



TOWN OF OLD LYME

ZONING COMMISSION

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TO: Old Lyme Board and Commission Members

FROM: Old Lyme Zoning Commission

DATE: 9/17/2025

RE: Comprehensive Zoning Regulation Update - Process Overview and Stakeholder Engagement

Executive Summary

The Zoning Commission is undertaking a comprehensive review and update of Old Lyme's zoning regulations - the first major overhaul in decades. This two-year initiative will modernize our regulatory framework to better serve current and future community needs while ensuring compliance with evolving state requirements. We invite your participation in this critical effort that will shape Old Lyme's development for years to come.

The Comprehensive Zoning Regulation Update will proceed in a 2-phase process as follows:

- **Phase 1: Technical Review (12 months - Currently Underway)** – This phase is internal to the Zoning Commission to clean up the current regulations and will not include any substantive changes to regulations. The process will include a state agency review and local public hearing before adoption.
- **Phase 2: Substantive Review (12 months - Beginning Spring 2026)** – This phase will start with a stakeholder engagement process that will include town boards and commissions and the general public. The process will allow for the Zoning Commission to take recommendations from all stakeholders throughout the update with numerous ways for engagement. A final state agency review and public hearing will take place before adoption.

Details of the process are contained in the following outline.

Why This Update is Essential

After careful analysis, the Zoning Commission determined that our current regulations require more than simple amendments. Over years of ad hoc changes, the document has become disorganized, redundant, and increasingly difficult to navigate for residents, businesses, and town officials alike. More critically, evolving state mandates and community needs demand a fresh regulatory approach.

Key drivers for this comprehensive update include:

- **Regulatory Compliance:** Ensuring alignment with recent Connecticut General Statutes changes, including zoning reform legislation
- **Economic Development:** Creating clearer pathways for appropriate business growth and innovation
- **Environmental Protection:** Incorporating enhanced environmental standards and climate resilience measures
- **Community Support:** Addressing evolving housing, transportation, and infrastructure needs
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Streamlining processes for applicants and town staff

Learning from Peer Communities

Several Connecticut towns have successfully completed or are in the process of completing similar comprehensive zoning updates, providing valuable lessons for our process:

Guilford completed a comprehensive zoning regulation rewrite that modernized their development standards while preserving community character. Their phased approach, similar to ours, allowed for thorough stakeholder input while maintaining regulatory continuity.

East Hartford began their comprehensive rewrite in 2019, focusing on economic development opportunities while addressing infrastructure and environmental concerns. Their process emphasized early and frequent stakeholder engagement.

Madison and **Essex** have also undertaken significant zoning updates, each emphasizing the importance of aligning regulations with their respective Plans of Conservation and Development - a key objective for Old Lyme as well.

Stonington is about one year ahead of us in this process and is also using FHI Studio for technical support. You can learn more about their process on the town's planning department website: stonington-ct.gov/planning-department/pages/comprehensive-zoning-rewrite.

Two-Phase Process Overview

NOTE: As the process advances, we will make any updates publicly available.

Phase 1: Technical Review **(12 months - Currently Underway)**

Internal Zoning Commission work with FHI Studio, regulatory compliance verification

Status: Approximately 6 months into this phase

This foundational phase focuses on "cleaning up" the existing regulations without changing their substance. Working line-by-line through the current document, we are:

- Eliminating errors, inconsistencies, and redundancies
- Improving organization and readability
- Ensuring statutory compliance
- Creating a solid foundation for substantive updates

Upon completing the initial technical review, Connecticut General Statutes require submission to relevant state agencies for comment, including:

- Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP)
- Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)
- Office of Policy and Management (OPM)
- Regional Council of Governments (as required by CGS 8-3b)

These agencies have up to 65 days to review proposed changes for consistency with state policies and regulations. The Zoning Commission will carefully consider all comments and incorporate required modifications before proceeding. State agency review will be repeated following the conclusion of Phase 2.

Following the State Agency Review, the Zoning Commission will hold a public hearing to adopt the revised regulations. Comments from the other town agencies and the public will be considered. Once the technical update of the regulations is adopted, the substantive review will begin.

Phase 2: Substantive Review **(12 months - Beginning Spring 2026)**

Continued community engagement and policy development

With a technically solid foundation in place, this phase will address the substantive policy questions

that will shape Old Lyme's future development patterns. This phase will feature extensive stakeholder engagement and public input opportunities, including additional public hearings.

At the conclusion of Phase 2, the Planning Commission will review the final draft for consistency with the Plan of Conservation & Development before the Zoning Commission votes on the new regulations according to the roles for any applications that come before it.

Board and Commission Engagement Process

Your expertise and insights are essential to this effort's success. We propose the following engagement framework:

Immediate Opportunities

- **Written Input:** Zoning Commission will not formally review submissions until Phase 2; however, we welcome submission of written comments or recommendations at any time.

Formal Consultation with Boards and Commissions

- **Collaborative Review:** The Zoning Commission will organize a workshop to give boards and commissions the opportunity to present materials and discuss issues relevant to your area of responsibility. Details about this will be shared in early 2026.
- **Collaborative Review:** Work sessions to address cross-cutting issues affecting multiple boards

Public Engagement Phase

- **Community Listening Sessions:** Multiple public forums held in local community spaces
- **Comprehensive Draft Review:** Public comments on the complete draft regulations are welcome at any time and will be included in the record.
- **Final Adoption Process:** Public hearing(s) as required by state statute

Timeline and Next Steps

Current Status (Fall 2025): Six months into Phase 1 Technical Review

Winter 2026: Complete Phase 1, submit for State Agency Review

Spring/Summer 2026: Begin Phase 2 Substantive Review with board/commission consultations

Summer/Fall 2026: Public engagement and draft finalization

Questions and Contact Information

This comprehensive update represents a significant investment in Old Lyme's future. We are committed to a thorough, inclusive process that respects both our community's values and regulatory requirements.

For questions about this process or to submit input, please contact: Eric Knapp, Land Use Coordinator; (860) 434-1605; eknapp@oldlyme-ct.gov.

We look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

This memo will be posted publicly at oldlyme-ct.gov.