

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

Winter 2024

A publication of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association



American Planning Association
Connecticut Chapter

Creating Great Communities for All

Planning for Trends Shaping the Future of New England Cities

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*Bioretention at
the University of
Connecticut, Storrs*



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greetings fellow planners. 2024 is off to a gallop!

I like to say that planners are in the quality-of-life business. This reflects CCAPA's slogan, "Creating Great Communities for All." In Connecticut, a lack of affordable and diverse housing challenges the quality-of-life for many in the communities where we live and work. It's no longer necessary to cite the many sources

that suggest the causes of these issues — whether lack of supply, competition amongst independent housing-aged households (Boomers, Millennials, and now Gen Z populations), in-migration due to the pandemic, and Connecticut's lack of housing diversity to adequately match life-cycle needs. We see evidence of these issues in our everyday lives, whether it's the high cost of house prices and rent or increasing homelessness not only in our cities, but also in our suburbs and smaller towns.

As many of you may know, National APA has been partnering with the National League of Cities (NLC) on a [Housing Supply Accelerator initiative](#) that will be rolled out at the National Conference in Minneapolis in April. This partnership acknowledges the collaboration at the local level that elected officials and planners need to ensure that our communities continue to be successful, and frankly that all of our neighbors continue to be housed. Zoning regulations are living documents that need to adapt as our populations' needs change. In Connecticut, we are at a crucial crossroads where change is needed.

Planners are at our best when we can collaborate, learn from each other, and support each other. CCAPA is working on two initiatives that we hope will foster an environment to move zoning reform forward:

- First, we are partnering with UConn's Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) to provide additional housing training to local commissioners to dispel myths and to set the stage for context-sensitive zoning revisions with our elected partners.

(continued next page)

Cover image: Green infrastructure at the Northwest Science Quad, University of Connecticut, Storrs (Courtesy Towers|Golde, LLC)

CONNECTICUT PLANNING

is published quarterly by the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association. Contributions are encouraged. Submissions must include the name and contact information of the contributor. Material may be edited to conform to space or style requirements. Please address submissions to Executive Editor Jeanne Davies, AICP (contact information below).

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President's Message, cont'd

- Second, CCAPA is hosting a housing forum by planners and for planners in Fall 2024. We envision break-out rooms with colleagues from like-sized communities to brainstorm solutions and share best practices with subject matter experts available as needed.

Planners are uniquely skilled to solve the housing issues here in our state and we have an ethical responsibility to all people in our communities to do so. It's time for us to roll up our sleeves and lean into this work. Our communities and our neighbors need us.

CCAPA has formed a Housing sub-committee to plan this event chaired by our Vice-President Jon Reiner. Please don't hesitate to contact Jon or me to help with the Housing Forum. Many hands make light work. 🏠

— Emmeline Harrigan, AICP, CFM 



CCAPA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: 1st Row Bottom L to R: Marek Kozikowski (Treasurer), Chadwick Schroeder (DEI), Michelle Andrzejewski (Membership Chair), Abby Kenyon (Secretary), Emmeline Harrigan (President), Patrice Carlson (At-Large), Meghan Sloan (At-Large). 2nd Row L to R: Rob Phillips (At-Large), Jeremy DeCarli (Professional Development Officer), Kyle Shiel (Government Relations Co-Chair), John Guskowski (Government Relations Co-Chair). 3rd Row Top L to R: Amanda Kennedy (Communications Co-Chair), Jon Reiner (Vice-President), Jeanne Davies (Communications Co-Chair). Missing: Evan Seeman (Program Chair), Don Poland (Jason Vincent Scholarship Chair), Chris Smith (At-Large). Welcome to new At-Large Board Members: Savannah-Nicole (SN) Villalba, Christine O'Neil, Deb Lawlor and Anthony Lagana (Student Rep). (Photo taken at the ExComm's December 2023 meeting.)

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FROM THE EDITOR



As the new editor for *Planning Magazine*, I'm in awe of past magazine editors and most recently Amanda Kennedy, current Communications Co-chair. This is a labor of love for the CCAPA chapter membership and takes some serious coordination. Over the years, they coordinated article contributions and have produced such amazing content and layouts...while working full time!

Gratitude to Jeff Mills and Amanda Kennedy for their guidance, and also to our contributing content writers. This issue is a smorgasbord of planning content, focused primarily on thinking creatively about the future of planning. As noted in one article, we as planners can make "no small plans" and look to build visionary plans through sharing our work through this magazine, workshops, and collegial events.

Don't forget that CCAPA programs (including commissioner training) are archived at ct.planning.org/events/past-events. Please reach out to me at ctriverplanner@gmail.com with story ideas for future issues. 🏠

— Jeanne Davies, AICP 



Joanna Nadeau



Susan Mara

Planning for Trends Shaping the Future of New England Cities

by Joanna Nadeau, AICP, and Susan Mara, AICP

Change is a constant, and yet, we plan anyway. Amidst the political and social upheaval of the past decade, planners in New England and elsewhere continue to seek ways to serve the public interest, even as that interest is a moving target.

The American Planning Association (APA)'s *2023 Trends Report for Planners* tries to predict some of the ways the world is changing and how planners can take a role in shaping that future. The report recognizes that planners have begun to shift their attention away from the public health emergency of COVID-19 towards a variety of other pressing social and economic concerns. Issues like equity, accessibility, and the future viability of urban areas were brought to



In thinking about the future of cities for the next 50 years, much is uncertain. Where should we focus limited time and energy for planning?

the forefront during the pandemic years. While neither new nor emerging, climate change remains one of the most serious threats to the public and natural environment. Technological advancements in how we communicate and operate have also entered the focus of discussions at local, national, and global scales. With so many issues vying for attention, planners may struggle to prioritize their limited resources and best meet the needs of our communities.

Plan for What, Exactly?

In thinking about the future of cities for the next 50 years, much is uncertain. Where should we focus limited time and energy for planning? At the Fall 2023 Southern New England APA (SNEAPA) conference, we asked Southern New England planners to share their

(continued on page 5)



Four areas — energy and climate action, climate resilience, historic preservation, and transportation — are, or should be, top of mind for planners.

Planning for Trends, cont'd

top concerns and predictions for the future. Using the Trends Report, regional insights, and their feedback as guides, this article discusses trends and forecasts for four areas that are top of mind for planners: energy and climate action, climate resilience, historic preservation, and transportation, and the tools planners will need to guide their communities into each aspect of the future.

The Trend: Climate Action on Energy

The 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that, on an international level, we are making progress toward mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and implementing strategies to adapt to the impacts of climate change. In the U.S., new political emphasis and government investment are advancing climate action and adaptation (e.g., the Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA). These investments cover electric vehicle (EV) production and adoption; battery, solar, and wind power; improving transit; and



carbon-neutral grid electrification. Federal investments promote job creation and accelerated transition away from fossil fuels, as green manufacturing and industry increases. Critically, federal funding is being directed such that these benefits will be sure to reach low-income, underserved, and underrepresented communities.

At the state and regional level, investments and policy goals are also driving climate action. For example, Massachusetts,

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To accommodate more EV cars and charging stations like these, communities are investing in municipal upgrades and retrofits and implementing resiliency code changes.



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Challenges have emerged as new technologies seek to use an electric grid already in need of upgrades and long-overdue maintenance. Local communities and utilities are grappling with the costs of transitioning the grid alongside regulatory and ownership questions.

Planning for Trends, cont'd

Connecticut, and Rhode Island have each passed restrictions on natural gas in new buildings, even as policymakers in other states seek to preempt these bans. These same three states have also each set new emissions mandates and NetZero goals. The EPA's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant program is funding climate action planning at the state level and within major EPA-designated metropolitan statistical areas across the region. Renewable energy policies have also proliferated. These require utilities to supply a percentage of customers with renewable sources.

EV cars and charging stations have increased by 700% nationally since 2016. Communities are investing in municipal upgrades and retrofits and implementing resiliency code changes, while many individuals are making the most of new renewable energy incentives and rebates.

And yet, challenges have emerged as new technologies seek to use an electric grid already in need of upgrades and long-overdue maintenance. Constraints

on the electric system may limit renewable energy site development and EV charging. Local communities and utilities are grappling with the costs of transitioning the grid alongside regulatory and ownership questions.

Planning Priorities for Energy in New England

When asked about energy and climate action, planners from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut said their top priorities were planning for 1) battery farms/storage; 2) the resilience and extension of infrastructure/energy systems; and 3) renewable sources and equity, funding, and locations of such.

Based on these priorities and anticipated trends, planners may need to consider:

- engaging with energy-producing utilities in infrastructure planning;
- drafting zoning and ordinances to accommodate or encourage renewable energy siting along with other land use demands;

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Planning for Trends, cont'd

- designing policies and programs that promote renewable energy generation and storage; and
- ensuring that these efforts consider equity.

The Trend: Climate Resilience

State and local strategies to adapt to climate change or climate resilience are advancing, mirroring national and international climate adaptation efforts. The Inflation Reduction Act, through programs like the Community Development Block Grant program and Community Change Grants, prioritizes projects that increase community climate resilience and capacity to address climate justice challenges. These funding programs designate a segment of funds for underserved communities, and they are exploring new methods for community engagement in resilience planning. The disproportionate impact of climate change on underserved communities has helped raise awareness about broader environmental justice issues.

Innovations in resilience strategies include using natural systems for capturing flood water or mitigating heat impacts; using community networks to improve individual/household emergency preparedness; as well as advancing solutions that involve redundancy, redesign, and relocation of existing infrastructure to face changing weather patterns and demands.



Lower-income neighborhoods are often more profoundly impacted by urban heat and flooding.



State and federal funding programs are harnessing the natural environment to improve resilience, making investments in green and natural infrastructure, agriculture resilience, and habitat restoration. In Massachusetts for example, the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program funds annual grants to help communities address their vulnerability to climate change impacts and build community resilience through nature-based solutions.

These programs are essential tools for communities facing stronger storms and other climate change impacts. Climate change threatens everything from public health and safety and infrastructure to the environment and economy. Power outages from wind damage, food, and housing access concerns, along with degradation of farms, forests, and freshwater ecosystems, are among the impacts communities are experiencing. Catastrophic flooding and violent weather events are also becoming more commonplace.

Planning Priorities for Climate Adaptation in New England

When asked about climate resilience and adaptation, planners from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut said their top priorities were planning for 1) water systems, stormwater, and flood management; 2) environmental and

(continued on page 8)

State and federal funding programs are harnessing the power that nature-based solutions hold for resilience, like this bioretention cell.

State and federal funding programs are harnessing the natural environment to improve resilience, making investments in green and natural infrastructure, agriculture resilience, and habitat restoration.



Urban redevelopment efforts need to consider equity or run the risk of displacing or pricing low-income residents out of their neighborhoods.

Planning for Trends, cont'd

climate justice; and 3) sea level rise and managed retreat.

Based on these priorities and ongoing trends, planners may specifically need resources for:

- designing and implementing green infrastructure;
- developing equitable resilience strategies; and
- proactively adapting and relocating homes and infrastructure for sea level rise.

The Trend: The Built Environment and Historic Preservation

In the Trends Report, questions about the future of urban areas envision a variety of possible outcomes. Underutilized urban centers are receiving attention as a potential solution for housing shortages and the record demand for new homes and rentals. Declining downtowns and business districts are being identified for office- or commercial-to-residential conversions and receiving federal funding support.

Building preservation contributes to achieving carbon footprint reductions, since adaptive reuse and retrofits of existing buildings cost less, use fewer materials, and generate fewer emissions than building new. Recent legislation in

Rhode Island, for example, hopes to drive broader action on adaptive reuse by making it a “by right” use.

Urban redevelopment efforts need to consider equity or run the risk of displacing or pricing low-income residents out of their neighborhoods. Typically, displaced residents do not realize the benefits of improved economic and infrastructural conditions. Lower-income neighborhoods are also often more profoundly impacted by urban heat, because of limited tree canopy, as well as flooding because these older neighborhoods tend to be in low-lying areas. When a property changes hands, new owners may decide to demolish existing buildings instead of renovating them up to code. There are risks, additional costs, and regulatory challenges that can make renovation less desirable than building new. Funding and other policies that promote preservation can help protect historic structures.

Aside from threats of demolition, historic and cultural resources are under threat from climate change, sea level rise, and fire. These resources need to be considered in climate resilience activities as they may have ripple effects on local economies, health, and transportation.

Planning Priorities for Historic Preservation in New England

When asked about historic preservation, planners from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut said their top priorities were planning for 1) preserving and adapting historic homes and buildings for housing; 2) funding sources for historic preservation; and 3) climate-wise and resilient building reuse and rehabilitation.

Based on these priorities and anticipated trends, planners may need to focus on:

- developing adaptive reuse regulations and incentives;
- planning to counteract displacement from redevelopment;
- promoting funding opportunities for historic preservation; and
- best practices for building efficiency and floodproofing/resilience improvements.

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Urban redevelopment efforts run the risk of displacing or pricing low-income residents out of their neighborhoods.

Planning for Trends, cont'd

The Trend: Changes in Transportation

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted a transportation sector already in upheaval. Use of transit plummeted in 2020 as people sought to avoid crowds and many companies shifted to remote work. Many commuters adopted new strategies, like biking, or going to the office less frequently. Transit agencies have responded by changing service hours and routes or reducing rates and staffing levels. Transit planners were already considering how to improve affordability and accessibility while facing needed upgrades. “Micromobility,” or planning for the last mile before or after the transit stop, is not a new issue but now there are new technologies like rentable e-bikes and scooters that have the potential to expand access to the transit system.

New perspectives on equity and reducing emissions are also driving change in the transportation sector. Recognizing past problems caused by major transportation projects, funding from



The IRA's Reconnecting Communities funding seeks to remove and retrofit transportation facilities that restrict access and connectivity.

the IRA's Reconnecting Communities Program seeks to remove and retrofit transportation facilities that restrict access and connectivity, particularly in communities previously cut off from economic opportunities.

To decarbonize the transportation sector, investments in electric mobility are being made which may shape the built environment and the charging network. Land use patterns will undoubtedly

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An architectural rendering of a modern, multi-story residential building with a walkable street, trees, and a car. The building has a grid-like facade with many windows and balconies. The street in front has a crosswalk, a car, and a sidewalk with trees and people walking. The overall scene is bright and modern.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Joanna Nadeau, AICP, is a Senior Project Planner and Sustainability/Resiliency Specialist who routinely works with government officials, NGOs, resource managers, and the public to develop and implement resiliency and sustainability plans and projects. Susan Mara, AICP, is an Urban and Environmental Planning Project Manager with over 20 years of experience in municipal planning. Both are with Weston & Sampson.

Planning for Trends, cont'd

change as gas stations become less widespread because EV drivers need places to fuel cars with electricity for a longer period. More charging stations may pop up in residential, office, and commercial hubs.

All these changes have impacts not only on land use, but also on our safety, equity, and health. How they will unfold will depend heavily on economic factors related to home and work, along with policy decisions. But themes of electrification, technological advancements in how and who operates cars, and access improvements seem certain to continue.

Planning Priorities for Transportation in New England

When asked about transportation, planners from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut said their top priorities were planning for 1) supporting active transportation and non-car modes; 2) improving micro-mobility and connectivity between modes; and 3) accessibility and safety. The term “healing from

highways” was a major focus, spurred by federal investment and widespread recognition of how highways have disproportionately impacted communities of color and low-income communities.

Based on their priorities, planners may need funding and technical support to:

- retrofit streets for multi-modal use;
- implement micro-mobility technologies; and
- improve accessibility in transit and pedestrian networks.

Perhaps more than the other areas discussed here, upcoming changes in our transportation system are difficult to predict. Land use dynamics drive transportation patterns, and vice versa, in a complex iterative relationship. Given the major changes happening in the transit system, rethinking vehicle operations, and shifting land uses, goals for increasing multi-modal use, expanding access, and emissions reductions may be challenging to achieve at the local scale in isolation. Regional partnerships and more extensive planning may be necessary in helping communities prepare for — and respond to — the changing mobility patterns in the future.

Planners Need to Lead the Way

We may not be able to envision all the ways that future trends and challenges will shape our communities, but as planners, we need to work to understand shifting dynamics, innovations, and technology and how they might affect our built environment. Keeping up may require new partnerships with utilities, transportation agencies, and state and federal funders. Planners also need to continue to be intentional about understanding the public interest more broadly and equitably as we seek to improve the future while learning from the past. Based on feedback we have received, New England planners are already thinking about these issues and are seeking ways to innovate, educate, and respond to the needs that are emerging.

Footnote

¹ AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023, www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr.

Membership Report

by Michelle Andrzejewski, Membership Chair



Over the course of 2023 CCAPA averaged 338 members, including regular, student, lifetime, retired, chapter-only, or group planning board members, as well as one ex-member. Regular members make up 80 percent of the membership, with students making up 13 percent.

Within the past few years, the chapter has seen growth and interest in student membership. It has become a primary focus of the membership committee to make more resources for this group of members. Some of these goals include starting a student mentorship program, adding a student to the executive board, and putting a mixer together for aspiring planners or young professionals interested in the field. It is important to show support to these members as they will soon fill the big shoes of our more distinguished planners.

We're excited to see what the future holds for the chapter as we chip away at these goals. Stay tuned for these resources and opportunities!

Welcome New CCAPA Members:

Sarah Chase, Planning & Zoning Commissioner, Kent

Danile DeBoo, Darien

Brittaney Key, Student – Master of Environmental Management candidate

Sai Revanth Mettela, Student

Anh Nguyen, Student

George Williams, Student

If you have any questions about your APA membership, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at mandrzejewski@norwalkct.org. 📧



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-Stephanie Camp, CCAPA Student Member

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Awards Banquet and Seminar March 22!

by Michele Lipe, Awards Committee Chair

This year we will be awarding a few chapter awards and 4-5 Planning Awards and will feature some new award categories from previous events. The Awards luncheon will be held on Friday, **March 22** (11 a.m.-2 p.m.) at Testa's Banquet Facility in Southington. We plan to offer an equity seminar to qualify for 1 CM credit from 11 a.m.-noon, followed by a buffet lunch and awards. Space is limited to 60 attendees. [Register here.](#)

Members, award recipients, and other guests at the 2022 CCAPA Planning Awards luncheon in Middletown in December 2022.



RECAP of the 2022 CCAPA Planning Awards:

■ **City of Bridgeport — “Cutting Edge Code Award”** for their user-friendly, digitized code tied to the online GIS Check it out: www.ZoneBridgeport.com.

■ **CIRCA — “Best Statewide Planning Program Award”** for Resilient CT — multi-pronged vulnerability assessment focused on flooding and extreme heat, and identification of climate adaptation and resilience opportunity areas; resulting in concept designs that are commencing in seven municipalities (Ansonia, Branford, Danbury, Fairfield, New Haven, Norwalk, Stratford) with unmet climate change-driven needs. Check it out: <https://resilientconnecticut.uconn.edu>.

■ **Town of Fairfield — “Engaging with Graphics Award”** for the Post Road Circle Study. Check it out: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6a61cdf2f-f55485aa9a42e6a57db5aaf>.

■ **Sandy Fry, City of Hartford — “The Power of One Planning Award”** for her passion of bike-pedestrian planning and traffic calming community outreach in the Hartford neighborhoods. Check it out: Slow Streets Hartford Project — Hampton Street www.hartfordct.gov/Government/Departments/DDS/DDS-Divisions/Planning-Zoning/Slow-Streets.

■ **Town of Haddam — “Exemplary Site-Specific Master Plan Award”** for the Higganum Cove Park Project. For many years, planning has gone on working towards their vision of a town park to be used for passive recreation and educational activities while protecting the natural features found in the Cove. In 2021, the Higganum Cove Advisory Committee was created in 2021 to oversee the development of a park at the town-owned Higganum Cove. Check it out: www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ruwmh9glv7ac0fyjh8msi/h?dl=0&rlkey=sycq5jhhx2acadxmg9vli0uke.

■ **City of Norwich — “Art for All Award”** for the Jubilee Mural — created in celebration of Juneteenth; an excellent example of placemaking. Check it out: www.facebook.com/norwichjubilee.

■ **RiverCOG “A Model for Regional Affordable Housing Plans Award”** — RiverCOG spearheaded the completion of the 8-30j plans for 12 of the region’s 17 municipalities providing them a sustainable framework for addressing housing needs with actionable steps. Check it out: www.rivercog.org/plans/rhp.

■ **City of Stamford “The Paradigm for Local Affordable Housing Plans Award”** — setting the ground work for the next era of affordable housing policy. Check it out: [Stamford Housing Affordability Plan](#). 🏠

PDO Corner

A Message from CCAPA's Professional Development Officer

by *Jeremy DeCarli, AICP, CZEO*



To begin, I would like to say congratulations to our five chapter members who passed the AICP Exam in November! Congratulations to Jonathan Blake, Clifford Brammer, Nick Campbell, Catherine Fletcher, and Lindsay Naughton on a job well done passing the exam!

The 2024 Annual AICP Classroom was held on Saturday March 16, 2024. The classroom included a number of speakers covering a variety of topics related to the planning profession. Anyone considering taking the exam in a future exam period should consider registering for the next classroom session. Please contact me if you are interested in registering for classroom sessions.

Speaking of the AICP Exam, registration for the May Exam opens on April 1, 2024 and closes April 30. The May exam window is May 1 to May 31.

For anyone needing assistance with the cost of taking the exam, please note that the application window is now open for the AICP Certification Diversity Scholarship. Please contact me for more information.

As a reminder, the 2022-2023 CM reporting period ended on December 31. If you have earned all of your credits and logged them, please remember to log into your CM log on the website and selecting the button to close out the reporting period. For anyone who has not yet logged all of the required credits, the grace period extends through May 31. Please make sure you get all of your credits and close out the reporting period prior to May 31!

As always, if you have any questions or need assistance with any certification or CM process, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at (860) 276-6248 or decarlij@southington.org.

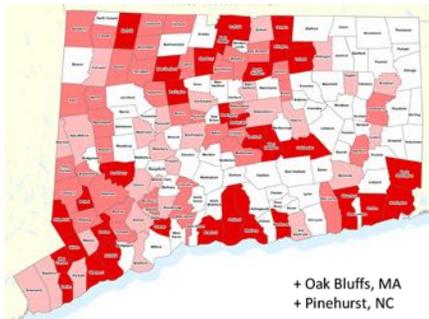
Happy spring, all! 🌱



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Connecticut's Housing Market: Inroads and Insights

2023-2024 Department of Housing Updates

Housing is hard to build, especially in Connecticut. Increasing supply — particularly for Connecticut's most vulnerable — is like threading a needle with many strands at once.

If the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a phase of turmoil in Connecticut's housing market, 2023 came and went without bringing much relief. Housing inventory remains about three times lower than it was in January 2020. Rents continue to rise¹. And the vacancy rate — 3.3% statewide² — highlights the tight competition for rental units. Furthermore, these trends, increasingly entrenched, have exacerbated homelessness in the state: as inventory lags, prices climb, pushing middle- and lower-income households, into socially precarious positions, unable to find affordably priced units.

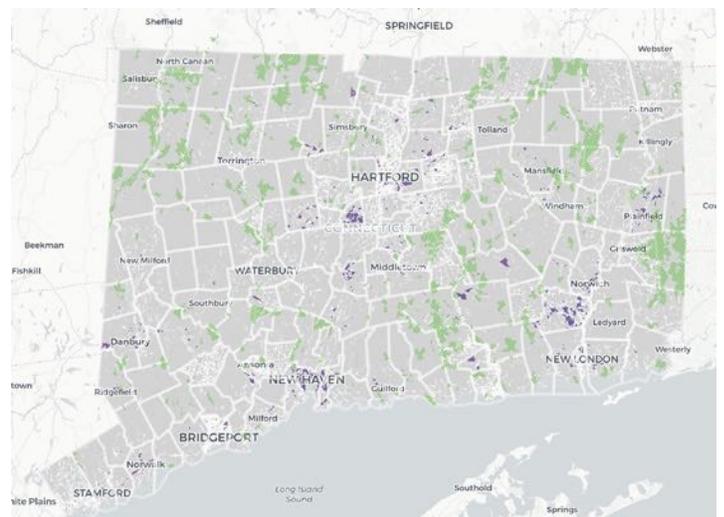
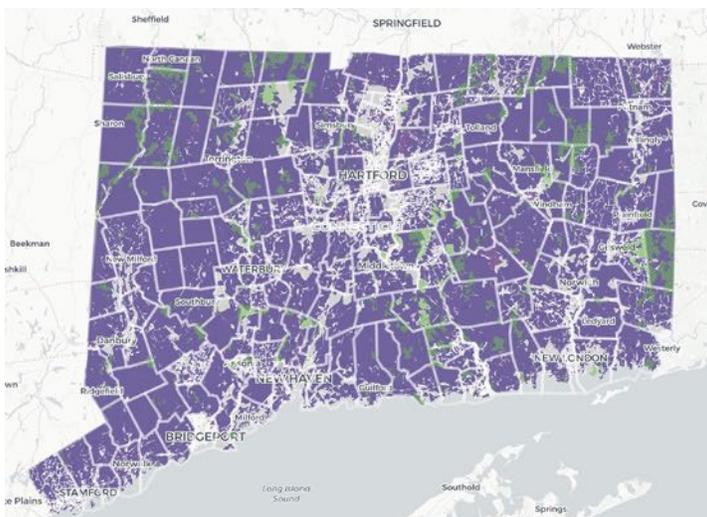
One solution, of course, seems obvious. Build housing, build all types, build it everywhere, and build it fast.

And yet, here's the rub: housing is hard to build, especially in Connecticut. Increasing supply — particularly for Connecticut's most vulnerable — is like threading a needle with many strands at once. As interest rates rise, the financing for development becomes more costly. When the price of construction materials balloon, building units affordable for

many households becomes trickier. Combine these forces with the fact that 90% of Connecticut is zoned for single-family housing *as of right*³ and a trend emerges: developers find it more feasible to build housing in lower opportunity areas — towns and cities that for a host of reasons, including cost, generally offer less opposition to development — which contributes to an overrepresentation of affordable housing in already segregated areas. However, the Department of Housing has been working with municipalities on the implementation of their municipal affordable housing plans and has active developments in many of our small to mid-sized communities, including Simsbury, Salisbury, Cheshire, and Orange.

Another solution, beyond construction, is subsidizing apartments on the private market. For this, the State oversees two programs, the Federal Housing Choice Voucher program (HCV), also known as Section 8, and the State's Rental Assistance Program (RAP). But high rental prices mean it's harder for these vouchers to cover the costs of units,

(continued on page 15)



Maps from *Desegregate CT's Zoning Atlas*. Left: 90% of Connecticut's land is zoned for single-family housing *as of right*. Right: Much less land is zoned for multi-family (4 units or more) *as of right*.

Connecticut's Housing Market, cont'd

especially in suburban towns and other high opportunity areas. Because Public Housing Authorities — municipal entities that, among other things, establish the cost of vouchers⁴ for prospective tenants — want to distribute as many HCVs as possible, they keep the price per voucher as low as reasonably possible, which contributes to an overrepresentation of voucher-holders in lower-income areas.

Despite these prolonged disruptions in the housing market and the trends to which these disruptions have given rise, The State and its partners have not been idle. To date, under the Lamont administration, DOH counts 11,734 completed units, with more than \$2.7 billion in construction-related investment. For future development, the Lamont administration is encouraging municipalities to develop around two different proposals: Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and so-called “Workforce Housing,” also known as “Middle Housing.” The Department of Housing, in collaboration

with the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) has implemented, with much success, *Time to Own*, a forgivable downpayment assistance program that helps first-time homebuyers. Through December 2023, this program has assisted more than 2,941 individuals with more than \$104MM in assistance in 132 municipalities. 51% of these borrowers are non-white, a meaningful effort to close the gap between white and non-white homeowners, especially in a tight real estate market.

Still, the need for more remains. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition estimates that Connecticut lacks about 89,000⁵ units of affordable housing. If this is true, building the units that we need presents itself as a formidable challenge.

Housing determines *everything*: where we live, what school we attend, who our neighbors are, and how we see ourselves in relation to a greater whole. Having a safe and secure home, in an area that itself offers safety and security, improves

(continued on page 16)

Housing determines everything: where we live, what school we attend, who our neighbors are, and how we see ourselves in relation to a greater whole.

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Climate Resilient Zoning For Municipal Land Use Commissioners Training

In 2021, the Connecticut legislature passed Public Act 21-29 which included a requirement for land use boards to attend four hours of training every two years starting in 2023. CIRCA has created three online training modules on zoning policies that can be adopted to increase municipal climate resilience and together will fulfill one hour of the training requirement. The modules can be accessed at <https://resilientconnecticut.uconn.edu/zoning>. Commissions can schedule a live presentation of these materials by contacting CIRCA Legal Fellow Louanne Cooley at louanne.cooley@uconn.edu to schedule a time. The CIRCA site also contains factsheets and other resources helpful for resilience planning.

Connecticut's Housing Market, cont'd

outcomes in health, education, economic security, and so on. As the state looks ahead to 2024, these are where the cards have fallen: high costs, low vacancies and more vulnerable people displaced from their homes. Whatever we — the State, its partners, stakeholders, and other citizens — do next will have to operate within those constraints.

The Look Ahead

- **Interest Rates.** The biggest question for 2024 is that of interest rates. Current rates — hiked to combat pandemic-related inflation — have encouraged many homeowners, even those who want to downsize or move, to remain in their homes rather than test the market. Without this turnover, those who are selling are those who urgently need to. A decrease in rates would likely contribute to a loosening in Connecticut's housing market. Additionally, lower rates would encourage more construction, making the financing more viable and passing the savings down to renters.

But aside from rate hikes, a factor wholly outside Connecticut's control, the Connecticut Department of Housing and its partners look forward to the imple-

mentation of a series of other new initiatives during 2024.

- **Build For CT.** The Department of Housing, acting through the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and Build For CT, the state's "middle housing" program, is expected to offer favorable financing to projects that house tenants between 60% and 120% of the Area Median Income (or AMI). The program also includes generous debt coverage ratios, below market interest rates and loan amounts for up to \$125,000 per eligible income restricted unit. See [more information here](#).

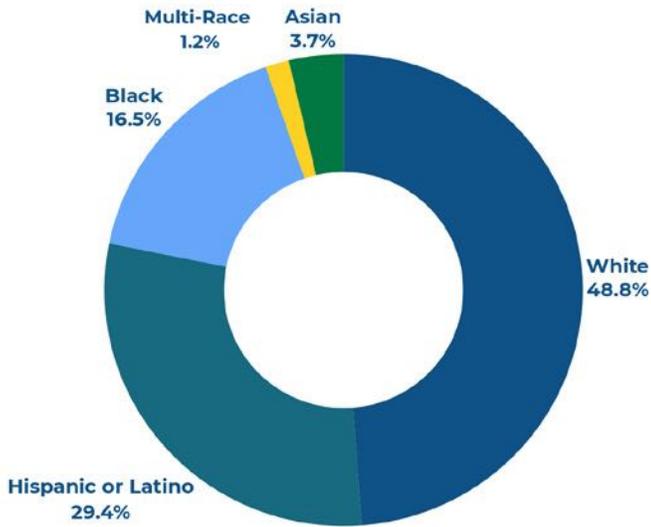
- **Mobility Counseling.** Recently, CT DOH received a \$4.5MM grant from The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to expand access to Mobility Counseling for households receiving Housing Choice Vouchers. Mobility programs offer a combination of pre- and post-move supportive services, such as housing search assistance and financial education programs, with the overall goal of shifting voucher recipients from lower opportunity areas into higher ones. The program could be particularly effective for families with younger children, serving as a pathway to access to higher opportunity

(continued on page 17)

☆ Housing Inventory: Active Listing Count in Connecticut (ACTLISCOUCT)



A graphic from FRED — Federal Reserve Economic Data — depicting Connecticut's housing inventory from 2017 to 2023.



51%

Time To Own Borrowers were BIPOC*

1,945

Time To Own Loan Closings

132

Connecticut Municipalities

Data from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority depicting the success of Time to Own. Data is through September of 2023.

Connecticut's Housing Market, cont'd

school systems. The grant would allow DOH and its partners, already conducting mobility counseling in the Hartford area, to expand to New Haven and Bridgeport.

- **Technical Assistance.** The Department of Housing plans to offer two different opportunities for direct technical assistance to municipalities. The first, a pilot

planned in tandem with The Regional Plan Association, will work with five different municipalities in Fairfield County, assisting in the implementation of their Affordable Housing plans. The other will be an in-house program, soon to come, offered directly through DOH.

(continued on page 18)



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Connecticut's Housing Market, cont'd

• **Ongoing Bond-Financed Project Development.** This past legislative session, the General Assembly passed a two-year bonding package that allocated \$200 million to the Flexible Housing fund and \$400 million to the Housing Trust Fund. The Lamont Administration estimates that this will lead to the creation of roughly 4,400-6,500 units over the next few years.

Building housing takes time. The process requires years to move a project from planning to groundbreaking. These programs and initiatives, in addition to the others offered through the State, CHFA and their partners, serve as meaningful attempts to stimulate development wherever possible and support citizens in vulnerable positions. Furthermore, much in the coming year will depend upon the actions and decisions of municipalities and the legislature (including Congress). Clearly, though, the need — and will — is there. What must follow is the open and thoughtful collaboration necessary for surmounting this multi-faceted challenge. ■

Endnotes

¹The National Low-Income Housing Coalition estimates that an individual earning minimum wage in Connecticut would have to [work 69 hours a week](#) to afford the average 1-bedroom apartment.

²Note that this data is through the end of 2022. Still, it indicates the competitive nature of the rental market.

³See also: Sara Bronin's "[Zoning by a Thousand Cuts.](#)"

⁴Based upon guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. With HCVs, for example, tenants only spend 30% of their income on rent and utilities.

⁵This does not mean that the state needs to construct 89,000 new units but that this number of units needs to be made affordable for middle- and lower-income households.

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Bill Voelker Elected to the AICP College of Fellows

by Dwight Merriam, FAICP

William “Bill” Voelker, recently retired as the planning director in Cheshire, is the Connecticut Chapter’s most recent member to be elected to the College of Fellows. He joins Connecticut Fellows Jan Degenshein, Richard Erikson, Deb Lawlor, Dwight Merriam, Rick Redniss, Jeff Taebel, and David Woods, and the late Horace Brown, Hyung Chung, and Peter Marcuse.

As aptly described in the nomination: “Bill...is one of the kindest, most generous colleagues in our Chapter. He is always willing to dialogue with other planners needing advice and offer his sage advice based on his personal and professional experience where needed.”

Bill has made many important contributions to planning, including as the principal drafter of legislation passed by the Connecticut General Assembly enabling mediation in land use disputes. He received the 2001 Distinguished Service Award from the Connecticut Growth Council and the 2001 Special Chapter Award from CCAPA for that work.

What distinguished Bill as a candidate for national recognition as a fellow is his aplomb and strength of character in handling personal adversity and his willingness to use this journey to help advocate and educate other planners — with classic humor and sass. Twenty-five years ago, at the age of 40, Bill Voelker began to experience problems walking. He was diagnosed with a degenerative nerve disease that as it has run its course has transitioned him from using a single cane, to two canes, then a walker, and eventually a wheelchair.

As a planner, Bill experienced a metamorphosis of perspective that led him to understand first-hand what it means for an individual with a physical disability to navigate their way across the built environment. He became increasingly interested in focusing on accessibility, not to the exclusion of his other work, but in addition to it, integrating what he knew from his decades as a planner, with what he came to learn with each passing day

as he slowly, inexorably, became more physically constrained. He teamed up with others who had spent their lifetime promoting accessibility as an advocate for better design and for better planning.

His advocacy has included speaking on accessibility at the 2018 NPC in New Orleans, 2021 Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute Western Places/Western Spaces annual conference, twice at SNEAPA, and this last June at the annual Hot Topics in Land Use Law event. He authored an article in the Winter 2018 CCAPA newsletter entitled “Advocating for the Disabled in Planning.”

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of how he came to be widely recognized for his advocacy is the way he handled himself in front of a large audience at the 2018 NPC in New Orleans when he and others were on a panel about accessibility. He rolled into the room to join the others assembling up on the podium for the presentation only to discover that no one had planned for or provided a ramp or any other means for him to get up onto the podium, and no lectern was provided from which he could speak as the others could. He gave his remarks from the floor that day to an awestruck audience, but he never complained about having been restricted in this way because of his physical disability. Instead, he seized the opportunity, almost as a sidebar to his principal remarks, to comment on the “micro aggressions” against people with disabilities.

Bill has also had a real influence on the rewriting of the AICP ethics code. Working with one of the Fellows of this chapter, he developed amendments to the draft for the committee’s consideration which would broadly increase the ethical responsibilities of Certified Planners for people with all kinds of disabilities.

In his retirement (if you can call it that...he’s currently filling as the planner for Windsor Locks), Bill Voelker continues to advocate, educate, and benefit the members of the Connecticut Chapter of APA. 🗑️



William “Bill” Voelker

What distinguished Bill as a candidate for national recognition as a fellow is his aplomb and strength of character in handling personal adversity and his willingness to use this journey to help advocate and educate other planners — with classic humor and sass...

Make No Little Plans

by John Guskowski, AICP, CZEO, CCAPA Government Relations Co-Chair

As we face a deeply important political year of 2024, a couple of (potentially) competing quotations come to mind. The first comes from Planning patriarch Daniel Burnham: “**Make no little plans.** They have no magic to stir men’s blood...” Burnham calls us, as Planners, to be leaders. To think big. To make change. But then comes the second quote, from, um... Otto Von Bismarck. “Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best...”



As members of the American Planning Association, we seek lofty goals. We aim to make our State (and our world) better and more equitable. But also: in Connecticut, this is a “short session” of the General Assembly, in an election year. Let’s face the reality. It’s going to be a challenging year to get big legislative changes done in the Land of Steady Habits.

All of that said, we in the Government Relations Committee of CCAPA take our role seriously. We wish to keep moving the State forward on key issues, big and small. This year, our statutory targets are smaller in scope, but our mission remains the same. We will seek to continue to build our reputation in Hartford as non-partisan subject-matter experts who are devoted to the current and future success of our communities.

As we enter the 2024 session of the Connecticut General Assembly, CCAPA has identified a few key legislative priorities, and several more issues to track and push forward. This list has been developed by the Government Relations Committee, with input, via our annual survey, from the CCAPA membership and in consultation with legislative leadership. Our primary legislative areas of focus include:

1. Allow for Town Website Posting of Legal Notices in Lieu of Newspapers

As an adjunct to the electronic meetings and notifications innovations allowed during the COVID pandemic, we strongly urge amendments to CGS Section 8-7 regarding public notification of meetings, hearings, and decisions, allowing municipal website notification in lieu of newspaper publication.

2. Continued Reform of Zoning Regulations for Housing Development

We support continued work on combinations of incentives and requirements to generate more housing, including market rate and affordable/workforce housing, especially (but not exclusively) in high-opportunity and *Transit-Oriented areas*. We support Governor Lamont’s efforts to revitalize the Municipal Redevelopment Authority and offer municipalities an additional tool to add housing supply. We also support the development of a statewide housing affordability model plan/template to assist municipalities in establishing affordability requirements for proposed developments.

3. Reforming the Process of Granting of Variances by ZBA

CCAPA acknowledges the current variance procedure in Connecticut needs reform. We are committed to working with our partners from the Connecticut Bar Association, Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officials and others to clarify definitions and criteria for the consideration and granting variances by Zoning Boards of Appeals.

In addition to highlighting these issues with the legislature, we will be offering support to move these issues forward:

(continued on page 21)

As we enter the 2024 session of the Connecticut General Assembly, CCAPA has identified a few key legislative priorities, and several more issues to track and push forward.



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Legislative Update, cont'd

- 1) Set aside State funds to provide municipalities with “local” matching funds for Federal infrastructure grants.
- 2) Track and provide insight and commentary on proposals that would address the Zoning Enabling Statute and the expansion of Housing Opportunity in Connecticut in a manner consistent with the APA Code of Ethics.
- 3) Clarify municipal authority to accept a Fee-In-Lieu of Sidewalks (PILOS) in Subdivisions and Special Permits.
- 4) Continue to support the efforts of the Commission on Connecticut’s Development and Future Continued Reform of Zoning Regulations for Housing Development.

We will be providing input and testimony on these, and other, issues as the session unfolds. We welcome questions and input from all CCAPA members. As always, if you have questions about CCAPA’s Government Relations Committee or our involvement with the State’s legislative processes (including offering your help or support), please reach out to us at ctplannersgovrel@gmail.com.

— *John Guskowski, AICP, is Principal of Tyche Planning & Policy Group, LLC and Co-Chair of CCAPA’s Government Relations Committee.*



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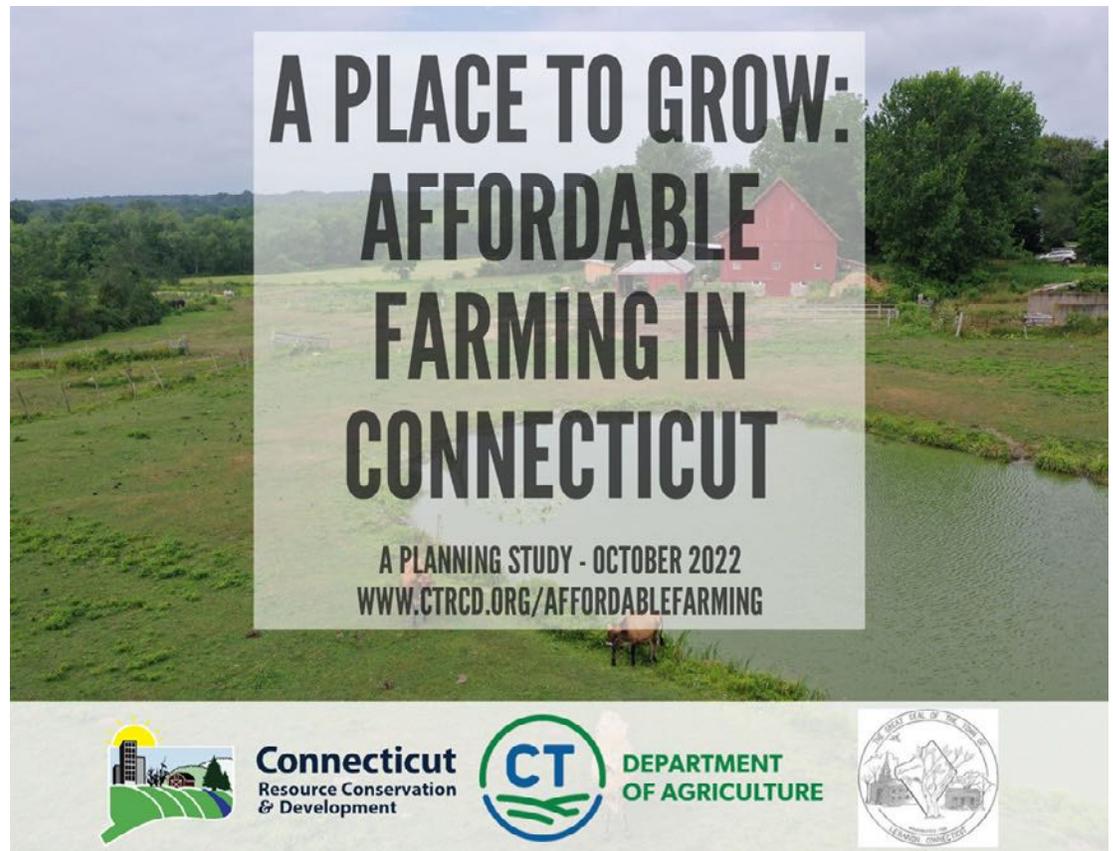
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As state and housing advocates encourage municipal planners and officials to create solutions for affordable housing, creative paths to more sustainable and cost-effective affordable housing options are vital in today's quickly changing monetized landscape.

Creative Thinking on Affordable Housing: Lebanon Case Study

by Jeanne Davies, AICP, Philip Chester, AICP, and John Guskowski, AICP



The dynamics of housing affordability and access in Connecticut are multi-faceted. Once accessible as a basic need during decades of stagnant migration, today's housing real estate has once again evolved to become a highly valued-traded commodity. Planning solutions to create affordable housing are not easily found within an ever-growing corporate equity platform that trades in the basic human need for housing.

Housing affordability is a constantly moving target for planners. While demographics, interest rates, assessed property values, and taxation policy often remain relatively stable in Connecticut's "land of steady habits," periodic booms in housing prices, financial stability, and investment activity as well as access to affordable housing can cause angst for planners and local planning and zoning commissions.

This is especially true during times of housing price market volatility — like the one we are currently experiencing.

Planners have managed this conundrum for many decades as housing prices and construction starts migrate through economic booms, busts, and bubbles in the housing market. Driving the current 2020s "crises" is the outwash from the COVID pandemic, wage disparity, and access to affordable housing as the housing prices skyrocket. How do planners address the current crises, while at the same time knowing that self-correction in the housing market will eventually occur? How to promote access to jobs and income that can support quickly rising housing costs in an ever-fluctuating employment landscape? These and other factors bring logistical challenges for planning professionals.

(continued on page 23)



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Affordable Housing, cont'd

As state and housing advocates encourage municipal planners and officials to create solutions for affordable housing, creative paths to more sustainable and cost-effective affordable housing options are vital in today's quickly changing monetized landscape. Which population sectors would benefit from innovative solutions toward affordable housing? Are affordable housing solutions dependent on the home building industry? Are there creative partnering organizations that could offer options for new affordable housing? Are there insights to be gained for Connecticut from alternative viewpoints for affordable housing?

The Lebanon Experience

In Lebanon, Connecticut, these questions were posed by several farmers and planning commissioners to the town's planner, Philip Chester, AICP. As a leading agricultural community in Connecticut with the greatest amount of preserved farmland in our state and New England, Lebanon supports the agriculture industry and its resident farmers through proactive governing leadership. How does agriculture relate to the subject of affordable housing? Lebanon is a rural eastern Connecticut community characterized by large-lot, single-family residential development where future housing affordability for new and emerging farmers is paramount to the town's major employment sector and industry — agriculture. Lebanon understands the importance of agriculture to Connecticut, preservation of agriculture lands, and the need for affordable housing and land access for farmers and farm workers.

Lebanon Town Planner Philip Chester continued to promote the idea of planning for affordable farmer housing at a Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association (CCAPA) housing workshop and to the State Department of Agriculture. Surveys of Lebanon residents supported the idea of affordable housing for young residents, including new farmers. The idea of planning for a burgeoning problem of affordable access to farmland and housing for new farmers



Paula Soler-Moya, Flickr

The Importance of Agriculture to Connecticut

A 2015 analysis reveals that the total impact of Connecticut's agricultural industry on the state economy was between \$3.3 and \$4.0 billion, measuring the value of agricultural output as statewide sales generated directly from the industry and through spillover effects on other industries. Agriculture is a critical component to a sustainable future in Connecticut. The USDA recognizes the importance of farming for sustainability and food security in the New England region and the potential for expansion of this industry. A New Hampshire project that was awarded a \$25 million USDA grant toward hydroponic production was expected to help reduce shipping times to the grocer's shelf to eight hours, compared to 7-10 days from the western United States and Mexico. From an urban agriculture perspective, the U.S. Department of Agriculture notes that hydroponics, or growing plants using mineral nutrient solutions in water without soil, is a growing area of commercial food production. The largest in New England, Backyard Farms in Madison, Maine, produces upward of 30 million tomatoes each year for supermarkets regionally. Concurrent with this good news and support for growing New England-based agricultural production is the need for affordable housing for the region's farmers and farm workers who work in these areas.

was compelling to all involved in the discussion.

Lebanon wanted to understand how best to promote affordable housing and farm access for new and emerging farmers. So began a partnership between Lebanon's Planning and Zoning Commission, Agriculture Commission, and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Council (CT RC&D) to create a "Plan for Affordable Farming in Lebanon," a template using an available farm in the town and a planning process to evaluate the need, implement, and manage a sustainable affordable farming

(continued on page 24)

Are affordable housing solutions dependent on the home building industry? Or are there creative partnering organizations that could offer options for new affordable housing?

Affordable Housing: Still Needed in an “Affordable” Community

Lebanon, with a median household income of \$107,050 and an average housing price of \$278,000 as well as average rental costs at \$1250/month, could be defined as an affordable community relative to other regions of Connecticut. That said, access to affordable housing for older residents, lower-income residents, farmers, and farm workers was a priority given their low-income thresholds. An established farmer’s annual salary can range from \$50,000 to \$75,000 depending on the farm operation, crop yield, and other factors. New farmers and farm workers hourly rates, based on recent New Farmer Alliance job postings for 2024, are approximately \$16-\$20/hour or \$33,300 to \$42,000 annually.

HUD Metro Area	Median Family Income	Income Category	Persons in Family			
			1	2	3	4
Colchester-Lebanon Metro	\$115,000	Low Income (80%)	\$54,950	\$62,800	\$70,650	\$78,500
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$1,374	\$1,570	\$1,766	\$1,963
		Very Low Income (50%)	\$40,250	\$46,000	\$51,750	\$57,500
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$1,006	\$1,150	\$1,294	\$1,438
		Extremely Low Income (30%)	\$24,150	\$27,600	\$31,050	\$34,500
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$604	\$690	\$776	\$863
Norwich-New London Metro	\$91,800	Low Income (80%)	\$54,950	\$62,800	\$70,650	\$78,500
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$1,374	\$1,570	\$1,766	\$1,963
		Very Low Income (50%)	\$35,950	\$41,050	\$46,200	\$51,300
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$899	\$1,026	\$1,155	\$1,283
		Extremely Low Income (30%)	\$21,600	\$24,650	\$27,750	\$30,800
		Equiv. Monthly Housing Budget	\$540	\$616	\$694	\$770

Colchester-Lebanon Metro consists of Colchester and Lebanon. Norwich-New London Metro, provided for reference, consists of Bozrah, East Lyme, Franklin, Griswold, Groton, Ledyard, Lisbon, Lyme, Montville, New London, North Stonington, Norwich, Old Lyme, Preston, Salem, Sprague, Stonington, Voluntown, and Waterford.

Affordable Housing, cont'd

(with housing) plan for farmers and farm workers. The overarching planning goal was to define alternatives for siting homes while preserving the best of the site for agriculture and natural resource protection, building shared farming solutions for new farmers and their workers. A secondary goal was to research how to market farm products and build additional income for farmers that would be critical to the success of a future affordable farm project.

A planning team was hired through grant funding provided by the CT Department of Agriculture. The team included agriculture

The overarching planning goal was to define alternatives for siting homes while preserving the best of the site for agriculture and natural resource protection, building shared farming solutions for new farmers and their workers.

marketing and land expertise, private equity farm trust representatives, a nonprofit management consultant, regional community land trust leadership, landscape architecture graduate students from the Conway

School of Landscape Design, USDA/Natural Resource Conservation Service, professional planners, a renewable farm energy implementation expert, and a videographer to capture the process on film and representative farmers.

The process included evaluation of two model farms to select a “focus” farm. The planning team ultimately chose Randall Farm for the “Affordable Farm template.” Randall Farm is a generational farm with a state conservation easement and significant challenges for site development, including extensive wetlands and stream crossings. The site was also close to the high school

(continued on page 25)

Affordable Housing, cont'd

and a potential learning opportunity was explored with the school's agriculture program. The Conway School did extensive site surveys and interviews with local farmers, the school, BIPOC farmers, and municipal officials to build a landscape model of an affordable farm for Randall Farm that would adhere to zoning and planning objectives of the town. The rest of the project team analyzed ownership, farmer recruitment, marketing and sales of farm products to ensure financial success of the project, site and organizational management, property constraints from conservation easements, funding sources, zoning, and new partnerships required to build an affordable farm project in Lebanon.

A cooperative affordable farm housing model was selected by the planning team as the optimal solution based on an equity or a community land trust management model,



one that has been successfully built in other New England states. The final plan also centered on how to build the model farm to ensure farmer wealth equity toward a future purchase of an existing larger agriculture business or land for an owner-occupied farm while retaining affordability in housing and land access.

(continued on page 26)



Above: Aerial view of Randall Farm, Lebanon, CT. Bottom: Planning team producing a segment of the video.

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Affordable Housing, cont'd

This planning process elicited some future goals and potential solutions for Lebanon, including the model cooperative farm overlaid on existing preserved Lebanon farmland. More importantly, the research and interviews yielded information on why a private sector solution to affordable housing is not a sole source solution to the complex problem of sustainable affordable housing in Connecticut. The final plan was designed to derive a workable correlation between nonprofit resources, municipal leadership, and creative investment by private benefactors toward the future of farming and affordable housing in Lebanon. The costs of land and development were simply too high to be justified by the target income ranges and likely farm revenues. In Lebanon's case, the solution for farmers and farm workers resides optimally with a non-profit management cooperative,

land trust, community land trust or municipal housing initiative.

Together the final Conway design report and "A Place to Grow: Affordable Farming in Connecticut" formed the full planning report to Lebanon and the State Department of Agriculture. While focused on Lebanon, "A Place to Grow" evolved as a planning study that could potentially benefit any Connecticut community seeking to promote affordable farming, either rural, suburban, or urban.

The plan was presented to Lebanon and the CT Department of Agriculture in October 2022. While the plan focused on the needs of Lebanon, there were takeaways from the project that planners in Connecticut may find helpful, especially those planners in municipalities who currently or plan to promote agriculture. They include:

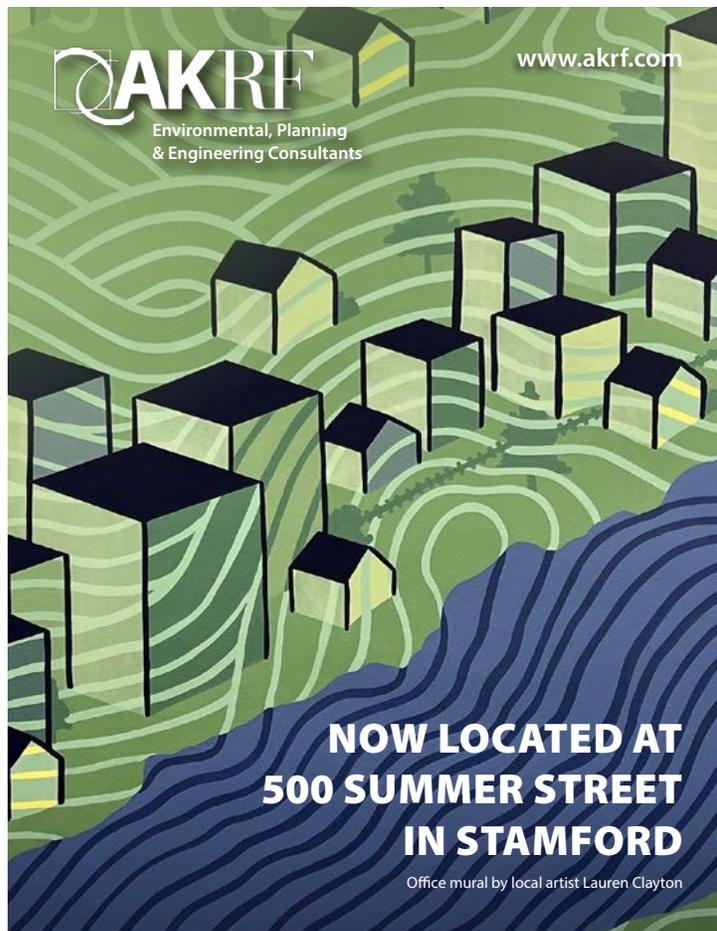
1) Ensure a collective understanding of how to build sustained

While focused on Lebanon, "A Place to Grow" evolved as a planning study that could potentially benefit any Connecticut community seeking to promote affordable farming.

affordable housing in your municipality and region: type of property management, avoidance of hidden costs to affordability (HOA fees, excessive utility access and fees — such as renewables/solar energy solutions — flood insurance, soils, contamination, wetlands and slope stability are a few examples).

2) Construct affordable housing to build wealth of occupants toward future wealth (ownership, cooperatives versus rental/outside management) to sustain access to housing and affordability.

(continued on page 27)

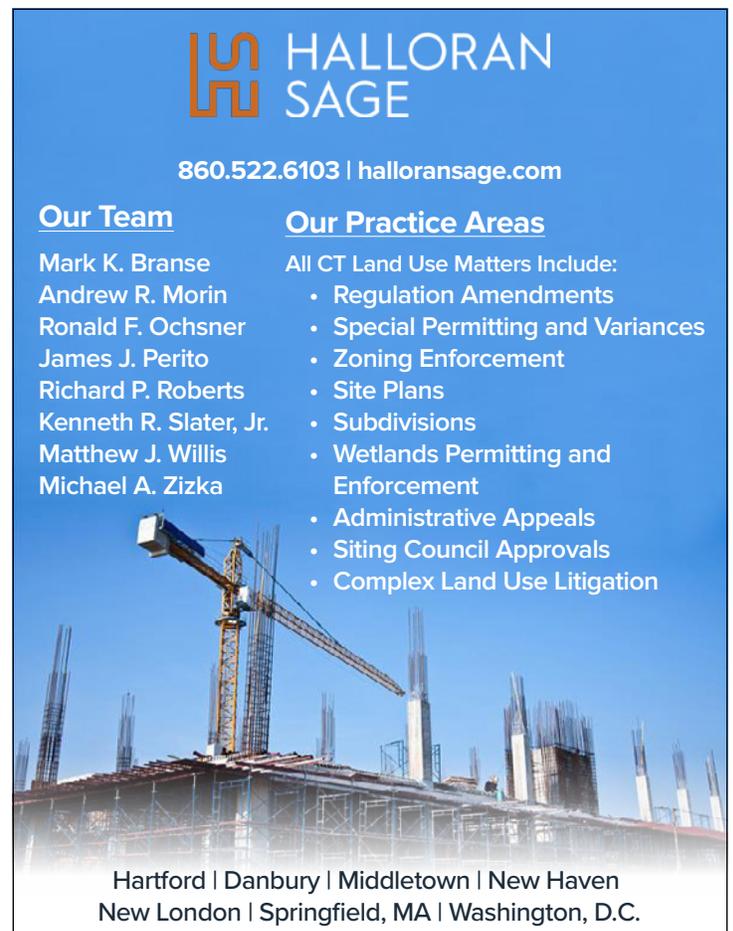


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Affordable Housing, cont'd

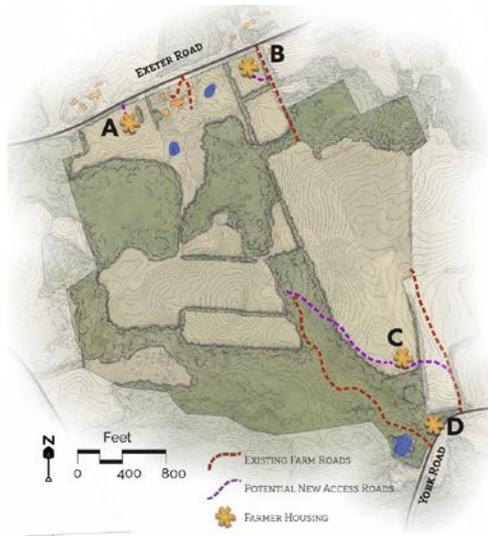
- 3) Examine cost-effective alternatives and partnerships, including nonprofit, to augment efforts by private home site developers to build affordable housing.
- 4) Base affordable housing on the needs of the town and residents, the industry and employment sector, wages and salaries, and the capacity of land and natural resources in the town.
- 5) Consider long-term sustainability, building quality of life/community living resilience, and access.
- 6) Incorporate where possible plans and zoning which promote affordable housing and access to agriculture, elimination or avoidance of food deserts, and promotion of agriculture uses and/or employment (community gardens, hydroponics, or local farms).
- 7) Consider designing templates for affordable housing and partnerships to build housing on available land or vacant buildings through resident workshops and discussion.

From a statewide perspective, Lebanon's case study for affordable housing highlights the need for the state leadership to fully understand the needs of each community as it addresses affordable housing and the future of its residents and workers. Accessing critical data for the planning study was challenging.

A key finding through this Lebanon planning process was the need for data. To successfully correlate sustainable affordable housing, municipalities and their planners need access to continually updated state-generated geospatial data sources (examples: housing inventory, demographic, real estate and assessment, employment, journey-to-work industry projections unique to each town, geography and transportation/transit access. Additionally, planners would benefit from workshops and access to new partnerships and creative holistic solutions to sustained affordable housing.

As each town moves forward to explore affordable housing zoning, the associated densities, building height, and utilities, Lebanon's planning process highlights the need to ensure that planners also look toward the carrying capacity of the land, the natural resources, access to recreation, agriculture, and the community to support new occupants. Sustainable affordable housing over the next decade and longer is built on planning that incorporates quality of life, water resources, soils, access to food — and affordable housing and space to farm for Connecticut farmers. 🏡

— *Jeanne Davies, AICP, is the former Executive Director of Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc. (CT RC&D), and is the editor of this magazine; Philip Chester, AICP, is the Lebanon, CT Town Planner; John Guskowski, AICP, is principal of Tyche Planning and president of CT RC&D.*



Graphic showing possible locations suitable for siting housing at Randall Farm (from the Randall Farm Master Plan, prepared by students at The Conway School).

Quick Links – A Place to Grow: Affordable Farming in CT Report / Video / Conway School Site Plan Recommendations

Additional References:

<https://cdi.coop/the-co-op-farming-model-might-help-save-americas-small-farms/>

<https://healthyfoodpolicyproject.org/key-issues/zoning-for-urban-agriculture>

<https://www.maine.cooperativehousing.com/blog/category/all>

<http://landforgood.org/blog/accessing-farmland-together/>

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Reflections from the Summit on Land Use in Connecticut

by Jovan Bryan, Connecticut Land Conservation Council

Over decades in Connecticut, the learning and practicing of conservation or environmental planning, urban planning, rural planning, emergency management, transportation, and community planning has generally been segmented into single-focus education workshops for planners.

While the annual Southern New England American Planning Association (SNEAPA) conference showcases multiple topic sessions for planners, few local planning forums or workshops have focused on the intersection of complex and seemingly conflicting planning topics. This is changing.

With growing access to limited resources and available land for the myriad of land uses required for sustaining Connecticut communities, organizations such as the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC) are working to help land trust members and local planners examine the potential for creative thinking and understanding about the intersect of land resources and land use in Connecticut. Effective land use planning in

Connecticut requires careful consideration to manage impacts encompassing climate, biodiversity preservation, land conservation, water quality, soil health, agriculture, and air quality for residents.



Over the past three years, CLCC has offered a Winter Summit to provide a platform for a specific topic for land trusts and partners/planners over a full-day conference-style event. Following CLCC's successful 2023 Summit, which focused on creative land conservation-based solutions and partnerships for affordable housing, CLCC's 2024 event centered on **Land Use in Connecticut: Connecting Grasstops to Grassroots.**

Hosted on January 19th in Hartford, the program offered a unique stage for state, regional, and local leaders to look at land use more holistically across agencies and sectors. The conversation provided insights into present and future

(continued on page 29)

The Summit on Land Use in Connecticut offered a unique stage for state, regional, and local leaders to look at land use more holistically across agencies and sectors.



(From left) Moderator John Guskowski, of Tyche Planning, and Grasstops Panelists: Office of Brownfield Remediation & Development Director Binu Chandu; Office of Policy and Management Responsible Growth Coordinator Rebecca Augur; DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes; Agriculture Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt; Housing Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno.

Summit on Land Use, cont'd

opportunities for more strategic land use planning and policies in Connecticut.

The “Grasstops”

In the first part of the program, leaders from Connecticut state agencies, the “Grasstops,” shared ideas and insights about state programs that can be coordinated to incentivize collaborative opportunities for land conservation, affordable housing, farmland access, remediation, and development across Connecticut communities.

The panel discussion, moderated by **John Guskowski**, co-founder and principal of **Tyche Planning & Policy Group**, provided insights and recommendations from Commissioner **Katie Dykes** of the **Department of Energy and Environmental Protection**, Commissioner **Bryan Hurlburt** of the **Department of Agriculture**, and Commissioner **Seila Mosquera-Bruno** of the **Department of Housing**. Also participating were **Binu Chandy**, Director of the **Office of Brownfield Remediation & Development** for the **Department of Economic and Community Development**, and Responsible Growth Coordinator **Rebecca Augur** of the **Office of Policy and Management**.

A series of hypothetical case studies stimulated discussion between these different agencies, panelists, and attendees and examined options to move a site plan forward with optimized impact for site preservation and achieving the land use goals for the property. For example:

“A 200-acre parcel in Northwest Connecticut, including 150 acres of woodlands and habitat of high ecological value, 50 acres of prime farmland, and an antique farmhouse, comes on the market. A land trust would like to purchase the property for conservation and agricultural purposes and partner with another nonprofit to save the house for affordable workforce housing. The property is listed with a real estate agent, the landowner is a family entity motivated to sell, and the land is highly

developable for large lot single-family development.”

In response to this and other a case scenarios such as this has, the officials discussed grant programs and funding avenues available that could assist the land trust toward achieving the goal of property acquisition and additional land use objectives. Each official offered specific suggestions of programs provided by their agencies that land trusts and communities can evaluate for multiple uses for the land.

After a break in the day, representatives from regional and municipal stakeholders built on the “Grasstops” conversation and discussed the nuances of land use at the local and regional level, navigating state programs and policies, and where opportunities lie to amplify community goals.

The “Grassroots”

The “Grassroots” panelists represented regional and local government entities, non-profits, and community organizations, all tackling new projects and the current and potential relationships that form when land is available. **Ashley Stewart**, Owner of Stewart Environmental and Equity Consulting, moderated a panel of diverse regional and local stakeholders in Connecticut. Participating leaders included:

Kaleb Garrett, Founder of The Circle; **Connie Manes**, Director of the **Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative**; **Mirna Martinez**, Executive Director of the **Southeastern Connecticut Community Land Trust**; **Tyra Penn-Gesek**, Director of Planning & Development for the **Town of Thompson, CT**; **Francis Pickering**, Executive Director of the **Western Connecticut Council of Governments**; and **Jonathon Savage**, Interim Executive Director for **Gather New Haven**.

Reacting to the insights from the “Grasstops” officials, this set of panelists engaged the audience to view, through their ever-evolving perspectives, how land can be utilized considering the funding sources, policies, regulations, codes, and alignments that apply to their field of

(continued on page 30)

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Grassroots panelists (from left): Panel moderator Ashley Stewart, Owner of Stewart Environmental and Equity Consulting; Mirna Martinez, Executive Director of the Southeastern Connecticut Community Land Trust; Connie Manes, Director of the Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative; Tyra Penn-Gesek, Director of Planning & Development for the Town of Thompson; Francis Pickering, Executive Director of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments; Kaleb Garrett, Founder of The Circle; and Jonathon Savage, Interim Executive Director for Gather New Haven.

Summit on Land Use, cont'd

work — while also keeping a focus on their mission. The audience was engaged with both sessions as the panelists and their specific points provided a diversity of new perspectives.

From the 2023 CLCC Winter Summit, one new perspective was the important role that land trusts can, and perhaps should, play in planning for more affordable housing. Land trusts can be partners on affordable housing projects, collaborate with affordable housing nonprofits, and/or advocate for smart, sustainable development. With a land trust in nearly every community across Connecticut, the conservation community is well-positioned to help create healthy, livable towns and cities and dispel the false narrative that land conservation and affordable housing are mutually exclusive.

Connecticut is a small state between two large metropolitan regions that impact demands on land use and resulting density. Our state agencies “reach up” to the federal level and collect resources to aid and transform the efforts on the ground. Those who work more locally gather as much information and resources as possible to support their projects and establish a strong network whose successes and challenges can be used as leverage to advocate for more assistance.

The challenge of building community is knowing how to hear every voice in the room and unite them toward common ground and understanding. Relationships with the land are personal. Every person has a different perspective on what that relationship looks like. Going forward, CLCC’s Annual Summits will continue to provide a pause during the wintertime and a forum to examine and reflect on the need for multiple voices to convene and reveal that common threads toward creative land use planning for a more sustainable Connecticut.

As a state leader in land use partnerships, CLCC, along with organizations such as CCAPA, is committed

to encouraging more of these discussions so that the connections between the state agencies and local stakeholders become stronger, more transparent, and more holistically aligned.

Video Recordings of the panel discussions can be viewed on [CLCC’s YouTube Channel](#). See a list of [programs, funding opportunities, and other resources](#) referenced at the Summit. 📺

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