

Zoning Regulation Clean-Up 3 FAQs (ZB application 222-01)

April 21, 2022

Prepared by the City of Stamford Land Use bureau

Why is the City changing the zoning?

The City is proposing this zoning change for the following reasons:

- Protect residents from inappropriate construction. Current Zoning Regulations allow air conditioning condenser units and swimming pools to be located anywhere on a property, including front yards. The proposed revision of this definition would prohibit swimming pools in front yards and require them to be set back from property lines. Air conditioning condenser units would not be permitted to extend more than four feet from the building wall.
- Correct inconsistencies in the regulations – the regulations have evolved over the course of time. Innovative new zoning rules, such as the requirement to provide amenity space for building residents, were first rolled out only in a few districts and were not consistently applied in others.
- Reorganize and simplify the regulations to make it easier for residents to look them up and to understand them.
- To make it easier to convert older, underutilized office buildings into much needed workforce housing. These existing buildings are mostly empty and mostly in downtown, because demand for office space has plummeted. They are not producing jobs, housing, or sufficient tax revenue. Converting them will fix that, giving nurses, social workers, and others who make our City work places to live affordably without relaxing existing rules.

Why is it important to make it easier to convert underutilized office space into housing?

- Conversion of office buildings is one strategy to encourage the creation of workforce housing to serve people working in Stamford who may otherwise not be able to afford to live here.
- Conversion of underutilized buildings increases tax revenue for the City and reduces the tax burden on all residents.
- Residential buildings create less burden on the city's infrastructure (for example, residential uses generally produce less traffic);
- Conversion increases the overall supply of housing, which helps keep down rents and homeownership costs;
- Reusing existing buildings is better for the environment than tearing them down and building new structures.

Are the proposed changes consistent with the Master Plan?

Yes. The Master Plan states that new housing, including workforce housing should be developed and that conversion of vacant and underutilized office buildings is a good strategy to do so.

Who decides what is consistent with the Master Plan?

Per the City Charter, the Planning Board, a Board whose members are approved by the Board of Representatives and who are residents of the City of Stamford, decides if a zoning change is consistent with the Master Plan. At its meeting on February 22, 2022, the Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of the proposed regulation change.

What do the text changes mean for single-family neighborhoods? Will it allow apartments in these areas?

The text change does not change anything for single-family neighborhoods. It does not allow apartment buildings to be built in these areas or otherwise increase the density. It will protect residents better by limiting where certain features, such as swimming pools or air conditioning condensers, can be placed on a property.

How was the public involved? Could the public comment?

As for all Zoning Regulation changes, the public can participate, as prescribed in the Charter. The Charter requires that all regulation changes require a public hearing. These hearings must be noticed twice in advance in the newspaper, and the public can sign up to receive agendas for meetings in advance by email. In addition to what is required by Charter, the Land Use Bureau also made all application material available on the website and – for this particular application – presented the proposed changes to the public on February 7, 2022. The public hearing was on February 28, 2022 and it was only closed after all members of the public had spoken.

Who is proposing this text change?

The change to the Zoning Regulations was proposed by the City of Stamford Land Use Bureau. The Land Use Bureau is tasked with advising the Zoning Board and implementing regulations on how land should be used within Stamford. It is the Zoning Board's professional, impartial staff. Staff has no personal interest in any of the land involved or applications it submits – it proposes amendments to the Zoning Regulations when in its professional judgement such amendments serve the best interest of the City and its residents and conform with the Master Plan.