

Overview

The Town of Abingdon is updating, modernizing, and restructuring the zoning and subdivision ordinances into one seamless regulatory document. The revised zoning and subdivision ordinance will:

- Provide streamlined and user-friendly regulations;
- Incorporate best planning practices and current state code requirements;
- Address the goals and strategies identified in the Comprehensive Plan; and,
- Consider citizen needs and issues identified through the public engagement process.

This process will be guided by Town staff, the Planning Commission, and Town Council with opportunities for input from stakeholders and citizens. To review the Zoning and Subdivision Diagnostic and to stay updated on the project, visit: <https://abingdon-va.gov/zoning-subdivision-ordinance-update/>. A guide to zoning is also provided for reference.

Agenda

The April 26 meeting will focus on reviewing the public engagement results and collecting direction on key policies necessary to proceed with ordinance development. The following agenda is provided as an outline for discussion:

1. Schedule & Progress to Date – 5 minutes
2. Public Engagement Summary – 15 minutes
3. Ordinance Structure and Content – 15 minutes
4. Key Policy Direction – 60 minutes
 - a. Zoning Districts
 - b. Zoning District Standards
5. Next Steps – 10 minutes

1. Schedule & Progress to Date

The project schedule is provided in **Attachment A**. Progress to date includes:

- **Staff Kickoff** – The Berkley Group conducted a kickoff meeting with Abingdon staff on February 9, 2021 to review the scope of work and deliverable items. This meeting gave Berkley Group’s team insight into current issues and areas of focus.
- **Council Kickoff** – The Town Council kickoff was held on March 1, 2021. Town Council provided guidance on important land use and zoning issues as well as suggestions to consider during the public input phase and ordinance drafting.
- **Public Engagement** – An online public survey was conducted between March 8-April 8. The Berkley Group also held stakeholder interviews and a public workshop on April 1 to collect feedback on priorities for the ordinance update.

2. Public Engagement Summary

Public engagement included a public survey, stakeholder interviews, and a community input workshop. A flyer was distributed by hand throughout the town to advertise the survey and public workshop. Town staff also advertised the survey and workshop on a webpage created to disseminate information regarding the zoning and subdivision update. Additionally, the public survey and workshop were advertised on the town's social media accounts.

Public Survey

The public survey was conducted online from March 8-April 8 and garnered 70 responses. **Attachment B** provides a summary of results.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were held on April 1, 2021, with four stakeholder groups, including landowners, business owners, economic development professionals, realtors, attorneys, and developers. A total of 10 stakeholders participated in the interviews. Each stakeholder group discussed the existing regulations and opportunities for improvement. **Attachment C** summarizes stakeholder feedback.

Community Input Workshop

The community input workshop was held at the Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator on April 1, 2021. Two individuals participated. Due to the low participation, Berkley Group staff reviewed the public workshop questions directly with the two participants. The results of this meeting have been combined with the stakeholder interview results (**Attachment C**).

Key Findings

Key findings from the public engagement process include:

- A desire to improve community appearance and preserve history while encouraging new commercial development.
- Dissatisfaction with the quality of development in business areas outside of the historic downtown and along major streets / entrance corridors.
- A desire to maintain open space and the remaining rural character in the town, with opinions differing on the approaches to accomplishing this goal.
- A desire to provide greater variety in housing, including measures to promote affordable housing options in the town.
- Support for sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, and parking standards to improve the aesthetic quality of the town and increase safe walkability.
- Revising the Old and Historic district to allow more consistent uses across subdistricts.

In addition, stakeholders also noted:

- A need for the zoning ordinance to be more flexible for use and development types, while being easy to understand.
- A need to restructure the subdivision ordinance standards to ease the burden on developers, such as removing sidewalks, curbing, and guttering requirements when adjacent parcels do not already have them.

3. Ordinance Structure

The existing table of contents for the zoning ordinance is provided for reference in **Attachment D**. Reorganization of the ordinance is recommended to provide a streamlined, more user-friendly ordinance that offers predictability and transparency.

As shown in the recommended ordinance structure below, reorganization would consolidate the existing authority, purpose, and applicability sections into one section and move it to the beginning of the ordinance. Administrative provisions would be combined and placed at the beginning of the ordinance as well. District provisions and standards will be incorporated into one article, including intent statements for all districts. Community design standards such as signs, parking, landscaping, and lighting will be removed from the existing districts and placed into one article to streamline use.

A new article is proposed to address the overlay districts and special districts, such as the Flood Hazard Overlay (FH), Planned Unit Development (PUD), and Old and Historic (OH) district. The subdivision ordinance will also be incorporated into the zoning ordinance to ease usage and interpretation relative to land development regulations.

The following general organization is proposed for the updated ordinance:

- Article I – In General (Authority, Purpose, Applicability)
- Article II – Administration (Official map, Amendment procedure, Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, Violations, and Appeals)
- Article III – Permits and Applications (Zoning permits, Special Use permits, Building permits, Permit application requirements)
- Article IV – Zoning Districts (Establishment, Intent, and Dimensional Standards)
- Article V – Special and Overlay Zoning Districts
- Article VI – Use Matrix
- Article VII – Use Performance Standards
- Article VIII – Community Design Standards (Signs, Parking, Landscaping, and Lighting)
- Article IX – Nonconforming Uses, Lots, and Structures
- Article X – Subdivision Code
- Article XI – Definitions

4. Key Policy Direction

In addition to the public input summaries provided herein and in **Attachments B and C**, the Town's Comprehensive Plan offers key consideration when revising the zoning ordinance. A brief overview of Plan considerations offering guidance to the ordinance rewrite are summarized below.

The Abingdon Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2020, envisions the Town as:

- The region's intersection of arts and nature,
- Supportive of business,
- A place that embraces preservation and progress,
- A connected, walkable, and bikeable small town,
- Providing housing for every stage of life, and,
- A town with complete neighborhoods.

Town of Abingdon Zoning & Subdivision Ordinance Update

Planning Commission Worksession #1

April 26, 2021



These visionary statements can, and should, be supported by the zoning and subdivision ordinances. To this effect, several goals and strategies throughout the chapters of the Plan direct changes to the zoning ordinance.

The Plan establishes a Land Use Policy Area map to guide the Future Land Use map. These areas advocate for revitalization of neighborhoods and redevelopment of underperforming commercial areas. Also included in the Land Use Policy Area map are opportunities for preservation and infill development to take advantage of Abingdon's limited development space. The Land Use Policy Areas also provides direction for intent statements that have not been incorporated for the residential, business, and office and institutional districts.

It is important that revisions to the Zoning Ordinance ensure that future development is based on clear, defined guidelines that balance property owners' rights with the vision of the community at large. As the Berkley Group staff analyzes existing ordinance regulations, Comprehensive Plan recommendations, and public and town staff input, additional guidance from the Planning Commission will be needed on key policy points prior to drafting zoning ordinance changes. The primary policy point for discussion this evening, detailed further in this section, is pertinent to the establishment of zoning districts and intent statements.

A. Zoning Districts

Existing zoning districts, overlays, and special districts are provided for reference in the District Summary & Intent Table (**Attachment E**). The table includes the current and proposed district title, the current and proposed intent statement, typical uses, and a brief analysis summary for each district.

The following items will be discussed during the worksession:

- **District Names for Clarity** – The names of the Residential districts should be modified to better represent the character of those districts. The current Residential districts are referred to only by number. Renaming these districts to Low Density Residential, Medium Density Residential, High Density Residential, and Mixed Residential (while still retaining the numbering convention, i.e. R-1, R-2, etc.) is more descriptive of respective use and character. ***Is there consensus on these suggested modifications?***
- **District Intent Statements** – As is common with older ordinances, Abingdon does not have intent statements for several districts, including the Agricultural, Forestal, and Open Space district, all Residential districts, all Business districts, the Office and Institutional district, and the Limited Industrial district. Intent statements have been drafted for these districts. Existing intent statements have also been refined, as appropriate. Language has been used to connect several of the districts directly to the Comprehensive Plan where possible. ***Are there suggestions to these modifications?***
- **Reduce Old & Historic Subdistricts** – Consolidating the 15 subdistricts in the Old and Historic district into three to five subdistricts will allow more consistent treatment of uses across the district. Staff and stakeholders have indicated that this is a critical need in the district. It would encourage economic development, help citizens understand allowable uses, and ease administration burden. ***Is there consensus on consolidating these subdistricts?***

B. Zoning District Standards

The current district standards for the zoning districts are provided in **Attachment F**. The Berkley Group suggests reviewing the district standards to make adjustments as needed.

The following recommendations will be discussed during the worksession:

- **Revising Old and Historic District Language for Dimensional Standards** – The Old and Historic District currently does not provide specific setback, frontage, yard, or height regulations. Current standards state:

“The old and historic district shall follow the general established pattern already in existence in the district insofar as area, setback, frontage, yard and height regulations are concerned.”

This statement is vague and could lead to administrative burdens or legal disputes. If subdistricts are consolidated, dimensional standards may be applied to guide future development. ***Is there a desire to develop dimensional standards for subdistricts?***

- **Modifying Lot Standards for the R-3 and R-4 Residential Districts** – Modifying the existing lot standards may address some housing affordability concerns in Abingdon. Currently, the minimum lot area for multiple-family dwellings (served by water and sewer) in these districts is 10,000 square feet, plus an additional 2,500 square feet for each dwelling unit over two dwelling units (see **Attachment F**). Abingdon’s standards for multiple-family dwellings are more restrictive than comparable districts in similar communities. For example:
 - Town of Blacksburg: 8,000 square feet
 - Town of Farmville: 5,000 sq. ft. plus 2500 square feet for each additional dwelling unit under 1 roof, overall density to not exceed 16 units per acre
 - City of Radford: 10,000 square feet for up to four units, plus 1,600 square feet per dwelling unit in excess of four units

Is there interest in reducing lot area standards for the R-3 and R-4 Residential Districts?

- **Other Items for Discussion as Needed** – The Berkley Group will continue evaluating lot standards and will identify additional questions for Planning Commission consideration. Planning Commission is also encouraged to identify questions and concerns related to district standards.

5. Next Steps

The Berkley Group will review recommendations and begin drafting ordinance articles. Topics to be discussed at the next meeting include:

- Revised District Standards
- Use Matrix
- Definitions
- Overlay & Special Districts