

Creating Affordable Housing in Woodbridge: A Racial Justice Issue

Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country, and predominately white, higher opportunity towns like Woodbridge can play a proactive role in turning that around through changes to their zoning.

[We can change this!](#)

Woodbridge v. Region v. New Haven

Woodbridge is a resource-rich community that in many ways relies on New Haven, a city hosting a greater share of multi-family and affordable housing than all other towns in the region.

Woodbridge is in a strong position to welcome affordable housing while remaining a vibrant community.

How did we get here?

After the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act, many suburban CT towns that had welcomed the development of starter homes in the post-World War II period, began to adopt highly restrictive zoning making it effectively impossible for Black and Latinx families to become first-time homeowners as white families, with the help of generous subsidies, had a generation earlier. Woodbridge had a head start on this trend, carefully crafting its zoning in a way that ensured that there would be almost no affordable – or even moderately priced – housing in town. The result has been that low- and moderate-income families, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx, are unable to live in Woodbridge.

Exclusionary Zoning

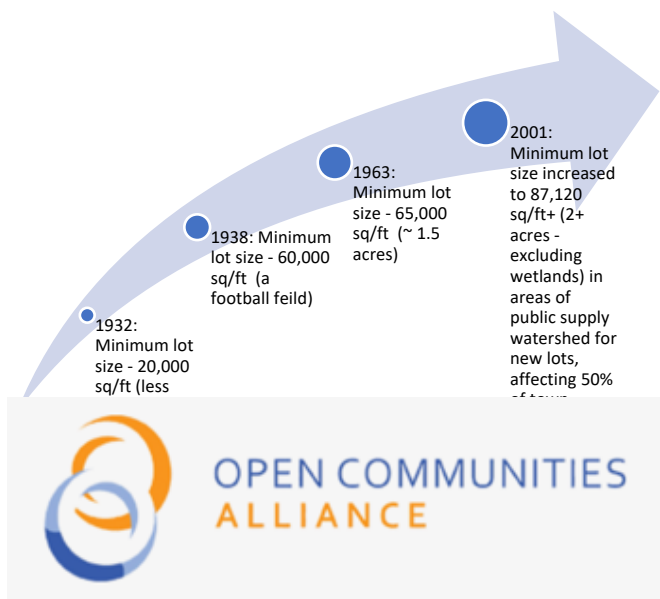
- **A Pioneer in Restrictive Zoning:** Woodbridge was a pioneer within South Central Connecticut in “imposing binding large-lot requirements in the 1930s . . . by the 1950s, many other New Haven suburbs had joined the bandwagon.”ⁱ
- **“Severely Restricted Zoning”:** A 1978 report by the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities cited Woodbridge as among the towns with the most homogenous demographics and “most severely restricted” zoning.ⁱⁱ
- **Zoning for Unaffordability:** In addition to rejecting efforts to allow more affordable housing (see chart), over the years Woodbridge has increased the minimum size for most of its residential lots so that it is now over 2 acres for new lots in about half of town and 1.5 acres in much of the rest. Lots this large significantly increase the cost of housing (see graphic at right).

Measure	Woodbridge	New Haven	Region
White (non-Hispanic) %	74.8%	30.5%	63.3%
Black (non-Hispanic) %	2.7%	31.5%	13.5%
Hispanic %	5.6%	30.3%	16.4%
Poverty Rate	4.3%	25.9%	11.4%
Median Income	\$142,188	\$41,142	\$68,028
School Performance (% points achieved out of 100 points)	84.7% (elementary) 83% (regional district middle/high school)	64.7%	NA
% Multi-family*	5.2%	57.8%	31.1%
% Affordable**	1.2%	32.1%	13.3%

* Census ACS data consisting of occupied housing units in structures of three or more units. This likely includes senior-only housing but may not include all nursing homes.
** Woodbridge percentage from the state annual list is comprised of 43 units, 30 of which are senior-only.

Woodbridge's Zoning has become increasingly exclusionary.

Most of Woodbridge is zoned as a “Residence District A” zone. The minimum lot size of this zone has increased significantly over the years, making housing necessarily more expensive.



Woodbridge's Zoning Today

Today in Woodbridge, new multi-family developments of three units or more are not permitted by the zoning code anywhere in town. Two-family developments are permitted in just 0.2% of the town.

Violating the Law

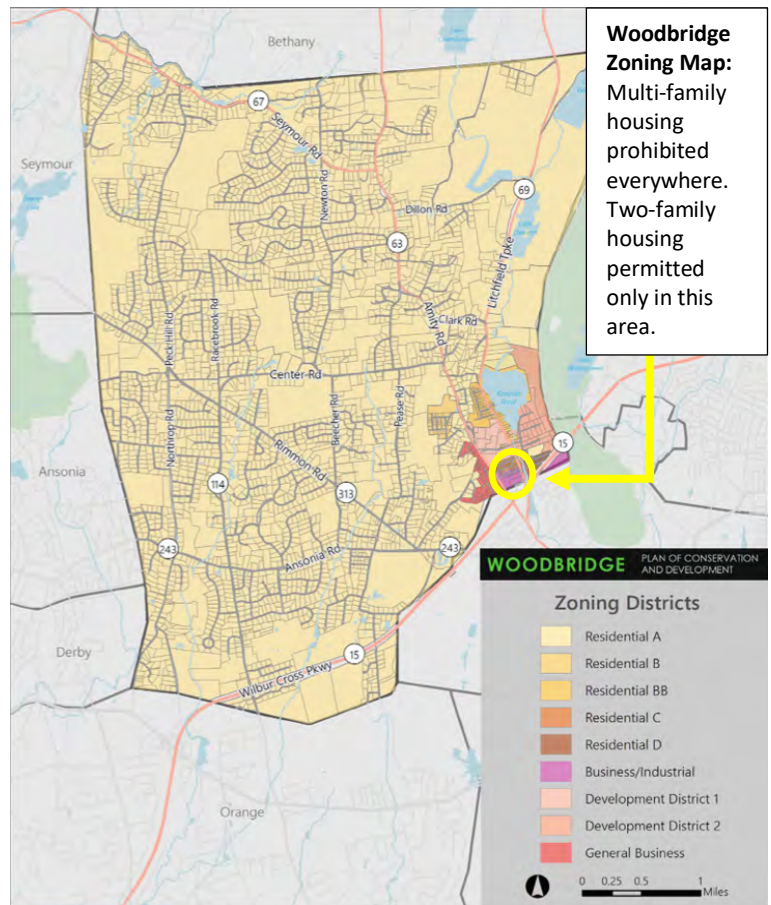
Woodbridge's zoning violates state and federal laws:

- **Fair Housing Laws:** The federal and state Fair Housing Acts prohibit government policies that have a disparate negative impact on Black and Latinx families unjustified by strong non-discriminatory reasons. Such families are disproportionately lower income and therefore have a disproportionate need for rental, multi-family and affordable housing. Woodbridge's zoning thus violates fair housing laws and contributes to racial injustice.
- **Zoning Enabling Act, CGS Sec. 8-2 & Planning Mandates, CGS Sec. 8-23:** These laws require that towns "encourage the development of ... multifamily dwellings" to meet the regional affordable housing need and "promote housing choice and economic diversity, including housing for both low- and moderate-income households." Woodbridge's zoning scheme does neither.
- **Connecticut Constitution:** Article First, Sec. 20 of the CT Constitution states, "No person shall be denied the equal protection of the law nor be subjected to segregation or discrimination in the exercise or enjoyment of his civil or political rights because of religion, race, color, ancestry or national origin." Woodbridge is using the zoning authority of the State in a manner that perpetuates racial segregation.

The Solution: Fair Share

The solution to Woodbridge's exclusionary zoning is to revamp its zoning regulations and planning documents to accommodate the town's fair share of the regional need for affordable housing, which is conservatively estimated to be 542 units by year 10 and at total of 1842 units by year 20. There are multiple strategies the town can employ to reach its fair share, including one it can implement immediately – allow modestly-sized "missing middle" multi-family homes with a percentage of affordable units in residential districts throughout the town.

Open Communities Trust has an option on a piece of property in a Residential A District in Woodbridge. We plan to request a change to Woodbridge's zoning ordinance to allow building of a small missing middle development with a mix of market and affordable rental units on this lot – and every other lot in most residential districts of Town, if the owner opts to do so. We will request that such zoning remain in place at least until the town overhauls its zoning to allow for its fair share of affordable housing.



What You Can Do?

This fact sheet was developed by Open Communities Alliance.

- Discuss concerns about Woodbridge's zoning with your friends and neighbors.
- Express your support of more inclusive zoning by emailing Beth Heller, First Selectwoman at bheller@woodbridgect.org.
- Support this proposal at a public hearing this fall with oral or written comments.
- Host a virtual briefing on this proposal with us (info @ right).



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40 Years of Rejected Inclusive Housing Proposals in Woodbridge

Date Proposed	Proposal	Outcome
Oct. 1981	Proposal to allow multi-family housing in two small zones permitting smaller (~ 1 acre) lots.	Withdrawn (Jan. 1982)
April 1982	Proposal to allow multi-family housing in two small zones permitting smaller lots.	Rejected (July 1982)
Oct. 1982	Proposal to allow two-family housing in two small zones permitting smaller lots. 3+ unit family housing still not permitted anywhere in town; duplexes only allowed in .2% of town	Passed but Insufficient (Nov. 1982)
July 1983	Proposal to allow multi-family housing with permits in two small-lot zones and the business zone and accessory dwelling units with permits in a number of other residential zones, all with restrictions on density, lot size, and more.	Rejected (Oct. 1983)
March 1988	Proposal to allow multiple dwellings per lot by special permit in areas served by sewer and with sidewalks and to change the definition of "dwelling" to include two-family homes.	Rejected (July 1988)
July 1991	Acknowledgement of new state law requiring towns to "encourage the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings . . . for all residents of the municipality and the planning region in which the municipality is located."	Acknowledgement with no action
Jan. 1992	Planning and Zoning Commission discussed the need to study designing zoning to meet a fair share obligation.	No Action
Sept. 1993	Proposal to allow, with a special permit and 20% affordable units, multi-family elderly housing in small-lot zones by permit and single, two-family or garden apartments in more zones.	Withdrawn (Nov. 1993)
May 1994	Proposal for single development of 330 Amity Road for 120 units & 35 units of elderly housing at 18 Hazel Terrace.	Rejected (Aug. 1994)
July 1996	Passed an "Affordable Housing District" allowing only single-family detached housing and elderly housing, with larger setback requirements than other residential districts, as well as more burdensome development plan requirements and parking space minimums.	Passed but never used (Sept. 1996)
Aug. 1996	Proposal to allow accessory apartments in most of town.	Rejected (Nov. 1996)
April 1999	Proposal for a Planned Residential Care Development for the Elderly in one zone.	Rejected (June 1999)
March 2000	Modified version of April 1999 proposal resubmitted.	Rejected & elderly development housing type removed from zoning ordinance (June 2000)
Sept. 2001	Proposal to increase to 2+ acres zoning for new construction in public watershed areas – affecting over 50% of the town.	Passed - More Exclusionary (Nov. 2001)
March 2007	Multi-family overlay in single family District A proposed.	Withdrawn as part of settlement (June 2007)

ⁱ Robert C. Ellickson, *Zoning and the Cost of Housing: Evidence from Silicon Valley, Greater New Haven, and Greater Austin*, 11 (Jan. 13, 2020), <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3472145>

ⁱⁱ Id. at 83.