

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.

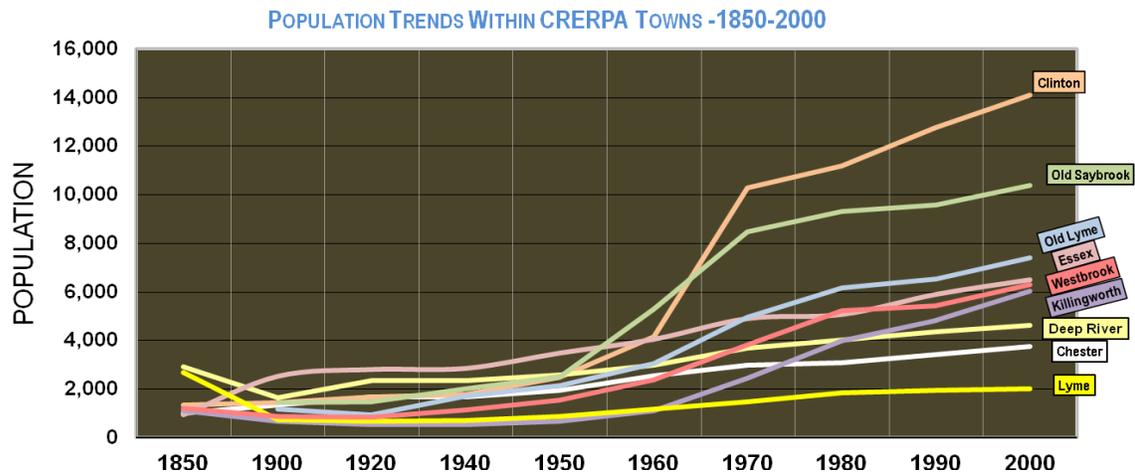
Changes

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.

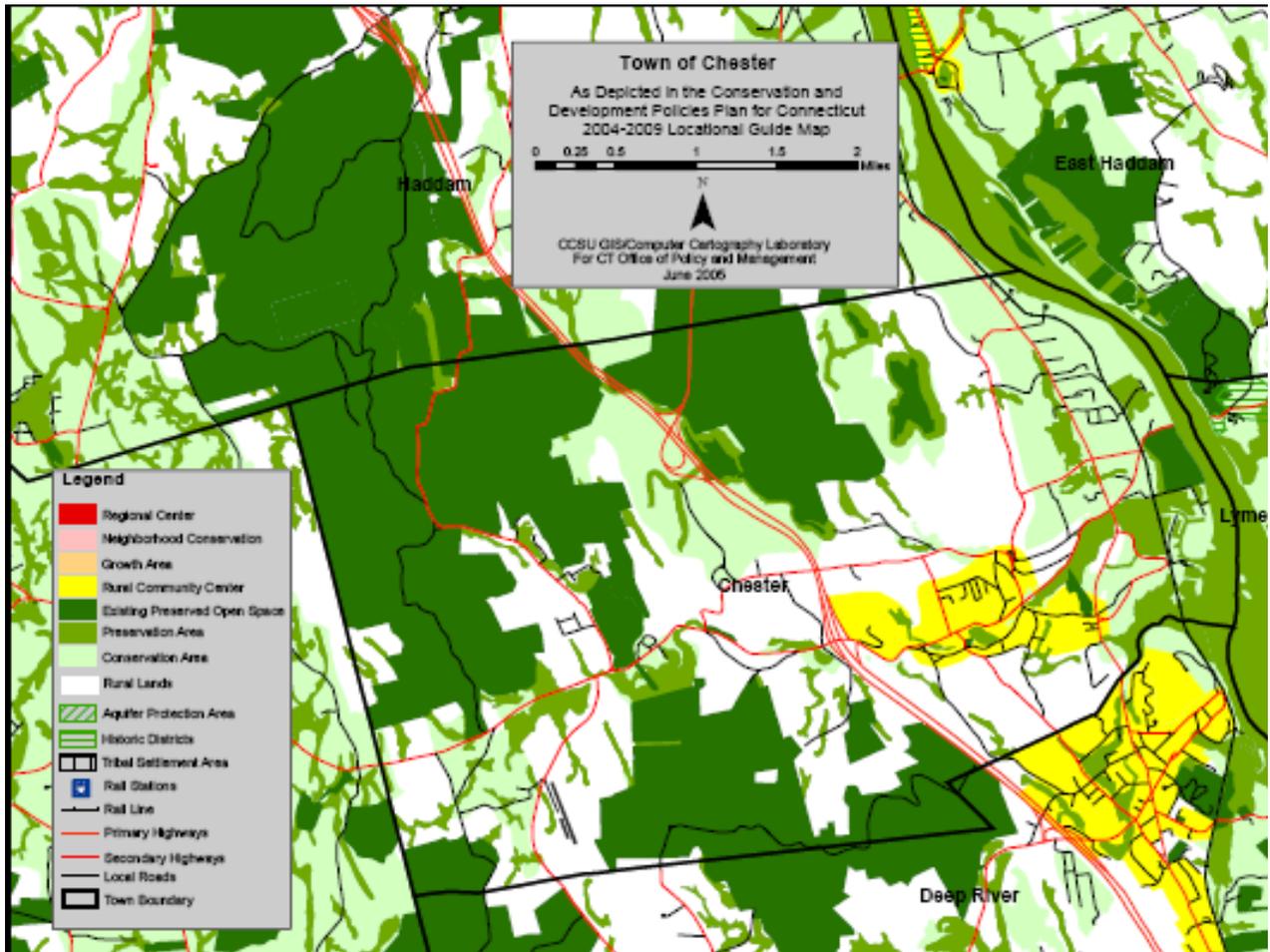
State Plan Policies

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.

