

Thornton Development Code

Summary of Key Changes - Effective Date: September 1, 2025

To access the full Development Code, visit goCOT.net/DevelopmentCode.

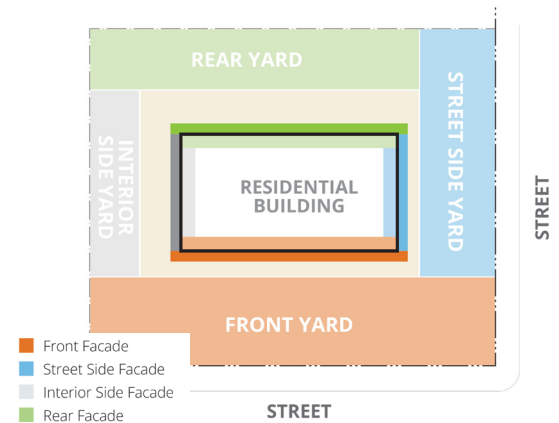
For questions, please contact the planner of the day at 303-538-7295 or by email at pod.info@ThorntonCO.gov

RESIDENTIAL USES

Thornton Neighborhoods, What Has Changed and What Has Not

In the 2025 updated Development Code the name of certain land uses, like single-family dwellings, have been altered. Now, the words defined for common housing types in Thornton are defined as attached and detached dwellings, which include:

- Dwelling, 1 Unit Detached, aka single-family dwelling
- Dwelling, 2 Units Attached (1 Unit Per Lot), similar to a duplex, but each dwelling unit is on a separate lot
- Duplex (Single Lot)
- Dwelling, 3-8 Units Attached (1 Unit Per Lot), aka townhomes



A diagram that shows how to determine the facade type location of a home based on the location as it relates to the street or a yard.

Existing Neighborhoods Built Before the 2025 Development Code

The majority of the city's existing neighborhoods are within the Planned Development (PD-L) or Single-Family Detached Legacy (SFD-L) Zone Districts, which are considered "Legacy Districts" in the new code. Legacy Districts are zone districts that existed prior to the adoption of the 2025 Development Code which have few or no changes in the new code. Legacy Districts maintain existing land uses in existing neighborhoods. Only modest changes occurred to the SFD-L zone district's setbacks and parking minimums. Land uses in the Legacy Districts will remain the same, but the names of the land uses may have been altered.

Changes that have been made for attached and detached residential uses include:

- Only two required parking spaces for Dwelling, 1 Unit Detached - only one space required to be in a garage
- Duplexes and Dwelling, 3-8 Units Attached no longer require a garage.
 - Dwelling, 3-8 Units Attached require 1.5 spaces per unit, a reduction from 2.
- Sidewalks are required to be detached from the street, with landscaping or xeriscaping provided in between the street and sidewalk.
- Setbacks have changed to be consistent across more of the city, in the SFD-L zone district they now are:
 - Primary structures: 5-foot interior side setback, 15-foot street side and rear setback, and 15-foot front; setback to porch with no living space above it or 20-foot front setback in all other circumstances
 - Accessory structures: 5-foot interior side & rear setbacks.
- Design standards for attached and detached dwellings apply in the SFD-L District.



**OPTION 1
MATERIAL CALCULATION**
Windows and doors shall not be included
in the facade material calculations

- Category 1 Material
- Category 2 Material

A diagram that displays the way to measure amounts of required building materials on a front facade, defined as "Category1" or "Category2" Materials.

Creation of a New Zone District: Residential - Low Density (RL) District

In response to growing demand for housing, a new zone district has been created that allows for smaller lots than the SFD-L district; that zone district is the RL District. Similar to the SFD-L district, the RL District allows for detached dwellings, but duplexes are also allowed in these areas. As of the adoption of the 2025 Development Code, no property is considered in the RL District. Additionally, the minimum lot size and dimensions have been changed to allow more housing than the SFD-L zone district. For more information on the RL district, see Section 18-76.

Residential Façade Types, Building Materials, and Site Design

To make the code more clear and objective, while maintaining baseline aesthetics for residential neighborhoods, new standards for building and site design have been adopted for residential uses. These include materials required relative to a façade's location, window requirements, garage design, and other aesthetic aspects of an attached or detached

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dwelling. In addition, entryway design and private outdoor space standards may apply depending on the type of housing being built. Existing homes would not need to meet these standards.

New Standards For New Residential Development

In addition to the noted changes above, other key changes to the Development Code that should be noted include:

- Porches of various types are now required for most attached and detached dwellings.
- Garage setbacks changed for new attached and detached residential uses.
- The Development Code has “anti-monotony” standards that require a mix of housing designs to make neighborhoods visually different. These have been updated to include more options for variation.
- Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) standards have been modestly changed to allow larger ADUs and to clarify the number of kitchens permitted on lots with or without an ADU.

Multi-Unit Development: Apartments, Cottage Housing, and Mixed-Use Development

Thornton’s Development Code had not been comprehensively updated since 1993 making many of the standards related to multi-unit dwelling development outdated. New multi-unit dwelling uses have been added to the 2025 Development Code.

Typical apartment styles (i.e., multi-unit dwellings) have been better defined to better address development types envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan. Multi-Unit Dwelling types include:

- Cottage Housing (Single Lot), multiple detached or duplex dwellings all on one lot
- Dwelling, Live-Work, aka a building that contains both a work and living space
- Triplex / Quadplex (Single Lot), aka building containing 3-4 dwelling units on one lot
- Multi-Unit Dwelling (Single Lot), aka single apartment building
- Multi-Unit Dwelling Complex (Single Lot), aka multiple apartment buildings on one lot
- Multi-Unit Dwelling, Above Ground Floor Commercial (Single Lot), aka mixed-use/vertical mixed-use

Changes that have been made relevant to multi-unit dwellings include:

- Required parking has changed to be by room count, not unit square footage; bike parking was added.
- Entryway standards have been added that delineate primary entrances to have entryway features, such as a roof overhang or plaza.
- New requirements to break up façades larger than 60-feet.
- Multi-unit dwelling amenities, such as community centers or dog parks, are now required in addition to any land required for public parks.
- Parking locations are generally required behind or next to buildings, not between streets and the buildings.

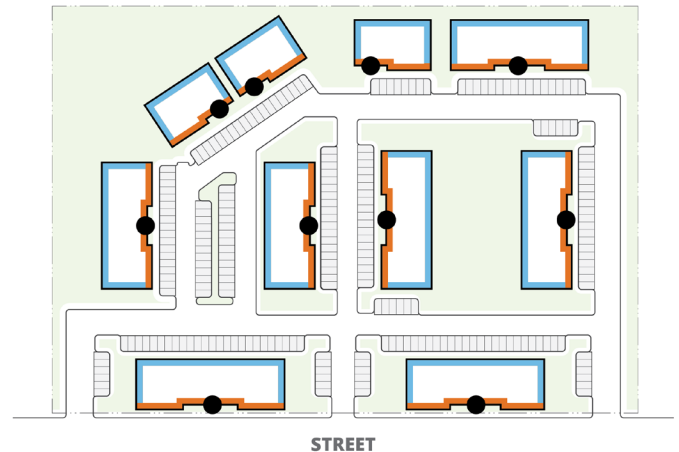
MULTI-UNIT DWELLING MATERIAL CALCULATION

Windows and doors shall not be included in the façade material calculations

- Category 1 Material
- Category 2 Material
- Category 3 Material



A diagram that shows how building materials are measured on a multi-unit dwelling façades.



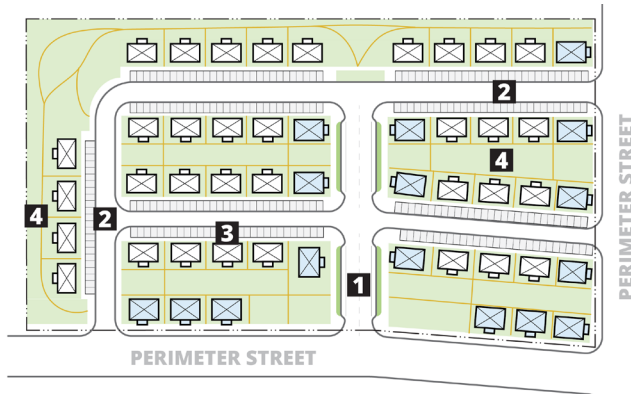
A diagram that illustrates façade type location based on a multi-unit building's location on a development site.

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A diagram that shows Cottage Housing dwelling units arranged around streets and common areas.

Cottage Housing

The Development Code has new design standards for a development called cottage housing. Cottage housing allows multiple smaller detached or duplex units on a single lot which increases the number of homes possible. Before the code was updated in 2025, this type of development was only feasible through Planned Development (PD) zoning. The new Code enables this type of development in base zoning districts, saving time and providing certainty on what future cottage housing developments could look like. The city does not regulate whether these developments are built for sale or for rent. Cottage Housing is permitted in most districts that allow residential uses, with limitations on the number of dwelling units permitted on one lot in the city's Residential - Low Density (RL) and Residential-Mid Density (RM) Districts. Cottage housing is not permitted in Legacy Districts.

Façade Types, Building Materials, and Site Design for Multi-Unit and Cottage Housing Development

Similar to attached and detached residential uses, multi-unit dwelling buildings are now required to contain certain percentages of building materials on building façades based on orientation. Rather than being called a "Front Façade," based on the façade's relationship to a yard, façades are referred to by "types." For example, a Type 1 Façade for a multi-unit dwelling development will typically face a street, a park, or a parking area. Different façades have different requirements for aspects such as building materials and windows with the front-facing or primary façade requiring higher architectural standards than the less prominent façades.

Amenities for Multi-Unit Dwelling Developments

The new Code requires developers of multi-unit dwelling (e.g., apartment) developments to provide amenities above and beyond public land dedication (PLD). PLD is typically used to build features like parks or trails. The amount of money to be spent on amenities is approximately 15 percent of the PLD cash-in-lieu requirement for a development. Before the 2025 Development Code Update, the city allowed apartment developers to receive PLD credit for their private amenities. This previous practice decreased the overall amount of park and open space land being provided while still increasing the overall demand on city park space. To balance future park needs, new development must provide both park/open space lands (or cash-in-lieu of PLD) and private apartment amenities.

NONRESIDENTIAL AND MIXED-USE USES

Standards for Nonresidential and Mixed-Use Development

The new Code retains and consolidates many existing design and development standards for nonresidential and mixed-use development. Many of the existing standards within the Development Code prior to the 2025 Update have been expanded to apply to more developments instead of only developments larger than 15 acres. Some modifications to the design standards have been made to improve the baseline aesthetics. New pedestrian and bicycle standards facilitate walking and biking while also ensuring sufficient overall site access and automobile connectivity.

Changes that have been made relevant to nonresidential and mixed-use development standards include:

- Cladding, or exterior building materials, now require a minimum amount of either brick or stone (alternative high quality/high aesthetic materials may be considered on case-by-case basis)
- Façade articulation and design standards have been enhanced to create more building variety
- When certain entryway features are required, like a roof overhang or plaza, were added.

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New and Changed Uses, Development Code 2025 Update

To better align the Development Code with the Comprehensive Plan and modern development practices, some new land uses have been added while other existing uses have been amended. Additionally, use allowances in each zone district have been updated. In some cases, uses were further restricted (see "Restrictions on Auto-Oriented Uses"). In other cases uses were added to zone districts where they were not permitted prior to the 2025 Update. For example, some nonresidential uses are now permitted in the Residential-High (RH) Density Zone District). Examples of new uses added to the Development Code include:

- Food Truck Courts
- Artisan Manufacturing
- Accessory Commercial Unit
- Dwelling, Live-Work, aka a building with both a work & living space
- Multi-Unit Dwelling, Above Ground Floor (Single Lot), aka mixed-use building

Restrictions on Auto-Oriented Uses

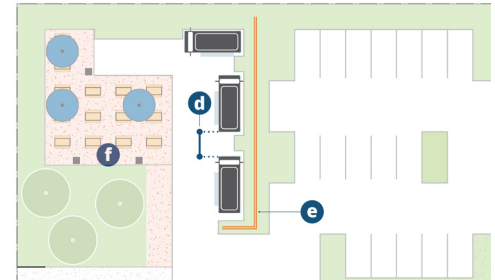
New categories of uses have been created in the use chart, a chart that describes where certain uses of land (like a drive-through) are permitted in the city based on zoning. One new category includes Industrial, Automotive, and Transportation Uses to include uses that are auto-oriented. Some auto-oriented uses were changed to be allowed only by Special Use Permit (SUP) and are now allowed in fewer zone districts. For example, Vehicle Fueling Stations are now allowed only by SUP except in the Industrial Legacy District and are no longer allowed in the Mixed-Use District. Drive-throughs are now allowed only by SUP regardless of the use they serve, and new drive-through regulations provide more control over stacking and aesthetics of these elements. The changes to auto-oriented uses are aimed at implementing the city's Comprehensive Plan while also balancing existing needs and the market demand for automobiles and auto-oriented uses.

Parking Lot Connectivity and Design - On-Site Access and Mobility

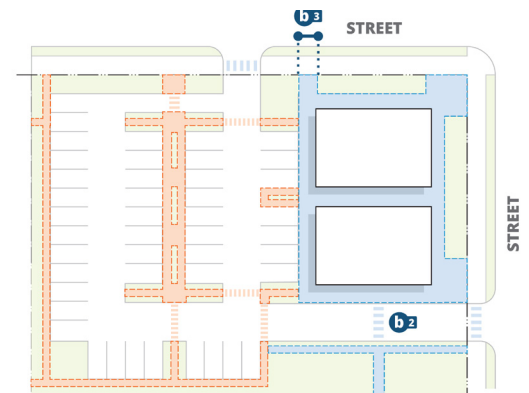
The new Code requires developments to better integrate on-site access and mobility, focusing less on just providing parking and focusing more on how to best incorporate landscaping, pedestrian connectivity, bicycle infrastructure, and overall site access and circulation. Prior to the 2025 Development Code Update, many of the standards related to parking lot design were only triggered on developments of 15 acres or more. In the 2025 Update the threshold for many of the parking lot design standards applies to either most new development or major redevelopment and/or when a development site is over five acres or 200+ parking spaces. Examples of the newly added/amended standards as it relates to access and mobility include:

- Standards for different types of internal access drives based on the development size have been added.
- Pedestrian walkway standards have been maintained and expanded upon for pedestrian access within development sites and connections required off-site.
- Clarifies when internal walkways are required to connect to buildings, public sidewalks, sidepaths, trails, and transit facilities based on the development proposed.
- All buildings on the development site are required to be connected by pedestrian walkways.
- Bicycle parking has been added as a requirement for all new development and some redevelopment activities for nonresidential, mixed-use, and multi-unit dwelling uses.

THE COURT SHALL BE
CLEARLY DEFINED AND
SEPARATED FROM PARKING



A diagram that shows a Food Truck Court that meets the standards in the Code.



A diagram that displays pedestrian walkway standards applied to a two building site.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCEDURES

The 2025 Development Code has retained many of the same development review processes that the Code contained prior to being updated. Article II within the Development Code establishes the review and decision-making processes required to develop land within the jurisdiction of the city. It describes the types of applications required for development, which decision-making body approves each application, and the public noticing requirements. The notable changes that have occurred in the 2025 Update include:

- The Conceptual Site Plan application has been replaced with anew Administrative Review process called the “Preliminary Plan”
- Development Permits are now called Development Plans – “amendments” to Development Plans are now considered a new Development Plan
- The Minor Development Permit and Development Permit Amendment have been removed from the Development Code
- A new process called an Administrative Adjustment has been added to allow minor flexibility to the Development Code
- The Minor Planning Permit has been added for driveway or artificial turf installation

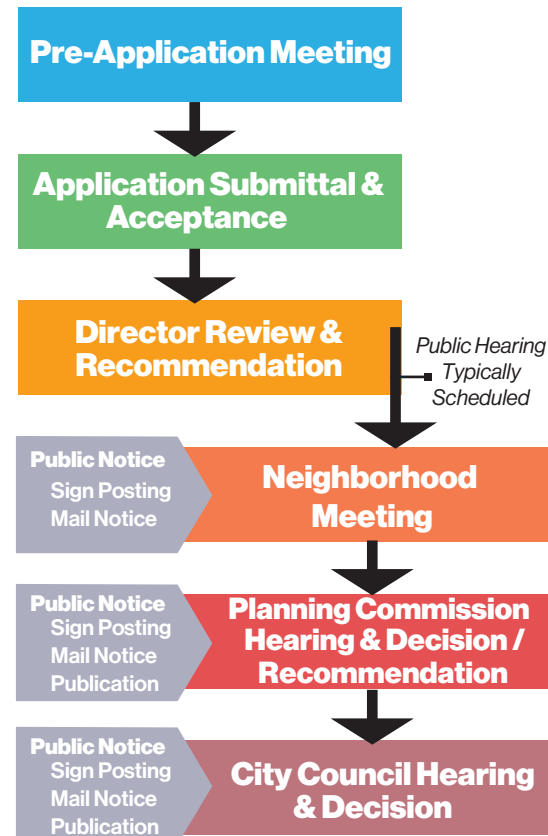
Administrative Review Processes



Relevant Applications

- Preliminary Plans
- Development Plans
- Administrative Adjustments
- Administrative Amendments
- Administrative Review of Priority Projects
- Comprehensive Plan Updates
- Interpretations
- Minor Planning Permit
- Short Term Rental License Review
- Subdivision Plat

Planning Commission & City Council Review Processes



Relevant Applications

Planning Commission recommends a decision to City Council; City Council votes to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the following development applications:

- Annexations
- Zoning Amendments
- Development Code Amendments
- Comprehensive Plan Amendments
- Vested Property Rights
- Preliminary Plans with a PD-0

The Board of Adjustment (BoA) is not listed. Appeals of a BoA decision go to District Court. No neighborhood meetings are required for applications before the BoA. The BoA decides on:

- Appeals of Administrative Decisions
- Variances