

CRAFTING A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR WESTON'S FUTURE PHASE I



A collaborative effort by:

Dr. Floyd Lapp, FAICP

Turner Miller Group

Ms. Tracy Kulikowski, Land Use Director

Dr. Chris Spaulding, PhD

Submitted to the Weston Boards of Selectmen and Finance
May 7, 2015

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This project was not initiated with any agenda or specific expectations in mind. It is simply a data gathering, information collecting exercise motivated by a request from the Boards of Selectmen and Finance to elucidate the factors affecting the projected decline in student enrollment and stagnant grand list growth. The authors are entirely agnostic with regard to proposed next steps if needed. Any further actions will be driven by the will of the town and its leadership. This planning study was intended to be a part of a larger project that will involve direct input and feedback from members of the community and leadership garnered from public meetings, discussion groups and extensive surveys. Any future guidance will be a result of this collaboration with input from as many stakeholders as feasible. To be clear, the intention of this report is to delineate what “could” be done and not necessarily what “should” be done to promote growth in Weston.

That said, Weston is possibly approaching a major crossroads. Like many geographically similar municipalities (see Appendix A), we are facing an aging population and a commensurate decline in school enrollment. In fact, from 1990 to 2010, Weston experienced a proportional halving of the key child bearing cohort (20-45 year olds) from 51% of the town’s population to 19%.

Following the national trends of post-World War II America, the Southwestern region of Connecticut, including Weston, experienced its greatest population growth between 1950-1970 (more than 130,000 persons and a 65% increase). However, since 1970, the region’s growth rates have significantly slowed adding only 30,500 persons or 9%, over a much greater time span. In 1950, Weston had a population of just under 2,000 that ballooned to slightly more than 7,500 by 1970 and to slightly more than 10,000 by 2000. However, in the 2000-2010 decade, Weston only increased by 142 persons and the projection for 2020 is even less robust, with projected growth of only 24 persons.

Half of the municipalities in Fairfield County are forecast to have population decreases by 2020 ranging from -0.7 to -9.3%. Similar to Weston's very modest growth of 0.2% projected to 2020 are: Trumbull (0.5%); Redding (1%); Shelton (1.1%); and Brookfield (1.3%). Additionally, our population is aging. Mirroring state trends, there has been a continued erosion of the 20-45 age cohorts within the population with several, not surprising, impacts. An aging population strongly correlates to declining school enrollments. According to Connecticut Economic Research Council (CERC), Weston’s school enrollment declined 5.4% over the five year period from 2007-2012. In addition, between 2015 and 2025 there is a projected enrollment decline of more than 500 students.

One trend that merits further analysis is a widening delay in initial student enrollment from first grade to latter elementary grades. Weston has traditionally seen a bump up of 10 to 25 students enrolling from kindergarten to first grade. This is possibly due to students being enrolled in programs that encompass kindergarten and the preference for completing the program. The delay may also be due to economic effects with parents holding off moving to other localities for as long as possible to build up financial reserves to enter our admittedly more expensive housing market. Recently, the trend has anecdotally broadened from first grade to latter grades, resulting

in potential mini bumps in enrollment in later grades.

Equally dramatic, since 2000, the trend that has persisted for the prior 50 years of urban decline (or slow growth) and major suburban development has been turned upside down. For example, in the Southwestern region, 75% of the population growth since 2000 has occurred in the urban centers of Stamford and Norwalk. Most of this growth has resulted from downtown residential multi-family redevelopment projects and economic development with nearby access to transit. By way of comparison, in the 1950-1970 period, Stamford and Norwalk's share of the region's growth was less than 50%.

According to the US Census Bureau, national migratory patterns do not favor New England and Connecticut specifically. Connecticut has seen a steady population outflow. In 2013 Connecticut ranked 45th in the nation for population growth and 44th in the nation for net migration.

A corresponding and possibly bigger concern is the lack of grand list growth (Appendix B). In order to keep mill rate increases manageable, we ideally rely on steady grand list growth. For the past 8 years, Grand List growth has been under 2% (Appendix C).

According to Weston Tax Assessor Ken Whitman, real estate assessments account for 94% of the grand list. Annual growth is predominantly the result of new or ongoing residential building permit work, including new construction, additions and renovations. Additionally, lot splits and subdivisions may also add the grand list. Business personal property is currently a mere 1% of the list. The majority of increases are generated by the electric and gas companies' infrastructure updates. Registered motor vehicles comprise about 5% of the grand list, and growth or shrinkage is a direct result of economic trends affecting the automobile industry. Since most of the vehicles are priced by the DMV, there is little control on the local level. Occasionally, external factors such as zoning changes, added amenities and services can have a causal effect on real estate values.

It should be noted that the State Legislature is currently considering several Bills that would have a significant impact on how property and motor vehicle taxes are determined and collected. Should some of these Bills become law, Weston would be significantly negatively impacted.

THE MILLENNIALS

The millennial age group, those born between 1980 and 2000, will define the near future housing market. According to a recent white paper by Cushman and Wakefield, "Facing the Millennial Wave", the majority of Millennials prefer to live in an urban environment, as demonstrated by the following facts:

- 62% of Millennials choose to live near shopping, restaurants, and offices;
- 2/3 of Millennials are renters;
- Young people aged 16-34 who have driver's licenses fell to 67% in 2011, its lowest level in 50 years. Out of those who drive, 23% drove fewer miles in 2009 vs. 2001.
- Millennials choose quality of life first, and job availability second. They prefer to live in the "cool cities", close to other highly educated people their age with a vibrant cultural scene.

- Millennials are getting married and having children later in life, pushing the average age to bear a first child from 27 to 34.

According to Jim Fagan, a Weston resident and Managing Director of Cushman and Wakefield, we may have lost a half of a generation of the housing market because of the above mentioned facts. However, some feel we may be on the verge of change. Millennials, as they age and have children, may opt for a suburban lifestyle. The big question is whether they will continue to opt for home locations that are close to shopping, restaurants and their work or whether the tide will turn once again towards a more rural environment.

Recent real estate trends in the Southwestern region indicate that the majority of home buyers in our area have at least one member of the household that work in the New York area. According to realtor Michelle Genovesi in the March/April edition of Westport Magazine, "If they can get closer to the city for close to the same price, they will choose a town closer." In the same article, realtor Jillian Klaff "notes that current buyers are not looking for huge homes....buyers are looking for new or nearly new homes....that are as maintenance free as possible....the trend for smaller, easy to landscape and maintain parcels is gaining momentum. In the past, two-acre properties were desirable; huge parcels of land are not on most buyers' must-have lists at the moment...Also, home buyers are continuing to seek out homes that are close to town or to the train. There is a perception that homes north of the Merritt Parkway are very far away from the 'action'." The article also notes that "there is a shortage of lower priced homes for end users and first time buyers."

Although not evidenced based, anecdotally, it is possible that Weston was not the first choice of location for many residents. The reason Weston was so successful in attracting new residents in the building boom of the 1990's and 2000's was because home prices were relatively less expensive than our neighboring communities while mill rates were just a bit higher. Families were willing to move a little further "into the country" for a quality of life that included open space and a superior education.

Future trends with the Millennials are particularly hard to forecast. They represent a significant population bulge, similar to or greater than the "Boomer" bulge. However, due to economic impacts from "the Great Recession", they have significantly delayed getting married and purchasing homes. The question as to whether they have simply delayed these activities or if this represents a fundamental behavior change is beyond the scope of this inquiry and will not likely be answered for some time.

WESTON'S INTREPLAY IN THE REGION

Not all communities are experiencing the same rate of decline as Weston. Communities along the I-95 corridor appear to be coming back quicker than those municipalities which are further removed from public transportation. This may be due to the desire to reduce commuting time, the desire to live closer to shops and retail, affordability, or the ability to rent vs. buy.

We need to realize that Weston will always be geographically challenged. We will never be able to offer our residents close proximity to a highway or a train station. This remoteness can also be a positive; it is one of the reasons people move to Weston: They want a rural environment.

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

To provide the basis for a discussion of future development policy, a list of public, private and quasi-public sites were evaluated for their development potential. This analysis was based on a review of the 2010 Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), the Weston Environmental Resource Manual, conversations with Land Use staff, and site visits. (Appendices D and E)

A. Non-Residential Development

Commercial development is most successful along major arteries. Given its geographical location, Weston is not, and will never be, a destination for shopping. Any commercial endeavor would likely have to rely on predominantly local residents or those visiting Weston for a specific purpose to be successful. This dependence can be hampered by the fact that the local town population is estimated to drop to about 7,000 people during normal weekday business hours.

Fairfield County is currently experiencing a 25% vacancy rate in our more urban areas, such as Stamford and Norwalk, and it is the unique enterprises in the more rural towns, such as destination farms, that have had some success. Therefore, we would caution that the Town would need to seriously consider the negative impact of commercial development (vacant buildings, additional public safety costs, traffic) prior to making significant changes (Appendix F).

The Town's existing local shopping center, commonly known as "Weston Center," is the only area in Town currently zoned for commercial development. Other commercial enterprises in Town, such as the Cobbs Mill Inn and Weston Gardens, for example, existed prior to the enactment of zoning regulations. Several residents also operate home based businesses out of their residences. The Planning & Zoning Commission explored the issue of additional commercial development at length during the preparation of the Town's 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development (PCOD). According to the which, 8% of residents surveyed in 2010 were in favor of additional development within Weston Center, 22% were in favor of development within or behind Weston Center and 31% were in favor of development within, behind and across the road from the Center. Few residents were in favor of non-residential development anywhere outside of this immediate vicinity of Weston Center, but land adjacent to Wilton and Redding were also considered. While the statistical accuracy of the survey may be questioned, it does provide the best basis for local views on commercial development.

It is important to note that "Weston Center" generates very little revenue for the Town. The current real estate taxes are approximately \$145,000 and the personal property taxes collected from all business are less than \$18,000 (see appendix G).

The construction of new commercial uses, such as retail or office uses on land in the vicinity of Weston Center or anywhere else in town would require a zoning map change and/or potentially changes to the text of the zoning regulations. The zoning map and the regulations can be changed, but only by the Planning & Zoning Commission after a public hearing process. The 6-acre Weston Center is zoned as Neighborhood Shopping Center District and it is the only site zoned that way in town. The rest of the town is zoned as a Two Acre Residential and Farming

District. The Neighborhood Shopping Center (NSC) District is intended to allow convenience goods and services that primarily serve the residents of Weston. The existing regulations limit the scale of new commercial development by requiring a minimum lot area of 5 acres, 300 feet of road frontage, 100 foot setbacks for the buildings, a maximum building size of 8,000 square feet and specific numbers of parking spaces.

“The Center of Town”

According to the Town Plan of Conservation of Development, residents only favored additional commercial development in the center of town, in the immediate vicinity of Weston Center. There are few small parcels of land in the area located along Weston Road (Route 57), from the intersection of Weston Road and Norfield Road north to School Rd., including the Town Hall complex that may be suitable for commercial development. The boundaries of the existing Neighborhood Shopping Center (NSC) District would need to be expanded by the Planning & Zoning Commission to include these properties before commercial development on these parcels of land could be considered. The existing NSC regulations would need to also be comprehensively reviewed to see if amendments are needed to allow appropriate commercial development, while providing adequate setbacks and screening from any adjacent residential development.

One parcel of town-owned land that could potentially be redeveloped into a commercial use is the former Jarvis Military Academy property, located at the corner of Norfield Road and Weston Road. The property consists of approximately two level acres of town-owned land. Currently, the Town's Parks and Recreation Department is housed in a 2,200 sq.ft. historic building located on the property. The Neighborhood Shopping Center District would need to be expanded to rezone the Jarvis property. The Planning & Zoning Commission, with a proposed site plan, could also address changes needed to the regulations to facilitate appropriately scaled non-residential development on the site.

Given the history associated with this site, the Town's POCD also recommends incorporating the historic home into any future development of the site. The Town, as landowner, is exempt from the zoning regulations, so another possibility for the reuse of this site is that the Town could lease the existing building for a commercial or professional office use if the building is no longer needed for municipal use. While the reuse of the Jarvis property may add valuable services to the town center, such as doctor's or other professional offices, it would not yield a significant source of new tax revenue.

Directly across Norfield Road from the Jarvis property, is private property located at 48 Norfield Road. This is another important site in the Town center that would have to be rezoned to be incorporated into Neighborhood Shopping Center District before it could be utilized for new commercial or office development. The site is currently listed for sale at \$1.1 million. It is a one acre site that contains a large historic home and outbuildings. This property abuts Town office buildings. The property is currently zoned for residential use and was previously utilized as a law office under the home occupation regulations. Beginning in 1950, before it was used as a law office, the property was utilized for a dentist's office and the dentist lived in the house. The prior owner obtained variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals which allowed up the law office to have 5 employees who lived outside of the home, as long as one of the firm's

employees lived in the house. That variance still applies to the property. However, a new business in the house must still be a home occupation, unless the Town were to own the property and lease it to a business as the Town is exempt from zoning. As with the Jarvis property, reuse of this property may add valuable services to the town center, such as doctor's or other professional offices, but it would not yield a significant source of new tax revenue.

The existing 6-acre Weston Center site is largely built out with several commercial buildings and parking areas. There was support for additional development or redevelopment of this site during the preparation of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), and there may be some room for minor building expansion around the periphery of this site. However, it would be extremely difficult for any building expansion project to comply with the current building setback and parking space requirements. Weston Center already has fewer parking spaces than zoning regulations require for the businesses currently operating there. While potentially offering additional amenities, this would not be a large new tax revenue source.

The owner of Weston Center also owns an additional 7 acres immediately to the west of the Center which is currently in the Two –Acre Residential and Farming District. The vacant parcel contains approximately 7 acres of land and meets the minimum, 5-acre lot area for permitted uses in the Neighborhood Shopping Center District, if the parcel were to be rezoned. Permitted principal uses include retail and personal service businesses, banks, professional offices, sit-down restaurants and automotive service stations.

Based on the existing requirements of the NSC District, this site could support approximately 32,600 square feet of total site development (assuming 15% total site coverage) which could accommodate the maximum 8,000 square foot building either as an 8,000 square foot single-story building or as a two-story building with a 4,000 square foot footprint. The remaining total site development would include site access drives, parking areas and sidewalks. This would leave the remaining four acres of the site as open space and would allow an area to buffer uses from surrounding properties and to blend any new development into the landscape. Based upon a discussion with the agent for the owner, there may be an opportunity for professional offices. The Planning & Zoning Commission, with a proposed site plan, could also address changes needed to the regulations to facilitate more commercial space or a greater mix of uses on the site that is still appropriately scaled given the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The Town owned property from the Onion Barn to the Bus Garage is approximately 5-6 acres in size. However, development options are constrained by factors such as the presence of the school bus depot, athletic fields, and existing traffic conditions along Route 57. Septic systems for Hurlbutt Elementary School also are located under the ball fields, further reducing the opportunity for expansion. While the POCD expressed that this may be the best opportunity for additional non-residential development within the town center, there are concerns with respect to safety given the proximity of the site to the school campus. In addition to these security concerns, the POCD also noted that there are significant issues that required detailed study related to future development of this area.

Should Hurlbutt Elementary School not be needed to house students, the Town would have the flexibility to consider other options for use, including but not limited to commercial development, a Community Center, Town Green, Senior or alternative housing, etc.

In addition to considering zoning map changes to expand the existing Neighborhood Shopping Center or text amendments to increase flexibility in the existing NSC District, the Planning & Zoning Commission could look at the creation of a mixed-use "Village District" to address development of all land in the town center. A Village District is a zoning tool permitted by state statute that permits the adoption of flexible aesthetic or design standards to encourage infill development that is consistent with the Town's character and can yield additional zoning flexibility. A privately initiated proposal for a Village District for 115 acres in the center of Town including Weston Center, the Town and Library facilities and neighboring houses and church buildings generated a great deal of discussion during the preparation of the POCD, but did not garner enough public support to be adopted at that time.

Property abutting the Redding and Wilton borders

The potential redevelopment of the Georgetown Wire Mill property into a mixed-use community in Redding, including the potential for a train station along the branch line may make the Georgetown area close to the intersection of Route 57 and Route 107, attractive for development in the future. However, after many attempts by several developers to get this project off the ground, the Wire Mill property is in tax foreclosure.

The 85-acre town owned property known as Fromson-Strassler and the 97-acre privately owned Weston Farms property in Georgetown that abut Wilton and Redding were evaluated as potential sites for new commercial or office development. During the information gathering for the POCD, the community discussed the development of a portion of the Fromson-Strassler property for an office complex or other non-residential uses, and the potential revenue if the Town were to enter into a long term ground lease, at length. The POCD stressed that additional, substantial analysis was needed by a committee. However, commercial realtors caution that the Fairfield County office and retail markets have softened substantially since the POCD was written and that commercial developers are looking for property that directly abut major roads. Neither the Fromson Strassler property nor the Weston Farms property have direct frontage along a major arterial road. The site preparation costs needed to provide access and utilities to these "inland" properties, along with environmentally sensitive areas on both, makes non-residential development on these properties even more difficult in an already difficult regional real estate market at this time.

B. Residential Development

Town-owned as well as large lot privately owned properties were considered (Appendix H). Based on the current zoning regulations, the minimum lot area for new homes is 2 acres. The mathematical analysis below represents a maximum build out of the sites based on the existing zoning and subdivision requirements and assumes a generally accepted formula that a minimum 15% of each site is utilized for infrastructure and roads. The estimated total number of new homes that could be built, is just that, an estimate for planning purposes only. Construction on these sites could be limited by specific site conditions such as wetlands, rock outcrops, streams, steep slopes and flood plains as well as road design standards contained in the subdivision regulations.

1. Major Public Sites

Fromson-Strassler Property

As discussed above, approximately 85 acres of publically-owned, undeveloped land lies in the northwest corner of the Town, on the Wilton town line. Approximately 60 acres of this land is encumbered with wetlands, watercourses, shallow bedrock, steep slopes, and rock outcroppings. The best opportunity for development is an area of 10 acres on the lower sections at the end of Upper Parish Road. Assuming that approximately an unconstrained 25 acres of this site remains buildable, it is anticipated that this site could yield up to 10 new single family lots. The Conservation Commission did approve an 8 home layout for this property in the late 1990's.

Moore Property

The Town owns approximately 36 acres of land on Lords Highway East. While the property is generally flat and not constrained by environmental conditions, the Town's deed to this property restricts sale to a third party for residential and/ or commercial development. This restriction is binding on the town and runs with the land. The property could be used for municipal functions, which could include construction of recreational uses, office uses or publically-owned housing. The land could also possibly be leased by the Town to a third party but it is uncommon for a private developer to be willing to make a private investment in land when he/she would not own nor control for the life of the investment. These deed restrictions should be further discussed with town counsel.

Several other Town owned sites were considered, but for a variety of reasons were deemed to be unsuitable for further development. These sites were as follows:

Bisceglie Park – 55 acres on Newtown Turnpike. This property is the location of youth baseball fields, a fitness trail and the town's swimming hole. Most of the property is across the West Branch of the Saugatuck and in its natural state contains wetlands and relatively steep slopes.

Devil's Glen – The property is on the east side of town between Valley Forge and Davis Hill. It is a natural gorge formed by the Saugatuck River below the Senior Dam and is rugged terrain. The property is generally regarded as an open space conservation area.

Lachat Property – This 40 acre property on Godfrey Road West is currently being revitalized as a farm with community gardens and a restored historic farm house for educational programs. The property is co-owned with the Nature Conservancy and development is limited by deed restrictions.

Keane Park – Located on River Road in lower Weston, this 8 acres "pocket" park has children's swings and a play area along banks of the Saugatuck River. It is a low lying area in the flood plain of the river

Morehouse Farm Park - This 30 acre property located off Newtown Turnpike at Valley Forge Road, near the Redding town line, contains playing fields on the upper portion of the property and the historic Morehouse family home last owned by descendant Minerva Heddy on the lower portion. This property is in a sensitive watershed area.

2. Major Private Sites

Weston Farms Property

This property contains approximately 97 acres off Osborne Farm Road in the Georgetown area of the town, south of the Meadow Ridge Retirement Community. It contains a vacant 75 acre parcel and several undeveloped 2-acre lots in an approved subdivision. The land is currently on the market and the realtor has advertised that bids to purchase the property are due on May 12, 2015. This land could be potentially be subdivided into a maximum of 41, two-acre single family lots.

The development of this property would require subdivision approval by the Planning & Zoning Commission. The property could provide an opportunity for a developer to propose more flexible zoning techniques to the Commission, such as an open space residential development. Open space residential development regulations permits the lot sizes to be reduced so that homes can be arranged to fit or clustered on a portion of the property, while a setting high standards for the quantity, quality and configuration of the protected open space. Open space residential developments encourage a creative design process and high-quality development on smaller lots, while minimizing a development's impact on the natural features of the land. High-quality housing on smaller lots may be very attractive option for seniors who wish to stay in the community, but no longer want a 2-acre lot to maintain.

Belknap Property

This property contains approximately 42 acres between Wampum Hill Road and Cindy Lane. It borders property held by the Aspetuck Land Trust. This land could be subdivided into a maximum of 17, two-acre single family lots, but this total would likely be less due to large wetland areas and topographical conditions that may make road construction on this site difficult.

Tannery Lane Subdivision

The Tannery Lane Subdivision, approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission in 2004, contains a lot that is 26 acres in size. This lot is west of the Saugatuck River, off of Banks Drive and Smith Ridge Road. Currently approved as a single house lot, it has recently been sold. This land could be potentially re-subdivided into a maximum of 11, two-acre single family lots if road access could be provided onto Lyons Plain Road. This total would also likely be reduced due to the floodplain of the Saugatuck River on the property.

Weston Woods

This 22 acres property off Newtown Turnpike, south of the Singing Oaks Subdivision, was subdivided into residential lots and a 6-acre museum property for the Weston Woods Institute in 2009. The land is currently developed with several residential buildings as well buildings utilized by the Institute. The owner of this land is considering development of senior housing and is researching potential changes to the zoning regulations as the current regulations do not have any specific provisions for senior, or age-restricted housing. This land could be subdivided into a maximum of six, two-acre single family lots.

Assuming that the development of all of these sites occurs, yielding 85 new homes, and an average home price of \$1,000,000, we could expect total grand list growth of \$59,500,000, a 2.6% increase.

With regard to integrating this report with the POCD, we acknowledge that the POCD projected that there were between 200 and 500 lots (including the 85 referenced in this report) potentially available to develop. However, given that the lots have not been developed thus far, it may be fair to assume many are not ideal for development, because of topographic, access or other challenges, or that the property owners have no interest in subdividing their property.

CONCLUSIONS

This project originated as a confluence of two separate, but related factors. Most recently, a request by the Board of Finance to hire a planner to help assess whether there any options to increase school enrollment. More distally, the 2010 Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) generated by the Planning and Zoning board made the recommendation to hire a planner to examine issues pertaining to alternative housing and village district development.

The essential question we must ask ourselves is whether it is time to revisit our planning and zoning regulations to allow for more expansion and growth, which may have a positive impact on school enrollment and grand list growth. If we can nudge our planning and zoning priorities in such a way as to encourage growth and maintain our open space and small town feel, what would be the positive (or negative) impact on grand list growth, home sales and school enrollment?

1. Non-residential Development

Given the minimal land zoned for non-residential development, the opportunities under the existing zoning to supplement the town's tax base with commercial development are nearly nonexistent. If the residents of the town have an interest in increasing non-residential development, changes to the zoning regulations could be considered. This includes map changes to permit non-residential development in new locations, review of the permitted non-residential uses and consideration of lower lot requirements for certain lower intensity uses.

Currently, all commercial activity, including home occupations, represents approximately one percent of the grand list. Given that non-residential development is not likely to be a significant direct source of grand list growth, attention should focus on non-residential development that provide amenities that would make the town more attractive to new and current residents. Could these types of services make Weston a more appealing place to move, and act as a significant factor in convincing residents to stay long term? We have not been able to metrically analyze whether additional amenities, such as neighborhood scale retail development, would have an impact on home sales.

2. Residential Development

Although Weston may be "geographically challenged", that doesn't't preclude searching for ways to increase our grand list or to attract home buyers. There may be ways to consider modifications to the scarce number of available development sites to provide more potential for housing growth while striving to maintain the open space /conservation legacy that has been a

hallmark of Weston's image. Innovative site planning and zoning techniques can provide the best of both.

Under the existing residential zoning, a full build out of the sites discussed above would yield a maximum total of approximately 85 single family homes. This number of potential housing units, is well above any plans or proposals that the array of private developers are currently considering. Large lot, single family homes will provide some tax revenue to the town, but given the time span that it will take to build, the tax impact will hardly be noticeable. Based on 2012 demographic data from CERC and the Connecticut Department of Education, the 85 homes would yield approximately 0.75 public school children per single family dwelling or a total of 63 public school children. These estimates may be somewhat low if the housing skews more toward new families. The projected impact on the more than 500 public school enrollment decline by 2025 would be minimal.

Single family homes on large lots tend to be less affordable to young families. Smaller lot, single family development, which will yield more affordable, starter homes will tend to attract families with school aged children. This could be accomplished through increasing the permitted density within certain areas of the town with more limited environmental constraints, along major roads or, to a lesser degree, through the creation of cluster, or conservation cluster design subdivision regulations. Conservation cluster subdivisions preserve the total number of residential units permitted by existing zoning but allow dwellings to be clustered on smaller lots to allow for the permanent conservation of environmental features and open space. Given the sensitive environmental nature of vacant land, and the strong desire to maintain the town's bucolic character, conservation cluster subdivisions would be an ideal way to allow for responsible development which reflects environmental land constraints. These types of alternative housing developments may induce new families to move in, and empty-nest families to remain in town.

New traditional development cannot be the sole answer to declining school enrollment and stagnant Grand List growth. Even if all 85 single family homes, permissible under existing zoning, were developed by 2025 the population would be still only increase slightly more than the total population growth from 2000 projected to 2020, of roughly 166 persons.

The development of zoning for age-restricted (typically 55+), or senior housing can be undertaken. These types of developments are sometimes known as "Planned Adult Communities", or PACs. They can consist of small detached dwellings (on one-half to one-quarter acre lots) or townhouses (often owned in condominium) and typically, zoning regulations lay out a range of recreation and other amenities (community center, walking paths, etc.) to be provided on site to be controlled by a Home Owners Association. A hybrid could also be developed whereby only a percentage of the total housing constructed would be age-restricted with the balance intended for families. This type of development promotes housing choice and even very modest housing turnover should aging households in town decide to move.

NEXT STEPS, PHASE II

1. Form a committee to explore the potential desire of current and future residents:
 - A. This committee should conduct town meetings to discuss report, gain feedback from all stakeholders and modify/fine-tune next steps
 - B. Conduct focus groups among key demographic groups and representative townsfolk to gauge desirability of options and to collect data in order to craft survey questions. Key initial groups will be:
 - i. Representative Townsfolk
 - ii. Individuals who have recently moved into town
 - iii. Real estate professionals who work in area
 - iv. Parents of High-School seniors and parents of recent High-School graduates
 - C. Conduct survey market research to better understand:
 - i. Why people may be moving to Weston?
 - ii. Why people chose to leave or stay in Weston?
 - iii. What amenities are missing and desired in Weston?
 - iv. Desirability of commercial expansion around town center.
 - v. Feelings/concerns around senior/cluster/alternative housing
 - D. Develop a detailed marketing plan (potentially Phase III).
2. Land Use staff should survey the neighboring communities to get a sense of different zoning districts and their effectiveness in increasing tax revenue.
3. Town Officials should reach out to all large non-developed private properties; efforts should be made to explore the intentions of the owners/developers
4. The Board of Selectmen should collaborate with the Planning and Zoning Commission to determine the interest and feasibility of modifying the existing zoning regulations to promote the potential for housing and commercial changes.
5. Conversations should be held with the Norwalk Transit District to determine the feasibility of bus service.
6. A planning consultant should be considered to tie together all initiatives that may impact "Town Center."

Appendix A

School districts consider options as enrollment drops

Rob Ryser

Updated 10:51 pm, Saturday, May 2, 2015

NEWTOWN -- As the school system approaches its turnover season -- the time of year when it discharges high school seniors and prepares for a new class of kindergartners -- it does so with more concern than perhaps any time in a generation.

Some 450 students will graduate from Newtown High School in June, but administrators expect only 235 kids to enter kindergarten in the fall.

It is a sharp drop-off in enrollment that has everything to do with the continuing effects of the Great Recession and nothing to do -- for once -- with the tragic events of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings two years ago.

"This is not a tragedy-based decline," said Joseph Erardi, the first-year superintendent of Newtown schools.

Indeed, Newtown is only the latest of several local school districts to commission a study of its declining enrollment and begin serious discussions about closing a school.

New Milford has already been through a divisive process that pitted parents against school board members and concluded with a decision to close John Pettibone Elementary in June.

Ridgefield, by a blip in its enrollment, has been saved -- at least for now -- from going through the same school closure process, although that conversation will resume in January.

Voters in three Litchfield County towns that make up the Region 12 school district have flat-out said "no" to a plan that would have shut three elementary schools and built one common building for Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington.

Although Newtown and nearby districts have unique circumstances that require

particular approaches, the common denominator here and across Connecticut is historically low birth rates that began after the Great Recession in 2007 and are now beginning to shrink school populations.

"It is statewide," said Robert Rader, executive director of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education. "We have been working with (the University of Connecticut) to address these demographics, and from what they're showing us, it looks like there will be a decline for years to come."

The irony is that in the middle of this suburban enrollment crisis, city districts such as Danbury are growing, largely because of immigration. Danbury is adding as many as 140 students a year, for example, and plans a major expansion of its high school, already the largest in the state.

Enrollment crisis

But the situation in the suburbs is very near desperate -- even in districts where parents have won out over administrators and blocked plans to close elementary schools.

"What keeps me up at night is some of our classes have six or seven kids," said Julie Stuart, a mother of two from Bridgewater who has been active in keeping the town's only school open. "We can't continue to have that."

Other suburban school districts that have not faced the enrollment crisis will likely have to do so soon.

The reason: birth rates across the state are expected to continue to decline over the next five years. Parents worried about the economy are putting off having children or having fewer of them, according to experts who have conducted demographic studies for three local school districts.

While improvements in the economy such as lower unemployment rates could spark an increase in local birth rates, they are not expected to climb to pre-recession levels -- at least not for the next 10 years.

For that reason, the state school boards association is organizing a summer workshop with UConn demographers to help local boards understand the impact

that falling student populations will have on programs and facilities.

"Some districts are going to lose 20 to 25 percent of their students," Rader said.

But the enrollment crisis will also affect communities that have under-enrolled elementary schools.

New Milford saw that firsthand last year, when the school board, facing an 11 percent enrollment decline, voted 5-4 to close Pettibone. The 60-year-old building would have needed \$2 million in repairs just to keep it open.

"There is still a group of people who clearly dispute the statistics and have their own interpretation of the facts, and that is their prerogative," said Angela Chastain, chairwoman of the New Milford Board of Education. "But the facts were clear to me that we didn't need a school that was two-thirds empty. And since declining enrollment is a statewide issue, we are paving the way for other school districts."

A New Milford mother disagrees.

"I still think it is terrible idea," said Michelle Liguori, who will send her second-grade daughter who is now at Pettibone to the Sarah Noble Intermediate School in the fall.

"We would rather have smaller class sizes for our children," Liguori said. "I don't think it was about the kids. I think it was about the bottom line."

Newtown's situation

In Newtown, where enrollment has declined 16 percent since 2007, from 5,600 students to 4,700 students, the district expects to lose about 200 students annually for the next five years.

Those numbers will be presented to the school board this summer with a recommendation by the Facility Review Committee.

The only schools certain not to be closed are the town's high school and the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, a \$50 million project underway on the site of the building razed after the 2012 shooting of 20 first-graders and six educators.

The fact that the enrollment decline started before the 2012 massacre is noted three times in an analysis prepared for Newtown by Milone & MacBroom, the same firm

hired by Ridgefield and New Milford to calculate their future enrollments.

The demographers note in the Newtown study that one of the most significant indicators of declining enrollment is a 20 percent drop during the last decade of women in their 20s and 30s. Births, which averaged 345 a year in Newtown at the turn of the millennium, are down to an average of 180 annually since 2008.

Although the authors assume the annual birth rate in Newtown will climb back to the mid-2000s over the next 10 years if the unemployment rate continues to drop, that would still be well below the number of births in town before the Great Recession.

Not everyone agrees, however, that births are a reliable indicator of future enrollment.

In Ridgefield, for example, the school board was ready to close one of its six elementary schools when its K-5 enrollment dropped under 2,000.

But something unexpected happened: More than 100 new students entered the elementary schools this year who were not accounted for in the town's birth records.

"We had an influx of children not born here and we attribute that to the quality of the school system," said Chris Murray, vice chairman of Ridgefield's school board.

"Our birth rate issue is being countered by the attractiveness of our schools," he said. "That gives us a measure of control over our destiny, which we are happy about, and which we hope continues."

It is not clear whether the trend of families with school-age kids moving into Ridgefield will continue.

"We don't want to close a school," Murray said. "We want the problem to be solved organically -- not politically -- simply by having more kids showing up."

Saving schools

The three towns of Region 12 don't want their schools to close, either. In April, voters overwhelmingly rejected a plan to consolidate the three elementaries into a single building on the Shepaug Valley School campus in Washington.

Residents had a say in the decision because the original agreement that established the three-town district required an elementary school in each town.

But since 2003 enrollment has declined by 32 percent, and by 2023, if nothing changes, the 800 students in the district now are expected to drop to 460.

The result is that administrators and parents have tried various creative solutions, from hiring a marketing firm to promote district schools to entertaining merger talks with neighboring districts.

In April, the district applied to the state to authorize a special agriscience program at the middle school in Washington in an effort to attract new students.

And in Bridgewater, the Burnham School has a combined class called "one-dergarten," made up of five kindergartners and eight first-graders. The idea is to make the most of small class sizes.

Still another idea was to lower tuition to \$7,500 to attract out-of-town students -- perhaps students from Pettibone -- anything but close the only school in Bridgewater.

"People don't realize what it would be like to live in a town without a school," Stuart said. "It would just be seniors and weekenders and the whole town would lose its flavor. We would be the first town in the state without a single school within our borders."

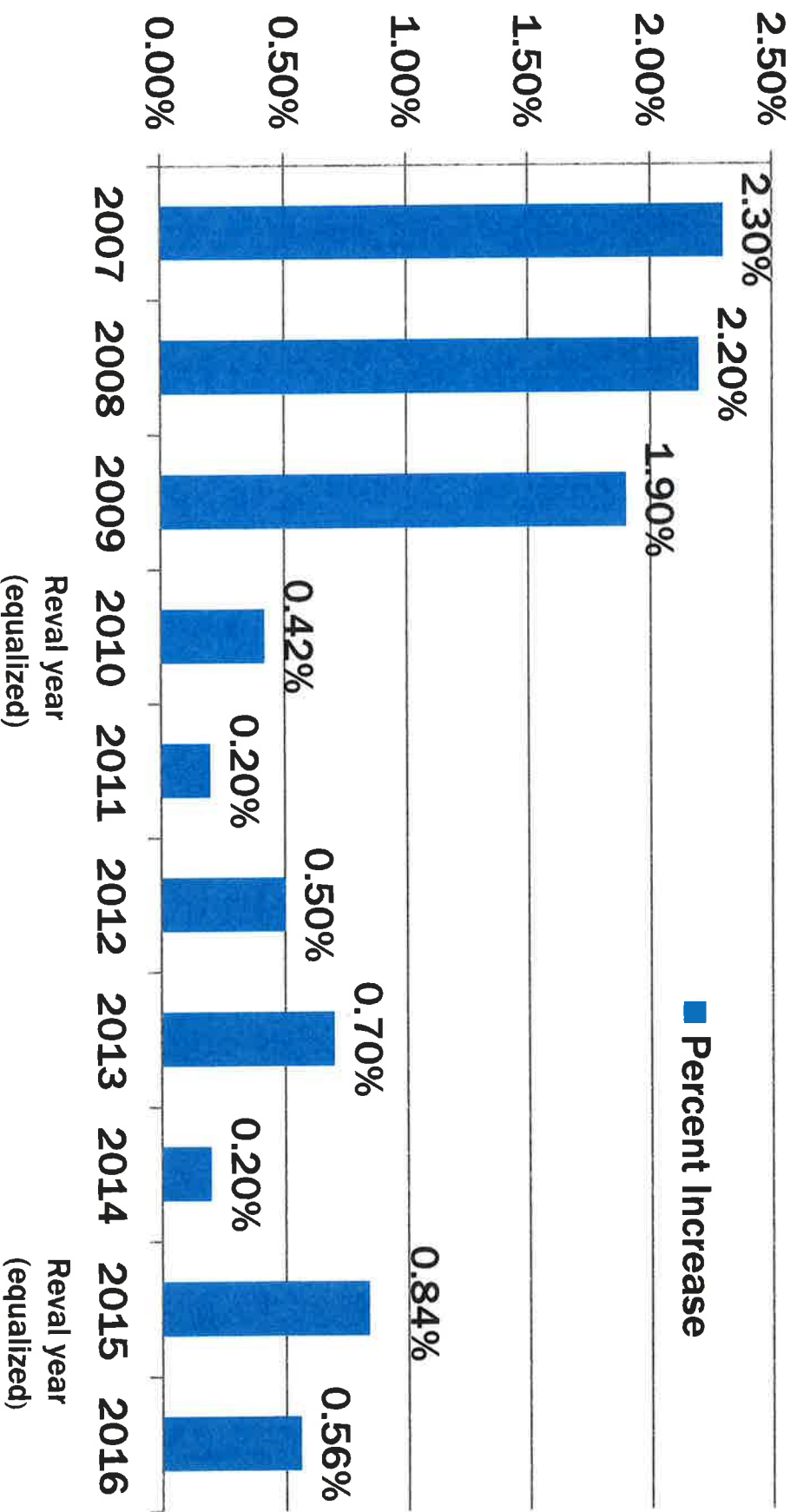
rryser@nwewstimes.com; 203-731-3342

Appendix B

October 2014 Net Grand List - Final as of 1-31-2015

	2013 GL	2014 GL	% CHANGE	\$ CHANGE
R.E.	2,191,212,640	2,202,424,150	0.51%	\$11,211,510
M.V.	117,243,278	117,725,119	0.41%	\$481,841
P.P.	21,539,234	22,849,098	6.08%	\$1,309,864
TOTAL	2,329,995,152	2,342,998,367	0.56%	\$13,003,215

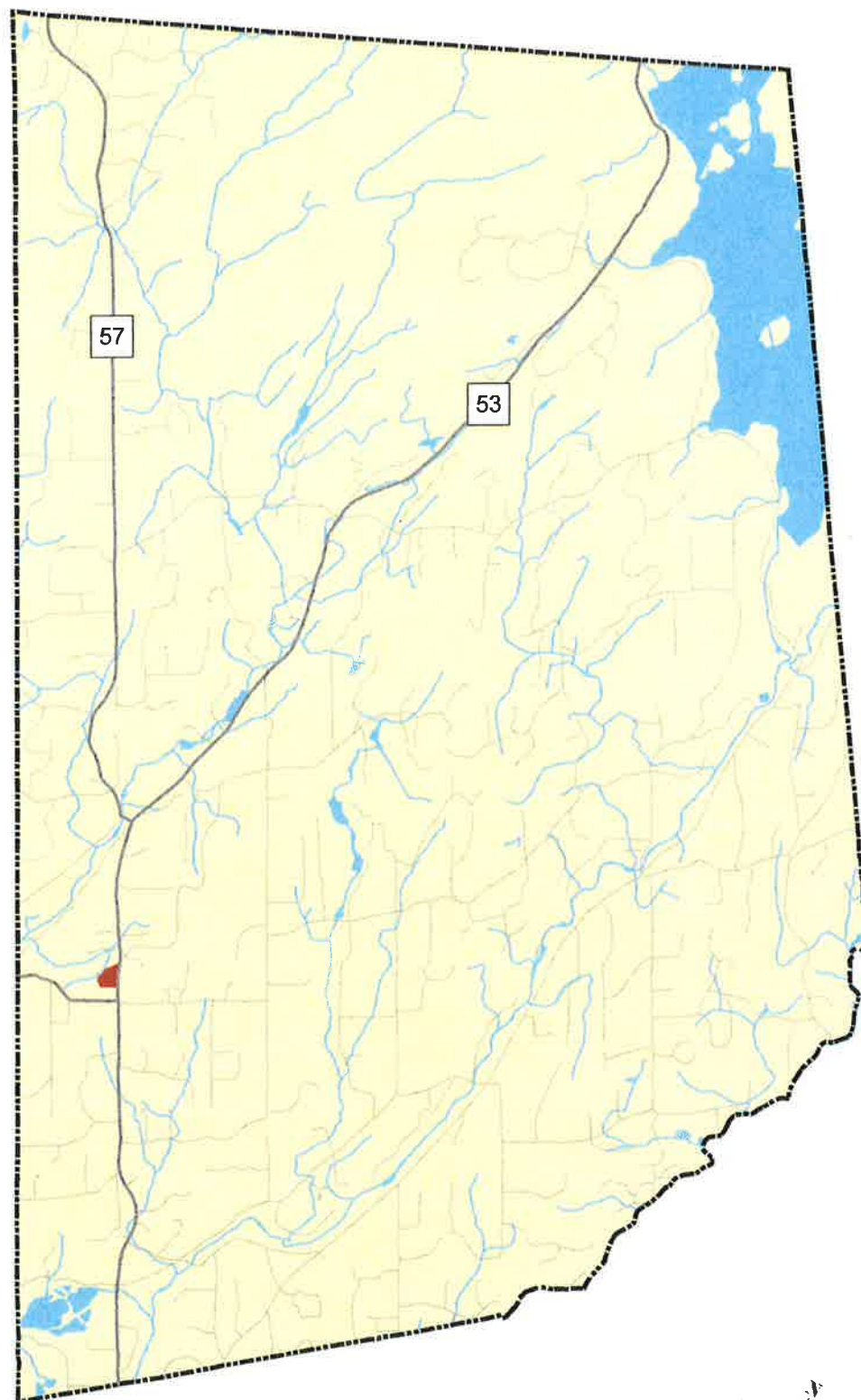
GRAND LIST GROWTH



Zoning

2010 Weston Plan of Conservation and Development

Appendix D



Legend

~ Roads

~ Watercourse

Neighborhood Shopping Center District

Two Acre Residential and Farming District



Prepared April 14, 2010
SWRPA
South Western Regional Planning Agency

Disclaimer: This map is intended for general planning purposes only.

Source: Source: Zoning Map, Town of Weston, Sanborn Map Company, Inc. July 1, 1985, and Data Accumulation Plan, Weston Road & Willow Drive prepared for Weston Shopping Center Associates, LLC, December, 15, 2008.

0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles

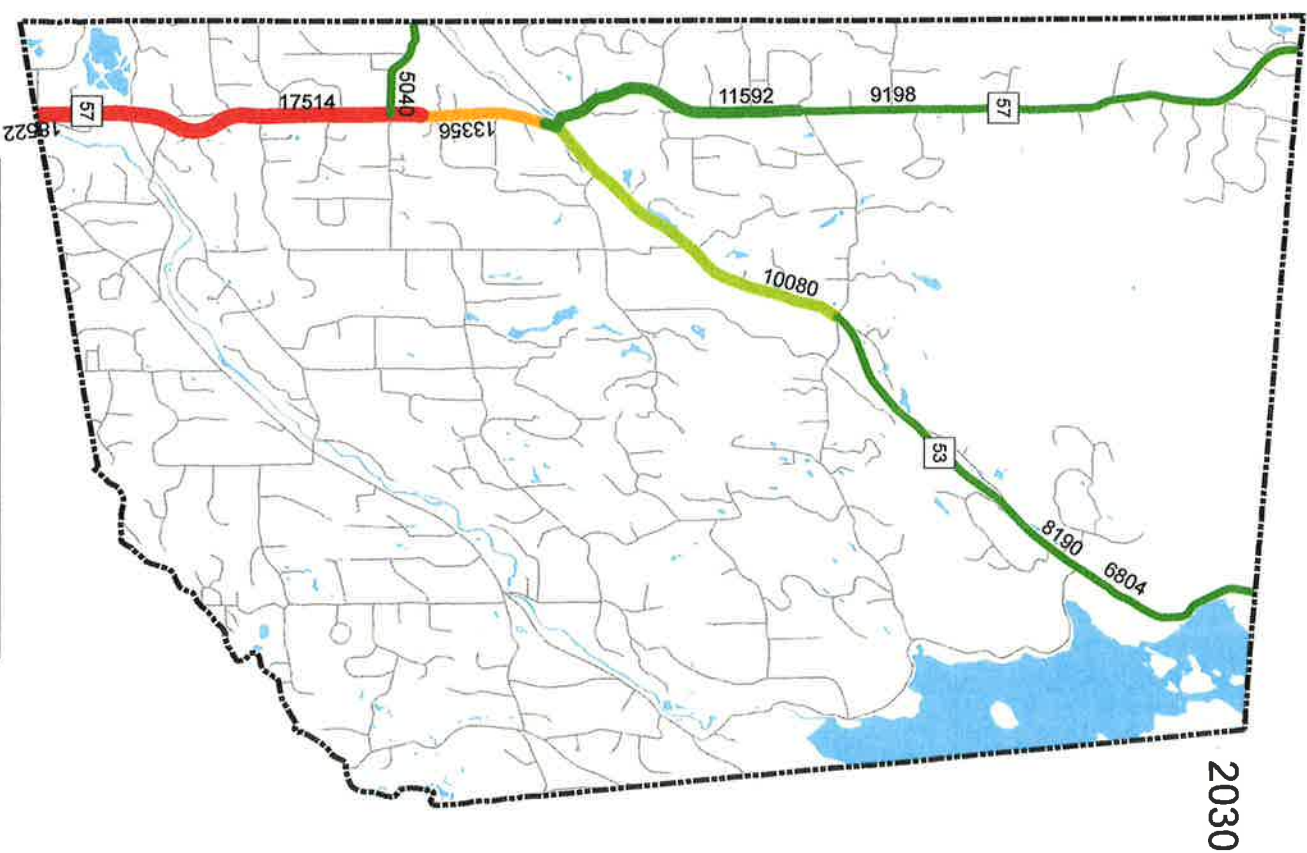
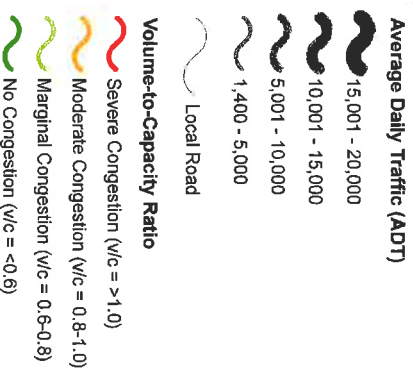
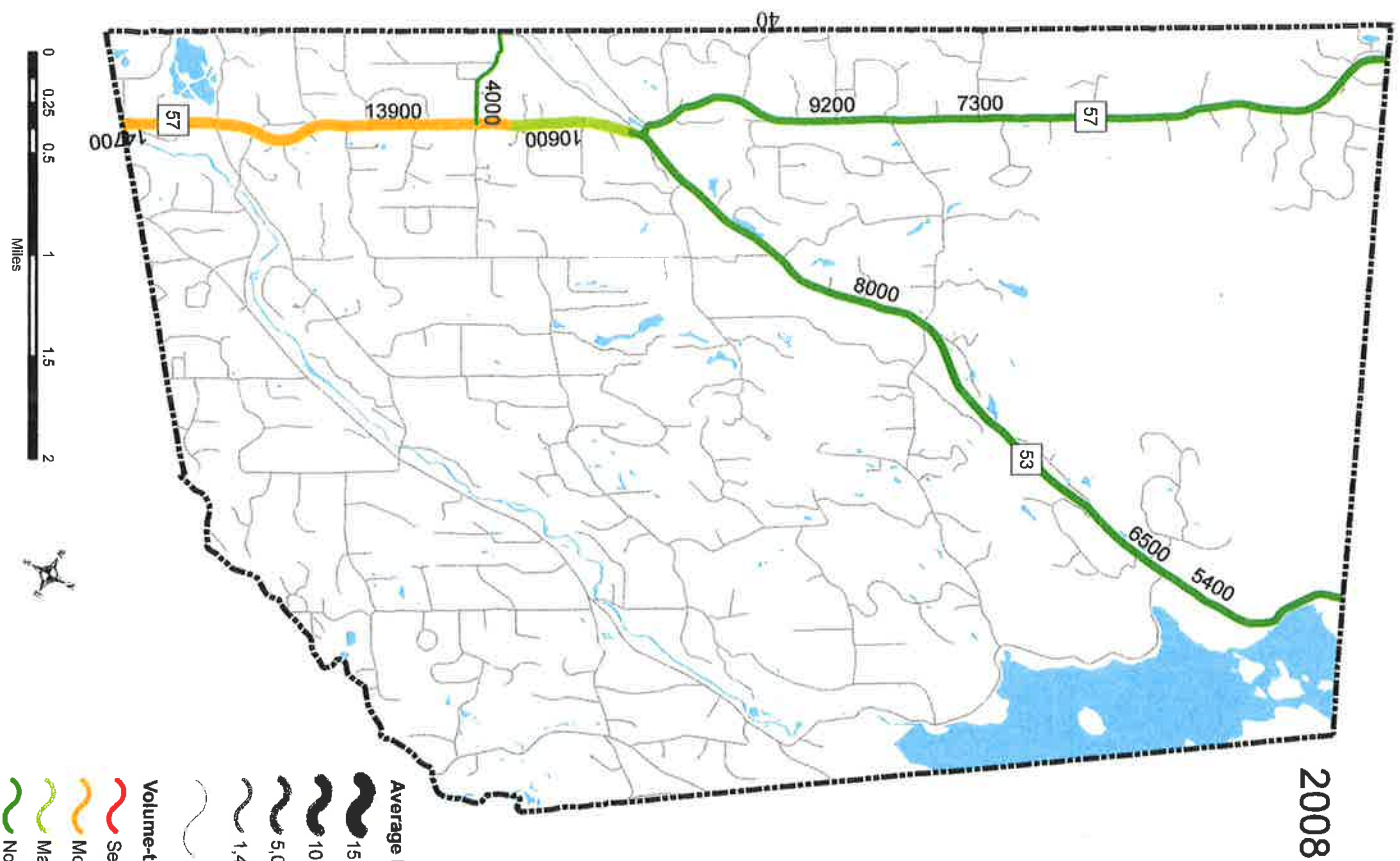
Appendix E



Traffic Volume and Volume-to-Capacity Ratio

Appendix F

2010 Weston Plan of Conservation and Development



Disclaimer: This map is intended for general planning purposes only.
 Sources: Connecticut Department of Transportation, Highway and Congestion
 Screening and Monitoring Report, Town Road Maps (TRM), Connecticut
 Department of Environmental Protection, Environmental GIS Data for Connecticut.

Appendix G

Real Estate

Weston Shopping Center Assoc./190 Weston Road	\$131,697.24
Weston Shopping Center Assoc./204 Weston Road	\$5,656.48
Weston Shopping Center Assoc./Weston Road	\$8,319.50
Real Estate Tax Total:	\$145,673.22

Personal Property

Weston Service Center - personal property	\$524.42
Peters Weston Market - personal property	\$6,593.76
Lang's Pharmacy - personal property	\$208.42
Lunch Box - personal property	\$315.96
Camelot Real Estate	\$149.68
Peters Spirit Shop	\$350.74
Weston Hardware	\$26.26
Fairfield County Bank	\$9,166.42
Minute Man Cleaners	\$229.32
Personal Property Tax Total:	\$17,564.98

Guidera Office/48 Norfield Rd	\$17,816.62
-------------------------------	-------------

Appendix H preliminary inventory

Preliminary Inventory of Town and Other Lands 1-19-15 rev 1-20-15

(subject to further checking on ownership, classification, acreage notes and comments; sources SpecPrint 2011 – Weston, CT and Weston TPOCD Land Use Map 2010)

Town Land Listed as Town Parks and Open Space

Bisceglie Park - Newtown Turnpike (near Rte 53-57 intersection) approximately 55 acres location of youth baseball fields, town swimming park (most land across West Branch is in natural state, in wetlands, and relatively steep slopes) 1.1 mile (2 min.) to Town Hall

Devil's Glen - On east side of town Between Valley Forge and Davis Hill a natural gorge formed by the Saugatuck River below the Senior Dam not far from Moore Property (rugged terrain and natural beauty accentuated by waterfalls and deep pools; generally regarded as an opens space conservation area). 4.9 miles (11 min) to Town Hall

Fromson Strassler - Upper Parish (private lane; no other existing access way) - approximately 85 acres in natural state on Weston-Wilton town line in the northwest corner near Georgetown (60+ acres in watercourses, wetlands, rock ledge etc.; Wilton section is an additional 30 acres similarly difficult to develop; best land for development is on the lower sections at end of Upper Parish just past CL&P power lines - about 10+ acres). 4.6 miles (8 minutes) to Town Hall

Jarvis Military Academy - On corner of Norfield and Weston Road (Rt. 57) 1.9 acre (offices for town Parks and Recreation; historic site). Across for Town Hall.

Lachat Property - Godfrey Road West approximately 40 acres (large sections cleared haying fields; sections set off for community gardens; efforts being made to restore historic home and run educational programs; some deed restrictions; ownership share with The Nature Conservancy) 2.7 miles (5 min) to Town Hall

Keane Park - River Road in lower Weston near local Grange Hall - approximately 8 acres (location of children swings and play area along banks of the Saugatuck River; low lying area with sections in flood plain). 2.1 miles (4 min.) to Town Hall

Moore Property - Lords Highway East - Davis Hill on eastern side of town near Saugatuck Reservoir - approximately 35 acres (relatively flat and gentle sloping; some sections may have high water table; near water company and town open space lands including Trout Brook) 4.1 miles (9 min.) to Town Hall.

Morehouse Park -- Newtown Turnpike at intersection of Valley Forge near Redding town line approximately 30+ acres (location of town playing fields on upper portion of the property and site of historic Morehouse family home last owned by descendant Minerva Heddy on lower section; near watershed lands) 3.7 miles (6 min) to Town Hall.

Trout Brook Valley -- East of Valley Forge near Devil's Glen off Bradley Road approximately 42 acres (Trout Brook merges with the Saugatuck River just below the property; generally

regards as a conservation and open space area and gateway to more 700 acres of open space land stretching in Easton across to Route 58 and contiguous watershed lands and Saugatuck Forest trail system.) 4.9 miles (11 min) to Town Hall.

Variety of small and inner holdings ranging in size from less than 2 acres to 10 acres mostly in the northern half of town in the following neighborhoods: Cannondale-Brookwood (west side near Wilton); Michaels Way; November Trail; Mountain View; Godfrey between Old Orchard and Old Field; Ravenwood; Banks Drive.

Major Vacant Private Parcels

Nevas 75 acres - Osborne Hill - Grey Fox near Georgetown

Belknap 40 acres – Inner holdings west of Georgetown Road and north of Cannondale near Wampum and Cindy and Wilson; land reportedly is on the market with potential direct access off Georgetown between Wilson and Samuelson; rugged land with wetlands, streams and bolder fields

Smith Ridge 26 acres - Off Steep Hill and west of Saugatuck River

Weston Woods 20+ acres - Off Newtown Turnpike south of Singing Oaks

Private Clubs and Organizations

Aspetuck CC 100+ acres - Old Redding Road on east side

Weston Gun Club 40 acres - Godfrey Road East near transfer station northeast

Weston Field Club 25 acres off Ladder Hill - north central

Hemlock Girls Scouts 13 acres - Old Easton Road on east side

Weston Racquet Club 10 acres off Newtown Turnpike south of Singing Oaks north central

Grange about 1 acre - Goodhill Road - lower Weston

Open Spaces Held by Non profits (The Nature Conservancy/Aspetuck Land Trust primarily) - 1,800+ acres

Open Spaces Held by Water Company - 1,186

Open Spaces Municipally Held - 324 acres (includes those listed above)

Town Property for Schools, Playing Fields and Other Uses

Transfer Station - 56 acres Godfrey East

Middle School and DPW - 30+ acres - School Road North

High School 40+ acres - School Road Central

Intermediate School 13+ acres - School Road Central

Elementary School 36+ acres - School Road South

Annex, School Board, Basketball Court and Field Hockey 5+ acres

Town Hall, Police Fire and Library 4 acres

Total = 184 acres

Town Shopping Center 6.1 acres (property owner has another 7 adjacent undeveloped acres)