



ZONING

AN EXPLANATION OF ZONING DISTRICTS IN SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA

LAST UPDATED FEBRUARY | 2026

QUICK FACTS

THERE ARE OVER 26 ZONING DISTRICTS IN SARASOTA COUNTY.

26

THE FIRST LAND USE PLANNING LEGISLATION IN FLORIDA WAS ENACTED IN 1928 CALLED THE ZONING ENABLING ACT.

1928

SARASOTA COUNTY ADOPTED ITS FIRST ZONING ORDINANCE IN 1955.

1955

DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU COULD FIND YOUR ZONING DISTRICT ON A GIS MAP? FIND THE ZONING MAP (PLANNING DATA EXPLORER) HERE:

<https://data-sarco.opendata.arcgis.com/>

UDC

THE UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE ZONING ORDINANCE IS ONLINE HERE: <https://www.scgov.net/government/planning-and-development-services/unified-development-code>

WHAT IS ZONING?

Zoning's fundamental purpose is to protect a community's health, safety and welfare. It is a system of land use regulations that classify how land can be used and prescribes standards for its development by helping to protect public and private interests, preserve critical areas, promote orderly growth, and encourage development in keeping with community desires. These land use regulations are a set of local laws that are codified into a document known as the Unified Development Code (UDC).

The UDC helps the county implement the Comprehensive Plan. It classifies land into zones called "districts," or "zoning districts," and specifies the type of uses and unique development standards allowed in each district. The development standards specify such things as the: height and size of buildings; density allowed; placement of buildings; amount of impervious surface allowed; amount of open space required; amount of parking; allowance for signs; and landscaping and buffering requirements.

The zoning regulations consists of text and a map. The map identifies the zoning districts for each property within the unincorporated area of Sarasota County. The text describes the rules that govern the different zoning districts; describes land uses; identifies allowable and non-allowable uses; and contains the development standards. The text also includes the administrative processes that explain how the UDC is administered; how it is interpreted; how to change zoning districts; and how to request variances.

“ZONING’S FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSE IS TO PROTECT A COMMUNITY’S HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE.”

KNOW YOUR ZONE; WHY IT MATTERS

Zoning Districts classify lots and parcels into categories. The most frequently-used Districts are; commercial, industrial, and residential. Within each of these are more specific divisions. For example, a residential zone might be segregated into separate zones for single-family homes or townhouses. Letters of the alphabet are used as code abbreviations to identify the use allowed in a physical area, such as R for residential, C for Commercial, or P for Planned Development Districts. A list of the most common districts and code abbreviations for Sarasota County can be found in the chart below.

ABBREVIATION		ZONING DISTRICT
RE-1,2,3	RESIDENTIAL	Residential Estate
RSF-1,2,3,4		Residential Single-Family
RMF-1,2,3		Residential Multifamily
RMH		Residential Manufactured Home
CN	COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL	Commercial Neighborhood
OPI		Office, Professional and Institutional
CG		Commercial General
CI		Commercial Intensive
CHI		Commercial Highway Interchange
CM		Commercial Marine
BP		Business Park
ILW	PLANNED DEVELOPMENT	Industrial, Light Manufacturing and Warehousing
PED		Planned Economic Development
PUD		Planned Unit Development Overlay
OPI/PD		Office, Professional and Institutional/Planned Development
PCD		Planned Commerce Development
CM/PD		Commercial Marine/Planned Development
PMI		Planned Mixed-Use Infill
GU	SPECIAL DISTRICT	Government Use
MP		Marine Park
HPIOD	SPECIAL PURPOSE OVERLAY	Historic Preservation Incentive Overlay District
CTOD		Commercial Transition Overlay District
MSOD		Main Street Overlay District
SKOD		Siesta Key Overlay District
MRPZ		Myakka River Protection Zone
CS		Conservation Subdivision

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN** AND **ZONING ORDINANCE**

It is very important to note the important distinction between a Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that establishes the community's vision, goals and objectives. The Zoning Ordinance is the legally binding regulatory tool that helps to make the Comprehensive Plan a reality.

WHAT DOES THE ZONING ORDINANCE REGULATE?

The Zoning Ordinance specifies the areas in which residential, industrial, recreational or commercial activities may take place. For example, the RSF-1 (Residential Single-Family) residential zoning district allows single-family detached homes as opposed to apartment complexes or hotels. The CN (Commercial-Neighborhood) zoning district permits only certain types of neighborhood scale commercial uses such as convenience stores or small cafés, but not large-scale commercial grocery stores or fast-food restaurants.

The Zoning Ordinance also regulates landscape buffers parking requirements and the dimensional requirements for lots and for buildings on property located within the county; the density of development; types of signs that are allowed; and whether you can keep certain types of animals on your property. In addition, zoning also regulates building setbacks, height and FAR (floor-to-area ratio).

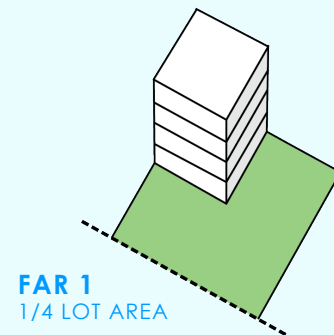
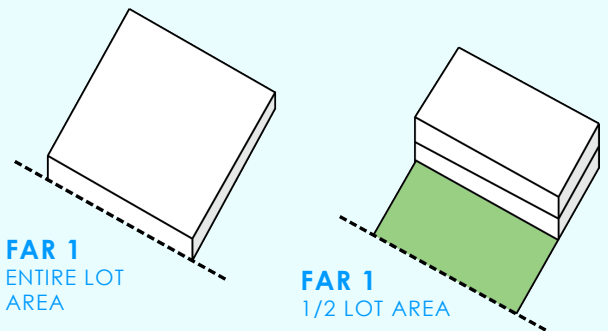
“ZONING REGULATIONS CONSISTS OF THREE PARTS: ZONING ORDINANCE, ZONING MAPS AND ADOPTED REZONES OR SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS.”

WHAT IS FLOOR AREA RATIO?

Floor Area Ratio (FAR), is a term for the ratio of a building's total floor area (Gross Floor Area) to the size of the land upon which it is built. The floor area ratio is used in zoning to limit the amount of construction in a certain area.

For example, if the zoning ordinance permits construction on a parcel at a 1.0 FAR, then the total area of all floors in all buildings constructed on the parcel must be no more than the area of the parcel itself. As a formula:

$$\text{FLOOR AREA RATIO} = \frac{\text{GROSS FLOOR AREA}}{\text{AREA OF LOT}}$$



WHO CONTROLS ZONING?

The Sarasota County Commission decides on requested changes to the zoning ordinance.

IS ZONING PERMANENT?

No, both the map and text of the zoning ordinance can be changed. Changes are referred to as text amendments or a rezoning when changing the zoning map. You can find more information on the rezoning process below.

CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

To Contact Zoning, please email zoning@scgov.net.

To learn how to submit a business use permit, temporary use permit, or other permit, please visit: <https://www.scgov.net/government/planning-and-development-services/online-permitting>

For even more information, visit scgov.net or call 311 or 941-861-5000.

To access a digital version of "Doing Business in Sarasota County" with clickable links, visit scgov.net/doingbusiness
This document provides useful information in how to start a business in Sarasota County.

THE REZONES AND SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS PROCESS

1 PRELIMINARY MEETING PRE-APPLICATION MEETING

Preliminary meetings are available by appointment to consult with a planner about your project. A pre-application meeting is required with the Development Review Committee (DRC). Written summary letter provided within 7-10 days. There is a \$350 fee.

2 NEIGHBORHOOD WORKSHOP

A neighborhood workshop is required with surrounding property owners. A county planner will attend this meeting to explain the process. There is a \$215 fee.

3 STAFF REVIEW APPLICATION SUBMITTAL | SUFFICIENCY REVIEW FORMAL REVIEW | SCHEDULE HEARING

Application submittals are by appointment. There is a \$7,500 escrow deposit required. Staff review involves a ten (10) day sufficiency and a five (5) day formal review. Staff and Applicant schedule a Planning Commission hearing date.

For more information on the rezoning or special exception process, please contact planner@scgov.net.

4 PUBLIC NOTICE

Public Notice is both for Planning Commission and County Commission public hearings, by newspaper advertisement, signs posted on the property and a mailed notice of public hearings.

5 PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING + RECOMMENDATION

Planning Commission hearing is held and a recommendation is made to the Board of County Commissioners. All information that is submitted either before or at the Planning Commission hearing is included in the information that is forwarded to the County Commissioners for their consideration.

6 COUNTY COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING + FINAL ACTION

The County Commission makes the final decision at the County Commission public hearing. The Process takes approximately 6-9 months.

PREPARED BY
SARASOTA COUNTY
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES
TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON
PLANNING RELATED TOPICS.
THIS CUTSHEET AND ITS ASSOCIATED
GRAPHICS ARE TO BE USED AS
EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ONLY.
ALL GRAPHICS ARE CONCEPTUAL
IN NATURE.



ZONING

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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WHAT IS MY ZONING?

To determine the zoning, go to the Planning Data Explorer GIS system, here: <https://data-sarco.opendata.arcgis.com/>

From the “Layer List” stack drop-down menu, you may click on the “County Zoning” check box. This will activate the zoning map for all of Sarasota County. You can also email the Zoning department at zoning@scgov.net for assistance.

SHORT TERM RENTALS

Only properties zoned RMF (Residential Multi-Family) on the barrier islands may be rented out short term. All other dwelling units within Sarasota County must comply with the requirements of UDC Section 124-131 and may be rented as a whole and for periods of greater than 30 days.

FENCES

Fences do not require a permit, however must meet the regulations in UDC Section 124-125. Fences may be installed up to a property line, but are limited to 8 feet in height on side and rear yards. In the front yard, a fence is limited to 4 feet in height at the property line, or 6 feet in height if the fence comes back at least 4 feet from the property line. The finished side of the fence must face the street and neighboring properties.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES

No lot shall contain more than two recreational vehicles stored outside of a completely enclosed building, and no such vehicle or equipment shall be used for living, sleeping, housekeeping or business purposes

HOME-BASED BUSINESS

A business that operates from a residential property is permitted and does not require a business use permit. External modifications must conform to the residential character of a home. The business shall be secondary to the activities of the business. Parking of heavy equipment and vehicles cannot be visible from the street or neighboring property.

ACCESSORY STRUCTURES

Accessory structures (such as a shed or detached garage) must comply with additional standards in the RSF, RMF, and RC zoning districts. Accessory structures shall not exceed 20 feet in height and cannot exceed 50% of the footprint of the home.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Accessory dwelling units (ADU) are permitted in the RE and RSF zoning districts. An ADU is limited to 750 square feet in area, the owner must occupy either the principal dwelling or the ADU, and it cannot exceed the height of the home.