



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

BILL NO. 250804

Introduced September 25, 2025

Councilmember Gauthier

**Referred to the
Committee on Rules**

AN ORDINANCE

Amending Title 14 of The Philadelphia Code, entitled “Zoning and Planning,” by amending certain provisions of Chapter 14-500, entitled “Overlay Zoning Districts,” by creating the “/UCO, University-Community Overlay District”; and by making related changes, all under certain terms and conditions

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA HEREBY ORDAINS:

SECTION 1. Title 14 of The Philadelphia Code is hereby amended to read as follows:

TITLE 14. ZONING AND PLANNING.

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CHAPTER 14-500. OVERLAY ZONING DISTRICTS

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§ 14-545. */UCO, University-Community Overlay District.*

(1) Purpose.

The /UCO, University-Community Overlay District, is established to ensure a transparent planning and community engagement process when college or university campus-related properties change use or ownership.

(2) Definitions.

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(a) For the purposes of this section, a “college or university” is defined as an institution of higher learning that offers courses of general or specialized study leading to a baccalaureate degree or higher, and that is either chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or accredited by a recognized accrediting agency.

(b) For the purposes of this section, a “college or university campus” is defined as a parcel or group of parcels, whether contiguous or non-contiguous, under common ownership or control, that are principally developed and operated for the educational, research, residential, cultural, or recreational purposes of a college or university. A campus may consist of non-contiguous parcels, provided that such parcels function and are branded in a coordinated manner as part of the institution’s spatial identity and facilities.

(3) Applicability.

(a) The University-Community Overlay District shall apply to applicable properties located within the area bounded by the Schuylkill River, Haverford Avenue (extended), 46th Street, Farragut Street, Spruce Street, 47th Street, Kingsessing Avenue, a SEPTA Railroad Right-of-Way, and 47th Street (extended).

(b) The provisions of this Overlay shall apply to any lot within the boundaries described in subsection (a) that contains an institutional use principal to or affiliated with a college or university, as whole or part of a college or university campus, including but not limited to: educational facilities, libraries, research laboratories, dormitories or student housing, religious assemblies affiliated with an educational institution, community or cultural facilities operated by or for an academic institution, community garden, museum, parks and open spaces, and indoor or outdoor athletic facilities.

(c) The requirements of this Overlay are triggered when ownership of such a lot larger than 5,000 square feet is transferred from an entity wholly or partially controlled by a college or university to an entity that is not legally or financially affiliated with a college or university; or such lot or building is conveyed as part of a college or university campus closure, court-ordered auction, merger, or subdivision. Properties owned and continuously operated by colleges or universities shall not be subject to the provisions of this Overlay unless and until such a transfer described in subsection (c) occurs.

(4) Building Requirements to Prevent Vacant Lots.

(a) No zoning or building permit shall be issued for the demolition of a principal building located within the UCO Overlay District that meets the criteria of 14-545(3) unless a building permit has been issued for the construction, expansion, or alteration of a new or existing principal building on the same lot.

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(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply if such demolition is necessary to abate an imminently dangerous condition as determined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections; or such demolition is necessary to abate an unsafe condition impacting the right of way or any adjacent property as determined by the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

(5) Planning Commission Approval.

L&I shall not issue a zoning or building permit for the erection or demolition of a building or the alteration of a façade of a building located within the /UCO Overlay District that meets the criteria of 14-545(3) until the Philadelphia City Planning Commission has reviewed site plans and determined, in the majority opinion of the Commission, that the proposed site plan is in alignment with the City's latest comprehensive planning for the District and satisfactorily addresses the following factors:

(a) Whether the site plan submission adequately depicts, at a minimum: existing and proposed uses, ground-floor layout and primary entries, pedestrian and bicycle connections, loading and curb cut locations, and if applicable a phasing diagram.

(b) Whether the proposed site plan strengthens connections between institutional campus and nearby residential communities and considers any negative impact that new construction could have on the historic campus fabric.

(c) Whether the site plan maintains public access to open spaces, courtyards, or green areas that historically functioned as campus commons, or introduces new publicly accessible open spaces.

(d) Whether proposed uses on the building ground floors contribute to neighborhood-serving amenities and active streetscapes; and

(e) Whether preservation or adaptive reuse of existing institutional buildings has been considered prior to demolition.

The Commission has 120 days to approve or disapprove the application, after which its approval will be presumed. If the Commission does not act within 120 days and the applicant has otherwise participated in good faith, the application shall be deemed recommended for approval, and L&I may proceed if all other Code requirements are met.

(6) Neighborhood Notice and Meetings Required.

(a) L&I will determine whether a zoning or building permit application meets the criteria of 14-545(3) and therefore is required to complete Planning Commission approval per

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14-545(5). In these cases, the applicant is required to comply with the neighborhood notice and meeting requirement in 14-303(12) (Neighborhood Notice and Meetings).

(b) The applicant must meet the applicable requirements of 14-303(12), regardless of whether those provisions would otherwise apply.

(c) If the applicant is already required to comply with the neighborhood notice and meeting requirement in 14-303(12) because the application meets another one of the applicable triggers listed in 14-303(12)(a), then the applicant may satisfy both requirements in a single notice and single meeting as long as they present all the materials required by each review body.

(d) If the zoning or building permit application includes new construction or expansion that creates more than 25,000 square feet of gross floor area, then before the notice and meeting required in this section, the district Councilmember whose district includes the applicant's property must convene a committee of overlapping Registered Community Organizations, block captains, and community organization leaders with a presence in the particular neighborhood, to review all materials required under 14-545(5). This committee must consist of no fewer than five (5) community representatives. This meeting must be scheduled for a date that is within 30 days after the district Councilmember receives notification of the particular application and meeting requirement.

(i) During the Planning Commission review of applications that meet the criteria of subsection (d), up to two (2) representatives from this committee will be offered seats on the Commission during Commission meetings where the application in question is presented and deliberated.

(6) Relationship with Other Ordinances.

The provisions of this section supersede any other limitations or authorizations related to the demolition of any building located within the /UCO Overlay District.

(7) Severability.

If any paragraph, subsection, clause, provision, or exception of this Section shall be declared by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such decision shall not affect the validity of this Section as a whole or any part thereof. It is the intention of City Council that the remainder of this Section would have been adopted as if such invalid paragraph, subsection, clause, provision, or exception had not been enacted.

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SECTION 2. Effective date. This Ordinance shall take effect immediately.