

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS COMPOSITE ZONING?

After extensive input from stakeholders, residents and community leaders, the City of Leander adopted the nation's first comprehensive composite zoning ordinance.

This method enables compatible mixed use neighborhoods by integrating form based standards with use standards in a flexible format that creates independent use, site and architectural district components. It provides a district format that is highly adaptive to the context of a site. The ordinance also provides significant administrative flexibility to minimize time consuming variance procedures.

The *Composite Zoning Ordinance* was adopted to directly address the following goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan:

- Adapt sustainable growth concepts and policies.
- Separate and/or create transitions or buffer areas between conflicting or incompatible land uses.
- Develop an economic development strategy that is consistent with land use objectives and with the City's desire to manage local growth.
- Preserve the integrity of existing property values and help to ensure the future economic stability of the community.
- Plan for continued growth and development that improves the community's overall quality of life and economic viability.

Composite zoning addresses the needs of the developer, neighborhoods, decision makers and planners. It offers greater use flexibility by reducing the number of use districts and creating a broader field of uses within each district. This provides land developers with a larger market for their product and creates opportunities for economic development.

It provides contextually appropriate zoning and greater predictability for development standards by integrating form component options that are independently selected and combined with use districts. This enables greater compatibility for context sensitive sites such as commercial sites near or within neighborhoods or on major thoroughfares.

It also gives decision makers and planners the assurance that their decisions will not result in an unpredictable surprise. These zoning improvements are accomplished by a fundamental change in the structure of zoning districts that better defines land use elements and provides for independent combinations of the various component options defining these elements.

Articles about Leander's *Composite Zoning Ordinance* have been published in two national planning periodicals: *Planning* and *Practicing Planner*. This ordinance won the Central Texas *Innovative Planning Award* and the State of Texas *Current Planning Award* from the American Planning Association.