

5. Land Use and Zoning

North Stonington contains 35,179 acres of land that is broken down into the following categories of land uses. Please note that some parcels have many different uses associated with them. The acreage for this map was calculated based on the **primary use** of the entire parcel rather than by calculating the acreage attributed to **each separate use** on the parcel. The acreages attributed here for Open Space and Agriculture may differ from those shown in other charts within this plan as they may not be considered the primary use of the parcel. The *Mixed Use Rural* and *Mixed Use Urban* categories were added to try and account for this occurrence of multiple uses per parcel. Additionally, there are parcels whose boundaries are currently being disputed which accounts for some discrepancy in the total land area of North Stonington.

The currently existing land uses and associated acreages are as follows:

Land Use Categories	Acres	% Total	Land Use Categories	Acres	% Total
Low and Very Low Residential Density: Any parcel with density less than one unit per acre	6,150.8	17.5	Transportation, Communication and Utility (TCU): Highways, roads, public and semi-public facilities providing services such as transportation, communications, gas, electricity and water	1,045.0	3.0
Medium to High Density Residential: Any parcel with a density greater than one unit per acre	410.3	1.2	Institutional: Churches, schools, municipal facilities, non-profit organizations, governmental buildings	210.7	.60
Mixed Use Urban: Residential and commercial (i.e. daycare or kennel with associated SFR)	103.7	.29	Native American Tribal Reservation: MPTN and EPTN reservation land	204.3	.58
Mixed Use Rural: Combined residential and farm/forest designation on one parcel or combined commercial and agricultural use (i.e. the Winery)	6,788.1	19.3	Dedicated Open Space and Cemeteries: public or private	995.3	2.8
Commercial: Retail, offices, commercial services, etc. (excludes industrial uses, active recreation, agriculture, and mixed use (MU))	152.2	.43	Active/passive Recreation: Public and private parks, State forests, playgrounds, golf courses, other outdoor facilities	5,233.3	14.9
Industrial Intensive: Manufacturing, warehousing, storage areas	15.4	.04	Agriculture: Cropland, orchards, tree farms, vineyards, pastures, farm and forest only – no SFR. State Purchased Development Rights	9,140.5	26.0
Industrial Extractive: Mining and sand and gravel operations	95.9	.27	Undeveloped: Vacant land. (Former gravel banks included here)	4,424.9	12.6

Figure 4 - Source: North Stonington GIS Data and 2012 Assessor Data



North Stonington
Connecticut

Current Land Use Map

Parcel Lines To
7/1/2013

Land Use

Developed Land

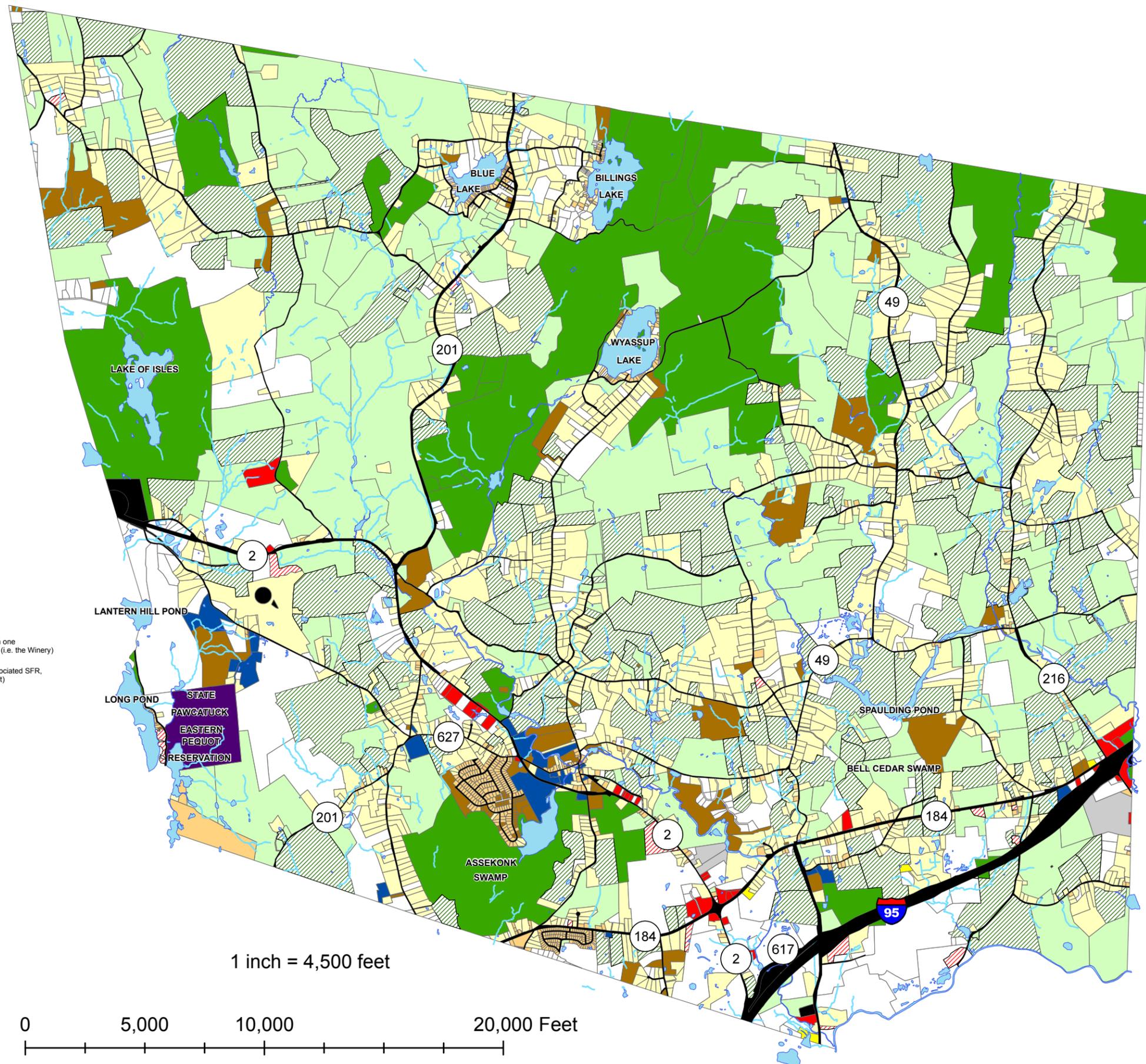
- Commercial
- Industrial Extractive
- Industrial Intensive
- Institutional
- Low and Very Low Residential Density
- Medium to High Density Residential
- Mixed Use Rural- Combined residential and farm/forest designation on one parcel or combined commercial and agricultural use (i.e. the Winery)
- Mixed Use Urban- Residential and commercial (i.e. daycare with associated SFR, commercial business with accessory residential unit)
- Transportation, Communication and Utility

Undeveloped Land

- Agriculture
- Dedicated Open Space
- Undeveloped

Other

- Active/Passive Recreation
- Native American Tribal Reservation
- Lakes, Rivers and Ponds



The primary existing land uses are residential at nearly 39% and Agricultural at 26%. Commercial and industrial uses only make up a small fraction of the overall land use. The low percentages attributed to commercial and industrial uses are slightly misleading in that for the purposes of recognizing *all* current economic activity in town, agricultural uses, mixed-uses, and some home occupations were identified. Approximately 83% of the **non-residential/non-agricultural** parcels are vacant or underutilized and only

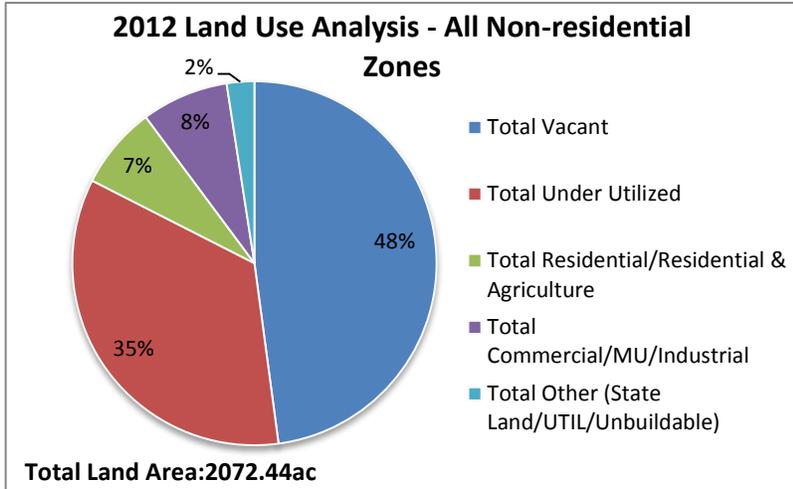


Figure 5 – Source: 2012 Assessor Data

8% are being used for actual commercial, industrial or mixed use (urban). North Stonington’s commercial and industrial zones are quite undeveloped compared to what is possible under current Zoning regulations, and could accommodate roughly 19 million additional square feet of development which, even with added sewer capacity, equates to a 30 to 40 year supply of land for development. North Stonington’s

growth has, and will likely continue to be slow and small-scale. Efforts to stimulate growth in the commercial and industrial zones must include a re-evaluation of permitted land use and permitting requirements in order to give the town greater flexibility to respond to changing economic conditions and market demand.

5.1 Transportation and Land Use

North Stonington’s land use pattern has evolved around dominant features such as the Shunock River, and major roadways. The dominant pattern is large-lot residential development consistent with the agricultural heritage; though some higher density post war housing was built in the 50’s and 60’s and concentrated in the southern portion of town adjacent to the commercial zones. This type of large-lot, low density development that is segregated from the commercial, institutional, and other land uses forces auto dependence and greatly limits the potential for and effectiveness of public transportation. There are currently only two scheduled daily Southeast Area Transit (SEAT) bus runs through North Stonington. The low density development and lack of public transportation has planning implications with respect to the mobility (access to goods and services) of seniors and people without access to or means of personal transportation. Despite the remoteness of the town, the town’s Senior Center and the nearby Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center offer door-to-door, handicapped accessible transportation to such things as doctor appointments, from Westerly to New London. These trips must be planned in advance, but once initiated, they become a regular part of many seniors’ lives helping many people to “age in place.”

5.2 Land Use and Sustainability

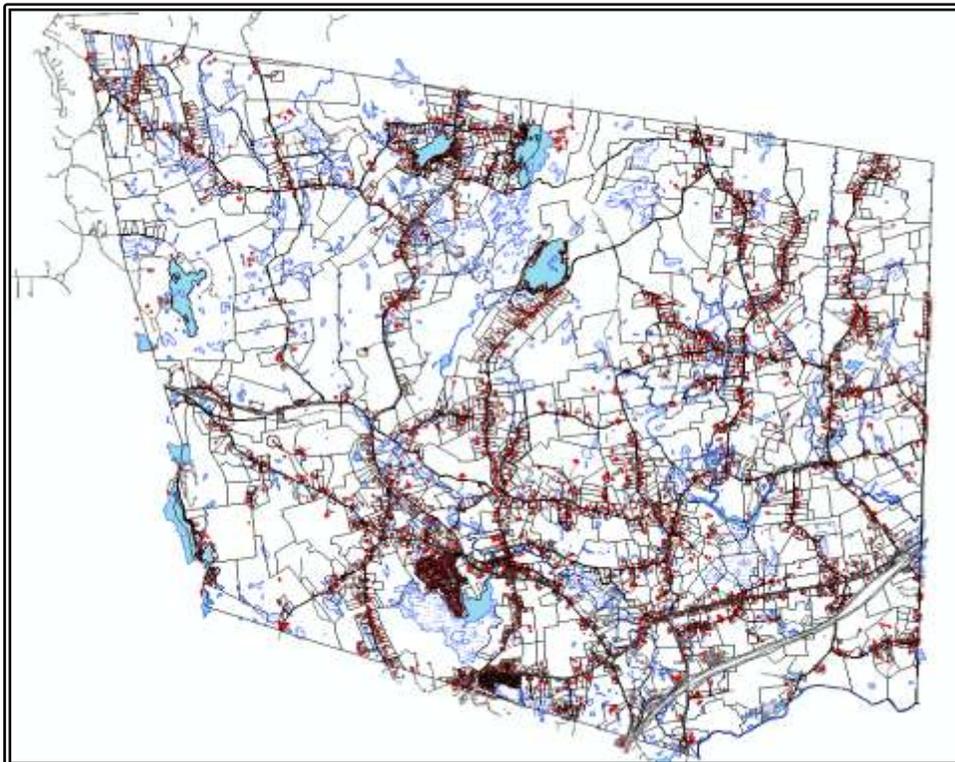
In order to better resolve conflicts between conservation efforts and economic development, as well as reduce the town’s vulnerability to natural disasters, towns must adopt a long-term perspective with

respect to sustainability. Municipalities manage land uses through both regulatory (zoning and wetlands regulations, building codes) and non-regulatory measures (incentives, location of infrastructure, design guidelines) to achieve goals such as natural resource protection and hazard mitigation, and to avoid major fiscal problems that arise from unexpected costs associated with property damage caused by hurricanes, winter storms, and flooding.

Though North Stonington has regulations in place restricting development in wetlands, flood zones and in areas with steep slopes, as well as strong stormwater management regulations, and the requirement for underground utilities in new developments, much of the early development was located within flood zones along the rivers. In 2010, along with many areas in town, the Historic Village was flooded and suffered the tragic loss of the double arched stone bridge as well as the popular Watermark Café. The cost to the town was estimated at \$563,000 an unanticipated expense in an already tight budget. The loss of the two community icons will be felt for decades to come.



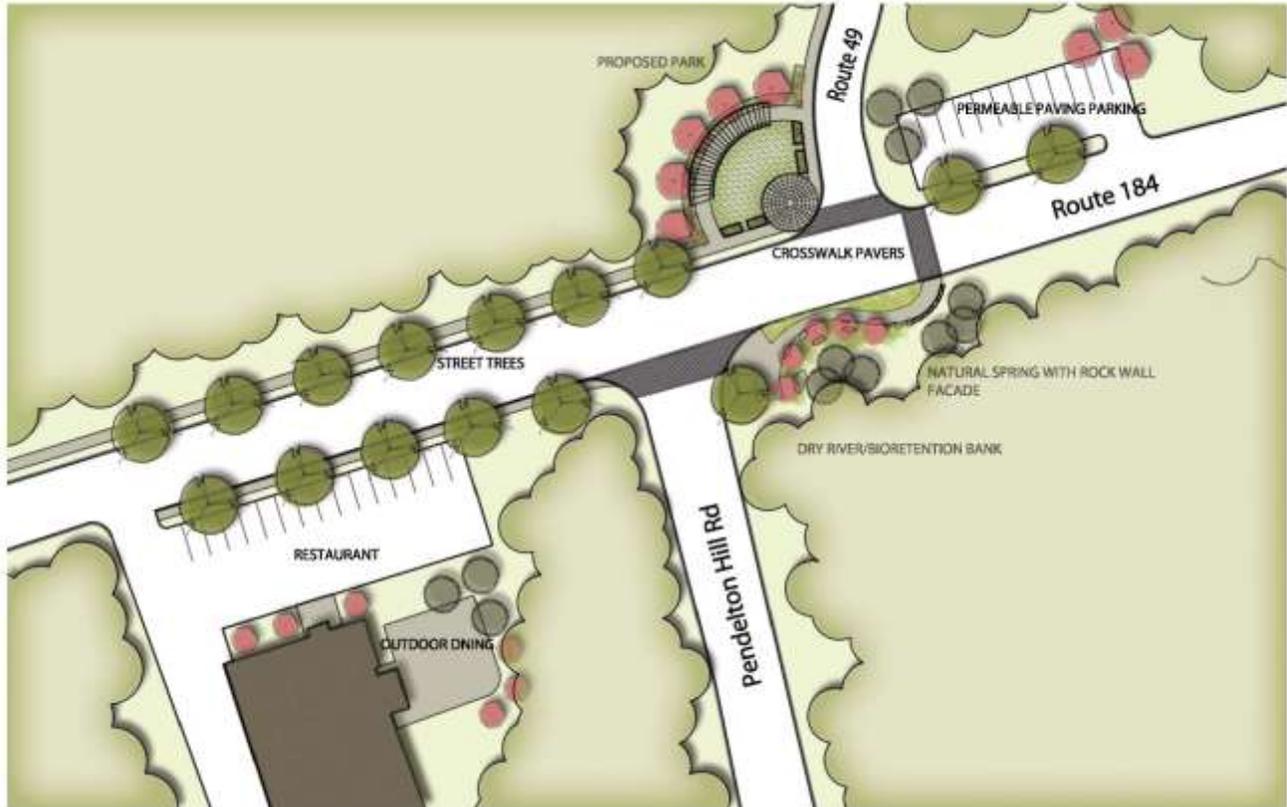
2010 Flood – Loss of the Bridge and Watermark Cafe



Sprawling post WWII development patterns in the region continue partly because of outdated zoning regulations (and land use theory) that actually perpetuate the problem. North Stonington is only “sprawling” in so far as it has a large land area, but has been fortunate in that Route 2 and 184 have remained relatively undeveloped with very few strip malls as is common

Current Settlement Pattern. Source North Stonington GIS

along major routes in surrounding towns. Public input gathered for the POCD indicated some support for sustainable land use such as mixed use in and around the existing non-residential zones, promoting redevelopment of existing vacant buildings; providing a range of housing choices for all incomes and all stages of life; preserving open space, farmlands, and environmentally sensitive areas; as well as encouraging compatible development that would stimulate community pride and offer residents a high quality of life and a strong sense of place.



Rendering depicts conceptual planned improvements to (former) Gary's Restaurant site and intersection of Routes 49 and 184. Improvements include a small pocket park, and landscaped area and rock wall facade around the natural spring, and a small parking area. Crosswalk pavers would connect the restaurant, spring, park and parking area and would give the important intersection new life. This intersection marks the beginning of the scenic portion of Pendleton Hill Road and functions as one of the gateways to North Stonington from Exit 92. Rendering by Andrea Fossa, Landscape Architect.

North Stonington must not look at land use as simply something the Planning and Zoning Commission does to manage the development of land. It must instead recognize it as part of a more inclusive planning process whereby the *community* determines how to maintain itself as vibrant, resilient, and fiscally sound despite the uncertainties of the future. The task is to utilize what is available to create places where people will want to live and visit and where businesses will want to locate while preserving the assets that have helped the town remain unique.

The recommended changes to the zoning regulations include adding some flexibility in the permitted land uses. The added flexibility coupled with a more streamlined permitting process will hopefully allow for some needed creativity in order to meet the residents' desires for compatible, well designed commercial uses and the expansion of existing successful businesses.

5.3 Zoning

Planning, Zoning, Conservation, and Development are all part of a complex system of land use. The aim of a land use system is to effectively and efficiently plan for the use of land and to regulate such use of land in a way that balances the social, economic, and environmental needs of the community. Ten zoning districts, four overlay areas and one floating zone have been established as part of this land use process.

A land use consultant was hired to review the town's zoning regulations and zoning districts and provide recommendations with the end goal of creating regulations that would encourage investment in the community. The consultant found that the number of zoning districts was excessive for the size and general character of the community and that based on the permitted uses, the commercial and industrial districts send mixed messages as to what kind of districts they are.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should create a speculative master plan for the Commercial Development, Office research, Village Commercial 1 and Industrial Zones that includes specifications and regulations to minimize impacts to Route 2, to pool water and sewer resources, and to treat the Shunock River as an amenity. These plans should also examine the need for infrastructure. Additional master plans should be created for the underutilized Highway Commercial and Commercial 2 Zones. The process would make it clear where the zones might be consolidated, what infrastructure is needed, and what kinds of businesses are desirable. It would then be possible to consider allowing businesses that conform /buy in to the plan to be allowed by right rather than by special permit.

The Commission should consider the addition of the following uses felt to be in keeping with the character of town while fulfilling an identified community need:

- **Senior Housing and Micro-assisted Living Facilities**
- **Incentive Housing Zones**
- **Conservation Subdivisions**
- **Mixed-Use (residential over commercial)**
- **Commercial Greenhouses**
- **Farm-worker Housing**
- **Small Scale Multi-family Housing (3-5 Unit)**

Zoning Districts:

High Density Residential (R-40)

Medium Density Residential (R-60)

Rural Residential

Preservation District (R-80)

Commercial District 1 (C1)

Commercial District 2 (C2)

(C separated into C1 & C2 2008)

Village Commercial District

(VC) *(Changed from HC 2008)*

Highway Commercial District

(HC)

Commercial Development

District (CD) *(2005)*

Office Research District (OR)

Overlay Areas:

Village Preservation Overlay Area

Aquifer Protection Overlay Area

Seasonal Use Overlay Area

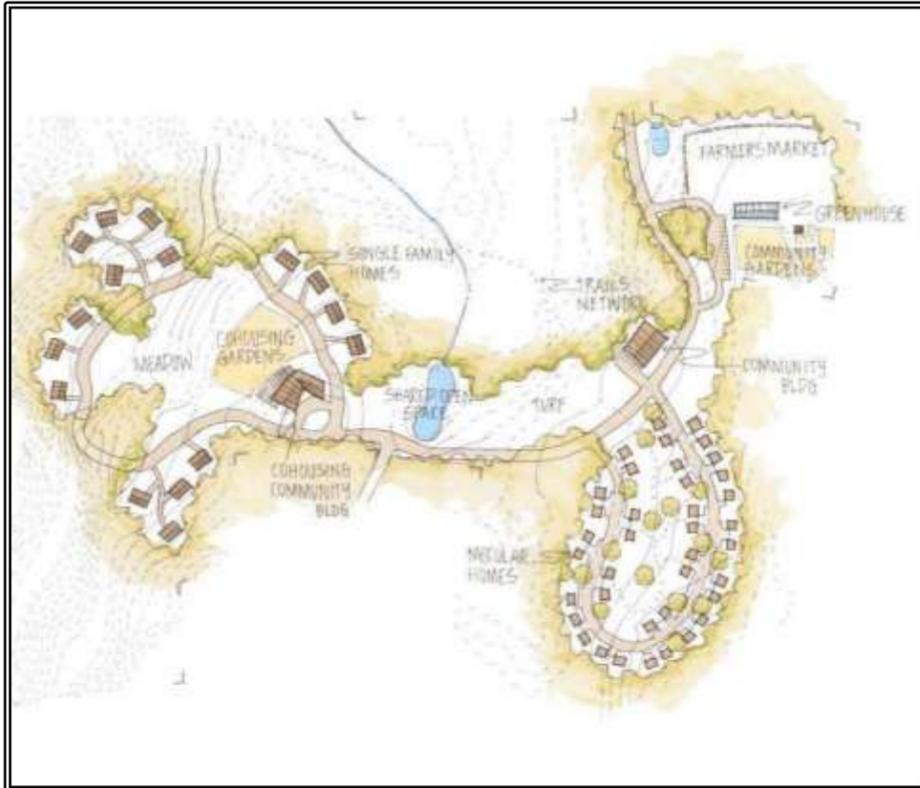
Affordable Housing Overlay Area –Meadow Court *(2010)*

Floating Zones:

New England Village Special Design District *(2007)*

Nearly 95% of the total acreage of North Stonington is zoned for residential use leaving just under 6% for commercial and industrial uses. Select commercial and industrial uses including churches, daycares, kennels, bed and breakfast establishments, farming, golf courses, home occupations and excavation are permitted in residential zones.

Planning Opportunity Areas



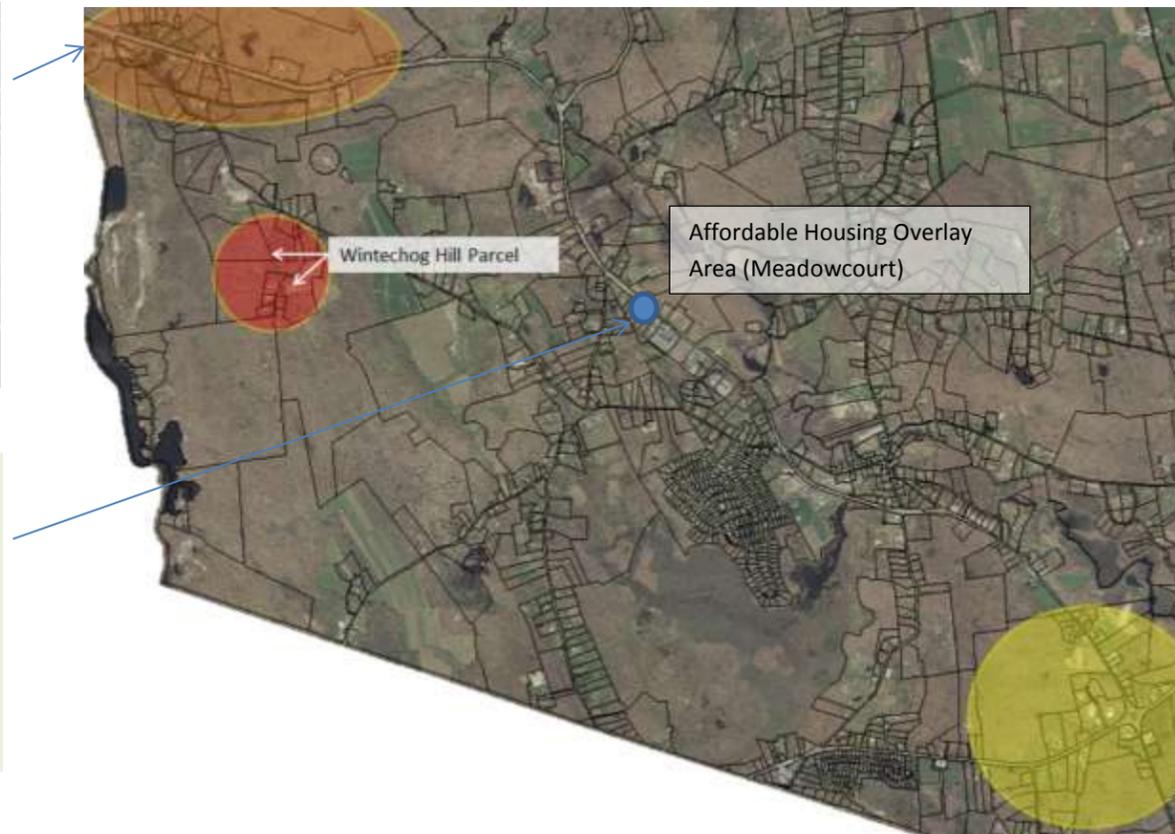
Wintechog Hill Parcel: The town recently acquired 108 acres off Wintechog Hill Road. Possible uses for the parcel include open space preservation and housing or a creative combination of both utilizing a conservation subdivision design. In 2012, the UCONN Landscape Architecture class was hired to develop possible concept plans for the parcel incorporating affordable housing, agricultural use, and the preservation of a significant amount of open space for passive recreation. Several creative designs were submitted including the one illustrated here. The NSAHC received a \$20,000 grant through the Housing for Economic Growth Program for pre-development costs associated with establishing incentive housing zones and will be used to investigate the feasibility of wells and sewage disposal systems on this property. (Left) Nicole Seelbach -Student Concept 1: 16 single family units; 38 single story studio modular homes; community gardens, green house, and farmers market; and 82 acres of open space. (Right) Andrea Fossa - Student Concept 2: 20 duplex houses on 4 acres; 15 acres mixed use including arts center, community farm store and greenhouse; and 75 acres of open space.



Example of Mixed Use Development



Example of a 4-unit apartment building



Mixed-use development downtown Essex, CT

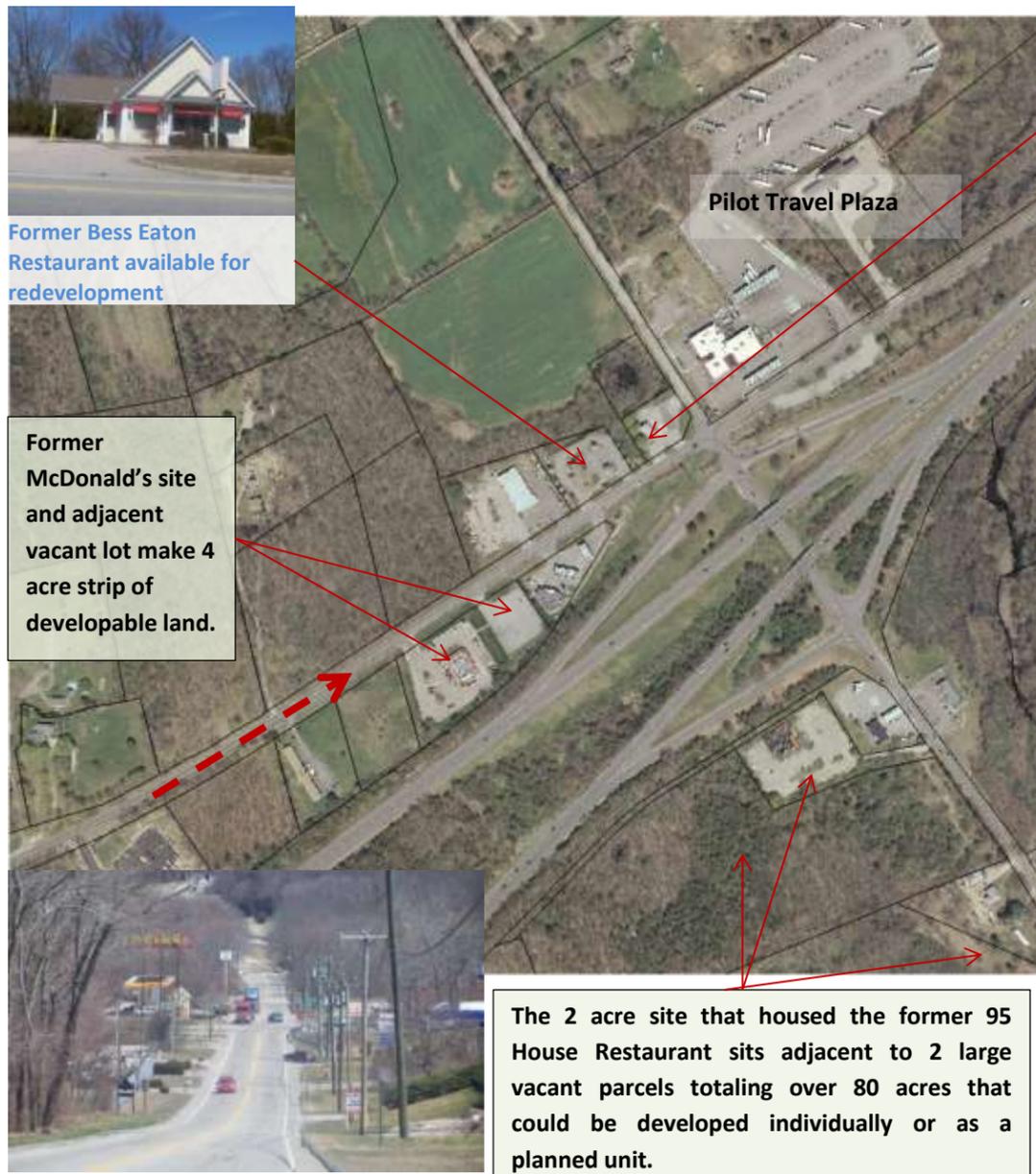


Commercial development in Haddam, CT

Other housing and planning opportunity areas were identified in the 2012 Housing Plan, and include the existing Affordable Housing Overlay Area (Meadow Court) along Route 2 and locations within the commercial zones near the rotary and along the western end of Rte. 2 that may allow for the possibility of mixed use (residential above commercial) and small-scale multi-family units.

Planning Opportunity Areas

The Exit 93 Interchange Area is essentially the gateway to Connecticut from Rhode Island. The access to and from I-95 is ideal and pre-existing signage allows great visibility to passing travelers. There are multiple vacant and underutilized sites that could be transformed into an area thriving with restaurants, hotels and attractive commercial development geared toward the passing travelers and tourists as well as for residents in the Clarks Falls area. This area is not in the aquifer protection overlay area, thus giving greater flexibility in types of permitted uses. This area's proximity to other area attractions and location along the I-95 corridor make it ideal for more creative hospitality uses such as a hotel with associated indoor family entertainment and certain chain family-style restaurants. Direct access on and off the highway would reduce potential traffic impacts from the higher impact uses.



Former Bess Eaton Restaurant available for redevelopment

Former McDonald's site and adjacent vacant lot make 4 acre strip of developable land.

The 2 acre site that housed the former 95 House Restaurant sits adjacent to 2 large vacant parcels totaling over 80 acres that could be developed individually or as a planned unit.

View from Rte. 184 looking toward Rhode Island.

The former gas station at 270 Clarks Falls Rd. adjacent to the travel center is currently used only seasonally for retail sale of fireworks. Rendering (below-right) depicts site redeveloped as a year-round farm store, with food vendors and outdoor eating area. The use would be geared toward residents as well as travelers getting off at Exit 93 for a rest and a bite to eat. Pervious pavers give the feel of a grassed area rather than a parking lot and would drastically reduce the amount of pervious cover on the undersized lot. Existing sign visible from I-95.

(Upper left to right): Hope Lake Lodge & Indoor Water Park, NY Cracker-barrel restaurant. (Lower right): Barn converted to Country Inn



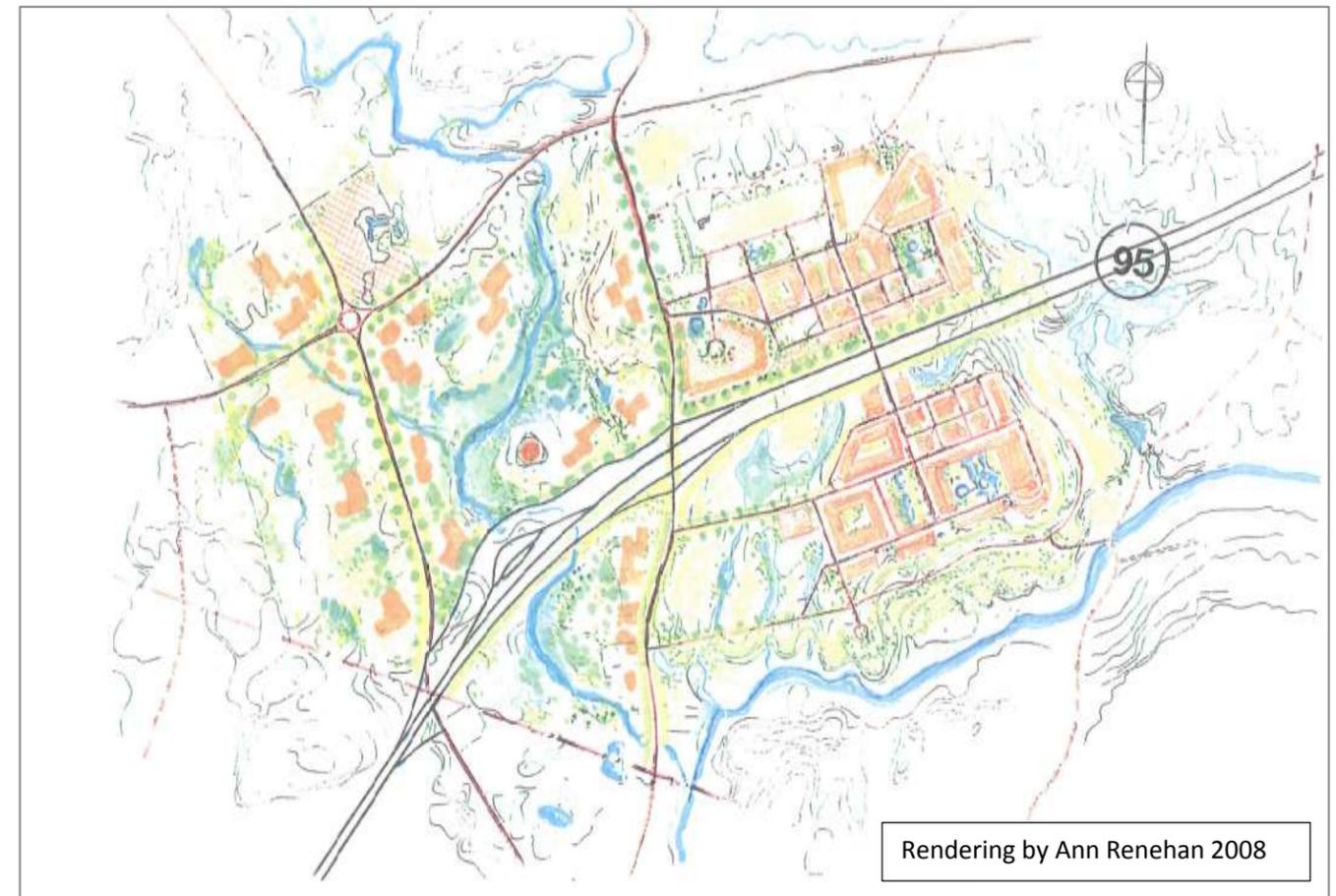
Rendering by Julia M. Leeming, Architect

Planning Opportunity Areas

The Exit 92 Interchange Area offers tremendous development and redevelopment opportunities. Route 49 forms the boundary line separating the Commercial Development Zone to the west from the Industrial Zone to the east. Future plans include upgrading the signage and landscaping at the interchange to give this gateway to North Stonington a more welcoming feel and to better direct travelers. The former Fisher Control and Romanella buildings have excellent access to the frontage road making them ideal locations for manufacturing, wholesale storage/distribution, and other uses that require easy access to the highway and where potential truck traffic would not impact the more rural roads. The entire area could be designed as a whole to incorporate mixed commercial and residential uses, and light manufacturing, while incorporating the Shunnock River as its prime amenity. The majority of available raw land for commercial and/or industrial development exists on the eastern side of Route 49 in the Industrial Zone. The vast majority of this land – over 400 acres- is owned by the Mashantucket Pequot tribal Nation and could be planned as a unit or with a specific cluster of related uses or industry in mind.



Future commercial development should highlight the Shunnock River as an amenity and could incorporate recreational uses into a master design. Photos : Retail shopping and recreation along river in Estes Park, Co (Left) ; bike trail bridge over the Farmington River in CT (Middle); and restaurants along the Pawcatuck River in Westerly RI (Right).



Desired characteristics in the Exit 92 commercial area include 2-3 story mixed use, office, restaurant or retail with traditional New England style architecture or context sensitive design. The Shunnock River should be highlighted as central amenity with recreational use incorporated into designs. Commercial areas should be connected via walking or biking trails as well as access roads.

Interest in clean energy technology might introduce the opportunity for light industrial use in the Industrial Zone. This area can accommodate several million square feet of new development but should protect the river as an important amenity.

Planning Opportunity Areas

The Commercial 2 Zone lies just outside of the historic village and resembles typical isolated “strip mall” development. There are several vacant and underutilized parcels within the zone and the architecture does not blend well with the nearby historic homes or New England style architecture. The former Chinese restaurant located on the parcel next to Green Onion Pizza was torn down in 2012 creating an opportunity to redesign the two abutting parcels as a whole. The rendering below depicts a more traditional village development with smaller detached buildings fronting a town green or courtyard— rather than the main road. As the courtyard in this instance is really a parking lot, pervious pavers could be used to give the feel of grass, rather than asphalt. The buildings to the left of Green Onion would be incorporated into the design as well creating a mini village that would become the gateway to the Historic Village just beyond. One of the three town-owned parcels that lie between Rte. 2 and Main Street across from the C2 Zone could also be incorporated into the design as a single retail establishment (i.e. antique store) and the open space at the intersection of Rte. 2 and Main Street formally landscaped as depicted in the aerial photo rendering to the right.



Aerial view of possible redevelopment of the western portion of the C2 Zone and town owned parcel to the southwest. Sidewalks would continue to the Village to link the two areas.



After



Before

View of Green Onion and vacant lot that abuts the parking lot (above) Goodies Restaurant and vacant commercial space (Below Left) - in C2 Zone. Below Right: Example of small retail store – traditional New England architecture.



Rendering by Julia M. Leeming, Architect