

PLANNING DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: Coventry Planning Commission

FROM: Doug McLean, Director of Planning and Development

DATE: May 21, 2026

SUBJECT: Advisory Recommendation on Ordinance 2026-19; Allowing Gasoline Service Stations in the GB and I-1 zones; Proposed Rework of § 255-930

Town Staff proposed this Ordinance 2016-19 in coordination with Ordinance 2026-18, which is focused on allowing Gas Station in the Business Park (BP) Zone. Further background and analysis on Ordinance 2026-18 is provided in a separate memorandum. While working with Walmart, the applicant for Ordinance 2016-18, it was discovered that this section of code has internal inconsistencies and missing elements, and should be changed to increase clarity for both staff and the public alike. These changes will make the code easier to understand and to work with. It was also discovered that some of the included uses should have added criteria in order to protect nearby residential structures.

In addition, it was felt that the criteria that was proposed by Ordinance 2026-18 gave the appropriate set of restrictions and criteria to allow for the permitting of the Gasoline Service Station use in both the GB (General Business) and I-1 (Industrial) zones.

Context

Although the ultimate authority to amend a municipal Zoning Ordinance resides with that municipality's Town Council, R.I. Gen. Laws § 45-24-51 ("Adoption – Review by planning board or commission.") establishes that the Planning Commission's role in the process begins upon referral of proposed amendments, and describes that role as follows: "...The planning board or commission shall, in turn, notify and seek the advice of the city or town planning department, if any, and report to the city or town council within forty-five (45) days after receipt of the proposal, giving its findings and recommendations as prescribed in § 45-24-52." It is anticipated the Town Council will conduct a first reading of this Ordinance on 05/12/26 and therefore the next step in the Town's review process is for the Ordinance to be reviewed by the Planning Commission at its 05/27/26 meeting for an advisory recommendation.

Proposed Rework of Chapter 255-930 Ordinance

Currently, there are three zones that have existing gasoline service stations: General Business (GB), Industrial 1 (I-1), and Village Rural Commercial (VRC), with the vast majority being in the GB zone along Rt. 3. Town staff believe that the GB and I-1 Zones are appropriate zones for the Gasoline Service Station use as these uses are already present in those zones today. For example, there are more than a half a dozen gas stations in the GB zone (mostly on Rt. 3) currently, and there is a gas station in the I-1 zone at the corner of New London Turnpike and Arnold Rd. (While there is a gas station in the VRC Zone, this Code amendment does not bring this use back to permitted at this time due to how little of Coventry is covered by that zone. In addition, Ordinance 2026-18 would allow this

proposed use in the BP zone.) Therefore, Town staff have drafted Ordinance 2026-19 to provide a more comprehensive consideration of Gas Stations in Town, including the additional zoning districts they should be allowed in (GB and I-1) and how associated auto-oriented code should be structured. Ordinance 2026-18 requires separation distances from the fuel pumps to a residential zoned property, or a property that is currently being used for a residential use of 100', or a non-residentially zoning property by 50'. It also includes language that the fuel pumps cannot be located within 30' of a right of way. In addition, there will be no light over 0.50 foot candles "spilling over" onto adjacent properties. Ordinance 2026-19 builds upon this new regulatory framework and adds additional organization to auto-oriented uses as regulated through the consolidation of sections A, B, and C of § 255-930. Section A is the "umbrella" that sections B and C are under. The Code separated out automotive dealerships from boat dealerships, and combined the sale of boats with the sale of motors and marine equipment. Town Staff think a better way to organize these uses is to move many criteria into Section A, which supersedes Sections B and C, and combine the sale of automobiles in with the sale of boats into one section. The sale of marine equipment and motors would then be treated just like any other retail use. Auto Body shops are also combined with Automotive Repair shops and covered in Section A, instead of calling them out in its own section where it was combined with boat sales and repair.

Some of the additional changes of note are that in one section of code it states that auto body repair must take place inside a building. It also states that auto service must take place within a building in a different section. Both are now consolidated to apply to both uses. The same situation applies to the storage and salvage of junk vehicles. Instead of it stating in individual uses, it is added to the overarching code that controls both uses. Staff would suggest that this new layout of the code is more streamlined and easier for both staff and the public to understand.

Town Staff also felt that this was the time to add in criteria for the distance between a drive-through speaker and a residential property, a distance of 100' "from a residential zoned property, or a property that is currently being used for a residential use." This regulatory concept was found in an abutting municipality's code and Town Staff believe it is a relevant piece of code for Coventry.

Findings of Fact

Staff has conducted an orderly, thorough, and expeditious review of this proposed ordinance for conformance with required standards set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-52, as well as in the Town of Coventry's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code, and finds as follows:

RIGL § 45-24-52 ("Adoption – Review by planning board or commission.") states that, "Among its findings and recommendation to the city or town council with respect to a proposal for adoption, amendment, or repeal of a zoning ordinance or zoning map, the planning board or commission shall:"

"(1) Include a statement on the general consistency of the proposal with the comprehensive plan of the city or town, including the goals and policies statement, the implementation program, and all other applicable elements of the comprehensive plan; and

1. The Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1999 does not provide any specific guidance on gasoline service stations or auto service stations. However, similar retail uses are currently permitted uses in the General Business (GB) and Industrial (I-1) zone and it is worth noting

that the use was permitted by Special Use Permit up until the changing of State Law in 2023.

2. The proposed gasoline service station use is generally consistent with the Land Use Plan designation of the General Business and Industrial zoning areas. As an example, the GB zone “is composed of certain land and structures to provide for the retailing of commodities and furnishing of services which depend primarily on vehicular traffic.” in the Comprehensive Plan. Planning Staff feel that I-1 is welcoming to even more intensive uses and will be a good fit for the proposed use.

“(2) Include a demonstration of recognition and consideration of each of the applicable purposes of zoning, as presented in § 45-24-30.”

3. The proposed ordinance is consistent with the applicable purposes of zoning as presented in Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL) § 45-24-30 and the Town of Coventry Code of Ordinances § 255-110, specifically:
 - a. The proposed ordinance “promote[s] the health, safety, morals and general welfare of the public” by establishing separation distances between Gasoline Service Station Uses and other sensitive uses.
 - b. The proposed ordinance also “provide[s] for a range of uses and intensities of uses appropriate to the character of the Town and reflecting current and expected future needs.” The Gasoline Service Station Use is an intensive commercial use for which both the General Business and Industrial zones are appropriate locations.
 - c. The proposed ordinance makes the zoning code clearer and easier to understand for both the general public and for Staff.

Recommendation

Staff finds proposed Ordinance 2026-19 to be consistent with the standards for the required findings of fact set forth in RIGL Section 45-24-52 and Coventry Zoning Section § 255-110 with regard to the Town of Coventry’s Comprehensive Plan and Purposes of Zoning Code. Staff therefore recommends that the Planning Commission adopt the documented findings of fact and forward a **positive recommendation** to the Town Council.

1 THE TOWN OF COVENTRY
2
3

4 **ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL**

5
6 IN AMENDMENT OF THE TOWN OF COVENTRY CODE OF ORDINANCES,
7 2008 PART II – GENERAL LEGISLATION,
8 CHAPTER 255, ARTICLE IX – Supplementary Regulations
9

10 **Ordinance No. 2026-19**

11
12 *The Town Council of the Town of Coventry hereby ordains as follows:*

13
14 **Section 1.** The Town of Coventry Code of Ordinance, Part II General Legislation is hereby
15 amended by amending the following Chapter and Sections of Article X:

16
17 **Article IX, Chapter 255 — Zoning (Supplementary Regulation)**

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19 **§ 255-930 Supplemental regulations for specific land uses.**

20
21 A. Gasoline service stations, automotive repair and drive-in restaurants. Gasoline stations, service
22 stations, drive-in restaurants, car washes, automotive repair shops, auto body repair shops, boat
23 repair shops, and similar highway oriented "drive-in" uses shall be designed to conform with the
24 following requirements, in addition to other applicable provisions of this chapter.

25
26 (1) The minimum lot area shall be 20,000 square feet with a minimum street frontage of not less
27 than 150 feet.

28
29 (2) Suitable separation shall be made between the pedestrian sidewalk and the vehicular parking
30 or moving area with the use of appropriate bumper, wheel guards, or traffic islands in accordance
31 with Article XII of this chapter. Where the portion of the property used for vehicular traffic abuts
32 a street, such portion shall be separated from the street line by a concrete curb at least six inches
33 high.

34
35 (3) The entire area used for vehicle service shall be paved, except for such unpaved area as is
36 landscaped and protected from vehicle use by a low barrier.

37
38 (4) The construction standards for all drive access openings (curb cuts) shall be in accordance with
39 Code § 255-1230C.

40
41 (5) The distance of any driveway from any property line shall be at least 10 feet.

42
43 (6) The distance between curb cuts serving the same lot or adjacent lots shall be no less than 40
44 feet.
45

46 (7) The distance between a street intersection and a curb cut shall be in accordance with Code §
47 255-1230D.

48
49 (8) Buffer landscaping and screening shall be done in accordance with Article XVII of this chapter.

50
51 ~~(9) No vehicles shall be stored on site for salvage or dismantling.~~

52
53 ~~(10)~~ Hydraulic hoists, pits, lubricating, greasing, washing, and repair equipment shall be entirely
54 enclosed within a building. Tire and battery service ~~and automotive repair, excluding automobile~~
55 ~~body repair and painting,~~ may be carried out within the premises.

56
57 (10) All automotive repair and auto body repair shall take place within a building.

58
59 (11) Fuel pumps shall not be located within 100 feet of a residential zoned property, or a property that is
60 currently being used for a residential use.

61
62 (12) Fuel pumps shall not be located within 50 feet of a non-residential zoned property.

63
64 (13) Fuel pumps shall not be located within 30 feet of a public or private right-of way.

65
66 (14) Light shall not produce direct or indirect glare as to cause illumination in excess of 0.50 foot-candles
67 when measured from an adjacent residential zoned parcel, or a parcel that is currently being used as a
68 residential use.

69
70 (15) Storage of vehicles or boats to be repaired shall be located in the rear and/or side of the repair
71 building and such storage area shall be enclosed with a six-foot-high fence which shall effectively
72 screen the area from view. Where the storage area is visible from the road or adjacent uses, four-
73 foot-high evergreens shall be planted along the fence.

74
75 (16) No junk vehicles, boats or marine equipment shall be stored on site. No vehicles, boats or
76 marine equipment shall be kept on site for the cannibalization of parts.

77
78 (17) Drive-through speakers shall not be located within 100 feet of a residential zoned property,
79 or a property that is currently being used for a residential use.

80
81 B. Automotive and boat dealerships/new and used. All car, ~~and~~ truck, and boat dealerships shall
82 conform to the following requirements, in addition to the other provisions of this chapter:

83
84 (1) The minimum lot area shall be 40,000 square feet with a minimum street frontage of not less
85 than 200 feet.

86
87 (2) The requirements of § 255-930A(2) through ~~(9)16~~.

88
89 (3) The number of vehicles to be displayed and stored on ~~site~~ car and truck dealerships shall be
90 limited as follows:

91

92 (a) The lot exclusive of building, landscape areas and drives shall be laid out as a parking lot with
93 travel lanes and back up areas and with each space being a minimum of 8.5 feet by 18 feet. The
94 number of required parking spaces shall be deducted from the total number of spaces on the lot.
95 The remaining spaces dictate the number of cars that can legally be displayed at the dealership.

96
97 (b) Spaces shall be set back five feet from side and rear property lines and five feet from sidewalk
98 areas or 10 feet from street lines. This setback shall be marked by some type of curb stop.

99
100 (4) Any building permit or zoning certificate issued for an automotive or boat dealership shall note
101 the number of vehicles that can legally be displayed on the lot.

102
103 ~~C. Auto body repair shops/repair and sale of boats, motors, marine equipment. Auto body repair~~
104 ~~shops shall conform to the following requirements, in addition to other applicable provisions of~~
105 ~~this chapter:~~

106
107 ~~(1) All auto body repair shall take place within a building.~~

108
109 ~~(2) Storage of vehicles, or boats or marine equipment to be repaired shall be located in the rear~~
110 ~~and/or side of the repair building and such storage area shall be enclosed with a six-foot-high fence~~
111 ~~which shall effectively screen the area from view. Where the storage area is visible from the road~~
112 ~~or adjacent uses, four-foot-high evergreens shall be planted along the fence.~~

113
114 ~~(3) No junk vehicles, boats or marine equipment shall be stored on site. No vehicles, boats or~~
115 ~~marine equipment shall be kept on site for the cannibalization of parts.~~

116
117 ~~(4) The requirements of Code § 255-930A(1) through (910).~~

118
119 **Section 2.** The Town of Coventry Code of Ordinance, Part II General Legislation is hereby
120 amended by amending the following Chapter and Sections of Article VI: 140.

121
122 **Article VI, Chapter 255-Zoning (Zoning District Use and Dimensional Regulations)**

123
124 **§ 255-600 Zoning District Use and Dimensional Regulations.**

125
126 A. The following Schedule of District Use Regulations, attached to this Chapter as Table 6-1, is
127 designed to regulate the uses in the various zoning districts in the Town. Specific uses are listed
128 for each zoning district.

129
130 B. For uses not specifically listed in Table 6-1, the property owner may submit a written request
131 to the Zoning Official for an evaluation and determination of whether the proposed use is of similar
132 type, character, and intensity as a listed use.

133
134 C. The following uses are permitted only in the zoning district marked with a " P." Uses
135 permitted in the zoning district as a special use permit under the provisions of Article IV of this
136 chapter are marked with an " S." Where the letter "N" appears, the uses are prohibited. Note that
137 Article XII, regarding parking, Article XVI (Development Plan Review), Article XIV (Land

Town of Coventry Schedule of District Use Regulations

The following uses are permitted only in the zoning district marked with a "P." Uses permitted in the zoning district as a special use permit under the provisions of Article IV of this chapter are marked with an "S." Where an "N" appears, the uses are prohibited. Note that Article XII (regarding parking), Article XVI (Development Plan Review), Article XIV (Land Development Projects), and Article XVII (Landscaping) will likely apply to some residential and agricultural uses, as well as most commercial and industrial uses.

4. Retail trade: motor vehicles.

	Use	RR5	RR3	RR2	R20	VRC	VMC	GB	BP	I1	I2	Comments
01	Motor vehicle, motorcycle, boat, or trailer dealers – new and used (including repairs conducted only within a building)	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	P	P	N	See § 255-930B
02	Tire, battery and accessory dealers – no service (auto parts store)	N	N	N	N	P	P	P	P	P	N	
03	Gasoline service (full or self) station (minor repairs only, may be combined with convenience store)	N	N	N	N	N	N	N P	P	N P	N	See § 255-930A
04	Storage; or repair and sales of boats	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	P	P	N	See § 255-930C

138 Development Projects), and Article XVII (Landscaping), will likely apply to some residential and
139 agricultural uses, as well as most commercial and industrial uses.

140

141 **[Amended _____ by Ord. No. 2026-_____]**

142 [This space intentionally left blank for legislative purposes only]

143 [Table 6-1 is a separate document containing amendments]

144

145 **Section 3.** This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and final adoption.

146

147 Approved as to Form:

148

149

150 _____ Date _____

151

152

153

154 Introduced by/Pursuant to: Council 

155

156 Referred to/for: First Reading of the Ordinance on _____, 2026

157

158 Planning Commission for recommendation on _____, 2026

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160 Public Hearing before the Town Council on _____, 2026

161

162

163 Passed or Denied on a vote of _____

164

165

166 _____
John-Paul A. Verducci – Town Council President

167

168

169 Approved:

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171

172 _____
Daniel O. Parrillo – Town Manager

173

174

175 Certification Actions by Town Clerk:

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177
