What is the affordable housing land use appeals procedure and what is its purpose?
The procedure requires municipal planning and zoning agencies (hereinafter “municipalities”) to defend their decisions to reject affordable housing development applications or approve them with costly conditions. In traditional land use appeals, the developer must convince the court that the municipality acted illegally, arbitrarily, or abused its discretion. The procedure instead places the burden of proof on municipalities.

What types of developments trigger the law’s protection?
The proposed development must be an “affordable housing development,” which the law defines to include “assisted housing” and “set-aside developments.”

Under what circumstances are municipalities subject to the law?
With one exception, developers can use the appeals procedure to contest a municipality’s decision on an affordable housing development application submitted to a municipality if (1) fewer than 10% of the municipality’s housing units are affordable, based on certain statutory criteria, and (2) the municipality has not qualified for a moratorium. Under the exception, a moratorium does not apply to appeals related to applications for certain small or low-income assisted housing developments.

What types of dwelling units count toward the 10%?
Affordable housing is defined to include (1) “assisted housing,” (2) housing currently financed by Connecticut Housing Finance Authority mortgages, (3) housing subject to deeds and conditions restricting its sale or rental to low- and moderate-income people, and (4) mobile homes or accessory apartments subject to certain deed restrictions.

Assisted Housing
Housing that receives government assistance to construct or rehabilitate low- and moderate-income housing, or housing occupied by individuals receiving rental assistance.

Set-aside Development
A development in which, for at least 40 years after initial occupancy, at least 30% of the units are deed restricted. Specifically, at least:
(1) 15% of the units must be deed restricted to households earning 60% or less of the area median income (AMI) or state median income (SMI), whichever is less, and
(2) 15% of the units must be deed restricted to households earning 80% or less of the AMI or SMI, whichever is less.
When is a municipality eligible for a moratorium?

A municipality is eligible for a temporary suspension of procedure (i.e., moratorium) each time it shows it has added a certain number of affordable housing units over the applicable time period (for first moratoria: since July 1, 1990). Newly built set-aside and assisted housing developments count toward the moratorium, as do units subject to certain deed restrictions. Generally, a moratorium lasts for four years, except that municipalities with at least 20,000 dwelling units are eligible for moratoria lasting for five years if they are applying for a second or subsequent moratorium (i.e., they previously qualified for a moratorium).

With one exception, a municipality is eligible for a moratorium each time it shows it has added affordable housing units, measured in HUE (housing unit equivalent) points, equaling the greater of 2% of the housing stock, as of the last census, or 50 HUE points. (The latter rises to 75 on October 1, 2022.) Under the exception, the 2% threshold drops to 1.5% for municipalities that have at least 20,000 dwelling units, adopt an affordable housing plan, and apply for a second or subsequent moratorium. (i.e., they previously qualified for a moratorium).

HUE points are calculated as shown in the adjacent table. (Bonus points are in addition to base points.)

How can municipalities defend an appeal brought under the procedure?

Municipalities cannot defend an appeal on the grounds that the application does not comply with land use regulations. Instead, to defend an appeal, a municipality must show either:

1. the decision was necessary to protect substantial public interests in health, safety, or other matters the municipal commission may legally consider, and that these interests clearly outweigh the need for affordable housing and cannot be protected by making reasonable changes to the proposed development or
2. the development is (a) receiving no government funds and (b) located in an industrial zone that does not permit residential uses.

Learn More

Public Act 17-170 (vetoed; veto overridden)
OLR’s Summary of Public Act 17-170
CGS § 8-30g and the related regulations (Note: as of this report’s publication, these do not reflect changes made in the 2017 session)

Housing Units Built Under the Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure (2013-R-0143)
Municipal Affordable Housing Stock: 2010-2016 (2017-R-0090)
Annual Lists Showing Percentage of Affordable Housing in Each Municipality