



How-to Guide: Completing the Zoning Proposal Template



WELCOME TO THE FREIGHT FARMS' HOW-TO GUIDE ON ZONING!

This guide is designed to help you fill out the Zoning Proposal Template provided by Freight Farms and give some general information about zoning best practices from current freight farmers.

Zoning rules and regulations are different for every city, town, and municipality in the country so not all of the information or examples in this guide may be relevant for you. Not to worry, even if the rules you uncover in your zoning investigation don't align with the examples or information presented here, the language used to describe an LGM and the general format for presenting your project should still be useful.

We know that dealing with city or municipal governments on zoning issues can be difficult, but hang in there!

Now that that's done, let's get started!

1. [Download](#) the financial plan template.
2. Follow the steps in this guide as you fill out the template.



INTRODUCTION **TO ZONING:**

Before we start filling in the Zoning Proposal Template, let's go over the basics of zoning.

The term zoning refers to a set of rules imposed by a city, town, or municipality to restrict the use of specific pieces of land. Zoning rules can dictate everything from what types of activities can take place on a given piece of land all the way to what color a building on that land must be painted. Not all governments apply the same rules so basic research about your community's zoning rules is a must.



Governments use zoning as a mechanism to ensure that communities remain a pleasant place to live and work. Zoning rules are what prevent a noisy nightclub from opening in the middle of a quiet neighborhood and what stops apartment developers from building new residences in the middle of a shipping yard.

While we don't want nightclubs in neighborhoods or apartments in shipping yards, all of these businesses and uses of land are important for a thriving community. Governments, then, classify land into different zones and position those zones such that community members have access to all of the areas they need.

The most common zoning designations are listed below:

- **Residential** – land that is designated for homes, apartments, townhouses, etc. Land that is zoned as residential may have some exceptions for things like parks, churches, or schools but will not likely allow for businesses.
- **Commercial** – land that is designated for businesses that interact with customers on their premises (grocery stores, shopping malls, office buildings, etc.). While not residential, commercial land is still intended to be a pleasant addition to a community so will likely have aesthetic and ease of access requirements included.
- **Industrial** – land that is designated for businesses involved in manufacturing, shipping, construction, etc. Because industrial land does not generally have high foot traffic, industrial zones have fewer requirements for appearance or ease of access.
- **Agricultural** – land that is designated for agricultural uses (farming, ranching, forestry, etc.). Agricultural land generally has the fewest additional restrictions but, due to the nature of the zone, is the most limited in terms of development.
- **Mixed Use** – land that is designated for a combination of activities that would otherwise fall into separate zones (apartments/condos with retail outlets on the ground floor, farms with a developed farm stand, etc.). Mixed Use may be a combination of any zoning districts so the requirements for a given mixed use zone will vary based on permitted activities.



While we have examples of freight farmers operating in each of the major zoning designations, the majority of our farmers operate their farms on industrial or agricultural land. As mentioned above, these zones generally have the fewest restrictions in terms of aesthetics and ease of access.

Your government may have different designations depending on the industry and history of the community or may use these designations in a slightly different manner than what is presented here. Be sure to read at least enough of your government's zoning code to understand which classification of land your desired farm site falls into or which classification is best aligned for starting an LGM based business.

If you entered the process with a site in mind and it is not zoned to allow for a farming business/project, you can apply for a variance or non-conforming use permit (depending on which is better suited for your needs). This process generally takes 6 – 12 months to complete so we do not recommend it! If you do decide to appeal to your zoning board, plan to hire an attorney who is familiar with the local zoning laws.

Meeting with your Zoning or City Planning Board:

Once you have a location in mind for your farm, you will need to obtain the proper permits from your city to place the LGM and operate it. At this stage we recommend having a few options in mind for locations as one of your choices may not fall into the correct zoning category.

The first step in the process of selecting a site for your LGM is meeting or communicating with a member of your zoning or city planning board to obtain a permit for your LGM(s). This is where the zoning rules raise their ugly heads and can cause problems. We have found, however, that the best way to move through the permitting process is to get your contact within the government as excited about the project as you are.

The members of the zoning or city planning boards work hard to ensure that their communities remain resilient and pleasant places to live and work. Our job, then, is to convince government officials that an LGM business is never a detractor and supports their goals of increased resiliency and happy communities.



Meeting Requests (via email):

Subject Line: Meeting Request for Urban Farming Project

Subject Line: Meeting Request for Container Farming Project

Subject Line: Meeting Request for Local Food Project

****Introduce yourself and your business***

Leafy Green Machine® Description:

A Leafy Green Machine is a vertical, hydroponic farm built entirely inside an insulated shipping container capable of growing a variety of leafy greens 365 days a year, regardless of the outside climate. The farm is equipped with climate control technology, and can produce the equivalent of 2 acres worth of fresh produce every year.

Once in place, a LGM is virtually silent, emits no light pollution, and has little impact on the area around it (see attached appendix A for pictures). The produce grown in a LGM can be harvested and packaged inside the farm.

Note: do NOT refer to the LGM as simply a metal shipping container as many cities/towns/municipalities have strict regulations around the placement of plain shipping containers.

Attachments:

Include the Zoning Proposal Template (completed with your information and attachments) and any additional information you think supports your case

Despite your best efforts you may still run into opposition to your project from your zoning/planning board. Don't get discouraged! If your initial site requests are turned down you can ask for alternate locations that are properly zoned for your project. Each zoning board should maintain a map of the current zoning districts that can help you as you reassess.



ZONING PROPOSAL **TEMPLATE:**

Now that we've covered the basics, let's dive into the template itself.

As a rule, any time you see brackets (<->) you should replace the text inside the brackets with your business/project specific information. We will walk you through the sections and address any bracketed text that may be confusing but we will not go through each one in detail.

A quick reminder before we begin, if anything in this template does not fit your business/project needs please ignore our suggested text and replace it with something better suited.

If you haven't already, please download the zoning template [here](#).



Title Page:

This should be fairly easy (and if you have already started work on your business plan you may have most of it already).

Fill in the brackets with the text appropriate for your project/business and include a logo if you have one. In the date section, we recommend entering the date that you completed the current iteration of the proposal rather than the date you send it to the committee. If you make edits to the proposal based on their feedback this dating practice (date of the last edit) will make version control easier.

Company Description

- Understand what you do (small business farmer)
- Know who you sell your products to (your industry of choice)
- Know where you plan to sell your products (your location/general market area)

As an example of how you can convey this information, we have included the following text:

<Company> is a hydroponic farming company that provides fresh produce to the <industry> industry in <location>. We will grow <crop or crops> in a Leafy Green Machine for <customers> and aim to support the growing local food movement in <location>.

If you have already started a business plan, you should feel free to copy over your company description from that document as a starting point.

For this version of your company description, be sure to focus on the positive impacts your business/project will have on your community. Ultimately, this proposal is designed to “speak the same language” as your contacts on the zoning board and community impact is their primary concern.



The Leafy Green Machine

Most of this section is completed for you with language that represents best practices gathered from existing freight farmers.

If you choose to keep it, the only significant place you need to enter information in this section is where you see "<contact Freight Farms for farm locations near you>". This section is meant to give examples of other LGM projects to the zoning board so that they can reach out to other cities/ municipalities to see how they incorporated a container farm into their regulations.

For confidentiality reasons we do not post the full list of LGM projects online but can give you a selection of near-by examples upon request.

<Company> Operations

This section will require some input from you as it is meant to highlight to your zoning board that your business/project will not negatively impact the community by causing excess noise, light pollution, traffic, etc. While the text we have provided is a simple fill in the blank exercise, it will not be a good fit to describe all business models/projects. If/where this text does not meet your specific needs please be sure to replace it!

For this section we recommend making your project/business as easily understood as possible, which includes inserting an actual image of your site. The easiest way to do this is to navigate to your proposed location(s) on Google Maps, switch to satellite view if you are not there already, zoom in and take a screenshot.

Just remember that all of your operations should be presented with their impact to the community in mind. As an example, if you are planning to have customers come to your farm you should indicate exactly which hours you will host customers and how you plan to manage traffic to ensure that other businesses/properties are not impacted by your customer flow.



APPENDICES

The only thing to remember here is to include the attachments (available via the linked text in the template) if you are delivering a printed copy. If you are sending your proposal digitally (via email) then you don't have any further action here.

That's it! Best of luck as you work with your local government to secure the permits you need to get your business/project off the ground. If you have any questions or concerns please reach out to the Freight Farms team and we will help you through the process.