



OKC Development Codes Update

Urban Medium Multi-Dwelling and Commercial Zones

Focus Group

Will Rogers Gardens

March 29, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Staff in attendance: Geoff Butler, Planning Director; Lisa Chronister, Assistant Planning Director; Marilyn Lamensdorf Allen, Program Planner and staff liaison to the Code Update; Katie Friddle, Principal Planner over Current Planning and Urban Design; Mark White, code update project consultant, White & Smith LLC.

Residents in attendance: 11 residents from various neighborhoods throughout the Urban Medium (UM) including Classen Ten Penn, Creston Hills, Linwood, Miller, Crestwood, Helms Farm and Wilde Oaks.

Staff gave a presentation explaining the proposal for new multi-dwelling and commercial zones in the area known as the “Urban Medium LUTA” (Land Use Typology Area) as assigned in the City’s Comprehensive Plan, plan**okc**. Staff presented single-dwelling zones in November/December of 2022. Like the proposed single-dwelling zones that were presented in November, the multi-dwelling and commercial zones are designed to have multiple options for development depending on where a parcel is located. The multi-dwelling and commercial zones are designed based on whether a property is located on an Arterial Street type, as designated in the Comprehensive Plan, and proximity to Arterial Streets. According to the Comprehensive Plan, the Urban Medium LUTA is to achieve a density of 10 to 40 dwelling units per acre. A challenge in designing the zones has been determining where the 10 dwelling units per acre is appropriate and where the 40 dwelling units per acre is appropriate. For comparison, Urban High and Downtown development intensities were envisioned in plan**okc** as having much more intense development of 100 du/acre and higher.

Staff presented concepts for three proposed mixed zones and an office and light industrial zone. The presentation includes pictures showing examples of the form intended for each zone. The mixed zones include Urban Medium Mixed Use (UM-MX); Urban Medium Mixed Commercial (UM-MC); and Urban Medium Multi-Dwelling (UM-

MD). The concept for the three zones is that development intensity increases as development moves from the single-dwelling neighborhoods toward the Arterials. Most of the UM development intensity would be allowed in the block adjacent to Arterial Street types if the block is a “short” block”, that is it was platted at less than 600 feet in length. (The intent of providing more intense development on the “shorter” blocks is that they are considered more walkable.)

The UM-MX and UM-MC zones would collapse several current zones, including O-1, O-2, NB, C-1, C-3 and C-CBD plus allowing R-3 and R-4 residential with the office and commercial in one development. Currently, this form usually requires a special zoning called a Planned Unit Development to accomplish, except in Downtown zones. The guiding principles the code update consultants and Planning Department used to draft the zones include encouraging mixed use at appropriate locations, where transit and commercial services can be best accessed and in areas where the short blocks make walking easier; building in urban design guidelines that encourage preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings; and effective landscaping and streetscapes to create areas where walking is encouraged. At the same time, a second guiding principle is to incorporate compatibility standards that protect the neighborhoods that back up to the Arterial Streets. The highlights of the mixed zones include:

UM-MX: *A place to be*; a place to stay awhile and live:

- Main Street pattern. This pattern provides a zone for streets designated as “Main” streets in plan **okc**. This includes the primary retail/restaurant areas of Paseo, Capitol Hill, Plaza District (along a central part of NW 16th), Stockyards, and N Western Avenue. In this zone, development patterns would respect the traditional main street character of the areas, including angled parking along the street, wide sidewalks with pedestrian amenities, and parking provided behind the buildings, on-street, and in shared parking lots.
- Transit Oriented pattern. This pattern is shown in plan **okc** as purple circles. The circles represent major stops on the city’s Bus Rapid Transit system that is currently under construction along N Classen Blvd and Northwest Expressway. The purple circles shown in plan **okc** reflect where the stations were being considered at the time the plan was adopted in 2015. Stations for the system in the southwest and northeast portion of the city are currently under study and plan **okc** will be updated when the exact routes are determined in the coming months. Where the purple circles are located, the MX Transit Oriented pattern would include higher heights of around 10 stories and a walkable street pattern, with buildings up to the sidewalks and higher heights for more uses and intensity at one location. Heights may be higher in exchange for certain incentives such as affordable housing and increased amenity spaces. However, the code would include “sensitive edge” limits near single-dwelling residential that would cap height at 3 stories where development abuts single-dwelling neighborhoods. One example of this type of development is currently being constructed at NW 50th and N Pennsylvania.

UM-MC: *A place to go*; along an Arterial Street:

- Arterial Commercial pattern. This pattern is located along Arterial Streets and is intended to allow a mix of uses and single uses. The pattern is similar to what is allowed now in existing C-3 zoning along Arterial Streets and is more auto-oriented than other patterns. It also limits heights to 4 stories to limit development intensity and increased traffic near neighborhoods. Heights may be even lower if adjacent to single-dwelling zones. If parcels are platted to face the Neighborhood Street, instead of the Arterial Street; and are currently single-dwellings platted as part of the neighborhood, these would remain single-dwelling (UM-SD zone). If parcels are platted to face the Arterial instead of the adjoining neighborhood, they would have the criteria to become a UM-MC zone or a Multi-Dwelling zone, even if they are currently residential. The principle with this limitation is to keep commercial development from happening at every intersection, thereby impeding traffic on the Arterial Street. Instead, this would allow commercial development at nodes and maintain commercial on Arterial Streets where it already exists. (Example: May and Pennsylvania Avenues within the UM LUTA area.)
- Urban Commercial pattern. This pattern is required for new development in areas depicted in Urban Commercial areas in plan **okc** that received special consideration for their ability to generate sales taxes and support retail and entertainment areas. They generally have historic value and/or portray cultural uniqueness of an area by their built form. These include Uptown 23rd, NE 23rd, the Asian District, parts of N Western Avenue that are not Main Street, and SW 29th Street. All of these designations are within the Urban Medium LUTA. The zone allows for up to 8 stories of heights, with sensitive edges limiting heights to 4 stories adjacent to single-dwelling residential. Unlike the Arterial Commercial pattern, parking would be at the rear of sites and this pattern would incorporate the urban design standards currently used in many of these areas in which development applications must be reviewed by the Urban Design Commission. Proposals for what areas may continue to be reviewed by or that will be added to the current Urban Design overlay have not been drafted yet.

UM-MD: *A place to live*; with more dwellings than UM-SD.

Guiding principles in developing the UM-MD zone included providing more density for a variety of housing types such as townhomes, small apartments and cottage courts. These are re-emerging development types across the country and current residential zones make it difficult to construct these types in Oklahoma City. The other guiding principle was, again, protecting neighborhood character and ensuring transition of higher-density housing types between the commercial and single-dwelling zones. The zone would collapse existing R-3 and R-4 zones into one zone. Heights are intentionally limited to 2 ½ and 3 stories to provide a transition between the UM-MC/MX zones and the single-dwelling zones. Existing multi-dwelling buildings less than 40 du/acre would receive this zone, regardless of their location.

The City completed a survey in 2022 asking about desired housing product types. The survey was completed by about 800 residents across the City. Staff presented a summation of the responses for neighbors who said they lived in Urban Medium zip codes. The survey asked residents to check all of the housing types listed that they would be interested in living in the future. More than three-quarters of UM residents checked “single-home” as one response but they also checked a variety of types including accessory dwellings, patio homes, multi-plex buildings and townhomes.

- Pattern 1: This type is allowed on Connector Street types in plan **okc**. Connector Street types carry more traffic than Neighborhood Streets but not as much as Arterial Streets. Their role is to provide secondary access to the Arterial Streets. Their slower speeds and design create more opportunity for pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in areas. Connector Street types assigned in plan **okc** varied by right of way width, transit accessibility and traffic signalization. Pattern 1 was designed to create nodes of multi-dwelling development on Connectors within proximity to signalized intersections, bus transit, and multi-use trails in the City’s off-street trail system. Pattern 1 is limited to 30 dwellings per acre. (i.e. about 9 dwellings on a typical UM multi-dwelling 14,000 square foot lot). The zone allows for residential uses only.
- Pattern 2: This type is allowed within the same block as UM-MX and MC, but not on a block that is 600 feet or greater in length unless multi-dwelling building types are already constructed. If the block is 600 feet or greater in length, the parcels would remain UM-SD. This pattern would allow up to 40 dwellings per acre (i.e. about 13 dwellings on a typical UM multi-dwelling 14,000 square foot lot). This pattern allows up to 3 stories in height, and parking is preferred at the rear of buildings. The zone allows for residential uses only.
- Pattern 3: This pattern is similar in style and height allowances to Pattern 2 but would allow limited commercial services on the bottom floor at a size no larger than 5,000 square feet for the commercial portion. This pattern would be allowed directly adjacent to UM-MX and UM-MC zones. Again, parking would be encouraged at the rear of the building. This pattern is also allowed for multi-dwelling buildings within a Transit Oriented (TO) LUTA.

Staff explained that the UM would also include zones for Professional Office (UM-PO) and for Light Industrial (UM-LI) which would be appropriate along Arterial and Industrial Street types.

The presentation then returned to the UM-SD zones and changes that had been made to the proposed concepts after public input meetings that occurred between November 2022 and February 2023. Staff explained more responses from Urban Medium residents in the

2022 survey that supported accessory dwellings in the backyards; uniform setbacks in the neighborhoods, and a variety of housing types in neighborhoods. Fewer residents were in favor of houses next to them that were two or more stories taller than their own, although they did support new structures that were only one story taller than their own. See slides 45 and 46 in the Presentation.

Changes to the UM-SD initial proposal include:

- Maintaining heights of 35' in the SD zone, similar to the current R-1 zone; but lowering heights to 28' for flat roof structures in order for more modern home styles to fit better into existing neighborhoods.
- Allowing more flexibility in the front setback. Currently front setbacks are 25 feet from the street. The minimum setback would be maintained at 15'. Setbacks between 15 and 30' minimum could be established by assessing the range of setbacks on a block. In this way, infill development would not be impeded if existing homes on a block were traditionally constructed with a setback less than 25'.
- Maintaining lot coverage at 50% of the lot as is currently required for R-1 and R-2 zones. This is to maintain the ratio of green space to covered space for continuity and to assist with infiltration of stormwater into green spaces so that the stormwater system is not overwhelmed. In addition, a metric for building coverage is proposed in the new code to maintain the existing neighborhood character.

A portion of the presentation covered the proposed approach to existing Urban Conservation Districts (UCDs), overlays created in the 1990s and 2000s to address neighborhood concerns about maintaining neighborhood character in the existing code. Staff explained that all of the UCDs would remain in place, but that staff suggests updating some of the regulations that are duplicative in other parts of the code and strengthening the UCD overlay, including processes for demolition requests and design review by staff or another body.

The presentation pointed out that neighborhoods are still eligible to apply to rezone into the UCD overlay. If neighbors apply for a UCD a majority of the property owners in the proposed boundary must agree to the overlay zoning. The zoning request can be brought by the property owners or a Planning Commissioner or a City Council member. Staff explained that because the revised UCD overlay may have more protections for maintaining neighborhood character and delaying demolitions than it does now, and new applicants should wait until the new code is adopted before applying for the overlay rezoning.

Staff also explained that there would be metrics for Accessory Dwellings. They would be limited in height to 24 feet, require one parking space and would be part of building and lot coverage calculations. The buildings are meant to be accessory to the principal dwelling and so could not be sold separately.

Staff then explained the timeline for UM drafts to be released to the public. Comments will be received first from the Mayor's Stakeholder Advisory Team. Afterwards, the drafts would be released for public comment. Neighbors asked how long citizens would have to

comment on the UM zone drafts once they are released for comment. Neighbors said that one to two months would give enough time for their associations to respond. Some participants said they wouldn't want the comment period to go on for too long to encourage residents to make comments in a timely manner.

During and after the presentation and some questions and answers, the following points were made as feedback and discussion.

Comments related to the Mixed Commercial and Mixed-Use zones:

- Neighbors expressed concerns about the concept of Mixed Commercial (MC) and Mixed Use (MX) backing up to residential. Staff explained that there would be regulations for “sensitive edges” if a commercial development is adjacent to a single-dwelling use. Heights would be limited to 3 stories in that case. Residents also expressed concerns about east-west streets that would create a situation of commercial on the Arterial, with multi-dwelling backing to the commercial on blocks that are now all single-dwelling in their neighborhood. An example given was commercial/mixed use on NW 23rd could create multi-dwelling in the block backing to it on NW 22nd, and then single-dwelling remaining across the street. Staff acknowledged that transitions would be needed and that east-west arterials are different from north-south arterials in terms of the width of possible commercial zones adjacent to neighborhoods. Staff responded that a UCD overlay could be conditioned to only allow single-dwelling zoning if it were desired; that building design standards would help create a buffer from the commercial to the residential and that building design standards would help multi-dwelling building forms fit into the neighborhoods (The example was given of Heritage Hills East and multiple housing types blending around N Robinson).
- Neighbors from the Helms Farm neighborhood expressed support for mixed use projects along N Classen Boulevard to provide more opportunities to walk to jobs and commercial offerings. However, they said they were concerned that their neighborhood is sandwiched between N Western Avenue and N Classen Blvd, because the adjacency criteria could lead to all of Helms Farm being eligible for Multi-Dwelling zoning. Staff reiterated that R-1 and R-2 existing zones would be zoned to UM-SD when a new zoning map is adopted. However, the locational criteria to re-zone to a multi-dwelling zone would allow UM-MD in the blocks adjacent to commercial. The change from UM-SD to UM-MD would require a re-zone approved by City Council. Staff also pointed out that since Western Avenue is a “Main Street” type to the east of the Helms Farm neighborhood, buildings along Western Avenue would be limited to three stories. MD zones are also proposed to be limited to three stories. The UCD overlay could be applied to Helm Farms to limit building types, if an overlay were approved by City Council.

Comments related to the Multi-Dwelling and Single-Dwelling zones:

- Sufficient parking for Multi-Dwelling development is important; already, streets and driveways are congested, with people backing into trash cans. Some streets are also too narrow to have cars parking on the street.
- Continuing to allow rezoning via the Simplified Planning Unit Development process (SPUD) may jeopardize many of the intentions of the new code. Continuing to allow SPUD's should be studied.
- New houses and multi-dwellings should respect the current character of the neighborhood; things like front porches, front facing doors, and window openings should be similar to current houses. A good start is the shorter height limit for flat roofs. Residents expressed concerns about newer homes that look like "boxes."
- Another issue is the size of recent new homes. Staff explained that lot coverage would remain at 50% as is the current R-1 lot coverage regulations. Neighbors said that size of new homes being constructed is an issue for compatibility with older homes. A related issue is that older homes that are more affordable are being torn down and larger and more expensive homes are being put in their place.
- One resident observed, and Planning staff agreed, that the ideas in the presentation are intended to be an incentive for builders/developers to use the new zones and not do SPUDs.
- Neighbors ask if the City could adopt pre-approved floor plans for accessory dwellings and possibly other infill housing types to ensure that the buildings fit in to the neighborhood. The code update consultant pointed out that this has been done with success in Portland, in some South Carolina cities and in Kansas City, Kansas.

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