



BE THE CHANGE

A PLAYBOOK FOR LAND USE ADVOCATES



www.desegregatect.org

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INTRODUCTION

So you're ready to step up to advocate at the local level? And you support "pro-homes" policies that make your town – and Connecticut – more welcoming? Great! This "Be the Change" Playbook is for you.

The Playbook will give you 4 critical tools you need to succeed:

- The Basics of Zoning: What is zoning, and why is it important? And what are the key zoning terms you'll need in your advocacy?
- How Your Town Zones: How can you use the Zoning Atlas to better understand how your town treats housing?
- Top 4 Zoning Reforms to Pitch: What are the hot topics you should push your public officials to support?
- Your Advocacy Game Plan: How do you share your voice with public officials, at meetings, and in the media?

We want your pro-homes advocacy to succeed, 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 advocates, please be in touch at [**info@desegregatect.org**](mailto:info@desegregatect.org)!



THE BASICS OF ZONING

To be the best advocate for pro-home zoning reform, you've got to know the basics. So what is zoning, and why it is important?

A. What is Zoning?

Zoning creates different districts in your town and says how land uses, structures, and lots are treated in each district.

When it comes to **land uses**, a zoning code could say that a factory is allowed in one district, but not in another. It could say that multifamily housing is allowed, allowed with lots of conditions, or not allowed at all. There are principal uses, which are the main uses on a lot, and accessory uses, which are usually smaller than the principal use. We'll talk more about accessory apartments, which are built on the same lot as a single-family home, in Part V of this Playbook.

When it comes to **structures**, a zoning code will often dictate the height, size, and even design of new buildings. It will also dictate the footprint of the building by saying where a building can be located on a lot, and how large the building can be relative to the size of the lot. New housing is affected by these rules. For example, if the maximum height in a district is two stories, and the allowable footprint is small, it will be really hard to build a multifamily apartment building.

When it comes to **lots**, a zoning code will indicate how big a lot has to be. Many towns have several zoning districts for single-family housing, and the only difference between them is the number of acres people must have before they can build a house on their land. We'll talk about minimum lot sizes in Part V of this Playbook.

B. Why is Zoning Important?

Zoning codes are important because they dictate virtually everything that gets built in Connecticut. Every Connecticut town has zoning (or, in the case of Bethlehem and Eastford, subdivision laws that act just like zoning laws). In Part IV, you'll learn how to figure out how your town zones for new housing.

Given that zoning is so powerful, it's important to get it right. DesegregateCT exists because we think too many of our zoning codes have gotten it wrong. Simply put: **Connecticut's status quo zoning hurts our economy, damages our environment, and creates inequities.** We think about this problem in 3 parts:

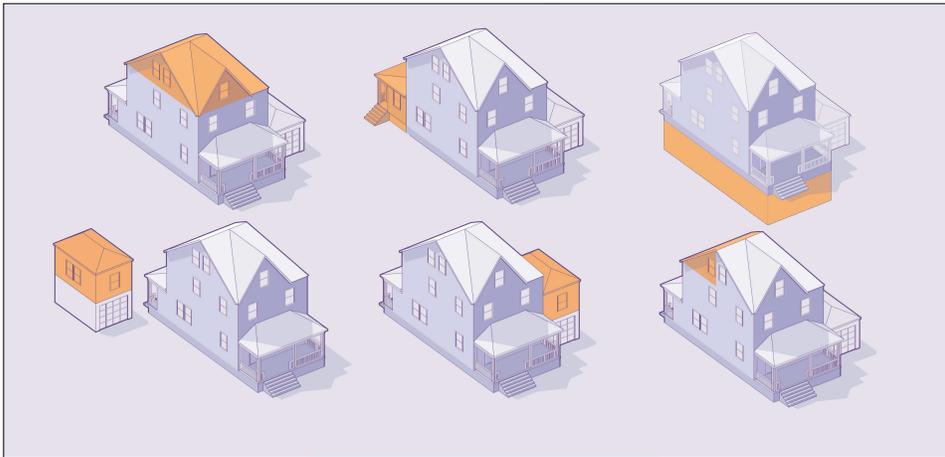
- **THE ECONOMY PROBLEM:** Restrictive zoning and costly land use review processes have stopped housing production and driven up prices. The high price of housing means essential workers can't afford housing, small businesses and manufacturers can't fill jobs, and young families and minority homeowners are priced out of homeownership.
- **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 and contributing to an international climate emergency.
- **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, from Connecticut.

If we all work together to advocate for the types of zoning reforms proven to address these issues, Connecticut will be a better place.

C. A Zoning Dictionary

As you go out and advocate for better zoning, you need to have at your fingertips a few key terms and their meanings. Updates will always be available at www.desegregatect.org/definitions.

ACCESSORY APARTMENT: Also known as an accessory dwelling unit (ADU), this term refers to a smaller home on the same lot as a larger home. State laws enable this type of housing to be built in a separate building, like a garage, or on the third floor or back of the primary home.

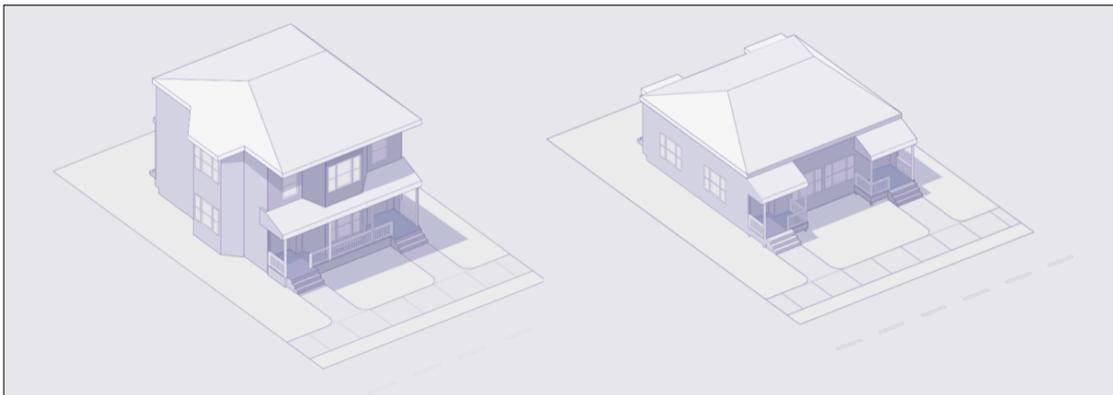


AS OF RIGHT: As-of-right means that project applications are reviewed for their compliance with the zoning code by town staff, without needing to undergo a public hearing, variance, or special permit/exception. If an as-of-right application meets the criteria outlined in the zoning code, it will be approved.

DIVERSE HOUSING: This broad term describes housing options that go beyond single-family zoning, including: accessory apartments, multi-family housing, and mixed-use developments. Here are some examples of diverse housing!



DUPLEX: A single building that contains two homes. They can be stacked, as shown in the below image at left, or side by side, as shown on the right.



EXCLUSIONARY ZONING: Zoning that ends up keeping people, particularly low-income people and people of color, out of certain communities. Scholars usually say that large-lot single-family zoning is the most exclusive.

FOURPLEX: A single building that contains four homes. It can come in many configurations!

HOMERENTER: Someone who rents his or her home. We have started to use this term to ensure people who rent are given as much dignity and value as people who own their own homes.

INCLUSIONARY ZONING: Zoning that sets aside a percentage of units to be affordable. This is not a term that refers to zoning being inclusive in the general sense.

MIXED-USE ZONING: A type of zoning that allows for both residential and commercial development, often in the same building. For example, buildings with retail shops on the ground floor and housing on the upper floors are mixed-use buildings.

MULTIFAMILY HOUSING: This term means different things to different people, but when we talk about multifamily housing, we usually distinguish between two units (duplexes), three units (triplexes), or four-or-more units.

OVERLAY ZONE: A specific type of zone that can be mapped on top of an existing zone.

PRIMARY DWELLING: Also known as a main unit, this term means a larger home on the same lot as an accessory apartment.

TRANSIT-ORIENTED COMMUNITY: A mixed-use neighborhood centered around an existing transit station.

TRANSIT STATION: We define a transit station as a fixed station, like a platform for passenger or commuter rail (Amtrak, Hartford Line, Metro North, and Shoreline East) or bus rapid transit (CTfastrak), not a bus stop.

TRIPLEX: A single building that contains three homes. It can come in many configurations, including the common arrangement, the stacked flats, shown below.



ZONING ENABLING ACT: The state law that delegates zoning authority to towns and establishes regulations within which towns can zone.

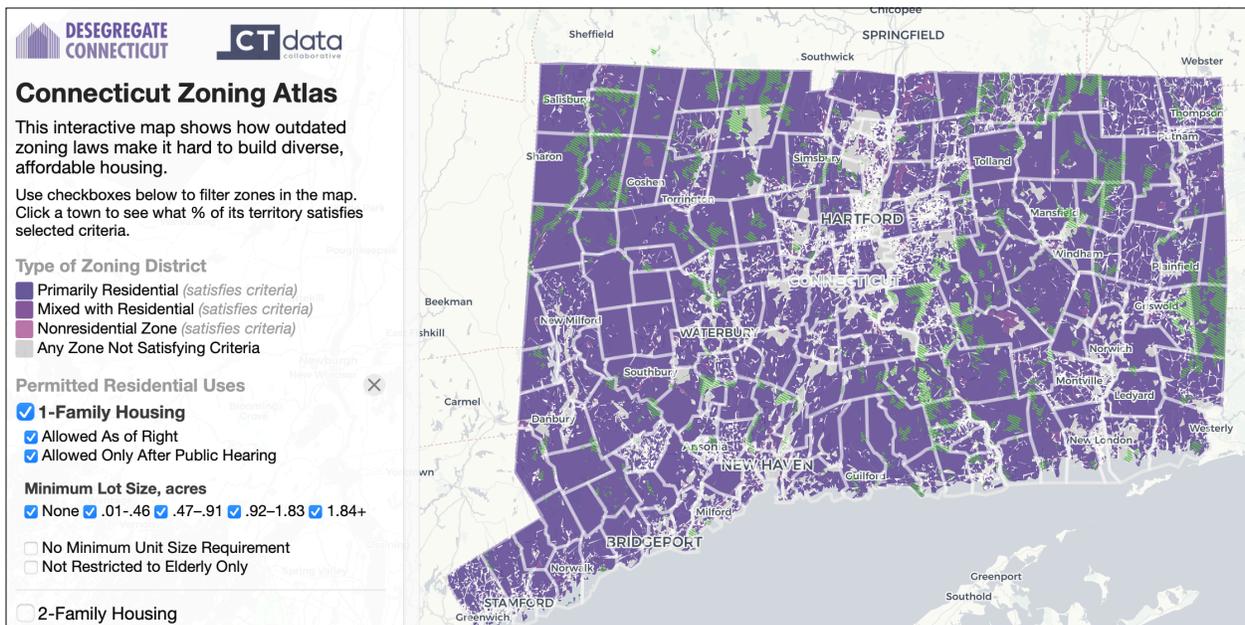


HOW YOUR TOWN ZONES

Understanding how your town zones is critical to understanding whether you need to advocate for some or all of the zoning reforms we describe in Part IV.

First, you should know that the zoning code consists of two parts: a text, which says in words what each district allows, and a map, which shows where the districts are located. You might get ambitious and download your town's zoning code (both the text and the map) to make some sense out of it. Often times, these codes are very difficult to understand.

So we've got a better idea. You can see your town's zoning code translated into an interactive map, online at www.desegregatect.org/atlas.



Our Zoning Atlas will show you how much of your town allows certain types of housing, and what types of permits are required. 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. One thing to remember are that every time you select new criteria on the left-hand side of the screen, the land matching the criteria is shown in purple (which comes in three different shades, depending on the way we've classified the zones). Another thing to remember is that you can move your cursor inside your town and click once - and a little gray box will appear showing what percentage of your town allows the housing you've selected on the left. You might be surprised at what you find!

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

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

IV TOP 4 ZONING REFORMS TO SUPPORT

So far in this Playbook, you've been exposed to zoning and key concepts, and you have learned how to figure out whether your town is doing well or poorly. Now you can put all the pieces together and delve into a few of our substantive suggestions.

In addition to these ideas, we encourage you to check out our arguments for reducing or eliminate minimum parking requirements, online at www.desegregatect.org/parking.

1. More Small-Scale (2-4 Family) Housing

If your town imposes onerous public hearing requirements on 2-4-family housing, you could propose that the town write zoning regulations to permit this type of housing "as of right." More information is at www.desegregatect.org/walkable.

Why:

- Small multi-family homes increase housing supply without significantly changing the look and feel of existing neighborhoods
- They encourage walkable communities that enable residents to walk to school, entertainment, and shops
- They bring more foot-traffic and consumers, thus stimulating local businesses

Who Benefits:

- Homeowners seeking to live in walkable neighborhoods
- Home renters or first-time home buyers who cannot afford to rent or own a single-family home
- Elderly or disabled individuals seeking an independent lifestyle where they also can live close to family members
- Local businesses who benefit from having more consumers closer to their business
- Property owners seeking to increase the value of their homes

Ideas for Change:

- Advocate for 2-family housing to be allowed as-of-right in your town, or at least within a 10-minute walk of downtown/commercial areas
- Reduce parking requirements that prevent multi-family housing
- Document architectural standards that already work for the community so review is streamlined and not arbitrary
- Upzone certain areas of town to allow for more forms of multi-family housing

2. More Accessory Apartments



If your town has outdated restrictions on accessory apartments, you could propose updating them to ensure that they are permitted as of right everywhere single-family housing is allowed.

More information, including the one-page summary at left - is at www.desegregatect.org/adv. We can also produce one-page summaries of how your town treats accessory apartments, for use in your advocacy.

Why:

- Accessory apartments are naturally affordable, meaning that they are budget-friendly because of their size
- Accessory apartments reduce sprawl because they are built where housing already exists
- Accessory apartments are environmentally efficient – their small size means they use less electricity and water
- Accessory apartments increase housing supply without changing the look and feel of the neighborhood

Who Benefits:

- Homeowners looking for naturally affordable housing
- Property owners seeking to increase property value and generate rental income
- People with disabilities seeking independent living situations close to home

- Seniors looking to downsize or live close to family
- Young people seeking to live where they work or grew up

Ideas for Change:

- Educate people about the benefits of accessory apartments
- Campaign to “opt in” to the 2021 reforms that legalized accessory apartments statewide
- Lift any bans and onerous permitting requirements on accessory apartments
- Establish programs/discussions which educate property owners on the benefits of accessory apartments and their creation in your town

3. More Multifamily Housing Near Transit Stations



If your town has a train (or CTfastrak) station (or areas with clustered bus stops), you could propose allowing diverse types of housing to be created around those stations.

More information - including the one-page summary at left - is at www.desegregatect.org/toc. We can also produce one-page summaries of how the areas around specific transit stations are zoned for housing, for use in your advocacy.

Why:

- Equitable transit-oriented communities (ETOCs) reduce reliance on cars, leading to less pollution and cleaner air
- ETOCs increase affordable housing supply by allowing naturally affordable housing as well as income-based housing
- ETOCs create jobs and promote denser communities, stimulating local business
- ETOCs generate new town tax revenue by increasing the supply of taxable property

Who Benefits:

- Communities of color and working-class individuals most reliant on public transit

- Homeowners desiring more affordable housing options
- Local property owners who can increase the value of their property by building more densely on it
- Employers near transit who benefit from increased foot traffic
- Employers on transit lines who have access to a growing workforce
- Town officials seeking to increase tax revenues and the grand list (listing all taxable property in town)

Ideas for Change:

- Advocate for a diverse housing types to be allowed as-of-right near your transit station(s)
- Eliminate all minimum parking requirements within a half-mile of transit
- Advocate that a percentage (such as 10%) of the housing near transit be deed-restricted affordable

4. Smaller Lot Sizes

If your town has large minimum lot sizes (as 81% of Connecticut does), you could propose allowing homeowners to subdivide their land or put more than one unit on their lot. More information is at www.desegregatect.org/lots.

Why:

- Reduces sprawl and cuts back vehicle emissions
- Reduces surging housing costs by allowing more housing creation in existing neighborhoods
- Enables denser neighborhoods with greater walkability
- Grows a town's tax revenue by increasing housing on land that was previously not generating the higher tax rates that housing does

Who Benefits:

- People who care about climate change and want to make our air and water cleaner

- Home renters and first-time homeowners seeking more affordable housing options
- Property owners seeking to subdivide lots and increase wealth
- Towns that can disperse taxes among more taxpayers, thus decreasing taxes for everyone but increasing tax revenues to fund schools, essential services, and infrastructure improvements

Ideas for Change:

- Reduce minimum lot sizes in large-lot areas of an acre or more
- Allow homeowners to add a dwelling unit to larger lots
- Develop smaller minimum lot sizes in areas served by sewer and water, which is done in Vermont (on a statewide basis)



YOUR ADVOCACY GAME PLAN

You're armed with information and ideas. Now what? In this section, we will provide you with all the tips you need for an effective advocacy game plan. First, speak with local officials. Then, urge your community to act on the urgent need for zoning reform. You can also write op-eds and letters to the editor. And, when a housing proposal finally makes it to a land use commission agenda, you can speak at a public meeting about the proposal.

1. Speak with Public Officials

Your public officials, whether they are members of the city council, board of selectmen, planning commission, or zoning board, are there to represent your interests. How will they know what your interests are, if you don't tell them? We strongly suggest making an appointment to speak with them to let them know that you are "pro homes" and that you expect to see change in your community.

We are happy to help prepare you for this kind of meeting, and to provide you with some ideas to share with your public official. You could go further and organize your community for change, discussed next.

2. Organize Your Community

Your local officials may need support in choosing common-sense zoning reforms. There's nothing more effective than ensuring they hear from their own community! Here are some tips to help you build power and mobilize allies in your community:

- **Set a goal.** Organize around a concrete policy that will help you or your community. The more concrete, the more effective your organizing will be! Government bodies can react specifically to concrete demands.

- **Identify power in your community.** Once you have a concrete goal, figure out who has the power to make that policy change. Is it a town council? A mayor? A planning and zoning commission?
- **Choose a strategy.** Align your strategy with who has power, and what your relationship with them is. Is the planning and zoning commission elected? You may need to get enough people to influence electoral outcomes. Are you good friends with the mayor? Maybe getting coffee with your friend will be enough!
- **Choose your scale.** The scale of your organizing depends on the size of your town. The more people in your town, the more people you'll need to be persuasive. Finding 10 people to join you is a good first goal for most towns in Connecticut.
- **Start with your current circle.** It's tempting to try to organize the most influential people or try to find people who already care about zoning. Instead, the easiest way to organize is to talk to people who already trust you and persuade them that zoning reform matters.
- **Tell your own story.** The most persuasive information you can offer to the people you're organizing is your own story. Why do you personally care about this? Don't feel pressure to make it dramatic. As long as it's about you, people will be compelled.
- **Set a deadline.** It's easy to delay organizing work and hope that someone else will do it. If you want to organize your community, set deadlines for yourself for number of conversations and your ultimate goal.

3. Write Op-Eds or Letters to the Editor

If you're interested in expressing your support for zoning reform, an op-ed or letter to the editor of your local paper is a great place to start. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Figure out where and how to submit.** Look on the website of your local paper for form or an email address (e.g., editor@townpaper.org) to send your writing to.
- **Be concise.** Most papers limit letters to the editor to 300 words or less, and op-eds to 700 words or less.
- **Make it personal.** Write about why you want zoning reform in your community, and why you care about racial equity, affordable housing, the environment, or the local economy.
- **Emphasize the overall goal.** We need more abundant housing and more diverse types of housing. At the same time, cite specifics, including our resources, available at www.desegregatect.org/data.
- **Be civil.** Tone matters. Assume that people who have different views are expressing those views in good faith.
- **Spread the word.** Point folks to our website to learn more about our proposals, data, and coalition.

4. Speak at Public Meetings

So you've spoken to your officials, gotten your community organized, and written op-eds. Now you hear that there's an application for an individual housing application or for a housing-related policy change on the land use board's agenda. Great!

Speaking at a public hearing is a great way to make your voice heard. Your goal is to persuade. How you speak is as important as what you say. Here are some tips to get you in the right mindset:

- **Be factual and polite.** Thank the decision-makers for their willingness to hear from the public.

- **Identify yourself.** Then, state your name, address, and whether you support or oppose the proposal.
- **Address the decision-makers.** Direct your comments to the board or commission, not other speakers or the applicant. Use titles and last names if addressing one directly ("Chair X," "Commissioner Y," etc.).
- **Make it personal.** Decision-makers respond to personal stories that illustrate why something matters to you. Talk about how the proposal could affect you, your family, or the community at large.
- **Know what you're asking for.** For hearings on specific projects, you should ask the body to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the project. For hearings on changing the zoning regulations (which would affect many parcels or projects), you should make suggestions on the drafted language and encourage adoption, modification, or rejection of the change. For hearings to develop city/town plans, consider asking for clear benchmarks (number targets) for housing to be included and make sure creating abundant, diverse housing is a top plan priority. In any situation, you can speak broadly about the equity, economic, and environmental benefits of building a more inclusive community.
- **Prepare in advance.** Take notes, write out your speech or bullet points, and if you can, practice in advance. It's OK to read from a phone.
- **Mind time limits.** Usually, testimony is limited to 2 or 3 minutes per speaker. You can say about 125 words per minute comfortably. The decision-makers may let you go over time, but read their body language. If they're annoyed, they might ignore your message.
- **Submit written comments.** You can submit written comments to supplement spoken comments during a meeting. (Bring multiple hard copies if attending in person!) You can also submit written comments if you can't attend a meeting at all. In that case, confirm with the recipient that your comments will be read in full into the record.

Sometimes, commissions will let speakers speak again to respond to points raised. To correct commonly-perpetuated myths about housing, consider arming yourself with answers to our Frequently Asked Questions, online at www.desegregatect.org/faqs!

VI CONCLUSION

As an advocate, you play a critical role in advancing reforms at the local and state levels. At the local level, you can help make your town a model for good zoning, and secure more wins for the pro-homes movement. In turn, we need you to be active in statewide advocacy efforts, because we also need statewide change. As we saw in the last legislative session, change is possible.

Along the way, we invite you to work in partnership with our organization. DesegregateCT was started in June 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd, when public awareness of racial inequities in American society was rapidly growing. Today, we have a deeper understanding that one of the most powerful manifestations of racial inequity in America is housing segregation, which was established in part through restrictive zoning.

We are grateful for your willingness to get educated and mobilized in service of change. We're available to help however we can! Stay in touch.



www.desegregatect.org