

City Planning Commission
Rochester City Hall
30 Church Street, Room 125-B
Rochester, NY 14614
Via email: PlanningCommission@CityofRochester.Gov

June 5, 2026

Re: City of Rochester's New Zoning Code and Map Proposed to Align with the Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2019

Dear Members of the City Planning Commission,

The **Inclusive Housing Coalition** and its six organizational members are providing these joint comments on the final draft of the City of Rochester's new zoning code. While we are pleased with many of the changes from the 2023 draft, we ask the City Planning Commission to recommend that the final draft incorporate our suggestions before it goes to City Council.

The vision of the Inclusive Housing Coalition is that *"All people in Greater Rochester have the choice to live in sustainable, racially just and equitable, opportunity rich communities."* Each of our six organizations--**Climate Solutions Accelerator, Community Design Rochester, Empire Justice Center, Our Local History, Reconnect Rochester, and Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI)**—use our various areas of expertise to build the will and skills of community members to become advocates for zoning and land use policy changes that open the door to: the development of a wide range of attainable and sustainable housing choices; safer, healthier, multimodal transit options; and increased economic and social vitality.

We ask that the City make the following changes to the Rochester ZAP final draft:

1. **Promote equity in the zoning code by replacing subjective procedures and criteria with more objective ones.** Zoning codes have historically been, and many continue to be, tools of segregation and racial inequity. We urge the City to look at the current draft of the code through a racial justice lens to assess how well it promotes equity. Don Elliott, in a recent op-ed (<https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/zoning-procedures-are-the-new-frontier-of-equity>), suggests the following to make zoning procedures in a zoning code more equitable:
 1. "[R]emove public hearing requirements and discretionary reviews for projects that comply with objective zoning and subdivision regulations."While Rochester's Site Plan Reviews have no public hearing requirement, Rochester's final draft code requires public hearings for many developments,

property changes or changes in use. We urge the City to review the uses that require a Special Permit, which requires a hearing in front of the Planning Commission, and to move some to administrative review.

2. *Make sure the criteria used in the code to make approval decisions are clear and objective rather than vague and subjective.* This means removing words like “appropriate,” “harmony,” “character,” “compatible,” “consistent,” “incompatible,” and “inconsistent” from the criteria in the final draft. The words “harmonious” and “incompatible” are among the exact terms historically used in public and private policies to segregate communities. Racial integration was viewed as inharmonious and incompatible with stable neighborhoods and sustained property values. We ask the City to replace these vague words with objective statements as to what is acceptable in different areas and situations. In the above op-ed, Elliott says, “It is far better to debate how to replace subjective with objective terms once than to debate compliance over and over again for each project.” He notes that Rochester, Minnesota avoids vague approval criteria in its [General Development Plan](#) (p. 367/376).
 3. As appeals of zoning decisions are being increasingly used to delay projects, limit their use, *require that appeals be based on some violation of specific objective criteria*, and do not allow new evidence in the appeal.
2. **Eliminate parking minimums citywide.** This has been a key zoning reform in over [100 cities across the United States](#) and unlocked affordable development potential. Eliminating minimums does not mean that parking will not be built - [in 80% of new developments in Buffalo since the Green Code](#), they continued to build parking. Citywide. Elimination of parking minimums gives developers, including the Greater Rochester Housing Partnership, choice about the parking they include in new residential development. This is parking that is right-sized to the context and to the market. It lowers costs while giving residents choice. While we appreciate that parking minimums in mixed-use districts have been eliminated in the final draft, we believe the City should join Buffalo and other cities across the country and eliminate them in the residential districts as well.

In addition, we urge you to eliminate the residential requirement that car parking must be on the same parcel (15.4.A.1). Shared car parking lots offer a way to reduce the space required to accommodate single-occupancy vehicles and is consistent with the City’s goals of reducing single-occupancy vehicle trips. Developers may also offer tenants a subscription to a parking lot or garage.

3. **Permit Accessory Dwelling Units in all residential districts and relax the building design standards to make them more affordable.** Thank you for permitting ADUs in Medium Density Residential (MDR), High Density Residential (HDR), mixed-use, and other districts and increasing the square footage allowance. However, we urge the City to remove the special permit requirement for ADUs in Low Density Residential (LDR) districts. The lots in LDR districts are more likely than those in other districts to be larger and/or have more space for attached or detached ADUs. Moreover, all detached ADUs require a site plan review, which is enough to ensure that the ADU will not cause “adverse impacts.”

We also ask that the City relax the design standards that make ADUs more expensive to build, including that ADUs resemble the architectural features and aesthetic of the primary structure and the ban on the use of shipping containers and industrial materials for ADUs.

The Final Environment Impact Statement (FGEIS, p. 28) observed that, “The lot frontage, or the amount of area that a parcel fronts along a street, contributes more to the character of a neighborhood in terms of scale than a minimum lot size as the amount of land in a rear yard which contributes to a lot size, is not visible from the street.” This logic applies to attached and detached backyard ADUs as well, including their location in LDR districts and how they look.

4. **Support infill development in MDR and HDR districts.** According to the draft and final Generic Environmental Impact Statements, the percentage of the city zoned as LDR would decrease from 41% to 32%, the percentage zoned as MDR would increase from 6% to 12%, and the percentage zoned as HDR would increase from 3% to 4%. These seem like relatively small changes overall. We ask that the City provide information on the percentage of land and number of lots in each district category (current and new) that are vacant. We also ask the City to take advantage of the newly designated MDR and HDR vacant lots by reducing administrative barriers so developers can more affordably and quickly build 2-4 family buildings or larger on these lots, as appropriate.

Thank you to all who have worked on this years-long project. As a result, the zoning code is substantially more aligned with the 2034 Comprehensive Plan. Making the above changes will further align Rochester's zoning code with its Comprehensive Plan's policy principle to promote equity, inclusion, and environmental justice and its placemaking principles to provide diverse housing options, design at a pedestrian scale, and strengthen multi-modal travel.

Sincerely,

- Climate Solutions Accelerator
- Community Design Rochester
- Empire Justice Center
- Our Local History
- Reconnect Rochester
- Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI)

Cc: Rochester City Council