



Zoning Code Update

Request for Proposals

Posting Date: October 10, 2025

Submission Deadline: November 17, 2025

Department of Planning and Development
108 E. Green Street
Ithaca, NY 14850

The City of Ithaca is requesting proposals from qualified firms to conduct a comprehensive update of its zoning code.

This document outlines the scope of work for the project and related planning services. Electronic proposals will be accepted until November 17, 2025 at 5:00 PM. Proposals shall be submitted by email* to:

Megan Wilson
Deputy Director of Planning and Development
zoning@cityofithaca.org

*An email reply will be sent confirming the City's receipt of the proposal. Please contact Planning staff at planninginfo@cityofithaca.org if you do not receive a confirmation email within two business days.

Summary

Ithaca's [current zoning ordinance](#) was adopted in 1977 and has since been amended more than 50 times to address changing conditions. With 43 zoning districts and 4 overlay zones, the code is challenging to understand and not easily accessible to the average property owner. Over half of Ithaca's total housing stock predates the zoning code, resulting in many nonconforming properties and making property redevelopment and variance applications tedious and difficult.

In 2015, the City adopted [Plan Ithaca](#), an ambitious comprehensive plan to modernize the city based on smart growth principles including compact mixed-use development, green space, and multi-modal transportation. The City has since passed three detailed neighborhood plans to address the specific needs and conditions of those individual areas. Zoning changes have been enacted in some areas based on these plans, but a comprehensive update is needed to fully realize the goals of [Plan Ithaca](#).

The City of Ithaca was awarded a grant by the New York State Department of State to conduct a comprehensive update of its Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 325 of the City of Ithaca Code). Ithaca's new zoning code will balance preserving neighborhood character and encouraging denser housing development to address the City's housing needs.

Some of the goals for the revised zoning code are as follows:

1. Implement a modern understanding of best practices as it relates to zoning regulations that encourage all types of housing, particularly "missing middle" housing.
2. Create an easy-to-understand code with clear regulations.
3. Implement climate-friendly strategies to help meet the City's sustainability goals.
4. Ensure green space and natural features are preserved.
5. Create form-based regulations that align with neighborhood features.
6. Create regulations that prioritize pedestrians, bicyclists, and other alternative modes of transportation.

Funding for this project is made possible through New York State's Smart Growth Community Planning and Zoning Grants program. The resulting zoning code must address the following general Smart Growth principles, in addition to the elements suggested by the New York State statutes:

1. Develop plans and land use regulations that allow for and encourage mixed-use neighborhoods.
2. Enable a diverse mix of housing types that provide for opportunity and choice for all.
3. Prioritize infill and redevelopment of existing buildings to revitalize neighborhoods and downtowns, including areas around public transit.
4. Provide well-planned, equitable, and accessible public spaces.
5. Encourage compact neighborhood design and concentrated development around existing infrastructure.
6. Preserve open space, agricultural resources, and natural resources.
7. Prioritize transportation options such as walking, cycling, and public transportation.
8. Promote climate resiliency and adaptation, preferably through nature-based solutions, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
9. Build on unique traits to create an attractive and welcoming community with a strong sense of place.
10. Engage in an inclusive, collaborative public planning process that considers the needs and character of the community.

Background

Located at the southern end of Cayuga Lake, Ithaca is the governmental seat and lively urban center of Tompkins County in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. Ithaca is a community of extraordinary natural beauty, a diverse and energetic cultural life, abundant recreational opportunities, educational excellence, a strong and enduring economy, and low unemployment rates. Despite its size and location, Ithaca is a vibrant city of significant racial, ethnic, and cultural distinction.

Ithaca's population, housing characteristics, and labor market are shaped by the presence of higher education institutions, namely Cornell University and Ithaca College. The students attending these schools account for roughly half of the City's 32,000 residents, per the 2023 U.S. Census. College students and young professionals contribute to Ithaca's reputation as a fun and lively community despite its small size and remoteness.

Ithaca is also well known for its surrounding natural beauty, with several gorges, creeks, and hiking trails that are well maintained and preserved. The city's downtown is situated on relatively flat terrain south of Cayuga Lake with residential neighborhoods extending up the surrounding hills to the east, west, and south. The city's recently updated flood plain maps illustrate how vulnerable Ithaca's low elevation developments are to flooding and must be factored into the zoning rewrite.

Ithaca's thriving culture and natural beauty make it a highly desirable place to live. Housing affordability is one of the top concerns for both current and prospective residents. Housing costs have increased significantly, with the median home value rising from \$220,000 in 2015 at the adoption of Plan Ithaca to \$330,000 in 2023, per the U.S. Census. The City of Ithaca is surrounded by the Town of Ithaca, leaving little room for outward expansion. New housing stock has largely been in the form of apartment buildings, which fill quickly, despite high rents, due to the City's majority-renter population. For people and families looking to own a home in Ithaca, the options are limited and asking prices often far exceed those in neighboring towns and villages. Recently, the City has adopted legislation aimed at addressing affordability, including new regulations of short-term rentals and a new accessory dwelling unit policy. Still, the revised zoning code must encourage dense housing development throughout the city, including townhouses and other for-sale options for prospective buyers.

Each neighborhood in Ithaca has a unique history and character that many of their residents wish to preserve. The new zoning code will need to balance neighborhood consistency while allowing for denser development to meet the City's housing goals. The City has experimented with hybrid zoning codes for specific neighborhoods, namely Collegetown and Southside. These codes blend traditional zoning regulations with form-based codes that are written to keep specific characteristics of the neighborhood and allow for a

broader variety of uses. Collegetown's hybrid code was adopted in 2014 and has yielded positive changes along with unforeseen consequences.

Ithaca is known for adopting bold and progressive policies to address present issues. The perception of zoning has changed dramatically since the adoption of the current zoning code. To meet the ambitious goals set in Plan Ithaca, this zoning rewrite will need to implement a modern understanding of urban planning best practices tailored to the unique characteristics of Ithaca.

Scope of Work

The Respondent's proposal shall address each of the following tasks, with a separate cost and timeline for each identified task, using the same identifying language (e.g., Task 1) as used in the RFP. The successful Respondent will be responsible for assisting the City in meeting its obligations under the terms of its grant with the Department of State.

The City's Sign Ordinance (Chapter 272) is a stand-alone chapter of the City Code also in need of a revision to reflect current technology, new development trends, and different sign needs for different uses. This scope of work includes a rewriting of the Sign Ordinance to ensure the Sign Ordinance is consistent with the updated Zoning Ordinance.

Please note, the City will consider alternative or limited approaches to each task on a case-by-case basis. In such instances, the Respondent will need to propose how the task will be accomplished by the selected Consultant team (the "Consultant"), the City, and/or other project partners in satisfaction of the City's obligations to the Department of State as outlined in its grant contract and work plan. The final scope of work to be carried out by the Consultant will be negotiated in advance of contracting with the City. This scope of work is intended to be flexible and shall be refined to best meet project needs and goals. Upon completion of this scope of work, the City of Ithaca intends to repeal the existing Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 325) and adopt the new code in its entirety.

Task 1: Finalize Workplan

The Consultant and the Department of Planning & Development (the "Department") will develop a final workplan for the project with a list of tasks, deliverables, and timelines. The workplan will include requirements for regular updates to the Department for accountability and oversight. The workplan will also include requirements for subcontracts and written certifications of compliance with procurement procedures. Work on subsequent tasks shall not proceed prior to Department review and approval of the proposed workplan.

Products:

- Final workplan with tasks, deliverables, and timelines
- Quarterly updates to the Department including reporting related to the State of New York's minority and women-owned business enterprise (MWBE) reporting requirements
- Subcontract agreements with written certifications of compliance with procurement procedures

Task 2: Zoning Advisory Committee Meetings Preparation

The Consultant will support staff in preparing for monthly Zoning Advisory Committee meetings. During these meetings, the Committee will advance the preparation, review, and approval of the zoning code rewrite. The Consultant will assist staff in preparing agendas and meeting materials. The Consultant will attend and present at meetings as necessary.

Products:

- Meeting materials including presentations and handouts

Task 3: Public Engagement

The Consultant, in collaboration with City staff and the Zoning Advisory Committee, will facilitate public engagement to ensure that community members have multiple opportunities to provide input and feedback on the proposed zoning code. Task 3 outlines different ways that the public will be able to participate in the zoning update project and meaningfully shape the outcome of the zoning code update.

- **Task 3.1: Public Participation Plan**

The Consultant, in collaboration with City staff and the Zoning Advisory Committee, will prepare a public engagement plan that identifies roles, responsibilities, timelines, and logistics for interviews with stakeholders, public meetings, public hearings, and a webpage with links to announcements, presentations, and documents prepared over the course of the project. The plan should include strategies for engaging hard-to-reach populations.

The Public Engagement Plan will include outreach activities that are directed and coordinated by the Consultant, City staff, and the Zoning Advisory Committee. The Consultant is expected to prepare the overall outreach and engagement strategy and create and maintain a project website. The Consultant's responsibilities will include at a minimum: three public information meetings/community workshops, one community survey, one public hearing, and six interviews with local stakeholders. The engagement plan may include additional outreach to be conducted by City staff and the Zoning Advisory Committee.

- **Task 3.2: Public Information Meetings**

The Consultant will conduct at least three public information meetings to introduce the project to the public, gather feedback on existing zoning regulations, identify smart growth-oriented solutions to current zoning issues, and solicit feedback on draft zoning regulations.

- **Task 3.3: Community Survey and Stakeholder Interviews or Focus Groups**

Develop at least one community survey to gather input on local conditions and issues. Conduct at least six stakeholder interviews or focus groups to gather detailed feedback on existing zoning regulations, identify smart growth-oriented solutions to current zoning issues, and solicit feedback on draft zoning regulations. Ideally, interviews and focus groups will be conducted at the beginning of the planning process and again to gather comments on draft regulations.

Products:

- Public Engagement Plan with implementation timeline and defined responsibilities
- Written agendas, presentations, handouts, and other materials for each meeting/interview
- Written summaries to provide a comprehensive overview of feedback received from the public
- Community survey, summary and analysis of responses

Task 4: Analysis of Current Conditions

Prior to drafting the updated code, the Consultant will analyze current conditions in the context of the goals set by Plan Ithaca and other neighborhood plans. The City will provide the Consultant with a recently completed Zoning Ordinance Technical Assessment. The City will also provide other relevant background information including GIS data, previous plans and studies, existing regulatory documents, and information on proposed development projects. This work will provide the foundation for the new code, including a proposed structure.

- **Task 4.1: Regulatory Framework Analysis**

The Consultant will review existing regulations that impact new development, including the Zoning Ordinance, Plan Ithaca, design review and design guidelines, and site plan review requirements. The Consultant will focus on requirements and procedures for development approvals to gain a clear understanding of the existing regulatory structure. The team's regulatory analysis will include an identification of potential barriers that will have to be surmounted to implement the type of code envisioned by this scope, as well as recommendations to streamline existing regulations and processes.

- **Task 4.2: Community Character Analysis**

The Consultant will examine the physical form of Ithaca and its current and historic patterns of development. The Consultant will examine the network of streets, blocks and lots, building types, public spaces, neighborhoods, and building form. The analysis will include an examination of existing land uses, density, and urban design elements. The Consultant will gain an understanding of existing patterns of development such as setbacks, street width, and building height, to determine the existing urban design and distinct characteristics of various neighborhoods throughout the city. This analysis should consider Plan Ithaca and other adopted neighborhood plans, and the future land use goals for each area. The analysis should include an assessment of how different neighborhoods meet or do not meet the goals set forth in these plans and recommend regulatory approaches to achieve the goals of the comprehensive plan and implement smart growth principles.

Products:

- Memo/Report detailing findings of regulatory framework analysis and recommendations
- Outline of new zoning code structure
- Memo/Report detailing findings of community character analysis, including necessary images and GIS analysis

Task 5: Initial Draft Code & Technical Report

The Consultant will draft a zoning code and sign regulations based on feedback from the Zoning Advisory Committee and the public, as well as an analysis of existing conditions. The Consultant should ensure that the proposed regulations are consistent with smart growth principles and Plan Ithaca. The Code will be user-friendly, visual, and will serve to encourage future redevelopment in an organized manner and further the goals and vision of the community. Graphics will be incorporated into the code to convey design standards.

Consultant will work closely with the City in determining the format and an updated outline of components to be included in the code. Consultant will submit all drafts of the updated code to the City in both electronic and hard copy format.

In addition to the draft regulations, the Consultant will draft a memo summarizing key changes between the existing zoning code and proposed zoning code. The report should be accessible to the public with visuals and maps as appropriate. Additionally, the report will describe how the proposed zoning code will be integrated into the City's Code. The City envisions that the updated zoning code will involve the complete replacement of Chapter 325, Zoning, of the City Code. There may be other sections of the City Code that should be updated as part of the zoning code update. The Consultant will recommend whether the updated Sign Ordinance should remain a stand-alone section or be integrated into the City's Zoning Code. The Consultant will work closely with the City to ensure the proposed code aligns with state and local legal requirements and provide input as to the need for changes to other existing regulations.

Products:

- Draft zoning code
- Draft zoning map and charts
- Draft sign ordinance
- Technical report

Task 6: Present Initial Draft Zoning Code

The Consultant will present the initial draft code to City staff, the Common Council, the Zoning Advisory Committee, the City's quasi-judicial Boards, and the community. The Consultant will participate in meetings with City staff and officials as well as key stakeholders (as scheduled by the City). The Consultant will present what is allowable under the current code along with the potential development that can be achieved under the revised code. Resulting discussions will be used to gather input on any desired refinements to the draft.

The draft documents shall be made available to the public and all interested participants following an initial presentation to staff. The public should be given a review and comment period, as well as explicit guidance for providing feedback.

Products:

- Presentation materials including handouts and slides
- Summaries of meetings and feedback

Task 7: Refine the Zoning Code

This task includes presentations and revisions of the draft Zoning Code. This task may involve multiple iterations of the draft code, depending on public feedback. The Consultant should expect preparation of the initial draft (Task 5) and three subsequent revisions. The drafting of the zoning code will be an iterative process that should respond to feedback from various stakeholders. The Consultant should track feedback provided based on each draft and keep record of how each subsequent draft responds to previous feedback. Between each draft, there should be enough time to allow feedback from staff, the public, Common Council and the Zoning Advisory Committee.

Products

- Draft zoning codes
- Memos accompany each draft with an overview of key changes from previous draft

Task 8: Final Proposed Zoning Code

The Consultant will address comments and recommendations received from the public and from local, regional and State agencies in the final zoning regulations. The final draft will be submitted to the City of Ithaca Planning and Development Board and the Common Council for review. This will involve multiple meetings with the Planning and Development Board and Common Council.

Products:

- Final zoning code, zoning map, and zoning chart ready for local adoption
- Written materials to help community members understand the new code

Task 9: State Environmental Quality Review

The Consultant will prepare materials necessary for compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and the City Environmental Quality Review Ordinance (CEQRO). The adoption or amendment of a zoning code is a Type I action pursuant to SEQRA 6 NYCRR Part 617 and CEQRA Section 176-4B(3), which may require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. The Common Council shall serve as the Lead Agency for SEQRA compliance.

Products:

- SEQRA documentation, including a Full Environmental Assessment Form or Environmental Impact Statement

Task 10: Public Hearing and Local Adoption

The Consultant will aid with the approval process. This work may include presenting the code and collecting comments, questions, and suggestions for refinements at meetings.

Products:

- Materials for presentations and responses to public comments as needed
- Minutes from the public hearing and record of decision by the local municipal board

Task 11: Grant Administration Assistance

The Consultant will provide the Department with requested documentation necessary to administer the Department of State Smart Growth Planning and Zoning Grant. This will include assisting the City to ensure any MWBE subconsultant partnering with the Consultant for this project provides the completed MWBE Workforce Employment Utilization Form and MWBE Utilization Plan to the City. The Consultant will also provide the City with records of any payments to MWBE firm(s) so the City can properly complete reporting requirements through the New York State Contract System.

Products:

- Documentation as requested by Department

RFP Submission Requirements

Submittals shall be submitted electronically and include the following components. Each proposal will be evaluated based on the following documents and requirements. Notwithstanding the weight indicators below, the City reserves sole award discretion.

1. Cover Letter (Required)

Please provide a cover letter summarizing your qualifications, experience with similar projects, and proposed approach to the execution of this project.

2. Qualification & Capabilities

Describe the qualifications and capabilities of the firm, team, or individual(s) as they relate to the requested project work. If any aspect of the project is to be completed by a subcontractor, this must be noted in the proposal and include the subcontracted firm's identifications and qualifications.

3. Technical Approach

Include a detailed work plan that lists all tasks determined necessary to accomplish the work outlined in the Scope of Work section. The work plan shall define resources needed for each task (title and person-hours) and the firm's staff person(s) completing the project task. Additionally, the plan should provide a timeline that details the approximate duration for each task and milestone.

The work plan should also give details of any City staffing needs, including role, expected time duration, and frequency. Any additional information or documents needed from staff should be included in this section of the submission.

Additional project elements or deliverables suggested by the Consultant can be included in the work plan and identified as 'consultant suggested elements.'

4. Past Project Experience

Please include examples of comparable projects and at least three references. Please identify any experience with projects funded by a New York State Smart Growth Communities Planning and Zoning Grant.

5. Cost Proposal

A budget of \$200,000 has been established for this project.

A cost breakdown shall be submitted as part of the proposal. Fees are to include the names, title, hourly rates, overhead factors, and any other details by which the overall and project element costs have been derived. The fees are to relate to each item of the proposed work plan. Consultants shall be capable of justifying the details of the fee proposal relative to personnel costs, overhead, material and time.

If applicable, provide the price of any optional services recommended by the Consultant that would be supportive of the services requested.

Important Dates

Publication of RFP	October 10, 2025
All Questions Due	October 31, 2025
City Responses to Questions	November 7, 2025
Proposal Submission Deadline	November 17, 2025
Selection	December 2025
Project Kickoff Meeting	January 2026

Submission

Submissions will only be accepted via email using the following address and subject line:

Email: zoning@cityofithaca.org

Subject Line: *Zoning Code Update Proposal*

Responses submitted to this Request for Proposal (RFP) will become property of the City of Ithaca at the time of submission. Any confidential information, such as a company's financial status, if required by the specifications, shall be submitted separately and marked "Confidential." All responses may be released pursuant to the Freedom of Information Law. This RFP is subject to the City of Ithaca Purchasing Policy and Procedure Manual and all applicable local, state, and federal law. All proposals must be submitted by November 17, 2025. The City of Ithaca may extend the advertising period of this RFP in its sole discretion.

Proposal Evaluation

A selection committee composed of City staff and elected officials will evaluate each proposal by the criteria set forth in Appendix A to select a short list of firms for further consideration. The City reserves the right to reject proposals found to be unresponsive and deficient in any of the requested information. The submission of a proposal with all requested information does not guarantee that the proposing firm is a candidate for further consideration. The City may contact references to verify material submitted by the Respondents.

All proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the attached tabulation schedule (Appendix A). The City reserves the right to waive any and all irregularities, to request additional information as required in order to make a procurement in the best interest of the City, and to reject any and all proposals for any reason.

Diversity & Inclusion

The City of Ithaca is committed to diversity, justice, and inclusion. We encourage women- and minority-owned businesses to submit responses and Awardees to utilize women and minority businesses for supplies, equipment, and services.

The City of Ithaca is committed to the full inclusion of all qualified individuals. Consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the NYS Division of Human Rights (NYS DHR) it is the policy of the City to provide reasonable accommodation when requested without causing an undue hardship. If accommodation is needed, please call (607) 274 6539 or email hrdept@cityofithaca.org.

This project is subject to the requirements of New York State Executive Law Article 15-A. Pursuant to these requirements, the awarded consultant will be required to make a good faith effort to achieve an overall MWBE participation goal of 30% of the total contract value. Proposals that successfully meet or exceed this MWBE participation goal will be favorably considered and given preference during the evaluation and award process.

The Consultant will provide the City of Ithaca with requested documentation necessary to administer the Department of State Smart Growth Planning and Zoning Grant. This will include assisting the City to ensure any MWBE subconsultant partnering with the Consultant for this project provides the completed MWBE Workforce Employment Utilization Form and MWBE Utilization Plan to the City. The Consultant will also provide the City with records of any payments to MWBE firm(s) so the City can properly complete reporting requirements through the New York State Contract System.

Next Steps

Following selection, the City of Ithaca intends to work with the identified lead Consultant to define the terms of the contract, including a workplan with milestones and deliverables. The Agreement will be subject to the City of Ithaca Terms and Conditions, which are attached as Appendix B.

Contract Award

The Contract award, if any, will be made by December 31, 2025. The Contract shall be awarded to the Respondent(s) who submits the proposal that proves to be in the best interest of the City. The City of Ithaca reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive any informalities, and to accept the proposal that serves the best interest of the community. This RFP does not commit the City to award any contract or to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of this proposal.

The resulting Contract will incorporate the City of Ithaca Contract Terms and Conditions, this RFP, any addendum, and Respondent's response thereto, all additional agreements and stipulations, and the results of any final negotiations will constitute the final Contract. The terms and conditions as contained in the final executed Contract for Services shall take precedence over any conflicting terms.

Questions

All questions and communications should be in writing and sent via e-mail. Questions and requests for clarifications related to definition or interpretation of this RFP shall be submitted via email to zoning@cityofithaca.org no later than 5:00 PM on October 31, 2025. Questions and staff responses will be posted to the City's website at <https://www.cityofithaca.org/bids.aspx?bidID=223> by November 7, 2025.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: TABULATION SHEET

Review Criteria	Weight	Max. Points	Points x Weight
Understanding Scope of Work	4	5	20
Past Performance of Similar Projects	3	5	15
Qualifications & Experience of Proposed Staff	2	5	10
Proposed Schedules & Budgets	3	5	15
Ability to Complete All Project Tasks	2	5	10
Overall Strategy and Quality of Proposal	4	5	20
Ability to Meet MWBE Goals	2	5	10
TOTAL	-	-	100

APPENDIX B: CITY OF ITHACA TERMS AND STIPULATIONS

Indemnification, Hold Harmless, and Insurance

The successful Respondent shall release, waive, indemnify, hold harmless, and defend the City and its officers, employees, agents and elected officials from and against any and all claims, demands, actions, causes of action, suits, or judgements, including but not limited to, losses, costs, expenses, penalties, or other damages or liability brought against the City and its officers, employees, agents and elected officials for injury, illness, or death to any person or persons or damage to property arising out of the performance of this RFP by the successful Respondent, its employees, subcontractors, or agents with the exception of actions and claims arising out of the negligence of the City. The indemnification will survive the term of this RFP.

The successful Respondent will be required to procure and maintain, at its own expense, the minimum limits of insurance as described herein or as required by law, whichever is greater.

Contract Extension

The City agrees, under the General Municipal Law of New York State, to allow all authorized users who wish to utilize any Contract awarded as a result of this solicitation to do so. However, it is understood that the extension of such Contract is at the discretion of the Respondent and the Respondent is only bound to the Contract between itself and the City.

Payment Terms

Payment terms subject to negotiation at the option of the City following award. Interest penalties against the City will not be allowed. The City is not subject to Federal, State, or Local taxes. The City shall not be liable for any costs incurred by a respondent prior to the date of execution of a contract. Award of this RFP does not constitute execution of a contract.

Non-Appropriation Clause

In accordance with New York State General Municipal Law, the City will not be liable for any purchases or contracts for goods or services for which funding is not available. As a result, the Respondent agrees to hold the City harmless for any contracts let for which funding either does not currently exist, or for which funding has been removed prior to the authorization to proceed. Should it become necessary for the City to cancel a project after the order to proceed has been issued, the Respondent agrees that the City's liability is strictly limited to only those financial damages that it can prove to have incurred as a result of the Contract termination.

Each person signing the proposal certifies that he or she is the person in the Consultant's firm/organization responsible for the decision as to the fees being offered in the Proposal and has not and will not participate in any action contrary to the terms of this provision.