



## A New Form-Based Code for Buffalo

The City of Buffalo is moving forward with a 21st century approach to zoning, designed to reinforce the mixed-use, walkable places that give the city its competitive edge.



Mayor Byron W. Brown has initiated the first rewrite of Buffalo's zoning ordinance since 1953. This project, dubbed the Green Code, promises to remake the city's regulatory framework.

The Green Code is a place-based economic development strategy designed to implement Buffalo's Comprehensive Plan, the master document for all policy and investment decisions made by the city.

The Comprehensive Plan revolves around three key principles: fix the basics, build on assets, and embrace smart growth and sustainability. The plan calls for a rewrite of Buffalo's zoning ordinance as one of the principal tools for implementing its vision.

The Green Code is divided into two phases: the first translates the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan into Buffalo's Land Use Plan, a detailed policy document outlining the physical development of the city over the next 20 years; the second is a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO),

which will establish rules on the form, use, and character of development. Simply put, the Green Code is an opportunity to rewrite Buffalo's development DNA.

### What is a UDO?

The new code will be a Unified Development Ordinance, which combines zoning, subdivision, and public realm standards into a single regulatory document. A user-friendly UDO will align approval procedures, eliminate conflicts between related codes, and encourage high-quality development through a coordinated set of regulations.

### Why is a new code necessary?

When Buffalo adopted its zoning code in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower was settling into the Oval Office, the first color television set was sold by Admiral, the Chevrolet Corvette was introduced at the GM Motorama, and Elvis Presley made his first recording at Sun Studio in Memphis.

To say the least, much has changed since 1953. The zoning ordinance is antiquated, addressing such archaic uses as livery stables, asbestos factories, and coal pockets, tipples, and trestles. It is out of sync with today's development practices and lifestyle trends.

In the six decades since its adoption, the code has been amended and overlaid dozens of times. It now has 12 base zoning districts, 20 overlay districts, and 46 urban renewal plans each with its own set of development regulations. This makes the code difficult to use, interpret, and enforce.

A new UDO will allow citizens to rethink the role these regulations play in the city's physical development. With the public's input, this new approach to zoning can finally align regulations with the community's goals.

### Why a form-based code?

The UDO will be a form-based code, which emphasizes physical form rather than the separation of uses as its basic organizing principle. This approach to Buffalo's new

code was chosen because of its unique capacity to realize the community's vision for walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

A form-based code focuses on the appropriate form, scale, and character of development. It addresses the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, and the scale and type of streets and blocks. The standards in a form-based code are presented in concise text and clearly illustrated graphics.

This approach is in contrast to the city's current zoning ordinance, a text-heavy document that focuses intensely on how land and buildings are used, but lacks precise controls on urban design that can produce more predictable development outcomes.

The UDO will enable users to easily understand what is allowed, whether in terms of building height, type, placement, function, and other factors. A form-based approach will communicate the preferred development pattern for every neighborhood, making it a more user-friendly document for citizens and investors alike.



*The Green Code process to date has involved over 2,000 residents.*

*A form-based UDO will reinforce walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.*



### Where will form standards apply?

Buffalo's Land Use Plan delineates the city into neighborhoods, districts, and corridors, each of which will be addressed by tailored regulatory approaches based on their distinct character and function. Therefore, form standards will apply in neighborhoods, to encourage walkable, green urbanism. A mix of conventional zoning standards addressing use, design, and performance will apply in single-use districts and corridors. The code will not be "one size fits all."

### How will different places be regulated?

Because of the place-based approach of the UDO, the character of place, not merely use, will be the sorting mechanism for its new zones. For instance, the current code may simply call one place "commercial," while the new code may call it a "neighborhood center."

Likewise, places that never had their own distinct treatment in the 1953 code, such as medical campuses or the Olmsted parks, will be better addressed in the UDO.

This place-based approach is far more nuanced than conventional zoning approaches, placing Buffalo on the cutting edge among cities nationally that are applying these new practices.

### What will the new code achieve?

The UDO will build on assets, address weaknesses, and tap into opportunities by:

- » supporting walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods;
- » strengthening economic centers across the city;
- » attracting and retaining talent through quality placemaking;
- » protecting and enhancing Buffalo's historic character;
- » removing barriers to the creative reuse of vacant land and structures;
- » simplifying approvals to encourage investment; and
- » helping citizens drive fewer miles, use less energy, and improve environmental quality.

The new code will set the stage for building a Buffalo that's healthier, wealthier, and more beautiful for present and future generations.

## How will the new code be structured?

The UDO will be divided into ten sections:

1. **General Provisions** will introduce the Unified Development Ordinance and Zoning Map, including the purpose and intent of the code, its application to land and structures, and rules governing the transition from the current code.
2. **Zoning Approvals** will address application procedures, the responsibilities of UDO administrators, general rules for processing applications, and notice requirements.
3. **Subdivision Approvals** will address the subdivision process, including requirements for minor and major subdivision applications and approval standards.
4. **Zones** will include the basic zoning requirements for neighborhoods, districts, and corridors.
5. **Form Standards** will include regulations on building types, building frontages, permitted encroachments, accessory structures and uses, signs, and parking.
6. **Use Standards** will include use definitions, use regulations, and temporary use regulations.
7. **Environmental Standards** will include standards for landscapes, stormwater management, outdoor lighting, and sensitive habitat protection.
8. **Thoroughfare & Subdivision Standards** will include standards for blocks, streets, streetscapes, and subdivision of land.
9. **Application of the Ordinance** will address the legal application of the UDO, including the control of text and graphics, nonconformity provisions, and enforcement procedures.
10. **Definitions** will include definitions for all technical terms used in the UDO.



## How can I stay involved in the process?

The development of a new UDO for Buffalo is intense and requires the ongoing involvement of the public. Key meetings will be scheduled for the coming months. Please stay tuned at [buffalogreencode.com](http://buffalogreencode.com) for more information.

*The Mayor has set a high standard for public input on the Green Code.*

