


**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** Anne McClung, Planning and Building Department Director 

**RE:** Zoning Ordinance Amendment #60/Ordinance #2001 – Zoning Ordinance Amendment to create a new Downtown Northwest zoning district

**DATE:** October 14, 2022

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#### Background of the Downtown Strategic Plan

In 2019, the Town adopted the Downtown Strategic Plan. The plan presents a strategic vision to guide the evolution of Blacksburg's Downtown into the years ahead. Rooted in community input and analysis, the plan provides a blueprint for action through policy, capital improvements, and development that advance community priorities. The full plan can be viewed with the link below.

<https://www.blacksburg.gov/departments/departments-l-z/town-manager/plans-and-studies/downtown-strategic-plan>

One of the outcomes of the Downtown Strategic Plan was adopting a districting framework, which defined six geographic areas, or sub districts, within Downtown that have their own distinct characteristics, identities, and mixes of uses. Each of these districts has their own assets and opportunities along with a unique vision identified in the plan for each area. The Downtown Northwest sub district consists of the area bounded by North Main Street, Prices Fork Road, and Turner Street. The vision for this area is more dense, mixed-use, architecturally appealing, and walkable development. This is also the only area identified in the plan as suitable for the inclusion of student housing.

#### New Downtown Northwest Zoning District

To implement the vision of the Downtown Northwest sub district, a new zoning district needs to be created and added to the Town's Zoning Ordinance. The proposed amendment will create a new "floating" zoning district applicable to the Downtown Northwest area. The district floats until an owner rezones to apply the district to their parcel(s). This district will not be applicable to any other area. It is important to note that creation of the district does not change existing zoning. Should property owners want to use the new district; a rezoning through a public hearing process will be required.

#### New Approach to Zoning Regulation

The district will include new form-based zoning regulations. These regulations have more specificity in building and site design requirements than typically found in traditional zoning districts. Form-based codes have been used more frequently in recent years to focus regulation on the details of the design of the site components such as the layout of buildings, parking, and landscaping and less on the uses. Staff finds this type of zoning to be most effective when customized to apply to a specific geographic area, especially one in which there is redevelopment potential.

This new type of regulation introduces new concepts not currently found in the zoning ordinance. Concepts such as *build-to* lines, *build-out* percentages and building height *step-backs* are included in the district. There are some sections of the new district that are similar to existing zoning districts such as the inclusion of a purpose statement, applicability criteria and a list of permitted uses and conditional uses.

Draft of Downtown Northwest Zoning District

Included in your packet is a draft of the district. Chris Jennette from Camiros Ltd. will be in attendance at the Planning Commission work session to walk through the district page-by-page. Staff has already briefed the Planning Commission on some of the key issues that need to be discussed. The first item will be to get a basic understanding of the form-based code approach and the specific standards contained in the new district. Other key issues for discussion are maximum building height, residential density and the allowance of drive-through facilities.

Public Information and Input Meeting

Attached are the sign-in sheets and meeting notes from the public information meeting on Zoning Ordinance Amendment #60 held on October 12, 2022 at 6:00 pm in the Council Chambers.

**Public Information and Input Meeting Notes**  
**Downtown Northwest Zoning District**  
**Zoning Ordinance Amendment #60/ORD 2001**

**October 12, 2022**

**6:00 PM**

A public information and input meeting was held on October 12, 2022 to introduce a new zoning district proposed to be added to the Town Zoning Ordinance. The district is called the Downtown Northwest district and covers the area bounded by North Main St., Turner St., and Prices Fork Rd. Staff present at the meeting were Anne McClung, Planning and Building Department Director and Matt Hanratty, Assistant to the Town Manager. Staff provided an overview of the district and a summary of the district standards. Staff also went over the public hearing schedule for the amendment. It was noted that the text of the district has been prepared by a consultant, Camiros Ltd., and the text of the district will be posted to the Town website on October 14, 2022. Sign-in sheets from the meeting are attached.

- An attendee asked what would happen if there were a development that met the minimum size requirement of 3.5 acres but is located in the middle of the block. How will that fit in?
- An attendee inquired about the total acreage of the area the district covers.
- There were comments about the existing development in the area, specifically regarding the buildings owned by the Virginia Tech Foundation. There were also comments about the impact of the Virginia Tech Foundation ownership on local taxes.
- An attendee asked about the building height and if the 100-125' height proposed in the draft were the maximum that could be considered. There were also questions about the relationship of building height and residential density.
- An attendee spoke about the Downton Strategic Plan and asked about why specific details of the Midtown sub district were not included in the Strategic Plan.
- An attendee asked when the specific zoning amendment text would be available for review.
- An attendee asked for clarity of the relationship between this new district and the existing Downtown Commercial zoning. Can requests for items other than the new district still be considered? Could a planned residential rezoning request still be filed?
- An attendee asked if the adoption of this new district would impact the likelihood of approvals for changes that are not rezoning to the DTNW district.
- An attendee commented that this proposal and the Strategic Plan mean that Blacksburg will not be a small town anymore.
- An attendee asked about the use of upper floors for residential uses.

Public Input Meeting

Downtown Northwest Zoning Amendment #60/Ordinance 2001

Date: October 12, 2022 6:00 pm

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