

# Zoning Assessment Steering Committee

Session 1 | 01/23/23 | 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

## Welcome and Project Introduction

Attendance: 29 people, including MPC and Urban Institute staff. 4 people attended remotely (individuals who were not in Chicago).

The zoning assessment project is a partnership with the Metropolitan Planning Council and Urban Institute. MPC shared the goals and objectives, steering committee member roles, participant list, project phases, and timeline. The goals are to

1. Assess the City of Chicago's zoning and land use practices
2. Foster a shared understanding of equity, sustainability, and health impacts to residents and communities
3. Set a baseline for understanding how to make changes that equitably benefit Chicago's communities

The project has 4 phases and is currently in the first phase (Designing the Methodology) that will continue until June. The project is expected to conclude in December 2024 after the methodology is piloted, adjusted and recommendations are developed. There are 21 members from the public, private, community, academic and civic sectors. Members are asked to name a proxy if the main representative is not available to attend a meeting.

Today's session objectives:

1. Introduce zoning assessment and preview work ahead
2. Co-create collaborative space
3. Get to know each other, experiences and roles
4. Review information on Chicago zoning

Notecards are provided for additional ideas and thoughts and are collected at the end of the session.

## Group Agreements and Degrees of Agreement

MPC reviewed the group agreements to be used during the duration of the committee meetings to steward the space and guide how members discuss challenging ideas.

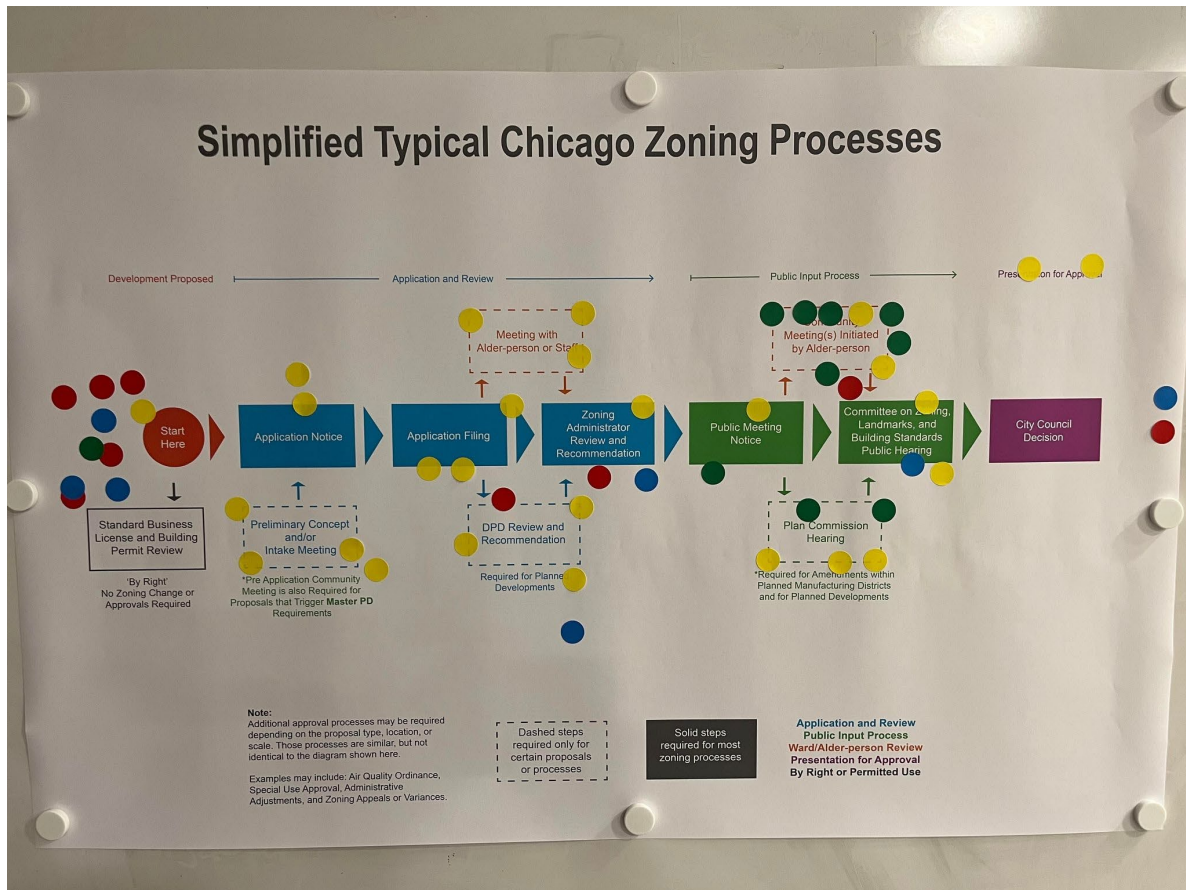
The "fist to five" model as a consensus building tool was also introduced. It will be used for the duration of the committee for decision-making. All participants agreed to use the model with everyone voting either 4 (I'm fine with this) or 5 (I'm fully on board).

## Participant Introductions

MPC shared a simplified zoning process flowchart for the introduction activity. Participants were asked to place dot stickers (as many as desired) based on where they were involved or interacted during the process. Red dots were for policy maker, writer or legislator; blue dots were regulatory or enforcement;

yellow dots were for applicant (e.g. developers, land owner, legal representation); green dots were for advocate or public participant (e.g. residents, policy advocates).

After placing dots on the chart, each person shared where they placed themselves and why. There was some discussion about where academic and research folks would be represented (most put themselves as green, but it was not a perfect fit). Many folks also noted that they should have put themselves as a green dot to signify being a resident of Chicago as well as their professional role, but most did not think of it during the exercise.



## Review of Takeaways from Previous Conversations

MPC staff conducted one-on-one meetings with each Steering Committee member and several city council representatives prior to the first committee meeting. The key takeaways from the meetings were categorized into the topics of people, law and process, and other curiosities and questions. Challenges, opportunities, and questions were summarized based on those discussions:

### People

- Challenges:
  - Right sizing public engagement
  - interpretations of zoning code can vary
  - role of city council members; communications across departments and sectors; owners vs renters

- Opportunities:
  - Trust building
  - communication, public education
  - enabling local organizations to be a formal part of zoning process
- Questions:
  - How can we have a process that is centered on shared values and allows for meaningful engagement that does not block projects that meet city goals or values?
  - How can the code benefit non-homeowners?

### Law and Process

- Challenges:
  - Navigating the process is difficult
  - Process is opaque even for city staff
  - Formal and informal processes where there is room for interference and pressure
  - PDs and the lack of multi-parcel or neighborhood or citywide land use plan
  - Missing nuanced definitions of certain elements (e.g. road types, art)
- Opportunities:
  - Updating the zoning map
  - Changing the code (text) instead of external measures, reducing spot zoning policy
  - Integrating other codes, policies and assessments (e.g. ARO, SDP, EIAs)
  - Pairing with financial incentives
- Questions:
  - How do other cities anticipate and deal with conflicting use or transitioning land uses?
  - How to attract and support development and tourism?

### Questions & Curiosities

- Zoning and planning model that are not centered on economic growth
- How to administer the code effectively while moving towards positive changes
- Analyzing administrative data to understand what kinds of projects make it through to approval most often
- Interested in specific practices: form-based zoning, green zones, zoning within master PDs, simplifying and expanding by-right zoning after proper realignment with values

**Highlights of Discussion:** Overall, participants felt that the takeaways were reflective of the one-on-one conversations. There were short discussions around exploring micro-zoning within master PDs of megadevelopments and other cities (e.g. Los Angeles who is exploring form based and green zoning or Japan that allows by-right simply). There was also a short discussion about the points around reducing spot zoning policies and changing the zoning code directly being different points, which should be separated.

### **Zoning and Land Use Overview**

MPC presented on the zoning code over time through a review of the history and timeline of zoning in Chicago from the inception of early zoning regulation to present day. Zoning in Chicago includes

numerous processes depending on the scale, type, location and use of each new development. Rather than describing each process in detail, a simplified zoning process diagram was presented to begin the conversation around how a development occurs by-right and how different zoning changes happen.

**Highlights of Discussion:** There were robust conversations around the history and timeline. There was a recommendation to explore developing a report of case studies and best practices from other cities. Additionally, a historical timeline of zoning should highlight eras with people or communities that were benefited or burdened by the changes. One participant noted that the history of plans and other notable city plans are not on the timeline.

Zoning is a mechanism to trigger ordinances (e.g. ARO) but it should be coupled with another set of documents that outlines what the city wants. Currently changing zoning becomes a “catch all” for solving every challenge, like housing affordability, but zoning alone is not able to address the root of the problem.

The opacity in understanding priorities of the city and neighborhoods makes development difficult in Chicago and developers can choose to invest in other cities where things are clearer.

### **Next Steps**

Steering Committee members were tasked with completing the pre-survey if they had not filled it out. The next meeting will be held on February 14 from 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm at the Metropolitan Planning Council. Members will participate in small group activities to define the terms guiding the assessment: racial equity, sustainability and health as well as to start to discuss outcomes.