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# Residential Development



## ISSUES FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Following the residential development boom of the mid- and late 1980's, residential values, market demand, and development slowed in the decade of the 1990's. Total permits for new home construction dropped from a high of approximately 73 houses per year in the 1980s to a more modest level of approximately 27 houses per year in the 1990s. As the town moves forward into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, issues facing Old Saybrook will potentially include the impacts of construction of a 300+ lot subdivision in the northern area of town, the infill of smaller five to ten lot subdivisions, and the winterization of seasonal homes in the beach areas fronting Long Island Sound. With the exception of the large subdivision, the most significant impact could come from the winterization of the many seasonal cottages as seen by summer traffic congestion on Route 1 and Main Street. As a result, Goals, Policies, Municipal Improvements, Programs and Standards are set forth to guide Old Saybrook through the next decade with an eye toward providing housing opportunities for all sectors of the market while protecting the town from excessive growth which could harm its "small town New England" character.

Other housing issues faced by Old Saybrook include the long-standing issue of affordability, whether or not younger residents

who have grown up in town will be able to afford housing here. In addition, there is more and more concern expressed with respect to the availability of sufficient housing opportunities for the elderly, such as affordable houses, rentals, and assisted living facilities. Although affordable housing has not been a "front-burner" issue for much of the 1990s, it continues to be a formidable problem in Old Saybrook and similar communities that strive to achieve a balance.

A recently failed effort to change zoning regulations which would have allowed condominiums on properties having historic structures indicates a potential change in policies regarding multi-family housing in Old Saybrook. In addition to the denial of this particular developer's petition, a separate and contemporaneous petition to ban condominiums from the Cornfield Point area succeeded. This flurry of petitions has raised the question of whether the town should consider a closer look at its condominium regulations in an effort to fine-tune regulations affecting this form of multi-family housing that remain essentially unchanged since their adoption in the 1970s.

Another multi-family housing issue has arisen with litigation over the town's ability to control forms of multi-family housing

by regulating ownership, something the courts have recently said is not permissible. Specifically, this addresses the town's current regulatory prohibition on rental housing in the form of apartment houses.

### **North of I-95**

Issues facing Old Saybrook north of the Interstate depend on the manner in which the former Lyons property (a 1,000-acre parcel) develops, as well as the eventual build-out of any vacant land along Schoolhouse Road and the remainder of Ingham Hill Road.

### **SCHOOL POPULATION**

The growth in student population and subsequent necessity for school expansion, is contingent upon the number of homes, the sizes of building lots, and the amount of open space allotted, as well as the possibility of municipal or private recreational facilities.

### **TRAFFIC CONCERNS**

With a larger number of homes, it is reasonable to think that a 300+ lot subdivision will likely have a greater impact on local traffic, especially on weekends when the new residents will join existing residents in their weekend "errands" around town. As currently proposed, the majority of Saybrook-bound traffic will not make its way down Ingham Hill Road, but will likely travel down Schoolhouse and Bokum Roads, raising questions of adequacy of those two country roads to handle the increased traffic load. Within this respect, incremental build-out of Schoolhouse and Ingham Hill Road residential properties will likely have some, but not as

significant, an impact. If, through review, the 260+ subdivision lots are directly connected to Ingham Hill Road, a question is raised regarding Ingham Hill Road becoming a regional thoroughfare from the Bokum Center area of Westbrook directly into the heart of Old Saybrook. It is questionable whether Ingham Hill Road in its current condition could handle such traffic.

The lack of East West connector roads North of I-95 and the Amtrak line forces traffic to access Route 1 to the south to make any kind of cross town connection. This is inconvenient and adds to the traffic volume along Route 1.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

With increased population and development come the issues of water usage and quality, air quality, non-point source pollution, loss of vegetation, soil erosion, and more impervious surfaces.

### **South of I-95**

The residential area south of the Interstate, encompasses mature locales that been long built out. Very few opportunities remain for subdivision development, although infill construction has continued at a slower pace as property owners split larger properties or sell off vacant lots. Although increases in traffic and population occur, the relatively small rate of increase will likely make these impacts insignificant in the next decade.

### **RECREATION**

The relatively small size of the building lots found in the residential neighborhoods south of Interstate 95 provide

less opportunity for residents to partake in spontaneous outdoor recreation. Although the Town does provide most of its organized recreational activities in this area of town through the Parks & Recreation Department, there is a growing need for more space for active open space for recreational facilities, including neighborhood parks, sidewalks and bikeways, and access to the waterfront and its public beaches.

### **BEACH AREAS**

In addition to the possible impact of the residential development in the northern section of town, the winterization of its beach areas has the potential for significant impacts to Old Saybrook. Recent estimates indicate that approximately sixty percent (60%) of beach area residents are seasonal, living in Old Saybrook during summer months only. Consequently, Old Saybrook's population expands almost threefold during the summer, putting pressure primarily on the town's road infrastructure. With the winterization of a significant percentage of seasonal cottages would come added pressures on town infrastructure including a potentially significant increase in school-aged children and added stress on the town's ability to handle the additional waste water. With respect to the town's efforts to avoid sewerage (see Water Resources section), the recent adoption of a town ordinance limiting winterization to only those properties where capable of code-compliant septic systems, is a positive step.

## **General Residential**

### **MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING**

Multi-family housing is an opportunity for more affordable housing in an area where housing prices have inflated. Such is the case in many shoreline communities including Old Saybrook. Of primary concern with multi-family housing in Old Saybrook is the issue of on-site sewage disposal, often the limiting factor to the physical ability to increase dwelling density on any given property. Despite this limitation and its impacts on the town's future, consideration of additional multi-family housing opportunities seems to be one solution to high housing costs.

### **NON-OWNERSHIP HOUSING**

For years, opportunities for affordable rental housing options have been limited to accessory apartments, room rental in existing homes, and academic rentals. These limited rental options revolved around the concept that rentals would be maintained properly when the owner of the property lived on-site. This philosophy, of course, has ruled out other options that include conversion of homes into several apartments and mixed-use apartments located over storefronts and offices in the Village Center area, options that would greatly expand housing opportunities consistent with the 1990 Plan of Development. As stated previously, one main obstacle to overcome is the issue of adequate sewage disposal on properties serving multi-family dwellings. As a part of the Plan of Conservation & Development, the Planning Commission recommends that, where soil conditions allow, provision should be made for rental opportunities,

which will expand the rental housing market in Old Saybrook.

**PLANNED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND CLUSTER HOUSING**

Given the recent series of petitions regarding planned residential development (condominium ownership), it is time to re-examine current regulations and to determine the conditions under which planned residential development and condominium ownership is acceptable.

This position is consistent with the Commission's desire to provide for more affordable housing alternatives in the current housing climate. The primary concern of multi-family housing is the ability of any given property to handle the increased dwelling density and the increased waste disposal that would result. In addition, the town should seek to establish cluster subdivision regulations so as to preserve more open space within subdivisions while at the same time providing an incentive to developers to cut costs on subdivision infrastructure development.

### PLANNING FOR THE NEXT DECADE

#### Goals

- Provide sufficient opportunity for creation of housing alternatives to the typical high-cost single-family house in order to:
  - Accommodate the elderly in a safe and convenient environment
  - Enable young persons to continue to both live and work in town
  - Create attainable housing for families at all income levels
  - Balance rates of development with existing capacity and planned expansion of public infrastructure and services.
  - Encourage design of new and renovated housing that is compatible with its surrounding neighborhood

#### Policies

- Promote additional multi-family opportunities that do not require owner residence including limited apartment facilities, home conversions, and non-ground floor apartments over Main Street businesses where soils can accommodate waste disposal.
- Continue to encourage creation of accessory apartments within larger single-family dwellings where single-family character and adequate parking and utilities and soil conditions permit.
- In the residential area north of I-95:
  - Assure that new residential development is fitted to the significant natural constraints of topography, variable soil conditions, and wetlands
  - Where land conditions are supportive, provide an opportunity for alternative forms of residential layout and buildings that best utilize individual site features.
  - Continue to seek solutions to access and internal circulation problems for the area as a whole.

**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 ACCESSORY RESIDENCES.** Develop regulations to allow for the establishment of residential units on non-first story floors in the Town Center (Central Business (B-1) District) where soil conditions allow.
- OPEN SPACE SUBDIVISIONS.** Review and update existing Open Space Subdivision standards and criteria to allow for and encourage alternative forms of residential layout and buildings where soil conditions will accommodate such density. Identify areas in which such alternatives may be workable due to soil type, topography, and access.
- SOILS-BASED RESIDENTIAL DENSITY.** Continue to base allowable residential densities on soil capacity and suitability for on-site sewage disposal systems, as part of a sewer avoidance program in all areas not currently scheduled for corrective sewer construction.
- MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENCE ANALYSIS.** Review and evaluate existing criteria for multi-family housing to determine whether additional multi-family units may be effective.
- AFFORDABLE AND ATTAINABLE HOUSING.** Encourage developers of residential projects that create diversity in housing type, size, and cost. In particular, support efforts of non-profit housing organizations to construct and operate housing for low- and moderate-income families in a manner that does not jeopardize the health and safety of residents, or conflict with public interests, the sewer density issue, or the zone.

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

- INCLUSIONARY ZONING REGULATIONS.** Consider adoption of inclusionary zoning regulations. Base support for housing on legal guarantees to remain “forever affordable.”
- TOWN CENTER RESIDENCES.** Create residential units on upper floors of commercial buildings in the Town Center and other suitable areas.
- TAX ABATEMENTS RENTERS.** Consider offering 10-, 15-, or 20-year property tax abatements tied to a predetermined index for rental rate increases.
- WINTERIZATION REGULATIONS.** Within the regulations, develop a permit process to assure that conversion of seasonal dwellings results in a net density consistent with overall community character and meets all current State Health Codes for waste disposal.
- EAST-WEST CIRCULATION STUDY.** Undertake a feasibility study of East-West connectors north of I-95 to provide alternative access to emergency vehicles, to alleviate Route 1 congestion and to provide links for neighborhood-to-neighborhood travel.
- INGHAM-TO-BOKUM CONNECTOR.** Seek access between Bokum and Ingham Hill roads.
- INTERAGENCY WATER QUALITY COMPACT.** Create a policy whereby the Zoning Board of Appeals refers any request for variance of the bulk standards of the Zoning Regulations that would affect a principal building/structure in the shoreline neighborhoods that have water pollution problems to the Water Pollution Control Authority for an advisory report.
- BEACH BULK STANDARDS.** Create and preserve appropriate architectural style that is obscured by the practice of maximizing structural volume to the limits of that permitted.
- WINTERIZATION UPDATE.** Revise Ordinance #62 to close “loopholes”.

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