

# DEFINITIONS for the model floodplain zoning ordinance.

10.06.2025

Unless specifically defined, words and phrases in this ordinance shall have their common law meaning and shall be applied in accordance with their common usage. Words used in the present tense include the future, the singular number includes the plural and the plural number includes the singular. The word "may" is permissive, "shall" is mandatory and is not discretionary.

Pink highlighted definitions reflect coastal definitions

1. A ZONES – Those areas shown on the Official Floodplain Zoning Map which would be inundated by the regional flood. These areas may be numbered or unnumbered A Zones. The A Zones may or may not be reflective of flood profiles, depending on the availability of data for a given area.
2. AH ZONE – See "AREA OF SHALLOW FLOODING".
3. AO ZONE – See "AREA OF SHALLOW FLOODING".
4. ACCESSORY STRUCTURE OR USE – A facility, structure, building or use which is accessory or incidental to the principal use of a property, structure or building. An accessory structure shall not be used for human habitation.
5. ALTERATION – An enhancement, upgrade or substantial change or modification other than an addition or repair to a dwelling or to electrical, plumbing, heating, ventilating, air conditioning and other systems within a structure.
6. AREA OF SHALLOW FLOODING – A designated AO, AH, AR/AO, AR/AH, or VO zone on a community's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) with a 1 percent or greater annual chance of flooding to an average depth of 1 to 3 feet where a clearly defined channel does not exist, where the path of flooding is unpredictable, and where velocity flood may be evident. Such flooding is characterized by ponding or sheet flow.
7. BASE FLOOD – Means the flood having a one percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, as published by FEMA as part of a FIS and depicted on a FIRM.
8. BASEMENT – Any enclosed area of a building having its floor sub-grade on all sides.
9. BREAKAWAY WALL – A wall that is not part of the structural support of the building and is intended through its design and construction to collapse under specific lateral loading forces, without causing damage to the elevated portion of the building or supporting foundation system.
10. BUILDING – See STRUCTURE.
11. BULKHEAD LINE – A geographic line along a reach of navigable water that has been adopted by a municipal ordinance and approved by the Department pursuant to s. 30.11, Stats., and which allows limited filling between this bulkhead line and the original ordinary highwater mark, except where such filling is prohibited by the floodway provisions of this ordinance.

12. CAMPGROUND – Any parcel of land which is designed, maintained, intended, or used for the purpose of providing sites for nonpermanent overnight use by 4 or more camping units, or which is advertised or represented as a camping area.
13. CAMPING UNIT – Any portable device, no more than 400 square feet in area, used as a temporary shelter, including but not limited to a camping trailer, motor home, bus, van, pick-up truck, or tent that is fully licensed, if required, and ready for highway use.
14. CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE – A certification that the construction and the use of land or a building, the elevation of fill or the lowest floor of a structure is in compliance with all of the provisions of this ordinance.
15. CHANNEL – A natural or artificial watercourse with definite bed and banks to confine and conduct normal flow of water.
16. COASTAL FLOODPLAIN – An area along the coast of Lake Michigan or Lake Superior which is inundated by the regional flood and which is also subject to additional hazard due to wave runup.
17. COASTAL HIGH HAZARD AREA – An area of special flood hazard extending from offshore to the inland limit of a primary frontal dune along an open coast, and any other area subject to high velocity wave action from storms.
18. CRAWLWAYS or CRAWL SPACE – An enclosed area below the first usable floor of a building, generally less than five feet in height, used for access to plumbing and electrical utilities.
19. DECK – An unenclosed exterior structure that has no roof or sides and has a permeable floor which allows the infiltration of precipitation.
20. DEPARTMENT – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
21. DEVELOPMENT – Any artificial change to improved or unimproved real estate, including, but not limited to, the construction of buildings, structures or accessory structures; the construction of additions or alterations to buildings, structures or accessory structures; the repair of any damaged structure or the improvement or renovation of any structure, regardless of percentage of damage or improvement; the placement of buildings or structures; subdivision layout and site preparation; mining, dredging, filling, grading, paving, excavation or drilling operations; the storage, deposition or extraction of materials or equipment; and the installation, repair or removal of public or private sewage disposal systems or water supply facilities.
22. DRYLAND ACCESS – A vehicular access route which is above the regional flood elevation, and which connects land located in the floodplain to land outside the floodplain, such as a road with its surface above regional flood elevation and wide enough for wheeled rescue and relief vehicles.
23. ENCROACHMENT – Any fill, structure, equipment, use or development in the floodway.
24. FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) – The federal agency that administers the National Flood Insurance Program.
25. FLOOD INSURANCE RATE MAP (FIRM) – A map of a community on which the Federal Insurance Administration has delineated both the floodplain and the risk premium zones applicable to the community. This map can only be amended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
26. FLOOD or FLOODING – A general and temporary condition of partial or complete inundation of

normally dry land areas caused by one of the following conditions:

- The overflow or rise of inland waters;
- The rapid accumulation or runoff of surface waters from any source;
- The inundation caused by waves or currents of water exceeding anticipated cyclical levels along the shore of Lake Michigan or Lake Superior; or
- The sudden increase caused by an unusually high-water level in a natural body of water, accompanied by a severe storm, or by an unanticipated force of nature, such as a seiche, or by some similarly unusual event.

27. **FLOOD FREQUENCY** – The probability of a flood occurrence which is determined from statistical analyses. The frequency of a particular flood event is usually expressed as occurring, on the average once in a specified number of years or as a percent (%) chance of occurring in any given year.
28. **FLOODFRINGE** – That portion of the floodplain outside of the floodway which is covered by flood waters during the regional flood and associated with standing water rather than flowing water.
29. **FLOOD HAZARD BOUNDARY MAP** – A map designating approximate flood hazard areas. Flood hazard areas are designated as unnumbered A-Zones and do not contain floodway lines or regional flood elevations. This map forms the basis for both the regulatory and insurance aspects of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) until superseded by a Flood Insurance Study and a Flood Insurance Rate Map.
30. **FLOOD INSURANCE STUDY** – A technical engineering examination, evaluation, and determination of the local flood hazard areas. It provides maps designating those areas affected by the regional flood and provides both flood insurance rate zones and base flood elevations and may provide floodway lines. The flood hazard areas are designated as numbered and unnumbered A-Zones. Flood Insurance Rate Maps, that accompany the Flood Insurance Study, form the basis for both the regulatory and the insurance aspects of the National Flood Insurance Program.
31. **FLOODPLAIN** – Land which has been or may be covered by flood water during the regional flood. It includes the floodway and the floodfringe and may include other designated floodplain areas for regulatory purposes.
32. **FLOODPLAIN ISLAND** – A natural geologic land formation within the floodplain that is surrounded, but not covered, by floodwater during the regional flood.
33. **FLOODPLAIN MANAGEMENT** – Policy and procedures to ensure wise use of floodplains, including mapping and engineering, mitigation, education, and administration and enforcement of floodplain regulations.
34. **FLOOD PROFILE** – A graph or a longitudinal profile line showing the relationship of the water surface elevation of a flood event to locations of land surface elevations along a stream or river.
35. **FLOODPROOFING** – Any combination of structural provisions, changes or adjustments to properties and structures, water and sanitary facilities and contents of buildings subject to flooding, for the purpose of reducing or eliminating flood damage.
36. **FLOOD PROTECTION ELEVATION** – An elevation of two feet of freeboard above the Regional Flood Elevation. (Also see: FREEBOARD.)
37. **FLOOD STORAGE** – Those floodplain areas where storage of floodwaters has been taken into account during analysis in reducing the regional flood discharge.
38. **FLOODWAY** – The channel of a river or stream and those portions of the floodplain adjoining the

channel required to carry the regional flood discharge.

39. FREEBOARD – A safety factor expressed in terms of a specified number of feet above a calculated flood level. Freeboard compensates for any factors that cause flood heights greater than those calculated, including ice jams, debris accumulation, wave action, obstruction of bridge openings and floodways, the effects of watershed urbanization, loss of flood storage areas due to development and aggregation of the river or stream bed.
40. HABITABLE STRUCTURE – Any structure or portion thereof used or designed for human habitation.
41. HEARING NOTICE – Publication or posting meeting the requirements of Ch. 985, Stats. For appeals, a Class 1 notice, published once at least one week (7 days) before the hearing, is required. For all zoning ordinances and amendments, a Class 2 notice, published twice, once each week consecutively, the last at least a week (7 days) before the hearing. Local ordinances or bylaws may require additional notice, exceeding these minimums.
42. HIGH FLOOD DAMAGE POTENTIAL – Damage that could result from flooding that includes any danger to life or health or any significant economic loss to a structure or building and its contents.
43. HIGHEST ADJACENT GRADE – The highest natural elevation of the ground surface prior to construction next to the proposed walls of a structure.
44. HISTORIC STRUCTURE – Any structure that is either:
  - Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or preliminarily determined by the Secretary of the Interior as meeting the requirements for individual listing on the National Register;
  - Certified or preliminarily determined by the Secretary of the Interior as contributing to the historical significance of a registered historic district or a district preliminarily determined by the Secretary to qualify as a registered historic district;
  - Individually listed on a state inventory of historic places in states with historic preservation programs which have been approved by the Secretary of the Interior; or
  - Individually listed on a local inventory of historic places in communities with historic preservation programs that have been certified either by an approved state program, as determined by the Secretary of the Interior; or by the Secretary of the Interior in states without approved programs.
45. INCREASE IN REGIONAL FLOOD HEIGHT – A calculated upward rise in the regional flood elevation greater than 0.00 foot, based on a comparison of existing conditions and proposed conditions which is directly attributable to development in the floodplain but not attributable to manipulation of mathematical variables such as roughness factors, expansion and contraction coefficients and discharge.
46. LAND USE – Any nonstructural use made of unimproved or improved real estate. (Also see DEVELOPMENT.)
47. LOWEST ADJACENT GRADE – Elevation of the lowest ground surface that touches any of the exterior walls of a building.
48. LOWEST FLOOR – The lowest floor of the lowest enclosed area (including basement). An enclosed space as provided in s. 5.3(2)(f), is not considered the building's lowest floor.
49. MAINTENANCE – The act or process of ordinary upkeep and repairs, including redecorating, refinishing, nonstructural repairs, or the replacement of existing fixtures, systems or equipment with equivalent fixtures, systems, or structures.

50. MANUFACTURED HOME – A structure transportable in one or more sections, which is built on a permanent chassis and is designed to be used with or without a permanent foundation when connected to required utilities. The term "manufactured home" includes a mobile home but does not include a "mobile recreational vehicle."
51. MOBILE/MANUFACTURED HOME PARK OR SUBDIVISION – A parcel (or contiguous parcels) of land, divided into two or more manufactured home lots for rent or sale.
52. MOBILE/MANUFACTURED HOME PARK OR SUBDIVISION, EXISTING – A parcel of land, divided into two or more manufactured home lots for rent or sale, on which the construction of facilities for servicing the lots is completed before the effective date of this ordinance. At a minimum, this would include the installation of utilities, the construction of streets and either final site grading or the pouring of concrete pads.
53. MOBILE/MANUFACTURED HOME PARK, EXPANSION TO EXISTING – The preparation of additional sites by the construction of facilities for servicing the lots on which the manufactured homes are to be affixed. This includes installation of utilities, construction of streets and either final site grading, or the pouring of concrete pads.
54. MOBILE RECREATIONAL VEHICLE – A vehicle which is built on a single chassis, 400 square feet or less when measured at the largest horizontal projection, designed to be self-propelled, carried or permanently towable by a licensed, light-duty vehicle, is licensed for highway use if registration is required and is designed primarily not for use as a permanent dwelling, but as temporary living quarters for recreational, camping, travel or seasonal use. Manufactured homes that are towed or carried onto a parcel of land, but do not remain capable of being towed or carried, including park model homes, do not fall within the definition of "mobile recreational vehicles."
55. MODEL, CORRECTED EFFECTIVE – A hydraulic engineering model that corrects any errors that occur in the Duplicate Effective Model, adds any additional cross sections to the Duplicate Effective Model, or incorporates more detailed topographic information than that used in the current effective model.
56. MODEL, DUPLICATE EFFECTIVE – A copy of the hydraulic analysis used in the effective FIS and referred to as the effective model.
57. MODEL, EFFECTIVE – The hydraulic engineering model that was used to produce the current effective Flood Insurance Study.
58. MODEL, EXISTING (PRE-PROJECT) – A modification of the Duplicate Effective Model or Corrected Effective Model to reflect any man-made modifications that have occurred within the floodplain since the date of the effective model but prior to the construction of the project for which the revision is being requested. If no modification has occurred since the date of the effective model, then this model would be identical to the Corrected Effective Model or Duplicate Effective Model.
59. MODEL, REVISED (POST-PROJECT) – A modification of the Existing or Pre-Project Conditions Model, Duplicate Effective Model or Corrected Effective Model to reflect revised or post-project conditions.
60. MODERATE WAVE ACTION AREA (MoWA) – A special flood hazard area subject to the potential for breaking wave heights of greater than or equal to 1.5 feet, but less than 3 feet, where the primary source of flooding is astronomical tides, storm surges, seiches, and/or tsunamis. A MoWA is an area within zone AE on a FIRM that is between the inland limit of zone VE and a Limit of Moderate Wave Action, where identified. (Also known as "coastal A zone")

61. **MUNICIPALITY or MUNICIPAL** – The county, city or village governmental units enacting, administering, and enforcing this zoning ordinance.
62. **NAVD or NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM** – Elevations referenced to mean sea level datum, 1988 adjustment.
63. **NGVD or NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM** – Elevations referenced to mean sea level datum, 1929 adjustment.
64. **NEW CONSTRUCTION** – Structures for which the start of construction commenced on or after the effective date of a floodplain zoning regulation adopted by this community and includes any subsequent improvements to such structures.
65. **NON-FLOOD DISASTER** – A fire or an ice storm, tornado, windstorm, mudslide, or other destructive act of nature, but excludes a flood.
66. **NONCONFORMING STRUCTURE** – An existing lawful structure or building which is not in conformity with the dimensional or structural requirements of this ordinance for the area of the floodplain which it occupies. (For example, an existing residential structure in the floodfringe district is a conforming use. However, if the lowest floor is lower than the flood protection elevation, the structure is nonconforming.)
67. **NONCONFORMING USE** – An existing lawful use or accessory use of a structure or building which is not in conformity with the provisions of this ordinance for the area of the floodplain which it occupies. (Such as a residence in the floodway.)
68. **OBSTRUCTION TO FLOW** – Any development which blocks the conveyance of floodwaters such that this development alone or together with any future development will cause an increase in regional flood height.
69. **OFFICIAL FLOODPLAIN ZONING MAP** – That map, adopted and made part of this ordinance, as described in s. 1.5(2), which has been approved by the Department and FEMA.
70. **OPEN SPACE USE** – Those uses having a relatively low flood damage potential and not involving structures.
71. **ORDINARY HIGHWATER MARK** – The point on the bank or shore up to which the presence and action of surface water is so continuous as to leave a distinctive mark such as by erosion, destruction or prevention of terrestrial vegetation, predominance of aquatic vegetation, or other easily recognized characteristic.
72. **PERSON** – An individual, or group of individuals, corporation, partnership, association, municipality, or state agency.
73. **PRIMARY FRONTAL DUNE** – A continuous or nearly continuous mound or ridge of sand with relatively steep seaward and landward slopes immediately landward and adjacent to the beach and subject to erosion and overtopping from high tides and waves during major coastal storms. The inland limit of the primary frontal dune occurs at the point where there is a distinct change from a relatively steep slope to a relatively mild slope.
74. **PRIVATE SEWAGE SYSTEM** – A sewage treatment and disposal system serving one structure with a septic tank and soil absorption field located on the same parcel as the structure. It also means an alternative sewage system approved by the Department of Safety and Professional Services, including a substitute for the septic tank or soil absorption field, a holding tank, a system serving more than one structure, or a system located on a different parcel than the structure.

75. PUBLIC UTILITIES – Those utilities using underground or overhead transmission lines such as electric, telephone and telegraph, and distribution and collection systems such as water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer.
76. REASONABLY SAFE FROM FLOODING – Means base flood waters will not inundate the land or damage structures to be removed from the floodplain and that any subsurface waters related to the base flood will not damage existing or proposed buildings.
77. REGIONAL FLOOD – A flood determined to be representative of large floods known to have occurred in Wisconsin. A regional flood is a flood with a one percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, and if depicted on the FIRM, the RFE is equivalent to the BFE.
78. SAND DUNES – Naturally occurring accumulations of sand in ridges or mounds landward of the beach.
79. START OF CONSTRUCTION – The date the building permit was issued, provided the actual start of construction, repair, reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition, placement, or other improvement was within 180 days of the permit date. The actual start means either the first placement of permanent construction on a site, such as the pouring of slab or footings, the installation of piles, the construction of columns, or any work beyond initial excavation, or the placement of a manufactured home on a foundation. Permanent construction does not include land preparation, such as clearing, grading, and filling, nor does it include the installation of streets and/or walkways, nor does it include excavation for a basement, footings, piers or foundations or the erection of temporary forms, nor does it include the installation on the property of accessory buildings, such as garages or sheds not occupied as dwelling units or not part of the main structure. For an alteration, the actual start of construction means the first alteration of any wall, ceiling, floor, or other structural part of a building, whether or not that alteration affects the external dimensions of the building.
80. STRUCTURE – Any manmade object with form, shape and utility, either permanently or temporarily attached to, placed upon or set into the ground, stream bed or lakebed, including, but not limited to, roofed and walled buildings, gas or liquid storage tanks, bridges, dams and culverts.
81. SUBDIVISION – Has the meaning given in s. 236.02(12), Wis. Stats.
82. SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE – Damage of any origin sustained by a structure, whereby the cost of restoring the structure to its pre-damaged condition would equal or exceed 50 percent of the equalized assessed value of the structure before the damage occurred.
83. SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT – Any repair, reconstruction, rehabilitation, addition or improvement of a building or structure, the cost of which equals or exceeds 50 percent of the equalized assessed value of the structure before the improvement or repair is started. If the structure has sustained substantial damage, any repairs are considered substantial improvement regardless of the work performed. The term does not include either any project for the improvement of a building required to correct existing health, sanitary or safety code violations identified by the building official and that are the minimum necessary to assure safe living conditions; or any alteration of a historic structure provided that the alteration will not preclude the structure's continued designation as a historic structure.
84. UNNECESSARY HARDSHIP – Where special conditions affecting a particular property, which were not self-created, have made strict conformity with restrictions governing areas, setbacks, frontage, height, or density unnecessarily burdensome or unreasonable in light of the purposes of the ordinance.

85. VARIANCE – An authorization by the board of adjustment or appeals for the construction or maintenance of a building or structure in a manner which is inconsistent with dimensional standards (not uses) contained in the floodplain zoning ordinance.
86. VIOLATION – The failure of a structure or other development to be fully compliant with the floodplain zoning ordinance. A structure or other development without required permits, lowest floor elevation documentation, floodproofing certificates or required floodway encroachment calculations is presumed to be in violation until such time as that documentation is provided.
87. WATERSHED – The entire region contributing runoff or surface water to a watercourse or body of water.
88. WATER SURFACE PROFILE – A graphical representation showing the elevation of the water surface of a watercourse for each position along a reach of river or stream at a certain flood flow. A water surface profile of the regional flood is used in regulating floodplain areas.
89. WELL – means an excavation opening in the ground made by digging, boring, drilling, driving or other methods, to obtain groundwater regardless of its intended use.