CHICAGO ZONING CHANGES TIMELINE





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Late 19th Century

Private and Public Nuisance Lawsuits

Allowed residents (private nuisance) or the local government (public nuisance) to file lawsuits against incompatible land uses to help protect the health and safety of residents.

1919

Glackin Law

Passed by the Illinois General Assembly. Authorized municipalities to develop piecemeal zoning ordinances for neighborhoods if 40% of that neighborhood's property owners endorsed the district plan.

1942

Rewrite of Zoning Ordinance

Comprehensive revision of the zoning ordinance. The main goal was to have more control over the intensity of development in the city by reducing buildings' height and bulk. The rewrite created three different types for residential districts, two business districts, and a new industrial classification.

1970s

Downzoning

Residents started to pressure their aldermen, the Plan Commission, and the Mayor to sponsor and pass amendments downzoning portions of the North Side neighborhoods and the Lakefront. The downzoning process led to an amendment downzoning the east part of Lincoln Park to help preserve the neighborhood character and block density.

1973

Lakefront Protection Ordinance

The City adopted the Lake Michigan and Chicago Lakefront Protection Ordinance, which supported the creation of miles of parks and beaches along Lake Michigan, as well as the limiting of high-rises along the lake front.

2004

Rewrite of Zoning Ordinance

Responding to the development boom of the 1990s, the 2004 Zoning Rewrite was designed to preserve the character of neighborhoods and help promote pedestrian-friendly environments. Among other significant changes, it established new height limits and new regulations on FAR and density to help protect neighborhoods from intense development.

2019

River Design Guidelines

The Chicago River Guidelines were created in 2005 and were updated in 2019. The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the requirements for development in and adjacent to the setback area along the rivers within the city limits.

2022

Connected Communites Ordinance

Encourages more homes and businesses near transit by expanding existing TOD incentives, improves safety for pedestrians. and increases housing opportunities, affordability, and accessibility near transit.

1923

First Zoning Ordinance

Creation of Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to provide relief in extenuating circumstances and avoid litigation that could derail comprehensive zoning regulation. Established four districts; residential, apartment, manufacturing, and commercial.

1957

Planned Developments, FAR, and other Zoning Ordinance Revisions

City Council adopted the new zoning ordinance. To accommodate the projected growth and allow for development, the new ordinance gave space to innovative techniques and approaches for land use control such as Planned Developments and Floor Area Ratios (FAR).

2021

Air Quality Zoning Ordinance

Passed in 2021, the ordinance sets additional regulations on certain facilities that create air pollution. Depending on the size and scope of the development, the new ordinance requires proposals to go through additional review processes, allows for review from other city departments, and includes more opportunities for public engagement in the process.

Early 20th Century

Restrictive Covenants and Frontage Consent Ordinances

Restrictive covenants and frontage consent ordinances were often deliberately used to exclude African Americans and other racial minorities from neighborhoods. The Courts later ruled restrictive covenants as unconstitutional and set limitations on frontage consent ordinances.

1953

Off-Street Parking Requirments

The city increased the off street parking requirements related to residential developments, offices, large retail stores, places of assembly, and industrial areas.

2003-2021

Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO)

The City first established the ARO in 2003 to increase the provision of affordable housing units in Chicago. The ARO has since been updated twice, with changes to increase the percentage of affordable units provided, address patterns of segregation in the city, and decrease displacement of long time residents in areas experiencing rapid development.

1990s

Special Districts & Planned Manufacturing Districts

The City started to adopt Special Districts to help control density and preserve neighborhood character. Established first in parts of Norwood Park to protect ranch homes that were being converted to more modern homes, these districts were often used to protect historically significant communities in wealthier north side neighborhoods from development. Restrictions in these districts primarily focused on building heights, dimensions of yards, etc. By the end of the decade the city had 23 special districts.

Legislation and Litigation

Zoning Ordinance Rewrite

Additional Ordinances

Other Methods