

SHARON TOWN PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT 2006



SHARON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

2016 TOWN OF SHARON – TOWN PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires a local planning commission to prepare, adopt and amend a plan of development for the community, with recommendations for the most desirable land use and density within the town. In the language of the statute, the plan should be a statement of policies, goals, and standards for the physical conservation and economic development of the municipality, and should 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.”

In 2005 the Town of Sharon held a comprehensive town planning session, which included addresses by town officials and town planner Thomas McGowan; various discussion groups; and priority choices by town residents with regard to town planning substance. Fourteen months of effort by the Planning and Zoning Commission, Town officials, citizens, boards, and volunteer organizations resulted in the Sharon Town Plan of 2006. The Plan put forth two general goals and provided nine areas in which those goals could be implemented. These included Sharon Town Center; Commercial and Industrial Zones; Natural Resources Inventory 2005 and Open Space Goal; Historic Preservation and Scenic Road and Ridgeline Protection; Water Quality Protection and Sewer Avoidance; Land Preservation; Future Land Use and Density of Population; Housing; Recreation and Capital Improvement Needs.

The Plan also recommended means by which the Town goals in those nine areas could be implemented. These included amendments to Sharon’s Zoning Regulations to policy suggestions for various Town boards to consider.

In pursuance of Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Sharon Planning and Zoning Commission held a planning session on June 29, 2016. Commission members agreed that many of the recommendations in the Town Plan of 2006 had been made effective, through amendment or other means. Examples include zone changes: the Light Industrial Zone changed to the Enterprise Zone; and re-zoning of the 215-foot-wide strip of land on the south side of Route 343 from the Sharon Playhouse to the Industrial District in the General Residence Zone as Rural Residential. Other examples include the adoption by the Town of an ordinance allowing for the establishment of an Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund.

In constructing a Town Plan for 2016, the Commission decided the following:

- A. That all recommendations in the adopted 2006 Town Plan be followed.
- B. That “cluster housing” in the Rural Residential Zones as well as living units above commercial buildings be considered.
- C. That work force housing be promoted.
- D. That creative use of barns be considered.
- E. That effort be put forth for establishment of a town fiber optic system.
- F. That the Planning and Zoning Commission continue to work on recommendations from the 2006 Town Plan that have not been accomplished.
- G. That joint efforts with Salisbury be continued and the Salisbury/Sharon Transfer Station be completed.

**PROPOSED 1st AMENDMENT TO THE SHARON 2006 PLAN OF
CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

WHEREAS, the Sharon Planning and Zoning Commission hereby proposes amending the Sharon Town Plan of Conservation and Development to designate the following described parcels of land as deserving of preservation as open space land, by adding the following provision to the Sharon 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development:

"That portion of any parcel of land in the Town of Sharon which is located in any of the Residential District(s) and/or in any Planned Conservation District(s) which is, are and/or may hereafter be established and shown on the Sharon Zoning Map, as the same may, from time to time to amended, and which meets the following requirements is hereby approved for designation and classification as Open Space for tax assessment purposes pursuant to and in accordance with Section 12-107e of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended:

That parcel of land improved or an approved subdivision lot the portion which is in excess of twice the zone acreage requirement shall qualify for Open Space Assessment.

A vacant parcel of land not an approved subdivision lot can have the total acreage qualify for Open Space Assessment. There is no minimum or maximum acreage requirement. Changes such as subdivision approval or improvements to parcel could result in a penalty.

EFFECTIVE JUNE 13, 2007

INTRODUCTION

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires a local planning commission to prepare, adopt and amend a plan of development for the community, with recommendations for the most desirable land use and density within the town. In the language of the statute, the plan should be a statement of policies, goals, and standards for the physical conservation and economic development of the municipality, and should be “designed to promote with greatest efficiency and economy the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people”.

The 2006 Sharon Plan of Conservation and Development is the product of fourteen months of work by the members of the Planning and Zoning Commission with the support and cooperation of Town officials, citizens, local boards and volunteer organizations, all of whom have contributed their time and constructive recommendations to benefit the future of our beautiful and historic community.

The Planning and Zoning Commission set out to prepare a plan that was comprehensive and that reflected the consensus wishes of the townspeople. With these goals in mind the plan has been prepared in phases:

Information Gathering. The first phase focused on gathering data and soliciting ideas and issues for the plan from local boards and organizations. The Commission sent a survey letter to 41 boards and organizations and held meetings with all groups willing and interested in providing comments and suggestions for the plan.

Citizen Forum. In the second phase the Commission reached out to the citizens of the Town at a public town plan forum held on June 4, 2005 at the Sharon Center School. Attended by over 200 citizens, the forum opened with an overview of the findings from the first phase, including a review of the Conservation Commission’s 2005 Natural Resources Inventory. Citizens were divided into 12 groups and each assigned a classroom. Commission members and citizens trained in advance served as facilitators and recorders at these sessions, which were designed to encourage everyone to participate. This forum produced hundreds of ideas and recommendations for the plan which were recorded and reported back to the re-assembled crowd.

Draft Town Plan. Based on the information gathered and the citizen forum results the Commission has worked for eight months to develop this draft Town Plan to guide Sharon’s future.

Based on the general goals from past town plans and recommendations gathered in this planning process from the Town Citizen Plan Forum and the local boards and organizations, the Commission has formulated two general goals to serve as an overall guide for this town plan:

“To preserve and conserve the Town’s critical natural resources and valued open spaces and maintain its rural quality of life, diverse population, and housing stock.”

“To preserve and enhance its village center as a ‘living’ rural and historic community center providing local shopping and town government services in an attractive and pedestrian-friendly environment.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Plan of Conservation and Development for the Town of Sharon, 2006, is an update from previous plans submitted by the P & Z Commission of 1985 and 1995. The present plan was prepared by the following members of the Planning & Zoning Commission with the valuable assistance of Tom McGowan, certified planner from Litchfield, CT (McGowan Associates Planning Services).

- Barclay Prindle Chairman
- Peter Reyelt Vice Chairman
- William Manasse Secretary
- Stan MacMillan Commissioner
- James DiMartino Commissioner
- Betsy Hall Alternate Commissioner
- Dona Ferry Alternate Commissioner
- Cindy Rubicam Alternate Commissioner

As a result of the 2005 municipal elections, there are two new additions to the Commission:

- Larry RandCommissioner replacing James DiMartino
- Ducky BancroftAlternate Commissioner replacing Cindy Rubicam

The Commission wishes to acknowledge contributions from the following organizations:

- American Legion Post #126
- Essent/Sharon Hospital
- The Hotchkiss Library of Sharon
- Sharon Association
- Sharon Audubon Center
- Sharon Ad Hoc Committee on Housing and the Sharon Housing Trust
- Sharon Day Care Center
- Sharon Board of Assessors
- Sharon Board of Education & School Principal
- Sharon Board of Recreation & Youth
- Sharon Board of Selectmen
- Sharon Conservation Commission and their expertly prepared 2005 Sharon Natural Resources Inventory
- Sharon Garden Club
- Sharon Historic District Commission
- Sharon Fire Department & Ambulance Squad
- Sharon Historical Society
- Sharon Housing Authority
- Sharon Inland Wetlands Commission
- Sharon Sewer and Water Commission/Aquarian Management
- Sharon Green Preservation Association
- Sharon Health Care Center

Sharon Land Trust
Sharon Lion's Club
Sharon Republican Town Committee
Sharon Woman's Club
Silver Lake Association
Taghannuck Grange
Tri Arts
Women's Support Services

With grateful appreciation, we would also like to thank:

Jamie Casey, Sharon Town Zoning Enforcement Officer
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... And finally, a thank you to over 200 residents of Sharon who participated and submitted their input in the public forum on the Sharon Town Plan of Conservation and Development held June 4, 2005, at the Sharon Center School. This event provided the catalyst for the direction of the Plan.



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NOTICE/DISCLAIMER

The photographs, maps and demographic and CERC data included with this printed copy were not part of the Plan as approved by the Town Meeting and adopted by the Sharon Planning and Zoning Commission, but were used as reference material by the Sharon Planning and Zoning Commission in drafting the Plan so are included in this printed copy for informational purposes. All other appendices to this plan are located in the Zoning Office on the second floor of Sharon Town Hall.





A BRIEF HISTORY OF SHARON

Excerpted from "A Brief History of Sharon", Published by the Sharon Historical Society, 2004

The Town of Sharon was officially established in 1739 and divided into fifty home lots, each owned by an original town "proprietor". Settlement grew exponentially and quickly reached a population of 1,205 by 1765. By 1782, more than 2,230 inhabitants were spread across the town, mostly attracted by the growing iron industry. Religion was the center of early village life and the Reverend Cotton Mather Smith, Sharon's third Congregational minister, was especially influential during his fifty years in Sharon's pulpit (1755-1806).

Sharon families were busy during the Revolutionary War as farmers and militiamen. During the summer of 1776, Sharon men were called to assist New York state militia in securing the Hudson River. Later, prisoners from Burgoyne's defeated army at Saratoga were marched through town and encamped in the field opposite Weatherstone, an impressive stone Georgian manor, built and owned by Dr. Simeon Smith on the South Green. The cap-

tured officers dined at Weatherstone during their brief sojourn while enlisted men made do in a temporary camp. Dr. Smith, a well-known physician and brother of Reverend Cotton Mather Smith, hosted the first medical society meeting in the U.S. at his home in 1770. Weatherstone later became the residence of John Cotton Smith, governor of Connecticut during the War of 1812.

By 1815, the center of Sharon was termed "a considerable village" comprising fifty to sixty houses, two churches, a post office, and several mercantile stores. By the 1850's, Congregational, Methodist and Episcopal Churches joined a smithy, wagon shop, three stores, attorney and physicians, offices, jewelry and harness shops, school and other services along the one-tenth mile stretch of Sharon's Green. The first Catholic masses took place in the 1840's.

From Joseph Skinner's first iron forge on a dam south of Mudge Pond in 1740, Sharon prospered as one of America's most important early mining and refining centers. Blessed with the critical resources of waterpower, iron ore, lime for flux, and timber to provide the necessary charcoal, the industry flour-

ished. In 1822, Sharon's iron industry received a boost when Lemah Bradley of Falls Village obtained land and waterpower rights in Sharon Valley along Webatuck Creek for the purpose of constructing a blast furnace, the first in town.

In Sharon Valley, Asahel Hotchkiss started his factory in 1828, making iron goods for home and farm using iron produced at the Sharon Valley Furnace. Throughout the nineteenth century, Sharon Valley had the nickname "Mouse Trap Capital of the World" by virtue of the numerous mousetraps made by the Jewett manufacturing company and others. Hotchkiss and Sons also experimented with, patented and produced a variety of cannonballs for use in a Hotchkiss designed rifled cannon which was used in the Civil War. Sharon's industries were also centered in the manufacturing hubs of Calkinstown, Amenia Union, and Ellsworth, where there were foundries, a cigar factory, blacksmith shops, stove factories, grist and saw mills, general stores and much more.

A new town hall was erected in 1875, built by Isaac Newton Bartram. A mansard roof was added, presumably to "update" the building's appearance in 1884. In 1886, the Wheeler sisters erected the Sharon clock tower as a monument to their mother. The Hotchkiss Library, a Romanesque Revival building, was built in 1893 as a gift to the town from Maria Bissell Hotchkiss, the philanthropist wife of Benjamin Berkeley Hotchkiss, son of Abel Hotchkiss. Iron production ceased in 1898. After World War I, the main streets were paved, automobiles increased in number, soon to be followed by school buses in the 1920's.

The relative ease of travel by railroad and automobile, between 1880 and 1920, attracted both vacationers and a new class of wealthy second home owners to town. Older homes were restored and new construction in the "Colonial Revival" style abounded, especially along South Main Street. Romulus Riggs Colgate, who made his fortune in lead and electricity, built "Filston", an Italianate

palazzo home on Route 343. Sharon was also the center of a thriving resort hotel trade with visitors to town arriving by train at Sharon Station, New York, and by car, staying at local venues such as the Sharon Inn (demolished in 1954, formerly located on the southwest corner of Routes 41 and 343), and the Bartram Inn (now apartments on Upper Main Street).

During the Depression years of the 1930's, the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program of Roosevelt's New Deal, utilized the present Housatonic Meadows State Park along Route 7 as a base for work in the Sharon area on road, fire pond and dam construction, as well as forest maintenance. Land was donated to The Audubon Society by Clement Ford, and the Sharon Audubon Center was opened in 1961. The Miles Sanctuary on West Cornwall Road joined the Audubon property holdings in 1963, a gift from the estate of Emily Winthrop Miles, bringing Audubon land holdings to a total of 1,950 acres within the Town.

Expedited by the development of the Sharon shopping center which began in 1957, the Sharon Green gradually evolved from the village commercial hub to a residential center. A small number of businesses remain on or near the Green, including a florist, liquor store, garage, women's fashions, and pizza take out. Dr. Jerome Chaffee founded the Sharon Hospital in 1909. Today it remains the town's largest employer. As the Sharon Hospital has expanded former stores and even private residences have become doctors' offices and clinics. After World War II the number of farms began to decrease and the number of second home owners started to significantly increase. Residential development expanded into the rural area. Sharon's Land Trust has actively promoted the protection of large land tracts. The scenic and historic beauty of Sharon has been preserved by careful stewardship of its resources to the present day. □



SHARON TOWN CENTER

Introduction

Sharon's town center is recognized as one of Connecticut's finest examples of a New England town center. Its focus is the Sharon Green and surrounding historic homes, many of which are listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

But Sharon center is more than an historic show-place; it is a living center. Based clearly on the comments of residents at the Town Plan forum in June of 2005, the goals for Sharon center are:

- *To maintain and enhance the Sharon Center area as an historic New England town center with a well defined boundary with scenic rural gateway highways.*
- *To maintain the center as a "living" historic town center with a mix of residential densities and local commercial services.*
- *To continue to support hospital - health care uses as a main element of the town center area plan.*

Center Zoning Districts

In terms of the Zoning Districts as shown on the Town Zoning Map, Sharon Center is defined primarily by the General Residential Zone, but it also includes the commercial zones on Main Street in the center, on Gay Street and Lover's Lane (Sharon Shopping Center), and at Sharon Valley Four Corners as well as the Light Industrial Zone on Route 343. This section of the Town Plan addresses the Center residential zone and the Town Green. The following section addresses the commercial and industrial zones.

Forum Recommendations:

The plan for the Center and the zones noted above must consider all aspects including:

- *Providing a mix of housing types and affordability while retaining the historic appearance and scale of buildings.*
- *Retaining a mixture of land uses including commercial and civic buildings and uses.*
- *Safe, attractive, and convenient streets and paths*

with a pedestrian orientation and a “pedestrian friendly” environment with walking access to stores, post office, and other public buildings.

- *Maintaining the town green and other open spaces.*
- *Providing for “fill – in” growth in the town center that is compatible with its scale and appearance.*
- *Coordinating provision for sewage treatment capacity and public water service needs for the village’s future development*
- *Maintaining a clear “edge” between the village center boundary and the surrounding rural residential district.*

SHARON GREEN

The heart of Sharon is its historic Town Green. Many consider it the most significant town green in the State of Connecticut. At one and one-half miles long it is one of the largest town greens in the State, it is essentially intact as it was originally laid out, and it is surrounded with handsome historic residential and commercial structures centered on the restored and expanded Town Hall.

The Goal for the Sharon Green is:

To prepare and implement a long term comprehensive plan for improvement of the Green. This plan should be designed to maintain and improve the Green true to its historic design and as a town gathering place.

For many years the task of maintaining the Town Green has been borne by the Town Green Committee and the local nonprofit Sharon Green Preservation Association, which has been responsible for raising the funds needed to provide a tree improvement program and annual bulb planting project.

Most persons assume that the area referred to as the “Town Green” is owned by the Town. In fact the State of Connecticut owns about two-thirds of the Green. As a part owner of this historic place, the State of Connecticut needs to be a major contributor to a long term Green improvement program.

The State of Connecticut Department of Transportation funded the preparation of an exceptionally comprehensive and professionally prepared Town Green long range improvement plan. This was published as part of the Routes 4 and 41 Sharon Scenic Corridor Management Plan. The Town Green portion of this plan is provided as a part of the Appendix to this plan.

The following is a summary of the findings and recommendations of this plan. The Town Plan suggests that the findings and recommendations in the Corridor Management Plan be used as a guide by the Planning and Zoning Commission in its review and comments on proposed Green improvement projects undertaken by the Town. The Corridor Plan section on the Town Green should be used as a guide for developing the long term Green improvement plan.

Sharon Corridor Management Plan Summary of Findings and Recommendations on the Town Green

Major Issues:

Tree Replacement: A large number of trees are in general decline due to disease or excessive road salt exposure.

Road Salt Reduction: The State applies more road salt than the Town, and this practice is damaging the Green trees.

Power Lines: The upgrade of power lines on the Green to larger, three-phase power lines and poles is forcing the planting of new trees toward the Green’s center, changing the historic tree planting pattern and blocking views.

Preservation Strategies:

The long term Green improvement plan must state the vision that will guide improvements to the Green. In terms of tree planting this can be either:

- *Replant the Green in an informal manner using a variety of species placed to avoid power lines, or*

- *Aim to restore the Green to its tree lined character with long open views down the center.*

Restoration of the Green to its historic, tree-lined character in its purest form anticipates burying the Green power lines. Estimates to complete this project are provided in the Corridor Management Plan, and it is a very expensive project. However, given the significance of the Sharon Green to the Town and to the State, it is not an unreasonable goal. The Corridor Management Plan strongly recommends that the Town "pursue putting the utility lines underground or relocating the lines behind existing buildings." (See Appendix D of the Corridor Management Plan for probable cost estimates.)

The Corridor Plan also provides options for a Tree Canopy Replacement Strategy that will preserve the historic long green vistas with or without elimination of the power lines.

The Corridor Plan also provides detailed plans for access, crosswalks, parking, paving, seating and other improvements in and around the Town Green. This plan should be used as a guide for Town Green improvements. Key recommendations which should be pursued are:

- *Change the center line alignment of Main Street to eliminate parallel parking on the west side in front of the Town Hall (this has been accomplished, and this street center line practice should be continued by the State Department of Transportation).*
- *Use granite curbing around the Green to protect it from cars and to help keep salt and sand off the Green.*
- *Use alternative paving material on Upper Main Street.*
- *Provide crosswalks to the Town Green at intervals along Main Street at existing cross paths.*

PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER SYSTEMS

Introduction

The compact Sharon village center development pattern with its mix of uses on small lots is possible

because the densely developed sections of the center area are served by a central water system and a central sewage collection and treatment system. A goal of the Town Plan is to extend this compact pattern to a wider area in the center. However the ability to accomplish this goal will be quite limited unless there is adequate public water supply service, sewage treatment capacity, and up-to-date water and sewer distribution and collection lines.

The fact is that at this time the Sharon Water and Sewer Commission reports that both the water and sewer system are operating at near capacity. The precise additional available capacity has not been determined, but there is margin to permit new service connections. The Commission reviews each request for new connection on a case by case basis.

Not only is capacity an issue. Both systems have extensive sections of aged piping that must be replaced. The total cost to upgrade the existing sewer piping was estimated in 2005 to be \$1.6 million dollars.

Operating capacity for the Water and Sewer systems is ultimately determined by the Connecticut Department of Public Health and Department of Environmental Protection (respectively). Currently (February, 2006) the State Department of Environmental Protection is in the process of renewing the Water and Sewer Commission's permit to discharge treated sewage waste from the Sharon Sewage Treatment Plant.

Operation and improvement of these utilities is the responsibility of the Town's Water and Sewer Commission, with fees collected from the system users. The Commission's first priority is to complete the replacement of aging water and sewer lines. These improvements are scheduled as funds become available from the system user fees. While the Commission has been actively seeking grant funds to assist financing these improvements, such funds are not readily available.

A major concern is that within the next ten year planning period a need will arise to provide sewer service to an area with failing septic systems. There



are several clusters of small lots where there is a risk of septic failure.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Water and Sewer Commission and the Health Department establish a septic management education and septic inspection program aimed at avoiding septic failures and the need to extend sewer lines. (See Water Resources Protection for more information)*

Water System

Isaac Newton Bartram was the primary designer and first engineer of the water system, which began in 1881. Rights to Beardsley Reservoir were acquired in 1884 and to Calkinstown in 1888.

Calkinstown Reservoir: This reservoir was constructed in the late 1800's, and its capacity is estimated at 500,000 gallons of water. This is equivalent to two to three days of water supply under current use conditions. A creek supplies the reservoir, but during heavy rains the reservoir becomes turbid quickly. In dry weather this small creek can

run dry. A priority goal of the Water and Sewer Commission is to protect land in the reservoir watersheds and preserve the quality of the drinking water.

The Commission reports the Calkinstown Reservoir needs to be dredged to remove accumulated sediment. Other major maintenance projects at Calkinstown cited by the Commission are repairs to the dam and renovation of the water intake structures.

Beardsley Pond Reservoir: Sharon's main reservoir is Beardsley Pond, which has a capacity of 95 million gallons of water or 550 days of water supply at current use levels. The two reservoirs are connected by a pumping system, and the precise amount of water drawn from each will vary in accord with the season and conditions. All water is treated before delivery to customers at two water filtration systems located at the water treatment plant. Each system can filter 205,000 gallons per day. Treated water is delivered to a storage tank, where a final chlorine treatment is applied before distribution.

Water use records from 1998 show that daily usage runs between 150,000 to 180,000 gallons per day, and this use level has remained in a similar range to the present.

Sewer and Water Recommendations

The Town Plan recommends that:

- The Water and Sewer Commission retain a margin of capacity at the sewage treatment plant to permit providing sewer service to homes in the center area on small lots that may experience septic failure.
- The Commission evaluate alternatives for providing a modest increase in sewage treatment capacity at the existing sewage treatment plant site and water capacity as well.
- Although utility expansion will require a major investment, a properly designed plan for modest expansion will:
 - insure that there is sufficient capacity for the hospital and other major users;
 - insure that there is capacity to accept additional customers on lots with failing septic systems;
 - provide the opportunity to permit some new cluster housing on smaller lots with a variety of housing types in the Sharon Center area.
- *When a plan is proposed for expanding the capacity of the sewage treatment plant, the Planning and Zoning Commission should work with the Water and Sewer Commission to define a sewer service area boundary map. This map will specify the boundary limits for sewer service, and this boundary limit will be consistent with the goals of the Town Plan to contain sewer service to Sharon Center.*
- *In developing this boundary the two Commissions must collaborate considering:*
 - the goal to contain sewer lines in the Center area;
 - the goal of providing a mix of new housing units in locations off the main streets;
 - the need to avoid, to the extent possible, additional costly sewage pumping stations.

GENERAL RESIDENCE ZONE — FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Lot Size

Most of Sharon Center is in the General Residence (GR) Zone. This zone permits housing on lots of 3/4 of an acre (32,670 square feet). In fact, according to the Assessor's records, the majority of existing lots in this zone (52%) are smaller than 3/4 acre.

The Planning and Zoning Commission recognizes the value of maintaining the opportunity for housing on modest size lots in the Town Center. The Commission has examined the boundaries of the Center area and the General Residence Zone with the goal of extending the General Residence Zone boundaries. However, it is not realistic to assume that the large undeveloped portion of the General Residence Zone in the Center area will be developed at a 3/4 acre lot density or to recommend significant extension of the General Residence Zone unless and until the capacity of the water supply and sewage treatment plant is expanded.

Moreover, in the GR Zone and in the rest of the Town where no water or sewer system is proposed, the State DEP recommends that to protect water quality minimum residential lot size should be two acres not counting areas of wetlands and water-courses.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *Until there is additional capacity available at the sewage treatment plant and additional water service capacity, new housing subdivisions and multiple family housing in the General Residence Zone be designed on the principles of cluster design with individual septic systems located on common land. This will permit smaller house lots in the tradition of the center area and will retain open space.*
- *In areas planned for future sewer service the layout of houses should be sited close to the side lot line leaving room to re-subdivide the lot and provide the opportunity to create an additional lot when sewer lines are extended.*

General Residence Zone Boundaries

Although it is not possible at this time to recommend a substantial expansion of the 3/4 acre-lot General Residence Zone, the Commission has determined that some modest expansion of the General Residence Zone should be considered where water or sewer lines either already exist or are readily available and needed.

On this basis an examination of the layout of the existing water and sewer lines indicates the General Residence Zone boundary can be expanded on Gay Street to Rhynus Road and to the eastern side of Hilltop Road.

Development in these areas generally follows the prevailing pattern in the General Residence Zone. The south side of Gay Street is developed and located in a streambelt. Water service is available to these properties, and sewer service would greatly help protection of water quality in this area.

Water service is also available to the north side of Gay Street to just beyond Rhynus Road. Water service could be extended into the area bounded by Gay Street, Low and Cole Roads.

The Town Plan recommends that

- *The 215-foot-wide strip of land on the south side of Route 343 (Amenia Road) from the Sharon Playhouse to the Industrial District in the General Residence Zone be re-zoned to Rural Residential.*

There are several reasons supporting this recommendation. This narrow strip of a zone provides no opportunity to set back homes on this scenic entryway to the center. Also land near the road is steep in places and otherwise generally not suitable for building. Finally, this strip is served by neither public water nor sewer lines, and it would not be in the public interest to extend utility lines to serve a narrow corridor of housing on small lots fronting on this State highway

TOWN HALL

The Town Hall has been completely renovated to provide the space needed for local government offices and meeting areas. As activity in the Town Hall continues to increase, the factor limiting full use of the Town Hall is the availability of accessible parking.

The Town has purchased an adjoining property for both parking expansion and perhaps—as the need arises—for another building to provide for future town office and meeting room needs. The Planning and Zoning Commission supports maintaining the Town Hall in the center of Sharon and the proposal to utilize the newly acquired adjoining property for this purpose and to insure that the investment in the Town Hall renovation will be viable for the long term.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Zoning Map be amended to incorporate this adjoining parcel into the Municipal Office District.*

GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN SHARON CENTER

The following are guidelines for future development in Sharon Center designed to promote the type of center envisioned by residents participating in the Town Plan forum.

The new development plan should provide varying lots sizes, pedestrian friendly streets, and neighborhoods with walk ways and bike paths.

Mixed Uses: Residential apartments or offices over commercial buildings should be encouraged to increase the vitality of the Center. A mix of single family and multifamily houses is recommended in the Center in a variety of family structures.

Streets: Paved portions of streets should be at village scale, narrower than typical subdivision standards and no wider than needed to accommodate private, service, and emergency vehicles. New streets should be designed for relatively slow speeds. Corner radii should be shorter as an additional

traffic calming technique. Streets designed for slower moving traffic are safer and encourage walking.

Village streets should be lined with trees, utilizing both existing trees augmented by new plantings.

Parking lots: Parking lots should be located to the rear of buildings, or if not possible to the side with the lot screened from the street by a fence, low wall or hedge. Paved areas should be no more than necessary to efficiently accommodate the required number of parking spaces. Trees should be required with unpaved areas around each tree.

Parking areas should be connected by alleys or direct, off-street connections. Alleys may serve as back streets or service routes where appropriate.

Signs: Directional, informational, and safety signs

should be designed, grouped, and organized to be recognizable, legible, and uncluttered in appearance. Business signs should be designed to enhance the architectural character of the village and should be attached to buildings, porches, or fencing. Free standing signs should be discouraged and awning signs encouraged.

Lot Sizes: Variations in lot sizes and frontage dimensions are encouraged for detached dwellings and multifamily dwellings. Frontages for detached houses should be narrow to encourage pedestrian use of sidewalks.



COMMERICAL AND INDUSTRIAL ZONES

LIGHT INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The Sharon Light Industrial District is located on the New York State line fronting on both sides of Route 343. There are three segments to the district; the largest is over 60 acres located north of Route 343 and west of Sharon Valley Road. The second segment, north of Route 343 and east of Sharon Valley Road, is over 40 acres in area. The segment south of Route 343 is much smaller but also has considerable frontage on Route 343, the western gateway highway to Sharon Center. The scenic resources map indicates that in this zone on both sides of Route 343 there are scenic ridgelines of "secondary" importance.

This zone has neither public water nor public sewer service. There are large areas of farmland soils on all of the district segments. The soils west of Sharon Valley Road are very favorable for water supply, and providing water needs for uses established in this district should not be a problem. Sewer service would not be practical given the topography and distance between this site and the sewage treatment plant.

A large part of the segment north of Route 343 on the west side of Sharon Valley Road is designated as a conservation area on the State Plan of Conservation and Development. A stream and a riparian corridor run through this segment and across Sharon Valley Road through the eastern segment as well. *Because large parts of this segment are consumed by a riparian corridor the Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The designation for this segment be changed from Light Industrial to General Residential*

The larger segment on the west side of Sharon Valley Road also has constraints. A primary constraint is access from Sharon Valley Road, which is constrained for several reasons:

- Land fronting on Sharon Valley Road is zoned residential and developed with small residential lots at a depth of 215 feet;

- The Zoning Regulations prevent accessing an industrial zone through a residential zone;
- Accessing the northern half of the interior of this zone will require stream and inland wetlands crossings.

The southern part of the segment north of Route 343 and the portion south of Route 343 have the potential to support development but not any type of development that would require connection to a public sewage treatment plant.

The existing list of uses in the Light Industrial District are industrial uses or processing, plants for processing and distribution, research and experimental laboratories, and publishing, printing and bookbinding. None of these uses are suitable in this zone given its utility and resource constraints.

The Town plan recommends that:

- *These portions of the Light Industrial District be changed to Local Enterprise District. This zone could be developed for uses with a more local demand - such as agricultural supplier, local contractor, and service uses.*
- *In order to preserve the scenic quality of this gateway to Sharon, the terms of this zone should include the requirement that buildings be at least partially shielded from view from Route 343 with appropriate native landscaping.*

TOWN CENTER AREA COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

Many comments were recorded at the Town Plan Forum calling for additional stores and shops aimed at expanding local shopping and services.

Sharon has three small commercial zones in the Center which should be fully utilized before any discussion of additional commercial zoning in the Center area. The existing commercial zones are:

- *On Main Street and West Main Street,*
- *The Sharon Shopping Center district at the intersection of Gay Street and Low Road,*
- *The Sharon Valley Four Corners commercial district.*

The two primary commercial zones are the Sharon

Main – West Main Street commercial zone and the Sharon Shopping Center zone. Main Street is fully developed as is the Shopping Center itself.

Expansion of the Main Street commercial zone is not recommended, however:

- *There is an opportunity to provide modest additional space at the Sharon Shopping Center by adding second floors to existing buildings. However, the Shopping Center parking is at capacity and second floor uses would need to be limited to uses that create a parking demand in off-business hours.*
- *A better opportunity for expansion of commercial uses may be on the Union Savings Bank and the motel lots. The maximum footprint or first floor area of all commercial buildings in this commercial district is 20%. Neither the Bank nor the motel lots are fully developed, and they could provide room for expanded or additional commercial buildings.*
- *The motel lot is the most underdeveloped lot in the commercial zone. Part of the land on this lot is in a flood zone, however it appears the cause of flooding could be reduced if the culvert that drains water off this lot was increased in diameter.*
- *Another option that will allow expansion of commercial development in this zone is to increase the maximum building footprint lot coverage from the existing 20% to 30%.*
- *Expansion of the Sharon Shopping Center itself is problematic – it is surrounded by land that is developed or has development constraints. However, the Commission could entertain a proposal for a limited expansion of this zone if the use and the site design were compatible with the goals of the Town Plan.*

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Zoning Regulations requirements for site plans in this commercial district be revised so as to provide standards for building and site design that are compatible with New England architecture and require appropriate landscaping and signage standards.*

CORNWALL BRIDGE SPECIAL DESIGN DISTRICT

The several commercial buildings and uses located in the Sharon side at Cornwall Bridge are non-con-

forming commercial uses located in the Rural Residential Zone. This location is at a well-traveled cross road, and there is a commercial zone with numerous commercial buildings and uses on the Cornwall side of the bridge. For these reasons it is very unlikely that these non-conforming uses and buildings will convert back to residential.

On the other hand, there is very little land suitable for septic disposal and commercial development on the Sharon side of the bridge. This location on the Housatonic River is a conservation area surrounded by State protected land on the north side of Route 4 at the Route 7 intersection.

A non-conforming use classification inhibits commercial investment and improvements, and creating a commercial district at Cornwall Bridge will encourage additional investment in commercial improvements. *However, a general commercial designation at this sensitive location is not recommended.*

- *An alternative is to create a special design district, which will expand the opportunities for commercial uses that will be compatible with their location near the Housatonic River.*
- *As suggested above for the Sharon Shopping Center, uses in this district should also be subject to a requirement that site plans for buildings and improvement conform to a set of standards for design that is compatible with New England architecture.*

TRAFFIC & SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

Sharon Shopping Center: The primary center of local commerce and activity is the North Main – Gay Street commercial zone and the Sharon Shopping Center. But the building, parking, and road access layout in this shopping center present important vehicle and pedestrian safety concerns.

A list of optional recommendations designed to improve the safety and appearance of the road frontage along the Sharon Shopping Center and commercial zone frontage were presented in the special Scenic Highway Corridor Study funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

After consideration of these options and discussions with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the following improvements are recommended to enhance safety and the quality of access to and from the Shopping Center:

- *Extend the sidewalk from Center School to Xtra Mart*
- *Create crosswalks:*
 - Opposite Xtra Mart
 - Opposite the bank and post office
- *Introduce traffic-calming measures:*
 - Create a painted median between the existing center curb cuts on Route 41
 - Install a pedestrian-activated flashing yellow sign at the Xtra Mart cross walk (similar to the sign at Hotchkiss School)

Town Center – Hospital Hill and Route 343 Interconnect: There are large areas of undeveloped land in the General Residence Zone, especially between

Hospital Hill Road and Route 343.

As this area develops the Planning and Zoning Commission should guide the design and layout of the road system to provide an interconnection between Route 343 and Hospital Hill Road.

Such an interconnection will offer an alternative route for traffic that does not need to travel through the Town Center.

Many traffic and pedestrian improvements were presented in the “Routes 4 and 41 Scenic Corridor Management Plan”. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission use this report and its recommendations as a guide in reviewing development proposals and proposed State and Town highway related improvements.* □



NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY 2005 AND OPEN SPACE GOAL

The 2005 Sharon Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), prepared by the Sharon Conservation Commission and its Natural Resources Inventory Task Force, identifies and describes Sharon's open space, conservation, and natural resources.

As stated in the report the Natural Resources Inventory "is part of a continuing process of review necessary for the Sharon Comprehensive Plan of Conservation and Development". This in-depth, beautifully presented report clearly and comprehensively defines and describes the elements of Sharon's natural landscape and offers recommendations on how these resources can be conserved.

It includes chapters on Geographical, Topographical and Geological factors, Slopes and Ridgelines, Wetland and Aquifers, Unique and Fragile Features, Soil Types, Land Cover, Archaeological, Historic and Architectural Resources, Scenic Vistas, Areas and Roads, and Recreation Areas and Opportunities.

OPENSOURCE & NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION, PROGRESS & GOAL

The Natural Resources Inventory reports that in 1982 Sharon contained 7,335 acres of permanently protected lands. By 2004, according to the Natural Resources Inventory, permanently protected land had increased to approximately 10,920 acres representing 28% of Sharon's total land area. The NRI recommends that in order to retain Sharon's rural environment a long term goal should be to protect 50% of Sharon's total land area.

Over the past 23 years a total of 3,585 acres of land were permanently protected as open space in Sharon. The recommendations in the Natural Resources Plan and in this section of the Town Plan support the following ten-year land preservation goal. The combined actions of the Town, the Land Trust and other permanent land saving actions should aim to protect an additional 3,500 acres of land by 2016.

IMPORTANT FACTS & FINDINGS FROM THE NRI

Sharon's total land area: 59.6 square miles

Highest point: Ellsworth Hill, 1551 feet above sea level

Lowest elevation: Housatonic River at Kent border, 390 feet above sea level

Slopes: Narrow valleys and steep slopes dominate much of Sharon's landscape.

Of the total land area in Sharon:

67.6% has gentle to moderate slopes of 0% to 15%.

19.7% has steep slopes ranging from 15% to 25%.

12.7% has very steep slopes with a grade over 25%.

Ridgelines: The Town has four principle ridgelines that run northeast to southwest. They are:

- Indian Mountain, Red Mountain, Mount Easter, Mine Mountain area, and The Housatonic Valley ridgeline.

There are four secondary or smaller ridgelines that are visible from major gateway roads and are considered vital to Sharon's rural appearance. They are:

- Along Millerton Road south of Indian Lake, Amenia Road from Sharon center to New York State, Ridges east and southwest of the Ellsworth Farm on Route 4, and the eastern ridgeline on Route 41 from Boland Road to Amenia Union.

Significant Water Bodies: Mudge Pond, Indian Lake, Beardsley Pond, Miles Pond, Hatch Pond, Ford Pond, Bog Meadow Pond, Hamlin Pond, Eastman Pond, Hilltop Pond, and Peck Pond.

Significant Watercourses: 25 significant watercourses are identified in the NRI. The first ten are: Housatonic River, Webatuck Creek, Indian Lake Brook, Mudge Pond Brook, Beardsley Pond Brook, Stone House Road Brook, Calkinstown Brook,

Jewett Hill Brook, Valley Brook and White Hollow Brook.

Major Wetlands: Proglacial Mudge Pond (north end), south of Indian Lake, three zones along White Hollow Brook, Mount Easter Pine Swamp, three phase proglacial Lake Miles, north extension of Sharon Valley, Stonehouse Road region, Sharon County Club/Benton Hill region, Bog Meadow region, West Woods/Peck Pond region, and Skiff Mountain Pine Swamp.

Important Stratified Drift Potential Water Supply Aquifers are located in: Central Sharon Valley, north of proglacial Mudge Pond, Gager's Swamp south to Hatch Pond, Mill Brook region, three phase proglacial Lake Miles, along Housatonic River in proglacial lake beds.

Forest Lands facts:

- 71% of Sharon's land area, or a total of 27,082 acres, is in forest.
- This includes 1,005 acres of forested wetlands.
- 4,618 acres of forest are protected by the State of Connecticut.
- 13,828 acres are classified "forest land" under the terms of Public Act 490 local farm, forest and open space preferential tax program.

There are two very important large blocks of forest in Sharon. *They are:*

1. *the area of Miles Sanctuary, adjacent Housatonic Forest, and adjoining large, privately owned tracts*
2. *Macedonia State Park and adjacent large privately owned tracts.*

Agricultural Resources Facts:

In 1960 75% of Sharon's land area was in farm or field use.

- In 2005 20.5% or 7,821 acres are in farm and field use.
- Seven major farms have gone out of business since 1982.

- Nine purchases by the State of Connecticut under the State Purchase of Farmland Development Rights Program have permanently preserved a total of 1,352 acres of farmland in Sharon. This includes 173.89 acres protected in 2005 in the beautiful Oblong Valley on Route 41 (Amenia Union Road).

Archaeological and Historic Resources: 75 archaeological and historic sites and eight historic cemeteries have been identified in the NRI report. Highest concentrations are in village hubs, including Main Street and the Green, Calkinstown, Sharon Valley, Ellsworth and Amenia Union.

Principle Indian archaeological sites are on the eastern edge of Indian Lake, in the Ten Mile River valley, and on a hillside overlooking Mudge Pond.

2005 NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY RECOMMENDATIONS

The NRI presents a host of recommendations designed to protect Sharon's natural environment and historic and archeological resources. Responsibility for enactment of these recommendations is assigned according to the nature of the proposal to various town boards and land use commissions as well as providing guidance for citizen action.

One of the most important recommendations of the NRI is that:

- *The Town should establish a Land Preservation Fund for the purchase of land or easements on valuable open spaces, unique and fragile areas, forest lands and agricultural lands.*

The recommendations relating to land use regulation under Zoning and Subdivision Regulations and therefore assigned primarily to the Planning and Zoning Commission are as follows:

Slopes:

- *Development within areas of 15% - 25% slopes should require architectural and site plan solutions for*

irregular terrain. Sedimentation and erosion control requirements should also apply.

- Limit development of slopes over 20%.
- Slopes greater than 25% should be excluded from calculations of the minimum building lot size requirement.

Ridgelines:

- The Planning and Zoning Commission should investigate methods used by other towns to protect ridgelines, even if those protections are limited in nature.
- Protect the viewable horizons of these ridgelines, which are sometimes of greater importance than the ridgelines themselves.

Wetlands:

- Exclude wetlands from the calculation of the minimum building lot size requirement.

Fragile and Unique Areas:

- Promote development that favors open space, using means such as set-aside requirements, cluster development, buffer zones for land adjoining existing protected open space, and so forth.
- Work with applicant proposing development in areas containing listed species.

Agricultural:

- Consider agricultural zoning: this has been done by other Connecticut towns to retain viable agricultural areas.

Scenic Vistas, Areas, and Roads:

- New Planning and Zoning regulations could reduce the impact of future development on the scenic value of (scenic) roads. For instance, setback requirements could be increased on scenic roads and screenings of natural plantings could be required.
- Planning and Zoning should investigate regulations to mitigate adverse impacts on Town scenic roads in the event of future development.



HISTORIC PRESERVATION , SCENIC ROAD AND RIDGELINE PROTECTION

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A goal of the Town Plan is to retain the historic appearance and scale of development in the center area. The Sharon Historic District Commission serves this goal well within the confines of the Sharon Historic District. This Commission reviews and approves all exterior building development proposals and other improvements that can be seen from public places, such as a parking lot, to ensure that these improvements are consistent with historic scale, design and materials of the District.

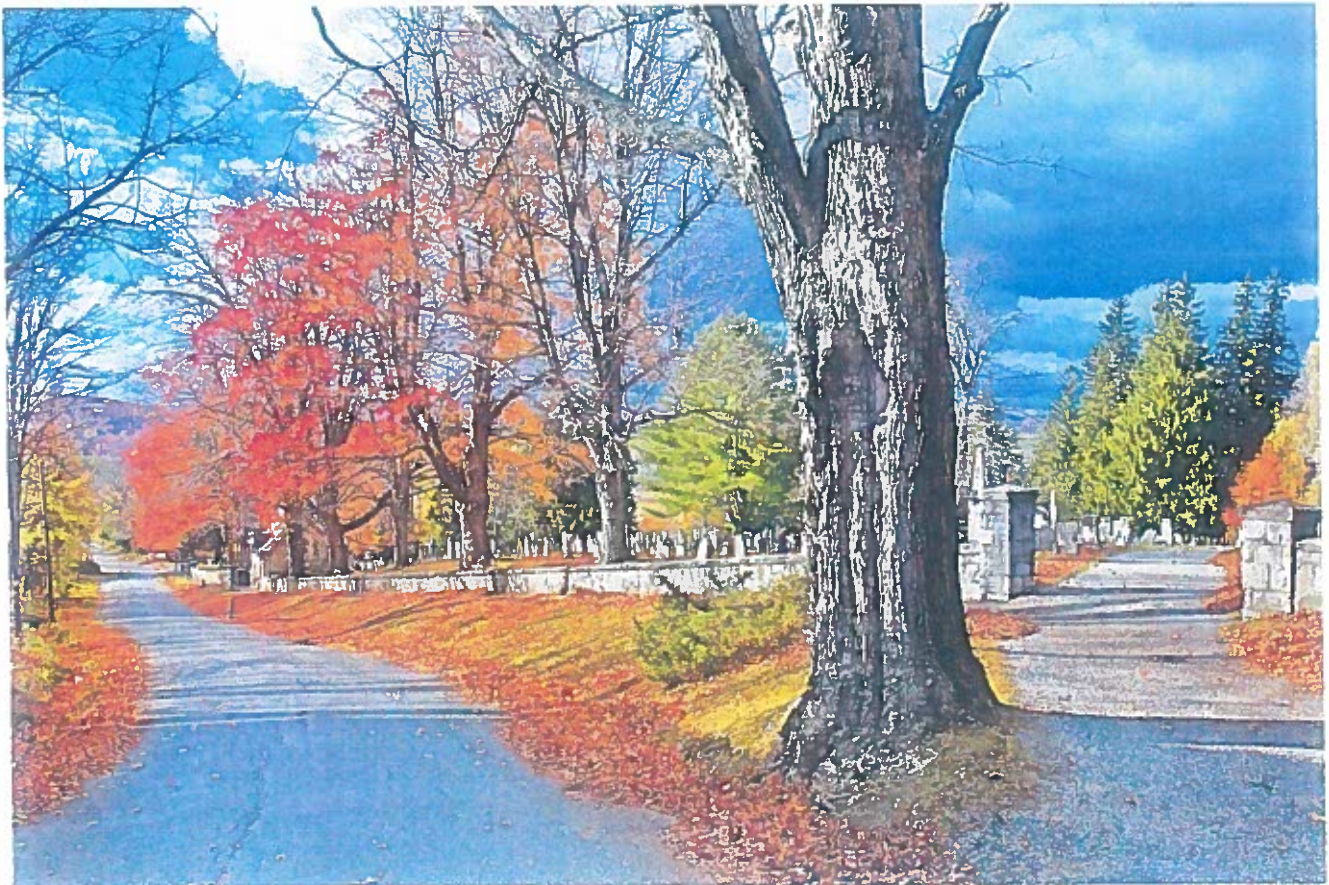
The Sharon Historic District is a narrowly configured area covering a band of land on main streets beginning in the Calkinstown section on Calkinstown Road from its intersection with Williams Road to Gay Street (Route 41), continuing south along Route 41 (on North Main and Main Streets) through the green and the heart of the center and

continuing south along Route 41 (South Main Street) to Boland Road. The District beginning at the Mitchelltown Road intersection widens east of Route 41 to include a strip on both sides of West Wood Road #1 and Boland Road.

In accord with the requirements of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Historic District Commission acts for the purpose of controlling the erection or alteration of buildings, structures or parking which are incongruous with the historic or architectural aspects of the District.

The Commission, under the Statutes, may do the following:

1. Make periodic reports to the legislative body;
2. Provide information to property owners and others involving the preservation of the District;
3. Suggest pertinent legislation;





4. Initiate planning and zoning proposals;
5. Cooperate with other regulatory agencies and civic organizations and groups interested in historic preservation;
6. Comment on all applications for zoning variances and special exceptions where they affect historic districts;
7. Render advice on sidewalk construction and repair, tree planting, street improvements, and the erection or alteration of public buildings not otherwise under its control where they affect historic districts;
8. Furnish information and assistance in connection with any capital improvement program involving historic districts;
9. Consult with groups of experts.

It is of vital importance to the Sharon Historic District Commission that property owners are aware that an approval is needed for exterior improvements visible from a public way or place. This includes building additions, window replacements, roof replacements, new doors, and the like.

For this purpose the Town Plan recommends that:

- *Building and zoning permit forms include a reminder that if a building is located in the Historic District a "certificate of appropriateness" from the Historic District Commission may be required.*
- *Signs announcing entry to the District should be placed at the District boundaries.*

The Historic District Commission and the Sharon Historic Society will continue to promote the value of the Sharon Historic District to residents, District land owners, and the community.

- *The Town Plan recommends that these organizations re-evaluate the potential to propose creation of an historic district in the Ellsworth area but with a much reduced proposed district boundary.*

This will be successful if an educational program defines the positive impact that a designation can have on property values and the opportunities it presents for greater access to historic property improvement grants and favorable loans.

SCENIC ROAD PROTECTION

Introduction

The entryway corridors to Sharon Center on Routes 41 north (Main Street, North Main Street and Gay Street), Route 41 south (Amenia Union Road), Route 4 (Cornwall Bridge Road), Route 343 (Amenia Road) and Route 361 (Millerton Road) are all exceptionally scenic roads. These State highways are the gateways to the historic Sharon Town Center, and preservation of the views, vistas, scenic and historic sites along these corridors is a vital element in the protection of Sharon's rural and historic character.

State Route 41 north and south of the center and Route 4 from Cornwall to Old Sharon Road #1 are designated State Scenic Roads. Currently the segment of Route 4 from Old Sharon Road #1 to the center of town has received approval for State Scenic Road designation, but for reasons that seem to defy explanation the segment of Route 4 from Old Sharon Road #1 to the Town center has been denied Scenic Road designation by the State Department of Transportation.

Route 4 "Missing" Scenic Road Segment: The Corridor Management Plan is a comprehensive scenic road study of Routes 4 and 41 published in 1997 and funded through the State Department of Transportation under the Federal Highway Administration Scenic Byway Program. This study strongly recommends that the "missing" segment of Route 4 be designated a State Scenic Road. The 2005 Natural Resources Inventory also supports this designation.

The 1997 Corridor Management Plan states the following in comparing the portion of Route 4 from Cornwall Bridge to Old Sharon Road #1 to the segment of Route 4 entering the Town Center.

"The descent down into Sharon past the Sharon Audubon Center is equally attractive with focal views of ponds, marshes and nearby hillsides. Currently not designated as a State Scenic Road, the views are not as dramatic as those at the top of the hill, and not as enclosed by towering forests as on the eastern face of the Housatonic Highlands. How-



ever, they complete the transect across the folds in the Appalachian Mountains - showcasing the differences between east and west facing slopes - including changes in the vegetation, landform and human settlement patterns." The Corridor Management Plan concludes that "designation of this section of Route 4 as a State Scenic Road should continue to be pursued".

Complete Route 4 State Scenic Road Designation.
The Town Plan recommends that :

- *The Town apply to the State for reconsideration of the designation of the Route 4 gateway to the Town Center as a State Scenic Road, citing the recommendations of the Corridor Management Plan and the Natural Resource Inventory.*

Add Route 343 and 361 State Scenic Roads.
The Town Plan further recommends that:

- *The Town consider applying to the State for designation of all of Route 343 and Route 361 as State Scenic Roads. While the scenic quality of Routes 41 and 4 are unquestionably outstanding, the 343 and 361 highway corridors have a scenic quality that clearly rises to the level of State Scenic Road designation.*

The State of Connecticut has also designated Route 7 in Sharon as a State Scenic Road. This designation is consistent with the preservation of the Housatonic River corridor as supported by the Town in previous town plans and by its participation and support of the Housatonic River Commission.

Gateway Road Corridor Preservation

Without question one of Sharon's greatest scenic assets, one that sets it apart from most New England village centers, is the beautiful rural landscape on the gateway roads leading to the Center. Preserving Sharon Center requires a plan to contain the denser village center development and provide a clear boundary between the compact center and surrounding countryside. This means preserving to the extent possible the important historic sites, features, views and vistas on the main gateway roads to the Center.

The Route 4 and 41 Corridor Management Plan describes Route 41 south between the Center and the New York State line as "unique to Connecticut and southern New England, and ... comparable in scenic quality to any Appalachian Mountain views found in the Eastern United States."

Route 41 north of the Center to Salisbury is described as "particularly dramatic, with long range vistas across the valley to Indian Mountain and New York State beyond." The Corridor Management Plan observes that views near the Salisbury town line are "some of the most dramatic mountain views to be found in Connecticut."

On Route 4 this study finds the panoramic views to the East at Ellsworth to be "among the finest views found in all of Connecticut" and "the descent down into Sharon past the Sharon Audubon Center ... equally attractive with focal views of ponds, marshes and nearby hillsides."

State Scenic Road designation ensures that in making plans for improvements to these State roads the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation will consider its scenic quality and will consult with

the Town of Sharon before making road improvements that can impact scenic quality.

However, as stated in the NRI the State Scenic Road designation "deals with the road itself and not the scenic quality of the land along the road. Visible development along these roads can diminish their scenic quality until, over time, it may be completely lost."

It is especially important to insure that the development along the segments of the State highways in proximity to Sharon center be consistent with the goal of retaining the Town's and the Center's rural and scenic quality. *Toward this end the Town Plan recommends that:*

- "Gateway Corridor Overlay Districts" be established along the entry segments of these state highways to the Town Center.

These "Gateway Corridor Overlay Districts" will not change the list of uses allowed in the underlying zone but can establish standards for building setbacks, street frontage and building and driveway sitings consistent with the goal of protecting the visual quality of gateway entrances to the Center.

Building setbacks, at least 50 feet, for new buildings should be determined with reference to the setback for adjacent principle buildings. Accessory buildings should be sited behind principle buildings, common driveway entrances to the highway should be preferred where feasible, and site plans for new development should encourage retaining major trees, stone walls, historic features and view vantage points. These setbacks should be considered for town-designated scenic roads as well.

Related Recommendation

Stone walls are a significant man-made feature important to the character of scenic roads and the community. *The Town Plan recommends that the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations be amended:*

- To require that where there is land fronting on a town public road or State highway the subdivision shall be designed to preserve stone walls to the maximum extent possible and to permit the Commission to protect stone walls fronting on public streets.

RIDGELINE PROTECTION

The Sharon NRI states that "Protection of Sharon's ridgelines is vital if we wish to preserve the scenic character of our rural environment." Citizens at the Town Plan forum also voiced strong support for protection of Sharon's ridgelines.

The Inventory cites four principal Sharon ridgelines which run northeast to southwest:

1. Indian Mountain from the Lakeville border to the Millerton Road
2. Red Mountain viewed from Salisbury to the south end of White Hollow and from Lakeville to Beardsley Pond
3. Mount Easter and Mine Mountain area
4. Housatonic Valley ridgeline from the Salisbury line to Cornwall Bridge and continuing through Silver Hill to Buck Hill and Dawn Hill to the Kent border. The Appalachian Trail runs along much of this ridgeline.

In addition to the principal ridgelines the Inventory recognizes "there are many smaller ridges that are also vital to Sharon's rural appearance . . . the most important of these ridges are those visible from major gateway roads." These include:

1. The Millerton Road south of Indian Lake to Sharon Valley Road
2. Amenia Road from Tri-Arts (Sharon Playhouse) to the New York border
3. The ridges east and southwest of Ellsworth Farm on Route 4
4. The eastern ridgeline on Route 41 from Boland Road to Amenia Union.

Both at the Public Forum and in the Inventory it is acknowledged that the primary vantage point for the protection of these ridgelines is the view of the ridges as seen from Sharon's roads and State highways.

A review of existing protected land indicates that there is considerable permanently protected land including large areas of very steep slopes along

large segments of several of the principal ridgelines. However, the smaller ridges identified in the Inventory have little protected land and therefore are more vulnerable to development.

Connecticut's planning statutes provide that the Town Plan "may show the Planning and Zoning Commission's recommendation for conservation and preservation of traprock and other ridgelines." Communities throughout the State are developing innovative regulations designed to preserve to the extent feasible development on ridgelines, especially in sensitive areas, such as areas with extensive steep slopes or ledge.

Communities are acting because they recognize that a prominent ridgeline cleared and developed for housing will be much more visible than other locations and will have a disproportionately significant negative impact on the scenic quality of the community.

The Planning and Zoning Commission has examined ridgeline or hillside-type regulations developed by the Town of Kent, steep slope overlay zone regulations proposed in Falls Village, buildable land regulations enacted by the Town of Cornwall, and other sample regulations from other States. The Planning and Zoning Commission should consider these regulations and others, the recommendations of the Natural Resource Inventory and use this information in determining the most suitable method of ridgeline protection for Sharon.

Steps to Ridgeline Protection

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission should first determine the town-wide zoning regulation amendments to be adopted as part of the implementation of this Plan. Some of these amendments will in part help protect ridgelines. Examples are:

- Proposals to change the requirement for minimum lot size in the Rural Residential Zone so that no inland wetlands, watercourse, or steep slope is counted in the calculation of minimum lot size requirement;



- Modifications to the requirements of the Town Driveway Ordinance which could also further limit development on steep slopes and ridgeline areas. This ordinance currently sets a limit on the steepness of a driveway at 15%. In other area communities the ordinance sets a maximum length of any grade exceeding 15%;
 - Limits set in the Zoning Regulations such as in Cornwall, where there is a limit on the area of steep slopes that can be developed or disturbed.
2. Assess the impact of these Zoning Amendments on ridgeline protection and consider appropriate additional regulatory recommendations.

The most important focus areas for ridgeline protection in Sharon based on the Inventory are the secondary ridgelines described above. These ridgelines are visible from Sharon's gateway roads, and the steep slopes rising to these ridges are especially susceptible to scenic disturbance caused by development.

One approach the Commission has examined is the creation of a watershed and ridgeline overlay zone covering these priority ridgeline areas. Utilizing the watershed boundary approach, an overlay zone can be designed to protect ridgeline areas with a focus on avoiding excessive land disturbance during construction, protection against erosion, and protection of agricultural soils and water quality.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION AND SEWER AVOIDANCE

IMPERVIOUS SURFACE LIMITATIONS

The many water bodies and important inland wetlands in Sharon as well as its extensive stratified drift aquifers can be better protected by amending the Zoning Regulations to establish limits on the total amount of impervious surfaces on a lot.

In recent years water quality scientists have conclusively demonstrated a direct correlation between the percentage of impervious surfaces in a watershed and lake, pond, or stream water quality. This has led local zoning authorities to set limits in zoning regulations on the *total* maximum impervious surface area allowed on a lot.

An impervious surface is a paved road, a house or any other structure that allows no penetration of rainwater into the ground. Roofs, concrete, asphalt and compacted soil prevent rain from soaking into the ground where the runoff pollutants it carries can be treated naturally as they move through root systems and soil layers.

As the area of impervious surface increases in a watershed, so do the rate of stormwater movement and the flow of untreated water reaching a lake or feeder streams. For example, it is estimated that a one acre parking lot will produce sixteen times more water runoff than a one acre undeveloped meadow (Schueler, T. 1994 article "The Importance of Imperviousness," Center for Watershed Protection).

Watersheds with low levels of impervious surfaces have sufficient areas of natural vegetation and soil surface to filter and treat stormwater by natural processes. Increased levels of impervious surfaces in a watershed can result in:

- greater fluctuations in water body water levels,
- degraded lake and stream habitat,
- warmer water and loss of sensitive cold water fish habitat,
- decline in aquatic insect diversity,

- decline in fish diversity,
- reduced spawning of fish.

A recent review of over 300 watershed studies by a nationally recognized lake scientist indicates the potential for declining water quality begins when impervious surfaces reach only 10% of a lake watershed. As the level of impervious surface increases above 10%, the risk to water quality rises (Schueler, T. 2002, unpublished paper, Center for Watershed Protection).

The summer 2002 issue of "Lake Line", the Journal of the National American Lake Management Society, reviews lake shoreline protection requirements and recommends "10% to 15% as an impervious cover limit for residential lots in a shoreline protection area."

Sharon's Zoning Regulations do not place a specific limit on the amount of all impervious surfaces that can be placed on a lot in a residential zone. The regulations have a building coverage requirement which sets a 20% limit for the total first floor building footprint on a lot in all zones. The regulations also require that all "buildings and structures" be "setback" from property lines. For example, in the Rural Residential Zone the front property line setback is 50' and side or rear property line setback is 30'. This rule maintains a substantial minimum of open undeveloped land on a lot. (However it should be noted that the term "structure" is not defined in the regulations and this definition should be added.)

This means that in a Rural Residential (RR) zone the first floor "footprint" of all buildings on a two acre lot can cover 17,424 square feet (20% of 87,120 square feet or two acres). This also means that at least theoretically on a typical 200' by 435' two acre lot a total of 49,820 square feet of the lot, more than one acre, is outside of the "setback" areas and can be covered with impervious surfaces.

In the RR zone, which covers most of the Town, there are many lots less than two acres that were established prior to the current two acre zone requirement. A good number of these lots are near

water bodies. With no total limit on impervious surfaces, the runoff from intensively developed lots near water bodies poses a threat to water quality.

It is now common in local zoning regulation to limit the total of all impervious surfaces on a lot to 20%, 15% or 10%. The Town of Washington has a total impervious surface limit of 10%.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Sharon Zoning Regulations be amended to establish a maximum total impervious surface requirement. This requirement is especially important for the protection of water quality from development near streams and water bodies.*

GROUND AND LAKE WATER QUALITY PROTECTION—SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND SEWER AVOIDANCE

Sharon's significant surface water bodies are: Mudge Pond, Indian Lake, Beardsley Pond, Miles Pond, Hatch Pond, Ford Pond, Bog Meadow Pond,

Hamlin Pond, Eastman Pond, Hilltop Pond, and Peck Pond.

Fortunately, several of these water bodies are located within protected land areas; these include Ford Pond and Bog Meadow Pond on the National Audubon Sharon preserve and Miles Pond on the Miles Sanctuary. Furthermore, the Inland Wetlands Commission's regulations are designed to closely review and regulate all new development near water bodies. Any development proposal (regulated activity) within 200 feet of all water bodies is subject to the review and approval of the Sharon Inland Wetlands Commission. The Commission treats this 200' buffer on the shorelines as a regulated area under the Inland Wetlands Regulations.

Beardsley Pond is protected under the special Watershed Overlay Zone requirements of the Zoning Regulations and land in the watershed owned by the Town. It is also protected by the Inland Wetlands Regulation 200' buffer requirement.



Mudge Pond. Mudge Pond is Sharon's most important waterbody. It is the Town's largest lake, with a land area of 200 acres and a depth of 35 feet. It is also the site of the popular Town Beach, overseen by the Board of Recreation and Youth. In addition, it provides public access through a State maintained public boat launch. The watershed is also an important aquifer area and Indian archeological resource.

The water quality in standing water bodies like Mudge Pond to a large degree reflects the landscape in its watershed. Excessive nutrients from fertilizers, farms and road runoff that flow into a lake from its watershed feed algae "blooms" and sustain weed growth. A new concern for all lakes is that these nutrients can also feed the growth of invasive water weeds that are becoming all too common in lakes in Connecticut.

Areas near the shoreline of Mudge Pond are densely developed, and more land is available for development in the watershed. For this and many other reasons it is especially important to manage land use and development in the Mudge Pond watershed in order to protect the Pond's water quality. The following recommendations aim to meet this goal.

Land Preservation Priority. It is fortunate that over 120 acres of land on the west side of Mudge Pond are protected by land owned by the Land Trust and under shoreline conservation easements. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Town and the Land Trust include the Mudge Pond watershed as a top priority for land protection.*

Lake Water Quality Monitoring. The Sharon Lake Association has instituted a program of lake protection for Mudge Pond. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Town encourage and support the voluntary measures promoted by Sharon Lake Association aimed at monitoring and protecting the lake.*

Boat Launches and Invasive Weeds. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Town and the Lake Association post signs at the boat launch on Mudge Pond and whenever possible*

man this site to inform and educate boaters on the requirement under a new State law to clean their boats of all weed material before entering the lake.

Septic System Maintenance and Sewer Avoidance. A major concern at Mudge Pond as well as other locations in Town is the age and condition of the septic systems serving clusters of homes on small lots. For the long term health of the Sharon's water bodies and to avoid the need for a costly sewer system it is in the best interest of the Town to institute a proactive sewer avoidance program.

Sewer Avoidance Program. A central component of this program should be educational. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Sewer and Water Commission, Conservation Commission, and /or the Health Department create an on-going educational program for homeowners on the importance of proper care and maintenance of septic tanks – leaching field sewage treatment systems. The life of a septic field can be considerably prolonged if care is taken to avoid introducing materials that harm the system and if a schedule of regular "pump – outs" is maintained.*
- *Sharon adopt an ordinance, based on similar ordinances in other Connecticut towns, requiring that in areas of special concern septic systems must be pumped by a licensed septic operator not less than once every three years. The Health Department and Water and Sewer Commission should identify these areas of septic system failure risk. These programs can be overseen by the Water Pollution Control Authority and/or the Department of Health. Where authorized by a Town ordinance the local Director of Health can be authorized to inspect septic fields and systems. If a malfunctioning system is detected, the health director can issue a notice of violation and an order requiring immediate abatement.*
- *A copy of an "as built" drawing for new septic systems showing their location and construction details be filed with the Health Department. Where these precautions have been instituted it has been demonstrated that septic failures are reduced and sewers can be avoided.*

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

Erosion and Sedimentation Controls. In 2002 the State issued a new and comprehensive update of its guidelines for the preparation of erosion and sedimentation control plans. The Zoning and Subdivision Regulations need to be amended to change this requirement as follows:

- *Change Connecticut Guidelines for Erosion and Sediment Control (1985) to 2002 Connecticut Guidelines for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.*

Special Exception Use. The Commission should review the special exception uses allowed in the Rural Residential Zone to identify uses that will involve either major land disturbances or require major on-site septic systems. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *Such uses either be eliminated from the list of uses allowed or the Commission adopt additional special exception standards for such uses.*
- *These special standards should increase the setback requirements for all non-residential buildings from lot lines and require that the use shall be designed:*
 - to adapt to the existing contours of the site, and
 - to demonstrate that the design minimizes the necessity for major cuts and fills and the potential for erosion, and
 - to retain the site's existing natural features and rural characteristics.

Well Water Protection Area Requirement. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Subdivision Regulations be amended to require that the majority of the radius required around a well site be located within the lot boundaries. The following is suggested for consideration as an amendment:*

"The majority of the well protection area required in the Public Health Code must be located within the property bounds of the lot served. A portion of this well protection area may be partially located within the adjacent street right-of-way and within adjacent lots provided it does not extend beyond the minimum building setback lines on the adjacent lots as required by the Sharon Zoning Regulations."

CONSISTENCY WITH THE STATE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

State statutes require that the Town Plan comment on the consistency between the local town plan policies and the conservation and development policies set forth in the State Plan of Conservation and Development. The policies of greatest importance in this review relate to protection of water quality and growth management in sewerred and unsewerred areas.

Based on recommendations in the State Plan, the Sharon Town Plan supports the following policy and strategies and recommendations designed to implement this policy:

To maintain the high quality of ground and surface water in the Town of Sharon through a combination of pollution prevention, pollution abatement practices and growth management actions.

Strategy:

Focus on regulatory and non-regulatory techniques aimed at reduction of non-point sources of pollution which pose the greatest threat to the water quality of Sharon's waters.

Recommendations:

- *A special focus on the protection of water quality in Sharon's Beardsley Pond and Calkinstown Reservoir public water supply watersheds.*
- *Promote the best available control methods to non-point pollution sources, including highway, urban, silvicultural, and agricultural runoff as well as erosion from construction sites.*
- *Update the zoning regulations and subdivision regulations to require compliance with the 2002 State Manual on Erosion and Sedimentation Control Guidelines.*
- *Aggressively correct non-point sources of pollution through regulatory and non-regulatory methods, including best management practices. Utilize preventive measures, such as vegetative buffers, in the management of non-point sources of pollution.*

- *Encourage on-going education of local land use decision-makers on how to deal adequately with non-point sources of pollution with the assistance of the Northwest Conservation District and other local area water protection organizations.*
- *Focus on the reduction of impervious surfaces; reduce blacktops and sidewalks wherever feasible. Establish requirements in the zoning regulations regarding maximum impervious surface limitations in all zones.*
- *Consider increasing required buffer from inland wetlands and watercourses in the highest water quality classification areas of the Town.*

Strategy:

Determine the ecological conditions and health of the significant recreational lakes. Promote the provision of technical support for lake management studies to evaluate biological, chemical, and physical water quality problems as well as problems of accelerated lake eutrophication.

Recommendation:

- *Support programs and funding aimed at controlling and preventing the acceleration of eutrophication and the impact of invasive aquatic weeds in Mudge Pond, Indian Lake, and other water bodies in the Town of Sharon.*

Strategy:

Monitor underground storage tanks to prevent contamination. In addition, design a pilot program that would promote the reversal of residential underground storage tanks by educating homeowners regarding the potential risks thereof. Investigate possible mechanisms to provide financial support and/or incentives for homeowners who replace their existing underground tanks.

Recommendation:

- *Support and encourage both public-funded and private educational programs designed to inform property owners of the threat posed by underground storage tanks and to replace underground tanks with properly designed above-ground fuel storage tanks.*

Strategy:

Avoid pesticide pollution.

Recommendations:

- *Discourage the use of pesticides in the public supply watershed and encourage the use of integrated pest management practices due to the overuse of pesticides.*
- *Through education and outreach programs, enable people to learn about safer and less toxic alternatives.*

Strategy:

Improve storm water management by use of natural systems, such as grass swales, minimizing impervious surfaces and assisting groundwater recharge.

Recommendations:

- *Amend storm water management regulations to encourage the use of grass swales and reduction of impervious surfaces, especially within the water supply watersheds.*
- *Review and revise the storm water management section of the zoning and subdivision regulations. Update these regulations to meet State-recommended standards.*

Strategy:

Coordinate land use with sewer and wastewater management policies.

Recommendations:

- *Develop and maintain a strong local water quality management program to deal effectively with domestic wastewater disposal.*
- *Prepare water pollution control plans which clearly distinguish between areas of existing and planned sewer service areas and areas where septic systems must be utilized and must be maintained consistent with environmental constraints.*
- *Review the Rural Community Center sewer service areas identified on the State Plan of Conservation and Development and affirm or revise these sewer service areas.*



- *Do not permit the extension of a sewer line outside of the sewer service area except as necessary to correct a pollution problem and in accord with established procedures.*
- *In lines outside of the sewer service district discourage development which cannot ensure indefinite functioning of individual on-site wastewater disposal facilities or small, off-site, innovative community systems.*
 1. Ensure the proper design, maintenance, and operation of septic systems by considering site-specific factors in determining the appropriate lot size.
 2. Support the extension of sewage collection systems into areas outside the sewer service area only where a thorough evaluation of all alternatives determines that:
 - it is the cost-effective alternative to correct an identified public health hazard and
 - it is sized to address only the existing pollution problem, and its design and capacity will not induce further intensive structural development with attendant non-point source pollution threats to water quality. □

LAND PRESERVATION

ESTABLISH A LOCAL FUND DEDICATED TO LAND PRESERVATION

The Connecticut General Statutes allow a community to establish by town ordinance a local fund for the protection of land for farming, open space and recreation. Donations received by the town for land preservation can be placed in this special fund and held until an acquisition opportunity arises. Without a special fund such donations if not used in the year received revert to the General Fund.

As proposed in the Natural Resource Inventory the *Town Plan recommends:*

- *That the Town create a "Sharon Land Preservation Fund". Similar funds have been established in Salisbury, Kent, Roxbury and Washington. (See Washington Ordinance in Appendix.)*

Local Land Acquisition Authority. The Town Plan also recommends that:

- *The Town consider taking advantage of the opportunity created by the Connecticut legislature in 2005 to create a local Land Acquisition Authority. Sharon may now under a new State law adopt an ordinance to "establish a land acquisition and development authority to assist the town to acquire or develop any agricultural, recreational or open space land or to assist the town to acquire any easements, interest or rights therein and to enter into covenants and agreements with owners of such land or interests therein to acquire, maintain, improve, protect, limit the future use of or otherwise conserve such land." Establishing such an authority will help accelerate and focus town action on land preservation.*

Sources for Open Space Fund. The Town Plan recommends that once a Land Preservation Fund is created:

- *The Town establish a line item in the annual budget to build a fund for open space acquisition. Open space grants, as well as donations and bequests for open space purposes and fees in lieu of open space all will be placed in this fund.*

A new law enacted in 2005 will provide a steady source of revenue available from the State for local open space acquisition. This law established a filing fee for each document filed on local land records, the proceeds of which are given to the Town (\$3.00 per transaction) and to the State (\$26.00 per transaction).

Fees received by the State are directed into a special fund titled "land protection, affordable housing and historic preservation account." Twenty five percent of this dedicated "account" must be used to support municipal open space grants. Other portions must be used to support agriculture in Connecticut and State financing of affordable housing programs. The Town of Sharon should be aggressive in its pursuit of grant funds that become available as a result of this new funding mechanism.

Other possible sources for the Sharon Open Space Acquisition Fund are:

1. **Real Estate Conveyance Tax.** The Town collects .0025% of the selling price on local real estate sales. For example, in 2000-2001 the Town collected \$29,692 in real estate conveyance taxes, and in 2001-2002 this increased to \$41,615. It was \$34,910 the following year and in 2003-2004 it jumped to \$89,314.
2. **Public Act 490 Penalty Funds.** Another source for a Town land acquisition fund is the penalty taxes collected each year from land owners who sell a property within ten years of having the land classified as open space under Public Act 490. These are typically smaller amounts, but over time these funds could build up in a dedicated land acquisition fund. Between 2000 and 2004 the annual 490 penalty collections were: \$3,379, \$4,002, \$1237, and \$9,980.
3. **Bonding.** The town should consider this as a means to protect open space.

OPEN SPACE REGULATION

Fee In Lieu of Open Space. The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission amend its regulations to permit the Commission to collect a fee for subdivision applications where a dedication of open space is not required. The Connecticut General Statutes permit the Commission to require a "fee in lieu of open space" provided the regulation adheres to the requirements set forth in the Statutes. An example of a "fee in lieu" regulation is provided in the Appendix.*
- *All "fee in lieu of open space" funds collected must be deposited in the Land Preservation Fund and used for the purposes allowed in the Statutes. The Planning and Zoning Commission in its regulations must establish criteria which will determine where such a "fee in lieu" will be required. A good example of the criteria for administration of the requirement for a fee in*

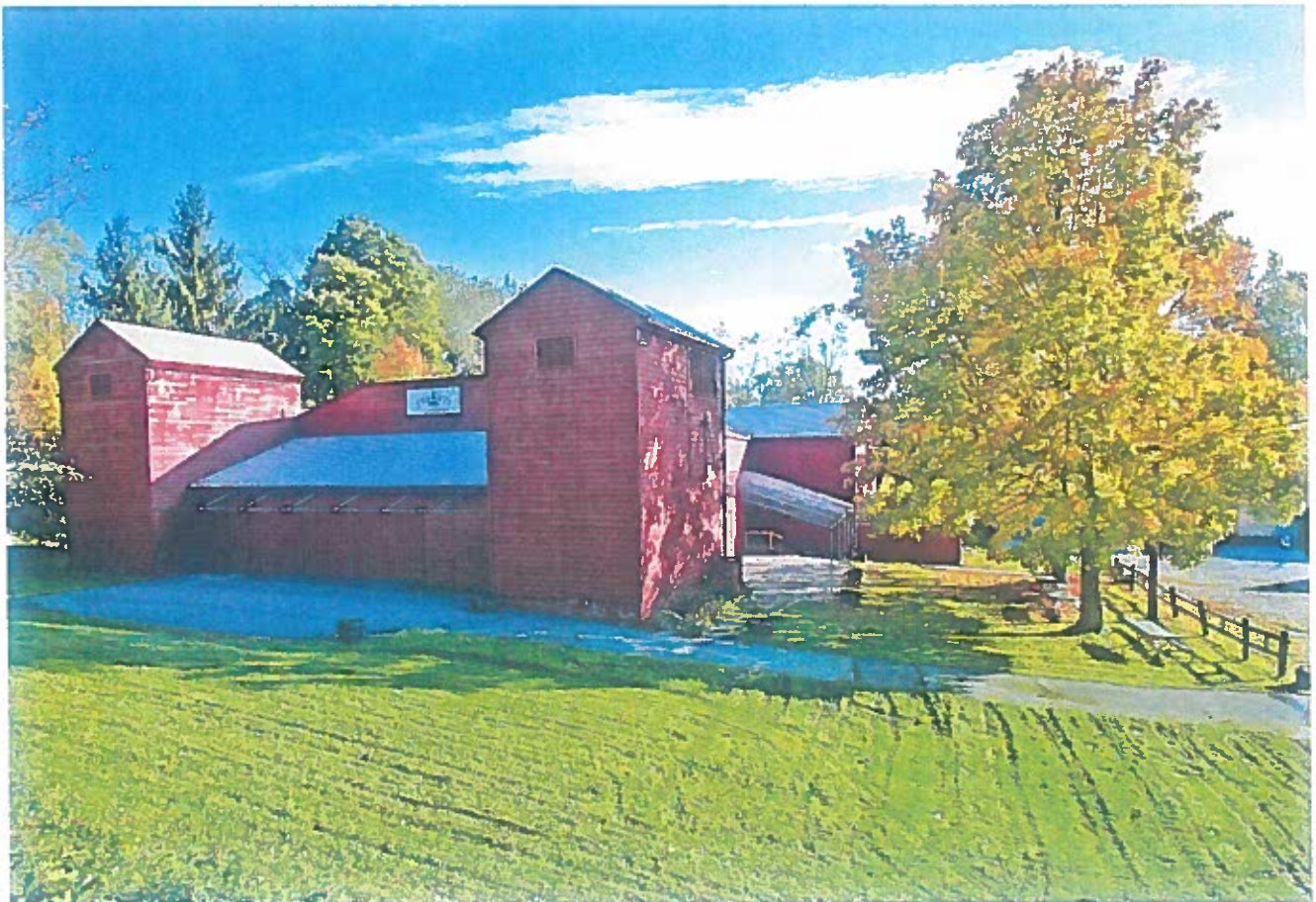
lieu of open space is the policy adopted by the Cornwall Planning and Zoning Commission, a copy of which is provided in the Appendix.

CRITERIA FOR OPEN SPACE IN SUBDIVISIONS

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission revise the section of the Subdivision Regulations on open space standards and requirements to provide more detailed criteria to require "useable" open space, define the purposes the open space shall serve, list the options for meeting the permanent preservation requirements, and offer options permitting the reduction of open space requirements. (See example of subdivision open space standards in the Appendix.)*

The recommendations in the 2005 Natural Resources Inventory should be used in developing this regulation and as a reference in determining the type and location of open space in subdivisions.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Perhaps the single most historical and defining feature of Sharon's rural landscape is its working farms and open farmland.

The goals of Sharon's farmland preservation program are:

1. To support the State's farmland preservation and food production goal,
2. To retain the Town's rural character,
3. To sustaining the local agricultural economy and retain Sharon's diversity of population,
4. To protect open space - especially in critically scenic and conservation areas such as along the gateway roads,
5. To protect natural resources,

Sharon has lost many of its working farms, especially over the past 25 years, but a core of active farms remain and most of the Town's valuable farm lands and farm soils remain undeveloped.

Farm Trends. The NRI reported that in 1960 75% of Sharon's land was in farm or field use. Since this peak, Sharon's working farm community has been in a long, steady decline. Since 1982 seven major farms have gone out of business. By 2005 only 20% of Sharon's farm and field lands were in active use. However, Sharon's farmland remains for the most part undeveloped and therefore potentially available for active use.

The importance of protecting Sharon's remaining farmland rises each year as Connecticut continues to lose farmland to development at the rate of 7,000 to 9,000 acres per year. There are only 370,000 acres of farmland left in Connecticut, covering less than 12 percent of the state's land base. Each year Connecticut residents are losing a valuable and irreplaceable natural resource that provides not only fresh local food, but important environmental and economic benefits as well.

State Farm Protection Program. In the early 1980's the State of Connecticut established the "Purchase of Development Rights Farmland Preservation Pro-

gram", the goal of which is to preserve a total of 130,000 acres including 85,000 acres of cropland. The main objective of this program is to secure a food and fiber-producing land resource base, consisting mostly of prime and important farmland soils, to preserve the future of agriculture in Connecticut.

If this farmland base can be protected it will enable Connecticut to produce at least 50% of its fluid milk needs and 70% of its in-season fresh fruits and vegetables. This in-state production will ensure some degree of local availability of fresh farm products. It will also help ensure related jobs and remain an important part of the State's economy.

As of 2005 the State of Connecticut's Farmland Preservation Program has purchased the development rights on 214 farms protecting a total of 30,157 acres. More than half of these acres are classified as prime and important farmland soils. However, after almost 25 years the State has protected only 22% of its 130,000-acre goal. Much more needs to be done, especially in farmland-rich communities such as Sharon.

Sharon, Salisbury and Canaan Farmland Corridor. A main objective of the State's farmland protection program is to preserve active farms that are clustered with other farms, therefore stabilizing a viable farming region.

The State of Connecticut recognizes that the corridor of prime farmland that runs through Sharon, Salisbury and Canaan is one of the most important blocks of contiguous farmland and clusters of active farms in Connecticut. Since the inception of the Farmland Preservation Program in the 1980's the State has purchased the development rights on nine Sharon farms and permanently preserved a total of 1,352 acres of the Town's farmland. This includes the 2005 purchase of development rights on 173.89 acres of beautiful farmland in Oblong Valley on Route 41 (Amenia Union Road).

As the rate of farmland loss continues to escalate in the urban and suburbanized areas of Connecticut, it

is critical to save the remaining intact farmland areas of the State such as those in the Sharon, Salisbury, and Canaan corridor. The State program will continue to help protect Sharon's farmland, but much more needs to be done to reach this goal.

Sharon Farmland Preservation Program. The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Town and local land preservation organizations continue and accelerate their farmland preservation program. An effective local farm protection program in Sharon will encourage the State to continue investing in Sharon farmland protection.*

Focus Areas. The greatest concentration of prime and important farmland soils in Sharon and the general focus area of farmland preservation is the northwestern segment of the Town along Routes 41, 343, and 361. Other valuable farm pockets are found in Ellsworth, on Fairchild, Sharon Mountain, and White Hollow Roads, and on East Street. The Land Trust has protected farm and valuable natural and scenic resources in these as well as other locations in Sharon.

The State has invested heavily, protecting four farms in the Route 41 corridor and two farms in Ellsworth. The Sharon Land Trust has greatly enhanced the State's effort, adding very important farms and other parcels in this corridor. The result is that Sharon is close to creating significant critical masses of protected farmland. Every effort should be made to build on these accomplishments and establish a viable farming region.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Town and local land preservation organizations place high on their protection list the farmland in Oblong Valley along Route 41 south of the Town center toward Amenia Union. Oblong Valley is both a fertile farm area and one of the most scenic gateway entrances to Sharon. The 2005 purchase of 174 acres of farmland development rights by the State on Amenia Union Road was a very important first step in the protection of this segment of Route 41 and can help stimulate more conservation action.*

Other Farm Preservation Recommendations.

Sharon Land Preservation Fund. The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The initial funding of the Land Preservation Fund earmark a portion of such funds to be used to acquire development rights or to purchase farmland in priority locations;*
- *In considering creation of a Local Land Acquisition Advisory Authority, the Town include representatives of the local Planning and Zoning Commission, the Conservation Commission, and the Sharon Land Trust. This Advisory body should take the lead in making grant applications to the State for land preservation funds;*
- *If the Town does not create such a local advisory authority on land acquisition, the Planning and Zoning Commission convene a meeting annually with local land preservation organizations to review progress on land preservation and cooperation toward common goals;*
- *The Planning and Zoning Commission and the housing-related organizations, such as the Sharon Housing Trust and the Housing Authority, meet annually, and the agenda for this meeting include discussion of how the Town, the farm community, and the housing-related organizations - such as the Sharon Housing Trust and the Housing Authority - cooperate to identify and develop farm worker housing that will support continuation of active farms in Sharon;*
- *The Planning and Zoning Commission and the Town work to facilitate the location and operation of local farm markets and farm stands.*

FUTURE LAND USE AND DENSITY OF POPULATION

POPULATION GROWTH TRENDS

One of the primary purposes of a Town Plan as set forth in the Connecticut General Statutes is to "recommend the most desirable density of population in the several parts of the municipality." Sharon is a rural community in one of the most remote sections of the State of Connecticut. The State and regional plans classify Sharon as a rural community and classify large areas of the town for land conservation and preservation.

Citizens at the June Town Plan Forum clearly supported the goal of retaining Sharon's small town size and rural appearance. Sharon has experienced little population growth throughout its history. However, over the next ten years it is not possible to insure that Sharon's historic low rate of population growth will continue.

Sharon and most of the small towns in the northwest corner of Connecticut have a very stable population and are experiencing low rates of population growth. In 2004 Sharon's population was 3,041 and is projected to increase by 0.6% to 3,127 between 2004 and 2009. This is lower than the average rate of population growth for the County and the State. Litchfield County is expected to grow 0.9% and the State 0.7% over this period. Adjoining towns Salisbury and Kent's 2004 population was 4,151 and 3,033 respectively, however both these towns are projected to grow at a rate slightly higher than Sharon's through 2009. Kent's projected growth rate is 1.3%, twice the rate of Sharon's, and Salisbury's is 1.0%.

These growth rates are projections essentially of past trends and presume that there will be no new major catalysts of new development in the Town or the region. While extension of the past trends is a reasonable prediction for the next ten years, there is no guarantee that past trends will continue to define Sharon's future.

Communities on the fringes of Litchfield County have been experiencing high rates of development and population growth for many years, and eventually this will begin to spill over into the communities of the northwestern most parts of Connecticut. Towns like Amenia, New York, and New Milford, Connecticut, for example, are rapidly-developing communities. Recently a 200-unit town house plan was presented in Amenia. In New Milford, new growth will be spurred with the completion of the reconstruction and improvement of Route 7 into the center of New Milford. Currently the Town is proposing to expand the town sewage treatment plant for the third time in the past 23 years. These are all signs of dynamic development and population growth which at some point will begin to impact towns in the Northwest corner.

Sharon is an extremely attractive rural community - a declining commodity in Connecticut. The trend of second home development is well established in northwestern Connecticut, and the fact that Sharon has a hospital sets it apart from other rural towns and only adds to its interest for second homes, retirement homes, and assisted living facilities.

Each year as communities to the south and east of Sharon become more developed the pressure on Sharon will gradually increase. Clearly if Route 7 is widened and improved into Northwestern Connecticut or a new major employment center is established nearby, either could produce a dramatic impact on the rate of housing development and population growth in Sharon.

SHARON "BUILD OUT" ANALYSIS

A very important part of the Town Plan is to establish a goal for the Town's future density of population. Ultimately the future feasible density of development in Sharon is determined by the suitability of the land to support development and the requirements of the Zoning Regulations.

In an effort to project the future density of development, the Planning and Zoning Commission authorized preparation of a "build out" map and analysis. A build out study is a common planning



technique useful even in communities like Sharon where there is no evident prospect that the community will be “built out” at any time in the foreseeable future. This analysis provides an estimate of the potential for creation of new development lots and from this a projection of population growth based upon existing land use and regulation requirements. The build out map shows how much development and where development can occur based on current Zoning Regulations.

This is invaluable information in the formulation of a town plan. It assists the Commission and the Town in understanding the areas of the community with the greatest building potential and how development will alter the town. It also provides insight into the areas of the Town that may need future capital improvements including roads, schools, and fire services.

The process of determining how many lots can be theoretically developed begins by eliminating all

land already fully developed. It also eliminates all permanently protected land. This is land held by the Town, the State, or nonprofit organizations - such as the Sharon Land Trust - for conservation purposes.

Next the study provides a realistic determination of building potential by accounting for the fact that large areas of Sharon have topographic and soil constraints that severely limit the potential for development. Guided by standards set forth in the Sharon Subdivision Regulations, the Planning and Zoning Commission identified the following areas as lands with building “constraints”: water bodies, inland wetlands and associated buffer areas, slopes over 20%, and land in the Aquifer Protection Zone and Housatonic River Zone.

This study then examines every parcel of land in Sharon and projects the number of building lots possible taking into account the above constraints and assuming that development will occur in

accord with the current zoning minimum lot size and road frontage requirements.

Zoning Minimum Lot Size Requirement – The Primary Zoning Regulation Determining Future Population Density. The great majority of the land area in Sharon is zoned “Rural Residential”. In this zone the minimum lot area for a single family residence is two acres. The only other residential zone, the General Residence Zone in the Town Center, requires a minimum lot size of 3/4ths of an acre.

The build out analysis shows that in the Center area there is the potential to create many new lots on large areas of undeveloped land. However, this build out projection in the Center area is not realistic, because land in this zone can not be developed with 3/4 acre lots unless the sewage treatment plant is expanded or a sufficient public water supply is available. Nevertheless, the build out shows a great many new lots are feasible in the Center if utilities are made available.

Build out facts. Sharon has a total land area of 59.7 square miles or 38,224 acres of land that is divided into total of 2,256 separately owned parcels of land. Of these 1,275 parcels are already fully developed or have no potential to be further divided into additional building lots.

Another 174 parcels are under permanent protection, such as land owned by the State for forest and park purposes or land owned by the Sharon Land Trust for conservation purposes and land that is protected under a permanent conservation easement preventing development.

This leaves 1,026 parcels with a total of 23,711 acres. On each of these parcels the study projected the potential number of new lots that could be developed. This involved several steps and assumptions. The study calculated there are 23,711 acres of unprotected land in the Town. 9,693 acres of this unprotected land (41%) has one “development constraints” category (very steep, wetlands, etc.), the total land having “development constraints”.

After deducting the land with development constraints and land devoted to new roads, the study

applied the minimum lot area and road frontage requirement to each parcel and calculated the potential number of lots on each parcel.

Using this accepted theoretical “build out” projection formula, the study determined that 7,482 additional building lots could be created on these 1,026 parcels.

The number of lots possible on each parcel ranges widely in accord with lot size and the amount of land on the parcel with development constraints.

Projected Future Maximum “Build Out” Population is 24,000. Assuming that a single family residence was constructed on each of these potential building lots and the number of persons in each new home was in line with existing family size in Sharon, the projected additional population in the Town would be 21,473. This would include an additional 4,414 students and 170 more miles of local roads. Sharon’s existing population is approximately 3,000, and if fully developed under the current zoning requirements the town’s total population would exceed 24,000.

Factors Insulating Sharon from Future Development. The total number of potential lots and projected population would be much higher if it were not for the high percentage of land in Sharon that is permanently protected and the amount of land with severe development constraints.

The study calculated that a total of 16,607 acres or 43% of Sharon’s total land area is classified in one of the several categories of land with development constraints (too wet, too steep, floodplain, etc.). Of this total 6,914 acres are already permanently protected as open space. As noted above, the other 9,693 acres of land with “development constraint” are located on the 1,026 “buildable” parcels.

The study calculated that 31% of the town’s land area (11,824 acres) is permanently protected from development. This is a high percentage of permanently protected land in comparison to most other towns in the State. However, if the State is to reach its goal to permanently protect 21% of its land area, rural and remote communities such as Sharon must protect a high percentage of their land area.

BUILD OUT IMPACTS

An examination of the current development patterns in Sharon compared to the future potential build out reveals a much changed town.

Currently development is focused in and around the center of the Town. Development in the rest of the town is scattered along the road system with no other special concentrations of residential housing. The following are some of the major observed impacts of the build out scenario.

On Farm and Forest Resources. As can be readily imagined the impact of a "build out" scenario on Sharon will disproportionately impact farmland, its most developable land resource. It is projected that 72% of the remaining farmland will be converted to development under the build out scenario.

The Route 41 corridor north and south of the center is the area most dramatically impacted by the build out scenario. This highway travels through the largest concentration of prime farmland soils in Sharon, and it is also the area of greatest concentration of future development build out. This provides re-enforcement to the proposal to assign a high priority for protection of the farmlands and scenic assets of the Route 41 corridor north and Oblong Valley farm area.

The Town's forest resources will also be affected; 56% of the unprotected forest land would be lost under the build out scenario. A large part of the southern half of the Macedonia Forest block as shown on the Natural Resource Inventory is suitable for development according to the build out analysis.

Overall the build out map indicates that the entire southern third of the Town is vulnerable to development. This part of the Town is remote and has few town roads. Development in this area would require a much expanded network of new roads.

The build out analysis demonstrates the value of protecting the Skiff Mountain area and lands along West Woods Road and Modley Road and other remote portions of this part of Sharon.

MINIMUM LOT SIZE REQUIREMENTS

Section 8-2 of the Connecticut General Statutes for zoning states:

"Sec. 8-2. Regulations. (a) The zoning commission of each city, town or borough is authorized to regulate, within the limits of such municipality, the height, number of stories and size of buildings and other structures; the percentage of the area of the lot that may be occupied; the size of yards, courts and other open spaces; the density of population . . ."

In rural communities in areas not planned for sewage treatment systems a town must establish a lot size that has a sufficient area to provide for on site sewage treatment. The State Department of Environmental Protection has determined that where sewer service is not planned the minimum area for a building lot needed to protect ground water quality is two acres of land, not including inland wetlands soils.

Rural communities throughout Connecticut have amended their zoning regulations to increase lot size requirements by eliminating inland wetlands from the calculation of the area required for a minimum building lot. Some communities have also eliminated steep slopes of more than 20% from the calculation of the minimum lot requirement. The Town of New Milford adopted such an amendment, and this regulation of minimum lot size was upheld by the Connecticut Supreme Court.

The Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-2b specifically permits local planning and zoning commissions to consider soil types in developing zoning regulations:

"Section 8-2b. Use of maps of Soil Conservation Service as standard. Any planning commission, zoning commission or planning and zoning commission of any municipality may use soil survey maps of the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture as a standard in determining land use, planning and zoning, or development regulations."

Two towns in the Northwest region, Kent and Washington, have established a system for determining lot size based upon soil types. The soil types with the greatest limitations for development are assigned a higher lot area requirement and those with fewer limitations a lower lot requirement.

It is important to restate that in establishing lot size requirements the Planning and Zoning Commission is acting not only to protect water quality and other resource features. The Commission is also acting under its authority to determine the "density of population" in the various parts of the community as authorized by the General Statutes.

The build out analysis indicates that the current two acre minimum lot size requirement will result in density of development that conflicts with the Plan goals to protect the Town's natural resource assets and may also be inconsistent with the goal of retaining the Town's rural character. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission revise the requirements for minimum lot size in the Rural Residence district and all areas of the town where sewer service is not planned for two purposes:*
- *To better insure that minimum lot area requirements are sufficient to provide for the long term needs for on site sewage disposal and*
- *To establish a density of development that is more consistent with the goal of retaining Sharon's rural character.*

OPTIONS FOR REVISING ZONING LOT AREA REQUIREMENTS

1. Amend the requirement for calculation of two acre minimum lot area requirement.

One option is to revise the existing requirement for a two acre minimum lot by requiring that inland wetlands and steep slopes not be included in the calculation of minimum lot area.

Wetlands and steep slopes are especially difficult for building and pose the greatest threat to the natural environment. By eliminating these types of land from the calculation of minimum building lot

requirements the community is accomplishing several objectives. It better insures that there will be sufficient area on the building lot to:

- Locate a septic field and tank and provide for a replacement septic field for the long term operation of the sewage treatment system on the lot;
- Provide for a house foundation location and driveway corridor with separation distances from inland wetlands and the opportunity to avoid disturbing steep slopes.

In communities such as Sharon, where there are extensive areas of inland wetlands and steep slopes, the effect of this requirement will be to increase the average size of building lots and open space and reduce the density of potential housing development.

In considering this zoning amendment the Commission should examine its details, which may include such additional requirements as the need to demonstrate that each lot must contain within its boundaries a minimum of one acre of contiguous land on the lot free of inland wetlands and steep slopes.

2. Define a Minimum Buildable Area on a Lot and Require that All Major Structures are Located within a Buildable Area.

Option #1 insures that in creating a building lot steep slopes cannot be counted in determining minimum lot size so that there will be sufficient land area to better accommodate housing development, but it does not require that in developing a lot the owner must avoid disturbing steep slopes. The Sharon Planning and Zoning Commission should also consider the lot area zoning requirement adopted by the Town of Cornwall.

The Cornwall Planning and Zoning Commission has taken this concept a step further by requiring that all new lots must have a minimum "buildable" area of one acre and "all structures and septic systems shall be located within the buildable area except accessory structures with a footprint under 250 square feet and wells."

The Cornwall Zoning Regulations define “buildable area” as: “A rectangular area of a lot that contains no wetland soils, waterbodies, watercourses, utility or access easements, rights of way or any naturally occurring slope exceeding 25% as measured using 2 foot contour intervals”.

This amendment, if adopted, would not only increase the average area of proposed lots but by avoiding disturbance of steep slopes would help reduce erosion and sedimentation problems from development and the radical alteration of the natural landscape.

3. Large Lot Zoning District.

Some parts of Sharon can be considered for a larger minimum lot area requirement. Many communities in Northwest Connecticut have established in sections of the town a minimum lot area requirement of three, four, or five acres. Towns with more than a two acre minimum lot area requirement in sections of the community include Cornwall, Litchfield, Washington, Roxbury and Bridgewater.

The most remote and environmentally sensitive sections of Sharon should be considered for large lot designation. In Sharon such areas include the relatively “roadless” areas labeled the Housatonic and Macedonia Forest Blocks on the Natural Resource Inventory map titled “Fragile and Unique Natural Resources”.

Other areas of the Town that should be considered for large lot zoning are the most vulnerable and important farmland corridors, such as Oblong Valley. In these areas a proposed subdivision of land of more than four lots should require the applicant to submit both a conventional subdivision plan and cluster subdivision plan showing how farm land will be conserved.

The Planning and Zoning Commission may consider establishing large lot zones in the Sharon’s remote and environmentally sensitive areas.

OPEN SPACE REGULATIONS

The Sharon Zoning Regulations do not provide for flexibility in the layout of subdivision lots, roads, and open spaces - with one exception. The Zoning Regulations permit a land owner to apply to create a “Planned Conservation Zone” which allows for flexibility in lot layout. However, the requirement to secure a zone change is a lengthy and costly process and does not provide sufficient encouragement for an open space subdivision design.

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission should apply the principles in the Planned Conservation Zone change to any subdivision of more than a certain minimum number of lots without the requirement for a zone change. In important conservation areas in the Town the Commission should consider requiring both a conventional subdivision plan and an open space subdivision plan (often referred to as a “cluster” design) allowing the Commission to select the conceptual design that is most suitable to the property and protective of the valued conservation resources.*

The limiting factor in designing an open space subdivision is the plan for the treatment of sewage. In Sharon, outside of the Town Center area, there is no plan for extending sewers, and the Town must require higher standards for on site sewage treatment of wastes to avoid septic failures and the need for costly public sewage treatment.

Under an open space subdivision regulation the lot area requirement may be reduced as long as each home is served by its own septic tank and leaching field sewage treatment system. It is critical, however, that each septic system have a sufficient area and soils that will support the system and replacement septic fields.

Until the State of Connecticut’s requirements for “community” septic systems change, Sharon should consider that subdivisions of land for housing be served by individual on site septic systems, not “community” septic systems. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that there have been significant advances in the planning and engi-

neering of common or "community" septic systems, and these systems are in use in other states.

However, in Connecticut a "community" septic system servicing more than 33 bedrooms requires a special permit from the State Department of Environmental Protection. Under the DEP's requirements the soils and topography in Sharon are generally not suitable for a "community" septic system. In addition, the process and requirements to secure such a permit from the DEP - while justifiably rigorous - typically discourage applications.

For Sharon perhaps the most important factor discouraging a "community" system is that the State DEP will not approve such a permit unless the Town

agrees to accept the responsibility for these systems should one fail. Understandably, many towns are not willing to agree to such a stipulation.

The safest approach in Sharon is to permit open space subdivisions in areas of the Town that are zoned for lots greater than two acres. In a large lot residential zone, open space subdivision homes can be on smaller lots, with less road frontage and subdivision construction expense, and as much as 50% of the land can be kept in open space. In order to permit smaller residential lots and protect more open space it will be important to permit location of septic tanks and fields in the protected open space. □

STATE AFFORDABLE HOUSING LIST —

Towns in the Northwestern Connecticut Planning Region as of the 2000 U.S. Census

Town	2000 Census Housing Units	Governmentally Assisted Units	CHFA/FmHA Mortgages	Deed Restricted	Total Assisted	Percent
Canaan	610	3	8	1	12	1.97%
Cornwall	873	18	1		19	2.18%
Kent	1,463	35	3		38	2.60%
North Canaan	1,444	101	6		107	7.41%
Roxbury	1,018	18	1		19	1.87%
Salisbury	2,410	17	3		20	0.83%
Sharon	1,617	20	4		24	1.48%
Warren	650		1		1	0.15%
Washington	1,764	14	5	12	31	1.76%
Total	11,849	226	32	13	271	2.29%

Source: Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

With the escalation of housing prices there are few homes or rentals available in the Town considered "affordable". A housing cost "rule of thumb" is: no more than 30% of total household annual income should be expended on housing costs.

In Sharon, according to the U.S. Census, 18% of households had an annual housing expense that was more than 30% of annual income. By 1999 this had increased to 23%. This increase reflects the rapid escalation in local housing costs. It is likely that today the percent of households paying more than 30% of income on housing is even higher.

The State of Connecticut defines an "affordable" annual housing cost as 30% of annual income where annual income is less than 80% of the median income for the County. To qualify as affordable under the Connecticut Affordable Housing Law a home or rental must meet this affordable housing cost definition continually for a minimum of 20 years or the housing cost must be subsidized under a local or government grant program.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census only 24 dwelling units in Sharon, or a total of 1.48% of all housing units in Sharon, meet the State of Connecticut's affordable definition. Twenty of these are apartments created by the Town and operated by the Sharon Housing Authority at Sharon Ridge. Region-wide in Northwestern Connecticut only 2.29% of all housing units qualify as "affordable". (See Table page 38)

The State's Affordable Housing law and its consequences are explained in detail below. The law provides a penalty for any town where less than 10% of total housing units meet the State's definition of "affordable". In these cases, and this applies to all towns in the Northwest region, an affordable housing development application shall be exempt from all but the basic health and safety requirements of the local Planning and Zoning Regulations. An affordable housing application under the State law is one where 20% or more of all proposed housing units meet the "affordable" housing definition.

In Sharon the housing issue goes beyond persons who earn less than 80% of the median income in the County. Many families with moderate incomes are having a very difficult time finding housing they can afford in Sharon. This would include, for example, an individual or family living on a starting teacher's salary. As a result small towns in Northwest Connecticut are less able to attract people who provide essential services such as teachers, health care workers, and others.

The Sharon Volunteer Fire Department and Sharon Emergency Services have identified the lack of moderate cost housing as the most important reason they have not been able to recruit young volunteers. As the average age of the Volunteer Fire Department members continues to climb, the Department is very concerned that it will not have an adequate number of members to provide vital fire and emergency services.

Residents of Sharon at the June Town Plan forum agreed that the Town needs to do more to encourage affordable housing and housing for persons with a moderate income. The following recommendations are offered to address this need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Goal: To encourage local public and private actions, including land use regulatory amendments, that will help expand housing opportunities - especially for the elderly and for young adults.

Sharon is the only community in Northwestern Connecticut with a local Housing Authority which is a local public agency charged with developing affordable housing in cooperation with the town. As stated above, the Sharon Housing Authority constructed and is operating the 20-unit Sharon Ridge affordable housing development.

The Sharon Housing Authority is a vital local organization. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *This Authority continue to provide its housing services and explore the possibility of expanding the Sharon Ridge housing development.*

As part of the Town Plan process the Planning and Zoning Commission appointed an Affordable Housing Study Committee. After considerable research and review this Committee researched and developed information on Sharon's housing conditions and the approach to affordable housing taken in area communities. Its report to the Planning and Zoning Commission recommended formation of a local private Housing Trust to encourage and provide affordable housing in Sharon.

Shortly thereafter the nonprofit Sharon Housing Trust was incorporated, and this new organization has been working hard and exploring opportunities to provide moderate cost housing in Sharon. This is a major step forward for housing in Sharon.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Town and housing-related organizations adopt a general policy of encouraging affordable housing on a scattered site basis. This approach will involve conversion of homes to provide an affordable apartment, constructing an affordable home on a lot donated for this purpose, and subdivisions with an affordable component.*

The Sharon Housing Trust could provide housing lots to be developed by residents with a moderate income. The Trust plans to explore options to purchase and renovate or build homes which can be rented or sold to provide housing to local persons, especially persons who are contributing to Sharon's emergency service program and other vital local services.

Based upon interviews with other local housing trusts, it is possible that the Sharon Housing Trust could provide one or two homes per year at prices below market value. The Trust anticipates that any dwelling unit it can provide that is connected to the Town's water and sewer system will require less land and have a lower building and housing cost.

The new Trust supports the notion of providing affordable housing on scattered sites throughout the Town. The Trust also recognizes there is a growing need for moderate cost housing. Sharon needs a

variety of housing to remain a balanced community and to sustain its emergency volunteer corps and local teachers, nurses, elderly persons, and children of residents who wish to remain in Sharon.

Sharon Ridge

There is a need for more housing units at Sharon Ridge as demonstrated by the waiting list of Sharon families and individuals who qualify and would like to rent a Sharon Ridge unit.

The Town and Sharon Housing Authority should complete their evaluation of the potential to add additional affordable housing units to Sharon Ridge. Preliminary indications are that there is the potential for at least ten and possibly 20 additional housing units at Sharon Ridge.

Currently there are few grant programs for affordable housing construction in communities such as Sharon. However, the State recently approved a new law that is designed to provide more State funding for affordable housing. *It would be wise to complete the assessment of Sharon Ridge expansion now so that when additional State funds are available Sharon will be ready with an application to expand Sharon Ridge.*

Affordable Lots

The Planning and Zoning Commission has studied zoning regulations in other communities that allow construction of an affordable or moderate cost home on an undersized lot as a Special Exception. This permission would allow a land owner to cut off a lot of a smaller size than required by the Zoning Regulations, but approval of the lot for housing would require a demonstration that the lot will be developed for affordable housing use. There are many existing undersized, pre-existing, non-conforming lots in Sharon, and these also could be considered for affordable lot use.

Cornwall and other communities have adopted "affordable lot" regulations that can be considered in drafting a regulation for Sharon.

Accessory Apartments

A survey of housing needs and accessory apartments by the Town Social Services Agent shows that accessory apartments are providing moderate cost housing opportunities for Sharon residents. This survey identified 102 accessory apartments in Sharon. Most of these units are renting at rates above the State's definition of "affordable", and some are no-rent units occupied by family members. Nevertheless, accessory apartments provide much needed moderate cost housing opportunities for local residents.

The Town Plan recommends that:

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission continue to provide the option of developing an accessory apartment in residential zones under the Zoning Regulations. However, the Commission should examine the requirements limiting floor area of accessory apartments and the proportional size of apartments to the principle residence on the lot.*

Accessory apartments can assist the Town in reaching the State mandated goal that 10% of Sharon's total housing units are "affordable". State statutes have been changed to acknowledge that accessory apartments that are restricted for affordable housing for a minimum of ten years will qualify as affordable housing units.

Apartments over Commercial Buildings

Many New England communities have long encouraged apartment use on the second floor of commercial buildings. The Sharon Zoning Regulations could be amended to include incentives that will encourage the construction of rental apartments or condominiums above commercial real estate.

Multiple Family Housing

Regulations allowing both multiple family structures and multiple family complexes in all residential zones may need to be considered.

Affordable Housing Regulation

Currently the Zoning Regulations have no provision or standards for an application for a housing

development that meets the State's definition of affordable housing. *The Town Plan recommends that:*

- *The Planning and Zoning Commission study the options for adopting such a regulation that will provide guidance to any applicant seeking to develop affordable housing in Sharon.*

Communities such as Litchfield have adopted this type of regulation, and it was helpful in guiding a design that blended the affordable housing units with the neighborhood.

STATE OF CONNECTICUT'S "AFFORDABLE" HOUSING LAW

In 1989, the State enacted PA 89-311 creating an affordable housing land use appeals procedure aimed at increasing the amount of affordable housing in the State. Although the statutes governing the procedure have been amended several times, the basic features remain the same. The following describes the requirements and elements of this important State law, especially as it relates to the Town of Sharon.

State Affordable Housing Appeals Process

The appeals procedure allows developers of affordable housing to appeal the denial of an affordable housing application by a local planning and zoning commission directly to State Superior Court. The affordable housing appeals process is distinctly different from other land use appeals processes. In all other appeals of a planning and zoning denial the burden is on the applicant to show that the Commission's denial should be overturned or modified. However if an application involves affordable housing as defined in the affordable housing law (PA 89-311) the burden is on the town rather than the applicant to demonstrate that the denial should be upheld.

Under the terms of the law a town must show that the denial is supportable on one of three tests. It must prove:

- *That its denial is necessary to protect "the public in-*

terests in health, safety or other matters which the Commission may legally consider”;

- That those public interests “clearly outweigh the need for affordable housing”;
- That reasonable changes to the application cannot be made to protect the public interests and meet with the Commission’s approval.

A town need not permit affordable housing in an industrially zoned district which does not permit residential uses. The third test requires a municipality to prove that the project is not actually “assisted housing” as defined in the statutes.

What Is “Affordable” Housing

Under Connecticut Statutes, a housing application is deemed affordable if it is either “assisted housing” or a “set-aside development”. The Statutes defines these two terms as follows:

Assisted housing: “housing which is receiving, or will receive, financial assistance under any governmental program for the construction or substantial rehabilitation of low and moderate income housing, and any housing occupied by persons receiving rental assistance under chapter 319uu or Section 1437f of Title 42 of the United States Code.”

Set-aside development: “a development in which not less than thirty per cent of the dwelling units will be conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions which shall require that, for at least forty years after the initial occupation of the proposed development, such dwelling units shall be sold or rented at, or below, prices which will preserve the units as housing for which persons and families pay thirty per cent or less of their annual income, where such income is less than or equal to eighty per cent of the median income.

In a set-aside development, of the dwelling units conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions, a number of dwelling units equal to not less than fifteen

per cent of all dwelling units in the development shall be sold or rented to persons and families whose income is less than or equal to sixty per cent of the median income and the remainder of the dwelling units conveyed by deeds containing covenants or restrictions shall be sold or rented to persons and families whose income is less than or equal to eighty per cent of the median income.”

Nonprofit developers and government agencies such as municipal housing authorities generally apply under the “assisted housing” provisions. Set-aside housing applications are generally filed by for-profit developers.

According to State Statutes, “median income” means, “after adjustments for family size, the lesser of the state median income or the area median income for the area in which the municipality containing the affordable housing development is located, as determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.” For Litchfield County, the median family income is \$70,200.

An example might help clarify how this appeals process would work. Assume that a private for-profit developer proposed a fifty unit project on one acre lots in a residential district zone where the minimum lot size is two acres. The developer submits an application to rezone the project site for one acre minimum lot sizes as well as applications for subdivision approval and inland wetlands commission approval.

The developer claims the project qualifies as a “set-aside development” under the affordable housing law. Of the fifty units, fifteen units must be sold to persons or families making less than 80% of the median income. In Litchfield County, a family of four with an annual income of less than \$57,040 would be eligible to purchase one of the units. In addition, eight of the fifteen units must be sold to persons or families making less than 60% of the median income. In this case, a family of four with an annual income less than \$35,650 would qualify.

The deeds for the fifteen units would contain restrictions limiting both the sales price of the units and the income of the purchaser. The restrictions are meant to insure that the units remain affordable for forty years. The remaining thirty-five units in the project would be market-rate units that could be sold and resold without any restrictions.

Even though the project did not meet the minimum lot sizes of the zoning regulations, a planning and zoning commission could deny this kind of application only if the Commission could prove that the project did not meet one of the tests mentioned above.

Exemptions from the Requirements of the Affordable Housing Law

Towns that have more than 10% of their housing units classified as affordable are exempt from the appeals procedure. According to the latest figures compiled by the State Department of Economic and Community Development, 1.48% - twenty-four units - of Sharon's housing units are "affordable". Of the twenty-four units, twenty are in Sharon Ridge, which is owned by the Sharon Housing Authority.

Sharon is far from being alone in either the State or the Northwestern Connecticut Council of Governments Region in not meeting the 10% threshold for exemption from the appeal procedure. Only twenty-nine of the State's 169 municipalities meet the 10% threshold. Of the nine NWCCOG towns, North Canaan has the highest percentage of affordable units, 7.41%.

The State Statutes, however, do allow for a four-year moratorium on affordable housing applications in towns where affordable housing projects have been completed. Towns qualify for the moratorium based on a complicated system that takes into consideration ownership, income levels, and family composition.

Affordable Housing Appeals The affordable housing land use appeals procedure has been successfully used by developers to gain approvals

for their projects. According to a 2000 State Office of Legislative Research report, courts have ruled in favor of the developer in twenty-seven different projects in twenty-one different towns.

The courts have found that an affordable housing project's impact on a town's school facilities, failure to comply with existing zoning regulations, or reduction of neighboring property values were not sufficient justifications for the town to deny an application for affordable housing. On the other hand, the courts have found that insufficient water supply or inability to provide safe sewage disposal and potential contamination of the town's water supply did justify a town's denial of an affordable housing application.

Affordable Housing Programs. Formed in 1989, the Northwestern Connecticut Regional Housing Council consists of representatives from thirteen towns including Sharon. The Council provides a forum for discussing affordable housing issues and has sponsored informational programs on affordable housing. Most of the Council's members have been through the long and arduous process of developing affordable housing in their towns and are a great source of practical knowledge. The NWCCOG provides staff support to the Housing Council. In addition, the NWCCOG Region offers several good examples of local efforts at creating affordable housing for both renters and home owners.

a. Local Housing Authority: A local housing authority is especially well equipped to apply for and receive government funds to construct and operate affordable housing. Sharon, of course, has the Sharon Housing Authority, which is a Town agency created under the provisions of the Connecticut General Statutes.

b. Local Nonprofit Housing Trusts: In several towns, including Salisbury and Cornwall, the housing trust model has been used by local nonprofit organizations to create affordable housing. With this model, a local nonprofit housing trust retains ownership of the land and the family owns the house. Since they are not purchasing the land, the family's overall cost is

reduced and they are better able to qualify for a mortgage. The nonprofit housing trust and the family sign a long-term lease agreement limiting the resale price of the house. The resale restriction is what serves to ensure the property's long-term affordability.

The housing trust model is an effective and flexible means of creating affordable housing because it allows local organizations to tailor their programs to fit the needs of both the individuals and the town. A nonprofit organization, for example, can reduce the house price to make it more affordable. It can buy an existing house or build a new one.

Another advantage is that the housing trust properties are generally single family houses that are indistinguishable from other houses. Also, since the

families are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their properties, the management responsibilities of the local land trust are greatly reduced.

Nonprofit organizations in Kent, Cornwall, Salisbury and Washington have built affordable rental units using a variety of funding sources. In 2004, Kent Affordable Housing Inc. (Kent's private nonprofit housing trust) completed a twenty-four unit rental project, South Commons, with a combination of federal grants, housing tax credits, town donation of land, and local contributions. The Washington Housing Trust recently completed an eleven unit rental project using private funds. Rental projects tend to be larger and more complicated to fund, develop, and manage than projects involving single family houses scattered though a town. □



RECREATION AND OTHER CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT NEEDS

The Town of Sharon is fortunate to have an active and energetic Board of Recreation and Youth. This Board is charged with the oversight and maintenance of the Town's recreational facilities at the Town Beach, the Community Center (next to Sharon Center School), and the buildings and fields at Veterans' Field in Sharon Valley. Currently the Board provides recreational opportunities, programs, and activities to the youth, adults, and seniors in the Town. The Board's mission is funded by the Town, but additional money is raised through various events and fund-raisers.

The present Community Center is antiquated and inadequate for the many programs and services the Board envisions for Town residents. The Board has proposed a plan for a 4,000 square foot Community Center – to be located adjacent to the Lions' Club Pavilion at Veterans' Field. This facility will provide a kitchen, public restrooms, a fireplace, and will be handicapped-accessible. It will serve the following functions:

- Recreational programs such as dance and yoga classes.
- Senior and adult programs and lectures.
- Space for teen activities and the Little Rascals Summer Program.
- A supplementary disaster relief site.
- This facility can also be used by residents for a fee for celebrations, wedding receptions, and other special occasions.

The estimated cost of this new facility is now in the \$1.7 million range.

The Board also recommends construction of a non-enclosed 90-by-200 foot multi-sports area which would include a 54-by-84 foot basketball court with the remaining area for skateboard and rollerblade use. This could also be used for ice skating in the winter months.

Other needs are new fences around Veterans' Field, reconstruction of the volley ball court, and installation of a barbecue grill.

OTHER CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT NEEDS

- Two-bay addition to the Town Garage.
- Upgrade the dog pound.
- Addition to the Sharon Fire Department Inc. Building to house the decontamination trailer and its prime mover.
- Possible building and parking improvements to the Town-owned 67 Main Street property (next to Town Hall).
- Consideration of future options for the use of the existing Community Center Building.

APPENDICES—(Not part of the Plan)

DEMOGRAPHICS

The 1990s saw Sharon’s population increase by only 1.4% – 40 people – to a total of 2,968. This compares with a 3.6% increase in the State’s population and a 4.7% increase in Litchfield County’s population. Table 1 and Chart 1 show the history of the Town’s population changes.

Although the Town’s total population remained virtually unchanged in the 1990s, the age composition changed markedly. These changes are best illustrated at the extremes – the 0 – 4 age cohort and the 85+ cohort. In 1990, children aged 0 – 4 outnumbered persons 85 years and older by a ratio of roughly 2.7 to 1. By 2000, the number of children aged 0 – 4 was virtually identical to the number of persons 85 and older.

Another significant shift was the 42% decline in the 25 – 34 year old cohort. For most people, these are the prime years for buying houses and starting families.

During the 1990s the Town saw an influx of people in the 35 - 44 age cohort. In 1990, 383 Town residents were in the 25 – 34 age cohort. In 2000, 502 Town residents were in the 35 – 44 age cohort. The difference between these two figures, 119, is the minimum amount of in-migration to the Town in this age cohort.

In 2000, the median age of the Town’s residents was 45.0 years. The median age for all Connecticut residents was 37.4 years.

In 2000, Sharon’s population was overwhelming white (96.9%) and non-Hispanic (98.0%).

**TABLE 1: SHARON’S POPULATION
1800—2000**

Year	Population	% Change	Change
1800	2340	—	
1810	2606	11.4%	266
1820	2573	-1.3%	-33
1830	2615	1.6%	42
1840	2407	-8.0%	-208
1850	2507	4.2%	100
1860	2556	2.0%	49
1870	2441	-4.5%	-115
1880	2580	5.7%	139
1890	2149	-16.7%	-431
1900	1982	-7.8%	-167
1910	1880	-5.1%	-102
1920	1585	-15.7%	-295
1930	1710	7.9%	125
1940	1611	-5.8%	-99
1950	1889	17.3%	278
1960	2141	13.3%	252
1970	2491	16.3%	350
1980	2623	5.3%	132
1990	2928	11.6%	305
2000	2968	1.4%	40

Source: U.S. Census

**TABLE 2: NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
POPULATION: 1990—2000**

Year	2000	1990	Change 1990-2000	% Change 1990-2000
Canaan	1,081	1,057	24	2.3%
Cornwall	1,434	1,414	20	1.4%
Kent	2,858	2,918	-60	-2.1%
North Canaan	3,350	3,284	66	2.0%
Roxbury	2,136	1,825	311	17.0%
Salisbury	3,977	4,090	-113	-2.8%
Sharon	2,968	2,928	40	1.4%
Warren	1,254	1,226	28	2.3%
Washington	3,596	3,905	-309	-7.9%
Region	22,654	22,647	7	0.03%

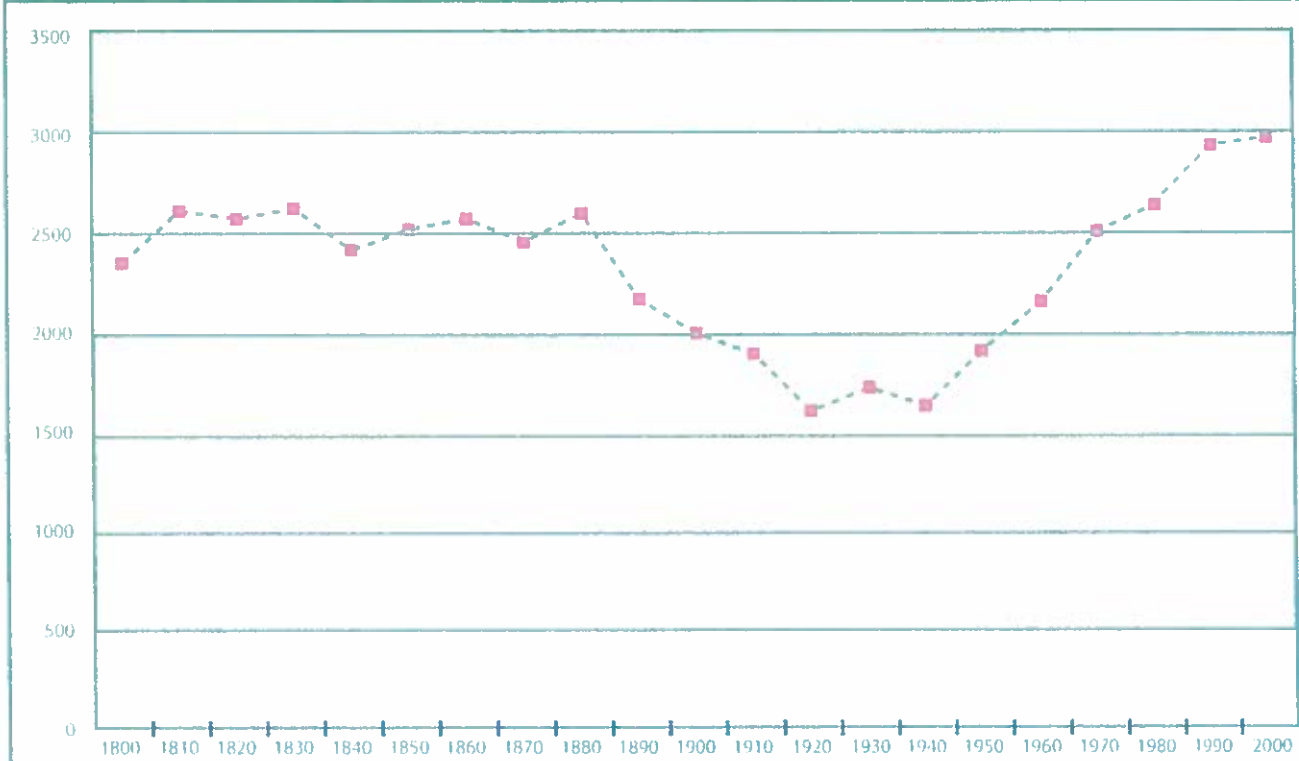
Source: U.S. Census

**TABLE 3: AGE COHORTS
1991—2000**

SHARON	2000	1991	% CHANGE 1991—2000
0-4	117	170	-31.2%
5-9	183	174	5.2%
10-14	208	147	41.5%
15-19	161	151	6.6%
20-24	89	110	-19.1%
25-34	222	383	-42.0%
35-44	502	516	-2.7%
45-54	515	376	37.0%
55-59	191	144	32.6%
60-64	158	174	-9.2%
65-74	294	331	-11.2%
75-84	210	189	11.1%
85+	118	63	87.3%
TOTAL	2968	2928	1.4%

Source: U.S. Census

**CHART 1:
SHARON POPULATION
1800 to 2000**

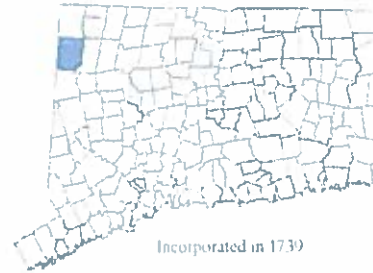


Sharon, Connecticut

CERC Town Profile 2006

Town Hall
63 Main Street
Sharon, CT 06069
(860) 364-5789

Belongs to
Litchfield County
Torrington Labor Market Area
Northwestern Economic Dev. Region
Northwestern Connecticut Planning Area



Incorporated in 1739

Demographics

Population (2005)	Town	County	State
1990	2,928	174,092	3,287,116
2000	2,968	182,193	3,405,565
2005	3,065	191,674	3,534,280
2010	3,155	200,688	3,656,299
'05-'10 Growth / Yr	0.6%	0.9%	0.7%
Land Area (sq. miles)	59	920	5,009
Pop./ Sq. Mile (2005)	52	208	706
Median Age (2005)	47	42	39
Households (2005)	1,278	74,631	1,336,674
Med HHI Inc. (2005)	\$60,974	\$62,364	\$59,761

Race/Ethnicity (2005)	Town	County	State
White	2,963	183,456	2,858,875
Black	28	2,043	318,835
Asian Pacific	19	2,401	117,997
Native American	20	530	14,298
Other/Multi-Race	35	3,244	224,275
Hispanic (any race)	73	5,077	370,958

Poverty Rate (1999) 7.2% 4.5% 7.9%

Educational Attainment (2000)

Persons Age 25 or Older	Town	%	State	%
High School Graduate	568	26%	653,300	28%
Some College	619	28%	553,667	24%
Bachelors or More	798	36%	720,994	31%

Age Distribution (2005)

	0-4	5-17	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Total
Male	53 2%	235 8%	96 3%	467 15%	365 12%	271 9%	1,487
Female	54 2%	232 8%	95 3%	461 15%	350 11%	386 13%	1,578
County Total	9,764 5%	32,098 17%	16,231 8%	66,274 35%	39,490 21%	27,817 15%	191,674
State Total	214,308 6%	614,744 17%	320,277 9%	1,251,454 35%	650,169 18%	483,328 14%	3,534,280

Economics

Business Profile (2005)

Sector	Firms	% of Total	Emp.	% of Total
Agriculture	20	8.1%	57	5.8%
Const. and Mining	45	18.1%	137	13.9%
Manufacturing	6	2.4%	10	1.0%
Trans. and Utilities	6	2.4%	41	4.2%
Trade	36	14.5%	162	16.5%
Finance, Ins. and Real Estate	20	8.1%	44	4.5%
Services	106	42.7%	438	44.6%
Government	9	3.6%	94	9.6%
Total	248	100.0%	983	100.0%

Top Five Grand List (2004)

Company	Amount	% of Net
Essent Healthcare of Connecticut Inc.	\$10,984,600	2.1%
Weatherstone Corp.	\$5,775,700	1.1%
Essent Healthcare of CT Inc.	\$5,307,420	1.0%
Connecticut Light & Power Co.	\$3,949,090	0.8%
Jasper Johns	\$3,848,550	0.7%
Net Grand List (2004)	\$525,109,885	

Top Five Major Employers (2006)

Sharon Hospital Incorporated	Sharon Board of Ed.
Town of Sharon	Upcountry Services of Sharon
Sharon Health Care Center	

Retail Sales (2002)

All Outlets \$15,648,411 \$105,014,859,890

Education

2000-2001 School Year

	Town	State
Total Town School Enrollment	375	542,193
Most public school students through grade 8 attend Sharon School District, which has 292 students. Students then go to Regional School District 1, which has 547 Students.		

Connecticut Mastery Test Percent Above Goal

	Grade 4		Grade 6		Grade 8	
	Town	State	Town	State	Town	State
Reading	52	58	0	64	70	66
Math	67	61	72	61	0	55
Writing	58	61	87	60	66	59

For more education data please see:
<http://www.state.ct.us/sde/>

Students per Computer	Town	State
Elementary:	3.7	5.3
Middle:		4.4
Secondary:	3.0	4.1

Average Class Size	Average SAT Score	
	Town	State
Grade K 11.5	Grade 2 12.0	
Grade 5 16.0	Grade 7 13.6	Verbal 534
High School 17.7		Math 506
		503

SHARON TOWN MAPS

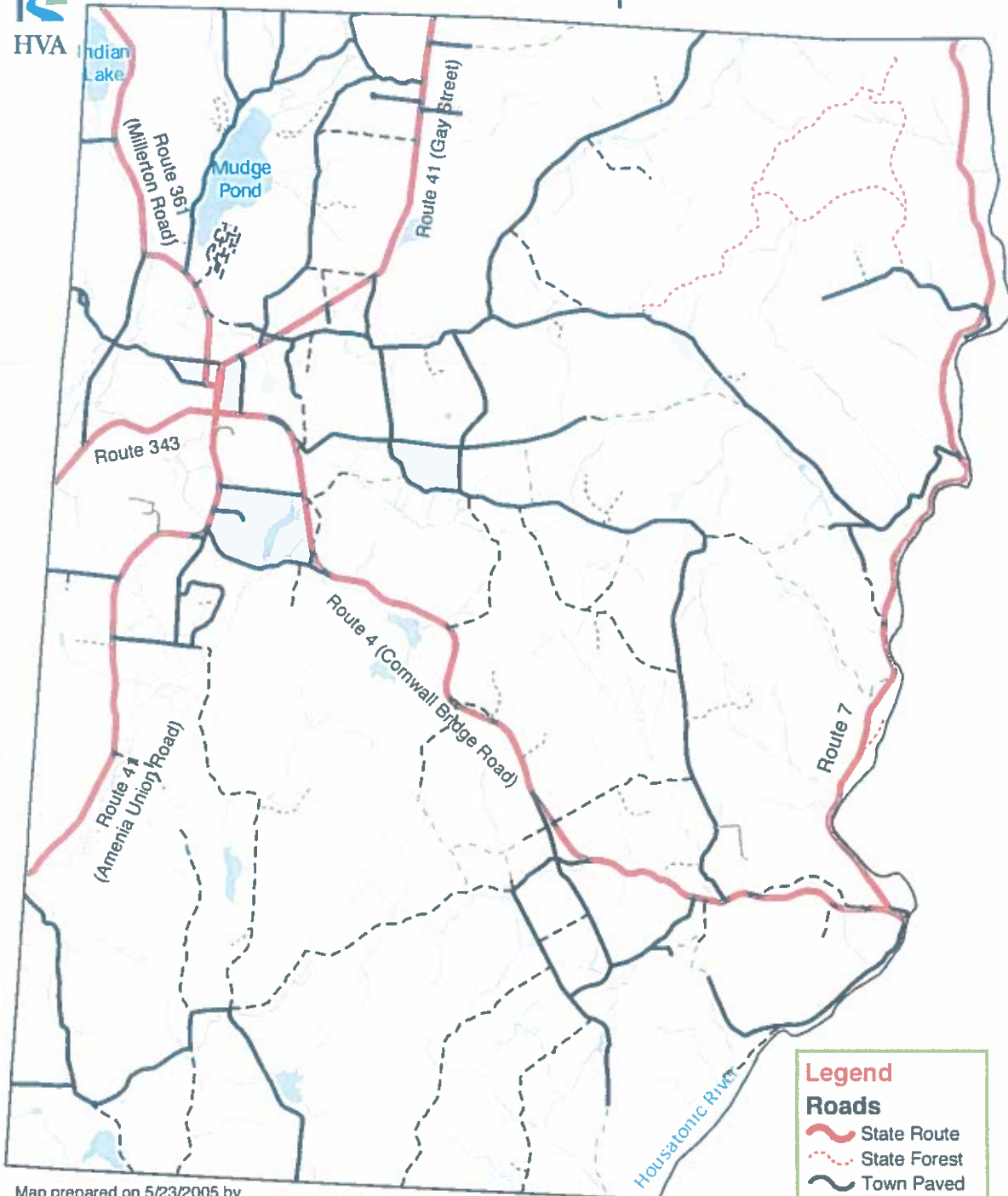
Six 11" x 16" Sharon Town Maps (fold-outs) graciously supplied by Kirk Sinclair, CIS Coordinator, and the Housatonic Valley Association follow this page.

Map titles:

- Sharon Base Map
- Town of Sharon Zoning Map
- Sharon Center Zoning Map
- Sharon Scenic Vistas, Areas and Roads
- Sharon Open Space Resources
- Sharon Slope Gradients and Ridgelines

SHARON, CONNECTICUT Base Map

May 2005



Legend

Roads

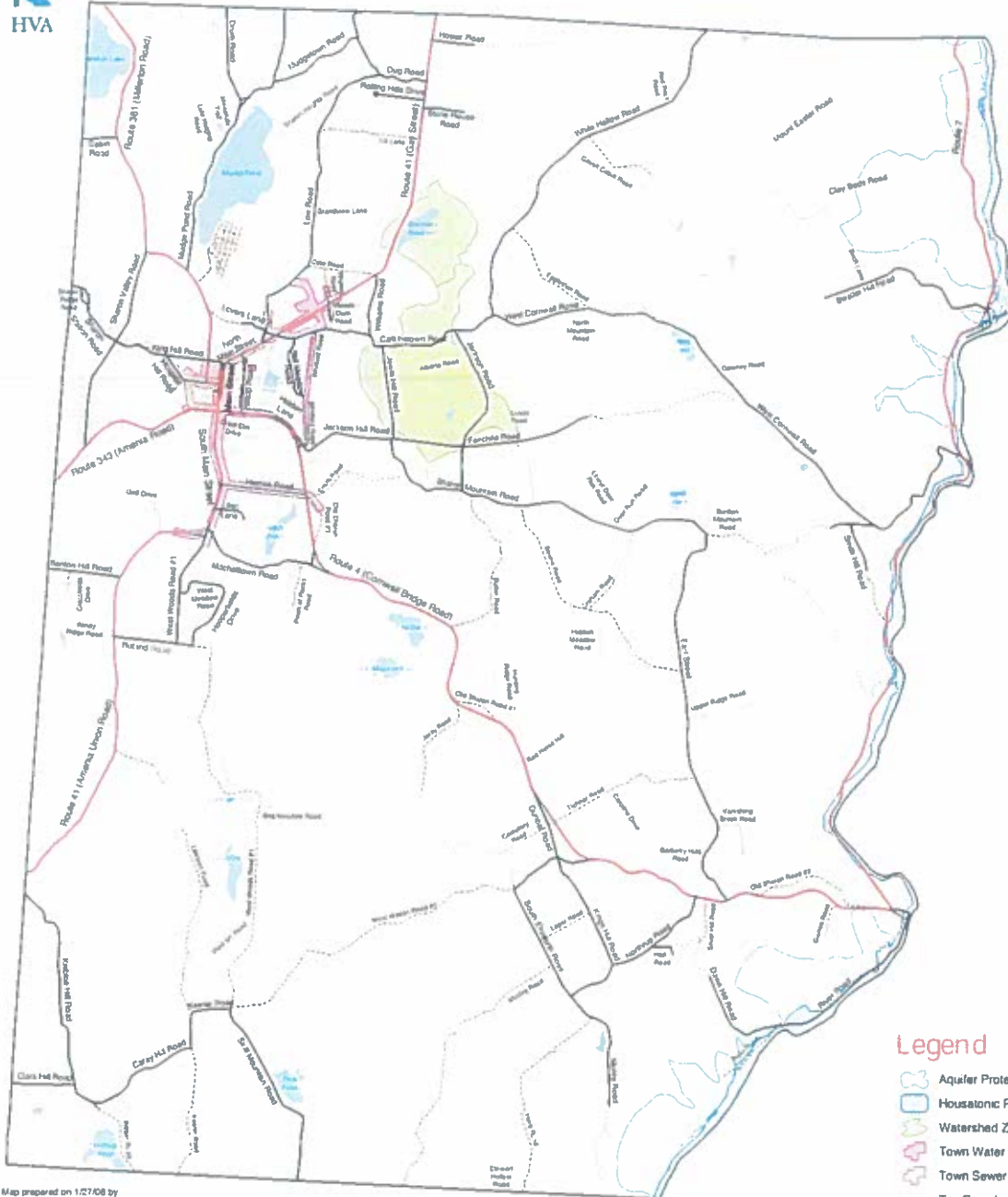
- State Route
- State Forest
- Town Paved
- Town Gravel
- Private Paved
- Private Gravel
- Discontinued

Map prepared on 5/23/2005 by
Kirk Sinclair, PhD, GIS Manager
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Cornwall Bridge, CT 06754
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1:72,318
Town Resource Map Series
Sponsored by the
Sharon Conservation Commission



Town of Sharon Zoning Map



Legend

- Aquifer Protection Zone
- Housatonic River Corridor
- Watershed Zone
- Town Water Service Areas
- Town Sewer Area
- Tax Parcels
- Zoning Districts**
- Commercial
- General Residential
- Light Industrial
- Municipal Office
- Rural Residential
- Sharon Housing

Map prepared on 1/27/08 by
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DATA SOURCES
 Data sources for roads are Connecticut's DEP and DOT enhanced through town review. Zoning Districts, Aquifer Protection, and Housatonic River Corridor Zones were digitized from maps provided by the Town Clerk of Sharon. The Watershed Zone and Town Water Service Areas were obtained from the Environmental GIS Database distributed by Connecticut's DEP. Tax parcels were digitized from Tax Assessor maps and were not completed at the time of this draft.

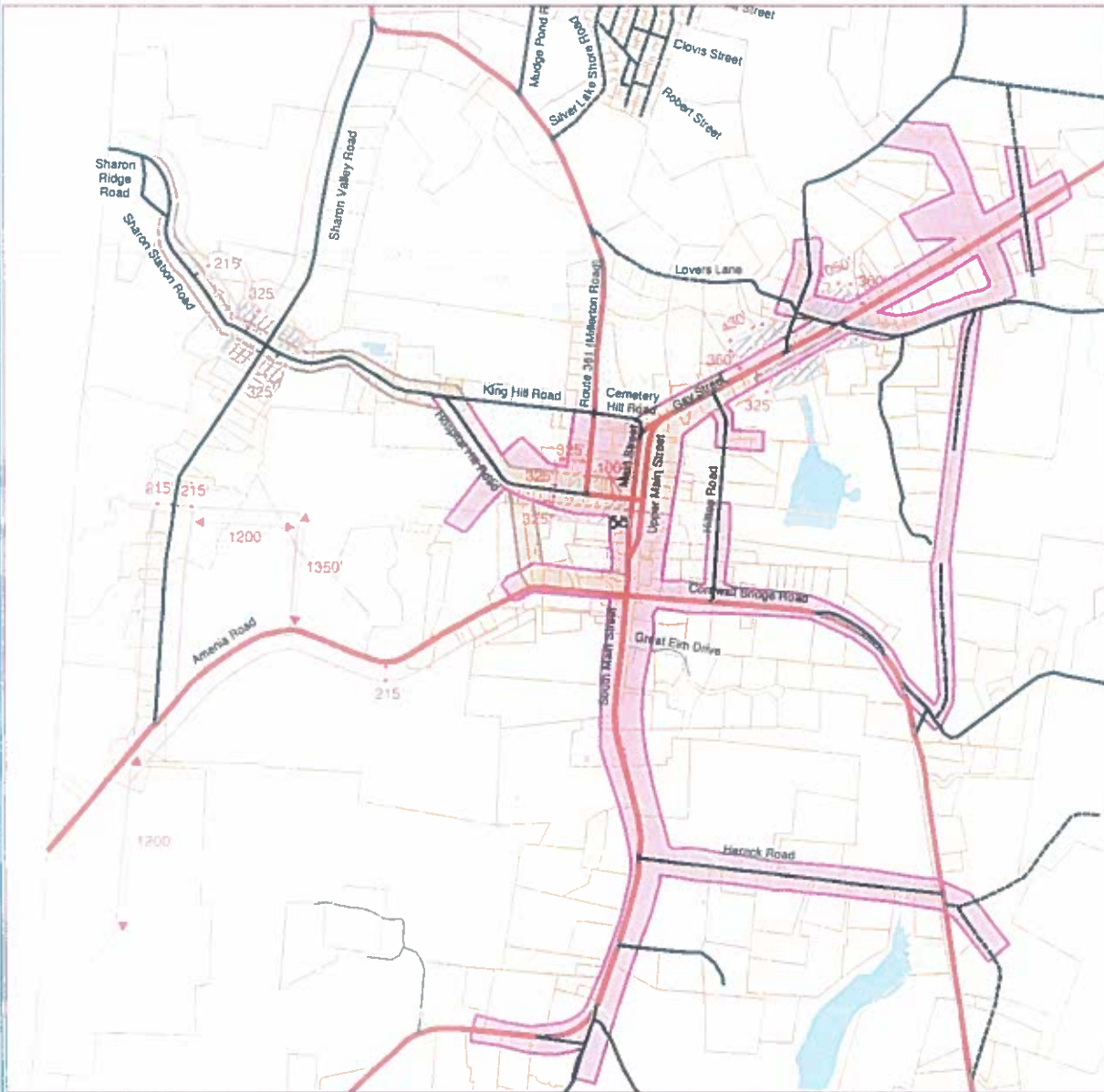
This is not to be construed as an accurate survey and is subject to change.



Sponsored by the
 Planning and Zoning Commission
 January 2006



Sharon Center Zoning Map



Map prepared on 6/7/06 by
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DATA SOURCES
 Data sources for roads are Connecticut's DEP and DOT, enhanced through town review. Zoning Districts, Aquifer Protection, and Housatonic River Corridor Zones were digitized from maps provided by the Town Clerk of Sharon. The Watershed Zone and Town Water Service Areas were obtained from the Environmental GIS Database distributed by Connecticut's DEP. Tax parcels were digitized from Tax Assessor maps and were not completed at the time of this draft.

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Sponsored by the
 Planning and Zoning Commission
 January 2006

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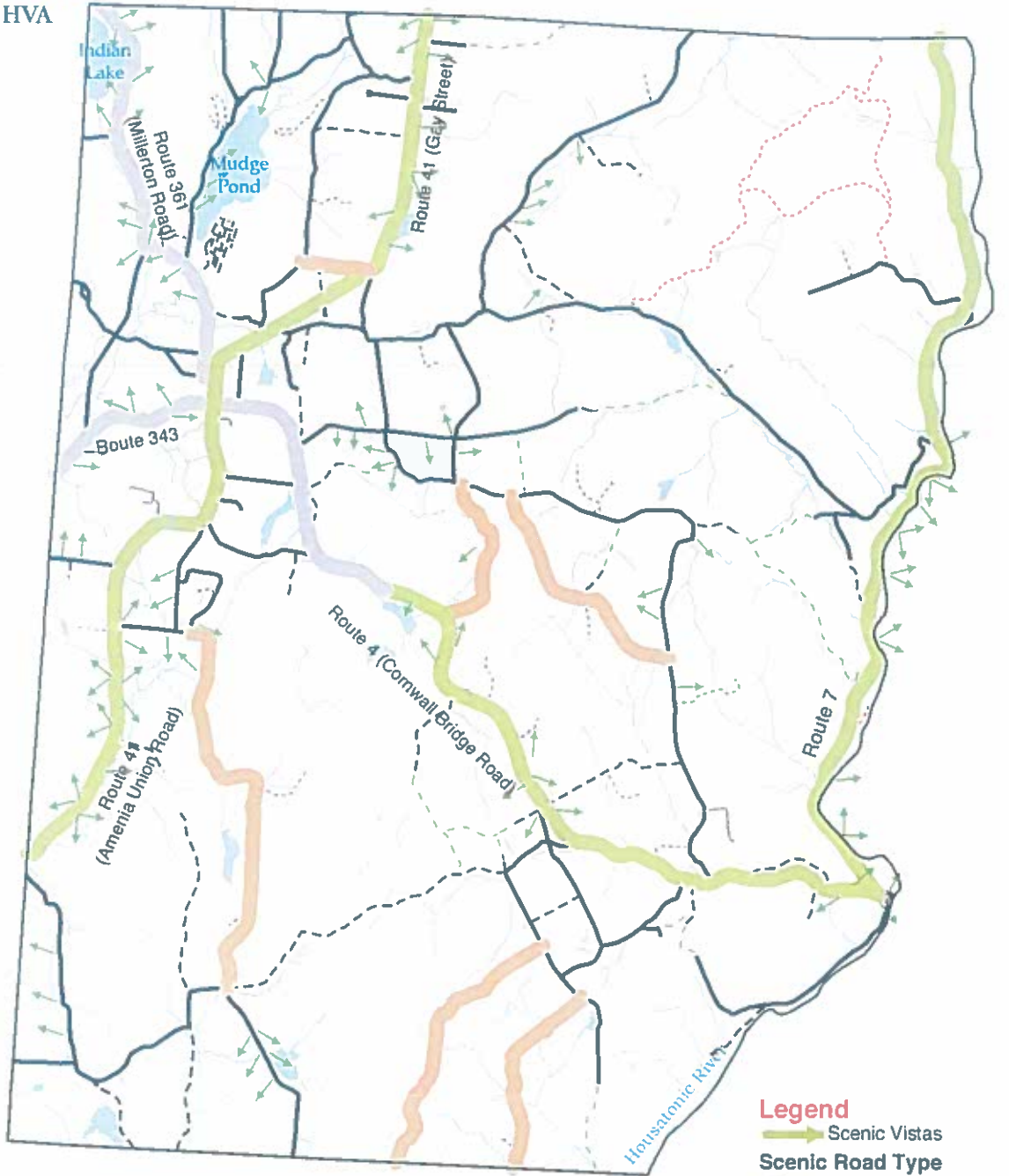
Legend

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Zoning Districts | Town Water Service Areas |
| Commercial | Town Sewer Area |
| General Residential | Tax Parcels |
| Light Industrial | |
| Municipal Office | |
| Rural Residential | |
| Sharon Housing | |

SHARON, CONNECTICUT

Scenic Vistas, Areas, and Roads

May 2005



Legend

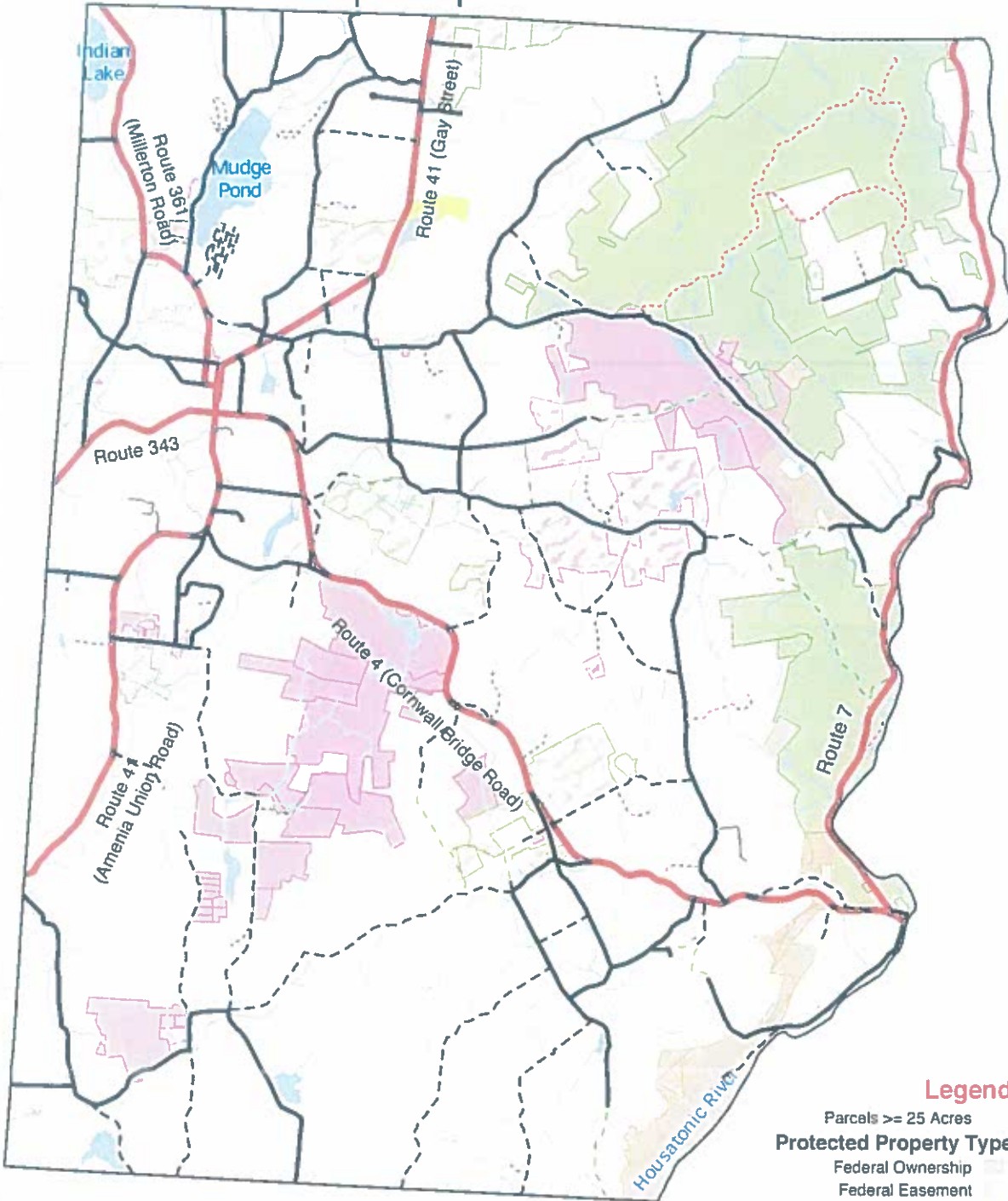
- Scenic Vistas (green arrow)
- Scenic Road Type
 - State Gateway (purple line)
 - State Scenic Gateway (green line)
 - Town Scenic (orange line)

Map prepared on 5/23/2005 by
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1:72,000
Town Resource Map Series
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SHARON, CONNECTICUT Open Space Resources

May 2005



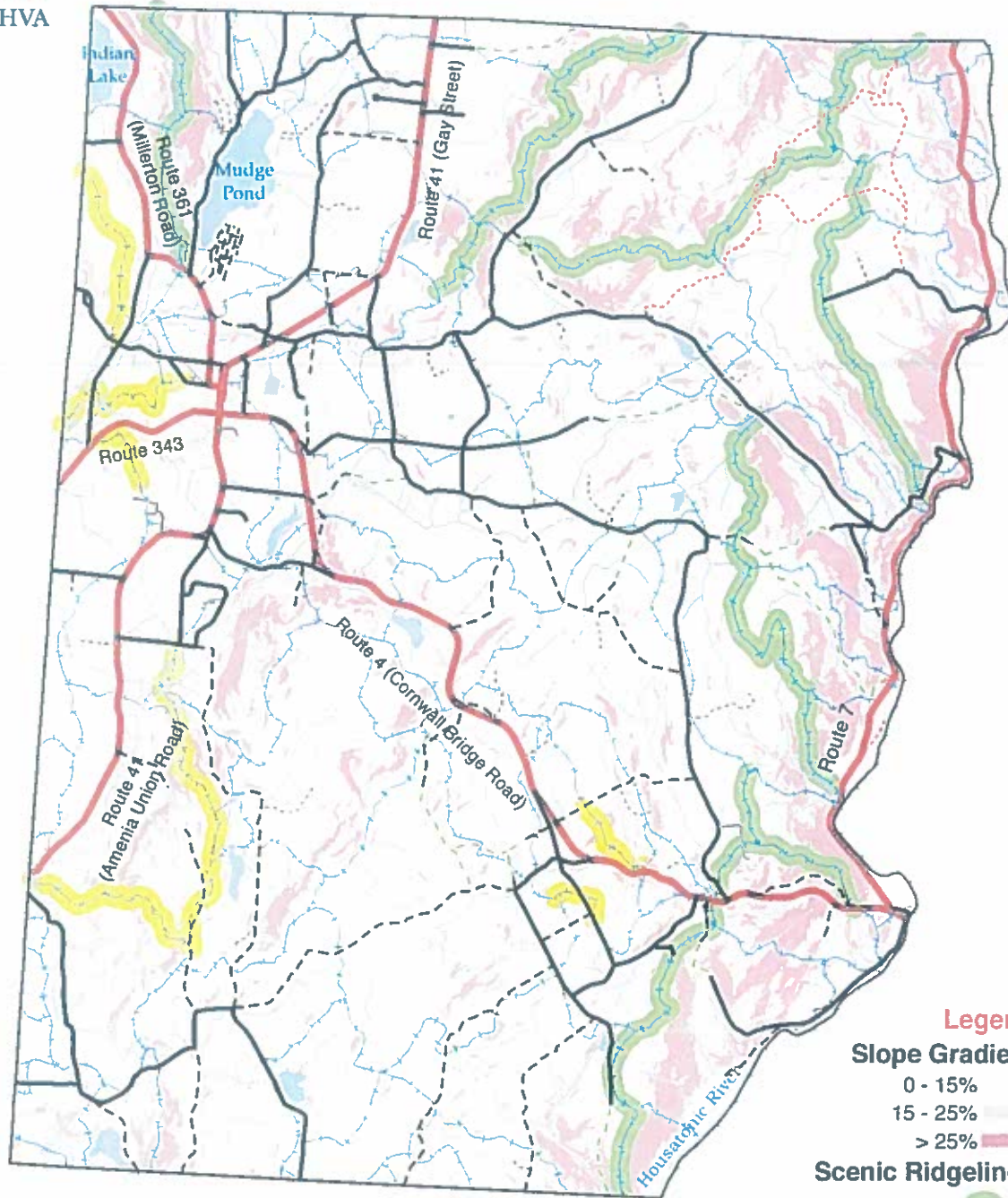
Legend

- Parcels \geq 25 Acres
- Protected Property Type
 - Federal Ownership
 - Federal Easement
 - Town Ownership
 - Nonprofit Ownership
 - Nonprofit Easement
 - State Ownership



SHARON, CONNECTICUT Slope Gradients and Ridgelines

May 2005



Legend

Slope Gradient

0 - 15%

15 - 25%

> 25%

Scenic Ridgelines

Principal

Secondary

Hydrographic Ridgelines

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