

Please join us for a series of

INFORMAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

LET'S TALK ABOUT ... THE FUTURE OF OUR SCHOOLS...WAYS TO ATTRACT NEW BUSINESSES TO LOWER OUR TAXES...WAYS TO SLOW DOWN TRAFFIC ON OUR ROADS... WAYS TO PRESERVE OUR FARMLAND.... OR WHERE WILL YOU AND/OR YOUR CHILDREN BE LIVING TEN YEARS FROM NOW... WHAT DOES "RURAL CHARACTER" REALLY MEAN? ... HOW WILL THE INTRODUCTION OF SEWERS CHANGE OUR TOWN?

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE OF NORTH STONINGTON!

PIZZA AND OTHER REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED.

Come share your opinion!

LOCATION: HIGH SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER

Wednesday 10/17, 7:00-8:30pm AND (REPEAT SESSION) Saturday 10/20, 10:30am-12:00pm

Topic 1: What types of businesses would be best for the town economically while preserving the quality of life we enjoy? What is the town doing to bring new commercial tax revenue to the town? Let's talk about economic development and planning for the future.

Wednesday 10/24, 7:00-8:30 AND (REPEAT SESSION) Saturday 10/27, 10:30am-12:00pm

Topic 2: What does "Rural Character" really mean? Is North Stonington entirely rural? What aspects do we want to preserve? What changes would we be comfortable with? Could we introduce limited sewers and still retain this "rural character?" Let's re-explore the concept of rural character and decide what aspects we want to preserve.

Monday 11/05, 7:00-8:30 AND (REPEAT SESSION) Saturday 11/10, 10:30am-12:00pm

Topic 3: Do we have enough protected open space? In a 2003 Poll, 78% of those who responded said the town needed to protect farmland. Have we? Is the "Transfer of Development Rights" the only way? Let's talk about our valuable natural resources and what agricultural in NS will look like in the future.

Monday 11/12, 7:00-8:30pm AND (REPEAT SESSION) Saturday 11/17, 10:30am-12:00pm

Topic 4: Are we ready for mixed-use or multi-family housing? Should we build quality senior housing? We have been talking about Conservation Subdivisions for years, is it time to write the regulations to allow them? Does North Stonington provide an adequate range of Housing Choice for its residents (current and future)?? Let's talk about the future housing needs for NS residents.

For further information, please call Juliet Leeming @ 860-535-2877 x27 M-F (8a-4p)

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

POCD - ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

The POCD Steering Committee is hosting a series of informal discussions with local residents on a variety of planning topics. There are a total of eight sessions. The topics are Economic Development, Rural Character, Open Space, and Housing.

SESSION 1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following is a summary of the first two sessions held on October 10th and October 17th on the topic of **Economic Development**.

A total of 26 residents attended the sessions. Seven of the 26 were members of a NS Commission or Committee (1- EDC, 2-PZC, 2- Hewitt Farm Committee and 1-NSCLA. All 7 are also members of the POCD Steering Committee). Juliet Leeming, the Town Planner/ZEO was also in attendance. The two sessions were facilitated by Peter Bogoian, Elaine Boissevain and Juliet Leeming.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

Residents and town officials/commission members both have difficulty determining what uses/businesses would work well in NS and why. Is our lack of commercial development simply a matter of population density or a lack of infrastructure (namely water and sewer), or does it stem from North Stonington's lingering reputation of being business unfriendly? Some feel we have too many small scattered commercial zones and that many prime parcels are effectively unavailable due to their ownership status. There are some who feel that their taxes are not too high and that the inconveniences of having to drive long distances for jobs or services are a welcome sacrifice for the privilege of enjoying such a high quality of life in such a pristine setting. Others would like to see their taxes reduced and worry that if the cost of living continues to climb while school enrollment and town services decline, that the currently high property values will decrease and that local businesses will not survive.

Though economic development and rural character are often considered to be in conflict with each other, there are many that believe that even large commercial developments such as a senior housing developments or large-scale retail can be located and screened in such a way as to not detract from the rural character of town.

The town must first decide whether they want development simply for tax relief (as was a cry during the recent budget meetings) or more for lifestyle improvements (or both). Residents feel NS should build on what it has and what it does well. Let growth happen organically and be in keeping with the character of town. When considering development for lifestyle improvement, a resident discussed the possibility of a new Central Town Complex with supportive services for the public. The establishment of such a complex would then attract compatible businesses that would provide much needed services to the residents. Other commercial developments mentioned ranged from having a Budweiser Farm/Brewery, to an indoor sports complex; space for business incubators or artists and more vineyards and nurseries.

Comments from both sessions strongly favored supporting agriculture though some still maintain the need to keep the tax base diverse despite our strong agricultural heritage. Farming related businesses such as a local slaughterhouse, butcher shop, and a commercial kitchen were suggested as food security (and desire to buy local) is foremost on many people's minds as transportation and food processing costs continue to climb. Farm-to-table programs and Vo-ag programs in schools must be actively pursued if the town is serious about making farming a viable industry again. Agro-tourism was also favored.

There is a strong sense of community in North Stonington. Residents are proud of their local businesses and farms. The desire to "keep it local" is strong. The desire to retain the rural character and good schools is equally as strong. There are many that feel we can have economic development and still maintain our character. Many feel that the addition of sewers along the I95 corridor or even up to the Rotary is not seen as a threat to the overall character of town and that it would remove one of the main obstacles to businesses locating in town. Appropriate growth in the appropriate areas with the appropriate design and site controls is favored by many as a way to reduce the growing tax burden.

The three main paths to economic development that emerged were investing in the necessary infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, schools, fire, police, etc.) as a means to attract investment, and provide more convenient access to goods and services for residents while also relieving some of their tax burden. Alternatively (or perhaps additionally), the town could pursue one large tax generator like a senior housing complex and hope that smaller supportive businesses would also locate in town such as more doctor's offices, a pharmacy, senior transportation service etc.. In keeping with the desire to retain the rural character and to support our agricultural heritage, the town could focus on bringing farming back to the schools and seek to attract uses that would support local farms by enabling them to process and sell their products more cost effectively in the local area.

Some additional summarizing statements:

The town should not be aggressive in economic development simply for tax relief. Lifestyle improvement (jobs and services) and maintaining a high quality of life are just as important.

Accentuate the positives in town and look to the future.... Leave the past behind.

Capitalize on what we have now that we like and that we feel is working (cottage industries, farming, rural charm), and invest in the town (schools and services). Sustain farming and encourage businesses that are symbiotic with the ones already here.

Make it possible for kids and seniors to stay in town – provide affordable housing and jobs and transportation for the elderly.

Allow large-scale development if it can still be in keeping with the character of town. Don't allow Rte 2 to become "Anywhere USA." The right businesses could benefit the residents in town while maintaining the character and quality of life.

SESSION 2: RURAL CHARACTER

The following is a summary of the second two sessions held on October 24th and October 27th on the topic of **Rural Character**.

A total of 23 residents attended the sessions. 11 of the 23 were members of a NS Commission or Committee (1- EDC, 1- ZBA, 3-PZC, 2-CC, 1 – NSAHC, 1- Hewitt Farm Committee and 1-NSCLA. 9 of the 11 are also members of the POCD Steering Committee). Juliet Leeming, the Town Planner/ZEO was also in attendance. The two sessions were facilitated by Julie Lanier, Belinda Learned and Juliet Leeming.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

When residents think of the word “rural” and of what “rural character” means to them, things like farms, dark skies, peace and quiet, narrow dirt roads, open space, lakes and streams, and stone walls come to mind. To most, rural means a smaller population spread out on large lots. There can be tasteful commercial developments, but “cottage industries” or small local businesses would be more the norm. Rural means strong community and a slightly slower pace; animals and tractors on the roads; wildlife and open fields; trees; historic landmarks; old houses and solitude; and no traffic. Residents of a rural community should expect to have to drive more than 20 minutes to get to work or buy groceries. They expect less crime than in more suburban or urban communities and also don’t expect to have all of the services those types of communities have. The schools are small and there are no sewers in town.

One resident captured what rural meant to him well: **“I like to feel like I live in Vermont, but don’t have to drive three hours to get there!”**

When these residents were asked what suburban meant to them a different picture emerged. A suburban community has mini-malls and shopping centers, more traffic and a denser population. The lots aren’t as big or spread out. You would see more defined neighborhoods that housed professional people. Suburban means more available jobs and greater wealth. Visions of loud children, soccer moms, SUVs, vinyl siding, fences and large manicured lawns were expressed. In suburbia, neighbors know each other and are friendly. There are good schools, restaurants, more businesses, stop lights, more traffic. There is also less privacy, no farms and some suggested that there was a lack of culture, more stress and a sense of conformity. Suburban communities had healthcare facilities, public transportation, public services, civic buildings/museums, and of course Wal-Mart!

When one group was asked to identify the characteristics of a suburban community that they felt they would like to see in NS – or perhaps felt were characteristics of NS now and worthy of protection- they identified greater wealth, friendly, professional people, restaurants and local businesses, biking and hiking friendly, civic buildings/museums, more recreational activity, good schools and public services. Several people also indicated that clustered shopping centers, public transportation, healthcare facilities, shorter commuting times, more jobs and multi-family apartments would be suitable for NS or still desirable in a rural community. Other cross-over characteristics were wide roads and sidewalks as these were desirable for NS to allow for safer walking and biking.

What balance can we achieve between economic development and preserving rural character? Is the key to this scale of development? Location? Architectural style? One suggested that to avoid major negative reactions to planned economic growth, scale and selectivity must be primary considerations. It has now been suggested more than once that what NS needs is “one big thing” instead of many little businesses cluttering up the landscape. This “one thing” could be a Stoneridge type development or a bio-tech facility or a large greenhouse facility. Some were concerned about putting all our eggs into one basket – siting Pfizer as an example of what can go wrong with that.

“**Everybody has to give**” – on resident said. She was concerned that if residential taxes continued to rise, property values would actually fall as the properties would be harder to sell (towns with high taxes and few services can be unpopular for those looking for homes). Another questioned whether or not our taxes were in fact too high.

The themes of self-sustainability and self preserving came up often. One pointed out the fact that our Geography was in fact self-preserving.

Discussion centering on development:

I think it is safe to say that most if not all in NS want to **avoid looking like Rte. 1 in Groton**. Residents said that good design, buffering, and tasteful creative signage would go a long way. People prefer a local hardware store to a Home Depot and want to get back to the way of life that comes with a real village center (post office, café, gathering place). The idea of a small business park was voiced as well as focusing on businesses that would support a “rural way of life.” The idea of sewers were not popular with this group.

Create a **tasteful shopping center that is itself a destination** – an activity center – to attract people. The center would be advertised as a whole avoiding the need for greater visibility on the road and more signage. Some felt that places like Holly green did not need to be so visible as people know that it is there and what businesses are there... and that they don’t rely on capturing passing traffic. Others felt that NS does not have the density to support centers like this and that businesses do in fact rely on the passing traffic and need to be visible to survive in this economic climate.

Highway Commercial area is too overgrown. The vacant properties need to be re-used and made more visible from the highway.

One suggested that we **need a central place in town** with a year round farmers market or co-op, and a place for artists to sell their wares. Something like this would need a pool of investors to make it happen (i.e. Angel Investors). Another suggested the need for a “new village” or town complex.... And that a new restaurant was **needed** to provide a **gathering place in the village again**.

One stated and most agreed that when combining rural character and economic development we need to **focus on what is unique about our community and build on that**. An example of this taken a little further was the concept of food security and the abundance of water in NS. NS is an agricultural town and the trends in the country are moving towards greater local food production and consumption. NS

should really encourage farming – use its agricultural roots to build an economic web to in turn build the community.

Many young people are **trying to “get back to the land”** and are looking to start small niche-farms. Large farms are too expensive to purchase and maintain. The number of farms in NS is declining and though we all may want NS to remain a farming town, it may not (example being Farmington CT). **Change is inevitable.** Some felt that as the farms started disappearing, we should try hard to preserve some of the land as open space in order to preserve our rural character and avoid development on the farmland. One suggested that young people are too concerned with the economy of the past ten years and should be thinking hard about the economy of the next ten years!

Another pointed out that we can't sit here being dreamers! People ultimately act in their own self interest. If they can't afford to farm, they may opt to sell the land to a developer for a profit rather than place it in permanent protection. **If we want to protect the farms to preserve our rural character, then we need more businesses to support farming** – i.e. a slaughterhouse, feed store, a vet, or something like a culinary institute with a farm-to-table program. Farming also needs to be included in school programs (i.e. Vo-Ag). There was discussion about a small business-style incubator program based on agriculture and sustainability. Essentially, the town needs to come up with a viable vision for supporting farming – then find a person or group to champion that vision and move us towards our goal.

With respect to the water resources: NS could sell water or simply use the fact that they have a pristine watershed to their advantage when attracting visitors to town. NS's many recreational opportunities (large amounts of protected open Space, rural roads great for cyclists, and many hiking trails), opportunities for agro-tourism and abundance of natural resources can be combined into one **defining identity for town – and this will attract people and businesses.**

Some of course felt that by **attracting more people we would destroy some of the characteristics of the rural town that most enjoy** (privacy, less traffic, and unspoiled areas). More tourists may mean more trespassing onto private land and more safety issues on the roads. More visitors may lead to more traffic on Rte 2 and this may lead to increased traffic on the back roads as people would use them to avoid the traffic. Capitalizing on NS's “rural characteristics” would bring the “messy John Q public” and that we should be careful what we invite into town.

One asked: **“Is our character was for sale;** and if we invite everyone into town, would we lose this character?”

Other thoughts:

- Preserve what we have – sense of nostalgia for the past ways (village center, tradesmen working from their barns, farming, rural beauty and isolation). Re-use vacant spaces before building new buildings for economic development.
- Focus on farming – food production (greenhouses and slaughter houses) – self sustainability. Encourage new farmers – teach it in schools. “Best economic development is food production.”

- Create an image (a brand) for NS and run with it. Capitalize on our positive qualities- use them to attract visitors. Build-self-sufficiency and make our economy viable.
- Rural is what we are... but we are a part of the busy New England corridor
- The children need to get back to nature and people should be taught to garden. Support the 4-H and the Grange. Return to a rural lifestyle.

SESSION 3: OPEN SPACE:

The following is a summary of the two sessions held on November 5th and 10th on the topic of Open Space.

A total of 21 residents attended the sessions. Eight of the 21 were members of a NS Commission or Committee (1- EDC, 1-PZC, 1- Hewitt Farm Committee and 1-NSAHC, 2-CC. Members of the NSCLA and Avalonia were also present. All 7 are also members of the POCD Steering Committee). Juliet Leeming, the Town Planner/ZEO was also in attendance. The two sessions were facilitated by Bill Ricker.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

North Stonington has a tremendous amount of “undeveloped land” some of which is protected as open space in perpetuity (Land Trust holdings, CE’s), some that is temporarily protected as open space (PA 490 farms and forests, State Forests), and some that is not protected at all (excess residential land, vacant parcels). The goal of the Town is to determine the right balance between facilitating or allowing the development of undeveloped land for commercial uses or housing and preserving undeveloped land as permanently protected Open Space – keeping in mind the amount of Open Space that already exists – though not permanently protected.

Currently, 51% of the Town is considered Open Space of some kind. The Town holds title to 9 Open Space parcels, there are 16 private Conservation Easements; 3 private land trusts that own many parcels; and a portion of Patchaug State Forest is in NS. Included in this 51% are farm and forest lands temporarily protected under PA490 and 10mil.

First thing that needs to be done is to clearly define Open Space. There are several kinds and each with varying degrees of protection. Some define it as land that is protected and usually open for public use. The state defines open Space as more purposeful with no requirement that it be accessible by the public. Farmland or land left in its natural state is considered open space to the State. In North Stonington we have several types of open Space:

TYPE OF OPEN SPACE	EXAMPLES	CURRENT ACREAGE
PROTECTED OPEN SPACE	State Owned Development Rights (or TDR)	426.57
	Conservation Easements/other deed restrictions and Set aside Open Space per Subdivision Approval	1614.26
	Land owned by Avalonia, NSCLA	573.96
	Unbuildable land (Wetlands, FEMA Flood Zone – still need accurate total)	7022
	*Land Owned by Nature Conservancy	135.13

	*Town Owned parcels	384.75
PURPOSEFUL/PERCEIVED OPEN SPACE	*Farmland (PA490 and 10 Mil)	5473
	*Forest (PA 490) – not including State Forest	6235
	Mixed Farm and Forest	2270
	*“remaining land” or excess land	??
ACTIVE AND PASSIVE PUBLIC RECREATIONAL AREAS	State Parks/Forests	1368
	*Municipal Recreational Areas (i.e. Hewitt Farm, recreational Facility, school fields)	58
	Private recreational facilities and Areas (Little League, Summer Camps)	1315

State Definition of Open Space:

(CGS Section 12-107b(c)): “The term ‘open space land’ means any area of land, including forest land, land designated as wetland under section 22a-30 and not excluding farm land, the preservation or restriction of the use of which would (1) maintain and enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources, (2) protect natural streams or water supply, (3) promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes, (4) enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open spaces, (5) enhance public recreation opportunities, (6) preserve historic sites or (7) promote orderly urban or suburban development.”

Van Brown submitted information about what a farm is – and that farms are considered open space.

This definition clearly does not assume that Open Space is land that is permanently protected. NS may choose to define it that way, but for now, I think it is important to recognize that there are many types of open space each serving an important purpose whether it be to provide wildlife habitats, provide flood control, provide recreational and educational opportunities for the public, to protect a view shed or to preserve rural character. Our goals in the POCD and PCRL must be clear. If our goal is to preserve open space in general; then we can seek anything on the list above. If our goal is to designate (acquire) more of our existing undeveloped land as “protected” open Space, then our actions will be different.

Some strategies:

- Create meaningful corridors (Concentrate on connecting corridors and understanding the utilization of all types of open space and how they can work together to create these corridors.
- Promote purchase of development rights and permanent Conservation Easements
- Preserve farmlands and forests (under PA 490, 10 mil or permanently)
- Keep 2 acre Zoning, Minimum buildable area and frontage requirements

- Encourage developers to utilize the “fee in lieu of” provision instead of setting aside random bits of open space – and only accept meaningful set-aside areas
- Don’t expand commercial areas
- Focus on the existing (and future)goals of PCRL

Purpose of Open Space:

- Provide wildlife corridors
- Protects and enhances rural character
- Greater Quality of Life for residents
- Provides passive recreational activities and gets people in touch with their natural surroundings
- Good for the economy – attracts visitors, no tax burden (though property doesn’t generate taxes either and can cost tax dollars to properly maintain it – i.e. Forest management)

During both sessions, many opposing views were voiced. There seemed to be a sentiment that the Town was not a good steward of Open Space and that OS should be owned by land trusts whenever possible. This would offer the most protection. Some also felt that OS was not for the public to use. Some think we have too much; others not enough. Some think encouraging farming is the way to preserve open space; others think farming can sometimes produce waste that is bad for the environment. Everybody seemed to agree that the POCD should encourage the preservation of OS. People come here due to rural character, Open Space adds a lot to our environment & reason people move here.

How do we achieve this goal of acquiring more protected open space? Should the Town be spending money on this? Some felt that there simply wasn’t enough money in the budget to be buying open space and that the Town shouldn’t be doing that at all, it should be the Land trusts. If there is no money, how do we get people to donate or permanently restrict their land? How do we get people to be excited about protecting their land?

Another question raised was whether or not protected Open Space is a “net loss” for the town? Generally, it is not. Even though the land may be “off the tax rolls,” OS requires few municipal services unlike housing and some commercial development. Again the question of balance came up. Do we want a ghost town full of open space or do we want a more vital community with a good mix of people (paying taxes), housing, commercial and light industrial development as well as all types of open space? One suggested that we as a town figure out what our maximum desired build out should be and that we work backwards from there.

Some not satisfied with the mantra “we like it the way it is” recognizing that change is inevitable. NS has gone through many changes over the years and will continue to do so. We need to plan for this change rather than simply resist it. For example, many felt we could pursue a well thought out commercial entity to help the Grand List that does not require expensive infrastructure. It was noted that NS has trouble attracting quality development. Residential development (to provide tax money) can be a drain on town resources if not well thought out. Want to find tax revenue from uses that have little impact or that require little development (i.e. the gas line that runs under the road or from selling water).

Self-sufficiency: What is the perfect balance of conservation and development that will allow NS to become more self-sufficient? What does a “self-sufficient” NS look like? More farms, family compounds, wind turbines, creating a water company, solar farms? Will we like the way this looks?

Town Planner suggested that we visualize NS as one parcel to determine the opportunities and constraints with respect to what uses should go where and what areas should be preserved (much like you would when developing a parcel). Step 2 would be to determine the desired build out (as well as the potential build-out based on current POCD and Zoning regulations). What do we want our town to look like? What is important to us and (more importantly) why? Step 3: What are our main objectives and why? Examples may be:

Objective - Reason

To preserve rural character – to preserve high QOL and sense of place

To increase our tax base – to ease tax burden of residents

To create meaningful greenways/corridors – to protect natural resources, aquifer, etc.

To encourage Farming – to achieve self-sufficiency/food security and to preserve our agricultural heritage and rural character

To bring more vitality to NS – to enjoy greater QOL, enjoy more social and cultural opportunities

When determining the list of objectives thought must be given to the history and heritage of NS; the current economy and inevitable fluctuations in the global and local economies; changing demographics = changing needs; and NS’s land constraints.

With respect to possible survey questions, it would be helpful to get a sense as to why the residents want to protect OS (or why they feel we should). Is it to protect the aquifer; provide recreational opportunities; increase overall QOL; improve visual qualities; increase property values; to help us to remain special and not turn into “anywhere USA”; to protect natural resources; or to protect/preserve our rural character. It would also be helpful to know how important each reason is. The same could be asked about development. Why do we want or need development? Is it to diversify the tax base; increase tax revenues for the Town, provide more local jobs, to provide greater access to goods and services for local residents; to increase vitality; etc.?

I am not sure if either group was able to answer the question raised as to whether or not NS had enough Open Space, but I think most understood its importance as well as the need for balance.

SESSION 4: HOUSING

The following is a summary of the last two sessions held on November 12th and 17th on the topic of **Housing**.

A total of 16 residents attended the sessions. Eight of the 16 were members of a NS Commission or Committee (1- EDC, 1-PZC, 1- Hewitt Farm Committee, 4-NSAHC, and 1-CC. 6 of the 8 are also members of the POCD Steering Committee). Juliet Leeming, the Town Planner/ZEO was also in attendance. The two sessions were facilitated by Mary Ann Ricker.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

The whole issue of “housing” and “housing choice” is intertwined with many other planning issues such as economic development, open space preservation, overall vibrancy and QOL in town. Affordable Housing as an issue has to be incorporated into the Plan of Conservation and Development in a more meaningful way. Now that the concept of mixed-use is fairly well received, housing can be combined with commercial uses as well as agricultural uses. There is a great need to educate the public about what “affordable housing” actually is and what some of the different are to achieve the goal of providing more housing choice for all our residents.

Many particular concerns were discussed during the two meetings. I have categorized the issues below and provided a summary of what was discussed.

Expanding Housing Choice

Senior Housing:

2008 Housing survey and current demographic trends support the need for senior housing. The population is aging and many seniors have expressed an immediate need for alternative housing. Some seniors may want to stay close to their families (living in an in-law apartment or family compound), while others looking to downsize may like the idea of an assisted living facility with services available to address their specific needs. One pointed out that many of the area assisted living facilities are full with large waiting lists. There are non-profit developers and state grant programs designed to facilitate this type of housing. The group spoke of the need to further interview seniors to better determine their wants and needs with respect to housing.

Housing for all demographics:

In addition to the need for senior housing, the 2008 survey revealed that 346 of the respondents needed alternative housing now! Only 90 of those were seniors. Young people are also leaving town because they cannot afford to live here. There are very few rental opportunities. The group also discussed the need for workforce housing specifically mentioning the “trade parade” that takes place each morning and afternoon in some wealthier communities where the people who work in town (teachers, emergency workers, town employees etc.) cannot afford to live in the same community.

Vibrancy

A town needs people from all age and income groups to truly be vibrant. There was discussion about the need for the school to be more interactive with the community. We need to keep our youth engaged as well. In addition to the need for local jobs, and recreational and cultural opportunities, is the need for housing that is affordable. There was discussion about small villages being located throughout town with affordable housing, small commercial stores and services, on existing large parcels of land not currently being used for farming. There was also discussion about the newly acquired Wintechog Hill parcel being used for affordable housing and other uses geared to support other town goals.

Suggested methods to increase Housing Choice/Options:

- Allow family compounds
- Support the development of an appropriately sized (and designed) senior housing facility (i.e. a rural version of Stoneridge)
- Allow farm-worker housing (temporary units, or permanent worker housing)
- Allow additional housing on farms to facilitate agro-tourism
- Allow multi-family housing (small enough to be supported by well and septic system i.e. a 4plex)
- Allow residential Care Homes
- Allow residential conversions (large home split up into a 2-4 family home)
- Allow people to stay in their homes by allowing a tax abatement in exchange for deed restriction
- Encourage conservation subdivisions with small lots as a better alternative to another Kingswood Meadow Wood type development

Predatory Development (8-30g)

The State of CT currently has a law on its books that **requires** 10% of the existing housing in a municipality be “affordable” (meaning a household earning less than 60-80% of the state or area’s median income must spend no more than 30% of its income on total housing costs). If a municipality has less than the required 10%, a developer can propose a housing project without following the local zoning regulations such as dimensional requirements, setbacks, buffers, density or building character/design. Essentially, the law states that for the developer’s proposal to be rejected, the town zoning or planning commission must make a **very convincing** case that such a proposal would clearly be against public interests or somehow endanger the health or safety of the community. Towns are rarely successful in defeating this type of development. Currently, North Stonington only has 18 qualified units – or less than 1% of the required 10%. There are many naturally occurring affordable housing units throughout town, but they do not count in the eyes of the state unless there is a deed restriction on the unit; it was bought with a CHFA loan; or the unit was subsidized by the government (i.e. Section 8 housing). Because of our very low percentage, North Stonington is VERY vulnerable to 8-30g development (as are many rural towns). In 2007, a developer proposed to build 17, four-story apartment buildings off of Boombridge Rd. This development was rejected by PZC, but likely would have been approved if the developer had pursued the appeal. The downturn in the economy essentially saved the Town from the Garden Court development.

There was a lot of discussion about getting the State to change the statute itself as it is unfair to small rural towns that do not have the infrastructure to support multi-family developments (an easy way to get a lot of affordable units). Many would like the State to recognize the “naturally occurring” affordable units that already exist in town. There was debate about whether it was better to try and get existing units to count or to focus on building new units that would be deed restricted.

One suggestion that was offered in the 2008 Housing report was to allow tax abatements for certain units which would then count as a “subsidy” and therefore be considered as a “qualified unit” and count towards the required 10% for as long as the tax abatement is in place – “deed recognition” vs “deed restriction”- This was seen as an alternative to the required deed restriction option as the restriction can put the owner at a financial disadvantage when he/she decides to sell. Another suggestion has been to require that all new housing developments above a certain size deed restrict a portion of the units (minimum of 10%). This is known as Inclusionary Zoning. This would provide some affordable housing options for residents while not decreasing the percentage of affordable units required by the State.

The group discussed “friendly 8-30g” developments whereby a town works with the developer to design an affordable housing development in order that it be in keeping with the character of town as much as possible. The Meadow Court development proposed on Rte 2 is an example of such a development.

The town needs to be proactive. Since the threat of Garden Court, the town established the Affordable housing Steering Committee and then the formal NSAHC that exists today. The new housing Plan is near completion and the Commission members are continually working to educate the public and to find ways to expand housing choice in town. Many felt there should be a line-item in the budget for housing similar to the line item for acquiring open space. This money could come from many sources such as the sale of a town-owned unit, fee-in lieu of providing affordable units in a new development, purchase of development rights, etc.

Educating the Public:

Facilitators of the discussion emphasized that affordable housing is NOT the same as low-income housing and that this misperception needed to change. Many people would qualify for this type of housing (teachers, firemen, EMTs, town-employees, hospitality workers etc.) A complimentary point was raised that not all people who qualify for affordable housing require transportation services or other public assistance. Most teachers, firemen, town hall employees and seniors all drive! Having affordable units in town will not necessarily mean a drain on town resources to provide services. The housing that the NSAHC seeks to provide is for a wide range of income and age groups. It must be shown that not all affordable housing developments equal a net loss for the town. There is great value in providing units to get to the required 10% if only to avoid something like a Garden Court. If an affordable housing development is done correctly with the assistance of the town, or planned and designed by the town itself, it can contribute to the town in a positive way. The public really must be educated as to the dangers of predatory development (8-30g). Many feel that the whole character of town would have been changed if a development such as garden Court had been approved.

NIMBY vs JIMBY – The poor economy has given us a moratorium to think and to change our mindset about housing. Many are less concerned about profit and NIMBYism and more concerned about providing housing for the many people in need. There are many non-profit groups willing to build affordable units...again... the Town needs to be proactive. Some people might be fine with a more dense neighborhood (pocket neighborhood – or village) right in their back yard (JIMBY folks).

We are held hostage by the 20% who vote in this town. We need to reach out to and hear from the other 80% - especially the younger generation. One suggested that perhaps people are simply happy with the status quo and that is why they do not attend meetings and workshops.