



CITY OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING



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Buffalo Green Code and Smart Growth

The Buffalo Green Code is a place-based development strategy to implement the City's 2006 Comprehensive Plan, which called for a zoning rewrite in accordance with the ten principles of smart growth. The product of this effort—a total zoning rewrite put into effect in 2017—is a citywide form based code that unifies all development standards into a single user-friendly document. This Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), among the country's most sweeping smart growth development blueprints, was awarded the 2019 Driehaus Award from the Form-Based Codes Institute.

The Buffalo Green Codes responds to the 10 Principles of Smart Growth accordingly:

MIX LAND USES

The Unified Development Ordinance identifies every neighborhood as mixed use, organized from the most urban to the least urban. As a form-based code, the UDO prioritizes public realm design that helps enable complementary uses to be closer together. The goal is to restore Buffalo's historic neighborhoods, initially organized to enable daily needs to be met on foot. At a policy level, mixing land uses is enabled both in the types of uses allowed in each zone and in the physical layout of zones to bring residential and mixed use zones into close proximity. As a principle, zones are organized so that each home is within a 10 minute walk of a mixed-use neighborhood center.

PROMOTE COMPACT BUILDING DESIGN AND CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

The Unified Development Ordinance legalizes the compact development patterns of Buffalo's historic neighborhoods. Density is easier to achieve in every part of the city, with no residential density restrictions in mixed-use zones, and density restrictions adjusted in residential zones to match the historic and desired development pattern. Lots can now be smaller, narrower, and occupied by a larger building footprint.

DIVERSITY OF HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES

The Unified Development Ordinance allows for a wide variety of housing choices, ensuring access for a range of income levels, household sizes, ages, and abilities. The code allows for a mix of singles, doubles, multi-family, and even accessory dwelling units (ADUs), now legal in the majority of the city. Home occupations are encouraged, allowing for zero-commute housing.

CREATE WALKABLE NEIGHBORHOODS

The Unified Development Ordinance emphasizes a high quality public realm, rather than use separation, as an organizing principle. Design standards, drawing on guidance from LEED for Neighborhood Development and Buffalo's distinctive development patterns, are intended to make neighborhoods more walkable, healthy, and whole. The new code includes Buffalo's first ever design guidelines for public rights-of-way, derived from the ITE Walkable Urban Thoroughfares Manual and NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide. This synchronizes public space and private development so that each are working toward the goal of more walkable, less car-dependent neighborhoods.

FOSTER DISTINCTIVE, ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE

The Unified Development Ordinance is designed to be finely tailored to match Buffalo's distinctive neighborhoods. Local development patterns were studied intensely, so that standards regarding building height, lot occupancy and setbacks, lot width and area, pedestrian access, exterior materials, and the like will match the places that people love and want to see restored.

PRESERVE OPEN SPACE, FARMLAND, NATURAL BEAUTY, AND CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS

The Unified Development Ordinance preserves open space, with Buffalo's first ever designations for protected open space. Now, fully 14.5 percent of the land area of the city is set aside as open space reserves, with new protections added for vacant rail corridors and undeveloped land along the waterfront, especially at the Outer Harbor. The code embraces sustainability practices to contribute to the quality of this environment—enacting dark-sky lighting standards, requiring green stormwater management, protecting mature trees, and providing legal clarity to renewable energy production.

STRENGTHEN AND DIRECT DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS EXISTING COMMUNITIES

The Unified Development Ordinance is a sprawl reversal strategy intended to make Buffalo the focus of regional development once again. Since it was adopted in 2017, the code has helped streamline dense, walkable development just as the market has shifted regionally and nationally in favor of urban centers. This is undoubtedly helping slow the pace of suburban growth on the regional fringe, while focusing growth on places like Buffalo with existing infrastructure.

PROVIDE A VARIETY OF TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Buffalo is the first large city in the U.S. to eliminate all minimum parking requirements. This is intended to encourage transportation choice and remove barriers to infill development and adaptive reuse. Instead of minimum parking requirements, the Unified Development Ordinance encourages transportation demand management (TDM) strategies that shift single-occupant vehicle trips to modes such as walking, cycling, transit, and ridesharing.

MAKE DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS PREDICTABLE, FAIR, AND COST-EFFECTIVE

The Unified Development Ordinance is designed as a user-friendly instruction manual for building Buffalo. In exchange for rigorous standards detailing the community's development expectations, the investment community is ensured a more predictable approvals process. Follow the code, and be virtually assured of approval within a reasonable timeframe.

ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION IN DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

The Unified Development Ordinance was informed by 244 public meetings over nearly seven years of community engagement. No planning project in the city's history has been as exhaustive and rigorous. Now that it's adopted, the community enjoys broader public notice of development projects and a clearer and more predictable approvals process.