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TOWN OF CORNWALL

Planning and Zoning Commission

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PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Annual Report · FY '25–'26

The Planning and Zoning Commission held twelve regular meetings during the fiscal year, along with a special meeting for its annual planning session in February and a site walk in March. The Commission adopted three amendments to the Zoning Regulations, approved two subdivisions, a site plan, and a special permit, and continued its comprehensive review of the Subdivision Regulations. In July 2025, the Town welcomed Spencer Musselman as Land Use Administrator and Zoning Enforcement Officer. The Commission continues to be supported by consulting planner Janell Mullen.

ZONING AMENDMENTS

In August, following a public hearing, the Commission revised the definition of "Buildable Area." The long-standing requirement for a rectangular building envelope was replaced with a standard that allows an area of any shape, provided a circle with a 50-foot radius fits within it. The change drew support from the Affordable Housing Committee and the Board of Selectmen and advances the housing goals of the 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).

In November, the Commission adopted new standards for flag lots. The amendment grew out of a pre-application discussion over the summer and clarifies how flag lots are created and where their frontage is measured, questions the regulations had not previously answered.

In January, after a well-attended public hearing, the Commission established a new West Cornwall General Business zone. Commercial lots in the village average roughly a third of an acre, well under the prior one-acre minimum, which left nearly every business nonconforming and unable to expand without a variance. The new zone sets dimensional standards that match the village's historic pattern of development. The Commission modified the petition to require five-foot side and rear setbacks out of concern for fire safety among the village's older wooden buildings. The amendment carries out a recommendation of the 2020 POCD and positions West Cornwall's businesses to grow as the Town builds the village's new wastewater treatment facility.

APPLICATIONS

In May, the Commission approved a three-lot subdivision on Great Hollow Road, the first to use the new flag lot standards. Commissioners walked the property in March. Because the proposed open space was too small and isolated for a conservation organization to accept, the Commission accepted a fee in lieu of open space

for the Town's open space fund. In June, the Commission approved a two-lot subdivision on Scoville Road. Other approvals included a site plan for Karl on Wheels, a moving business at 26 Kent Road, and a special permit for an accessory apartment on College Street.

Date	Action	Matter
Aug. 12, 2025	Amendment adopted	Buildable Area definition, Article 3 (effective Sept. 1, 2025)
Nov. 12, 2025	Amendment adopted	Flag lot standards, new Section 12.3; petition of Bodwell Engineering & Surveying (effective Dec. 1, 2025)
Jan. 13, 2026	Amendment adopted	West Cornwall General Business zone, Section 6.1; petition of West Cornwall Development Group
Jan. 13, 2026	Site plan approved	Karl on Wheels, moving business with retail space, 26 Kent Road
May 12, 2026	Subdivision approved	Three lots, Great Hollow Road
May 12, 2026	Special permit approved	Accessory apartment over 1,200 sq. ft., 94 College Street
June 9, 2026	Subdivision approved	Two lots, 66 Scoville Road

PLANNING

The Commission held its annual planning meeting in February, with discussion tables on natural resources, housing, economic development, and culture. Conversations ranged from invasive species and stormwater management to smaller housing lots, multifamily housing, and the idea of a Cornwall Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout the year, the Commission conducted a section-by-section review of the Subdivision Regulations, with valuable input from the Conservation Commission. Priorities for the revision include bringing the regulations into conformance with state statute; defining open space in line with the Cornwall Conservation Trust and ensuring it is permanently protected; establishing a standard method for calculating fees in lieu of open space; requiring subdivision plans to show stone walls, wetlands, steep slopes, farmland soils, and other significant features; and updating drainage and erosion control standards to current practice. The Commission has asked its consulting planner to reorganize the regulations into the same format as the Zoning Regulations. The revised regulations have not yet been adopted, and work on them continues.

In June, the Commission began discussing the State's new housing law, Public Act 25-1, along with regional concerns about battery storage facilities, data centers, and industrial-scale solar development.

LAND USE OFFICE

The Land Use Office issued 57 zoning permits during the year. Among them were permits for twelve new dwelling units of several kinds: eight new single-family homes, one of them built by the Cornwall Housing Corporation; three accessory apartments; and a cabin converted to a year-round home. That variety is what the 2020 POCD called for to broaden housing choices for young families, working residents, and older residents looking to downsize. The office also permitted RSVP's reopening in West Cornwall under new ownership, completed final inspections on two Cornwall Housing Corporation homes on Town Street, and worked with property owners to resolve several zoning violations. The questions residents asked most often concerned accessory apartments, new home construction, lot line revisions, and the reuse of older commercial buildings. A new monthly Land Use Administrator's report now keeps the Commission informed of permits, inspections, and recurring questions from the public. The office also overhauled all of its application

and permit forms, which now reflect the current regulations and are available on the Town website.

PERMIT TYPE	ISSUED
New dwellings (including one cabin converted to a dwelling)	9
Additions, porches, and garages	10
Generators	11
Decks	6
Propane tanks	7
Sheds and accessory structures	4
Accessory apartments*	2
Swimming pools	2
Signs	2
Other (restaurant, home business, solar array, hot tub pad)	4
Total	**57**

**A third accessory apartment was permitted together with a new home and is counted under new dwellings.*

LOOKING AHEAD

Permit activity has remained strong into the new fiscal year, with nearly twenty zoning permit applications received in its first three months. The Commission's planning agenda for the coming year includes:

- Comprehensive zoning update: The update will bring the Zoning Regulations into conformance with Public Act 25-1, the State's new housing law, which requires towns to provide clear, objective standards and a streamlined review process for qualifying housing.
- Data centers and battery storage: The Commission will consider prohibiting data centers and regulating battery storage facilities to the extent of the Town's authority. Neighboring towns are weighing the same issues.
- Subdivision Regulations: The reorganized regulations, including the new open space standards, will be brought to public hearing for adoption.
- Cornwall Bridge and the Four Corners: Building on the new West Cornwall zone, the Commission will study rezoning Cornwall Bridge to reflect its own pattern of development. The village is already seeing new investment: Northeast Building Supply is moving its store to a new building at its 44 Kent Road lumberyard, expected to open in early 2027. The Commission will also consider a mixed-use commercial zone at the Four Corners.

The Commission thanks alternate member Bruce Bennett, who resigned in June upon his appointment as Cornwall's second representative to the Housatonic River Commission, for his service. The Commission also thanks the Conservation Commission, the Economic Development Commission, and the residents who took part in its hearings.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Timell, Chair
Cornwall Planning and Zoning Commission