

# Multnomah County

## Zoning Code Improvement Project

### Project Overview



Multnomah County is in the first phase of a multi-year project to audit, rewrite, and modernize the County's Zoning Code.

### About the Project

The current code is not well organized. Its language is complex and confusing and does not provide clear direction. The code has limited flexibility for small changes to properties, and it lacks provisions to address neighborhood concerns.

The code is being updated to:

- Make it consistent with current laws and policies.
- Make it clearer, more flexible and easier to use.
- Improve operations and customer service, by limiting permit review times or easing some requirements.
- Align the code with community priorities identified in the County's Comprehensive Plan.
- Add clear and objective standards for most types of housing in unincorporated Multnomah County.
- Provide clear and objective land use application pathways, resulting in quicker, easier permitting while allowing for more flexible discretionary options for those who desire them.

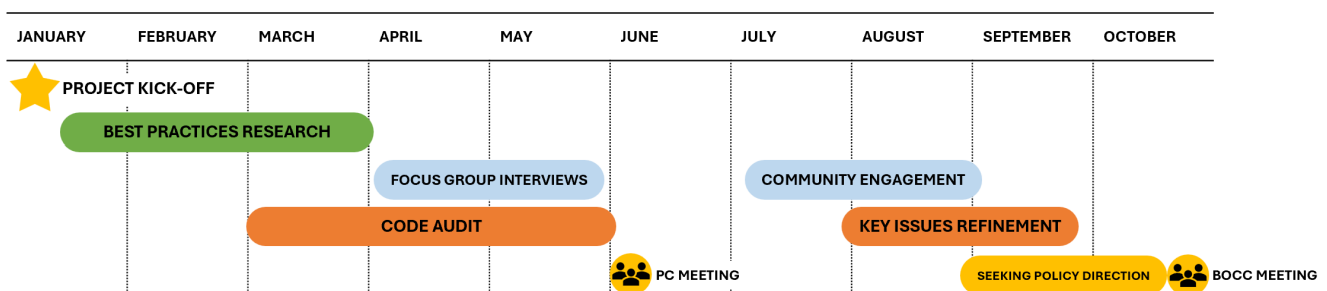
The improved code will be fairer, more accessible and more efficient. It will promote consistency with current laws and policies while addressing neighborhood concerns. It will also provide clear and objective standards that apply to most types of housing developments.

### Timeline

The project kicked off in January 2025 and will take about three years to complete.

- **Phase 1 – Year 1:** Address legal sufficiency, gather initial stakeholder input, and identify amendment and policy options.
- **Phase 2 – Years 1-2:** Conduct broader community engagement, refine zoning issues and options, and agree on policy direction.
- **Phase 3 – Years 2-3:** Draft, review and adopt code revisions.

2025



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#### Key Code Issues

County Commissioners, staff, and the project team identified the following set of key issues for the project to focus on. More details on each of these topics can be found in the Code Audit and Key Findings Memo found on the County's project webpage.



**Code organization.** Reformat to a single-column layout and improve readability through expanded use of tables and graphics, with minimal cross references. Simplify code language.



**Application procedures.** Clarify application procedures and requirements including “full compliance” standards, lot of record requirements, and when each review type is required.



**Common Development Standards.** Right-size standards like parking, transit requirements, farmstands, and signs to meet the needs of rural communities.



**Conditional Uses.** Review and refine purpose, approval criteria, uses and procedures, and use requirements.



**Specific Use Standards.** Key areas to discuss in this section may include design review, minor exceptions, adjustment and variances, nonconforming uses, bus shelters, marijuana businesses, temporary uses, home occupations, Significant Environmental Concern (SEC) overlay standards, and recreational vehicle parks.

#### Focus Group Input

In April 2025, the project team held a series of conversations with community members, public agency representatives, and other interested parties to help identify potential opportunities for improving the County's Zoning Code. Three major themes emerged from the comments made in the interviews:

1. The application process is unclear and challenging, with many opportunities for improvement.
2. Permit applications, even for small changes to properties, require writing lengthy findings statements and can include costly technical studies in order to submit them.
3. The code format makes it hard to read and the technical language used in the code is difficult to understand.

These categories generally align with County staff's initial thoughts regarding potential changes to the code. More detailed responses and a full list of interview questions can be found in the Focus Group Interview Summary.

#### Community Meetings

The project team will conduct several community meetings this summer in partnership with neighborhood associations and other community partners to gather broader feedback about priority issues to address in this project. Meetings are expected to take place in July, 2025, with more rounds of meetings in Phases 2 and 3 of the project. A schedule of meetings will be posted on the project webpage once they are scheduled.