

DC Zoning Map Glossary

Term	Definition
Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC)	An elected board representing a geographic subarea of the District of Columbia charged with advising on policies and programs affecting traffic, parking, recreation, street improvements, liquor licenses, zoning, economic development, police protection, sanitation and trash collection, and the District's annual budget. There are 37 ANCs in the District.
Air Rights (Air Space Development)	Development that occurs in the space over a piece of property, structure, or surface feature such as a highway or rail yard.
Apartment	One (1) or more habitable rooms with kitchen and bathroom facilities exclusively for the use of and under the control of the occupants of those rooms.
Apartment house	Any building or part of a building in which there are three (3) or more apartments, or three (3) or more apartments and one (1) or more bachelor apartments, providing accommodation on a monthly or longer basis.
Baist index	An index that delineates pages that comprise the four volumes of the Real Estate Atlas of Washington, DC published by Baist Company.
Basement	That portion of a story partly below grade, the ceiling of which is four feet (4 ft.) or more above the adjacent finished grade.
Building	A structure having a roof supported by columns or walls for the shelter, support, or enclosure of persons, animals, or chattel. When separated from the ground up or from the lowest floor up, each portion shall be deemed a separate building, except as provided elsewhere in this title. The existence of communication between separate portions of a structure below the main floor shall not be construed as making the structure one (1) building.
Building, accessory	A subordinate building located on the same lot as the main building, the use of which is incidental to the use of the main building.
Building Area	The maximum horizontal projected area of a building and its accessory buildings. The term "building area" shall include all side yards and open courts less than five feet (5 ft.) in width, and all closed courts less than six feet (6 ft.) in width. Except for outside balconies, this term shall not include any projections into open spaces authorized elsewhere in this title, nor shall it include portions of a building that do not extend above the level of the main floor of the main building, if placed so as not to obstruct light and ventilation of the main building or of buildings on adjoining property.
Building Height	<p>The vertical distance measured from the level of the curb opposite the middle of the front of the building to the highest point of the roof or parapet.</p> <p>The term curb shall refer to a curb at grade. In the case of a property fronting a bridge or a viaduct, the height of the building shall be measured from the lower of the natural grade or the finished grade at the middle of the front of the building to the highest point of the roof or parapet.</p> <p>In those districts in which the height of building is limited to forty feet (40 ft.), the height of the building may be measured from the finished grade level at the middle of the front of the building to the ceiling of the top story.</p> <p>In those districts in which the height of the building is limited to sixty feet (60 ft.), in the case of a building located upon a terrace, the height of building may be measured from the top of the terrace to the highest point of the roof or parapet, but the allowance for terrace height shall not exceed five feet (5 ft.).</p> <p>Where a building is removed from all lot lines by a distance equal to its proposed height above grade, the height of building shall be measured from the natural grade at the middle of the front of the building to the highest point of the roof or parapet.</p> <p>If a building fronts on more than one (1) street, any front may be used to determine the maximum height of the building; but the basis for the height of the building shall be determined by the width of the street selected as the front of the building.</p>
Building Line	A line beyond which property owners have no legal or vested right to extend a building or any part of the building without special permission and approval of the proper authorities; ordinarily a line of demarcation between public and private property, but also applied to building restriction lines, when recorded on the records of the Surveyor of the District of Columbia.
Campus Boundary	The grounds of a school, college, university, academy, hospital, or other large institution.

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Cellar	That portion of a story, the ceiling of which is less than four feet (4 ft.) above the adjacent finished grade.
Central Employment Area (CEA)	A legal definition used primarily by the federal government in the location of projects, leasing of space, determination of parking standards, etc. and synonymous with the major concentration of federal and commercial land uses in the core of the District of Columbia.
Community-based residential facility	A residential facility for persons who have a common need for treatment, rehabilitation, assistance, or supervision in their daily living. Includes designated “community residence facilities” and other types of facilities such as emergency shelters and substance abusers homes.
Comprehensive Plan	A long-range (20-25 year) plan containing maps and policies to guide the future physical development of a city or county. In DC, consists of “District” elements prepared by the Office of Planning and “Federal” elements prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission.
Dwelling	A building designed or used for human habitation. When used without a qualifying term, it shall mean a one-family dwelling.
Dwelling, multiple	A building containing three (3) or more dwelling units or rooming units, or any combination of these units totaling three (3) or more.
Dwelling, one-family	A dwelling used exclusively as a residence for one (1) family.
Dwelling, one-family detached	A one-family dwelling, completely separated from all other buildings and having two (2) side yards.
Dwelling, one-family semi-detached	A one-family dwelling, the wall on one (1) side of which is either a party wall, or lot line wall, having one (1) side yard.
Dwelling, row	A one-family dwelling having no side yards.
Dwelling, two-family	A dwelling used exclusively as a residence for two (2) families living independently of each other. A two-family dwelling is a flat.
Dimensions	A number in inches that represents the measurement of where the zoning boundary is located relative to the property line.
Family	One (1) or more persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, or not more than six (6) persons who are not so related, including foster children, living together as a single house-keeping unit, using certain rooms and housekeeping facilities in common; provided, that the term family shall include a religious community having not more than fifteen (15) members.
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	<p>A measure of density, intended to give some flexibility of design; can be expressed in one of the following ways:</p> <p>a). $FAR = \text{Gross Floor Area} / \text{Lot Area}$ b). $\text{Gross Floor Area} = FAR \times \text{Lot Area}$</p> <p>It is most commonly used in form “b” since the FAR and Lot Area of a parcel is predetermined and the gross floor area is what is unknown in most cases.</p> <p>For example a building with an FAR of 1.0 can take many different forms; e.g., a 1-story building over the entire lot; a two-story building over 1/2 of the lot; a four-story building over 1/4 of the lot; or any combination thereof.</p>
Front yard	The area between the front of a structure (e.g., the portion facing the street) and the street, including portions of the side yard located in front of the structure.
Gross Floor Area	The sum of the gross horizontal areas of the several floors of all buildings on the lot, measured from the exterior faces of exterior walls and from the center line of walls separating two (2) buildings.
Historic district	Area within a city or county formally recognized by the local, state, or federal government for its concentration of historic or notable structures.
Lot	The land bounded by definite lines that, when occupied or to be occupied by a building or structure and accessory buildings, includes the open spaces required under this title. A lot may or may not be the land so recorded on the records of the Surveyor of the District of Columbia.
Lot Occupancy (lot coverage)	That portion of a lot which is covered with buildings or structures; usually expressed as a maximum percentage; e.g., a maximum lot coverage of 40 percent means that no more than 40 percent of the lot area may be built over with buildings or structures.

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Lot, width of	The distance between the side lot lines, measured along the building line; except that, in the case of an irregularly shaped lot, the width of the lot shall be the average distance between the side lot lines. Where the building line is on a skew, the width of the lot shall be the distance between side lot lines perpendicular to the axis of the lot taken where either side lot line intersects the building line.
Map Amendment	A petition to the Zoning Commission to change the zoning designation on a property.
Map Index	An index of the 18 tiles that define the areas of the DC Zoning Map.
Matter of right (zoning)	The land uses and development densities and structural dimensions to which a property owner is entitled by zoning, with no additional special permission or approval required.
Natural grade	The undisturbed level formed without human intervention or, where the undisturbed ground level cannot be determined because of an existing building or structure, the undisturbed existing grade.
Nonconforming structure	A structure, lawfully existing at the time this title or any amendment to this title became effective, that does not conform to all provisions of this title or the amendment, other than use, parking, loading, and roof structure requirements. Regulatory standards that create nonconformity of structures include, but are not limited to, height of building, lot area, width of lot, floor area ratio, lot occupancy, yard, court, and residential recreation space requirements.
Overlay	A zoning designation that modifies the basic underlying designation in some specific manner.
Parcel Lot	Land often not residing within a square, most of which were created in 1905 by Act of Congress. All the unsubdivided land from Washington County merged with the city of Washington to form the District of Columbia.
Percentage of lot occupancy	A figure that expresses that portion of a lot lying within lot lines and building lines that is occupied or that may be occupied under the provisions of this title as building area; except as provided in the Waterfront Districts wherein lot occupancy shall be calculated in accordance with § 932, and Mixed Use Districts wherein the percentage of lot occupancy may be calculated on a horizontal plane located at the lowest level where residential uses begin.
Planned Unit Development (PUD)	A large-scale development in which conventional zoning standards (such as setbacks and height limits) are relaxed in order to conserve sensitive areas, promote the creation of public amenities such as parks and plazas, and encourage the mixing of different land uses.
PUD amenity	A feature provided by the developer of a planned unit development (PUD) that provides a benefit not only to the occupants of the PUD but also to the surrounding area or to the City as a whole (for example, a park).
Record Lot	Defined by the DC Surveyor. These are official, platted, recorded subdivision lots created by the D.C. Surveyor's Office in compliance with the Subdivision Ordinance of the District of Columbia. These typically must have public street frontage.
Reservations	Lands acquired for use by the Federal Government after the original founding of the city. There are presently more than 750 U.S. Reservations in D.C. These were acquired by the Federal Government through purchase, condemnation, dedication or gift. The majority of U.S. Reservations in Washington are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.
SSL	Square, Suffix, and Lot. The identifier is used by the District of Columbia to uniquely locate property primarily for the purpose of taxation.
Setback	The minimum distance on the interior perimeter of a property line that is required to be kept free of structures, e.g., the required front, rear, and side yards.
Single Member District	Single Member Districts are boundaries, within ANCs, developed by the DC City Council. Each SMD has approximately 2,000 residents represented by a commissioner that is elected to the Advisory Neighborhood Commission.
Special Exception	A conditionally permitted use in a particular zone district; that is, a use that is permitted provided certain specific criteria are met.
Square	A unit of land defined by the DC Surveyor that normally consists of a single city block and contains record and tax lots.

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Story	The space between the surface of two (2) successive floors in a building or between the top floor and the ceiling or underside of the roof framing. The number of stories shall be counted at the point from which the height of the building is measured.
Structure	Something constructed, especially a building or a part of a building, but also including fences, trellises, gazebos, and similar standing features.
Suffix	A directional letter (i.e. N, S, E, or W) that follows the Square number.
Tax Lots	A unit of land assigned by the real property tax administration that usually resides within a square. Often referred to as A&T lots or simply tax lots. These lots are strictly for real estate taxation purposes.
Transferable Development Rights	A method of protecting sensitive land or historic buildings in which the right to develop these properties is transferred to other, less sensitive sites.
Use, accessory	A use customarily incidental and subordinate to the principal use, and located on the same lot with the principal use.
Yard	An exterior space, other than a court, on the same lot with a building or other structure. A yard required by the provisions of the Zoning Regulations shall be open to the sky from the ground up, and shall not be occupied by any building or structure, except as specifically provided in the Zoning Regulations. No building or structure shall occupy in excess of fifty percent (50%) of a yard required by the Zoning Regulations.
Yard, rear	A yard between the rear line of a building or other structure and the rear lot line, except as provided elsewhere in this title. The rear yard shall be for the full width of the lot and shall be unoccupied, except as specifically authorized in the Zoning Regulations.
Yard, rear, depth of	The mean horizontal distance between the rear line of a building and the rear lot line, except as provided elsewhere in the Zoning Regulations.
Yard, side	A yard between any portion of a building or other structure and the adjacent side lot line, extending for the full depth of the building or structure.
Zoning District	A portion of the community designated by the local zoning regulations for certain types of land uses, such as single family homes or neighborhood commercial uses.