

THE TOWN PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
EASTON, CONNECTICUT, 2006 - An Executive Summary

In October and November 2005 the Easton Planning and Zoning Commission presented a draft of the proposed Town Plan to townspeople at several public hearings, the culmination of five years of intensive research and policy meetings with all segments of the Easton community.

While the 2005 Plan, for the most part, was well received, concerns were expressed at those hearings on several points which the Commission has now revised or addressed more fully. Additional public hearings were held on December 11, 2006, January 22, 2007 and February 12, 2007.

The 2005 proposal for enactment of “village districts” has been replaced by a proposal for preparation of specific neighborhood plans to guide future conservation and uses within each of Easton’s five small existing centers. These plans would stress preservation of historic landmarks and residential character, appropriate land use, environmental conservation and attractive civic design. They would not promote commercial development or uses incompatible with Easton’s residential character.

The 2005 Plan cited a location in southeastern Easton, off the public water supply watershed, for possible evaluation as a potential site for more intensive housing. Thorough engineering studies over the past two years have demonstrated conclusively that intensive housing development at this location would adversely affect the water quality of the adjacent Mill River. Consequently the 2006 Plan recommends single family residential use here at no greater density than for the other non-watershed land in the South Park Avenue neighborhood.

In response to a recommendation by the Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning agency the Plan now more fully addresses the Town’s housing needs. A section has been added on “Existing Apartment Regulations” and recommendations have been made to encourage affordable accessory apartments and age-restricted residential communities, each of which must be within State guidelines restricting density to protect public water supply watersheds.

Reference for these modifications in the proposed Town Plan should be made to the text in Chapters 4 and 10, and to the Town Plan of Conservation and Development 2006 map.

The fundamental philosophy as expressed in the 2005 Plan remains unchanged. In its revised iteration, the proposed Town Plan 2006 continues to express a vision of Easton for the future which preserves the town’s natural environment and the purity of its water resources, encourages volunteerism and civic values, projects infrastructure growth in balance with population growth and public need, and advocates protection and enhancement of its cultural heritage.

Following in the next several pages is an excerpt from Chapter 1 of the Plan text which summarizes the principal recommendations of the Plan.

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The Plan , In Summary

The twelve major policy recommendations of the 2006 Town Plan are summarized below. Following each point is a parenthetical reference to the particular chapter(s) of the text in which more background and detail may be found.

Town's Role in the Region:

1. *Easton's role within the densely developed region of southwestern Connecticut should be primarily that of providing pure water, clean air and permanent greenspace to support a livable environment for the half million people of the area. (Chapter 2).*

Watershed Land:

2. *Protect the environmental quality and low-density character of the watershed lands consistent with the density standards of the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan – i.e., no more than one dwelling unit or six bedrooms for every two acres of upland soil and three acres of site area. (Chapters 3 and 5)*

Residential Character

3. *Maintain the low density quasi-rural residential character of established three-acre residential neighborhoods throughout the town.*
4. *Maintain the attractive residential character and present density of Easton's established one-acre residential neighborhoods. (Chapters 4 and 5).*

Open Space:

5. *Conserve Easton's extensive watershed lands, wilderness areas, existing public open space preserves and other open lands as permanently dedicated open space.*
6. *Farmland and other privately-held large tracts of land should be conserved in their present open character as completely as possible and – where developed – planned to balance development area with conservation in the interest of preserving as much open space as possible in each tract. (Chapters 3 and 5).*

The Town's Heritage:

7. *Easton's rich cultural and historical heritage should be protected wherever possible by appropriate regulations and design review for new development in sensitive areas. (Chapter 7).*

Public Facilities:

8. *As the town grows public facilities must keep pace with town needs and new technology. Recent school facility construction for the new Staples School and at Joel Barlow High School will meet the Town's public school needs for the foreseeable future.*

Serious space and operational deficiencies exist at the Senior Center, the Town Hall, the Police Department, the Emergency Medical Service, the Department of Public Works and the School Administration offices, all of which must be addressed in the near future. The retired Staples School building complex should be thoroughly evaluated as part of an overall Town Space Needs study. Additional active recreation space is also needed and the Plan recommends use of the level field areas of the Town's Morehouse Road property for this purpose.
(Chapter 6).

Housing:

9. *Housing needs of Easton's senior citizens and less affluent residents should be addressed in a variety of ways including age-restricted residential in appropriate locations, affordable accessory apartments, increased elderly tax relief, limited duration elderly and in-law accessory apartments, and possible planned retirement communities; in all cases restricted to densities in persons per acre compatible with the State Plan of Conservation and Development and the natural limitations of the area in which located. (Chapters 4, 5 and 11)*

Roads and Transportation:

10. *While Easton is adequately served for local circulation by a well maintained network of Town and State roads, increasing inter-town traffic poses a threat to the tranquility and safety of many local neighborhoods. A pro-active program of traffic calming measures, speed enforcement and support for regional plans to reduce traffic volume growth on local and secondary roads is endorsed. Protection of the scenic quality of all Easton roads is an important component of preserving the town's special character. Bikeways and pedestrian paths should be developed in various sections to supplement travel by automobile and connect public facilities with various neighborhoods. (Chapter 8).*

Civic Life:

11. *The Town's civic life should be strengthened by encouraging volunteerism from many segments of the community, and also by encouraging the service facilities of the future to locate in the central area of the town where they will be most accessible to residents. Where public facilities are located design review should be mandatory in order to protect the visual character of the community. Special planning is needed for several of the historic community centers of the town to guide their appropriate development and architectural conservation.*
(Chapters 6, 7 and 10)

Financial Strategy:

12. Because most undeveloped land in Easton lies on public water supply watersheds and the town desires to preserve its predominantly residential character, opportunities for broadening the tax base are limited. Recommended financial strategy focuses on encouraging high-value tax-positive forms of residential development, preservation of open lands and other low-service-cost uses, efficient management of public services, and encouragement of civic volunteerism as well as other measures to enhance Easton's quality of life and residential property values. (Chapter 9).

The Town Plan of Conservation and Development map, described in Chapter 11, depicts in graphic form the major recommendations of the Plan. A guide to achievement of its goals is presented in Chapter 12, Program of Action.