

## Your Voices, All Voices WLHS Newsletter on Substack April 13, 2025

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### **LET'S MAKE AN EFFORT TO PULL TOGETHER FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS**

For the next three or four months, we'd like to see everyone, Yes and No, pro-growth and no-growth, city residents and officials, and all who have shown up for our zoning discussions, to be on the same side.

And we're not talking about the same side of an issue. There are many sides to every issue, and most of them have valid points worth debate. That's why we've been meeting. We've come a long way in the Planning Commission's Town Hall schedule. Together, we've revised over half of the Articles in the zoning code, going through each section line-by-line. Many people walked out together after the meetings saying the same thing, "I thought that would be a lot harder!"

One thing making it harder to come together was an uneasy sense of divisiveness in the community. It felt different and uncomfortable, especially for those who have lived here for a long time. The process leading to the new zoning code was more complex than expected. Decades of idiosyncracies is a knotted ball of string. It didn't build in time or ways for everyone to contribute, and consequently, many people felt left out, and in the dark as to what exactly had happened.

What had changed, and how did it affect them? There were more questions than answers, and the result was the code being repealed.

Now, people were paying attention and said, "No, not this zoning code, we're going to start over." It was a necessary, although jarring wake-up call, but it led to a year of division.

So, the side we need to take now is that there are no sides. We all commit to listening, openly considering new and different ideas, and agreeing to compromise in the best interests of the town. We've shown it's not only possible but productive to get in the weeds and hash things out. And, not surprisingly, building on each positive session makes the next one that much easier. We know everyone who has given so much time and energy to zoning wants the best for Harbor Springs. We just have different ideas on how that looks. The storm showed us that our strength lies in our people. Part-time, full-time, relative newcomers and those who never left, city and township. We all call this home. Some people have been reaching out 'across the aisle' and grabbing coffee or a beer together. It's working. Personal connections instead of personal slights.

Let's keep airing all the ideas. Agree where we can and compromise where we don't. Get informed. Come to the meetings. Speak out and listen up. We're getting closer and need everyone to get to the finish line.

### **WE LOVE HARBOR SPRINGS.ORG - - OUR ZONING BACKGROUND - 2024**

In May 2024, WLHS submitted a community document to the City Council and Planning Commission titled “*What is Missing. What Needs to Change. And What We Want.*” This report gathered input from residents, second homeowners, and volunteers through conversations, correspondence, public comments, and analysis of the proposed #439 Zoning Code, the 2005 Zoning Code and Master Plan.

Although the document was not formally accepted, the concerns and priorities expressed within it continue to resonate with the broader community. The community via WLHS chose to hold a referendum to repeal the new zoning code rather than seek an amendment.

WLHS carefully weighed the decision to propose a referendum to repeal rather than amending a new code. A referendum vote directly reflects the democratic will of the people and is often used when significant changes in policy or law are needed.

Ultimately, the choice depended on the specific circumstances of the changes being proposed, and the level of community involvement desired. Since so much of the old code was rewritten, reworded, and essentially brand new, it was not feasible to address all the changes through amendments.

To gain support, WLHS was formed and decided the best way forward was to hire professionals to help inform and educate the public through a public relations campaign.

Our intent remains unchanged: to preserve the distinctive character of Harbor Springs for future generations. We have a shared purpose now.

### **PRIMARY CONCERN: MAINTAINING THE IDENTITY OF HARBOR SPRINGS**

Harbor Springs has been a cherished destination since the mid-19th century, known for its natural beauty, historical architecture, quiet atmosphere, and sense of community. Zoning changes should only be enacted under the following conditions:

1. To comply with state law
2. When an issue is identified by local property owners
3. When City Council determines that it is necessary and beneficial to the community as a whole

### **SHARED GOALS AND COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT**

- Streamlining the zoning code
- Reducing but not eliminating historic and distinct zoning districts
- Historic Preservation Gaps: The current zoning code lacks provisions to safeguard the historical character of Harbor Springs, within the Central Business District and residential neighborhoods. A new local group, Preservation 49740, intends to propose formation of and participation in a Historical Commission for protective measures. For more information or to express interested participation, you are invited to contact: <mailto:Preservation49740@gmail.com>
- Addressing the needs of an aging population, visiting employees and young people while supporting families
- Preserving building height restrictions in the Downtown District to two story
- Prohibiting commercial uses in residential zones - we already have three service/business districts very near or in residential areas.
- Including all stakeholders—full-time, seasonal, and part-time residents—in long-term planning

### **THE CURRENT ZONING DISTRICTS MATTER: 14 Districts with no “Overlays”**

We combined 3 districts in #3 and 2 districts in #12, because their definitions were the same.

1. **Agricultural-Residential (AR)** Preserves open space, limits development, and supports Harbor Springs’ agricultural legacy.
2. **Single Family Estate (R-1-E)** Designed for larger homes that support both seasonal and permanent residents. Essential for maintaining Harbor Springs’ resort-style identity.
3. **Single-Family (R-1-A, R-1-B, R-1-C)** These districts protect the city’s traditional neighborhoods and reinforce its family-oriented, residential character. *Streets like Main, Bay, Zoll, Judd, Bluff, Second, Third, Fourth and Glen Drive should remain single-family zones. The city should prioritize single-family homes over high-density developments to protect the town’s appeal for residents and visitors alike.*
4. **Two-Family Residential (R-2)** Provides housing diversity and flexibility while preserving neighborhood integrity.
5. **Mobile Home Park (MHP)** Supports affordability by offering non-traditional housing options. Clear guidance on location and design standards is needed
6. **Residential Multiple (RM)** Encourages multi-family housing options in walkable areas near downtown, helping meet the needs of younger residents, retirees, and seasonal workers.
7. **Community (C)** Designated for public and civic uses, including schools, government buildings, and parks.
8. **Transitional Residential (TR)** Serves as a buffer between residential and commercial zones, permitting limited non-residential uses.
9. **Central Business District (CBD)** Supports a vibrant, walkable downtown by encouraging retail, dining, and entertainment while preserving scale and charm.
10. **Convenience Business District (B-1)** Allows for neighborhood-scale businesses that meet day-to-day needs.
11. **General Business District (B-2)** Permits larger commercial and office developments intended to serve both the city and surrounding township areas. It encourages broader business activity while remaining compatible with nearby uses.
12. **Waterfront & Waterfront Resort (WF, WF-1)** Preserves public access to Lake Michigan and supports limited, carefully managed development. These districts are critical to Harbor Springs’ identity and tourism economy.
13. **Manufacturing Industrial (M-I)** Supports industrial, warehousing, and commercial operations essential to Harbor Springs economic base while keeping such uses appropriately distanced from residential areas.
14. **Residential, Office, Service (R/O/S)** Allows for low-impact commercial services within residential neighborhoods, maintaining convenience without disrupting character.

#### **Conclusion: Why Zoning Districts Matter**

Every zoning district contributes to Harbor Springs’ long-term balance between growth, livability, and preservation. Together, these policies help maintain the qualities that make our city extraordinary—ensuring Harbor Springs remains a place where history, community, and thoughtful planning converge.

Our next newsletter will cover specific zoning found in Articles 2 and 3 in the 2005 Zoning Code.



Article 2 2005 Zoning Code  
1.3MB · PDF file

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Article 3 2005 Zoning Code Redone  
4.22MB · PDF file

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