

# Smart Planning for Southold

Respecting the Past,  
Shaping the Future



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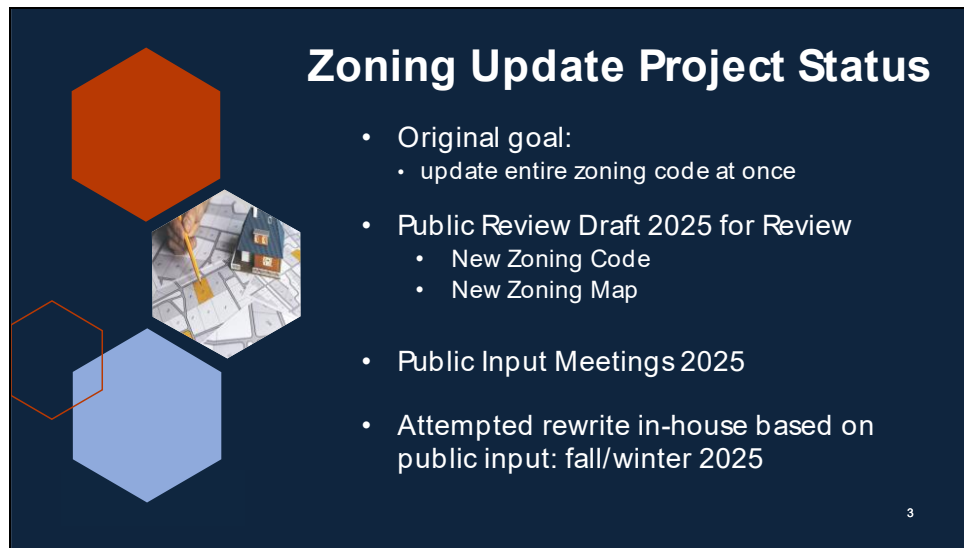
## What's Next for Southold Zoning?



1. Project Status
2. Next Steps
3. New process
4. Priorities
5. Work in Progress
6. Q & A

This is what we'll cover at tonight's meeting.

The zoning project's status, next steps for it, we'll go over the new process, review priorities, and work in progress, and there will be plenty of time at the end for questions.

A dark blue slide titled "Zoning Update Project Status". On the left, there are three hexagonal graphics: a solid orange one at the top, a light blue one at the bottom, and a smaller one in the middle containing a photograph of a hand pointing at a zoning map. On the right, a bulleted list details the project's progress. A small number "3" is in the bottom right corner.

## Zoning Update Project Status

- Original goal:
  - update entire zoning code at once
- Public Review Draft 2025 for Review
  - New Zoning Code
  - New Zoning Map
- Public Input Meetings 2025
- Attempted rewrite in-house based on public input: fall/winter 2025

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The Zoning Update Project, as originally conceived, aimed to comprehensively revise the entire zoning code in a single effort.

The reason behind this ambitious goal was to try and reconcile the many inconsistencies that have resulted from incremental code amendments done over the course of 35 years.

We made good progress towards this goal with a draft that went out for public review in 2025.

We heard you on the many issues and concerns about that draft code and map from last year. Based on that, we identified some major changes.

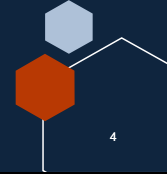
In reviewing changes with our outside zoning consultant, it became apparent that the consultant had taken the project as far as they could. So we chose to revise it in-house with Town staff.

We attempted to do that last fall. And it became obvious over several months that we simply didn't have enough staff to get it done that way.

## Next Steps: Restructuring the Zoning Update

### Solution! Divide the project into smaller phases

- Addresses concern of public that there were too many changes at once
- More manageable for all
- Greater focus for better results
- Able to be completed in-house



Southold Zoning Update

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Trying to rewrite the entire zoning chapter all at once has not worked for us. As a small municipality with limited staff and resources, it was simply too much to take on at one time.

We looked at bringing in another consultant, but the problem wasn't just on our end.

Everyone was struggling to digest a rewrite that large. And that came through clearly in the public feedback we heard last year: it was too much to review all at once.

We needed a better approach. The Town Board decided to divide the project into smaller phases

This phased approach will allow us to make steady progress while ensuring that each piece is thoroughly reviewed and thoughtfully considered.

And we should be able to do most or all of it in-house.

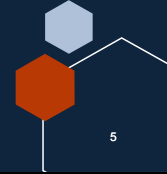
## What will be done with the Public Review Draft from 2025?

- Extract the good ideas but frame them in current code structure

## What will happen with the Zoning Map proposed in 2025?

- To be set aside and not carried forward.
- Any future zoning map changes will begin fresh from the start.

Southold Zoning Update



As many of you know, we had a complete draft new code in early 2025

That was the topic of a series of public workshops last spring and summer where we compiled a lot of public input on that draft.

Our plan is to extract the good ideas from that draft, and frame them in the structure of the current code.

The idea being to make substantive changes while keeping as much familiar structure as possible.

We also had a proposed new Zoning Map.

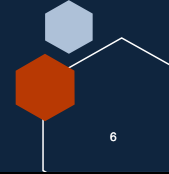
That will be set aside and not carried forward.

Any future zoning map changes will begin fresh, and only as needed as we develop new code

## What will be done with the input given by people in 2025 on that first draft?

- Your input is still valuable and is not wasted!
- All public input is being used now to inform priorities and new draft zoning code

Southold Zoning Update



I know many of you provided comments on the draft code and map from 2025.

That input is not wasted.

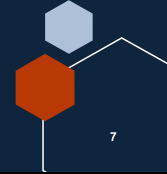
We consider it very valuable, and are already using it to inform the choice of priorities and new draft zoning code.

## Next Steps: Priorities for the Zoning Update

Priorities chosen using the following:

- Public input from 2025
- Zoning Update Advisory Committee
- Town Committee & Town Department Input
- Planning Board, Trustees, Zoning Board of Appeals
- Southold Town Comprehensive Plan
- Southold Town Board

Southold Zoning Update



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Deciding where to start means figuring out what the priorities are and we've drawn on a lot of sources to answer that question.

First and foremost, the public input we received on the 2025 draft has been invaluable in shaping where we focus next.

We've also relied heavily on the work and recommendations of our Zoning Update Advisory Committee.

And we've gathered extensive input from Town committees; including Water Advisory, Agricultural Advisory, Economic Development, Land Preservation, the Transportation Commission, and others.

We've heard from Town staff as well: including our building department and town attorneys; and from our boards: the Trustees, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Planning Board.

Through all of this, we keep the Town Comprehensive Plan front and center. All zoning must be consistent with it, and it guides everything we do.

And ultimately, it is the Town Board that sets the direction and decides what work gets done.

## Priorities for the Zoning Update



Southold Zoning Update

1. More Community Housing – Smart growth
2. Improved Zoning for Businesses
3. Improved Zoning for Agriculture
4. Protecting Community Character
5. Definitions
6. Address ZBA Code Interpretations
7. Coastal Resilience
8. Use Tables & Use Specific Standards

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Based on all of this input,  
the Town Board has identified  
an initial list of priorities.

This doesn't cover everything that needs updating in our zoning code,  
It is just a start.

And if you don't see a topic on the list that you feel is a priority,  
it doesn't mean it will never be addressed.

We have to start somewhere  
and there is only so much we can do at once.

Next I'll go over each of these priority areas in more detail.

## Priority: More Community Housing

- Community Housing refers to homes that people with middle & lower incomes can afford.
- Remove barriers in zoning to create more community housing
  - Apartments
  - Houses
  - Smart Growth
- Align Town Code with Town Housing Plan
  - Amend Chapters 280, 240, 117, 34 and 17
  - Create New Chapter: Community Housing
- Control short term rentals

Southold Zoning Update



Priority number one is housing.

We need more homes

that people with middle and lower incomes can actually afford.

We use the term community housing — and here's what that means.

It doesn't matter whether it's a single-family home or an apartment.

What matters is the price.

If it's within reach of moderate- to lower-income residents —

people who live and work in our community —

then it's community housing.

Part of what's slowing us down is our own zoning code.

We need to remove the barriers

that are standing in the way of creating more community housing.

And as we do that, we want to be guided by smart growth principles,

which means focusing higher-density housing

near our hamlet centers and

building a more walkable community.

There's also a financial piece. We've been collecting money from the new transfer tax specifically to subsidize community housing but we can't spend it the way we need to until our Town Code is updated.

That means aligning the Code with our Town Housing Plan, and it touches several chapters, including zoning.

Finally, we need to talk about short-term rentals.

The rise of short-term rentals as a business model

is one of the main reasons so few homes are available to rent year-round.

That makes it hard for people to live here

especially now,

when buying a home is out of reach for so many.

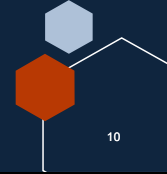
And when workers can't find housing,

businesses struggle to hire and hold onto employees.

Getting a handle on short-term rentals is an important part of bringing more housing back to the market.

## Priority: Improved Zoning for Agriculture

- Farm worker housing
- Application of Bulk Schedule for Farms
- Definitions revisions: Farm Operation and many more

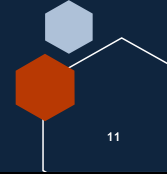


This priority is about updating our regulations to better reflect how farming actually works today. One significant change is in the nature of farm labor. Farm workers increasingly live and work here year-round it's no longer primarily seasonal, migrant work the way it once was. And because there are so few homes and apartments available to rent in our area, farms need to be able to provide housing for their employees. Our code needs to support that.

The other piece is about how the code treats farm operations more broadly. Right now, it doesn't reflect the reality of how farms function. A simple example: under the current rules, you can't have a winery and a farmhouse on the same two-acre parcel because the code sees them as two separate "uses." That doesn't make sense. A farm should be able to have a house and a farm business on the same property, and we need to update the code to say so.

## Priority: Improved Zoning For Businesses

- Workforce housing for employers
- Update regulations for more certainty in development process
  - Objective Design Standards



This priority is about supporting local businesses and it connects to several things we've already talked about. The first is housing.

Many employers here are struggling to find and keep employees because there simply aren't enough homes and apartments available to rent.

So one goal of this priority is to give employers more options for housing their workforce.

Another goal is clarity.

We want to make expectations for new development more straightforward by updating design standards that give clearer guidance to anyone coming in with a commercial project. The idea is to set the rules at the door, so there's less uncertainty throughout the process.

And this last piece connects directly to our next priority: community character.

## Priority: Protect Community Character

- Prevent overdevelopment in residential zones
  - Limit House Size 2.0
  - Including 3-D visual illustrations for updated rules on limiting house size
- Prevent overdevelopment in commercial zones
  - Objective Design Standards
  - Including 3-D visual illustrations for new setbacks, lot coverage, and other standards.
  - New bulk schedule proportionate to lot size



Southold Zoning Update

Protecting community character starts with having the right regulations in place; things like building height, setbacks, and other development standards.

Our zoning already addresses these, but there's room to improve.

One area where work is already underway is house size. The Zoning Update Advisory Committee, working alongside the Town, has been developing proposed revisions to better limit house size and they're creating 3-D illustrations to help everyone visualize what those changes would actually look like. That work is in progress now.

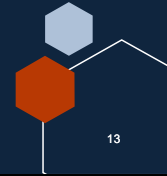
Similar work is happening in our business districts. The focus there is on objective design standards for commercial development: clearer rules that set expectations upfront, so that anyone looking to build knows what's expected and can move through the process more smoothly. Those standards will also be accompanied by 3-D illustrations.

In the course of that work something important was revealed. When we looked at lot sizes in our business districts and compared them to the minimum lot sizes required by the zoning code we found that the majority of lots are actually smaller than what the code requires.

What that means in practice is that people often need a variance just to build on a lot that already exists. That's a lot of unnecessary work for everyone involved. The proposed fix is a new bulk schedule, a table of setbacks and other parameters, that's tied to actual lot size, rather than just the zoning district. That work is also already underway.

## Priority: Definitions

- Create a separate chapter of definitions for Town Code



The goal of this priority is straightforward:

**one definitions chapter for the entire Town Code.**

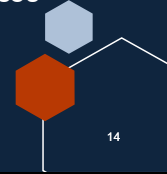
Right now, inconsistent definitions are causing real problems and we know this because we heard it directly from the people who use the zoning code every day.

## Priority: Address ZBA Code Interpretations

- When the ZBA is asked to interpret the code, the code probably needs to change.

### Example:

	<u>Before</u>	<u>After</u>
Interpret "Use"	=Each business	=Each Building
Effect on small lots	One business per building	Multiple businesses per building



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Another priority is evaluating interpretations made by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Here's why this matters.

When someone asks the ZBA to interpret a section of the zoning code, that's a signal it means the code isn't clear enough.

And these interpretations aren't small things. They can have sweeping effects on what gets built and how.

So the goal is to look at those interpretations and ask: what does the code need to say more clearly?

Let me give you a concrete example.

The Town code requires a minimum lot size for a given use. For years, that was interpreted strictly to mean one business per building which, in the hamlet business district where most lots are small, effectively meant one business per lot.

The ZBA was asked to weigh in.

Their interpretation? "Use" means the building itself, not each individual business inside it.

That one clarification changed everything for small lots in the hamlet.

## Priority: Coastal Resilience

- Identify opportunities in zoning to improve coastal resilience.

The goal of this priority is to identify where in our zoning we can make improvements for increased coastal resilience.

We received a lot of input on this topic, and the Town Board agrees that coastal resilience needs to be addressed in our zoning.

We have not yet begun work on this.

## Priority: Use Tables & Standards

- Add a table of uses to the zoning code –similar to the one in the public review draft.
- Add a section for use-specific standards similar to the one in the public review draft.

The 2025 draft zoning code included a clear table of uses that made it easy to see which uses were permitted in each zoning district.

We'd like to create a similar table in the updated code.

We also want to improve how conditions for specific uses are presented.

For example, a hotel may require a minimum number of acres.

In the current code, these types of requirements are scattered throughout the document and are not always applied consistently.

To address this, we plan to create a dedicated Use-Specific Standards section that consolidates all of these requirements in one place, making the code easier to understand and administer.

**Process for each priority**

- Review of public input by staff
- Drafting of new code
  - Town Staff: Planning, Building, Attorneys
  - Zoning Update Advisory Committee contributions
- Code Committee meetings (public)
- Public Forums as needed
- Public Hearings
- Adoption of new zoning code

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The process we will follow is straightforward and will be repeated for each phase of the project.

Town staff, working in small teams, will review the public input from 2025 for this project, as well as the recommendations from the Zoning Update Advisory Committee, and other sources of input we listed earlier.

They will prepare draft code amendments for the Town Board's review.

The Town Board will then discuss the draft at Code Committee meetings, which will be open to the public.

Depending on the scope and significance of the proposed changes, we may also hold additional public forums to gather feedback.

The next step will be a formal public hearing. Following the hearing, revisions may be made based on comments received.

Each phase will conclude with the adoption of a portion of the new zoning code.

This phased approach allows us to make steady progress and implement improvements as we move through the process, rather than waiting until the entire code is complete.

## Timeline

- Three to five years to complete ten priority phases.
- One or two priorities at a time, each taking four to six months.
- Dependent on complexity of revisions needed in each zoning area.
- Some work nearing completion!  
Wireless communications zoning code

A full overhaul of the zoning code is a multi-year effort; we're looking at roughly three to five years in total.

The approach is to focus on one or two priority areas at a time, with each one taking about four to six months depending on its complexity and how much public review is involved.

The good news is that we're already well underway.

One item worth mentioning that isn't on today's priority list is cell phone service.

We've been working on zoning code revisions to improve coverage, and that work is complete.

## Improving Cell Phone Service

Wireless Master Plan	Wireless Zoning Code
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Map poor service areas</li><li>• Identify solutions: improve service</li><li>• Recommend edits to Town's zoning code</li><li>• Adopted June 2, 2026</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Based on Wireless Master Plan</li><li>• Public Hearing 6/16/26</li></ul>

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The new wireless communications zoning code is a good example of how we plan to approach the broader zoning update moving forward.

So far, the process has been very successful.

The Town Board first commissioned a study to identify the best ways to address the problem of inadequate cell phone service throughout Southold Town.

That effort resulted in the development of a Wireless Master Plan, which the Town Board adopted just last week.

The new wireless communications zoning code has been drafted to implement the recommendations of that master plan.

At this point, there are only two steps remaining.

First, there will be a public hearing on the proposed code on June 16th.

After considering public input,

the Town Board can then move forward with adoption of the new code.

This is exactly the kind of structured, transparent process we envision using for future zoning code updates.

## Work in Progress

### Community Housing Code Rewrite Underway

- Short-term rental draft code nearly finished
- Revising code in zoning and other related chapters has begun
- Target Date for public Town Code Committee meeting on new housing code: August
- Adoption goal for new housing code: Early winter 2026

Significant work has already been done on the community housing priority.

Work on an updated draft code for short-term rentals is nearly finished, There have been several public code committee meetings on it already, and more to come.

Revising code for community housing in several chapters is underway.

Our timeline for a public code committee on the new community housing chapter and related code is this August.

And our goal for having new zoning around community housing adopted is early winter 2026.

And if you can tune in to the Town Board work session this Tuesday there will be a progress update on this work provided to the Board.



Now we will take questions.

Please use the mic provided so people can hear your question.

# Thank you!



Project Website:  
[southoldzoningupdate.com](http://southoldzoningupdate.com)

Send questions to:  
[ZoningUpdate@southoldtownny.gov](mailto:ZoningUpdate@southoldtownny.gov)

Thank you for your interest in this.

For regular updates on our progress,  
you can check the project website at [southoldzoningupdate.com](http://southoldzoningupdate.com)

If you have questions later,  
you can send an email to this address on the screen.  
[Zoningupdate@southoldtownny.gov](mailto:Zoningupdate@southoldtownny.gov)