

8. Economic Development

Development Vision

North Stonington should deliberately encourage and/or pursue specific kinds of commercial development and concentrate them along the I-95 corridor. Residents support development that will improve the tax base, but have limited impact on resources. Residents envision a town that encourages a greater variety of housing types including mixed-use, cluster subdivisions, affordable housing, and farm worker housing. All architecture and landscaping should be consistent with the character of town.

Economic development is a continually evolving, competitive process and discipline that occurs within the greater context of a regional and global economy. The global job market, e-commerce, and



Rendering of a Lifestyle Center

search for cost savings are changing the need for space. The vitality of traditional retail space is declining as is the number of new industrial facilities that once helped broaden the tax base with little impact on services. Municipalities must have an inventory of “ready-to-go” sites, an adequate skilled labor force, a friendly business climate, and must be aggressive in their incentive packages, and quick and efficient in their permitting in order to avoid elimination during a site-selection process. A community must be *committed* to increasing economic development, and this commitment must be reflected in

its POCD and subsequent zoning regulations.

Frequently, community hesitation to economic development is a reflection of a deserved dissatisfaction with negative consequences of older projects, a distrust of the land uses system, or a fear of losing control over the rate and type of change that may accompany this development. It is, therefore, helpful to view economic development as the business of attracting appropriate investment into the community. Investment can be in the form of time, effort, or money and includes investment in residential, commercial, institutional, and/or *any other* type of land use. Viewing economic development as an investment in the community rather than just commercial or industrial growth, makes it easier to understand its place in the land use system as a whole.

Conservation and development are equally important factors of sustainability and are both part of this same land use system. They should not be viewed as separate components with dissimilar needs, goals and outcomes. **“North Stonington must be committed to progress and be willing to make strategic investments in projects or community infrastructure necessary to support company expansions and locations, with the calculated expectation that this investment will reap the jobs, tax base and quality of life improvements the community desires.”** (2012 NS Economic Development Action Plan, Garnet Consulting Services). In other words, North Stonington must provide a solid framework for growth, be confident and collaborative as a community, and proactively plan for the type and rate of change

desired. If the town is intentional in how it regulates investment, it will not compromise its commitment to conservation or its small town, rural character.

8.1 Community Survey

When residents were asked in the recent survey what the most important issues facing North Stonington were, the overwhelming answers were high taxes and lack of commercial development. 71% of the respondents wanted more commercial development in order to lower their taxes. Residents also seemed to understand the necessity of investing in infrastructure to

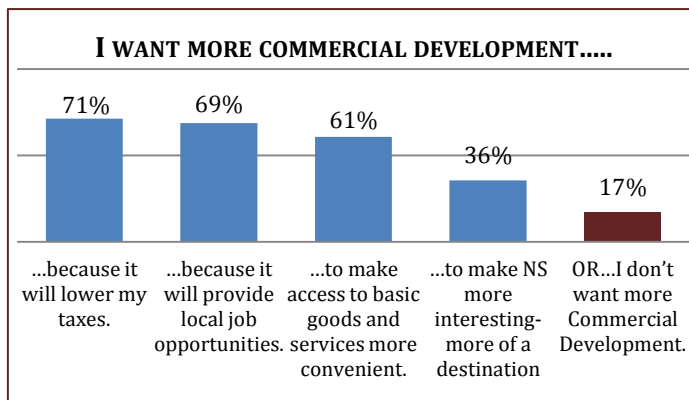


Figure 11 – Source: 2013 Community Survey

attract quality economic development and support the introduction of mixed-use development (residential units above commercial) in select areas. Based on all the public input gathered for the POCD, residents recognize the need to reduce the residential tax burden by supporting or facilitating development (or investment) in the non-residential zones, but added that the scale and appearance of any new development should be in keeping with the town's character.

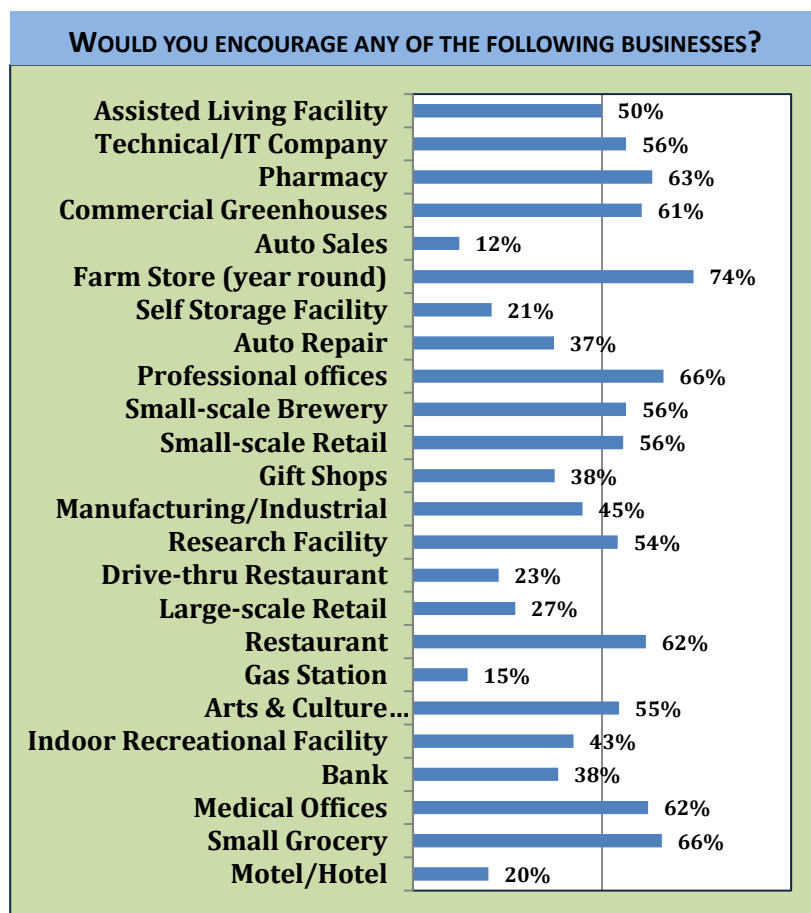


Figure 12 – Source: 2013 Community Survey



Senior Housing



Commercial Greenhouse



Farm Store

8.2 Demographic Changes

In the past decade, North Stonington's population only grew by 6.13% and experienced a shift in the distribution of age toward the 50 or older age group with noticeable declines in the primary workforce and younger groups. Thirty percent of the population is in the primary working age population of 25-49. In this same time frame, the 65 and older age group grew by 53% compared to only a 38% increase for New London County, and 46% increase for the State. Other demographic factors such as diversity, household size, and owner/renter occupancy all impact the type and likelihood of new development in town. Of particular importance are the high home values and lack of rental opportunities that effectively prevent younger people from remaining or moving into town, making it difficult to provide adequate emergency service volunteers and also decreasing our attractiveness to prospective businesses (as is further discussed in the Housing Chapter that follows).

Despite the presence of a highly skilled workforce, but consistent with regional employment changes, North Stonington's primary local employment opportunities are found within the accommodation and food service industries. Residents must therefore commute to neighboring towns to find higher paying jobs. North Stonington is however, in the enviable position of having a median household income that is well above that of the County and State, but a substantial part of the spending power associated with this income is lost because of the lack of retail or service opportunities within the town. Having more businesses in town would increase shopper convenience and help provide more commercial tax revenue for public facilities and services.

8.3 Existing Development

Representing just fewer than 6% of the town's 54.3 square miles, the town contains a total of 1,920.6 acres of land zoned for commercial and other non-residential uses. When development restrictions such as the presence of wetlands, steep slopes, required buffers, setbacks, and maximum lot coverage are factored in, the amount of developable acreage is reduced to 1,208.7 acres or just 3.5% of the town's total area. The following table gives a rough estimate of buildable acres per zone. For a more detailed discussion, please see the 2012 Economic Development Action Plan.

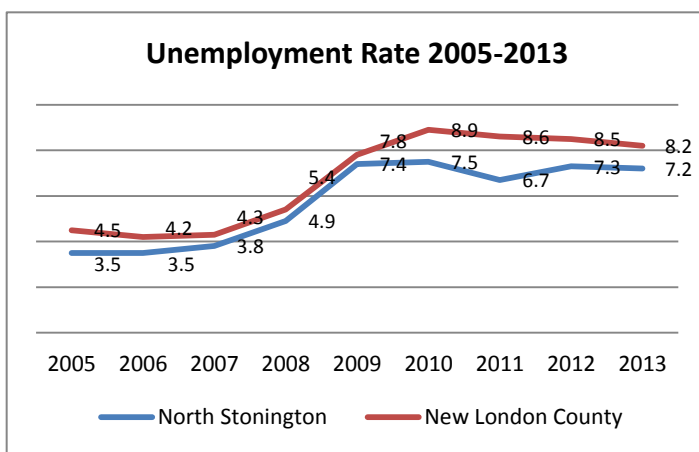


Figure 13 - Source US Census Data



Map identifying areas of restricted use in the Commercial and Industrial Zones near the Rotary

District	Total Acres	Buildable Acres	Existing Coverage (SF)	Maximum 25% Coverage (SF)	Existing % Coverage of	
					Total Acres	Buildable Acres
C1	32.8	23.1	116,468	357,192	8.14%	11.55%
C2	9.7	5.9	28,054	105,633	6.65%	10.89%
CD	433.8	259.5	179,236	4,724,082	0.95%	1.59%
HC	172.9	107.5	80,268	1,882,881	1.07%	1.71%
I (West)	323.0	163.8	10,514	3,517,470	0.07%	0.15%
I (East)	661.5	450.7	76,843	7,203,735	0.27%	0.39%
OR	251.0	172.8	106,298	2,733,390	0.97%	1.41%
VC	35.9	25.4	25,829	390,951	1.65%	2.33%
Totals	1920.6	1208.7	623,510	20,915,334	0.75%	1.18%

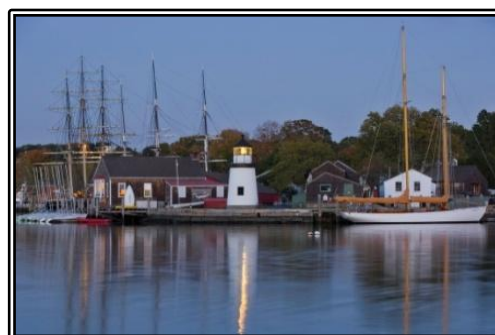
Figure 14 - Buildable Acres per Zone - Source: NS Assessor Data

8.4 Strengths and Weaknesses

As part of the process of writing the Economic Development Action Plan and this Plan of Conservation and Development, residents and town officials identified the town's primary strengths and weaknesses as a location for businesses.

Economic Strengths

- *Proximity to culture and urban-style amenities while offering a scenic rural community to live in.*
- *Proximity to I-95 (2 exits)*
- *Proximity to Boston, NYC, Providence, and Hartford*
- *Proximity to Long Island Sound*
- *Presence of cottage industries (with long history of entrepreneurialism and resiliency)*
- *Good schools and well-educated work force*
- *Large lots available*
- *Plentiful water resources*
- *Willingness to work toward achieving good balance of development and preservation of rural character*



Close proximity to Mystic Seaport Museum and Long Island Sound



Though weaknesses include a need for infrastructure and lack of shovel-ready sites, the vast amount of vacant and underutilized sites provide tremendous potential for new, well-planned, sustainable development in the majority of the commercial zones. The Planning and Zoning Commission with input from residents, stakeholders, and other boards and commissions has the opportunity to create detailed conceptual plans for the various commercial and industrial zones to determine what uses would work best, how to best utilize (or best preserve) any area amenities and resources, and to specify the desired scale and design of the desired development. Having a clear visionary plan for economic development would

make property owners more cooperative, create synergy between existing and new businesses, make technology more accessible, and venture capital more willing to support promising concepts. Planned, concentrated, economically paced development will bring social, cultural, and economic benefit to North Stonington while providing an opportunity to fulfill its conservation goals.

8.5 Summary

For North Stonington, adding to the town's Grand List to reduce the tax burden on residential tax payers is by far the dominant motivation for an enhanced economic development effort and far outweighs increasing employment opportunities (the town's unemployment rate is lower than the regional or state averages), or increasing availability of goods and services (town residents appear to be comfortable finding what they need in the nearby region). Therefore, the initiatives recommended in the 2012 Economic Development Action Plan and the strategies presented herein are aimed at the goal of making North Stonington more competitive and ready to attract business *investment* that will equate to a higher portion of local taxes being paid by businesses rather than homeowners.

Consistent with the mission and overall goals of the Economic Development Commission as well as the goals of the State Plan of Conservation and Development, North Stonington will strive to:

- *enhance its economic competitiveness and continue to create a positive business climate by working to increase developer confidence, flexibility in land use regulations, and greater predictability in the application process;*
- *expand upon its existing strengths and opportunities to provide a framework for success;*
- *be proactive, responsive and deliberate in all planning efforts to better prepare for and manage the rate, style, and amount of change;*
- *engage in careful planning that results in deliberate decisions with the help of an educated, professional staff and informed and committed resident volunteers; and*
- *maintain a diverse and vibrant community that is fiscally sustainable.*

Development will happen, therefore we must have tools in place to achieve our vision and control future growth. The town's primary tool to implement the goals of the POCD is its zoning regulations which must be designed to firmly assert the community's standards and requirements for development to ensure high quality architectural and landscape design that protects and maintains community character and adds value to the property.



A/Z Corporation on Rte. 2



Economic Activity Map

Per Assessor
Data 7/3/2013

Land Use

- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mixed Use Urban
- Other

-Other Commercial Activity includes Farms, Home Occupations, Commercial Services and Recreational Facilities with Commercial component.

Notes

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