

PLANNING DEPARTMENT MEMORANDUM

TO: Coventry Planning Commission

FROM: Doug McLean, Director of Planning and Development

DATE: July 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Proposed Kennel Use, Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A

Planning Staff have revised Ordinance 2026-17, which proposes an amendment to the Town of Coventry Zoning Ordinance regarding the use of kennels. The revised document is identified as “Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A” which will regulate the use of kennels in a more conservative manner than originally proposed.

As background, this land use was previously allowed in Town through a Special Use Permit, but this allowance was removed in January of 2024 due to changes in state law on the permitting criteria for Special Use Permits to make such permits more permissive. It has always been the intent of Town staff to allow kennels again without utilizing the Special Use Permit approach.

Context

Although the ultimate authority to amend a municipal Zoning Ordinance resides with the 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.”

The original version of Ordinance came before the Planning Commission on May 27, 2026, and received a neutral recommendation to the Town Council with suggestions for improvement. The Town Council held a public hearing on the original Ordinance on June 9, 2026, and the result of the Council’s review was it requested Planning Staff make changes to the original Ordinance 2026-17 to make it more conservative. In addition, they requested that the revised Ordinance be re-directed back to the Planning Commission to re-consider the matter before it comes back to the Town Council as part of a continued public hearing. Therefore, the next step in the Town’s review process is for the Planning Commission to review Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A at its meeting on July 22, 2026 for consideration of a new advisory recommendation. Then, the matter will return to the Town Council on August 25, 2026 for their formal consideration of Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A.

Proposed Kennel Ordinance

Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A will amend Table 6-1, Schedule of District Use Regulations, to allow seven different types of kennels, in specific zones as such:

- Small day care kennel – Allows up to 5 dogs in all zones except I-2

- Small boarding kennel – Allows up to 5 dogs overnight in all zones except I-2
- Medium day care kennel – Allows up to 10 dogs in RR-5, RR-3, VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I-1
- Medium boarding kennel – Allows up to 10 dogs overnight in RR-5, RR-3, VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I-1
- Large day care kennel – Allows up to 20 dogs in RR-5, GB, BP, I-1
- Large boarding kennel – Allows up to 20 dogs overnight in RR-5, GB, BP, I-1
- Breeding kennel – Allows commercial breeding and up to 20 dogs overnight in RR-5, GB, BP, I-1

These changes were made in response to Planning Commission and Town Council feedback that different gradations of kennels (small, medium, and large) and categories of kennels (overnight boarding, day care, breeding) were desired to allow for a more conservative approach. The use code for small kennels of up to 5 dogs is the most permissive of the new categories. Medium and large kennels have more conservative provisions due to an increased number of dogs. Thus, medium and large kennels are prohibited in denser residential zones and permitted in more rural areas, commercial zones, and industrial zones. With large kennels, more outdoor space is required and thus will only be allowed in larger commercial and industrial zones and the RR-5 district. The RR-5 district has the most conservative lot size and dimensional standards in Town. Breeding kennels, which are inherently more intensive due to the larger operation involved, would be regulated similarly to large boarding kennels.

The proposed minimum lot sizes in Ordinance 2026-17 – Sub A follow the different kennel sizes and use categories appropriately, with a 5-acre minimum established for large kennels and breeding kennels in the RR-5 zone, and medium kennels in both the RR-5 and RR-3 zones. This is the most restrictive minimum lot area standard required, as is reserved for the more intense kennel uses. For medium day care kennels in the RR-5, the minimum lot area is 4 acres. For medium boarding kennels in the RR-3 and small boarding kennels in the RR-5 zone, the minimum is 3 acres. Small boarding kennels in the RR-3 zone are subject to a 2-acre minimum. Additionally, the minimum for small boarding kennels is 35,000 SF in the RR-2 zone and 20,000 SF in the R-20 zone. Small day care kennels are held to a more permissive minimum lot area standard than their counterparts, due to less dogs and no overnight care operations: 2 acres in RR-5 zone, 1 acre in the RR-3 zone, 25,000 SF in the RR-2 zone, and 10,000 SF in the R-20. The minimum lot area in the existing dimensional standards code apply to kennels in commercial and industrial zones.

This ordinance will define “residential property” as a parcel of land with one or more residential dwelling units, which effectively requires the separation distance to be measured from the property line of the nearest residential use while preventing vacant residentially-zoned parcels from being construed as residential uses. Once again, the separation distances have gradations, starting with small kennels (up to 5 dog) in residential, commercial, and industrial zones having no additional separation distance from abutting residential properties. The separation distances for medium kennels will be 100 feet to 200 feet from residential properties, depending on which zone the kennel is in. The most restrictive separation distances will be applied to large boarding kennels and breeding kennels, in which the kennels will be 150 feet to 300 feet from residential properties, depending on which zone the kennel is in. This approach ensures that the separation distances change with the intensity of the kennel.

Moreover, a broad 100-foot separation distance will be required between medium and large kennels and the following land uses: schools, daycare, library, park/playgrounds, sports fields, youth centers, athletic and recreational facilities, and places of religious worship.

The proposed ordinance will mandate that medium, large, and breeding kennels be subject to the standards and procedures of Minor or Major Land Development Applications, with floor area to include outdoor enclosures. This will enable Planning staff, and potentially the Planning Commission, to help regulate and mitigate potential impacts to the community.

For medium, large, and breeding kennels, the proposed ordinance establishes a required 6' stockade fence along the perimeter of the kennel outdoor enclosure. This fence will help to mitigate potential noise impacts to abutters and ensure the security of the dogs when outside.

Finally, the hours of operation for the outdoor use of all overnight boarding kennels and breeding kennels will be restricted to 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, to prevent potential nuisances to abutters during the evening and early morning hours. For day care kennels, the hours are the same, but the dogs must leave the premises outside of those hours.

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 § 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 does not provide any specific guidance on kennels or the boarding of animals. However, personal services such as kennels or the boarding of animals are generally considered an acceptable use within both residential and non-residential districts.

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

2. 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 kennels and other sensitive uses. The zoning ordinance also addresses fencing requirements, storage and disposal of animal waste, and hours of operation.
 - 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." Kennels is an intensive personal service that can be accommodated in both residential and non-residential zones.

Recommendation

Staff finds proposed Ordinance 2025-17 – Sub A to be consistent with the standards for the required findings of fact set forth in RIGL § 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.