

City of Evanston Zoning Update - Draft Scope of Services 2/19/2026 Version

Evanston invites professional consulting firms and teams to submit a written proposal for the City of Evanston's Zoning Update. This is a critical, community-centered effort that will shape the future of Evanston's built environment. In January 2026, the City Council adopted a new Comprehensive General Plan as part of the Envision Evanston 2045 initiative. This is the foundational policy document that will guide zoning updates. The last significant update to the City's zoning code was completed in 1993. There have been several substantial amendments, including the addition of various overlay districts, signage regulations, and numerous smaller amendments, since then. Evanston seeks a holistic review to align the zoning code and map with the 2026 Comprehensive General Plan. Central to this effort is robust, inclusive, and transparent community engagement that meaningfully involves residents, businesses, and other community partners throughout the project.

The City encourages consultant teams to recommend their approach to updating the zoning code and map. Regardless of approach, provisions in the existing code will carry over. It is important to the community to understand where changes have been made. The outcome of proposed revisions should support implementation of the Comprehensive General Plan. The resulting code must be easy to understand, intuitive to navigate for users of all experience levels, produce predictable outcomes, use clear graphics and visuals (wherever possible) to communicate intent, and consider the unique attributes of the city. These include, but are not limited to, lakefront access, presence of a large higher education institution (Northwestern University), multiple historic districts, train access, university and business district transitions with residential areas, diverse housing types and needs, and quality design.

Anticipated Project Phasing and Schedule

The City anticipates the project will include three phases and is asking the consultant to propose a timeline to complete the project. However, the City emphasizes that quality is prioritized over expediency. Proposals should articulate the anticipated project schedule and any adjustments recommended to the proposed phasing. The final timeline and phasing will be reviewed and approved by the Zoning Update Work Group before project launch.

1. Work Plan and Project Launch
2. Community Assessment & Drafting the Code
3. Adoption/Legislative Process

Phase 1 - Work Plan and Project Launch

The City of Evanston established a Work Group to provide active oversight of each phase of the Zoning Update. The Work Group is composed of two members of both the City Council and the Land Use Commission, and staff from the Community Development Department. The primary role of the Work Group is to track project milestones, engagement activities, and decision points to ensure they are carried out and achieve the intended outcomes. It is not responsible for conducting a technical review of individual project deliverables. Getting the process right, particularly the approach to community engagement, is critical to the success of this project and to building public trust in the outcomes.

The City anticipates that the Work Group will convene virtually every month to receive status updates from the consultant team and discuss progress, challenges, and upcoming engagement activities. In addition to reviewing the proposed work plan before project launch, the Work Group will monitor implementation throughout the project and make recommendations to the City Council regarding any process adjustments needed to ensure meaningful community involvement and a successful outcome.

Phase 2 - Community Assessment & Drafting the Code

This phase will begin with a comprehensive assessment of Evanston's built environment. The assessment will combine technical analysis with local knowledge to develop a shared understanding of the City's physical characteristics, development patterns, and neighborhood attributes. The assessment should be conducted by ward and neighborhood, and evaluate housing and building types, height, setbacks, lot size, lot coverage, underutilized sites, infrastructure capacity, and existing uses.

This phase shall also include a review of the Comprehensive General Plan and relevant local, regional, state, and federal policies, regulations, and case law to inform zoning changes. This review shall include, but not be limited to:

- Adopted City planning and policy documents
- Adopted building codes, recent amendments, and upcoming code releases that may relate to or conflict with the Zoning Code
- Zoning application history from the past 10 years
- Zoning text amendment history from the past 10 years
- State law changes, including the People over Parking Act
- Relevant state and federal case law

Using this information, the consultant shall develop clear, accessible visual representations of the existing built environment that accurately reflect current conditions and support informed discussion and scenario planning. These visualizations

should reflect a variety of block typologies found across wards and neighborhoods and be designed specifically to test initial zoning concepts. The consultant team shall also prepare visualizations of what can be built under the current zoning code to help residents, decision-makers, and stakeholders understand existing development potential within each ward or neighborhood. To the extent possible, the assessment should identify nonconforming properties that exist today and those that could result from a future zoning framework.

Using the assessment findings, the consultant team shall develop and test initial zoning concepts with the community, Land Use Commission, and City Council. These concepts will explore potential revisions to development standards, use regulations, district organization, and map changes. Visual tools, graphics, diagrams, and scenario modeling shall be used to clearly illustrate the implications of proposed changes and to evaluate impacts. Based on this concept testing, the consultant shall prepare an initial draft zoning code and map and present the draft for public review. This process shall be iterative and highly interactive. At a minimum, the consultant shall:

- Present the initial draft to the community, the Land Use Commission, and the City Council (in separate working sessions)
- Collect and clearly document feedback
- Revise the draft zoning code and map in response to the feedback
- Present updated drafts to demonstrate how community, Land Use Commission, and City Council input was incorporated

Public engagement and community outreach will be a core component of this phase. Engagement activities should be designed to help participants understand existing conditions and zoning regulations while also capturing local knowledge. These opportunities must encourage broad participation, be tailored to each ward or neighborhood, and reach as many people as possible. Community engagement opportunities are anticipated to occur on a ward and neighborhood basis and shall be structured to support dialogue. Meetings shall review draft concepts, explain key regulatory changes, and clearly communicate how feedback is shaping subsequent revisions. The consultant shall be responsible for documenting feedback received and incorporating it into revised draft materials.

Advancement beyond this phase will be contingent upon completion of an independent analysis, grounded in national and regional research and adapted to Evanston's local conditions, evaluating the likely impacts of proposed zoning changes on housing supply, density, population growth, affordability, local ecosystems, displacement risk, infrastructure capacity (water, sewer, stormwater), school enrollment, public safety, fiscal impacts, and redevelopment feasibility. All assumptions must be clearly

documented, and findings shall be made publicly available in advance of the legislative process to support informed deliberation by the City Council and Land Use Commission.

Phase 3 - Adoption/Legislative Process

The consultant team will be responsible for facilitating, with City staff support, several public hearings with the Land Use Commission to review the updated draft zoning ordinance and map amendment. The consultant will be responsible for tracking and incorporating any amendments made by the Land Use Commission throughout the public hearing process. Upon receiving a final recommendation from the Land Use Commission, the consultant will be responsible for facilitating, with City staff support, the introduction and adoption of the Zoning Ordinance and map amendment with the City Council. It should be expected that several City Council meetings (regular or special) will be required before a final vote. The consultant will be responsible for tracking and incorporating any amendments made by the City Council throughout their review.

Project Deliverables

- I. **Draft and Final Work Plan:** The work plan must highlight key dates for each project phase and deadlines for draft and final deliverables. It must also identify specific consultant team members responsible for developing deliverables and meeting deadlines. A public engagement plan that outlines key dates and deadlines for draft and final materials and events must be included. The engagement plan should also explain how engagement relates to specific deliverables, how engagement opportunities will be communicated, how input will be analyzed, and how input will inform next steps.
- II. **Engagement and Outreach Materials:** The consultant will be responsible for preparing and supplying draft and final versions of all engagement and outreach materials throughout the project. This should include a slide deck that provides an overview of the process. The consultant team will use these presentation materials to record a video for City staff and elected officials to communicate with local community members and interested parties regarding what to expect throughout the process. The video will also be posted on the project webpage. This approach should also be used for subsequent phases of the project to help inform those who don't attend in-person or virtual meetings. The consultant will also develop and update content for the project webpage hosted on the City's website, which will serve as the main hub for information throughout the project. City staff will also be responsible for adding content and materials to the project webpage.

- III. **Community, City Council, and Land Use Commission Meetings:** The consultant will be responsible for facilitating community, City Council, and Land Use Commission meetings throughout the process. It is expected that there will be multiple meetings, events, pop-ups, etc., throughout every ward or neighborhood during each phase. Some meetings can be attended virtually as a cost-saving measure, but in-person attendance is preferred and will be required at key milestones.
 - I. **Community Assessment:** This report should summarize existing conditions as defined by the data, literature review, and public engagement, and identify both strengths and areas for improvement in the existing code and map. The following should also be included in the report:
 - A. Complete inventory of land use patterns, building typologies, transportation networks, infrastructure capacity, use data, etc.
 - B. Locations for infill development, Transit-Oriented Development, adaptive reuse, and small-scale multi-unit housing in all residential districts and a range of higher-density housing options in mixed-use and downtown districts, subject to lot size requirements and other standards.
 - C. Impact and resulting externalities of City policies, plans, and regulations on the built environment (e.g., land use type, building type, transit access, public improvements and infrastructure, etc.).
 - D. Impact and resulting externalities of City policies, plans, and regulations on surrounding natural resources, parks, and infrastructure systems.
 - E. Impact and resulting externalities of institutional land uses, including but not limited to Northwestern University, St. Francis and Evanston Hospitals, public school districts, etc.
 - F. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of all responses received from public engagement activities during this phase, alignment with Evanston's demographics, and how information was used to inform recommendations in the report.
 - G. List of federal, state, and appellate court cases used to inform recommended updates.
 - H. Relevant citations, data sources, and policy and planning documents that were used to inform the report.
 - II. **Graphic Comparison of Current Conditions and Proposed Regulations:** The consultant should prepare graphic comparisons of current and proposed regulations to aid in conversations with the community, Land Use Commission, and the City Council. These visualizations should reflect a variety of block typologies found across wards and neighborhoods and be designed to test and convey zoning concepts.

- III. **Initial & Subsequent Draft Zoning Code & Map for Public Review:** This will include the text, any graphics or illustrations that facilitate the interpretation and application of the Code, and a parcel-level map showing all proposed zoning districts and boundaries.
- IV. **Interactive Zoning Map:** As part of the public outreach, a mapping tool should be developed to display the proposed zoning map and compare current and proposed regulations for individual parcels. Community members should be able to provide feedback via this interactive map to help inform refinements.
- V. **Impact Analysis:** This report should evaluate the likely impacts of proposed zoning changes on housing supply, density, population growth, affordability, local ecosystems, displacement risk, infrastructure capacity (water, sewer, stormwater), school enrollment, public safety, fiscal impacts, and redevelopment feasibility.
- VI. **Engagement Summary:** A quantitative and qualitative analysis of all responses received from the various public engagement opportunities throughout the project, its alignment with Evanston demographics, and how this information was used to inform the draft zoning code and map.
 - I. **Land Use Commission Draft Code, Map, and Amendment Tracking:** The consultant will provide an updated draft zoning code and map for the Land Use Commission Public Hearing. They will also be responsible for tracking any amendments made throughout the public hearing process.
 - II. **City Council Draft Code, Map, and Amendment Tracking:** The consultant will provide a final draft zoning code and map incorporating the Land Use Commission amendments. They will also be responsible for tracking any amendments made throughout the City Council review and adoption process.
- III. **Final Zoning Code and Map:** The adopted code should include all applicable charts, graphics, and other inserts. As well as the final parcel-level zoning map with district boundaries as approved by the City Council.
- IV. **Monthly Work Group Meetings:** The consultant will be responsible for hosting and scheduling the virtual meetings. Agendas must be provided one week in advance of each meeting. The consultant will be responsible for minutes and providing a recording within one week of each meeting.
- V. **Monthly Consultant Progress Report:** Consultant invoices with task budget, percent complete, and earned value.
- VI. **All other project materials, data, GIS shapefiles, etc., in all formats:** Collected and developed throughout the process for City records.

Optional Deliverable

- I. **Built Environment Model:** A city-wide model of the existing built environment shall be developed to visualize and support scenario planning and impact assessment during Phase 3. The mapping tool should enable scenario planning with three-dimensional modeling capabilities to support the development of the Zoning Code.

Consultant Selection Criteria

Community and Project Understanding

- Understanding of local conditions and what makes Evanston special
- Understanding of the Comprehensive General Plan recommendations

Proposed Scope of Services

- Degree of innovation proposed
- Thoroughness of engagement approach (how community feedback will be documented and categorized, what criteria will be used to determine whether feedback is incorporated, and feedback loops to ensure the community understands updates based on input received)
- Commitment to engaging a representative sample of the community
- Thoroughness of phases and tasks
- Innovation of engagement approach
- Focus on data-driven recommendations
- Demonstrated experience in analyzing and incorporating public engagement
- Identification of deliverables
- Appropriateness of the project schedule
- Commitment to proper editing

Project Team

- Structure of organizational chart
- Experience of the project manager
- Experience of other key personnel
- Experience of the project team
- Experience in maintaining a consistent project team throughout the process
- Experience and approach to managing changes in the project team
- Experience conducting engagement methods that are neutral, not biased or leading, and are done in formats, times, and places so all types of residents, business owners, and community partners can participate.
- Inclusion and identification of team members with expertise in the following:
 - Planning and zoning
 - Public engagement
 - Built environment assessment and visualization
 - Urban Ecology and Ecosystems
 - Media, public relations, and professional writing
 - Meeting facilitation
 - Spanish interpretation and translation
 - Data analysis and visualization

Project Experience

- Experience writing zoning ordinances for communities with similar attributes (urban/suburban mix, lakefront access, large institutional land-uses such as universities and hospitals, historic districts, various transit options, and diverse demographics)
- Experience creating an online, map-based tool, scenario planning, and visualization
- Experience engaging diverse communities
- Experience with innovative public engagement techniques