

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Crafton's Draft Zoning Code

04/01/2025

Q. Why and when did zoning become such a priority?

A. 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 of 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 up until summer of 2024. Since then, ZoneCo's contract has expired and Borough staff have been managing the process.

Q. When was zoning last addressed in Crafton?

A. Crafton's current zoning code was adopted in 2004.

Q. What can zoning do?

A. A zoning code is the foundational law that controls how a borough looks and organizes land uses (i.e., single family home, apartment building, retail business 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 run-off
- Underutilized buildings

Q. What can't zoning do?

A. 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, or force anyone to redevelop their property.

Q. Where are we at in the process of adopting the new code?

A. Crafton Planning Commission is reviewing and discussing the draft code now. When they are comfortable with it, they will vote to recommend (or not recommend) approval to Borough Council. Borough Council will then send the code to the County Department of Economic Development for a 45-day review. If there are no significant changes recommended, Borough Council will then start their approval process. Borough Council will hold two public hearings on the code before considering adoption. The two public hearings will take approximately a month if moving at the maximum efficiency.

Q. Are we adopting this zoning code to build more low-income housing?

A. No. The development community can build low-income housing now subject to our current zoning code if they wanted to. No one has approached the Borough to construct new low-income housing, nor is the Borough encouraging more low-income housing.

Q. Will elected officials or Borough staff financially gain from a new zoning code?

A. 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.

Q. Does Crafton's Planning Commission get paid?

A. No.

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

A. 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.

Q. Will reducing lot dimensions, namely reducing lot-width to 25 feet, attract more businesses to set up shop in Crafton?

A. Zoning codes do not change lot dimensions. Subdivisions processes change lot dimensions. Zoning codes have requirements for minimums that property owners and business owners must follow. In the new code, minimum lot sizes in Neighborhood Residential districts are 40 feet wide. In Crafton's two commercial districts, there are no minimum lot size requirements, which reduces the barrier for entry for new businesses, and therefore increases the probability that businesses will set up shop in Crafton.

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

A. 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.

Q. If we do nothing to the Zoning Code what happens?

A. Crafton's commercial districts will continue to suffer from unfulfilled potential. The historic commercial center has zoning requirements that will lead most properties to increased vacancies and blight. 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. This has prevented the Borough from attracting any significant investment in the recent past.

Q. If the Planning Commission is the recommending body for the zoning code, why does the Borough Manager and Economic Development Director oversee the process during Planning Commission meetings?

A. Planning Commission members are volunteers. Borough staff are paid to provide professional recommendations for any given topic based on analysis and best practices. Planning Commission and Council may accept or reject recommendations.

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

A. 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 language 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 for when quality businesses approach the Borough.

Q. What are we doing about AirBnBs/Short-term-rentals?

A. Because our current code was adopted prior to AirBnBs/short-term-rentals existing, it does not regulate them. The new code has specific language to regulate short term rentals.

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

A. 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.

Q. Does the Borough have any studies to show how the proposed zoning ordinance will affect the look and environment 5, 10, and 15 years out?

A. Within the new code, residential areas will look the same. The code changes in the commercial areas reflect best practices and will add potential for vibrancy with improved walkability and flexible design standards that will encourage investment, new shops, and new restaurants. These changes are contingent on market demand and the Borough's work to induce it. The new zoning code removes arbitrary barriers that currently make it difficult for new shops and restaurants to establish themselves in Crafton.

Q. Have any impact studies been performed to show how the proposed zoning revisions will benefit the Borough and its residents?

A. Yes, ZoneCo was an external consultant hired for their expertise. They have access to the necessary data and experience. Any independent studies would be beyond our fiscal capacity. Nothing precludes developers from coming into Crafton under our current zoning code to build new things, but they do not because Crafton is built-out, which means the cost of new development is too high. The new zoning code will provide the foundation for more investment by lowering artificial barriers within our commercial districts, but new investment is not guaranteed.

Q. What will happen to the zoning code if PRT reduces service to Crafton?

A. Probably nothing. Crafton's Transit Oriented Develop 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.

Q. How are we going to manage our parking challenges?

A. The new zoning code maintains parking regulations but significantly simplified them for easier implementation. Zoning codes do a bad 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.