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A STRONG ECONOMY

Overview

This booklet has been prepared for Westbrook residents and other persons interested in the formulation of the 2021 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) for Westbrook, Connecticut. This booklet is intended to provide an overview of strategies from the 2011 POCD related to the theme of “A Strong Economy” with some suggested updates for consideration.

“Economy is the basis of society [and] when the economy is stable, society develops.”

Morihei Ueshiba
Japanese Sensei

Business Development



Marinas / Tourism



Housing Choice



Town Center



On the following pages, **black text** means the concept was included in the 2011 POCD. **Red text** is used to identify 2011 POCD strategies with “action verbs”.

Blue text is used to present **new strategies or information** which may be relevant.

Are the strategies, policies, and action steps in this booklet appropriate for Westbrook for the next 10-20 years? Should anything be added? Should anything be deleted?



BUSINESS / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Achieve a diverse and stable economy that is compatible with the Town’s growth objectives ...

2020 Information

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Route 1 Corridor Study RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

In the survey, about 95 percent of residents felt that business/economic development was an important Town goal but only 35 percent felt the Town was doing a good job.

Promote Economic Development (NEW!)

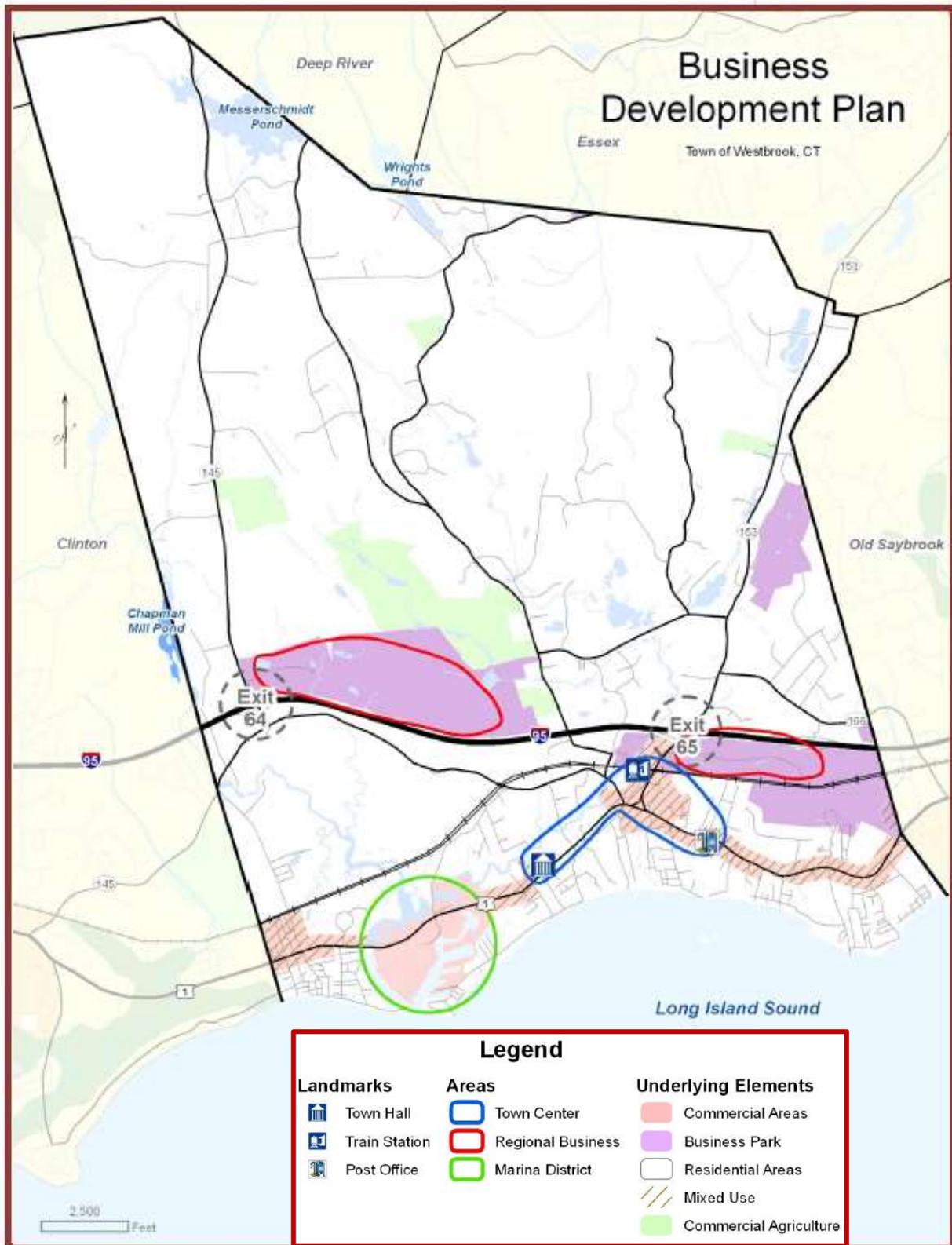
Economic development is an important issue for Westbrook.

Historically, business uses (stores, offices, manufacturing, research, etc.) were the main focus of economic development efforts. However, in recent years, the focus has grown to include other uses which also provide:

- Provide jobs for residents of Westbrook and the region,
- Provide goods and services for residents, businesses, and visitors,
- Promote spending at local businesses,
- Enhance the tax base, and/or
- Provide net tax revenue to support local services.

Under this framework, economic development can also include housing for “empty nesters” and senior citizens, assisted living facilities, age-restricted housing and other uses that provide more in tax revenue than they require in municipal services. Such uses support a strong tax base and net tax revenue to support the Town’s ability to provide quality services.

Promote Economic Development	Leader / Partners
1. Promote appropriate economic development in Westbrook in order to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Provide jobs for residents of Westbrook and the region, Provide goods and services for residents, businesses, and visitors, Promote spending at local businesses, Enhance the tax base, and/or Provide net tax revenue to support local services. 	



2020 Information

Overall, the RiverCOG region does NOT have a highly diversified economy.

About 2/3rds of all workers are employed in:

- health care and social services.
- government.
- manufacturing.
- retail trade; and
- accommodation and food services.

[Retain Existing Businesses]

The 2011 POCD stated that Westbrook’s first economic development priority was to retain existing businesses since more growth typically comes from existing companies and it is both easier and less expensive to retain existing businesses than to attract new ones.

Retain Existing Businesses	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue efforts to retain existing businesses. 2. Continue to seek ways to help existing businesses better market themselves (coordinated marketing/events, Town website, a sign program to guide people to businesses “off the beaten path”, etc.) 3. When appropriate, consider offering financial incentives for expansion of existing business expansions (i.e., tax abatements). 4. Continue to support commercial agriculture. 	

Market Dynamics

A market analysis conducted by Ninigret Partners (part of the Town Center Study) found the following:

Market Dynamics - Retail

- Westbrook has more retail floor area than the local population can support by itself
- Local retail relies on travelers, visitors, tourists, and people from nearby communities)
- With retail is shifting to on-line venues, new retail needs to be unique and experiential or it will compete with existing businesses

Market Dynamics - Office

- Office market is not particularly strong
- Rental rates may not cover construction costs, especially for a speculative building
- Space is available within the market

Promote Appropriate Economic Development

Town Center

Business and economic development in the Town Center continues to be a Town priority. Recommendations for this area are discussed separately (see page XX).

Essex Road / Flat Rock Place (Exit 65)

Additional economic development potential exists in the Essex Road (Route 153) and Flat Rock Place area. The POCD supports appropriate development (and redevelopment) of this area. Development in this area has the potential to support the Town Center area and benefit from the train station.



Office / Technology / Industrial Areas

The POCD also supports appropriate development (and redevelopment) along Pequot Park Road (near Route 145) and Pettipaug Road. These areas are more oriented towards office, technology, and industrial businesses. .

Pequot Park Road



Pettipaug Road



Information Resources

- [Route 1 Corridor Study](#)
- [RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan](#)
- [Harbor Management Plan](#)

Westbrook has a Harbor Management Plan and an ordinance related to use of harbors and waterways

The 2018 update of the Zoning Regulations simplified zoning requirements for marina operators by offering a “Master Plan” approval approach

Route 1 West / Marina District

The 2011 POCD recognized that the marinas in Westbrook provide jobs and tax revenue and are a vital part of the coastal tourism economy. There are over 2,000 boat slips in Westbrook and the users of these slips support a variety of other businesses– both boat-related and other types of businesses. Westbrook is recognized as one of the largest recreational boating facilities in New England.

Several studies have recommended “placemaking” strategies to recognize this area and capitalize on its strengths and assets. Some of the following concepts have been expressed:

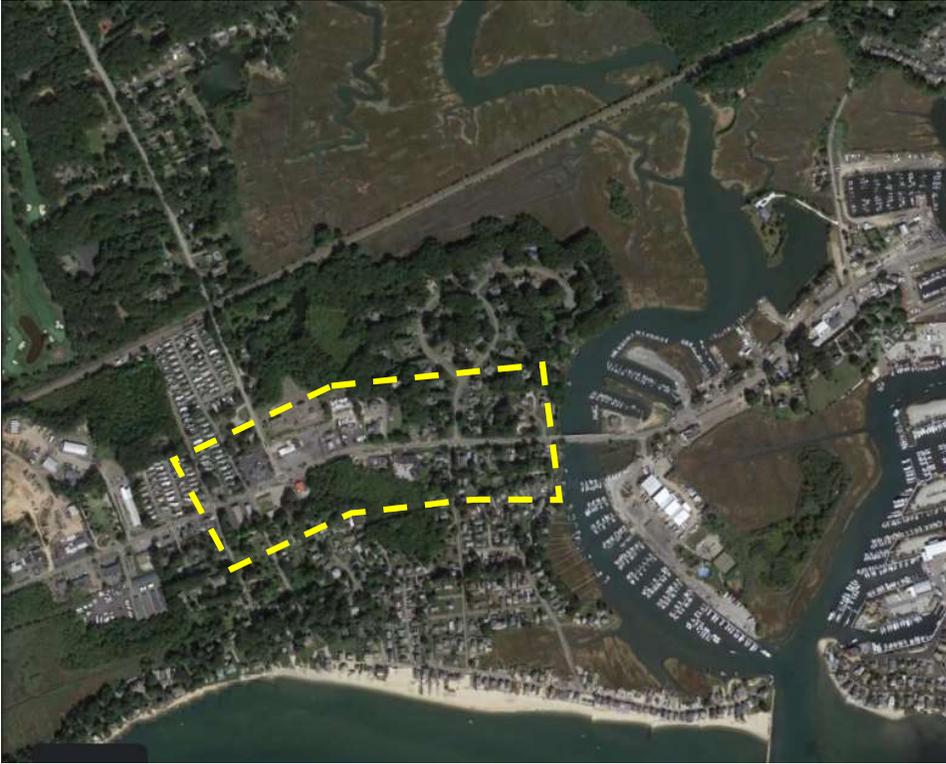
- Installing “gateway” elements to bolster recognition of the marina district.
- Improving pedestrian connections between marinas and Route 1 businesses.
- Finding ways to attract more marina users to other businesses in Westbrook (sidewalks, bikeways, shuttle service, etc.).
- Allowing pop-up businesses (such as food trucks) to serve boaters, visitor, and residents.
- Meeting regularly with marina owners to share ideas.

The POCD also supports the appropriate development (and redevelopment) of parcels along Route 1 West to the Clinton town line.

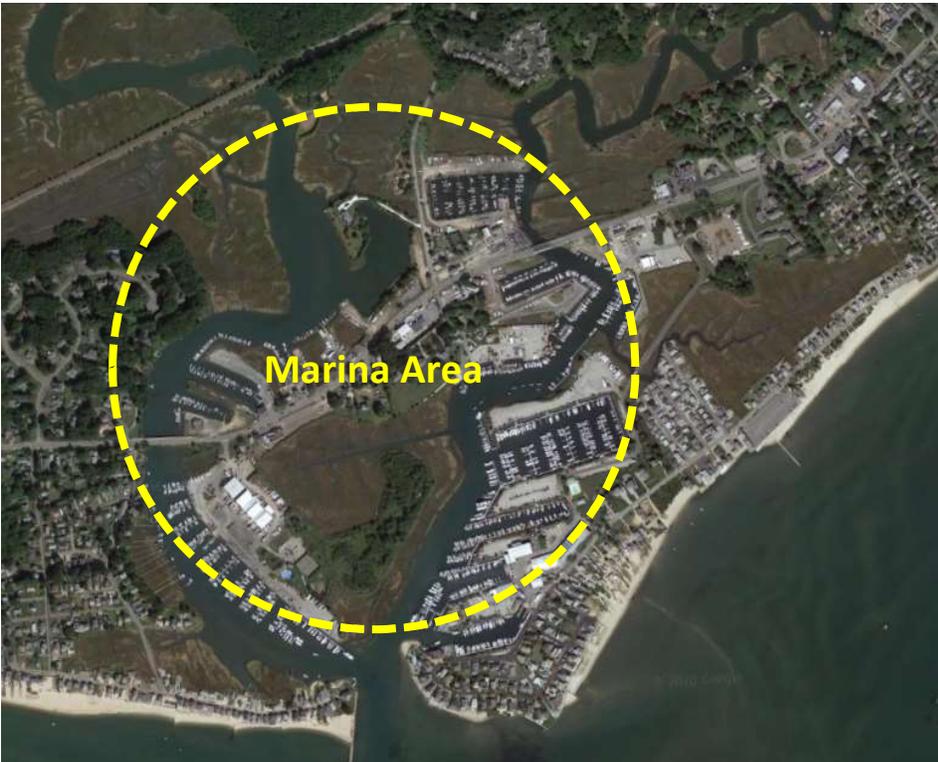
Marina District



Route 1 West

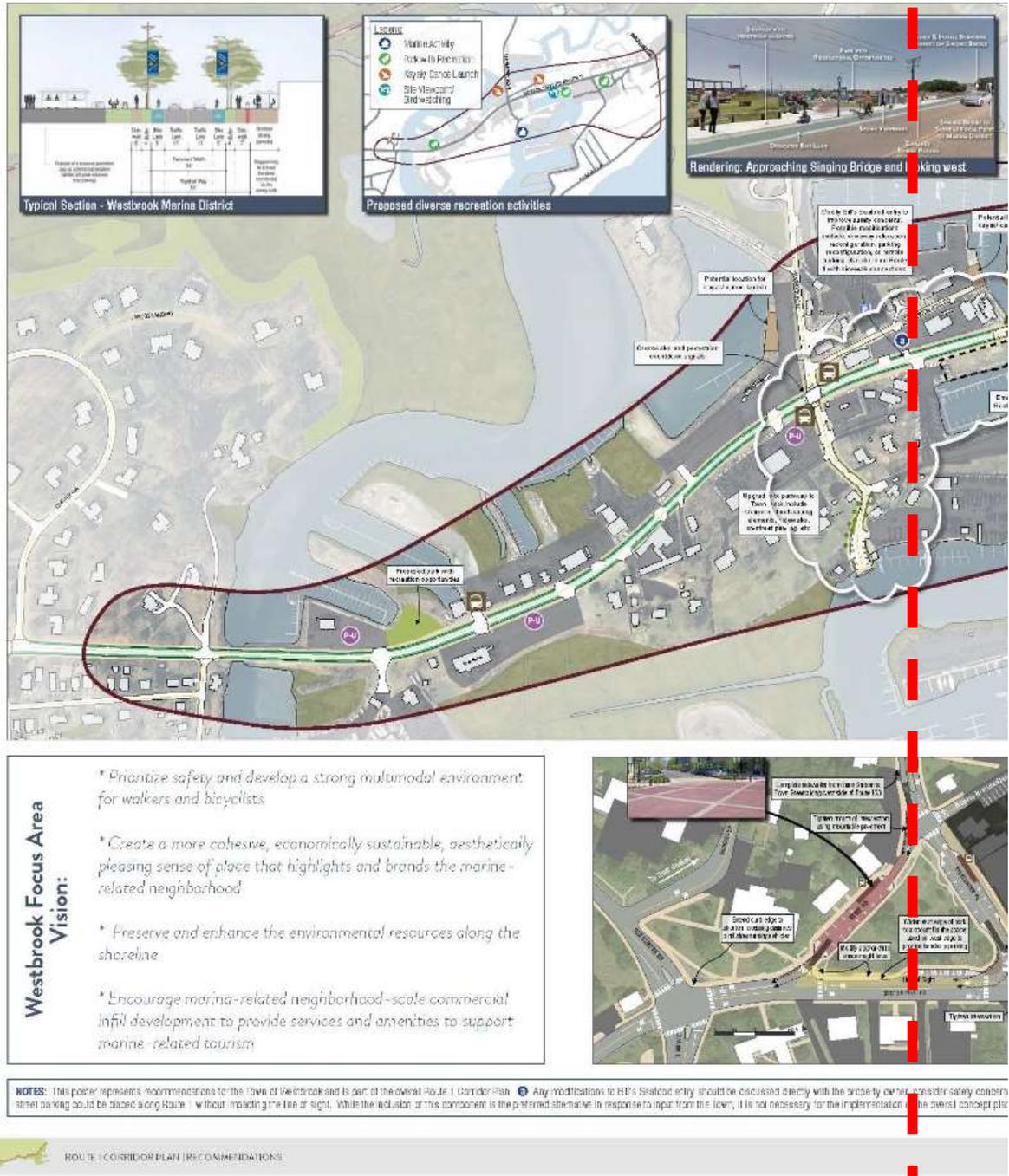


Marina Area



ROUTE 1 CORRIDOR PLAN

Concept Plans: Town of Westbrook, CT



be downloaded and viewed from the RiverCOG/ Route 1 website (<http://www.rivercog.org/route1>.)

Route 1 East / Waters Edge

There are several business and industrial zoned areas along Route 1 East between the Town Center and the Old Saybrook town line. The Water's Edge Resort & Spa – a popular Westbrook destination - is located in this area. The POCD also supports the appropriate development (and redevelopment) of parcels along Route 1 East to the Old Saybrook town line.



Promote Appropriate Economic Development	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development in the Town Center. 2. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development (and redevelopment) in the Essex Road (Route 153) and Flat Rock Place area. 3. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development (and redevelopment) along Pequot Park Road (near Route 145) and Pettipaug Road 4. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development in the “Marina District” including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continuing to support “placemaking” strategies (such as installing “gateway” elements and creating a unified streetscape theme and appearance) to bolster recognition of the marina district and help capitalize on its strengths and assets. b. Seeking ways to improve pedestrian connections between marinas and Route 1 businesses. c. Seeking ways to attract more marina users to other businesses in Westbrook (sidewalks, bikeways, loaner bicycles, shuttle service, etc.). d. Considering allowing pop-up businesses (such as food trucks) to serve boaters, visitors, and residents. 5. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development along Route 1 West to the Clinton town line. 6. Continue to support appropriate business and/or economic development along Route 1 East to the Old Saybrook town line. 	

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 1 Corridor Study • RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

Develop a Balanced Approach to Tourism

The 2011 POCD indicated that tourism has always been an important part of Westbrook’s economy and that many local businesses are dependent on a certain level of tourism in order to thrive.

Develop a Balanced Approach to Tourism	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote Westbrook as an eco-tourism and heritage tourism destination 2. Develop and install a wayfinding program (directional signs and informational signs) to orient visitors, help them find their way around Town, and provide interesting information. □ 3. Continue to collaborate with others (such as the Central Regional Tourism District, the local Chamber of Commerce, and other business organizations) on marketing efforts 4. Continue to seek ways to mitigate any negative impacts which might occur from tourism on the quality of life for residents (e.g., traffic, crowd, noise, lights, etc.) including impacts associated with outdoor dining and entertainment along the shoreline. 5. Continue to monitor cottage rentals since, while they are an important part of Westbrook’s tourism economy, they can also create conflicts for neighboring properties and people that live in the community year-round 6. Consider adopting a program to manage short-term rentals in order to minimize impacts on neighboring properties and on year-round residents (especially in an era of COZVID-19 and the need for contact tracing). □ 7. Consider adopting an ordinance to address mass gatherings (a planned or spontaneous event with a large number of people in attendance that could strain the planning and response resources of the community hosting the event, such as a concert, festival, conference, or sporting event). 	

Encourage Quality Development / Redevelopment

The 2011 POCD recognized that the quality and appearance of development greatly affects the image and character in Westbrook. Every building that gets built affects the overall character of the community for decades (or longer) and Westbrook should continue to strive to get the best building and site designs possible.

The long-term benefits to the Town from good design are considerable.

Encourage Quality Development and Redevelopment	Leader / Partners
1. Continue to maintain high design expectations and standards for new development and redevelopment.	
2. Review the Zoning Regulations to see if there are ways to reduce potential impediments to new development and redevelopment including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reducing the parking requirements where possible. b. Reducing the setback / buffer requirements if appropriate. c. Simplifying the categories of permitted uses in order to simplify and facilitate the permitting process. d. Continuing to seek ways to streamline the approval process including expanding the number of activities allowed under administrative approvals. 	□
3. Review the Zoning Regulations to see if there are ways to reduce potential impediments to redevelopment including flexible site design standards so that legacy sites can, to the extent practicable, be brought closer to current code requirements:	□
4. Adopt statutory provisions that allow land use commissions to engage in preliminary pre-application discussions with applicants.	□

2020 Information

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 1 Corridor Study • Market Analysis by Ninigret Partners • RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

The Zoning Regulations adopted in 2018 contain design guidelines to help encourage quality development.



RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Provide for a diverse mix of housing choices in quality, well-designed neighborhoods, that accommodates the needs of the Town’s residents ...

2020 Information

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market Analysis by Ninigret Partners RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

The Zoning Regulations allow for accessory apartments in residential zones

The Zoning Regulations allow for two-family dwellings in residential zones

Planned Residential Developments (4-8 units per acre) and Incentive Housing Developments (6-20 units per acre) may be allowed through a zone change process

Congregate facilities are allowed in all residential zones (except HDR)

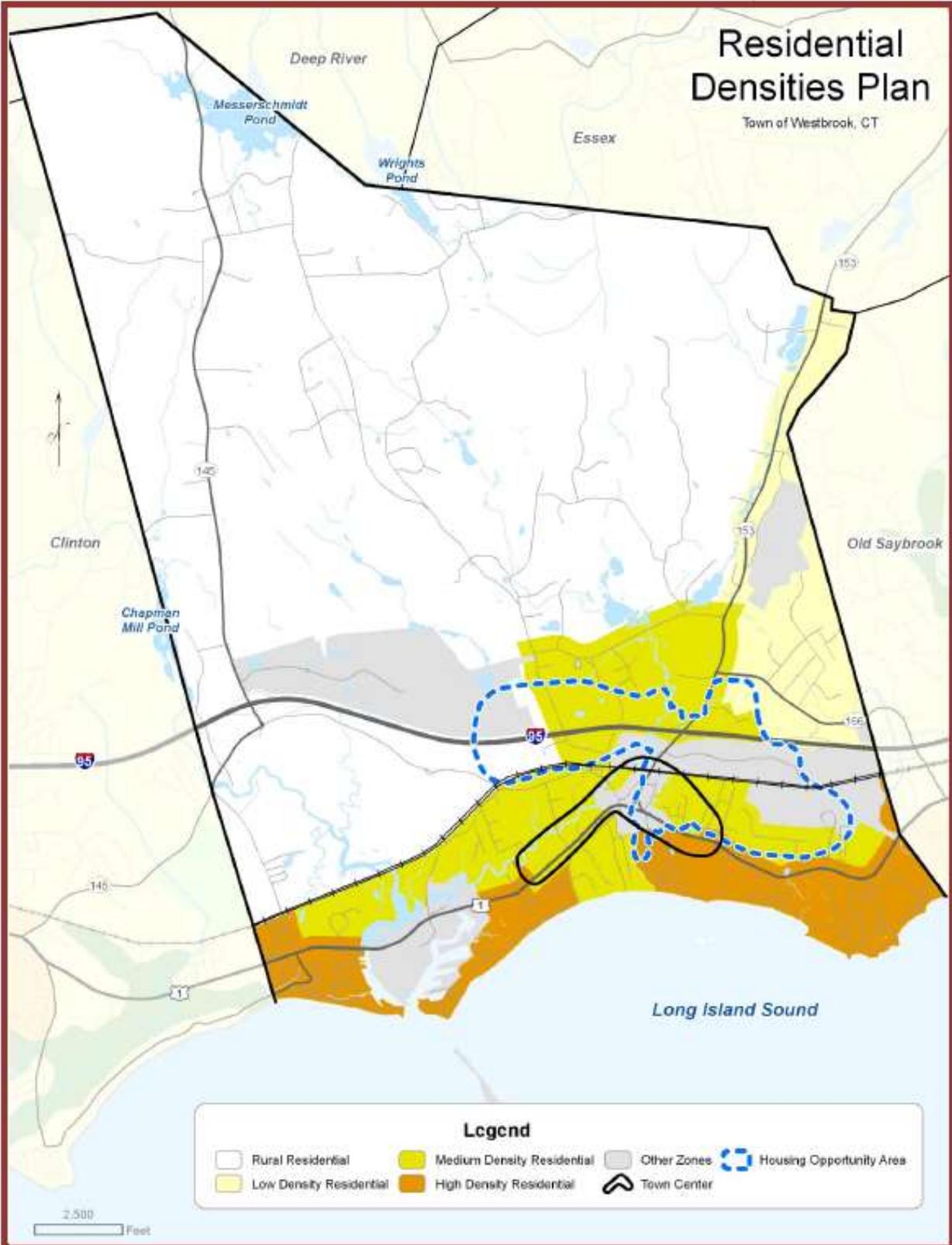
[Continue to Manage Residential Development]

With regard to residential development, the 2011 POCD recommended using zoning tools to manage residential development throughout Town and protect existing neighborhoods.

The recommended strategy for this POCD is to continue to manage residential development while assimilating housing diversity within the community. This slight change in focus is deliberate and is intended to enable housing options so that Westbrook’s housing portfolio can adapt to meet changing needs when and where appropriate.

Continue to Manage Residential Development	Leader / Partners
1. Continue to manage residential development throughout Town.	
2. Diversify Westbrook’s housing portfolio, when and where appropriate, in order to meet changing housing needs.	
3. Seek ways to assimilate housing diversity within the community.	

Market Dynamics - Housing	“Affordable Housing”
<p>A market analysis conducted by Ninigret Partners (part of the Town Center Study) found the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changing age and household composition indicate demand for smaller units Type of housing and its age suggest demand for newer housing with modern amenities Highest prices are south of Route 1 but limited land availability Strongest demand for rental units for younger and older households 	<p>According to the CT Department of Housing, Westbrook has the following units that count as affordable housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 140 units of assisted housing 5 units with tenant rental assistance 28 units with CHFA/USDA mortgages 29 units deed-restricted to sell or rent at affordable prices Overall, 5.13% of Westbrook’s housing stock meets the State criteria of “affordable housing”



Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

Anticipated Housing Needs

- Affordable housing for young adults and families (home health aides, childcare workers, police, teachers, municipal employees, and service workers), many of whom may work in Westbrook

According to the United Way, about 1/3 of Westbrook’s year-round population falls into the “ALICE” category:

- Asset limited
- Income constrained
- Employed

- Affordable housing for the growing population of seniors (rental and ownership) living on fixed incomes

- For all age groups, housing which is:
 - Smaller,
 - Easier to maintain,
 - Close to services, and transit options.

Encourage Housing Diversity

The 2011 POCD recommended there be housing choices in Westbrook to:

- meet the needs of those who want to live here (see sidebar), and
- meet the state goal that 10 percent of a community’s housing stock be subject to restrictions making it affordable to people earning 80 percent or less of area median income (Westbrook currently has 202 qualifying units and is at 5.13% relative to the State goal).

While some housing in Westbrook is “naturally affordable” because it sells at or below State criteria, there is not enough such housing to meet local needs and it does not count to the State’s 10% goal.

Any community that does not meet the State’s 10% goal is subject to the State’s Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure where a development proposing affordable housing may not have to meet local zoning requirements.

Encourage Housing Diversity	Leader / Partners
1. Seek opportunities to retain “naturally-occurring affordable housing” and, if possible, convert them to protected affordable units.	
2. Prepare an “Affordable Housing Plan” as required by CGS Section 8-30j by July 2022.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Investigate ways to create affordable elderly housing units to meet local needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Investigate ways to address the need for affordable family housing units to meet local needs.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Seek ways to enable accessory dwelling units to meet the housing (and other needs) of an aging population and others needing affordable housing.	
6. Encourage tenants receiving rental assistance and homebuyers obtaining CHFA/USDA mortgages to locate in Westbrook since such units count towards the State’s 10% threshold.	
7. Consider adopting inclusionary zoning provisions so that new housing helps Westbrook reach its housing goal rather than falling further behind: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A 10% set-aside requirement, b. A “fee-in-lieu” requirement c. A Zoning Permit fee, or d. Other provision. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Seek opportunities to work with local non-profit organizations to create new affordable housing (including special needs groups).	
9. Continue local programs that help support elderly residents who choose to age in place.	

Address Coastal Housing Issues

With regard to housing located in coastal neighborhoods, the 2011 POCD recognized that there were several issues that could be expected to affect Westbrook in the future. These issues affect Westbrook today and will continue to affect the community in the future:

- **Sea Level Rise** - Threats from coastal storms and rising sea levels.
- **Development / Redevelopment** - Impacts from new construction and development in coastal neighborhoods (house size, scale, proportion, grading, drainage, etc.).
- **Conversions** - Impacts from conversion of existing seasonal homes to year-round dwellings (septic loading, etc.).
- **Short-Term Rentals** - Impacts from short-term rentals with limited oversight.

Address Coastal Housing Issues	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to monitor the impacts on coastal neighborhoods from sea level rise and coastal storms. 2. Continue to monitor the impacts from new construction on coastal neighborhoods (house size, scale, proportion, grading, drainage, etc.) and conversion of seasonal dwellings in order to proceed with regulation changes if it becomes warranted. 3. Maintain regulations to control the expansion and/or conversion of seasonal units (about 400 in Westbrook) to year-round dwellings, particularly with regard to upgrading septic systems. 4. Continue to monitor the impacts from short-term rentals on coastal neighborhoods in order to proceed with regulation changes if it becomes warranted. 	

House Scale / Proportion Differences





TOWN CENTER

Preserve the Town Center as the civic, social, residential and commercial core of the community ...

2020 Information

Information Resources

- [Town Center Study](#)
- [Route 1 Corridor Study](#)
- [Market Analysis by Ninigret Partners](#)
- [RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan](#)

[Promote Vitality]

The 2011 POCD stated that Westbrook’s traditional Town Center was a defining feature of the community and that it should be preserved and revitalized.

However, in the on-line survey as part of the 2021 POCD, participants expressed significant concern about the overall vitality and appearance of the Town Center. Almost 70 percent of participants felt that invigorating / enhancing the Town Center was a community goal which was “very important”, but 66 percent of respondents felt that Westbrook was doing a *fair or poor job* at accomplishing this goal.

When asked in the on-line survey what one thing they would like to see happen as a result of the POCD, the most common response was to improve / enhance the Town Center.



Attract / Encourage New Uses And Development

The main way to revitalize the Town Center area will be to attract and encourage new uses and new development:

- New business uses that create an active streetscape (such as restaurants, and tourist-oriented boutiques and galleries),
- Mixed-use buildings (with residential units on upper floors) that provide housing for local workers and increase street activity,
- New civic uses, and
- Businesses that serve the needs of the community and the needs of residents within walking distance.

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Center Study • Route 1 Corridor Study • Market Analysis by Ninigret Partners • RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

Attract / Encourage New Uses And Development	Leader / Partners
1. Encourage new business uses in the Town Center that create an active streetscape (such as restaurants, and tourist-oriented boutiques and galleries)	
2. Encourage new mixed-use buildings (with residential units on upper floors) that provide housing for local workers and increase street activity,	
3. Maintain and encourage new civic uses in the Town Center	
4. Encourage new businesses that serve the needs of the community and the needs of residents within walking distance.	
5. Seek ways to provide regulatory flexibility for the reuse of older buildings. □	
6. Implement regulatory changes, as appropriate, to help encourage the establishment of mixed use and residential buildings. □	
7. Expand opportunities to live in or near Town Center to help support the Town Center and meet housing diversity objectives. □	
8. Implement wastewater management approaches that will allow appropriate development and redevelopment in the Town Center □	
9. Maintain participation in the CT Main Street Program.	
10. Be prepared to offer redevelopment incentives (such as tax abatements and low-interest loans) to promote desired development.	

Information Resources

- [Town Center Study](#)
- [Route 1 Corridor Study](#)

[Implement] Vision Plan Recommendations

In 2015, the Town Center Revitalization Committee and the Economic Development Commission (with the assistance of a team from the University of Connecticut) prepared a Town Center visioning report.



That report is hereby incorporated as a reference document to this POCD (but not as a final plan) since recommendations were later refined as a result of public feedback.

Still, the report demonstrates how the recommendations below can be achieved and what it might look like. The details of how the vision is implemented may vary, but going forward, proposals for infrastructure improvements and private development should generally conform to the report.

The study found that there is potential for commercial and residential growth as well as a need for such in order to create a vibrant Town Center. Infrastructure improvements such as a community septic system, the creation of shared parking connected by a series of internal driveways behind buildings, and improved pedestrian access are vital to realizing the full potential of the area and attracting private investment.

Implement Vision Plan Recommendations	Leader / Partners
1. Implement "vision plan" recommendations to help preserve and revitalize the Town Center.	



TOWN CENTER VISIONING – Town Green Area

- Improve traffic and pedestrian circulation through the creation of specific east-west and north-south access drives and shared parking areas behind buildings.
- Provide rear access to buildings on Westbrook Place.
- Abandon Boston Post Rd. entrance to Knothe Rd. (“J-hook”) upon completion of access drives and shared access through bank property.
- Maximize building and leasable square footage through infill and re-development
- Add upper story residential units over commercial space.
- Create a trailhead to Town Open Space (Wren Park).
- Create a defined edge between sidewalks and the Green.
- Maximize the visual impact of corners of the Green
- Remove the bumpouts on Westbrook Place and provide on-street parking on all three sides of the Green.
- Consider installing decorative pavers on Essex Road to allow temporary closing of the road to create an extension of the Town Green for special events.
- If an opportunity presents itself to narrow travel lanes on roadways surrounding the Green, consider re-utilizing excess roadway to widen sidewalks or create bike lanes.

TOWN CENTER VISIONING – Village Entries & Wayfinding Signage

- Create unique and memorable village entries at Mulvey Municipal Center, at the RR Bridge on Essex Road and on Boston Post Road at Goodspeed Drive utilizing landscaping, public art and/or signage to signify the beginning of the Village District.
- Develop a coordinated system of wayfinding signage throughout town that highlights key destinations, creates a positive first impression and reinforces community identity.

TOWN CENTER VISIONING – Town Park / Flat Rock Place

- Create a Town Park for passive activities with views to the Patchogue River at the American Legion overlook area.
- Expand the median at the entrance to Flat Rock Place by reducing lane width and install appropriate plantings and then reduce the number of lanes from 4 to 3 after the median to add bike lanes/sharrows along the entire length.

Information Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Center Study • Route 1 Corridor Study • RiverCOG GrowSMART Plan

[Maintain & Enhance Town Center Character]

The 2011 POCD recognized the importance of maintaining and enhancing the character of the Town Center area. This included building and site design on private properties as well as the form and function of the public realm (including State and local roadways).

Maintain & Enhance Town Center Character	Leader / Partners
1. Encourage land uses and building / site designs that will contribute positively to the Center (active streetfronts, civic uses, businesses, and mixed uses).	
2. Discourage or prohibit land uses that detract from the Town Center character and function (such as drive-throughs, gas stations auto-related uses, etc.).	
3. Encourage new development to complement existing development (size, layout, and charm) since design will continue to play a critical role in the Town Center.	
4. Establish design guidelines/requirements to promote appropriate building and site design (parking to the side and rear of buildings, pedestrian-oriented streets, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Consider establishment of a “village district” to help protect and enhance Town Center character.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Encouraging the burying of overhead wires over the long term.	
7. In terms of roadways, seek to narrow travel lanes and road widths where possible, allow on-street parking, and manage curb cuts.	
8. In terms of pedestrians and bicycles, seek to extend and expand sidewalks, install additional crosswalks, and provide for bicyclists.	
9. Seek to preserve existing trees and seek opportunities for trees to be planted along the roadway with appropriate species in appropriate locations.	

1998 Town Center Report - Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and effective traffic patterns for vehicles and pedestrians • Inviting pedestrian walkways and passages • Sufficient and convenient parking • Sewage disposal solutions • Aesthetic considerations that address landscaping and general streetscape • Architectural and design standards that maintain the unique character of the town center area

[Continue To] Address Parking Needs

The 2011 POCD recognized that parking is still required in pedestrian-friendly town centers since they need customers to survive and thrive and many customers arrive in vehicles.

Continue To Address Parking Needs	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find ways to balance the need / desire for parking with the desired character of the Town Center. 2. Consider appropriate ways to expand the parking supply in the Town Center Including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expanding on-street parking spaces. b. Requiring shared parking on private properties. c. Establishing new municipal off-street parking lots. 3. Amend the Zoning Regulations to allow the Commission to require shared parking in the Town Center. □ 	

Promote [Events And] Activities that Attract Visitors

Events and activities in the Town Center area will help to attract people and this will help support the overall vitality of the Town Center area:

Promote Activities that Attract Visitors to the Town Center	Leader / Partners
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to support and publicize community events (e.g., parades, community concerts) to draw visitors to the community, raise the Town's visibility as a special place, and add to community spirit and character. 2. Encourage activities that could draw more people to the Town Center: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. a farmer's market, b. art shows, festivals, holiday celebrations, c. walking tours, etc. 3. Providing amenities for visitors to the Town Center such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. parking, b. wayfinding signage, and c. public restrooms. 	

