


# Severance Overlay Zone: Built on Community Vision

The Severance Overlay Zone (SOZ) represents a transformative approach to urban planning that puts community voices at the center of development decisions. This comprehensive zoning framework didn't emerge from a vacuum—it's the direct result of years of careful listening, systematic engagement, and thoughtful response to the priorities expressed by Cleveland Heights residents, community leaders, and stakeholders.

Between rigorous community surveys, crowdsourced conversations, and extensive public input processes, the SOZ synthesizes feedback from hundreds of residents into enforceable development standards. The Result Academy Project (RAP) findings, FutureHeights 2024 Survey with 734 responses, Crowdsourced Conversations Severance #1 representing 11 group reports, MPact Crowdsourcing of Noble neighborhood, and nearly 70 website submissions with hundreds of likes have all shaped this vision. This document demonstrates how community input translated into concrete zoning provisions that will guide the future of the Severance district.


MPACT  
MICHIGAN PUBLIC ACTION CENTER


Severance Town Center Project

About

Ideas

Submit an Idea

Admin



# Shape the Future of Severance Town Center

Share your ideas and help transform our community space into something extraordinary

+ Submit Your Idea


## Community Ideas


We are looking for triple bottom line (socially, environmentally, and economically responsible) ideas and we'd love to hear yours. Browse and vote on ideas for the Severance Town Center redevelopment

Sort By  
Most Upvoted

Filter by Tags

Search




**Rooftop Farm**  
by Megh Wingenfeld · April 26, 2025

I'm Meghan and I have been farming most of my life. Throughout the last three decades I've run the educational program and CSA at Swan Farm, my family...


Sustainable/Regenerative


Retail

Entertainment

28

12 comments





**Connecting Severance**  
by April 10, 2025


I see a lot of folks talking about emulating Van Aken, which I'd love to see (with restaurants, retail, mixed-use residential and commercial). But how...

Residential

25

6 comments




**Family Fun**  
by April 10, 2025


We need more family fun. For example a movie theater, trampoline park, indoor amusement park, bowling alley, rec center, YMCA, etc. My teenager wants ...


Recreational

Entertainment

23

6 comments




**Walkability / Entertainment and Design**  
by April 10, 2025

The major bottom line is the area needs to support walk-ability, and bike-ability. It's going to be a community attraction for the town and surrounding...

Recreational


Residential


Retail

Entertainment

22

3 comments




**Indoor Farmer's Market**  
by April 10, 2025

A year round, indoor farmer's market is something that has been missing from the east side for many years now. We used to have a version of the west s...

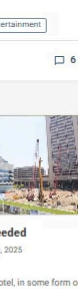
Recreational


Retail

Entertainment

18

7 comments




**Hotel Needed**  
by April 10, 2025

I like the idea of a hotel, in some form or fashion. If I'm not mistaken, Cleveland Heights has none. This has been a challenge with visitors having L...

Hospitality

22

3 comments

# The Community Spoke: Key Themes That Shaped the SOZ

Cleveland Heights residents were remarkably consistent and clear about their vision for Severance. Through multiple engagement channels, several powerful themes emerged that would become the foundation of the zoning framework.



## Walkability & Connection

Residents consistently emphasized the desire for pedestrian-friendly streets, bike infrastructure, and a truly connected neighborhood feel that brings people together.



## Vibrant Retail Districts

Strong preference emerged for diverse retail, quality restaurants, and family-oriented destinations that create reasons to visit and linger.



## Green Gathering Spaces

Greenspace, playgrounds, plazas, and community gathering areas were consistently identified as essential elements of quality of life.



## Housing Diversity

Support for varied housing types including townhomes, apartments, mixed-income options, and senior housing to serve all community members.



## Trust & Predictability

Clear demand for transparent processes, predictable outcomes, and development standards that residents can understand and rely upon.



## Authentic Identity

Desire for a destination that genuinely reflects Cleveland Heights character while connecting diverse neighborhoods into a cohesive whole.

# Creating Walkable, Connected Streets

When residents said they wanted walkable, bikeable streets that connect neighborhoods, the SOZ responded with enforceable design standards that make pedestrian-friendly development mandatory—not optional. The zoning code establishes a sophisticated street network framework that ensures every block contributes to neighborhood connectivity.

**Section 1149.11B establishes Street Types** that create a coherent hierarchy of public ways, from vibrant main streets to quieter residential lanes. These aren't abstract concepts—they're specific design templates with required dimensions, features, and character.

**Build-to-lines and frontage requirements (Section 1149.12)** ensure buildings frame streets properly, creating the enclosed, comfortable pedestrian environments that make walking pleasant. No more buildings set back behind vast parking lots—structures must engage the sidewalk.

**Pedestrian path requirements (Sections 1149.11C and 1149.12A)** mandate connections through larger blocks, ensuring residents can navigate the district on foot without circuitous routes. These provisions directly answer community calls for a truly walkable neighborhood fabric.



☐ **Mixed-Use by Right:** Section 1149.21A permits mixed-use development without special exceptions, streamlining the path to the vibrant, diverse districts residents requested.

# Delivering Retail, Restaurants & Destinations

The FutureHeights Survey demonstrated overwhelming support for retail destinations, quality restaurants, and family-friendly gathering spaces. The SOZ translates this priority into specific, enforceable provisions that guarantee commercial vitality.

1

## Broad Use Permissions

Retail and restaurant uses are permitted broadly across SO-1 and SO-2 zones, creating flexibility for diverse businesses to locate and thrive in the district.

2

## Storefront Requirements

Section 1149.23G requires storefront frontage on designated street edges, ensuring active, engaging street walls that create the vibrant atmosphere residents desire.

3

## Substantial Square Footage

Up to 175,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space is permitted under Section 1149.21B, providing critical mass for a true destination district.

These provisions work together to ensure Severance becomes the kind of place where families want to spend weekends, neighbors run into each other at dinner, and small businesses can establish themselves and grow. By requiring active frontages and permitting substantial commercial development, the SOZ creates the legal framework for the vibrant, authentic retail environment the community envisioned.



# Greenspace & Community Gathering



Across every engagement channel, residents emphasized the critical importance of greenspace, playgrounds, and places where the community can gather. The SOZ doesn't just encourage these spaces—it mandates them with specific quality standards.

**Section 1149.13F requires 10% civic space** in every development, ensuring public gathering areas aren't afterthoughts but integral elements of the district's design. This is enforceable, measurable, and guaranteed.

01

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## Defined Civic Space Types

Section 1149.47 establishes specific civic space typologies—plazas, greens, squares, playgrounds—each with design standards ensuring quality and usability.

03

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## Public Access Requirements

All civic spaces must be publicly accessible, preventing the creation of private amenities masquerading as community benefits.

02

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## Programming & Activation Standards

Spaces must meet programming and activation requirements, ensuring they're designed for actual use—farmers markets, concerts, community events—not just ornamental.

04

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## Unified Funding Mechanism

The fee-in-lieu provision (\$35/square foot) creates the Severance Public Realm Improvement Fund, pooling resources to create exceptional shared spaces.

This comprehensive framework ensures Severance will offer the greenspace, gathering places, and community-building infrastructure residents clearly identified as essential to quality of life.

# Housing Diversity & Affordability

Community input revealed broad support for housing diversity—townhomes for growing families, apartments for young professionals, senior housing for aging residents, and critically, affordability across income levels. The SOZ creates the regulatory framework to deliver this variety.

## What we heard:

- Strong interest in **townhomes** (54.4%), **apartments** (42.8%).
- Mixed-income housing desired (60.2%).
- Senior housing strongly supported (62.9%).
- People want **housing as part of mixed-use**, not isolated.

## How SOZ responds:

- **2,500-unit residential cap** controlled through phased thresholds (1149.21B).
- **Townhomes, apartments, senior housing all permitted.**
- **20% affordable housing** required in each threshold (1149.22C).
- Frontage and street requirements ensure housing contributes to walkable blocks.
- Housing **prohibited on ground floors of storefront areas** to maintain active commercial uses (1149.21 notes).

## Townhomes

Permitted residential typology offering ownership opportunities and family-sized units integrated into the neighborhood fabric.

## Mixed-Use Apartments


Residential units above retail create the vibrant, 24-hour activity that makes neighborhoods safe and engaging.

## Senior Housing

Specifically permitted to serve aging community members who want to remain in Cleveland Heights as they age.




But housing variety means little without affordability. **Section 1149.22C establishes a mandatory 20% affordable housing requirement** triggered at specific development thresholds. This isn't a suggestion or incentive—it's an enforceable standard that ensures mixed-income housing becomes reality.

By integrating residential uses into the mixed-use environment, the SOZ creates opportunities for people at different life stages and income levels to live in a walkable, amenity-rich district. This directly responds to community calls for inclusive, diverse neighborhoods.

 **Affordability Guaranteed:** The 20% requirement ensures that as Severance develops, it serves the full economic spectrum of Cleveland Heights residents.

# Arts, Culture & Community Programming

Beyond housing and retail, residents envisioned Severance as a cultural hub—a place for arts, youth activities, community events, and the gatherings that build social fabric. The SOZ permits and encourages these vital uses.

		
<p><b>Arts &amp; Culture</b></p> <p>Arts and cultural uses are explicitly permitted in SO-1 and SO-2 zones, creating space for galleries, performance venues, maker spaces, and creative enterprises.</p>	<p><b>Indoor Recreation</b></p> <p>Indoor recreational facilities are permitted, addressing community desire for year-round activity spaces for families and youth.</p>	<p><b>Event-Ready Civic Spaces</b></p> <p>Required civic spaces must support programming including concerts, farmers markets, festivals, and community gatherings that bring residents together.</p>

These provisions ensure Severance won't be merely a shopping district but a true community center where culture thrives, young people have places to gather, and events create shared memories. The mandatory civic space requirements, combined with broad cultural use permissions, create the infrastructure for community life that extends far beyond commerce.

From crowdsourced ideas about coworking spaces to desires for concert venues and markets, the SOZ creates the regulatory permission structure to make these visions real. Developers will know these uses are welcomed and encouraged, streamlining the path from community vision to built reality.

# Transparency & Predictability: Trust Through Process

Perhaps the most fundamental community priority was transparency—residents demanded clear, predictable processes they could understand and trust. Years of uncertain development outcomes created deep desire for regulatory clarity. The SOZ delivers this through its form-based code structure.



## Form-Based Standards

Rather than vague "compatibility" reviews, the SOZ establishes clear, measurable standards anyone can evaluate.



## Administrative Process

Section 1149.3 defines streamlined, transparent submission and review procedures with clear timelines and criteria.



## Guaranteed Public Access

Required public access to civic spaces prevents private control of community resources.



## Public Realm Fund

The Severance Public Realm Improvement Fund creates transparent mechanism for investing in shared infrastructure.

**The result is a zoning code that residents can read, understand, and rely upon.** When development proposals come forward, the community will be able to evaluate them against clear standards. Developers will know what's expected. City staff will have objective criteria for review. This predictability builds trust and ensures outcomes align with community vision.

The SOZ represents a direct, detailed, and faithful response to years of community engagement. From RAP's economic revitalization goals to crowdsourced plaza ideas, every major community priority found expression in enforceable code provisions. Severance will become the walkable, mixed-use, connected, and authentic district residents envisioned—not by chance, but by design grounded in your voices.