

# ST. LOUIS BEGINS FIRST MODERN REWRITE OF ZONING CODE IN DECADES

BY ABBY WOJCIK

The St. Louis Planning Commission and Zoning Sections have launched a comprehensive overhaul of the City’s zoning code, marking the first major rewrite and map update since the mid-twentieth century. The Zoning Upgrade, known as ZOUP, aims to modernize how land use is regulated, improving clarity, consistency and responsiveness to community priorities.

While it’s common for major cities to periodically update their zoning codes, St. Louis’ code hasn’t been amended since the 1950s, resulting in an outdated set of laws that doesn’t support strategic

growth and development in the city.

In early 2025, the Planning Commission officially adopted the new Strategic Land Use Plan. To build on that momentum, the overall policy intent of the new code will be rooted in the Strategic Land Use Plan, as well as neighborhood planning efforts and broad community engagement.

“Zoning is not the most exciting topic, but it does touch so many aspects of our lives,” said Senior Planner James Fister, one of the city planners working closely on the update. “Almost everybody has a property in their neighborhood that they complain about, and there’s a pretty good chance that there’s a failure in the zoning code that is allowing that to persist.”

Because the current code is so old and problematic, the use of variances has expanded, which is a legal way of permitting exceptions from the underlying code in order to get things permitted or built. This results in hardships falling on developers looking to propose anything, from a coffee shop or restaurant, to new housing or downtown skyscrapers.

“And you talk to people on the north side or in southeast St. Louis, and you’ll learn that it is incredibly easy to get tricky, or unfriendly, or

nasty uses permitted sometimes in the middle of a neighborhood commercial corridor,” Fister added.

The fresh zoning code won’t solve all of St. Louis’ development, housing or population issues, nor will it revoke existing variances, but it does signify the City’s attempt at removing barriers in the way of starting businesses or bringing new development to the city, according to Fister.

To help implement best practices from across the country, the City engaged a team led by Code Studio, a planning and zoning firm that helped rewrite Denver’s zoning code in 2010. With their additional years of experience, officials are



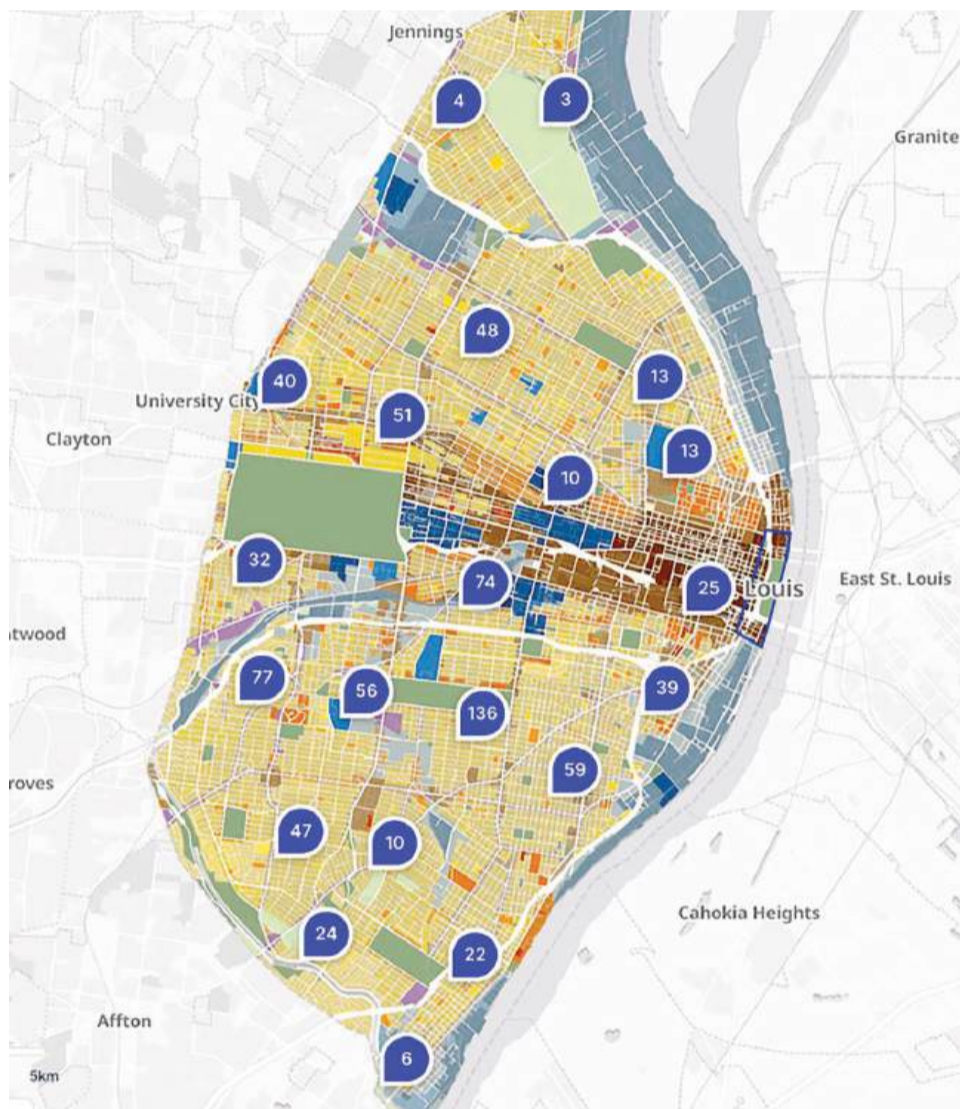
ABBY WOJCIK PHOTO

The Central West End, where mixed-use zoning has helped create one of St. Louis’ most dense and walkable neighborhoods.

workshops, virtual and in-person draft reviews and feedback surveys. Officials hope the final zoning code



Downtown St. Louis



Screenshot of the online interactive map of the proposed zoning districts. Public comments will reopen with the release of a revised draft in July.

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hopeful that Code Studio will help move St. Louis onto a trajectory similar to its thriving peer cities.

For example, the zoning update is specifically aiming to encourage transit investment by allowing greater density along major corridors and throughout neighborhoods. The proposed changes to parking requirements look to reduce costs and make it more feasible for residents to live near transit, jobs and amenities without relying as heavily on a car.

The project has a goal of ensuring community members are substantively involved throughout the process. An interactive web map is available on ZOUP-stl.com. There are also supporting materials to help people understand the changes and proposed zoning districts. Citizens are able to contribute comments that are seen by staff right away.

The first public draft of the map was released in March and remained open for comments until the end of May. A second round of drafts and a comment period will begin in July, with public interactive



ABBY WOJCIK PHOTO

The St. Louis skyline

will be adopted by the Board of Aldermen in summer 2027. The best way to stay updated is by following the ZOUP Instagram @zoup\_stl or sign up for the newsletter.

“We want people to get on board and feel invested and see their voices heard,” Fister said. “We’re not going to please everybody and that is a good thing. But I do believe whatever happens, we’re moving in a good, positive, modern direction.”



Central Library interior renovated ceiling.

**LIBRARY GRANT** *From Page 8*

vation, while expanding programs and prioritizing evolving needs of the public. The SLPL Board of Directors will conduct a national search for his successor.

As St. Louis Public Library looks ahead, the latest grant serves as a continuation of Carnegie’s original endowment and a reminder that, over a century later, libraries remain invaluable community spaces.

In a letter to St. Louis, Carnegie wrote, “The building is only the frame; the treasures of a Library are within.”



Readers at Carpenter branch.

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