



**SUSTAINABLE CONWAY**  
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# Conway planning

BALANCING OUR BOOM IN DEVELOPMENT  
 WITH SOUND PLANNING POLICY TO PLANT THE  
 SEEDS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

*Risking life and limb to ride your bike or walk to work and school?  
 Several local organizations are working to make your trip a little  
 easier — and the City is listening.*

## Complete Streets Why multi-modal roadways are the wave of Conway's future



Have you driven, walked, or cycled along Tyler Street west of Hogan Lane lately? If so, you've probably noticed some major changes. Prior to last Fall, Tyler between Hogan and Padgett was an auto-centric stretch of road, a place where cyclists and pedestrians had few options besides daring to share the road with drivers. In 2008, a three-quarter mile portion of Tyler became Conway's latest venture in creating a complete street where motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians are all safely accommodated. A bike lane and buffered sidewalk have broadened Tyler's streetscape. This portion of Tyler joins portions of College and Country Club as complete—or near complete—streets.

### What Is a Complete Street?

Defining "complete street" can be tricky because each area of the city is different and has unique transportation needs. At a minimum, a complete street includes a roadway wide enough to accommodate both motorists and cyclists, a pedestrian walkway, and crosswalks. Streets in less populated, more sprawling areas may require only a wide roadway and sidewalks, while streets in the city center may require wider sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, parallel parking spaces, and even bus lanes. A major arterial may require wider buffers and median islands for pedestrian refuge.

### Grassroots Leading the Way

In Conway, efforts to increase the number of bike lanes, paths, and racks have been led by Conway Advocates for Bicycling and the Bicycle Friendly Community Task Force. The latter group—led by University of Central Arkansas Professor Peter Mehl—is presently engaged in a lengthy and complex process to earn Conway the designation of "Bicycle Friendly Community" by the League of American Bicyclists; fewer than 100 cities across the U.S. have earned this distinction. The Bicycle Friendly Community Task Force will hold a

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community meeting on **Tuesday, April 7, at 6:00 PM, at Conway City Hall** to present a draft Bicycle Master Plan and answer questions about the Bicycle Friendly Community application process. *More information about Conway Advocates for Bicycling is available at [www.cycleconway.com](http://www.cycleconway.com).*

An upstart citizen-led group, Conway Association of Pedestrians (CAP), is similarly interested in seeing sidewalks built and repaired throughout the city. David Barber, a CAP leader, envisions Conway as “a city where cars, bikes, and pedestrians are all equally able to access all the needs of life on an equal footing.” The group’s initial goal, Barber notes, is to “complete the pedestrian routes that already exist, focusing on those areas with the greatest need for pedestrian routes or which would benefit the greatest number of people.” CAP’s policy focus is centered largely on sidewalk maintenance. *More information about Conway Association of Pedestrians is available online at [www.walkingconway.com](http://www.walkingconway.com).*

### Making Complete Streets a Reality

Where adequate right-of-way is available, the City has already begun implementing aspects of the complete streets model with sidewalks and bike lanes. Limitations to Conway’s existing transportation structure could limit the City’s ability to expand the model throughout the city. However, under Conway’s Subdivision Regulations and Development Review standards, expect to see more sidewalks as the City is further developed — and expect to see groups such as Conway Advocates for Bicycling, the Bicycle Friendly Community Task Force, and Conway Association of Pedestrians leading the charge for complete streets throughout the city.

## what’s going on?

**April 4** (Saturday), Faulkner County Supporters of Sustainable Communities Spring Membership Meeting, Open to Everyone, McGee Center, 10:00 AM

**April 6** (Monday), Pine Street Neighborhood Planning Meeting, Union Baptist Church, 6:30 PM

**April 7** (Tuesday), Bicycle Friendly Community Task Force Community Meeting, City Hall, 6:00—8:00 PM

April 14 (Tuesday), Conway City Council, District Court, 6:30 PM

April 20 (Monday), Conway Planning Commission Meeting, District Court, 7:00 PM

April 22 (Wednesday), Conway Board of Zoning Adjustment Meeting (if necessary), City Hall, 5:45 PM

April 28 (Tuesday), Conway City Council, District Court, 6:30 PM

## Save the Date: Pine Street Planning Meeting, April 6th

The Conway Planning and Development Department invites you to attend the first public meeting for the Pine Street Neighborhood Planning Project. The meeting will be held on **Monday, April 6th, 6:30 PM, at Union Baptist Church** (corner of Lincoln and Walnut Streets). Pine Street neighborhood residents, property owners, business owners, community groups, and other stakeholders are invited to bring their own ideas to the meeting and work alongside the Planning and Development Department in shaping a common vision for the neighborhood’s future.

The meeting will include a presentation by city planners, who have spent several months studying the area’s physical character, housing patterns, and land uses. Afterwards, attendees will have the opportunity to offer suggestions and help guide the neighborhood planning process. The Planning and Development Department will follow the meeting with a four-day Open House at City Hall, which will give stakeholders the chance to examine the Department’s proposals more closely and meet individually with city planners. The Open House will be held **April 7th-10th, 1:30-4:30 PM, at City Hall**. Following the Open House and public

comment and revision period, the Department will host a follow-up meeting at which time the final neighborhood plan will be presented. The date for the follow-up meeting will be announced later in April.



*Union Baptist Church — one of the Pine Street neighborhood’s most recognizable structures — will host the first Pine Street Neighborhood Planning Project community meeting.*

In this Op-Ed from *Planetizen*, Don Elliott, author of *A Better Way to Zone*, argues that dynamic zoning regulations can help cities grow appropriately and avoid bottlenecks to good development.

# Towards 'Dynamic' Zoning

by Don Elliot

Ever since the first zoning ordinances were adopted over 90 years ago we have thought of zoning rules as “fixed” – at least until City Council acted to change them. Minimum lot sizes, building heights, and setbacks were written down for each district, and they didn't change without Council action. A 35 foot height limit was a 35 foot height limit until Council amended the ordinance to make it 45 feet. Obviously, this made zoning predictable, but it also made the rules rigid, and most zoning codes are filled with “fixed” rules adopted by some long-dead City Council that no longer make sense. In fact, much of the history of zoning can be seen as a dance (or a battle) between the desire for flexibility and predictability. Fixed rules are predictable at the expense of flexibility.

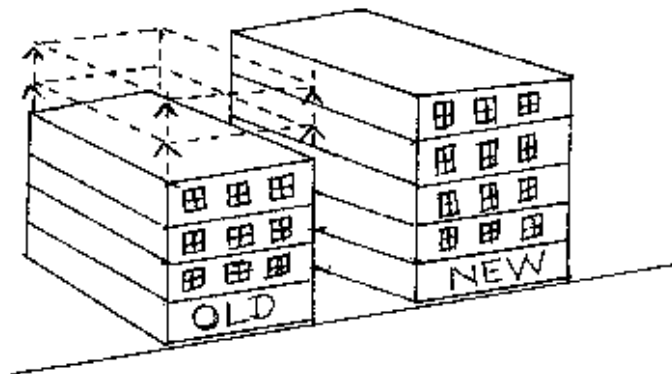
But local zoning rules don't have to be fixed – we can design them to change with the times in those neighborhoods where change is wanted. In fact, we are used to adopting standards that change. Many cities adopt impact fees with escalator clauses – they don't require City Council to adopt a new fee each year, they just state that the fee will go up by the construction cost index. We don't know what the fee will be next year, but we know it will be determined in an objective way.

Similarly, an increasing number of zoning ordinances include “contextual” height limits – the maximum height on your property is equal to the tallest building on an adjacent site, or on your block face, or within a certain radius of your property, or one story taller than that height. Contextual height limits reflect the Council's desire that buildings “fit in” with their neighbors, or that the neighborhood gradually allow taller buildings, rather than setting a fixed maximum height. After all, many cities have a single zone district with blocks of predominantly one-story houses and other blocks of predominantly two-story houses. Rather than create two districts with two different maximum heights, Council defines the maximum height based on the surrounding context. But note that these contextual maximum building heights may change over time without further Council action. If someone builds a new building one story taller than its neighbors, that changes the context for nearby properties, and they may be allowed to build even taller buildings. That is a “dynamic” zoning standard, and I

believe we will see more of them in the future.

Obviously, dynamic zoning standards are not appropriate everywhere. Most single-family residential zones are drafted for very high levels of predictability and homeowners often prefer an absolute height limit to one that may change in the future. But in redevelopment areas, mixed use areas, transit-oriented locations, and others, dynamic zoning standards have two significant advantages that some cities will find attractive.

First, they acknowledge the facts that cities change and that in some areas of the city the flexibility to respond to market forces (within limits) is more important than maintaining a pre-determined form, scale, or character. Dynamic zoning standards can allow more flexible development while still ensuring that the resulting projects are not significantly out of scale or character with those around them. While some cities may address these types of transitional redevelopment areas through form-based zoning (which is also based on a fixed



*An example of contextual height limits.*

graphic depiction of a preferred building form), others will decide that there are areas where flexibility is more important than form.

Second, dynamic development standards can help avoid some of the NIMBY battles that plague efforts to redevelop and densify transitional areas. While zoning theory says that Council will amend zoning when needed to reflect changing market conditions or planning goals, in fact that is only partially true. Good planning around many a light rail line or multi-family residential area have been stymied by those who oppose any change in the neighborhood no matter what its positive impacts on traffic congestion, air quality, housing affordability, or economic growth. Dynamic development standards allow Council to establish triggers that will permit gradual diversification of land uses or increases in development densities and scale over time without requiring a separate hearing (and NIMBY battle) on each project.

For both of these reasons I believe American cities will move towards more dynamic zoning standards in some redevelopment and transitional areas. Like many other things in life, sometimes the best way to get a better zoning result is to lighten up.



*City of Conway*  
*Planning and Development Department*  
*1201 Oak Street*  
*501.450.6105*  
*[www.conwayplanning.org](http://www.conwayplanning.org)*

Please contact any member of the staff with questions or comments regarding planning, zoning, subdivision, or any other land-use policy within the City of Conway.

**Planning and Development Director**

Bryan Patrick

[bryan.patrick@cityofconway.org](mailto:bryan.patrick@cityofconway.org)

**Assistant Planning Director**

Ken Pickett

[ken.pickett@cityofconway.org](mailto:ken.pickett@cityofconway.org)

**Planner**

Christy Sutherland

[christy.sutherland@cityofconway.org](mailto:christy.sutherland@cityofconway.org)

**Planner**

Wes Craiglow

[wes.craiglow@cityofconway.org](mailto:wes.craiglow@cityofconway.org)

**Planner**

Donald Anthony

[donald.anthony@cityofconway.org](mailto:donald.anthony@cityofconway.org)

**GIS Coordinator**

Jason Lyon

[jason.lyon@cityofconway.org](mailto:jason.lyon@cityofconway.org)

**Planning Technician**

Lileha Rhea

[lileha.rhea@cityofconway.org](mailto:lileha.rhea@cityofconway.org)