



City of Springfield

Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations Update

Recommendations Report

May 19, 2026



Introduction

In recent years, Springfield has prioritized comprehensive land use planning by taking decisive steps to shape the community's future growth. In 2025, the City adopted its Comprehensive Plan with a vision to preserve Springfield's small-town character and high quality of life while guiding balanced growth, expanding housing and local business opportunities, improving community connectivity, and protecting agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas. In January 2026, the City partnered with Sightline Planning and Zoning and Ray Planning Solutions to update the City's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to help implement the Comprehensive Plan. The consultant team is working with the City to assess the existing Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations and develop recommendations to guide the update process. The last major update of Springfield's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations was in 2015. Although the development standards have been updated and expanded over the years, they no longer fully reflect current development trends or support the City's goals for growth and development. Modern ordinances will help implement the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan while streamlining regulations, removing barriers to smart growth, and providing a clear framework for guiding Springfield's future development.

Purpose

The purpose of this Recommendations Report is to provide the City with initial recommendations for the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations as a point of discussion before the drafting process begins. The Recommendations Report provides a general assessment of the City's existing development regulations, highlights significant issues, and suggests preliminary recommendations. The goal of this phase of the project is to reach a broad consensus with the City on key issues prior to drafting the standards that will make up the development regulations. The Recommendations Report also helps the consultant team identify issues that may require further research, analysis, and discussion prior to the drafting phase of the project. In addition, the Recommendation Report is a public facing document that allows residents, property owners, and community stakeholders to understand the major themes of the project and provide feedback. The text and illustrations for the ordinances will be drafted during the next phase of the project.

Using This Report

The Recommendations Report is organized into a series of recommendations that provide suggestions on how to strategically improve the existing Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations. They are grouped into headings that include overall recommendations; administration; zoning districts, design, and use regulations; parking, landscaping, and signs; and subdivisions. The recommendations were developed based on in-depth discussions with City staff, the Planning Commission, and ongoing discussions with local stakeholders.

Overall Recommendations

Reorganize ordinances for cohesiveness and greater ease of use

The existing Zoning Ordinance will be reorganized in a logical and streamlined format to make it more cohesive and easier to use for both new and experienced users. Figure 1 Proposed Zoning Ordinance Structure, shows each of the sections that will make up the updated Zoning Ordinance. The proposed structure would reduce the number of sections in the Zoning Ordinance and consolidate similar types of information. In general, the Subdivision Regulations are thorough and meet the needs of the community; the update process will allow the City to make targeted improvements to these regulations.

Articles 1.00 through 5.00 of the Zoning Ordinance would serve as the administrative foundation of the Ordinance, and would include title and applicability, administrative bodies and notice, zoning applications, planned unit developments, and nonconformities. Articles 6.00 and 7.00 would make up the core of the Ordinance with standards pertaining to bulk and setback for the City’s various zoning districts and standards for principal and accessory uses and structures. Articles 8.00, 9.00, and 10.00 would include off-street parking and loading regulations, landscape standards, and sign regulations. Article 11.00 would serve as a glossary of terms and include all relevant definitions.

The updated Zoning Ordinance will consolidate similar regulations by subject matter, making the code significantly easier to navigate. In the existing Zoning Ordinance, various regulations are interspersed throughout the document, making it difficult to locate all standards related to a specific topic, which is a common problem in older ordinances. The update process provides the City with an opportunity to comprehensively reorganize these development standards so that users can find what they need quickly and efficiently.

Figure 1 Proposed Zoning Ordinance Structure

| Proposed Zoning Ordinance |
|---|
| Article 1.00 Title and Applicability |
| Article 2.00 Administrative Bodies and Notice |
| Article 3.00 Zoning Applications |
| Article 4.00 Planned Unit Developments |
| Article 5.00 Nonconformities |
| Article 6.00 Zoning Districts |
| Article 7.00 Uses |
| Article 8.00 Off-Street Parking and Loading |
| Article 9.00 Landscaping |
| Article 10.00 Signs |
| Article 11.00 Definitions |

Incorporate new and updated tables and illustrations

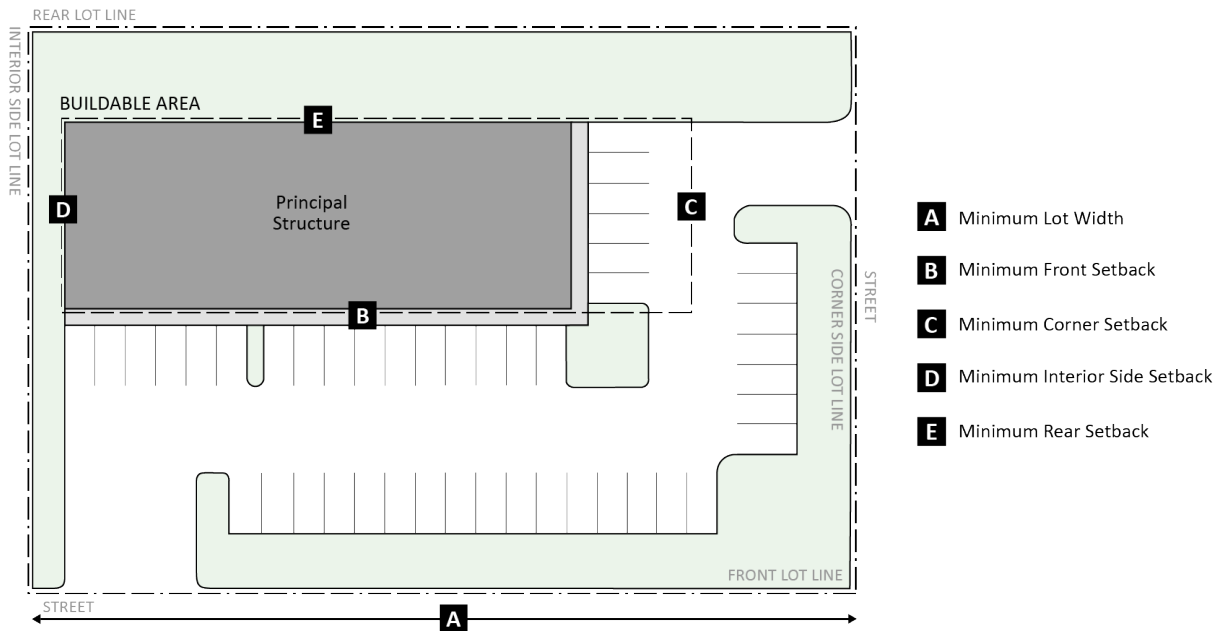
The updated Zoning Ordinance will use new and updated tables and illustrations to communicate information more effectively. Written standards can be summarized in tables and illustrations that complement the narrative text so that it is easier for users to absorb. While the existing ordinances include several useful tables, photos, and illustrations, the updated Zoning Ordinance will include fully

revised tables, flowcharts, and illustrations that more effectively communicate information. New flowcharts will be clear and easy to read. New illustrations will be redesigned with better use of color, proportion, line weight, and scale so they are easy to understand at a glance. For example, a combination of tables and graphics could be used to communicate the regulations of each of the zoning districts in the updated Zoning Ordinance. Figure 2 Example Bulk and Yard Regulations and Figure 3 Example Plan View Illustration show the standards of a sample zoning district utilizing a bulk and yard table and a plan-view graphic.

Figure 2 Example Bulk and Yard Regulations

| Bulk Requirements | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| | Minimum Lot Area | 25,000 sf |
| A | Minimum Lot Width | 100 ft |
| | Maximum Principal Building Height | 50 ft |
| | Maximum Impervious Coverage | 85% |
| Setback Requirements | | |
| B | Minimum Front Setback | 75 ft |
| C | Minimum Corner Side Setback | 25 ft |
| D | Minimum Interior Side Setback | 10 ft |
| E | Minimum Rear Setback | 30 ft |

Figure 3 Example Plan View Illustration



Add new definitions, eliminate outdated terms, and remove regulating language

In drafting the updated ordinances, existing terms will be evaluated, new definitions will be added, and outdated terms will be revised to reflect modern development standards and practices. Some terms will be removed if they are obsolete or are no longer used in the ordinances. To increase the accessibility and readability of the document, supporting definitions for signs and supplemental regulations will be

consolidated in one location as part of the ordinance update process. The role of definitions is to define key terms so any regulating language currently found in the definitions will be moved to the pertinent regulating sections of the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations. Key terms such as “building,” “structure,” “grade,” and “family” will be reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and enforceability.

Administration

Clearly outline the role of the Zoning Administrator

The Zoning Administrator serves as the coordinator for all development applications, ensuring they are appropriately routed to boards, commissions, and staff. By clearly designating the role of the Zoning Administrator in the updated Zoning Ordinance, applicants have a single point of contact who can guide them through procedures, answer questions, and keep applications moving. Explicitly defining the Zoning Administrator's authority and responsibilities establishes accountability, reduces confusion, and streamlines the development review process for both applicants and staff.

Consolidate zoning application information to create a consistent procedure

The existing Ordinance includes separate sections detailing procedures for variations, conditional uses, amendments, and a number of other zoning applications. While the updated Zoning Ordinance will continue to include separate steps and approval standards for each application, it will also consolidate procedural information that applies to all applications. For example, this section will provide information regarding procedures for filing zoning applications, including what parties are authorized to file applications, and references to required application fees. This consolidation will reduce repetitive content and ensure that common procedures are presented consistently across all application types.

Remove submittal requirements for zoning applications

The existing Zoning Ordinance includes submittal requirements for various development applications, as in Sections 5.23 (Main Street Overlay), 8.17 (Wind Energy Systems), and 9.03 (Landscaping Requirements). This is a common practice in many older development codes, but it adds unnecessary information and requires a formal amendment to the code when administrative processes change. We recommend moving these submittal requirements since it is unnecessary to include them in the Zoning Ordinance. Instead, these application requirements should be located in separate documents that are available online and from staff. This will give Springfield staff the opportunity to update the applications now, and in the future, and make it easier for applicants to access them.

Holistically update findings of fact for development applications

The updated Zoning Ordinance will include clear and up to date findings of fact requirements for each of the development applications in the code. Findings of fact guide decision-makers through required approval standards, which promotes consistent and transparent application of zoning criteria across all

cases. These findings provide the legal foundation for zoning decisions ensuring that approvals, such as conditional use permits and variations, are legally defensible. In the existing Zoning Ordinance, the standards for amendments and variations are minimal and the standards for conditional use permits include several performance standards (noise, dust, odor), which are not decision findings. Updated findings of fact will help the City articulate how each application meets the specific standards of the updated Zoning Ordinance by showing that decisions were made considering all relevant factors.

Revise the site plan review process to ensure balanced development and streamlined procedures

We recommend that the City revise its site plan review application as part of the ordinance process. A site plan shows how an applicant intends to develop a site and how it fits in with surrounding properties. In the existing Zoning Ordinance, site plan review is only part of applications in the BH Business Highway and MSO Main Street Overlay Districts. In each case, it is a complex procedure, particularly in the MSO District, which focuses on an intricate set of performance point requirements. We recommend replacing the existing site plan review procedure with a more straightforward process that would ensure that development and redevelopment is harmonious with surrounding properties. Site plan review could be applied to new development in all zoning districts to ensure a consistent framework for new construction within the community.

Explore a possible new process for administrative adjustments

The City may want to complement its existing variation application, approved by the Board of Adjustment, with a new administrative adjustment application approved by the Zoning Administrator. The administrative adjustment application would allow the Zoning Administrator to approve minor deviations from a select number of zoning requirements pertaining to bulk, setbacks, off-street parking, and landscaping. This procedure would allow the City to approve straightforward variation requests more efficiently and shorten review timelines. The Zoning Ordinance would clearly state the requirements eligible for administrative adjustments, and limit eligibility based on a maximum percentage in relation to the existing requirement. For example, a request for a five percent (or less) variation from a front setback would go to the Zoning Administrator for an administrative adjustment. Any application exceeding this limitation would be required to utilize the typical variation procedure with the Board of Adjustment.

Update the PUD process by removing the PUD District and mandatory triggers

The purpose of a PUD is to allow creative development that would not be possible under the strict application of zoning regulations. PUDs are reviewed by City staff, the Planning Commission, and the City Council against a defined set of approval standards to ensure that the project adheres to overall land use goals. The City's current PUD process includes a PUD District, which serves as a floating zone, with minimum acreage requirements for residential, commercial, and industrial development. We recommend removing the floating zone and these mandatory minimum acreage requirements in the updated Zoning Ordinance to allow for greater flexibility in development – as long as it is context specific and provides amenities for the community. Moving forward, the goal is to modernize the City's zoning standards so that land use goals are clear, and more development is done through the Zoning

Ordinance’s core development regulations. The PUD would be an optional process in any zoning district for large, complex development proposals that need many variations from the basic zoning regulations.

Zoning Districts, Design, and Use Regulations

Update the zoning districts to facilitate Springfield’s vision for the future

Over time, certain zoning districts in a community may become out of sync with the community’s vision for future development. The consultant team suggests refining Springfield’s zoning district structure per Figure 4 Proposed Zoning Districts. These recommendations were based on the Land Use and Development recommendations from the City’s [Comprehensive Plan](#). With these planning goals as a foundation, it’s clear that many of the bulk and setback regulations in the existing Ordinance should be maintained as part of the revised Ordinance. However, there are opportunities to update the zoning district regulations based on this review. Moving forward, the zoning district structure will not include zoning districts that are not mapped, which will allow the City to manage development with a different set of zoning districts. For reference, please use [this link](#) to view the location of the City’s existing zoning districts in an interactive version of the City’s zoning map.

Figure 4 Proposed Zoning Districts

| Existing Zoning District | Proposed Zoning District |
|--------------------------------|--|
| New Zoning District | A-1 Agricultural District |
| AR Agriculture Residential | RR Rural Residential District |
| RT Rural Arts/Tourism | RA Rural Arts District |
| R100 Single-Family Residential | R-1 Lower-Density Residential |
| R92 Single-Family Residential | R-1 Lower-Density Residential |
| R87 Single-Family Residential | R-1 Lower-Density Residential |
| R50 Two-Family Residential | R-1 Lower-Density Residential and/or R-2 Medium-Density Residential |
| R30 General Family Residential | R-3 Higher-Density Residential |
| DC Downtown Commercial | D-1 Downtown |
| BG General Business | C-1 Neighborhood Commercial |
| BH Highway Business | C-2 Regional Commercial |
| BP Business Park | BP-1 Business Park |
| LI Light Industrial | I-1 Light Industrial |
| FF/FW Flood Plain Overlay | FP Floodplain Overlay |

| Existing Zoning Districts to Revise or Remove | Rationale |
|---|--|
| CO Corridor Overlay District | Overlay standards will be embedded in base zoning. |
| HCO Highway Corridor Overlay District | Overlay standards will be embedded in base zoning. |
| MSO Main Street Overlay District | Overlay standards will be embedded in base zoning. |
| M Modified Residential District | Allow only existing mobile homes as a conditional use in specified residential zoning districts. |
| MU Mixed Use District | Mix of uses will be facilitated through use allowances in the appropriate commercial districts as shown in the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map. |
| RB Residential Business District | Existing Springfield Platteview Community Schools Office does not require standalone zoning district. |
| PUD Planned Unit Development District | Unnecessary; PUDs can be used in all districts. |

Modernize zoning standards for residential zoning districts

The current Zoning Ordinance has three single-family residential districts (R100, R92, R87) and one two-family district (R50), all of which have very similar development standards for single-family development. The names of these districts are confusing because of their numerical designations, and also because the R50 “Two-Family District” is predominantly made up of single-family homes. In addition, there is substantial overlap among the R92, R87, and R50 Districts because many lots are similar in size and development pattern, reducing the need for incrementally different residential districts. The updated Zoning Ordinance should revise these districts to modernize and simplify residential development. We recommend organizing the residential zoning classifications into three districts: R-1 Lower Density, R-2 Medium Density, and R-3 Higher Density. The R-1 District would generally include the City’s existing single-family detached homes. The R-2 District would generally include new development of smaller single-family homes, duplexes, and townhomes. The R-3 District would generally include small multi-family developments and senior housing communities.

The ordinance update process gives the City an opportunity to calibrate bulk standards in the residential districts, such as lot area, lot width, and setbacks. We recommend eliminating unnecessary requirements from the Zoning Ordinance to allow buildings to keep up with modern development trends. The residential zoning districts include several redundant bulk regulations, including minimum lot area per dwelling unit, minimum floor area by number of stories, and a requirement for wider lots for corner lots. We recommend removing many of these outdated bulk standards to facilitate more by right development that maintains the character of existing residential neighborhoods. Household size has declined over time, and many markets have shifted toward smaller lots and more compact housing types. Updated development standards can remove unnecessary obstacles for residential development, particularly in an era when it has become difficult for young people and seniors to find a new home in order to maintain or grow roots in a community.

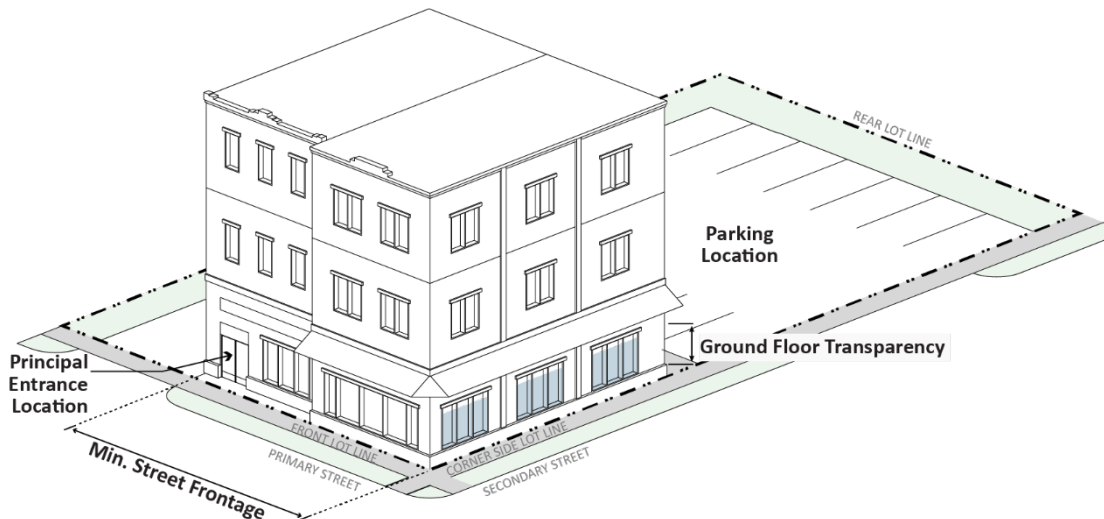
Improve design requirements throughout the Zoning Ordinance

Springfield has defined a vision for its residential, Downtown, commercial, business park, and industrial areas through its recently updated Comprehensive Plan. Discussions have revealed a desire for design

requirements throughout the City to improve the overall appearance of new development. The Zoning Ordinance should include design requirements for the City’s residential, Downtown, commercial, business park, and industrial districts to enhance aesthetics and help create a sense of place. These requirements should be tied to base zoning districts, rather than overlay districts. The updated Zoning Ordinance can build on the requirements of the CO Corridor, HCO Highway Corridor, and MSO Main Street Overlay Districts. The requirements will provide a foundation for the design of individual properties while providing room for architectural creativity.

These standards should establish requirements for the form of buildings based on the desired character of each district. For example, in residential districts, these standards would ensure that homes in new subdivisions are architecturally pleasing with standards for materials, windows, and rooflines. In contrast, the standards for the Downtown district would ensure that new buildings maintain the pedestrian character of Downtown with buildings built to the sidewalk and at appropriate heights. These standards could also address façade design, building materials, and placement of parking areas (see Figure 5 Example Design Requirements for Business District).

Figure 5 Example Design Requirements for Business District



Comprehensively review use allowances and include a shorter list of use categories

The updated Zoning Ordinance should comprehensively review the uses allowed in the City and include broader categories for permitted and conditional uses. For example, the existing Zoning Ordinance includes long lists of retail stores and professional services, which have become outdated over time, such as haberdasheries. The updated Zoning Ordinance can include use categories, such as retail goods or personal services, with flexible definitions that allow an array of similar uses with similar impacts. This approach helps simplify the Ordinance and avoids repetition. Use categories have the advantage of being broad enough to include a wide range of uses that are similar to one another, which reduces the need for zoning text amendments as new uses develop over time. The updated Zoning Ordinance should

continue to call out certain specific uses with more intense impacts to better manage their location within the City, such as gas stations, auto repair, and car washes.

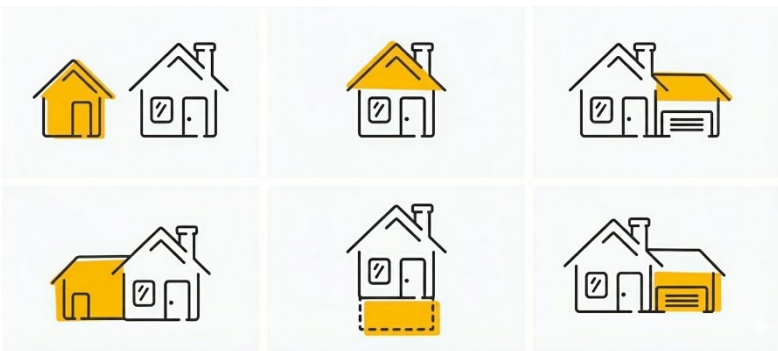
Expand housing choice by updating residential use types

As discussed in the Springfield Comprehensive Plan, the City has an enormous interest in greater housing choice. Single-unit residential development will continue to be the predominant land use type in the community; however, the ordinance update process will seek to facilitate the development of quality housing choice for all age groups. Springfield already has an array of housing types, but more options are needed for seniors, young professionals, and growing families. As discussed in the Comprehensive Plan, duplexes, townhomes, senior housing, cottage courts, and condominiums can be created as infill development in locations near existing activity centers. The ordinance update process will provide an opportunity to evaluate the uses allowed in residential and non-residential zoning districts to find ways to allow a greater diversity of housing types while maintaining the character of these neighborhoods.

Consider allowing accessory dwelling units in residential zoning districts

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), sometimes called granny flats or in-law apartments, can be used to provide a greater range of housing options without altering the character of a neighborhood. These units are typically constructed within a single-unit home or as an accessory structure, such as a detached garage. Regulations for size and scale ensure that they remain secondary in size to the home. ADUs expand housing choice and allow Springfield to grow within its existing footprint, making more efficient use of existing infrastructure and services. Currently, ADUs are not addressed in the existing Zoning Ordinance. While ADU regulations have been discussed in the state legislature and adopted by several cities across the state, we recommend revising the Zoning Ordinance to include clear standards for where and how these units may be built that is appropriate for Springfield. These standards may include defining maximum square footage, indicating whether they may be within a principal or accessory structure, and including parking requirements. Figure 6 Accessory Dwelling Units demonstrates the range of possible locations for ADUs, but some of these locations may not be appropriate for Springfield.

Figure 6 Accessory Dwelling Units



The image at the top left shows a detached accessory dwelling unit as a detached accessory structure.

The other five images show attached accessory dwelling units that are part of a principal structure.

Parking, Landscaping, and Signs

Update minimum parking requirements

The City should comprehensively reassess its parking requirements as part of the Zoning Ordinance update. Minimum parking requirements determine how many parking spaces a property owner must provide based on the use of the building. Over time, the City's minimum parking standards have become inflated, which can create excess parking, reduce the amount of developable area for buildings, increase project costs for property owners, and contribute to stormwater runoff. The ordinance update process will examine standards for all uses in the community to make sure that the City does not require too much parking.

Leverage the many benefits of better landscape requirements

Robust landscape standards play a critical role in the appearance of development sites and the community as a whole. In addition to their aesthetic and screening functions, well-designed landscape features provide valuable stormwater management and buffer surrounding properties from new development. Despite their importance, the City's current landscape regulations would benefit from consolidation and modernization. The landscape regulations in the Subdivision Regulations will pertain to right-of-way landscaping, such as street trees and parkway plantings, while the Zoning Ordinance will include on-site landscaping, with particular emphasis on parking areas.

We recommend modernizing and tailoring parking lot landscape requirements to balance aesthetics, functionality, and commercial visibility. Updated standards should maintain attractive screening while preserving appropriate sight lines for businesses and traffic safety. To enhance sustainability, the City may want to require parking lot landscape islands to incorporate stormwater inlets designed for retention and absorption. These bioretention islands can capture and filter stormwater runoff generated by the parking lot, reducing strain on stormwater infrastructure while creating healthier plantings through natural irrigation.

Ensure new landscaping incorporates native species, sustainable design, and tree protection

Native and naturalized plant species are essential for Springfield's landscapes because they are adapted to local climate conditions, require less maintenance, promote water conservation, and support pollinators. It is critical to avoid invasive species that can spread aggressively into natural areas and outcompete native vegetation. The City currently maintains an approved street tree list available from staff for public-area plantings. To provide an updated standard that reflects ecological best practices, we suggest comparing the City's tree list with Plant Nebraska's [Trees for Eastern Nebraska](#), which is prepared by regional arborists and ecologists. This resource would help ensure that the City prioritizes native species and recognizes emerging threats from pests and diseases affecting the region. The updated Zoning Ordinance can also include standards for tree protection and replacement to preserve the community's valuable tree canopy. In addition, the updated Zoning Ordinance can add tree species diversity requirements and standards for drought- and salt-tolerance, to ensure resilience to changing weather patterns.

Reorganize sign regulations for clarity and greater ease of use

The existing Zoning Ordinance organizes sign regulations by use type (residential versus non-residential), detached / attached signs, and miscellaneous signs. This organization causes confusion for users who are not already familiar with the Ordinance. Staff has already identified that the existing contradictions within the sign regulations need to be resolved. We recommend organizing signs by use type *and* by zoning district in the updated Zoning Ordinance so that users understand what sign types are allowed in which locations. For example, ground signs can be a residential sign, at the entrance to residential subdivisions, or a non-residential sign, in front of businesses. To avoid confusion, the updated Zoning Ordinance will ensure that the regulations for ground signs are in a single location, with separate standards for the size and location of the sign based on the zoning district. The ordinance update process will also provide an opportunity to reorganize standards for special signs, such as electronic message centers and manually changeable copy signs.

Update regulations to ensure consistency with recent court rulings on sign content

The City should revise its sign regulations to comply with *Reed v. Town of Gilbert* (2015), which requires that sign regulations be content neutral. Under this Supreme Court precedent, communities may regulate signs to achieve aesthetic and other legitimate goals, but cannot base those regulations on what a sign says or the message it conveys. The updated Zoning Ordinance should regulate signs based on structural criteria such as sign type (awning, ground, projecting, or wall-mounted), size and height, location and setback, and lighting and materials. This approach, which is already used in the existing Zoning Ordinance, allows the City to maintain aesthetic standards while eliminating content-based distinctions. Many communities in the region and across the country have successfully updated their codes using this framework.

Subdivisions

Emphasize connectivity and open space as part of new subdivision approvals

Overall, the City's Subdivision Regulations are thorough and meet the needs of the community. However, the update process allows the City to make targeted improvements to these regulations. While the City's Zoning Ordinance will be comprehensively reviewed, the Subdivision Regulations merely require targeted updates. These updated subdivision standards will help implement the City's Comprehensive Plan by strengthening connectivity between neighborhoods, including pedestrian and bicycle connections, and by limiting cul-de-sacs to promote greater connections within the street network. The update can also refine the City's requirements and incentives for parkland set asides and trail/greenway linkages, ensuring that future growth contributes to parks and recreation opportunities that serve both new and existing neighborhoods.

Modernize subdivision procedures for greater ease of use

The update process provides an opportunity to clarify and modernize the subdivision approval procedure. Targeted revisions will clarify submittal requirements, establish completeness review, and align review steps and timelines for plat types so the process is consistent, transparent, and easier for applicants, staff, and decision-makers to administer. The City should consider streamlining pathways for small/administrative plats of four lots or less by clearly stating eligibility, required submittals, and final decision authority. This effort will preserve existing options and make them more predictable and user-friendly.