



# The Sprawlbusters' Workbook:

What Connecticut communities  
can and cannot do to stop sprawling  
and to start growing smart



Prepared by the Sprawl Committee  
of the Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club

## Introduction

Over the years, the Sierra Club has published several reports concerning sprawl and its negative impacts on the environment. The reports highlight the best and worst ways in which metropolitan areas throughout the United States are managing sprawl.

These reports paint a bleak picture of rampant development devouring farmlands, wetlands and forests across the country.

Can anything be done to slow the sprawling development of suburban and rural areas here in Connecticut? This workbook attempts to bring some of the country's best sprawl-busting practices to the local level, where Connecticut decides how it will grow.

### What's Inside

This workbook has been prepared to help Connecticut residents work within their towns to change the way their communities grow. We

have attempted to outline what can and cannot be done in our state to control sprawl.

Along with a description of how suburban sprawl is being promoted in Connecticut, information is provided on what needs to be done to control development, and some ideas on how to deal with it. The needs will be different from town to town.

The results from a municipal survey conducted by the Rep. Jefferson Davis, House Chair of the Connecticut General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee are also compiled in this workbook. Not all towns are included since not all towns responded. If your town is not listed, you can contact your town planning officials to try to get the information.

Also included is a list of references and resources that you can use for additional information.

## Acknowledgements

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This workbook was made possible through the contributions and work of the Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter Sprawl

### Committee Members:

John Blake	Robert Michael
Jane Dixon	Tom Paul
John Dixon	Judy Postemsky
Jack Kaplan	Jennifer Sills
Molly McKay	Marcia Wilkins
Christel Manning	

### Photos and Design:

Robert Michael

The views represented in this workbook are those of the Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter Sprawl Committee.

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Information on obtaining this workbook can be found on the Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter website, at:

<http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/ct/>

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## Understanding Sprawl

Quite possibly the single most disturbing aspect of sprawl is its insidious nature. Bit by bit, shopping center by shopping center, housing development by housing development, the countryside in Connecticut has been eaten away. Not unlike the gradual erosion of cliff sides into beaches, the incremental changes don't seem large enough to get excited about and, often times, the new construction has supporters who want that nearby convenience store or new soccer fields.

Suburban sprawl is easily recognized once it is in place. All across Connecticut there are strip malls and arterial highways crowded with small stores fronted by paved parking lots. Few bother with landscaping or attractive lighting and many are characterized by corporate logos and slogans advertising "billions and billions sold." Elsewhere, where rolling farms and forests once graced Connecticut's landscapes, more and more subdivisions of large-lot single-family housing units spring up. Miles from the nearest commercial areas, this new housing is 100% automobile dependent. These changes in our cities and towns happen incrementally, yet, once erected, their sprawling nature is obvious.

What's not so apparent is how this unattractive sprawling development happens. Who designs it? Who likes it? Who approves it? Do towns actually plan it, or does it just happen? If it just happens, is it because the zoning map or town plan didn't explicitly say it couldn't? Can it be stopped? Can better development be put in its place?

The Connecticut Chapter of the Sierra Club thinks it can. We have created this workbook for ordinary

citizens to get a better understanding of the local processes that enable sprawl, and to give you some ideas for how you can work with your local officials, within your existing governmental framework, to make your town more liveable, more attractive and less sprawling.

The most effective and reliable way to curb sprawl is no different from what environmental advocates are already most familiar with: **prevention**. After years of wrestling with expensive and difficult toxic waste dumps, industrial pollution of rivers and streams, and poisonous air emissions, environmentalists turned their attention to preventing pollution in the first place. Curtailing polluting activities is less expensive and smarter than cleaning up after our mistakes.

The same rationale holds true for curtailing suburban sprawl. It is unlikely that we will see a sprawl "clean up" phase. Except in the rarest of instances, Connecticut will probably retain the sprawl we have today. But we can prevent further sprawling into greenfields, forests and open spaces by changing the policies and regulations that govern the way land is used in Connecticut. It is vitally important that environmental advocates who care about open

### Travel Trends

(Comparing 1990 and 1995)

	1990*	1995
Commute vehicle trips (000,000)	41,792	54,782
Commute vehicle miles travelled (000,000)	453,042	642,610
Total vehicle miles travelled (000,000)	1,695,290	2,068,368
% Commute VMT of Total VMT	26.72%	31.07%
Workers (000)	118,343	131,697
Average annual per Household:		
Person Miles of Travel	30,316	34,459
Person Trips	3,262	3,828
Person Trip Length (miles)	9.47	9.13

### Gasoline Use

(gallons)

	1997	1998	Change
Connecticut	1,400,016	1,426,074	1.9%
National	128,663,810	125,882,784	2.2%

Data taken from 1995 NPTS Summary of Travel Trends.

\* Note that the 1990 data have been adjusted to make them more comparable with the 1995 data. Care should be taken when comparing the data.

spaces, water quality, species and habitat protection, air quality, and public health recognize that each of these issues is threatened by sprawl. In Connecticut, that means getting involved at the local level to curtail sprawl in our own communities.

Connecticut is a relatively small state, both geographically and in terms of population. Our system of government is one of "Home Rule", meaning that each municipality has been granted the right of self-determination by the state. In addition to this right, Connecticut's municipalities have traditionally been fiercely independent. The residents of most municipalities feel a strong sense of allegiance to their towns, and in many cases, to the particular section of town in which they live. There are 169 incorporated municipalities in Connecticut. These towns and cities further subdivide themselves into over 450 villages and sections that residents identify with! Because of this strong home rule tradition, it is extremely difficult to formulate land use policies on the state level.

Citizens getting involved in curtailing sprawl

need to understand that the increased tax revenues from residential development is in most cases less than the cost of increased services required by the new residents. Connecticut municipalities rely almost exclusively on their right to exact property taxes from property owners to raise their municipal budgets, since an average of 57%<sup>1</sup> of their local revenue comes from property taxes. For most towns, the most significant expenditure (54%<sup>1</sup> on average) is their school budget. Since educating the next generation is an important goal and popular with many citizens, town officials are understandably eager to continue to bring in tax revenues. It is important for environmental advocates to understand that town officials have cited the need to increase the grand list to support new development under the present system. (See sidebar *The Costs of Sprawl to the Taxpayer.*)

The Sierra Club has long considered Connecticut's land use to be our state's most serious environmental issue. From poor land use decisions come the majority of our persistent environmental problems:

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<sup>1</sup> Percentage figures from "The Effects of Development and Land Conservation on Property Taxes in Connecticut Towns" as prepared for The Trust for Public Land, May 1995.

## The Costs of Sprawl to the Taxpayer

One of the best ways to put the brakes on unwise development is to publicize the cost to taxpayers. The popular notion that residential and commercial development is needed to keep local taxes down has been refuted by studies in many states.

*Sprawl Costs Us All: How Your Taxes Fuel Suburban Sprawl*, published by the Sierra Club, shows how federal, state and local programs have provided the incentives since the end of the World War II to fuel sprawl-related growth. These range from the millions of dollars spent on highway construction, and the tax incentives given to corporations as an enticement for relocation, to the sewer systems, water lines, schools, and increased emergency services.

Several publications in Connecticut tend to prove the fallacy of the ratables argument. They show that while, in general, the value of land increases as it is developed, the development usually requires more services. Thus, on one hand, there is an increase to the tax base; but, on the other hand, local expenditures are increased even more because of the increased demand for services.

One of these studies, *The Effects of Development and Land Conservation on Property Taxes in Connecticut Towns*, was prepared for the Trust for Public Land several years ago. The study found that the higher the property values (i.e., the tax base), the higher the expenditures of the town. The towns that have the higher tax bases have higher taxes in general. Thus, both municipal and educational expenditures per capita are higher in the towns with higher tax bases and larger populations on average.

Municipal services, including education, are paid in large measure by local property taxes. The study found that each housing unit in this state averages 0.4 public school children. One new house results in an average loss of \$1717 per year to the school district (1993-1994 data). Homeowners do not pay enough in school taxes to cover the costs of educating their children, so the difference must be made up by the other taxpayers.

The bottom line is that we are all paying the extra costs required to pay for development.

- air pollution from highway congestion which endangers our health
- polluted runoff from ever-increasing amounts of impervious surface areas contributing to water pollution of our rivers and Long Island Sound
- contaminated urban sites
- loss of important habitats for birds, fish and animals
- loss of agricultural lands, forests, and open space

### Protecting the Environment through controlling sprawl: Smart Growth

Very few people would disagree that it makes good sense to curb these environmental problems. It does take a little work to convince people—citizens as well as public officials and other decision makers—that the common thread at the root of these problems is the way we use, and misuse, the land. We live with increased air pollution from increased automobile use. We have increased automobile use because we have no transit alternatives. We have created dispersed rather than centralized employment centers. We continue to build sprawling residential areas accessible only by car.

More and more pavement—new roads and parking lots to service new developments—creates impervious surfaces. These surfaces provide a runway for pesticide- and fertilizer-laden rain waters to travel to our rivers and lakes and, eventually, into Long Island Sound.

Many of our older cities house contaminated industrial sites which have been abandoned, known as brownfields. The state has initiated a Brownfields reclamation program to assist communities financially to clean up these lands and return them to revenue-generating properties. Sadly, while these urban sites were neglected and languishing, the suburban race to attract tax-generating businesses was in full swing. Connecticut towns became adept at competing with one another for big taxpaying commercial establishments, known as “ratables”. Soon, suburbia had lured the major shopping opportunities away from our central cities into giant malls. Downtown businesses

were attracted to industrial “parks” and office “campuses”. Our urban centers were left without their traditional businesses and their accompanying taxes.

After decades of this urban drain, suburban communities are rethinking such unplanned growth, and looking for ways to grow smarter. Cities are looking for ways to attract people, housing, and businesses back to transportation hubs; rural communities are looking to grow without losing their character to disproportionately-sized businesses and dwellings. Everybody is looking for smart growth.

Smart growth programs are being undertaken throughout the country, as more and more communities are overrun with giant retail stores, unsightly strip malls, hamburger joints, and cookie-cutter construction that makes every place look like every place else. The essence of smart growth is to direct new development and redevelopment to areas with existing infrastructure, such as village centers and downtown business districts. As articulated by the American Planning Association, goals of a smart growth program should include:

- maximized public investments
- reclamation of contaminated urban sites
- revitalization of urban retail and housing
- improved quality of air, water, and land resources
- protected ecological resources
- preserved community character and identity
- job retention and attraction
- housing variety
- efficient and predictable processes for issuing permits for development
- protected historic, archaeological and cultural resources
- recognition of the interdependence of city, suburban, and rural areas

Communities across America are using a variety of tools to improve development patterns of land use. This workbook explores some of these options for Connecticut towns, and shows citizens how to encourage their local decision-makers to consider these tools when planning changes of development in their communities.

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**Connecticut was ranked #44 in Land Use Planning and #28 in Open Space Protection in the 1999 Sierra Club report *Solving Sprawl: The Sierra Club Rates the States***

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## Working with Local Government Officials

Protecting the environment by controlling sprawl means working with municipal decision-makers. You can work most effectively with your local leaders if you understand how your local town government works, and you are well-prepared.

Understanding how local governments work and how decisions get made is essential to being involved in the process. We have all heard about the squeaky wheel getting the grease, and in order to control sprawl, *you must be willing to squeak!*

The following information about municipal governments was excerpted from *Local Government in Connecticut* by Frank B. Connolly (1992, The Institute of Public Service, UCONN).

In Connecticut, there are three basic forms of local government and several variations on these.

### **The Selectmen-Town Meeting:**

Connecticut's most prevalent form because it works well in communities with populations under 25,000, usually involves three or five elected board members. These individuals are responsible for the municipality's decision-making and overall operation. The amount of authority the selectmen have is determined by

the town charter. On very important issues, which usually include ordinances, the selectmen are required to hold a town meeting. At these meetings, any resident may speak and vote on an issue if they are registered voters or property owners in town.

A variation on the town meeting form is the Representative Town Meeting. This involves a large group of citizens elected to represent the voters at large, essentially replacing the town meeting. Six Connecticut towns use this form of government: Branford, Darien, Fairfield, Greenwich, Waterford and Westport.

**The Mayor-Council:** This form has one top elected official and an elected legislative body. The mayor is responsible for running the town on a day-to-day basis and the council makes decisions. Mayor-Councils are usually found in larger towns and cities. The exact powers and duties of each elected official are laid out in charter provisions. In a "weak Mayor" form, the majority of power lies with the council; in a "strong mayor" form, the mayor has significant powers and authority, including the power to appoint members to land use commissions and boards.

**The Council-Manager:** This form involves a full-time paid professional called the Town or City Manager. This individual is hired by the Council to handle the municipality's administration and to carry out council policies.

### **What form of local government does your town use?**

If you are not sure as to what type of government your town uses, or who the key officials are, you can obtain this information in several ways, including:

- your Town Clerk's office
- the Secretary of the State's *State Register and Manual* (also known as the "Blue Book"); also available online at [www.sots.state.ct.us](http://www.sots.state.ct.us)
- town websites at [www.state.ct.us/munic/](http://www.state.ct.us/munic/)
- your local library
- the Blue Pages in the local telephone directory

You can also learn about your town's government by attending meeting held by the various boards and commissions. The Town Clerk's office will have a complete list of meeting dates and times.

### **Home Rule—Friend or Foe of Smart Growth?**

Suburbs and rural communities can benefit from one of the best aspects of Connecticut's home rule status: local officials may be people you know—even your friends and neighbors. Often these local officials volunteer their time to boards and commissions or get paid very small salaries compared to the long hours they put in. This usually means that they are contributing their time because they want to serve the public good. They can be a valuable source of information about land-use regulations, town ordinances, and development trends in your community. And they are often very accessible.

Big cities are more of a challenge to pro-Smart Growth advocates. They tend to have many large professionally-staffed departments and commissions. Not all municipalities have residency requirements, so many times these professionals are not accessible during non-working hours. While smaller town residents can chat with the planning commissioners on the sidelines of the local soccer match, city residents will likely have to make appointments and take time off from work to get to their officials. It is often more work (and more frustrating) for city residents to learn who the responsible professional or commissioner members are. All of this information can be found in the State Register and Manual which is published annually by the Secretary of the State's office (often called the "Blue Book"). It is available in most town halls, libraries, and on-line at [www.sots.state.ct.us](http://www.sots.state.ct.us).

Whether they represent big cities or small towns, local officials should embrace protection of the environment by controlling sprawl. However, the biggest obstacle to their support is Connecticut's property tax structure. Local officials rely on the property tax to supply the revenue for everything they need: schools, roads, police and fire services, libraries, and so on. This hard fact means town leaders often feel tremendous pressure to increase the tax base by allowing more sprawl.

Despite the fact that no one is an active pro-sprawl advocate, effecting a new growth management plan will not be easy. Traditionally, smart growth programs and incentives have been opposed by industry groups that see them as detrimental to their profit-making interests. This is a regrettable situation because smart growth advocates are proponents of better planned growth, not "no build" policies. Notable among the opposition to most of the incentives in this workbook will be home builders and their professional trade associations, along with road and highway construction companies. Oil companies have a large stake in keeping communities automobile-dependent and they have large enough bank accounts to intercede even at the local level when their profits are concerned.

Much, if not most, of this organized opposition to smart growth can be overcome by

grassroots efforts. Local citizens speaking up for how they want their town to grow—that's you and your neighbors—are the genuine article. Trade associations, self-interested builders, and out-of-town big industry lobbyists should not be able to override the will of the people. They cannot and will not beat you unless you let them.

### Prepare yourselves by doing your homework

Before you can begin to think about a Smart Growth plan for your community, you need to begin with what's already in place. Some of the pieces of information you'll need include:

- Your town's zoning map (the legal document of record governing how your town can grow)
- Land-use regulations
- Planning and zoning regulations
- Inland wetlands and/or conservation regulations
- The town's plan of conservation and development (required by state statute, but only advisory)
- A Department of Environmental Protection publication called *What's Legally Required*, a manual for land-use boards and commissions.

You may also want to get copies of permits recently granted by the Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands Commissions to give you a sense of the types of developments coming into your town.

Probably the single most effective thing you can do to catch the attentions of your local decision-makers is to create a map of a full build-out scenario of your town. To do this, you obtain the zoning map and demonstrate what your town would look like if it were completely built out as it is zoned to potentially be. Don't be discouraged that you haven't got a fancy computerized, digitized geographic information system to assist you. It would be great if you have access to such a system, but colored markers will do the trick. This dramatic illustration can be quite startling, and unsettling, since

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**Since 1990, Connecticut's financial contribution to local schools, as a percentage of the total cost of running them, has declined from 46 percent to 39 percent, with local property taxes picking up the slack.**

1998 U.S. Population Data Sheet

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# Municipal Survey Results

Town Name	Town Type	Adequate Public Facilities	Consistency Requirement	Critical Environmental Areas	Design Review	Growth Boundary	Impact Fees	Cost/Revenue Sharing	Land Use Taxation	Mixed-Use Zoning	Open Space Zoning	Overlay Zones	Regional Assets District	Traffic Calming	Site Use Plan
Ansonia	Urban	W	Z	W	Z	?	N	N	W	N	O	N	N	N	W
Ashford	Rural	U	?	?	L	U	L	L	?		N	O	U	?	L
Avon	Outer	W	W	O	O	O	Z	N	N	O	W	O	L	N	W
Bethany	Rural	?	W	Z	Z	N	N	N	N	N	Z	Z	N	N	N
Bethel	Outer	W	O	N	N	L	L	N	?	W	O	U	N	L	?
Bloomfield	Inner Outer	O	W	O	Z	L	L	L	U	O	O	N	?	O	W
Bozrah	Rural Urban	NOUW	OW	NOW	NOW	OW	LNW?Z	LNOW	NUW?	LNW?	NOW	NOW	NOUW	NW	NOW
Bridgeport	Urban	N	W	N	O	N	N	N	?	W	N	N	?	?	N
Brooklyn	Rural	?	W	L	O	L	?	L	?	L	O	O	L	Z	L
Burlington	Rural	?	?	L	L	L	U	U	U	L	N	L	N	O	?
Canaan	Rural	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Canton	Outer	U	W	L	L	L	L	?	?	O	O	O	N	O	L
Chester	Rural	?	O	L	L	?	L	L	L	O	W	L	L	O	L
Colebrook	Rural	O	O	W		N	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	N	
Columbia	Outer	N	O	Z	L	N		?	?	O	Z	O	?	L	W
Cornwall	Rural	?	W	O	?	?	?	U	U	?	L	O	U	U	?
Coventry	Rural	L	W	L	?	?	L	?	U	L	O	O	L	Z	O
Cromwell	Outer	U	Z	?	O	U	U	N	U	O	O	N	N	N	?
Darien	Inner	O	O	U	W	N	N	N	N	W	W	O	N	O	O
Deep River	Rural	O	W	Z	W	W	N	N	N	W	W	W		N	N
Durham	Rural	N	W	W	W	L	L	?	U	O	U	L	L	?	W
East Granby	Rural	O	W	N	N	W	L	?	N	N	W	N	N	O	N
East Haddam	Rural	O	W	O	O	?	O	?	U	O	W	N	?	O	W
East Hampton	Rural	W	W	W	W	W	W	N	W	W	O	W	U	O	O
Easton	Outer Rural	L	L	L	L	U	L	N	?	U	U	L	U	L	L
Ellington	Outer	?	L	L	L	?	L	U	?	L	O	O	?	N	L
Essex	Rural	W	W	L	W	O	L	N	?	W	O	?	L	?	L
Fairfield	Inner	O	W	W	Z	W	N	N	N	W	W	W	N	N	W
Farmington	Outer	U	W	L	Z	Z	U	U	Z	Z	O	O	Z	O	U
Goshen	Rural	L	W	L?	U	U	L	L	U	O	O	L	U	O	?
Granby	Outer	?	O	?	L	?	L	?	?	L	W	O	?	O	?
Greenwich	Inner Outer	W	W	Z	W	N	N	N	?	W	W	W	U	O	W
Groton	Urban	W	W	W	W	N	W	O	N	O	N	W	W	W	W
Groton ( city)	Urban	W	W	W	W	N	W	O	O	O	N	W	W	W	W
Groton (Town)	Rural	L	W	W	W	O	L	L	?	O	O	O	L	N	W
Guilford	Outer	N	W	O	W	L	L	L	?	W	W	W	?	Z	W
Haddam	Rural	U	O	U	L	U	?	?	U	?	U	U	U	?	
Hamden	Inner	W	O	W	Z	N	N	N	N	?	O	O	N	N	W
Hartford	Urban	U	W	?	W	U	?	?	Z	W	O	W	?	O	?
Hebron	Rural	W	W	W	O	N	L	?	?	Z	W	O	L	N	W
Killingly	Rural	W	W	O	L	O	N	N	N	O		O	N	N	N
Killingworth	Outer Rural		W	W	L	W	L	?		N	O	O	?	W	?
Ledyard	Outer	Z	O	L	O	N	L	?	?	O	N	O	?	O	N
Lyme	Rural	O	W	O	N	N	W	U	?	O	O	N	N	N	N
Madison		?	W	W	W	W	W	W	L	O	O	W	?	Z	W
Manchester	Inner	LW	W	NW	OW	OW	U?	LO	L?	O	NO	OW	L?	OW	O
Mansfield	Outer Rural	N?	WZ	OZ	Z	?	L	?	?	Z	OZ	LZ	L?	O	W
Marlborough	Rural	?	O	W	W	?	W	L	?	O	W	N	?	O	?
Meriden	Urban	LW	OW	OW	OW	U?	NO	LN	L?	OW	OW	?W	LU	O	OW
Middlebury	Urban	L	W	W	W	W	L	L	L	L	O	O	O	O	O
Middletown	Urban	O	W	W	O	L	O	U	?	W	W	O	U	?	W
Milford	Urban	O	?	O	L	L	?	N	N	?	N	L	?	L	?
Montville	Outer	L	W	W	W	L	L	?	?	O	O	N	?	O	L
New Britain	Urban	N	N	N	N	N	?	?	?	O	N	N	L	?	?
New Canaan	Inner Outer	?	?	?	?	L	U	U	U	W	N	O	U	O	N
New Hartford	Rural	L	W	L	L	L	L	?	?	W	O	W	L	W	W
New Haven	Urban	O	Z	Z	O	Z	N	L	N	W	N	W	L	O	O
New London	Urban	O	W	U	O	U	L	L	U	W	N	W	L	O	N
Newington	Inner	W	W	W	O	?	?	L	?	W	O	O	?	O	W

Town Name	Town Type	Adequate Public Facilities	Consistency Requirement	Critical Environmental Areas	Design Review	Growth Boundary	Impact Fees	Cost/Revenue Sharing	Land Use Taxation	Mixed-Use Zoning	Open Space Zoning	Overlay Zones	Regional Assets District	Traffic Calming	Site Use Plan
Newtown	Outer	L	?	L	Z	L	L	L	?	O	N	O	L	N	N
Norfolk	Rural	O	W	W	N	W	N	N	N	O	N	O	N	?	N
North Branford	Inner Outer	O	W	O	O	N	N	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	W
North Stonington	Rural			N	W	N	N	N	?	N	N	W	O	O	?
Norwalk	Urban	W	O	O	O	O	N	N	N	O	O	O	N	O	W
Norwich	Urban	O	W	L	O	L	L	?	?	O	O	L	?	O	?
Plainfield	Outer	L	O	O	U	U	L	?	U	Z	Z	O	L	Z	U
Plainville	Inner	W	W	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	Z	N	N	N	
Plymouth	Outer	L	W	O	Z	N	N	N	?	O	Z	N	?	O	W
Pomfret Center	Rural	L	L	L	L	L	L	?	?	U	L	L	?	L	L
Portland	Outer	?	L	L	L	?	?	?	?	L	Z	O	?	L	?
Putnam	Rural	O	Z	N	O	N	L	N	N	L	L	L	L	N	O
Redding	Outer Rural	U	L	L	L	L	L	U	U			L	L	L	L
Ridgefield		W	W	W	O	W	O	O	N	O	W	W	N	O	O
Roxbury	Rural	?	Z	L	N	?	U	U	N	U	L	?	U	Z	?
Salem	Rural	O	L	O	O	?	N	?	N	?		N	?	N	?
Seymour	Urban	W	W	?	O	W	?	?	?	O	W	?	?	O	W
Shelton	Outer	W	W	O	W	W	N	?	?	O	W	W	N	W	W
Sherman	Rural	N	W	W	U	W	?	U	U	U	W	W	N	L	?
South Windsor	Outer	L	W	L	W	U	L	N	N	N	W	W	N	O	L
Southbury	Outer Rural	?	W	W	W	N	L	U	?	Z	Z	W	U	Z	W
Southington	Inner Outer	O	O	W	N	N	N	N	N	N	O	O	N	N	W
Stafford Springs	Outer Rural	W	O	N	O	O	N	N	N	Z	W	N	U	O	W
Stamford	Urban	L	W	O	O	L	L	L	?	O	O	O	?	O	W
Sterling	Rural	?	Z	L	N	N	L	L	U	Z	Z		O	?	?
Stratford	Inner	O	L	W	O	N	N	N	N	O	O	O	N	O	O
Suffield	Rural	W	W	W	O	L	N	N	N	N	N	O	?	N	U
Torrington	Urban	O	O	O	O	N	?	?	?	L	O	O	N	O	W
Vernon	Outer	O	W	W	W	O	N	N	N	O	O	O	O	O	W
Voluntown	Rural	?	O	?	?	N	L	?	?	?	N	?	N	N	L?
Wallingford	Outer	L	L	L	?	Z	L	Z	?	N	N	N	N	N	W
Waterbury	Urban	N	W	N	W	L	N	L	N	L	L	L	U	N	L
Waterford	Urban Inner	O	W	W	O	L	L	N	?	O	W	O	?	O	W
Watertown	Inner	L	W	O	Z	L	L	?	?	Z	O	O	?	W	?
West Hartford	Inner	W	W	W	W	N	N	N	U	W	O	W	?	O	N
Westbrook	Outer	?	Z	O	Z	?	L	?	U	O	Z	O	?	L	?
Westport	Inner	W	W	W	W	N	L	N	N	W	O	O	N	O	W
Wethersfield	Inner	L	LZ	LO	LO	LN	LU	L	L?	LO	O	LN	LN	O	LN
Willington	Rural	O	N	O	O	O	N	N	U	O	Z	W	U	N	N
Wilton	Outer	L	W	W	O	Z	L	L	L	O	O	W	L	O	O
Windsor	Inner	?	W	L	Z	Z	L	Z	U	O	O	Z	?	O	?
Windsor Locks		O	W	O	L	L	L	?	?	N	O	W	?	O	W
Winsted	Outer	L	W	O	W	L	L	O	?	W	O	O	N	W	W
Woodbridge		?	W	W	W	W	O	?	O	?	W	O	N	O	?
Woodbury	Rural	L	W	W	W	N	L	N	?	O	O	O	N	N	W
Woodstock	Rural	U	N	L	L	L	L	?	?	W	O	L	N	N	N

**Notes to Survey Results:**

The towns represented in the tables are those that responded to the Municipal Survey conducted by the Connecticut General Assembly Planning and Development Committee. Multiple responses for a listed town represent opinions received from different officials within that town. Similar responses have been combined.

- W: use widely
- O: use occasionally
- N: do not use
- L: likely/would use is state passed enabling legislation
- U: unlikely/would not use if state passed enabling legislation
- ?: need more information
- Z: other

there are no mechanisms in place to prevent that potential build out from happening. Your build-out map will confirm that the current system of relying on chance, “market forces”, or other uncontrollable circumstances cannot be allowed to continue.

After discovering what your town might look like if the current zoning became reality, the next logical step will be to think about the changes you would like to see. It’s important to know what your local community has the power to enact and what falls under state jurisdiction. Sweeping public policy shifts, like eliminating municipal reliance on property taxes, have to be addressed by state government. Towns have to be granted permission by the state through enabling legislation to use other growth management initiatives. This means that your town is prohibited by state statute from imposing development impact fees<sup>2</sup> or considering the availability of adequate public facilities<sup>3</sup> when making land use decisions.

There are less grandiose changes that can happen at the local level when activists get organized. You can improve the way your town grows using a variety of reforms which will be discussed in the next section, *Sprawlbuster Tools You Can Use*.

In order for your group to be well-informed and to know what you are talking about when you visit decision-makers, it will be important to get a good inventory of what your town really looks like, apart from the zoning map.

For instance, your zoning map may show an industrial zone but will not tell you if that zone is a thriving commercial enterprise or abandoned factories sitting on a contaminated site. You and your neighbors probably will not have the financial resources to inventory your town’s land but you will be able to ask your town

officials to provide or collect this information. Knowing what is real and viable—versus what is somebody’s notion of a potential future land use—will help determine the appropriate growth areas for your town.

### Connecticut Facts

Population, 1997:	3.3 million
Projected population, 2035:	3.7 million
Annual growth rate:	0.1%
Percent of land protected:	7 ( <i>10</i> )*
Wetland loss, 1780-1980:	74% ( <i>30%</i> )*

\* Values in *italics* are national figures.  
Data taken from 1998 United States Population Data Sheet.

If your town cannot, or will not, provide an inventory of land uses, don’t give up! You can do your own non-scientific study. You’ll show your local officials that you are serious, and have fun in the process.

Governments respond to pressure, crises, and headlines, whether they are on the federal, state, or local level. They are accustomed to reacting, not looking for new ways to be innovative and flexible, to modernize, or to enact reforms. Thus, the more work you do for your local officials, such as investigative research or encouraging the use of sprawlbuster tools, the greater your likelihood for success. Remember, your town officials, for the most part, have other jobs. City officials and professional staffs usually have huge workloads. Both city and town decision-makers have the same time pressures that all busy people have. You may think that its their job to protect the environment by curbing sprawl—and it is—but this workbook is about getting the job done, not waiting for local officials to take up the banner.

<sup>2</sup> *Development Impact Fees would allow municipalities to assess new developments for the increase in services town must provide.*

<sup>3</sup> *Adequate Public Facilities: The purpose of enacting an ordinance of this type is to ensure that the board or commission granting a development permit has considered whether or not the town can handle the increased demand for public services at public expense. The ordinance would require that capacities of public utilities and agencies be assessed, including water supply, sewage treatment, roads, schools, transportation, fire and police protection, recreational opportunities, and open space. The commission would then issue a finding that the needs created by the new development could be met by the town before a permit to build would be granted. An alternative way to obtain such a fiscal analysis of the costs of services would be to require the developer to submit an independently researched analysis as a part of the permit application.*

## Sprawlbuster Tools You Can Use

In the previous section, you learned about how local governments work and things you need to do to prepare yourselves to work with decision-makers on conquering sprawl. In this section, you will learn about a variety of tools for towns that can help to curb creeping growth. This list is not exhaustive—there are dozens of techniques, large and small, that have been tried throughout the U.S. Instead, the list focuses on things that can work in Connecticut, given our existing development, density, and governmental structure.

As a group, you can decide which of these tools would help your city or town. Not every one is appropriate for all communities but local people know best how to help their municipality grow smart, so select the ones that will work best in your community. Remember, it's your hometown. And be creative—there are certainly some ideas we have not included here.

Several institutions in the state, including the Connecticut General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee and the Capitol Region Council of Governments, have surveyed Connecticut towns about their use of sprawlbusting techniques (see the *Municipal Survey Results* tables for data collected by the General Assembly's Planning and Development Committee). Over 105 towns reported what tools they use, and why. Consult the chart to see if your town is using the sprawlbusters you think it should be.

After checking what they say they're doing, you will need to determine how they're doing it. Your town's idea of controlling sprawl may be different from yours, so you will need to assess their efforts critically.

You will probably have a sense of which sprawlbusting tools to use depending on what's happening in your town. Are you in an urgent fight to stop

a new sprawling housing development? Bog-box stores? New highway? If so, your approach will be different than if you are looking at a more long-range effort to prevent future sprawl and want to begin to plan for smart growth for your community. You need also think carefully about what you want to accomplish, how many people can take on different parts of the work, what limitations on time everyone has, etc. Each group will develop its own personality—which is as important to take into consideration as the needs of your community. Success depends on the commitment of the participants, so they must be matched to the task.

Once you've decided which sprawlbusters you want to use in your town, you will need to make a trip to your town hall or library (many, but not all, Connecticut municipalities now have websites so you can start your research there). Here you can research the zoning, subdivision, and wetlands regulations and familiarize yourself with town ordinances involving land use and development. You'll want to know things like minimum lot size, wetlands set-backs, and buffer zones. These sprawlbuster tools will provide the basis for your conversations with town officials. The point is to be taken seriously because you care enough about how your town grows to have done some initial research, not to try to pass for a land use attorney. The actual drafting of a

### A different kind of Sierra Club Outing - Sprawl Patrol

Using the zoning map as your guide, determine those areas you are already familiar with. Many of the residential areas, for instance, will be ones you know are already built to capacity. Next, determine the areas you will need to see for yourselves.

Organize a central business district hike:

- Are the industrial zones functioning or run down?
- Are there candidates for brownfields reclamation?

Organize a residential bike ride through unfamiliar residential zones :

- Is there some area that is sprawl waiting to happen?
- Is this residential area already completely planned and bought, or are there ways to retool it as open space zoning before it's too late?

Organize a Tour de Sprawl with town officials and the media.

proposed ordinance will take place further down the road. Drafting ordinances is a highly detailed and specialized skill best left to a land use attorney.

### Meeting with Local Officials

Surprisingly, not many people take advantage of their right to present their views directly to their government officials. We take this ability for granted in our free society, yet we rarely exercise this fundamental means of participating in our own governance. Many people are “too busy” or think they can’t change things, but some are intimidated, often by lack of understanding of the process. This workbook cannot clear your calendar or cure your cynicism, but we do hope to erase your hesitation to get involved. Once you discover how easy it is to work with local officials, you’ll find it can be rewarding and fun.

After you have done your preparation work, you will want to set up a time to meet with the decision-makers. Decide which officials would

be important to meet with first. If you need more information about local regulations or applications before the Planning and Zoning or the Wetlands Commissions, then you want to meet with the Chairs of those commissions, or possibly the zoning enforcement officer or wetlands enforcement officer. If you want information about ordinances, you might want to meet with the Mayor or Town Manager. Often, the Town Clerk’s office can tell you how to go about getting the information you need.

Once you’ve decided which officials you need to meet with, get several dates and times of availabilities of the people in your group who want to attend the meeting before you call the official’s office for a date. You will have to work around his or her schedule so make sure everyone knows that the date selected may not be one of their first choices. If someone in your group has to attend because they are the most knowledgeable, only offer dates when that person is available. Tell the official how much time you’d like to have (be as brief as possible) for your meeting, but accept a shorter amount of time than you want rather no meeting at all.

### Techniques for Preserving Open Space\*

In addition to land use regulations and plans, the following is a summary of some of the more commonly used open space preservation techniques.

#### Ownership Option for Government and Nonprofits:

- Fee Simple and Fee Simple/Leaseback
- Purchase of Development Rights or Conservation Easements
- Lease

#### Nonprofit Purchase and Ownership Entity Options:

- Nonprofit acquires land and conveys it to public agency or a Land Trust
- Nonprofit acquires land and manages it
- Nonprofit acquires land then sells or leases it with restrictive easements or covenants
- Nonprofit acquires land then sells it so money can be used to preserve other parcels

#### Transfer of Title Options:

- Fair market value sale
- Bargain sale
- Outright donation
- Donation upon death of owner
- Donation with lifetime use (“Reserved Life Estate”)
- Land exchange
- Eminent Domain
- Tax foreclosure

\*Information taken from *Open Space Planning*, University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension System

### At the Meeting

First and foremost: *be on time*. Nothing is more insulting than to suggest that your time is more important than someone else's time by asking them to wait for you. If you are hopelessly, chronically late, do your cause a favor and let someone else meet with the public officials.

Find out how much time the official has slated for you at the beginning of the meeting. This is easier to do if you seem to simply be verifying what he or she has already told you but it's important to know if there has been a schedule change.

Be informed, organized, and concise. Decide in advance who will be the lead speaker and who will chime in at appropriate intervals. Let

the official share his or her views, but do not let them co-opt your meeting. You do not want to leave when your time is up and realize that the official dominated the meeting and half of your presentation went unsaid.

Stick to the issue at hand. Stay as focused and specific as possible, avoiding broad statements like concern for the environment or opposition to development.

Never make personal attacks or threaten to vote for someone else. It is perfectly all right to respectfully disagree, and to politely say so, but resorting to threats never helps your cause.

Make sure you have adequate materials to leave behind. Public officials need time to consider new ideas and to solicit other professional opinions. Bring a list of your names, addresses, phone numbers and relevant professional qualifications.

## Sample Sprawlbusters

The sample sprawlbusters listed in the following paragraphs correspond to the Municipal Survey table headings.

**Consistency Requirement:** Used to ensure that local zoning codes are consistent with the town's own plan of conservation and development. Use of such a requirement allows communities to effectively guide development in accordance with the agreed upon ten-year plan. (State statute requires that all municipalities review their plan of conservation and development every ten years).

**Critical Environmental Areas (CEAs):** The purpose of enacting this ordinance would be for towns to designate environmentally sensitive areas, such as aquifers, ridge lines, etc., and to protect these areas from unregulated development. Municipal CEAs would be locally-identified sensitive parcels for which towns could design customized protection programs. These protections could be written as part of the ordinance to preserve the legislative intent of the ordinance.

**Design Review:** Many communities across the U.S. use design review regulations or ordinances to preserve the character of their towns while still allowing permits for new housing developments and new retail stores and malls. Design review enables towns to set guidelines for street patterns and widths, parking, sidewalks, porches, fencing, landscaping, lighting, signage, windows, roof types, building materials, and other features identified by the town.

**Growth Boundary:** The purpose of this ordinance is to delineate the specific area into which growth is directed by prohibiting development beyond the boundary, or subjecting development to stringent standards. Growth boundaries encourage efficient land use, efficient use and re-use of existing infrastructure, and preservation of open spaces.

**Inter-Municipal Cost/Revenue Sharing Agreements:** These agreements allow municipalities to share the costs and/or revenues generated by new developments in

order to protect resources and utilize existing infrastructures. Cost/revenue sharing can eliminate the “race for ratables” that often inspires towns to court projects which are out of character for them. Local decision-makers need to hear from their constituents that they might prefer to share some of the new revenue realized by a development, rather than having all the revenue and all the added traffic, noise, pollution, new roads, etc., that the new development brought along with it.

**Land Use Taxation:** This method allows municipalities to establish two property tax rates, one for land and one for improvements to land, i.e., buildings, with the higher rate on land. Assessments of land and improvements are still made in the traditional manner. Land Use Taxation has been used successfully in other states to encourage investment, and to discourage speculation in blighted communities.

**Mixed-Use Zoning:** This zoning change would allow commercial and residential development in specified areas of town, usually the town center. The idea behind this type of zoning is to re-create the traditional New England village or small city center. Mixed-use zoning can reduce sprawl, protect environmental quality, reducing the cost of infrastructure, and provide housing in convenient, pedestrian-friendly communities.

**Open Space Zoning:** Creating this type of zone lets towns require concentrating development—usually detached single family housing—on that portion of a parcel most suitable for development, while permanently protecting the remaining open space. In this type of zoning, smaller individual lots means that one large lot land can be preserved for recreation, agriculture, or habitat.

**Overlay Zones:** This zoning requirement sets specific performance standards for new development in areas deemed to need special protections, such as aquifers, shorelines, riverbeds, etc. Restrictions on density, paving, vegetation clearing, fuels storage, etc., may be

implemented to protect natural resources.

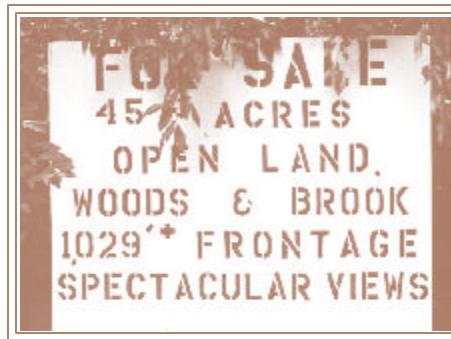
**Regional Asset Districts:** These districts allow towns, representing 50% or more of the population of a Council of Governments (COG) or a Council of Elected Officials (CEO), to support and finance regional assets. Regional Assets are civic, science, recreational, cultural, library, sports, arts, or transportation facilities and attractions of area-wide worth and benefit.

**Traffic Calming Techniques:** These techniques increase pedestrian safety and sense of place by slowing motor vehicle use in neighborhood communities. Techniques include landscaped islands, “S” bends, extended sidewalks at street corners—know as “neckdowns”, traffic circles, textured paving surfaces, speed bumps, and others.

**Site Use Plan:** Some towns may have specific parcels of land that, for a variety of reasons, should

be singled out for individual consideration. These lands may be situated near important transit corridors, be historically significant, or environmentally sensitive. A Site Use Plan outlines development criteria and imposes detailed land use restrictions in addition to existing zoning ordinances for such parcels. A specific site use plan is beneficial because it is proactive in soliciting community input on how to grow, and it explicitly states the town’s goal for the site. This pre-development planning can significantly reduce both time and costs for the developer and disappointment and frustration for the people of the town.

In addition to the description of how to work with you local government, the various sprawlbusters tools, and some examples of sprawlbusting techniques, the Bibliography lists other sources of information that may be helpful in formulating your plan for effectively controlling sprawl in your community. A search on the internet may find information not listed in this workbook. Your local library may also contain other information.



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### On the Internet

Sierra Club: [www.sierraclub.org/sprawl](http://www.sierraclub.org/sprawl), [www.sierraclub.org/transportation](http://www.sierraclub.org/transportation)

University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Cooperative Extension System Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO): [www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/nemo](http://www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/nemo)

Center for Livable Communities: [www.lgc.org/clc](http://www.lgc.org/clc)

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Conservative Law Foundation: [www.clf.org](http://www.clf.org)

Smart Growth Network: [www.smartgrowth.org](http://www.smartgrowth.org)

Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse: [www.sprawlwatch.org](http://www.sprawlwatch.org)

Tri-State Transportation Campaign: [www.tstc.org](http://www.tstc.org)



Sierra Club Connecticut Chapter  
118 Oak Street  
Hartford, CT 06127

[www.sierraclub.org/chapters/ct/](http://www.sierraclub.org/chapters/ct/)