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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2011

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A N A C T

RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES - ZONING ORDINANCES

Introduced By: Representative E Coderre

Date Introduced: March 02, 2011

Referred To: House Municipal Government

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 45-24-31 of the General Laws in Chapter 45-24 entitled "Zoning  
2 Ordinances" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **45-24-31. Definitions.** -- Where words or terms used in this chapter are defined in section  
4 45-22.2-4, they have the meanings stated in that section. In addition, the following words have  
5 the following meanings. Additional words and phrases may be used in developing local  
6 ordinances under this chapter; however, the words and phrases defined in this section are  
7 controlling in all local ordinances created under this chapter:

8 (1) Abutter. - One whose property abuts, that is, adjoins at a border, boundary, or point  
9 with no intervening land.

10 (2) Accessory Dwelling Unit. - A dwelling unit: (i) rented to and occupied either by one  
11 or more members of the family of the occupant or occupants of the principal residence; or (ii)  
12 reserved for rental occupancy by a person or a family where the principal residence is owner  
13 occupied, and which meets the following provisions:

14 (A) In zoning districts that allow residential uses, no more than one accessory dwelling  
15 unit may be an accessory to a single-family dwelling.

16 (B) An accessory dwelling unit shall include separate cooking and sanitary facilities,  
17 with its own legal means of ingress and egress and is a complete, separate dwelling unit. The  
18 accessory dwelling unit shall be within or attached to the principal dwelling unit structure or  
19 within an existing structure, such as a garage or barn, and designed so that the appearance of the

1 principal structure remains that of a one-family residence.

2 (3) Accessory Use. - A use of land or of a building, or portion thereof, customarily  
3 incidental and subordinate to the principal use of the land or building. An accessory use may be  
4 restricted to the same lot as the principal use. An accessory use shall not be permitted without the  
5 principal use to which it is related.

6 (4) Aggrieved Party. - An aggrieved party, for purposes of this chapter, shall be:

7 (i) Any person or persons or entity or entities who can demonstrate that their property  
8 will be injured by a decision of any officer or agency responsible for administering the zoning  
9 ordinance of a city or town; or

10 (ii) Anyone requiring notice pursuant to this chapter.

11 (5) Agricultural Land. - "Agricultural land", as defined in section 45-22.2-4.

12 (6) Airport Hazard Area. - "Airport hazard area", as defined in section 1-3-2.

13 (7) Applicant. - An owner or authorized agent of the owner submitting an application or  
14 appealing an action of any official, board, or agency.

15 (8) Application. - The completed form or forms and all accompanying documents,  
16 exhibits, and fees required of an applicant by an approving authority for development review,  
17 approval, or permitting purposes.

18 (9) Buffer. - Land which is maintained in either a natural or landscaped state, and is used  
19 to screen and/or mitigate the impacts of development on surrounding areas, properties, or rights-  
20 of-way.

21 (10) Building. - Any structure used or intended for supporting or sheltering any use or  
22 occupancy.

23 (11) Building Envelope. - The three-dimensional space within which a structure is  
24 permitted to be built on a lot and which is defined by regulations governing building setbacks,  
25 maximum height, and bulk; by other regulations; and/or by any combination thereof.

26 (12) Building Height. - The vertical distance from grade, as determined by the  
27 municipality, to the top of the highest point of the roof or structure. The distance may exclude  
28 spires, chimneys, flag poles, and the like.

29 (13) Cluster. - A site planning technique that concentrates buildings in specific areas on  
30 the site to allow the remaining land to be used for recreation, common open space, and/or  
31 preservation of environmentally, historically, culturally, or other sensitive features and/or  
32 structures. The techniques used to concentrate buildings shall be specified in the ordinance and  
33 may include, but are not limited to, reduction in lot areas, setback requirements, and/or bulk  
34 requirements, with the resultant open land being devoted by deed restrictions for one or more

1 uses. Under cluster development there is no increase in the number of lots that would be  
2 permitted under conventional development except where ordinance provisions include incentive  
3 bonuses for certain types or conditions of development.

4 (14) Common Ownership. - Either:

5 (i) Ownership by one or more individuals or entities in any form of ownership of two (2)  
6 or more contiguous lots; or

7 (ii) Ownership by any association (ownership may also include a municipality) of one or  
8 more lots under specific development techniques.

9 (15) Community Residence. - A home or residential facility where children and/or adults  
10 reside in a family setting and may or may not receive supervised care. This does not include  
11 halfway houses or substance abuse treatment facilities. This does include, but is not limited, to the  
12 following:

13 (i) Whenever six (6) or fewer children or adults with retardation reside in any type of  
14 residence in the community, as licensed by the state pursuant to chapter 24 of title 40.1. All  
15 requirements pertaining to local zoning are waived for these community residences;

16 (ii) A group home providing care or supervision, or both, to not more than eight (8)  
17 persons with disabilities, and licensed by the state pursuant to chapter 24 of title 40.1;

18 (iii) A residence for children providing care or supervision, or both, to not more than  
19 eight (8) children including those of the care giver and licensed by the state pursuant to chapter  
20 72.1 of title 42;

21 (iv) A community transitional residence providing care or assistance, or both, to no more  
22 than six (6) unrelated persons or no more than three (3) families, not to exceed a total of eight (8)  
23 persons, requiring temporary financial assistance, and/or to persons who are victims of crimes,  
24 abuse, or neglect, and who are expected to reside in that residence not less than sixty (60) days  
25 nor more than two (2) years. Residents will have access to and use of all common areas, including  
26 eating areas and living rooms, and will receive appropriate social services for the purpose of  
27 fostering independence, self-sufficiency, and eventual transition to a permanent living situation.

28 (16) Comprehensive Plan. - The comprehensive plan adopted and approved pursuant to  
29 chapter 22.2 of this title and to which any zoning adopted pursuant to this chapter shall be in  
30 compliance.

31 (17) Day Care -- Day Care Center. - Any other day care center which is not a family day  
32 care home.

33 (18) Day Care -- Family Day Care Home. - Any home other than the individual's home  
34 in which day care in lieu of parental care or supervision is offered at the same time to six (6) or

1 less individuals who are not relatives of the care giver, but may not contain more than a total of  
2 eight (8) individuals receiving day care.

3 (19) Density, Residential. - The number of dwelling units per unit of land.

4 (20) Development. - The construction, reconstruction, conversion, structural alteration,  
5 relocation, or enlargement of any structure; any mining, excavation, landfill or land disturbance;  
6 or any change in use, or alteration or extension of the use, of land.

7 (21) Development Plan Review. - The process whereby authorized local officials review  
8 the site plans, maps, and other documentation of a development to determine the compliance with  
9 the stated purposes and standards of the ordinance.

10 (22) District. - See "zoning use district".

11 (23) Drainage System. - A system for the removal of water from land by drains, grading,  
12 or other appropriate means. These techniques may include runoff controls to minimize erosion  
13 and sedimentation during and after construction or development, the means for preserving surface  
14 and groundwaters, and the prevention and/or alleviation of flooding.

15 (24) Dwelling Unit. - A structure or portion of a structure providing complete,  
16 independent living facilities for one or more persons, including permanent provisions for living,  
17 sleeping, eating, cooking, and sanitation, and containing a separate means of ingress and egress.

18 (25) Extractive Industry. - The extraction of minerals, including: solids, such as coal and  
19 ores; liquids, such as crude petroleum; and gases, such as natural gases. The term also includes  
20 quarrying; well operation; milling, such as crushing, screening, washing, and flotation; and other  
21 preparation customarily done at the extraction site or as a part of the extractive activity.

22 (26) Family. - A person or persons related by blood, marriage, or other legal means. See  
23 also "Household".

24 (27) Floating Zone. - An unmapped zoning district adopted within the ordinance which  
25 is established on the zoning map only when an application for development, meeting the zone  
26 requirements, is approved.

27 (28) Floodplains, or Flood Hazard Area. - As defined in section 45-22.2-4.

28 (29) Groundwater. - "Groundwater" and associated terms, as defined in section 46-13.1-  
29 3.

30 (30) Halfway House. - A residential facility for adults or children who have been  
31 institutionalized for criminal conduct and who require a group setting to facilitate the transition to  
32 a functional member of society.

33 (31) Hardship. - See section 45-24-41.

34 (32) Historic District, or Historic Site. - As defined in section 45-22.2-4.

1 (33) Home Occupation. - Any activity customarily carried out for gain by a resident,  
2 conducted as an accessory use in the resident's dwelling unit.

3 (34) Household. - One or more persons living together in a single dwelling unit, with  
4 common access to, and common use of, all living and eating areas and all areas and facilities for  
5 the preparation and storage of food within the dwelling unit. The term "household unit" is  
6 synonymous with the term "dwelling unit" for determining the number of units allowed within  
7 any structure on any lot in a zoning district. An individual household shall consist of any one of  
8 the following:

9 (i) A family, which may also include servants and employees living with the family; or

10 (ii) A person or group of unrelated persons living together. The maximum number may  
11 be set by local ordinance, but this maximum shall not be less than three (3).

12 (35) Incentive Zoning. - The process whereby the local authority may grant additional  
13 development capacity in exchange for the developer's provision of a public benefit or amenity as  
14 specified in local ordinances.

15 (36) Infrastructure. - Facilities and services needed to sustain residential, commercial,  
16 industrial, institutional, and other activities.

17 (37) Land Development Project. - A project in which one or more lots, tracts, or parcels  
18 of land are to be developed or redeveloped as a coordinated site for a complex of uses, units, or  
19 structures, including, but not limited to, planned development and/or cluster development for  
20 residential, commercial, institutional, recreational, open space, and/or mixed uses as may be  
21 provided for in the zoning ordinance.

22 (38) Lot. - Either:

23 (i) The basic development unit for determination of lot area, depth, and other  
24 dimensional regulations; or

25 (ii) A parcel of land whose boundaries have been established by some legal instrument  
26 such as a recorded deed or recorded map and which is recognized as a separate legal entity for  
27 purposes of transfer of title.

28 (39) Lot Area. - The total area within the boundaries of a lot, excluding any street right-  
29 of-way, usually reported in acres or square feet.

30 (40) Lot Building Coverage. - That portion of the lot that is or may be covered by  
31 buildings and accessory buildings.

32 (41) Lot Depth. - The distance measured from the front lot line to the rear lot line. For  
33 lots where the front and rear lot lines are not parallel, the lot depth is an average of the depth.

34 (42) Lot Frontage. - That portion of a lot abutting a street. A zoning ordinance shall

1 specify how noncontiguous frontage will be considered with regard to minimum frontage  
2 requirements.

3 (43) Lot Line. - A line of record, bounding a lot, which divides one lot from another lot  
4 or from a public or private street or any other public or private space and shall include:

5 (i) Front: the lot line separating a lot from a street right-of-way. A zoning ordinance shall  
6 specify the method to be used to determine the front lot line on lots fronting on more than one  
7 street, for example, corner and through lots;

8 (ii) Rear: the lot line opposite and most distant from the front lot line, or in the case of  
9 triangular or otherwise irregularly shaped lots, an assumed line at least ten feet (10') in length  
10 entirely within the lot, parallel to and at a maximum distance from the front lot line; and

11 (iii) Side: any lot line other than a front or rear lot line. On a corner lot, a side lot line  
12 may be a street lot line, depending on requirements of the local zoning ordinance.

13 (44) Lot, Through. - A lot which fronts upon two (2) parallel streets, or which fronts  
14 upon two (2) streets which do not intersect at the boundaries of the lot.

15 (45) Lot Width. - The horizontal distance between the side lines of a lot measured at  
16 right angles to its depth along a straight line parallel to the front lot line at the minimum front  
17 setback line.

18 (46) Mere Inconvenience. - See section 45-24-41.

19 (47) Mixed Use. - A mixture of land uses within a single development, building, or tract.

20 (48) Modification. - Permission granted and administered by the zoning enforcement  
21 officer of the city or town, and pursuant to the provisions of this chapter to grant a dimensional  
22 variance other than lot area requirements from the zoning ordinance to a limited degree as  
23 determined by the zoning ordinance of the city or town, but not to exceed twenty-five percent  
24 (25%) of each of the applicable dimensional requirements.

25 (49) Nonconformance. - A building, structure, or parcel of land, or use thereof, lawfully  
26 existing at the time of the adoption or amendment of a zoning ordinance and not in conformity  
27 with the provisions of that ordinance or amendment. Nonconformance is of only two (2) types:

28 (i) Nonconforming by use: a lawfully established use of land, building, or structure  
29 which is not a permitted use in that zoning district. A building or structure containing more  
30 dwelling units than are permitted by the use regulations of a zoning ordinance is nonconformity  
31 by use; or

32 (ii) Nonconforming by dimension: a building, structure, or parcel of land not in  
33 compliance with the dimensional regulations of the zoning ordinance. Dimensional regulations  
34 include all regulations of the zoning ordinance, other than those pertaining to the permitted uses.

1 A building or structure containing more dwelling units than are permitted by the use regulations  
2 of a zoning ordinance is nonconforming by use; a building or structure containing a permitted  
3 number of dwelling units by the use regulations of the zoning ordinance, but not meeting the lot  
4 area per dwelling unit regulations, is nonconforming by dimension.

5 (50) Overlay District. - A district established in a zoning ordinance that is superimposed  
6 on one or more districts or parts of districts ~~and that imposes specified requirements in addition~~  
7 ~~to, but not less, than those otherwise applicable for the underlying zone.~~ The standards and  
8 requirements associated with an overlay district may be more or less restrictive than those in the  
9 underlying districts consistent with other applicable state and federal laws.

10 (51) Performance Standards. - A set of criteria or limits relating to elements which a  
11 particular use or process must either meet or may not exceed.

12 (52) Permitted Use. - A use by right which is specifically authorized in a particular  
13 zoning district.

14 (53) Planned Development. - A "land development project", as defined in section 45-24-  
15 31(37), and developed according to plan as a single entity and containing one or more structures  
16 and/or uses with appurtenant common areas.

17 (54) Preapplication Conference. - A review meeting of a proposed development held  
18 between applicants and reviewing agencies as permitted by law and municipal ordinance, before  
19 formal submission of an application for a permit or for development approval.

20 (55) Setback Line or Lines. - A line or lines parallel to a lot line at the minimum distance  
21 of the required setback for the zoning district in which the lot is located that establishes the area  
22 within which the principal structure must be erected or placed.

23 (56) Site Plan. - The development plan for one or more lots on which is shown the  
24 existing and/or the proposed conditions of the lot.

25 (57) Special Use. - A regulated use which is permitted pursuant to the special-use permit  
26 issued by the authorized governmental entity, pursuant to section 45-24-42. Formerly referred to  
27 as a special exception.

28 (58) Structure. - A combination of materials to form a construction for use, occupancy,  
29 or ornamentation, whether installed on, above, or below, the surface of land or water.

30 (59) Substandard Lot of Record. - Any lot lawfully existing at the time of adoption or  
31 amendment of a zoning ordinance and not in conformance with the dimensional and/or area  
32 provisions of that ordinance.

33 (60) Use. - The purpose or activity for which land or buildings are designed, arranged, or  
34 intended, or for which land or buildings are occupied or maintained.

1 (61) Variance. - Permission to depart from the literal requirements of a zoning ordinance.  
2 An authorization for the construction or maintenance of a building or structure, or for the  
3 establishment or maintenance of a use of land, which is prohibited by a zoning ordinance. There  
4 are only two (2) categories of variance, a use variance or a dimensional variance.

5 (i) Use Variance. - Permission to depart from the use requirements of a zoning ordinance  
6 where the applicant for the requested variance has shown by evidence upon the record that the  
7 subject land or structure cannot yield any beneficial use if it is to conform to the provisions of the  
8 zoning ordinance.

9 (ii) Dimensional Variance. - Permission to depart from the dimensional requirements of  
10 a zoning ordinance, where the applicant for the requested relief has shown, by evidence upon the  
11 record, that there is no other reasonable alternative way to enjoy a legally permitted beneficial use  
12 of the subject property unless granted the requested relief from the dimensional regulations.  
13 However, the fact that a use may be more profitable or that a structure may be more valuable after  
14 the relief is granted are not grounds for relief.

15 (62) Waters. - As defined in section 46-12-1(23).

16 (63) Wetland, Coastal. - As defined in section 45-22.2-4.

17 (64) Wetland, Freshwater. - As defined in section 2-1-20.

18 (65) Zoning Certificate. - A document signed by the zoning enforcement officer, as  
19 required in the zoning ordinance, which acknowledges that a use, structure, building, or lot either  
20 complies with or is legally nonconforming to the provisions of the municipal zoning ordinance or  
21 is an authorized variance or modification therefrom.

22 (66) Zoning Map. - The map or maps which are a part of the zoning ordinance and which  
23 delineate the boundaries of all mapped zoning districts within the physical boundary of the city or  
24 town.

25 (67) Zoning Ordinance. - An ordinance enacted by the legislative body of the city or  
26 town pursuant to this chapter and in the manner providing for the adoption of ordinances in the  
27 city or town's legislative or home rule charter, if any, which establish regulations and standards  
28 relating to the nature and extent of uses of land and structures, which is consistent with the  
29 comprehensive plan of the city or town as defined in chapter 22.2 of this title, which includes a  
30 zoning map, and which complies with the provisions of this chapter.

31 (68) Zoning Use District. - The basic unit in zoning, either mapped or unmapped, to  
32 which a uniform set of regulations applies, or a uniform set of regulations for a specified use.  
33 Zoning use districts include, but are not limited to: agricultural, commercial, industrial,  
34 institutional, open space, and residential. Each district may include sub-districts. Districts may be



1 combined.

2 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
A N A C T  
RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES - ZONING ORDINANCES

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1           This act would amend the definition of "overlay district" under the chapter concerning  
2 zoning ordinances.

3           This act would take effect upon passage.

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