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Akron Planning Department - Summit Lake Meeting

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Agency: City of Akron

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Summary

- The meeting was hosted by the [City of Akron's Department of Planning and Urban Development](#) to propose rezoning part of the Summit Lake neighborhood. The rezoning is based on findings published in the [Our Summit Lake Neighborhood Land Plan](#) in 2022. This community planning process began in 2021 and with [Our Summit Lake](#), a “community planning process” led by the City of Akron with guidance from a resident advisory board. City Council passed a new zoning code in November (Ordinance No. 336-2023), which adds a form-based zoning code. This form-based coding is currently only being used in Merriman Valley, and Summit Lake is the next potential neighborhood to utilize it. {Editor’s note: A form-based code uses physical forms and allows for a mix of compatible uses as opposed to separation of uses in traditional zoning. [Learn more here.](#)}
- A public hearing for the proposed zoning will be held during the [Akron City Planning Commission's Jan. 19 meeting](#). If the proposed rezoning is approved by the commission, it will go to council for approval, most likely in February.

Follow-Up Questions

- Why did the city’s social media accounts not advertise this meeting?
- Why did the city choose Summit Lake as the next neighborhood to implement form-based code?
- Will the Planning Department make any updates or changes to the proposed rezoning based on questions, concerns, and suggestions made during this meeting before it goes to the Planning Commission on Jan. 19?

Notes

- City of Akron Department of Planning and Urban Development members present: Kyle Julien (newly appointed director of planning), Mike Antenucci (zoning manager), Daniel DeAngelo (city planner), Helen Tomic (long-range planning manager), and at least two others (they were not introduced).
- Elected officials present: Akron Ward 3 representative and City Council President Margo Sommerville and Summit County Council President and District 5 representative Veronica Sims (the section of the neighborhood discussed during this meeting is located in Akron's Ward 3 and Summit County's District 5).
- There were also staff present from the [Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority](#).
- DeAngelo stood at the front of the room and presented a slideshow while the others hosting the meeting stood to the side and answered questions from the side. He said the goal of the meeting was to have a conversation, ask questions and voice concerns.
- The meeting agenda was as follows:
 - Neighborhood land plan overview
 - Why the city needs new zoning
 - What is the Akron form-based zoning code
 - Proposed zoning districts and maps in Summit Lake
 - Discussion and Q&A

Neighborhood land plan overview:

- DeAngelo summarized the community feedback gathered in 2021 and 2022 that was published in the Our Summit Lake Community Land Plan. The proposed changes presented were based on the Community Feedback Themes (found on page 22 in the Land Plan document).
- He showed maps with proposed greenspaces and parks. One map showed greenway connectors, which are green spaces located near the middle of larger blocks and are meant to make longer blocks more walkable.
- DeAngelo also discussed possible street and sidewalk improvements, including improving the crosswalks on Lake Shore Boulevard. The planning department is also working with traffic engineering at the intersection of I-76 to cut down the four lanes to slow traffic.

Why the city needs new zoning:

- DeAngelo said that this was modernizing and updating zoning codes in the neighborhood so that the ideas and feedback given in 2021 and 2022 could be

achieved, particularly for the neighborhood's vacant land parcels.

- There is a mismatch between the current zoning and how the land is being used (not just in the Summit Lake neighborhood but in many parts of Akron). He showed how most of the Summit Lake neighborhood is currently zoned for single-family housing, but current land use shows the land is being used in other ways that aren't technically allowed (e.g., two-family homes) with the current zoning.
- [Summit Lake Choice Neighborhoods Plan](#) is working to update existing Summit Lake Apartments and rebuild them over time. Because the area is currently zoned as two-family and these units are not two-family, they cannot build or renovate until the zoning is updated.
- “Middle housing” is missing in the area. DeAngelo explained “middle housing” as any type of housing that is not a single-family home or an apartment building: two-family housing, small apartment buildings, townhouses, cottage courts, etc. “Middle housing” tends to be more affordable and an entry to homeownership. He said that the city wants the existing “middle housing” to be maintained and also wants people to build more of it.

What is the Akron form-based zoning code?:

- The city is transitioning from the currently used traditional zoning to form-based code zoning. The current zoning has been updated over time, but it was originally written in 1922.
- City Council passed the [form-based code](#) in November 2023 (Ordinance No. 336-2023), and it has been [implemented in the Merriman Valley neighborhood](#). Summit Lake is the next neighborhood where the city is looking to implement form-based code.
- DeAngelo explained traditional zoning vs. form-based code and used images of both types of zoning as examples.
 - Traditional zoning:
 - Divides land into distinct, separated uses
 - Separates zones of where you live, work, go to school, shop, etc., meaning that consequently you have to drive to go to different places
 - Requires a lot of parking, and parking lots are usually in front of a building
 - Focuses on building type
 - Doesn't require sidewalks or trees in the devil strip
 - Uses wordy, legal language
 - Reactive
 - Form-based code:

- Allows a mix of compatible uses
- Mixed uses allow for an area to have a variety of things (homes, stores, schools, etc.) and consequently makes an area more walkable
- Focus on building form: height and scale; building location on the site; parking location (behind building), windows facing street
- Proactive vision
- See the image of “What is a Form-Based Code?” handout for further information on form-based code

Proposed zoning districts and maps in Summit Lake:

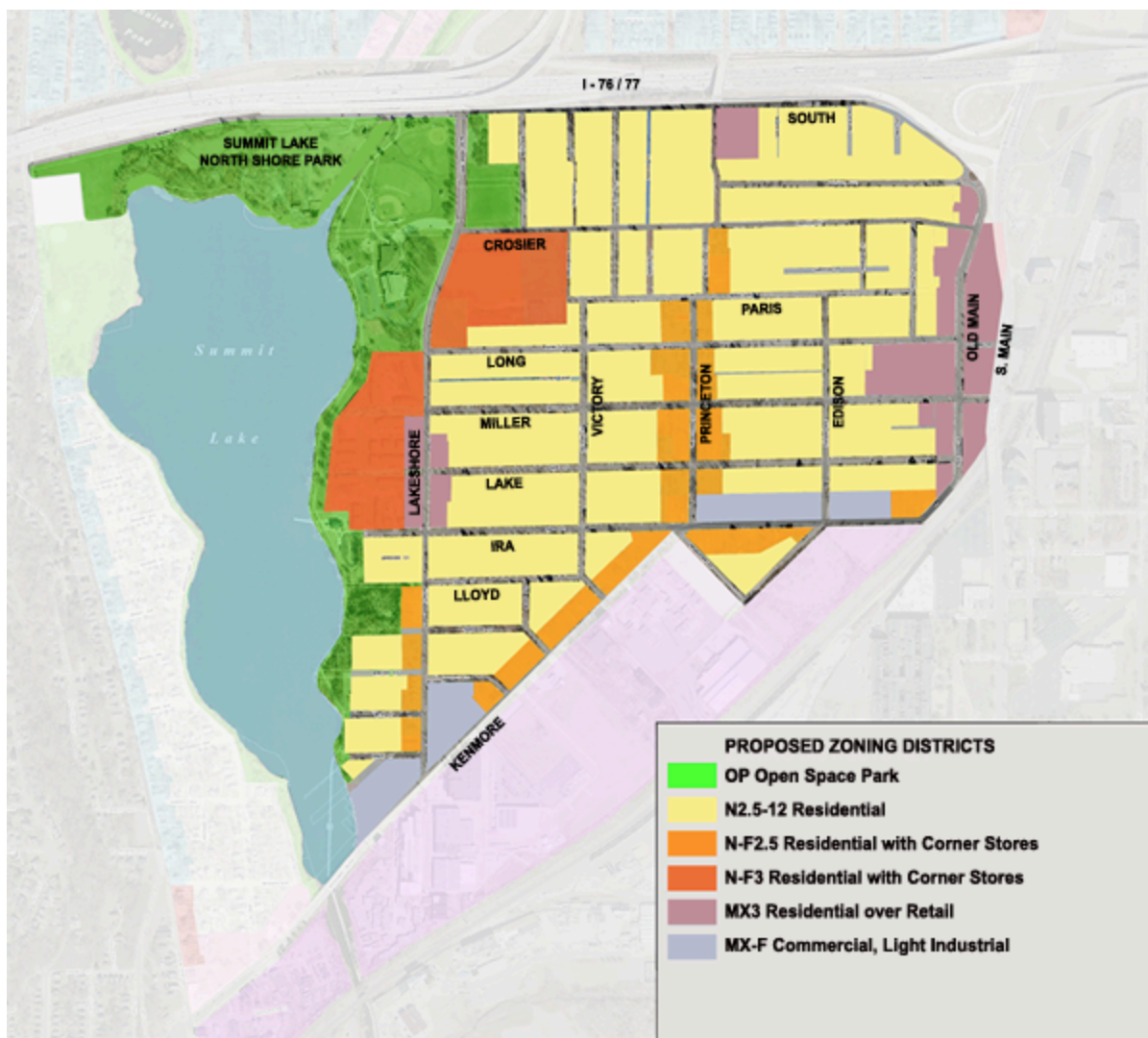


Image from the [Summit Lake Land Plan Proposed Rezoning Map](#)

- DeAngelo presented this map and explained the proposed zoning districts:

- OP Open Space Park:
 - This is a new type of zone. The city didn't previously have this type of zone
- N2.5-12 Residential:
 - Allows mixed types of housing: single-family houses, townhouses, small apartment buildings (up to 12 units)
- N-F2.5 Residential with Corner Stores 2.5 Stories:
 - Allows same housing types as N2.5-12 zone, but also allows corner stores (such as barber shops, beauty salons, insurance offices, tax preparers, coffee shops) in buildings up to 2.5 stories high
- N-F3 Residential with Corner Stores 3 Stories:
 - Allows same housing types as N2.5-12 zone, but also allows corner stores (such as barber shops, beauty salons, insurance offices, tax preparers, coffee shops) in buildings up to three stories high
- MX3 Mixed-Use Residential over Retail:
 - Allows retail on ground floor, residential above
- MX-F Mixed-Use Flex Commercial, Light Industrial
 - Allows light manufacturing, offices, some retail. Retail on ground floor, residential above
- The proposed rezoning was based on the type of housing that is currently there.
- The city believes this proposed rezoning will help achieve these goals: make the neighborhood more walkable, safer and more equitable for residents, preserve greenspaces, and protect the character of the neighborhood.
- DeAngelo noted that the proposed rezoning mainly affects new construction.

Discussion and Q&A:

- Approximately an hour was dedicated to questions.
- Some of the questions and concerns:
 - The neighborhood experiences a lot of power outages.
 - Problem of geese all over the neighborhood. How can they be encouraged to stay in the green spaces?
 - City will look into ways to manage the geese. A woman from Summit Metro Parks mentioned that Cleveland Metroparks uses trained dogs to keep the geese away.
 - The proposed greenway could be unsafe for children traveling through because it crosses several streets. There were requests for the greenways to not travel north to south or that a designated track be built instead.
 - DeAngelo noted that the greenways were placed in the least dense part of the neighborhood, but they will take these comments and

concerns into consideration. They can also do traffic studies and implement traffic calming measures.

- Proposed corner store zoning could bring more traffic, especially on Princeton Street. How much retail do they anticipate coming in?
 - DeAngelo said that these are smaller stores typically just serving the neighborhood, so ideally most customers are walking, not driving. He doesn't believe every single lot on Princeton Street will become retail, and some of these could become an insurance office or something else that does not always have a lot of traffic. The corner stores there now are illegally non-conforming, so changing the zoning will allow these corner stores to conform to the new zoning code.
 - Some residents were concerned about this and wanted the city to reconsider.
- What kind of housing is the city trying to attract to the neighborhood? What is the city considering “affordable housing?” The resident asking the question mentioned new single-family homes being built near Rhodes Avenue and Copley Road and selling for \$200,000 to \$270,000.
 - DeAngelo replied that that is the market price for building a new home. The city is hoping to build some of these homes in the neighborhood, but officials also want to build affordable housing that is at a lower price point.
 - Tomic noted that the city is looking to work with partners such as Habitat for Humanity to build houses, as well as exploring other opportunities such as offering lower interest rates or putting liens on houses.
- What can the city do about the neighborhood being redlined and out-of-town people buying houses?
 - Julien noted that this is a big policy question, but the proposed rezoning supports more types of housing and makes it easier for someone to build, so it is more likely there will be more quality housing that is affordable.
- Once the neighborhood is rezoned, will current residents be pushed out?
 - Antenucci said that he does not think this will happen and that this new zoning allows for different types of housing at different price points.
 - [The Choice Neighborhood Project](#) run by Akron and the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA) promises to revitalize [Summit Lake Apartments](#), a public housing

development built in 1965. There are currently 239 units there that AMHA plans to keep at the same affordability level. Current residents will be the first people invited to come back to live. AMHA will be adding more units, with slightly higher price points.

- Why does proposed rezoning not include the west side of Summit Lake, an area originally included in older maps? Is there a future plan to rezone the west side of the lake and north of I-76/77?
 - The city is focusing on this area first, officials said, which has taken a lot of work. 2,200 notices were sent out within the proposed area. But the plan is to expand into other parts of the neighborhood in the next year or so, eventually rezoning all of the land mentioned in the original land use plan. The city eventually wants to update zoning across the entire city and is doing it slowly.
- Does the new zoning allow for construction of tiny homes and container homes?
 - Yes. Both of these are allowed as long as they meet other requirements of the city zoning code (must be attached to a permanent foundation, connected to city services, etc.) and state building code. Tiny homes or container homes could be an accessory dwelling unit or on an individual lot, and multiple can be on a single lot.

Notes to reader: Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at documenters@signalakron.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.