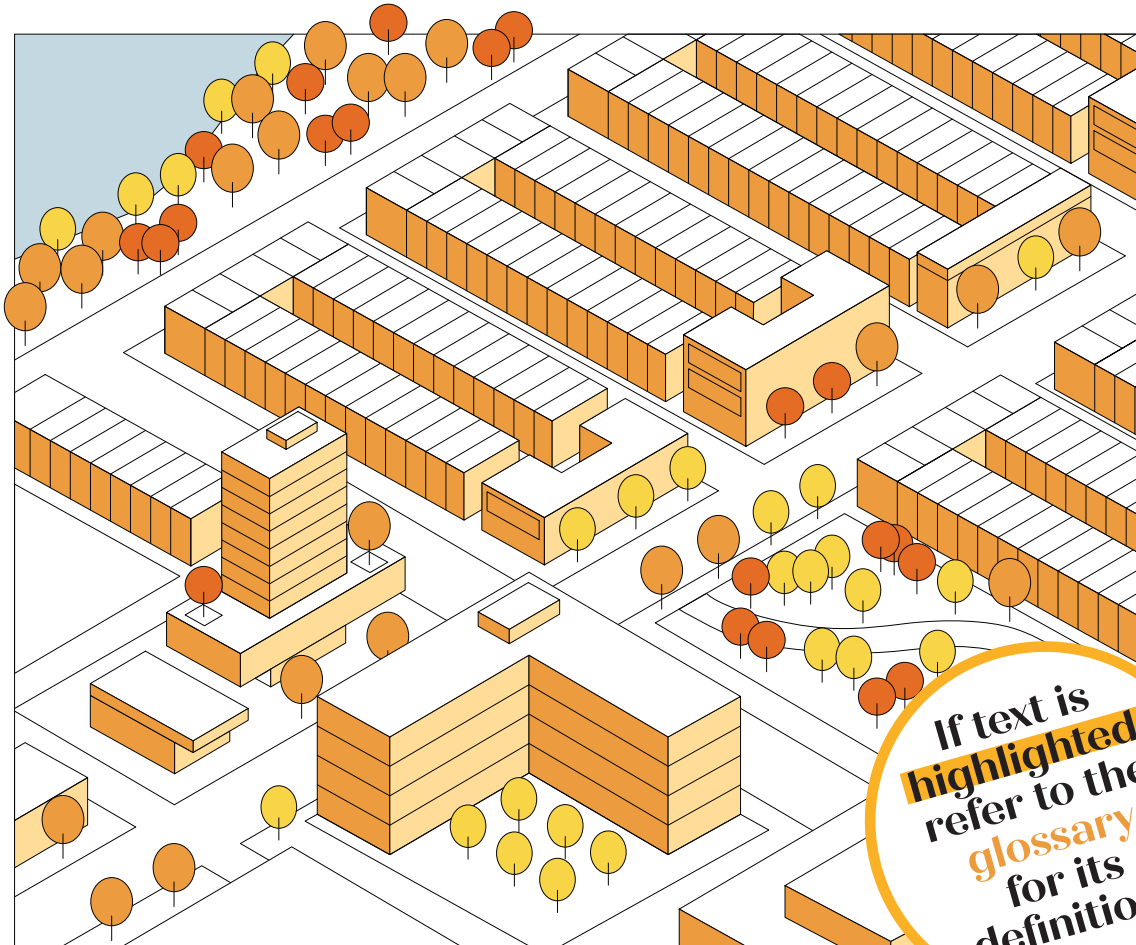




What is Zoning?



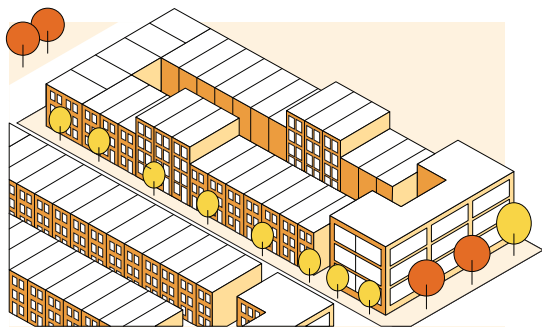
Zoning is a set of rules assigned to all properties in the city. Each 'zone' has different rules that make the most sense for that location. The **zoning code** provides the legal power to determine what can be built where. Philadelphia's City Council initiates and passes zoning legislation.

Use this booklet as a reference to zoning as a planning method, and how it is used in Philadelphia.

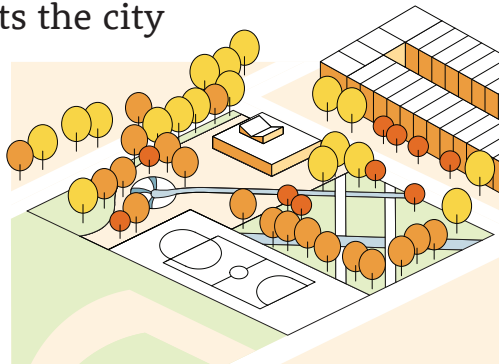
What does zoning regulate?

Zoning rules cover a variety of topics, but the main areas are “**use**” and “**bulk**”. Zoning sets limits on how a property can be used, such as for homes, stores and factories. Bulk rules deal with the size and shape of buildings, and where they can be located on the property. Bulk rules also maintain access to light and air and encourage development that harmonizes with what’s already there.

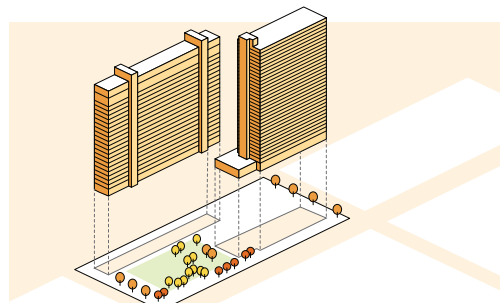
Examples of how zoning impacts the city



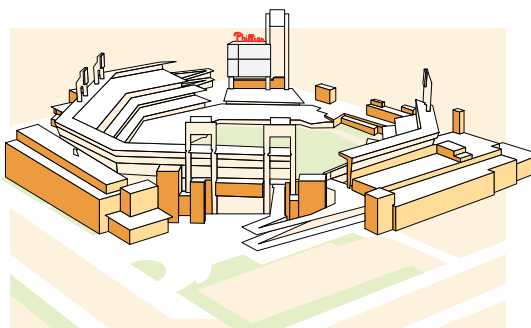
Types and locations of housing, such as single-family or multi-family (density)



Location of local businesses, industrial sites, and green spaces



Height of buildings and how much land they cover



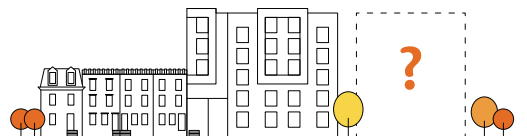
Special use structures, like universities or stadiums

Why do we need zoning and what purpose does it serve?

Zoning's role is to put reasonable limits on property rights so residents and businesses can have clear expectations about how properties near them will be used now and in the future. Zoning rules only apply when **changes** to use or bulk are made on the property. Zoning can't be used to deprive a property owner of their right to keep using a property just as they always have.

Zoning can be a tool for residents and elected leaders to work toward important goals, such as providing housing and finding locations for new parks and other public resources.

Zoning began as a local response to the rapid growth of cities brought on by industrialization and migration. Early zoning addressed separating housing from the pollution of industry and setting limits on density to prevent overcrowded and unhealthy housing conditions.



To learn how zoning has been used to discriminate, refer to the *History of Planning*

How is zoning used?

Zoning has two parts: the Code, or written rules, and a **zoning map**. Every property in the city has a zoning category, or “**base district**” and that name is also a mapping symbol. Each base district also has a unique color associated with it, which helps you see where properties with similar rules are. To find out which zoning rules apply to a property, first check the zoning map to see which district covers that property. Then the zoning code will tell you which rules apply to that district.

What categories of base districts are there?



Go to openmaps.phila.gov and check the box for “**Zoning Base Districts**” and you’ll see the categories of land uses, and names and colors for all base districts.

Here are the types of zoning districts you will encounter in Philadelphia*

R

Residential RSD RSA RTA RM **Residential Mixed Use**** RMX

C

Commercial CA **Commercial Mixed Use**** CMX CMX

I

Industrial I-1 I-2 I-3 I-P **Industrial Mixed Use**** IRMX ICMX

SP

Special Purpose SP-INS SP-ENT SP-STA SP-PO SP-AIR

*  <https://www.phila.gov/documents/zoning-code-information-manual-quick-guide/> is an online "quick guide" with examples of base districts.

** Used in coordination with other designations, such as CMX (Commercial Mixed Use), IRMX (Industrial Residential Mixed Use), ICMX (Industrial Commercial Mixed Use), and RMX (Residential Mixed Use)

Why should I care?

You (as property owner) need a zoning ‘permit’ if you are building a new structure, changing the use on a property, making an addition to an existing building, creating off-street parking or reconfiguring parking, or changing lot lines. The city agency that reviews the proposed changes is **L&I, Licenses & Inspections**. If the proposed work conforms to what is allowed in the base zoning district for that property, the project is “**by-right**”. This means you don’t need any special permissions to build the project or make the alterations.



www.phila.gov/departments/department-of-licenses-and-inspections

If the proposed work does **NOT** conform to what is allowed in the base zoning district for that property, you have the option to appeal to the **ZBA, or Zoning Board of Adjustment**. The zoning code provides two kinds of “relief” from having to comply with the regulations. The ZBA may grant a use or dimensional ‘variance’ or a ‘**special exception**’, depending on the existing conditions on the property. These are cases where the base zoning district doesn’t match the present use or conditions on a site, or in cases where the city has provided an additional step to allow the neighborhood affected by the change to weigh in.



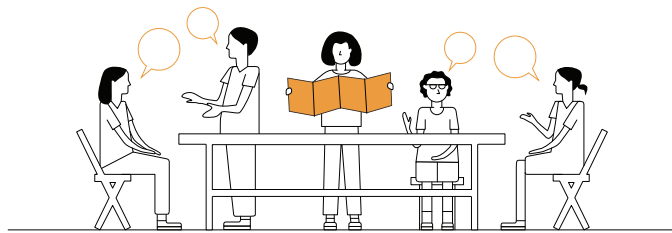
www.phila.gov/zba/appeals-calendar

Calendar of current appeals to the ZBA, or Zoning Board of Appeals, searchable by Council District, Planning District, or RCO (Registered Community Organization).

When that happens, the **Registered Community Organization (RCO)** whose boundaries include the property in question, holds a meeting with the property owner to discuss the project. The property owner may make changes suggested at the meeting, but is not obligated to. The RCO sends its opinion about the property to the ZBA when it hears the ‘appeal’.

Variations or special exceptions are **NOT “changing the zoning”**—they are a way for an owner to get “relief” from the code regulations because of certain unique circumstances of the lot or project or conditions that were there before the code.

Sometimes, the **base district** does NOT reflect what the current use is, or how the community wants to direct development in the future. Changing the **base district designation** is called “**remapping**”. This must be initiated by the District Councilperson and is a long legislative process. The Councilperson holds hearings and meets with the communities affected by the change before the Code and the map can be changed.










phila.gov/rconotification


This tool provides four pieces of information:


1. Addresses of near neighbors that need to be notified.
2. Names and contact information for RCOs.
3. Contact information for other entities, such as the local Council District, Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) and Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) that need to be notified through this process.
4. Templates for documents that applicants and RCOs are to use throughout this process.


How can I get Involved?

- Learn more about zoning history, processes, & procedures  Glossary
 - Keep up to date with what development is happening in your neighborhood  A Brief History of Planning
 - Provide testimony at **ZBA** hearings, and public meetings of the Planning Commission  Gathering Information
 - Attend zoning meetings of your local **RCO** (join the zoning committee!)
 - Petition zoning changes or development that go against your community's vision for its future
 - Call your local leaders & officials: share your opinion and collaborate  How To... Guides
 - Advocate for long-term change such as mandatory affordable housing, protecting small businesses, and preserving neighborhood character  Contact Sheet
 - Apply to the Citizens Planning Institute!  How To... Guides
- 

Where can I go to Learn More?

 bit.ly/dpdvideos The **Philadelphia Dept. of Planning and Development's** playlist on the **PHL Gov TV** YouTube channel. Check out their ten-minute videos to learn more about zoning and how **Registered Community Organizations (RCO)** play a role in development.

 phila.gov/zoning-summary-generator Go to this site and type in the address you want to learn about. It will describe **"by-right"** zoning information about the address in plain language. This helpful to understand what uses or changes to a building on the property may be allowed.

 openmaps.phila.gov Type in an address or zoom into the map to the area of interest. Scroll through the left side list and check the box on the information you want to see. You may need to zoom in closer for information to pop up. Click on the dot to see the associated information. Find the names of RCOs, specific information about Zoning Board appeals (or variances), zoning base districts and overlays, permits, locations of public facilities, and much much more!