

PRESERVE RURAL CHARACTER

3

Overview

Washington is defined and distinguished by its rural character. Preservation of this encompassing but vulnerable attribute has been the dominant planning theme of the Town of Washington since the first Plan of Development in 1963. In several surveys over the past decade and during public meetings on this Plan, this continuing objective was strongly supported by Washington residents.

The extent of that support was also evidenced by the significant efforts undertaken by Town residents over the past ten years to identify and understand the foundation of the Town's character and to protect it.

The next ten years may prove crucial for the longer term preservation of Washington's rural character. Many of the strategies identified in this Plan will lay the foundation for community actions to help retain the qualities that today's residents clearly value and future residents will cherish.

In Washington, community character includes features that contribute to the inherent quality of life for residents by enhancing the quality of the physical environment.

Conserve Natural Resources



Protect Open Space



Protect Scenic Resources



Preserve Historic Resources



From the 1993 Plan...

Rural character "is identified as being the Town's farming heritage, pastures, stone walls, fields and barns, single family residences dispersed through Town, pastoral open spaces, rural road system, lack of suburban style subdivisions, identifiable community centers and the friendly and neighborly attitudes of the townsfolk."

“The nation behaves well if it treats resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Protect Important Natural Resource Elements

Primary among the goals of this Plan is the protection of the functionally and environmentally important natural systems that help make up community character, preserve environmental functions, and enhance the quality of life for residents. Community efforts in this area should be coordinated with open space strategy and implementation, municipal land use regulations, State and Federal regulatory programs, and municipal land management.

The Natural Resource Inventory Report identifies in detail the natural resources and functions that should be preserved or conserved.

Resources for Preservation	Resources so important to environmental quality or community character that alterations to these areas should be avoided to the extent feasible and prudent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality • Watercourses / Waterbodies • Inland Wetlands • Steep slopes (>25 percent) • Floodplain (100-year)
Resources for Conservation	Resources with important functions that can be maintained while compatible activities take place nearby if development occurs in an environmentally sensitive way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floodplain (500-year) • Sensitive watershed areas (such as Lake Waramaug or public water supply watersheds) • Streambelt protection (buffers) • Stratified drift aquifers and areas of high groundwater availability • Unique or special habitat areas
Resources for Protection	Resources with important functions that can be permanently protected under the open space plan objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desirable open space shown on the Open Space/Greenway Plan map on page 3-9.

Resources identified for preservation already have some measure of protection in Washington since the soil-based residential density zoning regulation does not allow most of these areas to be included when determining the number of housing units that may be built on a given site. Washington should continue to encourage the permanent protection of sensitive natural resource areas through conservation easements, open space set asides in new developments, and by other appropriate means. Natural resource features are mapped on the following page.

Maintain Soil-Based Zoning

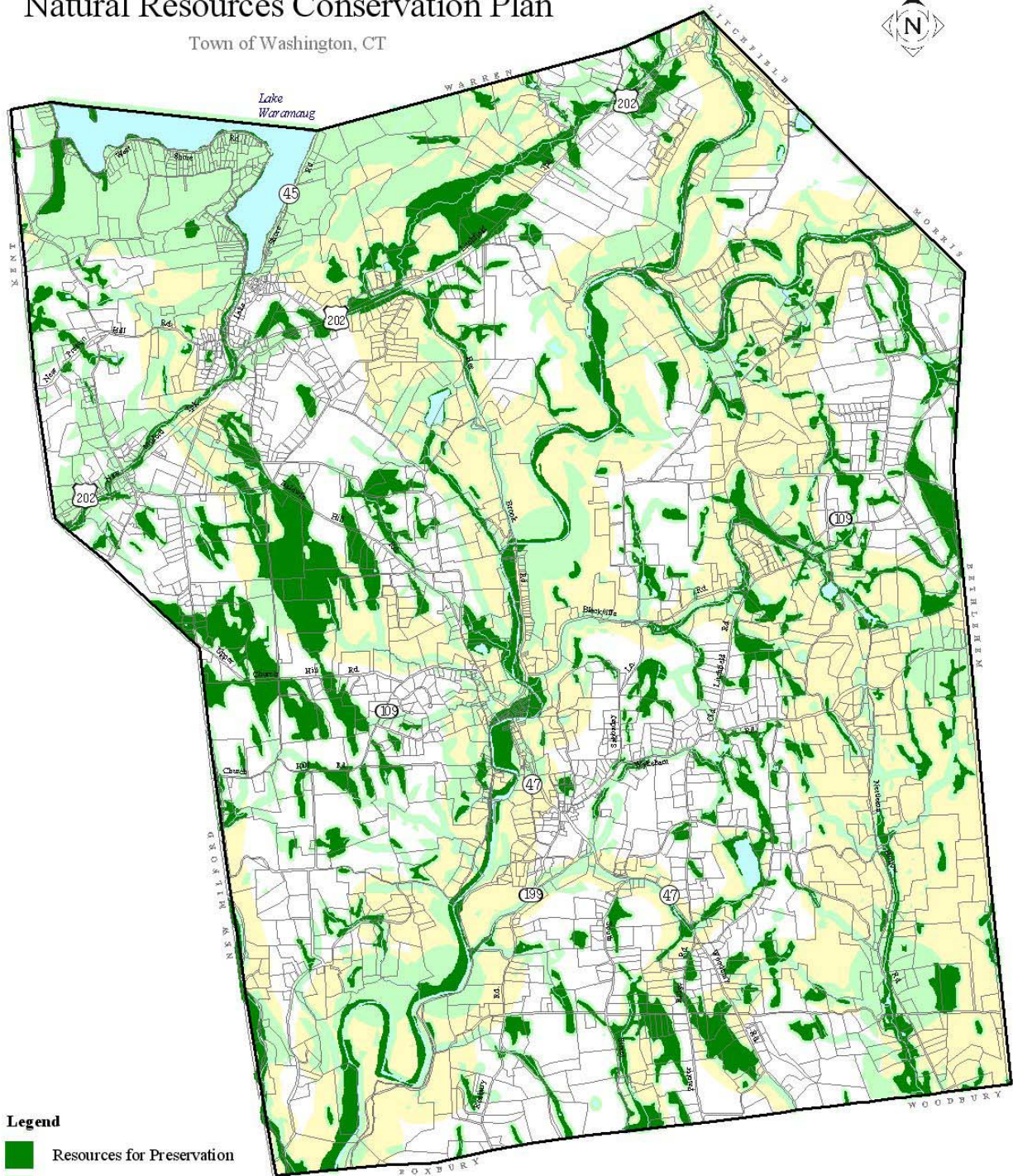
Washington has excellent soil-based residential density zoning regulations in place to manage the intensity of residential development in the community (see sidebar on page 1-8). In fact, Washington has received an award from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association for these regulations. Town officials are unanimous that these regulations must be maintained in order to relate development intensity to the natural capacity of the land to handle septic infiltration, stormwater run-off, water quality, and other environmental impacts of development.

The Zoning Commission recently modified these regulations to:





- refine the soil classifications, and
- include a density regulation that reduces the total number of houses that can be developed in a subdivision.

Natural Resources Conservation Plan

Town of Washington, CT



Legend

-  Resources for Preservation
-  Resources for Conservation
-  Resources for Protection
-  Watercourses, Lakes, & Ponds

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Water Quality

Protection of water quality is Washington's most important natural resource preservation priority because:

- water is a basic requirement of human, plant, and animal life,
- Washington relies on ground water resources for its drinking water, and
- water contributes to the natural beauty, the recreational pleasures and the quality of life in Town.

Biologic Resources

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) maintains a Natural Diversity Database to help preserve and protect important natural resources.

Specific information about the type of resource and its precise locations is released by CTDEP in response to a written request associated with a particular project. While such areas are not precluded from land use change, design modifications may be necessary to mitigate potential adverse impacts.

Additional information can be obtained by contacting the CTDEP Natural Diversity Database at 860-424-3550.

Protect Water Quality

Water Quality Monitoring – As recommended in the 1993 Plan of Development, Washington should develop, through its Conservation Commission, a regular water quality testing program for key surface waterbodies. Such a program would provide advance warning of potential contamination threats to surface water and aquifers. A test program of five to seven sites may cost \$2,000 to \$4,000 per year, depending on frequency.

Public Education - Public education and involvement are essential elements of any strategy to protect water quality. Educational programs related to reducing or eliminating sediment runoff, septic maintenance, hazardous materials, lawn and garden fertilizers/chemicals, yard composting, clear-cutting and clearing of understory, wetlands protection and similar issues may be sponsored by the Conservation Commission. Such programs will help to educate residents on threats to water quality and the cumulative impacts of individual decisions.

Non-Point Pollution - In recent years, water quality protection efforts throughout the nation have turned to reducing “non-point” pollution (pollution that does not originate from a specific point). This includes storm drainage discharges, lawn fertilizer, septic systems, agricultural runoff, and similar sources. The recently revised subdivision regulations addressed some of these issues, and Washington should continue to seek to reduce non-point source pollution. Possible tools include strengthened zoning and street design regulations pertaining to impervious surfaces.

Septic Management - Although there has been no indication of widespread septic failures or problems in Washington, improperly operating septic systems are a potential threat to water quality and public health. Washington should encourage programs to educate property owners about proper septic operation and maintenance. If problems arise in the future (especially in sensitive watersheds like Lake Waramaug), Washington should consider adopting regulations that:

- require septic tanks to be pumped and inspected periodically with information on septic tank pumping and condition reported to the Town, and/or
- require all improved properties to be inspected every three years for system failures.

Erosion and Sediment Control - Erosion and sediment controls are required in all new developments in Washington. However, adequate inspection and maintenance is necessary to ensure appropriate protection of water quality and water resources. Careful inspection and maintenance should be continued until areas are completely stabilized.

Lake Waramaug - While Washington has some excellent regulations in place related to the density of development, there is increasing concern in the community about the amount of development around Lake Waramaug and its impact on water quality in the lake. This Plan recommends that the Zoning Commission consider extending the boundaries of the R-3 residential zone to include the entire watershed that drains to Lake Waramaug. (On November 24, 2003 the Zoning Commission adopted regulations effectuating this recommendation.)

Establish a Municipal Open Space Program

Open space preservation is widely regarded as the most effective tool available to towns to manage growth, maintain community character, protect valued natural resources and scenery, and generally enhance the quality of life. Washington residents have identified preserving open space as a planning priority.

Washington has already done a great deal to preserve open space. Approximately 18 percent of Washington's land area (4,480 acres) is currently designated as permanently protected open space. Many people and organizations, such as Steep Rock Association, have worked diligently over the years to preserve open spaces in the community. The character of Washington today and the amount of open space that has been preserved is a testament to their efforts.

However, the community has identified ambitious goals for open space protection that are believed necessary to preserve its rural character. Part of this need arises from the fact that much of Washington's present rural character may be ephemeral. At least 60 percent of the Town (over 15,000 acres) can be considered "perceived" open space, that is, undeveloped but not necessarily protected.

The map on page 3-7 illustrates the extent of this unprotected land, compared to existing permanently protected open space. Land that is available for additional development includes oversized building lots which are lots currently developed but large enough to be subdivided or re-subdivided under applicable zoning standards. The map on page 3-9 depicts a conceptual outline of desirable open space areas throughout Town that would constitute the starting framework for meeting the Open Space Plan goals.

To build on the considerable progress that has been made to protect open space, Washington should establish a municipal open space program. Such a program would complement those of other organizations, such as Steep Rock Association, Weantinoge Heritage, and the State of Connecticut.

Open Space Definition

The Open Space Steering Committee Final Report defined open space as follows:

"Land permanently preserved for agriculture, forestry, recreation, wildlife habitat, natural resource conservation, maintenance of community character, or as undeveloped land."

Open Space Types	Ownership
Permanently Protected Open Space (with public access)	Steep Rock Association (owned), State of Connecticut (owned), Town of Washington.
Permanently Protected Open Space (without public access)	Steep Rock Association and Weantinoge Heritage (conservation easements), State of Connecticut (agricultural development rights), Town and private conservation easements, or deed restrictions.
Temporarily Protected Open Space	Privately held property temporarily restricted under criteria of PA 490 tax assessment program.
Unprotected Open Space	Public and private schools, Town of Washington (recreation facilities), non-profit institutions, private clubs, churches, cemeteries, utility lands, State and local facilities, undeveloped and under-developed parcels.

Open Space Plan Implementation

A series of important projects has established a roadmap to implementing an effective open space program to complement and supplement the private and public successes to date. The seminal document was the Final Report of the Open Space Steering Committee, published in February 2000, followed shortly thereafter by the widely acclaimed Natural Resources Inventory Report and Recommendations in November 2000. The Washington Conservation Commission subsequently applied these guiding documents to the preparation of an Open Space Plan adopted in August 2003.

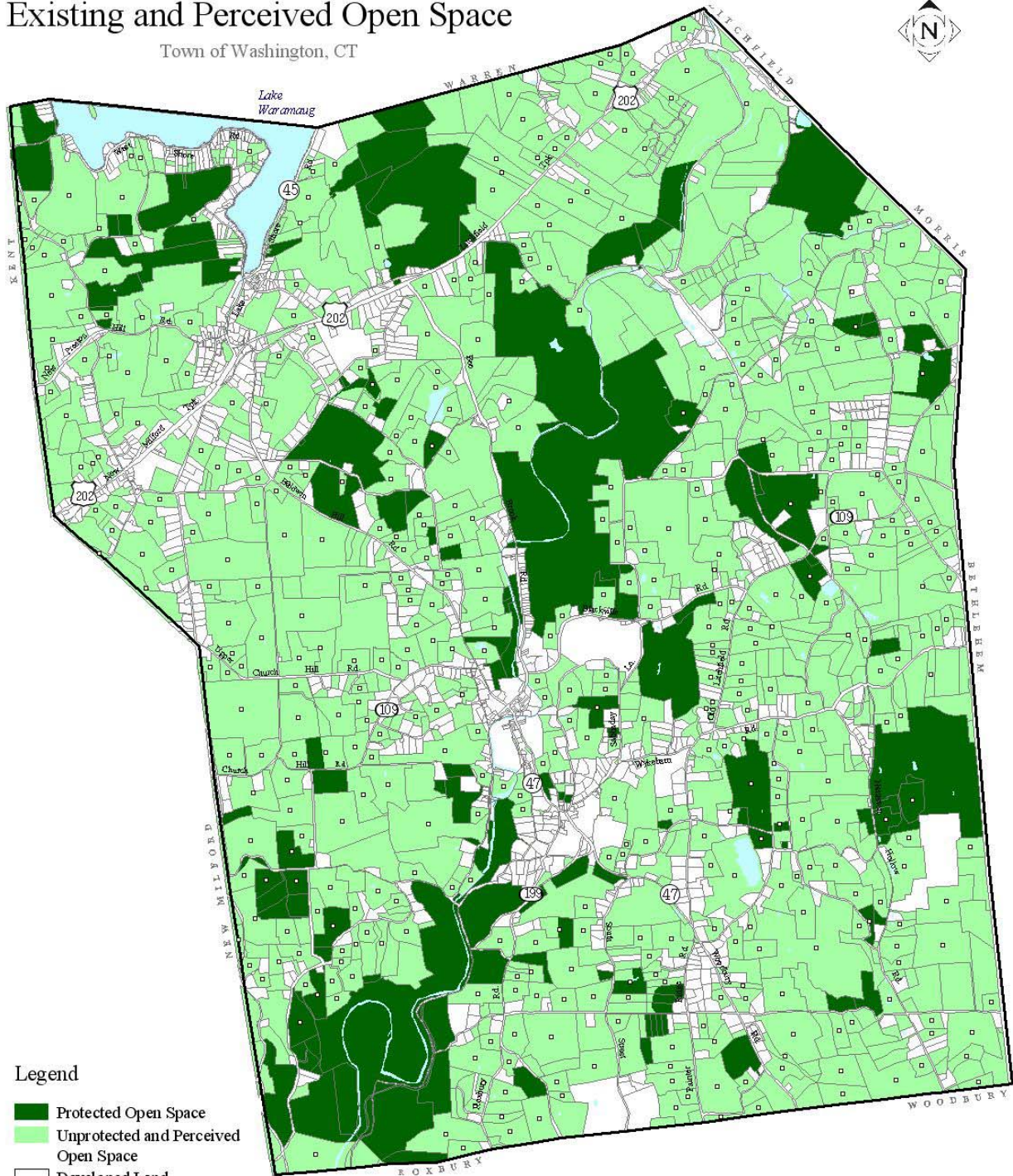
This Plan consolidates and summarizes the various recommendations of those reports pertaining to open space and proposes a definitive set of strategies to implement the basic goal of permanently protecting 30 percent of Washington as open space by 2015. These strategies are listed in the table below and discussed in detail on the following pages.

Open Space Implementation Process

Establish permanent Open Space Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should be assigned to Conservation Commission.• May be separate independent committee.
Adopt open space priorities and goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Priorities from Open Space Plan.• 30 % of Washington's land area.
Prepare an Open Space Action Plan to achieve goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop objectives and strategies to which resources will be allocated.• Establish priorities and criteria to define areas to be permanently protected, based on such criteria as size, contiguity, and quality.• Prepare and regularly update an Open Space Action Plan.
Establish open space funding mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Subdivision fee-in-lieu of open space, annual appropriation, bonding, grants, donations.• Accumulate funds in the Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund and use to acquire open space.• Establish a program for tax abatement incentives for permanent protection of open space by conservation easements or deed restrictions.
Implement the Open Space Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify parcels, partners, tools, and funding.• Prepare annual recommendations for Town acquisitions and funding for partnership efforts within budget cycle.• Develop management recommendations for Town-owned open space.

Existing and Perceived Open Space

Town of Washington, CT



Legend

- Protected Open Space
- Unprotected and Perceived Open Space
- Developed Land
- Water and Watercourses
- Single Family and Agricultural Property with Additional Development Potential

0 5000 Feet



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DRAFT Open Space Mission Statement

“Establish Town open space priorities, set goals, identify properties, coordinate partnerships, and propose municipal property acquisitions and other means to accomplish the open space goals of the Plan of Conservation and Development.”

Land Trusts

Land trusts active in Washington include the Steep Rock Association and Weantinoge Heritage.

Land trusts are important open space organizations since they can devote far more time and energy towards open space preservation than can a municipality.

More importantly, land trusts can, over many years, work with property owners to understand their motivations and needs and help them preserve their land as open space. Many property owners, if given approximately equal returns, would prefer to preserve their land as open space.

Open Space Committee

To pursue an open space program effectively, the Town should assign planning and implementation of the task to a specific committee. The preferred option is to add the charge to the work of the existing Conservation Commission. Another is to create a separate entity with a composition reflecting the diverse interests and expertise of Washington residents. In either case, a clear mission statement should guide the work of the Committee, such as suggested in the sidebar based on the Open Space Steering Committee Final Report.

Open Space Priorities

Based on the work of the Commissions and committees described above, this Plan recommends that the Open Space Committee adopt the following priorities:

- Preservation of farmland and farming,
- Protection of rivers, streams, wetlands, lakes, major groundwater resources,
- Protection of watershed resources,
- Contiguity of open space (linking open space parcels and providing regional corridors for wildlife and pedestrian trails),
- Ridgeline conservation,
- Protection of wildlife habitat, and
- Protection of forests and woodlands.

Open Space Goals

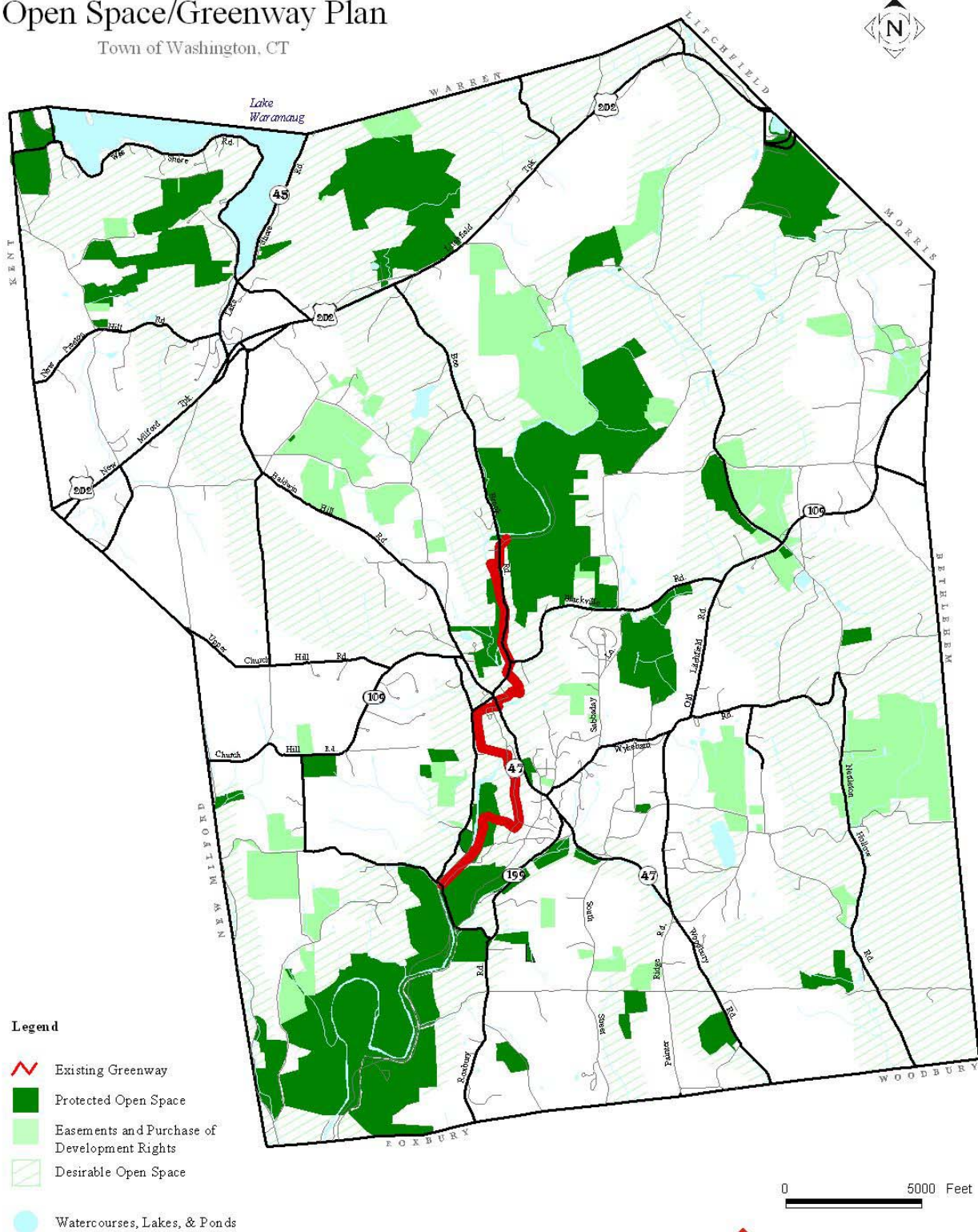
The Open Space Plan recommended specific goals, which are summarized in the table below and adopted for this Plan. These goals seek additional permanent protection of another 13 percent of Washington by 2015. The goals will rely on four basic strategies: continued activity by land trusts such as Steep Rock Association and Weantinoge Heritage, public (Town and State) acquisitions of land in fee, increases in acreage of land under permanent conservation easements and deed restrictions, and open space set asides under the Subdivision Regulations.

	Acres	% of Town
Current (Year 2000)		
Town Total Acreage	24,768	100
Current Open Space	4,229	18
Goals		
Land purchased/donated		
Land Trusts	900	3.6
Town/State	500	2.0
Conservation Easements	1,500	6.1
Subdivision Set Asides	250	1.1
Total Incremental Protection	3,150	12.8
Open Space Objective 2015	7,430	30

Source: Open Space Plan 2003
Washington Conservation Commission

Open Space/Greenway Plan

Town of Washington, CT



Regulatory Strategies

Washington already uses a number of effective regulatory strategies to acquire open space at the time of development.

Regulatory measures used by Washington to preserve open space include:

- a mandatory minimum 15 percent open space "set-aside" requirement for subdivisions (with potential increase based on soil-type "equivalent acres"),
- a fee-in-lieu-of open space provision,
- zoning and subdivision regulations that encourage consideration of conservation design subdivisions
- density regulations that promote environmentally sound development,
- development flexibility provided for open space preservation, and
- approvals that require conservation easements or other measures.

Open Space Evaluation Tools

One requirement of municipal property acquisition is a report from the Planning Commission on consistency with the Plan of Conservation and Development. An objective evaluation will facilitate that process and help the Town focus limited resources on the most important acquisition targets.

General evaluation criteria to apply to properties that meet the Town's open space priorities, discussed above, are suggested in the following table.

Permanently Protect More Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage open space preservation, especially when it contributes to a comprehensive open space system.• Encourage open space strategies that result in permanently protected open spaces.• Seek to convert unprotected and perceived open space to permanently protected open space by obtaining conservation easements
Maintain "Openness"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain the protected / unprotected open spaces that presently exist• Maintain low density zoning that promotes a feeling of "openness"
Encourage Public Access and Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage open space that allows for public access and use, such as Steep Rock properties.• Use conservation easements where public access or use is not feasible or desirable
Expand The Greenway System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over the long term, expand the greenway trail network in Washington to provide easy pedestrian access from anywhere in Town and to interconnect open space areas, where appropriate

The Open Space Committee may wish to consider a more specific evaluation tool, such as suggested in the following table.

Open Space Parcel Evaluation

Category	Factors	Threats
Farmland	Size, soils, contiguity	Development, abandonment
Forest	Size, age, composition	Development, roads, disease
Parks and Recreation	Contiguity, Greenway linkage, recreational function	Development, loss of access
Watershed	Size, proximity to rivers and streams	Pollution, erosion
Natural Systems and Habitats	Rare and endangered species or habitats, habitat diversity, wetlands, size	Land uses, fragmentation
Ridgelines	Linearity, visibility	Housing, clear cutting
Historic/Cultural	Location, contiguity, endorsement	Demolition, abandonment, remodeling

Open Space Tax Abatement

The Natural Resources Inventory Report and the Open Space Plan document the importance to community character of preserved open space and undeveloped land in Washington. As illustrated by the map on Page 3-7, approximately 60 percent of Washington remains potentially developable in the future. If development of that land can be delayed or avoided, Washington will retain its rural character longer and may be able to implement more permanent open space preservation strategies.

Washington has implemented the tax assessment authority of Public Act 490 to reduce tax assessments on farm and forest land. The statutes also authorize towns to apply reduced assessments to open space land as defined by the Town. Extension of tax abatement to a defined open space category may have broad consequences and, after evaluation, the Conservation Commission's 2003 Open Space Plan concluded that such additional tax abatement would be counterproductive unless it was conditioned on permanent protection.

Therefore, the 2003 Open Space Plan recommended municipal funding in the amount of 0.5 mill per year, allocated between a Land Acquisition Fund and a tax abatement program for open space land permanently protected by conservation easement or deed restriction. This tax abatement option would be in addition to the existing Public Act 490 program applying to farmland and forestland. Adoption by the Town of such a policy based on the 2003 Open Space Plan would be consistent with the objectives of this Plan of Conservation and Development.

Philanthropy

Washington has benefited from private property owners establishing conservation easements on their property that help preserve the rural character of the community. Encouragement of these efforts, particularly through the Steep Rock Association and Weantinoge Heritage, should continue.

Macricostas Preserve



Hidden Valley Preserve



Use Assessment (PA 490)

Section 12-107 of the Connecticut Statutes allows a community to assess land by its use (farm, forest, or open space) rather than its value.

The program contains three major components:

- Farm land (designated by the assessor),
- Forest (designated by the assessor or the state forester), and
- Open space (the policy must be identified in the Plan of Conservation & Development and adopted by Town Meeting).

The use assessment reduces the tax burden on the properties and makes large parcels of land less expensive for a property owner to retain. This reduces the possibility that land will be put into development due to increasing taxes. Connecticut General Statutes (Sections 12-504a through 12-504e) provides a conveyance tax penalty for property developed or sold within ten years of designation.

The use assessment program (PA 490) enhances the perception of open space in Washington since it provides for the land to remain undeveloped longer and it reduces the pace of growth. It also provides incentive for preservation of farming, forestry, and open space.

Greenways

A greenway is a corridor of open space that:

- may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation,
- may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors,
- may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man-made corridor, including an unused right-of-way, traditional trail routes or historic barge canals, or
- may be a green space along a highway or around a village.

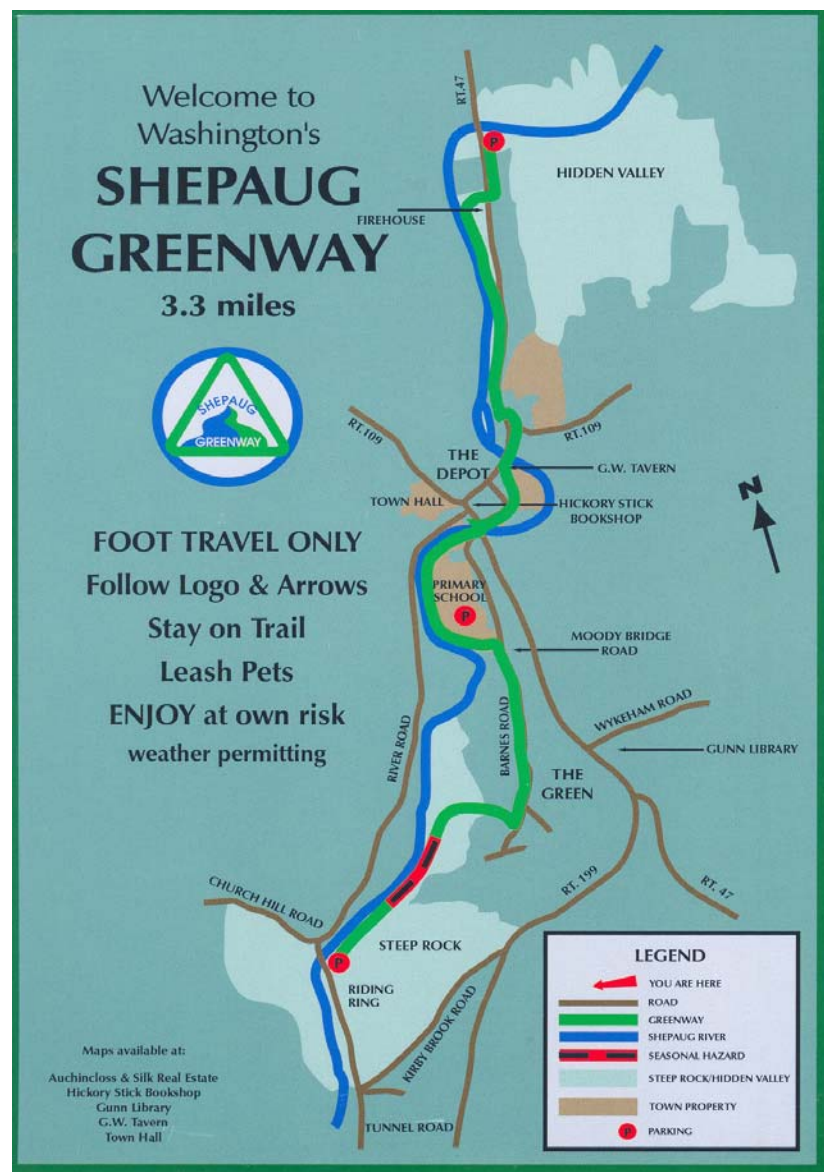
Connecticut General Assembly
Public Act 95-335

Greenways

An important example of the need for coordinated open space planning is the creation of greenways. Since 1997, the Washington Greenway Subcommittee has been working on a 3.3 mile walking and hiking trail, the Shepaug Greenway, to link Steep Rock Reservation and the Hidden Valley Preserve through Washington Depot and along the Shepaug River.

The Shepaug Greenway trail partly uses existing roadways, and the long-term goal is to replace roadway sections with off-road routes as opportunities become available.

Open space planning should consider the potential for additional greenways with convenient access throughout Town.



Municipal Open Space Funding Programs

Washington recognizes that it is very fortunate to have approximately 18 percent of its land area preserved as open space property with only modest local funding having been required. However, the Town also recognizes that it cannot continue to rely exclusively on private organizations and individuals to provide the resources necessary to attain the Town's 30% open space goal.

The following funding strategies, including recommendations from the 2003 Open Space Plan, will contribute to an ambitious open space preservation program over the next 10 to 15 years:

- strive to fund an annual line item in the operating budget for the "Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund" (CGS Section 7-131r), deposit funds from fee-in-lieu-of open space payments (CGS Section 8-25b), real estate conveyance taxes (if authorized by the legislature), state or federal grants, donations, bequests, or other sources into the Fund,
- establish a program for tax abatement incentives for permanent protection of open space by conservation easements or deed restrictions, and
- pursue state (such as Department of Environmental Protection) and federal (such as Transportation Efficiency Act) grant programs for open space acquisition and greenway trail development.

Annual Open Space Action Plan

Once the procedures described above are in place, the Open Space Committee should prepare an annual Action Plan, consisting of:

- identification of priority parcels based on the evaluation process,
- identification of partners and acquisition tools, including funding,
- specific municipal acquisition recommendations and requests for support funding for partner programs, and
- management recommendations for Town-owned open space properties.

The Committee should make a public presentation of its Annual Plan. Subsequently, following standard municipal procedures, this Open Space Action Plan should be presented to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance for necessary budget authorizations. Acquisitions recommended in the Open Space Action Plan would be referred to the Planning Commission for a report pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-24.

Open Space Land Acquisition Fund

CGS Sec. 7-131r. Land acquisition fund. Any municipality, by vote of its legislative body, may establish a special fund, which shall be known as the land acquisition fund. There shall be deposited in said fund, annually, an amount, not to exceed the amount which would be generated by the imposition of a tax of two mills against the property subject to tax in such municipality pursuant to chapter 203, as may be appropriated by the municipality. Such fund shall be used by the municipality for the acquisition of land to be used for open space, recreation or housing. Such fund shall not lapse at the close of the municipal fiscal year.

CGS Sec. 8-25b. Fund. Payments in lieu of open spaces. Any municipality which provides in regulations, adopted pursuant to section 8-25, for the payment of a fee or the fair market value of land transferred in lieu of any requirement to provide open space, shall deposit any such payments in a fund which shall be used for the purpose of preserving open space or acquiring additional land for open space or for recreational or agricultural purposes.

Protect Scenic Assets

The Natural Resource Inventory Report contains a comprehensive list of scenic resources, which may be found on virtually every road in Washington. Scenic resources contribute to community character, but are threatened by insensitive siting of development, installation of privacy fences (especially around Lake Waramaug), and indiscriminate tree cutting.

Scenic Protection

The Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission should consider regulations to include scenic resources (such as ridgelines) in development reviews. Such regulations can also include provisions to encourage preserving or relocating scenic resources such as stone walls, barns, and rustic fences. (The Viewshed/Watershed section of Woodbury's Subdivision Regulations may be a useful reference to consider.)

The Natural Resources Inventory Report recognized the significance of barns and farm outbuildings to local scenery and community character. The report also recommended the Town investigate ways to reduce the assessment on such structures as one example of the available tools to protect such structures. The 1993 Plan also included this recommendation. Regulations relating to such reductions should specify standards for maintenance of historic and scenic values.

Ridgelines are an important and sensitive scenic asset, because the enticement of homes with dramatic views is powerful in Washington. Strategies to preserve the scenic character of ridgelines may include:

- discouraging or preventing activities with negative visual impacts (such as communication towers as addressed in the current Zoning Regulations or indiscriminate tree clearing),
- adopting a special application review process to consider subdivision designs and proposed improvements (including fences) in sensitive scenic areas, and
- discouraging or preventing unnecessary lighting on or near ridgelines.

Scenic Roads

The Conservation Commission prepared and the Town has adopted a scenic road ordinance. Improvements or alterations to roads or scenic features, such as stone walls or significant trees, along roads designated as scenic by the Planning Commission will be balanced with the impact on the visual character. The Natural Resources Inventory Report provides a complete and detailed listing of Town roads and their scenic qualities.

Connecticut General Statutes Section 13b-31 allows the Department of Transportation to designate a State highway as a scenic road to ensure that any alteration to the State highway maintains the scenic character of the road. This designation should be considered by the Conservation Commission for parts of the State Routes in Washington and proposed to the State if found appropriate.

Preserve Agricultural Land and Farming

Over the course of its history, Washington has been a rural and farming community. However, agriculture in the Town is threatened by farm economics and other factors. It is possible that the most conspicuous components of the rural landscape: hayfields, dairy farms and cornfields feeding the dairy stock, could be gone within the next 20 years unless local action is taken.

The preservation of farms and farmlands is an important priority of this Plan. To enhance the rural character of the community, Washington should continue to seek ways to support agriculture locally. This Plan continues the recommendations from the 1993 Plan which included:

- Continue support for reduced local tax assessment on agricultural lands (PA-490 farm assessment).
- Continue to support PA-490 farm assessments for property owners who rent their farmland to others for agricultural purposes.
- Use the soil-based residential density regulation to conserve agricultural land by allowing smaller home sites in one or more areas and preserving the bulk of the land for agricultural use, as permitted by the Subdivision Regulations.
- Encourage the use of agricultural easements.

In addition, this Plan recommends that the Town continue to urge the State to acquire agricultural easements (including the purchase of development rights) in Washington. This strategy has already preserved farms and farmland in Washington.



Preservation of historically significant buildings, properties, and places will help enhance community character.

National Register

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is largely ceremonial. People typically assume the National Register of Historic Places is a protective program when it is actually only a recognition program.

This recognition entitles a property owner to display a commemorative plaque but only directly affects activities involving federal and/or state funding. It has little or no impact on the activities of the private sector.

State Register

Listing on the State Register of Historic Places (SRHP) is also largely ceremonial. This recognition also only directly affects activities involving federal and/or state funding and has little or no impact on the activities of the private sector.

However, such federal and state designations provide important recognition and this could benefit community character and spirit.

Encourage Preservation of Historic Resources

Washington's history, and the physical presence of many historic, architectural, and archeological assets, is another key component of the rural character that defines the community. Preservation of historic buildings, sites, and artifacts, as well as archeological resources, is an important way for Washington to provide a sense of identity and stability, preserve community character, and enhance the Town's historical heritage.

The map on the facing page identifies where historic and archeological resources are located or where they may be expected based on historic indications.

Historic Districts / Areas

Type	Location
Local Historic District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunny Ridge Washington Green
National Register of Historic Places*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunny Ridge Washington Green
State Register of Historic Places*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Preston

*Districts and areas on the National Register are automatically listed on the State Register.

Historic Buildings / Places

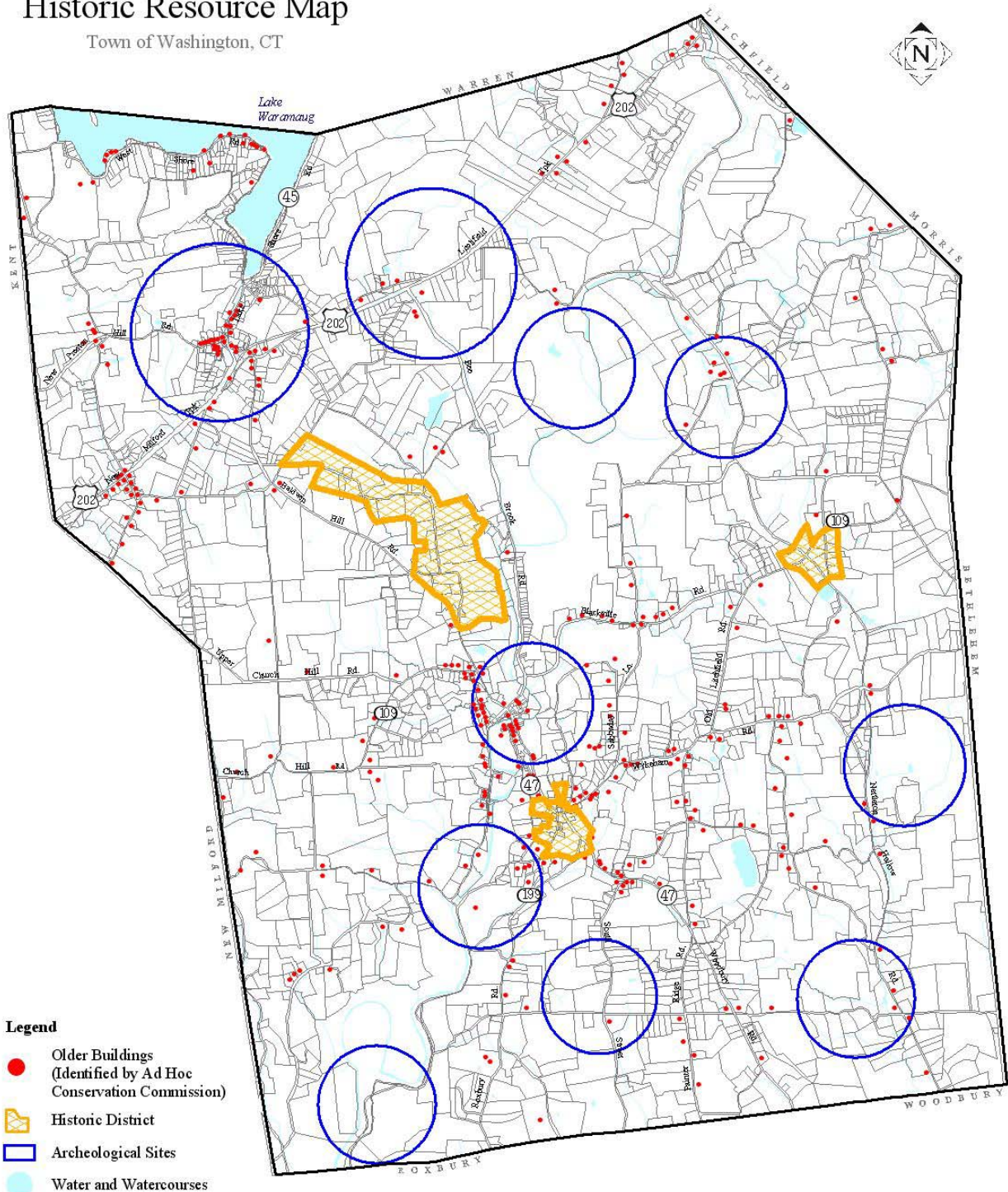
Type	Location
Local Register of Historic Places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None
National Register of Historic Places*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mount Tom Tower
State Register of Historic Places*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Averill Homestead Bushnell House Cogswell Tavern Congregational Church Litchfield Iron Works Noble Dayhouse Parish House

*Buildings and places on the National Register are automatically listed on the State Register.

Washington needs an organization to help coordinate the preservation of historic resources. The Historic District Commission is primarily a regulatory body and is not prepared to undertake this effort. This Plan recommends that establishing a Washington Historical Society (possibly with the assistance of the Gunn Historical Museum) be considered.

Historic Resource Map

Town of Washington, CT



NOTE: Boundaries are shown for local historic districts. Boundaries for state or national districts may be different.

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Planimetrics
J. Lutesh, Assoc. 13 0000 002 611 5201

Encourage “Sensitive Stewardship”

The most effective means of preserving historic resources is ownership by people or organizations that are sensitive to the historic significance of the resource and are financially and emotionally committed to maintaining that resource. Fortunately, most Washington residents have exhibited sensitive stewardship over the years and the community is richer as a result of their efforts.

Sensitive stewardship should continue to be encouraged and supported. In particular, the Town should investigate ways to provide educational programs and technical assistance related to historic preservation as effective tools to assist owners of historic resources. Such a task would be appropriately assigned to a volunteer historic society, which this Plan recommends.

Maintain Local Historic Districts

Washington has established three historic districts. Exterior alterations in these areas which are visible from a public street must receive a “certificate of appropriateness” from the Historic District Commission. These districts were established by local ordinance after recognition of their historic significance and ratification by the affected property owners.

These existing districts should, of course, be maintained since they are the most effective means of preserving historic character. Any potential new districts that are identified and that are endorsed by property owners should be considered favorably by the Board of Selectmen.

In addition, if a Historical Society is established, it should be encouraged to contact the State Historical Commission about participating in the Certified Local Government program. This program provides grants for partial funding for historic resource inventories and other projects.

Consider Adopting a Demolition Delay Ordinance

In order to help preserve historic structures, Washington may wish to consider adopting a demolition delay ordinance. While such an ordinance does not appear to be needed at this time, it may become a valuable tool in the future. A demolition delay ordinance allows up to ninety days to evaluate alternatives if a building or structure slated for demolition is found to be historically significant.

Preserve Archeological Resources

Evidence of habitation by Native Americans has been found in Washington. A number of archeological investigations by the Washington based Institute for American Indian Studies and others have found archeological artifacts from Native Americans living in this area thousands of years ago.

Activities in areas with archeological potential should be preceded by a responsible archaeological investigation so that additional information on the archeology and settlement history of Washington can be collected and catalogued. Such investigation could be made a requirement of zoning and subdivision regulations.

Promote Appropriate Architectural Design

Beyond its historic structures and features, much of Washington's character and its pleasing appearance come from the New England architectural styles that exist in the community. Washington is very fortunate to have some very attractive buildings, especially in its village center areas.

However, Washington does not have any architectural guidelines or review procedures to ensure that future buildings contribute to (and do not detract from) the rural and historic character that is revered by residents and visitors.

Washington should consider establishing a design review process with accompanying standards to help ensure that new and existing architectural styles are compatible. The Town could establish a design review board with members, having appropriate skills, appointed from the community at large. This board would review plans for uses in the village center areas and for special permit uses in residential zones submitted to it by the Zoning Commission. The design review board would then provide comments to that Commission about how to improve the design of buildings and sites.

Similarly, the Town should also investigate the need for standards to apply to lighting and noise pollution.

Since the design review comments would occur during the time period between receipt of an application and action by the Zoning Commission, it would not extend the decision timetable for an applicant. In addition, since the comments from the design review board are advisory to the Zoning Commission, it could choose to not impose conditions that it considered impractical or unrealistic.

Summary

Issues associated with preserving rural character – natural systems, open space, scenic, agricultural, historic, and other assets – dominated the priority listing based on public meetings and Commission discussions. The importance of these values carries through virtually all the Plan's components, but several relevant strategies were identified: conserve natural systems, protect open space, preserve scenic assets, support agricultural land and farming, preserve historic assets, and assure architectural integrity.

Design Review

New development should enhance local architectural style and character.

However, regulating architectural design can be problematic because it can be a subjective issue. What qualifies as "good design" to some, others see as visually incompatible or inappropriate.

On the other hand, a well-developed design review process can foster an improved and deeper understanding of community design and mitigate the subjective nature of reviewing architectural design.

The design review process would generally be utilized for development of:

- multi-family uses,
- business uses,
- institutional uses,
- special permit uses, and
- other uses that could have a significant impact on the community.

Preserve Rural Character – Strategies Summary

Responsibilities*

A. Natural Resource Elements

	Primary	Others	
1. Protect wetlands and watercourses	IWC	CC	
2. Protect water quality	IWC, CC	ZC	OSC
3. Maintain soil-based zoning	ZC		
4. Include natural systems in open space priorities	OSC	CC	

B. Open Space

1. Establish permanent Open Space Committee	BOS	CC	
2. Adopt Conservation Commission's Open Space Plan goals and actions	OSC, BOS	CC, BOF	Partners
3. Develop evaluation tools for Town acquisitions based on priorities and criteria	OSC		
4. Establish open space funding mechanisms for Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund	OSC	BOF	BOS
5. Prepare, implement, and regularly update open space action plan	OSC	BOS	

C. Scenic Resources

1. Consider scenic resource protection regulations	ZC, PC	CC	
2. Investigate options to reduce assessment on barns and farm buildings	BOS	CC	
3. Encourage implementation of Scenic Road Ordinance	Owners	CC	PC, BOS
4. Consider State Routes in Washington for proposal as State Scenic Roads	CC	BOS	Partners
5. Include scenic resources in open space priorities	OSC	CC	

D. Agricultural Land and Farming

1. Continue to support local agriculture	BOS	CC	
2. Include farmland as open space priority, including agricultural easements and State Development Rights purchase	OSC	CC	Partners
3. Continue application of PA 490 assessment for farmland, including leased land	BOS	BOF	

E. Historic Resources

1. Encourage creation of Washington Historical Society	All		
2. Maintain local Historic Districts; consider new districts	HDC		
3. Encourage sensitive stewardship	WHS	HDC	Partners
4. Adopt a demolition delay ordinance	BOS	WHS	
5. Encourage responsible archeological investigations	PC, ZC	BOS	WHS
6. Include historic/cultural resources in open space priorities	OSC	WHS	

F. Architectural Design

1. Consider establishing a design review process and standards	ZC		
2. Research appropriate standards for light and noise pollution, implement if found warranted	ZC		

*For key to abbreviations, see Page 7-4