

Technical Review + Approaches

Summary of Concepts and Recommendations

This document summarizes the goals of the Unified development ordinance process, and presents a series of key concepts, approaches, and recommendations made in the full Technical Review and Approaches Report prepared for the City of Saratoga Springs. Each concept outlined herein is explained in greater detail in the full report, now available to the public.

What are the Goals of a Unified Development Ordinance for Saratoga Springs?

Implement City Policies as articulated in documents such as the Comprehensive Plan, Complete Streets Plan and Policy, Urban and Community Forest Master Plan, and Greenbelt Trail Plan.

Organize the UDO into a document that is user-friendly, predictable, and consistent in its application.

Integrate land use and urban design goals through inclusion of objective standards that help produce high-quality development in the City.

Permit more development to occur by-right, balanced with the goal of reinforcing and enhancing existing neighborhood character.

Encourage creativity, and allow for development to flexibly respond to both market demands and public expectations

Increase the transparency and predictability of the City of Saratoga Springs' development processes

Summary of Key Concepts and Approaches by Topic

Organization and Ease of Use

- The UDO should employ a logical system of compartmentalization. Such a system groups the articles of the UDO into larger categories or “compartments,” ensuring users know where to look for specific provisions.
- Regulations should be explained with graphics and matrices to the extent practicable.
- All terms must be clearly defined, and used consistently across the breadth of the UDO.

Use Structure

- The UDO should maintain or expand the generic use approach of the current ordinance, with updates to definitions and use standards where appropriate.
- Ensure that a specific set of uses is delineated for each zoning district, tailored to the specific form and function of the district.
- Rethink the method by which uses are regulated in the transect districts; there need to be uses allowed by-right to achieve the vision of each of these districts.

- The UDO must acknowledge the breadth of new and emerging uses within the region – things like micro-breweries, marijuana dispensaries, and maker/creator/co-working spaces must be considered and addressed within the regulations.
- A full range of temporary uses should also be addressed within the UDO, including temporary outdoor entertainment events, outdoor sales, pop-up retail, food trucks, farmer’s markets, etc.

Zoning Districts

- Each district within the ordinance must be evaluated to determine its continued utility in light of modern development patterns and changes in City policy; districts should be reorganized or restructured where needed.
- All 31 current districts within the Saratoga Springs Zoning Ordinance have been analyzed in the full technical report, which contains recommendations regarding consolidation or reorientation of certain districts to provide more and better guidance for new development, leaving less to chance as the City continues to develop.

On-Site Development Standards

- The UDO should include on-site exterior lighting controls, to minimize light pollution and acknowledge both safety and aesthetic concerns.
- Expand the range of accessory structures addressed within the ordinance, and include definitions and regulations controlling the size, height, and location of structures, as well as required screening.
- Standards for home occupations should protect residential neighborhood character, while providing flexibility to ensure a range of home occupations, both current and emerging can be accommodated.
- Consider allowing accessory dwelling units in residential zoning districts. Such a provision can create new housing units while respecting the scale of existing single-family neighborhoods, and encouraging the preservation/reuse of the City's existing stock of carriage houses. Specific standards can be crafted to manage any potential impacts of accessory dwelling units on neighboring properties.

Parking, Landscape, and Signs

- Required parking ratios should be updated to reflect modern standards and local demand, including continuation of parking maximums for larger-scale uses such as retail centers and office parks.
- The design of both parking lots and structures should be addressed through the UDO.
- Expand requirements for bicycle parking beyond the transect districts, to further goals related to sustainability and community mobility.
- Incorporate additional parking flexibilities into the ordinance, such as exemptions for buildings that are being reused, or for businesses below a certain size threshold. The creation of a fee-in-lieu structure should also be explored, allowing the City to receive funds to be used to construct off-site parking when on-site requirements cannot be met.
- Include landscape standards to address a variety of contexts, including site landscape requirements, interior and rear buffer yards, and standards for both the perimeter and interior of parking lots.
- Plant selection, installation, and maintenance requirements should be further detailed to ensure successful implementation of the City's landscape requirements.

- Tree preservation requirements should be included within the UDO, prohibiting the removal of significant trees without permission from the City.
- Street tree requirements, including selection and spacing should be addressed within the UDO, referencing the City's Urban Forest Master Plan.
- The City's sign regulations should be comprehensively revised. Sign area limitations should be brought within reasonable limits and proportioned to the form of development anticipated within each district.
- Sign regulations should be evaluated and refined to ensure content neutrality, in alignment with recent case law.

Public Realm

- The UDO should comprehensively address the public realm through the inclusion of items such as right-of-way design standards to implement complete streets principles, sidewalk and block design standards, and connectivity requirements for new development.

Administration

- Reorganize the administration sections of the UDO to ensure the processes are more transparent and user-friendly.
- Include new provisions to ease administration for both the City and applicants, such as a completeness review, to avoid the submittal and processing of incomplete applications, and an optional pre-application review to allow applicants to receive staff input prior to formal application or payment of fees.
- Update approval standards and timeframes for each of the applications in the UDO, and consider adding flexibility in the variance process through the creation of an administrative modification, which would allow minor variations from select standards to be approved administratively.
- Update and modernize the City's Planned Unit Development Process.
- Update the City's nonconformity regulations, to address a full range of nonconforming situations, from structures and uses, to signs and lot characteristics such as required landscape.