

Memorandum

To: Megan Wilson, Deputy Director of Planning & Development
From: Katie Darcy, AICP
Date: December 2025
Subject: Assessment of the City of Ithaca Zoning Code (Chapter 325)

Review Context & Background

Based upon our preliminary review of the code language, feedback from stakeholder discussions, input from City staff, and recommendations of previous plans and studies, we offer this assessment of the City of Ithaca's Zoning Code (Chapter 325). We have used our experience as zoning practitioners, knowledge of NYS Law, and understanding of land use regulation best practice as a basis for these initial findings and recommendations. The information provided in this assessment was also prepared with the following goals in mind, including:

- Summarizing the issues experienced and challenges created under the current code;
- Facilitating a common understanding of recommended solutions and alternatives; and
- Guiding the City's subsequent zoning code update effort, serving as a roadmap for the review and revision of specific zoning code sections.

The City of Ithaca Zoning Ordinance, adopted in 1975 and amended on a piecemeal basis since, still reflects traditional zoning practices that have resulted in difficulties in administration and unintended limitations for desirable investment. Although the previous updates and revisions have served the City in the interim to implement more modern regulatory tools, such as form based districts, a comprehensive revision and restructuring of the code will be greatly beneficial. A wholesale update will help to ensure consistency across code sections, responsiveness to the City's changing needs and market shifts, and ease of application and enforcement.

Stakeholder Input

City Staff Meeting – May 7, 2025

The Colliers team met with a variety of City staff members who work with the Zoning Code in varying capacities to understand their perspective on current code strengths and weaknesses. Feedback was focused on what is currently working well within the Code, where some improvements may be beneficial for more efficient and effective administrative function, and areas of the code inconsistent with existing and desired development patterns. The main points of discussion are summarized below:

- The City would like to see less parking with projects and thus want to consider parking maximums.
- There is interest in reducing thresholds that allow for a staff-level review to and expediting the review process for desirable projects.
- Many City staff members field calls frequently from applicants / interested parties to receive interpretations of the Code – the Code update should help to more clearly illustrate requirements to reduce the volume of calls staff members receive.
- Design guidelines exist outside of the Zoning Code – which can sometime mean they are underutilized.
- There is a need to support middle-housing and more affordable housing options – current zoning restricts the number of individuals who can live in a dwelling unit, which results in empty bedrooms in homes.
- New FEMA FIRM maps present a challenge for homes in the flats – there is a potential that homeowners may be priced out due to flood insurance – what type of development would be appropriate if housing is no longer viable?
- The code update should take into consideration buildable heights / density based on soil conditions throughout the City.
- There is a desire to allow for more creativity within the Code.
- There are many nonconforming residential properties throughout the City – particularly with stairs, decks, porches, and heat pumps.
- There is a limited appetite for increased regulations in the face of the housing affordability challenges the City is experiencing.

Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting – May 7, 2025

Colliers staff members also met with several Planning Board and Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) members to gain insight to their perspective of how the code could be improved. A summary of key discussion points is presented below:

- To the extent possible, the BZA's involvement in development proposals should be limited, as variances should be the exception not the norm.
- It is important to applicants understand the limitations of the BZA, and the criteria they are required to use per NYS Law.
- It can be difficult to determine whether a variance is warranted or not on larger development projects.
- The BZA does not want to make design-based decisions.
- The rigidity of the existing code can sometimes force out of date practices or limit the highest potential of a site.
- There is an ongoing tension between higher density development and the "small-town feel" of Ithaca.
- Design guidelines don't have enough teeth – they aren't law.
- There is a need for more affordable housing in the community.
- "Sunken patios" have become common in the City – they don't interact with the streetscape well.
- There should be more multi-family development encouraged in the City, and the code should support conversion of single-family homes to 2-3 family homes.

Designers Roundtable – May 20, 2025

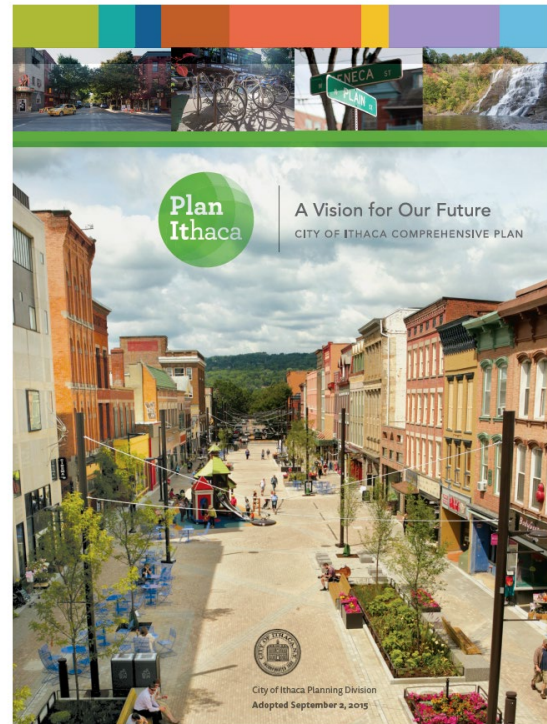
A virtual roundtable discussion was facilitated with architects and developers who frequently work in the City of Ithaca to better understand opportunities, challenges, and areas of improvement in the Zoning Code from those who utilize it on a frequent basis. Some of the opinions and thoughts expressed during that discussion are summarized below:

- The City's existing code is complicated, and information is scattered throughout the code.
 - Interpretations from City Staff are almost always required, causing extra time and effort, and often they differ slightly over time.
- Definitions need to be revised to reduce need for interpretations and should all be included within the Zoning Code rather than referenced to their location in other Chapters.
- The Collegetown form-based code elements can be challenging, should be more flexible, and reward projects that hit the mark in terms of the desired architectural forms.
 - Some of the review process should shift to staff-level review for ease of administration.
- There is a sense that in seeking perfection in development projects, the City is forgoing a lot of good projects.
 - The housing crisis in the City could be mitigated by reducing some of the hoops developers have to jump through – particularly with Planning Board review processes.
- To the extent possible, the Zoning Code should be synchronized with building code, housing code, and the property maintenance code.
- The City should consider establishing parking maximums – there has been pushback on the amount of parking that ends up in development projects.
- A large percentage of projects require variances – requiring extra time and effort from the City, applicants, and property owners, and it seems like most variances are granted. The City should strive to reduce the number of variances required, and if required, the applicant should go to the BZA first rather than the Planning Board.
- The City should explore flexibility within standards to allow for staff to grant variances within a certain threshold of the standard (e.g. a difference of 10% or less in lot coverage requirement can be reviewed and approved by City staff, beyond that it would go to the BZA).
- Existing neighborhoods should be legalized through zoning – many beloved neighborhoods are wholly nonconforming to existing regulations, and doing so may help support more housing development.
- The review process should be expedited for “good” projects.

Previous Plans & Studies

Plan Ithaca 2015

The 2015 Comprehensive Plan recognizes that Ithaca's current zoning approach needs significant updates to support the City's vision for compact, mixed-use development while preserving existing neighborhood character. The Plan acknowledges ongoing discussions about replacing the City's traditional Euclidean zoning with either a form-based code or a hybrid approach that addresses both use and physical form. The Plan emphasizes flexibility in zoning to accommodate diverse housing types, mixed-use development, and sustainable growth patterns. Below are some key recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan based on key topic areas:



Residential Neighborhoods

- Develop policies to mandate inclusion of affordable units within new market-rate housing developments.
- Implement a minimum green space requirement in residential neighborhoods throughout the City.

Mixed-Use & Commercial Development

- Maintain a balance of allowed nonresidential uses in residential areas to preserve and enhance neighborhood character.
- Encourage mixed-use development that includes a range of housing types and employment opportunities.

Sustainability & Environmental

- Identify and remove zoning barriers to establishing food-production and food-processing enterprises where appropriate.
- Identify and remove impediments in City Code to community gardens, shared projects, and other urban agriculture projects.

Historic Preservation

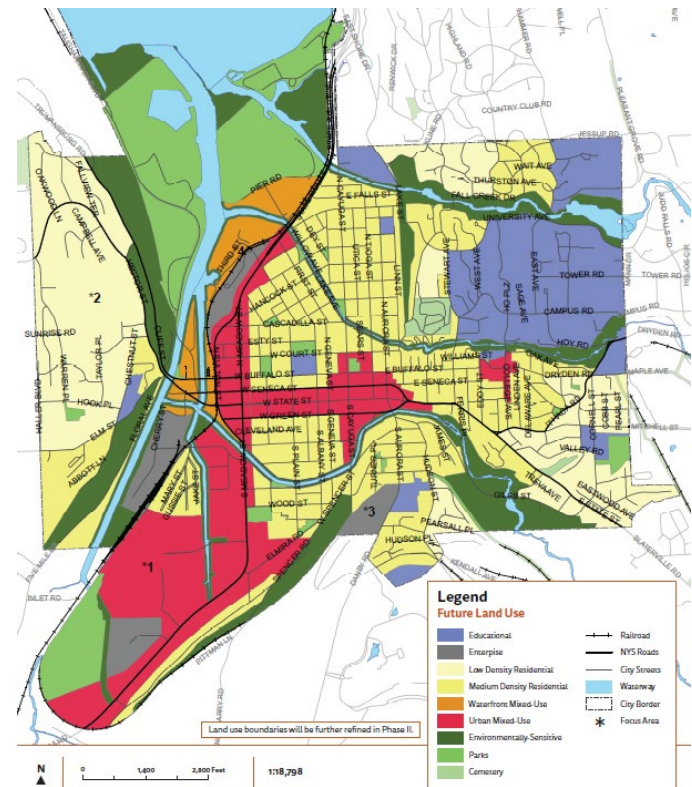
- Develop standards and guidelines for new development to promote compatible design in historic areas.

Specific recommendations from Plan Ithaca are cited in the Key Zoning Issues & Opportunities section of this memo beginning on page 17.

Future Land Use

The Future Land Use section of Plan Ithaca establishes a geographic framework for managing growth and preserving community character. The Plan recognizes that most of Ithaca's land is already developed, so future growth will largely involve reimagining and redeveloping appropriate areas. The strategy balances accommodating new housing and businesses with maintaining the City's small-city character and quality of life.

The Plan aims to strengthen Ithaca's role as the economic, social, and cultural center of Tompkins County by attracting a larger population and reversing a half-century trend of population decline relative to the County. Higher-density mixed-use areas are strategically located on or adjacent to major transportation corridors to support compact development patterns that reduce sprawl and provide alternatives to car-dependent living. The table below illustrates the future land use categories alongside the existing zoning district in each area:



Future Land Use Map, Plan Ithaca.

Future Land Use Category	Existing Zoning Districts
Educational	R-1b, R-2a, R-2b, R-3a P-1, U-1,
Enterprise	PUD, CSD, MD
Low Density Residential	R-1a, R-1b, R-2a, R-2b, R-3a, R-3b, R-U, CR-1 P-1, U-1
Medium Density Residential	R-1a, R-1b, R-2a, R-2c, R-2b, R-3a, R-3aa, R-3b, R-U, B-1a, B-2a, B-2d, B-4, CR-1, CR-2, CR-3, CR-4, CBD-50, C-SU, MU-1 P-1, U-1
Waterfront Mixed-Use	WE/WF, MD, ND
Urban Mixed-Use	B-1a, B-1b, B-2a, B-2d, B-4, B-5, CBD-50, CBD-60, CBD-85, CBD-100, CBD-120, CBD-140, SW-1, SW-2, SW-3, CSD, WEDZ-1a, WEDZ-1b, WE/WF, MD, P-1, MU-1, MU-2
Environmentally Sensitive	R-1a, R-2a, R-3a, R-3b, R-U, CSD, WE/WF, MD, ND, P-1, U-1
Parks / Cemetery	P-1

Areas for Continued Growth and Development

The Future Land Use map identifies areas for continued growth and development “in the form of well-designed, compact mixed-use development” – including the Urban Mixed Use, Waterfront Mixed-Use, and Enterprise areas. The type of development encouraged in these areas of change are summarized by character area below:

Urban Mixed-Use

- **Purpose:** Dense, multi-story development combining commercial, office, and housing uses
- **Vision:** Create walkable, transit-oriented areas with 20+ dwelling units per acre; serve as primary locations for new development
- **Five Subareas:**
 - Downtown/Urban Core: Remain the city's heart; preserve historic character while adding density and ground-level commercial activity. Development in the urban core should be multi-story mixed use development.
 - West State/MLK Street Corridor: Maintain character of a lively commercial district, and promote redevelopment of vacant / underutilized sites and surface parking areas. Support additional housing in this area, particularly in the form of upper floor dwelling units about ground-floor commercial.
 - West End: Transform from car-dominated area with low density development to pedestrian-scale environment with multi-story mixed-use buildings
 - Collegetown: Maintain dense development in the core area of Collegetown while gradually transitioning to surrounding neighborhoods.
 - Southwest: Transform this area from auto-centric commercial strip development to incorporate housing opportunities, offices, medical facilities, and encourage a more attractive urban environment. This will be the lowest density area within the Urban Mixed Use character area due to environmental constraints.

Waterfront Mixed Use

- **Purpose:** Mixed residential, commercial, and water-related uses with emphasis on waterfront access
- **Vision:** Create active waterfront environment while preserving water-related uses and public access; protect viewsheds and enhance pedestrian/bicycle connections; minimize surface parking.
- **Location:** Non-park land between the Flood Control Channel and Route 13, including Inlet Island.

Enterprise

- **Purpose:** Primarily industrial, office, and research/development uses targeted for business expansion and employment opportunities.
- **Vision:** Accommodate specialized housing, office, medical facilities, and potential relocated city facilities.
- **Locations:** Cherry Street, Emerson (major redevelopment opportunity underway), Commercial Avenue, Carpenter Business Park
- Due to development that have occurred since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted, this category could be removed or amended to reflect current conditions.

Areas for Preservation and Enhancement

The remaining future land use categories in Plan Ithaca are intended to be preserved and enhanced – with infill development encouraged so long as it is of high-quality design and compatible with the existing built environment:

Low-Density Residential

- **Purpose:** Preserve existing residential areas averaging fewer than 10 dwelling units per acre
- **Vision:** No significant character changes proposed; infill development must be sensitive to existing neighborhood character
- **Locations:** Portions of West Hill, Belle Sherman, University Hill, South Hill, and Cornell Heights

Medium-Density Residential

- **Purpose:** Maintain existing residential areas averaging 10-20 dwelling units per acre
- **Vision:** Continue providing variety of housing types (single-family, two-family, apartments); and create opportunities for compatible infill development.
- **Locations:** Most of the Flats (Northside, Southside, Fall Creek neighborhoods), portions of East, West and South Hills, Bryant Park, Cornell Heights

Educational

- **Purpose:** Acknowledge existing educational institutions and campus-like settings

Environmentally-Sensitive

- **Purpose:** Protect areas with unique natural features (steep slopes, woodlands, waterways, wetlands)
- **Vision:** Wide range of conditions; some areas may permit limited development with higher review, others prohibit new construction entirely

Historic Districts (Overlay)

- **Purpose:** Preserve areas with high concentration of historically/architecturally significant buildings
- **Vision:** Ensure modifications and new construction receive certificates of appropriateness to maintain historic character
- **Districts:** Clinton Block, Cornell Arts Quad, Cornell Heights, DeWitt Park, Downtown West, East Hill, Henry St. John, University Hill

Focus Areas

The Future Land Use section identifies four special areas requiring particular planning attention:

1. Southwest Ithaca:

- **Opportunities:** 60+ acres of City-owned undeveloped land and over 120 acres of surface parking with potential for significant housing development.
- **Challenges:** Drainage/stormwater/flooding, lack of infrastructure.

2. Undeveloped West Hill Land:

- **Opportunities:** Large tracts suitable for housing and neighborhood commercial.
- **Challenges:** Utility capacity, private ownership, sensitivity to existing character.

3. Emerson (underway):

- **Opportunities:** Former industrial site with major redevelopment potential for mixed uses.
- **Challenges:** Utility capacity, private ownership, sensitivity to existing character.

4. Waterfront:

- **Opportunities:** Prime real estate adjacent to water and well connected to trail network.
- **Challenges:** Utility capacity, undefined character, poor soils, flooding.

Downtown Plan

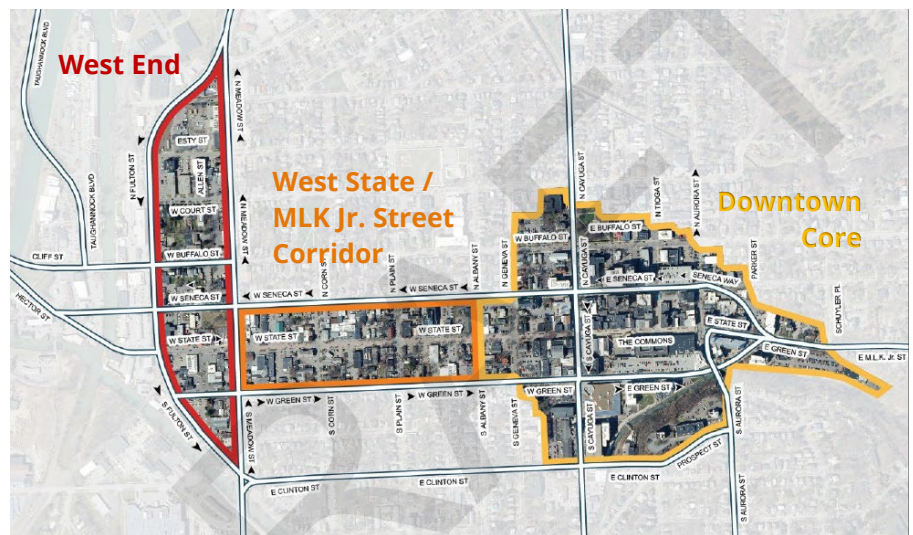
The Downtown Ithaca Plan views zoning as a meaningful way to shape a downtown that is vibrant, inclusive, and easy to navigate. Rather than treating zoning as just a regulatory tool, the plan emphasizes its role in creating a place where people want to live, work, and spend time. While much of downtown is already zoned to support dense, mixed-use development, especially in the Central Business District and West End, the current approach does not always reflect the way people move through the area or how the community wants to grow.

Today's zoning allows buildings to use the full lot with no required setbacks and no minimum parking. This has made it easier to build close to jobs, transit, and services while lowering development costs.

Downtown Character Areas

However, as Ithaca continues to evolve, the plan highlights the need to update zoning to reflect community values like affordability, walkability, and sustainability.

One of the key ideas in the plan is the potential adoption of a form-based code. This would shift the focus from what a building is used for to how it looks and fits into the neighborhood, helping ensure that new development supports a cohesive and welcoming environment.



The plan's zoning-related recommendations include the following:

- Encourage more housing in areas like the West End to support affordability, walkability, and sustainability.
- Consider a form-based code that guides the appearance and scale of buildings to better match the character of downtown.
- Create zoning standards that help new development transition more smoothly into surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- Develop design guidelines for areas such as West End to protect the neighborhood's identity while allowing thoughtful growth.
- Remove zoning barriers that prevent the use of sustainable energy systems, such as district energy networks.
- Use zoning strategies to promote affordable and mixed-income housing throughout downtown.
- Prioritize the reuse of vacant or underused buildings and land to bring activity to key areas.
- Encourage active ground-floor uses in important corridors to support a lively and engaging street experience.
- Maintain zoning policies that eliminate parking minimums in order to lower development costs and support alternative transportation.

Overall, the plan treats zoning as a way to support a future downtown that feels connected, welcoming, and reflective of Ithaca's values. It aims to make zoning work for people, helping create a city center that is not only functional but also full of life and opportunity.

Waterfront Plan

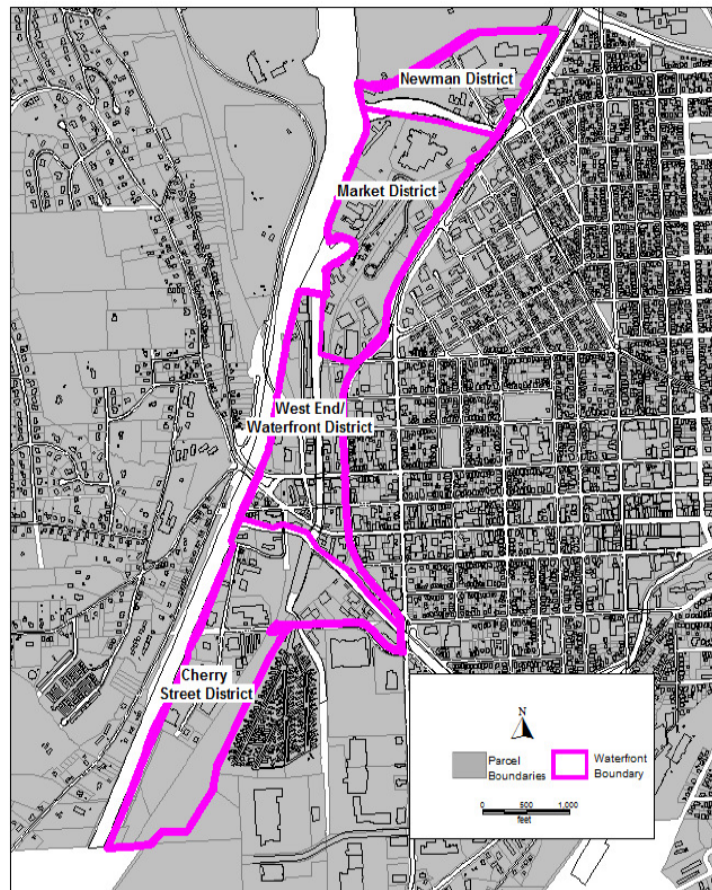
The 2019 City of Ithaca Waterfront Plan offers a vision for transforming the City's waterfront into a more connected, vibrant, and accessible place, and zoning plays a critical role in achieving that vision. The plan identifies zoning as both a challenge and an opportunity in shaping the waterfront's future, particularly in promoting mixed-use development, protecting open space, and encouraging active transportation and public access to the water.

Several key zoning-related takeaways emerge from the plan:

- The plan encourages flexible zoning that allows for a variety of uses within the same area. This includes supporting live-work spaces, small-scale commercial, light industrial, and residential uses in ways that align with the area's unique waterfront context.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing form-based or character-based codes. These approaches would guide the look and feel of buildings and streetscapes, rather than just land use, to ensure new development fits the character and goals of each subarea.
- Zoning updates should prioritize public access to the water, requiring new development to include waterfront trails, view corridors, and gathering spaces where appropriate.
- The plan calls for zoning to better support environmental resilience, including setbacks from the water's edge, green infrastructure, and protections for natural areas like wetlands and floodplains.
- There is also a recommendation to coordinate zoning with transportation and infrastructure planning, so that development is supported by adequate transit, bike, and pedestrian networks.

Overall, the Waterfront Plan views zoning as a key tool to shape the physical, environmental, and social character of the area. It recommends targeted zoning changes to unlock development potential, ensure design quality, promote equity, and preserve public access and natural resources.

Waterfront Character Areas



Parks Master Plan

The 2018 City of Ithaca Parks and Recreation Master Plan presents a clear and thoughtful vision for making the City's parks more welcoming, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all residents. While the plan does not directly address zoning or land use regulations, many of its goals could be supported through future zoning updates and coordinated planning efforts.

The plan focuses on improving park maintenance, adding high-quality amenities, expanding access in underserved areas, and strengthening the connections between parks and the surrounding neighborhoods. It emphasizes the importance of trails, inclusive recreational programming, and ongoing investment in community spaces to create a stronger and more equitable park system.

Even though zoning is not explicitly discussed, several parts of the plan suggest natural connections to land use policy. For example:

- As new development takes place, zoning could help ensure that parks and green spaces are intentionally included as part of the neighborhood design.
- Zoning regulations could encourage better pedestrian and bicycle access by supporting compact development and requiring connections to nearby parks and trails.
- As the city grows, zoning could play a role in protecting existing green spaces and setting aside land for future parks, especially in areas facing development pressure.
- Zoning and planning could work together to make sure that all residents, regardless of where they live, have access to nature, places to gather, and opportunities for recreation.

While zoning may not be at the center of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, it remains a valuable tool for turning the plan's vision into reality. Aligning future zoning and land use decisions with these priorities can help ensure that Ithaca's parks continue to grow with the community and serve everyone well.

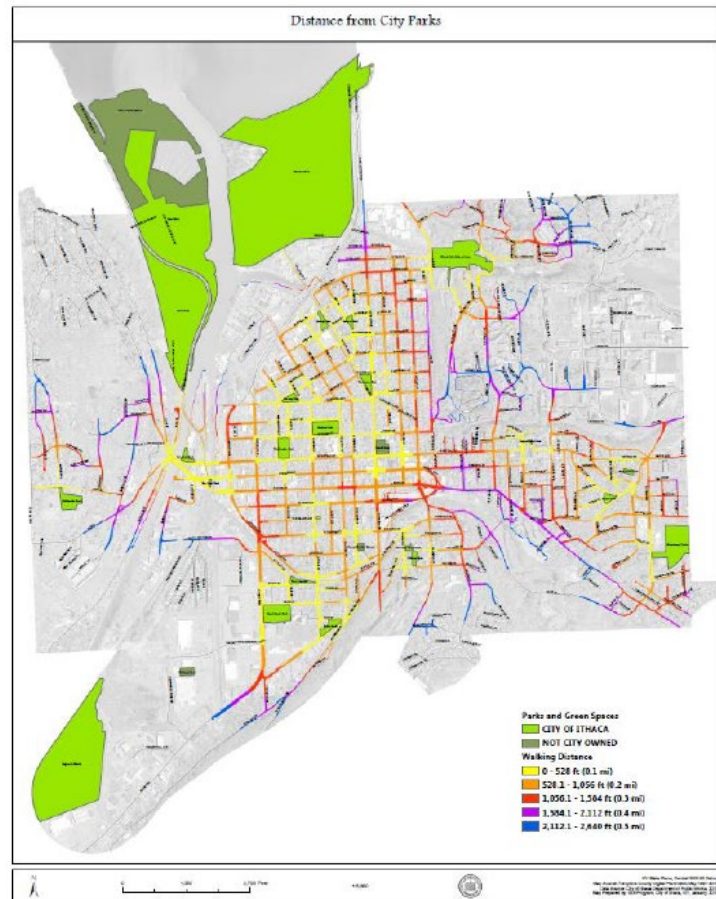


Figure 29-Walking Distance (in feet) From Parks within City of Ithaca Boundaries

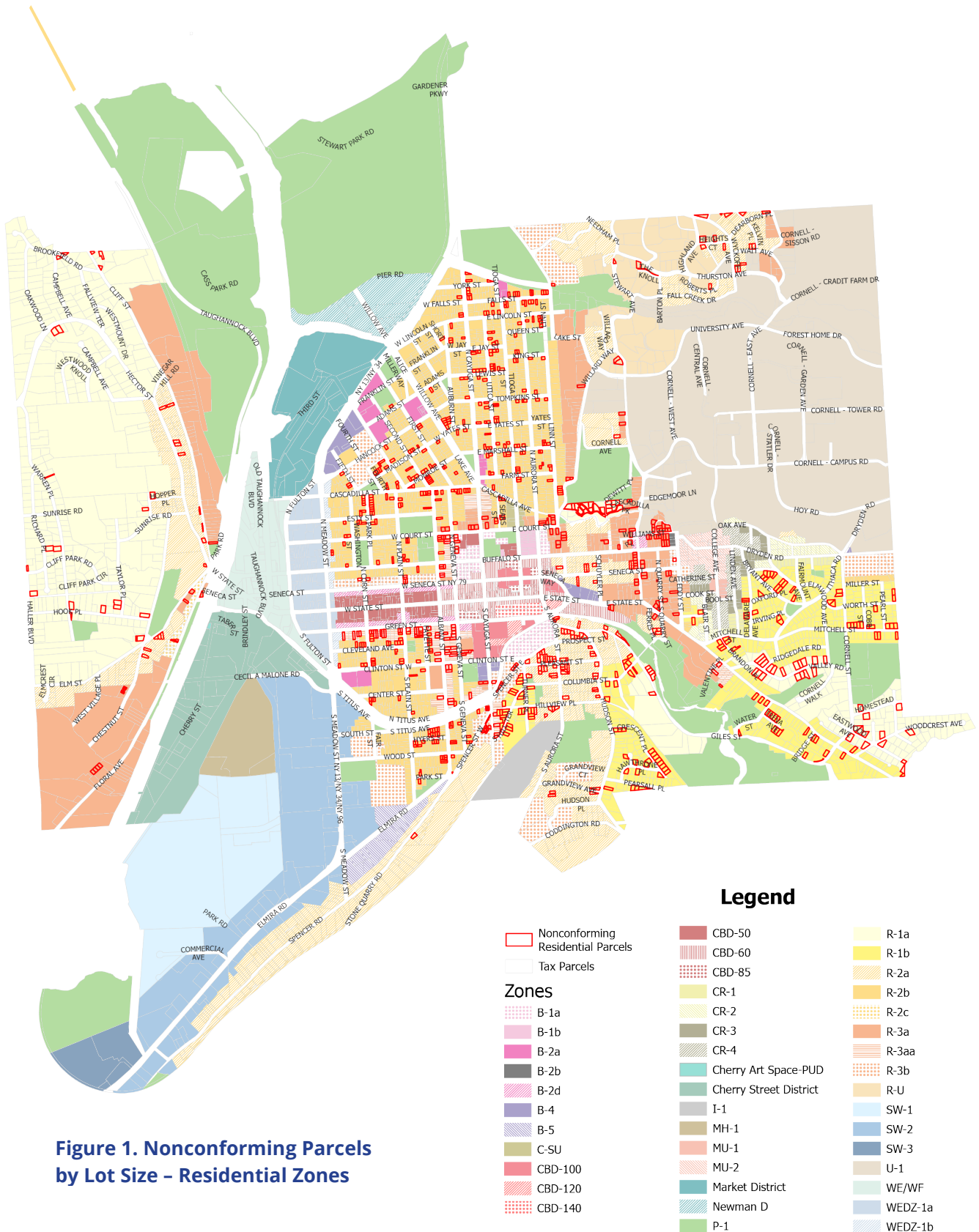
Nonconformity Analysis

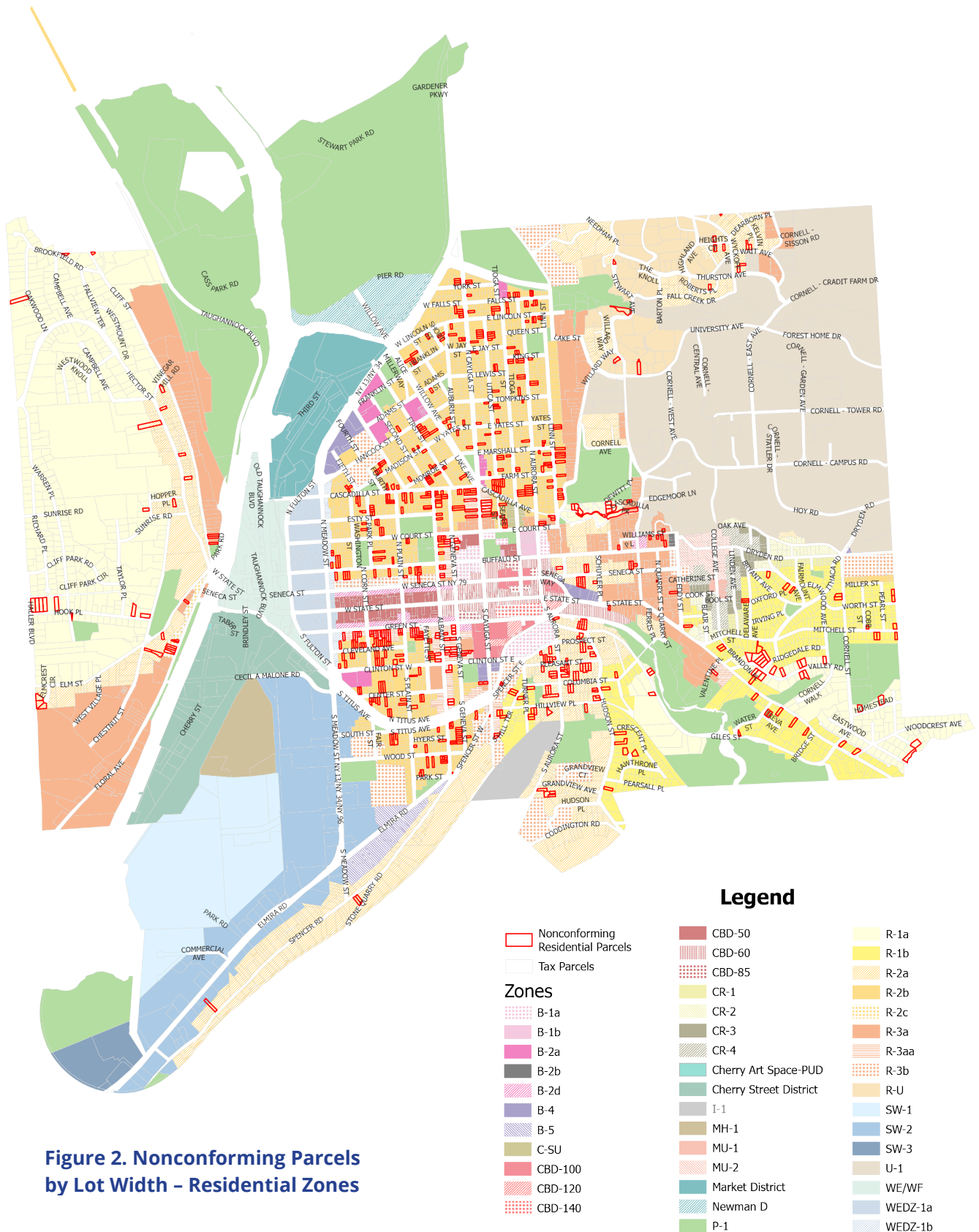
Through stakeholder conversations, the issue of nonconformities was identified as a hindrance to property owners making improvements and further housing development to help address cited affordability issues.

To support this notion, an analysis of parcels within the City's existing residential districts was conducted to quantify the issue. Parcels were flagged that were nonconforming based on minimum lot width (meaning the lot was too narrow compared to the minimum lot width), or minimum lot size (meaning the lot is too small to comply with existing minimum lot size regulations) for the City's nine residential districts. The table below presents the number and percentage of parcels that were identified as nonconforming by zoning district, and the spatial distribution of these parcels are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 on the following pages.

Residential Zone	Nonconforming Parcels by Lot Size (#)	Nonconforming Parcels by Lot Size (%)	Nonconforming Parcel by Lot Width (#)	Nonconforming Parcels by Lot Width (%)	Total Parcels
R-1a	77	14%	45	8%	550
R-1b	128	22%	44	8%	578
R-2a	99	14%	82	12%	684
R-2b	342	19%	349	19%	1841
R-2c	2	10%	6	30%	20
R-3a	95	26%	24	6%	370
R-3aa	68	48%	68	48%	142
R-3b	34	30%	4	4%	114
R-U	9	14%	6	9%	64
Total	854	20%	628	14%	4363

As shown in the table, 14% of the total parcels within the nine residential districts are nonconforming by lot width, and 20% are nonconforming by lot size. There are certain districts that possess higher percentages of nonconformities compared to the total – such as R-3AA, in which almost half of parcels are nonconforming by lot width, size, or both. This analysis indicates that the City and its property owners and residents may benefit from adjustments to minimum lot size and lot width requirements to improve consistency with the existing residential neighborhood development patterns (many of which were developed prior to the adoption of zoning in the City).





Key Zoning Issues & Opportunities

Zoning District & Use Regulations

District Framework

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Where practicable, ensure zoning district boundaries follow parcel lines to reduce situations in which the interpretation of the district boundary may be unclear.	N/A
Address existing properties that may be incorrectly zoned, such as residential lots currently zoned for commercial purposes, which may allow for the “bleed” of more intense development into neighborhoods.	N/A
Consider opportunities for consolidation of similar districts. For instance, the five subdistricts of R-1& R-2 could be consolidated into one or two residential districts.	N/A
Consider elimination of single-family exclusionary zoning, by allowing for two-family residential development in R-1a & R-1b.	Housing A: Facilitate the development of more housing within the city. Housing M: Review the zoning code and consider revisions to increase flexibility for residential development, while preserving desirable neighborhood characteristics.
Consider incorporating smaller tables for permitted uses, bulk and dimensional requirements within zoning code text.	N/A
Consider integrating information contained in § 325-8. District regulations with the district tables for each of reference and move calculation methodologies to district section or article.	N/A
Create separate articles for each sub-type of zoning district and move relevant portions of §325-8 (District regulations) to each respective article.	N/A
Consider moving some notes in revised use charts to zoning code text and referencing section for simplicity of chart.	N/A
Revise nomenclature of residential districts to align with updated purpose / intent of each district and revised allowed uses.	N/A
Revise nomenclature of business districts as “mixed-use” districts, in accordance with the vision of the Comprehensive Plan.	Economic Development M: Encourage mixed-use development that includes a range of housing types and employment opportunities, in coordination with the goals of the Land Use chapter.
Consider revising how the U-1 District is applied outside of University-owned property.	N/A

Use Regulations

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Use consistent nomenclature for use categories across districts (E.g. Health care facilities in vs. medical or dental office)	N/A
Consolidate and simplify use categories (E.g. "Confectionery, millinery, dressmaking or other activities involving light hand fabrication as well as sales")	N/A
Remove cumulative use lists (addressed with table revisions in 2024).	N/A
Remove single- and two-family uses as permitted uses in business districts to promote highest and best use of relevant zoned parcels.	Economic Development D: Encourage infill and redevelopment of underutilized properties, in coordination with the goals of the Land Use chapter. Economic Development G: Ensure that land use regulations provide sufficient appropriate areas zoned to meet the demand for business and employment-based activities.
Move the specific use conditions listed under §325-9 (Standards for special conditions and special permits) and group with other use-based requirements under Article V (Supplementary Regulations), such as short-term rentals and accessory dwelling units.	N/A
Consider the development of an inclusionary affordable or workforce housing zoning requirement that dictates mixed or multi-family housing developments of a certain size threshold must include of a percentage of below-market-rate units (such as 10-20%), or the development of an incentive zoning policy to accommodate affordable or workforce housing in exchange for density bonuses.	Housing C: Develop policies to mandate the inclusion of affordable units within new market-rate housing developments.
Consider addition of supportive commercial uses in residential areas where they already exist / are appropriate	Land Use C: Maintain a balance of allowed non-residential uses in residential areas to preserve and enhance neighborhood character.

Bulk & Dimensional Requirements

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Remove use of occupants to dictate minimum lot size in single-family dwellings and create a single lot size standard for all single-family homes (detached vs. attached).	N/A
Replace minimum lot size requirements dictated by number of units / bedrooms for multiple-family dwellings with single lot size standard for all multi-family dwellings.	N/A

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Consider how building height requirements apply within floodplains.	N/A
Review and revise minimum lot size requirements, particularly in residential districts where many nonconformities exist (see Figures 1 and 2 on pages 18 and 19).	Housing A: Facilitate the development of more housing within the city.
Review and revise yard requirements, particularly front yard requirements in the Waterfront districts, and clarify how yard requirements are calculated, particularly rear yards.	N/A
Create singular or consolidate bulk and dimensional requirements for one-family detached dwellings, one-family detached zero lot line dwellings, one-family semi-detached dwelling; two-family dwellings; and one-family attached dwellings.	N/A
Consider replacing front setback requirements with “most common on the block” to encourage consistency with the existing development pattern.	N/A
Consider the implementation of a maximum front yard setback requirement in certain districts to facilitate a consistent streetwall.	N/A
	Natural Resources U: Implement a minimum green space requirement in residential neighborhoods throughout the city.
Develop a minimum open space requirement for all districts, as desired / applicable.	Land Use G: Work with neighboring municipalities to explore mechanisms to preserve green space surrounding the city and prevent sprawl, such as a transfer of development rights program.

Development Standards

Off Street Parking

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Standardize minimum parking requirements by use across all or most districts.	N/A
Implement parking maximums.	Water Resources & Stormwater Management K: Discourage new construction of impervious surfaces and encourage conversion of existing impervious surfaces into pervious surfaces or landscaping.
Consider reducing or removing minimum parking requirements in certain mixed use areas to foster a more walkable character.	

	Transportation G: Consider the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in decisions concerning on-street parking.
Incorporate green infrastructure practices in off-street parking requirements to help manage stormwater runoff and reduce urban heat island effect.	Water Resources & Stormwater Management G: Preserve green space and other natural systems (stream corridors, detention ponds, wetlands, etc.) that enhance water quality and quantity.
Utilize graphics to help illustrate landscaping requirements, pedestrian and cyclist connectivity, and access management within parking areas.	Transportation H: Accommodate multiple modes of transportation in all public and private developments and maintenance projects.

Landscaping & Screening

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Develop landscaping standards for nonresidential and multifamily development.	N/A
Incorporate green infrastructure principles to assist in stormwater management.	Water Resources & Stormwater Management G: Preserve green space and other natural systems (stream corridors, detention ponds, wetlands, etc.) that enhance water quality and quantity.
Establish screening and buffering requirements between conflicting uses.	N/A
Identify appropriate plant species for use in development projects in Ithaca.	N/A

Signs

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Consider integration of Chapter 272 (Signs) into the Zoning Code Chapter for ease of reference.	N/A
Remove content-based provisions, to the greatest extent practicable, and consider additional sign types that may be desirable in the City.	N/A
Update and adapt sign code to vary allowable sign types, size, and design by district.	N/A
Clarify or potentially remove the specific sign variance process between the Planning Board and BZA. Without clear and explicit limitations under which the variances may be allowed, there is increased potential for content-based decisions.	N/A

Design Standards

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Consider codifying design guidelines for nonresidential and multi-family development to bolster their use and require certain design elements as a part of the development process.	Land Use F: Implement design standards and policies that require sustainable building practices and technologies. Historic Preservation Q: Use patterns of traditional design - including detailing, materiality, size, mass, form, rhythm and scale - which all enhance the sense of place within historic neighborhoods, to inform future development.
Consider creating lighting guidance for exterior lighting that complies with Dark Sky International standards.	N/A
Establish better transitional provisions for areas where nonresidential uses abut existing neighborhoods. This may include transitional building and site design treatments, allowing for a gradual increase in scale, density, and intensity of use.	Housing N: Develop standards and guidelines for new development to promote compatible design.
Consider a stepback requirement for taller structures and/or building height bonuses to address solar access and visual scale concerns.	N/A

Administrative & Development Application Procedures

Format & Organization

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Develop a review procedure flowchart for various applications, such as site plan review and special use permits, to ensure applicants understand the various steps of the process. This will also help provide clarity where concurrent and/or consecutive reviews may be required.	Economic Development H: Align land use regulations with the project review and permitting process to support the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.
Consider integrating existing Chapters 276 (Site Plan Review) and 160 (Design Review) into the Zoning Code Chapter, as they are primarily zoning based procedures. To further streamline the process, incorporate the design review recommendation process directly into site plan review.	
Ensure Chapter 228 (Landmarks Preservation and Certificates of Appropriateness) is consistently and clearly referenced in the Zoning Code to ensure applicants are aware of the potential addition application review process in the context of historic buildings and sites.	Historic Preservation D: Continue to annually notify owners of historic properties about the designated status of their property; local, state, and federal incentive programs for preservation activities; and the Ithaca Landmarks Preservation Commission (ILPC) approval process.

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Remove specific fees identified (e.g. §276-8 and §325-9 E) and instead refer to a general fee schedule. This way any necessary fee adjustments may be made by resolution of Common Council, rather than having to go through a full code amendment procedure.	Fiscal Health M: Regularly evaluate and adjust fees to better reflect the costs of providing City services.
Create a comprehensive table or other graphic indicating the various triggers and thresholds for various development application reviews. E.g. the applicability and exceptions for site plan review.	N/A
Remove the list of uses requiring a special permit under §325-9 as it creates the potential for inconsistencies with the district regulations use charts if not updated in tandem. The reference to the chart would provide more clarity.	N/A

Required Review Processes

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Establish a general application and review procedures section that addresses the steps which remain consistent for all applications. For example, the conditions for application acceptance and processing, procedures required referrals, public hearings, and public notices, and rendering of decisions by the review bodies. This will help reduce inconsistencies and redundancies repeated throughout the code.	N/A
The current sketch plan conference procedure functions more as a pre-application conference, providing guidance on the process rather than preliminary feedback on the proposed development. Consider further expanding the sketch plan review process to provide applicants with an opportunity for informal, nonbinding feedback from staff and/or the Planning Board on concept plans. This will help applicants respond to preliminary concerns and recommendations prior to investing in a full and complete development package.	N/A

Review Roles & Criteria

Assessment Recommendation	Relevant Plan Ithaca Recommendation
Review the membership and roles of the Planning Board outlined in Chapter 4 (Administration of Government) and consider moving the Planning Board section to the Zoning Code for consistency.	N/A
Review and clarify the BZA membership requirements, including removal of specific year references.	N/A
Reconsider the approach for zoning permit and variance eligibility (§325-35) as the variance procedure, by NYS Law, is not intended to be a flexible process. Increasing the parameters and context for staff-level review may be a more appropriate step or providing specific guidelines for Planning Board discretion to modify requirements based on certain building and site limitations. Addressing some of the nonconformities created by some overly restricted provisions of the code may also reduce the need for this section.	N/A
Expand upon the special use permit review criteria to provide more context to modern use impacts and allow the review boards to better evaluate uses not otherwise listed.	N/A
Review the current appeals process and review criteria for consistency with NYS Law. The application of additional considerations and restrictions is cautioned, as NYS Law explicitly outlined the criteria under which an area or use variance may be permitted.	N/A
Remove the provision for the expiration of variances as NYS Law asserts variances, once granted, are permanent and run with the land until the conditions creating such variance are otherwise removed or no longer applicable due to code updates, changes of use, or site improvements increasing conformity.	N/A

Anticipated Revisions by Section

Revised Code Structure

The specific language and content of the revisions to the code will ultimately be determined as the planned zoning code update effort is underway. Specific input and direction will be obtained through discussions with the designated Steering Committee, City Staff, key stakeholders, and the public. However, we have provided a preliminary outline of a potential approach and amendments in the tables beginning on page 21. The outline shows Chapter 325 (Zoning) broken up into four distinct parts or volumes, helping to better organize the various sections by topic. These parts include:

Part 1.	Introductory Provisions
Part 2.	District & Use Regulations
Part 3.	Design & Development Regulations
Part 4.	Application & Review Procedures

Table References

Each of the columns in the tables provide additional context relating the proposed code outline to existing code provisions, potential revisions thereto.

- **Proposed Article** – The new article numbering and titles as proposed to support the reorganization of the code into a more user-friendly format.
- **Relevant Existing Sections** – References to existing Zoning Code sections that are applicable under the proposed article topic. Existing language from these sections will be carried over into the new format and reviewed, revised, or removed as appropriate.
- **Anticipated Revisions & Considerations** – A summary of key considerations and recommendations for potential edits that may be made to the existing sections during the review and drafting process of the proposed article.

Other Relevant Chapters

It should be noted that there are several chapters of the City Code outside of Chapter 325 that may be impacted by or relevant to the zoning code update. These chapters include, but are not limited to:

- Chapter 4 – Administration of Government
- Chapter 146 – Building Code Enforcement
- Chapter 160 – Design Review (recommend relocating to Chapter 325)
- Chapter 176 – Environmental Quality Review
- Chapter 186 – Flood Damage Prevention
- Chapter 210 – Housing Standards
- Chapter 228 – Landmarks Preservation
- Chapter 272 – Signs (recommend relocating to Chapter 325)
- Chapter 276 – Site Plan Review (recommend relocating to Chapter 325)
- Chapter 282 – Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control
- Chapter 290 – Subdivision of Land

Revisions to these Chapters would not typically be included in a zoning code update effort; however, potential conflicts and needed updates should be identified and tracked as the project progresses.

Part 1. Introductory Provisions

PROPOSED ARTICLE	RELEVANT EXISTING SECTIONS	ANTICIPATED REVISIONS & CONSIDERATIONS
Article 10. Establishment		
§ 325-1. Title. § 325-2. Statutory authority and purpose.		- Refine and update intent and interpretation language for consistency with NYS Law - Update purpose and intent to align with Comprehensive Plan and other relevant studies - Add transitional provisions
Article 11. Zoning Map		
§ 325-5. Zoning Map. § 325-6. Interpretation of boundaries. § 325-7. Application of regulations.		- Update to reflect revised district framework - Consider creating interactive online zoning map or a way of making zoning map more accessible - Consider zoning district boundary adjustments to follow existing and future desired land use development patterns
Article 12. Review Bodies		
§ 325-37. Enforcement officer; assistance; appeals. § 325-40. Board of Appeals; variances.		- Review for consistency with NYS Law - Articulate powers/duties of the Common Council as related to the administration of the zoning code - Relocate Planning Board section from Chapter 4 to address powers/duties as related to the administration of the zoning code - Consolidate board membership provisions and ensure consistency with NYS Law
Article 13. Terminology		
§ 325-3. Definitions and word usage.		- Add, remove, and revise definitions as necessary - Relocate definitions located in various sections to this section, where appropriate

Part 2. District & Use Regulations.

PROPOSED ARTICLE	RELEVANT EXISTING SECTIONS	ANTICIPATED REVISIONS & CONSIDERATIONS
Article 20. Residential Districts		
§ 325-8. District regulations. § 325-4. Establishment of districts.		- Review and revise applicability and purpose of districts to ensure they are achieving intent (May remove, combine, or add new districts) - Update permitted/specially permitted use lists - Address Plan recommendations for varied housing types - Consider addition of supportive commercial uses in areas where they already exist / are appropriate - Consider implementation of a minimum green space requirement - Ensure dimensional and bulk requirements fit existing and desired development patterns - Reference development standards and additional use regulations, where applicable - Reduce inconsistencies and conflicts with Housing Standards
Article 21. Mixed Use Districts		
§ 325-8. District regulations. § 325-4. Establishment of districts.		- Consider redefining districts to reflect modern practice of mixing compatible uses and ensure districts are achieving their intended purpose (May remove, combine, or add new districts) - Update permitted/specially permitted use lists - Identify areas for permitting food-production and food-processing enterprises where appropriate - Support urban agriculture uses - Address Plan recommendations for continued mixed-use development in activity centers - Ensure dimensional and bulk requirements fit desired development pattern and character - Reference development standards and additional use regulations, where applicable
Article 22. Special Purpose Districts		
§ 325-8. District regulations. § 325-4. Establishment of districts. § 325-24. Special performance standards in Industrial District; penalties for offenses. ARTICLE VIII. Courthouse Special Use Zone § 325-12. Planned unit developments (PUD). ARTICLE X. Cliff Street Retreat Planned Unit Development District		- Incorporate Overlay Districts into one section for ease of reference. - Consider revising how the U-1 District is applied outside of University-owned property. - Review and revise applicability and purpose of districts to ensure they are achieving intent (May remove, combine, or add new districts) - Update permitted/specially permitted use lists - Ensure dimensional and bulk requirements fit existing and desired development patterns - Reference development standards and additional use regulations, where applicable

Article 23. West End & Southwest Districts

§ 325-8. District regulations.

§ 325-4. Establishment of districts.

§ 325-29.2. Southwest District.

- Review and revise use list to support Plan recommendations to transform area from auto-centric commercial center to mixed use, urban environment
- Consider soil limitations & floodplains in development bulk & density requirements
- Review/revise permitted/specially permitted use lists
- Ensure dimensional and bulk requirements fit existing and desired development patterns
- Reference development standards and additional use regulations, where applicable

Article 24. Waterfront Districts

§ 325-8. District regulations.

§ 325-4. Establishment of districts.

- Strengthen use of graphics and form-based elements, particularly with how develop interfaces with the public right-of-way
- Consider bolstering incentive zoning to foster more public open space / walkways, and access to the waterfront
- Incorporate requirements for green infrastructure
- Clarify building height requirements with visual representation
- Ensure bulk & dimensional requirements support desired walkable character of the waterfront

Article 25. Collegetown Districts

§ 325-8. District regulations.

§ 325-4. Establishment of districts.

ARTICLE IX. Collegetown Zoning

- Consider creating more flexibility in form-based standards, and creating rewards for “good projects,” such as expedited review processes

Article 26. Additional Use Regulations

§ 325-9. Standards for special conditions and special permits.

§ 325-10. Additional conditions for special permits.

§ 325-22. Motels.

§ 325-25. Location of accessory structures.

§ 325-27. Short-term rentals.

§ 325-29.1. Adult uses.

ARTICLE VA. Telecommunications Facilities and Services

Chapter 152. Communications Technology

- Consolidate all regulations pertaining to certain uses into one Article, separate from regulations that apply City- or district-wide
- Update list of uses to include modern uses which may warrant additional requirements to mitigate potential negative impacts, such as keeping of bees, breweries, cannabis uses, etc.
- Ensure alignment between Article VA of the zoning code and Chapter 152 telecommunications provisions

Article 27. Supplemental Use Regulations

§ 325-15. Use regulations.

§ 325-16. Height regulations.

§ 325-17. Area regulations.

§ 325-18. Yard regulations.

§ 325-19. Transition regulations.

§ 325-23. General standards applying to all land uses.

§ 325-26. New structures along streams or inlets.

§ 325-29. Landmarks.

- Clarify / simplify yard calculation methodology
- Remove any use-specific requirements and move into proposed Article 26

§ 325-29.3. Dumpsters.

Part 3. Development Standards

PROPOSED ARTICLE	RELEVANT EXISTING SECTIONS	ANTICIPATED REVISIONS & CONSIDERATIONS
Article 30. Circulation, Access, Parking & Loading		
§ 325-20. Off-street parking. § 325-21. Off-street loading.		- Standardize minimum parking requirements by use across all or most districts - Implement parking maximums. - Consider reducing or removing minimum parking requirements - Incorporate green infrastructure practices in off-street parking requirements - Utilize graphics to help illustrate landscaping requirements, pedestrian and cyclist connectivity, and access management within parking areas
Article 31. Landscaping & Screening		
		- Develop landscaping regulations pertaining to nonresidential and multifamily development - Identify screening requirements between conflicting uses - Identify appropriate plant species and minimum plant sizes - Incorporate green infrastructure principles to assist in stormwater management and reduce urban heat island effect
Article 32. Building & Site Design		
Collegetown Design Guidelines Downtown Design Guidelines Southwest Area Design Guidelines Waterfront Design Guidelines		- Consider codifying baseline design standards for all nonresidential development in the City - Consider codifying area-specific design standards
Article 33. Signs		
Chapter 272. Signs		- Consider integrating Chapter 272 into Zoning - Implement a content neutral approach - Utilize revised district framework to regulate signs in each district by type rather than use
Article 34. Outdoor Lighting		
		- Consider creating lighting guidance - Align with Dark Sky International standards

Part 4. Administrative & Review Procedures

PROPOSED ARTICLE	RELEVANT EXISTING SECTIONS	ANTICIPATED REVISIONS & CONSIDERATIONS
Article 40. General Application Procedures		
§ 325-9. Standards for special conditions and special permits. § 325-12. Planned unit developments (PUD). § 325-40. Board of Appeals; variances. § 325-41. Zoning permits. Chapter 176. Environmental Quality Review		- Establish a basic procedure for the processing and review of all applications - Consider areas where development review procedures may be streamlined or simplified - Reduce potential for conflict where more than one review board is involved - Create procedural flowcharts
Article 41. Required Permits		
§ 325-35. Zoning permit and variance eligibility. § 325-38. Building permits. § 325-39. Certificates of occupancy. § 325-41. Zoning permits.		Consolidate existing regulations into singular article for ease of reference
Article 42. Site Plan Review		
Chapter 276. Site Plan Review. Chapter 160. Design Review Chapter 228. Landmarks Preservation		- Consider integrating Chapter 276 and Chapter 260 into Zoning Chapter for ease of reference. - Create tables identifying site plan / design review triggers for ease of reference - Clarify relationship between Site Plan Review and Design Review processes
Article 43. Special Use Permits		
ARTICLE III. Special Permits and Related Special Conditions		- Relocate application procedures to Article 40 - Clarify relationship with Site Plan Review and Design Review processes
Article 44. Planned Unit Development		
§ 325-12. Planned unit developments (PUD).		Amend as necessary to provide better guidance for use and implementation
Article 45. Subdivision		
§ 325-11. Cluster subdivisions Chapter 290. Subdivision		Reference Chapter 290 in the context of zoning applications to formalize connection in the development review process
Article 46. Variances, Appeals, & Amendments		
§ 325-37. Enforcement officer; assistance; appeals. § 325-40. Board of Appeals; variances. ARTICLE XI. Amendments § 325-35. Zoning permit and variance eligibility.		- Update to reflect new references, as necessary - Ensure consistency with NYS Law

Article 47. Nonconformities**ARTICLE VI. Nonconforming Uses, Buildings and Lots**

- Amend nonconforming provisions for uses and structures as desired

Article 48. Penalties & Fees**ARTICLE XII. Penalties**

§ 325-9. Standards for special conditions and special permits.

§ 325-40. Board of Appeals; variances.

- Amend as necessary
 - Remove specific fees; reference fee schedule
-