

Old Lyme Zoning Update

Public Workshop on Commercial, Industrial, Mixed-Use, and Waterfront Zones

September 15, 2026

Town Staff attending

- Eric Knapp (Land Use Coordinator)
- Craig Bonatti (Land Use Technician)

About the Workshop

IMEG, on behalf of the Town of Old Lyme, conducted a public workshop in support of the Old Lyme zoning update. The workshop was held on Tuesday, September 15, 2026, at the Lymes Senior Center. Over two hundred residents and other stakeholders including Commissioners attended the workshop in person to provide their input and ideas regarding residential zoning and housing issues. The workshop presentation was also provided virtually via Teams, with twelve people attending virtually. The following outreach methods were used to promote the workshop and encourage attendance:



- Event listing on the Town's website and Town calendar
- Press release distributed to local press
- Social media and email list serve distribution

The workshop was conducted from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm with the following agenda:

1. Introductory presentation
2. Breakout sessions
3. Reporting back

Workshop Introduction and Presentation

The workshop began with an introduction from Eric Knapp, Land Use Coordinator. Following the introduction, a presentation was given by Francisco Gomes, of IMEG. The presentation included an introduction to the project team, review of the project purpose approach and schedule, review of preliminary survey results, and a review of the commercial, industrial, waterfront, and mixed-use zoning districts.

Break Out Discussions

Following the presentation, attendees were divided into four groups to participate in four 20-minute sessions for a total discussion period of 80 minutes. At 20-minute intervals participants were asked to move to another group to participate in a discussion of another zoning district. Some participants chose to participate in the same discussion more than once.

Each group was led by an IMEG staff member and notes were recorded on large easel-mounted paper pads. Between 20 and 60 people participated in each group discussion. The groups were organized as follows:

- C-30S Commercial Zone (Halls Road)
- C-10 and C-30 Commercial Zones
- Waterfront Business District and Sound View Village District
- Light Industry District

C-30S (Halls Road) Discussion Summary

Comments regarding the C-30S (Halls Road) zone reflected a desire to balance economic vitality and needed housing with protection of Old Lyme's small-town character, environmental resources, and infrastructure capacity. The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Scale, Density, and Community Character:** Residents expressed concern about increased density and large-scale development that could substantially change the existing character of Old Lyme. Participants generally favored maintaining existing setbacks, limiting building scale and intensity, and avoiding development patterns perceived as more urban or associated with places such as Niantic, Old Saybrook, or Blue Back Square. There was also opposition to expanding the geographic extent of the C-30S zone.
- **Water, Wastewater, and Environmental Constraints:** The lack of public water and sewer service was a significant concern. Participants questioned the long-term reliability of septic systems and their potential effects on nearby wetlands, including concern that systems meeting current standards could fail over time. Wetland protection was identified as a high priority, with suggestions that wetlands be excluded from lot-area and density calculations. Participants also called for stronger protection of trees and vegetated buffers. Participants felt that developers should be entirely responsible for providing and funding infrastructure necessary to serve new development.
- **Traffic, Infrastructure, and Municipal Services:** Existing traffic in the Halls Road area was identified as a concern, along with the ability of municipal services to accommodate additional development. Participants noted the limited capacity of the volunteer fire department and expressed concern about development exceeding its ability to respond. School capacity and the potential fiscal implications of increased enrollment were also raised as considerations when evaluating future development.
- **Commercial Vitality and Small Businesses:** Commercial vacancies, particularly within existing shopping centers, was repeatedly identified as concern. Participants generally favored prioritizing

reuse and occupancy of existing vacant commercial buildings and spaces rather than constructing additional commercial space. There was support for economic development incentives to attract and retain small businesses and for simplifying zoning approvals for smaller businesses, including reducing reliance on special permit procedures where appropriate. Participants also suggested reviewing the uses currently permitted in the C-30S zone to determine whether they remain appropriate.

- **Housing Needs:** While participants expressed concern about increased density and development intensity, there was also recognition of a need for additional housing in Old Lyme, particularly housing suitable for seniors. This suggests interest in addressing specific housing needs while maintaining controls over the overall scale and character of development.
- **Design, Appearance, and Public Realm:** Participants expressed interest in beautifying Halls Road and improving its overall appearance. Suggestions included establishing an architectural and design review board, strengthening landscaping and buffering requirements, protecting trees, and providing additional public open space. At the same time, comments favored maintaining setbacks and avoiding buildings placed immediately along the street.
- **Pedestrian and Recreational Connections:** There was substantial interest in improving pedestrian infrastructure. Participants called for sidewalks within the Halls Road area as well as connections between Halls Road, Lyme Street, and the high school. Trails and additional public open space were also identified as desirable improvements.
- **Planning Process and Public Involvement:** Several comments focused on how future changes to Halls Road should be planned and implemented. Participants expressed concern about transparency and the perception that zoning changes could disproportionately benefit particular property owners. There was support for broader involvement by residents and other Town boards and commissions rather than relying solely on the Zoning Commission. Participants also suggested that regulatory changes be phased so their effects can be evaluated before additional changes are made.

Overall, the comments indicate support for improving the appearance, pedestrian environment, economic health, and usefulness of the Halls Road area, while generally favoring a cautious approach to additional development. The principal concerns were centered on development scale and density, small-town character, wetlands and septic impacts, infrastructure and municipal-service capacity, and transparency in the planning process. At the same time, participants identified opportunities to support small businesses, address commercial vacancies, provide senior housing, improve pedestrian connections and public spaces, and enhance the overall appearance of the corridor.

C-10 and C-30 Zones Discussion Summary

Participants discussed the range of uses currently permitted within Old Lyme's C-10 and C-30 districts and how the Town can encourage a diverse mix of businesses and activities that meets community needs and preferences.

- Participants recognized that the commercial districts already permit a broad range of uses. Discussion focused less on expanding the overall list of permitted uses and more on how to attract and support the types and diversity of businesses residents would like to see.
- Participants identified desired uses including restaurants, coffee shops, grocery stores, sporting-goods stores, and recreational businesses and activities.
- Several comments suggested that permitting a broad range of uses uniformly across commercial districts may not, on its own, produce the desired mix of businesses or character in each area.
- Participants discussed whether a more targeted, place-specific approach could help encourage desired businesses and activities in appropriate locations.
- Some participants expressed interest in expanding commercial areas, while others emphasized limiting the extent or intensity of commercial development to maintain Old Lyme's existing character.

Specific Zoning Changes

- Interest was expressed in encouraging commercial activity along Lyme Street. Participants discussed its history as a commercial area and noted that it is not currently zoned for commercial activity. It was noted that existing commercial uses along Lyme Street are nonconforming under current zoning.
- Participants discussed potentially expanding the Sound View Village District (SVVD) and/or consolidating it with nearby C-10 and C-30 areas. This idea was shared by many different people. In some instances it was proposed as a way to provide additional flexibility within these commercial areas through the special permit process. In other instances, the desire was to allow for diverse residential in the commercial districts.
- A participant suggested that motor-vehicle service uses should be more limited in where they are allowed.

Mixed-Use and Residential Development

- Housing within commercial districts generated a range of viewpoints.
- Participants discussed recent zoning changes permitting mixed-use housing in commercial districts, with some viewing these changes as an opportunity to strengthen commercial activity.
- Some participants noted that housing above commercial uses can provide a nearby customer base, helping support the viability of businesses.
- Some attendees felt that limiting housing in commercial areas to only mixed use and not permitting multifamily housing was too limiting, as developers may not see the viability of mixed use and the areas would remain unchanged from present.
- Participants expressed both support for and opposition to multifamily housing in the C-30 district, with the location and form of development emerging as important considerations.
- One participant associated Old Lyme's small-town character with single family housing and expressed opposition to rental housing, while indicating some openness to other forms of multifamily development.
- Another participant identified a single-story housing development along Mile Creek Road as a development form they liked and suggested that a similar form might be appropriate near Cherrystones.

Business Vitality, Attraction, and Retention

- Supporting existing businesses and attracting desired new businesses were recurring topics.
- Participants expressed a desire to protect and support existing local businesses while identifying opportunities to attract new businesses.
- Seasonality was identified as a challenge for both existing businesses and efforts to attract new businesses.
- Participants observed that businesses can benefit from being located near one another, creating a concentration of activity and a destination for customers.
- Participants repeatedly discussed the need to better identify the types of businesses and commercial activities desired in different areas and consider how the Town could help attract those uses.
- A small-business owner expressed frustration that, while local businesses are described as valued by the community, that support does not always translate into financial or other tangible support, including patronage of local establishments by community members.
- Participants expressed interest in additional Town outreach and support for existing businesses.
- A question was raised about whether there are mechanisms to discourage prolonged commercial vacancies.

Community Character and Sense of Place

- Preserving Old Lyme's character was discussed alongside a desire for additional activity and gathering opportunities.
- Participants emphasized the importance of protecting Old Lyme's small-town character and charm. One participant described zoning as a tool for protecting the qualities that make the community attractive to residents and visitors.
- Some participants expressed a desire for additional commercial activity and gathering places so that Old Lyme is more than a "bedroom community."
- Participants expressed interest in places where residents can gather and socialize, including restaurants, coffee shops, dog parks, and other active public spaces.
- Interest was expressed in a restaurant or other community-oriented use at the Cherrystones property that could function as a gathering place. Another comment suggested using Cherrystones as community meeting space.
- Participants also emphasized that zoning and commercial development alone do not create community life. Community events, parades, markets, and similar activities were identified as additional ways to create opportunities for gathering and interaction.

Transportation, Pedestrian Safety, and Connectivity

- Participants emphasized considering transportation and safety alongside potential zoning changes.
- Participants indicated that traffic circulation and safety should be considered before or in conjunction with changes to commercial zoning.
- For the north side of the C-10 area, a participant suggested greater setbacks to accommodate sidewalks and bicycle facilities and provide separation or buffering from adjacent residential areas.
- Participants recommended prioritizing sidewalks and pedestrian crossings in commercial areas.

Signage and Zoning Enforcement

- Participants raised concerns about zoning enforcement, particularly related to signs.
- One participant specifically opposed internally illuminated signs and questioned whether existing sign regulations are being consistently applied and enforced.

Overall, the comments received indicate interest in strengthening Old Lyme's commercial areas by supporting existing businesses, attracting a diverse mix of desired uses, and creating additional opportunities for community gathering and activity, while preserving the Town's small-town character. Participants identified opportunities for more place-specific zoning, mixed-use and residential development in appropriate locations, improved business support, and enhanced pedestrian connectivity, while emphasizing that future zoning changes should carefully consider development scale and location, traffic and infrastructure, compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods, and consistent zoning enforcement.

Waterfront Business District

Comments regarding the Waterfront Business District (WF-20) reflected strong interest in preserving Old Lyme's limited waterfront commercial areas while ensuring that existing water-dependent businesses can continue to operate and adapt. The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Waterfront Character and Land Use:** Participants emphasized maintaining the existing character of the three WF-20 areas, which are viewed as small and distinct waterfront areas. There was support for retaining these areas for waterfront-oriented uses, particularly because opportunities for waterfront commercial activity elsewhere in Old Lyme are limited. Participants also raised questions about the potential future development of larger properties, including property currently owned by CT DEEP, and the implications of possible condominium-style marina or "dock-ominium" development.
- **Water-Dependent Businesses and Marina Operations:** Participants expressed strong support for preserving and strengthening water-dependent uses, including marinas, boatyards, boat maintenance, and related waterfront businesses. Zoning changes should avoid creating restrictions that could impair existing operations or their long-term viability. There was also interest in opportunities to expand marina and boatyard capacity while maintaining the ability of these businesses to provide necessary maintenance and support services.
- **Environmental and Coastal Resource Protection:** Environmental protection and low-impact waterfront development were identified as priorities, including consideration of impacts extending beyond individual sites to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. Participants also supported continued application of Gateway Commission standards within the WF-20 areas.
- **Flood Resilience, Building Design, and Infrastructure:** Participants recognized the need for new development and improvements to comply with FEMA flood-elevation requirements, while also considering how elevated construction could affect building heights and waterfront character. Parking, traffic, and infrastructure capacity were identified as important constraints that should be considered when evaluating future development.
- **Waterfront Access and Recreational Opportunities:** Participants identified opportunities to improve access to the waterfront, including additional kayak storage near launch areas, where existing storage is often at capacity. There was also interest in potential public-access improvements such as piers and boardwalks, including opportunities to provide or enhance access at private marinas where appropriate.
- **Coordination and Waterfront Improvements:** Participants emphasized coordination among the Town, Harbor Management Commission, waterfront property owners, and other relevant entities when addressing dredging, waterfront improvements, access, and other issues affecting the WF-20 areas.

Overall, the comments indicate a preference for preserving the WF-20 districts as limited, distinct waterfront areas focused on water-dependent and low-impact uses. Participants generally supported maintaining and enhancing existing marinas and boatyards, improving waterfront and recreational access, and addressing dredging and operational needs, while carefully managing environmental impacts, flood resilience, building scale, traffic, parking, and infrastructure capacity.

Sound View Village District

Comments regarding the Sound View Village District reflected a desire to continue the area's recent improvements while encouraging reinvestment, supporting local businesses, and preserving the neighborhood's residential and community character. The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Zoning and Development:** Participants suggested better aligning the Sound View Village District standards with the adjacent C-10 zoning to create a more cohesive regulatory framework and provide appropriate opportunities for investment. There was support for mixed-use development along Hartford Avenue while maintaining the predominantly residential character of surrounding areas. Participants also expressed interest in updating the Sound View Design Guidelines as a means of guiding future development and improvements.
- **Property Reinvestment and Economic Development:** Vacant, neglected, and underutilized properties were identified as a concern and a potential impediment to continued revitalization. Participants supported strategies to encourage property improvement and reinvestment, potentially including targeted tax incentives. At the same time, comments recognized the substantial investments that many existing property owners have made in maintaining and improving their properties.
- **Infrastructure, Utilities, and Parking:** Participants identified infrastructure capacity as an important consideration for future development, particularly uncertainty regarding septic systems and the potential for future sewer service. Parking capacity was also identified as a significant issue because of seasonal beach activity and the parking needs of local businesses.
- **Pedestrian Environment and Public Improvements:** Participants expressed support for continued investment in sidewalks, streetscape improvements, benches, and other public infrastructure that has contributed to a more pedestrian- and family-friendly environment. Additional pedestrian improvements and activities that generate foot traffic were viewed as opportunities to support both the neighborhood and local businesses.
- **Tourism, Recreation, and Community Amenities:** Participants supported small-scale tourism, arts, cultural, recreational, and family-oriented uses that could provide additional activities for residents and visitors. Potential amenities included miniature golf, a dog park, a splash pad, and other family-oriented recreational facilities. Continued coordination with Parks and Recreation was encouraged to identify opportunities for public amenities and programming. Participants also supported efforts to provide public restrooms and to identify potential funding for these facilities.
- **Community Character and Identity:** Maintaining and building upon Sound View's established community identity was an important theme, including recognition of multigenerational families and resident involvement in the Sound View Community Center. Participants noted that Sound View has historically faced negative perceptions and expressed interest in highlighting recent improvements and the area's increasingly family-oriented character.

- **Short-Term Rentals and Housing:** Participants raised concerns about the potential effects of short-term rentals, including Airbnb-type accommodations, on the residential neighborhood and housing stock and suggested that their impacts be evaluated as part of future planning and zoning efforts.

Overall, the comments indicate support for continued revitalization of Sound View through targeted reinvestment, public improvements, pedestrian amenities, and small-scale commercial, cultural, and recreational activity. Participants generally favored concentrating mixed-use and commercial activity along Hartford Avenue, improving vacant and underutilized properties, and addressing parking and utility constraints, while preserving the residential neighborhoods, community identity, and increasingly family-oriented character of Sound View.

Light Industry Zone

Comments regarding the Light Industry (LI-80) zone reflected a general desire to preserve its industrial and employment role while considering changes that could address vacancies, changing market conditions, and constraints on redevelopment. The following themes emerged from the discussion:

- **Industrial and Economic Role:** Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining industrial uses within the LI-80 zone, particularly because of its contribution to middle-income employment and the Town's tax base. The zone's highway access was identified as an important strength, and the expansion of Electric Boat was noted as a potential source of demand for supporting industries and businesses.
- **Existing Conditions and Redevelopment Challenges:** Participants identified significant vacancies, particularly in professional office space, with some buildings reported to be nearly 50% vacant. Existing buildings were described as increasingly functionally obsolete, while challenging topography, proximity to a former landfill, septic limitations, and drainage and runoff concerns were identified as constraints on redevelopment. Participants also raised concerns about the appearance and "curb appeal" of some properties.
- **Changing Industrial and Business Uses:** Participants recognized that industrial activities and space needs are evolving and discussed broadening the range of uses to help the district remain viable. Suggestions included contractor storage, service businesses, coworking spaces, and similar employment-oriented uses. At the same time, participants expressed concern about allowing too many general commercial uses and specifically suggested prohibiting data centers and solar farms.
- **Commercial and Service Uses:** There was interest in allowing limited commercial and service uses that could support employees and businesses within the district, particularly along its edges. Examples included grocery stores, coffee shops, and other convenient goods and services. Participants generally distinguished these supporting uses from broader commercial development that could diminish the district's industrial function.
- **Housing and Mixed-Use Development:** Opinions differed regarding introducing housing or mixed-use development. Some property owners advocated for mixed-use opportunities, and senior housing was discussed as one potential option, with Harbor Heights in Stonington referenced as an example of a desirable development form. Nearby residents and other community members generally opposed introducing housing into the industrial zone, citing compatibility, noise, traffic, and quality-of-life concerns, although they were more receptive to service-oriented commercial uses.

- **Traffic and Compatibility:** Traffic was a recurring concern, particularly along Hatchet Hill Road and with respect to existing cut-through traffic. Participants expressed concern that mixed-use or residential development could generate additional traffic. Noise and potential conflicts between residential development and existing or future industrial operations were also identified as considerations.
- **Zone Boundaries and Future Industrial Growth:** Participants suggested evaluating the geographic extent of the LI-80 zone, including whether expansion could provide additional opportunities for industrial development. This was discussed in the context of preserving the district's long-term industrial function and accommodating potential demand associated with regional employment growth.

Overall, the comments indicate support for maintaining the LI-80 zone primarily as an industrial and employment district while providing greater flexibility to respond to vacancies, aging buildings, and changing business needs. Participants identified opportunities to accommodate additional industrial, contractor, service, coworking, and limited supporting commercial uses and to consider expansion of the industrial area, while concerns regarding housing and mixed-use development centered on traffic, noise, compatibility, and infrastructure constraints.