

# Inclusion of the municipal zoning department by the Stamford Prevention Council to address proliferation of smoke shops in Stamford, Connecticut

## Stamford Prevention Council

### Background

- In Stamford, the numbers of smoke shops (stores that prominently feature tobacco products) began to increase substantially in early 2023 and some have also become sources for illegal sales of cannabis.
  - The Stamford Prevention Council (SPC), whose mission is to prevent and reduce youth substance misuse through positive youth and community development, recruited the participation of the City of Stamford zoning department to introduce regulations limiting the density and further restrict locations of smoke shops.

### Results

- In 2023 and 2024, the Zoning Board passed new rules to define smoke shops, requiring special permits, and restrict their locations and advertising (See **Figure** below).

Zoning Regulation Changes Passed in 2023		Zoning Regulation Changes Passed in 2024	
<b>Special Permit Requirements</b>	Smoke shops were defined as stores in which <b>50% or more</b> of the retail space was <b>dedicated to tobacco products or paraphernalia</b> and was required to obtain a <b>special permit and approval from land-use boards</b> .	<b>Special Permit Requirements</b>	The definition of a "smoke shop" was broadened so that a special permit was required if <b>10% of retail space</b> was dedicated to <b>tobacco products</b>
<b>Distance Requirements</b>	<b>New smoke shops</b> were <b>prohibited</b> from operating within <b>3,000 feet</b> of <b>any other smoke shop or cannabis dispensary</b> and <b>at least 1,000 feet</b> away from any <b>public or non-public school</b> .	<b>Distance Requirements</b>	<b>New smoke shops</b> were also <b>prohibited</b> from operating <b>within 1000 feet</b> of any <b>community center</b> that provides services to <b>individuals under 21 years old</b> and <b>within 1000 feet</b> of a <b>park or beach</b> .
<b>Advertising Restrictions</b>	Smoke shops were <b>prohibited</b> from using <b>illuminated signs, window displays, or storefront advertisements</b> for tobacco products and smoking paraphernalia.	<b>Advertising Restrictions</b>	<b>Neon signs</b> were included among those <b>prohibited</b> for smoke shops and the <b>maximum allowable window area for signage</b> was <b>decreased from 30% to 15%</b> .
<b>Locations</b>	<b>Sales of tobacco products</b> were <b>restricted to permanent buildings</b> , effectively prohibiting sales from mobile units like food trucks.	<b>Locations</b>	Smoke shops were <b>prohibited</b> on <b>lots adjacent</b> to or <b>directly across the street</b> from <b>residential districts</b> and specifically prohibited from those defined as <b>Neighborhood Business</b> and <b>Community Business districts</b> .

- The revised rules substantially reduced the available locations for smoke shops.
- Since the introduction of the rules in 2023 up to Oct 2025, no new applications for new smoke shop permits have been submitted to the city of Stamford.

### Key Takeaways and Lessons Learned

- Municipal zoning authorities can play an important role in limiting the accessibility of tobacco products; coalitions and/or other bodies concerned with the accessibility of tobacco should consider recruiting local zoning authorities in their efforts to restrict the availability of tobacco products.
- Nevertheless, retail outlets that do not fit within the definition of a smoke shop are still a substantial source of tobacco products for which there are currently few regulations concerning their numbers and locations; reducing the overall availability of tobacco products may require state-level regulations and imposition of caps on the numbers of outlets.

*For more information go to [www.stamfordpreventioncouncil.org](http://www.stamfordpreventioncouncil.org) or contact Ingrid Gillespie, Coalition Coordinator Email: [ingrid.gillespie@liberationprograms.org](mailto:ingrid.gillespie@liberationprograms.org)*