

# A Summary of Trenton's New Land Development Ordinance

Trenton's new Land Development Ordinance (LDO) is a key tool for implementing many of the policies contained in the Trenton250 Comprehensive Master Plan. At its most basic level, the LDO regulates what structures and land can be used for, where a structure can be located, and how big it can be. The LDO also includes some basic design standards for new buildings, and regulates things like parking, accessory structures, and landscaping.

## Why are we Updating the Land Development Ordinance (LDO)?

In short, the current LDO is obsolete. It contains out-of-date content, inconsistent standards, and insufficient administrative guidance. Additionally, many of the zoning district regulations don't relate to Trenton's built form, creating numerous nonconformities and unintentionally serving as a barrier to forms of development that the community desires. An updated LDO can address these problems, removing unnecessary regulatory hurdles and providing opportunities for Trenton to move toward the vision established in Trenton250. Modernizing the LDO is a big step in helping Trenton achieve its long-term vision.

*Some specific goals of the updated LDO include:*

- Make the LDO intuitive and user-friendly – include graphics and charts, and simplify regulations and processes to ensure they are transparent, predictable, and consistent in application and results.
- Integrate land use and urban design considerations into objective controls that make administration easy.
- Allow more by-right development to occur in the City.
- Set flexible standards that allow investors to respond creatively to market demand while meeting public expectations for future development.
- Increase the transparency of development approval through clear processes and approval standards, and predictable timeframes.

## What are Some of the Biggest Proposed Changes in the New LDO?

### A New, User-Friendly Organization

*Everything in its right place.*

The LDO has been restructured from top to bottom to be more intuitive, grouping items together by regulatory category and purpose. This new organization will help to eliminate the need to flip back-and-forth through multiple sections to get to the information you're looking for.

*The new LDO has been structured into 20 Articles as described in the following table:*

Chapter	What's Included?
1. Title, Purpose, & Applicability	An introduction to the LDO and how it applies to existing development
2. Definitions & Measurement Methodologies	All terms used in the LDO are defined and clear rules on how to apply the dimensional and design standards
3. Zoning Districts & Zoning Map	An introduction to the zoning districts and the Zoning Map
4. Residential Neighborhoods	
5. Commercial & Mixed-Use Districts	
6. Industrial Districts	The districts have been grouped by their larger land use categories, with dimensional and design tables showing all the regulations that apply
7. Special Purpose Districts	
8. Uses	Use permissions have been reorganized into one master matrix, with use standards added for those uses with impacts
9. On-Site Development Standards	
10. Off-Street Parking & Loading	
11. Landscape	Comprehensive site development standards are grouped within their respective articles so that they can be easily located, including accessory structures, parking, landscape, and sign regulations
12. Signs	



Chapter	What's Included?
13. Land Development Applications	All administrative provisions have been brought together in a series of articles that describe the application process, the responsibilities of Council, boards, commissions, and officials, rules for nonconformities, and how the LDO is enforced
14. Ordinance Text & Map Amendment	
15. Historic District Regulations	
16. Nonconformities	
17. Enforcement	
18. Land Use Boards	
19. Fee Schedule	As required by New Jersey Land Use Law, fees and application checklists have been updated and included in the LDO
20. Development Checklist	

## A New District Structure

*Districts that reflect, protect, and enhance the places of Trenton.*

Trenton's current LDO splits the City – with its wealth of varied and historic urban character – into just ten zoning districts. These ten districts do not adequately address the diverse, mixed-use character of the City, nor do they allow for the type of modern development the City would like to see in the future. The updated LDO's district structure – outlined below – is intended to both implement the City's vision for the future as established in Trenton250, and to acknowledge the historic on-the-ground development patterns within the City's neighborhoods.

*The table below outlines the proposed zoning districts, and provides a brief statement of their intent.*

Proposed Zoning District(s)	Intent of District
Low Density Single-Family Residential: RL-1, RL-2, RL-3	Existing single-family neighborhoods within the City
Medium Density Residential: RM-1, RM-2	A mix of dwelling types from single-family to rowhouse; RM-2 allows for limited commercial uses to acknowledge the existing mixed-use environment
High Density Residential: RH-1, RH-2	A full mix of dwelling types from single-family to multi-family, with RH-1 allowing structures up to 40' and RH-2 up to 65'; both districts allow for limited commercial uses to create a mixed-use environment
C-MS Main Street Corridor Commercial	Protects the mixed-use environment developed along Trenton's most prominent, historic, walkable corridors
C-CC Corridor Commercial	Commercial uses, interspersed with some residential along the City's highly trafficked mixed-use thoroughfares
C-MX Mixed-Use Flex	A vertically and horizontally mixed-use environment that is compatible with the existing historic fabric, and allows reuse of existing buildings and the creation of flexible spaces
MU-T Mixed-Use Transition	A mix of commercial and residential, serving as a transitional area between neighborhoods and more intensely developed mixed-use areas
DT Downtown Trenton, R-MX Riverfront Mixed-Use, TOD Transit-Oriented Development	The highest density mixed-used areas of the City, which is found in Downtown as well as the specific geographies of the Delaware Riverfront and transit stations
I-L Light Industrial Mixed-Use	The I-L district is home to office and light industrial users
I-G General Industrial	A district for the heaviest industrial users
I-MU Industrial Mixed-Use	The I-MU acknowledges those areas where light industrial uses can mix with commercial and residential uses to create a unique mixed-use environment
INST Institutional	A special purpose district that acknowledges government facilities, schools, and healthcare institutions in the City
OS-R Open Space	A special purpose district that acknowledges parks and recreation areas within the City

The new zoning districts can help to incentivize economic development by clearly articulating a set of place-based standards that coordinate with the City's future land use, acknowledging the historic patterns of Trenton's neighborhoods, and reinforcing and encouraging the types of development that are already building positive momentum in the City.

Basic design standards have also been added to the districts to further enhance the quality of future development within Trenton. Standards address elements such as the design of building entries, building articulation – such as recesses and projections – ground floor and upper story transparency, etc. These standards have been tailored to the individual districts and the standards have been written to ensure they are objective in nature and easy to review and administer.

Finally, the City's Zoning Map has been updated to reflect these proposed districts. Using the Land Use and Community Form Map from Trenton250 as a guide, the new districts have been placed on the map with careful consideration of both future development as envisioned within the Plan, as well as on-the-ground conditions.



## **A Modern Use Approach**

*Simplified, streamlined, state-of-the-art.*

*The way that uses are handled has been completely modernized:*

**Use permissions are organized within a global use matrix, replacing individual use lists within Zoning Districts.** The global use matrix lists all uses and districts within the LDO, showing use permissions for each district (whether a use is permitted, conditional, or prohibited). This approach provides two ways to explore the use permissions: a user can find the use they are interested in and look across the row to see which districts allow it, or a property owner can look down the column to see what uses are allowed within the district containing their property.

**A generic use approach has been adopted.** A generic use approach is established by combining similar specific uses into a series of broader use categories. For instance, as opposed to specifically listing “shoe store,” “record store,” and “bookstore,” a generic use approach would address all these uses – and more – within a category of “retail goods establishments.” Though this is a far more flexible and simple approach, it demands careful attention to the definitions of various uses within the LDO. First, each use referenced within the ordinance must be defined. These definitions may include examples of each use, and may also specifically exclude things that are not considered part of the generic use definition. Second, any use that is defined and regulated on its own may not be considered part of another generic use category.

**Uses have been tailored specifically to the purpose of the districts.** The uses allowed in each district have been evaluated and updated. Uses now correspond to the purpose, form, and function of each district. In addition, new use categories have been added to the LDO to address new and emerging industries and land uses.

**Certain uses have “use standards” to control potential impacts.** Use standards are needed for select uses that may have additional impacts or are linked to federal or state regulations. Use standards, where applicable, are based on mitigation of specific impacts or design concerns related to select uses.

## **A Realistic Approach to Parking**

*Parking shouldn't “drive” development patterns in Trenton.*

A major change in the new LDO is the elimination of minimum parking requirements in most instances. This means that for most development, the market will decide how much parking – if any – should be provided. Further, if parking is provided, the LDO contains parking maximum regulations that will limit how much parking may be provided on-site, as well as standards to ensure safe and attractive design of parking areas.

For certain development actions a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) plan is required, which may require off-street parking to be provided, determined on a case-by-case basis during site plan review. The new LDO requires a TDM plan for the following actions:

- New construction of a principal building larger than 10,000 square feet.
- Substantial renovation – including a change of use – of a principal building with a gross floor area of at least 25,000 square feet.
- Any multi-family dwelling or mixed-use development containing ten or more dwelling units.

There are numerous reasons why Trenton is pursuing this approach. First, minimum parking standards can be somewhat arbitrary, often based on calculations of parking demand at peak times rather than during normal conditions, resulting in large, underutilized, paved parking areas. This has the secondary effects of being environmentally unfriendly (excessive paving increases stormwater run-off and intensifies the heat island effect), and negatively impacting neighborhood character (minimum parking requirements tend to be the primary driver of site-design considerations, with contextually-appropriate designs often being sacrificed to accommodate required parking).

Additionally, minimum parking standards can have a dampening effect on the City's economic development climate. When required parking amounts cannot be accommodated on-site, variances are required, adding both significant cost and significant time to the development process. As many areas of Trenton developed without off-street parking, and have historically not provided any, the elimination of required minimums allows for easier reuse and redevelopment of these areas.

## **Required Bicycle Parking**

*Mode-share, everywhere.*

Bicycle parking is an essential component of filling the first- and last-mile needs of a multi-modal transportation system. As such, the new LDO requires bicycle parking for certain uses and larger developments. The regulations address both required amounts, and design of bicycle parking areas – distinguishing between long-term and short-term spaces. Short-term spaces are for visitors who typically visit infrequently or for short periods of time, whereas long-term spaces are designed to accommodate the daily needs of employees, students, residents, commuters, and others who live or work on-site.



## Updated Site Element Standards

*Trenton, dressed to impress.*

*Landscape and sign regulations have been comprehensively addressed within the new LDO:*

**The contribution of landscape to the visual quality of the built environment cannot be overemphasized.** In addition to its aesthetic benefits, green space provides numerous environmental and social benefits within communities. The LDO has reorganized and reoriented landscape requirements for the City of Trenton, addressing numerous conditions including site landscape for larger developments, the edge and interior of parking lots, buffer yards between districts or uses, required on-site trees, and trees within the curb lawn.

**Sign permissions have been updated and tailored to the form of each district, regulated by sign type.** Sign area limitations allow for reasonable maximums and are proportioned to the type of development anticipated in the district.

## Prioritizing Sustainability

*Working to build a healthy, resilient City.*

The term sustainability is often used in reference to environmental factors like solar and wind energy, cool roofs, and lighting standards. All of these should be part of development regulations. Yet community sustainability, the ability for city investments and private development to provide a high quality of life for residents now and into the future is much more than just environmental considerations.

A sustainable community is one that contains a land use pattern that fits the economic, housing, and lifestyle needs of a community. It is one that accommodates a host of transportation modes, scaled to the needs of the community. And it is one that enables environmentally-sound development, for example reducing urban heat islands through parking lot landscape, allowing solar panels, wind turbines and other alternative energy systems, and permitting community gardens and limited food processing in select commercial districts to expand access to healthy foods. It increases transportation choice by requiring bicycle parking, encouraging more dense development near transit, and requiring the provision of pedestrian access. Finally, it provides the opportunity to protect the City's natural resources through sensible, achievable controls.

*Some of the highlights that further goals of sustainability within the proposed LDO are:*

- Regulations that allow for the creation of true mixed-use neighborhoods, acknowledging the City's historic development patterns and reducing the need for vehicular trips to fulfill the daily needs of residents
- Impervious surface (i.e., paved surface) coverage limits in the residential districts
- No parking minimums required in most cases, and parking maximums that apply when parking is provided
- Required electric vehicle parking spaces if parking is provided
- Required bicycle parking
- Permissions for sustainable accessory structures, such as solar panels and private wind turbines
- Exterior lighting controls (on private property)
- New comprehensive landscape requirements
- Tree conservation regulations

*For More Info + To Leave a Comment:*

**[Trenton250LDOUpdate.com](https://Trenton250LDOUpdate.com)**

