



Watertown City Council

**Committee on Rules and Ordinances Meeting
Wednesday, May 13, 2026 at 6:00 PM
Louis P. Andrews Conference Room - Third Floor**

Agenda

ACCESS INFORMATION:

- A. This meeting will be held on May 13, 2026 at 6:00 P.M. Location: 149 Main St, Watertown, MA 02472 - Louis P. Andrews Conference Room - Third Floor
 - B. The Public may join the virtual meeting online: <https://watertown-ma.zoom.us/j/89707047441>
 - C. Public may join the virtual meeting audio only by phone: (877) 853-5257 or (888) 475-4499 (Toll Free) and enter Webinar ID: 879 7074 7441
 - D. Please visit the Committee on Rules and Ordinances Webpage here: https://watertownma.portal.civicclerk.com/?category_id=92
 - E. Public may comment through email: lfeltner@watertown-ma.gov
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- 1. Call to Order
- 2. Discussion
 - A. Continued from May 5th, 2026 Discussion on a Proposed Updated Noise Ordinance
- 3. Adjournment

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Nicole Gardner,
Chair

John G. Gannon,
Vice Chair

Lisa J. Feltner,
Secretary

WHEREAS noise pollution is a hazard to public health, welfare, safety, and quality of life; and whereas a substantial body of science and technology exists by which noise pollution may be measured and abated; and,

WHEREAS a substantial body of science and technology exists by which noise pollution may be measured and abated; and,

WHEREAS people have a right to and should be ensured an environment free from excessive noise pollution that may jeopardize their health, welfare, or safety.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of Watertown that Title IX, Chapter 95 of the Watertown Code of Ordinances, inclusive of all sections, is hereby repealed and replaced in its entirety with a new Chapter 95 as follows:

95.01 Statement of Purpose

- A. Noise pollution is a hazard to public health, welfare, safety, and quality of life. A substantial body of science and technology exists by which noise pollution may be measured and abated, and the people have a right to and should be ensured an environment free from excessive noise pollution that may jeopardize their health, welfare, or safety. This chapter serves to address persistent noise pollution rather than fleeting noise inherent to life in a densely populated community such as Watertown.

95.02 Definitions:

- A. Construction and demolition: Any of the following:
 - 1. excavation, highway construction, land development or land clearing work;
 - 2. the erection, demolition, alteration, repair, or relocation of any building or structure, which uses powered equipment including, but not limited to, backhoes, trucks, tractors, excavators, earth moving equipment, compressors, motorized or power hand tools, manual tools, or equipment of a similar nature as well as two-way radios or other communication equipment;
 - 3. the use of any equipment for recycling, screening, separating, or any other processing of soil, rocks, concrete, asphalt or other raw material
- B. Emergency: Any occurrence or set of circumstances involving actual or imminent physical hazard or property damage which demands immediate action
- C. Emergency work: Any work performed for the purpose of preventing or alleviating the physical hazard or property damage threatened or caused by an emergency
- D. Noise pollution: A noise source which increases noise level above ambient to the level prescribed in 95.03 (A)
- E. A-weighted decibels (dbA): The A-weighted sound-pressure level expressed in decibels

- F. Ambient noise level: The sound level associated with a given environment, being a composite of sounds from all sources excluding the alleged offensive noise, at the location and approximate time at which a comparison with the alleged offensive noise is to be made
- G. Plainly audible: Any sound that can be detected by a person of normal hearing ability using his or her unaided hearing facilities

95.03 Prohibition of Noise Pollution

- A. Any activity, other than those exempted by 95.03(B) below, which creates or produces sound measured at 10 dbA above ambient noise level at any of the following locations shall be deemed a violation of this section:
 - 1. The property line of any residential property or of any condominium or apartment house
 - 2. At least fifty feet away from the source of noise if in a non-residential setting if applicable
- B. Noise emanating from the operation of the following is exempt from the application of this section 95.03:
 - 1. Motor vehicles on a public highway
 - 2. Equipment used for construction and demolition
 - 3. Equipment used in domestic or commercial maintenance
 - 4. Domestic animals on a residential or commercial property
 - 5. Noncommercial public speaking and public assembly as protected by state and federal constitutions
 - 6. An emergency or emergency work
 - 7. City-sponsored events
- C. No person owning, leasing or controlling a source of sound shall cause, suffer, allow or permit unnecessary emissions from said source of sound that causes noise pollution via any of the following manners:
 - 1. Willfully
 - 2. Negligently
 - 3. Or through failure to provide necessary equipment, service, or maintenance or to take necessary precautions

95.04 Construction and Demolition

- A. All devices employed in construction or demolition which are plainly audible at any of the following locations shall be prohibited from use during the hours of 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM on weekdays, from 7:00 PM to 8:00 AM on Saturdays, and at any time on Sundays and legal holidays:
 - 1. The property line of any residential property or of any condominium or apartment house
 - 2. At least fifty feet away from the source of noise if in a non-residential setting, if applicable

- B. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit noise emanating from vehicles used in construction or demolition for the purposes of safety such as backup alarms on a vehicle.

95.08 Domestic and Commercial Maintenance

- A. All devices employed in domestic or commercial lawn, garden, or grounds maintenance which are plainly audible at any of the following locations shall be prohibited between the hours of 7:00 PM and 7:00 AM on weekdays and from 7:00 PM to 8:00 AM on Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays:
 - 1. The property line of any residential property or of any condominium or apartment house
 - 2. At least fifty feet away from the source of noise if in a non-residential setting, if applicable

95.09 Noise Waiver

- A. The Director of Public Health or his or her designee may grant a waiver for any activity otherwise forbidden by the provisions of this chapter upon a determination that compliance in the conduct of such activity would cause undue hardship on the person or persons conducting such activity or on the community, taking into account the extent of noise pollution caused by not requiring such compliance and whether reasonable efforts have been made to abate the noise. The Director of Public Health shall establish appropriate procedures for the processing of requests for such waivers, including such hearings as he or she deems appropriate. The Director of Public Health may seek the input of the Superintendent of Public Works in noise waiver requests related to construction or demolition. In granting any such waiver, the Director of Public Health may impose such appropriate conditions as he or she deems necessary pursuant to this section. Copies of all such waivers shall be filed with the clerk of the city council and to each ward city councilor whose ward is affected by the waiver promptly after issuance.

95.10 Enforcement

- A. The provisions of this chapter may be enforced by the Director of Public Health or his or her designee. The provisions of this chapter may also be enforced by the Chief of Police or his or her designee. Each violation shall be deemed as a separate offense.

95.99 Penalty

- A. Any person who violates any provision of this chapter shall be issued a verbal warning for the first offense, then fined as follows:
 - 1. \$100 for the second offense
 - 2. \$200 for the third offense
 - 3. \$300 for the fourth offense and each subsequent offense
- B. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to limit the use of other lawful methods of abating violations of this section, including but not limited to application for equitable relief from a court of law.

Note: This draft is updated as of May 6, 2026.

ORDINANCE # [REDACTED]

2026 – O – [REDACTED]

WHEREAS noise pollution is a hazard to public health, welfare, safety, and quality of life; and

WHEREAS a substantial body of science and technology exists by which noise pollution may be measured and abated; and

WHEREAS people have a right to and should be ensured an environment free from excessive noise pollution that may jeopardize their health, welfare, or safety.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED by the City Council of Watertown that Title IX, Chapter 95 of the Watertown Code of Ordinances, inclusive of all sections, is hereby repealed and replaced in its entirety with a new Chapter 95 as follows:

95.01 Statement of Purpose

- A. Noise pollution is a hazard to public health, welfare, safety, and quality of life. A substantial body of science and technology exists by which noise pollution may be measured and abated, and the people have a right to and should be ensured an environment free from excessive noise pollution that may jeopardize their health, welfare, or safety. This chapter serves to address persistent noise pollution rather than fleeting noise inherent to life in a densely populated community such as Watertown.

95.02 Definitions:

- A. Construction and demolition: Any site preparation, assembly, erection, substantial repair, alteration, destruction, or similar action for public or private rights of way, structures, utilities, or similar property, and also the use of any equipment for any processing of any material.
- B. Emergency: Any occurrence or set of circumstances involving actual or imminent physical hazard or property damage which demands immediate action
- C. Emergency work: Any work performed to prevent or alleviate the physical hazard or property damage threatened or caused by an emergency
- D. Noise pollution: A noise source which increases noise level above ambient to the level prescribed in 95.03 (A)
- E. A-weighted decibels (dbA): The A-weighted sound-pressure level expressed in decibels
- F. Ambient noise level: The sound level associated with a given environment, being a composite of sounds from all sources excluding the alleged offensive noise, at the location and approximate time at which a comparison with the alleged offensive noise is to be made
- G. Plainly audible: any sound that is detectable and distinguishable from ambient or background noise at a specified location, such that the sound's source or character can be reasonably identified under ordinary conditions. A determination of plainly audible sound may be made by direct observation.

- H. Tonal noise: any noise that is judged by a listener to have the characteristics of a pure tone, whine, hum, or buzz

95.03 Prohibition of Noise Pollution

- A. Any activity, other than those exempted by 95.03(B) below, which creates or produces sound measured at 10 dbA above ambient noise level at any of the following locations shall be deemed a violation of this section:
 - 1. The property line of any residential property.
 - 2. At least fifty feet away from the source of noise if on any publicly accessible space within a private property

- B. When a tonal noise, as defined in 95.02 (H) above, is emitted, the creation or production of noise measured at 5 dbA above ambient noise level at any of the following locations shall be deemed a violation of this section:
 - 1. The property line of any residential property
 - 2. At least fifty feet away from the source of noise if on any publicly accessible space within a private property

- C. Noise emanating from the operation of the following is exempt from the application of this section 95.03:
 - 1. Motor vehicles on a public highway
 - 2. Equipment used for construction and demolition
 - 3. Equipment used in domestic or commercial maintenance
 - 4. Noncommercial public speaking and public assembly as protected by state and federal constitutions
 - 5. An emergency or emergency work
 - 6. City-sponsored events

- D. No person owning, leasing or controlling a source of noise shall cause, suffer, allow or permit unnecessary emissions from said source of noise that causes noise pollution.

95.04 Construction and Demolition

- A. All devices employed in construction or demolition which are plainly audible shall be permitted for use during the hours of 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM on Monday through Friday, and during the hours of 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM on Saturdays. All such devices shall be prohibited outside of such hours on Monday through Friday and Saturdays, and at any time on Sundays and legal holidays.

- B. Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit noise emanating from vehicles used in construction or demolition for the purposes of safety such as backup alarms on a vehicle.

95.05 Domestic and Commercial Maintenance

- A. All devices employed in domestic or commercial lawn, garden, or grounds maintenance which are plainly audible shall be permitted for use during the hours of 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM on

weekdays, and during the hours of 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM on Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. All such devices which are plainly audible are prohibited from use outside of such hours.

95.06 Waiver

- A. The Director of Public Health or his or her designee may grant a waiver for any activity otherwise forbidden by the provisions of this chapter upon a determination that compliance in the conduct of such activity would cause undue hardship on the person or persons conducting such activity or on the community, taking into account the extent of noise pollution caused by not requiring such compliance and whether reasonable efforts have been made to abate the noise. The Director of Public Health shall establish appropriate procedures for the processing of requests for such waivers, including such hearings as he or she deems appropriate. The Director of Public Health may seek the input of the Superintendent of Public Works in nwaiver requests related to construction or demolition. In granting any such waiver, the Director of Public Health may impose such appropriate conditions as he or she deems necessary pursuant to this section. Copies of all such waivers shall be filed with the City Clerk and sent to all City Councilors.

95.07 Enforcement

- A. The provisions of this chapter may be enforced by the Director of Public Health or their designee. The provisions of this chapter may also be enforced by the Chief of Police or their designee, the Fire Chief or their designee, and the Building Inspector or their designee.

95.08 Penalty

- A. Any person who violates any provision of this chapter shall be issued a written and verbal warning for the first offense, then fined as follows:
 - 1. \$100 for the second offense
 - 2. \$200 for the third offense
 - 3. \$300 for the fourth offense and each subsequent offense
- B. Each subsequent day or part thereof on which a violation occurs, whether continuous or intermittent, shall be considered a separate and succeeding offense.
- C. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to limit the use of other lawful methods of abating violations of this section, including but not limited to application for equitable relief from a court of law.