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**PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
REVISIONS**

**TOWN OF OLD LYME, CONNECTICUT**

**OLD LYME PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Adopted on May 11, 2000**

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this effort:*

*Board of Selectmen*

*Conservation Commission*

*Economic Development Commission*

*Harbor Management Commission*

*Historic District Commission*

*Old Lyme Affordable Housing Corporation*

*Water Pollution Control Authority*

*Zoning Commission*

*and special thanks to the  
Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency*

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**INTRODUCTION**

In compliance with Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Old Lyme Planning Commission periodically reviews and updates its local Plan of Conservation and Development. The first Plan of Conservation and Development was adopted in 1965. In 1975, revisions to the Plan emphasized the need to protect the town's unique natural resources. Responding to the Connecticut Coastal Management Act, the Planning Commission added a coastal component to the Plan in 1982. The 1990 Plan revision was formulated at the end of almost a decade of substantial construction activity in Connecticut. It was a time of rapid increases in the cost of land and housing, increased pressure to develop natural areas, and concern about the impact of development on the town's small town character. The 1990 Plan attempted to offer solutions to the challenges posed by rapid growth. Since adoption of the 1990 Plan, the Town of Old Lyme has continued to experience changes both from within and without which shape the town's character. Still, over the past ten years, Old Lyme has remained very much the small quiet town envisioned in 1990.

Revisions to the Plan of Conservation and Development for the Year 2000 do not represent a dramatic change of focus from the 1990 Plan. A town wide questionnaire distributed by the Planning Commission in 1997 reaffirmed that residents value highly the town's special character and sense of community. The goal and priorities established in the 1990 Plan should continue to set the town's future course. While many of the recommendations from the 1990 Plan have been followed and new tools are in place to shape future growth, there is still additional work to do. Therefore, the year 2000 Plan includes additional recommendations to help Old Lyme follow the course it has chosen. This updated plan moves ahead to identify these further recommendations.

## **VISION STATEMENT**

The busy Route 95 highway corridor which cuts through Old Lyme provides a dramatic contrast to the easy-paced, unhurried quality of life that characterizes the town. Unlike many other communities, Old Lyme successfully maintains its distance from the rush of activity passing by, intentionally making little effort to catch its attention. Blessed with a great abundance and variety of natural resources, Old Lyme is a peaceful, serene haven, with its people strongly in tune with the natural world around them and having a real appreciation for its small town sense of community. Life in Old Lyme is typically gracious, relaxed, and restful.

Old Lyme is located at the mouth of the Connecticut River where it meets Long Island Sound after its long journey south. The shifting sands and maze of salt marshes at the river mouth have historically been a barrier to intensive

development along the east shore of the Connecticut River Estuary. Numerous smaller rivers and creeks also flow down from the hills and steep ledges in the northern part of town to join the Connecticut River and the Sound. The town's very varied and distinct natural resources have been a factor in discouraging development which would conflict with the town's rural character.

People have historically come to Old Lyme to enjoy its natural resources, especially during the summer months. For more than a century, seasonal communities have provided an opportunity for many people to enjoy the beaches and waters of the Sound and Rogers Lake. Artists have come to capture the essence of Old Lyme's landscape on canvas, and to establish a growing center for the arts along Lyme Street. Additional emphasis on art-related activities along Lyme Street near Exit 70 is welcome so long as it is in keeping with the character of the town.

Earlier in its history, Old Lyme was an industrial area. Little remains of the busy mills and shipyards that once dotted the town except the mill ponds along Mill Brook. Old Lyme was once also an active center of transportation as passengers awaited the ferries carrying people, goods and even railroad cars across the river. With the construction of a series of ever larger bridges, there is now little need to pause in Old Lyme during journeys along the Connecticut coast. The town's interests are focused on providing basic services and amenities for year round and summer residents and guests. It has successfully avoided any pressure to allow turnpike oriented services such as multiple gas stations, fast food restaurants and motels. This is not an accident, but a deliberate choice.

Old Lyme's development pattern is made up of distinct areas which have their own individual character. The town is a collection of neighborhoods in a variety of settings. The subdivisions, homes and farmsteads in the cool wooded upland hills are a pleasant contrast to the sunny open beach communities on the flat coastal plain. The town has allowed the land to shape the type of development that has occurred, rather than forcing the land to accept unnatural development patterns.

Lyme Street is the town's civic center. It is the location of most government activity and the historic religious center from a time when religion and government were closely intertwined. The decision to open up Halls Road for commercial development and create a new commercial center resulted in the preservation of Lyme Street as an historic area. Halls Road is characterized by development which maintains the scale and appearance of small town development in a collection of well-landscaped small shopping centers.

## OLD LYME'S NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES - A BRIEF SUMMARY

Old Lyme's natural resources have been inventoried numerous times as part of previous planning studies, including the original Plan of Development and its subsequent revisions. A full description of the Town's coastal resources can be found in the Coastal Municipal Plan, adopted as an amendment to the Plan of Development in 1982. Increasingly, natural resources information is available in an electronic format, enabling more rapid examination and analysis of information than was previously possible. An analysis of Census data and population characteristics was included in previous versions of the Plan of Development. When the results of the Federal Year 2000 Census become available, the Planning Commission will review the information to determine if there has been any change in population trends which would require reconsideration of this Plan's goals and recommendations.

**Natural Resources:** Situated on the east side of the Connecticut River where it meets Long Island Sound, Old Lyme's most outstanding natural feature is its estuarine environment. Hundreds of acres of tidal marsh fringe the River. Large estuarine islands, protected coves and rocky headlands enhance the riverfront. Along the 14 miles of Long Island Sound shorefront, beach strands are narrow and interspersed with rocky bluffs, small rivers and streams. Inland from the coastal plain, three linear ridges run north to south delineating the boundaries of the major drainage basins of the Lieutenant, Black Hall and Four Mile Rivers. Smaller streams are the Duck River, Mile Creek, Armstrong Brook and Swan Brook. An estimated 2,000 acres of inland wetlands are a major component of these drainage systems. To the north, Rogers Lake covers about 300 acres in the Towns of Old Lyme and Lyme.

**Development Pattern:** The Town of Old Lyme encompasses some 27.1 square miles. In 1990, about 68% of the land area remained undeveloped. Just under 15% of the undeveloped land is held as passive open space by the state, town or private conservation interests. Almost half of the remaining undeveloped land has very severe limitations for future development due to wet soils, very steep slopes and ledge conditions. These conditions make it difficult to install on site sewage disposal systems, and Old Lyme has no municipal sewers. In addition, private wells are the principal source of domestic water for all but the beach areas, which are served by the Connecticut Water Company. Thus, the appropriate density of development is limited by individual site constraints.

Early development followed the Boston Post Road and the Shore Road, concentrating around three areas - the village center along Lyme Street, the Rogers Lake-Laysville area, and the seasonal communities along Long Island Sound. In the 1920's, small lots were carved out along Rogers Lake for summer

cottages. Today many of these have become year round homes. Over the past several decades, year round single family residential subdivision homes have been built in previously rural areas of town. Decisions by individual landowners to sell their large tracts of land has been the determining factor in the location of new development, rather than ease of development or allowable zoning densities.

**Population:** During the first half of the Twentieth Century, Old Lyme's year round population grew slowly from 1,180 people in 1900 to 2,141 people by 1950. Following the opening of the Connecticut Turnpike in 1958, towns along the shore experienced increased rates of growth. Like its neighbors, Old Saybrook and East Lyme, Old Lyme more than doubled its population between 1960 and 1990, from 3,068 people to 6,535 year round residents in 1990. However, subsequent population *projections* by state agencies during the 1990s actually show a decline in population in Old Lyme over the last decade. This is an extrapolation of the trends established between 1980 and 1990. Following the regional and state pattern, the percentage of older residents in Old Lyme increased between 1980 and 1990, when the town's median age rose from 35.5 to 39.8 years. During the same period, the average family size declined to 2.54 persons per household. We must await the results from the April 2000 Census to determine whether the demographic trends of the past decade have continued, resulting in population decline, or whether new house construction and conversion of seasonal dwellings has actually resulted in a population increase.

On Census Day, April 1, 1990, 40.77% of the town's 4,336 dwelling units were vacant. This was the highest vacancy rate in the state at that time, and considerably higher than that of any other Connecticut town. Old Lyme's vacancy rate was a result of the large number of summer cottages which were empty in April, and a growing number of weekend retreat homes. Potential conversion of seasonal cottages to year round use could result in a significant increase in the town's year round population, but the small lot size and high water table of many seasonal properties is a substantial obstacle to installation of a septic system that can support year round use.

## **CHANGES SINCE ADOPTION OF THE MARCH 1990 PLAN**

The current Old Lyme Plan of Development was adopted by the Planning Commission on March 22, 1990. Since that time, the regional economy has experienced significant changes, moving from heavy dependence on defense procurement toward an increased emphasis on tourism, and more recently, biotechnology. The new Baldwin Bridge was opened in May of 1993, reducing the occurrence of traffic congestion on I-95, and resulting in an increased use of the highway for through traffic to the north. The natural resources of the Connecticut River Estuary have received renewed recognition of their unique characteristics. The Town has made considerable progress in addressing the facilities needs cited in the 1990 Plan. Much has happened in the region over the past ten years.

- **Appreciation for a Unique Resource** - Recognition of the Connecticut River both nationally and internationally has made residents more aware of how special this resource actually is. The tidal marshes at the river mouth were acknowledged as "Wetlands of International Significance" under the international Ramsar Treaty. The Nature Conservancy designated the River Estuary as one of their "Last Great Places". The area along the Connecticut River from the Canadian Border down to the Connecticut shore at Old Lyme was designated as the Silvio Conte Fish and Wildlife Refuge. Most recently, the Connecticut was one of 14 rivers in the United States designated as an "American Heritage River" by President Clinton.
- **Increase in Tourism** - Interest in Old Lyme as a cultural center of the arts has been heightened by the accreditation of the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts as a degree granting institution, as well as the inclusion of the Florence Griswold Museum on "The Impressionist Trail", a special promotion of the arts by the State of Connecticut. Federal recognition of the Pequot and Mohegan Indian tribes has led to construction of two large and extremely popular gaming casinos in Ledyard and Montville. All this, combined with the already well known and publicized attractions in eastern Connecticut such as the Essex Steam Train and Riverboat rides, the Mystic Aquarium and the Mystic Seaport have drawn increased numbers of tourists to the area.
- **Residential Development Continues** - At the end of the 1990s, New London and Middlesex Counties led the state in building permits for new homes. Over the decade, there have been almost 40 new subdivisions of land for a total of 257 lots in Old Lyme. The building official has issued approximately 350 permits for new home construction. There is increasing pressure to convert seasonal dwellings to year round use, although strict requirements for conversion include bringing sewage disposal and water systems up to health code standards. Since most new homes are not within the range of the median income family, the Old Lyme Affordable Housing Corporation was formed in 1993 to address this issue. The Corporation

received a gift of three lots on which two homes have been built and a third is planned.

- **A New Baldwin Bridge** - The most significant improvement to the regional transportation network was a new Baldwin Bridge over the Connecticut River, opened in May 1993. It was designed to alleviate frequent traffic congestion at the old bridge. The old bridge has been removed, and the town has constructed a scenic overlook of the river at the site of the old bridge abutment. Traffic studies by the State Department of Transportation show a significant increase in truck traffic through the region as truck drivers choose the I-95/395 coastal corridor over the busy I-91/84 corridor through Hartford.
- **Working on the Railroad** - Major improvements to the AMTRAK Northeast Corridor rail line are underway to allow more rapid service between New York and Boston. Some high speed trains will be stopping at the Old Saybrook station, providing more rapid access to larger urban areas for residents of the region. These improvements include electrification of the rail line through the southern part of Old Lyme. The electrified line will have a visual impact on the shoreline, and the speed and quiet of the new trains had raised concerns about safety along the track. Concern has also been expressed by boaters that the Connecticut River railroad drawbridge will not be as accommodating to boat traffic once the high speed trains begin service. The State's Shoreline East rail service from Old Saybrook to New Haven continues to provide connections to New Haven and New York during normal commuting hours.
- **New Industrial Development at Exit 71** - Old Lyme provides for light industrial and office development in the area off Exit 71, which is zoned for light industry and distribution. During the past decade, several large tracts of land on Hatchetts Hill Road have been subdivided for light industrial and office use, and several existing developments have expanded operations at their present sites. The area was zoned to allow telecommunications towers to serve cellular phone services. Room for additional growth remains.
- **Changes in Commercial Activity** - Halls Road is the center of commercial activity in Old Lyme, with additional commercial development along Route 1 in the Laysville area and along Route 156 through the beach areas. Thus far, commercial activity has been in keeping with the scale and character of the town, but retail shopping is experiencing significant changes nationally. Local retailers find it difficult to compete with large national discount retailers. Mail order and internet shopping are taking a larger share of retail sales. In order to be competitive, local shop keepers must emphasize personal service and unique products that are unavailable at the larger chains.
- **Capital Facilities** - Old Lyme has addressed many of the capital needs listed in the 1990 Plan. A senior citizens' center was built on town property on Town Woods Road. Expansion of the Phoebe Griffith Noyes Library on

Lyme Street has been completed. A new fire and ambulance station was constructed on Route 1 in the Laysville area. An effort to purchase beach property in the Soundview area was defeated at Town Meeting. Efforts are underway to determine the best way to meet school space needs, particularly at the elementary level.

- **Open Space** - In 1997, the Open Space Committee, a subcommittee of the Planning Commission, completed the Town of Old Lyme Open Space Plan for the town. Subsequently, a permanent committee on open space was appointed as a subset of the Conservation Commission to implement the recommendations of this plan. At the urging of the Planning Commission, the town began to set aside funds annually for an open space acquisition fund to be used as seed money for future purchases, acknowledging that any significant purchases would probably require bond financing. At the state level, the General Assembly approved new funding for the acquisition of open space throughout the State, with a goal of 21 percent of the state to be preserved for open space. The Old Lyme Conservation Trust was active in seeking open space parcels, including acquisition of the Watch Rock preserve on Long Island Sound. A state grant was obtained to create a scenic overlook at the site of the bridge abutment for the old Baldwin Bridge. Improvements were made to the boat launch facilities on Four Mile River and Great Island on Neck Road, as well as Hains Park on Rogers Lake. At the end of 1999, the town helped sponsor a seminar to inform property owners of techniques for preserving their land.
- **The Land Use Review Process** - A significant change was made in the land use review process by the creation of the full time position of Zoning Enforcement Officer and the addition of a part time enforcement officer for the Wetlands Commission. For greater efficiency, responsibility for site plan review was shifted from the Planning Commission to the Zoning Commission. The Planning Commission completed a review and revision of its Subdivision Regulations and assisted the Selectmen in drafting and adopting new town standards for road design and construction, subsequently approved at a Town Meeting. The Zoning Commission is in the process of comprehensive review of its regulations, which will result in both updating and reorganization.

## **CRITICAL ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Several issues were identified in the 1990 Plan as particularly important in determining the direction to be taken by the Town in the future. Certain of these, such as the future of beach areas, maintaining population diversity, and

enhancing town character and appearance, remain critical, while open space and economic development have surfaced as additional areas demanding attention.

- **Sewer Avoidance**

Old Lyme has chosen to address the Water Pollution Abatement Order, issued to the Town in 1981 by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, through an aggressive program of sewer avoidance. Following a two year committee study, establishment of a Water Pollution Control Authority was authorized by town ordinance in April of 1995. Under WPCA leadership, the town adopted the "Old Lyme WPCA Ordinance Concerning the Regulation and Management of On-site Sewage Disposal Systems" in June of 1997, and a surface water quality monitoring program was established in the same year. With the septic waste transfer station going on line in 1998, the WPCA is continuing its aggressive approach to proper installation and maintenance of on-site septic systems, including a town ordinance mandated seven year pumpout schedule. In the future, it is the WPCA's intent to identify areas of special concern and to develop specific solutions to problems in those areas. It is the objective of the Town of Old Lyme to avoid the need for public sewers. Although community systems may be necessary in some areas, most of the town can avoid the need for them with good installation and maintenance of individual septic systems.

- **Beach Areas**

Almost 1000 seasonal dwelling units remain in Old Lyme's overcrowded shore communities, built on very small lots before adoption of planning and zoning regulations. Most of the shore area is in a high flood hazard area and in danger of exceeding the capacity of the land to deal with on-site sewage. This requires vigorous enforcement of regulations, especially in view of the strong pressure to convert many of these properties to year round occupancy. Commercial strip development has increased along Route 156, and beach access and parking are still vital issues. Identifying a clear vision for the future of shore areas remains an important goal

- **Maintaining Population Diversity**

Addressing the need for housing which is affordable to a wider and more diverse segment of the population remains a difficult task. Because Old Lyme continues to be a desirable place to live, builders tend to construct large single family detached houses. These houses are not affordable to much of the population. The increase in the number of older residents, who may find the care and cost of large detached single family houses to be a burden, may lead to a corresponding increase in housing built for the needs of this population group, but this shift will not necessarily result in less expensive housing. Initial steps toward promoting economic diversity have been made by the Old Lyme Affordable Housing Corporation, with two houses having been built on donated land and land available for a third.

- **Community Appearance**

While the Historic District Commission has the authority to assure the historic compatibility of new development within the Historic District, similar authority is not available for land outside of the District. Visual details such as adequate buffering and landscaping, appropriate architecture, preservation of natural site features, and protection of views and vistas are critical components of town character. Although the Zoning Commission makes an attempt to gain the cooperation of developers to achieve a level of design compatible with the town's character, there are no regulations in place mandating such action. Such regulations are under consideration by the Zoning Commission as part of their current regulations review.

- **Preserving Open Space**

Old Lyme's preserved open space includes large areas of state-owned tidal marsh along the Connecticut River, but little of the town's upland areas is permanently protected. The newly appointed Open Space Committee is establishing priorities for land preservation and seeking acquisition or other means of protection for priority parcels. Preservation of land as open space remains an on-going responsibility.

- **Economic Development**

The town encourages additional development that is consistent with the historical and cultural character of the community. Growth of light industry as well as distribution and office facilities are permitted in the vicinity of Exit 71 off I-95. There is room for additional commercial growth along Halls Road, and in specific locations along Route 1 in Laysville and Route 156 in the shore area. The Old Lyme Economic Development Commission has begun publicizing the availability of these areas through membership in the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region. Building on Old Lyme's history as an art colony for American Impressionists, there is support for promoting the town as an area that nurtures art and artists, present and future. In addition, in recognition of Old Lyme shoreline's tourism and recreation attraction, there is interest in seeking to modernize the Sound View area in an effort to increase its value as a tax revenue producing asset to the community.

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE - GOALS AND POLICIES**

**GOAL:** The goal which has guided Old Lyme for the past 25 years remains essentially the same. It is still as valid as it was when it was adopted in the 1975 Plan of Development. It has been the underlying focus of the town's land use decisions for two and one half decades:

**TO MAINTAIN THE SMALL TOWN CHARACTER OF OLD LYME, WHILE PROVIDING FOR LIMITED GROWTH CONSISTENT WITH THE NEED TO PRESERVE EXISTING NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES.**

**POLICIES:** The policies adopted as part of the 1990 Plan have served the town well as guiding principles for the town's future. Old Lyme has been consistent in its adherence to these policies and has maintained the character of the town through cycles of intense pressure for land development and during slow economic times. These policies, summarized below, should continue to serve as the basis for future land use decision-making.

*[Policies are numbered for purposes of reference and do not indicate a priority order.]*

1. Future development should be consistent with the small town atmosphere of Old Lyme, including both the physical setting and sense of community. Development should be aesthetically pleasing and in keeping with the small town ambiance of Old Lyme. Retention of an attractive and rural community appearance should be one of the most important criteria used in land use decision making.
2. Land should be set aside as open space to preserve important natural resources, protect drainage ways, provide for passive recreation, and maintain the visual and aesthetic character of the Town.
3. Single family homes should continue to be the primary form of residential development, but provision should be made for a quantity and variety of other compatible housing types sufficient to meet the needs of various age groups, income levels and family configurations.
4. Commercial development should be compatible in scale and appearance with town character and be designed primarily to serve retail and service needs of local residents. Commercial uses and their expansion should be limited to three commercial areas: Halls Road, Laysville, and the Shore Road from Mile Creek eastward to the Sound View area. Additional strip development should not be allowed.
5. Light industry should be encouraged within the designated area to add stability to the tax base and provide employment opportunities within the community. Good industrial site design, an attractive setting and industrial

buildings of modest scale are necessary to maintain the character of Old Lyme.

6. Development should be controlled so as to prevent the creation of health and safety problems. Any existing health and safety problems should be eliminated. An aggressive sewer avoidance program should be pursued so that municipal sewers will not become a necessity, with the possible exception of the town's coastal plain where a high water table and a heavy household density pose unique challenges.. Ground and surface water must be protected from contamination due to the town's heavy dependence on well water for domestic use.
7. Improvement of town roads is necessary to remove identified hazards, but changes to local roads which would diminish their scenic quality should be discouraged consistent with safety requirements.
8. The development of public facilities should be scheduled to allow the provision of public services in the most cost effective and efficient manner, avoiding crisis decision making.

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION**

The 1990 Town Plan of Development established a vision for Old Lyme's future that has been maintained and enhanced by public and private actions over the past decade. Many of the 1990 Plan's recommendations have been followed and much has been accomplished that has improved the quality of life in Old Lyme. The most difficult task in shaping future development is to hold on to the desirable aspects of the past and present, while allowing for and accommodating changes in the future. The year 2000 Plan includes additional recommendations intended to keep Old Lyme on the path that it has chosen and carefully followed.

### **Consistency with the State Plan of Conservation and Development**

As required by Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Planning Commission has reviewed this Plan for consistency with the State Plan of Conservation and Development, adopted by the State Legislature in 1998. The Old Lyme Plan is consistent with the State Plan in all respects.

Along with each recommendation is a listing of the primary agency or agencies responsible for implementation of the recommendation. In fact, following through with any recommendation usually requires a cooperative effort from many individuals and boards. Shaping future land use decisions requires adequate land use staffing and a willingness to support professional help for volunteer boards and commissions when necessary. This requires a financial investment to support good land use decisions, including adequate budgeting for staff and consultants as necessary, adequate office space for staff and record keeping, and modernization of mapping and data capabilities.

*[Recommendations are numbered for purposes of reference and do not indicate a priority order.]*

### **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

***Future development must incorporate protection of natural areas to preserve natural resources, protect drainage ways, provide passive recreation and maintain the scenic character of Old Lyme. Equal attention to protection must be provided for the town's historic and cultural resources, which link the town to its past and enhance its strong sense of community.***

1. Protect fragile natural areas, including inland and tidal wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, mature tree stands and unusual geographic features as permanent open space. *(Action: Open Space Committee, land use commissions, Selectmen, private conservation organizations)*
2. Actively pursue preservation of open space in accordance with the 1997 Open Space Plan. Seek open space which complements existing open space areas, provides for linkage of larger tracts, creates greenbelts, and helps to define individual neighborhoods. *(Action: Open Space Committee, land use commissions, Selectmen, Board of Finance)*
3. Encourage cooperative efforts among public and private non-profit land conservation organizations to acquire open space "in fee" or through conservation easements. *(Action: Town boards and commissions, private conservation organizations)*
4. Continue to provide funding through the town's annual budget to build a reserve account for town purchase of open space land. The availability of funds for options, appraisals and surveys can allow the town to act quickly when desirable open space land is available for purchase. *(Action: Selectmen, Board of Finance)*

5. Support the adoption of additional flexible land use regulations consistent with evolving land use practices that permit clustering of residential housing, consistent with health and safety concerns, in order to preserve large tracts of open space and reduce storm water runoff and infrastructure maintenance costs by reducing the need for new roads and utilities. *(Action: Zoning and Planning Commissions)*
6. As part of the development application process, require the use of best management practices to minimize adverse impacts on natural resources. Following plan approval, provide sufficient town oversight during construction to assure that permit requirements and conditions are fully met. *(Action: Land use commissions, Selectmen, Board of Finance)*
7. Continue to assure that activities in the coastal area are consistent with the policies of the Connecticut Coastal Management Act. Increase public awareness of the uniqueness of the town's coastal and riverine resources by increasing visual access to the water and identifying opportunities for physical access (beach, boating). *(Action: Land use commissions, Parks and Recreation Commission, Selectmen, private conservation organizations)*
8. Protect water quality for drinking, swimming, and fishing, and maintain scenic beauty through a vigorous town sewer avoidance program. Other regulatory and educational efforts should be implemented to reduce non-point pollution from all sources, including the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and hazardous materials, and control of erosion and sedimentation. *(Action: WPCA, land use commissions, Conservation Commission, Selectmen)*
9. Investigate additional ways to use conservation and public lands for passive recreational use, including activities such as hiking, bird watching and cross country skiing. *(Action: Parks and Recreation Commission, private conservation organizations)*
10. Promote stewardship of resources by minimizing municipal solid waste disposal. Encourage source reduction, increase recycling, and provide for appropriate disposal of household hazardous waste. *(Action: Selectmen, Conservation Commission)*
11. Identify and articulate design elements that comprise town character, including appropriate design for different parts of town. Emphasize appearance of commercial and industrial development due to the potential impact of larger scale and massing of such development. Consider establishment of a joint committee to review and make recommendations for design standards. Consider possible creation of Village District regulations as authorized by CGS 8-2. *(Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions, Historic District Commission, possible joint design task force)*

12. Develop educational materials to increase awareness of the location and importance of historic sites and buildings, including early industrial and transportation sites and sites related to arts history. (*Action: Municipal Historian, Historic District Commission, Economic Development Commission, other agencies*)
13. Consider adoption of a demolition delay ordinance for historic houses to provide time to consider alternatives to demolition. (*Action: Planning Commission, Selectmen*)
14. Restrict location of new residential development to minimize visual impact on the rural landscape by maintaining open views and vistas and protecting ridgetops. (*Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions*)
15. When reviewing development plans, emphasize preservation of cultural features including stone walls, site trees, pastures, open fields, scenic views, vistas and sites with archeological significance. (*Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions, ZBA, Conservation Commission*)
16. Consider adoption of a local scenic road ordinance as authorized by Section 7-148 of the Connecticut General Statutes. (*Action: Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Selectmen*).
17. Assure public access to the waterfront by identifying, marking and maintaining town landings. Where possible, take advantage of opportunities to obtain additional access to both fresh and salt water. (*Action: Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Selectmen*)

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

***Old Lyme's development pattern has been shaped by its water resources. Early development along the river included shipbuilding and activities related to moving people and goods across the mouth of the Connecticut River. Later development located along the town's interior rivers to make use of water power for mills. In this century, people have been drawn to the shores of Long Island Sound for seasonal recreation and relaxation and have sought the high quality of the natural and built environment for year round living. Additional economic development must be compatible with the need to protect the town's natural and cultural resources..***

1. Future economic development should be located in a manner that is consistent with the town's current development pattern and should include only those uses and be of such size, scale and intensity as to be accommodated within the limitations of available infrastructure, including on-site sewer and water systems, fire protection and current road capacities. Current industrial and commercial zoning regulations should be reviewed to

assure that the location and character of potential future development will be in keeping with the town's vision. (*Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions, WPCA, Selectmen*)

2. New commercial and industrial development should incorporate architectural design and landscaping that reflects the historic small town character of Old Lyme. Building and site design should be compatible with the historic image of Old Lyme in building size and architecture, signage, lighting, parking, and landscaping. Standards should recognize the distinctive character of individual commercial and industrial areas. Consider establishment of a joint committee to review and make recommendations for design standards. [See Recommendations for Natural and Cultural Resources]. (*Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions, Historic District Commission, possible joint design task force*)
3. Halls Road should remain the principal commercial area in Old Lyme, intended to meet basic retail and service needs of residents. Commercial activities in the Halls Road area should be oriented primarily toward residents, rather than directed toward highway travelers or regional shopping needs. Consideration should be given to establishing a maximum square footage of 50,000 square feet for any one store, to prohibit regional "big box" retail stores. Adoption of design standards for the Halls Road area will help provide a common sense of identity for the central business area. (*Action: Zoning Commission*).
4. Neighborhood and seasonal commercial uses and services should be allowed in strictly limited commercial locations along Route 1 in the Laysville area and along Shore Road (Route 156) in the Sound View area. Consideration should be given to rezoning commercial land along both roads which still remains in residential use in order to avoid additional strip commercial development. (*Action: Zoning Commission*)
5. Limit seasonal commercial development along Hartford Avenue in Sound View, consistent with septic system and water service limitations, and compatible in intensity and character with nearby residential uses. Pursue town acquisition of land within Sound View to enhance public access and enjoyment of the shore for the general public. (*Action: Zoning Commission, Selectmen*).
6. Through regulation and site plan review, require strengthening of pedestrian access linkages in all commercial areas, including sidewalk construction where appropriate. Develop a town wide plan for sidewalk requirements in areas where pedestrian traffic is to be encouraged, including linkages to recreational and public facilities. (*Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions*)

7. Create a new mixed use zoning district for the arts along Lyme Street, to include the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts, the Lyme Art Association, and the Florence Griswold Museum, to take economic advantage of the current arts cluster in that area. Within the Arts District, allow a range of activities relating to and supporting the arts, including schools, museums, studio and exhibit space, galleries, restaurants, overnight lodging and living space for artists and art students. *(Action: Planning and Zoning Commissions, local business people, arts institution representatives)*
8. Identify and publicize public access to the town's waterfront areas, such as Watch Rock, the Great Island launch area, and the new Baldwin Bridge overlook, as an economic development measure to attract environmentally and artistically related tourism, emphasizing the town's historic connection to the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound. *(Action: Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Chamber of Commerce, business and real estate associations).*
9. Encourage light manufacturing and limited office activity in the existing industrial district near Exit 71 off of I-95, consistent with the existing road and utilities infrastructure. Strengthen design and landscaping and screening requirements for industrial and office sites to maintain an "industrial park" atmosphere in keeping with the rural character of the area. *(Action: Zoning Commission).*
10. Continue to allow home occupations in residential districts, consistent with limitations which will assure that home businesses do not detract from the residential character of their neighborhoods. *(Action: Zoning Commission).*

#### **RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

***Old Lyme is a residential community. In 1997, all commercial and industrial uses comprised only 5.7 percent of the tax base. The single largest taxpayer was a residential use - the Garvin Family Corporation, owner of numerous seasonal rental cottages in the beach area. Most recently, health standards for on-site sewage disposal and individual wells have led to new residential development consisting almost solely of large single family houses on lots of two acres and greater.***

1. When the results of the Federal Year 2000 Census become available, the Planning Commission should review the information to determine if there has been any change in population trends which would require reconsideration of this Plan's goals and recommendations. *(Action: Planning Commission)*
2. Future residential subdivisions should be designed to maximize and connect open space in greenways, retain buffer strips of open land along roads to retain rural appearance and reduce traffic hazards, locate dwellings to

minimize the need for new roads, and construct roads with the minimum dimensions necessary for traffic safety. (*Action: Planning Commission*)

3. Provide official support for on-going private non-profit affordable housing efforts by creating a town board to promote affordable housing alternatives for various age groups, lifestyles, family sizes and income levels so that Old Lyme can retain a diverse population. While the current real estate market for large single family houses remains active, market forces alone will not create alternatives without help and encouragement from the town. (*Action: Selectmen*)
4. Assure that zoning regulations make adequate provision for a diversity of housing types, including smaller apartments for both young and old, students at Lyme Academy, singles, and the elderly who cannot or do not want to care for a large house and yard. Consider expansion of provisions for accessory apartments. Develop regulations to allow life care and independent living facilities for the elderly within residential districts by special permit. (*Action: Zoning Commission*)
5. Avoid creating or aggravating public health problems in high density areas. Continue to require that seasonal dwellings be upgraded to meet health code requirements prior to conversion to year round use. (*Action: Zoning Commission, WPCA*)

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

***Some communities view municipal spending for new public roads, public sewers and community water service as a tool for attracting new economic development. An alternative approach, which has been generally followed in Old Lyme, is to require developers to pay for those improvements that are necessary to accommodate their new development. However, based on the policy that all new development must be consistent with the small town character of the town, to the greatest extent possible future development should be limited to that which does not require an increase in present infrastructure capacity.***

1. Continue to pursue an aggressive sewer avoidance program including stringent design and construction of new on-site systems and repairs, homeowner education, on-site maintenance inspections, and a systematic maintenance and pumping program (*Action: Water Pollution Control Authority*)
2. Continue provisions in the Zoning Regulations to prohibit expansion or winterization of seasonal dwellings unless all relevant health and building codes can be met. (*Action: Zoning Commission, Building Official, Zoning Official, Health Department*)

3. Support completion of a safe and adequate interconnected public water supply system in the shore area, while relying primarily on individual on-site water systems throughout the remainder of the town (*Action: Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Selectmen, WPCA, Sanitarian*).
4. Pursue a policy of "road avoidance", limiting future road construction and road improvements to minimize the impact on the natural and visual environment. Over designed roads can encourage speeding and increase stormwater runoff. Focus on improving sight lines, smoothing sharp curves and realigning dangerous intersections, while avoiding major realignment and road widening that will change the character of local roads. (*Action: Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, Selectmen, engineering consultants*).
5. Cooperate with state officials and neighboring towns to develop a coordinated approach to Interstate 95 traffic management to reduce the impact of I-95 congestion on local roads. This approach could include the creation of an incident management system for state and local officials, installation of variable message signs, a state operated highway advisory radio, and increased service patrols along I-95. Work with other communities to determine if physical improvements to I-95 in the Old Lyme area would be effective in reducing accidents and congestion (*Action: Selectmen*).
6. Old Lyme traffic does not follow a typical commuter pattern. Traffic problems are seasonal and often a result of accidents or construction on I-95. However, where feasible, support public transportation alternatives to I-95 including bus service and commuter rail service connecting Old Lyme to neighboring towns, with emphasis on targeted service for the elderly and handicapped. (*Action: Selectmen*).
7. Designate and provide signage for bicycle routes on roads of sufficient width to allow bike traffic, including routes identified on the State Bicycle Map. (*Action: Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Board of Selectmen*).
8. Continue to address Old Lyme's capital improvements needs. While many of the projects identified in the 1990 Plan have been completed, school improvements, town office space, acquisition of open space, upgrading the Soundview area and developing GIS capability for Town officials remain as priority needs. (*Action: cooperative effort by all boards and commissions*).

## **FUTURE LAND USE MAP**

The Future Land Use Map depicts the Planning Commission's recommendation for future use of land, and should guide the Zoning Commission in designating future zoning districts. This revised Map recognizes minor changes in land use since 1990, including the addition of new municipal facilities. It also incorporates recommendations from the 1997 Old Lyme Open Space Plan. For the most part, however, much of the revised Map is identical to the Future Land Use Map included in the 1990 Plan of Development which has proved to be a solid model for the town's future conservation and development.

- The Land Use Map shows a land use mixture intended to maintain the Town's historic settlement pattern by preserving rural areas and distinct neighborhoods. Potential greenways are shown in accordance with the 1997 Open Space Plan.
- Proposed densities are based on the natural ability of the land to support development without the need for public water and sewer systems. An aggressive sewer avoidance program is a key factor in keeping the traditional small town character of Old Lyme.
- The land use mixture and proposed densities are intended to reduce the need for major improvements to Town and State roads that would detract from their scenic quality.

### **Land Use Categories as shown on the Future Land Use Map**

**Established Residential Area:** This category recognizes areas which have been developed at relatively high densities prior to zoning. Fortunately, these

areas include some of the best soils for development. A minimum area of 30,000 square feet of buildable land is required for each new lot to assure that on-site wells and septic systems can be safely located without danger to public health and safety. These areas should be considered for future public water service, since the existing density may pose a threat to on-site wells.

**Medium Residential Area:** This includes land developed during the period of growth following the construction of the original Baldwin Bridge and the opening of the Connecticut Turnpike. A minimum lot size of one acre, including three quarters of an acre of buildable land is needed to maintain the character of the area, with larger lots as necessary depending on individual site conditions.

**Rural Residential Area:** This category encompasses most of the Town's large undeveloped areas, much of which has not been developed in the past due to poor soils, difficult terrain and poor access. Within the Rural Residential Areas, there are pockets of land that are suitable for development, and cluster subdivisions may be appropriate in some locations. As a rule, larger lots will be necessary to provide suitable locations on each lot for on-site sewage disposal and individual wells.

**Neighborhood Commercial:** Two areas are designated as Neighborhood Commercial centers: one along Route 1 in Laysville and the other along Shore Road and down Hartford Avenue in Soundview. These areas are intended to provide retail and other commercial services primarily for residents. They are limited in size to avoid creation of unattractive and inefficient commercial strip development.

**Commercial Center:** The commercial "downtown" along Halls Road is intended to provide a broad range of commercial activities to serve the entire Town of Old Lyme, and to a lesser degree, other rural areas to the north. Within the Center, structures should be of appropriate size, scale and design, and should be well landscaped, in order to maintain the small town character. Uses and signage intended to attract through traffic off the highway should be strongly discouraged.

**Fine Arts District:** The existing historic arts cluster which includes the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts, the Lyme Arts Association, and the Florence Griswold Museum provides a basis for a district focused on a range of activities which relate to and support the arts. Schools, museums, studio and exhibit space, galleries, restaurants, overnight lodging and living space for artists and art students could be encouraged in this district, consistent with the rural and historic character of the area.

**Historic Village District:** The Lyme Street area, the town's civic center, has preserved an historic context which smoothly blends civic, religious and residential uses into a pleasing streetscape. Great care must be taken to

maintain the special village character and balance of uses in the area. A special Village Zoning District might be helpful in this effort.

**Light Industrial:** Light industrial uses are encouraged in the vicinity of Exit 71, where industrial traffic can access I-95 with little impact on local roads. This use requires a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet to allow for adequate buffering, landscaping, parking, loading and other aspects of good industrial site design.

**Marina/Water Dependent Activities:** This category reserves suitable waterfront sites for water dependent uses in keeping with the Town's historic relationship to the waters of Long Island Sound and its rivers. Suitable sites are limited due to the extensive tidal marshes along the shoreline.

**Community Facilities:** Municipal and other community facilities are included in this category. Many of the Town's existing civic facilities are located along Lyme Street. New facilities should continue to be located there to reinforce the town's "civic center".

**Protected Open Space:** In this category, future development of property is permanently limited through ownership by the State Department of Environmental Protection, private conservation organizations, or by deed restrictions on future use.

**Unprotected land presently in open space use:** Several large tracts under institutional use are held in either an undeveloped condition or used for recreation.. There is no long term legal commitment to their present open space use.

**Areas of Special Conservation Interest:** The 1997 Open Space Plan identified greenway areas where efforts should be made to link open space parcels into a continuous chain of forest, pasture and watercourses to provide natural drainageways, protect animal habitats, and create interconnected hiking and biking trails. Within these areas, land should be acquired or reserved to complete greenway connections. This category includes the most sensitive natural features -streambelts, wetlands, steep slopes and shoreline areas. Development activity within these areas must be carefully reviewed to avoid destruction or damage to fragile natural systems. Protection of natural resources should receive highest priority, overriding the designation of the area for a particular use. Uses are appropriate only if they would have no significant adverse impact on natural resources.

## FURTHER REFERENCES

1990 Town Plan of Development, Old Lyme, Connecticut, March 22, 1990

Town of Old Lyme Open Space Plan, November 1997

Municipal Coastal Program for Old Lyme, Connecticut, December 27, 1982