

January 24, 2018

To: Town of Branford Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee
From: Peter Hentschel, RTM District 2 Representative, SCA POCD Subcommittee

Note: The enclosed comments are offered as a personal opinion and not as a representative of either the 2 District or the Stony Creek Association.

STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL POCD

Dramatic changes in public awareness over the past decade would seem to indicate that for the 2018 POCD with its 10 year planning window - Coastal and Environmental issues should be addressed in their own sections:

- Section on Coastal Resources and Resiliency
- Section on Environmental Sustainability

COMMENTS – re CONSERVATION (1st Listening Session)

Challenges of Sea Level Rise

The impact of projected sea level rise and climate change is of critical concern to our coastal neighborhoods and their management. Challenges include:

- Current road flooding due to normal monthly high tides
- Coastal flooding due to storm surge
- Significantly increasing private property damage and loss.
- Trend of dropping coastal property values and diminished tax base.
- Coastline Infrastructure lacks storm resiliency.
- Increased frequency of costly public infrastructure repairs and improvements.
- Diminished access to emergency services and available evacuation routes.

Response to Sea Level Rise

A response to this ever increasing challenge may be daunting but should include as a beginning:

- Substantial and continual outreach to the coastal neighborhoods to educate, to provide specific local data, and discuss solutions and resources. This could be done thru a dedicated **Coastal Resource & Resiliency Commission** working alongside Branford's municipal staff.
- Provision of coastal mapping delineating current and projected encroachments to coastal properties as an informational resource for coastal property owners.
- Development of individual strategies for each coastal neighborhood working with neighborhood associations.
- Consideration of local regulatory changes that may be needed to accommodate shoreline property resiliency
- Consideration of property buy-back programs in certain locations.

Response to Climate Change - Environmental Sustainability

In addition to sea level concerns, the need to act locally to change to a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle with “greener” buildings and lower impact development should be a central goal for all of Branford. Considerations should include:

- Adopting a program of environmental goals similar to other US cities
- Establishing regulatory programs that encourage the adoption of private, commercial and municipal alternative energy solutions.
- Addressing Zoning Regulation amendments that allow for implementation of alternative energy solutions in buildings and transportation (individual and communal).
- Consideration of a Town promoted program of electric vehicle charging stations.
- Possible use of property tax incentives to encourage the adoption of green energy solutions.
- Possible adoption of local building code regulations requiring the meeting of environmental goals in new building construction.
- The establishment of a **Commission on Environmental Sustainability** to promote change and provide information and access to resources.

Consider Incentive Programs to Encourage Open Space

- for small areas < 25 acres left as open space
- for private properties with large developable portions remaining undeveloped
- for private land committed to be permanently left undeveloped
- for private land allowing certain public walking/biking ROWs

Consider Incentives to encourage Sustainable Commercial Development

- special Zoning allowances
- tax abatements
- Energy Star signage recognition
- EV charging stations in the Town Center
- EV dedicated parking
- Zoning Amendments allowing solar and wind energy solutions

Stony Creek - Septic System Management

The coastal and geological conditions in Stony Creek have dictated that this section of town be served by septic systems. The Creek is not currently served by sewers. We need to strengthen steps to assure that those systems are maintained. Suggested needs:

- Establishing a town-wide data base of all residences that rely on septic systems
- Establishing an ordinance requiring periodic system pump outs.
- Send out notifications to property owners on a 3 year basis
- Establishing an ordinance requiring that all residential transfers include a certification that the septic system is in good working order.

COMMENTS – re DEVELOPMENT (2nd Listening Session)

Branford's Developable Land Resources Are Becoming Limited

The POCD should recognize that during the next 10 years the inventory of good developable land is becoming extremely limited

- The development section of the POCD should map out the remaining developable land inventory and the Town should maintain that data moving forward.
- The Town's development initiatives should focus on high value innovation enterprises – those that bring the highest tax dollars, good paying employment, and support for the community
- The POCD should recognize the fact that Branford is widely acknowledged to be a hub for bio-science and innovation and plan to protect and enhance that status.
- Given the rapidly changing landscape of retail enterprise in the US great care should be given before approval of significant retail development

The Exit 56 Hub – Last Major Area of Town with Good Developable Land and Good Access

- Should be saved for high value, high tax-base, innovation enterprise and support services
- Retail expansion should be discouraged around this hub

The Exit 53 Hub – Resolution to the Interchange

- Access to I-95 eastbound needs resolution
- The Town should aggressively push to find a resolution with DOT
- Functional development in this part of Branford cannot occur without a resolution

Streetscape and Trees

- The POCD should promote the addition of street lining trees where they are missing or have been removed
- The POCD should propose that RT-1 become a master planned district with strengthened site design standards for the landscape/streetscape buffer zone.

Stony Creek – Current Development Limitations Resulting From Lack Of Sewers

Stony Creek contains about 95% of all the septic systems in town. The Village of Stony Creek has classically been very protective of the Zoning limitations on development imposed by our lack of sewers, and therefore has been vehemently against the installation of sewers.

However, as sea levels rise our village's systems will become increasingly vulnerable to tidal flooding, and the Village may be the future target of State DEEP efforts pushing for the installation of a bona fide sewer system.

If it weren't for concerns about development, most residents would probably welcome sewers, especially since that would allow greater flexibility in making residential repairs and alterations.

As a possible solution, the POCD should consider recommend that the PZC consider the adoption of an overlay provision for SC which would permanently preclude any of the development advantages brought by sewers within the boundaries of the Village. If this constraint was to be put in place now the Village might in the future see the benefits of sewers as one response to sea level rise.

January 16, 2018 Draft

To: Town of Branford Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee
Subject: Stony Creek Village District Architectural Review Board Development recommendations

Thank you for soliciting our Board's participation in your planning process. As requested, our report speaks to changes since the 2008 Plan. It focuses on issues from the perspective of the village of Stony Creek, which is our Board's area of responsibility, but we think it is important to recognize that many of our concerns will be shared by the Town's other shorefront communities.

The New Stony Creek Village District

The newly created Stony Creek Village District fulfills a recommendation of the 2008 Plan and is similar to the Town Center District. It was adopted as an amendment to the Zoning Regulations in February of 2015 with a goal to protect, enhance and maintain the character and scale of the Village.

The District is supplemented by Design Guidelines that are provided to applicants and the submittal process affords applicants an understanding of the Village's intent. This has already had a positive impact on the Village (notably with Legacy Theater). It bears consideration as a model for other Branford neighborhoods.

The Stony Creek Business and Institutional Community

Stony Creek is unique among the Town Villages in having numerous strong, vibrant businesses that contribute to the identity, vitality and cohesiveness of the Village. Since 2008 we have established a home for the Stony Creek Museum, have finally achieved public restrooms and are now seeing the restoration of the theater building.

The identity of the village is further defined by the Stony Creek Post Office which should be preserved and protected as both an important service and a valued point of social interaction.

As the manner in which business is conducted changes, we must continue to support these institutions and businesses and address some of the challenges they present.

- Parking continues to be an issue and spots of off-street parking should be encouraged
- The boat ramp needs to be rebuilt and a separate kayak launching area established to avoid conflicts with boat trailers

- Consideration should be given to a summer shuttle service to move visitors from peripheral parking lots to destinations along thimble island road.
- Sidewalks should be maintained and expanded within the Village
- Allowance for a defined bikeway down the central spine of the Village should be established.
- Access to open space pathways should be adequately signed and defined parking areas for walkers established and specified
- Street trees along thimble island road that have been removed due to age or damage should be replaced with new plantings

Housing Affordability

Rising property values and commensurate (now non deductible) property tax increases and McMansionization are problems that threaten the unique diversity of the village, especially older people, younger families and long time residents.

Consideration should be given to measures such as:

Encouraging increased use of accessory apartments.

Enhancing bulk limitations.

Investigate preventing the merging of building lots.

Parking, Traffic and Transportation

Parking needs are unusual and worsening. Public parking competes with the needs of residential parking which is primarily street side. Public parking must accommodate Islanders, boaters, tour boat patrons, beachgoers, shop patrons, kayakers, summer visitors, and parents and children using our public parks.

This problem continues to evade adequate solution. Consideration might be given to:

- Greater reliance on other transportation forms
- A public transit shuttle
- Bicycle and walking paths
- Bicycle parking locations
- Potential restoration of a commuter rail link between Branford Center and the former Stony Creek RR station?

Speeding is also seen as a serious and growing problem which might be helped by:

- Further traffic calming measures, especially during the summer
- Enhanced education
- Stricter enforcement.

The FRA/DOT railroad expansion plans for additional tracks thru the Village to serve high speed rail service are seen as a potential serious threat to the future of the village. A response to these plans must be coordinated with the SECoast.org and with other Connecticut towns>

Environmental Impacts

Environmental issues are obviously of particular concern in relation to development in a coastal village. These include:

- Current flooding and storm resiliency.

- Environmental sustainability green building and low impact development.

- Regulatory encouragement of Individual and Community alternative energy solutions.

- Sea level rise and consequent:

 - Significantly increased property damage and loss.

 - Impact on property values and the tax base.

 - Costly public infrastructure repairs and improvements.

 - Emergency services access and evacuation routing.

To respond, we support:

- Town monitoring and adoption of solutions being generated by the variety of public and private agencies and bodies engaged in these issues.

- Potential dissemination of information and coordination of efforts about shared concerns via communication among Branford coastal villages and organizations.

Submitted by:

Greg Ames,

Chair, Stony Creek Village District Architectural Review Board

273 Thimble Islands Road, Branford

203 483 9528

gregoryames1@comcast.net