

## Summary

The planning commission has proposed a new T1 district that would partially replace the city's commercial and industrial districts. We support the intent of the T1 district, but we think its rules are too restrictive to be useful in all but a few parts of the city, and a more versatile solution is needed. We recommend that City Council ask the planning commission to develop one or more flexible mixed-use districts to fully replace the city's commercial and light industrial districts.

### The Need for Change

Currently, the city's commercial corridors are governed by a patchwork of suburban-style zoning districts in which developers are required to provide free parking but are forbidden from building high-density housing. As a result, our commercial areas consist mainly of strip malls, rather than walkable mixed-use neighborhoods.



M1 zoning on the S. State corridor.



Mixed-use buildings, forbidden in M1 zones.

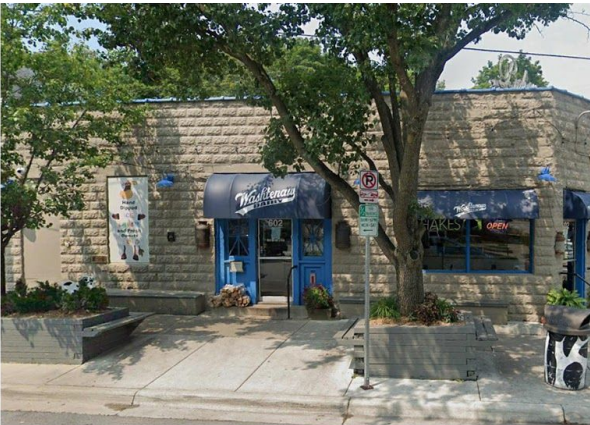
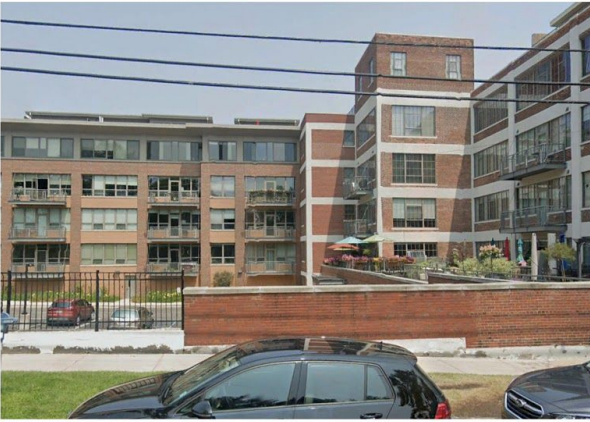
City Council has already committed itself to changing this state of affairs. It has [pledged to promote mixed-use neighborhoods](#) and has endorsed a [plan calling for high-density housing in commercial areas](#). We hope the city will now follow through on its commitments with specific zoning reforms.

### The T1 Proposal

Recently, the planning commission proposed a [new T1 district](#) designed to promote mixed-use development outside of downtown. The T1 district has several positive features, like its flexible density controls and lack of parking minimums, but it also has restrictions that could act as barriers to housing construction and development generally.

The T1 district bans all light industry, all single story buildings, and all developments that are not exactly 50-66% residential. If T1 zoning were applied widely to our commercial corridors, many

common and benign developments like apartment buildings or stores without housing would be forbidden.



None of these developments would be permitted in the T1 district. All of them violate the 50-66% residential rule, and Washtenaw Dairy (lower left) violates the two story height minimum and transparency requirement.

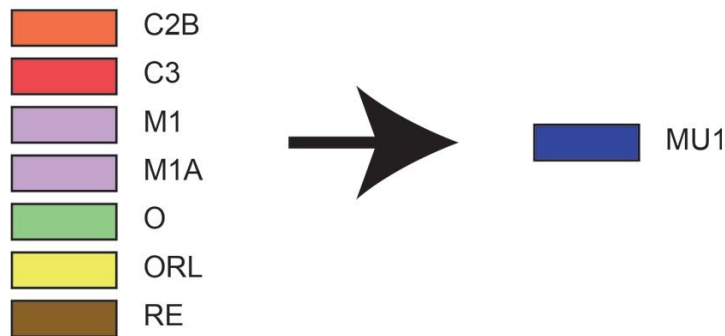
Since the city is committed to large-scale reform, but widely applying the T1 district is impractical, we suggest that city council fully replace our commercial and light industrial districts with flexible mixed use districts. Our recommendation below shows one possible way to implement this change.

### **Our Recommendation**

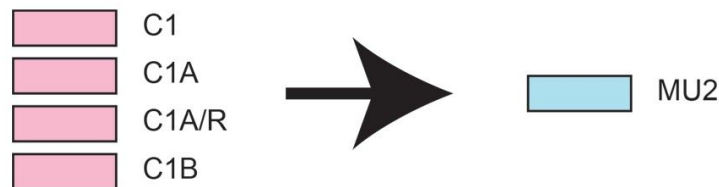
City Council should ask the planning commission to develop two new zoning districts:

1. An MU1 district designed to replace our C2, C3, O, ORL, M1, and RE districts, which would have the same rules as the proposed T1 zone, with the following changes:
  - a. Permit all of the uses allowed in the districts being replaced, including light industrial uses, which are permitted within mixed-use districts [in many cities](#).

- b. Remove the minimum and maximum housing percentages. We believe that along the broad stretch of commercial corridors, mixed use can be achieved through diversity in nearby buildings and does not need to be mandated within each individual development.
- c. Remove the 25% open space requirement. Currently, the city's commercial districts have no such requirement, and adding one contradicts the city's goals of allowing more density in its commercial corridors.
- d. Remove the two story height minimum. We worry that this requirement could end up discouraging medium-density single-story developments.
- e. Remove the parking maximums. If only 0.5 parking spaces are allowed per dwelling unit, developers might not build any residential units at all.
- f. Remove the transparency requirement for housing, and provide flexibility for commercial and industrial uses whose functioning might be impaired by transparent walls.
- g. The T1 district could be used as a character overlay for certain sections of the MU1 district, much like the city's existing overlays in the downtown.



- 2. An MU2 district designed to replace our C1 districts, which often border residential zones. The MU2 district would be the same as the MU1 district, but with stricter rules concerning noisy and potentially disruptive uses.



*Will Leaf has written about zoning for Real Estate Law Journal and can be reached at [willeaf@umich.edu](mailto:willeaf@umich.edu).*

*Jonathan Levine is a Professor of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Michigan and can be reached at [jnthnlvn@umich.edu](mailto:jnthnlvn@umich.edu).*