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# Economic Development



*Old Saybrook has a mission to improve its tax base through development of diversified commercial and industrial sectors while maintaining its community character and strengthening its image and development capabilities.*

## **ISSUES FOR THE NEXT DECADE**

Economic Development provides retail and other services to the public, creates jobs, establishes a property tax base to support town services, and offers an opportunity for investment. Physical factors influencing the future economic development of the town include providing suitable land area for development, adequate roadway capacity to accommodate traffic generated, sensitive site planning and design criteria, an adequate water supply, non-polluting sewage disposal, and well-designed drainage facilities. Ample housing opportunities for the labor force and an education system, renown for its quality, which attracts high caliber people are also factors in economic development.

Reflected by the scope of its products and services, as well as investment in its jobs and tax base, Old Saybrook acknowledges its role as a commercial hub on the shoreline. There are businesses concentrated on the US Route 1 (Boston Post Road) and Main Street (a portion of Connecticut Route 154); nonetheless, the Town must consider how to encourage appropriate development and growth yet prevent an

overburdened infrastructure. There is a need for a coordinated economic strategy that combines the resources of its citizens, government, local and regional companies, and institutions to maintain and/or enhance the Town quality of life.

In 2002, the Economic Development Commission (EDC) finalized its Economic Development Strategies Plan, prepared by Mullin Associates, Incorporated. The Mullin Associates' Report observes that Old Saybrook is at the mercy of the market place unless it creates a strong Economic Development Corporation. There is much the Town can do to take advantage of these forces and to take concrete steps to insure that the best interests of the citizenry are being protected. If the Town takes no action on its economic future, it is likely that an increasingly high tax burden on the home owners, more traffic, disorderly encroachment of commercial activity in residential areas, increased strip development, and an inability to fund needed capital improvements will evolve. As a result, the Town will lose opportunities to create a diversified tax base and the Town's special character will erode.

The goal of this Plan is to enhance and diversify the Town's tax base while maintaining its character and quality of life. This Plan is updated to incorporate those "strategic assessments" into its Issues for the Next Decade and the "action agenda" into its Planning for the Next Decade so that the Town may proceed to implementation with the full authority and support of the Plan of Conservation & Development.

### **Organizational Restructuring**

The structure of the existing Economic Development Commission as an advisory municipal Commission is appropriate for the short term; however, as the pace and scope of development increases, a corporate structure is more suitable. The Town recognizes that an appropriate structure would provide the necessary capacity for a mix of public/private/community representation and control. That recognition is based on the political and economic climates within the strategic target areas that complement existing capacity and institutions rather than duplicating or supplanting them.

An examination of the Town's development characteristics identifies strong political support for development, potentially strong industrial/commercial private sector support, and a strong, sometimes overtaxed staff. Overall weaknesses are lack of municipal financing for economic development projects and a weak public-private partnership.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR**

The success and effectiveness of the Plan depends on the Town's ability to provide additional professional staff to help the EDC. The EDC needs to assume a proactive

role in initiating the actions recommended and to establish an ongoing and long-term monitoring of the various tasks. Working initially with the existing part time EDC Executive Director, the new Economic Development Coordinator will provide timely expertise with development issues and the responsibility for dealing with them on a day-to-day basis. An ideal candidate for the position of Coordinator would possess a general knowledge and understanding of:

- The real estate development process,
- The operation of business,
- Local, state, and federal government,
- Community and real estate management and marketing, and
- Urban planning principles.

The Coordinator needs to have an ability to work effectively with businesses, other employees, the public, and the media. The Town should pay for a full-time Coordinator for a period of three years, and after this period, the Town elevates the position to Director with the responsibility of raising a significant portion of his/her own salary from grants, projects or other funding sources.

### **DESIGNATED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

The Mullin Associates' Report observes that Old Saybrook has a choice to make in terms of industrial development: it must decide whether to allow market

forces alone or selective intervention through public-private partnership to decide its future directions. The Town should begin to explore the community's support for its designation of the EDC as the Town's "development agency" on a project-by-project basis, under Chapter 114, Section 7-486 and Section 8-188, Connecticut City and Town Development Act. This will allow the EDC to work directly with State programs and to manage its funds. Such designation goes beyond the EDC's present powers and duties allowing it to take proactive positions on economic opportunities such that the town makes available and markets for development its land parcels, and provides financial assistance to quality businesses looking to locate in Old Saybrook.

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

Under the assumption that municipal funding is limited, the Town should next strongly consider that the best structural model for the long term is a not-for-profit, corporate organization to replace or to act as an adjunct to the Economic Development Commission. We are fortunate that there exists an "Old Saybrook Foundation" which could fulfill this role. The Town would have to designate the Old Saybrook Foundation as its next "development agency". The Economic Development Corporation structure provides the best of both public and private worlds; it complements existing strengths and provides the appropriate tools for the desired development outcomes. The Corporation receives public and private funding to build up financial assets for project financing, promotion, development incentives and operating expenses. It easily enters into land disposition agreements to "fast track" acquisition of

properties by negotiating in a timely manner or receiving donations of land in exchange for tax benefits. The Corporation presents a better posture to various private corporations with which it deals by avoiding some of the "red tape" and politicizing of development activities because business does not perceive the Corporation simply as "the government" – a very important aspect of Old Saybrook's development situation.

#### **Business Areas & Sites**

Given its proximity to I-95, Route 9, the railroad, and the Connecticut River, Old Saybrook has the land area, location, and access to continue to function as the economic hub of the region. Old Saybrook recognizes that continued development is important for the economic well being of the town and the residents have stated that they prefer future development that is consistent with the small-town character and the unique natural resources associated with the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. The task is to define what is appropriate and consistent with the townspeople's image of Old Saybrook as a small New England town blessed with an abundance of natural resources and a unique Main Street setting not preserved in many Connecticut towns. The desired result is to allow for continued growth of commercial and industrial development in a manner that is consistent with this Plan's goals to provide services for its residents and surrounding areas while still maintaining a character and scale that is consistent with the town's image of itself. Such development includes corporate business parks, light manufacturing, high tech facilities, and retail establishments.

The Economic Development Commission has designated seven business areas in town.

- Central Commercial and Retail Complex
- Central Industrial Complex
- Auto Complex
- Western Complex
- North End Complex
- Marina District and Riverside Complex
- Saybrook Point Complex

The chart and map on the next pages have further descriptions.

### **Comparison of Tax Base and Tax Rates**

According to Mullin Associates an economically sustainable community has approximately seventy percent (70%) of its tax income from residential property. Using the 2003 grand list Old Saybrook is about 85%. To reduce the tax burden on the residents, the Town needs to proactively promote and attract diverse, yet appropriate, commercial, and industrial development. The current and forecasted tax rates in Old Saybrook are very competitive with surrounding communities. Old Saybrook is well suited for light industry, office, research & development, and specialized retail activity, in summary Old Saybrook is an attractive community in which to locate.

## PLANNING FOR THE NEXT DECADE

This plan establishes the Goals, Policies, Municipal Improvements, Programs, and Standards that will lead the town toward the type of development strategies that will result in the retention of all the attributes that brought many of its residents and visitors here in the first place.

### Goals

- Diversified tax base in Old Saybrook.
- Employment choice for local residents.
- Sufficient and suitable land area for local services, shore resort, light industrial manufacturing/commercial distribution, and the regional service components of Old Saybrook's economic activity.
- A balance between commercial, retail, office, and light industrial development and the capacity of supporting public infrastructure and the integrity of the town's small-town character, natural resources and cultural heritage.
- An enhanced image of Old Saybrook as an important, successful, and enjoyable place for economic activity.
- An effective support system that can plan and implement action priorities and essential resources for achieving set objectives.
- Identification, targeting, and pursuit of opportunities in civic, industrial, and commercial sectors.
- Retention of existing business and replacement of those that move on In the Central Commercial and Retail Complex, Auto Complex, North End and Saybrook Point Areas
- Promotion of the availability of properties in the Central Industrial Complex including potential incentives for business use.
- Creation of a comprehensive development plan and town programs to harvest the opportunities available in the Marina District and Riverside Complex

### **Policies**

- To reduce the tax burden on residents.
- To proactively promote and attract appropriate and diverse commercial and industrial development.
- To observe the following order of priorities in future economic development:
  - Services for residents including employment opportunities,
  - Promotion of coastal resort features and maritime commerce,
  - Reinforcement of community image, and
  - A balance between seasonal activity and jobs in manufacturing and commercial distribution.
- To promote the small-town character and unique natural resources of the town as a marketable economic commodity, providing an exceptional quality-of-life for residents and a quality experience for visitors.
- To encourage development of commercial and industrial sites that is consistent with Old Saybrook's small-town character with respect to scale, appearance, and design and with special regard for landscape and other site amenities, traffic safety and convenience, and functional and visual linkages with adjacent areas.
- To periodically review and maintain or revise existing commercial development area boundaries, avoiding intrusions on established residential, civic or environmentally sensitive areas.
- To review and monitor land uses recommended for various commercial areas with consideration for current economic development trends, shifts in industry status such as from manufacturing to office operations, conservation of locations for local retail services, and potential for mixed use development that includes housing diversity.
- To maintain the quality of services offered by the Town in meeting market demands for new public infrastructure and services, such as roadways, storm water drainage, and emergency services, by controlling pressures on existing infrastructure and services and requiring development to contribute to the cost of new improvements.
- To promote the Town's historical, cultural, and natural resources, marketing Old Saybrook as a year-round destination for visitors.

**Municipal Improvements, Programs, and Standards**

The Plan recommends implementation of the following actions with priorities, resources and responsibilities coordinated among the appropriate Town agencies, including the Architectural Review Board (ARB), Board of Selectmen (BOS), Conservation Commission (CC), Economic Development Commission (EDC), Harbor Management Commission (HMC), Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission (IWWC), Historic District Commission (HDC), Planning Commission (PC), Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC), Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and Zoning Commission (ZC).

- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR.** Hire a full-time professional manager (and provide administrative support) to provide the special expertise needed to initiate and monitor Old Saybrook’s economic development strategies in a timely and professional way.
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.** Recognize the Old Saybrook Foundation, a not-for-profit 501(c) 4 corporation, as the Old Saybrook Economic Development Corporation which may receive public and private funding and donations of land and assemble the capital for project financing, promotion, and development incentives; designate the Old Saybrook Foundation as the Town’s designated development agency.
- DESIGNATED DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.** Sponsor enabling legislation whereby the Board of Selectmen designates the Old Saybrook Economic Development Corporation, successor to the current Economic Development Commission and empower it as Old Saybrook’s development agency.
- LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM.** In concert with the Land Acquisition Committee enable the town to gain control of critical parcels via land trade or purchase and use market forces to contribute to the tax base by selling or leasing for appropriate development.

	ARB	BOS	CC	EDC	HMC	IWWC	NCHDC	PC	PRC	WPCA	ZBA	ZC
		●		●				●				
		●		●				●				
		●		●				●				
		●	●	●				●	●	●		

**Municipal Improvements, Programs, and Standards, continued**

- ECONOMIC RESOURCES INVENTORY.** Create an up-to-date inventory of the commercial and industrial sites in Town with pertinent information on each site; identify abandoned or underutilized sites eligible for priority clean-up funding as “brownfields”.
- ECONOMIC RESOURCES MAP.** Delineate areas that are developed based on an avoidance of any areas of critical concern (environmental, cultural, safety).
- COMMUNITY MARKETING PROGRAM.** Create sophisticated marketing material and brochures showing the strengths of Old Saybrook and the region; highlights should include a market outlook, an analysis of workforce characteristics, an assessment of transportation networks, and an analysis of quality of life factors such as schools, recreation facilities, and housing availability.
- WEB PAGE.** Create a first class, marketing-oriented Economic Development Commission segment of the Old Saybrook web site to attract and retain business in town.
- ECONOMIC RESOURCES COMPENDIUM.** Develop a compendium of available resources for development. This should include financial as well as professional resources available to businesses and prospective clients.
- NON-RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT REDEFINITION.** Define the distinctive role of each non-residential zoning district, and modify the Zoning Purpose of each district to reinforce that role.
- COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE.** Coordinate efforts to revise the subdivision regulations, zoning regulations, and Town ordinances to address current economic development issues identified in the EDC Economic Development Strategies Plan; report on status of amendments at quarterly meetings of land use agencies.

ARB	BOS	CC	EDC	HMC	IWWC	HDC	PC	PRC	WPCA	ZBA	ZC
			●								
			●								
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# Town Center



## ISSUES FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Main Street, the center of Old Saybrook, has been and continues to be the single strongest focus of town activity – for shopping, services and community activities, all at a pedestrian scale. Since the adoption of the 1990 Plan, Main Street has a brick and granite median strip with antique-style light fixtures and brick-like sidewalks. Business owners have continued to upgrade and improve their building facades and have enhanced landscaping, all in recognition of the importance of Main Street to Old Saybrook. Concern exists, however, regarding the ability of the smaller “mom and pop” businesses to continue to compete with the larger franchises that have located on Route 1, Main Street, and the region within the last decade. Many residents prize Old Saybrook for its sense of community. The Town Center provides a place where chance meetings with neighbors and friends can occur. Scheduled community events allow people to share in community life. People need a reason to come to the Center. The continued vitality of the Center is critical to the perceived quality of life in Old Saybrook.

### Expanded Residential Opportunities

As highlighted in the 1990 Plan and expanded upon in this updated Plan, an effort to enhance the town center by

allowing for residential use on upper floors of businesses continues to be an important goal that will strengthen one of Old Saybrook’s most important assets. To accomplish this goal, the Town will need to make efforts to ensure that sufficient sewage disposal facilities are available and that such residential expansion will not compromise the town’s sewer avoidance policies.

### Congestion and Safety

As efforts to strengthen the town center move forward into the next decade, the Town will need to increase safety. Reducing traffic congestion and improving pedestrian safety is critical to the viability of village center commerce. The issue serves to increase the desirability of the town center from the point of view of both business owners and townspeople. Increased efforts to reduce congestion and improve safety will be especially crucial during the summer months when traffic congestion is most intense.

### Town Center as a Separate Identity

An important function of Old Saybrook’s land use boards in the next decade will be to clearly define Old Saybrook’s

## TOWN CENTER

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“village center.” Recent legislation allows a town to define and protect a village center much in the same way that an historic district delineates and protects significant landmarks and neighborhoods. In the meantime, the efforts of the recently created Architectural Review Board will assist the town’s regulatory boards in guiding the aesthetics of future

development proposals in a way that will enhance the built environment of Main Street. These efforts include review of architectural design for signs and structures, guidance in site layout, lighting, landscaping, pedestrian access, and other amenities that will enhance the community’s sense of the village as a meeting place.

**PLANNING FOR THE NEXT DECADE**

**Goals**

- Continue to promote Main Street and the historic village center as the focus for community life in Old Saybrook.
- Maintain and enhance the economic viability of the village center retail stores and services.
- Continue to promote the aesthetic qualities that make the village center an attractive, pleasant place to visit, create a positive image of the community, and give a sense of community pride.

**Policies**

- Continue to encourage a balance of commercial, civic, and residential uses in the town center to maintain vitality and character.
- Provide adequate space in the village center area for the present and future conduct of local governmental business, including renovation of the former Main Street School as a new location for municipal uses and enhancement and expansion, where appropriate, of the current Town Hall for ancillary civic needs.
- Assure that new development is compatible with the existing character of the village center in terms of appropriate scale and style.

**Municipal Improvements, Programs, and Standards**

The Plan recommends implementation of the following actions with priorities, resources and responsibilities coordinated among the appropriate Town agencies, including the Architectural Review Board (ARB), Board of Selectmen (BOS), Conservation Commission (CC), Economic Development Commission (EDC), Harbor Management Commission (HMC), Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission (IWWC), North Cove Historic District Commission (NCHDC), Planning Commission (PC), Parks & Recreation Commission (PRC), Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA), Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), and Zoning Commission (ZC).

- TOWN CENTER DISTRICT.** Use a *village district* for aesthetic development of Main Street.

ARB	BOS	CC	EDC	HMC	IWWC	NCHDC	PC	PRC	WPCA	ZBA	ZC
●			●								●

**Municipal Improvements, Programs, and Standards, continued**

	ARB	BOS	CC	EDC	HMC	IWWC	NGHDC	PC	PRC	WPCA	ZBA	ZC
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER BULK STANDARDS.</b> Develop bulk and architectural design standards to guide development in the town center: parking at rear of buildings, enhanced landscaping and pedestrian-scale amenities including benches, outdoor cafés, and information kiosks.	●			●				●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER COMPATIBILITY STANDARDS.</b> Continue the critical elements of land and structural design compatible with the existing character of the town center.	●			●								●
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER PARKING FACILITIES.</b> Establish additional public parking areas, including a municipal lot, and sharing of existing facilities.		●		●				●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>PEDESTRIAN SAFETY MEASURES.</b> Continue to improve pedestrian safety, including visual definition of crosswalks, public education, and maintenance of sidewalks.		●		●								
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER RESIDENCES.</b> Allow creation of residential units on upper stories of commercial buildings within the restrictions of the Town’s sewer avoidance program.	●	●		●						●	●	●
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>COMMUNITY EVENTS PROGRAM.</b> Continue municipal support for community events, including the provision of space, staffing, and supplementary funding.		●	●	●					●			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER REVITALIZATION RESOURCES.</b> Continue to provide local government resources for revitalization efforts, including time and expertise.		●		●					●			
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ROUTE 1-TO-MAIN STREET CORRIDOR LINKAGE.</b> Coordinate and promote linkage between the town center, the Old Saybrook Shopping Center, and the Route 1 corridor.	●	●		●				●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>REUSE/RENOVATION OF TOWN CENTER.</b> Encourage reuse and appropriate renovation of existing buildings in keeping with the village character.	●	●		●								
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>TOWN CENTER CAMPUS.</b> Maintain the Town Green for public gatherings.		●		●								