

# THEME A : CODE STRUCTURE

## THE PROBLEMS

The structure of current Zoning Ordinance has several problems:

- The code includes basic zoning districts and standards that apply in most places, except where customized districts exist.
- Basic zoning districts and standards do not reflect the framework of The Atlanta City Design (ACD), especially the City's diverse existing patterns of people, place-types, histories, etc.
- Basic zoning standards do not always result in the type of development that the City and its neighborhoods want, especially in pre-World War 2 neighborhoods (often classified as Urban Neighborhood Conservation Areas in the ACD).
- The process of creating customized districts today is time-consuming and complicated. Many neighborhoods lack the resources to do it.
- The City's existing customized zoning districts (e.g., Special Public Interests Districts and Historic and Conservation Districts) are often difficult to use due to inconsistent language. This creates challenges for applicants, neighborhoods, and the City.
- All of the above make it difficult for the City and its neighborhoods to easily address local needs.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION

Use a "Zone String" approach to codify many recommendations of the Diagnostic and reflect the place-based needs of Atlanta's diverse neighborhoods.

"Zone strings" would eliminate the idea of "one-size-fits-all" zoning districts and reduce or eliminate the need for new custom districts (e.g., SPIs, some Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts) to reflect local needs.

When we presented the concept of Zone Strings during the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Idea Labs, informal meeting polling found strong support.

When the concept of Zone Strings was presented during the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Idea Labs, meeting polling found strong support. Now that we've confirmed that the concept could be used to, at a minimum, replace basic zoning districts (e.g., everywhere except SPIs and Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts), we want to make sure we're on the right track.

If there is support for the concept, Focused Workshops #3 and #4 will explore specific standards for Zone Strings in both Atlanta City Design Growth and Conservation Areas.

## Share Your Thoughts

**A1. What do you think of using Zone Strings in Atlanta?**

## MORE ABOUT ZONE STRINGS

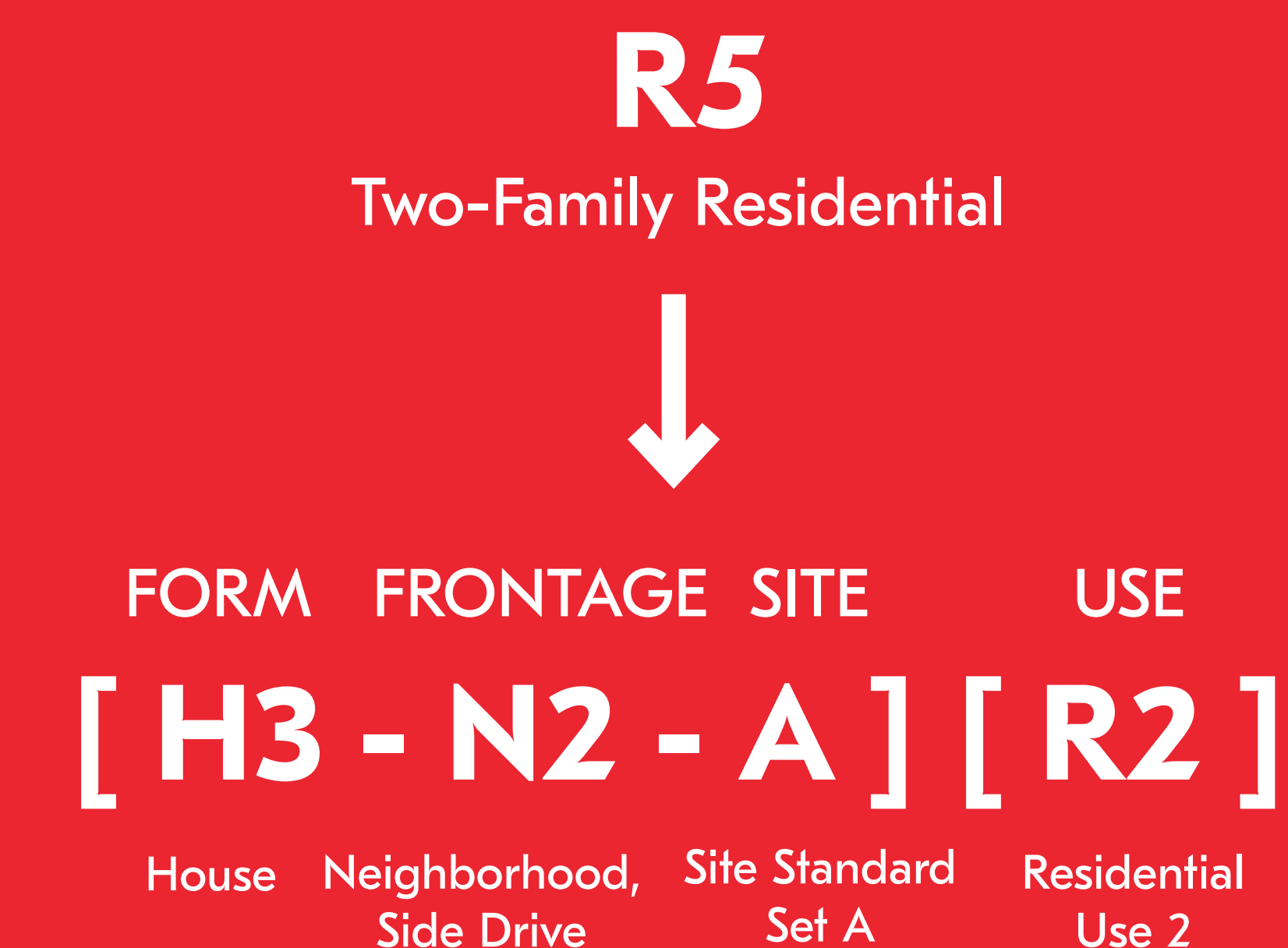
### Zone Strings

A zone string is combination of standards applied to a lot and could include Form, Frontage, Site standards, and Use.

### Zone String Brackets

The zoning of a lot could be separated into two interchangeable parts identified by bracket sets [ ]. The first bracket set could contain the standards that determine the built environment (Form, Frontage, and Site Standards), and the second bracket set could contain the standards that determines the types of activities on a lot (Use). Although the districts that make up the zone string might refer to other districts in the zone string, each district in the string would be independent, and the various districts could be combined in response to the variety of existing patterns and needs found throughout Atlanta.

An example of how a current zoning district might be converted into a zone string (without changing any regulations) is illustrated below:



### Zoning Districts

**Form** could regulate the placement, scale, and intensity of buildings and structures on a lot in order to ensure building forms are compatible with their surroundings and to promote projects that support community goals.

**Frontage** could regulate the portions of a lot and exterior building facades that impact the public realm. Frontage standards could help ensure that projects respond to the public realm in a contextually appropriate manner. Regulations could range from minimal standards to a robust set of standards which require projects to support a high-quality public realm that is active, comfortable, safe, and visually interesting, with strong connections between the public realm and uses inside buildings.

**Site Standards** could regulate site design, including location and characteristics of access, parking, landscaping, and other site features. They could also combine regulations that are appropriate to a variety of contexts such as City Centers, Urban Neighborhoods, Suburban Neighborhoods, and Rural Neighborhoods.

**Use** could establish a predetermined set of permitted uses in order to regulate activities on a lot and mitigate any potential impacts within a lot and on surrounding properties as a result of those activities.



# THEME B: EXISTING PATTERNS (PART 1)

## THE PROBLEMS

Many problems identified under Zone Strings relate to the existing Zoning Ordinance's poor job reflecting the existing patterns of some neighborhoods.

Most basic districts and standards were written in the 1970s with the goal of making Atlanta more competitive with the suburbs by imposing suburban standards on the city. While this is appropriate in Atlanta's Suburban Neighborhoods, it poses a challenge in Rural and Urban ones.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION

**Develop Zone Strings that reflect existing patterns found across Atlanta that are current illegally for future use.**

Currently, the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite is not planning to "rezone" any properties by changing their permitted density or uses. If there are areas that could benefit from "rezoning," these will occur after the new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map are adopted and in accordance with the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP).

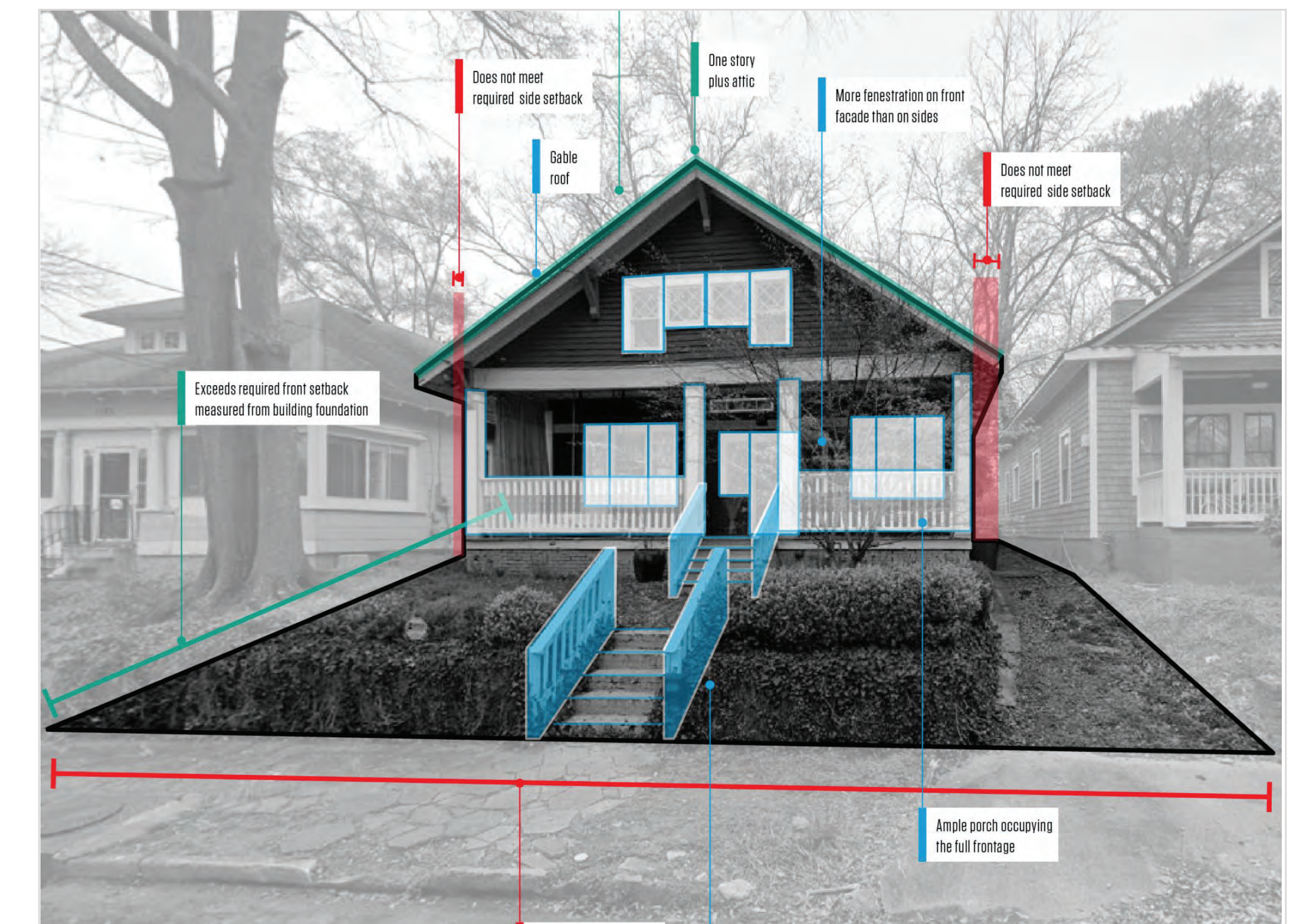
## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

### B1. Form Patterns: Setbacks

Create new **SETBACK** standards for where it is appropriate to match existing setback patterns, especially where built setbacks are much smaller or larger than the existing requirements.

**Did you know?**

Atlanta's zoning already allows front setback averaging where 50% or more of buildings on a block don't meet requirements.



### B2. Form Patterns: Lot Size

Create **LOT SIZE** standards for where it is appropriate to match existing lot size patterns, especially where existing lots are much smaller or larger than the existing requirement.

**Did you know?**

You can review nonconformity analyses by visiting [atlzoning.com](http://atlzoning.com) and selecting "Explore and Learn" at the top of the page.



### B3. Form Patterns: Sliding Scale

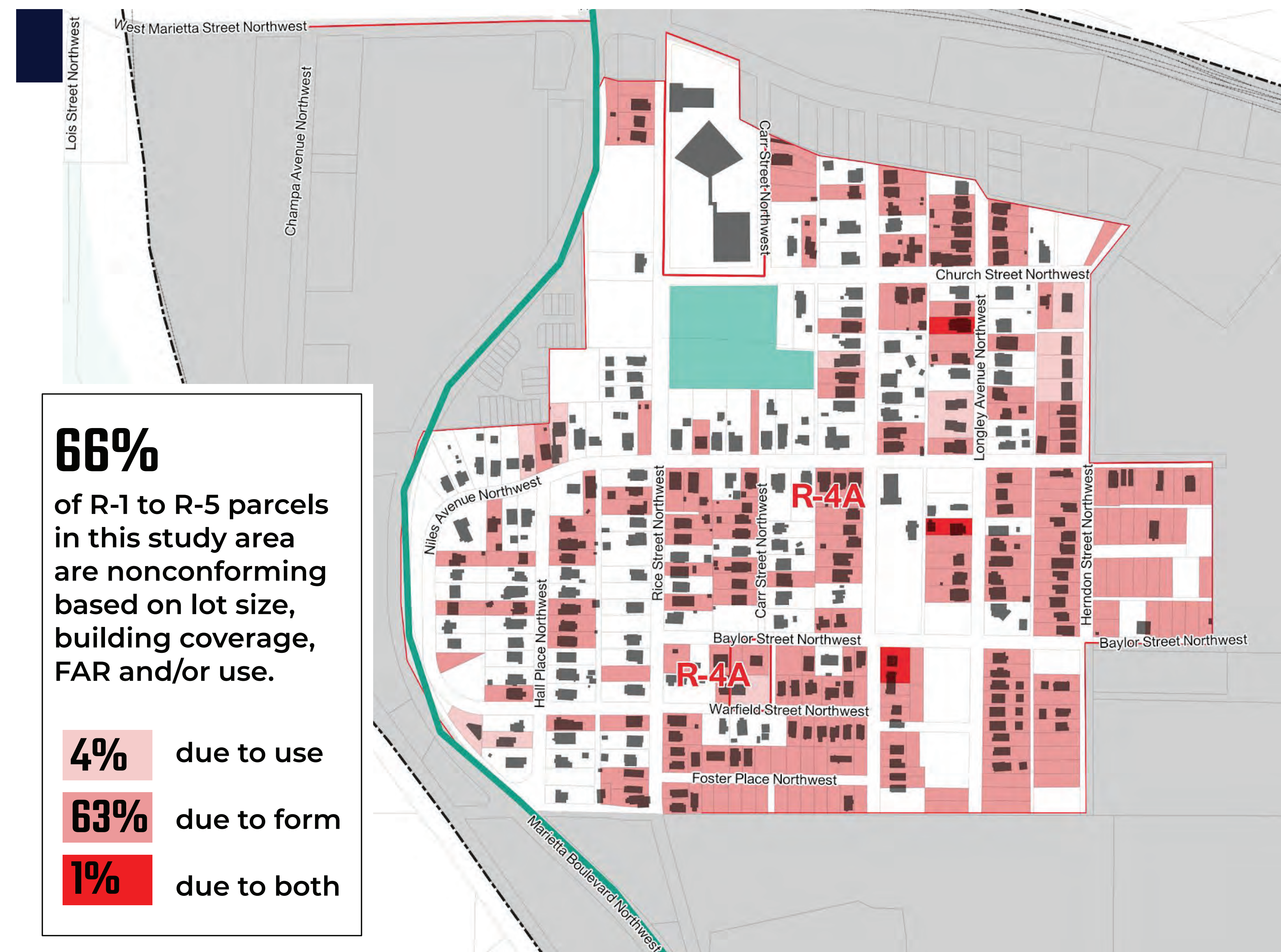
Create a "sliding scale" for where it is appropriate to provide predefined standards for existing lots that do not meet the minimum lot size.

**Did you know?**

This model is currently used in Poncey Highland due to its large number of nonconforming lots. It is also used in most older neighborhoods in Decatur.

### B4. Form Patterns: Prioritization

How important to you is developing standards that reflect existing **FORM PATTERNS** found across Atlanta (even if nonconforming) for future application, where appropriate?



**66%**

of R-1 to R-5 parcels in this study area are nonconforming based on lot size, building coverage, FAR and/or use.

**4%** due to use  
**63%** due to form  
**1%** due to both



# THEME B: EXISTING PATTERNS (PART 2)

## SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

### B5. Use Patterns

The uses at right are historically found in some neighborhoods but are often nonconforming today. Which, if any, do you think should be allowed again? Where it is appropriate to do so?

#### Did you know?

The Residential General (RG) district was intended to allow a mix of residential types but has not often been used that way.

### B6. Pilot Areas

Can you think of pilot areas where it may be appropriate to test allowing some of the uses at right and where there would be broad support?

### B7. Use Patterns: Prioritization

How important to you is developing standards that reflect existing **USE PATTERNS** found across Atlanta (even if nonconforming) for future application, where appropriate?

#### Accessory dwelling units, attached



#### Accessory dwelling units, detached



#### Corner stores



#### Live-work (home w/ commercial use)



#### Duplexes (2 main units per building)



#### Triplexes (3 main units per building)



#### Quadruplexes (4 main units per lot)



#### Cottage clusters (2+ houses per lot)



#### Townhouses



#### Walk-ups (5-12 main units per bldg)





# THEME C: FRONTAGES

## THE PROBLEMS

Many problems identified under Zone Strings are greatest when it comes to regulating how development relates to the street. By this we mean the placement of buildings on lots, the location of parking, the amount of windows and doors facing the street, building elements (e.g., balconies, storefronts, porches, stoops), retaining wall height, landscaping, and the overall building front size and shape. This usually excludes architectural **STYLE** or **MATERIALS**.

This can result in two more problems:

- New development that is incompatible with its surroundings in areas where City and/or neighborhood policies seek to preserve or protect local character; or
- New development that is incompatible with City and/or neighborhood plans for an area, especially where that plan calls for change.



City of Atlanta Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Focused Workshop #1 November 29, 2022

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**Continue to use Frontage Standards to regulate how a development relates to the street.**

Almost all zoning districts that currently regulate design (including many historic districts) use this approach. This approach avoids regulating style or materials. Rather, it focuses on avoiding blank walls along streets, prohibiting parking in front of buildings, or requiring storefronts, stoops, or porches, depending on context.

### C1. Frontage-Based Approach

Continue to use frontages standards.

### C2. Context-Based Standards

Develop standards for rural, suburban, and urban parts of Atlanta. These can be flexible/non-specific or inflexible/specific, depending on where they apply. We want to know what you think the right amount of regulation is in different areas.



### C3. New Frontage Standards

Allow frontages to include things not regulated today (except in existing Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts), where appropriate, such as:

- Architectural style (e.g., Arts and Crafts, Gothic, Spanish Revival, etc.)
- Building width (e.g., when the widths of existing buildings determine how wide new buildings can be)
- Exterior wall materials (e.g., brick, stone, stucco, wood siding, etc.)
- Front setback compatibility (i.e., when existing building setbacks determine the required front setback)
- Height compatibility (i.e., when existing building heights determines how tall a new building can be)
- Porch and stoop compatibility (when the



existence or porches or stoops determines if new buildings must have them).

- Roof form compatibility (i.e., when existing roof forms determine permitted new roof forms)

### C4. Neighborhood Frontages

Are there unique Frontage types in your neighborhood that you think the Zoning Ordinance should protect or require?

Please exclude Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts.

### C5. Frontage Prioritization

How important to you are frontage standards?

#### Did you know?

Every Atlanta zoning district effectively already contains Frontage standards.

Porch and stoop compatibility is required in all single-family districts, except R1, R2, R2A, and R2B.





# THEME D: PARKING DECK FORM

## THE PROBLEMS

Recent development in Growth Areas has greatly increased the number of large parking decks across the city. Often, their design only meets the minimum amount of screening and active ground floor uses required by zoning today. This results in:

- Taller buildings that often front the street as much as 20 stories of parking podium before active uses (e.g., housing, offices, hotels) begin. Podiums can discourage street life and reduce the public safety benefits of “eyes on the street,” especially along important corridors.
- Parking deck screening, heights, and designs that negatively impact their surroundings due to the “one-size-fits-all” nature of the citywide standards.

### New Development @ W P’tree & 17th



City of Atlanta Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Focused Workshop #1 November 29, 2022

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### Develop updated standards for parking deck design.

These could go beyond the current requirement for parking deck screening, active ground floor uses on some streets, and landscaping on others.

#### Reminder

The **AMOUNT** of parking provided will be addressed at a later workshop. This theme is only about parking deck design.

### D1. Active Ground-floor Uses

Require or encourage parking decks with active uses on the ground floor (e.g., shops, offices, housing).

### D2. Active Upper Story Uses

Require or encourage parking decks with active uses above the ground floor.

#### Did you know?

Many districts require active ground floor uses, but SPI 1 (Downtown) requires uses for the first 35 feet in height on key streets.

### D3. Adaptable Parking

Require or encourage parking decks to be easily convert to other uses.

#### Did you know?

Adaptable parking is expensive, especially for developments that normally use precast parking decks brought in and assembled on-site. The cost is often passed onto building occupants or customers, even if they don’t use it.

### D4. Buried Parking

Require or encourage buried parking.

#### Did you know?

Buried parking is very expensive and highly dependent on the geology of a site. The cost is often passed on to building occupants or customers, even if they don’t use it.

### D5. Context-Based Standards

Update existing citywide parking deck screening and height standards to better reflect their context.

### C6. Parking Deck Design Prioritization

How important to you is regulating the form of parking decks?

### Screening and Height @ Juniper St



### Ground-floor Uses @ 740 W. P’tree St



### Upper Story Uses @ 935 Marietta St



### Buried Parking @ 1389 Peachtree St





# THEME E: FLOOR AREA RATIO (FAR)

## THE PROBLEMS

While the City's use of floor area ratio (FAR) is well understood and provides clarity on how much theoretical development is allowed on a lot, it has several problems:

- The residential and nonresidential FAR distinction makes it hard for building to change use over time (without rezoning). Because the nonresidential FAR is often higher than the residential, rezoning land for housing can also result in rezoning for much more nonresidential density than is needed.
- Permitted FARs in multifamily, commercial, mixed-use districts are often arbitrarily precise and do not reflect any actual impact. Many regulate to the thousandth decimal place (e.g., 0.696).
- Parking decks do not count towards floor area in any zoning district, even though decks often are just as large as the buildings they serve.
- In districts that allow houses today (R1 through R5), the things that count towards floor area vary widely.

### What is FAR?

Floor area ratio (FAR) is the ratio of total floor area to the size of the piece of land upon which it is built.

$$\text{FAR} = \text{Floor Area} \div \text{Lot Area}$$

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**Update how FAR is used to be more flexible, consistent, and reflect the actual impact of development.**

These could be incorporated into Zone Strings.

### E1. FAR Reform

Review each zoning district's maximum FAR and consolidate similar FARs, when possible.

#### Did you know?

Today there are over 60 different FAR standards in the Zoning Ordinance.

Sometimes FAR is required to the thousandths decimal place.

### E2. Mixed-Use Floor Area

Stop differentiating between residential and non-residential floor area in mixed-use developments.

#### Did you know?

Today it is sometimes impossible to convert an obsolete commercial building to housing without a rezoning.

### E3. Elements of Floor Area

Update what counts as floor area.

### E4. FAR Bonuses

Use FAR bonuses to encourage things that the City cannot require through zoning.

### E5. FAR Prioritization

How important to you is updating FAR standards?



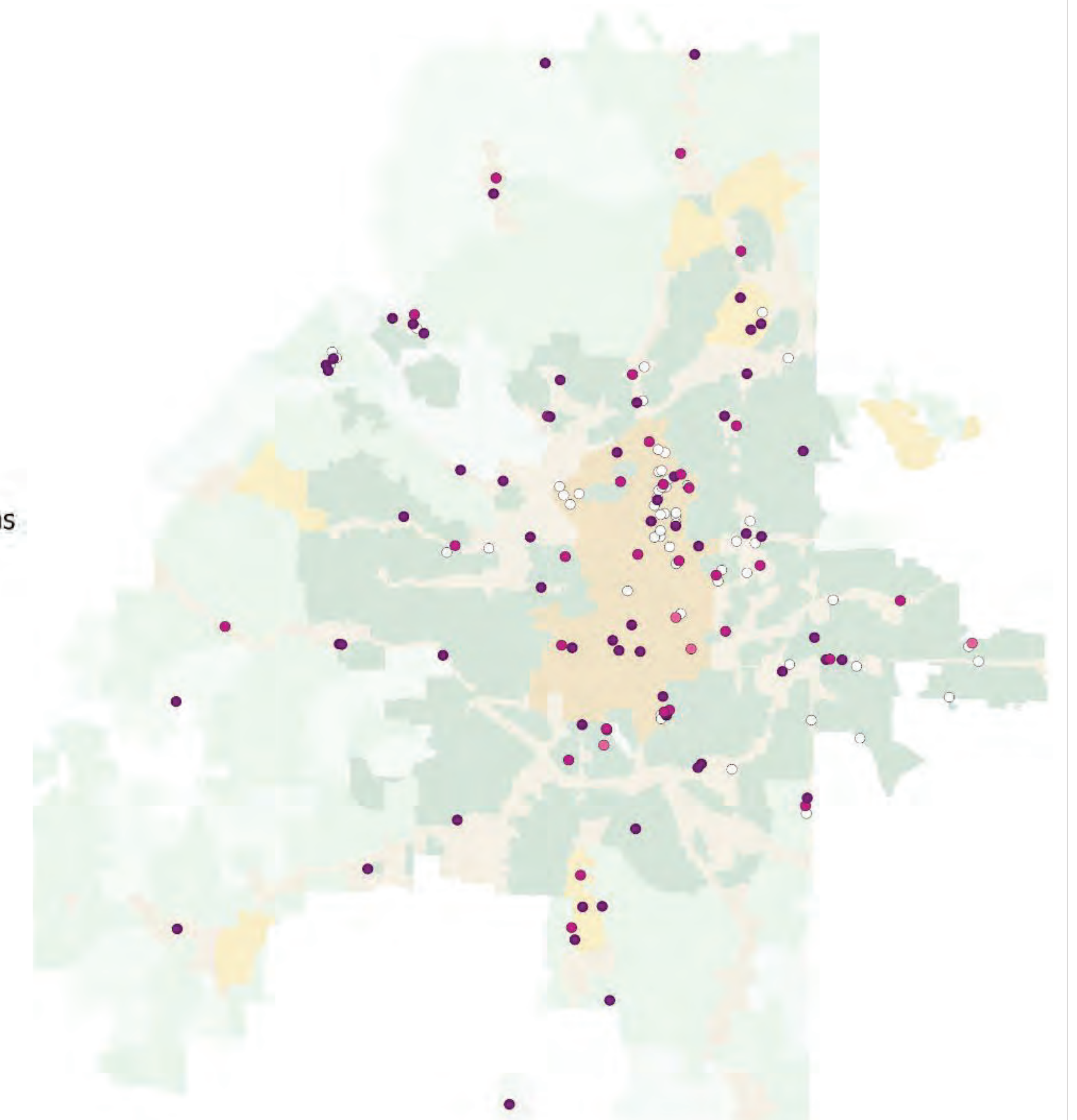
## Map Showing Remaining (Unused) FAR in Recent Years

### Percent Remaining FAR

- 40% or less
- 40% - 65%
- 65% - 90%
- 90% or more
- No FAR Remaining

### City Design Areas

- Growth Areas - Core
- Growth Areas - Corridors
- Growth Areas - Clusters
- Conservation Areas - Production Areas
- Conservation Areas - Urban
- Conservation Areas - Suburban
- Conservation Areas - Rural





# THEME F: BUILDING HEIGHT

## THE PROBLEMS

The City's current building height standards pose some problems:

- Height standards in multifamily, commercial, mixed-use districts often seem arbitrary and not grounded in construction methods or impact on adjacent properties.
- Height standards in commercial and mixed-use districts often discourage the creation of quality ground floor commercial space by limiting the floor to ceiling height.
- Height standards do not always allow the amount of floor area allowed by the zoning district to be built.
- Height standards do not consider topography.
- Height standards in some R1 through R5 districts allow out-of-scale new construction. See Theme C: Frontages.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**Update and consolidate height standards to consider off-site impacts, construction methods, topography, permitted floor area, and more.**

These could be incorporated into Zone Strings.

### E1. Height Standard Reform

Review each zoning district's maximum FAR and consolidate similar FARs, when possible.

### E2. Viable Floor to Ceiling Heights

Require minimum floor to ceiling heights for ground floor and/or upper story spaces

#### Did you know?

Many multifamily developers don't understand the types of ground floor spaces that business need to thrive. They often build ceilings in that are too low.

Minimum floor to ceiling heights would create more predictable building heights in terms of the number of stories.

### E3. Height and Topography

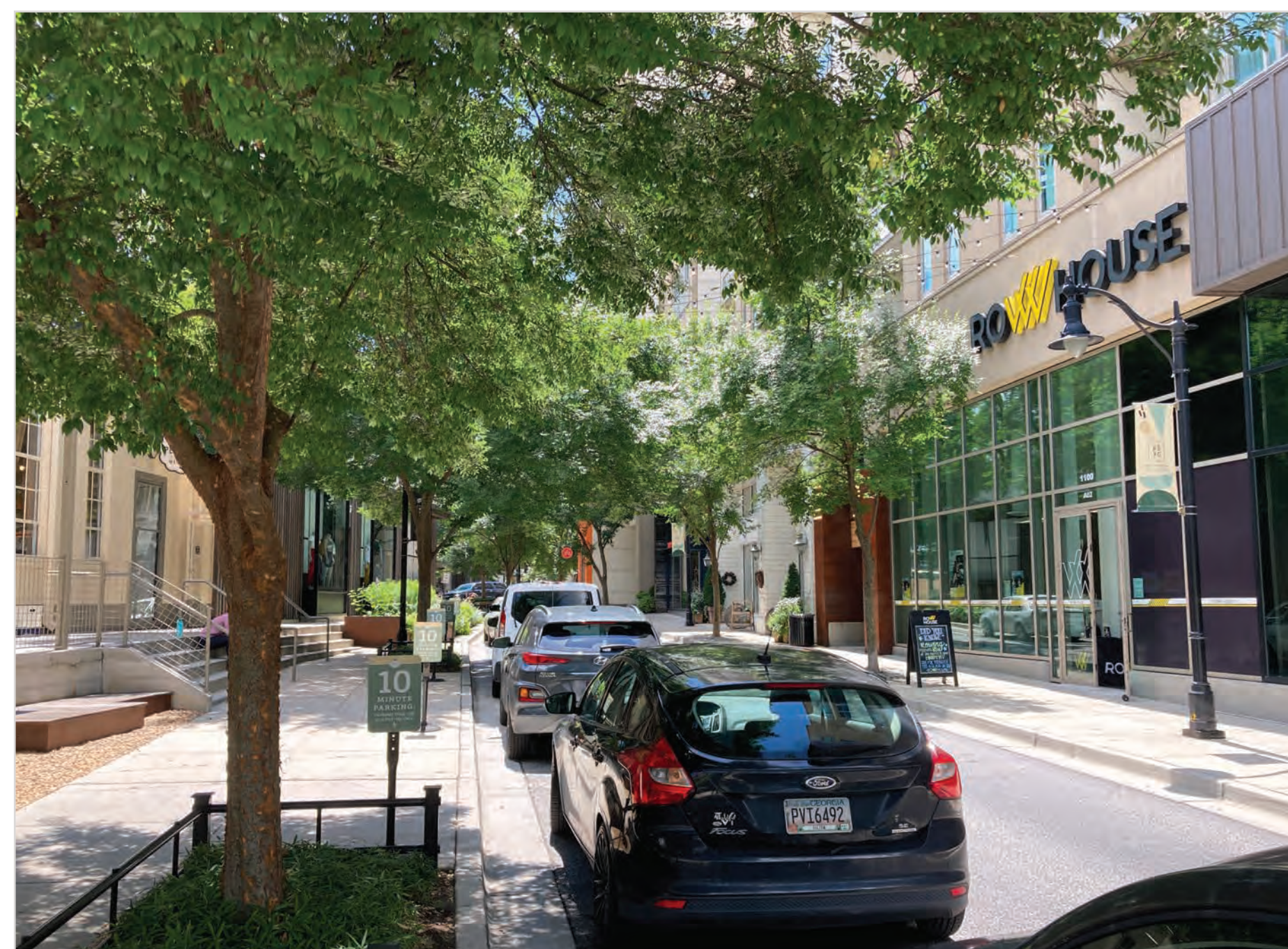
Require height to be periodically recalculated on to account for slopes.

### E4. Height Bonuses

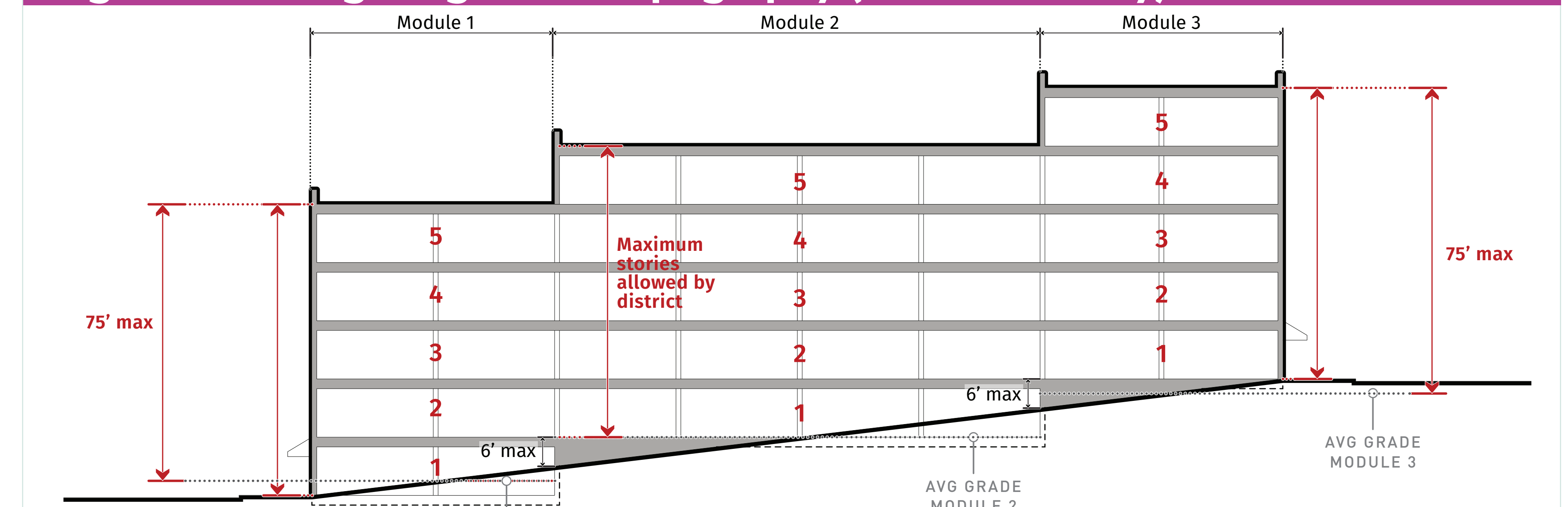
Use height bonuses to encourage things that the City cannot require through zoning.

### E5. Height Standard Prioritization

How important to you is updating height standards?



### Diagram Showing Height and Topography (illustrative only)





# THEME G: TRANSITIONAL STANDARDS

## THE PROBLEMS

The City's current tools for transitioning between higher and lower intensity areas are primarily limited to BUFFER, HEIGHT, and USE standards and have the following problems:

- Standards do not always reflect the needs of different neighborhoods, especially older urban neighborhoods with strong established physical patterns.
- Standards do not always sufficiently protect lower intensity areas from negative impacts of higher intensity areas.
- Outdoor lighting standards are inconsistent and vary by zoning district.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**Expand the ways to transition between more intense and less intense developments.**

These could be incorporated into Zone Strings.

### G1. Buffer Transitions

Update existing buffer standards (e.g., the transitional yard) to include more ways to transition between higher and lower intensity areas.

#### Did you know?

Today there are two main options for transition options:

- 20 ft. landscape buffer; or
- 10 ft. landscape buffer + 10 ft. alley.

Some Historic and Cultural Conservation Districts use other options.

### G2. Height Transitions

Incorporate updated height transitions.

#### Did you know?

Today the City uses a transitional height plane that requires tall buildings to step down in height adjacent to lower intensity areas.

### G3. Use Transitions

Incorporate updated use transitions.

#### Did you know?

Most commercial or mixed-use zoning districts today do not allow drive-throughs,

### Transitional Yard (20 ft. landscape buffer)



Photo by Kyle Sudu on Unsplash

car washes, service stations, funeral homes, or vehicular sales or repair within 100 feet of a residential district.

### G4. Outdoor Lighting

Develop consistent outdoor lighting standards to reduce light trespass.

### G5. Transitional Standard Prioritization

How important to you is updating transitional standards?

### Transitional Height Plane



### Historic Transition in Grant Park





# THEME H: OPEN SPACE

## THE PROBLEMS

The current approach to open space is largely regulated by the Land Use Intensity (LUI) Table. The table provides for variable open space requirements based on density. Under this system, a lot can have wildly different open space requirements, depending on its density. Generally, medium-density lots have lower open space requirements than low or high density ones. Both the types of open space tools pose the following challenges:

- The physical result of the LUI Table is unpredictable. The types of open spaces it allows are broad and include everything from parking lots (which count towards Total Open Space), to private balconies, to natural areas, to landscape parks or plazas.
- The LUI Table encourages the garden apartments and “towers in the park” that were common in the 1970s, and which can still be seen around the former Atlanta Civic Center. These no longer reflect the type of development advocated in various City plans.
- Developments that conform to the LUI Table often still lack any meaningful gathering spaces.
- Existing “public space” and “usable open space” standards do not consistently result in meaningful open space.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

**Replace the LUI Table with a new strategy that requires high-quality, usable open space that responds to context.**

These could be incorporated into Zone Strings.

### H1. Eliminating of TOSR

Eliminate Total Open Space Required (TOSR), which treats parking lots as open space.

**Did you know?**

Most districts written or updated in the past 20+ years have stopped using TOSR.

### H2. Context-Based Standards

Update open space standards to have different standards in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

**Did you know?**

Many Special Public Interest (SPI) Districts already have context-based standards.

### Total Open Space Required (TOSR)



### H3. Amount of Open Space

Update how much open space is required. Consider:

- Density neutrality
- Common space per residential unit
- Private space per residential unit
- Based on residential units
- Based on lot size

### H5. Open Space Incentives

Use incentives to encourage certain types of open space (that might not meet current city definitions), where appropriate.

### H5. Open Space Prioritization

How important to you is updating open Space standards?

