

Village of Trumansburg Commercial & Industrial Zoning Revision Frequently Asked Questions

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Executive Summary

What are the major changes being proposed?

The major changes being proposed are explained below. For the full details, please refer to the draft proposal.

New Zoning Districts – The commercial districts are replaced by two new zones, and the industrial districts are unified into one. The Downtown Core covers the traditional commercial center of the village. The Neighborhood Mixed-Use zone covers the rest of Main Street, allowing small-scale commercial activities like cafes, small shops, professional offices, and

personal services alongside residential uses. The Industrial Mixed-Use District consolidates previous industrial categories into a single flexible zone tailored for light production, artisan workshops, and commercial services. The previous undeveloped Commercial Industrial zone adjacent to a dense residential neighborhood is removed and proposed to return to residential zoning.

Allowed Uses Table – Instead of separate lists for each district, a single table now shows what is allowed across all village zones. Many commercial and industrial uses are grouped into size categories (Small, Medium, Large) so that smaller businesses face less review while larger ones receive closer scrutiny. Several overlapping use categories have been consolidated or reorganized to make the table simpler to read and consistent across the whole document.

Dimensional Requirements – In the Downtown Core, buildings may be up to four stories, setbacks are reduced to bring buildings closer to the sidewalk, and building footprint limits encourage smaller-scale development consistent with the existing downtown. In the Neighborhood Mixed-Use zone, building footprints are smaller still, keeping development at a neighborhood scale. In the Industrial Mixed-Use district, a 15,000-square-foot footprint limit ensures development fits the village scale, while setbacks are increased along residential boundaries to protect neighbors.

Design Requirements – For the first time, design standards are included for new commercial and industrial buildings. In the Downtown Core, standards address ground-floor ceiling heights, window coverage on street-facing walls, entrance placement, and architectural details between floors. In the Industrial Mixed-Use district, standards prohibit street-facing loading docks and require wall offsets every 50 feet along with clear window coverage to avoid blank warehouse walls.

Screening and Buffers – Where an industrial property abuts a residential zoning district, a 15-foot vegetated buffer is required to create a visual screen and protect adjacent homes. Across all commercial and industrial properties, outdoor waste dumpsters and rooftop mechanical equipment must be screened from public view.

Performance Standards – Enforceable standards at the property line prohibit industrial uses from emitting noticeable odor, glare, heat, vibration, or dust beyond their lot lines. Emissions of smoke and gases are subject to state air quality standards.

Parking Standards – Instead of a long table of parking minimums for each type of business, the proposal simplifies to one parking space per home (with no minimum in the Downtown Core)

and caps the maximum number of spaces for other uses based on current demand studies. Parking must go behind buildings rather than between buildings and the street.

Signs and Lighting – Sign standards are updated with clearer rules for measuring sign area, brightness limits, and a prohibition on flashing, moving, and inflatable signs. Changeable message boards are allowed with a permit. Exterior lighting rules, previously spread across several sections of the law, are brought together in one place with standards for fixture height, shielding, and color temperature to reduce light pollution. Existing nonconforming lighting must be brought into compliance within one year.

Ground-Floor Residential in the Downtown Core – Previously, apartments and other residential uses in commercial districts had to be above the first floor. The proposal now allows ground-floor residential in the Downtown Core as long as it is set back behind commercial frontage.

Lodging and Inns – Lodging is reorganized into three clear types—Bed and Breakfast, Inn, and Hotel—each with its own rules by district. A new section sets specific requirements for Inns in residential areas, including setback and site plan review requirements.

Adult-Oriented Businesses – Adult-oriented businesses remain strictly confined to the industrial zone, with requirements for age verification (18+) and complete indoor shielding from outdoor view. The setback from residential districts was adjusted from 200 feet to 100 feet to ensure the regulation is legally defensible while still protecting residential neighborhoods.

Background

What is the history of commercial and industrial zoning in the village?

Zoning has existed in the village since at least 1956. The current commercial and industrial zoning regulations were established in 1971 and expanded in 2012 to include additional uses and overlay districts, but many core regulations, such as dimensional requirements, parking ratios, and signage standards, remained largely unchanged for decades. The Village revised its residential zoning in 2023 and is working to update its commercial and industrial zoning with this combined draft.

Why is the Village revising its commercial and industrial zoning?

Zoning laws are meant to be living documents that adapt to changes in our community. The Village completed a Comprehensive Plan update in 2021 that created a vision for the Village over the next 10–20 years. That vision emphasized preserving village character while supporting economic vitality and pedestrian-friendly development. The commercial and industrial zoning revision implements that vision by updating outdated regulations and creating clearer guidance for appropriate development.

How is the zoning revision process structured?

The revision process has been broken into three milestones, with changes to the zoning law adopted at the end of each milestone. This phased approach allows for easier and earlier feedback from the community rather than overwhelming residents with massive changes all at once. The first milestone focused on residential zoning and was completed in 2023. This document accompanies the draft of the second milestone, which focuses on commercial and industrial zoning. The industrial zone was included in this milestone to allow for a full revision of the allowed uses table, simplifying and unifying it across all zones to make the document more consistent and easier for residents to use. The final milestone will focus on overlay districts and zoning administration.

What are the proposed revisions trying to encourage?

The proposed revisions aim to encourage:

- Pedestrian-friendly development with active street frontages and engaging streetscapes
- Modest, gradual growth in the downtown core to support local businesses and create vibrancy
- A variety of smaller storefronts matching the historic character of downtown rather than large single-box buildings
- Light commercial uses in residential areas of Main Street that complement neighborhood character
- Clean, village-scale light production and artisan enterprise in the industrial zone
- Quality design that reflects Trumansburg's existing architectural character
- Effective visual buffering between industrial activities and neighboring homes

What are the proposed revisions trying to discourage?

The proposed revisions aim to discourage:

- Heavy, high-impact industrial uses that are incompatible with village character

- Large single-box development that is out of scale with downtown character
- Car-oriented development with excessive parking and buildings set far from the street
- Blank walls, inactive street frontages, and street-facing loading docks that diminish walkability
- Industrial nuisances such as odors, dust, glare, and vibration affecting neighbors
- Light pollution and harsh lighting that impacts residents and the natural environment
- Visual clutter from excessive, flashing, or out-of-character signage

Frequently Asked Questions

What community input has been collected so far?

Through the 2017–2021 Comprehensive Planning process, including a village-wide survey and multiple in-person information meetings, the Village collected community input on commercial and industrial development, downtown character, and economic vitality. Those conversations, alongside the full Comprehensive Plan, have been the basis for the Village's zoning revisions.

Themes raised during the Comprehensive Plan revision process included pride in the historic character of downtown, desire for economic vitality and support for local businesses, concern about large-scale or out-of-character development, and support for pedestrian-friendly, walkable commercial areas with well-protected neighborhoods.

How do these proposed changes become law?

Not quickly, and not without plenty of opportunity for input. Before any changes can take effect, they must pass through a series of required steps designed to be open and deliberate:

1. **Public Comment & Board Review:** Residents, business owners, the Planning Board, and the Zoning Board of Appeals review the draft, and the Village Board revises it to address community feedback.
2. **County Planning Review:** Tompkins County Planning evaluates the proposal for regional coordination.
3. **Environmental Review (SEQR):** The Village assesses potential environmental, traffic, and community impacts through the state-required environmental review process.
4. **Public Hearing & Vote:** The Village Board holds a formal, noticed public hearing where residents can speak directly to the Board before any vote is taken.

Why create a new Neighborhood Mixed-Use zone instead of expanding the commercial zone?

Main Street has a fundamentally different character than the traditional downtown core—it is primarily residential with the potential for compatible small-scale commercial uses. Creating a separate zone allows the village to tailor regulations to this context, permitting light commercial activities (like small offices, studios, cafes, and bakeries) that fit naturally alongside homes without generating heavy commercial traffic or out-of-scale development.

Why combine the previous industrial zones into a single Industrial Mixed-Use District?

The Village previously had two separate industrial zones: Commercial Industrial and Mixed-Use Industrial. The Commercial Industrial zone allowed heavier industrial uses that were less compatible with a village setting and was located directly next to a densely populated residential area. Because that land is currently undeveloped, the proposal returns it to a residential zone to protect neighboring homes. The remaining industrial land is consolidated into a single Industrial Mixed-Use District tailored for light production, artisan workshops, and commercial services that fit the Village's scale.

Won't limiting building footprints prevent development?

No. Footprint limits are designed to encourage the fine-grained development pattern that already exists in downtown Trumansburg rather than massive single-box structures. This enables more total development over time by allowing multiple smaller buildings rather than one large structure, creating more varied streetscapes and expanding opportunities for diverse local businesses and property owners.

Why reduce setbacks in the downtown core?

Buildings close to the sidewalk create active, engaging streetscapes that support pedestrian activity and local businesses. This pattern already exists in the most successful parts of downtown Trumansburg. Reduced setbacks ensure new buildings reinforce this traditional pattern rather than creating gaps or parking lots between storefronts and the sidewalk.

How were the dimensional requirements determined?

Dimensional requirements were informed by spatial analysis of existing buildings in downtown Trumansburg, surveys of industrial uses in the village and surrounding areas, review of best

practices from similar villages, and guidance from the Comprehensive Plan. The goal across all districts was to allow development that reinforces the character and scale of successful existing buildings while preventing out-of-scale structures.

How does the zoning law protect the community from industrial impacts and nuisances?

To ensure industrial development remains compatible with the village and respects adjacent properties, the law establishes strict protections for streetscapes, neighboring homes, and environmental quality.

New industrial buildings must follow basic design and screening standards so they fit into village corridors. Street-facing walls must include windows and architectural offsets rather than long, unbroken blank surfaces, and loading docks cannot face the street. Additionally, whenever an industrial lot borders a residential neighborhood, the property owner must install and maintain a 15-foot vegetated buffer to provide a solid visual screen between industrial activities and adjacent homes.

The proposed law also sets clear, enforceable performance standards at the property line for any use in the Industrial Mixed-Use district. Businesses are not permitted to produce noticeable odor, glare, heat, vibration, or dust that can be detected beyond their property boundaries. Smoke and other emissions are also subject to strict state air quality standards, ensuring that businesses operate cleanly and contain their impacts on-site.

Why cap maximum parking spaces?

Excessive parking in downtown areas creates dead space that diminishes walkability, increases stormwater runoff, and reduces the land available for buildings and active uses. The downtown core is the most walkable area of the village, and many customers arrive on foot or can share parking. Maximum parking caps prevent over-parking while still allowing adequate parking behind buildings. This approach is increasingly common in walkable downtowns and village centers.

How are adult-oriented businesses regulated?

Adult-oriented businesses are strictly prohibited in all residential and commercial areas of the Village and are also subject to strict operating rules, including an 18-and-older age limit and full screening so that nothing is visible from outdoors.

The previous draft included a 200-foot buffer from residential districts, but because Trumansburg is a compact village, that rule left almost no viable land where such a business could operate. Under the First Amendment, completely zoning out a business category leaves local regulations vulnerable to court challenges. Adjusting the buffer to 100 feet ensures the Village's regulations are legally defensible while still maintaining separation from residential neighborhoods.

Will these changes affect existing businesses?

No. If your building or business is currently legal, you do not have to change anything. Existing legal buildings and uses are "grandfathered" and can continue operating exactly as they do today. The changes primarily affect new construction, major renovations, or changes to a new use. In fact, because the new rules reflect Trumansburg's actual historic building patterns, many existing buildings will actually become more conforming under the new regulations.

What happens if someone wants to build something that doesn't meet these requirements?

If a property owner faces practical difficulties or unnecessary hardships in meeting specific dimensional or use requirements, they can apply for a variance (an official exception) through the Zoning Board of Appeals. Additionally, site plan review by the Planning Board provides flexibility to address site-specific conditions while still meeting the intent of the regulations.