

Zoning Updates: Questions & Answers for Forest Park Residents

What is being proposed?

The Village is considering updates to the residential zoning code for R-1, R-2, and R-3 districts. These updates focus on lot coverage, setbacks, and development standards to better align the zoning code with existing homes, current infrastructure, and modern building practices.

Why are zoning updates being discussed now?

Much of Forest Park's zoning code reflects conditions from decades ago. In 2010, changes to lot width requirements unintentionally made thousands of existing homes "non-conforming" overnight. Since then, residents have faced unnecessary hurdles when rebuilding, renovating, or financing their homes.

The proposed updates are intended to:

- Restore fairness and predictability
- Reduce the need for zoning variations
- Align zoning rules with how Forest Park has historically developed

Will these changes reduce green space or increase flooding?

No.

Nearly 44% of Forest Park's total land area is open space, primarily cemetery land. This land plays a major role in stormwater absorption and protects the Village from large-scale flooding.

The zoning updates do not affect:

- Public parks
- Cemetery land
- Parkways or public rights-of-way

Private residential lots account for a relatively small portion of the Village's overall permeable land, and all new construction must still meet strict stormwater requirements during the permitting process.

How is stormwater managed for new construction?

Zoning approval does not bypass engineering review.

Every new home or redevelopment must submit:

- Civil engineering plans
- On-site stormwater detention and retention designs
- Utility capacity reviews

Modern construction often includes features such as permeable surfaces, underground detention systems, and controlled drainage outlets. If engineering standards are not met, a project cannot be built, regardless of zoning.

Why increase lot coverage at all?

Lot coverage limits determine how much of a lot can be built upon. The proposed adjustments are intended to:

- Bring existing homes into conformity
- Reflect modern standards and advances in civil engineering
- Allow reasonable rebuilding without repeated zoning hearings

The changes do not mean every property will be built to the maximum allowed. They simply ensure homeowners and builders are not forced into costly exceptions for projects that already exist throughout the Village.

Could the Village choose a lower lot coverage instead?

Yes — but doing so would:

- Leave homes non-conforming to the zoning codes
- Continue requiring zoning variations for routine projects
- Put Forest Park at a disadvantage compared to nearby communities

The proposed standards balance neighborhood character with practical development realities.

Will this lead to overdevelopment or overcrowding?

No.

Density should not be confused with overcrowding. Forest Park's population has declined by approximately **3.4%** (*from the April 1, 2020 population estimates base to the July 1, 2024 population estimate*), and new housing has not kept pace with regional demand.

Moderate, well-planned development:

- Supports local businesses
- Encourages owner-occupied housing
- Strengthens the tax base
- Helps stabilize population trends
- Meet trending buyer demographics
- Promote housing diversity

What about 25-foot-wide lots — will they suddenly be developed everywhere?

No.

According to the Cook County GIS Data, there are 803 homes currently built on 25-foot lots. Very few vacant 25-foot lots remain buildable today.

The zoning updates simply restore the ability to build on these lots without requiring a special exception, as was the case for decades prior to 2010.

Can investors buy 50-foot lots and split them into two homes?

In most cases, this is not financially realistic.

- Existing homes often straddle lot lines
- Subdivision permanently reduces the value of the remaining home
- The cost of demolition, subdivision, and construction often exceeds profit

Market conditions today are very different from the post-2008 foreclosure era that fueled speculative but successful redevelopment.

Will single-family homes be converted into two-flats?

While the zoning code would allow two-flats in some cases, real-world constraints make this uncommon.

- Basement conversions require extensive excavation, drainage systems, and utility upgrades that can exceed \$200,000
- Splitting upper and lower floors often removes bedrooms, reduces living space, and lowers resale value

For most homeowners and investors, these conversions do not make financial sense.

What changes are proposed for R-2 districts?

R-2 districts already allow multi-unit housing. The updates:

- Reflect current market demand
- Maintain existing infrastructure protections
- Do not reduce engineering or utility review requirements

Most R-2 areas contain relatively new housing where redevelopment without combining multiple properties is unlikely.

Why adjust setbacks in R-3 districts?

R-3 districts are intentionally located along major corridors such as Harlem Avenue, Roosevelt Road, and Madison Street.

Many existing buildings already sit close to the lot line and rely on advanced stormwater management systems approved through permitting. The update removes outdated rules that no longer reflect how these areas function today.

Will residents still have input?

Yes.

Zoning updates have already been discussed at multiple public meetings and covered extensively by local media. Residents may continue to:

- Attend public hearings
- Submit written comments
- Speak with elected officials

Community input remains an important part of the process.

What happens if these changes cause problems later?

The Village retains the authority to:

- Amend the zoning code
- Establish temporary moratoriums
- Adjust standards if unanticipated impacts occur

Zoning is not permanent or irreversible.

What is the overall goal of these updates?

The goal is to:

- Fix long-standing inconsistencies
- Protect neighborhoods
- Reduce unnecessary bureaucracy
- Support responsible growth in a walkable community

Forest Park's character has always been shaped by thoughtful development, not stagnation.

See Below References

References, Data, and Context

Selected sources (no hyperlinks)

1. U.S. Census Bureau. *QuickFacts: Forest Park village, Illinois*, Table PST045225 (V2024; includes July 1, 2024 population estimate and percent change from April 1, 2020 estimates base to July 1, 2024).
2. U.S. Census Bureau. *Decennial Census (2010 and 2020)*, Forest Park village, Illinois (benchmark population counts for long-term comparisons).
3. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). *Community Data Snapshot: Forest Park* (Municipality Series; e.g., August 2024 Release and/or July 2025 Release), including the *General Land Use* table and source notes under each table.
4. Village of Forest Park, Illinois. *Code of Ordinances / Zoning Regulations* (codified municipal code; see zoning districts and dimensional standards within the zoning title/chapter, and any amendment history notes where provided).
5. Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD). *Watershed Management Ordinance (WMO)* (effective May 1, 2014; amended Jan. 9, 2025) and *Technical Guidance Manual* (stormwater management, detention/volume control standards, and required submittals).
6. Cook County Assessor and Cook County GIS resources (property records and parcel mapping tools), and/or Village of Forest Park GIS/parcel records (to validate lot-width and land-use inventory counts used in local planning analyses).

Verification statements

- **Open space share:** “The open-space percentage cited here is based on the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) *Community Data Snapshot: Forest Park, General Land Use* table (release: **July 2025**). In that dataset, open space’ includes substantial cemetery land referenced as Institutional.”
- **Population change:** “The population trend cited here comes from the U.S. Census Bureau *QuickFacts: Forest Park village, Illinois* (Table PST045225, **V2024**): Population estimate (July 1, 2024) and percent change from the April 1, 2020 estimates base to July 1, 2024.”
- **Stormwater compliance:** “All new construction and major redevelopment must still meet stormwater requirements during permitting, including applicable Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) Watershed Management Ordinance (WMO) standards and Village engineering review requirements.”