

Chapter 1 Introduction

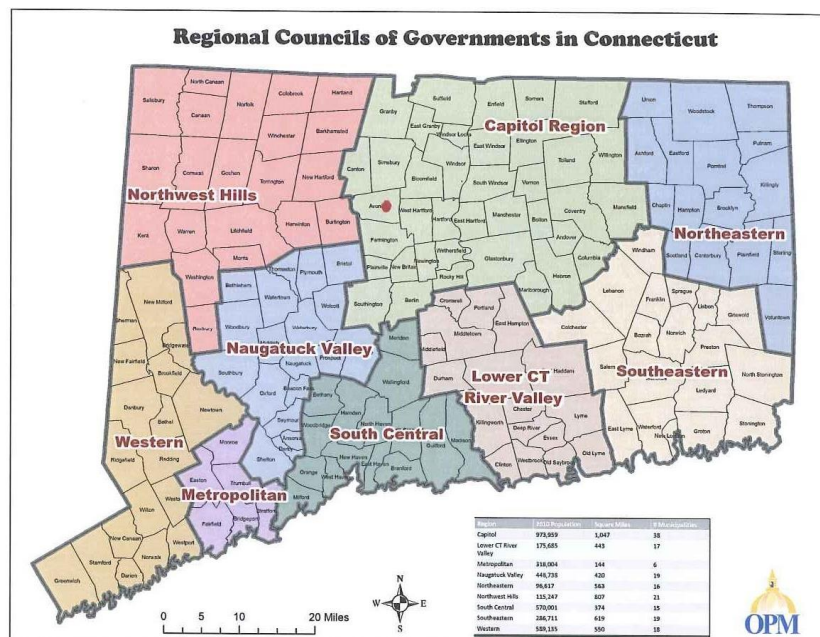


Avon is a picturesque New England Town that grew up along the wooded banks and meadows of the Farmington River. Avon is located in Hartford County in Central Connecticut, approximately 10 miles west of Hartford and is adjoined by the towns of Bloomfield and West Hartford to the east, Simsbury and Canton to the north, Burlington to the west, and Farmington to the south. The major transportation routes through Avon include Route 44 east and west and Routes 10/202, Route 167, and Route 177, north and south.

The topography of Avon is varied. The high-lands are in the easternmost portion of the Town. Avon Mountain on the West Hartford border is the most prominent feature with a peak elevation of 950 feet above sea level. The Town's western border with Burlington is delineated by the Farmington River. This part of Town also includes an area of higher elevation known as Huckleberry Hill. An area of lowlands located in the eastern third of the Town are part of the Central Farmington River Valley with the Farmington River flowing north through them.

The Town covers about 23.2 square miles. It has an average annual rainfall of 53" per year. The average daily maximum temperature is 63 °F and the average daily minimum is 42 °F.

Avon is part of the Capitol Region which is comprised of 38 towns in the Hartford area. Changes and growth trends within the City of Hartford have had an impact on growth and development in Avon. This will continue to be the case as we move into the future, although probably not as much as in the past. As suburban communities have taken on a more dominant role, Avon and the entire Farmington Valley area, consisting of the Towns of Avon, Canton, Farmington, Granby, and Simsbury, has become an employment center, shifting jobs from the core of Hartford to suburban areas. With the increase in the number of local jobs as well as increased opportunities to work from home, employment and commuting patterns have also changed.



Avon Denoted by a **Red Star** *

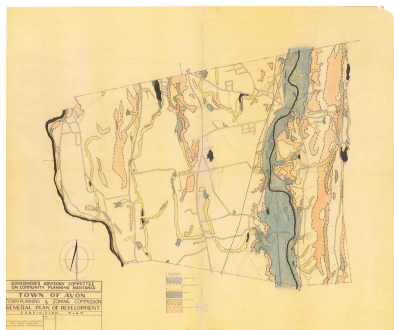
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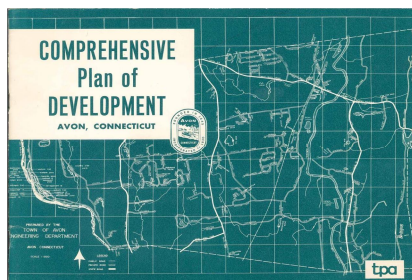
Avon is a community of well-maintained, single-family residences, attractive condominium and apartment developments, two planned office and light industrial parks, a substantial amount of retail development, good recreational opportunities, including significant areas of permanently protected open space, and a highly-ranked educational system.

Over 93% of Avon is currently developed for or dedicated to housing, commercial, industrial, institutional, recreation and open space uses. Approximately 6.5% of the Town is comprised of privately owned land which is currently undeveloped. Some of this undeveloped land is comprised of highly regulated floodplain, wetlands, and steep slopes. Chapter 3 presents a detailed breakdown of existing land uses and Chapter 7 presents information on future build out. As of 2014, there were approximately 7,650 housing units. According to the U.S. Census, the estimated 2014 population was 18,597.

Avon has a very desirable set of characteristics which make it a highly sought after place to live and work. Much of this character is derived from an adherence to, and the successful implementation of, land use policies contained in earlier Plans of Conservation and Development. The Planning and Zoning Commission is charged with the responsibility to prepare this Plan and then update it every 10 years. The Town's first Plan of Conservation and Development was adopted in 1956. Subsequent plans were adopted in 1968, 1979, 1991, and most recently in 2006 and amended in 2014.



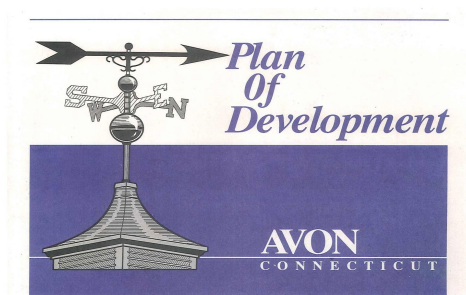
1956



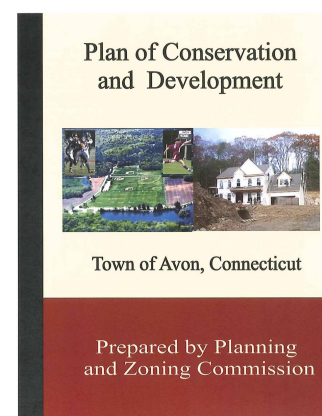
1968



1979



1991



2006



This Plan plays an important part in creating a long-term vision for how land should be developed, as well as preserved as open space. Through its implementation, using the principle tools available to the Commission which include zoning, subdivision, and inland wetland regulations, this vision may be realized. Since the preparation of the first Plan of Conservation and Development in 1956, there have been hundreds of goals established in these Plans that have been realized.

This long range planning has resulted in:

- The establishment of a network of roads that can safely and efficiently move traffic.
- A variety of housing choices including single family, cluster single family, condominiums, and rental apartments.
- Attractive retail shopping opportunities.
- Two business/office parks.
- Innovative changes to zoning regulations to promote an attractive, mixed use, walkable Town Center development within Avon Park North.
- Creation of significant areas of protected open space and an extensive network of hiking trails.
- Significant advancements in the protection of natural resources in the areas of aquifer protection, inland wetlands, floodplain management, and ridgetop protection.
- Preservation of important historic structures.
- Allocation and acquisition of land resources used to accommodate community facilities such as schools, the senior center, Town parks, and fields for active recreation.

The Planning and Zoning Commission also has an important regulatory function. The Commission must review individual applications from land owners who wish to develop their property. This Plan forms the basis for adopting regulations in an effort to implement the goals and policies set out in the Plan. The Planning and Zoning Commission is in some instances given a certain degree of discretion through its regulations when reviewing applications for development. In other instances, however, certain development activities are, by law, permitted as of right. In these circumstances, there is very little discretion given to the Commission and an application must be approved if all regulatory standards are satisfied.

The Commission acknowledges residents' general satisfaction with the manner in which Avon has developed and the special character which it maintains. The Commission is also aware that in many instances residents' sentiments are in opposition to new development in order to retain community character, protect the environment, and manage traffic.

However, the Planning and Zoning Commission does not legally have the right to simply stop development. Rather, Zoning Regulations must permit the "reasonable" development of privately owned property. Otherwise, in the event of a legal challenge, Connecticut courts will overrule the Commission with a finding of a "taking without just compensation". The Town, of course, has the option to purchase private property and limit development, such as the Town's decision to purchase the 317-acre Fisher Farm in 2002 and protect it as open space. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.



State enabling law is designed to ensure a process of orderly development. This Plan establishes a number of planning goals and policies. The Regulations enacted by the Commission are the mechanism to achieve these goals. This is a process that has served Avon very well. More growth will occur but in accordance with this Plan and established land use regulations. At the same time, natural resources will be protected, safe infrastructure built, housing opportunities created, commercial areas developed, and selected open space assets preserved.

This Plan is intended to be a working document to guide the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Residents of Avon in making decisions regarding land use, transportation, public services, recreation, open space, natural resources, business development, and housing, over the next decade.

The Plan also discusses certain capital needs relating to areas such as roads, sewers, and the construction of new or improved Town facilities. In some instances this plan can set the stage for future capital investments. Under Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes, significant capital projects which the Town Council decides to pursue must be first referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a finding of consistency with this Plan.

Requirements of a Plan of Conservation and Development

A Plan of Conservation and Development is required under Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) 8-23 to establish policies and goals related to both the development of land, as well as setting priorities for the conservation of land.

Connecticut Statutes state that the Plan shall:

- Be a statement of policies, goals, and standards for physical and economic development.
- Provide for a system of principal thoroughfares, sidewalks and multi-purpose trails.
- Promote coordinated development to have compact transit-accessible pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development patterns and land reuse.
- Recommend the most desirable use of land for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation and other purposes and include a map showing proposed land uses.
- Note inconsistencies with the following growth management principles: redevelopment and revitalization of commercial centers; expansion of housing opportunities and design choices; concentration of development around transportation nodes; conservation and restoration of the natural environment, cultural and historical resources and existing farmlands; protection of environmental assets critical to public health and safety; integration of planning across all levels of government.
- Make provision for the development of housing opportunities.
- Promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing.
- The Plan shall consider:
 - The need for affordable housing.
 - The need for protection of existing and potential drinking water supplies.
 - The use of cluster development and other development.
 - The State Plan of Conservation and Development (most recent Plan adopted in 2013).

- The Regional Plan of Development (Capitol Region Council of Governments most recent Plan adopted in 2014).
- Physical, social, economic, and governmental conditions and trends.
- The needs of the municipality, including the objectives of energy-efficient patterns of development.
- Protection and preservation of agriculture.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a concept that is embodied by every section of this Plan. A widely accepted definition is as follows:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Doing so must integrate and balance economic, environmental, and social goals”¹

Footnote: ¹1987 Brundtland Report World Commission on Environment and Development; sponsored by the United Nations.

Exhibit 1-1 illustrates the interaction of these variables.

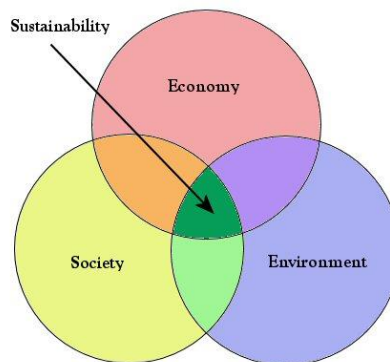


Exhibit 1-1 Sustainability Model Diagram

The main overall goal of this Plan is to create a dynamic balance between social well being, economic opportunity, and environmental quality within the context of the authority granted to the Commission under State law. Although this Plan is divided into 12 individual chapters, in order to place emphasis on a particular topic, in fact, no topic may be thought of as an isolated issue. Each must be integrated into a framework where it may be evaluated in context with all planning topics which are discussed in this Plan.

It can argued that the current regulatory framework that Avon follows (as prescribed by State law) sometimes forces the fragmentation of these issues. The preservation of wetlands, for example, is analyzed without any analysis of social or economic benefits. This Plan provides an opportunity to think about how conservation and development relate, and how, in some instances, compromises must be made to achieve what the Commission concludes are the most important goals.

Most Chapters of this Plan contain a discussion as to how its various components relate to the principles of sustainability. Where appropriate, specific recommendations are made concerning regulatory changes which warrant further discussion in order to advance these principles.

In general, this Plan addresses Environmental Sustainability by:

- Recommending changes/refinements to existing regulations in the areas of floodplain protection, ridgetop protection, inland wetland regulations, and aquifer protection.
- Recommending the adoption of regulations to manage stormwater in a more environmentally sensitive manner using a concept known as LID (Low Impact Development).
- Setting priorities for the acquisition/preservation of additional open space.
- Setting priorities for the management of existing open space assets and the construction of additional recreational trails.
- Recommending a reduction in the ratio of required parking.
- Creating opportunities for mixed-use developments that will allow residents to gain access to services, shopping, and recreation by walking and biking.

Economic Sustainability by:

- Creating opportunities for commercial and industrial development that reflects the present and projected needs of the residents and businesses of Avon.
- Carefully analyzing remaining vacant land parcels for innovative economic development opportunities.
- Recommending a reduction in the rate of required parking in certain instances which will increase redevelopment opportunities.
- Encouraging investments in high speed internet to facilitate business communications and the ability of employees to work from home.
- Encouraging the establishment of a micro grid for economic benefit and environmental sustainability.

And Social Sustainability by:

- Creating additional opportunities for a broad range of housing that can meet the needs of both younger and older buyers (a significant portion of Avon's population) and reflecting an increased interest in the ability to walk or bike for goods, services, and health.
- Recommending changes to make it easier to establish accessory apartments.
- Recommending ways to make Avon more pedestrian and bike friendly by prioritizing locations for new sidewalk construction, further study to promote the creation of bike lanes, and adding safer crosswalks at several key locations on Route 44.
- Encouraging the preservation of important historic structures which help define community character.

The Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) adopted the "Capital Region Plan of Conservation and Development 2014-2024" with an overall theme of creating a sustainable region. The Plan discusses ways that towns within the region can work together to accomplish these goals. In addition, with funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, CRCOG conducted a "Sustainable Land Use Code" project in 2014, which contains model land

use regulations in the areas of energy conservation; local food systems; compact mixed-use development; and housing diversity and affordability. Both the Regional Plan and the Sustainable Land Use Code Project may be viewed on their web page at www.CRCOG.org



The Planning Process

This Plan is the outcome of the work of the Planning and Zoning Commission, many other Town boards and commissions, Town Staff, consultants, and the residents of Avon. In preparing this Plan, all previous Plans of Conservation and Development, as well as eight (8) past special planning studies, were reviewed.

In order to gauge public opinion on issues relevant to this Plan, a statistically valid telephone survey was conducted by the survey research firm of GreatBlue Research. The survey was conducted during the month of December 2015. This survey consisted of 70 questions which were presented to 250 randomly selected residents. This selected group was of sufficient size to accurately represent the community with a margin of error of +/-5%. Participants were selected to fairly represent all age groups, genders, and geography. Survey methodology was selected to ensure statistically valid data. Questions were asked about policies relating to housing, open space, conservation, economic development, recreation, retail development, and proposed enhancements to Avon Town Center.



In addition, a notice was posted on the Town's webpage and a notification was sent to all subscribers of the town's email notification list. This notice informed residents that if they were not one of the randomly selected participants, they were still invited to participate by filling out the survey online. An additional 84 individuals participated in the survey in this manner. Although the respondents in this group were not randomly selected, the results were, in fact, very similar to the larger sample group, such that the 2 samples (representing a total of 334 participants) were aggregated for purposes of analysis.

Participants were exceptionally pleased with the quality of life in Avon, with 93% providing a rating of either excellent or good. When asked to indicate what the most important issues the Town was faced with in order to maintain this quality of life, the two most frequent responses were managing development/preserving open space (25%) and maintain the quality of schools (24%). A summary of the survey results are attached as Appendix A. Complete results including all questions and responses to each may be found on the Town's website www.avonct.gov. In addition, related portions of survey results are discussed in connection with individual Chapters.

Special Studies

The Planning and Zoning Commission has conducted eight (8) special planning studies over the past 35 years for specific areas of the Town which warrant special detailed review. These studies have resulted in actions that have contributed to the permitting of certain kinds of development, the preservation of valuable open space assets, and completion of important infrastructure. Many of the recommendations contained in these studies have been implemented over the years. In some instances, recommendations which have not yet been implemented are still relevant today. These include two architectural surveys conducted in 1997 and 2002; many goals established for Avon Center in 2005, which are just now being implemented; and recommendations for alternatives to manage stormwater runoff known as Low Impact Development, in a study done in 2011. **Table 1-1** presents a list of these studies and the year they were completed.

STUDY NAME	YEAR COMPLETED
Land Use and Circulation Study for Avon Park North	1980
Land Use Study	1986
Huckleberry Hill Land Use Study	1989
Land Use Study for Nod Road and Montevideo Road	1992
Town-wide Historic and Architectural Survey	1997
Avon Center Historic Inventory	2002
Avon Center Study	2005
Low Impact Development Study	2011

Table 1-1 Summary of Special Planning Studies

Work by the Commission and Public Participation

The Commission spent 13 months in the drafting of this Plan. A kickoff meeting was held by the Commission on October 13, 2015. Subsequent meetings were held on November 17, 2015, December 8, 2015, February 11, 2016, March 29, 2016, and May 17, 2016. Each of these meetings was open to the public. The preparation of this Plan is a very public process and, as a result, no aspect of this Plan was ever discussed in a closed session.

In accordance with State law a formal public hearing process began on October 18, 2016, and concluded on November 15, 2016, at which time this Plan was adopted by the Avon Planning and Zoning Commission.

Throughout the process various elements of this Plan were distributed to other Town Boards, and Commissions for comment. In addition, comments were sought from Department Managers employed by the Town.

How This Plan is Organized

This Plan is organized into 12 Chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Presents information on the Plan of Conservation and Development including the process of how this Plan was developed; Statutory requirements and challenges in maintaining community character; and information on a public opinion survey conducted by the Commission.

Chapter 2: Community profile

Presents information on population growth, population forecasts, work force data, income data, and household characteristics.

Chapter 3: Land Use

Presents data of existing land use based on 14 categories which are: single-family residences, multifamily residences, recreation and open space, business, industry, agriculture, churches and cemeteries, schools public and private, utilities, healthcare, government, water, rights of way, and vacant land.

Chapter 4: Natural Resources

Presents information on the Town's natural features, including floodplains, wetlands, aquifers, and ridgetops. Discusses challenges to protect these resources, recommended new regulations, as well as modifications to existing Regulations.

Chapter 5: Open Space and Recreation

Presents an inventory of existing open space assets and recommendations for prioritizing future preservation/acquisition. Also contains recommendations concerning future recreational trail development and a brief review of existing active recreation areas.

Chapter 6: Historic Resources

Summarizes two previous studies which inventoried historic resources along with a discussion about the importance of preserving these resources.

Chapter 7: Housing

Presents information on Avon's housing stock, housing growth by decade since 1960; an analysis of vacant land capacity for additional housing units leading to build out. Includes recommendations to utilize cluster zoning as a means to preserve open space and identifies areas where future multi-family housing may be appropriate.

Chapter 8: Public Facilities and Utilities

Presents information and recommendations regarding the public water supply, the Town's sanitary sewer system, and other public facilities.

Chapter 9: Business and Industry

Presents data on land currently used for business and industry, an analysis of vacant land currently zoned for business use, recommendations that may assist in the redevelopment of certain properties and the promotion of business growth and development.

Chapter 10: Transportation

Presents recommendations to improve the Town's road network. High priority areas are identified for roads needing improvements, new road construction, as well as the extension of temporary cul-de-sacs which are needed to complete the Town's road circulation system. This Chapter also includes a discussion about the challenges associated with Route 44 (Main Street), recommendations to expand the Town's system of sidewalks, and recommends further study to better accommodate bicycles on Town roadways.

Chapter 11: Future Land use Recommendations

This Chapter presents a discussion regarding future land use recommendations for key parcels.

Chapter 12: Consistency with Regional and State Plans

Compares the goals and policies of this Plan with those of the Capitol Region Plan of Conservation and Development 2014-2024 and the Connecticut Conservation and Development Policies Plan 2013-2018 as required by state law.

Defining Goals and Policies

Chapters 2 through 11 contain a set of recommended Goals and Policies at the conclusion of each chapter. The goals and policies of a Plan of Conservation and Development provide the framework for the Land use Plan. They are the written general philosophy, intentions, desires and the specific actions various boards and commissions may take to implement the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Goals and Policies contained in each Chapter are recommendations that should be utilized by the Planning and Zoning Commission in making decisions when reviewing applications for new development, zone changes, transportation improvements, open space preservation, recreation facilities, public facility needs and locations, utility locations, as well as places that merit special consideration because of their historic significance.

For purposes of this report, the terms Goals and Policies are defined as follows:

Goals: are overall philosophy statements of a very broad and inclusive nature that reflect the intent of the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Policies: are more specific statements following each goal that can be used as a basis for decision making and achieving objectives.

As noted earlier, although this Plan is divided into individual chapters, there are linkages between each. For example decisions regarding land use have impacts relating to transportation, the environment, and social well being. Decisions regarding housing have impacts regarding capital needs such as schools and the preservation of open space. This Plan is intended to be viewed as a single, cohesive document which recognizes that many recommendations have consequences which extend into other areas.



It is important to note that in some instances, final decision making on matters relating to land use is determined by other Boards or groups such as the Avon Town Council and Avon taxpayers. For example, a decision to purchase a significant parcel of open space consistent with this Plan must first be supported by the Avon Town Council and later supported at referendum by Avon taxpayers.

Our Commission has a great appreciation for the important role we play in helping to maintain the quality environment which residents value so highly. We hope that the goals and policy recommendations which follow will help Avon retain its very special community character while at the same time address forecasted needs.