



CERTIFICATION PROGRAM POLICY MANUAL

This policy manual is a set of comprehensive guidelines adopted by the NCAZO Board of Directors for the purpose of administering the NCAZO Zoning Official Certification Program.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Zoning Official's Certification Program is a voluntary certification for local government zoning officials in North Carolina sponsored by the North Carolina Association of Zoning Officials (NCAZO) with the assistance of the School of Government at Chapel Hill, N.C. The purposes of the program are to:

- 1) Serve the public of the state of North Carolina and the Management of local government,
- 2) Recognize achievement of an established level of competency and proficiency among zoning officials,
- 3) Promote the continuing professional development of zoning officials,
- 4) Enhance the stature of the work of zoning officials and their professional image.

This policy manual is a set of comprehensive guidelines adopted by the NCAZO Board of Directors (Board) for the purpose of administering the NCAZO Zoning Official Certification Program (the Certification Program). The Board shall have the authority to amend the policy, as it deems necessary. The committee may submit to the board, recommendations for amendments to the policy. All amendments proposed by the Certification Committee shall be voted on by the NCAZO Board of Directors.

II. THE CERTIFICATION COMMITTEE

- A. The Committee shall be a standing committee appointed by the Board and is responsible for overseeing the administration of the Certification Program.
- B. The Committee shall be comprised of two members from Western North Carolina, two members from Central North Carolina, two members from Eastern North Carolina, and two members at large. The boundaries defining each region shall be those adopted by the Board. Members of the School of Government faculty may serve on the Committee as faculty advisors.
- C. Once appointed, the Committee member may serve a four (4) year term. Terms shall run with the fiscal year beginning August 1st and ending in July 31st. The Board shall appoint two new members to the Committee each year at the NCAZO annual conference commencing in 1998. A member may not serve more than two consecutive terms. Only by approval of the Board, a Committee member may serve one additional term to fill a vacancy; provided the vacancy is within their district or an "at large" position. When a vacancy arises, the Board shall appoint a member to fulfill the unexpired fiscal year from the district in which the vacancy occurred. When a vacancy occurs after January 1st of a fiscal year, the appointee's term will not begin until August 1st in the new fiscal year. A chairperson appointed by the Board shall preside over all Committee meetings and is responsible for setting the time and place of all Committee meetings.

- D. A Vice-Chairperson shall be appointed by the Committee members and shall act in the absence of the Chairperson until such time as the Board appoints a new Chairperson
- E. One Committee member appointed by the Committee shall act as Secretary to the Committee. The Secretary shall be responsible for recording the proceedings of each Committee meeting in writing and furnishing the Committee members with copies of those proceedings.
- F. Should a member of the Committee have two or more unexcused absences from meetings, as determined by the committee, within a fiscal year, that member shall be removed from the Committee and a replacement shall be appointed to fulfill the unexpired term. Committee members may be asked to serve on subcommittees as needed. Teleconferencing is an additional means to hold meetings of the committee and shall be scheduled in advance with all members and held to the same standard as above.
- G. A quorum shall be present prior to the Committee's conduction business. A quorum shall consist of the majority of members.
- H. All decisions affecting the Certification Program shall be decided by a majority vote.
- I. Any member appointed to the Certification Committee must be a member in good standing of the NCAZO and a Certified Zoning Official as designated by the NCAZO. If at any time any member of the committee finds that they do not have the support of their jurisdiction and cannot fulfill their duties, they may request that another individual be appointed from the district they represent, and request possible reappointment at a later date.
- J. The chair of the certification committee will be responsible for all record keeping and verification. If needed, the chair can assign other committee members or volunteers. Electronic records will be kept, maintained and stored in a fashion that will allow future boards and chairs to maintain. The chair of the certification committee needs to understand the amount of commitment needed to fulfill the duties not only with the maintenance program, but to continue supporting the certification course as well as the members of the committee. In appointing members of the certification committee, the chair or president needs to verify with any proposed potential candidate their commitment, availability, and approval from their supervisor or department head.

III. THE CERTIFICATION COURSE

- A. The Certification Course shall be offered on a regular basis and shall be sponsored cooperatively by the NCAZO and the School of Government.
- B. The length of the Course shall be a minimum of five (5) days and shall consist of a minimum of thirty (30) hours of class time, including the certification exam.
- C. The course shall be comprised of classroom instructional sessions which will address the following topics:
 - 1) Investigative Techniques
 - 2) Zoning Equipment and Personal Safety
 - 3) Maps and Geographic Information Systems

- 4) Office Practices and Record Keeping
- 5) Dealing with Conflict and Difficult Situations
- 6) Public Records Law
- 7) Legal Issues of Field Enforcement
- 8) Ethics and Conflict of Interest
- 9) Zoning Inspectors and Local Government Liability
- 10) The Zoning Officer in the Courtroom and During Discovery
- 11) Other Zoning Topics

The content and length of each session may vary slightly from one course offering to the next and may be adjusted by the Committee as needed and/or as proposed by the School of Government faculty.

- D. The minimum and maximum number of participants permitted to attend each course offering shall be determined by the School of Government faculty member who serves as the course director. In the event that an insufficient number of participants exist in order to financially underwrite a course offering for a particular year, that course offering may be cancelled at the discretion of the School of Government.
- E. Email notification of course dates, registrations, and fees requirements will be sent out via the NCAZO web address to all NCAZO members and will be posted on the NCAZO webpage.

IV. ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTIFICATION AND PREREQUISITES FOR COURSE

- A. Only local government zoning officials shall be eligible for certification. A local government zoning official is defined as anyone who is actively engaged in reviewing development plans, interpreting the zoning ordinance, making field inspections, preparing cases for the Zoning Board of Adjustment, and enforcing the ordinance through administrative or judicial actions, or some combination of these activities. Experience as a zoning official shall not include drafting zoning ordinance provisions, preparing recommendations concerning adoption or amendment of a zoning ordinance, or performing the clerical work associated with zoning administration unless these activities are clearly incidental to work as a zoning official. In addition, a candidate for certification must also be either employed by a North Carolina city or county or must be designated a zoning official according to an agreement with such a local government.
- B. A candidate for certification must successfully pass the certification examination in order to become a Certified Zoning Official.
- C. A candidate for certification must attend the certification course offered cooperatively by the NCAZO and the School of Government. . In order to complete the course, a participant may miss no more than the equivalent of one full day of the course.
- D. In order to qualify for the certification course, a candidate must have the equivalent of at least five years of experience as a zoning official in the state of North Carolina or have completed the week long “Introduction to Zoning course” offered by the School of Government and have at least two years of experience as a zoning official in the

- state of North Carolina. The Committee reserves the right to require verification of work experience listed as part of the application for attending the Certification Course. Initial questions of eligibility shall be determined by the School of Government faculty member who serves as the course director. Appeals of their decisions shall be made to the Committee.
- E. Out of state certifications will only be considered towards the five (5) years of experience requirement. Up to three years may be contributed to the out-of-state experience and/or certification and the remaining two (2) years must be in the State of North Carolina. A request for consideration of out-of-state experience must be submitted to the chairperson of the Certification Committee.
 - F. In the event that insufficient space exists to accept all qualified candidates into a given course offering, candidates shall be selected randomly from the pool of qualified candidates whose applications are received by the specified deadline. Preference shall be given to an applicant who is eligible for the course, and who have filed a timely application, but whose application for previous course offering was not accepted despite the applicant's eligibility for such a previous course.
 - G. The course fee will be set at a rate to cover the cost of conducting the course and the cost of the certificate. Fee changes shall be approved by the Certification Committee upon recommendation of the School of Government faculty member who serves as course director.

V. THE CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION

- A. A written examination for certification shall be given to certification course participants on the last day of the course. The examination is open to individuals who meet the eligibility for certification requirements.
- B. The examination shall consist of thirty (30) multiple choice questions which shall be chosen from a pool of potential examination question kept on file by the Committee and the School of Government. While questions may vary from one examination to the next, overall content and level of difficulty shall remain the same. Examination questions shall be taken from materials presented in the course sessions, texts concerning the law and administration of zoning in North Carolina, the North Carolina General Statutes, and other appropriate sources.
- C. The amount of time given for the examination participants to complete the examination shall be one and one half hours.
- D. The examination shall be "open book" type format in which participants are permitted to reference course notes and other needed texts during the examination.
- E. Examination participants must successfully answer at least twenty-one (21) of the thirty (30) examination questions in order to receive their certification.
- F. Examination scores shall be made available to the Committee Chairperson and to the School of Government faculty coordinator for the course. All examination records shall be housed at the School of Government. Examination scores shall be given only to the examination participant and not to any present or future supervisory personnel.
- G. Individual reviews of examination questions with an examination participant shall be given only by members of the School of Government faculty and the Committee

- Chairperson. Examination participants shall not be permitted to retain copies of the examination.
- H. Any course participant who fails the examination the first time is permitted to retake the examination a second time. Any participant who fails the examination a second time must fully attend the certification course again before they can retake the examination. A participant may retake the course an unlimited number of times, provided that space is available in the course offerings. No preference in acceptance shall be given such a participant for any subsequent offering of the course.
 - I. An opportunity to retake the examination will be offered at the next certification course offering or at some other occasion prior to it such as the next NCAZO scheduled workshop or conference. Those individuals wishing to retake the examination may notify the School of Government faculty certification course coordinator of their desire to do so.
 - J. An examination review session shall be held at the NCAZO mid winter workshop or conference for individuals who request to attend one.
 - K. Examination participants who successfully complete the examination shall be designated as Certified Zoning Officials by the NCAZO and shall receive a certificate from the organization.
 - L. Once certification is obtained, certification maintenance requirements become effective. These requirements are outline in the NCAZO Certification Maintenance document.
 - M. CZO's who leave the zoning field and/or move out-of-state, must contact the certification chair and request certification be "tabled". Upon the individuals return to the zoning field in North Carolina, the individual must contact the certification chair, request to be added back to current status, and must obtain the required eight (8) CM hours within two (2) years of the new employment date. This includes those changing professions or retirees; not honorable members of the association.

VI. NCAZO CERTIFICATION MAINTENANCE

1. Why a maintenance program? To keep the original purpose of the certification program and the NCAZO Constitution and to achieve the goals and objectives of the maintenance program by:
 - a. Recognizing achievements of an established level of competency and proficiency among zoning officials
 - b. Promote the continuing professional development of zoning officials.
 - c. Enhance the stature of the work of zoning officials and their professional image
2. Who is required to obtain certification maintenance?
 - a. Maintenance will be required after five (5) years of obtaining certification.
 - b. Retired certified zoning officials and honorary members will be exempt from the requirements for maintenance.
 - c. Anyone leaving the zoning field may request their certification be placed on hold until such time they return to the zoning field. Upon their return to the zoning

field, the individual must contact the certification chair, request to be added back to current status, and must obtain the required eight (8) CM hours within two (2) years of the new employment date.

NOTE: For those individuals that completed the 1991-2004 courses, the minimum hours will start August 1st, 2009 and the date for completion of the minimum 8 hours will be July 31, 2011.

3. Minimum number of hours required

- a. Eight (8) hours of class time every two years, of which a minimum of 1 hour each should be on ethics and current or recent legal changes (i.e. legislation). Each educational session for maintenance credits must be on the level of a zoning official with at least seven years of experience.

4. Number of expected to pursue certification maintenance

- a. A letter will be sent to all individuals that have successfully completed the certification program. All letters will be sent to the last known address and attempts to notify individuals whose letters are returned will be the duty of the certification chair. There are well over 500 CZO certifications that have been awarded since 1991. All CZOs prior to 2009 certification are required to obtain eight (8) CM hours by July 31, 2011. All other CZOs are required to begin obtaining their required eight (8) CM hours at their five (5) year anniversary when they were CZO certified.

5. How will the credit hours obtained be recorded?

- a. There is an electronic registration database for all NCAZO functions. The certification chair will supply a sign in sheet at each session of a conference or workshop and the member will indicate whether or not they require a certificate of the CM hours obtained and one will be emailed to them. If requested, an electronic form can be generated and forwarded to the individual.

At this time, there should be no need for anyone outside of the association to keep or maintain the records. There is a committee assigned the duties and with the needed commitment from each member, the records can be updated as needed.

6. Will the individuals need to pay for maintenance?

Other than registration fees at the NCAZO functions, no other fees will be charged. The honor system will be implemented.

7. Availability of sessions, workshops, and conferences for a large number of individuals

- a. This proposal is designed so that an individual does not have to attend only NCAZO functions. Other association sessions such as APA, GIS, Floodplain,

Water Quality, local COG, and even in house training can supplement the credit hours required.

- b. Approved sessions, topics, of other providers will be placed on the NCAZO web site with a link to the certification chair for individuals that have any questions.
 - c. Video taping of sessions held at a NCAZO function may be coordinated with the chair of each workshop and or conference and pre approved by the certification committee and the board of directors for placement in a library for individuals to receive credit hours. The video of these sessions must be of good quality. Each video will be dated, content indicated, and number of approved hours allowed. Documentation will be maintained as to the content of the video and who those individuals are that are requesting to view these videos, if they wish to obtain credit hours from the material. The charge for renting of the videos will be adopted by the Board of Directors and disclosed on the web site.
 - d. Video sessions may be produced by the certification committee and the board of directors or other appointed members at any time, but if intended for certification maintenance, the session must meet the minimum criteria adopted for the maintenance program. Each video must be a minimum of ½ hours (30 complete minutes of instruction).
 - e. If an individual attends a session on ethics, dealing with conflicts, board of adjustment, etc. outside a NCAZO function, that individual will need to send to the certification chair a certificate or other documentation such as an agenda that indicates the topic, hours of the session and the instructor for review.
8. What type of sessions will be approved?
- a. Any session that is zoning related and includes such topics as investigative techniques, zoning equipment and personal safety, maps and GIS , office practices, conflict and difficult situation, public records law, field enforcement, and others. A list of typical sessions, comparable sessions, will be posted on the NCAZO home web site along with a direct link to the certification chair for potential topics for the committee to review.
 - b. The chairs of each NCAZO workshop and conference will include a minimum of 4 hours of available sessions for certification maintenance. There shall be a minimum of four (4) hours of direct zoning related topics such as Board of Adjustment, variances, special use, appeals, required in the total 8 (eight) hours of continuing education credits.
9. Are there to be approved providers?
- a. Typical providers for maintenance will be NCAZO, APA, FEMA, Water Quality, DEHNR, local Council of Governments, AACE and others. As part of the goals and objectives and as stated in our constitution, we may affiliate with other associations and organizations. In some instances, local in house training by a municipal or county government can be approved, depending on subject matter. No fees are to be requested from any outside provider.

- b. Comparable providers out of state will be considered based on subject matter and as well as the instructors with approval by the certification committee.
10. Is there a requirement for the qualifications of an instructor?
- a. Instructors shall exhibit advanced knowledge of the material being taught, (as approved by the NCAZO Board of Directors and chairs of the workshop or conference), and possess a certificate or certification in the related field, if applicable, and/or a letter of standing by someone with knowledge of the instructor's ability to lead such a class/course.
 - b. A minimum of eight (8) years of experience in the field is required to hold an instructor position. (Less time may be approved by the Certification Committee with supporting verification of experience from their peers or by a recognized professional association)
11. Will courses of related programs held in other states be approved?
- a. As with the certification program, consideration for approving courses and training from other states will be evaluated on a case by case basis.
 - b. Documentation will be required indicating the subject matter, instructor, contact information, hours of credit generated and possible other information not expressly listed here. The review will be conducted by the certification committee and the faculty from the SOG in charge of the NCAZO certification program.
12. What is the appeal process?
- a. Anyone requesting verification of an approved session, provider, or hours of credits earned, may at any time notify the certification committee in writing of their question or concern for an official opinion. All information concerning the question shall be submitted such as but not limited to, topic, instructor, hours of class time, and time, date, and location of the course.
 - b. The certification committee will hear the matter within 30 days of receiving the appeal form. Discussion and decisions may be conducted at a formal meeting of the committee, by conference call, or electronic mail. A decision of the certification committee will be sent, in writing, to the person making the request as well as to the instructor of the course if applicable.
 - c. Anyone wishing to appeal any decision of the certification committee on any approved session, comparable courses, or hours earned, can file a formal appeal with the board of directors. All appeals must be in writing and include the question and the decision of the certification committee. An official appeal form will be placed on the web site.
13. Consequences of failing to maintain certification

- a. Unlike the North Carolina Statutes requiring building inspectors to be certified, hold an active “license”, and have continuing education, zoning officials, planners, mappers and other associations have a volunteer certification program. No official legal action can be nor will be taken against any individual not obtaining the minimum number of hours of maintenance.
- b. If an individual fails to achieve the goal of 8 hours of continuing education within the time frame allotted, the individual will be sent an official letter of notice signed by the chair of the certification committee, one of the faculty staff at the school of government, and the current president of the NCAZO notifying them that they will no longer be recognized a Certified Zoning Official and if a member, the designation of CZO will be removed from the membership list. A note will be placed in the official Certified Zoning Official list for incomplete certification maintenance requirements. If at any time they wish to become recertified, they will be required to successfully complete a certification course. If they wish to appeal the decision, they must comply with the approved appeal process.
- c. During the required time frame to obtain certification maintenance hours, a situation arises that would limit or prohibit an individual from completing or attending such courses, the member shall contact the certification chair for a request to be excused from participating as long as their required hours are rescheduled in the next available course. The chair will forward the request and their recommendation to the entire committee. All requests must be in writing and contain pertinent information as to the circumstance that will not allow maintenance within the required time frame, provided HIPPA laws are not violated. The committee as a whole has the authority to grant or deny additional time. A formal letter will be sent to the individual notifying of the granting of additional time or, if denied by the committee, a letter will be sent noting the conditions for which the extension was denied and it shall be accompanied with a formal notice of appeal application. All decisions can be made during a formal meeting, conference call, or electronic means (e mail). All decisions must be approved or denied by a quorum of the certification committee in compliance with the adopted certification policy manual.

*** In times when budget approvals for travel and/or training (workshops, conferences, etc.) are not authorized for counties or municipalities a certified zoning official may forward an official memo to the certification committee, signed by their director, manager, or supervisor, requesting their required hours of certification maintenance be deferred for a two (2) year time period approved by the committee.

VII.

Goals and Objectives

NCAZO Zoning Officials Professional Development Maintenance Program

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
<p>Promote continuing professional development for Zoning Officials in North Carolina and enhance the stature of their work and professional image.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a methodology for certifying (or qualifying) professional development programs offered by affiliate associations that line up with the primary objectives of the NCAZO. Offer these programs as part of the NCAZO Professional Development maintenance program. • Use tools such as the NCAZO website and newsletter to promote qualified continuing professional development workshops offered by affiliate associations as well as the annual NCAZO conference. • Establish a calendar of workshops, seminars, and conferences that is updated regularly and offered to NC Zoning Officials • Partner with affiliate organizations to advertise NCAZO professional development programs and programs certified by the NCAZO.
<p>Establish a level of competency and proficiency among Zoning Officials.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish guidelines for the professional development maintenance program based on years of service and continuing education hours per year. • Tests • Certifications
<p>Provide opportunities, through the NCAZO and/or partner associations, to explore and/or review new concepts in the field of zoning including but not limited to planning, code enforcement, development, and legislative changes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to offer an annual NCAZO conference that offers progressive seminars and workshops • Develop workshops outside of the NCAZO annual conference that offer Zoning Officials the opportunity to learn new concepts and expound upon their knowledge base. • Use the expertise of the NCAZO board members to identify new issues facing zoning officials and create a plan to offer professional development programs based on those needs. • Monitor the NCAZO forum to identify

GOALS	OBJECTIVES
	frequently asked questions and relevant and issues facing Zoning officials and put a plan in place to address those questions and issues.
Track Zoning Officials who participate in the program, recognize their achievements, and award professional development credits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the NCAZO infrastructure, create a method of communicating the requirements of the maintenance program to NC zoning officials. • Design a system to record and monitor NC zoning officials that participate in the program and the credits they receive (possibly in Excel or Access). • Award credit hours and certificates of achievement that demonstrate completion of the course guidelines.

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