The 2009
Plan of Conservation & Development
Chester, Connecticut

Public Hearing
June 19, 2008

Adopted
March 19, 2009

Effective
April 22, 2009

Prepared by
The Chester
Planning & Zoning
Commission

and

CONNECTICUT RIVER ESTUARY REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

CHESTER CONNECTICUT 16 92

The Chester Planning & Zoning Commission would like to thank the townspeople, merchants, citizen groups, and current and former members of Chester's Boards and Commissions who took part in the formulation of this Plan. All who contributed their valuable time and knowledge — many who are experts in their related professions — have helped to make this plan insightful and visionary. Special thanks also to the CRERPA staff members who dedicated countless hours to creating the maps, structuring the Plan, and advising the Commission.

The next step is up to those of us who care about the well-being of our town, its citizens, its economic health, and the flora and fauna that thrive in this beautiful and fragile environment. This plan is nothing if not a call to action. Please take special note of the multitude of recommendations listed throughout, and repeated in Chapter 9. They are the heart of this Plan. Their implementation is essential to its purpose, and to our future.

Cover Photos

Connecticut River and Sunflowers; source: Brenda J. Davis
Tractor Parade, Chester Center; source: Caryn B. Davis
Gazebo at the Chester Meeting House; source: Cummings & Good
North Pattaconk Falls; source: Skip Hubbard

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Previous Chester Plans

1969 Plan

The first Chester Plan of Development was completed in 1969 with the help of the consulting firm of Raymond, May, Parish and Pine. The timing of the Plan, just before the 1970 Census, required that 1960 Census figures be used for future projections. The population in 1960 was 2,502 people. The 1969 Plan anticipated population growth which would result in a population in the year 2000 of more than 10,000 people. The Plan recommended that land for commercial and industrial purposes be located so as not to infringe on residential areas, and that land zoned for non-residential uses not greatly exceed that needed to provide local employment. It also recommended that there be one major retail center, in the Chester Center area. The Plan stated that other commercial areas should be encouraged, such as on "old Route 9 … along lines not competitive with the center". The 1969 Plan urged Chester to take advantage of its water resources, promoting parks along the Connecticut River, preserving river views and protecting potable water sources.

A survey circulated in preparation for the 1969 Plan "indicated a strong desire to retain the community's rural aspects, the beauty of the woods and streams, and space afforded by a small population spread over a large area". Residents liked the quiet and privacy of Chester and its convenient location. They disliked the "run-down" Chester Center, high taxes and inadequate shopping facilities. Today, almost 40 years later, Chester's current zoning districts follow the pattern recommended in 1969.

1995 Plan

The Plan of Development was reviewed and revised in 1995 as an "in house" project, with assistance from the University of Connecticut Extension Center. In the 26 years following the

Statutory Requirements - Contents of the Plan of Conservation and Development

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires a local planning commission to prepare, adopt and amend a plan of conservation and development for its community, with recommendations for the most desirable land use and density within the town. In the language of the Statute, the plan should be a statement of policies, goals and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality, and should be "designed to promote with greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people."

The Chester Plan of Conservation and Development is intended to be the central guidance document for town actions. Other plans for specific geographic areas (such as Chester Creek, Cedar Lake or the Village Center) or for specific functional areas (such as transportation, housing or a new commercial area) may be prepared and adopted between revisions to the Plan of Conservation and Development, but such plans should be consistent with the overall plan and further its recommendations.

1969 Plan, public awareness of environmental issues increased dramatically, environmental protection legislation was passed at federal and state levels, and local land use officials were required to include environmental restrictions in their decision-making. Expectations for intense property use were lowered. According to the 1990 Census, Chester's population was 3,417, nowhere near the 10,000 projected in the 1969 Plan. Along the shore, towns abutting I-95 experienced more rapid growth, but this did not carry over to more remote towns like Chester. The 1995 Plan re-emphasized the importance of Chester's rural character.

The 1995 Plan proclaimed the following: "The primary goal of the 1995 Town Plan of Development can be stated as follows: *To maintain the unique heritage and character of Chester by encouraging a strong sense of community and protecting natural and architectural features, while providing for sensitive development, growth and change that will preserve, enhance and strengthen our town."* Recommendations in the 1995 Plan emphasized a modest approach to growth which was compatible with existing development

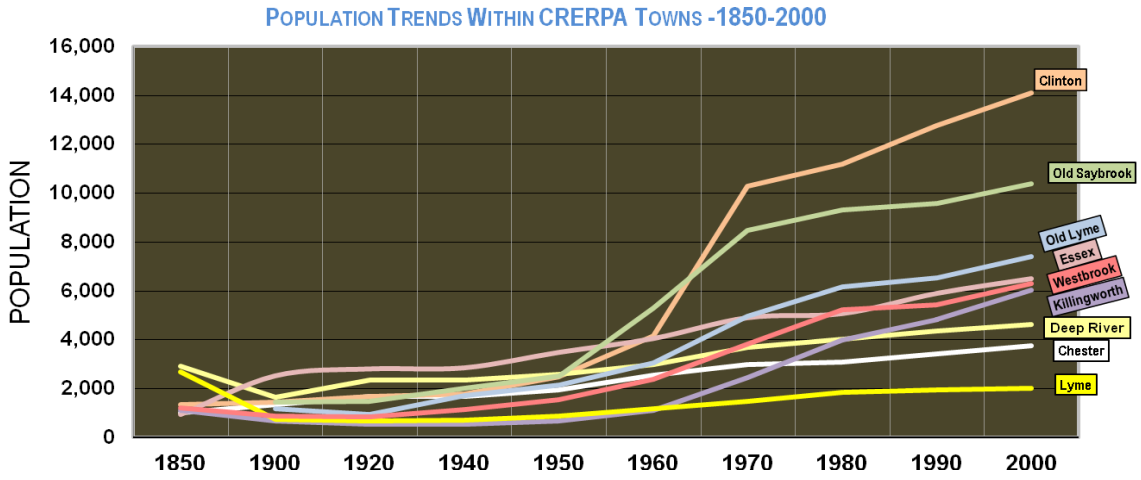
The 2009 Plan

State Statutes require the town's Planning Commission to review and revise its Plan at least every ten years. Chester's Planning and Zoning Commission had been considering a revision for several years and, in early 2007, requested assistance from the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency in completing that update.

Changes

Since the 1995 Chester Plan, the lower Connecticut River Valley and Shoreline towns in the planning region have seen significant population and economic growth. The largest growth has occurred in those towns along the I-95 Corridor. Chester and Lyme have experienced the least amount of population growth, as they are located furthest away from the I-95 corridor. Both Chester and Lyme have a significant percentage of their total land area in protected open space. Each town still retains a character reminiscent of its past. Lyme's history and character is agricultural. Chester's is a past with a riverfront heritage, a central village, and water-powered industry.

There has been relatively low population growth since the last plan. In many ways, Chester has changed little since 1995. Like many villages elsewhere, Chester Center has had a shift in focus from light industry and local services to a more tourist-oriented market. The larger regional economy has experienced a similar shift, from an industrial and defense base to a wide tourism sector which includes two of the largest casinos in the world. While new commercial development and a new town hall have been located on Route 154, Chester has not been subject to development requests from chain or "big box" stores in the manner of other neighboring towns. Chester Center has substantially maintained its village character and remains attractive to residents and visitors alike.



New large single family residences have been constructed on large lots in previously undeveloped portions of town. The cost of buying a home in Chester and the cost of living has increased in accordance with the national trend. While many residents work within the town, commuting to work outside has become more expensive and time-consuming. With the Shore Line East commuter rail service out of Old Saybrook and Westbrook, residents of the area can physically commute by train to southwestern Connecticut and New York City. At the same time, advanced telecommunications technology is enabling people in the area to work at locations remote from their traditional worksite, thereby reducing the need to commute at all.

In this age of electronics, change is rapid and sometimes unpredictable. The future will be shaped by changes in telecommunications, the impacts of global warming, changes in national and global economic conditions, and political changes in this country and around the world. Regionally, factors including public concern about property taxes, housing costs, the potential for a major hurricane, and issues associated with increasing traffic congestion along the I-95 corridor will bring consequences which can only be surmised. All of these trends must be kept in mind as the Town Plan is implemented.

The 2009 Plan takes a more comprehensive approach than that of the previous two plans. The principal emphasis of this plan is the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural resource base, and the Town's connection to water resources which have always been central to the viability and character of Chester.

- Chapters Two and Three of the Plan identify Chester's natural and cultural resources and consider the best ways to address these assets.
- Chapter Four examines the existing development and economic base and the type and location of development appropriate for the town.
- Chapter Five considers the goal of housing diversity and how it might be achieved in a manner compatible with Chester's character.
- Chapter Six examines infrastructure, including Town owned property.

- Chapter Seven focuses on Chester Center, with a detailed discussion of some of the implementation actions discussed in earlier chapters, and emphasis on action and responsibilities.
- Chapter Eight of this plan looks at trends in the region, nation and world, how they will affect Chester, and how Chester can become a more sustainable community.
- Chapter Nine summarizes the recommendations contained in the body of the Plan. It is a call to action.

Statutory Requirements - Consistency with State and Regional Plans

Over the past decade, the Connecticut Legislature has significantly revised the statutory requirements for a local Plan of Conservation and Development. Even the title of the Plan has been modified, to reflect the need to balance future development between conservation and development. Gradually, the legislature has added new requirements for the Plan's content. There has also been an increased interest in developing consistency between plans at different levels of government. Statutes now require that local plans be consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, and with the regional plan for the area in which the town is located.

State Policies Plan of Conservation and Development 2005-2010

In 2005, under the direction of the General Assembly, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) completed a five year update of the state Conservation and Development Policies Plan, with an emphasis on growth management strategies. The policies set forth in the Plan were later incorporated into Connecticut General Statutes in 2005. The State Plan recognizes the implications of suburban "sprawl" in wasted natural and economic resources, destruction of the character of the state, and the associated high energy demands. The Office of Responsible Growth, within OPM, is charged with the leadership role in carrying out the growth management principles within the state.

State Plan Recommendations for Chester

The State Plan proposes future land uses within Connecticut. Chester is targeted primarily for preservation. The state forest and water company land is identified as preserved open space. Other areas of town are designated as conservation areas and rural lands. Rural lands are areas where sprawl is strongly discouraged. The Chester Center area is designated as a rural community center. The 2009 Chester Plan of Conservation and Development is consistent with the policies and recommendations of the State Plan.

Connecticut River Estuary Regional Plan 1995 (under revision)

Chester is part of the nine town Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA), one of fifteen statutorily-designated regional planning organizations within the State. CRERPA's last regional plan was completed in 1995 and is in the process of being updated, with a completion

anticipated during 2009. Within the regional plan, much of Chester is designated as a resource protection area. Other areas within Chester are indicated as "rural residential" and "established residential". Two specific locations were designated as economic growth areas, Inspiration Lane and the area near Chester airport. Chester Center is identified as a village area. The Chester Plan is consistent with the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Plan.

Process to Develop The Chester 2009 Plan

Work to update the Plan began several years ago with discussions among Planning and Zoning Commission members and with input from other town commissions, including the Economic Development Commission, the Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands and Harbor Management, all of whom provided detailed written suggestions. In 2007, the Planning and Zoning Commission held two Saturday morning workshops for interested individuals to provide input and make recommendations for the Plan. The two Commission Workshops included a series of structured exercises to focus community discussion on specific subjects. A detailed report on the results from each workshop was prepared. A copy of those reports is on file in the office of the Planning and Zoning Commission and on the Town website.

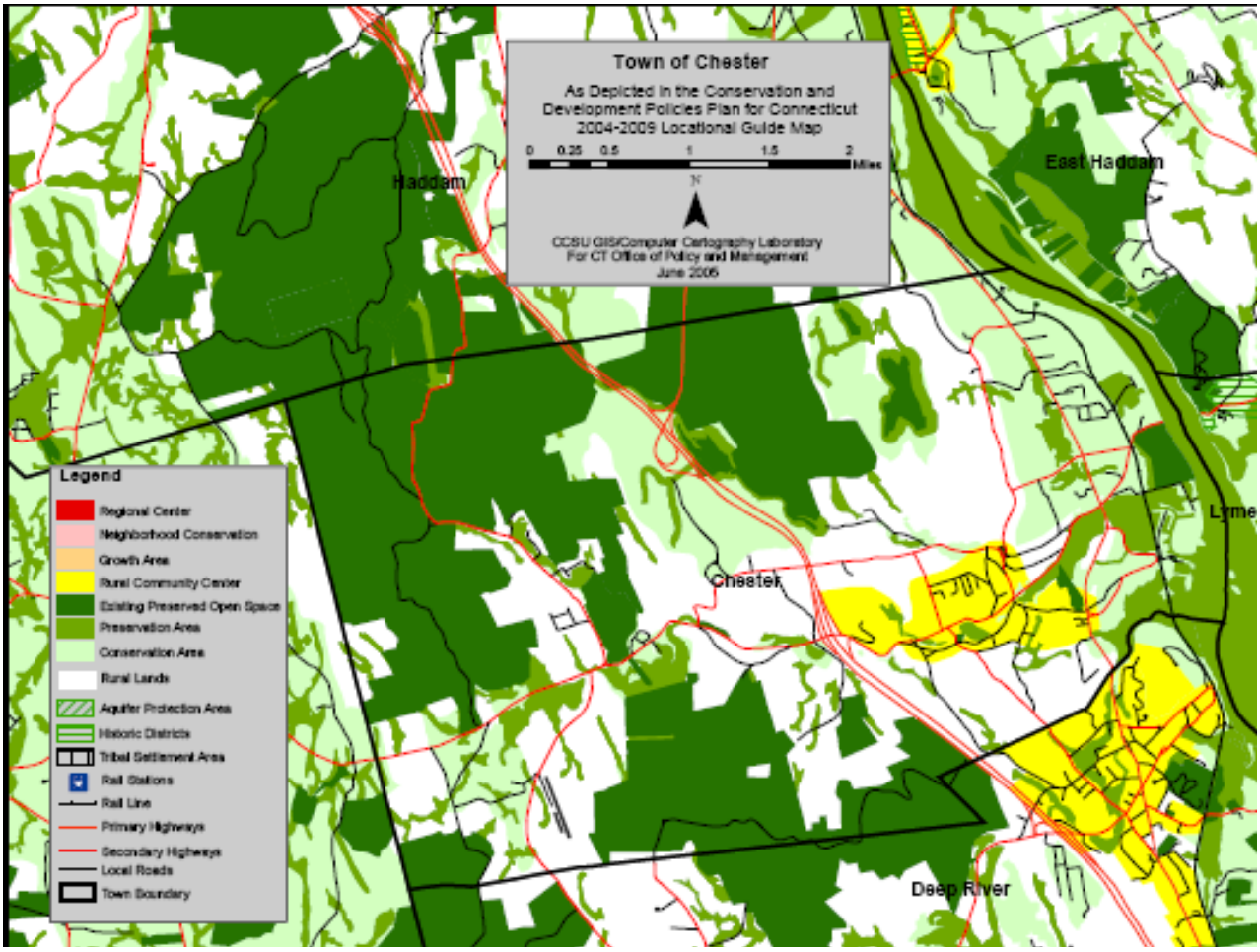
Following the workshops, the Commission began an internal discussion of the issues facing Chester. Recommendations to address these issues and implementation measures were discussed and drafted with the assistance of CRERPA. Draft portions of the Plan were circulated to interested commissions and made available to the public. Additionally, a formal presentation was conducted a few weeks before the final public hearing.

State Plan Policies

The following principles are intended to apply to the state as a whole, but are also applicable to smaller geographic areas including regions and even individual towns.

State growth management principles:

- Redevelop and revitalize regional centers and areas with existing or currently planned 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 operations.
- Conserve and restore the natural environment, cultural and historic resources, and traditional rural lands.
- Protect and ensure the integrity of environmental assets critical to the public health and safety.
- Promote integrated planning across all levels of government to address issues on a statewide, regional and local basis.



Map 1-1
Source: State OPM - POCD

Chester P&Z Workshops (Source: LJD 2007)

Workshop Results

Two workshops were held on consecutive Saturday mornings, February 3 and February 10, 2007, in the Chester Meeting House to discuss the Plan of Conservation and Development. These workshops were facilitated by Planning and Zoning Commission members. The meetings were well attended, with a strong representation from residents, non-resident workers and merchants.

The first workshop focused on the unique aspects of the town and its general character, asking participants to identify key issues that should be addressed in the Plan. The second discussion went more deeply into the hopes and fears that residents have for their town and how external development pressures might affect Chester in the future. Participants joined in open discussion as well as providing written comments in workbooks distributed for that purpose.

Discussion and written comments at the workshops showed a deep appreciation for the natural and cultural resources of Chester. The town's scenic character and small town sense of community were given as the principal reason that many people moved to or stayed in Chester. There was a fear that changes in the type of development within the town would diminish the quality of life found here. Participants were also concerned about the increasing costs of living in town, particularly with increased property taxes. Some participants expressed the fear that they might have to move out of town due to high costs, and that Chester's children could not afford to locate here in the future.

Most who expressed an opinion urged the Commission to create a Plan that restricted future development to that which was compatible with the small town character. In one exercise, entitled "beauty contest", participants rated a series of pictures as favorable or unfavorable on a ten point scale. The best-liked slide in the exercise was one showing four views of Chester Center.

Beauty Contest Results

These photos

received the

highest score for

"Most Liked"

Issues raised in the workshops which are addressed in this Plan include community appearance, natural resources protection, open space protection, population diversity, sewers, and future economic development and infrastructure improvements. The results of these workshops are reflected in the recommendations of this Plan.

CHAPTER 2 : NATURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

During the preparation of this Plan, it was clear from responses at the workshops and conversations with Chester residents, as well as previous studies, that Chester's natural resources lead the list of important factors which define the character of Town.

Geologically, most of the sixteen square miles that make up the Town of Chester are composed of very old crystalline metamorphic bedrock folded into a series of north/south oriented hills, with streams flowing through the breaks. This rugged terrain made early agricultural development difficult in many parts of Chester, but provided a boon to young industries during the age of water-powered mills. The Connecticut River valley itself is much younger geologically, having been created since the departure of the glaciers, between 20 and 30 thousand years ago. The best farmland soils are found near the river and in the western portion of town around Cedar Lake, although little farming has taken place there in recent years.

Figure 2-1 – Cedar Lake (Source: CRERPA/LJD 2007)

Water Resources

Chester's water resources have played an important role in the past development of the Town. This Plan focuses on the importance of these resources and the role they serve in determining future growth. Chester's abundant water resources are visible throughout the town. Intermittent streams run into larger streams and eventually into the Connecticut River.

Twenty-seven existing dams throughout the town slow the rushing water, creating mill ponds and dramatic waterfalls over many spillways. During the 18th and 19th centuries, more than fifty industries did business along the Pattaconk Brook. Many of the dams created to provide water power for grist and saw mills for the manufacture of textiles, witch hazel and woodworking tools, are no longer in use for these purposes. Several other dams today hold back the water in reservoirs belonging to the Connecticut Water Company, or contain water in lakes used for recreational purposes. The Connecticut DEP maintains a registration of existing dams and their condition when last inspected.

Water also provided a means of transportation, and Chester Cove was the location of early commerce and shipbuilding. For a while, the Connecticut River was a major transportation corridor. The last steamship docked at the Chester town dock along the Connecticut River in 1931.

Drinking Water

There are three major sources of potable water in Chester: the Chester Division of the Connecticut Water Company (CWC); the CWC-owned and operated well system at Chester Village West adult community; and areas not serviced by the water company that rely on private wells drilled to capture water located in fractures in the bedrock.

Public Water Supply

The Connecticut Water Company owns several water divisions throughout the state. Their Chester Division serves portions of Chester, Deep River and Essex, with 1,984 hookups serving 9,012 housing units (according to 2003 data). Daily residential consumption rate in the Chester System is 71 gallons per capita. Storage for the Chester Division is provided in the Turkey Hill, Wilcox, Deuses Pond and Upper Chester and Lower Chester Reservoirs in the northern portion of the Town. Water from Turkey Hill and Wilcox Reservoirs is pumped from Deuses Pond Reservoir to the Lower Chester Reservoir for filtration and distribution from the Williams Water Treatment Plant. Water is also stored and released from the Upper Chester Reservoir directly to the Lower Chester Reservoir. The Lower Chester Reservoir is aerated to reduce manganese pick-up from bottom sediments. Ground water sources in the division include the Dennison Well (1962) and three active wells at the Chester Village West System (1989/1990), which are treated by chlorination, pH treatment and phosphate addition. The Chester Division currently provides an average of 1.34 million gallons per day (mgd) and 1.69 mgd on a peak basis.

The water company has calculated that the available water supply is sufficient to meet projected demand for the next 50 years. CWC's Water Supply Plan projects that a part of the town of Haddam will be included in the Chester Division service area within the next 20 years. Within Chester, the water company expects to expand service to meet additional demand north along Route 154

Figure 2-4 – Water Company Property Entrance
(Source: CRERPA/LJD 2007)

and southwest of the Village Center. Provision of public water to areas not previously serviced is likely to result in a greater burden on disposal systems for on-site sewage. Any proposed extension of public water in Chester should consider the ability of the soil to handle additional effluent effectively.

The Chester Village West System consists of three drilled wells, with a safe yield of 9 gallons per minute each, and provides domestic water service only to the retirement community located on Route 148.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PUBLIC WATER:

1. Protect water company lands by adopting restrictive zoning to maintain and protect critical watershed areas.

2. Limit future expansion of water service to areas where soils are suitable for onsite sewage disposal.

Private Wells

In many towns, drinking water is found underground in large stratified drift deposits. In these areas, new wells will easily provide an adequate supply of domestic water. Chester's private wells, however, tap into bedrock fractures, with much less assurance that an adequate supply will be found. While private wells have generally provided satisfactory water quality and quantity, some towns with similar geological conditions require that a satisfactory well be provided prior to construction of a house or business.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERING PRIVATE WELLS:

3. Consider requiring a viable well be provided prior to construction.

Water Quality

According to the State DEP, there are no known large areas of ground water contamination in Chester. The quality of surface water is typically a function of nearby development. Improperly operating septic systems and contaminants carried by storm water runoff are principal sources of "non-point source" pollution. Until recent years, the disposal "solution" for septic waste was to pipe it away, often into the nearest stream. We now know better, but septic systems built before such knowledge may be hard to repair or replace. The town is under order from Connecticut DEP to correct contamination resulting from older dense development in the Village area. Elsewhere in town, there may be scattered systems that are not performing properly due to lack of maintenance, location or increased water use. Non-point pollution in runoff from paved (impervious) surfaces, fertilizers and pesticides from lawns also have an adverse effect on water quality. Sedimentation and erosion controls and retention of wooded areas along streams are helpful measures to reduce pollution.

Protection of Water Company Lands

CWC owns approximately 98% of the watershed area of the Lower Chester and Upper Chester Reservoirs. Land not under CWC ownership is part of the Cockaponsett State Forest. The Connecticut Water Company's Water Supply Plan for the Chester Division recommends that the Chester Plan of Conservation and Development include provisions for developing watershed regulations to protect these critical areas. CWC continues to review and comment on proposed amendments to the town's zoning and inland wetlands regulations and land use applications that may affect these sources of supply. The State's Conservation and Development Policies Plan recommends that these watershed areas be maintained as existing preserved open space and conservation areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WATER QUALITY:

4. Increase education of landowners on the importance of preventing deterioration of water quality caused by the introduction of contaminants into lakes and streams.

5. Monitor water bodies and streams for nutrient content.

6. Promote the maintenance or creation of vegetated buffer strips along lakes and streams.

7. Promote the use of low phosphorous fertilizers and detergent.

8. Promote the use of non-chemical fertilizers and pesticides on town properties.

9. Continue to enforce proper septic design and maintenance.

10. Minimize impervious surfaces to promote infiltration and filtration of storm water.

11. Regularly clean storm drains on town roads and provide corrective action for siltation and damage to town roads.

12. Ensure that the state cleans catch basins on state highways.

13. Review storm water management policies and practices to protect water quality.

14. Monitor for invasive plant species in water bodies and streams and take measures to remove such vegetation while the infestation is minor, using non-chemical methods for removal when practical.

Figure 2-6– Maple Street/Main Street
1936 Flood (Source: Chester Historical Society)

15. Consider ecological restoration of town waterways, including a review of dams for installation of fish ladders or specific dam removals.

16. Conduct boat inspections prior to launching to minimize the possibility of inadvertent introduction of invasive species.

17. Continue to solicit comment from CWC regarding zoning regulation changes and land use issues.

Hydrology

Figure 2-7 – 2007 April Flood – Chrisholm Marina. Barnick Property (Source: LJD/2007)

Chester approved several conventional subdivisions between 1990 and 2000. New subdivision development has slowed in recent years. Recent development in the town has predominantly been on single lots or in the form of expansion or reconstruction of existing homes. New homes tend to be larger than those built in earlier times. Despite the slow pace of development compared to most other area towns, there has been an overall increase in impervious surface and new lawns. Not only do these developed surfaces result in increased pollution, but the rate and volume of storm water runoff from these surfaces is greater than that from forested areas. Combined with changes in weather patterns and the likelihood of sea level rise, changes in surface cover can increase the threat of flooding, especially when ground is frozen or saturated. Computer-generated models from the Federal Emergency Management Agency show the areas of town that are subject to flooding today. Chester has adopted a Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan that identifies areas where damage may result from flooding and identifies mitigating actions that might be taken in advance of such an emergency. All construction of new storm water drainage systems, bridges, and roads should take into consideration likely future water elevations.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HYDROLOGY:

18. Discourage construction of new structures in areas subject to flooding.

19. Require new infrastructure improvements be designed to anticipate potential future sea level rise.

20. Encourage the Connecticut DEP to regularly monitor dams in Chester for safety and enforce their repair when necessary.

21. Require the use of best storm water management practices to reduce runoff rate and volume.

22. Review road standards periodically to assure that the town is requiring the most up-to-date management techniques.

Map 2-1

Hydrology Features: Chester

Datalayers used to produce this map and the following information provided by Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). They were acquired on 5/15/08 (http://www.dep.state.ct.us/gis/data/data.asp).

Subregional Basins:

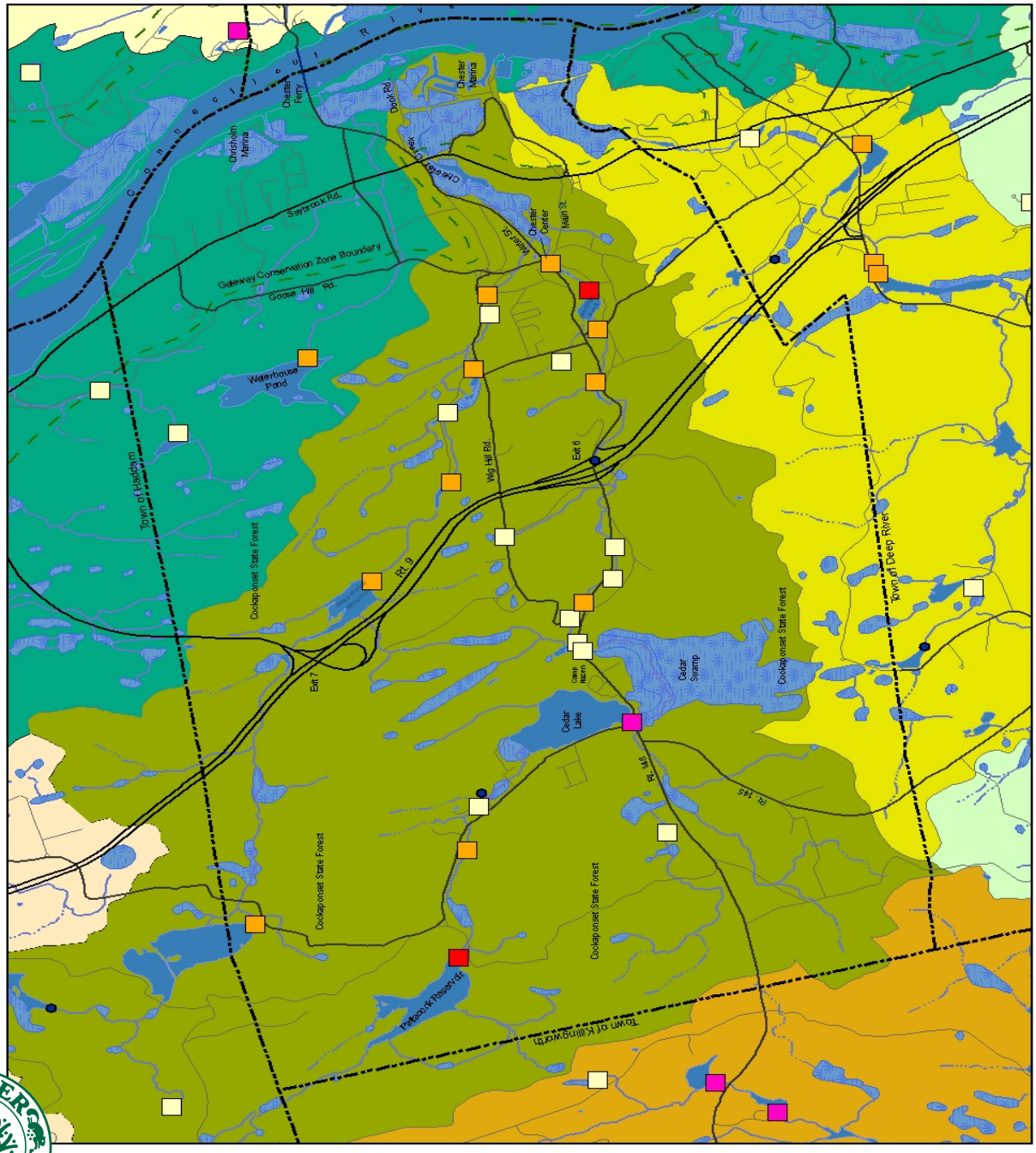
This is a 1:24,000 scale datalayer of Subregional drainage basins (watersheds) in Connecticut. The basin boundaries were originally delineated by interpreting the contour elevation lines and the hydrography network appearing on the 7.5 minute U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) quadrangle maps across Connecticut and published between 1978 and 1984. This data was digitized between 1978 and 1988 and published in 1988. This work was conducted by the Environmental and Geographic Information Center (formally the Natural Resources Center) of DEP and the Connecticut office of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Hydrography

These are 1:24,000 scale datalayers that include all hydrography features depicted on the U.S. Geological Survey 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle maps created between 1969 and 1984 for the State of Connecticut. Of these features reservoirs; lakes, ponds, marshes, single line rivers, streams, brooks, and intermittent streams are depicted on this map. The State of Connecticut (DEP) is the creator and maintainer of the data layer. The original datalayers were published in 1994 and aspects of them were improved in 2005, although they contain the same set of geographic features.

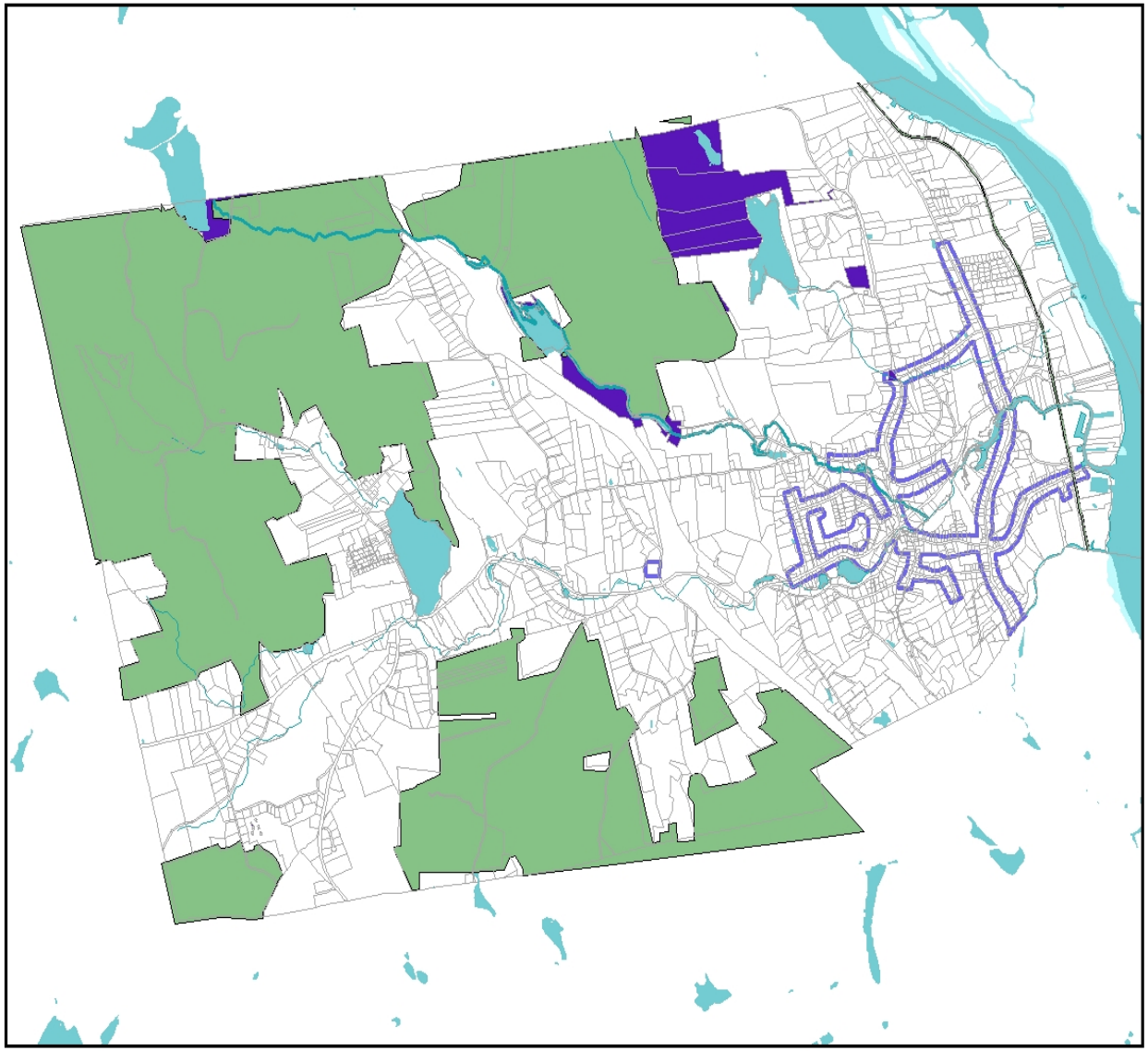
Dams

This is a 1:24,000-scale datalayer of dams in Connecticut. It includes dams owned and operated by individuals, businesses, corporations, water and electric utilities, local, state, and federal governments. Each dam is assigned a unique dam number. This information was compiled in 1996 and based on dam safety information from the Inland Water Resources Division, Bureau of Water Management, Department of Environmental Protection. The dams were mapped on 7½ Minute U.S. Geological Survey topographic quadrangle maps and digitized at 1:24,000 scale.



Water Company Properties and Service Area:Chester, CT

Map 2-2



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Legend

- CTDEP Property
- Connecticut Water Company Property
- Public Water Service Boundary
- Water Features
- Parcels

Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.

0 0.5 1 Miles

23. Review the Chester Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan to identify measures that should be programmed into the town's capital improvement program, including repair to high risk dams.

24. Maintain readiness for management of response and recovery from natural disasters.

Major Water Features of Chester

Connecticut River

Since the early 1990's, the Connecticut River and its estuary has been recognized for its outstanding biological resources. Nationally, the Silvio Conte Refuge was established through the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1997. The Clinton administration designated the Connecticut River as one of fourteen American Heritage Rivers in the United States. The Nature Conservancy declared the estuary as one of the 40 "Last Great Places" in this hemisphere. Internationally, the river estuary was recognized in the Ramsar Treaty as a globally important wetlands area. In 2007, the Connecticut Greenways Council designated the Gateway area of the lower Connecticut River as a state greenway. Water quality in the River has greatly improved since 1970 when it was locally referred to as "the best landscaped sewer in America". Today, the Connecticut River is intimately associated with the positive image of Chester.

Figure 2-8 – Connecticut River and Long Island Sound (Source: Chris Joyell, 2004)

Coastal and Harbor Management

Chester is a "coastal town" regulated under the federal and state coastal management acts. The coastal boundary is a band of land running along the Connecticut River. By State Statutes, coastal site plan reviews are required for most development within the boundary area. Chester also has a Harbor Management Commission, authorized under State Statutes to manage the waters of the town below high tide, including plans for waterfront use and marina operations. A Harbor Management Plan was adopted by the Town in 1994 and is currently being updated with the identification of separate dock management units within the harbor management area (HMA), special consideration of public visual access, and the preservation of currently undeveloped areas. The HMC, through the Town Meeting process, will also adopt the dock standards under review by Federal and State authorities. Chester has been instrumental in establishing a regional program, funded by the State, which provides a pump-out boat for septic waste from boats in the River. This program has successfully operated for several years.

Chester Ferry

The state-operated Chester-Hadlyme Ferry not only serves as a tourist attraction, but as a preferred transportation option for many local residents. On the east bank of the River, in the Town of Lyme, the approach to the ferry along Whalebone Cove on Route 148 and the ferry crossing itself have been designated a State Scenic Road. This designation protects the road against state improvements which ignore the scenic aspects of the area. Consideration should be given to requesting a similar designation for Route 148 from the River to the Killingworth/Chester town line.

The Gateway Commission

In 1973, the State Legislature created the regional Gateway Commission, including land in the eight towns along the Lower Connecticut River, "to protect the unique scenic, ecological, scientific and historic value, to prevent deterioration of the natural and traditional river scene." Comprised of two representatives from each town including Chester, the Commission is active in establishing standards, and in acquiring open space and conservation easements along the River. While the Town's holdings along the river are limited, the Gateway Commission was instrumental in protecting two large waterfront parcels in Chester through purchases or easements: the former Garthwaite property, purchased in fee, and the Bonanomi property which is protected by a conservation easement. These town's holdings along the river are limited but they provide potential access to and preservation of water quality within the Connecticut River.

Figure 2-9 – Chester Creek and the Connecticut River

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER:

25. Identify various means to acquire property frontage on the Connecticut River, as well as provide waterfront access including launching canoes, kayaks and row boats. Consistent with the CGS Sections 22a-101, 22a-102 and 22a-104, the Planning and Zoning and Harbor Management commissions should collaboratively work to expand on the Coastal Area Management Plan (CAMP) (1993) with the focus on preservation of historic views, visual access, public access (physical access), protection of coastal resources and water resource dependent uses (currently approved such as marinas, yacht clubs and boat launches). Incorporation of the Dock Management Unit revisions to the Harbor Management Plan should be incorporated into the CAMP.

Chester Flood Prone Areas

Map 2-3

FEMA Flood Zone Descriptions

A - An area inundated by 100-year flooding, for which no base flood elevations have been determined.

AE - An area inundated by 100-year flooding, for which base flood elevations have been determined.

AH - An area inundated by 100-year flooding, (usually areas of ponding), for which base flood elevations have been determined. Flood depths range from 1 to 3 feet.

AO - An alluvial fan inundated by 100-year flooding (usually sheetflow on sloping terrain), for which average flood depths and velocities have been determined; flood depths range from 1 to 3 feet.

D - An area of undetermined but possible flood hazards.

V - An area inundated by 100-year flooding with velocity hazard (wave action); no base flood elevations have been determined.

VE - An area inundated by 100-year flooding with velocity hazard (wave action); base flood elevations have been determined.

FW - Floodway areas in Zone AE.

X500 - An area inundated by 500-year flooding; an area inundated by 100-year flooding with average depths of less than 1 foot or with drainage areas less than 1 square mile; or an area protected by levees from 100-year flooding.

COBRA_IN - Undeveloped coastal barriers which are normally located within or adjacent to special flood hazard areas.

FEMA Flood Zones

- A
- AE
- AH
- AO
- D
- VE
- X500

Hydrologic Features

- Water
- Streams
- Intermittent Water
- Subregional Basins (Watersheds)

Roads

- Primary Highway
- Secondary Highway
- Local Road
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundaries
- Gateway Boundary

Map Created by:
Connecticut River Estuary
Regional Planning Agency
Date:
Jan 23, 2006

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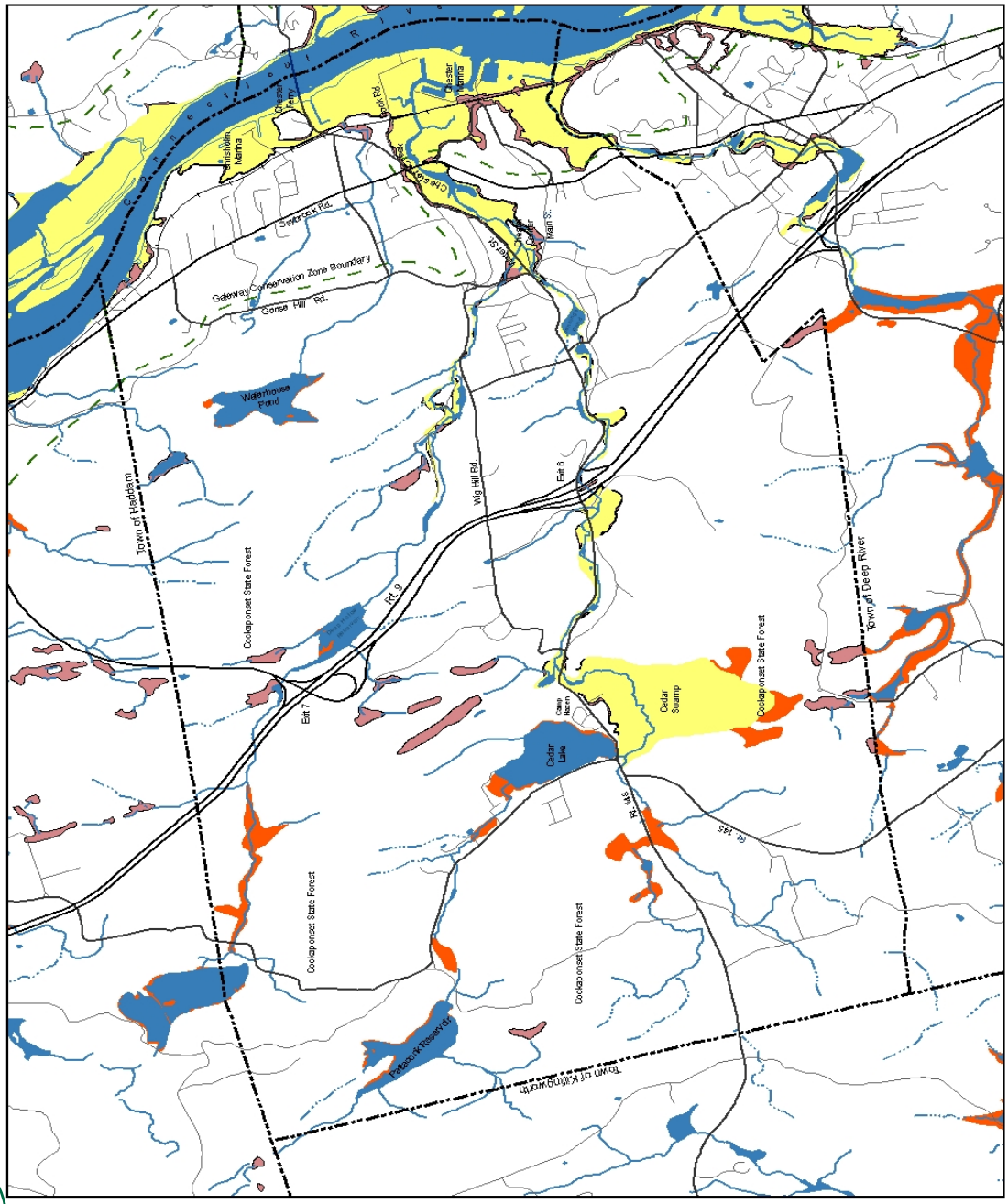


26. Encourage Chester's representatives on the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to work on behalf of the town to create passive access and possible viewing of the river from the former 14 acre Garthwaite property.

27. Continue to support efforts of the Gateway Commission to acquire endangered natural areas within the Gateway Zone of the Connecticut River.

28. Continue to support the state-funded pump-out boat for disposal of boat septage.

29. Participate in national and regional efforts to protect the character of the Connecticut River.

30. Seek designation of Route 148 and the Chester Ferry in Chester as a State Scenic Road.

31. Support the continued operation of the Chester Ferry.

Chester Creek

Chester Creek, east of Chester Center to the Connecticut River, is a rare tidal freshwater wetland. At some locations in the Creek, the tidal fluctuation is approximately 2.6 feet. The entire length of the creek is identified on the Natural Diversity Database, which shows the general location of state and federally listed endangered, threatened and special concern species. It is an extremely valuable habitat for both fauna and flora.

FIGURE 2-10 -Early factory in Chester (Source: Chester Historical Society)

Chester Creek was once known as Pattaconk Cove. The "Head of the Cove", where the Center is now located, was a center of trade, complete with wharfs and merchant houses. Natural products such as salt hay and cedar shingles were first shipped from the Cove, followed by products produced in Chester's many factories. In the early nineteenth century, Chester was one of the largest manufacturing locations in Middlesex County, second only to Middletown.

From the mid 1700s to the mid 1800s, there were three shipyards in the Cove building sailing vessels for coastal and West Indies trade. Very few were built for foreign trade. The Pattaconk was not deep enough for the larger ships required for the latter. The largest of the 63 ships built during that period was the three-masted, 280 ton Adriatic, measuring 89 feet in length. The last major ship was the Schooner Carrie H. Annis, in 1875. The decline of the Cove as a center of trade was the result of several factors. The need for larger and faster ships required that ships be longer and narrower, with a deeper draft.

The Cove was never very deep, and the lack of depth meant the Cove could not accommodate these new vessels. Shipbuilding and trading activities moved to deeper water in other towns. The road from Saybrook to Hartford, known as the Middlesex Turnpike, was completed in 1816 and a causeway built. A fixed bridge was installed over the Pattaconk River. The restricted flow through the opening allowed the cove to fill in. Subsequently, the construction of the Valley Railroad by William Goodspeed along the west bank of the Connecticut River in 1871 restricted flow even further. The train station was located along the Connecticut River near the Chester Town Dock. Passenger service lasted until 1933 and freight until 1968, but the effects of the railroad crossing of Chester Creek lasted much longer. The Head of the Cove was modified in 1942 by the construction of the former town hall. It was drastically narrowed again in 1970, when the area on the north bank was filled for parking lots. Additional fill was added in 1980 and the lot was extended to accommodate the Town sewer pumping station. Flooding is a common occurrence within the constricted area.

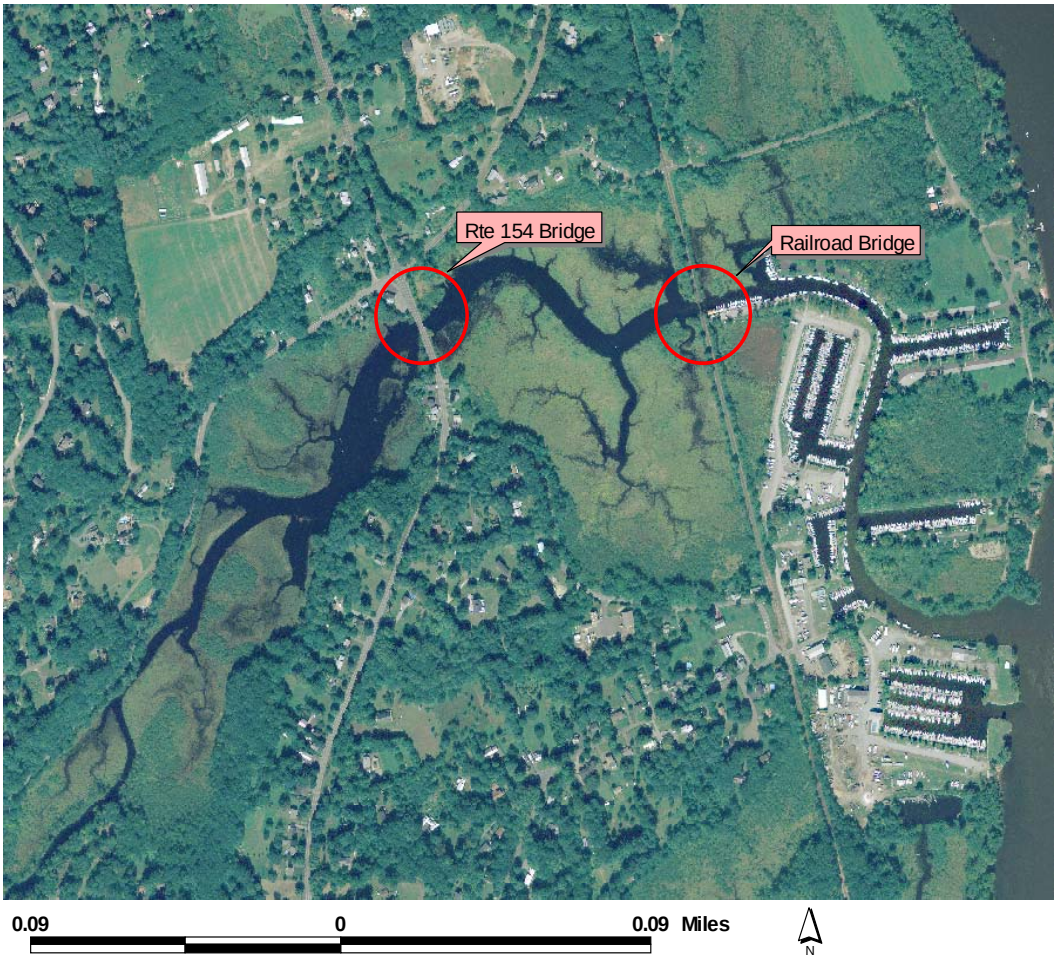


Figure 2-12 – Aerial Photo of Chester Creek and Marinas (Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA) 2004)

Chester Creek is limited by its depth to very small craft such as canoes and kayaks. While there are several possible points of access for such craft, physical constraints at these areas make their use impractical. A small launch area at the end of the Chester Land Trust's Carini Preserve on Water Street could be made much more accessible with minor improvements. Interest has been expressed in providing additional access, both active and passive, to the cove, including exploring the possibility of dredging. Discussion has also focused on the need to clean up the cove, removing trash, invasive species and dead trees which trap silt. A community of beavers has also modified the flow within the cove. A Chester Creek Advisory Committee was established several years ago to address issues concerning the area, but it has since become inactive. The Chester Harbor Management Plan revision committee has recommended, to preserve the natural beauty, that no dock structures be allowed in the upper section of Chester Cove (from Middlesex Avenue to the Center).

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER CREEK:

32. All active access to the Creek must respect the unique and delicate nature of freshwater tidal marshes.

33. Pursue options for greater passive and visual access of Chester Creek.

34. Seek access to Chester Creek for small non-motorized craft. Additional access shall also be incorporated into the design for bridge repair or replacement.

35. Include provisions for pedestrians and cyclists with any reconstruction or improvements to the Route 154 bridge over Chester Creek.

36. Establish a footpath to allow for walking around Chester Cove, connecting the Cove with Chester Center and North Quarter Park.

37. As recommended in the 1995 Plan, investigate restoration of the cove and mitigation of damage caused by invasive species and siltation.

FIGURE 2-11 - Downtown Chester (Source: Chester Historical Society)

Upper Pattaconk Brook Watershed : Cedar Lake Area

The Pattaconk Reservoir in Cockaponsett State Forest is an active recreation site, used by state residents for boating, fishing, swimming and camping. The Pattaconk Brook flows out of the Reservoir, dropping more than eighty feet in elevation before it flows into Cedar Lake.

Cedar Lake is a 75 acre body of fresh water with a mean depth of 16 feet and a maximum depth of 43 feet. It was the site of some of the earliest European development in Chester in the 1600s due to the abundance of cedar. Today, the Cedar Lake area is listed on the Natural Diversity Database for its outstanding natural resources. The lake is stocked by CTDEP with rainbow and brown trout. The Lake serves as a recreational site for the town, with swimming, fishing and small boating opportunities. Camp Hazen YMCA, an independent camp, occupies a portion of the southern shoreline. Cedar Lake was once surrounded by seasonal dwellings, many of which have been converted to year round use.

A plan for the management of Cedar Lake was completed by the Cedar Lake Advisory Committee in October 1998 and adopted by Town Meeting that December. That plan included a series of recommendations to protect the Lake area. In 2002, a survey of submerged aquatic vegetation was conducted by ENSR International of Westford, MA., including management recommendations. A Plan for Control of Nuisance Plants in Cedar Lake was completed in 2003. A copy of this plan is posted on the Chester website. Increased development around the lake and use of the lake itself has impacted water quality. The presence of milfoil and of flocks of wild geese, as well as storm drainage and nutrients from

Figure 2-13 – Aerial Photo of Cedar Lake and Cedar Swamp (Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

surrounding development has the potential for additional adverse impacts on the lake's water quality. Zoning regulations need to be reviewed to assure measures are in place to protect the lake, and additional development in the area must be carefully planned to minimize negative impacts.

At the Planning and Zoning Commission workshops, there was disagreement on the types of improvements desired for the town's Cedar Lake property. Improved parking, better pedestrian and bicycle access, more shade trees and better landscaping, better restrooms and services for users were discussed, but there was also concern that the area not be exploited or overused.

Cedar Swamp, south of Cedar Lake, is a unique habitat, one of the few remaining white cedar swamps in Connecticut. It is listed on the Natural Diversity Database. Much of the swamp is protected as part of the Cockaponsett State Forest. The Swamp, located between two ridges running north-south down to the Deep River town line, is not visible from public roads except immediately south of Cedar Lake. It is generally inaccessible.

Beyond Cedar Swamp, the Pattaconk Brook flows to Chester Center, dropping over 200 feet in elevation between Cedar Lake and Jennings Pond. There are eleven dams between Cedar Swamp and the former "Head of the Cove", indicating many former factory sites. Views of the Brook from West Main Street and Spring Street as it descends through steep hillsides contribute significantly to the scenic quality of Chester.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

38. Continue to pursue measures to protect the water quality of Cedar Lake through long term watershed management.

39. Develop a wastewater management plan for the lake watershed to reduce potential for eutrophication.

40. Create a plan for enhancement to town-owned property at Cedar Lake, including parking, restrooms and visitor amenities. Include scheduled work or projects in the Town's capital improvement plan.

Great Brook System

From the Turkey Hill Reservoir on the Chester/Haddam town line, Great Brook crosses through the Cockaponsett State Forest under Route Nine to the Deep Hollow Reservoir. There are six dams between the Deep Hollow Reservoir and the point where Great Brook enters Chester Creek. Most of this watershed is protected, either as State Forest or as water company land. Largely inaccessible by public road, this area of Chester is key to the drinking water supply of three towns. The undeveloped, forested ledges include some of the highest land in Chester and serve not only to protect water quality, but also provide a scenic backdrop of wooded hills that help maintain Chester's rural character. (See Map 2-4)

Forests and Uplands

Figure 2-14 – Dam on Pattaconk Brook (Source: LJD 2003)

Although Chester's many water features have been the most significant factor in shaping Chester's growth, the upland forest of the "Chester Hills" is also an important part of the town's character. In the northern part of the town, elevations above 450 feet are common, dropping abruptly down very steep hillsides. Wherever a vista opens to the north or west, the hills are there. They are recognized in the historic road names – Goose Hill, Wig Hill, Turkey Hill. Once farmed where possible, or cut to provide raw material for the many former mills, most of the hillsides have regrown. They are covered with primarily mixed hardwoods, including oak, hickory, maple, beech and birch. There are also significant stands of coniferous forest, including hemlock and white pine, northeast of Cedar Lake, east of Cedar Swamp, and in the Great Brook watershed.

Forest vegetation is constantly changing, and not only as a result of human use. At one time, chestnuts were the dominant tree, only to succumb to the chestnut blight; elms died from Dutch elm disease; gypsy moths attacked oak trees; and the wooley adelgid killed many of the Connecticut River Valley's hemlocks. The area's forests are vulnerable today to other natural forces. The Hurricane of 1938 destroyed many trees. There have been no comparable storms of such velocity since and the area is filled with mature trees. It is estimated that a Category Three hurricane could destroy up to seventy percent of those mature trees, changing the landscape significantly. Current emergency preparedness efforts include making plans for removal of storm debris, which is expected to include significant tree damage.

The Cockaponsett State Forest occupies a large percentage of Chester's land area. A portion of the Forest around and including the Pattaconk Reservoir is maintained for active recreation including camping, hiking, horseback riding, swimming, fishing and picnicking. There is a small ranger station near the Reservoir and a network of trails leading into other parts of the Forest. It has been suggested that the DEP be encouraged to work with local schools to develop environmental education programs based on the natural resources of the State Forest.

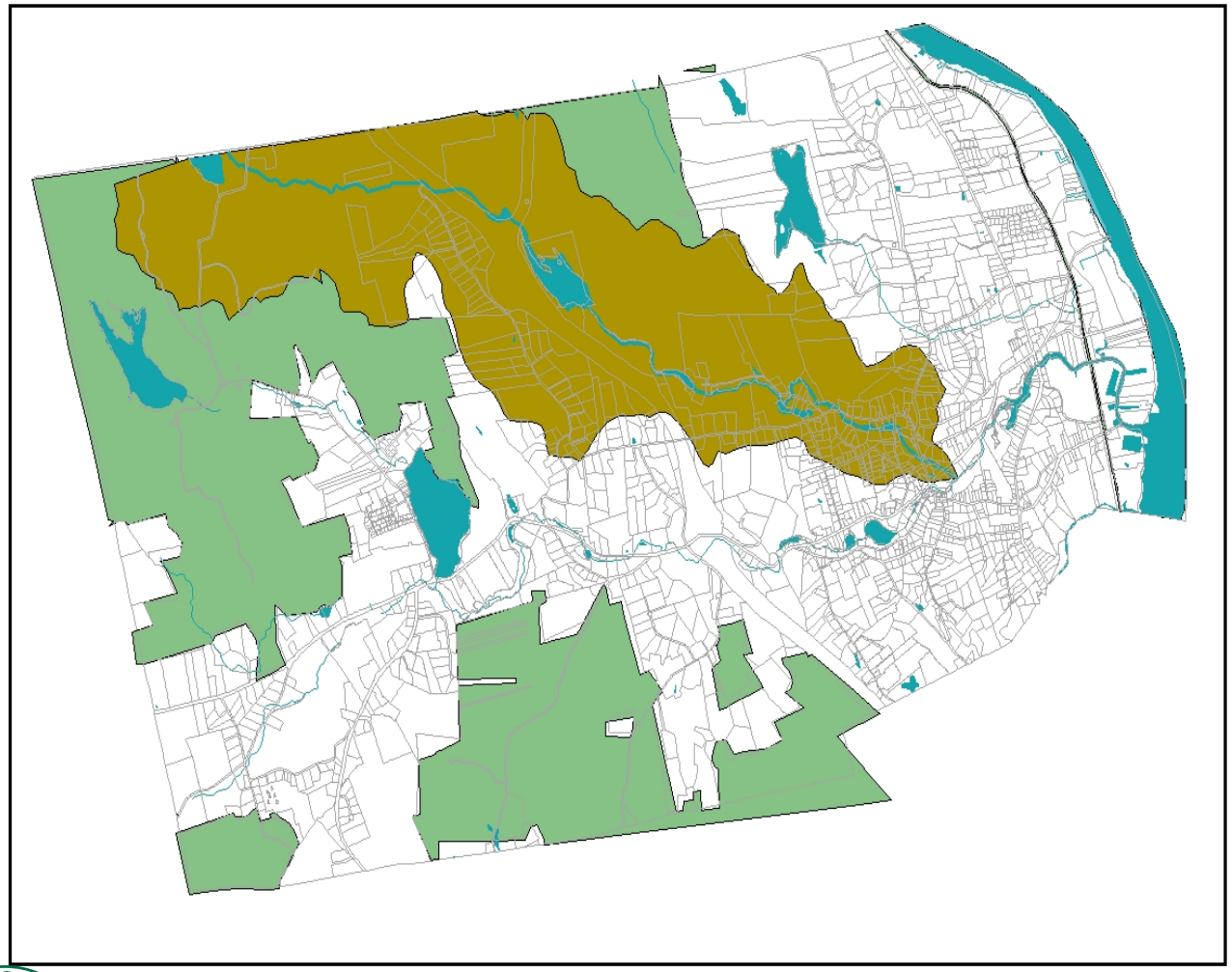
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING COCKAPONSETT STATE FOREST:

41. Work with Connecticut DEP to explore the possibility of educational programs based on the natural resources of the State Forest.

42. Encourage the DEP to prohibit motorized vehicles and mountain bikes in certain areas of the Forest where erosion will affect water courses.

GREAT BROOK WATERSHED
Chester

Map 2-4



GREAT BROOK WATERSHED: From the Turkey Hill Reservoir on the Chester/Haddam town line, Great Brook crosses through the Cockaponsett State Forest under Route Nine to the Deep Hollow Reservoir. There are six dams between the Deep Hollow Reservoir and the point where Great Brook enters Chester Creek. Most of this watershed is protected, either as State Forest or as water company land. Largely inaccessible by public road, this area of Chester is key to the drinking water supply of three towns. The undeveloped, forested ledges include some of the highest land in Chester and serve not only to protect water quality, but also provide a scenic backdrop of wooded hills that help maintain Chester's rural character

Legend

- CTDEP Property
- Great Brook Watershed
- Water Features
- Parcel Data

Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.

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"Urban Forestry" is the name given to managing street trees and other trees on public land. Some towns maintain an inventory of such trees and develop a regular program to maintain tree health. Proper care can often prevent the loss of valuable trees that contribute significantly to the character of a town. A regular replanting program can assure that the streetscape does not become denuded. Timely pruning can help trees endure windstorms and can minimize damage from fallen limbs. Landscaping of public improvements and new development can help such activities blend into the existing small town context.

Figure 2-15 – damaged Hemlock trees
(Source: CRERPA-MB- 2007)

Today, Chester manages its trees only on an ad hoc basis, when a problem arises and damage may have already occurred. Appropriate standards for landscape management need to be incorporated into the town's capital improvements planning. The Planning and Zoning Commission needs to review and update its landscape requirements for new or expanded development.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING URBAN FORESTRY:

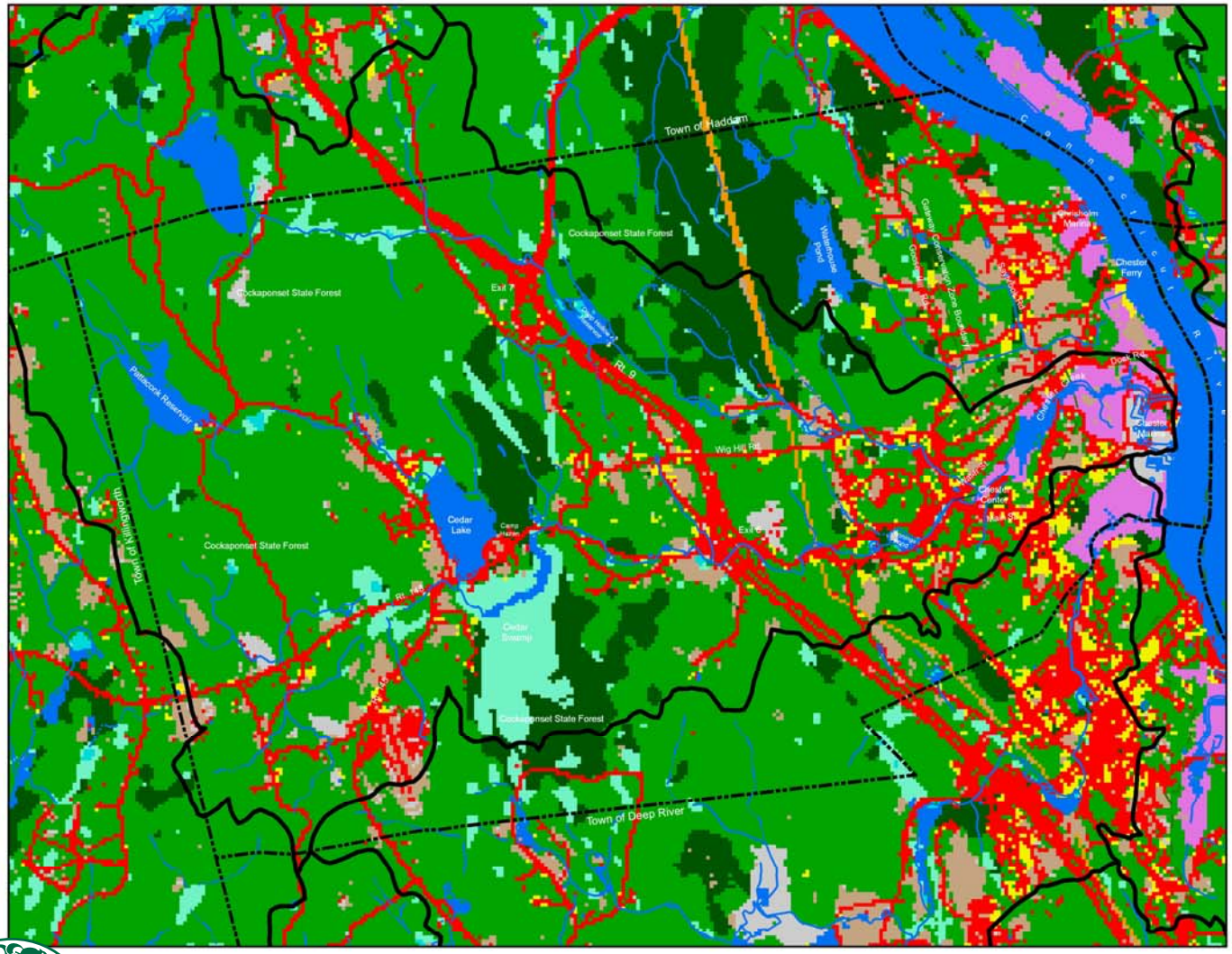
43. Require that new tree plantings include a variety of species to avoid monoculture stands which are susceptible to disease and insects.

44. Establish a town-wide urban forestry program to monitor, maintain, and replant street trees, and other trees on town property.

45. Develop a specific management plan for debris removal from wind-damaged trees and a replanting program following a catastrophic event.

Chester Hills

As noted previously, the wooded ridgelines and steep hillsides of Chester are an important part of its visual character. As stated in the Plan for the Conservation of Open Space in Chester, "All recognize the importance of preserving the current wealth of scenic vistas… clearly we must be attentive to retain and enhance these views which give Chester so much of its character." Development on the ridge tops and hills should be located to retain as much of the wooded appearance of the hills as is feasible. Preservation of the scenic character of ridges and hillsides is one purpose of the standards adopted for the Gateway Conservation District along the Connecticut River. Additional attention to protecting the appearance of the Chester Hills should be considered for other areas of town as part of subdivision and site plan review. Additional guidelines for tree-cutting, landscaping, and protecting natural views and vistas should be formulated and incorporated into the town's land use regulations.



Map 2-5

Land Cover 2002

The land use datalayer used to produce this map and the following information where provided by the University of Connecticut's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR), acquired on 9/27/06. Other base datalayers provided by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). (http://www.dep.state.ct.us/gis/data/data.asp)

The land use data's intended use is on a regional scale and was produced from Landsat images with a pixel resolution of 30 meters. Detailed information concerning the development of the data set and its intended use can be found at http://clear.uconn.edu/.

- Developed
- Turf and Grass
- Other Grasses & Agriculture
- Deciduous Forest
- Coniferous Forest
- Water
- Non-Forested Wetland
- Forested Wetland
- Tidal Wetland
- Barren
- Utility Rights-of-Way

- Subregional Basins
- Streams
- Intermittent Water
- Municipal Boundaries
- Gateway Boundary

Map Created by:
Connecticut River Estuary
Regional Planning Agency
M. Burns
January 23, 2006

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Route 9

Driving along Route 9 through Chester, the rural nature of the town is apparent. Proponents for the completion of Route 11 east of the Connecticut River have argued for the creation of a "greenway" along that roadway as a way to preserve the environment and maintain the visual character of that area. Route 9 in Chester is already a "greenway". Zoning and careful site design should be used to maintain the green appearance of the corridor, especially in the vicinity of Exits 6 and 7.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER HILLS:

46. Protect views by discouraging large areas of tree-cutting on hillsides.

47. Encourage proper management of privately-owned forest lands.

48. Maintain linkages among large contiguous wooded areas.

49. In considering proposed development visible from Route 9, encourage building and site design, tree retention and landscaping that maintains the rural appearance from the highway, especially at Exit 6.

Preserved Open Space

Approximately 36% of Chester's total land area has been preserved as permanent open space. Of that, about 65 percent is owned by the State of Connecticut, largely in the Cockaponsett State Forest. The Town of Chester, the Chester Land Trust and the Connecticut River Gateway Commission all hold additional protected land. The Connecticut Water Company land located in the northern half of the town is currently managed to protect the Chester Division water supply. State law regulates the sale of water company lands for other purposes. As long as the CWC continues to use their system of reservoirs in Chester and Haddam for domestic water, the lands should remain undeveloped.

Figure 2-6—Carini Preserve
(Source Cummings & Good)

In March of 1999, the Chester Town Meeting adopted a Plan for the Conservation of Open Space in Chester, Connecticut, prepared by the Chester Conservation Commission. That Plan recommends ten priorities for acquisition of additional open space in Chester, including both specific areas and actions to enable a rapid response when such areas become available. The Plan also includes recommendations to protect existing open space. Some of the recommendations are specifically stated in this Plan. In addition, the Conservation Commission is currently working on an updated plan.

A project funded through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is currently in progress under the auspices of the Tidewater Institute and the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency to involve the towns of the Lower Connecticut River Valley (including Chester) in the inventory of open land for the purpose of identifying potential greenways linking towns and regions. When completed, this additional information will be useful to Chester in its future open space planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING OPEN SPACE:

50. Target open space acquisitions to address specific community needs.

51. Establish a permanent town fund for acquisition and maintenance of open space.

52. Monitor availability of land along rivers, brooks, and ponds for possible town acquisition.

53. Modify zoning and subdivision regulations to require a variety of open space dedications in future subdivisions, including open fields, wildlife corridors and trail linkages. Modify subdivision regulations so wetlands are not calculated as part of lot size.

54. Frequently update the Plan for Conservation of Open Space in Chester to include additional parcels and techniques for land preservation.

55. Actively encourage donation of land to the Town or the Chester Land Trust.

56. Encourage less-than-fee acquisitions through the use of conservation easements and deed restrictions.

57. Support state authorization for a local option property transfer surtax dedicated to the purchase and maintenance of town open space.

Soils

A discussion of Chester's natural resources should include mention of its soils. In much of Chester, a thin layer of soil overlies the bedrock granite under the hills, with bedrock outcroppings visible on the surface in many locations. Between the hills, many of the valleys are covered with inland wetlands soils, which are poorly drained to very poorly drained. Areas with inland wetland soils have been mapped and are regulated locally under state law to protect the functions and habitat of this resource. Along the Connecticut River, the soils are alluvial within the floodplain which is formed when material is deposited by flowing water. In several areas of town, farmland soils have been designated by the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), as either Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance. The NRCS describes prime farmland as "land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber or oilseed crops and is available for these uses." Prime farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply and favorable temperature, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. Typically such soils do not flood during the growing season.

Except for a small area in the village center served by a sewage treatment facility, the town relies on onsite subsurface disposal for septic effluent. Some soil conditions pose limitations for installation and functioning of subsurface disposal systems. Steep slopes, high ground water, shallow depth to bedrock and slow permeability (the rate at which water travels through soil) are barriers to a successful on site system. Installation of community septic systems or sewers is also difficult under those conditions. The NRCS has classified soils for their potential for subsurface sewage disposal systems. Most of Chester has low, very low or extremely low potential. Most of the areas with high or medium potential are either already developed or located on State-owned land. Great care must be taken in the approval, installation and maintenance of onsite sewage disposal systems to avoid the need for additional community sewers in the future. Zoning densities must recognize the limitations of the underlying soil types.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SOILS:

58. Consider impervious surface limitations on areas designated as prime farm lands.

59. Review existing allowable zoning densities to assure that those densities adequately reflect underlying soil conditions for onsite sewage disposal.

60. Subject proposed building lots to strict scrutiny to assure that the soils can support the proposed development, requiring that subdividers submit a septic system suitability report to the Planning and Zoning Commission as part of the application, and that the location and results of all soil tests be shown on the subdivision plan.

Other Natural Resource Concerns

This Plan places special emphasis on the town's water resources, upland forests and soils. This emphasis is not intended to diminish other natural resource concerns.

Waste Disposal

In the past, solid waste disposal practices were a local issue and towns struggled to find a suitable means of disposing of garbage, bulky waste and hazardous waste. While collection and transportation of these materials is a local responsibility, regional and statewide disposal solutions have replaced the local "dump". In many towns, former dump sites remain a source of current water pollution. The former Haddam land fill is located upstream of the Turkey Hill reservoir and is cause for future concern. Former factory sites may also contain pollutants formerly used in production. These sites are often referred to as "brownfields" and must be renovated prior to reuse. Reduction in the amount of various wastes generated within the town is not only sound environmental policy, but also saves money spent for disposal. Recycling is a preferred alternative to incineration, and efforts are being made statewide to break up the waste stream into recyclable components. The town can assist in this effort by informing its citizens of alternatives and by financially supporting the most appropriate disposal methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WASTE DISPOSAL:

61. Continue to provide information to citizens concerning appropriate waste disposal alternatives.

62. Continue to educate the public and support local recycling and composting.

Light Pollution

The Planning and Zoning Commission can address excessive lighting of non-residential uses through its zoning regulations. In recent years, decorative lighting has been incorporated into landscaping for residential properties and is generally not reviewed by the land use commissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING LIGHT POLLUTION:

63. Review zoning regulations and consider a town ordinance to control light pollution and energy consumption.

64. Support dark skies initiative.

Air Quality

Air quality in the Chester area is often affected by airborne pollutants from other areas. Air pollution comes from many sources, but the generation of energy and the use of the internal combustion engine for most of our transportation are significant contributing factors. This is not specifically a local issue, but there are efforts that can address this issue at the local level where possible. Locally generated energy, reduction of motor vehicle trips, and increased energy efficiency of equipment and structures are all means of reducing the problem at the local level. Chapter Eight of this Plan discusses possible measures that can be taken by the town collectively or by its people individually to become a part of the solution. Many ideas suggested by the Conservation Commission during preparation of this Plan have been included in Chapter Eight.

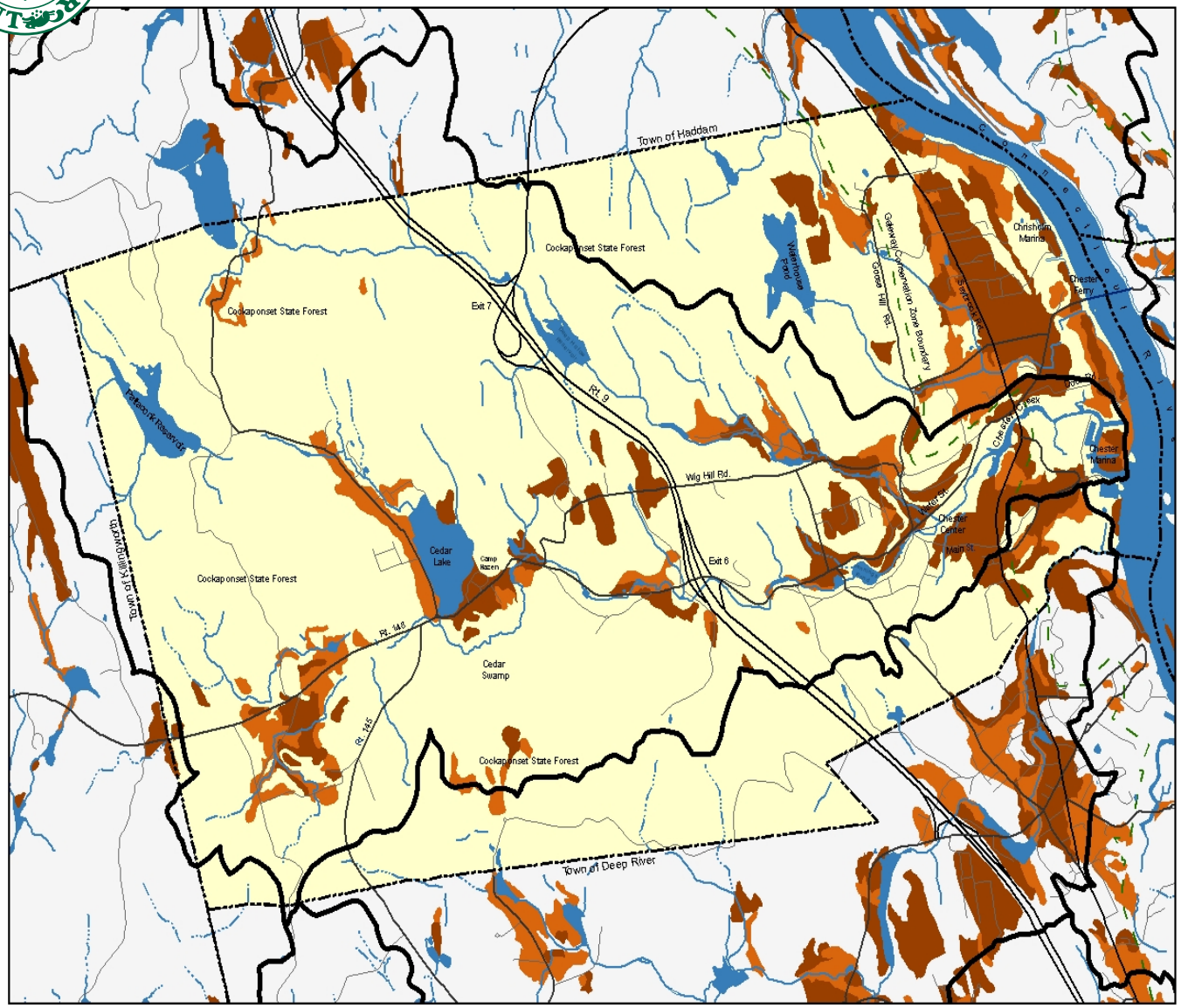
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

65. Complete natural resources inventory now in progress by the Conservation Commission and use the inventory in land use decision making.

66 .Create and expand an integrated town Geographic Information System to make natural resource information available to town decision makers.

67. Disturb natural areas only to the extent necessary to make use of a site for permitted purposes, retaining existing trees, grading and landscaping to the greatest extent possible.

68. Encourage “green” and sustainable building practices.



Map 2-6

Datalayers used to produce this map provided by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) (http://www.dep.state.ct.us/gis/data/data.asp). Farmland soils is a 1:12,000 scale data layer acquired 9/12/06. The following information comes directly from a document entitled *Identification of Important Farmland, Connecticut*, pg. 1, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Farmland Soils

Prime Farmland

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses. The land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forestland, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water. Prime farmland has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to modern farming methods.

In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable moisture supply, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time. Typically they do not flood during the growing season or they are protected from flooding.

Farmland of Statewide Importance

This is land, in addition to prime and unique farmlands, that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oil seed crops. Criteria for defining and delineating this land are to be determined by the appropriate state agency or agencies. Generally, additional farmlands of statewide importance include those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce as high a yield as prime farmlands if conditions are favorable. In some states, additional farmlands of statewide importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by state laws.

Farmland Soils

- Prime Farmland
- Farmland of Statewide Importance

Hydrologic Features

- Subregional Basins (Watersheds)
- Water
- Streams
- Intermittent Water

Roads

- Primary Highway
- Secondary Highway
- Local Road

- Municipal Boundaries
- Gateway Boundary

Map Created by:
Connecticut River Estuary
Regional Planning Agency
M. Bimbi
Jan. 19, 2006

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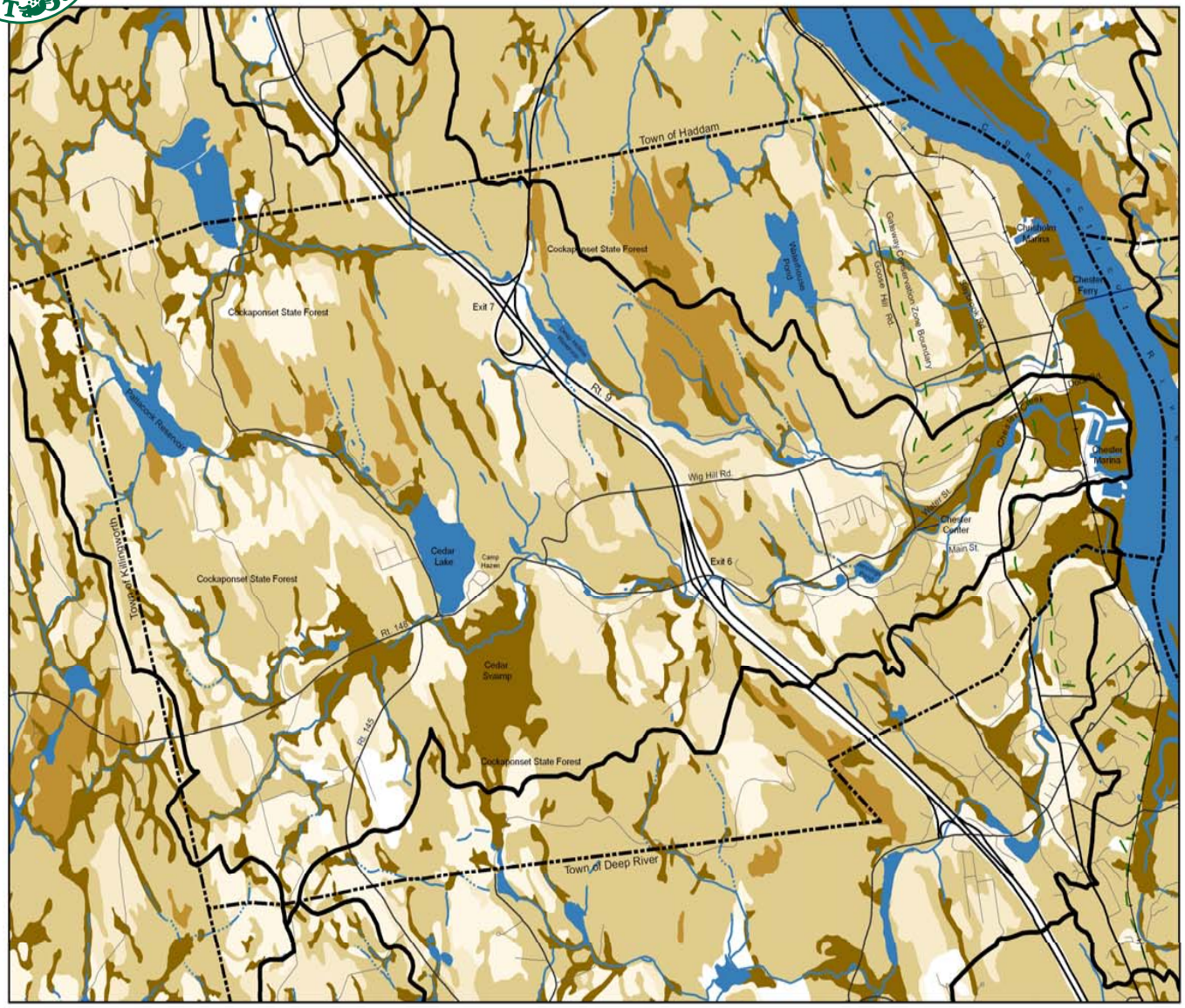

Map 2-7

Soil Potential Ratings for Subsurface Sewage Disposal Systems for Single Family Residences

The soil potential ratings and associated cost factors, assuming a typical system, are defined below.

High Potential – These soils have the best combination of characteristics or may have limitations that can be easily overcome using standard installation practices. The cost factor is 1x to 2.0x.

Medium Potential – These soils have significant limitations, such as low percolation rate, that are generally overcome using commonly applied designs. The cost factor ranges from 2.0x to 2.5x.

Low Potential – These soils have one or more limitations, such as low percolation rate and depth to seasonal high water table, that require extensive design and site preparation to overcome. The cost factor ranges from 2.5x to 3.5x.

Very Low Potential – These soils have to overcome major soil limitations, such as depth to bedrock, that require extensive design and site preparation. A permit for a SSDS may not be issued unless the naturally occurring soils meet the minimal requirements outlined in the state health code. It is unlikely these soils can be improved sufficiently to meet state health code regulations. The cost factor ranges from 4.25x to 6.0x.

Extremely Low Potential – These soils have multiple major limitations, such as flooding and depth to seasonal high water table, which are extremely difficult to overcome. A permit for a SSDS may not be issued unless the naturally occurring soils meet the minimal requirements outlined in the state health code. It is unlikely these soils can be improved sufficiently to meet state health code regulations.

Not Rated – Areas labeled *Not Rated* have characteristics that show extreme variability from one location to another. The work needed to overcome adverse soil properties cannot be estimated. Often these areas are urban land complexes or miscellaneous areas. An on site investigation is required to determine soil conditions present at the site.

Datalayers used to produce this map were provided by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) (http://www.dep.state.ct.us/gis/data/data.asp except for the 1:12,000 Soil Potential Ratings layer which was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (10/12/06).

- Water
- Streams
- Intermittent Water
- Subregional Basins (Watersheds)
- Primary Highway
- Secondary Highway
- Local Road
- Railroad
- Municipal Boundaries
- Gateway Boundary

Map Created by:
Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency
M. Burns
Jan. 27, 2006

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CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL RESOURCES

Characterizing Cultural Resources

Chester's people cherish the "sense of community" that characterizes Chester today. While this chapter outlines many of the cultural resources that make Chester unique, it is also the dynamism of Chester's residents and business owners that contribute to the vibrant history and present way of life in the town.

Figure 3-1 – Chester Village Center (Source: Cummings and Good 2007)

Demographics of the town from the 2000 census are detailed in Chapter 4. Of particular interest from a cultural point of view is the change in age of population over the last twenty years. Preservation and enhancement of the town's community character has received high priority from residents in all past survey results, workshops and vision statements, whenever Chester is discussed. That sense of community is a feeling of knowing other members of the community and having a history of shared experiences. Community is fostered by the physical characteristics of the town, particularly the presence of the physical reminders of Chester's past. These reminders give a sense of pleasure that is one of the amenities of the town. An awareness of a community's roots is particularly important in a period of rapid change. This Chapter discusses the town's cultural resources, both in terms of its historic legacy and in terms of locations and events that foster community interaction today and includes recommendations for preserving and enhancing the spirit of community that is part of Chester's small town character.

What is Preservation?

Preserving Chester's cultural resources does not mean trying to freeze the physical aspects of the town at a particular moment in time, nor is it an effort to create a museum-like atmosphere. Change should and will occur. As part of that change, however, it is important to retain elements of the past as an inspiration to present inhabitants, maintaining an appreciation for the community's roots

and historic record. Certain structures and locations should be preserved for their architectural merit, and their contribution to the overall pattern and context of development.

New development should be of such character and location as to complement the existing built environment. This is especially true for the Village Center. Villages have certain permanent values, including a sense of orientation and identity, as well as providing a principal area for community life and community interaction. The character of new development is also important throughout the town as a whole. The cultural resources of the town include the overall visual impression of the town, in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Cultural Resources—The Physical Framework

The Cultural Landscape

Chapter Two reviewed the town's natural resources. This Chapter discusses how those natural resources have been modified significantly over time by the actions of people who have developed the land. Forests were cut for timber and to create farmland, streams were dammed for water power, pavement was installed increasing storm water runoff, and wetlands were filled or dredged. Even a portion of Chester Cove was filled to create more land in the Village Center. Many human uses leave reminders of the past, even when those uses are no longer active. A crossroad intersection with a small cluster of homes, an old factory building, dam and millpond, centrally located public buildings, bridges – all these were based on locational decisions which are not necessarily relevant today. Chester is not famous for its major battles, historic speeches, grand architecture, famous inventors or ethnic enclaves, but it is built on the bones of everyday life in the past. Once off Route 9, the visitor sees the framework of Chester's past in a way that has been erased in many other towns.

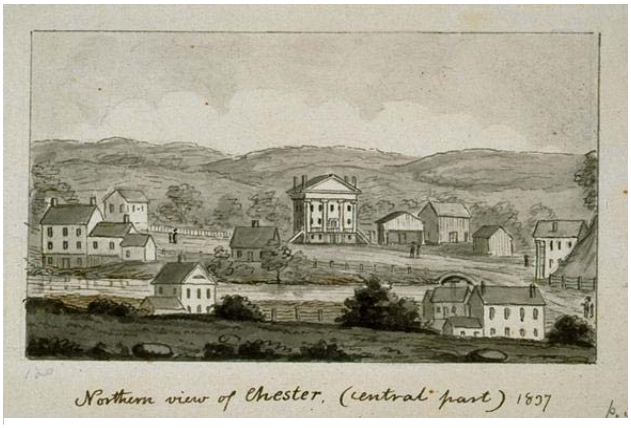


Figure 3-2 – Antique Print of Chester
(Source: Connecticut Historical Society)

Cultural Landscape Assessment

An evolving area of study in land use is that of cultural landscape analysis. Like the study of historic buildings, a cultural landscape study reveals aspects of an area's origins and development through their form and features and the ways they were used. Cultural landscapes also reveal much about our evolving relationship with the natural world. Chester is an historic vernacular landscape, which evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancies shaped that landscape. The

landscape reflects the cultural character of everyday lives through time. Cultural resources include land forms, transportation patterns, individual structures, collections of structures in context, and views and vistas of hills and water.

The National Park Service has written extensively about the value of, and techniques for, a cultural landscape assessment. The State of Massachusetts provides a manual for communities who wish to conduct such an analysis. As part of the effort within this planning region and two other regions (Lyme, East Haddam and Salem) to designate the Eight Mile River watershed as a federal "Wild and Scenic River", a cultural landscape study along the lines of the Massachusetts model was conducted. As has been noted, "it is difficult to be confident about protecting something if one doesn't know exactly what it is". A cultural landscape assessment of Chester would help the town understand how to best protect its character and history.

Figure 3-4 – Memorial Day Parade – Chester Main Street (Source: LJD 2006)

New England's Landscape Characteristics

In 1989, Harvard professor John R. Stilgoe published an article in "New England Landscape" on the four characteristics which define the landscape of rural areas of New England. The four region-wide defining characteristics were described by Stilgoe as diminutiveness, accretionary growth, afforestation, and dilapidation.

To a large degree, these characteristics have been retained in Chester. Preserving the cultural resources of the town requires that attention be given to protecting and enhancing that which remains of these assets. A "windshield survey" of Chester may leave the impression of significant areas of undeveloped land, but that undeveloped appearance does not mean that the land is not in use today. Protection of the public water supply and recreational activities are uses that serve important purposes.

Throughout town, the signs of present and past human occupancy are apparent, although vegetation may shield many structures from open view. While the ambient background sounds may be of running water and wind in the trees, a careful listener can also hear traffic on Route 9 or power boats on the Connecticut River. The peaceful quality of Chester is fragile. Thus far, Chester has managed to retain its special quality, but it would not take much ill-conceived development to damage that ambience. Excessive lighting, bothersome noise, clear cutting of woodlands, traffic congestion and poor design are all potential disruptions. This Plan of Conservation and Development provides the opportunity to identify measures which will protect the landscape that the people of Chester love.

Diminutiveness (Small Scale)

Development in Chester has been modest in scale, with few exceptions. Houses, neighborhoods, businesses, industry and even the town's narrow roads are small. Chester can assure that this scale is maintained by limiting the bulk and area of new development projects, including restrictions on future road improvements.

Accretionary Growth

Growth has accrued over time, typically without eliminating previous historic layers, so that one can view an original structure and its many additions over the years as a unit. With the exception of several newer residential subdivisions, neighborhoods also grew gradually, one or two houses at a time, so that the spectrum of history is apparent in most parts of town. This characteristic can be maintained by encouraging the reuse of existing structures and limiting the size and extent of totally new construction. Where this is not possible, new developments should be designed to reflect the accretionary character of the town.

Afforestation

Vegetation covers the hillsides of Chester and surrounds its waterways, screening much of the town's development, and giving the impression of even more undeveloped area than there actually is. On a site-by-site basis, landscaping or uncontrolled vegetative growth softens hard edges and visually breaks up large structures and impervious surfaces. This characteristic can be maintained by limiting clearing for new development and requiring significant landscaping efforts for new construction. Maintenance of existing street trees and planting replacement trees will help keep the vegetated character of the landscape.

Dilapidation

Much of Chester, from its houses to industrial buildings, has a patina of age. Most development, old or new, does not "shout" its modern characteristics. Colors and lighting are muted. Design guidelines and site plan review should be used to encourage an appropriately subdued appearance for new and rehabilitated development.

(Source: Reference to John R. Stilgoe)

Cultural Resources - Structures

From the beginning, European settlement of Chester was scattered, locating along rivers and streams, or close to timber stands that supplied wood for a variety of purposes. Over the years, frugal property owners were in no hurry to tear down and rebuild their structures, whether houses or businesses. In 1984, the Chester Historical Society published the second edition of its book, The Houses and History of Chester, which expanded on the first edition, published in 1976 as a Bicentennial year project. Their book documents the history of numerous old structures, including houses, church buildings, Center buildings and industries, which represent the unique cultural history of the Town. The structures in the book are organized geographically into the four school districts that existed prior to 1905. Rather than repeat information that is well-presented by the Chester Historical Society, it is recommended that those with an interest in cultural resources contact the Historical Society directly for more information (www.chesterhistoricalsociety.org).

One feature that most of Chester's historic structures have in common is that they are small in scale or are visually segmented. Many of these historic houses remain as single family homes while a few in the commercial districts have been converted to multi-family or other uses. Several old factories remain, some converted to non-industrial uses.

Chester was a town of numerous small factories along the streams rather than the site of large factory complexes. The largest public buildings are the town's places of religious assembly, reflecting the role of religion in settling Connecticut towns. Chester's major community events are held out of doors – in the village center, the Meeting House green, and the fairgrounds. Larger regional events are held at the regional middle or high school in neighboring Deep River.

Figure 3-7– Chester Meeting House
(Source: LJD 2008)

Another feature of Chester's historic structures is that they are often found in groupings, giving a context to individual buildings. The most significant grouping is in the Chester Center area. Numerous structures remain on Goose Hill, dating from one of the earliest settlements. Several early homes remain in the Cedar Lake area. The numerous dams and millponds are a remnant of the industrial era.

Rural Roads

With few exceptions, Chester's roads are winding, narrow and small in scale. As John Stilgoe has observed, New England's rural roads are "bordered not with Midwestern grassy berms, but by stone walls perilously near pavement". He has stated that the pattern of development along such roads is a vestige of horse drawn transport. Villages at intervals along rural roads were settled based on the travel time by horse and wagon. In rural New England, distance is discussed in "how long it takes to get there" rather than "how far" in miles. Local roads have been "improved" in minor ways over the years. Most began as dirt roads to and from "town". Small rural roads force drivers to drive more slowly and carefully. Narrow winding roads have a traffic calming effect.

Roads built to modern safety standards, typically wider, paved, with wide trimmed road shoulders, encourage people to drive faster. Town road standards should be reviewed to assure that roads are not overbuilt, resulting in a loss of visual character, a greater environmental impact, and a quickening of the pace of life. Designation of Chester roads as state and local "scenic roads" is one method of limiting the visual impact of proposed road improvements to existing roads. Roads are discussed further in Chapter Six – Infrastructure. One challenge presented by rural roads is the difficulty in providing safe bicycle and pedestrian access within the road right-of-way. Narrow, winding roads do not lend themselves to bike paths or sidewalks. In many situations, it may be more feasible and safer to establish hiking and biking trails apart from the road system.

Route 9, which bisects Chester in a north/south direction, has little visual impact on the town. For those on Route 9, there is a sense of driving through a rural area, with little adjacent development visible from the highway. The highway itself is visible in only a few locations, being largely at a different grade from its surrounding areas. The entrance and exit ramps are unobtrusive and terminate on low-volume secondary roads. At the present time, Route 9 in Chester is a "greenway" and the town should participate in regional or local efforts to maintain its scenic character.

Figure 3-3 – Intersection of Wig Hill Road and Deep Hollow Road (Source: LJD 2007)

Archaeology

The Lower Connecticut River is rich in pre-European cultural history. Native Americans have occupied and used these lands for over twelve thousand years. European settlers first established themselves in Chester in the 1690s. The State Archaeologist's Office lists five pre-colonial sites of interest within Chester, including the present Chester Fairgrounds and locations along the Connecticut River. Little detailed information is available about these sites. Most historical research has focused on later development.

A comprehensive archaeological survey would provide a useful tool in reviewing proposed development. Chester's land use regulations should be amended to require professional archaeological assessments where there is potential for adverse impact to known sites. The State Archaeologist is available for consultation where it is suspected that development may impact known and potential sites.

Cultural Resources—A Sense of Community

Chester values its strong sense of community life and its high level of community interaction. In many suburban areas, people commute between home and work, with little time for other social connections. Often, a family's children are the only outlet for community socialization, with school activities, youth sports and other learning experiences occupying any free time. People without young children may find it hard to connect to the community as a whole. In Chester, there are opportunities to participate in community life. In addition to children's activities, Chester has many groups that center on religious institutions, hobbies, public service, the arts, recreational activities, and community events. Parades, festivals, the Chester Fair, and the Road Race all give both residents and visitors the opportunity to gather in community celebrations.

One reason for the success of community events is the number of significant public spaces where people can gather. Indoor locations are fairly limited in capacity, but many community events make use of outdoor spaces.

Chester Village

Chester Village is the site of many festivities. In the 1969 Plan of Development, Chester Center was described as “run down”. Since that time, private investment has restored much of the vitality of the Village. Through the leadership and participation of the downtown business community, local business establishments become an extension of the public outdoor space. The compact space and sense of enclosure provided by the buildings in the Center give it a strong sense of place. The Village Center is the heart of the community. It is most commonly the location which comes to mind when people think of Chester. The Village is not a historical monument to a particular era, but the pattern of buildings, the structures themselves and the surrounding open spaces create a combination of elements that evoke another, simpler time.

Figure 3-5 – Winter Carnival Tractor Parade : Chester Main Street (Source: LJD 2008)

Currently, the area is attractive to both residents and visitors. The potential for tipping too heavily toward tourism is great, however. The Town of Chester must be careful that the Village is not overwhelmed by success. It is small in area and generally moderately-used. There is seldom heavy traffic passing through and traffic congestion is mild. Parking is generally available, whether visitors know its location or not. Better identification of off-street parking, including lighting and signage, could alleviate this lack of knowledge. East of the Village, heading toward Route 154, speeding has become an issue and traffic calming measures should be considered. Thus far, the Village retains its mix of uses and its human scale. Few buildings are longer or taller than an average house.

North Quarter Park

North Quarter Park, located east of the Village on Chester Creek, is used by a variety of groups and individuals, especially families with young children. However, it is generally felt that North Quarter Park is under-utilized as a community resource. It “looks tired.” The small community center adjacent to the Park is viewed as “not welcoming.” This Plan explores ways to enhance Park use and appearance, and provide additional space for community functions. There is a strong desire to reconnect North Quarter Park with the Village Center and Chester Creek, including the re-establishment of the old trolley line as a foot-path.

Chester Meeting House

Figure 3-6—North Quarter Park
(Source: LJD 2008)

The Chester Meeting House sits not far from the Center. In the early 1970s, the Old Town Hall Restoration Committee was formed, with members from the Chester Historical Society, the Board of Selectmen and civic and business groups. The Restoration Committee's task was to raise funds privately to refurbish the "Old Town Hall" and make it useable as a community center. The structure was built as a meetinghouse in 1794, when it served as a church until it was purchased by the town in 1847, and then used for town meetings until 1960. After an active period as a theater and gathering place (and the site of many school graduations), the building fell into disuse in the 1960s. With generous community support, this landmark building was saved. This property serves as an historic meeting area, but its potential for expansion is limited by the desire to preserve the historic character of the site.

Cedar Lake

The Cedar Lake area was the site of some of the earliest non-native development in Chester. It has been perceived as a seasonal use area, despite a growing number of conversions to year round residences. The town beach facilities at Cedar Lake are used by many residents in the summer, and when suitable, for ice skating in the winter. Swimming, fishing and boating are popular activities. There have been many suggestions for improvements to the town facility, both utilitarian and aesthetic. Cedar Lake can potentially serve a greater role as a location of community activities. Located on the east side of Cedar Lake, Camp Hazen is privately owned. During the winter months, Camp Hazen is a potential location for community activities, if a suitable arrangement can be made with the town. Issues such as maintenance and liability must be part of any discussion.

Figure 3-8—Cedar Lake
(Source: LJD 2008)

Chester Fairgrounds

The Chester Fairgrounds is owned by a private organization, the Chester Agricultural and Mechanical Society, which operates the annual Chester Fair. It is currently zoned for residential use. The fairgrounds is perceived as a town asset, although there is no assurance that it will not be used for other purposes sometime in the future. The fairgrounds itself is underutilized throughout the year. Consideration should be given to working with the Fair Association to determine whether the town can assist in maintenance and operational costs such as insurance in exchange for additional community use of the site.

Chester Public Library

Figure 3-10—Chester Library
(Source: LJD 2008)

The Chester Public Library is an aesthetic treasure. It is very small by modern library standards, but its size is part of its aesthetic charm. Due to space limitations, it is inadequate for current needs and lacks required handicapped accessibility. It is generally agreed that it would be difficult to construct a significantly large addition which would be compatible with the present building. While not owned by the town, a committee is now studying options for providing needed library space either through an addition or elsewhere in town. The library should remain in or near the Village Center.

Other areas in town serve as community resources. In particular:

-The Chester Elementary School is a gathering place for people with children of elementary school age. The school and grounds should be studied for their ability to accommodate growth in student population and a safe and efficient delivery of services..

-The Cockaponsett State Forest, also discussed in Chapter Two, is a gathering place for both local residents and out-of-towners, with occasional convergence between the two. Some out-of-towners may be more boisterous than local users find comfortable. In the off-season, however, the forest is left largely to local people. It is felt by some that there could be a stronger partnership between the state and the local environmental educators, using the resources of the forest as a learning center.

-Jennings Pond while unmonitored for safety, becomes a winter gathering spot for skaters, families, and fishermen.

-The Chester Ferry is one of the significant historic features of the town and the State. The Chester Ferry is the image that many non-residents call to mind when they think of Chester – historic, small, practical, beautiful, and fun. The ferry and ferry landing on the Hadlyme side of the Connecticut River is already a designated state scenic road, as part of the designation of Routes 156 and 148 within Lyme.

-The "Mill," home of the Chester Historical Society, is currently under a renovation campaign to improve archival storage and exhibit space. The space is used primarily by the Historical Society for functions and fundraising events, but is also available for community functions.

-Routes 148 and 154 through Chester are still rural roads. Both retain a character that has not yet been erased by modern development. Efforts should be made through zoning and site plan review to avoid additional development which would significantly alter the character of the roadscape.

-The Goodspeed at Chester Norma Terris Theater is currently unused for a great portion of the year. During scheduled shows, the theater is a vibrant contribution to the village economy and cultural landscape. It has significant potential as a community gathering place, but is limited by site

constraints including septic waste disposal limitations and space for parking. Traffic is also a concern if large gatherings are planned. Efforts should be made about future uses of this building: community center; learning center; movie theater or other facility.

Specific recommendations for infrastructure improvements within town are discussed in Chapter Six – Infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CULTURAL RESOURCES:

1. Create a "Demolition Delay Ordinance" to allow time to consider alternatives.

2. Locate all new public facilities in proximity to the Village Center.

3. Explore ways to link North Quarter Park with the Village Center and Chester Creek, both physically and functionally, through transit, pedestrian and bicycle connections and through joint usage for community events.

4. Facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access to and from the Center and throughout the town.

5. Encourage activities that use the outdoors as part of a celebratory venue.

6. Maintain and improve existing community gathering spaces as locations for community celebrations, including parades, strolls, fairs and other events.

7. Identify significant viewsheds within the town and beyond, and consider measures to protect and maintain scenic vistas.

8. Review road standards to assure that requirements will not result in unnecessary overbuilding which changes the character of the town's rural roadways.

9. Conduct a cultural landscape assessment for Chester.

10. Efforts should be made through zoning and site plan review to avoid additional development that would significantly alter the character of the roadscape of Routes 148 and 154.

11. When possible, seek closer relationship with Camp Hazen and Chester Fairgrounds for public events and community activities.

Figure 3-9– Chester Fair
(Source: LJD 2008)

CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This Chapter discusses and makes recommendations for future development in Chester. Given the strong public interest in protecting the Town's natural and cultural resources, the Plan next looks at appropriate future development that will maintain and enhance those resources.

Development History

Early European settlers were drawn to Chester by its abundant cedar stands and its navigable waters. As time passed, Chester's steep hills and flowing streams proved ideal for water-powered industries, many of which involved wood products and the manufacture of woodworking tools. Eventually, roads replaced waterways as major transportation corridors. Electrical power for industrial processing reduced or eliminated the advantage of water power. Chester became less of a center of commerce and settled into a more quiet existence. Water-powered factories were torn down or converted to other less intensive industrial, commercial, or even residential uses.

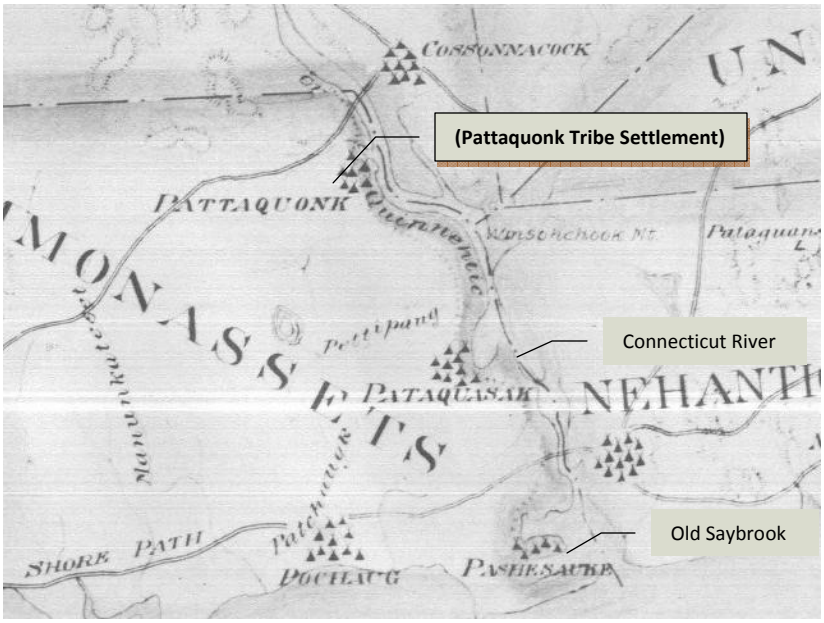


Figure 4-1 – Chester Native American Tribes
(Source: Online Link: http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/MAGIC_HistList.pl)

The Valley Railroad and its bridge over the Pattaconk Brook left much of Chester cut off from the Connecticut River and its former maritime linkage. Active from 1871 through 1968 when the last freight train ran, the railroad property was subsequently purchased by the State as parkland, with an agreement to operate a private recreational railroad museum along a portion of the tracks. Over time, Route 154 (Old Route 9) became the principal vehicle corridor on the west side of the Connecticut River. In other communities where Route 154 passed through local villages, automobile-related growth occurred in the downtowns. As a result of being bypassed by Route 154, Chester Center did not experience this transition and hence avoided the demolition and replacement of many of its older buildings. The construction and opening of the new State Route 9, cutting through the forested uplands of Chester, did little to encourage automobile-related growth in town. Small industrial facilities changed ownership and products. An

industrial park on Inspiration Lane was created on a ridge near Route 9's Exit 6. Additional industrial facilities were built near the Chester Airport in the southwestern part of town. Marinas expanded to fill their physical limits. As the provision of retail services evolved from a local to a regional model, Chester residents began to shop outside the town's borders for basic goods and services. The nature of the Village Center shifted from neighborhood service establishments to a more visitor-oriented, arts-focused mix of shops and restaurants.

Figure 4-2 – Chester in the 1800s (Source: Walling, Henry Francis, 1825-1888
Online Link: http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/cgi-bin/MAGIC_HistList.pl)

Current Economic Base

A "Grand List" of assessed property in each Connecticut town is compiled annually by town assessors effective on October first of each year. The assessed value of property is based on a study of fair market values for comparable properties. Periodically, the entire grand list is revalued to reflect current sales data. Chester went through a new revaluation in October of 2008. Chester's grand list for 2004 was over $400 million. The highest valued property was Chester Village West operated by Chester Woods, Inc., (over $15 million) which comprised 3.7% of the Grand List, followed by the Connecticut Water Company ($5.8 million) at 1.4%. Whelen Engineering, the Eastern Company (Greenwald), and RotoFrank of America rounded out the top five.

Demographics

The characteristics of any population group change over time. The basic source of demographic information is the U.S. Census, which is conducted every ten years. Other federal and state agencies supplement the Census data with updated information in many forms. Almost all data, including much of the Census data, is based on sample information which is decreasingly reliable for smaller units of population such as Chester. Over the years, Chester's household size has become smaller as the birthrate has declined and extended multi-generational families are separated by relocation. The percentage of elderly as a component of Chester's population has increased as people live longer, current residents stay in their own homes longer, and others reside in residential complexes designed for the elderly.

Population

The population of Chester has grown at a slow but steady rate over the past four decades. Since 1950, Chester's population has grown more slowly than that of any town in the Estuary Region other than the town of Lyme. The 2000 Census counted 3,743 people residing in Chester. In 2006, the town's population was estimated to be 4,111 people. By 2011 the Connecticut Economic Research Center estimates the population will grow to a total of 4,401 people.

Density

The in-migration and out-migration of people in existing housing and the addition of new subdivision housing throughout town produces a feeling that the town's population is growing more rapidly than is actually the case. Since much of Chester is unavailable for housing development, that which does occur is often close to existing development. The Town of Chester encompasses an area of 16.9 square miles, of which 16 square miles is land

Chester Top 10 Taxpayers
Total Assessment in Blue

Chester Woods, Inc. (Chester Village West)
(15, 279,740)

Connecticut Water Company
(5,761,400)

Whelen Engineering Company, Inc.
(4,930,930)

The Eastern Company (Greenwald)
(3,622, 140)

Connecticut Light and Power
(3,196,710)

Roto Frank of America, Inc.
(3,181, 320)

Quantum 318, LLC
(2,862,000)

Whelen Aviation, LLC
(2, 627, 600)

Sbriglio,Margaret and Robert
(2,278, 6000)

ASW, LLC
(2, 084, 810)

Source: Chester Assessor Records (2006)

Figure 4-3 Business Park at Inspiration Lane (Source: LJD 2008)

area. The 1990 Census indicated an average population density of 213 people per square mile. By the 2000 Census, density had increased slightly to 234 people per square mile. In comparison, nearby Clinton, which has a similar land area (16.3 sq. miles), had 818 people per square mile. Further down the coast, Bridgeport, Connecticut, also with 16 square miles of land area, had a density of 8,212 people per square mile. A reduction in household size between 1990 and 2000, from 2.57 to 2.38 people per household, means that the population is more widely distributed in an increased number of dwelling units.

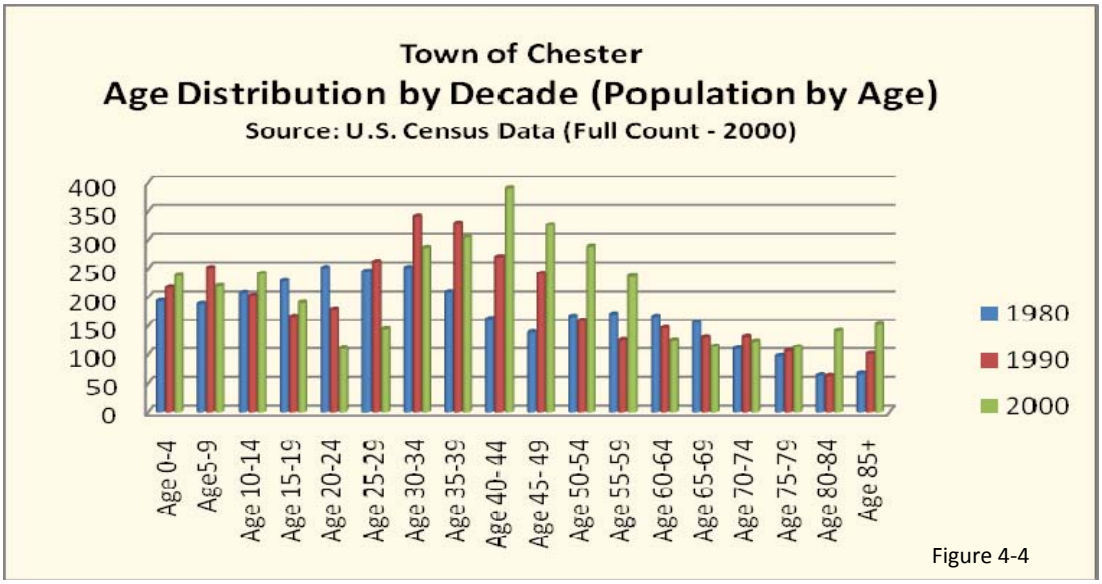


Figure 4-4

Ethnicity

Based on the most recent census data (2000), the resident population of Chester is primarily white, with a small representation of major minority groups. Three percent of the population identified themselves as Hispanic, one percent as Black, and one percent as Asian.

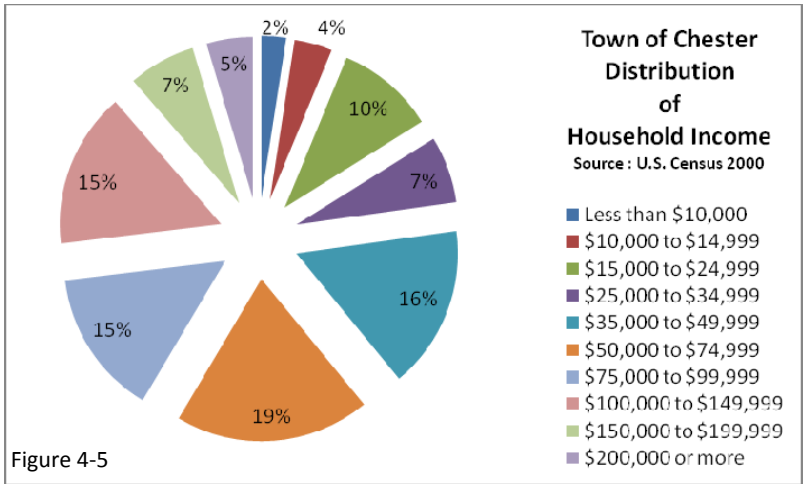


Figure 4-5

Labor Force

In July 2007, the Connecticut Department of Labor estimated that there were 2,333 people in the labor force from Chester. Of those, 2,236 people were employed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 4.2%. (People not actively looking for a job are counted as "not in the labor force.") Chester is often thought of as a bedroom community, with residents commuting to jobs outside the Town. However, about one quarter of the workforce both live and work here, many working from their homes. According to the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce, the most common out-of-town destination in 2004 was Middletown (220), followed by Old Saybrook (133), Deep River (105), Hartford (77) and New Haven (54). Journey-to-work data showed that most workers drove to work alone, while fifty people walked to work, and 19 used public transit.

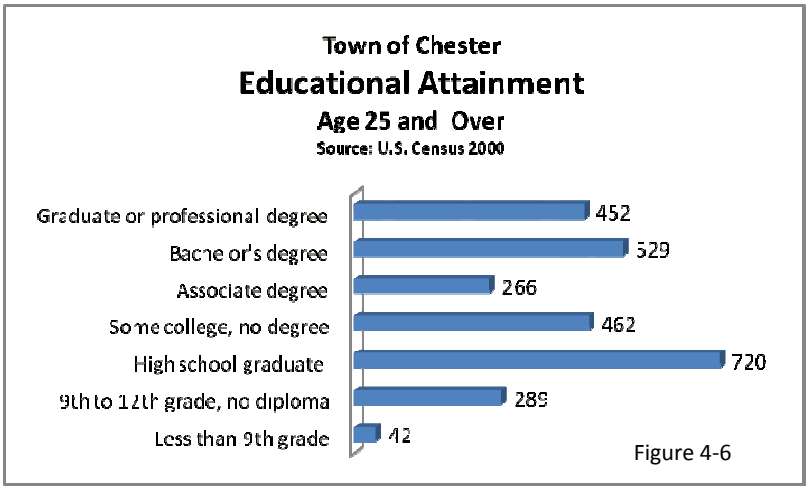


Figure 4-6

Two of the top five employers in Chester are manufacturing firms. Whelen Engineering Company, which began as a garage operation in Deep River in 1952, now makes products for the emergency warning industry in a 125,000 square foot plant on Winthrop Road. Whelen has an additional facility in Charlestown, NH. Greenwald Industries, on Route 154, manufactures components for coin-operated equipment and electronic card readers. Two other major employers are residential care facilities – Chester Village West, a life care facility, and Chesterfield Health Care Center. Also among the five largest employers is First Student, part of a larger national transportation company, which employs bus drivers and mechanics for the Region 4 school district.

Town of Chester

TOP FIVE EMPLOYERS

Whelen Engineering

Chester Village West

Greenwald Industries

First Student Transportation

Chesterfield Healthcare

2006

Reasons for Economic Development

This Plan is a statement of goals, policies and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality. In many communities, "economic development" is viewed as an end in itself, with little consideration of why such development is wanted, or what kind of economic development is consistent with the town's vision for its future.

There are many reasons for economic development. One goal often cited is to expand the town's non-residential property tax base, on the theory that this will lessen the property tax burden for residential owners. Economic development is also sought to create or maintain jobs for area residents and new residents who will be customers of local businesses. Providing services and amenities for residents, visitors and the local workforce enhances the sense of community and maintains diversity. A more narrow purpose of economic development is to increase the wealth of individual property owners and investors. A report discussing these purposes, entitled "Chester, Connecticut, a Review of Future Development Options", was prepared for the Chester Planning and Zoning Commission by the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency in April 1999.

Figure 4-7- Aerial Photo of Whelen Engineering-Route 145 (Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

During the Commission's workshops for this Plan, some participants expressed concern about the increasing cost of living in Chester. Some feared that the cost may become so high that people will be forced to move to less expensive locations. Others were concerned that children raised in Chester may not be able to afford to live in their hometown as adults. Much of the blame for this situation was attributed to increased property taxes in Chester. The heavy reliance on property taxes to pay for local government services is a problem in places like Chester where real estate taxes are the primary means of funding local government and schools.

Property taxes are only a portion of the increasing cost of living, which includes other rising costs such as energy, insurance, food, transportation and medical care. Property taxes are one component, however, that residents feel they can influence more than some of the other costs. New development is often promoted with the argument that it is a "solution" to higher property taxes and will ease the tax burden for existing residents.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that new economic development also has costs. The correlation between new residential development and rising school costs, which is often the biggest item in rural community budgets, has become apparent. To a lesser degree, there is a growing awareness that non-residential development may also have costs that reduce or negate

Figure 4-8 – Greenwald Industries – (Source: Cummings & Good)

the benefits of a larger tax base. Some of the costs of new development are obvious, such as an increase in the need for local services like fire and police protection. Other costs are less obvious, such as the cost of a diminished quality of life due to noise, lights, traffic or incompatible design that alters the character of the community. Many believe that a tax base should be "balanced" between residential and non-residential uses, although there is little agreement on what constitutes that "balance". Among its neighbors in the Estuary region, Chester has the highest percentage of its tax base attributed to commercial and industrial development. The amount of new development necessary to impact the property tax rate within the town by building more commercial or industrial property is significant. A new Chester Village West would only lower the mil rate by 0.7 mils. It would take five new Whelen Engineering complexes to reduce the mil rate by one mil. Any increase in Grand List due to increased development inevitably increases the cost of providing required services.

Chester must take a realistic view of what new economic development can accomplish. Development is essential to a healthy community, because the needs of the community change and new facilities and services are necessary to meet those changing needs. Services and amenities for residents and visitors, jobs, and diversity are all important considerations. In planning for the physical and economic development of the town, the Planning and Zoning Commission must examine all costs and benefits of potential development, financial and non-financial, tangible and intangible, to assure that the overall impact of such development is positive for the community.

Growth Potential

At 16 square miles, Chester is small in geographic area. Much of the town is protected as state forest and water company land. Other undeveloped areas in town have severe limitations for development in the form of difficult soils and steep slopes. Chester has grown more slowly than its neighbors in part due to such limitations. The town, which thrived on early water-borne transportation and water power, did not need to develop an alternative infrastructure until after many other towns had

become more modernized. Along with limited available land, the town's infrastructure is not designed for large scale development today. These two factors have shielded Chester from the dramatic changes taking place nearby. Developers look at a wide range of criteria when deciding where to locate a new development. These include topography and soils, ease of access, infrastructure, parcel size and parcel availability. Factors influencing locational decisions include ease of access, proximity to markets, financial incentives, the labor pool, ambiance, and competition. Some area towns have been inundated with large development proposals over the past several decades, especially near I-95 Interchanges and along Route One. These proposals have included grocery and fast food chains, home improvement centers, and pharmacy chains. While Chester remains "out of the way" for such ambitious projects, it is ripe for numerous smaller projects, the incremental impact of which can significantly change the town. Chester will eventually be faced with decisions to allow proposed development of potentially incompatible character, or to shape development in a manner which preserves its unique natural and cultural resources.

Town	Median Age	Land Area square miles	2005 POP.	2004 Net Grand List	2001 Equalized Grand List	2002 Actual Mil Rate	2002 Equalized Mil Rate	% Commercial /Industrial
Chester	44	16	4,111	607,060,188	547,697,440	21.9	15.3	16.3
Essex	46	10	7,203	996,408,474	1,412,372,140	14.9	10.4	13.6
Clinton	41	16	13,953	963,726,880	2,112,065,902	29	13	13.5
Westbrook	44	16	6,755	788,885,942	1,564,365,630	20.2	9.9	13.5
Old Saybrook	47	15	10,944	1,871,456,341	2,642,204,519	13.8	9.6	10.9
Deep River	42	14	6,885	386,651,070	727,752,679	28.1	14	8.1
East Haddam	41	54	9,320	668,663,049	1,187,804,658	25.35	13.9	5.9
Old Lyme	45	23	7,639	1,465,499,337	2,096,600,541	25.5	11	5.1
Haddam	43	44	7,732	612,106,250	1,091,294,023	29.5	16.1	3.5
Killingworth	42	35	6,648	568,720,060	1,005,072,452	24.8	13.8	2.7
Lyme	49	32	2,101	508,525,669	707,249,809	12.4	8.7	0.08

Source: Connecticut Economic Resource Center: CERC Figure 4-9

Compatible Development

Maintaining the character of Chester has been identified as a principal goal of future growth management. New development should be of a scale, density and intensity of activity so as to be consistent with the small town character of Chester. Large scale development projects, even if for the purpose of enhancing the tax base, are inappropriate for Chester. Large scale buildings and activities which generate a significant amount of traffic should be discouraged or prohibited. In a modern economy where change is the norm, products, services and the need for specific workforce skills may come

and go very rapidly. Upcoming changes in telecommunications technology, availability of resources for production, and globalization of the economy will result in further changes and dislocations. Small projects, on a scale suitable for Chester, are more likely to have lasting benefits without damaging the character of the town.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Encourage appropriate mixed-use and non-residential development which is compatible in scale and design with the character of the town with minimal impact on natural resources.

2. Prohibit large scale development or commercial activities which adversely impact the surrounding area. Chester should not duplicate large regional retail and service facilities found in nearby towns. This is consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development. Small retail, office, service and mixed-use establishments will be encouraged in specific areas to serve the everyday needs of residents and visitors.

3. Provide public transit between Chester and regional retail, recreational, medical and employment opportunities.

4. Recognize and encourage retention of the industrial heritage that shaped Chester by retaining existing industry where appropriate.

5. Encourage adaptive reuse of historic industrial structures as part of the cultural landscape.

6. Encourage development that will neither create a need for significant new infrastructure improvements nor overstress the town's existing infrastructure.

7. Where appropriate, limit development to sites with the soil capacity to support onsite sewage disposal and water.

8. Review regulations for all commercial and industrial zones to ensure that the uses and standards result in development that is in harmony with the character of the area in which it is located. Develop specific criteria for non-residential zones to reflect character differences in each area, with emphasis on appropriate scale.

9. Encourage low impact, sustainable development using "green building" principles.

Existing Commercial and Industrial Areas

Chester uses four zoning categories (commercial, RLM, CDD and WDD) to designate seven areas scattered around the town for commercial and industrial uses. In addition, some uses which may be considered commercial in nature are permitted in residential districts under special permit. These uses include hospitals, convalescent homes, day care centers, schools, dog kennels, riding stables, life care facilities, boarding houses and bed and breakfast establishments. There are also a substantial number of commercial entities located outside of commercial zones that have the status of pre-existing non-conforming uses. The 1999 CRERPA report "A Review of Future Development Options"

looked at each of the existing non-residential zones in detail. Most of the recommendations in that report are still applicable and are incorporated into this Plan. Additional recommendations address issues of scale and design within existing zones.

Chester Village Center

Figure 4-10 – Main Street Chester (Source: Caryn B. Davis)

The 1969 Chester Plan of Development, responding to concerns about the "run-down" condition of Chester Center, envisioned the future village area as a "controlled development district" serving as the commercial center for the town. The Plan stated the following: "Additional parking facilities and a new old seaport character are proposed to give Chester Center the added convenience and attractiveness found in most new shopping centers. The proposed development is aimed at once more establishing the Center as the commercial hub of the town, and, perhaps, includes the northern portions of Killingworth and Deep River, and the southern section of Haddam within its service area." That Plan was developed during a period of national interest in urban renewal, when federal funding was available for major renovation of town and city neighborhoods. Fortunately, the Town chose not to demolish the existing buildings in favor of a "new shopping center." Subsequent awareness of the town's cultural heritage makes such drastic change unlikely today. The 1995 Plan established a policy to "endeavor to maintain the town center as a focus for commercial and municipal activities in order to retain its vitality and functioning as a 'community meeting place'."

Chester Center is the heart of the town. In the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut, 2005-2010, the village area is identified as a Rural Community Center. The State policy for rural community centers is to "promote concentration of mixed use development such as municipal facilities, employment, shopping and residential uses within a village center setting." Numerous efforts have been made to define and protect the character and functioning of the Center. Chester Center is the focus of many community events, celebrations and other gatherings. Despite the relocation of the Chester Town Hall out of the Center to Route 154, the center remains a place for community gatherings such as parades and festivals. Through the efforts of the Chester Merchants Association, such events are coordinated to enhance business opportunities. Chapter Seven of this Plan addresses and identifies the issues and recommendations for the Center in detail and will identify specific implementation steps that need to be taken to assure that the town's heart remains healthy.

About 47 acres in Chester Center are zoned for commercial uses. The Commercial District allows all uses permitted in residential zones, plus a wide range of retail and service uses. Additional uses are allowed by Special Permit. Given the expressed goal to retain the village character, the list of permitted uses must be re-examined for compatibility with that goal. A subject of considerable discussion, the zoning regulations include few standards to guide the design of new development in the Center. In fact, the same district regulations apply to the Commercial District on Route 154, a much different environment.

Issues addressed in Chapter Seven include the delineation of the Center boundaries. There has been discussion of expanding the Commercial District along Main Street east to Route 154 to allow additional uses, while others are concerned that this could mean the weakening of a compact, pedestrian-oriented center of activity. There have been other efforts to attempt to link the Center with North Quarter Park through a walkway, which might be more likely to be accomplished if new commercial development is allowed along Main Street. Adequate parking has been a longstanding issue for the Center, with several efforts to fix the problem. Despite measures taken, adequate parking, and its visibility, remains a concern.

Figure 4-11 – Chester Village Center (Source: CRERPA/2004)

The density of development in the Center has resulted in sewage disposal problems in the past. In 1985, a community sewerage system was built adjacent to Chester Creek to treat effluent from the Village Center. For several years the Town has been under order from the State Department of Environmental Protection to further abate continuing pollution of the Creek. While there is little disagreement that pollution exists and should be abated, the method used for abating the problem has been vigorously debated. In October 2007, Chester residents voted to approve the construction of a limited central sewer system discharging to the Deep River sewage treatment plant.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations for the Chester Center area are discussed in Chapter Seven.

Marinas – Waterfront Design Districts

Chester occupies approximately 2.8 miles of shoreline on the west bank of the Connecticut River, about 12 miles upstream from the junction with Long Island Sound. In 2006, a survey by CRERPA counted seven marinas or yacht clubs along the shore, with a combined total of 854 slips.

Currently all facilities are full, with waiting lists. The largest area of marine commercial use is concentrated along the Chester Creek from the Connecticut River back to the Valley Railroad Bridge, located over three thousand feet upstream. The bridge clearance restricts most water craft from moving further up creek. The Hays Haven Marina, Castle Marina and Chester Marina are located near the entrance of Chester Creek in the southern Waterfront Design District (WDD). The Springfield Yacht Club and the Pattaconk Yacht Club are further up Chester Creek. Aside from Chester Creek, there are no coves or protected anchorages along the waterfront. Most of the riverfront is lined with marshes and shoals. The Chrisholm Marina is located directly on the river in the northern portion of the WDD. Near the Haddam town line, the Middlesex Yacht Club has facilities in a residentially-zoned area. Most of the marinas have winter storage capacity for boats. There are two public launch sites along the River, with public viewing and six slips for transient boats.

Figure 4-12 – Chester Village Center Aerial
(Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

Within the WDD, existing marinas appear to have reached their full growth potential, except for provision of marina-related amenities such as marine stores and services or food service. Under Connecticut's coastal management statutes, waterfront sites must be reserved for water-dependent uses.

Access to the marinas from the landward side is across the tracks of the Valley Railroad. While used recreationally for excursions by the Valley Railroad, the tracks have been discussed as a means of providing public transit from the Long Island Sound towns to the Middletown and Hartford areas, integrated with the tourist activities. Safety would certainly become an issue if railroad service were expanded along the line.

The Planning and Zoning Commission adopted a Coastal Area Management Plan for the town's coastal area in 1983. The Commission's jurisdiction was limited to land within the town above the mean high water line. The Town Meeting approved creation of a Chester Harbor Management Commission in 1990. That Commission adopted a Harbor Management Plan in April of 1994. Their

jurisdiction covers tidal and intertidal waters below the mean high water line within territorial limits of the town, including the intertidal area of Chester Creek to the center of town, about 1.8 miles from the creek's juncture with the Connecticut River. It is essential that these two agencies work together closely to assure that waterfront development is appropriate for the town.

Figure 4-13 – Chester Creek in the Lower Chester Cove Section (Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WATERFRONT DESIGN DISTRICT (WDD):

10. Review current WDD zoning regulations to determine whether additional accessory uses are appropriate for the area, including marine supply retail, seasonal restaurants, and boat storage. Carefully review plans to ensure that hazardous materials associated with marine uses are protected during flooding. Any additional activity in the WDD should recognize the inevitability of flooding within the Connecticut River's floodplain.

11. Maximize use of the Chester waterfront for water-dependent uses.

12. Coordinate with the Harbor Management Commission to review permits for new WDD development proposals.

Controlled Development District (CDD) - Inspiration Lane

The Controlled Development District encompasses approximately 43.6 acres, accessed by Inspiration Lane from Route 148, just east of Exit 6 off Route 9. Inspiration Lane is a steep and curving roadway, designed to overcome the steep hillside which rises in excess of 200 feet above Route 148. At the bottom of the hill, the intersection of Inspiration Lane and West Main Street forms a very sharp angle, with limited visibility for drivers on both roads. The CDD abuts several large parcels of residentially zoned land which have frontage on Wig Hill Road, which is unsuitable for significant traffic. The most easily developed land within the CDD has already been developed and the remaining land is limited in its ability to support new development. The CDD allows all uses permitted within the residential districts by right. An almost unlimited range of commercial and industrial uses are allowed by special permit. Basically, almost any use allowed anywhere in town is allowed in the CDD.

In recent years, it has been proposed to extend the Connecticut Water Company public water line to the CDD. Extreme caution must be used in allowing heavy water users in the Industrial Park,

since the importation of additional water to the area will make it difficult to accommodate on-site sewage disposal.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CONTROLLED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (CDD):

13. Review uses allowed in the CDD to assure that future development in the area is consistent with resource limitations and minimizes adverse impacts on adjacent residential properties. Limit development to uses that do not require extension of public water to the industrial park.

14. Limit further expansion of the present boundaries of the Controlled Development District. Although the most suitable land within the District has been developed, reuse or repurposing of existing development should be encouraged if vacancies occur.

15. Continue to seek ways to improve traffic safety and visibility at the intersection of Inspiration Lane and Route 148.

Research and Light Manufacturing District (RLM) – Winthrop Road/Chester Airport Area

Three areas in Chester are zoned as RLM. Two of those areas are located east of Route 154, and will be discussed along with other uses along 154. The third and largest area includes about 120 acres on Winthrop Road surrounding Chester Airport. The RLM allows any uses permitted in residential districts, plus research and development or manufacturing, processing, storage or assembling of commodities, goods or products. Airports are permitted as a special permit use.

Chester Airport is privately owned by Whelen Aviation. As of August 2007, there were 115 aircraft based at the field, most of which (100) were single-engine planes. There were 10 multi-engine planes, three helicopters and two ultralights. There are two paved runways, with a maximum length of 2,566 feet, fifty feet wide, and capable of handling planes up to 8500 pounds. Chester Airport is open to the public. The airport is not part of the State's airport planning and is not listed as a major facility. Room for airport expansion is limited.

Figure 4-14- Aerial view of Inspiration Lane Business Park (Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

There appears to be room within the RLM zone on Winthrop Road for additional research and industrial development without adversely affecting neighboring residential areas. The Airport land itself might be a suitable development site, but it has been the stated policy of the town to encourage maintenance of the airport as functioning entity. It is an unusual amenity that may make Chester more attractive to business owners. In the event that consideration is given to closing the airport, the Town should work with owners to determine if there are alternatives to closure.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING RESEARCH AND LIGHT MANUFACTURING DISTRICT (RLM):

16. Encourage owners of Chester Airport to maintain a functioning airport that is open for public use.

17. Encourage expansion of existing businesses in the RLM District, consistent with natural and cultural resource constraints.

Airport Operational Statistics 2006	
Aircraft based on the field: 115	Aircraft operations: avg-57/day
Single engine airplanes: 100	41% Transient General Aviation
Multi-engine airplanes: 10	39% Local General Aviation
Helicopters: 3	20% Air Taxi

Route 154 Development

Route 154 (Old Route 9) is bordered by a wide mixture of uses. Originally known as the Middlesex Turnpike, Route 154 has been a major through route along the western bank of the Connecticut River since the construction of the bridge over Chester Creek in 1816. Current zoning along the road is primarily residential, but also includes commercial and industrial zoning. Route 154 also provides the only vehicular access to the Waterfront Design District areas along the Connecticut River. Two areas east of Route 154 are currently zoned as Research and Light Manufacturing (RLM), the same zoning category as the Chester Airport area. The former Susan Bates factory, now Greenwald Industries, includes about 16.6 acres. An area in excess of five acres is located on the south side of Denlar Drive. About eight acres on the west side of Route 154 are zoned commercial and include the Chester Town Hall, which was relocated from Chester Center in 2002. The Route 154 Commercial District is zoned identically to Chester Center. The Chester Fairgrounds is zoned for residential one acre lots.

From the Deep River town line to the Haddam town line, land uses along Route 154 transition quickly among strip commercial development, industrial development, and rural residential uses. There is very little continuity of use or design. Access to abutting properties also varies, with roads and driveways of all sorts and varied separation distances. The Chester Economic Development

Commission (EDC) examined land uses along Route 154 and forwarded recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission for changes in current zoning. In particular, the EDC focused on possible expansion of the commercial zone to both sides of Route 154 northward from the Chester Town Hall to Parkers Point Road. The recommendations of the EDC have been considered as part of this Plan.

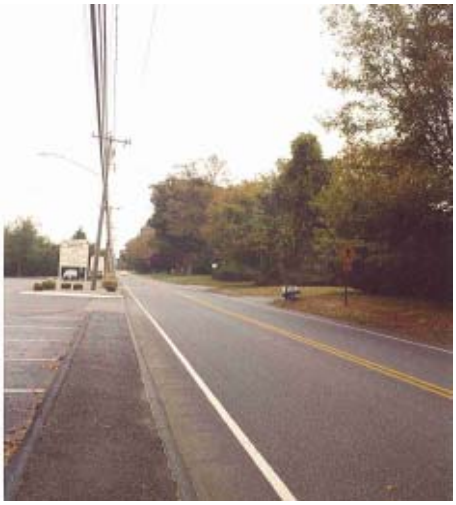


Figure 4-15 Route 154 – Rural conflicts with commercial aesthetics

Development along Route 154 can be described as "eclectic," with uses, styles and design from many periods in the past. Soils vary in suitability for on-site sewage disposal, but much of the better land has already been developed. Several large tracts of land (including the Fairgrounds) remain. If Chester wishes to retain its small town character, it will be necessary to develop general zoning standards for the entire length of Route 154 in Chester, rather than continuing to use zoning district regulations that are better suited to other areas of town. Much of the length of Route 154 appears suitable for small-scale mixed uses.

Figure 4-16: Route 154 – Town Hall/Bank. Landscaping heading in right direction. (Source: LJD/CRERPA 2007)

Maximum building square footage, low lot coverage, front yard setbacks, generous landscaping requirements, and some uniform characteristics for signage will help create an attractive visual corridor, regardless of use. Within this corridor, individual subareas can be created that allow new uses consistent with the historic land use pattern that have evolved over time. Additional commercial and community uses can be encouraged at current points of more dense development consistent with soil capacity. These include the areas around Town Hall and the intersection of Main Street and Route 154. A new industrial subarea can be designed for the existing RLM areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ROUTE 154:

18. Consider overlay zoning standards for the length of Route 154 and encourage development that is consistent with the current small town character of land use along the highway. Develop standards with appropriate design professionals that address building size, architecture, lot coverage, access, underground utilities and landscaping.

19. Identify and develop zoning standards for specific commercial/mixed use hub areas where current uses are concentrated, including the town hall area and the intersection of Main Street

and Route 154. Consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, include only those uses which provide neighborhood or town-wide services, while prohibiting large or regional retail facilities.

20. Review current RLM zoning along 154 to address the character of the Middlesex Turnpike and allow a smooth transition from industrial to residential and commercial uses.

21. Place a moratorium on expansion of non-conforming uses in residential zones on Route 154 pending the development of the overlay zone.

22. Review status of Fairgrounds and determine if current residential zoning is still appropriate.

23. Economic development along Route 154 should be sensitive to the economic and cultural vitality of the Village Center.

Non-Residential Development in Residential Zones

Historically, Chester has included a variety of mixed uses in its residential districts. In older residential areas, customary home occupations and accessory apartments were part of many traditional homesteads. Uniform residential subdivisions in Chester are a more recent land use pattern. Within these modern subdivisions, residents are often very sensitive to even minor differences in use from lot to lot. The character of the modern subdivision form is one of predictability and conformity. In many communities, residential zoning regulations have been adopted which foster this subdivision character without recognizing that there are alternatives that are more suitable to a rural landscape. With improved telecommunications, home occupations may become much more common. An area which promotes its rural charm to visitors can encourage longer stays within the area through the availability of guest rooms and bed and breakfast establishments. Accessory apartments can provide additional affordable housing units while allowing homeowners to help support the costs of owning a home.

Figure 4-17– Crossroad Intersection of Routes 154 and 148

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING MIXED USE IN RESIDENTIAL ZONES:

24. Review the special principal uses in residential zones.

Agriculture

Like many other parts of New England, Chester once had a flourishing agricultural community, although the steep topography and limited soils were less than ideal for growing crops or supporting domestic animals. The best soils for agriculture were found in the area of the

Connecticut River and Cedar Lake (see Chapter Two – Soils). Today, most of the agricultural land has re-grown as upland forest or has been used for development purposes. With the increasing interest in energy conservation and healthy eating, there is a growing market for locally-produced foods and other farm products.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING AGRICULTURAL LAND:

25. Establish zoning regulations to encourage production and sale of local farm products.

26. Research tax incentives for the preservation of agricultural land.

Cedar Lake Area on Route 148

The 1969 Plan suggested the possibility of limited neighborhood shopping facilities in the Cedar Lake area. This area is currently not zoned for such uses. Concern for water quality in Cedar Lake requires that any additional uses in the area be approached very carefully. The popularity of the State Forest recreational area and of Cedar Lake, and the increasing year round population in that area provide a potential market for small retail or service activities. Preservation of Camp Hazen in its current form is an important goal. The Commission has been presented with Camp Hazen's ten-year plan of development and is supportive of the Camp's commitment to continued operation and improvement. Should the Camp ever find itself in a position to divest its operations, meetings between the town and camp officials should discuss possible arrangements for preservation of this critical recreational asset.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

27. Limit both residential and non-residential uses in the Cedar Lake area to protect water quality.

28. Prepare guidelines for Town acquisition should any land within the Cedar Lake watershed become available.

Figure 4-18—Camp Hazen partners with North Cove Outfitters to host "Paddle sports Weekend" which draws visitors statewide to Chester (Source: North Cove Outfitters Paddle demo 2006 ® K.Lipeika)

CHAPTER 5: HOUSING

Historical Growth Patterns

For roughly 300 years, historic development patterns in Chester were based on proximity to farm soils, industry, and commerce, resulting in a stippled pattern of housing development. While no one central area of housing growth has emerged in Chester, the village area has nonetheless been a focal point for housing density over time. Chester Creek served as a waterfront commerce center in the early 1800s and associated housing and commercial growth evolved near the head of the creek. Gradually, development spread out from the village center and along the major road and trolley networks connecting the village to other towns. Additional housing developed near the town's many streams and ponds. (See Figure 5-4)

Figure 5-1 – Individually built homes from 1600s to 1930s characterize the village and town of Chester (Source: CRERPA/LJD 2007)

Housing Options

Single Family Housing

From about the 1940s to 1960s, density near Cedar Lake and Wig Hill Road began to increase significantly with single family housing and seasonal cottages. From 1970 onward, housing development increased near the floodplain of the Connecticut River, which until that time had remained largely unsettled. Small compact subdivisions followed national patterns in the 1960s and 1970s with one story capes or ranch housing being built on Castle View Drive, Johnson Road, and Bates Road. But these subdivisions were small in number in comparison with other towns which saw similar subdivision patterns on a larger scale.

Figure 5-2 :Expanded square footage characterizes homes in new subdivisions (Source: CRERPA/ LJD 2007)

New subdivision development in Chester over the last two decades is found on Turkey Hill Road, Brooks Lane near the school, Butter Jones Road, High Field Lane, Pattaconk Drive, Waterhouse Lane, Winthrop Road and Pine Knoll. (See Figure 5-3) Along with these small subdivisions, smaller resubdivisions have added additional housing in a scattered growth pattern consistent with past trends.

Residential Zoning

Currently, the town of Chester has three distinct residential zoning districts: R2 – Residential 2 Acre; R1 – Residential 1 Acre; and R ½ - Residential one-half acre. The town also has a Planned Residential District (PRD). During the 1980s, the Planning and Zoning Commission completed several zone changes that increased areas of one-half acre zoning to one acre zoning. The following chart shows the dedicated acreage for each category within the town. Within the category of residential zoning, approximately 818 acres are classified as available vacant land by the assessor. This does not factor in the potential for additional

Figure 5-3 – Ranch style housing on Castle View Drive (Source: CRERPA/LJD 2007)

subdivision lots created through resubdivision of properties with an existing house or structure. The total amount of acreage available for resubdivision into building lots is dependent on existing or future zoning and existing topographic or environmental constraints. An evaluation of existing zoning and open land, without factoring in topographic or wetland constraints, yields a potential residential build out of approximately 1300 lots. A build out analysis of these parcels that factors in wetlands, soils, and topography would provide an excellent planning tool for future zoning and subdivision design.

Figure 5-4: Evaluation of **Approximate** Available Privately Owned Acreage Per Zone

PRD	**R-1/2**	**R-1**	**R-2**	**Vacant**
48 Acres	37 Acres	157 Acres	1540 Acres	818 Acres
35 Parcels Counted	10 Parcels Counted	43 Parcels Counted	183 Parcels Counted	29 Parcels Counted
Single Family-Existing	60 Lots	157 Lots	770 Lots	409 Lots

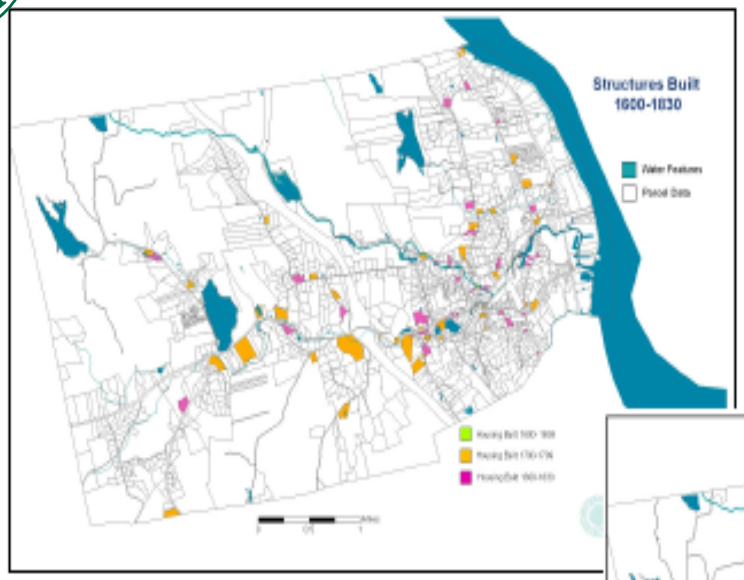
*Source: Municipal CAMA Data (Chester Fairground Included Due to Private Ownership Listing)

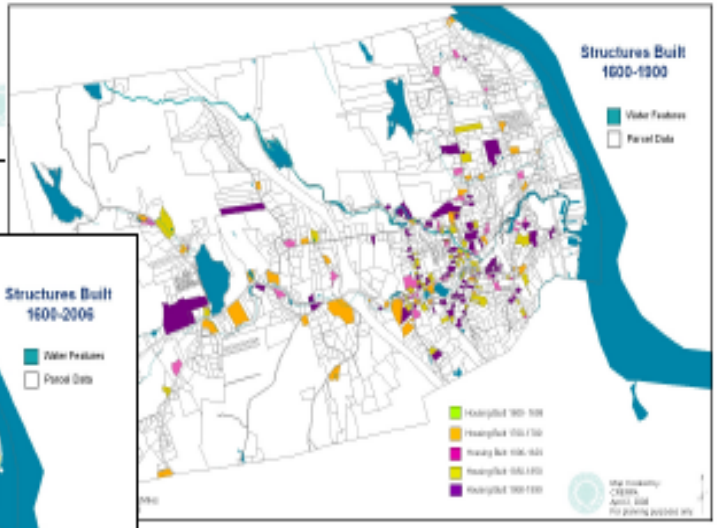
As lots become scarcer, the demand for additional building lots for housing will increase through private applications for rezoning, floating zones, combining existing housing lots to access rear land for subdivision, and planned development districts. To ensure that future growth is in harmony with goals and objectives stated throughout this plan, the town needs to carefully plan for single family residential housing in densities that can be supported by existing services and infrastructure. It is recommended that the town review and potentially revise the existing zoning for the Planned Residential District and the areas zoned residential one-half acre. The majority of lots within these zones are 1+ acre in size, and rezoning to one acre would create only a small number of nonconforming lots. This would decrease dependence on, and prevent a subsequent increase in, town services and infrastructure.

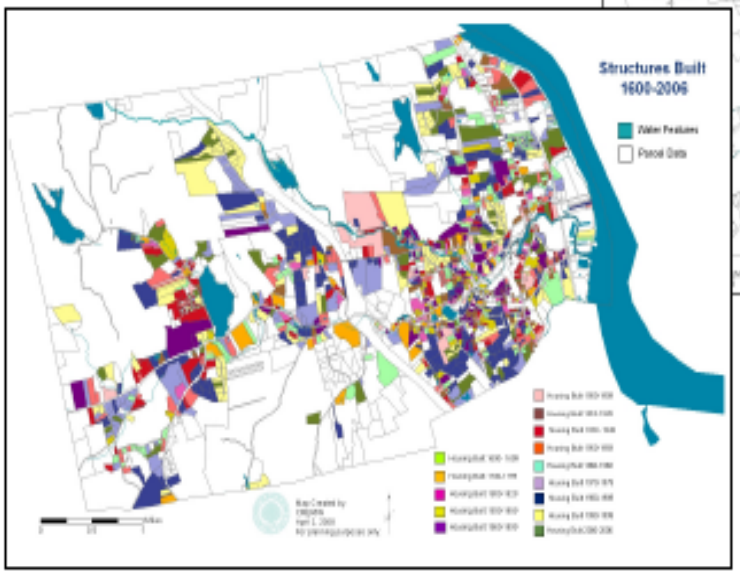
Areas zoned for one and two acre density need to be fully assessed for impacts of rear lot subdivision on existing road systems. In addition, a special study of two acre zoning districts should be evaluated in conjunction with soil conditions to assess the potential for open space/conservation subdivisions.

Senior Housing

A currently popular form of housing in many Connecticut towns is “senior housing,” including assisted living communities, retirement villages, and active-adult communities. These are euphemisms for housing restricted by zoning regulations to residents who are age 55 or older. In the case of assisted living, the housing is commonly comprised of apartments with varied square footage in a single structure.







Housing Development in Chester 1600- 2006

Map 5-1

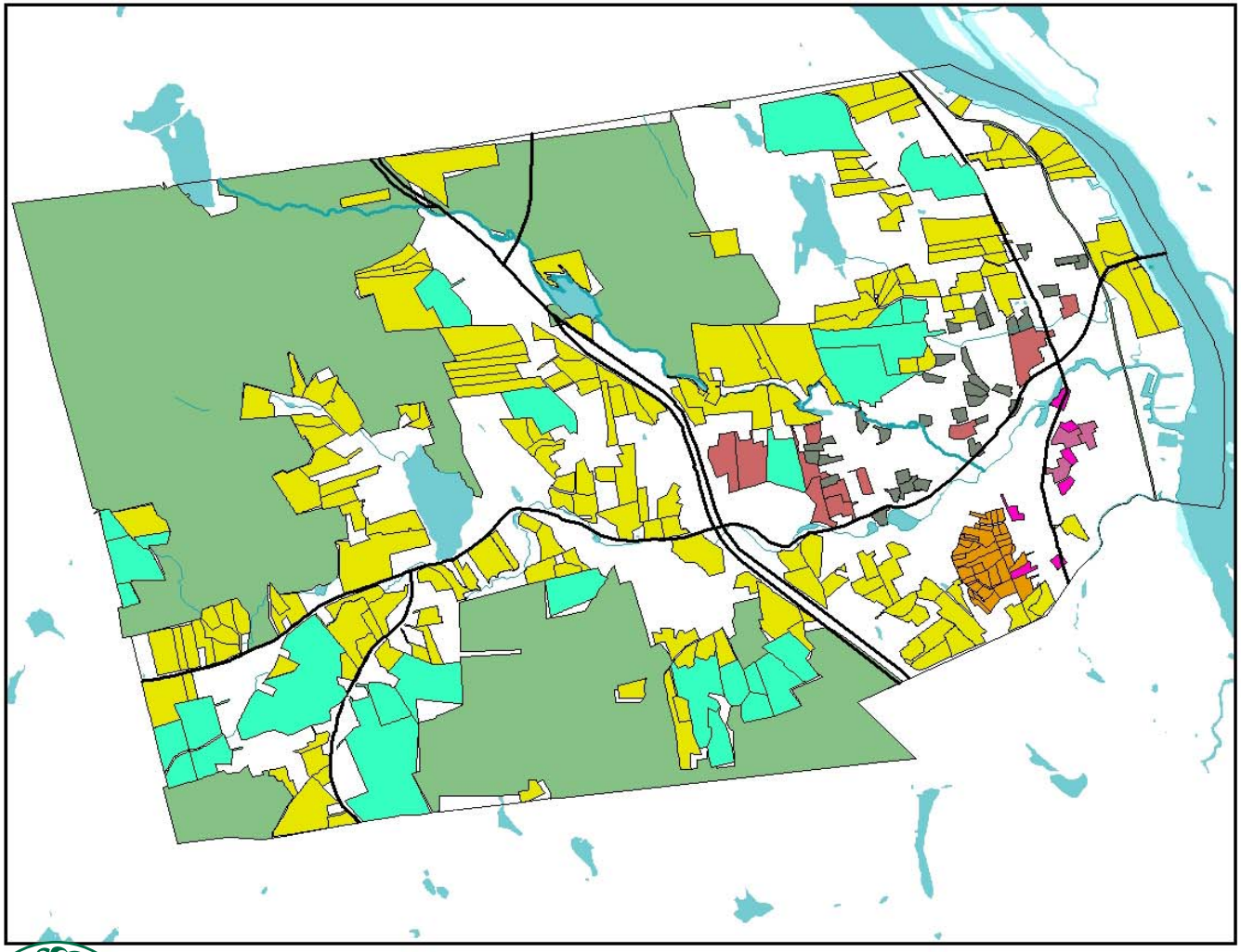
Maps depict the slow dispersed accretion of housing in Chester from 1600 through 2006. The mosaic of colors best portrays how no specific area of the town was the predominant center for development.

Map Created by CRERPA
For Planning Purposes Only
April 8, 2007

PARCELS WITH LAND IN EXCESS OF ZONING DISTRICT REQUIREMENTS

Map 5-2

Map depicts land area which has potential for subdivision into additional lots. Map provides a template for future evaluation of a full build out and zoning analysis



- Vacant Parcels of Land
- R1 (1 acre zoning) Parcels over 4 acres
- R1 (1 acre zoning) Parcels with 2-4 acres
- R2 (2 acre zoning) Parcels over 4 acres
- R 1/2 (1/2 acre zoning) Parcels over 4 acres
- R1/2 (1/2 acre zoning) Parcels with 2-4 Acres
- PRD (Planned Residential) Variable density possible
- CT DEP Property

Hydrologic Features

- Water
- Streams

Roads

- Primary Highway
- Secondary Highway
- Railroad

Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.

Most towns welcome senior housing due to the perception of increased taxable property without the demand for services and education. Chester senior housing and elderly care can be easily recognized in the examples of Cherry Hill Housing Complex, The Forest on Cross Road and Chester Village West (a life care facility), and Aaron Manor and Chesterfields (convalescent facilities). Less identifiable are the units of housing, both single family and apartments, providing housing to seniors with access to village services.

In many communities, planning for senior housing is dependent on market conditions, available land, and selective opportunities available to developers or property owners. With the expectation that need for senior housing will increase as the population of those over age 55 expands, planning for senior housing is predicated on two major components:

- Review private development applications for senior housing in the context of an increase in density for standard housing development. The Commission should anticipate that market conditions may influence the future use of the property. If the demand for senior housing diminishes, the pressure to convert formerly dedicated housing units to intergenerational housing may occur.

- Senior housing developments, and their elderly residents, need the support of public and commercial services. Planning for senior housing in a rural community includes: access to transit bus service, interaction with a multi-age community, grocery, medical support, library, secular and spiritual activity, and access to senior services.

Future housing development for seniors can benefit from locations near the village. The key reasons as noted above include:

- Proximity to current public transit services that connect to local and regional shopping, medical services, the Estuary Senior Center, and rail stations in Old Saybrook and Westbrook.

- Potential for future connection to services in Middletown through public transit.

- Uncomplicated access to village center activities: merchant activities, festivals, local medical and legal services, town government, library, and churches.

Figure 5-5 – Chester Rental Unit Pricing compared with Fair Market Rent (FMR)

Hartford HUD Metro FMR	One bedroom	Two bedroom	Three bedroom	Four bedroom
Propose FY 2008 FMR	$806	$985	$1,183	$1,469
2007 Local Survey of Advertised Chester Rentals	$660- $900	$900 - $1600	NA	NA

Multi-Family Housing

Like single family housing, new apartments and condominiums have similarly evolved in Chester. A scattered pattern of multi-family housing has emerged without an apparent planned strategy to location criteria such as transit access, and access to services and shopping. (See Figure 5-6) Chester Village retains the primary component of multi-tiered land use with mixed commercial, office, and single family/multi-family residential. Map 5-3 depicts the location of various categorized apartments in Chester. Larger apartment complexes include: Chester Village West senior housing, Cherry Hill duplex units, the apartments at 9 Maple Street, and the Denlar Drive Apartment Complex. (See Figure 5-5.) Apartments are also located as accessory uses to single family homes and over commercial buildings in the village area.

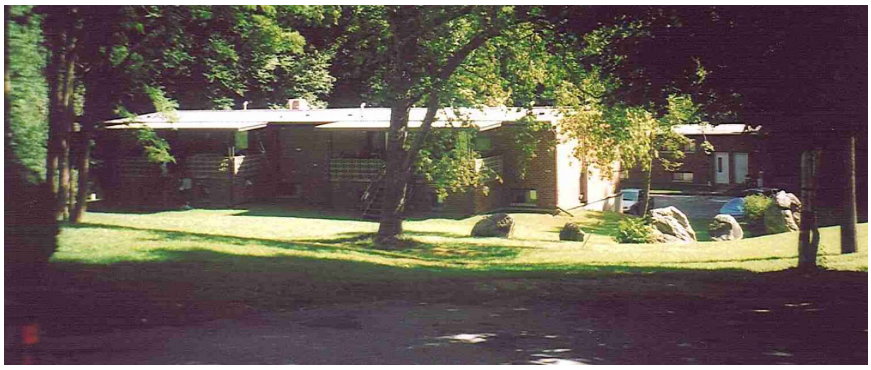


Figure 5-6—Apartment on Denlar Drive (Source: CRERPA 2007)

Issues and Trends in Housing

Current issues in housing reflect patterns coalescing from twenty years of debate on the best methods to apportion housing opportunities for a diverse population. Affordable housing remains the focal point for housing advocates in Connecticut. Efforts to encourage affordable housing in new developments through the passage of laws in 1989 yielded mixed results and more recent efforts have focused on incentive-based initiatives such as the recently adopted legislation for creation of "incentive housing zones." While current affordable housing programs are an important part of the effort to address the high cost of housing, housing is a complicated topic. Fluctuations in market conditions, energy costs, property tax assessment, gentrification, transportation costs, maintenance, total housing stock, and retention of retired residents on limited incomes are factors that transform the discussion of housing from numbers of total affordable units to how to achieve sustainable community housing options in the long term.

Affordable Housing in Chester

Chester's 2003-2006 deed-restricted affordable housing percentages fluctuated from 1.92% to 2.11%. Fluctuations are based on the number of total new housing units built or removed. Chester's dedicated affordable units are located almost entirely at the Cherry Hill complex off Route 154.

These units were built under a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/rural housing loan program and are managed by the Chester Housing Association, LP. Figure 5-7 lists the current fair market rents for Chester.

Chester currently has an inactive "Housing Partnership Committee" with just one member remaining. The Housing Partnership Committee was a result of an initiative by the State in 1991 to encourage towns, the State's Department of Housing, and other state agencies to develop ways to increase the supply and availability of affordable housing in the community.

An effective housing initiative recognizes and promotes the concept that affordable housing can be best described as housing attainable for the overall service and support populations in each town; workers, teachers, emergency officials, service providers, and medical personnel. A successful housing program also recognizes the existing and future age demographics in the community, retention of retired and elderly persons, local and state energy and transportation costs, tax assessment, gentrification, and existing patterns of housing construction and land constraints. Under the 2007 Home Initiative, Chester compares favorably with the other eight towns in the CRERPA region although Chester has become increasingly unaffordable to the general population. Figure 5-8 depicts the overall financing breakdown for achieving affordability for owner-occupied housing.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FRAMEWORK

The State of Connecticut, with the assistance of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), promotes affordable housing in Connecticut. In the past, the majority of Connecticut towns have not viewed affordable housing as an important issue. Escalating housing costs and an increased understanding that affordable housing is critical to maintaining the diversity of the population and workforce has reinvigorated the discussion in many towns.

The State of Connecticut defines affordability in the following discussion: "Set-aside development" means a development in which not less than thirty per cent of the dwelling units will be conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions which shall require that, for at least 40 years after the initial occupation of the proposed development, such dwelling units shall be sold or rented at or below prices which will preserve the units as housing for which persons and families pay thirty per cent or less of their annual income, where such income is less than or equal to eighty per cent of the median income. In a set-aside development, of the dwelling units conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions, a number of dwelling units equal to not less than fifteen per cent of all dwelling units in the development shall be sold or rented to persons and families whose income is less than or equal to sixty per cent of the median income and the remainder of the dwelling units conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions shall be sold or rented to persons and families whose income is less than or equal to eighty per cent of the median income." This formula is applied to deed restricted rental and owner-occupied housing. A key objective is that Connecticut towns have 10% or more of housing units designated as deed- restricted affordable.

A "carry a big stick" mechanism has been to shift the burden of proof to municipal land use agencies when an appeal of commission denial of an affordable housing project is made to the State Housing Appeals Court. Towns in Connecticut which have maintained deed-restricted affordable housing stock exceeding 10% of the town's total housing units are exempt from the state appeals procedure. This mechanism has had mixed results and does not always promote efficient or sustainable land use.

The Connecticut General Assembly enacted legislation in 2007 that encourages towns to promote affordable housing consistent with the HOME CT's Housing Program for Economic Growth using the mechanism of incentive housing zones. The legislation includes:

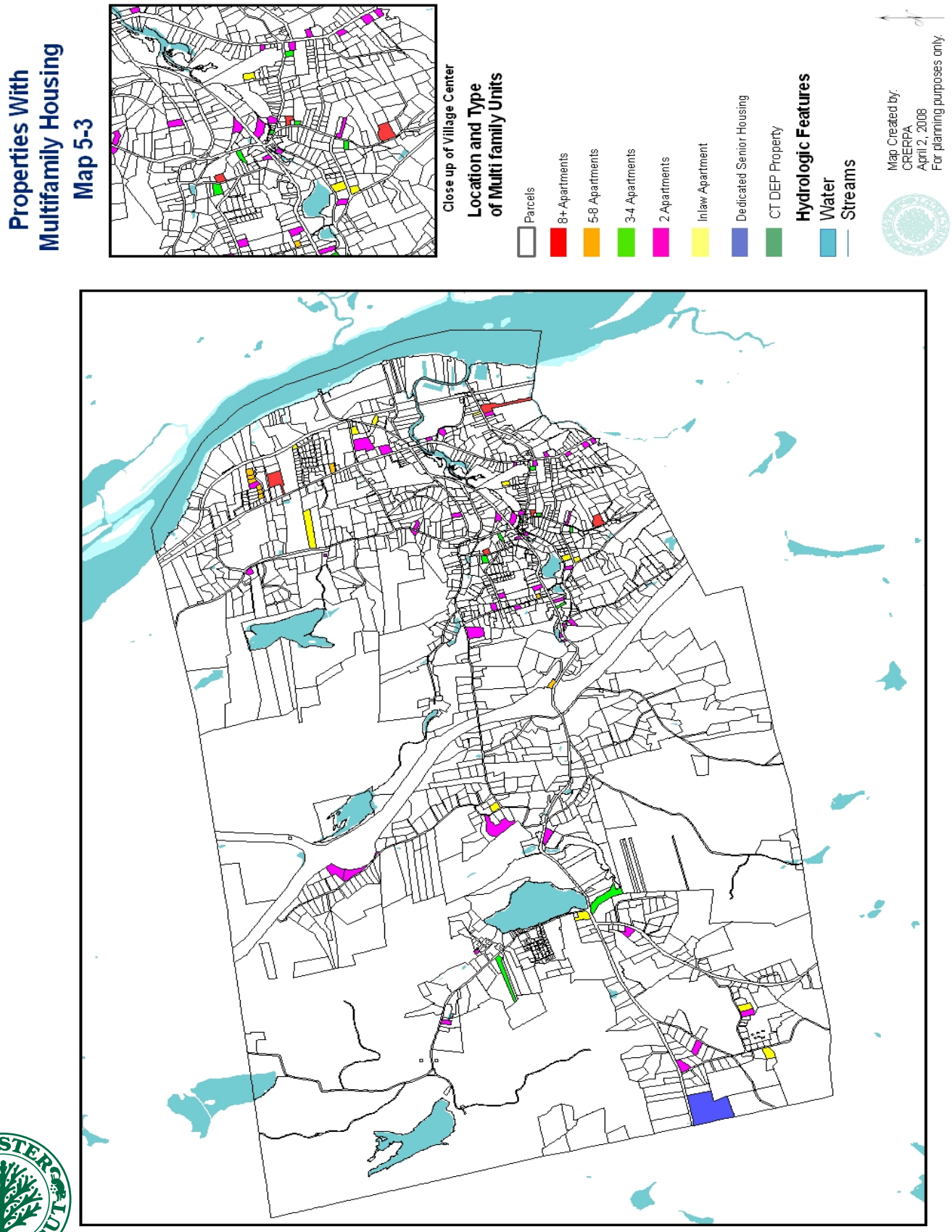
- Authorization to create incentives for municipalities that create zones allowing higher density housing and that issue building permits in those zones.
- Future allocation of $4 million for technical assistance and planning grants to towns, non-profit developers, housing assistance organizations and regional planning agencies and for zoning and building permit incentive payments.

2005 Rank	2006 Rank	Town	Median Sales Price	Qualifying Income	Median Income	Affordability Gap
39	11	Lyme	550, 000	165,061	82,339	-82,772
18	16	Essex	472,250	142,090	77,549	-64,541
26	20	Old Saybrook	407,500	122,961	72,136	-50,825
27	35	Westbrook	332,00	100,656	63,044	-37,612
56	39	Deep River	317,500	96,372	60,494	-35,878
43	45	Old Lyme	367,500	111,144	78,373	-32,771
71	50	Clinton	329,250	99,843	69,014	-30,829
48	52	Killingworth	398,250	120,191	90,671	-29,520
90	**83**	**Chester**	**296,400**	**90,138**	**73,328**	**-16,810**

FIGURE 5-7 CRERPA Region: How Chester Measures Up

Lower numbers denote decrease in affordability ranking with CT 169 towns Source: Home Connecticut: "Affordability in Connecticut, 2006" (www.HOMEConnecticut.org)

Figure 5-8—Cherry Hill Housing is the largest development providing affordable housing. (Source: LJD 2007)


Properties With
Multifamily Housing
Map 5-3
Close up of Village Center
Location and Type
of Multi family Units
Parcels
8+ Apartments
5-8 Apartments
3-4 Apartments
2 Apartments
Inlaw Apartment
Dedicated Senior Housing
CT DEP Property
Hydrologic Features
Water
Streams
Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.

Forecasting Housing Growth

In 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis took a toll on housing values and sales. An oversupply of large houses coupled with shifting demographics show at least a short-term trend of decreasing home values in the suburbs and rural subdivisions along with a slow migration of aging baby boomers to more urban or village settings. Therefore the stock of affordable housing fluctuates with the market and the regional and national economy. This major trend, evaluated by the professional planning community and academics, describes the reversal of the net migration to suburbs that started in the 1940s. This development is recently supported by forecasts of demographic changes and a resulting surplus in large lots (1/6 *of an acre and higher*) by 2025. This migration from suburb to urban is likely to decrease the market value of suburban homes and continue to increase the value of housing in urban neighborhoods.* (*A.C. Nelson, AICP : Virginia Tech)

The movement toward living in centrally located, community oriented, and transit friendly housing is evident in the Estuary region. Chester is distinctive in having revitalized the village area earlier than most towns. Preservation of the village setting and the continued emphasis on a community-oriented village center continues to attract investment and homeowners. Conversely, Chester will need to focus on these

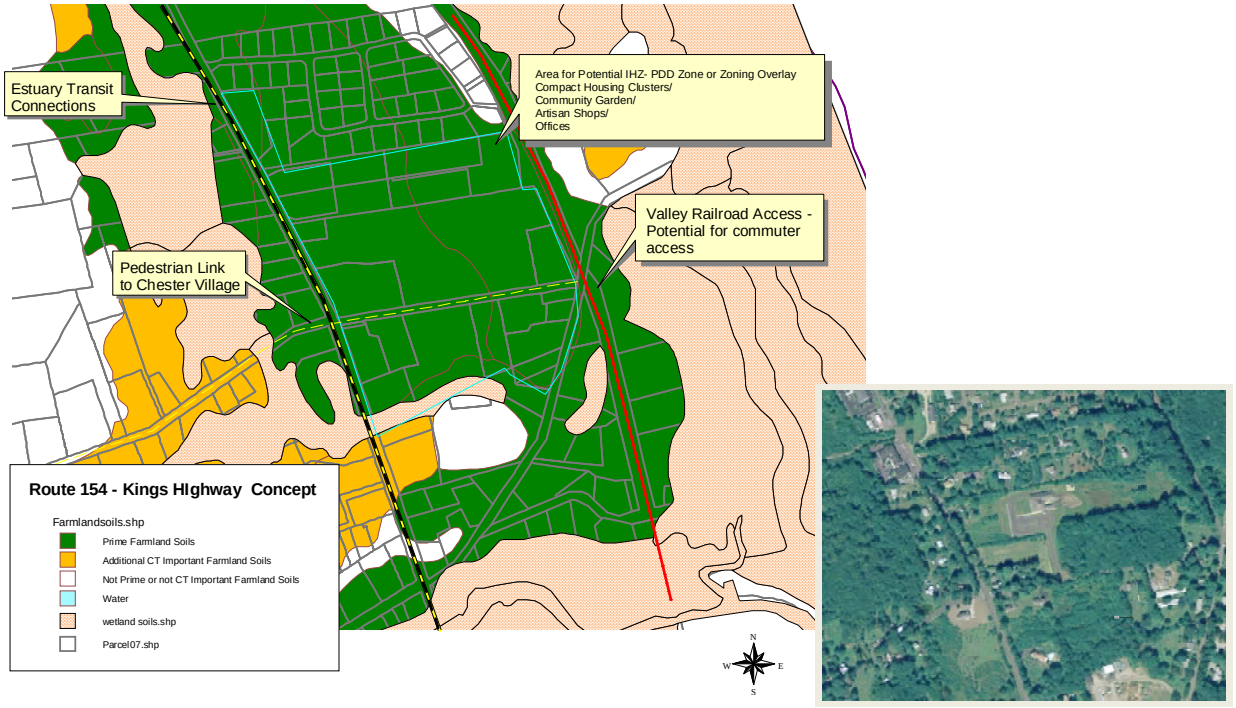


Figure 5-9– A Concept for Sustainable Housing - Areas of farmland soils for community gardens with adjacent higher housing density, artisan/business shops. Infill could occur within and around existing historical buildings and houses. An Incentive Zone Overlay would require compatibility with town character, including alternative utility systems. Proximity to rail, transit buses, bikeways, and village shopping encourage lower carbon footprint (Further research and planning required.)

anticipated trends and plan for affordable housing as the town becomes more popular and property values increase. The town will also want to carefully plan and zone for subdivisions in the rural areas of town to ensure connection to the town center and sustainable living practices.

Sustainability, Diversity and Choices

Based on feedback from the planning workshops, the primary housing goal for Chester residents is to promote a diversity of housing opportunities and provide for affordable housing as part of that diversity. Single-family housing is the predominant housing available in Chester. Future build out is limited by the availability of large vacant land tracts. Stated objectives by various conservation groups to obtain larger parcels for open space conservation may further reduce available lots. Options to achieve affordable housing and promote housing opportunities include:

- Formulating regulations which require 10% of lots and built homes in future subdivisions ten lots and over to be deed restricted affordable housing.
- Encouraging the construction or conversion of secondary housing units (carriage houses/in-law apartments) on existing lots where sanitary disposal conditions can be achieved.
- Designating incentive housing zones where a higher density of mixed housing options could be achieved of which 30% or more would be affordable. This area could also be located near public transit, the village, and other services and built in tandem with sustainable practices listed in other chapters of this document (e.g. *community gardens, artisan shops and workshops, and alternative technology sewer systems*)

There are a number of constraints challenging the town's planning efforts for affordable housing including:

- Availability of large vacant tracts for future subdivisions is limited to a few remaining parcels which are constrained by steep slopes, wetlands, and accessibility.
- Soil conditions on many one acre lots in Chester may not support the addition of a secondary housing unit and potential zoning regulations should carefully examine areas to be rezoned for in-law apartments.
- While sustainable practices of development admirably encourage high-density housing near public and commercial services to promote public transit, walking, biking and community interaction, potential higher-density development needs to be mitigated through sound planning practices to preserve rural land use practices, safe traffic and health conditions, access to public transit and services, and environmental sustainability.

Even with these constraints, the objective of a publicly supported contextual range of housing opportunities for a diverse population is an achievable objective.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HOUSING:

The Village Center:

1. Evaluate the current percentage of mixed use in the village and assure that an appropriate percentage of residential units, including single family homes, is provided in any future rezoning.

2. Provide design guidelines to ensure new apartments or condominiums are architecturally compatible with the historic village.

3. Review existing zoning requirements for parking allocation within the village and explore the use of shared parking regulations.

Town-wide:

4. Promote affordable housing by evaluating areas suitable for increased density as "Incentive Housing Zones." Areas should have easy access to village center, close proximity to public transit routes, and soil suitability for alternative sanitary treatment systems.

5. Encourage reuse of existing structures near the village for housing or mixed use.

6. Adopt revised subdivision regulations that require subdivisions of 10 lots or more to set aside 10% as deed-restricted housing lots.

7. Restore the Chester Housing Partnership Committee to consider opportunities for construction of affordable housing.

8. Modify the zoning regulations to clearly define and allow one unit of accessory housing for each residence, regardless of the age of the structure, where soils will support the additional on-site septic and off-street parking is available.

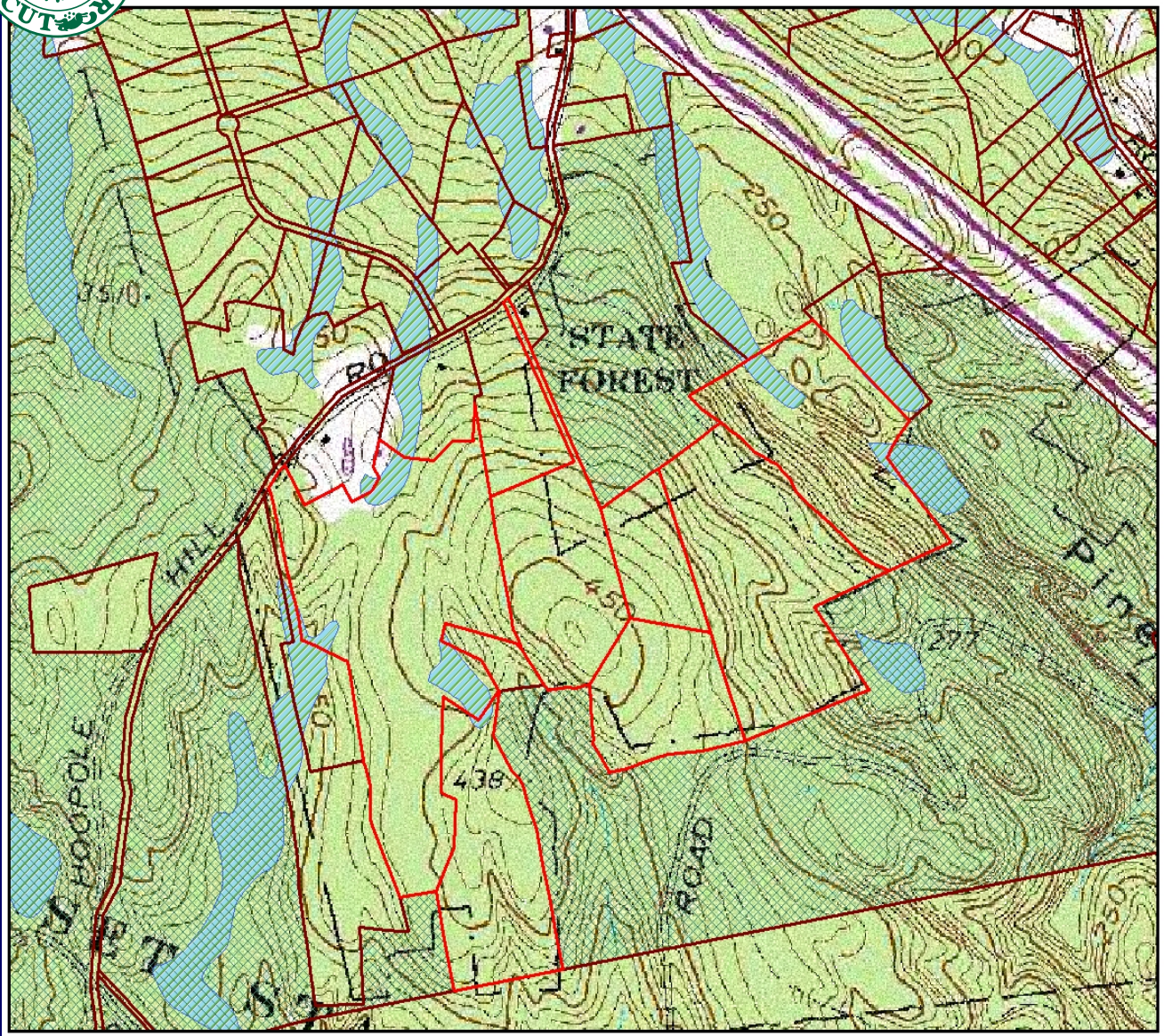
9. Evaluate rezoning ½ acre zoning districts to 1 acre zoning.

10. Review subdivision regulations for rear lot subdivision while also promoting safe conditions for road traffic.

11. Develop special permit criteria for senior housing which encourage accessibility to services and public transit, and feature architectural standards which are compatible with existing housing.

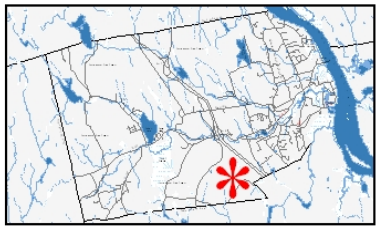
12. Conduct a build out analysis in conjunction with the Conservation Commission before making any comprehensive changes in zoning or subdivision regulations. Specific attention should be paid to soil type, on-site disposal of effluent and water supply.

13. Review subdivision regulations to consider changes to Chester's Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations.



Sample of Vacant Parcel Constraints

Map 5-4



Location Key

The following map depicts a USGS topographicmap which has been overlaid with the Chester parcel layer. Parcels outlined in red depict vacant properties and show that these parcels are constrained by steep slopes and wetlands. These parcels are indicative of similarvacant parcels in Chester which have marginal development potential. Green shaded parcels depict state forest properties.

- CTDEP Property
- Wetland Soils
- Parcel Outlines
- Vacant Parcels
- USGS Map

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For planning purposes only.

Miles
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CHAPTER 6: SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

Town services and infrastructure are the framework on which the community network operates, progresses, and interacts. Town services include governing boards and commissions, social services, recreational programs, education, public safety, and public works. Infrastructure incorporates tangible facilities that can be moved, expanded, modified, or removed. The library, town hall, community center, transportation, communications, parks, trails, water, sewer, fire stations, and schools are some of the significant facilities that enhance community character and quality of life.

This Plan of Conservation and Development explores Chester's services and infrastructure to provide recommendations to address future needs. To coordinate efficient and effective town planning, multiple services need to be supported by mutually shared infrastructure. A caveat in final recommendations within this section of the plan is the ability of the town to legally act within the context of enabling statutes outlined by the State of Connecticut. There are also policies and standards outlined by the state and federal government which the town follows in the context of receiving state funding or use of state property. Chester has significant acreage dedicated to state or regional ownership; parks, forest, regional watershed, and transportation. The town's ability to coordinate future planning goals with infrastructure improvements in parks, roads, and utilities is enhanced by the detailed recommendations in this Plan, forecasting state improvements and diligence in pursuing public involvement opportunities provided locally and by state agencies.

Figure 6-1—Chrisholm Marina
Source: CRERPA/LJD 2008)

Figure 6– 2– Looking west toward Chester
(Source: CRERPA 2007)

Overview of Town Government Service

The Town of Chester functions within a government structure with cooperative relationships between the legislative body, i.e., the town meeting, managed by the Board of Selectmen with financial oversight by the Board of Finance. Other boards and commissions are enabled with specific duties by either the state statutes (Planning and Zoning, Zoning Board of Appeals, Water Pollution Control Authority, Inland Wetlands, Economic Development Commission) or by the town (Cedar Lake Advisory Committee or Open Space Committee). There are other groups and organizations, local and regional, which contribute to the flourishing and diverse governance structure within Chester. Local groups include the Merchants Association and the Chester Land Trust. Regional organizations promote interoperability and cooperation with other towns to maximize resources: the Region 4 School District, the Chamber of Commerce, the Gateway Commission, the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA), Valley Shore Emergency Management Association, and Tri-Town Youth Services are just a few of the organizations that contribute to the town's public structure and provide resources.

Within the next ten to twenty years, Chester will need to explore options for increased efficiency for use of town space. This may include a re-evaluation of existing town buildings and future space needs. The primary goals of future changes in town building or new construction include meeting the state requirements for town services (emergency services or handicapped accessibility), improved efficiency of town services, and sustainable practices for long-term financial and environmental effectiveness. Additional community goals are often overlooked in the rush to mitigate an outstanding space problem or address individual organizational needs. Comments received at the workshops reinforced the need for careful planning to ensure an integrated approach to town buildings and meeting space and to maintain the small

Town Services	Transportation	Public Safety	Utilities	Recreation	Education
Town Hall	Pedestrian	Fire	Water	Parks	Schools
Public Meetings	Bicycle	Police	Sewer	Programs	Business Support
Library	Bus	Emergency Management	Communica-tions	Trails	Outreach
Public Works	Rail	Ambulance	Electric	Water	
Social Services	Road	Health	Wireless	Playgrounds	
	Air/Freight				

Figure 6-3 Chart of basic Town services provided by the town, public utilities and state

town character, public interaction and overall accessibility. A review of the various buildings in the town will address some of the advantages and deficiencies for each site.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SERVICES:

1. Establish a town building and facilities committee with the specific mission of evaluating strategies for financial support and prioritization of capital improvements to existing town buildings and properties. This committee would work with town, state, and regional offices as needed to ascertain possible funding sources and use existing plans and information to supplement general knowledge on how to best prioritize improvements to town buildings, and the purchase and reuse of existing buildings.

2. Evaluate library service and expansion with plans and concepts that will maintain or improve community interaction, promote small town aesthetics, increase efficiency, ensure long-term financial viability for maintenance, and promote sustainable access.

Public Interaction

Integral to a successful community is the ability of residents to meet and interact, both on a formal basis and an informal basis. This community function extends to all age groups. Chester's meeting and function space for various community services and activities is defined by the existing structures within the town. Comments at the planning workshops about the relocated Town Hall included "a lack of space" for large public or workshop meetings. The Meeting House serves as a primary location for larger gatherings and official town meetings. Beyond official meetings of boards and commissions and town meetings, there are other interactions within the community that are important to town residents. A consistent thread of discussion during the workshops was the need for more space for community interaction. Examples include: summer park and recreation programs for elementary school age children, civic organization meetings (garden club, scouting), school programs that interact with the community, seminars, and outreach programs. An examination of both existing town-owned space and other space owned by civic or non-profit groups follows. In addition to specific recommendations for town-owned space, the Commission evaluated the contribution of gathering space by civic and non-profit groups and examined ways to improve modal access (sidewalks, transit routes, bicycle lanes, crosswalks, and traffic calming) to those facilities.

Town Hall

Key elements of Chester's government are basic daily public services provided at Town Hall. In 2003, the Town Hall on Main Street was moved to the current location on Route 154. The new location has provided parking and needed additional space for offices and record storage. Residents at the workshops provided feedback including the need for larger meeting space, underutilization for the size of the space, and limited office hours. Site evaluations and discussions with Town officials about the current space highlighted limited sustainable access for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles, and the limited number of meeting rooms and the size of those rooms.

Figure 6– 4: Town Hall and Police Station (Source: LJD 2007)

A preliminary evaluation of the existing site by the Planning and Zoning Commission as part of this Plan noted its location in a commercial district. One concept raised was that if the demand for commercial space substantially increased on Route 154, a re-evaluation of the Town Hall's existing location should be conducted to see if the property could be sold at a profit. This option should be analyzed in the context of other issues related to building space needs and, if reasonable, consideration should be given to the relocation of town hall to a more accessible central location.

Meeting House

As noted above, the town-owned "Meeting House" is a primary location for many larger town meetings. The Chester Meeting House is used close to functional capacity, with few available calendar days during the course of the year. The Meeting House has been used extensively for town meetings, workshops, and public hearings, the Historical Society-sponsored Robbie Collomore Cultural Series and Craftworks, outdoor concerts of the Chester Elementary School, concert recitals; theatrical performances of the Meeting House Players; The National Theatre of the Deaf; meetings of civic groups both of Chester and statewide organizations; meetings of artists and craftsmen; political party events; weddings; and memorial services.

Figure 6-5 Gazebo (Source: Cummings & Good)

Figure 6– 6 – Chester Meeting House and Green (Source: LJD 2007)

Community Center

The Community Center is located on Route 154 with primary building access from North Quarter Park on Main Street. The building was constructed in 1928 as a box factory and sold to the town in 1941 for use as a Fire House. The only means of access at that time was from Route 154. Since the Fire House was relocated to its present site, the building has been used for over 40 years for various uses: Park and Recreation programs, senior programs, a police station, and storage. At the workshop and during Planning and Zoning Commission meetings, the future of the community center was one of the key items of discussion for future infrastructure.

Figure 6– 7– Chester Community Center at North Quarter Park (Source: LJD 2007)

In 1978, the Park and Recreation Commission conducted a feasibility study for the building, including the use of the existing park area that had been acquired by the town. The findings noted issues of serious water damage, as well as building and fire code deficiencies that needed to be addressed to allow use of the building. The primary recommendation was that the building be abandoned in favor of a new one-story, 6,000 square foot structure near the current ball field. A second section of the report listed options for corrective action to allow use of the building, but noted that use for assembly of large groups was not viable. The town opted for renovating the building to allow for continued use.

Thirty years later, the question of what to do with the Community Center still looms large in infrastructure planning for the town. Currently, the building is dedicated to serving various civic groups and town functions. A primary function of the building is for summer Park and Recreation programs. A major expansion, rehabilitation, or reconstruction of the building is required to address handicapped access, efficiency of storage, expansion of kitchen and meeting space, restrooms, and improvement of general appearance. One key advantage of the community center is its proximity to North Quarter Park, the village, and the sidewalk network. Improvements to the community center should be evaluated for the ability to support additional meeting space for larger commission and committee meetings, and to allow expansion for Park and Recreation Department programs.

Library

Figure 6– 8: Chester Public Library
(Source: LJD 2008)

The Chester Library Association, founded in 1875, was the forerunner of the present Chester Public Library. A $3.00 fee made one a member of the association with the privilege of borrowing one book a week. From the Stone Store the library was moved to a room in the building next to Robbie's and then to the top floor of the old Selectmen's building. In 1895, the association was dissolved and the library became a town institution, receiving its support from the town and state. For many years it was open three times a week. S. Mills Ely, who was born in Chester, proposed to give the town a library building. The Ecclesiastical Society of the Congregational Church deeded some land to the town as a site for the building on condition that should the library remain closed for a year the lot would revert to the donor. On that land, near the school and churches, a stone building was erected. With 3500 volumes available for lending, it was formally dedicated and opened with public ceremonies on Tuesday, Aug. 6, 1907. Originally the juvenile department was in the fireplace room, the adult section to the left as one entered the door, and the magazines and some non-fiction on the right. The old heating system in the basement was replaced, that room painted and fitted with shelves and furniture, and an outside entrance made at the rear of the building.

Over the years, many alterations have been made to the interior of the library building, and innovation within a constrained space has been the basis by which the library continues to provide service to the community. The most recent major project at Chester Library was the adoption of a computerized circulation system in 2007. Volunteers bar-coded the library's 18,000+ items through the winter and spring and the system was launched on May 31. For the first time, Chester Library users are able to reserve and renew items from any computer with Internet access whenever it's convenient for them. The library conducts numerous programs for children and adults: "Laugh it Up at Your Library" (the summer reading incentive program), a six-week craft and story program for children aged three and up, "Reading Adventurers" co-sponsored by the Connecticut Humanities Council, stories and crafts on Monday mornings throughout the school year, and special author presentations and book readings. Programs for adults cover a wide range of topics and interests.

The number of volumes, services, and programs offered by the library is a compelling reason for expansion. Another is the critical need for handicapped access. As the Library explores avenues for possible expansion and access improvement, the long term functional relationship with land use and infrastructure in Chester is an important component that the Planning and Zoning Commission

Figure 6-9

CHESTER LIBRARY 2006- 2007 Statistics

Circulation: 30,827 (40% adult, 23% juvenile, 29% movies and music, 6% recorded books)

Reference Questions: 1798 **Fines collected**: $2250.50

Inter Library Loan books borrowed: 1154 **Inter Library Loan books loaned**: 700

New Library Cards Issued: 159 **Volunteer hours** 494.5

Open Hours per week: 36 to 42 seasonal

Registered borrowers: 2379 Adults 22 Children

Inventory: 17,295 Books 664 CDs 1,117 Movies

Subscriptions to 58 periodicals and 4 newspapers (plus the Valley Courier, which is free)

Library staff grew to 4 with the addition of a Circulation Assistant in July 2007.

reviewed in the course of developing this plan. There are a number of possible options that may be explored by the Library, some of which might include on-site renovations, expansion on-site, relocation to a different building, or construction of a new building, free standing or shared with other town programs.

Fire House

In 2005, the Chester Hose Company (CHC) commissioned a comprehensive needs analysis of fire department and emergency support services and infrastructure. The following synopsis of the report is abbreviated. More detailed and updated information is available through the Chester Hose Company.

The Chester Hose Company currently operates with 27 active firefighters, 29 Emergency Medical Services responders, and six officers. The majority of calls are medical related followed by false/automatic alarms and motor vehicle accidents. There is a yearly average of eleven fire calls, 400 medical responses, and 50 motor vehicle accidents. The report notes that it is difficult to project future trends, but implies that the number of responses increases with the overall population growth.

The fire station is located on High Street within Chester village, and is centrally located for quick response to the Route 9 highway (approximately 1 mile), downtown and the waterfront, about 2 miles from the town's eastern border where the density of residential units is highest, and 4 miles from the town's western borders. An added benefit of this location is the convenience for CHC fundraising events such as Apple Pie night or the "Pancake Breakfasts" which enhance Chester's sense of community. The CHC has an informal arrangement with Whelen Engineering to use their Winthrop Road facility to house CHC's brush unit and a pumper unit, as well as storing the rescue boat during the winter months. All other equipment is stored at the High Street location.

The 2005 Report noted that there was inadequate space within the existing building for housing vehicles and equipment. The Report listed the top priorities for the CHC including: Pre-Incident Planning, Community Emergency/Disaster Planning, Apparatus Replacement Program, Training for Fire Department/Medical Personnel, Standard Operations Guidelines, Mutual Aid Agreements, Facility Improvements, and Recruitment and Retention.

Figure 6– 10 – Chester Fire House
(Source: LJD 2008)

Of these priorities, facility improvements are likely to be the item reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Commission to assure conformance with this Plan. Based on recommendations within the 2005 needs analysis, the CHC will work toward assurance that adequate space is available for operations and equipment parking and storage. It is recommended that the Chester Hose Company work with the Planning and Zoning Commission to assess future development trends for both commercial and residential properties in town, and ensure that future expansions of the existing facility are designed to ensure compatibility with adjacent village and residential areas. In addition to providing accurate data to the CHC, the Planning and Zoning Commission can be instrumental in proactive planning for adequate water supply, traffic circulation, and access for both fire emergencies and disaster preparedness.

Non–Profit, Civic Organization Meeting Space

There are several entities within Chester that have meeting space and facilities that contribute to the collective town space for community "meet-ups" or gatherings. These buildings owned by non profit organizations provide ample space and numerous opportunities for fun and interesting community events. Examples include: the Chester Elementary School PTO's Bingo Night at St Joseph's, various Holiday Craft Fairs, lectures and movie night at Congregation Beth Shalom, and pot roast and soup kitchen activities at the United Church of Chester. Formal fundraisers or special programs at the Historical Society's new location, the Mill, create another gathering location within walking distance of many residents. While the mission of Camp Hazen is providing outdoor and camping experience to children, the camp has successfully integrated into the community with outreach programs at the Chester Elementary School, with the PTO on field days for town children, special school year vacation camps, meeting space for the Cedar Lake Advisory Commission, and "Paddle sports" Weekend which draws residents as well as visitors who patronize the village's restaurants and shops. Special planning studies or town committees need to include outreach and involvement of these organizations to better assess town-wide needs.

Figure 6-11	NON PROFIT /CIVIC COMMUNITY MEETING SPACE - CHESTER				
	Historical Society	**Temple Beth Shalom**	**United Church of Chester**	**St. Joseph's School Gym**	Camp Hazen
Wheelchair Accessible	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Condition	Renovation	Excellent	Good	Good	Excellent
Usage Rate	High Use based on anticipated future programs	Religious – Community Outreach Programs	Religious – Community Outreach Programs	Religious – Community Outreach Programs	Summer Camping Program, Family Programs, Special Event Programs
Other Groups	Political Groups, Events, School		Scouts	PTO Events, Scouts	School, Scouts, Outdoor Groups

Village Center

Figure 6-12 – Memorial Day at Maple Street Flagpole
(Source: CRERPA 2007)

The Village Center's streets and retail shops offer considerable outdoor and indoor space for frequent informal community interaction. Beyond the everyday small gatherings for coffee, breakfast, lunch, dinner, and shopping, the Merchants Association sponsors larger events such as the Halloween Parade, the Winter Carnivale, and the Holiday Stroll. It is also the center of town events and ceremonies such as the Memorial Day Parade. While it is true that tourists frequent many of these activities, many of the events are crowded with town residents, socializing and reconnecting with the village merchants on an informal level. Evaluating infrastructure in the form of parking, seating, lighting, traffic calming and traffic flow are identified as recommendations in this chapter. Chester Village Center is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Schools

Chester is a member town in Regional School District 4 which cooperatively provides education for students in grades 7-12. Region 4 recently completed a significant building improvement and expansion project at both the John Winthrop Middle School and Valley Regional High School.

FIGURE 6-13 TOWN OWNED MEETING SPACE

	Town Hall	Community Center	Meeting House	Fire House	Library	Elementary School Gym
Wheelchair Accessible	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Building Condition	Excellent	Good to Fair	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent but poor acoustics for large meetings
Usage Rate	5-7 days AM-PM	Average of 3 times per week (12pm – 9pm) Summer Park & Rec: 5 days for 6 weeks- all day	3 evenings per week average 2-4 weekends per month average	3-5 Evenings per week	6 days/ week	School uses daily for all day and some evening activities/ Park and Rec sports programs/ rare town meetings
Capacity	A - 20 B – Upstairs lobby is used for overflow C – 8	75 persons Park & Rec uses small storage room	170 persons	300 persons		300 persons
Groups	Boards and Commissions/ Fish & Game/ Middlesex Hospital/ Probate Court/ Tri-Town Youth Services/ Political Town Committees	Cub scouts/ Daisies/ Fife and Drum/ Guiding Eyes/ Adult Dance Class/ other Park and Rec classes	Town Meetings, Commission and Board Meetings/ Chester Voices/ Rotary/ Land Trust/ Tai Chi Center/ Middlesex Chamber/ Winter Carnival/ Solar Clarity/ Scouts/ Eastern Ballet/ Meeting House Players/ Salt Marsh Opera/ Shagg Film Festival/ Piano Recitals/ River Rep Theater/ River way Studios/ Small Town Concert/Collomore series/ Guiding Eyes/ RTC/ DTC/ Receptions	Normally dedicated to the CHC use for training and meetings.	Town residents/ school/ special programs/ research groups	School – full function primarily Town rarely Park and Rec – After school winter sports programs
Parking	Approx 30 spaces	Approx 30 spaces	Approx 75 spaces	Dedicated	Shared with Church	Limited compared to meeting room size
Other Comments	Shared with Bank	Adjacent to North Quarter Park	Some Historical Society functions may transfer once Mill is renovated	Single Purpose uses	Property limits	Adjacent to fields

Chester, through the auspices of the Chester Board of Education, operates the Chester Elementary School located on Ridge Road. Chester Elementary School is an older facility, and while the Board of Education and facilities committee work hard to complete needed improvements, yearly budget constraints can hinder comprehensive updates to the facility.

Figure 6-14: Chester Elementary School Entrance
(Source: CRERPA 2007)

Recently, improvements to traffic circulation and parking were completed and more planning is underway for additional improvements to parking, the heating and cooling system, and other aspects of the facility. It is recommended that the Chester Board of Education forecast future needs for significant improvements to the school, and join with the Planning and Zoning Commission and other town committees and organizations to plan for possible property acquisition, sustainable building practices, and other school improvements, including the "Safe Routes to School" program.

Parks and Recreation

Town-owned parks, in contrast to conserved open space which has not been developed, have been minimally developed for organized or active recreation. This type of land use contributes to the Town character and uniqueness, and again serves as a gathering location for the community. The overall intent of planning for parks is to create an environment that continuously enriches the lives of Chester's residents.

This section on parks and recreation is included in the infrastructure chapter due to the careful financial investment and planning that is required for active recreation facilities and formal parks. While Chester's Park and Recreation Commission actively plans for future improvements to existing parks, the importance of parks, nature trails, ball fields, and playgrounds is integral to the overall town planning process to assure access by community residents. As the town begins to explore various options for improving the community center, the elementary school, and possibly acquiring additional land for parks and ball fields, it will be important for the Park and Recreation Commission to work closely with the Planning and Zoning Commission to plan for efficient and financially viable facilities in addition to safe and sustainable access by residents.

Cedar Lake

Cedar Lake's two public beaches are owned and maintained by the Town. The Town owns approximately one third of the shore. Another third is owned by Camp Hazen YMCA. The remainder is made up of private residences and State owned property, including a boat launch. Chester's main beach on West Main Street has a 50,000 square foot swimming area that is as deep as 20 feet. The park at the shore is named *Robert H. Pelletier Park* in memory of the Chester resident who was the Head Lifeguard for more than two decades. The area is 0.7 acres and includes seasonal lifeguard coverage, picnic tables, a pavilion, grills, and a concession. The smaller beach is located on Cedar Lake Road. It is unstaffed and has no designated swimming area. The beaches require patrons to have a permit.

Discussions at the workshops and Planning and Zoning Commission meetings note that Pelletier Park and the parking area could use significant upgrades that would improve not only the appearance, but also the use of the park.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

3. Improve the parking area for pedestrian safety, beautification, and drainage.

4. Improve access for canoe and kayak portage to the west end of the beach away from the swimming area including a break in the guiderail and a pedestrian crossing.

5. Improve the existing bathroom and changing facilities to incorporate new environmentally friendly technologies.

6. Improve the general appearance of the park and picnic facilities through grants and other opportunities.

7. Improve the sand area at the beach on Cedar Lake Road

8. Work with the Department of Transportation in conjunction with recommendations in the Chester Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan to improve the dam and stream crossing on Route 148 and include increasing width in reconstruction to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle use.

9. Request ideas from town children on how to improve the park area.

Figure 6-15 : Pelletier Park, parking and lake access (Source: Town website and LJD 2007)

North Quarter Park

North Quarter Park is a 22 acre multi-use facility located at the corner of Main Street and Middlesex Turnpike. It includes a playground, picnic area, volleyball net, baseball field, and an open field in a wooded setting. The northern section of the park has a well-maintained half-mile nature trail loop. The end of the trail offers beautiful views of the wildlife and habitat of the Chester Creek. A variety of water fowl, birds, and vegetation can be seen along the trail and in the creek. During workshops and Commission meetings, North Quarter Park was the subject of discussion in conjunction with the Community Center. Similar to the 1978 Feasibility Study which included a concept plan for park and building improvements, there were recommendations for a re-evaluation of the park and community center for more efficient land use of the parcel for beautification, buildings, trails, park, and playground area. A more recent concept plan is included at the end of this chapter. (See Map 6-3)


Figure 6- 16 – North Quarter Park Athletic Fields and Playground (Source: LJD 2007)

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING NORTH QUARTER PARK:

10. Formulate a comprehensive plan for improvements to park and playground facilities.

11. Formulate a plan to link North Quarter Park to the Village and Chester Cove.

L'Hommideau Park

This old mill site is located on Spring Street near its junction with Straits Road, just upstream from Jennings Pond on the Pattaconk Brook. It is a peaceful setting with a dam, rushing waters, a picnic table, and views of Mallards, Wood Ducks, Great Blue Heron, and beavers.

Chester Creek Overlook

The overlook is a waterfront spot with a deck, seating area and parking lot on the Chester Creek just a stone's throw from the Connecticut River. It is located at the end of Railroad Avenue. The town dock at the overlook houses marine rescue and law enforcement watercraft. As the town looks for

options to improve waterfront access for car top boats, this area, with some improvements, is an ideal location for safe public access to the water. This does not preclude the town from looking at other larger sites for waterfront parks and public access to the Connecticut River.

Figure 6- 17 - Town owned walkway and seating at mouth of Chester Creek (Source: LJD 2007)

Parker's Point Boat Launch

The boat launch facility is a 0.6 acre site located at the end of Parker's Point Road on the Connecticut River. It offers a concrete launching area, boat trailer parking and a small picnic area with a beautiful view. The shore is a favorite eagle viewing location. A town permit is required for parking.

Chester Elementary School Baseball Fields

There are three baseball fields that are maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department at Chester Elementary School on Ridge Road. This property was originally donated to the Town in 1928 by Jessie C. Bates, Hilton C. Brooks, and William P. Holden for athletic fields. The fields are available for group usage, but are primarily occupied during the Fall and Spring for use by the Elementary School and Little League Baseball. There is a small shack and storage shed near the fields that is maintained by the Little League for use in fundraising and storage of equipment. Informal pick-up baseball games frequently occur, but official groups and games take precedence. Use of the fields during school sessions is discouraged. There is a need for the town, through the Park and Recreation Commission to explore opportunities for acquiring additional land for additional playing fields. This would allow expansion of seasonal Park and Recreation programs for children and adults as well as reduce the competition for fields for organized youth sports.

Figure 6- 18 – Primary Field/ Ridge Road (LJD 2007)

Informal Parks

There are several areas of town that are used as gathering spots, both informally and formally, by town residents. These include: the Carini Preserve, the green in front of the Meeting House, the Laurel Hill Cemetery, Jennings Pond and parking area, the Chester Fairgrounds, and small seating areas in the village center. While locations such as the Chester Fairgrounds and the green in front of the Meeting House are used for formal events (concerts, art shows, fairs, festivals), all of these locations provide an invaluable opportunity for easy access for walking the dog, practicing bike riding, star and meteor shower gazing, model airplane flying, bird watching, child's play, skating, and general relaxation. These places and experiences enhance small town life in Chester.

Figure 6-19 – Carini Preserve
Chester Creek/ Village (LJD 2007)

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING INFRASTRUCTURE:

12. Develop a plan and recommendations for phased technology improvements in industrial parks, the village, and ultimately residential areas with the goal of establishing Chester as a center for WCCI (World-Class Communications Infrastructure.)

13. Develop a policy in conjunction with the WPCA for community sewer systems that use regenerative sustainable technologies for developments outside the Village Center sewer shed.

14. Consider development control in the sewer shed area that is consistent with the Village District Regulations.

15. Evaluate future water service needs to support desired land use density in specified areas and work with Connecticut Water Company (CWC) to make certain that town planning is considered in future CWC plans.

16. Create a specific lighting plan in the village district area to improve safety and use of parking areas. Lighting plans shall ensure safe access while protecting the village from excessive light pollution and promoting sustainability with solar powered lighting when appropriate.

17. Should properties within the village district area become available, initiate an evaluation of these properties for town purchase and use (community center, expanded educational and recreation programs for adults and children, community theater, library, etc.).

18. Improve facilities on town-owned land at Cedar Lake, including the provision of a car-top launch area near the town beach.

19. Encourage the retention of the postal facility in the town center.

20. Encourage the expansion of park areas and riparian improvements on and near the Carini Preserve, including remediation of vegetated buffers near parking areas near the streams.

21. Evaluate properties for new recreational uses, especially in new subdivisions.

22. Work with the Chester Agriculture and Mechanical Society to promote long-term use of the Chester Fairgrounds as a large venue public gathering location and preservation area.

23. Explore options for cooperative tri-town land use planning. This could include the services of a tri-town professional planner to assist with administration of land use functions, short term planning issues, and implementation of long range planning goals.

Connections

Recommendations for transportation improvements in Chester are derived from an analysis of pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile movements, existing infrastructure, anticipated future population needs, and goals for future development patterns. Over the next ten years, traditional methods of travel may undergo significant transformation as global competition for dwindling oil supplies transforms the economy of the United States, Connecticut, the Estuary Region, and Chester. For this reason, the Plan focuses on the improvement of sustainable transportation alternatives within Chester. New patterns of development within Chester require integration with best practices for sustainable movement of goods and people. Transportation modes can significantly influence development patterns. To maintain a viable economy over the next ten to twenty years, Chester, along with other neighboring towns, should move in the direction of multi-modal transportation. Roads are built and maintained for efficient connection between a series of points or to provide access to property for development. Eventually a hierarchical network of arterial, collector, and local roads evolved with a predominant emphasis on the safe and efficient movement of the motor vehicle. Historically in Connecticut, this emphasis on the efficiency of road networks has discouraged pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

The concentration of residential and commercial development near the village center makes many key facilities accessible by a radial sidewalk system that

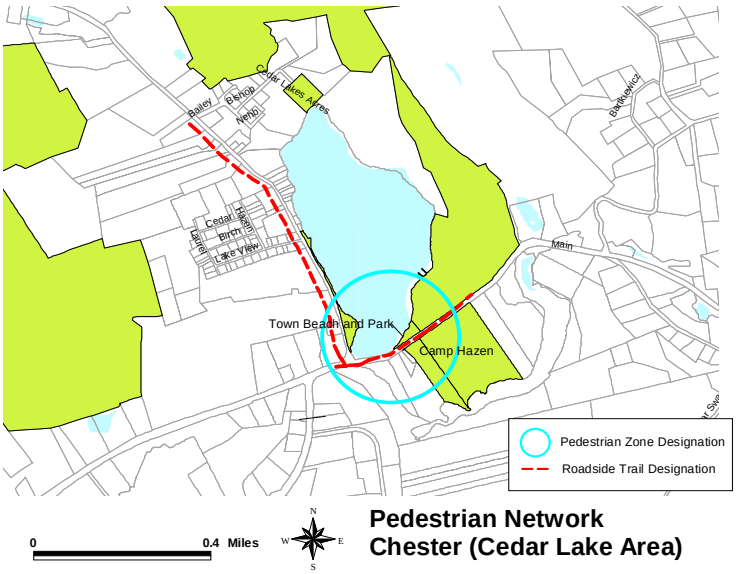
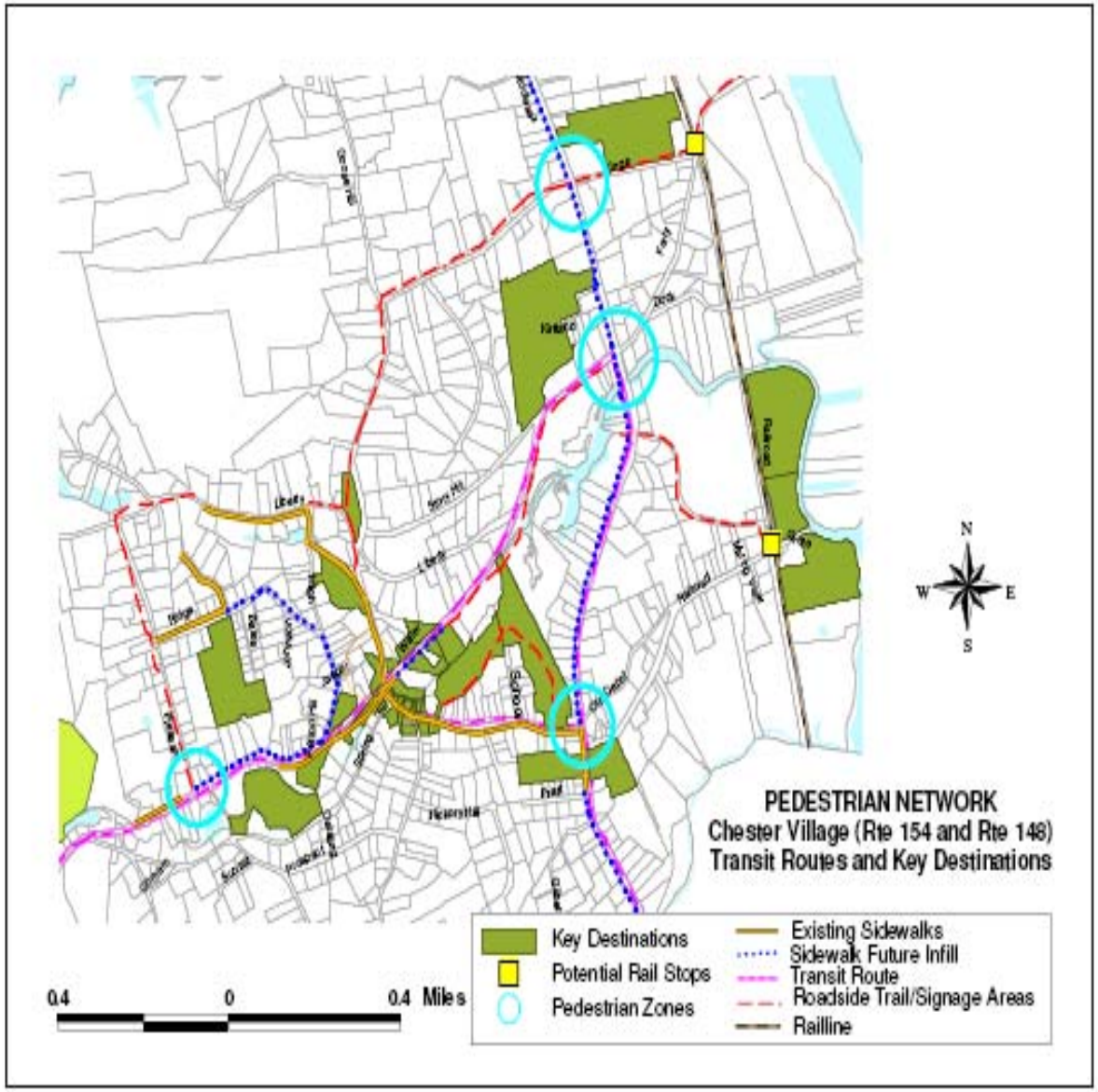


Figure 6- 20 – Areas frequently used by pedestrians adjacent to Cedar Lake (Source: CRERPA 2007)



Existing and Future Pedestrian Network

Map 6-1

Areas depicted as "sidewalk future infill" are those routes in close proximity to school bus routes and to and from destination areas on roads with higher traffic volume and vehicular speed. Those area identified on the map as "roadside trails/signage areas" are relatively isolated from high traffic volumes that provide connections between destination areas. The rural aspect of the road edge and topography precludes construction of a concrete sidewalk. These areas would benefit from either parallel construction of a roadside trail or pavement markings and/or signage that designates the area for shared pedestrian use. The primary goal in delineating these areas is informational to provide guidance for land use regulations, and future capital improvements within existing or expanded pedestrian zones. This map is for planning purposes only and further research is required.

Map Created by CRERPA
For Planning Purposes Only
April 8, 2007

offers pedestrian access to the village retail center, library, churches, firehouse, parks, and the community center. The overall goal as expressed in the work shops and through discussion in Commission meetings is to retain and improve the existing transportation system and develop new methods which provide varied and sustainable transportation opportunities to residents and which also support the movement of goods and freight for industry and commerce.

Existing Network

Pedestrian Travel

The relative low density associated with a grid of rural roads and streets with low average daily traffic volume (ADT) provides an excellent environment for exercise and recreation for residents near the village area. Existing sidewalks (see Map 6-1) offer safe and accessible options for residents and visitors, especially the young, old, and disabled who live near the village or visit the retail, services, churches, post office, the convalescent home, and community buildings. Even Route 148, a major collector road for the town and region, is safe and comfortable for a short distance from the village center. However, the sidewalk stops abruptly and pedestrian access is constrained in varying degrees depending on the width of Route 148. On Route 154, walking on the road is also less comfortable as vehicular speed increases and road width for multi-modal use is constrained. Rural roads such as Cedar Lake Road, Railroad Avenue, and Grote Road have lower traffic volume and vehicle speed which allows for pedestrian travel in remote populated residential areas near Cedar Lake and the Connecticut River marinas. Map 6-1 depicts those areas that are isolated from a pedestrian network due to limited length of safe road network, or proximity to a major collector which means that residents have to use an automobile to get to recreation, community buildings, shopping, or connections to transit stops. The primary goal in delineating these areas is informational to provide guidance for land use within existing or expanded pedestrian zones.

Bicycle Travel

Officially, bicycle access planning defines three distinct types of bikeways: Class One (Bike Path or Bike Trail) is a right-of-way, completely separated from automobile traffic, designated for the exclusive use of bicycles; Class Two (Bike Lane) is a restricted right-of-way designating occupancy of a portion of a roadway. The bike lane most frequently occupies the roadway shoulder and is set off by either a painted stripe or a physical barrier; Class Three (Bike Route) is a travel lane of a road, which is shared by both automobiles and bicycles. Signs or stenciling on the pavement indicate that it is a bike route.

All of the bikeways in Chester can be categorized as Class Three. For planning purposes, several classifications of bicyclists are evident in Chester and roadways can be informally classified based on use. First, there is the long distance bicycle enthusiast. Chester is a popular location for these riders as a stop along favorite long distance loops as designated on the State Bicycle Map. From Lyme over the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry to Old Saybrook or Killingworth these bicyclists

generally ride singularly or in groups and are familiar with sharing the road with higher speed traffic on state routes. Second is the recreational or destination bicyclist, including older children, teenagers and adults, who are less likely to ride on state routes, who leave from their home to use the safer roads for exercise and recreation, or to get to specific destinations within town or neighboring towns. Third are families with small children who will use specific safe routes within the village area or near the Cockaponsett Forest area for family outings.

The State of Connecticut provides a map which delineates bike routes throughout the state. This is primarily limited to state roads and many of the routes are not practical for use by families or destination/ recreational bicyclists. Local roads can often be a safer alternative to state routes, especially for family trips with children. In the future, Chester can provide opportunities for scenic and commuter biking by focusing on special improvements to Routes 148 and 154, either through town initiatives or through site plan or subdivision requirements as part of development applications. This would include appropriate lane designation where feasible and signage to create a Class Two bike lane on these routes. In certain areas, right of way width precludes an easy and convenient solution.

Transit

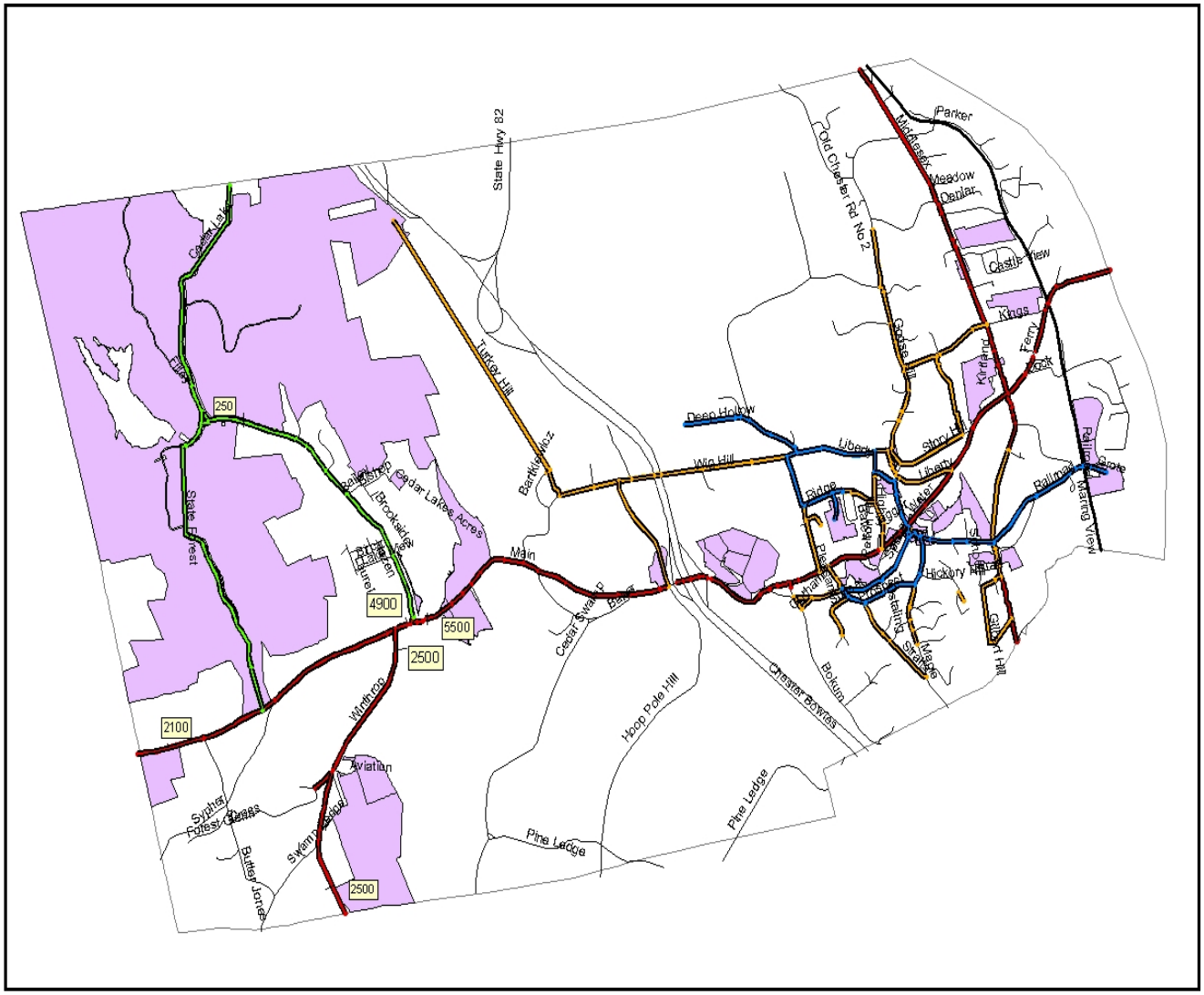
Public Bus Services – Estuary Region

The Estuary Transit District (ETD) was created in 1981 to organize and provide bus service to the nine towns of the Connecticut River Estuary Planning Region. From 1981 to 2003, ETD administered a number of bus service programs operated by the Estuary Council of Seniors with staff support from CRERPA. In 2003, ETD took control of the direct provision of services. ETD continues to promote expanded ridership from all sectors of the public and expand services where fiscally feasible. ETD provides flexible route systems with the Shoreline Shuttle and the Riverside Shuttle and has been able to offer limited Transit On-Call service. The flex routes, the Shoreline Shuttle and the Riverside Shuttle, are designed to run along a designated route making regular stops at selected locations. The bus also provides off-route curb-to-curb service by request for residents living within approximately one mile of the route or as designated by ETD or the State of Connecticut. Riders requesting a pick up must call at least 24 hours in advance and pay a premium fare.

Figure 6- 21: Photo of the Region's Public Bus
(Source: CRERPA 2007 and ETD 2005)

Bike Route Classification

Map 6-2



Standards for Bicycle Travel: Bicycle access planning defines three distinct types of bikeways: Class One (Bike Path or Bike Trail) is a right-of-way, completely separated from automobile traffic, designated for the exclusive use of bicycles; Class Two (Bike Lane) is a restricted right-of-way designating occupancy of a portion of a roadway. The bike lane most frequently occupies the roadway shoulder and is set off by either a painted stripe or a physical barrier; Class Three (Bike Route) is a travel lane of a road, which is shared by both automobiles and bicycles. Signs or stenciling on the pavement indicate that it is a bike route.

Informal Bike Route Classification for Chester

- Destinations within Chester
- Special Recreational Bike Route
- Local Bike Routes
- Recommended State Bike Route
- Recreational Bike Routes for Families with Children

Elsewhere in Middlesex County, bus transit services are provided by Middletown Area Transit District in the Middletown/Cromwell area with direct connections to Meriden. Estuary Transit District may soon begin a bus service to Middletown with special grant funds from the state and federal transportation departments. In the Norwich/New London area, local bus transit services are provided by Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT). Estuary Transit District has recently begun a bus service that connects with SEAT in Niantic, with special grant funds from the state.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) owns urban fixed-route bus systems operating in the Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, Waterbury, New Britain, Bristol, Meriden, and Wallingford urban areas. These services operate under the CTTransit brand name and are operated by private contractors. CTTransit and four other private contractors provide commuter express bus services into Hartford under contract to CTDOT. The commuter parking lot near Exit 6 off Route 9 in Chester , as well as lots at Exit 4 off Route 9 on the Deep River/Essex town line and the DOT Maintenance yard on Route 154 and the Old Saybrook rail station are all stops for the express bus to Hartford.

Rail

Valley Railroad

Chester is fortunate to have the Valley Railroad service within safe walking and biking distance from the village center. The rail line, a passenger rail service until the mid-1960s, has been slowly renovated through the efforts of the Valley Railroad. The Valley Railroad owns the locomotives, but installs, services, and maintains the track system which is owned by the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the

Figure 6–22 – Historical Photo of Chester Village shows trolley stop at the Village center (Source: UCONN: Thomas J. Dodd Research Center)

property which is owned by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. The Valley Railroad owns and operates the Essex Steam Train, a tourist attraction providing train rides connecting to Steam Boat rides from Deep River and making stops for hikers making connections at the Chester-Hadlyme Ferry for Gillette's Castle State Park in Hadlyme.

In 1999, an effort on the part of Middlesex County officials was initiated to study the potential for a Hartford–Old Saybrook commuter railroad using the Valley Railroad as one piece of the connection. There is also potential for expansion alongside the rail line to provide connections for bicyclists to access local roadways within Chester, Deep River and Essex. Long-term concepts include rail connections to the Old Saybrook train station. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and proximity to rail lines has been shown to increase property values. Developing partnerships with the Valley Railroad and planning for expanded use are focused on the use of the existing train service to also accommodate local travel for residents and possibly provide commuter service to Old Saybrook. For recreational opportunities and tourism, bicyclists would also be able to load their bikes to transfer to other scenic locations. While it may take time to gain momentum for this plan, a commuter and freight rail line would greatly improve sustainable transportation alternatives for Chester residents and the business community. Efforts to promote such an endeavor should be encouraged by the Town as part of long-range transportation alternatives for residents.

Shore Line East

Shore Line East is a commuter rail service funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation. It provides 23 weekday trains, 21 between Old Saybrook and New Haven and two that travel between New Haven and New London. Two round trips daily travel west of New Haven with stops in Bridgeport and Stamford. There are regional stops in Old Saybrook, Westbrook and Clinton. Old Saybrook has a large facility for commuter parking. In 2008, the service on SLE provided 568,000 passenger trips, an increase of 17% since 2007 and 22% since 2006. The Department of Transportation added a late evening weekday train and implemented weekend service in mid-2008. It is likely that Chester, as well as other towns in

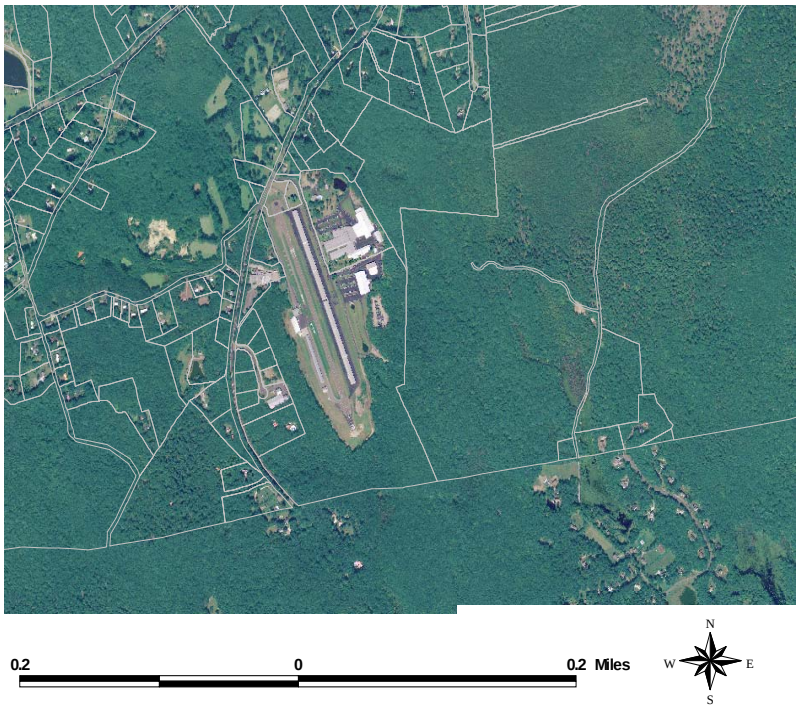


Figure 6– 23: Aerial Photo of Chester Airport and vicinity
(Source: CRERPA/CLEAR/NOAA 2004)

the region, would greatly benefit from the option of inexpensive weekend service due to tourism and the number of weekend visitors to the region.

Amtrak

Amtrak provides daily Northeast Corridor service between Boston and Washington, DC via New York City. Amtrak stops in Old Saybrook, New London and New Haven. Amtrak Regional service between New York City and Boston, with intermediate stops, takes approximately four hours. The ***Acela*** High Speed service improves the intercity trip time to just over three hours.

Airports

The only airport within the Estuary Region is the Chester Airport which is a small private general aviation airport. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) classifies this facility as a Basic Utility Airport. As the third tier of the four general modes of transportation available in the region, the airport plays a minor role in meeting the transportation needs of the residents or visitors to the region. While passenger service is limited, the airport provides charter service for both freight and passengers. To date, the airport meets the Region's needs with the limited freight service it offers.

The airport does offer options for regional relief efforts in the event of a regional or statewide emergency and for that primary reason alone, it is critical to the region's infrastructure.

Ferry

The Chester-Hadlyme Ferry is the only ferry that is operated within the Estuary Region. This is both a scenic asset for the region and an important transportation service, offering some relief to the increasing summer seasonal traffic seeking access across the Connecticut River. Currently, the Valley Railroad works cooperatively to link rail passengers on the Essex Steam Train to the Chester Ferry for access to Gillette Castle State Park for hiking and tourism. Also, the ferry provides emergency service options for Hadlyme and Lyme for ambulance and emergency transport to services in Middletown and Essex. The Selden III on the Chester-Hadlyme ferry route has a carrying capacity of 49 passengers and 8 automobiles, as well as motorcycles and mopeds. The Selden III has been in service since 1949. Vehicles up to five tons can be

Figure 6-24 : The Chester- Hadlyme Ferry operates seasonally from April through November (Source: CRERPA 2006)

transported. Operating at full capacity, this ferry is capable of carrying approximately 1,000 vehicles per weekday and 540 vehicles on weekends. A capital improvement project at the ferry slips and docking areas in Chester and Hadlyme that incorporated historic era light poles and stone pillars with iron fencing has recently been completed.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CONNECTIONS:

24. Explore and apply for federal transportation funding to install bus shelters which are architecturally consistent with town character at accessible locations (village center, senior housing, intersections with future bike trails, etc.)

25. Plan bike routes, pedestrian corridors, sidewalk installations, and mass transit to provide connectivity between, and encourage adoption of, transportation alternatives.

26. Improve Class 3 bike lanes through signage and lane designation on Routes 148 and Route 154.

27. Work with the Estuary Transit District and the Metropolitan Planning Organization to promote the expansion and ridership of public bus services.

28. Support the expansion of local commuter rail service (Shore Line East) to alleviate congestion on Interstate 95 and provide more carbon-efficient and cost-effective alternatives for Chester residents.

29. Study the possibility of working with the Valley Railroad to provide Chester residents with access for shopping, recreation, commuting, and connections with public bus service, and bikeways.

30. Study and coordinate with CTDOT, CTDEP and the Chester Land Trust to implement best management practices for storm water and hydrology in conjunction with current maintenance and operation activity including future improvements to Route 148 and Route 154, as well as including accommodations for a safe pedestrian environment.

31. Revise Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to incorporate requirements for sidewalk installation in commercial and industrial areas delineated in Map 6-1.

32. Work with CRERPA and CTDOT to access funding for sidewalk construction for areas designated in Map 6-1, including involvement in the "Safe Routes to School" program.

Roads

Chester has 47.32 miles of public road of which 15.12 miles are maintained by the State of Connecticut and 32.20 miles are maintained by the town. 2006 CTDOT accident reports listed 82 accidents in Chester during the year out of a total of 81,000 accidents statewide. Of the 82 accidents in Chester, 25 had related injuries and there was one fatality. A road system, depending on its condition, can either promote or hinder quality of life and emergency access for residents and business. Chester is included in the CRERPA–Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as established by the 2000 Census. Road classifications that were formerly considered rural are now classified as urban within the MPO boundaries. The following categories are generally accepted and were used in preparing the recommendations in this plan.

- Expressways – Designed to carry large volumes of high speed through traffic between regions and Towns. They afford no access to abutting properties and have grade-separated interchanges with ramps providing the only access. (Example - Route 9)
- Arterials – Roads carrying high volumes of traffic, often providing access to expressways and connecting important points within the community. (Examples - Routes 154 and 148)
- Collectors - Carry traffic between points in the community and collect traffic from residential neighborhoods for distribution to arterials and/or other points in the community. Some of these roads are in rural areas and carry only low volumes of traffic. (Example - Wig Hill Road)
- Boulevards – Similar to collectors, but minimize the impact on the slope and natural terrain and incorporate a center landscaped or tree- lined median and perimeter walkways or bikeways within residential neighborhoods or linking neighborhoods.

Commuter Rail/Bicycle/ Pedestrian Link:
Chester -Deep River Section
Draft Concept

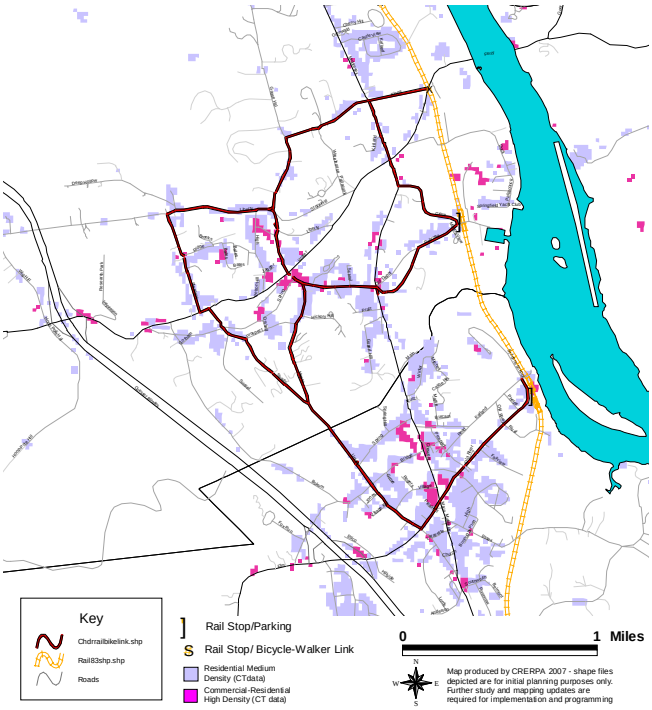


Figure 6– 25: Concept Map for encouraging sustainable multi modal transportation access through partnership with Valley Railroad (Source: CRERPA 2007)

- Local Roads – Provide access to individual properties, carrying lower average daily traffic volume.
- Rural Collectors – Roads located in largely unsettled areas and intended to carry low volumes of traffic, at the same time acting as routes to carry through traffic from one section of Town to another.

Land use and growth patterns have the potential for increasing dependency on the automobile, thereby minimizing the options for other alternatives such as walking, biking, or using public transportation. Anticipating continued development, it is expected that new roads will be built to access undeveloped property. Without consideration of multi-modal (walking, biking, transit, and rail) design alternatives, current road construction and improvements, including widening or design criteria, can lead to isolation of structures and people.

The current network of roads in Chester is especially important in the context of the existing and future Connecticut transportation network. Chester is centrally located at the junction of state routes 9, 145, 154 and 148 which connect to urban areas of the state. The town works locally and with the State of Connecticut through the Local Capital Improvement Program as well as state grant funding

to maintain the existing network of local and state roads and bridges. What existing state routes lack, as noted in the sections on pedestrian and biking, is adequate signage and designation as streets that need to be safely shared with pedestrians and bicyclists.

Another important aspect of road and bridge maintenance is environmental. There are three primary concepts for which the town will need to campaign with Connecticut Department of Transportation:

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ROADS:

33. Seek scenic road designations for Routes 148, 145 and 154. State scenic road designation differs from local scenic road designation. A designation of each of these state routes within Chester will require the Connecticut Department of Transportation to consider the scenic and historic character of the road in the event that the roads are selected for road widening or other improvements.

34. Monitoring of the Stormwater Management Plan. The plan was developed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) for the purpose of establishing, implementing and enforcing a storm water management program to reduce the discharge of pollutants from the department's highways, roadways, railways and facilities to the maximum extent practicable, to protect water quality, and to satisfy the appropriate requirements of the Clean Water Act. This is an important aspect of road and bridge construction that needs to be implemented and monitored by the town, especially in areas near Chester Creek and Pattaconk Brook.

35. The town will also need to be alert to the need for mitigation for state roads and bridges that are at or below flood plain elevation. For instance, one evacuation route for Chester is Route 154 which crosses Chester Creek and could be subject to storm surge in the event of a hurricane or flooding of the Connecticut River.

36. All bridge design and construction must be reviewed and approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission for consistency with the goals for this plan.

Utilities

Water Service

Currently, portions of Chester are served by a private water company, the Connecticut Water Company (CWC). In 1999, the CWC finalized a comprehensive Water Supply Plan for Chester and surrounding Towns. The provision of public water service generally increases water usage. As a result, developments with access to public water supplies will increase the need for handling septage. For this reason, the town must work closely with CWC to ensure that the company's goals for increasing their customer base do not conflict with the town's desire to restrict sewer expansion. Recommendations on Water Service and Hydrology are found in Chapter 2.

Sewer/Septic/Alternative Systems

In 1982, a community septic system was constructed on a parcel now referred to as the "Maple Street Parking Lot". This system was constructed to eliminate serious septic pollution in the village area where land on individual parcels for septic use is nonexistent or severely limited. Since that time, technologies and public policy have evolved and "modern" systems can now address:

- Separation of formerly combined storm and sanitary sewer systems.
- Improvements in nitrogen reduction.
- Sustainable methods to promote environmentally friendly community sewer systems.
- Public concern about overdevelopment caused by expansion of sewer capacity or construction of new wastewater treatment facilities.

Within the village, a vigorous debate on the use of sustainable septic systems versus a connection to the Deep River Wastewater Treatment Facility also illustrated the need for Planning and Zoning, the Water Pollution Control Authority and the Board of Selectmen to work in a concerted effort to control growth within the village sewer service shed and develop policy for oversight of future private community septic systems. As technology for community sewers advances, policies at the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection now allow for state and municipal oversight and control of community systems. A recommendation is that the town agencies and boards cooperatively write and implement a policy for both the existing sewer shed and future applications for private community sewer systems . This would include changes to the zoning regulations and boundaries, ordinances restricting use of the existing sewer system for pollution remediation only, and policy on acceptance of future private community sewer systems, specifically maintenance and bonding criteria.

Of specific and special interest to the future "small town" character of the village is the need to forecast and monitor future demand for sewer needs on individual parcels in Tiers 1 and 2 of the Village District, as described in Chapter 7. To ensure economic vitality of the village, a place of commerce, gathering, and business, it will be important to assure that use transitions between Tier 1 and Tier 2 are controlled not only through design and site plan regulations and review, but also by the allocation of sewer capacity for each of the lots to both restrict and allow for projected goals (higher residential density, carriage houses, expanded seating for existing restaurants, public bathrooms, or whatever is deemed appropriate by the Planning and Zoning Commission in the new Village District Regulations).

Lighting/Parking

Within the village and near Cedar Lake, there is need to examine the options for better lighting in conjunction with parking improvements and access. There are programs through Northeast Utilities which provide for historic lighting compatible with the need to reduce glare and impact on

residential properties and yet provide safely lighted areas for parking areas and walkways. The town has explored the option of burying utility lines underground which is prudent for both aesthetics and maintenance. In a long term study for renovating Main Street, it was determined that an underground utility project would be cost prohibitive at the time. This does not preclude the town from examining smaller areas, special design areas, and other select locations, or possibly working with developers to promote underground electrical service and installation of street lighting

Telecommunications

In December 2006, the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering released a report for the Connecticut General Assembly's Commerce and Energy and Technology Committees on Advanced Communications Technologies. In 2007, the General Assembly established a "Broadband Internet Council" to monitor the rapid pace of progress in communications technology to ensure that Connecticut has the

Figure 6-26 Chester Village Route 148, Main Street intersection - signage and better crosswalk de-lineation in context with small scale village needed (Source: LJD 2008)

Figure 6-27 Route 148 – Cedar Lake/Camp Hazen: High pedestrian use area – warning lights, signage and better crosswalk delineation required (Source: LJD 2008)

Figure 6-28 Intersection of Routes 148 and 154 – gateway and pedestrian improvements required (Source: LJD 2008)

most up to date information on emerging broadband innovations. The economic future of Connecticut and its regions and towns are closely tied to the guidance provided by the State on options for broadband infrastructure and growth. The report notes that there are many cities and states nationwide competing to capture share of businesses that require superior broadband service.

From a local perspective, there are several action items that can be initiated by the Town of Chester to ensure that the town is competitive in the state, regional and national market. Communications technology can also be the backbone and catalyst for retaining the "small town" character that is so often referenced. By coupling the attractiveness of a small-town lifestyle supported by modern communications technology, Chester can attract a vibrant and innovative small business and home occupation economic base which will support the tax base and provide the customer base for the existing service industry within the village. Additionally, Chester can support sustainable economic practices by providing options for telecommuting through a world-class communications infrastructure. There are already several examples of home occupations and businesses in town which compete globally that will benefit from continued improvements to broadband infrastructure. While this section cannot fully explain the options available to the town, future planning for broadband infrastructure for the town is included in the recommendations below.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

37. Assign the task of monitoring and planning for broadband infrastructure within existing town buildings and properties to both the Economic Development Commission and the Building and Facilities Committee.

38. Revise Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to require, as part of the permitting process for new subdivisions and commercial or industrial development, the installation of FTTX (fiber to the node, curb, and home). Similar to sidewalk installation, by installing the cables, even in sections, the town will begin to slowly create a fiber optic grid which has long term value, even in the ever-changing communications industry.

39. Monitor the progress of the "Broadband Internet Council" to ensure that Chester is up-to-date on the latest innovations and new options for improved communication technologies.

40. Develop an FTTX fund for the town, access available grants and sources of funding, and coordinate state and local road, utility, and infrastructure projects to ensure installation of fiber and fiber devices during construction and repairs.

41. Create policies that encourage anyone creating a right-of-way to auction or award the right to lay fiber to the town. Where rapid deployment is needed, offer tax incentives.

Concept Plan North Quarter Park

Map 6-3

North Quarter Park, located within Chester Center is an opportunity for creative improvement for various facilities that may be required in the near future.

Community Center
Play Area
Trails
Town Hall
Library
Open Air Theater

A master concept plan would be required to coordinate improvements and achieve full potential for the property.

Steve Tiezzi, Member of the Chester Planning and Zoning Commission with endorsement by the Commission, designed this concept plan

CHAPTER 7: CHESTER CENTER

Chester Center, also referred to as Chester Village, is a loosely-defined area at the head of Chester Creek which once served as a major shipping center on the Lower Connecticut River. Changes in transportation modes, from water-borne transportation to roads and railroads, both of which restricted the flow of water in and out of Chester Creek, reduced the importance of the Village area as a hub for commerce. New development in Chester and in the region as a whole grew up along major roads, and the Village, which was bypassed by the Middlesex Turnpike (now Route 154), did not attract much new commercial investment. By the late 1960s, the Center was considered a target for demolition and redevelopment. Fortunately, the significant financial and political investment necessary to "re-do" the Village did not materialize, and much of the original development patterns and architecture remain. Aspects of Chester Village are discussed in several other chapters of this Plan. Chapter Seven specifically examines the Village area in greater depth, and includes recommendations for immediate action to protect and enhance the important functions that are served by the Village.

Location - Delineation of Village Boundaries

The people of Chester have expressed a desire to maintain the village as a cultural resource and a gathering place for community life. In times of increasing energy costs, it is practical and desirable to focus community activities in the village while maintaining the rural character of other areas of Chester. The village should be a hub which is pedestrian friendly, accessible by public transit and linked to other parts of

Figure 7-1: Road Race 2008 (Source: Cummings & Good)

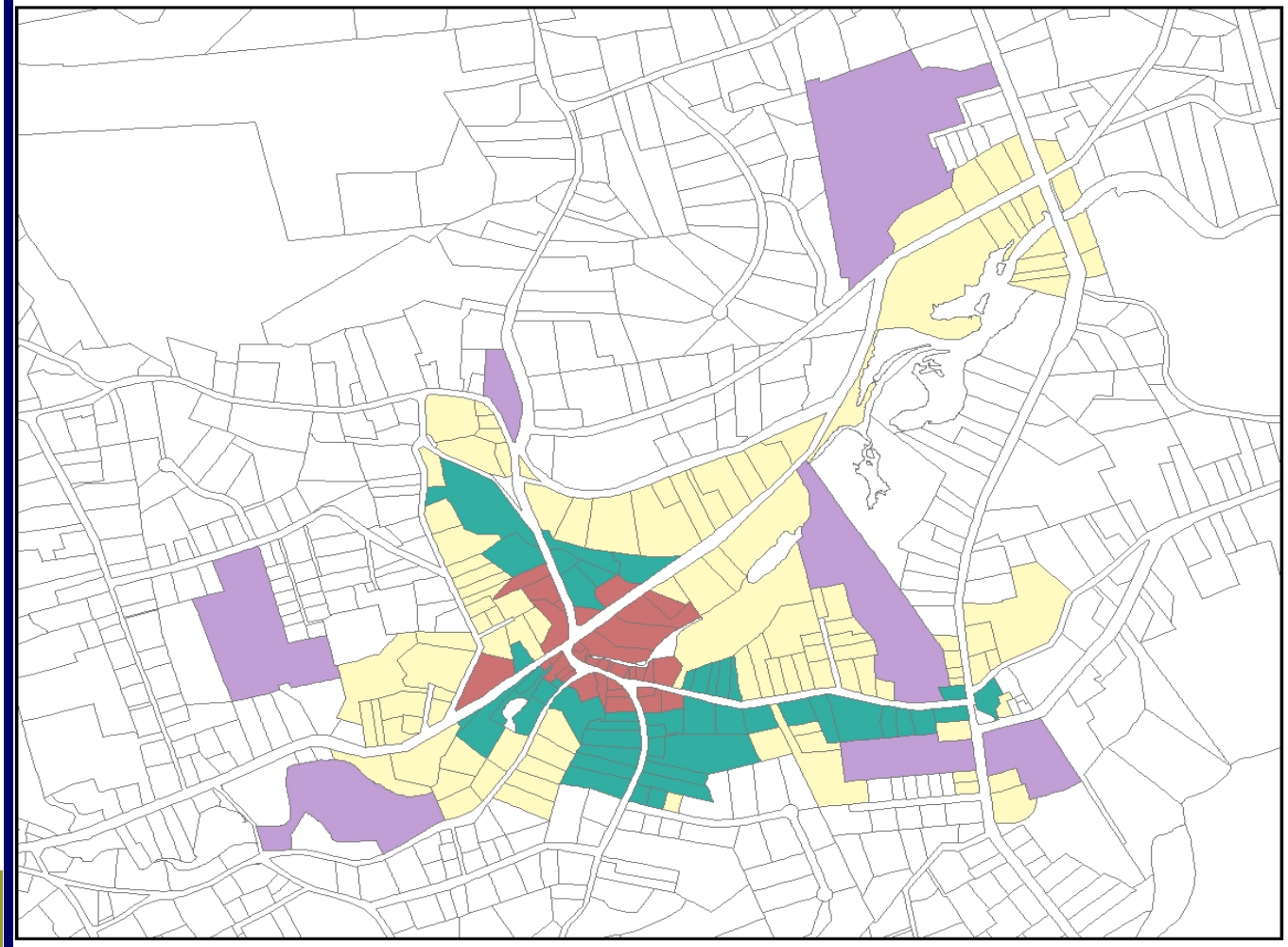
town by walkways, bike paths and public transit. The Center includes North Quarter Park and development at the intersection of Route 154 and Main Street. One way to envision village boundaries is to include the entire area where a passenger might debark from a transit bus at a designated stop and conveniently and easily walk to several destinations within a cluster of uses. Within this framework, logical stops would be located at the Route 154 intersection, at the corner of Water Street and Main, and perhaps at the present Library.

Figure 7-2: Restaurant Du Village/ Main Street
(Source: Cummings & Good)

The heart of Chester Village is the collection of buildings at the intersection of Water Street and Main Street. About 47 acres of land within 400 to 600 feet of the intersection are currently zoned for commercial use. A recent study showed 52 housing units located within this commercial zone. This mixture of retail and service establishments with residential uses helps maintain the vitality of the Center. The area surrounding the commercial district is zoned for a variety of residential densities. In actual use, however, many non-residential uses extend beyond the commercial zone, creating a larger area which is also considered the "village." This Plan recognizes that any efforts to enhance the village character must also include the larger area.

Uses in the larger village area are a mixture of commercial, multifamily and single family residential. Structures which are generally open to the public, like restaurants and retail businesses, or serving a public use, such as the library or churches, are located along an axis which is described as: Main Street from its intersection with Route 154 to its intersection with Route 148 and continued along North Main Street to East Liberty Street and Route 148 its intersection with Straits Road to its intersection with the driveway to the Carini Preserve. Since the current zoning districts were adopted in Chester, new zoning regulations have evolved to address mixed uses and design considerations, and to differentiate subzones within a broader context. Chester needs to update its zoning requirements to encourage the existing mix of uses, without allowing one category of uses to force out another. In particular, it is important to encourage economic activity in the center while preserving the quality of life for residents of the area.

In addition to new zoning requirements, public investment in appropriately-scaled town facilities and infrastructure is essential to the retention of the character of the village. Boundaries should be established which recognize the village as a connected whole. Public investment should be focused



Village District Zone with Overlay Zones

Map 7-1

The first tier is the dense, mostly commercial area. The second tier is an area with lower densities and a mixture of residences, civic uses, and less intensive non-residential uses. The third tier is an area which is primarily residential, with a village-like character. Each of these tiers has a role in the larger village area. The third tier includes a portion of the hillsides surrounding the downtown which provide a scenic backdrop for the center itself.

- Village Tier 1
- Village Tier 2
- Village Tier 3
- Destination Areas

Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.

0.3 Miles

on enhancing the larger village area by concentrating town services, including recreational activities, along the axis in the greater village area.

Three Tiers

This Chapter recommends addressing the village area in a three-tiered approach. The first tier is the dense, mostly commercial and mixed-use area. The second tier is an area with lower densities and a mixture of residences, civic uses, and less-intensive non-residential uses. The third tier is an area which is primarily residential, with a village-like character. Each of these tiers has a role in the larger village area. The third tier includes a portion of the hillsides surrounding the downtown which provide a scenic backdrop for the center itself. (See Map 7-1)

Role of the Village Area

Figure 7-3: "Afternoon View of Main Street in Chester's Center" (Source: Painting Leif Nilsson)

Chester Village does not aspire to be an all-purpose retail and service center. There is neither sufficient area nor infrastructure capacity for the intensity and scope of new development which has occurred in commercial centers elsewhere in the Estuary Region. Chester residents are fortunate to have a choice of commercial areas and services a short distance away in nearby towns, whether in Deep River, Essex, Old Saybrook, Haddam or Killingworth. Today, the future of many existing and newly-developed commercial areas in the region is unknown and unpredictable. Oversaturation by retail chains appears to be leading to the closing of older stores. Increased use of the Internet for retail purchases may affect local retail establishments. The high cost of energy involved in shipping goods around the country may lead to more emphasis on locally produced goods. Even busy regional centers may experience empty storefronts as consumer practices change. Chester should not sacrifice the character and scale of its village area to allow what may be short term development; it has a different role in the town and region.

Having defined what Chester Village is not, this Plan includes a vision of what the village is and can be for the Town of Chester. The village has a very strong "sense of place" that comes to mind when many people think of Chester. It has a nostalgic quality of a more simple time. John Stilgoe notes that the term "nostalgia" now connotes a rose-colored view of the past, but the term was originally a

medical one, meaning "homesickness", indicating a yearning for something. The Chester Center of today is very different from Chester in the past, but it evokes a sense of an idealized village of the past.

Chester Village deviates from the usual historic New England patterns of seaport, factory town or agrarian rural village center. The village patterns are a result of topographical and physical constraints, being at the convergence of two streams, precipitously steep slopes and historic transportation routes. The buildings themselves are largely historic stone and wood buildings, worn but renovated and maintained, retaining an old-fashioned and stable infrastructure of second-story flats, shops, offices and homes. Roads and sidewalks have no particular geometric or engineered pattern, crossing at odd angles, following historic patterns of cart paths, walking paths, railroads and trolleys. To find an aesthetic counterpart, an admirer of Chester village would have to travel to northwestern Connecticut, the Berkshires, or European small villages similarly developed near winding streams with closely spaced faces of steep hillsides and historic building preservation. The natural setting of surrounding hills and Chester Creek creates a sense of enclosure for much of the village center. Chester and its setting is reminiscent of an old world vernacular set apart from the hustle of everyday modern American life and land use. This setting is more than helpful in creating the old world sense of community and personal interaction, the loss of which is being lamented in many towns which are more prominently located on major traffic routes. Chester is not <u>that</u> remote, so the tourism trade is more vibrant than in many more isolated villages and attracts an interesting market segment.

Figure 7-4: 4 Water Street (Source: Caryn B. Davis)

Community Activities

One of the most important aspects of Chester Center beyond its primary commercial function is the role it serves as a location for community gatherings. Chester Center's physical arrangement and commercial activities act as magnets that draw community events. Chester Center is alive with people shopping, dining, walking or celebrating. While it is busiest in the summer, there is activity year round. The presence of residential uses and busy restaurants means that people are present throughout the day and evening. The Center is pedestrian-oriented, and there are things to look at while taking a walk. Many of Chester's celebrations are staged from the Center, including parades and "strolls" supported by local merchants. Unlike some downtown areas in the region, Chester Center has not become primarily a location for business offices which close at five. At night, it is not a landscape of dark windows and empty parking spaces.

The community aspects of the Center can be further enhanced by providing facilities which support the needs of participants in the Center's community life. Clearly designated and well-signed parking, walking paths along the axis, public sanitary facilities, chairs and benches and other modest improvements can make the "downtown experience" more pleasant. More formal community activities require organizers; credit must be given to the merchants and others that make the effort to plan and schedule community events, and to the town government for supporting such events. There is an opportunity for even more activity if people can be found to work on these projects. A return of a local farmers' market, a First Night Celebration, amateur races of various kinds or other themed events could be added to current activities. These activities can be successful in a setting which preserves the physical character of the Center. Attracting local people to the Center is as important as drawing visitors from further away since the combination of the two is synergistic.

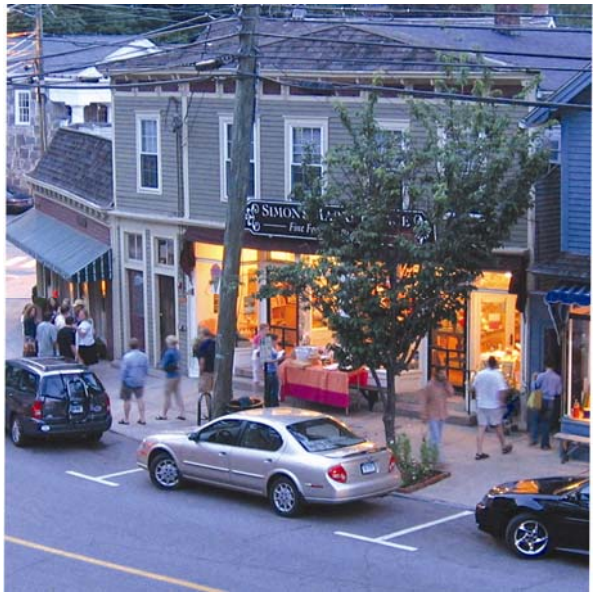


Figure 7-5: Chester Center (Source: Skip Hubbard)

Natural Resource Limitations

Chapter Two of this Plan includes a discussion of a key natural resource which is called Chester Creek today. This area was formerly known as Pattaconk Cove. Chester Village reached its height as an economic center because of its location at the "head of the cove". The Center's location was driven by the existence of the Cove, rather than by the environmental suitability of the area for development. Subsequent development of the railroad and Route 154 bridges restricted the flow of water between the Cove and the Connecticut River. A portion of the Cove was filled in to obtain more commercial land, and the density and character of development polluted the waters draining to the Connecticut River. Today, there is a much greater understanding of the environmental limitations of the area and an appreciation for the natural diversity found in the rare tidal freshwater wetlands along the Creek.

Any future plans for Chester Center must respect the vulnerability of the area's natural resources. While visual access to the Creek/Cove is desirable, access should respect the delicate nature of the area. The Harbor Management committee should be convened to identify locations to preserve or create new views of the Creek and to seek additional public access points. Any municipal or state improvements in the Chester Cove area, such as reconstruction of existing paths and bridges, should be designed to accommodate such increased access.

Infrastructure

Chapter Six discusses Chester's infrastructure and the maintenance and improvements which are necessary to serve townspeople in the future. In dealing with Chester Center, all infrastructure improvements should be of a scale and character that enhances the special qualities found there today. This is not a typical commercial area, and all improvements should be carefully scrutinized for their potential impact on the Center's "sense of place".

Sewage Disposal

In October of 2007, the voters of Chester approved construction of a limited sewer collection system for a portion of Chester Center, discharging to the Deep River sewage treatment plant through a force main which is to run down Route 154. The proposed sewer system was controversial, with some residents advocating for an alternative community septic system, fearing that sewers would lead to increased development in the village area. The Water Pollution Control Authority reduced the sewer service area from that originally planned, with the intent of addressing only existing septage disposal problems. The Planning and Zoning Commission, in supporting the Deep River connection, agreed to examine their zoning regulations for the Center to assure that incompatible development would not be allowed due to increased sewer capacity. Both the Authority and the Commission acknowledged the need to work together to have a coordinated approach toward only that growth which was appropriate for the Center.

Figure 7-6: Chester Center aerial (Source: Cummings & Good)

Roads

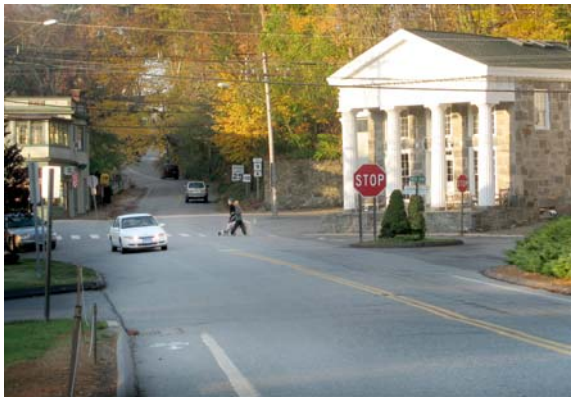


Figure 7-7: Main Street (Source: Cummings & Good)

The major roads leading to Chester Center are owned and maintained by the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation. In the past, DOT has made road improvements to state roads based primarily on safety considerations for vehicular traffic flow. In recent years, such road improvements have been criticized for failing to recognize the contextual setting for the road. Road improvements to the downtown area surrounding the intersection of Water Street and Main Street must be designed to minimize any significant negative impacts on the character of the area. The intersection currently does not meet geometric standards for a modern four-way intersection, yet this anomaly is an important aspect of the character of the downtown area. In 1998, the Connecticut General Assembly passed enabling legislation for creation of "village districts", which would restrict the character of road improvements in village zoning districts adopted under the standards of Chapter 124/Section 8-2j of the Connecticut General Statutes. A village district under this statute would allow the town greater control over design within the village area. In addition, measures to promote pedestrian circulation and to slow traffic ("traffic calming") should be incorporated into any redesign or improvement to Main Street, North Main Street and state roads through the Center. Local communities can apply to the DOT to have sections of state roads designated as scenic highways, as an additional means to influence road design. The criteria for designating scenic roads appear to fit Route 148 from the Connecticut River to the Killingworth town line, Route 145 and Route 154 for its entire length in Chester.

Pedestrian Circulation

A major attraction of the village is its pedestrian-friendly scale and circulation pattern. Maintaining and improving this asset is essential to preserving the character of the village. The design of any improvements to roads in the Center should begin with provisions for pedestrian safety and convenience. A location for future bus stops should be identified and enhanced with seating and aesthetic amenities. Although it may seem premature to designate such locations now, it appears inevitable that there will be an increased use of public transit over the next decade. Measures to slow traffic along Main Street should be considered. "Traffic calming" is a young technology, but concerns about speeding and safety are already being voiced in the area.

Parking

Chester has struggled with the issue of adequate parking for the village area. Past efforts have resulted in creation of parking areas somewhat removed from the entrances to downtown attractions. This additional parking may provide sufficient spaces for day-to-day usage, but it is not well marked. Pedestrian linkages between shops and restaurants and the remote parking need improvements in the area of lighting and secure footing. For larger events in the Center, such as parades or races, nearby parking is inadequate. In the future, additional event parking should be created at more distant locations, and linked with the downtown by a shuttle service.

Street Furniture

In this context, "street furniture" is a term used to describe safety, convenience and aesthetic enhancements to an area. In this case, the term includes street lighting, signage, planting and landscaping, linkage and sidewalks, and literally, street furniture such as benches and waste receptacles. Much of the current lighting in the Center is not helpful for pedestrian circulation after dark, creating glare and shadows which make walking more difficult. Lighting should be restricted in wattage, height and direction, as well as requiring fixtures which are contextually appropriate. Signage should be designed to assist visitors in accessing more remote parking areas, and should be appropriately lit. Street "furniture" such as additional benches is desirable and should be of a consistent style. Many Chester residents appear to use bicycles; bicycle racks could be provided to encourage cyclists to stop and walk within the village.

Design

Traditionally, local zoning regulations have been silent on the subject of building and site design, and the result in many towns has been new development which clashes with and eventually changes the character of land use in certain areas. That is changing, however, as communities realize how little it takes to drastically alter the visual character of an area.

Figure 7-8: Chester Designs (Source: 2006 Chester 6th Grade Class)

Chester Center is not an assemblage of specific historic period architectural structures. It has adapted and changed with changing technologies and economics. Despite that adaptation, the Center retains a unity of scale, massing and proportion. It evokes an older time. The basic buildings and patterns are still in place despite being significantly altered over time. Its structures blend into a pleasing whole. There are very few discordant elements. Because of its small scale and compact nature, even minor incompatibilities can stand out. Retaining a context which is not based on historical accuracy is a more difficult task than creating an historic district based on a particular era. There appears to be considerable public support for design controls and guidelines which will try to protect the character of the Center. The subject of design standards for the Center has been discussed over several years by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Numerous examples of such standards are available from other locations, and should serve as a starting point for Chester.

Design standards should include guidelines for "mass" (height, bulk and roofline) and "proportion" (relationship between height and width). In addition, the nature of the unbuilt area around buildings (setbacks, yards) should be guided by existing development. Other guidelines should offer preferences for the nature of the openings in the façade, primarily doors and windows, materials, color, texture and details of ornamentation. These parameters can be reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Commission as part of the required site plan review process, or as part of a special permit process already in place. A more difficult task is retaining the views from the village of the surrounding wooded hillsides. Conversations with developers and lot owners on land in the surrounding hills should be held to encourage awareness of the impact on the Center from development on the hills beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER CENTER:

1. Limit development within the Center to that which respects the special character of the area.

2. Adopt Village District regulations under Chapter 124-Section 8-2j of the Connecticut General Statutes. Include design standards which address bulk, massing, architecture, and site improvements in a manner consistent with the existing character of the Village Center.

Figure 7-9: Main Street Winter Crossing (Source: CRERPA /LJD 2007)

3. Review and modify allowable uses to assure that a mix of activities is maintained in Tier One and Tier Two of the Center, with a particular emphasis on retaining single- and two-family residential uses. Concurrently, non-residential uses must be permitted with sufficient conditions so as to avoid creating a nuisance for existing residents. Refine zoning criteria for permitted uses and special permit uses.

4. Review zoning to ensure that home occupations are encouraged at an appropriate scale and intensity for the village.

5. Develop a cooperative agreement with the Water Pollution Control Authority to implement a policy limiting expansion of uses in the Center following construction of the new sewer system. Amend regulations and ordinances as necessary to enforce the policy.

6. Conduct a study of pedestrian circulation within the village area, with emphasis on safe and convenient linkages along the Water Street/West Main Street axis, connections to North Quarter Park, clearly defined access to existing parking areas, and access to current and future public transportation routes and bus stops.

7. To the extent possible, locate or relocate new and expanded municipal uses in the village axis area for ease of access and for community identity.

8. Develop and implement a signage plan for the village area, including better directions to parking areas and walking paths.

9. Consider alternative use of designated parking space as gathering areas for use during special events or seasonally.

10. Prepare and submit applications to the Connecticut DOT for designation of Route 148, Route 154, Route 145, including the Main Street Bridge, Water Street Bridge and Route 154 Bridge as state scenic roads.

11. Continue town support of community events within the village area, especially outdoor gatherings which add to the vitality of street life in the village center.

CHAPTER 8 – SUSTAINABILITY

What Sustainability Means

"Sustainability" is an expansion of the old fashioned idea of stewardship – the careful, long term management of community land and resources. Sustainability is not simply about conservation—it is a long term strategy for economic growth. Conservation is focused on the management of resources so as to eliminate overexploitation and maximize long term benefits to society. It is a related and complementary concept with regard to sustainability. Activities are sustainable if they can be maintained over time without depleting the natural resource base. Sustainable development is development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations Brundtland Commission). Sustainability seeks to provide the highest possible quality of life for all residents in a way that maintains and enhances the ecological processes on which life depends.

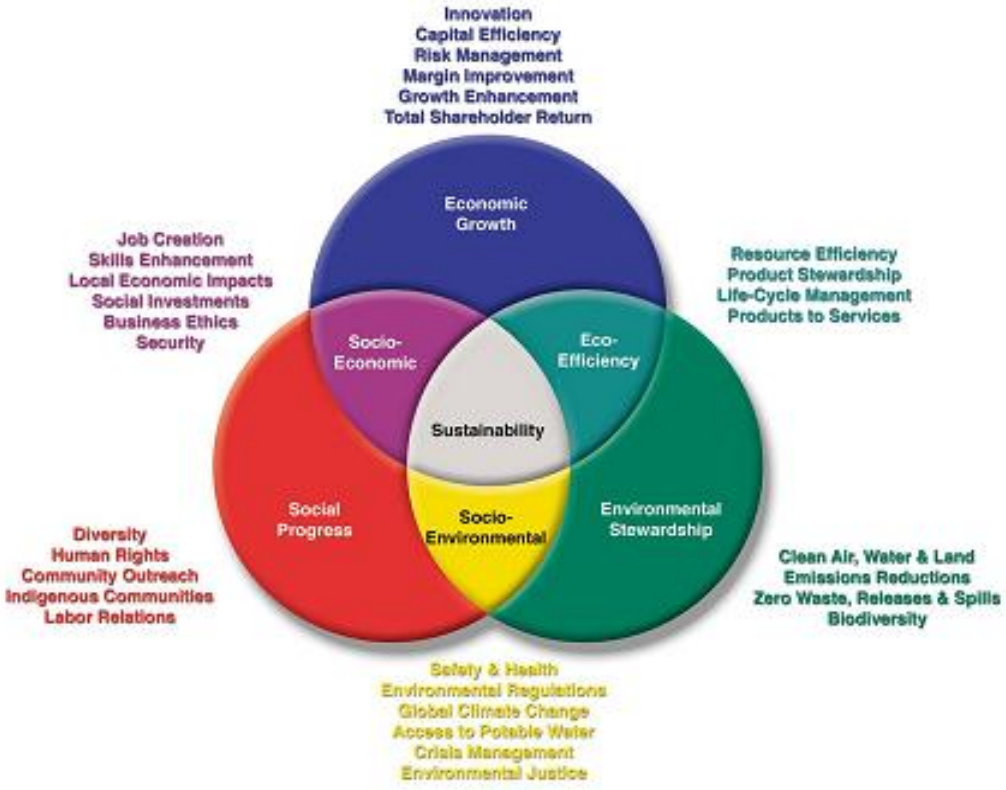


Figure 8-1: Sustainability Diagram (Source: www.future500.org)

Historically, conventional economic theory failed to encompass the full range of environmental, social and cultural costs when considering the benefits of development. Serious consideration of sustainable development requires considering the cost to the common good, including deterioration of air and water quality, depletion of resources, and such factors as noise and traffic congestion. The concept of costs should also include the loss of beauty and cultural resources, and the severing of

positive social relationships. There has been very little research on how to quantify these costs, many of which are intangible. However, an understanding that these costs are real is necessary to assure that development will not negatively affect the community for the sake of development. The full costs to the community as a whole should be considered.

Understanding the concept of sustainability as it applies to Chester is not difficult. Minimally, it implies that our natural and cultural environment presents certain limitations on how much infrastructure we construct, how many houses we build, how many fields we lose, and how many human beings live here, such that if we grow beyond that point, we will incur costs greater than any benefits we might hope to achieve through further growth. Sustainability also implies that we become mindful of the non-visible, negative consequences that economic activity in Chester may have, and that we become economically capable of reducing those negative impacts. It calls for a community-invested decision on how much and what kind of growth is acceptable. Finally, the concept of sustainability requires recognition that Chester is part of a global economy. That requires a simultaneous effort to maximize emerging environmentally responsible technology and innovation to promote new ways of "keeping it local," while also participating in a global marketplace. Generally, moving in the direction of sustainability means reducing our impact on the environment by producing less waste, using less toxic substances, consuming less and developing wholesome relationships with nature while also providing economic capacity for employment, innovation, and progress.

There are various descriptions for achieving sustainability which all share a common approach. According to The Rocky Mountain Institute, achieving sustainable development requires the following actions:

- Redefining prosperity, weighing community values, quality of life and the environment alongside traditional economic considerations;
- Seeking true development in the sense of getting better, instead of expansion, which is merely growing bigger;
- Advocating the long term stewardship of community resources, ensuring that present actions do not erode the basis for future prosperity;
- Pursuing self-reliance and a more democratic approach to decision-making, representing community wide interests over individual interests; and
- Stressing diversity, resilience, and a conviction that many small efforts can work better than a single one-size-fits-all solution.

Actions in Support of Sustainable Goals

There is a growing international urgency to look at growth and development with a new frame of reference. This has been greatly hastened by looming challenges in the areas of energy consumption and cost, the effects of climate change, and evolving globalism. While these problems have been identified for several years, it is only recently that this awareness has penetrated the public

consciousness in a major way. Numerous localities throughout the world have created sustainability strategies. Information on local efforts is available through web sites. For example, one particularly helpful website (www.town.wolfville.ns.ca) is that of the town of Wolfville, Nova Scotia. After creating a Sustainable Community Planning Task Force, Wolfville summarized its intentions in the form of four broad objectives as follows:

- Reduce and eliminate our dependence upon fossil fuels, extracted underground metals and minerals.
- Reduce and eliminate our dependence upon chemicals and unnatural substances that can accumulate in nature.
- Reduce and eliminate dependence on activities that harm life-sustaining ecosystems and encroach on nature.
- Meet the hierarchy of human needs fairly and efficiently..

These objectives are a solid basis for sustainable development. How these objectives are met is the challenge for each community. One strategy for accomplishing the objectives of sustainable development is economic re-localization. Economic re-localization is a way to develop a local economy by strengthening its resilience and self-sufficiency, as opposed to only increasing its income. The concept is best reflected in a discussion of locally-grown food and locally produced electrical energy.

Sustainability Projects for Chester

The list of actions to support sustainability grows larger as discussion of the subject expands. Many actions have long been advocated by conservationists and environmental activists. Others are just now being made possible by new technologies. The focus of these actions is to reuse, recycle, substitute, use less, and be aware of long term and far–reaching consequences.

Sustainability can be implemented by changes in approaches to physical development in town, minimizing impacts on the environment from local public and private activities, developing new approaches to maintaining and improving the local environment, employing sound land use practices, encouraging a pedestrian-, bicycle- and transit-friendly community, and promoting and furthering sustainability though a wide-ranging education and outreach program. What follows is a listing of some potential activities, tasks and goals for enhancing sustainability in our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SUSTAINABILITY:

Physical Development

1. Encourage the use of recycled, renewable and local materials for construction projects.

2. Encourage re-use and retrofitting of older buildings where possible, conserving both building materials and cultural resources.

3. Encourage adaptable, extendable buildings and public spaces, useable for many functions.

4. Evaluate opportunities for alternative energy generation from local resources.

5. Conduct an energy audit of town buildings and implement recommendations as part of the Town's Capital Improvement Program. Offer information and possible financial assistance for energy audits of private buildings.

6. Recommend adoption of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or equivalent energy-efficient building standards and certification for public buildings and subdivision regulations.

7. Encourage the use of solar power , low head hydropower and other alternative energy sources by removing unnecessary zoning barriers to their use.

8. Develop and provide guidelines through the Town's land use offices and commissions on green principles as a Chester preference.

9. Develop guidelines and encourage land use practices that promote appropriate design for density which supports sustainable objectives and transit- and pedestrian-oriented development.

10. Put the town's natural resources inventory online so it is readily accessible to the public.

11. Monitor discharge to watercourses and water bodies from town and state owned storm water systems to insure no or minimal damage to receiving waters. Recommend and monitor corrective actions where needed.

12. Educate and encourage the use of native plants for landscaping on private and municipal properties.

13. Promote and support local and regional infrastructure investments which advance intermodal transit opportunities and methods which lower "Vehicle Miles Traveled" (VMT).

14. Support and encourage the use of alternative and clean-fuel technologies by public fleets.

15. Partner on regional projects for marketing and promotion of commuting alternatives.

16. Promote installation of new and emerging telecommunication technology for telecommuting and business operations.

<u>Reducing Waste</u>

17. Work toward a Town "paperless office" by making use of electronic files and correspondence. Incorporate sustainability in town purchasing programs.

18. Develop an anti-idling policy for town vehicles that exceeds the state requirements.

19. Support a study of a town-wide composting program.

20. Continue support for regional recycling and regionally-based disposal of household hazardous waste and electronics equipment, consider "single-stream" recycling, and expand local collection options for recycling.

21. Reduce light and noise pollution through careful review of proposed development projects. Control outdoor lighting.

22. Develop and promote a program for installation of rain barrels on residential and commercial properties for water conservation in landscaping and gardening.

23. Educate the public and town officials about energy conservation and alternative energy sources using the existing Energy Task Force grant and other appropriate means.

Making Ecological Improvements

24. Establish an ongoing urban forest program which includes a street tree inventory, monitoring of tree conditions, and a replanting program.

25. Consider providing a location for and supervise a community garden.

26. Promote retention of onsite forestation to maintain tree cover, reduce storm water runoff, and protect the scenic value of the town's woodlands.

27. Consider providing space for and sponsoring a local Farmer's Market to promote local produce and agricultural products.

28. Consider economic incentives for businesses which provide sustainable goods and groceries to the local population with affordable pricing.

Land Use Patterns

29. Encourage use of LEED neighborhood standards within Chester. Neighborhood design standards, patterned after the LEED building standards, are being developed by the US Green Building Council, in cooperation with the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Congress for New Urbanism.

30. Support public transit financially and identify and promote future bus stops. Promote pedestrian connections between bus stops and activity centers, including Chester Village and Route 154.

31. Develop and promote safe bicycle routes and bicycle storage to encourage substitution of bikes for cars.

32. Support local and state car and vanpooling programs.

33. Use existing public utility services before extending new services.

34. Avoid additional impervious development on soils suitable for agriculture.

35. Recognize, anticipate and plan for changing patterns of living and work.

36. Review possible sources for the preservation of farm and forest land, including Public Act 490.

Education

In addition to using sustainable development strategies for town government activities, the Town of Chester can educate and encourage its citizens to practice sustainability in their private actions. Through the town newsletter, in-school educational programs and activities, and distribution of promotional materials at Town Hall and town events, information can be disseminated about sustainability practices. Specific events, such as an eco-fair or a "ride your bike" day can be coordinated by town commissions and town officials.

Sustainability Indicators

Figure 8-2: CTDOT Hydrogen Fuel Cell Bus (Source: CTDOT)

An important aspect of sustainable development is the need to develop quantitative indicators to measure whether sustainability measures are effective. A "Guide to Sustainable Community Indicators" has been published by Maureen Hart, with funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Ecosystems and Communities. Hart notes that effective community indicators need to address the carrying capacity of community capital, be relevant to the community, and be understandable and useful to the community. Further, these indicators should show the links among the economy, environment and society. They should focus on the long range view. According to Hart, "sustainability is not a quick fix for current problems. A primary goal of sustainability is to choose activities today that will not cause problems tomorrow."

The art of creating sustainability indicators is a young and evolving field. Data at the local level is scarce and unreliable. Census data quickly becomes dated, and projections based on the Census Year grow less reliable as the time from the Census passes. Many of the qualities that should be measured are intangible and difficult to quantify.

RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE:

37 Create an on-going Community Sustainability Committee comprised of knowledgeable volunteers from municipal boards and commissions as well as various community groups in town. The committee should include at least one representative from: Conservation, Planning and Zoning, Economic Development, Board of Finance, Board of Selectman, Public Works and Inland Wetlands. Planning and Zoning will be charged with the formation of the Committee.

The objective of this committee would be the following:

A. Bench-marking sustainability: The development of sustainability indicators, or ways to measure the town's progress towards greater economic sustainability. These indicators would be developed collaboratively, publicized at annual public presentations, and continuously revisited in order to generate genuine information feed-back. The first indicator—energy consumption—will be developed via a town-wide energy audit, using the Rocky Mountain Institute model.

B. Prioritizing actions to improve sustainability in town: The committee will be advisory to the town's land-use commissions, and will serve to coordinate information and actions among the many groups in town working towards sustainability. Regular (monthly or semi-monthly) meetings would serve to increase communication among town agencies.

CHAPTER 9 — THE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT: ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Planning and Zoning Commission will evaluate all recommendations in Chapters 2-8 using the criteria of financial viability, public acceptance, private investment, simplicity of task, economic and environmental benefit and public comment. Furthermore, the commission will prioritize each one in coordination with the overall Town vision. In consultation with the other boards and commissions in Chester, the Planning and Zoning Commission will offer a town-wide action plan on the basis of these

CHAPTER 1

No Recommendations

CHAPTER 2

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PUBLIC WATER:

1. Protect water company lands by adopting restrictive zoning to maintain and protect critical watershed areas.

2. Limit future expansion of water service to areas where soils are suitable for onsite sewage disposal.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERING PRIVATE WELLS:

3. Consider requiring a viable well be provided prior to construction.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WATER QUALITY:

4. Increase education of landowners on the importance of preventing deterioration of water quality caused by the introduction of contaminants into lakes and streams.

5. Monitor water bodies and streams for nutrient content.

6. Promote the maintenance or creation of vegetated buffer strips along lakes and streams.

7. Promote the use of low phosphorous fertilizers and detergent.

8. Promote the use of non-chemical fertilizers and pesticides on town properties.

9. Continue to enforce proper septic design and maintenance.

10. Minimize impervious surfaces to promote infiltration and filtration of storm water.

11. Regularly clean storm drains on town roads and provide corrective action for siltation and damage to town roads.

12. Ensure that the state cleans catch basins on state highways.

13. Review storm water management policies and practices to protect water quality.

14. Monitor for invasive plant species in water bodies and streams and take measures to remove such vegetation while the infestation is minor, using non-chemical methods for removal when practical.

15. Consider ecological restoration of town waterways, including a review of dams for installation of fish ladders or specific dam removals.

16. Conduct boat inspections prior to launching to minimize the possibility of inadvertent introduction of invasive species.

17. Continue to solicit comment from CWC regarding zoning regulation changes and land use issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HYDROLOGY:

18. Discourage construction of new structures in areas subject to flooding.

19. Require new infrastructure improvements be designed to anticipate potential future sea level rise.

20. Encourage the Connecticut DEP to regularly monitor dams in Chester for safety and enforce their repair when necessary.

21. Require the use of best storm water management practices to reduce runoff rate and volume.

22. Review road standards periodically to assure that the town is requiring the most up-to-date management techniques.

23. Review the Chester Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan to identify measures that should be programmed into the town's capital improvement program, including repair to high risk dams.

24. Maintain readiness for management of response and recovery from natural disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER:

25. Identify various means to acquire property frontage on the Connecticut River, as well as provide waterfront access including launching canoes, kayaks and row boats. Consistent with the CGS Sections 22a-101, 22a-102 and 22a-104, the Planning and Zoning and Harbor Management commissions should collaboratively work to expand on the Coastal Area Management Plan (CAMP) (1993) with the focus on preservation of historic views, visual access, public access (physical access), protection of coastal resources and water resource dependent uses (currently approved such as marinas, yacht clubs and boat launches). Incorporation of the Dock Management Unit revisions to the Harbor Management Plan should be incorporated into the CAMP.

26. Encourage Chester's representatives on the Connecticut River Gateway Commission to work on behalf of the town to create passive access and possible viewing of the river from the former 14 acre Garthwaite property.

27. Continue to support efforts of the Gateway Commission to acquire endangered natural areas within the Gateway Zone of the Connecticut River.

28. Continue to support the state-funded pump-out boat for disposal of boat septage.

29. Participate in national and regional efforts to protect the character of the Connecticut River.

30. Seek designation of Route 148 and the Chester Ferry in Chester as a State Scenic Road.

31. Support the continued operation of the Chester Ferry.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER CREEK:

32. All active access to the Creek must respect the unique and delicate nature of freshwater tidal marshes.

33. Pursue options for greater passive and visual access of Chester Creek.

34. Seek access to Chester Creek for small non-motorized craft. Additional access shall also be incorporated into the design for bridge repair or replacement.

35. Include provisions for pedestrians and cyclists with any reconstruction or improvements to the Route 154 bridge over Chester Creek.

36. Establish a footpath to allow for walking around Chester Cove, connecting the Cove with Chester Center and North Quarter Park.

37. As recommended in the 1995 Plan, investigate restoration of the cove and mitigation of damage caused by invasive species and siltation.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

38. Continue to pursue measures to protect the water quality of Cedar Lake through long term watershed management.

39. Develop a wastewater management plan for the lake watershed to reduce potential for eutrophication.

40. Create a plan for enhancement to town-owned property at Cedar Lake, including parking, restrooms and visitor amenities. Include scheduled work or projects in the Town's capital improvement plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING COCKAPONSETT STATE FOREST:

41. Work with Connecticut DEP to explore the possibility of educational programs based on the natural resources of the State Forest.

42. Encourage the DEP to prohibit motorized vehicles and mountain bikes in certain areas of the Forest where erosion will affect water courses.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING URBAN FORESTRY:

43. Require that new tree plantings include a variety of species to avoid monoculture stands which are susceptible to disease and insects.

44. Establish a town-wide urban forestry program to monitor, maintain, and replant street trees, and other trees on town property.

45. Develop a specific management plan for debris removal from wind-damaged trees and a replanting program following a catastrophic event.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER HILLS:

46. Protect views by discouraging large areas of tree-cutting on hillsides.

47. Encourage proper management of privately-owned forest lands.

48. Maintain linkages among large contiguous wooded areas.

49. In considering proposed development visible from Route 9, encourage building and site design, tree retention and landscaping that maintains the rural appearance from the highway, especially at Exit 6.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING OPEN SPACE:

50. Target open space acquisitions to address specific community needs.

51. Establish a permanent town fund for acquisition and maintenance of open space.

52. Monitor availability of land along rivers, brooks, and ponds for possible town acquisition.

53. Modify zoning and subdivision regulations to require a variety of open space dedications in future subdivisions, including open fields, wildlife corridors and trail linkages. Modify subdivision regulations so wetlands are not calculated as part of lot size.

54. Frequently update the Plan for Conservation of Open Space in Chester to include additional parcels and techniques for land preservation.

55. Actively encourage donation of land to the Town or the Chester Land Trust.

56. Encourage less-than-fee acquisitions through the use of conservation easements and deed restrictions.

57. Support state authorization for a local option property transfer surtax dedicated to the purchase and maintenance of town open space.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SOILS:

58. Consider impervious surface limitations on areas designated as prime farm lands.

59. Review existing allowable zoning densities to assure that those densities adequately reflect underlying soil conditions for onsite sewage disposal.

60. Subject proposed building lots to strict scrutiny to assure that the soils can support the proposed development, requiring that subdividers submit a septic system suitability report to the Planning and Zoning Commission as part of the application, and that the location and results of all soil tests be shown on the subdivision plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WASTE DISPOSAL:

61. Continue to provide information to citizens concerning appropriate waste disposal alternatives.

62. Continue to educate the public and support local recycling and composting.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING LIGHT POLLUTION:

63. Review zoning regulations and consider a town ordinance to control light pollution and energy consumption.

64. Support dark skies initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES:

65. Complete natural resources inventory now in progress by the Conservation Commission and use the inventory in land use decision making.

66 .Create and expand an integrated town Geographic Information System to make natural resource information available to town decision makers.

67. Disturb natural areas only to the extent necessary to make use of a site for permitted purposes, retaining existing trees, grading and landscaping to the greatest extent possible.

68. Encourage "green" and sustainable building practices.

CHAPTER 3

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CULTURAL RESOURCES:

1. Create a "Demolition Delay Ordinance" to allow time to consider alternatives.

2. Locate all new public facilities in proximity to the Village Center.

3. Explore ways to link North Quarter Park with the Village Center and Chester Creek, both physically and functionally, through transit, pedestrian and bicycle connections and through joint usage for community events.

4. Facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access to and from the Center and throughout the town.

5. Encourage activities that use the outdoors as part of a celebratory venue.

6. Maintain and improve existing community gathering spaces as locations for community celebrations, including parades, strolls, fairs and other events.

7. Identify significant viewsheds within the town and beyond, and consider measures to protect and maintain scenic vistas.

8. Review road standards to assure that requirements will not result in unnecessary overbuilding which changes the character of the town's rural roadways.

9. Conduct a cultural landscape assessment for Chester.

10. Efforts should be made through zoning and site plan review to avoid additional development that would significantly alter the character of the roadscape of Routes 148 and 154.

11. When possible, seek closer relationship with Camp Hazen and Chester Fairgrounds for public events and community activities.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

1. Encourage appropriate mixed-use and non-residential development which is compatible in scale and design with the character of the town with minimal impact on natural resources.

2. Prohibit large scale development or commercial activities which adversely impact the surrounding area. Chester should not duplicate large regional retail and service facilities found in nearby towns. This is consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development. Small retail, office, service and mixed-use establishments will be encouraged in specific areas to serve the everyday needs of residents and visitors.

3. Provide public transit between Chester and regional retail, recreational, medical and employment opportunities.

4. Recognize and encourage retention of the industrial heritage that shaped Chester by retaining existing industry where appropriate.

5. Encourage adaptive reuse of historic industrial structures as part of the cultural landscape.

6. Encourage development that will neither create a need for significant new infrastructure improvements nor overstress the town's existing infrastructure.

7. Where appropriate, limit development to sites with the soil capacity to support onsite sewage disposal and water.

8. Review regulations for all commercial and industrial zones to ensure that the uses and standards result in development that is in harmony with the character of the area in which it is located. Develop specific criteria for non-residential zones to reflect character differences in each area, with emphasis on appropriate scale.

9. Encourage low impact, sustainable development using "green building" principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING WATERFRONT DESIGN DISTRICT (WDD):

10. Review current WDD zoning regulations to determine whether additional accessory uses are appropriate for the area, including marine supply retail, seasonal restaurants, and boat storage. Carefully review plans to ensure that hazardous materials associated with marine uses are protected during flooding. Any additional activity in the WDD should recognize the inevitability of flooding within the Connecticut River's floodplain.

11. Maximize use of the Chester waterfront for water-dependent uses.

12. Coordinate with the Harbor Management Commission to review permits for new WDD development proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CONTROLLED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (CDD):

13. Review uses allowed in the CDD to assure that future development in the area is consistent with resource limitations and minimizes adverse impacts on adjacent residential properties. Limit development to uses that do not require extension of public water to the industrial park.

14. Limit further expansion of the present boundaries of the Controlled Development District. Although the most suitable land within the District has been developed, reuse or repurposing of existing development should be encouraged if vacancies occur.

15. Continue to seek ways to improve traffic safety and visibility at the intersection of Inspiration Lane and Route 148.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING RESEARCH AND LIGHT MANUFACTURING DISTRICT (RLM):

16. Encourage owners of Chester Airport to maintain a functioning airport that is open for public use.

17. Encourage expansion of existing businesses in the RLM District, consistent with natural and cultural resource constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ROUTE 154:

18. Consider overlay zoning standards for the length of Route 154 and encourage development that is consistent with the current small town character of land use along the highway. Develop standards with appropriate design professionals that address building size, architecture, lot coverage, access, underground utilities and landscaping.

19. Identify and develop zoning standards for specific commercial/mixed use hub areas where current uses are concentrated, including the town hall area and the intersection of Main Street and Route 154. Consistent with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, include only those uses which provide neighborhood or town-wide services, while prohibiting large or regional retail facilities.

20. Review current RLM zoning along 154 to address the character of the Middlesex Turnpike and allow a smooth transition from industrial to residential and commercial uses.

21. Place a moratorium on expansion of non-conforming uses in residential zones on Route 154 pending the development of the overlay zone.

22. Review status of Fairgrounds and determine if current residential zoning is still appropriate.

23. Economic development along Route 154 should be sensitive to the economic and cultural vitality of the Village Center.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING MIXED USE IN RESIDENTIAL ZONES:

24. Review the special principal uses in residential zones.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING AGRICULTURAL LAND:

25. Establish zoning regulations to encourage production and sale of local farm products.

26. Research tax incentives for the preservation of agricultural land.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

27. Limit both residential and non-residential uses in the Cedar Lake area to protect water quality.

28. Prepare guidelines for Town acquisition should any land within the Cedar Lake watershed become available.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING HOUSING:

The Village Center:

1. Evaluate the current percentage of mixed use in the village and assure that an appropriate percentage of residential units, including single family homes, is provided in any future rezoning.

2. Provide design guidelines to ensure new apartments or condominiums are architecturally compatible with the historic village.

3. Review existing zoning requirements for parking allocation within the village and explore the use of shared parking regulations.

Town-wide:

4. Promote affordable housing by evaluating areas suitable for increased density as "Incentive Housing Zones." Areas should have easy access to village center, close proximity to public transit routes, and soil suitability for alternative sanitary treatment systems.

5. Encourage reuse of existing structures near the village for housing or mixed use.

6. Adopt revised subdivision regulations that require subdivisions of 10 lots or more to set aside 10% as deed-restricted housing lots.

7. Restore the Chester Housing Partnership Committee to consider opportunities for construction of affordable housing.

8. Modify the zoning regulations to clearly define and allow one unit of accessory housing for each residence, regardless of the age of the structure, where soils will support the additional on-site septic and off-street parking is available.

9. Evaluate rezoning ½ acre zoning districts to 1 acre zoning.

10. Review subdivision regulations for rear lot subdivision while also promoting safe conditions for road traffic.

11. Develop special permit criteria for senior housing which encourage accessibility to services and public transit, and feature architectural standards which are compatible with existing housing.

12. Conduct a build out analysis in conjunction with the Conservation Commission before making any comprehensive changes in zoning or subdivision regulations. Specific attention should be paid to soil type, on-site disposal of effluent and water supply.

13. Review subdivision regulations to consider changes to Chester's Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SERVICES:

1. Establish a town building and facilities committee with the specific mission of evaluating strategies for financial support and prioritization of capital improvements to existing town buildings and properties. This committee would work with town, state, and regional offices as needed to ascertain possible funding sources and use existing plans and information to supplement general knowledge on how to best prioritize improvements to town buildings, and the purchase and reuse of existing buildings.

2. Evaluate library service and expansion with plans and concepts that will maintain or improve community interaction, promote small town aesthetics, increase efficiency, ensure long-term financial viability for maintenance, and promote sustainable access.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CEDAR LAKE:

3. Improve the parking area for pedestrian safety, beautification, and drainage.

4. Improve access for canoe and kayak portage to the west end of the beach away from the swimming area including a break in the guiderail and a pedestrian crossing.

5. Improve the existing bathroom and changing facilities to incorporate new environmentally friendly technologies.

6. Improve the general appearance of the park and picnic facilities through grants and other opportunities.

7. Improve the sand area at the beach on Cedar Lake Road

8. Work with the Department of Transportation in conjunction with recommendations in the Chester Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan to improve the dam and stream crossing on Route 148 and include increasing width in reconstruction to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle use.

9. Request ideas from town children on how to improve the park area.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING NORTH QUARTER PARK:

10. Formulate a comprehensive plan for improvements to park and playground facilities.

11. Formulate a plan to link North Quarter Park to the Village and Chester Cove.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING INFRASTRUCTURE:

12. Develop a plan and recommendations for phased technology improvements in industrial parks, the village, and ultimately residential areas with the goal of establishing Chester as a center for WCCI (World-Class Communications Infrastructure.)

13. Develop a policy in conjunction with the WPCA for community sewer systems that use regenerative sustainable technologies for developments outside the Village Center sewer shed.

14. Consider development control in the sewer shed area that is consistent with the Village District Regulations.

15. Evaluate future water service needs to support desired land use density in specified areas and work with Connecticut Water Company (CWC) to make certain that town planning is considered in future CWC plans.

16. Create a specific lighting plan in the village district area to improve safety and use of parking areas. Lighting plans shall ensure safe access while protecting the village from excessive light pollution and promoting sustainability with solar powered lighting when appropriate.

17. Should properties within the village district area become available, initiate an evaluation of these properties for town purchase and use (community center, expanded educational and recreation programs for adults and children, community theater, library, etc.).

18. Improve facilities on town-owned land at Cedar Lake, including the provision of a car-top launch area near the town beach.

19. Encourage the retention of the postal facility in the town center.

20. Encourage the expansion of park areas and riparian improvements on and near the Carini Preserve, including remediation of vegetated buffers near parking areas near the streams.

21. Evaluate properties for new recreational uses, especially in new subdivisions.

22. Work with the Chester Agriculture and Mechanical Society to promote long-term use of the Chester Fairgrounds as a large venue public gathering location and preservation area.

23. Explore options for cooperative tri-town land use planning. This could include the services of a tri-town professional planner to assist with administration of land use functions, short term planning issues, and implementation of long range planning goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CONNECTIONS:

24. Explore and apply for federal transportation funding to install bus shelters which are architecturally consistent with town character at accessible locations (village center, senior housing, intersections with future bike trails, etc.)

25. Plan bike routes, pedestrian corridors, sidewalk installations, and mass transit to provide connectivity between, and encourage adoption of, transportation alternatives.

26. Improve Class 3 bike lanes through signage and lane designation on Routes 148 and Route 154.

27. Work with the Estuary Transit District and the Metropolitan Planning Organization to promote the expansion and ridership of public bus services.

28. Support the expansion of local commuter rail service (Shore Line East) to alleviate congestion on Interstate 95 and provide more carbon-efficient and cost-effective alternatives for Chester residents.

29. Study the possibility of working with the Valley Railroad to provide Chester residents with access for shopping, recreation, commuting, and connections with public bus service, and bikeways.

30. Study and coordinate with CTDOT, CTDEP and the Chester Land Trust to implement best management practices for storm water and hydrology in conjunction with current maintenance and operation activity including future improvements to Route 148 and Route 154, as well as including accommodations for a safe pedestrian environment.

31. Revise Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to incorporate requirements for sidewalk installation in commercial and industrial areas delineated in Map 6-1.

32. Work with CRERPA and CTDOT to access funding for sidewalk construction for areas designated in Map 6-1, including involvement in the "Safe Routes to School" program.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING ROADS:

33. Seek scenic road designations for Routes 148, 145 and 154. State scenic road designation differs from local scenic road designation. A designation of each of these state routes within Chester will require the Connecticut Department of Transportation to consider the scenic and historic character of the road in the event that the roads are selected for road widening or other improvements.

34. Monitoring of the Stormwater Management Plan. The plan was developed by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) for the purpose of establishing, implementing and enforcing a storm water management program to reduce the discharge of pollutants from the department's highways, roadways, railways and facilities to the maximum extent practicable, to protect water quality, and to satisfy the appropriate requirements of the Clean Water Act. This is an important aspect of road and bridge construction that needs to be implemented and monitored by the town, especially in areas near Chester Creek and Pattaconk Brook.

35. The town will also need to be alert to the need for mitigation for state roads and bridges that are at or below flood plain elevation. For instance, one evacuation route for Chester is Route 154 which crosses Chester Creek and could be subject to storm surge in the event of a hurricane or flooding of the Connecticut River.

36. All bridge design and construction must be reviewed and approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission for consistency with the goals for this plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

37. Assign the task of monitoring and planning for broadband infrastructure within existing town buildings and properties to both the Economic Development Commission and the Building and Facilities Committee.

38. Revise Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to require, as part of the permitting process for new subdivisions and commercial or industrial development, the installation of FTTX (fiber to the node, curb, and home). Similar to sidewalk installation, by installing the cables, even in sections, the town will begin to slowly create a fiber optic grid which has long term value, even in the ever-changing communications industry.

39. Monitor the progress of the "Broadband Internet Council" to ensure that Chester is up-to-date on the latest innovations and new options for improved communication technologies.

40. Develop an FTTX fund for the town, access available grants and sources of funding, and coordinate state and local road, utility, and infrastructure projects to ensure installation of fiber and fiber devices during construction and repairs.

41. Create policies that encourage anyone creating a right-of-way to auction or award the right to lay fiber to the town. Where rapid deployment is needed, offer tax incentives.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING CHESTER CENTER:

1. Limit development within the Center to that which respects the special character of the area.

2. Adopt Village District regulations under Chapter 124-Section 8-2j of the Connecticut General Statutes. Include design standards which address bulk, massing, architecture, and site improvements in a manner consistent with the existing character of the Village Center.

3. Review and modify allowable uses to assure that a mix of activities is maintained in Tier One and Tier Two of the Center, with a particular emphasis on retaining single- and two-family residential uses. Concurrently, non-residential uses must be permitted with sufficient conditions so as to avoid creating a nuisance for existing residents. Refine zoning criteria for permitted uses and special permit uses.

4. Review zoning to ensure that home occupations are encouraged at an appropriate scale and intensity for the village.

5. Develop a cooperative agreement with the Water Pollution Control Authority to implement a policy limiting expansion of uses in the Center following construction of the new sewer system. Amend regulations and ordinances as necessary to enforce the policy.

6. Conduct a study of pedestrian circulation within the village area, with emphasis on safe and convenient linkages along the Water Street/West Main Street axis, connections to North Quarter Park, clearly defined access to existing parking areas, and access to current and future public transportation routes and bus stops.

7. To the extent possible, locate or relocate new and expanded municipal uses in the village axis area for ease of access and for community identity.

8. Develop and implement a signage plan for the village area, including better directions to parking areas and walking paths.

9. Consider alternative use of designated parking space as gathering areas for use during special events or seasonally.

10. Prepare and submit applications to the Connecticut DOT for designation of Route 148, Route 154, Route 145, including the Main Street Bridge, Water Street Bridge and Route 154 Bridge as state scenic roads.

11. Continue town support of community events within the village area, especially outdoor gatherings which add to the vitality of street life in the village center.

CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING SUSTAINABILITY:

Physical Development

1. Encourage the use of recycled, renewable and local materials for construction projects.

2. Encourage re-use and retrofitting of older buildings where possible, conserving both building materials and cultural resources.

3. Encourage adaptable, extendable buildings and public spaces, useable for many functions.

4. Evaluate opportunities for alternative energy generation from local resources.

5. Conduct an energy audit of town buildings and implement recommendations as part of the Town's Capital Improvement Program. Offer information and possible financial assistance for energy audits of private buildings.

6. Recommend adoption of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or equivalent energy-efficient building standards and certification for public buildings and subdivision regulations.

7. Encourage the use of solar power , low head hydropower and other alternative energy sources by removing unnecessary zoning barriers to their use.

8. Develop and provide guidelines through the Town's land use offices and commissions on green principles as a Chester preference.

9. Develop guidelines and encourage land use practices that promote appropriate design for density which supports sustainable objectives and transit- and pedestrian-oriented development.

10. Put the town's natural resources inventory online so it is readily accessible to the public.

11. Monitor discharge to watercourses and water bodies from town and state owned storm water systems to insure no or minimal damage to receiving waters. Recommend and monitor corrective actions where needed.

12. Educate and encourage the use of native plants for landscaping on private and municipal properties.

13. Promote and support local and regional infrastructure investments which advance intermodal transit opportunities and methods which lower "Vehicle Miles Traveled" (VMT).

14. Support and encourage the use of alternative and clean-fuel technologies by public fleets.

15. Partner on regional projects for marketing and promotion of commuting alternatives.

16. Promote installation of new and emerging telecommunication technology for telecommuting and business operations.

Reducing Waste

17. Work toward a Town "paperless office" by making use of electronic files and correspondence. Incorporate sustainability in town purchasing programs.

18. Develop an anti-idling policy for town vehicles that exceeds the state requirements.

19. Support a study of a town-wide composting program.

20. Continue support for regional recycling and regionally-based disposal of household hazardous waste and electronics equipment, consider "single-stream" recycling, and expand local collection options for recycling.

21. Reduce light and noise pollution through careful review of proposed development projects. Control outdoor lighting.

22. Develop and promote a program for installation of rain barrels on residential and commercial properties for water conservation in landscaping and gardening.

23. Educate the public and town officials about energy conservation and alternative energy sources using the existing Energy Task Force grant and other appropriate means.

Making Ecological Improvements

24. Establish an ongoing urban forest program which includes a street tree inventory, monitoring of tree conditions, and a replanting program.

25. Consider providing a location for and supervise a community garden.

35. Recognize, anticipate and plan for changing patterns of living and work.

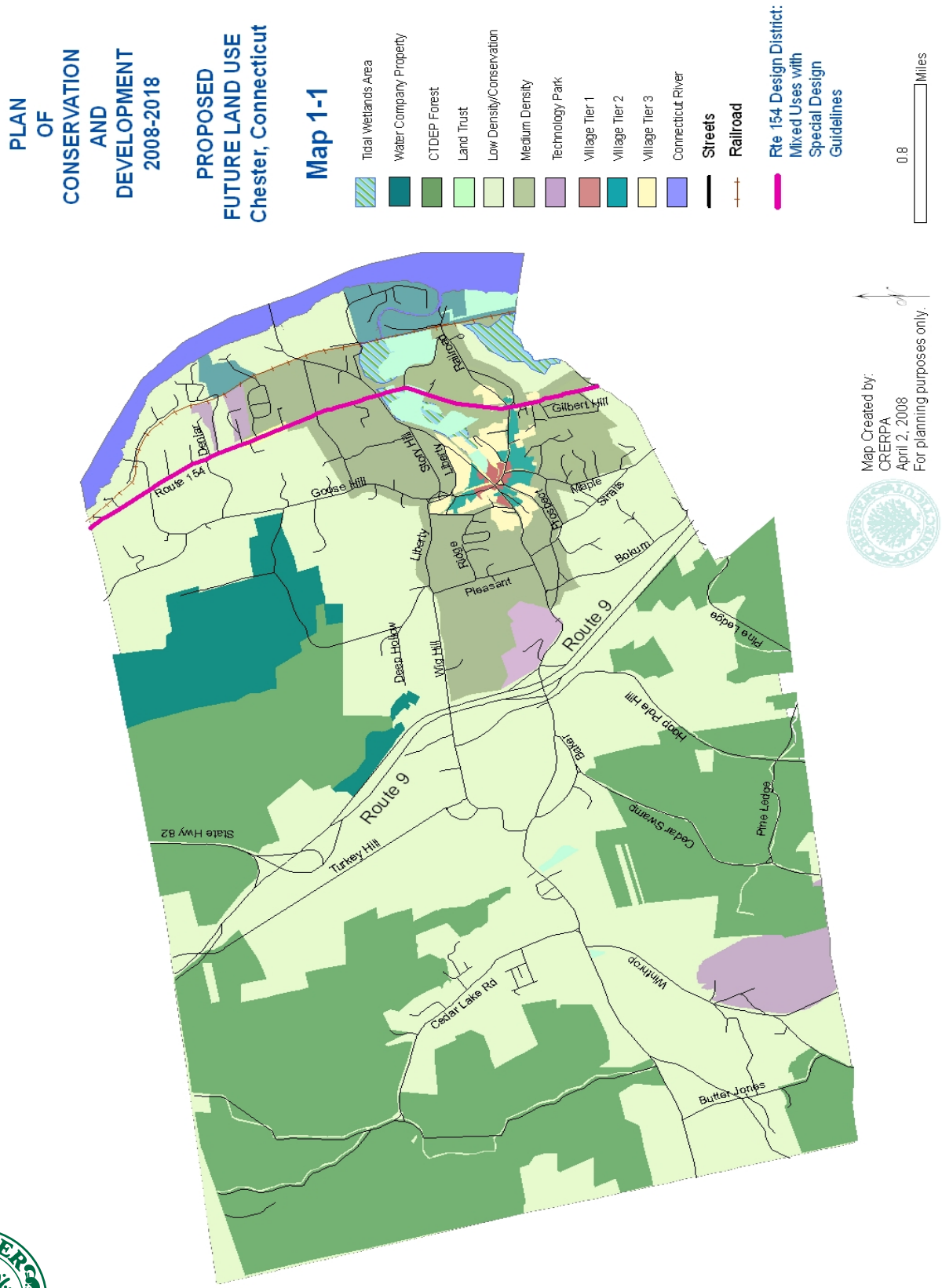
36. Review possible sources for the preservation of farm and forest land, including Public Act 490.

RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE:

37. Create an on-going Community Sustainability Committee comprised of knowledgeable volunteers from municipal boards and commissions as well as various community groups in town. The committee should include at least one representative from: Conservation, Planning and Zoning, Economic Development, Board of Finance, Board of Selectman, Public Works and Inland Wetlands. Planning and Zoning will be charged with the formation of the Committee. The objective of this committee would be the following:

A. Bench-marking sustainability: The development of sustainability indicators, or ways to measure the town's progress towards greater economic sustainability. These indicators would be developed collaboratively, publicized at annual public presentations, and continuously revisited in order to generate genuine information feed-back. The first indicator—energy consumption—will be developed via a town-wide energy audit, using the Rocky Mountain Institute model.

B. Prioritizing actions to improve sustainability in town: The committee will be advisory to the town's land-use commissions, and will serve to coordinate information and actions among the many groups in town working towards sustainability. Regular (monthly or semi-monthly) meetings would serve to increase communication among town agencies.


PLAN
OF
CONSERVATION
AND
DEVELOPMENT
2008-2018
PROPOSED
FUTURE LAND USE
Chester, Connecticut
Map 1-1
Tidal Wetlands Area
Water Company Property
CTDEP Forest
Land Trust
Low Density/Conservation
Medium Density
Technology Park
Village Tier 1
Village Tier 2
Village Tier 3
Connecticut River
Streets
Railroad
Rte 154 Design District: Mixed Uses with Special Design Guidelines
0.8
Miles
Map Created by:
CRERPA
April 2, 2008
For planning purposes only.
Route 154
Deep
Goose Hill
Railroad
Gilbert Hill
Scott Hill
Liberty
Ridge
Pleasant
Maple
Strait
Bokum
Route 9
Deep Hollow
Wild Hill
Pine Ledge
Hoop Pole Hill
Baker
Cedar Swamp
Pine Ledge
State Hwy 82
Turkey Hill
Cedar Lake Rd
Winthrop
Butter Jones

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