



**COMMUNITY CLIMATE**  
COLLABORATIVE

# C3's Policy Recommendations for Just and Smart Climate Zoning

Charlottesville, VA | October 2022

In Charlottesville, transportation and residential building energy use account for about 60% of the City's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Zoning laws encouraging mixed-use neighborhoods, smart growth, and transit-oriented development reduce the community's car-dependence, increase location efficiency, and may even contribute to higher housing

# Just and Climate-Smart Zoning

## Letter to Charlottesville Director of Neighborhood Development Services, CVille Plans Together, the Planning Commission, and City Council --

### **Charlottesville Needs Green, Inclusive, and Equitable Zoning to Address the Climate Crisis**

In Charlottesville, transportation and residential energy uses make up about 60% of the City's Greenhouse Gas emissions. Greenhouse gasses (GHGs) refer to the emissions created by burning fossil fuels that trap heat and have resulted in human-caused climate change. Climate change can be mitigated by reducing emissions from the transportation and residential sectors, where local levers—such as zoning—will play a critical role.

Zoning laws that encourage mixed-use neighborhoods and transit-oriented development reduce reliance on motor vehicles and increase energy efficiency, which will help the City reach its climate goals. We therefore write as local nonprofits to both support the following existing provisions in the Zoning Diagnostic + Approach Report (ZD+A Report) as well as urge the City to include the additional climate-smart zoning recommendations detailed on page two:

### **Existing Recommendations in the ZD+A Report Supported by C3 and Partners**

Given our commitment to zoning as a tool for reducing GHGs and building healthy communities, we are particularly excited by these existing initiatives in the ZD+A Report:

- **Assess and prioritize the needs of people who might be particularly vulnerable and/or are likely to be most affected by climate and environmental hazards**
  - Prioritize investment in Charlottesville neighborhoods that are subject to environmental and climatic injustices, and adjust zoning laws to mitigate future damage and repair past harms.
- **Upzone all districts to increase housing density**
  - Implement density bonuses for affordable housing construction;
  - Encourage infill development in all districts and especially those in close proximity to commercial or transit districts.
- **Align ZD+A report with a "Streets That Work" Plan and incentivize "complete streets"**
  - Incentivize mixed use development;
  - Support multi-modal streets that integrate transit, auto, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities in order to provide safe, comfortable, and accessible mobility options;
  - Reimagine our streets and designate car-free zones to disincentivize personal vehicle use in favor of public transit, cycling, and walking.
- **Revise zoning bylaws and permitting approval to align with climate goals**
  - Allow by-right the installation and operation of net zero enabling technologies in new and existing developments.

## Opportunities for Improvement to the ZD+A Supported by C3 and Partners

We hope the Director of Neighborhood Development, City Council, and Planning Commission will consider the following additions to the ZD+A Report:

- **Upzone all districts to increase housing density**
  - Eliminate minimum lot sizes;
  - Expand proposed incentives for affordable housing to include financial tools such as long-term tax abatements and infrastructure cost-sharing as well as process-based tools to expedite review of developments with affordable units;
  - Increase flexibility in long-term affordable housing provisions so as to not restrict affordable home ownership;
  - Permit additional density bonuses for housing developments if and only if the majority of units are affordable;
  - C3 supports the recommendations in [CLIHC's Zoning Rewrite Feedback Letter](#).
  
- **Align ZD+A report with a “Streets That Work” Plan and incentivize “complete streets”**
  - Improve coordination of off-street trails and their connection to transit facilities (*partially included in the ZD+A report*);
  - Update drainage requirements to include green infrastructure in response to increased flooding driven by climate change (*partially included in the ZD+A report*);
  - Adopt Vision Zero strategies for street design that prioritize safety over speed;
  - Reimagine our streets and designate car-free zones to disincentivize personal vehicle use in favor of public transit, cycling, and walking.
  
- **Define and incentivize transit-oriented development (TOD)**
  - Create a transit overlay district within a half mile of transit stations intended to be a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use district with increased housing density;
  - Remove public incentives of parking in transit overlay districts and instead offer incentives for low-emission and low-impact transit parking, including bikes, e-bikes, and scooters;
  - Prioritize low-income residents' needs in bus route planning and transit infrastructure improvements;
  - Effectively manage a parking supply through demand-responsive strategies, including setting a price for on-street parking, to keep spaces in circulation and enable more access to local businesses.
  
- **Revise zoning bylaws and permitting approval to align with climate goals**
  - Utilize any municipal real estate assets under municipal ownership or management, such as schools, public parking lots, and the airport, to generate solar energy (*partially included in the ZD+A report*);
  - Allow solar canopy coverage to partially or fully substitute tree cover requirements in parking lots;
  - Explicitly include net zero enabling technologies (including renewable energy, battery storage, and passive solar) and related terms in zoning definitions (*partially included in existing zoning code*);

- Exempt net zero enabling technologies, including but not limited to solar panels, insulation, and front door vestibules, from height and setback requirements;
  - Offer expedited permitting and reduced permitting fees for net zero emissions buildings and net zero enabling technology;
  - Incentivize neighborhoods to establish shared solar projects;
  - Build financial structure to solve the "split incentive" problem for tenants and property owners installing net zero enabling technologies;
  - Establish EV parking guidelines that encourage charging in off-peak hours and energy buy-back in peak hours using vehicle-to-grid charging stations.
- **Streamline the deployment of residential solar to low-income households and rental properties**
    - Enable solar installation on new and existing buildings through actions such as zoning and building reforms, financial incentives, and community education (*partially included in the ZD+A report*);
    - Leverage city funds to pilot no-cost solar projects for income qualified residents;
    - Explore opportunities to install solar plus battery storage systems in single-family and multi-family housing.

### Thank you!

We appreciate the opportunity to address these important issues. We believe that our City has the creativity, leadership, and community resources that will allow us to align all of our planning efforts around mutual goals of creating a more just and sustainable future.

Sincerely,  
**Charlottesville Nonprofits for Climate Justice**

## Partnering Organizations

