

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: [PETITION TO AMEND THE TEXT OF THE NEW HAVEN ZONING ORDINANCE](#), Section 42, Table 3, Use Table, Paragraph V, to Permit Cultural activities not carried on as a gainful business, including art galleries, libraries, and museums, to be permitted as of right in the Light Industrial (IL) Districts.

Submitted by: Lost in New Haven, Inc.

REPORT: 1681-05
ADVICE: Deny

SUBMISSION:
The petition for this ordinance amendment was dated for and received at the March 16, 2026 Board of Alders meeting. Legistar File ID: LM-2026-0109. The submission included:

- Full Submission PDF, 6 pages.
 - Cover Letter, 2 pages, dated March 10, 2026.
 - Schedule A – Proposed Use Table, 1 page.
 - Attachment B – Order Language, 3 pages.

BACKGROUND

This amendment involves a change to the text of Section 42 of the New Haven Zoning Ordinance. Section 42 establishes use regulations for business and industrial districts, and the applicant proposes to change “Table 3. Use Table” to permit “*Cultural activities not carried on as a gainful business, including art galleries, libraries and museums.*” by right in the IL zone. Currently the IL zone does not permit this use at all.

SCHEDULE A

TABLE 3, USE TABLE																	
Key: R - Permitted As-of-Right SP - Special Permit SE - Special Exception X - Not Permitted NA - Not Applicable In case of conflict between this Table 3 and the text of the Zoning Ordinance, the text shall prevail.																	
Use	BA	BA-1	CGD	BA-2	BC	BD	BD-1	BD-2	BD-3	BE	MUL W	TOC	IL	IM	IH	Parking	Loading
V. Institutional and Public Uses																	
Cultural activities not carried on as a gainful business, including art galleries, libraries and museums.	R	R	R	R	SP	R	R	R	R	X	R/R	R	X R	X	X	h	

Figure 1. Excerpt from petition showing zoning table change

PUBLIC HEARING

A Public Hearing was held by the City Plan Commission on April 15, 2026. A transcript of the hearing, meeting #1681, will be available from the City Plan Department.

The hearing included discussion of the following topics:

- Concern over impact to taxpayers, and the tax base due to this change.

- General support for Lost in New Haven and emphasis on the importance of arts and culture in New Haven.
- Praise for the educational value of the Lost in New Haven Museum.
- Emphasis on the civic value of Lost in New Haven Museum.
- Negative financial impact of increasing tax-exempt uses across the city
- Concern over pedestrian safety and traffic in IL Districts.
- Suggestion that this zoning change should remain on a case-by-case basis by Special Permit or Special Exception rather than as-of-right in all IL Zones

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed text amendment, if adopted, would permit a variety of arts and cultural land uses within areas currently zoned for light industrial uses. The IL zone was designed to accommodate less intensive uses than those found in the Heavy Industry (IH) zones. Arts and cultural uses such as art galleries, museums, and libraries have a significantly low environmental impact compared to common industrial uses, which is in keeping with the goals of the IL zone as a lower nuisance industrial district. Many of these uses often require and utilize open format floor plans in order to exhibit art work and archival materials and to hold talks and workshops.

To that end, vacant and formerly industrial buildings are appropriate physical structures for these uses as they tend to have open floor plans, high ceilings, and strong concrete floors that allow for a level of programmatic flexibility within the space. This type of adaptive reuse of industrial buildings is not only appropriate for the nature of these cultural land uses but can also help to promote the insertion of land use activities that are welcoming to nearby residents in areas that have otherwise been isolated from pedestrian activity due to their strict land use allowances and levels of vacancy.

Further, the IL zone already permits as-of-right a variety of retail uses carried on as gainful business that are in service of community needs and interests and that typically require open and large floor plan layouts to operate. Such uses include health clubs and gyms, grocery stores, and music or dancing schools. To this end, while the IL zone gives preference and priority to light industrial uses, it is already a zone that permits and is appropriately situated to accommodate a variety of non-industrial uses.

Several existing arts and cultural spaces within New Haven exemplify the potential for permitting cultural activities as-of-right in both industrial zones and in formerly industrial buildings. For example, Erector Square (315 Peck Street) in the Fair Haven neighborhood is a former toy factory located within the IL zone that hosts one of the largest artist studio complexes in the region and includes exhibition space for local artists. Similarly, NXTHVN (169 Henry Street) in the Dixwell neighborhood is a former manufacturing plant within the RM-2 zone that is now used as artist studios, exhibition space, housing, and community programming space for visiting and local curators and artists. Both examples showcase the value of adaptive reuse of formerly industrial spaces towards arts and cultural uses that are of benefit to local artists and local visitors seeking engagement with cultural enrichment activities.

The majority of IL zones within the City of New Haven abut RM-1, RM-2, or RH-2 zones. These residential zones all permit cultural activities as described in this text amendment as-of-right. The expanded allowance of cultural activities into IL zones would be in alignment with the land use allowance of the abutting lower intensity residential zones and would permit that use in areas that can accommodate larger scale arts and cultural uses that may not be as feasible in the properties commonly found in residential areas.

NEW HAVEN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: SUBMISSION MEETS REQUIREMENTS

The proposed text amendment aligns with the goals of the City of New Haven's Plan of Conservation and Development, Vision 2034 Comprehensive Plan (adopted October 2025) by supporting the arts broadly and

encouraging the adaptive reuse of vacant and formerly industrial and manufacturing properties. Specifically, this text amendment aligns with the following goals and strategies from Vision 2034:

Arts and Cultural Identity

Goal 1: Increase support for and promotion of arts and culture in New Haven. (p. 146)

Increasing the support for and promotion of arts and culture can provide economic benefits, attract tourism, and strengthen community identity. With more resources, the City can better support creativity, innovation, and social cohesion by providing platforms for diverse voices and cultural expression. Strong arts and culture initiatives improve quality of life, contribute to mental well-being, and create opportunities for education and workforce development.

Goal 3: Support the development of accessible and affordable space for arts and culture across the City. (p. 150)

While New Haven has remarkable galleries, studios, and performance spaces, most of those are located Downtown or are associated with institutions such as Yale University and Southern Connecticut State University. Few spaces exist in New Haven's neighborhoods or are available to small organizations or the public. Providing space that is available to a wider audience is important to improving access to opportunities in the arts and to improving equity in arts and culture. Additionally, many spaces are not accessible to artists and patrons with disabilities and should be retrofitted to provide universal accessibility.

- **Strategy 3.2: Repurpose vacant and underutilized spaces for community use.** (p. 150)

There is vacant and underutilized space located across the City that could be used or converted for use for local artists. This includes vacant and underutilized office and industrial space, institutional space, and retail space. The City, through its Economic Development Administration, should work with property owners to make such space available to artists and arts and culture organizations through short-term rentals, leases, or purchase agreements. New Haven should also continue its support for redevelopment of the Armory and for the inclusion of arts and culture space when redeveloped.

Additionally, most IL zones in New Haven are located in areas that are identified in Vision 2034 Future Land Use Map (p. 183) as future Coastal Mixed-Use or Neighborhood Commercial land use areas. These areas are imagined to be future waterfront and inland districts that support a diversity of business and community gathering spaces and encourage cultural and economic activity in New Haven's neighborhoods and coastal areas.

CITY CHARTER AND ZONING ORDINANCE CRITERIA

Sections 181 and 182 of the Charter of The City of New Haven

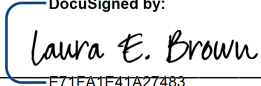
The City Plan Commission finds that, based on submitted information, the proposed zoning ordinance amendment complies with Sections 181 and 182 of the Charter of the City of New Haven in that it is:

- (i.) uniform for each class of buildings or structures,
- (ii.) made in accordance with the comprehensive plan,
- (iii.) designed to lessen congestion in the streets, secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers, promote health and the general welfare, provide adequate light and air, prevent the overcrowding of land, avoid undue concentration of population, facilitate the adequate provisions for transportation, water, sewerage, parks and other public requirements, and
- (iv.) made with reasonable consideration, as to the character of the proposed district and its peculiar suitability for particular uses, and with a view to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the City.

FINDINGS AND ADVICE

Following the public hearing held on April 15, 2026 the City Plan Commission recommended that the proposed zoning text amendment be **Denied**.

ADOPTED: April 15, 2026
Ernest Pagan
Chair

ATTEST: 
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Laura E Brown
Executive Director, City Plan Department