

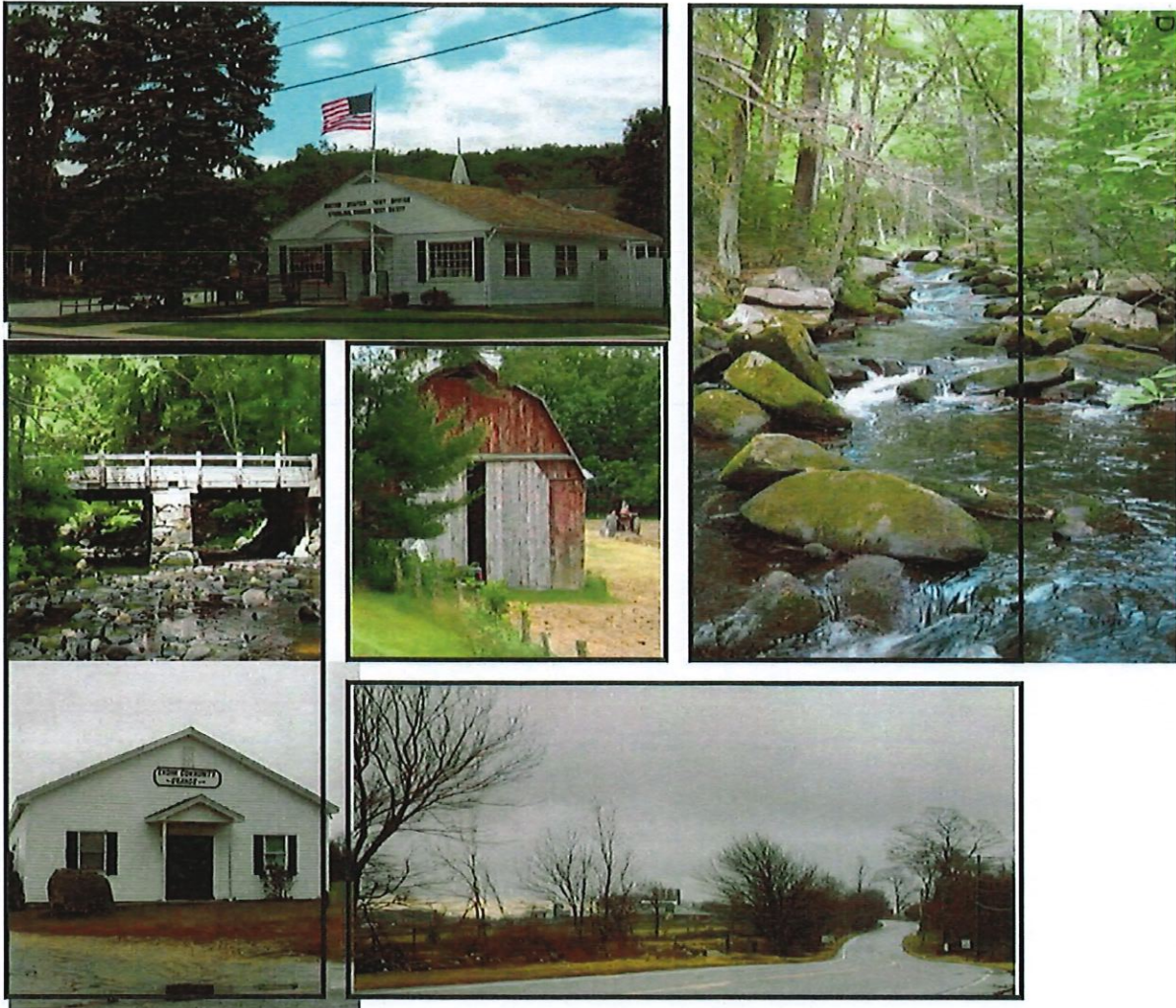
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# Sterling, Connecticut

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## 2022 Plan of Conservation & Development

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Effective Date: December 22, 2022



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# Welcome



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## Residents of Sterling, Connecticut

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The Planning Commission is pleased to submit this 2022 Plan of Conservation and Development to the Community. In Connecticut, a new or updated plan must be developed at least every ten years in accordance with Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes. This “Plan” will help guide activities of the Town through 2032.

Following a number of community workshops over the past two years, our Town Planner, worked with the Commission to develop a Plan that reflects community needs. The draft Plan will be reviewed at a public meeting. It may be modified based on additional input and then presented for final review.

A key element of the Plan is to preserve the things that residents have indicated are important to them. This includes maintaining the integrity of residential neighborhoods, protecting natural resources, and preserving open space and community character.

The Plan’s areas of focus for change are:

- establishing greenways for pedestrians and bicyclists along the Moosup-Valley River Trail;
- enhancing the Town’s two historic mill villages in Oneco and Sterling; and
- managing growth throughout the town while encouraging particular commercial entities that will serve an emerging residential population to locate within or in close proximity to the villages.

In addition, the Plan addresses single-family housing, transportation, community facilities, infrastructure, and emerging issues related to conservation of all resources.

Sterling’s boards, commissions and town departments are responsible for the implementation of the Plan. Section 7 contains specific strategies and recommendations for implementation over the next ten years. The Planning Commission updated the document where necessary and adopted it as Sterling’s Plan of Conservation and Development for use in planning the town over the next ten years.

Individuals involved in the preparation of the 2022 update of the Plan of Conservation and Development are listed below.

**Planning Commission Members:**

Regular Members:

Frank Bood, Chairman  
Ross Farrugia, Vice Chairman  
Dana Morrow  
Victoria Robinson-Lewis  
John Angelone  
Vacancy

Alternates

Kim Sith-Barnett  
Jon Turban

**Planning Commission Staff:**

Joyce Gustavson, Commission Clerk/Recording Secretary  
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**Board of Selectmen:**

Lincoln A. Cooper, First Selectman  
David Shippee, Selectman,  
Myron “Jack” Joslyn, Selectman

## Preface

### Plans of Conservation and Development, what are they?

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A Plan of Conservation and Development is a tool for guiding the future of a community. The goals and recommendations of this Plan reflect a consensus built from the work of the Planning and Zoning Commission with input from other boards and commissions and from Sterling residents.

Sterling adopted its first Plan of Development in 1970. Significant changes have taken place in Sterling, the State, and across the country since that Plan was prepared. Locally, the Town has dealt with challenges and opportunities through effective land use regulation and planning assistance from their Town Planner and occasional assistance from the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG). However, as the analysis in this Plan describes, increasing development demand, changing demographics, and growing opportunities called for fresh guidance and creative preparation to lead Sterling into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The Town's current Plan of Conservation and Development was adopted in 2009.

Planning is something that people and organizations perform on a routine basis. Planning helps prepare organizations and individuals for future challenges and opportunities. Communities, or towns are no different. Planning provides the opportunity to:

- focus on the 'bigger picture' and identify significant goals;
- promote overall values and achieve important purposes;
- coordinate efforts and produce consistent results; and
- achieve efficiency and economy in implementation.

Planning helps Sterling identify and address community needs, foresee the long-term consequences of current actions, make good decisions, and produce desired results.

### The Planning Process

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Initial efforts in the Plan preparation involved generating public interest, questioning the residents, identifying local issues and preparing an inventory and assessment of conditions and trends in Sterling. The Planning Commission then discussed alternative strategies and desirable future outcomes.

#### Other Information

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In the case of conflict between this Plan and such other information, the recommendations of the adopted Plan take precedence.





Public input was obtained throughout the process over the past few years by:

- public meetings that generated input and discussion;
- public forums that involved residents in planning for the future;
- surveys of residents at public meetings; and
- other exercises and analysis.

Research and consultation with Town officials and other agencies provided much of the background information for this Plan. Proven strategies adopted by other communities were reviewed for appropriate application to Sterling.

Finally, a set of strategies and a recommended implementation process were devised to provide the necessary guidance for the community to achieve the objectives set out by the Plan.

**EXCERPTS FROM CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES  
8-23 - PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**The Commission shall:**

- prepare, adopt and amend a plan of conservation and development ...
- review the plan of conservation and development at least once every ten years ...
- be a statement of policies, goals and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality,
- provide for a system of principal thoroughfares, parkways, bridges, streets, sidewalks, multipurpose trails and other public ways as appropriate,
- be designed to promote, with the greatest efficiency and economy, the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people and identify areas,
- recommend the most desirable use of land within the municipality for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation, agricultural and other purposes and include a map showing such proposed land uses,
- recommend the most desirable density of population in the several parts of the municipality,
- make provision for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region in which the municipality is located, as designated by the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management under section 16a-4a,
- promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate income households, and encourage the development of housing which will meet the housing needs identified in the state's consolidated plan for housing and community development prepared pursuant to section 8-37t and in the housing component and the other components of the state plan of conservation and development prepared pursuant to chapter 297, and
- consider allowing older adults and persons with a disability the ability to live in their homes and communities whenever possible.

**The Plan shall consider:**

- the needs of the municipality including, but not limited to, human resources, education, health, housing, recreation, social services, public utilities, public protection, transportation and circulation and cultural and interpersonal communications
- the need for affordable housing,
- the need for protection of existing and potential public surface and ground drinking water supplies
- physical, social, economic and governmental conditions and trends,
- the objectives of energy-efficient patterns of development, the use of solar and other renewable forms of energy and energy conservation,
- the need for technology infrastructure in the municipality
- protection and preservation of agriculture
- the use of cluster development and other development patterns to the extent consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity within the municipality
- the regional plan of conservation and development adopted pursuant to section 8-35a
- the state plan of conservation and development adopted pursuant to chapter 297

**The Plan may:**

- show the commission's recommendation for parks, playgrounds and other public grounds, the general location, relocation and improvement of schools and other public buildings, the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned, for water, light, power, transit and other purposes, the extent and location of public housing projects, programs for the implementation of the plan, including a schedule, a budget for public capital projects, a program for enactment and enforcement of zoning and subdivision controls, building and housing codes and safety regulations, plans for implementation of affordable housing, plans for open space acquisition and greenways protection and development, proposed priority funding areas.
- include recommended programs for the implementation of the plan ...
- (include) such other recommendations ... in the plan as will ... be beneficial to the municipality.







# History of Sterling

STERLING

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## Overview

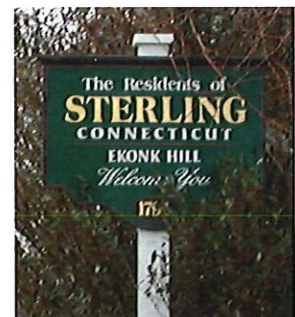
In order to plan for the future of Sterling it is important to understand how Sterling got to where it is today.

## Early History and Settlement Patterns.

The Town of Sterling evolves from the “volunteers’ land”, better known as the Town of Voluntown. In October, 1696, Lieutenant Thomas Leffingwell, of Norwich, and Sergeant John Frink, of Stonington, moved the general court, that they, with the rest of the English volunteers in former wars, might have a plantation granted to them. A tract of land six miles square was granted in answer to this request, to be taken up out of some of the conquered land, its bounds to be prescribed and settlement regulated by persons appointed by the court. The volunteers sent out upon the discovery of a suitable tract, found their choice very limited. Major Fitch, the Winthrops and others had already appropriated the greater part of the conquered lands, and the only available tract remaining within Connecticut limits was a strip bordering on Rhode Island, a few miles east of Norwich, hence the name “volunteers’ land.”

In October, 1700, Lieutenant Leffingwell, Richard Bushnell, Isaac-Wheeler, Caleb Fobes, Samuel Bliss, Joseph Morgan and Manasseh Minor moved for its confirmation to the volunteers, which was granted, so far as it concur with the former act of the General Assembly, provided it bring not the Colony into any inconvenience or, as afterward expressed, do not prejudice any former grant of the court. A large part of the tract thus granted is now comprised in the town of Voluntown. Its original bounds were nearly identical with those of the present township, save that eastward it extended to Pawcatuck River.

Little now can be learned of the primitive condition of this area. It was a barren frontier, utilized by various tribes of Indians, and after the Narragansett War (1675), claimed by the Mohegans, Massashowitt, sachem of Quinebaug, also claimed rights in it. No Indians are believed to have occupied it after the war, nor were any white inhabitants found on it when the area was turned over to the volunteers.



Some years passed before the division was completed. After the disputed Mohegan claim was settled a survey of the land was made in 1705. This land extended from the north bounds of Stonington northward to the Whetstone country (presently in Killingly), being a tract some twenty miles long, and from three to six miles in width. Its original size was diminished somewhat by the encroachment of the Rhode Island line, but after that had been established the tract was substantially the same as what is now occupied by the towns of Voluntown and Sterling.

One hundred and sixty persons had enrolled themselves as desirous of sharing in the benefit of this grant, and the land was distributed among them by a drawing made April 6th, 1706. Mr. Coit, of Plainfield, had received a grant of three hundred acres north of Egunk Hill, and he conveyed it to Francis Smith and Miles Jordan. Smith soon put up a mill and opened his house for the accommodation of travelers. Smith and Jordan, in 1714, erected a bridge over the river there, and received in payment 150 acres of land on the Providence road. This convenient road and pleasant locality soon attracted other settlers—John Smith, Ebenezer and Thomas Dow, Robert and John Parke, Robert Williams, Nathaniel French and others. In May, 1719, this vacant country was annexed to Voluntown, by act of the assembly, a strip one mile in width across the north end being reserved as public land. The settlers who were established in the vacant land had their purchases confirmed to them by the assembly, in October, 1719, on condition that each should have a tenantable house and settle themselves within the space of three years and continue to live there three years after such settlement, upon the forfeiture of said purchase.

In May, 1721, the people inhabiting this territory were invested with town privileges, in the exercise of which they proceeded to lay taxes for the support of a minister and building a meeting house. The town government of Voluntown was organized June 20th, 1721. The progress of the town had been greatly hindered, and at that date it was behind its contemporaries, having no schools or meeting house, and only a few roads were laid out. A long continued and obstinate contested debate over the site of the meeting house disrupted the town and prevented the erection of the building.

In 1740 a committee was appointed to lay out the undivided lands belonging to the proprietors. In 1739 the strip of public land, which had been reserved, a mile in width, at the north end of the town, was annexed to this town by an act of the assembly. Up to this time no freemen had yet been sworn, no "country taxes" paid, and no representatives sent to the general assembly. The town now settled down to a more complete fulfillment of the privileges and responsibilities of corporate existence. But the division of land ordered in 1740 was delayed until 1747, when all previous committees being dismissed, Humphrey Avery, Charles Campbell, Robert Dixon, Samuel Gordon and John Wylie, Jr., were appointed to divide the common lots to each proprietor or his heirs, re-measure and rebound old lots, and lay out cedar swamps, which were satisfactorily accomplished. The cedar and pine swamps, said to be the best in the county, were laid out and divided. The lot on which the meeting house stood, and the burial place adjoining, were sequestered for the use of the inhabitants of the town and their successors. Several of the original lots had been taken up by those to whom they had been granted.



In 1772 fifty-four persons north of Moosup River, including John, James and

1758 Map of Connecticut  
(Sterling not yet shown)



George Dorrance, Robert, Thomas and James Dixon, Robert Montgomery, John Coles, John Gaston, Mark and David Eames, some of them six, seven, eight and nine miles from Voluntown meeting house, and greatly impeded by bad roads and traveling, received liberty from the assembly to organize as a distinct society or join in worship with Killingly. A number of these northern residents consequently united with the church in South Killingly, and after some years organized as a distinct society. Sterling obtained town privileges without the customary struggle. The inconvenience arising from the peculiar elongation of ancient Voluntown was abundantly manifest, and a proposition, April 25th, 1793, to divide into two towns met immediate acceptance. The resolve incorporating the new town was passed in May, 1794, as follows: "Resolved by this Assembly, that all that part of the ancient town of Voluntown, within the following bounds, beginning at the northwest corner of said ancient town of Voluntown, at the south line of Killingly; thence running southerly on the east side of Plainfield until it comes to the southeast corner of Plainfield; thence east ten degrees south to the division line between this state and the state of Rhode Island; thence by said state line to the southeast corner of Killingly; thence westerly on the line of Killingly to the first mentioned bounds, be, and the same is hereby, incorporated into a distinct town by the name of 'Sterling,' and shall be, and remain in, and of the County of Windham."

The first town meeting was held at the house of Robert Dixon, Esq., on Sterling Hill, June 9th, 1794. Benjamin Dow was elected town clerk and treasurer; Captain John Wylie and Asa Montgomery, George Matteson, Anthony Brown and Lemuel Dorrance, selectmen. Nearly a hundred inhabitants were soon admitted as freemen. The original Voluntown families-Dixon, Dorrance, Dow, Douglas, Cole, Smith, Gaston, Gordon, Gallup, French, Frink, Montgomery, Wylie-were still represented. Patten, Perkins, Vaughan, Young, Bailey, Burgess, Burlingame, Hall, Mason, and



other later residents appeared among the inhabitants. The name of the town was given by a temporary resident, Doctor John Sterling, who promised a public library in return for the honor, however, this promise was never kept.

## **Economic Evolution**

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The Connecticut Yankee has long been a symbol of ingenuity and inventiveness. These qualities have been matched by production skills since the earliest days. From colonial times, Connecticut has been predominantly a manufacturing state and a world leader in industrial development and in 1794 Sterling entered upon its new duties with the usual spirit and energy. Its population was about nine hundred. Though much of its soil was poor, and its shape inconvenient, it had some peculiar advantages. It had fine water privileges, an excellent stone quarry, a great post road running through its center, and sterling men of good Scotch stock to administer public affairs.

The uprising of the manufacturing interest gave Sterling a fresh impetus in growth and prosperity, Asa Ames, Isaac Pitman and Samuel Dorrance and Dixon Hall, of Sterling, in 1808, as the Sterling Manufacturing Company, buying land "at a ledge of rocks, called the ' Devil's Den Chimney;' thence west by and down a small brook to Moosup River." The Sterling Manufactory was ready for work in 1809. Sterling's manufacturing facilities were well improved during the early part of the present century. Its first factory, built by Dorrance, Hall and others, was destroyed by fire soon after its completion, but its site was soon occupied by a larger building under the more exclusive management of Samuel Ames of Providence, which was described in 1818 as "one of the largest manufacturing establishments in the State, running sixteen hundred spindles." Dyeing of cotton began on site in 1879. The Sterling Dyeing and Finishing Co. operated on site from 1879-1904. The United States Finishing Corp., 1904-1954, the Moosup Finishing Corp., 1959-1960, and the Revere Textiles Prints Corp., 1966-1980, all operated on the site.

The American Factory upon the Quanduck, and a small cotton factory upon the Moosup were also carried on. Three grain mills, one carding machine, one fulling mill and clothiery works, two tanneries, four mercantile stores and two taverns were reported in 1818.

For many years the cotton factories continued in operation, furnishing employment to male and female operatives, and a ready market for farmers. The Sterling Company manifested much enterprise, and was one of the first in the country to whiten their cloth by the use of chlorine instead of sun bath. Mr. William Pike effected this invention, and also experimented in wood distillation, extracting for the use of the dyer the first pyroligneous acid made in the country. His success encouraged him to further enterprise. Brandy and gin distilleries had fallen into disrepute, but the transformation of wood into various chemical agencies met with nothing but favor. Three of these sap works were in time established two in Sterling, one in Voluntown requiring some five or six thousand cords of wood annually, and at least a score of men to prepare the wood and aid in the working. Pyroligneous and citric acids, sugar of lead, tincture of iron, naphtha and fine charcoal were among the products of distillation. Mr. Pike had his residence on Sterling Hill, in one of the fine old Dorrance houses, and was much respected as one of the leading men of the town. He was the first to introduce one horse wagons into use, paying for them in cotton yarn. Charcoal making was carried on quite extensively in Sterling.



Jeremiah W. Boswell was born in Foster, R. I., and came to Sterling, Conn., in 1876. He learned the trade of stone cutter and commenced quarrying granite about one-fourth of a mile east of Sterling Dye Works in 1887. He employs about twenty-five men. The stone is of superior quality for building purposes, and finds a ready market in Providence, Norwich and other places.

The village of Oneco, in the central part of the town, was founded by Henry Sabin, of Plainfield, who built a small cotton factory here about the year 1830. Successive owners gave it their names until it was finally re-christened by the Norwich proprietors, who then utilize its granite, working its fine quarries to good advantage. Indications of yet more valuable ore have been found in the vicinity. Among these are specimens of plumbago and dendrite, and such large and glittering quartz crystals, that their chief depository is known as "the Diamond Ledge." The famous Devil's Den Chimney " was blown up to make way for the railroad when that was built.

About 1860 Smith & Williams commenced granite quarrying. They were succeeded by A. & W. Sprague, and in 1884 by Garvey Brothers, of Providence, who employ at the quarry and in connection with it about 120 men. The granite quarried here is used for paving, building and monumental purposes in Providence, New York, Chicago and many other places, and was also sent to England. Their facilities for handling stone are not surpassed, a railroad running direct to the ledge. Mr. John Garvey, who, since the death of his brother Michael, in 1887, has been sole manager, came to this country in 1869 with about five dollars in his pocket. He learned the trade of stone cutter, became a contractor and builder, and, by his industry, has built up a large and increasing business.

Oscar F. Gibson, son of Allen Gibson, was born in Sterling in 1835. In 1886 he commenced quarrying granite about one mile west of Oneco Village. He employs about 20 men. The stone was chiefly used for building, and was very marketable. Mr. Gibson represented Sterling in the legislature of 1880. He married Ellen, daughter of Arnold Dixon, and has two sons, Allen M. and Merrill A.

The cotton manufacturing interests of the town declined over time. Factories burned down and have not been replaced. Its natural resources now furnish its chief reliance. The "sap works" of Mr. James Pike continue to resolve the forests into their component elements, consuming annually some two or three thousand cords of hard wood, employing a number of workmen, and extracting and combining a variety of useful products. A specialty of this unique establishment is the dissolution of refuse tin and iron, battered tin pans, rusty stove pipes and the like, by which these heretofore indestructible nuisances are made subservient to the will and use of man. Stimulated by the enterprises, Oneco bids fair to become a place of business importance, has a new public hall and public-spirited residents.

Since the relative prosperous times in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries a lot has changed. The once prominent textile industries have become victims of fire or more favorable economic conditions in other states.

### **Post-War Suburbanization**

Unlike most town's, Sterling did not experience a boost in population after World War II. Although, the proliferation of the automobile, government policies that promoted new

housing construction, and the growing post-war economy resulted in new population growth in other towns surrounding Sterling. It was not until the 1960's where Sterling started to experience significant growth. However, in the following decade Sterling experienced a decrease in population. Sterling's population remained relatively stagnant until the 1980 and 90's where they experienced substantial growth.

### **Historical Factors in Sterling's Evolution**

Sterling has experienced growth and decline with the economic ups and downs of the town, region and state. But despite uncertain economic conditions within the Town and surrounding area, people have been attracted to Sterling over the past 30 years due to:

- the character and ambiance of the community
- isolated nature, but with relative reasonable access to employment centers in eastern Connecticut, western and central Rhode Island

The items that have historically attracted residents to this quintessential New England community in the past have the potential to be threatened by increased residential development. Sterling has and will continue to become more attractive to potential homeowners given the increased residential development costs (building lot prices) in near by communities in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The residents of Sterling have never rested on their past achievements. Although, their historic textiles mills of a bygone era are gone, its entrepreneurial spirit is still alive. Sterling is in the process of re-inventing itself, small manufacturing is making return, stone quarrying and processing is active again. Agriculture, whether it is horses or dairy continues on a steady course of sustainability. While the community's two historic villages are once again are poised for redevelopment.



# Conditions and Trends

## Population Growth

According to the US Census, Sterling had a year 2020 population of 3,757, which ranked Sterling as the 140 most populated municipality in the state out of 169 towns/cities. The town's 2020 population represents a decrease of increase of 6.6% percent (252) from the 2010. Census. Sterling needs to consider how this decrease in growth will affect the community and how to address it. However, it is possible that the decrease in the calculated population could be attributed to census counts taken during the Covid19 pandemic.

Between 1810 and 1960, the Town of Sterling experienced either a single digit growth rate and/or negative growth, with the exception of the 1890's (15.03%). Over the last 200 years, Sterling has experienced negative growth in a total of seven separate decades. However, in three of the last four decades, Sterling has experienced their highest growth rates, 1960's (32.64%), 1980's (31.60%), 1990's (31.48%), 2000's 24%) and 2010-2020 (-2%). While the rate of growth has slowed in Connecticut to single digits, Sterling has been growing at rate greater than 20% per in 4 of the last 6 decades. In fact, Sterling has grown at a rate approximately seven times as fast as that for the State of Connecticut (3.6 percent during the same period). However, between 2010 - 2020 the Town experienced a decline in population according to the US Census similar to the decrease in population back in the 1970's.

## Population Growth

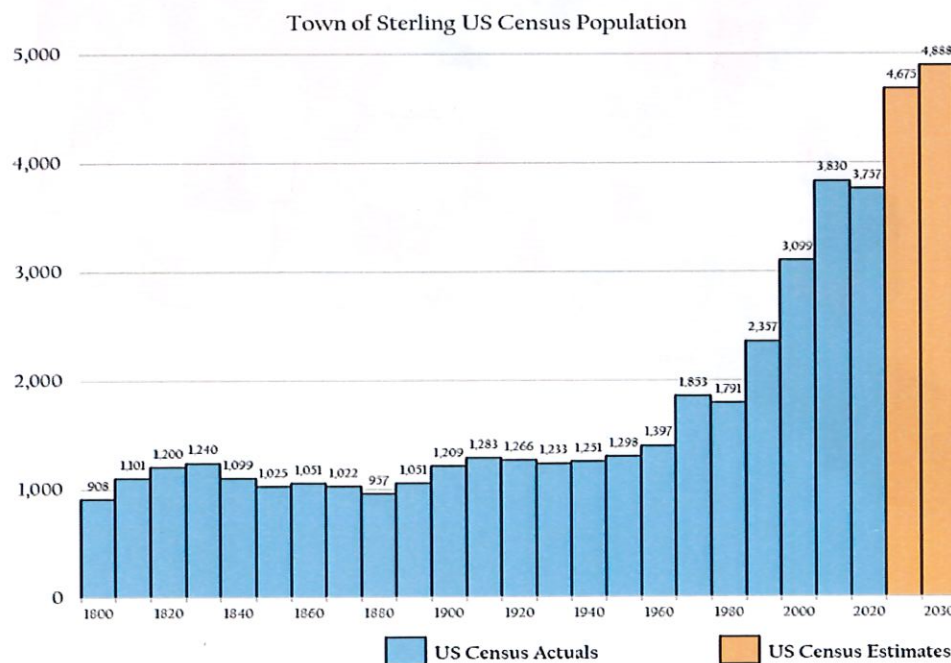
Year	Population
1800	908
1810	1,101
1820	1,200
1830	1,240
1840	1,099
1850	1,025
1860	1,051
1870	1,022
1880	957
1890	1,051
1900	1,209
1910	1,283
1920	1,266
1930	1,233
1940	1,251
1950	1,298
1960	1,397
1970	1,833
1980	1,791
1990	2,357
2000	3,099
2010	3,830
2020	3,757

1800 - 2000 Census. Projections from the CT Office of Policy & Management (2010 and 2020 projections) in italics/bold.

## Growth Rate

	Sterling	State
1800s	21%	4%
1810s	9%	5%
1820s	3%	8%
1830s	-11%	4%
1840s	-7%	20%
1850s	3%	24%
1860s	-3%	17%
1870s	-6%	16%
1880s	10%	20%
1890s	15%	22%
1900s	6%	23%
1910s	-1%	24%
1920s	-3%	16%
1930s	1%	6%
1940s	4%	17%
1950s	8%	26%
1960s	33%	20%
1970s	-3%	3%
1980s	32%	6%
1990s	31%	4%
2000s	24%	3%
2010-2020	-2%	2%

1900 - 2020 Census (Numbers were mathematically rounded).

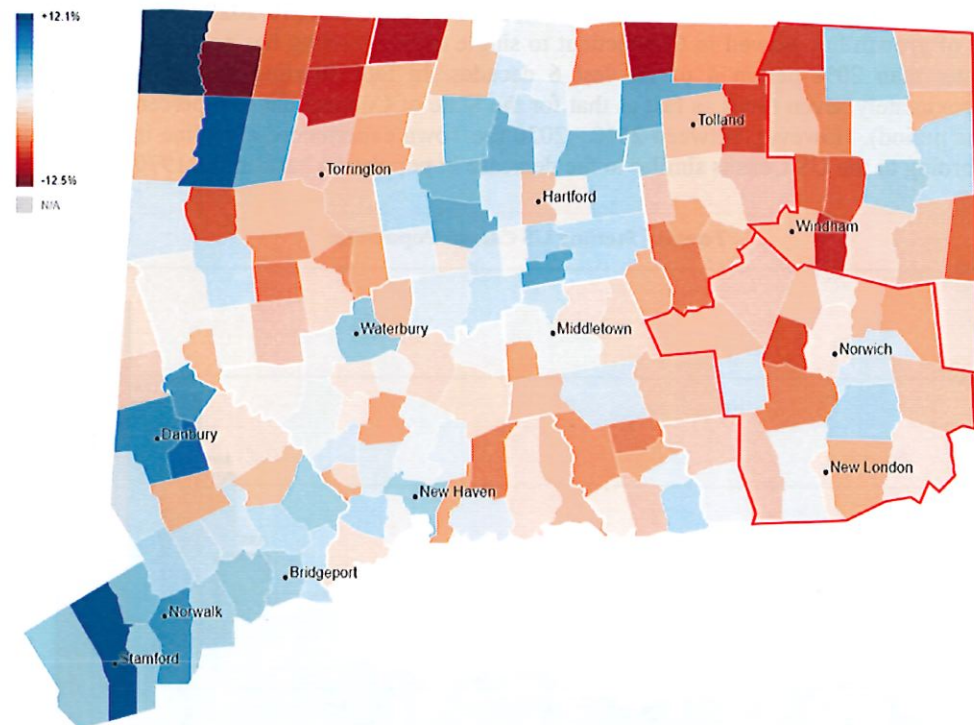


## Dynamics of Population Change

There are only two ways that population growth in a town can occur. The first is due to natural increase (more births than deaths). The Second is a result of net migration (more people moving in than out).

Historically, Sterling has experienced significant net in-migration and natural increase during the 1960s. However, growth factors (in-migration and natural increases) declined during the 1970s. During the 1980s, the amount of net in-migration increased significantly while the amount of natural increase slowed. Then, during the 1990s, growth due to natural increase accelerated, as well as, net-in-migration which similarly occurred in the 2000'. Between 2010 and 2020 Sterling experienced a net loss of populations, which base on a comparison to the entire state of Connecticut can be attributed to declining natural increases (smaller family size) and an increase in net out-migrations. The map below show how population has changed throughout the state between 2010 and 2020. Eastern Connecticut has seen significant decline in population with the exception of 4 towns (Brooklyn/2.9%, Killingly/2.2%, Pomfret/0.4%and Woodstock/3.2%) in the Northeastern portion of the state and 4 towns (Ledyard/2.4%, Preston/1.3%, Salem/1.5% and Waterford/0.3%) in the Southeastern portion.

Connecticut Population (by town) Percentage change between 2010 and 2020

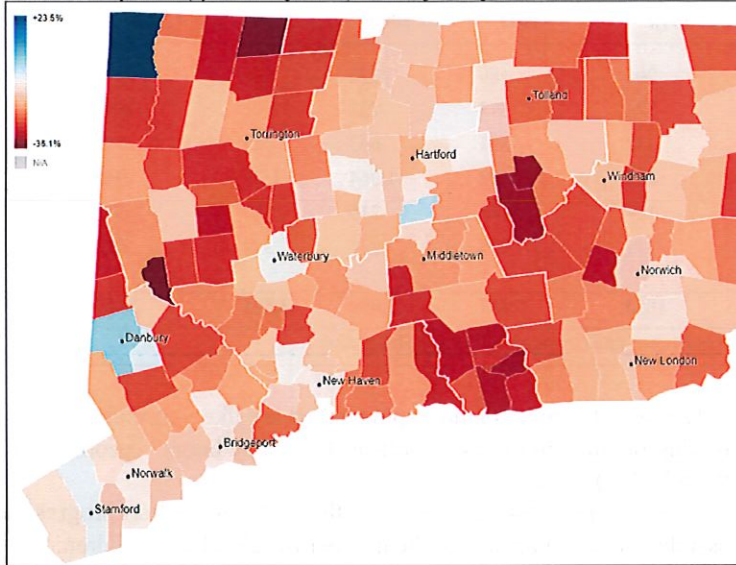




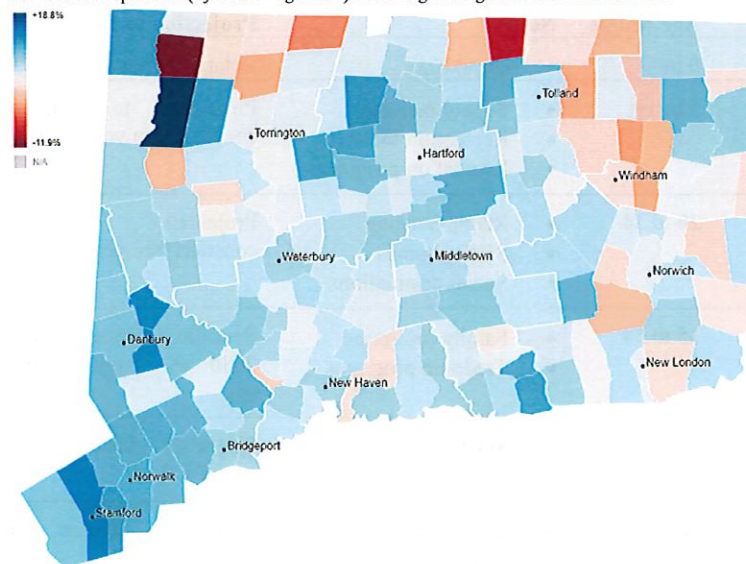
## Changing Age Composition

While overall population growth is important, the changing age composition of a community may be even more significant. For planning purposes, the age composition of a community can be considered to include three major age groups with differing needs or concerns - children (ages 0-19), adults (ages 20-54), and mature residents (ages 55 and up). In addition, each group can be further broken down into two or more sub-groups. Overall the statewide population of individuals between 0-17 year of age decreased by 9.8%.

Connecticut Population (by Town - ages 0-17) Percentage change between 2010 and 2020

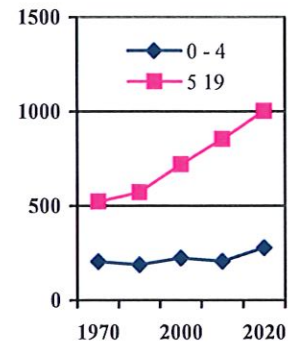


Connecticut Population (by Town - ages 18+) Percentage change between 2010 and 2020

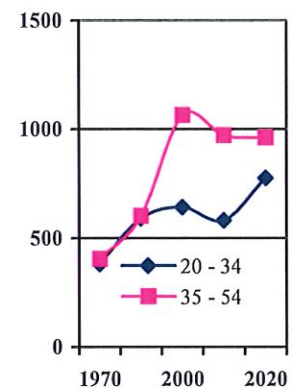


Statewide, the population of 18+ year old individuals only increased by 4.1% overall

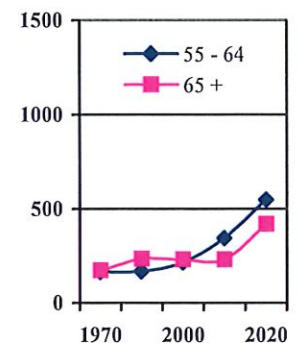
Children (Ages 0 - 19)



Adults (Ages 20 - 54)



Mature Adults (Ages 55+)





Between 1990 and 2000, the most noticeable trends in Sterling were increases (466 residents) in the number of residents aged 35 to 54 and net increases in:

- the number of residents above age 35 (people), and
- the number of residents under age 20 (98 people).

According to the numbers from 2010 and 2018/2020 that age bracket has remained stable. However the 55+ age bracket shows some growth as the existing population ages. It should also be noted that 28% of the population is between the ages of 40 and 60.

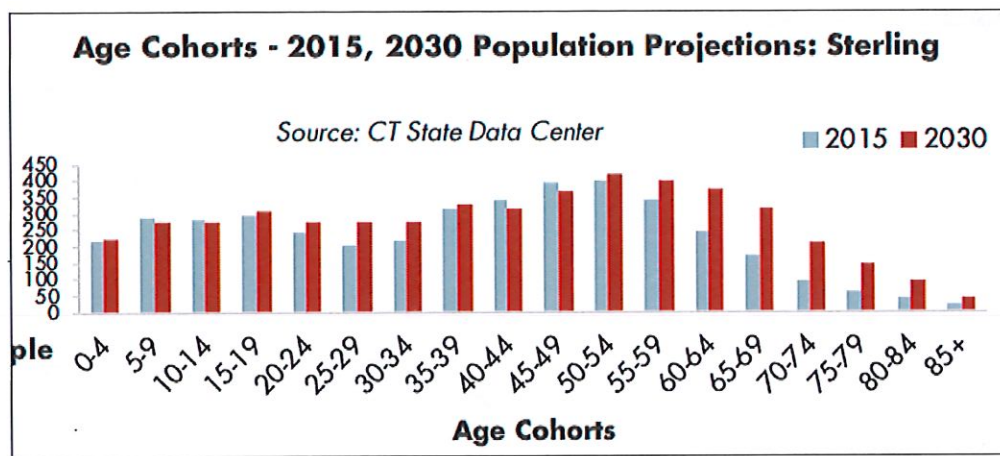
Ages	Actual			Projections		Actuals
	1970	1990	2000	2010	2020	2018
0-4	206	189	224	220	279	262
5-19	524	573	722	906	1004	723
20-34	382	591	643	721	776	627
35-54	404	602	1,064	1,267	962	1,117
55-64	164	168	215	383	548	534
65 +	173	234	231	304	420	442
<b>Total</b>	<b>1853</b>	<b>2,357</b>	<b>3,099</b>	<b>3,801</b>	<b>3,989</b>	<b>3,705</b>
1970 - 2018 US Census Bureau and Connecticut Data Collaborative						

Over the next twenty years, the major demographic trends are likely to include:

- a growing population of older adults as the “baby boom” (people born between 1945 and 1965) ages,
- an increase in the 55-64 populations as the 35-54 age cohort progress, and
- a possible continued decline in the number of school-age children.

Description	Age Range	Needs	Projection to 2020
Infants	0 to 4	• Child Care	Relatively Stable to 2020
School-Age	5 to 19	• School facilities • Recreation facilities • Recreation programs	Projected to remain constant thru year 2030
Young Adults	20 to 34	• Rental housing • Starter homes • Social destinations	Projected remain constant thru year 2030
Middle Age	35 to 54	• Family programs • Trade-up programs	Possible decrease to year 2030 as “baby boom” age
Mature Adults	55 to 64	• Smaller homes • Second homes	Projected increase to year 2030
Retirement Age	65 and over	• Tax relief • Housing options • Elderly programs	Projected increase to year 2020

According to the Partnership for Strong communities Sterling is one of 116 Connecticut municipalities projected to see a drop in their school-age population between 2020 and 2030. Many municipalities will see declines over 15%. In Sterling, the projected decrease is 2%. Meanwhile the 65+ population for Sterling is project to increase by 60%.



## Housing Growth

As shown in the sidebar, housing growth in Sterling has exceeded 25% over the in the 90's and 2000's. Housing growth was just under 20% in 2010's and has slowed in the last decade. Sterling's housing stock has grown over 100% since 1980. This growth has been more than twice as high as many of the nearby communities during the same time period.

The Town averages 2.6 persons per household. The majority of this households are occupied by married couples (61%).

## Housing Types

In terms of single family detached housing, Sterling ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> among abutting Towns (Killingly, Plainfield, and Voluntown) with 78%. It also ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> with regards to multi-family housing units (2 or more units) when compared to abutting town and 5<sup>th</sup> when compared to many surrounding communities and the state average.

While housing values and sales prices are lower in northeastern and southeastern Connecticut than the state as a whole, Sterling has higher housing values (and sale prices) than most of the surrounding communities. Still, the housing stock in Sterling could be considered affordable by a number of measures.

A good majority of the Town housing stock has been built after World War II. In fact, a large portion was

## Housing Tenure

The extent of owner occupancy in Sterling is the highest among the surrounding areas and is much higher than the state average.

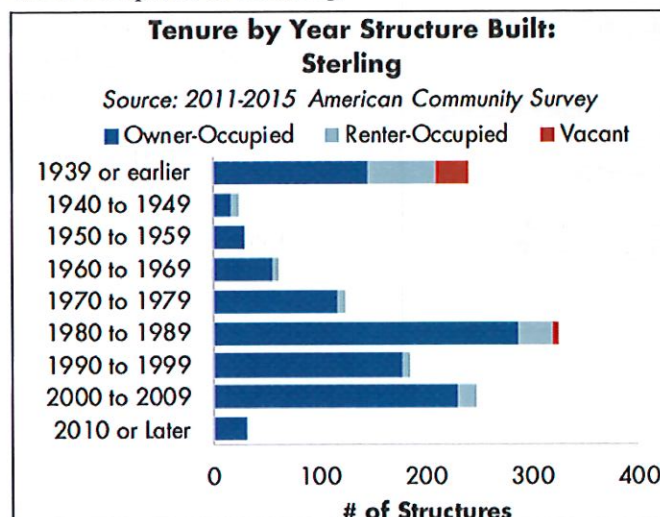
Town	Percent Owner-Occupied
Lisbon	88.6%
Canterbury	86.0%
Preston	82.7%
<b>Sterling</b>	<b>87.0%</b>
Voluntown	81.8%
Griswold	70.6%
Plainfield	68.6%
Sprague	66.2%
Killingly	64.7%
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>66.2%</b>
Norwich	52.5%

2015 American Community Survey - US Census

## Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure

In Connecticut, communities with less than ten percent of their housing stock meeting the definition of "affordable housing" are subject to the "Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure".

In this procedure, a developer can propose an affordable housing development and potentially override local zoning regulations.





constructed in the housing boom of the 1980's and 1990's as can be seen from the chart to the right.

The median home value in Sterling is listed as \$202,200. According to the American Community Survey. The median value as listed by Zillow in 2016 is \$179,826. Zillow presently (2022) has the median value listed as \$303,009 and increase of over \$120,000 in 5 years. The graph below show market conditions since 2013 in town.

#### Key Stats (2018)

##### Projected Change in Population from 2020-2030

5-19 Year Olds: -2%  
65+ Year Old: 60%

##### Median Household Income

All Households: \$71,696  
Owners: \$78,750  
Renters: \$50,179

##### Housing Units

Total Units: 1,274  
Owner-Occupied: 86%  
Renter-Occupied: 11%  
Vacant: 3%

##### Single-Family/Multifamily

Single Family: 95%  
Multifamily: 3%

##### Median Home Value

\$208,800

##### Median Gross Rent

\$1,036

##### Households Spending 30% or More on Housing

All Households: 35%  
Owners: 36%  
Renters: 28%

##### Housing Built 1970 or Later

72%

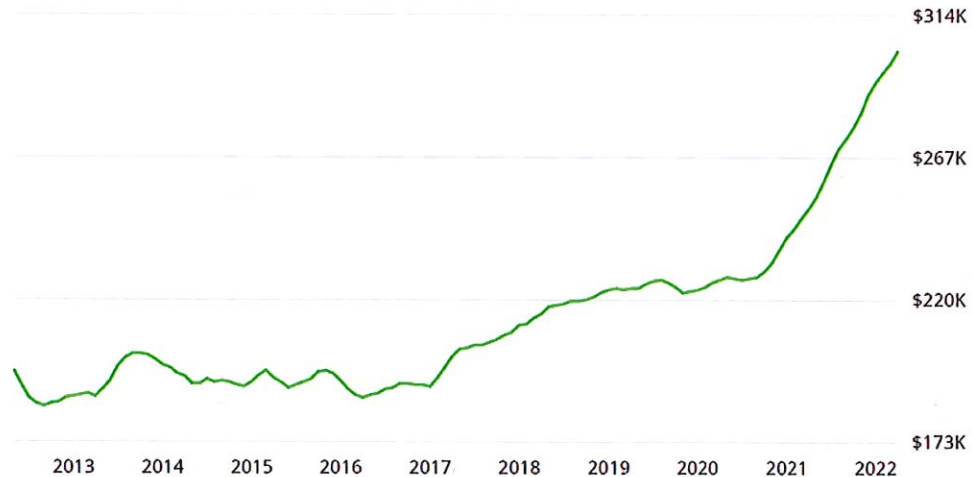
##### 2016 Affordable Housing Appeals List

Assisted Units: 3%

##### % Change in Total Real Property, 2008-2016

-32%

Mar 2022 — Sterling \$303K



According to the American Communities Survey the town median rent was report as \$1,132 for a two bedroom unit.

#### Affordable Housing

However, State statutes (CGS 8-39a and 8-30g) define “affordable housing” differently. Those statutes define “affordable housing” differently. Those statutes define “affordable housing” to include governmentally assisted units, units financed with CHFA or FMHA mortgages, or units that are deed-restricted to sell or rent at prices that make them affordable to persons or families earning 80 percent of the median income for the Norwich/New London area.

In terms of the this definition, only 1.79 percent of Sterling’s housing stock meets the affordable criteria and so Sterling is subject to the provisions of CGS Section 8-30g which is intended to enable the construction of affordable housing units. This is a decrease from 2.01 percent in 2010.

	2021 Housing Units	Government Assisted Units	CHFA/ FmHA Mortgages	Deed Restricted	Total Assisted	Percent
Sterling	1,511	6	21	0	27	1.79 %

Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure List (2021) Department of Community and Economic Development

## Economy

### Employment

According to the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL), there were 291 non-agricultural jobs in Sterling in the based on data from 2019. Regardless of the relative accuracy of this data it appears to paint a rather somber picture about the ability to be employed within the Town. Based on this data there are 1,987 residents who make up the work forces, with an unemployment rate of roughly 8.1%.

#### Labor Force

CT Department of Labor, 2020

Employed

Sterling

1,826

State

1,724,621

Unemployed

161

148,010

Unemployment Rate

8 8%

Self-Employment Rate\*

5 10%

\*ACS, 2015–2019

### Types of Jobs in Sterling

The following table shows how the Sterling economy has changed over time by looking at the types of jobs located in Sterling. Although this is not apparent in the table below, the trend throughout the state reflects an economy that is moving away from goods-producing industries (such as manufacturing) to an economy based on trade and services. The town's primary employers are the Sterling Community School, Town Hall, Angler Industries, Westmark, Detotec North America, Maxam Initiations Systems and Dubois Chemicals. Ninety-two percent of the workforce drives to work, seven percent works from home and one percent walks. In 2012, Detotec North America constructed their corporate headquarters in Town.

### Jobs Held By Sterling Residents

The Census contains information on the types of businesses that employ Sterling residents. This data shows that, over the past two decades, Sterling residents have also been adapting from goods-producing jobs to trade and service jobs.

Town of Sterling Employment Outlook (CT Dept. Labor 2019)

Labor Sector	Employment	Employers	Average Wage
Local Government	112	7	\$37,915
Manufacturing	82	8	\$73,173
Accommodations & Food Service	23	6	\$20,449
Construction	26	8	\$35,135
Other Services	11	7	\$13,437
All Industries	291	63	\$47,067

#### Educational attainment

**92.5%**

High school grad or higher

a little higher than the rate in  
Windham County: 88.4%

about the same as the rate in  
Connecticut: 90.6%

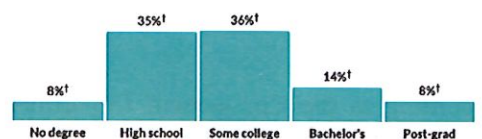
**21.6%**

Bachelor's degree or higher

about 90 percent of the rate in  
Windham County: 24.3%

about half the rate in Connecticut:  
39.3%

Population by highest level of education



\* Universe: Population 25 years and over

Show data / Embed

#### Median Income

While median household incomes in Sterling are higher (\$84,643) than that for the state, the per capita income is lower. This would reflect:

- the average household size in Sterling (2.78 persons) is higher than that for the State (2.53 persons), and
- the statistical difference between a household *median* (half the households make more and half make less) and a per capita *mean* (where all incomes are summed and divided by the number of people).

#### Per Capita Income:

Town	ACS 2010	ACS 2015	ACS 2020	Change 2010-2020	Change 2015-2020
Griswold	\$70,547 ± \$9,481	\$64,629 ± \$12,604	\$62,361 ± \$7,051	-11.6% ±15.6	-3.5% ±22.1
Killingly	\$63,286 ± \$7,402	\$60,926 ± \$9,126	\$66,071 ± \$8,726	+4.4% ±18.5	+8.4% ±21.7
Plainfield	\$73,170 ± \$4,435	\$66,290 ± \$5,630	\$66,689 ± \$4,122	-8.9% ±7.9	+0.6% ±10.8
Sterling	\$76,740 ± \$12,496	\$78,906 ± \$11,128	\$84,643 ± \$13,537	+10.3% ±25.1	+7.3% ±22.9
Voluntown	\$88,019 ± \$4,201	\$83,049 ± \$6,203	\$84,583 ± \$21,361	-3.9% ±24.7	+1.8% ±26.0

In 2017 the median income was \$78,684 and was broken down into the following categories. In comparison the Windham County average median house hold income was \$66,550 in 2019.

#### Income

**\$32,254**

Per capita income

about the same as the amount in  
Windham County: \$32,732  
about three-quarters of the amount  
in Connecticut: \$44,496

**\$78,684**

Median household income

about 20 percent higher than the  
amount in Windham County:  
\$66,550  
about the same as the amount in  
Connecticut: \$78,444

Household Income



#### Person Below the Poverty Line:

##### Poverty

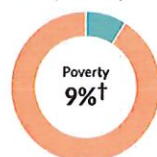
**7.8%**

Persons below poverty line

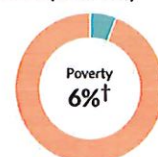
about two-thirds of the rate in Windham County:  
11.4%<sup>†</sup>

about 80 percent of the rate in Connecticut: 9.9%

Children (Under 18)



Seniors (65 and over)



■ Poverty  
■ Non-poverty

■ Poverty  
■ Non-poverty



## Sterling's Regional Role

Sterling's primary role within eastern Connecticut is a rural residential suburb for persons working in the Windham County and surrounding areas. According to the 2020 US Census, Sterling had workforce of 1,987 with 8.1% unemployment.

In 2010 the US Census provided journey to work data, however, in 2020 they changed their questions format to ask how far you commuted to work, verses where you commuted to work. Based on the new analysis the mean travel (commute) to work from Sterling was 34.2 minutes. The older commuting patterns/data are shown below the newer data. Employees in Windham County, have a slightly shorter commute time (25.3 minutes) then the national average of (25.5 minutes). Additionally 1.85 percent of the workforce in Windham County have a "super commute" in excess of 90 minutes.

### Transportation to work

**34.2** minutes

Mean travel time to work

about 1.3 times the figure in Windham County:  
26.5

about 1.3 times the figure in Connecticut: 26.6

Means of transportation to work



### Historic Commuting patterns.

Sterling Residents Commuted To Locations In:			Sterling Workers Commuted From Residence In:		
	Num	Percent		Num	Percent
Groton	95	5.79	East Lyme	18	3.32
Killingly	212	12.91	Killingly	41	7.56
Ledyard	103	6.27	Sterling	257	47.42
Plainfield	307	18.70	Plainfield	81	14.94
Norwich	77	4.69	Windham	23	4.24
Sterling	257	15.65	Voluntown	20	3.69
Other Windham County	218	28.93	Other Windham County	41	7.56
Other New London County	134	8.16	Other New London County	31	5.72
Elsewhere in State	86		Elsewhere in State		5.54
Out of State	153	9.32	Out of State	23	4.24
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1642</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Fiscal Overview

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### Expenditures

Expenditures are the major component of the municipal fiscal equation. The annual budget in Sterling is approximately \$11.2 million dollars (Fiscal Year 2022- 2023) with education being the highest category of expenditures at approximately \$8.2 million dollars.

On a per capita basis, overall expenditures in Sterling are below the State average. Sterling spends less than the State average on all categories of expenditures except for education. This is a reflection of the high priority that Sterling has given to providing educational services.

Town of Sterling (Municipal Budget)	2020-2021 Approved Budget	2022-2023 Proposed Budget
Town Budget Totals	\$ 2,849,409	\$ 2,955,489
Estimated Revenues	\$ 431,554	\$ 445,304
Total to be Raised by Taxes	\$ 2,417,855	\$ 2,510,185
School Budget Totals (Board of Ed. Budget)	\$ 8,255,286	\$ 8,255,286
Estimated Revenues	\$ 3,237,469	\$ 3,193,515
Total to be Raised by Taxes	\$ 5,017,817	\$ 5,061,771
Total Budget (Municipal and School)	\$ 11,104,695	\$ 11,210,775
Estimated Revenue	\$ 3,669,023	\$ 3,638,819
Total to be Raised by Taxes	\$ 7,435,672	\$ 7,571,956

# Community Vision and Themes

## Overview

Identifying the topics and issues Sterling residents felt were most important to address in preparing the 2022 Sterling Plan of Conservation & Development was an important step in the planning process. Topics for discussion included frequency of use of the Town plan, overall importance of the Plan, and progress made toward implementation. In the course of developing this Plan, a clear consensus began to appear. Sterling residents love their town.

Even though the majority of residents would like Sterling to remain the way it is, change will inevitably occur in the future. By finding consensus on strategies that will balance the rural character of the community, with planned growth, Sterling residents will be able to maintain the quality of life they are proud of and have grown accustomed to.

Sterling Character Scene



## Summary of Planning Issues

The predominant theme of the Plan of Conservation & Development recognizes the need to balance growth while the understanding that residents understand that recognize that some change is inevitable as development within the community



occurs. However, with regards to growth, most residents have indicated that they want to guide this growth and an associated changes in ways that will preserve and enhance the overall character and quality of life in the community.

The major strategies proposed in the 2022 Sterling Plan of Conservation were developed with a view towards addressing residents expressed desire to preserve and enhance the overall character of Sterling and ensure the highest quality of life for its residents and its businesses.

### **Conservation**

Participants at public meetings identified conservation as the most important theme for the Plan of Conservation & Development to address. Such efforts will help to preserve the rural character of Sterling.

The following elements are seen as important considerations (elements that seem to protect the town's sense of place and/or identity:

- *Conservation of the natural environment by protecting water quality, wetland, forests, slopes, and other natural features.*
- *Preservation of open space in key areas that will maintain the feeling of "openness" in the community, protect important natural resources, and provide recreational opportunities for residents.*
- *Recognition and protection of irreplaceable historic resources that give residents pride in their community.*

### **Development**

Sterling residents expressed considerable interest in balancing rural character with any type of development that would occur within the community. While this will be a challenge, Sterling can control the character, location, and to some degree the amount of development through regulations.

The following elements are seen as important considerations:

- *Increasing the business tax base, to maintain needed Town services and a reasonable mill rate, by encouraging high quality retail and industrial development in appropriate locations.*
- *Ensuring future single family development continues to support the rural development patterns of the community.*
- *Providing affordable alternatives to traditional single family housing to meet the needs of elderly residents.*

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure is defined as the basic facilities (community facilities, transportation, and utilities) needed to support the type of community that Sterling wants to be. Community facilities were identified as the third highest priority topic to be considered by the plan at one of the Commission public workshops on plan development. While other infrastructure issues did not generate much discussion at that meeting, such infrastructure is important to maintain the quality of life for residents.

The following elements are seen as important considerations and have been in prior plans:

- *Acquiring land now for future public use.*
- *Maintaining a high quality education system.*
- *Supporting improvement/enhancements to town hall and library facilities.*
- *Providing more and/or improved recreation facilities for residents.*
- *Providing a community center for public meetings and youth activities.*
- *Ensuring future development is designed so as not to overburden the existing road system.*
- *Determining road intersections that may be overburdened and require redesign.*
- *Providing land for future utility facilities that will be needed by the community such as pump stations, reservoir storage (water), and waste treatment facilities.*

#### Priority Topics

*People were asked to allocate their points towards the topics they felt were most important for Sterling to address in the Plan.*

*The top priorities were*

- 1. Business Development*
- 2. Open Space*
- 3. Natural Resources*
- 4. Residential Development\**
- 4. Community Facilities\**

*\* Tie*

The objectives and implementation strategies for each of these elements are discussed in Section 7 of this Plan.

Pasture - Ekonk Hill



After the Harvest - Ekonk Hill



Preparing the land for planting – North Main Street field







# PRESERVING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

## Overview

Participants at a number of Planning and Zoning Commission meetings identified conservation as the most important theme for the Plan of Conservation & Development to address. The Term “Conservation” continues to be used in a board sense to define the town’s ability to preserve its rural character. Residents stated the need to develop strategies that will balance the rural character of the community, with planned growth. In developing and defining this fine balance, Sterling residents should be able to maintain the quality of life they are proud of. The following elements are seen as important considerations:

- *Conservation of the natural environment by protecting water quality, wetland, forests, slopes, and other natural features.*
- *Preservation of open space in key areas that will maintain the feeling of “openness” in the community, protect important natural resources, and provide recreational opportunities for residents.*
- *Recognition and protection of irreplaceable historic resources that give residents pride in their community.*
- *Retaining and developing cultural resources within the town.*

Four primary small New England Town elements

Natural Resources



Open Space



Historic Resources



Cultural Resources



Sterling is defined and distinguished by its quintessential small town New England character which are representative of the four elements mentioned above. The town retains many of the qualities and characteristics that have attracted people to the area since the colonial era. Preservation of these encompassing but vulnerable attributes has been identified as the most important theme for this 2022 Plan of Conservation and Development. The next ten plus years may prove crucial for the longer-term preservation of Sterling's rural character with out any changes in regulatory oversight. Many of the strategies identified in this Plan will lay the foundation for community actions to help retain the qualities that today's residents clearly value and future residents will respect.

Specific strategies to preserve community character are:

- *Preserving open space,*
- *Improving environmental regulation,*
- *Preserving the essential character (form and density) of the Town's villages,*
- *Managing existing roads and developing modern design standards of future roads,*
- *Protecting historic resources and cultural resources, and*
- *Establishing community identity as individuals enter the Town.*

## Natural Resources

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Natural resources are the underpinning of a community's conservation planning and goals. Conserving natural resources helps preserve environmental functions, enhance community character, and sustain the overall quality of life.

### Land Resources

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According to the University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR), approximately 4.9 percent (855 acres) of Sterling's land area consists of wetlands soils and/or water.

Moosup River



Sterling lies within the highlands associated with the Quinebaug Valley. The lowlands within Sterling are associated with the Moosup River and Quanduck flood plains. As a result of glacial action in the eastern Connecticut highlands, the Town contains a diverse array of landforms within a relatively small area, with some rolling hills, riparian plains, forested uplands, and agricultural flatlands.

Despite the general nature of the Town's landforms there are a number of areas in town that contain steep slopes and shallow depth to bedrock. Some of these land forms have been historically mined for their granite over the generation. Granite was first commercially mined by Jeremiah W. Boswell beginning in 1887 a quarter of a mile east of the historic Sterling Dye Works (former Revere Site). Although these areas are not abundant, they merit a delicate mix between conservation and development consideration since disturbance of these areas can:

- *increase the area affected by development,*
- *increase the potential for septic failure and erosion,*
- *increase the cost of developing and maintaining buildings, roads, driveways, utilities, and septic systems, and*
- *impede overall traffic circulation and property access.*

Wetlands soils are widespread throughout Sterling and no one particular area is devoid of these soils. The town does contain a number of significant systems associated with its low-lying areas just east of Ekonk Hill in the Cedar Swamp/Porter Pond area and along Carson Brook, which runs along the Rhode



Island Border between Bailey Pond and the Moosup River. Wetlands systems constitute an essential conservation and preservation priority and are protected in Sterling by up-to-date and complete wetlands regulations, although the Wetlands Agency may consider enhancing wetlands protection by extending the upland review area.

## **Water Resources**

Water resources are a defining characteristic of Sterling. It could be said that Sterling's two rivers are responsible for its historic development patterns beginning in the early 1800 century. In fact, the Moosup River is responsible for Sterling's early prominence during the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of two distinct villages (Sterling and Oneco). Waterbodies account for approximately .6 percent of the Towns landmass. Wetlands, both forested and non-forested account for another 3.3 percent or 756 acres.

The protection of surface and ground water quality is an important environmental issue since Sterling relies primarily on ground water resources for its drinking water. As noted, effective wetlands regulation by the Wetlands and Conservation Commission are a key component of this protection. Open space planning and preservation is another important tool for protecting water resources, as discussed below. Other considerations relative to water quality will be discussed in a future workbook addressing regulatory issues.

Floodplains are areas subject to periodic flooding, threatening both life and property. Flooding can occur at most any time of year in Connecticut due to tropical storms, prolonged rains, and/or spring thaws. The map on the facing page identifies those areas of Sterling that have a 1.0 percent (called a 100-year flood) or 0.2 percent (called a 500-year flood) likelihood of flooding in any one year. More detailed boundaries can be obtained by reference to the detailed federal Flood Insurance Rate (FIRM) maps on file at the Town Hall.

## **Biologic Resources**

Sixteen Connecticut Natural Diversity Database sites have been identified in Sterling (see page 4-16 for map). Such areas may contain unique habitats, species of special concern, and other valuable resources (such as unique natural areas, scenic resources). The State maintains this special database to help preserve and protect these resources.

Other potentially important biological resources in Sterling include the two river valleys, which are likely migratory corridors for birds and other wildlife, and the remaining agricultural lands. As agricultural lands dwindle, many species of wildlife that depend on open fields and field edges are also declining, in some cases precipitously.

## **Water Resources**

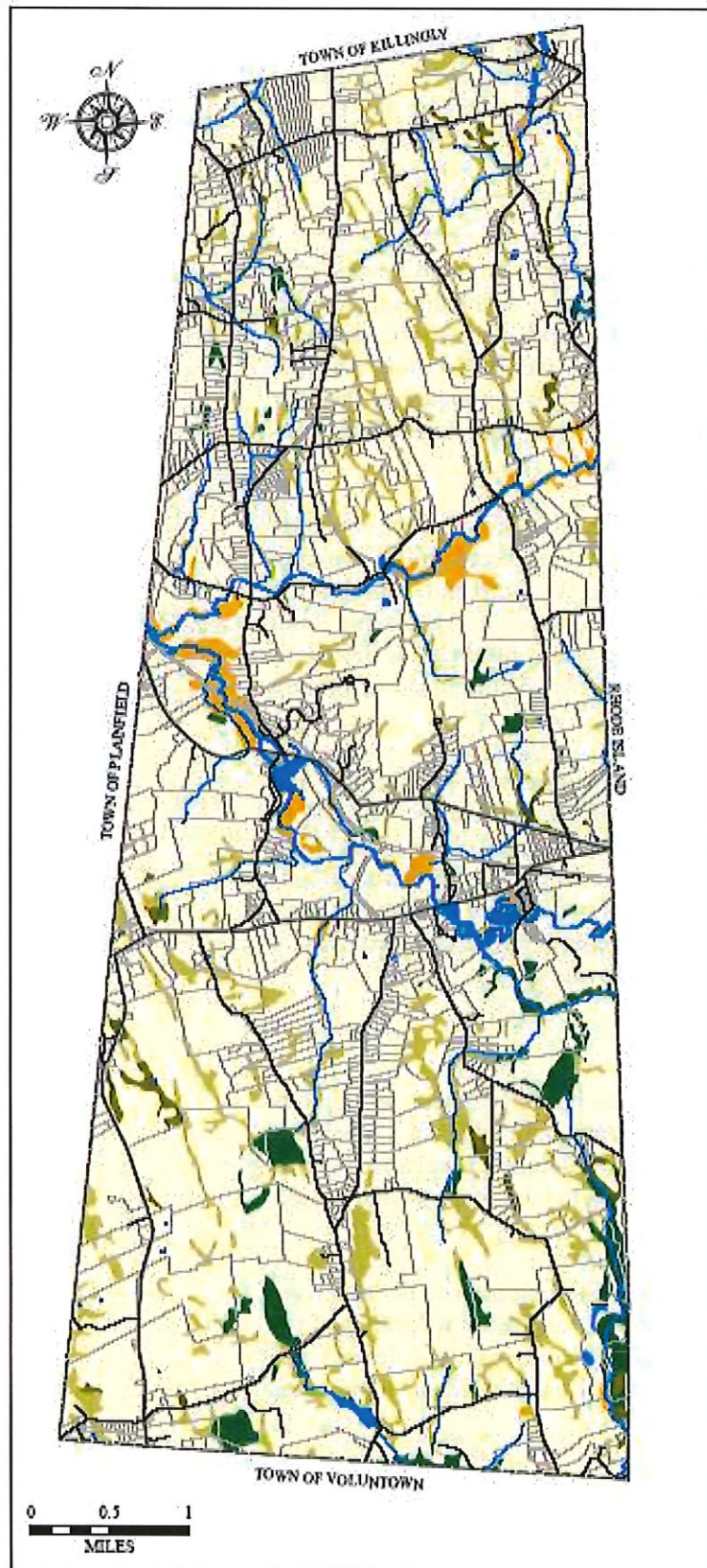
According to the University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research.

CLEAR broke these land areas into the following categories:

- Water (99 acres)
- Non-forested Wetlands (75 acres)
- Forested Wetlands (681 acres)

As a whole, approximately 4.9 percent (855 acres) of Sterling's land area consists of wetlands soils and/or water





# TOWN OF STERLING HYDROLOGY

## LEGEND

- Alluvial and floodplain soils
- Poorly drained and very poorly drained soils
- Poorly drained soils
- Very poorly drained soils
- Non-wetland soils
- Water
- Stream
- Highway
- Local Road
- Parcel boundary
- Town boundary

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*This Map is for evaluation purposes only. Information relative to features on this map is approximate and subject to change as subsequent surveys may disclose.*

*The Town of Sterling and Planning Commission assumes no legal responsibility for information depicted on this map. It is not valid for legal description or the transfer of property.*

Town of Sterling Planning and Zoning  
Commission 2022



## Assessment

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### Land and Water Resources

Under the Town's Zoning Regulations, a new building lot requires a minimum of 2 acres. The current Zoning Regulations define a minimum buildable area needed for development purposes, which excludes lands as defined as an inland wetlands or watercourse pursuant to Section 22a-38 of the Connecticut General Statutes. The Zoning Regulations which replaced the Town's Land Use Ordinance includes language associated with minimum contiguous lot size to include local regulations to more strongly discourage use of steep slopes, easements and rights-of-ways by including specific land use restrictions on building and road development in these areas.

Current regulations (including the State Health Code) appear to provide adequate controls to ensure that soil capability is fully considered at the time of development. However, the Commission may wish to recommend strengthening local inland wetlands regulations to provide an upland review area of 150 feet, as opposed to the 75 foot and 100 foot (Moosup & Quanduck Rivers) setback now in place.

Sterling should also utilize the state statutes fee-in-lieu of open space for the outright purchase of land which has functional value to the residents of Sterling over using the dedication of open space for the permanent protection of steep slope and wetland areas with conservation easements or as open space "set asides" in the updated subdivisions.

While erosion and sediment control are required in all new developments in Sterling, the regulatory commission should continue to ensure adequate inspection and maintenance for protection of water quality and water resources. Careful inspection and maintenance should be required until areas are completely stabilized.

### Organization Resources

Sterling's regulatory commissions have proven very effective at assuring environmentally sound development with limited regulations. Until the development of the new Land Use Ordinance, the Town had no regulatory authority over development outside of the Planning commission and Wetlands Commission Regulations. Planning Commission and Wetlands regulations are up-to-date with respect to protecting land and water resources. The Wetlands Commission may consider enhancing the upland review area provisions of its regulations.

Over the years the Planning Commission did a tremendous job, utilizing the Town's Subdivision regulations, and protection of natural resources and open space (discussed below) could benefit from revisions and additions to those regulations. The job of land use regulations has continued with the creation of the Town's Planning and Zoning Commission and the adoption of its Zoning Regulations and continued efforts at the regional level help to protect and enhance the natural resources within the Valley. Sterling's continued active participation in the program would help ensure that the Town's priorities are a component of future projects funded by this Federal program.

### Land Use Ordinance

Sterling adopted a Land Use Ordinance on July 24, 2004 to regulate the minimum size of a new building lot. These regulations assure that building lots are adequately sized to provide basic septic treatment and water supply requirements  
**Sewer Avoidance History**

Sterling has developed a Water Pollution Control Plan and established a Water Pollution Control Authority to further the policy of sewer avoidance and manage the Sterling Sewer District which was created in association with the development of the Sterling Industrial Park.

Treatment capacity, under contract with the Town of Plainfield, is limited and therefore new connections are only permitted under certain specified conditions within the Sterling Sewer District.

### Land Use Regulations

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Require a minimum of two acres excluding wetlands to assure that building lots are adequately sized to provide basic septic treatment and water supply requirements.



## **The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor**

### **A Special Kind of Park**

*The Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor encompasses about 695,000 acres in northeastern Connecticut and south central Massachusetts. The area stretches from Norwich, Connecticut north to Charlton, Massachusetts and from Coventry, Connecticut east to the Rhode Island border.*

*More than half the size of Grand Canyon National Park and ten times the area of Acadia, the National Heritage Corridor is a special type of park. Its 35 towns with numerous villages has a total population of about 300,000. The Federal Government does not own or manage any of the land as it does in traditional national parks. Instead, people, businesses, nonprofit cultural and environmental organizations, local and state governments, the National Park Service and other federal agencies are working together to integrate the celebration and conservation of the region's resources with the needs for sustained quality of life and quality of place.*

*Today the Quinebaug and Shetucket Rivers and their tributaries are much cleaner than they were in the 19th and early 20th centuries when bustling textile mills and factories lined their banks. Residents and visitors now enjoy these riverways for fishing, boating, canoeing, and swimming. Besides water activities, the National Heritage Corridor provides recreational opportunities for history buffs, hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, antique collectors, fall leaf peepers, and families out for a pleasant excursion.*

*The above is an excerpt from the National Park Service Brochure "The Last Green Valley"*

*For information, write to Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc.,  
107 Providence St., Putnam, CT 06260.*

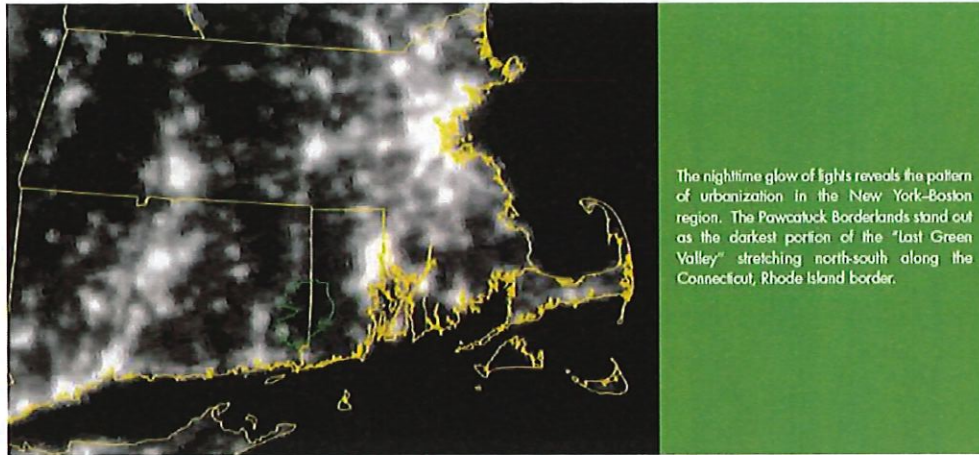
*Phone: 860-963-7226, fax: 860-928-2189,*

*e-mail: quinebaug.shetucket@snet.net.*

*web: [www.thelastgreenvalley.org](http://www.thelastgreenvalley.org)*

The introduction of the Pawtucket River Borderlands has also provided the Town with another opportunity to maximize the resources available to them. Leaders from the forested communities on the Rhode Island, Connecticut border are working to preserve our last remaining area of relatively un-fragmented forest, which the Nature Conservancy has dubbed the Pawcatuck Borderlands. The collaboration of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, the Nature Conservancy, and the Policy Council, with the leadership of Washington Trust and Northeast Utilities, epitomizes the kind of cross-disciplinary efforts that foster creative place making. A satellite image of the Pawtucket River Borderlands is shown on the following page. The satellite image depicts night sky of Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.





Sources: Nature Conservancy, NOAA Defense Meteorological Satellite Program, Radiance Calibrated Lights: 1996-1997; MASSGIS; RIGIS; Census

## Conservation Priorities

Sterling is a special place that contains vast tracts of un-fragmented forestland, agricultural land, and wetlands systems that constitute major natural resource conservation priorities. Although a majority of these areas are protected (i.e. State Forest, state purchase of development rights) the areas that are not are highly sought after for development. Therefore, the criteria for evaluation of these resources for preservation or conservation should be based on:

- *The inter-relationship of the value and function of the resource subject to preservation,*
- *The relationship of the resource as it relates to existing and future greenways or open space,*
- *The sensitivity of the resource to development pressures and*
- *The degree of constraints to development of the proposed resource.*

This methodology and/or philosophy ensure that important resources and functions are preserved and appropriate areas are identified for development at appropriate densities. Some resources are so valued for preserving environmental quality or community character that efforts must continue to ensure that these resources are preserved. Preservation generally means to avoid altering these areas to the extent feasible and prudent. On the other hand, some important functions of other natural resources can be maintained while compatible activities take place nearby. In other words, the natural resource functions of these areas could be conserved in an environmentally sensitive way.

As developmental pressure increases, the Town through its Plan of Conservation and Development, its land use regulations and commissions, and its municipal programs should pro-actively prepare to manage the Town's growth and development. Protection of such resources will not happen without some effort. If Sterling residents are to be successful at preserving the things that matter most to them and that enhance the community, we must take positive steps to identify and protect important resources.

## Preserve or Conserve?

Preservation means:

- to protect from harm
- to maintain intact or unchanged.

Conservation means:

- to save from loss or depletion
- to avoid wasting.

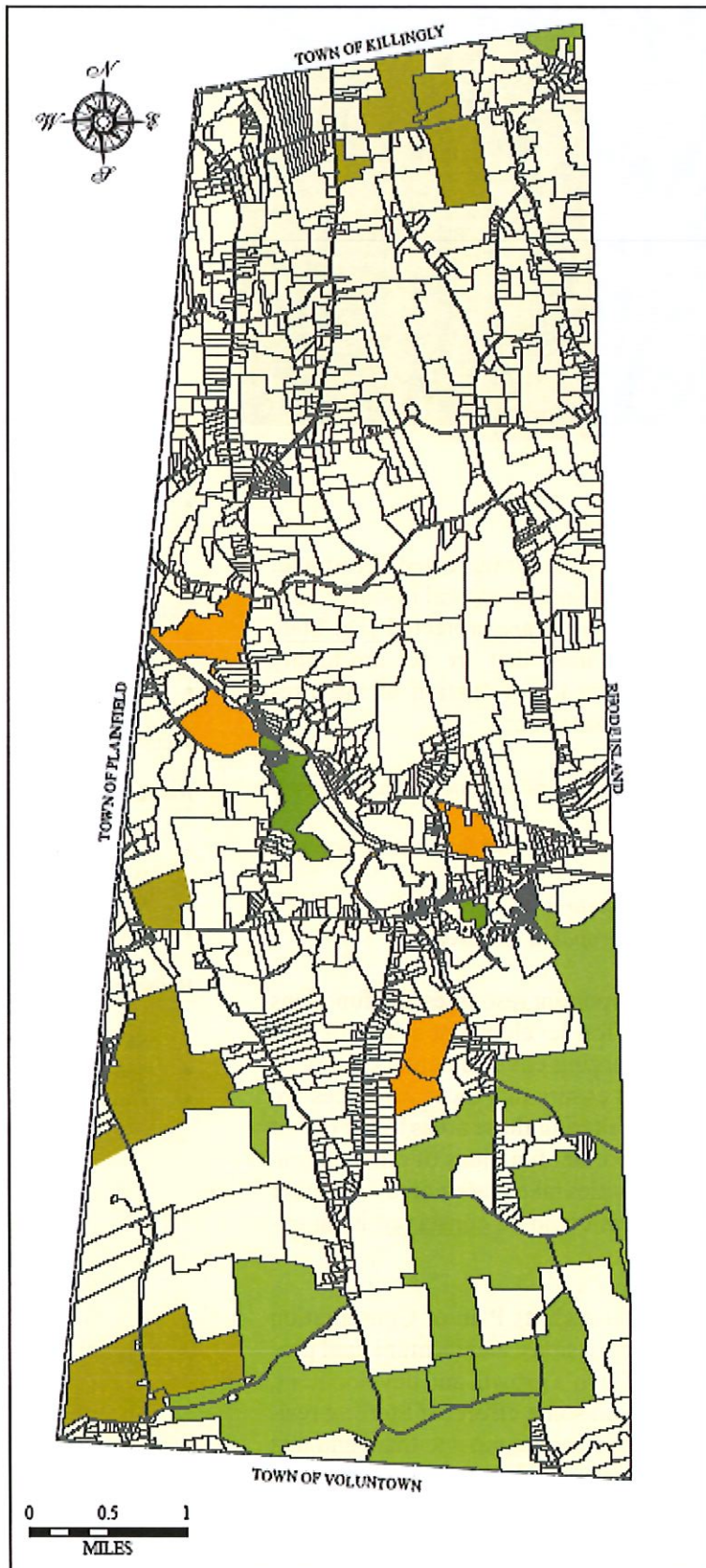
Webster's Dictionary

## Resources for Preservation

- Watercourses
- Waterbodies
- Wetland Soils
- 100 Year Floodplain

## Resources for Conservation

- Slopes over 20%
- 500 Year Floodplain
- Farmland



# TOWN OF STERLING CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

## LEGEND

- Conservation Priorities
- Development Rights Sold
- State Owned Land
- Town Owned Land
- Highway
- Local Road
- Parcel boundary
- Town boundary

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*This Map is for evaluation purposes only. Information relative to features on this map is approximate and subject to change as subsequent surveys may disclose.*

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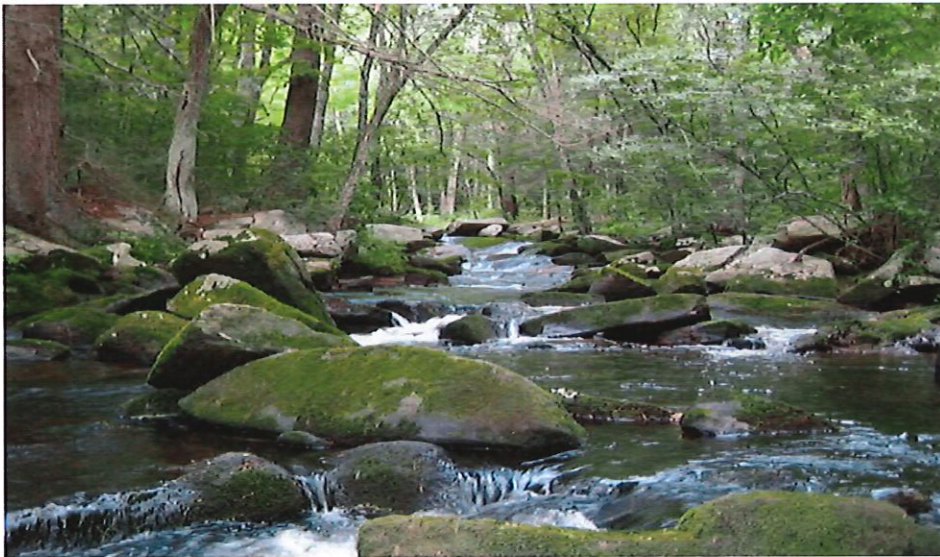
## Strategies

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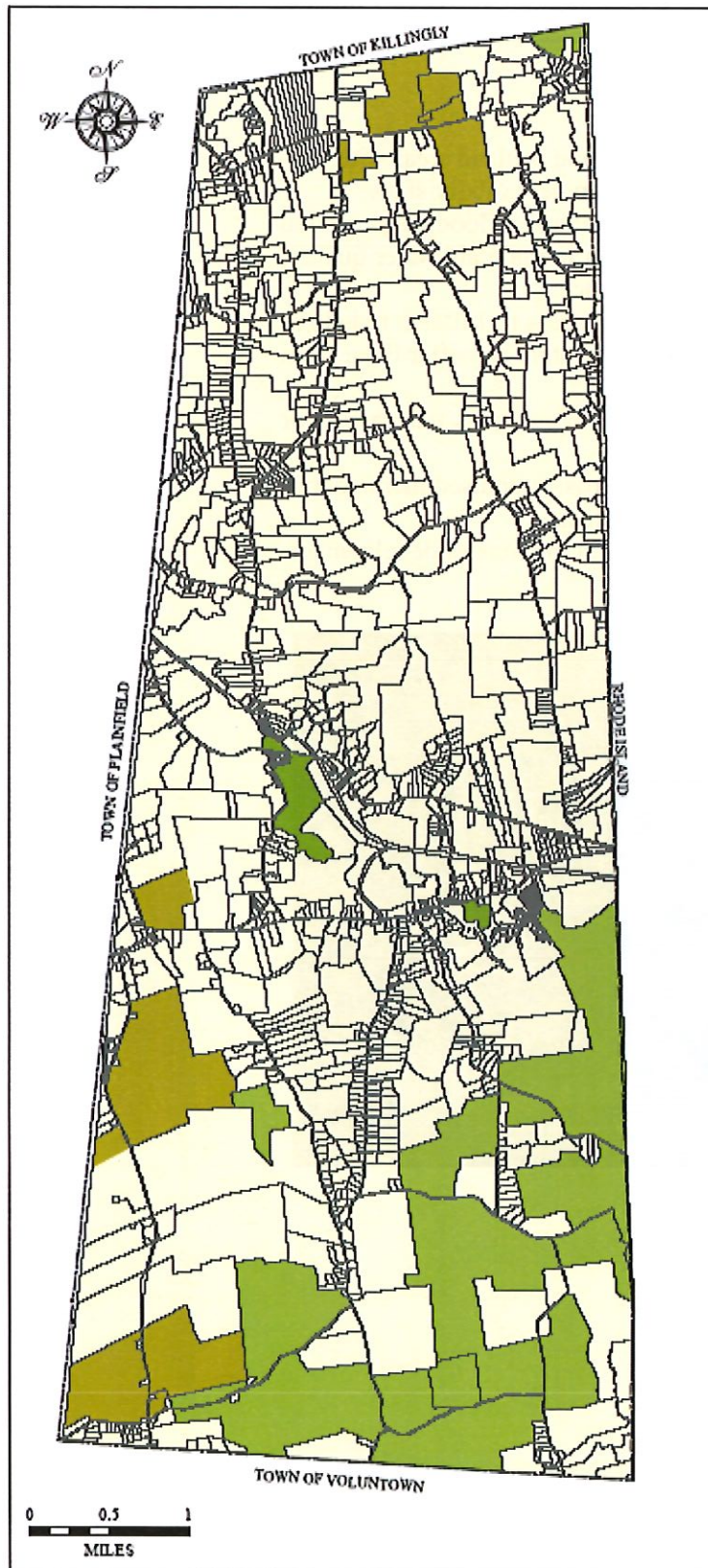
### Land and Water Resources

1. Encourage the permanent protection of steep slope and wetland areas with conservation easements or as open space “set asides” in new subdivisions.
2. Continue to protect watercourses, waterbodies, wetlands, floodplains, vernal pools, and other important water resources in order to maintain water quality, wildlife habitat, water supply, and ecological balance.
3. Increase inland wetlands regulatory upland review areas to 150 feet to help to preserve wetlands and watercourses in their natural state or buffer them from adjacent activities.
4. Improved land use regulations and/or subdivision regulations that restrict or limit construction on steep slopes
5. Ensure adequate inspection and maintenance of erosion and sediment control materials to protect water quality and water resources.
6. Continue to fully consider natural resource issues at the time of development.

#### Quanduck River – River Road Area







## TOWN OF STERLING EXISTING OPEN SPACE

### LEGEND

- Development Rights Sold
- State Owned Land
- Town Owned Land
- Highway
- Local Road
- Parcel boundary
- Town boundary

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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## Open Space

Open space when permanently preserved can help protect community character, enhance the quality of life for residents, conserve important natural resources, provide wildlife habitat, provide fiscal and economic benefits, shape development patterns, and preserve lands for recreational uses. On the flip side undeveloped land (perceived open space) that has not been permanently preserved threatens a municipality's sense of place and community. While most people perceive "open space as any land that is not built upon, it is important to stress that the Plan defines open space as land that is permanently preserved for or dedicated to open space uses.

### Inventory of Open Space

"Dedicated open space" includes land that has been set aside in perpetuity for parks, conservation, recreation, or similar purposes (i.e. Pachaug State Forest). This type of open space is typically owned by the Town, State or a public or non-profit entity that may allow public use of the land.

The term "managed open space" includes land that is used for another purpose but provides the community with open space benefits (private recreational facilities, camp grounds, utility rights-of-way, cemeteries, etc.). Since such land may not allow public use of the land or may be sold or developed in the future, it is not considered dedicated open space.

Finally, "perceived open space" is private land that is presently vacant or underdeveloped. While this land may appear to be open space, nothing prevents this land from being sold or developed at some time in the future.

In Sterling, there are only a few parcels owned by the Town and there is only one parcel held for open space protection by private land trusts (i.e. Wyndam Land Trust). The vast majority of dedicated open space is owned by the State of Connecticut and contained within the Pachaug State Forest. Several private recreational facilities (campgrounds) constitute the bulk of the managed open space and agricultural fields and former farms are the most evident example of perceived open space. This type of land is also typically at the greatest risk of development, due to ease of road and house construction. One hidden gem within the Town of Sterling is the old rail bed officially known as the Moosup Valley State Park Trail.

### Existing Open Space

Town Owned

State Owned

Purchase of Development Rights (Farm Land Preservation)

Private Recreation

Other Private

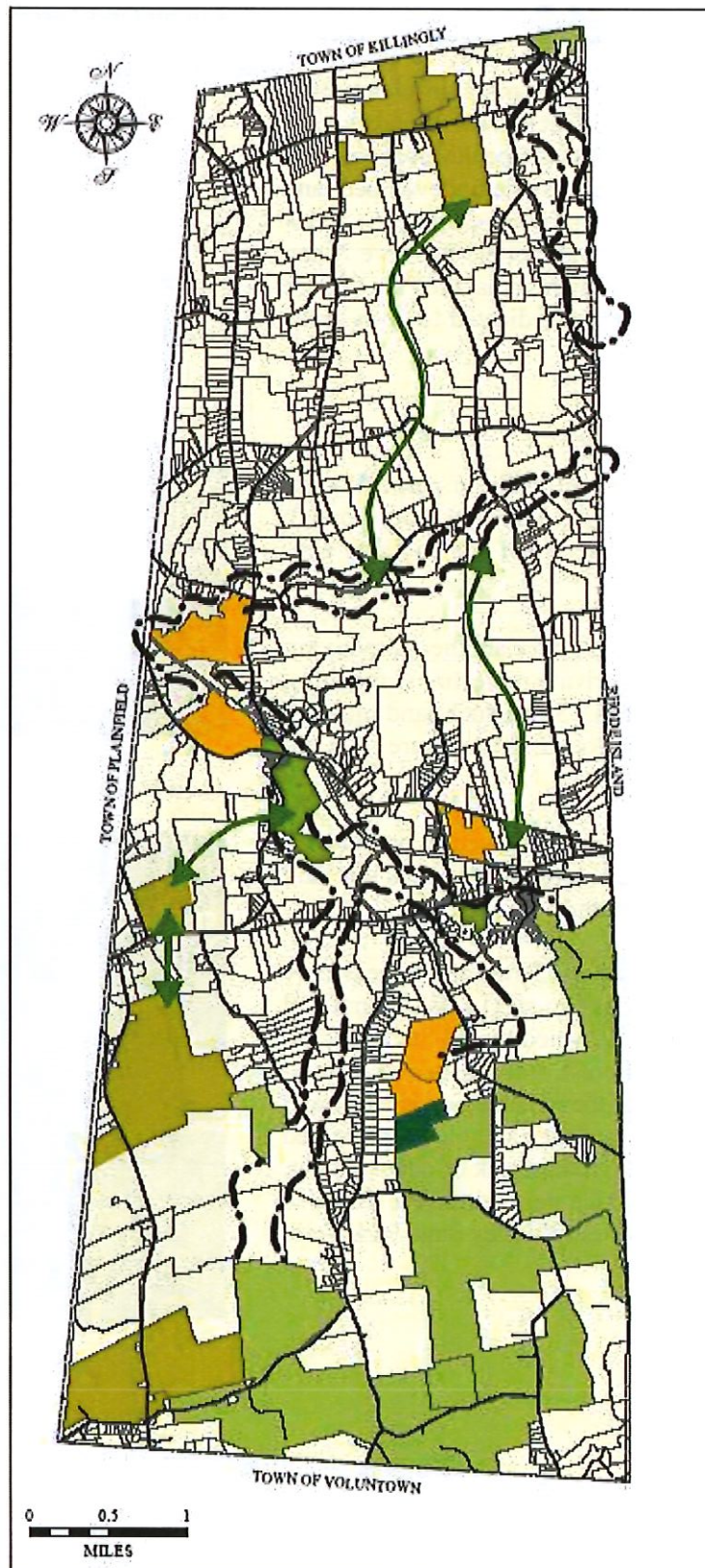
*Frink Farm Purchase of Development Rights – Route 49*



*Ekonk Hill Agricultural Lands*







# TOWN OF STERLING OPEN SPACE CORRIDORS

## LEGEND

- Development rights sold
- State owned land
- Town owned land
- Proposed future land acquisition
- Conservation Priorities
- Open Space corridor
- Proposed linkage to corridors
- Parcel boundary
- Parcel boundary
- Town boundary

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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## **Open Space Programs**

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### **Regulatory Measures**

The only direct regulatory measure used by Sterling to preserve open space is the discretionary 15 percent open space "set-aside" requirement for subdivisions. The Commission could strengthen this provision by increasing the required set aside to 20 percent, as many Towns have done.

### **Town Plans & Programs**

The Town of Sterling has no formal plan in place that contains a prescribed set of policies for identifying, funding or acquiring land for open space preservation. Although the Town has recently established an Open Space Fund or set funds aside for open space acquisitions.

There is no local or regional land trust actively working on open space preservation in Sterling. The Quinnebaug-Shetucket National Heritage Corridor was established in 1994 and which encompasses Sterling. One of the Corridor missions is to assist in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical, and recreational land resource management programs to retain, enhance, and interpret the significant features of the lands and resources of the region.

In addition, the Town should consider options for establishing a land trust or identifying other means of assuring that open space, whether purchased or provided as part of future subdivisions, can be expeditiously acquired and properly managed.

The Town could assign a new group or designate an existing commission to establish an open space program, open space fund, and revise regulations to provide at least 20% set aside. In addition, the town could create a separate non-regulatory Conservation Commission, assigned to conduct long range conservation planning, open space planning and implementation, advise other boards and commissions, and related tasks. The town could also investigate options for creation of land trust or other means of supporting open space acquisition.

## **Open Space Coordination**

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Many communities pursue development of an open space program in two steps: the first sets out the overall mission, criteria for setting open space priorities, and recommendations for permanent organizational structure to implement the plan. An ad hoc committee or existing commission may be assigned this task.

The second phase is implementation and acquisition managed by a special committee or existing commission charged with identifying specific properties meeting the plan criteria and finding means to fund and manage acquisitions.

Where private open space entities are in place, the Town's role includes coordination and cooperation.

## Assessment

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### Open Space Importance

For years, Sterling geographic location has not been looked on favorably with regards to residential development. However, as land prices in surround towns in Connecticut and Rhode Island continue to escalate, Sterling has been rediscovered. Sterling prized resource, available forests and open land has become a very valuable commodity. Overtime, this increased demand for residential development will change the very character of the community. Open space acquisition and protection is one of the most effective tools for managing and controlling growth in residential communities. Sterling has an exceptional opportunity to apply such tools before growth pressures become overwhelming.

#### Greenbelts and Greenways

A greenbelt is another word for a greenway. A greenway is a corridor of open space that:

- may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation,
- may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors,
- may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man-made corridor, including an unused right-of-way, traditional trail routes or historic barge canals, or
- may be a green space along a highway or around a village.

Connecticut General Assembly  
Public Act 95-335

### Open Space Amount, Location and Configuration

There is no true standard of how much open space a community needs. Every community is different in terms of physical features and residents' desires for public ownership and public use.

Agricultural economics continue to pressure farm owners, leading to disuse or development of farmland. The latter option becomes more appealing to farmland owners as property values rise in response to residential development. With over a 1,000 acres in active agriculture, preserving farmland should be a conservation priority. Although large areas have been saved by the State's purchase of development rights, other agricultural lands (ie. Sterling Hill) have been lost to residential development. Therefore, the community should continue to strive to protect these agricultural resources.

Experience in other communities has shown that, while the amount of open space is an issue, the utility of that open space is more important in the long term.

While isolated open space parcels may preserve an important natural resource or preserve the appearance of undeveloped land, they may not contribute to a meaningful open space system. However, if open spaces are interconnected into a cohesive overall system, the value of open space to residents and the impact on community grow exponentially through:

- increased accessibility for all residents,
- enhanced quality of life for residents,
- improved wildlife corridors, and
- more opportunities for active or passive use.

The most important function of the open space component of the Plan of Conservation & Development will be to identify those areas that appear most worthy of contributing to an integrated open space system. Then efforts can be devoted to implementing the open space plan.



## **Greenway and Trail Opportunities**

Sterling's hidden gem, the Moosup Valley State Trail which is slated for substantial improvements by the state can anchor an open space plan identifying the potential for a Town-wide network of greenways that would be a significant asset in the community and enhance community character, community spirit, and property values.

The map on the facing page depicts a conceptual framework for establishing open space priorities on Sterling. Such a design would emphasize the preservation of farmlands, scenic vistas, and river corridors and create significant potential for greenways, trail systems, and other passive recreation.

## **Open Space Philosophy**

While open space can be preserved in many ways, a realistic philosophy must recognize that open space preservation may require land acquisition by the Town of Sterling through tax dollars.

Experience in other communities has found that residents support public expenditures for things like open space, greenways, and trails when they see a direct benefit to community character and quality of life.

The Town of Sterling enjoys a mill rate significantly below that of many neighboring towns, a fact that may contribute to increased developmental pressure. The Town may consider mitigating this threat through fiscal planning that includes annual budgeting of funds dedicated to open space preservation or bonding for future open space acquisitions.

Additionally, the Connecticut General Statutes allow a municipality to establish a Land Acquisition Fund, funded up to 2 mills annually, to be used for the acquisition of open space. Unlike other municipal accounts, this fund does not have to be expended in a given year and can accumulate interest. Such an account must be established to hold fees-in-lieu of open space for subdivisions and private donations can also be deposited in this account.

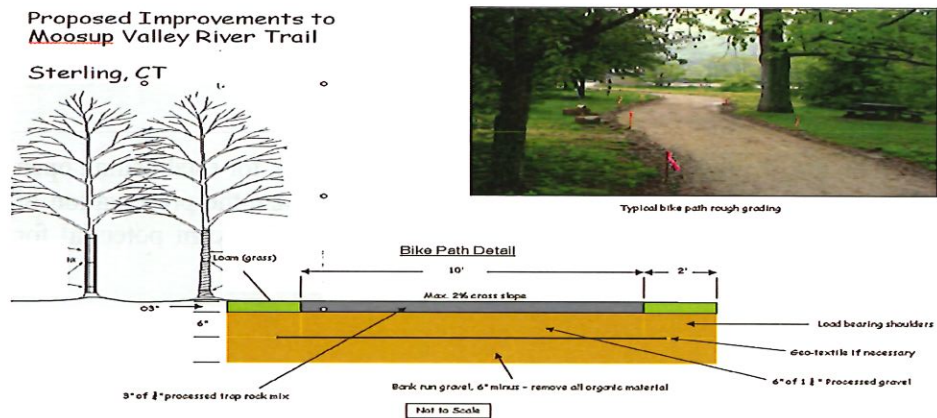
## **Strategies**

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### **Create a Greenbelt / Trail System**

1. Establish a meaningful open space system in Sterling by interconnecting open space areas into a cohesive overall greenbelt system with trails.
2. Create an interconnected local system of trails and greenways comprised of:
  - A central greenway/trail axis.
  - A southern greenway directly connecting the villages of Oneco and Sterling.
  -
3. Obtain trail easements and other access rights in key trail locations.

4. Encourage acquisitions by land trusts and other local funds that support a greenbelt system connecting existing open space and historic areas.



### Overall Coordination

5. However, since the town does not have a Conservation Commission long range conservation considerations have not received adequate attention. The Town may wish to consider creating a non-regulatory Conservation Commission to address the Town's increasingly urgent conservation needs. Consequently, the Sterling Conservation Commission could function as the lead agency to coordinate open space preservation efforts.
6. Cooperate with neighboring communities, regional organizations, and state agencies on open space acquisition and trail development.

### Regulatory Measures

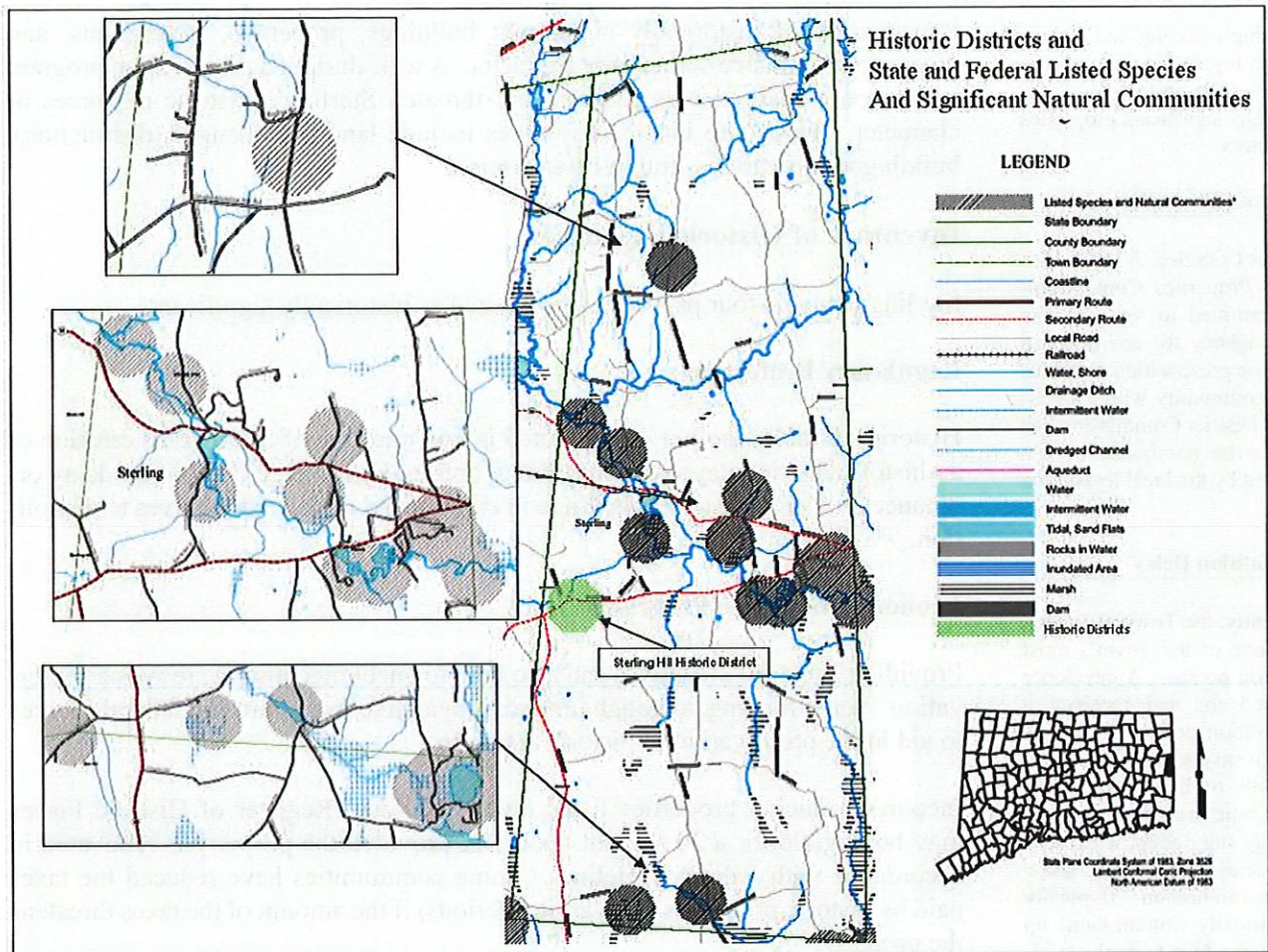
7. Consider increasing the discretionary 15 percent open space "set-aside" requirement for subdivisions to a mandatory 20 percent "set aside and/or";
8. Continue to require maximum fee-in-lieu-of open space provision.
9. Consider adopting a regulation to promote open space subdivisions.

### Other Programs

10. Investigate and, if found feasible, initiate establishment of a land trust..
11. Establish a Land Acquisition Fund and appropriate monies for future purchases of open space.
12. Pursue state and federal funding for open space acquisition and trail development.
13. In addition to authorization for application of Connecticut Public Act 490 provisions for tax abatement for agricultural and forest land, adopt such a provision for privately held open space land.



# Historic & Natural Communities Map



## Existing Regulations

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Sterling's Zoning and Subdivision regulations do not provide for the protection of historically significant properties or places.

## Historic Properties

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Under CGS Sec. 7-147, a Historic Properties Commission is permitted to serve as the lead agency for coordinating historic preservation activities in a community where a Historic District Commission has yet to be nominated or approved by the local legislative body.

## Demolition Delay

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Recently, the Town of Lisbon lost one of the Town's most historic homes. A developer applied for and received a demolition permit. Word of mouth save some of the components of this home, however, much was lost. A community may adopt a demolition delay ordinance to allow the commission (typically Historic Commission) up to ninety-days to evaluate alternatives to demolition, if the building is found to be historically significant.

During this period, the commission may attempt to find a purchaser who may:

- Retain the building,
- Transport the building, or
- Present some other alternative to demolition.

This regulation may not be applied to all buildings within a community. It is typically applied to structures that meet certain criteria for age or location.

## Historic Resources

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Preservation of historically significant buildings, properties, monuments, and places helps enhance community character. A well-designed preservation program can accommodate changes that do not threaten Sterling's historic resources or character. Threats to historic resources include land use changes (destruction), building modifications, and or deterioration.

## Inventory of Historic Resources

Sterling contains four properties recognized as historically significant.

## Regulatory Protection

Historic resources are not concentrated in any one area of Sterling, so creation of an historic district may not be a realistic option. However, a demolition delay ordinance may provide additional time to explore and review alternatives to demolition.

## Economic Incentive Programs

Providing financial incentives can also help to encourage historic resource preservation. Some funding, although limited, is available from state and federal sources to aid in the preservation of historic resources.

Income-producing properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places may be eligible for a 20 percent tax credit provided the property is renovated in accordance with federal guidelines. Some communities have reduced the taxes paid by historic properties (for varying periods) if the amount of the taxes threatens the property.

Sterling may wish to consider whether there is a need to modify property assessment policies to aid in historic preservation:

- *Adoption of an ordinance to abate all or part of the real property taxes on a historical structure provided it can be shown that current taxation is a factor which threatens its continued existence (CGS 12-127),*
- *Adoption of a resolution to designate one or more areas that are eligible for a deferral of tax assessment increase resulting from the rehabilitation of the property (CGS 12-127).*

## Education

Sterling may also wish to consider developing an educational program to raise local awareness about the importance of historic resource preservation. Education is often the most cost-effective tool to encourage sensitive historic preservation.



## Strategies

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### Identify Historic Resources

1. Undertake a historic resource inventory.
2. Pursue funding from the Connecticut Historical Commission under the Certified Local Government program to undertake a historic resource inventory.
3. Upon completion of the historic resource inventory, review and prioritize properties for preservation efforts.

### Protect Historic Resources

4. Consider adopting local ordinances to aid in historic protection through adoption of a demolition delay ordinance.
5. Promote educational programs on:
  - The importance of historic resources to community character.
  - Ways to preserve and protect historic resources.

State and federal government assistance programs which may provide tax credits and incentives for the rehabilitation of historic buildings.

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Historic Cemetery – River Road



Historic Barn – North Main Street







# DEVELOPMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Sterling

5

## Community Structure

A Community's historic development patterns, or structure (the overall physical organization of the Town/Community) is an important consideration in the Plan because of its correlation with a community's identity. Structure as it relates to historic development patterns is also an important guide for land use regulations and decisions and for guiding desired economic development (type/scale/density).

### Inventory

Sterling's community structure was highly influenced by the historic development of the town's two mill villages and agricultural areas on Ekonk and Sterling Hill. The community's structure has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade. The historic conditions, particularly the focal points of the town's two villages reinforce the original importance of the Moosup River as an energy sources for Town's mills and continues to influence community structure. As a result, the traditional focus of the Community as it relates to structure has not changed.

The following elements that contribute to community structure in Sterling are also identified on the map on the facing page:

Category	Elements	Description
Enhancing	Nodes / Villages	Identifiable focal points or places with distinctive characteristics (such as Sterling Village, Oneco Village and Sterling Hill historic area).
	Greenbelts	Greenways, trails, streambelts and other linear elements that provide overall context to the community (such as the Moosup River, Quanduck Brook, and Moosup Valley Rail Trail).
	Scenic Resources	Places providing a sense of scale.
Enhancing or Detracting	Roads / Links	The character of roads to, through, and around the community (Scenic Route 49).
	Commercial Developments	Style and scale as it pertains to historic development patterns and sense of place.
Detracting	Industrial Development	Development that may generate heavy traffic on primary access roads in Town.
	Strip Development and Sprawl	Large areas with little variation in style or character.

*Investment in the Community by the community speaks to community character and is an important guide for land use regulations and decisions...*

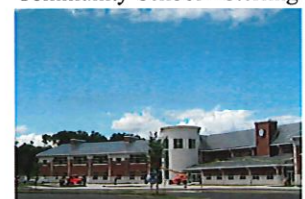
Oneco Post Office

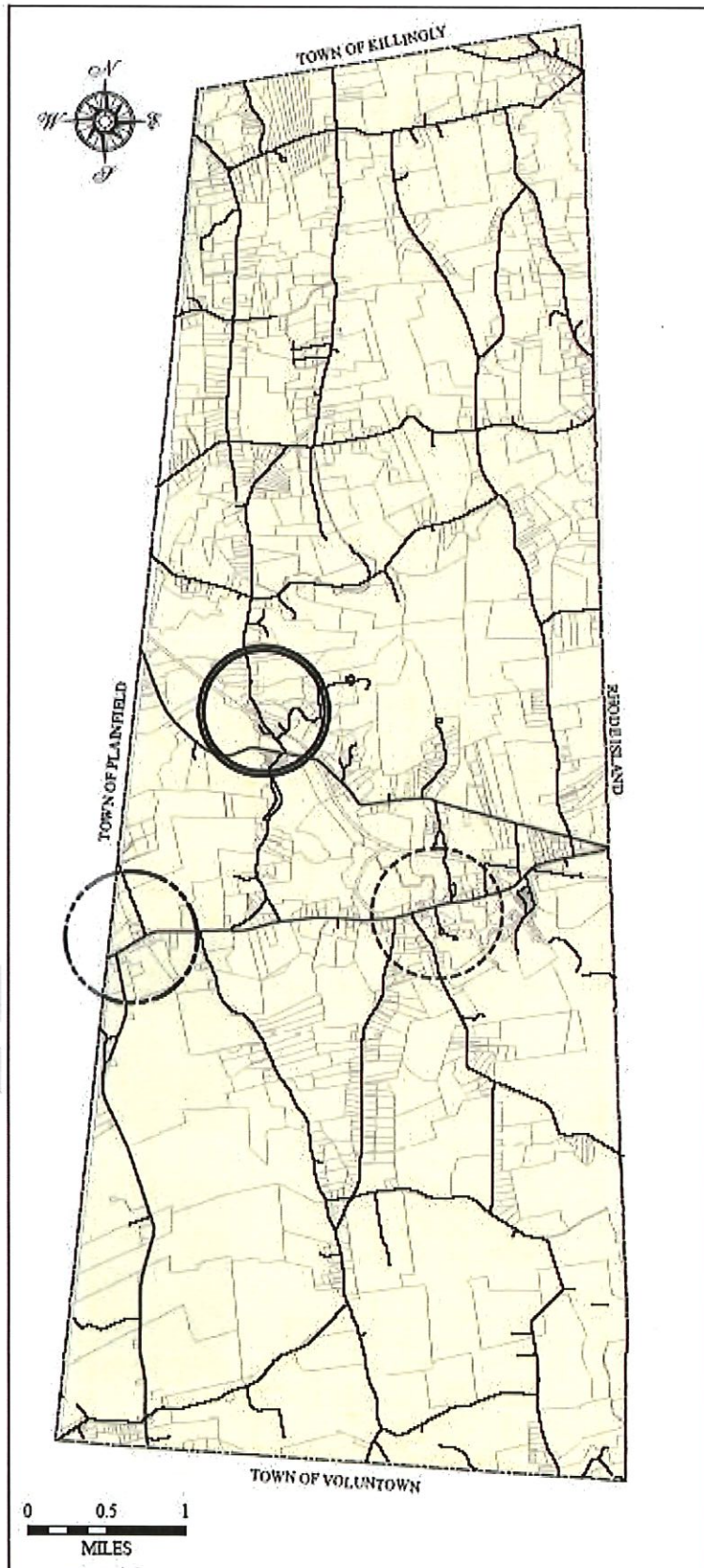


Old Sterling Town Hall



Community School - Sterling

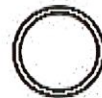




# TOWN OF STERLING COMMUNITY STRUCTURES

## LEGEND

### STERLING VILLAGE



U.S. Post Office  
Senior Center (Child Development)  
Town Industrial Park  
Town Ball Field and Track  
Fire House  
Town Garage  
New Middle School  
Church  
Commercial Space (retail, auto, service)

### STERLING HILL



Historic District  
Church  
Agricultural Area

### ONECO VILLAGE



U.S. Post Office  
Town Hall  
Town Library  
Ballfields  
Fire House  
Commercial Space (retail, service)

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT

### PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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## Overall Development Structure

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Studies of community structure and character show that people identify most strongly with sites and areas that exhibit a strong “sense of place”.

Basic structural considerations for Sterling are

- providing a strong community focal point in the Villages of Sterling and Oneco,
- providing appropriate land use controls to effectively manage and guide residential and non-residential development,
- optimizing development of the available commercial/industrial land with sewer and water in a manner compatible with community character, and
- as discussed in the during multiple public sessions, developing an effective open space plan for Sterling that ties in with the improvements to the Moosup Valley multi-purpose trail.

### Gateways

Gateways contribute to community character since they create anticipation and reinforce the overall “sense of place” in the community. Sterling may wish to consider establishing gateway features (such as signage or thematic elements) at the main entrances to Town from Plainfield, Coventry – Rhode Island, and Voluntown.

In addition, gateway elements could also be considered as people enter Sterling’s Sterling Hill, Oneco and Sterling Villages.

### Overall Conservation Structure

In an introductory public meeting, residents of Sterling ranked community character and conservation issues as the highest priorities for the Town. The character of Sterling is reinforced by the remaining open agricultural lands, the rivers and mill ponds that surround the Town, and the scenic qualities of many roads in and through Town.

Open spaces, greenways, vistas, scenic roads, and streambelts provide overall context to the community and enhance community character and community spirit. These types of structural elements play a significant role in the overall organization of Sterling’s structure.

### Community Focus

Sterling has an opportunity to enhance historic community focal points, establish and strengthen new ones, and ensure that modern growth patterns do not detract from overall community character and conservation goals. Specific recommendations with respect to these possible goals are discussed below.

Consider strengthening overall community structure with:

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### Overall Structure

The community structure of Sterling consists of:

- two Town Centers with limited functionality
- no formal nodes at entryways into Town,
- a large industrial park area with only primary long term tenant (waste to energy plant), and
- marginal land use controls to guide development.
- Structural change?  
Oneco has traditional been the focus of civic activities, however, this could change once the new school opens just outside of Sterling Village.

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### Community Structure Priorities

- Create stronger village centers through public and private investment.
- Manage and control residential development.
- Promote commercial and industrial development in appropriate areas.
- Institute an open space program with the Plan of Conservation and Development as its base.

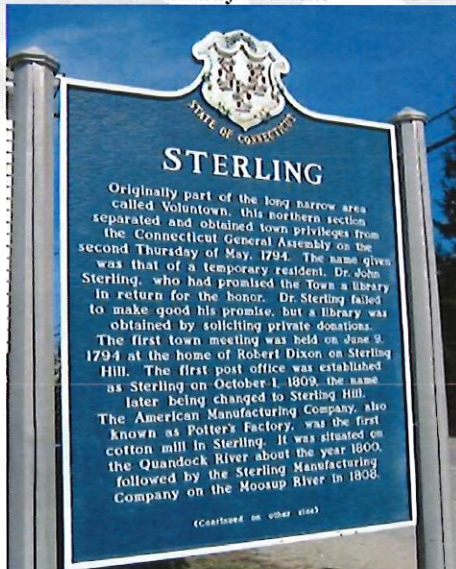


- enhanced and expanded villages (Oneco and Sterling) and Sterling Hill areas,
- support appropriate and compatible development of existing commercial areas, avoid strip development, and encourage village appropriate scale, which is even more important in the town's two existing villages.
- develop land use methods to control intensity of residential development, and
- continue and expand support for the preservation of open space, farmland, and woodland areas.
- Encourage elements that enhance community character (greenbelts, gateways, scenic resources, and scenic roads)
- Discourage elements that detract from community character (strip development, sprawl development, and "character-less" roads").

### Supporting Community Elements

Consider establishing gateway elements at main entrances to Sterling from surrounding towns to create anticipation and reinforce the overall sense of place. Consider promoting greenways, trails, streambelts and other linear elements that provide overall context to the community; include such elements in site development considerations where appropriate. Establish appropriately scaled roadway design and guide roadway improvements so that they enhance, rather than detract from, community structure and character.

Gateway Element



Open Space / Scenic View





## Housing and Residential Development

Like many small communities, Sterling faces the challenge of guiding future residential growth. The pace and intensity of this type of development can have far-reaching implications to the Town and this Plan proposes steps to prepare for future growth. The Plan also recognizes the need to consider promoting housing opportunity and diversity in preparing for the future. Sterling's ability to manage residential and non-residential development will affect the Town's fiscal future and community character. As a community grows, development pressures have considerable impact on public health, safety, welfare. In addition the community's historic character and spirit can be modified, which tends to affect the overall quality of life.

Although Sterling's location on the transportation grid tends to stifle new business development, residential development has prospered in the past twenty years as this quintessential New England community comes into its own. However, this new found attraction with Sterling may undermine the nature of its small town feel. Sterling has and will continue to become more attractive to potential homeowners given the increased residential development costs (building lot prices) in near by communities in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Approximately 12,000 acres of land, or 70% of the Town's land area, is potentially available for additional development. Under current land use regulations, nearly all of that land could be developed into either single family or commercial/industrial lots. Development of this land could result in as many as 6,000 additional housing units (however unlikely) in the future (approximately 1,193 residential units already exist). Sterling's lack of adequate land use controls does not help this scenario.

*The main housing issues in Sterling are:*

- *Anticipating increased demand for residential development, and*
- *Updating land use regulations to promote appropriate development and.*
- *Promote standards that allow the community to permit high quality development at sustainable rates of growth.*

Cul-de-sac Development



Multi-Family Housing (duplex units)



Sterling's quintessential New England charm could be threaten by increased residential development. Sterling has and will continue to become more attractive to potential homeowners given the increased residential development costs (building lot prices) in near by communities in Connecticut and Rhode Island. The Town, through its Plan of Conservation and Development, can take steps to anticipate and direct future growth, to avoid the growth issues all communities have encountered.

### **Future Residential Land Use Strategies**

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In the past 20-30 years, Sterling's residential development (subdivisions) have been based on pure speculation by individuals and corporations. These types of development where not based on any traditional development standards or patterns. Recent residential development has occurred without serious regard for specific natural resources, land characteristics or structural goals of the community. Consequently, the key strategies that need to be developed in the community should have positive influence on acceptable development standards which should allow the community to permit high quality residential development at sustainable rates of growth. Issues that should be considered in the near future and reflected in alternative land use regulations are;

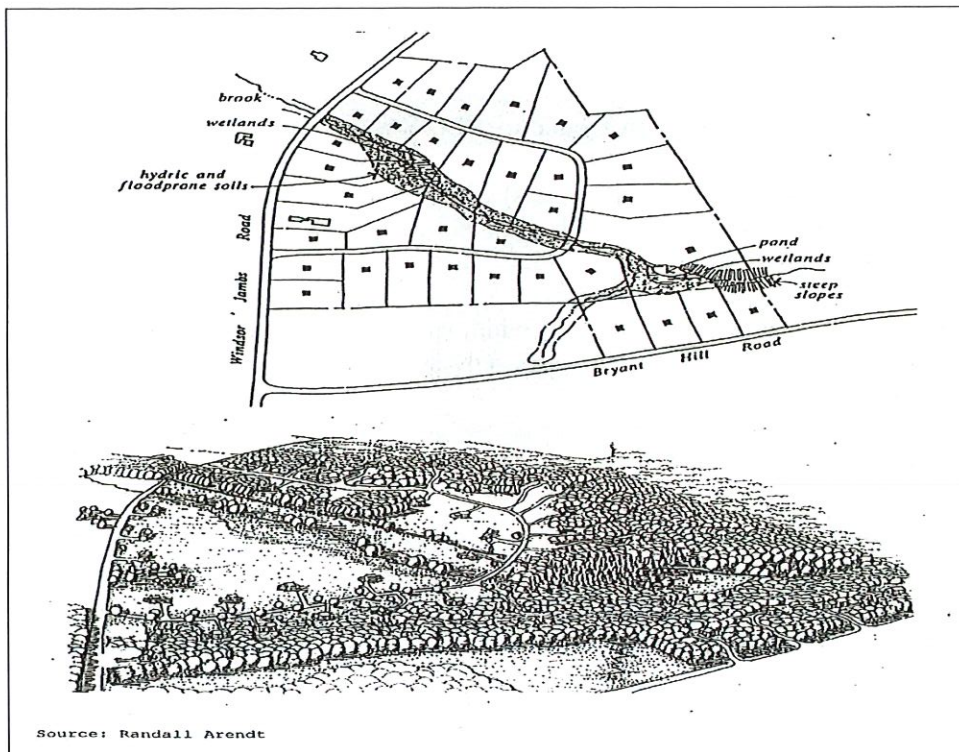
- Capability of the land to support development (e.g., water supplies, septic treatment capacity, accessibility, slopes, etc.),
- Housing density goals for Sterling (what is populations goal of the community),
- Road and drainage system designs, and
- Open space goals.

If the Community decides to further control growth, it needs to clearly identify specific development issues and adopt appropriate land use regulations to guide development in the near future. Land use decisions tend to influence development patterns for many years. The community needs to continually evaluate and establish open space requirement, subdivision design options to promote lower impact development, proper street design and other public improvements to ensure the proper placement of residential and non-residential uses to limit their impact on each other.

Examples of a conservation subdivision are shown on the following page. This example is shown as an alternative to traditional residential development strategies. However, the regulatory aspects associated with these types of development do no always achieve the desired result. In most cases developers use the regulation to maximize lot yield on marginal parcels. In these cases a well-intentioned development standards is abused. If development styles like this are embark on, the utmost care needs to be used in creating the appropriate regulatory language to achieve the desired result.



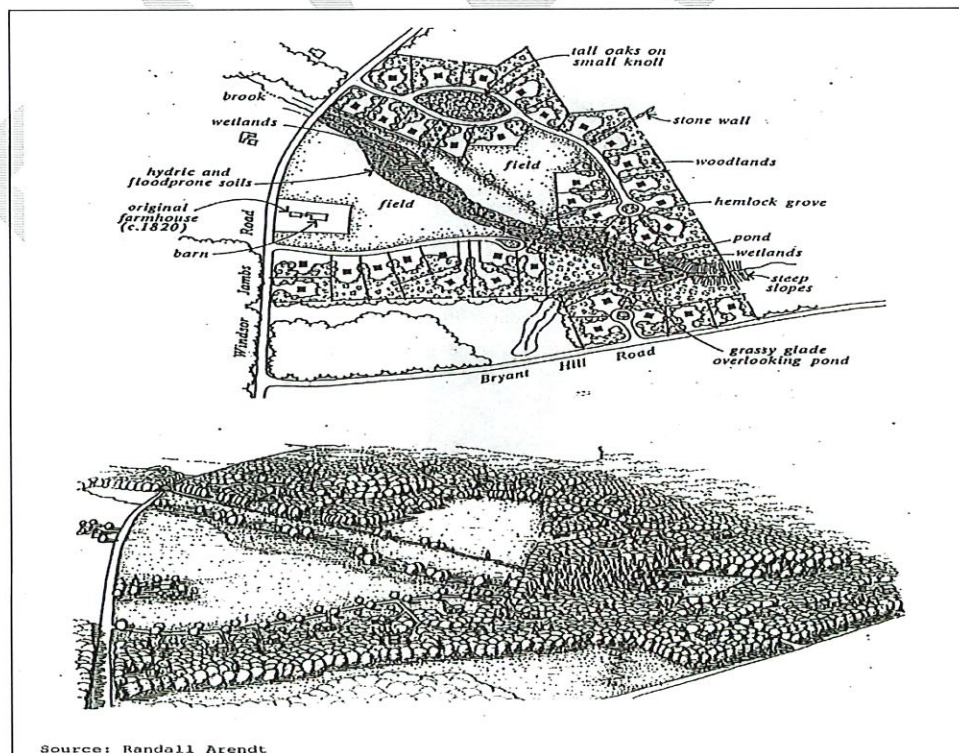
## Subdivision Design Concepts



Conventional Design Subdivision

### Conventional Subdivision Characteristics:

- All land divided into lots
- Little or no open space or public access
- No consideration of natural resources
- Rural character changes to suburban



Conservation Design Subdivision

### Conservation Subdivision Characteristics

- Open space protected
- Natural resources conserved
- Scenic features preserved
- Rural character maintained

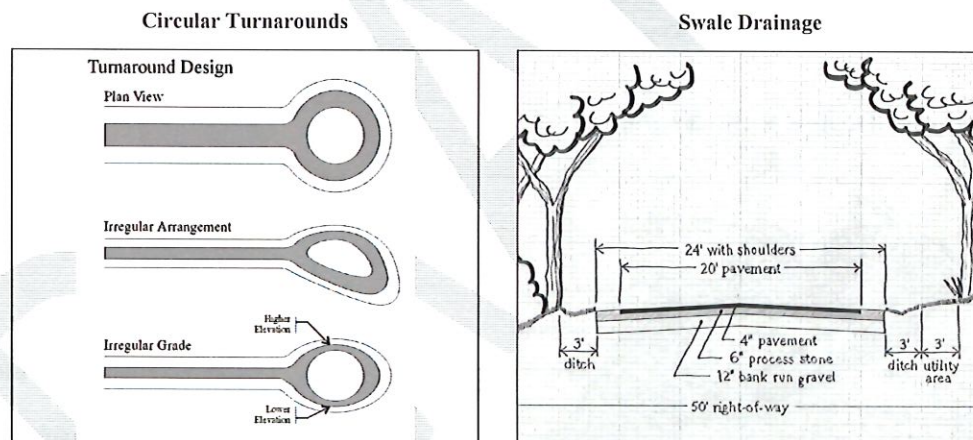
## Other Design Standards

Subdivision and street design standards that apply to cul-de-sacs, streets, and drainage may be evaluated for refinements that will enhance the incentive for consideration of conservation designs for new subdivisions.

Cul-de-sacs – Current standards require a circular turn-around of 50 foot radius. Regulations should be considered to require a circular turnaround to be irregularly shaped (and meeting turning radius requirements) and include a vegetated island. Alternative terminus designs should also be permitted including “T” or “hammerhead” turnarounds.

Road Standards – As discussed in Chapter 3, minimum road width should be a function of the use. Standards should attempt to permit roads only as wide as necessary for safe and efficient travel.

Drainage – Regulations should make clear that alternative designs making use of infiltration and natural topography are acceptable. Such designs may be more readily incorporated into conservation design developments and will reduce the potential for storm water run-off impacts on water quality.



Example of a well designed Circular Turnaround

Typical offset cul-de-sac (60ft. radius)





## Housing Diversity

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State Statutes require a Planning Commission to consider housing opportunities in its Plan of Conservation and Development. The availability of housing to meet diverse needs and the overall affordability of housing are two issues that Sterling needs to address.

Over the next 20 years, the composition of mature adults (ages 55+) in Sterling is expected to increase significantly as older residents live longer and healthier lives. Less than 2% of Sterling's housing stock meets the State of Connecticut affordable criteria (see sidebar) and so Sterling is subject to the provisions of CGS Section 8-30g, intended to enable the construction of affordable housing units.

At some point over the ten-year Plan period, the Town may wish to pursue specific strategies to address housing diversity and affordability. The revisions to the Town's zoning regulations allowing accessory apartment is one of many steps the town could take to help diversify the housing types available to individuals and families who may want to live in the community. A few of these options, which would require further study and evaluation, are described below.

**Regulatory** – Regulatory approaches to encouraging diverse and affordable housing could include the following.

- Identification in regulations of preferred locations (villages) and standards for multifamily and other housing types to promote housing diversity.
- Allowing more diverse housing options (such as apartments on upper floors in mixed use buildings) in village center areas.
- Current 2-acre land use regulations do not allow for village development patterns to continue in appropriate areas. Alternative land use regulations would allow the Town to better address development throughout the community.

**Town Involvement** – Non-profit or municipal developments should be designed to fit the location and be consistent with Sterling's character and structure. The Town may be able to play a role in an affordable housing project or elderly housing by seeking or identifying opportunities for land donations, use of existing Town owned property, or leasing of land for affordable housing development.

The state has added new requirements that each municipality adopt a housing plan as a stand-alone document or as part of their Plan of Conservation and development (Connecticut General Statutes, Title 8, Chapter 126a, 8-30j). Once prepared the plan shall be updated every 5 years.

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### Connecticut Statutory Reference

"The Plan shall make provision for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region."

"The Plan shall promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate income households, and encourage the development of housing which will meet the housing needs."

CGS 8-23

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### Affordable Housing Defined

"Affordable housing" includes governmentally assisted units, units financed with CHFA or FMHA mortgages, or units that are deed-restricted to sell or rent at prices that make them affordable to persons or families earning 80 percent of the median income for the Windham County area.

CGS 8-39a and 8-30g

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### Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure

In Connecticut, communities with less than ten percent of their housing stock meeting the definition of "affordable housing" are subject to the "Affordable Housing Appeals Procedure".

In this procedure, a developer can propose an affordable housing development and potentially override local land use regulations.



## Strategies for Guiding Residential Growth

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- Evaluate alternative land use regulatory standards
  - Evaluate revising and or adopting new land use regulations to provide development standards such as well defined net buildable area and or density-based standards for parcel subdivision
- Update and Refine Subdivision Regulations
  - Evaluate develop standards to encourage conservation design subdivisions, within maximum density limits or as permitted under revised land use regulations density standards, to maximize the preservation of open space and reduce environmental and aesthetic impacts of development, including
  - Road design standards
  - Cul-de-sac specifications
  - Drainage design options
- Evaluate subdivision regulations regarding effectiveness of minimum open space set-aside, criteria for such open space, and permit a fee-in-lieu of open space as presently utilized
- Promote Housing Diversity
  - Evaluate regulatory standards to encourage affordable housing and promote housing diversity
  - Consider regulation revisions to encourage housing options, such as mixed residential uses in village areas
  - Support public and private efforts to develop elderly housing

## Commercial and Industrial Development

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Since the decline of the textile industry in the Northeast, Sterling has struggled with industrial development. The Town has experienced marginal success with the development of their industrial park, beyond the tire burning plant. The lack of overwhelming success can only be attributed to the town's small population, geographic location and changes in the region's economy. As the Northeast Region's manufacturing base continues to struggle, so will Sterling. If possible, Sterling can position itself in a niche market in an attempt to develop its industrial and business base. The continuing challenge will be to accommodate additional non-residential activity without creating further impacts on the environment and character of the community.

Given, the lack of land use controls, the Town has no specific industrial or commercial districts. This lack of regulator oversight further enforces the notion that Sterling is not strategically located with regards to non-residential development, since this development could have occurred anywhere in Town and has not. Based on this observation, there has been no pressing need to expand or add to the industrial area. Although, Sterling has discussed and even attempted to provide addition space in the vicinity of the Town's Industrial Park they have not been successful. Monies necessary for infrastructure improvements to support non-residential growth are difficult to come by in rural communities. However, as a capitalist community Sterling will be targeted at some point in time as land in other areas becomes scarce. When this occurs Sterling may face some difficult choices.

### Support and Expand Existing Business

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Ekonk Hill Farm, Walking Weekend – Route 49



Sterling Industrial Park





It may be timely for the Town to identify its development preferences (from the list of permitted uses in the existing regulations) for the existing commercial properties in and around the two villages, as suggested in the sidebar.

## Overall Business Structure

Without traditional land use regulations it is difficult to discuss structure within the Town of Sterling as it relates guiding growth in specific areas. Without ridged land use districts, non-residential growth can occur almost anywhere in town. A non-residential could be located anywhere in town and is only limited by its ability to provide infrastructure (i.e. sewer and water). As long as provisions can be made for a facilities infrastructure, growth can occur anywhere. This is further supported by the advent of individual batch plants for sewage disposal. Over the past decade, the town's historic development pattern has been influenced by natural resource availability. Recent development has occurred in locations based on ownership and individual entrepreneurial gumption. While Sterling is not threatened with large scale retail development, such as, Lisbon Landing or, Killingly Crossings (former Anchor Glass site) or Waterford Commons, large scale industrial/warehousing could become a reality in Town as surrounding available areas (Plainfield) are used up. Sterling should continue to encourage appropriately scaled business. These facilities are extremely large and tend to threaten a community's traditional rural character. These developments, which need to be placed somewhere, are viewed as perfectly acceptable when they are located in another town or far way from one's home in their own community. But when inappropriately placed in the view of a neighbor, they are typically referred to as NIMBY's (not in my back yard).

If the Town is concerned about the location of NIMBY's, it could benefit from adopting more stringent land use controls. The adoption of more land use controls could assist the Community to recognize the different types of development that have occurred in Town and surrounding areas and avoid incompatible developments from occurring in the future. Sterling may also wish to consider revising current land use regulations to further develop current business and industrial areas.

The following items need to be answered by the Town as development pressures continue:

- Should the town discuss regulations to guide business growth? In specific areas? Not at this time?
- Where should non-residential growth occur?
- Should the disjointed non-residential development that has historically occurred be allowed to continue unchecked? Should it revert to residential (with provisions for continuation of existing uses)?

If a number of the answers to the above questions are yes, then the Town should consider the following:

- Consider developing land use regulations which delineate land uses and criteria for permitting those types of land uses that are deemed acceptable.

## Potential Business Development Priorities

Develop expanded infrastructure for non-residential uses

- develop strategies to retain agricultural base.
- continue economic development initiatives.
- attract agricultural focused development to enhance existing facilities
- support commercial recreational facilities that support agri-tourism.

## Village Districts

- Retail business and full service restaurants (as defined).
- Business service establishments.
- Consolidated parcel developments.
- Create incentives to develop within villages
- develop former Revere Textile site as municipal/retail center with a mix of residential to anchor Sterling Village (development should enhance existing development patterns)
- redevelop middle school site as municipal/retail center with a mix of residential to anchor Oneco Village

Support and Expand Existing Business and Industry

## Sterling Industrial Park





- Support growth in and around the village centers
- Continue to allow mixed uses in the Business Village (BV) Districts.
- Develop regulations that avoid “strip development” patterns by adopting regulatory standards for consolidated parcel standards to minimize access cuts and total parking area in new commercial developments.
- Seek ways to promote more of a pedestrian-friendly character where feasible.
- Identify priorities for preferred development(s) in and around the Town’s current industrial park.

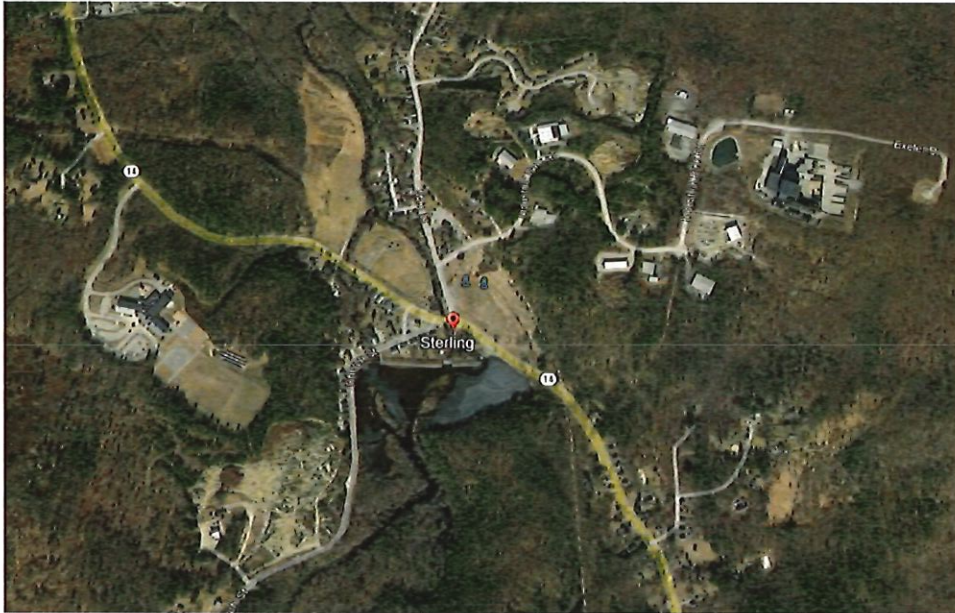
Wickford General Store, appropriate scale for village setting.



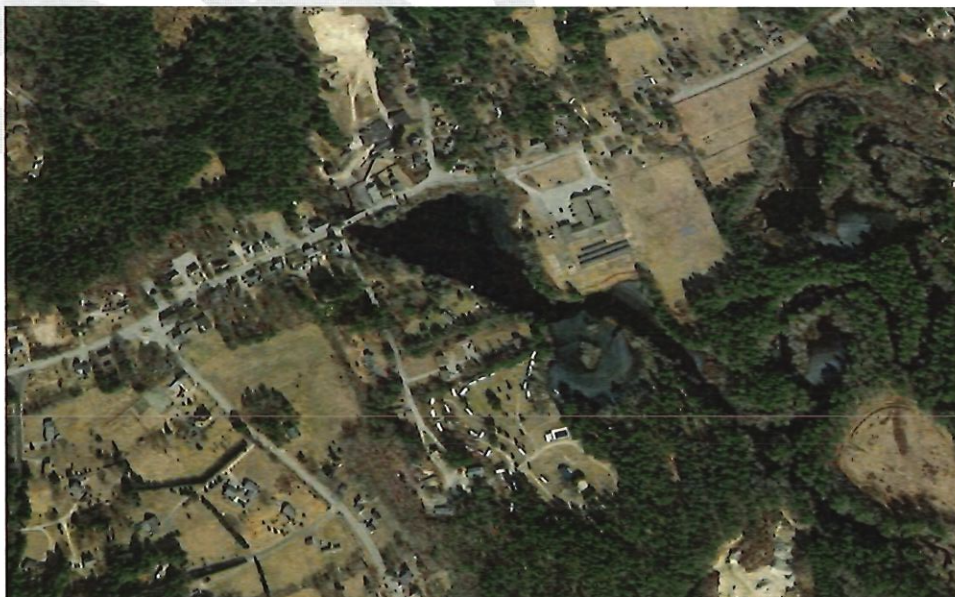
Sterling Village, historic mill housing, appropriate scale and character



Horse Show - Equestrian Center, Oneco, CT



Aerial view of Sterling Village – New Sterling School is shown on the far left



Aerial view of Oneco Village – Old Sterling School (Current Town Hall) is shown on upper right.



# STERLING VILLAGE

Sterling

6

## Traditional Village Development

The Town of Sterling contains two historic mill villages, Sterling Village and Oneco Village. Sterling Village is located in the northern portion of the town and Oneco Village is located in the southern portion. Sterling Village began to develop a little over two centuries ago as a direct result of the growth of small scale manufacturing in the United States and the forbearance and ingenuity of three town residents, Asa Ames, Isaac Pitman and Samuel Dorrance. The Village initially began to take shape when these three gentlemen bought land along the Moosup River in 1808 and opened the Sterling Manufacturing Company in 1809. The decision to purchase the land was based on its location next to water (Moosup River), availability of building materials (granite) and access to transportation. Although the first mill was destroyed by fire, the groundwork had been set to make this area Sterling's primary place of commerce in the early 1800's. Between the 1880's and 1900's the Village continued to flourish during the industrial revolution in the U.S.

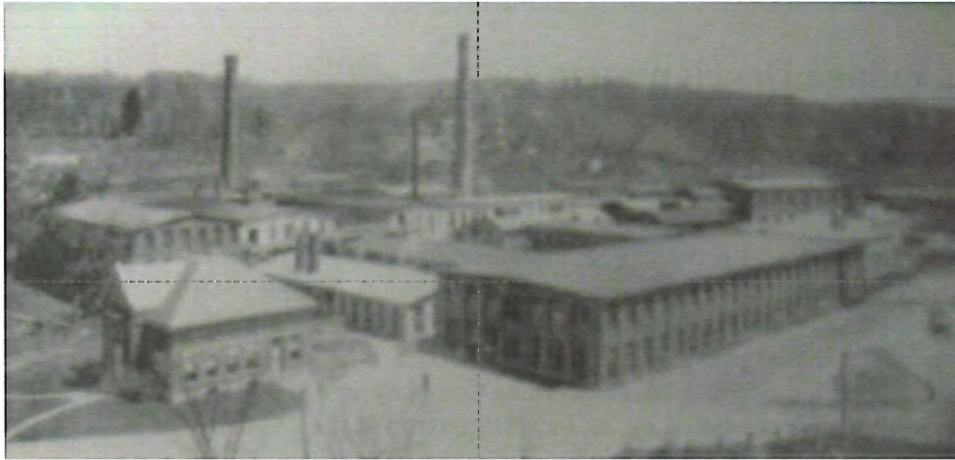
As the Village developed it was not just a place of employment, it became a place to shop and more importantly with the development of mill housing, it became a residential neighborhood. Although the development of the Village's residential component was self-serving, since it was developed as worker/mill housing, it gave the area a sense of place and vibrancy. Typically, residents of a village are looking for privacy, security and a sense of well-being, and Sterling offered all of that. Consequently, as Sterling Village grew, it became an integration of mixed characteristics – residential, commercial, recreational, cultural historic, and yet remained characteristically rural. And, as the textile industry grew, so did the village.

## Historic Inventory

**The Century's Before the Fire:** The Revere site as it is commonly called has long been used for industrial purposes and was originally home to a cotton mill operated by various owners from 1809 to 1879. The first dyeing of cotton began in 1879 with operations conducted by the Sterling Dyeing and Finishing Company. Since then, the Site has been occupied by several textile processing facilities, including the Sterling Dyeing and Finishing Company from 1904-1954, the Moosup Finishing Corporation from 1959-1960, and the Revere Textile Prints Corporation from 1966-1980. Pigments, dyes, and solvents were used at each of the textile firms to print various colors and patterns on fabrics until March 1980 when a fire forced operations at the facility to shut down. The fire, however, did

not destroy all of the buildings at the Site. Kenneth Lynch bought the Site in 1981, then sold it to W.F. Norman Company in 1982-1983. The W.F. Norman Company used the Site for metal stamping operations and then abandoned operations at the Site.

United States Finishing Company Plant, Sterling, Connecticut (Citra 1920)



The following is a brief list of a few of the historic elements that contribute to the sense of community within Sterling Village:

Revere Textile (Former US Finishing Company)  
General Store /Carl Pappas (Former Gas Station/ Mary Lou's Lunch)  
Sterling Village School (Present site of Post Office).  
Roman Catholic Church (Presently for Sale)  
Methodist Church and Parsonage  
Sterling Fire House (Presently Hadley Garage)  
Rail Road (Presently Moosup Valley Trail)  
School site (Presently U.S. Post Office)

### **Current Conditions**

Gone are the mills, the railroad, general store, school-house, Catholic Church, and gas station to name a few. But, despite these losses the framework created by the mill owners, government leaders and businessmen over the years have become the primary physical components of the Village remain relatively intact. Decisions made over a hundred years ago have had a significant impact on the historic development of the Village as well as the Town. The infrastructure that was built over the past century, which include but are not limited to, mill housing, Sterling Pond Dam and the raceways have become some of the important attributes of the Village and reinforces the original importance of the Moosup River as energy source for the mills. As a result, the traditional focus of the Community, as it relates to the basic structure of the Village has not changed for the most part.

*Investment in the Community by the community speaks to community character and is an important guide for land use regulations and decisions...*

Mary Lou's Lunch (circa: 1942), Building destroyed in Fire Mid 80's.



Typical Single Family Mill Housing (circa:1942)

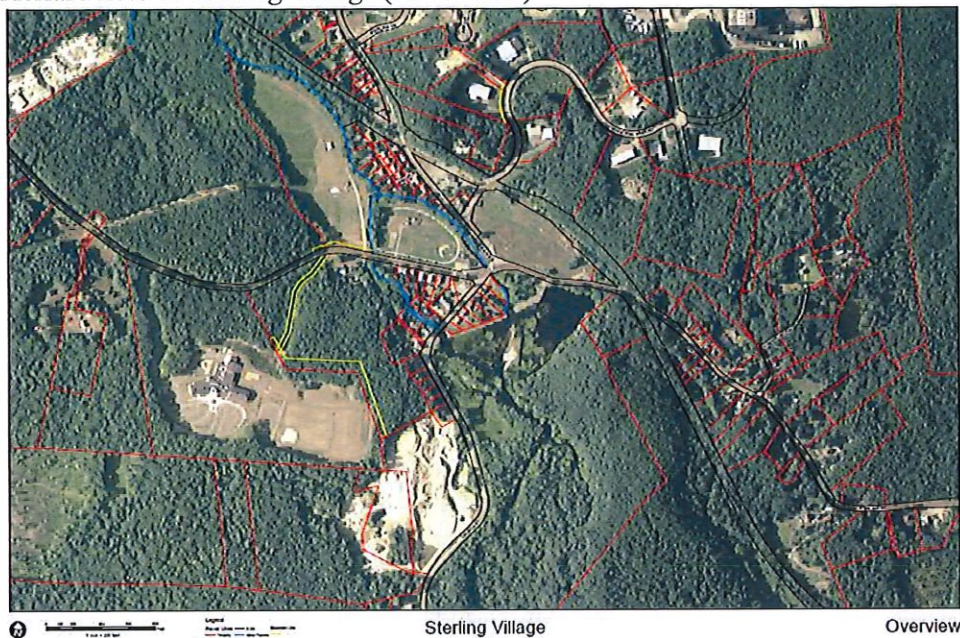


Typical Two-Family Mill Housing (circa: 1942)





Aerial Photo of Sterling Village (circa: 2010)



### Village Development Structure

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In New England you will find that most villages have developed around one or more primary business and/or activities. Village development typically occurred at the junction of two major routes, or near water, which was traditional, used for power and waste disposal (therefore industrial development) and/or center around a group of individuals who shared a common thread such as family or religion. Villages that evolved from the advent of industrial development historically became dependent on that entity for its contributions to a sense of place. Therefore, the loss of industrial development can be devastating. Whether a business leaves town or is lost to fire, it can leave town leaders searching to fill voids left by its departure.

In most instances, with modern day living and car ownership the traditional village has ceased to exist in all but name. People travel from the village to main towns and cities for work and leisure so houses in a lot of villages are usually homes to either commuters, used as second homes or as holiday homes.

This modern village sadly doesn't have the soul or spirit of the traditional times. In the traditional village everyone knew each other, there was a community spirit that just wasn't to be found in more suburban areas. The more traditional village can still be found, usually in the more remote areas of the countryside, they are getting fewer as time goes by. The main reason comes down to modern living and working practices, the need to travel to towns and cities for regular work being the main reason for the decline.

It's not uncommon to find that it's only where older folk remain in a village that any [semblance] of traditional village life exists these days. This has resulted in

village shops and post offices no longer being viable and closing down. When this happens its tantamount to the heart of the village being torn out.

The following elements that contribute to community structure in Sterling are also identified on the map on the facing page:

### Community Issues

A comprehensive list of relevant issues facing the Village Center evolved out of a number of work sessions during the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique historic character</li> <li>• Traffic levels provide good visibility</li> <li>• Presence of Post Office and Library</li> <li>• Visually interesting buildings</li> <li>• Location of Senior Center</li> <li>• Municipal holdings (land)</li> <li>• Recreation opportunities</li> <li>• Moosup Valley Trail</li> <li>• Diversity of housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small size of commercial district</li> <li>• Old buildings require a lot of maintenance</li> <li>• Traffic levels make walking risky given present infrastructure</li> <li>• Lack of formal parking</li> <li>• Mix of uses may not be ideal</li> <li>• Overhead utility lines are unsightly</li> <li>• Small lot size</li> <li>• Zoning does not account for small lot size</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an enhanced sense of place</li> <li>• Encourage or develop uses that enhance existing uses such as a farmers market or more frequent antique events</li> <li>• Develop architectural design guidelines</li> <li>• Develop and link parking to present and future uses</li> <li>• Enhance existing trees with new plantings</li> <li>• Create/schedule events that bring people to the Village Center</li> <li>• Develop traffic control measure within the Village Center to reduce vehicular speeds and increase pedestrian safety.</li> <li>• Create plan for the development of municipally owned property within the village</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vehicular speeds that detract from historic charm and hinder pedestrian enjoyment</li> <li>• Lack of critical mass to keep commercial uses viable</li> <li>• Development and renovations not in keeping with historic character</li> <li>• Truck traffic</li> <li>• Poorly planned/short sighted development</li> </ul>

The discussions held between the meetings and work sessions with the Planning and Zoning Commission continuously reverted back to one overriding theme. This theme consistently revolved around the mind set that Sterling Village should be viewed as a community asset and that any short term and/or short sighted decisions should not jeopardize and/or interfere with the long term viability of the



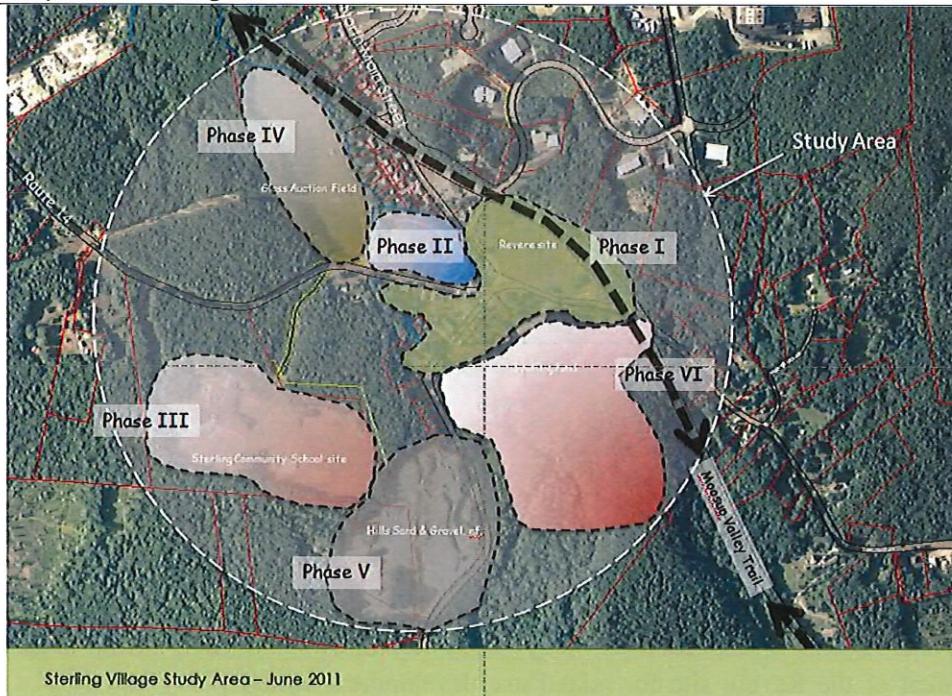
Village and its ability to grow and thrive as vibrant neighborhood community with in the Town of Sterling.

## **Future Village Development**

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For discussion purposes the future development and enhancement of the Village has been broken into six (6) phases. Although the phases are numbered I, II, III, IV, V and VI they are in no particular order, with one exception. The Planning and Zoning Commission would like to focus any short-term efforts within Area I.

**Study area and Phasing Plan**



## **Village Core Phase I - Area**

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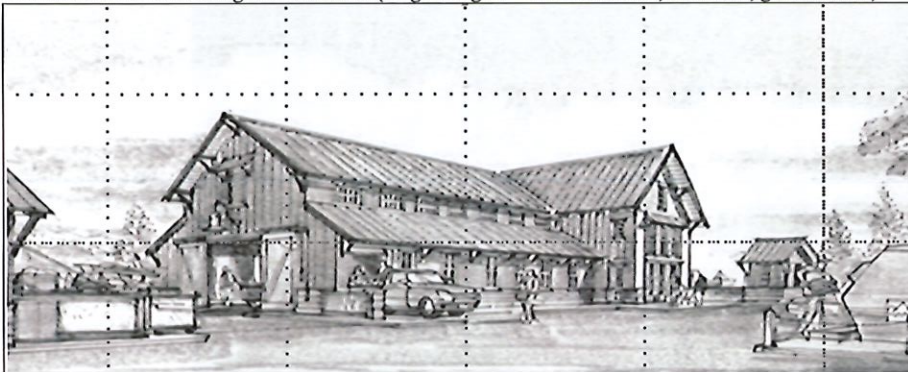
This area encompasses the very heart of the Village. The area includes the Revere Site, State Route 14, lower Church and southern portion of Main Street. Total Area approximately 15 acres.

### Short Term Goals (Area I):

- Streetscape
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
  - Parking

- Intersection Improvements
  - Realignment of Church Street
  - Realignment of Main Street
  - Installation of physical traffic controls/stop signs
- Traffic Calming
  - Pedestrian bump outs
  - Crosswalks
  - Landscaping
- General enhancement of the Revere site for Municipal purposes forgoing any short-term gains that may be realized by developing the site commercially and focusing on the long term goals of community building.

Possible mixed use building on Revere site (long term goal – farmers market, incubator, general store)



#### Long Term Goals (Area I) – OPTION I:

- Development of the Revere site for mixed use development which may include:
  - Municipal functions
  - Incubator space (Municipally sponsored) appropriate scale and architectural character, meeting the design guidelines of the Village.
  - Develop Village Design standards
  - Revise Zoning Code to allow for compact, scale appropriate, commercial and/or mixed uses.
- Develop Trail Head and Parking with signage appropriate to Trail System
- Develop plan for redevelopment of other municipal property in area
- Develop plan of the redevelopment of other properties in the Village Core that may become available in the foreseeable future (i.e., Catholic Church, U.S. Post Office)
- Bury overhead utilities



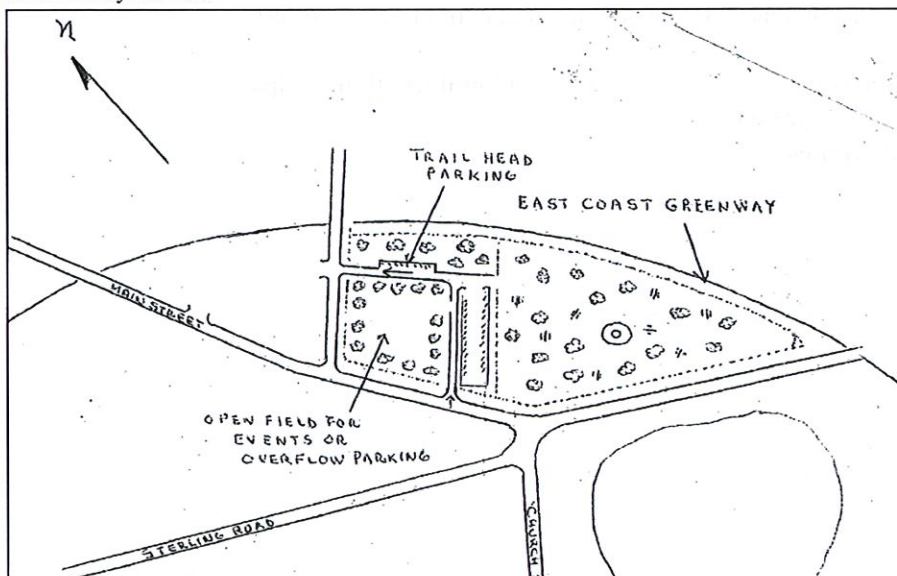
Long Term Goals (Area I) – OPTION 2:

- Passive and active recreational opportunities
- Connections to multi-purpose trail (State DOT/DEEP planned improvements 20222).
- On-site parking to complement existing recreation, future recreation, trail head access
- Overflow/event parking for redevelopment of Jorden Center
- Traffic Calming/Re-alignment of North Main Street and Main Street (Route 14)
- Create meeting space for residents – provide sheltered area/structure (i.e. gazebo. Pavilion, etc)

Figure 6-1 (Recreational opportunities on former Revere site) – Alternative site Developed - Planning and Zoning Commission



Figure 6-2 ((Recreational opportunities on former Revere site) alternative site development – submitted by resident.



## **Village Field, Phase II – Area**

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This area encompasses another important component in the heart of the Village and includes the town fields, municipal well fields, walking track and State Route 14. Total Area approximately 4.5 acres.

### **Short Term Goals (Area II):**

- Stabilization of Moosup River embankments
- Streetscape
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
- Park Improvements
  - Parking – Realignment/formalization of parking area at the site along Sterling Road/Route 14
  - Realignment of Main Street
  - Installation of physical traffic controls/stop signs
- Traffic Calming
  - Pedestrian bump outs
  - Crosswalks
  - Landscaping
- General enhancement to this site should be viewed as an investment in the community.
  - Enhancement to playing fields located at the site
  - Little league field
  - Multi-purpose fields

### **Long Term Goals (Area II):**

- Future development and municipal investment in this parcel may be limited to its location within the flood plain of the Moosup River and its proximity to the Town's well Fields.
- Relocation of playing fields to the Revere site may be the optimum solution to the long-term development of this area.
- Passive use of this area as an event staging area could have long-term benefits.
  - The area could be returned to an agricultural use if municipal fields are relocated.
- Bury overhead utilities



## **Sterling Community School, Phase III – Area**

This area encompasses the new Community School. Total Area approximately 20.5 acres.

### **Short Term Goals (Area III):**

- Develop Streetscape along Route 14
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
- Traffic Calming
  - Pedestrian bump outs
  - Crosswalks
  - Landscaping
- General enhancement of the Revere site for Municipal purposes forgoing any short-term gains that may be realized by developing the site commercially and focusing on the long term goals of community building.

### **Long Term Goals (Area III):**

- Bury overhead utilities
- Link School Facilities/functions to Village Center
  - Connect via Church Street and Route 14

## **Glass Auction Field, Phase VI – Area**

This area encompasses another important component near the heart of the Village. The Glass Auction Field (privately owned. Total Area approximately 17 acres.

### **Short Term Goals (Area VI):**

- Streetscape
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
- Traffic Calming
  - Crosswalks
  - Landscaping

### Long Term Goals (Area II):

- Future development and municipal investment in this parcel may be viable for athletic fields and passive recreation
- Determine future potential for expanding well fields (municipal system)
- Passive use of this area as an event staging area could have long-term benefits.
  - The area could be returned to an agricultural use if municipal fields are view as viable in the near term (+/- 20 years).
- Bury overhead utilities

## **Hill's Sand and Gravel, Phase V – Area**

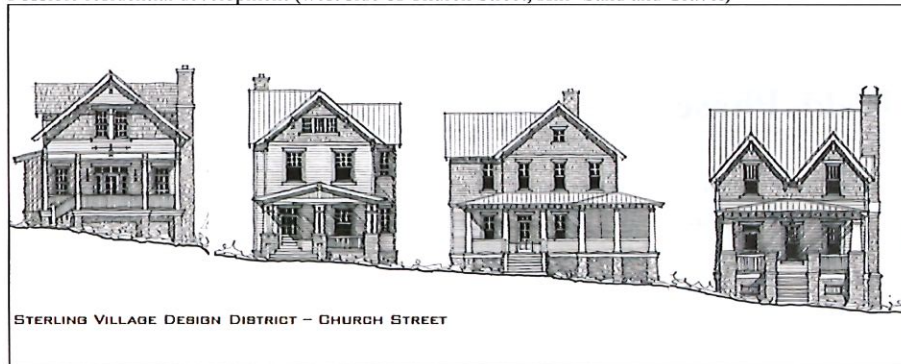
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This area encompasses the former Hill Sand and Gravel Bank (privately owned). Total Area approximately 15 acres.

### Short Term Goals (Area V):

- Develop Streetscape along Lower Church Street
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
- Revise Zoning Code to allow for compact, scale appropriate, residential, commercial and mixed uses.

Possible residential development (west side of Church Street, Hill' Sand and Gravel)



### Long Term Goals (Area V):

- Development of the site for possible residential uses and/or mixed use development which may include:
  - Municipal functions
  - Incubator space (Municipally sponsored) appropriate scale and architectural character, meeting the design guidelines of the Village.
  - Develop Village Design standards



- Revise Zoning Code to allow for compact, scale appropriate, residential, commercial and mixed uses.
- Develop connection to Community School and continue to Village core along Lower Church Street.
- Bury overhead utilities

## **Sterling Pond, Phase VI – Area**

This area encompasses Sterling Pond and the land owned by the Town to the South of the Pond. Total Area approximately 80 acres.

### **Short Term Goals (Area IV):**

- Develop Streetscape along Route 14
  - Landscaping (street trees)
  - Lighting, sidewalks
  - Curbing
  - Hardscape
- General enhancement of the Pond site for passive recreation (i.e., picnic area, fishing access) Focusing on the long term goals of community building.

### **Long Term Goals (Area IV):**

- Provide handicapped access to pond for fishing.
- Explore dredging possibilities to restore depth to pond and increase flood storage lost to sedimentation.
- Bury overhead utilities
- Create a more visible link to Village Core via signage and access.
  - Landscaping

## **Long Term Development and Design Strategies**

The character and quality of the village has developed over the past two hundred years. Therefore, it would be short sighted to think that change is going to occur overnight. But, it is appropriate for a community to plan for anticipated changes that may occur as a community grows and evolves over time and to do it in a manner which guides future growth in a direction the municipality it has settled on.

Sterling's present zoning code is limited in its ability to handle the intricacies of the village as it relates to scale and density. The present code correlates with large lot zoning and does not contain any provisions for the small lots that exist within the village. In the majority of the phases discussed above, one of the primary short-term goals involves the review and integration of new

language to be incorporated into the Town's Zoning Regulations in an attempt to handle growth and redevelopment in Sterling Village.

At this time the community is faced with a number of decisions it must make with regards to the redevelopment of Sterling Village. The community can support the development of a well thought out development plan to bring the village back in a form that will contribute the community and remain a vibrant neighborhood. Although, this road will take time, effort, and financial resources to develop it appears to be viewed as the best approach to achieve long term stability in the Village. However, there is a faction in the community that would make the choice to take the easier path and look for low bearing fruit for short term economic gain, which does not fit into the long term plan for the village, but may be readily achievable. It will take perseverance to take the longer road, but at the end of the journey the rewards are unlimited.

A number of basic design strategies and development options are detailed in Appendix C.

Figure 6-3 – Sterling Village (Goggle Earth image 2/22/2020)





# CONCLUSION AND IMPLEMENTATION

## Sterling's Vision

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Throughout the process it became apparent that the residents of Sterling appreciate the general nature and atmosphere that has existed in town that has helped to define the community. However, as internal and external forces pressure this unique balance between the historic development and new development, which, has had a visible impact on the town's historic landscape, the residents have become increasingly concerned about the future and direction of the community. This Plan of Conservation and Development identifies the critical issues that must be faced over the next ten years and beyond to address a vision for Sterling:

Sterling will guide future growth and change to:

- *Protect its quintessential rural character,*
- *Provide business opportunities in order to build a strong economic base, and*
- *Provide infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for its residents.*

To achieve this vision, Sterling will pursue four guiding objectives:

- *Preserve the historic community character,*
- *Establish efficient Town Villages in Oneco and Sterling Center*
- *Explore developing a municipal campus at the former Sterling Central School*
- *Guide residential growth through appropriate land use controls, and*
- *Guide non-residential development in a manner, that will encourage economic development.*

For each of the above objectives, this document identifies a definitive set of challenging, yet achievable, strategies and action steps. These are summarized in the implementation table provided in each Chapter and in the complete implementation table below.

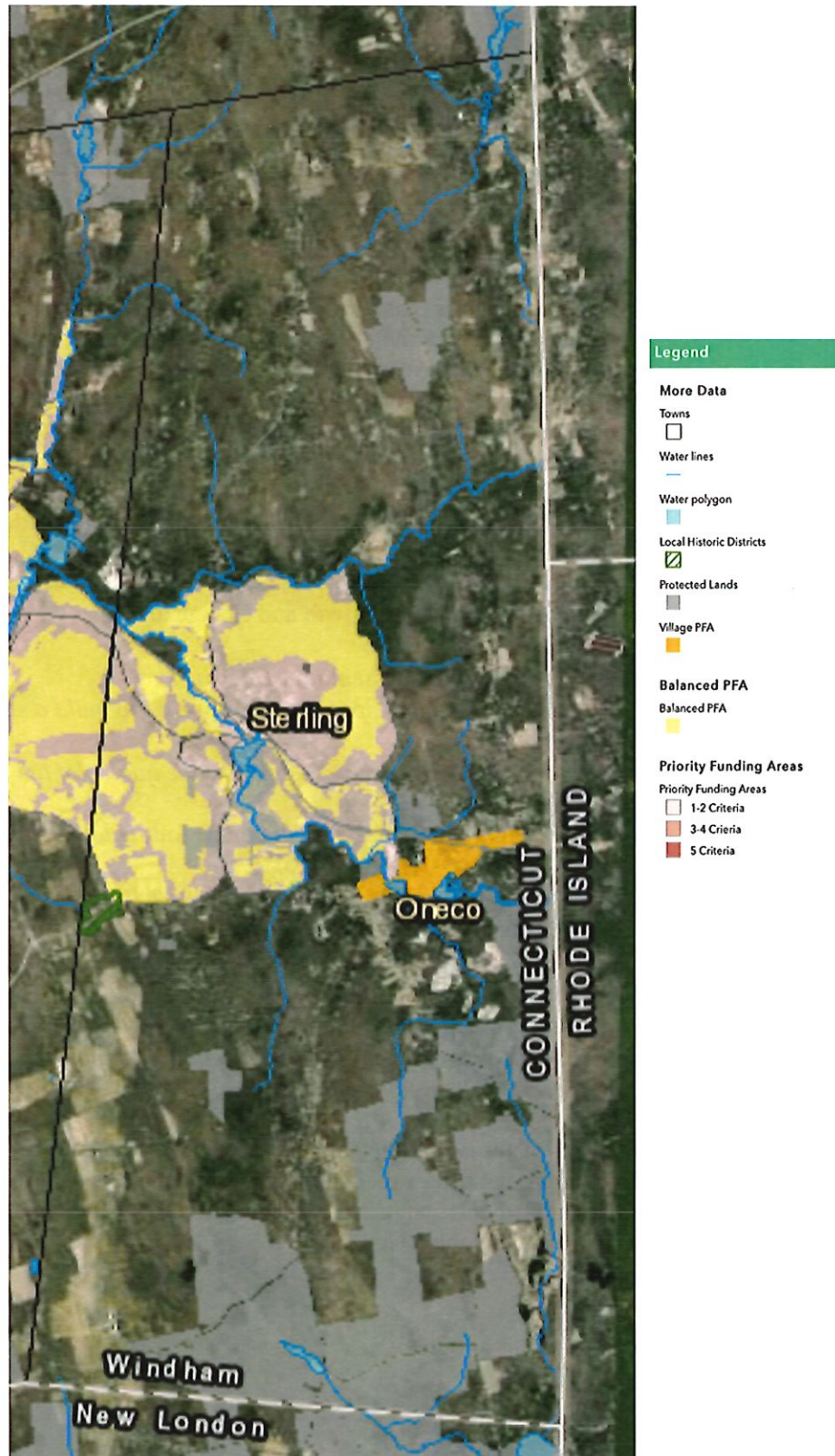
## Plan Consistency (State Plan)

This Plan was compared with the Locational Guide Map in the 2013-2018 State Plan of Conservation and Development and found to be generally consistent with that Plan.

The policies contained in the C&D Plan text provide the context and direction for state agencies to implement their plans and actions in a manner consistent with the following six Growth Management Principles (GMPs) which mirror the States prior C&D Plan:

- 1) Redevelop and Revitalize Regional centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure
- 2) Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs
- 3) Concentrate Development Around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options
- 4) Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands
- 5) Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets Critical to Public Health and Safety
- 6) Promote Integrated Planning Across all Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional and Local Basis

The Locational Guide Map plays an important role in coordinating relevant state actions by providing a geographical interpretation of the





state's conservation and development policies. Consistency becomes extremely important when a municipality seeks funding for a particular project. For example, infrastructure (sewer/water) improvements made by the municipality utilizing state funds need to be consistent with the above map. In this case improvements would need to be made inside of the Rural Community Centers.

### **Future Land Use Plan**

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The Future Land Use Plan on the facing page provides a graphic representation of the possible future land uses, structural, and other physical concepts discussed in this Plan. Sterling has developed over the past 200 hundred plus years without regulatory guidance. The Town has not created a regulatory environment utilized in most Connecticut Town's (ie. zoning). As Sterling faces may internal and external forces which shape the way that land is developed and utilized they may want to choose to investigate way to influence growth in the community.

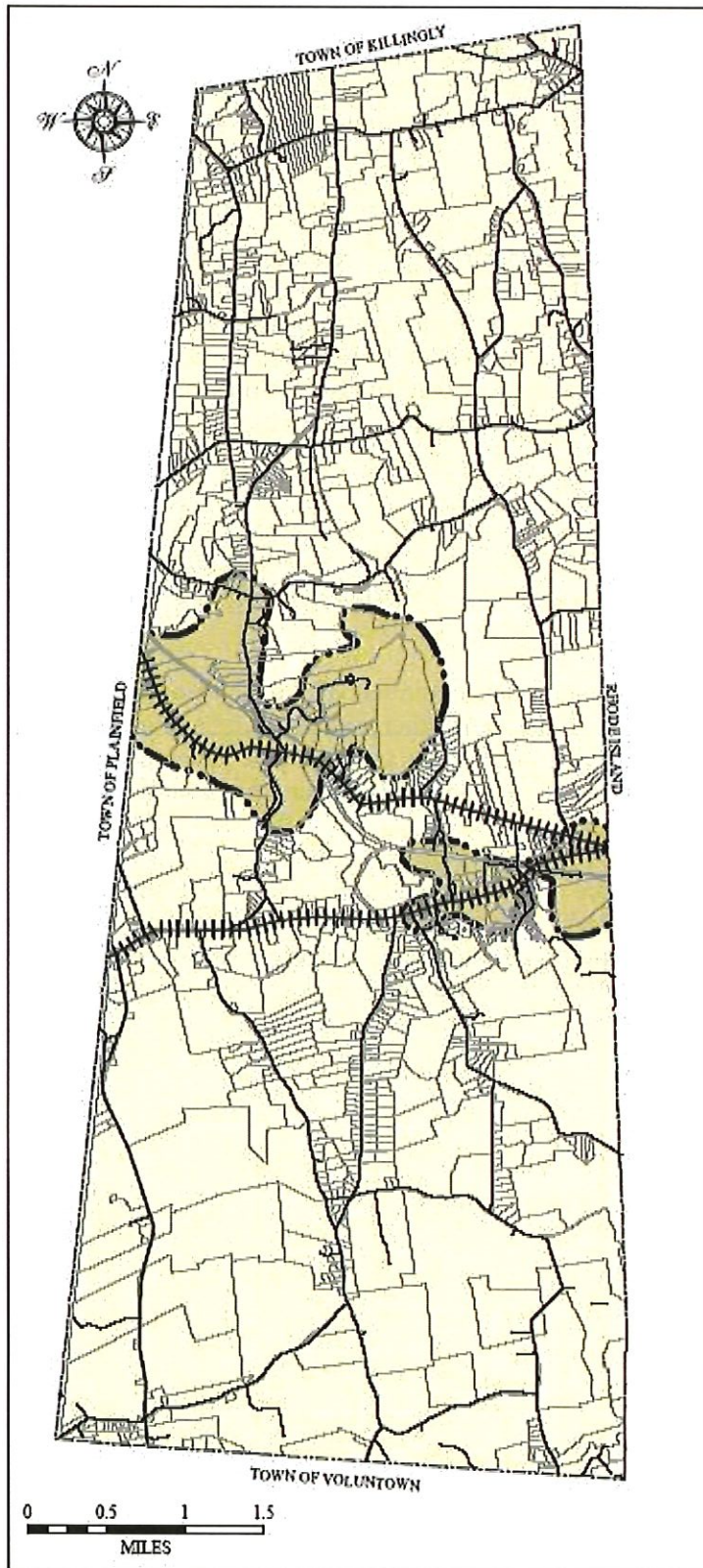
### **Implementation**

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There is little doubt that the most important step of the planning process will be implementation of the recommended strategies. For this, the Plan calls on all Sterling residents to ensure that the vision of the community's future is realized.

The Plan proposes to establish an implementation subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission, which will work with the Board of Selectmen, other town agencies and officials, and Sterling residents and business people to develop a program and schedule for conducting the evaluations, studies, development of regulations, organizational tasks, and program development outlined in this Plan.

This Chapter provides a complete set of the objectives and strategies developed to guide implementation of the Plan of Conservation and Development for Sterling. Although all of the strategies are considered important, an appropriate timeframe is provided for each. The implementation tables are organized as follows. Column headings are described in the sidebar.



# TOWN OF STERLING FUTURE LAND USE

## LEGEND

- ||||| Rural Growth Corridor
- Rural Growth Area
- Highway
- Local Road
- Parcel boundary
- Town boundary

## TOWN OF STERLING CONNECTICUT PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

*This Map is for evaluation purposes only. Information relative to features on this map is approximate and subject to change as subsequent surveys may disclose.*

*The Town of Sterling and Planning Commission assumes no legal responsibility for information depicted on this map. It is not valid for legal description or the transfer of property.*

Town of Sterling Planning and Zoning  
Commission 2022



## Strategy

It is important to recognize that the following objectives are the main policy statements and planning goals of the Town of Sterling. The strategies associated with each objective identify specific initiatives intended to help implement the strategy.

Issues will arise in the future that are not identified specifically in the Plan. In such situations, the overall strategies of the Plan will be the benchmarks used in evaluating whether a proposed activity or proposal is consistent with the Plan.

It should also be recognized that objectives and strategies will evolve over time as implementation or new situations provide insight into desirable policy directions. In other words, the Plan is not a static document and will continue to be reviewed and refined over time.

These implementation guides are intended to be used and refined over time as strategies are implemented and as priorities may change.

The priorities outlined on the following pages may be adjusted due to resource constraints (fiscal or staff) or changing policy issues.



## Preserve Community Character

### A. Open Space

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Investigate the creation of a Conservation Commission to work on the identification of Conservation issues in Town - Develop and adopt the Open Space Plan for the Town	BS	PC/IW W	2 years	
2. Assign implementation of the Open Space Program to the Conservation Commission.	BOS		3 years	
3. Establish open space land acquisition fund to be utilized by the town to implement Open Space Program established above, consider bond issuance for open space, and consider annual appropriation based on Conservation Commission recommendations.	BOS, BOF	CC, PC, WC	1,3	
4. Prepare, implement, and regularly update open space action plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and refine priorities</li> <li>Identify and evaluate resources</li> <li>Evaluate existing municipal properties</li> <li>Develop evaluation tools</li> <li>Recommend subdivision set-aside priorities</li> <li>Identify and seek funding, grants, donations, etc.</li> <li>Evaluate PA 490 program for open space land</li> </ul>	CC	BOS IWWC PC	2	

### B. Environmental Regulation

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Create Conservation Commission as stated above. PC and IWWC should be represented on this Commission	BOS	IWWC/ CC	1	
2. Revise and update subdivision regulations	PC		1	
3. Strengthen wetlands and water resource protections	IWWC	CC	2	
4. Evaluate and revise environmental and site development monitoring and inspection procedures, including fees	PZC, IWWC		2	

### C. Historic Resources and Welcoming Nodes

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Continue support for Sterling Historic Society	All		3	
2. Consider adoption of demolition delay ordinance	PC		3	
3. Establish welcoming elements at entrances to Town, into Sterling Village, Sterling Hill Section and Oneco Village.	BOS	PW	2	
4. Identify potential partner organizations to contribute or cooperate with entry node elements.	BOS		2	



## Establish an Efficient Town Centers

### A. Pedestrian and Vehicle Access

Action	Primary	Others	School	Timeline	Done
1. Consider development of sidewalk system connecting municipal properties and private institutions in Village areas area including Sterling Hill Section. (New School Connection to Sterling Village)	BOS	PW, PR	BOE	1	1
2. Consider development of Moosup Valley Trail System – New surface treatment. Work with State DOT and DEP to control access and explore interconnection to Oneco Village through historic rail spur to quarry site, replace old trestle crossing Moosup River.	BOS	PZC, CC, IWWA			
3. Evaluate future Connecticut Department of Transportation plans for Route 14 and 14a intersection, Route 14/Church Street/Main Street and propose appropriate alternatives, incorporating traffic calming techniques.	BOS			2	1
4. Seek funding for sidewalks and other area improvements through Small Town Economic Assistance grants, Federal TEA grants, Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers Valley Corridor programs, Boarderlands and other sources.	BOS	PW, PR	BOE	2	1

### B. Municipal Facilities

Action	Primary	Others		Timeline	Done
1. Conduct municipal space needs and facility availability including offices, public works, public safety, schools, recreation, and community center.	BOS	COM		1, 3	1
2. Set goals for expanding town office capacity, relocating public works and public safety functions, establishing a community function center, and planning for future school facilities.	BOS	PW, COM		2	1
3. Initiate site assessment of municipal properties (Old Elementary School, Town Hall, Library) for establishment of integrated municipal campus.	BOS	COM		2	1
4. Monitor properties abutting existing municipal properties or located on State highways in Town for possible acquisition by the Town.	BOS	COM		2	1

### C. Special Design District

Action	Primary	Others		Timeline	Done
1. Consider establishment of special Village Design District, subject to New England Design criteria for defined commercial uses consistent with overall goals for the two historic town villages.	PZC			2	1
2. Develop standards for defined commercial and mixed uses, based on developing appropriately scaled buildings honoring village design standards.	PZC			2	1

### D. Village Center Study

Action	Primary	Others		Timeline	Done
1. Establish an ad hoc study committee to conduct a comprehensive study of the Town's two historic village centers including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Municipal space needs assessment and design of municipal campus to integrate services, recreation, schools, and related facilities;</li> <li>Land use regulations and other approaches to enhancing and preserving the essence of these centers, including special design district concepts and standards and preservation of historic assets; and</li> <li>Designs and plans for accessible and safe pedestrian circulation inside and outside the area with sidewalks, pedestrian paths, and trails.</li> </ul>	BOS	PZC	BOE, PR, PW	1, 3	1

## Guide Residential Growth

### A. Land Use Concepts

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Explore developing modern land use regulations to provide buildable area, density-based standards for parcel subdivision.	PZC	BOS, COM	2	↑
2. Explore developing modern land use regulations to provide orderly growth as it relates to non-residential development	PZC	BOS, COM		

### B. Update and Refine Subdivision Regulations

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Explore the pro's and con's of developing standards to encourage conservation design subdivisions, within maximum density limits as an alternative to conventional subdivisions, to maximize preservation of open space and reduce environmental and aesthetic impacts of development, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Road design standards,</li> <li>Cul-de-sac specifications,</li> <li>Drainage design options.</li> </ul>	PZC	BOS, COM	2	↑
2. Revise subdivision regulations to detail development procedures on new Roads (ie. surety, issuance of building permits etc.)	PZC	BOS	2	↑

### C. Housing Diversity

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Evaluate regulatory standards to encourage affordable housing and promote housing diversity.	PZC	BOS	3	↑
2. Consider encouraging housing options, such as mixed residential uses in village areas.	PZC	BOS	3	↑
3. Support public and private efforts to develop elderly housing.	PZC	BOS	3	↑
4. Under take housing plan as required under CGS	PZC	BOS	1	



## Encourage Economic Development

### A. Route 14 and 14a Commercial Corridors

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Restructure and seek financial assistance to encourage investment in traditional small town Villages.	BOS	PC, COM	1	1
2. Develop regulatory standards for Village area, including parking, access, and other standards to encourage mixed-use, pedestrian friendly development and discourage strip development.	PZC	BOS	2	1
3. Create committee to evaluate the use/redevelopment of Revere site for Public use by the residents.	BOS	PZC	1	
4. Develop design standards (coverage setbacks, height, parking, access, etc.) applying to new non-residential development in Town to ensure appropriately scaled development.	PZC		1	1
5. Seek ways to balance historic industrial type uses (rock quarrying) with existing and future residential growth.	PZC		1	1
6. Seek ways to protect agricultural land along Route 49	PZC	CC, PC, IWWC	2	1

### B. Other Commercial Areas

Action	Primary	Others	Timeline	Done
1. Seek was to retain Industrial Park tenants and explore expansion to industrial base in appropriate areas based on infrastructure availability.	PZC	BOS	3	1
2. Evaluate reuse of Revere Textile site as mixed use village.	PZC		2	1

