



PIEDMONT TRIAD REGIONAL COUNCIL

Zoning: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is zoning? – Zoning consists of assigning parcels of land within a territorial jurisdiction to districts (“zones”) and establishing guidelines for development specific to each district. Zoning first came into practice in North Carolina during the 1920s, specifically for cities. Counties were first allowed to adopt zoning in 1959. In addition to setting guidelines and rules for specific districts, zoning also includes general regulations applicable across districts.
2. Are counties in North Carolina required to have a zoning code? – No, state law does not require local jurisdictions to have a zoning ordinance. However, state law does require a county to have a land use plan in place before adopting a zoning ordinance. Even though zoning is optional for NC counties, 67 of North Carolina’s 100 counties have chosen to adopt comprehensive zoning ordinances while an additional 15 have adopted partial zoning ordinances.
3. Why is zoning so widespread? – A zoning ordinance helps ensure the health, safety and general welfare of the public when properly balanced with the individual rights of private property ownership. Zoning helps ensure that incompatible land uses are separated from each. It is also a tool for preserving property values and the integrity properties in different districts. For example, it allows counties to enact legal tools to prevent the development of an asphalt plant directly abutting a residential neighborhood or farm.
4. What are the most common types of zoning districts? – The basic zoning districts in most counties include residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural and institutional. Mixed-use districts are becoming more and more common because they allow increased flexibility for property owners, developers, and land use planning staff. A zoning ordinance can also include overlays for historic areas, land conservation or highway corridors.
5. What are the advantages of zoning? – A zoning ordinance can help ensure that compatible land uses are grouped together and separated from incompatible uses. It can help preserve the character and history of previously developed areas while accommodating new growth and development. It can conserve environmentally sensitive land areas and protect farms. It can contain development rules for non-residential uses and structures, helping to ensure quality design, appearance and continuity. Zoning can also help encourage economic development.
6. Who decides if Caswell County needs zoning? – Enacting a zoning ordinance is a community endeavor. Developing a zoning code usually involves land use and transportation planning consultants, local planning staff, a steering committee, and extensive public input using surveys,

forums and town halls. Ultimately, the County Commissioners make the final decision on adopting a zoning ordinance.

7. Who administers the zoning ordinance once it is in place? – Zoning administration is usually handled by a county department that might include educated planners, zoning officials, and code enforcement personnel. In most cases, building inspectors, environmental health specialists and tax department staff work closely with planning and zoning officials.
8. Can a zoning ordinance be changed after it is enacted? – Yes, there are several ways to help ensure that zoning ordinances can be modified as community needs and development patterns change over time. Amending a zoning ordinance involves individual citizens or groups of citizens, planning staff, appointed planning boards and boards of adjustment, along with County Commissioners.
9. How can I get an exception from zoning rules if they cause undue hardship? – State law allows property owners who experience a significant hardship because of zoning rules to ask for an exception. This is called a “variance.” Requests for variances are decided by a Board of Adjustment. To obtain a variance, a property owner must prove that the hardship is not self-created, is unique to property in question, results from the strict application of the zoning ordinance and that the variance does not endanger public health, safety or welfare. It is important to note that variances cannot be granted for land uses, only for relief from the specific rules that apply to the zoning district the property is assigned to.
10. Can zoning dictate what my house must look like? – No, state law is very clear on this. A zoning ordinance cannot regulate architectural standards or design criteria for single-family homes, with the exception of limited rules for manufactured housing and historic districts.
11. Can I put a mobile home on my property? – Counties cannot ban all mobile homes. However, a zoning ordinance may allocate manufactured housing only to specific zones and it can require certain development/design standards, such as certain types of underskirting.
12. Can I have horses or chickens on my property? – Yes, NC state law allows counties to determine zoning guidelines for non-farm animal ownership that are in keeping with the nature of communities. In the unincorporated areas of a rural county like Caswell, there may be no need for animal regulation of any kind other than kennel facilities used for domestic animal boarding, breeding or training (specifically dogs and cats).