

CHAPTER 243
2026 -- H 7371
Enacted 06/19/2026

A N A C T
RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- ZONING ORDINANCES

Introduced By: Representatives Shallcross Smith, Fellela, Diaz, Slater, Hull, Messier, Donovan, Fogarty, Ackerman, and McNamara

Date Introduced: January 28, 2026

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 45-24-30 of the General Laws in Chapter 45-24 entitled "Zoning Ordinances" is hereby amended to read as follows:

45-24-30. General purposes of zoning ordinances.

(a) Zoning regulations shall be developed and maintained in accordance with a comprehensive plan prepared, adopted, and as may be amended, in accordance with chapter 22.2 of this title and shall be designed to address the following purposes. The general assembly recognizes these purposes, each with equal priority and numbered for reference purposes only.

- (1) Promoting the public health, safety, and general welfare.
- (2) Providing for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character of the city or town and reflecting current and expected future needs.
- (3) Providing for orderly growth and development that recognizes:
 - (i) The goals and patterns of land use contained in the comprehensive plan of the city or town adopted pursuant to chapter 22.2 of this title;
 - (ii) The natural characteristics of the land, including its suitability for use based on soil characteristics, topography, and susceptibility to surface or groundwater pollution;
 - (iii) The values and dynamic nature of coastal and freshwater ponds, the shoreline, and freshwater and coastal wetlands;
 - (iv) The values of unique or valuable natural resources and features;
 - (v) The availability and capacity of existing and planned public and/or private services and facilities;
 - (vi) The need to shape and balance urban and rural development; and
 - (vii) The use of innovative development regulations and techniques.
- (4) Providing for the control, protection, and/or abatement of air, water, groundwater, and noise pollution, and soil erosion and sedimentation.
- (5) Providing for the protection of the natural, historic, cultural, and scenic character of the city or town or areas in the municipality.
- (6) Providing for the preservation and promotion of agricultural production, forest, silviculture, aquaculture, timber resources, and open space.
- (7) Providing for the protection of public investment in transportation, water, stormwater management systems, sewage treatment and disposal, solid waste treatment and disposal, schools, recreation, public facilities, open space, and other public requirements.
- (8) Promoting a balance of housing choices, for all income levels and groups, to assure the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens and their rights to affordable, accessible, safe, and sanitary housing.
- (9) Providing opportunities for the establishment of low- and moderate-income housing.
- (10) Promoting safety from fire, flood, and other natural or unnatural disasters.
- (11) Promoting a high level of quality in design in the development of private and public

facilities.

(12) Promoting implementation of the comprehensive plan of the city or town adopted pursuant to chapter 22.2 of this title.

(13) Providing for coordination of land uses with contiguous municipalities, other municipalities, the state, and other agencies, as appropriate, especially with regard to resources and facilities that extend beyond municipal boundaries or have a direct impact on that municipality.

(14) Providing for efficient review of development proposals, to clarify and expedite the zoning approval process.

(15) Providing for procedures for the administration of the zoning ordinance, including, but not limited to, variances, special-use permits, and, where adopted, procedures for modifications.

(16) Providing opportunities for reasonable accommodations in order to comply with the Rhode Island Fair Housing Practices Act, chapter 37 of title 34; the United States Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 (FHAA); the Rhode Island Civil Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, chapter 87 of title 42; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.

Provided, however, that any zoning ordinance in which a community sets forth standards or requirements for the location, design, construction, or maintenance of on-site wastewater treatment systems shall first be submitted to the director of the department of environmental management for approval as to the technical merits of the ordinance. In addition, any zoning ordinance in which a municipality sets forth standards regarding wetland requirements, shall first be submitted to the director of the department of environmental management for approval as to the technical merits of the ordinance.

(b) Upon the effective date of this section, a city or town shall no longer be authorized to adopt as a provision of its zoning ordinance new requirements that specify buffers or setbacks in relation to freshwater wetland, freshwater wetland in the vicinity of the coast, or coastal wetland or that specify setback distances between an onsite wastewater treatment system and a freshwater wetlands, freshwater wetland in the vicinity of the coast, or coastal wetland.

(c) Cities and towns shall be prohibited from applying the requirements in existing zoning ordinances pertaining to both wetland buffers and onsite wastewater treatment system setbacks to development, redevelopment, construction, or rehabilitation applications submitted to a municipality. Nothing herein shall rescind the authority of a city or town to enforce other local zoning requirements.

(d) Notwithstanding any law or regulation to the contrary, no city or town shall by ordinance or regulation restrict or limit the number of children provided services and care by a department of human services licensed family child care home provider to less than twelve (12) children at a time; provided, however, that nothing in this subsection shall be construed to limit or abridge the provisions of chapter 12.5 of title 42 or the regulations promulgated by the department of human services to implement and enforce the provisions of chapter 12.5 of title 42.

~~(d)~~(e) Cities and towns shall act to amend their ordinances and regulations to conform to this section within twelve (12) months of the effective date of state regulations referenced herein.

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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