

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bristol Planning Board
FROM: Alfred R. Rego, Jr, Esq.
DATE: September 5, 2025

SUBJECT: Overview of Bristol Zoning and Adaptive Reuse Provisions
18 Burnside Street- 1 Resolute lane

This memorandum outlines recent updates to Rhode Island zoning laws that encourage adaptive reuse of non-residential structures, including those in industrial zones, for residential development.

Adaptive Reuse in Industrial Zones:

Rhode Island has amended its zoning laws to promote the adaptive reuse of existing non-residential buildings—particularly those in industrial zones—for residential purposes. [RIGL §42-64.20.3] [RIGL §45-23-50.1]

Local Implementation (Bristol):

Bristol has updated its local zoning ordinances in line with state mandates. These amendments allow residential units within adaptive reuse projects in all zoning districts, subject to applicable criteria and Planning Board review.

Key Regulatory Provisions

Permitted Use:

Adaptive residential reuse is now a permitted use in all zoning districts, including industrial zones, provided specific conditions are met. This enables residential conversion of former industrial buildings, even where previously prohibited, unless disqualified by documented health or safety concerns.

Eligibility and Density Requirements:

At least 50% of the building's gross floor area must be converted to residential units. Projects must maintain a minimum residential density of 15 units per acre, so long as the development remains within the building's existing footprint-envelope (exceptions may be made for fire code or utility-related upgrades).

Vacancy Requirement:

Industrial or manufacturing buildings must have been out of active industrial use for at least one year before an application can be submitted. For the past four years, these properties have been used for storage and non-conforming housing, and are not considered active industrial site.

Health, Safety, and Environmental Compliance:

Properties must not be subject to environmental land use restrictions that would bar residential conversion. All developments must comply with applicable public health and safety standards. Updated utility (water, sewer, etc.) connections are proposed to connect 18 Burnside Street - 1 Resolute Lane to Burnside Street.

Dimensional and Parking Standards:

Existing building setbacks and heights are treated as legally nonconforming. Only one parking space per dwelling unit is required. (In the current project, 7 spaces are required, with additional 7 indoor parking being proposed - for a total 14 indoor parking.)

Bristol's ordinance amendments fully incorporate state policy changes, allowing adaptive reuse projects for residential purposes in all zoning districts. All proposals remain subject to (Administrative review and Planning Board review and compliance with the above standards with a further determination of unit density.)

Legacy Projects

Just as the Bristol Yarn Mill represented a unique scenario due to pre-existing site conditions, this project should be evaluated as a unique site.