Town of Essex
Planning Commission

Plan of Conservation and Development

2015-2025

Adopted by the Essex Planning Commission
November 12, 2015

-- ACKNOWLEDGMENT --

A Very Special Thanks is extended to the Essex Planning Commission. This credit is to honor their hard work and dedication to the creation of this important document which will thoughtfully guide future growth and conservation efforts for the Town of Essex.

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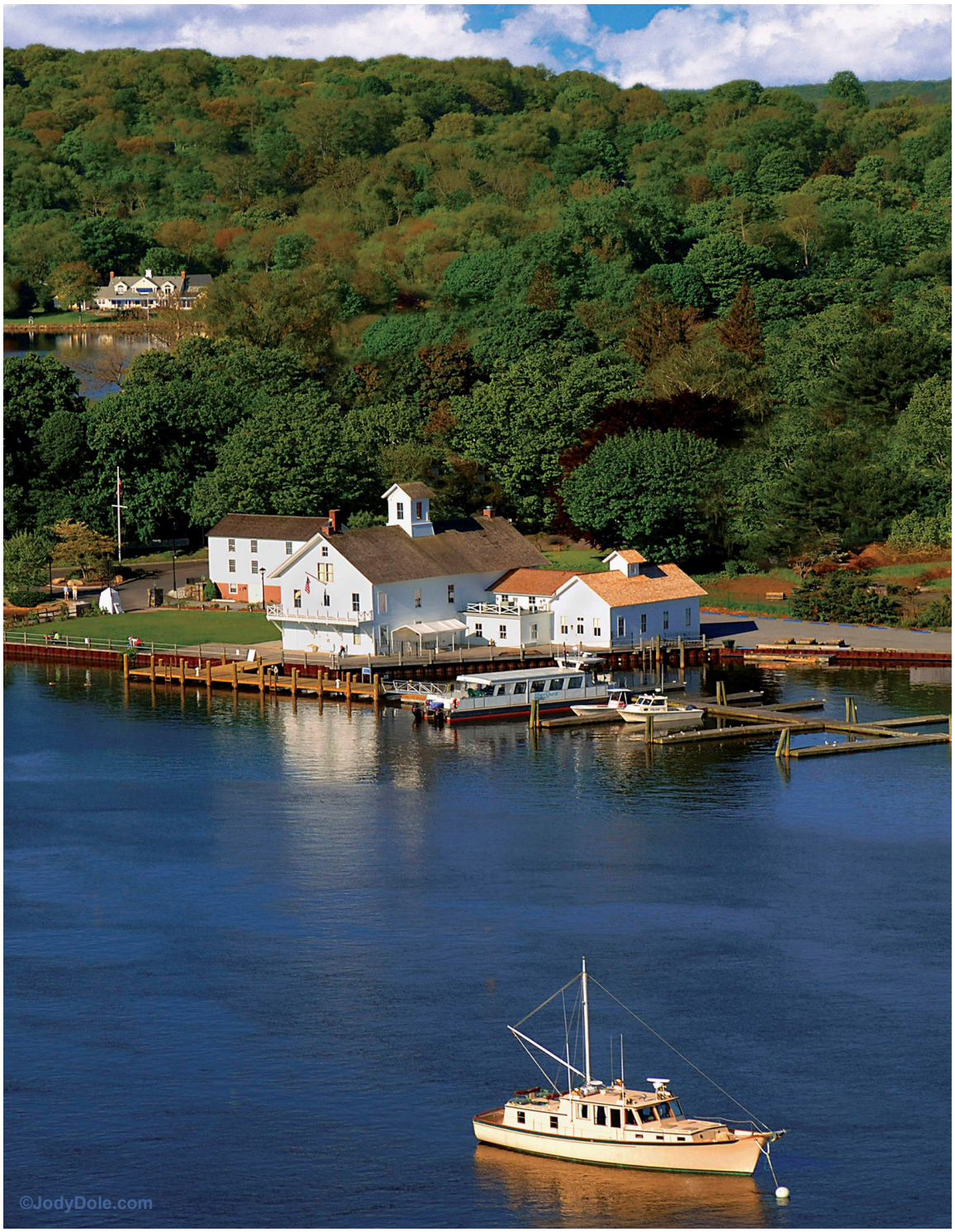
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What is a *Plan of Conservation & Development*?

This Plan of Conservation and Development (PoCD or Plan) is a tool for guiding and directing the changes that are likely to occur over the next decade in Essex. Its purpose is to articulate a common vision for the future shape and character of Essex and recommend policies that will help achieve that vision. The broad goals and specific recommended actions of this Plan reflect the overall consensus of the preferred path for Essex and its residents over the next decade. This Plan was prepared by the Essex Planning Commission with considerable input from Essex residents, Town staff, elected officials, other Boards and Commissions, community groups, and business owners. At its core, the PoCD is a statement of recommendations addressing the physical, geographical conservation and development priorities for Essex. More than this, however, the Plan is also intended to address the social, economic, and community future of Essex, since these elements are deeply inter-woven with conservation and development priorities.

This Plan of Conservation and Development is an advisory document to both the Planning and Zoning Commissions, as well as to municipal capital expenditures, and Essex residents in general. It is intended to guide local government, residents, and business owners, and to provide a framework for decision-making with regard to conservation and development activities in Essex. While the statutory responsibility to adopt the Plan rests with the Planning Commission, successful implementation will only occur with the cooperative efforts of the residents and officials of the Town of Essex.

WHAT IS A POCD?

Connecticut General Statutes Requirement for a Plan of Conservation & Development

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires each municipality to update their Plan of Conservation and Development every 10 years. Section 8-23 gives the municipality a broad array of topics to include, such as physical and economic development, desirable land uses, affordable housing, protection of the environment, conservation of historical resources and farmland, energy-efficient patterns of development and renewable forms of energy, and any other needs of the municipality. The State adopted its own 5-year Plan in 2013 in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 16a-29. Within that Plan are six Growth Management Principles that reflect the objectives the State is promoting and those opportunities which Essex also wants to create. They are:

- Redevelop and Revitalize Centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure
- Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs
- Concentrate Development Around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options
- Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands
- Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets Critical to Public Health and Safety
- Promote Integrated Planning across all Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional, and Local Basis

These principles are in line with what Essex intends to promote over the next 10 years, and form a close relationship with the goals adopted by the Essex Planning Commission in the preparation of this Plan. Both the State and Town Plans place strong focus on redevelopment of existing community centers, providing broader housing options, investing infrastructure funds in areas of concentrated or planned development, promoting and protecting natural and cultural resources, and a commitment to a comprehensive, coordinated planning process.

Town of Essex Planning Commission

Goals for Plan of Conservation & Development 2015-2025

1) ***Promote Mixed Use, Compact, Architecturally-Appropriate Development and Redevelopment in Villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton and in key hubs of Bokum Corner and the Route 9 Gateway.***

2) ***Enhance multi-modal transportation connections and expand appropriate public infrastructure within and between villages and hubs, and improve Essex's connection to surrounding communities.***

3) ***Foster community and economic growth consistent with Essex's history and promote a more diverse and vibrant small town.***

4) ***Expand the variety of housing options available throughout Essex, including more affordable housing opportunities in both mixed use developments and within traditional subdivision development.***

5) ***Encourage permanent preservation and active stewardship of key natural resources.***

Vision Statement

2015 Plan of Conservation & Development

The Essex Planning Commission, in developing this update to the 2005 Plan of Conservation & Development (PoCD), is guided by an interest in protecting and enhancing the cultural, historic, recreational and natural resources of Essex and by the desire to promote activities and policies that will foster a more vibrant, diverse, welcoming, sustainable, and livable community.

We envision an Essex that provides economic, educational, housing, cultural, recreational, and civic opportunities that are among the best in the State. We envision growth and development that encourages participation and maintains the integrity of our natural resources.

Development in Essex will continue to focus on three historic villages and two key intersection areas, while thoughtfully integrating development into surrounding areas. Encouraging creative, thoughtful development and redevelopment in these areas and strengthening linkages between them are major keys to the realization of this vision.

Town Statistics and Trends

From the size of police force and fire departments to the size of storage space within the Town vault in the Town Clerk's office, and to the size of schools, all aspects of Town government and operations are affected by Essex's population characteristics and size.

The most recent U.S. Census, in 2010, provided statistics on births, deaths, migration patterns, housing characteristics, population characteristics, to name a few. The 2010 Census and the 2007-2011 American Community Survey provide a basis for comparative growth which may affect land use decisions and Town issues for the next 10 years. The rate of population growth has slowed. Not only did population growth fail to meet the projection from the 2000 Census (7,350) it has actually decreased since 2010.

In addition to flat population growth, Essex is aging more rapidly than the rest of the State. The median age in Essex was 52.3 years in 2013 whereas the median age for the State of Connecticut was about 40 years during that same period. Of the 2,959 households in Essex, 26 percent had a resident under the age of 18 in 2011, whereas that percentage was 28 percent in 2000. Similarly, 35 percent of households had a resident over the age of 65 in 2011 up from 33 percent in 2000. The average household size was 2.23 people and about 78 percent of residents live in families with an average family size of 2.75 people. Twenty-seven percent of householders live alone.

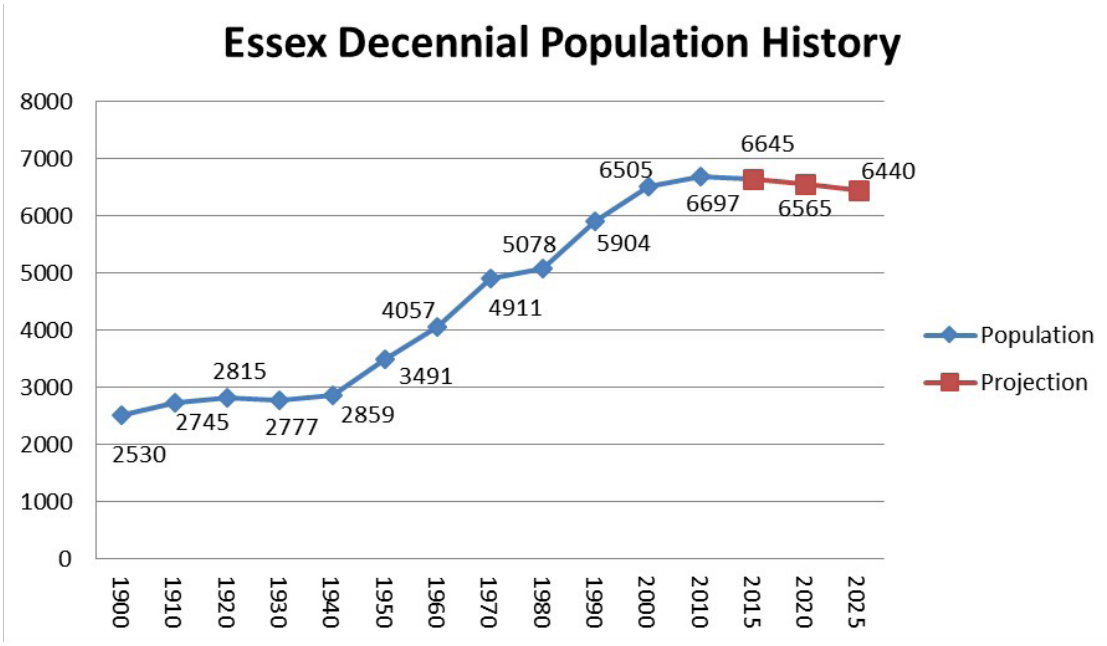


Figure 1. Historic population growth in Essex 1900-2010, and project population through 2025. Source: Connecticut State Data Center

Age distribution is an important statistical comparison because it projects the impact on the types of services that a community will need to provide over the next ten years. Fluctuations in certain age sectors may affect the allocation of Town resources toward certain services. Since the last Plan of Conservation & Development, the number of school aged children decreased slightly, except for an increase in the 10-14 year range. The 25-34 year range continued to significantly decrease while all older age groups have increased substantially, excepting the 75-84 year old range. This demonstrates that the overall Essex's median age (Figure 3) continues to increase and the services the Town will need to shift more to the requirements of an older population and less toward school services. Population projections by the Connecticut State Data Center shows a trend toward an increasing population over 65 and overall reduction in young family demographics.

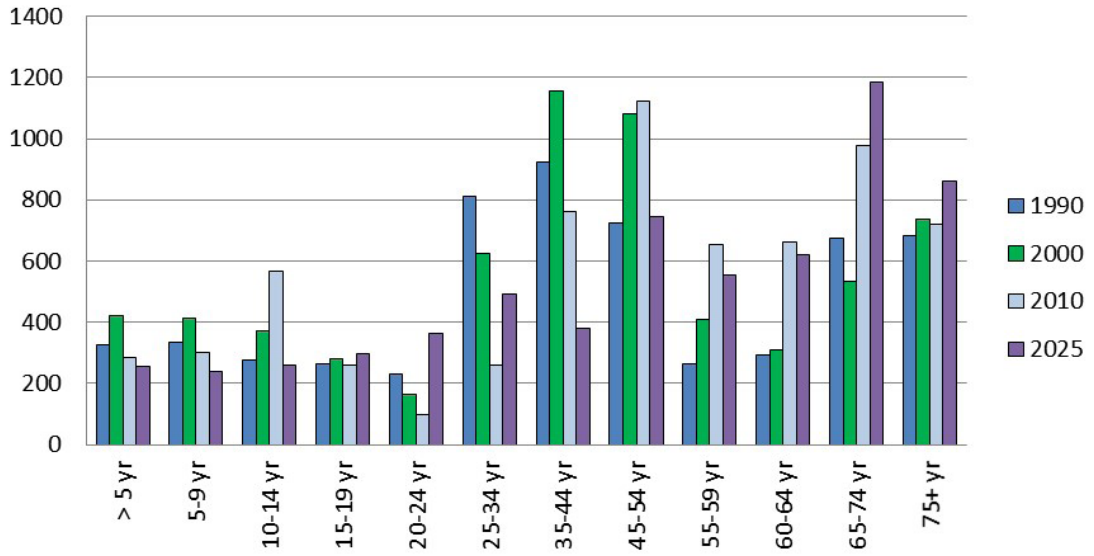


Figure 2.

Similar to population, land use has remained stable over the last 25 years. According to University of Connecticut land-use change analysis, the developed land within the Falls River watershed, which covers the great majority of land in Essex, has increased only 3.7 percent between 1985 and 2010. Likewise, the impervious cover has increased less than one percent over that time. This shows that development has occurred in existing developed and impervious areas as opposed to green and open spaces. It also demonstrates that development in the Falls River watershed has been minimal.

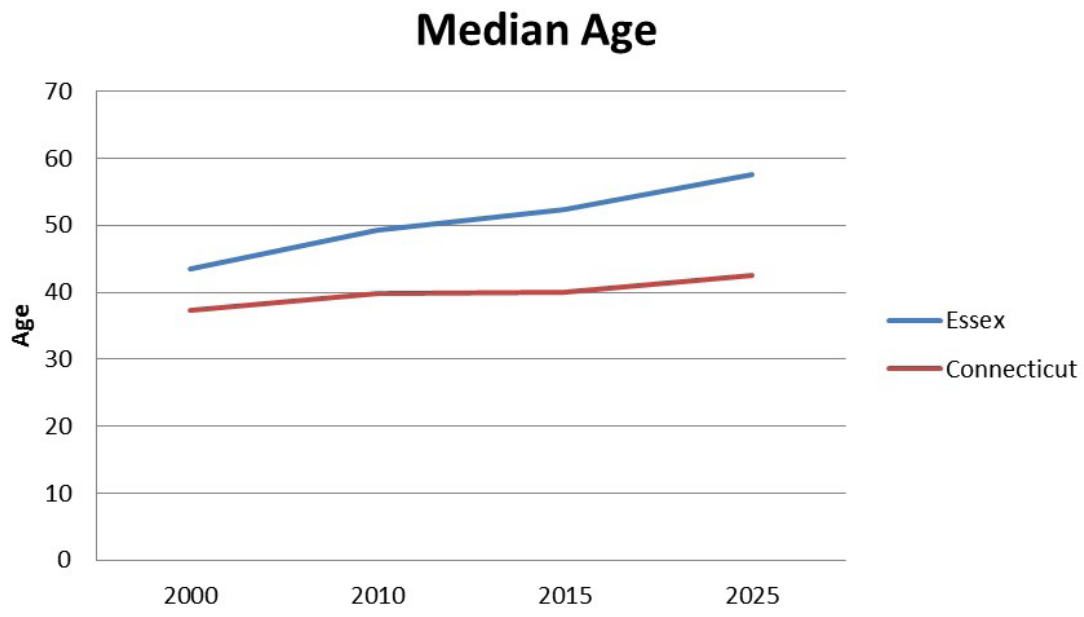


Figure 3.

Essex's housing characteristics are similar to many other communities in lower Middlesex County. It continues to be dominated by owner-occupied, single-family residences, with much smaller percentages of both multifamily and renter-occupied units. According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey, Essex had a total of 3,202 housing units, with 2,259 (71%) of them occupied by owner, and 669 (21%) renter occupied. The remaining 8% were vacant. Two-thirds of the housing stock is single-family units (2,302) with one third (626) were multifamily. A substantial portion of the multifamily units are represented by Essex Meadows and other "active adult" or age-restricted communities. Since the housing market crash of 2008-2009, Essex has seen very little construction of new housing units of any type, with fewer than 40 units developed over the past six years. Looking forward, it is anticipated that Essex will see a demand for more senior housing opportunities as well as multifamily units for both mixed age and mixed income.

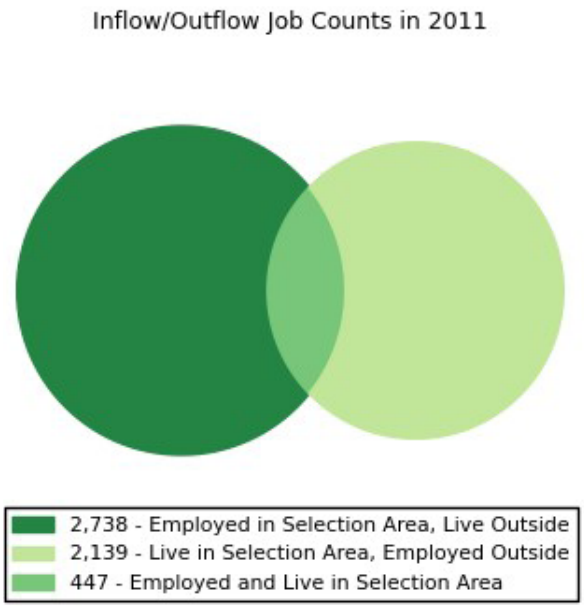


Figure 4.

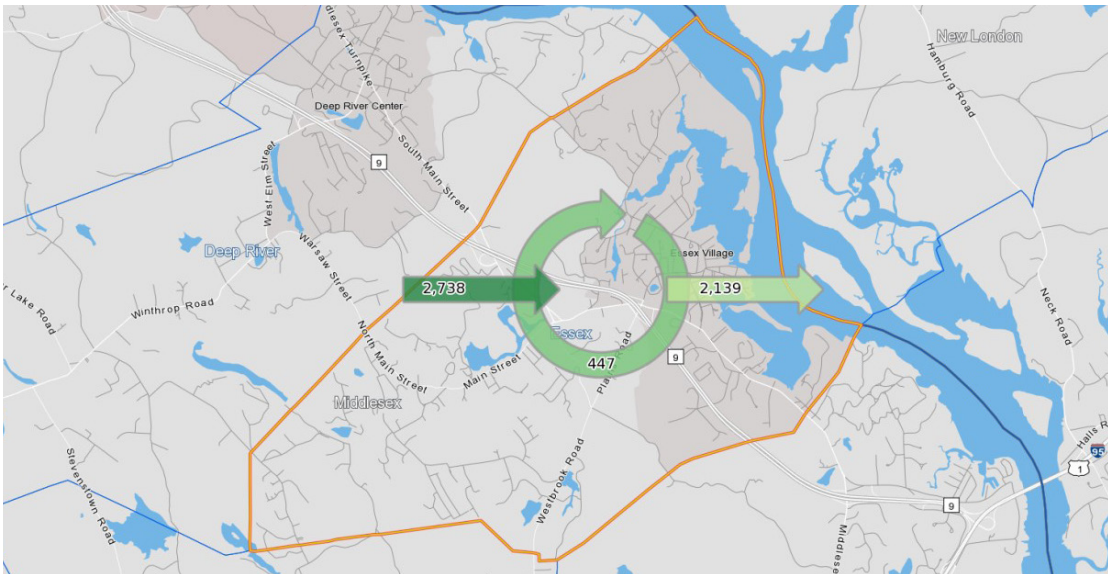
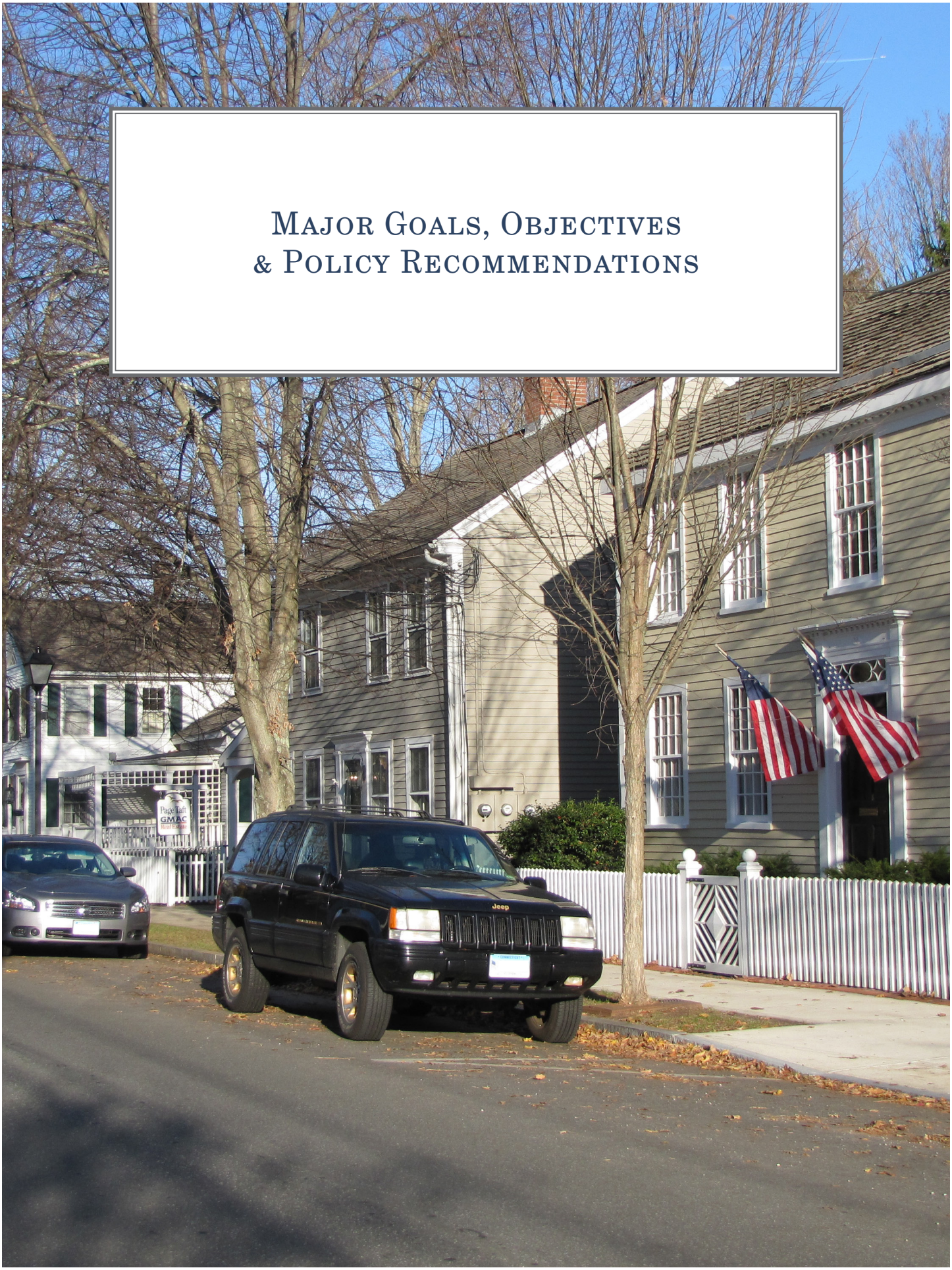


Figure 5.

Employment destinations for Essex's residents continue to be outside of Essex, with the majority of employees in Essex living elsewhere. In 2005, 2,896 employees commuted while 2,041 residents worked outside of Essex, and 448 lived and worked in Essex.

ESSEX
TOWN
HALL
29
WEST AVENUE

Major Goals, Objectives & Policy Recommendations



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Focused Development

1. *Promote Mixed Use, Compact, Architecturally-Appropriate Development and Redevelopment in Villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton and in key hubs of Bokum Corner and the Route 9 Gateway.*

Statement of Purpose: Essex is a small town, both by geography and by character. Though only twelve square miles in size, the Town of Essex has historically seen distinct villages develop in three main areas – the Villages of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton. Each Village has had its own character, its own Main Street, its own Post Office, and civic identity. In addition to the Villages, the Bokum Corner area, along Plains, Westbrook, and Bokum Roads, has developed into a key commercial center. Similarly, the development of Route 9 as a limited-access highway and the presence of the Essex Steam Train and historic Dickinson Factory have created a unique identity and potential for the Gateway area. The growth and development of these five "nodes" are central to the future vitality and identity of Essex, as is their connectivity.

Beyond the village and commercial cores, the majority of Essex is a suburban-scale residential mix, with open spaces, Land Trust and Town property throughout. The character of the individual residential neighborhoods varies from village to village, but there is a consistent, lower-density approach with narrow, quiet roadways.

FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT

The goal of the PoCD is to encourage a revitalization of the Village centers and nodes through increased activity, higher densities of both residential and commercial occupancy, mixing of uses, more housing opportunity, and multi-modal connectivity. The impact of this activity should be guided by regulatory standards and a design review process to ensure that it occurs in a way that promotes and enhances the historic small-town and village character to Essex.

a. Development Density: Commercial, industrial, and higher-density residential development is clustered in the Village centers of Centerbrook, Essex, and Ivoryton and in the hubs of the Route 9 Gateway and Bokum Corner. The majority of commercial and transportation activity takes place within, and between these centers. Most of the remainder of Essex is in lower-density residential or undeveloped/preserved land. The focus of future development should be on the established and historic centers; development that would include redevelopment of underutilized property within the core of these areas and intensification of activity. In order to enable this goal, several implementation steps will need to be taken, including:

   i. Develop/Codify mapping of Village and Hub areas

   ii. Implement zoning changes to enable more Mixed Uses in Villages and Key Hubs

   iii. Implement zoning changes in the Villages and Hub areas to allow for higher density residential development and commercial floor-area ratios

   iv. Mitigate environmental impacts, including consideration of the expansion and centralization of wastewater disposal capacity

   v. Improve sidewalk and bicycle facilities and connections.

   vi. Revise multifamily residential zoning area to promote lower-density residential development in north-central Essex

b. Transportation Study Recommendations: The Planning Commission adopted the recommendations of the town-wide Transportation Study, completed in 2011. The core of the plan involves improvements and enhancements in the Village Centers as well as multi-modal linkages between the Villages and Hubs. It also recommended implementation of the Safe Routes to School Plan, improvements to problematic intersections and corridors, and a Traffic Calming program. In order to carry forward the implementation of the Transportation Study, several steps should be considered, including:

   i. Expand Traffic Authority membership and/or actively engage the existing Traffic Authority with recommendations of Transportation Study.

   ii. Actively engage Town with RiverCOG and State of Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) on funding priorities and opportunities.

Crosswalk and streetscape in Essex Village.

iii. Review and revise public improvement standards such as road width, sidewalk requirement and maintenance, and cul-de-sac extensions.

iv. Examine Zoning and Subdivision Regulations relative to their ability to encourage pedestrian-oriented and compact development.

v. Encourage strong streetscape and active uses in corridors connecting development hubs (West Avenue, Main Street between Centerbrook and Ivoryton, Westbrook Road, Plains Road) through zoning and infrastructure improvements.

c. Design Review: Protection of the architectural heritage and character of Essex continues to be a priority for the Planning Commission. The 2005 Plan of Conservation and Development contained numerous recommendations for the implementation of design standards, which were partially affirmed by the work of the Architectural Design Review Subcommittee (ADRS) in 2011-2012. While the 2005 Plan recommended creation of design standards for numerous commercial, mixed-use, and residential areas and the creation of Historic District areas in the three Villages, the ADRS took a more limited approach. Recognizing the need for a more deliberative and gradual process

that would be more readily acceptable to the public, the ADRS recommended beginning with National Register District nominations and commercial design standards. As of early 2014, the National Register nomination for the Village of Ivoryton has been sought. The other recommendations of the ADRS were codified and adopted as a March 2014 supplement to the 2005 PoCD. To continue further down the path toward protecting the architectural heritage and character of Essex, the following steps are proposed:

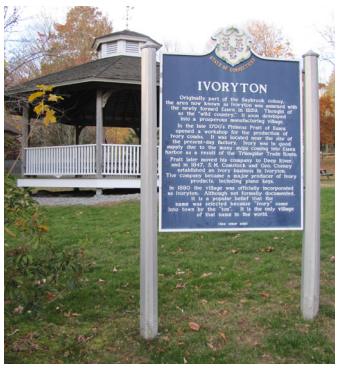
i. Following the anticipated designation of Ivoryton Village to the National Register of Historic Places, pursue (via grant funding) similar nominations for Essex Village and Centerbrook Village.

ii. Develop and implement, in cooperation with the Zoning Commission, design standards and a formal design review process for commercial buildings.

iii. Examine the Demolition Delay Ordinance for effectiveness in preventing loss of valuable historic facilities and work with the Board of Selectmen and Essex Historical Society on improvements or alternatives.

iv. Continue active conversation between Planning, Zoning, Economic Development Commissions, Village groups, and the Essex Historical Society on potential regulations or incentives to promote preservation of architectural character.

d. Ivoryton Village Recommendations: As one of the three historic villages of Essex, Ivoryton has a rich industrial and cultural heritage, and holds unique community and architectural character. Since the closing of the Pratt, Read & Co. piano factory several decades ago, Ivoryton has undergone a slow decline in economic vitality. Seeking to recapture and enhance the vibrant village center that is home to the historic Ivoryton Playhouse, the Planning Commission established an ad-hoc subcommittee in 2008 to study the area and make recommendations. A full report was developed and submitted to the Planning Commission and adopted as a part of the Plan of Conservation & Development in July, 2009. Key focus areas of this report included, in order of priority:



- **Economic Revitalization** – The study found that the variety of uses in Ivoryton Center was both healthy and desirable, including residential, retail, office/commercial, arts, food/beverage, and public uses including park, post office and library facilities. A continued strengthening of this mix, with the addition of more retail/residential combinations and the redevelopment of several parcels

would greatly benefit the area. Implementing Zoning Regulations and other municipal policies to help encourage and enable this appropriate development and redevelopment should be a top priority.

- **Sewage Disposal** – The lack of sewer lines or the availability of a proximate area for a large-scale community wastewater disposal facility is the most significant structural barrier to redevelopment of Ivoryton. Several properties in Ivoryton either do not meet current health codes for wastewater disposal or have little opportunity to expand or intensify use. A full redevelopment of Ivoryton Center, including the Pratt, Read & Co. Piano Factory, could mean wastewater flows 3-5 times current levels, which is not possible with current system availability. A Town-led process to link properties together in a standard or alternative community wastewater system is needed to help move Ivoryton forward.

- **Parking Availability** – As a traditional village center that developed both before the advent of the automobile and the advent of zoning regulation, it is not surprising that most commercial, retail, and multifamily properties in Ivoryton do not have enough parking to meet Zoning requirements. More troubling, most of these properties do not have enough parking to meet current peak demand, let alone the potential parking demand for a fully-redeveloped Ivoryton. Better managed on-street parking, the relaxing of zoning requirements and allowance of shared parking areas may help in the short term. In addition, the creation or location of several smaller parking areas could be cobbled together to assist current and growing demand. The establishment of a permanent public parking area would assist in the long-term with the redevelopment of Ivoryton Center.

In an effort to address these key issues and further revitalize the Village of Ivoryton, the following steps are recommended:

i. Adopt Ivoryton Center Zone regulations to encourage a mixed-use center, relax setbacks and parking requirements, and encourage compatible development and re-development.

ii. Undertake, through grants and Town funds, a landscape improvement and street-tree planting program to develop a "complete" streetscape along Main Street.

iii. Encourage redevelopment of the vacant property adjacent to the existing service station, including the creation of an office/retail building fronting Main Street and

a public parking facility to the rear. This exploration would include any necessary environmental testing and analysis of development feasibility.

iv. Explore and pursue community wastewater disposal that will allow properties in Ivoryton Center to tie in and fully develop properties.

v. Develop a permanently-available municipal parking area either to the rear of the lot adjacent the service station, on a portion of the Moeller Instrument Company property, or as alternative options that arise, to allow for "park once and walk" access to the Ivoryton Playhouse and most other retail/office/food facilities in the Village center.

vi. Investigate other shared parking options with Ivoryton Village Restaurant, Ivoryton Fire Company, Ivoryton Inn, Burdick property, and Pratt, Read & Co. piano factory property.

vii. Work with Ivoryton Village Alliance and other partners to promote Ivoryton Center as retail and tourist destination.

viii. Work with Ivoryton Fire Company to identify locations for potential new Fire Station building to accommodate larger apparatus.

ix. Consider strategic property acquisition in Ivoryton Center as land may become available to meet parking, municipal facility, or redevelopment needs.

x. Work with State of Connecticut and ownership of Pratt, Read, & Co. property to explore cleanup and creative redevelopment options.

e. Essex Village Recommendations: Essex Village is the home of a great deal of culture, history, civic pride and identity as a place that forms the core of what Yankee Magazine described in the late 1990s as "The Best Small Town in America." The combination of nautical history and the classic New England mix of colonial homes and shops along a tightly clustered Main Street have long been the pride of the Town and a significant tourist destination. Anchored at the tip of Main Street by the Connecticut River Museum and supported by marinas and historic fixtures like the Griswold Inn (in operation since 1776), Essex Village continues to be a critical focal point for the community. Over the last decade, however, a combination of factors threatens Essex Village with stagnation, or worse, regression as a vibrant place.

Capitalizing on the Village's charm, storefronts along the pedestrian-friendly Main Street have gradually become populated by real estate offices, eroding the historic mix of retail shops, which is further affected by broader retail trends toward larger stores. The challenge of wastewater management in a tightly-developed

area, and historically restrictive zoning regulations governing restaurants have made it difficult for Essex Village to compete with similar "restaurant row" areas seen in Chester Village or even Middletown as a destination for residents, visitors, and tourists alike. The slow decline of the marinas, also affected by zoning and market restrictions, have further challenged the vitality of the Village.

Even given those challenges, the legacy and the "bones" of an enduring classic New England Village remain. Essex Village is compact, charming, rich in culture, history, sense of place, and civic commitment. It holds great potential to restore its place as a true jewel of Connecticut. To pursue this revitalization, several recommendations are advanced, including:

i. Examine and revise Zoning Regulations to encourage a higher density, mixed-use, economically diverse Village that retains its historic character.

ii. Work with Essex Board of Trade and Economic Development Commission to identify and target business sectors that would contribute to the character and economy of Essex Village.

iii. Actively seek solutions to wastewater management limitations, including examination of community septic systems and sewer-based approaches.

iv. Support efforts to expand activities at Connecticut River Museum and marinas;

v. Pursue historic recognition for Essex Village, including nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and lower Main Street's designation as a Historic Battleground Site.

vi. Conduct a parking availability analysis and future parking build-out for Essex Village and consider the creation of a Parking Authority to manage parking and circulation.

vii. Continue to support and expand the use of Essex Village as a center for events such as parades, celebrations, and regional tourism festivals.

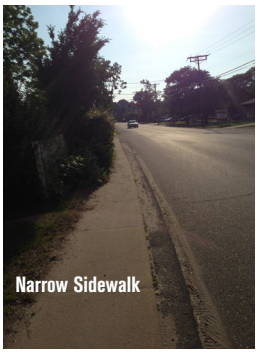
f. Centerbrook Village Recommendations: Centerbrook is defined as the area along Main Street from the Railroad Station and Witch Hazel Plant on the east to the Elementary School on the west. It includes the Village Green between the Deep River Road split.

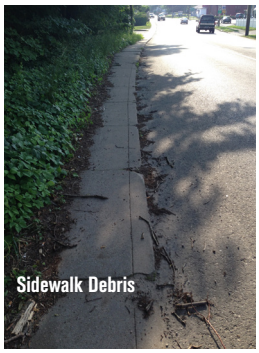
Main Street, Centerbrook Village

In the Essex *Town Transportation Study,* the Centerbrook section focused solely on the Village Green as the defining area of Centerbrook. However, Centerbrook is the most commercial area in Town, and is characterized by a variety of businesses along this Main Street corridor. Unlike Ivoryton or Essex Village, Centerbrook developed as a vehicle-dependent business area; along Main Street there are three gas stations. As such, Centerbrook has lacked a clear plan or development scheme and an identity and cohesive character. In 2014, with a Preservation of Place grant from the Connecticut Main Street Center, a stakeholder group was formed that included business owners, employees, and residents of Centerbrook. The group was tasked with establishing an identity for Centerbrook and to come up with ideas that would make Centerbrook a destination and safer area for patrons, pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. Key focus areas of the Centerbrook stakeholders meetings included:

- **Safety Issues** – The area is singularly defined by vehicles. Sidewalks are cracked and full of debris in many locations. There is a significant lack of sidewalks on the north side of Main Street and an overall lack of crosswalks. The light at the

intersection of Main Street, Deep River Road, and Westbrook Road only has a pedestrian light for the crosswalk at Westbrook Road, and it is very slow to turn to the "walk" sign. Lack of a consistent breakdown lane endangers bicyclists and pedestrians alike. Essex Court is situated on the eastern side of Centerbrook. Elderly residents have a difficult time walking from their homes to the Post Office or Visiting Nurses at the Village Green or other areas along Main Street because of the lack of safe, wide sidewalks and crosswalks. Children from the Elementary School could be endangered trying to cross Deep River Road to access Scoops for an after school treat. Even the parking lot at Spencer's Corner is considered hazardous. Drivers seeking to avoid the traffic at the intersection cut through the parking lot to access Main Street or Westbrook Road.





Centerbrook Safety Issues

- **Economic Development** – As the busiest commercial area in Town and its highly-traveled main corridor, Centerbrook has the benefit of an established business community. With parking, safety, and transportation improvements in the area, businesses, current and future, could benefit from patrons who come for shopping and stay for restaurants and ice cream. Businesses looking to site in Essex will prefer to be in an area with other successful businesses. The continuing efforts of the Centerbrook stakeholders group can establish a dialogue with Economic Development, Planning, Zoning, The Essex Board of Trade, Ivoryton Village Alliance, and the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce to provide incentives and information to businesses. Improvements to the parking lot and septic system at Spencer's Corners could provide potential mixed-use and residential space, although it currently suffers from vacancy, in addition to existing Class A office space at the former Witch Hazel plant.

In an effort to address these key issues and meet the ultimate goal of combining pedestrian safety, transit connections, and economic opportunity in a heavily trafficked area, the following steps are recommended:

i. Continue the Centerbrook stakeholders group to serve as a contact between businesses, residents, and future businesses.

ii. Identify landmarks or iconic buildings that stand out and contribute to the identity and character of the area to establish a sense of place. Create pedestrian connections between these landmarks to encourage people to stay in Centerbrook after visiting the train or other businesses.

iii. Crreate bicycle lanes to provide a safe space for cyclists and serve as a buffer between the sidewalks and Main Street. In addition, bicycle lanes would narrow Main Street and help slow traffic.

iv. Reconstruct the sidewalks:

   a. Along the south side of Main Street.

   b. Construct continuous sidewalks along the north side with crosswalks in areas of businesses particularly near Gabrielle's and Cumberland Farms to Visiting Nurses and across Deep River Road.

   c. Install as sidewalk on the north side of Main Street to connect with the crosswalk serving Essex Court.

d. Install different pavement texture and color on pedestrian walkways than that of road and parking lots in order to differentiate the pedestrian environment and slow vehicular traffic.

v. Evaluate and reduce curb-cuts where possible to shift the balance of power from the car to the pedestrian.

vi. Implement traffic calming measures, including consideration of narrowing of the roadway and adding on-street parking.

vii. Work with businesses, such as Cumberland Farms, to reconstruct or redesign their driveways to make a safer pedestrian walking experience.

viii. Design and implement better signage throughout Centerbrook:

a. Remove vegetation from crosswalk signs.

b. Place signage near railroad so visitors are aware of dining and retail opportunities in Centerbrook

ix. Rezone Spencer's Corners for mixed-use development and allow a residential component.

x. Identify grant opportunities:

a. Façade improvements

b. Sidewalk reconstruction

xi. Add landscaping, plantings, and a tree canopy to the streetscape.

xii. Implement consistent and cohesive street hardware throughout Centerbrook, including items like street lamps and banners.

g. Gateway Area: The Gateway to Essex, which centers on the Exit 3 interchange of Route 9, is in many ways the "first impression" visitors have of the Town. This area includes the Essex Steam Train, the Fire Station, the historic Dickinson Witch Hazel facility, and several commercial and office buildings. The Route 9 overpass prominently segments the Gateway, and the hub of Routes 153, 154, and West Avenue provide connections between the Villages of Essex. The significance of this location warrants special attention to create a strongly positive image of Essex, as well as highlighting the importance of the area from a historic, tourism, and connectivity perspective. Specific recommendations include:

i. Work with the State of Connecticut and local stakeholders to improve the landscaping in the interchange area, including sidewalks, medians, and within rights-of-way.

ii. Work with the State of Connecticut to improve the aesthetics of the Route 9 overpass, including improvement and maintenance of the overpass structure.

iii. Develop a signage and wayfinding plan for Route 9 Gateway area that establishes a strong context and sense of place and assists connection to the Villages.

iv. Review and revise Heritage Gateway District Zoning Regulations to encompass the entire Route 9 Gateway area and encourage redevelopment, including allowance for higher-density residential development and mixed uses.

v. Work with State of Connecticut and property owners to create a separated driveway and access to the Witch Hazel facility that does not require crossing through the Steam Train property.

vi. Work with State of Connecticut and property owners to identify and address environmental concerns that have negatively impacted the aesthetics or the redevelopment potential of the area.

vii. Work with RiverCOG and State of Connecticut to convert Route 621 (frontage road to Route 9) to a one-way, southbound roadway and consider addition of parking and bicycle/pedestrian facilities for this area.

viii. Work with State of Connecticut, Economic Development Commission, and RiverCOG to consider establishment of regional welcome center/tourism hub in Route 9 Gateway area.

h. Bokum Center Commercial Area: Bokum Corner, at the crossroads of Plains Road (Route 153), Bokum Road, and Westbrook Road (Route 604) has become a commercial hub, hosting the Town's largest grocery store, several other retail businesses, a restaurant, florist/greenhouse, two banks, and multiple offices and service businesses. Just off the intersection are the Lee Company and Essex Meadows, a major commercial enterprise and the largest multifamily complex in Essex, respectively. Although it is not a "village" per se, it has emerged as another key gateway to Essex and an important commercial and civic crossroads. It is less than one mile to Centerbrook Center (via Westbrook Road) and just over a mile to the Essex Steam Train and the Route 9/Essex Junction area. Traffic patterns and its location have demonstrated that Bokum Corner will continue to be a key commercial node in Essex.

Public input received on Bokum Corner favors maintaining and enhancing current levels of commercial activity and seeks to avoid substantial increases in development along the Route 153 corridor heading toward Westbrook. The

2011 Transportation Study envisioned a redevelopment of the Colonial Market plaza and former Oliver's Restaurant parcels and the creation of a new, traditional village center. The high groundwater table and wetlands surrounding the Bokum intersection may present obstacles to some of this development. In order to pursue appropriate, balanced growth for Bokum Corner and to more closely tie Bokum in with Essex and Centerbrook Villages, the following policy steps are recommended:

i. Strengthen pedestrian and bicycle connections from Bokum Corner to other Village centers as well as to employment centers such as the Industrial Park, including consideration of sidewalks and bicycle lanes on Plains Road (Route 153) and Westbrook Road (Route 604);

ii. Review Zoning district designation and standards for Bokum Corner to encourage commercial, retail, office, and mixed-use development that serves a local market.

iii. Explore soil and groundwater conditions to determine suitability for intensification of development density.

iv. Encourage strong connections between higher-density senior residence developments on Bokum Road and the Bokum Corner node and the Town at large.

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Transportation and Connectivity

2. *Enhance multi-modal transportation connections and expand appropriate public infrastructure within and between villages and hubs, and improve Essex's connection to surrounding communities.*

Statement of Purpose: The Town of Essex, while initially developed within small, pedestrian- and equestrian-scaled village centers, has experienced the long-term transition to an automobile-dependent land use pattern over the last 50-70 years. The community as a whole is relatively well-served by automobile facilities. Routes 153 and 154 bisect the Town and connect Essex with its neighboring communities in the Lower Connecticut River Valley. It also has two exits along Route 9, which is a major north-south arterial connecting Essex with the shoreline (and Interstate 95) and Middletown (and Hartford beyond it) to the north. Significant collector roads such as West Avenue, Bokum Road, Book Hill Road, North Main Street, Westbrook Road, and Deep River Road combine to ensure that the relatively small geographic limits of Essex are well connected and every area of town is easily accessible via automobile.

a. Transportation Study Recommendations: The Transportation Study, adopted by the Planning Commission in 2011, contains a number of recommended priority projects

focusing on improving the transportation environment within each of the villages and nodes in Essex, as well as improving connectivity between them and between Essex and neighboring communities. The Town should seek to pursue opportunities to revisit and implement these priorities, including adopting the following approaches:

i. Conduct detailed bicycle and pedestrian audits of village centers and routes connecting development nodes and develop a list of needed improvements;

ii. Work with Traffic Authority, Public Works, DOT, and RiverCOG to prioritize and seek funding for bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements, including the recommendations of the Safe Routes to School Plan;

iii. Include consideration of sidewalk/pedestrian accommodation and bicycle accommodation with any roadway redevelopment or improvement;

iv. Work, with assistance of RiverCOG, on development of regional bicycle and pedestrian network;

v. Include consideration of Traffic Calming measures with roadway improvements;

vi. Work with Traffic Authority, Economic Development Commission, and Essex Board of Trade on exploration of creation of Parking Authority for Essex Village.

vii. Conduct regular assessments of the changing needs of Essex residents for mobility and work with RiverCOG, 9 Town Transit, and Traffic Authority on being responsive to transportation solutions.

b. <u>Public Water, Natural Gas, Electricity, Telecommunications</u>: Generally defined as a set of interconnected structural elements that provide a framework for development, infrastructure is an essential part of the Town's overall livability and future growth potential. Infrastructure includes basic physical structures needed for the operation of society and the services and facilities necessary for an economy to function. It includes a network of roads and municipal buildings, power, high speed cable and internet lines, public water, wastewater management, and the service structure of those physical systems. How Essex provides for and manages these infrastructure systems will help enable the continued growth and development it seeks. The Town should undertake the following recommendations:

i. Work with Connecticut Water Company to plan for protection of public water sources and conservation techniques to ensure a clean and plentiful water supply for current and future users.

ii. Continue support of Essex's efforts as a Clean Energy Community to reduce energy consumption by 20% between 2013-2018, as well as the development of a Municipal Action Plan to seek further reductions.

iii. Work with utility providers on strengthening the delivery, efficiency, and resilience of power grid.

iv. Seek and encourage pursuit of opportunities for municipal and private expansion of solar and other renewable energy usage.

v. Support planning and implementation of expansion of natural gas service to business, institutional, and residential customers to provide a wider range of heating options.

vi. Participate in State of Connecticut's Nutmeg Network and seek additional opportunities to improve access to high-speed data infrastructure.

c. Wastewater Management: The Town of Essex has functioned and matured thus far in the absence of any centralized or municipal wastewater disposal system. The Town's 3000+ developed parcels are generally served by privately-managed, on-site subsurface sewage disposal systems (i.e. septic systems). In some cases, particularly those involving buildings with historic uses, those located on very small parcels of land or those built on parcels with unsuitable soil characteristics, cesspools or holding tanks are their only means of wastewater disposal. In other cases, the existing conventional septic systems are currently non-compliant or could never be brought into compliance with current Public Health Code which eliminates any expansion or intensification of use on the parcel. This limits municipal and economic growth. The conflict between economic growth interests and the limitations of on-site wastewater disposal is most evident in the Town's historic village areas. In both Essex and Ivoryton villages, undersized and non-conforming systems tend to be the rule and not the exception. This situation creates substantial burden not only on property owners to maintain systems, but also on the Town's Health Department, who is responsible for tracking and monitoring hundreds of private systems that are not compliant with current health codes.

The Town of Essex's current policy, established by the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) has been one of "sewer avoidance" as outlined in the Wastewater Management Plan last completed in 1998. This policy was endorsed in the 2005 Plan of Conservation & Development as a means of control during a time of significant growth in residential development. As with many other similar communities in lower Middlesex County and along the shoreline, Essex must begin to consider that long-term growth opportunities can be balanced with the

cost and complexity of a well-defined centralized wastewater management solution. Newer community subsurface sewage disposal technologies are available and designed to disperse a specified volume of wastewater onto parcels with suitable soils. While the WPCA retains much sentiment toward sewer avoidance, this Plan's overall focus on encouraging growth within and between the five development nodes presents an opportunity for renewed investigation and discussion. The WPCA established a sinking fund during the last three budgets and plans to seek RFQ/RFP bids for a new Wastewater Management Facilities study. Specific recommendations include:

i. Undertake a new Wastewater Management Facilities study to investigate current capability of land, particularly in the Village areas and development nodes of Essex, to support increased growth and density.

ii. Investigate the feasibility of continued on-site wastewater management in Essex, including a full cost-benefit analysis of other options for areas of focused growth such as small community systems and extension of sewer service from Deep River.

iii. Work closely with Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Economic Development Commission, WPCA, and Board of Selectmen to ensure that regulatory controls of economic growth are appropriate to manage potential results of increased infrastructure capacity.

d. Public Safety: The safety of the residents, businesses, and visitors in the Town of Essex is managed jointly by police, fire, and emergency management agencies. The Essex Resident Trooper's Office and Essex Police are responsible for policing and public safety in the Town of Essex. The office is located on the ground floor of the Town Hall. Staffing consists of one Resident State Trooper who oversees three full time Essex Officers, and one part time Officer. In addition there are three part time Harbor Patrol Boat Operators who operate the Town police boat during the summer months. The goal of the Resident Trooper's Office is to maintain and enhance community policing concepts, goals and programs, while working effectively and courteously with the public. Long term goals are to continue to modernize the infrastructure of the department, while maintaining or expanding current staffing levels.

The Essex Emergency Management Department works to assist residents, businesses, and the municipal government in preparedness for and recovery from disasters. It is responsible for developing and updating the "Essex Emergency Preparedness Guidebook" for residents, maintaining and expanding a Citizen Evacuation Registry database, conducting emergency management drills, and

managing the Emergency Operations Center during actual crisis events. Multiple blizzard and flooding events over the past decade have contributed to the Department's readiness and refinement of procedures.

Essex is served by a volunteer-led Fire Department, the Essex Fire Engine Company No. 1, and a volunteer ambulance corps, the Essex Ambulance Association. The Fire Engine Company manages two fire stations: the main fire station at the Route 9 Gateway intersection of West Avenue and Route 154, and the Ivoryton fire station. Both groups lean on community support and the hard work of dedicated volunteers to respond to Essex's emergencies. Both organizations are committed to the ongoing training of their teams and continual improvement of their services and facilities.

In order to support and ensure the continued safety and preparedness of Essex's residents, businesses, and visitors, the following recommendations are made:

i. Continue to provide financial and organizational support to Essex Fire Company No. 1 and the Essex Ambulance Association;

ii. Work with Essex Fire Company to assess current facility needs and find solutions for expansion of Ivoryton fire station;

iii. Ensure that Emergency Management Department strives toward continual improvement and has adequate resources and facilities to meet local needs;

iv. Work toward modernizing the Police Department facility and infrastructure.

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Community and Economic Growth

3. *Foster community and economic growth consistent with Essex's history and promote a more diverse and vibrant small town.*

a. Individual Village Promotion: The Town of Essex is a community of Villages, and its history is reflected in the independence and interdependence of the Villages of Ivoryton, Centerbrook, and Essex. While the vision of the entire municipality of Essex seeks to interconnect and knit more closely together these distinct and distinctive Village areas, so too does it seeks to celebrate the unique history, character, and identity of each Village. While specific discussion and recommendations on action steps for each Village are detailed under Goal #1 above, there are several general actions the Town should undertake to promote the diversity of its Village areas, including:

   i. Work with stakeholders in each Village area, the Economic Development Commission, and the Connecticut Main Street Center to implement streetscape elements, signage, pedestrian enhancements, active tourism/visitor promotion efforts, and business development approaches to strengthen Village character.

   ii. Work with Zoning Commission on the development of Commercial and Mixed-Use Regulations and Design Standards to enhance and support established architectural character.

b. Waterfront Area: As with many riverfront and estuarine communities, Essex's natural and cultural history has been dramatically shaped by its relationship to the Connecticut River. From a shipbuilding center and site of the Connecticut's first battleground of the War of 1812 to a yachting and marina hub; from quaint, pedestrian-friendly commercial district to a critical habitat for eagles, ospreys, and environmental bounty, the waterfront is a key element of Essex. Encouraging activity, leveraging the waterfront as an economic and tourism driver, connecting the draw of the waterfront to other areas throughout Essex, and safeguarding the environmental integrity of our riverfront are all high priorities for the next decade. Specific actions should include:

   i. Promote more public access to riverfront for both active and passive recreation, and enhance pedestrian connections to mitigate traffic and parking concerns.

   ii. Implement recommendations of Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan and put into place both conservation and resiliency measures to help protect habitat, prepare for natural disasters and the effects of climate change, and plan for recovery.

   iii. Expand allowable uses through Zoning Regulation change to facilitate commercial, restaurant, retail, and tourism-friendly development.

   iv. Support and promote the Connecticut River Museum as a hub of cultural and ecological activity.

   v. Work with the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to assist with ensuring that waterfront developments are designed and constructed to protect and enhance the River environment and heritage

c. Promoting Appropriate Development: While municipalities may make Plans and adopt policies to encourage certain types of growth while discouraging others, it is critical to recognize and understand that a vast majority of the force for growth and change is beyond the ability of a municipality to control. Global, regional, and local economic and market forces, long-term demographic shifts, geographic and environmental realities place relatively narrow parameters around the potential directions of the next decade. While Essex is highly unlikely to be a target for a multi-billion dollar Silicon Valley-style tech campus or even a Clinton- or Westbrook-style retail outlet mall, there remains within the Town's grasp the ability to put a thumb on the scale and indicate to the marketplace of developers and businesses the sort of community Essex wishes to be. To this end, the Town should seek to:

   i. Unndertake a comprehensive review and potential re-write of the Zoning Regulations to reflect the philosophical direction of this Plan and encourage appropriate type and scale of permitted land uses throughout Town.

ii. Encourage an active and empowered Economic Development Commission and dedicated Village Groups such as the Board of Trade, Centerbrook Vision Group, and Ivoryton Village Alliance to actively participate in village improvement projects, municipal decision-making and business recruitment and retention.

iii. Continue to work with the Connecticut Main Street Center and local Economic Development experts on community improvement initiatives.

iv. Work, through the Economic Development Commission, Board of Finance, and Board of Selectmen, on the analysis of tax abatement or other incentives to encourage recruitment, retention, and expansion of targeted business sectors

d. Cultural Asset Promotion: Promoted by the State of Connecticut as a "quintessential New England river town," Essex has long been associated with its location and connection with the Connecticut River. The waterfront marinas and harbor activity, Connecticut River Museum, and the riverboat excursions combine with the Essex Steam Train and the Ivoryton Playhouse to create a major center of culture and tourism activity for the Connecticut River Valley, particularly between spring and fall. Throughout the year, Essex has also endeavored to present an active and vibrant array of events and opportunities for residents and visitors alike. These initiatives should be encouraged and supported, both as events and attractions on their own, but also through complimentary opportunities for retail, dining, recreation, lodging, and entertainment. Specific recommendations include:

i. Support ongoing conversation between key culture and tourism assets such as Ivoryton Playhouse, Connecticut River Museum, Essex Steam Train and businesses to coordinate promotion of Essex as a destination.

ii. Support recognition and promotion of historic assets, including National Register designation for Villages, Historic Battlefield status, and historic properties.

iii. Coordinate and support a full range of annual public and tourism events, including parades and festivals, which promote Essex as a vibrant and welcoming community.

iv. Explore opportunities to promote the varied talents and experience of Essex artists of all forms for the enjoyment and benefit of all.

v. Review municipal policies and work with community groups to ensure a consistent message and policy of making Essex a diverse, vibrant, and welcoming community.

e. Municipal Assets and Facilities: The Town of Essex provides numerous valuable services to the community to maintain public health and safety, encourage community and wellness, and provide for education, maintenance of public assets, and services to those in need.

Schools: Essex has a single school facility in Town, Essex Elementary School in Centerbrook, serving kindergarten through sixth grade students. John Winthrop Middle School and Valley High School serve the Region 4 towns of Essex, Deep River, and Chester, and are located Deep River. Essex has committed to improvements at the Elementary School facility, which have included improved parking, circulation for buses, and new roof and mechanical systems. Long-term trends in population, as discussed elsewhere in this plan, indicate that school-age population (under 19 years old) will contract substantially between 2015-2025. Estimates for contraction of student numbers range between 20-40%. Similar trends are expected for both Deep River and Chester. Accordingly, the Towns of District 4 will be undertaking discussions about restructuring or further consolidating school facilities for maximum benefit and utility for all communities. The Town and the District remain committed to providing the highest level of educational experience for all students.

Town Facilities: In addition to Essex Elementary School and the facilities of the Regional District, the Town offers multiple resources to its residents. Essex Town Hall, located at the intersection of Grove Street and West Avenue, services as a hub of municipal activity, including Town offices, meeting space, Emergency Operations, and the police station. The Town Hall is also adjacent to Grove Street Park, offering a playground and tennis courts. Over the past several years, the Town has undertaken several improvement to the Town Hall campus and Park, and a recent capital improvement bond will allow for continued modernization and renovation of the Town office facilities.

Across the street from Town Hall is one of Essex's two public libraries, the Essex Library Association. Together with the Ivoryton Library Association, serve the community as critical resources. Both libraries are Associations, nonprofit entities not managed by the Town, though their success and growth are key priorities of the government and community of Essex.

Parks and Recreation: The Town owns and maintains several public parks and recreation locations, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department. Essex Park and Recreation's mission is "Creating Community Through People, Parks, and Programs." In addition to maintenance of the parks, they offer a wide variety of community-building special

events and beneficial recreation program offerings, including 60 youth and adult programs, 16 special events, and processed just under 1000 registrations. Newer programs include volleyball, green engineering, and theatre. Essex Park and Recreation seeks to continue its service to the community and encourages residents take advantage of the benefits its programs and facilities have to offer.

Social Services: The Town of Essex Department of Social Services mission is to enhance the quality of life and self-sufficiency of people in need of financial and social services. Social Services is dedicated to providing services with respect, compassion and accountability, committing to not only the delivery of integrated social services but focusing on meeting basic human needs and promoting services that foster self-sufficiency and economic independence. These resources provide the support, such as food, shelter, educational and employment opportunities, personal safety and access to health care services. The available services are diverse and support all ages.

Essex Social Services has long-standing tradition of collaborating with community partners to enhance services to town residents. Its partners, along with many others, include the Shoreline Soup Kitchen, The Community Renewal Team, The Salvation Army, The Estuary Council, FISH, Child and Family Services, Visiting Nurses of the Lower Valley, Operation Fuel, along with the Essex Community Fund, who is a major donor to the Essex Emergency Assistance Fund, which assists local residents with fuel, food, shelter and other emergency services.

The Department of Social Services will continue strive to seek out new ways to improve and enhance operations and to expand activities to better meet the needs of the community while maintaining a positive, compassionate, and cost-efficient environment.

Public Works: The Public Works Department provides the Town with professional and technical services which are necessary to operate and service the community. The Department administers programs related to the transportation infra-structure and associated public open spaces. Over eighty seven miles of roadway are maintained throughout the seasons as well as associated drainage facilities. Several acres of parks, open space and ball fields are kept mowed, landscaped and in good condition for the residents to enjoy. The Department keeps the Town vehicles and equipment safe and well maintained. Within the next five years the Director of Public Works anticipates re-

placing three bridges, upgrading the Public Works facilities on Dump Road, and initiating road reconstruction throughout the Town. It is the goal of this Department to provide quality services to the taxpayer of the Town of Essex in a timely and efficient manner.

Recommendations for continuation and improvement of municipal resources include:

i. Complete a strategic plan related to Special Revenue Fund;

ii. Conduct a full Asset Inventory of Parks & Recreation facilities

iii. Refine and implement Parks Capital Improvement Plan.

iv. Maintain recreational fields and facilities in environmentally sensitive manner.

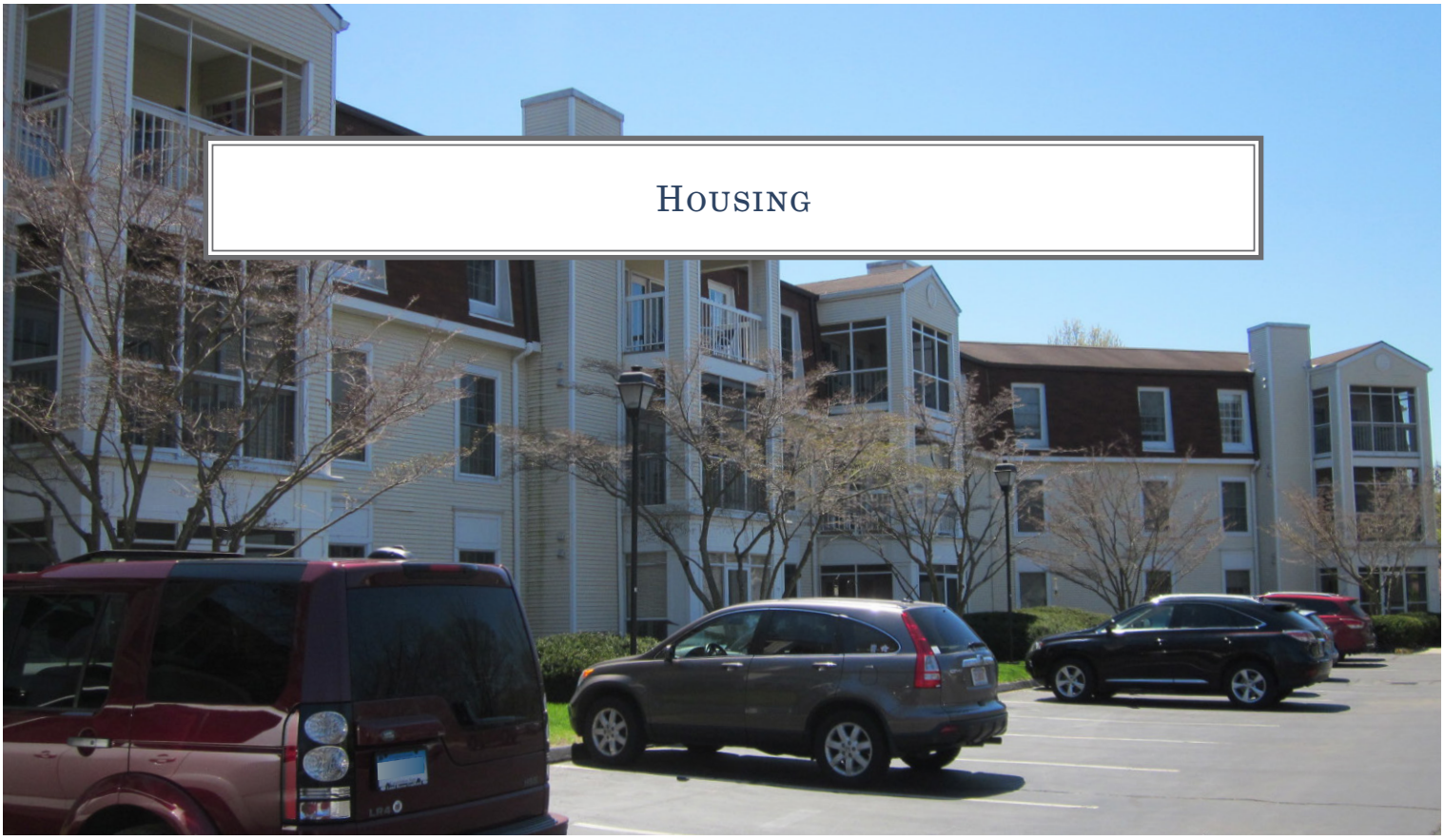
v. Continue to support Social Services programs and seek opportunities to expand and enhance services to the community;

vi. Actively participate in discussions of Regional School facilities to ensure continued high-level educational services and efficient use of resources with changing demographics;

vii. Support Essex and Ivoryton Library Associations

viii. Continue physical resource improvements at Town Hall, Public Works facility, and Essex Elementary School;

ix. Review municipal service provision and encourage adequate staffing to meet the needs of Essex residents



Housing

4. *Expand the variety of housing options available throughout Essex, including more affordable housing opportunities in both mixed use developments and within traditional subdivision development.*

Statement of Purpose: The issue of housing is a critical component of the continued growth and success of the Town of Essex. While most residents of Essex enjoy a very high quality of life and the unique character of our community, for many others, living in Essex has become further and further out of reach. As property values rise (and property taxes along with them), many older residents are finding it harder to remain in their Essex residences. In addition, entering the housing market is prohibitive for many key groups in Town – teachers, municipal employees, fire-fighters, service-sector workers, etc. Many of our children would find Essex virtually impossible to afford. Essex's long-term success depends of a vibrant mix of residents. In recognition of this issue, the Essex Planning Commission stated "encouragement of the integration of affordable housing into existing neighborhoods" as a key goal statement in its 2005 Plan, and this goal continues to be a priority.

HOUSING

Statement of Problem: The dearth of affordable or "workforce" housing is a significant problem for the Town of Essex. There is substantial concern that hard-working people that fill critical job categories in Essex would be unable to live in Essex close to their place of employment. As of 2010, the median price for a single-family home in Essex was $405,000, over 35% higher than the median in Middlesex County as a whole and over 40% higher than Connecticut's statewide median. This high home price, coupled with the 2012 median household income of $90,212 indicates that even for those already living in Town, home ownership is consuming a larger and larger percentage of income and is getting farther from the realistic reach of potential new residents.

Expanding housing options throughout Town is frequently difficult, given the relatively "built-out" nature of much of the core of Essex's Villages. The expanded use of accessory apartments, or additional subsidiary dwelling units added to existing homes, can be a way to both provide a wider range of less-expensive housing options and assist current residents in remaining in and paying for current homes.

Philosophical Approach: The 2005 PoCD laid out several implementation steps with regards to housing. As is seen following, five of the six implementation steps deal directly with the provision of wider housing options throughout Essex:

- Modify the zoning regulations to allow accessory apartments to be incorporated into commercial buildings in the Commercial Village Districts as established by the Zoning Commission and where the soils will support the additional on-site septic systems.
- Modify the zoning regulations to clearly define and allow one accessory apartment as an integral part of a primary owner-occupied residence, regardless of the age of the structure, where the soils will support the additional on-site septic system and off-street parking is available.
- Encourage developers to include affordable housing in subdivisions and housing development with incentives such as reduced lot size and increased density where soils would support the increase.
- Encourage developers to provide housing, including affordable housing, within walking distance of the villages and other two "centers", employment, and bus transportation.
- Promote architectural design review for subdivision applications through residential design guidelines developed by the Planning Commission.
- Identify specific areas where affordable housing would be appropriate.

These goals from the prior PoCD are still substantially applicable as the Town looks toward the next decade, and additional recommendations may be added to these, including:

i. Establish overall municipal goals for increasing the percentage of state-designated Affordable units within Essex.

ii. Develop Incentive Housing Zone regulations.

iii. Develop design standards, both flexible and enforceable, to ensure that higher-density and mixed-income housing developments are complimentary to adjacent land uses, buildings and structures.

iv. Examine potential development incentives beyond the IHZ program to encourage broader participation by developers in creation of affordable housing opportunities.

v. Work closely with the HOPE Partnership, the Partnership for Strong Communities, and other nonprofit groups to educate the public, work with property owners and developers, and advocate for housing opportunities.

vi. Modify the Zoning Regulations to allow accessory apartments to be incorporated into commercial buildings, on upper floors or to the rear of street-front uses, in the Development Nodes where the soils will support the additional on-site septic systems.

vii. Modify the Zoning Regulations to clearly define and allow, without a Special Exception process, an accessory apartment as an integral part of a primary owner-occupied residence, regardless of the age of the structure, where the soils will support the additional on-site septic system and off-street parking is available.

viii. Ensure design standards for construction and maintenance of accessory apartments provide for protection of streetscape and neighborhood character.

ix. Provide, through social services, resources and assistance to property owners struggling to maintain safe and high-quality housing.

Natural Resources

5. *Encourage permanent preservation and active stewardship of key natural resources.*

Statement of Purpose: Essex is blessed with an abundance of high quality natural resources, the most prominent of which are the Connecticut River with its associated coves, marshes, and islands, and the Falls River, which contains most of the town within its watershed and links the villages of Ivoryton, Centerbrook and Essex. These river systems comprise the backbone of the region's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. In addition, they are inextricably linked to the history of the town and provide much of the "sense of place" so prized by residents and visitors alike. Finally, these natural systems are an important part of the town's capacity for resilience during extreme weather events. Thus, the natural resources of Essex are critical to the economic, social and environmental health of the town.

For these reasons, it is the purpose of the PoCD to protect the town's key natural resources to the maximum extent possible, to manage these areas to improve and maintain their health, and to provide opportunities for public access and enjoyment of these special areas. Specific recommendations covering a range of strategies to accomplish these goals are listed below.

a. Natural Resource and Open Space Preservation

i. **Permanent land protection**: Keeping land in its natural state in perpetuity is the first and foremost strategy for protecting natural resources. The Essex Open Space Plan, adopted by the Planning Commission in 2000, lays out the geographic focus areas and priority parcel characteristics for open space preservation. These were:

Geographic focus: Priority corridors are the Connecticut River shoreline, Falls River shoreline, Mud River corridor, and the 153 corridor. Since the 2000 Open Space Plan, these priority corridors have been revised somewhat to de-emphasize the Route 153 corridor and focus on building upon and connecting existing protected lands in both the areas north of the Falls River and west of Ivoryton Center.

Priority parcel characteristics: These include parcels within the priority corridors, large parcels, parcels contiguous to already protected open space, and parcels containing unique and/or critical natural resources (e.g. vernal pools, rare plants, streams and ponds, critical habitat).

Specific recommendations include:

a. Work with the Conservation Commission and the Essex Land Trust to update the Open Space Plan and put into place a specific list of high priority properties for protection.

b. Support annual funding of the town Open Space Sinking Fund to build a reserve that can be tapped when priority properties become available.

c. Maintain flexibility in potential acquisition or partnership on acquisition of open space and conservation land to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

d. Work with neighboring towns and the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) to identify opportunities for regional open space corridors.

e. Work with Connecticut River Gateway Commission to identify opportunities to protect and enhance the natural and traditional riverway corridor of the Connecticut River.

f. Revise municipal ordinance on Open Space Tax Abatements to uncouple the Plan of Conservation & Development from the granting of tax abatements.

ii. **Conservation Subdivisions**: Alternatives to conventional subdivision design can often result in opportunities to protect additional open space, without reducing the overall density. Essex Subdivision Regulations Section 7.3 set forth the conditions and provisions for "conservation subdivisions." The Planning Commission should:

1. Encourage Conservation Subdivisions in areas identified as priority open space or natural resource preservation areas.
2. Strongly consider the use of Fee-In-Lieu of open space for subdivisions in areas of higher density or established neighborhoods.

iii. **Open Space Tax Abatements**: Per the terms of Connecticut General Statutes, Section 12-107e regarding the classification of land as open space land, the Planning Commission of the Town of Essex, in preparation of this Plan of Conservation & Development (2015-2025) has designated areas which it recommends for preservation as areas of open space land. In order for land to be considered as open space land for purposes of property taxation or payments in lieu thereof, a property must meet the following characteristics:

1) The property must be at least twice the minimum size of a lot in the underlying Zoning District; and
2) The property must contain a continuous undeveloped portion of land of at least the minimum size of a lot in the underlying Zoning District.

If the property for which Open Space designation is sought does not meet these criteria, in order to be considered for such designation, the property must:

1) Be adjacent to existing open space property; or
2) Part of a natural resources or greenway corridor; or
3) Be found by the Planning Commission as clearly enhancing the open space and conservation purposes of this Plan of Conservation & Development.

Decision on the ability of the applicant property to meet one of these two additional criteria will be made solely by the Essex Planning Commission, which will review these applications annually no later than its regularly scheduled meeting in October. Notwithstanding the preceding, the applicant property cannot be created by aggregating two or more adjacent properties under common ownership.

b. Low Impact Development for Stormwater Management: Stormwater runoff is the number one cause of water pollution in the United States, according to the EPA. Both national and Connecticut-based research confirms this fact and document the strong correlation between the "development footprint" of impervious manmade surfaces in a watershed and the health of the water resources in that watershed. To minimize the impact of new and existing development on the town's water resources, Essex strongly supports the use of development concepts and practices known as "Low Impact Development" (LID) or "Green Infrastructure" (GI). These practices use a variety of techniques to promote infiltration of stormwater into the ground, reducing runoff and allowing natural processing of pollutants by plants and microorganisms in the soil. The following recommendations are made:

   i. Direct development applicants to follow the guidance of the Connecticut Stormwater Quality Manual (2004) and its Low Impact Development Appendix (2011) in the design of stormwater practices.

   ii. Develop and adopt an LID Checklist for the use of development applicants in providing information on their prospective LID practices to the Planning and Zoning Commissions, and incorporation into regulations.

   iii. Undertake a thorough review of land use regulations and ordinances, resulting in recommendations for additions and revisions that require or support LID. This includes language that pertains to: street width, cul-de-sacs, road drainage, parking ratios, parking lot size, parking lot runoff, alternative pavements, conservation subdivision design, setback and frontages, sidewalks, driveways, roof runoff, stormwater management plans, riparian buffers, clearing and grading, tree conservation, and the use of native plants.

c. Energy Sustainability: "Sustainability" as a concept is the logical progression of the conventional idea of "stewardship," or the careful, long-term management of the community's land and resources. It provides for a careful balance of conservation while allowing for healthy economic development and growth. Activities can be described as sustainable if they can be maintained over time without depleting the natural resource base. Overall, a successful approach to sustainability provides a high quality of life for all residents in a way that maintains and enhances the ecological process upon which that life depends.

   For the Town of Essex to successfully move into the future and ensure a continued quality of life and character, a continual re-examination of behaviors and policies relating to conservation and development should be undertaken. This examination should

include an assessment of ways to develop cleaner energy sources, reduce current levels of consumption and waste generation, and implement development practices that are friendlier to the natural environment.

In 2012, the Essex Board of Selectmen, acting with the support of the Clean Energy Task Force, signed a pledge for Essex to be a "Clean Energy Community," a program promoted by the Connecticut Green Bank (formerly CEFIA) and the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund. The overall objective of this program is to reduce municipal, business, and residential greenhouse gas and air pollution emissions throughout the community while simultaneously reducing our dependence on the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy.

In addition to these efforts, the Planning Commission created an ad-hoc "Energy Sustainability Subcommittee" to make recommendations for municipal improvements that could be incorporated into the Essex Plan of Conservation and Development. These recommendations included:

i. Continue support of Essex's efforts as a Clean Energy Community to reduce energy consumption by 20% between 2013-2018, as well as the development of a Municipal Action Plan to seek further reductions.

ii. Pursue additional funding opportunities and set municipal funds aside to support home- and business-owner implementation of energy efficient technologies and building upgrades.

iii. Require municipal building projects to exceed energy efficiency standards of the State Building Code and to meet guidelines of LEED certification.

iv. Encourage Planning and Zoning Commissions to incorporate energy efficiency and other sustainable practices into Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.

v. Pursue funding and set aside municipal funds to incorporate sustainable energy upgrades such as geothermal heating/cooling, photovoltaic solar panels, wind turbines and/or fuel cell technology into municipal facility construction or improvement where feasible.

vi. Explore methods of promoting innovative wastewater recovery, use of heat exchangers to waste heat, and the recycling of graywater for non-potable purposes.

vii. Consider the acquisition or conversion of municipal vehicles to alternative fuel sources such as liquid natural gas, hybrid engine technologies or biodiesel.

viii. Modify Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to promote more compact, efficient development and the orderly flow of transportation as well as enabling pedestrian and nonmotorized transportation options.

ix. Work with regional groups to promote expanded public transportation, including passenger rail and the use of multi-modal facilties.

d. Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan: The primary purpose of the Essex Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (NHMP or "Plan") is to identify natural hazards and risks, existing capabilities, and activities that can be undertaken by the Town to prevent loss of life and reduce property damages associated with identified hazards. The overall goal of this Plan is: Reduction or elimination of injury to or loss of life and property and natural environments and the associated economic impacts form natural hazards. The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 requires local communities to have a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) - approved mitigation plan in order to be eligible to receive Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program grants and Post-Disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds under the Hazard Mitigation Assistance program. This Plan was prepared by the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) in conjunction with the Town of Essex.

In order to prepare this Plan, the town evaluated several factors including current critical facilities, current residential population and demographics, and risk factors associated with natural hazards including past occurrences and potential for future occurrences.

The Town considers critical facilities to be those that serve the town on a day-to-day basis as well as during an emergency situation. The facilities include but are not limited to the Town Hall (location of Police Department and Emergency Operations Center) Public Works Garage, Fire Department Number 1 and Ivoryton Station, and the Essex and Ivoryton Libraries. This list can also include facilities that house elderly and disabled people, such as Essex Meadows and Essex Court. The maintenance of these critical facilities is necessary to support emergency response before, during, and after natural hazard events. Maintenance of these facilities ensures the availability of the facility and the increased likelihood of survival in the event of a major hazard event.

Transportation is essential in any major hazard event. The Town of Essex has a variety of transportation options. The Town is served by Route 9, as well as major arterials such as CT Routes 153 and 154. Smaller town roads act as collectors to bring traffic to larger

roads. The Town is served by several bus routes of the 9 Town Transit District which connects to neighboring communities and a railroad station in Old Saybrook. Without proper mitigation, transportation infrastructure is vulnerable to all natural hazards. Events of different magnitudes will impact the transportation system differently. The Town must be prepared for unpredictable impacts on the system.

Essex is susceptible to several natural hazards. The Falls River, cutting a path through the middle of town has flooded on several occasions causing damage, most significantly in June 1982 when the Bushy Hill Dam collapsed flooding the area. Inland and Connecticut River flooding both pose a risk. Hurricanes pose another threat; that of downed trees and prolonged power outages as experienced in the last few years. In addition, Winter Storms can lead to difficult snow removal, heavy snow fall resulting in loss of power and in some cases flooding.

This Plan details natural hazards present in the town and suggests steps that the Town can take to mitigate long lasting effects from each hazard type. The Comprehensive Mitigation Action Item list is provided in Section III: Mitigation. This table includes the item, project status, the party responsible for carrying out the action item, and other pertinent information. The most prominent hazard in any of the towns within the region is flooding, and significant discussion is devoted to how best to mitigate flooding events. Other hazards discussed include high winds and tornadoes, hurricanes and tropical storms, drought and wildfire, extreme heat, and earthquakes. Each hazard type has a list of mitigation action items that the Town could implement, some being a higher priority than others. For each of the hazard types presented in the Plan, historic events are presented along with the probability of that event occurring again. The town's specific impacts from each event are also noted.

The goals and projects outlined in the Essex NHMP should be incorporated into larger planning efforts in the Town of Essex in order to better prepare for natural hazard events. The NHMP will be updated in 2019 in order to comply with FEMA requirements and to reassess the vulnerability of the town to natural hazard events.

The Essex Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan names specific projects that the town can take to protect infrastructure and residents from the effects of Natural Hazards. These action steps include:

i. Conduct comprehensive evaluation of bridges, culverts and roads within the town in order to prioritize construction projects based on flood vulnerabilities.

ii. Continue installing generators at all critical facilities including the public works garage and transfer station and outfitting telecommunications towers with backup generators for long term power outages

iii. Conduct a dam inventory and updated conditions analysis with engineering specialists per State regulation.;

iv. Work with all levels of government to implement the recommendations of the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan.

e. Coastal Area Management and Resiliency: The basic concept underlying coastal area management, as embodied in Connecticut's Coastal Management Act (C.G.S. 22a-90 through 22a-114) can be summarized as:

- The coast and its adjacent waters are a uniquely valuable natural resource.
- The coast possesses great value for a wide variety of competing uses-residential, commercial, industrial, recreational- which have exerted intense pressure for development
- Development of coastal areas unsuited for intensive use has resulted in damage to, or the loss of, natural coastal resources.
- Within the coastal areas best suited for development, many sites have been committed to uses that do not require a shorefront location, thus limiting future water dependent development opportunities.
- Improved public management of the coastal area depends on adequate consideration of the capacity of natural resources to support development when planning for and regulating coastal uses; and improved coordination among the various governmental authorities sharing regulatory control over the coast.

Following on the initiative of the Federal Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, the Connecticut Coastal Area Management (CAM) Program was established in 1975. A four-year planning process culminated in passage of the Connecticut Coastal Management Act, which took effect January 1, 1980. The Act defines the boundary of the coastal area, establishes policies to guide coastal development and sets forth the regulatory system to be employed to manage the coastal area.

The coastal area of the Town of Essex is comprised of four main areas: open water, fringing estuarine wetlands, river islands, and coastal uplands. Topography within the CAM boundary lines runs relatively flat on the islands. Grade changes inland produce a gently rolling landscape of a predominantly 0%-15% slope

with many valleys which drain into the river and one major tributary. The tributary, the Falls River has been drastically changed from the 1982 flood. Wetlands along the waterfront are influenced by both fresh and saline water. The Great Meadow is a pendant river bar affected saline water on the river's side and fresh water on the cove side.

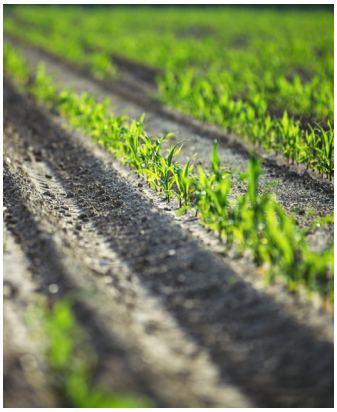
The Essex waterfront is made of several shore types, including a pendant river bar, islands, river coast, brackish coves, a tributary river, and small streams. In addition, there is developed shoreline in the form of private docks, marinas and moorings, and residential and commercial development.

One of the purposes of the CAM Report, originally approved in the early 1980's, was to examine the growth and development of Essex in terms of problems and issues related to the frontage that the Town shares on the Connecticut River with 22 other Connecticut towns. The CAMR describes several issues and problems which are still relatively applicable:

- Much of the Essex waterfront is characterized by fragile soil types such as found on the Great Meadow and the shallow water of the coves, which separate the upland areas from the main river channel. As a result, most development still occurs in Essex Village, the small finger of land which projects into the Connecticut River.
- As the River is a major attraction to both permanent residents and tourists, Essex Village has the highest density, the greatest traffic and parking problems and concentration of commercial uses within the coastal area boundary
- The limited number of viable harbors on the Connecticut River, plus the atmosphere of Essex Village draw a large number of boating enthusiasts to Essex. This results competing interests of development and conservation along the waterfront.
- Increase the opportunities for environmentally responsible marine use through applications for funding from the State for public access and dredging.
- Pollution is a potential hazard on the Essex waterfront, because so much of the water adjacent to the uplands is in shallow coves not flushed by the river's flow. This condition has been compounded by lack of sewers on the land areas, combined with difficult soil conditions. The Town has taken great strides in strengthening the on-site septic monitoring for Essex Village, though future growth may require alternative or community solutions.

f. Agriculture/Use of Protected Land: Agriculture is an important industry in Connecticut, employing nearly 30,000 people and contributing $3.5 billion annual to the State's economy. In addition, farms and agricultural operations contribute significantly to quality of life and environmental quality through protection of natural habitat, carbon sequestration, and water resources. From a land-use perspective, agriculture can often present a quandary for communities. Agriculture includes not only traditional crop- and livestock-based production, but also includes such diverse land uses such as vineyards and wineries, forestry, nurseries and greenhouses, and aquaculture.

Essex is not traditionally considered an agriculture-intensive community, and most statistics seem to bear this out. Fewer than 200 acres in Essex are identified as "farm fields," though some of these, like the Johnson Sheep Farm and Scott's Farm on Plains Road, have received higher visibility over the last several years. Other small operations, such as Essex Garlic, seeks a niche, organic market.



While the trend of these agricultural operations disappearing is shared elsewhere around the State, the latest U.S. Census of Agriculture (2012) has revealed that the actual number of farms in Connecticut is on the increase. This is largely attributable to the growth in small, niche operations, backyard farms, and the establishment of community or shared farming operations. The interest in locally-grown food and farm products, the concern about the cost and safety questions arising from far-flung food sources, and general sustainability movements has also been driving these trends.

Over the past several years, numerous programs have been established to help communities better support agricultural operations and the establishment or growth of local farms, including funding programs through the State and Federal Departments of Agriculture to help new and beginning farmers, specialty crop growth, and farm transition.

The University of Connecticut and CitySeed have partnered on the BuyCTGrown.com website and the Connecticut 10% Campaign to help connect consumers with their local producers and encourage more consumption of locally-grown products. The Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments has established the State's first Regional Agriculture Council, designated to help their member communities better understand the needs of their farmers and promote regulations and policies to sup-

port a vibrant agricultural economy. Essex's participation in these and similar programs could be useful toward providing a strong foundation for the future of agriculture in Town. Other specific action items to support the growth and development of a vibrant agricultural sector in Essex include:

i. Consider of adoption of Right-to-Farm Ordinance;

ii. Consider of adoption of tax abatement policies for farm buildings and equipment;

iii. Actively participate in the RiverCOG Regional Agricultural Council;

iv. Support for the designation of Locally Important Agricultural Soils;

v. Review Zoning Regulations and other municipal policies for "farm friendliness";

vi. Consider allowing use of Town lands and other open space for agricultural uses.

g. Protecting Environmental Resources: As with many riverfront communities, Essex is home to a diverse set of environmental and archeological resources. With continued development and land use conversion, the integrity of these resources can be threatened or compromised. A continual focus on identifying and protecting key attributes of the natural environment is critical. To preserve these natural and cultural features, the following recommendations are made:

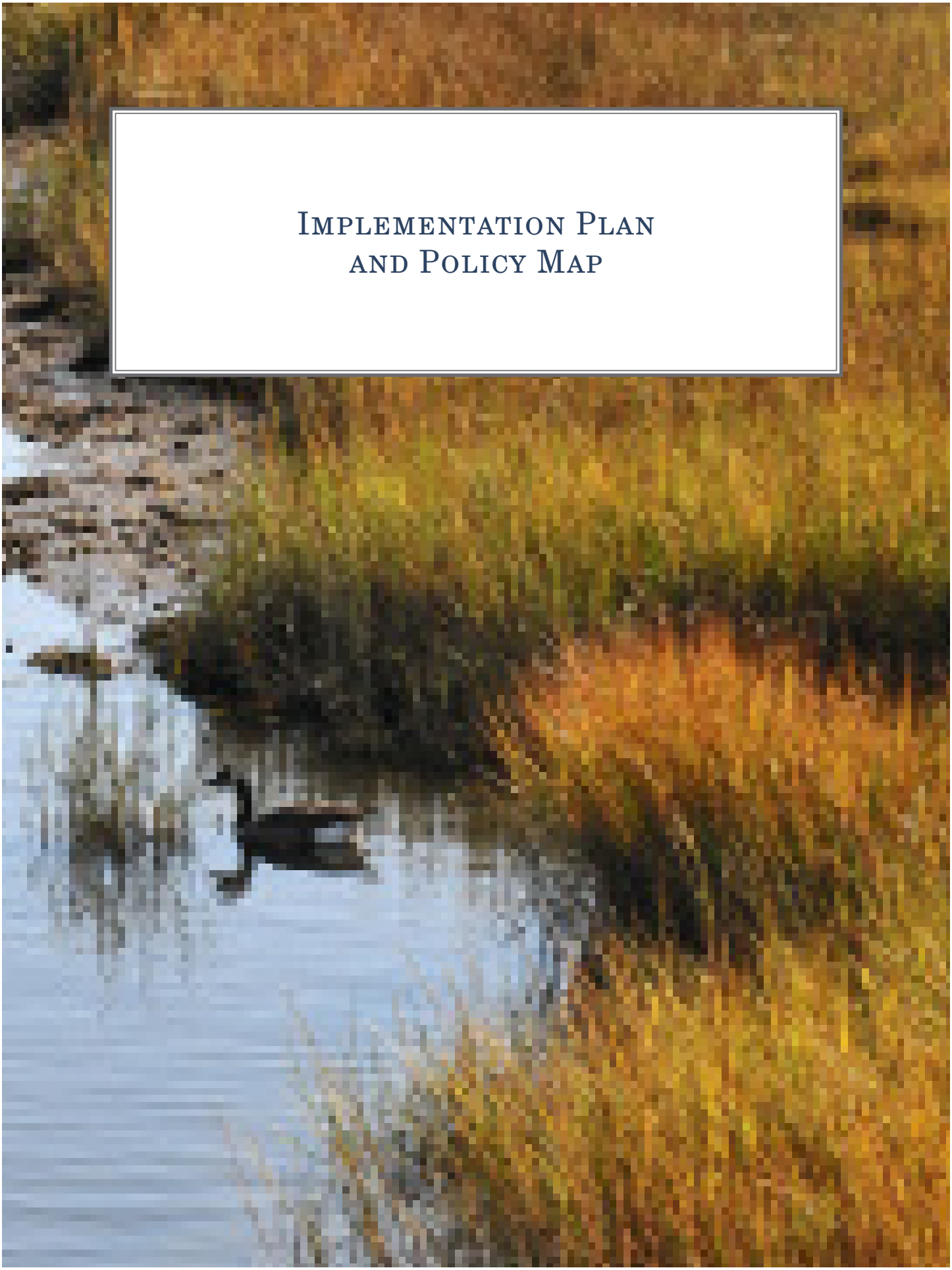
i. Work with Connecticut Water Company, Department of Health, and municipal commissions to develop a sourcewater protection plan for public drinking supplies.

ii. Support the Tree Warden's efforts to increase funding for street tree planting and undertake a management strategy for street trees.

iii. Review and update Aquifer Protection Regulations as appropriate.

iv. Update inventories of scenic and archeological resources and provide for consideration of protection of these resources in regulatory priorities.

v. Undertake GIS-based analysis of environmentally-sensitive lands in Essex and modify allowable development densities and uses in areas with multiple high-priority conservation priorities.



Implementation Plan and Policy Map

Recommended Action Item	Lead Entity	Priority
		1: **Immediate** and Ongoing 2: Initiate within **years 1-2** of Plan 3: Initiate within **years 2-4** of Plan 4: Initiate within **years 5-7** of Plan 5: Initiate within **years 8-10** of Plan
Promote Mixed Use, Compact, Architecturally-Appropriate Development and Redevelopment in Villages of Essex, Centerbrook, and Ivoryton and in key hubs of Bokum Corner and the Route 9 Gateway.		
Develop/Codify mapping of Village and Hub areas	Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Staff	1
Implement zoning changes to enable more Mixed Uses in Villages and Key Hubs	Zoning Commission	1
Implement zoning changes in the Villages and Hub areas to allow for higher density residential development and commercial floor-area ratios	Zoning Commission	2
Mitigate environmental impacts, including consideration of the expansion and centralization of wastewater disposal capacity	Water Pollution Control Authority	2
Improve sidewalk and bicycle facilities and connections.	Traffic Authority	3
Revise multifamily residential zoning area to promote lower-density residential development in north-central Essex	Zoning Commission	3
Expand Traffic Authority membership and/or actively engage the existing Traffic Authority with recommendations of Transportation Study.	Traffic Authority	2
Actively engage Town with RiverCOG and State of Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) on funding priorities and opportunities.	Traffic Authority, Staff	2
Review and revise public improvement standards such as road width, sidewalk requirement and maintenance, and cul-de-sac extensions.	Planning Commission, Traffic Authority	3
Examine Zoning and Subdivision Regulations relative to their ability to encourage pedestrian-oriented and compact development.	Zoning Commission, Planning Commission	3
Encourage strong streetscape and active uses in corridors connecting development hubs (West Avenue, Main Street between Centerbrook and Ivoryton, Westbrook Road, Plains Road) through zoning and infrastructure improvements.	Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen, Planning Commission	2

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

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		1: **Immediate** and Ongoing 2: Initiate within **years 1-2** of Plan 3: Initiate within **years 2-4** of Plan 4: Initiate within **years 5-7** of Plan 5: Initiate within **years 8-10** of Plan
Following the anticipated designation of Ivoryton Village to the National Register of Historic Places, pursue (via grant funding) similar nominations for Essex Village and Centerbrook Village.	Planning Commission, Staff	3
Develop and implement, in cooperation with the Zoning Commission, design standards and a formal design review process for commercial buildings.	Zoning Commission, Planning Commission	3
Examine the Demolition Delay Ordinance for effectiveness in preventing loss of valuable historic facilities and work with the Board of Selectmen and Essex Historical Society on improvements or alternatives.	Board of Selectmen, Planning Commission	2
Continue active conversation between Planning, Zoning, Economic Development Commissions, Village groups, and the Essex Historical Society on potential regulations or incentives to promote preservation of architectural character.	Planning Commission	2
Adopt Ivoryton Center Zone regulations to encourage a mixed-use center, relax setbacks and parking requirements, and encourage compatible development and re-development.	Zoning Commission	2
Undertake, through grants and Town funds, a landscape improvement and street-tree planting program to develop a "complete" streetscape along Main Street in Ivoryton.	Staff, Planning Commission	1
Encourage redevelopment of the vacant property adjacent to the existing service station, including the creation of an office/retail building fronting Main Street and a public parking facility to the rear. This exploration would include any necessary environmental testing and analysis of development feasibility.	Planning Commission	2
Explore and pursue community wastewater disposal that will allow properties in Ivoryton Center to tie in and fully develop properties.	Water Pollution Control Authority	2

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Develop a permanently-available municipal parking area either to the rear of the lot adjacent the service station, on a portion of the Moeller Instrument Company property, or as alternative options that arise, to allow for "park once and walk" access to the Ivoryton Playhouse and most other retail/office/food facilities in the Village center.	Board of Selectmen, Ivoryton Village Alliance	3
Investigate other shared parking options with Ivoryton Village Restaurant, Ivoryton Fire Company, Ivoryton Inn, Burdick property, and Pratt, Read & Co. piano factory property.	Planning Commission, Board of Selectmen, Ivoryton Village Alliance	2
Work with Ivoryton Village Alliance and other partners to promote Ivoryton Center as retail and tourist destination.	Economic Development Commission	2
Work with Ivoryton Fire Company to identify locations for potential new Fire Station building to accommodate larger apparatus.	Board of Selectmen	3
Consider strategic property acquisition in Ivoryton Center as land may become available to meet parking, municipal facility, or redevelopment needs.	Planning Commission, Board of Selectmen, Staff	3
Work with State of Connecticut and ownership of Pratt, Read, & Co. property to explore cleanup and creative redevelopment options.	Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission	3
Examine and revise Zoning Regulations to encourage a higher density, mixed-use, economically diverse Village that retains its historic character.	Zoning Commission	2
Work with Essex Board of Trade to identify and target business sectors that would contribute to the character and economy of Essex Village.	Economic Development Commission	2
Actively seek solutions to wastewater management limitations, including examination of community septic systems and sewer-based approaches.	Water Pollution Control Authority	2
Support efforts to expand activities at Connecticut River Museum and marinas;	Economic Development Commission	4

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

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Pursue historic recognition for Essex Village, including nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and lower Main Street's designation as a Historic Battleground Site.	Planning Commission, Staff	2
Conduct a parking availability analysis and future parking build-out for Essex Village and consider the creation of a Parking Authority to manage parking and circulation.	Planning Commission, Traffic Authority	2
Continue to support and expand the use of Essex Village as a center for events such as parades, celebrations, and regional tourism festivals.	Economic Development Commission	2
Continue the Centerbrook stakeholders group to serve as a contact between businesses, residents, and future businesses.	Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission	1
Identify landmarks or iconic buildings that stand out and contribute to the identity and character of the area to establish a sense of place. Create pedestrian connections between these landmarks to encourage people to stay in Centerbrook after visiting the train or other businesses.	Economic Development Commission	2
Create bicycle lanes to provide a safe space for cyclists and serve as a buffer between the sidewalks and Main Street. In addition, bicycle lanes would narrow Main Street and help slow traffic.	Traffic Authority, Public Works, Planning Commission	3
Reconstruct the sidewalks: Along the south side of Main Street; Construct continuous sidewalks along the north side with crosswalks in areas of businesses particularly near Gabrielle's and Cumberland Farms to Visiting Nurses and across Deep River Road; Install as sidewalk on the north side of Main Street to connect with the crosswalk serving Essex Court; and Install different pavement texture and color on pedestrian walkways than that of road and parking lots in order to differentiate the pedestrian environment and slow vehicular traffic.	Traffic Authority, Public Works	3
Evaluate and reduce curb-cuts where possible to shift the balance of power from the car to the pedestrian.	Traffic Authority, Connecticut DOT	3

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Implement traffic calming measures, including consideration of narrowing of the roadway and addition of on-street parking.	Traffic Authority, Connecticut DOT	3
Work with businesses, such as Cumberland Farms, to reconstruct or redesign their driveways to make a safer pedestrian walking experience.	Zoning Commission, Economic Development Commission	2
Design and implement better signage throughout Centerbrook, including: Removal of vegetation from crosswalk signs and placing of signage near railroad so visitors are aware of dining and retail opportunities in Centerbrook.	Public Works, Traffic Authority	2
Rezone Spencer's Corners for mixed-use development and allow a residential component.	Zoning Commission	2
Identify grant opportunities, including Façade improvements and Sidewalk reconstruction	Planning Commission, Staff	1
Add landscaping, plantings, and a tree canopy to the streetscape.	Traffic Authority, Planning Commission	2
Implement consistent and cohesive street hardware throughout Centerbrook, including items such as street lamps and banners.	Traffic Authority, Public Works	2

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Enhance multi-modal transportation connections and expand appropriate public infrastructure within and between villages and hubs, as well as improve Essex's connection to surrounding communities.		
Conduct detailed bicycle and pedestrian audits of village centers and routes connecting development nodes and develop a list of needed improvements;	Planning Commission, Traffic Authority	3
Work with Traffic Authority, Public Works, DOT, and RiverCOG to prioritize and seek funding for bicycle and pedestrian facility improvements, including the recommendations of the Safe Routes to School Plan;	Planning Commission, Staff	3
Include consideration of sidewalk/pedestrian accommodation and bicycle accommodation with any roadway redevelopment or improvement;	Traffic Authority	2
Work, with assistance of RiverCOG, on development of regional bicycle and pedestrian network;	Traffic Authority, Planning Commission	2
Include consideration of Traffic Calming measures with roadway improvements;	Traffic Authority	2
Work with Traffic Authority, Economic Development Commission, and Essex Board of Trade on exploration of creation of Parking Authority for Essex Village.	Planning Commission, Staff	3
Conduct regular assessments of the changing needs of Essex residents for mobility and work with RiverCOG, 9 Town Transit, and Traffic Authority on being responsive to transportation solutions.	Traffic Authority	2
Work with Connecticut Water Company to plan for protection of public water sources and conservation techniques to ensure a clean and plentiful water supply for current and future users.	Board of Selectmen, Planning Commission	2
Continue support of Essex's efforts as a Clean Energy Community to reduce energy consumption by 20% between 2013-2018, as well as the development of a Municipal Action Plan to seek further reductions.	Clean Energy Committee	2
Work with utility providers on strengthening the delivery, efficiency, and resilience of power grid.	Board of Selectmen, Emergency Management	3
Seek and encourage pursuit of opportunities for municipal and private expansion of solar and other renewable energy usage.	Clean Energy Committee	2

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Support planning and implementation of expansion of natural gas service to business, institutional, and residential customers to provide a wider range of heating options.	Clean Energy Committee	2
Participate in State of Connecticut's Nutmeg Network and seek additional opportunities to improve access to high-speed data infrastructure.	Board of Selectmen	3
Undertake a new Wastewater Management Facilities study to investigate current capability of land, particularly in the Village areas and development nodes of Essex, to support increased growth and density.	Water Pollution Control Authority	2
Investigate the feasibility of continued on-site wastewater management in Essex, including a full cost-benefit analysis of other options for areas of focused growth such as small community systems and extension of sewer service from Deep River.	Water Pollution Control Authority	2
Work closely with Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Economic Development Commission, WPCA, and Board of Selectmen to ensure that regulatory controls of economic growth are appropriate to manage potential results of increased infrastructure capacity.	Water Pollution Control Authority, Zoning Commission	2
Continue to provide financial and organizational support to Essex Fire Company No. 1 and the Essex Ambulance Association;	Board of Selectmen	1
Work with Essex Fire Company to assess current facility needs and find solutions for expansion of Ivoryton fire station;	Board of Selectmen	3
Ensure that Emergency Management Department strives toward continual improvement and has adequate resources and facilities to meet local needs;	Board of Selectmen	2
Work toward modernizing the Police Department facility and infrastructure.	Board of Selectmen	4

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

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Foster community and economic growth consistent with Essex's history and promotes a more diverse and vibrant small town.		
Work with stakeholders in each Village area, the Economic Development Commission, and the Connecticut Main Street Center to implement streetscape elements, signage, pedestrian enhancements, active tourism/visitor promotion efforts, and business development approaches to strengthen Village character	Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Staff	2
Develop Commercial and Mixed-Use Regulations and Design Standards to enhance and support established architectural character.	Zoning Commission	2
Promote more public access to riverfront for both active and passive recreation, and enhance pedestrian connections to mitigate traffic and parking concerns.	Economic Development Commission, Traffic Authority, Parks & Recreation	2
Implement recommendations of Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan and put into place both conservation and resiliency measures to help protect habitat, prepare for natural disasters and the effects of climate change, and better plan for recovery.	Board of Selectmen	2
Expand allowable uses through Zoning Regulation change to facilitate commercial, restaurant, retail, and tourism-friendly development.	Zoning Commission, Economic Development Commission	2
Support and promote the Connecticut River Museum as a hub of cultural and ecological activity.	Economic Development Commission	3
Undertake a comprehensive review and potential re-write of the Zoning Regulations to reflect the philosophical direction of this Plan and encourage appropriate type and scale of permitted land uses throughout Town.	Zoning Commission, Planning Commission	2
Encourage an active and empowered Economic Development Commission and dedicated Village Groups such as the Board of Trade, Centerbrook Vision Group, and Ivoryton Village Alliance to actively participate in village improvement projects, municipal decision-making and business recruitment and retention.	Economic Development Commission, Board of Selectmen, Planning Commission	2

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Continue to work with the Connecticut Main Street Center and local Economic Development experts on community improvement initiatives.	Economic Development Commission, Staff	2
Work, through the Economic Development Commission, Board of Finance, and Board of Selectmen, on the analysis of tax abatement or other incentives to encourage recruitment, retention, and expansion of targeted business sectors.	Staff, Board of Finance, Economic Development Commission	2
Support ongoing conversation between key culture and tourism assets such as Ivoryton Playhouse, Connecticut River Museum, Essex Steam Train and businesses to coordinate promotion of Essex as a destination.	Economic Development Commission	2
Support recognition and promotion of historic assets, including National Register designation for Villages, Historic Battlefield status, and historic properties.	Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission, Staff	2
Coordinate and support a full range of annual public and tourism events, including parades and festivals, which promote Essex as a vibrant and welcoming community.	Economic Development Commission	2
Explore opportunities to promote the varied talents and experience of Essex artists of all forms for the enjoyment and benefit of all.	Economic Development Commission, Staff	2
Review municipal policies and work with community groups to ensure a consistent message and policy of making Essex a diverse, vibrant, and welcoming community.	Economic Development Commission	2
Complete a strategic plan related to Special Revenue Fund;	Parks & Recreation	3
Conduct a full Asset Inventory of Parks & Recreation facilities.	Parks & Recreation	3
Refine and implement Parks Capital Improvement Plan.	Parks & Recreation	3
Maintain recreational fields and facilities in environmentally sensitive manner.	Parks & Recreation	2
Continue to support Social Services programs and seek opportunities to expand and enhance services to the community;	Board of Selectmen, Social Services	2

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

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Actively participate in discussions of Regional School facilities to ensure continued high-level educational services and efficient use of resources with changing demographics;	Board of Education	2
Support Essex and Ivoryton Library Associations.	Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance	1
Continue physical resource improvements at Town Hall, Public Works facility, and Essex Elementary School;	Board of Selectmen	2
Review municipal service provision and encourage adequate staffing to meet the needs of Essex residents.	Board of Selectmen	2

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Expand the variety of housing options available throughout Essex, including more affordable housing opportunities in both mixed use developments and within traditional subdivision development.		
Establish overall municipal goals for increasing the percentage of state-designated Affordable units within Essex.	Planning Commission	1
Develop Incentive Housing Zone regulations.	Zoning Commission	2
Develop design standards, both flexible and enforceable, to ensure that higher-density and mixed-income housing developments are complimentary to adjacent land uses, buildings and structures.	Zoning Commission	3
Examine potential development incentives beyond the IHZ program to encourage broader participation by developers in creation of affordable housing opportunities.	Planning Commission, Zoning Commission	2
Work closely with the HOPE Partnership, the Partnership for Strong Communities, and other nonprofit groups to educate the public, work with property owners and developers, and advocate for housing opportunities.	Planning Commission, Staff	2
Modify the Zoning Regulations to allow accessory apartments to be incorporated into commercial buildings, on upper floors or to the rear of street-front uses, in the Development Nodes where the soils will support the additional on-site septic systems.	Zoning Commission	2
Modify the Zoning Regulations to clearly define and allow, without a Special Exception process, an accessory apartment as an integral part of a primary owner-occupied residence, regardless of the age of the structure, where the soils will support the additional on-site septic system and off-street parking is available.	Zoning Commission	1
Ensure design standards for construction and maintenance of accessory apartments provide for protection of streetscape and neighborhood character.	Zoning Commission	2
Provide, through social services, resources and assistance to property owners struggling to maintain safe and high-quality housing.	Social Services, Board of Selectmen	2

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

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Encourage permanent preservation and active stewardship of key natural resources.		
Work with the Conservation Commission and the Essex Land Trust to update the Open Space Plan and put into place a specific list of high priority properties for protection.	Planning Commission	3
Support annual funding of the town Open Space Sinking Fund to build a reserve that can be tapped when priority properties become available.	Planning Commission	2
Work with neighboring towns and the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments (RiverCOG) to identify opportunities for regional open space corridors.	Planning Commission, Conservation Commission	2
Encourage Conservation Subdivisions in areas identified as priority open space or natural resource preservation areas.	Planning Commission	1
Strongly consider the use of Fee-In-Lieu of open space for subdivisions in areas of higher density or established neighborhoods.	Planning Commission	2
Direct development applicants to follow the guidance of the Connecticut Stormwater Quality Manual (2004) and its Low Impact Development Appendix (2011) in the design of stormwater practices.	Planning Commission, Zoning Commission	2
Develop and adopt an LID Checklist for the use of development applicants in providing information on their prospective LID practices to the Planning and Zoning Commissions, and incorporation into regulations.	Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Staff	2
Undertake a thorough review of land use regulations and ordinances, resulting in recommendations for additions and revisions that require or support LID. This includes language that pertains to: street width, cul-de-sacs, road drainage, parking ratios, parking lot size, parking lot runoff, alternative pavements, conservation subdivision design, setback and frontages, sidewalks, driveways, roof runoff, stormwater management plans, riparian buffers, clearing and grading, tree conservation, and the use of native plants.	Conservation Commission	2

Recommended Action Item	Lead Entity	Priority
		1: **Immediate** and Ongoing 2: Initiate within **years 1-2** of Plan 3: Initiate within **years 2-4** of Plan 4: Initiate within **years 5-7** of Plan 5: Initiate within **years 8-10** of Plan
Continue support of Essex's efforts as a Clean Energy Community to reduce energy consumption by 20% between 2013-2018, as well as the development of a Municipal Action Plan to seek further reductions.	Clean Energy Committee	2
Pursue additional funding opportunities and set municipal funds aside to support home- and business-owner implementation of energy efficient technologies and building upgrades.	Clean Energy Committee, Board of Finance	3
Require municipal building projects to exceed energy efficiency standards of the State Building Code and to meet guidelines of LEED certification.	Board of Selectmen	2
Encourage Planning and Zoning Commissions to incorporate energy efficiency and other sustainable practices into Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.	Clean Energy Committee	2
Pursue funding and set aside municipal funds to incorporate sustainable energy upgrades such as geothermal heating/cooling, photovoltaic solar panels, wind turbines and/or fuel cell technology into municipal facility construction or improvement where feasible.	Clean Energy Committee, Board of Finance	2
Explore methods of promoting innovative wastewater recovery, use of heat exchangers to waste heat, and the recycling of graywater for non-potable purposes.	Clean Energy Committee	3
Consider the acquisition or conversion of municipal vehicles to alternative fuel sources such as liquid natural gas, hybrid engine technologies or biodiesel.	Board of Selectmen, Public Works	3
Modify Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to promote more compact, efficient development and the orderly flow of transportation as well as enabling pedestrian and nonmotorized transportation options.	Zoning Commission, Planning Commission	3
Work with regional groups to promote expanded public transportation, including passenger rail and the use of multi-modal facilties.	Planning Commission, Traffic Authority	2
Conduct comprehensive evaluation of bridges, culverts and roads within the town in order to prioritize construction projects based on flood vulnerabilities.	Board of Selectmen, Public Works	3

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Recommended Action Item	Lead Entity	Priority
		1: **Immediate** and Ongoing 2: Initiate within **years 1-2** of Plan 3: Initiate within **years 2-4** of Plan 4: Initiate within **years 5-7** of Plan 5: Initiate within **years 8-10** of Plan
Continue installing generators at all critical facilities including the public works garage and transfer station and outfitting telecommunications towers with backup generators for long term power outages.	Board of Selectmen, Emergency Management	2
Conduct a dam inventory and updated conditions analysis with engineering specialists per State regulation;	Board of Selectmen, Public Works	3
Work with all levels of government to implement the recommendations of the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan.	Board of Selectmen	2
Consider of adoption of Right-to-Farm Ordinance;	Board of Selectmen	3
Consider of adoption of tax abatement policies for farm buildings and equipment;	Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance	3
Actively participate in the RiverCOG Regional Agricultural Council;	Planning Commission	2
Support for the designation of Locally Important Agricultural Soils;	Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission	2
Review Zoning Regulations and other municipal policies for "farm friendliness";	Zoning Commission	3
Consider allowing use of Town lands and other open space for agricultural uses.	Board of Selectmen, Essex Land Trust	3
Work with Connecticut Water Company, Department of Health, and municipal commissions to develop a sourcewater protection plan for public drinking supplies.	Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission	2
Support the Tree Warden's efforts to increase funding for street tree planting and undertake a management strategy for street trees.	Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance	2
Review and update Aquifer Protection Regulations as appropriate.	Zoning Commission	2
Update inventories of scenic and archeological resources and provide for consideration of protection of these resources in regulatory priorities.	Zoning Commission	3

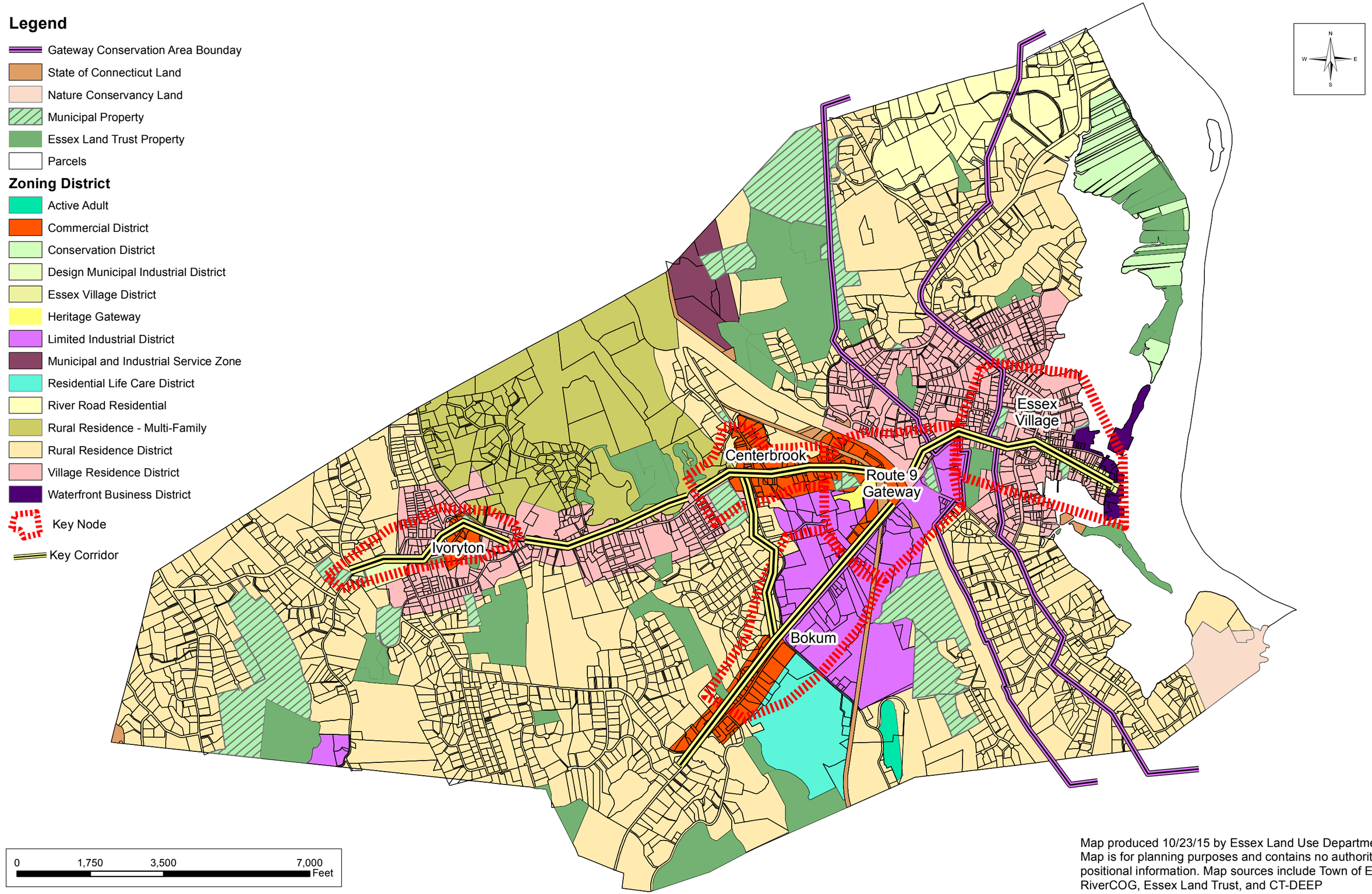
Land Use Policy Map

The enclosed policy map, shown on the fold out page to follow, supports of the goals of this Plan of Conservation & Development.

This Development Policy Map illustrates both existing Zoning Districts and areas of Town where additional development density is encouraged. The "Key Node" areas are rough boundaries of the key focus areas described in this Plan; specifically the Villages of ***Essex***, ***Centerbrook*** and ***Ivoryton***, as well as the ***Bokum Corner*** and ***Route 9 Gateway*** areas. Most of the future economic and population growth in Essex is encouraged to occur within these nodes in a way that increases activity, mixing of uses, housing and commercial density, walkability, and community vitality. These nodes also reflect the general extent to which community wastewater services should be considered as part of any facilities plan. Any increased activity or growth within these areas should be accomplished in a way and of a design that is sensitive and supportive of Essex's community character and heritage. The "Key Corridors" are the roadways and pathways accessing and connecting these nodes. Ensuring that these connections are strong, appropriate for higher traffic loads, and supportive of safe, non-motorized travel (bicycle and pedestrian) is critical. Municipal regulation changes and policy decisions should be supportive of the goals of this map.

This map also reflects existing open space and conserved land under the ownership of the Town of Essex, the State of Connecticut, the Essex Land Conservation Trust, and the Nature Conservancy. Continued preservation of land in Essex, particularly lands that build upon existing holdings and create natural resource corridors, are of high priority.

Town of Essex Plan of Conservation & Development: Development Priority Areas



Map produced 10/23/15 by Essex Land Use Department
Map is for planning purposes and contains no authoritative positional information. Map sources include Town of Essex, RiverCOG, Essex Land Trust, and CT-DEEP

Appendix

Sec. 8-23. Preparation, amendment or adoption of plan of conservation and development.

(a)(1) At least once every ten years, the commission shall prepare or amend and shall adopt a plan of conservation and development for the municipality. Following adoption, the commission shall regularly review and maintain such plan. The commission may adopt such geographical, functional or other amendments to the plan or parts of the plan, in accordance with the provisions of this section, as it deems necessary. The commission may, at any time, prepare, amend and adopt plans for the redevelopment and improvement of districts or neighborhoods which, in its judgment, contain special problems or opportunities or show a trend toward lower land values…

(d) In preparing such plan, the commission or any special committee shall consider the following: (1) The community development action plan of the municipality, if any, (2) the need for affordable housing, (3) the need for protection of existing and potential public surface and ground drinking water supplies, (4) the use of cluster development and other development patterns to the extent consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity within the municipality, (5) the state plan of conservation and development adopted pursuant to chapter 297, (6) the regional plan of conservation and development adopted pursuant to section 8-35a, (7) physical, social, economic and governmental conditions and trends, (8) the needs of the municipality including, but not limited to, human resources, education, health, housing, recreation, social services, public utilities, public protection, transportation and circulation and cultural and interpersonal communications, (9) the objectives of energy-efficient patterns of development, the use of solar and other renewable forms of energy and energy conservation, and (10) protection and preservation of agriculture.

(e) (1) Such plan of conservation and development shall (A) be a statement of policies, goals and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality, (B) provide for a system of principal thoroughfares, parkways, bridges, streets, sidewalks, multipurpose trails and other public ways as appropriate, (C) be designed to promote, with the greatest efficiency and economy, the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people and identify areas where it is feasible and prudent (i) to have compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented mixed use development patterns and land reuse, and (ii) to promote such development patterns and land reuse, (D) recommend the most desirable use of land within the municipality for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation, agricultural and other purposes and include a map showing such proposed land uses, (E) recommend the most desirable density of population in the several parts of the municipality, (F) note any inconsistencies with the following growth management principles: (i) Redevelopment and revitalization of commercial centers and areas of mixed land uses with existing or planned physical infrastructure; (ii) expansion of housing opportunities and design choices to accommodate a variety of household types and needs; (iii) concentration of development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors to support the viability of transportation options and land reuse; (iv) conservation and restoration of the natural environment, cul-

tural and historical resources and existing farmlands; (v) protection of environmental assets critical to public health and safety; and (vi) integration of planning across all levels of government to address issues on a local, regional and state-wide basis, (G) make provision for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region in which the municipality is located, as designated by the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management under section 16a-4a, (H) promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate income households, and encourage the development of housing which will meet the housing needs identified in the state's consolidated plan for housing and community development prepared pursuant to section 8-37t and in the housing component and the other components of the state plan of conservation and development prepared pursuant to chapter 297. In preparing such plan the commission shall consider focusing development and revitalization in areas with existing or planned physical infrastructure.

(2) For any municipality that is contiguous to Long Island Sound, such plan shall be (A) consistent with the municipal coastal program requirements of sections 22a-101 to 22a-104, inclusive, (B) made with reasonable consideration for restoration and protection of the ecosystem and habitat of Long Island Sound, and (C) designed to reduce hypoxia, pathogens, toxic contaminants and floatable debris in Long Island Sound.

(f) Such plan may show the commission's and any special committee's recommendation for (1) conservation and preservation of traprock and other ridgelines, (2) airports, parks, playgrounds and other public grounds, (3) the general location, relocation and improvement of schools and other public buildings, (4) the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned, for water, sewerage, light, power, transit and other purposes, (5) the extent and location of public housing projects, (6) programs for the implementation of the plan, including (A) a schedule, (B) a budget for public capital projects, (C) a program for enactment and enforcement of zoning and subdivision controls, building and housing codes and safety regulations, (D) plans for implementation of affordable housing, (E) plans for open space acquisition and greenways protection and development, and (F) plans for corridor management areas along limited access highways or rail lines, designated under section 16a-27, (7) proposed priority funding areas, and (8) any other recommendations as will, in the commission's or any special committee's judgment, be beneficial to the municipality. The plan may include any necessary and related maps, explanatory material, photographs, charts or other pertinent data and information relative to the past, present and future trends of the municipality.

2015-2025
PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT