

# Room at the Table

Increasing civic participation  
in land use decision making



Centers for  
Housing  
Opportunity



In Connecticut, local land use boards like Planning & Zoning Commissions make critical decisions about housing and land use in communities. Yet demographic data reveals **10% of land use board seats in Fairfield County and New London County are unfilled, 10% of land use board members are serving in expired terms, and land use decision makers as a whole are not demographically representative of the residents in their communities or regions.**

[Room at the Table](#), a report from the Centers for Housing Opportunity, presents this data and offers recommendations to increase and support civic participation in land use decision making. Given the critical role of local decision making in Connecticut, it's essential that **all** residents have an opportunity to serve on these boards and participate in the decision making process.

**Read the full report at [bit.ly/RoomAtTheTableCT](https://bit.ly/RoomAtTheTableCT)**

## Fairfield County

**70% Male**

Men represent 49% of the population but 70% of land use board members in Fairfield County.

**94% White**

White people represent 58% of the population but 94% of land use board members in Fairfield County.

**91% Homeowners**

Homeowners represent 67% of the population but 91% of land use board members in Fairfield County.

## New London County

**72% Male**

Men represent 48% of the population but 72% of land use board members in New London County.

**97% White**

White people represent 73% of the population but 97% of land use board members in New London County.

**92% Homeowners**

Homeowners represent 68% of the population but 92% of land use board members in New London County.



## Increase Participation

- **Expand Awareness on How to Become a Board Member:** Create and distribute accessible online “how to” resources on joining land use boards to raise awareness. Advertise open positions on websites and social media and partner with organizations for information sessions.
- **Draft a “Role Description:”** Develop and publicize detailed role descriptions for land use board members, outlining responsibilities, time commitments (including meeting schedules), training, and virtual participation options.
- **Outreach to Underrepresented Groups:** Take steps to proactively engage people who are underrepresented on land use boards, especially renters.

## Support Participation

- **Ensure Effective Meetings:** Identify opportunities to improve efficiency & effectiveness of land use board meetings.
- **Provide Childcare:** Provide childcare during meetings to increase board member ship accessibility to parents.
- **Expand Hybrid Meetings to Increase Accessibility:** Offer remote or hybrid meeting options to remove barriers to participation, improve board member attendance, and increases public access to decision-making tables.
- **Consider Providing Stipends:** Offer stipends for land use board participation to remove economic barriers and allow more residents, especially those with work, family, or transportation challenges, to serve.

## Education & Training

- **Complete Required Training in Year One:** Ensure that all new land use board members complete the required four hours of training within their first year of service.
- **Promote Continued Land Use Education:** Encourage land use board members to go beyond minimum training requirements and view ongoing education as crucial to their role.
- **Monitor for Additional Training Opportunities:** Monitor for and inform land use board members of relevant available training opportunities.
- **Pay for Additional Training & Incidentals:** Cover training costs, incidentals like childcare and parking, and potentially compensate participants for their time.
- **Provide Meeting Facilitation Training for Land Use Board Chairs:** Provide training to land use board chairs to ensure effective meeting facilitation.