

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Telephone (203) 563-0180
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TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897

MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission

FROM: Conservation Commission

DATE: July 17, 2019

RE: **2029 DRAFT POCD Comments**

Dear Planning and Zoning Commissioners,

Thank you for your work to date on the 2029 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). It has been an enormous commitment of time by staff and volunteers and your commitment to leading the project is appreciated.

The Conservation Commission reviewed the draft POCD and have included our comments in this letter.

In addition to our specific edits, the Conservation Commission strongly suggests that, the Natural and Historical Environment chapter be divided into two chapters within this POCD; Conservation of Natural Resources and the Preservation of Historic Resources. The preservation of historical resources has garnered a lot of interest over the past year and we see this trend only growing since the creation of the Village District Design Advisory Committee. The Conservation Commission is of the opinion the two areas are distinct and very different; grouping them together does not do justice to either of them.

Conservation and preservation are closely linked and may seem to mean essentially the same thing. Both terms involve a degree of protection, but how that protection is carried out is the key difference. Conservation is associated with the protection of natural resources, including the scientific processes that are involved in conserving them, while preservation is associated with the protection of buildings, objects, and landscapes (the built environment).

The Conservation Commission concerns itself with the *natural resources* of water, soil, wildlife habitats, wildlife management and biodiversity. Our role has always been strongly grounded in education of the public about the role they play in caring for the natural resources. A key aspect of this education is connecting the public with our natural spaces through walks and hikes. More

recently we have been addressing sustainability and restoration actions to reverse negative impacts on our natural resources.

Wilton continues to embrace the open space, trail networks, rivers, parks and natural habitats which the CC oversees. The POCD survey identified this as important to the majority of participants. Wilton residents' enthusiastic support, use and conservation of natural open spaces is a defining character of Wilton and differentiates our town from most other Fairfield County towns.

Historical preservation deals with cultural aspects –an appreciation of our history and retaining the look and feel of the structures that reflect that history. It does not center on the natural resources on which these buildings are sitting.

The Conservation Commission looks forward to using the 2020 POCD to guide our future decisions as we oversee conservation of Wilton natural resources, just as we have used the 2010 version. The updated vision as presented is somewhat muddled by the grouping of the two distinct areas of conservation and preservation. Both are important, but due to the entirely different strategies each employs and the groups who implement those strategies, we strongly believe the two should be addressed separately to ensure each of them realizes the intended impact required.

Specific edits to Chapter 4. Natural and Historical Environment

Change to: **Chapter 4 Natural Environment**

Goals as stated - **Change order of goals to reflect:**

1. Protect Wilton's Natural Resources
2. Protect, Preserve and Enhance Open Space and Greenways
3. Continue to lead the State in energy conservation and resiliency, waste reduction, sustainability, and public health

Page 25 Draft Goal #1 **Protect, preserve and enhance Open Space and greenways**

Issues and Trends:

“Wilton benefits from a wide variety of natural resources..... and enjoyment.”

Fifth bullet point - **The Conservation Commission, in conjunction with the Department of Environmental Affairs, is responsible to the Town for stewardship of our open space. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department steward the grounds of active use parks and greenways for the Town.**

Other stewardship organizations that collaborate with the Conservation Commission include Wilton Land Conservation Trust, Aspetuck Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, Norwalk River Watershed Association, Wilton Go Green, Norwalk River Valley Trail, Wilton Garden Club and Woodcock Nature Center.

“Wilton's system of parks and open spaces..... *Ongoing* improvements at existing facilities include:”

Continued maintenance of trails...

DELETE (Habitat restoration at Quarry Head Park)

Continued removal of invasive species at Horseshoe Pond...

Continued restoration of Kent Pond and its riparian buffer

Restoration of riparian buffers along ...

Annual Town clean-up events; ...

Plans for restoration of Schenck's Island Park and the Norwalk River riparian buffer along River Road

Continued maintenance of the River Road Pocket Park

Educational and

*Add under **Issues and Trends**: Add the following new section **before** section on NRVT*

Wilton continues to permanently protect open space by the use of conservation subdivisions. Permanently protecting and conserving open space is of high importance to the residents of Wilton.

Objectives and strategies:

Draft 1.1 Manage existing open space to maintain and enhance high quality environmental and recreational benefits

Second bullet point- Update, maintain and promote local open space (**delete and**) trail maps in user friendly formats for the public.

Draft 1.2 Acquire open space that complements existing holdings ... manner.

First bullet point- "Work with local....conservation value **that may be in need of protection, preservation and conservation.**"

Sixth bullet point- Evaluate existing conservation subdivision regulations and explore increased density and flexibility of design, ensuring quality open space is preserved **and protected** while also.....surrounding neighborhood. **Ensure these developments are beneficial to the health and well-being of the land, water, air and wildlife as intended by examining all of the long-term conditions likely to ensue on a case by case basis before endorsing the establishment of these developments.**

p. 31 Draft Goal #2: **Protect Wilton's abundant natural resources**

Issues and Trends:

"Wilton contains numerous sensitive water resources...improve water quality."

First bullet point - A majority....issues **among** survey respondents.

Sixth bullet point - The Norwalk River Action Plan updated in 2011 recommends ways of addressing water quality issues in the corridor in Wilton and the surrounding communities that comprise the watershed. **The plan should continue to guide future decisions.**

Seventh bullet point - “The Town adopted a Stormwater Management Plan in 2017 which includes many recommendations from the Norwalk River Watershed Action Plan. The plan should guide future decisions.

“As Wilton grows and develops, it has become increasingly important **to protect, preserve and enhance existing natural areas and improve habitat for plants and animals.”**

First bullet point: The Town, **working with the Conservation Commission, Trout Unlimited, Wilton Garden Club, Norwalk River Watershed Association, and with individuals** have made...Norwalk River.

Second bullet point- Town groups started a **“Pollinator Pathways initiative”** in 2017 to provide pollinator friendly habitat and food sources for bees, butterflies and other pollinating wildlife. **It is significant in defragmenting the environment, creating corridors for wildlife to forage and creating communication networks among the various participants within Wilton and across more than 45 towns into which it has expanded throughout Fairfield County and neighboring Westchester County, NY.**

Fourth bullet point - The Town has established **the Deer Management Committee** to manage the **white-tailed** deer population **in an effort to** reduce tick-borne illness, improve ecology, and improve public safety. **This Committee’s work has reduced the number of deer in Wilton however work continues in order to meet the Town’s goals.**

Add bullet point:

Medication Drop-off Program has been initiated in Wilton in August of 2011 to ensure proper disposal of expired or unwanted medication which can negatively impact water quality if flushed down drains or toilets.

Objectives and Strategies:

“Improve stormwater drainage systems andwater quality.”

Draft 2.1

First bullet point- “continue to implement....on waterways.

Add bullet point - **Consider Low Impact Development (LID) techniques for all new development, including on town roads and road projects.**

Fourth bullet point – **“Consider zoning changes to enhance** aquifer protection, stormwater best management practices and low impact development practices in new developments (including pervious pavement and other methods), as appropriate.

Add bullet point - Identify properties within the Norwalk River Watershed that do not have adequate stormwater management systems and develop a strategy to educate these property owners on stormwater runoff and available techniques to reduce stormwater runoff.

Add bullet point - Work with the Planning and Zoning Commission to develop a strategy for existing property owners, that would reduce and improve the quality of stormwater runoff, including how to address site change applications.

Add bullet point: Evaluate the Medication Drop-off Program for participation and awareness, and consider education of the public about the program as necessary.

Draft 2.2 Monitor water resources and promote water conservation
“In addition to the quality of water,.... last experienced in 2016.”

First bullet point - Continue to educate residents on well water issues, usage, testing, and best practices including how well water usage can impact neighbors during periods of drought.

Third bullet point-

- Consider partnering with a local conservation group to educate the community on water conservation. ADD:
 - Consider creating a consortium of representatives of local conservation organizations from up and downstream communities to educate residents on appropriate and necessary uses of water and methods of conserving it, particularly when under drought conditions.

Add bullet point:

Develop a strategy to limit future water diversion projects in Wilton to protect existing and future drinking water sources, the health of the aquifers in Wilton and the Norwalk River.

Draft 2.3 Protect and enhance wildlife

Second bullet point - Continue to manage invasive species and the deer population which negatively impact trees and shrubs, habitats, other wildlife and the health of residents and their pets.

Draft 2.4 Protect, preserve and enhance habitats

First bullet point - Require plants that are native to the Northeastern United States when a landscaping plan is required for a project per zoning.landscaping plan is not required.

Fifth bullet point- Encourage tree and shrub plantings in any required vegetative buffers ...

New Section

Protect and enhance our tree canopy

- Encourage the expansion of tree and shrub plantings throughout the community by modeling the species within the Town Center and along Route 7. Select plants that

exemplify a biodiverse environment and engage the public's sense of aesthetics, while supporting wildlife through defragmentation. Select plants known to be healthy and not subject to diseases common in the area.

- Create and implement a proactive, prioritized plan of maintenance for trees and significant shrubs in the Town Center and along the major roads that also addresses known diseases and likely demise of trees. Recommend replacement species in keeping with the long-term planting plans of the Wilton Tree Committee.
- Create a healthy and aesthetically welcoming view of the Norwalk River along River Road by eradicating invasive species and replanting with species that are native to the Northeastern United States. Open 'windows' of scenic views of the river and the park behind it; maintain these conditions following best practices for riparian buffers through regular healthy methods of eradication of invasive regrowth.

Note: Future Open Space Acquisition Criteria (Pg.29) – Unprotected Open Space includes water utility lands, P.A. 490 properties, and the Route 7 Expressway right-of-way (ROW). This section explains that these lands provide recreational opportunities for residents. This is not accurate because the water utility land is closed to the public, the P.A. 490 land is private (typically closed to the public) and only the Route 7 ROW land is open to the public (at least where the NRVT is built).

Note typo on table: Town of Wilton Existing Open Space: 2018
Conservation is misspelled under Privately Owned.

Boxed section Future Open Space Acquisition Criteria: typo: Future should be lower case 'f' in first paragraph.

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RECEIVED
JUL 30 2019
PLANNING & ZONING

MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning & Zoning Commission

FROM: Conservation Commission

DATE: July 30, 2019

RE: **Additional 2029 DRAFT POCD Comments**

Dear Planning and Zoning Commissioners,

The following edit is in addition to the previous edits submitted:

Conservation Commission
Edit 7.29.19

Addition to the draft 2029 POCD
Chapter 4: Natural and Historical Environment

Draft Goal 1: Protect, Preserve and Enhance Open Space and Greenways Issues and Trends:

Add as second BOLD FACED POINT:

Use of conservation easements and restrictions continues to be a method used to preserve open space in Wilton. Conservation easements are voluntary agreements between the Town of Wilton and landowners that limit development on private property.

- **Wilton holds conservation easements and/or restrictions on approximately ... (To ensure accuracy, the number of acres or the number of CE/CR's will be supplied by Mike Conklin, Director of Environmental Affairs).**
- These properties and the conservation easements granted create a legal and good faith stewardship responsibility that endures forever. The commitment by the Town of Wilton to monitor, defend and enforce the easement terms is what ensures perpetual protection of the property.

- Since 2010, the Levin Property on Ridgefield Road and the Keiser Property on Seeley Road have been protected via conservation easements totaling 53 acres. (remove this bullet point from the draft first section under **Issues and Trends** where it is listed as the third bullet point and insert as above)

Objectives and Strategies:

Insert as 1.2 and Draft 1.2 becomes 1.3:

With guidance from the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Conservation Commission will develop a Stewardship Policy for the conservation easements and restrictions held by the Town of Wilton. The stewardship policy will be a written standardized guide on how the Town of Wilton will carry out its stewardship obligations to .

The primary elements of the policy will include:

- Documentation of existing conditions
- Monitoring for change
- Standardized recordkeeping
- Tracking stewardship expenses
- Annual reporting to the Board of Selectmen