

Best Practice: Zoning Handbook

REPORT UPDATED: MARCH 25, 2010

CITY: NEW YORK CITY

POLICY AREA: CITY PLANNING

BEST PRACTICE

The **Zoning Handbook**, published by the Department of City Planning (DCP), is a user-friendly, illustrated reference book that explains in lay terms the complexities of the City's Zoning Resolution. The first Zoning Handbook was published the same year as an executive summary of major changes in the 1961 zoning. Since then, it has been updated periodically. The most recent edition, issued in March 2006, represented a major overhaul of previous versions, with abundant photographs depicting existing neighborhoods and new explanatory graphics that clarify planning and zoning issues and regulations.



ISSUE

The new Zoning Handbook makes complex zoning requirements and regulations accessible and understandable through concise plain-English explanations and illustrations. It was designed to help make the content of the New York City Zoning Resolution intelligible to all New Yorkers, not just to land use specialists and zoning experts.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Zoning Handbook is to make zoning information readily accessible and understandable to all New Yorkers, allowing them to understand and participate fully in the planning process. This helps enable an open and inclusive public debate of land use related city policies. The publication is also a practical guide of local zoning laws for a wide range of users interested in the city's land use policies and development, including architects, property owners, community residents, advocacy groups and students.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Department of City Planning is the sole publisher of the Zoning Handbook. As the first revision of the Handbook in 16 years, its much-anticipated release coincided with the most far reaching revision of the city's zoning since 1961. The Handbook details and illustrates recent changes to the zoning including mixed-use districts and new contextual zoning districts that have been developed to manage growth and preserve the character of neighborhoods; and it clearly describes new special districts, such as Hudson Yards, with enhanced inclusionary zoning to help promote construction of affordable housing.

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The new edition of the Handbook is a handy reference for people from many walks of life who follow land use and development in the city. With new color photos and graphics to illustrate building types permitted in the city's different zoning districts as well as an expanded glossary and other useful information, the Handbook helps explain some of the complexities of the city's Zoning Resolution. New editions have been distributed to elected officials, city agencies and 59 community boards in the city to assist them in their role in the land use review process. It is available in public libraries, through the DCP bookstore at 22 Reade Street and may be ordered on the DCP web site at www.nyc.gov/planning.

The Handbook contains:

- Innovative graphics illustrating typical buildings each zoning district produces with improved explanatory captions.
- Color photographs of buildings that typify zoning districts in neighborhoods throughout the city.
- Tables for every zoning district listing applicable bulk regulations including height and setback, parking and yard requirements and minimum lot size.
- Listings of comparable residential districts for each commercial district.
- Details on new zoning districts and techniques that have been developed in recent years to manage growth and preserve the character of lower-density neighborhoods with illustrative photographs.
- Description of waterfront zoning regulations including requirements for public access.
- A simplified use group chart showing uses permitted in residential, commercial and manufacturing zoning districts.
- A zoning analysis of a hypothetical "mixed" building with residential and community facility uses.
- Comparisons of the contextual and non-contextual (or "height factor") zoning options available in the city's moderate-density districts.
- An expanded glossary with illustrated plain-English definitions of more than 150 terms from Attic allowance to Zero lot line building.

The information in the Handbook is also fully accessible on the Department's website, and it is updated on the website.

COST

The entire publication, including all photographs, graphics, charts and text, was prepared by staff of the Department of City Planning. The cost for printing 15,000 copies was \$76,000 in 2006.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The 2006 edition has been a tremendous success. Not only is it virtually sold out as of October 2009, but it has been recognized and praised by a wide range of users. Community Board members and other members of the local community have been empowered in order to better advocate for their neighborhoods; elected officials can better understand the effects of proposed amendments to zoning laws; visitors from cities across the world have had better access to the NYC's regulatory framework and it is used as a text book at the four planning schools in New York City.

The Department is currently working on a new edition, to be released in early 2011. Similar to the Zoning Resolution, the Zoning Handbook is a live document that needs to be updated periodically to reflect the changes implemented in the code. Revisions, including new zoning districts and explanatory material will continue to be reflected on the Department's website as the Zoning Resolution itself is modified.

TIMELINE

1961	Zoning Resolution enacted and first Zoning Handbook released
2006	Current Zoning Handbook released
2010	Anticipated release of revised Zoning Handbook



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LEGISLATION

Not Applicable – the Zoning Handbook summarizes the laws contained in the New York City Zoning Resolution.

LESSONS LEARNED

With the kind of material included in the Zoning Handbook, communities and stakeholders can more effectively engage in the land use process, and as a result, can have a greater say in land use code changes that affect the overall growth and development of their municipality.

TRANSFERABILITY

This handbook can be a model for other cities to follow. The Zoning Handbook explains technical land use regulations in plain English with graphics that visually show what types and sizes of buildings different zoning districts produce. While other cities may have different regulatory frameworks and regulations, the concept of the handbook is easily transferable. All municipalities should view this type of document as a way of helping communicate to communities and stakeholders how zoning laws affect their physical growth and ultimate livability, and to help them understand the implications resulting from zoning proposals.

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