

Blue Springs, Missouri

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Communities across the country have opted to introduce pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions into their zoning and land use regulations to foster increased community walkability. This study identifies best practices and lessons learned in adopting and implementing New Urbanist and pedestrian-oriented zoning. Information for each community was gleaned through key informant interviews with planning officials and documentary/Internet research. Fifteen communities across the United States were selected as case studies for this project from a larger, nationwide study of pedestrian-oriented zoning; profiles were developed for 13 out of the 15 communities and are presented herein.

Current Pedestrian-Oriented Zoning Provisions

The [Downtown Development Code](#), adopted in 2007, implemented recommendations enumerated in the [Blue Springs 2006 Downtown Master Plan](#) and resulted in the creation of the [Downtown Zoning District](#). This district fosters a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly environment with an array of housing options and quality public spaces. The district employs [New Urbanist transect zones](#), or, as Blue Springs refers to them, T-zones, which determine the intensity and density of the built environment. In the Downtown Zoning District, land uses vary from T3 (suburban zones), T4 (general urban), and T5 (urban center) transect zones. T3 zones are the least dense and provide a residential context to the community. T4 zones still yield significant residential uses but provides a wider variety of housing options which permit more density. T5 zones encourage dense, mixed-use developments and are located at the core of the downtown district. The Downtown Zoning District provides the convenience of living in a central location, where residents can walk to restaurants, shopping, and other community amenities.

After the adoption of the Downtown Zoning District, Blue Springs adopted a [Unified Development Code](#) in 2015, which includes specific requirements for pedestrian access. Elements of the Unified Development Code facilitate the construction of sidewalks in areas that connect pedestrians to businesses and retail.

The Unified Development Code also introduced the [Neighborhood Limited](#) and [Neighborhood Open](#) zones which encourage New Urbanist and Traditional Neighborhood Design elements such as a diverse mix of housing types and densities within a particular subdivision.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE BLUE SPRINGS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Catalyst for Implementing Zoning Changes

Blue Springs sought to facilitate a streamlined development process for the creation of walkable and denser communities in response to national trends and community input for downsized and alternative housing options. The Neighborhood Limited and Neighborhood Open zoning designations served to simplify the development of vibrant, New Urbanist community areas.

Additionally, Blue Springs adopted the Downtown Zoning District in order to encourage reinvestment in areas around the downtown that were vacant or sparsely developed into mixed-use, higher density developments.

Perceived Impacts Since Implementing Zoning Changes

Increased Pedestrian Activity

Businesses located in the Downtown Zoning District have noted an increase in pedestrian foot traffic since zoning changes have been made. Residents are also drawn into downtown as a result of numerous events hosted year-round in the district.

Increased Connectivity & Walkability

As a result of specific requirements in the Unified Development Code, Blue Springs has benefitted from increased sidewalk development which provides walkable connections throughout the community.

Increased Economic Development

Small businesses and residents are choosing to relocate to the Downtown Zoning District as a result of the new developments and investments in the district. Commercial vacancy rates have significantly decreased since implementing the zoning changes. Blue Springs' downtown now serves as a vibrant economic engine for the community.

Increased Mixed-use & Higher Density Development

Since implementing the Downtown Zoning District, property owners have been able to convert two-story buildings into mixed-use projects with retail on the ground-floor and residential units above. These conversions meet residents' desires for more affordable, downsized housing options within Blue Springs.

BLUE SPRINGS DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	
Total Population	54,036
Median Household Income	\$68,258
Median Age	34.5
% Households with related children <18	39.5%
% White (non-Hispanic)	84.4%
% Black (non-Hispanic)	8.1%
% Hispanic	5.4%
Average Temperature December/July	32/78°F
Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2017); The Weather Channel, 2019	

Resources for Further Information

City of Blue Springs 2006 Downtown Master Plan
<https://www.bluespringsgov.com/1740/Downtown-Master-Plan>

City of Blue Springs Downtown Development Code
<http://www.bluespringsgov.com/211/Downtown-Development-Code>

City of Blue Springs Unified Development Code
<https://ecode360.com/BL3243-DIV-06>

Section 404.115 Neighborhood Limited District, Blue Springs Zoning District Regulations
<https://ecode360.com/28244717?highlight=limited,neighborhood,neighborhood%20limited,neighborhoods#28244717>

Section 404.118 Neighborhood Open District, Blue Springs Zoning District Regulations
<https://ecode360.com/28244732?highlight=neighborhood,neighborhood%20open,neighborhoods,open#28244732>

Transect Zones, Congress for the New Urbanism
<https://www.cnu.org/resources/tools>

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Planning officials in the City of Blue Springs identified key lessons learned in the process of adopting and implementing pedestrian-oriented zoning provisions, as well as overarching recommendations for other communities who may wish to explore similar zoning provisions.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

When developing pedestrian-oriented zoning changes, Blue Springs recommends cross-sectoral collaboration that includes residents, representatives from multiple city departments, and citizen-led advisory groups. Devoting attention to community engagement leads to cohesive implementation.

UTILIZE ALTERNATIVE FUNDING SOURCES AND CONSIDER DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, helped fund sidewalk improvement projects to meet the city's connectivity goals. The CDBG program is available for local governments to tackle community development initiatives. Additionally, Blue Springs offers tax incentives to developers and property owners who wish to invest in blighted properties, spurring revitalization of underused pockets of the community.

DEVELOP FROM THE "INSIDE-OUT"

Blue Springs deliberately focused development efforts in the city's downtown core with the implementation of the Downtown Zoning District. This city-center-first approach was vital for stimulating reinvestment and creating a walkable, pedestrian-oriented downtown that can be accessed by a growing network of sidewalk connections.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THEM

While the community has experienced many benefits as a result of implementing pedestrian-oriented zoning, it still continues to address resident concerns over safety as new cyclists enter the road. Several four lane roads have been transitioned into two lane roads with striped bike lanes on each shoulder in order to put cyclists in a safe position away from vehicles.

Additionally, some developers in the community are hesitant to choose New Urbanist projects as they are often associated with higher development costs. Blue Springs has accommodated these concerns by offering flexible and affordable alternatives through the Planned Development process, which may not follow all neo-traditional design principles, but still include a complete pedestrian network and amenities.

SUGGESTED CITATION

A Reimann and JF Chriqui. Pedestrian-oriented Zoning in Action: A Community Snapshot-Blue Springs, Missouri. Chicago, IL: Illinois Prevention Research Center, 2019. Available: <https://go.uic.edu/zoning-for-walkability-profile-BlueSprings>.



Illinois Prevention Research Center