



BE THE CHANGE

A PLAYBOOK FOR PRO-HOMES LAND USE COMMISSIONERS



**DESEGREGATE
CONNECTICUT**

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INTRODUCTION

So, you're on your town's planning and zoning commission, planning commission, or zoning board of appeals? And you support pro-homes land use policies that make your town or city – and Connecticut – more welcoming? Great! This “Be the Change” Playbook is for you.

The Playbook assumes you're familiar with the basics! If you want to brush up on zoning terms, visit www.desegregatect.org/definitions. If you want to brush up on Connecticut's statewide zoning enabling laws, which give local commissions their powers, visit www.desegregatect.org/laws. In addition, our team has compiled a bank of studies and reports on our website that can get you up to speed on the latest research that we keep updated.

We wrote this Playbook because we realized that many commissioners want to learn more about how they can be pro-homes and what that truly means. In this Playbook, we'll focus on 3 critical skills you need to be a pro-homes commissioner:

- A technical understanding of zoning and its role in planning.
- A practical grounding in the economic, social, and environmental benefits of reform.
- A social appreciation of your role as a commissioner.

We want you to change your town/city for good, and we're here for you! Your success locally is our success statewide. If you have questions or want to be put in touch with our network of like-minded commissioners, please be in touch at **info@desegregatect.org**!

Welcome to the Pro-Homes Movement!

We are a growing group of residents, advocates, students, business & faith leaders, and elected officials who want to see a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable Connecticut through land use reforms at all levels of government. We welcome people of all professional, political, and personal backgrounds to join our movement. Here's what we believe and want to see in pro-homes commissioners!

What Does the Pro-Homes Movement Believe?

- Everyone deserves a safe & secure home.
- The housing crisis is real and impacts every type person, family, and business.
- Restrictive zoning has helped create the housing crisis and is based on historic patterns of housing & land use discrimination.
- Restrictive zoning is harmful to our economy and our environment.
- Solving the housing & climate crises will take an "All of the Above" approach.
- Pro-homes reforms benefit all types of members of our community.
- Pro-homes reforms will make our community and our state more welcoming and equitable to all new current and new residents and businesses.

What Does It Mean to be a Pro-Homes Commissioner?

- Find the pro-homes solutions that work for your community.
- Advocate for pro-homes solutions with your neighbors and other local leaders.
- Promote pro-homes solutions in your position where ever appropriate.
- Be kind, patient, informed, and dogged in the face of resistance.
- Be a good ambassador for the pro-homes movement in Connecticut.

What Does a Pro-Homes Commissioner Do?

While you're serving, it is important for you to understand what you want to accomplish on your local commission so you can properly communicate that to your neighbors. It's just as important to understand what you can and can not accomplish, so you don't set expectations for yourself or the voters that elected you can't meet. Here's what to expect!

At the Administrative Level

- You will review applications to determine if they meet existing regulations or require special amendments to be approved.
- You must review every application with a good faith open-mindedness about if they satisfy zoning regulations or deserve amendments.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Remember the people who are not in the room when reviewing an application. Often times, the people who will live in proposed homes won't be there, so it is your job to be a voice in support of their needs.

At the Legislative Level

- You will promote pro-homes reforms to be added to your current zoning regulations that work for your community.
- *Be Pro-homes:* You need to be the voice pushing the commission to consider amending existing regulations to meet pro-homes objectives and to set up public input for them. This is the best way to make change.
- *Be Pro-homes:* You will also need to hold the commission and the community accountable for its existing planning documents including the POCD and AHP when considering projects.

At the Democratic Level

- You will encourage more democratic participation in your community's planning process, which is not generally very representative of the community's demographics, needs, or future.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Activate other local pro-homes advocates to attend meetings and speak up.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Work to make the process less burdensome to commissioners and the public.



ZONING: A PROBLEM & SOLUTION

Whether you've been a commissioner for many years or are new to public service, you probably already sense that there is something about our current zoning system that doesn't quite work for everyone. In this section, we articulate the problems zoning creates and explain the solutions offered by pro-homes zoning.

We recognize you probably weren't around when most of the laws in your zoning code were created. But you're here now! And you've got the power to change outdated laws in your town/city. Your reading this Playbook is an excellent first step.

A. What Problems Has Zoning Created?

Since we were founded in June 2020, we have heard from thousands of people about the problems that our current zoning system has created. Connecticut's status quo zoning hurts our economy, maintains inequity, and damages our environment. By "status quo zoning," we mean restrictive laws that perpetuate car-centric, low-density, single-use zoning. This favors large-lot single-family housing and that make it very difficult to build any other type of homes.

We've done more thinking about all three of these problems, and here's how we summarize them:

- THE ECONOMY PROBLEM: Restrictive zoning and costly land use review processes have limited home construction and driven up prices. The high price of housing means essential workers can't afford homes, small businesses and manufacturers can't fill jobs, and young families and minority homeowners are priced out of homeownership.
 - : More Details: [Restrictive zoning, costly review processes, and arbitrary impediments have ensured our housing supply falls short of necessary](#)

- levels. They drive up prices, which in turn makes it harder for people to find attainable housing.
- THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM: One-size-fits-all zoning laws require us to build single-family housing on large lots, which creates serious sprawl. This gobbles up our farmland and forest and pollutes our waterways. Our housing is built too far away from shops and jobs, making us a car-dependent state which contributes to the global climate emergency.
 - More Details: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has provided irrefutable evidence that the warming of our planet is caused by people. Land use laws contribute. Connecticut’s zoning laws require a minimum of one acre per house on 81% of residential land in our state. Sprawl makes us use more land for housing, which requires us to drive and build roads, and thus pollutes our waterways. Researchers have found that between 1985 and 2010, Connecticut lost 6.5% of our forests and 15% of agricultural land – primarily to sprawling residential development.
- THE EQUITY PROBLEM: Connecticut’s zoning laws overwhelmingly create the most expensive kind of housing: freestanding, single-family housing (which according to our Zoning Atlas is allowed on 91% of the land in state). This kind of zoning excludes people with diverse backgrounds and needs, including the elderly and disabled, and the working class from Connecticut.
 - More Details: In Connecticut, one in six families in our state pay more than 50% of their income on housing. Our land use laws prevent us from attracting and retaining racially and economically diverse populations.

Check out further stats and links at www.desegregatect.org and go to “Learn”

B. How Can Zoning Be Part of the Solution?

Some types of zoning laws are definitely problematic. But modern zoning laws based on data and common sense can be a solution. Later in this Playbook, we’ll talk about

specific pro-homes zoning solutions that are right for a broad range of Connecticut towns and cities. For now, just note that in general, changing zoning laws to make it easier to build diverse types of homes in cities and towns across the state is a good thing for all of us. Here's how pro-homes solutions address each of the 3 problems noted above:

- **THE ECONOMIC SOLUTION:** Pro-homes zoning reform is pro-growth. It makes it easier to create diverse homes that stimulate the economy by creating construction jobs and by increasing demand for supporting jobs in nearby shops and offices. New homes add to the property tax base – and multi-family homes contribute more taxes on a per-unit basis than single-family housing.
 - **More Details:** By creating more attainable housing options, zoning reform will make our economy work for everybody. According to one study, if we build 1,500 multi-family homes, we will generate \$271 million dollars in income and almost \$40 million dollars in revenue for state and local governments, not to mention over 3,000 jobs.
More Details: The Connecticut Business and Industry Association estimates that the state has between 90,000-100,000 jobs are unfilled and they city housing costs as a major factor.
- **THE ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTION:** Pro-homes zoning reform is pro-environment. It helps build more walkable, transit oriented communities that reduce the time we all spend in cars and the amount of land dedicated to parking. This reduces energy and infrastructure costs and gives people the variety of homes and activities they want close by. We have to build more homes, and it's smarter if we build them in places that already have infrastructure like sewers, sidewalks, and transit. This type of "in-fill density" also means we don't destroy our farms and forests.
 - Zoning reform can nestle additional homes into existing neighborhoods, using the streets, sidewalks, sewers, water lines, and stormwater systems that are already in place. Zoning reform can also help create more centralized neighborhoods where residents are able to walk from their homes to their workplaces, local businesses, and transit stations.

- THE EQUITY SOLUTION: Zoning reform that enables diverse housing will make our communities more diverse, too. More diverse neighborhoods can reduce racial disparities in access to grocery stores, child care, and vital services.
 - More Details: Studies show that children of low-income families who live in income-diverse neighborhoods make more money, go to college at higher rates, have measurably better life outcomes and benefit from lower income gaps. If you live in a city where gentrification is a concern, note to your constituents that more housing (especially larger apartment buildings) can help reduce rents for everyone.

In summary, being pro-homes means embracing zoning that produces more diverse types of homes in more accessible and sustainable places. To understand what your town needs to do better, you're going to have to dig a little deeper. Turn next to Part III, where we talk about what you need to know to make progress.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What do you need to know about your town/city to make the best decisions for your town's future? We think it comes down to three basic things: you need to know zoning, demographics, and some useful stats that might help you convince other commissioners about the need for change.

A. Your Town or City's Approach to Planning & Zoning

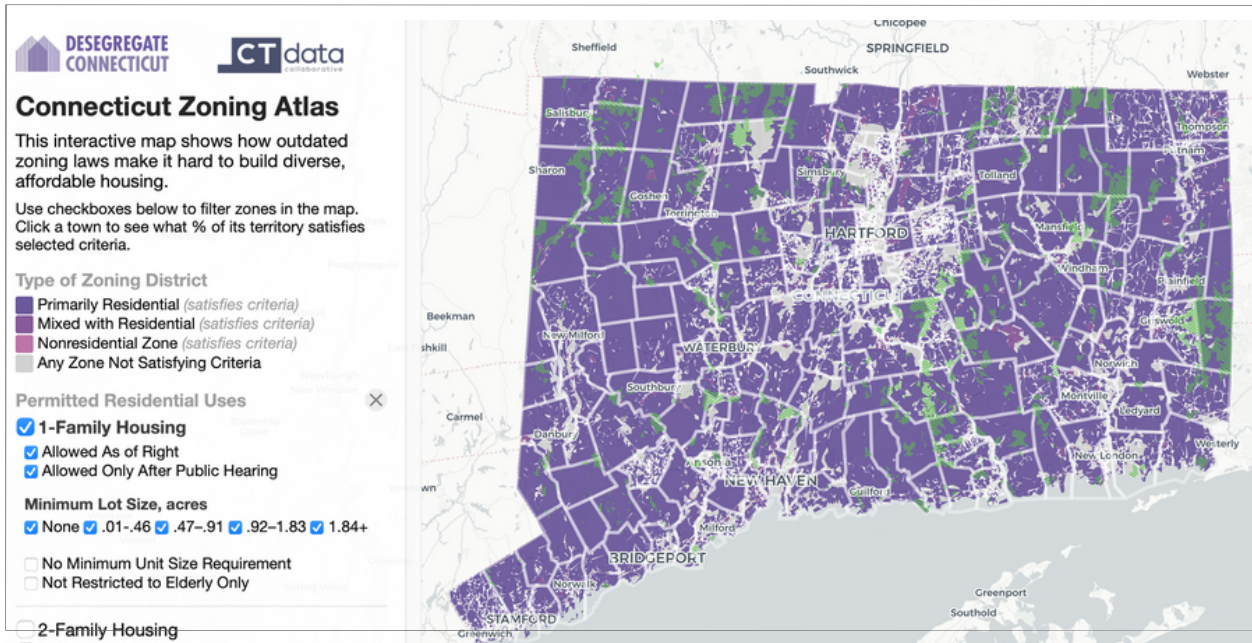
If you want to change how your community's zoning works, you should know how it works now! Every town and city in Connecticut is required to produce planning documents that serve as a guide to growth and preservation. Most zoning codes are dozens, if not hundreds, of pages long. Unless your community has done a comprehensive rezoning in recent years, the zoning code is probably the result of piecemeal edits, with hodgepodge amendments scattered throughout – and it almost certainly reflects an outdated 20th century vision.

Become familiar with these resources to better understand what is working and what isn't working. Many communities take these documents very seriously and engage in detailed public outreach and planning and reference them as projects come up. Others do not. Visit our [Local Hub](#) to find all of your local information. Currently, the state doesn't do much to hold municipalities accountable for these plans, so pro-homes advocates have to step up!

Local Zoning Code - Start by reading your town/city's zoning code, usually available on your commission's official website.

Plan of Conversation and Development (POCD) - Every municipality is required to complete a POCD every 10 years to outline the overall planning framework for the community. Does it have pro-homes priorities? When is it up for review?

Affordable Housing Plan (AHP) - A 2017 law requires that every municipality create an AHP every 5 years, but didn't specify what it should include. The Department of Housing partnered with RPA in 2020 to [provide a guideline](#). At the first deadline in June 2022, less than half submitted plans to the state. Did yours?



You should also be aware of our Zoning Atlas, which shows much of your town/city allows certain types of homes, and what types of permits are required. It also shows minimum lot sizes that are required for different types of homes, and shows where a zoning district limits homes to elderly people only. It also shows where accessory apartments are allowed, and whether certain conditions apply to them.

A step-by-step tutorial appears when you first visit the site, but we are always available to provide additional resources or information if needed.

As you review the code and the Atlas, consider a few additional issues:

- Does your zoning code primarily for large-lot, single-family housing?
 - Clicking on the tooltip in the Atlas will tell you the percentage of land requiring 1-acre or 2-acre minimum lot sizes, which are considered very exclusionary by national standards.
- Does your code to allow two, three, or four-family housing near commercial areas? Near train or bus stations?
 - Zoning for housing around shops and jobs is better for business, people, and the environment.
- Does your code align its zoning with existing sewer lines?
 - Areas served by sewer are great places to put more diverse housing options.

The last thing we will suggest is that you should compare your town/city to neighboring communities with similar aspirations and characteristics. One easy way to do this is to use the “tooltip” feature of the Zoning Atlas: that’s the little box that appears if you click within the boundaries of your municipality. You can select the characteristics you’re interested in on the left-hand menu, then click within the boundaries of the town/city, and then a number will appear showing the percentage of the community zoned for the characteristics you have selected. If another town/city is permitting more diverse types of housing than yours, does it suggest that your town/city could do more? If none of your neighboring communities permits a diverse array of homes, could yours lead the way?

B. Your Town or City’s Demographics

The other thing that you might want to understand is your town/city’s demographic makeup. The Zoning Atlas shows two demographic measures in the tooltip. First, it shows the percentage of people who identified in the last Census as non-Hispanic, non-White, which includes Black, Hispanic, Asian, and indigenous people. Second, it shows the percentage of people who are cost-burdened, meaning in the Census definition, they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. The cost-burden number may surprise you: even people in wealthy towns are overspending on housing as a portion of their income. The reason for this is that we aren’t producing enough homes, and when supply goes down relative to demand, prices go up.

After you’ve checked out those measures on the Zoning Atlas, we strongly suggest that you visit the Partnership for Strong Communities’ Housing Data Profiles. This excellent resource shows the amount, affordability, and quality of housing that each town and county provides. It identifies the number of “assisted housing” units (those whose occupants or owners receive public subsidies), the median rent, cost burdened households, home values, population changes, household income, and many other demographic characteristics.

There is a lot of additional information available from Data Haven about community well-being and from other sources on our website. Overall, these resources paint a picture that zoning has likely made homes unattainable and overpriced for too many Connecticut residents. It could be true in your community and won’t change unless you change it.

C. State Land Use Laws & Recent Reforms

Many residents (and commissioners) prefer "local control" to state laws. This is a false choice. The pro-homes movement supports smart local, regional, state, and federal collaborative planning - all working together to create more homes and better communities. Understanding the structure of our state's land use laws can help you answer your constituents' questions and understand your duties. There are several legal obligations every town and city has in Connecticut in regards to planning and zoning that we will outline in this section.

Local zoning powers are derived from the State Legislature. A century ago, the Legislature adopted the "Standard Zoning Enabling Act" (now Chapter 124 of the General Statutes) and the "Standard Planning Enabling Act" (now Chapter 126 of the General Statutes). These laws *enable* towns (including cities) to zone and plan, under certain circumstances. In fact, there have always been constraints on what types of provisions towns can place on new buildings. While these laws have been modified here and there over the last century, the basic structure of local zoning remains intact.

Some of your constituents may talk about "8-30g." In 1989, Connecticut adopted an affordable housing bill (contained in Chapter 126a of the General Statutes), known as 8-30g. It established a 10% baseline for affordable housing in each municipality, letting towns/cities decide how they would achieve that goal. Most towns have not satisfied 8-30g. You can review your town/city's status on the latest Affordable Housing Appeals list. If your town/city has not satisfied the 10% baseline, be ready to discuss how zoning reforms would make it more affordable while also enabling property owners to create the kind of housing that gets your town/city to improve its stats. More background information can be found at www.desegregatect.org/laws.

Recent Reforms. You may be aware of recently passed laws. Here's a quick primer.

The 2021 zoning reforms (aka Public Act 21-29) require municipalities to:

- Legalize accessory apartments – both attached and detached – as of right and cap costly parking mandates.
 - Note: Municipalities were allowed to "opt-out" of both of these provisions by 12/2022. Refer to our report to see if your town or city did.
- Require training and certification for land-use commissioners.

- “Affirmatively further fair housing,” making Connecticut the first state to have this requirement.
- Promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low-income and moderate-income households.
- Address significant disparities in housing needs and access to educational, occupational and other opportunities.
- Expressly require the development of housing as determined by the state's consolidated plan for housing and community development.

The 2021 zoning reforms prevent towns from enacting zoning regulations that:

- Discriminate on the basis of income source (including public assistance), income level, or “immutable characteristics” (other than age and disability).
- Cap the number of multi-family homes.
- Charge unreasonable or different fees for multifamily affordable housing or impose onerous consulting fees on property owners.
- Require housing units to be a minimum square footage, except for public health reasons like those enshrined in building and housing codes.

The 2023 zoning reforms (Aka Public Act 23-207) requires the state to:

- Establish an Office of Responsible Growth to coordinate state and local planning priorities.
- Establish a process to determine regional housing needs.
- Create a state working group to address the housing crisis.

A note on upcoming state-level reforms

- Our coalition will continue to advocate for pro-homes zoning reforms at the state level as part of our "All of the Above" approach to addressing the housing crisis in CT. It will be important to stay informed about what these reforms could mean for your community (and to help us pass them!) You can always find our state-wide legislative agenda on our website.

D. Some Useful Stats

Sifting through all of this information can be time-consuming. So we've done some the work for you. We have identified useful statistics and data that are relevant different groups of people you represent. We thought organizing it this way would help you figure out how the status quo affects different people. A helpful way to think through this issues is to think of the various stakeholders in your community.

1. Homeowners

Useful Stats:

- Single-family housing is allowed as of right on 91.1% of the land in Connecticut, making it the most dominant (and sometimes the only) type of housing. However, multi-family homes are only allowed on 2% of land.
- Accessory apartments can increase the resale value of a home by up to 50%.
- Single-family home values are not negatively impacted by multi-family or even affordable housing nearby.
- Single-family homes near multi-family homes in fact appreciate in value faster than homes in single-family neighborhoods.

Summary: These are the folks most likely to show up concerned with or opposed to reform. Highlighting the overwhelming economic evidence that they will benefit is a good start, but also highlight the likely lack of impact they will experience in their daily lives and quality of life.

2. Home renters

Useful Stats:

- The median rent in Connecticut is \$1,180.
- In the United States at large, more and more high-income people are renting their homes instead of buying them. Their demand for housing has made it harder for lower- and moderate-income people to afford housing.
- In addition, more older Americans and larger households (primarily families with kids) are renting than in prior years.
- Only 2.1% of the land in Connecticut allows four-or-more family housing as of right, meaning that more affordable rental options are few and far between.

- About 64% of Connecticut's homerenters with extremely low incomes in the state are severely cost burdened and risk becoming homeless.
- Studies have shown that a 10 percent increase in housing construction can lead to a 4 to 7 percent reduction in rents, which makes housing more affordable for all people.
- Harvard University reported that between 2012 and 2017, the number of housing units renting nationally for less than \$600 a month fell by 3.1 million.

Summary: Diverse housing options – including accessory apartments and multi-family housing – tends to be a better housing option for young, mobile professionals, and working class families. More housing means that rents become lower and more affordable. In addition, zoning that allows new, diverse housing options (including multi-family housing) can actually increase property values in single-family neighborhoods.

3. Employers

Useful Stats:

- See the stats on rental housing above.
- The Connecticut Business and Industry Association reported in 2020 that the manufacturing industry was losing jobs due to Connecticut's high cost of living, and that only 25% of manufacturing employers reported "no trouble" in retaining and recruiting young workers.
- A study of 34,000 workers found that those who commute fewer than 30 minutes per day gain seven days' worth of productive time annually.
- 64% of workers who earn less than \$50,000 said they would consider a lateral employment move if it would shorten their commute, while 60% of workers earning more than \$50,000 said the same.

Summary: When Connecticut residents spend less on housing costs, they can spend more at local businesses. We should locate housing near main streets and near publicly accessible transportation to make businesses in your community more successful and to boost Connecticut's economy.

4. Young People/Families

Useful Stats:

- Connecticut's population only grew by 1% over the past 10 years, trailing our competitor states.
- Most towns in Connecticut (likely including yours!) are facing declining school enrollments.
- For the sixth consecutive year, Connecticut's K-12 public school enrollment has decreased.
- Connecticut's child population dropped by 10% over the past decade.

Summary: Attracting new residents will expand our tax base and help pay for essential services for our aging population. Improved zoning can help Connecticut maintain its vitality while building and educating the workforce of the future.

5. Baby Boomers and the Elderly

Useful Stats:

- Connecticut has the 7th oldest population in the country.
- Baby boomers make up a third of our population, and the 65+ population projected to grow by 57% between 2010 and 2040.
- By 2030, one fifth of America's population will have reached the age of retirement.
- Connecticut's population grew by barely 1% over the past decade.

Summary: Changes to zoning laws can help seniors "age in place," by providing them with affordable and accessible housing options, like accessory apartments. With more diverse housing options, our town/city can make it possible for residents to upsize/downsize without having to look elsewhere and can make it possible for multi-generational families to live together. In addition, zoning laws that foster walkable communities can provide for older residents who, because of preference or ability, do not drive cars anymore.

6. Disabled People

Useful Stats:

- 50,000 Connecticut residents are intellectually disabled, and many rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments.
- Disabled Connecticut residents only receive \$932 per month in Supplemental Security Income benefits.
- Rent for an average one-bedroom apartment ranges from the cost of a one bedroom rental unit ranged from a low of 88% of SSI payments in the Windham County housing market area to a high of 183% in the Stamford-Norwalk housing market area.

Summary: If we want to be a state where everyone belongs, we need to change restrictive zoning laws and make housing more accessible. Ensuring accessory apartments are accessible to people with a wide range of physical abilities can ensure integration of members of the I/DD community into existing neighborhoods. Members of the I/DD community who cannot drive will also benefit if we build more housing near transit centers and commercial areas. In such housing, members of the I/DD community can live near family members, support networks, and health services while maintaining an independent lifestyle.

E. Common Anti-Homes Tropes

In addition to having some useful facts about various stakeholders, here are some short responses to specific anti-homes tropes you will hear during public meetings. You can find effective longer responses to more of these questions at desegregatect.com/faqs. Topics addressed there include:

- Common topics you'll get asked about and a quick pro-homes response:
 - Local control: We need good local planning and state planning together. We can't solve the housing or climate crisis on our own.
 - Property values: Zoning reform is good for property values. You might not want to live next to a duplex, but there are plenty of people who do.
 - Property taxes: If you don't want taxes to go up, we need more tax revenue. There are also state programs to help vulnerable populations from tax increases if they do occur.
 - Schools and enrollment: Child-age population has declined in CT. Even in towns that are growing like West Hartford or Milford, they project decreases. We have plenty of capacity in our schools.
 - Traffic: Suburban sprawl is why we have traffic, we need to get people off of roads by building walkable neighborhoods near transit.
 - Gentrification: We need to protect existing residents and more homes lower costs and lower pressure on displacement.
 - Climate change: More density reduces emissions from car trips and energy costs from big single-family houses. It also means we can protect natural spaces from development.
 - Transit ridership: Bus ridership has surpassed pre-COVID numbers, train ridership is close. But if we want more riders, we need more homes and jobs in walking distance of our stations.
- Sewer/water infrastructure: Chances are we have capacity already. But we also need more revenue to support our infrastructure as it continues to age.

F. Discussing the Legacy of Discrimination

Connecticut's history of racial segregation is a difficult but essential issue for every land use commissioner to appreciate. We live in one of the most segregated states in the nation because, for generations, federal, state, and local laws actively enforced racial exclusion. (See our Learn page, including the "[Segregated by Design](#)" video, for more on this history.) The effects of policies like redlining are still visible in our communities and institutions. Unfortunately, our land use laws did and currently do exacerbate inequality, even if commissioners are unaware or unbiased personally.

Many residents and many commissioners, of all races, are not aware that zoning has historically been used as a tool of segregation, but pro-homes commissioners have a unique opportunity to communicate that legacy to residents as part of their service. If somebody does not understand how Connecticut became segregated, it is important to treat them with respect. If we disrespect those who simply do not understand the history of segregation by labeling them as racists or bigots, we lose opportunities to educate and convince. Even when presented with this information, a person might still support local zoning restrictions that were based on racist policies, but for other reasons. This can be frustrating, but take a different approach and highlight other aspects of reforms.

Spend energy identifying and activating residents who are already aware of these issues. Then focus on those who are persuadable and just need more information and support.

We should also make a note about partisanship. We have always believed that zoning reform is a bipartisan concern. Zoning reform has been achieved on a bipartisan (and sometimes even unanimous!) basis in places like Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, Vermont, and Oregon. If zoning reform is politicized on party lines in your town/city, we suggest focusing on areas of common ground. Highlighting the economic benefits of zoning reform, whether for small businesses or for homeowners, is one example of messaging that nationally receives strong bipartisan support.

IV MAKING CHANGE AS A COMMISSIONER

So far in this Playbook, you've been exposed to key ideas, research, and statistics. Now you can put all the pieces together to develop a pro-homes vision for your town, which you can make sure is enacted as a commissioner. First, though, you have to figure out what you can and can't do in your official role. This section lays out the three levels of your responsibilities as a commissioner and then provides suggestions as to the types of reforms you can advance as a pro-homes commissioner.

A. At the Administrative Level

- You will review applications to determine if they meet existing regulations or require special amendments to be approved.
- You must review every application with a good faith open-mindedness about if they satisfy zoning regulations or deserve amendments.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Remember the people who are not in the room speaking for an application. Often times, the people who will live in proposed homes won't be there, so it is your job to be a voice in support of their needs.

As a commissioner, you will spend the majority of your time in meetings and outside of meetings reviewing zoning applications for development submitted to your municipal government. However your board or commission receives these applications, it is your job to vote for or against an approval based on a narrow reading of the application's compliance with your communities' zoning code. This may be straight forward, but often times there are questions about compliance or requests for an amendment for the application that you must deliberate over with your other commissioners.

It is important to note that the proper role of the commissioner in this setting is to review an application in good-faith and to make a good-faith determination based on your understanding of the application in the context of your community's zoning code and planning documents. You must also avoid pre-determination, the idea that you are coming into the application review process with your mind already made up. In other words, you must treat every application equally and without prior bias. It goes without saying that if you have a personal financial stake in the application, you must recuse yourself.

To be perfectly clear, a pro-homes commissioner isn't going to rubber stamp every application. You must weigh each one on its own merits and make the best judgement based on your responsibilities. If you do not believe that an application satisfies your town/city's zoning code and planning documents, you should oppose it and/or seek changes from the applicant. Despite this, as a pro-homes commissioner, expect to be accused of bias in a way that other commissioners who usually oppose applications won't be. It is not a conflict of interest to be pro-homes as long as you fulfill your responsibilities in good faith.

At the Administrative Level, focus on two things: 1) remember who is not in the room and 2) remember that facts outweigh feelings. It is very unlikely that the people who will be living in the proposed homes will be at the meeting. They need someone advocating for them. It is likely that people opposed to these homes will be there and they may be passionately against them. They may have good faith concerns that must be addressed by the applicant and commission, but they may have misplaced or even bad faith concerns. And these need to be checked, particularly if they veer into ugly territory about potential residents. Remember these short bullet points for these types of arguments (and the data sources for your town/city to draw from):

- Property values - Zoning reform is good for property values. You might not want to live next to a duplex, but there are plenty of people who do.
 - Property taxes - If you don't want taxes to go up, we need more tax revenue. There are also state programs to help vulnerable populations from tax increases if they do occur.
 - Schools and enrollment - Child-age population has declined in CT. Even in towns that are growing like West Hartford or Milford, they project decreases. We have plenty of capacity in our schools.
 - Traffic - Suburban sprawl is why we have traffic, we need to get people off of roads by building walkable neighborhoods near transit.
 - Gentrification - We need to protect existing residents and more homes lower costs and lower pressure on displacement.
 - Climate change - More density reduces emissions from car trips and energy costs from big single-family houses. It also means we can protect natural spaces from development.
 - Transit ridership - Bus ridership has surpassed pre-COVID numbers, train ridership is close. But if we want more riders, we need more homes and jobs in walking distance of our stations.
- Sewer/water infrastructure - Chances are we have capacity already. But we also need more revenue to support our infrastructure as it continues to age.

B. At the Legislative Level

- You will promote pro-homes reforms to add to your current zoning regulations.
- *Be Pro-homes:* You need to be the voice pushing the commission to consider amending existing regulations to meet pro-homes objectives and to set up public input for them. This is the best way to make change.
- *Be Pro-homes:* You will also need to hold the commission and the community accountable for its existing planning documents including the POCD and AHF when considering projects.

As a commissioner, you have a unique opportunity to shape the future of your community. You have more power than the average resident in making change, because (absent any local rules to the contrary!) you can propose general amendments to zoning laws without paying stiff application fees or doing individual mailings to each person in town. As long as a majority of commissioners agree that your amendment can proceed, it should be given a public hearing. As a pro-homes commissioner, this level is where you have the most opportunity to make pro-homes changes in your community.

How you develop a proposal for amendments is the subject of the next section. And certainly before doing anything radical, you'll want to talk with fellow commissioners and constituents. But we encourage you to explore using the route of a commission-proposed amendment, to make necessary updates in your town/city.

As you develop your proposals, you can communicate with your constituents about zoning policy and consider their feedback, as long as you remember one critical rule: don't talk with them about any "live" applications on individual projects or policies. Once an application has been submitted, you can only hear from your constituents about the application "on the record," that is, during a public hearing.

There are a number of pro-homes ideas being explored in Connecticut, but not all of them will make sense in your town/city. In the next section, we'll tell you how to collaborate with other pro-homes advocates and stakeholders to develop the pro-homes agenda that works for your community, but below are basic solutions to start with:

1. Allow Accessory Dwelling Units

- Educate people about the benefits of accessory apartments
- Make ADUs as of right on any residential lot.
- Remove excessive restrictions on size, number of bedrooms, owner occupancy and other such ideas to make ADUs more economical.
- Allow ADUs to be subdivided and sold to create affordable homeownership options.

2. Promote Missing Middle Homes

- Advocate for 2-4+ family homes to be allowed as of right in residential zones to encourage duplexes, triplexes, quads, and perfect sixes.
- Remove excessive parking requirements that raise costs and waste land.
- Document architectural standards that already work for the community so review is streamlined and not arbitrary.
- Upzone certain areas to allow for more forms of multi-family housing along public water/sewer.

3. Reduce Minimum Lot Sizes

- Reduce minimum lot sizes in large-lot areas of an acre or more.
- Develop smaller minimum lot sizes in areas served by sewer and water, which is done in Vermont (on a statewide basis).
- Allow homeowners to add a second home on larger lots and subdivide.
- Remove restrictive setback, lot coverage, and where appropriate height restrictions.

4. Create Transit Oriented Communities

- Create an as-of-right mixed-use district near your transit station(s).
- Eliminate restrictive parking requirements within a half-mile of transit
- Allow infill residential development in commercial or industrial zones around transit.
- Require certain levels of deed-restricted units for 10+ developments.

5. Explore Affordable Housing Models

- Identify publicly owned land that can be developed for mixed-used homes.
- Allow non-profit or public developers to build deeply affordable homes
- Explore creating or partnering with a Community Land Trust.

C. At the Democratic Level

- Your other role is to encourage more democratic participation in your community's planning process, which is not generally very representative of the community's demographics, needs, or future.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Activate other local pro-homes advocates to attend meetings and speak up.
- *Be Pro-homes:* Work to make the process less burdensome to commissioners and the public.

As a pro-homes commissioner, you're aware that not only zoning laws are often exclusionary, but the process of making or preserving these laws can be too. Studies have shown that commissioners and folks that show up for zoning meetings tend to be older, wealthier, and whiter than the community at large. This is in part due to how demanding the commitment to serve can be both in time and complexity and how hard it can be to make the time to attend. You can change all of that:

Inform the public: Often, local government can feel inaccessible to community members. You can use your office to involve community members in your decision making! Set up social media accounts if you haven't already - Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are good places to start. Though these platforms can be a little noisy, they are also incredibly effective at reaching people and expanding your pro-homes vision. You can make it a point to explain all of the votes you take through social media or publicize local government events for the general public.

Organize pro-homes advocates: You may be the only pro-homes commissioner serving for now, but you can change that. The more you speak up about your pro-homes vision, the more you'll move your fellow commissioners but you'll also be able to attract like-minded folks in your community. Start a groupchat, FB page, or meetup. Get folks involved in your community to attend meetings, to talk about reforms, and inspire a brighter future for your community. Having a couple of people at a meeting speaking in favor of more homes is a gamechanger.

Reduce the burden of serving: By advocating for more pro-active as of right zoning and more forward-thinking planning, you will be able to reduce the amount of work your board or commission does on a monthly basis, making it easier for more types of people to serve and to avoid burnout. Also encourage more inclusive meetings; either by changing up the times and locations or by leveraging technology to not only host virtual meetings, but to allow asynchronous public comments and votes to open up participation. Even if you're the only pro-homes commissioner, pay it forward for the next wave.



CONCLUSION

As a local commissioner, you play a critical role in advancing municipal-level reforms, making your town/city a model for good zoning, and securing more wins for the pro-homes movement. In turn, your voice as a pro-homes commissioner will help spur statewide change. As we saw in the last legislative session, local commissioners and planning staff play a key role in crafting legislation, implementing policy provisions, and championing reform.

Along the way, we invite you to join the pro-homes movement across the state and to work in partnership with our organization. DesegregateCT is dedicated to seeing our state become more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable. Our support for your time as a commissioner is informed by the recognition that statewide legislation isn't enough to make Connecticut more equitable, more economically strong, or more environmentally sustainable.

It's gonna take an "All of the Above" approach, which means your unique perspective for your community is exactly what we need! Local land use commissioners have the authority and power to make our towns and cities places everyone can call home.



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