

# NASHVILLE CIVIC DESIGN CENTER

## Zoning

### What is zoning?

“Zoning is a term used in urban planning for a system of land-use regulation.”

It is important to have zoning criteria in order to control growth and development, so land will not be used inappropriately. Zoning was implemented to “segregate uses that are thought to be incompatible”, but it is actually used as a “permitting system to prevent harming existing residents or businesses and to preserve the character of a community.”

Regular zoning and building code regulations describes how land can or cannot be used. There are use-based regulations and guidelines for “building height, lot coverage, and similar characteristics.” “Agricultural, residential, institutional, mixed-use, office, commercial, shopping center, and industrial” are also categories used to describe zoning regulations. They also appoint the type of buildings and activities that are allowed on properties.

The Metropolitan Planning Department and Planning Commission of Nashville are the authorities to regulate and control growth and development in Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County. These two bodies also oversee the “Urban Overlay Detailed Neighborhood Design Plan” and the “Planning Detailed Neighborhood Design Plan”.

Some areas have additional guidelines or overlays for development. They are regulated by other organizations like Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (MDHA) or the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission (MHZC).

MDHA has designed “redevelopment districts with additional development guidelines for some neighborhoods, primarily in Downtown and inner-ring suburbs.”

Historic Zoning is a “planning tool to protect a district from a loss of architecturally or historically important buildings, new construction not in character with the neighborhood, and alterations or additions to buildings that would lessen their architectural significance.” Therefore the MHZC reviews all the projects according to the guidelines within the county’s historic zoning district.

### How do I know how my property is zoned?

There is information provided online on the government’s and organization’s websites.

Planning Department: [www.nashville.gov/mpc/zoning\\_allow.htm](http://www.nashville.gov/mpc/zoning_allow.htm)

MDHA: [www.nashville.gov/mdha/index.htm](http://www.nashville.gov/mdha/index.htm)

MHZC: [www.nashville.gov/mhzc](http://www.nashville.gov/mhzc)

The Planning Department or Planning Commission itself can be asked, too.

### How to navigate the process when you want to...

demolish a building, construct a new building, add to an existing building (build an addition, add a roof dormer – anything that increases habitable space), move a building; or repair or alter a building?

Depending on the zoning overlay and district, first thing needed is a permit with guidelines and recommendations of the basic zoning and building code regulations from the Planning department or Planning Commission. In case there are more overlays or zoning restrictions to follow, this permit must be presented to MDHA or MHZC. They will review the plans for compliance with the regular zoning and building code regulations and permit fees will be charged. For historic zoning a preservation permit is required after that.

### How do I get a preservation permit?

1. Call the MHZC at 862-7970 to obtain an application for a Preservation Permit and to make an appointment to meet with the staff.  
Staff members will meet with you at your building to discuss your project, answer any questions about historic zoning, and advice you as to whether or not your plans will meet the design guidelines. The staff can guide you in making your plans meet the guidelines and will provide free design advice on request.  
Copies of the design guidelines are available through the office of the MHZC.  
When you submit your completed application, the staff will determine whether a preservation permit can be issued immediately or if the work requires referral to the Commission.  
If the work requires referral to the Commission, a meeting will be called within fifteen (15) working days. Regular meetings of the Commission are scheduled for the third Wednesday of every month.

2. Take the Preservation Permit to the Metropolitan Department of Codes Administration:

Officials at Codes will review your plans for compliance with regular zoning and building code regulations – applicable whether or not your property is in a historic zoning district.

Permit fees (amount charged depends on the type and value of the work to be done) will be charged to you then. The MHZC does not charge a fee for preservation permits. The Codes Department is located on the second floor of the Metro Howard Office Building at 700 Second Avenue North.

For a preservation permit to remain valid, work must begin within six (6) months of the date of issue.