

*Borough of Stonington,
Connecticut*

2022 PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT



**Adopted February 2, 2023 by the
Borough Planning & Zoning Commission**

Effective: February 22, 2023

Borough of Stonington

Borough of Stonington Planning and Zoning Commission

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INTRODUCTION

The Borough of Stonington (the “Borough”) is located in New London County in southeastern Connecticut. The Borough, which comprises 205 acres, includes a peninsula and is bounded by Stonington Harbor to the west, Little Narragansett Bay to the east, Fishers Island Sound to the south, and the Town of Stonington (the “Town”) to the north. While the Borough is an integral part of the Town, it functions as a separate and distinct political jurisdiction, governed by the Board of Warden and Burgesses. The Borough’s Planning and Zoning Commission regulates land use within the Borough with its own Zoning and Subdivision Regulations. The Planning and Zoning Commission is also responsible for preparing the Borough’s Plan of Conservation and Development decennially.

Borough residents pay the majority of their property taxes to the Town in exchange for services from the Town, including police protection and public education. The Borough additionally levies its own property tax on its residents to support its independent operations and cover the cost of services not provided by the Town. The Town owns land in the Borough, and must comply with the Borough’s Zoning Regulations.

In 1982, the Borough’s Planning and Zoning Commission adopted a Master Plan for the Borough of Stonington, which included special emphasis on coastal resource management. That 1982 Master Plan was incorporated into a document entitled “Policy Recommendations For The Future Development Of The Southern Portion Of The Borough” in 1989. Ten years later, the Master Plan was further refined with the adoption of amended Goals and Objectives in 1999. In 2012, the first official Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD or Plan) was adopted by the Borough, which reflected the previous planning documents. This 2022 POCD relies heavily upon the planning and ideas included in the 2012 POCD, and has been brought to current standards with the most recent data available.

The Borough’s 2022 POCD recognizes that it is not an island separate from adjacent areas and events, but rather an integral part of a multi-faceted social and economic environment. The Plan now includes additional information, particularly regarding housing types and affordability. It is with that in mind that this document has been developed and the spirit in which it will be implemented.

Technical Notes

Stonington Borough is located in New London County, and is a part of the Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG) region. Throughout this Plan, the term “region” shall mean the municipalities within the SCCOG region, as shown in Figure 1 below. Note that from the 2012 POCD to the 2022 POCD, the SCCOG region changed, to include Lebanon and Windham and remove Voluntown. Therefore, the numbers presented in the two plans will differ slightly.

Data for this Plan is primarily sourced from US Census surveys, with the intention of providing the most current data available. In some situations, this means that different surveys with different margins of error are utilized. Decennial Censuses have the highest accuracy rating, while other Census surveys (such as the American Community Survey), have a slightly higher margin of error. Each data set presented here includes what source of information was consulted.

Figure 1: SCCOG Region



BOROUGH HISTORY

Throughout its history, the Borough has been engaged with the sea. Seal hunting, whaling, shipbuilding, fishing, and trade were mainstays of Borough life throughout the 1800s. Famous early residents include Edmund Fanning, an explorer and sea captain who discovered the Fanning Islands in the South Pacific in 1797-1798, and Nathaniel Palmer, a sea captain and seal hunter, who is recognized as the first American to discover the Antarctic Peninsula in 1820. The sea also made the Borough vulnerable; during both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, British naval forces positioned in Stonington Harbor attacked the Borough and were repelled by the citizenry. The HMS *Terror*, now famous for her involvement in Sir John Franklin's lost expedition in search of the Northwest Passage, fired on Stonington Borough in the War of 1812.

Portuguese emigrants from the Azores came to Stonington Borough during the whaling years and established the fishing fleet that survives today as Connecticut's only commercial fishing fleet. During the mid-1800s, construction of the railroad changed the Borough dramatically, by allowing the Borough to become a transportation hub. The Borough connected New York City to Boston through rail and steamboat passage. Businesses, banks, and industry dependent on this trade began to decline when the railroad was rerouted through New London and Mystic in the 1890s.

The Borough was home to large mills, most notably the Atwood Mill on Water Street, and the Velvet Mill on Bayview Avenue. The former, which employed hundreds of people in the 1800s, closed in 1989, and was destroyed in a fire in 2003. The land Atwood Mill was on is now used for condominiums, houses, and an event center, constructed almost identically to the former Mill. The Velvet Mill, which operated as a mill between the 1890s and 1997, is now a thriving marketplace with restaurants, art vendors, a brewery, and a variety of shops.



*Frozen pond by the Velvet Mill, January 28, 1900
From the Collection of the Stonington Historical Society*

The history of the Borough is reflected in the wide range of architectural styles of the buildings that still exist today. The pre-Revolutionary era homes of merchants sit side by side with the 18th Century Georgian or Classic Revival homes of sea captains. The Greek Revival Custom House built in 1823 was the original Stonington Bank, until it closed at the end of the Civil War. The rocky, windswept area south of Cannon Square remained less developed in the early years of the Borough, but between 1868 and 1897, Zebulon Hancox built 14 Greek revival houses on the street that bears his name. The houses originally housed millworkers and later became homes to the Portuguese fishermen.

There are two main squares in the Borough, Wadawanuck Square to the north and Cannon Square to the south. The former resembles a large village green, and was the site of an early tourist hotel built by the railroad in 1837. The Stonington Free Library replaced the hotel in 1899 when the square became a public park. Cannon Square, near the southern end of the peninsula, was the commercial center of Stonington, due to its proximity to the original town landing, where a number of cooperages, ships, docks, a tavern, and a hotel were located.

In 1823, Stonington Light was constructed and became a beacon to approaching vessels. The original 30 foot stone tower supported a lantern containing 10 oil lamps and parabolic reflectors, providing a light visible 12 miles out to sea. The tower had to be relocated due to erosion, and it remained active until 1889, when a beacon was installed on the harbor breakwater. In 1925, the lighthouse became the first lighthouse museum in the country.



*Historic Photo of Stonington Light
From the Collection of the Stonington Historical Society*

With the loss of the railroad and related businesses in the 1890s, the Borough became less commercial and began to attract more seasonal residents, artists, writers, and fishermen. In 1910, the Borough's population of 2,500 was one of the wealthiest in Connecticut, but the money was not being made in Stonington anymore. This trend continued over the decades. As the mills shut down and industry moved out, factory workers and fishermen sold their homes to people looking for a weekend or summer residence in this historic village by the sea.

BACKGROUND

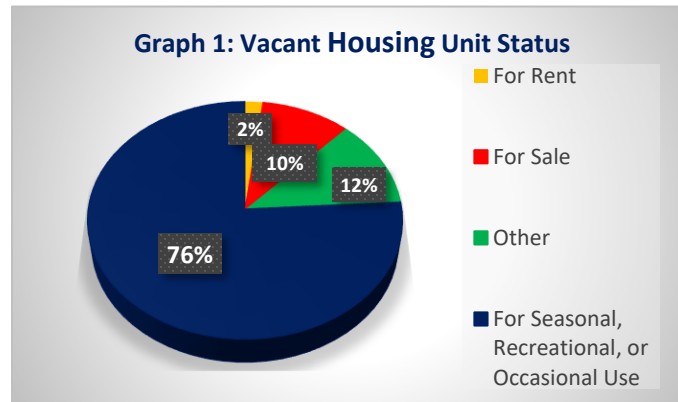
Population

From 1930 to 2010, the U.S. Decennial Census showed a steady decline in the population of Stonington Borough. The population decreased by more than 50% from a high of 2,006 residents in 1930 to a low of 929 residents in 2010 (see Table 1). From 2010 to the 2020 Census, however, the population had its first increase in recent history, increasing by 47 people, to a total of 976 residents. These numbers do not count seasonal residents of the Borough, as Census data does not take into account part-time residents of the Borough (Census data is based on where individuals live throughout the *majority* of the year). These population figures, therefore, are slightly misleading, as a significant number of people are seasonal residents of the Borough. This is evidenced by Census data which shows that of the 780 housing units in the Borough, only 545 are listed as occupied. The remaining 235 units (30%) are listed as vacant, but the majority of those units are seasonally or occasionally occupied (see Graph 1). This is a decrease from the 2010 Census, which reported 33% of housing units vacant. Therefore, at certain times throughout the year, the population of the Borough is significantly higher than Census figures show.

Year	Population	Percent Change
1930	2,006	
1940	1,826	-9.0%
1950	1,739	-4.8%
1960	1,622	-6.7%
1970	1,413	-12.9%
1980	1,228	-13.0%
1990	1,100	-10.4%
2000	1,032	-6.2%
2010	929	-10.0%
2020	976	5.1%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

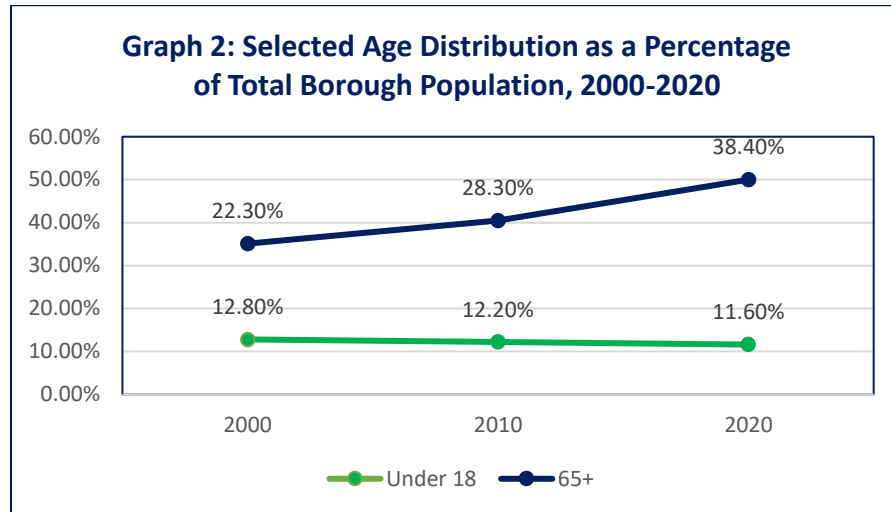
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Source: U.S. 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The makeup of the Borough has changed over the centuries. While early in its history many residents worked locally in the mills or in trade, the Borough is now a primarily homogenous residential community of adults, with approximately 94% of the population being white. The Borough has the lowest ratio of children to total adults in the region. Approximately 12% of the Borough’s population is composed of children ages 0-17, while the percentage for the region is 19%. This 12% figure has remained fairly consistent over the past 20 years. The population aged 65 and over, however, has increased from 22.3% in 2000 to 38.4% in 2020 (see Graph 2). This is,

at least in part, due to the high real estate values of land in the Borough. While there are some affordable homes and apartments, the high cost to buy property in the Borough discourages younger adults and families to locate here.



Source: U.S. Decennial Census and U.S. 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

While it appears that the Borough has had an increase in both population and full-time residents, it is likely that the average age will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. This is a pattern that is currently occurring throughout Connecticut, as the baby boomer generation continues to age and fewer children are born.

Regional Comparison

An interesting anomaly took place from 2010 to 2020. While in the decades prior, the populations of the Town of Stonington and the Southeastern CT region increased, the population of the Borough decreased. In this most recent decade, the exact opposite occurred, with the populations of the Town and the region decreasing, and the Borough population increasing. In fact, only three towns in the region, along with the Borough, had a population increase, (Ledyard at 2%, Preston at 1%, and Salem at 1%) with the Borough population increasing by the greatest percentage (5%). The population shift is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Regional Population Change Trends, 1980-2020

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Stonington Borough	1,228	1,100 ↓	1,032 ↓	929 ↓	976 ↑
Town of Stonington (w/o Borough)	14,992	15,819 ↑	16,874 ↑	17,616 ↑	17,359 ↓
Southeastern CT Region	249,853	266,399 ↑	269,995 ↑	286,711 ↑	280,430 ↓

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

Housing

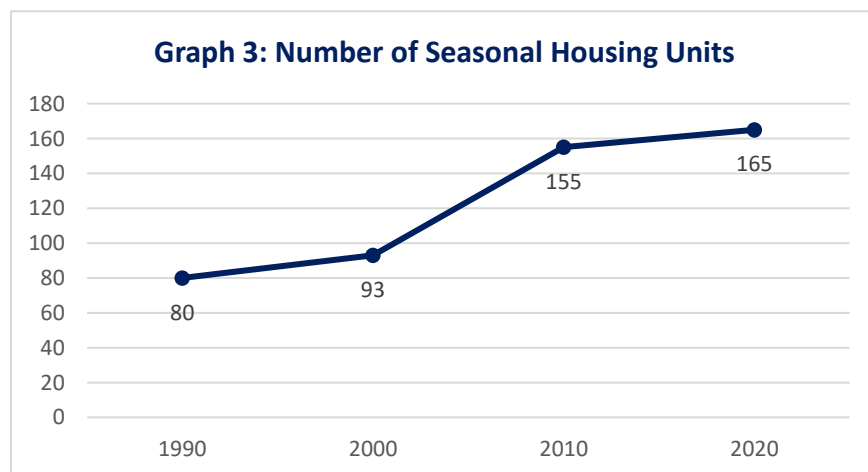
The number of housing units in the Borough declined slightly from 788 units in 2010 to 780 units in 2020. This is the first time in recent history that the number of units decreased over a decade, and is in contrast with the Town, which experienced an increase of 768 units. A table showing the number of total housing units in the Borough and the Town from 1980-2020 is provided in Table 3 below.

Year	Borough	Percent Change	Town	Percent Change
1980	681		6,065	
1990	713	4.7%	7,210	18.9%
2000	723	1.4%	7,868	9.1%
2010	788	9.0%	8,679	10.3%
2020	780	-1.0%	9,447	8.8%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

A significant increase in housing was seen in the Borough between 2000 and 2010, due to the redevelopment of the Monsanto property (Stonington Commons) and the lumber yard (101 Main). No such developments occurred between 2010 and 2020. The Borough has very little vacant property, so the construction of new housing units is not common. When new housing units are created, it typically involves the conversion or re-builds of existing non-residential buildings or the expansion of existing residential units. According to Census data, approximately 72% of housing units were constructed prior to 1939.

As stated in the Population subchapter, a considerable number of housing units in the Borough are seasonally occupied. In 2020, there were an estimated 165 seasonal units in the Borough, a number which has steadily increased in recent decades (see Graph 3). The number of seasonal homes directly correlates to population figures, as seasonal dwellings will likely show as vacant in Census data.



Source: U.S. American Community Survey

Another component of housing and population review is the average household size. There has been a consistent decrease in household size over the previous decades, due to housing stock increasing faster than population growth. As children grow into adulthood and fewer children are born in the Borough, the average household size will continue to decrease. This is a phenomenon that is occurring in the Town as well, as seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Average Household Size

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Stonington Borough	2.10	1.93	1.82	1.75	1.71
Town of Stonington (w/o Borough)	2.67	2.40	2.31	2.25	2.23

Source: U.S. American Community Survey

Housing Affordability

The State of Connecticut, and the SCCOG region, is facing a serious affordable housing shortage, and has been for a number of years. In 2018, the SCCOG and the Southeastern CT Housing Alliance (SECHA) published the *Southeastern Connecticut Housing Needs Assessment*, which details the unmet demands for housing in the region. The report notes that “affordability challenges have increased for both owners and renters over the last fifteen years, with the share of renters who are cost-burdened growing from 32% in 2000 to 48% in 2015 and the share of cost-burdened homeowners increasing from 25% to 30%.”¹ The report further notes that one in four of the households in Southeastern CT cannot afford the housing they reside in.

The Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-30g defines “affordable housing” as meaning a housing development that is either assisted housing or a set-aside development. Assisted housing is housing which receives financial assistance under any government program for low and moderate-income persons or families. A set-aside development is a development that has at least 30% of the dwelling units deed restricted for at least 40 years as follows: of the 30%, half of the dwelling units shall be sold or rented to persons with income less than or equal to 80% of the median income of the State or area, and the remaining half shall be sold or rented to persons whose income is less than or equal to 60% of the median income of the State or area. The dwelling units shall be sold or rented at or below prices that account for 30% or less of the annual income of the persons or families in these income groups. Municipalities in which at least 10% of the housing meets the definition of affordable housing can be exempt from the provisions of 8-30g.

The 2021 Affordable Housing Appeals List for the State of Connecticut, prepared by the Department of Economic and Community Development, identifies 541 housing units in the Town

¹ Southeastern CT Council of Governments and the Southeastern CT Housing Alliance. *Southeastern Connecticut Housing Needs Assessment*. 2018.

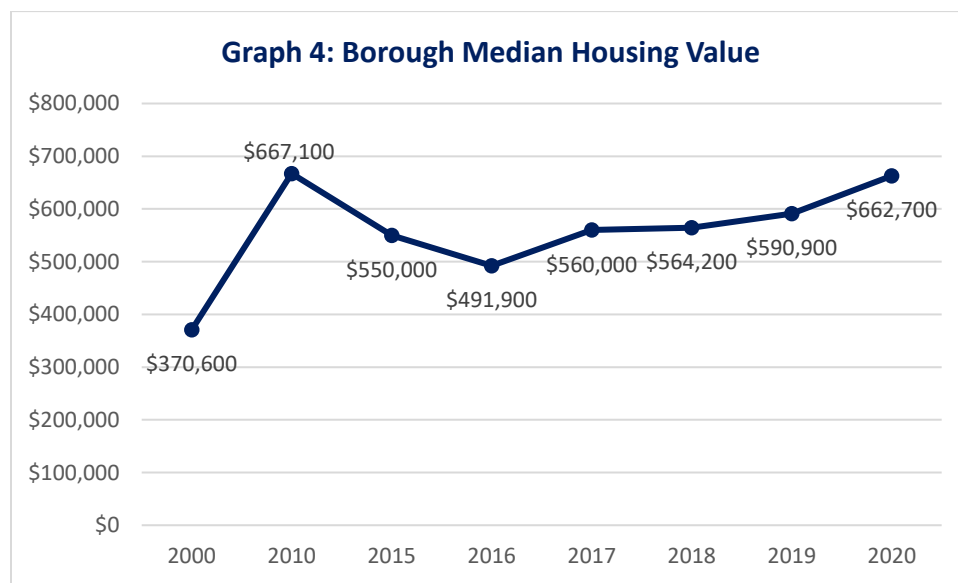
of Stonington (which includes the Borough), or 5.71% of the housing stock, as affordable. This number has not changed significantly over the past two decades (see Table 5), and it is still considerably below the 10% threshold goal set forth in Section 8-30g.

Table 5: Percentage of Affordable Housing in Stonington (Town and Borough) in Select Years

	2002	2005	2010	2015	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Percentage of Affordable Housing	5.21%	4.26%	4.25%	4.98%	5.69%	5.86%	5.93%	5.85%	5.71%

Source: State of Connecticut Department of Housing

As the Borough is a densely-settled seaside community, affordable housing may not be naturally occurring, but there are certain things that can be done to increase affordability, including making allowances for accessory apartments. Currently, the median value of housing in the Borough is \$662,700, and has nearly doubled since 2000 (see Graph 4). This makes it significantly more difficult for a lower- or middle-class person to purchase a home or reside in the Borough.



Source: U.S. Census

Land Use

The Borough of Stonington, which encompasses approximately 205 acres, was settled around 1649. The long settlement history and compact land area are factors which have contributed to the majority of land area, or approximately 87%, being developed. In fact, the ratio of developed to undeveloped land area has remained similar between 1981, as documented in the 1982 Master Plan, and 2022. There have been only slight changes in specific land uses between 1981 and 2022. Table 6 below shows the 2022 land use tabulation. Additionally, Figure 2 at the end of this document shows the current land uses mapped throughout the Borough.

Table 6: Distribution of Land Use, Stonington Borough, 2022

Land Use	Acreage	Percentage of Total Land
Low Density Residential	23.66	11.51%
Medium Density Residential	49.38	24.02%
High Density Residential	34.39	16.73%
Commercial	6.68	3.25%
Industrial	6.88	3.35%
Institutional	14.59	7.10%
Open Space	6.15	2.99%
Recreational	2.16	1.05%
Transportation/Rights of Way	34.82	16.94%
Undeveloped	26.86	13.07%
Total	205.57	100.00%

The 2022 land use tabulation shows that residential land use comprises the largest percentage of developed land area, or approximately 52.26% of the total land area. The 1981 land use data tabulated approximately 69 acres as residential, whereas the 2022 land use data tabulated approximately 107.43 acres as residential. This represents an increase of approximately 56%.

Industrial and commercial activities comprised approximately 9.8% of the total land area, or 20 acres, in the 1981 tabulation. The 2022 land use tabulation of these same activities concludes that they have decreased to approximately 6.6% of the total land area, or to 13.56 acres.

Open space comprises approximately 6.15 acres or 2.99% of the total land area. Active recreation accounts for approximately 2.16 acres or 1.05% of the Borough's total land area. Together they total approximately 4.04% of the Borough's land area. The 1981 land use tabulation indicated that 3.9% of the Borough's land area was in these categories. Accordingly, these categories have increased slightly.

One anomaly in the comparison of 1981 and 2022 land use data is the acreage attributed to the category of Transportation, Communication, and Utilities. The 1981 data listed approximately 64 acres in this category. The 2022 tabulation calculates slightly less than 35 acres. There are several possible explanations for this, including that the method of calculation changed significantly, and/or that the areas included are different.

Given the uniqueness of the Borough's attributes, it is expected that demand for residential use will continue in the future. Also, given the small amount of undeveloped land, it is expected that conversion of non-residential to residential use and increased density within existing residential areas will be experienced. The challenge for the Borough will be to guide this demand and encourage, to the extent possible, the expansion of commercial uses to provide services for both year-round and seasonal residents.

Coastal Area Management

The entire Borough of Stonington lies within the coastal boundaries designated by the State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) Coastal Area Management (CAM) Act. The Borough is bounded to the east and south by the water of Fishers Island Sound and Little Narragansett Bay, to the west by Stonington Harbor, and to the north by the Town of Stonington.

The information concerning the Borough's coastal resources is used to review coastal site plan applications required for development within the coastal boundary. This is accomplished in order to ensure consistency between an application, the Connecticut General Statutes (Chapter 444, Coastal Management) and the Borough's POCD. In general, this section provides guidance for present and potential property owners with regard to the Borough's goals and policies that are established to ensure that development or use of the land proceeds in a manner that will preserve and enhance coastal resources. The extent of the coastal resources is shown in Figure 3 at the end of this document.

The Borough's coastline is approximately 3.5 miles long, including breakwaters and piers. The Borough encompasses, and the coastal boundary encloses, approximately 205 acres. Nearly all of the Borough's land has been developed for some form of use. The terrain is relatively flat, with elevations ranging from sea level to a maximum of 30 feet. Most of the Borough is underlain by unstratified glacial till. A few small deposits of stratified drift are present. The large area of till is surrounded by artificial fill, which comprises the Borough's shoreline.

Stonington Harbor can be characterized as an estuarine embayment. The harbor's channel has an average depth of thirteen feet.

Coastal Resources

The State of Connecticut Coastal Area Management Unit of DEEP has identified a number of coastal resources in the Borough. These include both natural and manmade resources. Policy and use guidelines for each of these resources are taken from the Connecticut CAM Act as well as other relevant State statutes. The most prominent of these resources are:

Flood Hazard Areas: 145 acres, or approximately 71% of the Borough is in a flood hazard area. This is a significant change from the Federal Emergency Management Agency maps in 2012, which categorized 127 acres, or 62% of the Borough as a flood hazard area. These areas are defined as being affected by a 100-year storm, a storm having a 1% chance of occurring in any one year. Under the National Flood Insurance Program, owners of buildings in the Borough may purchase flood insurance at low subsidized rates. No new construction or substantial alterations of buildings in the identified flood hazard areas can occur unless the lowest floor level is elevated above the level of the 100 year storm, or the area below the flood level is flood proofed to prevent flood water infiltration. The Borough's shoreline is subject to the direct force of storm

waves, as well as damage from high waters. It is therefore important to control development in the flood hazard areas, both to protect natural resources such as wetlands from runoff surges, and to protect the personal investment of property owners.

Tidal Wetlands: There are extensive tidal wetlands in the section of the Borough east of Orchard Street, with a majority of those wetlands along and south of the railroad line, and north of Salt Acres Road. These wetlands total approximately 19.5 acres and are contained in the FEMA Flood Hazard Areas. Tidal wetlands are regulated under the State Tidal Wetlands and Watercourse Act (Public Act 695). They are defined by the Connecticut State Statutes as being “those areas which border on or lie beneath tidal waters, such as, but not limited to, banks, bogs, salt marsh, swamps, meadows, flats, or other low lands subject to tidal action...” (CGS 22a-29). The CAM Act has summarized the natural functions of tidal wetlands as being: areas of high nutrient and biological productivity, contributors to the base of the food chain, provide habitat and refuge areas for shorebirds; and serve as a nursery ground for various estuarine organisms. Tidal wetlands also serve to improve water quality by trapping sediments, buffering the shoreline from storm high waters and erosion, providing the potential for recreational and educational opportunities, and their vegetation stabilizes the shoreline. Due to their fragile nature, the CAM Act states that the protection of tidal wetlands is in the national interest. In the Borough, it is fortunate that most of the existing tidal wetlands have not yet been encroached upon. Permits are required from CT DEEP, Wetland Management Section for most activities in tidal wetlands.

Freshwater Wetlands: Only a small portion of land areas in the Borough (approximately 1.5 acres) is classified as freshwater wetlands. These are all located within the Flood Hazard Areas. Freshwater wetlands are either inland wetlands, which consist of any soil type designated as poorly drained, very poorly drained, alluvial, or floodplain under the Inland Wetland and Watercourses Act (Public Act 155), or tidal wetlands not regulated under the Tidal Wetlands Act. They generally consist of bogs, swamps, meadows, and submerged lands. Freshwater wetlands serve many of the same functions as tidal wetlands. They act to slow and store stormwater, are areas of high biological productivity, serve as a wildlife habitat for a large variety of wildlife, and trap sediments and filter impurities. The Town of Stonington’s Inland Wetlands and Water Courses Commission currently regulates the Borough’s inland wetlands. Permits must be obtained for regulated activities that would develop or alter a wetland. Permitting is required within wetlands, and review and possible permitting is required within the Upland Review Area, which extends 100 feet from the edge of wetlands.

The Borough’s shorefront is varied, and contains modified bluffs and escarpments, beaches, rocky shorefront, and developed shorefront. The bluffs and escarpments are relatively steep, seaward sloping shore lands, which have been stabilized by seawalls. The modified bluffs dissipate wave energy and thus provide protection from coastal flooding.

The Borough’s beaches are privately owned. DuBois Beach is owned by the Stonington Village Improvement Association and is available for use by the public. This beach is regularly used by recreational SCUBA divers, and is regarded as one of the best beaches in Connecticut for shore-based diving. Other smaller beaches are restricted to use by the owners. Besides their

recreational value, these beaches serve as a buffer to coastal flooding and erosion, dissipate wave energy and provide areas of scenic value.

The Borough has a small area of rocky shorefront that is composed of bedrock and boulders, which are highly erosion resistant. This shoreline dissipates and absorbs energy without significant changes in the shoreline configuration. It also functions as a natural habitat for intertidal organisms and as a feeding ground for shore birds and fish.

The balance of the land in the Borough is classified as shore lands as defined in the CAM Act and identified as a coastal resource. Shore lands are those upland areas within the coastal boundary, exclusive of coastal hazard areas. It is the policy of the CAM Act that shore land use and development be regulated in order to minimize adverse impacts upon coastal systems and resources.

The Stonington Harbor side of the Borough is categorized as being developed by the CAM Act. This shorefront has been developed to the extent that its natural physiographic features have been altered. This section of shoreline is considered a coastal resource because of its social importance as an economic center. It is the policy of the CAM Act that the use of existing developed shoreline be promoted for marine related uses.

Stonington is also the location of extensive shellfish concentration areas on both its western shore and off its eastern shore near Sandy Point. Shellfish concentration areas provide habitat for several species of shellfish, contribute to the diversity of benthic life, and provide sources of food for shorebirds, lobsters, and other marine life. Shellfish concentration areas support an important source of food, provide recreational shellfish harvesting opportunities and economic and employment opportunities for the shellfish industry. These shellfish concentrations are comprised primarily of hard shell clams.

The Stonington Borough Planning and Zoning Commission promotes, where applicable, land use regulations that protect shellfish concentration areas through a variety of measures such as increasing buffers between development and coastal resources and improved storm water management.

Activities in shellfish concentration areas are regulated directly by the CT DEEP and Department of Agriculture. Additionally, the Planning and Zoning Commission and Harbor Management Commission promote policies to minimize impacts to these, and other, sensitive coastal resources.

PLAN AND FINDINGS

Statement of Purpose

Pursuant to Chapter 126, Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Borough of Stonington Planning and Zoning Commission (the “Commission”) hereby adopts this Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) as its statement of policies, goals, and standards for the physical and economic development of the Borough of Stonington (the “Borough”), the preservation of the Borough’s unique historic character and maritime heritage, and the general welfare and prosperity of its people.

In preparing this POCD, the Commission has considered the physical, social, economic, and governmental conditions of the Borough, its history and trends, and has held public meetings to obtain input from Borough residents and businesses.

The overall goal of this POCD is to guide the future development of the Borough in a manner consistent with that articulated by the community and further defined by the following objectives:

1. Preserve and protect the distinctive physical and historic qualities of the Borough, its maritime heritage, and 19th Century character, as embodied in various streets and neighborhoods.
2. Preserve and strengthen the existing natural resources of the Borough, as defined by its geographic location, maritime heritage, and surrounding coastal views and vistas, all of which contribute to the atmosphere of the Borough.
3. Preserve, to the greatest extent possible, the coastal resources of the Borough by adhering to the goals of Section 22a-92 of the Connecticut General Statutes and implementing the listed policies, as applicable, whenever and wherever possible.
4. Encourage the preservation of existing and creation of new scenic/water vistas, public access to open space, coastal and waterfront features, and protect public access to the waterfront from further decline. New public access should be provided in appropriate situations in accordance with Chapter 444 of the Connecticut General Statutes (the Coastal Management Act), where any new or expanded non-water dependent use is located along the waterfront.
5. Recognizing the predominantly residential character of the Borough, maintain land use policies that encourage a variety of commercial, retail, professional, and maritime related businesses that are complimentary to the human scale of the Borough. Encourage a diverse village environment where residents can safely walk to stores, restaurants, offices, community and government facilities, open spaces, and neighbors.
6. Work to maintain and expand where appropriate the use of waterfront property in the Borough for water dependent uses such as marinas, boat yards, public boat

landings, and fishing docks, and the continuation of the commercial fishing fleet as a viable industry.

7. Safeguard new construction and substantial improvements to existing buildings against the effects of flooding through the enforcement of the Special Flood Hazard Area requirements in the Zoning Regulations.
8. Maintain residential land use policies that encourage the preservation of historic features, open space, light, air, and development within the existing scale and harmony of the Borough, and control the bulk of new structures and additions to prevent “squarification².”
9. Maintain a safe vehicular/pedestrian circulation system within the limits of the existing narrow 19th Century streets that supports community and municipal facilities and services that are sufficient to meet the needs of the residents, businesses, and visitors. Encourage signage to assist Borough visitors to find parking areas, historic sites, and other amenities and facilities.
10. Recognize the increasing proportion of retired and aging residents, and the growing trend to continue to live in one’s own home safely and independently as one ages (“aging in place”), as opposed to in a health care facility. Encourage policies that support living arrangements and the provision of products, services, and conveniences associated with aging in place.
11. Recognize the concern that energy costs will continue to increase in the future, encourage policies that allow residents and businesses to avail themselves of energy conservation, sustainable, and renewable energy systems, while maintaining sensitivity to the historic character of the Borough.
12. Maximize interaction and cooperation between the Commission, the Board of Warden and Burgesses, the Harbor Management Commission, and other municipal agencies and departments to support appropriate development, growth, and preservation initiatives. Coordinate with the Fire Department, the Stonington Ambulance Corps, and the Stonington Police Department in matters affecting the delivery of vital services and emergency preparedness related to public safety.

The underlying philosophy of the Commission in adopting this Plan of Conservation and Development is to continue to preserve the historic nature of the Borough and its maritime heritage and to support its diverse socio-economic population, which is comprised of residents of all ages. However, the Commission recognizes that economic forces over which it has no control impact property values, commercial and residential property use, and demographics within the Borough. The Commission believes that the Plan and the policies stemming from it should be responsive, over the passage of time, to the changing needs of the Borough’s residential and commercial population. The basic purpose of preservation is not to arrest time, but to mediate sensitively with the forces of change.

² Squarification Definition: The construction of architecturally inappropriate additions or renovations to a building to maximize the square foot area or volume of that building, generally characterized by roof lines, building shapes, and volumes that are not historically accurate or aesthetically pleasing.

Findings

A. Circulation

Findings of Fact:

1. Roads in the Borough were originally designed prior to widespread use of the automobile, and are marginally adequate for existing traffic volumes and population densities. The Borough's congested and narrow streets pose a limitation for emergency vehicles.
2. The sole means of vehicular ingress and egress to the portion of the Borough south of the Amtrak rail line (the "Village") is via Alpha Avenue, the existing viaduct over the rail line. This limited access sets finite limits on the ability of the Village to absorb additional population with the attendant increased traffic levels.
3. The major arterial road pattern for the Village consists of Water and Main Streets. Village roads are narrow by modern standards, and the lack of additional rights-of-way coupled with the total absence of building setbacks along these streets, makes widening unfeasible. Elimination of on-street parking is not presently feasible due to the lack of adequate off-street parking.
4. North of the Amtrak rail line, the community is predominantly residential and has varied density. The former Velvet Mill building on Bayview Avenue is the only commercial property in this area. The main street serving this area is Elm Street, which has vehicular ingress and egress on both Alpha Avenue and Route 1A. The traffic in this area is less dense than in the Village and a better circulation pattern results from the dual points of vehicular ingress and egress of Elm Street. Small population and traffic increases could be absorbed with improvements, including expanded availability of off-street parking.

Recommendations:

1. Increased traffic burdens on the Village arterial road system, including the Alpha Avenue viaduct and the traffic along the length of Water and Main Streets, should be carefully considered. Traffic capacity is a matter of convenience and public safety. As such, the Commission must be sensitive to future development that would increase traffic in the Borough.
2. Suitable sites for off-street parking in the commercial zones should be reviewed and the feasibility of additional parking should be explored.
3. Residents with off-street parking spaces should be encouraged to use them for parking vehicles to reduce the use of on-street parking.

B. Population and Housing

Findings of Fact:

1. The population of the Borough increased for the first time in recent history between 2010 and 2020. While the population is still lower than it was in 2000, the increase is notable and should be monitored in the future.
2. During the past several decades the percentage of the population that is 65 years and older has grown significantly over the past several decades, and now comprises 38.4% of the population of the Borough.
3. The percentage of the population that is under 18 years old has stayed fairly consistent over the past decades.
4. The number of seasonal dwellings has more than doubled since 1990. The seasonal population, therefore, continues to increase.
5. The percentage of affordable housing in the Town of Stonington and Stonington Borough has stayed consistent over the previous decades, while the cost of housing has increased significantly.

Recommendations:

1. The Commission will promote regulations that encourage housing opportunities for individuals and families of different incomes and ages while maintaining the historic and architectural significance of existing buildings.
2. As the Borough does not currently permit accessory dwelling units (ADUs), the Commission should explore permitting ADUs in the Zoning Regulations, to allow for more affordable housing for both young residents and the elderly.
3. The Commission should consider additional ways to promote affordable housing, including but not limited to allowing for density bonuses when affordable housing units are proposed.

C. Economy

Findings of Fact:

1. The economy of the Borough is characterized by diversity and includes tourist/visitor activities, local commerce, commercial fishing and marina uses, and retail, professional, and service businesses.
2. The harbor and waterfront of the Borough, besides their obvious value for recreation and tourist-oriented uses, are unique assets for commercial and recreational marine activities.

Recommendations:

1. The Zoning Regulations should provide for the continuation of industrial, commercial, marine, and other net revenue producing uses of land within the present commercial and industrial zoned areas. Growth should be encouraged assuming it is compatible with the existing scale and nature of the community.

D. Densities and Character

Findings of Fact:

1. The restrictions on vehicular and pedestrian circulation previously cited in this Plan place an unavoidable limitation on the population levels which the Borough, and especially the Village, can safely support. Much of the Borough during the summer months is already at or above the manageable population level.
2. In 1979, much of the Borough was recognized as a district on the National Register of Historic Places. As noted in the 1982 Master Plan, such a district designation “emphasizes the interrelationships of buildings and the importance of preserving entire streetscapes.” Some of the buildings in the Borough are notable as distinguished architectural examples of a particular styles, but all are important for their contribution to the harmony and general appearance of the area. New development, which alters the pattern of the streetscape, can have deleterious effect. As older structures are demolished and replaced with new ones, or as additions and modifications lead to squarification (as defined earlier), inappropriate changes on just one property can seriously disturb the appearance and character of the entire area.
3. The character of a community is a combination of its physical features and the various human activities that take place there. Elements as diverse as architecture, setting, history, and climate all contribute to community character. Even sounds-of waves, a foghorn, or of halyards slapping-help create character. Preserving character requires respect for these and other essential elements.

Recommendations:

1. The Zoning Regulations should continue to provide for minimal density increase and the conversion of existing structures to multi-family dwellings, provided such structures are of suitable size and are located on lots large enough to support sufficient parking and still retain open areas, and, where applicable, vistas. Such conversions must be restricted so as to protect the architectural character of the structures converted.
2. Preserving the physical site characteristics of the Borough must include protection of the existing streetscape. The design of new development should be appropriate to its surroundings and compatible with the context in which it will be located.
3. The Commission will work to enhance the unique characteristics of the Borough, as opportunities arise, by promoting rehabilitation of historic structures, public access to

coastal resources, and a mix of residential and non-residential activities that are reflective of the village character.

4. In order to ensure the livability of the Borough, the Commission should review the physical standards for site work and structures present in the Zoning Regulations, to ensure the Regulations are in compliance with Public Act 21-29.

E. Commercial/Waterfront District

Findings of Fact:

1. The present size and location of the Borough's commercial areas are adequate for present needs and the demands of foreseeable local population growth. It is not a goal of this Plan to provide substantial commercial growth that is oriented towards tourism or resort populations.
2. The Borough harbor and waterfront are unique natural features that have substantial value for commercial marine uses; however, the waterfront is an obvious amenity for any use that locates near it.

Recommendations:

1. The Zoning Regulations should keep the present commercial zones in their present area but consideration should be given to permitting increased intensity of commercial activity within those zones.
2. Special regulations should continue to protect the Borough waterfront and to give the highest priority and preference to water-dependent uses and facilities in shorefront areas as required by the State of Connecticut Coastal Management Act.

F. Recreation and Open Space

Findings of Fact:

1. The access of the public to the Borough's waterfront has diminished in certain areas due to development. The loss of waterfront access has a substantial detrimental effect on local recreation and open space opportunities because the availability of inland open space and recreation areas is limited. In addition, this Plan finds that waterfront open space holds a place of special importance for the Borough, which has drawn its very life from the sea. Protecting and enhancing public access to the shorefront for both active and passive recreational uses is important to preserving the character of the area and is mandated under the provisions of the State of Connecticut Coastal Management Act.
2. Besides the loss of actual waterfront access, the Borough has been harmed by the loss of aquatic vistas, blocked by buildings and landscaping, which obstruct views of the sea and diminish the very character of the Borough as a seaside community.

3. Although little inland property remains that is suitable for active recreation use, the presence of private open land creates a sense of openness, which is beneficial to the community as a whole.
4. Public spaces are not confined to parks and beaches, but also include public streets, Borough rights-of-way and walkways. Such spaces have an essential role in the enhancement of the Borough's quality of life precisely because other public space is so limited. Therefore, the streetscape becomes the focus of community activity and identity.
5. Within the Borough, walking and bicycle riding area a frequent means of transportation and a form of recreation. Keeping the area safe and attractive for pedestrians is one means of maintaining village character.

Recommendations:

1. The Zoning Regulations should provide that any major development along the Waterfront districts of the Borough provide public access and public amenities. Linear access along the shoreline is particularly desirable and should be encourage in the Zoning Regulations.
2. The Zoning Regulations should continue to protect and enhance all remaining vistas of the sea, especially at the ends of east-west oriented streets. Preservation of existing water views or creation of new water views should be actively pursued through site plan review and coastal site plan review. New principal buildings, accessory structures, and fences, as well as vegetation, should be placed and maintained so as to preserve water views and a sense of openness.
3. The Zoning Regulations should encourage the preservation of all open spaces. Property owners should be encouraged to retain existing private garden areas as private open space.
4. Public amenities that encourage a pedestrian environment should be provided where practical.

G. Infrastructure and Resiliency

Findings of Fact:

1. The majority of Stonington Borough is serviced by sewer lines. These lines are managed by the Town of Stonington and their Water Pollution Control Authority. The exceptions to such sewer service are located along Chesebro Lane and Salt Acres Road, which are served by private septic systems. There are no plans to extend sewer lines at this time.
2. Electricity is provided to the Borough via Eversource Energy, and public water is provided to the vast majority of the Borough via Aquarion Water Company. Cable and internet service is available through Comcast/Xfinity and Breezeline.
3. Everbridge provides an emergency alert system for registered Stonington residents.
4. As the Borough has a significant amount of coastline and properties in flood hazard areas, the Borough is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise. Minimizing the effects of any sea level rise should be a goal of the Borough.

5. The Borough of Stonington participates in the Community Rating System, which provides a discount to property owners when they purchase flood insurance. The current level of participation became effective on October 1, 2014, and provides a 10% discount to properties in the Special Flood Hazard Area. Discounts can go as high as 45% for higher levels of participation.

Recommendations:

1. As technology becomes increasingly important in day-to-day life, the Borough should continue to ensure that technological infrastructure is available to all residents and businesses.
2. The Commission should review the Zoning Regulations to see what amendments could be made to address sea level rise. As the sea level could rise by as much as 20 inches by 2050, the Regulations should determine what changes could be made to ensure the safety of residents and property. To this end, the Borough should also review what infrastructure improvements may be necessary or beneficial.
3. The Borough should review their Community Rating System eligibility, to see if the participation level could be increased.

H. Regionalism

Findings of Fact:

1. The Borough of Stonington and the Town of Stonington collaborate in a significant number of areas, ranging from fire and police protection to sewer maintenance to wetlands reviews. This relationship will continue in perpetuity.
2. The Borough participates regularly in Southeastern CT Council of Governments (SCCOG) meetings, which provide regional knowledge other benefits.

Recommendations:

1. The Borough should continue to look for new ways to coordinate with the Town, and with neighboring communities if beneficial.
2. The Borough should continue participation in SCCOG meetings, and ensure that a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission is appointed to the Regional Planning Commission with the SCCOG.

Plan Consistency

This Plan was prepared in accordance with Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) and considered the range of factors in Section 8-23(d) as well as the municipal coastal program requirements of Sections 22a-101 to 22a-104 (CGS). The 2022 POCD also considered the Borough's Harbor Management Plan when formulating its goals and objectives.

Comparison of this Plan with the Locational Guide Map and Growth Management Principles in the most current State Plan of Conservation and Development (2013-2018), the 2017 Regional Plan of Conservation and Development for Southeastern Connecticut, and the municipal coastal program requirements of the Connecticut General Statutes has concluded that this Plan is generally consistent.