

NYC PLANNING

Zoning Handbook



The City of New York
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The Zoning Handbook provides a brief overview of the zoning rules and regulations of New York City and is not intended to serve as a substitute for the actual regulations which are to be found in the Zoning Resolution of the City of New York, available in print and also online at www.nyc.gov/planning. The City disclaims any liability for errors that may be contained herein and shall not be responsible for any damages, consequential or actual, arising out of or in connection with the use of this information.

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How to Use this Handbook

Since 1961, the Zoning Handbook has been published as a helpful companion to the Zoning Resolution. This edition of the Handbook is intended to meet the needs of a wide variety of readers, ranging from those unfamiliar with zoning to those who are familiar but looking to better understand its rules in greater detail. It includes charts, drawings and photos to explain the applicable zoning regulations, as well as information on the history and rationale for the rules.

The first two chapters set the stage for the rest of the Handbook with background information, history and case studies demonstrating some of the basic concepts in zoning. For those who are unfamiliar with how zoning works in the city, these chapters are an excellent place to start. Chapters 3 through 5 go into greater detail about the rules applicable in the three core types of zoning districts: Residence, Commercial and Manufacturing. Each of the three starts with a summary of the overarching rules while the individual district pages provide more specific information about each district. Chapters 6 and 7 include descriptions of rules applicable in certain parts of the city that modify the basic regulations, while Chapter 8 describes the public process necessary to amend the Zoning Resolution. The chapters are followed by a glossary of important zoning terms.

It is important to note that the Handbook is a reference guide to help interpret the rules, and should not be taken as the actual zoning law. The Resolution, which can be found on the Department of City Planning's website, contains the official rules regulating land use in the city. To make it easier to find these rules, the Handbook includes references to specific applicable sections of the Zoning Resolution in the following form: **(ZR ##-###)**.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Zoning

Page 4

This chapter provides an overview of the 100-year history of zoning in New York and the major concepts in the Zoning Resolution.

Chapter 2: Applying Zoning

Page 30

Three case studies examine how zoning rules work in practice. These examples look at (1) how zoning regulates the construction of a new building, (2) how it regulates the modification of an existing building and (3) how special approvals can be granted when needed.

Chapter 3: Residence Districts

Page 62

This chapter explains the rules applicable in the city's wide variety of residential neighborhoods – from suburban areas of Staten Island to the dense skyscrapers of Manhattan.

Chapter 4: Commercial Districts

Page 122

This chapter introduces the rules applicable in commercial areas, including neighborhood commercial streets and the Coney Island amusement park.

Chapter 5: Manufacturing Districts

Page 146

This chapter presents the rules for manufacturing districts – from high-density loft buildings to locations with essential services such as power plants.

Chapter 6: Special Area Rules

Page 158

This chapter explains supplemental zoning rules applicable in large areas of the city – such as around airports or along the waterfront.

Chapter 7: Special Purpose Districts

Page 174

This chapter provides descriptions of each special purpose district – over 50 of which are currently in effect – that modify the underlying zoning rules on a neighborhood scale.

Chapter 8: How Zoning Gets Amended

Page 190

This chapter describes the public process by which zoning regulations can be amended or other discretionary actions sought.

Appendix: Glossary of Zoning Terms

Page 198

Key zoning terms, highlighted in bold throughout the Handbook, are compiled here for easy reference.





Reflecting on the long history of zoning in New York City, I smile at the thought that the Department of City Planning (DCP) is currently located in Lower Manhattan's beautiful, landmarked Equitable Building. Rising 42 stories straight from the street, the edifice was of a scale previously unseen when completed in 1915. In response to its construction, residents, elected officials and civic groups decided that the time had come to regulate the city's growth, leading to New York City's 1916 Zoning Resolution. The Resolution, the country's first ever comprehensive zoning law, set out a blueprint for the city and established planning as a core governmental function.

Like the city, zoning has not stood still. Over time, it became a key land use tool that continues to help us plan the future of the city and its neighborhoods. As new challenges arose, like the automobile, zoning regulations were updated to address them. This continues today as the city grapples with a growing and graying population, a housing affordability crisis, climate change and aging infrastructure – to name a few. Recent zoning changes – such as the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program, the most far-reaching and rigorous of its kind in the country – have helped address these challenges. Others include flood resilience zoning, which helped the city rebuild after Hurricane Sandy, and the Greater East Midtown rezoning that, just a year after its approval, is already yielding results, securing this area as a staple of New York City's world-class business economy for decades to come.

Addressing all of these issues in a city that is continually evolving makes zoning complex. So, to help the public understand the rules, DCP began publishing a 'Zoning Handbook' in 1961. This most recent edition continues the tradition. It includes zoning rules revised since the last edition was published in 2011. It also adds history, drawings, photos and technical details, so that the Handbook now tells a fuller story about zoning.

Zoning, at its core, is a system of priorities that adapts over time to reflect the needs and consciousness of a changing city. Just as importantly, zoning is most successful when there is active public participation. Our goal is for this Handbook to increase your understanding and appreciation of zoning, and allow you to play a more informed and robust role in shaping our dynamic city. We hope that this Handbook will be a valuable resource for every reader – whether you are a neighborhood resident, worker, business owner, community advocate, student, planner or applicant.

Very truly yours,

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