

**TOWN OF WEST GREENWICH  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**LAND USE ELEMENT**

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## **SECTION I LAND USE ELEMENT**

### **A. Introduction**

The overriding land use goal as expressed by citizens at a public forum on April 20th 1992 is to **preserve the traditional rural landscape and lifestyle of West Greenwich**. It is critical to consider this goal, along with the goals set forth by the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act of 1988, when analyzing and providing recommendations for future land use in the town.

State legislative and local proactive land use goals dictate the analysis of current land use and guide the direction of future land use in West Greenwich. The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act of 1988 sets forth several goals that the Land Use Element is designed to achieve. They are condensed as follows: To promote an orderly growth and development that recognizes the natural characteristics of the land; To promote a balance of housing choices for all income levels and age groups; To promote the protection of the natural, cultural, and historic resources; To promote the preservation of open space and recreational resources; To encourage the use of innovative development regulations and techniques of land development; To ensure that municipal land use regulations and decisions are consistent with the comprehensive plan.

As required by State Law, areas of fundamental conflict, between existing zoning and land use promoted by the Plan, will be subject to the future corrective influence of additional development standards listed below and/or rezoning, although grandfathered rights will apply to existing uses. Conflicts include insensitive frontage lot development in the RFR2 district throughout town and strip commercial development.

### **1. Existing Land Use and Zoning**

#### **a. Historical Perspective**

**Pre-18th Century:** Hunting and Gathering. The earliest inhabitants of the area were the Narragansett Indians who migrated inland for the winter. They cultivated food and fished

the coastal areas of Rhode Island during the summer months. During the seasons spent in the area (now West Greenwich), they used granite outcroppings as temporary winter campsites. Rattlesnake Ledge, in Wickaboxet State Forest, and Witch's Rock, located off Hopkins Hill Road are two of these sites.

**18th Century:** Farms. Early colonial settlement in the area occurred rapidly after the Town was incorporated in 1741. By 1790 the population had increased to 2,054, the highest until recent history. Development occurred along existing long roads such as the old Pequot Indian Trail (Division Street) and Sharpe Street, both connecting West Greenwich to the markets of East Greenwich and the waters of the Narragansett Bay beyond. Settlers built farmhouses on large tracts of land set back from the main roads and farmed the land at subsistence level. The main source of their livelihood was lumbering and the town's abundant forests ensured that the saw mills and shingle mills flourished.

**19th Century:** Commerce. The New London Turnpike (built in 1815), cutting diagonally across the eastern part of the town, created a new land use for West Greenwich. The road was a major thoroughfare from New York City to Providence that brought with it revenue for the town. There was one tollgate, the Webster Gate at the corner of Hopkins Hill Road, set up along the route in West Greenwich. Other turnpike-related structures, such as taverns and inns to service the stage coaches and their passengers, were also established. The establishments prospered until the introduction of railroad and steamboat service rendered the Turnpike obsolete by the late 19th century. Today, the unpaved stretch of the Turnpike retains a strong sense of its original character and has been recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Industry. The abundance of water power encouraged several small mills and other industrial activities including grist mills, cotton cloth and yarn factories and acid works began to locate in West Greenwich during the 19th century. While the isolation of the town prohibited it from fully realizing its industrial potential, the establishment of mills led to the growth of several widely separated hamlets. At Liberty, located near West Greenwich Center, John Manchester built a cotton mill around 1808 and Albert Wells operated a mill which built wagons and carriages. Robin Hollow, located one mile west of Nooseneck

Village was another hamlet comprising sawmills, houses, and a blacksmith shop. Another settlement was at Escoheag located in the southwestern corner of the town. During the late 18th and much of the 19th century the Tillinghast and Hazard families established a working farm, a tavern, a sawmill, a grist mill, a stone quarry, and a molasses factory. A post office and church were established in Escoheag by the late 19th century.

These hamlets have all but disappeared except for Nooseneck Village which proved to be profitable enough to attract a year round population. Nooseneck Village, located on a plateau of Nooseneck Hill, was the only settlement in West Greenwich that ever reached village status. The area had an abundance of available water power to fuel the succession of mills built for manufacturing cotton yarn, wool, braided sash cord, rope, and twine. The years of village's greatest prosperity were from 1830 to the 1860s but it continued to develop into the later part of the 19th century. Many buildings were demolished or neglected as a result of the Big River Reservoir land acquisition and therefore few signs of the once flourishing Nooseneck Village remain.

**20th Century:** Suburbanization. In 1920, the U.S. Census reported the town's population had declined to 367 residents, its lowest total in this century. Some of the factors that have limited growth in this area were the distance from industrialized areas of the state, lack of public water, and irregular topography. However, in the late 1920s Nooseneck Hill Road (Route 3) was improved and Victory Highway (Route 102) was built before and during World War II. These transportation improvements along with an increase in automobile travel made West Greenwich more accessible. Since 1930 the population of the town has experienced a slow but steady growth due to the outflow of citizens from the urban areas of the state. However, much of the new population increase of the late 1930s was seasonal and due to the popularity of the vacation cottages that sprang up around Lake Mishnock area. The town's assets for passive recreational activities were enhanced with the creation of three major state parks, Wickabonet State Forest, Beach Pond State Park and Arcadia Management Area. A large tract in west central West Greenwich was converted to a private recreational retreat - Hianloland - later named the W. Alton Jones Campus of the University of Rhode Island. Steppingstone Ranch, a horse stable with 80 acres of trails, Oak Embers camp site and the Glen Cove estate were developed in the western portion of town.

The 19th century hamlets were forgotten in the post World War II suburbanization of West Greenwich and the quest for building the Big River Reservoir. Plans to build the reservoir have now been indefinitely postponed if not abandoned. The latter converted the largest and most organized of West Greenwich's hamlets, Nooseneck, into a virtual ghost town by the mid-to late 1970s. Conventional subdivisions were carved out of the rural landscape, occupying large tracts of land. Strikingly apparent results of this type of development are the loss of open space, no apparent community focus and no established Town Center (until the completion of the Town Hall and Library on Victory Highway). Interstate 95, running diagonally across the eastern part of the town was completed in the early 1960s. The consequence of the new thoroughfare was an increase in population to 1,841 by 1970. Another influence of the Interstate was the highway business development that began to spring up at the interchanges. In the haste to modernize developments and transportation, attributes of the traditional rural character of West Greenwich have been lost.

## **2. Growth**

Commuter residents make up a large percentage of the current local population. The town has become a "bedroom community" for urban areas such as Providence, Warwick, and Groton, Connecticut. The 1990 census placed the town's population at 3,492 and current population is estimated to be 3,800 to 4,000. The town is expected to continue to grow in the near future.

A recently completed build-out analysis for the town projected a potential increase of 14,500-16,500 residents or over 6,000 additional dwelling units based upon available land, its carrying capacity and current zoning. The current number of dwelling units in town is approximately 1,400 units. Build-out represents a 4-fold increase in the town's population and a corresponding need for an increase in community facilities, services and administration. Based upon the current rate of residential growth (35% over the last decade), build-out of the town could occur in approximately 50 years or by the year 2045. While build-out may seem a long way off, the town could see a doubling of the current population within the next two decades. The rate of residential growth in West Greenwich is a frequently expressed concern in town among residents who are concerned about loss of rural character, loss of the country setting, higher taxes, housing affordability and capital expenditures for schools, all of which are affected by the rate of residential growth.



As development continues to follow conventional subdivision models, much more of the traditional character of West Greenwich will be altered. It is important to recognize this condition and explore more sensitive land use alternatives if the people of West Greenwich desire to balance the preservation of the rural landscape with the development of the town.

### **3.    Build-Out Analysis**

#### **a.    Introduction**

Recent studies have begun to dispel the myth that increased development enhances the property tax base, thereby reducing the property tax burden for residential property owners within a community. This is a result of new pressures being placed on public infrastructure and services that are not being paid for by the tax revenue generated by the increased value of the land. This runs counter to the common perception that the "highest and best use" of the land is one that will result in reduced property taxes. Although more research needs to be done on this subject, it is clear that planners should no longer assume that farmland, forest, and open space must be converted so that it can meet the highest and best use criteria, as determined by the developers submitting proposals to local boards and commissions.

When municipalities debate how land use is to be allocated in the future, it is typically assumed that if the rate of development is increased, the tax base will also increase, thereby lowering the overall level of property taxes paid by the residents of the town. This assumption leads to development pressures that frequently outstrip the municipalities' ability to provide services and capital improvements to accommodate that growth. As a consequence, towns face exorbitant and sometimes unanticipated expenses in meeting the needs of a growing community. For example, a new 20-lot conventional residential subdivision on 2-acre lots may yield 20 school age children (based on 3.05 people per household ratio inclusive of 1-child per household). Based upon an annual education cost per student of \$7000, the Town could spend approximately \$140,000 each year for this demand upon the Town's school system exclusive of capital expenditures for building improvements or expansion. When compared to an average annual taxation rate of approximately \$2,500/dwelling unit, or \$50,000 in revenue, it is clear that medium to large scale

conventional residential subdivisions are a fiscal liability to the community. Planners have started to seriously contemplate and question the fiscal ramifications associated with all types and variations of development.

The planning profession is giving further credence to Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) as a means of evaluating land use proposals in relation to zoning ordinance regulation and growth. It is a widely recognized and academically accepted methodology used to evaluate land use patterns based on current zoning regulations. In fact, FIA can be utilized as a land use planning tool to monitor the growth-related impacts on local services in relation to current zoning patterns.

#### **b. Build-Out Analysis Philosophy**

A build-out analysis is a professionally recognized tool used by planners with varying assumptive criteria that attempts to predict the maximum amount of development that can potentially occur on a given parcel of land. Taken in the context of an entire community, an estimate of overall growth can be determined by factoring in existing and proposed zoning district classifications. Since existing zoning districts provide the basis for much of this analysis, growth projections are specifically limited to those land use requirements. For example, residential growth projections were determined based on the maximum number of new dwelling units and resulting increased population that could potentially evolve based on the theoretical development of every parcel given its current zoning classification (RFR-1 and RFR-2).

Commercial and industrial growth was measured on the square footage of new floor area that could be potentially developed in relation to commercial and industrial zoning standards.

There are some limitations to the build-out data generated for this report that require explanation. Ideally, the analysis would account for a parcel-by-parcel review of whether the land is vacant or "underdeveloped" and would include all dimensional regulations found in the zoning code on a site specific basis. Furthermore, environmental factors that could affect the ability to develop land should be considered. This would include those environmentally-sensitive areas such as waterbodies, steep slopes, wetlands, severe soil classifications (unsuitable for septic), and similar constraints. In addition, not only would

current (existing) zoning districts be evaluated for potential full-scale development on a parcel-by-parcel basis, but also, future (proposed) zoning districts would be similarly critiqued as well (e.g., 2-acre residential districts versus 3-acre districts, etc.).

The build-out analysis attempts to predict growth rates, land use patterns, and development intensity over time. It cannot predict economic or market conditions that often influence growth, nor can it account for whether a town may actually have the infrastructure in place to support a predicted level of growth. Therefore, the timing of when the development may occur cannot be factored into the analysis without making assumptions about sustaining an average rate of growth over time. Although it is doubtful that full build-out would ever occur in the town, the build-out analysis is a planning tool to be used with an appreciation for the potential implications of growth on land use patterns and its cost-revenue fiscal impact.

### **c. Purpose of Analysis**

For the purpose of this study, the existing land use pattern and zoning parameters are utilized to ascertain a "snapshot" view of the town if it was built-out according to existing conditions only. While somewhat limited in scope, the analysis nonetheless creates insight into existing and/or proposed land use ordinances and how they potentially affect the land use/zoning in town.

The analysis also gives the community an impression of how much development is actually programmed by current zoning and it begs the question of whether or not such development is fiscally manageable or physically desirable in terms of environmental impacts, maintaining rural character and the quality of life in West Greenwich.

An important aspect to the build-out analysis is the potential to evaluate the spin-off effect that may occur as a result of increased development. For example, if new commercial and industrial facilities are to be located in the town, it is evident that significant infrastructure improvements may be necessary, such as new or improved roads, water and sewer line capacity expansion, and increased public safety. However, according to one economic theory, while increased commercial activities may contribute more significantly to the local tax structure, there may also be secondary impacts of induced growth

such as new residential development resulting from the possible need to provide new housing to accommodate the increased employment force brought into town. Regardless of the explanation(s) accounting for increased residential development, the influx of new families into town may significantly affect the capacity of the school system to provide educational services. As such, school facilities may need to be expanded along with additional staff to meet the needs of incoming families and resulting higher population figures. It is logical to assume increased costs will occur to provide these services with additional taxation called upon to defray associated fiscal burdens. The net result is higher not lower property taxes, if the commercial tax base cannot offset its own service demands as well as the costs associated with residential development. Many urban areas in Rhode Island have experienced the vicious cycle of induced growth and have failed to curb increased residential taxes with new commercial development.

The direct and indirect impacts associated with developments cannot be ignored. While any build-out analysis may have inherent limitations, it is anticipated that local officials can further evaluate alternative future land use scenarios and associated fiscal implications. To assist in this on-going process, the application of Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) is recommended for utilization in the review of major residential subdivisions and proposed commercial/industrial activities. By utilizing standardized fiscal methodologies recognized by the American Planning Association, a means to evaluate the proportional valuation of any proposed project can assist local officials in evaluating the short and long term ramifications associated with varying development scenarios. As such, a fiscal-related process or format for quantifying land use decision-making could be utilized as a planning tool in evaluating development proposals.

#### **d. Methodology**

The build-out analysis was conducted using Tax Assessor's records, the Zoning Ordinance, and related data in the Town Planner's files. Data from the Tax Assessor's records includes breakdowns by land use categories, number of parcels, acreage, and developed versus vacant land. Acreage associated with each zoning district was generated by the Planning Department based on area information obtained from the computer-generated local Zoning Map (created by Cherenzia Associates). While data varies somewhat between departments due to different methodologies and

classification systems utilized by each department, a comparative build-out analysis was examined. Using these figures preliminary build-out information was calculated. To be consistent with the FIA, commercial and industrial land was aggregated as one classification.

Additional land use and demographic data was gathered and utilized for the analysis. Particularly useful was data regarding constraints to development (environmentally-sensitive areas) that allowed land to be deducted from the build-out calculation. Where specific data was unavailable, assumptions were made to estimate the impact of such constraints. In each case 10% of land area was deducted for roadways and utilities and an additional 20% for environmentally sensitive areas (e.g., water bodies, steep slope > 15%, wetlands, flood-plains, severe soils unsuitable for supporting septic systems, and state and town open space areas). Building permit data was also utilized to examine trends in development rates for the town. Between 1991-94, the town has issued an average of 61 new single-family building permits per year (49, 54, 72, & 68, respectively).

#### **e. Build-Out Analysis Findings**

According to the 1990 U.S. Census, West Greenwich is Rhode Island's 3rd least populated municipality. However, from 1980-1990, the town experienced an increase in its population of over 27% or 754 new residents.

West Greenwich is the State's 6th largest municipality in terms of land area. This combination of large land area and sparse population makes the town the least densely populated municipality in Rhode Island, with only 69 residents per square mile. As it is currently constituted, the town is predominantly residential in nature with vast tracts of open space, agricultural soils, and forest.

According to the data provided by the computer-generated zoning map, based on the computer generated Zoning Map, 40% of the area of West Greenwich is public open space totaling 13,127 acres. Much of this land is in the public trust as part of the Big River Reservoir Watershed. Substantial acreage is also occupied by the W. Alton Jones Campus of the University of Rhode Island and state park and forest land. Just over 3% of the town is zoned for business or industrial purposes. The remainder is designated as Rural, Farming, Residential (RFR) and is divided into two

separate zoning districts, each carrying different density standards. (See Table 1 below for the detailed breakdown of West Greenwich by zoning district.)

**Table 1. Land Use Breakdown by Zoning District**

ZONE	AREA	% OF TOWN
Rural, Farming, Residential (RFR1)	485 Acres	1.5%
Rural, Farming, Residential (RFR2)	18,110 Acres	55.3%
Neighborhood Business (NB)	9 Acres	Less than 0.1%
Highway Business (HB)	279 Acres	0.9%
Industrial A (IA)	472 Acres	1.4%
Industrial B (IB)	273 Acres	0.9%
Open Space Public Land	13,127 Acres	40%

The Planning Department analysis (Planner's Build-Out) is focused on residential development, which is clearly where the most significant growth is likely to occur. The larger of the two RFR zones (RFR-2) is 18,110 acres and the minimum lot size in this district is two acres. To determine the potential buildout for the RFR-2 zoning district, the total acreage was divided by two (the minimum lot size) to yield 9,000 potential new dwelling units. By deleting 30% for roads and environmentally-sensitive areas (constraints to development), the total number of maximum dwelling units in the RFR-2 district would be 6,339. By factoring in a standardized average household size used by the U.S. Census of 2.7 people (perceived as a conservative estimate), this level of potential build-out would be 17,114 people.

As the town is generally attracting the type of population that is moving out of more urban areas to enjoy the inherent rural qualities associated with the town, more school-aged children are apparently associated with families than that allocated by the Census. For example, the Town of Narragansett, which has some similarity in housing patterns, has utilized a ratio of 3.05 people per family. As the single-family housing patterns

continue to evolve in town, a similarity is also realized with that developed in portions of the Towns of North Kingstown and East Greenwich. As such, both family multipliers are used in this analysis. A standardized household size of 3.05 people increases the build-out of the RFR-2 district to 19,332 people.

The other residential zoning district (RFR-1) encompasses only 485 acres of the town, with a minimum lot size of one acre. This district is located around Lake Mishnock. According to planning data and the Tax Assessor's Office, there are currently 375 dwelling units in this area, housing 1,013 people based upon the average 2.7 person household size. Based on 3.05 people per household, this number increases to 1,144 people. There are eleven (11) lots known to be vacant within this district, although the total acreage cannot be specifically quantified without applicable survey work to correlate buildable acres. Some of the lots may be potentially subdivided if large enough to meet the zoning requirements. Since the area is essentially built-out at this time, no appreciable increase in population is accounted for in this scenario.

**Table 2. Planner's Build-Out**

RFR-2 Acreage	18,110		
Divided by 2	9,055	(1-DU/2-acres)	
-30% (constraints)	6,339		
Dwelling Units	6,339		
Family Size	x 2.7	(standards)	x 3.05
	-----		-----
	17,114	(population)	19,334

RFR-1 Acreage (Mishnock)	BUILT-OUT		BUILT-OUT
Dwelling Units	375		375
Family Size	x 2.7		x 3.05
	-----		-----
	1,013	(population)	1,144

TOTAL DWELLINGS	6,714		6,714
TOTAL POPULATION	18,128	versus	20,478

Whether factoring a projected population of 18,128 or 20,478, it is obviously in sharp contrast to the estimated range of the current population of 3,800-4,000.

It is not clear whether these numbers actually differentiate between improved and vacant land. An examination of the numbers show that the build-out is based on the total acreage for each land use category, as opposed to just the undeveloped land within each zoning district.

#### **f. Tax Assessor's Data**

A separate build-out analysis based on data supplied by the Tax Assessor's Office provides additional information for comparative purposes and attempts to refine those numbers associated with "improved residential" and "vacant residential" areas. This study also projects future build-out for non-residential land as well. The information provided by the Assessor's Office is displayed in Table 3 below.



**Table 3. West Greenwich Land Use Breakdown**

<b>CODE</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	<b>% TOTAL COUNT</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>% TOTAL AREA</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
01-03,12	1,295	64.24%	4,105	19.72%	Improved residential
13	391	19.39%	2,451	11.77%	Vacant residential
5,6,24	56	2.78%	1,002.73	4.82%	Improved commercial
14	23	1.14%	277.42	1.33%	Vacant commercial/industrial
7,10	8	0.40%	67.93	0.33%	Improved industrial
9,15,33	243	12.05%	12,918	62.04%	Farm, Forest, Open Space
	2,016	100%	20,822.08	100%	TOTAL

Tax Assessor's data assists in three respects. First, it provides data for non-residential development; second, it accounts for restrictions that may limit development, such as environmental constraints, and roadways and utilities; third, *land already developed* was deducted from the analysis. As such, there are some differences in the acreage breakdowns for the different land classifications.

According to the Tax Assessor's data, improved and undeveloped land in West Greenwich totals 20,822 acres (see Table 3). This apparently excludes the 13,127 acres identified in the Open Space Public Land (OSPL) district as undevelopable. The purpose of this zoning district is to ensure that all land:

"owned by a public agency has a district associated with it in the event of transference or sale. This district regulates and manages any parcel or area of land or water essentially unimproved and set aside, dedicated, designated, reserved, and

preserved from private development."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore all land in this district will be considered undevelopable and is removed from the build-out calculations. Aside from public recreation and certain public services, the zoning ordinance prohibits development in this district.

Table 3 also indicates there is another 12,918 acres of land designated as farm, forest, and open space that will be assigned to the residential land use classification in its entirety. The rationale behind this assumption is the data provided by the Planning Department that indicates a total of 18,595 acres in either the RFR-1 or RFR-2 zoning districts. Moreover, the Tax Assessor's Office data classifies more land as falling into non-residential categories than that delineated by the Planning Department. As a result, the Assessor's breakdown used here classifies slightly more land in each category than the Planning Department. This difference may be explained by some commercial or industrial uses located in residential zoning districts that may have since been grandfathered.

Using the figures shown in Table 3 and the assumption described above, there is a total of 19,474 acres of residential land, (improved and vacant residential land plus the farm, forest and open space category), of which 4,105 acres is considered improved. Based on the above parameters, 15,369 residential acres can be potentially developed. Approximately 3% of the residential land is zoned for one acre housing. According to Planning Department figures, this land around Lake Mishnock is substantially built-out. The remaining residential land is zoned for two-acre lots.

Additionally, as in the Planner's Build-Out, it is assumed that 20% of the land will have environmental or other constraints that will restrict development potential. Another 10% will be allotted for roadways and utilities. As a result, 30% of the vacant land described above will be deducted from the overall build-out potential. After subtracting 30%, 10,758 residential acres may be developed.

The Planning and Tax Assessor's Departments identified eleven vacant lots in the RFR-1 district. Until more survey work is conducted to determine total acreage, it will be assumed for the

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<sup>1</sup>Town of West Greenwich Zoning Ordinance, Article II, Section 3A

purposes of this analysis that these lots average 2 acres in size, yielding 22 buildable acres. This leaves 10,736 acres in the RFR-2 zone. Thus, 5,368 new houses may potentially be built in the RFR-2 zone and 22 dwellings in the RFR-1 zoning district, which results in a total of 5,390 additional dwelling units or 14,553 additional people. When added to the existing population of approximately 3,900 people, a total residential build-out scenario reveals 18,453 people based on 2.7 people per household, or 20,340 based on 3.05 people per dwelling.

**Table 4.    Town of West Greenwich Potential Build-Out**

**Residential**

<b>Assumed Min. Lot Size</b>	<b>Developable Acres</b>	<b>Potential Build-out</b>
<b>(RFR-1) 1 acre</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22 dwelling units</b>
<b>(RFR-2) 2 acres</b>	<b>10,736</b>	<b>5,368 dwelling units</b>
<b>Total Approximate Population Range at Build-out:    18,100       -       20,500*</b>		

**\*Based upon the Planner's and the Assessor's build-out analyses**

**Table 5.    Assessor's Build-Out**

RFR Total Acreage	19,474		
Improved Residential	-4,105	(deleted)	
	-----		
Residential Acres	15,369	(potentially-developable)	
-30%	10,758	acres	
-Mishnock	10,736	(22-developable acres)	
Divided by 2	5,368	dwelling units--RFR-2	
	+    22	dwelling units--RFR-1	
	-----		
	5,390	<b>Total Additional Dwelling Units</b>	
Family Size	x 2.7	people/dwelling	x 3.05
	-----		-----
	14,553	Additional Pop.	16,440
	+3,900	Est.Current Pop.	+3,900
	-----		-----
	18,453	TOTAL POP.	20,340

**g.    Non-Residential Land**

Non-residential land encompasses 1,348 acres, and 277 acres of that amount is vacant. After accounting for environmental constraints and roadways, 194 acres remain. The minimum lot requirements for the commercial districts is one acre and two acres in the industrial districts. An average of 1.5 acre sized lots will be used for this analysis. This results in 129 new commercial or industrial facilities if full build-out is achieved. Assuming one story buildings and the maximum lot coverage is 25% permitted by zoning, approximately 2,107,215 square feet of non-residential floor area could be built. The build-out scenarios are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6. Commercial/Industrial**

<b>Assumed Min. Lot Sizes</b>	<b>Developable Acres</b>	<b>Potential # of New Structures</b>	<b>Lot Coverage by Building</b>	<b>Potential New Floor Area</b>
1.5 acres	194	129	25%	2,107,215 sq.ft.

Thus, it is conceivable that substantial new development could occur in West Greenwich. Vast contiguous open spaces are protected through the Open Space Public Land zoning district, but other areas may see future growth that may further fragment the agricultural and forest lands. This build-out analysis attempts to predict the maximum level of new construction under current zoning only. Any proposed changes in residential lot sizes should be analyzed as separate build-out scenarios as well. It is important to understand, however, that this analysis does not factor economic or market conditions that will ultimately determine the timing, type and intensity of new development.

## **SECTION II INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS**

### **A. Current Land Use Overview**

#### **1. Residential**

The majority of residential units have been built within conventional subdivisions and on frontage subdivision lots. There are some isolated farmsteads and historic houses scattered across the town. These remnants of the past are not prominent within the residential landscape of the town. Most new residential lots are in the one and two acre size range, the latter being the more prominent.

#### **2. Commercial**

Commercial uses tend to be highway-oriented and development of commercial uses generally has occurred in small strips. Businesses in these areas appear to be geared toward the needs of commuters rather than neighborhood business. The two primary commercial areas in town are centered at the Interstate I-95 interchanges off Route 3 (Nooseneck Hill Road/I-95, Exit 6) and Route 102 (Victory Highway/I-95, Exit 5). In addition to these areas there is a small linear district on Nooseneck Hill Road ranging north from the Robin Hollow Road intersection. This is the remnant of historic Nooseneck Village. There are no other types of businesses except a nightclub (The Barn) in the Lake Mishnock area. In general the commercial enterprises in West Greenwich are highway service-oriented. The Exit 6 area and the Exit 5 Cloverleaf are the most dynamic of these areas in terms of intensity of use. There are two motels, two competing service stations, and a Bess Eaton donut shop recently completing renovations at Exit 6. The Exit 6 Plaza, a commercial strip mall, north of these uses has had high vacancy rates. The Exit 5 Cloverleaf houses a major interstate truck stop, a restaurant catering to the truck stop, a convenience store, a motel, a bank, and a strip mall which is half occupied. In both commercial highway areas there appears to be additional space for commercial development - either on vacant land or within existing underutilized spaces.

### **3. Agricultural**

The primary agricultural activities in the town are small scale nurseries and horse farms. The town's forest resources are located in the eastern and western sections. Big John's Tree Farm (Leyden property) also off of Plain Meeting House Road is one of several tree farm/nurseries scattered across the town. Equestrian activities and private horse ownership are prevalent throughout West Greenwich which is said to have more horses per capita than any other town in Rhode Island. Other agricultural activities are comprised of a few isolated dairy farms, cornfields and limited housing of livestock.

### **4. Industrial**

The majority of industrial activities are located in the northeast corner of the town in the Technology Park. Light industrial manufacturing plants make up the majority of activities. Smaller-scale industry such as gravel mining activities and logging businesses are scattered around the town. There are several sawmills within town. A sawmill operates in the Big River area off of Henry Brown Road in the east, and off of Plain Meeting House Road to the west.

### **5. Institutional**

Institutional activities include municipal uses such as the Town Hall, Louttit Memorial Library, a highway department facility, and a solid waste disposal transfer station. Educational uses are URI's W. Alton Jones Campus as well as primary and secondary schools. The Towns of West Greenwich and Exeter participate in a regional school system. Both the Mildred E. Lineham pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and the Exeter-West Greenwich Junior-Senior High School are located in close proximity on lower Nooseneck Hill Road (Route 3). The Metcalf Elementary School is located further south on Nooseneck Hill Road adjacent to the town boundary line in the Town of Exeter. The Wawaloam School, also in Exeter on Victory Highway (Route 102), currently services first grade students. While these schools have served the area since the 1950s and 60s, the regional high school was only recently completed in 1990. Various religious establishments also exist. Each section of town retains a volunteer fire station/rescue squad. The West Greenwich Fire and Rescue Company #1, the West Greenwich Community Rescue, the Hianloland Fire &

Rescue, and the Mishnock Fire & Rescue are the four organizations that service the town with fire and rescue. Perhaps more than any other institution, it is these services that are viewed as community organizations.



**MAP 1.      Existing Land Use**

## **B.    Current Zoning Overview**

The following are the major land use regulatory vehicles in town:

**1.    Zoning Districts.**    A total of seven zoning districts have been established:

**a.    RFR-1:** 1 acre lots allowing rural, farming, residential use (485 acres). This district is composed of existing legal non-conforming ½-acre lots or less in the Lake Mishnock area. (It is important to note that although the Bailey Pond area in the western end of town also has ½-acre lots it is zoned in the RFR2 district.)

The purpose of this zone is to provide adequate land suitable for medium density development, to establish unified neighborhoods for more efficient, economical community services and facilities, and to create a more pleasant diversified environment. Creation of new lots of record for building purposes shall have a service connection to an existing community water supply (Kent County Water Authority).

**b.    RFR-2:** 2 acre lots allowing rural, farming, and residential uses (18,110 acres). Existing uses in the town's largest zoning district vary from 2-acre subdivision lots to large tracts of farmland and wetlands.

The purpose of this zone is to provide adequate land suitable for moderate density development, to establish unified neighborhoods for more efficient, economical community services and facilities, and a more pleasant and diversified environment.

**c.    NB:** Neighborhood Business (9 acres). The only district is small and located on Lake Mishnock. A night club and a recreation area presently occupy the site.

The purpose of this zone is to provide areas for business use to serve the day-to-day needs of the residential population of the community. It is expected that areas of this zone classification will be located in a manner that is accessible to developed residential areas with the prospect that new locations will be so designated in the future by the Town Council as new residential development occurs.

**d. HB:** Highway Business (279 acres). There are four areas where this zone is allowed and businesses are strung out along the roads.

The purpose of this zone is to provide areas for commercial activities to serve the needs of the entire community and contiguous regions. It is expected that such zones will be located on major arterial highways to maximize accessibility.

**e. IA:** Industrial Area A (472 acres). These areas are presently used for gravel banks, manufacturing business, or are vacant. The Technology Park area in the northeastern section of town is in an IA district.

The purpose of this zone is to provide areas for the future development of industrial and allied uses and to provide for existing uses of this nature. Areas so designated are considered to be geographically and topographically suitable for such use and are so designated in the interest of providing for the future economic growth of the community.

**f. IB:** Industrial Area B (273 acres). There are only two areas in this district, one in the southeastern corner and another in the northwestern corner of the town.

The purpose of this zone is to provide areas for future development of industrial and allied uses which, due to the peculiar nature of their activities require locations *remote* from other classes of use. Areas so designated are primarily undeveloped or are very sparsely developed to minimize adverse impact upon neighborhood properties and activities.

**g. OSPL:** Open Space Public Land (13,127 acres). The existing activities in this district are state parks, public facilities, and private recreation areas. The district occupies forty percent (40%) of the town's land and offers significant protection for open space in the future.

The purpose of this zone is to insure all OSPL owned by a public agency has a district associated with it in the event of transference or sale. The zoning district would safeguard such property therein, in the event of transference or sale, while granting via special-use permit exclusively, select public-related uses. Residential, commercial, and industrial uses are prohibited in this zone.

**Site Plan Review.** West Greenwich's zoning ordinance (adopted December 1994) requires site plan review for any building permit other than for single family dwellings. The general criteria and standards dictate that development must address the following: ecological considerations; landscape; relationship of proposed structures to environment; scenic, historic, archeological landmark sites; surface water drainage, driveway connection to public streets, traffic effects, pedestrian safety, on-site parking and circulation, and utility services.

**MAP 2.      Current Zoning Map**

### **C. Land Use Inventory**

The predominant character of West Greenwich is that of a rolling wooded landscape with development strung along key roadways broken by large expanses of protected open space. Interstate 95 cuts through the southeastern portion of town and has afforded the opportunity for commercial and industrial land use patterns to evolve at three major intersections. The town is one of Rhode Island's most undeveloped localities, however, there are pockets within West Greenwich which are densely developed.

For descriptive purposes the town can be broken into four (4) principal geographic areas: Lake Mishnock, Big River, Town Center and the West End.

#### **1. Lake Mishnock**

The Lake Mishnock area occupies the northeastern corner of the town and is bounded by Interstate 95 to the south, Nooseneck Hill Road to the west, Coventry to the north, and East Greenwich to the east. It is the most actively used area in West Greenwich yet occupies the least amount of land.

The northeastern section is dominated by the Technology Park, a high tech industrial area. Long driveways lead into large lots where industrial buildings are situated. The deep setback of the buildings presents the condition of empty frontage areas. It is understood that much of the Town's tax revenue is generated by these industries.

The middle section of this area is comprised of legal non-conforming, ½ acre lots or smaller that were part of the Lake Mishnock recreational development area. The dense settlement of the land poses a potential problem because none of the houses are sewered and they appear to have been built on filled land or former wetlands with high watertables.

The western section is mainly highway business oriented. Fast food chains and gas stations dominate the development. At least one plaza in the area is almost vacant, but the other businesses seem healthy.

## **2. Big River**

The Big River area occupies the southeastern part of the Town and is bounded by Exeter on the south, Interstate 95 on the west and north, and East Greenwich on the east. The land use in this area occupies a substantial piece of land the state took control of in the Big River Reservoir acquisition.

The southeastern and northeastern sections of this area are rural in character with only a few exceptions. A large cornfield and a small farm exist along Henry Brown Road. There are two isolated industrial areas and a few subdivisions. The subdivisions are the frontage lot and conventional models. It appears that the conventional subdivisions in the eastern part of this section are market and design-oriented to neighboring East Greenwich, a wealthy suburban community to the east.

The middle section of this area covers 6,300 acres of state-owned land. The use of it is primarily residential except for one or two small farms and at least one logging business. The houses do not appear to follow any modern suburban development pattern but are all close to the road. The roads are dirt and the majority of the land is used for recreational activities. The state controlled land also includes the archaeological site of historic Nooseneck Village.

The southwestern part of the section is occupied by frontage lot development and a limited area of highway business at the intersection of Nooseneck Hill Road and Congden Mill roads. This part of the section is dominated by an eastern vista over Big River Reservoir lands and runs parallel to Interstate 95. The southern tip of the section abuts the Exit 5 Cloverleaf of the highway.

## **3. Town Center**

The Town Center area occupies the middle part of the town and is bounded by Exeter on the south, the URI W. Alton Jones campus and Wickabonet State Park on the west, Coventry on the north, and Interstate 95 on the east. Its development patterns have closely followed the suburban model of development and frontage lot suburban housing characterizes Victory Highway as it passes through the area to the south and north of Town Hall.

The southern section covers an area commonly known as the Exit 5 Cloverleaf. The use of the land is predominant highway business, yet there is one industrially zoned site presently vacant. The highway-oriented businesses consist of a truck stop, a motel, a retail plaza, a bank, and several isolated businesses along Victory Highway.

The center section is concentrated around Victory Highway and the land use is primarily residential. The subdivision lots are both frontage and conventional types. Beyond the surrounding vicinity of Victory Highway, large tracts of open and wooded land are used for single family residences, farms, nurseries, and gravel mines.

Institutional uses in this area are the West Greenwich Community Rescue, the Town Hall, highway garage, the library, a fire station, the West Greenwich Community Baptist Church, and the RI Fish & Game Protection Association.

The northern section of the area focuses around Sharpe Street, Weaver Hill Road, and Plain Meeting House Road. The land use is primarily residential except for a few small farms and nurseries.

Subdivisions are suburban and conventional in nature and houses are usually set back from the road. The general rural feel of the section is characterized by woodlands periodically opening up to fields or wetland ponds. A few historic buildings exist in this section but their locations are isolated from each other.

#### **4. West End**

The West End occupies the western third of the town, and is bounded by Exeter on the south, Voluntown and Sterling, Connecticut on the west, Coventry to the north, and the Wickabonet State Forest area to the east. Its development is characterized by dirt roads and sporadic frontage lot residential development.

The eastern section of this area is dominated by the URI W. Alton Jones Campus and Wickabonet State Park. The use is primarily recreational, although Alton Jones does run an educational program and a conference center on the site. Streams, lakes, woodlands and trails are accessed by a network of hiking trails used by students and conference attendees.

The middle section can be divided into two parts, the old West Greenwich Center and Bailey Pond. Land use around West Greenwich Center is primarily residential set on frontage lot subdivisions.



There are several historic and archeological sites, scattered farms, and roads are both paved and dirt. The second part of this section is Bailey Pond which can be characterized by residential use on legal, non-conforming ½ acre lots. The roads and a small recreational area, called Wickaboxet Camp, are privately owned by an association.

The southwestern section known as Escoheag, is primarily used for residences except for Stepping Stone Ranch (where annual festivals are held), Oak Embers Campground, South County Rod & Gun Club, and Arcadia Management Area which are used for recreation. The subdivisions include frontage-type lots and conventional development although isolated historic buildings exist such as the dwellings and barns at what was once known as the hamlet of Hazard Mill (Tillinghast-Hazard House). In addition, approximately thirty (30) frontage lot subdivisions and single family dwellings have been constructed in the past eight years on Hazard Road and Escoheag Hill Road on land once associated with the old Pine Top ski resort. These dwellings, in addition to other single family subdivisions, have added vitality to the Escoheag area.

## **D. Findings: Existing Land-Use**

### **1. Land Use Patterns**

The land use patterns in town are conventional sprawl patterns, consuming large areas of the landscape along the town's roadways.

Residential development is primarily strip frontage lot development along the town's roadways. Large lot zoning with extensive frontage width requirements has dictated the placement of new houses at regular intervals. In many cases, however, the setback requirements have allowed a treed buffer area to be retained between the house and road. These buffer areas do help in retaining a rural quality in the spring - summer - fall months. The strip style, however, also gives the false impression that large portions of the town are well developed when they are not. Interior lot development has been undertaken for conventional suburban subdivisions - primarily with large houses and wide streets. This type of development does not conform to rural character.

### **2. Commercial Activities**

The commercial development within the town is limited. It is primarily related to highway service functions and it is located in strip commercial areas within the vicinity of two I-95 interchanges. Many of the commercial uses at these interchanges appear to be marginal. Other ventures are more viable. The Exit 5 Cloverleaf truck stop is one of the town's most active areas. The strip shopping centers built near each of the interchanges are underutilized. Neighborhood commercial districts have not been developed in town. There are essentially very few, if any, areas within the town that provide town or community-oriented retail (either in food or clothing) or service-related functions such as cleaning, repair, or professional services. Residents drive elsewhere for these services, or find them in the City before commuting home.

### **3. Town Center**

The town has no center other than the area currently occupied by the Town Hall and Library. This area is ideally situated in the central portion of the town in a scenic location.

#### **4.    Town Identity**

West Greenwich has had an identity as a rural community. Due to transportation improvements, settlement patterns have sprawled over large portions of the town and there are no real concentrations or villages with the exception of Lake Mishnock and Bailey Pond. There are few neighborhood businesses. Most of the current development has little, if any, linkage to a sense of place. The current pattern is reinforced by conventional zoning and subdivision activities.

#### **E.    Community Issues and Concerns**

##### **1.    Guiding Future Development**

The last comprehensive plan to be completed for the Town was completed in 1965 - thirty years ago. The 1965 plan contemplated completion of the Big River Reservoir among other changes. Because it is long out-of-date, this plan has been largely ignored. Significantly the zoning map and code replaced comprehensive planning for the last two decades of growth and development within town. The map and code have been a stamp of approval for the existing pattern of suburban development. There has been no prior analysis of the impact of the current development trends upon the town until the studies undertaken for this plan. Guiding future development to protect the rural character of West Greenwich has become a primary concern.

##### **2.    Residential Development**

**Subdivision Regulations.** The current residential development is governed by conventional subdivision regulations (adopted in 1993) that do not fully recognize the rural character of West Greenwich. These regulations create a suburban development in a country setting. Thirty foot (30') wide roadways ending in cul-de-sacs one hundred feet (100') in diameter do not fit in with existing country roads. Street construction requirements call for the removal of all growth, including trees for six feet (6') on either side of the road. Curbs line streets using Rhode Island standard models.

There are some parts of the regulations that do contribute to a rural feel provided they are enforced. All mature trees within

the street right of way must be left and there are open space set aside requirements of 2000 square feet of land area per lot per subdivision. The open space reservations are used for playgrounds and other recreational activities (or payment in lieu of).

**Subdivision Development.** Previous planned residential development (from 1980-1994) in West Greenwich was approved for fourteen (14) conventional road subdivisions totaling 212 units. All development that continued after the planning stages followed existing subdivision regulations. Both frontage lot and conventional models of subdividing the land were used.

Current pending and proposed development will generally take place off of the town's secondary roads. Weaver Hill Road, Plain Meeting House Road, and Victory Highway are the main roads where conventional subdivision development occurs. Wickaboxet Hills, a thirty-seven (37) unit development and another unnamed sixty-six (66) unit subdivision are planned for Plain Meeting House Road, and another nineteen (19) unit development, Linden Lane Estates, is planned to occupy a site just off of Victory Highway (Route 102). Blue Ridge Estates (13 units) off Stubble Brook Road and Vale Court (4 units) off Weaver Hill Road are also in the preliminary stages of review. The total planned units of development is 139 which would use a minimum of 300 acres of land. If the land is developed using existing subdivision models several times this amount of land surrounding the sites will be affected. The projected growth from current development proposals alone is more than three (3) times the average yearly building rate of past years. In the wake of such development and growth potential it is important to consider the positive influences that flexible zoning could have on the rural character of West Greenwich.

### **3. Industrial Development**

The industrial zoning districts (A and B) in West Greenwich should be analyzed in order to ascertain their productivity. Industrial district A is underutilized at the Exit 6 area.

The Industrial district B is zoned for uses that require remote locations such as automotive repair shops, quarries, and lumber and wood products. However, some uses such as floor covering mills, and yarn and thread mills which may create nuisances for adjoining neighborhoods, are allowed in Industrial district A.

**Map 3.      Pending and Proposed Subdivisions 1995**

#### **4. Commercial Development**

**Exit 5 Cloverleaf.** The most critical area in need of attention is the Victory Highway/I-95 Exit 5 Cloverleaf. The area has become an amorphous disjointed development. A sprawling truck stop, built in the early 1970's has become the anchor of a commercial strip that rapidly spread up Victory Highway in a linear fashion.

Buildings exist within the area that bear no relationship to the landscape. Huge and vacant parking lots that surround one half empty strip mall are now largely used as commuter lots. The bank is set back into its own oasis. Each unit of new development is separated from its neighbor, increasing in-and-out circulation movements within the area. A large gravel mine to the north of Exit 5, zoned for industrial use, has the potential to become, through redevelopment, a major beneficial land use for the town.

Increased traffic will continue to escalate the congestion problem at the cloverleaf. The new Exeter-West Greenwich Junior-Senior High School located nearby and a general population increase in the area are adding to existing commuter traffic flowing through the intersection. One of the traffic concerns is the activity of the truck stop. Constant entering and exiting 18-wheelers onto and off of Interstate 95 to Victory Highway creates a potential hazard to through-passing traffic because of the relatively short merge lane of the exits and the locations of the entrance ramps.

The increasing sprawl and traffic in the cloverleaf area are intruding on the rural landscape of West Greenwich at this gateway to the town. While the community realizes the importance of the commercial assets of the cloverleaf area, so does it value the surrounding rural environment. The growth of highway business needs to be contained in a node, and existing business should be retrofitted to compliment their surroundings. There is a potential to include commercial-recreational use in planning for the area. Such uses could be utilized as buffers to surrounding residential uses. It would be possible to steer development in the right direction by enforcing stringent site plan review for the zoning district. Another tool in ruralizing the cloverleaf is to introduce buffer plantings and eliminate continuous curb cuts. These are only some of the site planning tools that could be used to contain and enhance the area.

In order to fully understand what is taking place and what could happen at the cloverleaf it will be necessary to undertake the development of a mini-plan for the area. If the area is allowed

to grow unconditionally it will most likely spread out - continuing the character of the strip. The mini-plan would spell out the symptoms and prescribe cures for the enhancement of the area. The outcome of the plan would be a map showing possibilities for increased economic potential as well as preservation of the town's rural character at this significant gateway to the town. Such guidance would lead to revisions of the town's zoning code to guide development.

**Exit 6.** The intersection of Interstate 95 and Nooseneck Hill Road (Route 3) has many similarities with the Exit 5 cloverleaf. Existing highway oriented businesses include Bess Eaton, two gas stations, and two motels. An Elks Club, a karate club, a quilt shop, and a largely underutilized shopping plaza (Exit 6 Plaza). Dunkin' Donuts is proposing to build a new building in the plaza rather than using existing plaza buildings. It is possible to create a contained oasis in the motel area on the bluff above. Best Western and the Congress Inn currently exist on the site, but there is room for expansion. Highway business related shops and recreation could be added to create a complex of buildings in the area.

As with the Exit 5 area, a mini-plan should be undertaken to further study the Exit 6 area in order to determine more accurately what is occurring in this area and how it could be improved. Similar to the Exit 5 mini-plan described earlier, it should evolve into a document that shows possibilities for economic development while preserving the town's rural character.

## **5. Protecting Environmental Quality**

Preserving the rural quality of the town is dependent upon protection of the town's environmental quality. Although large tracts of open space are protected through state ownership and the Open Space zone, there are areas within the RFR-2 residential zoning district which are in need of protection. Key issues are soil erosion on slopes, stormwater runoff and related non-point source pollution, high water table soils and wetlands protection, wastewater management, the protection of agricultural soils and farmland, and the preservation of scenic areas and historic resources.

## 6. Preserving and Enhancing Special Character

**Lake Mishnock.** The Lake Mishnock area developed as a seasonal resort around a fresh water lake with cottages on small lots, some of which are on filled land, each with a septic system. The character of the place is small-scale and intimate. Lake Mishnock has now become a year round neighborhood. The area has public drinking water, but no public sewers. Much of the built-up land is marginal for the extra demand on individual sewage disposal systems (ISDS). Many are prone to failure. A central beach and commercial-recreation facility at one time gave the area a community - family focus. This facility has been converted into a night club.

**Nooseneck.** Historic Nooseneck still maintains a sense of its original layout and buildings. Several buildings are vacant or are in disrepair. Historic buildings are still used for residences. The area is zoned for Highway Business and existing buildings include the West View Inn and an auto repair shop. This current zoning district will not protect Nooseneck from change. Demolition of existing buildings and replacement with strip development is likely to take place in the long term if the zoning district is not amended.

**Town Center.** The geographic center of the town, this area could be further developed. Currently the Town Hall, a highway maintenance depot, a library, a fire station, a significant historic home, a community church and a concentration of the residences exist in this area. The Town is proposing to create a recreational center here. The plan calls for new recreational fields, but does not include any commercial support activities.

**Escoheag.** Stepping Stone Ranch is a major attraction in this area and a seasonal population occupies the adjacent Oak Ember Campground. The Arcadia Management Area also serves as a recreational catalyst that has regional significance as well. A considerable amount of residential growth in the town has occurred in this isolated area in the past ten years. There are no Neighborhood Business zoning districts in the area that serve its residents who are forced to go to Voluntown, Connecticut or Hope Valley for milk, eggs, and newspaper. An overall goal stated in other plan elements is to ensure growth is reflective of a rural economy of scale based on the independent principle of self-reliance. The Zoning Ordinance was amended last year to include lot and building dimensional regulations and use activity restrictions in Neighborhood Business districts. As such, when



market conditions dictate a need for said use, strict guidelines have been previously established.

**Bailey Pond.** As in the Lake Mishnock area, Bailey Pond is densely populated with seasonal homes converted to year-round use. There are no sewers or public water, and the roads are unpaved and maintained by a private association. A community beach area serves as a focal point. The road system is private.

#### **F.      Alternative Land Use Regulations and Tools**

Current regulatory activities of the Town are conventional tools which do not address rural issues and concerns that West Greenwich is faced with. Several alternatives exist that preserve open space and agricultural land and address the problems associated with zoning regulations that produce suburban sprawl patterns. Many of these programs have been put in place in other communities in New England and throughout the United States to preserve rural character. Among the tools listed, the use of Creative Land Development design techniques and Greenbelt overlay zoning are two strategies which are acceptable to West Greenwich residents at this time.

##### **1.      Flexible/cluster/open space zoning**

Flexible or cluster zoning is a site planning technique and an alternative to conventional subdivision design that may be used to group buildings in certain areas on the site to allow the remaining land to be used for open space, recreation, and/or preservation of environmentally sensitive features. The regulatory techniques used to group buildings or place them where there will be the least impact to the property may include reduction in lot areas (but not overall density), frontage requirements, and setbacks. The open space preserved must be rendered permanently undevelopable through easements, covenants, development rights transfer and other legal restrictions which run with the land in perpetuity. The flexible nature of the zoning allows the Planning Board to guide the development design to be compatible with rural character rather than the conventional suburban-type development current rigid regulations promote. No increase in the number of lots allowed for a property in a conventional development would be allowed by these regulations.

## **2. Greenbelt Overlay District**

The flexible zoning and creative land development techniques described above would help preserve the character of the town. These techniques include, but are not limited to, interior building lot, cluster housing, setback variation, increased buffers, flexible building envelopes and road width standards. Such techniques may be permitted as options within a greenbelt or conservation overlay zoning district. Such a district could be considered in conjunction with the consolidation of the highway business nodes. The Greenbelt Overlay District should be considered as a tool to protect rural character. The district would wrap around the highway business districts and act as a green/rural buffer against sprawl. Any new development would use specific rural design guidelines. (These are activities that are available and have been tried by other neighboring towns.)

To guide development in patterns that respect the rural character of the town and its environmental sensitivity, the Plan calls for the retaining and enhancement of the Rural-Farming-Residential zoning district (RFR-2) with the adoption of the Greenbelt Overlay Zoning District which will include areas of town with the unique qualities that prescribe rural character and are the most sensitive to development such as prime agricultural lands and farmland, unique natural habitats, aquifers, environmentally sensitive wetlands and hydric soils, historic and scenic areas. Within this district, development standards will be applied in addition to the existing zoning to mitigate the adverse affects development may have on these defining characteristics.

## **2. Special Area Management Plans**

In addition Special Area Management Plans (SAM plans) are called for to guide development within the special places of town - such as Lake Mishnock, and Escoheag with the possible inclusion of neighborhood business zones. The commercial and industrial areas of town may be expanded or enhanced based upon analyses of the impacts to furthering strip development, particularly in the Exit 5 cloverleaf area, on Nooseneck Hill Road and at Exit 6. These areas will be guided in the future with mini-plans for development.

### **3. Growth Management**

The overall approach to future land use is growth management. A critical component of growth management is the ability of the Town to manage the timing of growth and its location such that services and facilities are available at a reasonable cost and in synchronization with development. The growth rate management component also proposes considering a growth rate timing strategy based upon a rate of growth West Greenwich can sustain in terms of providing services and facilities and protecting the environmental character of the town. In this approach growth management has two facets as expressed in the Action & Implementation Program in Section IV. The first deals with where growth occurs and what it looks like (Location/ Design Regulations) and the second concerns how fast growth happens and how the Town meets its legal obligation to provide facilities and services for growth (Growth Rate Regulations).

**MAP 4.      Future Land Use**

**Section III  
Land Use Plan Element  
Goals and Policies**

The overriding land use goal, as expressed by citizens at a public forum on April 20th 1992, is to **preserve the traditional rural landscape and lifestyle of West Greenwich.**

**A. Goals:**

- G#1** Preserve the rural heritage, landscape, and character of the town - components include, but are not limited to: country charm, large tracts of open woodlands, farm fields, forests, wildlife, privacy, serenity, sense of community.
- G#2** Develop resource management strategies to preserve ponds, rivers, lakes, and prominent environmental features in the landscape.
- G#3** Develop strategies through educational activities to inform, enhance, and elevate public awareness of the contributions that GREENWAYS, Scenic Highway designation, Flexible land use techniques, and State Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act have on preserving the rural quality of life in the Town.
- G#4** Promote preservation of town's rural character, while encouraging limited economic expansion designed to augment the concepts of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.
- G#5** To prevent commercial "strip development" from evolving adjacent to arterial or secondary roads.
- G#6** To enhance, strengthen, and promote existing Highway Business districts.
- G#7** Encourage expansion of Industrial activities at or near the Technology Park.
- G#8** Assure that the rate of growth does not adversely affect the town in terms of ability to guide growth to appropriate development areas or provide the necessary facilities and services (i.e. schools, police, fire protection, water, etc.)

**B. Policies**

- P.1** Encourage flexible "Building Envelopes" through the use of a zoning overlay/ordinance or by varying residential building front yard setback standards from 50-foot depth to 100 foot depth (in the RFR-2 district).
- P.2** The preservation of the rural character of West Greenwich demands careful consideration of visual factors. The visual diversity of West Greenwich is an important component of the scenic rural quality of the community.
- P.3** Identify and promote preservation of the town's scenic vistas and visual diversity which are recognized as important to the character of West Greenwich.
- P.4** Consider amending zoning ordinance to strengthen natural resource and town character protection strategies considering some combination of the following:  
flexible/cluster zoning, overlay districts, setback requirements, buffer zones, interior building lot, DIS, and special use regulations.
- P.5** Identify and protect natural and cultural resources through site plan review, design guidelines and flexible development siting.
- P.6** Maintain the minimum 2-acre minimum lot size required in the RFR-2 district.
- P.7** Amend land development regulations to encourage growth in areas of limited land constraints and discourage development in environmentally sensitive or scenic areas.
- P.8** Consideration shall be given to limited expansion of sewers into the densely-populated Lake Mishnock area to ensure protection of Lake Mishnock and stabilize property values.
- P.9** Promote the Town of West Greenwich as a regionally significant GREENWAY amidst adjacent communities that have already formed a large greenbelt around the Providence Metropolitan Area.
- P.10** Promote "Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities" that utilize natural resources based economic activities such as

farming, wood cutting, native lumber, tree farming, orchards, golf courses, and intensive crop management. Said Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities shall be promoted as potential transition areas separating Industrial A and residential districts.

- P.11** Promote continued operation of farming activities and the preservation of prime agricultural soils.
- P.12** Develop a small-scaled tourism industry designed to promote Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities and state owned management areas that attracts overnight visitors at small inns or bed & breakfast establishments.
- P.13** Land use activities including, but not limited to, Hi-tech business, Office Parks, Commercial Parks, and Industrial Parks, are encouraged for the Exit 5 Cloverleaf.
- P.14** Consider designated areas for Neighborhood Business districts to serve the day-to-day needs of remote residential nodal areas or villages.
- P.15** Study potential impact of future Highway Business expansion on east side of Nooseneck Hill Road (Route 3) in Nooseneck Area and on the west side of Victory Highway adjacent to Interstate 95.
- P.16** The Town shall enhance, strengthen, and promote development within existing Highway Business districts.
- P.17** Land use activities including, but not limited to, Hi-tech business, Office Parks, Commercial Parks, and Industrial Parks, are encouraged for Exit 6A (Hopkins Hill Road) and Exit 7 (New London Turnpike) north of Interstate 95.
- P.18** The Planning Board shall utilize Subdivision Regulation authority to require PHASED major subdivision development.
- P.19** Promote land use patterns that reflect and respect the town's natural resources, wildlife habitat, rural density, scenic values, and cultural heritage.
- P.20** Consider establishing an annual growth rate indicator (number of new house building permits/year) which is in step with the town's ability to provide necessary services and facilities for new development.

- P.21** Limit residential development to a level commensurate with the Town's ability to provide services.
- P.22** Assure that the integrity and identity of new residential neighborhoods is consistent with the rural character of West Greenwich and that the quality of life, including an increasingly secure, more healthful, self-reliant and attractive rural community environment is retained and enhanced by new development.
- P.23** Promote land use patterns that reinforce overall town identity and provide generous amounts of open space between built up areas and discourage sprawl development.
- P.24** Encourage, through land use regulation, small-scale industrial and commercial development, subject to appropriate performance standards, which is in keeping with the rural character of the town and does not require infrastructure improvements and services not now available.
- P.25** Explore changing notification requirements for the review and approval of all new major development such that the community may be better informed about such proposals and their impacts to the community.
- P.26** Investigate legally defensible incentives and disincentives to achieve a stable growth rate at acceptable levels.
- P.27** Onsite waste disposal is the preferred alternative for wastewater disposal in areas zoned for commercial/industrial use not currently serviced with water.
- P.28** Limited expansion of sewer lines in areas already designated for such expansion should be in response to existing need and for the purpose of accelerating commercial and industrial growth in these areas
- P.29** The Town encourages private on-site water-wells rather than expansion of public facilities. Limited expansion of public facilities should be in response to existing need and not for the purpose of accelerating growth.



**SECTION IV  
LAND USE ELEMENT  
ACTION & IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

The following implementation items are recommended actions to fulfill goals and policies.

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**G = Goals                      P = Policies                      I = Action/Implementation**

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**A.    Location/ Design Regulations**

**G#1**    Preserve the rural heritage, landscape, and character of the town - components include, but are not limited to: country charm, large tracts of open woodlands, farm fields, forests, wildlife, privacy, serenity, sense of community.

**P.1**    Encourage flexible "Building Envelopes" through the use of a zoning Greenbelt Overlay District or by varying residential building front yard setback standards from 50-foot depth to 100-foot depths (in the RFR-2 district).

**I#1**    Adopt an Interior Building Lot (IBL) ordinance that promotes limited development of large tracts of land thereby ensuring preservation of open space in perpetuity.

**I#2**    Adopt other forms of flexible zoning techniques designed to ensure preservation of severe constraints such as but not limited to: open space cluster, variable setbacks, and Development Impact Statements (DIS), through the use of a Greenbelt Overlay District.

**I#3**    Institute in the Zoning Code variable lot standards for all appropriate frontage subdivisions, major subdivisions, and land development projects so as to vary development patterns and the uniform look of development along roads.

**P.2**    The preservation of the rural character of West Greenwich demands careful consideration of visual factors. The visual diversity of West Greenwich is an important component of the scenic rural quality of the community.

- I#1** Adopt zoning and subdivision controls to protect cultural resources by requiring archeological surveys in the Site Plan and Subdivision review process -- for projects cited as likely to contain archeological sites as identified on the local "Open Space and Other Sensitive Areas" map by the RIHPHC.
- I#2** Consider adopting criteria and/or measures necessary to identify, evaluate, protect, and/or safely move/remove said archeological artifacts from areas in close proximity to proposed development.
- P.3** Identify and promote preservation of the town's scenic vistas and visual diversity which are recognized as important to the character of West Greenwich.
  - I#1** Create Scenic Road Ordinance -- Planning Board & Conservation Commission.
  - I#2** A Citizens Advisory Committee could be created to designate scenic roads.
- P.4** Consider amending zoning ordinance to strengthen natural resource and town character protection strategies considering some combination of the following: flexible/cluster zoning, overlay districts, setback requirements, buffer zones, interior building lot, DIS, and special use regulations.
- P.5** Identify and protect natural and cultural resources through site plan review, design guidelines and flexible development siting.
  - I#1** Planning Board and Conservation Commission shall utilize constraint maps in Planning Office.
- P.6** Maintain the minimum 2-acre minimum lot size required in the RFR-2 district.
- G#2** **Develop resource management strategies to preserve ponds, rivers, lakes, and prominent environmental features in the landscape.**

- P.7** Amend land development regulations to encourage growth in areas of limited land constraints and discourage development in environmentally sensitive or scenic areas.
- I#1** Utilize Composite Constraint Map that includes areas of conservation concern. A parcel would be so mapped if a substantial portion of the property contains features worthy of protection as determined by the Environmental Inventory.
- I#2** Institute performance standards in the Town's Zoning Code and Subdivision Regulations that account for environmental constraints and specify appropriate criteria for types of development to meet (e.g. DIS).
- I#3** Institute Greenbelt Overlay District in RFR-2 district to protect open space character by guiding development to areas on the property which are appropriate while conserving prime agricultural soils, other farmland, forests, environmental features, views, and open space.
- P.8** Consideration shall be given to limited expansion of sewers into the densely-populated Mishnock area to ensure protection of Lake Mishnock and stabilize property values.
- I#1** Ongoing Town Council review.
- G#3** **Develop strategies through educational activities to inform, enhance, and elevate public awareness of the contributions that GREENWAYS, Scenic Highway designation, Flexible land use techniques, and State Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act have on preserving the rural quality of life in the Town.**
- P.9** Promote the Town of West Greenwich as a regionally significant GREENWAY amidst adjacent communities that have already formed a large greenbelt around the Providence Metropolitan Area.
- I#1** The Conservation Commission and Planning Board shall identify and map detailed Greenway Corridor Connections via use of Assessor Plat Maps and associated reference maps as a means of developing an interconnected system of Greenways.

- I#2** The Conservation Commission and Planning Board shall promote Greenway Corridor Connections through cooperative review of subdivision plans and by identifying select parcels worthy of potential acquisition.
- G#4** **Promote preservation of town's rural character, while encouraging limited economic expansion designed to augment the concepts of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.**
- P.10** Promote "Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities" that utilize natural resources based economic activities such as farming, wood cutting, native lumber, tree farming, orchards, golf courses, and intensive crop management. Said Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities shall be promoted as potential transition areas separating Industrial A and residential districts.
- I#1** Amend Zoning Ordinance.
- P.19** Promote land use patterns that reflect and respect the town's natural resources, wildlife habitat, rural density, scenic values and cultural heritage.
- I#1** Consider growth management techniques, including but not limited to, flexible/open space zoning, property owner incentives, impact fees, and other methods.
- P.22** Assure that the integrity and identity of new residential neighborhoods is consistent with the rural character of West Greenwich and that the quality of life, including an increasingly secure, more healthful, self-reliant and attractive rural community environment is retained and enhanced by new development.
- P.23** Promote land use patterns that reinforce overall town identity and provide generous amounts of open space between built up areas and discourage sprawl development.
- I#1** Amend Zoning Ordinance
- P.11** Promote continued operation of farming activities and the preservation of prime agricultural soils.

**I#1** Amend RIGIS soils map to identify and enumerate those potential Prime Agricultural Soils worthy of possible consideration for protection.

**P.12** Develop a small-scaled tourism industry designed to promote Planned Commercial-Recreational Facilities and state owned management areas that attracts overnight visitors at small inns or bed & breakfast establishments.

**I#1** Amend Zoning Use Matrix

**P.24** Encourage, through land use regulation, small-scale industrial and commercial development, subject to appropriate performance standards, which is in keeping with the rural character of the town and does not require infrastructure improvements and services not now available.

**P.25** Explore changing notification requirements for the review and approval of all new major development such that the community may be better informed about such proposals and their impacts to the community.

**P.13** Land use activities including, but not limited to, Hi-tech business, Office Parks, Commercial Parks, and Industrial Parks, are encouraged for the Exit 5 Cloverleaf.

**G#5** **To prevent commercial "strip development" from evolving adjacent to arterial or secondary roads.**

**P.14** Consider designated areas for Neighborhood Business districts to serve the day-to-day needs of remote residential nodal areas or villages.

**I#1** Undertake Special Area Management (SAM) Plans for Lake Mishnock, Nooseneck, Town Center, Escoheag, and Bailey Pond. The principal purpose of the SAM Plans is to provide guidance on how to protect and maintain the unique character of these areas and whether or not a sewer system is appropriate for Mishnock.

**P.15** Study potential impact of future Highway Business expansion on east side of Nooseneck Hill Road (Route 3) in Nooseneck Area and on the west side of Victory Highway adjacent to Interstate 95.

**G#6 To enhance, strengthen, and promote existing Highway Business districts.**

**P.16** The Town shall enhance, strengthen, and promote development within existing Highway Business districts.

**I#1** Improve site plan review process for commercial uses to ensure conformity of new development with goals of Comprehensive Plan.

**I#2** Develop mini master plans for Exit 5 Cloverleaf and Exit 6 area to improve Highway Business areas. Consider implementing specific development standards and site plan review criteria to promote small scale, mixed use, neighborhood-oriented, buffered development rather than large scale retail centers or strip development.

**I#3** Promote incentives to encourage property owners in the Victory Highway corridor to enhance and upgrade existing commercial property through joint efforts by an Economic Development Advisory Commission, area business owners, and the RIDOT.

**I#4** Develop a mini-master plan that assesses those land use activities for the Exit 5 Cloverleaf deemed appropriate for development, and where district boundary lines may require adjustment.

**G#7 Encourage expansion of Industrial activities at or near the Technology Park.**

**P.17** Land use activities including, but not limited to, Hi-tech business, Office Parks, Commercial Parks, and Industrial Parks, are encouraged for Exit 6A (Hopkins Hill Road) and Exit 7 (New London Turnpike) north of Interstate 95.

**B.    Growth Rate Regulations**

**G#8    Assure that the rate of growth does not adversely affect the town in terms of ability to guide growth to appropriate development areas or provide the necessary facilities and services (i.e. schools, police, fire protection, water, etc.)**

**P.18** The Planning Board shall utilize Subdivision Regulation authority to require PHASED major subdivision development.

**I#1**    Require residential development scheduling (PHASING) for new developments to ensure the Town's capability to accept growth while minimizing adverse financial impacts to their infrastructure.

**P.20** Consider establishing an annual growth rate indicator (number of new house building permits/year) which is in step with the town's ability to provide necessary services and facilities for new development.

**I#1**    Consider adoption of a growth rate cap or similar vehicle to regulate the rate of new residential development.

**P.21** Limit residential development to a level commensurate with the Town's ability to provide services.

**I#1**    Conduct feasibility analysis of enacting impact fees assessed against new development to help cover the cost of providing additional capital facilities necessitated by new development.

**P.26** Investigate legally defensible incentives and disincentives to achieve a stable growth rate at acceptable levels.

**P.27** On-site waste disposal is the preferred alternative for wastewater disposal in areas zoned for commercial/industrial use not currently serviced with sewer.

- P.28** Limited expansion of sewer lines in areas already designated for such expansion should be in response to existing need and for the purpose of accelerating commercial and industrial growth in these areas
- P.29** The Town encourages private on-site water-wells rather than expansion of public facilities. Limited expansion of public facilities should be in response to existing need and not for the purpose of accelerating growth.