

# The ABC's of P & Z— A Planning & Zoning Glossary

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## Introduction

Did you ever drive by a new residential or commercial development and wonder why the decision was made to locate it there? Did you ever wonder how the decision was made? Have you ever looked at a new subdivision, office complex, or industrial park and thought, "I wonder how long that's been there"?

In many Indiana communities, locating a new development involves a fairly complex checks and balances system. Knowing and using a common vocabulary of planning terms will help you understand planning and zoning issues, and make it easier for you to get involved in answering questions and making decisions about growth in your community.

## Frequently Used Planning & Zoning Terms

**Agricultural District:** One method to designate a geographic area voluntarily formed by landowners and approved by government agencies for fixed, renewable time periods to protect against farmland conversion pressures.

**Agricultural Zoning:** Local zoning that establishes permitted and conditioned uses of land.

**Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA):** Group of individuals appointed to hear proposals and make decisions concerning exceptions to the current zoning ordinances.

**Business District:** Land zoned for commercial use.

**Comprehensive Plan:** Guide for community growth over a 10- to 20-year time period. Provides legal support for land use regulation and direction. Also known as a "master plan."

**Conservation Easement:** Legal tool enabling purchase or donation of property for the purpose of preserving natural amenities.

**Current Land Use Value:** A method of valuing farmland based on soil type and product markets, rather than on development potential.

**Development Rights:** Property rights to develop land under local, state, and/or federal laws.

**Eminent Domain:** Right of government acting in the public interest to take private property with just compensation.

**Fiscal Impact:** The effect that economic development or public policy has on government finances.

**Impact Fees:** Monetary charge imposed on new development by a unit to defray the capital costs of infrastructure needed to serve the new development.

**Industrial District:** Land zoned for light or heavy industrial use. Helps protect industry from nuisance suits.

**Land Trust:** Private, non-profit land organization that protects natural and cultural resources through conservation easements, land acquisition, and education.

**Non-Conforming Use:** Use of property not meeting zoning ordinance specifications.

**Nuisance Doctrine:** Legal doctrine that no owner has an absolute right to use property in a way that might harm the public health or welfare, or damage a neighboring landowner's interest or the interests of the community as a whole.

**Petitioner:** Person or entity requesting a zoning change, a subdivision approval, or a zoning variance.

## Communities on Course Land Use



**Plan Commission:** Group of individuals appointed to develop a comprehensive plan and recommend zoning changes to local legislative boards.

**Planning:** Legal process for deciding future use of the land in a community.

**Prime Farmland:** Land best suited for row, forage, and fiber crop production. Natural characteristics include level topography, good drainage, adequate moisture supply, favorable soil depth and texture, and ability to consistently produce the most food, feed, and fiber with the least fertilizer, labor, and energy.

**Property Rights:** A defined privilege to use land, water, and other resources in particular ways.

**Property Tax Incentives:** Property tax relief for farmland owners, such as income tax credits or property assessments based on current use value rather than potential development rights.

**Purchase of Conservation Easements (PACE) Program:** A government initiative for acquiring development rights to farmland and preserving agricultural use. Landowners retain ownership while agreeing to keep land in agriculture.

**Purchase Development Rights (PDR) Program:** Like PACE, an initiative in which the government or land trust purchases the development rights to farmland to preserve agricultural use. In this voluntary program, landowners retain ownership while agreeing to keep land in agriculture.

**Remonstrator:** Person or entity objecting to a proposed change in zoning.

**Residential District:** Zone established for housing of various densities and varieties.

**Subdivision Control Ordinance:** Device for implementing the comprehensive plan. Subdivision controls set forth standards that are used to ensure orderly community growth.

**Taking:** Acquisition and occupation of land or regulation of land to the extent it has no economic value to the owner.

**Transfer Development Rights (TDR) Program:** A program that allows landowners to transfer the right to develop one parcel of land to a more suitable parcel of land in order to prevent farmland conversion. TDR programs establish "sending areas" and "receiving areas" for development rights.

**Urban Growth Boundary:** Area designated to contain urban development within planned urban area where basic services, such as sewers, water facilities, and police and fire protection, can be economically provided.

**Zoning:** A way of putting the comprehensive plan to work. A zoning ordinance contains regulations designed to implement the comprehensive plan. It includes, but is not limited to, setbacks, signs, parking, landscaping, environmental restrictions, density, and site plans. It provides for allowable uses.

## Conclusion

As you travel your community highways, look at the landscape. The changes taking place affect you and all your neighbors now and in the future. Remember that your participation and understanding are the basis for a strong community. The ABCs of planning and zoning depend on you.

### A = Attitude

Open your attitude; a closed mind is a fertile field for conflict. Approach change in a professional way. Ask questions. Awareness is important.

### B = Boards

Work with your local boards, state legislators, and planning commissions. Offer ideas to better the community. Your community will benefit from your involvement.

### C = Consensus

Community cooperation is a critical component. Consensus is vital in a comprehensive plan. And your part in caring for your neighborhood is critical to its future.

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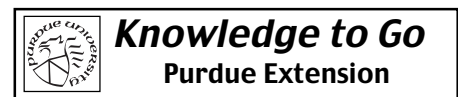
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