

Cascade Township narrowly passes divisive zoning overhaul

Kate Carlson - February 12, 2026



Credit: Cascade Township

The Cascade Township Board of Trustees narrowly approved a divisive overhaul of the township's zoning ordinance as critics raised concerns over a lack of allowable density, the infringement of property rights and failing to consider public feedback.

Trustees approved the comprehensive zoning ordinance amendment in a 4-3 vote Wednesday night. The changes come after the township updated its master plan, which was adopted in July 2024. The township board previously approved the first reading of the new zoning ordinance on Nov. 5 after a **heated meeting**, which was followed by several open houses to educate residents about zoning changes.

"The amendments include six core principles: protecting single-family neighborhoods, preserving rural character in eastern areas, upgrading the 28th Street corridor, enhancing the village's architectural style, making township goals easy to achieve while discouraging contrary development and demanding quality development standards," according to a township memo about the zoning changes.

Cascade Township Supervisor Grace Lesperance directed staff to incorporate some changes to the zoning ordinance after hearing public feedback, she said in a Feb. 5 memo addressed to trustees.

The changes are part of the newly adopted ordinance, and include changing references of "form-based code" to "village districts" and allowing more than one principal building on a single parcel. The changes also increase the base residential density in Centennial Park to 16 dwelling units per acre, with density bonuses allowing up to 22 dwelling units per acre.



This is an increase from 12 units per acre, with density bonuses allowing 18 units per acre. As well, the changes decrease the maximum size of accessory structures on residential lots throughout the township.

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Trustee Timmy Noordhoek, who voted against the zoning ordinance, said he wanted more time to consider all of the new changes Lesperance put forth.

"Go ahead, ram it through," Noordhoek said before the vote.

Noordhoek also said that he thought the increase of allowable density in Centennial Park goes too far. The Centennial Park overlay district is south of 28th Street, between Kraft Avenue and Thornapple Hills Avenue. The stated goal of regulations in the overlay district is to create a "walkable mixed-use node within the township."

"There are other communities where affordable homes are there and there are other communities where they are building houses left and right," Noordhoek said. "We don't have to participate in that. You can come and join us, but there is a price of admission. Everybody knows what it is. Our houses aren't cheap, but we are spread out. People come here because we have room between the homes. People come here for the low traffic."

The township spans about 34 square miles southeast of the city of Grand Rapids, with a population of nearly 20,000 people and a median household income of \$114,000 as of 2021. The township contains a bustling commercial corridor along 28th Street SE as well as the Gerald R. Ford International Airport.

People who spoke during public comment Wednesday were divided over the density changes, with some arguing that they don't allow enough while others say they go too far. Other speakers said the township board should have taken more time to consider suggestions since November.

Trevor Blood, local government affairs manager for the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, told trustees before they voted that they should take time to consider the public comments and input from critics of the zoning ordinance.

"We've heard concerns from members in Cascade that the engagement process felt procedural," Blood said. "We'd like to see an open dialogue on the feedback in a public forum. This would go a long way toward easing those concerns and demonstrating transparency."

Blood added that "overly restrictive policies almost always lead to unintended consequences."

"It's always easier to refine policy before it's adopted than to attempt to amend it afterwards," he said.

Mark Ansara, partner and senior vice president at Advantage Commercial Real Estate, is among realtors, property owners and developers who have been calling for an economic study on how the proposed changes would affect the township.

Ansara raised concerns about the form-based code, now known as village districts, in the new ordinance.

The village standard building requirements will “deter development, hands down,” Ansara said. “It will limit property rights for landowners as well. I just don’t believe the masses were heard on the proposed ordinance.”

Township homeowner Michelle Lauer, who spoke in favor of the zoning ordinance, said “we don’t need the realtors to represent our interests. We feel very comfortable that you are representing our interests.”

Doug Merriam, director of advocacy and external affairs for the Greater Regional Alliance of Realtors, also said the board failed to consider all of the public feedback about the ordinance. Merriam said the changes could ultimately have negative consequences for property values.

“From what I (have gathered) during public comments at previous meetings, ultimately the zoning proposal could not only hurt property rights, but it could take away property values,” Merriam said. “Taking away property values could lead to troubles ultimately for the township’s tax base, which could lead to the township needing to raise taxes on the residents of Cascade.”

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