

# NEW ZONING ORDINANCE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

<b>GENERAL QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>RESIDENTIAL AND NEIGHBORHOOD TOPICS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE VILLAGE &amp; OLD 28<sup>TH</sup> STREET .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>RURAL AND FARMLAND .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PRIVATE STREETS .....</b>	<b>4</b>

*This FAQ is intended to provide responses in plain English to common questions we have received regarding the new ordinance. If you would like to discuss any of these questions in greater detail, please contact us directly at [zoning@cascadetwp.com](mailto:zoning@cascadetwp.com) or 616-949-0224.*

## General Questions

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

The current Zoning Ordinance was originally adopted in 1989 and has been amended periodically over time. The ordinance was developed during a period when attracting large-scale commercial and industrial development was a community priority. As amendments were added over the years, some sections became inconsistent or difficult to interpret. This made administration and enforcement of the ordinance challenging and led to differing interpretations of zoning requirements by applicants, property owners, and staff.

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

A lot of the existing zoning remains in the new Zoning Ordinance. The goal is to modernize and reformat it to provide clearer definitions and stronger protection against growth pressures.

### Why is the new Zoning Ordinance longer than the old Zoning Ordinance?

The Zoning Ordinance is the legal rulebook to determine permitted uses, special rules for uses that may negatively affect neighboring properties, building size and placement, landscaping, parking, lighting, and access (i.e. driveways and sidewalks). It also includes processes and procedures for approvals, appeals, amendments, and enforcement. As a result, the documents can be quite large.

Additionally, the new Ordinance combines three previous ordinances into one: the Zoning Ordinance (177 pages), the Subdivision Ordinance (32 pages), and the Private Streets Ordinance (9 pages). It also includes more graphics, charts, and maps.

### Does the new Zoning Ordinance increase restrictions for property owners?

This depends on where the property is located. The new Zoning Ordinance is not universally more strict than the old one, 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 highly restrictive Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

### 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.

*Property values are calculated based on many factors, not zoning alone. For further information regarding property value calculation and determination, please contact the Township Assessor's Department at 616-949-6176.*

### Will the new Zoning Ordinance change the character of Cascade?

It could, but not overnight. Change and redevelopment are inevitable. Buildings age, markets change, technologies evolve, and what was appropriate for one time does not work in another. The new 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 new Zoning Ordinance to do so while still accounting for the features of Cascade that make it unique.

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

Yes, in specific areas. The new ordinance will allow more housing in the Centennial Park Overlay in areas where the necessary infrastructure exists. Additionally, it will allow housing in the Starr and Glenwood overlay, whereas it was prohibited previously. [See map here.](#)

### If I have questions, what should I do?

You can call or email staff or visit Township offices during normal business hours.

- Email [zoning@cascadetwp.com](mailto:zoning@cascadetwp.com)
- 616-949-1500
- Township Administration Building  
5920 Tahoe Dr SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

## Residential and Neighborhood Topics

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

The old ordinance allows for the keeping of domestic animals and fowl on residential lots over 3 acres (old ordinance: Section 4.11) The new ordinance increases the number of animals allowed in residential areas, but adds new standards to prevent nuisances. (new ordinance: Section 4.4). The chart below summarizes the changes for residential districts:

ANIMAL TYPE	OLD ZONING ORDINANCE	NEW ZONING ORDINANCE
<b>CHICKENS (ALSO DUCKS, AND OTHER LIVESTOCK BIRDS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few specific regulations</li> <li>• Limited to one for every 3 acres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to lot 15,000 sf or larger</li> <li>• Roosters prohibited</li> <li>• Enclosure requirements</li> </ul>



<b>SHEEP &amp; GOATS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free-range not explicitly prohibited.</li> <li>Undefined</li> <li>Limited to one for every 3 acres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited to lots 1 acre or larger</li> <li>Number limited by lot size</li> <li>Manure management required</li> <li>Nuisance animals prohibited</li> </ul>
<b>LIVESTOCK (PIGS, COWS, HORSES)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undefined</li> <li>Limited to one for every 3 acres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowed in Rural Conservation and Farmland Preservation Zone Districts</li> </ul>
<b>RABBITS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowed as domestic pet</li> <li>No limitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allowed</li> <li>Number limited</li> </ul>
<b>BEES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulations consistent with best practices in Beekeeping added</li> </ul>
<b>EXOTIC ANIMALS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prohibited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prohibited</li> </ul>

### Can I cut down my trees under the new Zoning Ordinance?

Yes. The new Zoning Ordinance discourages large scale clear cutting of forest by requiring tree replacement on all non-residential parcels and on 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. (new ordinance: Section 11.9)

### Can I build a guest house or accessory dwelling unit on my property?

No. These types of housing are not allowed in Cascade under the old or new ordinances. This is a policy decision that each community makes.

### Would the new Zoning Ordinance displace businesses in Cascade Township?

No. Any business legally operating in Cascade can continue to operate under the old or new Zoning Ordinance. The adoption of new zoning rules has no impact on the operation of an existing 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 and is allowed to operate in perpetuity. Zoning cannot force someone to change a legally established operation or force a business to close.

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

Commercial overlays provide an additional layer of zoning regulation on top of existing zoning districts to achieve specific planning goals, such as preserving an area's character or changing the character of an area that is currently undesirable. The new Zoning Ordinance introduces new overlays for 28<sup>th</sup> Street and Centennial Park to encourage a more cohesive and attractive commercial district. Along 28<sup>th</sup> Street, the overlay is intended to shift new development away from a previous emphasis on big box stores and drive thru restaurants. [See map here for overlays.](#)



## The Village & Old 28<sup>th</sup> Street

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

The new Zoning Ordinance would help create a more walkable Village area between 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Cascade Road, and the Thornapple River.

### What are “Village Districts” and why were they introduced as part of the new Zoning Ordinance?

The Village Districts are one of many elements of the new Zoning Ordinance that came from the Township's [2024 Master Plan](#). While the old Zoning Ordinance provided some building design standards in the Village Business District (B-1), the new ordinance sets more rigorous standards for building design and sets standards for landscaping, signs, and walkability. The Village Districts are focused on design and character rather than being focused solely on land use (as most zoning ordinances do). Adopting these Districts for commercial areas in and around the east end of 28<sup>th</sup> Street, Old 28<sup>th</sup> Street, and from Cascade Road down to the Thornapple River ensures that private redevelopment, only when and if it happens, is high quality and retains Cascade's timeless character.

### 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 Road 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 we received during the [Strategic Plan in 2021](#).

## Rural and Farmland

### How does the new Zoning Ordinance preserve farmland and natural spaces?

The new ordinance allows property owners to *voluntarily* preserve farmland and natural spaces for future generations by introducing a process known as a purchase of development rights. In addition to receiving property tax breaks, participants will be 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 new Zoning Ordinance?

Currently, vehicle access from a public street to more than one private property requires a private street and a maintenance agreement governed by the Private Streets Ordinance (Ordinance #9 of 2002). This has not changed, but the rules for private streets have been moved into the Zoning Ordinance to make them easier to find and use. Private streets exist all over the Township, but the quality and maintenance varies 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 has now been added as Section 10.2 to the new ordinance.

*\*This is a 'working document.' Check back for frequent updates. \**

The rules remain mostly the same except for the few changes listed in the table below. The changes require wider private streets than in the old ordinance to make it easier for fire trucks to maneuver, and they reduce the number of houses permitted on private streets.

RULES	PRIVATE STREETS ORDINANCE	<i>NEW SECTION 10.2</i>
<b>ROAD WIDTH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 18 feet wide</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing access for 1 to 4 houses: 22 feet wide for streets</li><li>• Providing access for 5 to 8 houses: 26 feet wide</li></ul>
<b>MAX NUMBER OF HOMES PERMITTED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Streets providing access for twenty or more lots require 2 means of access.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eight houses</li></ul>

[Cascade Township DDA Bond Presentation Iteration.pptx](#)

