

UDC in a Nutshell

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This guide shall be used as an introduction and supplement to the Memphis and Shelby County Unified Development Code (the “UDC”). Use [this link](#) to access the full UDC. Please use the following steps to answer the most basic questions about the UDC.

1. **Zoning Atlas.** Go to the [zoning atlas](#) to determine which zoning district applies to the subject property. Zoning district boundaries may be turned on by going to the “map layers” tab at the top of the page, and then to the sub-tab called “planning layer.” Zoning Districts are turned on by clicking the “Zoning” box. Also, click on the box for the “Overlay Districts” since overlays affect zoning. For a more detailed list of instructions on how to use the zoning atlas, click [here](#).
2. **Register of Deeds.** To obtain a complete understanding of the zoning that affects a property, you will also need to access the Shelby County Register of Deeds’ [website](#). On the right side of the home page is a map. You can locate a property by either typing the address or zooming into the map until the parcel lines are portrayed. Once the parcel lines are portrayed, you can click on the subject site. On the left side of the screen, under the heading “Plat BK and PG,” there may be a hyperlink to a particular plat. Click on this hyperlink. That plat may contain additional zoning regulations for the site. For instance, if the site is within a Planned Development (“PD,” formerly known as “Planned Unit Development”), the conditions of that PD will govern the site. See UDC Sec. 1.13.3 to determine the relationship between the conditions of a PD and the provisions of the UDC. If the site is within a subdivision, that subdivision plat may contain setbacks that supplant whatever setbacks are provided for in the UDC (See Item 8 below). For a more detailed list of instructions on how to use the mapping program on the Register’s site, click [here](#).
3. **Zoning Districts.** On the zoning atlas, zoning districts are outlined in red boundaries. Basically, commercial uses are permitted in the “CMU” districts, apartments are permitted in the “RU” districts, homes are permitted in the “R” districts, offices are permitted in the “OG” and “RW” districts and industrial uses are permitted in the “EMP” and “IH” districts. The “CBD” district downtown allows commercial, office and residential uses. Go to UDC Sec. 2.5.2 for a complete list of uses permitted in each district (see Item 7 below). Click [here](#) for a PDF with just Sec. 2.5.2.
4. **Special Purpose Districts.** In the areas immediately north and south of downtown, Sec. 2.5.2 does not apply. The Special Purpose Districts are distinguished by containing zoning districts not included in Sec. 2.5.2, such as “MU,” HDR,” “SM and “Bluffview.” Go to UDC Article 7 for the permitted uses and setbacks for these areas. UDC Chapter 7.2 contains regulations for the areas south of downtown (the SCBID Special Purpose District) and Chapter 7.3 contains regulations for the areas north of downtown (the Uptown Special Purpose District). [This map](#) shows the boundaries of the Special Purpose Districts.
5. **Overlay Districts.** If the zoning atlas shows the property in an overlay district (indicated on the atlas by blue hatch marks), the permitted uses may be affected by an overlay district. Go to Article 8 for the overlay district regulations. The Medical Overlay District (Chapter 8.2) does not contain its own use table; instead, it uses the use table in Sec. 2.5.2 as a base and adds restrictions to it. The University District Overlay (Chapter 8.3) and the Midtown District Overlay (Chapter 8.4), on the other hand, contain their own use tables. [This map](#) shows the boundaries of the Overlay Districts.
6. **Historic Overlays.** If the zoning atlas shows the property in a zoning district with an “(H)” suffix, it is located within a historic overlay district (also known as a “Landmarks District”). If this is the case, any new building, addition to a building or demolition must first be approved by the Landmarks section of the Office of Planning and Development. Minor matters may be approved by staff; major matters must go to the Landmarks Commission. See [this graphic](#) for FAQs related to this historic overlay districts.

7. **Primary Use Table.** Sec. 2.5.2 is the use table that shows all uses permitted in the zoning districts outside of the special purpose and overlay districts. On the left side of the use table are references to various sections of Chapter 2.9. Chapter 2.9 contains an exhaustive list of uses that may not be explicitly included in Sec. 2.5.2. On the right side of the use table in Sec. 2.5.2 are references to Chapter 2.6. Chapter 2.6 contains use standards for particular uses, such as when certain uses require landscaping screening along the property lines of the subject site. If a plat recorded with the Register of Deeds (see Item 2) contains its own list of uses, that list supplants any use provisions in Sec. 2.5.2 or the special purpose or overlay district regulations. Click [here](#) to view a PDF of just Sec. 2.5.2
8. **Setbacks and Heights.** Building setbacks, or the distance a building must be from its front, side and rear property lines, are in several sections of the Code. These sections also contain the maximum heights for the buildings. For the single-family zoning districts (the “R” districts), go to Chapter 3.6. For the multi-family zoning districts (the “RU” districts), go to Chapter 3.7. For all other districts (“CMU,” “OG,” “EMP,” etc.), go to Chapter 3.10. If a plat recorded with the Register of Deeds (see Item 2 above) contains particular setbacks, those setbacks supplant any setback provisions found in these sections. [This chart](#) contains setbacks, lots sizes and other bulk regulations for all uses covered in Section 2.5.2. [This map](#) shows the parts of town subject to maximum setbacks.
9. **Encroachments and Height Exceptions.** Certain encroachments are permitted into the setbacks; these are listed in Sub-Sec. 3.2.9E. Also, certain building elements may surpass the maximum heights; these are listed in Sec. 3.2.6.
10. **Contextual Infill Standards.** For single-family residential homes in the older parts of the City, the setbacks of new homes are not regulated by Chapter 3.6, but by the Contextual Infill Standards of Sec. 3.9.2. See [this graphic](#) to help determine whether your property is subject to the Contextual Infill Standards.
11. **Accessory Structures.** Chapter 2.7 contains regulations related to accessory structures, or those structures found on a lot that are incidental and subordinate to the primary, or principal, use. [This graphic](#) contains regulations for accessory structures in a nutshell.
12. **Special Use Permits and Board of Adjustment.** If a structure or use is located on the subject site that does not meet the use or setback provisions of the UDC, or any plat recorded with the Register of Deeds, it may have been approved by the City Council or Board of County Commissioners as a Special Use Permit or by the Board of Adjustment as a variance. Those cases may be access on the zoning atlas by clicking on the “Board of Adjustment” and “Special Use Permit” layers under “Planning Layer” on the atlas.
13. **Nonconformities.** If a structure or use is located on a subject site that does not meet the provisions of the UDC, a recorded plat, or any approved Special Use Permit or Board of Adjustment case, then it may be nonconformity. Nonconformities either predate the adoption of zoning or predate certain zoning regulations now in place. See [this page](#) to download historic zoning maps and regulations, which may assist in the determination of whether a particular use or structure is legal, nonconforming.
14. **Fences.** Sec. 4.6.7 contains the rules for fences and walls. See [this graphic](#) for the fence regulations in the single-family residential districts in a nutshell.
15. **Signs.** Chapter 4.9 contains the rules for signs. See [this graphic](#) for the sign regulations in a nutshell.
16. **Parking.** Sec. 4.5.3 contains the required parking ratios for certain uses. Please note that in the SCBID Special Purpose District, the University Overlay District and the CBD zoning district, no parking minimums apply. [This document](#) contains the parking ratio, parking reduction and handicap parking tables.
17. **Lots of Record.** Sometimes, there is no evidence that a parcel was created legally. If there is a recorded plat on the Register’s website showing a particular lot, it is legal and a structure may be built upon it. However, if the lot is smaller than would otherwise be permitted in Chapters 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10, see Chapter 10.5. If it is not indicated on a recorded plat, but was created by deed, it may be legal, provided it meets the minimum size requirements of Chapters 3.6, 3.7 and 3.10, and it was created prior to March 1, 1989 (see Sec 9.7.3). If it is too small, the lot will require the approval of a variance from the Board of Adjustment. If it was created by deed after March 1, 1989, it will require the approval of a one-lot subdivision by the Technical Review Committee or Land Use Control Board. See [this tutorial](#) that addresses frequently asked questions about legal lots of record.