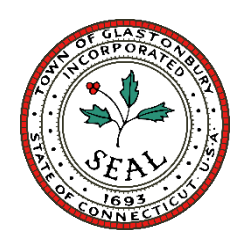# Village District Regulations

Initial Analysis for Town Plan and Zoning Commission

June 1, 2021

Introduction

- Town Council requested a preliminary report and recommendation from TPZ on establishing Village District Regulations in the following areas of the current Town Center Zone:

  - Along Main St. from Naubuc Ave./ New London Tpk. South to Rankin Rd.

  - Along Hebron Ave. from Main St. to Rt. 2

  - Along New London Tpk. From Salmon Brook to Rankin Rd.
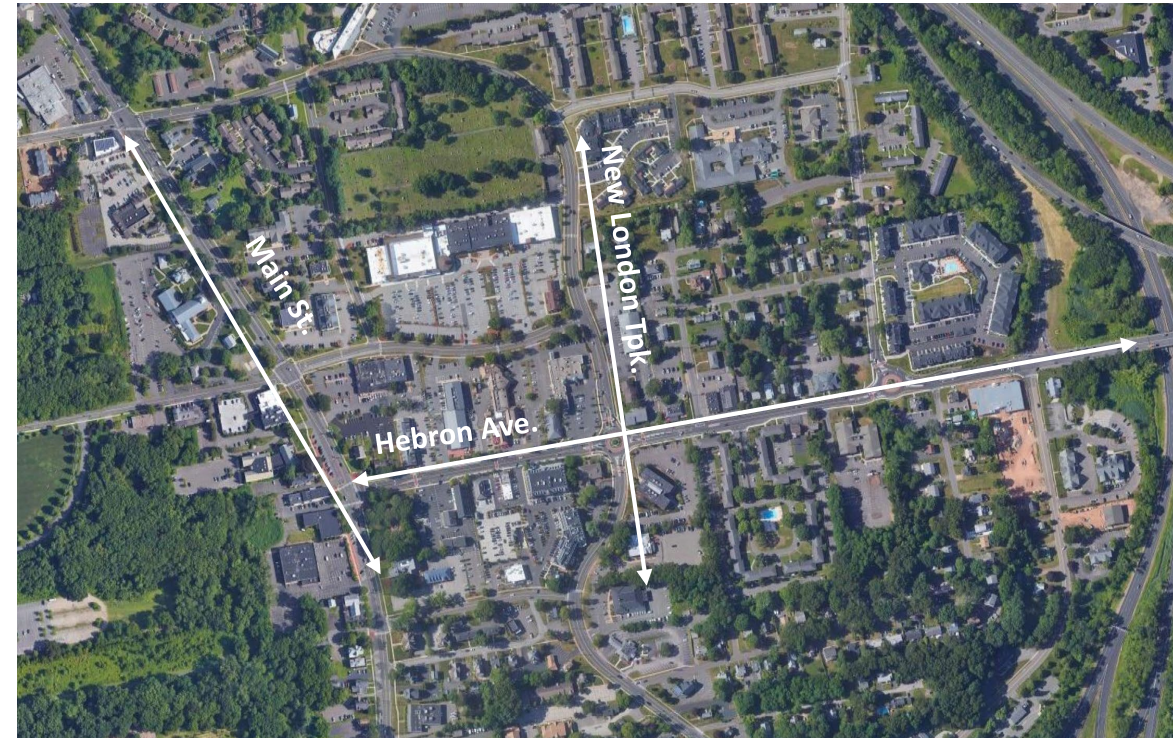
Contents of Initial Analysis

- Enabling Law

- POCD Analysis

- Town Center 2020 Plan Analysis

- Case Studies

- Analyses of Study Areas

- Process for Adopting Village District Regulations

- Alternatives

Enabling Law

- Village Districts are enabled by *CT General Statutes* Sect. 8-2j

- Zoning tool intended to protect the distinctive character of an area by regulating the design of new construction and substantial reconstruction

- Requires compatibility with design objectives and enables regulations that establish criteria around:

    - Design, materials, colors, and placement of buildings

    - Landscaping, lighting, and signage

    - Public views

    - Design, materials and locations of public streets

    - Other elements deemed appropriate

Compatibility Objectives per Sect. 8-2j

- Buildings and layouts must reinforce existing development and streetscape patterns

- Streets must connect with the existing street network

- Open spaces must reinforce existing open space patterns

- Significant site features, such as buildings or views must be integrated into site design

- Landscaping must complement existing landscape patterns

- Signs, lighting and accessory structures should support a common architectural theme

- Proportionate scale, massing and detailing relative to the district

Enabling Law

- A "Village District Consultant" reviews development and significant alteration proposals for consistency with the design standards established by the Village District regulations

  - The Village District Consultant can be a contracted architect, landscape architect or certified planner OR a committee consisting of at least one architect, landscape architect or certified planner

- Reviews must be provided to the Town Plan and Zoning Commission within 35 days of receipt of the application

- The Consultant's report becomes part of the public hearing record and is to be considered by the TPZ in making decisions on applications

POCD Analysis

- Sect. 8-2j specifically ties Village District regulations to distinct areas identified in the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

- 2018 POCD established the Town Center Planning Area (#4)

  - Also establishes the Central Business District within the Town Center as generally bound by Main St. from Rankin Rd. to Glastonbury Blvd, east to New London Tpk. - significantly overlaps with the areas under consideration for a Village District

  - The CBD is recognized as the commercial core of the Town Center Zone with a high concentration of retail, service and other business uses

POCD Supporting Policies

Town-Wide Policies

11. Town Center

d. Support high quality design through methods such as Form Based Zoning, Universal Design and Design Guidelines that promote context sensitive development and pedestrian friendly streetscapes.

Town Center Planning Area Policies

Residential and Mixed Use

7. Protect, maintain and enhance the streetscape trees and planting within the Town Center.

8. Encourage high quality design through methods such as Form Based Zoning and Design Guidelines that promote pedestrian friendly streetscapes and development in keeping with the size and architectural character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Historic Preservation

2. Continue to promote and support rehabilitation of older commercial buildings in the Central Business District that have architectural or historic interest.
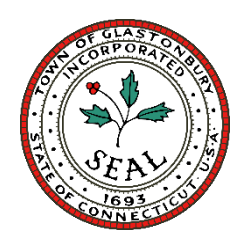
Economics

4. Continue efforts to enhance the streetscapes along Main Street and Hebron Avenue through landscaping and architectural improvements...
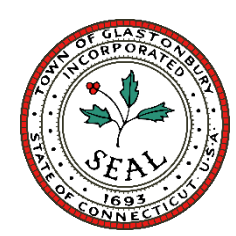
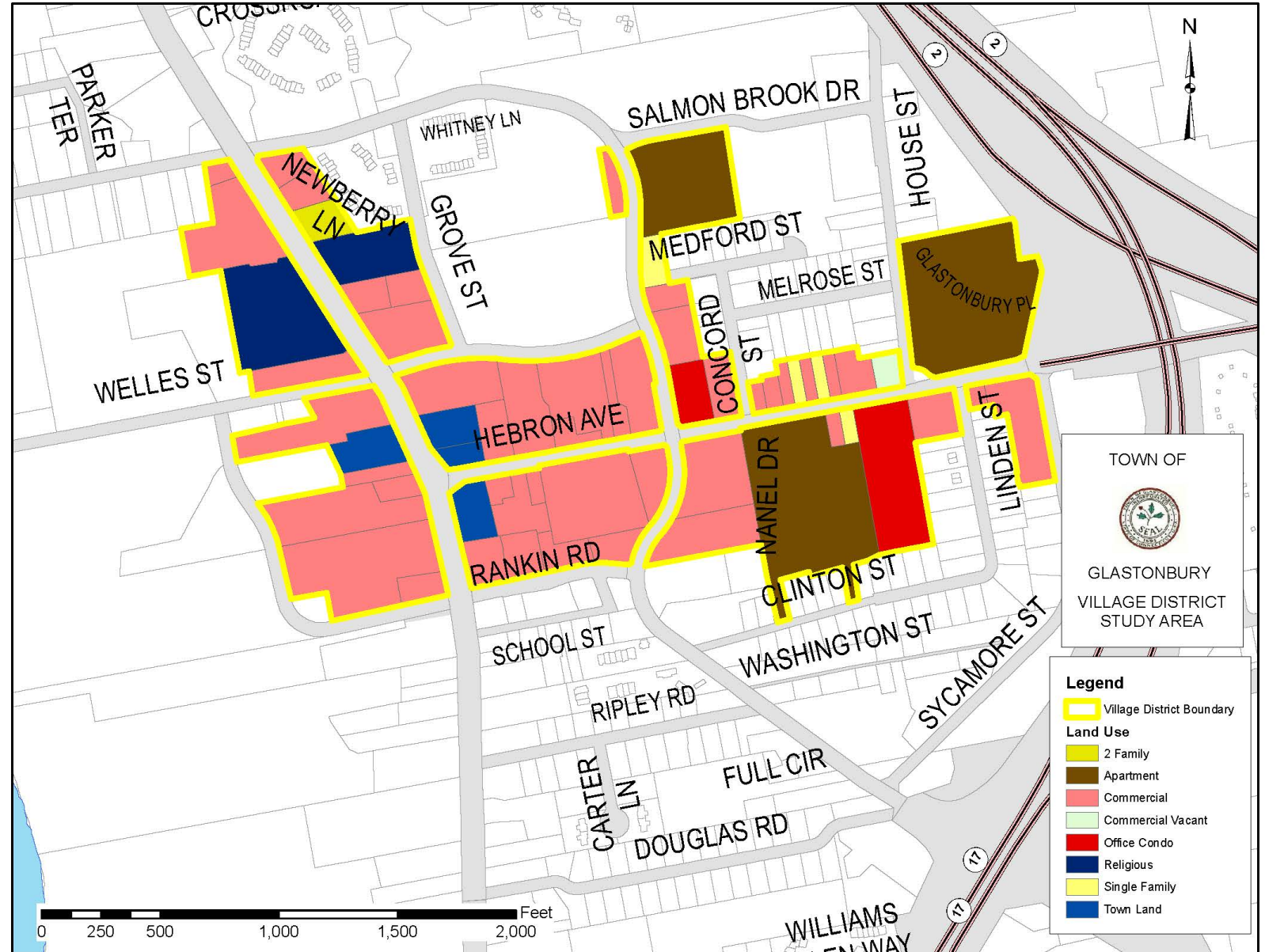# Town Center 2020 Plan Analysis

- This plan recommended design guidelines addressing many similar elements as Village Districts, including:

  - *Distinctive paving materials* - for sidewalks and crosswalks, including cobblestone, brick and scored concrete

  - *Trees* - along street frontages and within parking lots with recommended species including Honeylocust, Littleleaf Linden and Pin Oak

  - *Shrubs and seasonal plantings* - along the front of properties and within parking lots to provide screening, reduce headlight glare and enhance the pedestrian environment

  - *Street furniture and bus shelters* – furniture and amenities encouraged to be consistent with existing amenities and bus shelters to be upgraded

  - *Lighting and bollards* – decorative fixtures in keeping with existing amenities in the Town Center

  - *Signage* – Consistency with existing best practices in Town Center, minimal information to avoid clutter, grouped commercial signs with consistent materials, colors, type-face and character, low monument-style signs and upgrades to street signs consistent with existing historic light poles

  - *Historic resources* – encourages preservation of historic resources and opportunities to highlight the Town's history
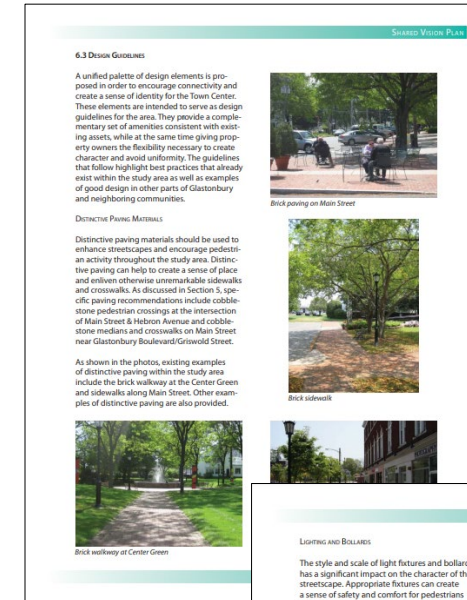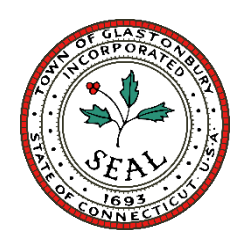
Study Area

- 64 properties encompassing nearly 79 acres

- Parcel sizes range from .2 to 7.2 acres with an average parcel size of 1.25 acres

- Predominant land use is commercial

- Some multi-family and institutional uses

TOWN OF

GLASTONBURY

VILLAGE DISTRICT STUDY AREA

Legend
⬚ Village District Boundary
Land Use
■ 2 Family
■ Apartment
■ Commercial
■ Commercial Vacant
■ Office Condo
■ Religious
■ Single Family
■ Town Land

Study Area

- Current development spans centuries

- Oldest structures more concentrated along Main St.

- Diversity of forms
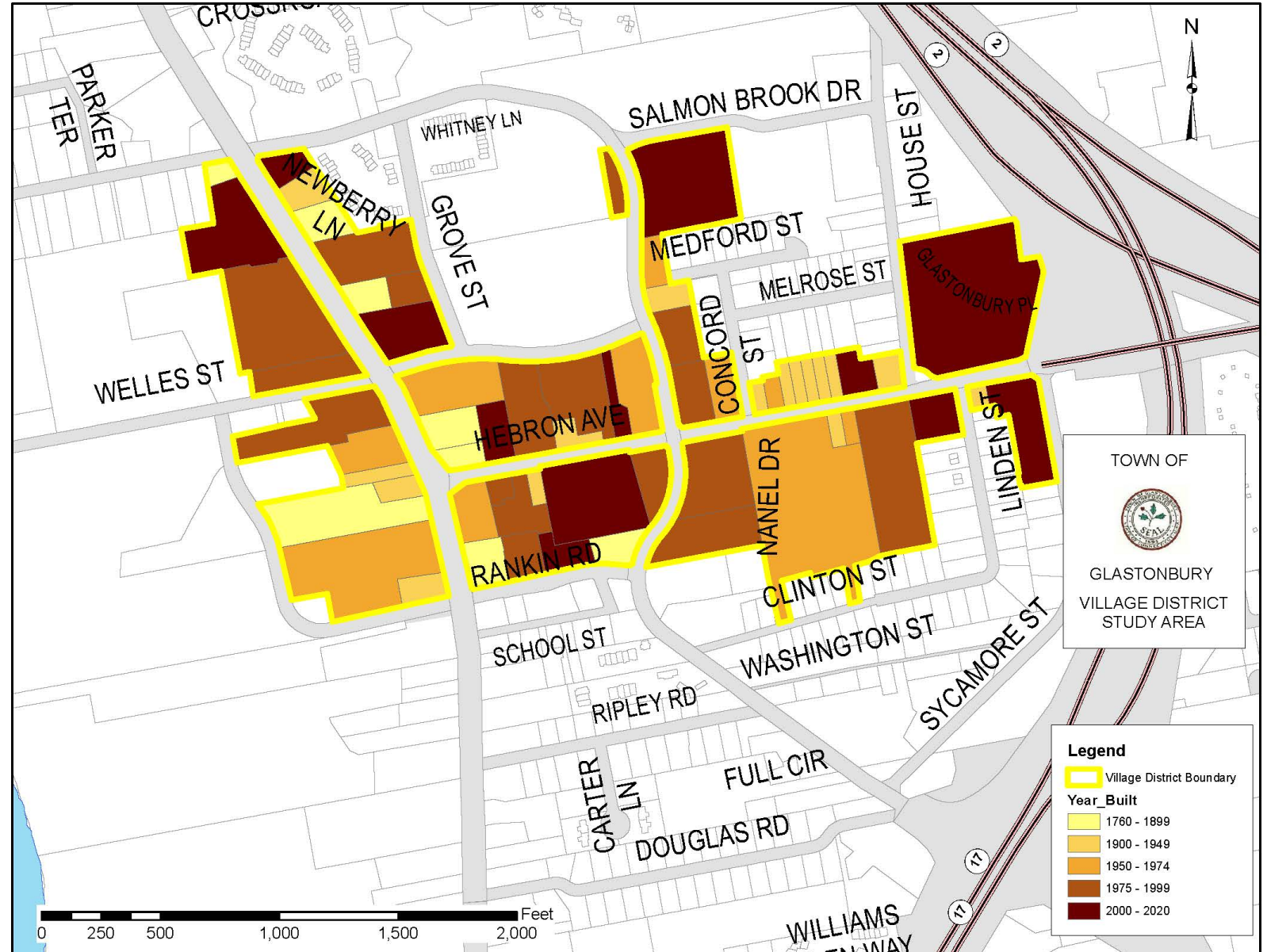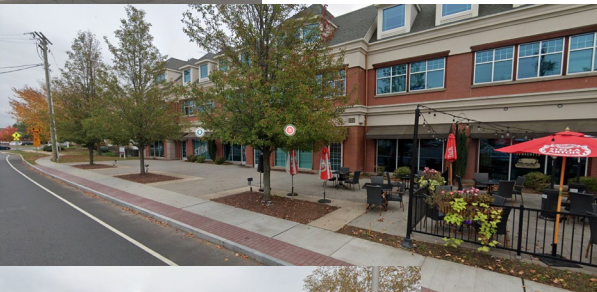
Case Studies

- At least 15 communities in Connecticut have established Village Districts

  - Brooklyn
  - Farmington
  - Kent
  - Lebanon
  - Ledyard

  - Madison
  - Middletown
  - New Canaan
  - Norwich
  - Old Lyme

  - Preston
  - Portland
  - Ridgefield
  - Southbury
  - Woodbridge

- Following is information from some of these communities with additional documentation provided in the Appendix

Case Studies - Farmington

- Two Village Districts: Unionville and Farmington Center

- Unionville adopted in 2004 as an overlay of the Unionville Center Zone

- Farmington Center adopted in 2012 as an overlay of the Town Center Zone

- Seven-member Design Review Advisory Committee – includes at least one architect or landscape architect, at least one property/ business owner and one resident of districts, and at least one at-large resident

- Basic design guidelines are incorporated in regulations, references made to books published in late 1908s and mid-1990s for further design guidance
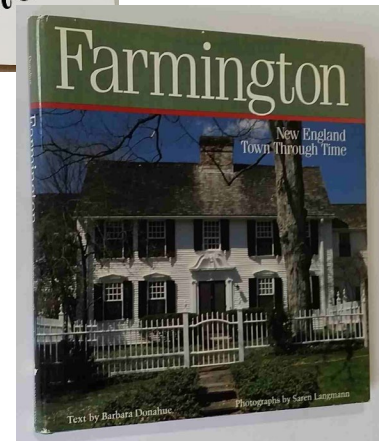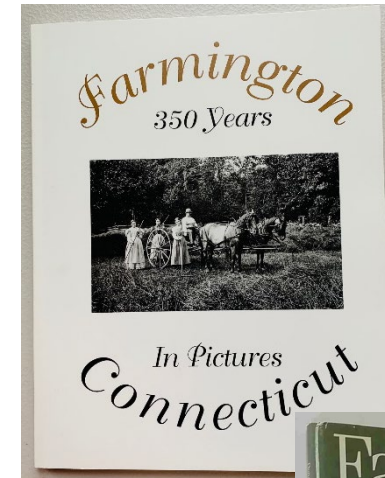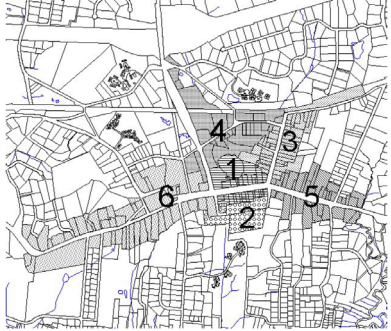
Case Studies - Madison

- Downtown Village District adopted in 2008 as an overlay to multiple zones – includes six distinct design sub-districts

- Design and Landscape Standards incorporated as an Appendix to regulations

- Nine-member Advisory Committee on Community Appearance – includes architect, landscaper or landscape architect (at least 2 members); planner with experience in design; land surveyor or civil engineer; artist or graphic designer; developer; member of the Chamber of Commerce; historic preservationist or member of the Madison Historical Society; and/or member-at-large

Case Studies - Norwich

- Village District Overlay adopted for Norwichtown in 2018 as an overlay zone over mostly commercial districts and adjacent to an historic district

- Establishes three-tier system of review:

  - Tier 1 Activities:
    - Sign, awning, lighting, public art/historical markers, solid waste, and recycling storage, fire exits, and handicapped access or fence.

  - Tier 2 Activities:
    - Replacement of stairs, accessory buildings, landscaping, minor additions of 200 square feet or less, sidewalks, siding and facades, or window and door replacement.

  - Tier 3 Activities:
    - New structures, major additions of over 200 square feet, new paved parking lots, scale roof mounted solar systems, and any application or site plan that requires approval from the Commission on the City Plan.
    - All proposals that don't adhere to Tier 1 or 2
    - All municipal improvements are automatically Tier 3

EARLY CLASSICAL REVIVAL
(1770-1830; locally to c. 1850)

Identifying features: "Entry porch (portico) dominating the front façade and normally equally in its height; porch roof usually supported by four simple columns (Roman Doric or Tuscan types) each with a shallow square base (plinth); the columns support a prominent centered gable; a semi-circular or elliptical fanlight normally occurs above the paneled front door; windows are aligned horizontally and vertically in symmetrical rows, usually five ranked on front façade, less commonly three ranked or seven ranked. Other defining features include: Two Story, One Story, and Gable Front and Wings."

Samuel Huntington Mansion, c. 1769, exterior altered c.1900
34 East Town Street

GOTHIC REVIVAL
(1840-1880)

Identifying features: "Steeply pitched roof, usually with steep cross gables (roof normally side gabled, less commonly front gabled or hipped; rarely flat with castellated parapet); gables commonly have decorated verge boards; wall surface extending into gable without break (eave or trim normally lacking beneath gable); windows commonly extend into gables, frequently having pointed arch (Gothic) shape; one story porch (either entry or full width) usually present, commonly supported by flattened Gothic arches. Other identifying features include: Centered Gable, Paired Gables, Front Gabled Roof, Asymmetrical, Castellated or Parapeted, and Polychromed."

Residence, c. 1890 65 Town Street

City of Norwich Design Guid

Example of an exposed utility structure which is not encouraged

Example of an appropriately shielded utility structure

Parking
a. Use hard-surfaced materials that provide an aesthetic alternative to bituminous concrete for parking areas.
b. Use materials that are consistent with the historic character of the Village District, such as cobblestone, brick, compacted stone dust or materials which imitate these design elements.
c. Locate parking in secondary rather than prominent locations. Parking in the rear of the building is preferred. Parking in the front yard is inappropriate.
d. Place parking areas at the side or rear of structures; partially concealed with landscaping fencing or walls; and/or be broken into separate sections of parking rather than large and highly visible lots. Alternative parking materials are encouraged.
e. Visually reduce large expansive lots with the use of landscaped buffers and berms.
f. Parking layouts should balance the functional requirements of vehicle circulation with provisions for pedestrian amenities.
g. Create a strong streetscape edge by locating majority of parking behind buildings.
h. Provide vehicle barriers (e.g. curbs, low fences, etc.) to protect and not obstruct adjacent walkways.

An example of breaking up pavement with greenspace

Accessory Buildings
a. Accessory structures shall be designed to incorporate and/or mimic architectural elements of

City of Norwich Design Guidelines | Page 10

Case Studies - Portland

- Town Center Village District adopted in 2008 as an overlay covering the B-3 General Business Zone, and one large parcel in the RMD Residential, Multifamily Zone at the southwest end of Main Street

- The Town Center Village District Regulations specify permitted uses within the zone and establish general design guideline and compatibility criteria for new construction and additions to existing buildings.

- The Town of Portland Planning Zoning Commission adopted The Village District Design Guidelines as a separate document.

- Three-tiered system of review for projects:

  - Tier 1 – Minor architectural improvements such as signs and exterior lighting

  - Tier 2 – Minor additions or site improvements that do not alter lot coverage, and do not alter impervious (paved) coverage more than 5%

  - Tier 3 – New buildings and substantial rehabilitation projects.

- Certified Planners from the Lower Connecticut River Valley Council of Governments review Tier 1 and 2 projects. A contracted consultant reviews Tier 3 projects

Case Studies

- Design standards from case study communities are available on Town website
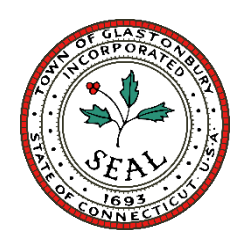
- Go to TPZ agenda page for June 1, 2021 meeting

Process to Adopt

- Engage property owners in discussion

- Inventory the structures, streetscape, landscape, and settings of the district and/or any sub-districts – to serve as the basis for establishing district boundaries and design standards. An architect and/or landscape architect is best suited for conducting the inventory and developing design standards.

- Decide on "Village District Consultant" – new committee? Revamped Beautification Committee? Contracted professionals?

- Consider in context of current development application review process – minimize redundancies and potential conflicts

- Draft Zoning Map and Regulations will need to be prepared and taken through the typical text and map amendment process involving the TPZ and Town Council

- No development applications would be subject to the regulations until regulations are adopted

Potential Alternatives

- Advisory design guidelines
  - Similar to guidelines that might be adopted with a Village District; however, adopted as a guidance document only
  - Provide clear direction to applicants and decision-makers within the existing special permit with design review process
  - Still requires inventory and study to recommend the design standards
- Form-based code
  - Zoning regulations that focus on achieving a predictable physical form through layout and design standards
  - Shift away from use and density provisions with the expectation that uses will change over time
  - Intensive study to develop appropriate standards administered through development approval process