

List of CPTC Topics for Fall 2025

Adopting & Revising Rules & Regulations

Boards of appeal and planning boards frequently choose to, or are required to, adopt rules and regulations governing process, procedure and even the substance of their application reviews. While such documents are an important source of authority for boards, they also make life easier for board members and applicants by providing a clear road map for a fair and predictable process. This session will clarify which types of zoning, non-zoning and subdivision rules and regulations are mandatory and which are voluntary; describe what they can and cannot cover; and explain how they get adopted and amended. The regulatory framework for establishing fees and using consultants will also be discussed.

Creating Master Plans

Local officials will learn why and how to prepare, adopt, and implement the master or comprehensive plan described in MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D. The session will identify the sections of a master/comprehensive plan and specific steps by which the plan will be carried out. The session will also discuss what kinds of goals and policies does a master plan typically include? Why is an implementation program such an important part of creating a master plan? Evaluating future conservation and development opportunities. The advantages of hiring a consultant.

Drafting Zoning Amendments

While regular review and amendment of a municipality's zoning ordinance or bylaw in response to changing needs and circumstances is essential to ensuring that it remain up-to date, the process can be tricky. This course will provide a step-by-step roadmap on how to adopt and amend zoning codes in accordance with the strict requirements of G.L. 40A Section 5. Local officials and staff will gain an understanding of what type and scope of amendments are permissible; the relationship between zoning and other municipal planning documents; and the essential role of the Planning Board in the process. Tips for drafting zoning amendments, and strategies for successfully getting them passed will also be addressed.

Fair Housing Laws

Fair housing laws regulate the development, leasing, buying and selling of real estate, as well as state and municipal housing programs, and aspects of municipal land use. This module will describe how land use regulations have been (and continue to be) used to exclude groups from specific neighborhoods and properties, and provide a detailed overview of federal and state laws intended to prevent discrimination and promote equity in housing. A special focus will be on the role of the municipality in enforcing a commitment to fair housing, and the potential consequences of not doing so.

Introduction to the Subdivision Control Law and ANR

This session addresses the purposes of the Subdivision Control Law and the Planning Board's authority under the Act. It also covers important procedural requirements and board responsibilities when reviewing subdivision and ANR plans; adoption of subdivision regulations; review of ANR plans; access issues; preliminary and definitive plans; Planning Board waivers; modifying, amending and rescinding plans; enforcement; vested rights and zoning freezes.

Introduction to the Zoning Act

This course addresses the purposes of the Zoning Act and the process (and the Planning Board's role) for the adoption/amending of zoning bylaws and ordinances. The difference between variances and special permits will be discussed. Additionally, the course will include how zoning is enforced and by whom as well as the role of the Zoning Board of Appeals in variances and zoning appeals.

Planning With Community Support

The course describes how to conduct a planning process, with an emphasis on a comprehensive or master plan that will ultimately have the support of the community. A variety of public participation strategies will be examined, including plan implementation processes. The course will cover how to design the community engagement process.

Reasonable and Defensible Decisions (Including Hearing Requirements)

This course covers some key points that will assist boards in making clear and defensible decisions and why that is important. It describes criteria that should be contained in local zoning provisions and how they relate to the drafting of the decision and the conditions a board may impose when approving a special permit or variance application. The first part of this course covers legal and procedural requirements for conducting a public hearing and the ramifications of failure to follow procedural regulations in the decision-making process.

Roles and Responsibilities of Planning & Zoning Boards

Join us if you are a new Board member or building inspector. This program will launch you into your role as a local official, introduce you to the functions of the two boards and the main tools of planning and zoning. This session will also include a brief discussion of the Open Meeting, Public Records, and the Conflict of Interest Laws.

Site Plan Review

The Zoning Act does not contain any provisions for the review of site plans, however the process can be a very effective tool for a board to review the details, aesthetics and impacts of a potential project. This course explains the legal issues when using site plan review; the difference between site plan approval and special permits; the review process; the types of conditions a board may impose; the reasons for disapproval; the appeal process and the types of information a municipality can require to be shown on a site plan. Additional material will be presented on how to incorporate site plan review into your zoning bylaw or ordinance.

Special Permits and Variances

Participants will learn about the difference between special permits and variances; the issues and criteria for decision-making; and procedural requirements. Additionally, the course will discuss who has the authority to issue special permits and variances and how judicial decisions guide the way we work with them.

Use of Design Review

Design review is a process that municipalities can undertake to improve the visual quality of structures and promote good design for the benefit of the public. This session will clarify the appropriate scope and authority for the use of design guidelines, the types of standards that can be implemented, and how that can be accomplished. The session will also explain how design review guidelines can be developed, administered and enforced in a fair and predictable manner.

Vested Rights and Nonconforming Structures and Uses

The course will cover the issue of vested rights under zoning and subdivision law, why they exist, and how they affect the work of the Zoning Boards of Appeals and Planning Boards. Participants will learn what the Zoning Act says about vested rights and the way it occurs. This session will answer the question regarding whether nonconforming structures and uses can change and if so, how much. Finally, the course will address how judicial decisions shape the way provisions of the Zoning Act are interpreted today.

Zoning Exemptions

Section 3 of the Zoning Act provide certain exemptions for agricultural, educational, childcare and religious uses, as well as state and federal lands and uses, from local zoning regulations. This course explains these exemptions and their purpose; what does it mean to be exempted from zoning requirements; and identifies under which circumstances municipalities can enact and impose zoning regulations. The course will also cover how judicial decisions guide the way this section of the Zoning Act is interpreted.

Working with MGL Chapter 40B

A workshop for municipal staff and local boards reviewing applications for projects seeking a comprehensive permit under G.L Chapter 40B. Topics will include the following: reviewing the initial application for completeness and compliance with state and local requirements; conducting a site visit; managing the public hearing process; retaining Peer Review consultants; making an informed decision consistent with the local needs provided for in the statute; drafting and issuing the Comprehensive Permit decision; and working with developers, abutters, and other interested parties. This workshop will focus on how municipal officials as well as others can use 40B to achieve housing goals as well as some of the permitting requirements involved with 40B.

Zoning with Overlay Districts

Overlay zoning is a popular and useful tool allowing municipalities to implement land use policies and strategies with greater flexibility than traditional zoning, without the necessity of

amending the underlying zoning. This course illustrates the various types of overlay districts, and explains how they differ from traditional zoning measures and describes the form and contents of an overlay district. Discussion will allow participants to explore the potential pros and cons of overlay vs. traditional zoning.