

City of Bristol Zoning Regulations Update

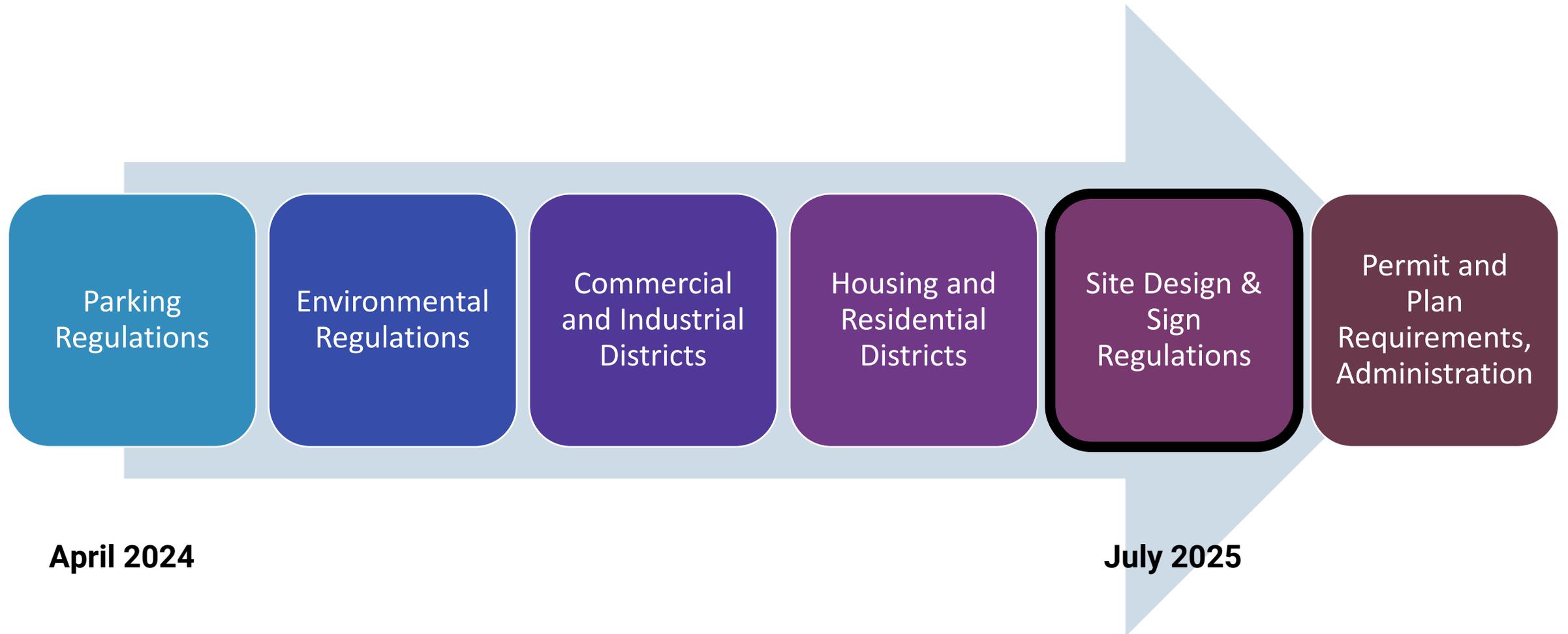
Zoning Commission Meeting 7/24/25



Agenda

1. Review of zoning update schedule
2. Review new recommendations
3. Review of recommended outdoor lighting regulations
4. Review of recommended sign regulations
5. Review of access management recommendations
6. Additional Items:
 - Landscaping and fence requirements
 - Posting of properties
 - Average finished grade
 - Data centers
7. Next Steps

Phase 3: Work Sequence



April 2024

July 2025

New Recommended Amendments

R37: A Zone Bulk Standards

What it does:

- Reduces side and rear yard requirements in all zones.
- Allows for potential reduction of front yard standard to match abutting zones.
- Increase impervious coverage limits.
- Increase density from 12 to 20 units per acre if site abuts a state highway.



City of Bristol Comprehensive Zoning Update

Date: 6/26/25

Recommendation 37: A Zone Bulk Standards

Purpose: To adjust bulk standards to more closely align with the purpose of the zone and existing development in A zones. To allow higher density residential development in A zones that have the infrastructure to support such density.

Description: This amendment would modify bulk standards of Section 7.2.2. It would also allow residential density to be increased from a maximum of 12 units per acre to 20 units per acre for A zone sites abutting a state highway. This requires an amendment of Section 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 of the regulations.

Geographic Extents: A Zone only.

Potential Impacts: May allow for residential density above levels that are currently permitted in the A zone.

Context: Many developments in the A zone do not conform to existing bulk standards. Additionally, development should be concentrated in areas that have the infrastructure to accommodate a higher density of development. One of the primary impacts of increased density is traffic generation. State highways generally have more capacity to absorb additional traffic than local roads.

Recommended Zoning Amendments:

1. Adjust the bulk requirements of Section 7.2.2 (Lot, Coverage, and Setback Standards) as follows (text to be removed shown in strikethrough, text to be added shown in red)

Standard	8 units per acre or less	Greater than 8 units per acre	Single-family subdivisions
A) Minimum Lot Area	2 acres	4 acres	6,000 sf
B) Minimum Lot Frontage (ft)	50	50	60
C) Minimum Lot Width (ft)	150	200	N/A
D) Minimum Front Yard (ft)	40 ^a	40 ^a	15
E) Minimum Side Yard (ft)	25/50 ^a 20/30 ^b	25/50 ^a 20/30 ^b	6
F) Minimum Rear Yard (ft)	25/50 ^a 20/40 ^b	25/50 ^a 20/40 ^b	15
G) Maximum Building Height (ft)	40	40	35
H) Maximum Building Coverage (%)	30	35	40
I) Maximum Impervious Coverage (%)	40 50	50 60	N/A

^a May be reduced to the minimum front yard requirement of the zone or zones abutting and opposite the frontage of the parcel. If abutting or opposite more than one zone, the greater minimum front yard requirement shall apply. In no case shall the front yard requirement be reduced to less than 20 feet.

^b Applicable to yards abutting a single-family residential zoning district

R38: BD Zone Amendments

What it does:

- Removes first floor street facing prohibition on dwelling units on Main Street, South Street, and Prospect Street.
- Increases the allowed floor area for first floor residential from 35% to 50% for streets other than North Main Street, Church Street, Riverside Avenue, North Street and School Street.
- Reduces the share of frontage windows and doors from 60% to 50%.
- Removes street frontage use restrictions from commercial parking structures.



City of Bristol Comprehensive Zoning Update

Date: 6/30/25

Recommendation 38: Amend Mixed-Use and Street Wall Requirements of BD Zone

Purpose: To encourage mixed-use development by providing more flexibility in the regulations.

Description: This recommendation relaxes restrictions on the share and location of residential units at street level in a mixed-use development. More specifically, it removes the street-level, street-facing restriction on residential units facing Main Street, South Street, and Prospect Street. It increases the allowed residential floor area of street-level units on all other streets from 35% to 50%. It reduces the share of required non-residential street-facing walls from 60% to 50%. The recommendation also provides more flexibility in the use of required commercial space in a parking structure and removes the commercial space requirement from parking structures on Main Street.

This recommendation is linked to Recommendation 25, which recommends consolidation of the BD-1 and BD-2 into a singular BD zone. Recommendation 25 relocates the content of existing Section 4.3.15 (Mixed-Use Development) to an amended Section 8.4.2. As such, the content from existing Section 4.3.15 is shown below as new Section 8.4.2.D

Geographic Extents: BD zone

Potential Impacts: May encourage new mixed-use development in the BD.

Context: Demand for retail and office space is weak due to market trends partially related to the COVID pandemic. This demand is not expected to recover in the near future. By contrast, demand for housing is extremely high.

Recommended Zoning Amendments:

1. In accordance with Recommendation 25, relocate existing Section 4.3.15 to Section 8.4.2. Amend as follows (text to be removed shown in ~~strikethrough~~, text to be added shown in **red**):

8.4.2.D Mixed-Use Development

In the BD-1 zone, Dwelling units shall not be allowed at street level in that portion of a building facing ~~Main Street, North Main Street, Church Street, Riverside Avenue, North Street, or South Street; School Street, or Prospect Street.~~ On all other streets in the BD-1 zone, up to ~~35%~~ **50%** of the gross floor area of a building's street level, excluding any street-level floor area devoted to structured parking, may be occupied by dwelling units.

2. Amend the street-level, street-facing wall requirement of Section 8.4.2.B of Recommendation 25 as follows (text to be removed shown in ~~strikethrough~~, text to be added shown in **red**):

Area of street-level, street-facing walls consisting of windows and public entrance/ exit doors ("building fenestration")	Minimum of 60% 50% of such wall area devoted to non-residential uses.	The wall area shall be measured between 2 and 10 feet above the top of the building foundation. Windows and public entrance/exit doors shall contain clear or tinted glass capable of providing an unobstructed view from the outside into the building. In developments containing two or more buildings, each building shall comply with this standard independently of any other building on the lot.
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Recommended Outdoor Lighting Regulations

Existing Lighting Regulations

- The regulation of lighting is limited to Section 11.2.

11.2 Outdoor Lighting

- A. Outdoor lighting of parking areas and loading areas shall be provided by luminaires mounted on lamp posts and/or by floodlights mounted on the building.
- B. Luminaries shall be of a design appropriate to the use and the area and shall be subject to the approval of the Commission.
- C. Lamp posts shall be the minimum height necessary to provide adequate illumination, but in no case shall they exceed a height of 30 feet.
- D. Lamp posts in parking areas shall be placed within planting areas (i.e., end islands, interior islands, planting strips) and shall be recessed at least 3 feet from curbs.
- E. Light intensity at ground level shall be a minimum of 3 foot-candles and a maximum of 6 foot-candles.
- F. Walkways shall be adequately lit; the use of bollard lighting for such purpose is encouraged.
- G. Lighting shall be Dark Sky approved (as certified by Dark Sky International) and should be designed so that the filaments, light sources, reflectors or lenses are shielded with opaque material such that the light shall be directed down and shall not be visible at a height greater than 6 feet above the ground level at any lot line.

Model Lighting Regulations

There are multiple sources of model lighting ordinances aimed at reducing light pollution.



Model Outdoor Lighting Regulations for Connecticut




Outdoor Lighting Principles

Five Lighting Principles for Responsible Outdoor Lighting



Responsible outdoor lighting is

1 Useful

Use light only if it is needed

All light should have a clear purpose. Consider how the use of light will impact the area, including wildlife and their habitats.



2 Targeted

Direct light so it falls only where it is needed

Use shielding and careful aiming to target the direction of the light beam so that it points downward and does not spill beyond where it is needed.



3 Low Level

Light should be no brighter than necessary

Use the lowest light level required. Be mindful of surface conditions, as some surfaces may reflect more light into the night sky than intended.



4 Controlled

Use light only when it is needed

Use controls such as timers or motion detectors to ensure that light is available when it is needed, dimmed when possible, and turned off when not needed.



5 Warm-colored

Use warmer color lights where possible

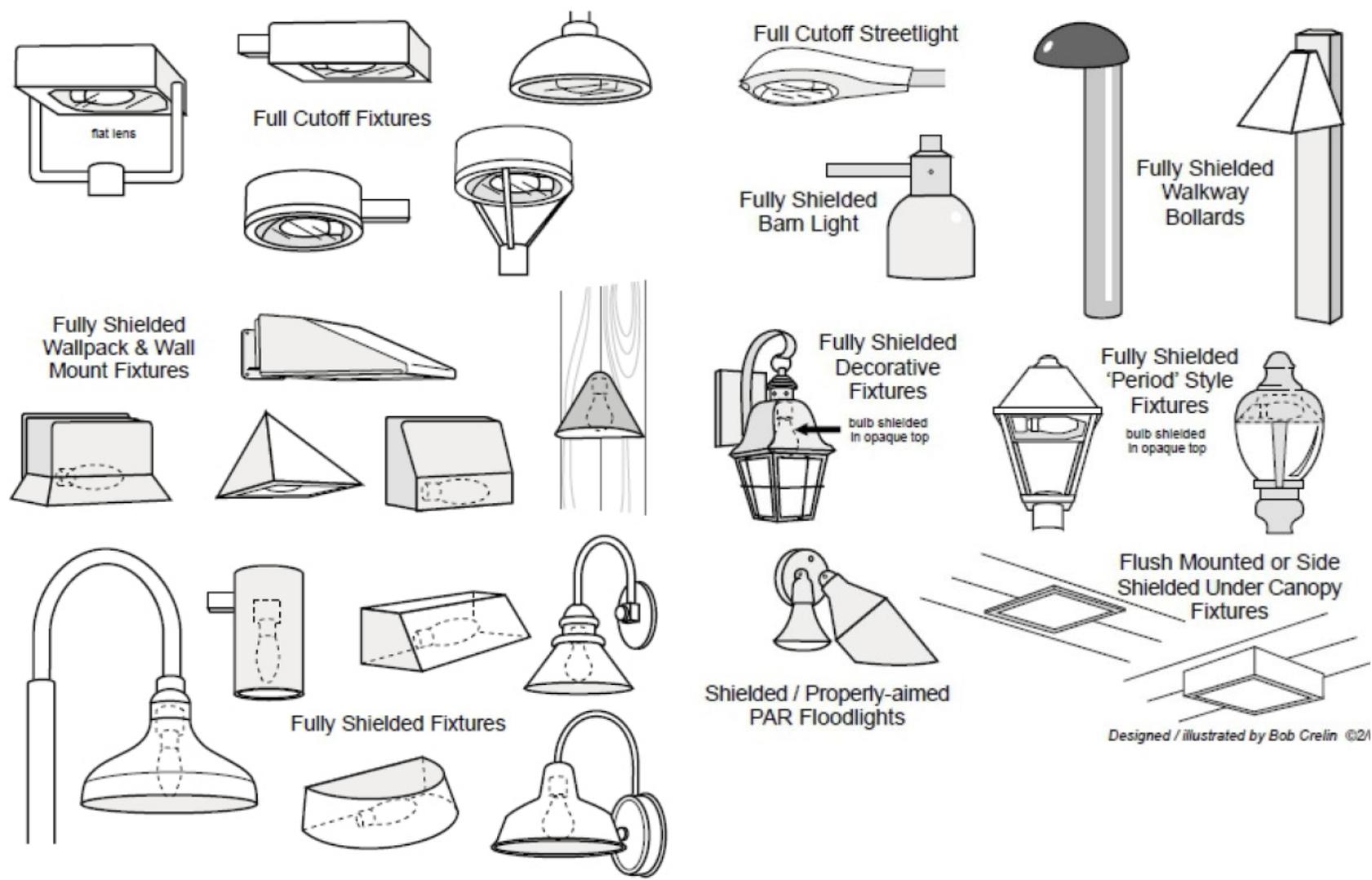
Limit the amount of shorter wavelength (blue-violet) light to the least amount needed.



Successful Example



Examples of Fully Shielded Luminaires



Recommended Exempt Uses

- Luminaires that emit less than 850 lumens.
- Critical lighting used by the Police Department, Fire Department, or Emergency Services.
- State or City roadway lighting.
- Temporary lighting authorized by a special event permit for a fair, carnival or similar function.
- Temporary holiday lighting provided it is not used for more than 60 days in a 12-month period.
- Flagpole lighting, provided all luminaires are shielded so that the light source is not visible from the property line and the CCT does not exceed 2,700K.
- Internally lit signs as permitted by Section 14.

Recommended Prohibited Lighting

- Strips of light intended to outline or highlight a structure, whether composed of linear light tubes or a sequence of individual illumination sources.
- Light sources that oscillate or vary in intensity or color to the degree that the modulation is perceptible to the human eye (e.g., strobe lighting).
- Lasers.
- Illumination of entire buildings. Facade illumination shall be limited to security lighting or lighting of specific architectural features.
- Floodlights that project above the horizontal plane.

Recommended Regulations: Residential Zones

The following shall be applicable to all uses and all properties in residential zones:

- A. Any light source emitting more than 850 lumens shall be fully shielded and positioned so that the light source is not directly visible at a height of 5 feet above ground from any residence on another property.
- B. Athletic field or activity area lighting that complies with Section 11.2.7. is exempted from this requirement.



Recommended Lighting of Common Areas Regulations

Driveways, parking lots, loading areas, sidewalks, plazas, and other common areas used by vehicles or pedestrians on properties subject to Site Plan or Special Permit approval shall be illuminated in accordance with the following:

- A. The average horizontal maintained illumination shall be no less than **one footcandle**.
- B. With the exception of gas station canopies, loading areas, and primary building entrances, the average horizontal maintained illumination shall not exceed **3 footcandles**, unless otherwise required for safety, security, or operational needs and provided such lighting does not exceed the illumination levels specified by ANSI/IES for the use.
- C. The maximum height of the light source shall be 30 feet measured from the surface of the ground. The use of luminaires mounted at lower heights is strongly encouraged.
- D. For parking lots with more than 20 parking spaces, the maximum-to-minimum uniformity ratio shall not exceed 10:1.

Recommended Lighting Standards

The following shall be applicable to all uses across all zones subject to a Site Plan or Special Permit approval except for athletic field or activity area lighting that complies with Section 11.2.7:

- A. Dark Sky Approval:** Luminaires shall be Dark Sky approved.
- B. Light Trespass:** Luminaires shall be located, aimed, and optically cutoff so that the light source is not directly visible from an adjacent property or the public right-of-way as measured at a height of 5 feet above ground.
- C. Glare and Sky Glow:** Unless otherwise specified, luminaires shall be fully shielded and emit no more than 5% of their total lumen output above 80 degrees as measured from perpendicular to the ground.
- D. Illumination Level:** Lighting shall provide the lowest level of illumination necessary for safety and intended use as specified by ANSI/IES except as otherwise specified by this Section 11.2. No lighting installation shall exceed the ANSI/IES recommended levels for the specified use.
- E. Correlated Color Temperature:** All light sources shall have a CCT of 3,000K or less.
- F. Lighting Control:** All outdoor lighting shall be enabled to be controlled by automatic timers and/or motion sensors. Except where there is a need to maintain lighting levels due to safety, security, or overnight hours of operation, all outdoor lighting shall be:
 - 1. Turned off after 11:00 p.m. and during daylight conditions, and/or
 - 2. Turned off or reduced to 25% of the full illumination level after 15 minutes of no activity.

Recommended Athletic Field or Activity Area Lighting

The following shall apply to outdoor athletic fields or other special outdoor activity areas such as sports courts that are subject to a Site Plan or Special Permit approval:

- A. Luminaires shall be Dark Sky approved.
- B. The luminaires shall include internal or external shielding to minimize uplighting and light trespass.
- C. Field or surface lighting shall be provided exclusively for the illumination of the surface of play and viewing stands and not for other applications.
- D. The design and installation of lighting shall follow the illuminance and uniformity guidelines of the Illuminating Engineering Society for the appropriate class of play.
- E. At least 85% of lumens shall be confined to within 60 feet or one pole height, whichever is greater, of the activity surface.
- F. The CCT of the lighting shall not exceed 4,200K.
- G. When the field or surface is used for purposes other than practice or play, lighting shall not exceed 25% of full output. After practice or play, illumination shall be reduced to 25% of full output within one hour and turned off completely within two hours.

Recommended Lighting Enforcement Regulations

Enforcement

- A. The Zoning Enforcement Officer may inspect any outdoor lighting installation for compliance with this section at any time.
- B. Upon notice of violation of the regulations of this Section 11.2, the responsible party shall correct the violation and provide a written statement to the Zoning Enforcement Officer as to how the violation was corrected within 10 days.
- C. If such statement is not received and/or corrective action is not sufficiently taken within 10 days, the Zoning Enforcement Officer may require a photometric survey and impose additional penalties as authorized by Section 8-12 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Sign Regulations

Reed v. Town of Gilbert

The need for a content-neutral approach

- In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a regulation that “on its face” requires consideration of the content of a sign is “content-based” and will be subjected to strict scrutiny.
- A regulation that is facially content-neutral could still be considered content-based if its purpose is related to the message on a sign.
- A content-based sign regulation is presumed to be unconstitutional and will be invalidated unless government can prove that the regulation is narrowly tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest. This is known as the “strict scrutiny” test.

SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION 2016 ANALYSIS

THE STATE OF SIGN CODES AFTER *REED V. TOWN OF GILBERT*

Professor Alan Weinstein holds a joint faculty appointment at Cleveland State University's Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs and also serves as Director of the Colleges' Law & Public Policy Program. Professor Weinstein is a nationally-recognized expert on planning law who lectures frequently at planning and law conferences and has over eighty publications, including books, book-chapters, treatise revisions and law journal articles.

Reed v. Town of Gilbert

- Because the Reed rulings considers “speaker-based” provisions to be content-based, differing treatment of signs for “educational uses” vs. “institutional uses” vs. “religious institutions” would be subject to strict scrutiny.
- Reed does not, however, cast doubt on the content-neutral “time, place or manner” regulations that are the mainstay of almost all sign codes, provided they are not justified by or have a purpose related to the message on the sign.

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Reed v. Town of Gilbert

The Court provided an example of some rules that would not be content-based such as:

- Regulating the size and location of signs, including distinguishing between building and free-standing signs;
- distinguishing between lighted and unlighted signs;
- distinguishing between signs with fixed messages and electronic signs with messages that change;
- distinguishing between the placement of signs on private and public property and between the placement of signs on commercial and residential property;
- restricting the total number of signs allowed per mile of roadway;
- distinguishing between on-premises and off-premises signs; and
- imposing time restrictions on signs advertising a one-time event.

SIGN RESEARCH FOUNDATION
2016 ANALYSIS

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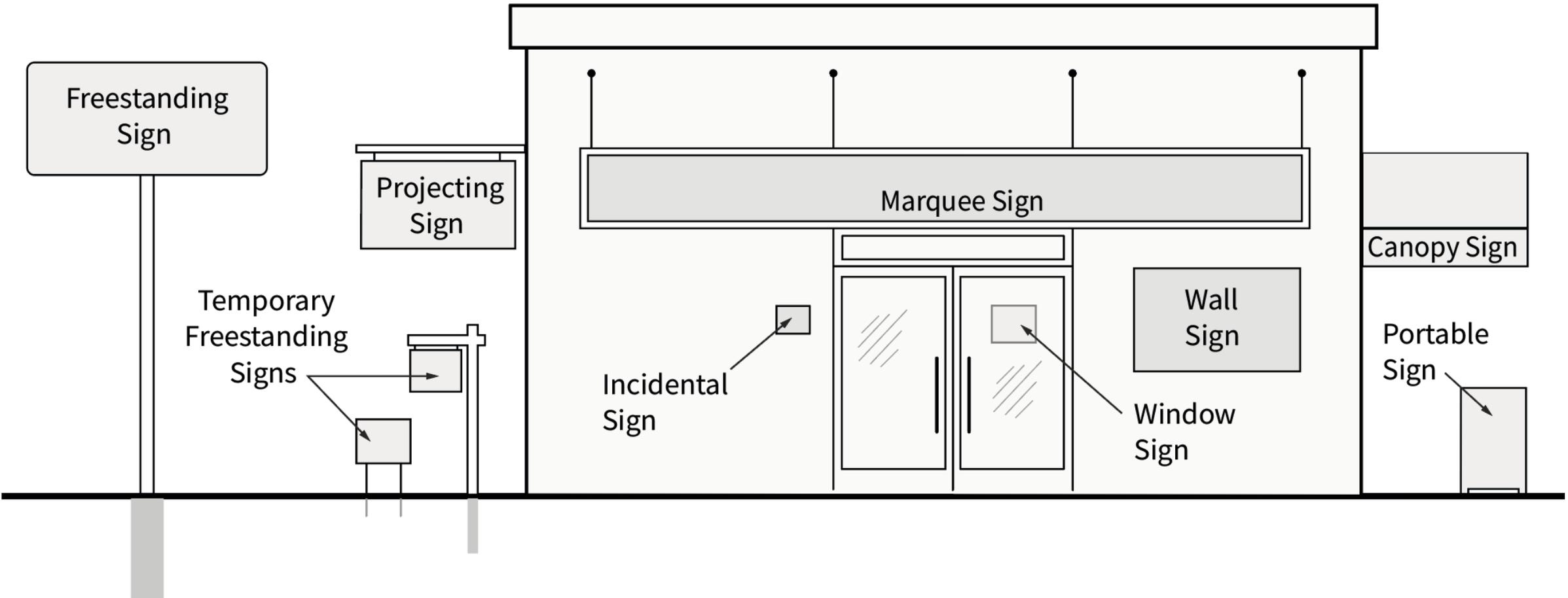
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Recommended Sign Types

Existing Sign Type	Proposed Sign Type
Freestanding Sign	Freestanding Sign
Wall Sign	Wall Sign
Projecting Sign	Projecting Sign
Canopy Sign	Canopy Sign
Marquee Sign	Marquee Sign
Directional Sign	Internal Use Sign
Identification Sign	Incidental or Freestanding Sign
Billboard	Billboard
Political Sign	Campaign Sign
Real Estate Sign	Temporary Freestanding Sign
Noncommercial Sign	Eliminate Category
Portable Special Event Sign	Large Portable Sign
Portable Business Sign	Small Portable Sign
Nameplate Sign	Incidental Sign
Service Club Meeting Sign	Large Portable Sign
Construction Sign	Temporary Freestanding Sign
Business Signs	Eliminate Category



Recommended Sign Types



Exempted Signs

- **Legal Obligations:** Any sign required by a valid and applicable federal, state, or local law, regulation, ordinance, or judicial order.
- **Indoor Signs:** Signs contained solely within a building and intended solely for inside use and not for attracting attention from the outside.
- **Traffic Signs:** Any sign or traffic control device installed by an authorized agency or as required or recommended by the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- **Government Signs:** Signs erected, maintained or otherwise posted, owned or leased by the U.S. government, State of Connecticut, or the City of Bristol.
- **Campaign Signs:** Any temporary sign directly related to a federal, state, or city election or referendum.

Government Exemption

Federal and State Governments are generally exempt from zoning laws.

- Supremacy Clause (U.S. Constitution, Article VI): Federal law overrides conflicting state/local laws.
- Federal Enclaves Doctrine: Land owned by the federal government (like a post office) is generally immune from local control, including zoning.
- Case Law: Courts have repeatedly upheld that local zoning boards cannot enforce regulations on federal installations unless the federal agency voluntarily complies.

Campaign Lawn Signs

- The challenge in regulating these is that any regulation is inherently content-based.
- There are no regulations surrounding these signs in the existing regulations.



Whitton v. City of Gladstone, 1995

In *Whitton v. City of Gladstone*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit struck down a city ordinance that **restricted the display of political campaign signs** on private property **to a limited time period** — specifically, only during the 30 days before and 7 days after an election.

- The plaintiff, Janie Whitton, wanted to display a political campaign sign supporting a candidate well before the 30-day limit. She challenged the ordinance as a violation of her First Amendment right to free speech.
- The court held that the ordinance was unconstitutional because it was a content-based restriction on speech.
- Political speech, especially signs on private property, is entitled to the highest level of First Amendment protection.
- The city's interest in aesthetics or traffic safety was not sufficient to justify limiting when someone could express a political opinion on their own property.

Freestanding Temporary Signs

- Contractor Lawn Signs, Real Estate Signs, Other signs
- Typically limited to one per sign type and a max area of 6 sf. In residential zones and 18 sf in other zones.
- Our recommendation is to:
 - Treat all as the same and limit to two signs per frontage at any one time.
 - Maintain sign area limits
 - Allow all As of Right for one year, require a Zoning Permit for continuance beyond one year.



Portable Signs

Provide two categories of portable signs:

- Small Portable Signs: Business Sandwich Board Sign: As of Right, One sign per establishment up to 8 sf
- Large Portable Signs: Special Event Sign, Sign permit required, up to 32 sf and 30 days max



Incidental Signs

- Group the following sign types together as Incidental Signs:
 - Incidental Signs (outside of a business)
 - Historical Plaques
 - Address Signs
 - Home Occupation Signs
- Limit to two signs per principal structure or one sign per dwelling unit in buildings with more than one dwelling unit.
- Limit to 1 sf As or Right and 3 sf with a Sign Permit.



Internal Use Sign

- Limit to 3 sf per sign and prohibit internal illumination.
- Allow As of Right in all zones



Window Signs



Window Signs

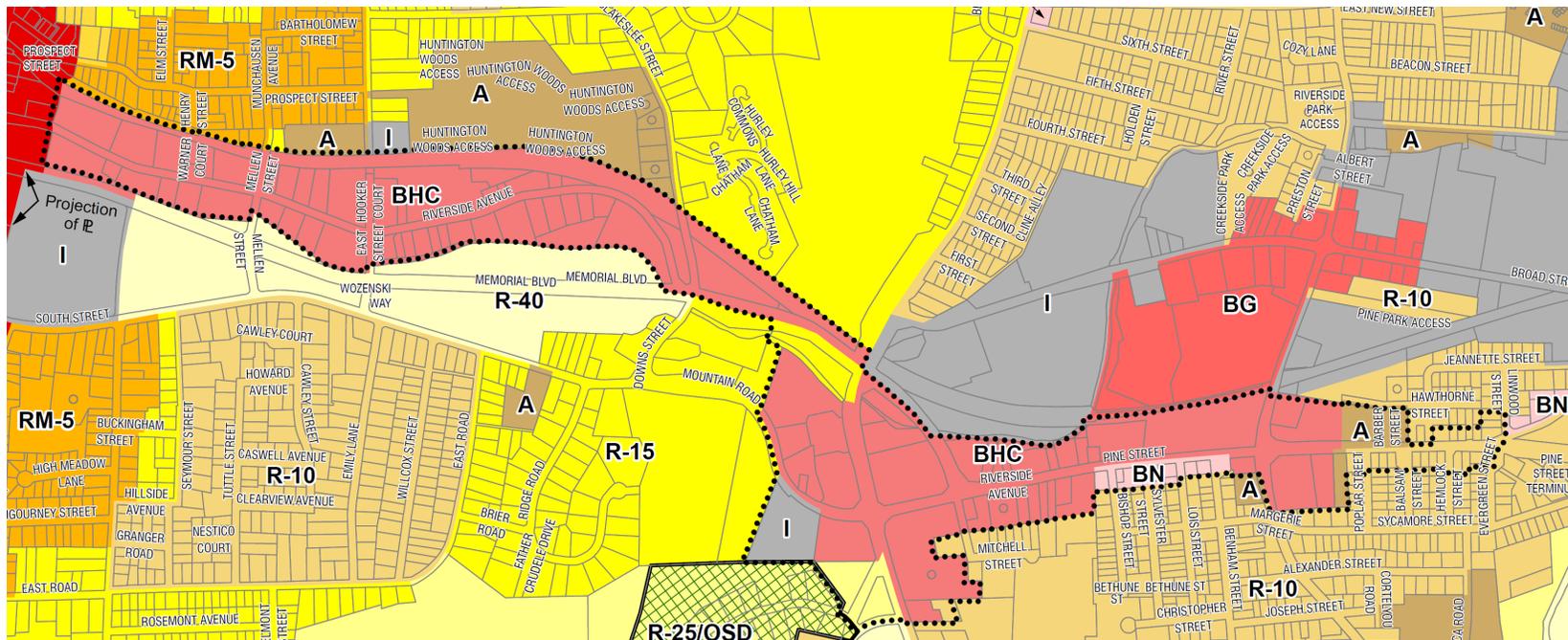
Provide a new regulation limiting use of window signs as follows:

- Allow display only by commercial establishments
- Allow only on ground or first floors
- Limit to 25% of the window space or 48 sf, whichever is less
- Limit illuminated signs to a maximum of 3 sf per establishment.

Access Management

Access Management

- The Access Management Regulations are located in Section 12 and span four pages.
- These regulations are only applicable to the Access Management Overlay Area
- The regulations are incentive-based, few of the standards are absolute requirements.
- Points are earned for voluntary compliance which reduces the traffic study and analysis requirements.



Access Management

We recommend the following:

- Merge the Section 13.11 Driveway regulations with the Access Management Regulations.
- Make the Access Management regulations applicable Citywide and eliminate the overlay zone.
- Establish a set of standards that are applicable to all uses/roadways/permit types and a set of standards that are more stringent based upon uses/roadways/permit types.

Additional Items

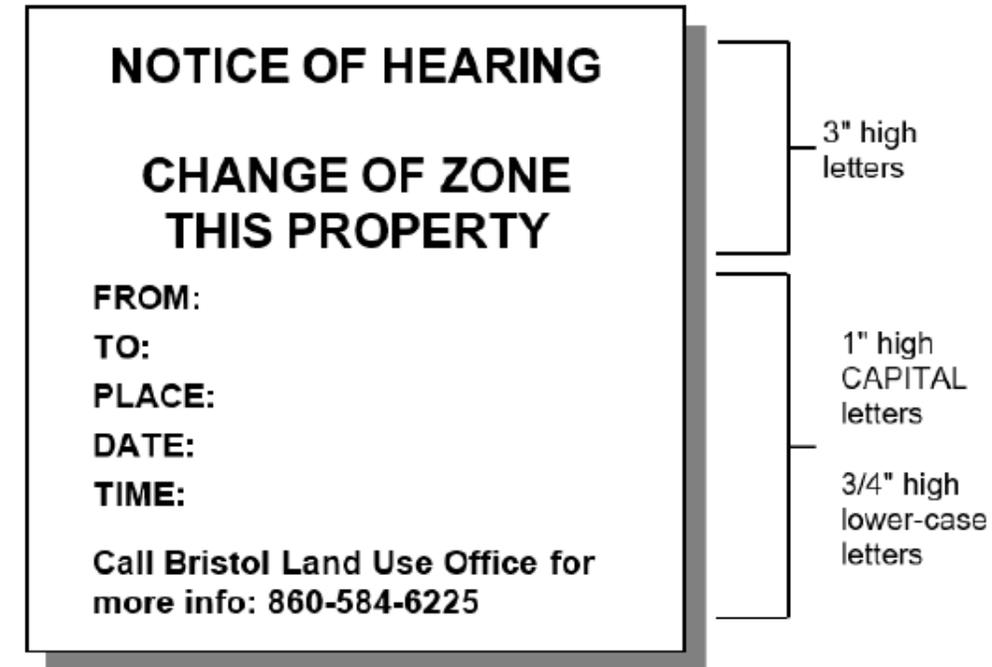
Additional Items: Landscaping and Fence Requirements

We recommend the following:

- Add a prohibition on planting invasive species within Section 11.1.2.
- Better link and provide clarity about the application of the Section 11.1.3 Screening requirements and the Section 11.1.4 Buffer requirements.
- Specify that the buffer width shall only be reduced if screening is provided in accordance with Section 11.1.2.
- Consolidate the fence requirements of Sections 11.3.2 and 11.3.3 since they are the exact same standards.
- Allow temporary construction fences to be maintained after more than 90 days of activity if for safety purposes.
- Change permit references from “Zoning Permit” to “Fence Permit”.

Additional Items: Posting of Properties

- Section 17.1.5 requires that a Notice of Hearing sign be posted every 200 feet along a frontage.
- Signs are required to be a minimum of 4 feet by 4 feet.
- There is no flexibility on this requirement based upon the length of frontage. For example, 2,000 feet of frontage would require the posting of 10 signs.
- We recommend providing more flexibility by allowing the posting of a smaller number of signs at prominent locations.



Additional Items: Average Finished Grade

- The term “Average Finished Grade” is used in measuring the height of a building or structure to determine conformity with the height regulations.
- It is defined as follows: The final elevation of the average ground level adjoining a building at all exterior walls.
- There are no specifics as to how this should be measured.
 - Is it an average between the highest and lowest points?
 - Should additional points be measured?
 - Would it be better to measure away from the building rather than adjoining the exterior walls?
- It is common to require the average to be calculated based upon major corners of a structure or on regular intervals such as 10 feet.
- Communities such as Berlin and Ridgefield require the measurement be taken at the lowest point between 6 feet and 10 feet away from the wall, respectively.

Additional Items: Data Centers

- Data Centers are not defined as a permitted use in the zoning regulations.
- These facilities are increasingly common.
- Much like our treatment of Cannabis Cultivators and Battery Energy Storage Systems, without a regulation, the City does not have much control over these facilities as they could be considered a generic industrial use.
- The mitigation of noise and distancing of these facilities from residential uses and zones is a primary consideration as the facilities can emit a low “humming” noise on a 24/7 basis.
- Consider allowing in the BHC, I, and IP zones with a Special Permit and provide distancing requirements from residential along with noise mitigation requirements.



Next Steps

- Prepare recommendations in recommended amendment memo format
- Review Site Plan and Special Permit requirements



Next Meetings

AUGUST

2025

Our next meeting is on
Thursday, August 21st at
5:00 pm.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						