

The 2025 Legislative session included several bills related to land use and housing production, some of which introduced substantive and procedural changes to bills enacted in the 2023 and 2024 sessions. Below are summaries of bills from the 2025 session that were enacted into law that have an impact on local land use policy. The bill title identifies if the associated amendments are new language or language that updates or further modifies language from one of the previous two legislative sessions referenced above.

Bill Title	Local Planning Board or Commission *new and updated in 2025*
House Number	H 5794Baa (Substitute B, as amended)
Senate Number	S1086Aaa
Effective Date	June 27, 2025
Bill Overview	Amends provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 and the Development Review Act related to the powers and duties of local planning boards and commissions, subdivision and land development review procedures, certification of completeness, public notice, appeals, and administrative approvals.
Summary of Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies that “development plan review” may be considered by the planning board. • Exempts comprehensive plan amendments that allow for an increase in new housing units from the statutory limitation on the number of comprehensive plan amendments permitted per calendar year. <p>CERTIFICATION OF COMPLETENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifies the certification of completeness process by limiting the administrative officer’s review to determining whether: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required items listed on the local checklist have been submitted; and ○ Items required as conditions of prior approval stages have been satisfied. ○ An application may not be deemed incomplete for any other reason. <p>SUBDIVISION AND LAND DEVELOPMENT</p>

Bill Title	Local Planning Board or Commission *new and updated in 2025*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amends the definitions of minor and major subdivisions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Redefines a minor subdivision as a subdivision creating nine (9) or fewer buildable lots and a subdivision creating ten (10) or more buildable lots on an existing improved public street. ○ Redefines a major subdivision as a subdivision creating ten (10) or more buildable lots where a street extension or street creation is required, thereby classifying all subdivisions on existing improved public streets as minor subdivisions subject to administrative approval. • Establishes oversized lot subdivisions as a subcategory of minor subdivision, subject to specific statutory criteria. • Makes pre-application meetings optional, rather than mandatory, for major applications and allows such meetings to occur only at the request of the applicant. • Relocates the submission of permits and legal documents for major land development projects and major subdivisions from the preliminary plan stage to the final plan stage. • Extends the expiration period for final approval of major subdivisions and major land development projects from one (1) year to two (2) years from the date of approval. • Limits appeals to the zoning board of review to administrative matters, interpretations, and determinations made by the administrative officer, and excludes appeals of administrative officer decisions approving or denying applications, which must instead be appealed to Superior Court. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clarifies that the zoning board sitting as the ‘board of appeal’ hears only administrative matters/interpretations/determinations, and that administrative officer decisions under §45-23-38 and §45-23-50 that approve or deny an application are not appealed to the board of appeal. • Replaces references to the planning board in appeal provisions with the “board of appeal or permitting authority, as applicable,” to reflect the revised appeal structure.

Bill Title	Local Planning Board or Commission *new and updated in 2025*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces required findings for approval of minor subdivisions and minor land developments subject to administrative review by eliminating findings related to environmental impacts and physical constraints to development. • Clarifies that a floating zone is not effective upon adoption of the ordinance alone and becomes effective only after an application for development is approved and the approved plan is recorded. <p>ADAPTIVE REUSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds new prohibitions specifying where adaptive reuse “shall not be allowed,” including where residential use is prohibited by recorded environmental land use restrictions and in certain industrial/manufacturing contexts (including industrial/manufacturing districts where residential use is prohibited based on specific findings, and certain formerly industrial/manufacturing buildings that have not been vacant for at least one year). • Adds/clarifies parking limitations for adaptive reuse, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An overall cap that local zoning provisions “shall exempt” adaptive reuse from off-street parking requirements over one space per dwelling unit; and ○ Bedroom-based caps on required off-street parking per unit. • Changes density standards to tie to affordability and project size, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For projects with more than four units, requiring at least ten percent (10%) low- or moderate-income housing in order for the ordinance to have no maximum density; and ○ If less than ten percent (10%) is provided, allowing the municipality to determine the allowable maximum density. <p>SUBSTANDARD LOTS and MODIFICATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands the availability of administrative dimensional relief for development on substandard lots of record. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allows reduced yard setbacks, lot coverage, and building placement to be approved administratively for qualifying substandard lots.

Bill Title	Local Planning Board or Commission *new and updated in 2025*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eliminates the need for dimensional variances where development complies with the additional statutory criteria. ● Allows the municipality to require compliance with dimensional requirements if the municipality has a zoning district where a substandard lot of record would be conforming as to size. ● Requires a compilation plan signed by a professional land surveyor when merger is not required based on surrounding property lot areas. ● Aligns substandard lot provisions with the revised definition of “modification.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changes the standard for approval of a modification to “minimal to a reasonable enjoyment of the permitted use to which the property is proposed to be devoted.” ○ Adds a cross-reference to § 45-24-46(c) (NCBM) to clarify when lot area and dimensional relief may be granted administratively. ○ Confirms that relief granted under these provisions is not treated as a dimensional variance. ● Adds a new type of administrative modification (Neighborhood character-based modifications (NCBM)) that may be granted under the Zoning Enabling Act, separate from the existing modification authority. ● Removes the prohibition on lot area relief as part of a modification . ● Revises the definition of “modification” by replacing references to dimensional variances with administrative relief. ● Expands the range of dimensional requirements that may be addressed through a modification application, subject to statutory limits. ● Clarifies that modification approvals are administrative in nature and are not zoning variances. ● Updates cross-references to conform modification authority to newly added and amended provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act. <p>INCLUSIONARY ZONING</p>

Bill Title	Local Planning Board or Commission *new and updated in 2025*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revises the minimum project size subject to inclusionary zoning requirements, clarifying that the requirements apply to projects creating ten (10) or more dwelling units through new construction, reconstruction, or conversion. • Prohibits municipalities from limiting the number of bedrooms in an inclusionary zoning development to less than three (3).¹ Prohibits application of inclusionary zoning requirements where development density is limited under the regulations of a state agency. <p>UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amends unified development review standards so that, when dimensional relief is requested as part of a subdivision application, the variance standard in § 45-24-41(d)(2) (that the hardship is not the result of any prior action of the applicant) does not apply. All other variance evidentiary standards remain in effect. <p>TOD PILOT PROGRAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expands eligibility to allow developers, in addition to municipalities, to apply for funding through the pilot program. • Clarifies location-based eligibility requirements, limiting participating development to sites within one-quarter (¼) mile of an existing or planned regional mobility hub or one-half (½) mile of an existing or planned frequent transit stop. • Requires municipalities participating in the program to have zoning districts, overlays, or other zoning provisions certified into the program that allow high-density residential development and provide easing of dimensional and parking requirements. • Adds an affordability requirement for developer-funded projects, requiring that a portion of residential units be provided as affordable housing. • Expands and clarifies the scope of rules and regulations to be adopted by the Department of Housing (with input from DOT and Statewide Planning), including eligibility criteria, application and acceptance procedures, reporting requirements, and penalties for noncompliance.

¹ Limiting the number of bedrooms may constitute a violation of the Fair Housing Act. Municipalities should seek advice from the Solicitor.

Bill Title	Zoning Certificates *updated in 2025*
House Number	H 5795A
Senate Number	S 1084
Effective Date	Takes effect upon passage (June 2025)
Bill Overview	Amends provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 related to the administration and enforcement of zoning ordinances by local officials or agencies, including the issuance of zoning certificates and appeal rights.
Summary of Key Takeaways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes time within which zoning enforcement officials or agencies must issue a zoning certificate or provide a written determination to within twenty (20) days of a written request from a requesting party. • Provides that, if no written response is issued within twenty (20) days, the requesting party has the right to appeal to the zoning board of review for a determination pursuant to § 45-24-63. • Clarifies that determinations made through a zoning certificate are appealable to the zoning board of review in accordance with existing appeal procedures.

Bill Title	Development in the Urban Services Boundary *new in 2025*
House Number	H 5796
Senate Number	S 1092
Effective Date	January 1, 2026
Bill Overview	Amends provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 to add an additional required purpose to the list of standard provisions that a zoning ordinance must address through reasonable objective standards and criteria.
Summary of Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds a new required standard provision to zoning ordinances requiring municipalities to provide for residential use options that are not limited to single-family detached structures within the urban services boundary., as shown on the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program future land use map tools and the Rhode Island Geographic Information System • Limits application of the new requirement to areas with available public water and sewer capacity, ensuring that the provision applies only where adequate infrastructure exists. • Requires zoning ordinances to address this new residential use provision through reasonable and objective standards and criteria, consistent with the structure and requirements of other mandatory zoning ordinance provisions.

Bill Title	Co-Living Housing *new in 2025*
House Number	H 5797 (Substitute A)
Senate Number	S 1085
Effective Date	January 1, 2026
Bill Overview	Amends multiple provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 to add new definitions, expand permitted residential uses, authorize co-living housing and require zoning ordinances to allow certain residential uses through specific and objective standards.
Summary of Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds a definition for “co-living housing” as a residential development with independently rented and lockable sleeping units that share sanitary and/or food preparation facilities and clarifies that existing dwelling units may not be converted to co-living housing unless authorized by local ordinance. • Authorizes zoning ordinances to include community living options such as co-living housing as a special provision in areas served by transit and other services. • Authorizes co-living housing as part of an adaptive reuse project when they meet the building and fire code requirements.

Bill Title	Attached Single-Family Dwellings *new in 2025*
House Number	H 5798
Senate Number	S 1083
Effective Date	January 1, 2026
Bill Overview	Amends provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 to require zoning ordinances to allow attached single-family dwellings in designated zoning districts and to establish minimum statewide standards governing dimensional requirements, lot configuration, and development capacity for such dwellings.
Summary of Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires zoning ordinances to allow attached single-family dwellings in zoning districts that allow for the construction of two (2) or more units, the number of dwelling units permitted shall be the same as the corresponding residential density for the property and zoning district. • Defines “attached single-family dwelling” as dwelling units constructed side-by-side or horizontally, separated by a party wall and lot line. • Requires attached single-family dwellings to be permitted where adequate infrastructure exists, including access to public water and sewer or approved private water and wastewater systems. • Prohibits municipalities from increasing minimum lot size, lot width, lot frontage, or lot depth requirements for attached single-family dwellings compared to other residential structures of the same density in the same zoning district. • Requires zoning ordinances to allow zero-lot-line setbacks along common property lines to accommodate subdivision of attached single-family dwellings. • Applies base zoning district dimensional requirements only to the exterior perimeter of end units in an attached single-family development and prohibits additional dimensional standards that apply solely to attached units. • Limits additional local standards by prohibiting municipalities from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limiting floor area ratio to less than one (1);

Bill Title	Attached Single-Family Dwellings <i>*new in 2025*</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Limiting the number of bedrooms to fewer than three (3)²; or○ Requiring more than one (1) off-street parking space for up to two (2) bedrooms or more than two (2) spaces for up to three (3) bedrooms.● Requires attached single-family dwellings to be allowed at the same residential density otherwise permitted for the zoning district in which they are located.

² Limiting number of bedrooms may constitute a violation of the Fair Housing Act. Municipalities should seek advice from the Solicitor.

Bill Title	Village Mixed - Residential Development in Commercial Districts *new in 2025*
House Number	H 5800
Senate Number	S 1090
Effective Date	January 1, 2026
Bill Overview	Amends provisions of the Zoning Enabling Act of 1991 to require zoning ordinances to provide for residential development within all or some of the areas encompassing commercial zoning districts through objective standards and criteria, including mixed-use and medium- to high-density residential development.
Summary of Key Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds a new required standard provision to zoning ordinances requiring municipalities to provide for residential development in all or some of the areas encompassing commercial zoning districts. • Requires zoning ordinances to allow residential uses to be integrated with commercial uses, including through mixed-use or village-style development patterns. • Requires zoning ordinances to permit residential units above commercial uses, including residential units located on upper floors above ground- or first-floor commercial space. • Requires zoning ordinances to allow medium- to high-density residential development within commercial zoning districts where residential use is permitted. • Requires zoning ordinances to adopt flexible and reasonable dimensional standards that promote and allow mixed-use or village development in commercial districts. • Requires municipalities with populations exceeding forty thousand (40,000) to provide for residential development in at least thirty percent (30%) of the total land area within their commercial zoning districts.

Bill Title	Low- and Moderate-Income Housing *updated in 2025*
House Number	H 5801
Senate Number	S 1088
Effective Date	Upon passage (June 2025) and January 1, 2026. This was a two part bill with two effective dates.
Bill Overview	Amends multiple provisions of the Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act to revise definitions, clarify and expand comprehensive permit procedures, establish minimum zoning incentives and density bonuses, refine standards for local review board findings, and modify vesting, review timelines, and administrative approval processes for affordable housing developments.
Summary of Key Changes	<p>Part 1 – Effective upon passage (June 2025)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revises and expands statutory definitions applicable to low- and moderate-income housing, including definitions for adjustments, affordable housing plans, local review boards, monitoring agents, municipal government subsidies, and qualifying housing units counted toward a municipality’s affordable housing inventory. • Removes the prohibition to include wetland buffers in density calculations and clarifies that infrastructure deducted from land area utilized to calculate the minimum density bonus is “roadway infrastructure” only. • Revises the application and review process for comprehensive permits, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Municipality may require a pre-application conference only when the applicant has elected not to have a master plan review. ○ Optional master plan review with limited submission requirements and defined vesting periods. ○ Revised preliminary plan review procedures, findings, and timelines; and ○ Administrative final plan review, except where major modifications require local review board action.

Bill Title	Low- and Moderate-Income Housing *updated in 2025*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes required findings for approval and denial of comprehensive permits, including standards related to consistency with local needs identified in the community’s affordable housing plan and integration of affordable units. • Revises vesting periods for master plans, preliminary plans, and final plans, including provisions for extensions and conditions for continued vesting. <p>Part 2 – Effective January 1, 2026</p> <p>The language that took effect January 1, 2026 removed the alternative rental calculation that was available for meeting the affordable housing threshold.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive permit applications are not available in municipalities that have LMI housing in excess of ten percent (10%) which also have an inclusionary zoning ordinance. • Revises comprehensive permit eligibility and availability, including limitations in municipalities that exceed ten percent (10%) low- or moderate-income housing and have compliant inclusionary zoning ordinances. • Municipalities that exceed 10% LMI housing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May provide density bonuses and other incentives under its zoning ordinance ○ Council may by ordinance limit annual total number of dwelling units in comprehensive permit applications from non-profit development to an aggregate of one percent (1%) of the total number of year-round housing units in the town. Applications would be heard sequentially in the order submitted to address this limitation. ○ Clarified that density bonuses are one of the zoning incentives provided to offset the differential costs of the low- and moderate-income housing units.