

Planning Commission Reporting Form for Municipal Bylaw Amendments

This report on June 3, 2026, is in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4441(c) which states:

"When considering an amendment to a bylaw, the planning commission shall prepare and approve a written report on the proposal. A single report may be prepared so as to satisfy the requirements of this subsection concerning bylaw amendments and subsection 4384(c) of this title concerning plan amendments..... The report shall provide(:)

(A) brief explanation of the proposed bylaw, amendment, or repeal and include a statement of purpose as required for notice under §4444 of this title,

The proposed changes to the Westfield Zoning Bylaw include:

- Change accessory structures from "P/S" (Permitted with Site Plan Approval) to "P" (Permitted) in the Recreational-Residential Zoning District, in Table 1. Table of Uses

Purpose: Currently in the Recreational-Residential Zoning District, residential structures are permitted and accessory structures require Site Plan Review. This creates a situation where someone could construct a dwelling with an attached garage as permitted development subject to administrative review without Site Plan Review. However, a landowner could not build a detached garage at some later date without Site Plan Review. In addition, at the time the Site Plan Review requirement was put in place, the cost to pursue Site Plan Review from the Development Review Board was \$150. This has increased to \$370 creating a more substantial burden for an applicant seeking permission to build a simple garage, for example, as an accessory structure. The current situation seems inequitable; In all other zoning districts where residential development is a permitted use, accessory structures are also a permitted use.

The additional level of review exists in the current Zoning Bylaw to protect the scenic qualities of the byways where the Recreational/Residential District is located. The Planning Commission concludes that accessory structures would not detract from the scenic quality. From a scenic drive perspective, accessory structures such as a garage or shed fit into the existing residential aesthetic of the Recreational-Residential Zoning District.

This proposed change to the Zoning Bylaw would create more equitable treatment for landowners in the Recreational-Residential Zoning District without detracting from the goals of the Zoning District.

- Change self-storage units from "C/S" (Conditional Use Review and Site Plan Review) to "--" (Prohibited) in the Village Zoning District, in Table 1. Table of Uses.

Purpose: The Planning Commission concludes that rental storage units typically are not a destination someone walks to and are a more appropriate use outside a dense walkable Village. Removing this permitted use better aligns with town goals and smaller lots to allow for dense Village housing where shared services are available.

(A)nd shall include findings regarding how the proposal:

1. *Conforms with or furthers the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan, including the effect of the proposal on the availability of safe and affordable housing:*

The Westfield Town Plan sets out recommendations for safe and affordable housing:

- Ensure zoning regulations offer options for future home sites, especially in the areas of town most able to support new growth.

The Planning Commission concludes that rental storage units typically are not a destination someone walks to and are a more appropriate use outside the dense Village development. Removing this permitted use better aligns with town goals and smaller lots to allow dense Village housing where shared services are available.

Making accessory structures permitted in the Residential-Recreation Zoning District does not detract from the availability of safe and affordable housing, and may create more equitable means for landowners to pursue a residence with appurtenant accessory structures in a step wise sequence creating a more affordable pathway to meet their needs.

2. *Is compatible with the proposed future land uses and densities of the municipal plan:*

The overall vision for land use and density in the Town Plan is "We want to maintain local recreation access to farm and forest land for hunting, fishing, skiing, biking, snowmobiling, and hiking. We welcome residential growth at a pace that allows us to retain Westfield's rural character, and provide municipal services. We will maintain community spirit by welcoming newcomers, and by maintaining the Town's neat appearance." The Westfield Town Plan heavily emphasizes the goal of keeping open working land viable for agriculture, while including residential uses in the same areas. **The proposed revision to change Self storage facilities from Conditional Use and Site Plan approval to Prohibited in the Village District is consistent with the Town Plan recommendation to support housing growth in the Village.**

On future forest-land use, the Town Plan states: "This plan identifies forest resources, and provides planning guidance to encourage environmentally sustainable forestry practices that also provide adequate wildlife habitat and connectivity. It allows some subdivision and residential growth at edges of forest blocks along existing roads." **By permitting accessory structures in the Recreational-Residential Zoning District which is adjacent to the existing road, pressure to locate accessory structures further away from the road or near the rear of a parcel relieves some pressure to construct long driveways or further infringe on forest and wildlife habitat to meet residential needs.**

3. *Carries out, as applicable, any specific proposals for any planned community facilities."*

There are no specific proposals for planned community facilities in the Westfield Town Plan.