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**MIXED-USE ZONING**

**Description:**
Mixed-use zoning blends a variety of land uses together in one area. Single-family detached homes of various sizes, townhouses, apartments, and condos; retail stores, restaurants, and services; and civic and cultural amenities might all be located within walking distance of each other. Mixed-use zoning is typical in traditional cities, villages, and hamlets that were developed in the early 20th Century.

Like density, the extent to which land uses can or cannot be mixed within a given area is determined by the municipal zoning code. Most municipalities establish several different land use classifications in their zoning codes, delineating the land-use and building-density allowed on a parcel of land or in an entire area or district. For example, an R1–residential zoning code might allow one unit per acre; an R2–residential code might allow two units per acre; NC might allow neighborhood commercial/retail uses; and IND might allow heavy industrial uses.

Zoning originated in the early 20th Century for two related reasons: to separate residential neighborhoods from noxious manufacturing plants, and to provide stability and certainty in the real estate market. By writing development outcomes into local zoning laws, builders and home-buyers were given some degree of certainty about the future of the biggest investment of their lives. Since the mid-20th Century, the separation of different land uses and residential types has become the norm, and mixed-use zoning the exception.

The idea of single-use zoning was stretched to the point that often no two different land uses could be located near one another. Within residential areas, single-use zoning even segregated different housing types. Public and civic spaces were also separated. Parks and municipal centers, formerly located accessibly at the center of communities, were treated as separate, isolated land uses and were thus located on the suburban fringe. Schools were sited on large tracts of land along highways and arterials, separated from the neighborhoods they served and accessible only by car.

The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) eventually required single-use zoning as a condition for granting low-interest, long-term mortgages. And, a burgeoning post-war housing market for large homes on large lots, with privacy and exclusivity, led localities and developers to plan and build almost exclusively on a single/separate-use matrix. Mixed-use zoning—and the vibrant environments they create for older adults, individuals, persons with disabilities, families, workers, and businesses—don't always comply with most suburban and rural municipal jurisdictions.
Benefits:

- **Land Use Synergy:** Mixed-use areas create mutually-supporting and complementary synergies among the different land uses. For example, residents and office workers provide a market for retail stores and restaurants, which offer convenient and accessible amenities in return. Activity on the street from retail, cultural, and recreational activities creates a more vibrant and safe environment. This environment invites more residents and businesses to move in. The festivals and other public gatherings made possible by the public space and street activity continue a positive cycle of supporting restaurants and other businesses.

- **Walkable/Bikeable Neighborhoods:** Single-use suburban zoning created unprecedented distances between the different places we need to go to in our daily lives, making these destinations accessible almost exclusively by car. Mixed-use zoning, instead, places a variety of life’s daily needs—home, work, recreation, retail, food, school—within close proximity, making them more accessible by foot, bike, transit, or short car ride. Increasing density magnifies this beneficial effect.

- **Increased Transit Opportunities:** Compact, mixed-use communities are also more transit-friendly. First, transit becomes more accessible by foot, bicycle, or short car ride. Second, density provides the critical market mass necessary to sustain a public investment in mass transit.

- **Affordable Housing:** The inclusion of smaller housing units into a residential neighborhood offers more affordable housing options for older adults, one- or two-person families, persons with disabilities living alone, and others. They also create a more vibrant and socially-interactive community life, offering quality-of-life and mental health benefits.

- **Life-Cycle Housing:** Mixed-use communities also offer life-cycle housing for those wishing to stay in a particular locale throughout the different home-buying stages of life—offering a variety of housing types, including starter homes, larger family homes, apartments, accessory units, townhomes, senior housing, shared housing, and others. This type of community creates opportunities for residents to interact with all demographics in a community—peers, long-time friends, children, families, and members of their own families. As one author noted, “With life cycle housing available, social networks can remain intact after moves; children need not be uprooted from familiar schools; and elderly persons can remain near friends and families.”

- **Access to Amenities and Destinations:** When land uses are mixed within a community, rather than each being isolated and segregated from the others in a community, life’s daily destinations and amenities become more accessible, particularly for pedestrians, bicyclers, and transit riders. For example, instead of having to travel long, circuitous routes and endure traffic congestion to reach shopping and entertainment destinations, older adults and other residents can access these points within, or close to, their neighborhoods. Mixed-use development is often most feasible in city and village downtowns, urban
neighborhoods, and sometimes even in rural hamlet areas where development has been concentrated.

- **Access to Fresh, Healthy Food:** Across the country, awareness has increased significantly about the impact of diet on the mental and physical health of all community residents, including older adults and children—making easy, close access to fresh, healthy, nutritious food take on greater significance as an element of a livable, healthy community. Under conventional zoning, many large supermarkets that would stock fresh food are not located within easy access by foot, bike, or public transit. Instead, locating food retail and farmers markets with fresh—preferably local—food within easy access presents the ideal venue through which older adults, younger individuals, and families can pursue a healthier diet.

- **Sense of Place:** Well-designed, mixed-use communities generally create a greater sense of place and community identity, the very characteristics that older adults appreciate in their later years and that families value when raising children, working, and recreating.

**Reference:**

**Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:**
- **Local Zoning:** Post-war suburban zoning is dominated by single-use zoning. Consequently, mixed-use projects usually require developers to seek zoning changes and/or variances.

- **Development Complexity:** Mixed-use projects are generally more complicated for developers and municipalities. Because of the greater variety of land uses involved, the lead developer must often assemble a team of developers, each with expertise in the particular components of a mixed-use project. Financing also becomes more complicated as each developer must seek different sources of financing for the project. Mixed-use projects typically take longer to turn a profit, but successful projects offer greater rewards to those investors and developers willing to wait longer. To reap these benefits, municipalities and other levels of government sometimes enter into a public/private partnership to provide financial or infrastructure support for a mixed-use project.

**Resource—statutory authority:**
- **Zoning:**
  - Grant of specific powers: General City Law §20.
  - Grant of Power—appropriations for certain expenses incurred under this article: Town Law §261.
  - Adoption of zoning regulations: Town Law §264.
  - Grant of power: Village Law §7-700.
  - Adoption of first zoning: Village Law §7-110.
- **Planned Unit Development:**
  - General City Law: §81-f;
  - Town Law: §261-c;

**Resource—examples and ordinances:**
- New Model Colony Mixed-Use District, City of Ontario, California: [www.ci.ontario.ca.us](http://www.ci.ontario.ca.us).
- Planning Department, “Downtown 2010 Sector Development Plan,” *Planning Department Publications/Documents*. New Mexico: City of Albuquerque,


**Resource—written and web:**

- In the Resource Manual, see also: Form-Based Codes and Smart Growth/TND/New Urbanism.


