

South Milwaukee

Summary of Chapter 15 Zoning Chapter Changes

Adopted May 6, 2025

Zoning Chapter Amendment Goals

- Streamline and simplify permitting and development review processes, such as removing conditional uses, developing site design standards, and allowing administrative approvals of minor zoning regulations.
- Address levy limits and housing needs, to allow varying land uses and context-sensitive density increases, permitting 1-2 dwelling unit buildings in residential areas and growth in key corridors.
- Create a framework for easier updates over time as city and market conditions change.

Summary of Zoning Changes

New Districts

Zoning Districts

- The number of zoning districts decreased from 11 to 6, eliminating the public (B) use district, combining single-family (R-A) and two-family (R-B) districts, and merging manufacturing districts (M-1, M-2) into a single district.
- Moved the Flood Plain section language from the zoning chapter, creating a new chapter 35, per WisDNR.
- Added criteria for Planned Development Districts.
- Changed all split-zoned parcels to a single-zoned.

	Z-1 Natural Zone
	Z-2 Sub-Urban Zone
	Z-3 General Urban Zone
	Z-4 Urban Center Zone
	M-1 Manufacturing Zone
	PDD Planned Development District

Exhibit A: New Zoning District Map

Exhibit B: Previous Zoning District Map

Lot and Building Regulations

Building setbacks, heights, lot widths and impervious coverage

- To support incremental density increases, lot width ranges were added and minimum lot area requirements removed, which previously increased as the number of housing units increased.

NOTE: Minimum lot sizes are not conducive to smaller single-family homes, townhomes, and other historically common housing types. The addition of lot width ranges varies by district, allowing lot divisions or combinations, with maximum lot widths established to prohibit large lot combinations.

- Simplified front yard setback calculations and ensured new building locations are contextual to surrounding structures.
- Building heights may incrementally increase the further set back from the front property line to support gentle density goals, limited by adjacent building height averages.
- Removed side yard setbacks in the Z-4 District commercial areas and along major and minor street arterials in the Z-3 District, with further setback requirements in context to adjacent principal buildings. Removed side yard setback language that previously increased as the number of dwelling units increased.

Land Uses

Residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, educational, recreation

The previous lengthy list of permitted and conditional uses was replaced with land use categories allowing for a wider range of compatible uses, which simplifies the approval process.

NOTE: Use categories reduce the need for special and conditional approvals, variances, or zoning amendments and also promote economic development. Some uses deemed undesirable is often because of lack of site design standards, now added, that ensure neighborhood compatibility.

- One- and two-family dwellings are allowed in the Z-2 and Z-3 Districts and are no longer permitted in the Z-4 district that is for higher-density developments. Two-family uses may be within a single building or a separate accessory structure.
- In the Z-3 District, single-family structures up to multifamily residential developments are allowed. Multifamily are limited to arterial street types only. Mercantile and professional businesses are allowed along major and minor arterial streets within the Z-3 District only.
- Any use not listed as permitted or not deemed similar to a permitted use by the zoning administrator, is prohibited.
- Auto repair-related businesses were previously by conditional use permit in all commercial and manufacturing districts, now permitted in M-1 Districts only.
- Home occupations contain flexible language while further detailing prohibited uses and criteria.

NOTE: Home occupations include uses accessory to residential uses that allow residents to engage in customary home-based work activities while also helping to ensure that they do not subject neighboring residents to adverse impacts.

Site Design Standards

Site design standards were created to ensure that site improvements, building additions or alterations and developments are functional, safe, aesthetically pleasing, and environmentally responsible. They also establish objective and timely reviews. Most standards apply to new construction or significant improvement projects.

Architectural Standards

Previously adopted commercial façade design guidelines were incorporated into the code, listing acceptable façade materials for all uses, most notable that all sides of a building exterior shall use similar materials including on accessory structures. Most other site standards do not apply to 1- 2 family dwellings.

Parking

Excessive parking supply minimums were reduced and shared parking credits incorporated that factor in nearby public parking, on-street parking, permanent bicycle racks, and shared parking agreements with adjacent properties.

The addition of parking lot design requirements improve safety by differentiating internal pedestrian circulation from driving lanes.

NOTE: An increasing number of urban cities continue to reduce or remove parking minimums, letting the market or property owners decide. Parking minimums are shown to be arbitrary, often set for extreme capacities. When an excessive amount of space is allocated to cars, there is less space for jobs, services, housing, and sustainable transport options.

Landscaping & Screening

Landscaping regulations were added and screening (fencing) language enhanced to help contribute to the visual quality, environmental health and character of the community.

Landscaping requirements **do not** apply to 1 & 2-family residential uses

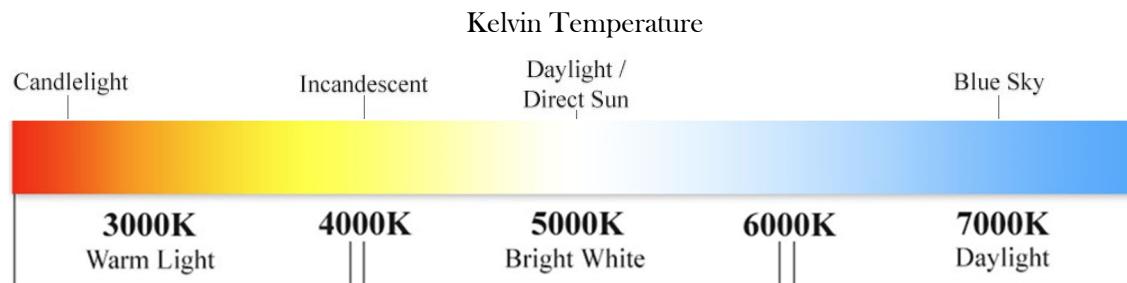
- Screening regulations for parking lots, outdoor storage and work areas, and trash areas apply when visible from any publicly accessible right-of-way, walkway or adjacent property, providing several options, using either plantings, fencing or walls.
- Interior areas of parking lots now require canopy trees, based on the number of parking spaces provided.

Lighting

Previous outdoor lighting regulations were descriptive and applied to all properties, permitting minuscule indirect light from spilling over onto other properties and prohibiting glare and nuisance situations.

The new code further specifies how lighting is measured and limits color temperature to 3,000 Kelvins and total light output on a property, that shares similarities with DarkSky practices. Allowed light spillover in residential districts was lowered and exempts low wattage ornamental landscape light fixtures. Swapping out bulbs does not require compliance with new requirements as long as performance standards are met for glare and spillover.

NOTE: DarkSky is a recognized worldwide authority combatting light pollution. A growing body of evidence links the brightening night sky directly to measurable negative impacts on: wildlife and ecosystems, human health, crime and safety, energy and climate change, night sky heritage and scientific research.



NOTE: The Kelvin temperature of a light represents the color that a bulb produces.

Sign codes

The sign code was reorganized and remains largely intact, with some notable changes. The maximum number of business wall signs was eliminated, now based on the façade width. Single-pole freestanding signs are now permitted, removing landscaped bed requirements around all freestanding signs. Freestanding sign heights may also increase the further set back from the front property line. Special exceptions requests to the Plan Commission were removed, deemed unnecessary given the majority of requests were for previously prohibited single pole signs. Permanent sign material language clarifies industry standards, reducing exterior signs constructed of inappropriate temporary materials.