

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite and Comprehensive Map Amendment: Community Engagement Summary

April 2025



Introduction

The City of Rockville is undertaking a comprehensive rewrite of the city's Zoning Ordinance to modernize this chapter of the city code so that it better accommodates the changing living, working, and recreation trends of the 21st century. Zoning is a system of laws and regulations that local governments use to control how land is used in different areas of the city.

Zoning divides land into different “zones” or “districts,” each with specific rules about what can be built and how the property can be used. For example:

- **Residential zones** allow for individual houses, apartments, and related uses
- **Industrial zones** allow for warehouses, automobile repair, self-storage, etc.
- **Mixed-use zones:** allow a combination of residential and commercial uses (businesses like shops, offices, or restaurants)

Zoning rules also control things like building height, parking requirements, how close buildings can be to the street or to one another, and the processes by which development can be approved. The goal is to organize growth, reduce conflicts between different land uses, and support public health, safety, and community planning.

This Zoning Ordinance Rewrite follows the adoption of the Rockville 2040 Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan) in 2021. One of the primary goals of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is to implement the Comprehensive Plan's land use and zoning goals and policies, and those of supporting plans. In addition to implementing the Comprehensive Plan, along with other goals listed in the Project Objectives portion of this report.

At the same time as the text of the Zoning Ordinance is being updated, the city's zoning map will be comprehensively amended through a Comprehensive Map Amendment (CMA). The rezonings proposed through the CMA were identified and recommended in the Comprehensive Plan and are already adopted policy but have yet to be incorporated into the city's zoning map. The process of updating the Zoning Ordinance and the zoning map, though separate, are running concurrently to one another and are joined as two parts of the same project. As such, this report includes community outreach and engagement for both portions of this project (the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite and the Comprehensive Map Amendment).

Project Phases

The project consists of the following phases and anticipated timelines:

- **Project Kickoff:** Fall 2023

- **Diagnose Phase:** Winter 2023/2024

During this phase, the project team reviewed and identified the issues and strengths of the current Zoning Ordinance and analyzed whether and how the Zoning Ordinance is aligned with goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

- **Calibrate Phase:** Summer 2024 – Winter 2024/2025

Using guidance provided by the Comprehensive Plan along with community input, this phase identified and proposed effective base standards of the updated Zoning Ordinance and solved for issues identified in in the Diagnose phase.

- **Drafting Phase:** Winter 2024/2025 – Fall 2025

Following on the proposed new standards, this phase develops a user-friendly, concise, and well-written Zoning Ordinance, as well as an updated zoning map.

- **Adoption Phase:** Winter 2025/2026 – Spring 2026

The adoption phase will consist of facilitated review by the Planning Commission and Mayor and Council, public hearings, and ultimately adoption of the updated Zoning Ordinance and map amendment.

Project Objectives

The following objectives have been identified for the ZOR and CMA project:

- Implement many of the recommended land use actions identified in the Rockville 2040 Comprehensive Plan, including implementing the Plan's zoning recommendations.
- Accomplish goals from the city's ongoing FAST Initiative, making the development review and permitting process Faster, Accountable, Smarter and Transparent.
- Incorporate planning and zoning best practices that have become common in the field of urban planning and in other similarly situated communities;
- Incorporate the city's commitment to equity, resilience, and sustainability, as described in the 2021 Mayor and Council social justice resolution and the 2022 Climate Action Plan.
- Ensure compliance with current federal and state regulations.
- Create a modern ordinance that can accommodate the changing living, working, and lifestyles of the 21st century.

- Create a user-friendly, accessible, and well-organized document that provides appropriate graphics and information to aid in its understanding.

Methodology and Process for Getting Feedback

The initial community engagement that forms the basis for the ZOR and CMA took place several years ago, during the Rockville 2040 Comprehensive Plan process. Throughout the Comprehensive Plan process, dozens of community meetings, workshops and charettes were held to identify the community's vision for Rockville's future. Extensive community engagement efforts for the Comprehensive Plan started in 2015 and continued over the course of six years. The outcome of these meetings are the policies in the Comprehensive Plan, adopted by the Mayor and Council in August 2021, which formalize Rockville's dedication to bringing the community's vision to life. Many of the changes to the text of the Zoning Ordinance through the ZOR project are based on this shared community vision, along with other policy guidance adopted by the Mayor and Council, including the Climate Action Plan, Pedestrian and Bikeways Master Plans, and the Mayor and Council's Social Justice Resolution. Other changes to the Zoning Ordinance through the ZOR are a result of national best practices, clarifying language, fixing identified issues and nonconformities, or reorganizing the code for ease of use.

In addition to changes to the text of the Ordinance, the project will also change the city's zoning map through a Comprehensive Map Amendment. The proposed zoning changes (or "rezonings") result directly from the specific land use and zoning recommendations called for within the Comprehensive Plan and the Town Center Master Plan.

Building on initial community engagement exercises from the Comprehensive Plan, Community Planning and Development Services staff developed a targeted engagement plan to ensure the community is aware of the ZOR and CMA project, what changes the project may present, and opportunities for community members to learn more and provide feedback. A summary of the methodology used during the five project phases are detailed in this section.

Engage Rockville Website

A [project page](#) on the Engage Rockville website has been the main tool for spreading information on this project. The Engage Rockville page was published in September 2024 and consists of several key features and widgets:

- **Project Timeline:** A visual representation of project process and timeline.
- **Key Dates:** Information about upcoming meetings and project deadlines.
- **Project Documents:** Links to key documents involved in or produced throughout the project.

- **Project Resources:** Links to background information on zoning and related city initiatives.
- **Frequently Asked Questions:** A series of common questions about zoning and the project as a whole.
- **News Feed:** A series of short articles providing project updates and opportunities for feedback.
- **Survey:** A short survey was posted in fall 2024 to gauge the public's background knowledge on this project, and as an opportunity to express interest in participating in a focus group or other event to stay engaged with the project. This survey was advertised through Rockville Reports and social media, as well as during all public meetings.

Engage Rockville also has the ability for users to “subscribe” to receive periodic updates via email. As of April 2025, the ZOR and CMA project had a total of 168 subscribers on Engage Rockville. Subscribers have received up to four emails with updates on the project delivered directly to their inbox, depending on when they subscribed.

Public Workshops

Two public workshops were held in October 2024 to kick off the public-facing portion of the project and educate the community on what to expect as the project progresses. At these workshops, the project team introduced the project and provided background information, laid out the project timeline, shared project milestones and progress to date, introduced the Engage Rockville page and hosted a question-and-answer session for meeting attendees. The workshop held on October 17 was held virtually via Webex. The workshop on October 22 was held in person, at Rockville City Hall. Approximately 20 people attended these meetings.

Focus Groups

To identify any issues with the current Zoning Ordinance, it was important to hear firsthand from users to understand their experience. To do this, city staff hosted a total of 12 focus groups over six months with different stakeholder groups. These focus groups were intentionally curated to remain small to facilitate discussion amongst participants. Many of the participants in the focus groups opted in to additional engagement with the project via the survey tool on Engage Rockville referenced above in the Engage Rockville Website portion of this report. Most of the focus group participants represented themselves, their interests and their lived experiences, while some focus groups were primarily attended by individuals representing an organization they work for. Table 1 lists the focus groups hosted in this phase of the project.

Table 1: Focus Group Meetings and Attendees

Focus Group	Meeting Date	Number of Attendees
Twinbrook Library Conversation Club	October 21, 2025	8
Rockville Urbanists Group	November 8, 2024	7
Commercial Property Owners and Brokers	November 18, 2024	5
Disability Community	November 18, 2024	4
Homeowners	November 19, 2024	5
Renters	December 2, 2024	2
Open Invitation*	December 3, 2024	7
	December 10, 2024	4
	December 12, 2024	7
Design Professionals/Developers	March 3, 2025	9
Land Use Attorneys	March 5, 2025	10
Affordable Housing Organizations	April 4, 2025	4
Infill Housing Builders	April 4-8, 2025	3

* Three “open invitation” focus groups were hosted in December 2024. Offers to attend an open invitation focus group were extended to all those who expressed interest (through the public survey or otherwise) in attending a focus group, but who had not attended an earlier focus groups. All open invitation focus group attendees were individuals who rented or owned homes within the City of Rockville.

Property Owner Meetings

Approximately 600 properties are recommended for rezoning in the Comprehensive Plan and proposed to be implemented through the Comprehensive Map Amendment. Because these recommended rezonings have been the city’s adopted policy since 2021, many property owners are aware of the Comprehensive Plan’s recommendations to change their property’s zoning district to meet the Plan’s vision. Other property owners either were not living in the city during the Comprehensive Plan process from 2015 – 2021, or may not have participated in that effort, so may not be aware of the proposed rezonings. As a result, extra effort was given to ensure the owners of these properties are aware of the ZOR and CMA project, its timeline, and the potential implications for their properties.

In October 2024, a mailing was sent to owners of all properties recommended for rezoning in the Comprehensive Plan, as well as all properties within 100 feet of a property recommended for rezoning. (The August 2024 memo updating Mayor and Council on the project committed staff to informing property owners and adjacent property owners, but staff ultimately decided to exceed this.) This resulted in approximately 1,100 letters being mailed to Rockville residents and businesses. The letter informed property owners of the project and invited them to attend one of three meetings targeted to those whose properties are proposed to be rezoned. The property owner meetings took place on November 12, November 13, and November 14, 2024, and were scheduled at different times of the day to accommodate different

schedules. A total of 69 people attended these meetings. At the meetings, an overview of the project was shared, then zoning recommendations from the Comprehensive Plan for each planning area were presented. The meeting concluded with an opportunity for attendees to ask questions and provide feedback to staff.

Mayor and Council express a desire that staff notify a wider audience of the proposed rezonings in the future. Following a May 5, 2025, work session with Mayor and Council, staff plans to host another meeting with community members related to the proposed rezonings and will send a new mailing to property owners at a slightly greater distance from the proposed rezonings. Additionally, this meeting will also be advertised more broadly via social media, Rockville Reports, and through an e-blast to Engage Rockville project page subscribers. Staff anticipate the next mailing to affected property owners and their neighbors will take place in Summer 2025.

Neighborhood Association and Multifamily Residential Communities

In addition to outreach to individual property owners, the city also ensured that neighborhood associations such as homeowner's associations, condominium boards, and civic associations were aware of the project and proposed rezonings either within or adjacent to their neighborhoods.

In October 2024, Community Planning and Development Service staff sent an email to leadership of all Rockville neighborhood associations that have rezonings proposed within or adjacent to their association boundaries, as well many rental communities recommended for rezoning or adjacent to land proposed for rezoning. This email introduced the project, offered an opportunity to meet with city staff to discuss the project in more depth, and encouraged communities to follow along by subscribing to the Engage Rockville page. Some neighborhood associations and residential communities took staff up on this offer, while others declined the opportunity.

Table 2 provides a complete list of the neighborhood associations and residential communities contacted in Fall 2024. Table 3 lists the neighborhood association that expressed interest in meeting with staff, along with the date of their meeting(s) with staff.

Table 2: Neighborhood Associations and Residential Communities Contacted in October 2024

Neighborhood Association / Residential Community
Beall's Grant Apartments
Bethany House Apartments
Burgundy Knolls Neighborhood Alliance
Cambridge Walk I Homeowners Association
Cambridge Walk II Homeowners Association
Congressional Towers
David Scull Courts / Rockville Housing Enterprises
East Rockville Civic Association

Heritage House Apartments
Heritage Park Co-Op
Hungerford Civic Association
Residences at Congressional Village
King Farm Citizens Assembly
Lincoln Park Civic Association
Montrose Civic Association
New Mark Commons Homeowners Association
Preserve/Protect West End
Rockcrest Courts Community Association
Rollins Park Apartments
The Forest Apartments
Twinbrook Citizens Association
West End Citizens Association
Woodley Gardens Civic Association
Wootton Oaks Homeowners Association

Table 3: Neighborhood Association Meetings

Neighborhood Association/Group	Meeting Date
East Rockville Civic Association	June 11, 2024
Lincoln Park Civic Association	October 12, 2024 April 12, 2025
Twinbrook Community Association	October 15, 2024
West End Civic Association	November 14, 2024
Montrose Civic Association	December 10, 2024 April 30, 2025 (planned)
Jerusalem Mt. Pleasant Methodist Church	March 6, 2025
Hungerford Civic Association	April 26, 2025 (planned)

In February 2025, a follow up email was sent to all neighborhood associations listed in Table 2 to ensure they are tracking the project and aware of proposed rezonings in or adjacent to their neighborhood association boundaries. As a courtesy, primary contacts for these neighborhood associations were sent confirmation emails to subscribe to project updates through Engage Rockville. Many of the neighborhood associations who had not yet responded to staff emails were contacted via phone to ensure they were aware of the effort.

The February 2025 distribution list was also widened, incorporating rental communities identified by Mayor and Council at a January 27, 2025, work session (some of which also received emails in October 2024, as listed in Table 4). In addition to emails, these residential communities were also contacted by staff via phone to explain the project, and fliers were provided to these communities to be placed in mail areas, community rooms, on bulletin boards or other places where residents tend to

gather. Table 4 lists the additional residential communities who were engaged by city staff about the project.

Table 4: Residential Communities for Targeted Additional Outreach

Residential Community
Bethany House Congressional Towers David Scull Courts Rollins Park The Flats at Shady Grove The Stories

As the project continues, staff will continue coordinating with interested neighborhood associations and other residential communities to provide them with updates and recommendations of the project. The next round of outreach to these groups is anticipated in Summer 2025.

Boards, Commissions, and Task Forces

As the quasi-judicial body in Rockville tasked with formulating the city's master plan and making recommendations to the Mayor and Council on map amendments, the Planning Commission is involved in this project. To date the Planning Commission has hosted briefings on the project, which took place on January 10, 2024, October 9, 2024, and December 11, 2024, in addition to regular staff updates. These briefings provided project information ahead of a series of work sessions scheduled to take place between January and September 2025, and the start of the formal review and recommendation period, anticipated in December 2025. All Planning Commission meetings are open to the public and recordings of meetings can be viewed online.

Staff also provided a general briefing to the Environment Commission on November 7, 2024, and a briefing with the Transportation and Mobility Commission is planned for May 27, 2025. Briefings and facilitation of feedback from city boards and commissions will continue as the Zoning Ordinance is developed and released for review.

Summary of Preliminary Feedback

Though a draft of the Zoning Ordinance is not yet complete, staff have gathered insights and feedback on the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite portion of the project through public meetings and focus groups, both with members of the public and 'heavy code users' (generally, design professionals, developers and builders, and land use attorneys). Members of the community also shared feedback on the Comprehensive Map Amendment that will rezone properties in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan recommendations through meetings with neighborhood

associations, interested groups, and property owners. Themes identified for each portion of the project are summarized below.

The feedback provided below is based on the community engagement efforts thus far in the process. Therefore, it is subject to change as engagement for this project is ongoing throughout the process. Staff anticipate a revised version of this document to be provided with the full draft of the Zoning Ordinance and zoning map.

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

During focus groups with members of the community (including homeowners and renters and members of the disability community) and heavy code users (designers, developers and builders, and land use attorneys), individuals provided general and specific guidance on topics related to the rewrite of the text of the Zoning Ordinance.

When considering development generally, residents value walkability and proximity to amenities (including transit, schools, parks, and retail/restaurants) and want to see the local business community supported through the Zoning Ordinance. Many residents want to see the City support development generally, specifically citing support for density and transit-oriented development and noting that Rockville's height requirements around metro are lower than Montgomery County as a whole. Many like the development that is currently happening, and some expressed that development is happening too slowly. Some participants encouraged the City to think broadly about people who don't yet live in Rockville when rewriting the Zoning Ordinance. There is a perception that zoning can be overly restrictive, and there is a need for flexibility within the ordinance to achieve housing and economic development goals. Some individuals expressed concerns about potential increases in traffic and parking (including some who thought that parking enforcement should be heightened), while others thought the City has too much parking and parking requirements are too high, citing concerns about its impact on walkability, rental prices, and building costs.

When considering diverse housing types, residents generally liked the look of 'missing middle' housing types (duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, and cottage courts). They expressed that City plans should encourage small, affordable housing and think that, depending on the size and architecture, missing middle housing types could fit into many Rockville neighborhoods; however, some questioned if these types of housing would be one's 'forever' home, while others expressed concerns about parking, particularly that residents did not want to see too much parking on residential lots. Renters desire to continue living in Rockville but are concerned about affordability and see missing middle housing options as a possible pathway to homeownership. However, some renters noted that not all renters want to eventually become homeowners,

Some perceive that conflicting or complicated requirements have led to difficulties in enforcing regulations and suggest creating clearer requirements and simpler

processes. Some recommend that greater consistency with Montgomery County's regulations would be useful. Some suggest utilizing more color, diagrams, and tables in the Ordinance.

Comprehensive Map Amendment

The rezonings proposed to be implemented through the Comprehensive Map Amendment are adopted policy, either in the Comprehensive Plan or the Town Center Master Plan. During meetings with community members (generally neighborhood associations meetings and property owner meetings), individuals asked questions and provided thoughts on the rezonings. Community input provided during these meetings may also have an impact on future City projects, and City staff will continue to coordinate with communities throughout Summer 2025.

Many community members support the Comprehensive Plan's recommended rezonings to support housing goals, transit, and walkability; while others expressed concerns about issues perceived to be exacerbated by the Comprehensive Plan's recommended rezonings, particularly related to traffic, property taxes, property investors, pedestrian infrastructure, new residents moving to the city, changes in neighborhood 'character', loss of green space, and the implementation of zones with higher building height maximums. There was concern raised about the potential consequences of the proposed rezonings, including whether rezoning a given property would obligate the redevelopment of that property or otherwise force the owner to make changes. (Staff reassured community members that any redevelopment would be voluntary, that a rezoning would allow changes if desired but not require them.)

One concern voiced at many community meetings related to equity. Individuals questioned why more of the recommended rezonings from single-unit detached to RMD-Infill (which allows a diverse range of 'missing middle' types, including duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses) were proposed east of MD-355, and whether additional rezonings in areas west of MD-355 would be proposed.