

Gulf Shores, Alabama

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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 Planning and Zoning Provisions

Over the last decade, the City of Gulf Shores has adopted and implemented several pedestrian-oriented zoning districts. The [Walking Area Overlay District](#), adopted in 2010, encompasses Gulf Shores' beach front and serves as the city's downtown district. The district encourages mixed-use developments and includes connectivity requirements for bike and pedestrians (e.g. bike parking, trails, and connected networks of sidewalks). In 2016, the city began implementing recommendations from the [Gulf Place Revitalization Master Plan](#) which intended to stimulate beachfront pedestrian infrastructure improvement initiatives within the Walking Area Overlay District.

The [Waterway Village District](#), a dense, compact, mixed-use neighborhood is the most recently adopted pedestrian-oriented zoning district in Gulf Shores. Zoning provisions for the district were inspired by elements of the [Smart Code](#) approach to urban development which focuses on walkable neighborhoods with a mix of residential and retail uses. The street design of the district serves pedestrians with widened brick sidewalks, on-street parking, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, and bike racks.

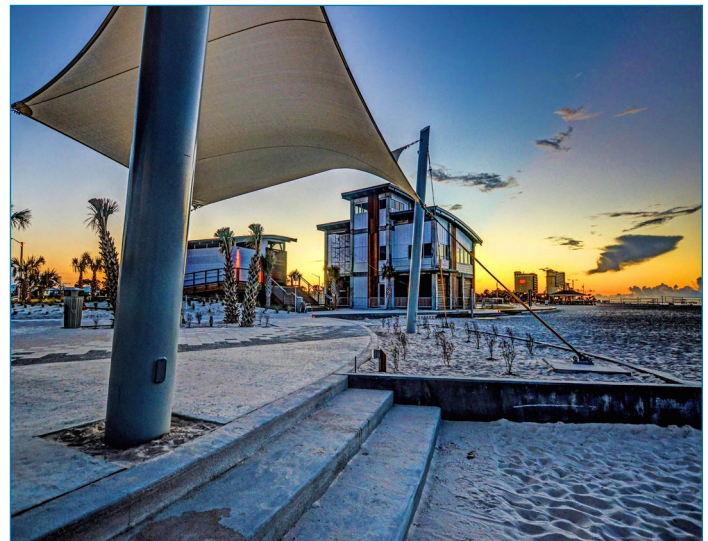


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The Catalyst for Adopting Zoning Changes

The impetus of the Walking Area Overlay District was to define and enhance the Gulf Shores' downtown and to develop in a way that

provided walkable and bike-friendly connections for residents and visitors of the city.

The Waterway Village Overlay District was created to diversify Gulf Shores' local economy that was originally reliant on the city's beachfront tourism. After recovering from Hurricane Ivan in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the BP oil spill in 2010, all of which damaged Gulf Shores' beach access, city leaders sought to develop a secondary tourist destination to strengthen Gulf Shores' economic resiliency and meet stated goals for walkable community areas.

Perceived Impacts Since Implementing Zoning Changes

Increased Pedestrian-Friendly Infrastructure

Within pedestrian-oriented zoning districts, there has been a significant expansion of pedestrian and bike infrastructure. The city has developed networks of widened sidewalks, separated bike lanes, and an 8-foot-wide walkway along the beach.

Increased Economic Development

Since implementing zoning changes, pedestrian-oriented districts have benefitted from increased restaurant and retail occupancy. The city recently formed a private/public partnership to create a new 247 room Embassy Suites within the Walking District. Additionally, the Waterway Village, home to the area's first craft brewery, is meeting stated goals of serving as a secondary destination for tourism in Gulf Shores.

Increased Mixed-Use Development Proposals

Business owners and developers in the community have brought forward plans for new mixed-use development projects that seek to promote the desired walkable design of pedestrian-oriented zoning districts.

GULF SHORES DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	
Total Population	11,358
Median Household Income	\$50,227
Median Age	51.6
% Households with related children <18	12.3%
% White (non-Hispanic)	97.2%
% Black (non-Hispanic)	.03%
% Hispanic	3.3%
% Walking to Work	5.8%
Average Temperature December/July	55/81°F

Source: Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2013-2017); The Weather Channel, 2019



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Resources for Further Information

City of Gulf Shores, Zoning Ordinance, Article 10.1: Walking Area Overlay District

<http://www.gulfshoresal.gov/DocumentCenter/View/56/Zoning-Ordinance-as-Amended-Feb-25-2019?bidId=>

City of Gulf Shores, Zoning Ordinance, Article 10.8: Waterway Village Overlay District

<http://www.gulfshoresal.gov/DocumentCenter/View/56/Zoning-Ordinance-as-Amended-Feb-25-2019?bidId=>

Gulf Place Revitalization Master Plan

<http://www.gulfshoresal.gov/878/Gulf-Place-Revitalization>

Urban Regulations, Architectural Standards, and The SmartCode, DPZ Partners

<https://www.dpz.com/Initiatives/SmartCode>

SUGGESTED CITATION

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

Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Planning officials in the City of Gulf Shores 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.

ZONING CHANGES CAN FOSTER SAFER WALKING ENVIRONMENTS FOR PEDESTRIANS

The addition of bike lanes, sidewalks, and other pedestrian amenities in Gulf Shores have improved the perception of safety for residents who walk or bike through the community. With more pedestrian users each year, the city expects this trend to continue.

ZONING TO MITIGATE FUTURE DAMAGE FROM NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS

Gulf Shores endured Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Ivan, and the BP oil spill in a span of five years. The devastation prompted the city to reexamine their zoning ordinance and determine ways the city could mitigate future damage by redeveloping in a responsible manner (e.g. more compact, sustainable development).

PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED ZONING AND CITY INVESTMENTS

Planning officials note that cities must be willing to invest in capital improvements in addition to adopting pedestrian oriented zoning regulations to stimulate private investment. The city has recently completed the redesign and construction of the entire Gulf Place Public Beach area which includes a paved 20-foot wide pedestrian promenade adjacent to the beach front, access to open green space, and attractive streetscaping and landscaping.