



Zoning Background

When and why was zoning created?

Zoning as a key tool for planning

Industrialization across the Americas and Europe spurred a public health focus on planning through housing construction, sanitation improvements, and – most notably – access to recreation and an appropriate way to divide cities through zoning to achieve economy and efficiency. This era witnessed the beginnings of urban planning as a professional field.

Along with the city's power to budget, tax, and condemn property, zoning is a key tool for implementing planning policy. New York City's power to regulate use, bulk, density of buildings, to promote affordable housing, and to protect places of historical significance through zoning is derived from the state, which grants municipalities the power to regulate land use in a manner designed to promote the public health and welfare.

The 1916 Zoning Resolution

New York City pioneered our nation's first citywide zoning code, the 1916 Zoning Resolution (1916 ZR), which reflected borough and local interests. The direct catalyst for the 1916 ZR was the speculative development of 120 Broadway, also known as the Equitable Building, in lower Manhattan. When it was built, its height and bulk, with street walls rising uninterrupted to its 41st uppermost floor, incited concern among neighboring property owners, planners and the civic community.

The 1916 ZR has had a profound influence on urban development across the nation and throughout the world. After a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling upheld the validity of zoning (**Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.** 1926), many U.S. towns, villages, and cities developed zoning ordinances and controls. After the Great Depression, city planning became a primary function of local governments, and various theories and models for ideal planning evolved.

The 1961 Zoning Resolution

The first significant update to the 1916 ZR came in 1961. Since the passage of the 1961 Zoning Resolution, fresh approaches have been continually developed to address issues and opportunities that have emerged as New York City has grown and changed. The Department of City Planning has continued to fine-tune the Zoning Resolution to make it more versatile and responsive, to better address issues of neighborhood character and social equity as well as to help promote strategic investment in the city's future. Contemporary planning notably uses a more collaborative and participatory approach than was evident in earlier periods.