Executive Report
Rezoning Albany: A Pilot
Assessment of the South End Neighborhood

Fall 2012 Planning Studio
Department of Geography and Planning
University at Albany, SUNY
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Copies of the full report are available online at www.albany.edu/gp or can be obtained through the University at Albany, Department of Geography and Planning at:

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Rezoning Albany: Challenges and Opportunities

Why Zoning?

Historically, zoning has been the process of separating incompatible uses to protect public health, safety, and general welfare by dividing a community or area into distinct districts. Zoning has evolved over the years into a municipal tool to steer the growth and development throughout communities. As such, zoning can play a significant role in creating healthy, functional, and livable neighborhoods and cities. At its most basic, zoning provides a set of standards. A good zoning code is clear about what is expected and where it is expected. Uses are well defined and compatible. With this set of standard rules comes easier investment and development. When a property owner, investor, or developer knows what the rules are they can be more confident in what they will be allowed to do with their property.

Challenges and Opportunities for Albany

Unfortunately, the current zoning code for Albany was recently identified as “failing to adequately address design guidelines for new development or redevelopment.” Requirements laid out in the City’s current zoning districts are often not compatible with the existing built environment. This incompatibility fosters a cumbersome, time-consuming, and variance-heavy development process that limits development and redevelopment in Albany. This is particularly true in older and historic neighborhoods within the city.

The South End neighborhood provides a useful context within which to consider both the problems inherent to the current zoning code and potential benefits that rezoning could offer. This neighborhood has many of the issues associated with the City’s inadequate, outdated zoning standards, including lots that are smaller than allowed and variable setbacks. Much of this is due to imposing suburban-style zoning on neighborhoods built in the 1800s. A large proportion of properties are located within an Historic District overlay zone.

Figure 1: 69 Alexander Street

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2 City of Albany. 2011. Albany 2030 Plan; pg. 35.
Conducting a Pilot Assessment

The Studio conducted this pilot assessment over the fall semester (September – December 2012) to evaluate the current zoning in a subsection of the South End Neighborhood. Goals identified for the Studio included:

- Analyze benefits and challenges of the adopting various zoning types in Albany;
- Develop specific recommendations for rezoning the South End neighborhood; and
- Create a model rezoning assessment process that can be replicated throughout other city neighborhoods.

In implementing this pilot assessment, the Studio utilized a two-pronged approach using individual reports and team-based work.

Individual Reports:

Studies were conducted exploring different zoning types and various zoning models from similar municipalities. The Zoning Type case studies considered existing literature; rationale for rezoning; the structure of the zoning code and examples of the zoning type as applied. The Rezoning Process cases examined primary and secondary data of rezoning initiatives; the scope and avenues of public participation in the rezoning efforts; as well as the cost and timeframe needed for the rezoning process.

Team-Based Work: Work was divided into three categories existing conditions, public participation, and scenario building. Teams were formed to develop each section of the workload. Each team was tasked as follows:

The Existing Conditions Team was tasked with gathering, analyzing, and assembling quantitative data and parcel-level information from a variety of existing sources. This was formatted to educate and inform all parties involved in the pilot assessment. This team also produced maps, charts and graphs needed by the other teams to complete their work.
The Public Participation Team was responsible for engaging community members and other stakeholders to garner a better understanding of neighborhood needs and aspirations. They acquired information through interviews, roundtable discussion exercises and follow-up conversations. Through those public outreach efforts, a wide array of stakeholders (agencies, organizations, and residents) were consulted and involved in the pilot assessment. The information gathered through the various outreach methods has helped to inform and guide the project.

Scenario Building Team was charged with organizing and conceptualizing information gathered by the Existing Condition and Public Participation teams. Four sites were chosen within the study area to depict visualizations of build-outs with current zoning and with rezoning. Each scenario represents specific characteristics of the neighborhood. Scenarios were developed based on the current zoning and build-out scenarios were done for each of the sites. Scenarios consist of 3-D modeling, discussion of land uses, dimensional standards for parcels, building design characteristics, and discussion of how the potential rezoning type would alter and/or facilitate reinvestment within the neighborhood.
Zoning Types and Processes

**Floor Area Ratio (FAR)** is a bulk regulation based on the ratio of the floor area of a building to the lot area. A building’s footprint gets smaller as it increases in height.

Depicted above is an abstracted range of allowable development ratios under a given FAR (from left to right, 1.0, 2.0, 4.0). This combined with proper design guidelines and accompanying site regulations can result in compelling park spaces, public squares, as well as a variety of buildings heights creating a more diverse streetscape.

**Zoning Type Case Studies**

**Overlay Zoning** adds a layer of regulation for specialized districts on top of existing general zoning districts, and is not a standalone zoning type. Overlay zoning can become burdensome, potentially creating excessive regulations that impede development while trying to preserve certain neighborhood characteristics.

**Incentive Zoning** is designed to work with other zoning types to promote development through incentive structures, including tax abatements and density bonuses. Incentives are typically granted to developers who provide a valuable public service, which can include community space, affordable housing, or open space.

**Green Codes** are a retrofit of existing zoning codes to actively incorporate environmentally sustainable building and development practices and accessory uses. Green codes can also facilitate and encourage the development of features such as permeable pavement, tree plantings, and other green design elements.

**Composite Zoning** regulates development through a series of discrete modules: 1. Use, 2. Site 3. Architectural form. These modules can be arranged in different combinations to create unique zoning districts. It can also utilize FAR (see sidebar) to allow for more accurate calculations of density, as well as a more diverse range of site configurations.

**Form Based Codes** primarily regulate form, with use being subordinate to site and architectural requirements. This type of code makes the aesthetics of new development predictable and promotes an environment that conforms to diverse architectural typologies and urban fabric. It can, however, be costly to develop.
Rezoning Process Case Studies

Neighborhoods of a similar character to Albany’s South End that recently underwent rezoning were studied to inform a proposed rezoning process for Albany.

**Pittsburgh, PA** – *Polish Hill Neighborhood* is an example of rezoning a lower income neighborhood. The previous zoning code had many issues similar to the South End. Specifically, regulations were inconsistent with the built environment, making development difficult, and requiring zoning variances. This rezoning permitted mixed use and greater density along transit hubs. The city had no estimate for the cost of the project.

**New York City**– *West Harlem* is similar to the South End in housing stock, demographics, socioeconomics, transit accessibility, and rezoning goals. They attempted to bring the neighborhood’s outdated zoning into conformity with the existing built environment, providing transit-oriented density increases in selected locations, and fostering economic development in subareas that had been stifled by regulations that were out of context with the rest of the neighborhood. The final cost of the project is estimated at $357,000.

**New York City** – *Bedford-Stuyvesant North* was chosen as a predominately low-income, minority neighborhood dominated by brownstones with two corridors desirable for development. Residents were eager for a rezoning effort that could address the double-digit abandonment rate. The primary concern of residents was maintaining the current context of the neighborhood. New zoning targeted protecting historic buildings. The final cost of this project is roughly $600,000.

**Lowell, MA** – *Acre Neighborhood* contains a mixture of light industrial uses scattered throughout a predominantly low-income residential neighborhood of historic properties, much like in the South End. Setback requirements were particularly problematic. Rather than requiring zero setbacks commonly used in dense, urban settings, Lowell required setbacks to be consistent with existing development.

In terms of rezoning processes, the public participation process in Polish Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant North, and West Harlem were quite similar to the approach taken by the Studio, relying both on an existing community plan and feedback from residents and stakeholders.

**Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)** allows for development density to be transferred to another parcel (between two consenting property owners). TDR may be used to pursue certain community goals such as historic preservation, the open spaces or a reallocation of density.
Recommendations for the City of Albany

We recommend that the City of Albany adopt Composite zoning. Composite zoning provides a consistent framework for regulating the use, form, design, and density while maintaining flexibility. The three modules (Use, Site, and Architectural Form) can be implemented in many different combinations and tailored to the unique needs of each community. Composite zoning makes it possible to avoid an over-reliance on special districts, overlays, and variances and is expected to make the permitting process more predictable. An example of potential modules are below in Tables 1-3, followed by an illustration of how these modules can be combined to form unique zoning districts in Figure 3. These are further illustrated through a build-out analysis for four South End sites under existing versus proposed zoning in the following Pilot Assessment.

Use Module
Establishes the uses that are permissible in the district and permit procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UR</td>
<td>Urban Residential</td>
<td>One- and two-family residential and buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MX</td>
<td>Mixed-Use</td>
<td>Multifamily residential with ground floor and second floor commercial uses permitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LX</td>
<td>Local Mixed-Use</td>
<td>Multifamily residential with small-scale shops and services permitted on ground floor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Example of Potential 'Use' Module Designations

Architecture Module
Defines the physical characteristics or parameters for the development, such as dimensional standards (setbacks, heights, vegetative cover, etc.) and building design features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architecture</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Historic District or TND District or Neighborhood Commercial District</td>
<td>Follow requirements laid out by the Historic Resources Commission or the Department of Development &amp; Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>60% of exterior street-facing walls constructed with $X$ material(s) Building fronts must have at least 3 design features 15% of primary building façade must consist of window or door openings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Example of Potential 'Architecture' Module Designations
Site Module

Governs the allowable floor area ratios and density of the development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Max Set-</th>
<th>Max FAR</th>
<th>Max Lot Coverage</th>
<th>Total Side Yard</th>
<th>Height Req’s</th>
<th>Parking Req’s</th>
<th>Curb Cuts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4R</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td>2.0 Res</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Min 0’</td>
<td>20’ min base</td>
<td>-Waived for 2 units or less</td>
<td>Prohibited on frontage of less than 40’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Max 15’</td>
<td>30’ max base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40’ max total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ setback req’d above 30’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4X</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td>2.0 Total of which: 1.8 Min Residential 0.2 Max Commercial</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Min 0’</td>
<td>25’ min base</td>
<td>-Waived for 2 units or less</td>
<td>Prohibited on frontage of less than 40’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Max 15’</td>
<td>30’ max base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40’ max total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ setback req’d above 30’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6X</td>
<td>0’</td>
<td>3.0 Total of which: 2.8 Max Residential 0.2 Min Commercial</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Min 0’</td>
<td>30’ min base</td>
<td>-Waived for 2 units or less</td>
<td>Prohibited on frontage of less than 40’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Max 8’</td>
<td>40’ max base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50’ max total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(10’ setback req’d above 40’)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Example of Potential ‘Site’ Module Designations

Figure 3: Assembling a Composite Zoning District
Pilot Assessment of the South End Neighborhood

Existing Conditions

In order to properly assess future alterations to the South End of Albany the Existing Conditions Team collected and analyzed demographic and housing stock data. This process provides crucial information for future alterations to the city’s Zoning Ordinance.

The Existing Conditions Team collected, mapped, and analyzed existing data using a Geographical Information System (GIS). This assessment included assembling data from existing sources and the creation of maps; additionally social demographic data was collected and analyzed. Areas of analysis include land use, zoning data, nonconformity, zoning variance applications, and age, education, household income and population levels.

Demographic Information

The following demographic information was retrieved from the American Community Survey 5-year estimates for census tracts 23 and 25. Tract data was used because block group data was not available. This census tract information should be used with caution: information regarding age and ethnicity lacked error terms, and error terms of income and benefits were found to be wide ranging.

Education

The City contains a higher percentage of residents with high school diploma's, bachelor degrees, graduate degrees and postgraduate degrees then both Census Tract 23 & 25 when combined. There are a higher percentage of individuals with some college experience within Census Tract 23 than Tract 25. On the whole, Census Tract 25 lacks in educational attainment in comparison to the City and Census Tract 23. The City's largest age concentration is 20-39 year olds, Census Tract 23 largest age concentration between 20-39 years of age while Tract 25's largest concentration is 0-19 year olds.

Race/Ethnicity

The most prevalent ethnic group within the City is white, at 56.7% followed by Black or African American at 29.6% and Asian at 4.8 %. Census Tracts 23 and 25 encompasses 5 percent of Albany’s residents. Here the ethnic diversity is Black at 52.5%, White 34.2% and Asian 3.2 %.

Income

Of the approximate 41,000 households in Albany, 13.5% earn less than $10,000. Census Tract 23 has approximately 1,083 households, with 20.4% or 220 households earning between $15,000-$24,000, with an estimated 7.9% or 86 households earning incomes less than $10,000.
Census Tract 25's has approximately 1,137 households, with 22% or 250 households earning between $15,000 - $24,000, with estimated 11.40% or 130 households earning incomes less than 10,000.

**Current Zoning Districts**
The South End study area contains 968 tax parcels and is comprised of four different zoning districts: Two-Family Residential (R-2A), Multifamily Medium-Density Residential (R-3B), Neighborhood Commercial (C-1) and Light Industrial(C-M).

As the existing zoning map indicates (See Figure 4), the majority of parcels are located within an R-3B district, representing 91% of the area's tax parcels, indicating the highest concentration of tax parcels are zoned Multifamily Medium-Density Residential. South Pearl Street and portions of Morton Avenue contain the bulk of the neighborhood’s commercial buildings. Both corridors are known for their mixed-use development efforts, but more so South Pearl Street than Morton Avenue. In recent years Morton Avenue has strengthened its presence as a commercial corridor which should be taken into consideration during rezoning. The South End Historic District covers more than half of the study area's tax parcels.

**Zoning Variances**
Between 2008 and 2012, 60 variances were submitted within the South End of Albany, and 59 of these were approved. This raises questions about the adequacy of existing zoning in the neighborhood. Furthermore, variances show clustering along Morton, Alexander and Delaware Street and can be attributed to the Albany Housing Authority and the non-profit efforts of Habitat for Humanity. Variances create undue hardship, and increase the time and costs associated with building.

**Vacant Buildings/ Nonconformity**
Vacancies are associated with disinvestment and deterioration of social morale. Rezoning can help mitigate the high number of vacancies plaguing the South End through the alteration of zoning

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**Figure 4: Existing Zoning**
districts and parcel size requirements. This will in return reduce costs and reservations about investment.

The Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan, indicates many uses for vacant parcels, such as housing, urban agriculture, urban landscaping and community gardens. These ideals have the potential of reducing the South Ends 138 vacant builds. Another deterrent to development is that current parcel sizes do not meet the parameters of the current zoning ordinance, resulting in 764 of the areas 968 properties being classified as nonconforming (See Figure 5). It would be in the city's best interest to alter the required parcel size requirements, with foreseen reductions in variance applications as a result.

Public Participation

Engaging the Stakeholders

An active outreach program is a key component for an effective plan. Therefore a team was dedicated exclusively to community outreach and charged with, gathering the perceptions of community stakeholders regarding existing zoning and providing results to the other teams. They interviewed community stakeholders in September and held two Community Roundtables at the Howe Library in November. The Initial Interviews brought to light key issues facing the community and became part of the Roundtable discussions. Information gathered by other Studio Teams was also presented at the Roundtables. Questions used to guide conversation included, but were not limited to:

- How has the City's zoning code impacted development in the South End?
- How does the South End see itself developing in the future?
- What are some examples of “good” development in the neighborhood?

The first Roundtable was attended by representatives from eight different public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in the community. Nine residents, all homeowners, attended the second
one. These were primarily new and future residents of the Habitat for Humanity homes on Alexander Street who received credit from Habitat for attending. Other participants were longtime residents of the neighborhood, many belonging to the South End Neighborhood Association.

Findings

Participants agreed that the zoning code has created an undue barrier to development in the area. Many thought that clarifying standards could promote neighborhood development. Some discussion explored initiatives successfully implemented by other cities, including design guidelines for historic districts and a “picture book” visualizing design standards.

Both meetings targeted the high level of abandoned buildings in the neighborhood as a significant barrier to development. Vacant buildings/lots are plentiful and depressing property values. One of the main complaints is that buildings are suddenly demolished without warning, leaving a vacant lot. There was broad agreement that Morton Ave and Pearl Street were prime candidates for mixed used development as a vibrant corridor with easy access to mass transit.

Other suggestions from organizational stakeholders included increasing density, promoting an urban design and reducing bureaucratic barriers within the development process. Residents are concerned primarily with issues surrounding parking, green space, and promoting varied design styles. They also suggested that the neighborhood could have more than a single zoning style.

Scenarios

Site Selection

The Studio selected four sites that represent a diversity of South End settings that contain viable infill lots. The selected block types include a mixed-use thoroughfare, an interior residential block outside of the South End / Groesbeckville Historic District, a residential block within the historic district, and a residential block with a substantial number of vacant and underutilized structures. Two sets of block-level visualizations are presented based on the information gathered throughout the course of the Studio to provide. The first set represents a potential build-out of each site under the South End’s existing zoning, and the second set shows a potential build-out of each site under the recommended composite zoning.
Delaware Street near Elizabeth Street
Lies outside of the historic district, this street allows for a full interpretation of the existing R-3B Multifamily Medium-Density Residential District that encompasses most of the study area.

Third Street at Elizabeth Street
Completely encompassed by the historic district overlay, this site serves as a good representation of how historic district guidelines govern the built form under existing zoning and proposed rezoning.

Elizabeth Street at Osborne Street
Set in the core of the neighborhood with one side of the street in the Historic District. Here there are many vacant or neglected buildings. This area can convey a mixed-use destination.

South Pearl Street at Fourth St
This is part of the mixed-use exterior commercial corridor along partially within the Historic District. This allows for a visualization of how South Pearl Street might be developed both inside and outside the Historic District.
Why Elizabeth Street?
Elizabeth Street is represented in three of the four sites that the SBT has selected. A variety of characteristics made it an attractive base for visualizations. The relative width of Elizabeth Street and the presence of buildings that once hosted commercial uses make it a prominent interior corridor for the neighborhood. Lastly, the intersection of 3rd Avenue and Elizabeth Street contains the largest urban garden in the study area, making it a useful node through which to consider how zoning could affect such valuable community-tended open space.

Visualization Process, Assumptions, and Limitations
The Studio chose to use Google SketchUp in crafting visualizations of potential buildouts. SketchUp was ideal due to its ability to integrate actual block measurements into the buildouts, produce quality graphics, and easily recreate existing structures. In addition, untrained team members were able to quickly learn the program thanks to its intuitive format and relative ease of use.

As in any representation of potential buildouts under a given set of zoning regulations, the analyst must make assumptions that reflect only one of many possible futures. In particular, the following visualizations were created assuming ideal market conditions. This helps give a picture of how each zoning scenario could affect the South End if demand and willingness to invest increased from its present levels. Beyond just visualizing potential futures, this assumption allows residents and the City to view the full effects of the existing and proposed zoning, rather than presenting an incomplete (or even misleading) development picture that is based on present economic conditions. Additional assumptions include:

1. Ability to consolidate parcels where appropriate
2. Reduce need for variances
3. General adherence to the requirements of the South End / Groesbeckville Historic District
4. Enforcement of the C-1 Neighborhood Commercial design standards
5. Predominantly private development

The City’s existing zoning brings with it a number of limiting factors it is important to note that much of the South End could not be developed at all if the current R-3B regulations were strictly adhered to. These inconsistencies have led to existing zoning build-out scenarios that are interpretations of the type of developments that the zoning at each site encourages, given optimal lot assemblage and site composition, rather than depicting a no-development scenario (as much of the current zoning would lead to without the provision of variances)

Sites within the historic district were far easier to develop into full build-out scenarios, as those guidelines also rely on interpretations of conformity to the existing built environment. This allows developers to more easily skirt the pure R-3B regulations, which are largely inconsistent with the South End’s historic pattern of development.
Zoning Buildouts

1. 3rd Avenue and Elizabeth

Due to the number of vacant lots on this portion of the street, most of the buildings seen here are new construction. These are within the Historic District and must be compatible with existing architectural scale, massing, volume, and styles.

3rd Avenue (Proposed UR-4R-A District)

This build-out represents the UR-4R-A composite zone. This includes preserving community garden with a TDR program. The buildings on the left are newly constructed the buildings on the right side of the street currently exist and conform to the UR-4R-A district’s requirements.

The first module “UR” stands for Urban Residential, which allows one- and two-family residences and apartment buildings. The “4R” site module designation gives a range of suitable setbacks, side yard totals, and height requirements. The “A” architecture module designation means that developments must follow Historic Resource Commission guidelines. New residences would have windows, doors, and stoops similar to other buildings in the area.
2. Delaware Street

This residential block is within a designated R-3B district, with two parcels on the edge of the block within the Historic District.

Despite a forthcoming Habitat for Humanity construction, the site was chosen for its visual character and location outside of the historic district. The potential build-out depicted here serves to illustrate the deep setbacks and relatively low-density typology dictated by the existing zoning. Currently, nearly all development occurs in spite of the current zoning. In fact, most existing housing on Delaware Street does not conform to the current zoning regulations and could not be developed under the existing zoning.

Delaware Street (Proposed UR-4R-C District)

This build-out depicts Delaware Street under the proposed composite zoning ordinance. Note the range of building heights and widths, the presence of moderate front yards, and the presence of side yards. This rezoning build-out uses an architecture module of “C” which is less strict than the historical district standards allowing development under less stringent design standards.
3. Elizabeth Street
Elizabeth Street runs south along the center of the study area. These street and sidewalks are wide and could be inviting despite being scattered with a mix of occupied and vacant buildings. Current zoning allows for residential use only. Since most of the street is within the Historic District, the requisite guidelines must be followed. A best-case scenario under current zoning is a residential use build-out, unsuited to these buildings. More likely, under the current zoning these buildings will continue to deteriorate and would eventually be demolished.

Elizabeth Street (Proposed LX-4X-A District)
Changing the zoning may increase the renovation. Proximity and diversity of commercial services also makes sense for this neighborhood. Residents likely use public transportation, so walkable access to amenities is essential and creates a local identity, increased community connectedness, a shared civic culture and better physical health.

Zoning would be designated LX-4X-A on the east (left) side of the street, and LX-4X-C on the west side of the Street, with the sole difference being the architectural standards discussed previously. In keeping with the residential feel of the neighborhood, the use module designation of “LX” allows for multi-family residential with shops and services on the ground floor only.
4. **South Pearl Street**

While both sides of South Pearl fall within the C-1 Neighborhood Commercial zone, the left side is in the Historic District. Standards allow for low-rise commercial use with setbacks of up to 12 feet and relatively large parking lots. Even in the historic district, there are few regulations that limit the provision of large amounts of surface parking, which can break up the street wall, allow a multitude of curb cuts, and create an environment that is less hospitable to pedestrians. Recent development on South Pearl Street, even within the historic district itself, has consisted of low-density structures.

**South Pearl Street (Proposed MX-6X-A District)**

The “MX” module denotes mixed-use, allowing multifamily residential uses and commercial uses on lower floors. The site module “6X” requires a 0.2 commercial, and no more than a 2.8, FAR. Maximum lot coverage is 75%. This designation carries base height between 30 and 40 feet resulting in buildings between 3 and 4 stories. Parking requirements can be waived under some conditions. The architecture module is designated “A,” which means that the architectural standards are governed by the South End / Groesbeckville Historic District, the Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) overlay, or the Neighborhood Commercial design standards (formerly contained with the C-1 district).
Recommendations for the City of Albany

Zoning Type: Composite Zoning

Overall, the Studio sees Composite zoning, as exemplified by the preceding explanations and proposed zoning buildouts, as a viable alternative to the City’s current zoning code, which has the potential to improve flexibility, predictability, sustainability and community character, in the following ways:

Flexibility
- Eliminates the need for variances.
- Eliminates nonconforming uses and structures.
- Ensures that form and aesthetics conform to the South End’s existing built environment.

Predictability
- FAR allows a predictable zoning code and density-based development calculations.

Community Character
- Density bonuses incentivize community space, affordable housing, and fresh food outlets.
- TDR program preserves open spaces, while allocating density in specified locations.
- Promotes a walkable urban fabric that contains targeted areas of mixed-use.

Sustainability
- Supports plans for transit-oriented development zoning overlays by allocating density to designated locations.
- Diversify the housing stock.
- Promote green design and sustainable building elements.

Rezoning Process

For future re-zoning initiatives, the Studio has the following recommendations for the DDP in formulating its process:

1. Divide the City into roughly five to six geographic sections in order to obtain the most relevant public input about a particular neighborhood or area.
2. Host at least three rounds of public meetings / roundtable discussions for each section, in addition to one final citywide presentation of proposed rezoning.
3. Reach out to a diverse group of community stakeholders and ask them to identify other potentially important, but perhaps overlooked, parties.
4. Create a website to raise awareness of the rezoning initiative, and to update the public.
5. Conduct an iterative process with the public to ensure their input is accurately interpreted.
Estimates of the approximate staff time, cost, and length of process for the DDP to carry its rezoning initiative for the City are provided. The figures were extrapolated from the time and effort expended by the Studio in completing its final project, as well as case studies of rezoning initiatives in other cities.

The Studio was comprised of nine individuals who had varying degrees of experience with such a project. It was estimated that each student spent approximately 200 total hours each (12.5 hours per week average) for the semester toward the project or 1,800 total hours. However, taking into consideration the limitations of the Studio, as well as the resources of a professional planner, the Studio believes that it would take one full-time planner approximately 45 weeks to complete the first round of meetings.

Based on these calculations and assumptions, the Studio recommends the following:

- **Staff time** – Three full-time staff members who are each in charge of outreach efforts for two sections of the city, as well as presenting findings to the DDP.

- **Length of Process** – From project initiation to the final citywide rezoning presentation is estimated to take approximately 26 months to complete. This is assuming designating three full-time staff, using ten months from project initiation to conclusion of the first round of meetings, four months for each of the second and third rounds, and eight months to compose a final document.

- **Cost** – Based on the case studies, cost for a city-wide rezoning initiative can range from about $100,000 to $400,000. Using the average salary of a planner of $65,000, three full-time staff, and a twenty-six month process, cost is estimated to be approximately $422,500.

### Areas of Further Research

Some areas requiring further research were uncovered through this project. We recommend that the city explore these ideas further before or in addition to taking actions on other proposed recommendations.

**Redesigning the development process to expedite partnerships and project approval**

A number of participants in the Roundtable discussions provided suggestions about Albany’s development process. While rezoning will make considerable headway in easing this process, other aspects of the development lay outside the purview of zoning. These involve communication among City agencies, how the City communicates with developers, and finally the working relationship between the City and developers. Specific suggestions mentioned include:

1. Increase continuity amongst agencies in the City.
2. Develop a fast-track process to accommodate entities under the time constraints of grants.
3. Provide incentives for non-profits to collaborate with one another.
4. Create an easily accessible step-by-step overview of the planning process, as well as a schedule of fees to clarify the development process.

**Integrating current overlay district design standards with composite zoning**

The City of Albany should conduct a more detailed study into how the current historic district would impact the site and architectural design modules of a composite zoning code. Integrating a historic district and a composite zoning code should be done carefully to limit unforeseen consequences that could undo the benefits gained by a comprehensive rezoning project.

**Understanding the role of the Historic Resources Commission in this new zoning process**

It is recommended that the City of Albany reexamine the role of the Historic Resources Commission. The HRC’s role in protecting the integrity of the Historic Districts is very important, but clarity on design guidelines is an area that needs to be addressed. By clarifying the design guidelines the City will make the requirements for development more predictable. This sense of predictability could result in higher levels of investment and development by private interests. Currently there is a high level of confusion, bordering on distrust, between the residents and the HRC. Allowing residents to have a better understand of what is, and is not, permitted within a Historic District could go a long way to establishing good will between residents, developers, the HRC, and the City itself.

**Further investigate ways to address parking issues within proposed mixed use areas**

Although proposed mixed use developments will be centered along new public transportation hubs, whenever commercial development is proposed to increase, it is important to consider the provision of parking. The need for additional parking should be explored with a study by the city to see if such a demand may exist.