

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Crafton's Draft Zoning Code
06/10/2025

Question: Why and when did zoning become such a priority?

Answer: Adopting an updated zoning code was identified as a priority in Crafton/Ingram's 2017 Thrive Comprehensive Plan. The pursuit of a zoning code update for both boroughs is recommended several times throughout the Thrive Plan. One section is devoted to laying out goals for a zoning code update. In 2020, the commonwealth approved a grant for Crafton to write a new zoning code, which was funded in 2021.

In 2022, ZoneCo was selected as the consultant to help write the code. In September 2022, a Zoning Diagnostic Report was written by ZoneCo. The Zoning Diagnostic Report took objectives outlined within the 2017 Thrive Plan and translated them directly to relevant zoning improvements that would facilitate meeting those objectives. Those objectives are as follows:

1. Facilitate vibrancy through flexibility to accommodate uses that meet resident and business needs, facilitate new and evolving uses, and facilitate a mix of commercial and residential uses where appropriate.
2. Enhance the public realm through high-quality design standards that reflect and preserve the historic fabric, and thoroughfare and public space standards that facilitate vibrancy and accessibility.
3. Ensure compatibility between uses and implement effective means of buffering and transitioning between uses.
4. Protect and enhance natural resources and implement green/low-impact design solutions where possible.
5. Ensure organizational efficiency through the exploration of opportunities for joint land use administration and enforcement. Ensure that enforcement is effectively addressing blight.
6. Facilitate pedestrian, bicycle, and transit utilization through the coordination of infrastructure and land use regulations.

A Zoning Steering Committee was established and worked through revisions to the draft code until summer 2024. Since then, ZoneCo's contract has expired and Borough staff have been managing the process.

Question: When was zoning last addressed in Crafton?

Answer: Crafton's current zoning code was adopted in 2004.

Question: What can zoning do?

Answer: A zoning code is the foundational law that controls how a borough looks and organizes land uses (i.e., single-family homes, apartment buildings, and retail businesses are all 'uses'). Zoning controls where different types of land uses are located, sets minimum standards and rules for development (such as how far from the street a home should be located), and can require design standards and amenities for new development. If written to best practices, zoning can improve the following quality of life factors:

- Protect public health and safety
- Preserve historic neighborhoods
- Increase walkability
- Improve the small business environment
- Reduce blight
- Control and regulate Airbnbs/short-term rentals and other nuisance uses

If a zoning code is outdated or poorly written, it will contribute to the following factors:

- Unregulated nuisance properties that lead to blight
- The decline of walkability
- The decline of community character
- Low/no investment in business districts
- Outdated basic environmental controls for erosion, buffering, and runoff
- Underutilized buildings

Question: What can't zoning do?

Answer: Zoning can't ban renters or rental units, can't stop future growth, can't ban LLCs from buying property or regulate them differently than other people, and can't force anyone to redevelop their property.

Question: Where are we in the process of adopting the new code?

Answer: Crafton Planning Commission is reviewing and discussing the draft code now. They will consider a recommendation to move the code to Borough Council during their regular meeting on June 24 at 6:30 PM in Council Chambers. All are welcome to the meeting. The new code is not yet approved if Planning Commission votes to move the code to Council. Borough Council will send the code to the County Department of Economic Development for a 45-day review. Commonwealth law requires a county review of local zoning codes, but the county does not have authority to change or veto the code. If there

are no legitimate changes recommended, Borough Council will then start their approval process. Borough Council will hold two public hearings on the code before considering adoption.

Question: How does the Borough plan to track impacts of the proposed zoning code, such as population growth, development, and infrastructure burdens?

Answer: The most effective way to measure the proposed zoning code's impact is to track building permits for projects that weren't previously allowed. For example, a developer building apartments in the CR (Current R-2) district wouldn't count as evidence of the new code's impact since apartments are already allowed in the R-2 district. However, a developer adding apartments above a business in the Mixed Use (Current C-1) district would count because this wasn't allowed under the old code. Tracking these changes will be straightforward since there is little demand for construction permits and the old and new codes are substantially similar, making permits attributable to the new code easy to identify.

Zoning codes shape population growth by controlling property development. The proposed code creates only two new housing opportunities: apartments above commercial buildings in the Mixed Use district and conversion of institutional buildings to residential use—both require Council and Planning Commission approval via a conditional use permit. In two other instances, the new code actually restricts housing development. It lowers maximum building heights in the Mixed Use district and eliminates house-to-apartment conversions in the Community Residential district.

Finally, Crafton's infrastructure was designed for a larger population than today's residents. The Borough had 8,400 residents in 1960 compared to approximately 6,000 now, and infrastructure continues to be upgraded. The Borough can comfortably accommodate growth, but the more likely scenario is slow to no growth because there have been 65 years of population decline despite new zoning codes coming and going, and we appear to have stabilized at around 6,000 people.

Question: Are we adopting this zoning code to build more low-income housing?

Answer: No. Both our current zoning regulations and the proposed updates focus on land use standards rather than affordability requirements. The zoning code establishes what types of housing can be built and where, but it doesn't mandate specific price points or affordability levels.



Under both the existing and proposed zoning frameworks, developers have the flexibility to create housing at various price points—from affordable options to luxury developments—based on market conditions and their business decisions.

Question: Will elected officials or Borough staff financially gain from a new zoning code?

Answer: No. Elected, appointed, and executive leadership at the Borough are required to submit annual financial disclosures, which are open to public inspection. Perjury is the penalty for lying on the disclosure.

Question: Does Crafton's Planning Commission get paid?

Answer: No. Planning Commission members are unpaid volunteers.

Question: Are there New York hedge funds awaiting adoption of the new code to buy properties all over Crafton?

Answer: Not to our knowledge. According to 2025 Allegheny County records, 87% of the residential properties in Crafton are owned by people in the 15205 zip code, and 95% are owned by people living in Allegheny County.

Question: Will reducing lot dimensions attract more businesses to set up shop in Crafton?

Answer: Zoning codes establish minimum requirements that guide development, while subdivision processes are the mechanism through which lot dimensions are actually modified. In Crafton's two commercial districts, there are no minimum lot size requirements, which reduces the barrier to entry for new businesses, and therefore increases the probability that businesses will set up shop in Crafton.

Question: Why is Crafton's administration recommending initiatives that could result in increased density in the Borough?

Answer: Recommendations by members of the Zoning Steering Committee and Borough staff to increase housing options in Crafton's residential areas have been removed from the code or rejected by the Planning Commission. The new code does allow property owners in the commercial districts to provide housing above their ground-level shops, which will potentially increase density.

Question: If we do nothing to the Zoning Code, what happens?

Answer: Our commercial areas will continue to suffer from unfulfilled potential. To build or significantly rehabilitate a property in the historic commercial center of town, a business

owner is limited to constructing buildings that are at least 100 feet wide with 15-foot setbacks, similar in look and feel to a small strip mall. These design requirements do not match downtown Crafton's historic built environment and create barriers to investment. Our other commercial district, the shopping center area, needs modernization. The new zoning rules reduce barriers and make it simpler for property owners to improve their properties and attract businesses to fill their available space.

Question: If the Planning Commission is the recommending body for the zoning code, why do the Borough Manager and Economic Development Director oversee the process during Planning Commission meetings?

Answer: Planning Commission members are volunteers. Borough staff are educated and paid professionals who provide recommendations for any given topic based on analysis and best practices. Planning Commission and Council may accept or reject recommendations from Borough staff.

Question: Why do we need to tackle the entire zoning code at once instead of addressing specific needs as they are deemed an absolute necessity?

Answer: ZoneCo's 2022 Zoning Diagnostic Report pointed out usability issues with our current code: "Issues with organization tend to originate within individual sections where several different zoning issues are lumped together incongruously." And the language within the code "is sometimes verbose, confusing, or the intent is hard to discern." Additionally, new uses are not addressed in our current code, such as tap rooms and Airbnbs/short-term rentals. The new code provides standards for those uses. Finally, if a quality business approaches the Borough with interest in investing but cannot because our zoning is too restrictive, we will be in a reactive position and not prepared to cultivate the opportunity. Being proactive now streamlines the process later when quality businesses approach the Borough.

Question: What are we doing about Air BnBs/short-term rentals?

Answer: Because our current code was adopted prior to Air BnBs existing, it does not regulate them. The new code restricts Air BnBs to our commercial districts and eliminates Air BnBs from residential areas.

Question: Why are we spending so much time on zoning? Aren't there more important things to do?

Answer: The Borough is working on several initiatives, and improving the zoning code does not preclude other priorities. Improving the zoning code will help enable the success of other initiatives, such as business recruitment, walkability, and nuisance property

reduction. Borough Council and Planning Commission heard suggestions from the community to slow the process down, which has occurred, and numerous suggestions for improvement from individual community residents were incorporated into the new code. Because the zoning code is the fundamental law that guides the direction of new investment in a community, it takes time and lots of public feedback to get it right. There has been open public engagement and public meetings since 2022 for the zoning process, surveys, committees, legal analysis, and dozens (probably hundreds) of individual meetings on the topic.

Question: What will happen to the zoning code if PRT reduces service to Crafton?

Answer: Probably nothing. Crafton's Transit Oriented Development District is zoned to encourage mixed-use development with street-level shops/restaurants and residential on the upper levels. Easy transit access is a great asset but does not preclude mixed uses.

Question: How are we going to manage our parking challenges?

Answer: The new zoning code maintains parking regulations but significantly simplifies them for easier implementation. Zoning codes do a poor job of addressing current parking challenges. For instance, many of Crafton's residential streets were built before parking garages were a priority. Therefore, street parking is a challenge. Short of implementation of a parking management system within the residential areas, the challenge will remain the same. Within Crafton's historic commercial district, parking is not a challenge. Implementation of a parking management system within a commercial area is an indicator the commercial area is in demand, and therefore a good problem to have. Crafton does not have that good problem yet.