

2025 Village of Greenport Zoning Update – Policy & Implementation Framework

Purpose

The Village of Greenport is a compact, one-square-mile community with a historic, maritime identity and a unique balance of year-round residents, second-home owners, seasonal visitors, and a business community that includes both traditional small, family-run establishments and larger operations that are investor-backed. Over the past decade, the Village has experienced significant economic and development pressures, including:

- A wave of **pre- and mid-COVID commercial investment** that has since collided with **macroeconomic trends**, where investor return expectations often exceed the rents that small, local businesses can realistically support
- **Vacancy challenges** in both residential and commercial properties, influenced by rising short-term rental activity, seasonal ownership patterns, and investor-driven real estate strategies
- The ongoing need to plan for **climate resiliency** and maintain the Village's **working waterfront**

The proposed zoning updates are **not intended to be a wholesale rewrite of the Zoning Chapter**, instead, they are intended to make **practical, incremental refinements** to the Zoning Chapter in order to:

- Clarify and address interpretation issues and other concerns that have been identified in the Zoning Chapter in connection with the 2023 revision to the Zoning Chapter
- Continue to ease barriers for small businesses and adaptive reuse projects.
- Promote year-round business and housing opportunities for Village residents

By clarifying provisions, addressing administrative bottlenecks, and encouraging incremental improvements, these updates aim to **improve utilization of existing buildings** and **lay the groundwork for future initiatives** once staffing and resources allow.

Challenges Under the Current Code

The Village undertook a major zoning code revision two years ago under **extreme time constraints**, during a development moratorium. The 2023 revision sought to:

- **Encourage small-scale, local businesses** rather than large investor/seasonally-based restaurants, clubs, and hotels
- **Protect the working waterfront**
- **Lift the moratorium quickly** to avoid economic disruption

While those changes were necessary, several **challenges remain**:

1. **Ambiguity in Definitions and Provisions** – Key terms and cross-references create confusion for applicants and complicate administration and enforcement
2. **Limited Enforcement Capacity** – With minimal staff and procedures, the Village struggles to monitor and address violations consistently
3. **Administrative Complexity and Resource Constraints** – The Building Department lacks the capacity to process applications efficiently or guide property owners proactively
4. **Rigid Parking Requirements** – Certain business types are burdened with parking mandates that discourage adaptive reuse or small business openings in the CR Retail Commercial District
5. **Density and Bulk Standards Misaligned with Existing Village Fabric** – Current standards often conflict with the Village’s historic lot configurations, resulting in unnecessary variances or underutilized parcels

These gaps **limit the Village’s ability to reduce vacancies, expand year-round housing, and support a resilient local economy.**

Policy Objectives of the Proposed Zoning Update

1. **Strengthen community vitality** by increasing opportunities for full-time, resident-occupied housing for individuals and families – expand year-round housing opportunities to support the local workforce and sustain small businesses, reducing reliance on a purely seasonal labor market

2. **Promote adaptive reuse of existing structures** and encourage a balanced housing market that supports long-term stability and affordability
 3. **Support a Year-Round Economy** – Encourage businesses that operate throughout the year rather than only seasonally, to stabilize employment opportunities, reduce storefront vacancies. Avoiding over-concentration of purely seasonal enterprises will help maintain a vibrant, balanced economy.
 4. **Foster mixed-use development** in the CR Retail Commercial District to create a vibrant, walkable downtown that integrates living, working, and community life
 5. **Further simplify approvals for new businesses** seeking to open in existing commercial spaces in the CR Retail Commercial District
 6. **Provide greater flexibility in parking standards** in the CR Retail Commercial District to support business and mixed-use growth
 7. **Improve clarity and usability of the Zoning Code** by removing ambiguities, correcting cross-references, and streamlining complicated provisions
 8. **Advance incremental, practical changes** that the Village can realistically enforce today, while laying the groundwork for future initiatives—such as density and affordability requirements—once staffing and resources permit
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Implementation Requirements

To ensure the zoning updates have **real-world impact**, the Village should be working to pair these code changes with **basic administrative, enforcement, and public-facing support functions**:

1. Strengthen Enforcement and Administrative Capacity

- Assign or hire limited additional code enforcement support (part-time or shared services with the Town of Southold)
- Establish clear enforcement procedures and a violation-tracking system
- Explore **shared services or intermunicipal agreements** with the Town of Southold to supplement staffing without heavy new hires

2. Adopt a Comprehensive Rental Code

- Clearly distinguish **short-term rentals (STRs)** from **long-term residential rentals**
- To the extent that STRs are permitted, require STR registration with occupancy and safety standards

- Require registration for all long-term rentals to monitor occupancy and housing availability
- Coordinate enforcement with online rental platforms where feasible

3. Provide Public-Facing Economic and Planning Support

- Designate a **single point of contact** for property owners and businesses to receive upfront guidance
- Offer **pre-application consultations** to simplify the approval process and reduce errors
- Create a **web-based zoning and permitting hub** with FAQs, flowcharts, and checklists reflecting current Code requirements and processes to minimize in-person demand

4. Monitor Housing and Vacancy Trends

- Maintain a **vacancy and occupancy database** for commercial and residential properties
- Track **year-round vs. seasonal housing** to measure the impact of zoning changes

5. Incentivize Compliance and Adaptive Reuse

- Offer modest **fee reductions or recognition programs** for projects that add year-round housing or reuse underutilized spaces
- Leverage **county, state, and regional grant or tax incentive programs** for small-scale rehabilitation and housing projects

6. Emergency Services

- Ensure that development approvals incorporate input from Fire, Police, and EMS to safeguard access, response times, and public safety. This should include reviewing curb-cut policies, loading zones, and other material site plan approvals with emergency service capacity in mind.

7. Engage and Educate the Community

- Communicate zoning changes and available resources via the Village website, mailings, and public meetings
- Share **progress dashboards** to demonstrate outcomes such as vacancy reduction and new year-round housing

7. Review and Align Related Village Code Sections

- Conduct a **targeted review of other Village Code chapters**, including **Chapter 65 (Fire Prevention and Building Construction)**, to identify and address inconsistencies or procedural conflicts with the updated Zoning Code
- Ensure that permitting, inspections, and construction standards are **coordinated with zoning objectives** to reduce administrative friction and improve compliance
- Establish a **regular review cycle** to update related provisions as the Village's planning, building, and economic development needs evolve
- Review and update **Chapter 132 (Vehicles and Parking)**. Residents and other stakeholders polled in the Planning Board survey were either indifferent or supportive of metered parking on the business corridor streets but support was most often subject to the following conditions relating to **paid/metered parking zones** (and these views are even stronger if the Village were to expand the paid parking program):
 - ⇒ Need for consistent and visible **enforcement**
 - ⇒ **Exemption for local residents**, ideally through a sticker program available to Greenport Hamlet residents for a nominal fee
 - ⇒ Limited to the **peak tourism season** (Memorial Day through Labor Day)
 - ⇒ Limited to **high-demand hours**—roughly **Thursday through Monday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.** (not applicable to overnight parking)

Why This Matters

Without complementary enforcement, administrative support, and basic economic development outreach, zoning changes alone will not create year-round housing or reduce vacancies. This framework prioritizes **small, realistic steps** the Village can implement now, while positioning Greenport for **long-term success** as resources grow.
