BELMONT
NORTH CAROLINA

Land Development Code Update

CODE AUDIT

OCTOBER 2026

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Part 1: Introduction

Overview

The City of Belmont is undertaking an update to its Land Development Code (LDC) in order for the City's development regulations to remain clear, effective, and responsive to current planning and development needs. The LDC establishes the regulations that guide the use and development of land throughout Belmont and serves as one of the City's primary tools for implementing its long-range planning goals.

This Code Audit provides an initial evaluation of the existing LDC and establishes a framework for the update before detailed ordinance drafting begins. The audit focuses on opportunities to:

- Improve organization and usability so regulations are easier to locate, understand, and administer.
- Consolidate related regulations that are currently distributed among multiple chapters or sections.
- Clarify development procedures and approval requirements.
- Modernize land use regulations and definitions to better address current development types and practices.
- Improve consistency and enforceability by reducing ambiguous, duplicative, or conflicting provisions.
- Review the LDC for consistency with current State law.
- Review the LDC for consistency with applicable City plans and policies.
- Update the presentation of the Code through improved tables, graphics, cross-references, and formatting.

The recommendations presented in this report should be viewed as a starting point rather than an exhaustive list of every amendment that may ultimately be incorporated. Additional issues may emerge as individual provisions are reviewed and rewritten. Routine code maintenance, including correcting outdated terminology, conflicting provisions, unclear cross-references, formatting inconsistencies, and outdated graphics, will also occur as part of the update.

Part 2: Public Engagement

Public engagement is a critical component of the LDC Update process because the regulations contained within the Code directly influence how Belmont grows, develops, and redevelops over time. Engaging residents, property owners, business owners, developers, elected and appointed officials, and other community stakeholders provides valuable insight into how the existing Code functions in practice, where challenges or confusion may exist, and what opportunities should be considered through the update. This input helps the updated LDC be technically sound and consistent with the City's adopted plans, but also responsive to community priorities and the experiences of those who regularly interact with the Code.

While not every comment received will result in a specific code amendment, the public input has been reviewed to identify recurring themes, connect those themes to relevant code topics, and inform the audit findings. This process helps demonstrate how community feedback was considered, where it may influence future code updates, and where additional policy discussions may be needed.

The following are high-level summaries from public engagement events held thus far. More information about the input received from these engagement efforts is available in the individual meeting notes or summaries for each effort.

Online Community Survey

An online community survey was available from **July 27 through September 15, 2026**, providing an additional opportunity for community members to participate in the LDC update at their convenience. The survey received **552 survey contributions**. Participants were asked to share their perspectives on Belmont's existing development regulations and priorities for the updated LDC, providing broader community input to complement the in-person workshops, focus groups, and other engagement activities. The survey also provided an accessible online avenue for community members who may not have been able to participate in a scheduled meeting or event.

Key Takeaways

1. **Balance Development with Capacity** – A common concern is that residential and commercial growth has outpaced roadway, water, sewer, school, and other public-service capacity. Participants want infrastructure impacts addressed before or alongside additional development approvals.
2. **Support Transportation Safety** – Congestion, road conditions, intersections, and access along corridors such as South Point Road were identified as concerns. Participants support safer access points, improved intersections, and coordination between development and roadway improvements.
3. **Preserve Belmont's Historic Character** – Participants valued established neighborhoods, historic buildings, mature landscaping, and the character of downtown. There is desire for

new development to complement these qualities through appropriate scale, architecture, and site design.

4. **Protect Natural Areas and Open Space** – There is concern regarding clear-cutting and the loss of Belmont's tree canopy. Participants favor preserving existing mature trees, ensuring usable open space in development, strengthening landscaping and environmental standards, and improving enforcement.
5. **Expand Pedestrian Connectivity** – Participants view downtown as a positive example of walkability but identify gaps elsewhere. Suggested improvements include connected sidewalks, bicycle facilities, shade, and pedestrian connections to schools, parks, neighborhoods, and commercial areas.
6. **Ensure Quality Residential Standards** – Quality residential development was associated with varied architecture, landscaping, sidewalks, trees, amenities, and safe streets. Many participants oppose "cookie-cutter" development and subdivisions that lack distinctive character or open space.
7. **Improve Regulatory Procedures** – Participants desire clear standards, predictable review procedures, accessible public information, and transparent decision-making in permitting and review processes.

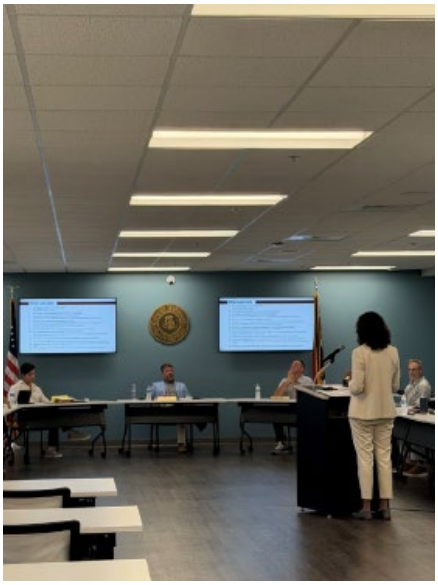
Technical Staff Meeting and Site Tour



On June 23, 2026, the project team met with City staff representing the Planning and Zoning, Fire, Police, Engineering and Stormwater, Public Works, and Community Development departments to discuss their experiences administering and working with the existing LDC. Staff were asked to identify provisions that are working well, recurring challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Discussion covered a broad range of topics, including transportation and emergency access, sidewalks and pedestrian connectivity, street and greenway standards, parking, multifamily development, infrastructure capacity, conditional zoning, permitting, landscaping, nonconformities, and code enforcement. Staff also emphasized the need to simplify LDC language, clarify development processes and approval triggers, and better coordinate the LDC with the City's Land Development Standards Manual. The project team also met with the City's Technical Review Committee (TRC) to discuss their experience with applying the LDC to applications and where improvements or modifications could be made, as well as common issues they face during TRC meetings.

Joint Planning and Zoning Board and City Council Workshop



On July 16, 2026, the project team conducted a Joint Workshop with members of the Belmont Planning and Zoning Board and City Council, along with Planning and Zoning Department staff.

Participants discussed how the existing LDC is functioning, opportunities for improvement, and how the updated regulations can better support Belmont's future growth and development. Key themes included proactively planning for emerging land uses, aligning development regulations with Belmont's vision and identity, improving consistency among zoning and development standards, and ensuring that the LDC better implements the Comprehensive Plan and Small Area Plans. Participants also emphasized preserving community character and important local assets, improving standards for infill and redevelopment, balancing regulatory standards with flexibility, and making development regulations and approval processes easier for the public to access and understand.

Plan Palooza



On August 20, 2026, the City hosted Plan Palooza, an open-house-style community engagement event at TechWorks Gaston that provided residents and other community members an opportunity to learn about several ongoing planning initiatives, including the LDC Update. The event was designed as an informal drop-in session where participants could speak directly with the project team, learn about the purpose and role of the LDC, and provide feedback on issues and opportunities to consider during the update. Interactive activities invited participants to share their preferences regarding future development types, identify examples of quality development, discuss how the LDC can protect Belmont's character while accommodating growth, and suggest improvements to existing development regulations and review procedures.

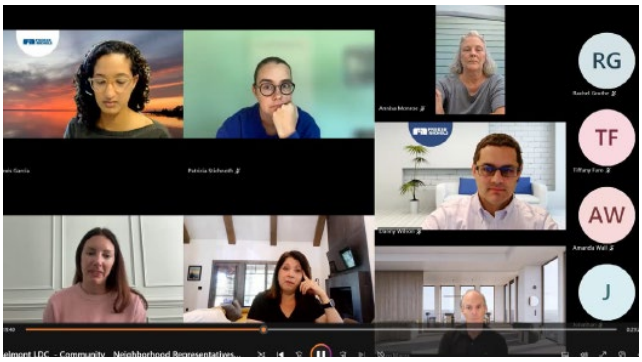
Community feedback from the Plan Palooza showed broad support for growth and redevelopment in Belmont, provided it is planned in a way that preserves the City's character and quality of life. Residents consistently emphasized the importance of walkability, bicycle connectivity, preserving open space and historic assets, improving traffic and infrastructure, and ensuring that new

development reflects Belmont's small-town character. Participants also expressed interest in a wider variety of housing options and a simpler, more predictable development process.

Key Themes:

- More sidewalks, trails, crosswalks, and bike infrastructure to improve connectivity throughout the city.
- Address traffic congestion and improve transportation and utility infrastructure alongside future growth.
- Preserve Belmont's historic character, small-town feel, architectural quality, and community identity.
- Protect trees, open space, parks, and natural resources while promoting sustainable development practices.
- Encourage high-quality development that is walkable, context-sensitive, and delivers promised amenities.
- Support a broader range of housing options, including ADUs, cottage courts, duplexes, townhomes, tiny homes, and workforce housing.
- Simplify regulations, improve public communication, and create a more predictable development review process.
- Increase public art, placemaking elements, and community gathering spaces.

Virtual Focus Group Meetings



A series of virtual focus group meetings was conducted with representatives from community and neighborhood organizations, business and economic development interests, development and design professionals, and the Environmental Sustainability Board. The sessions provided an opportunity for participants with different perspectives and experiences to discuss how the existing LDC affects Belmont's neighborhoods, businesses, development activity, natural resources, and overall community character.

Across the sessions, participants emphasized the importance of preserving Belmont's small-town character, historic development patterns, walkability, vibrant downtown, and natural setting while allowing for continued growth, reinvestment, and a broader mix of housing and commercial opportunities. Recurring themes included the need for clearer and more predictable development standards and review processes, greater flexibility for infill and redevelopment, additional housing choices, improved infrastructure and multimodal connectivity, and continued attention to tree preservation, open space, parks, trails, and greenways. Participants also expressed interest in making the LDC easier to understand and administer while ensuring that future development and reinvestment reinforce Belmont's unique identity and long-term economic vitality.

Part 3: Current State of Regulations and Comprehensive Plan Alignment

Current State of Regulations

Belmont's existing Land Development Code is a regulatory document that combines zoning, subdivision, development, design, and administrative requirements into a single ordinance. Note that similar regulations that also impact development, such as the Watershed Management and Protection regulations, are not included in the LDC, but are located in the Code of Ordinances. Major topics currently addressed in the LDC include:

- General provisions and definitions;
- Building types and design requirements;
- Zoning districts;
- Supplemental requirements for certain uses;
- Open space;
- Streets and greenways;
- Parking;
- Signs;
- Tree protection and landscaping;
- Site lighting;
- Development review and plan requirements;
- Nonconformities;
- Administration and boards; and
- Amendments.

The existing Code contains many features that continue to support Belmont's desired development character and can provide a foundation for the updated LDC. However, the code audit has also identified several overarching issues affecting the Code's usability and administration:

- **Organization:** Related regulations are sometimes located in different chapters, requiring users to move between multiple sections to determine applicable requirements.
- **Land Use Regulations:** Permitted uses, use categories, definitions, supplemental standards, and approval requirements could be more clearly consolidated.
- **Approval Requirements:** Certain Special Use Permit requirements and other approval provisions are embedded within broader district regulations rather than being immediately apparent to the user.
- **Code Presentation:** Existing graphics, tables, dimensional standards, and cross-references provide opportunities for simplification and modernization.
- **Administration and Enforcement:** Some provisions rely on standards that may be difficult to interpret, monitor, or enforce consistently.

- **Technical Standards:** Certain detailed construction requirements may be more appropriately located in technical manuals or other supporting documents.
- **Legal Updates:** Portions of the Code require review and revision for consistency with current North Carolina law.

Comprehensive Plan Alignment

The Land Development Code is one of the City's primary tools for implementing the vision, goals, and recommendations established through *Our Belmont*, the City's Comprehensive Plan. While the Comprehensive Plan establishes the long-term policy direction for growth and development, the LDC translates that direction into the regulations that govern land use, development form, infrastructure, open space, and the development review process.

The LDC update provides an opportunity to better align Belmont's development regulations with the community priorities established through the Comprehensive Plan. Particular areas of coordination include:

- **Land Use and Development Pattern:** Ensure zoning districts, permitted uses, building types, and development standards support the land use patterns envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Housing Choice:** Review regulations affecting a range of housing types, including missing-middle housing and accessory dwelling units, while considering neighborhood character and compatibility.
- **Community Character:** Maintain and strengthen standards that reinforce Belmont's established neighborhoods, Downtown, corridors, and other distinctive areas of the community.
- **Mobility and Connectivity:** Coordinate street, sidewalk, greenway, access, and development standards with the City's goals for a connected and multimodal transportation network.
- **Natural Resources and Open Space:** Coordinate development regulations with goals related to tree preservation, open space, parks, greenways, and environmental resources.
- **Growth and Infrastructure:** Consider how development standards and review procedures can better coordinate future growth and redevelopment with infrastructure and public service needs.

These Comprehensive Plan priorities provide an important policy foundation for the Code Audit and subsequent LDC rewrite. Recommendations identified through the Audit should therefore be considered not only as opportunities to improve the organization and administration of the existing Code, but also as opportunities to strengthen the LDC's role in implementing Belmont's long-term vision.

Part 4: Key Recommendations

Simplify and Consolidate the LDC Structure

Reduce the overall number of LDC chapters by consolidating related regulations into broader, topic-based chapters. The existing LDC separates several closely related development standards into individual chapters, which can require users to move between multiple sections of the Code to understand the full set of requirements applicable to a project. As part of the update, the overall chapter structure should be streamlined by grouping regulations that address related aspects of development into coordinated chapters.

For example, open space, streets, greenways, and related public-realm standards could be combined into a single chapter, while other closely related regulatory topics could similarly be consolidated where appropriate. Within these broader chapters, clear section headings, tables, graphics, and internal organization can maintain easy access to individual standards. This approach would reduce unnecessary cross-references, improve navigation, and create a more intuitive LDC without eliminating substantive regulations or significantly changing the City's overall regulatory framework.

Improve Usability and Navigation of the LDC

A primary objective of the LDC update should be to make the ordinance easier to navigate, understand, and administer for City staff, residents, property owners, applicants, developers, and design professionals.

The updated LDC should:

- Establish a clear and predictable organizational structure.
- Consolidate related provisions that are currently located in multiple chapters.
- Improve section titles, internal cross-references, and navigation.
- Reduce unnecessary duplication and conflicting provisions.
- Use tables in place of lengthy regulatory text where appropriate.
- Incorporate graphics and diagrams where they can more clearly communicate requirements.
- Make it easier for users to determine which regulations apply to a particular property or project.
- Include cross-references or hyperlinks to relevant regulations to reduce duplication of requirements throughout the Code.

Consolidate and Modernize Land Use Regulations

The updated LDC should establish a centralized and intuitive approach to regulating land uses. The goal should be for a user to readily determine what a use is, where it is allowed, what approval is required, and what additional standards apply.

Key changes should include:

- Create a dedicated land use section.
- Consolidate permitted-use regulations into a clear use table or similar format for consistency.
- Modernize and clarify use categories and individual use definitions.
- Consolidate supplemental or use-specific standards.
- Clearly distinguish uses permitted by right from those requiring a Special Use Permit, Conditional Zoning or other approval.
- Provide direct cross-references between the use table and applicable supplemental standards.
- Review broad or overlapping use categories to improve consistency in classification.

Streamline and Clarify Development Procedures

Development procedures should be predictable and clearly communicate what is required of an applicant from the beginning of the process.

The update should:

- Clearly identify each application and approval type.
- Identify the appropriate review and decision-making authority.
- Establish consistent approval criteria and findings where applicable.
- Clarify the general sequence of review.
- Consolidate procedures that are currently repeated or dispersed throughout the Code.
- Improve cross-references between procedures and applicable development standards.
- Evaluate opportunities for administrative approval where appropriate.

The update should also evaluate the appropriate role of administrative, quasi-judicial, and legislative approvals within Belmont's development process.

Improve Consistency and Enforceability

Regulations should provide sufficient specificity so that applicants can understand what is expected, and City staff can administer requirements consistently.

During the rewrite, provisions should be reviewed to:

- Replace ambiguous or subjective terminology where possible.
- Establish measurable standards and thresholds.
- Clarify how compliance is determined.
- Remove unnecessary or duplicative regulations.
- Clearly identify where administrative flexibility is appropriate.

Separate Regulatory Standards from Technical Specifications

The updated LDC should focus primarily on regulations necessary to govern land use and development. Highly technical construction and engineering specifications should be evaluated for placement in separate manuals, adopted plans, or other supporting documents when appropriate.

This approach could include:

- Retaining regulatory requirements and minimum standards within the LDC.
- Moving detailed construction specifications to appropriate technical manuals.
- Referencing adopted plans and regulations rather than reproducing information that may change over time.
- Avoiding duplication between the LDC and engineering or construction standards.
- Establishing clear cross-references to external standards when they remain applicable.

Align the LDC with Current Law and City Policy

The updated LDC should be comprehensively reviewed for consistency with current North Carolina law and to ensure that its regulations effectively implement the goals and recommendations of the City's Comprehensive Plan and other applicable adopted plans and policies.

The update should:

- Replace outdated statutory citations and terminology.
- Review procedures and approval authorities for consistency with current State law.
- Review development and design standards affected by changes in State legislation.
- Review sign regulations against applicable legal requirements.
- Review provisions related to nonconformities, development approvals, and administrative procedures.
- Update references to adopted City plans, transportation plans, maps, and technical documents.
- Clarify the status and role of the City's official zoning map.
- Identify tools that are allowable for regulating certain uses in light of changes in State Law.

Part 5: Review of Existing LDC

Chapter 1 – Purpose and Applicability

Chapter 1 establishes the legal authority, applicability, purpose, title, interpretation provisions, and effective date of the Land Development Code. It also establishes the relationship between the LDC and the City's Zoning Map and describes the broader planning principles the Code is intended to implement. Recommendations include:

- **Update statutory authority and applicability.** Revise outdated references to the former Chapter 160A planning and zoning statutes and update the chapter to reflect current North Carolina statutory authority. The existing provisions currently cite G.S. 160A-381, 160A-382, and 160A-372.
- **Strengthen references to adopted plans.** Update the chapter's relationship to the City's current Comprehensive Plan and incorporate appropriate references to other adopted plans and transportation-related plans or policies that inform implementation of the LDC. The current purpose statement references the City's Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
- **Clarify Code terminology and the official Zoning Map**. Establish that references to the "Land Development Code," "LDC," "Code," and "Ordinance" refer to the same regulatory document. Clarify that the City's official GIS-based Zoning Map is the authoritative zoning map and update related terminology accordingly.
- **Review map interpretation and authority and standards.** Retain necessary rules for interpreting zoning district boundaries, but review and simplify these provisions as appropriate for the City's current GIS-based mapping system. The existing section relies on physical features, map scale, and Planning Board interpretation when district boundaries are uncertain.
- **Update the effective date and adoption language.** Replace the outdated and incomplete adoption history currently contained in Section 1.6 with the appropriate effective date and transition language for the updated LDC. The existing section contains both an effective 1995 date and an incomplete 2001 adoption statement.

Chapter 2 -Definitions

Chapter 2 establishes the rules of construction and defines terms used throughout the Land Development Code. Recommendations include:

- **Review and modernize definitions.** Review existing definitions for outdated terminology, unclear language, duplication, and consistency with terminology used elsewhere in the LDC. Definitions that are no longer necessary should be removed, while new term definitions should be added where needed to support the updated Code.
- **Refine and expand land use definitions.** Create more specific definitions for land uses where the existing terminology is overly broad or combines uses with meaningfully different characteristics. More precise use definitions will support the proposed consolidated land

use section and make it easier to determine how individual uses should be classified and regulated.

- **Coordinate definitions with the proposed land use framework.** Review defined uses alongside the future permitted-use table and supplemental use standards so terminology is consistent across all three components.
- **Review definitions for consistency with State law.** Update terms that are defined or affected by North Carolina statutes and that statutory terminology is used consistently where appropriate.
- **Consolidate definitions where practical.** Definitions applicable throughout the LDC should generally be located in Chapter 2 rather than repeated in individual chapters. Chapter-specific definitions may remain where they are highly technical or apply only to a specialized regulatory program, but unnecessary duplication should be avoided.
- **Improve overall usability.** Standardize the format and organization of definitions and correct outdated cross-references, numbering, and terminology. For example, the current definitions include section numbering such as "3.10.5 DDD" within the alphabetical definitions, indicating an opportunity for general organizational cleanup.

Chapter 3 – General Provisions

Chapter 3 establishes a wide range of general development standards that apply across zoning districts. These provisions address lot and setback requirements, block design, temporary uses, vehicle and equipment storage, trash and recycling containment, residential accessory structures, accessory dwelling units, solar energy systems, erosion and sedimentation control, and water and sewer service, and more. Recommendations include:

- **Reorganize the chapter by topic.** Review the overall structure of Chapter 3 and relocate provisions where they more logically fit within the updated LDC. General lot and development standards may remain together, while temporary uses, accessory uses and structures, supplemental use standards, infrastructure requirements, and other specialized provisions could be consolidated with related regulations elsewhere in the Code. Regulations specific to a particular zone or building type within the other chapters should be incorporated or clarified to make it more clear where regulations apply.
- **Clarify accessory structure and Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations.** Reorganize and clarify the standards for accessory structures and ADUs to better distinguish accessory dwelling units from other accessory structures and from duplexes or other principal dwelling units. The updated LDC should establish clear standards for attached and detached ADUs, including applicable setbacks, maximum size, number of units permitted, utility and metering requirements, and their relationship to the principal dwelling. Separate standards should also be established or clarified for accessory structures associated with nonresidential uses. For example, the current LDC groups garages, carports, and ADUs together for certain location requirements and then applies generalized accessory structure height and setback standards, which can make it difficult to determine when an ADU

should be treated differently from a conventional accessory structure. Additionally, there are challenges that are created when converting an accessory building to an ADU because ADUs have more stringent requirements.

- **Consolidate accessory use and structure standards**. Chapter 3 currently contains broad residential accessory structure requirements as well as separate standards for accessory dwelling units, pools, satellite dishes, and solar energy systems. Consider consolidating these regulations into a more coordinated accessory use and structure section so that applicable dimensional, location, and approval requirements can be understood in one place. Additionally, incorporate standards for commercial and industrial accessory structures to provide clarity for developing accessory structures on non-residential properties.
- **Coordinate general provisions with other chapters.** Review provisions that overlap with district standards, parking, supplemental use standards, subdivision design, and development review requirements. For example, Chapter 3 includes block standards, use-permission language, accessory structure standards, and cross-references to other chapters. The rewrite should minimize duplication and place standards where users would most reasonably expect to find them.

Chapter 4 – Building Type Requirements

Chapter 4 establishes development and architectural standards for a series of building types, including detached houses, townhouses, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, apartment buildings, shopfront buildings, workplace buildings, flex commercial buildings, and civic/institutional buildings. Recommendations include:

- **Reconcile multifamily and missing-middle housing standards.** Review the treatment of duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhouses, cottage courts, courtyard buildings, apartments, and other small-scale multifamily housing types to establish consistent definitions, building forms, dimensional standards, and approval requirements. The updated LDC should clearly distinguish housing type from building form and identify when each housing type is permitted by-right or requires additional approval.
- **Retain and clarify the building-type framework.** Continue using building types as a key component of Belmont's development regulations but review the organization and presentation of each type so users can more easily understand applicable lot, dimensional, access, and architectural requirements. The chapter currently combines narrative descriptions, dimensional standards, architectural standards, and example imagery for each building type.
- **Update graphics and example imagery.** Replace or improve existing diagrams and example images so they more clearly illustrate the intent and dimensional requirements of each building type. Additional examples should be considered where they would help users understand acceptable development forms, particularly for less familiar building types such as civic/institutional buildings.

- **Review dimensional and impervious coverage standards for consistency.** Confirm that lot coverage and maximum impervious surface requirements are coordinated with applicable watershed protection requirements and other development standards.
- **Review architectural standards for current legal requirements.** Evaluate architectural and design standards throughout the chapter for consistency with current North Carolina law and revise requirements where necessary. At the same time, determine aesthetic standards for specific building types where we have control, such as non-single-family residential structures. Consideration of design preferences should be coordinated with input from the concurrent City Center and Waterfront Area Plan projects. **Clarify newer and mixed-use building types.** Refine descriptions and standards for newer or more flexible building forms so their intended use and development pattern are readily understood. For example, clarifying whether cottage court dwellings are located on individual or shared lots and explicitly recognizing mixed-use development within the shopfront building description.

Chapter 5 – District Provisions

Chapter 5 establishes Belmont's zoning districts and the development framework associated with each district. The overall approach provides a strong foundation, but the chapter would benefit from simplification, clearer formatting, and better coordination with the proposed consolidated land use regulations. Recommendations include:

- **Simplify the Code structure and improve navigation.** Consolidate related regulations and reduce the number of chapters users must consult to determine applicable requirements. For example, the existing framework requires users to interpret the use categories established in Chapter 5 to determine whether a particular use is specifically listed or falls within a broader use category, then consult Chapter 6 for applicable performance standards, and potentially reference Chapter 15 for Special Use Permit procedures.
- **Create consolidated district, use, and building type tables.** Reorganize district regulations so users can readily determine the building types and land uses permitted within each district and whether approval is by-right, subject to supplemental standards, requires a Special Use Permit, or requires another approval process. The current district provisions frequently separate building types, use categories, individual permitted uses, and supplemental-standard references within the same district.
- **Clarify the overall zoning district structure.** Clearly distinguish between base districts, overlay districts, and conditional districts so users can quickly understand how each type functions and how multiple districts may apply to a property. The existing Code currently lists all districts together and separately notes that most districts have a corresponding conditional district.
- **Improve the presentation of district standards.** Evaluate alternative formatting for dimensional and development standards so information such as setbacks, density, lot dimensions, height, and other requirements can be more easily compared between

districts or evaluate options to better link the connection between building form and zoning districts for improved clarity.

- **Consolidate and clarify permitted uses.** Move toward a centralized land use table or similar format rather than relying primarily on narrative use categories within each individual district. The current Code uses broad categories such as residential, lodging, office, commercial, manufacturing, civic, and other, with "open," "limited," and "restricted" variations, while also separately identifying certain individual uses. The update should make it easier to determine whether a particular use is permitted by right, subject to additional standards, requires a Special Use Permit, or is prohibited.
- **Make Special Use Permit, Variance and Conditional Zoning requirements more visible.** Clearly identify uses and development standards that require a Special Use Permit, Variance, or Conditional Zoning rather than embedding those requirements within district text.
- **Clarify the role and flexibility of Conditional District zoning.** Review existing project-area thresholds and clearly identify which dimensional, design, development, or procedural standards may be modified through Conditional District zoning.
- **Evaluate specialized district and corridor standards.** Review the Wilkinson Boulevard Overlay, Rural Commercial District, Infill Development District, Downtown District, and other specialized district or overlay provisions for consistency with current development conditions, redevelopment objectives, and the Comprehensive Plan.

Chapter 6 – Additional Requirements for Certain Uses

Chapter 6 establishes additional performance and operational standards for certain land uses that may require special consideration due to their design, intensity, location, or potential impacts. These standards apply to uses identified in Chapter 5 as permitted with performance standards or as Special Uses. Recommendations include:

- **Consolidate and standardize supplemental use regulations.** Retain use-specific standards in one centralized location and organize them consistently so users can easily identify applicable location, dimensional, operational, buffering, parking, and approval requirements. Chapter 6 currently serves this purpose, but individual sections vary considerably in structure and level of detail.
- **Coordinate Chapter 6 with the proposed land use table.** Each use requiring supplemental standards should be clearly identified in the future permitted-use table, with a direct cross-reference to the applicable Chapter 6 standards. This will reduce the need for users to search between district narratives, definitions, and supplemental regulations to determine what requirements apply.
- **Improve clarity and enforceability of operational standards.** Review requirements involving hours of operation, noise, and similar operational impacts so that they can be objectively administered and enforced and determine if any regulations should reference the municipal code instead. For example, the private nightclub provisions regulate noise

relative to "normal background noise" and allow hours of operation to be established based on neighborhood conditions.

- **Clarify multifamily housing standards and approval pathways.** Reevaluate Section 6.2.29 so that multifamily development requirements are easier to understand and administer. The current section establishes different Conditional Zoning and Special Use Permit pathways depending on building form and project size and also ties development requirements to trip-generation categories in the ITE Trip Generation Manual.

Chapter 7 – Open Space

Chapter 7 establishes Belmont's open space dedication requirements, payment-in-lieu provisions, general open space standards, and recognized open space types. The chapter emphasizes usable, accessible neighborhood open space rather than leftover or otherwise unusable land. Recommendations include:

- **Clarify coordination with other chapters and adopted plans.** Open space requirements should be clearly coordinated with zoning district standards, watershed requirements, development review provisions, and adopted parks or open space plans. The current LDC already references open space requirements in several other chapters.

Chapter 8 – Streets and Greenways

Chapter 8 establishes Belmont's street and greenway design principles, engineering standards, street cross-sections, and greenway construction requirements. The chapter emphasizes interconnected street networks, pedestrian and bicycle access, multimodal design, and coordination with adopted transportation and recreation plans. Recommendations include:

- **Reference adopted transportation plans rather than maintaining roadway lists in the LDC.** Remove the current list of designated collector streets and instead reference the applicable MPO or adopted transportation plan so roadway classifications can be updated without requiring an LDC amendment.
- **Evaluate the appropriate location for technical construction standards.** Review whether detailed engineering specifications should remain in the LDC or be relocated to the City's Land Development Standards Manual or another technical document.
- **Reevaluate sight triangle requirements for driveways and intersections.** Review the existing 35-foot by 35-foot sight triangle requirement and consider establishing different standards based on the type of intersection or access point. The current standard may be unnecessarily restrictive when applied to private and commercial driveways, particularly on constrained infill or redevelopment sites. Any revised standards should continue to provide adequate visibility for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists and should allow the City Engineer to require additional sight distance where warranted by roadway speed, geometry, topography, or other site-specific conditions.

Chapter 9 – Parking

Chapter 9 establishes standards for off-street parking, including parking location and design, minimum parking ratios, maximum parking allowances, parking space and aisle dimensions, shared parking, bicycle parking, overflow parking, structured parking, and parking lot landscaping. Recommendations include:

- **Reevaluate the overall parking framework.** Transition away from the existing minimum-parking approach and establish a parking framework that better reflects Belmont's development goals while complying with State law. Options could include parking maximums, voluntary or advisory parking ratios, shared parking provisions, use of on-street and public parking, requiring the applicant to provide a parking analysis based on industry standards, and standards focused primarily on the location, design, landscaping, and impacts of parking areas.
- **Update parking regulations for consistency with current State law.** Review and revise Chapter 9 to reflect recent changes to State law governing local parking requirements. Session Law 2026-39 (House Bill 162) amends G.S. 160D-702 to prohibit most local governments from requiring a minimum number of off-street parking spaces per development or structure, regardless of occupancy or use. The law also limits required off-street parking-space dimensions to no more than 9 feet by 20 feet, except for accessible, parallel, or diagonal spaces. These parking provisions become effective January 1, 2027.

Chapter 10 – Signs

Chapter 10 establishes Belmont's sign regulations, including permitted signage by zoning district, standards for individual sign types, signs exempt from permit requirements, prohibited signs, illumination standards, electronic message and reader boards, and sign maintenance. Recommendations include:

- **Review the sign regulations for content neutrality.** Conduct a comprehensive review of Chapter 10 so that sign regulations are structured and administered consistently with the First Amendment and current case law. Where practical, regulations should focus on objective characteristics such as location, size, height, number, type, illumination, duration, and physical form rather than the message displayed on a sign. The existing Code contains several provisions that distinguish signs according to their subject matter or purpose, including campaign/election signs, real estate signs, yard sale signs, and certain informational signs that may not comply with the First Amendment and applicable case law.
- **Update election sign provisions for consistency with State law.** Review Section 10.4 and revise applicable standards for political and election signage for consistency with current North Carolina requirements, particularly regulations governing signs within NCDOT-maintained rights-of-way. The existing provisions establish specific size, timing, placement, and removal requirements and reference G.S. 136-32.

Chapter 11 – Tree Protection and Landscaping

Chapter 11 establishes Belmont's tree protection and landscaping requirements, including applicability and exemptions, administrative provisions, tree save areas, heritage tree protection, tree inventories and protection plans, planting requirements, landscape plans, parking lot landscaping, street trees, and residential tree canopy standards. Recommendations include:

- **Clarify and consolidate landscaping and buffering requirements.** Review the existing landscaping and buffer standards to establish a more consistent set of buffer types and clearly identify when each is required. Where landscaping, screening, and buffering requirements overlap, accomplish similar purposes, or are located in separate chapters, such as Chapter 9, consolidate the standards to reduce duplication and make it easier for applicants and staff to determine the applicable requirements. Consider using tables and graphics to illustrate required buffer types, planting requirements, and the development situations in which each applies.
- **Clarify applicability, exemptions, and redevelopment triggers.** Establish a more straightforward framework for determining when Chapter 11 requirements apply to new development, expansions, changes of use, infill development, and redevelopment. The current Code includes several separate exemptions based on development type and scale; for example, certain residential infill development, minor subdivisions, residential additions, interior upfits, changes of use without expansion, and nonresidential building expansions of less than 20 percent are exempt from the tree protection requirements of the chapter. These provisions should be reviewed and coordinated with the broader redevelopment applicability standards recommended elsewhere in the updated LDC.
- **Establish clearer criteria for administrative relief and modifications.** Retain appropriate flexibility for constrained sites and redevelopment projects but establish measurable criteria that guide when and to what extent the Planning Director may approve modifications or relief from landscaping, buffering, tree preservation, or related requirements. The existing chapter generally requires written approval from the Planning Director for relief and provides specific relief mechanisms for certain requirements. More objective criteria would improve predictability for applicants while supporting consistent administration of the Code. Further clarity is needed to distinguish the role of the Environmental Sustainability Board (ESB) and when the discretion of the Planning Director applies.
- **Reevaluate tree inventory and preservation requirements.** Review when a full tree inventory should be required and consider scaling inventory requirements based on the type and intensity of development, anticipated limits of disturbance, existing site conditions, and the amount of tree preservation proposed. The current LDC allows the Planning Director to reduce the tree inventory survey area for certain nonresidential projects when at least 200 percent of the required Tree Save Area is proposed for preservation, while still requiring all heritage trees on the site to be inventoried. The updated

LDC should build on this concept by establishing a clearer and more proportional approach to tree inventories while maintaining the City's tree preservation objectives.

Chapter 12 – Site Lighting

Chapter 12 establishes standards for exterior site and street lighting, including applicability, light measurement, exemptions, prohibited sources, fixture design and installation, street lighting, lighting for specific uses, and photometric plan requirements. Recommendations include:

- **Update terminology and technical references as needed.** Review lighting terminology, referenced technical standards, and measurement requirements so they reflect current industry terminology and current City standards. Any outdated organizational names, technical references, or cross-references should be corrected during the rewrite.

Chapter 15 – Development Plan Review Process

Chapter 15 establishes Belmont's procedures for reviewing development applications, including minor subdivisions, site plans, conditional districts, preliminary and final plats, re-subdivisions, Special Use Permits, vested rights, and improvement guarantees. Recommendations include:

- **Review thresholds that trigger Conditional District zoning.** Evaluate the current provisions requiring Conditional District approval for certain site plans and subdivisions based on project size or transportation-study requirements.
- **Clarify the roles of administrative, legislative, and quasi-judicial approvals.** Clearly distinguish applications that are approved administratively from those requiring Planning Board or City Council action. Conditional Districts are currently reviewed by the Planning Board and decided by City Council, while Special Use Permits are conducted as evidentiary hearings before City Council.

Chapter 16 – Development Plan Requirements

Chapter 16 establishes the information, improvements, and technical requirements associated with development plans. It addresses land suitability, required infrastructure, consistency with adopted plans, environmental surveys, buffers, sketch plans, schematic designs, construction documents, landscape plans, easements, final plats, monuments, and Transportation Impact Analyses. Recommendations include:

- **Simplify and modernize plan submittal requirements.** Review the requirements for sketch plans, schematic design plans, construction documents, landscape plans, and final plats to eliminate outdated or duplicative information and better reflect current digital review practices. For example, the current final plat provisions include specific requirements for multiple paper and mylar copies as well as an AutoCAD file.
- **Review school-site reservation requirements for consistency with state law.** Evaluate Section 16.4.C, including the current requirement that developments exceeding 200 acres

or 500 housing units reserve a minimum 16-acre school site, and confirm that the City has appropriate statutory authority for the requirement.

- **Consider combining Chapters 15 and 16.** Chapter 15 outlines the development plan review process, while Chapter 16 establishes the corresponding development plan requirements. Consolidating these chapters would improve navigation and usability by presenting the review procedures and applicable requirements within a single, comprehensive chapter. This approach would make the Code easier to understand and reference for both applicants and reviewers.

Chapter 17 – Nonconformities

Chapter 17 establishes how existing nonconforming uses, structures, accessory uses and structures, lots, signs, landscaping, street frontages, development plans, and watershed-related conditions may continue, expand, be altered, or be re-established after damage or discontinuance. Recommendations include:

- **Update nonconformity provisions for consistency with current state law.** Review and revise Chapter 17 to reflect recent changes to North Carolina law affecting nonconformities, vested rights, down-zoning, and the continuation or modification of existing development. The updated provisions should clearly distinguish between the treatment of existing lawful nonconformities and limitations on the City's ability to create new nonconformities through zoning or development regulation changes. Standards for expansion, alteration, reconstruction, discontinuance, and re-establishment should also be reviewed for consistency with applicable statutory protections.
- **Clarify redevelopment and compliance triggers.** Establish consistent standards identifying when improvements to an existing site trigger compliance with current LDC requirements.

Chapter 18 – Administration

Chapter 18 establishes the basic administrative and enforcement framework for the LDC, including Planning Department authority, zoning permits, violations and penalties, and appeals and variances. Recommendations include:

- **Review administrative and enforcement procedures for consistency with current state law.** As part of the overall legal review, confirm that zoning permits, notices of violation, enforcement procedures, appeals, and variances are consistent with current Chapter 160D requirements.

Chapter 19 – Boards and Committees

Chapter 19 establishes the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, and Technical Review Committee (TRC), along with their respective responsibilities, membership requirements, meeting procedures, staff support, and attendance requirements. Recommendations include:

- **Clarify the status and procedures of the Technical Review Committee.** The LDC formally establishes the TRC as a City committee and requires it to maintain a regular meeting schedule like other official boards. Update the role of the TRC as a review committee with delegated authority from the Planning Director.
- **Clarify administrative authority, relief, and enforcement.** Clearly identify the authority delegated to the Planning Director and other administrative officials, establish objective criteria where administrative modifications or relief may be granted, and consolidate enforcement procedures where practical. Review notification requirements, including any applicable HOA notification procedures, and evaluate whether operational or non-land-use regulations currently contained in the LDC would be more appropriately located in the City's general Code of Ordinances or supporting technical manuals.

Chapter 20 – Amendments

Chapter 20 establishes the procedures for amending the text of the Land Development Code and the City's Zoning Map, including provisions for changes and amendments and rehearings. Recommendations include:

- **Relocate amendment provisions within the LDC.** Incorporate the existing procedures for LDC text amendments and Zoning Map amendments into Chapter 18 – Administration. These provisions serve a similar purpose to the other permits and procedures currently located in Chapter 18, making this information easier to find and eliminating the need for a standalone amendments chapter.

Part 5: Proposed Code Outline

The following is the draft proposed outline of the Belmont LDC. This is the recommended reorganization of the LDC sections for improved usability and clarity, and will be used as a guide during the drafting process. This outline is an initial draft and may evolve throughout the drafting process based on City direction and best practices.

Chapter 1. Purpose and Applicability (Previously Chapter 1)

- 1.1. Authority and Applicability
- 1.2. Purpose
- 1.3. Title
- 1.4. Separability
- 1.5. Ordinance and Map Interpretation
- 1.6. Effective Date

Chapter 2. Building Type Requirements (Previously Chapter 4)

Alternative option to combine building types with zoning districts in one chapter.

- 2.1. Building Types Established
- 2.2. Detached House
- 2.3. Townhouse
- 2.4. Cottage Court
- 2.5. Courtyard Building
- 2.6. Apartment Building
- 2.7. Shopfront Building
- 2.8. Workplace Building
- 2.9. Flex Commercial Building
- 2.10. Civic/Institutional Building
- 2.11. Accessory Structures (New Section for General Standards for All Accessory Structures)
  - 2.11.1 Residential Accessory Structures (Previously Section 3.9)
  - 2.11.2 Commercial Accessory Structures (New Section)
  - 2.11.3 Additional Regulations For Specific Accessory Structures and Uses (Previously Section 3.10)

Chapter 3. District Provisions (Previously Chapter 5)

Existing section rearranged to group similar districts. Land use permissions moved to the new Chapter 4.

- 3.1. General Provisions
- 3.2. Zoning Districts (New Sub-Section)

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3.2.1. Rural Residential (RR)
A. Purpose (Example Subsections to be used in all zoning districts.)
B. Permitted Building Types
C. Specific District Provisions
3.2.2. Suburban Residential (SR)
3.2.3. Rural Commercial (RC)
3.2.4. General Residential (GR)
3.2.5. Neighborhood Center Residential (NC-R)
3.2.6. Neighborhood Center Commercial (NC-C)
3.2.7. Downtown District (DD)
3.2.8. Traditional Neighborhood Development (TN-D)
3.2.9. Highway Commercial (HC)
3.2.10. Business Campus Development (BC-D)
3.2.11. Institutional Campus Development (IC-D)
3.2.12. Infill Development (INF-D)
3.2.13. Manufactured Housing Development (MH-D)

3.3. Overlay and Special Districts (New Sub-Section)
3.3.1. Highway Corridor Overlay (HC-O)
3.3.2. South Point Peninsula Overlay District (SPP-O)
3.3.3. South Fork Overlay District (SF-O)
3.3.4. Conditional Districts (CD)

Chapter 4. Land Use and Additional Requirements For Certain Uses (Previously Chapter 6)

Chapter repurposed for Land Use and Additional Standards. Land use permissions have been moved from the zoning district chapter. Land Uses would be consolidated into a land use table.

4.1. General Provisions
4.1.1. Interpretation of uses (New Section)
4.1.2. Uses Not Expressly Permitted Or Special Uses (Previously Section 3.6)
4.1.3. Organization of Land Use Table (New Section)

4.2. Land Use Table (New Section)
4.3. Additional Standards (Previously Chapter 6)
4.4. Temporary Structures/Uses (Previously Section 3.5)

Chapter 5. General Development Standards (Previously select sections of Chapter 3)

Combine General Provisions for development standards like measurements and standards that apply to all development.

5.1. General Provisions (Previously Section 3.1)

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5.2. Lot and Block Standards (Previously Section 3.2-3.4)

5.9. Containment Areas For Trash and Recyclables (Previously Section 3.8)

Chapter 6. Open Space and Landscaping (Previously Chapters 7 and 11)

6.1 Open Space (Previously Chapter 7)

6.2. Tree Protection and Landscaping (Previously Chapter 11)

Chapter 7. Mobility (Previously Chapters 8, 9, and select sections of Chapter 3)

7.1. Streets and Greenways (Previously Chapter 8)

7.2. Parking (Previously Chapter 9 and Section 3.7)

Chapter 8. Signs (Previously Chapter 10)

8.1. Signs (Previously Chapter 10)

Chapter 9. Infrastructure (Previously Chapters 12 and select sections of Chapter 3)

9.1. Site Lighting (Previously Chapter 12)

9.2. Sedimentation and Erosion Control (Previously Section 3.11)

9.3 Water and Sewer Provisions (Previously Section 3.13)

9.4. CEPTED Design Standards (New Section)

Chapter 10. Development Plan Review Process and Requirements (Previously Chs. 15 &16)

10.1. Development Plan Review Process (Previously Chapter 15)

10.2. Development Plan Requirements (Previously Chapter 16)

Chapter 11. Nonconformities (Previously Chapter 17)

11.1. Purpose and Applicability

11.2. Nonconforming Uses

11.3. Nonconforming Principal Structures

11.4. Nonconforming Accessory Uses and Structures

11.5. Nonconforming Lots

11.6. Nonconforming Signs

11.7. Nonconforming Landscaping, Screening, and Lighting

11.8. Nonconforming Street Frontages

11.9. Nonconforming Plans

11.10. Nonconforming In A Watershed Area

Chapter 12. Administration (Previously Chapter 18)

12.1. Planning Administration

12.2. Zoning Permit

12.3. Violations and Penalties

12.4. Appeals and Variances

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12.5 Text Amendments (Previously Chapter 20)
12.6 Zoning Map Amendments (Previously Chapter 20)
12.7 Special Use Permits (Previously Section 15.9)

Chapter 13. Boards and Committees (Previously Chapter 19)

13.1. Boards and Committees Established
13.2. Planning Board
13.3. Board of Adjustment
13.4. Technical Review Committee (TRC)
13.5. Meetings, Hearings and Procedures of All Boards and Committees
13.6. Staff
13.7. Attendance Policy For Boards and Committees

Chapter 14. Definitions (Previously Chapter 2)

All definitions to be compiled into this chapter.

14.1. Rules of Construction
14.2. Definitions

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