



# Annual Report of the Newport Zoning Board of Review

City of Newport, Rhode Island 2025

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## From the Chair

Dear Honorable Mayor Holder and Fellow Members of The Newport City Council:

Please accept the following as my annual Chairman's Letter to The City Council. What a difference a year makes! In last year's letter I was discussing how The Zoning Board, although diligent, was overworked and needed help in the form of new alternate members, and perhaps even another board. Well, due to a number of factors I will discuss below those pressure points have eased considerably. Perhaps too much.

First, I would like to lay out some statistics and discuss what it means to the board, review our members, including newly appointed alternates, City staff, then close with some personal thoughts.

Our Board met 14 times in 2025, 12 regular monthly meetings and two special meetings. In 2024 we had 17 meetings, 12 regular and 5 special meetings. In 2025 we received 115 new petitions, compared with 144 petitions in 2024. We have 3 pending full hearings as of the end of this year, where we had 11 at year end 2024. In addition, we had only 1 appeal this year, while hearing 3 last year and 5 the year before. In fact, there were 2 or 3 meetings where our business was finished in an hour or less. Unprecedented!

What do these statistics tell us? Our workload has dropped significantly. The question is why? First, it seems the new proportional zoning laws are finally having a salutorious effect on our caseload, i.e. property owners are finding they don't need relief because the new law gives them the lot coverage percentage they need. Second, accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are now allowed under certain circumstances by state law, so those property owners do not need to seek relief from us. Third, we are seeing far less HDC appeals because of a court ruling stating essentially that an HDC Board member's yes vote assumes that the petition meets all the findings of fact.

Last, and most important, we don't see any of the big cases anymore, which usually involve special hearings, due to the state's mandate to Cities and Towns to implement The Unified Development Review Law, effective Jan. 1, 2024. The upshot is that The Planning Board now hears all the big development cases, and The Zoning Board gets all the smaller petitions. Much of what we are hearing now revolves around short term rentals and their parking requirements. Myself and all my colleagues feel like the rug has been pulled out from under us by the state. Call us Zoning Lite. That being said, we all take our positions quite seriously, and will continue to do so. One last thing on law, the more we can give the small things, like a/c condensers, to Nick, the more efficient we will be.

Indeed, attendance this year was at 90%, a record for my Board tenure. Regular voting members, Vice-Chairman Dave Riley, Secretary Russ Johnson, Bart Grimes, and with perfect attendance, Nicole Shevory continue to do a great job. Their considered and diverse decisions are indisputable and solid. The same may be said for our two alternates, Melissa Pattavina and Richard Berlinsky. Jonathan Bell I believe is inactive as he has not seen an opportunity to serve. In fact, I took last month off to give our alternates a chance to sit and vote. I heard they all did very well, particularly Russ as acting Chairman.

Our staff continues to excel and innovate, streamlining the application process by moving it online, and the petitions continue to be easily accessed by Board members, with everything in one place. Nick Armour, Girard Galvin, Dylan Conley, Zach Cabrera and their newest assistant Sarah Lynch are responsive, efficient and pleasant to deal with. Truly government done right!

In conclusion, the underlying theme of this letter is, what a difference a year makes. We seem to have gone from being busier than a one-armed paper hanger last year to the Maytag repairman this year. Maybe 2026 will find us in the comfortable middle. Regardless, we will be ready and willing to serve our beautiful city with well thought-out, common-sense decisions.

Sincerely,

Wick Rudd, Chairman, Newport Zoning Board

## Meeting Schedule

The Zoning Board met on these dates:

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1) January 27, 2025    | Regular Meeting        |
| 2) February 10, 2025   | <i>Special Meeting</i> |
| 3) February 24, 2025   | Regular Meeting        |
| 4) March 24, 2025      | Regular Meeting        |
| 5) March 31, 2025      | <i>Special Meeting</i> |
| 6) April 28, 2025      | Regular Meeting        |
| 7) May 19, 2025        | Regular Meeting        |
| 8) June 23, 2025       | Regular Meeting        |
| 9) July 28, 2025       | Regular Meeting        |
| 10) August 25, 2025    | Regular Meeting        |
| 11) September 22, 2025 | Regular Meeting        |
| 12) October 28, 2025   | Regular Meeting        |
| 13) November 25, 2025  | Regular Meeting        |
| 14) December 15, 2025  | Regular Meeting        |

## Members of the Board and Attendance

Wick Rudd, Chair

David Riley, Vice-Chair

Russell Jackson, Secretary

Bartholomew Grimes, Member

Nicole Shevory, Member

Melissa Pattavina, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate

Richard Berlinksy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alternate, July 28-Present

Jonathan Bell, 3<sup>rd</sup> Alternate, not yet trained

## Attendance

Zoning Board Member 2025 Meeting Date	Wick Rudd – Chair	David Riley – Vice Chair	Russell Johnson – Secretary	Bart Grimes	Nicole Shevory	Melissa Pattavina (1 <sup>st</sup> alternate)	Richard Berlinsky (2 <sup>nd</sup> alternate)	Jonathan Bell (3 <sup>rd</sup> alternate)
January 27	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
February 10 – Special Meeting	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
February 24	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
March 24	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
March 31 – Special Meeting	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
April 28	Present	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
May 19	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
June 23	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A	N/A
July 28	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Absent	Present	N/A
August 25	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A
September 22	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A
October 28	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A
November 25	Present	Present	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present	N/A
December 15	Absent	Present	Present	Present	Present	Absent	Present	N/A
<b>Staff Attendance:</b> Nick Armour, Zoning Officer, present at all meetings except June 23, 2025. Patricia Reynolds, Director, Department of Planning and Development, present at June 23, 2025 meeting. Girard Galvin, Dylan Conley, or Peter Friedrichs, Assistant City Solicitors, present at all meetings. Zach Cabrera, Assistant Planner, present at all meetings.								

## Applications, appeals and matters decided

The Zoning Board had 11 applications from previous years (2023 & 2024) still on the docket during 2025, eight of which were approved, one denied, and two remain on the agenda into 2026. In 2025, the Zoning Board received 108 new petitions for special use permits, dimensional and parking variances, and other forms of relief, and 1 appeal.

The Zoning Board heard and approved the 1 appeal. Of the 115 new petitions received in 2025, 71 petitions were approved by the Zoning Board and zero petitions were denied. 24 petitions submitted in 2025 were withdrawn (primarily due to either a variance not being required after review, or later submission of a survey that allowed for substandard lot proportionality to eliminate need for a variance) and 16 applications remain incomplete. Three active petitions are awaiting a full hearing and four inactive petitions will be continued into 2026.

<b>Previous Years' Applications Heard in 2025</b>			
Year Received	2023	2024	Totals
Approved	1	7	<b>8</b>
Denied	0	1	<b>1</b>
Withdrawn	0	0	<b>0</b>
On 2026 Agenda	0	2	<b>2</b>
Appeals	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Total</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>

<b>Zoning Applications Received in 2025</b>													
Month Received	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Totals
Approved	7	7	4	6	9	10	3	4	8	2	7	4	<b>71</b>
Denied	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Withdrawn	1	0	1	2	0	3	3	2	7	3	1	0	<b>23</b>
On 2026 Agenda	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	<b>4</b>
Appeals	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Incomplete	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	3	1	5	3	<b>16</b>
Continued	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<i>Total</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>115</i>

<b>Zoning Officer Modifications Received in 2025</b>													
Month Received	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Totals
Approved	2	2	1	0	1	1	2	2	1	0	1	0	<b>13</b>
Withdrawn	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
Under Review	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<i>Total</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>19</i>

**2025 Summary Statistics:**

- 115 total applications received by Staff
- 99 complete applications considered by the Zoning Board of Review
- 0 applications denied
- 1 appeal heard and approved
- 4 petitions awaiting a full hearing in 2026
- 1 petition pending other Boards or Commissions
- 16 incomplete applications awaiting corrections or new information
- 9 applications per month received on average
- 19 Zoning Officer Modification applications received
- 13 Zoning Officer Modification applications approved
- 5 Zoning Officer Modification applications withdrawn
- 1 Zoning Officer Modification application awaiting final approval in 2026

## **Staff**

The Zoning Officer, Nick Armour, continued to play a central role in advancing zoning and planning initiatives throughout the year, while also implementing operational improvements aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency, and public accessibility.

Over the past year, the Zoning Department successfully transitioned to online zoning applications, marking a significant modernization of the application and review process. This new system has made zoning applications more accessible and user-friendly for members of the public, allowing applicants to submit materials digitally and track submissions more easily. The online platform has also improved the transparency and organization of application materials, benefiting Zoning Board members and members of the public by making documents easier to review, share, and understand during hearings and deliberations.

## **State Law Compliance and Zoning Code Updates**

Over the past year, the Zoning Office has placed a strong emphasis on ensuring that the City's Zoning Ordinance remains consistent with updates to Rhode Island General Laws and evolving State planning and zoning requirements. This has included ongoing monitoring of legislative changes, regulatory guidance, and best practices issued at the State level, as well as evaluating their potential impacts on local zoning administration and land use policy.

In response to recent State law updates and City Council directives, the Zoning Officer has worked proactively to identify areas of the Zoning Ordinance that require clarification, amendment, or technical correction. This work has occurred alongside broader ordinance rewrites and has focused on maintaining legal compliance, improving internal consistency, and ensuring the ordinance remains clear and implementable for staff, applicants, boards, and the public.

The Zoning Office has also continued to respond directly to City Council directives related to zoning code updates, preparing draft language, background analysis, and implementation guidance as requested. This collaborative approach has supported informed policy discussions and ensured that zoning amendments align with Council priorities, State mandates, and community needs.

Looking ahead, the Zoning Office is preparing a series of targeted "quick fix" zoning amendments intended to address technical issues, clarifications, and compliance-related updates identified through ordinance administration and State law review. These proposed updates are anticipated to be presented to the City Council in a workshop setting in early 2026, allowing for focused discussion and feedback prior to formal consideration.