



Urban Research & Development Corporation

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Summary of the Draft Old Forge Borough Zoning Ordinance

A series of maps, a set of studies, and draft policies were prepared and discussed as part of a draft new Comprehensive Plan for Old Forge. The Comprehensive Plan is an overall set of policies to guide the development and preservation of Old Forge over the next 10 to 15 years. Based upon those policies, working with a Borough Advisory Committee, a new draft Zoning Ordinance is being completed. We also are assembling and updating the various sections of the draft Comprehensive Plan over the next couple weeks to provide a complete draft of that document. Our goal is to consider the draft Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance at a joint set of meetings - one by the Borough Planning Commission and one by Borough Council.

The overall goals are to provide compatibility between different types of development, to protect residential areas from nuisances and hazards, to avoid traffic problems, to protect important natural features, and to encourage appropriate locations for different types of businesses to grow the tax base and expand employment opportunities.

The Zoning Ordinance is the main tool that the Borough has to address new development. The Zoning Ordinance divides the Borough into various zoning districts. Each zoning district allows a range of land uses and varying intensities of development.

Zoning is primarily directed towards new development, new construction and expansions of existing uses. If an existing legal use operates today, it can generally continue to operate regardless of the zoning district. This is known as a “non-conforming use.” A non-conforming use typically predates zoning or a zoning amendment. Generally, a non-conforming use can expand within limits, can be sold, and can be changed to a different non-conforming use, provided the new use is not more intensive than the previous use.

Proposed Zoning Districts

Most of the proposed zoning districts are similar in purpose to existing zoning districts. Some changes in zoning district boundaries are proposed, but they are not revolutionary changes. The uses allowed in each district are proposed to be updated.

E-1 Environmental Conservation - This district mainly includes undeveloped land that was formerly mined in the west-central part of the Borough, which is north of Edgewood Dr. and west of Pittson Av. on both sides of Mountain Road. The district also includes land along the Lackawanna River east of Bridge St. The site suffered from contamination from past waste landfill operations. This district is proposed to mainly allow single family detached houses on one acre minimum lots, as well as commercial outdoor recreation uses and campgrounds. In addition, the new zoning draft would allow solar energy facilities, which are an appropriate use above lands that have a cap to contain past environmental contamination.

R-1 Low Density Residential - This district mainly includes most newer residential areas of the Borough, including areas south of Edgewood Dr., areas around the High School, areas west of Lenape Dr., areas along the Lackawanna River, areas near the Duryea border, and areas along Spring St. near Milwaukee Av. Most of the undeveloped residentially zoned land in the Borough would continue to be zoned R-1. This district would continue to allow single family detached houses on 9,000 sq. ft. lots (about 1/4 acre) and side-by-side twin homes. Townhouses at an average of 4 homes per acre and personal care/assisted living homes (with a 2 acre minimum lot size) would be allowed with conditional use approval by Borough Council. The district would no longer apartments at 10 homes per acre. Conversions of an existing one family home into two or more housing units would be prohibited.

R-1A Moderate Density Residential - This district includes a few areas of existing homes, including areas along Moosic Rd. near Small St., areas along Church St. northeast of Winter St., and an area west of Milwaukee Av. north of Villa Dr. This district would continue to mainly allows single family detached houses on 6,000 sq. ft. lots (such as 60 by 100), and twin homes and townhouses at an average of 6,000 sq. ft. per unit. Personal care/assisted living homes (with a 2 acre minimum lot size) would be allowed with conditional use approval by Borough Council. The district would no longer allow apartments at 14 homes per acre. Conversions of an existing one family home into two or more housing units would be prohibited.

R-2 Medium Density Residential - This district mainly includes older residential areas, including areas southeast and northwest of the downtown, areas along Oak St. near Albion St., and areas northwest of Milwaukee Av. along Franklin St. An existing apartment development west of Milwaukee Av. is proposed to be changed to R-2. This district would allow a full range of housing types at an average of 4,000 square feet per housing unit. As a result, the maximum density of apartments would be reduced from 14 to 10 homes per acre. Conversions of an existing one family home into two or more housing units would be prohibited, except for unusually large homes that have over 3,000 square feet of heated floor area.

C-1 Main Street Commercial - This district mainly includes most areas along the length of Main St. It also includes two areas along Sibley Av., including around the intersection with Milwaukee Av. A couple areas along Main St. are proposed to be changed from C-1 to R-2, including an area near Dunn St. and an area near Morton St. The lots fronting Main St. across from Borough Hall would be changed from C-2 to C-1, while the back of the property that was a grocery store would remain C-2.

The intent of the Main Street district is allow types of commercial uses that fit in well with neighboring homes and that promote pedestrian activity, including retail stores, personal service uses, offices, funeral homes and dance schools. Restaurants would be allowed, but not drive-throughs. This district would no longer allow new gas stations, vehicle repair garages and car washes. Currently, residential uses are limited to “dwellings related to businesses.” Instead, new apartments would be allowed by right, provided that a lot along Main Street would need to include a street level commercial use. Buildings in all of Old Forge’s commercial and industrial districts are limited to only 2 stories, vs. the new draft would allow 3 stories. New buildings would be required to be built close to the street, as opposed to a strip-mall type of design with a large parking lot in front of a building.

C-2 Highway Commercial - This district would continue to include an area along Lonesome Road near the Lackawanna River and portions of Moosic St. near Quarry and Carbon Sts. A portion of the east side of Moosic St. that mainly includes existing homes is proposed to be changed from C-2 to R-1A. The current C-3 district would become part of the C-2 district. As a result, much of the southeast side of Milwaukee Av. south of Sibley Av. would be zoned C-2.

This district would continue to allow a wide range of commercial uses, including auto body shops, vehicle repair, vehicle sales, offices, restaurants and motels. This district would no longer allow trucking terminals, light manufacturing uses, and manufactured/mobile home parks. Junkyards would be prohibited. This district also would not allow warehouses and distribution centers.

I-1 Light Industrial - This district mainly includes lands along the railroad north of the Lackawanna River and south of Hoover St., which includes Verrastro, Marriotti Building Products and Jed Pool Tools. It includes an area north of Hoover St. that includes Northeastern Envelope and Newbreed Athletics. The district also includes an area along Wood St. south of Drake St. An area northwest of Milwaukee Av./Keyser Ave. west of the Alliance Landfill would be changed to I-1. An industrial area west of Bridge St. would be changed from I-2 to I-1. This district would not allow landfills or junkyards.

The draft ordinance would include a stronger distinction between the types of industrials allowed in the light industrial district vs. the general industrial district. Currently, there are few differences in the allowed uses in the two districts in Old Forge. Most common types of industrial uses would be allowed in the I-1 district, plus some commercial uses. A full set of standards are proposed to control large distribution centers, including larger setbacks from homes and a requirement for conditional use approval by the Borough Council.

New billboards are proposed to be limited to the two industrial districts. Currently, billboards are allowed in both industrial districts and the C-2 district. New billboards would be limited to 300 sq. ft., which is less than half the size of billboards that are commonly seen along major highways. There would be large setbacks between a new billboard and an existing home.

I-2 General Industrial - This district includes an area of land along the Duryea border that is northwest of Lackawanna River, south of Connell St. is mostly open land that was mined. The General Industrial district is proposed to allow a wide range of commercial and industrial uses. Under State law, a municipality needs to have a location that allows almost all types of land uses.

Please contact us if there are any questions or comments.