

East Hartford 2024 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update

Ideas Wall Summary

November 2023 – February 2024

Prepared on behalf of:

Town of East Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission

Prepared by:

BFJ Planning
115 5th Avenue
New York, NY 10003



BFJ Planning

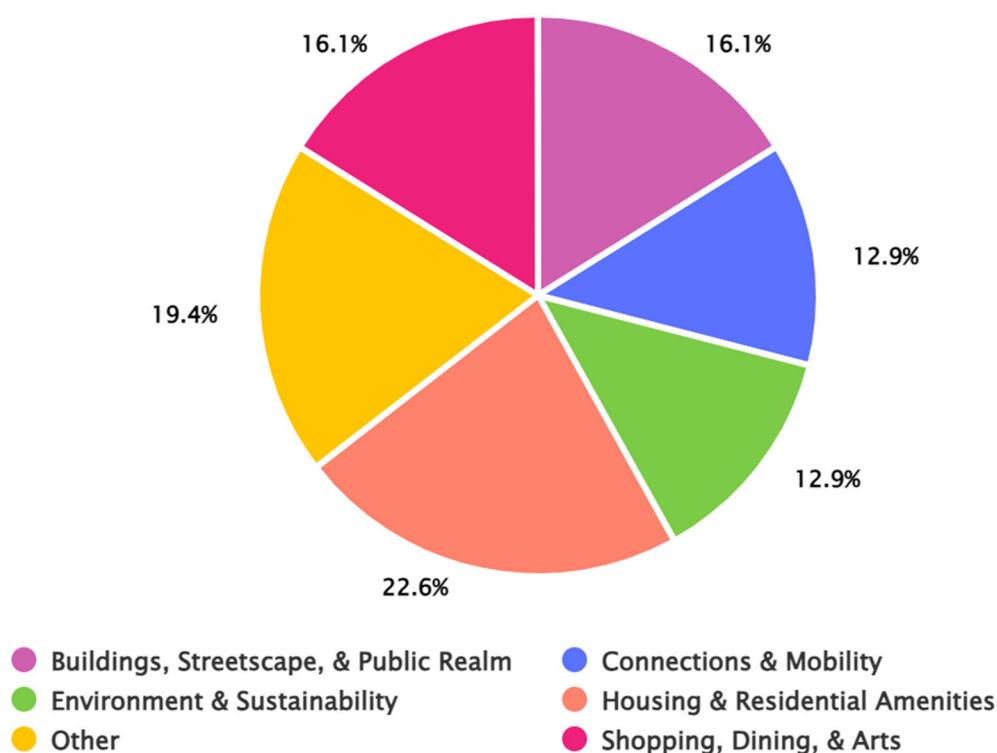
Town of East Hartford 2024 POCD Update
Ideas Wall Summary

March 19, 2024

Summary

As part of the Town of East Hartford 2024 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update, the Town of East Hartford and the BFJ Planning team launched an interactive online Ideas Wall where residents were able to share their ideas on how to improve East Hartford in the next 10 years and beyond. This tool provided an opportunity for the community to express their ideas around various topic areas: (1) Housing and Residential Amenities, (2) Buildings, Streetscapes, and Public Realm, (3) Environment and Sustainability, (4) Shopping, Dining, and the Arts, (5) Connections and Mobility, and (6) Other Category. Community members could select one of the six categories, post an idea, and interact with comments made by others.

The engagement tool was open for about three months (November 28, 2023, through February 23, 2024) and made accessible in multiple languages on the Town's POCD website. In total, the Ideas Wall received 35 comments and 215 visits from 11 unique visitors. The top four categories that saw the most comments were (1) Housing and Residential Amenities, (2) Other Category, (3) Buildings, Streetscapes, and Public Realm, and (4) Shopping, Dining, and the Arts, as illustrated in the pie chart below.



East Hartford POCD Ideas Wall, Total Comments by Category Type, 2024.

Below is an overview of the key recommendations, organized by topic area.

- **Buildings, Streetscapes, and Public Realm**

- Educational and Recreational Spaces

- Introduce a Boys and Girls Club at each side of the Town to provide families with another option for afterschool programming (i.e., homework help, workforce or college training, youth development, etc.) for school-aged children from kindergarten to 8th Grade.
 - Investigate the potential to create a year-round sports complex for all sports. There is an opportunity to combine a sports complex with a learning and enrichment center, such as a Boys and Girls Club.
 - Explore the opportunity to rent out the Pratt & Whitney Stadium at Rentschler Field for activities or events, such as summer concerts, at affordable rents.
 - Consider adding a sign at the entrance of Rentschler Field to promote upcoming events.

- Streetscapes

- Enhance the streetscapes of downtown and other key commercial corridors to create a more walkable and enjoyable environment for pedestrians to patronize local businesses.
 - Create improved accessible walking and biking paths between parks and open spaces to public bus stops, so residents can use public transit to reach parks and open spaces.
 - Improve the look and feel of sidewalks along residential streets off Burnside Avenue and Main Street. Improvements could include maintaining overgrown bushes, replacing broken sidewalks, and adding curbing where it is missing.

- Zoning and Land Uses

- Explore zoning code revisions in the downtown area to allow for a higher maximum building height.
 - Evaluate the creation of a detailed landscaping and zoning plan for Burnside Avenue and Silver Lane to protect the residential and historic nature of these corridors.
 - Study the creation of mixed-use zoning districts throughout the Town that encourage more variety in building types, sizes, and uses.
 - As a general statement, when the Town considers major investments into developments, changes to land use, and compares relative strength of commerce categories, it's critical that we consider the taxable value per acre as a metric. The Town is responsible for long term maintenance costs such as road resurfacing that the taxable land use must be capable of supporting decades into the future. We should make smart choices regarding where these maintenance costs should be solvent vs. subsidized.

- **Connections and Mobility**

- Roadway Design and Parking

- Modify roadway design in residential neighborhoods by incorporating traffic calming strategies to assist with lowering vehicle speeds. Some traffic calming strategies could include examples found on the Global Designing Cities Initiative website linked [here](#).
 - Study the traffic circulation patterns in the downtown area to ensure the walking and cycling paths are safe and comfortable for pedestrians and cyclists.
 - Continue to perform snow removal clearing on public walkways, cycling paths, and roadways on a timely manner.
 - Develop a thorough parking study to understand parking lot usage and need.
 - Explore revising the minimum parking requirements to reflect current and future needs.

Alternate Modes of Transportation

- Explore and improve the existing public bus system stops and routes to ensure all residential neighborhoods have access to a nearby public bus stop to reach commercial corridors, parks, open spaces, and other key destinations.
- Enhance the public bus system with universal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, reliable on-time service, and high-frequency bus service.
- Study the potential to create dedicated bus lanes along major roadways.
- Prioritize public transit and alternate modes of transit infrastructure rather than personal vehicle infrastructure (i.e., parking) in any future new development projects, such as Founders Plaza and Rentschler Field.
- Evaluate the feasibility of developing a light rail system that connects areas in the Town with nearby municipalities. This study should include a cost benefit analysis.

• **Environment and Sustainability**

Parks and Open Spaces

- Create accessible playground spaces for families and children of all abilities, as seen at Nevers Park in South Windsor, CT.
- Continue active efforts to preserve the Hockanum River Linear Park as a recreational facility for residents and home for wildlife.
- Explore the creation of new public spaces throughout the Town, such as creating a plaza in the downtown area, to create more walkable areas.

Resiliency

- Develop climate change adaptation strategies to strengthen the Town's future resiliency. These strategies should include ways to mitigate the impacts of transportation challenges, such as improving the public bus system, exploring additional public transit options (i.e., light rail system), and enhancing walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Establish a disaster preparedness plan to mitigate the impacts of severe weather events and natural disasters.

• **Housing and Residential Amenities**

Housing

- Increase the variety of housing options, including “missing middle” and affordable housing.
- Consider the following suggested modifications to the zoning code regulations to allow for more variety in housing types:
 - Increase density on a lot-by-lot scale.
 - Allow R-1, R-2, and R-3 housing types to be permitted in either of the three zoning districts.
 - Include mixed-use areas to allow appropriately scaled businesses within higher density residential neighborhoods.
- Look into ways to lower property tax for Town residents, especially the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- Provide Town residents with resources on potential funding streams to assist with home renovation.

Suggested Goals for the Housing Chapter of the 2024 POCD

- Support the progress towards creating resilient, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhoods.

- **Shopping, Dining, and the Arts**

- Desired Land Uses

- Expand key community serving uses such as grocery stores, restaurants, and retail, especially along Silver Lane (i.e., Charter Oak Mall and Main Street).
 - Consider the potential to create a small marina along the Town's riverfront.

- Economic Development

- Explore economic development strategies to make the downtown area more of a destination for residents and visitors. One strategy could include creating incentives for existing businesses to relocate to the downtown area.
 - Identify and attract businesses that are needed by residents and visitors from neighboring municipalities (i.e., Glastonbury and Manchester) to boost the local Town economy.

- **Other Category**

- Accessibility

- Ensure accessibility for all residents is imbedded into all aspects of Town, such as ramps, parking, and playgrounds.
 - Encourage offices to incorporate Braille translations onto their office doors.
 - Consider using smooth ground surfaces for commonly travelled areas to make it easier for those residents using wheelchairs, canes, walkers, and those with unseen disabilities. Some ground surfaces, such as brick, cobblestone, and wood shavings in a playground area, are not easily accessible to all residents.