

**Monthly Meeting of the
Allentown City Planning Commission
September 9, 2025
DRAFT Minutes
Zone Allentown**

Proposed New Zoning Ordinance and Map

Item #6. Bill 69-2025 Repealing Chapter 660, Zoning, in its entirety and adopting a new Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map.

Proposed New Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance

Item #7. Bill 70-2025 Repealing Chapter 350, Land Development and Subdivision, in its entirety and adopting a new Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance.

Presentation/Discussion:

Melissa Velez provided an overview of the ZONE Allentown project timeline and the adoption of a new zoning map, ordinance and a new SALDO. Ms. Velez stated that since the last presentation before the ACPC, ZONE Allentown was introduced by City Council and was reviewed positively by the LVPC. Ms. Velez highlighted that the only change that was made prior to the introduction to City Council was to address the ACPC's concerns regarding the possible confusion between the mixed-use corridors, the zone and the streets. Therefore, staff renamed the MX zones for mixed-use to storefront mix. Changing one table in the entire ordinance instead of multiple changes throughout. Ms. Velez reviewed the timeline that was first shared with the commission in July and shared that it is currently before the Planning Commission for a 2nd time, which is Step 5 in the approval process. Ms. Velez stated that as more dates are scheduled for the future steps they will be updated on the ZONE Allentown website.

Public Comment: Rachel Green who resides at 114 W Allen St. read a letter and submitted it to the City, addressed to Mayor Tuerk as well as to the members of the Planning Commission. Ms. Green conveyed that the 6th Ward started to get development opportunities with the positive changes adopted by the City that occurred in 2022. She was concerned that the current zoning changes may negatively impact by stripping away the good changes that occurred in 2022 that created development in the Ward. Ms. Green encouraged the City to continue the 2022 changes with a focus on jobs, safety and the continuation of housing.

Yolanda Matias who resides at 345 W St. read a letter and submitted it to the City, addressed to Mayor Tuerk as well as to the members of the Planning Commission. Ms. Matias indicated that she is a member of congregation of Iglesia Jehova El Gran Yo Soy in the 6th Ward. She stated that she would like the City to preserve the 2022 Zoning changes west of Front Street. Ms. Matias said that the 2022 changes brought unprecedented development, jobs and hope to the neighborhood. She stated that for the first time in decades the neighborhood has not only seen economic growth but a real reduction in crime and drug activity. The 2022 update led to tangible progress in improving quality of life for families living in the Ward. Ms. Matias highlighted Mr. Alex Wroght as a minority builder who has invested 15 years in the community. She believed that the proposed changes would be detrimental to his work. She requested that the Commission adjust the SRRO boundary to include areas West of Front Street. She stated that this adjustment would allow the progress that the City created in 2022 to continue. Ms. Matias said she looks forward to working with the City to ensure progress continues for the 6th Ward.

Craig Beavers inquired what specific items that the speakers would like to see addressed, and what has changed between the current zoning code and the proposed zoning code that might help the commissioners contextualize the comments?

Ms. Green responded that to her understanding that in the proposed zoning code only low-rise buildings are allowed in the 6th ward and that they had plans in the area to build new larger structures and buildings in order to accommodate for the old housing stock in an area that is greatly in need of new development. Ms. Green stated that they are building a 7-story building currently and would like to continue to build larger story buildings not necessarily 7 stories but larger structures and to her understanding under the new zoning code the height of the buildings in that area will be limited.

Mark Hartney shared that Pastor Harry Aponte sent an email voicing similar concerns earlier this week and shared his response with the commission. His response acknowledged and appreciated the receipt of his comment letter and Pastor Aponte's advocacy for the 6th Ward. Mr. Hartney's provided a written response in which he outlined his appreciation for the public participation and feedback. He is committed to reviewing the concerns by the public in future revisions. He stated making changes at this point in the process would interrupt significant progress made to date. *(A copy of the Mr. Hartney letter is in the project file)*

Mr. Brown reiterated that the process of adopting a new ordinance is a long legal process that follows an intricate timeline. Mr. Beavers stated that there will be future amendments to the zoning ordinance and that it will be amended with further changes and in line with the Community Vision and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Melissa Velez showed the area that was being discussed, noting that it is categorized as B5 in the current Zoning code. Some B-5 properties are also a part of the SRRO overlay. Ms. Velez stated that in the proposed zoning code it has been changed to a mixed-use zone to allow for additional growth.

Peter Sposato who resides at 118 N 8th St. read a letter that he addressed to his State Representative Joshua Siegel and also submitted to the City in which he shared that he has 6 children who attend Sheridan Elementary. Mr. Sposato also stated that the area has improved tremendously since he first moved there 9 years ago. He stated that most importantly public safety has increased and he hopes to see that improvement continue. Mr. Sposato encouraged Representative Siegel and the City not to stop the momentum of the 2022 changes and to take the public process feedback from the community *(A copy of the letter is available in the project file)*.

Jenny Lemma who resides at 308 S Fulton St. read and submitted to the City, a letter addressed to Mayor Tuerk. Ms. Lemma stated she is a life long resident of the City and was able to secure employment working in construction in the Ward that benefited from the 2022 changes. She was concerned the changes will stop construction and employment opportunities. The opportunities allowed them to better themselves and their community. A safer and more positive place to live. *(A copy of the letter is available in the project file)*.

Ms. Green asked the commission to think carefully about their vote on the proposed zoning code.

Mr. Brown asked for clarification on the purpose of the SRRO district and how many properties will be affected by the SRRO overlay. In response, Mr. Hartney stated that some of the updates within the SRRO were meant to respond to resident concerns about access to the river as well as visibility. Ms. Velez stated that the area that is being discussed never had the ability have unlimited story height, it was up to 5 stories allowed with an additional 2 stories with an interior parking garage. She also stated that there were approximately 50 properties that had the urban transition multifamily dwelling permitted. Ms. Velez stated that in the proposed zoning code you can build 4 ½ stories by right and 6 ½ stories with affordable housing for 20% of the units.

Mr. Beavers clarified that if the city proposes an amendment to the zoning code it would be less complex then if an individual attempted to submit a zoning petition. He emphasizes that the commission looks forward to working with everyone involved to continue to encourage the development of this area in the 6th Ward and ensure its continued improvement and growth. Mr. Brown reiterated and stated that he is willing to work with the proponents of that development to ensure that it continues to positively impact the community in the future. Mr. Brown states that he doesn't believe interrupting the process today is necessary but states that moving forward during the amendment stage he is willing to revisit this issue.

Action: Craig Beavers made a motion to favorably recommend the zoning ordinance and the map with the understanding that future amendments will be encouraged and recommended by the Planning Commission based on community feedback and their merits. Jeff Glazier seconded that motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Craig Beavers made a motion to favorably recommend the adoption of the SALDO with the understanding that future amendments will be encouraged and recommended by the Planning Commission based on community feedback and their merits. Erich Hornung seconded that motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Dear Mayor Tuerk,

a member

As Pastor of Iglesia Jehovah El Gran Yo Soy and leader of a coalition of more than 3,000 congregants in the 6th Ward, I am writing to urge the City to preserve the 2022 zoning changes west of Front Street – changes that your administration and Council supported and that have brought unprecedented development, jobs, and hope to a neighborhood that had been overlooked for decades. That zoning relief made possible the Riverview II project, which has already created hundreds of good jobs for residents in our community. It also spurred the transformation of long-blighted housing stock and the start of true revitalization west of Front Street. For the first time in decades, our neighborhood has begun to see not only economic growth but also a real reduction in crime and drug activity – tangible progress that is improving quality of life for families across the ward.

It is deeply troubling that this progress now stands to be undone. While zoning protections for billion-dollar developers remain untouched, the areas that have finally started to flourish (thanks to local investment and City partnership) face harmful rollbacks. For a hardworking minority builder like Mr. Alex Wright, who has spent the last 15 years reinvesting in this community, this change is more than unfair: it threatens to erase the jobs, safety, and momentum that his efforts and the City's previous support made possible.

Mr. Wright is not a distant developer. He is a neighbor, a mentor, and a daily presence in our community. He works tirelessly with our youth, showing them that they can be builders and leaders too. To penalize his work, while leaving untouched the zoning that benefits far wealthier interests, would send a devastating message to a community that has only just begun to feel seen.

I respectfully request that the SRRO boundary be adjusted to include the areas west of Front Street that were rezoned for 7-story mixed-use development in 2022. This adjustment would allow the progress that the City helped create to continue, while aligning the new plan with the shared goal of equitable growth and revitalization. Our congregation and coalition want to remain constructive partners with the City, and we believe a collaborative solution is possible. But if the zoning change proceeds as drafted – undoing the relief that catalyzed this progress – we will have no choice but to voice our concerns at the next public hearing to ensure that the harm to our neighborhood is fully understood.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working together to ensure that the progress we have fought for is not erased.

Sincerely,



Pastor Harry Aponte

Dear Mayor Tuerk,

I am a life long resident of Allentown. I applied for jobs with the only other two people putting up buildings in this city but I never heard back from them.

However I have found lasting employment with Mr. Wright and AW Construction. We recently completed Riverview Lofts I and are now working endlessly to complete Riverview II next door. We plan on having at least another 10 years worth of work continuing to build up our community and making a positive impact on our neighborhood.

However your planning Dept's proposed zoning change will strip me and hundreds of other young men born and raised in Allentown of our ability to work and put food on the table for our families.

This previous zoning change approved unanimously in 2022 opened up the work for young men like myself and gave us an opportunity to not only better ourselves and our families but our community.

If your planning department continues to move forward with their proposed zoning as is it will not only effect me but hundreds of other young men like myself the ability to put food on the table for our families and to make our community a safer and more positive place to live.

We are your people Mayor, However please don't leave us behind !

Dear Representative Siegel,

As representative of our community in the 6th Ward we are calling on you to stand up for our rights and stop the City's planning dept. from stripping us of our zoning which was approved unanimously in 2022. If the current zoning the city is proposing should pass- it will decimate our opportunities for continued jobs and safer neighborhoods. Our neighborhood previously was one of the most dangerous in the City, West of Front St up until the Immaculate Conception Church and Cemetery. Daily gunshots and shootings were the norm. However since the zoning that the planning commission and city council approved in 2022 took effect we have seen drastic change and benefit to our neighborhood, most importantly public safety.

Hundreds of jobs have been created to date, and thousands of jobs for our people are on the horizon. However, the City's planning department is attempting to stop our momentum and kill our opportunities for long awaited and much needed jobs.

We have reached out to the City endlessly, but since our name is not Jandl or Reiley and we don't have a million dollars we get ignored. The City has stated that this is a public process and that they are looking for feedback from the community. Well here we are !

It is unfortunate that instead of being treated equally by the City we need to protest for our rights at a Planning Commission Meeting. Mr. Siegel you say that you are a progressive and fair representative for all. If this is true, show us that you stand behind your people and your community !

Dear Mayor Tuerk,

In 2022 our people struggled to get development started in the 6th Ward and by the Grace of God we have been successful. Hundreds of new jobs have been created, our streets are becoming safer and much needed new housing stock is being built in our neighborhood.

However, it has come to our attention that your Planning Dept. seeks to undo these positive changes that both City Council & the Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve in 2022. These zoning changes your Dept is currently proposing will strip us of our ability to continue to provide much needed jobs for our families, increased safety in our neighborhoods, and the ability to continue to build new housing stock for the long forgotten 6th Ward.

You pride yourself as a progressive mayor and a mayor of the people that listens to the voices of the underprivileged and underserved. Well here we are Mayor ! Don't let the 1% that has run the City for long enough try to ruin our zoning that we deserve. Just because we aren't billionaires or don't own a bank doesn't mean that we shouldn't have access to the same opportunities as the 1 % who are a few hundred feet away from us. We are tired of being treated as 2nd class citizens because of our socioeconomic status.