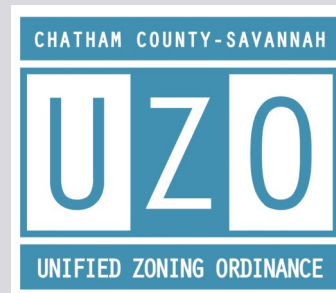


**Chatham County-Savannah
Metropolitan Planning Commission**

Planning for the Future - Respecting the Past



A Citizen's Guide to the Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO)



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**Chatham County-Savannah
Metropolitan Planning Commission**

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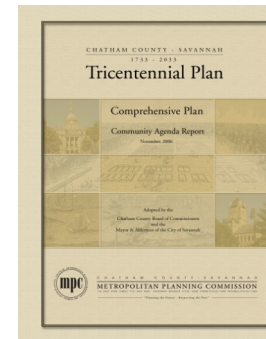
What is the Unified Zoning Ordinance?

The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), in partnership with the City of Savannah and Chatham County is pleased to introduce you to the Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO), an updated and unified zoning ordinance and zoning map for Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County. The initial draft ordinance and map were released on June 28, 2011.

Introduction

The UZO is the second phase of the Tricentennial Plan. The first phase was to prepare a unified Comprehensive Plan for the city of Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County.

The Comprehensive Plan, a state required plan, formalizes city and county policies into a strategic vision plan. Plan elements include: Land Use; Economic Development; Housing; Historic and Cultural Resources; Natural Resources; Transportation; and Community Facilities.



UZO addresses the various goals and objectives in the Plan that have a relationship to zoning.

The Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2006 by the City Mayor and Aldermen and the Board of County Commissioners. The Plan, including the Community Agenda Report that identifies the goals, is available on the MPC website at www.thempc.org.

Why is an Update Necessary?

Savannah and Chatham County have individual zoning ordinances that were adopted in the early 1960s. Neither ordinance has been updated since their initial adoption but each has been amended numerous times which has led to contradictions, formatting and process issues, and over 125 zoning districts (many of which are redundant). In some areas, suburban-oriented zoning districts—which emphasize the separation of land uses and often require large minimum lot sizes—were applied without consideration of existing development patterns and neighborhood character. This has led to numerous variance requests over the years. Updating the zoning ordinance and zoning map will eliminate many of these issues.



The Unified Zoning Ordinance (UZO)

The Zoning Assessment Report

MPC planning staff began the Unified Zoning Ordinance process in 2007 by evaluating the existing zoning ordinances



for Savannah and Chatham County, including other development-related ordinances and policies. This work resulted in the “Zoning Assessment Report” which can be viewed at

www.unifiedzoning.org. The report also serves an educational tool as it explains the fundamentals of zoning.

How Was the UZO Draft Developed?

MPC staff led the drafting and mapping process with the assistance of city and county staffs, Savannah Area Geographic Information (SAGIS) staff, consultants, a Technical Committee and an Advisory Committee.

The Technical Committee consisted of approximately 30 private and public sector individuals with zoning-related experience, including one city alderman and one county commissioner. The Advisory Committee consisted of approximately 80 individuals, including 33 representatives from neighborhood and homeowner’s associations. This group reviewed the draft pro-

vided feedback. More than 400 questions and comments were provided over the course of 14 meetings which led to further refinement of the UZO draft. You can view these questions and comments at www.unifiedzoning.org. An overview of the UZO is provided below.

Administration

Good administration is vital to the success of a zoning program. As part of this component, the review process for each type of zoning-related procedure (e.g., rezoning, site plans, variances) is included. Additionally, the role and responsibility of the various commissions, boards, and administrators are identified.



Standards for public notice, neighborhood meetings, and ordinance interpretation are also included.

Base Zoning Districts, Land Uses, and Use Conditions

Base zoning districts and their permitted land uses are the heart of a zoning ordinance. This component contains the zoning districts necessary to protect, maintain, and/or promote a specific area character, such as residential, commercial, or industrial. Within each base zoning district, specific uses and activities are identified as one of the following types: 1) a matter of right use (no conditions); 2) a lim-

ited use (some conditions); or, 3) a special use (some conditions and approval by the governing body, which may add additional conditions to achieve greater compatibility with the surrounding area).



Overlay districts may also be proposed for some areas. An overlay district is in addition to the underlying base district and protects and promotes certain features and resources. Historic overlay districts are most common and help to protect the historic and architectural character of an area beyond the minimum standards of a base zoning district.

General Site Standards

The UZO also addresses a variety of elements related to site development, such as lighting, signage, screening and buffering, and parking, among others. By regulating these site elements, potential problems can be avoided such as lighting spilling across property lines or service/refuse areas that are unscreened.

Other Sections

The UZO also includes updated definitions, provisions for enforcement of violations, and

identifies how nonconformities will be addressed (i.e., uses or standards that change).

Zoning Map

The zoning map is also proposed to be updated as part of the UZO process. All proposed base and overlay zoning districts for 90,000+ parcels of land in the city of Savannah and the unincorporated county are shown. The most common reasons for proposing a change of district include: 1) The unification of city and county zoning districts into one district with a new district name (e.g., R-6 in the city and R-1 in the county will become RSF-6; 2) Correction of map errors (e.g., residential properties that are zoned for non-residential uses); and, 3) districts that do not accurately reflect the development character for an area (e.g., suburban style zoning for areas developed in the late 1800’s and early 20th century).

Public Review and Comment Period

The review and comment period will extend into 2012. For important dates and to view the UZO draft, please visit www.unifiedzoning.org. Use the UZOOM (UZO Online Mapping) tool available on the UZO website to see the existing and proposed zoning for any property in Savannah and the unincorporated Chatham County. For assistance, please: 1) visit MPC Monday-Friday from 8:30am-5:00pm; 2) email staff at uzo@thempc.org; or, 3) call the UZO hotline at (912)651-1499.