

CONTEXT

1

Overview

This chapter of the Plan of Conservation and Development will outline the conditions and trends affecting the community during the preparation of the Plan.

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.”

Abraham Lincoln

Demographics



Housing



Economy



Land Use



Buildout Potential



Fiscal Considerations

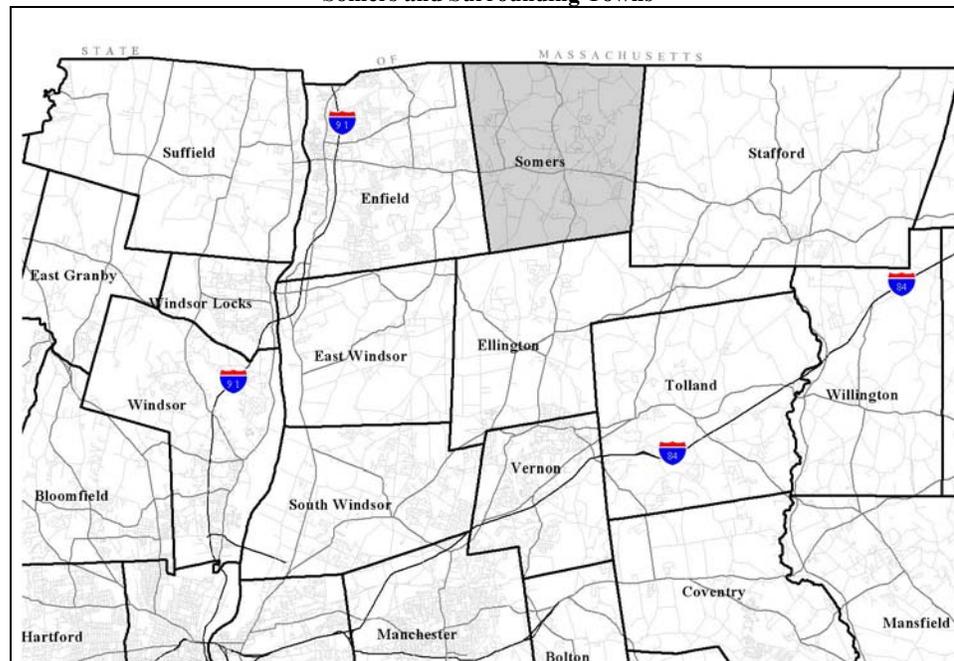


Introduction to Somers

Somers is a predominantly residential and agricultural community located in north-central Connecticut on the Massachusetts border between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA. Despite its inclusion and active participation in Connecticut's Capitol Region, Somers influences and is influenced by Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley as well.

The town can be divided into two distinct geologic areas. The western two-thirds are characterized by generally flat, rich agricultural land that is also highly suitable for development. The eastern third is generally steep and rocky, making it less suitable for intensive agriculture or development, but it remains desirable for residential development due to scenic views.

Somers and Surrounding Towns



Historical Context

Colonial Period (1706-1780)

Like many Connecticut towns, Somers is the product of a series of political and religious divisions, with its origins laying in Springfield, MA. The area encompassing present day Enfield and Somers was separated from Springfield and incorporated as the Town of Enfield in 1679.

Somers was first settled in 1706 as an agricultural community. In 1724, residents formed the Society of East Enfield for the purposes of hosting their own religious services, incorporating ten years later as the Town of Somers. In 1749, Somers was separated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and annexed by the Colony of Connecticut.

Agricultural and Early Industrial Period (1780-1850)

During the Early Industrial Period, Somers became a hub of activity in the transportation and hospitality industries, serving as a stagecoach stop on the route from Boston to Hartford.

Various gristmills and sawmills were constructed during this period and in 1839, the Billings Satinette Mill was constructed in Somersville, marking the beginning of 141 years of textile manufacturing at the site.

Agriculture did not improve significantly during this period and further specialization was necessary to compete with cheaper grains transported from the Midwest towards the later half of this period. The first agricultural fair was organized in 1838 and within two years would grow to become the Four Town Fair.

Industrial Period (1850-1930)

Farming improved significantly during this period with the widespread use of iron and steel plows followed by advances in mechanization.

The mill in Somersville would grow to become the Somersville Manufacturing Company, famous for its woolen fabrics used in overcoats and blankets. The Somersville Manufacturing Company was responsible for Somers' second wave of immigrants, who came from throughout Europe to work in the mill.

The turn of the century brought trolley lines to Somers, providing new opportunities for education, shopping and recreation.

Modern Period (1930-Present)

The Modern Period would mark the arrival of correctional facilities in Somers in 1963 and the demise of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970. The jobs lost at the mill have been replaced by a diversity of smaller businesses but the mill remains vacant. Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Town. The widespread use of automobiles and post World War II expansion would begin a trend of rapid residential development that would peak during the 1970's.

Regional Context

Somers Plays an Integral Role in the Region

Like several neighboring towns, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community with far fewer jobs than workers. Despite this, Somers gained jobs during the last decade, with the number of jobs rising 18 percent from 1,720 in 1990 to 2,230 in 2000. About 1,700 jobs were filled by non-Somers residents, making Somers a minor regional source of employment.

Another regional role that Somers serves is providing a labor force that supports the overall economy of the region. While over 600 Somers residents worked within the community in the year 2000, almost 3,500 Somers residents filled jobs in other communities in the Capitol Region, Pioneer Valley and beyond.

In addition to providing a skilled labor force for regional businesses, Somers residents also support the regional economy by purchasing goods and services in Somers as well as regional commercial centers such as Enfield and Manchester.

Somers contains a number of State and regional facilities including:

- the Four Town Fairgrounds,
- the YWCA Camp Aya-Po,
- Shenipsit State Forest,
- The Sopastone Mountain Observation Tower, and
- State correctional facilities.

The Four Town Fairgrounds



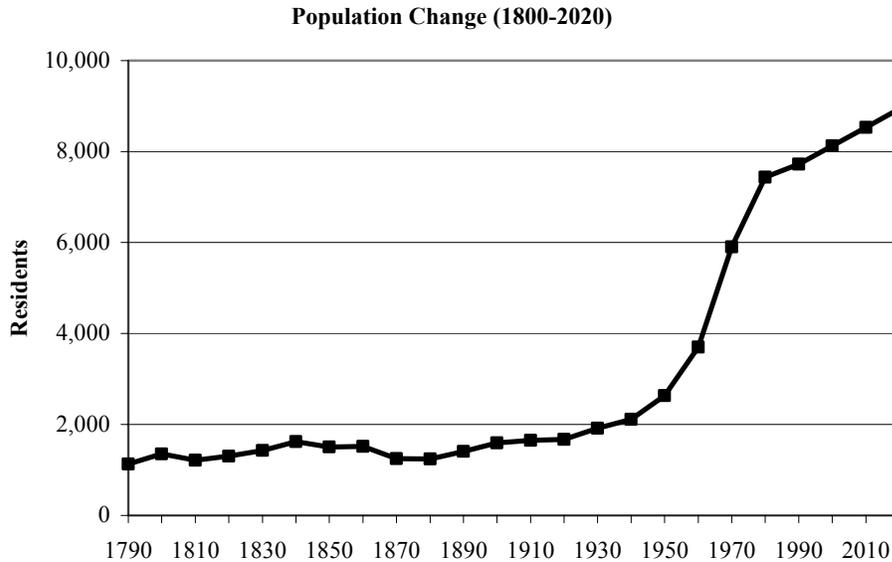
YWCA Camp Aya-Po



A Growing and Changing Population

Somers is Growing Faster than the State

In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Somers' population was 10,417. Subtracting the correctional facility population reduces that number to 8,126: an increase of 407 residents or 5.3% growth since 1990. By comparison, the population of Connecticut grew by only 3.6% during this same period.



Population Growth is Projected to Continue

The preceding chart illustrates that prior to 1940, Somers' population was relatively stable. By the 1940's, the population was growing at an increasing rate, reaching a growth rate of 59% during the 1960's before tapering off to modest growth rates of three to five percent during the last two decades. The population is expected to continue increasing at a modest rate through 2020.

Age Composition is Expected to Change

While population growth trends can help plan for future residential growth, tracking changes in the age composition of residents can be far more useful in anticipating future community facility and service needs. For example, as the "baby boomers" aged, they created a wave of peak demands on facilities and services starting with schools and now heading towards services for older residents.

As the following table illustrates, Somers' age composition is expected to change significantly in the future, with residents aged 55 and over comprising 35% of the total population by 2020. The 35-54 age-group, containing the majority of baby boomers, is expected to decrease significantly as they move towards retirement age.

Demographic Issue

In reporting many demographic and other statistics, the Census Bureau, the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Department of Public Health do not distinguish between the residents of Somers and the inmates of Somers' State correctional facilities. We have attempted, wherever possible, to compensate for this oversight, resulting in minor discrepancies between the various charts and tables presented hereafter.

Population Growth

Year	Population
1790	1,127
1800	1,353
1810	1,210
1820	1,306
1830	1,429
1840	1,621
1850	1,508
1860	1,517
1870	1,247
1880	1,242
1890	1,407
1900	1,593
1910	1,653
1920	1,673
1930	1,917
1940	2,114
1950	2,631
1960	3,702
1970	5,901
1980	7,439
1990	7,719
2000	8,126
2010	8,533
2020	8,940

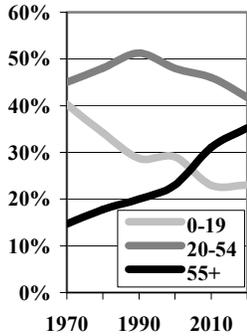
1790 – 2000 Census, Projections in italics are an extrapolation of historical births, deaths and net migration from 1990-2000 and have been adjusted to remove the prison population from 1970-2000

2000 Age Comparison*

	Somers	State
0 - 4	5%	7%
5 - 19	24%	21%
20 - 34	12%	19%
35 - 54	36%	31%
55 - 64	11%	9%
65+	12%	13%

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics
*Adjusted for prison population

Age Composition*



*Adjusted for prison population

Median Age*

East Longmeadow	41.4
Hampden	41.1
Stafford	37.8
Somers	37.4
Enfield	37.3
Ellington	36.9
County	35.7
State	37.4

Source: 2000 Census,
*Not adjusted for prison population

Somers Age Composition (1970 to 2020)*

Ages	1970	Estimated*			Projected*	
		1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
0-4	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%
5-19	32%	28%	22%	24%	18%	18%
20-34	19%	21%	20%	12%	16%	15%
35 -54	26%	27%	31%	36%	30%	27%
55-64	8%	9%	10%	11%	14%	15%
65 +	7%	8%	10%	12%	17%	20%

1970 - 2000 Census, Projections by Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (1995). Planimetrics (2003) *Adjusted for prison population.

The following table depicts the various life-stages of Somers residents that will each have changing primary needs over the next twenty years.

Life-Stage Primary Needs Assessment

Description	Age Range	Primary Needs	Projection to 2020
Infants	0 to 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care 	Stable through 2020
School-Age	5 to 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School facilities Recreation facilities/programs 	Lower but rising again by 2020
Young Adults	20 to 34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rental housing Starter homes Social destinations 	Higher by 2020
Middle Age	35 to 54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family programs Trade-up homes 	Lower by 2020
Mature Adults	55 to 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smaller homes Second homes 	Higher by 2020
Retirement Age	65 and over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax relief Housing options Transportation Elderly programs 	Significantly higher by 2020

With moderate overall population growth expected, much of the change within specific-age groups will be the result of aging within Somers' existing population. The mature adult and retirement age groups are expected to increase significantly by 2020, due to the first half of the "Baby Boom" generation exceeding 65 years of age while the latter half will be 55 or older. Residents age 65 and over may nearly double as a percentage of total population by 2020, demanding alternative housing options, tax relief and other programs for older residents.

A Modest Economy

As indicated under the discussion of Somers' regional role, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community.

Business Profile 2001

Sector	Firms	% of Total	Employees	% of Total
Services	127	35%	690	33%
Government	7	2%	509	24%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	86	23%	334	16%
Construction and Mining	69	19%	205	10%
Manufacturing	23	6%	153	7%
Agriculture	27	8%	123	6%
Transportation and Utilities	9	3%	50	2%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	14	4%	49	2%
Total	365	100.0%	2113	100.0%

Connecticut Economic Resource Center 2001. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding

Despite this role, 365 businesses and government agencies in Somers employed 2,113 people in 2001. Service firms dominate the local economy by comprising approximately one-third of both firms and employees. Due to the correctional facilities and the Somers school system, the government sector is the second largest employer, despite representing less than two percent of all firms. It is not uncommon for the town government, including the local school system, to be one of the largest employers in a town similar to Somers.

Somers' manufacturers account for six percent of all firms and seven percent of all employees. Major products include high pressure valves, printing plates, fiber optic components, electrical equipment, dental/medical equipment and steel structures. Farming continues to play a significant role in Somers with more agricultural firms and almost as many employees as manufacturers. Somers has a diversity of farming activity including but not limited to dairy farms, horse farms, produce farms, tobacco farms, nurseries, produce stands, and riding stables that all contribute to the character and charm of Somers. Grower's Direct is the second largest taxpayer and fourth largest employer in Somers.

During the 1970's, Somers suffered the loss of 20% of its jobs, due mainly to the closing of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970, ending 131 years of textile manufacturing at the site. The Town nearly regained its earlier employment levels during the 1980's and surpassed them with 30% growth during the 1990's.

At \$65,273, Somers' median household income ranks above all neighboring Connecticut. This may be due in part to the prevalence of single-family homes and their tendency towards two wage earners. At \$29,128, Somers' per capita income is the highest among neighboring towns as well as higher than the State average.

Employment Growth

	#	% Change
1970	1,820	-
1980	1,460	-20%
1990	1,720	18%
2000	2,230	30%

Source: CT Labor Dept

1999 Median

Household Income

Hampden, MA	\$65,662
Somers	\$65,273
E Longmeadow, MA	\$62,680
Ellington	\$62,405
Enfield	\$52,810
Stafford	\$52,699
State	\$53,935

Source: 2000 Census

1999 Per Capita Income

Somers*	\$29,128
Ellington	\$27,766
E Longmeadow, MA	\$27,659
Hampden, MA	\$26,690
Stafford	\$22,017
Enfield	\$21,967
State	\$28,766

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics
*Adjusted for prison population

Housing Growth

Year	Units	Percent Change
1980	2,390	-
1990	2,739	15%
2000	3,012	10%

Source: 1980-2000 Census

Median Housing Value 2000*

Somers	\$193,900
Hampden, MA	\$160,900
Ellington	\$158,000
E Longmeadow, MA	\$146,400
Stafford	\$127,500
Enfield	\$124,500
County	\$150,500
State	\$169,900

Source: 2000 Census and CT. DECD
*Owner-occupied housing

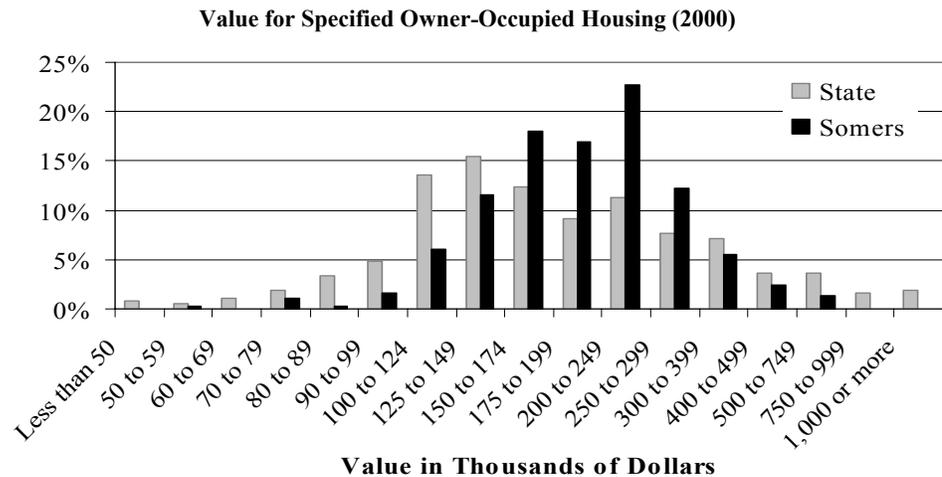
Affordable Housing

Somers	3%
Capitol Region	14%

Source: CT-DECD 2002

Housing in Somers

According to the Census Bureau, 273 housing units were added to Somers' housing stock during the 1990's for a 10% increase. At \$193,900, the median home value in Somers is well above the state median, making the Town less affordable relative to the state.



Source: 2000 Census

While Somers has affordable housing, an affordable mortgage or rent alone does not constitute an affordable housing unit by state standards (G.G.S. Section 8-30g). Until a town reaches the goal of having 10% of its housing stock affordable, it is subject to the affordable housing appeals procedure that shifts the burden of proof to the town to show that threats to public health or safety resulting from an affordable development outweigh the need for affordable housing. In order to qualify under Section 8-30g, a dwelling unit must be:

- Assisted housing (housing funded under a recognized state or federal program),
- CHFA-financed housing (housing financed under a program for income-qualifying persons or families), or
- Housing that is deed-restricted to be affordable to low- or moderate-income persons or families for at least 40 years.
- A moderate-income household earning 80% of the regional median household income or a low-income household earning 50% of the regional median household income cannot spend 30% or more of its gross income on rent, mortgage, utilities, taxes or similar costs.

At just under three percent affordable, the Town is below the regional average in meeting the State's goal of 10% affordable housing stock. The regional average is skewed by an abundance of affordable units in more urbanized areas such as Hartford, East Hartford and Manchester.

According to the 2000 Census, 427 households, or 35% of all Somers households earning \$75,000 or less, spend more than 30% of their household income on housing costs. A family of four earning \$61,000 or less will experience financial stress under these circumstances.

Since the Legislature adopted Section 8-30g in the late 1980's, no deed-restricted affordable housing has been constructed in Somers. Section 8-30g was recently amended to allow a three-year moratorium on further affordable housing applications every time the Town adds affordable housing accounting for two percent of its total housing stock. When the State goal of 10% per town is met, the Town is exempt from the requirements of Section 8-30g.

High owner occupancy rates are considered an indicator of community stability. At 85%, Somers is well above the State average.

2000 Housing Mix
(ranked by percent one-unit detached)

	1-Unit Detached	1-Unit Attached	2-4 Units	5+ Units	Mobile Home
Hampden, MA	94%	1%	2%	2%	0%
Somers	90%	1%	7%	2%	0%
East Longmeadow, MA	89%	1%	3%	6%	0%
Stafford	71%	3%	16%	10%	1%
Enfield	69%	5%	15%	11%	0%
Ellington	65%	3%	9%	23%	0%
State	59%	5%	18%	17%	1%

Source: 2000 Census

Somers' homogenous mixture of housing is the result of predominantly post World War II rural/suburban growth surrounding older multi-family housing clustered in the villages of Somersville and Somers. At 90% of the total housing stock, Somers' single-family detached housing stock far exceeds the ratio of neighboring Connecticut towns or the State. As Somers' population continues to age in place, demand for alternatives to single-family home ownership will grow. Older residents who are unable or unwilling to maintain a conventional single-family home may need to leave town unless alternatives are provided.

Housing Tenure (2000)

	Town	State
Owner Occupied	85%	63%
Renter Occupied	12%	31%
For Rent or Sale	0%	4%
Occasional Use	1%	2%
Vacant	2%	0%

Source: 2000 Census

Woodcrest



Definitions

Developed Land - land that has buildings, structures, or improvements used for a particular economic or social purpose (such as residential or institutional)

Committed Land - land that is used for a particular economic or social purpose (including open space)

Vacant Land - land that is not developed or committed

Underutilized Land – developed or committed land that is underdeveloped based on the density or uses permitted by zoning.

Dedicated Open Space - land or development rights owned by the Federal government, the State, the Town, land trusts, or conservation organizations intended to remain for open space purposes.

Managed Open Space - land owned by fish and game clubs, cemeteries, recreational clubs, and other organizations which is used for other purposes but provides open space benefits.

Dedicated Agriculture - farmland from which the development rights have been purchased, removing the possibility of further development.

Land Use in Somers

Somers encompasses 28.6 square miles or 18,324 acres. After subtracting water features, the Town's physical land area is slightly less at 18,268 acres. An analysis of the Tax Assessor's records indicates that over 81 percent of the land in Somers is committed to specific land uses: mainly single-family homes, agricultural uses and open space. Much of the committed land is underutilized, such as single-family homes on large tracts of land or farms in residential zones. After factoring out the underutilized area of oversized residential lots, farms and managed open space, all of which remain developable, the amount of land committed to existing land uses falls to 47%.

The largest land use is residential use at 34% followed by agriculture at 27% and open space at 11%. More than two-thirds of the open space land is considered dedicated open space in that it is restricted by deed or other measure to ensure its protection. The remaining open space is managed open space, meaning that it presently functions as open space, such as a golf course, but it is not legally protected from future development.

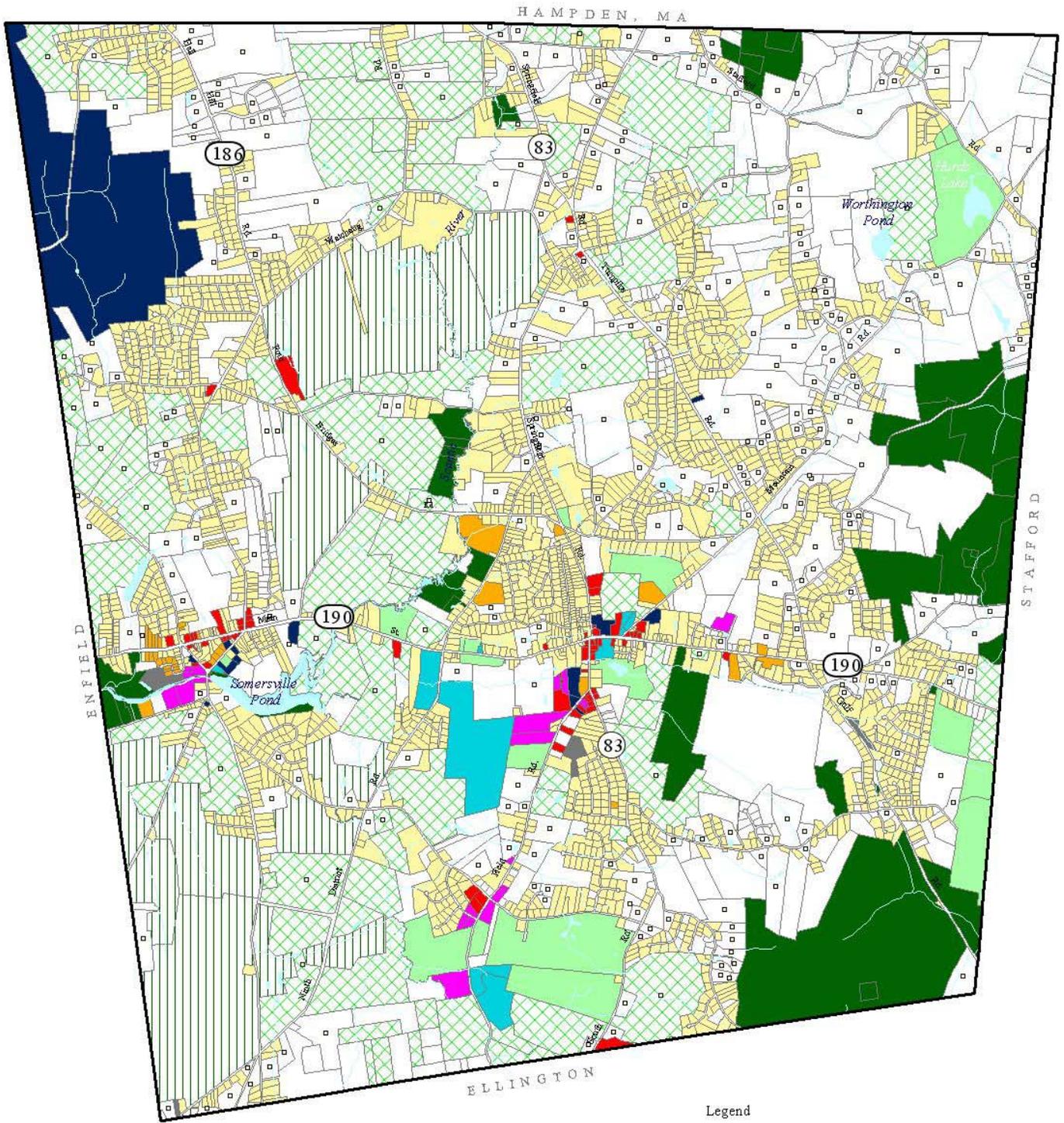
Land Use in 2003

Use	Acres	Percent of Developed/ Committed Land	Percent of Total Land
Residential	6,167	42%	34%
Single Family	6,086	41%	33%
Multi-Family	81	1%	0%
Commercial	84	1%	0%
Industrial	109	1%	1%
Industrial	82	1%	0%
Utility	26	0%	0%
Agriculture	4,932	33%	27%
Dedicated Agriculture	1,654	11%	9%
Agriculture	3,278		18%
Open Space	1,986	13%	11%
Dedicated Open Space	1,353	9%	7%
Managed Open Space	633		3%
Institutional	595	4%	3%
Community Facility	188	1%	1%
Transportation	715	5%	4%
Developed / Committed	14,776	100%	81%
Vacant / Developable	3,493		19%
Total Land Area	18,268		100%

Planimetrics (Totals may not add due to rounding). Land use information from Somers.

Existing Land Use

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
|  | Single-Family Development |  | Institutional |  | Utility |
|  | Multi-Family Development |  | Community Facility |  | Vacant |
|  | Commercial |  | Dedicated Open Space |  | Water and Watercourses |
|  | Industrial |  | Managed Open Space | | |
| | |  | Dedicated Agriculture | | |
| | |  | Agriculture | | |

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Essex Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Zone	Area (S.F.)
A	40,000
A-1	40,000
Business	40,000
Industrial	60,000

Builder’s Acre

Somers’ Zoning Regulations utilize a concept known as a builder’s acre. A conventional acre of land is equal to 43,560 square feet. For simplicity sake, a builder’s acre rounds down to 40,000 square feet, thus the A, A-1 and Business Zones are the rough equivalent of one-acre zones.

Zoning in Somers

Somers has a simple set of four zoning districts, ranging in size and intensity from the 40,000 square foot single-family A Zone to the 60,000 square foot Industrial Zone.

Residentially zoned land accounts for over 98% of Somers’ land area with 91% located in the A-1 Zone. The A and A-1 Zones are identical in all dimensional respects except that the A-1 zone allows two-family residences on 80,000 square foot lots with 300 feet of frontage. Single-family homes, two-family homes (A-1 Zone) and farms are the only permitted uses in the residential zones. Many agricultural and residentially related activities are regulated as special uses, requiring applications and hearings before the Zoning Commission before being permitted. The A Zone is the more restrictive of the two residential zones, with fewer special uses allowed.

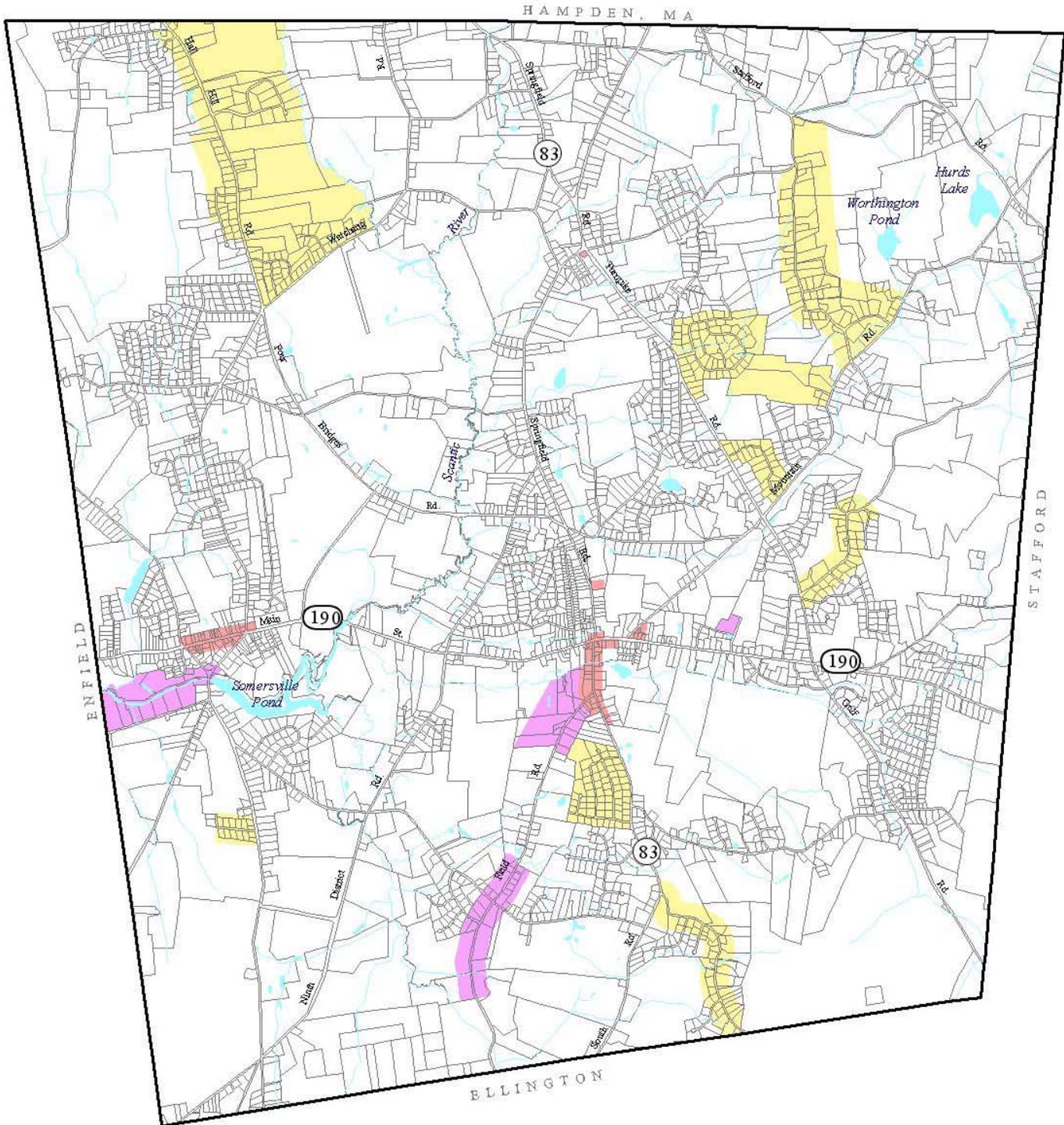
Commercial development is generally limited to the Business Zone, which at 67 total acres, accounts for less than one percent of Somers total land area. The B Zone, with a few exceptions, is concentrated in the villages of Somersville and Somers. The Business Zone prohibits residential use while all commercial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.

The Industrial Zone rounds out the balance of land in Somers with 235 acres or 1.3 percent of the total land area. The Industrial Zone prohibits residential use while all other commercial and industrial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.



Current Zoning

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
|  A-1 |  I |
|  A |  B |

0 3000 Feet

Residential Development Potential	Max. Units
Vacant Land	2,300
Excess Residential Land	1,531
Unprotected Agricultural Land	2,141
Managed Open Space Land	421
Total	6,393

Development Potential in Somers

With over 9,700 acres or 53% of the Town consisting of vacant or underutilized land, there is significant potential for additional residential development in Somers (see adjacent map). Based on the present regulations, future residential development may occur on residentially zoned properties that:

- are currently vacant,
- have excess land area for future development, or
- have potential for redevelopment.

Subtracting the approximately 30 acres of vacant commercial and industrial land still leaves almost 9,680 acres of developable residential land remaining. After factoring in such variables as current zoning requirements, open space set-asides, road acreage, and natural constraints, that acreage could yield nearly 6,400 additional housing units. Adding this number to the Town's existing housing stock under existing zoning results in approximately 9,400 housing units at full build-out or more than three times the 2000 Census total of 3,012 housing units.

Multiplying the potential number of dwelling units by Somers' average household size of 2.78 persons per household results in the potential for nearly 25,900 residents at full build-out. This would represent an increase of over 17,770 residents above the 2000 population. It is unlikely that this potential would ever be reached as it represents a worst case scenario in which every currently available acre is developed. There may also be zoning changes and demographic trends such as shrinking household sizes that may alter this figure significantly.

Farmland Can Be Readily Developed for Housing

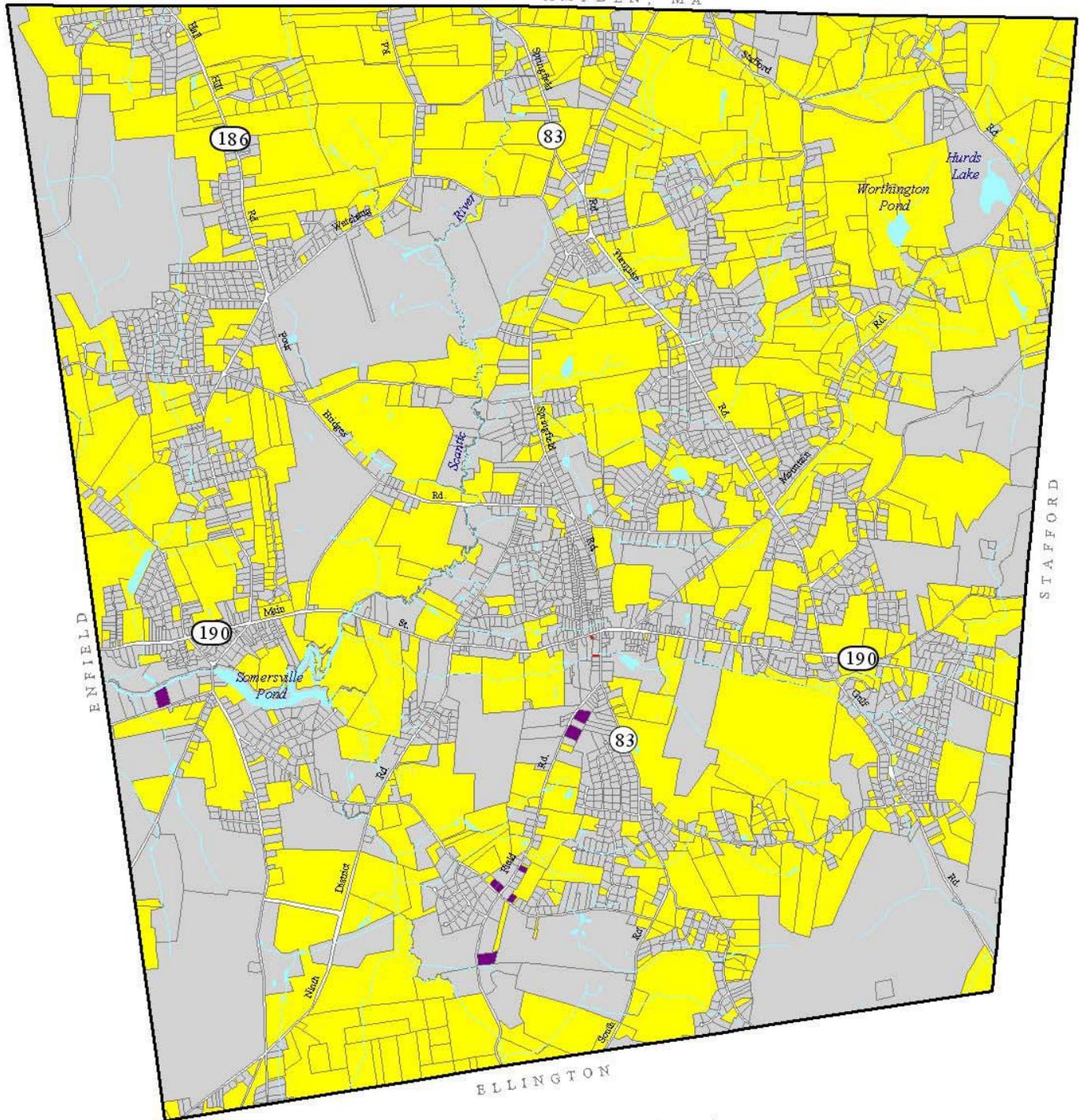


Developable Land

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



ENFIELD

STAFFORD

ELLINGTON

Legend

Developed/Committed Land

Developable Land

Residential

Commercial

Industrial

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 South Dixie, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5261

Per Capita Expenditures

Somers*	\$2,435
Suffield*	\$2,399
Ellington	\$2,173
Enfield	\$2,025
Stafford	\$2,002
State	\$2,444

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita Property Taxes

Suffield*	\$1,570
Somers*	\$1,328
Ellington	\$1,364
Enfield	\$1,243
Stafford	\$1,218
State	\$1,612

CT Policy & Economic Council
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita State Aid

Somers*	\$1,006
Stafford	\$731
Ellington	\$678
Enfield	\$644
Suffield*	\$597
State	\$627

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base Composition

	% Business
Enfield	30.8%
Stafford	21.2%
Ellington	14.8%
Suffield*	14.7%
Somers*	8.4%
State	26.0%

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001

Equalized Net Grand List

ENGL estimates the market value of property in every town across the state for a given year, adjusting for varying revaluation dates.

Fiscal Overview

Expenditures and Revenues

Somers' Fiscal Year 2001-2002 budget was approximately \$23.4 million, 65% of which went towards education expenses. On a per capita basis, Somers spends at virtually the same rate as the State average, with above average education and debt service costs as a percentage of the total budget. Emergency services spending per capita is less than half of the state average.

2000 – 2001 Per Capita Expenditures Distribution

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Education	\$1,571	65%	\$1,386	57%
Police	\$60	3%	\$162	7%
Fire	\$55	2%	\$93	4%
Debt Service	\$322	13%	\$181	7%
Public Works	\$158	7%	\$191	8%
Other Expenditures	\$233	10%	\$431	18%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,444	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

With the presence of the prisons and the associated State Payments In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT), Somers state-aid per capita is 60% higher than the State average, making Somers less dependent on local property taxes. With a downward trend in PILOT payments relative to the assessed value of the prisons and the State struggling to balance its budget, state-aid will likely continue to decline, increasing local reliance on property taxes.

2000 - 2001 Per Capita Revenue

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Current Taxes	\$1,328	55%	\$1,612	69%
State Aid	\$1,006	42%	\$627	27%
Surplus	\$1	0%	\$39	2%
Other	\$63	3%	\$166	7%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,345	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base

Somers ranks 68th out of 169 towns in terms of property value per capita and is slightly higher than the State average. This is probably due to above average home values, given the low percentage of business that might otherwise raise this figure.

Tax Base Comparison

(Ranked by 1999 per capita ENGL)

	Per Capita ENGL	State Rank
Suffield*	\$99,525	67
Somers*	\$97,812	68
Ellington	\$70,706	125
Enfield	\$64,566	137
Stafford	\$60,088	147
State	\$96,546	

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

COMMUNITY ISSUES

2

Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of issues and concerns that were important to the community, a series of public meetings, a community survey, interviews and other exercises were conducted throughout the planning process.

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee used the results of these activities to identify and prioritize the most important community issues before developing strategies to address them.

“It is really the community itself which must try to pull together ... in order to preserve those things that the community values and to foster the growth and change that the community wants.”

Russell Peterson
Former EPA Director

Workshop Meetings



Public Meetings



Telephone Survey



Working Meetings



Residents clearly value Somers' community facilities, and open spaces as well as community and historic character.

Things to Encourage ...

At a meeting attended by approximately 60 residents early in the planning process, residents were asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly proud of.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that make their community special to them and things that they would like to encourage in the future.

	“Prouds” in Somers	Percent of Total Votes
Community Facilities	Field Road Recreation Area, firehouse, library, Piedmont Hall, Recreation Department, recreation programs, school activities, school complex, school system, Senior Center, Town Hall, youth programs.	40%
Open Space	Northern Connecticut Land Trust open space, open space, Shenipsit State Forest, Soapstone Mountain, Town Green, undeveloped areas, Cedar Knob Golf Course.	16%
Community Character	Apple orchards, beautification group, farms, flowering gardens, McCann Farm, rural character, small town character, Somersville Mill, Worthington Pond Farm.	16%
Historic Resources	Historic buildings, historic houses, historic Main Street, Historical Museum, Indian (Somers Mountain) Museum, Robert Pease House.	13%
Business Development	Colonial Flower Shop, Dzen's Garden Market Area, lack of fast food franchises, small shops on Main Street, Child's Place Preschool.	5%
Miscellaneous	Cooksville, Green Tree Lane development, center of town, Four Town Fairgrounds, new sidewalks, 624 Springfield Road, 5 Main Street.	10%

Choosing “Prouds”



Choosing “Sorrys”



Things to Discourage ...

Residents were also asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly sorry about.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that concern them about their community and things that they would like to discourage in the future.

Residents also expressed desire for protecting and improving community character

Groundwater contamination and the firehouses were largely responsible for the concern over natural resources and community facilities.

	“Sorrysts” in Somers	Percent of Total Votes
Business Development	Field Road an eyesore, Field Road metal buildings, junk yard area on Field Road, new metal "box" on South Road, Egypt Road industrial park, should have an industrial park, Eleanor Road industrial building, Gold House, CBT, Clarissa's Villa/Plaza, Dunkin Donuts, Italian Villa, Johann's, Maturo's Golf Center, Micky Finn's, Mobil, Somersville used car lots, spot commercial area on Springfield Road, need to be more business-friendly, failed opportunities for business development, center of Somers - loss of business area, lack of business development, lack of development in Somersville.	32%
Historic Resources	Somersville Mill, loss of historic buildings in the center of Somers, failure to take advantage of older buildings.	23%
Community Character	Abandoned/rundown houses, Egypt Road/Field Road storage area in residential neighborhood, light pollution, Somersville homes, unregistered/abandoned cars/trucks, Worthington Pond Farm, deforested building lots on Brookford Drive.	13%
Natural Resources	Contaminated land on Field Road, contaminated land on Springfield Road, contaminated Properties, Egypt Road needs more trees, litter on George Wood Road at Somers/Enfield Line area, pollution, water pollution from prison, water pollution, Shady Lake unused by youth.	9%
Community Facilities	Poor condition of Field Road playground, Kibbe Fuller School, Land Use staff, new fire house, old fire house – not used by police, school objectives for students, Town Hall	9%
Miscellaneous	64 Springfield Road, Mill Road, high taxes, Zoning Commission, firehouse cell tower, prisons, rod & gun club, lack of senior / affordable housing, Mill Pond Apartments, Partridge Run development, Route 190 goes through the center of town, Car dominated Town Center, Intersection of Rtes. 190 and 83, Rte. 83 curb cuts, Somersville used car lot drive unapproved	15%

Residents were asked to identify topics that they felt were most important for Somers to address in the Plan. The top priorities were:

1. *Open Space*
2. *Business Development*

Things to Focus on...

To identify the top issues to be addressed in the Plan, residents were each given 50 planning points and asked to identify the issues that were most important to them by voting with their points for a variety of planning topics likely to be included in the Plan. The results are described below.

In December of 2003, a random telephone survey of 401 households was conducted to validate the public input received to date, as well as many of the strategies developed by the Steering Committee to address identified issues. While the results of the survey are incorporated throughout this Plan, some of the highlights are summarized below by planning topic.

Primary Issues

Among the broad categories of conservation, development and infrastructure topics, conservation was the most important, garnering 44% of the participant's votes, led by the number one issue of open space (21%). Development issues closely followed conservation issues with 41% of the votes, led by the number two issue of business development (19%).

Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote
Conservation Topics		44%	Development Topics		41%	Infrastructure Topics		15%
1	Open Space	21%	2	Business Development	19%	9	Vehicular Circulation	5%
3	Natural Resources	12%	4	Village Enhancement	12%	10	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
6	Community Character	8%	5	Housing Needs	9%	11	Community Facilities	3%
7	Historic Resources	8%	8	Residential Development	7%	12	Utilities	2%

Open Space

Residents at the April 17, 2003 public meeting expressed a number of reasons for preserving more open space including preserving wildlife habitat, preserving community character, providing recreation areas and reducing development potential. The telephone survey results supported these findings as indicated by the following responses

Open Space	Response
• Somers should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails.	80%
• Somers should require open space as part of every new development.	65%
• Would pay \$50 to \$100 more per year in taxes, to have the Town acquire more open space.	59%
• Somers should preserve more open space.	58%

Business Development

Business development was the number two issue identified. However, concern for business development was not limited to the need for tax revenue, shopping opportunities or jobs. Many residents were concerned with the quality and appearance of industrial and commercial development and its effect on community character. Others accepted Somers' role as a rural bedroom community and want it to stay that way. Once again, the survey results presented below support these findings.

Residents found protecting natural resources and village enhancement to be equally important to the future of Somers.

Business Development	Response
• I would shop more in Somers if stores met my everyday needs	80%
• Somers needs a grocery store	72%
• Somers could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development in town.	72%

Secondary Issues

Natural resources and village enhancement issues were in a virtual tie for the third and fourth most important planning issues.

Natural Resources

Natural resource protection was the third most important issue identified, receiving 12% of residents' votes. Residents were primarily concerned with protecting surface and groundwater quality as well as preserving forest and farmland. Despite being the third ranked concern among meeting participants, 83% of residents surveyed agreed that Somers was doing a good job protecting natural resources.

Natural Resources	Response
• Somers is doing a good job protecting natural resources..	83%

Business Development



Natural Resources



Village Enhancement

Village enhancement received slightly fewer votes than natural resources yet also garnered 12% of the votes. Village enhancement issues raised by meeting participants included: the need for pedestrian enhancements; protecting historic buildings and the New England charm of the villages; moving parking to the rear of buildings; property maintenance; and creating draws within the villages to attract residents and visitors.

Village Enhancement	Response
• The Town should do more to create walkable villages.	69%
• Somers should encourage mixed-use development within the villages, such as apartments and offices over first floor retail stores	49%

Survey results were mixed with respect to the public meeting results, with clear support for making the villages more pedestrian friendly but only moderate support for mixed uses within the villages. However, there was clear support for the mixed-use redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Company mill, with survey results ranging from 59% in favor of lodging uses up to 83% in favor of office uses within the mill.

Tertiary Planning Issues

Rank	Topic	% of Total Vote
5	Housing Needs	9%
6	Community Character	8%
7	Historic Resources	8%
8	Residential Development	7%
9	Vehicular Circulation	5%
10	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
11	Community Facilities	3%
12	Utilities	2%

Tertiary Issues

Housing needs, community character, historic resources and residential development make up the third tier of planning issues, receiving seven to nine percent of residents' votes. While not discussed in detail during the initial public meeting, survey results clearly support strategies to address issues in these areas.

Housing Needs

Housing for older residents and active adults, first time buyers and moderate income households were all identified as significant housing needs while additional apartments and condominiums were not supported.

There need to be more:	Response
• Housing for elderly persons.	91%
• Housing for active adults who are 55 and older.	83%
• Moderate-income housing.	70%
• Housing for first-time home buyers.	60%

Community Character and Historic Resources

Despite being ranked sixth among issue areas, the issue of community character spilled over into many of the public discussions on other issues such as open space, business development and village enhancement. Historic resources are an important component of Somers community character.

Survey respondents were clearly supportive of community character and historic resource protection strategies.

Community Character and Historic Resources	Response
• Somers should do more to protect scenic resources.	72%
• Somers should create economic and regulatory incentives for historic preservation.	72%
• Somers should create regulatory controls for historic preservation.	69%
• The Town should do more to protect scenic roads	65%

Residential Development

Residential development is closely tied with both open space preservation and housing needs. Residents surveyed were moderately to strongly supportive of strategies to manage residential development patterns in an effort to protect natural resources and preserve more open space. A strong majority of residents were also in favor of housing diversity, reinforcing the findings for housing needs.

Residential Development	Response
• Residential subdivisions that preserve more public open space but keep the same number of houses are a good idea	72%
• Somers needs a variety of housing types to maintain a diverse community	71%
• Residential subdivisions that reduce lot sizes to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, but keep the same number of houses, are a good idea.	53%

Infrastructure

Infrastructure topics received the lowest public interest, which was mirrored by the survey results in which residents generally found community facilities and services to be adequate for their needs.

Despite the low priority of infrastructure issues, survey respondents moderately to strongly supported infrastructure related strategies.

Infrastructure	Response
• The intersection of Route 190 and Route 83 is a problem	71%
• Somers needs after-school programs for teenagers	70%
• There should be sidewalks or trails connecting Somers and Somersville to each other as well as to other activity areas such as the School / Library campus and the Recreation Area	63%
• Somers' sewer system should be expanded to accommodate future development	60%
• Somers' public water systems should be expanded to accommodate future development	59%
• Somers needs some form of outdoor water recreation such as a swimming area, pool or children's recreational fountains	58%

Overall Plan Direction

Overall Philosophy

Based on this input from residents and committee members, it appears that the overall guiding philosophy of the Plan is to:

**Balance conservation and development
to protect and enhance community character and
improve Somers' quality of life.**

Themes

To accomplish this overriding goal, the plan has been organized under the following strategy themes

Themes	Components
Protecting Important Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preserve more open space• Protect natural resources• Preserve farmland• Protect historic and scenic resources
Guiding Appropriate Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve patterns of residential development• Guide appropriate, quality business development• Support desired development patterns
Addressing Community Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain quality community facilities and services• Ensure a safe and efficient transportation system• Address changing housing needs

Voting on Important Issues



Walkable Community Workshop



PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

3

Overview

Somers derives much of its character and quality of life from its unique combination of natural, historic, and scenic resources.

By protecting these important resources and guiding future development, Somers can maintain and enhance community character and quality of life for generations to come.

Protecting important resources is a critical element in maintaining community character and ensuring quality of life for current and future generations.

Open Space



Natural Resources



Historic Resources



Scenic Resources



Preserving open space was a primary concern of Somers' residents and is therefore a high priority in the Plan.

Open Space Types

From an open space planning perspective, experience has shown that open space generally falls into four categories.

Dedicated Open Space

Land preserved in perpetuity as open space, often with public use.

Managed Open Space

Land set aside for some other purpose, such as a golf course or public watershed land that provides some open space value. Public use may not always be allowed.

Protected Open Space

Land protected from development, such as a conservation easement, but public use may not be allowed

Perceived Open Space

Land that looks or feels open, such as a fallow farm or private woodlands, but is not preserved as open space.

Preserved Agriculture

Preserved agriculture, illustrated on the adjacent Open Space Plan, is active farmland from which development rights have been purchased, allowing the land to continue being farmed but prohibiting future development.

Preserve More Meaningful Open Space

Preserving meaningful open space will help conserve important natural resources, protect wildlife habitat, create more environmentally sensitive development patterns, provide fiscal benefits, protect community character and enhance the quality of life for Somers residents.

Open space ranked as the number one planning issue facing Somers, receiving 21% of the "votes" among residents attending the initial public meeting on this Plan. After being informed that seven percent of Somers is actually preserved as open space, 58% agreed that the Town should preserve more open space.

Preserve More Open Space

For Somers to protect and enhance community character and quality of life, attention must be paid to preserving more open space. This can be done by regulation (such as increasing the "set-aside" as part of new residential development), through purchase of land or even donation. The Somers Open Space and Trails Committee has recommended a goal of preserving 50% of the remaining undeveloped land in town. If this goal is accomplished, over 7,700 acres or approximately one-quarter of Somers total land area would be preserved as open space by the time the Town is fully developed.

There are two basic approaches to preserving more open space: regulatory approaches and acquisition.

Regulatory Approaches

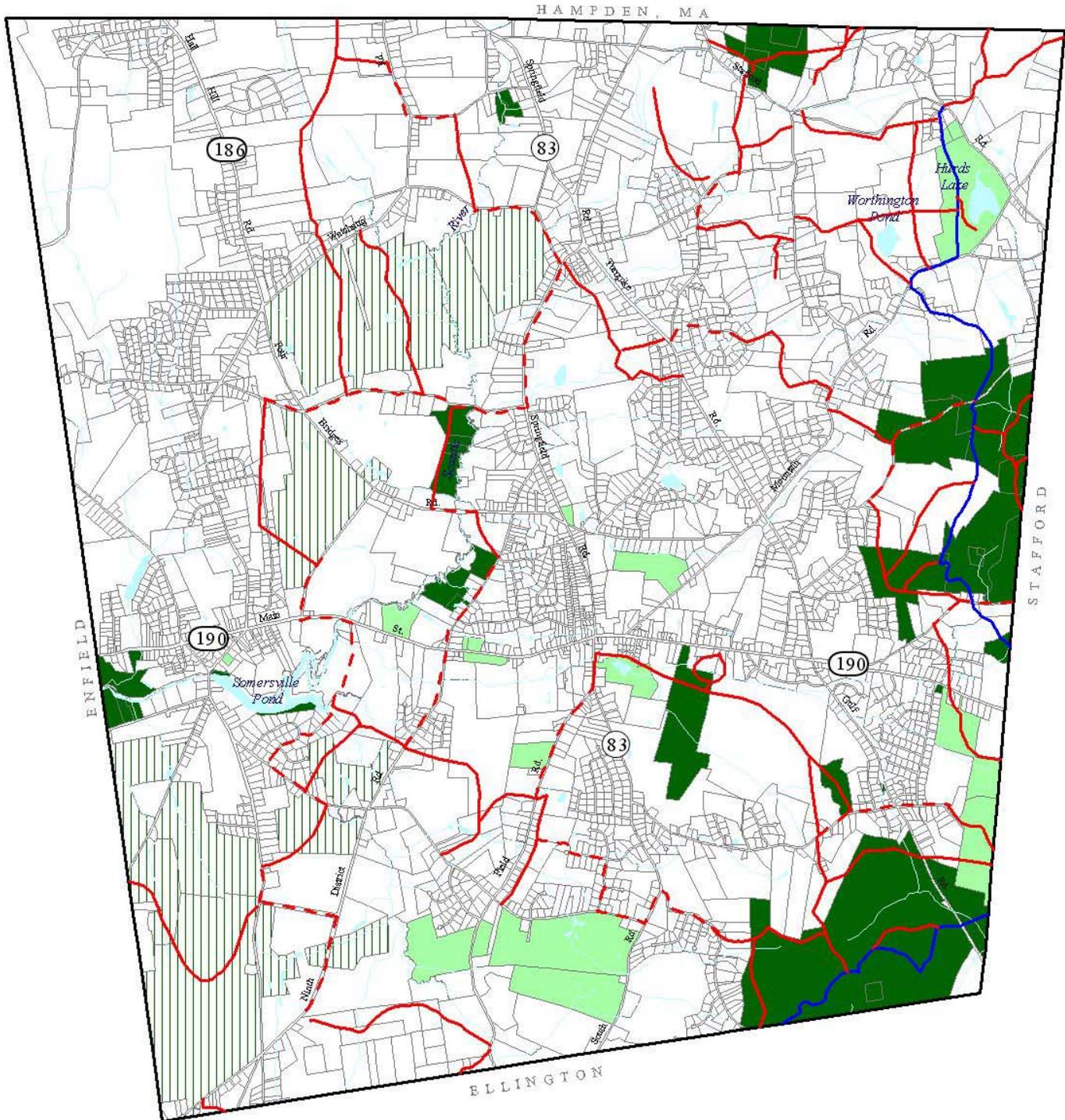
In terms of regulation, it is recommended that Somers increase the mandatory open space "set-aside" from 10% to 15% of every residential subdivision. Sixty-five percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers should require open space as part of every new development. The Planning Commission or its Open Space and Trails Committee should identify the most appropriate open space within each development.

Some communities have adopted open space equivalency factors where wetlands and other environmentally constrained areas are "discounted" so that an even greater percentage of open space preservation occurs on the most constrained parcels. Other communities require that dedicated open space be representative of the overall quality of the parcel (i.e. similar in the proportion of wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes). Somers may wish to consider similar regulations.

Somers' conventional one-acre zoning practically assures that new development will consume all but the mandatory open space set-aside for residential lots. By adopting density-based zoning, the same number of residential lots can be flexibly located within a development to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, reduce the amount of infrastructure needed and preserve open space above and beyond the mandatory set-aside.

Open Space Plan

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- Dedicated Open Space
- Managed Open Space
- Preserved Agriculture
- Water and Watercourses

- State Blue Trail
- Existing Trails
- On-Road Connections

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Lincoln Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5261

Many property owners have an emotional attachment to their land and given a choice, would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community.

Fiscal Benefits

Studies have shown that purchasing open space can be fiscally responsible over time when compared to the perpetual costs and benefits of residential development that might otherwise occur.

A 1990 study of three Dutchess County, NY towns by Scenic Hudson, Inc. found that residential land required \$1.11 to \$1.23 in services for every tax dollar it generated, while open land required only \$0.17 to \$0.74 in services¹

According to a report by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, "for every \$1.00 collected in taxes, residential development costs between \$1.04 and \$1.67 in services..."²

A study of three rural Massachusetts towns found residential development requires \$1.12 in services for every dollar in tax revenue, compared to \$0.33 in services for farmland and open space³.

¹Thomas, Holly L. February 1991. "The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation", Technical Memo of the Dutchess County Planning Department.

²Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions. "Open Space is a Good Investment: The Financial Argument for Open Space Preservation.". 1996.

³Freedgood, Julia. 1992. "Does Farmland Protection Pay?: The Cost of Community Services in Three Massachusetts Towns." American Farmland Trust.

Some communities simply permit greater development flexibility in return for preserving additional open space while others permit subdivisions with open space development patterns by right, making conventional subdivisions a special permit. Somers may wish to consider a similar approach.

When there is no appropriate open space within a new subdivision, the Commission can accept a fee-in-lieu of open space equal to ten percent of the fair market value of the land prior to development, to be used to purchase open space elsewhere in Town. Fees must be placed in the Town's dedicated open space fund.

An alternative might be to allow an equivalent off-site dedication of open space, such as a portion of the Shenipsit Trail or similar valuable open space. A variation on off-site dedication is "open space banking" in which the Town purchases desirable open space and allows developers to gradually pay down the purchase with fees-in-lieu of open space as they develop land elsewhere in Town.

Regardless of the methods used, the Planning Commission should obtain desirable open space or a fee-in-lieu-of open space as part of every residential subdivision.

Acquisition Approaches

For Somers to be able to preserve the open space parcels that are most important to the Town's open space strategy the community must be prepared to purchase key properties and/or work with property owners for their full or even partial donation, either before or when they come on the market. Residents are supportive of the Town purchasing additional open space with 69% of those surveyed willing to spend \$50 or more per year in taxes to have the Town do so.

To facilitate this, the Town should finance the dedicated open space fund on an annual basis or consider bonding to have an immediately effective fund, able to purchase critical open space as it becomes available. Several communities, such as Groton, CT, have successfully used this approach. When adequately funded, an open space fund can be used to leverage matching open space grants, making local funds twice as effective.

Open space preservation does not always have to mean purchase of an entire property. Somers is one of the most successful towns in the State at purchasing development rights to protect farmland. Many communities have used this approach to preserve open space as well. Land can also be purchased outright and paid back over time through a "reverse mortgage", leased back to an owner, or an owner can be granted "life use" of the property.

Donating land or development rights can also be an effective estate planning tool. Many property owners have an emotional attachment to their land and given a choice, would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community rather than be developed. The active solicitation of open space donations (land, development rights and easements) is an increasingly popular and successful open space tool that should be promoted in Somers.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

Overall Open Space System

Interconnecting open spaces with greenways is the most effective way for Somers to establish a meaningful open space system that provides benefits for both passive recreation and wildlife. Eighty percent of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails where appropriate. A system of greenways can function as wildlife corridors, allowing wildlife to migrate between larger open space habitats. By connecting the villages of Somers and Somersville with the school campus and recreation area, a trail system within the greenways can not only provide passive recreation but can also reduce dependency on automobiles.

Connectivity between greenway segments is critical to the effectiveness of the overall system. To close gaps in a greenway system, the Town should encourage other open space organizations to allow public access and secure easements over private property when necessary.

Enhance Existing Open Space

When opportunities to acquire land adjacent to existing open space arise, they should be evaluated for their ability to enhance the overall utility of the open space system and acquired if desirable. Such acquisitions can enhance wildlife habitat, create linkages between open spaces and expand both passive and active recreational opportunities.

Protect Important Resources

Preserving open space is an important tool for protecting natural and scenic resources. While outright acquisition of open space typically provides the greatest benefits, protection of the natural or scenic resource can also be effectively accomplished through the use of conservation easements. The Planning Commission and Conservation Commission can require conservation easements to protect important resources during their respective application review processes.

Identify and Prioritize Open Space Parcels for Acquisition

The Open Space and Trails Committee should prioritize open space parcels for acquisition to produce the most effective open space system for Somers.

Observation Tower



Shenipsit State Forest



Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to guide appropriate residential development that may result in additional open space.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies to create a system of trails throughout Somers.

Fees in-Lieu-of-Open Space

The Somers Subdivision Regulations allow the Planning Commission to accept a fee-in-lieu of open space to be used to purchase open space in more appropriate locations, in accordance with Section 8-26 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Despite the recommendation to increase the mandatory open space set-aside to 15% of every new residential development, if choosing to accept a fee-in-lieu of open space, the Planning Commission will be limited by Statute to accepting a fee or a combination of land and fee equal to 10% of the pre-development fair-market value of the land .

Open Space Preservation Strategies

Preserve More Open Space

1. Increase the mandatory open space "set-aside" to 15% as part of every residential development application.
2. Enhance the open space acquisition fund through annual contributions in the budget and/or by bonding to have a more immediate effect.
3. Pursue state and/or federal open space grants.
4. Convert unprotected and perceived open space into protected open space by acquiring land or easements.
5. Establish criteria in regulations to allow development flexibility for open space preservation.
6. Continue to require conservation easements or other measures during approvals.
7. Adopt regulations to allow off-site dedication and/or banking of open space.
8. Amend the regulations allow "open space developments" resulting in a higher percentage of open space by right and require a Special Use Permit for "conventional developments" that maximize lot sizes..
9. Educate residents about benefits of open space donation and sale of development rights.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

10. Identify and prioritize open space parcels for acquisition.
11. Interconnect open spaces into a system of greenways.
12. Establish trails along greenways to encourage passive recreation.
13. Encourage other organizations to allow for public access and use.

Somers Little League Fields



Cedar Knob Golf Course



Protect Important Natural Resources

Conservation of natural resources is important for preserving environmental functions, maintaining biodiversity and preventing damage to the environment.

Despite the fact that 83% of residents surveyed agree that the Town is doing a good job protecting natural resources, there are several strategies that Somers can use to enhance protection of natural resources.

Relate Development Intensity to Land Capability

While natural resources can be degraded over time due to pollution and other factors, development activity poses one of the most significant threats to both the quantity and quality of natural resources in Somers. Unless regulations acknowledge that all land is not created equal, development will continue to encroach upon environmentally sensitive areas, degrading or depleting natural resources.

Adopt Soil-Based Zoning

Soil-based zoning relates the residential development potential of a parcel to the carrying capacity of the underlying soils. Under soil-based zoning, a residential density factor is assigned to each natural soil group, with progressively lower densities for soils with fair to poor development potential. Such an approach is most appropriate in areas that rely on soil characteristics to support wells and septic systems necessary for residential development in certain areas of Somers (it would not be applicable in areas served by public water and sewer). The natural soils groups are described in the following table and map.

Development Potential	Natural Soil Group	Description
Good	Excessively Drained	Generally very well drained soils.
	Well Drained	Generally well drained soils.
Fair	“Hardpan”	Restricted drainage is a constraint
	Shallow and Rocky	Presence of rock is a constraint.
Poor	Floodplain / Alluvial (Wetlands)	Flooding potential is a constraint
	Poorly Drained (Wetlands)	Poor drainage is a constraint
Variable	Made / Urban Land	Soil types are not discernible.

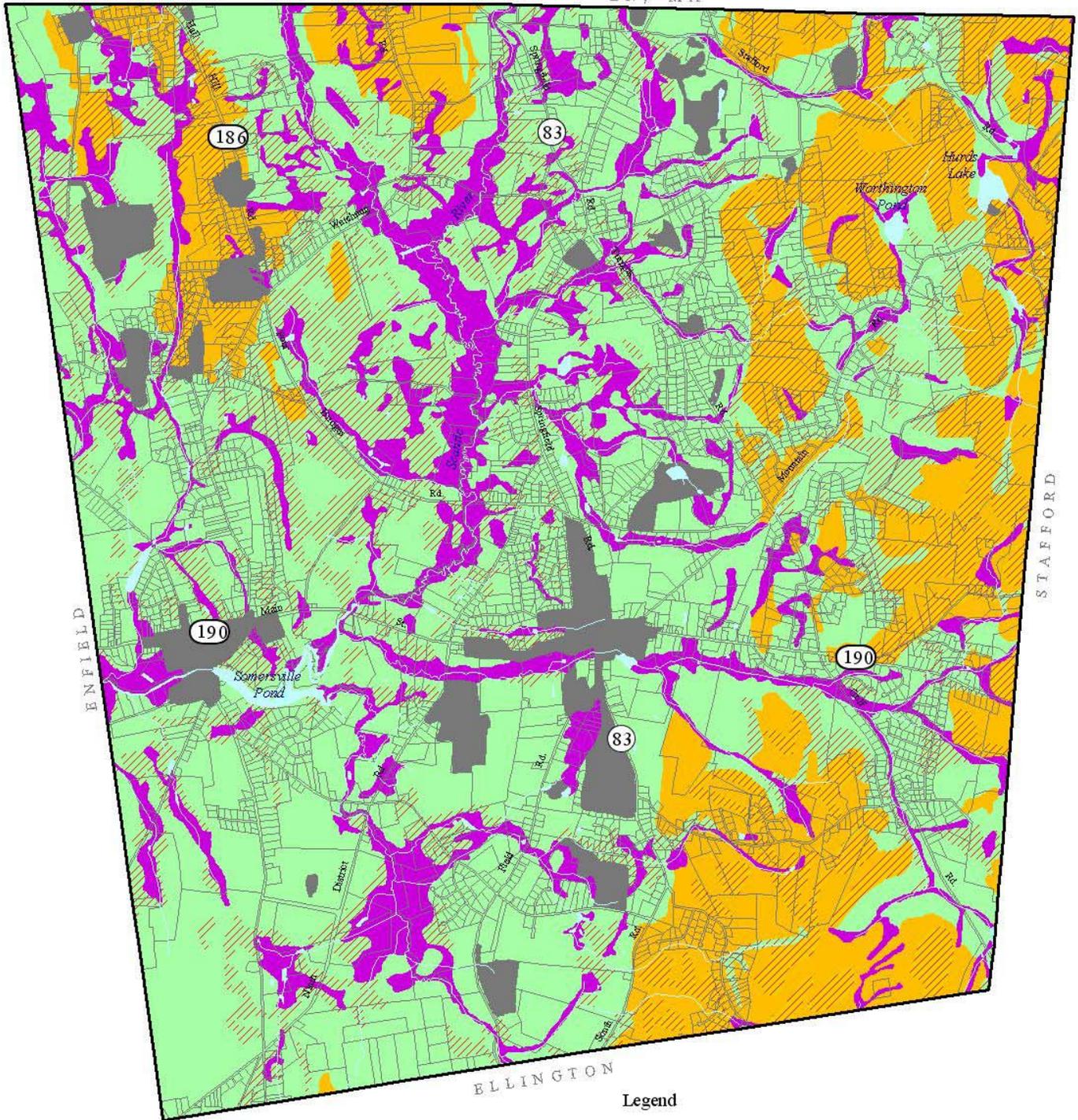
Protecting natural resources is important to maintaining community character and the overall quality of life in Somers.

Natural Soil Groups

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

3125801 Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Legend

- Well Drained
- Well Drained (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)
- Hardpan or Shallow/Rocky
- Hardpan or Shallow/Rocky (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)
- Poorly Drained
- Variable
- Water

Preserve Natural Diversity

With 60% of the Town either preserved as open space or undeveloped, Somers likely contains significant areas of wildlife habitat. As future development occurs, wildlife habitat will be disturbed, fragmented and lost unless measures are taken to minimize their disturbance. This loss of habitat can lead to wildlife encroaching on residential development and even a reduction in biodiversity if rare or endangered species are affected (see sidebar).

To protect vernal pools and threatened or endangered species habitat identified in the DEP's Natural Diversity Database (see Natural Resources Plan), Somers' staff should work closely with applicants to mitigate any negative development impacts on these sensitive natural resource areas. The Conservation Commission should consider inventorying and mapping vernal pools to aid in their protection.

Another simple measure of added protection for preserving the natural ecosystem is to prohibit the deliberate introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process. Invasive plant and animal species can aggressively multiply; replacing native wildlife food sources, causing costly property damage and even threatening human health and safety.

Important Natural Resource Protection Strategies

1. Adopt soil-based zoning to relate density of development to the capability of soils to support development.
2. Minimize wildlife habitat loss through the preservation of open space and natural resource areas.
3. Work with applicants to ensure that important vernal pools and Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) resources are protected.
4. Inventory and map vernal pools.
5. Prohibit the introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process.

Invasive Species (Giant Hogweed)



Steep Erodible Soils



Important Wildlife Habitat

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) maintains a Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) that identifies areas where species of concern that are threatened or endangered may exist within Somers.

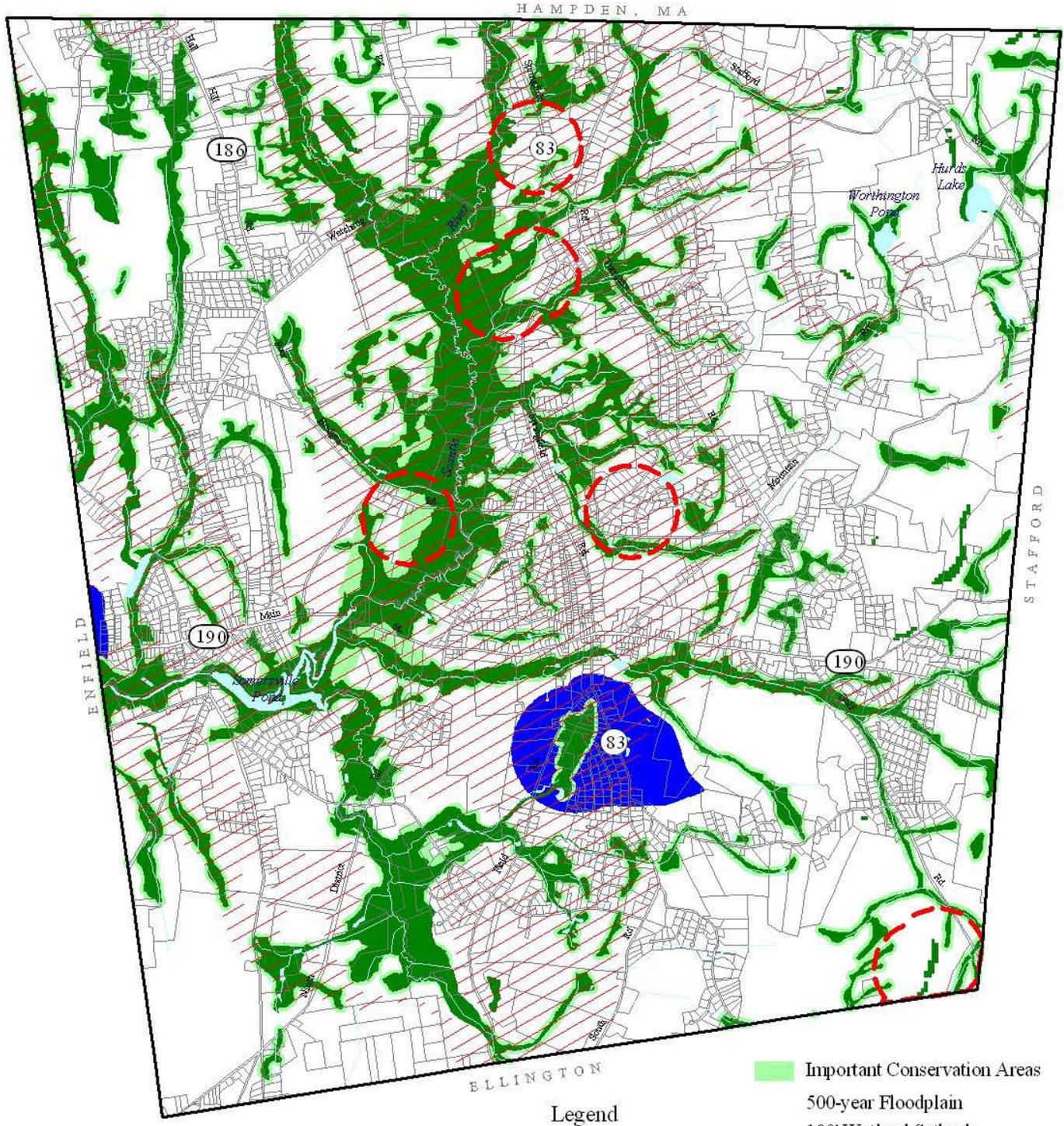
When development proposals occur in these areas (depicted on the Conservation Plan on the facing page), applicants should work closely with Town and DEP staff to mitigate any impacts on the species of concern and its habitat.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to guide appropriate residential development that may also help to preserve important natural resources.

Natural Resources Plan

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

0 3000 Feet



- Significant Conservation Areas
- Wetlands
- 100-year Floodplain
- Slopes > 25%

- Important Conservation Areas
- 500-year Floodplain
- 100' Wetland Setback
- High Groundwater Availability
- Aquifer Protection Areas
- Natural Diversity Database Areas
- Water and Watercourses

Protect Water Quality

Given Somers' history of groundwater contamination, protecting water quality should be a high priority for natural resource protection in Somers. Somers' surface and groundwater resources provide potable water, contribute to biological diversity and add to the overall quality of life for residents.

Modify Aquifer Protection Regulations

Somers' Zoning Regulations contain groundwater protection regulations intended to regulate the use and storage of potential water contaminants above aquifers areas and other high groundwater availability areas. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has also adopted model aquifer protection regulations that specifically affect public water supply well-fields. It is recommended that Somers appoint the Zoning Commission as the "aquifer protection agency" for the Town and modify its groundwater protection regulations to comply with the minimum requirements of the DEP's new regulations governing Level A Aquifer Protection Areas.

Protection of water quality may be Somers' most important natural resource protection priority.

According to Aquifer Protection Regulations adopted by the Department of Environmental Protection (Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies - Section 22a-354i-9. Best Management Practices for Regulated Activities), best management practices for sensitive water resource areas include:

1. Every regulated activity shall be conducted in accordance with the following:
 - a. Hazardous materials may be stored above ground within an aquifer protection area only in accordance with certain conditions.
 - b. No person shall increase the number of underground storage tanks used to store hazardous materials.
 - c. An underground storage tank used to store hazardous materials shall not be replaced with a larger tank except under certain conditions.
 - d. No person shall use, maintain or install floor drains, dry wells or other infiltration devices or appurtenances which allow the release of waste waters to the ground, without specific approval.
 - e. A materials management plan shall be developed and implemented in accordance specified criteria and standards.
2. The development and implementation of a storm water management plan shall be required for regulated activities, as follows:
 - a. A storm water management plan shall assure that storm water run-off generated by the subject regulated activity is (i) managed in a manner so as to prevent pollution of ground water, and (ii) shall comply with all of the requirements for the General Permit of the Discharge of Storm Water associated with a Commercial Activity issued pursuant to section 22a-430b of the Connecticut General Statutes; and
 - b. upon approval by the Commissioner or the municipal aquifer protection agency, as appropriate, the storm water management plan shall be enforceable by the Commissioner or such agency, as appropriate.

Address Underground Storage Tanks

Underground fuel storage tanks, if not properly maintained and monitored, can also pose a threat to groundwater quality. Recognizing the potential for tanks to leak as a threat to property values, many lending institutions are requiring the removal of underground storage tanks. Despite this trend, new underground storage tanks continue to be installed in Somers.

Somers should adopt an underground storage tank ordinance that: prohibits the installation of new underground storage tanks; requires the registration, testing and/or monitoring of existing tanks; and requires the scheduled removal of older tanks based on their age, construction and useful life (ex.. single-wall steel tanks of undetermined age must be removed within one year or upon the sale of the home; single-wall steel tanks must be removed within 10 years of documented installation or upon the sale of the home; and double-wall fiberglass or plastic tanks with double wall piping and monitoring must be removed within 20 years of documented installation)

Address Stormwater Management

Dispersed or “non-point” sources of pollution such as road runoff, pesticides and fertilizers can be harmful when collected, concentrated and discharged into waterways. Under the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) new National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II guidelines, Somers, and commercial properties tying into its system, will be responsible for reducing the discharge of pollutants to the “maximum extent practical” through the implementation of a series of “minimum control measures” and “best management practices”.

Such measures and practices might include:

- clarifying and strengthening the zero increase in runoff regulations contained in the Zoning Regulations;
- improving stormwater treatment by natural or mechanical means such as vegetative wetland buffers that filter pollutants; or grease and sediment traps that capture oily residue from motor vehicles and sand applied to pavement in winter;
- limiting clearing and grading of sites to minimize impacts on natural drainage patterns; and
- providing water quality educational resources to land use commissions and the public.

Water Quality Protection Strategies

1. Adopt an Aquifer Protection Zone to allow uses according to their potential risk to water resource protection areas and designate the Zoning Commission as the agency responsible for administering the regulations.
2. Adopt a residential underground storage tank ordinance to prohibit the installation of new tanks, require the licensing, and monitoring of existing tanks and require the removal of older and undocumented tanks.
3. Require that the “first flush” of runoff be appropriately treated in terms of quality and rate of runoff.
4. Encourage site designs that minimize impervious surfaces, promote infiltration of stormwater, and reduce runoff.
5. Continue to provide vegetative buffers to wetland and watercourses to filter pollutants and protect them from direct receipt of runoff.
6. Limit the clearing and grading of sites so as to minimize the impact on natural drainage patterns.
7. Promote public education programs that address “non-point” pollution issues.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies designed to mitigate the stormwater impacts of paved surfaces such as roads and parking lots.

Underground Storage Tank Removal



Pesticides Can Add to Non-Point Pollution



Prime Farmland

Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage fiber, oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (i.e. undeveloped). This land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland or forestland.

Department of Environmental Protection

Additional Farmland of Statewide Importance

Nearly prime farmland that economically produces high yields of crops when treated and managed according to modern farming methods. These areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmlands under the right conditions.

Department of Environmental Protection

Purchase of Development Rights

Programs that purchase development rights assist farmers by:

- preserving the best agricultural lands as farmlands,
- providing an opportunity for farmers to purchase land at affordable prices,
- providing working capital to enable farm operations to become economically stable,
- helping farmers overcome estate planning problems, which often result in loss of farmland.

Preserve Agricultural Resources

Thanks to the rich agricultural soils found in the western two-thirds of town, Somers has remained an agricultural community for nearly 300 years. Today, almost 5,000 acres or 27% of Somers land area is being used for agricultural purposes including: growing food crops, tobacco and nursery stock as well as raising livestock such as cattle and horses.

For Somers, preserving farmland is more than simply protecting a natural resource. Somers' farms contribute to the local economy, with more farm employers than manufacturing employers and produce available through several local outlets. Somers' farms are also a major contributing factor to the Town's scenic character. By preserving agricultural land, Somers will help maintain economic diversity, community character and the overall quality of life in the community.

Encourage Preservation of Prime Areas for Agricultural Use

As the following map illustrates, there is not always a correlation between prime farmland and actual farming. Somers has no agricultural zone designed specifically to protect and encourage agricultural use over other uses. The areas identified as prime agricultural soils at risk are predominantly zoned for one-acre residential development but may still be actively farmed. The protected prime agricultural soils benefit from the purchase of development rights that limit prohibit their further development

Continue Success of the Purchase of Development Rights Program

The best method of preserving prime farmland is through a program that purchases development rights from farmers. The State of Connecticut operates a Farmland Preservation Program that accomplishes four things:

- it allows farms to remain in private ownership and farmed in perpetuity;
- it prevents farmland from ever being developed;
- farmers receive an influx of cash, eliminating the need to sell all or part of a farm for development; and
- it reduces the taxable value of the land, making farming more viable.

This program is voluntary and property owners are required to document existing farm use and prime agricultural soil types. Despite funding limitations at the state level that make this program highly competitive, Somers has the second most successful farmland preservation effort in the State with 1,654 acres of development rights purchased accounting for nine percent of the entire town.

Some towns have also used local funds to purchase farms or development rights to for the greater good of the community. Options available to towns include:

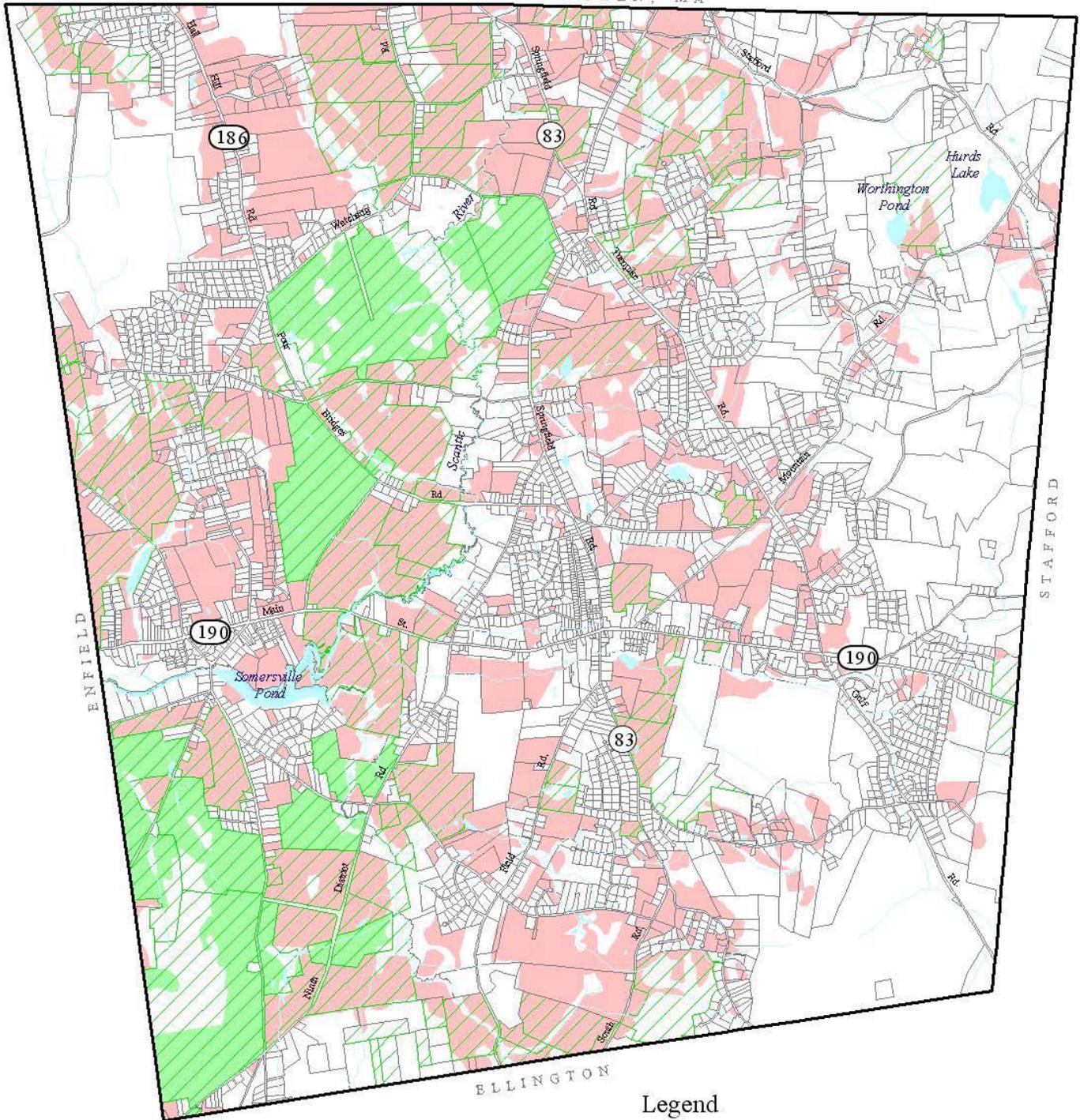
- purchasing development rights, allowing farms to remain in private ownership and farmed in perpetuity;
- purchasing farms outright and leasing them back to the owner or others to farm (such as a resident farm cooperative); and
- purchasing a farm outright and operating community gardens.

Agricultural Resource Plan

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



ENFIELD

STAFFORD

ELLINGTON

Legend

-  Presently Farmed
-  Prime Agricultural Soil at Risk
-  Prime Agricultural Soil Preserved
-  Water

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Lindbergh Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5264

Utilize Agricultural Land Trusts

Agricultural land trusts offer another alternative for preserving land and are dedicated to holding and leasing farmlands. The American Farmland Trust operates nationwide to preserve farms and address farmland issues while the Working Land Alliance has recently established the Connecticut Farmland Trust for the donation of agricultural land and preservation funds. Such organizations make ideal stewards to own and maintain the productive use of preserved farmland.

Continue to Offer Local Tax Incentives for Preserving Farmland

Section 12-107 of the Connecticut General Statutes, often referred to as Public Act (P.A.) 490, authorizes communities to assess farmland at a lower value when it is actively farmed. While not a true preservation program, P.A. 490 does help farmers by lowering their tax assessment, which helps maintain the viability of farms under what can be difficult economic conditions. Somers should continue to offer this program to assist farmers with maintenance of agricultural uses.

Adopt a “Right to Farm” Policy

With its successful farmland preservation program and status as home of the Four Town and Hartford County 4-H Fairs, Somers is clearly supportive of agricultural activities. However, as the Town continues to develop residentially, conflicts between farmers and residents will increase over such issues as odor, wandering livestock, trespass, etc. Somers should adopt a “right to farm” policy that supports agricultural activities by protecting farmers from nuisance claims that may arise from the normal operation of their farms in close proximity to residential development.

Farmland Protection Strategies

1. Encourage local farmers, and assist them if necessary, in submitting applications for the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program in order to preserve farmland and agricultural uses.
2. Continue the farm assessment program (P.A. 490) in order to assist farmers with maintenance of agricultural uses.
3. Consider establishing a municipal program for purchase of farm development rights.
4. Work with agricultural land trusts to preserve agricultural land in Somers.
5. Adopt a “right to farm” policy to protect agricultural uses.

Preserve Historic Resources

Somers and its residents, such as Captain Levi Pease and the Keeney Family, have made important contributions to state and national history. Thanks to the foresight of many residents who followed them, much of Somers' history has been preserved in its architecture, villages and museums.

A survey of residents revealed that 80% agree that Somers is doing a good job of protecting historic resources. Surprisingly, all of the preservation efforts to date have been voluntary, as there are no controls in place to protect these historic resources.

Encourage “Sensitive Stewardship”

Owners who are emotionally and financially committed to maintaining historic resources are the most effective means of preserving them. Sensitive stewardship should be encouraged through educational programs and other technical assistance, since without it, no regulatory or incentive program can prevent the loss of historic resources due to demolition or neglect.

Recognize Significant Historic Resources

Another way to encourage historic preservation is through recognition programs such as the National Register of Historic Places. While Somers has two National Register Historic Districts, no individual properties are recognized on either the State or National Registers of Historic Places.

According to the Somers Historical Society, Somers was home to the first theological seminary in the country. Although the building no longer exists, the site may be worthy of an historic marker. The Blacksmith Shoppe in Somersville is also a good candidate for designation as a National Register Historic Place.

Somers should also consider establishing a local register of historic places to acknowledge properties of local historic significance. Such a program can be administered by the Somers Historical Society and involve the voluntarily placement of small placards on historic structures to indicate the original owner and date of construction. While adding no protection to a property, it can instill pride in ownership and encourage preservation efforts.

Options for Establishing Preservation Programs

Somers can choose from a variety of preservation programs, ranging from honorary programs such as historic registers to regulatory programs such as “village districts” and local historic districts, in order to protect its historic resources. While some programs are simple and inexpensive to implement, others may require further investigation, significant public education efforts and careful consideration before adoption.

Somers should preserve historic resources to protect community character and enhance quality of life.

National Register Historic Districts

- Somers village
- Somersville

National Register Historic Districts

Somers already has two National Register Historic Districts, essentially covering the most historic portions of its two villages. These district designations are mostly honorary in nature but also offer tax advantages for the rehabilitation of historic commercial properties within them. Consideration should be given to expanding these districts to include any peripheral historic properties.

Local Historic Districts

In order to exercise regulatory control over the architectural integrity of historic resources, local historic districts should be established. Despite failed attempts to establish local historic districts in Somers in 1980 and Somersville in 1995, 69% of Somers residents surveyed agreed that Somers should create regulatory controls for historic preservation.

Local historic districts are established by a vote of the property owners within the proposed districts and regulated by a Historic District Commission whose membership is typically drawn from within the districts themselves. Once appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the Commission(s) can then adopt and administer regulations requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness for certain exterior improvements within their district.

While the scope of regulations may vary from district to district, the intent should be to ensure that repairs and improvements do not harm the architectural character of historic properties or the surrounding district. For example, Somers might warrant regulations that attempt to keep the architectural integrity of existing structures and the village intact while Somersville might need more flexible regulations that can gradually restore the historic character and architectural integrity of the village. Preservation minded property owners within local historic districts often appreciate the assurance that their investment in rehabilitating and maintaining their properties is protected by the continued historic and architectural integrity of neighboring properties.

A concerted effort will be needed to educate property owners about the benefits of membership in a local historic district as well as to dispel myths and misinformation about how historic districts are regulated (see sidebar).

Certified Local Government Designation

Once a local historic district is established, Somers is eligible for Certified Local Government Designation. As a Certified Local Government, a local historic district would be eligible to apply for State and Federal historic preservation grants to conduct rehabilitation, education and other historic preservation programs.

Historic District Myths

*Historic District Designation will lower the value of homes: **False.*** Studies have shown that both national and local historic district designations can stabilize or increase property values relative to similar properties outside of historic districts.

*Local Historic District Commissions can regulate changes to the interior of buildings: **False.*** Local Historic Districts in Connecticut can only regulate the exterior appearance of properties that are visible from the street. Interior changes or alterations and additions to the exterior of a building that are not visible from the street are not regulated.

*Local Historic District Commissions can control the color of your house: **False.*** Painting your house is considered routine maintenance and is not a regulated activity. A Historic District Commission, if requested, might offer advice to a property owner on historically accurate paint schemes.

*Local Historic District Commissions can prevent the demolition of a historic structure: **False.*** Historic District Designation cannot ultimately prevent the demolition of an historic structure. A separately enacted Demolition Delay Ordinance can delay the demolition of an historic structure for up to 90 days in order to explore alternatives to demolition such as purchasing the property or relocating the structure.

*Local Historic District Commissions can prohibit the installation of handicapped access ramps or fire escapes: **False.*** Commissions cannot prohibit the permitted installation of features required to protect public safety.

Village Districts

Another tool for protecting the aesthetic character of historic properties is the “village district.” Adopted by Zoning Commissions, a village district is a zoning district that allows for a high degree of architectural and site design control within established villages that would otherwise be beyond their jurisdiction. A village district ensures that as properties are redeveloped or infill development occurs, it will be in character with the surrounding village.

Unlike a local historic district, village districts may be adopted unilaterally by the Zoning Commission in accordance with their established zoning procedures. The establishment of village districts in both Somers and Somersville was studied but never implemented. The Zoning Commission should conduct a workshop to educate the public on the benefits of village districts and explain their distinction from local historic districts before attempting to adopt village districts.

Financial Incentives

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) can provide economic incentives such as tax abatements for the restoration of historic resources. By simply deferring the tax increase on improvements made to historic properties, a major disincentive for making those improvements is reduced. The Town benefits not only from the visual improvement of the property, but from the eventual increase in property taxes as the improved value of the property is phased in. Seventy-two percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers should create economic and regulatory incentives for historic preservation.

Regulatory Incentives

To encourage historic preservation, regulatory incentives such as adaptive re-use provisions can be adopted by the Zoning Commission to give property historic owners flexibility in re-tenanting their properties in return for making repairs that ensure the continued architectural and historic integrity of the property.

Historic Resources Inventory

Building upon the earlier work required to nominate Somers’ two National Register Historic Districts, Somers should complete a townwide historic resources survey. When completed, the survey can be used to expand the existing National Register Historic Districts and make nominations to the national, state or even a local historic register for individual properties outside of these districts.

Demolition Delay Ordinance

Another measure that can be taken by the BOS is to adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished. While not preventing the demolition of an historic building, the waiting period allows the opportunity to seek alternatives to demolition such as purchasing the property, relocating the structure(s), or at a minimum, salvaging architectural components.

Education and Tourism Programs

The Somers Historical Society should continue and expand upon their efforts to educate the public about Somers' history and the benefits of historic preservation, becoming a clearinghouse of information for residents interested in understanding and preserving the history of their homes. The Historical Society should encourage house tours and other historic tourism initiatives as an element of Somers overall economic development strategy.

Historic Preservation Strategies

1. Encourage "sensitive stewardship" or pride in ownership as the most effective means of preserving historic resources.
2. Continue to identify and recognize important historical resources through national and state recognition programs.
3. Establish a local register of historic places.
4. Investigate establishing local historic districts that require a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior renovations in the district.
5. Pursue Certified Local Government designation if one or more local historic districts are established.
6. Investigate establishing "village districts" (by the Zoning Commission) that allow architectural review of proposals within the district.
7. Provide economic incentives such as tax abatements, grants or loans for restoration of historic resources.
8. Adopt regulatory incentives (such as historic overlay and/or adaptive reuse provisions in zoning regulations).
9. Complete a townwide historic resources survey.
10. Adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished.
11. Continue to provide educational programs and technical assistance about historic preservation to historic property owners.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies to enhance the character of Somers' villages that may also support historic preservation efforts.

Somers Historical Society



Historic Recognition Plaque



*Scenic resources
contribute to
Somers' character
and quality of life.*

Preserve Scenic Resources

Somers natural and man-made scenic character plays a significant role in the overall character of the community. From its picturesque horse farms to its stony uplands, Somers' scenic character makes the town attractive to residents, tourists and outdoor enthusiasts alike. Like natural and historic resources, if not adequately protected, Somers' scenic resources can be degraded or even lost. Somers residents agree, with 72% of those surveyed agreeing that Somers could do more to protect scenic resources.

Protect Scenic Areas and Vistas

Scenic resources can be grouped into two main categories: vistas that offer distant scenic views and scenic areas that may offer scenic views from within as well as from afar.

Somers location at the northernmost extent of the Bolton Range offers residents in the western two-thirds of town a panoramic view of the foothills to the east. Locations within those foothills, such as Bald Mountain and Soapstone Mountain, offer bikers and hikers spectacular views of Somers and the Connecticut River Valley beyond.

Other scenic areas include portions of the villages of Somers and Somersville as well as farms throughout town that derive their scenic character from a combination of natural and historic elements.

An agency such as the Conservation Commission or Open Space and Trails Committee, working in cooperation with the Zoning Commission should conduct a thorough inventory of scenic resources to allow the Town boards and commissions to take steps to protect them.

The Zoning Commission should adopt new ridgeline protection overlay district with clearly defined limits, such as a critical elevation along the ridgeline, above which development can severely harm the scenic character of the Town.

Preserve Undeveloped Land As Long As Possible

While not protected from development, undeveloped land contributes to the overall character and quality of life in Somers. Such land should be preserved for as long as possible.

Public Act 490 can again be an effective tool in reducing the cost of owning undeveloped land. This program allows the Town to reduce property taxes on farmland, forest and open space in return for not developing the land for a ten-year period. If the land is developed during the ten-year time frame, a recapture provision allows the Town to recoup a prorated share of the taxes that would have otherwise been paid without the tax reduction.

Somers is also one of a select number of Connecticut towns that are authorized to regulate forestry practices. Once the Department of Environmental Protection

adopts model regulations, Somers will be able to use its Forest Practice Ordinance designed to mitigate the impacts of commercial logging through a strict regulatory process administered by the Conservation Commission.

Protect Scenic Roads

Somers has many roads throughout town that are scenic in character due to scenic and historic features located along them as well as the rural character of the roadways themselves (i.e. narrow, winding, tree lined, etc.). Sixty-five percent of residents surveyed agreed the Somers should do more to protect scenic roads.

While Somers has a Scenic Road Ordinance, only one road has been designated thus far. Such an ordinance offers a degree of protection by limiting road improvements that might alter a road's scenic character. Unfortunately, many of the elements that make a road scenic such as stone walls, significant canopy trees, rustic barns and scenic meadows often lie outside of the road right-of way, beyond the reach of state and local scenic road regulations, requiring a second level of protection.

As development threatens the character of these roads, consideration should be given to protecting scenic elements through conservation easements, open space acquisition or other means to limit the disturbance of stone walls, street trees, and other scenic features, while pushing development away from road. Consideration should be given to providing design flexibility in the Subdivision and Zoning Regulations to allow for thoughtful subdivision designs that do not penalize a developer for preserving historic or scenic resources. The Subdivision Regulations already require the design of subdivisions to maximize the preservation of scenic resources but lack objective standards.

Utility maintenance is also a threat to scenic roads. Utility companies and their contractors often disfigure street trees for the sake of electrical or telephone reliability. While an important duty, such maintenance does not always have to be so destructive to scenic character. The First Selectman (or his/her designee), acting as Tree Warden can intervene and should work cooperatively with the utility companies to limit pruning to the extent necessary to maintain service reliability.

Scenic Resource Protection Strategies

1. Inventory scenic resources and establish policies and regulations to protect them.
2. Reestablish a ridgeline protection overlay district.
3. As scenic roadsides are developed, preserve scenic elements through conservation easements or open space set-asides.
4. Consider expanding the P.A.. 490 open space program.
5. Work with utility companies to preserve scenic streetscapes.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies to improve the pattern of residential development that may also help to preserve scenic resources.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies designed to minimize the impacts of public streets that may help to protect the character of scenic roads and enable future scenic roads.

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GUIDING APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

4

Overview

Somers is recognized within the region as a desirable suburban community and there is little doubt based on population projections that it will continue to grow and change in the future. How this anticipated growth is managed will have a significant impact on future community character and quality of life in Somers.

Because the villages of Somers and Somersville are for the most part developed, future growth is most likely to occur in the outlying rural areas of the community. Unless this development is guided more appropriately, the current pattern of development will consume larger than necessary amounts of forest, farmland and wildlife habitat, irrevocably altering Somers' character and quality of life.

Major development issues facing Somers include:

- attracting appropriate commercial and industrial development;
- improving the design and appearance of commercial and industrial development;
- reusing the Somersville Manufacturing Company mill; and
- guiding more appropriate residential development.

Somers needs to manage the environmental and visual impacts of development before residential "sprawl" and inappropriate commercial development erode Somers' character and quality of life.

Somersville Manufacturing Mill Complex



Conventional Residential Development



Economic development is an important issue in Somers, not only in terms of providing a diversified tax base, jobs and shopping opportunities, but from a community character standpoint as well.

Encourage Appropriate Economic Development

During public meetings held throughout the creation of this Plan, business development remained a major concern for Somers residents but not entirely for the reasons typically associated with this type of development. While residents understandably ranked improved tax base, availability of goods and services, and jobs as the top three reasons for encouraging economic development, their concern over business development focused as much on the quality and type of commercial and industrial development in town.

Attract and Retain Appropriate Businesses

With its limited available commercial/industrial land, lack of direct access to an interstate highway and rural location, Somers is not positioned to become a major business destination. However, this does not mean that Somers is without economic development potential (as evidenced by the replacement of all of the jobs lost with the closing of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970). Somers needs to make the most of its economic development potential by focusing on its strengths to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses.

Meet Residents' Everyday Shopping Needs

Eighty percent of residents surveyed agreed that they would shop more in Somers if available goods and services met their everyday needs, indicating an untapped potential for commercial development that provides the basic necessities of daily living. Seventy-two percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers needs a grocery store, a business capable of meeting many of those daily needs.

The following table illustrates estimated retail spending by Somers residents based on statewide averages. While Somers may not be an appropriate location to capture the majority of retail spending in categories such as automobiles and furniture (establishments better suited to regional shopping areas such as Enfield), \$19 million in food sales is more than enough to support a local grocery store, according to the Food Marketing Institute. Somers can probably support additional restaurants, apparel stores, small general merchandise stores, and similar establishments that also cater to everyday needs.

2002 Retail Sales and Estimated Spending

	Statewide Per Capita Sales	Somers Estimated Spending
Apparel & Accessories	\$668	\$5,425,979
Hardware	\$808	\$6,564,146
Eating & Drinking	\$991	\$8,050,683
Home Furnishings & Appliances	\$1,066	\$8,659,137
General Merchandise	\$1,175	\$9,549,150
Automotive Products	\$2,527	\$20,532,343
Food Products	\$2,386	\$19,391,790
Misc. Shopping Goods	\$3,278	\$26,633,587
Total Retail Sales	\$12,898	\$104,806,816

Source: Connecticut Department of Revenue Services, Census Bureau, Planimetrics

Residents responding to a random telephone survey were asked about the mix of businesses in Somers. The results, tabulated below, indicate that (with the exception of light manufacturing facilities) the majority of residents feel that the amount and mix of businesses in Somers is about right. However, 31% to 49% of residents still expressed a need for more business, with the exception of automotive sales and repairs.

Business	Too Many	About Right	Too Few
Light manufacturing facilities	3%	43%	49%
Restaurants	4%	55%	41%
Small specialty shops	4%	53%	41%
Offices	2%	61%	31%
Service businesses	2%	61%	31%
Automotive sales/repairs	23%	67%	8%

Based on these findings, Somers should encourage a grocery store and other small businesses that cater to residents' daily needs. New light-manufacturing facilities, restaurants and specialty shops are also appropriate based on community input, Somers' ability to accommodate them, and their potential impact on community character.

Expand the Local Economy from Within

Given Somers' attributes as a business location, attempting to attract major employers to town is not a good use of limited economic development resources. With much of the job growth in the U.S. economy occurring in small startup firms, Somers best strategy is to grow from within.

In today's wired global economy, multi-million dollar businesses are being conducted out of residential dwellings. As businesses add employees and outgrow the home environment, many owners will look to move locally rather than uproot their families. By protecting its community character and promoting home-based businesses, Somers can put its positive residential attributes to work by becoming an attractive place to live and start a business.

To help businesses remain competitive and grow, Somers newly appointed Economic Development Commission can play a proactive role by working with state and regional economic development agencies to act as a clearinghouse of information on available loans, training, and other programs available to small businesses; and to create a business visitation program to stay informed of the concerns and needs of the business community

Expand the Local Tourist Economy

Route 190 from Hazardville to Stafford Springs has evolved into one of several scenic routes throughout the State that are frequented by tourists. As a result, Somers has a burgeoning tourist economy with several antique stores, gift shops, and other businesses that take advantage of Somers location and historic character. Events such as the Four Town Fair, the Hartford County 4-H Fair and mountain bike tours of the Shenipsit Trail also periodically attract visitors to Somers.

While the potential for this market is not without limits, by creating a critical mass of tourist based businesses, Somers can become more of a tourist destination and less dependent on drive through traffic.

Historic mills throughout New England have been put to use as antique shops, Christmas shops, gift shops and even furniture outlets. The Somersville Manufacturing Company could easily adapt a portion of its floor area to antique stores, boutiques and restaurants, becoming a centerpiece of the local tourist economy.

Historical and educational tourism is a major sector of the State's economy. The Somers Historical Society can play a role in attracting visitors, not only through its museum, but by sponsoring historic house tours and other events as well.

Create a System of "Wayfinding" Signs

Somers should investigate creating a system of "wayfinding" signs to direct residents and visitors to business activities as well as public and other facilities. Wayfinding signs can be used to direct motorists and pedestrians to community facilities such as Town Hall or the school / library campus, clusters of business activities such as shopping or dining (without specifically naming businesses), and even tourist destinations such as the fairgrounds or Soapstone Mountain.

Consider Non-Traditional Forms of Economic Development

Promote Revenue Positive Housing

When residents think of economic development, they tend to think of offices, retail stores, and light manufacturing uses, but there are other types of economic development that are not so obvious. Certain housing developments, such as assisted living facilities, age-restricted housing and even multi-family developments with limited bedrooms per unit, can be considered economic development because they generate more tax revenue than they require in services (based on few or no children and the cost of education representing more than two-thirds of the municipal budget).

In addition to the direct tax benefits that such development provides, when located near the villages, these uses can add vitality to the village centers, and support local businesses.

Seek Restoration of PILOT Funding Levels

Somers is home to several State correctional facilities and a State forest that are exempt from local property taxes. To compensate the Town for the loss of tax revenue, the State reimburses Somers through Payments In Lieu Of Taxes or PILOT payments. By statute, PILOT payments for correctional facilities should equal 100% of the taxes due on the assessed value of the property (State forest is lower) or \$2,266,933. In recent years, the State has reduced PILOT payments statewide with Somers receiving almost \$450,000 less than required in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-2004 alone. Pilot payments for FY 2004-2005 are expected to go almost \$100,000 lower, despite an increase in the Town mil rate. State pay-

ments and grants have dropped from 40% of total revenue to only 35%, placing considerable strain on the municipal budget.

While Somers is one of the most profoundly affected communities, it is not alone with PILOT payments under-funded by over \$16 million statewide. Somers, together with other affected communities, should collectively petition the State to restore PILOT payments to their statutorily required levels.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 5 contains additional alternative housing strategies that result in more tax revenue and less service demands than conventional single-family development, making them a form of economic development.

Strategies to Encourage Appropriate Economic Development

1. Seek to attract and encourage businesses that meet residents everyday needs.
2. Promote home-based businesses.
3. Expand the role of the Economic Development Commission to act as ambassadors to the business community.
4. Institute a Business Visitation Program with the Economic Development Commission to keep informed of businesses concerns and needs.
5. Encourage tourist-based businesses.
6. Investigate creating a system of “wayfinding” signs.
7. Promote revenue-positive, alternative housing such as age-restricted housing.
8. Pursue restoration of statutory PILOT payment funding levels.

A Historic Inn



An Attractive Local Business



Improve the Appearance of Business Development

When residents were asked to identify issues that were most important for addressing in this Plan, business development ranked as the number two issue. In discussing the issue further, many residents indicated that they were not as concerned over the benefits of economic development such as tax revenue and jobs, as they were over the appearance of commercial and industrial development in town. The telephone survey confirmed this finding with 72% of respondents agreeing that the Town could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial and industrial development

Adopt Village Districts

One area where the Zoning Commission can have a profound impact on the appearance of commercial development is in the villages of Somers and Somersville. Both villages have seen historic structures demolished or moved, only to be replaced by development that is out of character with the historic nature of the villages. The village of Somers has recently been witness to a controversial application where residents were concerned over the relocation of an historic building to accommodate new franchise architecture.

By adopting village districts in the villages of Somers and Somersville, the Zoning Commission can strictly regulate the site layout and architectural design of new development (a power normally limited to local historic district commissions). After defining the character of each village, the Zoning Commission can create standards to ensure that new development reflects the most desirable attributes of each village. In doing so, Somers can welcome appropriate new business to either village (regardless of ownership) and be assured that the business will not detract from the character of the village or neighboring properties.

Implement Design Review

In recent years, much of the commercial development occurring around the country can be characterized as strip development, catering to motorists and their vehicles while industrial development often consists of utilitarian metal buildings, juxtaposed against residential areas or located at gateways into the community. This type of development can undermine the community character that residents value so highly.

For those commercial and industrial locations outside of the villages, such as the industrial areas along Field and Egypt Roads, village districts are not an option for controlling the appearance of development. Although lacking the power granted under a village district, a Design Review Committee can still help to improve the appearance of these outlying commercial areas.

Rather than adopt rigid zoning standards that must be adhered to, a Design Review Committee creates architectural and site design guidelines for businesses to follow in developing their properties. The Design Review Committee reviews applications for conformance with their voluntary guidelines and makes non-binding recommendations to the Zoning Commission based on their findings.

Many businesses appreciate the clear design direction provided by such guidelines, provided that compliance is not unreasonably costly.

While not bound by the design review process, existing businesses may be inspired to voluntarily make architectural and landscaping improvements to their properties, possibly triggering a commercial gentrification process throughout Somers.

Provide Tax Incentives for Improving Businesses Properties

Once design guidelines are implemented, a sharp contrast between new and older commercial and industrial properties will become apparent. To facilitate the improvement of existing older properties, the Town can adopt an abatement program under Section 12-65 of the Connecticut General Statutes to abate the increase in assessment due to major improvements to buildings over a seven year period. Criteria would have to be established to ensure the program's effectiveness such as: a minimum age of building, a minimum cost threshold, and design criteria such as adopted architectural design guidelines described above.

Improve Commercial and Industrial Development Standards

Beyond the oftentimes subjective nature of architectural design, there are more objective measures that the Zoning Commission can use to improve the quality and appearance of commercial and industrial development. The Zoning Commission should comprehensively review the Zoning Regulations to identify the standards that have allowed the type of development that residents are concerned with, and make modifications where necessary to ensure that future development is more compatible with the character of the community. Buffers, landscaping, lighting, parking, signage and yards are all factors that can easily be modified to help mitigate the negative impacts of development. Specific recommendations for improving some of these standards can be found throughout this plan.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also help to maintain the character of historic commercial areas.

Chapter 5 contains strategies designed to mitigate the impacts of parking lots that may also help to improve the appearance of business development.

Strategies to Improve the Appearance of Business Development

1. Adopt separate "village districts" in the villages of Somers and Somersville to ensure that future development is compatible with the character of each village.
2. Create a Design Review Committee to adopt and administer development guidelines to help improve the appearance of commercial/industrial development outside of the villages.
3. Create a tax abatement/incentive program to encourage exterior improvements to commercial/industrial buildings.
4. Comprehensively review and modify the Zoning Regulations where necessary to ensure that future development is more compatible with the character of the community.

Potential Uses for Somersville Mill	Agree
Offices	83%
Retail Stores	79%
Services	78%
Restaurants	76%
Housing	74%
Light Manufacturing	73%
Entertainment	61%
Lodging	59%

Adaptively Reuse the Somersville Mill

The Somersville Manufacturing Company complex represents a significant piece of Somers overall economic development strategy. The location and character of the mill make it ideal for a number of alternative uses. The majority of residents surveyed agreed that the mill is suitable for a variety of uses ranging from 59% in favor of lodging up to 83% in favor of offices (see sidebar). With the exception of lodging uses, the Zoning Regulations permit all of the suggested uses.

The mill complex is particularly well suited to supporting two of the main economic development strategies: building upon the local tourist economy and growing the local economy from within. The location and character of the building makes it attractive as a tourist destination for antiques, gifts, art galleries and possibly dining. With minimal improvements, a portion of the complex could be used as an incubator for small businesses that have outgrown the home office or garage environment.

Because of its historic nature as part of a walking mill village, flexibility will be required to adaptively reuse the mill. Flexible parking, area, bulk and other standards will be needed to allow the owners to retrofit a property that is non-conforming in so many ways by today's zoning standards. A new design development district could:

- allow the site to be comprehensively master planned for a variety of uses;
- establish reasonable standards that recognize the non-conforming nature of the property and eliminate the need for variances; and
- protect the architectural and historic character of the property in return for design flexibility.

The Water Pollution Control Authority's (WPCA) treatment plant is sized for the industrial use of the mill but will need to be expanded if it is to accommodate more water intensive uses such as housing, retail and restaurants. The WPCA is currently investigating expansion of their plant and according to the survey results, residents support their efforts.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also help efforts to redevelop the Somersville Manufacturing Co.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies to expand the sewer system that will also support efforts to redevelop the Somersville Manufacturing Co.

Somersville Mill Redevelopment Strategies

1. Explore the possibility of allowing hospitality uses such as lodging or a conference center and amend the Zoning Regulations if uses are appropriate.
2. Consider a design development district for the Somersville Manufacturing Company site.
3. Expand the WPCA treatment plant to at least accommodate the redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Company site.

Reinforce the Villages

Somers' villages have been the focus of community life for almost 300 years. Churches, civic functions, shops, and until recently, schools and factories were all located in the villages. Post World War II suburban expansion has shifted the focus away from the villages, with housing, industry and schools all becoming dispersed and automobile dependent.

Limit Commercial Sprawl

By allowing traditional commercial uses such as retail, restaurants and personal services in the Industrial (I) Zone, Somers is inviting automobile oriented commercial sprawl to spread along Egypt Road and Field Road, further eroding the importance of its two villages. The Zoning Commission should restrict these uses to the Business (B) Zone located predominantly in or near the villages. In doing so, commercial activity will become focused in the villages, adding to their vitality and helping to restore their importance in daily life.

Encourage Housing In and Near Villages

Housing is a critical element of a successful and vibrant village center. Residents living in or near villages are less dependent on automobiles, patronize village businesses and contribute to the vitality and sense of place that makes villages attractive.

Somers currently allows age-restricted housing at a density of four units to the acre. Congregate and assisted living facilities, recommended in Chapter 5-Addressing Community Needs, require higher densities as well. These alternative types of housing should be focused in or near the villages not only because of their symbiotic relationship with businesses and other village functions but because of the availability of public water and sewer needed to serve them. While this obstacle can be overcome by engineering community wells and septic systems, these solutions should not be used to allow these alternative housing options to locate in remote locations where older residents will be dependent on automobiles or paratransit options such as dial-a-ride to perform daily functions.

Mixed-use development is another way of adding to the vitality of a village. By allowing housing in combination with commercial businesses, business owners can live and work on the same premises or create rental opportunities within walking distance of village services. Somers residents were divided on this issue with 49% agreeing that Somers should encourage mixed-use development within the villages, such as apartments and offices over first floor retail stores.

Create Walkable Villages

Enhancing pedestrian access throughout the villages of Somers and Somersville will add to community character and quality of life by reducing dependence on motor vehicles (traffic and parking) as well as promoting a healthier, more convenient environment for residents and visitors. Seventy percent of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should do more to create walkable villages.

Sidewalk Standards

Sidewalks in the villages should be provided on both sides of major streets and at least one side of all other streets. Five foot widths allow pedestrians to walk side by side and comfortably pass. Sidewalks should be either integrated into curbs or separated by several feet to accommodate an area large enough for grass to thrive.

Coordinated streetscape elements such as lighting, benches, trash receptacles and tree grates, can create an attractive, comfortable pedestrian environment and add significantly to community character and sense of place.

Burial of overhead utilities in these areas can also greatly enhance the streetscape by eliminating overhead wires and allowing the unimpeded growth of street trees.

In order to create truly walkable villages, consider: sidewalks that are appropriately sized for their use, safe pedestrian street crossings, streetscape amenities such as shade trees, seating areas, and pedestrian scaled lighting, and even pedestrian oriented business signage such as on windows and awnings. Many of these improvements can be installed as improvements are made to Routes 190 and 83 or required as properties within the villages are redeveloped.

While the villages of Somers and Somersville both have sidewalks, they are narrow in places and do not serve the full extent of either village. Both villages could benefit from wider, more extensive sidewalk networks and other pedestrian safety enhancements to make them truly walkable villages.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also reinforce the character of the villages.

Chapter 5 contains alternative housing and pedestrian enhancement strategies that may also help reinforce the character of the villages.

Village Reinforcement Strategies

1. Prohibit retail, restaurant and personal service uses in the I-Zone to focus commercial activity in the villages.
2. Encourage age-restricted and other alternative housing in and near the villages.
3. Encourage appropriate mixed-use development in the Business District.
4. Create walkable villages through sidewalk, safety and streetscape improvements.

Somersville



Somers



Manage Residential Growth

Around the country, people are realizing that traditional, inflexible large-lot zoning regulations have resulted in the systematic consumption of rural land into characterless subdivisions that has come to be known as “residential sprawl.”

While Chapter 3 – Protecting Important Resources contains many strategies to reduce the amount of raw land being consumed by residential development, increase the quality and quantity of preserved open space, and relate development potential to the ability of the land to support it; there are additional tools available that can be used to improve the pattern of future residential growth.

Adopt a Soil-Based Residential Density Regulation

Soil-based zoning regulations can not only be used to manage the amount of future residential growth but the pattern of development as well. Soil-based zoning (see Page 31) replaces minimum lot size and frontage requirements with soil-dependant density factors that limit the total number of houses in a development, making development patterns more flexible and eliminating uncertainty in the development potential of land (see sidebar).

Soil-based zoning would not apply to residential areas already served by public sewers since it is based on the ability of soils to support on-site septic systems. Soil-based zoning also would not render developed “A” and “A-1” residentially zoned properties non-conforming because it only applies to the development of vacant land.

Residents support this concept with 72% of those surveyed agreeing that residential subdivisions that preserve more public open space but keep the same number of houses are a good idea. Similarly, 53% of survey respondents agreed that residential subdivisions that reduce lot sizes to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, but keep the same number of houses, are a good idea.

Encourage Open Space Development Patterns

When soil-based regulations are used to specify the total number of housing units in a development, more attention can be given to overall development patterns. The problem with conventional zoning is that developers who try to fit as many housing units as possible on a property are forced by inflexible standards to consume all available land in an effort to maximize profits. The results are often open spaces that appear to be more of an afterthought and development patterns that do little for community character.

Under soil-based zoning, once the number of housing units is determined, there is no incentive to utilize the entire parcel. A developer is free to design the development in a more environmentally sensitive manner and maximize profits by reducing necessary public improvements.

To discourage the use of conventional development patterns in sensitive areas such as aquifers and watersheds, conventional subdivisions that maximize lot

With 98% of the Town zoned for residential development, residential growth has the greatest potential to affect community character and quality of life for Somers residents.

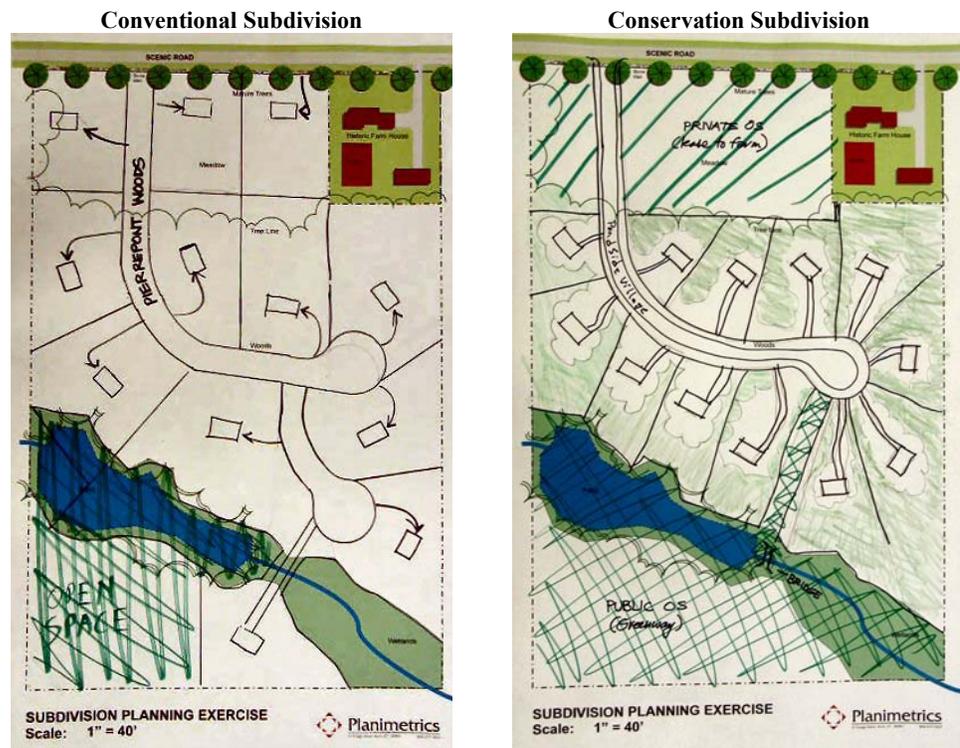
Soil-Based vs. Conventional Zoning

The benefits of soil-based zoning over conventional lot-based zoning include:

- lot sizes can be reduced without increasing the number of housing units,
- the amount of infrastructure to be constructed and maintained can be reduced, thus reducing stormwater to be collected and treated;
- environmentally sensitive areas can be avoided and the impacts on larger sensitive areas such as aquifers and watersheds can be reduced;
- the amount of raw land consumed can be reduced as much as soil conditions will allow; and
- residents as well as wildlife are able to enjoy the benefits of the larger open spaces surrounding their homes.

sizes and minimize the open space set-aside could only be allowed by Special Use Permit while allowing lower impact conservation subdivisions by right.

The following figures were prepared by the Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee as part of an exercise to illustrate the benefits of conservation subdivisions. The conventional subdivision on the left destroyed a meadow and scenic road frontage; required an additional cul-de-sac and stream crossing; and set aside minimal open space in order to achieve 12 lots and maximize profits. In contrast, the conservation subdivision preserved most of the meadow and scenic road frontage; required less new road and no wetland crossing; and preserved more open space - all while achieving the same number of lots. The Steering Committee unanimously agreed that despite their smaller size, the conservation subdivision lots were superior because they all fronted on the cul-de-sac and more lots fronted on the pond, meadow and other open space.



Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to preserve more open space, protect natural resources and preserve scenic resources that may also help to improve the pattern of residential development.

Chapter 5 contains strategies designed to minimize the impacts of new public streets that may also improve the pattern of residential development.

Residential Growth Management Strategies

1. Adopt a residential soil-based density regulation.
2. Require Special Use Permits for conventional subdivisions that maximize lot size (based on applicable density) while allowing conservation subdivisions by right.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

6

Overview

The recommendations of each of the preceding chapters can be combined to present an overall Future Land Use Plan for Somers. The Future Land Use Plan is a reflection of the stated goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Plan.

In essence, the Future Land Use Plan is a statement of what the Somers of tomorrow should look like.

The Future Land Use Plan is a depiction of the Plan's recommendations for the future conservation and development of Somers...

CONSERVATION	Natural Resources	Open Space	Historic Resources
			
	Community Structure	Residential Development	Economic Development
DEVELOPMENT			
	Community Facilities	Transportation	Utility Infrastructure
INFRASTRUCTURE			

Descriptions of Future Land Use Categories

Open Space

Dedicated Open Space	Areas currently preserved for open space purposes.
Desirable Open Space	Areas that would make a significant contribution to Somers' open space network and greenbelt system.
Proposed Trail Network	Proposed overall trail system intended to interconnect open spaces villages and nodes in a greenbelt system.
Natural Resources	Areas with significant environmental constraints that represent the highest priorities for conservation.

Business Areas

Commercial / Retail	Areas that have, and are intended to be, developed with retail, personal service, and office facilities.
Industrial	Areas that have, and are intended to be, developed with office and industrial development and similar facilities.
Village	The area where a village pattern of development is intended to be concentrated.

Residential Areas

Very Low Density	Areas where adverse environmental conditions restrict development to densities less than one dwelling unit per acre.
Low Density	Areas where environmental conditions are suitable for residential densities of approximately one dwelling unit per acre.
Multi-Family	Areas where apartments or other multiple dwelling units exist.
Village	Areas where residential development is expected to occur at a density greater than one unit per acre in a village environment supported by public water and sewer.

Other Areas

Community Facility / Institution	Areas that have developed or are intended to develop with community facilities or institutional uses.
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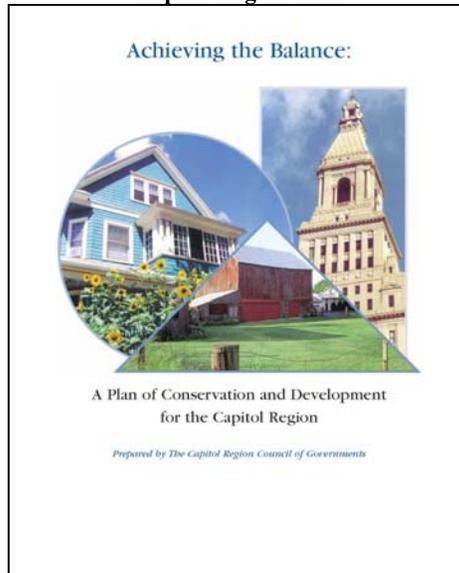
Future Land Use Plan

Plan Consistency

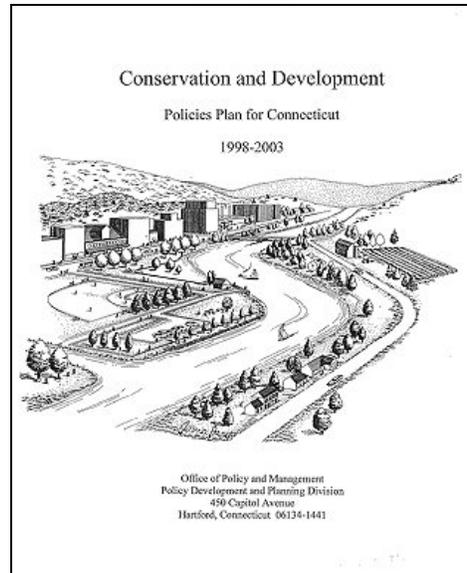
This Plan was compared with the 1998-2003 State Plan of Conservation and Development for consistency with that Plan and found to be consistent with the general policies as well as the Locational Guide Map specific to Somers. The Future Land Use Map was also compared to the Draft 2004-2009 State Plan of Conservation and Development Locational Guide Map and found to be consistent as well.

In addition, this Plan was compared with the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development for the Capitol Region for consistency with that Plan and again found to be consistent with both the policies and policy maps contained in that Plan.

Capitol Region Plan



State Plan



IMPLEMENTATION

7

Overview

Implementation of the strategies and recommendations of the Plan of Conservation and Development is the main purpose of the planning process.

Implementation of a Plan typically occurs in two main phases:

- many of the major recommendations can and should be carried out in a relatively short period of time since they are critical to the implementation of the Plan;
- other recommendations will be implemented over time because they may require additional study, coordination with or implementation by others, or involve the commitment of financial resources.

The Planning Commission can implement many of the recommendations of the Plan of Conservation and Development through regulation amendments, application reviews, and other means and has the primary responsibility of overseeing the implementation of all of the Plan's recommendations.

Other recommendations may require cooperation with and action by other local boards and commissions such as the Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen and similar agencies.

However, if the Plan is to be realized, it must serve as a guide to all residents, businesses, builders, developers, applicant, owners, agencies, and individuals interested in the orderly conservation and development of Somers.

Implementation Committee

Oversight of implementation can be coordinated by the Planning Commission or another committee.

An “ad hoc” committee made up of residents and representatives of local boards identified in the implementation schedules would be a significant step towards including a variety of Town agencies in implementing the Plan and monitoring progress. This Committee could provide status reports to the Planning Commission, Board of Selectmen, and others.

Such a committee could meet quarterly to review implementation and coordinate local activities.

Annual Update Process

An appropriate way to regularly update the Plan may be to update major sections of the Plan every year by:

- holding a public informational meeting to summarize the Plan recommendations and receive feedback from the community,
- holding a workshop session for local boards and other interested persons to discuss Plan strategies and suggest alternative language,
- revising Plan sections, as appropriate, and
- re-adopting the Plan (even if there are no text or map changes).

Tools

Using the Plan of Conservation and Development

Using the Plan of Conservation and Development as a basis for land use decisions by the Planning Commission and Zoning Commission will help accomplish the goals and objectives of the Plan. All land use proposals should be measured and evaluated in terms of the Plan and its various elements.

Plan Implementation Committee / Annual Work Program

A Plan Implementation Committee (PIC) is an effective way to help implement the Plan. A PIC could use the implementation schedules that follow to develop an annual implementation program of issues to be addressed by boards and commissions.

A PIC might include representatives of various boards and commissions and would help to prioritize, coordinate, and refine the implementation of the Plan. The Committee could meet two to four times a year to establish priorities and guide implementation of the Plan’s recommendations. In addition, the Committee could assess the status of specific recommendations, establish new priorities, and suggest new implementation techniques.

As the ultimate responsible agency, the Planning Commission can also assume the responsibility for coordinating implementation of the Plan’s recommendations.

Annual Update Program

A Plan that updated only once every ten years can be silent on emerging issues, trends and current policy objectives, which could lead to conflicts in land-use decisions or missed opportunities. When a Plan is considered strictly a reference document rather than a working document, its effectiveness in guiding the community can diminish over time. Somers should consider keeping this Plan current and not waiting to update it every ten years. A preliminary schedule might be as follows:

Conservation Themes	Development Themes	Community Needs
2005	2006	2007
2008	2009	2010

Each review and update would extend the Plan’s ten-year life until the community felt that a comprehensive update was required. A work program for annual updates of the Plan is discussed in the sidebar. A Plan Implementation Committee could also assist in this effort.

Updating Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

Many of the recommendations in the Plan of Conservation and Development can be implemented by the Planning Commission and Zoning Commission through regulation amendments, application reviews, and other means. The Zoning and the Subdivision Regulations provide specific criteria for land development at the time of applications. As a result, these regulations are important tools to implement the recommendations of the Plan. However, this is only true if the regulations reflect the recommendations of the Plan.

In the near future, Planning Commission should undertake a comprehensive review of the subdivision regulations and the Zoning Commission should similarly review the zoning regulations and zoning map, making whatever revisions are necessary to:

- make the regulations more user-friendly,
- implement Plan recommendations, and
- promote consistency between the Plan and the regulations.

Capital Improvement Program

The Capital Improvement Program or CIP is a tool for planning major capital expenditures of a municipality so that local needs can be identified and prioritized within local fiscal constraints that may exist.

The Plan contains several proposals (such as relocating the Resident State Trooper's Office to the old firehouse) whose implementation may require the expenditure of Town funds. The Plan recommends that these and other items be included in the Town's CIP and that funding for them be included as part of the Capital Budget.

Referral of Municipal Improvements

Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that municipal improvements (defined in the statute) be referred to the Planning Commission for a report before any local action is taken. A proposal disapproved by the Commission can only be implemented after a two-thirds vote by Town Meeting. All local boards and agencies should be notified of Section 8-24 and its mandatory nature so that proposals can be considered and prepared in compliance with its requirements.

Inter-Municipal and Regional Cooperation

Somers can continue to work with other towns in the region, the Capitol Region Council of Governments, the State of Connecticut, and other agencies to explore opportunities where common interests coincide.

Regulation Updates

The importance of updating local regulations as soon as possible cannot be over-emphasized.

Compared to a number of other communities, the regulations in Somers lack a lot of the basic land use tools that will serve to promote the best possible conservation and development of the community.

Sample Legend

BOS	Board of Selectmen
CC	Conservation Commission
DEP	Department of Environmental
PC	Planning Commission
Staff	Town Staff
ZC	Zoning Commission

Priorities

	Task
1	High Priority
2	Moderate Priority
3	Lower Priority

	Policy
---	--------

A	High Priority
B	Moderate Priority
C	Lower Priority

Implementation Schedule

Implementation of the Plan is an ongoing process. While some recommendations can be carried out in a relatively short period of time, others may only be realized by the end of the planning period or beyond. Since some recommendations may involve additional study or a commitment of fiscal resources, their implementation may take place over several years or occur in stages.

Detailed implementation tables will be provided following review and refinement of the Draft Plan by the Steering Committee.

As illustrated below, implementation tables will assign primary responsibilities and preliminary schedules to the Plan’s recommendations. In many instances, the responsibilities are shared by a number of entities (see sidebar).

Preserve More Meaningful Open Space

	What	Who	Priority	Done
	1. Require a mandatory open space "set-aside" of 15% as part of every residential development application.	PC	1	<input type="checkbox"/>

In addition, the tables identify both policies and tasks. Policies are long-term guidelines that do not readily lend themselves to a specific schedule or measurement. Tasks on the other hand, are specific actions that can typically be scheduled, completed and evaluated.

Preliminary priorities are identified in the tables and are ranked according to a three step scale. High priorities are items that are either critical to the success of a planning strategy or are relatively easy to implement and can be handled without delay. Moderate priorities are policies and tasks that are not as time sensitive as high priorities and may be more difficult to implement due to funding constraints or complexity. Moderate priorities should be addressed by the middle of the ten year planning period. Lower priorities are typically longer range items that might require a “wait and see” approach or are preceded by higher funding priorities. Lower priorities may be addressed towards the end of the planning period and beyond.

CONCLUSION

8

Overview

The Plan of Conservation and Development has been prepared to meet the challenges that will confront the Town of Somers over the next ten years and beyond.

The first step in the planning process was to understand Somers and the desires of its residents. A great deal of information was collected, presented, reviewed, and discussed as part of the process of developing this Plan.

The second step was to determine what direction the residents of Somers want to take. Many meetings were held to assess local issues and discuss alternative strategies. Through this work, general goals were developed and a vision for the future of Somers was confirmed.

The third step was to develop actions and policies to guide Somers' residents and agencies towards achieving their vision. These specific strategies are detailed throughout the Plan and summarized in the implementation tables found in Chapter 7 – Implementation.

Despite all of the thought and effort that went into preparing this Plan, the most important step of the planning process is implementation. While the task of implementation falls on all Somers residents, the responsibility for implementing the Plan lies with the Planning Commission and other Town agencies.

The Plan is intended as a guide to be followed in order to enhance the quality of life and the community character of Somers. It is intended to be flexible in terms how specific goals and objectives are reached, provided that the long-term goals of the community are achieved.

During the next few years, many of the higher priority tasks will be completed and hopefully goals will be achieved. Circumstances will inevitably arise that may suggest that it is time to reconsider the Plan or some of its elements. Such situations should be welcomed since it will mean that the Plan is being actively used and considered by residents. By preparing this Plan of Conservation and Development, Somers has taken the first step towards creating a better future for its residents.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Residents of Somers

Town Staff

David Pinney	First Selectman (from 1/04)
Richard Jackson, III	First Selectman (until 12/03)
Patrice Carson, AICP	Town Planner
James Taylor	Zoning Enforcement Officer
Steven Jacobs	Town Sanitarian
Sgt. Jose Claudio	Resident State Trooper
Bill Meier, Jr.	Fire Chief
Walter Somers	Fire Marshal
Everett Morrill	Director of Public Works
Kenneth Anderson	Highway Superintendent
Mike Provencher	Park Maintenance Supervisor
Francine Alouisa	Library Director
Elaine Freidman	Social Services Coordinator (until 12/03)
Jenifer Charette	Recreation Coordinator
Dave Eddy	Transfer Station Coordinator
Janice Steinmetz	Assessor (until 12/03)
Thomas Jefferson	Superintendent of Schools
Lou Bachetti	Economic Development Commission, Chair
Steve Krasinski	Special Projects Committee, Chair

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee

Clifford Bordeaux	Planning Commission, Vice-Chair
Michael Collins	Planning Commission
Kathy Devlin	Board of Selectmen
Greg Genlot	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Michelle Hayward	Planning Commission
Terri Henderson	Board of Education, Chair
Joseph Iadarola	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Peter Klein	Zoning Commission, Chair
Georgeanne Kuzman	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Tom McCaleb	Planning Commission (until 6/03)
Michael Parker	Board of Finance
Brad Pellissier	Planning Commission
Carole Pyne	Somers Historical Society
Leonard Viera	Planning Commission (until 12/03)
Karl Walton	Planning Commission, Chair

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



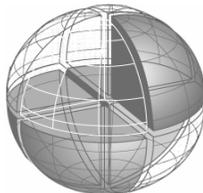
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Planimetrics

31 Ensign Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

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CONTEXT

1

Overview

This chapter of the Plan of Conservation and Development will outline the conditions and trends affecting the community during the preparation of the Plan.

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.”

Abraham Lincoln

Demographics



Housing



Economy



Land Use



Buildout Potential



Fiscal Considerations

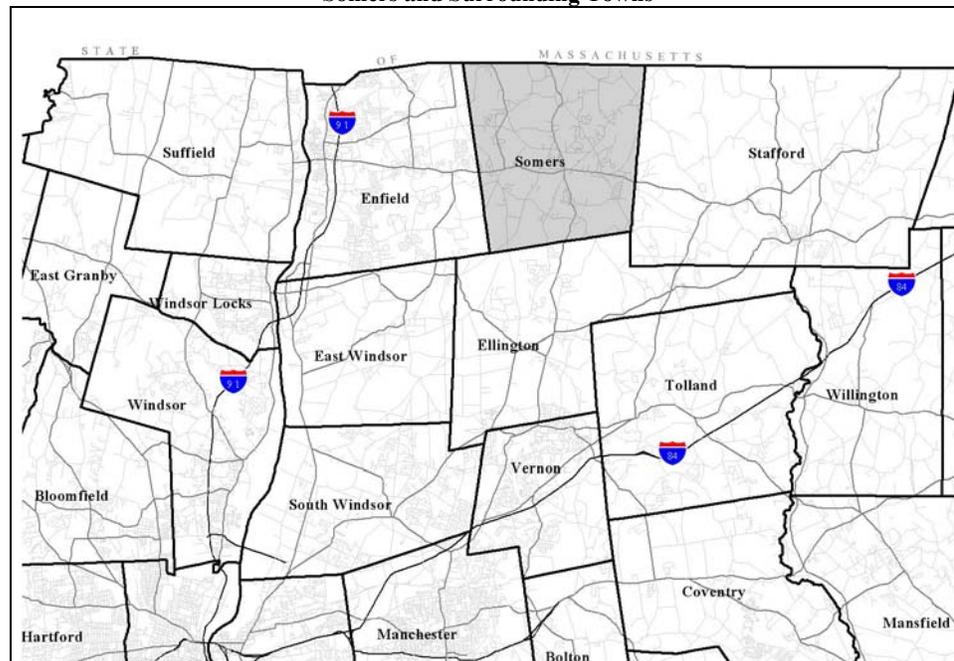


Introduction to Somers

Somers is a predominantly residential and agricultural community located in north-central Connecticut on the Massachusetts border between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA. Despite its inclusion and active participation in Connecticut's Capitol Region, Somers influences and is influenced by Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley as well.

The town can be divided into two distinct geologic areas. The western two-thirds are characterized by generally flat, rich agricultural land that is also highly suitable for development. The eastern third is generally steep and rocky, making it less suitable for intensive agriculture or development, but it remains desirable for residential development due to scenic views.

Somers and Surrounding Towns



Historical Context

Colonial Period (1706-1780)

Like many Connecticut towns, Somers is the product of a series of political and religious divisions, with its origins laying in Springfield, MA. The area encompassing present day Enfield and Somers was separated from Springfield and incorporated as the Town of Enfield in 1679.

Somers was first settled in 1706 as an agricultural community. In 1724, residents formed the Society of East Enfield for the purposes of hosting their own religious services, incorporating ten years later as the Town of Somers. In 1749, Somers was separated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and annexed by the Colony of Connecticut.

Agricultural and Early Industrial Period (1780-1850)

During the Early Industrial Period, Somers became a hub of activity in the transportation and hospitality industries, serving as a stagecoach stop on the route from Boston to Hartford.

Various gristmills and sawmills were constructed during this period and in 1839, the Billings Satinette Mill was constructed in Somersville, marking the beginning of 141 years of textile manufacturing at the site.

Agriculture did not improve significantly during this period and further specialization was necessary to compete with cheaper grains transported from the Midwest towards the later half of this period. The first agricultural fair was organized in 1838 and within two years would grow to become the Four Town Fair.

Industrial Period (1850-1930)

Farming improved significantly during this period with the widespread use of iron and steel plows followed by advances in mechanization.

The mill in Somersville would grow to become the Somersville Manufacturing Company, famous for its woolen fabrics used in overcoats and blankets. The Somersville Manufacturing Company was responsible for Somers' second wave of immigrants, who came from throughout Europe to work in the mill.

The turn of the century brought trolley lines to Somers, providing new opportunities for education, shopping and recreation.

Modern Period (1930-Present)

The Modern Period would mark the arrival of correctional facilities in Somers in 1963 and the demise of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970. The jobs lost at the mill have been replaced by a diversity of smaller businesses but the mill remains vacant. Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Town. The widespread use of automobiles and post World War II expansion would begin a trend of rapid residential development that would peak during the 1970's.

Regional Context

Somers Plays an Integral Role in the Region

Like several neighboring towns, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community with far fewer jobs than workers. Despite this, Somers gained jobs during the last decade, with the number of jobs rising 18 percent from 1,720 in 1990 to 2,230 in 2000. About 1,700 jobs were filled by non-Somers residents, making Somers a minor regional source of employment.

Another regional role that Somers serves is providing a labor force that supports the overall economy of the region. While over 600 Somers residents worked within the community in the year 2000, almost 3,500 Somers residents filled jobs in other communities in the Capitol Region, Pioneer Valley and beyond.

In addition to providing a skilled labor force for regional businesses, Somers residents also support the regional economy by purchasing goods and services in Somers as well as regional commercial centers such as Enfield and Manchester.

Somers contains a number of State and regional facilities including:

- the Four Town Fairgrounds,
- the YWCA Camp Aya-Po,
- Shenipsit State Forest,
- The Sopastone Mountain Observation Tower, and
- State correctional facilities.

The Four Town Fairgrounds



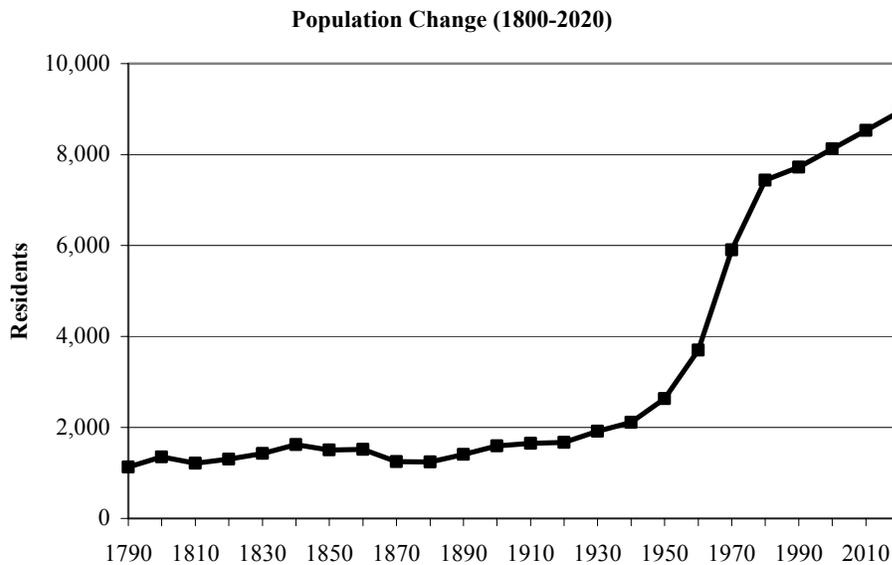
YWCA Camp Aya-Po



A Growing and Changing Population

Somers is Growing Faster than the State

In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Somers' population was 10,417. Subtracting the correctional facility population reduces that number to 8,126: an increase of 407 residents or 5.3% growth since 1990. By comparison, the population of Connecticut grew by only 3.6% during this same period.



Population Growth is Projected to Continue

The preceding chart illustrates that prior to 1940, Somers' population was relatively stable. By the 1940's, the population was growing at an increasing rate, reaching a growth rate of 59% during the 1960's before tapering off to modest growth rates of three to five percent during the last two decades. The population is expected to continue increasing at a modest rate through 2020.

Age Composition is Expected to Change

While population growth trends can help plan for future residential growth, tracking changes in the age composition of residents can be far more useful in anticipating future community facility and service needs. For example, as the "baby boomers" aged, they created a wave of peak demands on facilities and services starting with schools and now heading towards services for older residents.

As the following table illustrates, Somers' age composition is expected to change significantly in the future, with residents aged 55 and over comprising 35% of the total population by 2020. The 35-54 age-group, containing the majority of baby boomers, is expected to decrease significantly as they move towards retirement age.

Demographic Issue

In reporting many demographic and other statistics, the Census Bureau, the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Department of Public Health do not distinguish between the residents of Somers and the inmates of Somers' State correctional facilities. We have attempted, wherever possible, to compensate for this oversight, resulting in minor discrepancies between the various charts and tables presented hereafter.

Population Growth

Year	Population
1790	1,127
1800	1,353
1810	1,210
1820	1,306
1830	1,429
1840	1,621
1850	1,508
1860	1,517
1870	1,247
1880	1,242
1890	1,407
1900	1,593
1910	1,653
1920	1,673
1930	1,917
1940	2,114
1950	2,631
1960	3,702
1970	5,901
1980	7,439
1990	7,719
2000	8,126
2010	8,533
2020	8,940

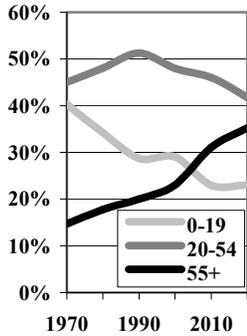
1790 – 2000 Census, Projections in italics are an extrapolation of historical births, deaths and net migration from 1990-2000 and have been adjusted to remove the prison population from 1970-2000

2000 Age Comparison*

	Somers	State
0 - 4	5%	7%
5 - 19	24%	21%
20 - 34	12%	19%
35 - 54	36%	31%
55 - 64	11%	9%
65+	12%	13%

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics
*Adjusted for prison population

Age Composition*



*Adjusted for prison population

Median Age*

East Longmeadow	41.4
Hampden	41.1
Stafford	37.8
Somers	37.4
Enfield	37.3
Ellington	36.9
County	35.7
State	37.4

Source: 2000 Census,
*Not adjusted for prison population

Somers Age Composition (1970 to 2020)*

Ages	1970	Estimated*			Projected*	
		1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
0-4	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%
5-19	32%	28%	22%	24%	18%	18%
20-34	19%	21%	20%	12%	16%	15%
35-54	26%	27%	31%	36%	30%	27%
55-64	8%	9%	10%	11%	14%	15%
65 +	7%	8%	10%	12%	17%	20%

1970 - 2000 Census, Projections by Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (1995). Planimetrics (2003) *Adjusted for prison population.

The following table depicts the various life-stages of Somers residents that will each have changing primary needs over the next twenty years.

Life-Stage Primary Needs Assessment

Description	Age Range	Primary Needs	Projection to 2020
Infants	0 to 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care 	Stable through 2020
School-Age	5 to 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School facilities Recreation facilities/programs 	Lower but rising again by 2020
Young Adults	20 to 34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rental housing Starter homes Social destinations 	Higher by 2020
Middle Age	35 to 54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family programs Trade-up homes 	Lower by 2020
Mature Adults	55 to 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smaller homes Second homes 	Higher by 2020
Retirement Age	65 and over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax relief Housing options Transportation Elderly programs 	Significantly higher by 2020

With moderate overall population growth expected, much of the change within specific-age groups will be the result of aging within Somers' existing population. The mature adult and retirement age groups are expected to increase significantly by 2020, due to the first half of the "Baby Boom" generation exceeding 65 years of age while the latter half will be 55 or older. Residents age 65 and over may nearly double as a percentage of total population by 2020, demanding alternative housing options, tax relief and other programs for older residents.

A Modest Economy

As indicated under the discussion of Somers' regional role, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community.

Business Profile 2001

Sector	Firms	% of Total	Employees	% of Total
Services	127	35%	690	33%
Government	7	2%	509	24%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	86	23%	334	16%
Construction and Mining	69	19%	205	10%
Manufacturing	23	6%	153	7%
Agriculture	27	8%	123	6%
Transportation and Utilities	9	3%	50	2%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	14	4%	49	2%
Total	365	100.0%	2113	100.0%

Connecticut Economic Resource Center 2001. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding

Despite this role, 365 businesses and government agencies in Somers employed 2,113 people in 2001. Service firms dominate the local economy by comprising approximately one-third of both firms and employees. Due to the correctional facilities and the Somers school system, the government sector is the second largest employer, despite representing less than two percent of all firms. It is not uncommon for the town government, including the local school system, to be one of the largest employers in a town similar to Somers.

Somers' manufacturers account for six percent of all firms and seven percent of all employees. Major products include high pressure valves, printing plates, fiber optic components, electrical equipment, dental/medical equipment and steel structures. Farming continues to play a significant role in Somers with more agricultural firms and almost as many employees as manufacturers. Somers has a diversity of farming activity including but not limited to dairy farms, horse farms, produce farms, tobacco farms, nurseries, produce stands, and riding stables that all contribute to the character and charm of Somers. Grower's Direct is the second largest taxpayer and fourth largest employer in Somers.

During the 1970's, Somers suffered the loss of 20% of its jobs, due mainly to the closing of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970, ending 131 years of textile manufacturing at the site. The Town nearly regained its earlier employment levels during the 1980's and surpassed them with 30% growth during the 1990's.

At \$65,273, Somers' median household income ranks above all neighboring Connecticut. This may be due in part to the prevalence of single-family homes and their tendency towards two wage earners. At \$29,128, Somers' per capita income is the highest among neighboring towns as well as higher than the State average.

Employment Growth

	#	% Change
1970	1,820	-
1980	1,460	-20%
1990	1,720	18%
2000	2,230	30%

Source: CT Labor Dept

1999 Median

Household Income

Hampden, MA	\$65,662
Somers	\$65,273
E Longmeadow, MA	\$62,680
Ellington	\$62,405
Enfield	\$52,810
Stafford	\$52,699
State	\$53,935

Source: 2000 Census

1999 Per Capita Income

Somers*	\$29,128
Ellington	\$27,766
E Longmeadow, MA	\$27,659
Hampden, MA	\$26,690
Stafford	\$22,017
Enfield	\$21,967
State	\$28,766

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics
*Adjusted for prison population

Housing Growth

Year	Units	Percent Change
1980	2,390	-
1990	2,739	15%
2000	3,012	10%

Source: 1980-2000 Census

Median Housing Value 2000*

Somers	\$193,900
Hampden, MA	\$160,900
Ellington	\$158,000
E Longmeadow, MA	\$146,400
Stafford	\$127,500
Enfield	\$124,500
County	\$150,500
State	\$169,900

Source: 2000 Census and CT. DECD
*Owner-occupied housing

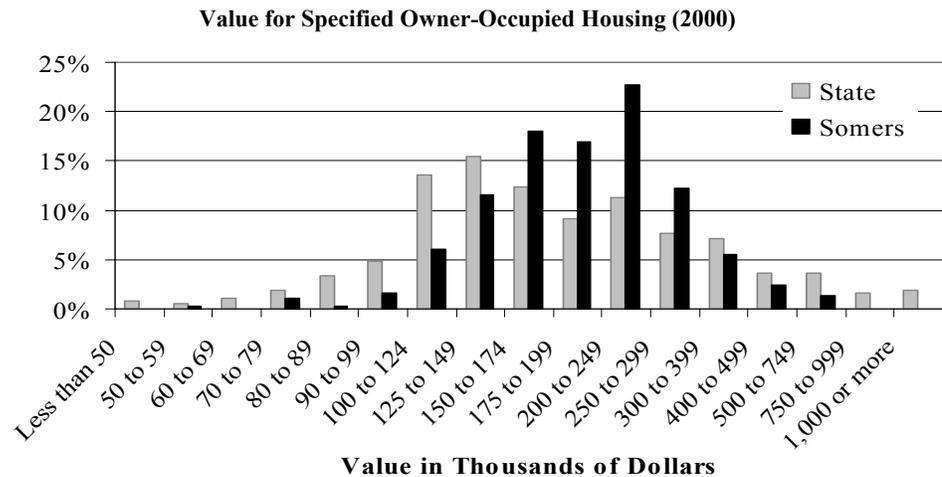
Affordable Housing

Somers	3%
Capitol Region	14%

Source: CT-DECD 2002

Housing in Somers

According to the Census Bureau, 273 housing units were added to Somers' housing stock during the 1990's for a 10% increase. At \$193,900, the median home value in Somers is well above the state median, making the Town less affordable relative to the state.



Source: 2000 Census

While Somers has affordable housing, an affordable mortgage or rent alone does not constitute an affordable housing unit by state standards (G.G.S. Section 8-30g). Until a town reaches the goal of having 10% of its housing stock affordable, it is subject to the affordable housing appeals procedure that shifts the burden of proof to the town to show that threats to public health or safety resulting from an affordable development outweigh the need for affordable housing. In order to qualify under Section 8-30g, a dwelling unit must be:

- Assisted housing (housing funded under a recognized state or federal program),
- CHFA-financed housing (housing financed under a program for income-qualifying persons or families), or
- Housing that is deed-restricted to be affordable to low- or moderate-income persons or families for at least 40 years.
- A moderate-income household earning 80% of the regional median household income or a low-income household earning 50% of the regional median household income cannot spend 30% or more of its gross income on rent, mortgage, utilities, taxes or similar costs.

At just under three percent affordable, the Town is below the regional average in meeting the State's goal of 10% affordable housing stock. The regional average is skewed by an abundance of affordable units in more urbanized areas such as Hartford, East Hartford and Manchester.

According to the 2000 Census, 427 households, or 35% of all Somers households earning \$75,000 or less, spend more than 30% of their household income on housing costs. A family of four earning \$61,000 or less will experience financial stress under these circumstances.

Since the Legislature adopted Section 8-30g in the late 1980's, no deed-restricted affordable housing has been constructed in Somers. Section 8-30g was recently amended to allow a three-year moratorium on further affordable housing applications every time the Town adds affordable housing accounting for two percent of its total housing stock. When the State goal of 10% per town is met, the Town is exempt from the requirements of Section 8-30g.

High owner occupancy rates are considered an indicator of community stability. At 85%, Somers is well above the State average.

2000 Housing Mix
(ranked by percent one-unit detached)

	1-Unit Detached	1-Unit Attached	2-4 Units	5+ Units	Mobile Home
Hampden, MA	94%	1%	2%	2%	0%
Somers	90%	1%	7%	2%	0%
East Longmeadow, MA	89%	1%	3%	6%	0%
Stafford	71%	3%	16%	10%	1%
Enfield	69%	5%	15%	11%	0%
Ellington	65%	3%	9%	23%	0%
State	59%	5%	18%	17%	1%

Source: 2000 Census

Somers' homogenous mixture of housing is the result of predominantly post World War II rural/suburban growth surrounding older multi-family housing clustered in the villages of Somersville and Somers. At 90% of the total housing stock, Somers' single-family detached housing stock far exceeds the ratio of neighboring Connecticut towns or the State. As Somers' population continues to age in place, demand for alternatives to single-family home ownership will grow. Older residents who are unable or unwilling to maintain a conventional single-family home may need to leave town unless alternatives are provided.

Housing Tenure (2000)

	Town	State
Owner Occupied	85%	63%
Renter Occupied	12%	31%
For Rent or Sale	0%	4%
Occasional Use	1%	2%
Vacant	2%	0%

Source: 2000 Census

Woodcrest



Definitions

Developed Land - land that has buildings, structures, or improvements used for a particular economic or social purpose (such as residential or institutional)

Committed Land - land that is used for a particular economic or social purpose (including open space)

Vacant Land - land that is not developed or committed

Underutilized Land - developed or committed land that is underdeveloped based on the density or uses permitted by zoning.

Dedicated Open Space - land or development rights owned by the Federal government, the State, the Town, land trusts, or conservation organizations intended to remain for open space purposes.

Managed Open Space - land owned by fish and game clubs, cemeteries, recreational clubs, and other organizations which is used for other purposes but provides open space benefits.

Dedicated Agriculture - farmland from which the development rights have been purchased, removing the possibility of further development.

Land Use in Somers

Somers encompasses 28.6 square miles or 18,324 acres. After subtracting water features, the Town's physical land area is slightly less at 18,268 acres. An analysis of the Tax Assessor's records indicates that over 81 percent of the land in Somers is committed to specific land uses: mainly single-family homes, agricultural uses and open space. Much of the committed land is underutilized, such as single-family homes on large tracts of land or farms in residential zones. After factoring out the underutilized area of oversized residential lots, farms and managed open space, all of which remain developable, the amount of land committed to existing land uses falls to 47%.

The largest land use is residential use at 34% followed by agriculture at 27% and open space at 11%. More than two-thirds of the open space land is considered dedicated open space in that it is restricted by deed or other measure to ensure its protection. The remaining open space is managed open space, meaning that it presently functions as open space, such as a golf course, but it is not legally protected from future development.

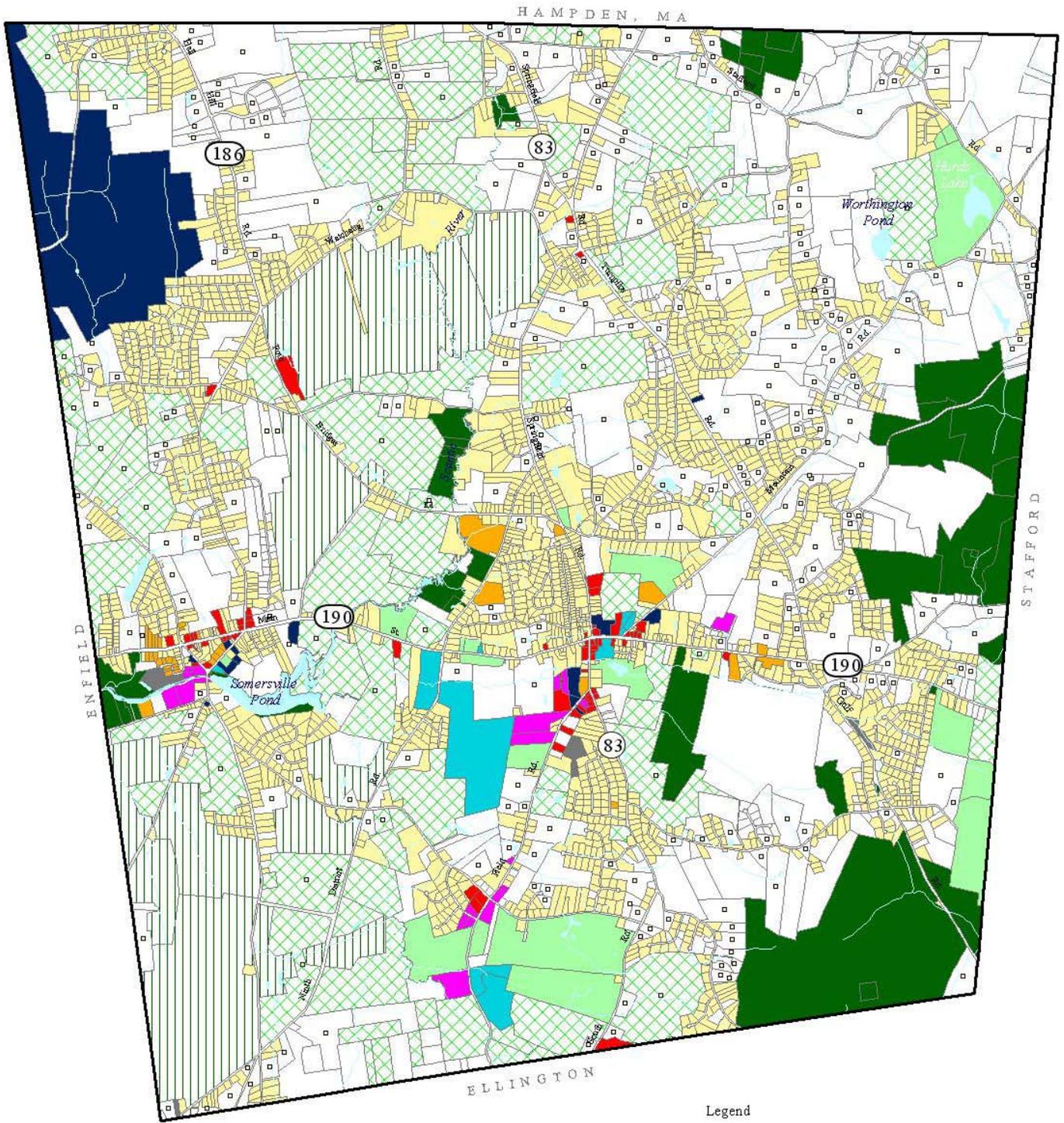
Land Use in 2003

Use	Acres	Percent of Developed/ Committed Land	Percent of Total Land
Residential	6,167	42%	34%
Single Family	6,086	41%	33%
Multi-Family	81	1%	0%
Commercial	84	1%	0%
Industrial	109	1%	1%
Industrial	82	1%	0%
Utility	26	0%	0%
Agriculture	4,932	33%	27%
Dedicated Agriculture	1,654	11%	9%
Agriculture	3,278		18%
Open Space	1,986	13%	11%
Dedicated Open Space	1,353	9%	7%
Managed Open Space	633		3%
Institutional	595	4%	3%
Community Facility	188	1%	1%
Transportation	715	5%	4%
Developed / Committed	14,776	100%	81%
Vacant / Developable	3,493		19%
Total Land Area	18,268		100%

Planimetrics (Totals may not add due to rounding). Land use information from Somers.

Existing Land Use

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
|  | Single-Family Development |  | Institutional |  | Utility |
|  | Multi-Family Development |  | Community Facility |  | Vacant |
|  | Commercial |  | Dedicated Open Space |  | Water and Watercourses |
|  | Industrial |  | Managed Open Space | | |
| | |  | Dedicated Agriculture | | |
| | |  | Agriculture | | |

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Essex Drive, Avon, CT 06031 860-677-5267

Zone	Area (S.F.)
A	40,000
A-1	40,000
Business	40,000
Industrial	60,000

Builder’s Acre

Somers’ Zoning Regulations utilize a concept known as a builder’s acre. A conventional acre of land is equal to 43,560 square feet. For simplicity sake, a builder’s acre rounds down to 40,000 square feet, thus the A, A-1 and Business Zones are the rough equivalent of one-acre zones.

Zoning in Somers

Somers has a simple set of four zoning districts, ranging in size and intensity from the 40,000 square foot single-family A Zone to the 60,000 square foot Industrial Zone.

Residentially zoned land accounts for over 98% of Somers’ land area with 91% located in the A-1 Zone. The A and A-1 Zones are identical in all dimensional respects except that the A-1 zone allows two-family residences on 80,000 square foot lots with 300 feet of frontage. Single-family homes, two-family homes (A-1 Zone) and farms are the only permitted uses in the residential zones. Many agricultural and residentially related activities are regulated as special uses, requiring applications and hearings before the Zoning Commission before being permitted. The A Zone is the more restrictive of the two residential zones, with fewer special uses allowed.

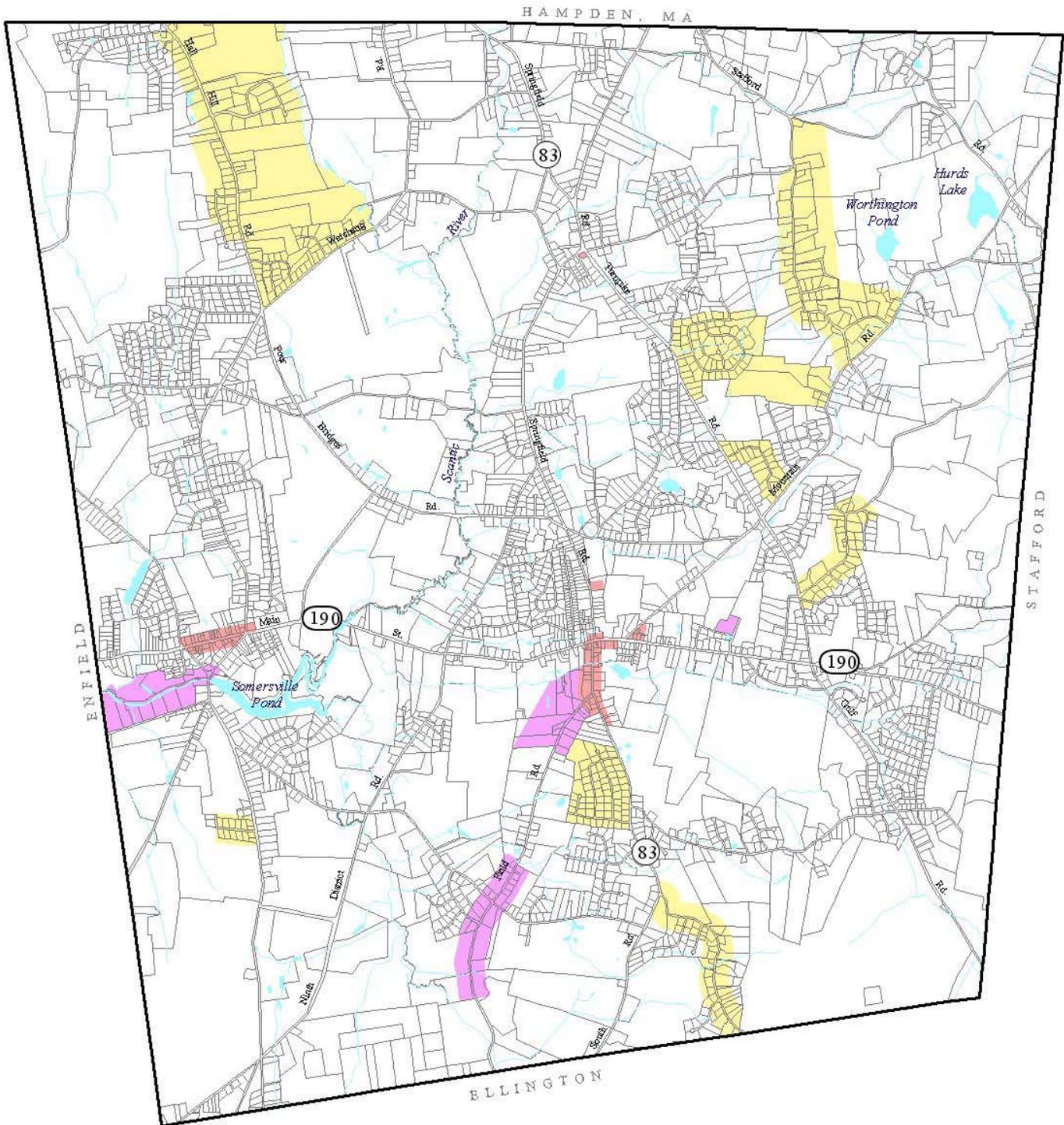
Commercial development is generally limited to the Business Zone, which at 67 total acres, accounts for less than one percent of Somers total land area. The B Zone, with a few exceptions, is concentrated in the villages of Somersville and Somers. The Business Zone prohibits residential use while all commercial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.

The Industrial Zone rounds out the balance of land in Somers with 235 acres or 1.3 percent of the total land area. The Industrial Zone prohibits residential use while all other commercial and industrial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.



Current Zoning

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---|---|
|  | A-1 |  | I |
|  | A |  | B |

0 3000 Feet



Residential Development Potential	Max. Units
Vacant Land	2,300
Excess Residential Land	1,531
Unprotected Agricultural Land	2,141
Managed Open Space Land	421
Total	6,393

Development Potential in Somers

With over 9,700 acres or 53% of the Town consisting of vacant or underutilized land, there is significant potential for additional residential development in Somers (see adjacent map). Based on the present regulations, future residential development may occur on residentially zoned properties that:

- are currently vacant,
- have excess land area for future development, or
- have potential for redevelopment.

Subtracting the approximately 30 acres of vacant commercial and industrial land still leaves almost 9,680 acres of developable residential land remaining. After factoring in such variables as current zoning requirements, open space set-asides, road acreage, and natural constraints, that acreage could yield nearly 6,400 additional housing units. Adding this number to the Town's existing housing stock under existing zoning results in approximately 9,400 housing units at full build-out or more than three times the 2000 Census total of 3,012 housing units.

Multiplying the potential number of dwelling units by Somers' average household size of 2.78 persons per household results in the potential for nearly 25,900 residents at full build-out. This would represent an increase of over 17,770 residents above the 2000 population. It is unlikely that this potential would ever be reached as it represents a worst case scenario in which every currently available acre is developed. There may also be zoning changes and demographic trends such as shrinking household sizes that may alter this figure significantly.

Farmland Can Be Readily Developed for Housing

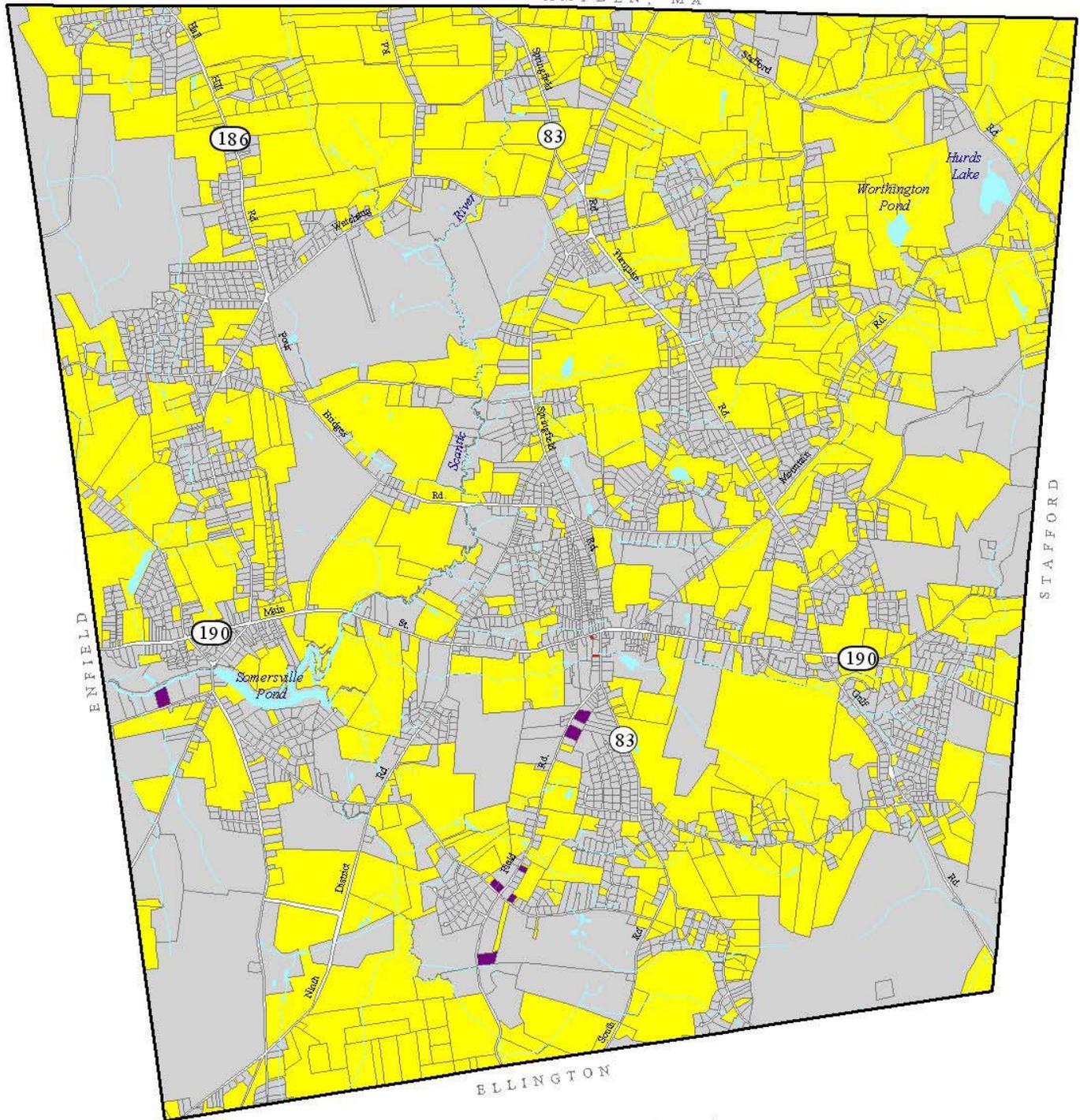


Developable Land

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



ENFIELD

STAFFORD

ELLINGTON

Legend

Developed/Committed Land

Developable Land

Residential

Commercial

Industrial

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 South Dixie, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5261

Per Capita Expenditures

Somers*	\$2,435
Suffield*	\$2,399
Ellington	\$2,173
Enfield	\$2,025
Stafford	\$2,002
State	\$2,444

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita Property Taxes

Suffield*	\$1,570
Somers*	\$1,328
Ellington	\$1,364
Enfield	\$1,243
Stafford	\$1,218
State	\$1,612

CT Policy & Economic Council
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita State Aid

Somers*	\$1,006
Stafford	\$731
Ellington	\$678
Enfield	\$644
Suffield*	\$597
State	\$627

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base Composition

	% Business
Enfield	30.8%
Stafford	21.2%
Ellington	14.8%
Suffield*	14.7%
Somers*	8.4%
State	26.0%

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001

Equalized Net Grand List

ENGL estimates the market value of property in every town across the state for a given year, adjusting for varying revaluation dates.

Fiscal Overview

Expenditures and Revenues

Somers' Fiscal Year 2001-2002 budget was approximately \$23.4 million, 65% of which went towards education expenses. On a per capita basis, Somers spends at virtually the same rate as the State average, with above average education and debt service costs as a percentage of the total budget. Emergency services spending per capita is less than half of the state average.

2000 – 2001 Per Capita Expenditures Distribution

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Education	\$1,571	65%	\$1,386	57%
Police	\$60	3%	\$162	7%
Fire	\$55	2%	\$93	4%
Debt Service	\$322	13%	\$181	7%
Public Works	\$158	7%	\$191	8%
Other Expenditures	\$233	10%	\$431	18%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,444	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

With the presence of the prisons and the associated State Payments In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT), Somers state-aid per capita is 60% higher than the State average, making Somers less dependent on local property taxes. With a downward trend in PILOT payments relative to the assessed value of the prisons and the State struggling to balance its budget, state-aid will likely continue to decline, increasing local reliance on property taxes.

2000 - 2001 Per Capita Revenue

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Current Taxes	\$1,328	55%	\$1,612	69%
State Aid	\$1,006	42%	\$627	27%
Surplus	\$1	0%	\$39	2%
Other	\$63	3%	\$166	7%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,345	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base

Somers ranks 68th out of 169 towns in terms of property value per capita and is slightly higher than the State average. This is probably due to above average home values, given the low percentage of business that might otherwise raise this figure.

Tax Base Comparison

(Ranked by 1999 per capita ENGL)

	Per Capita ENGL	State Rank
Suffield*	\$99,525	67
Somers*	\$97,812	68
Ellington	\$70,706	125
Enfield	\$64,566	137
Stafford	\$60,088	147
State	\$96,546	

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

Public Meeting



SOMERS



2004 Plan of Conservation & Development

Thursday June 17 - 7:00 PM
Somers Town Hall



Protect Important Resources



Guide Appropriate Development



Address Community Needs



Implementation

Please join the Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee as they present their Draft 2004 Plan of Conservation and Development. This is the last opportunity to provide input into the Draft Plan before the Committee forwards the Plan to the Planning Commission for their review and public hearing for adoption this Fall.

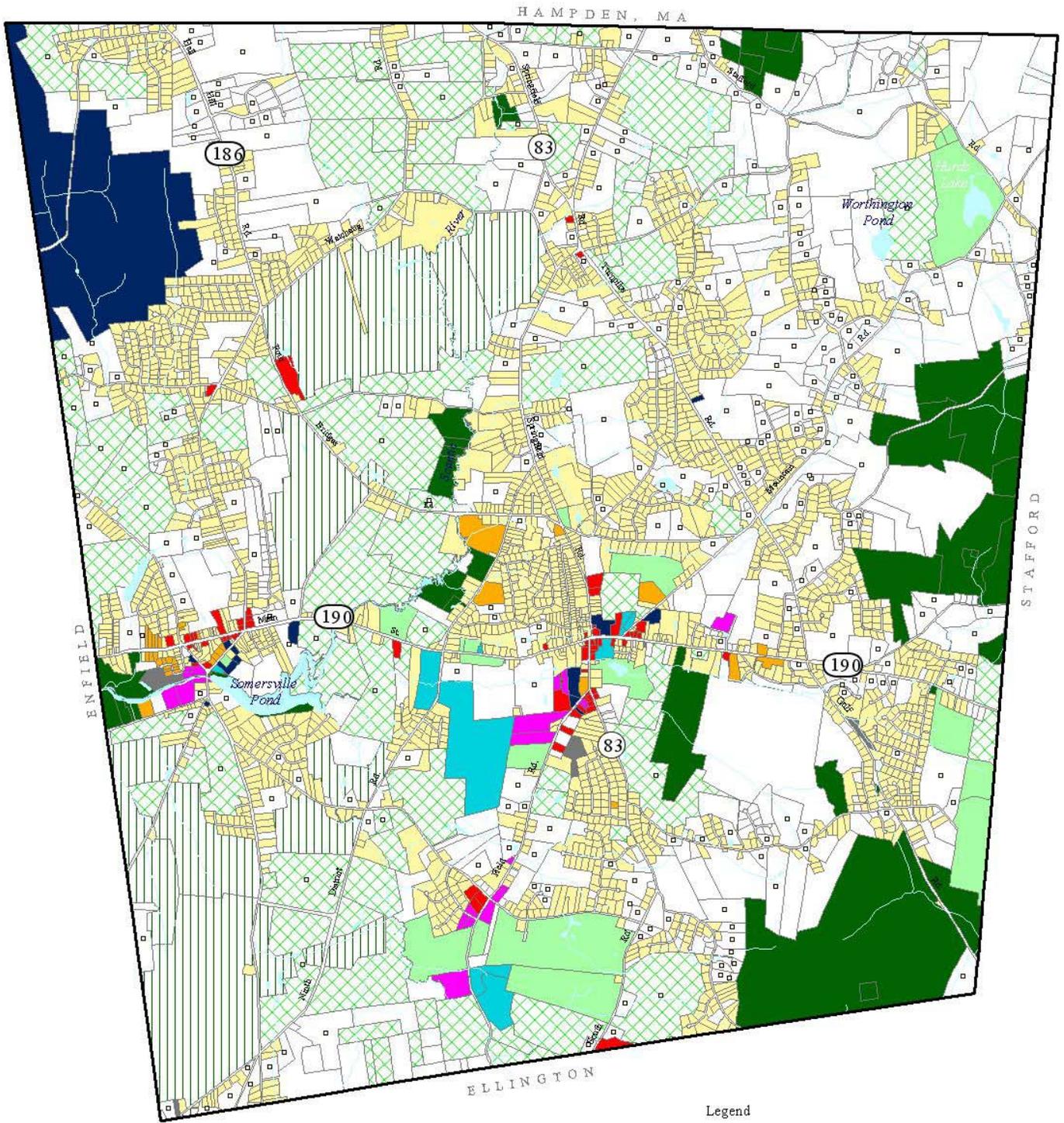
For information, call the Somers Land Use Office at 763-8214. The 2004 Draft Plan of Conservation and Development and other documents pertaining to the Plan can be viewed at the Land Use Office in Town Hall, the Somers Library or online at <http://www.somersnow.com>

PLEASE PLAN ON ATTENDING!

Public Meeting
6/17/04 7:00 PM Town Hall
<http://www.somersnow.com/Town>

Existing Land Use

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | | | | | |
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| | |  | Agriculture | | |

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Essex Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Somers



2004 Plan of Conservation and Development



**Preliminary Draft for Review by the
Plan of Conservation and Development
Steering Committee**

March 2004



PREFACE

This Plan has been prepared to help guide Somers' future conservation and development ...

Statutory Reference

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that the Planning Commission prepare, adopt, and amend a Plan of Conservation and Development for Somers.

Purpose of the Plan

This Plan of Conservation and Development is a tool for guiding the future of Somers. It is intended to be both:

- visionary, and
- action oriented.

One purpose is to establish a common vision for the community's future by determining a positive future outcome or positive strategies and directions for Somers to go in.

Another purpose is to outline action steps that, when implemented, will help attain that vision.

If steadily implemented by Somers residents and officials, this Plan will help protect important resources, guide appropriate development, address community needs, protect community character and enhance the quality of life of current and future residents.





Use and Maintenance of the Plan

This Plan is intended to provide a framework for consistent decision-making by Town boards, commissions and residents with regard to conservation and development activities.

While generally intended to guide conservation and development over the course of a decade, this Plan will lay the foundation for long-term goals reaching far into the future.

This Plan is intended to be a dynamic document. As strategies are implemented and evaluated, the Plan should be refined to address new issues, adjust a course of action, or refine strategies.

The challenge for the Planning Commission will be to keep the Plan up-to-date and implementation on-course in the face of changing community priorities.

Village of Somers





The Planning Process



Preparation of the Plan

Preparation of the Plan was coordinated by a Steering Committee made up of representatives of Town boards and commissions and other Somers residents.

Somers residents helped guide the overall process through a series of public meetings and workshops. In addition, a random telephone survey was conducted to help the Steering Committee finalize preliminary strategies.

With the assistance of a planning consultant, an inventory and assessment of technical and policy issues was conducted.

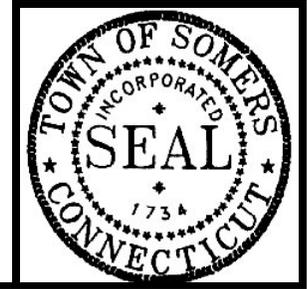
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The Steering Committee reviewed and modified the draft Plan before turning it over to the Planning Commission for their review. Before adopting the Plan, the Planning Commission referred the Plan to the Town Meeting for its review and comment before holding a public hearing of their own for its adoption.

Village of Somersville



WELCOME



March 4, 2004

Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee
Town of Somers
P.O. Box 308
619 Main Street
Somers, CT 06071

Dear Committee Members:

We are pleased to submit this preliminary draft of the 2004 Somers Plan of Conservation and Development for your review and comment.

After more than a year of input, analysis, formulating strategies and soliciting feedback, this draft represents the first opportunity to compile all of the work to date in a comprehensive manner that reflects the major themes developed during the process. We have attempted to create a document that is compelling, visionary and strategic in nature.

While we believe that we have captured the essence of the discussion and input received to date, this document is simply the first draft of a document that is intended to be the plan for the future of Somers.

We look forward to starting this next phase of the planning process with you on March, 18 2004, when we begin discussion of the draft Plan in detail.

Sincerely,

PLANIMETRICS, LLC

Glenn Chalder, AICP

Eric Barz, AICP



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Village of Somersville



CONTEXT

1

Overview

This chapter of the Plan of Conservation and Development will outline the conditions and trends affecting the community during the preparation of the Plan.

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it.”

Abraham Lincoln

Demographics



Housing



Economy



Land Use



Buildout Potential



Fiscal Considerations

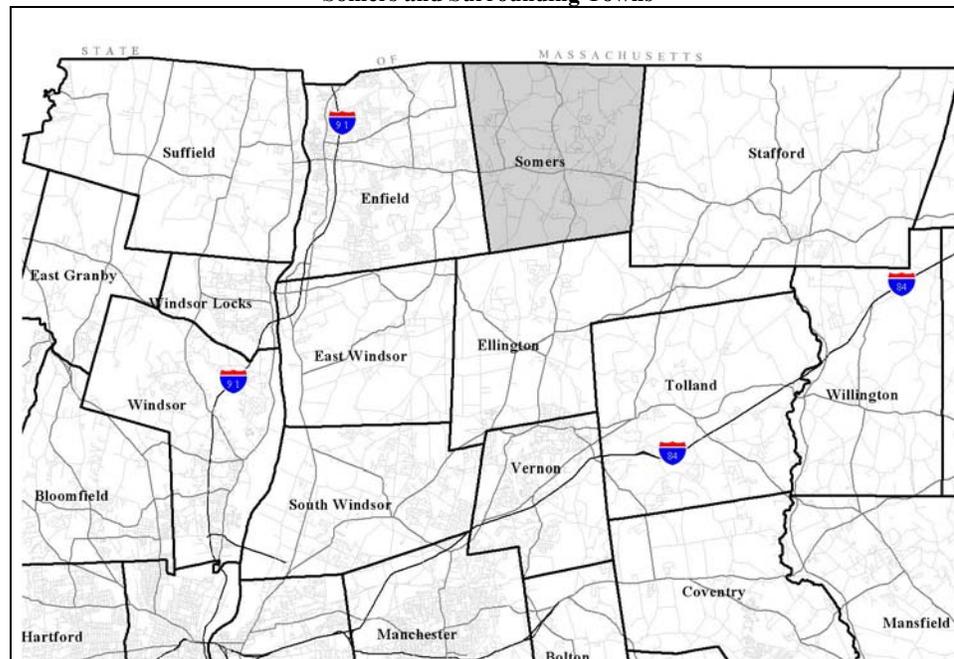


Introduction to Somers

Somers is a predominantly residential and agricultural community located in north-central Connecticut on the Massachusetts border between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA. Despite its inclusion and active participation in Connecticut's Capitol Region, Somers influences and is influenced by Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley as well.

The town can be divided into two distinct geologic areas. The western two-thirds are characterized by generally flat, rich agricultural land that is also highly suitable for development. The eastern third is generally steep and rocky, making it less suitable for intensive agriculture or development, but it remains desirable for residential development due to scenic views.

Somers and Surrounding Towns



Historical Context

Colonial Period (1706-1780)

Like many Connecticut towns, Somers is the product of a series of political and religious divisions, with its origins laying in Springfield, MA. The area encompassing present day Enfield and Somers was separated from Springfield and incorporated as the Town of Enfield in 1679.

Somers was first settled in 1706 as an agricultural community. In 1724, residents formed the Society of East Enfield for the purposes of hosting their own religious services, incorporating ten years later as the Town of Somers. In 1749, Somers was separated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and annexed by the Colony of Connecticut.

Agricultural and Early Industrial Period (1780-1850)

During the Early Industrial Period, Somers became a hub of activity in the transportation and hospitality industries, serving as a stagecoach stop on the route from Boston to Hartford.

Various gristmills and sawmills were constructed during this period and in 1839, the Billings Satinette Mill was constructed in Somersville, marking the beginning of 141 years of textile manufacturing at the site.

Agriculture did not improve significantly during this period and further specialization was necessary to compete with cheaper grains transported from the Midwest towards the later half of this period. The first agricultural fair was organized in 1838 and within two years would grow to become the Four Town Fair.

Industrial Period (1850-1930)

Farming improved significantly during this period with the widespread use of iron and steel plows followed by advances in mechanization.

The mill in Somersville would grow to become the Somersville Manufacturing Company, famous for its woolen fabrics used in overcoats and blankets. The Somersville Manufacturing Company was responsible for Somers' second wave of immigrants, who came from throughout Europe to work in the mill.

The turn of the century brought trolley lines to Somers, providing new opportunities for education, shopping and recreation.

Modern Period (1930-Present)

The Modern Period would mark the arrival of correctional facilities in Somers in 1963 and the demise of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970. The jobs lost at the mill have been replaced by a diversity of smaller businesses but the mill remains vacant. Agriculture continues to play a significant role in Town. The widespread use of automobiles and post World War II expansion would begin a trend of rapid residential development that would peak during the 1970's.

Regional Context

Somers Plays an Integral Role in the Region

Like several neighboring towns, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community with far fewer jobs than workers. Despite this, Somers gained jobs during the last decade, with the number of jobs rising 18 percent from 1,720 in 1990 to 2,230 in 2000. About 1,700 jobs were filled by non-Somers residents, making Somers a minor regional source of employment.

Another regional role that Somers serves is providing a labor force that supports the overall economy of the region. While over 600 Somers residents worked within the community in the year 2000, almost 3,500 Somers residents filled jobs in other communities in the Capitol Region, Pioneer Valley and beyond.

In addition to providing a skilled labor force for regional businesses, Somers residents also support the regional economy by purchasing goods and services in Somers as well as regional commercial centers such as Enfield and Manchester.

Somers contains a number of State and regional facilities including:

- the Four Town Fairgrounds,
- the YWCA Camp Aya-Po,
- Shenipsit State Forest,
- The Sopastone Mountain Observation Tower, and
- State correctional facilities.

The Four Town Fairgrounds



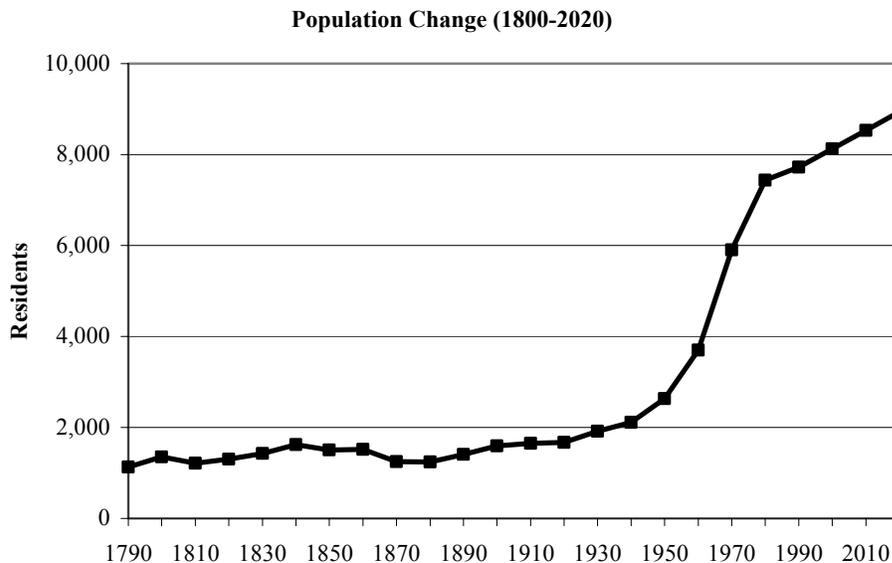
YWCA Camp Aya-Po



A Growing and Changing Population

Somers is Growing Faster than the State

In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Somers' population was 10,417. Subtracting the correctional facility population reduces that number to 8,126: an increase of 407 residents or 5.3% growth since 1990. By comparison, the population of Connecticut grew by only 3.6% during this same period.



Population Growth is Projected to Continue

The preceding chart illustrates that prior to 1940, Somers' population was relatively stable. By the 1940's, the population was growing at an increasing rate, reaching a growth rate of 59% during the 1960's before tapering off to modest growth rates of three to five percent during the last two decades. The population is expected to continue increasing at a modest rate through 2020.

Age Composition is Expected to Change

While population growth trends can help plan for future residential growth, tracking changes in the age composition of residents can be far more useful in anticipating future community facility and service needs. For example, as the "baby boomers" aged, they created a wave of peak demands on facilities and services starting with schools and now heading towards services for older residents.

As the following table illustrates, Somers' age composition is expected to change significantly in the future, with residents aged 55 and over comprising 35% of the total population by 2020. The 35-54 age-group, containing the majority of baby boomers, is expected to decrease significantly as they move towards retirement age.

Demographic Issue

In reporting many demographic and other statistics, the Census Bureau, the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, the Office of Policy and Management, and the Department of Public Health do not distinguish between the residents of Somers and the inmates of Somers' State correctional facilities. We have attempted, wherever possible, to compensate for this oversight, resulting in minor discrepancies between the various charts and tables presented hereafter.

Population Growth

Year	Population
1790	1,127
1800	1,353
1810	1,210
1820	1,306
1830	1,429
1840	1,621
1850	1,508
1860	1,517
1870	1,247
1880	1,242
1890	1,407
1900	1,593
1910	1,653
1920	1,673
1930	1,917
1940	2,114
1950	2,631
1960	3,702
1970	5,901
1980	7,439
1990	7,719
2000	8,126
2010	8,533
2020	8,940

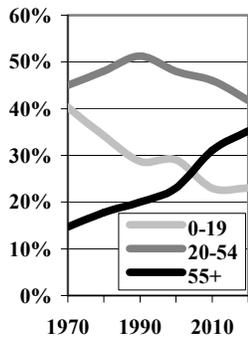
1790 – 2000 Census, Projections in italics are an extrapolation of historical births, deaths and net migration from 1990-2000 and have been adjusted to remove the prison population from 1970-2000

2000 Age Comparison*

	Somers	State
0 - 4	5%	7%
5 - 19	24%	21%
20 - 34	12%	19%
35 - 54	36%	31%
55 - 64	11%	9%
65+	12%	13%

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics
*Adjusted for prison population

Age Composition*



*Adjusted for prison population

Median Age*

East Longmeadow	41.4
Hampden	41.1
Stafford	37.8
Somers	37.4
Enfield	37.3
Ellington	36.9
County	35.7
State	37.4

Source: 2000 Census,
*Not adjusted for prison population

Somers Age Composition (1970 to 2020)*

Ages	1970	Estimated*			Projected*	
		1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
0-4	8%	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%
5-19	32%	28%	22%	24%	18%	18%
20-34	19%	21%	20%	12%	16%	15%
35-54	26%	27%	31%	36%	30%	27%
55-64	8%	9%	10%	11%	14%	15%
65+	7%	8%	10%	12%	17%	20%

1970 - 2000 Census, Projections by Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (1995). Planimetrics (2003) *Adjusted for prison population.

The following table depicts the various life-stages of Somers residents that will each have changing primary needs over the next twenty years.

Life-Stage Primary Needs Assessment

Description	Age Range	Primary Needs	Projection to 2020
Infants	0 to 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child Care 	Stable through 2020
School-Age	5 to 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School facilities Recreation facilities/programs 	Lower but rising again by 2020
Young Adults	20 to 34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rental housing Starter homes Social destinations 	Higher by 2020
Middle Age	35 to 54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family programs Trade-up homes 	Lower by 2020
Mature Adults	55 to 65	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smaller homes Second homes 	Higher by 2020
Retirement Age	65 and over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tax relief Housing options Transportation Elderly programs 	Significantly higher by 2020

With moderate overall population growth expected, much of the change within specific-age groups will be the result of aging within Somers' existing population. The mature adult and retirement age groups are expected to increase significantly by 2020, due to the first half of the "Baby Boom" generation exceeding 65 years of age while the latter half will be 55 or older. Residents age 65 and over may nearly double as a percentage of total population by 2020, demanding alternative housing options, tax relief and other programs for older residents.

A Modest Economy

As indicated under the discussion of Somers' regional role, Somers is predominantly a bedroom community.

Business Profile 2001

Sector	Firms	% of Total	Employees	% of Total
Services	127	35%	690	33%
Government	7	2%	509	24%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	86	23%	334	16%
Construction and Mining	69	19%	205	10%
Manufacturing	23	6%	153	7%
Agriculture	27	8%	123	6%
Transportation and Utilities	9	3%	50	2%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	14	4%	49	2%
Total	365	100.0%	2113	100.0%

Connecticut Economic Resource Center 2001. Total may not equal 100% due to rounding

Despite this role, 365 businesses and government agencies in Somers employed 2,113 people in 2001. Service firms dominate the local economy by comprising approximately one-third of both firms and employees. Due to the correctional facilities and the Somers school system, the government sector is the second largest employer, despite representing less than two percent of all firms. It is not uncommon for the town government, including the local school system, to be one of the largest employers in a town similar to Somers.

Somers' manufacturers account for six percent of all firms and seven percent of all employees. Major products include high pressure valves, printing plates, fiber optic components, electrical equipment, dental/medical equipment and steel structures. Farming continues to play a significant role in Somers with more agricultural firms and almost as many employees as manufacturers. Somers has a diversity of farming activity including but not limited to dairy farms, horse farms, produce farms, tobacco farms, nurseries, produce stands, and riding stables that all contribute to the character and charm of Somers. Grower's Direct is the second largest taxpayer and fourth largest employer in Somers.

During the 1970's, Somers suffered the loss of 20% of its jobs, due mainly to the closing of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970, ending 131 years of textile manufacturing at the site. The Town nearly regained its earlier employment levels during the 1980's and surpassed them with 30% growth during the 1990's.

At \$65,273, Somers' median household income ranks above all neighboring Connecticut. This may be due in part to the prevalence of single-family homes and their tendency towards two wage earners. At \$29,128, Somers' per capita income is the highest among neighboring towns as well as higher than the State average.

Employment Growth

	#	% Change
1970	1,820	-
1980	1,460	-20%
1990	1,720	18%
2000	2,230	30%

Source: CT Labor Dept

1999 Median

Household Income

Hampden, MA	\$65,662
Somers	\$65,273
E Longmeadow, MA	\$62,680
Ellington	\$62,405
Enfield	\$52,810
Stafford	\$52,699
State	\$53,935

Source: 2000 Census

1999 Per Capita Income

Somers*	\$29,128
Ellington	\$27,766
E Longmeadow, MA	\$27,659
Hampden, MA	\$26,690
Stafford	\$22,017
Enfield	\$21,967
State	\$28,766

Source: 2000 Census, Planimetrics

*Adjusted for prison population

Housing Growth

Year	Units	Percent Change
1980	2,390	-
1990	2,739	15%
2000	3,012	10%

Source: 1980-2000 Census

Median Housing Value 2000*

Somers	\$193,900
Hampden, MA	\$160,900
Ellington	\$158,000
E Longmeadow, MA	\$146,400
Stafford	\$127,500
Enfield	\$124,500
County	\$150,500
State	\$169,900

Source: 2000 Census and CT. DECD
*Owner-occupied housing

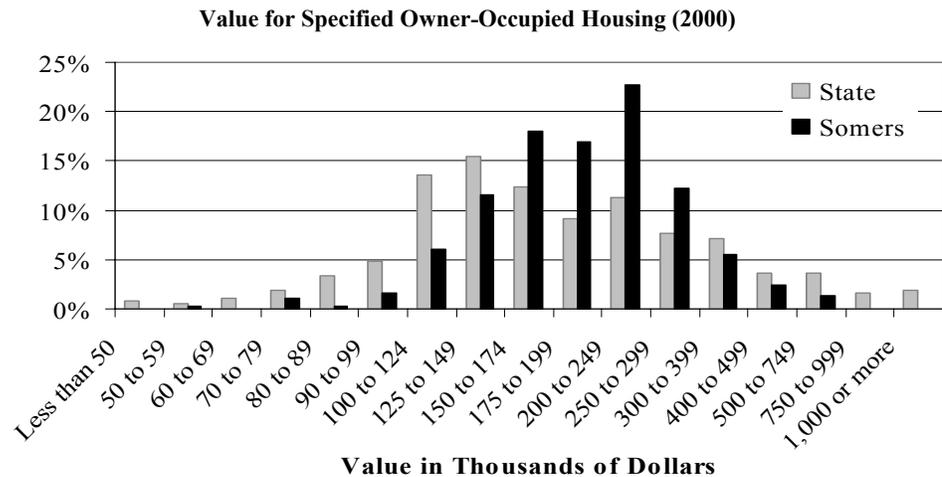
Affordable Housing

Somers	3%
Capitol Region	14%

Source: CT-DECD 2002

Housing in Somers

According to the Census Bureau, 273 housing units were added to Somers' housing stock during the 1990's for a 10% increase. At \$193,900, the median home value in Somers is well above the state median, making the Town less affordable relative to the state.



Source: 2000 Census

While Somers has affordable housing, an affordable mortgage or rent alone does not constitute an affordable housing unit by state standards (G.G.S. Section 8-30g). Until a town reaches the goal of having 10% of its housing stock affordable, it is subject to the affordable housing appeals procedure that shifts the burden of proof to the town to show that threats to public health or safety resulting from an affordable development outweigh the need for affordable housing. In order to qualify under Section 8-30g, a dwelling unit must be:

- Assisted housing (housing funded under a recognized state or federal program),
- CHFA-financed housing (housing financed under a program for income-qualifying persons or families), or
- Housing that is deed-restricted to be affordable to low- or moderate-income persons or families for at least 40 years.
- A moderate-income household earning 80% of the regional median household income or a low-income household earning 50% of the regional median household income cannot spend 30% or more of its gross income on rent, mortgage, utilities, taxes or similar costs.

At just under three percent affordable, the Town is below the regional average in meeting the State's goal of 10% affordable housing stock. The regional average is skewed by an abundance of affordable units in more urbanized areas such as Hartford, East Hartford and Manchester.

According to the 2000 Census, 427 households, or 35% of all Somers households earning \$75,000 or less, spend more than 30% of their household income on housing costs. A family of four earning \$61,000 or less will experience financial stress under these circumstances.

Since the Legislature adopted Section 8-30g in the late 1980's, no deed-restricted affordable housing has been constructed in Somers. Section 8-30g was recently amended to allow a three-year moratorium on further affordable housing applications every time the Town adds affordable housing accounting for two percent of its total housing stock. When the State goal of 10% per town is met, the Town is exempt from the requirements of Section 8-30g.

High owner occupancy rates are considered an indicator of community stability. At 85%, Somers is well above the State average.

2000 Housing Mix
(ranked by percent one-unit detached)

	1-Unit Detached	1-Unit Attached	2-4 Units	5+ Units	Mobile Home
Hampden, MA	94%	1%	2%	2%	0%
Somers	90%	1%	7%	2%	0%
East Longmeadow, MA	89%	1%	3%	6%	0%
Stafford	71%	3%	16%	10%	1%
Enfield	69%	5%	15%	11%	0%
Ellington	65%	3%	9%	23%	0%
State	59%	5%	18%	17%	1%

Source: 2000 Census

Somers' homogenous mixture of housing is the result of predominantly post World War II rural/suburban growth surrounding older multi-family housing clustered in the villages of Somersville and Somers. At 90% of the total housing stock, Somers' single-family detached housing stock far exceeds the ratio of neighboring Connecticut towns or the State. As Somers' population continues to age in place, demand for alternatives to single-family home ownership will grow. Older residents who are unable or unwilling to maintain a conventional single-family home may need to leave town unless alternatives are provided.

Housing Tenure (2000)

	Town	State
Owner Occupied	85%	63%
Renter Occupied	12%	31%
For Rent or Sale	0%	4%
Occasional Use	1%	2%
Vacant	2%	0%

Source: 2000 Census

Woodcrest



Definitions

Developed Land - land that has buildings, structures, or improvements used for a particular economic or social purpose (such as residential or institutional)

Committed Land - land that is used for a particular economic or social purpose (including open space)

Vacant Land - land that is not developed or committed

Underutilized Land - developed or committed land that is underdeveloped based on the density or uses permitted by zoning.

Dedicated Open Space - land or development rights owned by the Federal government, the State, the Town, land trusts, or conservation organizations intended to remain for open space purposes.

Managed Open Space - land owned by fish and game clubs, cemeteries, recreational clubs, and other organizations which is used for other purposes but provides open space benefits.

Dedicated Agriculture - farmland from which the development rights have been purchased, removing the possibility of further development.

Land Use in Somers

Somers encompasses 28.6 square miles or 18,324 acres. After subtracting water features, the Town's physical land area is slightly less at 18,268 acres. An analysis of the Tax Assessor's records indicates that over 81 percent of the land in Somers is committed to specific land uses: mainly single-family homes, agricultural uses and open space. Much of the committed land is underutilized, such as single-family homes on large tracts of land or farms in residential zones. After factoring out the underutilized area of oversized residential lots, farms and managed open space, all of which remain developable, the amount of land committed to existing land uses falls to 47%.

The largest land use is residential use at 34% followed by agriculture at 27% and open space at 11%. More than two-thirds of the open space land is considered dedicated open space in that it is restricted by deed or other measure to ensure its protection. The remaining open space is managed open space, meaning that it presently functions as open space, such as a golf course, but it is not legally protected from future development.

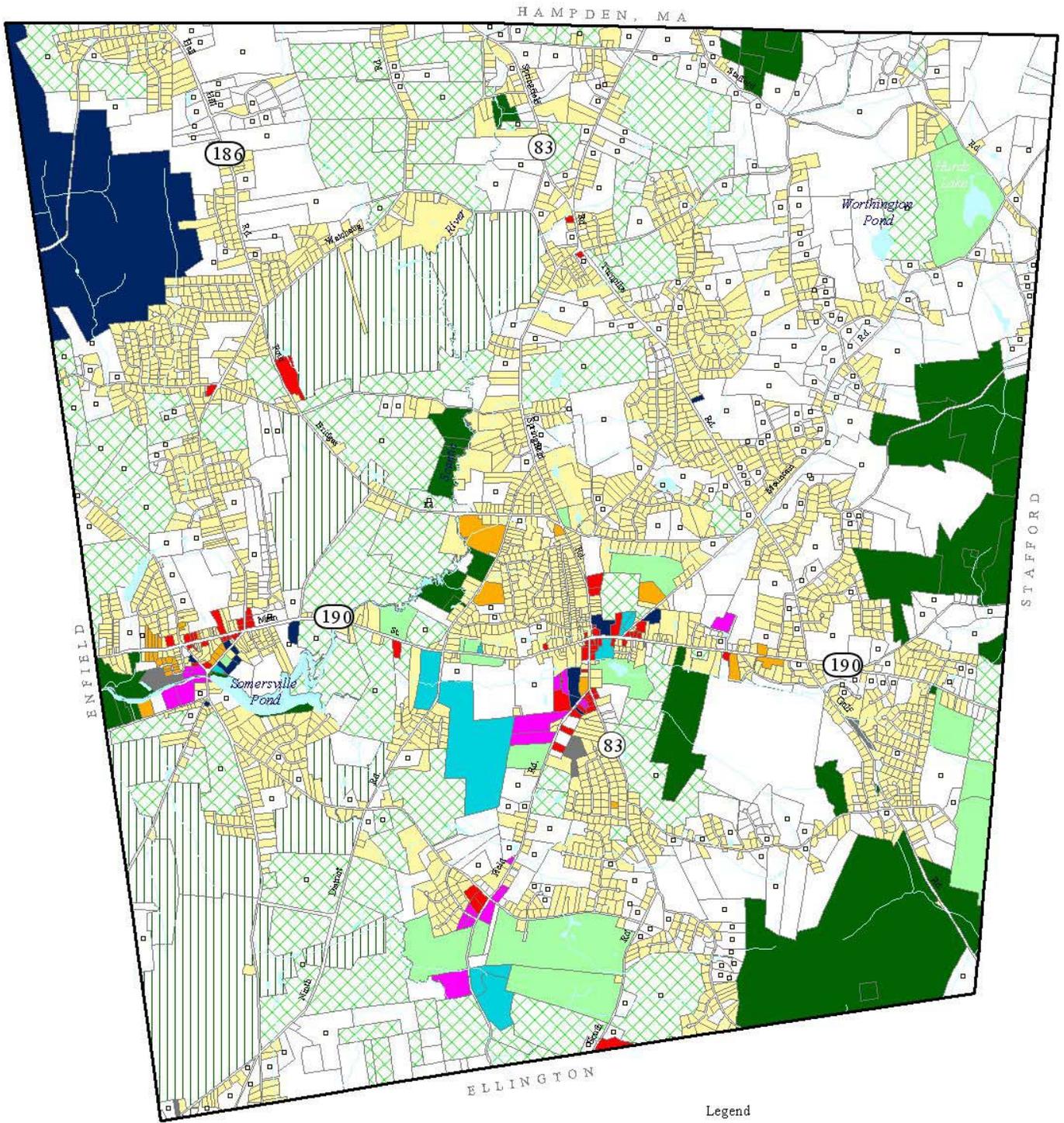
Land Use in 2003

Use	Acres	Percent of Developed/ Committed Land	Percent of Total Land
Residential	6,167	42%	34%
Single Family	6,086	41%	33%
Multi-Family	81	1%	0%
Commercial	84	1%	0%
Industrial	109	1%	1%
Industrial	82	1%	0%
Utility	26	0%	0%
Agriculture	4,932	33%	27%
Dedicated Agriculture	1,654	11%	9%
Agriculture	3,278		18%
Open Space	1,986	13%	11%
Dedicated Open Space	1,353	9%	7%
Managed Open Space	633		3%
Institutional	595	4%	3%
Community Facility	188	1%	1%
Transportation	715	5%	4%
Developed / Committed	14,776	100%	81%
Vacant / Developable	3,493		19%
Total Land Area	18,268		100%

Planimetrics (Totals may not add due to rounding). Land use information from Somers.

Existing Land Use

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------------|
|  | Single-Family Development |  | Institutional |  | Utility |
|  | Multi-Family Development |  | Community Facility |  | Vacant |
|  | Commercial |  | Dedicated Open Space |  | Water and Watercourses |
|  | Industrial |  | Managed Open Space | | |
| | |  | Dedicated Agriculture | | |
| | |  | Agriculture | | |

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Essex Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Zone	Area (S.F.)
A	40,000
A-1	40,000
Business	40,000
Industrial	60,000

Builder’s Acre

Somers’ Zoning Regulations utilize a concept known as a builder’s acre. A conventional acre of land is equal to 43,560 square feet. For simplicity sake, a builder’s acre rounds down to 40,000 square feet, thus the A, A-1 and Business Zones are the rough equivalent of one-acre zones.

Zoning in Somers

Somers has a simple set of four zoning districts, ranging in size and intensity from the 40,000 square foot single-family A Zone to the 60,000 square foot Industrial Zone.

Residentially zoned land accounts for over 98% of Somers’ land area with 91% located in the A-1 Zone. The A and A-1 Zones are identical in all dimensional respects except that the A-1 zone allows two-family residences on 80,000 square foot lots with 300 feet of frontage. Single-family homes, two-family homes (A-1 Zone) and farms are the only permitted uses in the residential zones. Many agricultural and residentially related activities are regulated as special uses, requiring applications and hearings before the Zoning Commission before being permitted. The A Zone is the more restrictive of the two residential zones, with fewer special uses allowed.

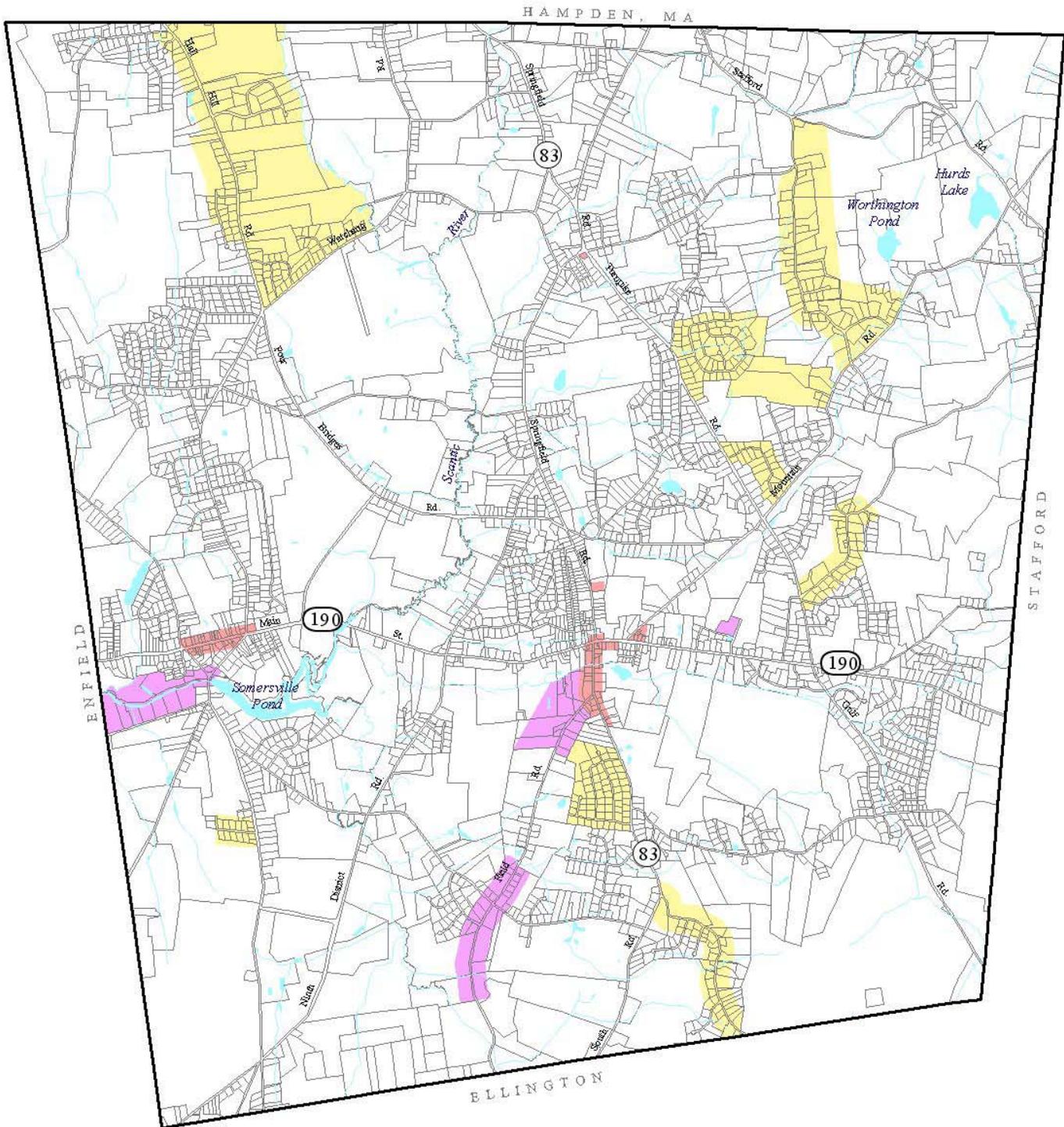
Commercial development is generally limited to the Business Zone, which at 67 total acres, accounts for less than one percent of Somers total land area. The B Zone, with a few exceptions, is concentrated in the villages of Somersville and Somers. The Business Zone prohibits residential use while all commercial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.

The Industrial Zone rounds out the balance of land in Somers with 235 acres or 1.3 percent of the total land area. The Industrial Zone prohibits residential use while all other commercial and industrial uses require a special use permit and/or site plan approval.



Current Zoning

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
|  A-1 |  I |
|  A |  B |

0 3000 Feet

Residential Development Potential	Max. Units
Vacant Land	2,300
Excess Residential Land	1,531
Unprotected Agricultural Land	2,141
Managed Open Space Land	421
Total	6,393

Development Potential in Somers

With over 9,700 acres or 53% of the Town consisting of vacant or underutilized land, there is significant potential for additional residential development in Somers (see adjacent map). Based on the present regulations, future residential development may occur on residentially zoned properties that:

- are currently vacant,
- have excess land area for future development, or
- have potential for redevelopment.

Subtracting the approximately 30 acres of vacant commercial and industrial land still leaves almost 9,680 acres of developable residential land remaining. After factoring in such variables as current zoning requirements, open space set-asides, road acreage, and natural constraints, that acreage could yield nearly 6,400 additional housing units. Adding this number to the Town's existing housing stock under existing zoning results in approximately 9,400 housing units at full build-out or more than three times the 2000 Census total of 3,012 housing units.

Multiplying the potential number of dwelling units by Somers' average household size of 2.78 persons per household results in the potential for nearly 25,900 residents at full build-out. This would represent an increase of over 17,770 residents above the 2000 population. It is unlikely that this potential would ever be reached as it represents a worst case scenario in which every currently available acre is developed. There may also be zoning changes and demographic trends such as shrinking household sizes that may alter this figure significantly.

Farmland Can Be Readily Developed for Housing

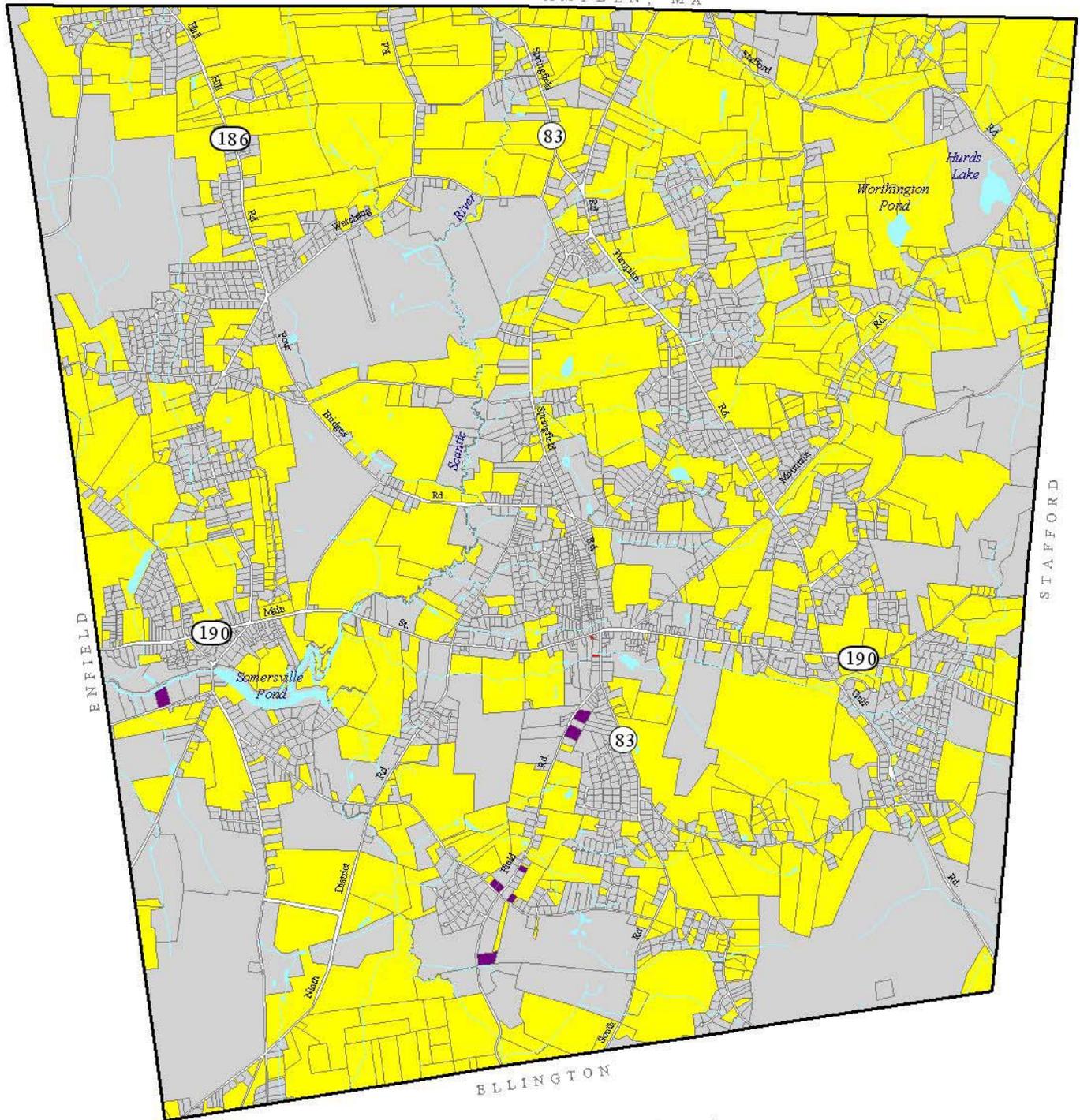


Developable Land

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



ENFIELD

STAFFORD

ELLINGTON

Legend

Developed/Committed Land

Developable Land

Residential

Commercial

Industrial

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 South Dixie, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5261

Per Capita Expenditures

Somers*	\$2,435
Suffield*	\$2,399
Ellington	\$2,173
Enfield	\$2,025
Stafford	\$2,002
State	\$2,444

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita Property Taxes

Suffield*	\$1,570
Somers*	\$1,328
Ellington	\$1,364
Enfield	\$1,243
Stafford	\$1,218
State	\$1,612

CT Policy & Economic Council
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Per Capita State Aid

Somers*	\$1,006
Stafford	\$731
Ellington	\$678
Enfield	\$644
Suffield*	\$597
State	\$627

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001
*Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base Composition

	% Business
Enfield	30.8%
Stafford	21.2%
Ellington	14.8%
Suffield*	14.7%
Somers*	8.4%
State	26.0%

CT Policy & Economic Council 2000-2001

Equalized Net Grand List

ENGL estimates the market value of property in every town across the state for a given year, adjusting for varying revaluation dates.

Fiscal Overview

Expenditures and Revenues

Somers' Fiscal Year 2001-2002 budget was approximately \$23.4 million, 65% of which went towards education expenses. On a per capita basis, Somers spends at virtually the same rate as the State average, with above average education and debt service costs as a percentage of the total budget. Emergency services spending per capita is less than half of the state average.

2000 – 2001 Per Capita Expenditures Distribution

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Education	\$1,571	65%	\$1,386	57%
Police	\$60	3%	\$162	7%
Fire	\$55	2%	\$93	4%
Debt Service	\$322	13%	\$181	7%
Public Works	\$158	7%	\$191	8%
Other Expenditures	\$233	10%	\$431	18%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,444	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

With the presence of the prisons and the associated State Payments In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOT), Somers state-aid per capita is 60% higher than the State average, making Somers less dependent on local property taxes. With a downward trend in PILOT payments relative to the assessed value of the prisons and the State struggling to balance its budget, state-aid will likely continue to decline, increasing local reliance on property taxes.

2000 - 2001 Per Capita Revenue

	Somers*		Connecticut	
Current Taxes	\$1,328	55%	\$1,612	69%
State Aid	\$1,006	42%	\$627	27%
Surplus	\$1	0%	\$39	2%
Other	\$63	3%	\$166	7%
Total	\$2,399	100%	\$2,345	100%

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

Tax Base

Somers ranks 68th out of 169 towns in terms of property value per capita and is slightly higher than the State average. This is probably due to above average home values, given the low percentage of business that might otherwise raise this figure.

Tax Base Comparison

(Ranked by 1999 per capita ENGL)

	Per Capita ENGL	State Rank
Suffield*	\$99,525	67
Somers*	\$97,812	68
Ellington	\$70,706	125
Enfield	\$64,566	137
Stafford	\$60,088	147
State	\$96,546	

Source: Connecticut Policy & Economic Council *Adjusted to exclude prison population

COMMUNITY ISSUES

2

Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of issues and concerns that were important to the community, a series of public meetings, a community survey, interviews and other exercises were conducted throughout the planning process.

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee used the results of these activities to identify and prioritize the most important community issues before developing strategies to address them.

“It is really the community itself which must try to pull together ... in order to preserve those things that the community values and to foster the growth and change that the community wants.”

Russell Peterson
Former EPA Director

Workshop Meetings



Public Meetings



Telephone Survey



Working Meetings



Residents clearly value Somers' community facilities, and open spaces as well as community and historic character.

Things to Encourage ...

At a meeting attended by approximately 60 residents early in the planning process, residents were asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly proud of.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that make their community special to them and things that they would like to encourage in the future.

	“Prouds” in Somers	Percent of Total Votes
Community Facilities	Field Road Recreation Area, firehouse, library, Piedmont Hall, Recreation Department, recreation programs, school activities, school complex, school system, Senior Center, Town Hall, youth programs.	40%
Open Space	Northern Connecticut Land Trust open space, open space, Shenipsit State Forest, Soapstone Mountain, Town Green, undeveloped areas, Cedar Knob Golf Course.	16%
Community Character	Apple orchards, beautification group, farms, flowering gardens, McCann Farm, rural character, small town character, Somersville Mill, Worthington Pond Farm.	16%
Historic Resources	Historic buildings, historic houses, historic Main Street, Historical Museum, Indian (Somers Mountain) Museum, Robert Pease House.	13%
Business Development	Colonial Flower Shop, Dzen's Garden Market Area, lack of fast food franchises, small shops on Main Street, Child's Place Preschool.	5%
Miscellaneous	Cooksville, Green Tree Lane development, center of town, Four Town Fairgrounds, new sidewalks, 624 Springfield Road, 5 Main Street.	10%

Choosing “Prouds”



Choosing “Sorrys”



Things to Discourage ...

Residents were also asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly sorry about.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that concern them about their community and things that they would like to discourage in the future.

Residents also expressed desire for protecting and improving community character

Groundwater contamination and the firehouses were largely responsible for the concern over natural resources and community facilities.

	“Sorries” in Somers	Percent of Total Votes
Business Development	Field Road an eyesore, Field Road metal buildings, junk yard area on Field Road, new metal "box" on South Road, Egypt Road industrial park, should have an industrial park, Eleanor Road industrial building, Gold House, CBT, Clarissa's Villa/Plaza, Dunkin Donuts, Italian Villa, Johann's, Maturo's Golf Center, Micky Finn's, Mobil, Somersville used car lots, spot commercial area on Springfield Road, need to be more business-friendly, failed opportunities for business development, center of Somers - loss of business area, lack of business development, lack of development in Somersville.	32%
Historic Resources	Somersville Mill, loss of historic buildings in the center of Somers, failure to take advantage of older buildings.	23%
Community Character	Abandoned/rundown houses, Egypt Road/Field Road storage area in residential neighborhood, light pollution, Somersville homes, unregistered/abandoned cars/trucks, Worthington Pond Farm, deforested building lots on Brookford Drive.	13%
Natural Resources	Contaminated land on Field Road, contaminated land on Springfield Road, contaminated Properties, Egypt Road needs more trees, litter on George Wood Road at Somers/Enfield Line area, pollution, water pollution from prison, water pollution, Shady Lake unused by youth.	9%
Community Facilities	Poor condition of Field Road playground, Kibbe Fuller School, Land Use staff, new fire house, old fire house – not used by police, school objectives for students, Town Hall	9%
Miscellaneous	64 Springfield Road, Mill Road, high taxes, Zoning Commission, firehouse cell tower, prisons, rod & gun club, lack of senior / affordable housing, Mill Pond Apartments, Partridge Run development, Route 190 goes through the center of town, Car dominated Town Center, Intersection of Rtes. 190 and 83, Rte. 83 curb cuts, Somersville used car lot drive unapproved	15%

Residents were asked to identify topics that they felt were most important for Somers to address in the Plan. The top priorities were:

1. *Open Space*
2. *Business Development*

Things to Focus on...

To identify the top issues to be addressed in the Plan, residents were each given 50 planning points and asked to identify the issues that were most important to them by voting with their points for a variety of planning topics likely to be included in the Plan. The results are described below.

In December of 2003, a random telephone survey of 401 households was conducted to validate the public input received to date, as well as many of the strategies developed by the Steering Committee to address identified issues. While the results of the survey are incorporated throughout this Plan, some of the highlights are summarized below by planning topic.

Primary Issues

Among the broad categories of conservation, development and infrastructure topics, conservation was the most important, garnering 44% of the participant's votes, led by the number one issue of open space (21%). Development issues closely followed conservation issues with 41% of the votes, led by the number two issue of business development (19%).

Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote
Conservation Topics		44%	Development Topics		41%	Infrastructure Topics		15%
1	Open Space	21%	2	Business Development	19%	9	Vehicular Circulation	5%
3	Natural Resources	12%	4	Village Enhancement	12%	10	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
6	Community Character	8%	5	Housing Needs	9%	11	Community Facilities	3%
7	Historic Resources	8%	8	Residential Development	7%	12	Utilities	2%

Open Space

Residents at the April 17, 2003 public meeting expressed a number of reasons for preserving more open space including preserving wildlife habitat, preserving community character, providing recreation areas and reducing development potential. The telephone survey results supported these findings as indicated by the following responses

Open Space	Response
• Somers should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails.	80%
• Somers should require open space as part of every new development.	65%
• Would pay \$50 to \$100 more per year in taxes, to have the Town acquire more open space.	59%
• Somers should preserve more open space.	58%

Business Development

Business development was the number two issue identified. However, concern for business development was not limited to the need for tax revenue, shopping opportunities or jobs. Many residents were concerned with the quality and appearance of industrial and commercial development and its effect on community character. Others accepted Somers' role as a rural bedroom community and want it to stay that way. Once again, the survey results presented below support these findings.

Residents found protecting natural resources and village enhancement to be equally important to the future of Somers.

Business Development	Response
• I would shop more in Somers if stores met my everyday needs	80%
• Somers needs a grocery store	72%
• Somers could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development in town.	72%

Secondary Issues

Natural resources and village enhancement issues were in a virtual tie for the third and fourth most important planning issues.

Natural Resources

Natural resource protection was the third most important issue identified, receiving 12% of residents' votes. Residents were primarily concerned with protecting surface and groundwater quality as well as preserving forest and farmland. Despite being the third ranked concern among meeting participants, 83% of residents surveyed agreed that Somers was doing a good job protecting natural resources.

Natural Resources	Response
• Somers is doing a good job protecting natural resources..	83%

Business Development



Natural Resources



Village Enhancement

Village enhancement received slightly fewer votes than natural resources yet also garnered 12% of the votes. Village enhancement issues raised by meeting participants included: the need for pedestrian enhancements; protecting historic buildings and the New England charm of the villages; moving parking to the rear of buildings; property maintenance; and creating draws within the villages to attract residents and visitors.

Village Enhancement	Response
• The Town should do more to create walkable villages.	69%
• Somers should encourage mixed-use development within the villages, such as apartments and offices over first floor retail stores	49%

Survey results were mixed with respect to the public meeting results, with clear support for making the villages more pedestrian friendly but only moderate support for mixed uses within the villages. However, there was clear support for the mixed-use redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Company mill, with survey results ranging from 59% in favor of lodging uses up to 83% in favor of office uses within the mill.

Tertiary Planning Issues		
Rank	Topic	% of Total Vote
5	Housing Needs	9%
6	Community Character	8%
7	Historic Resources	8%
8	Residential Development	7%
9	Vehicular Circulation	5%
10	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
11	Community Facilities	3%
12	Utilities	2%

Tertiary Issues

Housing needs, community character, historic resources and residential development make up the third tier of planning issues, receiving seven to nine percent of residents' votes. While not discussed in detail during the initial public meeting, survey results clearly support strategies to address issues in these areas.

Housing Needs

Housing for older residents and active adults, first time buyers and moderate income households were all identified as significant housing needs while additional apartments and condominiums were not supported.

There need to be more:	Response
• Housing for elderly persons.	91%
• Housing for active adults who are 55 and older.	83%
• Moderate-income housing.	70%
• Housing for first-time home buyers.	60%

Community Character and Historic Resources

Despite being ranked sixth among issue areas, the issue of community character spilled over into many of the public discussions on other issues such as open space, business development and village enhancement. Historic resources are an important component of Somers community character.

Survey respondents were clearly supportive of community character and historic resource protection strategies.

Community Character and Historic Resources	Response
• Somers should do more to protect scenic resources.	72%
• Somers should create economic and regulatory incentives for historic preservation.	72%
• Somers should create regulatory controls for historic preservation.	69%
• The Town should do more to protect scenic roads	65%

Residential Development

Residential development is closely tied with both open space preservation and housing needs. Residents surveyed were moderately to strongly supportive of strategies to manage residential development patterns in an effort to protect natural resources and preserve more open space. A strong majority of residents were also in favor of housing diversity, reinforcing the findings for housing needs.

Residential Development	Response
• Residential subdivisions that preserve more public open space but keep the same number of houses are a good idea	72%
• Somers needs a variety of housing types to maintain a diverse community	71%
• Residential subdivisions that reduce lot sizes to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, but keep the same number of houses, are a good idea.	53%

Infrastructure

Infrastructure topics received the lowest public interest, which was mirrored by the survey results in which residents generally found community facilities and services to be adequate for their needs.

Despite the low priority of infrastructure issues, survey respondents moderately to strongly supported infrastructure related strategies.

Infrastructure	Response
• The intersection of Route 190 and Route 83 is a problem	71%
• Somers needs after-school programs for teenagers	70%
• There should be sidewalks or trails connecting Somers and Somersville to each other as well as to other activity areas such as the School / Library campus and the Recreation Area	63%
• Somers' sewer system should be expanded to accommodate future development	60%
• Somers' public water systems should be expanded to accommodate future development	59%
• Somers needs some form of outdoor water recreation such as a swimming area, pool or children's recreational fountains	58%

Overall Plan Direction

Overall Philosophy

Based on this input from residents and committee members, it appears that the overall guiding philosophy of the Plan is to:

**Balance conservation and development
to protect and enhance community character and
improve Somers' quality of life.**

Themes

To accomplish this overriding goal, the plan has been organized under the following strategy themes

Themes	Components
Protecting Important Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preserve more open space• Protect natural resources• Preserve farmland• Protect historic and scenic resources
Guiding Appropriate Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve patterns of residential development• Guide appropriate, quality business development• Support desired development patterns
Addressing Community Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain quality community facilities and services• Ensure a safe and efficient transportation system• Address changing housing needs

Voting on Important Issues



Walkable Community Workshop



PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

3

Overview

Somers derives much of its character and quality of life from its unique combination of natural, historic, and scenic resources.

By protecting these important resources and guiding future development, Somers can maintain and enhance community character and quality of life for generations to come.

Protecting important resources is a critical element in maintaining community character and ensuring quality of life for current and future generations.

Open Space



Natural Resources



Historic Resources



Scenic Resources



Preserving open space was a primary concern of Somers' residents and is therefore a high priority in the Plan.

Open Space Types

From an open space planning perspective, experience has shown that open space generally falls into four categories.

Dedicated Open Space

Land preserved in perpetuity as open space, often with public use.

Managed Open Space

Land set aside for some other purpose, such as a golf course or public watershed land that provides some open space value. Public use may not always be allowed.

Protected Open Space

Land protected from development, such as a conservation easement, but public use may not be allowed

Perceived Open Space

Land that looks or feels open, such as a fallow farm or private woodlands, but is not preserved as open space.

Preserved Agriculture

Preserved agriculture, illustrated on the adjacent Open Space Plan, is active farmland from which development rights have been purchased, allowing the land to continue being farmed but prohibiting future development.

Preserve More Meaningful Open Space

Preserving meaningful open space will help conserve important natural resources, protect wildlife habitat, create more environmentally sensitive development patterns, provide fiscal benefits, protect community character and enhance the quality of life for Somers residents.

Open space ranked as the number one planning issue facing Somers, receiving 21% of the "votes" among residents attending the initial public meeting on this Plan. After being informed that seven percent of Somers is actually preserved as open space, 58% agreed that the Town should preserve more open space.

Preserve More Open Space

For Somers to protect and enhance community character and quality of life, attention must be paid to preserving more open space. This can be done by regulation (such as increasing the "set-aside" as part of new residential development), through purchase of land or even donation. The Somers Open Space and Trails Committee has recommended a goal of preserving 50% of the remaining undeveloped land in town. If this goal is accomplished, over 7,700 acres or approximately one-quarter of Somers total land area would be preserved as open space by the time the Town is fully developed.

There are two basic approaches to preserving more open space: regulatory approaches and acquisition.

Regulatory Approaches

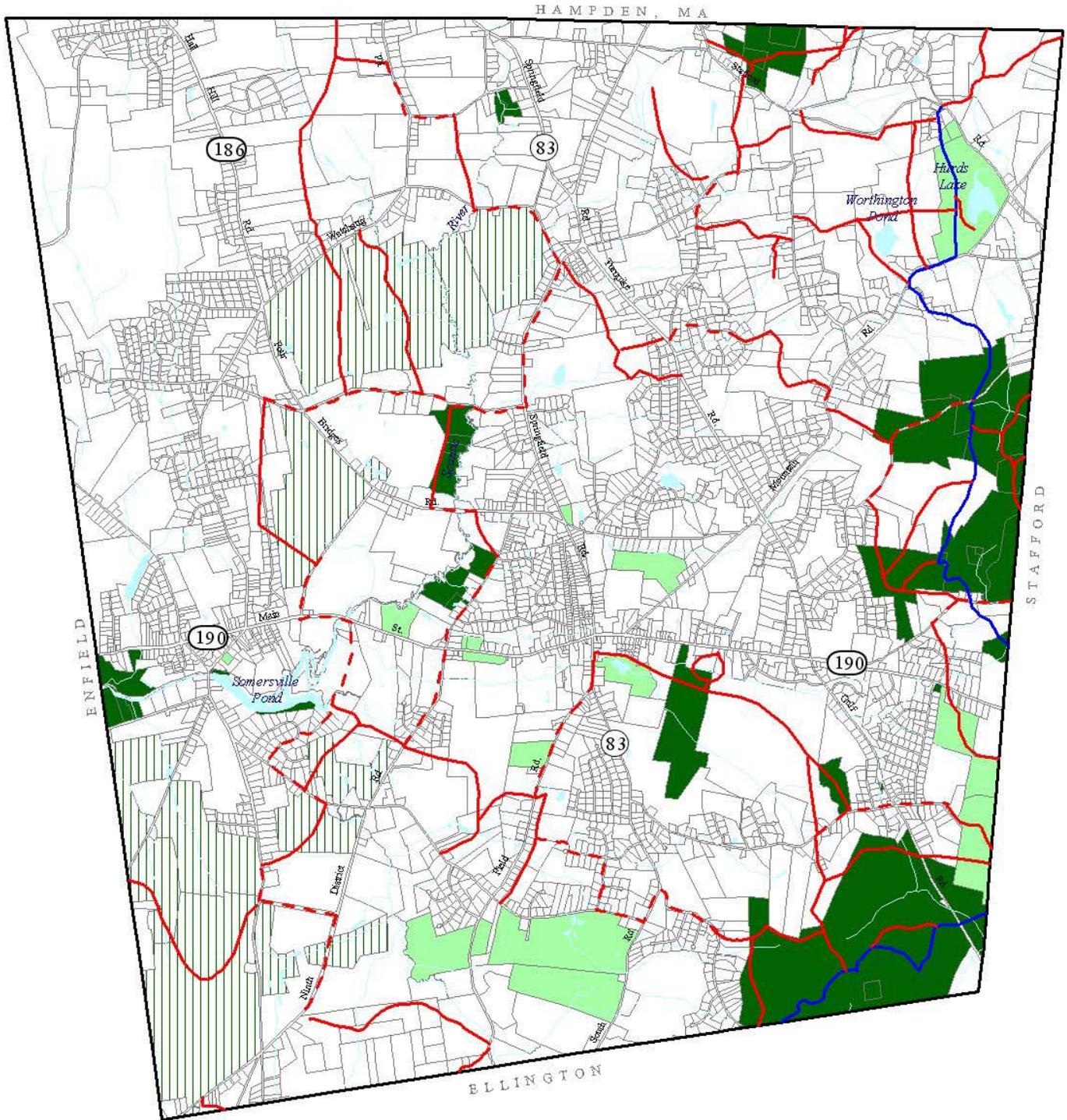
In terms of regulation, it is recommended that Somers increase the mandatory open space "set-aside" from 10% to 15% of every residential subdivision. Sixty-five percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers should require open space as part of every new development. The Planning Commission or its Open Space and Trails Committee should identify the most appropriate open space within each development.

Some communities have adopted open space equivalency factors where wetlands and other environmentally constrained areas are "discounted" so that an even greater percentage of open space preservation occurs on the most constrained parcels. Other communities require that dedicated open space be representative of the overall quality of the parcel (i.e. similar in the proportion of wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes). Somers may wish to consider similar regulations.

Somers' conventional one-acre zoning practically assures that new development will consume all but the mandatory open space set-aside for residential lots. By adopting density-based zoning, the same number of residential lots can be flexibly located within a development to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, reduce the amount of infrastructure needed and preserve open space above and beyond the mandatory set-aside.

Open Space Plan

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

- Dedicated Open Space
- Managed Open Space
- Preserved Agriculture
- Water and Watercourses

- State Blue Trail
- Existing Trails
- On-Road Connections

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Lincoln Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5261

Many property owners have an emotional attachment to their land and given a choice, would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community.

Fiscal Benefits

Studies have shown that purchasing open space can be fiscally responsible over time when compared to the perpetual costs and benefits of residential development that might otherwise occur.

A 1990 study of three Dutchess County, NY towns by Scenic Hudson, Inc. found that residential land required \$1.11 to \$1.23 in services for every tax dollar it generated, while open land required only \$0.17 to \$0.74 in services¹

According to a report by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, "for every \$1.00 collected in taxes, residential development costs between \$1.04 and \$1.67 in services..."²

A study of three rural Massachusetts towns found residential development requires \$1.12 in services for every dollar in tax revenue, compared to \$0.33 in services for farmland and open space³.

¹Thomas, Holly L. February 1991. "The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation", Technical Memo of the Dutchess County Planning Department.

²Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions. "Open Space is a Good Investment: The Financial Argument for Open Space Preservation.". 1996.

³Freedgood, Julia. 1992. "Does Farmland Protection Pay?: The Cost of Community Services in Three Massachusetts Towns." American Farmland Trust.

Some communities simply permit greater development flexibility in return for preserving additional open space while others permit subdivisions with open space development patterns by right, making conventional subdivisions a special permit. Somers may wish to consider a similar approach.

When there is no appropriate open space within a new subdivision, the Commission can accept a fee-in-lieu of open space equal to ten percent of the fair market value of the land prior to development, to be used to purchase open space elsewhere in Town. Fees must be placed in the Town's dedicated open space fund.

An alternative might be to allow an equivalent off-site dedication of open space, such as a portion of the Shenipsit Trail or similar valuable open space. A variation on off-site dedication is "open space banking" in which the Town purchases desirable open space and allows developers to gradually pay down the purchase with fees-in-lieu of open space as they develop land elsewhere in Town.

Regardless of the methods used, the Planning Commission should obtain desirable open space or a fee-in-lieu-of open space as part of every residential subdivision.

Acquisition Approaches

For Somers to be able to preserve the open space parcels that are most important to the Town's open space strategy the community must be prepared to purchase key properties and/or work with property owners for their full or even partial donation, either before or when they come on the market. Residents are supportive of the Town purchasing additional open space with 69% of those surveyed willing to spend \$50 or more per year in taxes to have the Town do so.

To facilitate this, the Town should finance the dedicated open space fund on an annual basis or consider bonding to have an immediately effective fund, able to purchase critical open space as it becomes available. Several communities, such as Groton, CT, have successfully used this approach. When adequately funded, an open space fund can be used to leverage matching open space grants, making local funds twice as effective.

Open space preservation does not always have to mean purchase of an entire property. Somers is one of the most successful towns in the State at purchasing development rights to protect farmland. Many communities have used this approach to preserve open space as well. Land can also be purchased outright and paid back over time through a "reverse mortgage", leased back to an owner, or an owner can be granted "life use" of the property.

Donating land or development rights can also be an effective estate planning tool. Many property owners have an emotional attachment to their land and given a choice, would prefer to see their property preserved in a way that enhances the community rather than be developed. The active solicitation of open space donations (land, development rights and easements) is an increasingly popular and successful open space tool that should be promoted in Somers.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

Overall Open Space System

Interconnecting open spaces with greenways is the most effective way for Somers to establish a meaningful open space system that provides benefits for both passive recreation and wildlife. Eighty percent of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails where appropriate. A system of greenways can function as wildlife corridors, allowing wildlife to migrate between larger open space habitats. By connecting the villages of Somers and Somersville with the school campus and recreation area, a trail system within the greenways can not only provide passive recreation but can also reduce dependency on automobiles.

Connectivity between greenway segments is critical to the effectiveness of the overall system. To close gaps in a greenway system, the Town should encourage other open space organizations to allow public access and secure easements over private property when necessary.

Enhance Existing Open Space

When opportunities to acquire land adjacent to existing open space arise, they should be evaluated for their ability to enhance the overall utility of the open space system and acquired if desirable. Such acquisitions can enhance wildlife habitat, create linkages between open spaces and expand both passive and active recreational opportunities.

Protect Important Resources

Preserving open space is an important tool for protecting natural and scenic resources. While outright acquisition of open space typically provides the greatest benefits, protection of the natural or scenic resource can also be effectively accomplished through the use of conservation easements. The Planning Commission and Conservation Commission can require conservation easements to protect important resources during their respective application review processes.

Identify and Prioritize Open Space Parcels for Acquisition

The Open Space and Trails Committee should prioritize open space parcels for acquisition to produce the most effective open space system for Somers.

Observation Tower



Shenipsit State Forest



Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to guide appropriate residential development that may result in additional open space.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies to create a system of trails throughout Somers.

Fees in-Lieu-of-Open Space

The Somers Subdivision Regulations allow the Planning Commission to accept a fee-in-lieu of open space to be used to purchase open space in more appropriate locations, in accordance with Section 8-26 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Despite the recommendation to increase the mandatory open space set-aside to 15% of every new residential development, if choosing to accept a fee-in-lieu of open space, the Planning Commission will be limited by Statute to accepting a fee or a combination of land and fee equal to 10% of the pre-development fair-market value of the land .

Open Space Preservation Strategies

Preserve More Open Space

1. Increase the mandatory open space "set-aside" to 15% as part of every residential development application.
2. Enhance the open space acquisition fund through annual contributions in the budget and/or by bonding to have a more immediate effect.
3. Pursue state and/or federal open space grants.
4. Convert unprotected and perceived open space into protected open space by acquiring land or easements.
5. Establish criteria in regulations to allow development flexibility for open space preservation.
6. Continue to require conservation easements or other measures during approvals.
7. Adopt regulations to allow off-site dedication and/or banking of open space.
8. Amend the regulations allow "open space developments" resulting in a higher percentage of open space by right and require a Special Use Permit for "conventional developments" that maximize lot sizes..
9. Educate residents about benefits of open space donation and sale of development rights.

Preserve Meaningful Open Space and Create a Greenway System

10. Identify and prioritize open space parcels for acquisition.
11. Interconnect open spaces into a system of greenways.
12. Establish trails along greenways to encourage passive recreation.
13. Encourage other organizations to allow for public access and use.

Somers Little League Fields



Cedar Knob Golf Course



Protect Important Natural Resources

Conservation of natural resources is important for preserving environmental functions, maintaining biodiversity and preventing damage to the environment.

Despite the fact that 83% of residents surveyed agree that the Town is doing a good job protecting natural resources, there are several strategies that Somers can use to enhance protection of natural resources.

Relate Development Intensity to Land Capability

While natural resources can be degraded over time due to pollution and other factors, development activity poses one of the most significant threats to both the quantity and quality of natural resources in Somers. Unless regulations acknowledge that all land is not created equal, development will continue to encroach upon environmentally sensitive areas, degrading or depleting natural resources.

Adopt Soil-Based Zoning

Soil-based zoning relates the residential development potential of a parcel to the carrying capacity of the underlying soils. Under soil-based zoning, a residential density factor is assigned to each natural soil group, with progressively lower densities for soils with fair to poor development potential. Such an approach is most appropriate in areas that rely on soil characteristics to support wells and septic systems necessary for residential development in certain areas of Somers (it would not be applicable in areas served by public water and sewer). The natural soils groups are described in the following table and map.

Development Potential	Natural Soil Group	Description
Good	Excessively Drained	Generally very well drained soils.
	Well Drained	Generally well drained soils.
Fair	“Hardpan”	Restricted drainage is a constraint
	Shallow and Rocky	Presence of rock is a constraint.
Poor	Floodplain / Alluvial (Wetlands)	Flooding potential is a constraint
	Poorly Drained (Wetlands)	Poor drainage is a constraint
Variable	Made / Urban Land	Soil types are not discernible.

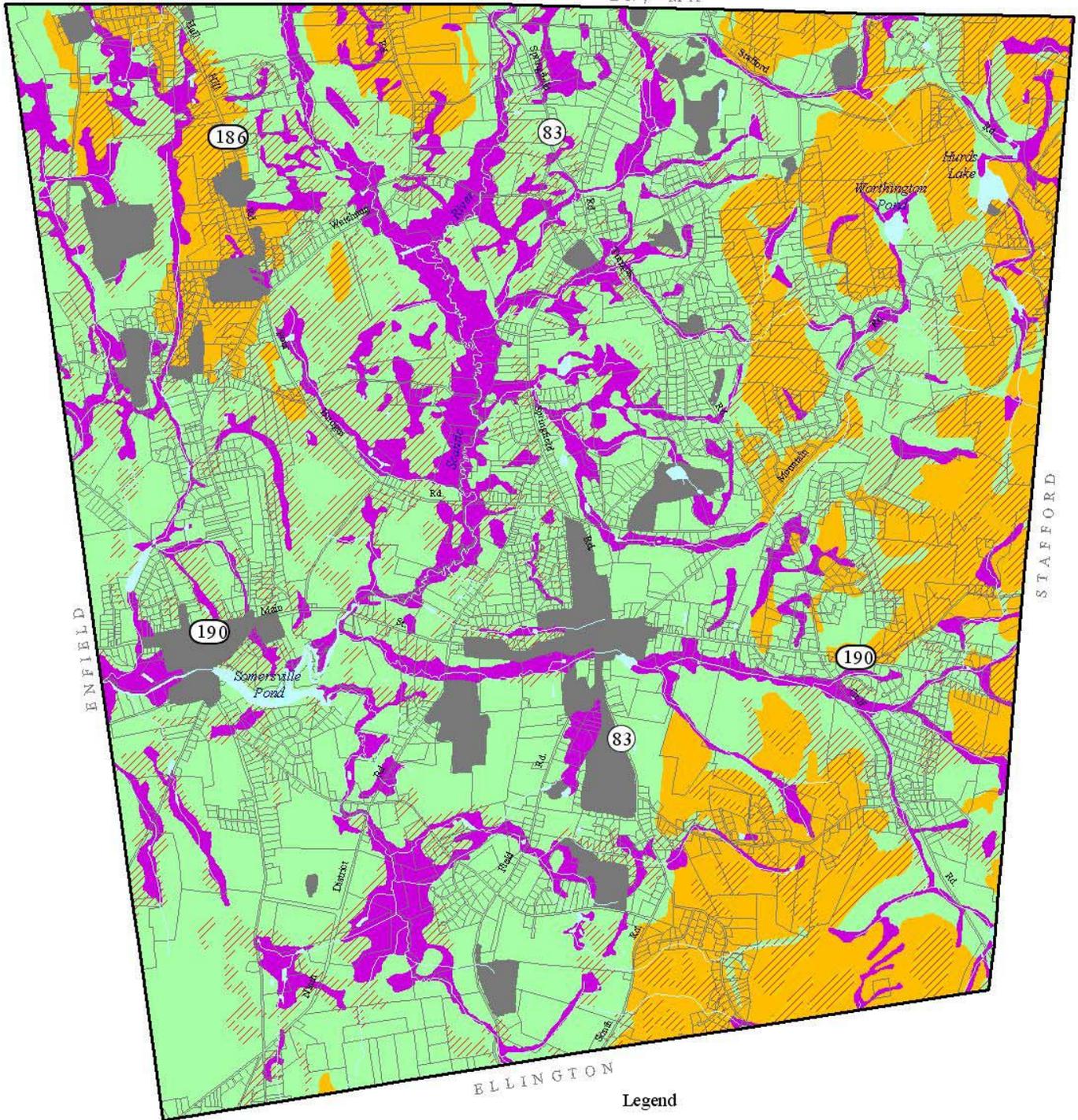
Protecting natural resources is important to maintaining community character and the overall quality of life in Somers.

Natural Soil Groups

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

3125801 Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Legend

- Well Drained
- Well Drained (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)
- Hardpan or Shallow/Rocky
- Hardpan or Shallow/Rocky (Slopes > 15% or High Water Table)
- Poorly Drained
- Variable
- Water

Preserve Natural Diversity

With 60% of the Town either preserved as open space or undeveloped, Somers likely contains significant areas of wildlife habitat. As future development occurs, wildlife habitat will be disturbed, fragmented and lost unless measures are taken to minimize their disturbance. This loss of habitat can lead to wildlife encroaching on residential development and even a reduction in biodiversity if rare or endangered species are affected (see sidebar).

To protect vernal pools and threatened or endangered species habitat identified in the DEP's Natural Diversity Database (see Natural Resources Plan), Somers' staff should work closely with applicants to mitigate any negative development impacts on these sensitive natural resource areas. The Conservation Commission should consider inventorying and mapping vernal pools to aid in their protection.

Another simple measure of added protection for preserving the natural ecosystem is to prohibit the deliberate introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process. Invasive plant and animal species can aggressively multiply; replacing native wildlife food sources, causing costly property damage and even threatening human health and safety.

Important Natural Resource Protection Strategies

1. Adopt soil-based zoning to relate density of development to the capability of soils to support development.
2. Minimize wildlife habitat loss through the preservation of open space and natural resource areas.
3. Work with applicants to ensure that important vernal pools and Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) resources are protected.
4. Inventory and map vernal pools.
5. Prohibit the introduction of non-native or invasive species during the site development or subdivision process.

Invasive Species (Giant Hogweed)



Steep Erodible Soils



Important Wildlife Habitat

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) maintains a Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) that identifies areas where species of concern that are threatened or endangered may exist within Somers.

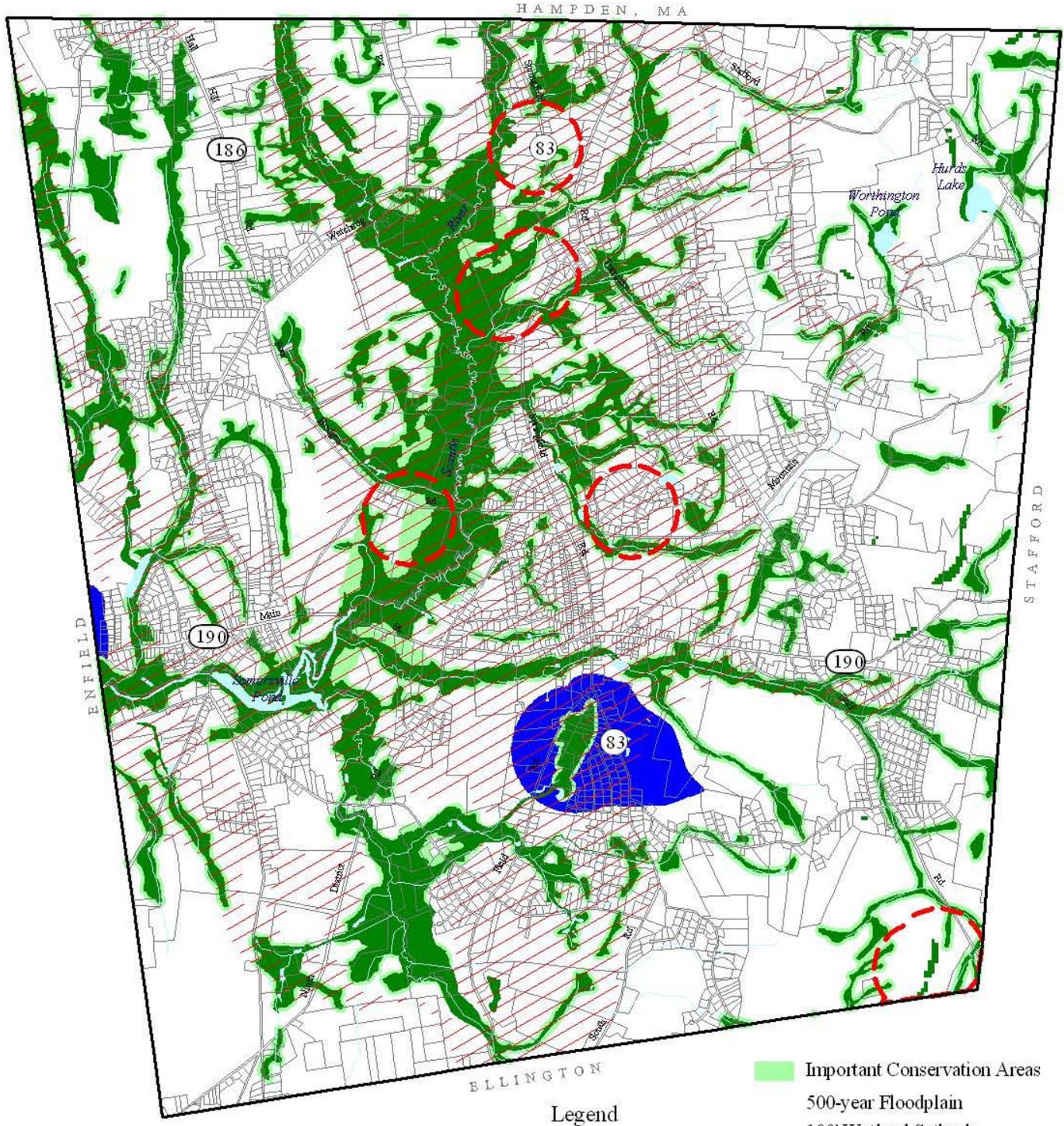
When development proposals occur in these areas (depicted on the Conservation Plan on the facing page), applicants should work closely with Town and DEP staff to mitigate any impacts on the species of concern and its habitat.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to guide appropriate residential development that may also help to preserve important natural resources.

Natural Resources Plan

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

0 3000 Feet



- Significant Conservation Areas
- Wetlands
- 100-year Floodplain
- Slopes > 25%

- Important Conservation Areas
- 500-year Floodplain
- 100' Wetland Setback
- High Groundwater Availability
- Aquifer Protection Areas
- Natural Diversity Database Areas
- Water and Watercourses

Protect Water Quality

Given Somers' history of groundwater contamination, protecting water quality should be a high priority for natural resource protection in Somers. Somers' surface and groundwater resources provide potable water, contribute to biological diversity and add to the overall quality of life for residents.

Modify Aquifer Protection Regulations

Somers' Zoning Regulations contain groundwater protection regulations intended to regulate the use and storage of potential water contaminants above aquifers areas and other high groundwater availability areas. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has also adopted model aquifer protection regulations that specifically affect public water supply well-fields. It is recommended that Somers appoint the Zoning Commission as the "aquifer protection agency" for the Town and modify its groundwater protection regulations to comply with the minimum requirements of the DEP's new regulations governing Level A Aquifer Protection Areas.

Protection of water quality may be Somers' most important natural resource protection priority.

According to Aquifer Protection Regulations adopted by the Department of Environmental Protection (Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies - Section 22a-354i-9. Best Management Practices for Regulated Activities), best management practices for sensitive water resource areas include:

1. Every regulated activity shall be conducted in accordance with the following:
 - a. Hazardous materials may be stored above ground within an aquifer protection area only in accordance with certain conditions.
 - b. No person shall increase the number of underground storage tanks used to store hazardous materials.
 - c. An underground storage tank used to store hazardous materials shall not be replaced with a larger tank except under certain conditions.
 - d. No person shall use, maintain or install floor drains, dry wells or other infiltration devices or appurtenances which allow the release of waste waters to the ground, without specific approval.
 - e. A materials management plan shall be developed and implemented in accordance specified criteria and standards.
2. The development and implementation of a storm water management plan shall be required for regulated activities, as follows:
 - a. A storm water management plan shall assure that storm water run-off generated by the subject regulated activity is (i) managed in a manner so as to prevent pollution of ground water, and (ii) shall comply with all of the requirements for the General Permit of the Discharge of Storm Water associated with a Commercial Activity issued pursuant to section 22a-430b of the Connecticut General Statutes; and
 - b. upon approval by the Commissioner or the municipal aquifer protection agency, as appropriate, the storm water management plan shall be enforceable by the Commissioner or such agency, as appropriate.

Address Underground Storage Tanks

Underground fuel storage tanks, if not properly maintained and monitored, can also pose a threat to groundwater quality. Recognizing the potential for tanks to leak as a threat to property values, many lending institutions are requiring the removal of underground storage tanks. Despite this trend, new underground storage tanks continue to be installed in Somers.

Somers should adopt an underground storage tank ordinance that: prohibits the installation of new underground storage tanks; requires the registration, testing and/or monitoring of existing tanks; and requires the scheduled removal of older tanks based on their age, construction and useful life (ex.. single-wall steel tanks of undetermined age must be removed within one year or upon the sale of the home; single-wall steel tanks must be removed within 10 years of documented installation or upon the sale of the home; and double-wall fiberglass on plastic tanks with double wall piping and monitoring must be removed within 20 years of documented installation)

Address Stormwater Management

Dispersed or “non-point” sources of pollution such as road runoff, pesticides and fertilizers can be harmful when collected, concentrated and discharged into waterways. Under the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) new National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II guidelines, Somers, and commercial properties tying into its system, will be responsible for reducing the discharge of pollutants to the “maximum extent practical” through the implementation of a series of “minimum control measures” and “best management practices”.

Such measures and practices might include:

- clarifying and strengthening the zero increase in runoff regulations contained in the Zoning Regulations;
- improving stormwater treatment by natural or mechanical means such as vegetative wetland buffers that filter pollutants; or grease and sediment traps that capture oily residue from motor vehicles and sand applied to pavement in winter;
- limiting clearing and grading of sites to minimize impacts on natural drainage patterns; and
- providing water quality educational resources to land use commissions and the public.

Water Quality Protection Strategies

1. Adopt an Aquifer Protection Zone to allow uses according to their potential risk to water resource protection areas and designate the Zoning Commission as the agency responsible for administering the regulations.
2. Adopt a residential underground storage tank ordinance to prohibit the installation of new tanks, require the licensing, and monitoring of existing tanks and require the removal of older and undocumented tanks.
3. Require that the “first flush” of runoff be appropriately treated in terms of quality and rate of runoff.
4. Encourage site designs that minimize impervious surfaces, promote infiltration of stormwater, and reduce runoff.
5. Continue to provide vegetative buffers to wetland and watercourses to filter pollutants and protect them from direct receipt of runoff.
6. Limit the clearing and grading of sites so as to minimize the impact on natural drainage patterns.
7. Promote public education programs that address “non-point” pollution issues.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies designed to mitigate the stormwater impacts of paved surfaces such as roads and parking lots.

Underground Storage Tank Removal



Pesticides Can Add to Non-Point Pollution



Prime Farmland

Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage fiber, oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses (i.e. undeveloped). This land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland or forestland.

Department of Environmental Protection

Additional Farmland of Statewide Importance

Nearly prime farmland that economically produces high yields of crops when treated and managed according to modern farming methods. These areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmlands under the right conditions.

Department of Environmental Protection

Purchase of Development Rights

Programs that purchase development rights assist farmers by:

- preserving the best agricultural lands as farmlands,
- providing an opportunity for farmers to purchase land at affordable prices,
- providing working capital to enable farm operations to become economically stable,
- helping farmers overcome estate planning problems, which often result in loss of farmland.

Preserve Agricultural Resources

Thanks to the rich agricultural soils found in the western two-thirds of town, Somers has remained an agricultural community for nearly 300 years. Today, almost 5,000 acres or 27% of Somers land area is being used for agricultural purposes including: growing food crops, tobacco and nursery stock as well as raising livestock such as cattle and horses.

For Somers, preserving farmland is more than simply protecting a natural resource. Somers' farms contribute to the local economy, with more farm employers than manufacturing employers and produce available through several local outlets. Somers' farms are also a major contributing factor to the Town's scenic character. By preserving agricultural land, Somers will help maintain economic diversity, community character and the overall quality of life in the community.

Encourage Preservation of Prime Areas for Agricultural Use

As the following map illustrates, there is not always a correlation between prime farmland and actual farming. Somers has no agricultural zone designed specifically to protect and encourage agricultural use over other uses. The areas identified as prime agricultural soils at risk are predominantly zoned for one-acre residential development but may still be actively farmed. The protected prime agricultural soils benefit from the purchase of development rights that limit prohibit their further development

Continue Success of the Purchase of Development Rights Program

The best method of preserving prime farmland is through a program that purchases development rights from farmers. The State of Connecticut operates a Farmland Preservation Program that accomplishes four things:

- it allows farms to remain in private ownership and farmed in perpetuity;
- it prevents farmland from ever being developed;
- farmers receive an influx of cash, eliminating the need to sell all or part of a farm for development; and
- it reduces the taxable value of the land, making farming more viable.

This program is voluntary and property owners are required to document existing farm use and prime agricultural soil types. Despite funding limitations at the state level that make this program highly competitive, Somers has the second most successful farmland preservation effort in the State with 1,654 acres of development rights purchased accounting for nine percent of the entire town.

Some towns have also used local funds to purchase farms or development rights to for the greater good of the community. Options available to towns include:

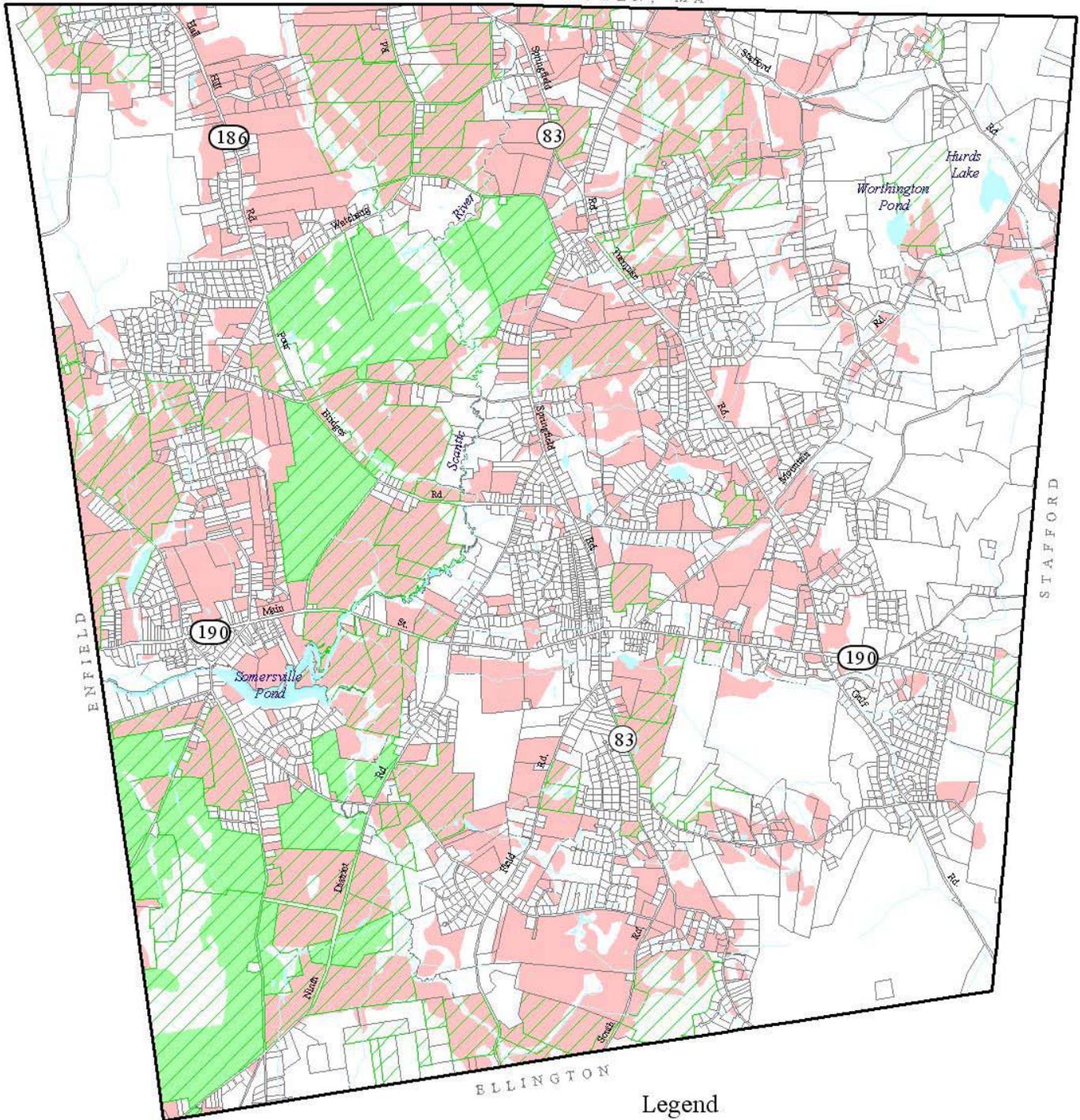
- purchasing development rights, allowing farms to remain in private ownership and farmed in perpetuity;
- purchasing farms outright and leasing them back to the owner or others to farm (such as a resident farm cooperative); and
- purchasing a farm outright and operating community gardens.

Agricultural Resource Plan

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



ENFIELD

STAFFORD

ELLINGTON

Legend

-  Presently Farmed
-  Prime Agricultural Soil at Risk
-  Prime Agricultural Soil Preserved
-  Water

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Longfellow Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5264

Utilize Agricultural Land Trusts

Agricultural land trusts offer another alternative for preserving land and are dedicated to holding and leasing farmlands. The American Farmland Trust operates nationwide to preserve farms and address farmland issues while the Working Land Alliance has recently established the Connecticut Farmland Trust for the donation of agricultural land and preservation funds. Such organizations make ideal stewards to own and maintain the productive use of preserved farmland.

Continue to Offer Local Tax Incentives for Preserving Farmland

Section 12-107 of the Connecticut General Statutes, often referred to as Public Act (P.A.) 490, authorizes communities to assess farmland at a lower value when it is actively farmed. While not a true preservation program, P.A. 490 does help farmers by lowering their tax assessment, which helps maintain the viability of farms under what can be difficult economic conditions. Somers should continue to offer this program to assist farmers with maintenance of agricultural uses.

Adopt a “Right to Farm” Policy

With its successful farmland preservation program and status as home of the Four Town and Hartford County 4-H Fairs, Somers is clearly supportive of agricultural activities. However, as the Town continues to develop residentially, conflicts between farmers and residents will increase over such issues as odor, wandering livestock, trespass, etc. Somers should adopt a “right to farm” policy that supports agricultural activities by protecting farmers from nuisance claims that may arise from the normal operation of their farms in close proximity to residential development.

Farmland Protection Strategies

1. Encourage local farmers, and assist them if necessary, in submitting applications for the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program in order to preserve farmland and agricultural uses.
2. Continue the farm assessment program (P.A. 490) in order to assist farmers with maintenance of agricultural uses.
3. Consider establishing a municipal program for purchase of farm development rights.
4. Work with agricultural land trusts to preserve agricultural land in Somers.
5. Adopt a “right to farm” policy to protect agricultural uses.

Preserve Historic Resources

Somers and its residents, such as Captain Levi Pease and the Keeney Family, have made important contributions to state and national history. Thanks to the foresight of many residents who followed them, much of Somers' history has been preserved in its architecture, villages and museums.

A survey of residents revealed that 80% agree that Somers is doing a good job of protecting historic resources. Surprisingly, all of the preservation efforts to date have been voluntary, as there are no controls in place to protect these historic resources.

Encourage “Sensitive Stewardship”

Owners who are emotionally and financially committed to maintaining historic resources are the most effective means of preserving them. Sensitive stewardship should be encouraged through educational programs and other technical assistance, since without it, no regulatory or incentive program can prevent the loss of historic resources due to demolition or neglect.

Recognize Significant Historic Resources

Another way to encourage historic preservation is through recognition programs such as the National Register of Historic Places. While Somers has two National Register Historic Districts, no individual properties are recognized on either the State or National Registers of Historic Places.

According to the Somers Historical Society, Somers was home to the first theological seminary in the country. Although the building no longer exists, the site may be worthy of an historic marker. The Blacksmith Shoppe in Somersville is also a good candidate for designation as a National Register Historic Place.

Somers should also consider establishing a local register of historic places to acknowledge properties of local historic significance. Such a program can be administered by the Somers Historical Society and involve the voluntarily placement of small placards on historic structures to indicate the original owner and date of construction. While adding no protection to a property, it can instill pride in ownership and encourage preservation efforts.

Options for Establishing Preservation Programs

Somers can choose from a variety of preservation programs, ranging from honorary programs such as historic registers to regulatory programs such as “village districts” and local historic districts, in order to protect its historic resources. While some programs are simple and inexpensive to implement, others may require further investigation, significant public education efforts and careful consideration before adoption.

Somers should preserve historic resources to protect community character and enhance quality of life.

National Register Historic Districts

- Somers village
- Somersville

National Register Historic Districts

Somers already has two National Register Historic Districts, essentially covering the most historic portions of its two villages. These district designations are mostly honorary in nature but also offer tax advantages for the rehabilitation of historic commercial properties within them. Consideration should be given to expanding these districts to include any peripheral historic properties.

Local Historic Districts

In order to exercise regulatory control over the architectural integrity of historic resources, local historic districts should be established. Despite failed attempts to establish local historic districts in Somers in 1980 and Somersville in 1995, 69% of Somers residents surveyed agreed that Somers should create regulatory controls for historic preservation.

Local historic districts are established by a vote of the property owners within the proposed districts and regulated by a Historic District Commission whose membership is typically drawn from within the districts themselves. Once appointed by the Board of Selectmen, the Commission(s) can then adopt and administer regulations requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness for certain exterior improvements within their district.

While the scope of regulations may vary from district to district, the intent should be to ensure that repairs and improvements do not harm the architectural character of historic properties or the surrounding district. For example, Somers might warrant regulations that attempt to keep the architectural integrity of existing structures and the village intact while Somersville might need more flexible regulations that can gradually restore the historic character and architectural integrity of the village. Preservation minded property owners within local historic districts often appreciate the assurance that their investment in rehabilitating and maintaining their properties is protected by the continued historic and architectural integrity of neighboring properties.

A concerted effort will be needed to educate property owners about the benefits of membership in a local historic district as well as to dispel myths and misinformation about how historic districts are regulated (see sidebar).

Certified Local Government Designation

Once a local historic district is established, Somers is eligible for Certified Local Government Designation. As a Certified Local Government, a local historic district would be eligible to apply for State and Federal historic preservation grants to conduct rehabilitation, education and other historic preservation programs.

Historic District Myths

*Historic District Designation will lower the value of homes: **False.*** Studies have shown that both national and local historic district designations can stabilize or increase property values relative to similar properties outside of historic districts.

*Local Historic District Commissions can regulate changes to the interior of buildings: **False.*** Local Historic Districts in Connecticut can only regulate the exterior appearance of properties that are visible from the street. Interior changes or alterations and additions to the exterior of a building that are not visible from the street are not regulated.

*Local Historic District Commissions can control the color of your house: **False.*** Painting your house is considered routine maintenance and is not a regulated activity. A Historic District Commission, if requested, might offer advice to a property owner on historically accurate paint schemes.

*Local Historic District Commissions can prevent the demolition of a historic structure: **False.*** Historic District Designation cannot ultimately prevent the demolition of an historic structure. A separately enacted Demolition Delay Ordinance can delay the demolition of an historic structure for up to 90 days in order to explore alternatives to demolition such as purchasing the property or relocating the structure.

*Local Historic District Commissions can prohibit the installation of handicapped access ramps or fire escapes: **False.*** Commissions cannot prohibit the permitted installation of features required to protect public safety.

Village Districts

Another tool for protecting the aesthetic character of historic properties is the “village district.” Adopted by Zoning Commissions, a village district is a zoning district that allows for a high degree of architectural and site design control within established villages that would otherwise be beyond their jurisdiction. A village district ensures that as properties are redeveloped or infill development occurs, it will be in character with the surrounding village.

Unlike a local historic district, village districts may be adopted unilaterally by the Zoning Commission in accordance with their established zoning procedures. The establishment of village districts in both Somers and Somersville was studied but never implemented. The Zoning Commission should conduct a workshop to educate the public on the benefits of village districts and explain their distinction from local historic districts before attempting to adopt village districts.

Financial Incentives

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) can provide economic incentives such as tax abatements for the restoration of historic resources. By simply deferring the tax increase on improvements made to historic properties, a major disincentive for making those improvements is reduced. The Town benefits not only from the visual improvement of the property, but from the eventual increase in property taxes as the improved value of the property is phased in. Seventy-two percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers should create economic and regulatory incentives for historic preservation.

Regulatory Incentives

To encourage historic preservation, regulatory incentives such as adaptive re-use provisions can be adopted by the Zoning Commission to give property historic owners flexibility in re-tenanting their properties in return for making repairs that ensure the continued architectural and historic integrity of the property.

Historic Resources Inventory

Building upon the earlier work required to nominate Somers’ two National Register Historic Districts, Somers should complete a townwide historic resources survey. When completed, the survey can be used to expand the existing National Register Historic Districts and make nominations to the national, state or even a local historic register for individual properties outside of these districts.

Demolition Delay Ordinance

Another measure that can be taken by the BOS is to adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished. While not preventing the demolition of an historic building, the waiting period allows the opportunity to seek alternatives to demolition such as purchasing the property, relocating the structure(s), or at a minimum, salvaging architectural components.

Education and Tourism Programs

The Somers Historical Society should continue and expand upon their efforts to educate the public about Somers' history and the benefits of historic preservation, becoming a clearinghouse of information for residents interested in understanding and preserving the history of their homes. The Historical Society should encourage house tours and other historic tourism initiatives as an element of Somers overall economic development strategy.

Historic Preservation Strategies

1. Encourage "sensitive stewardship" or pride in ownership as the most effective means of preserving historic resources.
2. Continue to identify and recognize important historical resources through national and state recognition programs.
3. Establish a local register of historic places.
4. Investigate establishing local historic districts that require a Certificate of Appropriateness for exterior renovations in the district.
5. Pursue Certified Local Government designation if one or more local historic districts are established.
6. Investigate establishing "village districts" (by the Zoning Commission) that allow architectural review of proposals within the district.
7. Provide economic incentives such as tax abatements, grants or loans for restoration of historic resources.
8. Adopt regulatory incentives (such as historic overlay and/or adaptive reuse provisions in zoning regulations).
9. Complete a townwide historic resources survey.
10. Adopt a demolition delay ordinance that requires as much as a 90-day waiting period before historic buildings can be demolished.
11. Continue to provide educational programs and technical assistance about historic preservation to historic property owners.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies to enhance the character of Somers' villages that may also support historic preservation efforts.

Somers Historical Society



Historic Recognition Plaque



*Scenic resources
contribute to
Somers' character
and quality of life.*

Preserve Scenic Resources

Somers natural and man-made scenic character plays a significant role in the overall character of the community. From its picturesque horse farms to its stony uplands, Somers' scenic character makes the town attractive to residents, tourists and outdoor enthusiasts alike. Like natural and historic resources, if not adequately protected, Somers' scenic resources can be degraded or even lost. Somers residents agree, with 72% of those surveyed agreeing that Somers could do more to protect scenic resources.

Protect Scenic Areas and Vistas

Scenic resources can be grouped into two main categories: vistas that offer distant scenic views and scenic areas that may offer scenic views from within as well as from afar.

Somers location at the northernmost extent of the Bolton Range offers residents in the western two-thirds of town a panoramic view of the foothills to the east. Locations within those foothills, such as Bald Mountain and Soapstone Mountain, offer bikers and hikers spectacular views of Somers and the Connecticut River Valley beyond.

Other scenic areas include portions of the villages of Somers and Somersville as well as farms throughout town that derive their scenic character from a combination of natural and historic elements.

An agency such as the Conservation Commission or Open Space and Trails Committee, working in cooperation with the Zoning Commission should conduct a thorough inventory of scenic resources to allow the Town boards and commissions to take steps to protect them.

The Zoning Commission should adopt new ridgeline protection overlay district with clearly defined limits, such as a critical elevation along the ridgeline, above which development can severely harm the scenic character of the Town.

Preserve Undeveloped Land As Long As Possible

While not protected from development, undeveloped land contributes to the overall character and quality of life in Somers. Such land should be preserved for as long as possible.

Public Act 490 can again be an effective tool in reducing the cost of owning undeveloped land. This program allows the Town to reduce property taxes on farmland, forest and open space in return for not developing the land for a ten-year period. If the land is developed during the ten-year time frame, a recapture provision allows the Town to recoup a prorated share of the taxes that would have otherwise been paid without the tax reduction.

Somers is also one of a select number of Connecticut towns that are authorized to regulate forestry practices. Once the Department of Environmental Protection

adopts model regulations, Somers will be able to use its Forest Practice Ordinance designed to mitigate the impacts of commercial logging through a strict regulatory process administered by the Conservation Commission.

Protect Scenic Roads

Somers has many roads throughout town that are scenic in character due to scenic and historic features located along them as well as the rural character of the roadways themselves (i.e. narrow, winding, tree lined, etc.). Sixty-five percent of residents surveyed agreed the Somers should do more to protect scenic roads.

While Somers has a Scenic Road Ordinance, only one road has been designated thus far. Such an ordinance offers a degree of protection by limiting road improvements that might alter a road's scenic character. Unfortunately, many of the elements that make a road scenic such as stone walls, significant canopy trees, rustic barns and scenic meadows often lie outside of the road right-of way, beyond the reach of state and local scenic road regulations, requiring a second level of protection.

As development threatens the character of these roads, consideration should be given to protecting scenic elements through conservation easements, open space acquisition or other means to limit the disturbance of stone walls, street trees, and other scenic features, while pushing development away from road. Consideration should be given to providing design flexibility in the Subdivision and Zoning Regulations to allow for thoughtful subdivision designs that do not penalize a developer for preserving historic or scenic resources. The Subdivision Regulations already require the design of subdivisions to maximize the preservation of scenic resources but lack objective standards.

Utility maintenance is also a threat to scenic roads. Utility companies and their contractors often disfigure street trees for the sake of electrical or telephone reliability. While an important duty, such maintenance does not always have to be so destructive to scenic character. The First Selectman (or his/her designee), acting as Tree Warden can intervene and should work cooperatively with the utility companies to limit pruning to the extent necessary to maintain service reliability.

Scenic Resource Protection Strategies

1. Inventory scenic resources and establish policies and regulations to protect them.
2. Reestablish a ridgeline protection overlay district.
3. As scenic roadsides are developed, preserve scenic elements through conservation easements or open space set-asides.
4. Consider expanding the P.A.. 490 open space program.
5. Work with utility companies to preserve scenic streetscapes.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies to improve the pattern of residential development that may also help to preserve scenic resources.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies designed to minimize the impacts of public streets that may help to protect the character of scenic roads and enable future scenic roads.

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GUIDING APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

4

Overview

Somers is recognized within the region as a desirable suburban community and there is little doubt based on population projections that it will continue to grow and change in the future. How this anticipated growth is managed will have a significant impact on future community character and quality of life in Somers.

Because the villages of Somers and Somersville are for the most part developed, future growth is most likely to occur in the outlying rural areas of the community. Unless this development is guided more appropriately, the current pattern of development will consume larger than necessary amounts of forest, farmland and wildlife habitat, irrevocably altering Somers' character and quality of life.

Major development issues facing Somers include:

- attracting appropriate commercial and industrial development;
- improving the design and appearance of commercial and industrial development;
- reusing the Somersville Manufacturing Company mill; and
- guiding more appropriate residential development.

Somers needs to manage the environmental and visual impacts of development before residential "sprawl" and inappropriate commercial development erode Somers' character and quality of life.

Somersville Manufacturing Mill Complex



Conventional Residential Development



Economic development is an important issue in Somers, not only in terms of providing a diversified tax base, jobs and shopping opportunities, but from a community character standpoint as well.

Encourage Appropriate Economic Development

During public meetings held throughout the creation of this Plan, business development remained a major concern for Somers residents but not entirely for the reasons typically associated with this type of development. While residents understandably ranked improved tax base, availability of goods and services, and jobs as the top three reasons for encouraging economic development, their concern over business development focused as much on the quality and type of commercial and industrial development in town.

Attract and Retain Appropriate Businesses

With its limited available commercial/industrial land, lack of direct access to an interstate highway and rural location, Somers is not positioned to become a major business destination. However, this does not mean that Somers is without economic development potential (as evidenced by the replacement of all of the jobs lost with the closing of the Somersville Manufacturing Company in 1970). Somers needs to make the most of its economic development potential by focusing on its strengths to attract new businesses and retain existing businesses.

Meet Residents' Everyday Shopping Needs

Eighty percent of residents surveyed agreed that they would shop more in Somers if available goods and services met their everyday needs, indicating an untapped potential for commercial development that provides the basic necessities of daily living. Seventy-two percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers needs a grocery store, a business capable of meeting many of those daily needs.

The following table illustrates estimated retail spending by Somers residents based on statewide averages. While Somers may not be an appropriate location to capture the majority of retail spending in categories such as automobiles and furniture (establishments better suited to regional shopping areas such as Enfield), \$19 million in food sales is more than enough to support a local grocery store, according to the Food Marketing Institute. Somers can probably support additional restaurants, apparel stores, small general merchandise stores, and similar establishments that also cater to everyday needs.

2002 Retail Sales and Estimated Spending

	Statewide Per Capita Sales	Somers Estimated Spending
Apparel & Accessories	\$668	\$5,425,979
Hardware	\$808	\$6,564,146
Eating & Drinking	\$991	\$8,050,683
Home Furnishings & Appliances	\$1,066	\$8,659,137
General Merchandise	\$1,175	\$9,549,150
Automotive Products	\$2,527	\$20,532,343
Food Products	\$2,386	\$19,391,790
Misc. Shopping Goods	\$3,278	\$26,633,587
Total Retail Sales	\$12,898	\$104,806,816

Source: Connecticut Department of Revenue Services, Census Bureau, Planimetrics

Residents responding to a random telephone survey were asked about the mix of businesses in Somers. The results, tabulated below, indicate that (with the exception of light manufacturing facilities) the majority of residents feel that the amount and mix of businesses in Somers is about right. However, 31% to 49% of residents still expressed a need for more business, with the exception of automotive sales and repairs.

Business	Too Many	About Right	Too Few
Light manufacturing facilities	3%	43%	49%
Restaurants	4%	55%	41%
Small specialty shops	4%	53%	41%
Offices	2%	61%	31%
Service businesses	2%	61%	31%
Automotive sales/repairs	23%	67%	8%

Based on these findings, Somers should encourage a grocery store and other small businesses that cater to residents' daily needs. New light-manufacturing facilities, restaurants and specialty shops are also appropriate based on community input, Somers' ability to accommodate them, and their potential impact on community character.

Expand the Local Economy from Within

Given Somers' attributes as a business location, attempting to attract major employers to town is not a good use of limited economic development resources. With much of the job growth in the U.S. economy occurring in small startup firms, Somers best strategy is to grow from within.

In today's wired global economy, multi-million dollar businesses are being conducted out of residential dwellings. As businesses add employees and outgrow the home environment, many owners will look to move locally rather than uproot their families. By protecting its community character and promoting home-based businesses, Somers can put its positive residential attributes to work by becoming an attractive place to live and start a business.

To help businesses remain competitive and grow, Somers newly appointed Economic Development Commission can play a proactive role by working with state and regional economic development agencies to act as a clearinghouse of information on available loans, training, and other programs available to small businesses; and to create a business visitation program to stay informed of the concerns and needs of the business community

Expand the Local Tourist Economy

Route 190 from Hazardville to Stafford Springs has evolved into one of several scenic routes throughout the State that are frequented by tourists. As a result, Somers has a burgeoning tourist economy with several antique stores, gift shops, and other businesses that take advantage of Somers location and historic character. Events such as the Four Town Fair, the Hartford County 4-H Fair and mountain bike tours of the Shenipsit Trail also periodically attract visitors to Somers.

While the potential for this market is not without limits, by creating a critical mass of tourist based businesses, Somers can become more of a tourist destination and less dependent on drive through traffic.

Historic mills throughout New England have been put to use as antique shops, Christmas shops, gift shops and even furniture outlets. The Somersville Manufacturing Company could easily adapt a portion of its floor area to antique stores, boutiques and restaurants, becoming a centerpiece of the local tourist economy.

Historical and educational tourism is a major sector of the State's economy. The Somers Historical Society can play a role in attracting visitors, not only through its museum, but by sponsoring historic house tours and other events as well.

Create a System of "Wayfinding" Signs

Somers should investigate creating a system of "wayfinding" signs to direct residents and visitors to business activities as well as public and other facilities. Wayfinding signs can be used to direct motorists and pedestrians to community facilities such as Town Hall or the school / library campus, clusters of business activities such as shopping or dining (without specifically naming businesses), and even tourist destinations such as the fairgrounds or Soapstone Mountain.

Consider Non-Traditional Forms of Economic Development

Promote Revenue Positive Housing

When residents think of economic development, they tend to think of offices, retail stores, and light manufacturing uses, but there are other types of economic development that are not so obvious. Certain housing developments, such as assisted living facilities, age-restricted housing and even multi-family developments with limited bedrooms per unit, can be considered economic development because they generate more tax revenue than they require in services (based on few or no children and the cost of education representing more than two-thirds of the municipal budget).

In addition to the direct tax benefits that such development provides, when located near the villages, these uses can add vitality to the village centers, and support local businesses.

Seek Restoration of PILOT Funding Levels

Somers is home to several State correctional facilities and a State forest that are exempt from local property taxes. To compensate the Town for the loss of tax revenue, the State reimburses Somers through Payments In Lieu Of Taxes or PILOT payments. By statute, PILOT payments for correctional facilities should equal 100% of the taxes due on the assessed value of the property (State forest is lower) or \$2,266,933. In recent years, the State has reduced PILOT payments statewide with Somers receiving almost \$450,000 less than required in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003-2004 alone. Pilot payments for FY 2004-2005 are expected to go almost \$100,000 lower, despite an increase in the Town mil rate. State pay-

ments and grants have dropped from 40% of total revenue to only 35%, placing considerable strain on the municipal budget.

While Somers is one of the most profoundly affected communities, it is not alone with PILOT payments under-funded by over \$16 million statewide. Somers, together with other affected communities, should collectively petition the State to restore PILOT payments to their statutorily required levels.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 5 contains additional alternative housing strategies that result in more tax revenue and less service demands than conventional single-family development, making them a form of economic development.

Strategies to Encourage Appropriate Economic Development

1. Seek to attract and encourage businesses that meet residents everyday needs.
2. Promote home-based businesses.
3. Expand the role of the Economic Development Commission to act as ambassadors to the business community.
4. Institute a Business Visitation Program with the Economic Development Commission to keep informed of businesses concerns and needs.
5. Encourage tourist-based businesses.
6. Investigate creating a system of “wayfinding” signs.
7. Promote revenue-positive, alternative housing such as age-restricted housing.
8. Pursue restoration of statutory PILOT payment funding levels.

A Historic Inn



An Attractive Local Business



Improve the Appearance of Business Development

When residents were asked to identify issues that were most important for addressing in this Plan, business development ranked as the number two issue. In discussing the issue further, many residents indicated that they were not as concerned over the benefits of economic development such as tax revenue and jobs, as they were over the appearance of commercial and industrial development in town. The telephone survey confirmed this finding with 72% of respondents agreeing that the Town could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial and industrial development

Adopt Village Districts

One area where the Zoning Commission can have a profound impact on the appearance of commercial development is in the villages of Somers and Somersville. Both villages have seen historic structures demolished or moved, only to be replaced by development that is out of character with the historic nature of the villages. The village of Somers has recently been witness to a controversial application where residents were concerned over the relocation of an historic building to accommodate new franchise architecture.

By adopting village districts in the villages of Somers and Somersville, the Zoning Commission can strictly regulate the site layout and architectural design of new development (a power normally limited to local historic district commissions). After defining the character of each village, the Zoning Commission can create standards to ensure that new development reflects the most desirable attributes of each village. In doing so, Somers can welcome appropriate new business to either village (regardless of ownership) and be assured that the business will not detract from the character of the village or neighboring properties.

Implement Design Review

In recent years, much of the commercial development occurring around the country can be characterized as strip development, catering to motorists and their vehicles while industrial development often consists of utilitarian metal buildings, juxtaposed against residential areas or located at gateways into the community. This type of development can undermine the community character that residents value so highly.

For those commercial and industrial locations outside of the villages, such as the industrial areas along Field and Egypt Roads, village districts are not an option for controlling the appearance of development. Although lacking the power granted under a village district, a Design Review Committee can still help to improve the appearance of these outlying commercial areas.

Rather than adopt rigid zoning standards that must be adhered to, a Design Review Committee creates architectural and site design guidelines for businesses to follow in developing their properties. The Design Review Committee reviews applications for conformance with their voluntary guidelines and makes non-binding recommendations to the Zoning Commission based on their findings.

Many businesses appreciate the clear design direction provided by such guidelines, provided that compliance is not unreasonably costly.

While not bound by the design review process, existing businesses may be inspired to voluntarily make architectural and landscaping improvements to their properties, possibly triggering a commercial gentrification process throughout Somers.

Provide Tax Incentives for Improving Businesses Properties

Once design guidelines are implemented, a sharp contrast between new and older commercial and industrial properties will become apparent. To facilitate the improvement of existing older properties, the Town can adopt an abatement program under Section 12-65 of the Connecticut General Statutes to abate the increase in assessment due to major improvements to buildings over a seven year period. Criteria would have to be established to ensure the program's effectiveness such as: a minimum age of building, a minimum cost threshold, and design criteria such as adopted architectural design guidelines described above.

Improve Commercial and Industrial Development Standards

Beyond the oftentimes subjective nature of architectural design, there are more objective measures that the Zoning Commission can use to improve the quality and appearance of commercial and industrial development. The Zoning Commission should comprehensively review the Zoning Regulations to identify the standards that have allowed the type of development that residents are concerned with, and make modifications where necessary to ensure that future development is more compatible with the character of the community. Buffers, landscaping, lighting, parking, signage and yards are all factors that can easily be modified to help mitigate the negative impacts of development. Specific recommendations for improving some of these standards can be found throughout this plan.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also help to maintain the character of historic commercial areas.

Chapter 5 contains strategies designed to mitigate the impacts of parking lots that may also help to improve the appearance of business development.

Strategies to Improve the Appearance of Business Development

1. Adopt separate "village districts" in the villages of Somers and Somersville to ensure that future development is compatible with the character of each village.
2. Create a Design Review Committee to adopt and administer development guidelines to help improve the appearance of commercial/industrial development outside of the villages.
3. Create a tax abatement/incentive program to encourage exterior improvements to commercial/industrial buildings.
4. Comprehensively review and modify the Zoning Regulations where necessary to ensure that future development is more compatible with the character of the community.

Potential Uses for Somersville Mill	Agree
Offices	83%
Retail Stores	79%
Services	78%
Restaurants	76%
Housing	74%
Light Manufacturing	73%
Entertainment	61%
Lodging	59%

Adaptively Reuse the Somersville Mill

The Somersville Manufacturing Company complex represents a significant piece of Somers overall economic development strategy. The location and character of the mill make it ideal for a number of alternative uses. The majority of residents surveyed agreed that the mill is suitable for a variety of uses ranging from 59% in favor of lodging up to 83% in favor of offices (see sidebar). With the exception of lodging uses, the Zoning Regulations permit all of the suggested uses.

The mill complex is particularly well suited to supporting two of the main economic development strategies: building upon the local tourist economy and growing the local economy from within. The location and character of the building makes it attractive as a tourist destination for antiques, gifts, art galleries and possibly dining. With minimal improvements, a portion of the complex could be used as an incubator for small businesses that have outgrown the home office or garage environment.

Because of its historic nature as part of a walking mill village, flexibility will be required to adaptively reuse the mill. Flexible parking, area, bulk and other standards will be needed to allow the owners to retrofit a property that is non-conforming in so many ways by today’s zoning standards. A new design development district could:

- allow the site to be comprehensively master planned for a variety of uses;
- establish reasonable standards that recognize the non-conforming nature of the property and eliminate the need for variances; and
- protect the architectural and historic character of the property in return for design flexibility.

The Water Pollution Control Authority’s (WPCA) treatment plant is sized for the industrial use of the mill but will need to be expanded if it is to accommodate more water intensive uses such as housing, retail and restaurants. The WPCA is currently investigating expansion of their plant and according to the survey results, residents support their efforts.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also help efforts to redevelop the Somersville Manufacturing Co.

Chapter 5 contains additional strategies to expand the sewer system that will also support efforts to redevelop the Somersville Manufacturing Co.

Somersville Mill Redevelopment Strategies

1. Explore the possibility of allowing hospitality uses such as lodging or a conference center and amend the Zoning Regulations if uses are appropriate.
2. Consider a design development district for the Somersville Manufacturing Company site.
3. Expand the WPCA treatment plant to at least accommodate the redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Company site.

Reinforce the Villages

Somers' villages have been the focus of community life for almost 300 years. Churches, civic functions, shops, and until recently, schools and factories were all located in the villages. Post World War II suburban expansion has shifted the focus away from the villages, with housing, industry and schools all becoming dispersed and automobile dependent.

Limit Commercial Sprawl

By allowing traditional commercial uses such as retail, restaurants and personal services in the Industrial (I) Zone, Somers is inviting automobile oriented commercial sprawl to spread along Egypt Road and Field Road, further eroding the importance of its two villages. The Zoning Commission should restrict these uses to the Business (B) Zone located predominantly in or near the villages. In doing so, commercial activity will become focused in the villages, adding to their vitality and helping to restore their importance in daily life.

Encourage Housing In and Near Villages

Housing is a critical element of a successful and vibrant village center. Residents living in or near villages are less dependent on automobiles, patronize village businesses and contribute to the vitality and sense of place that makes villages attractive.

Somers currently allows age-restricted housing at a density of four units to the acre. Congregate and assisted living facilities, recommended in Chapter 5-Addressing Community Needs, require higher densities as well. These alternative types of housing should be focused in or near the villages not only because of their symbiotic relationship with businesses and other village functions but because of the availability of public water and sewer needed to serve them. While this obstacle can be overcome by engineering community wells and septic systems, these solutions should not be used to allow these alternative housing options to locate in remote locations where older residents will be dependent on automobiles or paratransit options such as dial-a-ride to perform daily functions.

Mixed-use development is another way of adding to the vitality of a village. By allowing housing in combination with commercial businesses, business owners can live and work on the same premises or create rental opportunities within walking distance of village services. Somers residents were divided on this issue with 49% agreeing that Somers should encourage mixed-use development within the villages, such as apartments and offices over first floor retail stores.

Create Walkable Villages

Enhancing pedestrian access throughout the villages of Somers and Somersville will add to community character and quality of life by reducing dependence on motor vehicles (traffic and parking) as well as promoting a healthier, more convenient environment for residents and visitors. Seventy percent of residents surveyed agreed that the Town should do more to create walkable villages.

Sidewalk Standards

Sidewalks in the villages should be provided on both sides of major streets and at least one side of all other streets. Five foot widths allow pedestrians to walk side by side and comfortably pass. Sidewalks should be either integrated into curbs or separated by several feet to accommodate an area large enough for grass to thrive.

Coordinated streetscape elements such as lighting, benches, trash receptacles and tree grates, can create an attractive, comfortable pedestrian environment and add significantly to community character and sense of place.

Burial of overhead utilities in these areas can also greatly enhance the streetscape by eliminating overhead wires and allowing the unimpeded growth of street trees.

In order to create truly walkable villages, consider: sidewalks that are appropriately sized for their use, safe pedestrian street crossings, streetscape amenities such as shade trees, seating areas, and pedestrian scaled lighting, and even pedestrian oriented business signage such as on windows and awnings. Many of these improvements can be installed as improvements are made to Routes 190 and 83 or required as properties within the villages are redeveloped.

While the villages of Somers and Somersville both have sidewalks, they are narrow in places and do not serve the full extent of either village. Both villages could benefit from wider, more extensive sidewalk networks and other pedestrian safety enhancements to make them truly walkable villages.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to protect historic resources that may also reinforce the character of the villages.

Chapter 5 contains alternative housing and pedestrian enhancement strategies that may also help reinforce the character of the villages.

Village Reinforcement Strategies

1. Prohibit retail, restaurant and personal service uses in the I-Zone to focus commercial activity in the villages.
2. Encourage age-restricted and other alternative housing in and near the villages.
3. Encourage appropriate mixed-use development in the Business District.
4. Create walkable villages through sidewalk, safety and streetscape improvements.

Somersville



Somers



Manage Residential Growth

Around the country, people are realizing that traditional, inflexible large-lot zoning regulations have resulted in the systematic consumption of rural land into characterless subdivisions that has come to be known as “residential sprawl.”

While Chapter 3 – Protecting Important Resources contains many strategies to reduce the amount of raw land being consumed by residential development, increase the quality and quantity of preserved open space, and relate development potential to the ability of the land to support it; there are additional tools available that can be used to improve the pattern of future residential growth.

Adopt a Soil-Based Residential Density Regulation

Soil-based zoning regulations can not only be used to manage the amount of future residential growth but the pattern of development as well. Soil-based zoning (see Page 31) replaces minimum lot size and frontage requirements with soil-dependant density factors that limit the total number of houses in a development, making development patterns more flexible and eliminating uncertainty in the development potential of land (see sidebar).

Soil-based zoning would not apply to residential areas already served by public sewers since it is based on the ability of soils to support on-site septic systems. Soil-based zoning also would not render developed “A” and “A-1” residentially zoned properties non-conforming because it only applies to the development of vacant land.

Residents support this concept with 72% of those surveyed agreeing that residential subdivisions that preserve more public open space but keep the same number of houses are a good idea. Similarly, 53% of survey respondents agreed that residential subdivisions that reduce lot sizes to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, but keep the same number of houses, are a good idea.

Encourage Open Space Development Patterns

When soil-based regulations are used to specify the total number of housing units in a development, more attention can be given to overall development patterns. The problem with conventional zoning is that developers who try to fit as many housing units as possible on a property are forced by inflexible standards to consume all available land in an effort to maximize profits. The results are often open spaces that appear to be more of an afterthought and development patterns that do little for community character.

Under soil-based zoning, once the number of housing units is determined, there is no incentive to utilize the entire parcel. A developer is free to design the development in a more environmentally sensitive manner and maximize profits by reducing necessary public improvements.

To discourage the use of conventional development patterns in sensitive areas such as aquifers and watersheds, conventional subdivisions that maximize lot

With 98% of the Town zoned for residential development, residential growth has the greatest potential to affect community character and quality of life for Somers residents.

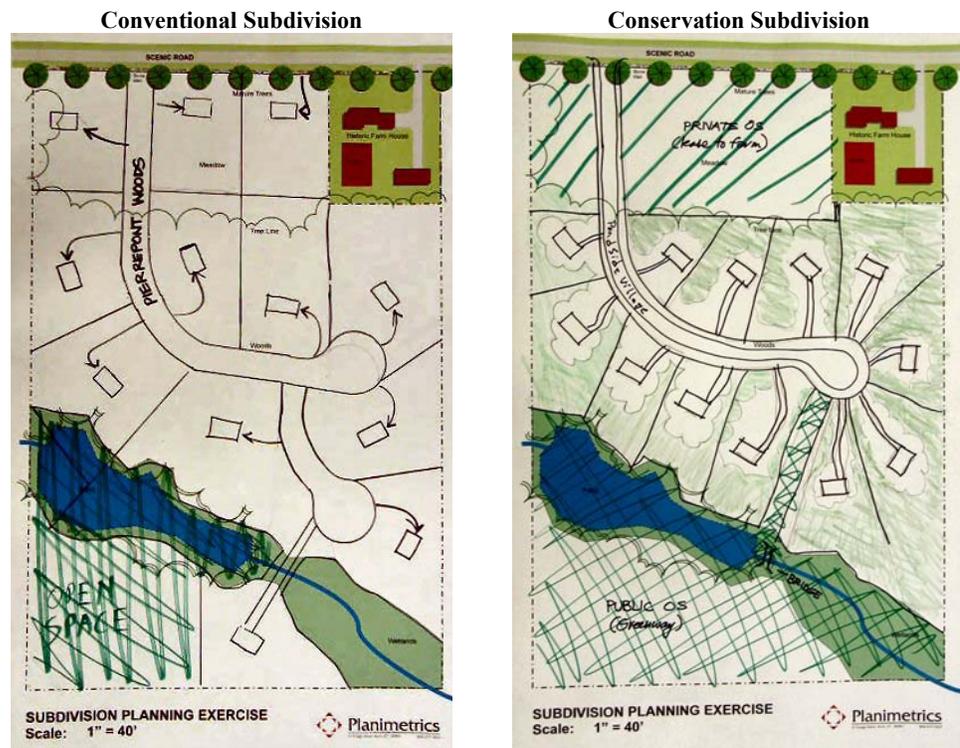
Soil-Based vs. Conventional Zoning

The benefits of soil-based zoning over conventional lot-based zoning include:

- lot sizes can be reduced without increasing the number of housing units,
- the amount of infrastructure to be constructed and maintained can be reduced, thus reducing stormwater to be collected and treated;
- environmentally sensitive areas can be avoided and the impacts on larger sensitive areas such as aquifers and watersheds can be reduced;
- the amount of raw land consumed can be reduced as much as soil conditions will allow; and
- residents as well as wildlife are able to enjoy the benefits of the larger open spaces surrounding their homes.

sizes and minimize the open space set-aside could only be allowed by Special Use Permit while allowing lower impact conservation subdivisions by right.

The following figures were prepared by the Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee as part of an exercise to illustrate the benefits of conservation subdivisions. The conventional subdivision on the left destroyed a meadow and scenic road frontage; required an additional cul-de-sac and stream crossing; and set aside minimal open space in order to achieve 12 lots and maximize profits. In contrast, the conservation subdivision preserved most of the meadow and scenic road frontage; required less new road and no wetland crossing; and preserved more open space - all while achieving the same number of lots. The Steering Committee unanimously agreed that despite their smaller size, the conservation subdivision lots were superior because they all fronted on the cul-de-sac and more lots fronted on the pond, meadow and other open space.



Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to preserve more open space, protect natural resources and preserve scenic resources that may also help to improve the pattern of residential development.

Chapter 5 contains strategies designed to minimize the impacts of new public streets that may also improve the pattern of residential development.

Residential Growth Management Strategies

1. Adopt a residential soil-based density regulation.
2. Require Special Use Permits for conventional subdivisions that maximize lot size (based on applicable density) while allowing conservation subdivisions by right.

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEEDS

5

Overview

Infrastructure such as transportation facilities and utilities can be used to help guide appropriate development patterns as illustrated in Chapter 4. Transportation facilities and utilities together with community facilities and services can also have significant impacts on residents' quality of life depending on how well they meet their everyday needs.

The predominance of single-family homes in Somers coupled with a changing population is likely to increase the need for alternative forms of housing over the next ten to twenty years. If Somers residents are to be able to remain in Somers, the Town will need to create fiscal programs to allow aging residents to stay in their homes as well as make regulatory changes and provide appropriate infrastructure to facilitate alternatives to high-end, single-family homes to meet residents' needs in the years to come.

By addressing housing needs and providing adequate infrastructure, Somers can maintain and even enhance residents' quality of life.

Community Facilities



Transportation



Housing Needs



Utilities



Address Changing Housing Needs

Following a trend occurring throughout Connecticut, Somers' housing supply has become increasingly oriented towards luxury single-family homes. Projected demographic changes over the next 20 years suggest that alternative housing types will be needed by Somers residents in the future.

The random telephone survey asked a number of housing questions, confirming these needs. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed agreed that Somers needs a variety of housing types to maintain a diverse community. The following table illustrates perceived needs for different styles of housing based on the survey results.

There needs to be more:	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree
Housing for elderly persons	58%	33%
Housing for active adults who are 55 and older	45%	39%
Moderate-income housing	31%	40%
Housing for first-time home buyers	31%	30%
Condominiums	11%	26%
Apartments	8%	22%

Residents expressed strong support for elderly and active-adult housing with 91% and 83% in agreement respectively. Moderate-income housing and housing for first-time buyers also received strong support with 70% and 60% in agreement respectively. In contrast, condominiums and apartments were not perceived as a need by a majority of residents but 36% and 29% respectively felt a need for these types of housing nonetheless, making these needs no less valid to those households.

Survey respondents were also asked if they were considering moving within the next ten years. Thirty percent responded positively and of those, 60% would like their next move to be within Somers and 78% were considering moving to a type of housing that is not being built in today's luxury, single-family home dominated market.

Next Housing Choice for Those Considering Moving Within the Next 10 Years			
Smaller single-family home	38%	In-law apartment	3%
Larger single-family home	22%	Affordable/subsidized housing	3%
Active adult community	13%	Life-care facility/nursing home	2%
Condominium	11%	Other	5%

Based on these survey results, there are two main areas of housing needs that should be addressed if residents, both young and old, are to be able to find housing that meets their needs: elderly and active-adult housing as well as housing for moderate-income households and first-time buyers.

Increase Elderly Housing Options

Somers' population aged 55 and older is expected to grow to 35 percent of the total population by the year 2020. The majority of these residents will probably want to stay in their homes as long as possible.

To facilitate this, the Town has created an elderly tax relief program for age and income eligible residents. Somers should also anticipate expanding existing elderly programs such as meals-on-wheels and dial-a-ride services to allow these residents to maintain their relative independence.

Even with a tax relief program, encouraging "empty nesters" to remain in their homes can be financially beneficial for the Town when compared to the cost of services required by young families with children that might replace them if they are forced by income or infirmity to leave their single-family homes.

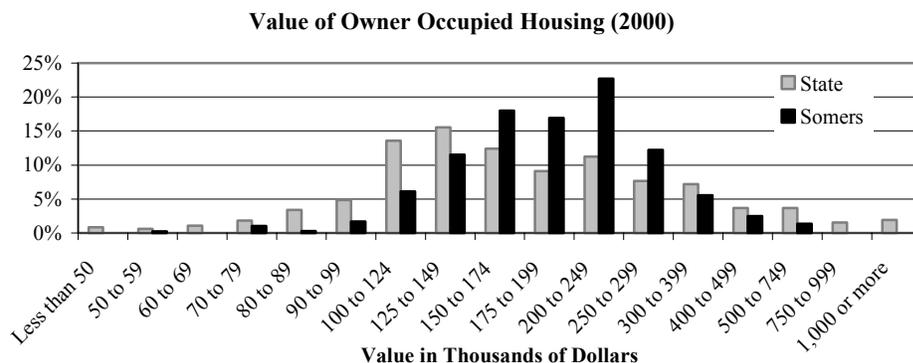
For those who choose to downsize or can no longer maintain their single-family homes, options such as active-adult housing should be encouraged, preferably close to the villages where infrastructure is available to support it and residents can be within walking distance of daily needs.

Other elderly housing options that Somers might consider include:

- congregate and life-care facilities that provide independent living with varying degrees of medical and other services; and
- in-law apartments with pass through doors between units that allow family members to care for elderly or infirm relatives while giving them a sense of independence.

Accommodate Housing for a Diversity of Resident Incomes

While there are certainly affordable homes in Somers, their numbers are few and growing smaller as a percentage of all housing units in town as the overwhelming majority of new homes being built are large single-family homes. The rising cost of land, the current strength of the housing market and Somers' desirability as a residential community are all making it more difficult to purchase a home in Somers. At \$191,500, Somers' median house value in the year 2000 was more than \$20,000 higher than the State median value of \$169,900. As illustrated below, Somers has less housing stock below \$150,000 and considerably more housing stock between \$150,000 and \$300,000 than the State averages.



Elderly Housing Options

Section 214-98 of the Zoning Regulations permits convalescent or nursing homes while Section 214-125 allows age restricted housing. Despite these available options, no developments have been constructed to date under these regulations.

The number of nursing home beds is tightly controlled by the State Department of Social Services which must issue a Certificate of Need before new or expanded nursing facilities can be constructed.

Affordable Housing

According to the Connecticut General Statutes, affordable housing means housing that is:

- subsidized housing,
- financed by CHFA or other mortgage assistance programs, or
- is deed restricted to affordable prices.

According to Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes, an affordable price is that which can be afforded by a person or family earning 80% of the regional median income without spending more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs. Such a unit must be also be guaranteed to remain affordable for 30 years.

About 3% of Somers' housing stock meets these criteria and this is below the State goal of 10% affordable housing units in a community.

As a result, Somers is subject to the State Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure which allows developers of affordable housing developments considerable regulatory flexibility during the approval process.

Inclusionary Zoning

Section 8-2i of the Connecticut General Statutes enables communities to adopt inclusionary zoning regulations that encourage housing for low and moderate income persons. Such regulations may include but are not limited to:

- setting aside affordable housing units through long-term deed restrictions or other means,
- allowing density bonuses for providing affordable housing units, and
- allowing a fee-in-lieu of an affordable housing unit.

To address concerns over the impacts of affordable housing developments, Somers can draft affordable housing regulations that address public health and safety issues such as the provision of public water and sewer, fire prevention and traffic.

Somers can also regulate the construction of affordable units such as requiring affordable units to be similar in size and appearance to market-rate units or preventing a developer from “skimming” a project by building all of the market-rate units at a higher density without building the affordable units.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to enhance the villages that may also help to meet alternative housing needs.

Affordable housing is often equated to low-income, high-density, government-assisted housing “projects”, when in fact there is a broad range of affordable housing options, ranging from age-restricted apartments to modest single-family starter homes no different from many older homes found in Somers today.

By the State definition of affordable housing (see sidebar), at today’s interest rates of 5.5% to 6.5%, a qualifying moderate income family of four (earning \$61,000) can afford a mortgage of approximately \$155,000 to \$175,000 dollars. With a down payment, the value of an affordable home is not too dissimilar from Somers’ median value house.

Such affordable housing need not be concentrated in one or more locations. Habitat for Humanity, churches and other organizations are able to construct small scale projects, often as small as one or two homes on existing vacant lots.

Somers could take one or more of the following measures to encourage affordable housing on a similar scale:

- allow development flexibility in return for providing one or more affordable units within a proposed development;
- allow a modest increase in density to be used to build affordable units;
- require a small percentage of all new housing units to be affordable; and/or
- allow a fee-in-lieu of providing affordable units to be placed in a housing trust fund to purchase, construct, or rehabilitate affordable units.

By creating an affordable housing trust fund and accepting fees-in-lieu of affordable housing units, the Town can retain control over the design (design review), density (units and bedrooms) and the ability to locate units where they are most appropriate.

Creating age-restricted affordable housing projects similar to Woodcrest can also provide multiple benefits for Somers including:

- providing affordable housing units;
- progressing towards State goal of 10% affordable housing units in Town;
- helping to meet the projected demand for elderly housing;
- allowing elderly residents to remain in Town, and
- remaining revenue positive for the Town despite their affordability, due to lack of school children.

Housing Need Strategies

1. Continue elderly tax relief programs.
2. Continue to actively encourage active-adult and elderly housing where appropriate.
3. Expand options for accessory apartments as elderly units.
4. Investigate allowing density bonuses or design flexibility in exchange for providing affordable units.
5. Investigate requiring a percentage of affordable units or a fee-in-lieu of affordable units for all new residential developments.

Address Community Facility and Service Needs

Community facilities support important community functions such as education, public safety and recreation and contribute significantly to the quality of life in Somers.

Somers has made great strides in recent years to improve its community facilities through renovations, additions and new buildings but there are still a number of deficiencies that will need to be addressed during the next decade if the Town is expected to meet growing demands for services. The following items are the main issues among many that should be addressed:

- providing additional sports fields,
- enlarging the library,
- enlarging the Somersville water pollution control facility,
- enlarging Town Hall, and
- monitoring the need for a firehouse to better serve northern Somers.

Community facilities and services are major contributing factors in determining the overall quality of life in Somers.

Somers Town Hall



Kibbe Fuller Community Center



Somers Library

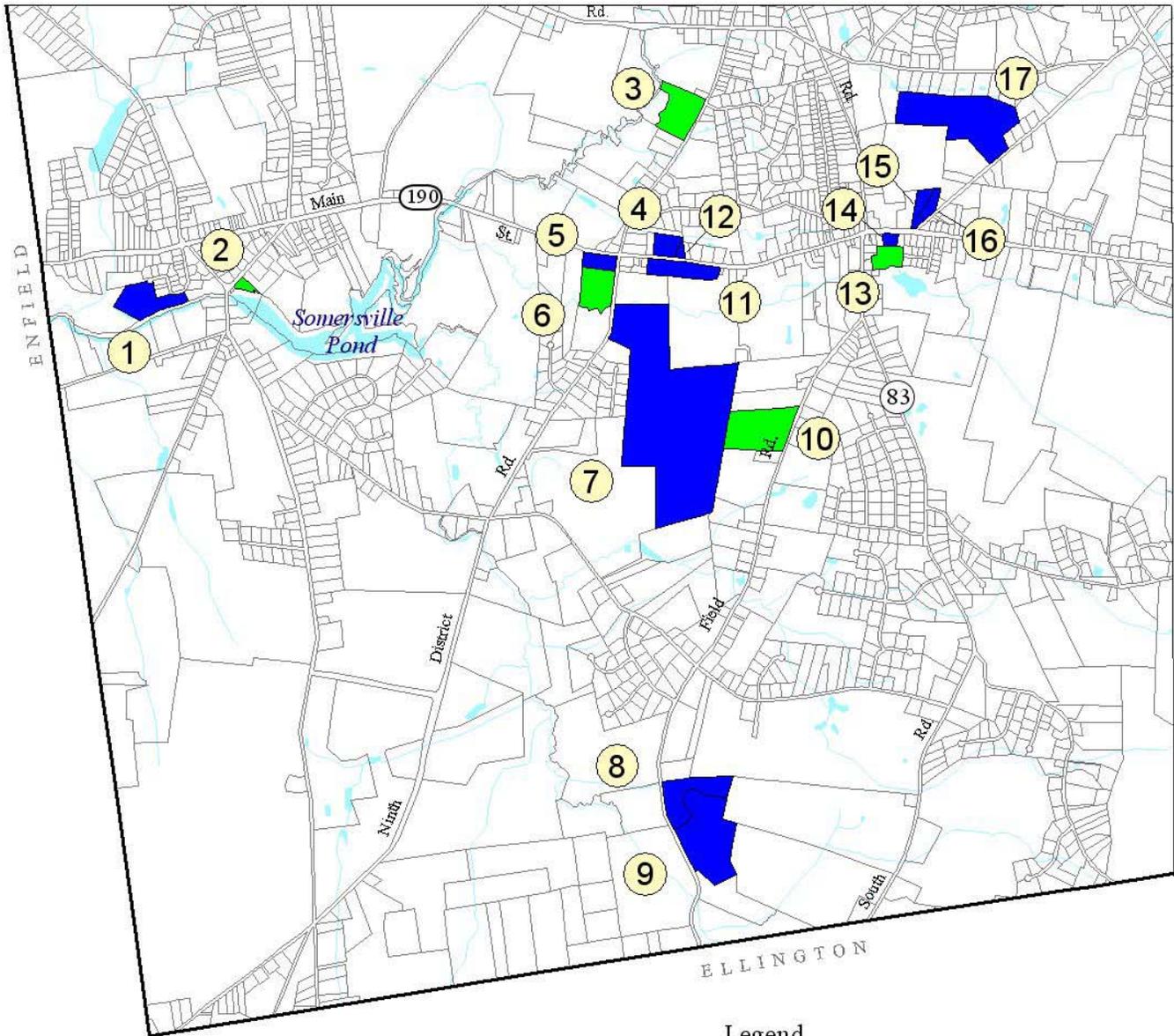
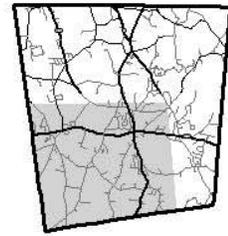


Recreation Fields



Community Facilities

Town of Somers, CT



Legend

Public Safety Facilities

- 5. Firehouse
- 15. State Trooper Office

Town Hall/Community Centers

- 14. Town Hall and Piedmont Hall
- 15. Kibbe-Fuller Community Center
- 16. Historical Society and Senior Center

Schools

- 7. School/Library Campus

Recreation

- 2. Ballfields
- 3. Soccer/T-Ball Fields
- 6. Ballfields
- 10. Recreation Park
- 13. Ballfields

Other

- 1. Sewer Treatment Plant
- 2. Mill Pond Playhouse
- 4. Cemetery
- 7. School/Library Campus
- 8. New Highway Garage
- 9. Transfer Station and Dog Pound
- 11. Cemetery
- 12. Old Firehouse
- 16. Historical Society
- 17. Cemetery

0 3000 Feet



Planimetrics

31 Longfellow Drive, Avon, CT 06001 860-677-5267

Address Town Hall Needs

Despite being recently renovated in 2000, the Town Hall may be inadequate to meet the needs of the community over the next decade and beyond. While the renovations created new office and meeting spaces, they left no room for staff growth and did not address the lack of storage space, lack of hot water or failing heating system. Survey respondents disagreed, stating that Town Hall was sufficient to meet the Town's future needs and ranked improvements to Town Hall as a low priority; possibly due to the knowledge of the recent renovations.

Planning for an addition should begin early in the planning period to allow for its funding, design and construction within the next ten years. Digital technology can be used to address some storage needs, especially in the Town Clerk's Office where rapid growth in land records is quickly consuming vault space.

Address Kibbe Fuller Community Center Needs

The Kibbe Fuller Community Center, located on Battle Street, serves many functions including: housing the Resident State Trooper's Office, the Parks and Recreation Department and an emergency shelter. The building also provides additional meeting space and an auditorium to supplement the recently renovated meeting spaces at Town Hall.

A slight majority of residents surveyed (55%) agreed that the Kibbe Fuller Community center effectively meets community needs and ranked the facility as a moderate priority for improvement.

The Town has received a \$500,000 grant to add an elevator, a permanent handicapped access ramp, upgrade the electrical system and remove asbestos from the building. When the Resident State Trooper's Office is moved to the old firehouse, the space can be converted to a much needed multi-purpose room for use as a Teen Center and for other recreation programs. The ground floor will be used for storage and may help alleviate Town Hall storage needs.

Address Library Needs

The Somers Library is a 10,000 square foot facility constructed in 1988 on the school campus at Ninth District Road. Despite its relatively young age, the library is deficient in many areas, requiring an 8,000-10,000 square foot expansion to address them. The main portion of the building is essentially a large open room affording no storage or study space and inadequate meeting space. Changing technology has also created demand for new multimedia collections that have no room to grow.

Despite its deficiencies, 87% of survey respondents agreed that the library effectively meets community needs. However, respondents also ranked library improvements as a moderate priority.

Monitor Senior Center Needs

Centrally located on Battle Street, the Senior Center was doubled in size in 2000. The facility is able to accommodate approximately 100 residents for weekly hot meals, with higher capacities for non-dining functions.

Survey respondents ranked improvements to the Senior Center as a moderate priority. As Somers' senior population continues to grow as a proportion of the total population, service needs at the senior center should be monitored to anticipate future staff and space needs.

Address Police Protection Needs

Police protection is provided by a combination of four resident state troopers and the equivalent of two Town police officers under the command of a State Police Sergeant. It is anticipated that staffing levels will need to increase during the planning period as the Town continues to grow or sooner if the desire for 24/7 police coverage warrants an additional officer.

The Resident State Trooper's Office is currently housed in a former classroom in the Kibbe Fuller Community Center which is inadequate for their needs due to space constraints and conflicts with the recreation functions within the building.

The old firehouse on Route 190 offers an existing, functional facility that will be adapted to the needs of the Resident State Trooper's Office. The old firehouse includes vehicle bays, offers more privacy for officers and residents conducting their business and would allow for future expansion or conversion to a Town Police Department.

Address Fire Protection and Emergency Medical Services Needs

Fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) are provided by a combined force of 60± volunteers and paid firefighter/Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT). While recruiting volunteer firefighters is not a problem, recruiting and retaining volunteer EMT is becoming increasingly difficult due to 180 hours of initial training and continuing education requirements. Higher wages offered by other fire departments are creating high turnover in paid personnel.

The Fire Department operates out of a new firehouse on Main Street that should be adequate for their needs during the planning period and beyond. However, the northern extremes of town may not be adequately served by this new station due to response times that may exceed National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards. Response times should be monitored to assess whether a small fire sub-station should be located in the northern reaches of town to house a fire truck and ambulance that can quickly respond to emergencies before the balance of the department arrives from the main station.

Fire hydrants are another issue that is slowly being addressed. Five new hydrants are slated to be added annually over the next five years in the Somersville area but there are other deficiencies that are not being addressed such as along Field Road and Egypt Road where there are major commercial and industrial tenants.

New residential developments within a reasonable distance from water mains should be required to connect to public water and provide fire hydrants throughout.

Other fire protection/prevention needs during the planning period include:

- a driveway ordinance to ensure emergency access;
- regulations to ensure emergency water supplies such as fire ponds or cisterns at the time of development or a residential sprinkler ordinance based on distance to water supply; and
- improved fire prevention education in the schools.

Address Emergency Communications Needs

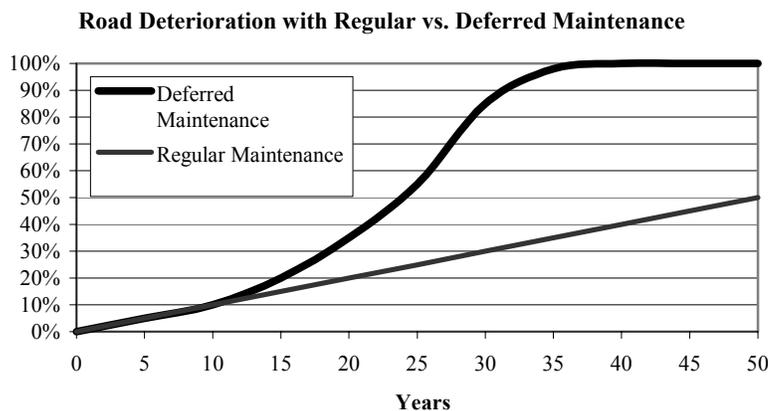
Emergency services are dispatched from Tolland utilizing a new communications tower on Soapstone Mountain. While an improvement over the previous tower, there are still areas that cannot be reached by the new tower. Identified communication needs during the planning period include: improved radio equipment to facilitate better two-way communications, close gaps in coverage and allow radio interoperability between police, fire, and Town personnel.

Address Highway Maintenance Needs

The Public Works Department operates out of a new garage and office built in 2000 that should be more than adequate for highway maintenance during the planning period, with room to grow.

Staffing levels have remained at 7 ½ positions since the 1960's despite a doubling of road miles to approximately 90 miles during that time frame. Staff levels and reduced road maintenance budgets due to cutbacks in state funding have limited the Department to maintaining the status quo. Road maintenance has been cut back and detention ponds are not being maintained.

The following chart illustrates how deferred maintenance can shorten the lifespan of a road and increase repair costs over time. To avoid more costly repairs and premature replacement of roads and other improvements, Somers should restore earlier funding levels and ensure adequate staff to properly maintain roads, sidewalks and storm drainage facilities.



Address Parks and Grounds Maintenance Needs

The parks and grounds maintenance function lacks adequate storage and office space. Estimated needs during the planning period include a heated 40' by 60' building with concrete floors (to safely store lawn chemicals), a small office and a restroom.

The staff of two (plus summer help) is barely adequate to meet the demands for current playing fields (which are already known to be insufficient in number) and will need to be increased during the planning period. Somers Public Schools has a maintenance staff of four (apart from custodians) that maintain their grounds and facilities as well as the library. If feasible, the grounds crews could be merged to make the most efficient use of their combined time, potentially avoiding the need for additional staff.

Address Solid Waste Disposal Issues

The transfer station is capable of handling all forms of waste with the exception of hazardous household waste and electronics that are handled by a consortium of towns and processed in Manchester. With new equipment, a new transfer station shed and room to grow, the facility should be able to meet community needs over the next ten years and beyond.

Staffing is an issue, relying on correctional facility inmates to supplement the Town staff. Inmates must be bussed to and from the facility and closely supervised by trained Town Staff.

Permit fees are insufficient to cover the cost of operating the facility, which is subsidized through property taxes. Town waste disposal costs are a function of the volume and weight of garbage that must be hauled and disposed of.

To keep costs down, several Connecticut communities have successfully adopted “pay as you throw” programs that charge a fee per bag of waste. Two benefits of these programs are that fees are directly proportional to the amount of waste that residents generate and residents are encouraged to recycle and reduce the amount of waste they generate to keep costs down.

New Transfer Station Shed



Old Highway Garage



Address Recreation Needs

According to school enrollment projections, the number of school age children is expected to increase throughout the planning period while the adult population aged 55 and over is projected to grow to 35% of Somers total population by the year 2020: increasing demand for two different sets of recreation programs.

Between the Town Recreation Park, Somers Public School Complex and other smaller facilities, residents have access to a wide variety of traditional outdoor recreation facilities as well as a skateboard park. Despite 60% of residents surveyed agreeing that Somers has adequate recreational facilities, the growing popularity of sports such as soccer, field hockey and lacrosse will require additional all-purpose athletic fields to meet the growing demand and reduce pressure on existing fields. Additional land for playing fields should be acquired near the Recreation Park / Public School Complex to make future maintenance as efficient as possible.

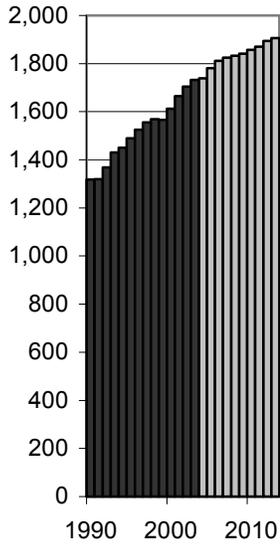
With the loss of use of the privately owned Shady Lake, Somers has no public swimming facilities. While 58% of residents surveyed agreed that Somers needs some form of outdoor water recreation such as a swimming area, pool or children's recreational fountains, such facilities were ranked as a low priority for improvement. The Town should continue to look for opportunities to provide some form of outdoor water recreation during the planning period.

To accommodate more passive forms of recreation, 63% of residents surveyed support constructing a system of sidewalks and trails along Route 190 between Somers and Somersville, with connections to the recreation park on Field Road and the school campus on Ninth District Road, ranking it as a moderate to high priority. As the Town and Northern Connecticut Land Trust acquire additional open space land, priority should be given to land that can be used to create greenways to accommodate new trails or close gaps in existing trails.

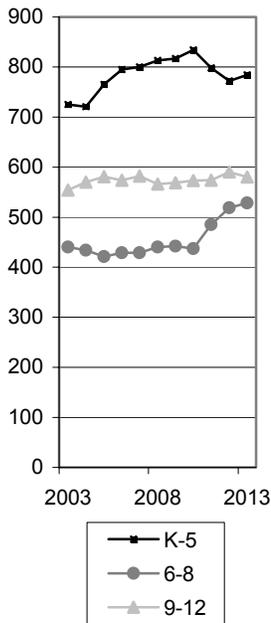
Indoor recreation facilities include a teen center at the Kibbe Fuller Community Center, a recently expanded senior center and various school facilities. Identified indoor recreation needs include an indoor pool (in the absence of an outdoor pool), a supervised after-school program for children 12 and older and a multi-purpose room at the Kibbe Fuller Community Center. Seventy percent of residents surveyed agreed that Somers needs after-school programs for teenagers and ranked improvements to the Kibbe Fuller Community Center as a moderate priority for improvement.

The Town utilizes a part-time Recreation Coordinator position to program and monitor recreation activities while the Somers Public Schools have a part-time Athletic Coordinator that is similarly responsible for programming school facilities and coordinating with Somers' Recreation Coordinator on the use of school recreation facilities. If feasible, the two positions could be combined to make more efficient use of time and better serve both entities if the demands on these positions outgrow their part-time status. Alternatively, the position could be shared with a neighboring town.

**Historic & Projected
(PK-12) School Enrollments**



**Projected Enrollment
By Grade Group**



Address Education Facility Needs

According to 2003 Connecticut Department of Education projections, Somers' youth population will continue to grow steadily throughout the planning period to 1,906 students by the 2013-14 school year. With the middle school population peaking in that same year, the high school population can be expected to continue growing through the 2017-18 school year.

The Somers Elementary School houses pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with half-day kindergarten. During the 2003-04 school year, Somers Elementary School reached its capacity of 725 students. There are plans in effect to add a six classroom wing that should bring capacity up to 875 students by the Fall of 2005. With enrollment numbers projected to peak in 2010-11 at 834 students before declining, the added capacity should serve the school for the planning period and beyond.

The Mabelle B. Avery Middle School currently houses grades 6-8 and is scheduled to undergo renovations to add four new classrooms, address code issues and relocate the Board of Education offices. Renovations are expected to be completed by the Fall of 2007 and should be able to accommodate the projected peak enrollment of 528 students in 2013-14.

Completed in 1993, Somers High School was designed to accommodate 505 students and is presently beyond capacity, based on desired class sizes. The building was designed with oversized core areas (gym, cafeteria, etc.) and configured to easily accommodate additional classrooms as enrollment increased. Plans are underway to add 7 classrooms, 2 science labs and a chorale room that should be completed by Fall of 2005 and address enrollment needs for the planning period and beyond.

In 1990, Somers public school enrollment ratio was 17% of the total population and by 2000 it had increased to 20%. If Somers becomes the projected community of 8,940 residents by 2020, enrollment ratios between 17% and 20% would result in school enrollments ranging from 1,520 to 1,788 students, well below the peak levels projected for 2013. Despite this, Somers High School's space needs should be monitored closely given that the Avery Middle School's enrollment will peak at the end of the planning period and begin spilling over into the High School.

If the concept of maintaining a single education complex is desirable in the future and further expansion of one or more schools within the existing campus is impractical, consideration should be given to acquiring additional land adjacent to the school campus in the near future before it is consumed for residential development.

Community Facility and Service Strategies

1. Enlarge Town Hall and update physical plant to meet anticipated needs.
2. Complete the relocation of the Resident State Trooper's Office to the old firehouse.
3. Assess the need to build or purchase a firehouse to better serve northern Somers.
4. Extend water and fire hydrants to serve Field Road and Egypt Road industrial areas.
5. Adopt a driveway ordinance to ensure emergency access.
6. Adopt regulations to ensure access to emergency water supplies for new development.
7. Consider adopting a residential sprinkler ordinance based on distance to water supply.
8. Upgrade radio equipment to facilitate better two-way communications, close gaps in coverage and allow radio interoperability between police, fire, and Town personnel.
9. Provide adequate funding and personnel to properly maintain roads and drainage facilities to avoid more costly repairs in the future.
10. Study the feasibility of sharing resources between the Town and School park/grounds maintenance staffs.
11. Upgrade the parks maintenance building to meet staff needs.
12. Consider a pay-as-you-throw program to encourage recycling, reduce waste and lower hauling and disposal costs.
13. Provide additional sports fields.
14. Acquire additional land for future recreation needs near the Recreation Park.
15. Consider providing some form of outdoor water recreation.
16. Create an after-school program to address issues at the library.
17. Study the feasibility of sharing resources between the Town and School recreation positions.
18. Closely monitor enrollment projections to anticipate additional space needs at the Somers High School.
19. If maintaining a single education campus is desirable and further expansion within the campus is impractical, adjacent land should be acquired.
20. Plan to enlarge the Library during the planning period.
21. Monitor the growing senior population to anticipate staff and space needs at the Senior Center.
22. Convert the State Trooper's Office in the Kibbe-Fuller Community Center to a multi-purpose room for recreation programming and other needs.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains strategies to preserve more open space that can be used to acquire additional land for additional outdoor athletic facilities.

An efficient transportation system that safely combines private automobiles, pedestrians, bicycles, and other forms of transit can contribute significantly to overall quality of life by meeting the transportation needs of all residents.

Address Vehicular Transportation Needs

From its earliest beginnings, Somers road network has played a significant role in the development of the community. However, as transportation systems have evolved, Somers has become more isolated relative to many towns. Despite this, Somers has a well-connected road network for a rural, suburban town, allowing relatively easy north-south and east-west travel.

Major road network issues facing Somers include:

- Somers and Somersville are in need of transportation improvements to calm traffic, enhance walkability and create/maintain a sense of place;
- funding for road maintenance/scheduled road improvement projects must compete with other more visible capital improvement projects; and
- changes in road design and parking standards are needed to reduce stormwater runoff and enhance community character.

Road Classification



Parking Standards



Parking Lot Design



Road Standards



Relate Road Design to Desired Land Use

Road classifications are important for matching the design of roads to their location, adjacent land uses and function. Recommended road classifications are outlined in the table below and illustrated on the facing page.

Road Classifications			
Arterials	• Route 190	• Route 83	
Collectors	• Battle Street • Bilton Road • Billings Road • Field Road • Four Bridges Road • George Wood Road • Gulf Road	• Hall Hill Road • Hampden Road • Maple Street • Mountain Road • Mountain View Road • Ninth District Road • Pinney Road	• School Street • Shaker Road • Sokol Road • Stafford Road • Turnpike Road • Wood Road
Local	• All other roads		

Matching the width, surface, geometry, and alignment of the road to anticipated traffic needs (access, volume and speed) creates an efficient circulation system. Roads that are generally straight, flat and wide encourage speeding, require excessive clearing and grading, and can potentially detract from community character.

Many of Somers more scenic roads do not meet current road standards yet function safely and efficiently. Unless modified, Somers' current road standards will discourage such scenic roads in the future.

Roads are also a significant source of stormwater and non-point source pollution that must be dealt with under the new National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II guidelines. By reducing pavement widths on collector and local streets, the volume of stormwater runoff generated by new development can be reduced. Somers also needs to adopt storm drainage standards for existing streets adjacent to new developments to ensure that stormwater from new development does not overwhelm the Town's drainage system and lead to costly improvements in the future.

Somers' road design and drainage standards should be examined by a comprehensive group of stakeholders and revised to balance safety and function with impacts on community character and the environment.

Classifying Roads

Roads are typically classified based on their:

- function (through traffic versus access),
- major land use (business or residential),
- traffic volumes, and
- overall location.

Classification and Access

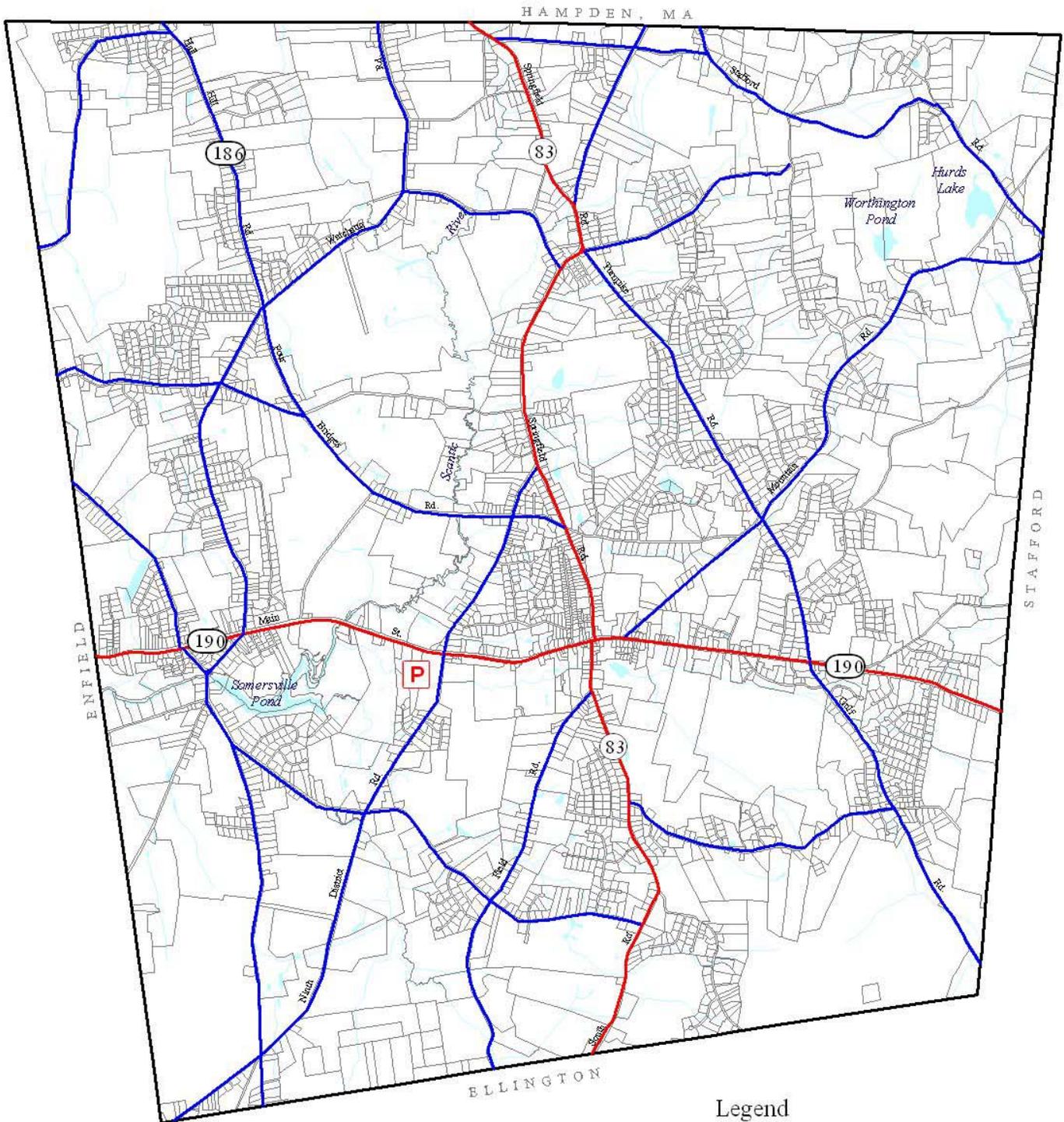
Arterial Road - A road primarily intended to carry regional traffic and serve major activity centers. Direct access to arterials should be restricted, requiring shared driveways, interconnected parking lots and similar measures to reduce curb cuts and maximize the movement of through traffic. Acceleration/Deceleration lanes could also be required at access points to facilitate the efficient flow of traffic.

Collector Road - A road intended to serve business areas and/or distribute traffic between arterial roads and neighborhoods. Collector roads can provide both direct and indirect access to adjacent land but access management measures should be encouraged in commercial and industrial areas.

Local Street - A road primarily intended to provide direct access to abutting properties and not serve major through traffic.

Transportation Plan

Town of Somers, CT



0 3000 Feet



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Legend

- Arterial
- Collector
- Local

P Park & Ride

Water

Address Traffic Issues

According to Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDOT) accident statistics (see sidebar), Route 190 at Ninth District Road and Route 190 at Route 83 both experienced higher than expected numbers and rates of accidents based on their configuration, indicating a potential need for safety improvements.

The Route 190 Corridor Study (prepared by the Capitol Region Council of Governments) recommends realignment of Route 83 at Route 190. A grant application to improve the intersection of Route 190 at Ninth District Road is currently pending. In addition to these major intersections, the following roads need to be improved to eliminate unsafe conditions, address drainage issues or simply bring them up to acceptable standards:

- Battle Street (reconstruct)
- Gulf Road (widen, guide rail, drainage)
- George Wood Road (reconstruct, drainage)
- Mountain View Road (drainage)
- Parker Road (drainage)
- Pinney Road (drainage)
- Shaker Road (drainage)
- Stafford Road (guide rail, drainage)

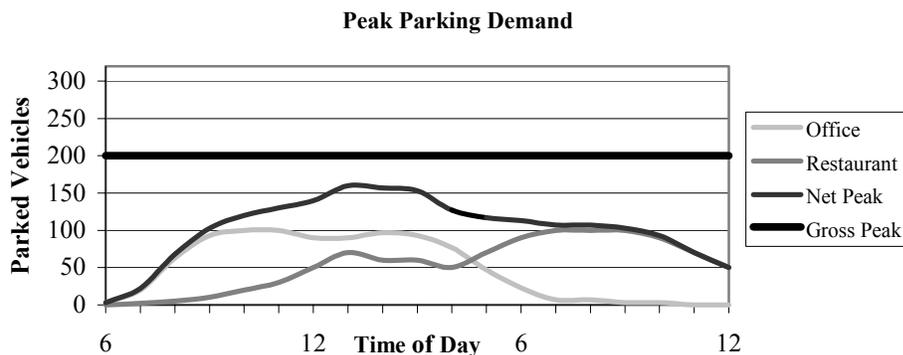
Modify Parking Standards

Communities use parking standards to ensure that each use has sufficient parking to meet its own needs without impairing traffic, public safety or the use of adjacent land. Excessive parking requirements can waste valuable land, create additional stormwater runoff and detract from community character.

The Zoning Commission should examine the parking ratios for each use and make modifications where necessary to ensure the most efficient provision of parking.

Since parking demand can vary significantly within major use classes such as retail stores, restaurants and offices, the Zoning Commission should allow a percentage of the required parking spaces shown on a site plan to be deferred until increased demands warrant their installation.

As the following chart illustrates, shared parking standards can further reduce required parking by recognizing that different uses within a development have variable parking needs and that the net peak parking demand for all uses can be considerably less than the gross required parking for individual uses.



TASR

"Traffic Accident Surveillance Report" - Used by ConnDOT to evaluate roadways for indications of higher than statistically expected accident rates. When the ratio of actual accident rate (RA) to critical accident rate (RC) exceeds 1.0 and the number of accidents exceeds 15, the intersection or road segment is placed on the SLOSSS.

SLOSSS

"Suggested List of Surveillance Study Sites" - Prioritized list used by ConnDOT of highest risk accident locations, as determined by TASR. Documented SLOSSS problems can help attract public funding for remediation.

Allowing consolidated parcels can also have a number of traffic and parking benefits. With proper cross-easements and modified yard/buffer requirements between consolidated parcels, curb cuts can be reduced and shared parking requirements can be implemented where they might otherwise not be possible.

The Zoning Regulations currently lack parking lot paving, curbing, pavement marking and lighting requirements. The Zoning Commission should adopt flexible parking lot standards that require bituminous concrete pavement on a suitable base for most applications while allowing alternative pavement systems (outside of aquifer protection areas) such as porous block or grass pavers for seldom used parking spaces and perimeter fire lanes to reduce stormwater runoff.

Parking lot lighting should be restricted in height and intensity, utilizing full-cutoff fixtures that limit glare within a site.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 contain strategies designed to reduce impervious surfaces, protect scenic roads and mitigate the impacts of impervious pavement.

Strategies to Address Vehicular Transportation Needs

1. Pursue improvements to the intersections of Route 190 at Ninth District Road and Route 190 at Route 83 with the Connecticut Department of Transportation.
2. Keep road improvement projects and maintenance funded and on schedule to avoid more costly repairs in the future
3. Reevaluate the parking requirements by use and make adjustments as necessary to ensure adequate yet efficient numbers of parking spaces.
4. Adopt standards for pavement materials, pavement marking and handicapped parking.
5. Reduce impervious surfaces through the use of porous pavement systems, deferred parking and shared parking requirements where appropriate.
6. Create a committee of stakeholders to study reduced road standards for Town roads and recommend standards for adoption.
7. Modify lighting requirements to reduce excessive lighting and adopt an ordinance to prohibit off-site floodlights.

Intersection of Route 190 and Route 83



Lack of Landscaping or Pavement Markings



Address Alternative Forms of Transportation

As a relatively isolated rural/suburban town, Somers is heavily dependent on private motor vehicles for meeting the majority of transportation needs. Alternative transportation facilities such as mass transit, sidewalks and trails are limited. Alternative transportation issues facing Somers in the coming decade are as follows:

- there are significant gaps and omissions in the sidewalk network,
- many existing sidewalks are too narrow,
- multi-modal trails are lacking between the villages and activity nodes, and
- demand for dial-a-ride services is projected to increase.

Somers should encourage alternative modes of transportation to reduce dependency on private motor vehicles, encourage smart development patterns, promote a healthier lifestyle and reduce pollution.

Pedestrian Circulation



Bicycle Accommodations



Dial-a-Ride Service



Multi-Use Trails



Walkways

For the Plan, walkways are defined as areas used or intended for pedestrian circulation. Such walkways may be public or private and may be improved or unimproved.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are defined as walkways located along streets. Sidewalks are typically dedicated to public use and improved (concrete, brick, asphalt).

Trails

Trails are defined as dedicated (but often unimproved) walkways/bikeways located off streets.

Bicycle Routes

A safe, convenient, comfortable, and secure bicycle-riding environment will encourage bicycle transportation as an important transportation mode and recreation activity.

The types of bicycle facilities that may be appropriate in Somers include:

- shared roadway,
- wide curb lane,
- shoulder bikeway, or
- multi-use trails.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 3 contains additional greenway and trail strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies designed to create walkable villages.

Address Pedestrian Needs

With 98 percent of Somers zoned for low-density, one-acre residential development, the need for sidewalks in residential neighborhoods is not critical. What are lacking are sidewalks and trails in and between more intensely used areas that residents could be reasonably expected to walk.

There are no trails or sidewalks between the villages and other activity nodes such as the Recreation Park or School/Library Campus. At a minimum, a system of sidewalks and/or trails should be provided between the two villages along Route 190 as well as connecting to the school/library campus along Ninth District Road and the Recreation Park along Field Road. The latter can also provide a safe location for employees within the industrial area to walk during breaks.

There is an extensive system of hiking trails throughout Somers, utilizing Town, State and private land that should be incorporated into a system of open space greenways connecting open spaces and activity nodes throughout Somers. Wherever possible, gaps in the trail system should be eliminated through acquisition of land or rights during the subdivision process or through outright purchase.

Address Bicycle Circulation

Bicycle facilities are also limited in Somers. To safely accommodate bicycles, the sidewalk/trail connections between the villages and other activity nodes should include provisions for bicycles, such as creating 8 to 12 foot multi-use trails in lieu of sidewalks. Whenever practical, road improvement projects should take bicycle circulation into account by providing such measures as wide paved shoulders, bicycle friendly catch basin grates and even bicycle lanes along Routes 83 and 190 wherever multi-use trails are not provided.

Monitor Demand for Dial-a-Ride Service

Somers, working in cooperation with the Greater Hartford Transit District, provides dial-a-ride service to elderly or infirm residents allowing them to shop, visit doctors and perform other activities. Somers' population is growing older, with fully one-third of all residents projected to be 55+ years of age by 2020. Senior population growth should be carefully monitored to anticipate future demand for this important service.

Alternative Transportation Strategies

1. Provide sidewalks throughout the commercial and more densely populated areas of the two villages with attention given to crosswalks and other safety enhancements.
2. Provide sidewalks or multi-use trails between village centers and major activity nodes.
3. Enhance and protect the existing hiking trail system throughout town.
4. Monitor the dial-a-ride service to anticipate future demand as Somers population ages.

Provide For Adequate Utility Services

As a rural suburban town, Somers utility infrastructure is somewhat limited. Water and sewer service has often been provided on a reactionary basis, due to groundwater contamination and septic failure. Other utilities such as natural gas, digital subscriber line service (DSL) and wireless communications services are sporadic to non-existent due to remoteness from urban centers.

Major utility issues facing Somers include:

- expansion of water service, especially along Field Road; and
- expansion of the Somersville water pollution control plant to accommodate anticipated needs.

Ensure Adequate Public Water Service

Domestic Water

Public water service is provided by the Connecticut Water Company (CWC), Hazardville Water Company (HWC) and Ellington Acres Company (EAC) utilizing Town-owned water lines. The vast majority of the town is served by private wells.

The benefit of public water over private wells is their ability to serve densely developed areas without concern for groundwater contamination from on-site septic systems or hazardous industrial waste. Fifty-nine percent of Somers residents surveyed agreed that Somers' public water systems should be expanded to accommodate future development.

The HWC operates two water systems: one serving Somersville and the other serving an area along George Wood Road. The HWC systems have adequate capacity and margin of safety to meet demand over the next decade and beyond.

The CWC operates the water system serving the village of Somers and surrounding areas. The CWC system had adequate capacity and margin of safety to meet demand over the next decade and beyond but the potential for future contamination in the Field Road area is a concern due to past contamination incidents and the presence of industry in the vicinity of a well field.

The EAC serves approximately 700 customers in Ellington and operates a single eight-inch water-main on Egypt Road, serving the new Public Works Garage. Capacity and margin of safety have been an issue in the past for the EAC but two new wells are expected to meet future demand and provide adequate margin of safety throughout the planning period and beyond.

Fire Supply

All three water companies report volumes and pressures at or near industry guidelines for fire protection. The Town is in the process of adding five new fire hydrants a year to existing water mains over the next five years to improve fire protection around the villages. Consideration should be given to extending water and hydrants to the industrial areas along Field Road and Egypt Road.

Utilities should facilitate desired development patterns, support community structure and enhance quality of life.

Definitions

Infrastructure - in the preparation of this Plan, the term infrastructure refers to utility services such as:

- piped utilities (water, sanitary and storm sewers and natural gas);
- wired utilities (electricity, telephone, cable TV, and internet); and
- wireless communications (telephone, paging, satellite TV and radio).

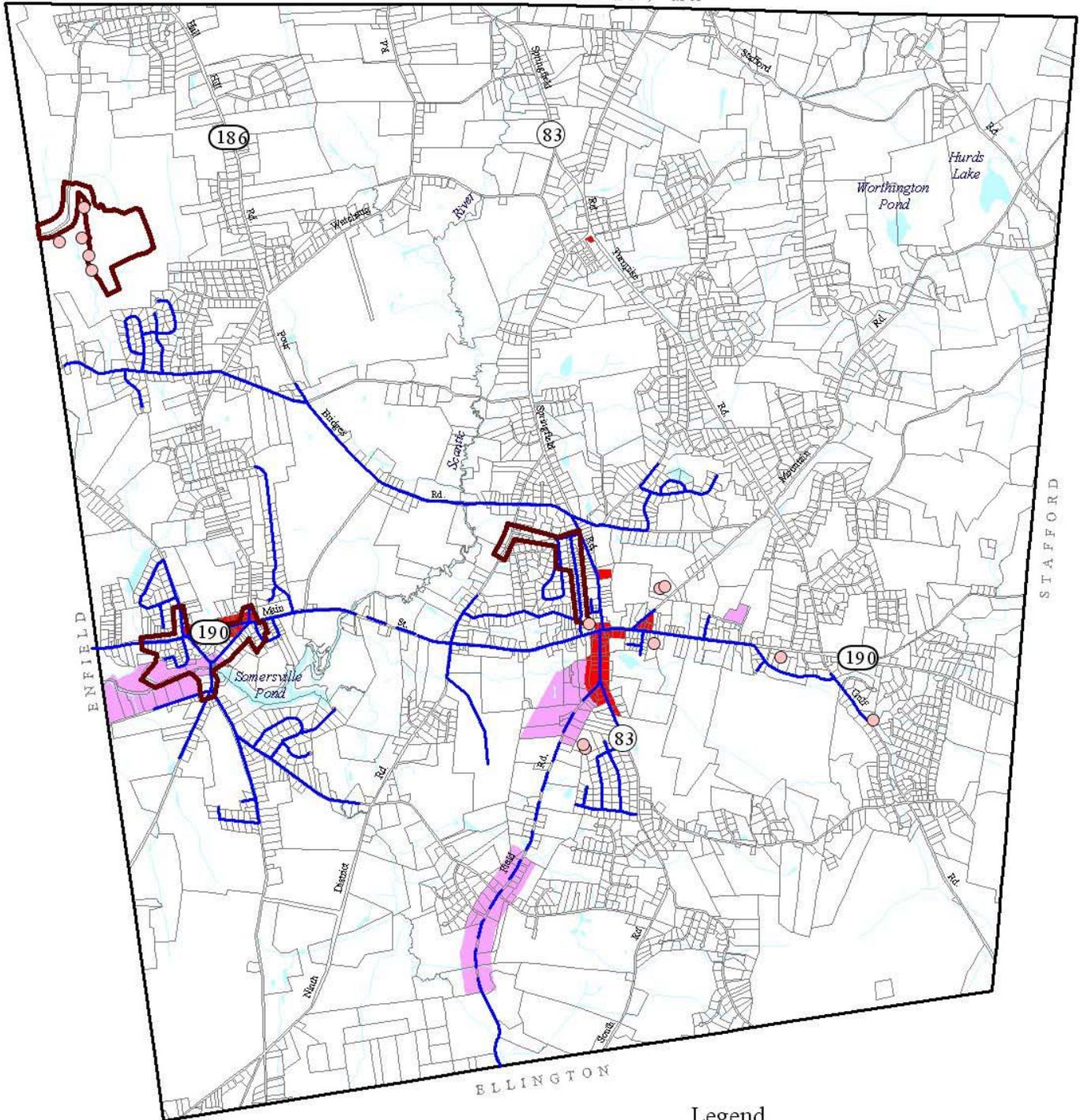
Margin of Safety – The Department of Public Utility Control requires water companies to maintain the capacity to safely exceed daily demand by 15%.

Utility Plan

Town of Somers, CT



HAMPDEN, MA



Legend

-  Community Well
-  Sewer Service Area
-  Existing Water Service Line
-  Business Zone
-  Recommended Water Service Line
-  Industrial Zone
-  Water and Watercourses

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Ensure Adequate Public Sewer Service

The Somers Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) provides public sewers in the vicinity of Somersville. The treatment plant on the Scantic River is nearing its 65 thousand gallons per day (gpd) capacity and an expansion to 90-100 thousand gpd is being studied.

If the Somersville mill or another area of town is to be considered for higher intensity development, the treatment plant will have to be expanded. Sixty percent of Somers residents surveyed agreed that the sewer system should be expanded to accommodate future development.

Public sewers and a community septic system operated by the WPCA serve the Maple Ridge neighborhood where older homes on small lots led to widespread septic system failures. Similar systems under the control of the WPCA should be proactively considered in the future, where necessary to facilitate alternatives to large-lot residential development.

Ensure Adequacy of Other Utility Services

Electrical Service

Electricity is delivered locally by Connecticut Light and Power Company with customers able to choose their own electricity supplier. Electric service in Somers is reported to be reliable town-wide and should be able to meet both current and anticipated future needs.

Wired Communication

Wired telephone services available through SBC and Cox Communications are reported to be reliable and available town-wide to meet current and anticipated future needs.

Internet and other data services are provided by SBC and Cox Communications in the form of dial-up service, high-speed DSL, T1 and T3 lines, and broadband cable. Such services are becoming increasingly critical for attracting a broad spectrum of commercial and industrial activity to desired locations. Cox high-speed cable modem access is generally available town-wide. DSL is limited to the extreme western edge of town but is planned to be extended further into Somers.

Wireless Communication

Due to the density of customers, major cities and interstate highways were the primary focus and backbone of most wireless networks. Towns like Somers eventually received service as the network expanded outward from this backbone, with coverage shaped by the highway network, topography, population density and the regulatory climate of each town. Somers has several towers serving multiple carriers but coverage is sporadic.

Natural Gas Service

Natural gas service is not available in Somers

Television

Cable television is available from Cox Communications throughout Somers. Satellite television is available from a number of providers.

Somers has regulations in place to regulate both conventional and satellite dish antennas.

Recent Federal legislation will enable the transfer of telephone numbers between both wired and wireless telephones which, combined with wireless 911 service, is likely to spur tremendous growth in wireless phone service as residents and businesses cancel their wired telephones in favor of wireless phones. To meet the demand, new towers and antennae will be needed to fill existing gaps in coverage and handle additional call density in established areas.

Due to a Connecticut Superior Court ruling, the Connecticut Siting Council (CSC) currently has jurisdiction over all but municipal telecommunication towers. Prior to the ruling, Somers adopted comprehensive tower regulations that must be considered by telecommunications providers and tower builders when applying to the CSC.

The Town should consider taking a proactive role in the siting process by identifying desirable tower sites based on the location of existing towers, topography, and visual sensitivity (i.e. avoid ridgelines, historic areas, etc.). At a minimum, the Town should actively participate in the siting process by working with prospective telecommunications providers/tower owners as they seek approvals from the CSC to ensure the most efficient and least obtrusive tower network.

Additional Strategies

Chapter 4 contains strategies to attract appropriate businesses, enhance the villages, redevelop the Somersville Manufacturing Co. and improve the pattern of development that all may impact the provision of infrastructure.

Preliminary Strategies

1. Monitor the Ellington Acres Company well permit process to ensure adequate capacity and margin of safety in the future.
2. Study the expansion of water service with emphasis on serving the industrial areas along Egypt and Field Roads.
3. Pursue interconnection between the water systems where possible for future emergency use.
4. Expand the treatment plant to accommodate the redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Co. mill and consider adding additional capacity to accommodate more intense development in and around the villages.
5. Consider the use of community septic systems to support open space development patterns and housing diversity if necessary.
6. Plan for additional growth in wireless communications by identifying desirable tower and antenna locations.

Public Water



Power Substation



FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

6

Overview

The recommendations of each of the preceding chapters can be combined to present an overall Future Land Use Plan for Somers. The Future Land Use Plan is a reflection of the stated goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Plan.

In essence, the Future Land Use Plan is a statement of what the Somers of tomorrow should look like.

The Future Land Use Plan is a depiction of the Plan's recommendations for the future conservation and development of Somers...

CONSERVATION	Natural Resources	Open Space	Historic Resources
			
	Community Structure	Residential Development	Economic Development
DEVELOPMENT			
	Community Facilities	Transportation	Utility Infrastructure
INFRASTRUCTURE			

Descriptions of Future Land Use Categories

Open Space

Dedicated Open Space	Areas currently preserved for open space purposes.
Desirable Open Space	Areas that would make a significant contribution to Somers' open space network and greenbelt system.
Proposed Trail Network	Proposed overall trail system intended to interconnect open spaces villages and nodes in a greenbelt system.
Natural Resources	Areas with significant environmental constraints that represent the highest priorities for conservation.

Business Areas

Commercial / Retail	Areas that have, and are intended to be, developed with retail, personal service, and office facilities.
Industrial	Areas that have, and are intended to be, developed with office and industrial development and similar facilities.
Village	The area where a village pattern of development is intended to be concentrated.

Residential Areas

Very Low Density	Areas where adverse environmental conditions restrict development to densities less than one dwelling unit per acre.
Low Density	Areas where environmental conditions are suitable for residential densities of approximately one dwelling unit per acre.
Multi-Family	Areas where apartments or other multiple dwelling units exist.
Village	Areas where residential development is expected to occur at a density greater than one unit per acre in a village environment supported by public water and sewer.

Other Areas

Community Facility / Institution	Areas that have developed or are intended to develop with community facilities or institutional uses.
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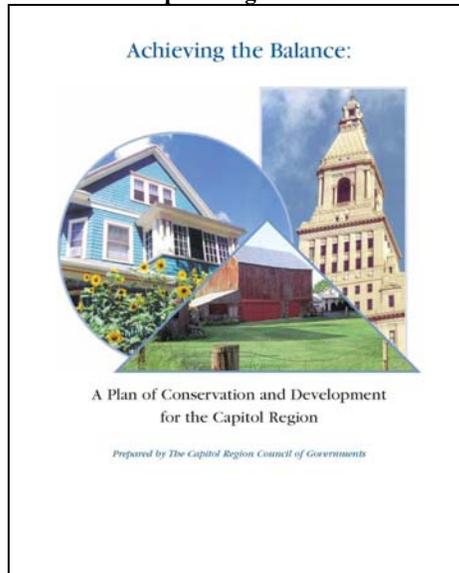
Future Land Use Plan

Plan Consistency

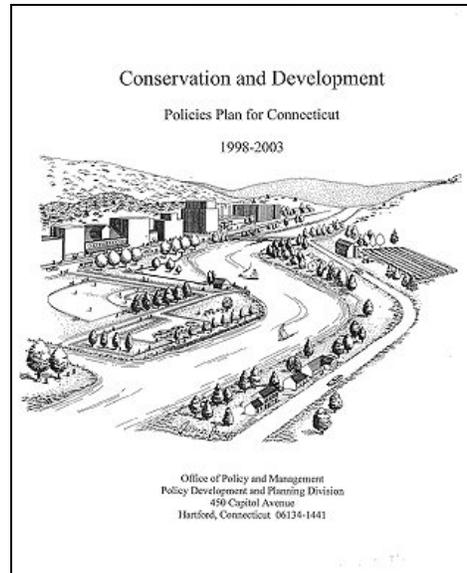
This Plan was compared with the 1998-2003 State Plan of Conservation and Development for consistency with that Plan and found to be consistent with the general policies as well as the Locational Guide Map specific to Somers. The Future Land Use Map was also compared to the Draft 2004-2009 State Plan of Conservation and Development Locational Guide Map and found to be consistent as well.

In addition, this Plan was compared with the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development for the Capitol Region for consistency with that Plan and again found to be consistent with both the policies and policy maps contained in that Plan.

Capitol Region Plan



State Plan



IMPLEMENTATION

7

Overview

Implementation of the strategies and recommendations of the Plan of Conservation and Development is the main purpose of the planning process.

Implementation of a Plan typically occurs in two main phases:

- many of the major recommendations can and should be carried out in a relatively short period of time since they are critical to the implementation of the Plan;
- other recommendations will be implemented over time because they may require additional study, coordination with or implementation by others, or involve the commitment of financial resources.

The Planning Commission can implement many of the recommendations of the Plan of Conservation and Development through regulation amendments, application reviews, and other means and has the primary responsibility of overseeing the implementation of all of the Plan's recommendations.

Other recommendations may require cooperation with and action by other local boards and commissions such as the Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen and similar agencies.

However, if the Plan is to be realized, it must serve as a guide to all residents, businesses, builders, developers, applicant, owners, agencies, and individuals interested in the orderly conservation and development of Somers.

Implementation Committee

Oversight of implementation can be coordinated by the Planning Commission or another committee.

An “ad hoc” committee made up of residents and representatives of local boards identified in the implementation schedules would be a significant step towards including a variety of Town agencies in implementing the Plan and monitoring progress. This Committee could provide status reports to the Planning Commission, Board of Selectmen, and others.

Such a committee could meet quarterly to review implementation and coordinate local activities.

Annual Update Process

An appropriate way to regularly update the Plan may be to update major sections of the Plan every year by:

- holding a public informational meeting to summarize the Plan recommendations and receive feedback from the community,
- holding a workshop session for local boards and other interested persons to discuss Plan strategies and suggest alternative language,
- revising Plan sections, as appropriate, and
- re-adopting the Plan (even if there are no text or map changes).

Tools

Using the Plan of Conservation and Development

Using the Plan of Conservation and Development as a basis for land use decisions by the Planning Commission and Zoning Commission will help accomplish the goals and objectives of the Plan. All land use proposals should be measured and evaluated in terms of the Plan and its various elements.

Plan Implementation Committee / Annual Work Program

A Plan Implementation Committee (PIC) is an effective way to help implement the Plan. A PIC could use the implementation schedules that follow to develop an annual implementation program of issues to be addressed by boards and commissions.

A PIC might include representatives of various boards and commissions and would help to prioritize, coordinate, and refine the implementation of the Plan. The Committee could meet two to four times a year to establish priorities and guide implementation of the Plan’s recommendations. In addition, the Committee could assess the status of specific recommendations, establish new priorities, and suggest new implementation techniques.

As the ultimate responsible agency, the Planning Commission can also assume the responsibility for coordinating implementation of the Plan’s recommendations.

Annual Update Program

A Plan that updated only once every ten years can be silent on emerging issues, trends and current policy objectives, which could lead to conflicts in land-use decisions or missed opportunities. When a Plan is considered strictly a reference document rather than a working document, its effectiveness in guiding the community can diminish over time. Somers should consider keeping this Plan current and not waiting to update it every ten years. A preliminary schedule might be as follows:

Conservation Themes	Development Themes	Community Needs
2005	2006	2007
2008	2009	2010

Each review and update would extend the Plan’s ten-year life until the community felt that a comprehensive update was required. A work program for annual updates of the Plan is discussed in the sidebar. A Plan Implementation Committee could also assist in this effort.

Updating Zoning and Subdivision Regulations

Many of the recommendations in the Plan of Conservation and Development can be implemented by the Planning Commission and Zoning Commission through regulation amendments, application reviews, and other means. The Zoning and the Subdivision Regulations provide specific criteria for land development at the time of applications. As a result, these regulations are important tools to implement the recommendations of the Plan. However, this is only true if the regulations reflect the recommendations of the Plan.

In the near future, Planning Commission should undertake a comprehensive review of the subdivision regulations and the Zoning Commission should similarly review the zoning regulations and zoning map, making whatever revisions are necessary to:

- make the regulations more user-friendly,
- implement Plan recommendations, and
- promote consistency between the Plan and the regulations.

Capital Improvement Program

The Capital Improvement Program or CIP is a tool for planning major capital expenditures of a municipality so that local needs can be identified and prioritized within local fiscal constraints that may exist.

The Plan contains several proposals (such as relocating the Resident State Trooper's Office to the old firehouse) whose implementation may require the expenditure of Town funds. The Plan recommends that these and other items be included in the Town's CIP and that funding for them be included as part of the Capital Budget.

Referral of Municipal Improvements

Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that municipal improvements (defined in the statute) be referred to the Planning Commission for a report before any local action is taken. A proposal disapproved by the Commission can only be implemented after a two-thirds vote by Town Meeting. All local boards and agencies should be notified of Section 8-24 and its mandatory nature so that proposals can be considered and prepared in compliance with its requirements.

Inter-Municipal and Regional Cooperation

Somers can continue to work with other towns in the region, the Capitol Region Council of Governments, the State of Connecticut, and other agencies to explore opportunities where common interests coincide.

Regulation Updates

The importance of updating local regulations as soon as possible cannot be over-emphasized.

Compared to a number of other communities, the regulations in Somers lack a lot of the basic land use tools that will serve to promote the best possible conservation and development of the community.

Sample Legend

BOS	Board of Selectmen
CC	Conservation Commission
DEP	Department of Environmental
PC	Planning Commission
Staff	Town Staff
ZC	Zoning Commission

Priorities

	Task
1	High Priority
2	Moderate Priority
3	Lower Priority

	Policy
---	--------

A	High Priority
B	Moderate Priority
C	Lower Priority

Implementation Schedule

Implementation of the Plan is an ongoing process. While some recommendations can be carried out in a relatively short period of time, others may only be realized by the end of the planning period or beyond. Since some recommendations may involve additional study or a commitment of fiscal resources, their implementation may take place over several years or occur in stages.

Detailed implementation tables will be provided following review and refinement of the Draft Plan by the Steering Committee.

As illustrated below, implementation tables will assign primary responsibilities and preliminary schedules to the Plan’s recommendations. In many instances, the responsibilities are shared by a number of entities (see sidebar).

Preserve More Meaningful Open Space

	What	Who	Priority	Done
	1. Require a mandatory open space "set-aside" of 15% as part of every residential development application.	PC	1	<input type="checkbox"/>

In addition, the tables identify both policies and tasks. Policies are long-term guidelines that do not readily lend themselves to a specific schedule or measurement. Tasks on the other hand, are specific actions that can typically be scheduled, completed and evaluated.

Preliminary priorities are identified in the tables and are ranked according to a three step scale. High priorities are items that are either critical to the success of a planning strategy or are relatively easy to implement and can be handled without delay. Moderate priorities are policies and tasks that are not as time sensitive as high priorities and may be more difficult to implement due to funding constraints or complexity. Moderate priorities should be addressed by the middle of the ten year planning period. Lower priorities are typically longer range items that might require a “wait and see” approach or are preceded by higher funding priorities. Lower priorities may be addressed towards the end of the planning period and beyond.

CONCLUSION

8

Overview

The Plan of Conservation and Development has been prepared to meet the challenges that will confront the Town of Somers over the next ten years and beyond.

The first step in the planning process was to understand Somers and the desires of its residents. A great deal of information was collected, presented, reviewed, and discussed as part of the process of developing this Plan.

The second step was to determine what direction the residents of Somers want to take. Many meetings were held to assess local issues and discuss alternative strategies. Through this work, general goals were developed and a vision for the future of Somers was confirmed.

The third step was to develop actions and policies to guide Somers' residents and agencies towards achieving their vision. These specific strategies are detailed throughout the Plan and summarized in the implementation tables found in Chapter 7 – Implementation.

Despite all of the thought and effort that went into preparing this Plan, the most important step of the planning process is implementation. While the task of implementation falls on all Somers residents, the responsibility for implementing the Plan lies with the Planning Commission and other Town agencies.

The Plan is intended as a guide to be followed in order to enhance the quality of life and the community character of Somers. It is intended to be flexible in terms how specific goals and objectives are reached, provided that the long-term goals of the community are achieved.

During the next few years, many of the higher priority tasks will be completed and hopefully goals will be achieved. Circumstances will inevitably arise that may suggest that it is time to reconsider the Plan or some of its elements. Such situations should be welcomed since it will mean that the Plan is being actively used and considered by residents. By preparing this Plan of Conservation and Development, Somers has taken the first step towards creating a better future for its residents.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Residents of Somers

Town Staff

David Pinney	First Selectman (from 1/04)
Richard Jackson, III	First Selectman (until 12/03)
Patrice Carson, AICP	Town Planner
James Taylor	Zoning Enforcement Officer
Steven Jacobs	Town Sanitarian
Sgt. Jose Claudio	Resident State Trooper
Bill Meier, Jr.	Fire Chief
Walter Somers	Fire Marshal
Everett Morrill	Director of Public Works
Kenneth Anderson	Highway Superintendent
Mike Provencher	Park Maintenance Supervisor
Francine Alouisa	Library Director
Elaine Freidman	Social Services Coordinator (until 12/03)
Jenifer Charette	Recreation Coordinator
Dave Eddy	Transfer Station Coordinator
Janice Steinmetz	Assessor (until 12/03)
Thomas Jefferson	Superintendent of Schools
Lou Bachetti	Economic Development Commission, Chair
Steve Krasinski	Special Projects Committee, Chair

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee

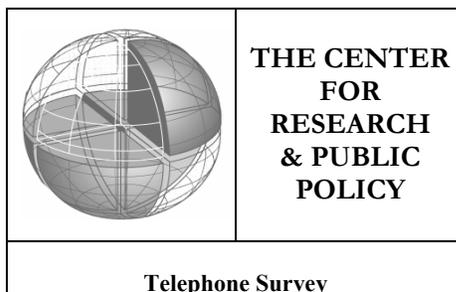
Clifford Bordeaux	Planning Commission, Vice-Chair
Michael Collins	Planning Commission
Kathy Devlin	Board of Selectmen
Greg Genlot	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Michelle Hayward	Planning Commission
Terri Henderson	Board of Education, Chair
Joseph Iadarola	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Peter Klein	Zoning Commission, Chair
Georgeanne Kuzman	Planning Commission, Alternate (from 1/04)
Tom McCaleb	Planning Commission (until 6/03)
Michael Parker	Board of Finance
Brad Pellissier	Planning Commission
Carole Pyne	Somers Historical Society
Leonard Viera	Planning Commission (until 12/03)
Karl Walton	Planning Commission, Chair

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Technical Assistance Provided By:

Comprehensive Planning





Planimetrics

31 Ensign Drive, Avon, CT 06001

860-677-5267



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WELCOME



March 4, 2004

Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee
Town of Somers
P.O. Box 308
619 Main Street
Somers, CT 06071

Dear Committee Members:

We are pleased to submit this preliminary draft of the 2004 Somers Plan of Conservation and Development for your review and comment.

After more than a year of input, analysis, formulating strategies and soliciting feedback, this draft represents the first opportunity to compile all of the work to date in a comprehensive manner that reflects the major themes developed during the process. We have attempted to create a document that is compelling, visionary and strategic in nature.

While we believe that we have captured the essence of the discussion and input received to date, this document is simply the first draft of a document that is intended to be the plan for the future of Somers.

We look forward to starting this next phase of the planning process with you on March, 18 2004, when we begin discussion of the draft Plan in detail.

Sincerely,

PLANIMETRICS, LLC

Glenn Chalder, AICP

Eric Barz, AICP