

To: Board of Selectmen, Town of Stonington
Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC)
Town Hall, 3 Elm Street
Stonington, CT 06378

4 August, 2008

From: POCD Implementation Committee

Subject: Progress towards implementing strategies and recommendations approved for the 2004 Plan of Conservation and Development for the Town of Stonington (POCD)

Background: When the POCD was approved, it included an Implementation Guide outlining some 150 initiatives, tasks, and general policy guidelines that needed to be addressed by various government agencies (primarily the Board of Selectmen and the PZC) to implement the Plan as a whole. Using the April 22, 2008 Report (attached) issued by the Stonington Department of Planning, you can see that implementation progress has been slow over the past four years, with only 4 of 37 General Policy Items addressed and 22 ½ of 113 basic tasks completed. We have been following these activities closely over this time period, and are pleased with those items which have been put into place. On the other hand, while we understand that there has been upheaval in Planning Department during those ensuing years, we are concerned about the pace exhibited in achieving the remainder of the work that the Town set out to accomplish in the POCD. We have provided below commentary on several key areas that we feel need urgent attention.

Discussion:

1. We are deeply concerned about the protection of our water resources; i.e. Identifying and maintaining the purity of our aquifers, channeling run-off, and protecting reservoirs, streams and other related resources. Task #7 under the general initiative "PRESERVE OPEN SPACE," calls for "modifying the Aquifer Protection Zone to allow uses according to their "potential risk." We strongly urge that the priority for this task be raised from "Moderate" to "High" and wording be established as soon as possible to define what constitutes "potential risk" and how this explanatory wording can be effectively applied to ALL affected areas of the Town. In so doing, this wording can be a management tool rather than just a concept. We place the item at the top of our agenda considering:
 - a) The impact of global warming on our climate
 - b) Our LIMITED aquifer area
 - c) Our dependence already on other jurisdictions for this essential commodity
 - d) The increasing demand for use of a fixed resource, particularly by high demand users
 - e) That inaction now can produce crisis later similar to other shore line communities

We recommend that the PZC work closely with the Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions on this matter. Likewise, Tasks #1 and 4 under another category of the POCD entitled "PROVIDE FOR ADEQUATE UTILITY SERVICES" receive the same careful attention here as well, thereby assuring adequate drinking water for our citizens, and developing a Master Plan to reach that goal.

2. In a related matter, we recommend that steps be taken to put the completion of Stonington's "Town Standards Manual" on a fast track. A number of high priority tasks associated with implementing the POCD are dependent upon completion of this work, including the above water resource protection tasks. Right now, to give you a feel for the scope of this work, the draft table of contents of the Technical Standards Manual includes: Roadway, Storm drainage,

Sidewalks and Ramps, Driveways and Aprons, Sanitary Sewers, Landscaping, Lighting, Roadway Restoration Associated with Utility Installation, Administration and Inspection, Construction Standards and Standard Details. Perhaps parts of the Manual should be approved rather than wait for the entire project to be completed.

3. As a further tool in achieving the goals set forth in the POCD, we urge that the PZC place all the resources they can on “adopting buildable land regulations to reduce development pressure on sensitive areas.” This is Task 1 under “PROTECTING IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES.” A sub-committee is in place, working with Planning Staff to address this topic. They should be given all assistance and encouragement to bring their work to completion.
4. It is recommended that the Town continue to place the work of the Economic Development Commission on the “Revision Program” in Pawcatuck and elsewhere in Stonington on the forefront, The POCD created the perception of an anomaly of interests by placing a high priority on maintaining open space, while at the same time stressing the importance of economic development. This might seem in conflict, but the POCD believes both can be achieved, and we do likewise. We believe that the mills should be major players in providing the economic growth that we need.
5. Finally, in reviewing ALL the remaining 120 or so POCD items calling for attention, we are concerned that wetlands and tidal areas are still endangered by over-zealous developers. The POCD noted this under “CONSERVATION OF COASTAL RESOURCES” Task #4. We recommend that the priority of this task be raised from moderate to high, and that uniform set-backs, as called for, of 75-100 feet from all tidal wetlands be adopted with provisions for minor incursions allowed only where absolutely necessary. Without teeth, one of our most precious resources may be lost through inaction. It is our belief that the State is leaving the enforcement of coastal resources up to the town by default.
6. Age-restricted and affordable housing received high priority in the POCD and much publicity over the years. However, the committee formed to look into this has not reported much progress to date. We are concerned.

Bringing the above issues to the fore in no way denigrates the importance of the remaining chores to be accomplished in the POCD. We simply believe that the issues noted above need to be addressed now rather than later. After four years, we urge completion of on-going work and other matters discussed above.

To the Board of Selectmen. We urge that you focus on improving the referral process and smooth interaction between all government agencies, commissions, committees, INCLUDING THE BOROUGH OF STONINGTON, to ensure timely response and interaction where necessary for the good management of the Town as a whole. See POCD item “PRESERVE COASTAL RESOURCES” Task 11. We believe that coordination and interaction should apply at all levels of government.

Finally, as a more personal request, we urge the Board to appoint another member to this Committee as appropriate. It has been a year since we requested this.

Very respectfully yours,