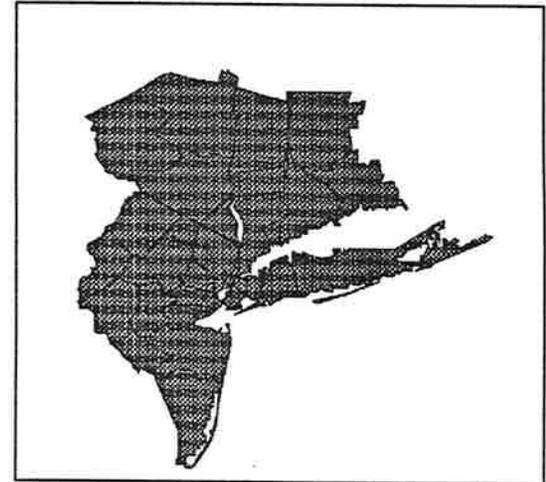


RPA

Regional Plan Association

COMMUNITY DESIGN HANDBOOK BUILDING LIVABLE COMMUNITIES



February 1997

Prepared by Regional Plan Association
&
Land Use Coalition

Connecticut Land Use Coalition

Established in 1993, the Land Use Coalition is an ad hoc association of business, environmental, planning, and municipal communities as well as private citizens. The Coalition was established to promote the fundamental changes in regulation and land uses must be made if Connecticut is to meet the resource management challenges of the next century. The Coalition received support from the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust for outreach and education of land use planning and design principles to organizations with similar interests and to the grassroots population. For more information about the Coalition and presentations to your community, please contact the coalition director.

Regional Plan Association

Regional Plan Association is the nation's oldest independent regional planning organization. Formed in 1929 its work is to develop comprehensive plans that provide a vision for the 31-county Connecticut/ New York/ New Jersey metropolitan region and detail specific recommendations to move the region forward toward those goals. RPA's Connecticut Office offers recommendations and undertakes specific projects to advance land use planning, economic development, transportation investments and environmental conservation in the western portion of the state. Its recent accomplishments include the completion of the Merrit Parkway Trail Study which supported the feasibility of constructing a bicycle/pedestrian path along the parkway's 37.5 mile length. RPA has teamed up with the Housatonic Valley Association to create the Litchfield County Open Space Forum, the first countrywide assembly of local conservation organizations. And RPA has organized the Land Use Coalition, a group of attorneys, business people, environmentalists, planners municipal officials and local citizens to address deficiencies in the land use regulatory system.

Cox Charitable Trust

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Introduction:

A Call to Action

As suburban and exurban areas in Connecticut “build out”, growing numbers of citizens have recognized the effects that low-density sprawl growth patterns—longer commutes and endless traffic jams, rising taxes and housing prices, destruction of natural resources and open space—are having on their daily lives. And many citizens are being motivated to take action by the recognition that their sense of place is being destroyed and their quality of life is being threatened.

In Connecticut, each city and town is vested with the responsibility of governing land use change within its borders and setting standards for development. Without up-to-date town plans supported by consistent zoning regulations, these communities are at risk of being overrun with traffic, having village centers replaced by strip retail, losing open space and creating hostile environments for pedestrians and bicyclists. In other words, without thoughtful planning guided by sound design and planning principles, uncontrolled growth will slowly diminish the quality of life and livability of communities.

As the new patterns of suburban and exurban development have emerged, so too must the solutions be different than those that have worked in the past. Traditional land conservation and regulatory approaches—such as large lot zoning or traditional cluster—will not succeed in taming exurban growth or suburban sprawl. Instead, a new generation of innovative and comprehensive planning and land preservation initiatives will be needed. This new planning and

regulatory system must rise above the development vs. conservation confrontations of the past.

This new approach must identify appropriate, environmentally suitable locations for needed development and provide infrastructure to service that development. At the same time, this approach must limit development in areas containing important environmental resources and hold development that does occur in these places to stringent environmental performance standards. The ultimate goal of this new approach must be to create patterns of development that reinforce, rather than destroy, character of communities.

Why Change?

Problems of Suburban Sprawl

Why change conventional planning and design practices? Why adopt community design principles to guide the process of updating town plans and regulations? Because conventional practices enforced at the local level have created problems that affect the region as a whole, undercutting the economy, increasing highway congestion, increasing housing prices, and damaging Connecticut's landscape and waterways—including Long Island Sound. The local effects of these regional trends include land consumption, development pressure, traffic congestion, increased vehicle miles travels, and a loss of a sense of community and place.

Land Consumption

Connecticut land, a finite resource, is being consumed at a rate faster than the rate of population growth. Development increased rapidly during the 1980s and tended to be more dispersed. The dispersed growth patterns of the past decade have had significant environmental consequences. This low density, land-consuming development has had a detrimental impact on wildlife, water quality, and the visual character of many communities. And large lot zoning requirements—often rationalized by wastewater disposal needs—have pushed the cost of adequate housing beyond the reach of many residents. Between 1980 and 1990, twenty-six communities showed a rate of growth in housing units that was at

least twice the statewide rate.¹ But only four of these communities adjoined a central city. The number of building permits issued in Connecticut rose to a high of 30,163 in 1986, an increase of 174% over that of 1980. And the number of non-residential permits also increased from 7,685 in 1980 to 16,009 in 1986, an increase of 108.3%. If Connecticut is to meet the resource management challenges of the next century, fundamental changes in the regulation of land uses must be made. We must stop consuming land as if it were a renewable resource.

Development Pressure on *Exurbs*

The leading edge of housing development continues to move farther away from urban centers. As suburban growth pushes farther out, rural areas are developed. In these rural areas, construction costs are cheaper and regulations are less stringent. Connecticut towns such as Brookfield and Sherman have tripled in size between 1960 and 1990. We must refocus our attention to our centers to preserve our rural resources.

Traffic Congestion

Uncontrolled traffic growth can be fatal to the quality of life of a community. Noted urbanist Jane Jacobs has commented that the erosion of communities by vehicle traffic “proceeds as a kind of nibbling, small bites at first, but eventually hefty bites...a street is widened here, another is straightened there, a wide avenue is converted to one-way flow, staggered-signal systems are installed for faster movement...an expressway is cut through yonder, and finally whole webs of expressways... No one step in this process is, in itself, crucial, but cumulatively the effect is enormous.”

¹ Conservation and Development, Policies Plan for Connecticut 1992-1997, Office of Policy Management, Hartford, Connecticut, 1992.

Figure 1. Traffic

The cumulative effects of this piecemeal growth—intolerable traffic problems, corruption of natural landscapes, and degradation of water and other natural resources—will not be ameliorated by building more roads and widening existing ones. Towns need to have both local and regional infrastructure and perspectives. They must begin to channel growth into existing concentrations of development, in other words “centering” growth in areas that have existing services, adequate public transportation, roads and infrastructure to support development. Continuation of current development patterns that focus commercial development on highway strips will only exasperate traffic congestion.

Increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled

Vehicle Miles Traveled, or VMT, measures the number of miles a person travels by car. Increased number of vehicles per household, increased vehicle miles traveled, deconcentration of homes and jobs and the strict separation of land uses set by zoning regulations have all contributed to greater highway travel. Between 1970 and 1990 daily vehicle miles traveled increased by 62%—from 45 to 73 million miles a day.² Even though vehicles run cleaner than in the past, more cars driving longer distances clog the region’s roads and contribute greatly to Connecticut’s continuing air pollution problems. By trading our cities for suburban subdivisions and office parks, the region’s residents have far fewer choices when it comes to how they get to work, school, or leisure activities.

Figure 2. Urban Sprawl

² *ibid*

Loss of a Sense of Community and Place

As the region was devouring land at its periphery, it was also abandoning its urban centers, hollowing out cities that historically have been the locus for jobs and people. Cities such as New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford lost 10% or more of their populations between 1970 and 1990. These cities are simply indicative of a larger regional trend away from urban centers in the last 30 years. For the Tri State Metropolitan Region as a whole, in 1960, urban counties were the primary residences for 53% of the population. By 1980 the majority had shifted to rural counties. The 1990 census indicates that this rural shift is continuing, with only 43% of the population residing in urban counties. But this trend is not limited simply to residences; while some of the region's downtowns were able to attract business investment, since 1975, these centers as a whole have lost 30,000 private sector jobs even as businesses were creating one million jobs outside downtowns. Without activity and pedestrians, many cities and town centers have languished and become unpleasant and sometimes unsafe places to visit.

Figure 3. Strip Commerical

These trends have had an immense impact on developing suburban and rural areas, as well as the urban centers that were left behind. This pattern of development raises many design issues, as well as sustainability concerns. How much longer and at what economic and environmental cost can the region continue this conventional growth pattern? How do we redesign the formless suburban sprawl to instill a sense of place and community? How do we retrofit urban centers to make them attractive, safe and pleasant places to be? Most of us are aware of suburban sprawl and decaying cities, but we often fail to associate these ills with a lack of land use planning and poor community design.

In order for a community plan to thoroughly address these issues, local residents' concerns and ideas need to be shared with local officials to foster a truly community-based plan. Often community residents have an intimate understanding and awareness of the issues in their communities. This handbook is intended to be a primer for citizens to become more informed and effective participants in the planning process by providing the basic vocabulary and methods of land use management and design techniques. Also, this handbook lays out effective tools that can be considered by planning officials in addressing areas of community concern.

Section 1

Plan of Development

Benefits of a Plan of Conservation and Development

A plan of conservation and development is a planning document to guide a town's zoning, development, tax and capital investment decisions for a ten-year period. These plans provide a policy framework to guide development, revitalization and conservation efforts.

Comprehensive planning should stimulate creative thinking about where a community wants to go, where it will go if nothing is done and what needs to be done differently if the community is to realize its long-term vision. This is the essence of the local planning process.

The plan of development need not be a complex or expensive document, but it should be tailored to suit each community's needs. The plan's action program should fit the local situation and capacities for growth. Carrying out a plan means adopting policies, developing non-regulatory programs, and adopting or revising zoning laws, and other regulations.

Comprehensive community planning has important benefits, because the plan:

- involves the community in setting long- and short-term municipal growth and resource allocation policies;
- creates a long- and short-term action program by providing solutions that address community problems, such as failed septic systems, Main Street redevelopment, open space preservation, and pedestrian and bicycle safety;
- helps establish priorities for capital investments in infrastructure;
- facilitates the development and revision of zoning and land use laws;
- addresses quality of life factors; and
- enhances the climate for necessary and appropriate growth and economic development.

Developing a Plan

Developing a town or village comprehensive plan should not be a mysterious, complicated or highly technical process. Nor is it necessary that a comprehensive plan be an encyclopedic document containing every statistic available and covering every issue facing a community. A plan of development can, in fact, be a short document--a dozen pages may not be too brief--describing the goals and policies that will guide the community's growth and development and lay out the course of action the community intends to pursue. A simple, clearly written plan is likely to be more useful and effective than one that attempts to cover and analyze every topic in detail.

A comprehensive plan should at a minimum accomplish the following:

- *Articulate a vision:* Involve the public in a discussion about the community to identify concerns and desires with respect to its neighborhoods, open space, business district, economy, infrastructure, environment, and other factors. Establish community goals.
- *Describe the future envisioned:* Specifically describe in words or illustrate with pictures, maps or drawings, the goals of the town or village.
- *Inventory natural resources and community assets:* Map and describe visual and the environmental resources, especially sensitive water resources and special places, and outline the opportunities and challenges facing the community. Identify development limitations, especially those environmental and infrastructure limitations that will shape and channel growth, and the opportunities that are to be the basis for future growth and achieving the goals of the community.
- *Project what will happen if nothing is done:* Given various constraints, limitations, existing policies and land use regulations, look at where projected growth will most likely occur. Create scenarios of probable outcomes if current trends are followed and compare this scenario with the community's stated vision.
- *State what needs to be done differently to achieve the community's goals.*
- *Create an action program to realize the vision.*

Volunteer planning boards or planning committees should have all the resources needed to prepare a valuable and workable plan. A planning professional may bring an outside and fresh perspective to the community and be able to share the experience of having worked with other communities where similar problems and issues have been dealt with in creative and effective ways. But an effective plan must be site specific, involve meaningful community input and participation, and have an effective implementation strategy that includes reviewing and updating the plan.

How to Plan

Current law stipulates that localities “review the plan of development at least once every 10 years and [shall] adopt such amendments to the plan or parts of the plan...as the commission deems necessary to update the plan” according to Connecticut General Statutes.

Six Steps for Preparing a Comprehensive Plan

There are six important steps involved in the creation, implementation and long-term success of a comprehensive plan. Although each step may involve a series of tasks, once completed, they should provide a clear vision for the community and a means to achieving it.

1. Identify the goals of the community. What kind of a community do we live in--urban, suburban, or rural? What do we want our community to be in 10 years? 20 years? What do we want more of and less of?
2. Determine which areas are to be conserved and which areas are to be developed. Consider each plan element to define critical aspects of a working, successful community.
3. Incorporate planning and design principles as a means of achieving the goals identified by the community. The objective of these

principles is to integrate complex regional planning, environmental, economic and social issues with physical planning and design by focusing development and investment into existing centers. The design principles address the design of suburban town centers, urban downtowns, greenways, waterfronts and transit-friendly communities.

4. Examine and assess federal, state, and municipal tools that can help your community achieve its goals. Determine if there are new municipal tools that need to be drawn up to achieve goals.
5. Involve a professional planner or land use attorney to assist in the drafting of new codes for the community, as well as to assist in the review and assessment of existing plans of development and zoning. Their assistance will prove invaluable in addressing issues identified by the community and in establishing long term rules.
6. Most important to the successful implementation of a community's plan of development, in both the short- and long-term, is having zoning regulations that are consistent with the plan's objectives. After conducting a survey of planning officials, the General Assembly's Joint Committee on Planning and Development and the Land Use Coalition found that, many towns' zoning regulations were not consistent with their plans. Survey results showed that the most frequently cited reason for the lack of consistency was lack of money to update the plan. The Land Use Coalition had put forward a legislative proposal to use Federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) funds to pay for updating plans and zoning regulations.

Eleven Elements of a Plan

There are 11 planning elements or sections of a comprehensive plan which, if considered fully, will assist you in accounting for all the facets of your community in your comprehensive plan. Successful integration of these elements into a comprehensive planning document will aid and serve as guidelines for future growth and assist in the preservation of the plan as a living document, capable of managing the changing needs of the community. Regardless of the scope and size, a comprehensive plan, should include the following elements listed below. Each element should relate and be integrated to contribute to long-term goals of the municipality set out in a community planning process. By viewing your community as an environment made up of these components, you are more able to identify those aspects which are lacking in your community or those that have a strong presence.

- **Housing element:** identify existing public and private housing stock and the municipality's need for future housing.
- **Economic development element:** identify existing and proposed economic development strategies.
- **Development areas element:** map areas that are best suited for development due to the existing or planned infrastructure, physical and environmental conditions which are conducive to development.
- **Environmental conservation and preservation element:** identify, inventory and map regulated natural resources.
- **Cultural resource element:** identify and map boundaries of historic, archeological and cultural resources.
- **Open space and recreation element:** identify existing open spaces and recreational resources of the municipality.
- **Community facilities and utilities element:** identify public utilities and community facilities, publicly or privately owned.
- **Transportation element:** identify and map all existing and proposed circulation systems and integrate alternative modes of transportation other than private vehicles.
- **Capital improvements element:** incorporate estimates of capital costs of constructing new or expanding existing community facilities or infrastructure elements.
- **Energy element:** identify strategies for energy conservation.
- **Long Island Sound element:** outline measures to restore and preserve ecosystem and habitat of Long Island Sound and its tributaries.

Planning and Designing Communities

The following outline of land use planning and community design principles should be adopted by towns to guide their planning process. Divided into land use planning and community design sections, these principles will ensure that a town's plan will promote patterns of development that respect and reinforce the character of the community.

Land Use Planning Principles

•**Recenter Development:** Build higher density, mixed-use centers of appropriate sizes to protect the surrounding open space. Reestablishing centers in the suburbs recalls the traditional villages, towns, and small cities that once characterized traditional development patterns. Clustered patterns of development have multiple benefits, including reducing sprawl, protecting environmental quality, saving open space, providing housing for various income groups, reducing the cost of infrastructure, and establishing more convenient and livable communities.

•**Allow for Mixed-Use Development:** Commercial districts or Main Street areas are complemented by the presence of residences, offices, public spaces, and areas devoted to health, education and social services. Communities should be planned and built on a pedestrian scale that emphasizes ease of access and a sense of community. The aim—creating a synergy that accompanies a concentration of multiple

uses—also has the practical benefit of increased pedestrian activity, reduced use of cars and augmented support for local retail.

Figure 4.. Farm/forest

•**Coordinate Transportation and Land Use Planning:** Towns need to take fuller advantage of access to public transportation. In places where there are Metro-North stations, municipalities should develop land use regulations that channel growth and guide street improvements to transform the adjacent area into a transit-friendly community: this is a community where housing, schools, parks, shopping, and public transit are within walking distance. Alternatives to driving, such as walking, transit, and bike riding, are designed and built into the community to ensure local mobility. In a livable community, use of the automobile is optional.

•**Identify Conservation Areas:** Economic development should not damage the natural environment or character of Connecticut's towns. Areas that should be set aside for the protection and enjoyment of outstanding natural, scenic and recreational resources should be identified. Restrictions on development should be adopted to prevent the further fragmentation of open spaces and other natural resources caused by development. And areas of critical environmental concern such as watershed systems, wetlands, rivers, regional parkland and other significant features of the natural landscape, require open space

Figure 5. High density residential

- **Identify Development Areas:** A special designation is appropriate for areas which are well suited for commercial, industrial and residential uses. Development areas should be more readily available for development than other areas of the town, taking into consideration topography, existing infrastructure, costs, environmental impact and social impact. The objective of establishing development areas is to redirect development into appropriate areas and provide incentives to encourage in-fill development and retrofitting of strip commercial developments. Regulations in these areas may be tailored to relieve constraints on development, increase densities, facilitate permitting and allow a larger variety of uses.

- **Preserve Open Space:** Communities should preserve open space in the form of designated greenways, greenbelts, trails, woodlands, waterfronts, and wildlife habitats. Also, towns should connect these spaces to larger regional and inter-municipal open space systems instead of thinking of them as merely discrete isolated pieces of open space.

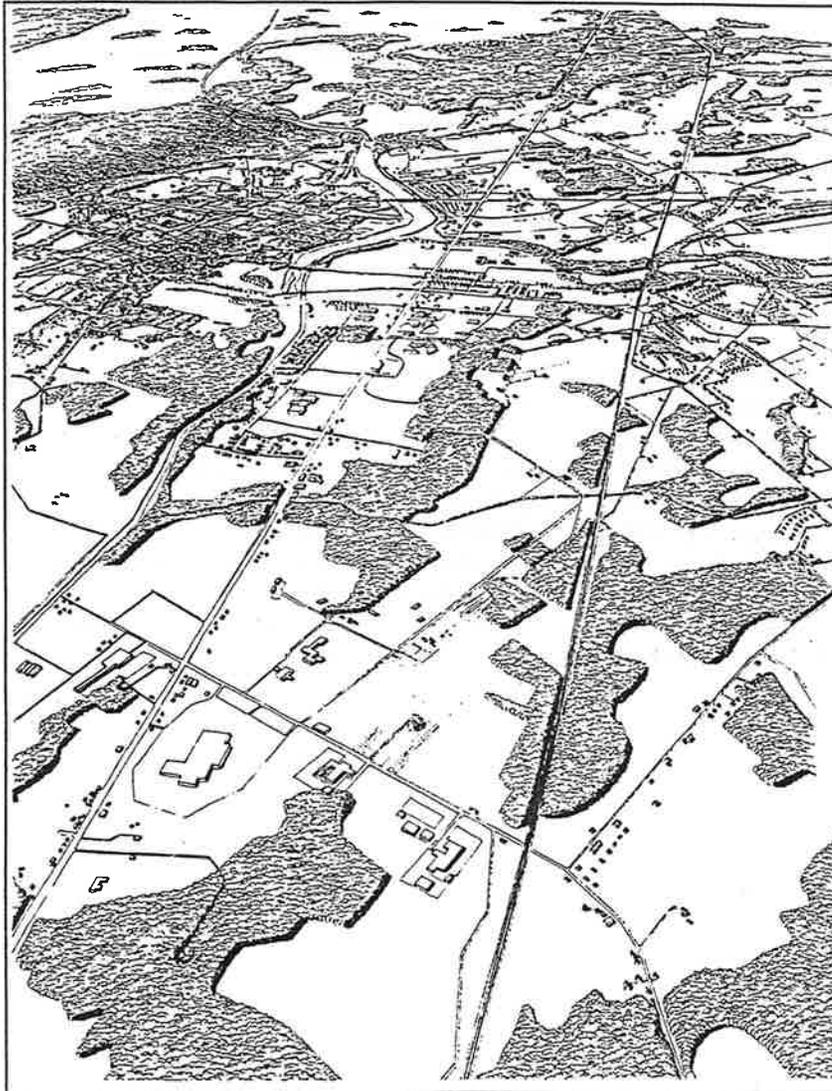
- **Preserve Farmland:** Town can guide development to ensure viable working farms and the retention of productive farmland in agricultural

areas. Often farmland is viewed as prime land for shopping malls or as subdivisions in waiting. Agricultural land preservation programs should not only save the farm but also the farmer by making it economically viable to continue agricultural production.

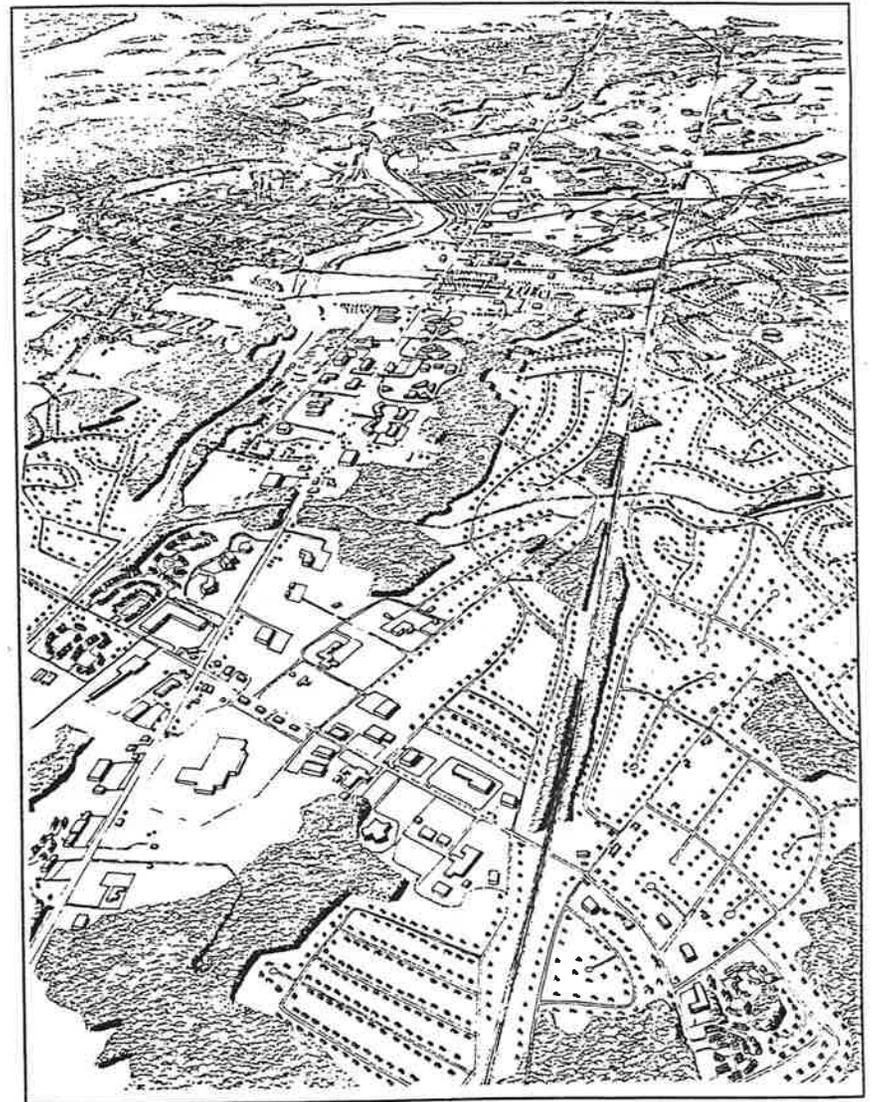
- **Limit Use of Large Lot Zoning:** Hundreds of New England towns have used large lot zoning as an excuse for planning, by zoning 1-5 acre minimum lot sizes. This is probably the fastest single way to consume land and destroy town character in a New England town. Large lot zoning makes sense only where lots are large enough to truly protect landscape features and a rural character. Otherwise, land subdivisions should be clustered to ensure that contiguous open space is protected and service costs are managed.

- **Eliminate Commercial Strip Zoning:** Commercial strip zoning creates one of the most noxious, unsafe and inhuman patterns of development found in New England today. Hundreds of miles of highway have already been developed into commercial strips, and hundreds more are zoned for future strips. This makes no sense in communities concerned about maintaining visual quality, reducing congestion, and improving highway safety --all casualties of commercial strips. Where highways are zoned for this use, but not yet built out, commercial strip zoning should be eliminated. Where commercial strips already exist, towns should adopt higher standards for parking and curb cut layouts, sign controls, and landscaping to upgrade the appearance and safety of these areas. Model regulations have been developed by the Center for Rural Massachusetts for Eastham, Wellfleet, Great Barrington, and Lee, Massachusetts that could be adapted to the needs of most Connecticut towns.

Below: Typical Highway Corridor Before Development -- Crossing a flat former agricultural area, a regional arterial follows an historic transportation corridor connecting major cities in the region. A commuter rail line runs along the right side of the rendering. The settlement pattern, typical of Connecticut, is a mix of traditional villages and towns at key junctions along the rail line and recent sprawl along the highway corridor.



Below: Suburban Highway Corridor After Typical Development -- Rigid separation of uses promoted by local zoning has created a landscape dependent on the automobile but ill-equipped to serve it. Office parks and individual corporate headquarters line the highway. Open space and farms have been consumed by office park complexes and sprawling subdivisions.



Below: Suburban Highway Corridor After Recommended Development – Residential development on farmland and open space away from the highway is discouraged in favor of compact, pedestrian-oriented new towns built around commuter rail stations and expansion of towns and hamlets with good rail or other mass-transit connections. Preserved farms and wooded stream corridors are pulled together into an integrated open space system.



Community Design Principles

New Cannan fig. 6

•**Designing Streets:** The definition of streets needs to be expanded from thoroughfares, primarily to move traffic, to include the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists. A balance must be created that allows for a variety of users as well as space for parking, walking, and vehicular movement, especially in commercial areas. Ample space needs to be allocated to create a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment along town streets.

Streets can also be destinations in themselves -- outside rooms for the public to enjoy. Paying careful attention to the design of streets and their elements, such as the ratio of building heights to street and sidewalk widths, the placement and size of trees and landscaping, and the use of materials in paving, curbs, and signs, all contribute to a positive experience. Just like an interior room, streets have walls, doorways, floors and even ceilings that deserve careful attention.

•**Traffic Calming:** Traditionally, traffic engineers and transportation departments have been primarily concerned with moving traffic quickly and efficiently and have generally not been sensitive to the impact of traffic on the quality of life of communities. To accommodate more traffic, they widen streets and traffic lanes, remove on-street parking, and narrow sidewalks; all of which decreases pedestrian safety and reduces the sense of community.

Communities around the country are beginning to implement innovative street designs to prevent traffic from destroying the livability of their communities. They are implementing traffic-calming techniques that improve the design of their streets by making them more welcoming, safe and attractive for bicyclists and pedestrians. Traffic calming, a technique extensively applied with great success in Europe, involves a full range of methods to slow cars but not necessarily bar them as they travel through residential and commercial districts.

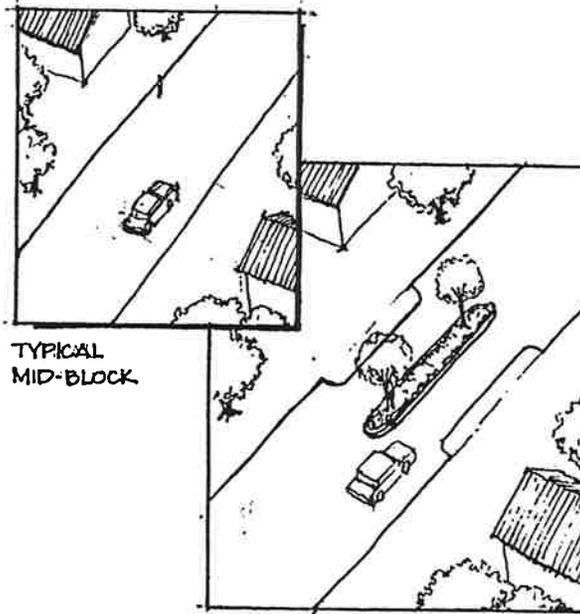
The goal is to design the street so that there are physical and visual impediments to speeding. By altering the design of streets with these methods, drivers can see that they are entering a pedestrian oriented environment that requires slower speeds. Design techniques include altering the path of a vehicle and shortening the driver's line of vision with "S" bends. Also, extending the sidewalk at street corners, often referred to as "neckdowns," creates visual gateways that narrow the width of the road, prompting drivers to slow down. Neckdowns also create additional public space for pedestrians. Other design methods include raised crosswalks, textured paving material, rumble strips, planted medians, narrowed traffic lanes, roundabouts, offset intersections and channels. In addition to slowing vehicles, these design elements provide strong visual clues that alert drivers to watch for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Traffic Calming

These are illustrations of commonly implemented traffic calming designs.

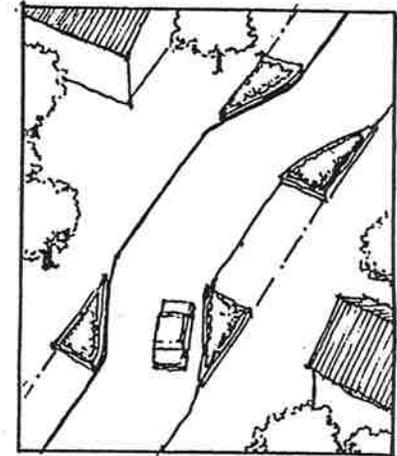
The objectives of traffic calming include:

- Improve Street Safety
- Reduce Through Traffic
- Achieve Slower Speeds
- Create more Open Space
- Provide More Trees and Flowerbeds

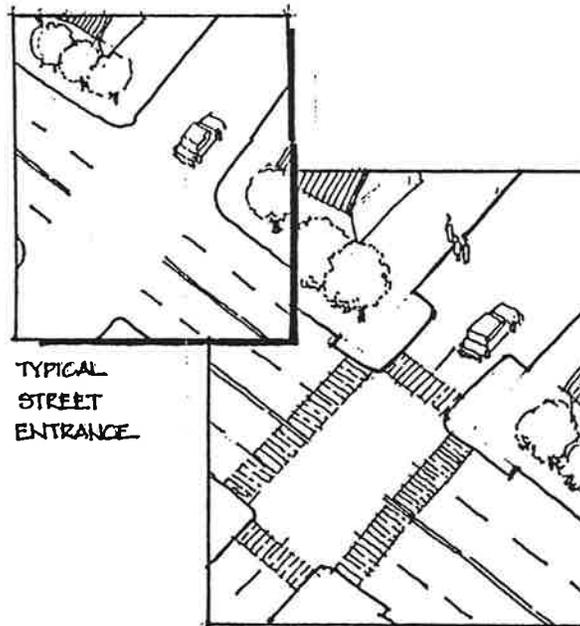


TYPICAL
MID-BLOCK

LANDSCAPED ISLAND

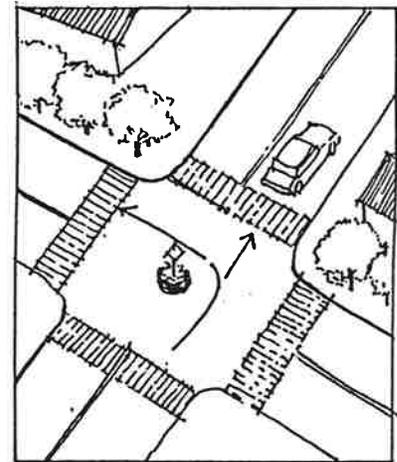


5' BEND



TYPICAL
STREET
ENTRANCE

NECKDOWN



TRAFFIC CIRCLE

•**Main Street Retail:** Rather than bland, lifeless commercial strips, the traditional village center--designed and managed to improve its streets, sidewalks, public spaces, and ground floor architecture--should be the model for retail development in Connecticut towns. The objective should be to create a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere encouraging pedestrian activity and attracting visitors. In addition to design improvements, property owners, retailers and local officials need to create public-private partnerships to manage and market the retail district. Design guidelines should be adopted to enhance the pedestrian environment and sense of place in commercial areas. Measures may include promotion of continuous building lines, street-level retailing, wider sidewalks, signage control, accessible public spaces and public amenities. Guidelines should discourage strip commercial, on-street parking lots and excessive curb cuts that disrupt a pedestrian's path.

Rail Station

•**Public Space and Placemaking:** Well-designed public spaces are critical in creating a sense of place, especially in areas of concentrated development. Public spaces include streets, sidewalks and plazas, as well as parks and community facilities such as a library, historic district, or local museum. These areas present opportunities for designing and locating amenities that will support social interaction that is critical to successful communities. They can be enriched by incorporating elements that reflect traditional local design. Streetscapes can be enhanced with special paving, lighting fixtures, information kiosks, benches, landscaping and public art. Towns can also create a sense of place by establishing gateways into their towns or village centers with special signage, distinctive landscaping or public art. Public art is an underestimated feature that increases people's use and enjoyment of public spaces. Cities have commissioned local artists to design everything from commemorative statues to bicycle racks to highway underpasses.

•**Rail Station and Station Area Design:** Efforts need to be made to retrofit train stations with better lighting, signage, street furniture, historic lighting, improved landscaping and pedestrian walkways, and on-site retailing. The aim is to make these stations more user friendly and safer and to make the public transit experience more pleasant and convenient. While it is important to improve the station, it is even more critical to improve pedestrian access from residential and commercial districts to the station. Station area designs and development incentives should be adopted to enhance the pedestrian character around the stations, introduce mixed-use developments and allow dense residential neighborhoods.

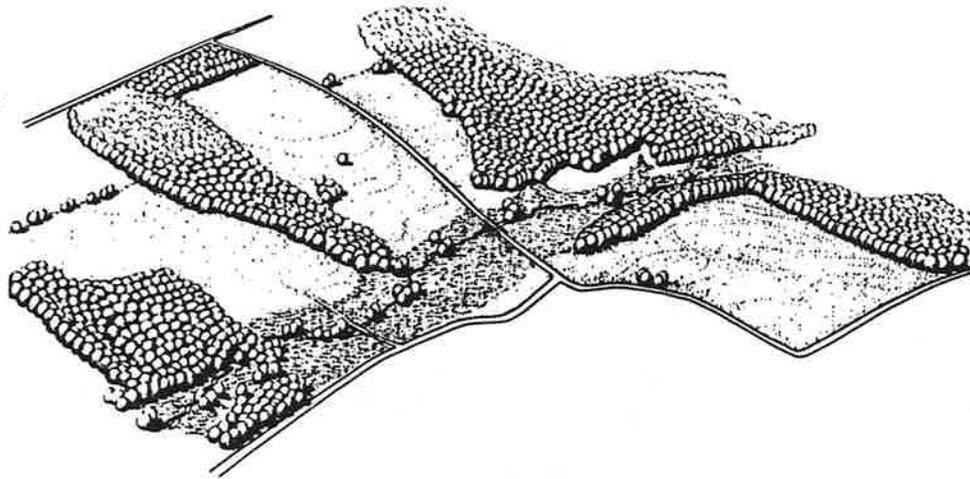


Fig. 7.4.1 Site D: *Before Development*

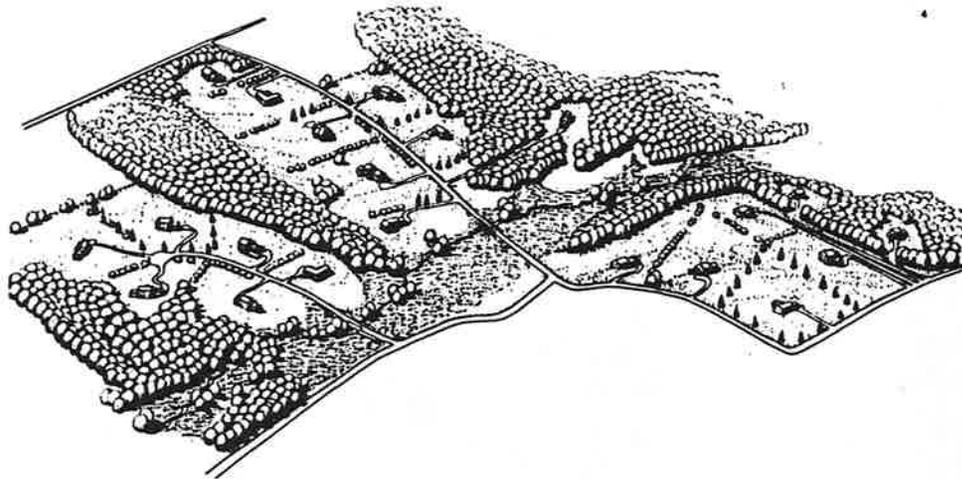


Fig. 7.4.3 Site D: *With Conventional Development*

Conventional Subdivision Development vs. Open Space Communities

Open space communities or "conservation subdivision design", refers to residential subdivision in which half or more of the developable land is designated as permanent common open space. The intention is to conserve open space and limit the development's impact on water resources and other critical natural features while developing on remaining portions of the land.

The following series of illustrations, from Randall Arndt's "Conservation Design for Subdivisions", show how the principles of open space design could be applied to a property with an upland pasture and water meadows bordering a small creek.

This 63-acre site, located in the rolling Pennsylvania countryside, lies at the edge of the Philadelphia metropolitan area where suburban development pressures and rising land values have combined to discourage commercial agriculture, which is steadily declining.

The figures on the right depict before development and the result of developing the land using conventional practices. The conventional layout observes the obvious sensitive natural features, but does nothing more in the way of resource protection or neighborhood access to the stream corridor. The entire site is divided up into houselots two to three acres each, in an unnatural and unneighborly manner.

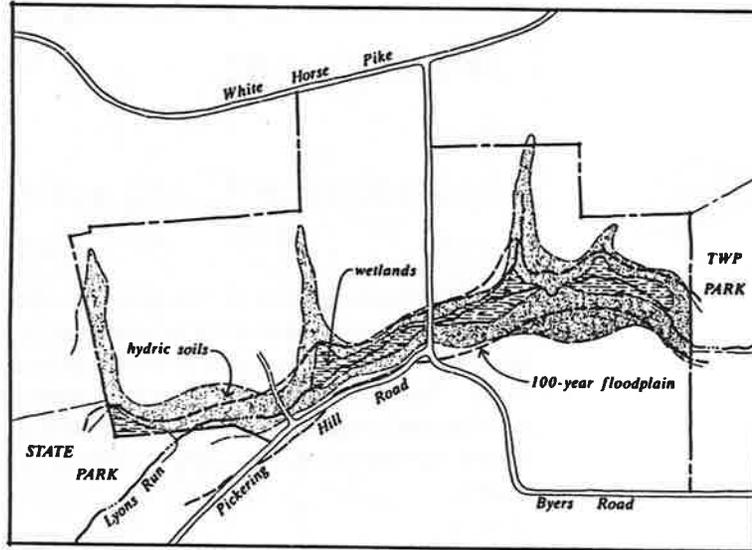


Fig. 7.4.4 Site D: Identifying Primary Conservation Areas

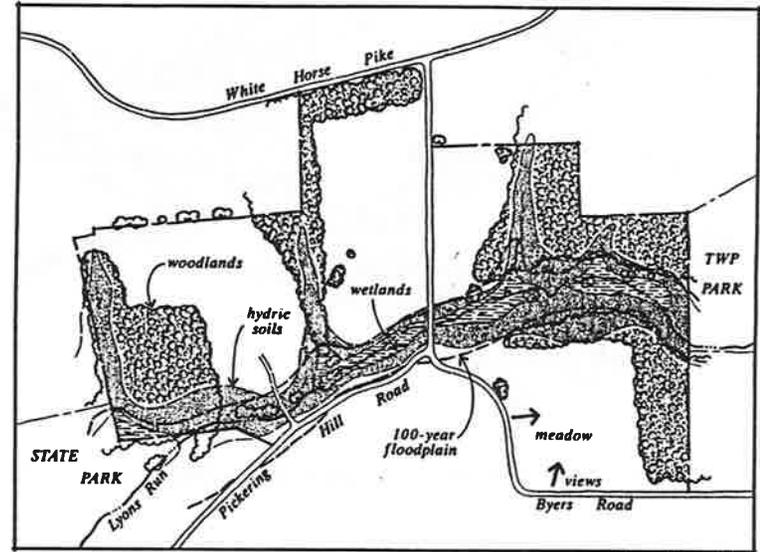


Fig. 7.4.5 Site D: Identifying Secondary Conservation Areas

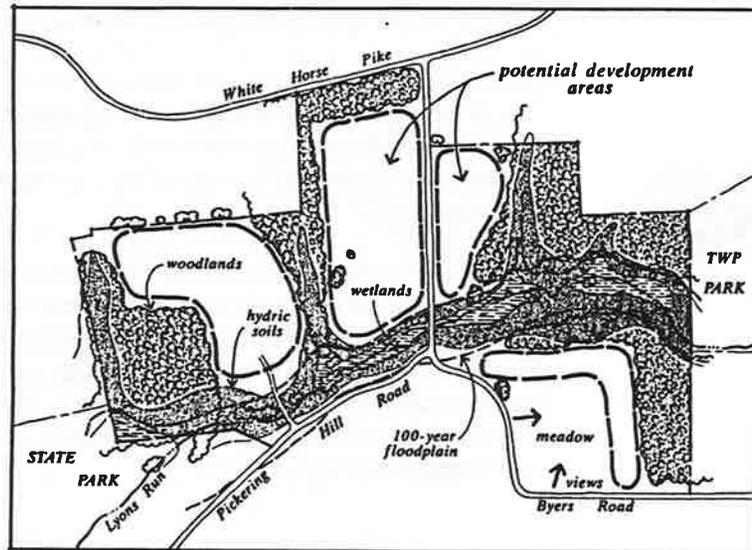


Fig. 7.4.6 Site D: Identifying Potential Development Areas

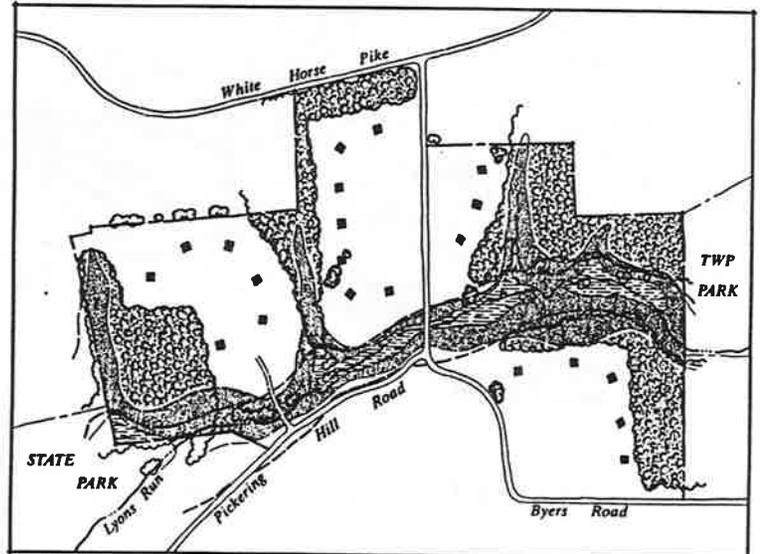


Fig. 7.4.7 Site D: Locating Potential House Sites

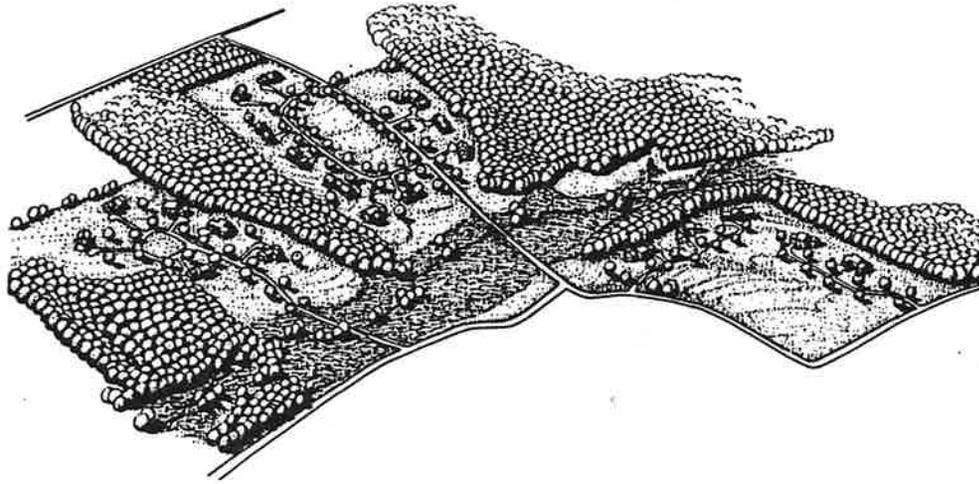


Fig. 7.4.18 Site D: With Open Space Design

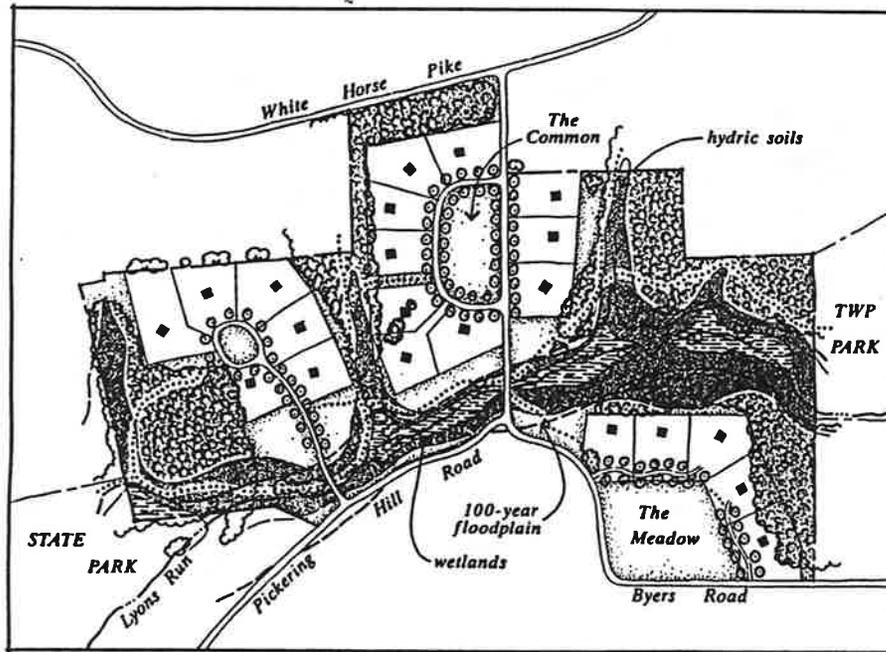


Fig. 7.4.19 Site D: Drawing in the Lot Lines

Randall Arendt outlines the process for designing open space subdivision in the following steps:

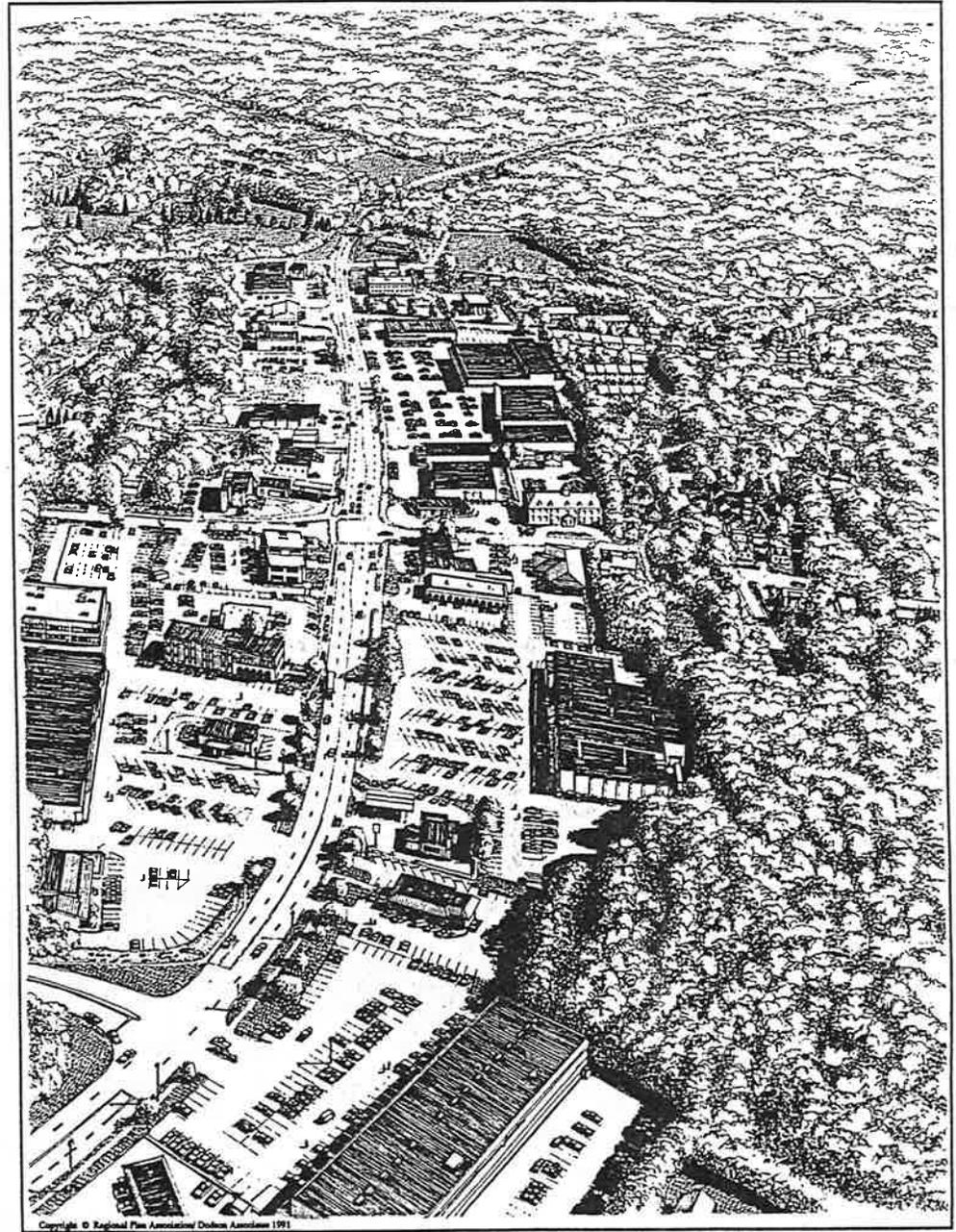
1. Conduct a site analysis to understand the notable natural features and the local context.
2. Outline potential areas for conservation, both primary and secondary conservation areas, and potential areas for development.
3. Locate house sites within proposed development areas. For this site, a principal consideration is maximizing the number homes that will have views of the creek and the surrounding protected open space.
4. Design access to homes with streets and common driveways. Also, identify trail links to open spaces on and off site.
5. Determine lot lines.

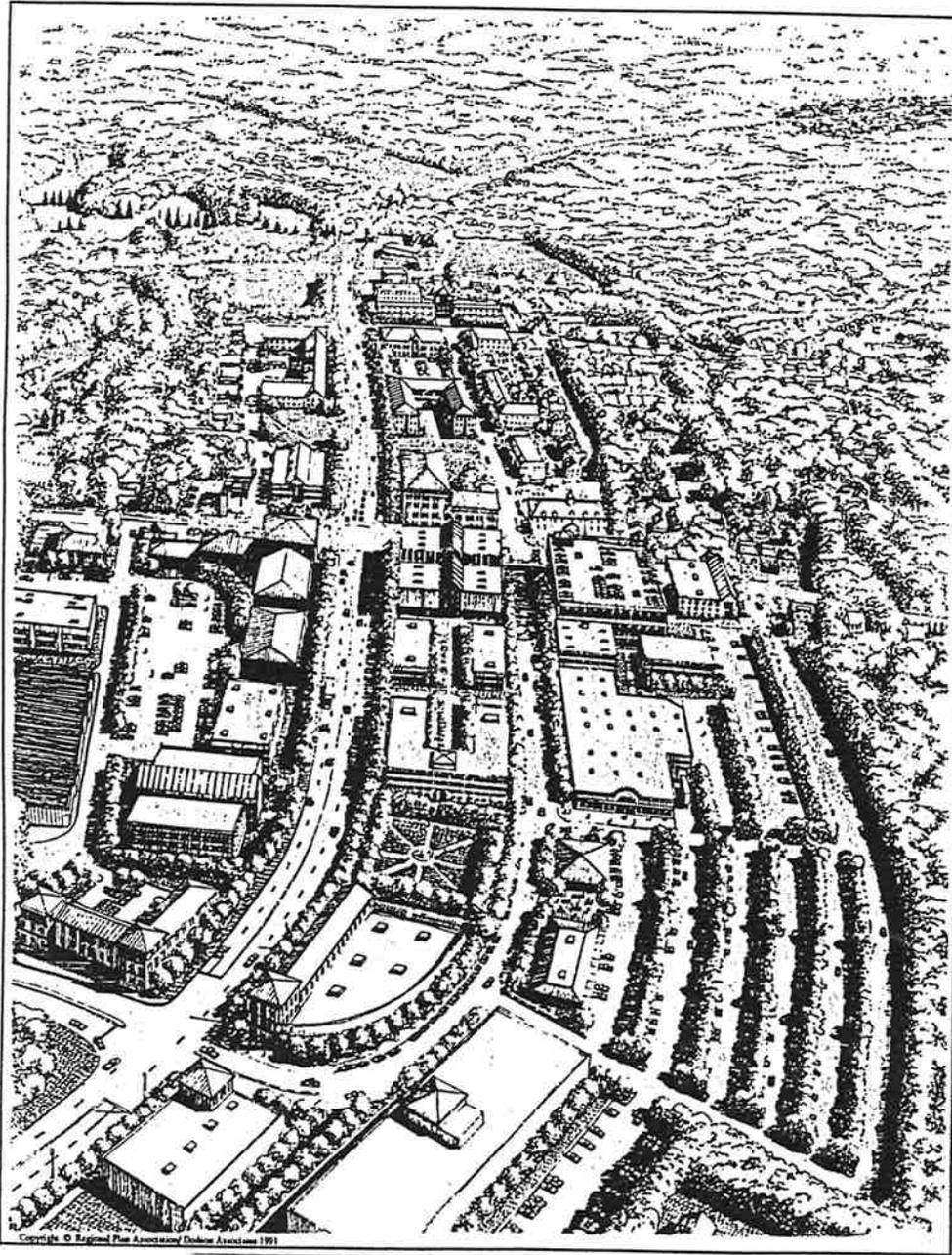
In contrast to the oversized house lots on the conventional subdivision, the open space design provides more reasonably sized one-acre lots on parts of the land with soil that is most suitable for individual well and septic systems.

The beauty of open space design and zoning is that it is easy to administer and is extremely effective in permanently protecting a substantial portion of development tracts without public expenditure to purchase development rights. It allows rural landowners and others to extract their rightful equity. Down-sized house lots and more efficient road layout offers economic advantages. Developers can reduce costs for building roads, local governments save on snowplowing and road re-surfacing.

Typical Suburban Commercial Strip

Commercial Strip along a suburban state highway. Supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, small office buildings and gas stations compete loudly with neon signs and billboard. This unattractive environment burdened with traffic congestion is the result of lack of prior planning and design that ignores human scale and the social aspects of attractive places. This environment is designed solely to accomodate the automobile and is practically impossible for pedestrians and bicyclists to get around.





Redesigning the Suburbs

The illustration on the left depicts the same suburban commercial strip redeveloped following more thoughtful community design principles. To accommodate the same amount of development shown in the first panel, increased zoning densities are allowed in a distinct center along the highway, shown in the foreground and the distance separated by expanses of rural or low density development. With increased zoning densities, investment in infrastructure, and site planning and design guidelines, these former commercial strips can be redeveloped as true town centers that have internal streets, are pedestrian friendly and provide a range of land uses. Also, the creation of comfortable and attractive public spaces provides a social gathering space and a stronger sense of place and community. Additional parking required by the expanded commercial center is handled through a combination of structured parking garages and beautifully landscaped parking lots located behind the buildings. Placement and design of buildings creates a strong edge of buildings along streets to provide enclosure and scale.

Section 4

Land Use and Planning Tools

There are several regulatory and non-regulatory tools that can be used by municipalities and towns to guide new development in patterns consistent with local and regional design, natural resource protection, and economic development considerations. Several important federal and state regulations provide guidance for state and local regulatory initiatives to protect the quality of life of communities. The Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Coastal Zone Management Act are just a few. Additionally, local regulations, such as zoning and subdivision control, that address overall community concerns are strengthened by the presence of livability objectives in the comprehensive plan. The planning tools and techniques that are outlined in this section will enable communities to put into practice sound land use and community design principles. These tools are divided into those that are required by the State of Connecticut, those that can be initiated and upheld by towns, and those whose specific function is to enable development and conservation.

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State Planning and Land Use Requirements

The State of Connecticut requires that each municipality have documents that govern development: a comprehensive plan, zoning regulations, and subdivision regulations.

Land Use and Planning Tools

Tool	Description
Plan of Development	outlines town's development and conservation policies
Zoning Regulations	controls land uses
Subdivision Regulations	controls how land is developed

Plan of Development

A plan of development is a planning document that identifies community goals and is an overall guide for a town's physical development. The plan should increase a municipality's understanding of its development capabilities and limitations and help officials determine the impact of specific development proposals on its long term goals and vision. By stating the immediate and long-range growth and development goals of the town, the plan provides the guiding framework for writing and revising zoning and growth control laws, and if need be, defending them in court. It is important to remember that the plan of development is not a legally binding document. For this reason, local zoning regulations need to be consistent with the comprehensive plan in order to implement the plan's objectives. A plan of development should also identify an action program or specific steps the municipality intends to take toward realizing the plan's vision. These actions can include regulatory, non-regulatory and capital programs.

Zoning Regulations

The most widely used and legally binding local mechanism to shape the form and location of future development is a town's zoning regulations. Zoning regulations consist of zoning text, also known as an ordinance, and a zoning map. While zoning ordinances are simply a set of rules, zoning maps illustrate the types of land use that exist and that are allowed, such as residential, commercial, institutional, industrial, recreational, etc. Zoning is a fundamental community design tool for shaping the pattern and scale of growth. Zoning can be used alone or along with other land use regulatory tools to encourage development in particular areas while conserving others. In its most basic form, zoning laws and ordinances are employed to separate incompatible land uses from one another and to designate appropriate districts in which uses are permitted by right. One of the fundamental uses of zoning is to control lot size, density of development, and setbacks from the edges of a property lot.

In updating comprehensive plans, towns should reassess existing zoning ordinances and adopt ordinances that support more sustainable land use and incorporate community design principles. Establishing zoning that is consistent with the intent of the comprehensive plan is a key step toward effectively implementing goals.

Subdivision Regulations

Subdivision regulations differ from zoning in that they do not control the use of land, but rather how it is developed. The primary purpose of regulating subdivision of land is to ensure that building lots are accessible, able to support necessary wastewater facilities and are otherwise suitable for development. The intent is to protect the future buyer by preventing the creation of unbuildable lots, and to protect the public from environmental and health consequences resulting from improper development of sub-divided land.

Cluster subdivision regulations are often implemented to address the problems created by conventional subdivision practices such as uniformity, high development costs and maintenance, and the pressure to develop environmentally sensitive stream and wetland areas. Standard zoning for cluster subdivisions allows the same number of homes on smaller lots, providing flexibility in design and reducing development and maintenance costs. Environmentally sensitive areas

are set aside as communal conservation land, thus providing private space around each house, and greatly enhancing the beauty, sense of community, and livability of the development.

Local Initiatives

There are also a variety of statutes that can be initiated and maintained by towns that will assist in its preservation and growth.

Tools	Description
Town Plan and Site Plan Review	siting review for appropriateness to town's objectives and context
Design Review Process	review for impact on character of town
Overlay Zones	special zone outlining a significant resource, the zone is overlaid on existing zoning districts.
Consistency Requirements	requires zoning and plan to be consistent
Interlocal Agreements	cross municipal agreement to protect larger resources
Adequate Public Facilities	requires infrastructure demands be met by developers

Town Plan Review and Site Plan Review

Towns should adopt site plan review, roadway layout, and other siting guidelines designed to produce new subdivisions and commercial development that "fit" the character of existing development in the community. Dimensional requirements, building height and bulk, form and materials, signage and other features of new development should closely match the traditional patterns of compact communities.

A municipality may require site plans to be submitted as part of the development review process. This requirement is usually incorporated in local zoning codes. It is common for these codes to require applicants to submit detailed plans for proposed land uses that require special permits.

The site plan review process allows a planning board to review aspects of a plan related to drainage, vegetative clearing, wastewater treatment

system design and location, the location and characteristics of roads and structures, the protection of significant natural features, traffic safety, landscaping, architecture and a variety of environmental concerns. A site plan review requirement can also include provisions that protect wetland and steep slopes and control erosion and sedimentation to protect a watershed area. Site plan approval can become a condition of zoning approval or other local permit acceptance.

Design Review Process

The design review process is a means by which a town can determine whether a specific proposed project is in line with a town's plan and design guidelines. More specifically a design review allows communities to protect and maintain their town's character. A design review should look at several aspects of any proposed project in relation to the rest of the town. Factors such as street patterns and widths, building alignment and entrances, alleys and parking, sidewalks and porches, as well as fences, walls and landscaping can be part of a design review. Further considerations may include: signage, lighting, windows, roof types and building materials. A well structured design review process, directed by guidelines and explicit design principles, can be an effective way of ensuring that local character is preserved and that new developments will uphold higher design standards that will enhance a community's appearance, character and uniqueness.

Overlay Zones

Aside from designating districts or zones for particular groups or types of uses, zoning regulation can identify important natural or community resources within the town that need specific protection beyond what is specified by the conditions placed on locations and types of allowed uses. Overlay zones, such as a water resources overlay, can require that new development must not be sited within a set distance from streams, ponds, or wetlands. Certain uses, such as those that require the use or storage of hazardous materials, also may not be allowed within the overlay zone and certain activities, such as draining of wetlands, will not be permitted. Overlay zones can be applied as well to other areas with unique natural features such as steep slopes or poor soils. Overlay zones may also be applied over commercial or dense residential areas allowing for mixed uses such as housing above ground floor

commercial. Overlay zones must be identified by distinct boundaries and be included on the town's zoning map.

Consistency Requirement

The consistency requirement, required by state law but rarely adhered to, is a vital tool in regulating new development and protecting natural assets such as open spaces, wetlands, and recreational spaces. By ensuring that zoning codes are consistent with the town's plan of development, a town can prevent a developer from violating the intentions of the plan. In court, it is the zoning—not the town plan—that will be used to settle a development dispute. Without consistency between the two documents it is more likely that developers will adhere to the minimum requirements of the zoning codes rather than a community's vision outlined in the town's plan. By requiring the zoning code and the plan to be in agreement and by using other tools of site and design review, the community can more effectively guide development to fulfill its desired vision.

Intermunicipal Agreements

There are times when an issue or problem crosses town boundaries. Coordinated inter-municipal planning for cross-jurisdictional issues allows for better community design and economic development. Sharing financial and technical resources, such as forming joint planning boards or a "council of governments", ensures that there is more cooperation and consistency in planning decisions across adjacent towns. Sharing resources may also be the most cost effective approach. An intermunicipal partnership can encourage development, in some areas and discourage it from other, environmentally sensitive areas. In this way, communities can potentially achieve more than they can by going it alone. Through inter-municipal agreements, towns and villages can work with one another and with county governments to develop plans and work cooperatively to implement those plans.

A frequently encountered situation where inter-municipal planning is particularly effective is in the case of rivers, streams, and watersheds which often do not fit neatly within political boundaries. Activities in one part of the watershed can affect water quality downstream. Agreements should be made to guide the preservation of water quality and water resources as a whole rather than in individual pieces. Inter-

municipal planning in the watershed can take numerous forms, but most important is the coordination of local actions and programs to achieve common, inter-municipal goals, achieved through joint development of goals, as well as integrated strategies of implementation.

Adequate Public Facilities by Law

This is a mandate that requires that the capacities of public utilities and agencies be assessed. Facilities may include water supply, sewage, roads, schools, fire and police protection and transportation, as well as recreation and open space. Although Connecticut has not established a uniform set of standards for this method, it can be used effectively to channel growth by creating incentives to develop on land already served by infrastructure. Generally part of a capital improvement program, it ensures that improvement needs of new development are consistent with the overall needs of the town at large. In this way, new developments are better integrated into the existing town.

It is important to remember that the Adequate Public Facilities by Law tool is for managing growth and an important factor for all growth considerations. Of foremost importance of those facilities to be examined are the sewage and wastewater treatment facilities. Any assessment must include a realistic look at the ability of higher density developments to accommodate sewage and wastewater treatment, either through a centralized wastewater treatment facility or properly sited septic systems. In both cases, there is a financial and environmental cost that must be assessed and accounted for in the capital facilities section of the comprehensive plan.

Development and Conservation Tools

This section describes tools available at the town, state and federal levels that will assist in stimulating growth in those areas identified as appropriate for development and preserving open space in those areas designated as natural assets. Each of the tools outlined in this chapter provide powerful means of regulating and shaping the growth of your community. It is necessary to assess each of them for their potential value to the town with respect to the goals identified and to understand fully the impact of each of those selected on its long range vision.

Tools	Description
Open Space Zoning	provision requiring clustering of development while setting aside permanent open space
Purchase of Development Rights	purchase a conservation easement to protect farmland from development
Fees in Lieu of open Space	requires a percentage of open space or payment for its absence
Transfer of Development Rights	allows development options from more sensitive to less sensitive areas.
Urban Growth Boundary	mapped line dividing development areas and protected areas
Neighborhood Revitalization Zones	neighborhood designated areas targeted for growth with special incentives attached
Enterprise Zones	state designated zones established to promote growth in a specific area
Specific Site Use Plan	details conditions for use of a particular site
Greenways Legislation	protects and creates open space corridors
Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Fund	state administers tool land acquisition to preserve open space
Critical Environmental Areas	areas defined as sensitive to protect them from unregulated development
Environmental Overlay District	protected areas that contain resource areas
Wetlands Protection	areas defined as wetlands are protected from development
Coastal Areas Management	regulates development and ownership of coast line
Ridgeline Overlays	specific areas designated and preserved from destructive development
Protected Rivers Legislation	state administered tool to preserve river corridors
Multiple Use Rivers	a plan of development that reconciles disparate uses of river corridors

Open Space Zoning

Open Space Zoning provisions require clustering of development on that portion of a site most suitable for development, while permanently protecting land to be used for agriculture, resource protection or recreation. This technique can be employed town-wide or only in designated overlay districts (in areas containing farmland, for example). It can be distinguished from traditional cluster regulations in that it generally requires that clustered units be single-family, detached units on individual (albeit clustered lots). This is an important distinction: in most rural and exurban towns, attached wall townhouses are not welcome, either by the community or the market.

Purchase of Development Rights

Purchase of Development Rights is a technique in which state or local authorities buy a conservation easement on farmland or undeveloped open space to protect the land from development and preserve it as open space or as a working farm. This technique is most often applied to save farmland and keep the farmer in business. Those concerned with farmland preservation know that it is not enough to be concerned with saving farmland; you need to save the farmer, too. Land will only stay in agricultural production if it is economically viable for the farmer.

While PDR is an expensive technique, this strategy ensures that agricultural land will stay in production indefinitely while giving the farmer funds that are often converted back into capital improvements on the farm itself. Connecticut has an active PDR program. As of 1995 Connecticut has protected 24,250 acres on 161 farms.³

Fees in Lieu of Open Space

Another technique for preserving open space, particularly in subdivisions, is the optional requirement that developers dedicate open space as a condition of subdivision approval. In some instances it is possible for the developer to pay a fee instead of providing open space. However, this is only allowed in cases where the subdivision residents are to be the beneficiaries of the payment.

³ A Region at Risk- Third Regional Plan , New York: Regional Plan Association, Island Press, 1995 . p107.

Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights, or TDR, is a sophisticated method of directing new growth away from environmentally sensitive, historic, agricultural, or open space areas. Within a TDR program, areas to be protected from further development, "sending areas," and areas better suited for increased development, "receiving areas," are identified. New development would be directed into the receiving zones using development credits that are purchased from landowners in the sending zones, thereby compensating them for the development value of their land.⁴

Urban Growth Boundaries

In most industrialized countries, development is directed into or adjoining already developed village, town or city centers, and this developable area is circumscribed by an "urban growth boundary." Outside the boundaries development is prohibited or allowed only subject to stringent environmental or visual performance standards. This technique was mandated in Oregon in the early 1970s, and more recently Maine adopted a similar provision as part of its state growth management act. This is one of the most effective means to maintain compact, efficient patterns of development, and to preserve open space and natural resource areas. Oregon's experience has demonstrated that urban growth boundaries can actually increase opportunities for higher density (hence more affordable housing and industrial development).

Neighborhood Revitalization Zones

Neighborhood revitalization zones are designed to promote growth in a specific area. These are areas that can be established in a town plan as areas where growth would be advantageous and beneficial. Often incentives are offered to developers to attract housing and commercial development in established revitalization zones.⁵

⁴ Creating Successful Communities, A Guidebook to Growth Management Strategies, The Conservation Fund, Washington D.C., Island Press. 1990.

⁵ *ibid.*

Enterprise Zones

Enterprise zones are particularly useful in areas where growth is to be stimulated. While neighborhood revitalization zones are defined by the community, enterprise zones are designated by the state and administered by the Department of Economic and Community Development. The intent of enterprise zones is make it attractive for manufacturers and certain service sector firms already located in an enterprise zone to reinvest in that area and to attract new eligible business to stimulate job creation in those communities. Businesses that do invest in these areas are eligible for a series of tax credits, tax abatements and other incentives designed to promote growth in these specific areas.⁶

Specific Site Use Plan

A specific plan is a more explicit regulatory tool that outlines development criteria and imposes detailed land use controls in addition to the existing zoning ordinances. It is often adopted to address either a single project, such as a planned unit development, or a local area with special characteristics that need to be considered. The benefit of creating a specific plan is that it explicitly states a town's goals for land use for a particular sub-area. And by significantly decreasing the development time and costs for the developer, it becomes more likely that these areas will attract types of projects desired by the local community. This tool can be effective particularly in cases of in-fill sites by involving the local community beforehand in the decision making process concerning what conditions would need to be met by an in-fill project, placing the community in a proactive rather than reactive position.⁷

Greenways Legislation

In Connecticut, citizens groups, state agencies and public commissions are planning, funding and creating greenways. Protected corridors of

open space can provide for free flow of people, water, and wildlife--benefits that isolated tracts of land cannot provide. Greenways can be trails, scenic roads, and bikeways for recreation and for travel between destinations that multiply the value of existing public parks by linking them to a larger network of open spaces. Greenways also make open space accessible to commercial districts and neighborhoods. And they help communities shape development by defining corridors of open space that should be protected.⁸ The Greenways legislation allows greenways to be included in a town's plan of development, permits local conservation commissions to recommend greenways plans, and adds "conservation" to the title of future town plans of development.

The Greenways legislation establishes a greenway capital grant program administered by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Grants may be used to provide matching funds to develop greenways, including those supported by the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). Grants may be made for up to 20% for projects that are part of an interstate transportation greenway, such as the East Coast Greenway, up to 10% for an inter-town transportation greenway. For greenways that are not transportation related, grants may be made for up to 50% of project costs.

Legislation also establishes a greenways small grant program to be administered by the commissioner of the DEP. The grants, not to exceed \$5,000, may be given to municipalities, towns, councils of governments, councils of elected officials, or non-governmental organizations to plan and implement greenways projects. Grants can also be issued by the Commissioner of Economic Development from the Restoration of Historic Assets Fund.

Making a greenways network a reality will mean building on the local grassroots efforts. Connecticut is helping to foster a statewide greenways network by inventorying local efforts and by providing technical assistance to community-based organizations undertaking these projects. Good examples of places where towns have come

⁶ State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, Hartford, Connecticut

⁷ Building Sustainable Communities, An Environmental Guide for Local Government, Center for the Study of Law and Politics, San Francisco, May 1993, p.39-42.

⁸ A Region at Risk- Third Regional Plan, New York: Regional Plan Association, 1995. p.115.

together to establish greenways include the Housatonic River, the Farmington Canal right-of-way and the Merritt Parkway. The state has recently created a permanent Greenway Council and authorized small capital and planning grant programs. More importantly, the legislation creating these programs mandates that locally designated greenways be recognized by state agencies in their planning policies.

Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Fund (state land acquisition program)

This program is a state administered tool to provide grants for the acquisition of the easements and land needed to preserve open space by leveraging contributions from municipalities or non-profits. Since 1986, the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program, administered by the Department of Environmental Protection, has acquired over 4,300 acres of land at a cost of \$32.2 million.⁹ Assessment of grant applications is made to coordinate local, state and non-profit conservation activities. Non-profit involvement can be important in attracting landowner participation. Access to these grants allows them to secure matching funds. In some cases, the state may provide as much as 80% of the purchase price of the land. And although ownership rests with the state, the town may manage the property. Some of the costs to manage the property can be deferred by depositing an additional 20% of the purchase price in a stewardship account.

Critical Environmental Areas (CEA)

These are areas deemed to be environmentally sensitive in order to protect them from unregulated development. Development in these areas requires an Environmental Assessment and Impact Statement. State law requires special review for state designated areas such as wetlands and coastal areas. For example, Department of Environmental Protection has identified and protected sensitive aquifers, creating Aquifer Protection Areas (APA). Although these areas are designated

⁹ Preserving Open Space: A Guide for New England, U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, 1992.

by the DEP, the municipality in which an aquifer protection area resides bears the burden of regulation.¹⁰

Environmental Overlay Districting

This is one of the most commonly used environmental regulations in New England today. Dozens of communities have adopted overlay districts to protect aquifer recharge areas, floodplains and other resource areas. In these locations, additional environmental performance standards are required of new development, including reductions in density, limitations on paved surfaces and restrictions on underground fuel storage and vegetation clearing. One important new application for overlay districting is along river, streams, lakes or the ocean, where shoreland zoning can be used to control the visual and environmental impacts of development. For more than a decade, Maine has required that its coastal towns adopt shoreland zoning to set back and screen development from the coast. Fairfield and New Haven County shoreline communities and the environmental well-being of Long Island Sound would benefit from similar provisions.

Wetlands Protection

Wetlands are a critical feature of the natural environment. They act as natural filters for water by slowing and storing surface water from streams and overland flow so that pollutants can settle out or be assimilated by wetland vegetation. Wetlands also provide valuable habitats for a number of aquatic and terrestrial species. While artificial wetlands can be created to mimic a natural wetland's structure and function for purposes of wastewater or storm water treatment, natural wetlands are invaluable resources that should be protected. Wetland laws protect water quality by regulating activities that affect wetlands and stream corridors.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issues or denies permits for the discharge of dredged or fill material that would affect one acre or more of wetlands.¹¹ Municipalities can enact wetlands laws to regulate activities in wetlands and their buffer areas. In municipalities that have

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.21.

¹¹ U.S. Corps of Engineers, Watershed Design Manual, p57

enacted their own wetlands protections, applicants are still required to obtain all other applicable permits, including state and federal permits.

While the method of identifying wetlands and their boundaries depends as much on legal jurisdiction as it does on science, the definition used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency would provide a municipality with the greatest protection of wetlands at the local level. Their three criteria are: hydrologic indicators, such as seasonal standing water; hydrophytic vegetation, plants associated with wetlands because of their competitive advantage in areas with water-logged soils; and hydric soils, soil groups whose development shows the effects of water-limited soil oxygen.¹²

wetlands fig 9.

Coastal Areas Management

In recent years Connecticut has taken a quiet approach to enhancing public access to the Long Island Sound. Slow but steady progress has been made in providing additional access and, just as importantly, in improving existing access points. This low-key success is the result of two main efforts. First, both local and state governments have continued to acquire and upgrade publicly owned access points. Second, local zoning officials and state coastal regulators acting under the State's Coastal Management Act have required property owners to provide public access as a condition to a number of shore development approvals. Approximately 10 miles of coastline have been acquired in this way. Access gained in this fashion ranges from pedestrian walkways to boat launches and fishing piers.

fairhaven fig. 10

¹² Managing Watersheds- Combining Water Quality Protection and Community Planning, by Regional Plan Association, John Feingold, Robert Pirani, Graham Trelstad, 1995, p.56-57.

Ridgelines

Ridgelines are natural features of the landscape, significant because of the views they provide and because they usually contain sensitive wildlife and micro-environments that, once disrupted, may never be restored. Common problems with development in ridgeline areas are excessive disturbance of steep slopes that can lead to erosion problems, surface runoff that can contaminate water sources, and excessive and poorly located housing that can disrupt wildlife corridors and critical habitats. Furthermore, development at greater elevation makes it more visible and can disrupt the aesthetic view of the ridge from the valley and surrounding towns. At a minimum, a plan for development and zoning regulations should provide controls to balance conservation and steer development away from such areas.

Traditional zoning regulation has not been effective in advocating more sensitive development and protection of mountainous terrain such as ridgelines. Therefore, other techniques such as creating “ridge overlay districts” have been recommended because they can be adopted by a municipality without having to amend other aspects of local zoning such as lot size or allowable uses.¹³ The overlay district also carries with it supplemental zoning regulations that are concerned with a specific condition.

Protected Rivers Legislation

The State has established legislation that provides for the preservation of river corridors, including the floodplains, wetlands and uplands and overland runoff. A particularly useful tool, this review of the river corridors offers ample opportunity for both community review and community initiative. Those river corridors that are eligible are designated by the state after the completion of a rivers assessment data base. The municipality may request the establishment of a rivers committee whose duty is to inventory and map the river corridor and create a river corridor protection plan. The protection plan must be

reviewed by public hearing, the commissioner and the state for consistency with state and municipal land use laws.

By requiring compliance with a local town’s land use ordinances, this legislation is a powerful tool for the community, particularly when provisions are made in the comprehensive plan to protect the river corridor. Public notices and hearings provide a forum that ensures that all voices in the community are heard and that local concerns are addressed. If a town has a river corridor within its boundaries, it is imperative that provisions for the preservation and management of that resource be included in its comprehensive plan.

Multiple Use Rivers

Similar to the Protected Rivers Legislation, the Multiple Use Rivers Act relies heavily on both the state rivers assessment data base and the creation of a rivers commission. In this case however, the rivers commission is charged with the task of preparing a river corridor management plan, designed to recognize existing uses and conflicts that may arise among different towns along a river’s corridor. The goal of the management plan is to account for and reconcile these conflicts by recommending modification to municipal plan of development, subdivision, site plan and wetlands regulations. “The recommendations made may concern tourism, navigation, utility and transportation rights of way and water dependent recreational, industrial and commercial uses. Possible recommendations may include proposals for specific setbacks from the river, dimensions of new lots, and buildings, restrictions on cutting vegetation, restrictions on earth moving for mining and other purposes, prohibited activities and regulation of paving and other forms of impervious ground cover.”

This act allows a community to voice its needs and assist in the creation of a means of managing the river corridor in its town. By providing explicit rules governing the uses of the river and its adjoining areas, towns can be certain that the river will continue to be a valuable resource.

¹³ Shawangunk Ridge, Conservation and Design Guide Book, by David Church and John Myers, Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, Inc. 1993

Section 5

Community Participation

The Community in the Planning Process

“Plan ahead. Plan for the future.” We have all heard these words of wisdom applied in many facets of our lives. What do they mean in the context of municipal life? A strong planning process gives ordinary citizens an avenue through which they can influence the development of their community. The state’s statutes require that localities write a plan of development or comprehensive plan and include citizen comment as part of the process. The statute states that town officials must hold a hearing after a notice has been publicized in the local paper. The extent of the input beyond that is largely up to the community leaders. The planning process is the only formal opportunity local residents have to discuss the development issues facing the community as a whole, instead of on a parcel-by-parcel basis, as with zoning change hearings. Some communities use survey techniques to sound out the citizenry and others merely hold the statutory required hearing on the plan.

Why is community input so important? A home is probably the largest investment any of us will ever make, and decisions made at the municipal level affect profoundly that parcel’s value, and the overall quality of life in a community. Aside from the periodic trip to the ballot box, there is no other way for the average citizen to voice his or her opinion on development matters on a comprehensive basis. The

importance of community participation can be found in current debates over big box retailers and their effect on communities. These debates themselves are instructive for two reasons. First, in the absence of a periodic plan review and discussion of issues, the town administration may pursue businesses, in the hopes of holding down property taxes, that residents feel are inappropriate for their communities. Administrators will not know this unless they ask their residents. Without the planning process, there is no formal mechanism to solicit this information. Second, the planning process provides residents with the opportunity to direct their town leaders’ actions when deciding on their town’s future. The big box retailer or superstore debate is as much about large scale retail as it is about community control and who has it.

Planning is positive in other ways. It helps a community conserve scarce fiscal resources by directing development in an orderly fashion. It encourages people to think about where their town is heading in terms of demographics, its role in the state or regional economy, how existing natural resources should be used or preserved, and what and where infrastructure investments should be made.

Methods of Public Participation

A comprehensive plan contains a clear expression of a community’s goals for future development, areas of improvement and assets worth preserving. It should reflect the values and best thinking of the community’s residents. It is essential that local citizens be involved in the preparation and update of the plan, not just in its review. A town/village forum, public workshops and brainstorming sessions should be held to give residents opportunities to offer ideas and perspectives, to participate in developing the vision of the community’s future, and develop and select the programs and methods to achieve the vision.

A citizen-based “planning committee” should be appointed by the town board or planning board and charged with developing ideas and support for programs that local elected officials will be responsible for implementing. A planning professional can be very helpful in facilitating the public involvement process that identifies issues that need to be addressed and engages residents in shaping their

community's response to issues and challenges (by revising or adopting zoning for example).

Implementing their vision for their communities requires residents' effective participation in the political process at the local, regional and state level. Land use decisions are made by elected officials with technical as well as political considerations. The following are rules of thumb from the Conservation Foundation's Guidebook to Growth Management Strategies.¹⁴

- *Know the decision-making process.* Knowledge of procedural rules and timetables is critical in knowing how and when to effectively participate in the process.
- *Know the key decision makers.* These include council members, planning commissioners, and staff members. Look for ways to increase your effectiveness by building bridges to local officials.
- *Be a credible resource for public officials.* Public officials value comments and sources of information they can trust. Therefore, fulfill the commitments you make to them.
- *Build effective coalitions.* Be creative in identifying common ground with other interest groups. It may be particularly effective to build coalitions on specific issues with influential groups that are not natural allies.
- *Pick your issues strategically.* Do not wage or prolong counterproductive campaigns. Do not lose sight of the big picture.
- *Staying power is critical.* Planning and growth management is an ongoing process. Specific development proposals may be in the review process for many months, sometimes years. You will be taken more seriously if you stay involved over the long term.
- *Do your homework.* Stay informed about the issue and the players. When meeting public officials or addressing a public hearing, there is no substitute for thorough preparation.

¹⁴ *Creating Successful Communities, A Guidebook to Growth Management Strategies*, The Conservation Fund, Washington D.C., Island Press, 1990.

Local Government

In order to be able to effectively participate in the planning process it is necessary to understand precisely how your local government works. In Connecticut there are typically three types of local hierarchies that run your municipality.

Selectmen - Town Meeting
The first and most common form of governance in the state is called the Selectmen - Town Meeting form: a board of Selectmen and a First Selectman is elected and their duties are to manage the day-to-day running of the city. This is balanced by the Town Meeting where individuals, all residents, are allowed to express their views and vote on issues facing the community. The primary authority for the governance of the township rests in the town meetings and there may be several of these town meetings during the course of the year. This form is common in the smaller towns in the state, where there are generally fewer than 25,000 residents.

Mayor - Council

The second most common form of local government is the Mayor - Council format. In this form the decision making process is less diffused than that of the Selectmen form, and in this case the day-to-day decisions are made by the elected head, the Mayor, and the Council, also elected, which serves as the towns representatives instead of the town meeting. There are two possible variations of these forms. In the case where the Mayor has appointment authority and budget administration and veto powers this situation is called the "Strong" Mayor form. The "Weak" Mayor form, by contrast has much

less power over the day to day operations of the city. In this case it is the council that has control over appointment of department heads and budget assessment and preparation. In either event, the authority of running the city is abdicated by the townspeople and granted through the election process to the mayor and the council.

Council - Manager

The Council Manager form is the least common form of local governance in Connecticut. In this form, the day-to-day running of the city is handled by a City or Town Manager, who is hired frequently from outside the municipality to oversee the operations of the city. The council is the only directly elected body in the chain of governance and have the responsibility of electing the Manager who will then oversee the city.

In each of these forms of governance, the department heads and commissioners are appointed by voter-elected officials. While the process of overall management of the township is important to know and understand fully, it is also particularly important to be aware of the departments and commissions that will have to be addressed by a community at large in making any significant changes to the town's comprehensive plan. In each municipality there are likely to be numerous commissions and departments involved in any such comprehensive plan. Some of these include the Planning and Zoning Commission, which will likely have both Planning and Zoning Commissioners, the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Zoning Enforcement Officer; a Conservation Commission and Commissioner, some agency dealing with the preservation of Inland Wetlands and many others. Since these vary from town to town it is important to understand precisely which boards and commissions will be affected by the changes that are to be implemented. An excellent reference for outlining this hierarchy is the Connecticut State Register and Manual which is published by the Connecticut Office of the Secretary of State.

New Regulations and Programs

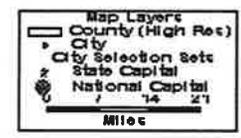
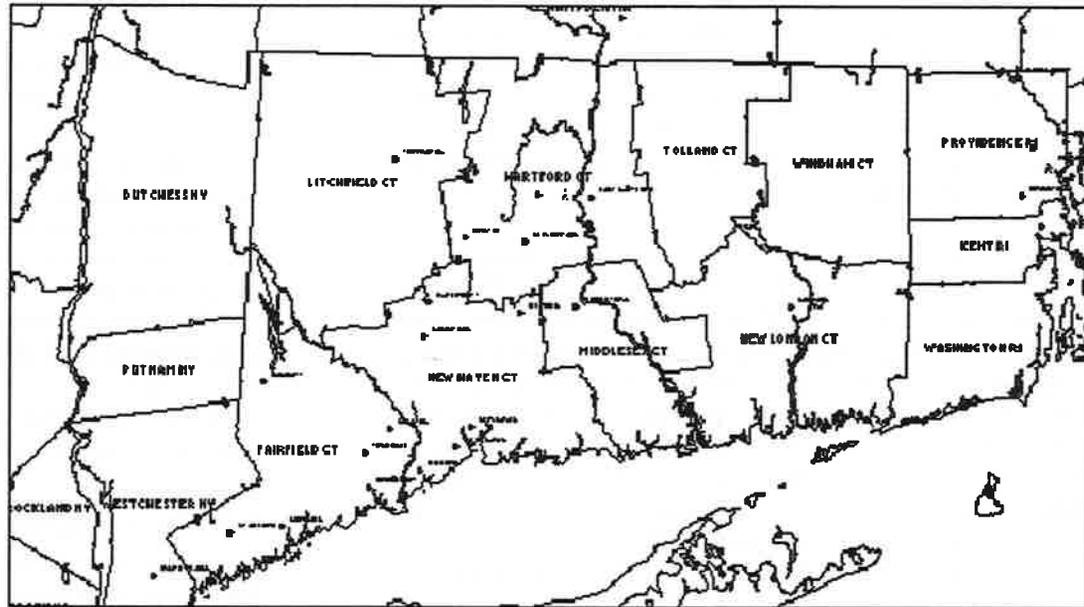
When it comes to developing regulations to carry out a plan, a planning board or plan committee, without the aid of a professional planner or

legal counsel, can fashion the framework of a zoning code based on objectives articulated in a comprehensive plan. The actual drafting of a zoning law, however, should always be left to a competent professional planner or lawyer familiar with the plan and with municipal land use law and its implicit effects. It is important to note, that most municipal lawyers excel in procedural and statutory matters, which are essential to land use regulation, but not the results of regulation. These can be best interpreted and guided by a planner or lawyer specializing in planning issues. Whomever assists the town or village, the evaluation must be sensitive to environmental, economic development, social and community design issues.

Even before drafting begins, a professional planner or land use lawyer can explain the range of regulatory approaches and choices available and can help a community select the most appropriate type of local law or ordinance to meet community objectives. In either case the planner or lawyer assisting in developing land use regulations must be equipped to fully interpret, understand and explain the effects of the laws and to ensure that the local officials responsible for administering them fully understand them in detail. The outcomes of zoning and subdivision laws can be worse than if no such laws had been adopted if they are not prepared thoughtfully and with a full understanding of their effects.

Carrying Out the Plan

When adopted by a town or village board, a comprehensive plan should guide many of the municipality's decisions. Is the decision consistent with the comprehensive plan? And does it set the municipality's agenda for action? A plan's action program should include non-regulatory and regulatory actions, as well as capital programs. It is essential that these actions and programs be put in priority order to ensure that the most important are addressed first. Using a comprehensive plan to enlist the support of state agencies in carrying out a municipality's action program is a powerful and valuable use of the plan. The plan shows outside agencies that the community has thought about its future and that the proposals it is implementing are part of an integrated plan to achieve community goals.



Conclusion

We don't have to make stark choices between development and open space. We also don't need to hobble our economy or make it too expensive to live and work here as the price of preserving the character of Connecticut towns. And we don't have to accept the destruction of the character of the region and its communities. Rather we need to create new patterns of development which meet public needs while respecting and perpetuating those attributes of our communities that have given them their sense of place.

Generating public understanding and political support for more coherent patterns of development must, therefore, be the focus of efforts in Connecticut where citizens are resolved to resist continued suburban and exurban sprawl destruction of the open spaces and special places that define their lives.

Conventional planning and development practices are not always in keeping with the wishes of the community. In fact, in the absence of a thoughtful plan, communities may lack the capacity to assess the long-term and cumulative effects of piecemeal development. The impacts may appear in the form of overburdened water resources, inadequate wastewater treatment facilities, pollution control mandates, traffic congestion and inadequate road systems, over-crowded schools and housing costs rising beyond the reach of local residents and employees of newly-located industries. Also, conventional planning, zoning and development practices have created suburban sprawls that lack a sense

of community, lack attractive public spaces, and force residents to rely on their automobiles to get around.

While review of development proposals by the town planning board and the community on a case-by-case basis may appear to be constructive, it creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for developers who fear being ambushed at every stage in the review process. Reviewing projects in this manner also places the town and community in a reactive position. As communities and regions become known as difficult places to develop, the result is either no growth or spotty growth. Furthermore, only projects which are designed for easy approval are proposed and built. Such projects usually meet lower common denominator standards aimed only at meeting the letter of applicable law, leaving little room for creativity or efforts to meet larger community needs.

Local comprehensive planning will not solve all of the problems of Connecticut's fractured and segmented land use and development practices, but good local planning can set the tone for what happens on the ground. Most importantly, a comprehensive plan is the town's opportunity to communicate its vision. The process of developing a plan should involve the participation of a wide range of citizens who are encouraged to put their differences on the table and develop consensus around these issues now, rather than in court later. Spelling out the ground rules and the vision for the community in the local plan would make the development process and preservation of the sense of community much less of a gamble, less contentious, more predictable and more successful.

Appendix

Model Ordinance Language

The following model zoning language was produced by the Connecticut Fund for the Environment to enhance conformity between a town's plan of conservation and development [hereafter Master Plan] and zoning as well as to enhance open space protection within the zoning ordinances.

Model Consistency Language

Model Zoning Regulations

Many land use practitioners believe that a lack of consistency between planning and zoning is a serious problem which leads to poor decision-making which has many harmful side effects to county, environmental, aesthetic and other assets. Although zoning authorities are required to consider the Master Plan of a municipality, they are not under any mandate to render decisions consistent with that plan. Towns need to compel zoning authorities to look to the Master Plan as a guide to thoughtful environmental planning and require that zoning be in harmony with the planning mandates of the town.

The following proposed amendment directs zoning authorities to examine the Master Plan as the primary source of guidance when

making zoning decisions. The Master Plan includes the conservation planning of the town and the zoning regulations. With this guidance, the Zoning Board would be directed to "do the right thing." The following model language should link planning and zoning.

In addition to other guidelines and factors for consideration by the Zoning Board, the decisions, rulings, opinions, and conclusions by the Zoning Board, on any matter over which they have authority, including any limited to modification, amendment, or change of the zoning map, regulations, or guidelines, established by this section as a power of the Zoning Board, shall be:

(a) consistent and in substantial conformity with the letter and spirit of the Master Plan as established by the Charter of this municipality as amended from time to time.

This is an appropriate amendment where planning and zoning powers are vested in one authority. However, under Connecticut state law, the town planning and zoning responsibilities can be vested in more than one authority.¹⁵ Consequently, the following subsection (b) directs the Zoning Board to follow the decisions of the Planning Board as a source of precedent and policy.

(b) consistent and in substantial conformity with the decisions, rulings, opinions, and conclusions of the Planning Board as operation and established under the Charter of this municipality as amended from time to time.

¹⁵ Planning and Zoning authorities may be joint or separate. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-4a, reads, "Any town, city or borough . . . may by ordinance or by vote of its legislative body designate its zoning commission or its planning commission as the planning and zoning commission for such municipality, and such commission shall thereupon have all the powers and duties of both a planning commission and a zoning commission and shall supersede any previous planning commission or zoning commission, as the case may be."

Also, the Planning Board regulations should be amended to additionally read:

The Planning Board shall have the power to review the decisions of the Zoning Board and offer guidance to assure the conformity of the actions of the Zoning Board with the Master Plan.

With this review, presumably fewer appeals on consistency grounds would be generated because the Zoning Board has a starting point for their analysis and they will have reviewed what the Planning Board has decided about the current question. Additionally, a veto in the hands of the Planning Board would be the most appropriate for the purposes of the environment and responsible planning and government. In instances where the power structure of the municipality is significantly different to prevent a structural change such as this, there is an alternative which would provide similar safeguards against the trampling of the master plan by the zoning authority. In this alternative chain of review could go from Zoning to Planning with the Board of Representatives as the final point of review. In this case, veto power could be amended to name the town legislature as the reviewing body, from appeal from the Planning board, and satisfy the potential competition between Planning and Zoning authorities.

Strategies for Open Space Identification And Protection

Wetlands Identification and Protection

The wetlands protection process begins at the municipal level. The powers of the inland wetlands commission, to survey and record, can be exercised by an independent authority or be vested in the planning or zoning commission. Identification, however, is not sufficient.

Towns can achieve more significant results by ranking the wetlands found in the survey by the priority by which they need protection. Important wetlands without such a ranking, might be subject to destruction. An

independent indicator of relative importance is a substantial factor to consider when making wetlands decisions.

The solution to this problem is to amend the wetlands regulations to include categories for addressing the relative importance of wetlands. This priority should be used as reasoning to protect high ranking parcels from development. However, this ranking should not be used by owners of low ranking wetlands as factor, in and of itself, to allow development. The following model language should be included in section 10.2, Considerations for Decision, Standards and Criteria for Decision, of Appendix A of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Model Regulations published by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection in the Wetland Commissioner's Handbook (1994).

The wetland agency shall consider the relative rank of the wetlands as identified by the inland wetlands commission of the town and consider the priority or relative importance of the wetlands.

Once the identification and ranking of the wetland is made, the town can then use this information in conservation, planning and zoning decisions. As wetlands are designated and ranked, changes made by the town wetland authority can be made to the map and Master Plan so those factors will be considered when zoning decisions are made

Incentives for Cluster Development

Cluster development is identified as a goal of zoning under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-23. As defined in § 8-18, cluster development is important as it provides additional considerations and points of balancing when asking for planning and zoning decisions

Conn Gen Stat. § 8-18, defines cluster development as "a building pattern concentrating units on a particular portion of a parcel so that at least one-third of the parcel remains as open space to be used exclusively for recreational, conservation and agricultural purposes except that nothing herein shall prevent any municipality from requiring more than

one-third open space in any particular cluster development." (emphasis added)

With this language, towns can compel open space set-asides for conservation. Taken together with the fees in lieu of open space strategy, towns are in a better position to purchase the most important parcels within their boundaries.

Fees in lieu of Open Space

Once open space is identified, through wetlands survey or pursuant to cluster development, the basic provisions covering fees in lieu of open space, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-25, allows the zoning commission to make requirements of those persons wanting to develop land.¹⁶ The

¹⁶ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-25, covering the subdivision of land, reads in part, "(a) . . . Such regulations shall also provide that the commission may require the provision of open spaces, parks and playgrounds when, and in places, deemed proper by the planning commission, which open spaces, parks and playgrounds shall be shown on the subdivision plan. Such regulations may, with the approval of the commission, authorize the applicant to pay a fee to the municipality or pay a fee to the municipality and transfer land to the municipality in lieu of any requirement to provide open spaces. Such payment or combination of payment and the fair market value of land transferred shall be equal to not more than ten per cent of the fair market value of the land to be subdivided prior to the approval of the subdivision. The fair market value shall be determined by an appraiser jointly selected by the commission and the applicant. A fraction of such payment the numerator of which is one and the denominator of which is the number of approved parcels in the subdivision shall be made at the time of the sale of each approved parcel of land in the subdivision and placed in a fund in accordance with the provisions of section 8-25b. The open space requirements of this section shall not apply if the transfer of all land in a subdivision of less than five parcels is to a parent, child, brother, sister, grandparent,

commission may require that the locations and designations of such requirements be placed on the master map of the town. To ensure compliance, these regulations allow payment of a fee to the town or transfer other land to the municipality in lieu of any requirement to provide open spaces. In the interests of fairness, the statute sets out a cost cap to developers, a provision for fair market valuation in case of dispute, and an intra-family transfer protection provision.

The fees collected from this provision allow the town, to select and provide for the purchase of critically important open space areas as part of their Master Plan. These fee ideas are and should be used in conjunction with the following ideas and strategies. Once the open space is identified and purchased, it can be protected for the future as a greenway or other conservation zone.

Large Acreage Zoning/Lot Size requirements

In order to protect substantial resources within its borders, a town can take advantage of the provisions of Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-23 and designate an area fitting the following description and use those criteria in zoning decisions.

The commission of any municipality more than twenty per cent of which is existing preservation area, conservation area, or rural land, as defined in the state plan of conservation and development adopted pursuant to chapter 297, shall consider it as part of its plan of conservation and development the use of cluster development to the extent consistent with soil types, terrain, and infrastructure capacity within the municipality.

Also, lot size requirements, adopted as part of the zoning code and town's plan of development, can provide a tool to manage the impact of development across the entire municipality, as long as there is a mandatory or voluntary cluster development provision. In this manner,

grandchild, aunt, uncle or first cousin for no consideration." (Emphasis added.)

Ridge Line Identification and Protection

As specialized subset zoning, ridge line protection is concerned with a particular, focused geographical type for conservation. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-23(a) authorities, "any municipality in which a traprock ridge . . . is located may make recommendations for conservation and preservation of traprock ridgelines." Once a town has identified a traprock ridge on its map, it can take significant steps to protect the ridgeline setback area.

Currently, P.A. No. 95-239 § 1 defines "Traprock Ridge" by a list of place names that, in the judgment of legislature, qualify as a particular place worthy of protection. Sections 2 and 3 set out a precise definition of what area is to be considered a traprock ridgeline and what setback areas exist surrounding a given ridgeline.

Towns are free to adopt and utilize the definition of traprock ridgeline their own regulations. Once identified, the process of protection is much harder to reverse. Identification of a parcel as a ridgeline forces the planning and zoning system to recognize sensitive and important environmental features of the landscape.

Greenways: Identification, Protection and Development

As a matter of protecting open spaces, municipalities can protect significant areas by recognizing greenways in their master plan. Greenways are clearly a system for the promotion of conservation and cooperation between neighboring municipalities. In 1995, the Connecticut legislature enacted the Greenway Capital Grant Program and established a system of assistance to municipalities for funding and information to develop greenways in town, whether or not transportation related. The provisions provide for grant program administered by the department of environmental protection to give matching funds, including those types of greenways supported by the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.¹⁷

¹⁷. Unfortunately, ISTEPA funding is not moving quickly and may not be forthcoming in the near future. However, funds collected under

For the purposes of this program, greenways means a corridor of open space that:

- (1) may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation, (2) may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors, (3) may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man made corridor, including an unused right-of-way, traditional trail routes or historic barge canals or (4) may be a green-space along a highway or around a village.¹⁸

The program also sets up different levels of green way assistance. Both large small grants are contemplated by the legislation. The program is based on matching funds. Depending on the monetary means available to a town or regional planning authority, either large scale or small scale projects can be completed. The capital grant program provides:

- (1) For transportation greenways projects that are part of interstate greenways, not more than twenty per cent of the project cost and (2) for transportation greenways projects that are local spurs from interstate greenways or that are inter-town greenways projects, not more than ten per cent of the project cost and (3) for greenways that are not transportation greenways, not more than half of the capital costs of the project.¹⁹

The small grant program does not consider land acquisition as part of its mandate. These small grants can not be for more than five thousand dollars and the yearly total can not exceed fifty thousand dollars. The small grant program is primarily concerned with

fees in lieu of open space might be directed toward a project such as greenway development.

¹⁸. P.A. No. 95-335, § 1, amending Conn. Gen. Stat. § 32-6a.

¹⁹. P.A. No. 95-335, § 2 (a).

organization, design, and implementation of green way projects.²⁰ For consistency and uniformity in planning, a council is created by the legislation and charged with organizing the distribution and implementation of the greenways.²¹

²⁰ P.A. No. 95-335, § 2 (b).

²¹The green way council has a series of duties, which, according to P.A. No. 95-335, § 3 (b), read in part, "(1) to advise and assist in the coordination of state agencies, municipalities, regional planning organizations and private citizens in voluntarily planning and implementing a system of greenways; (2) to operate a greenways help center to advise state agencies, municipalities, regional planning organizations and private citizens in the technical aspects of planning, designing and implementing greenways, including advice on securing state, federal and nongovernmental grants; (3) to establish criteria for designation of greenways; (4) to **maintain an inventory of greenways in the state . . .** (5) to advise the commissioner of economic development on the distribution of grants for greenways transportation projects . . . and 6) to advise the commissioner of environmental protection on the distribution of grants." (Emphasis added.)

Other Sources:

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Planning for Development Rights; A Handbook for New Jersey Municipalities, Burlington County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

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