

PROPOSED ZONING ORDINANCE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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General Questions

Why don't we just keep using the current Zoning Ordinance?

The current Zoning Ordinance was originally adopted in 1974 with modifications along the way. The previous version was passed with a preference for big box stores, drive thru 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.

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

A lot of the existing Zoning remains in the proposed Zoning Ordinance. Our goal has been to modernize and reformat it to provide clearer definitions and stronger protection against growth pressures.

Why is the draft Zoning Ordinance more pages than the current Zoning Ordinance?

The Zoning Ordinance is the legal rulebook to determine permitted uses, special rules for uses that may impact neighboring properties, building size & placement, landscaping, parking, lighting, and access management. It also includes clear processes and procedures for approvals, appeals, amendments, enforcement and more. As a result, the documents can be quite large.

Additionally, the Draft Ordinance includes three previous ordinances: the Zoning Ordinance (177 Pages), the Subdivision Ordinance (32 pages), and the Private Streets Ordinance (9 pages) as well as more graphics, charts, and maps. The font and spacing have also increased for readability.

Does the proposed zoning ordinance increase restrictions for property owners?

This depends on where your property is located. The proposed Zoning Ordinance is not universally stricter, but trends toward more clarity, higher standards, and stronger preservation controls. It increases some restrictions for non-residential lots with the tree replacement requirement but also adds new flexibilities to Commercial Zone Districts. It also provides more options for lots located in dated and restrictive Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).



Could there be an economic analysis to determine the impact this ordinance would have on property values?

While conducting an economic analysis sounds good in theory, there are several drawbacks to doing one. There is always a potential for bias if conducted by parties with a specific agenda. An economic analysis also often focuses more on economic gains instead of social goals, such as preserving the character and community feel that the residents of Cascade overwhelmingly want.

Will the new Zoning Ordinance decrease my property values?

Cascade Township currently has the highest State Equalized Value (SEV) in Kent County, reflecting the community's long-term strength and desirability. The new zoning ordinance is designed to support and protect those values by preserving the character of our rural and residential areas, guiding quality development, and ensuring that future growth aligns with the priorities residents shared during the Master Plan process. While no ordinance can guarantee specific market outcomes, this update is intended to maintain and enhance property values over time by strengthening the factors that make Cascade a sought-after place to live.

Will the proposed Zoning Ordinance change the character of Cascade?

It could. Growth and redevelopment are inevitable. Buildings age, markets change, technologies evolve, and what was appropriate for one time does not work in another. Some of the commercial buildings in the Township are reaching the end of their useful life. The community strongly supports preservation of Cascade's unique natural and built environment. The proposed Zoning Ordinance was created with both development and preservation in mind. When a property owner chooses to develop or redevelop their property, they will be able to use the tools of the proposed Zoning Ordinance to do so while still accounting for the features of Cascade that make it so unique.

Does the proposed Zoning Ordinance allow for more residential homes throughout the community?

Yes, 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.

If I have questions or want to provide input and feedback, what should I do?

There are a variety of ways to provide input, feedback and questions including:

- Email zoning@cascadetwp.com
- Attend a Zoning Open House at the Cascade Library Wisner Center:
 - December 17th @ 1-3pm & 4:30-6:30 pm
 - January 8th @ 1-3 pm & 4:30-6:30 pm
- Fill out the questionnaire! Scan the QR code to answer a few brief questions:



Residential and Neighborhood Topics

Where were small farm animals allowed in the current Zoning Ordinance and where are they allowed now?

The Current Ordinance allows for the keeping of domestic animals and fowl on residential lots over 3 acres. (Current Ordinance: Section 4.11) The proposed Zoning Ordinance increases the number of animals allowed in residential areas with enhanced standards to prevent nuisances. (Proposed Ordinance: Section 4.4). The chart below summarizes the changes for residential districts:

ANIMAL TYPE	CURRENT ZONING ORDINANCE RULES	PROPOSED ZONING ORDINANCE RULES
CHICKENS (ALSO DUCKS, AND OTHER LIVESTOCK BIRDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few specific regulations • Limited to one for every 3 acres • Free-range not explicitly prohibited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to lot 15,000 sf or larger • Roosters prohibited • Enclosure requirements
SHEEP & GOATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undefined • Limited to one for every 3 acres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to lots 1 acre or larger • Number limited by lot size • Manure management required • Nuisance animals prohibited
LIVESTOCK (PIGS, COWS, HORSES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undefined • Limited to one for every 3 acres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed in Rural Conservation and Farmland Preservation Zone Districts
RABBITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed as domestic pet • No limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed • Number limited
BEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowed on lots ½ acre or larger • Regulations consistent with best practices in Beekeeping added
EXOTIC ANIMALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibited

Can I cut down my trees under the proposed Zoning Ordinance?

Yes. The proposed Zoning Ordinance discourages large scale clear cutting of forest by requiring tree replacement for non-residential parcels or residential parcels over 3 acres that remove more than 25 percent of the trees on site per year. There are exceptions for removal of invasive species and removal of trees under a qualified forest management program. (Proposed Ordinance: Section 11.9)

Can I make a guest house on my property?

No. These housing types are not allowed in Cascade now, or under the new Zoning Ordinance. This is a policy decision that each community makes. Like some of the surrounding communities, including Lowell Township, Caledonia, and the City of Lowell, Cascade has chosen to prohibit guest houses for now.

28th Street Businesses

Would the proposed Zoning Ordinance displace businesses in Cascade Township?

No. Any business legally operating in Cascade can continue to operate under the current or proposed Zoning Ordinance. The adoption of new zoning rules has no impact on the operation of a current business.



If an established business is no longer allowed in a Zone District because of a change in zoning, it is called a nonconforming use. Some will also use the term “grandfathered.” Zoning cannot force someone to change a legal established operation or force a business to close.

I keep hearing about Commercial Overlays being part of the proposed Zoning Ordinance. What are these and why are they being included?

Commercial overlays provide an additional layer of zoning regulation that is superimposed on top of existing zoning districts to achieve specific planning goals, such as preserving the community’s character. The proposed Zoning Ordinance would introduce new overlays for 28th St. and Centennial Park to 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 drive thru restaurants.

Does the new Zoning Ordinance take away personal property rights on commercial properties?

No. In fact the current Zoning Ordinance was restrictive to the point that most new commercial development was accomplished through the creation of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). For example, the minimum lot size for parcels located off 28th St. is three acres, which is larger than most family restaurants or corner stores. Decreasing the minimum lot size to one acre opens the door for more allowed uses and more compact development in areas already serviced by utilities. Additionally, the number of allowed uses in the new Zoning Ordinance vs. the current has increased, including the addition of residential in some areas on and around 28th St.

The Village & Old 28th Street

What changes would the Zoning Ordinance create for the Village area?

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

What is “Form Based Code” and why is it being introduced as part of the proposed Zoning Ordinance?

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 from Cascade Rd down to the Thornapple River ensures that private redevelopment, only when and if it happens, is high quality and retains Cascade’s timeless character.

Were the current business owners considered when the proposed Zoning Ordinance was drafted?

Property owners and business owners have been contacted numerous times during the process. In fact, the Downtown Development Authority members are people who own and operate businesses in the Village and along the 28th Street Corridor. They have been the driving force in the creation of a vision for the Village and the Form Based Code. Owners have attended public meetings, and many have taken the Township’s invitation to meet one-on-one to discuss the Ordinance. Feedback from business owners has helped shape the proposed Zoning Ordinance throughout the process.



Is the Township attempting to turn the Village into greenspace?

No. 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. The past few years, the Township has purchased land adjacent to Cascade Rd. and Tassell Park, as the opportunity has arisen, with the intent of creating more cohesive pedestrian connectivity between Tassell Park and the Village. This desire was clear in the feedback received during the Strategic Plan in 2021.

Rural and Farmland

How does the proposed Zoning Ordinance preserve 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.

Private Streets

What is the difference between the rules for private streets now and the rules in the proposed Zoning Ordinance?

In Cascade, any vehicle access from a public street to more than one property requires a private street and a maintenance agreement governed by the Private Streets Ordinance (Ordinance #9 of 2002). Private streets exist all over the Township, but the quality and maintenance vary from street to street. This can cause an unexpected burden on property owners, and many times they turn to the Township for help. In the past the Private Streets Ordinance was sometimes overlooked. It is now added as Section 10.2 to the 2025 Proposed Zoning Ordinance for ease of use. It remains mostly the same except for the few changes listed in the table below.

RULES	PRIVATE STREETS ORDINANCE	PROPOSED SECTION 10.2
ROAD WIDTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18 feet wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing access for up to 4 houses: 22 feet wide for streets• Providing access for 4 to 8 houses: 26 feet wide
MAX NUMBER OF HOMES PERMITTED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Streets providing access for twenty or more lots require 2 means of access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eight