

City of Amarillo Zoning Ordinance Revision

Overview of Revisions in Module 2

Introduction

The City of Amarillo Zoning Ordinance Revision is being completed in three modules:

Module 1: Introduction, Zoning Districts, & Use Regulations

Module 2: Development Standards (parking, landscaping, etc.)

Module 3: Procedures, Administration, & Definitions

Drafting in modules provides manageable portions of the ordinance for review, as well as an opportunity to “check in” with the community to receive feedback at key points in the revision process.

Module 1 was completed early this year and presented to the community in February 2020. Module 2 has just been finalized and will be presented on June 30th.

Following review of Module 2, the consultant team will revise the drafts based on feedback and input received. **Module 2 drafts will also be revised during drafting of Module 3 for consistency with this subsequent module and to address feedback received as the revision process continues.**

Overview of Module 2

Module 2 includes Article IV, Development Standards, which is comprised of eight divisions:

- Division 1. Generally
- Division 2. Area & Bulk Regulations
- Division 3. Landscaping and Screening
- Division 4. Outdoor Lighting
- Division 5. Parking
- Division 6. Parks, Open Space, & Civic Space (*to be completed in Module 3*)
- Division 7. Performance Standards
- Division 8. Signs (*current ordinance carried forward*)

Also included for review in Module 2 is the new Historic Preservation Overlay District (HP-O).

Key Revisions/Topics

Area & Bulk Regulations

This division provides uniform methods for the application of the area and bulk regulations established in Article II, *Zoning Districts*, and Article III, *Use Regulations*, including height; density; lot area, width, and depth; lot coverage; and yards and setbacks. This division also carries forward standards for zero lot line developments, slightly revised, and provisions for reasonable accommodation of citizens with disabilities.

Height

While the height of accessory buildings is measured in feet, height is measured in building stories in all zoning districts with a height limit. This is consistent with the current Zoning Ordinance. However, the method for measuring height and the definition of building “story” is proposed to be revised to align with the International Building Code (IBC).

For buildings where maximum height is specified in feet, the proposed revision requires measurement from “grade plane” (as defined in the IBC) to the highest point on the building. This is generally consistent with the current requirement for carports.

For buildings where maximum height is specified in stories, the proposed revisions clarify what constitutes a story (consistent with the IBC) and whether attics and basements are included. A new graphic illustrates the measurement of building stories.

Density

Module 1 introduced “density” as a metric for residential uses. For residential uses, density refers to the minimum or maximum number of dwelling units allowed per lot or per acre of land. The density section in Article IV (Sec. 4-10-136) describes how to calculate density and clarifies that accessory dwelling units are not included in the calculation.

Currently, the City regulates residential density through minimum lot area. Proposed is to maintain this technique for the agricultural and single-family residential zoning districts. For example, while the A, E, R-1, R-2, and MH Districts specify a maximum density of 1 dwelling unit per lot for residential main buildings, each district also specifies a minimum lot area that effectively limits the number of dwelling units per acre of land.

In the medium and high density residential districts and the low and moderate intensity commercial districts, there is no minimum lot area (except for certain residential uses in the MF District) but there is a minimum and/or maximum density. This provides flexibility in land development while maintaining the desired character of these districts.

The MD and NS Districts specify minimum and maximum density, either per lot or per acre depending of the type of residential use. The MF, O, GR, and LC Districts specify only maximum density. The HC, I-1, and I-2 do not specify density since residential uses are not permitted in these districts.

Section 4-10-136 provides example calculations of minimum and maximum density.

Lot Dimensions

Section 4-10-137 explains how to calculate lot area, width, and depth. It includes graphics, as well as guidance for staff to use when interpretations are required for irregularly shaped lots.

Lot Coverage

The Zoning Ordinance currently defines lot coverage as “the percent of Lot Area which is covered by a roof, floor or other Structure and is not open to the sky.” Proposed is to modify this by including all impervious surfaces on a lot in the calculation of lot coverage. This implements Comprehensive Plan Action Strategy #2-32, *Tie Lot Coverage to Character Intent*. Section 4-10-138 specifies how to measure lot coverage.

Comprehensive Plan Action Strategy #2-32: Tie Lot Coverage to Character Intent.

Adjust the maximum lot coverage standards in the zoning ordinance to establish a link to the existing and/or desired character for various areas of the community, and also so “coverage” encompasses impervious surfaces and not just structures, which is typical of most zoning ordinances. By limiting lot coverage, Amarillo’s current ordinance already has an important element of a character-based approach. This zoning tool helps to control the extent of site area that may be covered by improvements, which also maintains open space and is particularly important where a more Suburban development character is desired. However, because the current nonresidential coverage standard is the same (50% maximum) in almost every type of zoning district, except for the higher limits in the industrial (75%) and Central Business (100%) districts, this is one important reason why distinct development characters are not evident in different areas of the community. In particular, most of Amarillo’s main corridors and highest-profile commercial areas have a predictable Auto Urban character because the lot coverage standard does not include “non-structural” improved surfaces such as paved circulation, parking and loading areas on non-residential development sites. This approach in Section 4-10-173 is not how maximum coverage standards are applied in most zoning ordinances.

Limiting the extent of impervious surfaces in urbanized areas not only benefits the community’s appearance and aesthetics; it is also a basic factor in the volume and rate of storm water runoff, particularly from commercial sites with substantial paved surfaces. Because of federal and state mandates, the City of Amarillo must also monitor and address pollutants in storm water runoff, which are typically more prevalent in Auto Urban environments. And avoiding excessive paved surfaces can also reduce the “heat island” effect that contributes to higher summer temperatures in cities.

Yards & Setbacks

Section 4-10-139 clarifies how yards are defined and how building setbacks are measured.

The current Zoning Ordinance includes a number of special provisions or exceptions related to yards and setbacks. These are consolidated into Section 4-10-139, with updated graphics provided inline with the text (rather than in an appendix at the end of the ordinance).

Like the Lot Dimensions section, this section provides guidance for staff to use when interpretations are required for irregularly shaped lots.

Landscaping

Current landscaping regulations are largely being carried forward, although proposed revisions do clarify the requirements for fences and walls. In addition, new provisions are proposed for bufferyards, which provide an alternative method for screening adjacent lots.

Outdoor Lighting

Requirements for outdoor lighting of multiple-family and non-residential uses are proposed to be added to the Zoning Ordinance. Proposed is a simple approach, based on Dark-Sky principles, to minimize glare, light trespass, and skyglow. These provisions implement Comprehensive Plan Action Strategy #3-23. Policies for applying proposed lighting standards to redevelopment will be addressed in Module 3 with respect to nonconforming uses and structures.

Parking

Proposed revisions modernize the parking regulations and provide flexibility for infill lots, historic structures, and adaptive reuse projects in Neighborhood Plan areas.

Minimum parking ratios are specified for all uses listed in the use tables. Many current ratios are maintained, while some are updated in accordance with modern best practices.

Proposed is to implement parking *maximums*. This allows a developer to provide more than the minimum number of spaces required, but disallows excessive amounts of parking. A new process for administrative adjustments allows the Planning Director to adjust the minimum or maximum by up to 10%.

Historic Preservation Overlay District

Module 2 includes a new Historic Preservation Overlay District that establishes preservation standards based on Secretary of the Interior guidelines to implement Comprehensive Plan Action Strategy #5-19. The overlay district is proposed as a “floating zone,” meaning it will only be applied by landowner request and is not a fixed zoning boundary to be established by the City.

Definitions

Definitions will be included in Article IX (Module 3). This section of the Zoning Ordinance undergoes ongoing development and refinement throughout the drafting process. A current working draft of the definitions is provided with the Module 2 drafts. **This draft will be modified during Module 3.**