

Some towns drop the word ‘character’ from zoning rules

Term can be used as a tool to be exclusionary, officials say

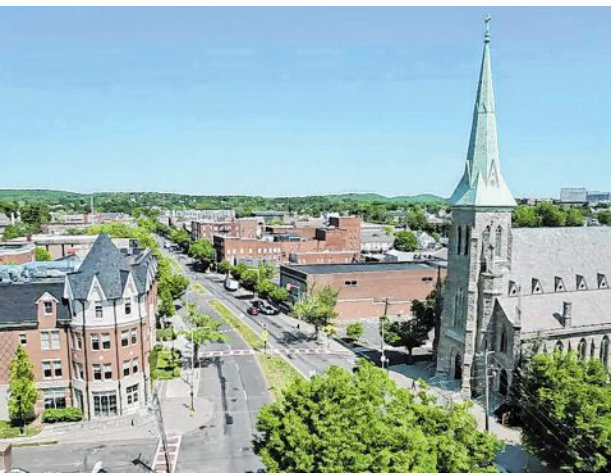
By Jordan Nathaniel Fenster
STAFF WRITER

Over the last five years, many towns and cities across Connecticut have been rewriting official zoning regulations to remove a single word: “character.” The change comes thanks to a 2021 law that

followed several appeals of project denials throughout the state. It removes some of the subjectiveness in a project’s denial and helps reduce the “exclusionary” connotation land use officials, including Milford City Planner David Sulkis, say is attached to the word “character.” Specifically, towns can’t

deny land use permits based on “a district’s character, unless such character is expressly articulated in such regulations by clear and explicit physical standards for site work and structures,” the law states. The word had become nearly ubiquitous in official planning and zoning documents, and had consequently been the basis for many appeals when zoning applications were denied, Sulkis said.

“Public Act 21-29 got that out of planner-speak, because ‘character’ is such a nebulous term. Planning is not about character. Planning is about the built environment,” said Janell Mullen, who works directly with several local zoning boards and commissions in Litchfield County as a land-use consultant. “‘Character’ is very vague, and it could mean many different things to many people. So, *Zoning continues on A4*



Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

In Danbury, zoning officials denied the use of a former hotel as a shelter for unhoused people. The plaintiff’s appeal argued that the commission had improperly considered the “character of the neighborhood.”



Arnold Gold/Hearst Connecticut Media

From left, Pam Ehrenkranz, CEO of UJA-JCC Greenwich; Gary Jones, Jewish Community Relations Council director, United Jewish Federation of Stamford, New Canaan and Darien; and Jim Comstock, regional security director of the Community Services Initiative, are photographed in front of the UJA/Federation of Greenwich.

As antisemitic incidents rise, Jewish leaders stress safety

Community members are being trained to protect themselves

By Shaniece Holmes-Brown
STAFF WRITER

STAMFORD — A young boy with a yarmulke on his head was walking with his sister to a school bus stop in Stamford when he heard someone driving past yell “F— Jews!” at him. Former Stamford police officer Jim Comstock said this happened in November 2025 while the boy was walking from his home where Israel’s flag was displayed out front. According to the Anti-Defamation League’s 2025 data report, Connecticut ranked No. 14 nationally for total antisemitic incidents, and No. 9 nationwide for incidents that occurred at K-12 schools. “One incident is one too many,” Comstock said. “I’m very sad to get reports of as young as middle schools having swastikas written on desks, and in high schools.” According to the ADL’s report, Connecticut had 126 antisemitic incidents in 2025; 83 of them were harassment; 42 were vandalism;



Courtesy of UJA-JCC Greenwich

UJA-JCC Greenwich and United Jewish Federation of Stamford are hosting joint active-threat training for community members to protect themselves from antisemitic attacks. A June 9 “Stop the Bleed” training, hosted by UJA-JCC Greenwich, was held at Christ Church in Greenwich.

and there was one assault. Comstock said residents need to learn how to protect themselves from antisemitic attacks, which is why he hosts free “Advanced Active Threat” training in collaboration with the United Jewish Federation

of Stamford, New Canaan and Darien and UJA-JCC Greenwich. “It’s to teach individuals within these institutions what to do, God forbid an attack were to happen,” he said. “We like to train people, plan *Safety continues on A6*

School districts to phase out kindergarten age waivers

By Crystal Elescano
STAFF WRITER

Some Connecticut families will no longer be able to seek early kindergarten admission for their children as school districts begin phasing out waivers ahead of the state’s plan to eliminate them entirely. Here is what you need to know about the phasing out of the waivers:

What is the current kindergarten age requirement? Currently, students must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 1 of the school year to enroll, though some districts may offer a waiver process for students who do not meet the age requirement. But soon, the waiver will be eliminated.

When is the waiver eliminated? The waiver will be eliminated starting July 1, 2027, and go into effect for the 2027-28 school year.

When does the phaseout start? The phaseout of the waiver has already begun. For the 2026–27 school year, local school districts may offer a waiver process, but they *Waivers continues on A4*

Conn. settles suit for \$850K over woman’s death while in custody

By Lisa Backus
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut officials have settled a lawsuit for \$850,000 with the family of a woman who died in 2018 within 12 hours of being incarcerated at York Correctional Institution, the state’s only prison for women, in Niantic, documents show. Desiree Diaz, 33, died because she was not treated for alcohol withdrawal even though she told an intake nurse at the prison she had consumed “eight shots” shortly before her arrest on domestic violence charges hours before, a lawsuit filed by her mother, Katherine Lindsay, on behalf of her estate said. The findings of a state Department of Correction investigation after her death did not place blame on the correction officers and medical staff who interacted with Diaz in the 12 hours she was in the agency’s custody. But the investigation report and several emails sent by prison officials said that everyone should be trained in how to deal with alcohol withdrawal, court papers showed. In the settlement document, state officials did not admit fault but agreed to pay Diaz’s estate, *Death continues on A6*

Data shows Connecticut districts’ income divides

By Patrick McCaslin
STAFF WRITER

In 2024, residents of the Hartford School District in the center of Connecticut had a per-capita income of just over \$27,000. Head a few miles to the west, though, and the picture is starkly different: people in the West Hartford School District made

more than two-and-a-half times as much, \$70,000 per capita. It’s one of the state’s largest disparities in per-capita income between two neighboring school districts. As might be expected, the difference doesn’t only manifest in incomes. It is also reflected in English language arts and math test scores, chronic absenteeism,

the four-year graduation rate, post-secondary readiness and even physical fitness. On each metric, West Hartford scored significantly higher on the state’s metrics than its neighbor. In an effort to understand where similar dividing lines exist across the state of Connecticut, we calculated the average per capita income in each school

district by aggregating income data across each district from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and then dividing that total by the district’s total population. Darien topped the list with an aggregate income of \$150,000 per resident in 2024, nearly triple the state’s average per-capita income. In the 2024-25 school year,

students in Darien posted the third- and fourth-highest English language arts and math scores respectively and the fifth-highest accountability index score from the state. Other wealthy school districts received similarly high scores. New Canaan, the second wealthiest, had the highest test scores *Divide continues on A4*