



Date of Meeting: July 10, 2025

TOWN OF LEESBURG
PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION

Subject: Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

Staff Contact: Michael Watkins, Zoning Administrator
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Purpose: Review of Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Article IV: Development Standards

Background: At their July 20, 2023 Public Meeting, the Planning Commission received an introductory presentation on the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project. In October 2023, representatives from Kendig Keast Collaborative (Consultant) presented their code audit of the Town's current Zoning Ordinance and broad recommendations for changes at a joint meeting of the Planning Commission and Town Council. In February and September 2024, the consultants delivered their first draft of the new Ordinance via the Town's enCodePlus online zoning platform and provided an overview of concepts in each Article to the Planning Commission. The first draft of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite was released on March 6, 2025 for a 60-day public review period. All Planning Commission and public presentations and the code audit are available on the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project page at: leesburgva.gov/zoningordinancerewrite.

Issues: At the Planning Commission meeting on July 10, 2025, discussion will begin on Article IV: Development Standards. Article IV establishes site and building development standards that apply across all zoning districts in Leesburg. It sets rules for parking, loading, and stacking, buffering and landscaping, tree preservation, outdoor lighting, signs, noise limitations, and attainable housing provisions.

Division 17: Purpose and Applicability

Division 17 establishes the general intent and guiding principles behind the Town's development standards. These standards are organized into specific divisions, each addressing a distinct aspect of land development to promote the health, safety, and public welfare of the community. Development standards also protect community aesthetics and character, ensure functional infrastructure and transportation systems, encourage environmental stewardship, and promote accessibility. Development standards apply to many projects including but not limited to new development (residential, nonresidential, or mixed-use), redevelopment, and expansions of buildings, uses, or sites.

Division 18 – Parking, Loading, Stacking, and Access

This division establishes the core rules, conditions, and requirements for parking, loading, stacking, and access facilities. It provides direction for when and how parking/loading standards

apply, how facilities may be used and maintained, interpretation of parking/loading requirements, and applicability to residential, nonresidential, and mixed-use developments.

The bulk of Division 18 focuses on minimum and maximum number of off-street parking spaces required for all uses permitted in the Town. These off-street parking requirements ensure that development provides adequate parking without overbuilding it, which could negatively impact land use efficiency and environmental goals. Modifications to parking requirements may be offered through proffers, imposed as a condition of a special exception or limited use approval, or via other provisions within the Zoning Ordinance.

Table 18-2-1 organizes parking requirements by use category and specific use type, listing both minimum and maximum off-street parking spaces. Parking requirements vary by use category, and are often based on square footage (e.g., per 1,000 sf), number of employees, number of dwelling units (DU), number of seats or beds, or number of amenities (e.g., courts, fields). In some cases there is no requirement (NR), and in other instances parking requirements are reduced in specific areas like Downtown (DT). Accessory uses like guest houses and short term residential rentals have specific add-on parking requirements.

On-site parking is the default, but off-site or valet parking can be allowed with appropriate approvals and safeguards. Parking reductions are also available under limited circumstances such as shared parking (mixed use and joint use) or payment in-lieu of parking. In general, residential uses are not eligible for reductions through shared parking, and are generally excluded from using the payment-in-lieu option.

There are modified parking requirements in the DT District for nonresidential developments, allowing flexibility for existing buildings, additions, and redevelopment projects that can utilize public parking facilities. The intent is to support adaptive reuse and revitalization of downtown buildings while balancing parking needs. However, if development removes existing parking, the lost spaces must be replaced in full or a payment in lieu must be made.

Division 18 also outlines the minimum requirements and design standards for vehicle stacking spaces associated with drive-up and drive-through uses. The goal is to prevent traffic congestion, ensure safe site circulation, and minimize visual impact of stacking lanes. Stacking lanes must not interfere with parking, loading, or circulation routes. Screening is required to minimize visual impact from nearby streets.

The ZO Rewrite introduces more robust bicycle parking standards to promote bicycling as a safe and convenient mode of transportation, encourage the use of bicycles for recreation, provide an alternative to motor vehicle transportation, and ensure safe, secure, accessible, and convenient storage of bicycles for all users. Bicycle racks must meet certain design and location requirements, including being securely anchored and easily accessible. Bicycle parking must be well-lit and located on appropriate surfaces.

Finally, Division 18 addresses pedestrian access to encourage a safe, attractive, and usable internal pedestrian circulation system in all developments and parking areas. The pedestrian access standards ensure a direct pedestrian connection between streets and buildings, as well as

between buildings and other activities within the site. Sidewalks must meet strict slope, material, and construction standards, including compliance with other local, state, or federal regulations.

Division 19 – Tree Preservation, Landscaping, Buffering, and Fencing

Section 19-1 establishes the standards for plant materials, locations, substitutions, landscape plans, enforcement, and conservation for development projects. The goals are to ensure biodiversity, appropriate plant placement, and long-term success of landscaping through planning, bonding, and enforcement mechanisms.

Draft Section 19-2 is “pending” due to ongoing review of recent changes in Virginia State legislation, which affect how local governments may regulate and require tree canopy conservation and preservation. The intent is to maximize conservation and protection of existing tree canopy to the extent possible under State law.

Section 19-3 establishes landscaping requirements for the interior of parking lots to improve aesthetics, provide shade, reduce heat island effect, and support stormwater management. The standards apply to new or expanded parking lots of a certain size and are designed to complement other landscaping requirements such as perimeter screening, buffers, and street trees.

Section 19-4 requires bufferyard landscaping to provide physical and visual separation between differing land uses, structures, and streets to reduce visual, noise, and other land use conflicts. Bufferyard types (A through E) vary in size and plant material density based on the intensity of the buffer needed. The creek valley buffer provides water quality protection, stormwater filtering, habitat preservation, and public access to waterways.

Section 19-5 establishes requirements for the installation, design, maintenance, and placement of fences, walls, hedges, and screening structures. It applies to both required and optional screening for outdoor storage, dumpsters, loading areas, and other facilities, and it sets height and material standards for fencing in various zoning districts. Key points include:

- Finished side out: Fences must present their finished face to neighbors and the street.
- Owner responsibility: Property owners must maintain all fences, walls, and living screens.
- Outdoor storage/loading screening: Must be opaque and at least 6 feet high.
- Dumpster screening:
 - Options include walls plus gates or interior storage.
 - Native vines, murals, or compatible designs are required.
 - 25-foot setback from residential zones (may be reduced).
- Height limits for fences located in:
 - Front yards: Max 42 inches, with some exceptions up to 6 feet.
 - Side/rear yards (residential): 7 feet (8 feet if adjacent to nonresidential).
 - Side/rear yards (nonresidential): Max 8 feet.
- No hazardous fencing: Barbed wire or electric fencing is banned in residential areas.
- Visibility protection: Fences in front setbacks must not block sightlines at driveways or corners.

Section 19-6 establishes standards for the planting, placement, species selection, and quantity of street trees required in conjunction with development or improvements to public streets. The provision is intended to enhance streetscape aesthetics, promote environmental sustainability, and maintain or increase urban tree canopy coverage. It applies to all zoning districts and most types of development or redevelopment activity, including minor development plans and capital improvement projects.

The ZO Rewrite introduces new “sustainability incentives” in Section 19-7 to encourage sustainable development practices, including energy efficiency, resource conservation, and resiliency through a point-based incentive system. The point-based incentive system applies to both multi-family and nonresidential development. To earn sustainability incentives projects must use sustainable design, construction, and operational methods across multiple components. Examples of incentives for qualifying sustainable developments include increased density, increased building height, and reduced parking minimums.

Sections 19-8 and 19-9 address installation and maintenance and alternative compliance for tree preservation, landscaping, buffering and fencing. Key points include:

- Use native species and avoid monoculture.
- Follow Table 19-8-1 for minimum sizes of trees, shrubs, grasses, etc.
- Existing trees must be healthy to count toward canopy requirements.
- Public utility easements generally prohibit trees unless special approval is granted.
- Property owners are responsible for ongoing maintenance and replacements.
- Trees generally prohibited on slopes >3:1; special rules apply for 3:1–2:1 slopes.
- Alternative compliance is possible when there are physical site constraints (e.g., steep slopes, poor soil), irregular site layout, or safety considerations.
- Alternatives must match the standard in quality, durability, and plant hardiness.

Division 20 – Outdoor Lighting

This division establishes the applicability, submittal requirements, design, placement, height, and shielding standards for outdoor lighting to ensure that exterior lighting installations do not adversely impact neighboring properties or the surrounding environment. These standards are intended to reduce light pollution, minimize glare, and enhance visual comfort and safety without sacrificing necessary illumination. Certain types of lighting (e.g. streetlights, public safety lighting) are not subject to the requirements of the outdoor lighting regulations due to their public necessity or federal/state jurisdiction.

In general, lighting fixtures used for general purposes like walkways, parking lots, building lighting, and open-sided parking garages must be full cut-off fixtures that prevent light spillage and direct glare. Lighting for objects like flags, statues, signs, architecture, and landscaping must use full cut-off or directionally shielded fixtures aimed and controlled to limit illumination only to the intended object.

Outdoor lighting fixtures have maximum height limits and minimum setbacks from property lines. There are limitations on specific light fixtures such as wall-mounted lights in residential

areas and wall pack lights on nonresidential buildings. There are also more detailed lighting standards for specific uses including automobile-related and service uses to address potential issues from canopy lighting and outdoor display lighting.

Division 21 – Signs

Division 21 is “pending” to allow more time to draft a comprehensive overhaul of the existing sign regulations. The goal of the update is to modernize the ordinance by incorporating industry standards and best management practices, ensuring that regulations are effective, balanced, and legally sound. Effective sign regulations balance the marketing and communication needs of local businesses with preserving the character, aesthetics, and special qualities that define Leesburg’s unique community identity.

Division 22 – Noise Limitations

This division sets forth maximum allowable noise levels recorded as A-weighted decibels (dBA) for stationary noise sources by zoning district, along with methods for measurement, enforcement provisions, and certain exemptions. The goal is to protect the public’s health and comfort by limiting exposure to excessive or disruptive noise while accounting for practical exemptions and zoning-specific tolerances. “Continuous noise” means a sound that is sustained for a prolonged period without significant interruption, often considered a nuisance due to its consistent and disruptive nature. “Impact noise” is defined as intermittent sounds of a single pressure peak or a single burst (multiple pressure peaks) for duration usually less than one second. Examples of impact noise sources are a punch press, drop forge hammer, or explosive blasting. The following is a summary of noise limitations:

Continuous Noise Limits

- 55 dBA – Residential
- 65 dBA – Commercial
- 70 dBA – Industrial

Impact Noise Limits

- 60 dBA – Residential
- 70 dBA – Commercial
- 80 dBA – Industrial

Measurements of noise levels shall be taken at the property boundary of the noise source. Where two different zoning districts are adjacent, the more restrictive limit shall apply. Exemptions include airport overlay zones, power equipment used 7:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m., and air conditioning units on tight lots measured from front/rear property line, not side.

Division 23 – Attainable Housing

Division 23 is “pending” but will address attainable housing, focusing on strategies and regulations that support the provision of housing affordable to a range of incomes within the community. The Town is carefully reviewing recent changes to Virginia state enabling legislation that affect how localities manage and implement affordable dwelling unit (ADU)

programs. The intent is to align Leesburg’s attainable housing regulations as closely as possible with Loudoun County’s recently adopted Zoning Ordinance Chapter 9 – Attainable Housing. By harmonizing local policies with those of the County, Leesburg aims to ensure consistency, legal compliance, and effective administration of attainable housing programs, while also responding to regional housing needs.

Next Steps

Tentative PC Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Work Plan

Topic	Commission Meeting Date
ZO Rewrite Work Plan	January 16, 2025
Zoning Map	February 6, 2025
Release of Draft Text	March 6, 2025
Article 1 General Provisions	
Article 2 Zoning Districts and Dimensional Standards	April 3, 2025
Article 3 Use Regulations	April 17, 2025
Article 3 Use Regulations (continued)	May 1, 2025
Article 3 Use Regulations (continued)	May 15, 2025
None	June 5, 2025
Recap Articles 1-3, Article 4 Development Standards	July 10, 2025
Article 5 Review Bodies, Article 6 Review Procedures	July 17, 2025
Article 7 Nonconformities, Article 8 Enforcement	August 7, 2025
Recap Articles 4-8, Article 9 Word Usage	September 4, 2025
Public Hearing on PC Draft	September 18, 2025

Online Zoning Platform (enCodePlus)

The draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite was available until May 5, 2025 via enCodePlus at the following website address: <https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/leesburg-va/>.

Planning Commissioners and public are strongly encouraged to review and make comments on the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite via this online platform. It will enable staff to receive questions and comments in real time, respond quickly to questions via the platform, and create reports of all public and Planning Commission comments received.

The July 10, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting is another of many opportunities throughout the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project for members of the Planning Commission and the public to provide input.

Attachments

1. Public Comment Report
2. Future Discussion Items (Dive List)