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Memo

To: Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission
From: Jennifer M. Rauch, AICP, Director of Community Planning & Development
Date: May 7, 2026
Initiated By: Christopher Will, AICP, Senior Planner
Zachary C. Hounshell, Planner II
Re: 26-001ADMC – West Innovation District Code Amendments and
Setback and Screening Design Manual Introduction

Summary

This is a request for discussion and feedback on proposed Zoning Code amendments to Sections 153.002, 153.016 and 153.037-153.042 for the removal of data centers as permitted or conditional uses, the creation of the ID-6, Research Transition District and the amendment of design standards associated with ID-6 in the West Innovation District (WID), and the creation of the West Innovation District Screening and Setback Design Manual. No vote is requested at the May 7th Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

Update

January 20, 2026

The PZC reviewed and provided non-binding feedback for the draft ID-6 Code Roadmap and landscape buffer study. Members of the public attended the meeting and provided comments consistent with those represented through the planning process. The Commission provided the following comments:

- The Commission expressed overall support for the direction of the code language, recognizing that the changes reflect genuine responsiveness to community feedback about building intensity, height, and scale.
- The Commission expressed that the Advanced Manufacturing language needed to be further refined, with questions about limitations on the operations of the use.
- The Commission supported the 200-foot setback and the recommended buffering treatment, asking questions about minimum tree size requirements for immediate screening and recommendations for a consistent park-like buffer and intentional landscaping.
- The Commission supported the reduction in height to 45 feet and the requirement for uses not to operate outside the building.
- The Commission expressed concerns regarding environmental and operational impacts, such as light pollution and noise management, and recommended ways to address this for uses in the district.

Background

City staff began a rezoning process of approximately 370 acres of land from R, Rural District to ID-2, Research Flex District, and ID-3, Research Assembly in February 2025. Following the Planning & Zoning Commission's recommendation of approval, the rezoning application was forwarded to City Council. Throughout the review process, residents in nearby neighborhoods expressed concerns about the potential impacts of the Flex Innovation development adjacent to existing single-family homes. Key issues included building height and scale, noise and light spillover from loading and service areas, increased traffic along Cosgray Road, environmental impacts, and the adequacy of landscaping and buffering between residential areas and future development. These concerns prompted City Council to table the rezoning ordinance in August 2025 and direct staff to work with stakeholders to draft targeted zoning code amendments to address compatibility concerns while preserving the long-term vision for development within the WID and ensuring consistency with the approved Envision Dublin Community Plan.

Based on this direction and subsequent public engagement, staff's near-term focus is on the proposed ID-6 zoning district amendment and the five properties (approximately 144 acres) located east of the railroad tracks, south of the future Shier Rings Road extension, and extending to Cosgray Road. In this area more sensitive zoning standards are proposed to provide additional protections, particularly as it transitions to existing residential development.

This application does not contemplate the rezoning of any particular property, but establishes a new zoning district that addresses these concerns for future properties to zone into. The rezoning of properties would occur at a future City Council meeting.

Case History and Public Engagement

City Staff have engaged in several public meetings, community conversations, and stakeholder meetings since the application was last before the PZC in February 2025. A timeline of meetings and public engagement over the course of the application is provided in your packets, and is also provided on the City of Dublin's West Innovation District Rezoning webpage here: <https://dublinohiousa.gov/west-innovation-district-rezoning/>

Community Feedback

Throughout the initial rezoning process, and subsequent code amendment development, Staff have received significant amounts of public comments concerning the application. All public comments received over the past year have been provided in the Commission's packets. Additional public comment received prior to the May 7th PZC meeting will also be provided to the Commission ahead of the meeting. The draft code amendments were shared and reviewed with the Ballantrae Community Association during a meeting with City staff in April. The concerns that have been consistently shared throughout the process include:

- Uncertainty of the types of businesses that can develop within the ID-6 Code
- Industrial uses being incompatible adjacent to single-family residential
- Negative environmental / physical impacts on the neighborhood
- Increased traffic volumes on Cosgray Road
- Increased utility needs and impacts on the neighborhood
- Large building heights adjacent to single-family residential
- Potential negative impacts on private property values

- Health and safety concerns for residents and children

Stakeholder Feedback

As outlined above, staff members engaged with residents in Ballantrae and the neighboring area throughout the development of the draft amendments. Additionally, staff consulted with representatives from the flex and research industries, as well as the property owners included in the rezoning application, to ensure the code amendments strike the right balance between compatibility with surrounding properties and market viability. Staff have reviewed the proposed code amendments with several industry representatives and have received generally positive feedback on the approach towards the district, but outlined development limitations that are critical for the feasibility of projects. The following summary highlights key themes gathered from industry representatives and property owners based on the language of the proposed code amendments:

- Understanding and appreciation of the goals and recommendations for the WID area and also the need to be respectful to resident concerns with the proposed development standards.
- The proposed advanced manufacturing use is appropriate to attract high-quality businesses to the area.
- The reduction of maximum building heights from 68' to 45' can satisfy industry needs for flex and research innovation space.
- Clarify the difference between storage of goods related to allowable principle uses within the building versus pure warehousing/distribution uses.
- Maintain construction and contract services as a permitted use as it is under the current code.
- Concerns with landscape buffer and setbacks as it relates to higher development costs and limiting buildable area.
- Consider a landscape design with more evergreens and lower shrubs instead of swales, avoiding poorly maintained features.
- Allow stormwater detention within setbacks and consider a shared regional pond for better land use efficiency.

Staff have considered the recommendations and concerns of all involved stakeholders and have drafted code language that balances the concerns of residents with the developability of the properties within the intended flex innovation land use to the best extent practicable.

Community Plan

The Community Plan is a key policy document that guides decision-making regarding the future of Dublin's natural and built environments. It assists in evaluating development proposals and helps ensure that proposed development supports the community's long-term objectives. In developing code amendments for the proposed sites, the Community Plan is utilized to ensure that the proposed requirements remain aligned with the general intent of the Community Plan, while balancing the recommendations and concerns of property owners and stakeholders. The following sections are provided for reference.

Future Land Use Plan

The Future Land Use Plan identifies the subject properties as Flex Innovation. This designation is intended to provide vibrant, modern development that incorporates a variety of uses, including innovation, office, and collaboration, integrated into the existing natural and built environment. Intended principal uses are office, research and development, flex office, and clean manufacturing.

Thoroughfare Plan

The Envision Dublin Thoroughfare Plan classifies road types based on traffic demand and identifies future character improvements to accommodate the increased activity. Cosgray Road is classified as a Rural Connector Boulevard with a Planned Right-of-Way width (ROW) of 102 feet. The character of the future improvements of Cosgray Road will feature a four-lane road with a central boulevard dividing the street, similar to the streetscape design of Emerald Parkway. To support the Envision Dublin Community Plan, the City is initiating a Cosgray Road study in 2026. The study will evaluate street type alternatives and develop preliminary engineering for Cosgray Road from Shier Rings Road through Amlin to the southern Dublin corporation limits. It will recommend pedestrian and bicycle facilities, incorporate railroad crossing design elements, and develop intersection concepts at key locations. As development occurs, future development will be required to dedicate the ROW where appropriate to achieve the goals of the Envision Dublin Thoroughfare Plan.

West Innovation District Special Area Plan

The WID Special Area Plan outlines the future growth potential of the far western corridor of the City with approximately 2,250 acres of land between Avery Road, Houchard Road, Shier Rings Road, Rings Road, State Route 161/Post Road, and the future extension of Tuttle Crossing Boulevard. The goal of the plan is to establish a world-class innovation and research district that serves as an economic engine for Dublin, with the broader objective of creating a self-sustaining cycle of innovation that collaborates with local educational institutions and companies to continually provide talent and opportunities for regional collaboration. This will enable Dublin to attract innovative companies, create a dynamic district, facilitate collaboration among companies, support emerging entrepreneurs, and offer diverse options for various industries.

The plan provides recommendations for development and transportation, as well as site-specific recommendations throughout the district. It includes the following design recommendations for sites along Cosgray Road adjacent to single-family neighborhoods, which would be reviewed as part of future development proposals.

- Landscape buffers with mounding, minimum 200-foot setback
- Preservation of the 1900s farmstead as a new community garden and trailhead
- Leverage the economic development potential of power corridors

The plan also suggests the 'South Jewett Property' located southwest of the intersection of Shier Rings Road and Cosgray Road as a Key Opportunity site. The plan provides the following recommendations for this site:

"The City-owned property located southwest of Cosgray and Shier Rings Road provides the opportunity to expand flex innovation uses in the district to support economic development.

Future development should be setback and screened from Cosgray Road. A historic farmstead located on Cosgray Road should be preserved and integrated into landscaped setbacks to preserve the rural character of the roadway and buffer new development from existing residential neighborhoods to the east.”

Proposed West Innovation District Amendments

Staff engaged McBride Dale Clarion to lead the development of the proposed amendments to the WID zoning district. The goal of the amendments was to address community and stakeholder feedback in a balanced manner by drafting requirements that support an appropriate transition to existing residential development, while achieving the general goals and recommendations outlined in Envision Dublin. Staff has included the proposed code amendments in the packet. The following is a general overview of key highlights within the amendments.

Data Centers

The draft amendments include the removal of data center uses within ID-1, 2, 3 and 6 Districts and are the only proposed change that impacts the larger WID Code. This recommendation is based on community feedback, and further data center development does not align with the intended character of the WID. This is not intended to prohibit a user from having a server room or similar facility for supporting data storage, provided it is for the purposes of the business.

ID-6, Research Transition District

The proposed amendments include the creation of a new district within the WID Code, the Research Transition District (ID-6).

District Intent

Establishing a district intent is important because it clearly states the purpose and character a zoning district is meant to achieve and protect. It guides how regulations are interpreted, helps decision-makers evaluate permitted, conditional, and accessory uses, and provides a policy basis for reviewing applications. District intent also promotes consistency, predictability, and fairness in zoning decisions by ensuring development aligns with the community’s long-term planning goals and desired land-use patterns. Below is the draft district intent language for ID-6.

The ID-6 District is intended to support economic development, fostering innovation and the advancement of cutting-edge research, technology, and employment opportunities, while providing a sensitive transition from established single-family residential neighborhoods. Uses within the ID-6 District are expected to be of lower intensity and scale, minimizing adverse impacts, including but not limited to noise, traffic, lighting, other off-site effects, and environmental impacts. Uses within the District are encouraged to incorporate sustainable practices and utilize non-toxic inputs to the greatest extent feasible.

This District emphasizes the provision of flexible spaces that can accommodate evolving businesses, research, and technology needs, provided such flexibility does not compromise the District’s low-intensity character, environmental responsibility, or its compatibility with adjacent residential areas.

Based on feedback from the Ballantrae Community Association, language in the district intent was added encouraging 'sustainable practices and utilization of non-toxic inputs to the greatest extent feasible.'

District Uses

In zoning, a principal use is the primary purpose for which a property is intended and occupied. Within the ID-6 district, principal uses include research and development facilities, advanced manufacturing, office, and flex innovation spaces that support employment and innovation-focused development. These uses define the site's overall function and establish how the property is expected to operate.

An accessory use is a secondary use that is clearly subordinate to and supportive of the principal use on the same property. Accessory uses are limited in scale and are not permitted to function independently. In the ID-6 district, examples of accessory uses include parking areas or structured parking garages serving the primary building, vehicle charging stations, bicycle parking, internal storage, loading areas, and similar site features that support day to day operations of the principal use without changing the overall character or intent of the development.

The following outlines the proposed principal uses within the district, and the associated restrictions.

Advanced Manufacturing

A newly created use category within the Code to address concerns raised by the Commission and the community, which further defines the existing Manufacturing and Assembly use category permitted in other WID districts. The definition and use-specific standards below have been refined following the January PZC discussion.

The proposed definition is as follows: "An establishment engaged in the manufacturing of finished products or component parts from previously prepared materials, integrating scientific research, development, testing, and experimentation directly into the production process. This use includes processing, fabrication, assembly, mixing, synthesis, prototype development, analysis, packaging, and the preparation, calibration, or testing of equipment and components necessary or incidental to such activities. Operations typically require a high level of specialized and company-specific skill training and commonly utilize advanced technologies such as computer-controlled systems, robotics, automation, additive manufacturing, and other innovative methods to improve products or processes. Activities such as quality control, storage, distribution, and on-site sales shall be permitted only as accessory activities that are clearly incidental and subordinate to the principal use and conducted solely in support of the primary operation; however, this definition does not include stand-alone warehousing, wholesaling, bulk distribution, or principal retail sales."

Advanced Manufacturing uses in the ID-6 will be required to meet the following requirements:

- All activities shall occur entirely within an enclosed building. No outdoor activity is permitted.
- The use shall not generate vibration, odor, dust, smoke, glare, heat, or electromagnetic interference at a level above that normally perceptible from other development in the area or from the usual street traffic observed at the street right-of-way line of the lot.

When the Advanced Manufacturing definition is considered with the intent of the ID-6 district, the types of uses that could be permitted are:

- Prototype development labs (hardware, electronics, medical devices)
- Small-batch or pilot-scale manufacturing tied to research
- Biotechnology or materials labs with limited production
- 3D printing / additive manufacturing shops
- Robotics assembly and testing (low volume)
- Precision electronics or instrumentation manufacturing
- Tech companies designing and building products in-house
- Engineering firms with fabrication/testing areas
- “Flex space” users combining office, lab, and light production

Construction and Contract Services

The Code currently defines this use as “Facilities used for the repair of machinery, equipment, products or by-products.” No changes have been proposed for this use definition.

Construction and Contract Services uses in the ID-6 will be required to meet the following requirements:

- All activities shall occur entirely within an enclosed building. No outdoor activity is permitted other than the parking of fleet vehicles.
- All equipment and vehicles utilized by the construction and contract service use shall be stored inside the building except for fleet vehicles.
- A new definition created for fleet vehicle is defined as “a vehicle that is owned or operated by the person, company, or business on the premises, and which is used for purposes of delivery, pick-up, or service to patrons of the primary use. A fleet vehicle may also be a commercial vehicle, but does not include semi-tractor, semi-trailer, any non-recreational trailer used for commercial purposes, or any heavy construction equipment.”

Uses that generally fit within this category are general contractor offices, trade contractors, contractor offices with associated storage, and trade service shops.

Office – General – no proposed changes

Office – Medical – no proposed changes

Parks and Open Space – no proposed changes

Research and Development

The Code currently defines this use as “A facility or area for conducting scientific research, synthesis, analysis, investigation, testing, or experimentation, and including the fabrication of prototypes, assembly, mixing and preparation of equipment and components incidental or necessary to the conduct of such activities. Research and development includes support facilities, but not including facilities for the manufacture or sale of products except as may be incidental to the main purpose of the laboratory.” This use is currently permitted throughout the WID and will be permitted within the ID-6.

R&D uses in the ID-6 will be required to meet the following requirements:

- All research, testing, fabrication, storage, loading, and related activities shall occur entirely within an enclosed building. No outdoor activity is permitted.
- Fabrication, assembly, or processing shall be limited to prototype or pilot-scale development only and shall be clearly incidental and subordinate to the research function.
- Retail sales, wholesale distribution, and customer pickup of goods are prohibited.

Staff have identified the following accessory uses within the district:

Bicycle Facilities (P)

Community Activity (P, T)

Construction Trailer/Office (P, T)

Parking Structures (C)

Utilities – Essential Services (P)

This is intended to address standard public and private utilities that are necessary for the operation of the site. This does not include alternative modes of utility delivery.

Utilities – Renewable Energy - Geothermal (P)

Solar energy is an established permitted accessory use within the City of Dublin and would be permitted in the ID-6 if it met the existing regulations. Additional renewable energy sources on individual sites (ex. wind, nuclear, natural gas, etc.) would not be permitted for sites in the ID-6.

Vehicle Charging Stations (P)

Warehousing, Wholesaling, and Distribution (P, S)

When a use has an accessory warehousing, wholesaling, and distribution component, the use shall meet the following requirements:

- Warehousing, wholesaling, and distribution activities shall be incidental and subordinate to a principal use located on the same lot and shall function solely to support the operations of that principal use. Warehousing, wholesaling, and distribution shall not operate as a stand-alone logistics, wholesale, or bulk storage facility.
- Permitted accessory activities include the storage, staging, packaging, assembly, shipment, and limited distribution of goods, materials, equipment, or products used in, produced by, or sold as part of the principal use.
- The warehousing, wholesale or distribution of goods not created by the principal use shall be prohibited.
- The size limitation applies to the showroom space within a building, which cannot exceed 10 percent of the gross floor area of the principal structure. This is an existing requirement in the Code.

Building Height

Based on feedback received from economic development and real estate development contacts to identify an appropriate height for Flex Innovation-type buildings, the permitted height is proposed to be decreased from 68 feet to 45 feet within the ID-6 district. Rooftop mechanical screening is also required to meet the 45-foot height requirement. For example, a 35-foot tall building would have approximately 10 feet to provide any rooftop mechanical equipment and screening.

Outdoor Operations/Storage/Service Areas

Several changes are proposed to address development within the ID-6 district with the intent to minimize noise and light pollution along Cosgray Road.

- All uses would be required to operate entirely within an enclosed structure.
- Outdoor storage would be prohibited on the site. This does not include mechanicals necessary for the operations within the building.
- Service bays and loading docks would be prohibited along Cosgray Road.

Setbacks from Cosgray Road / Residential

The West Innovation District Special Area Plan currently recommends a 200-foot setback and landscape buffer along Cosgray Road to buffer Flex Innovation development from existing residential development. The 200-foot building and pavement setback is included in the proposed amendments, as well as a 150-foot building and pavement setback from any existing residential zoning districts. The WID Buffer and Setback Design Manual explain the approach for landscaping and screening within the 200-foot setback required along Cosgray Road, which is outlined in the section below. Where property is adjacent to residential zoning districts that are not covered by the Design Manual (i.e. When the side or rear of the property abuts residential), developers shall provide landscape screening at an opacity of 90 percent between the residential properties and the operations of the site measured at ground level. Landscaping shall be planted in a natural pattern with mixed deciduous and evergreen trees and native understory shrubs.

Additional Code Requirements

Additional code language that will be applied to the ID-6 district, including but not limited to architectural requirements, sign requirements, lighting requirements, and lot development requirements are provided in the materials.

WID Setback and Screening Design Manual

Overview

The City contracted MKSK to evaluate the existing WID setback and screening requirements in the Code and provide recommendations to update standards that enhance the quality of screening and provide clear and predictable expectations for new development as viewed from public rights-of-way. Work follows previous Council direction to establish more robust setback and screening standards, particularly adjacent to existing single-family neighborhoods and other sensitive areas, including Darree Fields.

Current Setback and Screening Requirements - Assessment Key Findings:

- The original WID setback and screening standards were established using traditional Dublin landscape treatments that primarily focused on screening parking areas while preserving views of corporate office buildings from the public right-of-way. Development patterns in the WID are expected to be different in such that screening standards should be updated to address both parking and buildings while preserving the economic productivity of property to the fullest extent practical.
- There are opportunities to modernize landscape and planting strategies to better align with best practices that support long-term tree health, species diversity, ecological resilience, and sustainability.

- Setback areas can serve functions beyond screening by contributing to placemaking, reinforcing Dublin’s character, and providing opportunities for walking and cycling paths.

Proposed Design Manual

To implement recommendations, the WID Setback and Screening Design Manual (the Design Manual) for ID-6 is proposed as an extension of the Code. The Design Manual supplements the baseline zoning requirements of the Code, providing guidance for setbacks, landscape design, implementation and strategies to address unique conditions needed to achieve the desired aesthetic and development pattern for ID-6 as viewed from public rights-of-way. Future updates to the Design Manual may address setbacks and screening for other WID zoning districts. The draft Design Manual has been provided in the Commission’s packet.

The Design Manual is organized into five sections;

1. Overview – outlining the purpose and intent of the document,
2. Existing Site Features – identifying and describing existing site features such as mature tree rows, farmsteads and utility corridors that provide a contextual base which in instances inform application of recommendations,
3. Edge Type Setbacks - enumerating setback and screening recommendations for each specific street frontage within the proposed ID-6 district scaled appropriately based on proximity to residential areas, roadway classification, and desired public realm character, while reinforcing a consistent and high-quality identity across the WID,
4. Design Guidelines – guidelines illustrating recommendations to achieve the desired aesthetic for mounding heights, grading, form, and plantings strategies, stormwater location, incorporation of shared use paths and walks, transitions for screening between property lines as well as guidance to address special conditions such as incorporating existing farmstead into the design and landscape of setbacks and overhead high-voltage utility corridors which may limit standard screening; and
5. Landscape Planting Guidelines – listing appropriate plant types, planting instillation strategies, and maintenance recommendations.

Key Recommendations

- Cosgray Road: 200-foot building and pavement setback, incorporating 10-14-foot mounds and layered deciduous and evergreen plantings to support year-round screening along the west frontage, south of Shier Rings Road and north of the railroad.
- Shier Rings Road: 100-foot building and pavement setback, incorporating 8-foot mounds and layered deciduous and evergreen plantings to support year-round screening along the south frontage, west of Cosgray Road and east of the railroad.
- Local streets: 35-foot building and pavement setbacks with layered plantings to screen parking areas. Local streets include any future public streets in the district not recommended through the Multimodal Throughfare Plan.

Conceptual renderings and section diagrams illustrate how the setback and screening strategies can be applied to achieve the intended transition and visual quality within the Cosgray Road corridor.

Next Steps & Process

The following outlines the next steps in the process.

- 1) January 22, 2026 – Planning & Zoning Commission - Status Update / Discussion (no decision)
- 2) May 7, 2026 – Planning & Zoning Commission – Code Amendments Introduction
- 3) May 21, 2026 (tent.) – Planning & Zoning Commission – Code Amendments Second Review / Recommendation to City Council
- 4) June 8, 2026 (tent.) – City Council – Code Amendments First Reading
- 5) July 1, 2026 (tent.) – City Council – Code Amendments & Rezoning Second Reading / Determination

Following the Commission’s discussion on May 7, Staff and the consultants will amend the draft code language and setback and screening recommendations prior to the next PZC review. This is tentatively scheduled for May 21 and is intended to include a recommendation of approval to City Council by the Commission.

Discussion Questions

The Planning & Zoning Commission is asked to consider the following discussion questions:

- 1) Do the draft code amendment and setback and screening recommendations successfully address the prior feedback provided by the Commission?
- 2) What additional revisions does the Commission recommend for the code amendments?
- 3) What additional revisions does the Commission recommend for the landscape and mounding treatments within the 200-foot setback?
- 4) Additional considerations from the Commission.