

# ZONEiN COLUMBUS

## Where Do We Begin?

IDENTIFYING INITIAL FOCUS AREAS  
FOR MODERNIZING THE CITY OF COLUMBUS' ZONING CODE



THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**  
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR



## A NOTE FROM THE PROJECT TEAM

When we started asking folks to tell us about their challenges navigating Columbus' zoning code, we often got the response, "where do I begin?" Across 3,000 surveys and dozens of interviews with people who use the code and are affected by it - residents, area commission members, affordable housing providers and developers - we heard loud and clear that our zoning code is broken.

Our analysis found that the code is a barrier to Columbus being the vibrant, equitable community we aspire to be. Built around dated ideas of what people and businesses want, the code is inhibiting creation of much-needed housing and transit-supportive development. It's also difficult to use, creating a heavy reliance on project-by-project negotiations, variances and rezoning to accommodate even simple projects. This is not only burdensome and inefficient for the city to administer, but it creates barriers to investment by property owners big and small. It also means that community groups spend a great deal of time contending with standards that aren't well-adapted to their neighborhoods.

A modernization of the code can help unlock development potential and direct Columbus' growth toward a more equitable future. Mayor Andrew J. Ginther and Columbus City Council have prioritized revising the code,



which has not been comprehensively updated in 70 years, so we may better address our housing, mobility and affordability challenges. We've named this work Zone In.

Yet as the Zone In team looked at the map of our city, we asked again ... "Where do we begin?"

While modernized zoning is needed throughout Columbus, data, policy and public input all tell us that our corridors are the best place to start. "Main Streets" like West Broad Street, East Main Street, Morse Road and commercial nodes like The Continent and the Eastland Mall site have the greatest development capacity to deliver the housing, mobility and employment opportunities our community needs in ways that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

In the following pages, you'll see the rationale for why we've "zoned in" on these corridors as smart places to start our work to modernize our zoning code. These corridors serve as centers of

**Insight2050 estimated that a household located on a corridor - like Cleveland Avenue or West Broad Street - could save thousands of dollars annually through improved access to transportation and reduced energy costs.**

community activity. They already have zoning and are generally mixed-use. Now, we have an opportunity to update zoning in these identified areas to better achieve community goals along these important thoroughfares.

This map gives us a place to start, but not the answer. It shows us the areas that are most suited to be re-zoned, but not how new zoning will be applied in different settings.

The map gives us a sense for where to begin, but not what to put there.

To answer the questions of how and what, we need help from the people who live, work and play on the corridors, to determine how best to accommodate housing, offices, retail and other amenities to address our community's current and future needs, values and aspirations. We especially need to hear from people whose voices historically haven't been represented in zoning and land use conversations.

I invite all of our residents to "zone in" on this historic initiative. Join us in the coming months for educational workshops on how zoning and development happen, and share your thoughts with us to influence how we will zone these streets that are so important to the ways we live.

Together, we can design opportunity into our city. Let's zone in on prosperity, together.

**KEVIN WHEELER**  
ZONE IN PROGRAM MANAGER





# Zone In on Opportunity

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Columbus' economy has flourished in recent years, bringing growth and change. Columbus grew by 15% in the last decade – that's 32 people each day. By 2050, we expect approximately one million new residents in Central Ohio.

For decades, the Columbus Region has enjoyed stable housing costs because we had enough places for people to live, but housing affordability is starting to slip away. Presently, the Columbus Region has 869,406 housing units to 855,570 households – a ratio of 1.02 units for every 1 household. But as the region has grown, the growth in our housing supply has not kept pace. If we continue on the current trajectory for housing construction, we will have a regional ratio of 0.96 units for every 1 household by 2030, meaning our regional housing demand will fully eclipse supply and damage our regional affordability, livability and economic competitiveness. In 2022, Mayor Andrew J. Ginther introduced the Columbus Housing Strategy, which challenges the region to double the number of units being built for the next 15 years. If this happens, we will have a ratio of 1.06 housing units per 1 household by 2030, restoring the health of the housing market.

So where will future residents live? Where can we cultivate investment now, to unlock our ability to address our housing, mobility and affordability challenges?

We know we need to think about things differently, and act now. Zoning can help create the conditions for smart, sustainable, equitable growth, and unlock the economic and development potential of our neighborhoods. Zoning can't mandate development – that takes time for investment and new construction to happen, but it is an important place to start. It can provide residents a clearer idea of what can be built in their neighborhoods, and help developers avoid unnecessary time and cost that deters investment.

**Zoning codes are a set of rules that regulate what can and can't be done on a particular piece of property – they influence where we live, where we work and how we get around. Zoning can be used to help attract new businesses, encourage the construction of new housing and protect natural resources.**

# Zone In on Our Corridors

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Corridors are the “Main Streets” of our community. Technically speaking, they’re characterized by density, mixed-use development, and access to transit and amenities. These areas are compact, walkable, and have complementary land uses, such as homes, restaurants, stores, offices and public institutions. These different uses may share the same building or sit side-by-side. This pattern is common in Columbus’ older neighborhoods and increasingly sought in suburban areas.

Practically speaking, corridors are where people shop and live each day. They’re where buses come and go frequently. They’re where we bump into a friend, where we dine and play.

Mixed-use development is when one property or area offers multiple purposes - such as a storefront on the first floor with apartments above. Different uses may share the same building or sit side-by-side.

Area and community plans developed with each neighborhood and adopted by Columbus City Council consistently document residents’ desire to see investment along our corridors, for both job and housing creation. Studies such as Insight2050 sponsored by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) quantify the benefits of development along corridors, and the LinkUS mobility initiative sponsored by the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA), the City of Columbus and MORPC is anchored in equitable transit-oriented development along corridors.

All of the city’s corridors are already zoned. However, the zoning in place is commonly out of step with the ways area plans and land use recommendations say the land should be developed in the future. For example, a survey of 145 miles of Columbus corridors found that 80% of the properties facing the street were zoned with a 35-foot height limit. So even though research data and community input both tell us that these streets are the best places for denser, taller offices and housing developments, a developer would need to go through a time-consuming variance process to build the kind of building the community wants and needs there.

Modernizing the zoning code along these important thoroughfares can help us accelerate housing construction, better support transit and cultivate investment in our neighborhoods.





**ZONE IN ON THE MAP**

# Where We Can Begin

**THE ZONE IN TEAM HAS IDENTIFIED  
INITIAL GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS AREAS FOR MODERNIZING  
THE ZONING CODE BY ANALYZING FIVE CRITERIA  
AND SOME SITE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS:**

**Mixed-Use Recommendations  
from Area Plans**

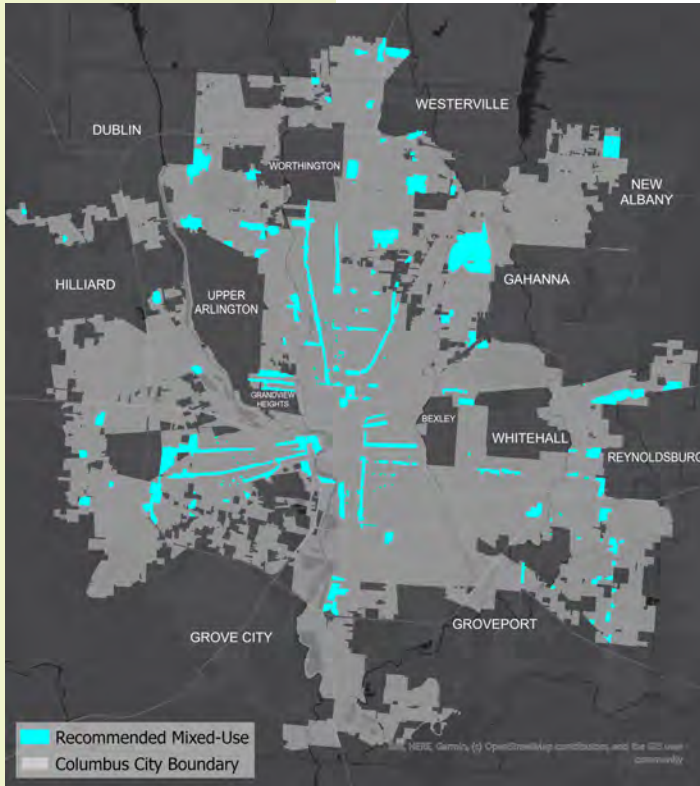
**COTA Bus Routes**

**Commercial Zoning Overlays**

**LinkUS Corridors**

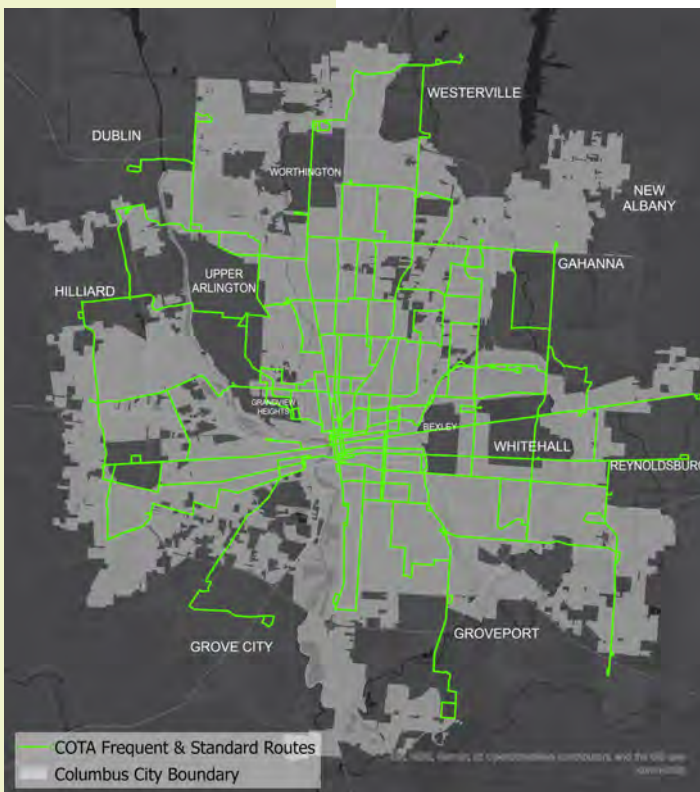
**Existing Zoning**





# Mixed-Use Recommendations from Area Plans

Many Council-adopted area plans and community plans recommend mixed use in specific areas. Mixed-use development is compact, higher-density, walkable, and incorporates complementary land uses such as multi-family residences, restaurants, stores, office and public institutions.



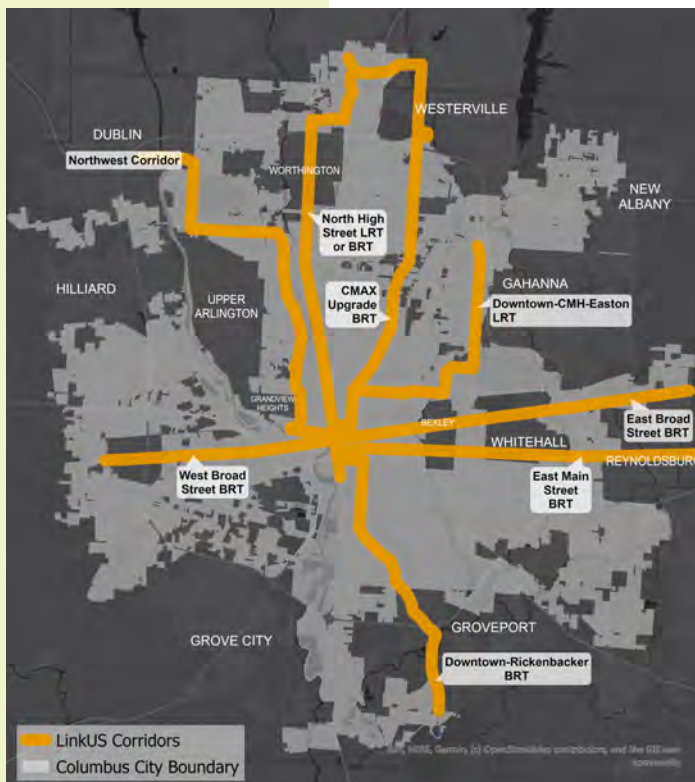
# COTA Bus Routes

Transit systems serve a critical role in connecting people with jobs, education, healthcare and other destinations in an accessible and affordable manner.



## Commercial Zoning Overlays

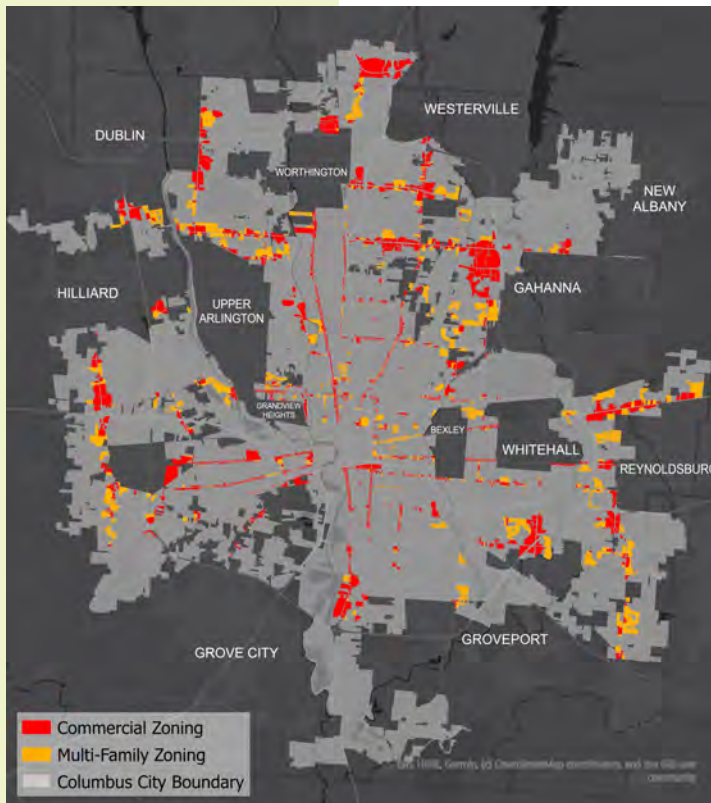
Columbus' commercial overlays support a pedestrian-friendly environment and consistent design through standards addressing such things as building setbacks, parking placement, and graphics. Mixed use development is a key characteristic of many overlay areas.



## LinkUS Corridors

LinkUS is a regional initiative focused on bringing high-capacity rapid transit (HCRT) and complete streets to key corridors.





## Existing Zoning

Commercial and multi-family zoning along COTA routes and LinkUS corridors are where higher-intensity residential and mixed uses are currently allowed in some form.

## Site-specific considerations

1

Where appropriate, properties recommended for commercial, office, and employment center were considered to complement mixed-use areas when adjacent.

2

Where the current zoning might not reflect the conditions on the ground, or where there is no land use recommendation, existing land use data was considered in identifying areas.

3

Areas recommended for mixed-use, but that are either too small in size or not located on a bus route, were removed from this first mapping phase.

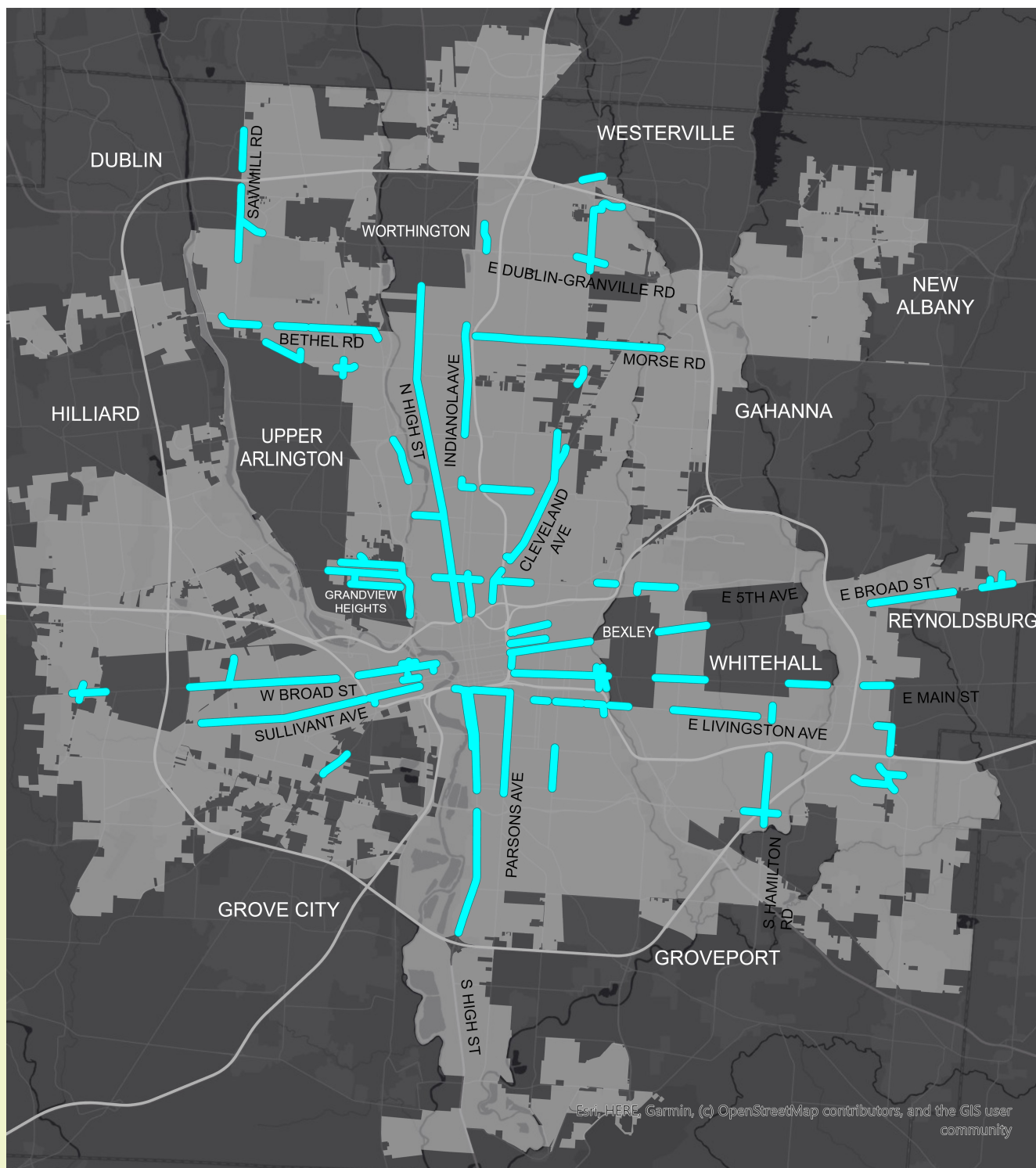
4

Unique zoning environments, such as The Ohio State University or Easton, were taken into account as not being a priority for this phase.

# Initial Focus for Modernized Zoning

When these five criteria are overlaid and site specific adjustments are made, there are 62 identified corridors and nodes that have the greatest potential to support growth through modern zoning.

No recommendations have been developed yet for if or how zoning in these areas will change. Future recommendations will come after community dialogue and further analysis.







# Zone In on What's Next

This map shows the areas that are most suited to be re-zoned first, but how new zoning gets applied has yet to be determined. We need your input to update the zoning code in a way that reflects the desires, needs and aspirations of each neighborhood. Here are some upcoming opportunities for the community to learn more about the project and begin the conversation. Join our mailing list to get info on additional events, feedback opportunities and resources.

## Upcoming Zone In Events

### Where Do We Begin? Webinar

The Zone In project team will provide an overview of why the City has taken on the challenge of updating the existing zoning code and what that process will look like. Our planning experts will provide insight into why our current code does not serve the needs of our growing and dynamic community, and detail the technical rationale for starting this work on our corridors.

Join us live or watch a recording on our website:

**April 10, 2023, 11 AM**

**Join WebEx webinar [HERE](#)**

**Webinar number (access code): 2318 609 9216**

**Webinar password: ZoneInCbus (96634622 from phones)**

### Zone In Community Conversations

The Zone In project team will host community conversations around a number of zoning topics throughout the life of this project. These conversations will provide an opportunity to learn, discuss and ideate around many different aspects of zoning. Visit the project website for the list of topics and dates as they become available.

**Visit [www.columbus.gov/zoningupdate](http://www.columbus.gov/zoningupdate)**

**Email comments or questions to [zoningupdate@columbus.gov](mailto:zoningupdate@columbus.gov)**

**Sign up for email updates to learn what's next**