

1. Introduction and Regional Context

Role of the Plan of Conservation and Development and the Planning Process

In a successful long-term planning process, a municipality reflects upon its past, appraises its present, and formulates community-supported and actionable plans for the future. The process itself results in a comprehensive planning document that serves as a long-range guide to future development.

The Town of East Hartford last updated its Plan of Conservation and Development (“POCD,” or “Plan”) in 2014, in conformance with Connecticut General Statutes (CGS), Title B, Chapter 126, Section 8-23, which requires each municipality to review its plan every 10 years. POCDs are commonly described as cookbooks, toolboxes, and blueprints, all providing guidance and strategies for the municipal future. The planning process is itself a critical part of the update. The process involves research and assessment tasks, reviews of past plans and their recommendations, analyses of current conditions, identification of strengths and weaknesses, and a clear summary of the actions needed to most effectively address issues and build on assets. POCDs look at the appropriate type and intensity of development, provision of community facilities and services, the need for housing and economic development strategies, the components of an effective transportation system, and preservation of important environmental and cultural assets.

Although POCDs set forth recommendations for a Town’s future, they are not in themselves laws or regulations. Recommendations are implemented through zoning laws and other land-use regulations, capital expenditures and ongoing planning. In addition, the plan enables the Town to influence decisions by State agencies (such as ConnDOT, the state Department of Transportation) and the regional planners at CRCOG (Capitol Region Council of Governments), to strengthen the Town’s ability to attract State dollars for projects that support the plan.

In mid-2023, the Town of East Hartford began the process of reviewing and updating its 2014 POCD. In embarking on this update, the Town sought to build on the prior Plan, retaining a comparable structure and updating information on conditions and trends as needed. However, this 2024 POCD incorporates a new vision statement and topical goals, to fully ground the recommendations in community input and direction. In addition, building on a nascent revitalization of the Silver Lane commercial corridor that arose out of the 2014 POCD and subsequent planning efforts, the updated 2014 Plan includes a chapter focused on the Founders Plaza portion of the Connecticut River waterfront. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the area and lays out planning principles to guide the future zoning and development and facilitate a vibrant, mixed-use community that is well-connected to the fabric of East Hartford and the region.

The approximately yearlong POCD update process was closely coordinated with Town staff and the Planning and Zoning Commission and included robust stakeholder engagement and three public workshops to gain consensus on Plan vision and goals, review draft chapters, and gather input on and test ideas for the new content of the Plan. In addition, upon completion of various draft elements of the Plan, pertinent documents were posted on the Town’s website for citizen review and comment.

Many relevant Town studies and plans were reviewed and incorporated into the updated Plan. These included both the 2003 and 2014 POCDs, the 2023 Affordable Housing Plan, various Silver Lane

redevelopment plans and documents, draft planning documents for the ConnDot Greater Hartford Mobility Study, the 2021 Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) Complete Streets Plan, and the 2019-2024 Capitol Region Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, among other CRCOG plans. In addition, the consultant team obtained Town reports and data from departments and boards and committees, to develop an understanding of existing conditions and trends, as well as municipal priorities.

Planning Vision

An overarching vision for the POCD was developed based on input at the first public workshop and online visioning survey; it seeks to capture where East Hartford is today and what it seeks to be as a community. The following vision statement is meant to frame the POCD, a set of topic-specific goals, and the planning recommendations that are presented in the chapters:

East Hartford's tapestry of neighborhoods, business and employment nodes, and natural and municipal resources create a unique and diverse community that combines suburban living and an urban vibe. Our vision is that all residents can enjoy the highest quality of life balanced with economic prosperity: with thriving neighborhoods, an effective and accessible transportation network, a range of goods and services in attractive settings, and excellent community facilities and services.

East Hartford's History

Occupying part of the lands once inhabited by the Podunk Indians, the area that became East Hartford saw its first permanent colonists in 1635, when Thomas Hooker and his followers came from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to found the City of Hartford. At that time, the east side of the Connecticut River was part of Hartford and was initially settled about 1640, with early settlers including William Goodwin, Thomas Burnham, and William Pitkin. The first petition by residents to establish a separate town was rejected by the General Assembly in 1726, followed by the submission of several more petitions, until the Assembly ultimately gave its approval in 1783 to the incorporation of East Hartford. The Town then received its Charter from the state on the land area taken from Hartford.

During its early years, East Hartford's municipal meetings were held in the basement of the First Congregational Church in the center of town at Main Street and Connecticut Boulevard. The Town would receive its first meeting hall through a bequest by Jonathan Wells in 1885, on a site slightly north of the town center, and East Hartford's first public library would be constructed in 1888-1889 by the Raymond family to the south.

East Hartford adopted its first Plan of Development in 1927, followed by its first building and zoning codes in 1929. By 1937, the Town was providing police and fire protection, had established a public school system and built its first high school, and built a new Town Hall at its present location. A picture postcard around that time looking to the north of the new Town Hall depicted a Main Street lined with elms, grand old homes, and several blocks of storefronts.

However, the town center at Main Street would be left behind with the 1929 arrival and subsequent growth of Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. Tobacco fields in this area made way for housing, as the company grew to employ 40,000 during the war years. Construction of the I-84/Route 2 "mixmaster" interchange in the 1950s created a highway barrier, cutting East Hartford in two. The 1960s saw a proliferation of suburban-scaled subdivisions which today house many Town residents.

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East Hartford has continued to plan for its future throughout the past decades. Plans of Development were prepared in 1960, 1980, 1990, 2003, and 2014, while an interim plan titled *East Hartford at the Crossroads* was prepared in 1970. Population in East Hartford reached its peak in 1970 at 57,583, declining in each subsequent census period until 2010, when it recovered to a pre-1990 level. Reduced employment at Pratt & Whitney, out-migration to surrounding areas in the region, and ongoing out-of-state migration all contributed to this population decrease.

Recent years have presented new directions for East Hartford. New businesses at Rentschler Field are providing the Town with new jobs and a boost to its tax base, several key commercial corridors are seeing revitalization, Goodwin University has created a source of activity along the southern riverfront, and the rest of the developed waterfront is primed for a rebirth.¹

Regional and State Planning Context

The Capitol Region encompasses some 800 square miles surrounding the urban center of Hartford. The region is predominantly suburban, but nearly a third of the towns in the region can be characterized as rural. The Regional Context Map in Figure 1 shows East Hartford's location at the center of the regional transportation network, with I-84 and I-384 converging at the "mixmaster" interchange. Though largely suburban in nature, East Hartford, with a 2020 population of 51,045, is somewhat more urban – with a range of land uses, a fully developed infrastructure and connections to the regional mass transit system – than its neighboring communities of Glastonbury, Manchester, and South Windsor. This can be attributed to East Hartford's proximity to the region's financial center and State capital at Hartford; accessibility from three bridge crossings of the Connecticut River; and the boom in growth of the manufacturing sector in the post-World War II years, led by Pratt & Whitney. A closer look at East Hartford's development from a land-use perspective is provided in Chapter 3 of this Plan. The following section discusses the Town's place within the regional planning context.

Regional Planning Context

East Hartford is one of 38 member municipalities comprising the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) planning region (see Figure 1). The region's 2010 population was about 976,250, with some 121,054, or 12%, of its residents living in Hartford. As the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the CRCOG conducts long-term transportation planning for the Capitol Region. The CRCOG's most recent regionwide POCD, adopted in 2014, is guided by six key themes, which are unchanged from the 2009 regional POCD:

- Focus new regional development in areas in which existing and planned infrastructure can support that development.
- Support efforts to strengthen and revitalize Hartford, the Capitol Region's central city, and also support the revitalization of older, urbanized areas throughout the region.
- Develop in a manner that respects and preserves community character and key natural resources.

¹ Adapted from the 2014 Plan of Conservation and Development and "About East Hartford," by Municipal Historian Raymond Johnson, available at <http://easthartfordct.gov>.

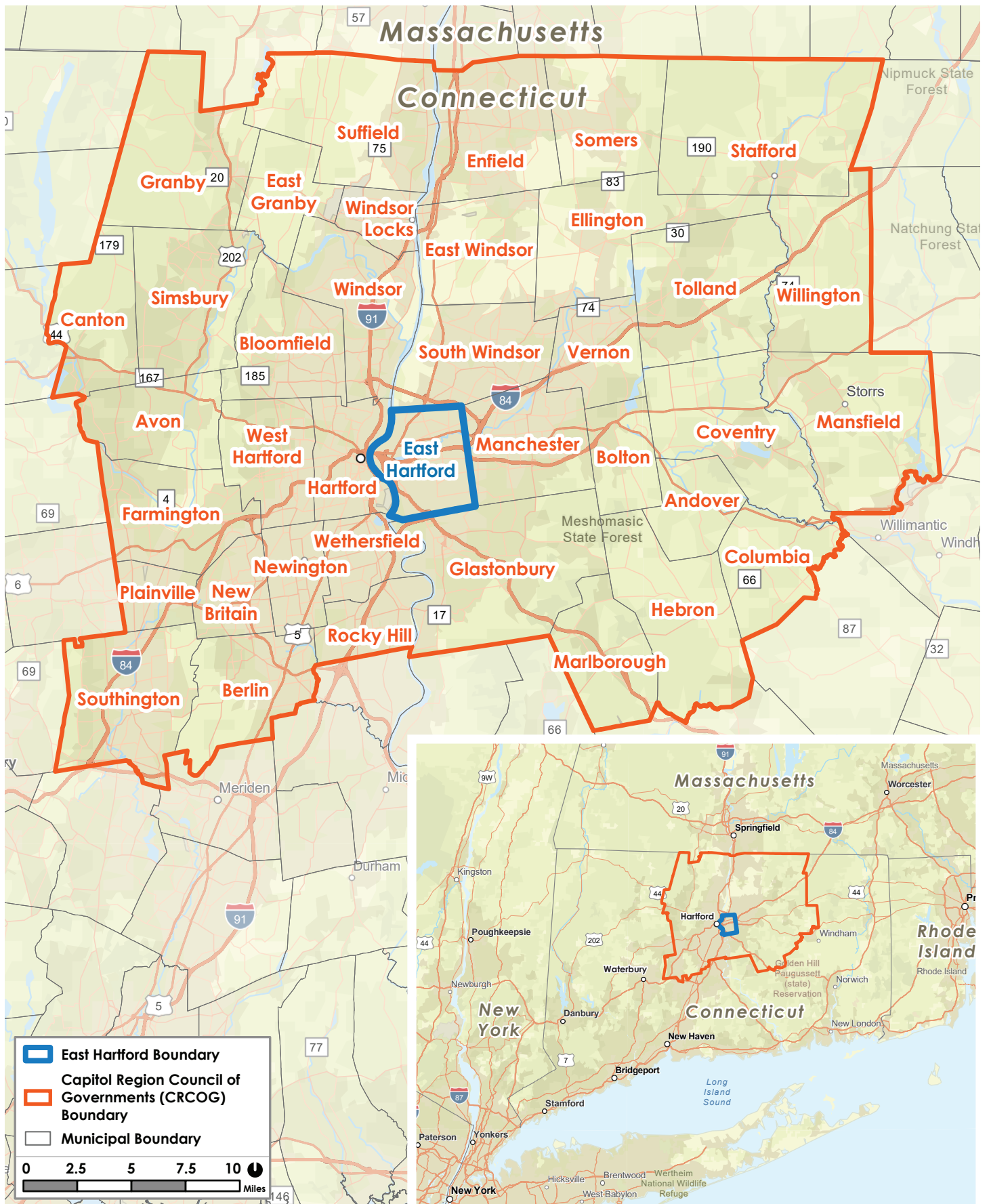


Figure 1: Regional Context

Town of East Hartford POCD

- Implement open space and natural resource protection plans that acknowledge and support the multi-town nature of our natural systems.
- Support the creation of new employment and housing opportunities, and transportation choices, to meet the diverse needs of our region's citizens.
- Encourage regional cooperation in the protection of natural resources, the revitalization of urban areas, and economic development.

The CRCOG POCD does not contain recommendations specific to East Hartford, but its discussion of "Municipal Focus Areas," for the Town supports the goals of its 2014 POCD to revitalize economic opportunity areas, preserve neighborhoods and historic assets, and redevelop commercial corridors. In addition, the CRCOG POCD contains a set of overall goals that may be applicable, listed on the following page. As with the overall planning themes, these goals are largely unchanged from CRCOG's 2009 regional POCD. Of note, a new set of goals for climate change has been added. CRCOG is in the process of updating its POCD; a draft is expected in spring 2024.

CONSERVATION GOALS

Natural Resource Conservation

- Protect air, water and soil quality in the region
- Grow and develop in harmony with natural resources
- Promote active natural resource stewardship

Watersheds & Water Quality

- Improve and maintain water quality
- Protect water supply and increase water conservation efforts
- Reduce nonpoint source pollution
- Continue combined sewer overflow and point-source pollution discharge reductions
- Use innovative wastewater treatment techniques for new developments

Open Space & Farmland Preservation

- Support protection of more open space in the region
- Encourage preservation of farmland in the region
- Encourage preservation of declassified water company land as open space
- Coordinate and prioritize open space preservation throughout the region
- Expand and protect open space along major rivers

Food Systems & Food Insecurity

- Preserve and look for opportunities to reclaim the Capitol Region's working lands
- Improve regional residents' access to food resources
- Improve the health and nutrition of the region's population
- Reduce environmental impacts of the food system

DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Climate Change

- Connect communities with tools and resources to address climate change
- Strengthen and broaden CROG's network of partnerships to address climate change
- Bolster the regional approach to climate change
- Continue to work toward greater transportation options in the Capitol Region in an effort to mitigate the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels in the state

Sustainable Land Use and Zoning

- Guide growth to regional centers and areas of established infrastructure

- Increase sustainable redevelopment and infill development efforts
- Revise zoning and subdivision regulations to address local and regional land use concerns

Public Water and Sewer Service

- Ensure an adequate and high quality water supply
- Continue reduction of environmental impacts of sewage discharge
- Use existing water and sewer infrastructure to guide future growth
- Balance water supply and ecosystem considerations

Transportation

- Provide a range of viable transportation options within the region
- Improve interregional and interstate transportation
- Coordinate land use, environmental and transportation efforts
- Anticipate and plan for future transportation needs

Housing

- Increase the range of choice in housing for people of all incomes and all ages, but especially for those who have the least choice in achieving their locational preference
- Enforce Federal and State fair housing laws and promote fair housing through the creation of housing opportunities
- Encourage and support the maintenance of viable residential neighborhoods
- Support preservation of the region's rental housing stock, and the expansion of housing opportunities for renters
- Continue to improve the Capitol Region transportation system in order to better link housing, jobs and services, thus expanding individuals' housing choices

Economic Development

- Revitalize Hartford as the economic, residential, entertainment and cultural center of the Capitol Region
- Coordinate and promote regional land use, infrastructure and fiscal policies for economic development
- Increase the recognition of a regional identity
- Maintain a focus on workforce development
- Support and improve regional business development strategies and efforts

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