
Town Image



The image, or character, of the Town of Old Saybrook is defined primarily by its rich and varied history. From Adrean Bloch's first exploration up the river to Lion Gardiner's settlement, Lady Fenwick, General Hart, Yale College and Anna James, this history bears witness in our town monuments, parks, historic sites, streets, town greens and wealth of significant architecture. Our town image, based upon its history, is complemented by its natural heritage; the Connecticut River, Long Island Sound, North and South Coves, beautiful tidal rivers, marshes, trees and woodlands. Moreover, this image extends to the modern convenience Old Saybrook offers to commuters and consumers in its location and amenities available to residents, summer residents, and tourists. It is the total of these aspects: historical heritage, natural beauty, a viable commercial center, and shoreline arts and culture that we reference in order to further define this image of Old Saybrook so that we may protect, enhance, and celebrate it. This composite is what many feel is Old Saybrook's "small town character", the character that we strive to maintain.

ISSUES FOR THE NEXT DECADE

A number of critical issues need immediate attentions if the town is to protect its image from the impact caused by lack of careful consideration. The erosion of our historic village center by inappropriate building can threaten to overwhelm the unique characteristics, which are important to residents and visitors alike. A positive example of commercial re-development is the new Saybrook Country Barn, designed to emulate an historic building, situated at the head of Main Street. Modifications taking place at Saybrook Point, where much of our town's history began, and home to historic sites and monuments, must be just as carefully undertaken. The Town has also earmarked for improvement the Town Green,

the Town Hall, Main Street School, top of Main Street, and town gateways. The Town must act judiciously to maintain and renovate these valuable resources.

Competition from regional malls and "factory outlets" near Old Saybrook requires strong efforts by Town officials to maintain and strengthen our economic vitality. The manner in which new or renovated commercial and industrial buildings and sites develop reflects the image desired. Our main thoroughfares have experienced an increase in traffic volume over time, now requiring analysis and possible reconfiguration. Our regulations need to withstand current development pressures, promoting a shift in

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commercial activity toward tourism. None of this should be undertaken without due consideration for preserving and enhancing the town image.

As anyone who defines “*small town character*” or “*town image*” can attest, a town’s character and image can be described in many ways other than its architecture and sites. As revealed by the 1998 Questionnaire sponsored by the Conservation and Planning Commissions, Old Saybrook’s character and image decidedly is “*small town New England*”. It is its Main Street, its churches, its size, and its “*community feel*”. It is the beaches, the tidal marshes and creeks, the rivers, and Saybrook Point. It is The Castle at Cornfield Point and Johnny Ad’s. It is many things to many people. It is primarily the *aesthetics* that its residents describe when asked what they like about their town. People commonly express Old Saybrook’s small town character and town image as the reason its citizens came here in the first place. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire voiced a desire for future development to proceed in a manner consistent with small New England town character and image. Residents clearly indicated they want to be careful about how their town grows in the future.

In addition to historic places, culture encompasses embracing the arts, and continued community spirit, activities, and events.

Old Saybrook residents and visitors enjoy the summer concerts on the Town Green, art, garden, and craft shows, the Torchlight Parade, the Saybrook Stroll, sidewalk sales and outside tables, and many other events and activities. An example of a fine blend of history and art, is the Acton Library's creation, in conjunction with town historians and a tile artist, of a bas-relief tile mural depicting the history of Old Saybrook, for its new wing. Old Saybrook was voted number two in "Culture and Leisure" by Connecticut Magazine in 2001, illustrating that we are moving in the right direction. However, dedication to culture requires still further development of the arts. The Town image and quality of life in Old Saybrook would be greatly enhanced by the encouragement of artistic endeavors such as: live theater, art galleries, music and dance programs, art and pottery studios, and museums, as well as the promotion of our restaurants, cafes, Bed and Breakfasts, antique shops, library programs, book stores, trolley and river boats, Estuary Council for senior citizens, and Old Saybrook Artists' Association. A deeper commitment to the arts offers diverse experiences for residents, while drawing tourists and businesses to Town. One such recent example is the re-opening of the Main Street movie theater and the proprietor's plans to display local art and show classic movies while offering special features to children. These types of endeavors bring vitality, excitement, and commerce to Main Street and thus, the Town.

PLANNING FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Goals

- Focus attention on Old Saybrook's historic past and cultural resources in order to build support for local historic preservation efforts.
- Strengthen commercial economic viability by incorporating structures designed to be in harmony with the town's historic structures and sites.
- Enhance the Town image of Old Saybrook by supporting the development of the arts and continuing community traditions and activities.

Policies

- Encourage quality design of commercial, industrial, and municipal development sites with special regard for landscape and other site amenities, traffic safety and convenience, and functional and visual linkages with adjacent areas.
- Encourage dialogue between land use boards and commissions in order to promote recognition of the powerful impact that aesthetics has on the quality of life in Old Saybrook.
- Promote Old Saybrook as an attractive place to locate artistic and cultural endeavors such as music and dance programs, a Community Theater, art gallery, museum, or restaurant.

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 CHARACTER INVENTORY.** Document in written and visual terms an authentic and unique town character via inventory of landmark buildings, historic structures, and areas.
- CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY CONSERVATION.** Strengthen municipal standards to maintain the visual integrity of the Lower Connecticut River Gateway Conservation Zone.
- SPECIAL DESIGN DISTRICT STANDARDS.** Establish Special Design Districts for the varied commercial areas of Old Saybrook.
- HISTORICAL BUILDING REUSE INITIATIVE.** Enact an adaptive reuse program for historic buildings with incentives and assistance to complement or enhance a site.
- COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES.** Develop, and provide as a part of application materials, a series of design guidelines; emphasize pre-application meetings.
- HISTORICAL SITE DESIGN REGULATIONS.** Assure that development involving historic sites incorporates site design and landscaping features in keeping with the site’s history.
- OLD SAYBROOK ARTS INITIATIVE PROGRAM.** Bring more art-focused activities to town.
- TOWN HISTORY EDUCATION PROGRAM.** Acquaint children and residents with local history, museums, artifacts, architecture and their significance and preservation.
- MUNICIPAL ARTS & CULTURE FACILITY.** Identify facilities to house cultural endeavors.

	ARB	BOS	CC	EDC	HMC	IWWC	NCHDC	PC	PRC	WPCA	ZBA	ZC
<input type="checkbox"/> TOWN CHARACTER INVENTORY.	●	●					●	●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> CONNECTICUT RIVER GATEWAY CONSERVATION.	●							●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> SPECIAL DESIGN DISTRICT STANDARDS.	●											●
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL BUILDING REUSE INITIATIVE.		●		●				●				
<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES.	●		●	●				●				●
<input type="checkbox"/> HISTORICAL SITE DESIGN REGULATIONS.	●			●				●			●	●
<input type="checkbox"/> OLD SAYBROOK ARTS INITIATIVE PROGRAM.		●										
<input type="checkbox"/> TOWN HISTORY EDUCATION PROGRAM.		●	●	●			●	●				
<input type="checkbox"/> MUNICIPAL ARTS & CULTURE FACILITY.	●	●	●					●	●			