

Q. Why did you conduct a one-year review of the zoning code?

A. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC), in partnership with the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I), the Department of Commerce and the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), was required to submit a report showing which parts of the code were working and which ones needed improvement. The report was delivered to City Council on Aug. 22, 2013, the one-year anniversary of the code's effective date.

Q. How was the review conducted?

A. Five years of zoning permits and data from the ZBA were gathered from a L&I database so that trends could be analyzed. We wanted to see the number of special exceptions and variances granted by the ZBA. Also, an inter-agency Zoning Technical Committee has been conducting a technical review of zoning permit applications under the new code. And finally, public input was an important part of the one-year review process, in the same way it was for reforming the code itself.

Q. What did the one-year review show?

A. Respondents to surveys said that the code was definitely easier to use and more clearly written. There was a drop in variances sought, although the percentage of variances granted by the ZBA did not fall. One possible explanation for that is a backlog of cases filed under the old code that still needed approval. The expectation is that fewer variances will be granted going forward. The one improvement that still needs to be made, all agree, is the completion of zoning remapping across the city. Only then will appropriate land use in each neighborhood be clear.

Q. What are the recommendations of the one-year review?

A. There are four recommendations to improve the city's zoning code:

- Adopt the recommendations of the Zoning Technical Committee addressing unclear language and incorrect cross-references that cause unnecessary and frivolous variances.
- Evaluate and implement changes to the Registered Community Organizations (RCO) amendments.
- Create an enhanced data tracking system for variances and special exceptions. Monitor zoning applicant and local RCO compliance. Conduct biennial updates of the Zoning Code Review to ensure consistency with other City codes and to reflect the changing needs of the city.
- Have PCPC consult with City Council to implement the zoning map revisions recommended by the Philadelphia2035 District Plans. Philadelphia2035 is a comprehensive planning process that includes a Citywide Vision and 18 district plans. Through public input, each district plan identifies current and preferred land uses in order to make corrective zoning changes and recommendations that spur appropriate development. The plans are meant to be tools ensuring that future growth and development of the city unfold in a thoughtful, positive manner in the years to come.

Q. What is remapping and why is it so important?

A. The remapping process entails zoning every piece of property in the city to ensure that land is used according to neighborhood plans and the preferences of community members, property owners, and legislators. The PCPC works closely with these stakeholders during the District Planning process laid out in Philadelphia2035 to come up with remapping recommendations. Remapping of the City's land by City Council will be carried out as the final step in the zoning reform process.

Q. When will the remapping be completed?

A. Remapping will be completed sometime after the PCPC finishes the Philadelphia2035 planning process in 2016. Remapping is a more complicated issue since one of the critical steps of that process is legislation by members of City Council. A bill containing the "Existing Zoning Map" and the "Proposed Zoning Map" is traditionally introduced by the appropriate district councilmember. The process for passage of a zoning map bill is similar to the process for the adoption of any bill. You can view the City's current zoning maps at <http://citymaps.phila.gov/zoning/>.

Q. Why was a new code necessary?

A. Philadelphia's first zoning code was enacted in 1933. By the 1950s, changes in lifestyles and housing preferences—combined with the increasing use and reliance on the automobile—meant that the 1933 code no longer met the City's needs and development trends. A new zoning code took effect in 1962. That was the last update. Over the years, the code had become unwieldy and out-of-date. City Council enacted a new code in August 2012.

Q. What are the major goals of the new code?

A. There are five:

- To be easier to understand
- To make future development more predictable for all concerned
- To encourage high-quality, not piecemeal, development
- To preserve the character of Philadelphia's diverse neighborhoods
- To make sure the public has a voice in development

Other sites that may help you better understand Zoning Code Reform:

- A review of completed [District Plans](#)
- You can also consult the [Zoning Administrative Manual](#) for step-by-step information on approval processes and other aspects of the new zoning code.
- The [Zoning Code Quick Reference Guide](#) provides illustrative examples for each zoning district, basic measurements and standards, and categories of allowed uses.