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Memo

To: Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission
From: Jennifer M. Rauch, AICP, Director of Community Planning & Development
Date: January 16, 2026
Initiated By: Christopher Will, AICP, Senior Planner
Zachary C. Hounshell, Planner II
Re: 26-001ADMC – West Innovation District – ID-6, Research Transition District and the West Innovation District Setback and Buffer Study Update / Discussion

Summary

This is a request for discussion and feedback on future Zoning Code amendments to Sections 153.016 and 153.037-153.042 for the creation of the ID-6, Research Transition District in the West Innovation District (WID). Additionally, Staff will provide an update on the Setback and Buffer Study as it relates to the ID-6 district implementation.

Background

City staff began the 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 application in August 2025 and direct staff to work with stakeholders to develop targeted zoning code amendments, supported by the WID Setback and Buffer Study, to address compatibility concerns while preserving the long-term vision for Flex



Innovation development within the WID and ensuring the outcome remains consistent with the approved Envision Dublin Community Plan.

Based on this direction and public input, staff reduced the scope of this rezoning from 370 acres to approximately 144 acres, focusing on the five parcels along Cosgray Road where more sensitive zoning practices are targeted to provide additional protections, particularly as it transitions to existing residential development. The remaining area will be revisited in subsequent phases as planning efforts continue. This refined approach ensures that new standards address community concerns while remaining aligned with the recommendations of the Community Plan and the West Innovation District's strategic goals.

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 listed below, which is also provided on the City of Dublin's West Innovation District Rezoning webpage here: <https://dublinohiousa.gov/west-innovation-district-rezoning/>

February 20, 2025

The Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) reviewed the rezoning of nine parcels totaling approximately 370 acres within the West Innovation District from Rural District to ID-2, Research Flex District and ID-3, Research Assembly District. PZC recommended approval of the rezoning with no conditions. Opportunities for public comment were provided during the PZC review.

March 17, 2025

City Council held a first reading for Ordinance 06-25. Council received the first reading, and the second reading was scheduled for April 7.

April 7, 2025

Dublin City Council provided a second reading/public hearing of Ordinance 06-25– Request and approval of rezoning approximately 370 acres within the West Innovation District from R, Rural District, to ID-2, Research Flex District and ID-3, Research Assembly District. Following public comment, Council moved to table Ord. 06-25 to allow for additional review and public input.

May 8, 2025

A public meeting was held in the Council Chamber to allow staff to share information about Dublin's strategic planning efforts, the vision for the West Innovation District and the details of the proposed rezoning. Resident engagement was high, with approximately 100 attendees in person and an additional 65 viewing the meeting online. Following the presentation, residents asked questions and shared comments.

May 21, 2025

Staff met with the newly elected leaders of the Ballantrae Community Association to further the dialogue with residents and discuss the feedback received, including concerns about noise, light pollution, and traffic.

June 11, 2025

Staff met with Washington Township residents to answer questions and hear concerns regarding the proposed rezoning.

June 23, 2025

At their June 23, 2025, meeting, Council members approved a motion to hold an additional reading and continuation of the public hearing for Ord. 06-25 at the August 11 City Council meeting. This allowed additional time for staff to collaborate with residents and property owners and to understand how targeted Zoning Code amendments could be developed to reflect community input while supporting the community's long-term vision.

July 1, 2025

Staff met with Ballantrae Community Association (BCA) leadership and members of their Planning & Zoning Committee to discuss communications, development and code amendments.

July 2025

Throughout July, staff held a series of community conversations to provide residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to offer additional feedback through focused discussions with staff members. Across the sessions, approximately 100 residents and stakeholders attended and were given the opportunity to record feedback on worksheets, which are included in the packet for reference.

August 11, 2025

Responsive to feedback from residents and stakeholders, City staff members identified that targeted Zoning Code amendments were necessary to accompany the West Innovation District rezoning proposal. These future amendments recommended the incorporation of specific, actionable suggestions from neighboring residents that remain consistent with the Envision Dublin Community Plan and respect the rights of property owners within the proposed rezoning boundaries. To facilitate a coordinated review, City Council tabled Ordinance 06-25, allowing time for the Code amendments to be drafted and vetted through the public process, including review and recommendation by the Planning & Zoning Commission, followed by review and determination by City Council.

December 19, 2025

City staff met with members of the Ballantrae Community Association board on Dec. 19 to review the proposed West Innovation District ID-6 rezoning code amendments and the setback and landscape buffer study. Association leadership expressed appreciation for the draft approach, asked clarifying questions, and shared additional insights to inform the ongoing work.

January 13, 2026

City staff met with members of the Ballantrae Community Association board on Jan. 13 to review feedback received by the Association leadership. The Association shared results from a survey it had conducted with residents, and the general sentiment was similar to previous concerns expressed to City staff.

Public Comment

During the course of the rezoning process, Staff have received significant amounts of public comments concerning the application. Public comments have been provided in the Commission's packet for consideration and will be updated should Staff receive public comment ahead of the January 22 meeting.

Stakeholder Feedback

As outlined above, staff members engaged with residents in Ballantrae and the neighboring area throughout the development of the ID-6 roadmap. 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. The following summary highlights key themes gathered from industry representatives and property owners based on the language of the roadmap:

- 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 reduction of maximum building heights from 68' to 45' can satisfy industry needs for flex and research innovation space.
- Loosen use restrictions by permitting showrooms and last-mile/regional distribution (not large-scale warehousing and distribution) as suitable uses.
- Optimize site layout and circulation by relocating any future internal streets toward the railroad easement, reducing traffic impact on nearby homes.
- Clarify the difference between large data centers and co-location facilities (shared, multi-tenant facility where businesses can co-locate their hardware alongside others); allow co-location to attract high-value-add tenants without implying insufficient power capacity.
- 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 limits the 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.

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 within this rezoning request, 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."

West Innovation District – Data Centers

Given Dublin's existing zoning framework and the large acreage required for major facilities, opportunities for new data center development are limited. Staff find that further data center development is not aligned with the intended character of the WID and recommend their removal as an allowed use as part of the proposed roadmap. The proposed amendment is intended to target large-scale (hyperscale) facilities that house computer systems and related equipment for storing, managing, and processing digital information. 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. This amendment is the only proposed change to the entire WID Code. The remaining changes outlined below apply only to the properties within the proposed ID-6 boundaries.

ID-6, Research Transition District

Staff engaged McBride Dale Clarion to lead the proposed creation of the ID-6 zoning district requirements. The goal of the code is to address properties that are most sensitive to existing residential development, while achieving the general goals and recommendations outlined for Flex Innovation. Staff have provided a detailed roadmap as part of the Commission's packet, which outlines the general guidance and intent behind the proposed code language. The following is a general overview of key highlights within the roadmap.

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 approving or denying 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.

The ID-6 district is intended to achieve the following:

- Context-sensitive development is integrated into the existing natural and built environment, and transitions appropriately from existing single-family residential neighborhoods.
- Attract uses of lower intensity that are operated solely inside the building and have limited traffic, noise and lighting impacts.
- Low to medium-sized uses with lower building heights.

The ID-6 district generally aligns with the ID-2 district and reflects several of the ID-2 district's development standards. The ID-2 district served as the base for the code amendments, but the ID-6 district provides additional protections, particularly for transitioning from existing residential neighborhoods surrounding the site.

District Uses

In zoning, principal use is the primary purpose for which a property is intended and occupied, such as a business, store, or flex innovation space. Accessory use is a secondary activity that is incidental and subordinate to the principal use and is customarily associated with it, such as a garage, parking area, or storage. Accessory uses serve and support the principal use and typically cannot exist independently or exceed it in scale or intensity.

Within the ID-6, Staff have identified the following principal uses within the district:

- Advanced Manufacturing
 - This is a new use category that is intended to be industrial in nature but fully contains uses within a building.
 - These uses require a high level of unique skill training that is specific to each company and typically involves computer technology, robotics, or other innovative uses to improve a product or process.
 - This use category is intended for uses that have minimal environmental impacts, emissions, and waste; and do not create noise, odor, vibration, or hazardous byproducts detectable beyond the property line.
- Construction and Contract Services
 - The Code currently defines this use as "Facilities used for the repair of machinery, equipment, products or by-products."
 - Uses that generally fit within this category are general contractor offices, trade contractors, contractor offices with associated storage, and trade service shops
 - It is the intent of the City to prohibit these uses to operate outside the confines of the building. All operations would be required to occur within the principal structure.
- Office – General
- Office – Medical
- Parks and Open Space
- Research and Development
 - This use will be refined for the ID-6 district to primarily limit the use to a facility or designated area used for systemic or technical activities aimed at discovering new technologies, developing new products or processes, or improving existing ones.

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)
 - The intent is to allow warehousing, wholesaling, and distribution as an accessory use and prohibit it as a principal use in the ID-6.
 - Warehousing and distribution is an accessory use when it is clearly subordinate and incidental to another principal use, such as limited on-site storage supporting a manufacturing facility, contractor service areas, or laboratory facility. In this case, the storage and distribution activities serve only the on-site operation, remain secondary in area and intensity, and do not function independently of the principal use.
 - Additional considerations will be required to clarify that the intent is for limited warehousing as a supportive component of business operations, allowing storage of materials essential for their services. The intent is to encourage diverse business models while ensuring that large-scale distribution centers are not permitted.

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.

Outdoor Operations/Storage/Service Areas

Several changes are proposed to address the development of the properties along Cosgray Road:

- 1) All uses would be required to operate entirely within an enclosed structure
- 2) Outdoor storage would be prohibited along Cosgray Road
- 3) Service bays and loading docks would be prohibited along Cosgray Road

The intent of these updates would be to minimize noise and light pollution 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 roadmap, as well as a 150-foot building and pavement setback from any existing residential zoning districts. The WID Setback and Buffer Study explain the approach for landscaping and screening within the 200-foot setback required along Cosgray Road, which is outlined in the section below.

Additional Code Requirements

The roadmap outlines additional code language that will be applied to the ID-6 district, including but not limited to architectural requirements, sign requirements, and lot development requirements. Any requirement that is not explicitly stated in the roadmap but is included in the existing zoning code is intended to align with the ID-2 zoning requirements.

WID Setback and Buffer Study

Study Overview

The City has contracted with MKSK to conduct a setback and buffer study within the WID, informing future development standards and design considerations. The purpose of this study is to evaluate and recommend updates to the screening of future buildings, service areas, and parking from the public right-of-way, including streets, sidewalks, and trails, as well as from adjacent residential areas, while reinforcing the desired character of the WID public realm.

The study provides background information and guidance on buffering and screening requirements, including analysis of mound heights and slopes on both public and private sides, along with a range of planting strategies to illustrate impacts on views from the public right-of-way. It also examines appropriate setback and screening standards for site elements closest to the public realm, such as parking areas, buildings, stormwater facilities, and above-ground utilities or substations.

Additional analysis evaluates the recommended setbacks, landscape screening, and utility easements, as well as their effects on developable land; location options and impacts of required stormwater management components; and planting types and placement in relation to mounding design. The study further identifies methods for implementing desired screening outcomes through potential zoning code updates and design guidelines, with key objectives focused on incorporating sustainability practices, protecting economic viability and development potential, and establishing clear and predictable buffering and screening expectations throughout the WID.

Current Conditions Assessment

Assessing current conditions includes a review of existing zoning code requirements related to setbacks, buffering, and screening within the WID. Previous Council discussions expressed a desire for more robust buffering in areas where future WID development is adjacent to existing single-family neighborhoods. Materials provided as part of this assessment illustrate a range of built projects within the WID, including Crosby Court, Command Alkon, VA Data Centers, and Urban Air Trampoline and Adventure Park, which help inform how current standards have been applied and identify opportunities for refinement.

Key takeaways from this assessment indicate that 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. Given changes in development types and community expectations, consideration should be given to updating these standards. In some locations, additional setback depth may be needed to accommodate desired mounding and screening treatments. There are also 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 passive recreation.

Key considerations for future mound, landscape, and setback standards include:

- Mounding, with attention to appropriate heights, horizontal space needed to achieve functional and visually appealing slopes, and the use of undulation to create more natural landforms.
- Landscape and plantings, emphasizing layered planting designs, thoughtful species selection, and sustainable practices.
- Balancing setbacks and developable land, recognizing the need to maintain the WID's intent of promoting economic development and long-term competitiveness while achieving desired buffering outcomes.

Districtwide Approach

To support a cohesive and flexible districtwide approach to buffering, screening, and placemaking within the WID, three complementary landscape strategies have been identified. Together, these approaches provide a range of tools that respond to varying contexts, adjacent conditions, and visibility expectations throughout the district. Rather than applying a single solution uniformly, the strategies allow buffering and setback treatments to be 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. The different approaches are provided below:

- Enhanced Buffering: This approach features large, overlapping, and undulating sculptural mounds that vary in height and slope to create a rolling foothills landscape character. These planted mounds provide the highest level of visual screening and are particularly effective at buffering views between differing or incompatible land uses. This strategy is best suited for locations where flex and research uses are adjacent to residential neighborhoods and where a strong visual separation is desired. It is most appropriately implemented along key public arterials where sufficient horizontal space is available, as well as along corridors that directly border residential land uses.
- Traditional Landscape: This approach may be implemented with or without mounding, depending on available setback widths, and relies on dense, layered plantings to provide effective screening while maintaining year-round visual interest. A combination of native evergreen and deciduous trees, along with grassland plantings, is used to screen parking areas and smaller utility spaces, while still allowing for selective visibility of the building architecture. Where setback conditions permit, low, undulating stone walls and/or integrated stormwater features may be incorporated to enhance visual interest and functionality. This strategy is well-suited for corridors adjacent to other industrial land uses, interior roads within industrial parks, and areas where architectural elements or development features are intended to remain visible and contribute to the district's character.
- Iconic Moments: This approach emphasizes targeted areas of sculptural planting, mounding, and material interventions that highlight innovation, identity, and placemaking within the district. These locations are designed to allow greater visibility while incorporating iconic artwork, energy features, and occupiable open spaces that contribute to a distinctive and engaging public realm. Sculptural mounding and planting are particularly appropriate at key intersections and transitional locations where development is intended to be showcased or celebrated. Implementation is best focused at prominent intersections and roundabouts, primary site entrances, and transition zones between mixed-use and industrial areas, where these design elements can reinforce the district's character and create memorable gateways.

Proposed ID-6 Considerations

In addition to the districtwide approach, several ID-6-specific recommendations are provided along Cosgray Road. These include incorporating 10 to 14-foot mounds within the 200-foot setback identified in the Community Plan. Where space permits, private stormwater ponds may be located within the rear 50 feet of this setback, positioned behind the mound. Swales should be placed on the private side of the berm to direct drainage away from the building.

Evergreen plantings are intended to be concentrated on the private-side slope of the mound to provide year-round screening, while deciduous trees would be installed on the public-facing slope to create a layered, naturalized appearance. The front slope will feature no-mow or meadow grasses to reinforce a cohesive landscape character.

Two conceptual renderings illustrate how these buffer and screening strategies can be applied to achieve the intended transition and visual quality within the Cosgray Road corridor. These renderings have been provided in the Commission's packet.

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) TBD – Planning & Zoning Commission – Code Amendments First Review
- 3) TBD – Planning & Zoning Commission – Code Amendments Second Review / Recommendation to City Council
- 4) TBD – City Council – Code Amendments First Reading
- 5) TBD – City Council – Code Amendments & Rezoning Second Reading / Determination

Following the Commission's discussion on January 22, Staff and the consultants will analyze the feedback provided by the Commission, as well as public comments and stakeholder input, to begin developing the code amendments. It is anticipated that the code amendments will need to come before the Commission for introduction and final recommendation to Council. As the code amendments would be an Ordinance, the standard practice is for City Council to hold two readings before issuing a determination. The tabled rezoning ordinance would be coordinated to be heard with the second reading of the draft ordinance for the ID-6 code amendments

Discussion Questions

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

- 1) Is the Commission supportive of the code direction presented within the ID-6 roadmap?
- 2) What revisions would the Commission recommend for the ID-6 roadmap?
- 3) Is the Commission supportive of the proposed landscape and mounding treatments within the 200-foot setback?
- 4) Additional considerations from the Commission.