



City of St. Louis Zoning UPgrade

A Modern Code to Meet the Moment

ZOUP Scoop Issue 03: Let's Talk About Tradeoffs

The Zoning Section of The Building Division & The Planning and Urban Design Agency of St. Louis

What is The ZOUP?

The City of St. Louis is proud to announce the launch of a comprehensive process to overhaul the City's zoning code—the Zoning Upgrade: a modern code to meet the moment—marking the first major rewrite and map update since the mid-twentieth century. This process is spearheaded by the Planning and Urban Design Agency (PDA) and the Zoning Section of the Building Division.

STAY UPDATED!



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Meet The ZOUP Team
www.zoup-stl.com/project-team

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LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Over the past year, we've had hundreds of conversations with St. Louis residents, business owners, neighborhood leaders, developers, preservationists, advocates, and city staff as we've worked on the Zoning Upgrade (ZOUP). Those conversations have shaped the code in countless ways. They have helped us understand what people value about their neighborhoods, what they worry about, and what they hope for the future of the city.

Along the way, we've also heard many of the same questions come up again and again. What happens if we allow more housing types in a neighborhood? Will mixed-use zoning bring unwanted businesses onto residential blocks? Does removing parking requirements mean nobody will build parking anymore? How quickly could these changes happen? These are important questions. They deserve thoughtful answers.

In this issue of the ZOUP Scoop, we've turned some of those conversations into a series of comics. The characters are fictional, but the questions are real. Each comic explores a topic that has come up repeatedly during the planning process and illustrates how the proposed zoning code may approach it.

Our goal isn't to tell anyone what to think. It's to help make zoning — which can sometimes feel technical or abstract — a little easier to understand and discuss. We hope these comics spark new conversations, challenge a few assumptions, and help more people participate in shaping the future of St. Louis.

****To follow the comics, read them like a comic book! Read each page from left to right, and top to bottom.***

VIEW THE DRAFT ZONING DISTRICTS, USE TABLE, AND DRAFT INTERACTIVE ZONING MAP:



VIEW THE DRAFT ZONING DISTRICTS AND USE TABLE

Draft 1 of the Zoning Districts and Use Table are available for review. Comments will be closed until the release of a revised draft which will be opened up for comments again.



VIEW THE DRAFT INTERACTIVE ZONING MAP

This is the first public draft of the zoning map, and it will continue to evolve as we receive comments from members of the public and make edits. Comments will be closed until the release of a revised draft which will be opened up for comments again.

Thank you to everyone who has shared comments and feedback throughout this process. Your input is helping shape the next iteration of the draft zoning districts and map. This is an ongoing, collaborative effort, and additional opportunities for public review and comment will be available as the draft continues to evolve.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PARKING

THE ZOUP MIGHT GET RID OF MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS? THAT SOUNDS LIKE A DISASTER. PARKING IS ALREADY HARD ENOUGH

REMOVING MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS DOESN'T MEAN PARKING IS BANNED. IT JUST MEANS DEVELOPERS AREN'T REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A SPECIFIC NUMBER OF OFF-STREET PARKING SPACES FOR EVERY APARTMENT, RESTAURANT, OR BUSINESS.

BUT WON'T DEVELOPERS STOP BUILDING PARKING ALTOGETHER?

SOME PROJECTS WILL STILL INCLUDE PARKING BECAUSE THE MARKET DEMANDS IT. BUT THE ZOUP WOULDN'T FORCE EVERY SITE TO DEVOTE LARGE AMOUNTS OF LAND AND MONEY TO PARKING WHETHER IT MAKES SENSE OR NOT.

Pre-Parking Minimums

Post-Parking Minimums

YEAH, BUT PEOPLE STILL DRIVE TO THOSE PLACES.

THEY DO. BUT THE CITY EVOLVED IN A WAY WHERE PARKING WAS SHARED, DISTRIBUTED, AND BALANCED WITH WALKABILITY INSTEAD OF DOMINATING EVERY PARCEL

I'M WORRIED EVERYONE WILL JUST PARK ON THE STREET.

WHAT HAPPENED?

MY UNCLE SAID THE SAME THING WHEN THEY GOT RID OF PARKING MINIMUMS CITYWIDE IN BUFFALO IN 2017.

HONESTLY? NOT MUCH. MOST NEW PROJECTS STILL BUILT PARKING WHEN THEY THOUGHT TENANTS WANTED IT. THEY JUST WEREN'T REQUIRED TO BUILD THE SAME AMOUNT EVERY TIME.*

Parking's Impact on Density & Affordability

AND PARKING IS EXPENSIVE! STRUCTURED PARKING CAN COST TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS PER SPACE TO BUILD. EVEN SURFACE PARKING CONSUMES LAND THAT COULD OTHERWISE HOLD HOUSING, BUSINESSES, TREES, OR PUBLIC SPACE

SO RESIDENTS END UP PAYING FOR PARKING EVEN IF THEY DON'T OWN A CAR?

EXACTLY. DONALD SHOUP A UCLA PROFESSOR WHO WROTE A BOOK CALLED THE HIGH COST OF FREE PARKING, ARGUES THAT PARKING IS NEVER REALLY FREE. THE COST GETS BAKED INTO RENTS, HOUSING PRICES, GOODS, AND SERVICES.

Effects of Parking Minimums

I'VE HEARD ABOUT THAT BOOK! IT BASICALLY SAYS WE'VE SUBSIDIZED DRIVING BY REQUIRING ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF PARKING EVERYWHERE, RIGHT?

THAT'S ACTUALLY WHAT MANY CITIES HAVE FOUND. REMOVING PARKING MINIMUMS DOESN'T ELIMINATE PARKING. IT GIVES PROPERTY OWNERS MORE FLEXIBILITY IN DECIDING HOW MUCH PARKING THEY NEED.**

THAT'S ALSO WHY ST. LOUIS USES MANY TOOLS BESIDES PARKING MINIMUMS INCLUDING PERMITS, METERS, SHARED PARKING AGREEMENTS, TRANSIT INVESTMENTS, BETTER SIDEWALKS, AND BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE.

SOMETIMES ON-STREET PARKING CAN EVEN HELP WITH TRAFFIC CALMING BY NARROWING ROADS AND CREATING A BUFFER BETWEEN THE SIDEWALK AND MOVING VEHICLES.

YOU BET. AND THOSE REQUIREMENTS HELPED PRODUCE A MORE SPRAWLING, AUTO-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PATTERN. THE SLUP RECOMMENDS SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR ST. LOUIS: WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS, MIXED-USE CORRIDORS, TRANSIT-SUPPORTIVE DEVELOPMENT, AND STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BUILDINGS AND STREETS.

THINK ABOUT ALL THE PLACES PEOPLE LOVE IN ST. LOUIS THAT DON'T HAVE GIANT PARKING LOTS OUT FRONT...

AND A LOT OF THE CITY'S MOST BELOVED PLACES ALREADY WORK THAT WAY.

AND SOMETIMES REQUIRING TOO MUCH PARKING MEANS THE HOUSING NEVER GETS BUILT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

EXACTLY. ON SMALLER LOTS ESPECIALLY PARKING REQUIREMENTS CAN MAKE PROJECTS FINANCIALLY OR PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. ZOUP STILL REGULATES HOW BUILDINGS RELATE TO THE STREET IN MANY DISTRICTS. PARKING BETWEEN THE BUILDING AND THE STREET IS PROHIBITED BECAUSE THE GOAL IS TO CREATE WALKABLE URBAN CORRIDORS AS OPPOSED TO SUBURBAN STRIP DEVELOPMENT.

SO THE IDEA ISN'T 'NO PARKING.'

CORRECT. THE IDEA IS TO STOP REQUIRING MORE PARKING THAN WE ACTUALLY NEED AND TO GIVE NEIGHBORHOODS MORE FLEXIBILITY IN HOW LAND GETS USED OVER TIME.

* Orbach, R. (2023, September 14). Eliminating parking minimums in Buffalo, NY. Bipartisan Policy Center.

** U.S. Department of Transportation, Climate Change Center, Climate Strategies that Work. (n.d.). Parking Reforms.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOUSING CHOICE

SO LET ME GET THIS STRAIGHT. THE ZONUP IS BANNING SINGLE-FAMILY ZONING; DOES THAT MEAN NOBODY IN ST. LOUIS WILL BE ALLOWED TO BUILD A SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSE ANYMORE?

NO NOT AT ALL!

N-A
N-B
N-C

DETACHED HOUSES ARE STILL ALLOWED IN MULTIPLE DISTRICTS, INCLUDING N-A, N-B, AND N-C. THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT DETACHED HOUSES WOULD NO LONGER BE THE ONLY TYPE OF HOUSING ALLOWED. IT'S INCREASING WHAT'S POSSIBLE.

A LOT OF ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOODS ALREADY HAVE THIS MIX. YOU'LL SEE DETACHED HOUSES, TWO-FAMILIES, FOUR-FAMILIES, AND SMALL APARTMENT BUILDINGS ALL ON THE SAME BLOCK.

EXACTLY MANY OF THE CITY'S MOST BELOVED NEIGHBORHOODS WERE BUILT BEFORE THE ZONING CODE ADOPTED IN THE 1950S PUSHED ST. LOUIS TOWARD A MORE SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT PATTERN THAT SEPARATES USES, LIMITS HOUSING TYPES, AND ENCOURAGES LOWER-DENSITY, SINGLE-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT.

YEAH, BUT THOSE NEIGHBORHOODS WERE BUILT A LONG TIME AGO.

BUT I LIVE IN A SUBURBAN PART OF THE CITY. PEOPLE MOVED THERE BECAUSE THEY WANTED A SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD.

B. Building Standards

AND ZONUP STILL PLANS FOR THAT. FOR EXAMPLE, THE N-A DISTRICT IS SPECIFICALLY INTENDED FOR PREDOMINANTLY DETACHED NEIGHBORHOODS THAT LACK ALLEYS. IT STILL LIMITS BUILDINGS TO 2.5 STORIES, STILL REQUIRES SETBACKS, AND STILL REGULATES BUILDING COVERAGE.

IN N-A, A PROPERTY OWNER COULD STILL BUILD A DETACHED HOUSE. BUT THEY COULD ALSO BUILD A DUPLEX OR ADD AN ADU. IN N-B, YOU COULD HAVE UP TO FOUR UNITS. IN N-C, UP TO EIGHT.

SO WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGES?

DUPLEX ADU

A LOT OF THE MIXED-USE BLOCKS, CORNER STORES, FLATS, AND APARTMENT BUILDINGS PEOPLE LOVE TODAY WERE BUILT BEFORE THOSE RULES EXISTED.

SO ZONUP IS BASICALLY UNDOING THE 1950S CODE?

IN SOME WAYS, YES. THE STRATEGIC LAND USE PLAN—OR SLUP—CHARTS A DIFFERENT DIRECTION FOR THE CITY. INSTEAD OF TRYING TO MAKE ST. LOUIS MORE SUBURBAN, IT SAYS WE SHOULD DOUBLE DOWN ON WHAT MAKES ST. LOUIS DISTINCTLY URBAN: WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS, MIXED-USE CORRIDORS, TRANSIT-SUPPORTIVE DENSITY, AND A WIDER RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS.

ZONUP IS REALLY THE IMPLEMENTATION TOOL FOR THAT VISION. THE SLUP SETS THE DIRECTION; THE ZONING CODE HELPS MAKE IT POSSIBLE.

Full Document
City of St. Louis Strategic Land Use Plan
of the Comprehensive Plan

THAT SOUNDS LIKE THERE WILL BE APARTMENTS EVERYWHERE...

NOT REALLY. ZONUP STILL CONTROLS HEIGHT, FRONTAGE, WINDOWS, SETBACKS, ENTRANCES—EVEN HOW LONG A BLANK WALL CAN BE. THE IDEA IS THAT NEIGHBORHOODS CAN EVOLVE WITHOUT LOSING THE PHYSICAL QUALITIES PEOPLE VALUE.

MY COUSIN LIVES IN MINNEAPOLIS. THEY ENDED SINGLE-FAMILY-ONLY ZONING YEARS AGO AND THERE ARE STILL PLENTY OF SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES.

ALSO, THE PACE OF CHANGE WILL BE SLOW. IN MINNEAPOLIS, MANY PEOPLE FEARED RAPID NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE. IN REALITY, THE FIRST YEAR PRODUCED JUST 16 NEW DUPLEXES AND 4 NEW TRIPLEXES.

N-A Neighborhood Limited Use, 2 Units	
1. Massing	See 1.1.1
2. Building height (feet)	25.5 stories/25'
3. Building depth	N/A
4. Building width	N/A
5. Primary street frontage	N/A
6. Side street frontage	N/A
7. Ground story	See 1.1.2
8. Ground story height (feet)	10'
9. Windows	See 1.1.3
10. Ground story windows	100% 100%
11. Ground story windows	100% 100%
12. Ground story windows	100% 100%
13. Ground story windows	100% 100%
14. Ground story windows	100% 100%
15. Ground story windows	100% 100%
16. Ground story windows	100% 100%
17. Ground story windows	100% 100%
18. Ground story windows	100% 100%
19. Ground story windows	100% 100%
20. Ground story windows	100% 100%

MY PARENTS WANT TO DOWNSIZE BUT STAY NEAR US. MY SON WANTS TO MOVE OUT BUT CAN'T AFFORD A HOUSE YET. RIGHT NOW THERE'S BASICALLY NO MIDDLE OPTION.

Household Size Over Time

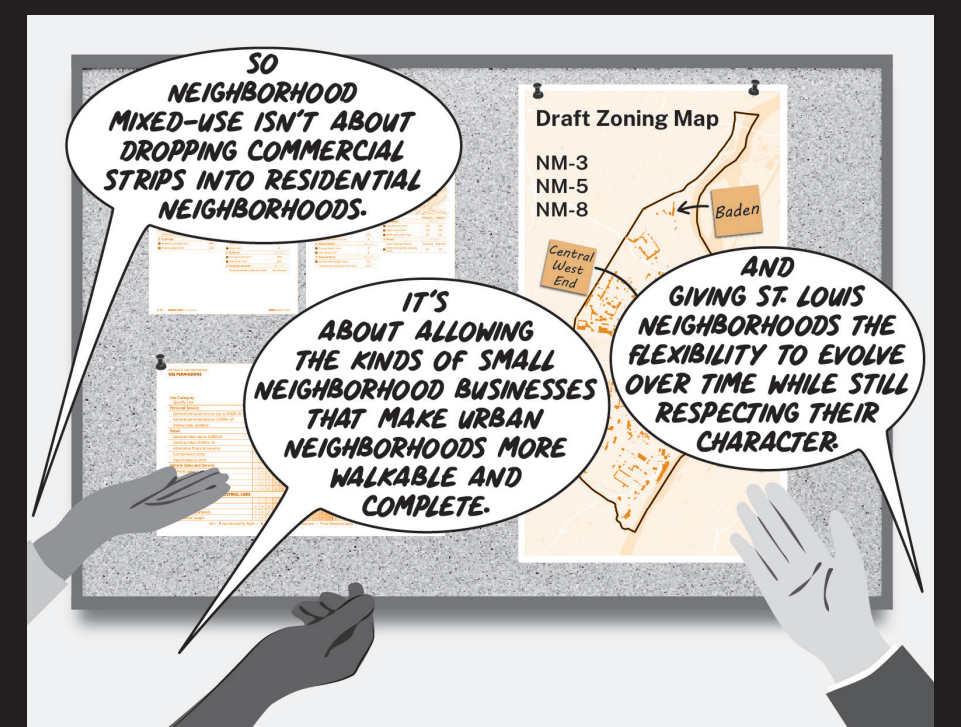
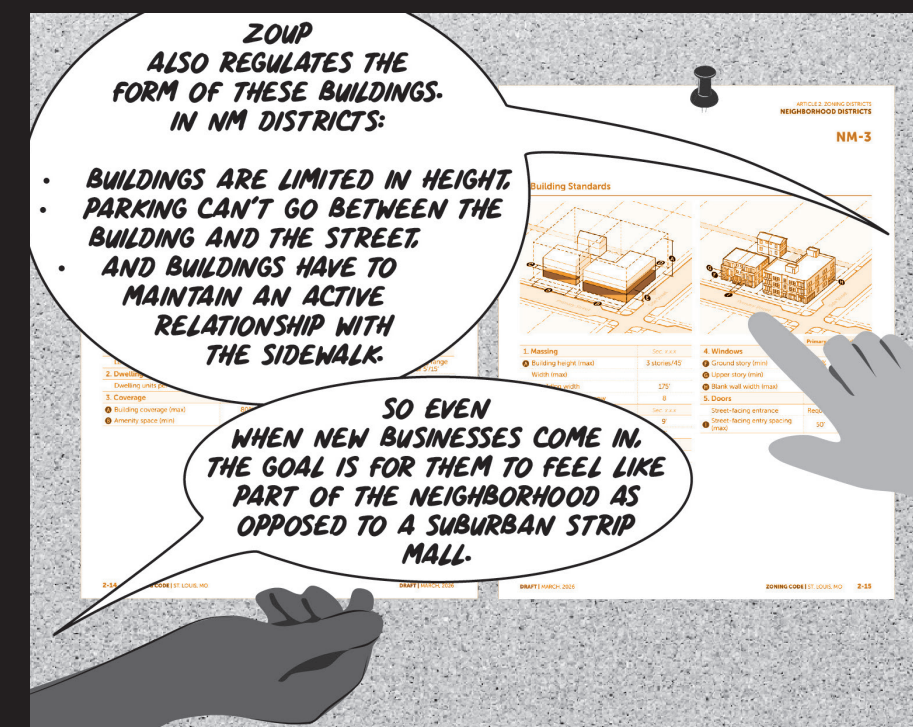
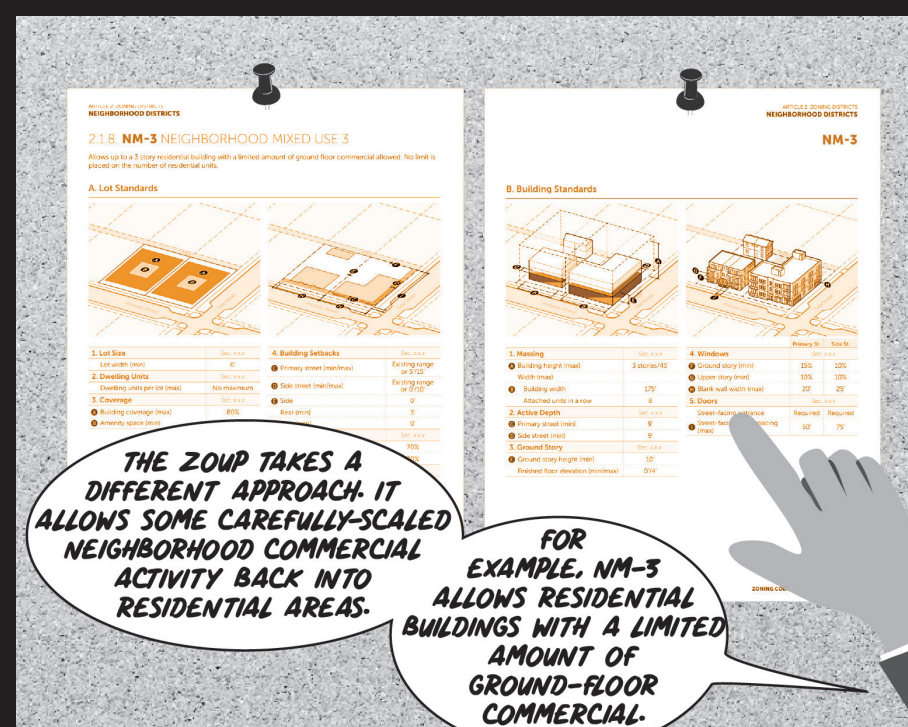
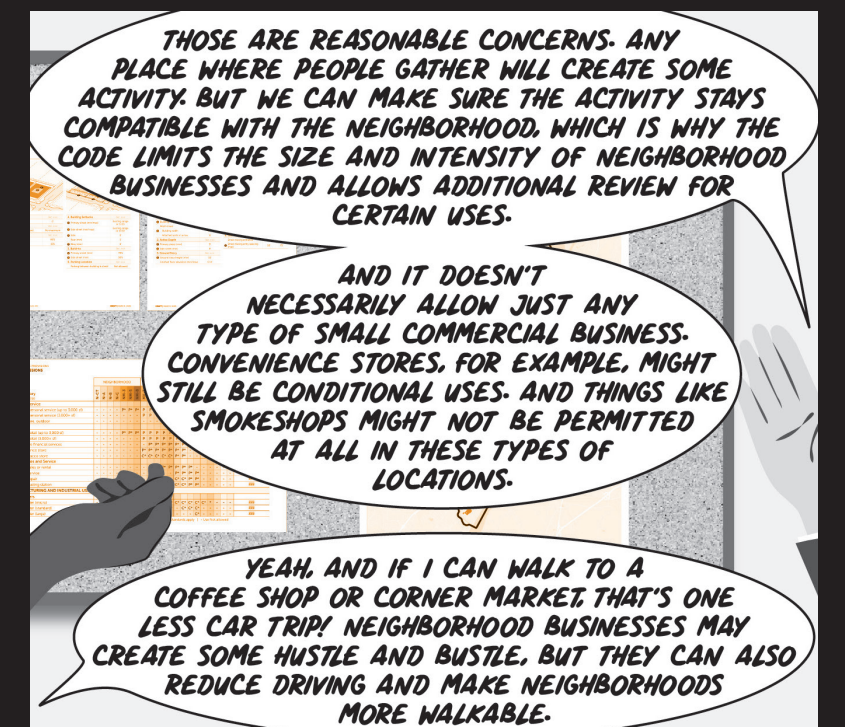
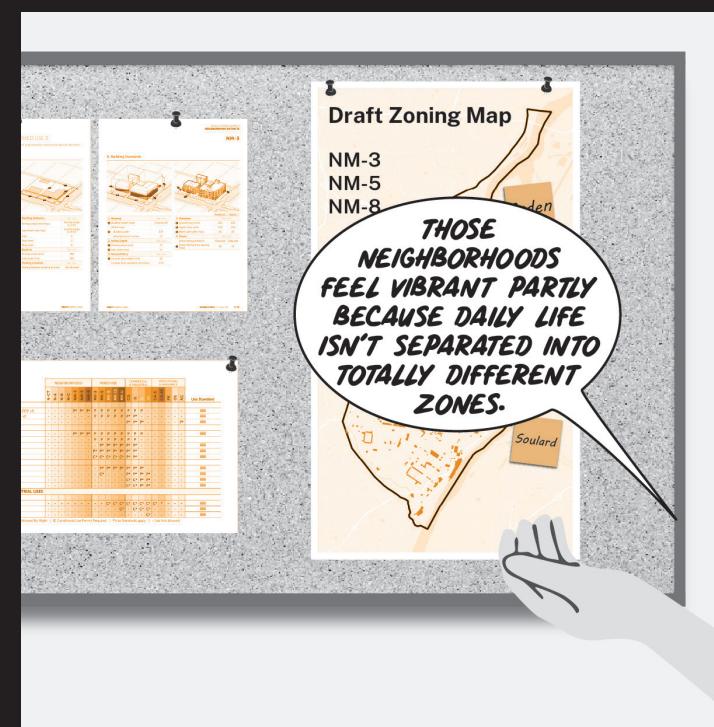
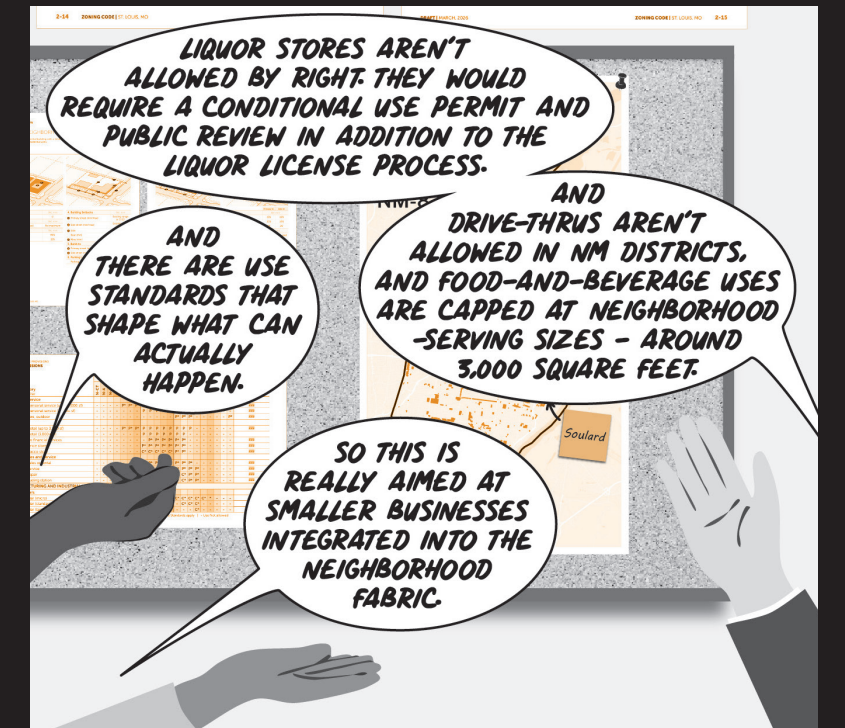
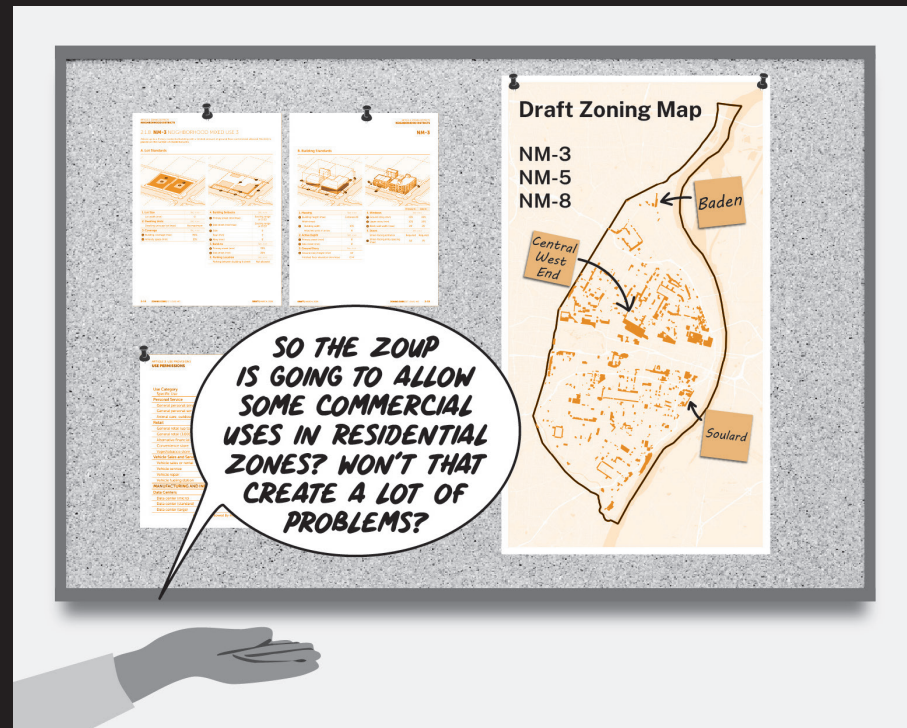
AND THAT'S ONE REASON CITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE RECONSIDERING SINGLE-FAMILY-ONLY ZONING. HOUSEHOLDS ARE GETTING SMALLER. PEOPLE ARE LIVING LONGER. MORE RESIDENTS WANT FLEXIBLE HOUSING CHOICES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE.

SO THE POINT ISN'T TO ELIMINATE DETACHED HOMES.

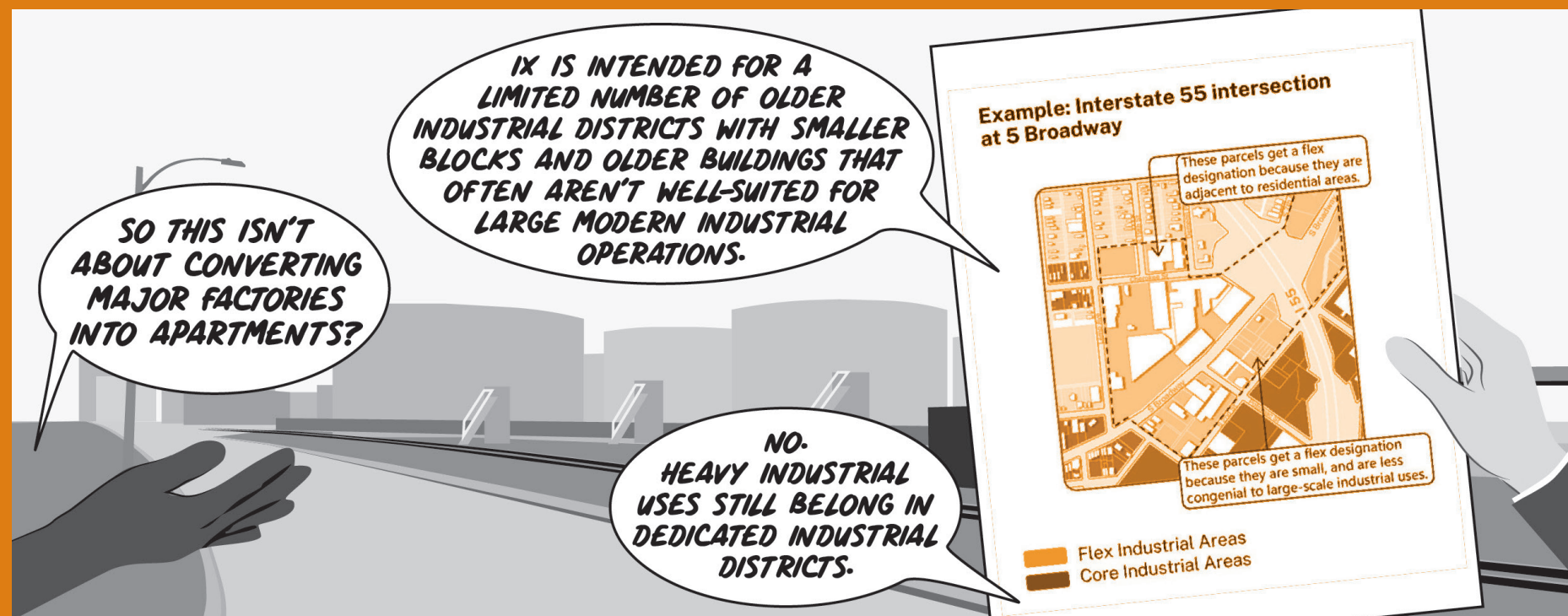
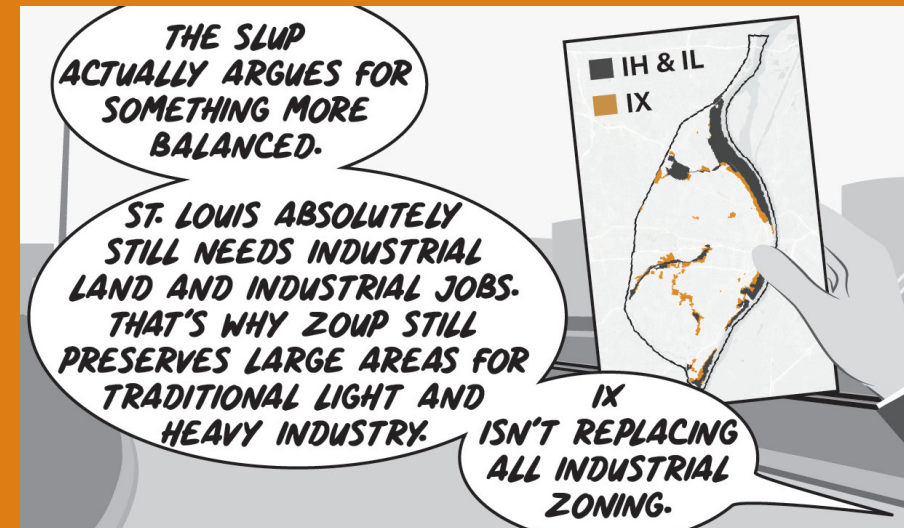
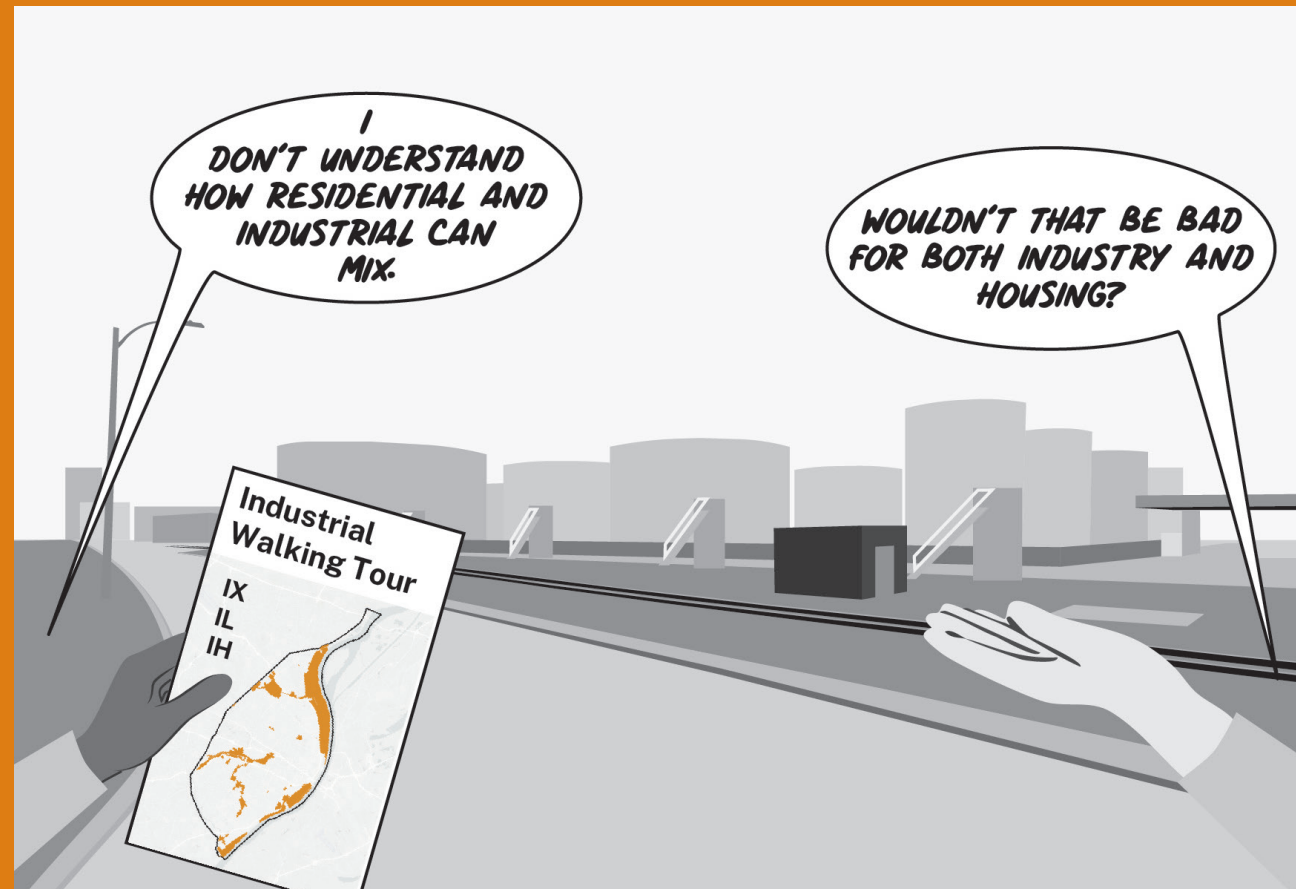
N-A
N-B
N-C

NO. THE POINT IS TO LEGALIZE MORE OF THE HOUSING TYPES THAT ALREADY EXIST ACROSS ST. LOUIS AND ALLOW NEIGHBORHOODS TO ADAPT GRADUALLY OVER TIME.

LET'S TALK ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL



LET'S TALK ABOUT URBAN INDUSTRY



LET'S TALK ABOUT THE PACE OF CHANGE

I'M SORRY, BUT THIS IS JUST TOO MUCH CHANGE TOO FAST!

YEAH! DUPLEXES EVERYWHERE. CORNER STORES IN RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS. NEW MIXED-USE BUILDINGS. IT FEELS LIKE THE WHOLE CITY IS ABOUT TO CHANGE OVERNIGHT.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PARKING

I UNDERSTAND WHY IT CAN FEEL THAT WAY. BUT CHANGING ZONING DOESN'T MEAN THOSE CHANGES IMMEDIATELY HAPPEN.

ZONING MOSTLY CHANGES WHAT COULD HAPPEN, NOT WHAT WILL HAPPEN.

AND EVEN WHEN CHANGE DOES HAPPEN, IT USUALLY HAPPENS GRADUALLY OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME.

BUT THESE COMICS MAKE IT SEEM LIKE ENTIRE NEIGHBORHOODS TRANSFORM OVERNIGHT.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOUSING CHOICE

TAKE THE COMIC ABOUT ALLOWING MORE HOUSING TYPES.

IT MAY SOUND DRAMATIC WHEN YOU HEAR 'SINGLE-FAMILY-ONLY ZONING,' BUT IN REALITY, CHANGE WOULD PROBABLY LOOK MORE LIKE THIS.

ONE PROPERTY CHANGES. THEN MAYBE ANOTHER YEARS LATER. SOME BLOCKS MAY BARELY CHANGE AT ALL.

TAKE LAST YEAR FOR EXAMPLE. IN 2025 ONLY ABOUT 2,350 RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS WERE ISSUED IN ST. LOUIS. THAT'S JUST OVER 1% OF THE CITY'S TOTAL HOUSING STOCK.

TODAY

TOMORROW

DISTANT FUTURE

AND SOME NEIGHBORHOODS MIGHT NOT CHANGE MUCH BECAUSE THE MARKET MAY NOT SUPPORT IT.

EXACTLY. ZONING CREATES POSSIBILITIES, BUT DEVELOPMENT STILL DEPENDS ON FINANCING, DEMAND, LANDOWNERS, CONSTRUCTION COSTS, INTEREST RATES, AND MANY, MANY OTHER FACTORS.

TODAY

TOMORROW

DISTANT FUTURE

OR TAKE THE NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED-USE DISTRICTS.

THIS ISN'T ABOUT SUDDENLY TURNING RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS INTO COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS.

I GET IT NOW: IT'S ABOUT ALLOWING SMALL NEIGHBORHOOD-SERVING BUSINESSES TO APPEAR GRADUALLY WHERE THEY MAKE SENSE.

TODAY

TOMORROW

DISTANT FUTURE

AND HERE'S THE SMALL-SCALE 'FLEX INDUSTRIAL' EXAMPLE.

SO THE IDEA IS EVOLUTION, NOT INSTANT TRANSFORMATION.

EXACTLY. CITIES ARE ALWAYS CHANGING. BUT THEY CHANGE MUCH MORE SLOWLY THAN PEOPLE IMAGINE.

AND ST. LOUIS ALREADY CONTAINS MANY DIFFERENT BUILDING TYPES AND USES SIDE-BY-SIDE BECAUSE THAT'S HOW CITIES HISTORICALLY EVOLVED OVER TIME.

ZONING DOESN'T INSTANTLY REMAKE NEIGHBORHOODS.

IT CREATES A FRAMEWORK THAT ALLOWS NEIGHBORHOODS TO ADAPT GRADUALLY OVER TIME—IF AND WHEN PEOPLE CHOOSE TO INVEST IN THEM.

Now

Future

BUILDING PERMITS

LET'S TALK ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT!

"We need to become a city with a "Culture of Yes", where people with ideas can bring them to life."

-Business Roundtable Participant

"The zoning code should think forward to the future, not just building on what we have today."

-Business Roundtable Participant

"There are smart street plans & transportation oriented development plans - I think the ZOUP should reflect these types of plans."

-March Workshop Participant



"I want strong limits on mechanics, liquor stores, convenience stores within neighborhood areas"

-March Workshop Participant

You can continue to leave feedback or ask questions throughout the project by emailing us at info@zoup-stl.com



"Can we incentivize outdoor 3rd spaces? A rezone option?"

"How can we incentivize or require tree coverage?"

"Could we look for open green space on the Riverfront?"

-March Workshop Participants

"I have a concern that if the standards are higher in areas that flood, then it might encourage development that may not be long-term sustainable...but also that development could be more resilient to the flooding that will happen."

-March Workshop Participant

"In St. Louis parking is a weird problem because transit is terrible."

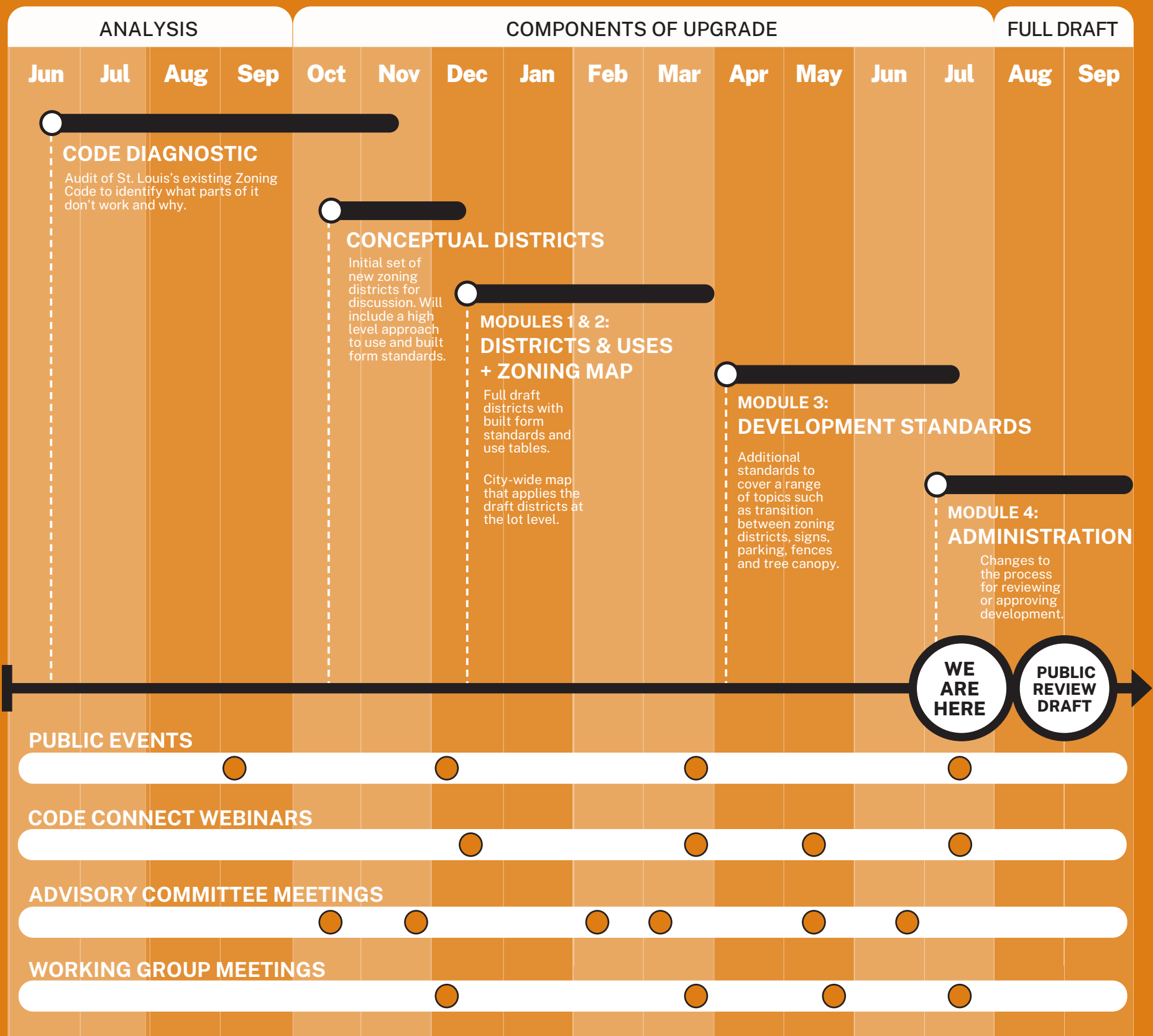
-March Workshop Participant



ZOUP PROJECT TIMELINE

ZOUP Phase 1 Timeline

Phase 1 of the Zoning Upgrade is a roughly 15-month process, targeting a complete draft Zoning Code in August 2026. Additional public input and review will continue beyond that, leading to the adoption of the new Code by first the Planning Commission and then the Board of Aldermen.



CRITICAL CONDITION

Can you Balance Community Benefits and Buildability?



CRITICAL CONDITION

Can you Balance Community Benefits and Buildability?

OBJECTIVE

Every new development is an opportunity to improve St. Louis. As projects move through the approval process, various City boards may require “conditional approvals:” these might be requirements for affordable housing, better landscaping, public art, stormwater retention, bike parking, and other community benefits. These might be requests of the Board of Aldermen, the Board of Adjustment, the Board of Public Service, the Planning Commission, the Preservation Board, or others.

Each of these conditions can make a project — and the neighborhood around it — better. But they also come with tradeoffs. They can increase construction costs, require redesigns, and can add time to the approval process. If too many conditions are added, a project may become too expensive or too difficult to build and the project could be withdrawn altogether.

In “Critical Condition,” you will work as a team to find the right balance. Which community benefits are worth requiring? How will you keep projects financially viable and moving toward approval? The more City policy like zoning can reflect this type of balance, the more successful development in the City can be for all involved.

At the end of the game, score one point for every community benefit incorporated into a completed project, plus the Community Value printed on each completed Project Card. Withdrawn projects score nothing.

Can your team create the best neighborhood without asking for so much that projects stop getting built?

SETUP

PLAYERS

- 2–5 players:
- 1 player represents City boards
 - 1–4 Developers (each controls one project)

Everyone works together to achieve the highest possible community score.

COMPONENTS

- Game board
- 4 Project Cards / Scorecards
- 1 six-sided die

PREPARATION

- Cut out the Project Cards, shuffle, and deal one to each player.
- Cut out Project Markers on the bottom of the Project Cards, fold, and place on the starting space.

GAMEPLAY

1. ROLL

The developer rolls one die and advances that many spaces.

2. CONDITIONAL APPROVAL

If the project lands on a Conditional Approval space, read the condition printed on that space.

3. CITY BOARDS DECISION

The City boards decide whether to require the requested amenity or benefit.

- If **no**, play continues.
- If **yes**, fill in an Amenity box on your project scorecard.

4. PROJECT STRENGTH CHECK

If the requested amenity is one of the project’s **Already Planned** amenities, the project incorporates it automatically.

- No money is spent.
- No spaces are lost.

Otherwise, continue to Step 5.

5. FEASIBILITY ROLL

Roll one die.

If the developer cannot afford the required payment, the project is immediately withdrawn.

If the project gets pushed back to start, the project is immediately withdrawn.

FINAL APPROVAL

Projects must land on the Final Approval space with an exact roll.

SCORING

Completed projects earn:

- Their printed Community Value.
- +1 point for every Amenity incorporated into the project.

Withdrawn projects earn 0 points.

ROLL	RESULT
1–2	Pay \$1 (cross off a (\$)) and move back 1 space.
3–4	Pay \$2 and move back 2 spaces.
5	Pay \$3 and move back 3 spaces.
6	The project no longer pencils and is withdrawn from the game.

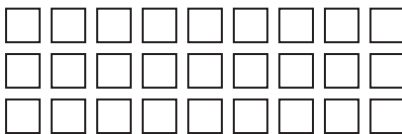
SCORE	RATING
0–15	The projects got built — but your community may have missed opportunities.
16–25	Nice balance! You created meaningful community benefits while keeping most projects viable.
26–35	Excellent! You found a strong balance between development and community priorities.
36 +	Outstanding! Your team created a high-quality neighborhood while keeping projects moving. (Or did you get lucky?) Try playing again to see if you can beat your score!

SCORING

Budget:



Amenities & Benefits:

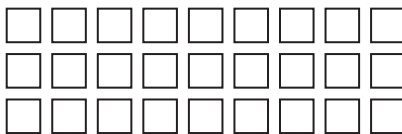


SCORING

Budget:



Amenities & Benefits:

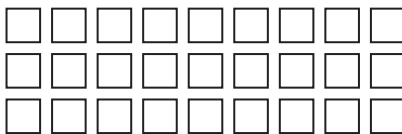


SCORING

Budget:



Amenities & Benefits:



SCORING

Budget:



Amenities & Benefits:

