

EX#44

Planning & Zoning Commission
Ledyard, CT

7/10/2025

RECEIVED

Good evening, Commissioners.

JUL 10 2025

As many of you know, Connecticut's 8-30g law allows developers to bypass local zoning regulations in towns where less than 10% of housing is deemed affordable—provided that 30% of the new development is set aside as deed-restricted affordable housing between 60% and 80% of the Area Median Income.

Land Use Department

Over the past year, at least two developments in Ledyard have, in my view, taken advantage of this law to circumvent local zoning standards (PZ#24-2 RESUB, 96-100 Stoddards Wharf Rd; PZ#24-1 SITE, 59 King's Hwy). While 8-30g limits what local commissions can regulate, one key tool is still permitted: **district design guidelines**. These allow towns to influence the aesthetics and character of new development—even under 8-30g. Unfortunately, Ledyard no longer has that tool in place.

Back in 2008, former Town Planner Bill Hasse created a comprehensive set of design guidelines for Ledyard Center and Gales Ferry Village. These guidelines were eventually incorporated into a practical set of zoning regulations that remained in effect when the Planning and Zoning Commissions were merged.

After the merger, however, the Commission began loosening those standards to promote economic development. While that intent is understandable, it's important to recognize what those earlier guidelines helped make possible: the Village Market, Police and Fire Stations, Dime Bank, the condos at Fairway Drive, CVS, and improved gas station canopies—all successful projects shaped by thoughtful design standards.

Since then this shift has continued. For too long a development-focused approach has gradually dismantled those regulations, leaving us without a critical mechanism for guiding responsible growth.

I believe now is the time to reconsider our path and return to a planning approach rooted in our town's original values and character.

With that in mind, I respectfully urge the Commission to hold a **public workshop** to explore the merits of reestablishing village districts and design guidelines. Let's give the public a voice in shaping the future look and feel of our community—before that future is shaped for us.

Thank you.
Dave Schroeder

6/12/2025

RECEIVED

JUL 10 2025

Good evening, Commissioners.

Land Use Department

I've been a Ledyard resident since 1970, when my dad received his first Navy commission on a submarine based out of Groton. I grew up in Gales Ferry, went to Juliet Long and the old Junior High, and graduated from Ledyard High School before heading to Carnegie Mellon to study architecture.

In college, I learned that "suburbia" wasn't exactly admired in architectural circles. But that view didn't match my own experience growing up in Gales Ferry. If this is suburbia, then I think suburbia is great.

We have the best of both worlds—close to nature and wildlife, yet not far from urban areas. Our unique landscape of boulders, ledges, and trees gives privacy and character to our neighborhoods. There's individuality in our homes, access to the river, strong schools and sports programs, deep history, and a great community. All of this makes Ledyard a special place to live.

But I believe that's now at risk—more than ever—because of zoning changes made over the past 2 years.

About a year ago, I saw the large 304-unit Triton Square apartment complex across from Super Stop & Shop being built in Groton—four to five stories high, covering 14 acres, in my personal opinion a visual monstrosity. It raised the question: could something like that be built here in Ledyard under our current zoning? The answer is, alarmingly, yes.

Historically, Ledyard limited ridge heights for multifamily housing to 30 feet. Even with modest increases in 2012, the practical height was still around 35 feet. But under current regulations, 45-foot buildings are now allowed by special permit in residential areas, 50-foot buildings are permitted in the Ledyard Center Transition District, and 65-foot-high developments with hundreds of units can be built without public hearings in several zones, including Gales Ferry, Ledyard Center, Multifamily, and Resort Cluster districts.

These changes mark a dramatic shift from past standards. Massive, high-density developments may be appropriate in urban areas such as Groton, but they are not a fit for a quiet, rural town like Ledyard.

The Plan of Conservation and Development from 2020 (POCD), lays out thoughtful, long-term goals to help guide how our town grows. However, our current zoning regulations for multifamily and mixed-use developments don't line up with those goals. In fact, they conflict with the POCD.

The current regulations are inconsistent with at least four major goals of the POCD:

1. They don't preserve Ledyard's rural, low-density residential character (pages 10 and 17).
2. They fall short in protecting property values (page 10).
3. They don't adequately protect the quality of life for residents living near these developments (page 16).
4. And they fail to encourage the kind of traditional village-style development we want to see in places like Gales Ferry and Ledyard Center (page 38).

The amendments under consideration today are intended to realign our zoning regulations with the goals outlined in the POCD. At their core, these proposals focus on four key changes, each reinforcing the POCD's vision for Ledyard:

1. Require special permits for multifamily and mixed-use developments to give the town authority to impose conditions that protect public health, safety, welfare, property values, and natural resources.
2. Lower height limits for these developments to 35 feet—the same as single-family and duplex homes—to ensure compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods and preserve Ledyard's rural residential character.
3. Establish clear parking requirements to guarantee adequate and safe parking for residents, which current regulations lack.
4. Limit building footprints to encourage more appropriately scaled development, with flexibility to suit different site layouts—supporting the town's rural aesthetic.

These amendments are crafted to reflect the POCD's long-term goals and to safeguard the community from the impacts of incompatible or poorly planned development.

Ledyard is a unique, low-density community with fewer than 6,000 housing units, a small police force, and a fire department equipped to handle buildings up to 35 feet tall. Residents have consistently supported growth that doesn't come at the expense of quality of life.

Mr Treaster's proposed regulation changes were submitted to help preserve that balance—and to ensure both Ledyard Center and Gales Ferry's rural characters are not lost to unchecked urban-style development.

Tonight's P&Z meeting is a chance to correct zoning regulations—put in place just since January 2024—that have proven flawed, conflict with the POCD, and have already sparked public outcry and potential (and actual) legal challenges.

The question is: Will we protect what makes Ledyard special—or allow it to be transformed into something else entirely?

Thank you for your time—and for caring about the future of Ledyard.

Thank you,
Dave Schroeder
290 Whalehead Road

Appended statement: (7/10/2025)

Good evening, Commissioners,

We don't need to guess what the January 2024 zoning changes might lead to—we're already seeing the impact. A six-story development is currently under review here in town. Yes, I understand this project is protected under a grandfather clause and isn't subject to any new regulations. But it serves as a real-world case study—and a warning.

There's a popular argument that if developers are allowed to build "up," they won't need to build "out." But this project disproves that. The original plan filled the entire site with parking—cramming in as many units as possible based on car capacity. The buildings were pushed to six stories, built effectively on stilts with ground-floor parking garages. Four massive buildings, completely out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood, including a nearby historic district.

That version was withdrawn—not because of public input or zoning pushback, but because it would have discharged too much treated wastewater into a nearby wetland.

A revised proposal scaled back the parking slightly to comply with wetland setbacks, which reduced the number of units by about 20%. The buildings are still six stories, just fewer of them—but even larger. The parking lot still covers the entire buildable site, and the design remains completely out of character for Ledyard.

And because it's allowed **by right** under current zoning, the Planning and Zoning Commission *doesn't have to* won't hold a public hearing.

I believe if the public had been fully aware that zoning changes would allow six-story buildings **by right**, there would have been overwhelming opposition. But this major change was tucked into a broad overhaul, *likely* escaping public notice.

This kind of development does not meet any demonstrated need in Gales Ferry. *& Ledyard* It runs counter to our Plan of Conservation and Development. The only clear benefit is to the landowner or developer—maximizing profit, not serving the community.

And it's troubling to hear that the idea for six-story buildings and by-right approvals reportedly came in a letter from an LLC with anonymous ownership. That's not a sound or transparent basis for reshaping our town.

I urge the Commission to reflect on how we got here—and take steps to bring our zoning regulations back in line with the character and values of Ledyard. Adopting Mr. Treaster's proposed changes is a smart and healthy move in that direction.

Thank you.

Dave Schroeder