

Alternative Zoning Mechanisms – Quick Notes

Overlays: encourage coordinated, cohesive development across lots or through lot consolidation. Useful where there are multiple underlying zoning districts. Overlays create additional options for redevelopment while leaving underlying zoning in-tact.

Mixed-Use Overlay District

Tenets:

- Goal – deliberately mix uses to reduce auto-dependence, improve resource management
- Best applied – where revitalization and economic development are needed
- Overlay – targets areas of interest but leaves underlying zoning in-tact
- Process – typically via Special Permit, which is discretionary (community has control)

Specifics:

- Permitted uses by-right or by special permit
 - Uses should be carefully chosen, and guidance given to create connectivity
- Prohibited uses
 - i.e., new single-family homes, 1-story structures, big box retail
- Balance Incentives with Requirements
 - consider goal of Town in creating the district & incentivize it
 - if there are too many hurdles, bylaw will never be utilized
- Overlay Boundaries – should enable smooth transition to surrounding areas
- Regulate New Development – Density Standards vs Design Criteria
 - Density Standards – units per acre, FAR, lot coverage
 - Design Criteria – performance standards negotiated via special permit process
- Design Features
 - Balanced mix, connectivity, active street frontage, compactness, compatibility with town character, bicycle & pedestrian access, reduced parking, etc.

Example Towns:

- Wakefield, MA – Mixed-Use Development / also have a Creative Development Overlay District

Village Center Overlay District

Tenets:

- Goal – create compact walkable neighborhood
- Best applied – where gradual or piecemeal revitalization is likely
- Overlay – targets areas of interest but leaves underlying zoning in-tact
- Process – can be via Special Permit, Site Plan Review, etc.

Specifics:

- Permitted uses by-right or by special permit
 - i.e., multi-family, café, grocery store, artist space
- Prohibited uses
 - i.e., new single-family homes, 1-story structures, big box retail
- Lot Area Minimum – should be appropriate for the district based on existing lot sizes
- Dimensional requirements – frontage, setbacks, heights for different uses
 - Build in flexibility via special permit
- Parking – shared, off-site
- Design Standards – buildings, signs, sites
- Open space, civic use, affordability not required, but if provided → density bonuses

Example Towns:

- Yarmouth, MA – Village Centers Overlay District (they have 4 centers)
- Chelmsford, MA – Village Center Overlay District

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Overlay District**Tenets:**

- Goal – fulfill existing housing, transportation & employment needs that encourage furtherance of transit oriented development
- Best applied – within ¼ to ½ mile of transit station
- Overlay – targets areas of interest but leaves underlying zoning in-tact
- Process – some uses allowed by-right, some by Special Permit

Specifics:

- Permitted uses by-right
 - i.e., mixed-use, public institutions, community facilities, services
 - high-tech, R&D, incubator may be encouraged or incentivized
- Permitted uses by Special Permit
 - i.e., new single-family home, surface parking, fast food, large grocery stores
- Prohibited uses
 - i.e., auto uses, drive-throughs, industrial, strip commercial, low density housing
- Dimensional requirements – frontage, setbacks, lot coverage or FAR, height
 - Create densities that will support transit & be pedestrian-friendly
- Parking – less parking required due to proximity to transit
- Transit Modes – enhance bike infrastructure, sidewalks, ADA features
- Design Standards – streetscapes, buildings, signs, sites

Example Towns:

- Melrose, MA – Rail Corridor Overlay Districts on Tremont and Essex streets
- Ashland, MA – Rail Transit District