



# TOWN OF LEESBURG PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

**Subject:** TLZNOA2026-0002 Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

**Staff Contact:** Michael Watkins, Zoning Administrator  
Brian Boucher, Deputy Director  
James David, Director

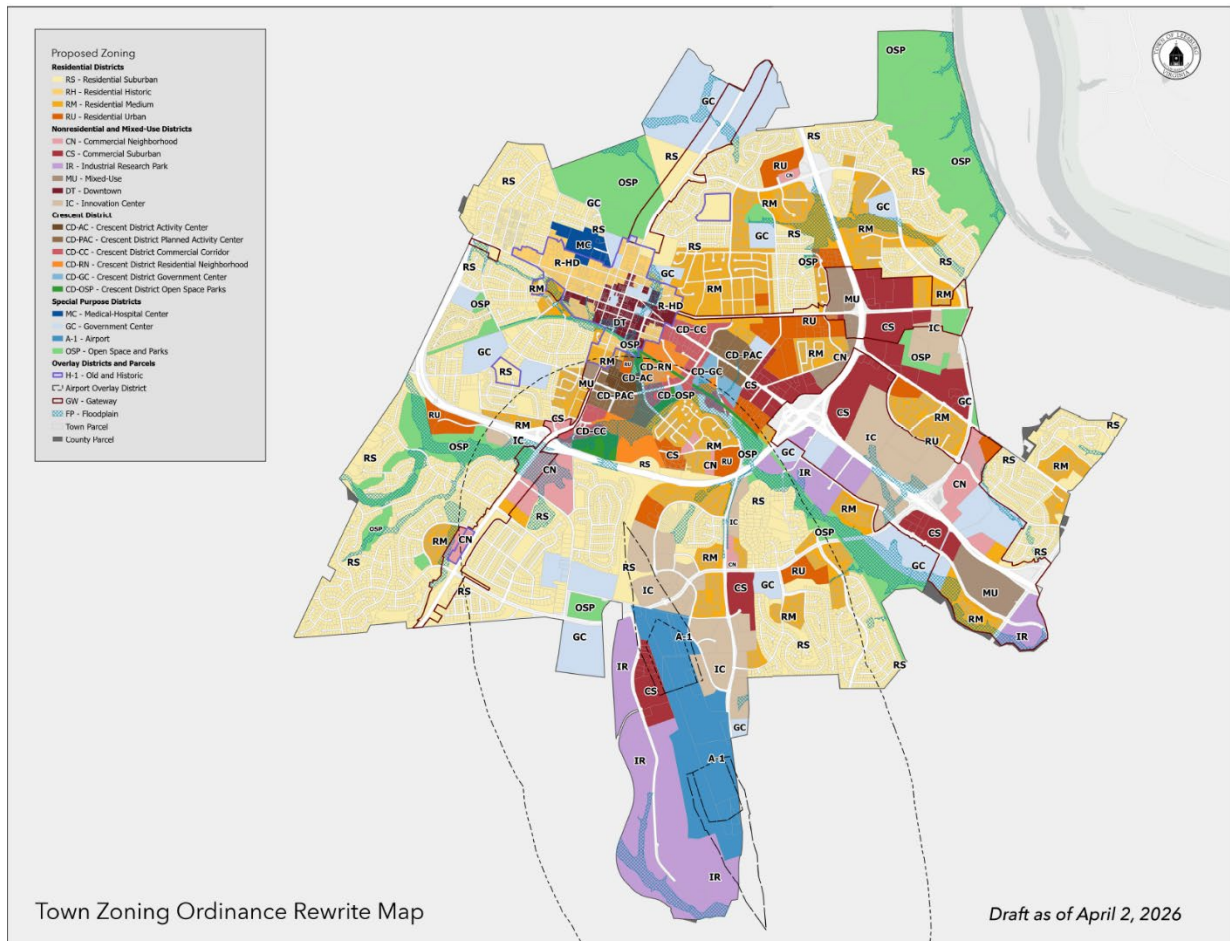
**Applicant:** Town Council ([Resolution No. 2023-034](#))

**Proposal:** 2026 Rewrite of the Town of Leesburg Zoning Ordinance

**Recommendation:** Forward a recommendation of approval to the Town Council, based on finding the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite implements Legacy Leesburg Town Plan policies including the new Crescent District Master Plan, streamlines process, modernizes zoning standards and practices, and restructures the document to improve usability.

**Web Link:** [www.leesburgva.gov/zoningordinancerewrite](http://www.leesburgva.gov/zoningordinancerewrite)

## **Proposed Zoning Map:**



**Draft Motions:**

**Approval**

I move to adopt the proposed Planning Commission Resolution recommending approval of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite, dated April 16, 2026, and included as Attachment 1.

OR

**Work Session**

I move that the Planning Commission forward TLZNOA2026-0002 Zoning Ordinance Rewrite to a future Planning Commission Work Session with the following direction to staff:

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**Background:** The purpose of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project is to rewrite the Town's Zoning Ordinance with an emphasis on Legacy Leesburg Town Plan implementation, bringing the ordinance into compliance with modern zoning practices, streamlining process, and restructuring the document to improve usability. The last major update of the Zoning Ordinance was adopted in February 2008. Major changes to the ordinance since then include the adoption of the Crescent Design District and the Gateway Overlay District. Numerous other amendments to the ordinance have been adopted through either yearly batch amendments to address State Code changes and administrative clarifications or amendments initiated by the Town Council or Planning Commission to address specific issues or community needs.

With the adoption of the Legacy Leesburg Town Plan in March 2022, a comprehensive rewrite of the Zoning Ordinance was needed to ensure that this regulatory tool aligns with the policies outlined in the Town Plan and complies with state legislation and modern zoning practices.

*Project Strategy*

The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite has been a multiyear effort by staff, consultants, and the Planning Commission. Other advisory boards including the Board of Architectural Review, Board of Zoning Appeals, and Economic Development Authority have also weighed in on the draft. To date, input from the Planning Commission, other advisory bodies, various Town departments, and public has been a significant part of the document development process:

- 13 Focus Group Meetings held throughout 2023 and 2024 that included civic groups, business owners, developers/attorneys, engineers/architects, preservationists, industry representatives, and real estate professionals.
- Five General Public Open Door Meetings held throughout 2024.
- Multiple online public comment periods via enCodePlus review platform for the March 2025 First Draft, November 2025 Second Draft, and May 2026 Commission Draft.
- Multiple meetings with staff upon request of community stakeholders.
- 21 Planning Commission public meetings on the draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite since January 2025. The Commission also broke out into two subcommittees, one on Attainable Housing and the other on Signs, to spend extra time on these important regulatory areas.

Detailed lists of public comments and a summary Public Comment Report are available for review as part of the Planning Commission Work Session memos listed on the [Zoning Ordinance Rewrite](#) project page.

### *Project Scope*

The main objectives of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project are:

1. **Legacy Leesburg Town Plan Implementation.** Revise the ordinance, including amendments to existing zoning districts or the creation of new districts, to realize the plan vision as expressed in the plan's character areas and place-based recommendations.
2. **Code Consistency.** Analyze existing Zoning standards and strive for consistency within the document and with other Town regulations.
3. **Revisions to the Crescent Design District.** Align Crescent District zoning regulations with revised Crescent District Master Plan.
4. **Streamlined Processes.** Streamline the land development process through increased by-right uses and administrative approvals.
5. **Modernization.** Update definitions, land uses, and development standards throughout the document to reflect current zoning and best management practices.
6. **Document Structure.** Improve the document structure; make it user-friendly and graphics based.
7. **Interactive Online Platform.** Replace the current static PDF document with an interactive online platform providing hyperlinked content.

**Draft Ordinance:** The draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is organized into the following Articles:

- Article 1. General Provisions.** Regulations that cover the Town's jurisdiction and authority, as well as how the Town measures or allows items such as building frontage, floor area ratio, gross density, building height, lot area/coverage, setbacks, and minimum yard requirements.
- Article 2. Zoning Districts and Dimensional Standards.** The zoning map and accompanying regulations for residential, nonresidential, mixed use, special purpose, and overlay districts.
- Article 3. Use Regulations.** Categorization of land uses, consolidated use table, limited use standards, special exception standards, and standards for accessory uses and structures, temporary uses and structures, telecommunication facilities, and new and unlisted uses.
- Article 4. Development Standards.** Parking and loading standards, community amenities and open space, landscaping and screening, sustainability, outdoor lighting, signs, noise standards, and attainable housing.
- Article 5. Review and Decision-Making Bodies.** Powers and duties related to the Zoning Ordinance for the Town Council, Planning Commission, Board of Architectural Review, Board of Zoning Appeals, Zoning Administrator, and Floodplain Administrator.

- Article 6. Review and Approval Procedures.** Development review process, submittal and noticing requirements, neighborhood meetings and public hearings, administrative and legislative decisions, and appeals.
- Article 7. Nonconformities.** Regulations that protect uses, structures and lots that came into existence legally in the past but no longer comply with one or more requirements of the existing Zoning Ordinance.
- Article 8. Enforcement, Violations, and Penalties.** Procedures for correcting violations of the Zoning Ordinance.
- Article 9. Word Usage.** Rules of construction such as meanings and intent, computation of time, delegation of authority, mandatory and discretionary terms, rounding, etc. Also included is a list of definitions for key terms (primarily land uses) in the Zoning Ordinance.

### *Highlighted Revisions to the Zoning Ordinance*

The Town's Zoning Ordinance has been rewritten with an emphasis on Town Plan implementation. For example, Town Plan policies supporting more housing options are implemented by allowing more housing types and density in certain zoning districts. Another example is Town Plan policies supporting tourism Downtown are implemented by permitting "hotel" and "bed and breakfast" in the Downtown (DT) zoning district by-right rather than requiring a special exception. The majority of substantive revisions in the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite are based on Town Plan policies and Town Plan Character Areas. The following sections identify highlights in each Article of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite.

#### Article I: General Provisions

1. Sec. 2-2, *Measurements*, includes graphics accompanying all methods of measurements for development standards.
2. The method for measuring building height has been revised to ensure that height measurements are based on existing topography of the site, before grading for onsite improvements.
3. Sec. 2-3, *Lot and Yard Requirements*, includes graphics on how to determine lot lines and public street frontage.
4. Sec. 2-4, *Allowances*, permits limited rooftop uses in mechanical penthouses on buildings Downtown, subject to minor special exception approval.

#### Article II: Zoning Districts

1. Sec. 3-3, *Zoning Districts Established*, consolidates 24 existing zoning districts into 15 revised zoning districts, and eliminates Planned Development districts.
2. Sec. 3-3, *Zoning Districts Established*, creates three new zoning districts: Commercial Neighborhood (CN), Innovation Center (IC), and Open Space & Parks (OSP).
3. Sec. 4-1, *Residential Suburban (RS)*, supports single-family detached homes in suburban settings. New RS increases the max residential densities in old RE (three dwelling units per acre), R-1 (one dwelling unit per acre), and R-2 (two dwelling units

- per acre) to four dwelling units per acre. A standard for minimum 10 percent community amenities and open space is added.
4. Sec. 4-3, *Residential Medium (RM)*, allows single-family homes, duplexes, and townhouses in medium-density areas. New RM increases the max residential density in old R-6 (six dwelling units per acre) and R-8 (eight dwelling units per acre) to 10 dwelling units per acre for single-family attached housing only. Single-family detached housing density does not increase. A standard for minimum 10 percent community amenities and open space is added.
  5. Sec. 4-4, *Residential Urban (RU)*, supports high-density residential development, including apartments, townhouses, duplexes, and mixed-use buildings. New RU increases the max residential density in old R-16 (16 dwelling units per acre) to 22 dwelling units per acre. Density thresholds in old R-22 (22 dwelling units per acre) do not change. A standard for minimum 15 percent community amenities and open space is added.
  6. Sec. 5-1, *Commercial Neighborhood (CN)*, is a new zoning district that supports low-intensity, small-scale retail, repair, sales, service, and office uses that cater primarily to nearby residents. Upper-story residential is allowed but must accompany nonresidential buildings. The max residential density in new CN is 16 dwelling units per acre for multifamily housing on upper floors only. A standard for minimum 20 percent community amenities and open space is added.
  7. Sec. 5-4, *Mixed-Use (MU)*, is a revised zoning district that supports residential, civic, and commercial uses alongside community spaces. There are “use mix standards” to ensure a good balance between office, commercial, and residential uses. New MU establishes a max residential density of 40 dwelling units per acre. A standard for minimum 25% community amenities and open space is added.
  8. Sec. 5-5, *Downtown (DT)*, serves as Leesburg’s mixed-use core, supporting employment, tourism, and commercial activities. It allows for nonresidential uses, residential uses, and institutional, retail, and community uses. The Commission considered raising by-right residential density in the DT District but ultimately decided to keep it at 5 multifamily units by-right, 6 to 40 units by minor special exception, and more than 40 by special exception.
  9. Sec. 5-6, *Innovation Center (IC)*, is a new district that fosters a mix of residential, office, research, and laboratory uses in a greener setting than traditional business zones. There are “use-mix standards” like the MU District and the max residential density in new IC is 24 dwelling units per acre for multifamily housing. A standard for minimum 25% community amenities and open space is added.
  10. Sec. 5-7, *Crescent District (CD)*, maintains existing uses along commercial corridors while accommodating a range of development including retail, residential, office, and civic in designated activity centers. CD zoning also allows some residential neighborhoods, open space and parks, and government facilities. There are six Crescent District subdistricts: Activity Center (CD-AC), Planned Activity Center (CD-PAC), Commercial Corridor (CD-CC), Residential Neighborhood (CD-RN), Government Center (CD-GC), and Open Space and Parks (CD-OSP).

- a. New CD-AC increases the max residential density from 24 to 60 dwelling units per acre in two concentrated nodes at S King Street and Catoctin Circle, and E Market Street and Catoctin Circle. A standard for minimum 10% community amenities and open space is added, as well as a requirement for a minimum half-acre park or signature public space.
  - b. New CD-RN applies to limited areas and increases the max residential density from 16 to 22 dwelling units per acre. A standard for minimum 10% community amenities, and a separate minimum 10% open space is added.
11. Sec. 6-4, *Open Space and Parks (OSP)*, is a new zoning district that provides for the protection and preservation of the community’s natural and park resources and provides visual and physical relief from development. This is a change from the existing Zoning Ordinance that designated most public open space and parks as residential zoning.
  12. Sec. 7-4, *Floodplain Overlay District (FP)*, has been revised to align local regulations with current FEMA guidance. This is a change from the existing Zoning Ordinance that had more restrictive floodplain regulations than FEMA.

### Article III: Uses

1. Division 8, *Use Categories*, is a new streamlining approach to classifying land uses. Uses are grouped based on common characteristics, which may include type and intensity of activity, method of delivering goods or services, and anticipated impact on the surrounding environment. These “Use Characteristics” assist in identifying and comparing land uses, especially when evaluating unlisted or proposed uses. If a proposed business is not explicitly listed, but it meets the characteristics of a Use Category that is permissible, it can be dealt with administratively (or by special exception) and does not require a lengthy Zoning Text Amendment to add the business.
2. Sec. 9-2, *Use Tables*, consolidates all land uses into one matrix that lists which uses can go in what zoning district. It establishes a new category called “Limited Use,” which permits a land use with limitations. This new category streamlines process since many Limited Uses previously required special exception approval, but now they can proceed by-right if they can meet related codified use standards.
3. Sec. 9-2, *Use Tables*, includes a cross-reference and hyperlink to all applicable Use Standards listed in Divisions 10 through 14. Use standards are a specific set of regulations that govern how a particular land use must operate, beyond simply being permitted or prohibited in a zoning district. All use standards were simplified and clarified as needed.
4. Sec. 12-2.F, *Home Occupations*, is revamped to allow more home business uses that do not have impacts on the neighborhood.
5. Sec. 12-2.G, *Short-Term Residential Rental*, contains more restrictions on how and when owners or operators can use residential units for short-term accommodations (e.g. Airbnb, VRBO, etc.). A residency requirement stating the operator must occupy the dwelling for a minimum of 185 days per year, and an overall duration that stipulates no dwelling may be used as a short-term rental for more than 90 total calendar days per year, is added.

Article IV: Development Standards

1. Sec. 17-2, *Off-Street Parking Requirements*, includes parking space maximums in addition to parking space minimums. Many minimum parking requirements have been adjusted based on the Institute of Transportation Engineers Parking Generation Manual to ensure parking ratios are based on market realities.
2. Sec. 17-6, *Modified [Parking] Requirements in the DT District*, expands the exemption from parking requirements to any existing building or structure that is used or rehabilitated for any nonresidential use in the DT District. The 1,000-foot walking distance and 500-foot walking distance to a municipal parking facility stipulation is eliminated.
3. Sec. 17-9, *Bicycle Parking*, is a new section that requires bike racks be installed for certain uses. This helps implement Town Plan policies to improve bicycle infrastructure in Town.
4. Division 18, *Community Amenities and Open Space*, is a new approach to ensure that all developments provide functional, accessible, and well-maintained open spaces and amenities. The inclusion of diagrams, visuals, and descriptive tables helps clarify requirements and expectations.
5. Sec. 19-2, *Tree Canopy*, is shortened since the majority of tree canopy preservation requirements will be moved to a new chapter in the Town Code. Placing the Tree Ordinance in the Town Code is a best management practice and shifts administration responsibilities to the Urban Forester rather than the Zoning Administrator where technical tree expertise is required.
6. Division 20, *Sustainability*, introduces new incentives 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 multifamily and nonresidential development. Examples of incentives for qualifying sustainable developments include increased density, height, and reduced parking minimums.
7. Division 22, *Signs*, is a comprehensive update to ensure compliance with the First Amendment, add graphics, and simplify procedures. The Division categorizes signs by type: attached, freestanding, or temporary. The sign regulations effectively balance communication for businesses with aesthetic quality, safety, and community character.
8. Division 24, *Attainable Housing*, has been updated to support two types of attainable housing similar to Loudoun County's zoning:
  - a. Affordable Dwelling Unit Program – requirement for proposed developments that will yield 24 or more housing units to provide a minimum percentage of affordable dwelling units (ADU). The Zoning Ordinance Rewrite increases the existing minimum ADU requirement from 6.25% for multifamily projects and 12.5% for single-family attached/detached projects to 15% across the board.
  - b. Affordable Housing Units – this is a new section that allows affordable housing units (AHU) that meet State Housing program requirements to count towards

local ADU requirements. AHUs are typically 100 percent affordable projects that are funded by Low Income Tax Credit and other State or Federal programs.

9. Division 24, *Attainable Housing*, maintains the density bonus incentive for providing ADUs, and includes a new building height increase incentive of five additional feet when a development exceeds the applicable number of ADUs required by five or more.

#### Article V: Review and Decision-Making Bodies

1. No changes to generic descriptions of zoning powers and duties of advisory bodies and Council. It is mostly restatements of existing State legislation or bylaws.

#### Article VI: Review and Approval Procedures

1. Division 27, *Common Review Procedures*, reformats information in tabular format to make it easier to understand and follow. For example, there are tables for Procedural Elements, Application Contents, Decision Criteria, and Approval Validity Periods.
2. Sec. 27-3, *Optional Neighborhood Meeting*, is a new section that encourages additional community outreach by applicants and developers. It hyperlinks to a newly developed [Public Engagement Quick Start Guide](#).
3. Sec. 29-1, *BAR Certificate of Appropriateness*, adds a requirement that any application that requires a site plan must receive a first submission Consolidated Comment Letter prior to applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness from the BAR. This ensures that significant parts of an application such as use, density, and site layout are vetted before the BAR begins their work on architecture and historic compatibility.
4. Sec. 29-3, *Concept Plan and Proffer Amendments*, is a new legislative application type that allows an applicant to follow a streamlined process (instead of a full rezoning) for making changes to accepted proffers or an approved concept development plan. The Town Council may waive the requirements for public hearing before either or both the Planning Commission and Town Council when an amendment to such concept plan or proffered conditions is requested that does not affect conditions of use or density.
5. Sec. 29-7, *Town Plan Amendment*, revises the initiation requirements by requiring private parties to receive Council authorization before they can apply for a Town Plan Amendment. The Council may also initiate Town Plan Amendments of their own accord.

#### Article VII, Nonconformities

1. Sec. 33-1, *Conversion of Nonconforming Uses*, is a new section that allows the Town Council to convert a legal nonconforming use to a conforming use if specified criteria are met.
2. Sec. 33-2, *Verification of Nonconforming Site Elements*, is a new section that allows the Zoning Administrator to verify legal nonconforming site elements to protect private property interests.

Article VIII, Enforcement, Violations, and Penalties

1. No changes to procedures for correcting violations of the Zoning Ordinance. It is mostly restatements of existing State legislation.

Article IX, Word Usage

1. Sec. 38-1, *Rules of Construction*, clarifies how certain words and terms are interpreted for the purpose of the Zoning Ordinance.
2. Division 39, *Definitions*, modernizes land use definitions using the consultant's extensive land use glossary that draws from numerous Zoning Ordinances nationwide, as well as the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and American Planning Association Land Based Classification Standards (LBCS).

**Next Steps**

The April 16, 2026 Planning Commission Public Hearing is another of many opportunities throughout the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite project for members of the public to provide input. It marks the end of the Commission's work on the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite unless the Commission determines further work sessions are needed. It is anticipated that the Town Council will begin their review of the Planning Commission Draft of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite in Summer 2026.

**Attachments:**

1. Draft Planning Commission Resolution
2. Draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Map
3. Draft Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Text
4. Public Comment Report (as of April 2, 2026)

**Online Content:**

1. Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Map – <https://leesburgva.info/zorewritemap>
2. Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Text – <https://leesburgva.info/zorewritetext>

A hard copy of the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite may be examined at:

Town of Leesburg  
Department of Community Development  
222 Catoctin Circle SE, Suite 200  
Leesburg, VA 20175