

March 24, 2025

To: Members of the Budget and Finance Committee

202500546

From: Sheryl M.M. Long, City Manager

Subject: Department of City Planning and Engagement Revised Fees

Reference Document #202402596

The City Council, at its session on December 18, 2024, adopted the following item:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmember Walsh, WE MOVE that the Administration provide a report within 30 days, or before the held fee adjustments (item # 202402562) are considered by Council, on the rationale and impacts of the fee adjustments for planning-related services.

The Department of City Planning and Engagement (DCPE) charges fees for certain planning- and zoning-related services in performing city planning-related functions in administering the Cincinnati Zoning Code and Subdivision Regulations. The current fees have not been adjusted since 2014 and 2015. Some fees require City Planning Commission approval while others require approval by City Council.

The Budget and Finance Committee reviewed the proposed fee changes requiring approval by City Council on December 16, 2024. It was determined that more information was needed regarding how the proposed fees compare to those of similar jurisdictions. The Administration was asked to provide a report on the proposal to adjust fees with a focus on remaining competitive in terms of cost and quality of service.

PROPOSED FEES – ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

DCPE conducted a detailed analysis of its current fees, fees charged by other cities, the cost of staff time for each of the fees (including postage), and impact of inflation. This analysis found that the contrast with other cities was a dissimilar comparison, given that each city's processes and application types are different. The analysis also found that the cost of staff time for each application type outweighed the revenue received from the current fee. Although the proposed fees do not fully cover the cost of staff time, the modest increases would allow the department to recoup a higher portion of its costs each year for planning and zoning services.

In order to adjust fees to better align with staff time without creating a drastic increase, most proposed fee increases are based largely on inflation. In most cases, the percentage increase is between 50% and 67%. The one outlier is the Notwithstanding Ordinance (150%), which was considered appropriate to price at the same cost as a zone change.

RESEARCH OF LOCAL AND PEER CITIES

Because the review of peer cities was conducted over the course of several previous years, DCPE Staff felt it was important to revisit this information and incorporate additional jurisdictions. In January and February 2025, DCPE Staff researched the fees charged for similar planning- and zoning-related services in 14 jurisdictions, including local communities such as Mason and Anderson Township and peer cities such as Indianapolis, Louisville, Columbus, Pittsburgh, and Kansas City. The table below demonstrates the range of fees charged by these other cities, as well as how Cincinnati's current and proposed fees compare.

Background research indicated that multiple other cities updated their fees between 2020 and 2025, leading to more incremental changes averaging approximately 15%. Because Cincinnati's fees for planning- and zoning-related services have not been updated in 11 years, the difference between the current and proposed fees is greater.

Service	Range of Fees Charged	Cincinnati's Rank (current fees)	Cincinnati's Rank (proposed fees)
Zoning Map or Text Amendment Current fee: \$1,500 Proposed fee: \$2,500	\$175 to \$3,000 +300/acre (max \$15,000)	Middle of Range Higher than 7 cities Similar to 2 Lower than 5	Middle-High of Range Higher than 9 cities Similar to 2 Lower than 3
Planned Development Establishment/ Concept Plan Current fee: \$4,500 Proposed fee: \$5,000	\$600 to \$3,499 +19/acre	Highest of Range Similar to fee charged by Indianapolis at 53 acres	Highest of Range Similar to fee charged by Indianapolis at 54 acres*
Planned Development Major Amendment Current fee: \$3,000 Proposed fee: \$3,000	\$300 to \$1,750 +50/acre (max \$2,500)	Highest of Range Not many cities to compare, higher than the 3 with fees for major amendment	Highest of Range Not many cities to compare, higher than the 3 with fees for major amendment
Notwithstanding Ordinance Current fee: \$1,000 Proposed fee: \$2,500	-	No cities with comparable service	No cities with comparable service Increased to be in line with zone change fee
Historic Landmark/District Designation Current fee: \$1,500 Proposed fee: \$500	\$0 to \$500	Highest of Range Most cities do not charge a fee, Lebanon charges as a map amendment	Most cities do not charge a fee, same as fee charged by Lebanon

* Average acreage of a PUD in Indianapolis is 77.4 acres.

ESTIMATION OF STAFF TIME

Each type of Planning and Zoning application requires a different level of staff time dependent on the complexity of the project. An estimation of staff time includes time spent by various members of DCPE staff including Planners, Zoning Plans Examiners, Supervisors, Administrative staff and the Director. Staff time does not include work done by the Law Department to provide guidance or draft legislation or any of the other reviewing departments in the Coordinated Site Review process.

Estimation of staff time also includes the cost of postage for public notification. Printing is assumed as a general office expense.

Activity/Service	Average Staff Cost (Including Postage)	Current Fee
Zoning Map or Text Amendment	\$7,700	\$1,500
Planned Development Establishment/Concept Plan	\$8,800	\$4,500
Planned Development Major Amendment	\$7,100	\$3,000
Notwithstanding Ordinance	\$5,500	\$1,000

PROPOSED FEES – POSSIBLE ADJUSTMENTS

Major Amendment to a Planned Development

The additional research showed that Cincinnati's proposed fees for Planned Development (PD) Establishment, PD Major Amendment, and PD Final Development Plan were higher than all comparable cities. The proposed fee for PD Establishment \$5,000 is the highest of the range, though it is not far from the fee of \$3,499 + \$19/acre in Indianapolis.

Establishing a PD in Cincinnati currently costs \$3,000 for the PD Concept Plan plus \$1,500 for the map amendment, resulting in a total cost of \$4,500. The proposed change to \$5,000 for PD Concept Plan includes the map amendment fee, resulting in a modest \$500 (11%) increase. Furthermore, this fee corresponds to the additional freedom granted by this unique zoning designation and the accompanying public engagement at all steps of the process. It is important that an application to change a zoning designation to Planned Development is not submitted lightly, and this fee reflects that intentionality.

However, the proposed PD Major Amendment fee is also \$5,000. Upon further consideration, DCPE Staff suggests that this fee is too high given the wide range of changes to a PD that qualify as a Major Amendment. If the PD Major Amendment was maintained at the current fee of \$3,000, it may be more reasonable.

Historic Landmark or District Designation

Traditionally, applications to designate a property (or district) as a local historic landmark or district within the City of Cincinnati have been treated the same as a Map Amendment. If we follow that logic with the fee increases, the proposed fee of \$2,500 to apply for a local historic landmark/district was higher than all comparable cities. Most cities do not charge for an application, while Lebanon charges \$500, in line with their city's Map Amendment fee. In comparison with similar cities, \$2,500 was determined to be too high a fee for an application, but it was determined a small fee would still be appropriate based on the number of hours each

application requires from the Urban Conservator, the City of Cincinnati's sole staff member assigned to historic review. As such, the new proposed fee for a local historic landmark/district application could be lowered to \$500 to not discourage historic designation applications.

Existing Opportunities for Relief from Fees

On May 7, 2024, City Council provided guidance to DCPE that zoning studies and zone change applications, including applications for historic designation, applied for by a Community Council or Community Development Corporation that are consistent with their approved Neighborhood Plan could be considered at no cost to the requestor. In addition, an effective exemption from an application fee is still currently available if a City Councilmember agrees to sponsor the application of a community group as their own legislative proposal.

A Summary of the Current Fees, Current Fees Adjusted for Inflation since 2014, and Proposed New Fees, including possible adjustments, is below.

Activity/Service	Current Fee	Inflation (from 2014)	Proposed New Fee	Proposed Dollar Increase	Proposed Percentage Increase
Zoning Map or Text Amendment	\$1,500	\$2,046	\$2,500	\$1,000	67%
Planned Development Establishment/Concept Plan	\$4,500*	\$6,138	\$5,000	\$500	11%
Planned Development Major Amendment	\$3,000	\$4,092	\$3,000	\$0	\$0
Notwithstanding Ordinance	\$1,000	\$1,364	\$2,500	\$1,500	150%
Historic Landmark/District Designation	\$1,500	\$2,046	\$500	-\$1000	-67%

* The current fee for PD Concept Plan is \$3,000 plus \$1,500 for the map amendment. The proposed new fee would include the map amendment fee.

NEXT STEPS

Approval of the proposed Ordinance (Item # 202402562) will adjust the fees for Zoning Map or Text Amendments, Establishing a Planned Development, Planned Development Major Amendment, Notwithstanding Ordinance, and Historic Landmark/District Designation. If City Council wishes to adjust the fees to not change the Major Amendment to a Concept Plan and/or lower the fee for Historic Designation, an updated version of the proposed Ordinance would be required.

The City Planning Commission approved fee increases on September 20, 2024, for Minor Subdivisions, Major Subdivisions, Final Development Plan, Mapping Services, and Copies, which will go into effect concurrently with the date the City Council-established fees go into effect.

cc: William "Billy" Weber, Assistant City Manager
Katherine Keough-Jurs, Director, Department of City Planning and Engagement

Attachment: Planning and Zoning Fee Research