

# Zoning District(s): What, Where, When, How?

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## Question:

How do municipalities decide to create variable (i.e., more than one) zoning districts?

How does a town move from one or two zoning districts, such as agricultural/residential, to more than one zone for residential land use (one acre, two acre, ten acre lots)?

## What is Zoning and a Zoning District?

Zoning is one way to achieve what citizens want in their community or one way to implement Master Plan policies. It is a legal process of designating geographic areas in a municipality (Zoning Districts or Zones) and defining their purpose, land uses permitted in the district, development standards and other procedures for administering the review process.

## What is the Basis for a zoning district?

### Answer: The Master Plan Policies and Map.

The Master Plan is the basis for establishing zoning districts. Per RSA 674:2:I:

*“The purpose of the master plan is to set down as clearly and practically as possible the best and most appropriate future development of the area under the jurisdiction of the planning board, to aid the board in designing ordinances that result in preserving and enhancing the unique quality of life and culture of New Hampshire, and to guide the board in the performance of its other duties in a manner that achieves the principles of smart growth, sound planning and wise resource protection.”*

And from RSA 674:2:II:

*“The master plan shall be a set of statements and land use development principles... with such accompanying maps, diagrams, charts and descriptions to give legal standing to the implementation ordinance (e.g. Zoning ordinance) and other measures of the planning board.”*

Thus, the Master Plan is critical to initially define the purposes and initial development standards for each zone. However, since the Master Plan is not legally adopted, it is the legal process of zoning that is the primary implementation tool for the Master Plan. Zoning

laws “enhance the public health, safety, general welfare, and encourage the appropriate and wise use of the land.” (RSA672:1:III) (Also see SPRC Planning Guide Series “How to Get the Development You Want?”)

## How is/are Zoning District(s) Established?

1. Review the Master Plan land use, natural resource, housing, and other appropriate policy goals, principles, and standards and the Master Plan map. (If you do not have a Master Plan map, you should. Contact SRPC for assistance. The map is the general graphic representation of the Master Plan text.) The Master Plan text, especially policy goals, principles and standards, and the map set the basis for the number, type, and purpose of each land use zoning district. (Note there may be one or several zoning districts depending on what the citizens want to achieve (i.e., Master Plan policies.) For example, citizens may want different land uses, densities and development standards in the downtown/town center, adjacent residential areas, further-out residential and agricultural areas, or commercial business, manufacturing/industrial, resource protection or other areas.

2. Use the general Master Plan map to set the boundaries for each zone on the Master Plan Implementation – Zoning Map. The specific Zoning Map will become a legal document adopted with the zoning ordinance.

3. Describe the purpose, location, use and development standards for each zone.

4. Double check the proposed zones with your Master Plan policies/standards and map.

## SRPC FACT SHEET SERIES

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