

New Zoning Ordinance Paves Way for a Healthier Community in Savannah

By: Nichele Hoskins

AT A GLANCE

The City of Savannah Zoning Ordinance's was developed in 1960 and remained stagnant as the city grew and developed. The ordinance continued to stall and delay progress needed to meet the demands of Savannah's growing neighborhoods. The updated zoning ordinance (NewZO) greatly improves the accessibility of the ordinance and makes key improvements such as the creation of connected street networks that support walking , biking and access to bus routes. NewZO promotes mixed use to allow small scale development to support neighborhood stability .



APPROACH

Through strategic community education and outreach and earned media, the REACH team, Healthy Savannah and community partners showed residents to council members to neighborhood activists that density in residential development can be a step toward healthy, connected neighborhoods that retain and attract residents of different backgrounds, income levels, and ages. That diversity, in turn, can attract small scale, manageable development that meets the needs of those residents. That's especially important in the many areas in the city that lack nearby places to buy fresh, wholesome food. In order to achieve a successful vote, community partners added vital education resources for the community

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

One in three children in Chatham County is overweight or obese, according to Georgia Southern University (formerly Armstrong Atlantic University). The US Department of Agriculture notes that locally, one in four children lives in a neighborhood without access to healthy food. The City of Savannah's zoning ordinance has not changed since it's inception in 1960, despite the evolving needs and values of the city changing drastically. As Savannah develops, access to everyday destinations, bus stops, grocery stores and schools have become more hazardous or impossible in marginalized parts of our community. Without safe routes or an increase in mixed use development, many of our residents are lacking access to services and pathways necessary for them to thrive. Evidence demonstrates that the antiquated zoning ordinances placed undue hurdles in the way of modern, urban development.

"Partners (including the REACH team) have helped us identify things that we left out ... things that we need to put more focus on, especially pedestrian access, bike access, and things of that nature."

*- Marcus Lotson,
Metropolitan Planning Commission*

RESULTS

In July of 2019, the NewZO passed following the City of Savannah City Council meeting. NewZO is streamlined, simplified, accessible on-line and went into effect on September 1, 2019. Key updates to the zoning guidelines include supporting a complete-streets standard that invites walking and biking along activity-friendly routes to everyday destinations and provides safe access to bus stops, shopping, places of worship and quality clinical care. Under the new guidelines, incentives are in place for developers to add bicycle parking and focus on mixed-use development to allow for walkable, connected access within Historic districts. Through NewZO, our neighborhoods are poised to become more vibrant, more connected and healthier for our residents.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

As new development shapes the City of Savannah, NewZO's updated, modernized policies will create more access to crucial services for the community as a whole. With an emphasis on alternate transportation such as walking and biking, NewZO opens doors to encourage safe physical activity across our community. We project an increase in biking and walking to school and we anticipate a significant decrease in the percentage of Savannah roadways that do not have a sidewalk, allowing for more resident mobility.

FIND OUT MORE

To find out more about the NewZO and what it means for Savannah, watch this video <https://youtu.be/EB4DAJE RHE> or visit <http://www.newzo.org/>. This project is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health cooperative agreement (1814).

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