

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite and Comprehensive Map Amendment: Community Engagement Summary

November 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. Additional goals are 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 majority of 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. Some additional rezonings have been proposed in the CMA near the Twinbrook and Shady Grove Metro stations in alignment with policy direction from the Mayor and Council to steer densest development to transit-oriented areas.

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 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 – Fall 2025

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

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

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

Project Objectives

The following objectives have been identified for the ZOR/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, 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, or from the policy direction to steer dense developments to transit-oriented areas.

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 the end of November 3, 2025, the ZOR and CMA project had a total of 160 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.

Additionally, Engage Rockville provides metrics to inform staff on activity on each project's site. As of November 3, 2024, the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite and Comprehensive Map Amendment project page has received 2,900 total visits. Engage Rockville estimates that 2,108 participants are aware of the project, meaning they have visited at least one page on the site; 458 participants are informed of the project, meaning they have interacted with the page; and 117 participants are engaged, meaning they have interacted and utilized the various tools, widgets, and features of the site. 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.

In summer and early fall 2025 during the drafting phase of the project, additional public workshops were held, focusing on different components of the ZOR/CMA project. These workshops have typically occurred in the weeks following Mayor and Council and Planning Commission work sessions on the same topics. These meetings

have all taken place virtually via Webex. Table 1 lists the various public workshops along with their meeting dates and number of attendees.

Table 1: Public Workshop Meetings and Attendees

Workshop Topic(s)	Meeting Date	Number of Attendees
Zones and Zone Standards	June 4, 2025	3
Parking and Uses	July 31, 2025	8
Amenity Space, Subdivision, Historic Preservation and Nonconformities	September 25, 2025	2

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 2 lists the focus groups hosted in this phase of the project.

Table 2: 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.

Comprehensive Map Amendment Meetings

Approximately 729 properties are recommended for rezoning in the Comprehensive Plan and proposed to be implemented through the Comprehensive Map Amendment. Because the vast majority of the 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, may not have participated in that effort, or have properties that have been proposed for rezoning based on more recent policy direction from the Mayor and Council, 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. Following these meetings, the Mayor and Council expressed a desire that staff notify a wider audience of the proposed rezonings in the future.

In response to feedback from the Mayor and Council, CPDS staff hosted two additional Comprehensive Map Amendment meetings in June 2025, with additional outreach (described below). These meetings were held virtually via Webex on June 24 and June 26. More than 100 people attended these meetings. The content of these meetings was very similar to the Comprehensive Map Amendment meetings held in October 2024; staff provided a high-level overview of the ZOR/CMA project, then presented recommendations for rezonings in each planning area.

Extensive outreach advertising the June CMA meetings was conducted. Letters were sent to all premises addresses and all owner addresses (if the property was not owner occupied) for each of the parcels identified for rezoning. Additionally, letters were sent

to property owners of all land within 500 feet of a proposed rezoning, which represented a significant increase from the first mailings in the fall. In total, nearly 6,000 letters were mailed. In addition, these meetings were advertised in Rockville Reports and in CPDS's Development Watch newsletter, promoted on the city's calendar and advertised via the Engage Rockville page.

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 Services 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 3 provides a complete list of the neighborhood associations and residential communities contacted in Fall 2024. Table 4 lists the neighborhood association that expressed interest in meeting with staff, along with the date of their meeting(s) with staff. Table 4 has been updated to reflect additional meetings since this Community Engagement Summary was first prepared in April 2025.

Table 3: 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 4: 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 June 14, 2025 October 11, 2025
Twinbrook Community Association	October 15, 2024 June 17, 2025
West End Civic Association	November 14, 2024
Montrose Civic Association	December 10, 2024 April 30, 2025
Jerusalem Mt. Pleasant Methodist Church	March 6, 2025
Hungerford Civic Association	April 26, 2025
New Mark Commons Homes Association	September 4, 2025

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. 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 5 lists the additional residential communities who were engaged by city staff about the project.

Table 5: 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.

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 heavily involved in this project. As a result, there have been several briefings/work sessions with the Planning Commission to solicit guidance from the body and to review staff's proposed recommendations. During the drafting phase, Planning Commission work sessions have followed the Mayor and Council work sessions on the same topics. Table 6 lists the dates of Planning Commission briefings or work sessions tied to the ZOR/CMA project. All Planning Commission meetings are open to the public and recordings of meetings can be viewed online.

Table 6: Planning Commission Meetings

Meeting Date	Topics of Discussion
October 25, 2023	Project Overview
October 9, 2024	Project Update
December 11, 2024	Project Update / Comprehensive Map Amendment
April 23, 2025	Work Session: Development Review Process
May 28, 2025	Work Session: New Zones, Revisions to Existing Zones, Height Transitions, Comprehensive Map Amendment
June 11, 2025	Work Session: FAST 2 / Site Plans
August 13, 2025	Work Session: Parking and Uses
October 8, 2025	Work Session: Historic Preservation, Amenity Space, Subdivision, and Nonconformities.

Once the Mayor and Council provide authorization to file a text amendment to update the zoning ordinance and a comprehensive map amendment to update the zoning map, the formal adoption process will begin. Adoption has two phases: The first before the Planning Commission and the second before Mayor and Council. During their

portion of the adoption process, the Planning Commission will hold additional work sessions on the ZOR/CMA to ultimately develop recommendations to the Mayor and Council on how to move forward. It is anticipated that most of these meetings will take place between January – March 2026.

Beyond the Planning Commission, staff have also provided a general briefing to the Environment Commission on November 7, 2024, and a briefing to the Transportation and Mobility Commission on May 27, 2025. The Historic District Commission reviewed proposed modifications to the historic preservation sections of the zoning ordinance at their meeting on July 17, 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 Feedback

Throughout this process, staff have gathered insights and feedback from the Rockville community. The list below presents the most frequent feedback heard by staff; it is not a comprehensive list of every comment received. General themes of the feedback to date include:

- General support for rezonings to support housing goals, transit, and walkability.
- Concerns about specific rezonings, particularly those that are perceived to change “neighborhood character.”
- Some concern broadly about rezoning, and how that may impact traffic, taxes, the number of residents and building heights.
- Concern about equity in rezoning across the city.
- General favorability towards the look of missing middle housing types.
- Renters desire to continue living in Rockville but are concerned about affordability; see missing middle housing options as a possible pathway to homeownership.
- Mixed feelings on densifying, parking, and who Rockville should be planning for (e.g., those already living in Rockville or future residents).
- Residents value proximity to amenities, walkability, transit and the business community.
- Perception that zoning can be overly restrictive.
- Need for flexibility within the ordinance to achieve housing and economic development goals.

The feedback provided above is based on the community engagement efforts thus far in the process and has helped guide the development of the draft zoning ordinance and draft zoning map. Additional engagement will continue to occur through the adoption process