham County," zoning regulations can serve as an implementation tool to help our community become the "Greenest County in Georgia."

Encourage a Better Built Environment

Zoning affects numerous aspects of our built-environment, including proximity to work, school, shopping and services; pedestrian and vehicular accessibility; open and recreational space; and preservation of historic resources. General site development standards such as buffering can provide more green space, screen service areas, and reduce potential nuisances such as noise and

unsightly views. Standards for other site elements, such as signage and parking, will recognize area character.

Promote Healthy Living

Zoning can promote healthier lifestyles. Continuing the tradition of mixed-use neighborhoods, the UZO will have a number of mixed-use zoning districts that encourage social interaction and walking and biking to nearby shops and services. Most new residential subdivisions are proposed to have required open and recreational space for residents. And all zoning districts are proposed to allow community gardens which can provide fresh fruit and vegetables to nearby residents.

Apply Zoning Districts that Match Existing Development Patterns Where Appropriate

In addition to land uses, a zoning district determines lot size, lot width, maximum building coverage, development setbacks and building height (also known collectively as building or bulk and height standards). In some areas, particularly urban neighborhoods, current zoning reflects a more suburban standard—large lot sizes and greater building setbacks, for example. This causes a nonconforming situation and has led to numerous variance requests to reduce such standards. Applying zoning districts that match existing development patterns will mostly correct this situation; however, some situations that are atypical or undesired for an area will likely continue to be nonconforming.

Preserve Our Historic Resources and Neighborhoods

Through historic property overlays and historic district overlays (standards that are in addition to the base zoning district), our community can save more of its historic resources and ensure a greater degree of architectural compatibility for new construction and rehabilitation. A local historic designation through zoning is a voluntary process that must comply with the State Historic Preservation Act. Benefits may include federal, state and local tax incentives for property owners.

As of June 2011, two historic properties and five historic districts (neighborhoods) are locally designated. Many more are designated on the National Register of Historic Places, but these properties and historic districts are not protected to the degree that a local designation would provide.

Associations, Organizations and Professional Groups: Do we have your contact information?

MPC strives to keep the community informed of zoning-related matters that may affect your organization or neighborhood. If you'd like to determine if your organization is on our contact list, update information, or to add your organization, please call Charlotte Moore, Project Manager at 651-1466, or email moorec@thempc.org.