

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

RE: **ORDINANCE AMENDMENT** adding language to the Zoning Ordinance City of New Haven, CT § 43.1-13b, to support biodiversity within the city and, in turn, the health and welfare of the population.

Submitted by: Yale School of the Environment

REPORT: 1661-04

ADVICE: **No Recommendation**

BACKGROUND

To support New Havens goals of promoting sustainability and protecting public health and welfare, the Applicant proposes that the New Haven City Planning Commission [Board of Alders] should amend ZONING ORDINANCE CITY OF NEW HAVEN, CT § 43.1-13b to include a provision on promoting biodiversity for all planting and trees covered by this section of the ordinance. Specifically, New Haven should add the following italicized language to the existing enumerated provisions.

Section 43.1-13b - Planting and Trees.

The provisions of this Section are intended to facilitate a combination of landscaping elements in order to provide comfort, shade and textural variety.

...

(9) All planting of trees, shrubs, and associated vegetation should be designed to promote biodiversity, supporting the natural habitat and ecological balance within the jurisdiction

If New Haven does not adopt this provision, keeping urban development business as usual, the city faces the risk of reducing biodiversity and imminent health risks as a result. Urban development has the direct effect of reducing biodiversity, and through biodiversity loss has the indirect effect of increasing potential pathogen transmission and reducing human physical and mental health. Urban development directly reduces biodiversity by altering landscapes through land cover change and spatial construction that fragments urban greenspaces. These processes reduce genetic diversity of the biotic community, consequently causing a reduction of overall species biodiversity. Reduced biodiversity increases human health risks by enhancing pathogen transmission because they are concentrated among low numbers of species and the potential prevalence of an infected ‘vector’ is higher. Further human resilience to diseases is reduced because of the reduced ecosystem services correlated with lower biodiversity levels. Typically, biodiverse areas provide humans with strong microbiome (which supports immunity levels) and improved mental health. But with low biodiversity, humans will face lower immunity levels and lower overall mental health.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

In accordance with Title I, Article XIII, Section 2(A) of the New Haven Code of Ordinances states, **"Every Ordinance or Resolution of the Board of Alders relating to the location and use of any street, bridge, boulevard, esplanade, square, park, playground, playfield, aviation field, parking space, public building, the facilities or terminals of any public utility, or the establishment or**

change in the boundaries of or regulations concerning zoning, shall be at once referred to the City Planning Commission and final action shall not be taken on any such Ordinance or Resolution until the commission shall have reported thereon, provided that the Board of Alders may establish by ordinance a period of not less than sixty (60) Days within which the commission shall file its report with the City Clerk and if no report is filed within such period the approval of the commission shall be presumed.” Accordingly, the Board of Alders seeks guidance regarding the proposal.

The Board of Alder seeks guidance as to:

- Whether the proposal is aligned with the City’s Comprehensive Plan.

Staff are broadly supportive of the intent of this request and believe it to be in harmony with New Haven’s Comprehensive Plan. The proposal is consistent with the City’s commitment to addressing quality-of-life issues, balancing economic development, environmental protection and cultural enrichment (VII-17). Deliberate regulations that promote landscape plantings biodiversity would further the city’s environmental goals, especially if the city’s endangered species are considered in the review of development activities. (VII-22).

However, it should be noted that the extent of this ordinance as drafted would only apply to a small portion of the city. Section 43.1 regulates the design standards for public plazas in the BD-3 zone alone. Were this ordinance to be adopted, it would not be applicable to most development permit applications within the city plan departments purview. In addition, the ordinance language lacks specific criteria for gauging compliance with the ordinance. Applicants would be asked to consider the proposed language, without a mechanism for staff to ensure that they do.

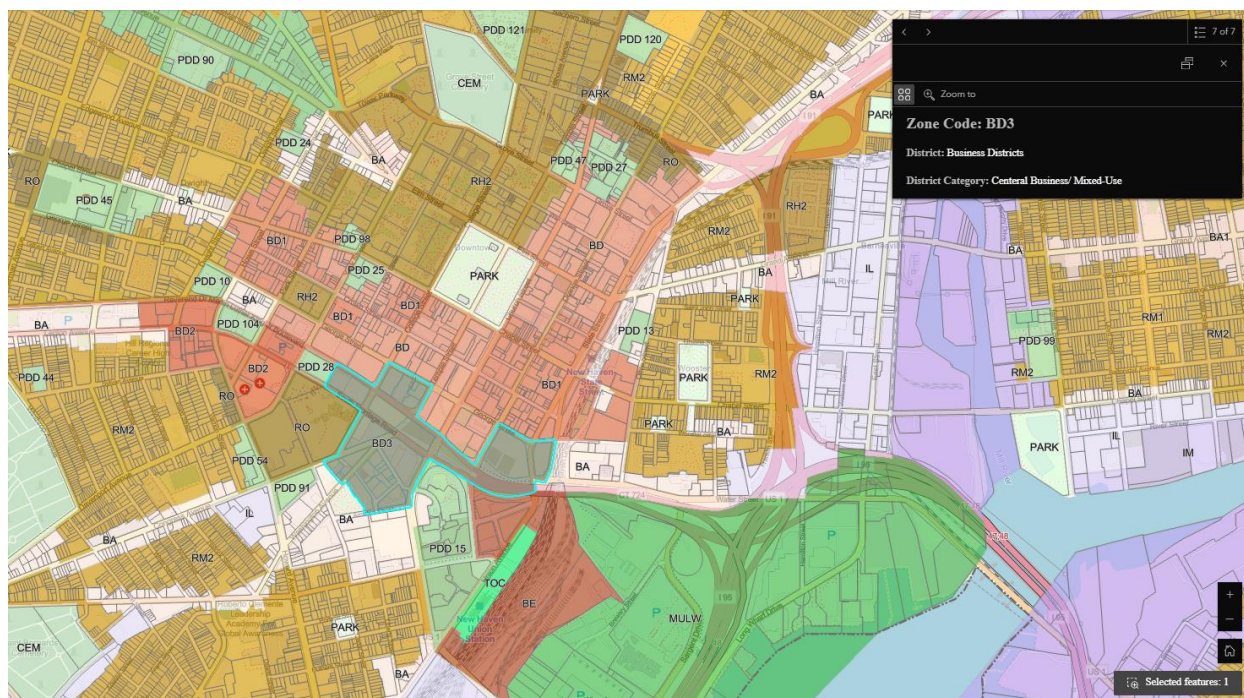


Figure 1. Zoning map showing parcels subject to the proposed ordinance.

It is the goal of the City Plan Department to conduct a comprehensive overhaul of the zoning ordinance, which has not happened in the 61 years since its current iteration was adopted. While marginal improvements have been made to targeted sections of the ordinance, it remains largely a product of 20th century zoning principals. Staff believe that a more comprehensive overhaul that considers the biodiversity of New Haven's ecology should be the avenue for such efforts. While staff are not against the inclusion of the proposed language in section 43.1, we believe the ordinance can be strengthened through collaboration with relevant New Haven shareholders, including the New Haven Parks Department and the Yale School of the Environment.

ADVICE

The City Plan Commission makes a recommendation that the Board of Alders give this item leave to withdraw.

ADOPTED: February 19, 2025
Leslie Radcliffe
Chair

ATTEST: _____
Laura E Brown
Executive Director, City Plan Department