



August 18, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting

TO: Harrisonburg Planning Commission
FROM: Wesley D. Russ, Jr., Deputy City Attorney
DATE: August 5, 2026
RE: Review Zoning District Names and Intent Statements

At its last meeting, the Commission requested a list of the proposed zoning districts and their intent statements. Staff are also taking the opportunity to recommend new names for three of the residential districts.

District Names

We recommend the following changes to the residential district names used in earlier drafts:

Previous Name	Recommended Name
Neighborhood Residential	Suburban Neighborhood
Flexible Residential	Flexible Neighborhood
Traditional Neighborhood	Urban Neighborhood

Traditional Neighborhood drew its name from Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND), which in planning literature is the counterpart to Conventional Suburban Development (CSD).¹ Where TND is a compact, gridded, walkable form, CSD is the curvilinear, separated-use, automobile-oriented form that dominated American development since the mid-20th century.

While the district name was an intentional nod to TND, it works best when the reader is familiar with both concepts. Otherwise, *traditional* and *conventional* might be interpreted as synonyms relating to a custom.

¹ E.g., Jonathan Ford, Morris Beacon Design, *Smart Growth & Conventional Suburban Development: An Infrastructure Case Study Completed for the EPA* (Jan. 13, 2010), <https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-07/documents/mbd-epa-infrastructure.pdf>.

Further, “Neighborhood Residential” tells the reader little—just that it is a residential district and involves a neighborhood, which is true of all three districts.

In place of the previous names, staff recommend “Urban Neighborhood” and “Suburban Neighborhood” as descriptors for the two patterns TND and CSD describe, using terminology more likely to connect with the typical reader. “Flexible Neighborhood” then completes the gradient.

Recognizing that *suburban* carries connotations for some readers, staff also considered “Conventional Neighborhood.” Staff recommend Suburban instead, for the same reason we recommend Urban over Traditional: it describes the development pattern in ordinary, more accessible language.

Aligning these three districts along a gradient that modifies the shared “Neighborhood” also better highlights the distinction between these districts and the “Community” districts. Both Attached Community and Garden Community are typically larger, coordinated developments, generally with some degree of shared facilities and private drive aisles and travelways in place of public streets.

District Intent Statements

The **Suburban Neighborhood (R-SN) District** is intended for low-density residential development. The district emphasizes single-family development with dimensional standards that may accommodate infill and a variety of home sizes within a low-density residential character.

The **Flexible Neighborhood (R-FN) District** is intended to accommodate single-family detached, single-family attached, and duplex development, with limited townhouse and apartment dwellings. The district includes diverse neighborhood forms and permits the same uses as the Urban Neighborhood (R-UN) District with generally larger minimum lot standards.

The **Urban Neighborhood (R-UN) District** is intended to accommodate medium-density residential development in areas with a traditional neighborhood character, including single-family detached, single-family attached, and duplex dwellings, with limited townhouse and apartment dwellings. The district promotes walkable, human-scale development on a traditional street grid with a mix of housing types.

The **Attached Community (R-AC) District** is intended to provide for higher-density attached residential development, including single-family attached dwellings and townhouses, through coordinated development sites that incorporate shared facilities, private travelways, and efficient land use, while maintaining compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods.

The **Garden Community (R-GC) District** is intended to accommodate garden-style apartment and multi-building residential developments.

The **Mixed Use Urban Village (MU-UV) District** encourages coordinated development and redevelopment that integrates a variety of housing types with commercial and community uses scaled appropriately for a neighborhood setting. Development should emphasize walkable design, interconnected streets, and compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods, creating cohesive, mixed-use environments that can evolve over time while maintaining human scale.

The **Mixed Use Downtown (MU-D) District** provides for the City's urban activity center of concentrated commercial, office, civic, and residential uses. Development should occur in a compact, walkable pattern with buildings oriented to the street, active ground-floor uses, and minimal front setbacks.

The **Neighborhood Commercial (C-NC) District** is intended for small- and medium-scale commercial uses that serve nearby neighborhoods, without introducing undue auto-oriented or high-impact uses. Development should be compatible in scale and design with surrounding residential areas, emphasizing pedestrian access where feasible.

The **Auto-Urban Commercial (C-AU) District** accommodates large-format retail, regional commercial centers, and similar developments typically located along major corridors. The district supports the incremental evolution of these corridors through special exceptions for residential uses where compatible as part of a larger transition toward a more integrated, pedestrian-oriented design.

The **General Industrial (I-G) District** provides areas for manufacturing, processing, distribution, and related industrial activities that may not be appropriate in residential or mixed-use settings. The intent is to preserve land for employment uses, ensure adequate access and buffering, and minimize potential conflicts between industrial operations and adjacent uses.

Draft Zoning Map

The draft Zoning Map is available here: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b9685a88af8d4869bab56db6f5174de6>. The district names have not been yet updated to reflect staff's recent recommendations described within this memorandum.