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Memo 2

To: City of La Crosse

From: MSA Zoning Code team

Subject: Diagnostic Summary

Date: February 21, 2025 (Residential Districts: pages 1-4)

Date: March 25, 2025 (Commercial & Industrial Districts; Subdivision Regulations: pages 5-9)

The La Crosse Zoning Code is found in Chapter 115 of the Municipal Code and is defined by seven articles and contains the following:

- A total of 211 pages
- 21 districts and 2 overlay districts
- Definitions, penalties, administration, appeals and amendments are found in Articles I and II
- District regulations are found in Article IV; dimensional standards that apply for each district begin on page 26.
- Overlay regulations are defined in Article V.
- A generous list of conditional uses is defined in Article VI that covers 23 pages of address additional standards and regulations. We will provide an additional analysis just focused on conditional uses.
- Article VII cover supplemental regulations including design standards for multi-family housing and commercial uses and the traditional neighborhood development (section 115-403).
- Generally, urban standards (and dimensional requirements) are written out in extended sentences and are often difficult to follow.
- It seems, in general, that most of the residential districts share dimensional standards and regulations subject to different time periods, going back to the 1938 edition of the code.
- The word 'special' is used in the title for the R-3 and R-6 districts but it isn't clear exactly what this means or designates.

Residential

A high level review of the R districts follows; titles are spelled out as they appear in the body of the code.

Agriculture (A-1) and Exclusive Agriculture (EA) Districts

The code includes an Agricultural district and an Exclusive Agricultural district. The A-1 district's purpose is to act as a preserve for future urban development. The Exclusive Ag district is intended to preserve lands for food and fiber production. In either case not many areas/parcels zoned are A-1 or EA; it appears the only active agricultural use is in the southern part of the city along Old Town Hall Rd.

R1 District

Unlike the A-1 and EA districts, the R1 district does not include a direct purpose statement. The R1 Single Family district does allow two-family dwellings provided they were in existence on September 13, 1984 with an odd requirement that a new two family dwelling can replace an existing two family dwelling if it is limited to 2 bedrooms in each unit; no additional bedrooms can be added I any case.

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There is no direct mention of lot area and dimensional standards except for the reference to the 'Residence District' (this is a reference to the 1938 zoning code which included two residential districts: Residence and Multiple Dwelling) - apparently this is assumed to refer to the R2 District and these standards apply to R1.

Language and requirements like the following paragraph will need to be resolved regarding the uses in the R1 district:

- *Two or more family dwellings provided that such were in existence on April 10, 1997, have not discontinued the number of dwelling units for a period of 12 months or more, and are located within the area bounded by 9th Street-Farnam Street-east-west alley north of Green Bay Street-West Avenue, and provided further that such two or more family dwellings may be replaced by another two or more family dwellings as long as such replacement shall not contain more units or bedrooms than existed on April 10, 1997 and other applicable building and zoning code requirements for the R-1 District are met.*

R2 District

Like the R1 District, the R2 District does not have a specific purpose statement. It allows two family dwellings but only if they contain no more than three bedrooms per unit. It allows churches that were in existence on August 10, 1989. As in other districts, language makes multiple references to specific dates in time that provide a threshold for permitted uses.

Language and requirements like this this will need to be resolved regarding the uses in the R1 district:

- *The side yard regulations in subsections (3)a. and b. of this section shall apply to all lots including corner lots, except that in the case of a reversed corner lot which faces intersecting streets, the side yard on the street side of such reversed corner lot shall have a width of not less than 50 percent of the front yard depth required on the lots in the rear of such reversed corner lot, and no accessory building on such reversed corner lot shall project beyond the front building line of the lots in the rear of such reversed corner lot; provided, however, that this regulation for reversed corner lots shall not have the effect of reducing the buildable width for the main building to less than 26 feet, or for an accessory building to less than 20 feet, on any lot of record August 27, 1938.*

R3 Special Residence District

This district is meant to allow single family, two-family and up to four or more dwellings provided they were in existence on April 10, 1997. Lot and dimensional standards are the same or similar to R1 and R2.

Standards for yards are laboriously overwritten (similar to R1 and R2) and difficult to interpret in a single reading. These will benefit from summary and simplification:

a. *On every lot in the Special Residence District, there shall be two side yards, one on each side of the building, and except as hereinafter provided, neither of such side yards shall be less than six feet in width, and provided further that for any main building other than a one-family dwelling neither of such side yards shall be less than seven feet in width, except that lots occupied by each attached dwelling unit which is located within a single structure, which is attached along a lot line which is approximately perpendicular to the street right-of-way line, shall not be required to meet this requirement other than the outer side yards of the structure in which the two attached dwelling units are located shall not be less than seven feet in width.*
b. *On any lot having a width of less than 44 feet, and of record on August 27, 1938, the width of no side yard shall be less than that heretofore prescribed less one-fourth foot for each foot said lot is less than 44 feet in width; provided further, however, that no side yard shall be less than four feet in width in any case.*
c. *The side yard regulations in subsections (2)a and b of this section shall apply to all lots including corner lots, except that in the case of a reversed corner lot which faces intersecting streets, the side yard on the street side of such reversed corner lot shall have a width of not less than 50 percent of the front yard depth required on the lots in the rear of such reversed corner lot, and no accessory building on such reversed corner lot shall project beyond the front building line of the lots in the rear of such reversed corner lot; provided, however, that this regulation for reversed corner lots shall not have the effect of*

reducing the buildable width for the main building to less than 26 feet, or for an accessory building to less than 20 feet, on any lot of record August 27, 1938.

Low Density Multiple Dwelling District (R4)
This district is shown as the R4 district on the map but is not titled as that in the body of the code and allows multiple dwelling buildings that contain more than 4 units. Similar to the other R districts language and standards regarding lot area and yards are very overwritten and can benefit from simplification and more direct language.

Multiple Dwelling District (R5)
This district is "nested" into the R4 and thus any use allowed in R4 is permitted in this district. Uses include boarding house, room houses, fraternities and sororities (occupied by less than 6 persons). Height is allowed up to 55 feet and may exceed this per section 115-390 (Art. VII Supplemental Regulations).

R-6 Special Multiple Dwelling District
This district is "nested" into the R5 and thus any use allowed in R5 is permitted in this district. Uses include boarding house, room houses, fraternities and sororities (occupied by less than 6 persons). Height is allowed up to 55 feet and may exceed this per section 115-390 (Art. VII Supplemental Regulations).

Washburn Neighborhood District (R-7)
The purpose of the district is to encourage people to work and live in the City of La Crosse and will encourage single family dwellings. The district standards and regulations are "nested" in the R1 district (but excludes section 114-142(a) (10). A unique condition in this district is the requirement of Architectural Control that is to encourage physical development to a higher degree of aesthetic satisfaction per approval of the Design Review Board.

Map Diagrams

In a separate document we reviewed lot sizes for R-1, R-2, R-3 and the Washburn zoning districts based on the threshold of 5000 sf, lots that fall between 5000 -7200 sf and lots over 7200 sf. Lots under 5000 sf are shown in red and based on how the districts are defined many of these lots, we assume, were platted in 1938 or earlier so are not technically nonconforming. Nevertheless there is a distinct pattern (and a significant number) of smaller lots that seem to be functioning well today. More analysis is needed which will help determine how best to define standards.

R-1 = 10,833 Parcels
>7,200 sqft = 4,878 Parcels (45%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 4,454 Parcels (41%)
<5,000 sqft = 1,501 Parcels (13.9%)
R-2 = 1,298 Parcels
>7,200 sqft = 504 Parcels (38.8%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 522 Parcels (40.2%)
<5,000 sqft = 272 Parcels (20.9%)
R-3 = 4 Parcels
>7,200 sqft = 1 Parcel (25%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 2 Parcels (50%)
<5,000 sqft = 1 Parcel (25%)
Washburn Neighborhood District = 451 Parcels
>7,200 sqft = 185 Parcels (41%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 111 Parcels (24.6%)
<5,000 sqft = 155 Parcels (34.4%)
R-4 = 169 parcels
>7,200 sqft = 68 (40.2%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 68 (40.2%)
<5,000 sqft = 33 (19.6%)
R-5 = 941 parcels
>7,200 sqft = 592 (62.9%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 159 (16.9%)
<5,000 sqft = 190 (20.2%)
R-6 = 117 parcels
>7,200 sqft = 65 (55.6%)
5,000-7,200 sqft = 11 (9.4%)
<5,000 sqft = 41 (35%)

Total = 13,813
<5,000 sqft = 2,193 (15.8%)

Commercial Districts
There are three (3) commercial districts that are closely related to each other relative to dimensional standards, with distinctions for building heights and certain uses.

- Local Business: C-1
- Commercial District: C-2
- Community Business: C-3

The code is written to identify uses that are not allowed in the C-1; and C-2 and C-3 are written that list what uses are allowed. It appears that the Local Business District (C-1) provides the basis for most commercial uses in the city; any use in this district is also permitted in the Commercial District (C-2) . The Community Business (C-3) district is mostly focused on blocks and parcels in the downtown area and includes a more narrow range of uses. All of the commercial districts allow some type of residential use and appear to rely on bulk standards based in the Residence (clarified to refer to the current R2 District) and Multiple Dwelling (the R-5 District) districts.

Conditional uses are coded in Article VI; we will provide an additional analysis just focused on conditional uses.

Local Business C-1
Despite its title this district regulates a broad range of uses throughout the city and also provides the basis for allowed uses in the Commercial district (C-2). The title, which dates back to the 1938 code, may have regulated smaller size commercial parcels and allowed uses more related to neighborhoods in the city at a point in history. Among the dimensional standards are references to 'outer' and 'inner' courts, a very specific outdoor space that we have not found a local example of from our current analysis.

Commercial District C-2
This district functions as the general and 'highway' commercial district throughout the city and as such regulates a wide range of commercial buildings from enclosed malls to small franchise operations to less intensive uses surrounding the downtown core. It regulates large commercial areas like Valley View Mall, in -line and shopping center uses along Hwy 53, commercial uses along Hwy 61 and a number of blocks and partial blocks surrounding the downtown core. The language, unlike language in the C-1 district, defines uses that are allowed Like the Local Business District, C-2 defines regulations for 'outer' and 'inner' courts as well as residential uses.

Community Business C-3
This district is mainly concentrated on the downtown core that is defined by walkable streets, urban storefronts, on-street and structured parking as well as a mix of uses including historic districts and properties.

Page 41 of the code under 'Vision Clearance' refers to properties in the Central Business District (capitalized) and defines a specific boundary (Cameron Ave, Mississippi River, La Crosse St and Sevent St) but there is no Central Business District in the code or zoning map. This appears to be a generic reference but it's capitalized spelling is confusing.

Industrial
There are two industrial districts, Light M-1 and Heavy M-2, both of which operate from a similar set of uses. Both of these districts declare particular uses that are not allowed as a distinction for what is allowed. The Heavy Industrial district includes a majority of the land mapped; Light Industrial zoning tends to be smaller lots and parcels in discrete locations.

Other Districts

- Public utility (Sec. 115-154) – a very few specific locations
- Parking (Sec. 115-155) – mainly focused on downtown but this district is not mapped
- Planned Development (Sec. 115-156) – strategic locations throughout the city that requires a minimum 2 acre site; a recent example is the River North development.
- Public and Semi-Public (Sec. 115-157) -large parts of the city are zoned including the airport and parts of Barron Island.
- Conservancy (Sec. 115-158) – this district covers one of the largest land areas of the city including wetlands, marshes, lakes, waterways and bluffs.
- Traditional Neighborhood Development (Sec. 115-403) – this district is located in Article VII Supplement Regulations and regulates compact traditional mixed use development pattern. This is no minimum acreage for this district and no requirements for lot dimensional standards.

Overlay Districts (Article V)

- Neighborhood Center (Sec. 15-185) – there is one district defined in the code for this overlay, located in the Logan Northside neighborhood but it is not officially mapped.
- Floodplain (Div. 2: Sec. 115-207)
- Historic Zoning Overlay (Div. 3: Sec 115-313) – contains an abundance of requirements and regulations related to the city's historic districts and properties. Design standards are very specific about renovation, rehabilitation and demolition for each historic district.

Attachments

Attachment 2.1 - Summary Table of Dimensional Standards (in-progress)

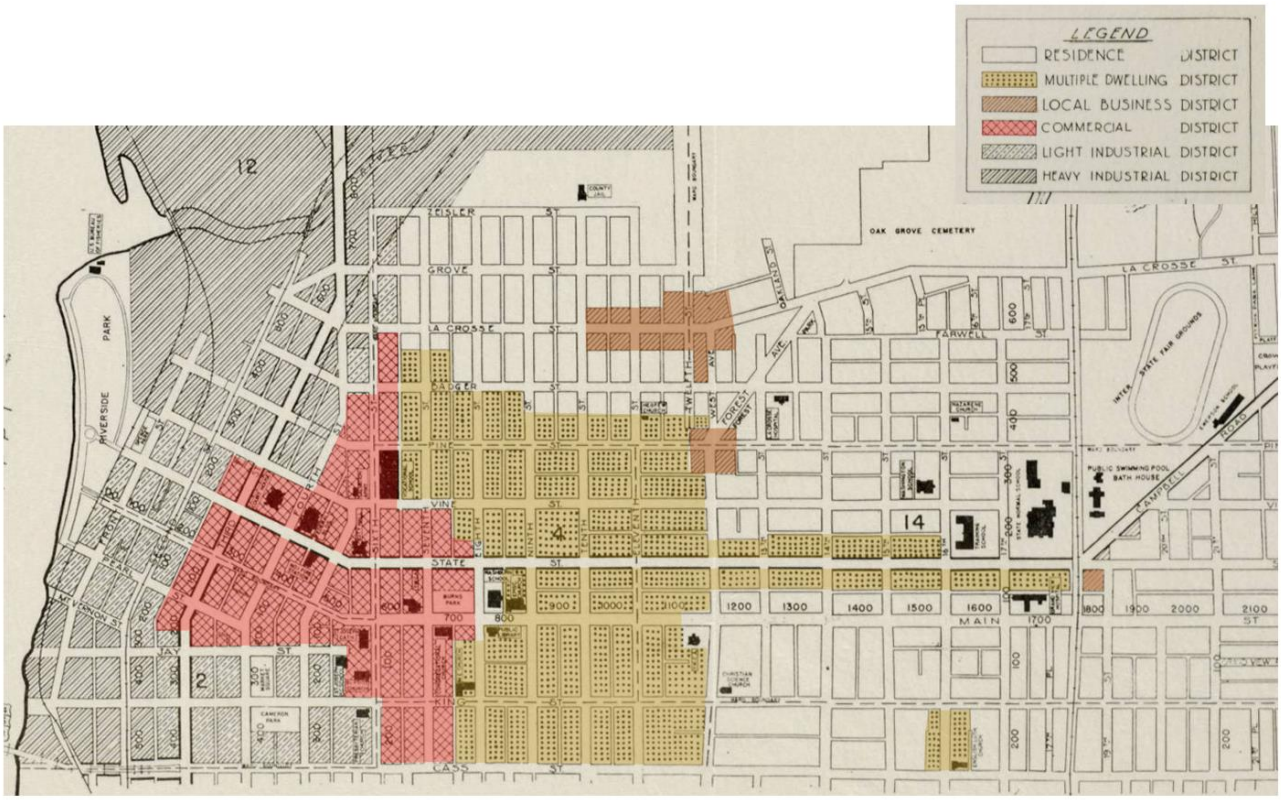
Attachment 2.1: Summary of Dimensional Standards (in progress)

Residential	**AG**	**EX AG**	**R1**	**R2**	**R3**	**R4**	**R5**	R6	Washburn
lot area	7200	35ac							
before 1938 less than:	5000sf		5000sf	5000sf	5000 sf	5000 sf	5000 sf	5000sf	5000sf
between 1938 & 1966:	5000+sf		5000+sf	5000+sf	5000+ sf	5000 sf	5000+ sf	5000+sf	5000+sf
after 1966:	7200sf		7200sf	7200sf	7200 sf	7200 sf	7200 sf	7200 sf	7200sf
other		20,000sf							
lot area per per family					1800 sf/unit	1800sf/unit	1500sf/unit	400sf/unit	
front yard			25 fyt	25 ft	25 ft	20 ft	20ft	15 ft	25 ft
side yard		6 ft	6 ft	6 ft	6 ft	6 ft	6 ft	6 ft	6 ft
lots as of 1938 or before			4 ft	4 ft					4 ft
rear yard		6 ft	20% depth	20% depth	20% depth	20% depth	20% depth	20% depth	20% depth
max. height		35 ft	35 ft	35 ft	35 ft	35 ft	55 ft	100 ft	35 ft
max. height, other		2x fr nearest					55ft		
		lot line							
public street frontage	min 30 ft	none	min. 30 ft	min. 30 ft	min 30 ft	none	min 30 st	min 30 ft	min 30 ft
court width not to exceed							24 ft	24 ft	
architectural control									Design Rev Bd.

	Local	*Commercial*	*Community*		*Light*	*Heavy*			
Business/Commerical & Industrial	**C-1**	**C-2**	**C-3**		M-1	M-2			
lot area	none		none		none	none			
height	45 ft	100 ft	160 ft		100 ft	100 ft			
dwelling height						35 ft			
side yard	none/6 ft	none/6ft	none/6ft		none/6ft	none/6ft			
side yard: residence or multiple dwelling	6 ft	6 ft	0 ft/or 6 ft						
rear yard	20 ft	no less than 9ft	no less than 9 ft		no less than 9 ft	no less than 9 ft			
outer courts (min)	10 ft x 30 ft	10 ft x 30 ft	na		10 ft x 30 ft	10 ft x 30 ft			
inner courts (min)	8 ft x 16 ft	8 ft x 16 ft	na		8 ft x 16 ft	8 ft x 16 ft			
lot area per family(	1000 sf	1000 sf	na			2500 sf			
Exceptions									

Attachment 2.2 Historic Zoning Map

Attached is part of the zoning map from 1938 that shows the very simple zoning organization of industrial, commercial, multi-family and single family zoning districts. This simplistic approach may have some benefits as we continue to consider regulations and how best to apply them.



Chapter 113 Subdivisions
The Subdivisions chapter covers 23 pages spelled out over four Articles:

- Article I, In General – includes definitions, purpose, intent, compliance, jurisdiction, improvements, fees and a few other administrative rules;
- Article II, Platting – includes Div. 1 Generally, Div. 2 Preliminary Plats, Div. 3 Final Plats;
- Article III, Design Standards – includes street arrangement, street design standards, blocks, lots, easements, public open space, etc;
- Article IV Required Improvements – includes grading, surfaces, curb & gutter, sidewalks, stormwater, other utilities, etc.

Some highlights:

- Cul de sac streets to be no less than 500 ft long.
- A reference to 'green complete streets'; must be reviewed by City Traffic Engineer, City Engineer, City Planner and approved by the Board of Public Works prior to any preliminary or final plat. More detail is found in Chapter 40 Street and Sidewalks.
- Blocks shall not be less than 500 ft long and no longer than 1200 ft long (with exceptions) (as an example the Riverpoint North Planned Development District street and block layout do not meet these standards and this may also conflict with the purpose and intent of the TND ordinance).
- Mid block crossings are required for a street if over 900 ft in length
- Regarding access every lot shall not be less than 60 ft wide and lot depth should not be less than 100 ft.
- Street names must refer to the use of 'courts', 'places' or 'lanes' in certain conditions.
- Local Residential Streets shall have a pavement width of 36 ft.
- Street trees shall be planted at least one per every 50 ft on all streets to be dedicated.
- Reference is made to 'Confluence The La Crosse Comprehensive Plan' (Dec. 2002).
- Plat shall be prepared on tracing cloth or paper of good quality – state statutes (WI 236.12) refer to submitting an electronic copy.