



Healthy Outcomes Zoning Code Audit Chillicothe

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Prepared for Creating Healthy Communities by:



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Key Factors

This report provides a review and analysis of the zoning ordinances of the City of Chillicothe with regard to community health. There are many factors influencing health outcomes related to the built environment, and those described below are most directly influenced by zoning. This report compares these key factors to the current zoning code and provides recommendations to better align city regulations with the goal of achieving a healthier community.

Walkability

The ability to safely and conveniently move around a community without the need for a car is a significant aspect of healthy cities. Community walk scores measure the walkability of an area by analyzing walking routes to nearby amenities. High walk scores are commonly tied to improved health outcomes including lower levels of obesity.^{1,2} The quality of the built environment can have a huge effect on walkability; this includes having destinations that are nearby, an aesthetically pleasing environment, and safe interactions between pedestrians and motor vehicles. Including site design and architecture standards in zoning codes can have an enormous positive impact on walkability.

Connectivity

The ability to move safely and easily between everyday destinations and link to adjacent communities is vital. Trails and paths providing safe linkages for walking and biking are key complements to sidewalks in creating a healthy

connected community.³ Connectivity must be integrated into open space planning and access to destinations such as parks.⁴ Zoning codes should require installation of connectivity elements in streetscape and site development, including standards that facilitate implementation of relevant elements from parks and transportation plans.



Walkability / Mix of Uses

Active Transportation

Through the design of the built environment, cities can encourage increased use of active transportation options including walking and biking. Infrastructure may include paths and sidewalks, on-street bike facilities, and overall safe and well-proportioned streetscapes that emphasize active transportation to a level at least equal to motorized vehicles.^{5,6} Zoning codes should include site improvements to support active transportation facilities on-site, and to tie into community active transportation plans.

Open Space/Green Practices

Access to open space for both passive and active recreation is essential for physical and mental health.^{7,8} Linking these spaces through a robust sidewalk, trail, and bike path system is ideal.

Overall environmental improvements should be part of all site development within commercial corridors. This includes greening of sites through landscaping and a reduction of pavement as well as stormwater improvements such as permeable paving and bioswales. A commitment to a healthy environment translates to healthier outcomes for the community population. Zoning codes can play a major role through requirements for green practices in site design and open space dedication.



Active Transportation / Connectivity

Food Access

One of the most significant challenges for many communities is easy, reliable, affordable access to healthy food options. There are numerous economic challenges to overcome and regulations should allow opportunities for things such as urban agriculture and farmers' markets in addition to brick-and-mortar grocers; and this access is vital to healthy communities.^{9,10} Zoning codes can facilitate the production and distribution of affordable, nutritious food in all built environments by eliminating regulatory barriers.

Mix of Uses

Promoting mixed-use development has direct impacts on the walkability and health outcomes of a city,¹¹ particularly when coupled with design standards that promote the other key factors outlined here. Zoning codes can be highly impactful in promoting mixed-use development through regulatory and design standards often used to encourage this type of development. Beyond allowing a mix of use types in a district, codes can promote development standards, such as shared parking, that ease barriers to implementation.

Other Policies

Additional practices by cities are known to contribute to overall health through increased walkability. These include:

- **Complete Streets:**^{12,13} The design and implementation of streets that balance the needs of the pedestrian, biker, and driver, while promoting a safe and aesthetically pleasing experience.
- **Safe Routes to Schools:**¹⁴ A program established to encourage and enable students in grades K-8 to safely walk or ride their bicycles to school, through both physical infrastructure improvements and related policies and programs.
- **Public Health Goals in Comprehensive Plans:** Including goals and outcomes related to healthy communities in comprehensive and community Plans helps to guide the overall regulatory and policy direction of a city.

Related Planning Information

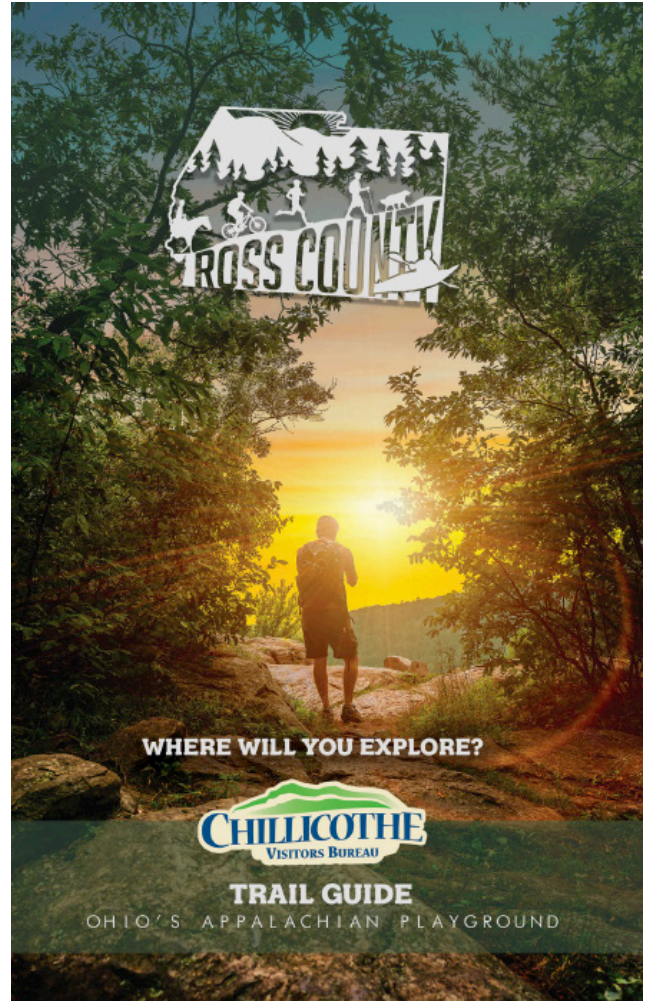
There are several existing and ongoing planning efforts in Chillicothe that have an influence on the regulatory and built environment of the city, and that have previously identified community goals for health and development. These include the following:

Active Transportation Plan

An Active Transportation Plan is being developed for Chillicothe and its surroundings by the Ross County Health Department and CHC program, City of Chillicothe and other partners. The plan will outline opportunities to integrate active transportation into the city through bike and pedestrian facilities. This will include potential linkages to parks, open space areas and key community destinations. Following plan completion, the code should be updated to support the recommendations through requirements for connectivity, site design, and site amenities supportive of active transportation as detailed in the next section..

Ross County Trail Guide

The Ross County Park District prepared a Trail Guide that also incorporates information about active and passive recreation opportunities across the area. This guide summarizes the larger trail and park network, of which Chillicothe plays a major role and central hub. This is indicative of the larger recreation aspects of the region and the advantages the city has in tapping into natural resources to help achieve healthy outcomes, as well as a boost to regional tourism.



Code Analysis

Chillicothe is a city with many positive attributes. The downtown core includes numerous excellent examples of historic architecture, and recent revitalization efforts have been awarded recognition.¹⁵ The downtown is highly walkable with a number of active pedestrian-oriented corridors. In addition, Yoctangee Park stretches along the Scioto River, immediately adjacent to the downtown historic district. This presents an excellent amenity for healthy outcomes through active recreation opportunities and also directly links downtown to multi-use trails along the Scioto. Passive recreation and the overall benefits of greenspace contribute further to the value of this asset to the community.

The zoning code is fairly robust and conveys an overall intent to encourage quality development that leads to healthy outcomes. The type and variety of districts establish a framework that can be used to steer the city toward these positive results. At the same time, there are districts that do not encourage the walkability and mix of uses that will lead to the best outcomes for Chillicothe.

In addition, there are gaps in the code that may undermine the strong and targeted ideas encouraging quality development, connectivity and active transportation. In some cases there are goals mentioned that are not tied back to larger review approaches, or references to other chapters for uses or site review standards that leave them open to interpretation during the zoning or development review process. Those issues may prevent the stated intent of the code from being realized in development results.

While this audit focuses on health outcomes, the intent is to place the recommended changes into the overall context of regulatory and development impacts resulting from the code. This is necessary because health outcomes are so intertwined with a variety of factors in the built environment. Based on the structure of the code, the districts outlined, and the stated goals for development in the code, it is likely that targeted updates and implementation strategies will be the most useful and expedient path, rather than a full-scale overhaul of the existing code.

Chillicothe Code Challenges

While all key factors described above have value in creating a better community, these are cited most frequently in the following detailed analysis:

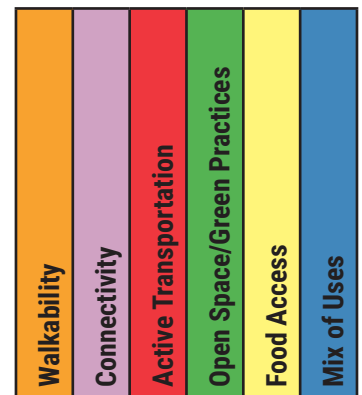
- **Walkability:** The code does little to encourage a mixed-use development environment that inspires walking and other active transportation nor does it promote placemaking as a tool toward physical and mental health for residents, visitors and workers.
- **Active Transportation:** There are solid requirements for walkways in the subdivision regulations, but further opportunities for pathways, bike facilities and links to major recreational amenities would be a boost, along with requirements for bike parking and amenities.

Improvements to several critical gaps in the code would positively impact all the indicated key factors.

The following tables outline the current code in relation to promoting healthy community outcomes. This analysis informs the recommendations for implementation outlined at the end of this report.

The color-coded columns at the right side of the chart indicate the key factors that are most impacted for each code section cited.

There is significant overlap between the key factors regarding application and their impacts to the built environment. The color box columns provide an at-a-glance summary of how each issue relates to each code section.



			IMPACTED ISSUES					
			Walkability	Connectivity	Active Transportation	Open Space/Green Practices	Food Access	Mix of Uses
Code section		Analysis						
101.01	Designation; How Cited	The Code is referred to as a 1961 code in several places, but this discounts the many quality updates made over time. It appears that much was updated in 2011, including the primary chapters covering zoning districts and development standards. In addition, there are a number of sections that were updated in 2014.						
132.01	Department of Urban Renewal	This looks to be a legacy section left over from 1965. The term "urban renewal" is outdated with some negative connotations. It would be interesting to see if this could be re-purposed into a different neighborhood improvement and economic development function.						
136.04	City Tree Commission: Purposes and Objectives	The inclusion of a City Tree Commission demonstrates a commitment to improvements and upkeep to the natural environment of the city. In addition, the urban tree canopy contributes to walkability.						
1102.02	Planning and Zoning Code: Purpose	The first stated purpose of the code is to "promote the public health" which underscores the opportunity to frame code updates through that lens.						
1105.02 (5)	Definitions: Alley	Alleys are limited to right-of-way "which provides only secondary means of access" but can also be useful tools serving as the primary means of access to rear-located parking areas in urban districts, which contributes to safer walking/biking environments by reducing curb cuts/opportunities for ped/bike conflict with cars.						
1105.02 (23)	Definitions: Comprehensive Plan	This is a good inclusion, indicating the value of a Comprehensive Plan for the city. However, the City does not currently have an updated Comprehensive Plan.						
1105.02	Definitions	Consider adding definitions for active transportation elements that can be cited elsewhere in the code, such as: - Bike path/trail - Bikeways						
1115.08(a)	Subdivision Procedures: Plans and Specifications for Site Improvements	Sidewalks are included in subdivision improvements, and should be required for all new roadways.						
1117.06 (g)	Amendments: Criteria	There are several mentions regarding administering the code in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan, indicating the need for an updated plan for the entire community. This, and other references in the code are useful for when a plan is developed.						

			IMPACTED ISSUES					
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Code section	Analysis							
1131.02(g)	Rules of Application: Site Plan	This section has importance in the code because it is referenced in several district sections for site plan requirements. It could be an ideal place to add sidewalks and trails as needed elements.						
1137	R-3 Older Neighborhood Single-Family Residential District	This is an interesting way to handle the distinctions between existing neighborhoods and new residential subdivisions, acknowledging the differences in lot sizes and site development approaches.						
1141.06	RM-2 Urban Residential Multiple Family District	Allowing densities of 18 units per acre helps encourage walkable development.						
1145.05	RO Residential Office District: Permitted Uses	Referencing R-3 permitted and conditional uses here as permitted uses is a bit confusing, since they seem to potentially overlap with the conditional uses listed later here. This is the case in several districts referencing other districts. Listing those in each, or considering whether the distinctions merit separate districts may be of use.						
1147.04	LC Limited Commercial District: Additional Yard and Pedestrian Areas	This is a great standard to encourage walkable, connected development with open space components to promote community health.						
1151.02	DE Downtown Enterprise District: Permitted Uses	Residential is permitted, promoting a mixed-use downtown district.						
1151.03(c)	DE Downtown Enterprise District: Conditional Uses	Additional restrictions on the use and placement of drive-throughs should be added. Since this is an urban downtown district, drive throughs should not be allowed to encroach on the pedestrian experience or diminish the walkability of the area. This could include siting drive-throughs only to the rear of buildings and accessed only by alleys. Existing drive-throughs may still remain, but could be altered or phased out over time as uses change in those buildings.						
1151.04(e)	DE Development Standards: Parking and Loading	Only requiring 15% of required parking for heavily developed sites is a great way to encourage mixed-use, walkability and small business opportunities in the downtown area.						
1159	RI Industrial Reuse District	This is a clever way to frame this use area and allows the code to advocate for the preferred type of redevelopment for the area.						
1163.07	PUD Planned Unit Development: Arrangement of Non-Residential Uses and Parking	The approach to site design for parking outlined in this section would be a strong basis for standards applied to other zoning sections throughout the code.						

Code section			IMPACTED ISSUES					
			Walkability	Connectivity	Active Transportation	Open Space/Green Practices	Food Access	Mix of Uses
Analysis								
1167.07(a)	HDR Historic Design Review District: Criteria of Evaluation	This section refers to historic compatibility of site design and related elements such as vehicular and pedestrian circulation. More detailed site standards could be added to outline the preferred outcomes.						
1168.02(f), (h)	Chillicothe Downtown Development Commission	<p>The stated principles are excellent and promote the type of downtown development that will promote healthy outcomes. Of particular significance is advocacy for a mix of uses and a pedestrian-oriented environment. As the district guiding development with the most urban characteristics, it would be valuable to have additional site development standards for the siting of buildings. Some standards specific to the downtown could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siting of buildings established to create walkable corridors. • Prohibition of off-street parking between buildings and the street. • Screening of parking areas from the public right-of-way. • Parking access from alleys where possible. • Siting of buildings established to reduce/narrow curb cuts. • Requirements for street trees. • Bike rack requirements. • Parking reductions for bike facilities, links to paths. • Overall parking reductions. 						
1168.05(c)(1)(a)	Chillicothe Downtown Development Commission: Duties	This section references a Downtown Plan. An updated plan for this district would be highly useful in guiding future development and as an outline for potential added standards and guidelines.						
1177.03 (i)	Off-street Parking and Loading Requirements: General Requirements	There is an opportunity to establish true shared parking standards between adjacent uses of certain types, which is a good approach to encourage walkability. This could be extended to uses on the same site and as part of a larger mixed-use strategy.						
1177.04	Off-street Parking and Loading Requirements: Required Number of Off-Street Parking Spaces	Overall parking requirements are high for retail, restaurants and entertainment uses. For most of these uses, the requirement should be one space per 250 square feet maximum. Consider a moving to a parking maximum, rather than minimum, approach overall.						

Code Summary

The Chillicothe code has a number of positive attributes that suggest intent for quality development and healthy outcomes. Many sections of the code have been updated within the past 10 years and reflect a number of up-to-date zoning practices. Even with the updates, the approach to site development is incomplete, leaving gaps in standards for establishing pedestrian-oriented development on primary corridors or to protect the quality of the downtown area. To address these issues further, a more detailed study will be needed to develop specific zoning text through a publicly accessible process. Several themes emerged through the code review process, as indicated by the specific comments in the previous tables. The following is a summary of those prevalent issues:

- **Opportunity to strengthen downtown district:** The Downtown Enterprise District is a good basis for downtown, but falls short of requiring quality site development. Coupling upgraded site development standards with architectural standards and design guidelines could both ensure preservation of the exiting quality environment at the core and encourage expansion to adjacent corridors.
- **Opportunity to expand quality development standards:** Adding site development standards for all commercial districts would lead to more walkable, greener outcomes. For key

districts such as Downtown Enterprise, aspects of the architectural review such as those in the Historical District could be extended and adapted to new construction as well.

- **Potential for additional Planned Districts:** The Planned Unit Development District includes many standards and an overall approach encouraging healthy outcomes. Planned districts could be created for other uses and geographies in order to promote those approaches more widely in the city. In addition, the approach to aspects such as non-residential parking in that district could be applied to the greater commercial districts in the code.
- **Too much parking required:** The overall level of prescribed parking tends toward the high side and pushes corridor development outside downtown toward less walkable, auto-dominated site design. Having fewer parking spaces also encourages access through walking and biking. The direct prohibition on same-site shared parking practices directly discourages mixed-use development. In addition, lower parking space requirements can increase small business development by lowering costs and site size requirements. Consider a moving to a parking maximum, rather than minimum, approach overall.



Recommendations

The Chillicothe Zoning Code incorporates many aspects that encourage quality development leading to healthy outcomes. At the same time, there are some gaps that hinder reaching the stated goals of the code. There are opportunities to improve the code in this regard by adding standards for site development and connectivity as well as stronger guidance for the downtown area. This could include extending mixed-use development along primary corridors and establishing site standards for quality development.

Regulatory Options

Zoning Code Standards Updates

The existing code is generally strong, but could be clarified and strengthened regarding quality site development for walkability and integrating a mix of uses in areas throughout the city. A number of the solutions identified in the Code Analysis section should be considered for immediate adoption. Longer term, a more robust changes should be considered, such as strengthening the Downtown Enterprise District and adding planned districts to build on successful code approaches such as the Planned Unit Development District.

Guidelines Versus Standards

Design guidelines can provide a level of site plan and architectural review that serve as a companion to the zoning code. Design guidelines can be more aspirational in that they are not codified. By contrast, standards must be followed or require a variance. Guidelines can be a set of recommendations that boards and commissions use as a benchmark when evaluating development applications. This could be useful in the near-term if the community is not ready to adopt more rigorous standards for elements such as architecture and streetscape improvements for new development.

Overlays

Overlays are used to place additional development standards in a geographical area in place of changing the underlying zoning code. It is a highly useful tool used throughout the state and could be an ideal first step to repositioning development on key corridors into the downtown area.

Implementation

Near Term (Year 1)

Update basic zoning standards noted

Based on the type of probable near-term development, focus on clarifying the aspects of the code that mention biking and walking facilities, quality site design, parking, and building materials. Much of this could be through added details to definitions, clarifying the intent of other sections.

Adapt and adopt commercial overlay for the downtown area.

Consider a cohesive and more rigorous approach to development and preservation in downtown, while incorporating the intent of the historic review area. An overlay can maintain flexibility to adapt to changing opportunities and can be more rapidly put in place than extensive code changes.

Beyond (Years 2-3)

Revise and strengthen Central Business District to promote downtown success

The Downtown Enterprise District is a good framework for the downtown area, and could be strengthened through upgraded zoning standards and the potential addition of design guidelines. This could also allow for a better mix of uses and extend or supplement the existing Historic District.

Adopt design guidelines

Quality design guidelines can include reasonable requirements that lead to greatly improved development outcomes. This can be a catalyst for revitalization and include specific approaches for healthy outcomes in site and building design.

Endnote References

1. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-11/walkability-is-good-for-you>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6025475/>
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