

Cascade Connections

Zoning Update



2025 | SPECIAL EDITION
Cascade Charter Township Newsletter



from the **Supervisor** *Grace Lesperance*

The holidays are in full swing throughout Cascade and I know while festive, this is often a busy time for many. However, I hope you can find a few minutes to enjoy this special edition of Cascade Connections which provides additional information around the proposed Zoning Ordinance.

There has been a lot of discourse about this initiative in the last several weeks, and our goal is to ensure the community is well-informed on what is happening and has ample opportunities to continue to provide feedback.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Cascade's Zoning:



ZONING ORDINANCE - BACKGROUND

A Zoning Ordinance is a necessary and legal document a Township uses to determine permitted uses, building sizes & placement, landscaping, parking, lighting, and more. Cascade's current ordinance was originally adopted in 1974 and passed with a preference for big box stores, drive-through restaurants and expansive industrial development. Many Sections contradict one another and some very useful rules were buried in unrelated sections and overlooked by applicants and administrators. This caused a lot of confusion among Township staff, residents and business owners who often struggled to properly and fairly enforce what was written.

WHY NOW?

The current Zoning Ordinance reflected the former Master Plan which also encouraged industrial development, including areas east and south of the airport as well as multiple new M-6 expressway on/off ramps in Cascade Township. To maintain Cascade as a place of trees and tranquil rivers, we surveyed residents to help us identify areas to prioritize in a new Master Plan that was formally adopted in 2024. We received nearly 2,000 responses to the survey that asked residents about their long-term growth goals. What we heard was that residents undeniably wanted to preserve our community's unique character while enhancing the quality of their lives. The responses to that survey helped identify our top assets and concerns:

Top Assets to Protect: natural scenery, safety, proximity to most areas in greater Grand Rapids, the Thornapple River and our pathways.

Top Concerns to Work On: speeding traffic, lack of a central village area, lack of lake and river preservation areas and traffic congestion.



Based on input, we established four areas of primary focus and scheduled public input work sessions for each: Parks and trails; Growth management; Road safety; and Streetscapes.

The former Zoning Ordinance would not adequately address these priorities which is why we are working to update, modernize and clarify many aspects within the newly proposed Ordinance.

WHAT WE'RE HEARING?

The proposed Zoning Ordinance was spearheaded by the Board of Trustees and the Planning Commission. Since October of last year, there have been 28 meetings held with details included in seven newsletters sent to residents. Additionally, we sought input on a questionnaire, which can be found at cascadetwp.com, asking residents for feedback. Thus far, most responses are in support of our efforts to maintain Cascade's unique character and quality of life.

Mostly what we're hearing is that residents want more walkability, particularly around the Village as well as a connected village core with unique shopping and dining opportunities. We've also heard a desire for more biking, especially as it pertains to the river. We agree! The proposed ordinance allows for these types of amenities.

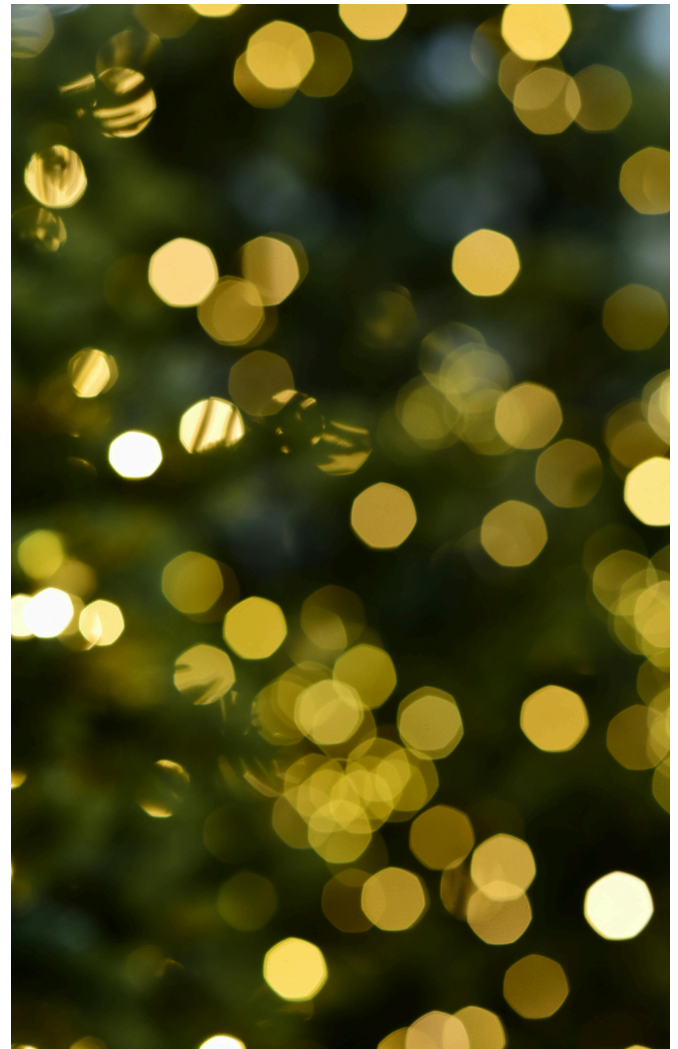
We've also heard questions asking if a permit would be needed to remove trees on your property. No! Can residents have chicken and goats? Yes! Answers to these questions and more can be found in the Zoning Ordinance FAQ at cascadetwp.com/zoning.

GET INVOLVED

We invite you to attend one of several Open Houses being held where Township officials will be available to address any questions or concerns regarding this initiative. In addition, we encourage residents to attend Township Board meetings that are held every 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm at the Cascade Library – Wisner Center. You can also email zoning@cascadetwp.com with any questions or comments.

Ultimately, we want to improve and streamline processes that allow for sustainable and purposeful growth, increase the quality of development while promoting lower density residential with a walkable area. It reflects feedback from the public, many hours of work by staff, discussions and debate among the board and an enforcement of the intent of the Master Plan that was approved two years ago.

Want to learn more about Cascade Master Plan? Scan the QR code:



The overarching goal continues to be what we heard from residents at the outset: To preserve Cascade's unique character and enhance the quality of our lives for many years to come.

Thank you for your continued focus and input on Township issues. As always, it's an honor to be your Supervisor. Wishing you and your family a warm holiday season.



Grace Lesperance

Cascade Charter Township Supervisor
glesperance@cascadetwp.com

Zoning Ordinance

The proposed Zoning Ordinance is based on the goals and priorities set forth in Cascade's 2024 Master Plan.

Top goals include improving the village area, ensuring quality new development, and preserving natural areas for future generations. While large parts of the previous Zoning Ordinance remain the same, certain sections of the ordinance have been clarified and/or changed. Updates include:

VILLAGE REDEVELOPMENT

The Village area and nearby commercial districts will follow a Form Based Code, which sets standards for building design, landscaping, signage, and walkability, rather than focusing solely on land use. Adopting a Form Based Code for commercial areas in and around 28th St., Old 28th St., and on Cascade Rd. from 28th St. down to the Thornapple River ensures that private redevelopment, when it happens, is high quality and retains Cascade's timeless character.

“ULTIMATELY, WE WANT TO IMPROVE AND STREAMLINE PROCESSES THAT ALLOW FOR SUSTAINABLE AND PURPOSEFUL GROWTH, INCREASE THE QUALITY OF DEVELOPMENT WHILE PROMOTING LOWER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL WITH A WALKABLE AREA.”

-TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR GRACE LESPERANCE

28TH STREET COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

New overlays for 28th Street and Centennial Park encourage a more cohesive and attractive commercial district. Standards are in place for future development along 28th St, shifting away from a previous emphasis on big box stores and car-oriented businesses.

TREE PRESERVATION

The new Zoning Ordinance preserves the tree canopy by requiring new commercial, industrial, and certain residential developments to keep or replace in kind quality mature trees. This requirement is not applicable to existing residential and agricultural properties under 3 acres.

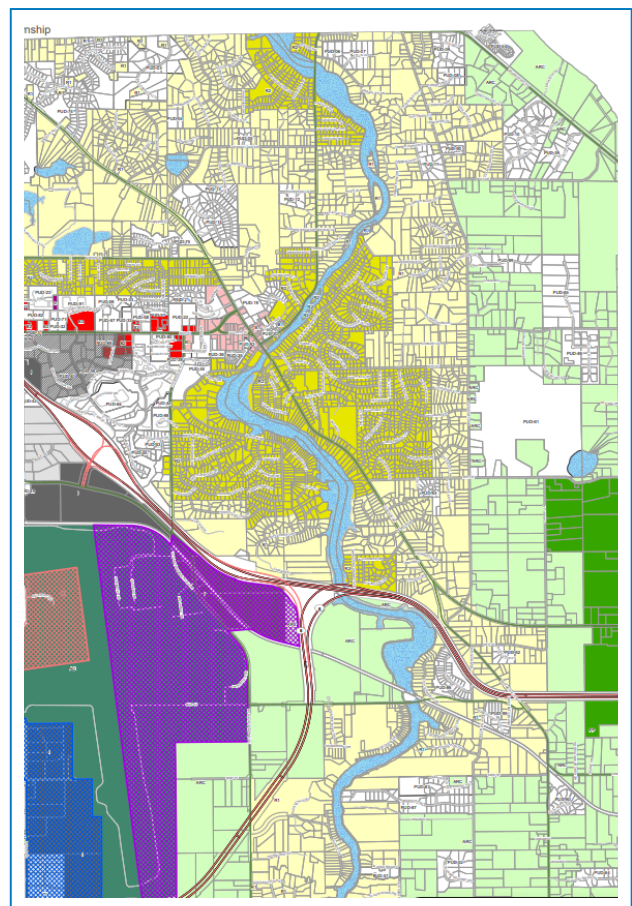
ANIMALS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Bees, chickens, and goats are now allowed in residential areas, subject to zoning requirements and limitations.

OPTION TO VOLUNTARILY SELL DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

To help preserve Cascade's rural character, the new Zoning Ordinance creates a mechanism for property owners to voluntarily preserve farmland and natural spaces for future generations. In addition to receiving property tax breaks, participants are compensated through various funding sources and government programs for entering into a formal agreement to not develop their property.

To view the proposed Zoning Ordinance, and for more details including zone district maps like the one below, visit cacadetwp.com/zoning



Legend

FP, Farmland Preservation	TI, Transitional Industrial
ARC, Agricultural Rural Conservation	I, Industrial
R1, Residential	PUD
R2, Residential	AC, Airport Commercial
B1, Village Business	Overlay A
B2, General Business	Overlay B
ES, Expressway Services	Overlay C
O, Office	Centennial Park

Form Based Code

The proposed Zoning Ordinance would help create a more walkable Village area between 28th St., Cascade Road, and the Thornapple River.

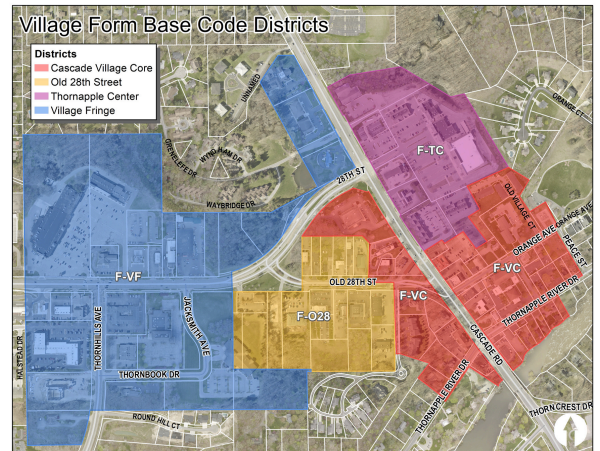
Form Based Code sets standards for building design, landscaping, signage, and walkability rather than focusing solely on land use. Adopting a Form Based Code for commercial areas in and around the east end of 28th St., Old 28th St., and on Cascade Rd. from 28th St. down to the Thornapple River ensures that private redevelopment, only when and if it happens, is high quality and retains Cascade's timeless character.

The intent is to keep the current mixed-use nature of the Village and enhance the way that residents interact with the businesses and natural features of Tassell Park.



▲ After being in downtown Grand Rapids for twenty years, owners Thomas Kuiper and Scott Kraemer, both residents of Cascade, recently relocated their law firm to Cascade. Design for their new building, located at 6660 Old 28th St, incorporates proposed form based code design elements that are included in the Township's draft zoning ordinance, which is intended to encourage small-scale, quality redevelopment in the village area.

“While we're at it, why not create a "walkable" community with restaurants and shops along and near Old 28th St.? This is a huge opportunity to bring in tax dollars and encourage people to shop, dine, bike and thrive in Cascade. We have far too many car shops, car washes and outdated plaza-type shops along that corridor. Look at all the quaint villages and towns (Rockford, Ada, Holland, etc.) that have this sort of appeal. It's inspiring to think of the potential and depressing to see this area so underutilized.” - Resident Testimonial



Residential & Neighborhoods

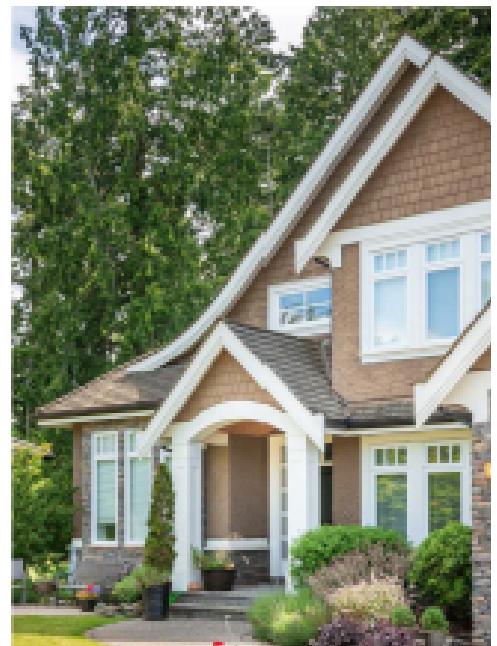
MORE RESIDENTIAL HOMES

Increased residential is allowed in the Centennial Park Overlay where the necessary infrastructure exists in the appropriate areas. Additionally, residential is now allowed in the Starr and Glenwood overlay whereas it was prohibited previously.

SMALL FARM ANIMALS

The Current Ordinance allows for the keeping of domestic animals and fowl on residential lots over 3 acres. The proposed Zoning Ordinance increases the number of animals allowed in residential areas with enhanced standards to prevent nuisances.

“Thank you for your diligence! I like adding residential living quarters above businesses in the village and the facade requirements. I also like reducing sprawling neighborhoods in farm fields.” - Resident Testimonial



Farm & Tree Preservation

FARMLAND AND NATURAL SPACES

The new Zoning Ordinance allows for property owners to voluntarily preserve farmland and natural spaces for future generations. In addition to receiving property tax breaks, participants are compensated through various funding sources and government programs for entering into a formal agreement to not develop their property.

TREE PRESERVATION

Discourages large scale clear cutting of forest; permits not needed to remove trees on private property.

To protect resident's property values and quality of life, and despite intense pressures to develop the area east of the airport into industrial sites, current Township leadership is steadfast in its desire to keep this area, which includes this farm on Thornapple River Drive and 52nd Street, rural and residential.



"I appreciate the limit to residential construction and permission to cut down trees. The community has beautiful topography that can easily and quickly change in the name of unfettered growth." - Resident Testimonial

FAQs - Top Five

Will small farm animals be allowed in the proposed Ordinance?

The number of animals allowed in residential areas will be increased with enhanced standards to prevent nuisances.

Will the new Zoning Ordinance decrease my property values?

While no ordinance can guarantee specific market outcomes, this update is intended to maintain and enhance property values by strengthening the factors that make Cascade a sought-after place to live.

What changes to private roads are being proposed?

Construction standards for private roads remain consistent with current zoning regulations that follow county requirements. Road width for private routes would be increased to allow for better access for public safety vehicles, such as firefighters and ambulances. The number of houses on private roads would be reduced to preserve Cascade's character.

Does the proposed Zoning Ordinance add regulations to businesses and residents in Cascade?

Much of the existing Zoning would remain. Our goal is to modernize and reformat it to provide clearer definitions and stronger protection against growth pressures.

Does the proposed zoning ordinance increase restrictions for property owners?

This depends on where your property is located. The proposed Ordinance trends toward more clarity, higher standards, and stronger preservation. It increases some restrictions for non-residential lots but also adds new flexibilities to Commercial Zone Districts. It also provides more options for lots located in dated and restrictive PUDs.

For a full list of Frequently Asked Questions, visit: cascadetwp.com/zoning

Timeline

Planning Commission Work Session
10/21/2024 Public Meeting

Creation of Ad Hoc Committee
January 2025- Public Meeting

Subcommittee Work Session
January – July 2025 (21 meetings)
Members of the public were welcome

Planning Commission Public Hearing
Public Hearing Held 8/18/2025

Township Board Public Hearing
Noticed 9/19
Public Hearing Held 10/08/2025

Board Work Sessions
8/05/2025, 8/25/2025, 9/9/2025,
10/22/2025, 10/27/2025

Zoning Ordinance Introduction
11/5/2025

Zoning Ordinance - Open Houses
12/17/2025 | 1-3 pm & 4:30 - 6:30 pm
1/8/2026| 1-3 pm & 4:30-6:30 pm
Kent District Library - Cascade - Wisner
Center

Zoning Ordinance Adoption
Early 2026

Contact Us

Township Manager
Jade Smith
616-949-1500
jsmith@cascadetwp.com

Township Assessor
Paula Jastifer
616-949-6176
pjastifer@cascadetwp.com

Building Inspections
Brian Wilson
616-949-3765
bwilson@cascadetwp.com

Community Planning & Development Director
Andrea Hendrick
616-949-0224
ahendrick@cascadetwp.com

Township Engineer
Aric Thorne
616-949-1500
athorne@cascadetwp.com

Finance & Budget Director
Lorna Nenciarini
616-949-1500
lnenciarini@cascadetwp.com

Human Resources Director
Katie Murawski
616-949-1500
kmurawski@cascadetwp.com

Parks & Facilities Director
Dan Zwick
616-949-1500
dzwick@cascadetwp.com

Cascade Township Fire Department
Fire Chief / Non-Emergency Adam Magers
616-949-1320
amagers@cascadetwp.com

Kent County Police Department
Sheriff / Non-Emergency Dispatch
616-336-3113
Community Policing Officer Omar Dieppa
616-632-6435
omar.dieppa@kentcountymi.gov





PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
GRAND RAPIDS, MI
PERMIT NO. 657

Cascade Charter Township

5920 Tahoe Drive SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
616-949-1500
cascadetwp.com

Township Office Hours

Monday through Thursday: 7 am – 4 pm
Friday: 8 am – 12 pm

Save the Dates!

Zoning Ordinance - Open Houses

Join Township officials for an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the proposed Zoning Ordinance.

December 17, 2025 | 1-3 pm & 4:30 - 6:30 pm
January 8, 2026 | 1-3 pm & 4:30-6:30 pm
Kent District Library - Cascade - Wisner Center
Can't make these dates?
Email zoning@cascadetwp.com with any questions.

We want to heard from you!

Scan the QR code below to share your thoughts and questions about the proposed Zoning Ordinance

