THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE
NORTH CAROLINA

Planning & Zoning Commission
3/4/2026
ACTION MINUTES

These action minutes are intended to provide the reader with an overview of the committee meeting and actions taken during the meeting.

For detailed information on this meeting, please refer to the meeting recording, also located on the commission web page, ashevillenc.gov/pzc, or contact Will Palmquist with any questions.

Present: Chair Geoffrey Barton, Jonathan Anzollitto, Lindsay Broughel, Brenton Faircloth

Absent: Vice-Chair Jason Seickel, Jane Margaret Bell, Anna Zuevskaya

AGENDA ITEM	ACTION
Planning & Zoning Commission Land Acknowledgment Chair Barton read the PZC Land Acknowledgement: "As we are gathering today as the Planning and Zoning Commission, the body tasked with reviewing and advising on appropriate land use in the city of Asheville, it is fitting to acknowledge the storied history of this land. We occupy the Land of the Cherokee people, who have stewarded and been in relationship with these mountains and waterways from time immemorial. This land is occupied through violence, oppression, coercion, broken treaties, and forced relocation. Please join me in expressing respect and gratitude for the present-day Eastern Band of Cherokee, the Cherokee Nation, the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee, and all of our Indigenous neighbors, as well as the past and present marginalized community members, as we seek to join in the healing of the indelible trauma that is embedded in this land."	
A request for a special use permit for a government use at 179 S. Charlotte St	**Motion:** Continue to the 4/1/26 PZC meeting **Motion made by:** Commissioner Faircloth **Motion 2nd by:** Commissioner Broughel **Vote:** Motion passes 4-0 (Motion made at 10:07)
Approval of minutes from the 2/4/2026 meeting	**Motion:** Approve minutes from February 4, 2026 **Motion made by:** Commissioner Faircloth **Motion 2nd by:** Commissioner Broughel **Vote:** Motion passes 4-0 (Motion made at 10:48)
Report out on recent legislative and administrative actions. **Jannice Ashley**, Deputy City Attorney, provided a briefing on a significant change to state law (NC 160D 601) via the Disaster Recovery Act of 2024.	

Local governments can no longer initiate "downzoning" (reducing density or permitted uses) without the written consent of all affected property owners. This law helps prevent the creation of new nonconformity (dimensional or use-based)**.** This could create a hurdle for broad city-wide updates. For example, if a new flood map amendment restricts development on certain lots to protect residents, the city might need permission from every affected owner.

Some possible concerns noted included: 1) That the City is required to update flood maps to ensure residents can get federal insurance. However, new maps often prohibit certain uses or create nonconformities in newly identified flood zones. Under this law, the city technically needs the consent of every property owner in that flood zone to adopt the map; and, 2) That the City of Durham recently halted a major Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) update because it feared it would trigger massive lawsuits under this new downzoning definition.

Dawa Hitch, Director of Communications And Public Engagement, presented on the Legacy Neighborhoods Coalition (LNC) and efforts that are focused on protecting historically marginalized communities from being priced out as density increases.

She explained that the City is partnering with the Legacy Neighborhoods Coalition (LNC) and groups like Asheville for All and GAP AVL to explore strategies such as a Displacement Impact Review Tool and "enhanced development notifications" to ensure residents are informed about proposed development projects.

<u>Discussion of the Comp Plan & Development Regulations Update Project Idea Generation at the January 2026 PZC Retreat & Work Session.</u>

The commission discussed the recent idea generation exercise at the January 2026 PZC Annual Retreat and Work Session. Some key takeaways were that commissioners expressed interest in studying recent updates in cities like Durham and Greenville to see what worked and what did not work for their respective cities.

The commission broke down the items into three main elements, including:

- **The What**: Increasing housing supply, improving affordability, and addressing anti-displacement and subsidized housing.
- **The Where**: Updating floodplain regulations, managing stormwater, and protecting sensitive environmental areas from unregulated development.
- **The How (Implementation)**: Using green infrastructure, incentivizing sustainable practices, reducing development barriers, and determining what "asks" the city should have for developers beyond the code minimum.

Commissioners suggested looking outside the "Asheville bubble" to learn from the successes and failures of other cities, including looking at recent code updates in Durham, NC, and Greenville, SC, which were cited as potential points of comparison. Staff noted that the forthcoming project consultant is expected to bring a national perspective, providing data-driven "success and crash stories" from across the country to guide the process.

The commission discussed the "Road Map" for internal city engagement. To ensure the UDO rewrite is cohesive, an inter-departmental team will review RFP (Request for Proposal) responses.

The commission emphasized strategic public engagement to make it more "meaningful and impactful" rather than just a "check the box" exercise. A suggestion was made to let data inform the "Whats" (like housing supply needs) so they can be treated as preconditions. Accepting certain data-backed needs early on, the City can focus public energy on more nuanced topics.

Presentation on the Recent Housing Plans and Proposed UDO Amendments.

Will Palmquist, Principal Planner with Planning & Urban Design, provided a comprehensive recap of recent housing reforms and proposed amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The presentation aimed to "level set" the commission on current progress and solicit feedback on "low-hanging fruit" for future housing-related goals.

Timeline of Recent Reforms

- **Late 2023:** Missing Middle Housing Study completed.
- **January 2025:** Commission recommended increasing development thresholds, removing parking minimums, and incentivizing housing in commercial corridors.
- **March 2025:** City Council adopted some changes, though notably rejected backyard lots and certain ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) standards.
- **January 2026:** Council adopted changes allowing non-conforming structures to be converted into ADUs without a variance.

Key Discussion Themes

1. The Missing Middle Gap

The Missing Middle Study highlighted that Asheville's zoning significantly favors single-family homes over duplexes, triplexes, and courtyard developments.

- **The Opportunity:** There are approximately 2,400 vacant lots in Asheville, but over 30,000 lots are already built upon. Staff argued that infill development on existing lots (like backyard units) is the most viable path forward.
- **Backyard Lots vs. ADUs:** A "Backyard Lot" creates a separate fee-simple parcel that can be sold to a builder, whereas an ADU remains on the same lot. This distinction is crucial for homeowners who cannot access the capital to build an ADU themselves.

2. Thresholds and Incentives

The commission discussed the "Level 3" trigger (which requires City Council approval and conditional zoning).

- **Affordability Bonus:** If a project includes affordability (e.g., 8% of units at 60% AMI), it can build up to 200,000 square feet by right.
- **Mismatch with Downtown:** A commissioner noted that the Central Business District (CBD) allows 100,000 square feet by right with no affordability requirement, creating a "mismatch" with other commercial districts that should be investigated.

3. Reducing Barriers to Small Projects

Staff reported that the most successful recent change was raising "Level 1" site compliance thresholds.

- **Outcome:** Projects like small additions (up to 1,500 sq. ft.) or changing uses in old buildings no longer trigger expensive requirements like building $50,000 sidewalks.
- **Speed:** These administrative changes are showing results within weeks, whereas large-scale residential projects take years to mature.

4. Commission Proposals for the UDO Rewrite

Commissioners suggested several "surgical tweaks" and bold reforms:

- **End Exclusionary Zoning:** Multiple members advocated for allowing duplexes and triplexes in all residential zones (RS4, RS8). It was noted that the 1929 "Nolan Plan" was more progressive in this regard than current code.
- **Simplify Standards:** Instead of complex names for housing types (cottage court vs. townhouse), the city should "focus on numbers, not names"—regulating based on units per square foot of lot area.
- **Parking Minimums:** There is strong commission support for eliminating off-street parking requirements citywide, citing that the market will still provide parking where necessary.
- **Revitalizing Corridors:** Members expressed concern that previous "Urban Center" strategies for dying corridors like Tunnel Road have failed and need fresh redevelopment strategies.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.