

Purpose and Overview

Following the Planning Commission’s initial discussion of former Special Use Permit uses and potential use-specific performance standards at its August 26, 2026 meeting, Weston & Sampson prepared this revised framework to support the next phase of that discussion. The initial review focused primarily on identifying whether uses were generally appropriate as-by-right uses, uses subject to performance standards, or uses that may warrant continued case-by-case review. Comments and direction from the Planning Commission have been incorporated into this updated version.

The purpose of this memorandum is not to present draft ordinance language or final recommendations. Rather, it is intended to serve as a discussion tool that helps organize uses into potential regulatory pathways, identify where objective performance standards may be appropriate, and highlight policy questions that may require additional Planning Commission direction before drafting can proceed.

This updated version also provides additional context regarding where uses are currently permitted under the Coventry Zoning Ordinance, identifies potential performance standards that may apply to selected uses, and highlights recurring policy themes raised during Commission discussion, including residential separation requirements and the treatment of rural and land-intensive uses. Clarifying questions for the Planning Commission have also been added at the end of the memorandum to help guide next steps and inform continued work on zoning updates.

Current Zoning Status

The following table summarizes where the uses discussed in this memo are currently permitted under Table 6-1 of the Coventry Zoning Ordinance. This information provides a baseline for evaluating the proposed regulatory approach and associated performance standards discussed below.

Currently Permitted In	Uses
All districts	Fire / police station / municipal school
RR5, RR3, RR2, R20, VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I2	Individual instruction
RR5, RR3, RR2	Commercial animal raising / breeding
RR5 only	Commercial boarding of horses or livestock
VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I1, I2	Restaurant, no alcohol; Trade or professional school; Group instruction
VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I2	Individual instruction
VRC, VMC, GB, BP, I1	Government buildings
VRC, VMC, GB, BP	Small personal services; Nursery / traditional greenhouse; Bowling / billiards / movie theater / exercise center / gym / sauna; Laundry / dry cleaner / laundromat; Veterinarian / animal hospital; Private school / daycare
VRC, VMC, GB	Caterer
GB, BP, I1, I2	Walk-in medical clinic / treatment center; Arena or recreation hall; Self-storage facilities, indoor
GB, BP, I1	Café / club / bar / lounge, currently one combined use; Auto dealership / vehicle sales; Indoor skating / court games / athletic fields; Driving range / miniature golf; Outdoor tennis courts / athletic fields / commercial swimming pools
BP, I1, I2	General warehousing and storage
GB, BP	Restaurant with alcohol; Paintball / airsoft / laser tag
BP, I1	Boat repair / storage / sales
GB only	Mortuary / funeral home; Drive-through / fast-food restaurant; Church / religious services; Hospital
BP only	Residential care uses, including retirement and nursing homes; Golf course
I1 only	Autobody repair
Not currently permitted in any district	Cemetery; Riding academies and riding schools; Compassion centers and cooperative cultivation facilities; Campgrounds; Outdoor gun or archery range
No current Table 6-1 category	Vehicle storage yard / equipment storage; Small-scale manufacturing / artisan production; Commercial greenhouse / controlled-environment agriculture
Future consideration; no current category identified	Data centers; Fulfillment centers

The zoning review indicates that most uses included in this analysis are already permitted in at least one district generally consistent with the intended character and intensity of the use. As a result, the primary focus of the proposed framework is not the expansion of district permissions, but rather the application of objective performance standards to uses that are already permitted.

A smaller group of uses , including campgrounds, riding academies, compassion centers and cooperative cultivation facilities, commercial greenhouse/controlled-environment agriculture, vehicle storage yards, and small-scale manufacturing/artisan production, present broader policy questions because they are either not currently permitted in any district or do not presently exist as distinct use categories within Table 6-1. These uses may require additional Planning Commission direction regarding district applicability before associated standards can be finalized.

Recommended Regulatory Approach by Use

The following table organizes selected uses into three recommended regulatory approaches: by-right, permitted subject to performance standards, and case-by-case review. The table is intended as a working framework and does not represent an exhaustive review of every use listed in the Zoning Ordinance. Residential uses were removed from this analysis, along with industrial uses and other uses that are already appropriately addressed or regulated through existing performance standards or other specific provisions of the Code. Where included, the italicized descriptions are intended to provide a general sense of the use type or level of intensity—such as *farm sales and supply* or *low-impact public facilities*—where additional context may help clarify the intended grouping or regulatory approach.

By-Right	Performance Standards	Case-by-Case
Beautician / barber / shoe repair / Photo studio / taxidermist / specialty shops / Tattoo shop / Travel agency / newspaper office (no printing) <i>Small retail & personal services</i>	Restaurant, no alcohol / Restaurant with alcohol	Commercial greenhouse / Controlled environment agriculture
Nursery / traditional greenhouse <i>Farm sales & supply</i>	Laundry/ dry cleaner / laundromat <i>High environmental risk factors</i>	Commercial animal raising /breeding
Bowling / billiards / movie theater / exercise center / gym / sauna <i>Low-intensity indoor recreational uses</i>	Auto dealership / vehicle sales <i>Equipment sales, vehicle display/storage</i>	Compassion centers and cooperative cultivation facilities
Government buildings <i>Low-impact public facilities</i>	Vehicle storage yard / equipment storage <i>Contractor yard, construction material storage, light industrial storage</i>	Hospital
Fire / police station / municipal school <i>Higher-intensity public facilities</i>	General warehousing and storage <i>Outdoor self storage, contractor storage</i>	Campgrounds
Individual instruction <i>Tutoring, instructional facilities</i>	Small-scale manufacturing / Artisan production <i>Surfboard production, furniture production, artisan manufacturing, craft production</i>	Outdoor gun or archery range <i>High-impact outdoor recreation</i>
	Residential Care Uses <i>Retirement homes, nursing homes</i>	USES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION: <i>Data centers, Fulfillment centers</i>
	Drive-through / fast-food restaurant	
	Club / bar / lounge	
	Cafe	
	Mortuary / funeral home	
	Self-storage facilities (indoor)	
	Veterinarian / animal hospital	
	Commercial boarding of horses or livestock / riding academies	
	Private school / daycare Trade or professional school	
	Group instruction <i>Studios, tutoring, small school facilities</i>	
	Church / religious services	
	Caterer	
	Walk-In Medical Clinic / Treatment Center <i>Medium impact medical offices and clinic</i>	
	Arena or recreation hall <i>High-impact indoor recreation and assembly</i>	
	Roller / ice skating rink / tennis / court games / athletic fields (indoor) <i>High-impact indoor recreation</i>	
	Driving range/ Miniature golf	

Golf course
Tennis courts, athletic fields, commercial swimming pools (outdoor) / Paintball / airsoft / laser tag High-impact recreation
Boat repair / storage / sales / Autobody repair
Cemetery

Potentially Applicable Performance Standards by Use

The following table identifies common performance standards that may be appropriate for selected uses recommended for a performance standards approach. An “X” indicates that the standard may be applicable based on the typical operational or site-related impacts of the use. The matrix is intended as a screening tool rather than an exhaustive list of all possible standards or regulated uses. Residential uses, industrial uses, and other uses that are already appropriately addressed or regulated through existing Code provisions were not carried forward into this matrix. Specific standards, thresholds, and applicability would be refined during ordinance drafting.

Individual Use	Hours	Noise	Lighting	Buffer / Screening	Distance from Residential	Parking / Loading	Traffic / Access	Outdoor Storage / Display	Odor / Dust / Emissions
Restaurant, no alcohol	X				X		X		
Restaurant with alcohol	X				X		X		
Café					X		X		
Cub / bar / lounge	X	X		X	X		X		
Drive-through / fast-food restaurant	X	X	X	X	X		X		
Laundry / dry cleaner / laundromat				X	X	X			X
Caterer						X			
Pet Grooming		X			X	X			
Small scale manufacturing / Artisan production	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Small scale auto repair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Auto dealership / vehicle sales	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vehicle storage yard / equipment storage	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
General warehousing and storage	X	X	X		X	X		X	
Self-storage facilities (indoor)				X	X	X		X	
Veterinarian / animal hospital		X	X		X	X	X		
Commercial boarding of horses or livestock / riding academies		X	X	X	X			X	X
Private school / daycare/ group instruction					X	X	X		
Trade or professional school					X	X	X		
Mortuary /funeral home				X	X	X	X		
Church / religious services				X		X	X		
Cemetery				X	X				
Walk-In Medical Clinic / Treatment Center					X	X	X		
Retirement / Nursing Home				X	X	X	X		
Arena or recreation hall		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Roller / ice skating rink / tennis / court games / athletic fields (indoor)			X		X	X	X		

Miniature golf			X	X	X	X	X		
Driving Range		X	X	X	X	X	X		
Tennis courts, athletic fields, commercial swimming pools (outdoor)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Paintball / airsoft / laser tag	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		

Rationale for Performance Standards

Restaurant, no alcohol / Restaurant with alcohol: Hours, Distance from Residential, and Traffic/Access are proposed for both. Predictable closing times and adequate separation from residential lots address the main compatibility concern for food service uses, without requiring the more intensive noise/lighting standards reserved for alcohol-and-entertainment uses below.

Café: Split out as its own use, separate from Club/Bar/Lounge. Distance from Residential and Traffic/Access only. A café’s lower-intensity, non-alcohol service model doesn’t generate the noise or late-hours concerns that justify a fuller standard set.

Club / Bar / Lounge: Hours, Noise, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, and Traffic/Access. The added Buffer/Screening and Noise standards specifically target nightlife-related impacts (amplified sound, late-hours activity).

Drive-through / fast-food restaurant: Hours, Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, and Traffic/Access. Hours and Noise are paired directly: late-night drive-through speaker use near residential areas was a specific concern raised, and an enforceable closing time is the most direct way to address it.

Laundry / dry cleaner / laundromat: Parking/Loading and Odor/Dust/Emissions. The proposed standards recognize the operational characteristics associated with these uses, including specialized equipment, chemical handling, ventilation systems, and wastewater management. The intent is to address those considerations through a limited set of performance standards rather than a dedicated use-specific section of the Ordinance.

Caterer: Parking/Loading only. Delivery and staging activity are the only impact distinct enough from a general office/retail use to warrant a standard.

Pet Grooming: Noise, Distance from Residential, and Parking/Loading. Odor/Dust/Emissions has been removed, consistent with treating this as an indoor-only use whose impacts don't extend meaningfully beyond the building.

Small Scale Manufacturing / Artisan Production: Hours, Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, Outdoor Storage/Display, and Odor/Dust/Emissions. Proposed as a full standard set to distinguish genuine production activity (furniture-making, surfboard shaping, etc.) from a typical retail or office use, while still allowing it in commercial districts where conventional manufacturing wouldn't be appropriate.

Small scale auto repair: Full standard set retained, consistent with the operational profile already addressed by Coventry's existing § 255-930A/C framework for auto-related uses.

Auto dealership / vehicle sales: Currently shown with the full standard set, including Noise and Odor/Dust/Emissions. Flag for Commission/staff discussion: a typical dealership doesn't generate meaningful noise or odor beyond standard retail use — these two would only be warranted if the intent is to capture on-site servicing or detailing as part of the same use.

Vehicle storage yard / equipment storage: Full standard set. As the most intensive storage-oriented use under consideration — and one with no current Table 6-1 category at all — this is the appropriate baseline against which the lighter treatment of other storage uses below can be compared.

General warehousing and storage: Hours, Noise, Lighting, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Outdoor Storage/Display. These standards recognize the loading, delivery, and operational activity commonly associated with warehousing uses. Additional discussion may be warranted regarding whether Outdoor Storage/Display is appropriate given Coventry's current use definition, and whether Traffic/Access should also be included due to the potential truck traffic generated by larger facilities.

Self-storage facilities (indoor): Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Outdoor Storage/Display.

Veterinarian / animal hospital: Noise, Lighting, Distance from Residential, and Parking/Loading. Odor/Dust/Emissions has been removed, for the same reason as Pet Grooming — this is treated as an indoor-only use.

Commercial boarding of horses or livestock / riding academies: Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Outdoor Storage/Display, and Odor/Dust/Emissions. No Parking or Traffic standard is proposed, reflecting the low daily trip-generation of this use. The Lighting standard should extend Table 6-1's existing "no lighting for night use" restriction on riding academies (G.1-02) rather than create a new one. Recommend splitting this into two uses before finalizing — horse/livestock boarding is currently permitted in RR5, while riding academies are not permitted in any district today, which is a materially different starting point for Commission discussion.

Private school / daycare / Trade or professional school / Group instruction: Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access for all three — reflecting drop-off/pick-up traffic management and adequate separation as the shared core concern across school-type uses of varying scale. For Group instruction specifically, the Commission may also want to preserve a lower threshold for small-scale, in-home instruction (≤6 individuals) consistent with Table 6-1's own existing language, before this full standard set applies.

Mortuary / funeral home: Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, Traffic/Access, and Odor/Dust/Emissions. If drafted, any emissions-related standards may be most applicable to facilities containing on-site crematory operations rather than funeral homes generally.

Church / religious services: Buffer/Screening, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access.

Cemetery: Buffer/Screening and Distance from Residential. Unlike most uses on this list, this isn't a new standard — Coventry already regulates fencing and setbacks for cemeteries under § 255-930D. What's driving these two marks is that the existing 50-foot building setback may not comply with state law, so this section needs active revision rather than a simple cross-reference to unchanged text.

Walk-In Medical Clinic / Treatment Center: Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. Split from Retirement/Nursing Home because a walk-in clinic's traffic and parking pattern (short visits, patient turnover) is fundamentally different from residential care facilities.

Retirement / Nursing Home: Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. Carries one additional standard (Buffer/Screening) beyond the clinic use above, reflecting its more residential-adjacent character and higher sensitivity to neighboring uses — plus the emergency-access and staff shift-change considerations distinct to a live-in care facility.

Arena or recreation hall: Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. This is the highest standard indoor use on the list, reflecting event-scale traffic and amplified sound potential that smaller indoor recreation uses below don't generate.

Roller / ice skating rink / tennis / court games / athletic fields (indoor): Lighting, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. These standards focus primarily on-site design, parking demand, event traffic, and compatibility with surrounding development rather than operational impacts occurring within the building. Noise and Buffer/Screening were removed because activities are generally contained indoors and are less likely to create off-site nuisance impacts than comparable outdoor recreation uses.

Miniature golf: Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. Lighting standards should build upon Coventry's existing treatment of golf-related facilities. Future discussion may be warranted regarding whether miniature golf, driving ranges, and golf courses should ultimately be regulated through a more unified framework.

Driving Range: Added as a new, separate use entry following Commission discussion, distinguishing it from miniature golf. Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access retained — notably carries Noise where Miniature golf does not, reflecting the more open, higher-intensity nature of ball-striking activity. Future discussion may be warranted on whether driving ranges and golf courses should ultimately be treated under a unified standard.

Tennis courts, athletic fields, commercial swimming pools (outdoor): The fullest standard set among the outdoor recreation uses (adds Hours to the list above), reflecting the combined lighting, noise, and scheduling concerns raised specifically around outdoor court sports — including pickleball's documented noise impact in other communities.

Paintball / airsoft / laser tag: Hours, Noise, Lighting, Buffer/Screening, Distance from Residential, Parking/Loading, and Traffic/Access. Buffer/Screening for this use specifically should be drafted as a safety berm/netting requirement rather than a standard landscape buffer — the underlying concern is projectile containment, not visual screening.

Anticipated Changes by District

RR5, RR3, RR2, RR20 (Rural Residential and Residential Districts)

These districts would experience relatively limited change under the proposed framework. No new use types are proposed for introduction, and most currently permitted uses would remain unaffected. The primary proposed changes involve agriculture and animal-related uses, where commercial boarding of horses or livestock and commercial animal raising/breeding would move into more clearly defined regulatory pathways. Controlled-environment agriculture also remains a distinct discussion item, reflecting Commission concerns that large-scale greenhouse operations may function differently than traditional agricultural uses.

VRC, VMC (Village Districts)

Most village-scale retail, service, and recreational uses are proposed to remain permitted as they are today. The primary proposed change is that several currently permitted uses, including restaurants, laundromats, veterinary facilities, schools, and similar commercial or service uses, would become subject to objective performance standards where few or no use-specific standards currently exist. The intent is not to change district permissions, but to establish clearer operational expectations.

GB (General Business)

GB would likely see the greatest practical impact under the proposed framework because it contains the largest concentration of uses under review. Most proposed changes involve applying performance standards to uses already permitted today, including restaurants, bars, drive-throughs, vehicle-related uses, institutional uses, storage uses, and recreation uses. The focus would generally be on compatibility standards such as residential separation, buffering, lighting, parking, traffic, and operational impacts rather than changing where these uses are allowed.

BP (Business Park)

BP would follow a similar pattern to GB under the proposed framework. Existing permitted uses would generally remain permitted, but more uses would become subject to defined standards. The largest proposed changes would affect storage facilities, recreation uses, vehicle-oriented uses, residential care facilities, and institutional uses. The proposed framework focuses on establishing predictable standards rather than substantially changing district permissions.

I1, I2 (Industrial Districts)

The industrial districts would experience comparatively little change under the proposed framework because many industrial uses are already regulated through Article VII Performance Standards. The most notable future discussion item is the potential introduction of Small-Scale Manufacturing / Artisan Production as a category distinct from traditional industrial manufacturing. These districts may also be the most logical location for future consideration of currently undefined uses such as fulfillment centers or data centers.

Uses Not Currently Permitted Anywhere

Several uses would remain outside the current permitted-use structure unless the Commission chooses to consider them further, including campgrounds, riding academies, outdoor gun or archery ranges, compassion centers/cooperative cultivation facilities, and several newly identified use categories. Any future decision to allow these uses would represent an expansion of the use table rather than the application of standards to an already-permitted use. Additional Commission discussion is needed to guide potential district assignments for these uses.

Key Planning Commission Discussion Items

The following topics emerged as recurring themes during Planning Commission discussion at its August 26, 2026 meeting, and may warrant additional evaluation as the Town continues work on use-specific performance standard and zoning text amendments.

Residential Separation and Compatibility Standards

A recurring theme throughout Commission discussion was the use of residential separation requirements as an alternative to relying on numerous use-specific standards. Rather than developing standards for individual uses, several Commissioners suggested that many commercial, institutional, recreational, and service uses may be appropriate if they maintain adequate separation from nearby residential properties. Local examples discussed included existing separation requirements associated with cannabis-related uses and gasoline pumps, suggesting that residential separation may already be an accepted zoning tool within Coventry.

Because this concept appeared repeatedly across multiple use categories, residential separation may ultimately become one of the primary compatibility measures associated with future performance standards. Additional research may be warranted to evaluate how comparable Rhode Island communities structure and apply residential separation standards, including how distances are measured and how those standards interact with buffering, screening, lighting, and other compatibility measures.

Questions: Should residential separation be used as a broad compatibility tool applicable to multiple use categories, or should it be reserved for a narrower group of uses that present recurring concerns related to residential adjacency? If residential separation standards are pursued, what should serve as the point of measurement: residential zoning district boundaries, residential property lines, individual dwellings, or another sensitive land-use feature?

Rural and Land-Intensive Uses

Commission discussion also highlighted that several uses under review may not fit neatly within a conventional commercial performance standards framework. Uses such as campgrounds, riding academies, golf courses, outdoor gun ranges, and outdoor archery ranges were repeatedly discussed in the context of larger rural parcels, substantial acreage requirements, and operating characteristics that differ significantly from typical commercial or institutional development

A consistent theme was that these uses have historically been associated with rural residential areas, open land, or large undeveloped tracts rather than traditional commercial districts. As a result, the primary policy consideration may not be whether these uses should be regulated through performance standards alone, but rather whether they should be evaluated through a distinct rural-use framework that accounts for acreage, intensity, buffering, access, seasonal activity, and compatibility with surrounding development patterns. Additional research may be beneficial to evaluate how comparable communities regulate rural and land-intensive uses and identify potential approaches that could be considered in Coventry.

Questions: Would the Planning Commission be interested in exploring a distinct regulatory framework for rural and land-intensive uses, including campgrounds, riding academies, golf courses, and outdoor recreation uses? If so, what role should acreage, buffering, operating intensity, and infrastructure availability play when evaluating these uses?