

**Knowing No Boundaries: Stemming the Tide of Urban Sprawl in
Several Southern Connecticut Towns and the Lessons for Other Strong
Home Rule Areas**

by

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER IN CITY PLANNING

at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
June 2002

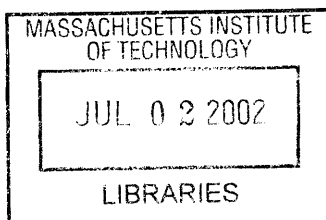
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ABSTRACT

Land use regulations and development patterns of several southern Connecticut towns and cities were studied in order to determine how the individual municipal land use controls in each town have contributed to urban sprawl in Southern Connecticut. Additionally, the historical foundations for the absence of strong regional governmental entities in southern Connecticut were studied to provide a baseline for developing potential regional solutions to suburban sprawl in Connecticut.

Drawing upon analysis of land use regulations, regional governmental structure, existing sprawl typologies and professional and academic literature, remedies for preventing the proliferation of suburban sprawl in Connecticut through municipal action, framed within a multiple-town urban design corridor and a regional compact construct, were proposed and discussed. The potential applicability of these remedies to other areas of the United States where there are many independent municipalities concentrated in a relatively small area, each making land use decisions without a regional framework, was investigated.

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Acknowledgments

My deep gratitude goes to my thesis advisor and thesis reader, Terry Szold and Eran Ben-Joseph, for their guidance and their critiques that made this thesis stronger and more precise, and for their selfless gifts of time and effort in assistance of its writing.

I dedicate this work to my wife, Dawn, and my son, Matthew, who have given me the strength and motivation to complete this thesis and constantly bring happiness and joy to my life.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Sprawl – The National Issue

Over the past decade, the words “urban sprawl”, “suburban sprawl”, or just “sprawl”, have become perhaps the most ubiquitous terms in the urban planning lexicon, the equivalent to “blight” in the days of urban renewal. Their use has ranged from a politician’s buzzword meant to convey a sense of understanding about the continued decline of urban centers, to an all-encompassing statement of the various forms of development that suburban and rural residents view as the forces of imminent destruction of exurban tranquillity.

“Sprawl” has at its core a dichotomous nature; it is at the same time the general term applied to all consumptive manifestations of development on historically rural or suburban land, and the much more specific term applied by a single individual or group to describe one particular form or typology of the general concept of “sprawl”. In every community in the nation, residents, planners, politicians, and developers have different ideas about the nature of this intellectually amorphous yet physically recognizable concept. To some, the construction of “monster homes” and large-lot, generic subdivisions that place an exponentially increasing burden upon schools and other municipal facilities are the enemy. Others see the spread of massive regional malls and big-box retailers, surrounded by their accompanying large parking lots, as the detritus of

suburban living. Environmental degradation in the form of farmland lost to development, clear-cutting of wooded areas, air pollution from increased traffic, and surface run-off into water bodies from newly-created impervious areas are the main urban sprawl concerns of yet another segment of society. Sprawl can even be viewed as the symptoms of uncontrolled growth, such as the explosion in school, highway and road construction in towns where such infrastructure expenses were never imagined. Still others view suburban development as simply being the outcome of market demand, and that there is, in fact, nothing inherently wrong with this form of growth. In sum, sprawl can be everything and anything that people see as being wrong with suburban development over the past fifty years.

As is clearly evident from the countless articles, books and publications on the issue, sprawl is a planning problem of national proportions. Shrinking central city size belies the fact that roughly 80% of all Americans reside in metropolitan areas, a clear indicator that our nation is urbanizing previously undeveloped or sparsely developed land at an alarming rate.¹ Retail and commercial sprawl, the central focus of this thesis, is also expanding rapidly, even in substantially developed areas of the country such as New England. In addition to increases in the number of big-box retail stores and corporate office parks, the scope of this form of sprawl is also widening as stores and malls become larger; between 1986 and 1998, the amount of retail square footage per American increased an astounding 30% to 19 square feet per citizen.² In the three decades between

¹ F. Kaid Benfield, Matthew D. Raimi, and Donald D. T. Chen, Once There Were Greenfields: How Urban Sprawl is Undermining America's Environment, Economy and Social Fabric (New York: Natural Resources Defense Council, 1999), 5.

² Benfield, 16.

1960 and 1990, large urban areas of the country saw the amount of their “developed” land double, while growth in population in these same areas was far behind this pace.³ The fact that metropolitan areas such as Cleveland (-11% population growth, 33% increase in developed land), New York (8% population growth, 65% increase in developed land), and Chicago (4% population growth, 46% increase in developed land) have all witnessed development eating away at greenfields indicates that sprawling regions and metropolitan areas are not limited to Atlanta and Phoenix, and that regional sprawl is truly a problem with a national scope.⁴

Sprawl – The Connecticut Challenge

As in many areas of the nation, the period beginning with the end of World War II and stretching to the present day has seen the expansive spread of suburban sprawl throughout the southern Connecticut region. While the central cities of the region, New Haven and Bridgeport, have declined significantly in population, the region’s suburbs have experienced explosive growth and the city of Stamford has risen to become a power center for Fortune 500 headquarters. This suburban population growth was obviously the impetus for commercial sprawl throughout the region, yet the sprawl that has resulted is somewhat unique in its form and structure.

The concept of “sprawl” in Connecticut is somewhat different than in other parts of the country for several reasons. First, there is no unincorporated land in Connecticut; every

³ Donald C. Williams, Urban Sprawl – A Reference Handbook, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 12.

⁴ Williams, 12.

acre of the state lies within the borders of an incorporated town or city. Unlike the southern or western regions of the United States, where development occurs in unincorporated areas almost unchecked (with the exception of some limited extraterritorial zoning powers on the part of cities and counties), and then the developed areas are often annexed by a nearby city, every development in Connecticut occurs within some town's borders and affects someone's grand list. This reality has a very positive, if underutilized and unappreciated, element to it: everything related to development is under some jurisdiction's control. Thus, the potential power needed to stop sprawl in Connecticut already lies in the hands of towns and cities. It is a power that they simply need to learn how to exercise effectively. Therefore, unlike other parts of the country where rapid sprawl development in unincorporated areas is difficult to check, Connecticut's sprawl problem is certainly manageable.

Second, the borders of Connecticut's towns and cities have been largely fixed for a considerable period of time, in some cases hundreds of years. Annexation has always been a rare event (New Haven's annexation of a portion of East Haven in the 1880s stands out as one of the few examples of such action), and secession has actually been more common, particularly in the colonial and early Federal periods. The absence of unincorporated land mentioned above, the lack of annexation powers as a tool for absorbing growth into cities, and the long and treasured histories and independence of so many of Connecticut's towns essentially ensures that regional consolidation or other radical changes in government structure or geographic boundaries are virtually removed from the realm of possibility. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, towns in Connecticut

likely will be waging battles against sprawl on their own. Rather than inventing a new way to unify Connecticut's various regions into metropolitan governments or transplanting a governmental structure idea from some other part of the nation, the challenge is to develop new mechanisms for independent Connecticut towns to fight sprawl together while retaining the coveted powers of home rule and self-determination.

Third, Connecticut has fairly high population density, particularly in southern Connecticut, as compared to the rest of the United States. Although Connecticut remains a heavily forested state, a high percentage of land near key transportation routes and in high population density areas has been built upon. The rising outcry from residents against the continuation of sprawl, while not stopping its proliferation where it already exists, has greatly slowed the wholesale commercial development of large tracts of greenfields. In addition, Connecticut's population growth has slowed to a crawling pace, and although new residents will continue to populate the state for the foreseeable future, the population growth experienced will be nothing like that of southern and western states. Thus, the areas of sprawl that exist now may not expand much further. However, in the areas of the state where sprawl is the dominant built form, it has seemed to gain a tacit sense of acceptance, even if residents dislike the traffic congestion and the noise. The subconscious attitude of many appears to be one of defeat concerning existing sprawl, the belief that what is already been done cannot be fixed. The only hope is to stop it from happening again. The problem with this attitude however, is that although it may keep sprawl from going any further, the fact remains that there is a large amount of sprawl on the landscape already. Sprawl that is accepted in an area will continue to self-

replicate itself in the same place; indeed, it is not uncommon to see an older 1950s strip mall become abandoned, demolished, and rebuilt as today's large shopping center or big-box retail.

In summary, Connecticut's fight against sprawl is a unique battle, the features of which are closely tied to traditional New England-style government structures and a long history of development. The battle in Connecticut is much different than the battle against sprawl in Arizona, Texas, or Georgia, and the solutions that will win this battle must be equally unique. Preventing the continued manifestation of sprawl in suburban commercial corridors is one facet of the sprawl challenge in Connecticut, and beginning to craft solutions to this challenge is the central theme of this thesis.

Methodology and Thesis Outline

This thesis is essentially divided into five distinct parts, each of which plays a critical role in constructing the necessary support structure for the thesis' main premise. Beginning with an expansive view of Connecticut's town-centered governmental structure, existing regional entities and a discussion of county government to create a larger framework within the context of which sprawl issues in southern Connecticut can be investigated, the thesis proceeds to an historical examination of the four subject towns (North Haven, Orange, Milford and Norwalk) to create context for further discussions on sprawl in these particular towns. The illustration of sprawl typologies in identified commercial strips in these towns is then supplemented with extensive zoning regulation critiques of these same commercial areas. Finally, recommendations for remedying and preventing sprawl

at the zone, town and regional levels are provided as a capstone to the previous investigation and analysis.

Chapter 2 lays out many of the limiting factors in Connecticut's struggle to prevent commercial sprawl. A lack of strong regional governmental entities and the absence of county government, coupled with the existence of a fractured geopolitical landscape of small towns and cities, sets the stage for strong individual town home rule to serve as the guiding force in land use decision-making. The chapter's essential conclusion is that the enshrinement of the town as Connecticut's basic political and zoning entity presents particularly vexing challenges to sprawl prevention. Chapter 3 provides an historical look at the people, events and forces that have shaped the development patterns of these four subject towns, creating a temporal context for understanding these towns and the development of Connecticut in general.

Chapter 4 provides illustrative examples of particular areas of sprawl in each of the four subject towns. These examples serve as baseline for an intensive critique of applicable zoning regulations, including land use, dimensional requirements and parking requirements, that allow the sprawl typologies one finds in these areas to flourish. This critique, which is the core of Chapter 5, elucidates how and why particular regulations not only allow sprawl, but actually promote its creation while leaving little room for alternative types of development. Finally, Chapter 6 will discuss the possible urban design solutions to southern Connecticut's commercial sprawl problem, ranging from

municipality- and zone-specific measures to possible regional constructs to help foster better urban design throughout southern Connecticut.

Premise of Thesis

Whatever one's definition of sprawl is, the true nature of sprawl is inextricably tied to place. Depending upon what part of the United States one is discussing, the main issues of contention can change substantially. While every element that falls under the rubric of "sprawl" carries some importance in almost every area of the nation, these issues change priority based on a number of factors. These factors range from governmental structure to demographics, from historical patterns of development to basic infrastructure. The Connecticut towns of North Haven, Orange, Milford, and Norwalk illustrate that this connection to place and its role in urban sprawl solutions is no different here than anywhere else.

The uniqueness in sprawl that is based on place, however, is clearly evident in southern Connecticut in several ways. First, the areas of commercial urban sprawl in these four towns, upon which this thesis is based, are largely built up. While several potential development sites in these commercial corridors still remain untouched, and other parts of the towns are in danger of sprawl development, the damage to the landscape has largely already occurred. Second, southern Connecticut, while a relatively small area, is comprised of numerous, separate cities and towns that each have their own set of land use regulations and essentially act in isolation from surrounding municipalities when making decisions about economic growth and development. Third, a history of strong home rule dominates municipal government in Connecticut. The lack of any county government in

Connecticut has allowed each town to operate in its own sphere of influence, essentially free from the intrusion of other governmental agencies in matters of land use planning. Regional planning agencies make only general, non-binding recommendations for future growth, and mainly focus on regional transportation issues rather than economic development or affordable housing. As a result, towns often make land use decisions without due consideration of the regional impacts of their decisions.

Because of the unique and complex characteristics of its physical sprawl problem, as well as its governmental and political intricacies, southern Connecticut requires an equally unique set of measures to combat future sprawl. To apply a boilerplate set of urban design guidelines and zoning recommendations without any consideration of place would most likely be ineffectual.

A three-prong approach is necessary to address sprawl in these four towns. To simply compile a set of urban design and zoning guidelines that are designed to curb future sprawl development is not enough. Since many of the commercial corridors in these towns are already built out, significant steps must be taken to address the sprawl that already exists. In addition, measures to repair existing sprawl and prevent future sprawl developments must be conducted in a regional construct in order for them to succeed. Thus, a hierarchical approach of attack that begins at the individual zone level of specificity, expands to town-wide policy measures, and concludes with a regional framework for combating sprawl is a far more effective form of preventing future sprawl patterns and rehabilitating those that already exist.

The first prong of attack involves altering and adding to the existing standard zoning language for dimensional requirements and site planning principles and guidelines in these towns. Minimum setback lines that compel structures to locate undue distances from roads and streets, lot coverage percentages and height restrictions that ensure a lack of harmony between solids and voids and essentially mandate the construction of bland and monotonous commercial architecture, and strict Euclidean land use delineations that prevent combinations of complementary uses with varying times of usage are perhaps the most insidious forms of sprawl typology promotion in commercial areas. Improving these guidelines would enable substantial progress to be made in sprawl prevention.

The second prong of attack involves municipality-wide policy changes that create a logical connection between the abstract ideal of “stopping sprawl” and the specific zoning alterations listed above. These could include a wide range of incentives for retrofitting current sprawl areas into better designed mixed-use developments, such as height and lot coverage bonuses in exchange for meeting certain design criteria or for providing public open space. The policy changes would not simply state that denser mixed-use developments are encouraged, but rather indicate the reasoning behind the desire for these developments and how to tangibly achieve the goal of their creation.

Payment in lieu of parking programs, zone changes, mandating that all surface parking be to the rear of a structure, and extending the existing street grid into developments over a certain size are all tools that could conceivably be used on a town-wide basis to supplement dimensional and use requirements at the site level.

As potentially positive as these suggestions may sound from an anti-sprawl standpoint, it would be naïve to believe that these changes could simply be implemented en masse in a strong home rule area. Doing so presents a version of the classical Prisoner's Dilemma game theory problem to any town that tries, particular when that town is not a market in and of itself, but rather a small part of a much larger regional market. Standing alone in its noble push for better urban design, the town would simply watch as all of its potential development located in its neighboring communities, resulting in the political demise of whoever proposed doing it in the first place. It is clear that in a strong home rule area, individual towns and cities need assistance on a regional level to create effective sprawl prevention programs.

This line of reasoning leads to the third and final prong of attack against sprawl. A new regional construct for land use planning and urban design could be developed to supplement an individual town's ability to implement the first two prongs without fear of seeing their tax base dollars disappear. It is most advantageous to find a way to create this new construct without also adding an additional layer to the already overburdened political bureaucracy; doing so could potentially render such a construct ineffective, as it may be seen as just another government agency not to be taken seriously. Creating a body or organization that allows towns and cities to maintain their urban planning and economic self-determination while still having the strength and flexibility to effectively prevent additional sprawl development in the southern Connecticut region is the real challenge. The premise of this thesis is that a regional organization based upon shared urban design principles, and utilizing the concept of urban design compacts, could be a

powerful means of furthering the municipality- and zone-specific measures for preventing future sprawl development in southern Connecticut.

Chapter 2

THE CONNECTICUT SETTING

Many Towns, Small Area

Towns and cities in Connecticut are at a decided disadvantage when it comes to economic competition with other areas of the nation. This disadvantage has two separate yet interlocking (and equally potent) facets: 1) small population size of center cities in relation to their respective regions and the state as a whole; and, 2) a fractured political landscape comprised of a large number of towns and cities in a small geographical area, all of whom closely guard their home rule authority.

The state of Connecticut is only 5,018 square miles, or roughly 20% larger than San Diego County, CA.⁵ However, 169 cities and towns are incorporated in the state, creating a complex puzzle of small municipalities pursuing their own limited interests in a regional vacuum. In addition, none of Connecticut's cities is large enough to serve as the driving force behind state politics or policy development. The table below illustrates a crucial difference between Connecticut's three largest cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven) and the largest cities in other neighboring states.

⁵ David Blomstrom, "Geobop's U.S. Counties Ranked by Area (Geobopological Survey)", 1998, <http://www.geobop.com/world/NA/Counties/Area/> (28 April 2002).

Table 1: City Population as Percentage of State⁶

City	Population (2000)	Population of State (2000)	City Pop. As a % of State
Hartford	121,578	3,405,565	3.6%
New Haven	123,626	3,405,565	3.6%
Bridgeport	139,529	3,405,565	4.1%
New York City	8,008,278	18,976,457	42.2%
Boston	589,141	6,349,097	9.3%
Providence	173,618	1,048,319	16.6%

In order for a city in Connecticut to have the equivalent population power that Boston has in Massachusetts, it would need to have almost 317,000 residents. Similarly, the city would need over 565,000 residents to match Providence's influence in Rhode Island, and an astounding 1,437,000 people to equal New York City's strength in the state of New York.

Connecticut's division into many separate cities and towns traces its roots to the 1600s. Three factors catalyzed the relatively small number of English colonies within the future state's borders into many individual municipalities: religion, transportation, and colonial administration. As the first two factors are interconnected, they shall be examined together.

Early Colonial law made church attendance mandatory, and since few roads existed and travel was difficult, colonists initially built their homes near the town center. The farmland owned by these early colonists was also close to the town center, occupying a

⁶ Source: 2000 United States Census

large percentage of the land in use; as a result, there was only a very limited supply of subdividable land close to the town center. Once the town population reached a certain point, newcomers or the children of the early colonists were forced to locate in somewhat more distant areas, in a manner that could be reasonably described as extremely low-level intensity sprawl. The issue of poor transportation necessitated that homes be near the owners' farmland, so as colonists pushed farther out for farmland, their houses followed. Once a large enough number of colonists had located far enough away, poor transportation made church attendance extremely difficult. This fact, coupled with the frequent intra-denominational rifts that often occurred, compelled the more far-flung residents to separate off from the original town and form their own communities, usually as a new "religious society". By the end of the Revolutionary War, a large number of these tiny individual jurisdictions existed, and many were soon incorporated as towns in the new United States of America.

Colonial administration also played a significant part in creating Connecticut's myriad of towns and cities that exist today. Much of New England was colonized by Puritan settlers, who emphasized small, compact towns for religious and philosophical reasons. This pattern of development essentially remained in effect during the Cromwellian rule over Great Britain. With the restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II in 1660, however, colonial administration shifted to a more traditional Anglo-Saxon philosophy on land development. This philosophy promoted the spread of housing, churches and other social institutions to keep pace with the outward expansion of farmland, where the overwhelming majority of the population derived its livelihood. In Connecticut, the

Puritan ideal of town development essentially died with the absorption of the Puritan New Haven Colony into the more Anglo-Saxon-oriented Connecticut Colony in 1660, corresponding with the restoration of the monarchy.

The “town” had quickly become the dominant form of European colonization in New England, much as the county would become in the midwest and western parts of the United States years later. The town had always outpaced counties in prestige in New England, and the distance between the two only grew as time progressed. After several hundred years of relative town autonomy, the concept of regional control over local land use decisions is a foreign, if not abhorrent, concept to many residents and politicians alike. While other areas of the country that had developed under the county system of government look with interest to regional government formats, Connecticut continues to hold dearly to its long history of town-centered ideals.

Retaining this somewhat arcane approach to government in an increasingly region-based world, Connecticut places itself at a distinct disadvantage to other parts of the nation. The “new regionalism” school of thought that developed beginning in the early 1990s has argued convincingly that the “region” is now the basic component of an increasingly globalized economy; since regions, composed of more people and assets than any one municipality, have a greater capacity to attract business and industry than individual governmental units, the way a region promotes itself ultimately determines the fate of all the towns within that region.⁷

⁷ Manuel Pastor, Jr., et al., Regions That Work: How Cities and Suburbs Can Grow Together (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4.

Many large and geographically expansive cities are better able to market themselves to the economic world than Connecticut because they offer a wide array of assets under one municipality, as opposed to a wide array of assets under the control of many towns and cities. Coordination of these assets is therefore much easier in these “metroplexes”, since only one autonomous government is involved. However, other regions of the country that do have numerous municipalities, such as the greater Boston area, have also been able to position themselves positively in the globalizing economy. In these cases, however, the region often has a powerful and vibrant central city that serves as a market draw and an economic force in and of itself. Unfortunately, Connecticut has neither powerful supraregional governments nor dominant central cities, and thus the state’s towns and cities are placed in the unenviable position of having to court whatever development they can attract in order to fill property tax coffers, and yet never having enough regional leverage to create a economic development system that guides smart and responsible growth where it is needed most.

Regional Governance

All four of the towns examined in this thesis are members of a regional planning organization; Norwalk belongs to the South Western Regional Planning Agency, and North Haven, Orange and Milford belong to the South Central Regional Council of Governments. In addition, Norwalk, as a part of Fairfield County, falls within the boundaries of the Regional Plan Association based in New York City, which conducts long-term master planning for the Tri-State area.

Under Connecticut General Statute Section 16a-4a, the state's Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has the charge of drawing up boundaries for "planning regions" in Connecticut, creating fifteen of these regions for the entire state.⁸ The municipalities in each of these regions in turn voluntarily create one of three statutorily authorized regional planning organizations by way of a local ordinance: a Regional Planning Agency, a Regional Council of Elected Officials, or a Regional Council of Governments.⁹ When a planning region creates one of these organizations, the organization becomes eligible for a grant-in-aid from the state of Connecticut to support its activities. Regional planning agencies have been designated \$640,000 for the 2002 fiscal year, and each of the fifteen regional organizations receives a base grant of \$33,920.¹⁰ The remaining \$131,200 of the designated grant money is divided up between the fifteen organizations using a complex distribution formula. Each organization also receives dues from the participating municipalities, and the amount of dues raised by each determines the allotment of the remaining grant funds: "Each agency that raises local dues in excess of \$33,920, shares the remainder of the grant money in the same proportion that its excess dues relates to the total of all excess dues raised by all 15 agencies."¹¹

Each regional planning organization performs a variety of planning functions. They are responsible for creating a regional plan of development, providing technical assistance to

⁸ State of Connecticut, "Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut," Regional Planning Organizations (RPO), 27 March 2002, <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/RPOs/rpo.htm> (28 April 2002).

⁹ State of Connecticut, "Regional Planning Organizations in Connecticut," Regional Planning Organizations (RPO), 18 December 2001, <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/rpo.htm> (28 April 2002).

¹⁰ State of Connecticut, "Regional Planning Grant-in-Aid," Regional Planning Grant-in-Aid, 4 March 2002, <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/grants/SGIA.HTM> (28 April 2002).

¹¹ <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/grants/SGIA.HTM>.

municipalities when requested, and making development recommendations.¹² Perhaps most importantly, the regional planning organizations are the designated authorities for authorizing regional Transportation Improvement Projects and distributing earmarked funding for these projects; thus every major transportation project in each region must pass through the RPO.¹³ Regional planning organizations also review the subdivision of land that includes land in two or more towns or land on the border of two or more towns¹⁴; review zone changes in a town on an area that is within 500 feet of another town¹⁵; review municipal development projects¹⁶; and various other minor activities. Although their names are different, their functions (as they pertain to regional planning) are essentially the same. These organizations, along with their interactions with their representative municipalities, work closely with the state government, particularly the Intergovernmental Policy Division (IPD) of the Office of Policy and Management. This wing of OPM has the responsibility of coordinating “regional and state planning activities”, drawing the planning region boundaries, and providing technical and financial assistance to the regional planning organizations.¹⁷

While the various regional planning organizations in Connecticut have an important role in the overall political landscape, they have very limited ability to control individual

¹² State of Connecticut, General Statutes of Connecticut, 1 January 2001, Chp. 127, Sec. 8-35a-c, <http://www.cga.state.ct.us/2001/pub/Chap127.htm> (28 April 2002).

¹³ Joseph Straw, “Is It Time Suburbs Did More to Share the Wealth?,” New Haven Register, 17 February 2002, sec. A.

¹⁴ State of Connecticut, General Statutes of Connecticut, 1 January 2001, Chp. 126, sec. 8-26b, <http://www.cga.state.ct.us/2001/pub/Chap126.htm#sec8-26b.htm> (28 April 2002).

¹⁵ State of Connecticut, General Statutes of Connecticut, 1 January 2001, Chp. 124, sec. 8-3b, <http://www.cga.state.ct.us/2001/pub/Chap124.htm#sec8-3b.htm> (28 April 2002).

¹⁶ State of Connecticut, General Statutes of Connecticut, 1 January 2001, Chp. 588l, sec. 32-224, <http://www.cga.state.ct.us/2001/pub/Chap588l.htm#sec32-224.htm> (28 April 2002).

¹⁷ State of Connecticut, “Regional Planning Coordination,” Regional Planning Coordination, 4 March 2002, <http://www.opm.state.ct.us/igp/services/rpc.HTM> (28 April 2002).

municipalities' land use and zoning decisions. The general plan of development adopted by each regional organization is usually a rather vague document with an attractive land use map attached. Although a tremendous amount of time is spent on its creation and many different constituencies and parties are consulted and asked for input, the resulting product has little bearing on the development patterns of each town. The regional organization is often simply another advocate for a particular side of a zoning battle, with little additional weight given to its opinion. Only when a dominant regional issue arises, such as the construction of a new interstate highway bridge or a large regional mall, do the regional organizations carry some weight. However, the incremental land use changes that create sprawl in Connecticut towns are very much isolated from any regional control wielded by these organizations.

It is logical to argue that the state statute that enabled these regional planning organizations never meant to create a powerful agency capable of overseeing and controlling local land use decisions. Indeed, this would seem to be the obvious conclusion given Connecticut's long history of strong home rule and municipal independence. Thus, as proponents of the county form of government quickly found out in the 1800s, giving additional strength to regional planning organizations requires taking power away from individual municipalities, a politically unattainable move. Therefore, although regional planning organizations have a place in Connecticut, that place is limited by these outside governmental constraints. A new form of regional cooperation and decision-making must be found that circumvents the traditional town vs. region

conflict while maintaining the emotional element of home rule and municipal self-determination.

The Absence of County Government

One of the hindrances to creating and implementing planning solutions to urban sprawl in Connecticut has been the absence of strong regional governing bodies and institutions. Like most of the New England states, Connecticut has relatively little political or governmental use for its counties. In 1960, county government was officially abolished by the Connecticut state legislature, the first state to ever do so.¹⁸ Although this move eliminated a few jobs, assimilated many others into the state bureaucracy, and rearranged the administration of the state court system, it had very little impact on the political landscape of Connecticut and even less impact on the lives of average citizens.

The reason that county government dissolved in Connecticut without much fanfare traces its roots back to the early colonial years. Counties in Connecticut and the rest of New England generally arose as judicial districts, as did most counties around the nation, early in the region's history.¹⁹ Connecticut's first four counties (Hartford, New Haven, New London, and Fairfield) were laid out in 1666, and an additional four counties (Windham, Litchfield, Middlesex, and Tolland) were created between 1726 and 1785, generally concurrent with the time period of greatest settlement of the state.²⁰ However, the "town" had quickly gained preeminence as the basic unit of government throughout the state

¹⁸ Rosaline Levenson, County Government in Connecticut – Its History and Demise (Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, 1966), 1.

¹⁹ Levenson, 16.

²⁰ Levenson, 67.

during the colonial period, essentially blocking the expansion of county power and function. A foreboding example of the primacy of the town over other governing bodies can be found in the Fundamental Orders of 1639, which established a colony-wide government over the three towns in the Connecticut Colony at the time (Hartford, Wethersfield, and Windsor). However, in doing so, the Orders left the existing individual powers of the three towns untouched, allowing them to continue to run their own internal affairs.²¹ Thus, the idea of the “town” as the key element of government was institutionalized only two years after the settlement of Connecticut.

Several causes contributed to the result that the town outpaced the county for governmental supremacy. First, although Connecticut was located along the Atlantic seaboard, many of its towns were relatively isolated and free from British intrusion, enabling them (and, in a way, forcing them) to exercise a unique form of colonial self-governance.²² Second, under a precedent set by the Fundamental Orders of 1639, the General Court (the governing body of the colony), and eventually the lower house of Connecticut’s legislature, had its representation apportioned by town, not by population; thus, being an independent town was vital for having any local impact on state affairs.²³ Finally, almost immediately upon the settlement of Connecticut, the state’s towns began to wield enormous power over the citizenry, including making decisions regarding who received what farmland, where a person’s house could be constructed, and to whom one could sell his property.²⁴ Perhaps due to the fact that many, if not all, Connecticut towns

²¹ Levenson, 65.

²² Levenson, 68.

²³ Levenson, 68.

²⁴ Levenson, 67.

began their lives essentially as religious societies, the ability of towns to strongly regulate the lives of their residents became ingrained in the psychology of the people. By the end of the Revolutionary War, towns in Connecticut had been in charge of their own destiny for almost one hundred fifty years. They had evolved socially from simply being a unit of government to occupying “an emotional place in the hearts and minds” of Connecticut residents.²⁵ County government was destined to have a protracted battle against these emotionally sacred jurisdictions if it was to make any gains in power, function, or political status.

County governments were initially given control over a new colonial judicial system (a mid-level set of courts that fell between town courts and the General Court) and the county jails. However, Connecticut’s county system had several built-in flaws that prevented the counties from ever feasibly expanding much beyond these functions. First, from the very beginning, counties lacked the power to appropriate funds or create laws, a fact that stunted their ability to be self-sufficient governmental entities. Second, by the time Connecticut’s counties were established, the state’s towns had already been incorporated, unlike counties in other states that were created to help serve outlying unincorporated areas. Increasing the power and the role of counties would therefore have meant taking powers and functions away from the towns, a task that is difficult to complete against an established governmental institution. Finally, the counties had been created by state statute, not the state constitution, making them unstable and their functions and powers easily refined by simple legislative action. While at first glance

²⁵ Levenson, 20.

this fact could have provided opportunities for county power expansion, it actually resulted in the counties being granted new functions at the same time that old ones were taken; one can imagine that many citizens were probably never quite sure what the county was supposed to do besides run the courts and jails.²⁶

By the 1700s, the counties had limited means of raising funds, including fees from the issuance of liquor licenses, a county tax that was levied against each town in a county, and various fines and penalties. The counties were required to pay for the cost of their individual county governments; however, if they ran a deficit, the Connecticut Colony would pay the balance. Each county also had a marshal, or sheriff, who was at first appointed by the county court and later by the governor and the General Assembly. The ebb and flow of the counties' powers and functions continued, first with the creation of probate courts in the late seventeenth century that reduced the power of the county courts, and then with the creation of city courts in 1784 that had jurisdiction over all cases that took place in incorporated cities within a county. In addition, the counties began to lose their meager financial independence when in 1841, the General Assembly revoked their levying responsibility and forced the counties to submit their annual budgets for legislative approval. Finally, in 1855, the county courts were abolished and replaced with the state superior courts, the first serious blow to the original function of county government.²⁷

²⁶ Levenson, 69-73.

²⁷ Levenson, 74-76.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the early 1900s, however, the counties saw new powers vested in them that would increase the social impact of county government. In 1883, counties were charged with operating homes for neglected children. In 1919, administration of the state's Widows' Aid program was given to the county commissioners, as was funding agricultural education in 1914; counties also oversaw the construction of bridges over waterways that separated towns. By the 1920s, Connecticut counties had reached the pinnacle of their political and social importance, a place where they would not remain for long.²⁸

Several factors led to the meteoric decline of county government over the next four decades. With the enactment of Prohibition in 1919, the counties lost their revenue-generating activity of granting liquor licenses; when Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the state set up the Liquor Control Commission to oversee this function. An increasing state bureaucracy also began to intrude upon formerly county government functions, and federal funds for welfare, provided to the state, replaced the Widows' Aid program. Finally, tighter administrative control was implemented over the counties (which had long been the home of egregious patronage practices), including independent auditing of financial records rather than by an elected auditor and mandating that county budget hearings be open to the public.²⁹

While these constrictive changes occurred throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the death blow for county government didn't happen until 1953, when serious illegal activity on the

²⁸ Levenson, 78-80.

²⁹ Levenson, 80-82.

part of prison staff was uncovered and county prison conditions had reached such a deplorable state that a public outcry went up for reform.³⁰ County homes for neglected children were the scenes of several high profile crimes and child abuse, prompting further calls for change.³¹ The general public had become enraged by the widespread problems within the county system and a movement began to abolish the entire county system altogether. When this finally took place in 1960, only the position of county sheriff avoided eradication, as the position had been written into the state constitution in 1818; therefore, if the legislature wanted to eliminate the sheriffs, a constitutional amendment would have been necessary.³² Instead of going through this lengthy process, the sheriffs were allowed to remain as the law enforcement officials of the municipal and superior courts. However, in 2000, the office of county sheriffs was replaced by a new position, state marshal, after a state-wide referendum on the matter. The public had been outraged by several incidents of prisoner suicide and sexual assault in jail cells and prisoner transfer vehicles that were guarded by deputy county sheriffs. The final piece of Connecticut's county government has now been swept away, with former county functions being almost exclusively absorbed by the state.

³⁰ Levenson, 92.

³¹ Levenson, 105.

³² Levenson, 125.

Chapter 3

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SUBJECT TOWNS

North Haven



Washington Avenue/Broadway intersection



The wide expanse that is the Washington Avenue corridor

With the settling of the New Haven Colony in April of 1638, Europeans established permanent residence in south central Connecticut for the first time. The area of land that is now the town of North Haven was contained within the original boundary of the New Haven Colony land purchase that was negotiated with the local Native American sachem, Montowese, in 1635.³³ The present day North Haven area initially remained unsettled as the fledgling European population huddled close to New Haven Harbor with only the occasional venture into the surrounding hinterland for hunting or forge construction. With the restoration of Charles II and the British monarchy in 1660, however, colonial administration in America changed significantly and led to the absorption of the New Haven Colony (essentially set up as a Puritan utopian theocracy) by the more mainstream Connecticut Colony based in Hartford in 1665.³⁴ As a result, the development of areas

³³ Lucy McTeer Brusic, Amidst Cultivated and Pleasant Fields – a Bicentennial History of North Haven, Connecticut, (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1986), 9.

³⁴ Brusic, 18.

outside the early colonial centers was encouraged so that housing and social and commercial institutions (translation: churches) could be located closer to the farms where most of the population derived its livelihood.³⁵ Thus, the patterns of sprawl in the greater New Haven area can essentially be traced back to a seemingly inconsequential alteration in the ideology of town design.

North Haven's development from roughly 1680 to the Revolutionary War proceeded at a slow pace, with farming and milling serving as the primary economic activities. The town was officially recognized as a separate parish in 1716 with its own meeting house, and although the population remained very small, it began to cluster around a town green to form a distinct village center.³⁶ Even after incorporation as a town in the United States in 1786, North Haven remained a poor hamlet, as noted by one traveling minister: "There is a meeting house and a Church of England. The houses are few and have the genuine marks of poverty – very small and out of repair, and the barns in a shattered state."³⁷ By 1790, the federal census indicated that North Haven only had 1,236 people, and local records indicate approximately 350 "chimneys" dotting the town landscape.³⁸ During the 1790s, small improvements in North Haven became evident as limited shipbuilding, brick-making, and import/export businesses began to sprout up and diversify the local economy.

³⁵ Brusic, 17.

³⁶ Brusic, 27; Sheldon B. Thorpe, North Haven Annals, (New Haven, CT: Lee & Adkins Co. Press, 1892), 22.

³⁷ Brusic, 73.

³⁸ Brusic, 73, 76.



Burial ground on North Haven's historic town green.

The turn of the nineteenth century saw the construction of several major roads and turnpikes through North Haven, which had the double-edged effect of making North Haven more accessible and easier to exit; the latter was more the case, as North Haven's population dropped to 1,157 by 1800 and remained below 1,300 until 1840.³⁹ The town's slow economy continued to plod along with little change, and while the War of 1812 helped fill the town taverns with traveling merchants bringing provisions to the northern battlefields, time must have seemed to stand still for the early decades of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Emigration from North Haven was a result of limited opportunities in town; the typically difficult New England soil had already been farmed beyond its capacity, and the westward expansion of the United States offered the chance for greater wealth and adventure.⁴¹ Emigration to northwestern Connecticut and the lack of additional large tracts of land available for settlement also contributed to North Haven's declining

³⁹ Brusic, 85.

⁴⁰ Brusic, 88.

⁴¹ Brusic, 100.

population base.⁴² Even the laying of railroad tracks during the late 1830s through North Haven to connect New Haven and Hartford initially had little impact on the town, other than to arouse the curiosity of its residents.⁴³

The 1840s saw the first substantial industrial development in North Haven: brick-making. While brick-making had been a side industry in North Haven since the 1700s, it had never developed to the point of being considered a major manufacturing enterprise. Around 1820, the North Haven brick-making industry produced only 500,000 bricks per year; by 1848, this number was up to 4.6 million bricks per year.⁴⁴ This significant increase in manufacturing also brought a small wave of immigrants, primarily Irish, to the brickyards of North Haven. By 1860, the town's population had reached 1,499 and businesses were beginning to multiply in number around the center of town, perhaps as a result of the increasing importance of the railroad to the regional economy.⁴⁵ Despite the evolutionary processes of immigration and industrialization, North Haven remained very much unchanged between 1800 and 1860, leading one prominent resident to lament, "The poor half-way-everything people of this town are so much exhausted that they cannot command sufficient energy to produce an excitement."⁴⁶

The Civil War and the patterns of immigration, industrialization and urbanization that drastically shaped the nation's cities in the late nineteenth century, although having a

⁴² Sheldon B. Thorpe, "Historical Address by Sheldon B. Thorpe Delivered in the Congregational Church, North Haven, Connecticut, June, 1901," in North Haven in the Nineteenth Century, ed. Sheldon B. Thorpe (North Haven, CT: Twentieth Century Committee, 1901), 158.

⁴³ Brusic, 109.

⁴⁴ Brusic, 110.

⁴⁵ Brusic, 117.

⁴⁶ Brusic, 114.

dramatic effect on neighboring New Haven, barely had an impact on North Haven. While industry continued to develop at a slow pace, many civic improvements were constructed such as new bridges, better roads, sidewalks, and lights situated around the town green. By the early 1900s, the pace of the town's development began to quicken as three large commercial brick manufacturers had arisen in addition to the smaller independent brick makers.⁴⁷ These new brick making enterprises aggressively hired recent immigrants who landed in New York and brought them to the North Haven brickyards, ushering in a new wave of immigration to the town.⁴⁸ In 1900, the population of North Haven, while still under 2,500, was 44% foreign-born or first-generation American.⁴⁹ The advent of an electric car line connecting North Haven with New Haven in 1895 and more frequent train stops at the North Haven station provided the transportation impetus for more intensive development.⁵⁰

In the years following World War I, the automobile began to have its first impact on North Haven. The number of cars registered in North Haven in 1920 was 238, but by 1930 that number had risen to 963, or roughly one car per household.⁵¹ News reporting in North Haven had long been focused primarily on religion, such as summarizing the latest sermon given at the Congregational Church, but by the late 1920s, accounts of local auto accidents took up just as much column space as church news.⁵² At the intersection of Broadway and Washington Avenue, right at the North Haven Green, traffic volume

⁴⁷ Brusic, 167.

⁴⁸ Brusic, 171.

⁴⁹ Brusic, 172.

⁵⁰ Brusic, 181.

⁵¹ Brusic, 205.

⁵² Brusic, 205.

was approximately 1,100 cars per hour in the 1920s according to one study, roughly the same volume at the same intersection in 1986 (the reason for such a high volume of traffic for a town of only 2,500 was probably that North Haven lay along the most direct route connecting New Haven with Hartford, as well as the industrial towns of Wallingford, Meriden, and New Britain).⁵³ The increase in cars also led to significant expenditures for new bridges and road improvements in town.

The automobile would forever alter the future development of North Haven, as the town's population almost doubled in the 1920s, reaching 3,730 in 1930.⁵⁴ Housing developments began to spring up along the southern and western edges of town as farms were consolidated, purchased and developed by wealthy individuals, including A. C. Gilbert, the inventor of the Erector set.⁵⁵ In addition, the rail yards in North Haven that helped support the large rail industry of New Haven expanded in the early 1920s, bringing more jobs and the town's first significant African-American population.

The Great Depression was not felt as acutely in North Haven as it was in larger and more industrial towns. While there were many unemployed workers in the town during the 1930s, the brick manufacturers made it through the Depression relatively unscathed (compared to other industries) and provided steady work for many town residents. North Haven even continued to grow during the Depression, prompting the adoption of a town

⁵³ Brusic, 206.

⁵⁴ Brusic, 225.

⁵⁵ Brusic, 208.

zoning ordinance in 1938.⁵⁶ By 1940, North Haven had grown to 5,326 people, despite the economic hardships of the time period.⁵⁷

The influx of residents between 1920 and 1940 was significant not only in raw numbers, but also in its composition. Many of the town's newest residents had jobs in New Haven and were commuting from North Haven to work everyday; North Haven was no longer an outlying rural farming town, but had become a first-ring suburb/bedroom community.⁵⁸ Although World War II slowed the town's growth, the post war years saw phenomenal changes in North Haven. For example, there were 1,275 houses in North Haven in 1940, but by 1950 there were 2,868 houses, an increase of 125%.⁵⁹ A town planning report published in 1946 showed North Haven to be the fastest growing town in the New Haven region, a finding which served as the impetus for creating a town planning commission.⁶⁰

The North Haven planning commission's first concern was the enormous traffic problem the town faced, particularly of the heavy truck variety. After analyzing the situation, the commission recommended that the State of Connecticut construct an express highway right through the center of town, where the traffic problem was most acute. This highway, which would eventually become Interstate 91, was proposed in 1951 and its course was slated to run along the western edge of town. However, during the early

⁵⁶ Brusic, 236.

⁵⁷ Brusic, 237.

⁵⁸ Brusic, 241.

⁵⁹ Brusic, 242.

⁶⁰ Brusic, 242.

1950s the state consulted with the planning commission and eventually moved the path of the new highway closer to the center of North Haven. I-91 would open in the early 1970s and would become another catalyst for change and development in North Haven.⁶¹

One historian notes that, “For the most part, the early 1950s were so prosperous by comparison with the depression and World War II years that people were not inclined to resist the growth or to question the changes that were taking place in North Haven.”⁶²

The town’s population in 1950 of 9,444 exploded to 15,935 in 1960, and during the same period the value of commercial and manufacturing property increased from \$1.5 million to \$16.5 million.⁶³ The labor force of North Haven was only 6,234 (indicative of the fact that many women had still not entered the workforce), but of this total, 2,121 were employed in manufacturing.⁶⁴ The town was rapidly transforming from a small town to a growing, blue-collar suburb, and remained overwhelmingly white with only 189 African-American residents in 1960 and a non-existent Hispanic population.⁶⁵

The town continued to grow explosively during the 1960s as the mass exodus from New Haven gained momentum. By 1970, North Haven’s population reached 22,194, an

⁶¹ Brusic, 243.

⁶² Brusic, 255.

⁶³ Brusic, 255.

⁶⁴ U. S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960 – Census Tracts – New Haven, CT SMSA (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), Table P-3.

⁶⁵ U. S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960 – Census Tracts – New Haven, CT SMSA, Table P-2.

increase of over 39% in only ten years.⁶⁶ The number of housing units in town had gone from 4,618 in 1960 to 6,331 in 1970, and the labor force jumped to 9,357.⁶⁷ Most notably, retail employment of town residents had risen from 794 in 1960 to 1,403 in 1970.⁶⁸ Commercial growth blossomed along several spines running through the town, such as State Street, Washington Avenue, Quinnipiac Avenue and Whitney Avenue, and the industrial base of the region shifted from New Haven into North Haven with the Pratt & Whitney plant along the North Haven/Wallingford town line and the consolidation of a large number of manufacturing industries along Sackett Point Road.

Population growth tapered off in North Haven during the 1970s, with the town actually losing approximately 100 people by the 1980 census. However, commercial growth continued almost unabated as the town sought to diversify its tax base with non-residential developments. Small office buildings began to dot the landscape, and national retail began to show interest in North Haven. In 1977, the town had 202 retail establishments; by 1982, that number had jumped to 240, retail sales had gone from \$73,609,000 to \$123,969,000, and retail employment rose from 1,772 to 2,039.⁶⁹ The economic boom of the 1980s saw the retail development of Universal Drive, a new industrial and office complex that housed the US Surgical Company, and continued

⁶⁶ U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), Table 16.

⁶⁷ U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 16; U. S. Census of Housing, 1970: Housing Characteristics for States, Cities and Counties: Connecticut (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), Table 1.

⁶⁸ U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 106.

⁶⁹ U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1977: Vol. II, Geographic Area Statistics, Part I, U. S. Summary: Connecticut, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1980), Table 7; U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1982: Geographical Area Series: Connecticut (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1984), Table 8.

development of strip commercial along Washington Avenue. While the population once again remained fairly stagnant, new subdivisions of split-level and colonial homes were constructed in the northern and eastern ends of town to satiate the demand for new housing in the region.

By 1990, North Haven's population was 22,247, indicating virtually no growth in the town's population over the previous twenty years.⁷⁰ However, retail sales in town had reached \$342,728,000 by 1992, and retail employment was at a new high of 2,531.⁷¹

Modest economic and population growth characterized North Haven during the decade of the 1990s, and by the turn of the millennium, the town had exceeded 23,000 in population. More interestingly, however, the amount of housing in North Haven has continued to grow at a rate that far exceeds the rate of population growth. In 1970, the town had 22,194 people and 6,331 housing units; by 2000, North Haven had a population of only 23,035, but 8,985 housing units.⁷² The largest employers in North Haven currently are the United States Surgical Corporation, Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield health insurance, and Pratt & Whitney.⁷³ The town is also home to numerous national retailers and a substantial manufacturing base.

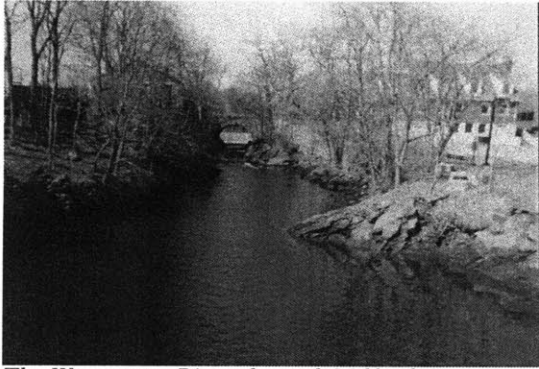
⁷⁰ GCT-Pa. Age, Sex and Group Quarters: 1990, Census Summary Tape File 1 (STF 1) 100-percent data, North Haven, CT, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet> (15 May 2002).

⁷¹ U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1992: Geographical Area Series: Connecticut (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1994), Table 4.

⁷² U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 16; U. S. Census of Housing, 1970: Housing Characteristics for States, Cities and Counties: Connecticut, Table 1; DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-percent data, North Haven, CT, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet> (15 May 2002).

⁷³ Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, Town Profile – North Haven, November 2001, <http://www.state.ct.us/ecd/research/townprof00/towns/northhaven.pdf> (15 May 2002)

Milford



The Wepawaug River through Milford Center



Historic architecture surrounds the Milford Green

Milford, the sixth-oldest town in Connecticut, began as an offshoot of the existing New Haven Colony.⁷⁴ In 1639, English settlers purchased a large tract of land from local Native-Americans that comprised the present-day towns of Milford, Orange, West Haven and part of Woodbridge; this land was settled the same year and was named Milford Colony, directly adjacent to the west of the year-old town of New Haven.⁷⁵ A grist mill, a bridge over the Wepawaug River that passed through the center of town, and a town meeting-house were quickly constructed as the small farming community began to grow.⁷⁶ Initially a separate colony, Milford was an English “frontier” town near Dutch holdings in New York, and town residents soon became leery of possible incursions from the west.⁷⁷ The Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut and New Haven colonies had all formed a mutual protection confederation where if one colony was invaded by Native-Americans or the Dutch, all the colonies would come to that colony’s defense.⁷⁸ Milford,

⁷⁴ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939 (Bridgeport, CT: Braunworth & Co., 1939), v.

⁷⁵ Names ‘N Places (Orange, CT: 1963), 48.

⁷⁶ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 10-14.

⁷⁷ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 16.

⁷⁸ Florence H. Wright, ed., Milford, Connecticut 325th Anniversary – 1639-1964, (Orange, CT: Wilson H. Lee, 1964), 11.

anxious to be a part of this confederation, agreed to consolidate with New Haven Colony in 1643, thus ending its brief and uneventful life as a separate colonial entity.⁷⁹

Initially, Milford's residents were almost entirely farmers, but over the course of a few decades, several artisans moved into town and a thriving fur trade developed with both Native-Americans and larger towns such as Boston.⁸⁰ By 1700, Milford had developed a significant shipbuilding industry, as well as the traditional colonial vocations such as tanning, weaving, blacksmithing and coopering.⁸¹ The population had reached about 800 by the turn of the eighteenth century, and the creation of adequate schools soon became a very pressing issue for the town.⁸² The continued population growth of Milford, reaching 1,633 in 1756⁸³, was coupled with additional land purchases by the town that extended the area of Milford north into the present-day towns of Woodbridge and Bethany.⁸⁴

Milford provided both men and supplies for the Revolutionary War, but perhaps the most illustrative example of the town's spirit was a mysterious incident on New Year's Day, 1777. A British ship under flag of truce suddenly appeared in Milford Harbor, dropped anchor shortly, and quickly departed from the area; later that evening, a resident near the shore found his front yard filled with two hundred cold and sick men. Apparently, the men were American prisoners-of-war whom the British had quickly released when they realized that most of the men had smallpox. Dumped unceremoniously at Milford, the

⁷⁹ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 17.

⁸⁰ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 19.

⁸¹ Wright, 11; History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 41.

⁸² History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 44, 49.

⁸³ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 44.

⁸⁴ Wright, 11.

men were taken in and treated by the town residents, who converted the town hall into a makeshift hospital. One man, Captain Stephen Stowe, volunteered to take care of the men in the hospital; in a frighteningly stoic fashion, he made his will, said goodbye to his family, and went to work treating the afflicted soldiers. Within a month, he had lost his own life to smallpox, but he had saved countless others by his heroism.⁸⁵

In 1784, the present-day towns of Bethany and Woodbridge separated from Milford, and this coupled with the 1822 secession of the town of Orange significantly contracted the territory of Milford.⁸⁶ While the post-Revolution years saw a brief shipbuilding boom for Milford, the embargoes associated with the War of 1812 essentially destroyed this small industry; at the same time, Milford's economy began to slowly shift from agriculture to manufacturing.⁸⁷ By the 1830s, Milford was producing horse-drawn carriages, shoes and hats, while still clinging to small local industries such as oystering and fishing.⁸⁸

However, like many other Connecticut towns, Milford's population declined throughout the early nineteenth century as a number of residents moved west in search of better farmland, dropping from 2,417 in 1800 to 2,256 in 1830, and finally leveling off at 2,465 in 1850.⁸⁹

Milford's contribution to the Civil War was primarily in the form of supplies for the Union army, although over 200 local men did serve in the armed forces.⁹⁰ The town,

⁸⁵ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 60-63.

⁸⁶ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 78.

⁸⁷ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 70-72.

⁸⁸ Wright, 47.

⁸⁹ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 74.

⁹⁰ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 96.

while diversifying its economy somewhat, changed little physically during the mid-1800s but experienced moderate population growth; by 1870, 3,405 people called Milford home.⁹¹ The oyster industry, as well as a nascent seed-growing industry, thrived in the post-Civil War era, but Milford's population actually declined slightly to 3,347 in 1880.⁹² Perhaps the most important development in the late nineteenth century was the construction of an electric trolley line through the southern part of town which made the shoreline much more accessible.⁹³ As a result, the summer resort business along Milford's beachfront boomed, an industry that still continues to the present day. The incredible rise in property values caused a substantial increase in the town's grand list, enabling governmental functions to expand.⁹⁴

The continued expansion of the railroad coupled with the rapid industrialization of Milford's economy, as well as that of the larger nearby cities of Bridgeport and New Haven, spurred the town's growth into the twentieth century.⁹⁵ During the World War I period, numerous factories making metal goods, tools, submarine parts, and gas masks added another dimension to Milford's economy.⁹⁶ The town's growing population required more schools and additional public services, needs that were fortunately able to be met because of a grand list that was increasing at a rate of 8-10% per year.⁹⁷ The explosive population and commercial growth in Milford, combined with ever increasing beach traffic caused by vacationers, created heavy congestion along both Route 1 and the

⁹¹ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 96.

⁹² History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 109.

⁹³ Wright, 49.

⁹⁴ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 113.

⁹⁵ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 120.

⁹⁶ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 132.

⁹⁷ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 134, 135.

much smaller local roads alike; one traffic count for a Route 1 bridge leading out of town was 42,000 cars, going in only one direction, over a six hour period.⁹⁸ Throughout the late 1910s and 1920s, roads were widened and new bridges were constructed to handle the increased traffic. In the face of this tremendous growth, Milford enacted a series of “Building Zone Regulations” in 1930 designed to “prevent future congestion and the erection of unsightly buildings, and to regulate the growth of the town.”⁹⁹

The Great Depression seems to have had a limited impact on Milford, as it was still a small town of 12,660 in 1930. Still, a significant WPA program existed during the 1930s, leading to extensive repairs to local streets, drains, sewers and town buildings, as well as a sizable educational program.¹⁰⁰ During the late 1930s, the construction of the Wilbur Cross Parkway through Milford began, ultimately connecting the town to New York and New Haven and allowing quicker access to both.¹⁰¹ World War II, although a difficult time for Milford residents, spurred the continuing growth of the town. U.S. Electric Motors constructed a large factory in Milford, employing many residents, and considerable new housing was built to house the many factory workers streaming into the war industries of Bridgeport and New Haven.¹⁰²

After weathering the social and economic effects of the Second World War, Milford found itself in the enviable position of being a very attractive bedroom community. The

⁹⁸ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 140.

⁹⁹ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 147.

¹⁰⁰ History of Milford Connecticut – 1639-1939, 149-153.

¹⁰¹ William Bloxsom, et al., Milford, Connecticut 1939-1989 – a Fifty-Year Diary, (Milford, CT: Hometown Publications, 1989), 1.

¹⁰² Bloxsom, et al., 4, 10.

next twenty years saw a nearly uninterrupted building and growth boom, particularly in the residential and commercial elements of town.¹⁰³ A post-war population of 24,528 in 1946 quickly grew to 26,870 in 1950, and then ballooned to 41,662 in 1960.¹⁰⁴ By 1948,



Development along Milford's harbor

parking was a major problem in downtown Milford, and residents were complaining about rampant examples of spot zoning, including the location of a supermarket in an exclusively residential zone; in response to these complaints, Milford's town planners created a policy document stating that spot zoning was both appropriate and desirable in a growing community!¹⁰⁵ By as early as 1949, many residents believed that Milford was losing its "small-town charm", and a comprehensive plan for town growth by the Planning and Zoning Commission was proposed.¹⁰⁶

During the 1950s, Milford became home to two major national corporations, Bic Pen and

¹⁰³ Bloxsom, et al., 31.

¹⁰⁴ Bloxsom, et al., 33.

¹⁰⁵ Bloxsom, et al., 45.

¹⁰⁶ Bloxsom, et al., 53.

Schick Razor, and housing development continued unabated. Large tracts of farmland were being devoured by single-family homes and industrial plants, forever destroying Milford's history of agriculture. The population boom resulted in another round of massive school construction expenditures, much to the dismay of some fiscally conservative Milford residents. In 1958, I-95 began operation through Milford, enabling many more people to quickly access the town's beaches, shops and industrial jobs. By 1960, the Connecticut Post Shopping Mall was in operation along the Boston Post Road with 500,000 square feet of retail space and 5,600 parking spaces, along with a number of other retailers. Milford's new plan of development exacerbated the pressure on farmland; under the existing property tax laws, land in the town was taxed on its potential rather than actual use. Therefore, if a farm was located in a primarily residential area, it was taxed as residential property; the higher taxes that resulted as residential developments surrounded them forced many farmers to sell their land to developers.¹⁰⁷

As Milford's growth continued through the 1960s, any hope of retaining a small-town feel was quickly diminishing. Industrial parks and shopping centers built addition after addition, and the town's population rapidly approached 50,000. In 1968, the Regional Planning Agency of South Central Connecticut produced a land-use study which predicted Milford's population in 2000 to be over 100,000; even the town's own projections proposed a population limit of 74,000, or a density of 3,135 people per square mile.¹⁰⁸ However, attitudes toward growth of any kind began to change rapidly in the early 1970s. In 1971, residents came out strongly against additional housing construction

¹⁰⁷ Bloxsom, et al., 59-83.

¹⁰⁸ Bloxsom, et al., 100.

in Milford, and the Milford Redevelopment Agency voted for a policy declaration that discouraged high-rise apartment buildings.¹⁰⁹ Citizens vehemently opposed condominium developments and industrial plants alike.¹¹⁰ Yet development kept coming, including a new Jai-Alai fronton in 1974, although residents did manage to stop the construction of an asphalt plant.¹¹¹

By 1975, the fight over development in Milford had reached a crisis point. As one source states:

“Every piece of farm land, every vacant lot and even wetlands had become free game for speculators. Milford’s location on Long Island Sound, and its availability to the many turnpikes was ideal for apartments and condominiums. Residents banded together in neighborhood groups to protest these requested changes, predicting the new development would lower the market prices on their homes.”¹¹²

As town residents fought just about every development proposal, Milford’s planning department unveiled a façade improvement and beautification plan for downtown businesses whose economic livelihood had been severely damaged by the growth of regional malls and big box retail along the Boston Post Road. Milford residents also realized the historic and aesthetic value lost in the demolition of older buildings in the years following World War II, and preservation of such structures came into vogue

¹⁰⁹ Bloxsom, et al., 110, 111.

¹¹⁰ Bloxsom, et al., 115.

¹¹¹ Bloxsom, et al., 117

¹¹² Bloxsom, et al., 120.

during the late 1970s.¹¹³

Throughout the 1980s, prominent companies continued to locate in Milford, along with their signature office parks. Boise Cascade, Pitney Bowes, Owens-Illinois, and Equitable Life Assurance all located offices in Milford, and strip commercial developments continued almost unabated.¹¹⁴

Orange

Although not recognized as a town until 1822, the history of Orange begins back in the seventeenth century. In 1639, English settlers purchased a large tract of land from local Native-Americans that comprised the present-day towns of Milford, Orange, West Haven and part of Woodbridge; this land was settled the same year and was named Milford Colony, directly adjacent to the west of the year-old town of New Haven. The area of the colony that would become the town of Orange remained virtually untouched until roughly 1687, when Alexander Bryan purchased so much land that the area quickly became known as “Bryan’s Farms”.¹¹⁵ The first houses appeared around 1720, and in 1750, enough people resided in Bryan’s Farms to necessitate the construction of a school.¹¹⁶

Since colonial law required church attendance, residents of Bryan’s Farms (or North

¹¹³ Bloxsom, et al., 127-132.

¹¹⁴ Bloxsom, et al., 134.

¹¹⁵ Names ‘N Places, 48-50.

¹¹⁶ Alton Mabry, Jr. and Edith Mabry, History of Orange – Sesquicentennial 1822-1972, (Orange, CT: 1972), 11.

Milford, as it was now known) had to make a substantial journey to the center of Milford for services. This trip had become so bothersome that North Milford constructed its own church and asked Milford to send a clergyman every two months; this demand increased to once a month by 1796.¹¹⁷ Still not satisfied, the residents of North Milford petitioned for and were granted a charter to form a separate “Ecclesiastical Society” by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1804, despite Milford’s objections.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the area of Milford known as West Farms (later West Haven) had formed a similar separate religious society. In 1820, West Farms approached North Milford and proposed that the two societies join and petition to become a town; West Farms had already tried to petition before and had been vigorously opposed by both Milford and New Haven, who believed that such a division would be bad for the region, both economically and politically.¹¹⁹ North Milford agreed to the proposal and in 1822, the two societies were officially joined and recognized as the Town of Orange, in honor King William III of England.¹²⁰

By the 1850s, Orange was a small farming town of only 1,500 people.¹²¹ While agriculture was the primary pursuit of town residents, a number of saw, grist, and flour mills existed along the Wepawaug River, as well as a textile mill that produced uniforms for the Union Army during the Civil War, lumberyards, and seed-growing establishments. The town survived a vicious epidemic of diphtheria in 1859, and visitors

¹¹⁷ Names ‘N Places, 50.

¹¹⁸ Names ‘N Places, 50.

¹¹⁹ Mary R. Woodruff, ed., History of Orange (North Milford) Connecticut 1639-1949, (New Haven, CT: Payne and Lane, 1949), 33.

¹²⁰ Names ‘N Places, 53.

¹²¹ Names ‘N Places, 54.

rode through town along the toll turnpikes that were common throughout Connecticut. Orange's contribution in the Civil War was minimal, and the only real event of note to occur in the town during the latter half of the nineteenth century was the failure of two New Haven land speculators in constructing a new city within the town limits of Orange. In the early 1870s, these men purchased hundreds of acres of land within Orange along the railroad line that connected New Haven with the industrial town of Derby; the speculators were gambling that this newly-constructed railroad would turn this area of Orange into a highly-industrialized area. A public auction of this land pulled in many investors, and although a few factories did get built, most people lost interest in the endeavor. By 1900, the planned city had essentially dissolved.¹²²

At the turn of the twentieth century, Orange's population had reached 7,000; the town now had its own water and telephone system, a trolley line from New Haven to Derby ran through Orange in 1904, and electricity arrived in 1909.¹²³ The town was growing quickly, and by 1907, the population had risen to roughly 10,000.¹²⁴ However, problems between the former North Milford section of town and the former West Farms part of town were reaching a boiling point. The two sections, though joining together to form the town of Orange, never entirely gelled into a single entity. As early as 1848, discussions had taken place regarding a separation of the two areas. In 1873, West Farms successfully applied to the Connecticut legislature for borough designation (giving the area some degree of autonomy) as the Borough of West Haven.¹²⁵ This action had

¹²² Names 'N Places, 54-57; Woodruff, 101.

¹²³ Names 'N Places, 58.

¹²⁴ Names 'N Places, 59.

¹²⁵ Mabry and Mabry, 24.

spawned from an increasingly contentious debate over how the town of Orange should evolve; the residents of the rapidly growing West Farms section wanted to raise taxes to help pay for their increasing need for services, whereas the farmers in Orange proper wanted to maintain the town government as “simple and inexpensive.”¹²⁶ After a proposal arose that called for turning the Orange Center school district into another separate town, the people of the old West Farms section seemed to have had enough. The residents of this area decided to secede from Orange, and in 1921, the Connecticut General Assembly authorized the creation of a new town named West Haven. Most of the population of Orange, however, had been concentrated in the eleven square miles that comprised the new West Haven, so the secession dropped Orange’s population by over 10,000, reducing the town to its mid-nineteenth century population level.¹²⁷

After its population plunge, Orange returned to its bucolic agricultural ways. The only substantial industrial development in town during the early twentieth century was the construction of a large printing plant along the Boston Post Road in 1929.¹²⁸ The impacts of the Great Depression and World War II were obviously small in a town of Orange’s size, which had reached 2,000 people. The post-World War II years, however, saw enormous growth, for by 1950, the town had grown to 3,000 people, and by 1960 had reached 9,000.¹²⁹ Housing construction in the town was phenomenal; only 589 houses stood in Orange in 1940, but that number was up to 2,500 houses in 1960.¹³⁰ While

¹²⁶ Mabry and Mabry, 24.

¹²⁷ Names ‘N Places, 59.

¹²⁸ Names ‘N Places, 60.

¹²⁹ Names ‘N Places, 61.

¹³⁰ Names ‘N Places, 61.

needing to rapidly expand its municipal services, Orange found relief in the form of manufacturing firms locating along the Boston Post Road; in the early 1960s, twenty-five firms could be found along a relative short stretch of road.¹³¹

Orange continued its rapid growth through the turbulent 1960s, reaching a population of 13,524 in 1970 and increasing its housing stock by almost 1,300 units to 3,812 in the same year.¹³² Like North Haven, Orange's population growth stagnated during the 1970s, but the rise of retail along the Boston Post Road continued unabated. By 1977, 167 retail establishments were located in Orange, employing 2,130 and generating \$110,182,000 in sales; however, within ten years, the number of firms had only risen to 171, but employment had jumped to 3,444 and sales were an astounding \$318,332,000.¹³³ These numbers are likely indicative of a decline in smaller stores and an increase in national retail chains, which employ more people and generate more sales. By 1990, Orange's population had actually dropped to 12,830, but the retail and housing construction markets rolled on through the decade.¹³⁴ Formerly agricultural land was still being converted into stores and housing, as the number of housing units jumped to 4,746

¹³¹ Names 'N Places, 61.

¹³² U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 16; U. S. Census of Housing, 1970: Housing Characteristics for States, Cities and Counties: Connecticut, Table 1.

¹³³ U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1977: Vol. II, Geographic Area Statistics, Part I, U. S. Summary: Connecticut, Table 7; U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1987: Geographic Area Series: Connecticut, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1989), Table 5.

¹³⁴ GCT-Pa. Age, Sex and Group Quarters: 1990, Census Summary Tape File 1 (STF 1) 100-percent data, Orange, CT, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet> (15 May 2002).

by 2000 and more and more big-box retailers appeared along the Boston Post Road.¹³⁵

At present, Orange is a town of primarily two contrasting land uses: large-lot housing stock throughout most of the town and the intense strip retail along the Boston Post Road in the southern end of Orange.

Norwalk

Founded in 1651, the City of Norwalk was settled as an extension of the existing Connecticut Colony along Long Island Sound. Its location was particularly advantageous for several reasons. First, the town lay between two rivers and the land was considered particularly fertile.¹³⁶ Second, Norwalk separated the bulk of the New Haven Colony to the east from its outlying settlement of Stamford, just west of Norwalk.¹³⁷ This break in New Haven's hold over the Long Island Sound coastline provided a port for the Connecticut Colony and was helpful in limiting the expansion of its New Haven rival.¹³⁸ Third, the founding of Norwalk helped bolster the English presence in western Connecticut, a move that had the underlying motive of preventing Dutch intrusion into the area from New Amsterdam, just down the coast.¹³⁹

The residents of the town settled on the east side of the Norwalk River and led an agrarian existence, growing staple crops and exporting some flaxseed to Ireland and the

¹³⁵ DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-percent data, Orange, CT, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet> (15 May 2002).

¹³⁶ Deborah Wing Ray and Gloria P. Stewart, Norwalk: Being an Historical Account of That Connecticut Town, (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1979), 3.

¹³⁷ Charles M. Selleck, ed., Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years, 1651-1901, (South Norwalk, CT: C.A. Freeman, 1902), 13.

¹³⁸ Ray and Stewart, 4; Selleck, 15.

¹³⁹ Ray and Stewart, 4.

West Indies for profit. The land that had been purchased to establish the town was subdivided for private ownership in a parsimonious fashion during the mid and late 1600s, thereby stunting Norwalk's growth, maintaining low land values and preventing land speculation. During this period, Norwalk engaged in several heated border disputes with the towns of Fairfield and Stamford, as well as being in the middle of a boundary line dispute between Connecticut and New York. By the early eighteenth century, Norwalk was still simply another small farming hamlet in Connecticut.¹⁴⁰

The early 1700s saw the rise of Norwalk's merchant class as the port began to gain prominence. As Norwalk had now developed into the agricultural center of what is now lower Fairfield County, the port provided a central place for farmers to bring their goods for trade. As more products were brought to the port, trading ships arrived with greater frequency, continuing the cycle of economic growth for Norwalk. The town pier, never intended to withstand intensive use, began to buckle, leading to several merchants constructing their own private piers that generated even more trade profits. Although growing at a robust rate, Norwalk's maritime economy began to suffer as the deep-water harbors of New Haven and New London (which could accommodate much larger vessels) became the preeminent commercial centers of the region. Nevertheless, Norwalk's artisan class expanded significantly, land prices rose and the quality of life in the town increased notably during the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Ray and Stewart, 17-30.

¹⁴¹ Ray and Stewart, 35-37, and Augustus Field Beard, "The Building of Norwalk," in Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years, 1651-1901, Charles M. Selleck, ed. (South Norwalk, CT: C.A. Freeman, 1902), 140.

During the 1760s and early 1770s, while the more radical and rebellious towns of eastern and central Connecticut took an inimical stance toward Great Britain, Norwalk remained steadfast in its conservative ways and its loyalty to the crown.¹⁴² As war with England became imminent, however, a rapidly increasing patriot population drove the town in favor of secession from Britain, and Norwalk soon became a center of privateering against British shipping.¹⁴³ Norwalk would pay dearly for this activity when, on July 11, 1779, the town was attacked and burned by British forces.¹⁴⁴ This attack caused lingering hardship in the town, as residents spent many years rebuilding and replacing their lost personal property and homes.¹⁴⁵

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Norwalk's commercial sector had largely rebuilt itself and the shipping industry in town was booming. However, Norwalk failed to register substantial population growth because while shipping and maritime-related industries were surging, agriculture (still the primary occupation of local residents) was faltering because of high taxes and the allure of better and cheaper land out west.¹⁴⁶ The population of Norwalk in 1810 was approximately 1,700 and would slowly grow to 3,702 in 1830.¹⁴⁷ In addition to shipping, the pottery industry came to economic prominence in Norwalk in the early 1800s as merchants provided demand for a variety of items, such as water jugs, oyster containers, and buttons.¹⁴⁸ Industry remained small-scale, though, primarily because Norwalk lacked the water power needed to run large factories before

¹⁴² Ray and Stewart, 47.

¹⁴³ Ray and Stewart, 53.

¹⁴⁴ Beard, 141; Ray and Stewart, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Ray and Stewart, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Ray and Stewart, 72.

¹⁴⁷ Ray and Stewart, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Ray and Stewart, 80.

the advent of coal power.¹⁴⁹ During the 1820s and 1830s, the steamboat and stagecoach industries added additional facets to Norwalk's economy; the town was particularly aided by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Gibbons v. Ogden*, which authorized Connecticut steamboat companies to trade with New York City, roughly forty miles to the southwest of Norwalk.¹⁵⁰

By 1850, the time of the first hints of industrialization in Norwalk, the town's population had grown to 4,600, growth that was probably leveled off by the loss of two parts of the town that had been either annexed by a neighboring town or had seceded to form their own town.¹⁵¹ As the nation approached civil war, Norwalk's industrial sector began to flourish with the help of a wave of Irish immigration that served as the manpower for local factories and railroads; in 1850, the top five occupations in town were "hatter, boatman, shoemaker, farmer and laborer".¹⁵² As this list indicates, hat-making had become a large industry in Norwalk by the middle of the nineteenth century, and at its peak would employ over two thousand people.¹⁵³ Shirt and lock manufacturing were also prominent, the demand for working capital spawned several new banks, and railroads finally linked the town to the rest of the national industrial base in 1848.¹⁵⁴

As a small town, Norwalk's participation in the Civil War was very limited, although a number of local young men were killed in battle and Norwalk troops were heavily

¹⁴⁹ Ray and Stewart, 83.

¹⁵⁰ Ray and Stewart, 89.

¹⁵¹ Selleck, 14.

¹⁵² Ray and Stewart, 102.

¹⁵³ Ray and Stewart, 104.

¹⁵⁴ Ray and Stewart, 108.

engaged with the Confederate forces of General Stonewall Jackson at the Battle of Chancellorsville. The town's industry in the years immediately following the Civil War began to concentrate heavily in the southern end of town and although the manufacturing sector of the economy continued to grow, Norwalk was gaining more of a reputation as a fashionable place to live. Appearance and protection of public health were obviously critical issues during the late 1800s, as Norwalk residents voiced their anger over litter and pollution, and the town began developing a modern municipal water system in the 1870s. The city of South Norwalk, which, although technically part of Norwalk, had its own charter and control over most of its own affairs, gained national recognition when it constructed its own city-operated electrical plant in 1892 to bring power to streetlights, businesses and homes.¹⁵⁵

The oyster industry, which had long been a small commercial enterprise for local residents as well as an addition to their diets, rose in importance for the town in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Depression of 1873 tempered industrial growth in Norwalk, creating an entrepreneurial vacuum that was filled by innovations in the farming of oysters. Perhaps the most critical innovation came when steam was first employed to power oyster sloops in 1874; this change from sail to steam power led to a boom in the ship building industry as commercial oystermen upgraded their old sail-powered fleets. Oystering in Norwalk hit its peak from 1885 to 1910, driven by a huge demand for the popular bivalves in New York City restaurants.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ray and Stewart, 126-136.

¹⁵⁶ Ray and Stewart, 138-139.

In 1901, as Norwalk celebrated its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary, town attitudes began to change from small-town concerns and in-fighting to a more regional view. One source quotes an industry analyst of the time as stating, “The popular opinion is that Norwalk has not lived up to her possibilities and, therefore, has little reason for boasting’.”¹⁵⁷ Although hatting was a major town industry, the city of Danbury to the north was the uncontested leader in the hat industry; although oystering was a critical element of the local economy, a single firm in New Haven farmed more oysters than all the oyster businesses in Norwalk combined.¹⁵⁸ While clearly unable to compete with the international economy of New York City, Norwalk also saw itself rapidly losing ground to regional centers such as Bridgeport and New Haven; indeed, Norwalk had made a bid to become the county seat in the 1890s, but had been out-lobbied in Hartford by the Bridgeport delegation.¹⁵⁹

The land that had originally comprised the “colony” of Norwalk in colonial times had broken apart during the intervening centuries. Parts of Norwalk had split off to form the independent towns of Wilton, New Canaan, Darien and Westport; in addition, the portion of Norwalk known as South Norwalk had gradually developed its own identity and had even been granted a city charter by the state legislature, essentially giving the area legal separation from the Borough of Norwalk, as the rest of the town was known.¹⁶⁰ South Norwalk had developed as the manufacturing and oystering center of the immediate area, and its residents often felt looked down upon by the wealthier Norwalk residents;

¹⁵⁷ Ray and Stewart, 170.

¹⁵⁸ Ray and Stewart, 170.

¹⁵⁹ Ray and Stewart, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Ray and Stewart, 135.

competition between the two municipalities over everything from water access to business recruitment left bitter memories as well.¹⁶¹ One historian of the time harshly described this animosity by saying, “Indeed, what caused the disagreement between the two cities is not that they have so little in common, but so much in common selfishness.”¹⁶² By 1913, however, both Norwalk and South Norwalk realized that their rivalry was counterproductive and agreed to create a unification charter.¹⁶³ After considerable wrangling, an agreement was reached to unify both areas as the City of Norwalk.

The nature of the reunification charter, though, may have caused as many problems as it solved. The new city’s utilities were not combined; several different areas either kept their own water and electric systems or purchased these commodities at different rates. Differences in city services meant setting up different tax districts (eight in all), which created another level of cumbersome and confusing bureaucracy that exists to the present day. The area of Norwalk known as Rowayton even took advantage of the confusion to obtain its own separate status while still remaining as part of the city of Norwalk, a designation that allowed it to receive municipal services but enabled it to exclude non-Rowayton residents from its beaches years in the future.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ray and Stewart, 172.

¹⁶² Selleck, 169.

¹⁶³ Ray and Stewart, 172.

¹⁶⁴ Ray and Stewart, 173.

The decade following World War I, though marred by influenza, inflation and labor unrest, was a period of strong growth for Norwalk.¹⁶⁵ By 1923, Norwalk had 157 manufacturing firms that employed almost 8,000 people, and the improvement of the Boston Post Road through town made the journey south to New York City easier and quicker.¹⁶⁶ The automobile began to dominate the transportation landscape in the 1920s, as it did in other Connecticut cities and towns, and by 1927, Norwalk's population was almost 36,000.¹⁶⁷ But this growth came at a cost; two eighteenth century houses that had been historical landmarks in the town were demolished to make way for gas stations in the mid-1920s.¹⁶⁸ Norwalk residents, outraged by the loss of these buildings, quickly persuaded city officials to create zoning regulations to protect residential areas from commercial development such as this.¹⁶⁹ In addition, Norwalk had long been lax in its control of pollution, a problem further exacerbated by the rapid growth of the 1920s. The pollution of Norwalk Harbor had reached such a level that the state of Connecticut had to ban shellfishing in Norwalk, crippling the oyster industry.¹⁷⁰

The Great Depression, while a period of economic hardship for Norwalk, was not felt as acutely as in other towns and cities. None of the factories in the city were large enough to cause an economic crisis by closing down, many firms that found New York City too expensive migrated up to Norwalk where rents were generally cheaper, and the local Chamber of Commerce strenuously recruited businesses to relocate in the city. WPA and

¹⁶⁵ Ray and Stewart, 182.

¹⁶⁶ Ray and Stewart, 183, 184.

¹⁶⁷ Ray and Stewart, 187.

¹⁶⁸ Ray and Stewart, 186.

¹⁶⁹ Ray and Stewart, 186.

¹⁷⁰ Ray and Stewart, 187.

FERA funds helped provide jobs for local workers, as well as a new high school, several refurbished elementary schools and many miles of newly-paved roads.¹⁷¹

Norwalk broke out of the Depression-era economic slump when World War II compelled local factories to retool for war production. Soon, manufacturers were churning out submarine pumps, anti-aircraft and bomber parts, and tires.¹⁷² The reinvigoration of Norwalk's economy led to new jobs, which in turn led to an acute housing shortage that would continue through the 1940s.¹⁷³ The swell of newcomers was enormous; in 1940, Norwalk's population was around 39,000, but then jumped to 49,460 in 1950 and 67,775 in 1960.¹⁷⁴ The city planning commission found itself overwhelmed, approving an incredible 156 subdivision plans in 1960.¹⁷⁵ As literally hundreds of three-bedroom, split-level homes mushroomed throughout the city, schools became inundated with new students. The African-American and Puerto Rican populations in the city experienced an incredible surge in numbers as members of these ethnic groups both filled and propelled Norwalk's industrial base. A new high school and a community college were quickly built to fill the educational demand, and the city struggled to keep up with the service demands of its growing population.¹⁷⁶

During the 1950s, Norwalk's industrial sector began to rapidly move away from traditional manufacturing plants to more advanced technology companies and corporate

¹⁷¹ Ray and Stewart, 192-193.

¹⁷² Ray and Stewart, 199.

¹⁷³ Ray and Stewart, 199.

¹⁷⁴ Ray and Stewart, 211.

¹⁷⁵ Ray and Stewart, 211.

¹⁷⁶ Ray and Stewart, 211-213.

offices. Companies such as Perkin-Elmer and United Technologies located research and development office in Norwalk, increasing the demand for more highly-educated workers. A massive flood hit the city in 1955, destroying or damaging many parts of town, including the downtown business district, and the newly created Redevelopment Authority used this unfortunate event as a way to begin urban renewal plans for Norwalk. However, the plans remained just plans for several years until federal approval was received in 1959; as a result, the center of Norwalk remained blighted and flood-damaged for much of the late 1950s. Finally, the completion of I-95 through Norwalk in 1958 would forever alter the nature of the city in the decades to come, as it almost immediately began to draw city shoppers out of Norwalk to Stamford and New York City.¹⁷⁷

By 1960, Norwalk was a bustling small city of 67,775 people that was quickly becoming more affluent as the comparatively calm atmosphere of Connecticut life began to appeal in earnest to New Yorkers.¹⁷⁸ While other cities in Connecticut such as New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport experienced a debilitating exodus of population, the lasting negative impression of urban renewal, and even race riots, the cities of Norwalk and Stamford saw continued growth and revitalized downtowns. Arguably, these two cities (they can actually be considered as one larger city, since they are so geographically close to one another) were among the earliest iterations of the “edge city” concept, benefiting from the new federal highway system that funneled population and investment dollars from New York and other parts of Connecticut directly into their midst.

¹⁷⁷ Ray and Stewart, 214, 221.

¹⁷⁸ U. S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960 – Census Tracts – Norwalk, CT SMSA (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), Table P-1.

During the 1960s, Norwalk's downtown was finally rebuilt after the damage wrought by the flood of 1955. Some modest public housing projects and the city's only high-rise office building were constructed during the decade, while Norwalk saw its median family income leap from \$7,420 in 1960 to \$12,507 in 1970.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, Norwalk's population had increased incredibly by almost 12,000 during the decade, hitting 79,192 in 1970, and the African-American and Hispanic populations of the city saw significant growth during this period.¹⁸⁰ The continuing momentum of urban renewal threatened the historic center of South Norwalk in the late 1970s, but a combination of public and private interests preserved and eventually revitalized the area into the "SoNo" district, home to quaint shops, boutiques, nightclubs, restaurants and upper-story office space. The completion of this project in the 1980s was coupled with the construction of the Norwalk Maritime Center, an aquarium and museum with an IMAX theater. These two developments created a vibrant pedestrian atmosphere that effectively connected Norwalk's harbor with downtown Norwalk.

While Norwalk experienced a slight population drop during the 1970s, to 77,767 in 1980, retail growth began to increase in pace.¹⁸¹ In 1977, Norwalk had 500 retail establishments, but by 1982 this number had jumped to 609, creating employment for 5,572 workers and generating \$556,902,000 in sales, as regional department stores, strip malls and big-box retailers multiplied along the city's most heavily traveled corridors.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ U. S. Census of Population and Housing, 1960 – Census Tracts – Norwalk, CT SMSA, Table P-1; U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 89.

¹⁸⁰ U. S. Census of Population, 1970: Characteristics of the Population: Connecticut, Table 16.

¹⁸¹ U. S. Census of Population, 1980: General Population Characteristics: Connecticut, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), Table 14.

¹⁸² U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1977: Vol. II, Geographic Area Statistics, Part I, U. S. Summary: Connecticut, Table 7; U. S. Census of Retail Trade, 1982: Geographical Area Series: Connecticut, Table 8.

The minor setback in Norwalk's population was only fleeting, as the population stabilized by 1990 and then rose to 82,951 in 2000.¹⁸³ At present, Norwalk is a modestly growing community that is struggling to keep home prices within reason, to manage growth without succumbing to sprawl, and to survive wave after wave of development pressure without eroding the character of the small city that it once was.

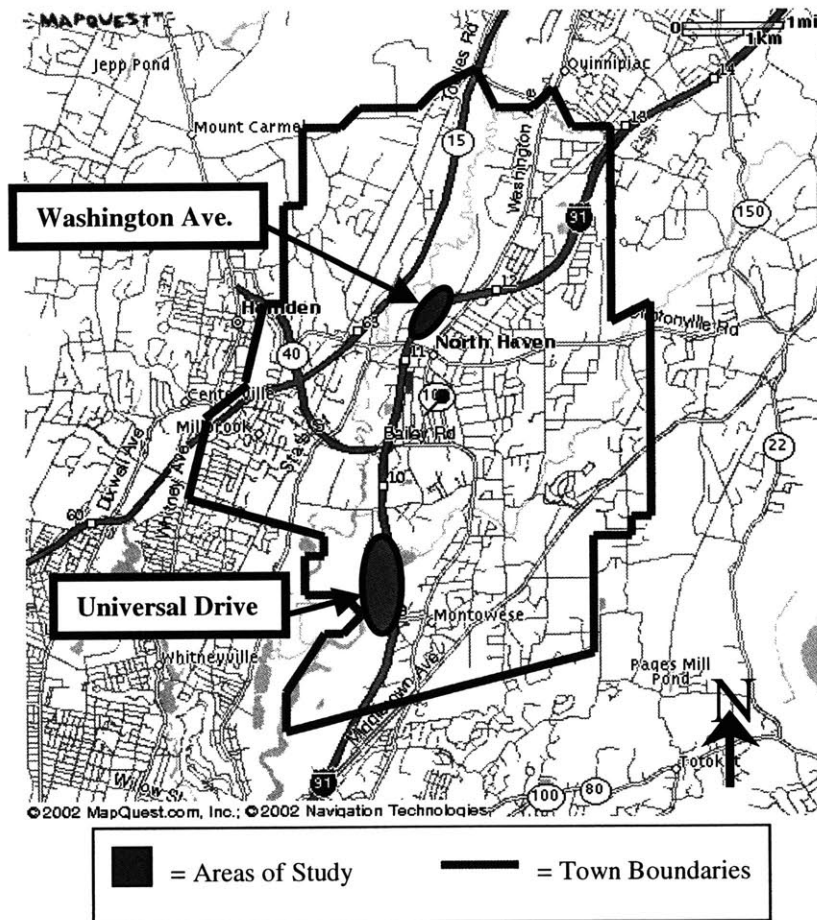
¹⁸³ DP-1. Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000, Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-percent data, Norwalk, CT, <http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsServlet> (15 May 2002).

Chapter 4

SPRAWL FOCUS AREAS IN SUBJECT TOWNS

North Haven

This thesis will focus on two small areas of commercial sprawl in the town of North Haven: the Washington Avenue Corridor and the Universal Drive Corridor.



Washington Avenue Corridor

The Washington Avenue Corridor is an area of retail and office development in the central part of North Haven. The roughly one mile stretch of Washington Avenue

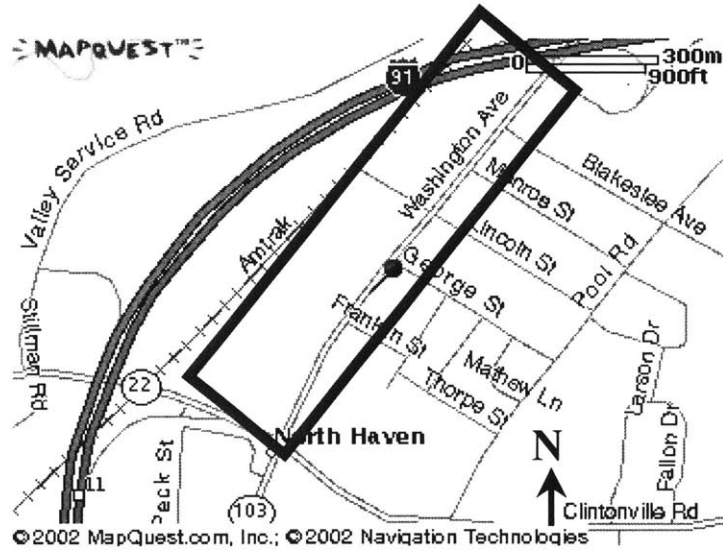
studied in this thesis lies between Exit 11 and Exit 12 of Interstate 91, with its northern end at the I-91 overpass and its southerly terminus at the North Haven town green. The



Typical parking lot with strip mall to the rear.

balance of Washington Avenue runs northward to the Pratt and Whitney plant and into the town of Wallingford.

Several small local roads intercept Washington Avenue along this corridor, carrying traffic to and from the adjacent residential areas. Route 22 (Clintonville Rd.), a four- to five-lane road, forms a major intersection with Washington Avenue along the southern end of the corridor, at the north corner of the town green. This road is the only means for traffic from the corridor to cross over I-91 to the western side of North Haven; the highway itself and changes in topography essentially rule out any additional integration of the Washington Avenue corridor with this side of town. Washington Avenue itself is a heavily congested, wide expanse of five lanes. The sidewalks that exist are rarely used, as there is no on-street parking and most of the commercial uses are located far back from the street with their own parking. The intersection with Clintonville Road is quite busy,



very wide, and intimidating to pedestrians, thereby limiting the number of people who try to walk from the historic town green to shop. With a few exceptions, street trees are non-existent, and landscaping is generally limited to the ubiquitous junipers and small shrubs.

The northwest side of Washington Avenue is home to approximately fifty commercial establishments. These include national chain stores (GNC, Radio Shack, Walgreens, Payless Shoes), national fast food restaurants (Subway, Burger King, McDonald's, Boston Market), regional-level stores (Stop & Shop, Town Fair Tire, Tommy K's Video), and independent local retailers and restaurants. In addition, three gas stations and two bank branches, as well as a small office building and Stop & Shop offices, are located on this side of the street. Moving northeast along Washington Avenue, one finds most of these establishments in three successive suburban strip mall developments; the fast food restaurants, gas stations, and several stores are located in a row of detached, "small-box" buildings that are closer to the street in front of the strip developments. These small

buildings are surrounded by parking and access driveways leading to the strip malls behind them and their associated parking lots.

The southeast side of Washington Avenue is an interesting contrast to its opposing side, with small houses that have been converted to professional offices and small-scale retail use. One tiny strip development housing limited retail and service uses can be found here, along with a few low-rise office buildings interspersed among delis, cafes and baseball card shops. As one gets closer to the northern end of the street, however, one finds more typical sprawl development with a detached, “small-box” CVS pharmacy and a Starbucks in a new strip development, surrounded by ample parking. Finally, at the southern end of this commercial corridor is the North Haven Green, bounded by Federal and Colonial-style buildings and an old town cemetery.



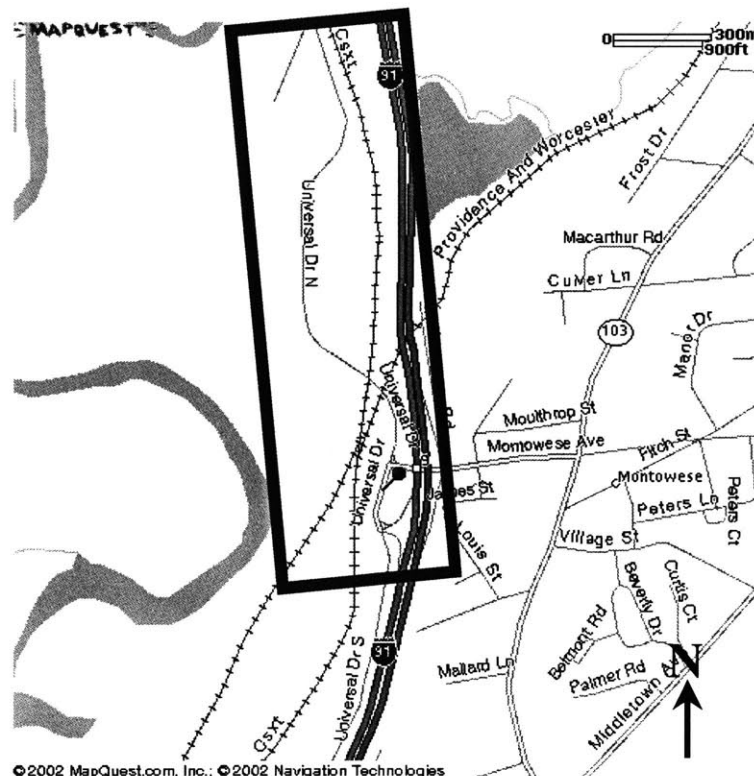
Starbucks has landed.

After a tour of this area, it is apparent that the Washington Avenue corridor is an area of development that has evolved over an extended period of time. The small strip development along the southeast side of the street hints at early suburban development,

with its small size and 1950s appearance. The three major commercial plazas are much more reminiscent of the style of strip mall development that arose in the 1970s and 1980s. The free-standing, “small-box” typologies that house Verizon Wireless, CVS, and Boston Market, and proliferated in an almost endemic fashion during the 1990s, also have their place along the corridor. Finally, the small historic buildings around the North Haven Green serve as a reminder that this area had its own identity long before strip malls and supermarkets ever existed.

Universal Drive Corridor

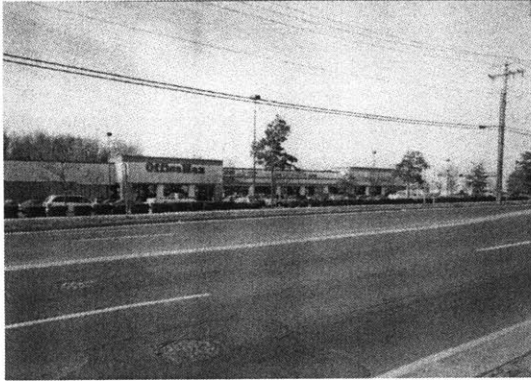
The Universal Drive Corridor is an area of big-box retail development in the southern end of North Haven, just over the town line from New Haven. The commercial sprawl here began in the mid-1980s, as this largely undeveloped part of North Haven was sought after for big-box retail because of its direct access to Exit 9 off I-91.





Sprawling surface lot in front of strip retail.

The roughly one and one-half mile-long stretch of road runs northward immediately to the west of I-91, with excellent visibility from the highway, as I-91 is elevated above the surrounding area. At its intersection with Montowese Avenue, the road divides into Universal Drive North and Universal Drive South; Universal Drive South has a few big-box retailers such as Circuit City and Raymour & Flanagan, before giving way to heavy industry along the New Haven line. The main commercial developments are located along Universal Drive North, with Home Depot anchoring a strip mall along the east side of the road. The west side of Universal Drive North has a two-part strip mall containing Sports Authority, Petco, Office Max, Barnes & Noble, and several smaller national chains and local stores. Further north along the road on the west side is a ten-screen movie theater and an auto sales showroom, while the east side has BJ's, a regional wholesale club. An isolated McDonald's and a few other restaurants and stores are located in small-box buildings in the parking lot for the Home Depot strip mall.



Asphalt and retail.



Home Depot (with ubiquitous orange cart).

Local access to the Universal Drive area is limited, as the area is cut off from the rest of North Haven by I-91 to the east and rail lines, the Quinnipiac River, and its associated wetlands to the west. Universal Drive South running south essentially ends in an industrial cul-de-sac that does not allow access from or to New Haven. Montowese Avenue, terminating at Universal Drive and running east toward the center of North Haven, and Sackett Point Road, another route of heavy industry that forms a perpendicular intersection with Universal Drive North, offer the only access to the main section of North Haven. In addition, Sackett Point Road is the only route enabling access to the west and into the town of Hamden.



Showcase Cinemas.



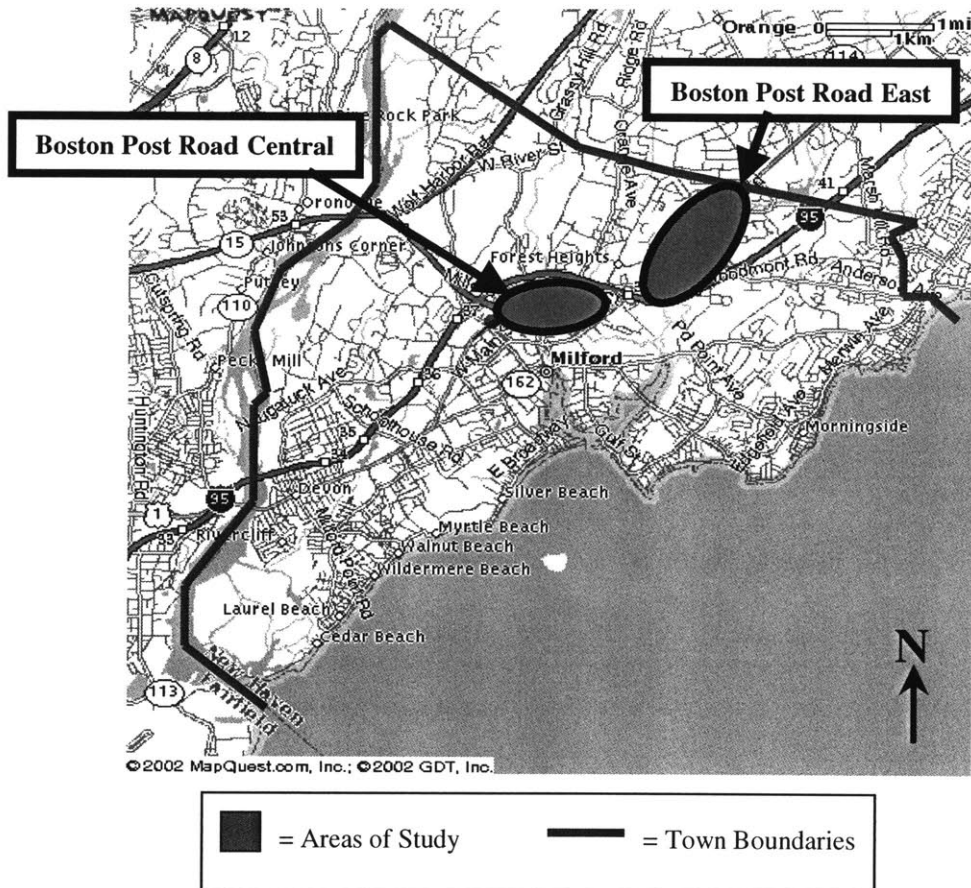
New sprawl construction.

This commercial strip is a particular product of the 1980s construction boom, when the market economy's tendrils finally found their way off of Exit 9 of I-91. Without even

knowing the development history of the area, one could clearly tell that the construction is relatively new based on its architecture and site layouts. Unlike the Washington Avenue corridor, the Universal Drive area was of rapid creation and not subject to the same evolutionary forces that have impacted the center of North Haven. In fact, one could argue that the Universal Drive corridor is still in the process of creation, as a twenty-seven acre vacant lot along the road is being discussed for development as another regional shopping center.

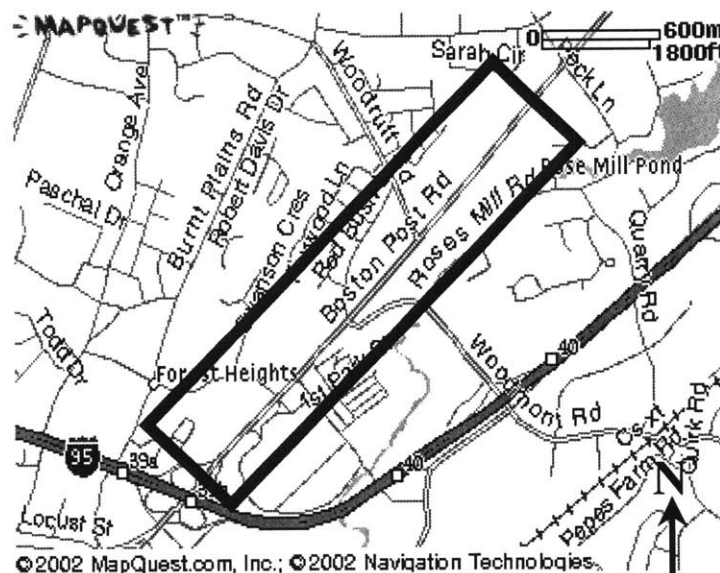
Milford

This thesis will examine two areas of commercial sprawl in the town of Milford: Boston Post Road East and Boston Post Road Central.

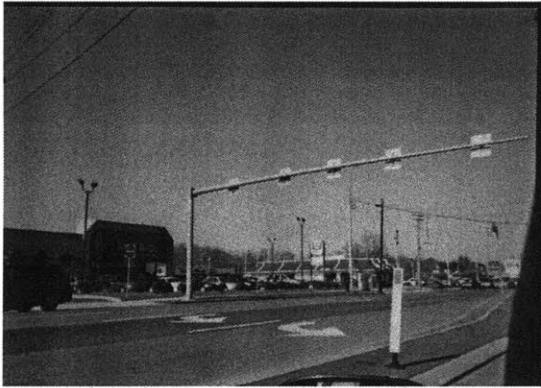


Boston Post Road East

The eastern part of Milford is home to a ribbon of commercial sprawl just over a mile and a half long, stretching along the Boston Post Road (Route 1) from the Milford/Orange town line to the east to the I-95 overpass at Exit 39 to the west. The road is a heavily used artery for both regional and local traffic, and since it lies just to the north of I-95, is a key route for highway access. A few small roads sprouting off the Boston Post Road funnel drivers into several residential areas while two other roads, Woodmont Road and East Town Road, provide additional highway access to the south. As the road consists of four to six lanes of very congested traffic, crossing it on foot is a dangerous challenge; even to get from one store to another next door, a car is often required due to the lack of sidewalks and other means of pedestrian access. With the exception of the occasional shrub or traffic island, landscaping is at a minimum.



The sprawl at the eastern end of the Boston Post Road East corridor is indistinguishable from the sprawl in Orange; only the small sign indicating the location of the town line



Automobile dominance, with Rite-Aid in the background.



Frightening to try to cross on foot.

lets one know that he or she is passing from one municipality to another. The Boston Post Road East is an eclectic mix of various sprawl typologies. Small strip malls from the 1950s and 1960s lie next to larger L-shaped strip malls from the 1970s and 1980s and much more recent big-box retailers.

Along the northern side of the road at the Milford/Orange town line, one finds the continuation of an extensive stretch of furniture stores located in both strip shopping centers and as stand alone big-box retail. Frank's Craft and Garden Center, Costco, and Tweeter audio/electronics lie to the west, and Levitt's, Sports Authority, and the Milford Bowling Lanes are on the southern side of the street. The northern side of the Boston Post Road is further anchored by the Wayside Furniture store, a large local home furnishings establishment, as well as an Ethan Allen chain furniture store. Across the street is a Dakota's restaurant and a video arcade/amusement center, along with several small stores and a Subway restaurant. A mix of national chain retailers and smaller, independent establishments proliferates as one moves west, along with restaurants such as Taco Bell, Chili's and Boston Market. The national retailers and restaurants are

primarily located in big-box typologies set apart from other stores by parking lots, while the independent retailers tend to be found in strip mall settings.

Anchoring the western end of this commercial area is the Connecticut Post Mall, the largest mall in the greater New Haven region. Located directly next to I-95 as it passes over the Boston Post Road, the mall has excellent visibility from the highway and is easily accessible for many people in the region. Surrounded by a sea of surface parking spaces, the mall is one of the top property tax (and traffic) generators in Milford. The number of customers it attracts helps buoy the other stores and businesses along the Boston Post Road, which in turn helps attract more development to the area.

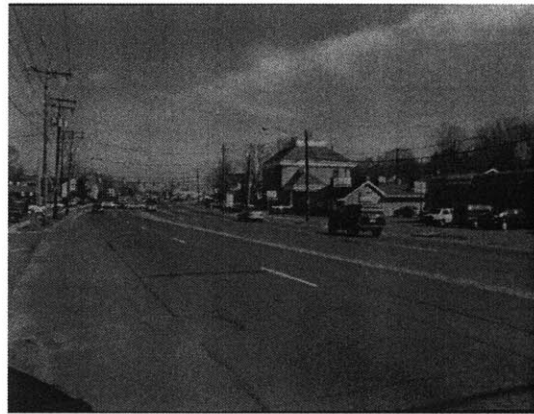


Connecticut Post Mall.

Boston Post Road Central

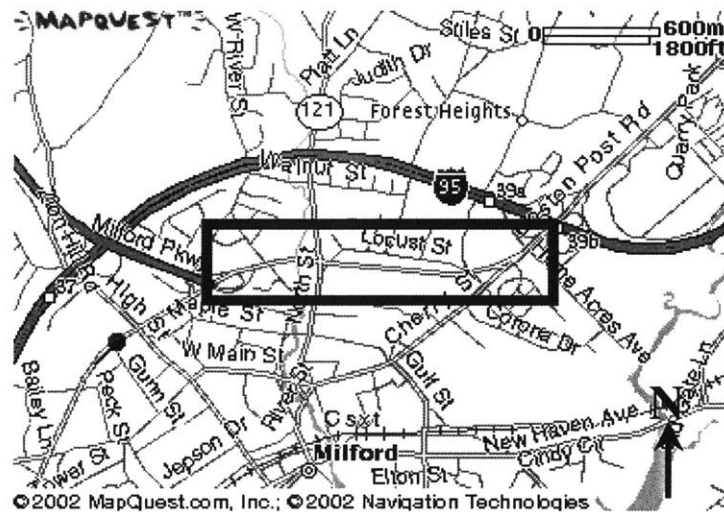


Typical retail development.



Looking east along Route 1.

In contrast to the eastern end of the Boston Post Road, the centrally located segment of Route 1 between the I-95 overpass and the connector to the Merritt Parkway appears much older and has very few national retail chains. Most of the commercial development is concentrated in small, single-story strip buildings with small- to moderate-size parking areas located in front.

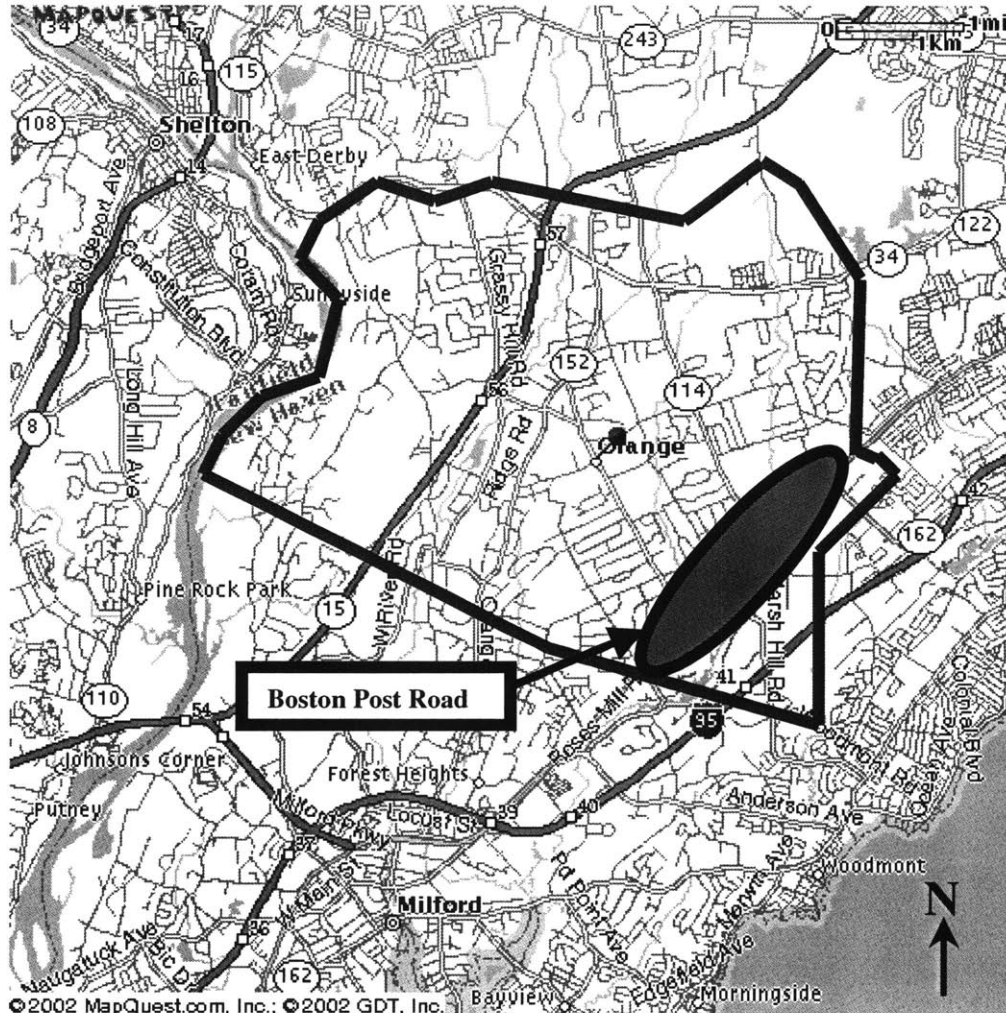


Not only is there a distinct lack of national name retailers along this stretch, the targeted economic level of customers is very different from the eastern part of the Boston Post Road. The numerous independent merchants here include pawn shops, liquor stores,

adult video stores, and other similar establishments mixed in with restaurants, copy shops, gas stations, and pet stores. As one approaches the eastern edge of this area, though, one finds a multiplex cinema and the beginnings of big-box retail expansion into the area, with the appearance of a new Volvo dealership and a children's clothing store.

Orange

The center of sprawl in the town of Orange is located along the segment of the Boston Post Road that cuts through the southern end of the town, with its eastern end located at



the Orange/West Haven town line and its western end at the Orange/Milford town line. This nearly three mile-long stretch of Route 1 was the site of early commercial development in Orange, and has continued to serve the greater New Haven area as one of the leading retail strips in the entire region. The road itself is a wide, four-lane expanse that suffers from substantial traffic volume, particularly on the weekends and evening hours.



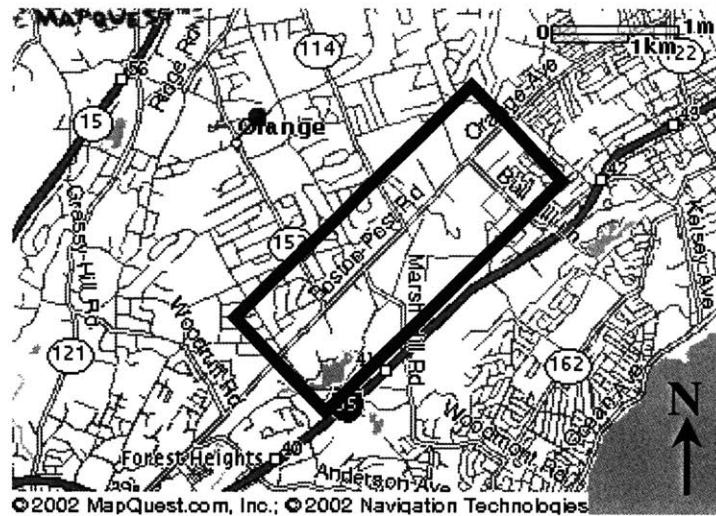
OfficeMax (note the peaked roof).



Standard strip retail.

More recently, the sprawl along Route 1 has begun to creep up Marsh Hill Road toward the Exit 41 interchange of I-95. Showcase Cinemas has had a large, multi-screen movie theater in this location for several decades, and during the 1990s, a Courtyard by Marriot hotel and an Outback Steakhouse have arisen beside the movie theater. Closer to the Boston Post Road along Marsh Hill Road, a large shopping center that is home to the Christmas Tree Shop, A.C. Moore arts and crafts store, Yankee Candlesmith, a handful of clothing stores, a Mexican restaurant, and several other small retail establishments has been built in the past few years. Other large, developable properties along Marsh Hill Road that were formerly farmland or wooded areas are either for sale or being prepared for commercial development.

As mentioned above, the Boston Post Road has long been the hub of commerce in Orange. Like the other three towns discussed in this thesis, Orange's portion of Route 1 saw explosive commercial and retail development begin in the post-World War II years with the unequivocal rise of the automobile. While some traces of 1950s commercial development can still be seen along the road, much of what exists now appears to have been built from the 1960s to the present. Big-box stores have a noticeable presence on



the landscape, but much of the area is dominated by large strip shopping centers, with smaller-scale strip retail often nestled between the two.

The Orange/West Haven line is a massive jumble of stand-alone box retail, both large and small, large shopping centers anchored by regional or national retailers, fast-food restaurants and some smaller retail strips. Extending down Bull Hill Lane as well, this sprawl is populated by stores such as Stop & Shop, Service Merchandise, and Barnes and Noble. Moving westward along Route 1, one finds small retail strips filled with a wide variety of local and independent retailers, as well as a few service establishments and

professional offices. After descending down a small slope in the road, one sees along the north side of the road an intense proliferation of large strip shopping centers located behind “small-box” national and regional retailers, such as CVS Pharmacy and Bernie’s electronics store. The south side of Route 1 has smaller commercial developments that continue to house many different local retailers and restaurants.

Between its intersections with Marsh Hill Road and Orange Center Road, the Boston Post Road sees a continuation of similar development typologies, with this segment of the road anchored by CompUSA, Home Depot and Office Max. As one passes the Orange Center Road intersection and gradually approaches the Milford town line, the retail mix shifts from a wide variety of goods to largely furniture, bedding and clothing stores, with a sprinkling of other retail types. The development pattern, however, changes little as big-box, shopping center, and small commercial strips continue in a very even mix.

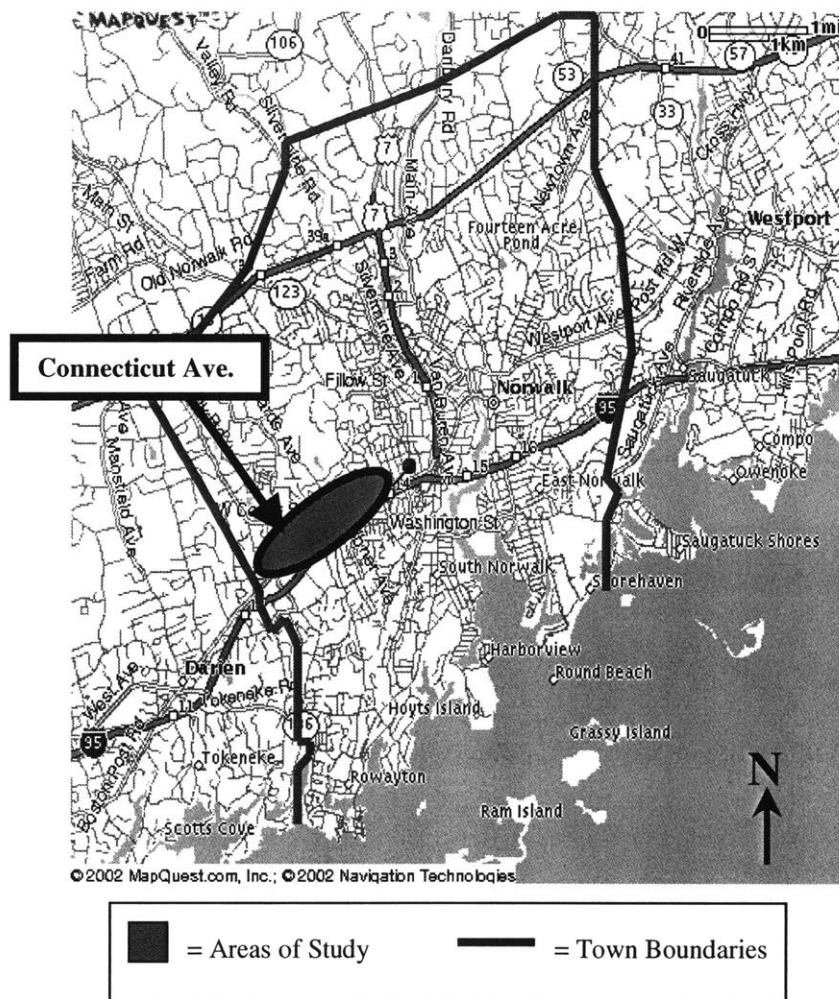
The Town of Orange’s Plan of Conservation and Development 2000 calls for the Route 1 corridor to remain the economic development area for the town, while preventing retail spill over into nearby residential and light industrial areas. As an urban design goal for this area, the plan calls for a review of design standards “on a regular basis” to ensure quality design; it is unclear, however, what time frame is meant by “regular basis”.¹⁸⁴

Norwalk

This thesis will look at one section of the Connecticut Avenue (Boston Post Road)

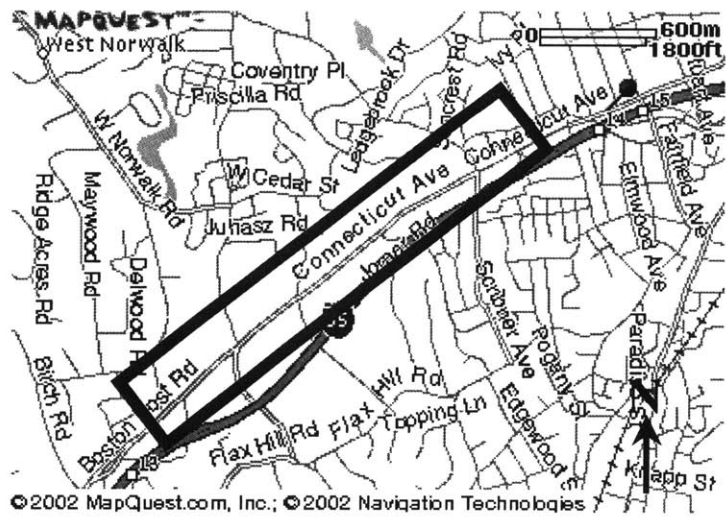
¹⁸⁴ Town of Orange, Connecticut, Plan of Conservation and Development 2000 (1 November 1999), 6.

corridor that runs through the western side of Norwalk. This roughly one and a half mile portion of US Route 1 lies parallel to Interstate 95 between Exits 13 and 14, with its western terminus at the Norwalk-Darien town line and its eastern terminus at the Exit 14 off-ramp. The road has long been a major east-west route through Norwalk and heavily traveled. However, with the growth of commercial development in this area, Connecticut Avenue has rapidly become overburdened with traffic, resulting in periodic widenings of the road that only seem to exacerbate the situation. At a few points along this stretch, Connecticut Avenue is seven lanes wide and virtually uncrossable on foot.



The eastern end of the Connecticut Avenue corridor, directly off of I-95, contains some

of the oldest commercial development still in existence along this portion of the road, with several small, compact commercial strip developments reminiscent of the early sprawl of the 1950s. These developments, on both sides of Connecticut Avenue between the Exit 14 off-ramp and Scribner Avenue (one block to the west), have numerous small local retail and service establishments. After the congested intersection at Scribner Avenue, the sprawl grows more intense, with a large Super Stop & Shop (surrounded by a sea of parking) on the southern side of Connecticut Avenue and a two-part strip mall anchored by The Wiz electronics store on the northern side. Immediately west of this development is another L-shaped strip mall containing a Barnes & Noble, CompUSA, and a ShopRite supermarket, along with small local stores and national chains such as GNC and Cingular Wireless. The strip mall built form temporarily gives way to two “big-box” retail developments, Sports Authority and Circuit City, before another strip mall anchored by the Kohl’s department store. Continuing west along the southern side of Connecticut Avenue, one finds a small-box auto repair shop and some older strip retail before a 14-story office building set back from the street looms up.



Further west, one finds perhaps the poorest example of urban design in all of Norwalk. At the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Keeler Avenue, Home Depot has built one of its standard suburban “big-box” stores; however, the site appears to have been too small to accommodate the necessary off-street parking. Home Depot’s solution was to build a two-level parking structure attached to and directly in front of the store. One cannot actually see the store from the street; only the large orange lettering on the parking structure indicates that it is a Home Depot. Equally unattractive is the vacant former Bradlees department store building and parking lot directly next door. Across the street, there are several “small-box” retailers such as Blockbuster Video and Frank’s garden and craft store, as well as a bowling alley and a Staples store that is essentially built into the side of a cliff. At the western terminus of the commercial corridor, at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Richards Avenue, a smattering of fast food restaurants completes the sprawl landscape.

Like North Haven’s Washington Avenue, Connecticut Avenue is an area that has obviously evolved over an extended period of time. The eclectic mix of commercial sprawl architecture is very similar to that of Washington Avenue, with 1950s mini-strip malls across the street from Home Depot. It is clear that close proximity to the interstate highway has spurred the continuing evolution of the area, from the time of I-95’s construction up through the present time. The dynamism of the development atmosphere in this section of Norwalk, implicit in its obvious physical evolution, is potentially both a positive and a negative element. Market forces and ineffective zoning and land use regulations have created the sprawl found along Connecticut Avenue, and two sizable

vacant parcels (the former Bradlees site and a recently demolished gas station) leave the door open for even more poorly designed development. However, the intense development pressure also means that if more rigorous and place-based guidelines are properly enacted, the market could quickly produce quality urban design that could turn Connecticut Avenue into an example of what effective regulations can do.

Chapter 5

PROBLEMATIC REGULATIONS IN SUBJECT TOWNS

North Haven

One needs only a cursory examination of North Haven’s zoning regulations to see that they practically predicate the development of urban sprawl typologies. One of the first facets of North Haven’s Zoning Regulations that is readily apparent (as it is in the zoning regulations of the three other towns examined in this thesis) is that the regulations are not place-based. In essence, one could find these exact same regulations in any town or city anywhere in the United States. There is no tangible underlying foundation within the text or its specifications that indicate anything special about North Haven, either in the form of problems or pressures that the town faces or a unique character or history that the town desires to protect. While the document is dense and prescriptive, it is often difficult to see how these regulations could make North Haven different from anywhere else.

North Haven has taken one step in its zoning to create and preserve a sense of place around its historic town green. Developers may submit plans for a Village Center Planned Residential District (VCPRD) on any property within a quarter-mile radius of the town green that the Planning and Zoning Commission may approve regardless of the underlying zoning, provided that the property in question contains one or more “traditional” structures that the Planning and Zoning Commission believes is “worthy of refurbishing.”¹⁸⁵ A VCPRD designation allows a developer to build at a much higher

¹⁸⁵ Town of North Haven, Connecticut, Regulations of the North Haven Planning and Zoning Commission (8 May 2000), Z-29e.

density (up to twelve units per acre) than one normally finds in North Haven. The body of the resolution that created this zoning subsection has considerable progressive text, stating that “it is in the best interest of the Town of North Haven to preserve the superior façade character of existing traditional structures”¹⁸⁶ and:

“It is desirable to provide multiple unit housing ...near to the town center and green for our adult citizens so they may have ready pedestrian access to the green and nearby commercial and recreational facilities, civic and religious facilities as well as public transportation.”¹⁸⁷

Such wording gives one the impression that North Haven is truly committed to creating a more pedestrian-friendly and compactly-developed town. There are substantial problems with this provision, however, that erode its potential for promoting intelligent development.

First, the provision requires that the total square footage of a lot or assemblage of lots proposed for a VCPRD be a minimum of 240,000 square feet (5.5 acres). When one considers that there are only about 125 acres in a quarter-mile radius area, such a large land requirement for development seems to preclude any tactile change in the nature of the area. Second, the provision mandates that no more than 70 units may be constructed on a single property. Since the minimum land area requirement would already allow 66 units, and that a developer would want to maximize his or her profit by building at the 12 unit per acre limit, a development larger than about 254,500 square feet would not be feasible. This narrow range of size does not allow any flexibility in development types,

¹⁸⁶ Regulations of the North Haven Planning and Zoning Commission, Z-29e.

¹⁸⁷ Regulations of the North Haven Planning and Zoning Commission, Z-29e.

and insures that every proposal for a VCPRD would be almost identical in number of units and land area. Third, the parking requirements for a VCPRD are the same as any other residential development. No reduction in the number of spaces is allowed, even though, the provision clearly notes that such development would be within walking distance of mass transit. Finally, the VCPRD provision requires that no children under the age of 18 reside in the units constructed. Without even delving into the issue of whether or not such a requirement would survive a court challenge, it is clear that VCPRD units are intended primarily for older adults and senior citizens.

These requirements severely limit the potential positive impact of a compact residential development at the center of town. The VCPRD regulation would essentially create another single-unit type housing development, differing from a typical suburban subdivision only in that it would cater to older adults rather than to families. In fact it is difficult to discern how a VCPRD would be much different than a planned unit development or a planned development district. While the stricter architectural and urban design standards of the regulation are admirable, compact development and façade treatment alone are not enough; a mix of housing types and a more progressive approach to transportation needs is essential to enliven a town's core.

General Discussion

North Haven's commercial zones are divided into several districts: Office "O", Limited Commercial "LC", Commercial-Neighborhood "CN", Commercial "CA", and Commercial "CB". In addition, commercial development is allowed in the town's two

industrial zones, Industrial-Light “IL” and Industrial-General “IG”. CN districts are the least dense, allowing single-family homes and restaurants but prohibiting retail stores over 2,000 square feet. O districts are next, allowing offices and one- and two-family homes. LC districts allow everything in O districts plus retail stores, except for department stores. CA and CB districts are the general commercial zones where almost everything is allowed, with only setback limits and lot coverage percentages separating them from one another. The industrial zones also allow most forms of commercial development.

Parking Requirements

North Haven’s off-street parking regulations are very specific on the square footage and the dimensions of parking spaces; unfortunately, the regulations are much less specific on the siting of these spaces. The requirements for the number of spaces for each type of land use are very liberal, including five spaces for every 1,000 gross square feet of retail space. Perhaps most detrimental to the aesthetics of North Haven’s commercial corridors is the condition that “in commercial districts the required front yard may be used for driveways and parking”, provided that a fifteen-foot landscaped strip be placed between the street and the off-street parking.¹⁸⁸

Although the parking regulations do create some flexibility by allowing fifty percent of the necessary parking for a use to be located off-site (on the same side of the street and no more than 200 feet away from the structure or use), the section on off-street parking leads

¹⁸⁸ Regulations of the North Haven Planning and Zoning Commission, Z-38a.

off with the sentence: “Off-street parking facilities, with adequate driveways for entrance and egress connected to a street, shall be provided and suitably maintained on all premises...”¹⁸⁹ It is clear that most, if not all, of the prescribed off-street parking for a property is intended to be on-site. An examination of the urban form of the town gives one the impression that most developers never read very far past this sentence.

Setback Requirements

In commercial zones, North Haven’s zoning regulations require substantial front yard setbacks that detract from the continuity of the built form and prevent the creation of a unified streetscape. Below is a chart illustrating the various dimensional requirements for commercial zones.

Zone*	O-12	LC-12	CN-20	CA-20	CB-20	CB-40	IL-30	IL-80	IG-80
Min. Lot Area (s.f.)	12,000	12,000	20,000	20,000	20,000	40,000	30,000	80,000	80,000
Min. Width (ft.)	80	80	100	100	100	150	100	200	200
Front Yard (ft.)	25	50	50	50	50	50	75	75	75
Rear Yard (ft.)	25	25	40	25	25	40	40	75	75
Side Yard (ft.)	10	12	12	12	15	20	20	25	25
Max. Bldg. Coverage	25%	25%	25%	25%	25%	20%	35%	35%	35%
Max. Height (ft.)	35	35	35	35	35	55	60	60	60

* The number after the zone letter refers to the minimum lot area allowed

Interestingly, North Haven’s regulations have no standards for maximum FAR. One can only assume that a combination of building coverage percentage allowed and maximum height are used to develop the buildable floor area for a property.

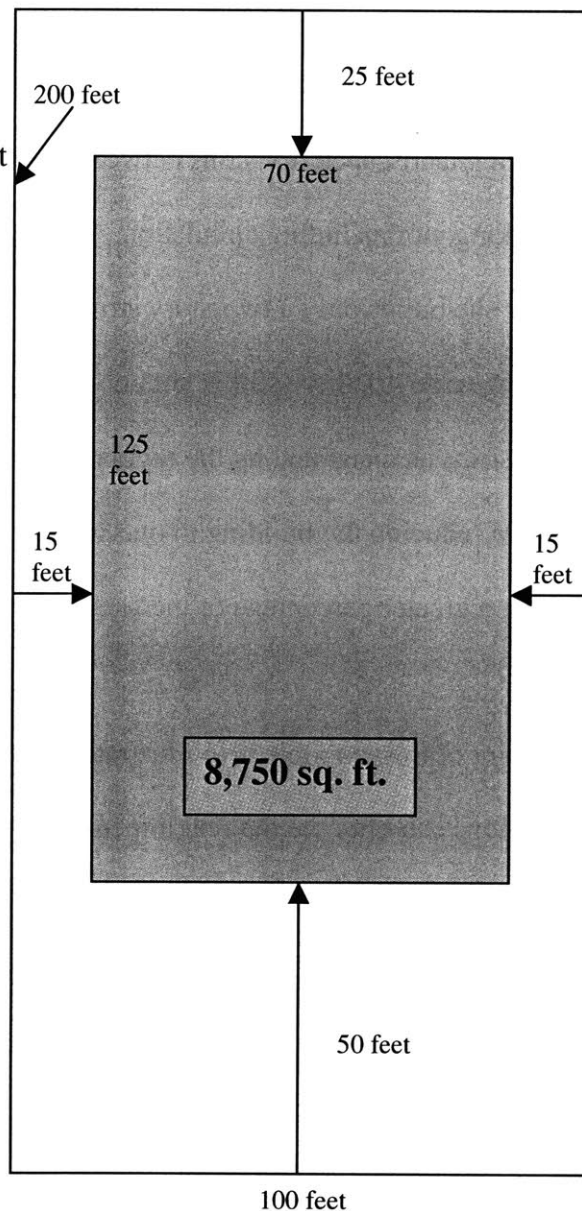
These dimensional requirements, like those in hundreds of cities and towns, arose as a means of protecting adjacent properties from any excessive noise, light, or odors caused

¹⁸⁹ Regulations of the North Haven Planning and Zoning Commission, Z-46.

by the use of a particular property. However, since North Haven's main commercial corridors are isolated and are almost entirely of one land use, these strict requirements hardly seem justified. Unnecessary setback standards may have served the judicious past purpose of protecting homes from smelting plants. Now, however, they serve the much more nefarious purpose of promoting sprawl, cementing the primacy of the automobile in the suburban landscape, and limiting creative site planning that could improve the aesthetics of suburban commercial areas. An example is needed to clearly illustrate these points.

Consider a typical suburban commercial lot zoned CB-20, with an area of 20,000 square feet and dimensions of 100 feet wide by 200 feet long. Assuming the developer wishes to maximize his or her profit, and since the maximum building coverage is 25% and the maximum height is three stories, a building of 15,000 gross square feet with a footprint of 5,000 square feet is planned. Given the setback requirements, the illustration to the right indicates the buildable area of the property.

The setbacks reduce the buildable area of the site to 8,750 sq. ft., or only



43.75% of the total site area. The developer must now site a 5,000 square foot building footprint in an area less than twice that size. This constraint leaves little room, or incentive, for unique, interesting, or progressive urban design typologies. One need only look at the existing built environment to see that most developers would simply opt for the 70 foot by 70 foot “box” structure.

Assuming that this structure will have 15,000 square feet of office space, with four parking spaces per 1,000 square feet required, 60 spaces will need to be provided. North Haven’s parking regulations state that each parking space must be 270 square feet (including landscaped divisions between rows of spaces), so 16,200 square feet is needed for parking, not including circulation. Unfortunately, the developer is out of room. Even if he or she builds only a two-story structure, thereby reducing the parking space requirement to 40, there still is not enough room to include circulation and landscaped buffer strips as mandated by the regulations. The developer is therefore forced to choose between reducing the building to one story or making the building footprint smaller, making a greater percentage of the site impervious surface.

The point of this example is to illustrate that the town’s setback requirements and parking regulations can often be the real impetus behind the building typology in North Haven’s commercial districts. If one wants to prevent future sprawl development, one needs to closely reexamine these mandates and the results that they produce. The development community is often vilified for the built environment that it produces, but towns must realize that substantial blame for development outcomes rests on their shoulders.

Lot Coverage Restrictions and Land Use Restrictions

Lot coverage restrictions work in concert with parking regulations and setback requirements to propagate small, one-story commercial buildings surrounded by expansive parking lots. As the previous example illustrated, lot coverage restrictions further reduce the buildable area of the site in addition to what is already taken out of the realm of possibility by these other limitations. Like setbacks, lot coverage restrictions were designed to prevent the excessive densities found in America's cities in the early part of the twentieth century. However, suburban development over the past fifty years has shown that there can be such a thing as not enough density.

North Haven's lot coverage restrictions in commercial and industrial zones range between 20% and 35%, with the only increase allowed for is on any lot of 30 acres or more in an industrial zone, where the maximum building coverage is 50%. It is often assumed that small lot coverage restrictions prevent large retailers from placing enormous, single-story structures on small and medium-sized lots. However, there are other and better ways to regulate bulk and design that create a more attractive built form while still allowing greater density. Increasing maximum lot coverages can allow additional building typologies that would not be feasible under existing regulations, such as street-oriented facades and pedestrian-scale design and articulation, by bringing structures closer to roadways and allowing more room for unique building plans that break out of the "big box" mold.

Finally, the wholesale zoning of large tracts of land in North Haven generally prevents mixed-use developments that could provide a new sense of neighborhood to commercial

strips. The Washington Avenue corridor is an excellent example of this reality. For nearly a mile, the western side of the road is inundated with chain retail stores and fast food restaurants in a strip mall setting. With the exception of one commercial office building and a few assorted professional offices, there are no other land uses. Such unilateral zoning creates “dead zones” of non-usage, such as evenings and Sundays, and overuse at peak weekday hours and Saturdays. This type of zoning creates more traffic, as residents are forced to make multiple trips to different parts of town (or other towns) to shop, work, eat, visit the doctor, and return home, rather than making one trip to a mixed use development.¹⁹⁰

Milford

After an in-depth examination of Milford’s zoning regulations, one recognizes that a great amount of time and energy has been exhausted in creating them and, unlike North Haven’s zoning regulations, gets a sense that the regulations are particularly reflective of the town itself. Too small to be a central city, yet too large and too old to be just another bedroom suburb, Milford’s zoning proves to be an intriguing problem. The town zoning map is a confusing jumble of districts, with sometimes as many as six to nine different districts within a one quarter square mile area. It is clear that the current zoning districts were adopted well after most of the town’s development patterns were set, giving the impression that the zoning designations are simply post facto reinforcements of the status quo rather than thoughtful future projections of desired growth or specific typologies based upon existing infrastructure, needs and environmental suitability. However, it is

¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Barnett, The Fractured Metropolis, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 21.

difficult to determine what else could have been done aside from changing Milford into a town full of non-conforming uses.

Despite Milford's myriad of zoning districts and supplementary regulations for off-street parking, service station design, cluster and planned residential development, and performance standards (to name a few), the town is home to some of the most obscene examples of commercial sprawl in southern Connecticut. The portion of Route 1 (Boston Post Road) that runs through Milford is notorious throughout the region for its traffic congestion, a direct impact of the Connecticut Post Mall and the scores of big box retailers along the road. Ironically, the center of Milford is a New Urbanist's dream; quaint shops and typical "small-town" stores line a network of streets that surround the long, narrow town green, the tiny Wepawaug River (complete with a small waterfall), and Town Hall.

General Discussion

Milford has a total of thirty-four zoning districts, including ten single-family residential zones, three multi-family residential zones, eighteen commercial and industrial zones, an open space zone, a beach erosion zone, and a "Waterfront Design" zone. For the purpose of this thesis, only the following zones will be considered as they lie within the area of study: General Office "GO"; Limited Business "LB-50", "LB-10", and "LB-2"; General Business "GB"; General Industrial "GI"; and Shopping Center District "SCD". General Office zones allow offices, mixed use buildings combining office/retail and office/residential, and single family homes. Limited Business zones allow retail, offices,

mixed-use buildings, and single family homes on half-acre sites. General Business zones allow almost all business establishments as well as mixed use residential buildings. General Industrial zones allow both commercial and industrial uses, and Shopping Center District zones provide for most commercial establishments as special uses.

Parking Requirements

Milford's retail and commercial off-street parking requirements are generally four parking spaces per one thousand gross square feet of retail or office space, with some exceptions for restaurants, wholesale stores and certain types of retail such as appliance or furniture stores. While this requirement is lower than North Haven's, it still creates a substantial amount of off-street parking for retail establishments. The town's "Design Standards for Off Street Parking" are simply two photocopied pages of standard parking space schematics, and the landscaping and buffering section, while providing for speed bumps and trees, says nothing about the siting of parking spaces. Similar to North Haven, Milford's off-street parking requirements allow "all or part of" the necessary parking spaces to be located off-site, at the discretion of the Planning and Zoning Board, at a distance of up to 250 feet.¹⁹¹

Milford's regulations do have one progressive feature that is absent from many parking regulations. A paragraph entitled "Multiple Uses and Facilities" states that when two or more uses occupy a single site, the general rule for providing parking is to use the sum of

¹⁹¹ City of Milford, Connecticut, Zoning Regulations of the City of Milford, Connecticut (January 2002), V-6.

the parking spaces required for each individual use as the total off-street parking required for the site. However, the Planning and Zoning Board may approve the joint use of parking spaces by two or more establishments, thereby reducing the number of spaces that would normally be required, provide that “the Board finds that the capacity to be provided will substantially meet the intent of the requirements by reason of variation in the probable time of maximum use by patrons or employees among such establishments.”¹⁹² A regulation such as this is a logical step to providing enough off-street parking while preventing an abundance of spaces that appropriate a large percentage of a site and spend many hours a day unused. This regulation is also particularly useful in creating compact and denser developments, as well as mixed-use projects on smaller sites.

Setback Requirements

Although the setback requirements in Milford commercial zones are substantially smaller than the expansive requirements prescribed in North Haven’s regulations, one still finds sprawl in Milford that is very similar to that of North Haven. Retail buildings are set back far from the Boston Post Road and set far apart from one another, with ample parking lots covering the intervening distances; very few commercial buildings even come close to the minimum setback lines. The various dimensional requirements for each pertinent zone are summarized in the table below.

¹⁹² Zoning Regulations of the City of Milford, Connecticut, V-6.

	GO	LB-50	LB-10	LB-2	GB	GI	SCD
Min. Lot Area (s.f.)	10,000	50,000	10,000	2,000	10,000	10,000	435,600
Min. Width (ft.)	70	180	50	20	50	50	300
Min. Depth (ft.)	100	200	100	70	100	100	300
Front Yard (ft.)	20	25	25	20	20	20	50
Rear Yard (ft.)	25	25	10	0	0	0	50
Side Yard (ft.)	10	25	10	0	0	0	50
FAR	N/A	0.4	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.5
Max. Bldg. Coverage*	40%	N/A	N/A	N/A	50%	50%	50%
Max. Lot Coverage**	80%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Max. Height (ft.)	35	30	30	24	40	40	120

* *“Maximum Building Coverage” refers to the percentage of a site that may be covered by structures*

** *“Maximum Lot Coverage” refers to the total allowed percentage of a site that may be covered by buildings and impervious surfaces*

Milford’s sprawl problem illustrates yet another issue regarding setback requirements.

The fact that the designated setbacks are only minimum requirements without any additional measures to give developers an incentive to build up to the setback lines aids in creating sprawl typologies. An implicit assumption in commercial development is that suburban shoppers will only park in surface lots that they can easily see from the highway or the road; therefore, developers prefer to locate surface parking in front of commercial buildings. Since setback requirements do not compel a building’s façade to be constructed at the minimum setback line, developers simply ignore it and place surface parking in front.

Building Coverage Restrictions, FARs, and Land Use Restrictions

Milford’s dimensional regulations for commercial zones rely primarily upon FAR and building coverage restrictions to regulate bulk; a separate regulation, lot coverage, refers only to the maximum impervious surface allowed as a percentage of site area and is only utilized in General Office zones. Limited Business zones do not have maximum lot or building coverage percentages, relying solely on FAR as a means of regulating site

density, and General Business, General Industrial, and Shopping Center District zones require only that building coverage not exceed fifty percent of the site.

While the building and lot coverage allowances in these selected Milford commercial and industrial zones enable a wider array of potential building typologies and site designs than are possible in North Haven, they do little to stem the continued development of sprawl along the Boston Post Road corridor. One finds numerous points of new construction along this stretch of road that are egregious examples of suburban sprawl, examples that are far worse than those found in North Haven. The inherent problem in these regulations is that lot coverage percentages and FARs are blunt tools being used to combat a precise phenomenon; a few well-placed and seemingly minor regulations can vastly alter a potential development from sprawl to good urban design.

While Milford's incorporation of mixed-use as an allowed use in its commercial zones is admirable, there are no incentives tied to these regulations to encourage developers to construct mixed-use projects. It is not enough to simply authorize a desired form of development if one actually wants that development to occur; steps must be taken to change the "path of least resistance" that the real estate and development industries often follow. In order for developers to stop creating single use commercial strip or big-box retail surrounded by parking, cities and towns must not only promote good development techniques, but also use the legislative powers at their disposal to guide the growth and built form of their respective communities.

Orange

The town of Orange has five sections of its zoning ordinance that pertain to the Boston Post Road commercial area: Article IV, “Local Shopping Center District”; Article V, “Commercial C-1 District”; Article VI, “Commercial C-2 District”; Article XIII, “Site Plans”; and Article XVIII, “Parking Regulations”. These three articles make an attempt to lay out effective regulations, yet one cannot help but see that these articles are the vain efforts of a small town government in the face of enormous and powerful development pressures. The situation is at best a difficult fight, if not a totally hopeless battle. This reality makes finding sprawl solutions an even more important and complex challenge in Orange.

Similar to the town of North Haven’s regulations, and perhaps even more so, Orange’s various commercial zoning requirements lack any sense of place. The text seems both sketchy and generic, and the words “PC/Codebook for Windows” at the top of each page make clear that the regulations were compiled, and perhaps even created, with a uniform desktop program. While a town with only a single full-time planner may have few other choices when it comes to updating the town zoning ordinance, the sprawl that results from insufficient and ineffective regulations can destroy the town’s character, landscape, and built environment.

General Discussion

The commercial area around the roughly three mile-stretch of the Boston Post Road that runs through Orange contains primarily three zones: Commercial C-1; Commercial C-2;

and Local Shopping Center (LSC). The dimensional regulations for these three zones are summarized in the table below.

	LSC	C-1	C-2
Min. Lot Area (s.f.)	25,000	25,000	25,000
Min. Frontage (ft.)	50	50	50
Max. Stories	3	3	3
FAR	0.5	0.5	0.5
Max. Bldg. Coverage	25%	25%	25%
Street setback (ft.)	50	50	50
Rear yd. setback (ft.)	50	50	50
Side yd. setback (ft.)	12	12	12

This table leads to a very obvious conclusion and the definition of a major problem: the regulations are entirely the same for all three zones. The only differences between these zoning districts are the uses that each allows and prohibits, differences that are very slight indeed. All three zones allow most retail commercial enterprises while prohibiting wholesale businesses, with a few very minor variances among the three. Upon close examination, having three different zoning districts for this part of Orange seems relatively useless.

Parking Regulations

Under Orange’s parking regulations, retail establishments require five parking spaces per one thousand square feet of gross leasable area, the same number as required in North Haven. A provision in the regulations allows joint parking lots for two or more separate properties; however, there is no consideration for reducing the required number of spaces due to differences in property use and the time of such use as there is in Milford’s regulations. In addition, it is unclear where the joint parking lot may be located. Finally, regulations on the design of parking lots is limited to a technical discussion of the

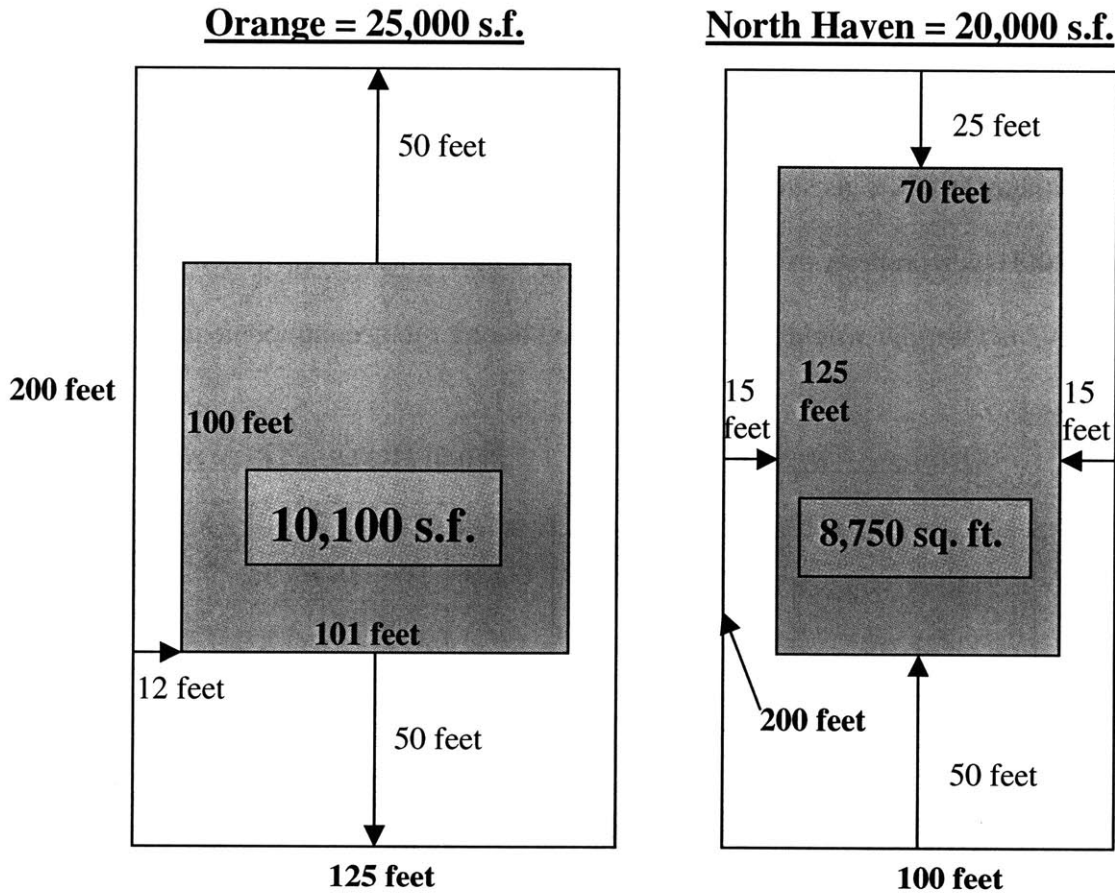
measurements for parking spaces and the necessary access aisles, with the exception of a short sentence mandating that every lot with more than thirty parking spaces have one tree and one shrub for every ten spaces. Needless to say, Orange's parking regulations are woefully inadequate for achieving any sort of positive urban design.

Setback Requirements and Minimum Lot Size

As mentioned above, the setback requirements for the three commercial zones identified are identical and prototypical of suburban towns. The resulting development patterns are similar to those of North Haven's, particularly of that town's Universal Drive area. The uniformity of the setback requirements across the three zones is particularly intriguing and gives one the impression that such requirements are simply an afterthought, as the setbacks have neither a discernible connection to the zones and their allowed uses, nor an integral purpose in the regulations aside from the standard "protection of adjacent properties" value implicit in all setback requirements. The minimum lot size requirement of 25,000 square feet virtually assures that no small-scale retail will develop outside of a strip mall setting and seems custom-made for big-box retail and malls. The purchase of 25,000 square feet of prime commercial real estate is not financially feasible for smaller companies, so only medium to large-sized developers and companies will be performing new construction.

Lot Coverages, FARs, and Land Use Restrictions

The maximum lot coverage of 25% is even more problematic in Orange than it is in North Haven. Since the minimum lot size in Orange is larger than in North Haven, the effects of a poor lot coverage regulation are magnified. Combined below is a graphical



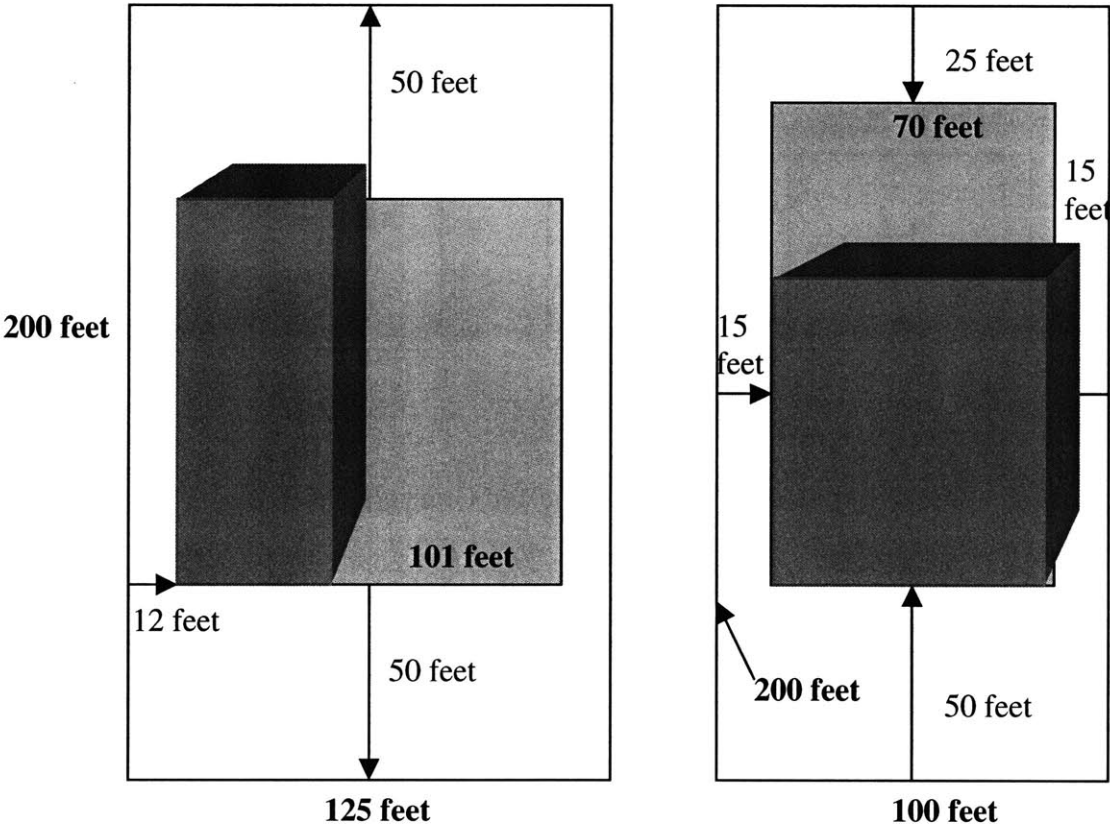
comparison between North Haven's CB-20 zone and Orange's C-1 zone.

The FAR for the Orange property is 0.5, while the North Haven property's FAR is assumed to be 0.75 (25% lot coverage multiplied by three stories allowed). Therefore, the allowed build-out for the Orange property is 12,500 square feet and 15,000 square

feet for the North Haven property. Assuming that the developer of the North Haven property could make arrangements for off-site parking, a three-story building with a footprint of 5,000 square feet could be constructed. The developer of the Orange property would be able to construct a building with a footprint of 6,250 square feet, proportionally the same in comparison to its property size as the North Haven example. However, the Orange property could only have a two-story building at its full footprint potential, as the FAR would then be maximized. As a result the scale of the building three-dimensionally to its site would decrease, making the property feel “emptier” than the North Haven property. Even if a three-story building were constructed on the Orange property, its footprint would have to be reduced in order to accommodate the increased floor area:

Orange – Three story option

North Haven – Three story option



The loss of both scale and compactness has a dramatic effect upon the appearance of a site and, ultimately, an entire commercial area.

Orange has virtually no provision for non-commercial uses in the Boston Post Road corridor; dwellings are prohibited in the LSC zone, and only planned residential developments are permitted as a special use in the C-1 and C-2 zones. While there is no clear prohibition or allowance of non-PRD housing units in the C-1 and C-2 zones, it is clear that they are neither expected nor desired. Mixed-use makes no appearance in the commercial zone text, unlike the Milford regulations which allow mixed-use developments by right.

Norwalk

Norwalk's zoning regulations are extensive and detailed; indeed, they need to be in order to control the wide variety of uses that can be found in the city and to handle the intense development pressure facing Norwalk. Although the city has taken steps in its zoning ordinance to both maintain the historic character of the city and prevent sprawl, Connecticut Avenue in the western section of Norwalk indicates that these steps have not necessarily helped. As is evident in the example of Milford, simply stating that mixed-use projects and good urban design are desirable means nothing unless effective and purposeful regulations exist to guide development in this direction.

General Discussion

The portion of Connecticut Avenue (Boston Post Road) in Norwalk that is studied in this thesis has only two zoning districts: Business “B-1” and Business “B-2”. These zones are very similar to general commercial districts found in many towns and cities, allowing offices, retail, restaurants, and some limited manufacturing. However, Norwalk has tailored the zoning text in an attempt to create a vibrant, mixed-use environment. The “Purpose and Intent” statement of the Business “B-1” section states:

“The purpose of this regulation is to permit a diversity of uses, including offices, retail services, manufacturing and multifamily dwellings, at a scale appropriate to the commercial, employment and housing needs of this city.”¹⁹³

The dimensional requirements for the B-1 and B-2 zones are summarized in the table below.

	Business B-1	Business B-2
Min. lot area (s.f.)	12,500	12,500
Max. height (stories)	4	3 or 4
Min. width (s.f.)	50	50
Front setback (ft. from street centerline)	45	45
Side setback (ft.)	0	0
Rear setback (ft.)	10	10
Max. coverage		
Building	50%	50%
Building & Parking	70%	80%
Mandatory Open Space	30%	20%
FAR	1.0	0.9

Mixed-use and multifamily residential developments are allowed by right in both B-1 and B-2 zones, and the maximum height allowed for these types of buildings is four stories, while strictly commercial buildings are limited to three stories.

¹⁹³ City of Norwalk, Connecticut, Building Zone Regulations of the City of Norwalk, CT (26 October 2001), Sec. 118-521.

Setback Requirements

At first glance, Norwalk's front setback requirement seems particularly conducive to a solid street façade line. Forty-five feet from a street center line would not be that far in from the curb line, especially along a street as wide as Connecticut Avenue. However, although this close proximity to the street is an excellent guideline, there is no incentive for a developer to build that close to the street. Since it is easier for a development corporation to use a standard site plan rather than create new plans for every town in which town it locates a chain store, a town must be more forceful in its approach to specific site guidelines. Likewise, the other setback requirements, while theoretically capable of creating a more compact urban form, also suffer from the inability to require that developers build up to the setback line. Norwalk's setback regulations, like Milford's allowance of mixed-use in commercial zones, need to do more than simply advocate for a certain form of development.

Parking Regulations

Norwalk's parking regulations require five parking spaces per one thousand square feet of retail space, a considerable amount but similar to the requirements of other towns studied in this thesis. Off-street parking for a particular property is encouraged to be on the same site; however, the parking may be located off-site up to 600 feet away. In addition, any land use, "the major use of which is during the weekend or evening hours, may meet fifty percent (50%) of the required parking facilities through the use of parking spaces provided for land or buildings the major use of which is during the weekday or

daylight hours,”¹⁹⁴ provided that the parking is located no further than 600 feet from the property in question. Parking may not be located between the front setback line and the street line, as this area is intended for landscaping. The regulations also include in-depth descriptions of the necessary dimensions of each parking space, as well as mandating planting islands in parking lots with more than twenty parking spaces. Norwalk also has a payment in lieu of parking program that, unfortunately, does not extend to the Connecticut Avenue area.

Many of Norwalk’s off-street parking provisions are progressive and laudable; however, they appear to have failed in their goal of limiting sprawl and improving urban design in the Connecticut Avenue corridor. These regulations in essence strive to make sprawl more palatable rather than changing the very nature of how off-street parking is designed and provided for; in a sense, they attack the symptoms rather than the root of suburban sprawl. Aggressively applying alternative design guidelines for off-street parking could assuage the sprawl problem in this area much more than superficial control measures.

Lot Coverages and Land Use Restrictions

Of all the lot coverage regulations examined, Norwalk’s regulations are the most progressive in terms of addressing sprawl. Fifty percent lot coverage is considerable, particularly in a commercial strip area, and the mandatory open space percentage is a laudable requirement. Despite these provisions, however, one finds sprawl all along Connecticut Avenue, with buildings generally covering nowhere near fifty percent of a

¹⁹⁴ Building Zone Regulations of the City of Norwalk, CT, Sec. 118-1220.

lot. While the regulations for lot coverage are clearly intended to prevent small buildings on large lots, they fail to effectively impact the built form because there is no incentive for developers to build to the maximum lot coverage. Without any impetus to create different building typologies, developers will simply use off-the-shelf, standard building plans for the Sports Authority or Circuit City, no matter what the lot coverage allowance is. More aggressively designed regulations are needed to prod the private market into producing the improved building forms that fulfill the City's goals for these areas.

Similarly, Norwalk's provision for mixed-use in the B-1 and B-2 zones, like that in Milford, is an admirable attempt to breathe additional life into a commercial corridor. However, it suffers from the same lack of forcefulness that plagues most mixed-use allowances in zoning regulations. Along a stretch of road that is already mostly retail development, mixed-use will not come into being unless there is a concerted effort to make it happen. The general rule of development in these areas is one of inertia; the development pattern that currently exists will continue to self-replicate itself unless a significant alteration in market conditions of land use regulations occurs.

Chapter 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Decision-making responsibilities must be shared in such a way that *local governments retain major responsibilities* for development policies and regulations and day-to-day development decisions; the alternative is the almost certain rejection of regional governance.”¹⁹⁵

Southern Connecticut – Background Analysis

The first two parts of this thesis have demonstrated that Connecticut has unique political, legal and territorial issues that pose significant impediments to regional cooperation and coordination. The four towns examined have provided a cross-section of the particular problems of sprawl in southern Connecticut, with a half century of low density commercial development extending along its principal automobile arteries through the suburbs, following the explosive post-World War II population growth. The historical background material, while necessarily unique for each of the four towns, reveals a common thread running through the development of all the studied municipalities.

The four towns, like most of their companion jurisdictions along the Connecticut shoreline, were settled during the early years of colonial America. In general, they all evolved and developed independent of one another and their neighboring towns, tied to their respective regions only through geography and the impersonal links of economy and transportation routes. Well over three centuries of strong and independent municipal governance have created an aura around the concept of home rule, further entrenched

¹⁹⁵ Douglas R. Porter, Managing Growth in America's Communities, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 242.

by individual town identities and character that have also evolved over time. Although all four towns studied have experienced similar patterns of growth and development (albeit at different scales and rates of growth), each views itself as being separate and distinct in its evolution, rather than a small part of a larger regional dynamic.

Examination of sprawl patterns in selected areas of North Haven, Milford, Orange and Norwalk reveal that sprawl has been a long-standing issue. The building typologies of these sprawl areas indicate development from the 1950s to the present day.

The inability of county government to carve out a lasting niche for itself in the past, coupled with the absence of strong regional organizations in the present, leaves southern Connecticut in a regional planning vacuum. Animosity between central cities and their surrounding suburbs continues to hamper cooperative regional efforts.

Although metropolitanism and regional planning garnered academic favor in the 1960s and 1970s, relatively few tangible gains developed as a result. The occasional city-county consolidation, such as Miami-Dade County, can be found as products of this era. The most successful examples of regional growth management and cooperation are found in the much celebrated systems of metropolitan Portland, Oregon and the Twin Cities region of Minnesota; these successes, born in the 1970s, are in stark contrast to two failed attempts to create metropolitan bodies in the Chicago area and California during the relatively same time period. With the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 and the resulting social program reductions in the federal budget, as well as the failure of regionalism to gain momentum, the idea of cohesive metropolitan government

quickly went out of vogue. Recently, however, it has seen a resurgence as previously undeveloped areas of the nation are facing a difficult battle against suburban sprawl (a battle that many communities are quickly finding is too exhausting to fight alone), and Myron Orfield continues to tout the merits of “metropolitics”. In addition, politicians are beginning to catch on to what scholars were promoting thirty years ago. David Rusk, the former mayor of Albuquerque, has brought to both political and academic attention the idea of “elastic” and “inelastic” regions and how the ability to grow and absorb exurban expansion plays a large role in racial and economic distributions.

Attempts are being made to break new ground for a regional dialogue in southern Connecticut on issues such as tax base sharing and expansion of Tweed-New Haven Airport. Recently, Yale University sponsored a “deliberative poll”, where a small number of local residents are culled from a larger group and sequestered for a weekend to discuss particular regional issues. The participants are polled regarding their opinion on these issues at the very beginning of the process; they then spend a weekend reading about these same issues, listening to lectures, and discussing the key points with their fellow participants and Yale staff. At the end of the weekend, the participants are polled again on the same issues to determine whether their opinions have changed. The purpose of the whole exercise is to show that when properly “educated”, most people will support regional initiatives. Supporters of this method imply that the failure of regional cooperation to gain momentum is essentially based on an information disconnect.

A recent article in the New Haven Register clearly illustrated the problematic disconnect in southern Connecticut between general support for regionalism but outright disdain for some of what the concept implies:

“Ask suburban elected leaders how they feel about the concept of regionalism and they’ll answer with a resounding roar of support. None argue with regional planning, or towns joining together to market Greater New Haven to the country or the world. But ask them about regional tax-base sharing, and the silence is deafening.”¹⁹⁶

Perhaps most indicative of the regional situation are quotes from the mayor of Milford (“Right now in Milford, we have our own budget problems. We have reduced revenues, and it’s harder and harder for residents to afford their taxes. I really have to be concerned right now with the taxpayers in Milford, and keeping their taxes down.”) and the mayor of East Haven (“I know it’s worked in other parts of the country, but in New England we’re a little different. We like our home rule.”).¹⁹⁷

Despite the numerous hurdles to regional cooperation, several initiatives of a regional nature have begun to take form. The South Central Regional Council of Governments has spun off programs such as C-Med (Greater New Haven’s regional emergency dispatch system), the Rideworks regional carpooling and mass-transit program, and the Regional Growth Partnership (RGP), which seeks to foster regional cooperation through economic growth initiatives. The RGP currently has two tax-sharing programs under development, TecHaven (a joint biotech marketing program involving New Haven, West Haven and Hamden that would pool a small percentage of new tax base to promote the

¹⁹⁶ Straw, sec. A.

¹⁹⁷ Straw, sec. A.

three cities as a biotech center) and the Quinnipiac River Conservation and Development Corridor (a collaboration of New Haven, Hamden, North Haven, and possibly Wallingford and Meriden, that would pool some tax revenue for environmental cleanup of the Quinnipiac River).¹⁹⁸ In addition, historically accepted regional assets and responsibilities such as water supply and water pollution mitigation are controlled by the Regional Water Authority and the Water Pollution Control Authority. Finally, watershed protection efforts and the preservation of a trap rock ridge in the central part of the state have shown that environmental issues can be key catalysts for regional partnerships in Connecticut.

The first two parts of this thesis, as well as the discussion above, have shown is that Connecticut is neither Oregon nor Minnesota. Simply stating that an overarching metropolitan government or tax base sharing by itself is the answer would be assuming a certain homogeneity between Connecticut and these other areas of the country, which as discussed above, is not the case. Connecticut's unique land use, commercial growth, and political problems deserve equally unique solutions. While elements of regionalism from other parts of the United States can play important roles in Connecticut's solutions, the complex quilt of small, incremental commercial district- and town-specific pieces stitched together with bolder, region-wide steps must be truly "Connecticut" in nature.

¹⁹⁸ Straw, Sec. A.

Municipality-Specific Steps

As a prelude to the discussion on municipality- and zone-specific steps to remedy and prevent commercial sprawl in southern Connecticut, the following table summarizes the various urban design concepts that will be promulgated as possible solutions to sprawl problems in this region.

Recommendation Summarization Table
<i>Municipality-Specific Steps</i>
1) Eliminate strip zoning
2) Land banking
3) Development agreements
4) Incentive zoning
5) Alternative forms of development
6) Better plans and regulations
<i>Zone-Specific Steps</i>
1) “Build-to” lines
2) Stronger encouragement of mixed use
3) Alternative parking requirements
4) Sidewalks and enhanced landscaping requirements
5) Modified height and lot coverage requirements

#1: Eliminate Wholesale Commercial Strip Zoning

Robert Yaro described the problem of commercial strip zoning perhaps best and most concisely, saying, “Commercial strip zoning creates one of the most noxious, unsafe and, well, alien patterns of development found in New England today.”¹⁹⁹ Long, unbroken stretches of single-zone tracts of land at best create a boring and unattractive landscape, at worst create an environment dangerous to pedestrian and automobile alike, inefficient

¹⁹⁹ Robert D. Yaro, “Balancing Growth and Conservation,” in Balanced Growth – A Planning Guide for Local Government, ed. John M. DeGrove (Washington, DC: International City Management Association, 33.1991), 33.

in its use of land, and damaging to natural systems. Remediating these unpleasant environments by altering zoning regulations should be a goal of suburban towns.

Towns can take several different approaches to rectifying their antiquated Euclidean zoning regulations. First, commercial strip areas could have the permitted uses for these zones altered to allow a wider array of land uses, such as housing, educational uses, or a mix of various different uses. The drawback to this approach is that simply because housing is an allowed use in a zone does not mean that housing will be constructed, particularly in an area that is already heavily retail. Second, towns could rezone commercial strips as new mixed-use zones that would replace the old zoning designation. This method would have the benefit of allow towns to make standard strip retail development a non-conforming use, so therefore it could not be promulgated in the future. However, this method also suffers from the same drawback of the first method. Simply saying one wants something doesn't make it happen.

A third possible alternative would be to rezone commercial strip areas to mixed use and allow only developments that were self-contained mixed-use projects (in some ways, similar to an entire zone composed of separate planned development districts). While this approach would guarantee that a mix of uses would be achieved rather than only more retail, the market for separate mixed-use developments might not materialize, at least to the level needed to fill a large area. Thus, retail strip developments would remain, and once they became abandoned, it could be difficult to find a replacement

project for the vacant land. In addition, the strict requirement that all projects be entirely mixed-use could easily scare off potential developers.

A fourth, and potentially most useful, method would be to rezone the commercial strip areas for mixed-use and provide density bonuses for developers who include a significant mixed-use component in their projects. This method would enable towns to designate strip retail developments as non-conforming uses while compelling developers to build mixed-use projects, not just more retail. Over the long-term, this method could result in significant transition from strip retail commercial typologies to a much more mixed-use environment in areas such as these.

#2: Land Bank Available Land to Control Future Development

A substantial part of the retail sprawl problem in suburban towns is that the acquisition and development of land is left entirely to the whim of the private market. Existing development patterns in suburbs clearly indicate that uncontrolled or unmanaged growth can lead to built forms that degrade the physical environment. One step for managing some private market decisions and transactions is to guide development in a manner beneficial to individual communities and the entire region through a land banking program.

Municipalities could create land banking programs for commercial strip areas that would enable them to purchase prime lots of land when they became available, removing these key parcels from uncontrolled private market development plans. By holding the land,

the city or town can solicit Requests for Proposals for each site, allowing the municipality to guide development in the manner it sees fit. In addition, the municipality would be able to exact conditions from developers that it might not be able to under standard zoning measures. For example, the city or town could negotiate with the developer for more open space in return for an increase in density or a height bonus. Rather than design a massive zoning ordinance that lays out all possible development iterations and potential trade-offs between the town and a developer, towns could use land banking and Requests for Proposals to customize the development of sites in a much more exact manner than with zoning tools, and probably with less time and effort expended.

A land banking program could easily mold to fit the needs and the means of each individual town. For some, a land banking program could comprise a single, one-time purchase of a strategically located lot, around which the town plans to redesign its commercial strip. For another, land banking could mean a continuing process of purchasing lots in transition for a constant municipal presence in the development of town land. The concept of land banking is flexible enough to allow multiple iterations matching the unique characteristics of each town, and even enabling instantaneous changes in the nature of the program should market conditions or other external factors change.

#3: Utilize Development Agreements to Negotiate Good Design

The discussion on land banking naturally leads to the idea of development agreements as a form of control over development. Development agreements provide a variety of

benefits for both municipalities and developers; in fact, the development agreement is a vehicle of land use control originally promoted by developers.²⁰⁰ Developers like these agreements because they “lock in” the rules of the development game in a particular town for a set period of time. A developer then does not have to worry about how changing municipal administrations and public sentiment might affect his or her project in the future; the document gives a developer security and reduces the risk inherent in all financial investments. For their part, towns are able to exact site amenities and other benefits, such as additional infrastructure or specific design guidelines that would not be attainable through standard zoning.²⁰¹

While many towns already employ development agreements for particularly large or prominent sites, smaller lots that still contribute significantly to the built form of an area when constructed upon are almost always allowed to develop unfettered at the hands of the private market. These smaller lots, although seemingly inconsequential by themselves, combine to form a critical mass of development whose whole is greater than the sum of its poor urban design parts. As is evidenced by the suburban built form today, the private market doesn't necessarily produce the best development outcomes, either functionally or aesthetically, on its own. Implementation of development agreements for a wider range of land parcels could create a series of projects that could reverse poor urban design trends in suburban commercial corridors. Rather than a critical mass of

²⁰⁰ Steve Bergsman, “Development Agreements Lock In Regulations,” in Balanced Growth – A Planning Guide for Local Government, ed. John M. DeGrove (Washington, DC: International City Management Association, 1991), 113.

²⁰¹ Irving Schiffman, Alternative Techniques for Managing Growth, (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1989), 55.

small, poorly-designed strip retail developments, a suburb could realize a critical mass of small, well-designed mixed-use projects.

#4: Use Incentive Zoning to Exact Proper Design and Land Use

Referred to obliquely in several parts of this thesis, incentive or bonus zoning is a widely recognized and used tool for exacting specific concessions from developers in exchange for bonuses in density, lot coverage, height, floor-to-area ratio, or allowed uses. The particular conditions that towns seek to exact from developers are often design-related, such as additional landscaping, specific building siting conditions, façade treatments, and protection of existing natural systems. In theory, zoning incentives could be based on any reasonable exaction that a town can argue provides a substantial benefit to the public or protects a valuable public resource. Creating town-specific mixes of various bonus incentives can be a time-consuming process, but the potential benefits in the resulting design and development forms are well worth the effort.

As part of a wider revision of existing zoning regulations, an incentive zoning program could aid a town significantly in acquiring the desired town design and built environment expressed in the enhanced regulations. It must be stressed that there truly cannot be one set of universally applicable incentive zoning regulations. Incentive zoning must be firmly based in numerous, place-based factors, such as the current state of the built environment, the expressed opinion of residents and government officials concerning how they want their community to look and feel, what zoning steps are needed to make this community vision in a reality, and what steps the residents and town officials believe

are acceptable trade-offs for improvements in design and development. Clearly, these are issues that need to be worked out at the local level.

In addition, incentive zoning measures need to be specific for each zone and area of a town. For example, a height bonus might be completely appropriate for a dense commercial corridor, but incompatible with the nature of a single-family residential zone.

#5: Investigate the Pertinence of Alternative Forms of Development

As more of a long-term step, towns could begin studying the physical and financial feasibility of alternative forms of development that do not fall under the heading of typical suburban development typologies. These alternative forms of development could include transit-oriented development (TODs), development projects based upon New Urbanist planning principles (distinct and separate from the architectural, design control and social control principles of this style), and a return to denser, more urbanistic site and development plans in commercial corridors. More specifically, towns should examine the place-specific design and development implications of using numerous housing unit types, creating street grids within commercial strip areas rather than having only a single main road and a few widely-scattered minor access roads, guiding future development in a way that maximizes the use of existing infrastructure, and rethinking the role of both the automobile and the public transit system in future development plans.

Municipalities could begin this process by deciding where these alternative forms of development would be best situated within their respective borders. Identification of existing transportation and utility infrastructure could form the baseline data for a

discussion about the appropriateness of various locations for new forms of development. While the towns studied in this thesis have all major utilities running into and through their commercial corridors, analysis of existing transportation infrastructure and certain types of communication infrastructure (such as advanced fiber optic cables) would be critical. Determining the current carrying capacity of roadways, the location of existing public transit routes and potential paths of expansion for these routes, and other factors would provide invaluable insight into the best location for new development typologies.

After initial analysis of existing development conditions within commercial corridors, suburbs could begin a thorough examination and evaluation of possible sites for reuse as alternative development plans. The evaluation process would be very similar to that of creating a master or comprehensive plan, with significant input from government officials and the public. An open and frank discussion about the merits of various potential sites, the implications of these alternative development plans on the transportation systems and built form of the town, and how these developments could alter or impact the character and nature of the town would be essential elements of the process.

Introducing these alternative forms of development in suburban towns would be a significant challenge. The concept of high density, mixed-use projects centered around mass transit is an idea antithetical to the suburban mentality; to many, it would appear that the city they or their parents had left behind was finally catching up with them. Indeed, it is hard to argue against the fact that many suburbanites enjoy their large-lot zoning and ample retail stores. The challenge is not to try to change suburbanites into

New Yorkers or Bostonians, but rather to illustrate that there are alternatives to development that is architecturally defoliant, out of scale and proportion, and reliant on the automobile. Alternatives to the strip mall and the big-box, whether they be typologies that exist now such as TODs and New Urbanism, or typologies yet to be proposed in the coming years, should be examined as possible solutions to commercial sprawl in these towns.

#6: Create Better Plans and Zoning Regulations

Perhaps the most influential factors behind the development of suburbs are the planning documents and zoning regulations of each town. These documents, in essence, codify the rules of the development game in each town, informing citizens, developers and government officials about the requirements of and prescriptions for development in different parts of a municipality. In an almost endemic fashion, however, towns have simply adopted standard zoning regulations promulgated throughout the country, with some of the language even reminiscent of the first half of the twentieth century; one can still find provisions for “light and air” in the purpose statement of many zoning regulations, wording virtually unchanged since the 1920s. Planning documents, such as comprehensive or master plans, are often overly general and are only advisory in nature.

Many Connecticut residents can be heard saying, “What happened to our town?”, or “We’re losing our historic character.”; people often seem perplexed as to why their respective towns have morphed into carbon copies of sprawl everywhere. One simple explanation for this problem is that zoning regulations in these towns are the same as

those anywhere else in the country. These regulations lack place-specific considerations, so it is no wonder that one town looks just like many others. If residents and government officials want development that respects the character of their towns and reflects the ideals, goals and aspirations of the population, zoning regulations should be retooled to promote specific local planning philosophies.

Towns should take the necessary time, money and effort to revisit their zoning ordinances and rebuild them from the bottom up. One often reads in local newspapers about this town or that town's process of "updating" their zoning ordinance. These "updates", however, typically imply tweaking a few permitted uses in certain zones, adding a few uses as special permit uses in other zones, amending and adding some definitions, and perhaps tweaking a couple of minor dimensional requirements. These topical alterations to the regulations do not address the root of the suburban sprawl problem which is located deep in the heart of standard dimensional requirements, parking requirements, and the undue separation of uses, as argued in this thesis. To truly remedy suburban sprawl, one must attack the heart of the problem with full zoning ordinance revisions.

Over-worked and under-staffed planning and zoning departments are often unable to assume such a large task as rewriting an entire town zoning ordinance in a new and non-traditional manner. Doing so requires extensive research, consultation with citizens, government officials and private sector representatives, and enormous time and energy resources to devise place-based strategies for creating a zoning ordinance that guides development in the direction in which the town wishes it to go. Politicians and taxpayers

must be willing to face the reality that there is no easy or inexpensive way to create proper zoning regulations; in many cases, more staff or the services of outside consultants may be needed. The expense involved in either method must be recognized as a necessity for improving the built form of the town.

Similarly, vague master or comprehensive plans should be either supplemented by more in-depth, focused plans for specific areas or made more specific themselves. The element of specificity added should include clear and concrete goals, feasible and direct steps that will be taken to achieve these goals, and an articulate text understandable to citizens and planners alike. Towns should employ various methods that give these plans more power, both for the benefit of the plan and for its comprehension in the public eye; there is nothing quite as disconcerting as reading a planning document from cover to cover and still not knowing how much of the plan or what parts of it will actually become reality. Indeed, one of the best methods for giving a plan power is to begin establishing a pattern of actual implementation of plan recommendations. Over time, it will become evident that if something is stated in a plan, it is stated for a reason. Thus, the recommendations contained in a plan finally will have concrete meaning to people other than the plan's authors.

Zone-Specific Steps

#1: Reconfigure the Concept of Setback Requirements

As argued previously in this thesis, setback requirements have had an adverse impact on the physical form and development of commercial corridors in several southern

Connecticut towns. Forcing the siting of structures far from the street line and distanced from other similar uses, setback requirements aid in the development of big-box retail and strip shopping centers with expansive surface parking lots in front of them.

Overhauling these outdated and counterproductive requirements for commercial corridors is a first step toward improving the design of future development projects in these towns.

Towns have two main options at their disposal to remedy the problems that result from excessive setback requirements. A town in question can simply reduce the distance of the required setbacks or employ “build-to” lines that delineate how close a structure must be located to a property or street line. However, utilizing one of these options without using the other can lead to undesirable site planning or be ineffective in preventing sprawl typologies. Therefore, a combination of both of these tools is a necessary component to effectively amend commercial corridor zoning regulations in the fight against sprawl.

Simply reducing setback requirements would do little to change suburban sprawl patterns. Although reduced setbacks would mean that new development theoretically could be located closer to the street, there is no incentive or legal impetus for developers to build at the setback line. For many developers, the big-box retail store surrounded by parking lots or the shopping center set far back from the road with expansive surface parking located in front for easy and visible vehicular access is the industry standard, a standard used for decades and proven economically efficient and successful. Without a strong reason for designing different retail typologies (typologies that could likely be as

efficient and as successful as “standard” suburban developments, but have simply never been attempted in this setting), developers have no compulsion to alter what they believe already works fine. Reducing setback requirements, while in principle a positive step against sprawl, lacks the power to affect real change in sprawl patterns.

“Build-to” lines, in contrast, do not allow the relative freedom that standard setback requirements provide to developers; rather, they mandate the maximum distance from lot lines that development can take place. This measure helps ensure that development will occur in an area of a lot where a town deems it to be best for the overall urban design of the commercial corridor. Build-to lines provide greater power to municipalities for shaping their own unique built environments; towns that desire buildings closer to the street can simply set the build-to lines very close to front lot lines, while other municipalities that believe that a small amount of surface parking in front of retail establishments is a positive element and in keeping with their respective plans of development can set the build-to lines further back. In either case, the town in question can be relatively certain of the façade location of future development before it is even proposed.

The ability of build-to lines to exert greater control over the location of development on a particular site can also serve as a remedy to another problem related to scale. In the description of sprawl patterns in the targeted areas of Orange, North Haven, Milford and Norwalk, one of the underlying problems with the physical form of the studied areas was the width of the main roadway that traversed each area. The Boston Post Road in

Norwalk, Milford and Orange, and Washington Avenue and Universal Drive in North Haven are all very wide, beset with heavy traffic, and very difficult to cross on foot. However, the width of these roads is probably justified given the amount of traffic that courses along them. Aside from these rather obvious problems, the excessive street widths also cause a more subtle, but equally damaging to the quality of the built environment, difficulty. A general guideline for scale in urban design provides that in order for a street to be perceived as “enclosed”, and thus provide the street with a sense of place, the ratio of the distance between building façades on opposing sides of the street to the height of the buildings lining the street should not exceed 2:1. Clearly, this ratio is far exceeded along the Boston Post Road, Washington Avenue and Universal Drive. The wide roadways amplify the negative impact that substantial setback requirements have on the scale of a commercial corridor, further diminishing the sense of place in these areas. The utilization of build-to lines rather than minimum setback requirements in the commercial corridors of these towns would provide each municipality with the ability to bring development closer to the street. This shift to more street-oriented buildings quickly reduces the ratio of distance from building façades to building heights. In addition, the width of the street no longer appears as visually overwhelming as before, because the buildings near the street line help to give the area an enhanced sense of scale. Although the street may be the same width, the framing provided by the buildings reduces the perception of this width, thereby allowing the road to carry the same amount of traffic while blending into the urban fabric in a much more harmonious manner.

Although build-to lines provide greater control over the siting of development, standard setback requirements can still serve a role in commercial corridors, particularly when these corridors are directly adjacent to single-family residential neighborhoods. Few could argue that the intent behind setback requirements is flawed; the protection of one property from the potentially noxious uses of another property or roadway is certainly an important function. However, this function has been inadvertently misused in areas where it is not needed, often resulting in lower density, sprawling development. No matter how “street-oriented” or urbanistically designed a commercial corridor becomes, there will still be heavy traffic, light and noise associated with the commercial development. Reasonable setbacks along commercial lot lines that border upon residential areas are certainly warranted. In addition, small front yard setbacks would be appropriate to allow room for landscaping, lighting and other streetscape amenities. An effective system of building siting requirements would include build-to lines that set the maximum distance from the street or lot line that one could construct a main building in conjunction with small setback requirements that provide space between the right-of-way and the buildings for streetscape and landscaping elements.

#2: Make Mixed Use a Reality Rather Than a Laudable Ideal

Both Norwalk’s and Milford’s zoning regulations discuss mixed use as a permitted land use in commercial zones. However, if one does not include retail and professional office space together as a mixed use development, one would be hard pressed to find any examples of true mixed use developments in the areas studied in this thesis. While it is fashionable to mention mixed use in plans of development and zoning regulations, often

little is done to promote its actual creation. Simply stating that mixed use in commercial zones is a goal of a town or city in no way provides an impetus for its manifestation. Stronger steps must be taken if towns and cities truly wish to achieve this goal.

One facet of this problem stems from the reality that most big-box retail and commercial strip shopping center developers have little or no experience with mixed use projects, particularly when those projects involve housing. Retail development is all that they do and all that they are comfortable doing. Creating mixed use projects either involves finding a development firm that has expertise in retail, office and residential development or putting together a team of developers who collectively have the necessary skill sets to create such a project; the former are few and far between, and the latter is a complex, time-consuming and difficult coalition to put together.

Putting language in zoning regulations that promotes the development of mixed use in commercial corridors means little if there is no forceful municipal action to support it. When CVS or Circuit City is looking for a site on which to build in a town, they have no interest in mixed use projects, no matter how important the zoning regulations make it sound. Towns need to take several additional steps to turn a lofty urban ideal into a suburban reality. While broader, town-wide policy changes are needed to truly create the drive toward mixed use development, some additions to existing zoning regulations can lay the foundation for expanded mixed use opportunities. First and foremost, the towns of North Haven and Orange should follow the example of Milford and Norwalk and

include mixed use projects as permitted uses in the commercial corridors examined previously in this thesis.

All four towns must provide incentives for mixed use developments in their commercial corridors in order for any such developments to occur. Admittedly, it is difficult to create an incentive package for large mixed use developments; indeed, if a development firm has no experience with such projects, no incentive, no matter how inviting, will be able to entice the developer to create a mixed use development. Towns can, however, develop incentives for small mixed-use elements to be added on to commercial projects.

Lot coverage, height and Floor-to-Area Ratio (FAR) bonuses are three forms of incentives that can often be used to entice developers to provide added amenities to stale and monotonous projects. Towns could create, over designated commercial areas, an overlay district that includes bonuses in these three dimensional requirements for developers who provide space for more than one type of use, with the amount of space required to achieve the bonus tied to the overall size of the development project. For example, a retail developer could receive an FAR bonus for dedicating a certain percentage of a proposed project's area for non-retail uses, such as professional offices, community use, education or housing. In order for this incentive to work, the bonus program would need to be designed to provide a net gain in the square footage of the primary proposed use, so that taking part in the program would provide a financial benefit to the developer.

Similarly, lot coverage and height bonuses could also serve to incentivize the development of mixed use projects. Providing a mix of uses would afford a developer greater lot coverage and additional building height, serving the dual purpose of providing developers with a financial carrot to create such projects while increasing density. While it is unlikely that these bonuses, if used in the absence of other steps to promote mixed-use (discussed below), would generate much in the way of new housing or generally turn a retail corridor into a bustling, twenty-four hour a day destination, they could be influential in breaking the unchallenged dominance of single-use projects in the suburban landscape.

#3: Create a Paradigm Shift in Parking Requirements

As discussed previously in several sections of this thesis, surface parking requirements are some of the most onerous and sprawl-promoting regulations in standard zoning ordinances. Excessive requirements for the number of spaces for a retail use result in parking lots that are half-empty everyday, with the exception of the holiday shopping season. Clauses stating that all parking for a site must be located on that same site limit creativity in building and site design, compel small lot coverages where they are not necessary, and raise the amount of impervious surface on lots. Little provision or incentive for shared parking between different uses on the same property or several different properties leads to the unnecessary compounding of these excessive space requirements. To effectively combat sprawl, towns need to address the issue of parking and develop solutions that are not simply temporary fixes to this problem; these solutions

must in fact change the basic principles and assumptions through which parking is approached in suburban commercial corridors.

Reducing the number of parking spaces required for different uses is a key first step in a program of parking requirement revisions. The towns of North Haven, Milford, Norwalk and Orange have parking requirements for retail space ranging from four to five parking spaces per one thousand square feet of retail space. Assuming a requirement of four parking spaces for every one thousand square feet of space, a retail corridor containing one million square feet of space would require 4,000 parking spaces. A simple reduction of one-quarter of a parking space per one thousand feet of retail space would reduce the total number of required spaces by two hundred fifty. Assuming minimum dimensions of nine by eighteen feet per parking space, these two hundred fifty spaces account for 40,500 square feet, or just under one acre. This number does not even include the square footage of accessways and driveways needed to service these two hundred fifty spaces. Clearly, even minor alterations of parking space requirements can have a significant impact on the amount of land consumed by the automobile in sizable suburban retail corridors. When one sees parking lots that never appear to exceed three-quarters full, the justification for modest reductions in the number of parking spaces required for retail is clearly observable.

The improved siting of surface parking lots is also a critical component of reducing sprawl. Large lots, located between their associated structures and the street, dehumanize the scale of suburban commercial corridors, rendering any attempts to pedestrianize these

corridors futile. To help alleviate this problem, towns could mandate that all surface parking be located to the rear of commercial buildings, or prescribe specific percentages for how much surface parking could be located on any one side of a building. For example, a town could state that up to 10% or 50 parking spaces, whichever is less, could be located in front of a store or other commercial building. Similar guidelines could be enacted for the sides of buildings as well.

Another method of reducing the number of parking spaces needed for commercial development is the utilization of shared parking. This method is most efficient when used in a mixed-use environment, where, for example, parking can service office space during the business day and residential units in the evening and on the weekends. While none of the commercial areas studied in this thesis truly provide the symbiotic mix of uses that would allow complete shared parking, some modifications to existing parking requirements could help abate the overwhelming amount of surface parking currently required. A thorough examination of timing and use patterns within a selected commercial strip could indicate potential shared parking opportunities. Supermarkets, for example, do much of their business after five o'clock in the evening and on weekends; perhaps arrangements could be found where a portion of the supermarket parking could be shared by more workday-intensive commercial uses.

The streetscape of suburban commercial corridors is often marred by driveway and accessway curb cuts that create both more complex traffic interactions due to many vehicles entering and exiting a roadway from many different points and an auto-oriented

atmosphere that stifles any hopes of having a corridor that is pedestrian-friendly. A solution that could significantly reduce the number of these egress points is the use of shared driveways to access commercial parking lots. Two or more businesses could have a joint accessway to either separate or shared parking lots that would substantially limit the proliferation of traffic-complicating curb cuts. This goal could be accomplished with joint use agreements, whereby a shared accessway or driveway would be provided on one of the properties and then “leased” by the adjoining properties for a nominal fee to cover maintenance of the accessway and to compensate the underlying owner for use of private property.

Perhaps the most effective means of addressing the aesthetic problem of surface parking is to eliminate much of it by either centralizing surface parking or providing structured parking in its place. This method, however, would require significant control and oversight on the part of the municipality, which could be a difficult task for a smaller town such as Orange. However, the benefits to the built form, sense of place, and aesthetics of commercial corridors would certainly warrant the additional government involvement for larger cities and towns like Milford and Norwalk.

In a centralized parking system, the municipality would purchase suitable situated tracts of available land in designated commercial corridors. Ideally, these land parcels would be rear lots set back from the street; if they were located directly along a roadway, the municipality could subdivide the land, using the portion of the original lot removed from the street for parking and selling the newly created lots along the street to developers to

help defray the cost of parking lot construction. These tracts of land would then be developed by the town as surface parking. Rather than have private developers build their own surface lots for each new commercial project, developers would “purchase” parking spaces in the municipally-created surface lots near their projects in a payment in lieu of parking (PILOP) program. The up front cost of these spaces would be close or equal to the cost that the developer would have had to pay to build its own spaces, and a modest annual maintenance fee paid to the town by the developer on a per space basis would be equivalent to the maintenance cost the developer would have had to pay for the upkeep of its own private spaces.

The essential logic behind a PILOP program is that the costs of creating and maintaining parking remain unchanged for developers, while the municipality maintains complete control over the siting, design, and location of surface parking, as it actually owns the surface lots rather than attempting to control their design and development through relatively blunt zoning instruments. The removal of on-site surface parking requirements would liberate a tremendous amount of lot area for open space, better urban design and more creative site planning and building typologies. As these satellite municipal lots would be located perhaps as far away as five hundred to one thousand feet away from the front doors of some retail developments, developers would be forced to design sites that are pedestrian-oriented and integrated with their respective off-site parking locations to enable effective customer flow to their projects.

In the absence of a PILOP program, because of physical or financial limitations or because of a small town government that cannot expend additional resources to manage several parking lots (such as Orange, perhaps), promoting collective off-site parking would be a desirable alternative plan. Loosening the on-site parking requirements to allow off-site parking up to five hundred feet away to count toward a use's parking requirements (as is allowed in North Haven and Milford) could lead to a reduction in the size and scale of surface parking lots by collecting excessive parking spaces in suitably located shared lots. However, development bonuses would likely be needed to stimulate the private market to provide such a service. While both North Haven and Milford allow off-site parking, developers have little incentive to utilize this option unless there are serious site constraints that prevent the provision of enough on-site parking to meet the necessary requirements. Indeed, it seems this clause was placed in the zoning regulations more as an auxiliary measure to aid developers than as a measure to promote good urban planning.

Structured parking is a rare sight in the suburbs, even in suburban retail corridors. However, parking garages may also be effective tools in combating the spread of large surface parking lots. Less land-consumptive than centralized, shared or collective parking, structured parking would allow a large number of parking spaces in a relatively small area. This density of parking would mean that garages could conceivably be located very close to or directly adjacent to the uses they serve, rather than several hundred to one thousand feet away.

Parking garages, however, suffer from the three stigmas of cost, management issues and perception. Structured parking is prohibitively expensive for many private retail development projects, and certainly much more expensive than simple surface parking. Developers rarely have any interest in either managing garages themselves or arranging for a private management firm to run associated parking structures. For towns and cities that do not have parking authorities, the idea of delving into municipal parking garage management may seem foreign and unwanted. Even for municipalities that do have parking authorities, the added burden of managing more parking may be financially infeasible. Finally, many suburban residents (and urban residents, too) perceive structured parking as harbors for crime. Surface parking is viewed as safer and easier to access, particularly when it is free, highly visible and does not require driving up several levels to park.

These hurdles, while difficult to overcome, can be cleared by a dedicated and aggressive municipal and regional approach. Towns, in conjunction with assistance from the regional corridor organization and the state, could fund parking garages in strategic locations where they would be of most use. A town could use its bonding ability combined with state bonding money to finance the construction of parking garages. Impact fees from regional development could be earmarked in part by the regional corridor to assist the town in paying the annual debt service on these bonds and to help pay for additional security, thereby reducing the financial burden on the town in recognition of the regional benefit received by having structured parking. Other

programs combining unique mixes of local, regional, state, and even federal or private funds could be developed to make the construction of parking garages a financial reality.

#4 Install Sidewalks and Demand Quality Landscaping

Many discussions concerning suburban sprawl focus on how federally-funded programs have encouraged sprawl development, the primacy of the automobile and its effect on land use patterns, or the economic forces of the private market and how these forces drive the location of development. Indeed, these major issues, as well as many others too numerous to list, are and were key elements in forming the suburban environment one sees today. Yet, remedying a defect that often seems too mundane for consideration in larger discussions on sprawl could have a beneficial impact on how one perceives suburban development. The simple step of improving the aesthetics of site design and site planning could be crucial in creating a physical setting more conducive to the pedestrian and more pleasing to the eye.

The installation of sidewalks along commercial corridors would both facilitate the movement of pedestrians around and through shops and businesses and improve the safety of these areas for pedestrians. Sidewalks should not be limited to placement only alongside major roadways, but also through parking lots and across minor streets and accessways. Standard commercial corridors without sidewalks force customers to use their cars to go from one store or shopping center to the next, even if these businesses are adjacent to each other or directly across the street from one another. The multiple routes for foot traffic allowed by sidewalks would help reduce the amount of automobile

congestion in suburban commercial corridors by allowing shopping patrons to park in one lot and visit multiple stores on multiple sites safely on foot without needing to get back into their cars.

Many, if not most, zoning regulations require that landscaping be part of any new development, both in parking lots and either in front of buildings or along setback areas. However, when one examines the “landscaping” that developers provide in suburban commercial corridors, it is quite obvious that quality is sorely lacking, even in places with site plan review. The plantings one sees emphasize the bare minimum of effort and expense, often dominated by ground cover elements (such as the ever-popular juniper) mixed with bark mulch to prevent weeds from growing. In order to abate the continuing visual destruction of these suburban commercial corridors, towns must devise comprehensive and stringent landscaping requirements that far exceed those that are found currently in suburban zoning regulations.

For example, towns could impose highly specific requirements regarding the types of plantings used and the mix of these various types. Requiring one shade tree of a minimum planting height and/or caliper for every so many feet of linear distance in setback or buffer strip areas would help screen parking lots and commercial uses from residential areas and give the entire corridor a more natural feel and appearance.

Requiring an adequate mix of flowering trees, evergreen trees and shrubs, deciduous trees and shrubs, and ground cover would ensure that one type of planting would not dominate the corridor landscape. Mandating that landscape elements reach a certain level of

opacity by certain milestone years (such as five years or ten years) after planting would provide a benchmark that could be used as a way to measure how well a developer has met the landscaping requirements. Finally, adding a regulation that compelled developers to retain as much existing vegetation, particularly large-caliper trees, in their site plans and required the planting of native New England species wherever possible in the landscaping plan would protect the existing natural environment and prevent entire sections of a town from being overrun by on-sale, store-bought plants that reflect neither the existing natural environment nor its hundreds of years of history.

#5: Modify Lot Coverage and Height Requirements

Along with setback and parking requirements, lot coverage requirements have had a significantly detrimental impact upon the suburban built form, as argued previously in this thesis. Creating an environment where only 25% of a lot is covered by structures, which are usually set far back from the street, results in a built form where voids dominate over solids and eradicate any sense of place, cohesion or enclosure. However, in a suburban environment where lots are often much larger than those along a typical urban main street, allowing 100% lot coverage could be just as detrimental. A long, solid row of 100,000 square foot buildings would generate an oppressive amount of traffic and would eliminate all surface parking, making the corridor unnavigable without some form of massive public transit infrastructure. Thus, a healthy balance between allowing more bulk and providing for its external effects must be achieved.

Modest increases in lot coverage, when coupled with reduced parking requirements and the provision for off-site surface or structured parking, would be feasible in suburban commercial corridors. Increasing lot coverage would reduce the amount of void space in

these corridors, giving the areas a heightened sense of place and enclosure. Because of the large lot size generally found in suburban commercial areas, the front lot lines adjacent to roadways are often quite long. In order to maintain a consistent façade line along the roadway in a commercial corridor, increased lot coverage could allow larger buildings that would stretch the distance necessary to give a street façade line some continuity, while still enabling the building to be wide enough for meaningful commercial use.

Height is another dimensional requirement that is often misused in suburban development. Clearly, it would be incongruous to have twenty-story buildings in a suburban commercial corridor directly adjacent to single family homes. However, there can be such a thing as not enough height; single-story buildings surrounded by seas of surface parking and wide streets illustrate this fact poignantly. The four towns studied in this thesis do allow buildings to be up to three stories of thirty-five feet in height in their commercial corridors, but one rarely sees such height achieved because developers often opt for the simple, single-story box structure with which they are most comfortable. The key to achieving maximum height in these areas is to devise ways to compel developers to build more than a single story.

“Build-to” lines for height are one possibility for reaching a desired height for buildings in a commercial corridor. Rather than prescribe a set height that all buildings must reach, however, towns can allow for flexibility by setting a range of heights within which developers can work. For example, a town could require that all buildings in a particular

area be between two and five stories in height, rather than strictly stating that all buildings must be four stories. Variation in height is certainly a positive element of a streetscape, as it helps to break up the built form and articulate the texture of the façade line.

Regional Steps

#1: Regional Summit

Before any tangible steps can be taken to limit additional commercial sprawl, improve existing sprawl problems, and create better urban design, all the towns in the region must come together to discuss the issues that are of importance to each. Currently, major discussions over key regional issues only occur when one municipality is pitted against another in some sort of battle. During the past few years, New Haven and Milford were essentially at war over a proposed “super-regional” mall for New Haven’s waterfront. Milford is home to the Connecticut Post Mall, the largest mall in the region, and the town teamed up with the Westfield Corporation, the Post Mall’s owner, to wage a costly, and ultimately successful, legal attack against the proposed mall in New Haven. It was during this conflict that questions of sprawl, excessive traffic generation, and commercial development in general began to be discussed on a regional level. However, the core issues of the mall debate were clouded by heated emotions, as New Haven saw an opportunity to have over 3,500 jobs locate in the city along with the massive tax revenue, and Milford feared the demise of one of its largest tax generators.

In a calmer environment, a valuable regional dialogue could have arisen from the mall fight. A regional summit would provide an opportunity for a reasoned and sensible discussion on regional issues, enabling all of the represented towns to understand the concerns of the others, to work on finding solutions to mutual problems, and to construct a framework for future cooperation and a wider dialogue.

#2: Urban Design Compact

The concern that perhaps most impedes the development of good urban design in southern Connecticut is the fear of losing tax dollars. The reliance of towns on the local property tax in Connecticut is almost slavish; with few other ways to generate funds, municipalities are economically coerced into seeking to expand their commercial and industrial tax base as much as possible. To not do so would require raising residential tax rates, which no politician with plans for a long career enjoys doing. The problem of overreliance on the local property tax also stems from the fact that many school systems in Connecticut are municipality-based rather than regional systems. Education takes a huge percentage of many towns' budgets, particularly smaller towns such as Orange and North Haven.

The result of this limiting reality is that developers are not pressed for better urban design, additional site amenities, or impact fees and conditions. The fear is that a developer will simply go one town over, where the additional tax base is needed and relied upon just as badly. Aside from the more long-term goal of achieving some type of regional tax base sharing program (the Minnesota tax base sharing program of Myron

Orfield-fame was born in the early 1970s, and only within the past five years has it gained widespread acclaim and acknowledgment), what can towns in strong home-rule areas do to compel better urban design?

Hudson River Valley Greenway

An urban design compact is a mechanism that could make a very valuable contribution to improving the design and development of southern Connecticut. In a similar vein of thought, the state of New York created the Hudson River Valley Greenway Act of 1991, which combined the preexisting Hudson River Valley Greenway Council and the Heritage Task Force for the Hudson River Valley into a new regional body that included 10 counties and three million acres of land area.²⁰² The reconfigured Greenway Council was empowered to encourage voluntary regional planning compacts for the entire Hudson River Valley region; communities that join a regional compact receive “financial and procedural incentives” from the state of New York.²⁰³ The Heritage Task Force was retooled as the Greenway Conservancy for the Hudson River Valley and charged with implementing the goals and policies that were produced by the new regional planning process.²⁰⁴ As the executive director of the Greenway Council states, “It is the combination of planning and projects-of visions and the means to attain portions of these visions-that has led to early successes within the Greenway region.”²⁰⁵

²⁰² David S. Sampson, “The Hudson River Valley Greenway – a Regional Success Story,” 16 May 2001, <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/Proceed/sampson.html> (28 April 2002).

²⁰³ <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/Proceed/sampson.html>.

²⁰⁴ <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/Proceed/sampson.html>.

²⁰⁵ <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/Proceed/sampson.html>.

In the Greenway program, the county is the building block of the regional planning compact process, although municipalities can form compacts with one another at a sub-county level. When communities join together in a regional compact, there is usually a stated and specific intent and purpose for doing so (i.e., promoting economic development in a certain area, protecting wetlands or open space in another, etc.). The regional planning compact must address the five key issues that are the purpose for creating the Greenway initially. These include economic development, regional planning, natural and cultural resource protection, heritage and environmental education, and public access. The compacts must also include provisions for “identifying development of regional impact and areas of regional concern” and identifying “necessary public facilities and infrastructure.”²⁰⁶ Using the Hudson River Valley as a focal point around which to base a regional planning effort, the state of New York has created a system where regional planning is not another layer of government but rather a piece in a larger framework that promotes and contributes to a specific goal and purpose. Protecting the Hudson River Valley corridor is the overriding purpose of the Greenway and the Conservancy, with the regional planning compact serving the three-fold role of promoting regional cooperation, sensible development and environmental protection within this global structure.

Freedom’s Way

“From a handful of individuals with a dream of regional cooperation for historic preservation and sustainable development” has arisen the Freedom’s Way Heritage Area,

²⁰⁶ NYS Hudson River Valley Greenway – Community Council, <http://www.hudsongreenway.state.ny.us/commcoun/commcoun.htm> (28 April 2002).

a regional composition of thirty-six towns in Massachusetts and six towns in New Hampshire that have united in an attempt to protect and leverage their collective and significant historical resources.²⁰⁷ The Heritage Area has established itself as a 501(c)(3) organization under the name The Freedom's Way Heritage Association, Inc., whose stated purpose is "to preserve the special sense of this place and enable both residents and visitors to share that special sense."²⁰⁸ One of the association's key functions is to form partnerships with municipalities, state and federal government agencies, and with other public and private sector groups to ultimately create and implement a Cultural Heritage and Management Plan for the designated Freedom's Way area.²⁰⁹ Currently, legislation is pending in Congress that would designate the area as a National Heritage Area, opening the door for federal financial assistance.

This form of regional compact is truly an extension of the "narrative city" philosophy of urban planning (or, in this case, the "narrative region"), and as the Hudson River Valley Greenway finds its philosophical roots in the planning role of natural systems, Freedom's Way respects the landscape by tying it into interpretive historical elements of the area. The Freedom's Way Heritage Association views the planning function of the Heritage Area as being "story"-based; these stories can be divided into three basic themes: "Rediscovering the Native Landscape", "Inventing the New England Landscape", and "Shaping the Landscape of Democracy."²¹⁰ The association envisions "heritage trails" that tie history with the landscape linking member towns and "interpretive centers", with

²⁰⁷ "About FWHA," Freedom's Way Heritage Association, <http://www.freedomsway.org> (29 April 2002).

²⁰⁸ <http://www.freedomsway.org>.

²⁰⁹ <http://www.freedomsway.org>.

²¹⁰ <http://www.freedomsway.org>.

a strong focus on how key historical figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, as well as Native American populations, tied the use of the natural environment to larger issues of social justice, independence and spirituality.²¹¹

Ultimately, the social goal of the Heritage Area can be interpreted as instilling a renewed sense of land stewardship that motivates residents and visitors alike to be more respectful of both history and natural systems in land use planning.²¹²

While more limited in its scope than the Hudson River Valley Greenway program, Freedom's Way offers another example of how non-traditional methods of regional coordination and cooperation can be developed to impact the form, design and function of multiple-municipality areas (non-traditional in the sense that they entail neither creating another layer of bureaucracy on top of existing metropolitan governmental structures nor proposing a new regional government form). This part of Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire has found a common theme of history to which participating towns and cities can all relate, and it is around this theme that regional cooperation begins to grow. Outside of any consideration of how Freedom's Way may ultimately impact people's attitudes toward land stewardship, the importance of preserving natural systems, and land use and development in the future, the ultimate success of this program would illustrate that regional cooperation does not have to involve "big government" that takes away cherished home rule powers. An atmosphere of success surrounding the protection and promotion of the Heritage Area's unique

²¹¹ <http://www.freedomsway.org>.

²¹² <http://www.freedomsway.org>.

historical assets is the breeding ground for further cooperation on regional land use, development controls, and affordable housing.

Analysis

The regional compacts have process benefits that may make the idea of such political and planning mechanisms popular from a Connecticut standpoint. Regional compacts are extremely flexible and allow individual towns and counties to pick and choose which issues they want to work on together. This fact has several key advantages over a standard form of regional or metropolitan governance. First, before a compact is even created, the municipalities involved must outline the purpose and scope of the compact, including the issues to be addressed by the compact. This preplanning creates a center of focus for each compact; the purpose of setting up the compact is clear, its goals definite and more manageable, and success can be easily measured. Second, regional planning compacts, by focusing on a small number of issues, allow individual municipalities to retain their independence and decision-making authority. For strong home rule areas, this could mean a politically feasible opportunity to expand regional cooperation and planning efforts without sacrificing cherished home rule self-determination. Third, regional compacts allow an incremental form of regional planning that does not force numerous municipalities into a large, immediate metropolitan or regional planning effort. The regional compact method enables cities and towns to try out regional planning on a small scale, perhaps with a few minor pilot projects. Getting the feel for a regional approach to solving planning problems would lead to enhanced opportunities in the future

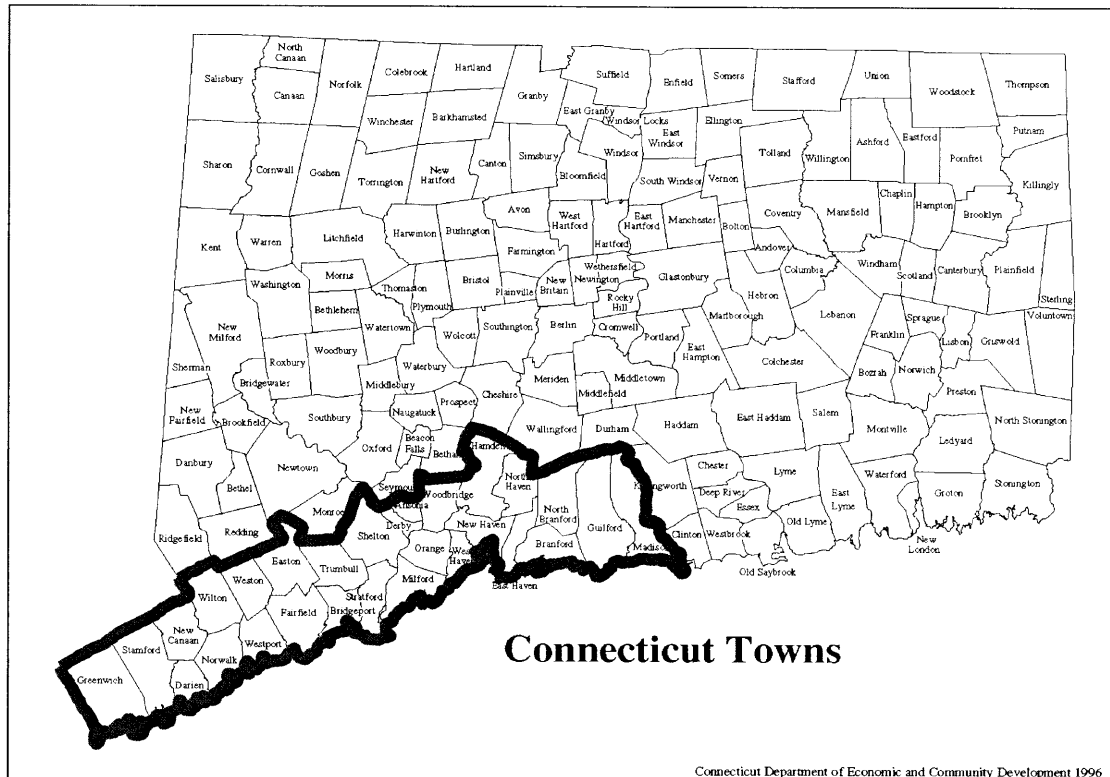
for wider and more comprehensive regional solutions. One could envision the regional compact form of regional planning arising through the three-step process outlined below.

First, a central touchstone for many of the towns in southern Connecticut must be identified. In the example of the Hudson River Valley Greenway, the Hudson River was clearly identified as having a special place in the six counties of New York through which it runs. Such a large and prominent regional asset easily registers in the minds of average citizens, much more so than an amorphous regional planning ideal. The Hudson River, and the protection of the river's health and natural beauty, is a clear, understandable and laudable goal that is recognizable to everyone. Working economic development and heritage preservation elements into a regional environmental protection effort is perhaps the true genius of the Greenway program. If a similar method of regionalism is to occur in southern Connecticut, residents and political leaders alike must find a common issue or element of the landscape, be it physical, political, or developmental, around which a large portion of the population can unite.

The regional summit proposed previously is one mechanism for identifying this unifying element. One central feature of southern Connecticut is the Interstate 95/Route 1 (Boston Post Road) corridor. These two transportation routes, in many ways, define the evolving nature of the towns in their paths. Much of the early commercial development that occurred in southern Connecticut towns and cities away from the original colonial town centers was concentrated along the Boston Post Road, as it was the major thoroughfare for almost all of these towns. The construction of I-95 in the late 1950s accelerated the

commercial and retail growth in the Boston Post Road corridor because of its tendency to run both parallel to and very close to Route 1. The continued prominence of both routes in southern Connecticut's transportation system has meant that the areas around both are where one can find extensive retail and commercial sprawl development; these areas are currently the prime locations for big-box retail and strip malls, as they will continue to be for the foreseeable future. As unattractive development and ever-increasing traffic congestion have spawned a brewing public backlash, the design and development of the I-95/Route 1 corridor may be the focal point around which southern Connecticut can rally. One could envision the central focal point for the region arising from discussions within the regional summit, where local leaders and other participants could discuss and come to a consensus on the most critical issues, in their estimation, facing the region.

After a regional planning touchstone had been developed in the regional summit process, the Connecticut General Assembly, with the assistance of local legislators, mayors and first selectmen, could begin drafting legislation that would codify statutorily the regional touchstone into a physical and geographic entity. For example, the state could designate the I-95/Route 1 corridor as a regional urban design corridor, similar in concept to the Hudson River Valley Greenway. Membership in this regional corridor could be open to towns and cities through which either of these two major transportation routes pass and municipalities immediately adjacent to these impacted towns.



Map of Proposed Regional Urban Design Corridor

Following the utilization of the concern over urban design in the I-95/Route 1 corridor as a regional touchstone and motivating municipalities in the designated area to enlist in the new regional organization, the towns in the corridor area would meet to lay out a set of basic guidelines for regional urban design; this document would essentially serve as an “Urban Design Constitution” for the corridor area. The creation of an Urban Design Constitution would be a difficult but critical component of the regional corridor plan. Without at least a baseline agreement on urban design issues and how to address them in the I-95/Route 1 corridor, each town would still follow its own urban design path, regardless of whether or not it was beneficial or detrimental to the region as a whole. However, if the prescriptions for urban design were too stringent and specific, member towns could fear that their individual powers to control land use and development within

their borders was being overly impinged upon, a perception that could lead towns to withdraw from the urban design corridor. Thus, a careful balance between control and freedom in urban design matters would need to be identified and codified in the region's Urban Design Constitution for the program to be effective.

Once these important initial steps had been completed, the true benefits of the urban design corridor could finally be tested. The benefit package that accompanies this regional corridor would need to be significant in order to provide incentives for towns to use the corridor designation to its full potential. These benefits should be a mixture of financial and procedural incentives, and be varied enough to facilitate the development of a wide variety of interests in the region. Many of the new financial incentives would likely need to come from the state level; however, the towns in the region could also find ways to raise funds, and the new regional organization could serve as a centralizing point for some existing federal and state funding programs normally relegated to the municipal level. For example, the regional corridor could decide to levy impact fees upon developers for the additional traffic created by their development projects and then earmark these funds for specific uses such as reimbursing towns for sidewalks they might need to install or for pedestrianizing major intersections. Additionally, the regional corridor as a whole could apply for federal and state brownfields money for a collection of projects within the region. Doing so would provide each individual town brownfield project with more leverage as it would be part of a large package. Funding the regional application could also be viewed as more promising to federal and state authorities because of its scope, especially if the regional corridor could articulately illustrate how all

of the region's brownfield projects form a larger, economically sustainable plan of development.

An example of how the process of regional towns creating "compacts" for both mutual and regional benefit could be as follows. The political leaders of both Milford and Orange have decided that the retail development along the Boston Post Road has resulted in excessive and high-speed traffic, which in turn is causing an increase in traffic accidents, road widening and maintenance costs, and complaints that pedestrians feel unsafe going anywhere near the road, let alone cross it. Therefore, Milford and Orange decide to team up to fight the problem and join together in a compact that is geared toward controlling the traffic-related problems of development along the Boston Post Road. Both towns initially meet and decide on the framework of the compact, including a clear and achievable concrete goal, the manner in which the two towns will work together to reach this goal, the responsibilities of each town, and a time frame in which the goal is to be accomplished.

Utilizing funds drawn from both towns' budgets, the urban design regional corridor, and designated funding from the state, Milford and Orange hire an urban design consultant to analyze the situation and recommend solutions within the framework of the corridor's Urban Design Constitution. From these recommended solutions, the two towns develop a plan of action to control the traffic implications of development along the Boston Post Road. After public review of the plan and subsequent revisions, the plan is finalized and designated for funding for implementation. This final round of funding could come from

a number of sources, including town budgets, municipal or state bonding, or block grants. Once funding is set aside, Milford and Orange could place the urban design project out to bid, receive proposals, and choose a project contractor for the physical elements of the plan and/or designate a private planning firm or the towns' planning departments to produce any document-based recommendations of the plan. For example, the plan might include constructing traffic calming measures, raised crosswalks, and landscaped center medians, as well as zoning changes to limit curb cuts and accessways without traffic signals. Milford and Orange could hire a construction firm to do the roadwork, and do the zoning alterations in house with existing staff.

The compact idea is flexible enough to encompass a wide variety of urban design issues, from architectural standards to traffic mitigation, landscaping to site planning. Compacts allow municipalities to cooperate on specific issues and to achieve specific goals, rather than signing on to a large, regional governmental body that removes home rule powers for the general purpose of "improving the region" over the long-term. At the same time, however, regional compacts allow towns to band together and leverage their collective power on issues that are of prime concern to all involved. These alliances, while only temporary, could not only be instrumental in addressing many of the urban design problems in suburban commercial corridors, but also serve as a pilot program illustrating the benefits of greater regional cooperation. Perhaps in the future, bolstered by a successful regional compact program, the numerous municipalities in southern Connecticut can engage in more "revolutionary" concepts, such as true metropolitan planning and tax base sharing. Until then, however, regional compacts have the potential

to confront and solve vexing urban design issues in individual towns while creating more possibilities for regional cooperation.

#2: Public Works Funding

Public works funding can serve as both an opportunity to improve the street environment of particular towns and as a stepping stone to greater regional cooperation. Towns and cities could work in concert with one another to earmark ISTEA funds and other sources of road construction funding to improve the design, function and aesthetics of existing commercial strips, rather than spend these funds on widening other roads or building new ones. This measure would be particularly helpful in the Boston Post Road areas of Orange, Milford and Norwalk. As the parts of the Boston Post Road that run through these towns are excessively wide and heavily congested, funds could be allocated to build landscaped traffic islands, install sidewalks and lighting, and plant street trees. Improved pedestrian crossings, better designed intersections, and traffic calming measures could also be added. At strategic locations where commercial development on both sides of a road was particularly dense and intensively used, the possibility of a pedestrian bridge over the roadway could be explored to reduce the need for automobile trips to cross the street.

Regionalism as a Tool for Place-Making

Regionalism is often construed, particularly in areas of the nation where the concept has not yet truly taken hold, as an additional layer of government that oversees larger-scale issues such as general regional land use patterns, taxation, utilities and transportation.

For many areas of the country, this description is very true. Large metropolitan and county governments and other similar regional entities do engage in the above listed activities. But regionalism doesn't have to mean more bureaucracy and control over vast metropolitan assets. Regionalism can, when properly constructed and utilized, enhance the place-making abilities of individual towns and cities. It is within this vein of thought that the regional recommendations presented previously have their base, and from this base that they draw their potential power.

The designation and codification of shared urban design values is perhaps the most important concept to be drawn out of these recommendations, for it is these shared values that will ultimately allow better suburban design to flourish. Shared design values are the building blocks for a better-designed region; by creating a construct that allows these values to be discussed, fleshed out, and solidified in the development patterns of the region, every town in the region will benefit. By rejecting poor urban design throughout the region and embracing improved site layouts, building typologies, and design guidelines, the message to developers that poor design will no longer be accepted becomes clear. When residents, politicians and planners begin to demand better design, the private market is compelled to listen. As stated before in this thesis, changing the design mentality on a town-by-town basis can be problematic, as development may simply shift from one town to the next. A regional approach of coalescing the demand for better design, in a manner similar to the methods discussed above, can be a powerful tool in aiding the place-making ability of individual towns.

Comparable Example

Mashpee Commons: Mashpee, MA

Like southern Connecticut, the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts experienced significant commercial growth between the 1950s and the 1980s, and saw many of its main roads become centers for strip commercial development. The heart of Mashpee, a community located in the western end of Cape Cod, was no different; this part of the town had long been designated as the central business district, with substantial strip commercial development resulting. In the 1980s, however, Cape Cod residents began to revolt against the over-development of their respective communities, a phenomenon often referred to as the “mallng” of Cape Cod.²¹³

During this decade, a plan was developed to convert the strip commercial development in the center of Mashpee into a traditional New England town center, and in 1986, work was begun by the development team of Arnold Chance and Douglas Storrs. The project subsequently became a New Urbanist project, with Duany/Plater-Zyberk creating plans for the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the town center. By 1993, Mashpee Commons (the center of the whole master plan) had been converted into 265,000 square feet of street-oriented commercial space and 100 housing units. Additionally, six surrounding neighborhoods have been incorporated into the master planning process, designed to be mixed use areas that both compliment and build upon the success of

²¹³ Mashpee Commons L.P., “Planning & Development,” Planning & Development, 28 December 2001, <http://www.mashpeecommons.com/mashcomlp/plan.htm> (15 May 2002).

Mashpee Commons.²¹⁴

Mashpee is an excellent example of how the reconfiguration of strip commercial development can occur in strong home rule areas. An important consideration in Mashpee, however, was that the entire region of Cape Cod had shifted in its opinion of strip development. Residents throughout the region saw this form of development as degrading the historical and environmental character of Cape Cod, and that action was needed to halt the destruction of these unique assets (culminating in the creation of the Cape Cod Commission in 1990). Thus, the reconfiguration of Mashpee Commons occurred within an atmosphere of changing regional attitudes toward sprawl. This fact likely aided the acceptance of new development typologies. Not only does Mashpee Commons illustrate how a street-oriented mixed use development can replace typical suburban strip development, it also shows how shared regional attitudes about urban design can promote better suburban development.

Implementation

Effective implementation of these recommendations is a complex proposition, where the timing and the sequence of implementation are critical to a successful impact on these suburban commercial corridors. A thorough analysis of different implementation schemes for these recommendations and their political and social implications would likely delve deeply into game theory, and could be an intriguing thesis topic in its own

²¹⁴ <http://www.mashpeecommons.com/mashcomlp/plan.htm>.

right. In the interest of applicability to this thesis, however, a brief summary of general implementation guidelines is presented below.

One very simple conclusion can be drawn from the town-wide and zone-specific recommendations proposed above: given the political realities of Connecticut, no single town would uniformly agree to these recommendations by themselves. Though they might be tempted to pursue methods to achieve better urban design, the towns know that making development regulations too strict would only lead to developers avoiding whichever town enacted these recommended regulations and locating their projects in neighboring towns. The reliance of Connecticut towns on the local property tax for revenue is simply too powerful of a force for them to ignore. In addition, losing potential commercial tax revenue would be political suicide for whatever political official suggested it. Therefore, in the current geopolitical atmosphere of Connecticut, no town would have any incentive to lead a regional charge for better urban design; if no other towns joined with the one leading the charge (a likely scenario), they would simply lose development to their neighbors.

Given this fact, southern Connecticut must attack the problem of sprawl beginning from a general regional level and gradually working down to a town- and zone-specific level. There are several reasons for this approach to implementation. First, the urban design corridor for southern Connecticut would allow member towns to come together and create an Urban Design Constitution that would embody the key urban design elements, criteria and guidelines for the corridor area. Based upon compliance with this

constitution, towns would alter their respective zoning ordinances to match these regionally agreed upon standards. Thus, certain key elements of every town's individual regulations would be the same, thereby eliminating the risk that each town would face if it tried to implement more stringent urban design measures on its own. Developers could not simply turn to another municipality as the site of their projects because the regulations would be the same.

Second, by creating a coalition of many towns, the urban design corridor encompasses a critical mass of market potential that developers simply cannot ignore. If only two or four towns formed a coalition to promote better urban design, developers might be able to avoid these towns altogether because their collective populations did not constitute a large enough market share. However, the area proposed for the urban design corridor encompasses thirty-one towns, including three medium-size cities, and a population of 1,177,191, clearly a segment of the state too large to avoid. Tempted by the potential profits to be made in these parts of New Haven and Fairfield counties (two of the wealthier counties in the nation), developers would simply have to accept the new guidelines and work within their parameters. With the stricter urban design guidelines that challenge the conventional notion of suburban commercial development, developers would be forced to produce projects of better design quality.

Once the major urban design requirement changes were in place through the creation of the urban design corridor, individual towns could begin evaluating and enacting the town-wide and zone-specific recommendations that were mandated by the Urban Design

Constitution. With the safety net of a regional consensus on design within the urban design corridor, towns could now create stringent place-based regulations to promote and preserve their character without fear of development dollars fleeing to neighboring municipalities. At the same time, regional compacts related to urban design could begin to take form, either to facilitate the implementation of town-wide and/or zone-specific recommendations, or other forms of mutual cooperation deemed expedient by member towns.

Applicability

In theory, the approach to regional cooperation and enhanced urban design requirements outlined in this chapter could find applicability anywhere that strong home rule powers exist, particularly in New England and the mid-Atlantic states. As is evidenced by Freedom's Way and the Hudson River Valley Greenway, the concept of regional cooperation without a large metropolitan government is not a foreign idea to this area of the country. The geopolitical situation in Connecticut, while certainly unique to the state in its myriad of issues, is not unlike that of New Jersey or Massachusetts, where fractured local government dominates and the reliance on local property tax revenue is substantial. While they possess some significant differences, there are enough similarities between the governmental structures of the New England and mid-Atlantic states to make the concept of a regional entity that includes regional compacts applicable to many of the regions in these states.

Although the concept of a unifying regional corridor based on a common issue or asset that cuts across municipal lines, and the program of regional compacts associated with a corridor such as this, is flexible enough to fit the various needs of most areas of the country, in many cases there may be stronger and more effective means for promoting regional cooperation and stopping sprawl. This fact would likely be true in southern and western parts of the nation, where annexation, regional consolidation, or a metropolitan government or planning agency with more power to control local land use decisions might be more appropriate and effective. The concept of utilizing non-traditional means for enhancing regional cooperation, without adding another layer of bureaucracy to the existing governmental structure or eliminating home rule powers for municipalities, is an idea tailor-made for areas such as the Northeast and its unique blend of local and regional governmental entities. While regional corridors and compacts may have some applicability in other parts of the country, more direct measures for curbing sprawl are likely the preferable treatments.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

The intention of this thesis has been to use four Connecticut towns, each unique in size and history, but similar in long-term development patterns, as illustrative examples of the commercial sprawl that plagues numerous areas of southern Connecticut. The background information regarding these towns supplemented the examination and analysis of their respective zoning regulations, along with a general discussion of the lack of regional governmental entities in Connecticut. Analysis of pertinent existing literature on combating sprawl and enhancing regional cooperation, combined with the aforementioned town-specific research provided the basis for final recommendations as to how individual towns in southern Connecticut can prevent sprawl typologies within a new regional framework.

As noted in numerous parts of this thesis, Connecticut's governmental and geopolitical structure, as well as its version of sprawl, is unique compared to other parts of the country. This fact makes developing effective remedies for sprawl in southern Connecticut a difficult task. Methods with significant applicability in other regions often simply have no relevance in Connecticut. Timing development with infrastructure planning is useless because southern Connecticut is already substantially built up and all of the necessary utilities and other infrastructure are in place. Municipal consolidation or the creation of a single, large metropolitan government is politically infeasible due to a long and cherished history of home rule. Powerful regional planning organizations are

just as infeasible because they would require taking powers away from individual towns to strengthen themselves. Urban growth boundaries would also be relatively ineffective because most towns have fairly rigid zoning practices that discourage the enlargement of existing commercial zones; therefore, extensive sprawl expansion beyond its current boundaries will happen very slowly, if at all. While this a very positive fact, due largely to public concern over traffic and degradation of residential neighborhood character (and a substantial NIMBY and BANANA attitude prevalent in Connecticut), in that more greenfields will not be devoured for additional WalMarts, it does not mean that existing sprawl areas will improve. Measures such as urban growth boundaries have little applicability because they do not touch the heart of the Connecticut sprawl problem, which is finding a way to improve the urban design of commercial areas already substantially built up. In essence, the primary tools for combating sprawl must inherently be regulatory, and Connecticut's current political landscape requires such regulations to be implemented on a town-by-town basis. As a result, to make these regulatory tools feasible at all, some sort of regional construct is needed to ensure that towns won't have to act alone in implementation. Perhaps the task of greatest difficulty is devising a way to create a regional entity of substantial force that does not require the lessening of individual town powers or independence.

The difficulty of Connecticut-based sprawl solutions is further increased by the general lack of literature on sprawl in Connecticut (and most parts of New England, as well) as compared to other parts of the country. Some of this academic neglect is likely attributable to the fact that Connecticut is with little overall population growth. States

such as Arizona, Nevada, California, Texas and Florida often garner more sprawling attention because of their rapid population growth and the endemic spread of housing and commercial developments into previously untouched landscapes. Indeed, Connecticut is not “sprawling” at a pace that even approaches what is happening in these other areas. However, Connecticut’s sprawl problem is not going away. Sprawl will continue to replicate itself in the areas in which it already exists and is tacitly accepted. Thus, Connecticut residents will still have to deal with heavy traffic, automobile-oriented environments and architecturally dismal commercial areas, as the WalMarts of today are replaced with some future retail use in the future.

“Stopping sprawl” in southern Connecticut essentially implies improving the use and built form of existing commercial retail strips rather than preventing the unchecked spread of new development. While the latter is naturally an important goal, it is a goal that towns are already tackling by keeping zoning boundaries fixed and not allowing new development to encroach on residential areas. Connecticut towns still have problems with the “mansionization” of some residential areas, but the lessons of the explosive growth of suburbs in the 1960s and 1970s have been learned well. Second- and third-ring suburbs around central cities in Connecticut have seen what has happened in the first-ring suburbs, and they don’t want to experience the same result. Yet at the same time, these towns rely very heavily upon the local property tax, and the most advantageous way to raise funds is through new development. In the midst of these competing interests, good urban design often falls by the wayside; enhancing its visibility in the discussion on

sprawl is an important factor in improving the continued development of commercial corridors.

The urban design corridor, regional compact system and regulatory measures prescribed in this thesis can provide a form of sprawl control that could significantly improve the urban design of commercial corridors in southern Connecticut. However, like many urban planning proposals, this system would require local leaders or resident activists to take the initiative. This initiative must not emanate from only one community; multiple towns need to collectively start the push for greater regional cooperation. While this thesis has focused almost exclusively on suburbs (although Norwalk is debatably a central city), the push for regional cooperation may be best started by central cities such as New Haven and Bridgeport. Possessing greater political power, these cities could also gain the support of first-ring suburbs, whose problems now mirror those of the central cities. A political bloc of central cities and first-ring suburbs could create the drive needed to begin the process of regional cooperation to improve urban design. Such an alliance would finally start southern Connecticut down the long and complex road to an improved built form and an alternative future free from sprawl.

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