



Frequently Asked Questions

ZONING



What is zoning?

Zoning answers the question of “what can go where?” Zoning codes contain detailed regulations that identify what individual properties can and cannot be used for, and under what conditions. Zoning codes also include development standards that regulate the physical characteristics of development – things like how large buildings can be, where buildings can be constructed on properties, and how much parking is required.

Can cities zone private property?

Yes. Regulating land use through zoning is a key function of all cities. State law requires cities to designate “the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of the land” within city limits, including both “public and private uses of land” ([California Government Code Section 65302\(a\)](#)).

All public and private property in Laguna Woods, with the exception of public streets, is presently zoned and has been since the community was first constructed.

How does zoning relate to general plans?

General plans, like zoning, are tools cities use to regulate land use. State law requires cities to “adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development” of land within city limits and land that “bears relation to its planning” ([California Government Code Section 65300](#)). General plans adopt higher-level land use policies that zoning codes then translate into more detailed development standards and regulations.

FAST FACTS



CITY COUNCIL

City councils adopt general plans and zoning codes for their communities.



GENERAL PLAN

Think of this as an “umbrella” that includes high-level land use policies under which zoning codes exist.



ZONING CODE

This is the official collection of zoning regulations.

The Laguna Woods Zoning Code is available at:

www.lagunawoods.gov/municipal-code





Can property owners request zoning changes?

Property owners can request changes of zoning; however, it is important to note that cities are not required to approve such requests and may only do so when the changes are in the public interest. State law also prohibits cities from approving changes in zoning when the changes would be inconsistent with general plans ([California Government Code Section 65860](#)).

For example, the City of Laguna Woods could not rezone an open space property for commercial or residential use, or vice versa, without first amending its general plan.

Can property owners request general plan amendments?

Property owners can request amendments of general plans; however, like requests for changes of zoning, cities are not required to approve such requests. Amending general plans often requires significant environmental analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) ([California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.](#); [California Code of Regulations Section 15378\(a\)\(1\)](#)).

Can property owners request zoning variances?

Property owners may only request variances (or, deviations) from zoning regulations when “because of special circumstances applicable to the property, including size, shape, topography, location or surroundings, the strict application of the zoning [regulation] deprives such property of privileges enjoyed by other property in the vicinity and under identical zoning classification” ([California Government Code Section 65906](#)). Variances cannot not be granted to allow land uses that are not expressly authorized by the zoning code governing the subject property.

For example, the City of Laguna Woods could not approve a variance to allow a retail store on a residential property, due to retail stores being prohibited on residential properties.

For more information, please contact the City of Laguna Woods Planning & Environmental Services Department at (949) 639-0500 or planning@lagunawoods.gov.