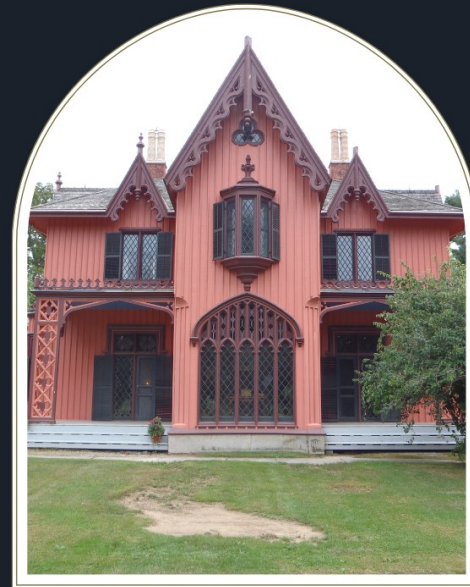


NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2024-2029



📞 860-774-1253

🌐 necceg.org

📍 125 Putnam Pike, Dayville, CT
06241



NECCOG

Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

Ashford - Brooklyn - Canterbury - Chaplin - Eastford - Hampton - Killingly - Plainfield -
Pomfret - Putnam - Scotland - Sterling - Thompson - Union - Voluntown - Woodstock

Results through Regionalism

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREPARED BY

Anna Shugrue, Regional Economic Development Coordinator & Delia P. Fey, AICP, Senior Regional Planner

With GIS support from Jim Larkin, Director of Regional Planning & David Bitler, Regional GIS Analyst

CEDS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

- Carly DeLuca, former Putnam Director of Economic and Community Development*
- Mary Calorio, Killingly Town Manager*
- Ken Rapoport, Azuluna Foods*
- Alison Dvorak, Executive Director at Senior Resources Agency on Aging*
- Jill St. Clair, Killingly Economic Development Director*
- Kimberly Pascone, Dean of Students, Harvard H. Ellis Technical High School*
- Dr. Karen Hynick, Chief Executive Officer, Quinebaug Valley Community College*
- Robert Angeli, Superintendent Killingly Public Schools*
- Wendy Bury, former Executive Director of Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition*
- Maureen Nicholson, First Selectman, Town of Pomfret*
- Kathleen Krider, Senior Director of Community Engagement and Resource Management, Access Community Action Agency*
- Lois Bruinooge, Executive Director, The Last Green Valley*
- Fran Kefalas, Assistant Director, The Last Green Valley*
- Diane Nadeau, President of the Windham Region Chamber of Commerce*
- Eric Protulis, Executive Director of EASTCONN*
- Robert Garland, General Manager, Providence and Worcester Railroad Company*
- Linda Hapeman, Executive Director Windham Region Transit District*
- Michael Steinmetz, Chief Operating Officer, Generations Family Health Center*
- Patti Larrow George, Killingly Town Councilor*
- Ann-Marie Aubrey, Killingly Director of Planning & Development*
- Jonathan Blake, Killingly Planner I / Zoning Enforcement Officer*
- Allison Brady, Killingly Asst. Planner / Natural Resource Officer*

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWEES

- Carol LaBelle, Senior Director of Programs and Special Projects at Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)*
- Lois Bruinooge, Executive Director, The Last Green Valley (TLGV), and Fran Kefalas, Assistant Director The Last Green Valley*
- Elsa Núñez, former President of Eastern Connecticut State University*
- Barry Jessurun, CEO/CFO Green Valley Hospitality*
- Dr. Karen Hynick, Chief Executive Officer, Quinebaug Valley Community College*
- Kathleen Krider, Senior Director of Community Engagement and Resource Management, Access Agency*
- Alison Dvorak, Executive Director at Senior Resources Agency on Aging*
- Tony Sheridan, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut*
- Linda Auger, Co-Founding Owner of Taylor Brooke Winery*
- Kimberly Pascone, Dean of Students, Harvard H. Ellis Technical High School*
- Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Agriculture*

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This plan was supported by funding from the CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)



About Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments

*NECCOG
consists of 16
towns in the
northeastern
corner of
Connecticut.*



Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (NECCOG) is a regional council of governments created through the adoption of CT General Statutes Secs. 4-124i through 4-124p, through local ordinance to carry out a variety of regional planning and other activities on their behalf, as authorized under Chapter 127, Gen. Stat. (Connecticut Office of Secretary of the State, 2022). NECCOG is a 16-town regional council of governments founded in 1987, with its member towns currently being Ashford, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Chaplin,

Eastford, Hampton, Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Scotland, Sterling, Thompson, Union, Voluntown, and Woodstock. Each municipality is represented by their respective chief-elected official, facilitating an organized forum for member towns to discuss, facilitate, and develop responses to regional issues. NECCOG provides economic development assistance, transportation planning and project assistance, land use planning and regulation development, transit administration, GIS services, and other programs and assistance to member towns.

About the Plan

This plan is an update to the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) as part of the overall COVID-19 recovery effort in coordination with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the U.S. Economic Development Administration. NECCOG is updating 2018 CEDS for the region with additional sections to address housing, economic development, workforce and educational development, small business development, healthcare access, etc. in light of the varied impacts resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Two new elements of the CEDS update are: (1) To clearly articulate the social equity issues as well as the needs of the region's stakeholder's with strategies necessary to correct identified deficiencies and (2) to develop and incorporate into the CEDS a set of metrics to measure the region's position and progress with regard to social, economic and racial equity.

Utilizing this Plan

This report was written through NECCOG’s efforts with regional stakeholders representing public and private economic interest groups to provide a blueprint for the region’s economic growth and development. The CEDS explains the economic development conditions of the region in light of recent COVID-19 impacts, discusses the region’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and provides a strategic action plan based on CEDS Oversight Committee input, as well as an economic resiliency scorecard to be utilized by the region’s municipalities and CEDS Evaluation Framework. The CEDS will utilize the strategic action plan to focus on resilience as it relates to economic recovery through a social and racial equity lens.

Public Engagement

This update is written with the participation of a more diverse and inclusive stakeholder group than reflected in the most recent CEDS. The preliminary process of aggregating stakeholder opinion involved creating an economic development regional survey to gauge public opinion on the northeast region’s economic position and progress. In September, NECCOG staff collaborated in creating a survey on “SurveyMonkey” which was sent to a compiled list of over 350 economic actors in northeastern Connecticut and the Windham

- Agriculture
- Business
- Construction/Land Development
- Education
- Students
- Faith Based
- Health Care
- Local Government
- Nonprofit
- Real Estate
- Regional Government
- Residents
- Retirees
- State Government
- Transportation and
- Tribal entities

Region to aggregate electronic responses. Respondents represented the following interest groups:

Besides directly contacting our stakeholder list, the economic development regional survey was featured in a written article and radio broadcast done by WINY Radio and was advertised within the Shopper’s Guide & Turnpike Buyer, a publication located within Putnam, Connecticut. Paper copies of the survey could be found within the Northeastern CT Chamber of Commerce and NECCOG member town libraries and town halls. The survey was the initial step in updating the CEDS and guided the plan’s development as well as priority topics for discussion within NECCOG’s public economic development kickoff meetings, the next step in gathering public opinion data. Flyers advertising the survey and information about the public kickoff meetings were left at community hotspots (Appendix 1). In an

effort to be accommodating to different schedules, NECCOG provided Zoom links on its website before each kickoff meeting, so that stakeholders could join virtually. Additionally, towns were asked to advertise the meetings on their websites and circulate meeting information to active committees. The three meetings occurred as follows:

- **Wednesday, October 12th at 6:30pm- Ashford Town Hall**
- **Monday, October 17th at 6:30pm- Canterbury Town Hall**
- **Tuesday, October 18th at 6:30pm- Putnam Town Hall**

The intent of the public kickoff meetings was to present key demographic findings on the region, the current survey results, gain public input through a SWOT exercise (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and gauge public interest in the plan. Public comments from these meetings can be found in Appendix 2. Due to the survey response rate, the deadline for electronic responses was extended to the end of October, so those who attended the kickoff meetings could take the survey as well.

Interviews

NECCOG reached out to various stakeholders within the northeast region and the state of Connecticut in an effort to gauge a diverse array of public opinion when it comes to economic development within the region. Through a coordinated effort, a list of over twenty stakeholders was assembled to include those within the manufacturing industry,

local government, tourism, social services, senior citizen care, agriculture, education, as well as owners of small businesses. Transcriptions of the interviews can be found in Appendix 3. Stakeholders were contacted through email to arrange interviews and were notified of the role of the planning report regarding economic development and social equity within the region. Input from these critical stakeholder groups aids in facilitating conversation about the strategic direction of the plan and serves to identify common opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the region. A set of general questions was developed for each interview to establish the consistent topic of economic development within the conversations; however, each interview added questions tailored to the industries or sectors of each interviewee. All interviewees were asked to answer these questions utilizing an economic development approach:

- *How does your organization's/institution's mission contribute to the economic well-being of the NECCOG region?*
- *The update of the region's CEDS will place a strong emphasis on improving the social, gender and racial equity in the region- both in the workplace and in the community. What steps/changes, if any, do you think need to take place to improve the current situation in terms of equity improvement?*
- *What are the region's two greatest strengths?*
- *What are the region's two greatest weaknesses?*

- *What are the region's two greatest opportunities?*
- *What are the region's two greatest threats?*

To regularly engage stakeholders within the CEDS process, interviewees have been invited to join the working group committees to form the strategic direction and action plan.



SUMMARY BACKGROUND

NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

16 towns

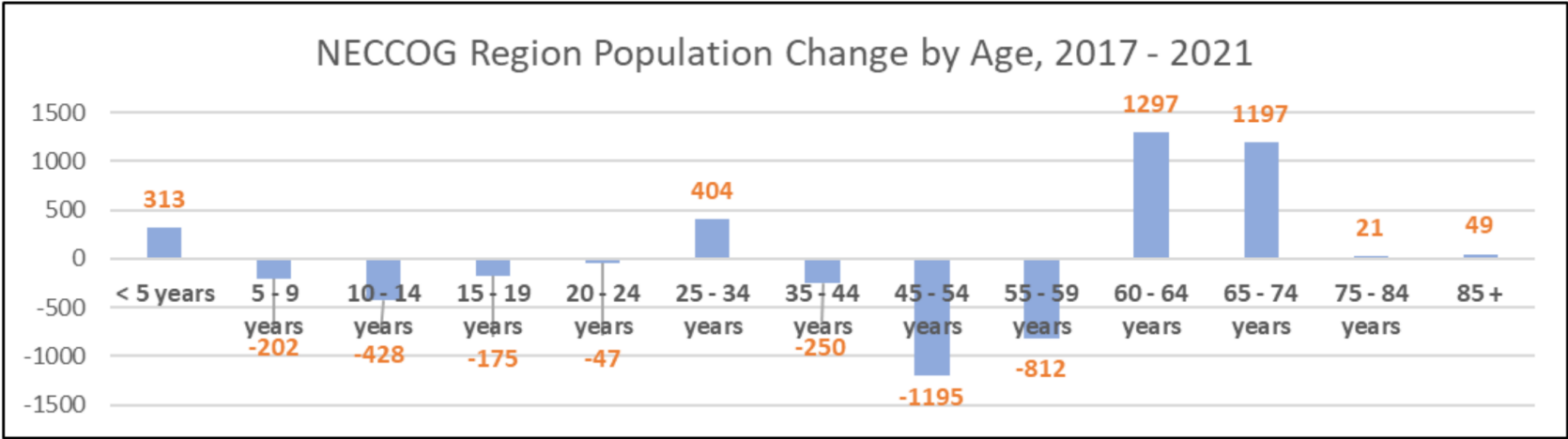
562.8 square miles

169 people/mi²

The regional and municipal summaries shown on the following pages highlight demographic and economic statistics of northeastern Connecticut. As the data shows, service, retail trade, construction, health care/social assistance and public administration are the leading industries, with service indicated as the lead growth industry.^[i] To support these industries and further growth of new and existing businesses it is essential that the region’s partners in education and workforce development continue to offer opportunities for personal career development and enhancement. Local governments must commit to continued infrastructure improvement such as sidewalks, and expand broadband internet access and housing opportunities.

From 2017 to 2021, the region has experienced inconsistent population change, with 10 towns losing population. Chaplin lost the highest amount of people (157), and Voluntown lost the least (16). Five towns gained population, with Killingly gaining the most at 521 and Eastford with the smallest increase at only 9. Union, as the smallest town, remained stable with no change in population.ⁱⁱ

Overall, the 16-town region lost population in the 5 – 24-year and 35 -59-year age brackets, with the 45 – 54-year age bracket losing the most at 1,195 people. 8 towns had an average decrease in the median age of residents of 2.4 years, with the highest decrease being in Ashford. Seven towns had an average increase of 2.8 years with Thompson leading at 6.2 years.ⁱⁱⁱ



Source: American Community Survey, Estimates 2017, 2021. Table DP05

i. ESRI/Data Axl. Business Summary by NAICS. 2023, ii. American Community Survey, Estimates 2017, 2021. Table DP05., iii. American Community Survey, Estimates 2017, 2021. Table S0101.

ENVIRONMENT



Taken from 2016-2026 Corridor Management Plan

The NECCOG region contains some of Connecticut's most rural communities with several state parks, lots of open space, both protected and simply undeveloped lands. The presence of active farmland and a resident population that often enjoys the country life enjoying everything small towns have to offer including the outdoors, the privacy and the opportunities for recreation, interaction with wildlife either passively or actively with hunting, etc., northeastern Connecticut is aptly named the "Quiet Corner". This land, much of it still relatively undeveloped, contains many areas of contiguous wetlands and woodlands that serve as wildlife habitat as well as replenishes the watershed, and much like other rural areas of southern New England, serve as the lungs of the natural world, clearing the air that has been polluted by more densely developed communities in neighboring regions and states. The Quinebaug River flows south through the region offering many outdoor enthusiasts numerous recreational opportunities from canoeing, kayaking, fishing, birdwatching, etc.

With so much undeveloped land, wildlife abounds throughout the region, including but not limited to many species of birds, white-tailed deer, red and gray foxes, beaver, Canada Geese, opossum, rabbits, raccoons, and many more. In fact, in recent years black bear have even made their presence known in the region. With the relatively average low density of 169 people/ sq mi, and the 291,956 acres of forest and active farmland (as of 2015)* there remains great potential for future generations to continue working the land while accommodating additional development. Providing Best Management Practices and Low Impact Development Methods are utilized, the small towns may retain their traditional development patterns.

*UCONN CLEAR, CT's Changing Landscape, 2015 Land Cover.



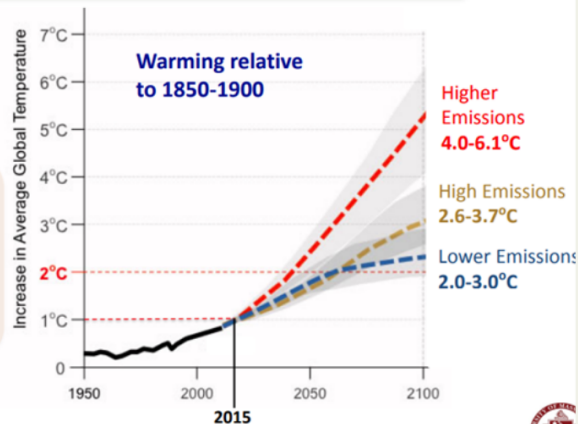
CLIMATE

Northeastern CT is considered a “Humid Continental Climate” with four unique seasons and large contrasts in seasonal weather. Weather extremes have historically ranged from droughts to floods, high humidity and heat waves, to periods of very cold temperatures, with harsh storms throughout the year, including lightning, and when temperatures fall blizzards and Nor’easters occur, sometimes with a few feet of snow from a single winter storm. Less frequently, hurricanes and tornadoes occur and even the random earthquake have been known to occur in recent years in the northeastern US, where the impacts, if not the full brunt, are often felt in the region. The 2020 report, Connecticut: Our Changing Climate by the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (in collaboration with many others) has identified the primary climate change issues uniquely affecting Northeastern Connecticut as being increased yearly precipitation and average temperature. Sea level rise and frequent storm surges are not a significant concern for our landlocked region whereas flooding presents the most serious natural hazard concern of many of the region’s municipalities. When weather extremes lead to power outages or other disruptions the economy has to pause until roads are clear and people can get back to work. With the most extreme of events, municipalities have to act swiftly to come to the aid of residents and businesses that suffered structural damage or road closures ,etc. Sometimes, recovery, even with the financial aid from the government, can take months if not years. In terms of climate change, “temperatures in Connecticut have risen almost 3.5F since the beginning of the 20th century.” (NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, State Climate Summaries 2022, CT Narrative).

Graphic taken from Climate Change State Profiles, UMass Amherst. April 26, 2016
https://www.geo.umass.edu/climate/stateClimateReports/CT_ClimateReport_CSRC.pdf

How will global temperatures change in the future?

The global average temperature has already increased by about 1°C (1.8°F) relative to pre-industrial levels.



Current CO₂ emissions are tracking the ‘higher emissions’ scenario; unless emissions are reduced, the 2°C threshold will be crossed before 2050.

The 2015 Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is nearing the end of the process of an update. Towns are required to update their Local Emergency Operations Plans (LEOP) on an annual basis. Both of these plans serve as the plan for towns and the region to respond to unforeseen weather and other events that can result in economic interruptions.

INFRASTRUCTURE

“Transportation is the circulatory system of the economy, linking the individual from their place of residence to their employment and to all their other destinations of choice whether they be for leisure or necessity” (NECCOG, Long Range Transportation Plan). All employees and businesses of all types as well as the end-consumers, use this system to participate in the economy to get to work, to shop, to medical appointments, and to school, etc. For example. raw materials delivered to the region’s manufacturers and goods, locally made and imported are all distributed throughout the region, including those sold direct to consumers or via wholesalers and via food service establishments.

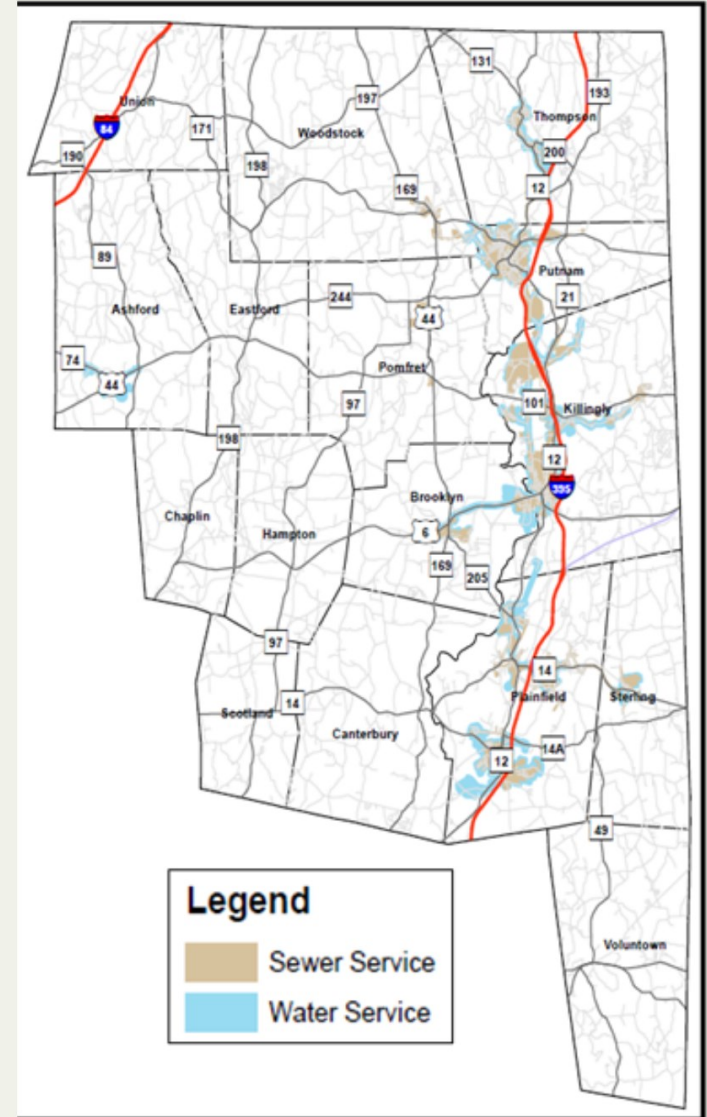
NECCOG Town Road Miles

The sixteen towns of the NECCOG region have a total of 1,355.2 miles of town and state roads.

Town	State Roads	Town Roads
Ashford	20.17	67.59
Brooklyn	15.98	66.06
Canterbury	15.77	68.43
Chaplin	8.35	36.11
Eastford	13.60	33.58
Hampton	12.63	43.14
Killingly	40.45	131.60
Plainfield	38.38	101.29
Pomfret	26.78	63.99
Putnam	21.31	65.34
Scotland	8.82	28.17
Sterling	10.12	48.11
Thompson	31.22	98.09
Union	19.47	23.71
Voluntown	18.26	29.91
Woodstock	35.08	113.69
Total	336.39	1,018.81

CT DOT. Public Road Mileage by Maintenance Responsibility, 2022.

NECCOG Region Infrastructure Map



Public Water and sewer is critical for economic development in locations of higher density.

Public Water service is provided to limited areas of Ashford, Brooklyn and Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson and Woodstock.

Sewer Service is provided to limited areas of Brooklyn, Killingly Plainfield, Pomfret, Putnam, Sterling, Thompson and Woodstock.



LAND USE

There are various limiting factors that some may believe obstruct new development, ranging from strict land use regulations to sewer avoidance policies that prohibit the expansion of sewer districts to new areas of town or to properties that have not previously been served or connected to sewer before.

It is important to regulate development to protect water quality and watersheds, to set aside space for wildlife, and to serve future generations of the community. New development must be designed following Best Management Practices: for stormwater management, reducing erosion, and considering smart site design for new or expanded uses.

Balanced development is necessary— new development is important in the way it supports growth in the economy, including the creation of new jobs and increase in the standard of living – and the protection of the environment.

Land use regulations in Connecticut are administered by the Planning & Zoning Commissions (sometimes existing as distinctly different regulatory bodies within local governments) and Wetlands Commissions. NECCOG conducted a land use survey that received a 64.1% response rate. Respondents included local land use staff, CT licensed surveyors, civil engineers and developers who work in the NECCOG region, to find out what is working and what needs work in terms of land use regulation in northeastern Connecticut.

Best Land use Practices

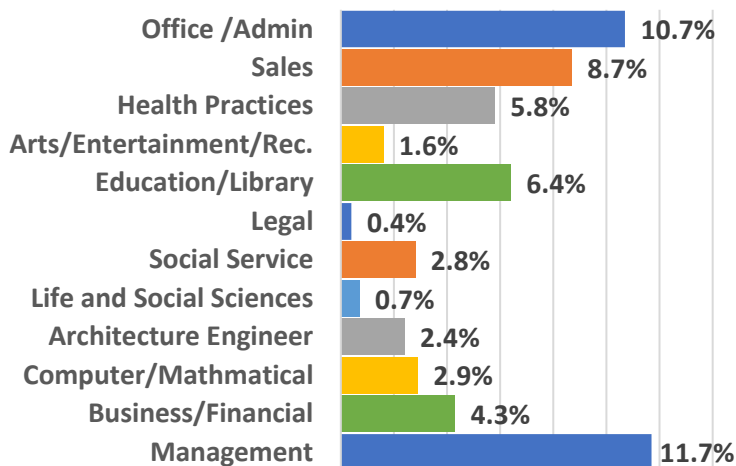
- 1. Zoning makes sense when it reflects the needs of the community it serves, i.e.: cookie cutter approaches will not work in all communities.**
- 2. Consider scaling the application type to the level of the proposal with simpler application types having a less complex process than new construction or large scale development.**
- 3. Update regulations for stormwater, erosion control, parking standards, while recognizing every property is not the same.**
- 4. Plan for where uses should go by creating zones accordingly.**
- 5. Make regulations concise and user friendly. Make them available for download from an easily accessible location on town's home page.**
- 6. Allocate sufficient time for staff to do the land use job.**
- 7. Have staff available to speak with applicants prior to application submittal. Where practical, have meetings of all staff that will have to review a proposal meet at the same time to improve communication and efficiency.**
- 8. Open membership to unaffiliated members of the community.**
- 9. Towns should host annual meeting with their planning, zoning, inland wetlands, conservation, economic development, agricultural and open space commissions to facilitate understanding of each other's role in the community. Work to align overall goals for increased effectiveness.**

ECONOMY

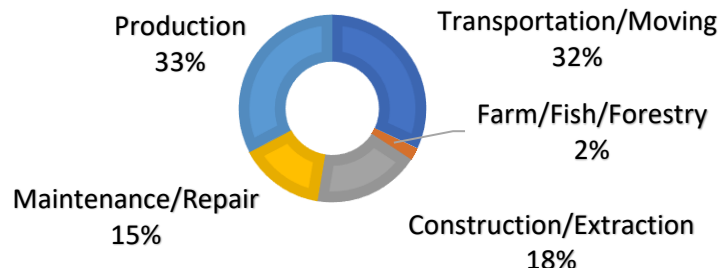
Northeastern Connecticut is home to approximately 3,300 businesses employing almost 36,000 employees. The top five industries, in terms of the labor force, include manufacturing (15.4%), health care (15.0%), retail trade (12.5%), educational services (10.1%) and construction (7.3%).

The employment is comprised of 58.4% white collar, 26.5% blue collar and 15.1% service employment. The highest white-collar employment is 11.7% management and 10.7% office/administration. The highest blue-collar employment is 8.7% in production and 8.5% in transportation/moving. The service industry is dominated by 4.9% food preparation. 83% of employees drove alone to work with 7.2% carpooling, 0.9% walking with 0.2% taking public transportation and 0.1% biking.

White Collar



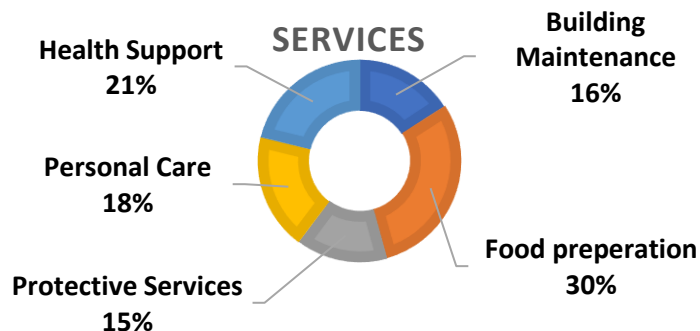
BLUE COLLAR



The graphic below does not show that 8% of the employed population works from home. Moving forward, the region would benefit from greater emphasis on the collaborative efforts for promoting businesses throughout the region between the Chamber of Commerce, NECCOG and other more local entities such as business associations.

Local Agricultural Commissions and Economic Development Commissions can work with business within their communities on how to promote the town along with events that can draw attention to the area with the businesses being a focal point of the efforts.

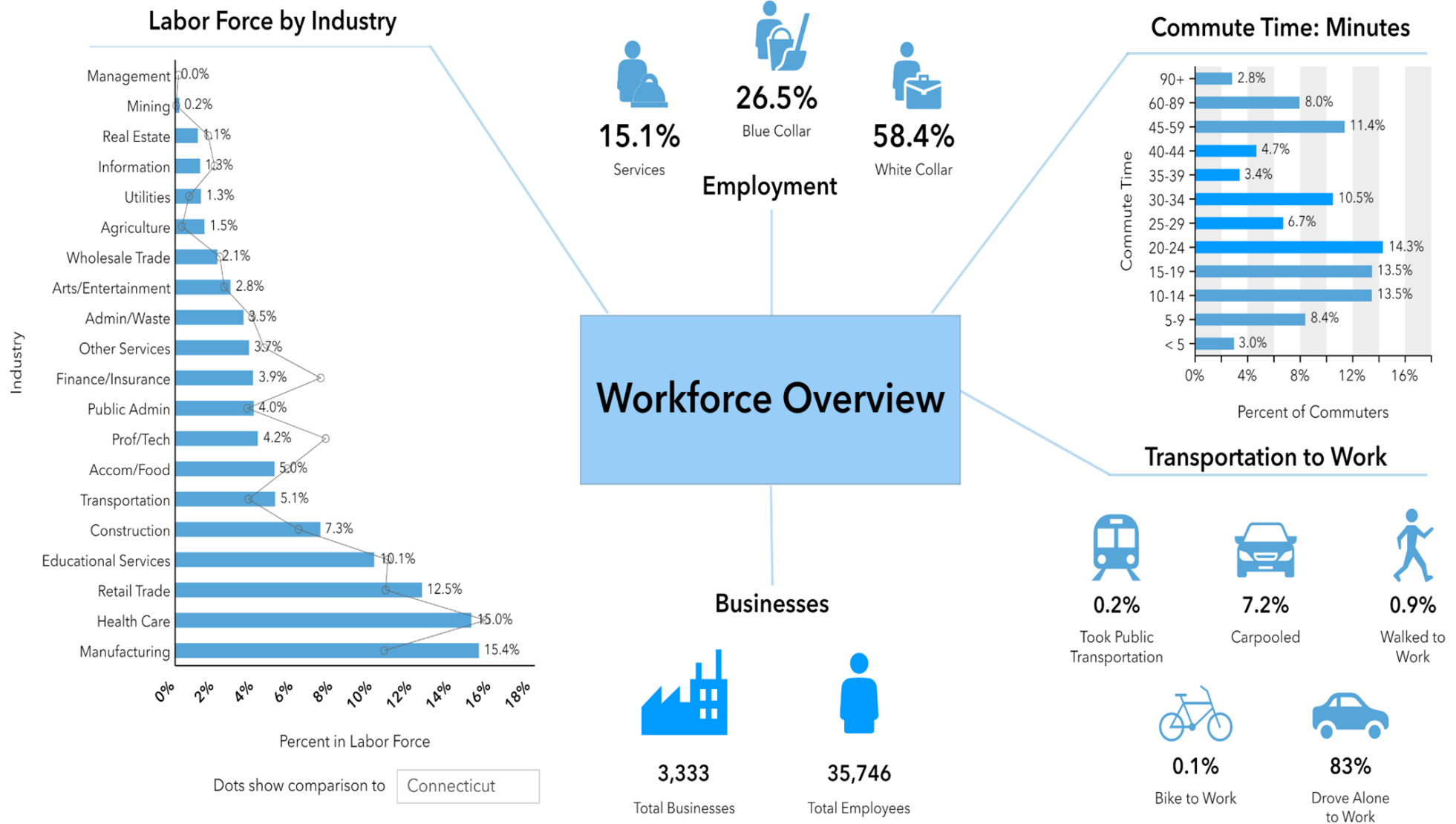
SERVICES



Economic Development Profile

NECCOG

Geography: County Subdivision



Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2017-2021), Esri-Data Axle (2023), Esri (2023), Esri-U.S. BLS (2023), AGS (2023).

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce development within the region begins with the education system, preparing students for the skills employees will need tomorrow as well as introducing them to various career fields they may want to pursue. One of those avenues for skill building and workforce development is the Eastern CT Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI). Killingly, Plainfield and Putnam high schools as well as and Norwich Free Academy, and Woodstock Academy participate in the YMPI. Harvard H. Ellis Technical Highschool also offers an early introduction to the workforce with industry specific training, internships and apprenticeships to local students at an earlier age than they could otherwise secure such skilled employment.

YMPI

Offers students hands-on training, developing manufacturing related job skills taught during class time among other benefits.

NE CT High Schools Participating in YMPI: Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam and Norwich Free Academy and Woodstock Academy

HARVARD H. ELLIS TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

Students graduate with a high school diploma and a certificate in their Career Technical Education area leaving them both immediately employable and/or college ready.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT (A2E)

Entry level skill building is available via the A2E (Access to Employment) Classes provided by Access Agency “that teaches personal empowerment, computer and financial literacy and provides individual case management to is students.”
www.accessagency.org



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Other education and skill building opportunities, in the form of certificates and degree programs available to residents from northeastern CT:
 QVCC, UCONN, ECSU, among several other colleges

Apprenticeships in the NECCOG Region include:

Accessibility Journeyperson	1
Agriculturist	1
Barber	2
CNC Production Machinist	2
Electrician (E-2)	30
Electrician Low Voltage (C-6)	1
Heating & Cooling Mechanic (S-2)	4
Heating & Cooling Mechanic (S-10)	1
Heating Mechanic (S-4)	2
Heating Mechanic Limited (S-8)	3
Injection Mold Designer	1
Lawn Sprinkler Installer and Maintainer (J-4)	1
Machinist	1
Machinist (CNC)	1
Machinist (EDM)	1
Mechatronics Tech	1
Mold Maker (Plastic)	1
Oil Burner Servicer/Installer (B-2)	6
Oil Burner Servicer/Installer (B-4)	1
Plumbing Mechanic (P-2)	11
Plumbing, Heating & Cooling Mech. (P-2/S-2)	1
Sewer, Storm & Water Lines Installer (P-6)	3
Sheet Metal Fabricator	1
Sheet Metal Worker Ltd (HVAC) (SM-2)	3
Telephone Equipment Servicer & Installer (T-2)	2
Toolmaker	1
Warm Air Heating & Cooling Mechanic (D-2)	5
Well Driller	1
Total	89

CT Department of Labor

Our feedback from businesses (that have apprentices) show us that there is interest in increasing the number of apprenticeships, however they are constrained by state limits. With the number of skilled tradesmen retiring, this is an important opportunity for both workforce development and the region's economy.

Culture & Outdoor Recreation



Northeastern Connecticut has abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, from state parks with hiking and walking trails, birdwatching, sponsored road races, and non-competitive organized fundraising walks and bike rides. There are many notable historical sites with museums to visit such as the Prudence Crandall Museum, and Roseland Cottage in addition to various Historical Societies.

Towns sponsor various events throughout the year such as festivals, holiday themed events, fundraising events, and fireworks celebrations for the 4th of July that draw in locals and out of town visitors alike. The Brooklyn Fair and Woodstock Fair are annual agricultural fairs held each summer that draw hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over for their respective weekends.

There are farms with pick-your-own fruits and vegetables, and farm stands as well as farmer's markets from spring through late fall every year. Wineries are particularly popular destinations for tourists.



Opportunities for Promoting Tourism in the Region

- The NECCOG CEDS Hubs site will have a calendar of events planned for the region that will be frequently updated.
- Build relationships /partnerships with the Eastern Regional Tourism District and the Cultural Coalition.
- Support the formation of and invigoration of existing branding strategies to knit the regions town together and promote the region.
- Build upon the Route 169 National Scenic Byway to implement the plan and promote that route within the region.
- Determine the market for additional lodging and where it would best suit the out-of-town tourists. Recommend zoning text amendments where necessary to implement this.
- Promote zoning amendments or changes for where they could expand tourism related business opportunities, including agritourism (wedding and event venues, farm tours and stores, farm-to-table events or restaurants and farm summer camps).
- Develop and expand environmental and recreational tourism as well as cultural and historical tourism.
- Promote volunteerism to maintain and increase accessibility of trails and open space as well as historical sites and small museums.

Northeast CT Sites of Interest Map



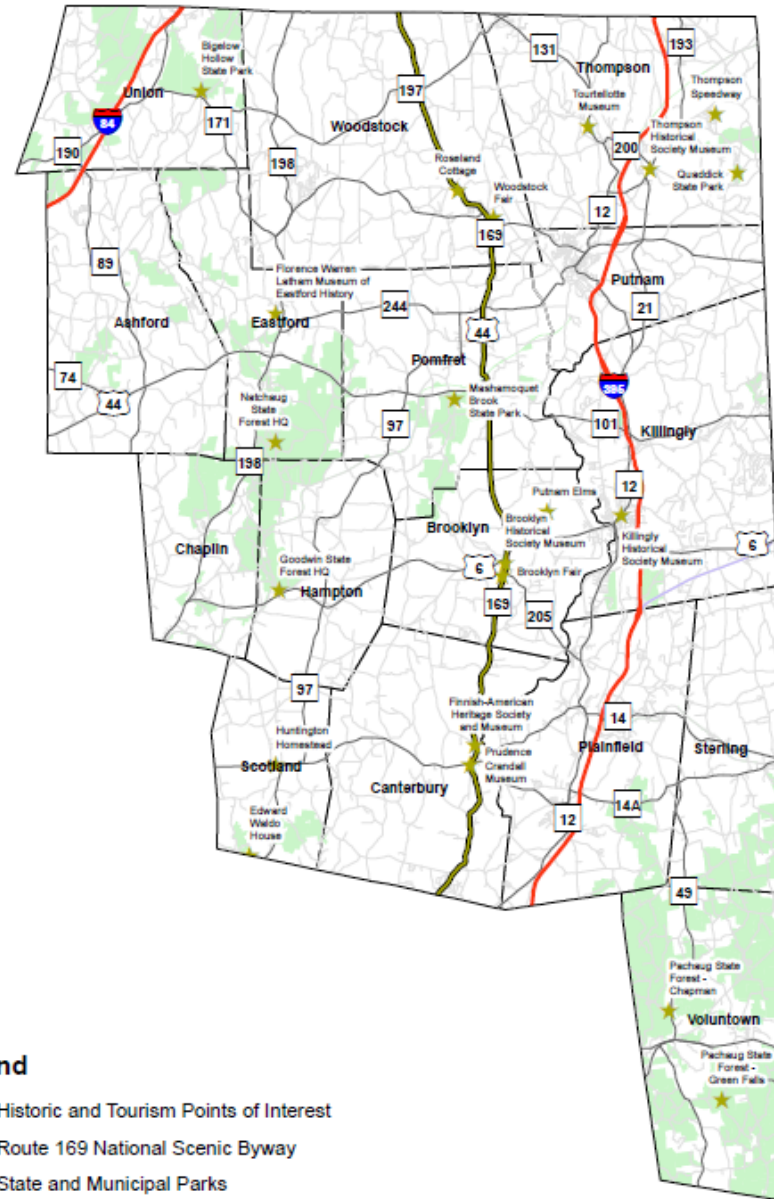
ROUTE 169
NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY



East Coast

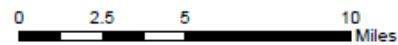


Greenway
ALLIANCE



Legend

- ★ Historic and Tourism Points of Interest
- Route 169 National Scenic Byway
- State and Municipal Parks



This map is for planning purposes only.
It contains no authoritative data.





HOUSING

Housing is not affordable for many of northeastern CT's residents.



Housing development in America has predominantly been in single-family homes for several decades. However, these single-dwelling lots cost more per dwelling unit than many in the region can afford. While larger lots and lower density may have many benefits, (depending on how the lots are used- including outdoor space for hobbies, privacy, etc.) if the lots are left generally in a natural, undisturbed state they can serve as habitat for wildlife and provide for watershed recharge due.

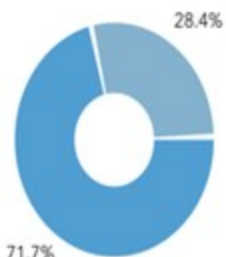
Downtowns and more densely developed neighborhoods not only need greater population to support local economies and provide employees for those businesses, these customers and employees also need places to live. So, housing and a stable, if not growing economy, goes hand in hand. Smaller dwelling size and/or larger number of dwellings per property can reduce the per dwelling unit cost and therefore yield savings. The ALICE 2023 Report shows that the average NECCOG town has 7.01% of their households in poverty and 23.56% ALICE for 30.63% of households in the region are below the ALICE Threshold. This means almost ¼ of the region's "households earn above the Federal Poverty Level but cannot afford the basic cost of living."

The region's municipalities can amend their zoning regulations to allow for greater diversity in housing types, to include greater density than single-family dwellings, smaller lots, accessory dwellings, or two—four family structures on single lots. Many larger lots, even when they are served by private septic systems could support the addition of an accessory dwelling/apartment or a second dwelling to make the property a two-family, regardless of whether the second unit is attached or not. Lots served by sewers may have the space to add additional dwellings. In order for these to be allowed, regulation amendments would often need to take place.

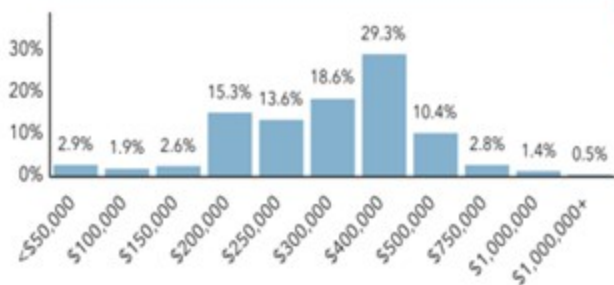
Other options include new residential development within the following scenarios:

- Mixed use zones that allow for businesses on the same lot as residential uses, either within the same structure or on the same lot.
 - Reuse of larger underutilized former commercial buildings to include residential uses.
 - Mill redevelopment to include residential uses
- Infill (re)development where outdated and oversized parking lots exist.

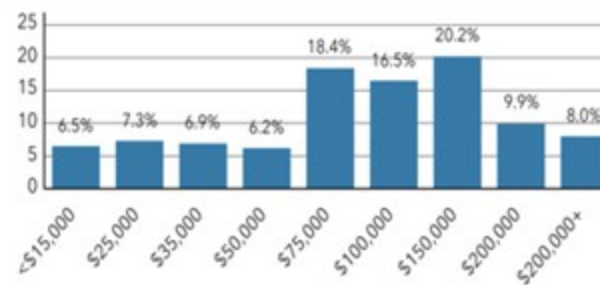
Home Ownership



Home Value

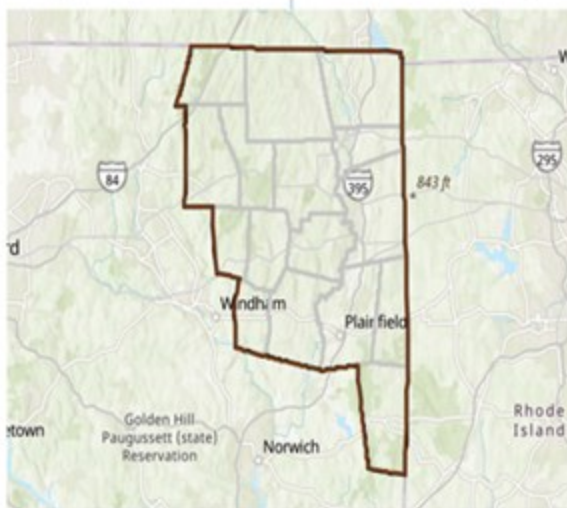
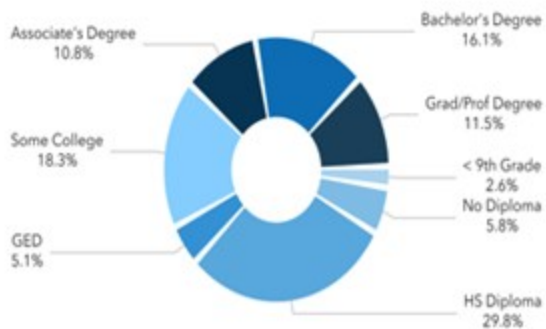


Household Income



Community Overview

Educational Attainment



Key Facts

41,936 Total Housing Units	102 Housing Affordability Index	3,051 Households Below the Poverty Level
44.1 Median Age	\$80,595 2023 Median Household Income (Esri)	95,443 Total Population
98 Wealth Index	30 Diversity Index	55 Total Crime Index

Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2017-2021), Esri-Data Axle (2023), Esri (2023), Esri-U.S. BLS (2023), AGS (2023).

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., 'shocks') to its economic base. (eda.gov)

Whether a region is economically resilient goes beyond whether it can recover quickly from a disruption: it is how well prepared the community is for the inevitable shock that can and ultimately will happen from any number of disruptions (US Economic Development Administration). These disruptions may be on a local scale such as a devastating flood that damages or destroys areas of towns, businesses and homes alike or on a larger scale involving many states or the entire country such as a war, etc. A disruption may be industry specific and will hit harder if that industry has a significant presence in the region. Disruptions are more commonly felt in southern New England as weather related and sometimes due to man-made causes.

A resilient region will include planned initiatives such as steady state or responsive initiatives designed to work in the near term and in the long term.



Existing economic initiatives **Steady-state resilience practices**
practiced in the NECCOG region:

- There are extensive GIS parcel data

records for towns within the region. This information would be useful in business retention and creating recovery efforts after a disaster.

- Local zoning and inland wetlands & watercourses regulations take into account drainage, stormwater and impact on wetlands and watercourses, etc. thus newer development should be designed in ways that reduce the likelihood of significant impact from flooding, etc.

New steady-state initiatives that could be of great benefit to the region:

- Develop collaborative approaches to create resiliency plans, involving business retention and disaster response plans and programs,
- Promoting business continuity and preparedness plans
- Promoting smart land use practices that allow for diversified development and development that is designed to work with the environment regarding impervious surfaces, and flood plain management and protection, etc.

Existing Responsive Economic Resilience Initiatives:

- Towns update their Local Emergency Operation Plans (LEOP).
- The Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan is in the process of being updated.

It will be of great benefit to ensure these plans are updated on a regular basis and the individual town's Emergency Management Officials are kept up to date on their training.

CEDS HUBSITE

The Updated CEDS has an online component that makes an extensive dataset available for review. The data can be filtered and searched so that you can see your choice topic as it applies to the state, the NECCOG region or for one or more of the 16 member towns in the region.



<https://necog-ceds-2023-update-1-necog.hub.arcgis.com/>

Community Data

View dashboards of various data metrics and compare by town.

The image displays four interactive dashboard cards for NECCOG, each with an 'Explore' button at the bottom. The cards are:

- NECCOG Economic Development:** Features a 'Workforce Overview' diagram and various charts showing economic metrics.
- NECCOG Employment:** Features a central 'Employment Overview' diagram with icons for different sectors and a 'Living' icon.
- NECCOG Health Care:** Features a 'Health Care & Insurance' dashboard with various data points and charts.
- NECCOG Housing Market Characteristics:** Features a 'Housing Market Characteristics' dashboard with various charts and data points.

Share this card

<https://necog-ceds-2023-update-1-necog.hub.arcgis.com/pages/communitydata>

Demographic Data

The image displays two interactive dashboard cards for Demographic Data, each with an 'Explore' button at the bottom:

- Demographics by Town:** Features a photograph of a white, two-story house with a steeple. Below the image is the text: 'Explore demographic data at the town level.'
- Demographics by Village/CDP:** Features a photograph of a group of people sitting around a table, engaged in a meeting or discussion. Below the image is the text: 'Explore demographic data at the village/CDP level.'

<https://necog-ceds-2023-update-1-necog.hub.arcgis.com/pages/background>

SWOT ANALYSIS

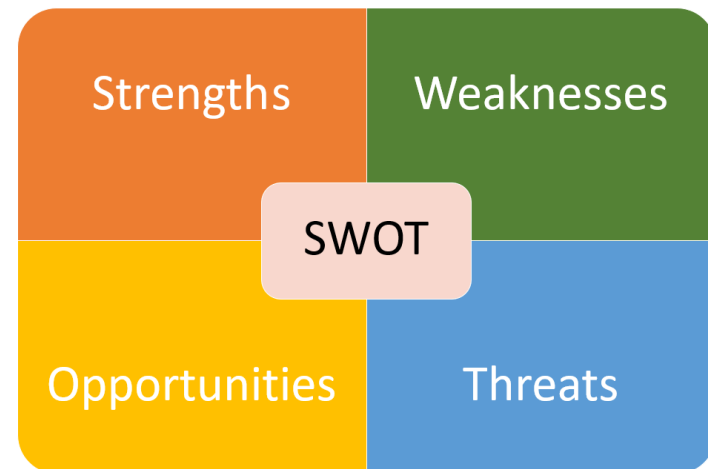
Survey Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NECCOGCEDS>

Overview

A comprehensive economic development survey was conducted within the region to serve as a channel to gauge public opinion on the northeast region's economic position and progress. This survey's intent was to capture a broad perspective of the region's economic conditions while gauging response regarding the report's newest focus, social equity. The survey service "Survey Monkey" was utilized to collect online survey responses, and paper copies were made available as well. The survey was the first step in updating the CEDS and guided the plan's development and priority topics for discussion within NECCOG's CEDS Kickoff meetings. Topics covered within this survey reflected different factors that affect regional economies, such as demographic data, environmental, geographic, and cultural opinion, social equity concerns, community needs, economic resilience, infrastructure assets, industry sectors, and a SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis asks respondents to pick what they think to be the top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the region, in terms of its economic status, growth and progress. An analysis of the economic development survey results can be found in Appendix 4.

Distribution

A contact list of over 350 contacts was compiled to reach those affiliated with the region's municipalities, state agencies and legislators, private and public nonprofit organizations, higher education and career and technical education institutions, small businesses, agricultural businesses, municipal commissions, business associations, WINY Radio, etc. Paper copies of this survey were distributed to the NECCOG region's town halls, libraries, and popular community hotspots. **This survey received 145 responses.**



Strengths are relative competitive advantages.	Excellent access to outdoor recreation opportunities & to historic/heritage sites • Country living • Strong sense of community • Agriculture • Great location •
Weaknesses are relative competitive disadvantages.	Poor access to public transit • Housing options • Diversity • Municipal budgets • Access to high-speed broadband •
Opportunities are chances or occasions for improvement of progress (often external in nature).	Increased remote work opportunities • Expand public transit • Increased regional collaboration • Local food movement/ agritourism • Small business marketing • Public water & sewer access • Electricity & natural gas • Condition of roads • Utilization of Uber/Lyft • Greater emphasis on regional innovation clusters • Training opportunities to increase employability • Alignment of workforce & educational expectations • Adult mental health support •
Threats are chances or occasions for negative impacts (also external in nature).	Aging population • Property tax. Low wages • Job availability • Resources for women & minority entrepreneurs • Youth prevention programs • Healthcare access through schools/employers •

Sample Questions and Rationale

Primarily, the survey asked respondents to indicate the towns in which they work or live. Asking these questions aided in adding more perspective and context to one's responses.

Implications

While there is no consensus on how to best measure public opinion, this survey is useful as a basis in establishing common

themes amongst opinions of those living or working in the northeast region. Using the responses collectively, NECCOG compiled a group of regional stakeholders, representative of the priorities voiced by survey respondents. The sample taken by the economic development survey served to identify potential stakeholders that would most accurately represent the views of those within the northeast region, as they are partners in developing the CEDS.

REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS

Top 5 Economic Strengths of the NECCOG Region

1. Access to various outdoor recreation opportunities

Open space within the northeast region supports recreational opportunities for its residents. Emphasis of the use of outdoor recreation spaces can provide tourism dollars if paired with other regional tourism opportunities such as retailers, restaurants, hotels, and campgrounds. Greater engagement with these types of businesses in turn can create job opportunities and further generate revenue for the local economies. Furthermore, outdoor recreation in Northeastern Connecticut contributes to the region's agritourism marketing efforts, positioning the area as a desirable place to live. Northeastern Connecticut's access to various outdoor recreation opportunities contributes to the resiliency of the regional economy in many ways: various forms of outdoor recreation diversify the economic base beyond traditional industries such as manufacturing or agriculture. By offering various activities such as hiking, fishing and boating, camping, cycling, wildlife viewing and birdwatching, and historic and cultural attractions, the northeastern region can mitigate the risks associated with an economy built on other industries.

2. Low population density

The NECCOG region has a total population of 95,443 people, and its population density is 172.3 persons per square mile compared to the State population density of 746.7 persons per square mile. Low population density is appealing to those who wish to move to an area that offers more privacy and space compared to urban or suburban areas.

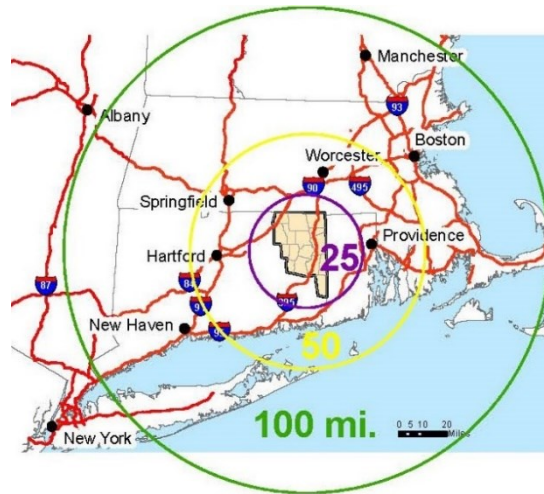


3. Sense of community identity/values

Many residents and municipal leadership within the NECCOG region believe that the area's low population density is what contributes to each of the towns' sense of community and tight-knit relationships. Because of the lower population density, it is easier for people to get to know and feel close to their neighbors. Many First Selectmen state that their towns' residents are very interconnected and watch out for each other.

4. Agriculture/agritourism

There are about 40 farms within the northeastern region. Many farmers in the region and the state are turning to an agritourism-oriented business model that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism to attract visitors. The growth of agritourism is a viable way to create a more robust and vibrant agricultural community within the northeast. Examples of agritourism activities can include everything from wine/vineyard tours to farm tours with farm-to-table dinners, to mazes and more. The state Department of Economic and Community Development increased its funding to promote more diversified attractions and agritourism hot spots. Additionally, The Connecticut Department of Agriculture maintains a website that provides information on agritourism activities in the state and administers grant programs to invest in farms and invest in the development of farms.



5. Geographic location

While those who live in the northeastern region enjoy its rural setting, a strength of the region is that it is conveniently located near four major cities, Hartford, CT, Providence, RI, Worcester and Boston, MA. Many residents work outside of the region with easy access to Interstates 84 and 395. The Last Green Valley National

Heritage Corridor encompasses all of NECCOG's member towns and beyond and is characterized by its rural landscape and classic New England scenery. This nonprofit is an essential resource doing work to connect people to the cultural and heritage resources while growing representation and engagement from diverse audiences in the region. A stakeholder interview with The Last Green Valley (TLGV) can be found in Appendix 3. It is also important to note NECCOG's inclusion in Connecticut State Route 169 National Scenic Byway and the Quinebaug Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor that the Byway cuts through. Route 169 is one of two of America's scenic byways in Connecticut and is an asset that can be leveraged as an opportunity for economic development to draw visitors to the region.

Top 5 Economic Weaknesses of the NECCOG region

1. Access to public transportation

¹While some public transportation options do exist in the region and are generally accessible, such as CT Transit service, Dial-A-Ride & Senior Center busses, and the Northeast Transit bus lines operated from NECCOG's offices, many find that these options may not depart or arrive from their desired destinations and operate at times that are inconvenient for users. Reliable transportation directly relates to job accessibility- without dependable transportation options, people may find it difficult to reach

employment opportunities efficiently. For low-income individuals who are least likely to own a car, reliance on other means of transportation can lead to longer commuting times and financial burdens. These time and cost barriers can hinder participation in the labor market and other essential life activities.

2. Housing options

Most housing development within the northeastern region consists of single-family lots used to achieve a lower density effect. A greater variety of housing types such as smaller



¹ Parolek, Daniel with Arthur C. Nelson. Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis. Island Press. 2020.

lots, accessory dwellings, or two to four family structures on single lots are needed to improve living conditions and boost economic development within the region. Delia Fey, AICP, NECCOG’s Senior Regional Planner created a guide offering an evaluation of housing types and their compatibility for different neighborhoods titled, “Housing Regulation Updates: A Guide for Vibrant Communities” that can be found in Appendix 8. The guide also outlines the influence of zoning practices on developing a variety of housing options, why walkability and scale are so important for development, and other opportunities to promote vibrant communities.

3. Diversity of residents

2022 American Community Survey Demographic and Housing Estimates provide a breakdown of race within the Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region. Assuming that some respondents may have picked more than one choice, the breakdown is as follows: 94% of residents were white, 4.1% were black, 6% were American Indian and Alaska Native, and 2.6% were Asian.² According to a piece published by Indiana University titled, “Impact of Community Diversity on Economic Development,” research

² United States Census Bureau. DP05 ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. 2022.

³ News at IU. “Impact of Community Diversity on Economic Development.” 2020. <news.iu.edu/live/news/27204-impact-of-community-diversity-on-economic>

has shown that diversity, equity, and inclusion can lead to more community engagement and higher productivity. When a diverse group of people makes decisions, the results often have a more far-reaching impact.³ Additionally, a publication from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also outlines why greater diversity is imperative for economic growth: “Businesses that recognize and embrace the value of inclusion consistently perform better across multiple financial metrics. Research shows a strong correlation between diversity in leadership and quarterly earnings.”⁴

4. Budget capacity of local government

Towns in the northeastern region have comparatively lower budgets than other municipalities in Connecticut. A data table for each town’s municipal revenue collected in state fiscal year 2020-2021 can be found within the Evaluation Framework of the CEDS. Municipalities are more capable of prioritizing the basic needs of the community and promoting social and economic development if their budgets are higher. Investing in transportation, education, and infrastructure needs makes a community more attractive for people to move to and for development to occur.

⁴ U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Why Greater Diversity is an Economic Imperative.” 2019. <uschamber.com/employment-law/why-greater-diversity-economic-imperative>

5. Access to highspeed broadband

A table displaying those without internet access in the NECCOG Region can be found below. (2023 CT Broad Band Access. CT OPM)

Town	Total Locations	No service, Unserved and Underserved.	Served Locations	% No service, Unserved and Underserved.
Voluntown	1289	25	1264	1.9%
Union	391	4	387	1.0%
Ashford	1789	15	1774	0.8%
Brooklyn	2927	13	2914	0.4%
Canterbury	2063	23	2040	1.1%
Chaplin	883	13	870	1.5%
Eastford	737	25	712	3.4%
Hampton	836	11	825	1.3%
Killingly	6594	935	5659	14.2%
Plainfield	5268	111	5157	2.1%
Pomfret	1614	41	1573	2.5%
Putnam	3123	202	2921	6.5%
Scotland	417	3	414	0.7%
Sterling	1306	222	1084	17.0%
Thompson	4073	28	4045	0.7%
Woodstock	3690	55	3635	1.5%
Connecticut				0.7%

Thirteen towns within the northeastern region have a higher percentage of locations with no internet service or are

considered underserved than the percentage. Community access to reliable, highspeed broadband is crucial for sustained economic development. Broadband is now considered essential infrastructure as it can impact business performance, education and professional development, as well as worker productivity.

Top 5 Economic Opportunities of the NECCOG Region

1. Increased remote work opportunities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to work remotely positioned the northeastern region as a more desirable place to live. The pandemic brought about a notable shift in population movement within Connecticut- a CT Patch article titled, “Where are all the People Who Moved to CT During the Pandemic?,” writes, “While the largest counties- Fairfield, New Haven, and Hartford- experienced more people leaving than entering, all other Connecticut counties saw a net positive migration.”⁵ While an influx of population due to the pandemic was most likely not as dramatic in the northeast as it was in other regions of the state, the pandemic did prove that one could live in a more desirable area without the need to commute to work, which overall, is an opportunity for economic development.

⁵ CT Patch. “Where are all the People who Moved to CT During the Pandemic?.” 2021. <patch.com/connecticut/ridgfield/where-are-all-people-who-moved-ct-during-pandemic>.

2. Expansion of public transportation services

Economic development opportunities lie within expanding public transit services in the region. The largest group of those affected by transportation barriers are those trying to reach their place of employment. One group that may get overlooked during this struggle is students from Ellis Technical High School trying to reach their Work-Based Learning (WBL) placements. WBL allows students to work during school hours in their trade with a local employer. However, transportation to the employer is a large hurdle to students participating in this program. The Dean of Students at Ellis Tech estimates that about 35% of Ellis Tech Seniors and 42% of Juniors do not have transportation and cannot participate in the program. In this instance, increased types of public transportation options could prove to be valuable to retaining the region's younger workforce as students strengthen their trade skills and expand their professional network in the northeast.

3. Increased collaboration on projects in the region

Increasing collaboration among neighboring towns in the region can foster economic development by leveraging assets, improving efficiency, and creating a supportive environment for growth. Regional collaboration can allow

for the region's municipalities to tap into underutilized resources and pool their assets. For example, if more than one town were to collaborate on an infrastructure project, these communities could share the costs, making projects more feasible for cost-burdened towns. Additionally, regional collaboration allows for a platform in which neighboring areas can collaborate to streamline processes and make the area more conducive for business growth.

4. Movement towards localized food/agritourism

In 2021, the Commissioner for the CT Department of Agriculture stated in a Governor press release that, "Connecticut agriculture was deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing them to continue planting, growing, and harvesting a diverse array of food critical to feeding the residents of our state. However, like so many others, these family businesses were negatively impacted by market disruptions and closures."⁶ NECCOG conducted a stakeholder interview with the Commissioner, Bryan Hurlburt, in which Hurlburt advised that NECCOG collaborate with agricultural commissions in the region to restart and revitalize their efforts of fostering awareness of the importance of agriculture and supporting agricultural endeavors.

6

The Office of Governor Ned Lamont, "Governor Lamont Directs Nearly \$10 million in COVID Relief Funding for Connecticut's Dairy and Aquaculture Industries," < [https://portal.ct.gov/doag/press-room/press-](https://portal.ct.gov/doag/press-room/press-releases/2021/governor-directs-about-$10-million-covid-relief-funds-to-ct-dairy-and-aquaculture)

[releases/2021/governor-directs-about-\\$10-million-covid-relief-funds-to-ct-dairy-and-aquaculture](https://portal.ct.gov/doag/press-room/press-releases/2021/governor-directs-about-$10-million-covid-relief-funds-to-ct-dairy-and-aquaculture)

5. Expansion of small business marketing

Expanding small business marketing is important to capture new interest, increase brand visibility, and generate sales. There are many types of opportunities for small business marketing. According to Forbes Advisor, some of these marketing opportunities may involve email marketing, social media marketing, content marketing, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Marketing (having your business website rank higher on search engines).⁷ Expanding small businesses' marketing can contribute to economic growth in several ways: it can increase revenue for a small businesses which in turn creates more jobs, attracts tourists, and generates interest amongst private investors.

Top 5 Economic Threats of the NECCOG Region

1. Aging population

As mentioned in the CEDS Summary Background, as of 2021, the average median age within the northeastern region was 44.9 years old, and from 2017-2021, the region experienced population losses in the age ranges of those under 24 years old and those from 35-44 years old.⁸ An aging population most likely trends towards a lower labor force participation rate and

⁷ Forbes Advisor. Small Business Marketing in 2024: The Ultimate Guide. <[Small Business Marketing In 2024: The Ultimate Guide – Forbes Advisor](#)>

⁸ American Community Survey Data, 2017-2021. Table DP05.

smaller workforce which can limit productivity and economic output.⁹

The following chart shows the population change, from 2010 to 2020 by age group, within the NECCOG region.

American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2010 & 2020. Table DP05

Age		Change	% change
Under 5	Decrease	-369	-7.14%
5 – 9	Decrease	-1,399	-22.86%
10 – 14	Decrease	-1,197	-17.17%
15 – 19	Decrease	-1,003	-15.59%
20 – 24	Decrease	-249	-4.99%
25 – 34	Increase	416	3.72%
35 - 44	Decrease	-3,140	-21.41%
45 – 54	Decrease	-2,332	-13.87%
55 – 59	Increase	1,591	25.12%
60 – 64	Increase	2,609	49.68%
65 – 74	Increase	3,514	54.51%
75 – 84	Increase	824	21.51%
85+	Increase	67	3.46%

Source: OPM's Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2017-21 Edition.

⁹ National Bureau of Economic Research. Implications of Population Aging for Economic Growth. 2011. <www.nber.org/digest/jul11/implications-population-aging-economic-growth>.

2. Property tax

According to a real estate analysis conducted by ATTOM Data, in 2023, Connecticut had the third highest effective property tax rates in the nation for single family homes. Disparities in average tax bills across the United States are usually connected to differences in local governments and school services, public employee wages, economies of scale between large and smaller towns and the amount of commercial properties that help shoulder the local tax burden.¹⁰ Many towns within the northeast region have a high percentage of tax-exempt property according to OPM's Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2017-21 Edition. A high percentage of tax-exempt properties requires that a town's tax burden be largely shouldered by property tax revenue. Some towns, such as Pomfret, find the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program and its associated use-value assessment (PA 490 value) to be detrimental to towns. The PILOT program provides annual grants to municipalities to reimburse them for a portion of the revenue lost from certain tax-exempt property¹¹, however municipalities believe that the assessment value is not adequate and should be increased.

¹⁰ Connecticut Inside Investigator. Connecticut property taxes third highest in the country, according to analysis. 2023. <insideinvestigator.org/connecticut-property-taxes-third-highest-in-the-country-according-to-analysis/>.

A comprehensive table of municipal revenue, including property tax revenue per capita and commercial/industrial share of the net grand list for each of the region's municipalities can be found in the Evaluation Framework section of the CEDS document.

Tax Exempt Property as a % of 2021 Grand List	
Ashford	11.4
Brooklyn	6.1
Canterbury	3.8
Chaplin	8.4
Eastford	8.9
Hampton	8.8
Killingly	11.4
Plainfield	9.2
Pomfret	20.9
Putnam	15.7
Scotland	9.1
Sterling	8.1
Thompson	7.2
Union	9.9
Voluntown	11.7
Woodstock	6.8

3. Housing affordability

Housing affordability is imperative to advancing economic development and quality of life within the region. NECCOG

¹¹ CT Office of Legislative Research. Connecticut's Payment in Lieu of Taxes Program. 2020. <<https://www.cga.ct.gov/2020/rpt/pdf/2020-R-0330.pdf>>.

has completed several Affordable Housing Plans for its member towns to address housing affordability challenges within the region and believes it is important that towns take an approach to developing housing attuned to their population's needs. As mentioned within the Background Summary and pointed to in the Strategic Direction/ Action Plan, the region would benefit from regulations that allow for greater diversity of housing types that include greater density than single-family dwellings.

4. Businesses paying less than a living wage

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor's Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, as of May 2023, the state's median hourly wage in a measure taken amongst all occupations is \$26.98.¹² The Living Wage Calculator, which was developed in 2003 by MIT, utilizes geographically specific costs for food, childcare, health care, transportation, housing, and other basic needs along with taxes at the state level for different family types to estimate the living wage that one would need in each state. According to this calculator, a single adult without children and working full-time would need to make at least \$24.13 an hour to support themselves, while a single adult with one child would need to make \$47.76 per hour to support the household.¹³ Evidently, the state's median hourly wage is scarcely enough

to support a single person and serves as a weakness to economic development overall.

5. Job availability

Compared to other regions, the northeast may have fewer opportunities in the job market due to the smaller population and specific industries that exist. Some key industries that exist within the northeastern region include manufacturing (ex. Frito Lay which manufactures and processes food, or SPIROL, which is a leading manufacturer of fasteners and components for various industries), healthcare (ex. United Services, Generations Family Health Center and Day Kimball Hospital), educational (ex. Quinebaug Valley Community College, Woodstock Academy, specialized programs operated by EASTCONN, and Eastern Connecticut State University which is located just outside of the region), and agricultural (ex. Sharpe Hill Vineyard, which holds the title of CT's largest and most award-winning winery¹⁴, Fairvue Farms LLC, a dairy farm, etc.). A comparison of unemployment rates from 2022 to 2023 within the NECCOG region shows that from 2022 to 2023, unemployment rates have increased within the towns of Killingly, Plainfield, Pomfret, and Sterling. Tracking unemployment rates from year to year may provide an indication of job availability within the region.

¹² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 2023 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. <Connecticut - May 2023 OEWS State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates (bls.gov)>.

¹³ Living Wage Calculator. Living Wage Calculation for Connecticut. <[Living Wage Calculator - Living Wage Calculation for Connecticut \(mit.edu\)](#)>.

¹⁴ <sharpehill.com>.

CEDS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE SWOT ANALYSIS

A second SWOT analysis was also conducted with the CEDS Oversight Committee to further steer the direction of the topics and subsets of topics for the Strategic Direction & Action Plan. Respondents of this survey were given overall topics and asked to rank the different subsets of these topics as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. The full results of this survey with comments can be found in Appendix 5.

Up-to-Date Infrastructure

 Public water access	Opportunity
 Sewers/wastewater treatment	Opportunity/Weakness
 Condition of roads	Opportunity
 Electricity	Opportunity
 Natural gas	Opportunity
 Highspeed broadband	Weakness

“Many manufacturing companies have expressed this is a reason they do not settle in the region. Poor access to

highways but potholes and narrow roads elsewhere. Makes it difficult on vehicles and creates costly repairs.”

-Committee Survey comment

“There is a need for better, more reliable broadband options at a reasonable price.”

-Regional Survey comment

Transportation

Transfer of manufactured goods

- Strength

For small business purposes

- Strength/Weakness/Opportunity

Accessibility to the public

- Weakness

Utilization of other platforms i.e., Uber or Lyft

- Opportunity

“Access to public transportation and housing go hand in hand. If you don’t have public transportation, it makes it harder for residents to get to a job. I would say that public transportation must come first, because there would be no point in producing affordable housing if someone could not travel between home and work.” -Ashford Kickoff Meeting

“Without a car a person is very limited in this region. Public transportation does not have enough stops or times to make it readily available.” -Committee Survey

Land Use & Development Process

Wetlands permits	• Strength
Planning commission applications	• Weakness
Zoning permits	• Weakness
Building permits	• Opportunity

“Changing local zoning regulations is going to have to align with what our current environment can maintain and withstand, whether that be infrastructure, sewer, etc.”

-Kathleen Krider, ACCESS Community Action Agency

Business Assistance

Educational Resources	Opportunity
Regional Business Associations	Strength
Emphasis on regional innovation clusters, i.e. agriculture/agritourism, manufacturing & technology	Opportunity
Resources specifically for small businesses	Weakness
Resources for women & minority entrepreneurs	Weakness

“There could be more collaboration between groups to strengthen the clusters. However, many rely on funding and that makes them competitive under the surface.”

-Committee Survey comment

“Brooklyn has a reputation of being unfriendly to new businesses. I would like someone to put together a guidance document for starting a new business in our town.”

-Regional Survey comment

Tourism



Heritage/historical **Strength**



Creative **Opportunity**



Scenic beauty and recreation **Strength**

“Last Green Valley is a remarkable organization that we are so lucky to have. They have been able to share our beauty with guests.”

-Committee Survey comment

“Most of the cultural and art assets fund themselves with events and we still have not recovered from people's fear of attending events. So many of our artists and art groups have closed or reduced hours because they cannot raise dollars. There are less quality art events because the events need the attendees to cover costs-and costs have gone way up.”

-Committee Survey Comment

Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development



Alignment of high school curriculum with employer/college needs

Opportunity



Workforce alignment and preparation, i.e., pipeline initiatives

Opportunity



Training opportunities to keep skills up-to-date

Opportunity

“Employment conditions for young professionals also depend on the economy- five years ago students may not have had easier access to jobs as they do now, making it more difficult to choose a line of work. The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) could provide students with an established career pathway, which they could continue at QVCC or Three Rivers, both post-secondary institutions that provide manufacturing training.”

-Carol LaBelle, Sr. Director of Programs and Special Projects at EWIB

Health & Well-being

Youth prevention programs	Equitable healthcare access through schools/employers	Adult mental health support
• Weakness	• Weakness	• Opportunity

“The current waiting time for an annual physical is 10 months to a year. There is a shortage of health care professionals in the region, especially mental health. If you can only get an appointment with your psychologist every 6 weeks, it will not be effective. Medicaid pays so poorly that most providers are not taking that insurance. The most in need, with the least ability to pay are being left out. Employers cannot afford to provide healthcare any longer because plans are too expensive, the state requires too many “services to be covered” and there are no longer any discounts for being healthy.”

-Committee Survey comment

Housing Stock

Small housing units for singles and retirees	• Weakness
Availability of affordable renter options	• Weakness
Availability of single-family options	• Weakness
Availability of multi-family options	• Weakness
Overall quality of existing housing stock	• Weakness

“Diversity of new housing stock options is greatly needed along with a housing feasibility study for lending institutions to refer to in making lending decisions.”

-Regional Survey comment

Childcare

Affordability

- **Weakness**

Safety

- **Strength**

Consistent/reliable access

- **Weakness/Opportunity**

“We help people determine the reason for their challenging work history...Access to adequate childcare and transportation services are major issues that contribute to a person’s ability to retain their job...I’d like to think that if we had the capacity to bring these concepts into some of our bigger or second chance employers, we could better support them through dealing with employees who may be facing barriers to being good workers.”

-Kathleen Krider, Access Agency

The topic of Adult & Senior Care was not added to the CEDS document until after the CEDS Oversight Committee meetings were well underway, and thus was not a part of the CEDS Oversight Committee SWOT survey.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION & ACTION PLAN

The Strategic Plan contains the region’s goals, objectives, and action steps as they pertain to each identified pillar of economic development. Through the CEDS planning process, NECCOG has identified ten pillars as the organizing foundation for economic development within the region:

- 1. Public Infrastructure**
- 2. Transportation**
- 3. Land Use & Development Process**
- 4. Business Assistance**
- 5. Tourism**
- 6. Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development**
- 7. Health & Well-being**
- 8. Housing Stock**
- 9. Childcare**
- 10. Adult & Senior Care**

CEDS Vision

“Northeastern Connecticut is welcoming to new economic development and is committed to building the strength and resiliency of the community through enhancing what already exists and creating new avenues for opportunity.”

1. Public Infrastructure

Investing in sustainable, resilient, and inclusive infrastructure not only stimulates short-term economic recovery but also ensures lasting stability and prosperity for future generations. Infrastructure such as roads, bridges, utilities, etc. provides the backbone for economic activities and enables trade, powers businesses, and connects workers to their jobs. Investment in infrastructure has a strong impact on economic growth. A study conducted by the Global Infrastructure Hub titled, “The Vital Role of Infrastructure in Economic Growth and Development,” demonstrates that long-term investment in infrastructure has a prominent impact on economic growth. This study, conducted in 2020, found that the economic multiplier for public investment (including infrastructure) is 1.5 times greater than the initial investment within two to five years. This multiplier effect is much higher than other forms of public

spending.¹⁵ Ensuring that infrastructure is maintained and in good condition is essential to avoid costly reconstruction and disruptions.

It is essential that the region invest in climate-resilient infrastructure that can withstand extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and storms. Two 25-year floods and one 100-year flood has proven to be quite costly and disruptive to the town of Scotland, which is funding the construction of four bridges through the CT Local Bridge Program. These floods were quite disruptive to residents of the town of Scotland, as many could not leave their homes to get to work. The town is funding the construction of four bridges through the CT DOT Local Bridge Program and is looking to pursue state funding for two more- these repairs may prove to be costly.

Public Sewer & Water Meeting

In November of 2023, NECCOG hosted a hybrid meeting in Killingly to discuss the state of public sewer and water systems within the region's towns and their relation to economic development, to inform recommendations within the Strategic Direction & Action Plan and the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and to present the region's Sewer & Water Map Viewer developed utilizing GIS. Leadership from NECCOG's member towns (Town Manager, Town Council members, First Selectmen, Mayor) were invited to participate in the meeting as well as town's WPCA's if a public sewer and water system

existed. Five towns were represented at this meeting and voiced concerns about aging public sewer and water infrastructure as well as system capacity limitations. The following is an overview of the current state of public sewer and water in each town and related challenges.

1. Sterling:

- a. The sewer and water system is 40 years old and contains traces of manganese and iron. The town is serviced by WhiteWater Water & Wastewater Solutions.
- b. The town improved private wells but needs a water purification system, in which collaboration with the State has begun.
- c. Recent upgrades include pumps and a new generator.
- d. The town is facing challenges locating and elevating 30 manholes, which provide access to sewer lines for inspection, testing and cleaning.

2. Putnam:

- a. Sewer and water infrastructure in Putnam dates back to the 1950s.
- b. A \$15 million system purifies manganese in the water.
- c. Putnam faces debt for their public sewer and water system but has received a grant for lead line service.

• ¹⁵ Global Infrastructure Hub. "The vital role of infrastructure in economic growth and development." 2021. <[The vital role of infrastructure in economic growth and development \(github.org\)](https://github.com/infrastructure-in-economic-growth-and-development)>

- d. The filtration capacity for Putnam’s system is 2.3 million gallons per day.
- e. CT Water is proactive about well cleaning and collaboration with the town.
- f. Water quality evaluations are continuous at Roseland Lake.

3. Woodstock:

- a. Water usage of their system requires 100,000 gallons per day, and all sewer plant generators are new.
- b. Roseland Lake has a buoy system for algae prevention.

4. Killingly:

- a. The town is serviced by CT Water.
- b. Piping within town is aged and dates back to the early 1900s.
- c. The town has completed line expansions connecting Killingly’s system to Plainfield.
- d. Facility upgrades have included replacement pumps and equipment, and ten miles of sewer line rehabilitation were completed through USDA.
- e. The town is actively pursuing funding for capacity increases, as discharge limits impact growth (of businesses, housing, etc.).
- f. Killingly’s public sewer and water system is predicted to hit capacity by 2035, however the town is already reaching its capacity limit.
- g. 50% of households and all industry buildings are on the public sewer- it is imperative that capacity be

improved so that all activities can function as normal.

5. Voluntown:

- a. One neighborhood has a community well that is serviced by CT Water, while the rest of the community utilizes private wells- most private wells were impacted adversely by the last major drought.
- b. Sewer and water limitations make mixed-use development a challenge.
- c. Expansion is needed on the Beach Pond system.

Utilizing GIS, NECCOG has created a Public Sewer & Water viewer in order to map the public sewer and water lines (if applicable) within each town, so that municipalities can view a parcel's development potential in terms of this infrastructure.

Resiliency

The overall intent of the Public Infrastructure section of the Strategic Direction/Action Plan is to establish goals, objectives, and actions for resilient infrastructure across all areas, including public sewer and water, roadways, and broadband. Resilient infrastructure reduces risk of damage and disruptions, in turn ensuring that there is a continuity of business and essential services. Investing in resilient infrastructure reduces long-term costs associated with repairing or rebuilding damaged infrastructure, thus resulting in cost savings for municipalities. Areas with robust infrastructure have the potential to attract more business and housing development, thus contributing to economic growth and enhancing social well-being.

Accessibility

NECCOG aims to approach goals and objectives on roadways and their related development through an accessibility and equity lens. A framework similar to that of Complete Streets policies may be utilized during these planning processes. These policies prioritize creating accessible streets that are safe for all users, regardless of their mode of transportation. Complete



Church Street Putnam LOTCIP

Streets policies can be especially applicable to the northeastern region and may benefit the aging population, those without access to a vehicle, and students. Complete streets aims to ensure equity (making sure that roads accommodate all users regardless of their mode of transportation), implement safety measures, increase accessibility (for those of all ages, abilities and backgrounds), and to integrate land use and multi-modal design that considers the context and needs of a surrounding community.¹⁶ According to Smart Growth America, “Over 20

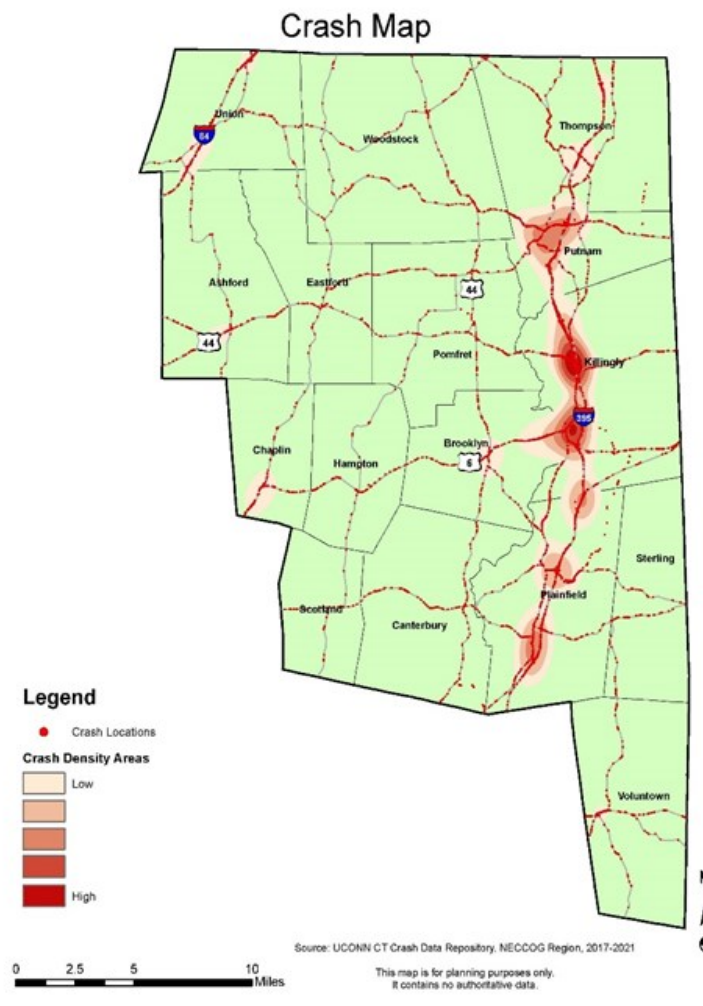
¹⁶ Smart Growth America. Complete Streets.
<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/what-are-complete-streets/>.

years, Complete Streets projects may contribute to a projected tax base increase, supporting affordable housing initiatives.”¹⁷ Implementation of Complete Streets policies may reduce the amount of fatal traffic incidents as well. In the regional Crash Map to the right, the red dotted lines reflect crash locations, and the highlighted areas depict the crash density areas, or how many crashes tend to occur there. A large number of crashes occur along Interstate 395 running through the towns of Plainfield, Killingly, Putnam, and Thompson. This map also depicts low crash densities in Chaplin, Voluntown, Union, and Ashford. This data may point to areas where concerted efforts to improve roadway infrastructure must occur. This crash data for the NECCOG Region was taken from the UCONN CT Crash Data Repository (2017-2021) and should be consulted frequently.

Vision Statement: *Maintain the region’s public infrastructure, including sewers, public water, roads, power grid, natural gas and highspeed broadband in order to support the needs of the growing economy.*

Goal 1: Upgrade and/or expand sewer systems to allow for additional growth within each district’s housing and commercial sectors.

Objective 1a. Repair existing sewers where necessary to prevent leaks of waste to the surrounding environment.



¹⁷ Smart Growth America. Powerful new tool for helping local communities evaluate the potential benefits of Complete Streets Projects. 2021. <smartgrowthamerica.org/benefits-of-complete-streets_site/>.

Objective 1b. Repair existing sewers where necessary to prevent infiltration of groundwater unnecessarily taking up volume in the system.

Goal 2: As a necessary condition for enabling economic growth, expand the public water system to serve additional parts of town as well as additional demand on volume from new development.

Objective 2a. Evaluate the public water system to identify where lead pipes may exist and need replacement.

Objective 2b. Evaluate the public water system to identify where any repairs need to be made.

Action Item 1: Evaluate areas served by both existing public water and sewer for where additional density could be built in walkable locations, thereby allowing greater housing options where infrastructure exists in proximity to employment and other locations people frequent.

Action Item 2: Encourage municipalities to evaluate areas adjacent to the outer boundaries of public water and sewer services to determine additional density if expanded.

Goal 3: Identify and address hazards within the region’s road networks to promote greater connectivity throughout the northeast.

Objective 3a. Tailor upgrades to accommodate “Complete Streets” specifications where feasible, particularly in village and downtown areas frequented by pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized travelers.

Goal 4: Upgrade the power grid where feasible to accommodate modern business and residential needs.

Objective 4a. Coordinate with municipalities to trim trees surrounding powerlines to enhance the resiliency of the power grid.

Goal 5: Maintain the natural gas network to serve densely developed areas within the region for the purposes of home and business use.

Goal 6: Expand highspeed broadband to serve all areas within the region to accommodate residential, work-from-home, and standard business needs.

Action Item 1: Pursue funding that expands affordable internet access for low-income households.

2. Transportation

In an effort to contribute to economic mobility and equitable access of services, mass transit options in the region must aim to improve access to housing, employment, healthcare and social networks. Not all residents in the northeastern region have access to a personal automobile, and those living in a single-vehicle household may not have access to a car during certain times of the day. Recent Town Profiles from AdvanceCT utilized American Community Survey (ACS) data to identify the mean commute time for residents in the state as well as the percentage of residents without automobile access. A table

displaying this information for each of NECCOG’s member towns may be found below.

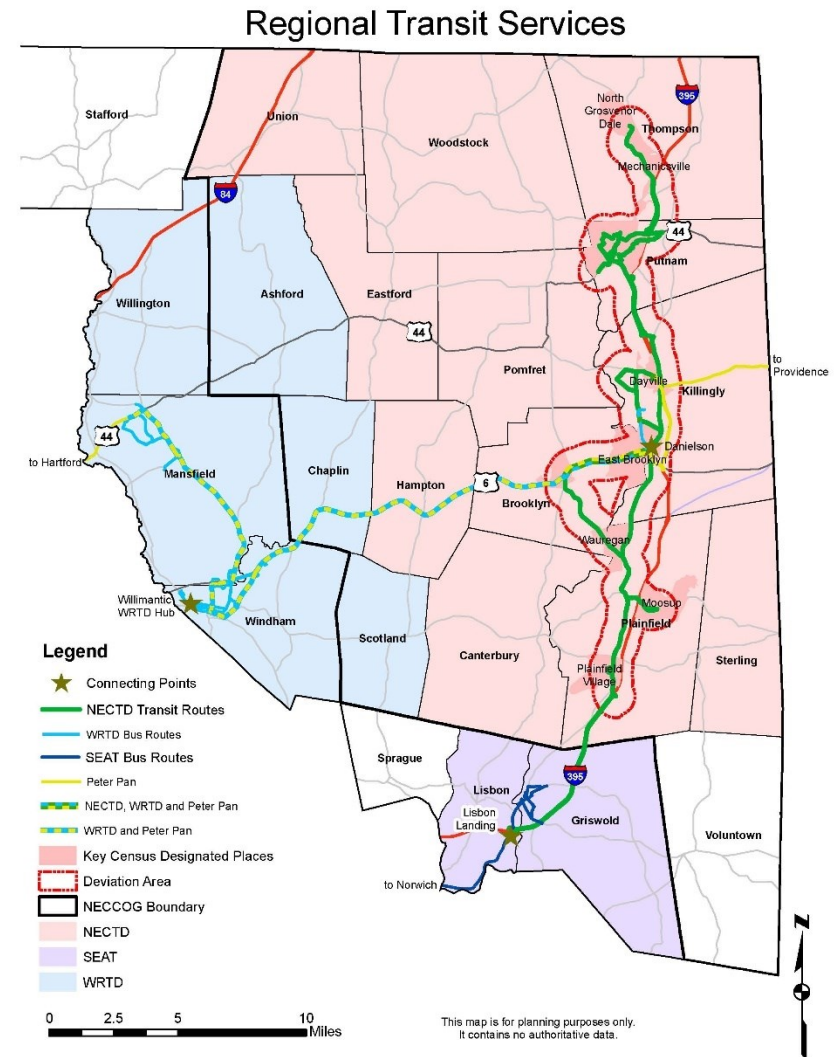
NECCOG Region Labor Force Commute and Access to a Car

	Mean Commute Time (minutes)	No Car Access (%)
Ashford	32	0
Brooklyn	27	4
Canterbury	33	3
Chaplin	30	6
Eastford	30	2
Hampton	31	3
Killingly	27	5
Plainfield	24	8
Pomfret	22	7
Putnam	21	12
Scotland	30	0
Sterling	35	3
Thompson	32	2
Union	31	3
Voluntown	33	7
Woodstock	28	3
State of CT	26	9

Taken from: AdvanceCT 2024 Connecticut Town Profile Reports

As displayed in this table, residents of many of NECCOG’s member towns commute at least 30 minutes to their place of

employment, indicating that diverse transportation options tailored to an individual’s needs are essential to labor force participation. While some towns do not have any documented



residents without car access, some have a population without access that approaches the state average of 9% (Plainfield at 8%, Pomfret at 7%, and Voluntown at 7%), while Putnam exceeds the average at 12% of its population without access to a car. The Regional Transit Services map is a visual guide of the public transit options available within the northeast. As one can see, no transit routes exist that can transport residents throughout the entire region, but rather the routes are centered around Interstate 395. The Northeastern Connecticut Transit District, or NECTD, offers five bus lines that offer deviated fixed route service, meaning that one can schedule a stop that deviates its course between two stops if it is scheduled ahead of time. NECTD does not have the capacity to provide rides over a comprehensive area of the region, as is the case for many of the other public transportation options that are available.

Vision Statement: *Establish an efficient and safe road network incorporating a design that considers the needs of various users engaging in residential, business, commercial and tourism activities as well as non-motorized users, including pedestrians, wheelchair bound, cyclists, and those with children and pets.*

Goal 1: Evaluate local road pedestrian safety countermeasures.

Objective 1a. Evaluate crosswalks for safety and marking visibility and make changes accordingly.

Goal 2: Prioritize improvement or redesign for problematic intersections/roadways in the region.

Objective 2a. Re-mark paved roads with faded lines.

Objective 2b. Apply for funding for prioritized road sections as needed.

Objective 2c. Improve road shoulders and line local paved roads to encourage drivers to travel at safe speeds.

Action 1: Initiate safety campaigns to raise awareness of practices and ‘rules of the road’ to increase safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized users. Share promotional materials with schools, libraries, newspapers, social media, radio stations and signage.

Goal 3: Implement transportation solutions within the region to make travel by car more accessible for all.

Objective 3a. Launch voucher campaigns through municipalities for ride services such as Lyft or Uber, in an effort to provide short-term transportation services to necessary destinations such as the grocery store, medical appointments, or work.

3. Land Use & Development Process

“Best Practices and Recommendations for Land Use in Northeastern Connecticut,” written by NECCOG’s Senior Regional Planner, Delia P. Fey, is a document that provides recommendations for effective land use most conducive to economic development. Throughout the CEDS process, many municipality’s leadership and business owners voiced their concerns about how the land use and development process in the region is a hinderance to economic development. NECCOG conducted a survey called, “The Regional Land Use Survey for

Northeastern Connecticut” and contacted 39 individuals involved in each step of the land use process within the region (such as land use staff for the towns, CT Licensed surveyors, civil engineers, developers, and builders). Out of 39 individuals invited to take the survey, 25 responded. While these survey results do not necessarily reflect the opinion of NECCOG’s staff, they were an effective tool at summarizing what the region’s land use professionals believe are the best and worst land use practices in the region and aided in drafting the recommendations for the CEDS Strategic Direction/Action Plan. While a copy of this document can be found in Appendix 7, the following summarized list displays examples of some of the best practices in local land use:

- I. **Zoning makes sense when it reflects the needs of the community it serves, i.e.: no cookie cutter approaches will work in all communities.**
- II. **Zoning Regulations that recognize the impracticality of trying to list ALL land uses within the Permitted and Special Permitted Uses** and allow for the recognition of uses that are *similar enough, related to or equivalent* to those that are listed and regulate them accordingly.
- III. **Consider scaling the application type to the level of the proposed development**, with new construction on raw land requiring the most detail and review and turnover of a use within an existing building or site, a lesser amount of detail and review.

Vision Statement: Adjust the land use process to be more efficient and welcoming to new business, thereby invigorating entrepreneurial interest in the local economy.

Goal 1: Encourage municipalities to develop a vision that approaches development in a coordinated way ensuring all applicants are treated fairly and efficiently.

Goal 2: Streamline the permit process for review and approval of new compatible uses, particularly with opening a new business.

Action Item 1: Pursue legislation that amends the criteria for publishing land use commission decisions to allowing postings on the town website or other online site in lieu of print media.

Goal 3: Encourage developers and entrepreneurs to meet with local regulatory and development review officials (including Zoning, Wetlands, Building Official, Fire Marshal, engineers, etc.) prior to application submittal to determine suitability of the site as well as to clearly determine requirements, procedure, and estimated timeline. Prior preparation improves likelihood of approval and quality of development design.

Objective 3a. Emphasize the importance of prior preparation and communication to improve the likelihood of approval and quality of development design.

Goal 4: Require Land Use Commission members to be trained and be familiar with land use statutes, regulations and planning concepts as well as the application process that can facilitate desirable land use changes.

Action Item 1: Establish an annual meeting between all land use boards and commissions so that each may understand each other’s role in the community government. Improved communication and agreement amongst commissions would

contribute to achieving and implementing the community's vision.

Goal 5: Update local regulatory land use regulations to incorporate mixed uses in downtown and larger village areas.

Goal 6: Promote regional vision and land use visioning sessions/discussions to improve communication and coordination between towns in the region.

Objective 6a. Propose the creation of a Regional Land Use Commission or volunteer think tank to improve communication and unification in achieving the region's economic development vision.

Action Item 1: Host regional visioning and land use discussions at least twice a year to identify where incompatible regulations exist in towns sharing common transportation routes leading to areas that struggle to implement the shared or common vision of the region. Improved communication and coordination across town boundaries can facilitate higher success in achieving the region's overall vision.

Action Item 2: Consider land use as part of a regional system or framework, recognizing that businesses and services serve the needs of the region, and people live much of their life outside of the confines of their individual towns but often still within the region, in terms of where they work, eat, shop and play, etc..

Goal 7: Reimagine zoning as a tool that furthers a municipality's future development priorities and creates vibrant communities.

Objective 7a. Evaluate Zoning Regulations to determine if changes need to be made to avoid any exclusionary language.

Objective 7b. Encourage towns to examine the capacity of each existing zone to determine which parcels are developable for the permitted & special permitted uses and which may be difficult to develop or are environmentally fragile and should be protected. The zones and permitted uses can then be reconsidered if changes would make sense.



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Action Item 1. Create or expand mix-use zones within the region's municipalities to offer the opportunity for businesses to be built in walkable locations from residents. Reconsidering the standards in land use regulations promotes the growth of new and modern business types.

Action Item 2. Reevaluate zoning practices to encourage compatible business on land used for agricultural purposes.

Action Item 3. Encourage safe and effective brownfield and greyfield redevelopment and reuse through more efficient land use processes, thereby presenting an incentive over new development on raw land.

Action Item 4. Incorporate Transfer of Development Rights within a municipality's zoning regulations to preserve land considered for productive agricultural use or watershed and wildlife habitat.

Action Item 5. Encourage the reuse and redevelopment of old mills as an opportunity to develop with higher than recently allowed density and increase walkability in municipalities.

Action Item 6. Identify and reevaluate underutilized, oversized parking lots for opportunities that could be compatible with existing uses.

4. Business Assistance

A Brookings article titled, "Rural small businesses need local solutions to survive," illustrates how rural small businesses play a crucial role in local economies. Prior to the pandemic, locally led downtown commercial corridor revitalization strategies were successful in fostering small business growth and development. These efforts, often in partnership with Main Street programs (specific approaches utilized to strengthen

communities through place-based economic development), supported an accessible entrepreneurial environment at the local level. As COVID-19 exposed economic instability in rural communities, it is now known that investing in these strategies is critical for rural recovery and economic resiliency.¹⁸ By focusing on regional clusters and leveraging local assets, targeted business assistance programs can foster economic growth and build resiliency into the northeast's municipalities.

There are several business associations and business-development related groups within the northeast region that assist businesses and support economic development at the local level:

- I. Small Business Academy offered in Killingly
- II. The Northeast CT Economic Alliance. This is an organization that offers financing to small businesses and provides business development resources by working with clients to guide them through application processes.¹⁹
- III. The Northeastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber offers various networking events each month and is an excellent medium for business owners in the region to connect with each other.

¹⁸ Brookings. *Rural small businesses need local solutions to survive*. Love, Powe. 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rural-small-businesses-need-local-solutions-to-survive/>.

¹⁹ <https://nealliance.com/>.

Vision Statement: *Encourage economic growth through local and virtual business assistance resources and educational strategies oriented towards entrepreneurs within the northeast region.*

Goal 1: Continue regional efforts to disseminate education resources geared towards local businesses.

Objective 1a. Assist in increasing the accessibility of educational resources for businesses within the region, whether this includes printed materials, translated materials, etc.

Action Item 1. Establish a COG (Councils of Government) Economic Subcommittee for the future to facilitate communication throughout the region on economic development concerns and opportunities. For example, information on potential need for new land use regulations as well as recommendations for municipalities could foster competitive and responsive economic development amongst towns.

Goal 2: Discover and promote what capital is available for small businesses in the region.

Goal 3: Support local business associations and Economic Development Commissions in their missions to promote and publicize businesses within the region.

Objective 3a. Emphasize the importance of relationships with the Chambers of Commerce and their role in bringing visibility to businesses within the region.

Goal 4: Enhance emerging economic clusters within the region.

Action Item 1: Utilize GIS software to create a database for residents to easily identify small and agricultural businesses within the region.

Action Item 2: Reinstate Agricultural Commissions in towns where they are inactive, with the intent of providing local agricultural businesses with new methods in both agriculture and business management and fostering public and private integration in agricultural strategy development.

Goal 5: Continue regional efforts to circulate educational resources and funding opportunities geared towards local small businesses.

Objective 5a. Educate residents on the northeast's business climate and best practices for starting a small business.

Action Item 1: Create a resource toolkit of publications to serve as guidance for best practices for small businesses.

Action Item 2: Identify SBA Hubs within the region for targeted business support and grants.

Action Item 3: Support applications for the Community Investment Fund 2030 for the following towns: Brooklyn, Chaplin, Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam, Scotland, Sterling, Thompson, and Voluntown.

Action Item 4: Offer a Small Business Academy in other locations to increase opportunities for potential entrepreneurs to prepare potential entrepreneurs to move from a dream for a business, through the business plan, obtaining financing and permits to opening day.

Goal 6: Support the development and dissemination of training for land use officials within the region.

Action Item 1: Host quarterly land use training of staff and commissions at NECCOG that goes beyond the basics. Advanced training may offer topics like how to improve the land use application process, how to update regulations to meet the needs of current applicants and modern application types, etc.

Goal 6: Expand regional efforts to circulate educational resources geared towards women and minority entrepreneurs.

Objective 6a. Form relationships with local business incubators to encourage start-ups among diverse populations within the region.

Objective 6b. Conduct outreach to identify which businesses are women and minority owned to promote them and create a special designation on the small and agricultural business database.

Action Item 1: Organize professional development training specifically for women and minority entrepreneurs in small business/agriculture.

5. Tourism

National Heritage Corridor & National Scenic Byway

²⁰ National Scenic Byway Foundation. "Connecticut State Route 169." <nsbfoundation.com/nb/connecticut-state-route-169/>

Northeastern Connecticut is positioned uniquely for tourism growth in its inclusion in the Quinebaug & Shetucket Rivers Valley National Heritage Corridor as well as Route 169, the scenic byway. The northeastern region places a lot of emphasis on its outdoor activities like paddling and hiking on outdoor trails such as the East Coast Greenway and Air Line State Park Trail, but also its cultural and historic offerings.

Connecticut State Route 169 is a country-road experience with cultural and scenic significance and is a terrific strength of the northeast that can be utilized to drive local tourism. Those who partake in this 32-mile-long scenic drive from Lisbon through Woodstock encounter beautiful rolling fields and old barns and towering grain silos that still remain.²⁰ The byway itself lacks comprehensive protection. Only a small portion, approximately a mile out of the 32-mile stretch, benefits from appreciable safeguards that would ensure its continued status as a scenic byway.²¹



Discover the "Last Green Valley" CTVISIT the Scenic Northeast

²¹ NECCOG. "Northeastern Connecticut 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan."

NECCOG believes that it is the region’s responsibility to maintain the landscape of the byway through vegetation management and smart growth. In NECCOG’S 2024 Legislative Platform, it is identified that many municipalities do not have the capacity to handle hazard trees on heavily utilized roadways, which not only poses a threat to roadway safety and drivers, but also obstructs the views on Route 169. Managing the foliage along Route 169 is important for the area's environmental health, as aging trees across the state have been plagued with invasive insect species such as the emerald ash borer and gypsy moth, and storm damage. However, it is also necessary to manage the built environment of the landscape as well. Promoting smart growth practices as an approach to development and conservation along Route 169 is a way to guide economic growth and tourism in a way that preserves the unique charm and character of the byway. The NECCOG region can utilize smart growth principles such as, “mix land uses, taking advantage of compact building design, and preserving open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas”²² to aid in the creation of tourism destinations (such as small businesses) along the byway, while preserving its aesthetic value. An example of smart growth business development along the byway is Fiberoptics Technology Inc. in Pomfret.



Image taken from Pomfret, Connecticut stock photos, gettyimages

The exterior of this building blends seamlessly with the surrounding agrarian landscape, even though it is a manufacturing facility for OEM fiber optic components! A threat to the area is continuing economic development that could be anywhere in the United States. Smart growth on a smaller scale in the northeast allows the region to keep some of the distinguishing character of the area and promote business creation.

Agriculture in the State

NECCOG conducted a stakeholder interview with Bryan Hurlburt, the Commissioner for the Department of Agriculture, in an effort to better understand the state of agriculture in CT and different resources for agricultural development. Over the years, the Department of Agriculture has been tweaking its grant programs to directly ensure that they are being more responsive to the needs of the industry. The department has created a new and beginning farmer microgrant program, included food access and food systems work as priority areas,

²² United States Environmental Protection Agency. “About Smart Growth.” [<About Smart Growth | US EPA>](#)

and launched a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) working group. The New and Beginning Farmer Microgrant Program is a \$5,000 grant program designed for new entrants into agriculture, who are trying to grow their business and make agriculture into a profession. Over the past year, the department has made efforts to keep up with offsetting the costs of implementing climate smart technology by announcing a Climate Smart Ag and Forestry Grant Program. Those who are interested in seeking agricultural business support can consult the department's Agricultural Transition or Viability grants at [Connecticut Department of Agriculture](https://necog-hub.arcgis.com/). NECCOG is also working to continuously update grants available to those in agriculture on the CEDS Hubsite. <https://necog-hub.arcgis.com/>

When asked about the role that zoning regulations play in agricultural development, Hulburt responded in the following way:

“As we talk about agriculture and agritourism, you think about your craft breweries and farm wineries, places that are not necessarily located in the commercial district. And so, when you’re bringing people to the farm and you’re doing events on the farm, that requires some work with Planning and Zoning. I think everybody wants to have a robust and viable agricultural community in the state, but we have to understand that that means something different than it did 70, 80, 100 years ago. We’ve been working closely with Treehouse Brewery, which is a great example. They purchased a protected farm that had some

customer activity, and they want to do something different that’s going to require a bit of flexibility in Woodstock to accommodate that. But you look at Taylor Brook Farm Winery and you know they were able to get it done and are successful.”

Agritourism

Agritourism helps farmers generate revenue from recreational or educational activities. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, “Counties with high agritourism activity may benefit from industry concentration, likely an effect of well-established regional reputations. For example, visitors are more likely to visit known wine regions or agritourism farms near scenic byways in the country.”²³

The following agritourism offerings exist within the northeastern region:

- Educational farm tours on agricultural practices, such as regenerative farming at Azuluna Farms in Woodstock
- Pick-your-own farms, such as Woodstock Orchards
- Corn mazes, such as at Fort Hill Farms in Thompson
- Farm-to-table dinners, such as at the Vanilla Bean Cafe (stakeholder interview found in Appendix 3)
- Fairs such as the Woodstock or Brooklyn fair
- Vendor cooperatives such as Walktober

²³ USDA Economic Research Service. “Agritourism Allows Farms to Diversify and Has Potential Benefits for Rural Communities.” <ers.usda.gov/amber-

waves/2019/november/agritourism-allows-farms-to-diversify-and-has-potential-benefits-for-rural-communities/>

Branding Strategies & Collaboration with other Groups

In an effort to implement economic development efforts related to tourism, NECCOG will collaborate with tourism-focused groups in the region such as the Eastern Regional Tourism District, the Northeastern, Eastern and Windham Chambers of Commerce, and The Last Green Valley (TLGV) to promote tourism development grants on the CEDS Hubsite <https://necog-ceds-2023-update-1-necog.hub.arcgis.com/>. CTVISIT is also a great resource to consult for a wide range of activities occurring in the state and in the northeastern region. NECCOG has also created and helped to author two branding strategies for the member towns of Pomfret and Thompson. NECCOG hopes to increase collaboration with other towns interested in creating branding plans and expanding these efforts to marketing campaigns.

Inclusivity

Vision Statement: Launch a cohesive approach that brings together diverse types of tourism and organizations to bring more visibility to northeastern CT, drive economic growth, and diversify the tourism sector.

Goal 1: Support and develop tourism with an emphasis on the northeast's regional strengths.

Action Item 1. Update the online NECCOG calendar regularly to include town and regional happenings.

Action Item 2. Form a partnership with the Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD) to support their advertisement of events within the northeast.

Action Item 3. Connect and form a relationship with the Cultural Coalition to promote their expanded services in our region.

Action Item 4. Support the possibility of inclusive branding strategies to connect different tourism sectors within the region.

Action Item 5. Build upon/update town branding strategies that exist already.

Action Item 6. Build upon the Route 169 National Scenic Byway to implement the plan and promote the area.

Action Item 7. Determine the market for additional lodging and where it would be best suited for those visiting the region. Recommend zoning amendments accordingly.

Goal 2: Support and develop tourism within the agricultural sector.

Objective 2a. Promote zoning changes and amendments that allow for expanded tourism-related business opportunities within agritourism, such as wedding and event venues on farms, farm tours or stores, farm-to-table events or restaurants, agricultural summer camps, etc.

Objective 2c. Work to improve diversity of representation on Agricultural Commissions within the region, per the recommendations of the DEI in Agriculture Working Group Report to the Commissioner of Agriculture.

Goal 3: Support and develop environmental and recreational tourism.

Objective 3a. Partner with organizations such as The Last Green Valley to support efforts of branding the northeastern region for tourism.

Objective 3b. Promote volunteerism to maintain and increase the accessibility of recreational trails and open spaces.

Objective 3c. Highlight outdoor activities that are “socially distanced” in order to appeal to those recovering from the social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 3d. Connect with land trusts in the northeastern region to gain an understanding of how open space is utilized and their goals for the future.

Goal 4: Support and develop cultural and historical tourism.

Objective 4a. Support the pursuit of funding for historical preservation sites and museums within the region.

Objective 4b. Promote volunteerism for maintenance of historical sites and museum operations.

Goal 5: Support and develop creative tourism in the arts.

Action Item 1: Connect with guilds in the region that promote local artistry and promote their offerings on the NECCOG Hub Site.

²⁴ American Institutes for Research. The Importance of Workforce Development for a Future-Ready, Resilient, and Equitable American

6. Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development

A scholarly article published by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) titled, “The Importance of Workforce Development for a Future- Ready, Resilient, and Equitable American Economy” underscores the importance of a stronger and inclusive workforce development system. AIR emphasizes that workforce development is essential for social equity. Workforce development aims to prepare workers for future-ready success, raise postsecondary completion rates, and support skill attainment. Thus, the benefits of workforce development programs are that an inclusive workforce development system may be created so that workers can acquire skills sought by employers in well-compensated jobs with advancement prospects.²⁴ Workforce development is especially pertinent in the northeast region, as it is important to advance the population without a college education to create an inclusive economy and society.

The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)

NECCOG conducted a stakeholder interview (Appendix 3) with Carol LaBelle, the Senior Director of Programs and Special Projects at the Eastern Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), a non-profit organization that provides manufacturing and healthcare workforce pipeline programs, other workforce preparation programs for youth, and services for employers in the region.²⁵ During this interview, LaBelle explained that the

Economy. 2021. <air.org/sites/default-files/WDEMP-Importance-of-Workforce-Development-Brief-April-2021.pdf>.

²⁵ <ewib.org/about-us>.

northeast is seeing a “job seeker’s market,” in which EWIB is helping employers fill their needs by tapping into the nontraditional workforce (those with disabilities, ex-offenders, single parents that are receiving cash assistance, or high school youth). Furthermore, the organization is focusing on high-school aged students that are not planning on going to college and are looking for other alternatives to land sufficient employment opportunities. The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative, or MPI, is a program conducted by EWIB that has now been expanded to about 17 of the high schools in the area and around Connecticut. Some high schools have a full manufacturing program in which they teach a full curriculum, while others have a partial program. EWIB will provide a school with the curriculum for the MPI, as well as staff support and ongoing technical assistance- the only challenge with developing this program in schools is finding a devoted instructor who will steer the growth of the program and serve as a centralized point of contact. LaBelle believes that finding dedicated teachers has most likely become an issue due to the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges associated with virtual teaching.

A stakeholder interview (Appendix 3) conducted with Karen Hynick; the Chief Executive Officer at Quinebaug Valley Community College (QVCC), further illuminates MPI’s reach. QVCC trains people to do various types of manufacturing, such as plastics manufacturing or mechatronics. Manufacturing is largely certifications-based, so the college offers certificate programs and associate degrees. QVCC takes part in the youth manufacturing pipeline by working with the local high schools in the region as well as EWIB to provide training to students that leads to certifications. Their program in manufacturing is

NIMS certified, a standard that is regarded highly in the industry. Then, QVCC connects back with employers to work on placement, usually in conjunction with EWIB and the Northeastern Chamber. QVCC has regional advisory boards in which the school works with local companies that they are aware of to ensure that their curriculum is meeting industry standards, thus establishing a feedback loop between the school and employers. According to Hynick, “A certification in manufacturing can lead directly to employment, in as little as a seven-week training program.” While manufacturing is a prominent industry in the northeast that does not require a postsecondary degree, other avenues for certifications exist in medical assisting, early childhood and applied management/business at QVCC.

[Access Community Action Agency](#)

Access Community Action Agency contributes to the economic stability and growth of the region by closing financial gaps that exist for the clients that they serve. Access offers a program called Access to Employment, which is both a case management program and an eleven-week class that provides people with job readiness skills, financial literacy, and what they call life literacy. During this time, their clients also receive case management on looking for jobs, resume writing, and other basics around job development and employment services. Krider believes that the challenge to adult workforce development is not in providing the services, but in providing ongoing support.

Youth Engagement

Youth engagement ties directly to workforce readiness, as engaged students acquire the relevant skills needed to prepare them for employment. A comprehensive table titled, “Chronically Absent Student Count within the NECCOG Region since 2019” can be found in the Evaluation Framework section of the CEDS. It is imperative that educational institutions in the region, especially high schools, are aware of their disengaged youth population. According to a stakeholder interview conducted with Elsa Núñez, former President of Eastern Connecticut State University (Appendix 3), “...kids coming from urban or rural centers will generally have poorer skill sets in reading, writing, and mathematics...” It is important to note high levels of chronic absenteeism in the region’s high schools. During the 2022-2023 school year, Killingly Highschool had a chronically absent student population of 34%- Plainfield High School had 31.2%, Putnam High School had 32.3%, Tourtellotte Memorial High School had 32.7%, and Woodstock Academy had 19.8%.

Vision Statement: *Support the collaboration of private nonprofits, public organizations, higher education and career and technical education institutions in their work in broadening the region’s skilled workforce while remaining attuned to industry demands.*

Goal 1: Support the region’s public, private, and career and technical institutions in their work to align high school curriculum with employer/college needs.

Objective 1a. Support the establishment of an employability initiative within the region’s schools, with clearly defined outcomes and skills learned for each class a student is enrolled in.

Action Item 1. Emphasize the importance of the development of soft skills prior to entering college or the workforce.

Action Item 2. Promote a feedback loop between employers and regional educational institutions to ensure that curriculum is continually updated per workforce/industry needs.

Goal 2: Promote the importance of pipeline initiatives in their purpose of workforce alignment and preparation as an alternative to traditional postsecondary education.

Action Item 1. Partner with local transportation companies/nonprofits to discuss transportation modes for students needing to get to their work-based learning placements.

Goal 3: Partner with private nonprofits and public organizations to publicize professional development training opportunities to keep adult’s skills up to date.

Objective 3a. Partner with organizations such as Access Agency to improve adult job readiness skills and other are skills that could improve quality of life.

Action Item 1. Promote employment opportunities amongst the non-traditional workforce- those with disabilities, ex-offenders, single parents, and under and unemployed individuals in the region.

Objective 3b. Promote adult education options by providing materials in food pantries, put ads in local Shopper’s Guide and Turnpike Buyer with a focus on targeting audiences such as veterans, who may have barriers to continuing education.

Goal 4: Encourage businesses in the region to prioritize hiring graduates from Connecticut based colleges and high schools as well as Connecticut natives who graduated from out-of-state colleges.

Objective 4a. Increase awareness of internship opportunities within Connecticut and the northeast for both high school and college students.

Action Item 1. Create an internship website for all CT business that seek interns and/or entry level employees.

Action Item 2. Increase apprenticeship and summer internship programs within the region.

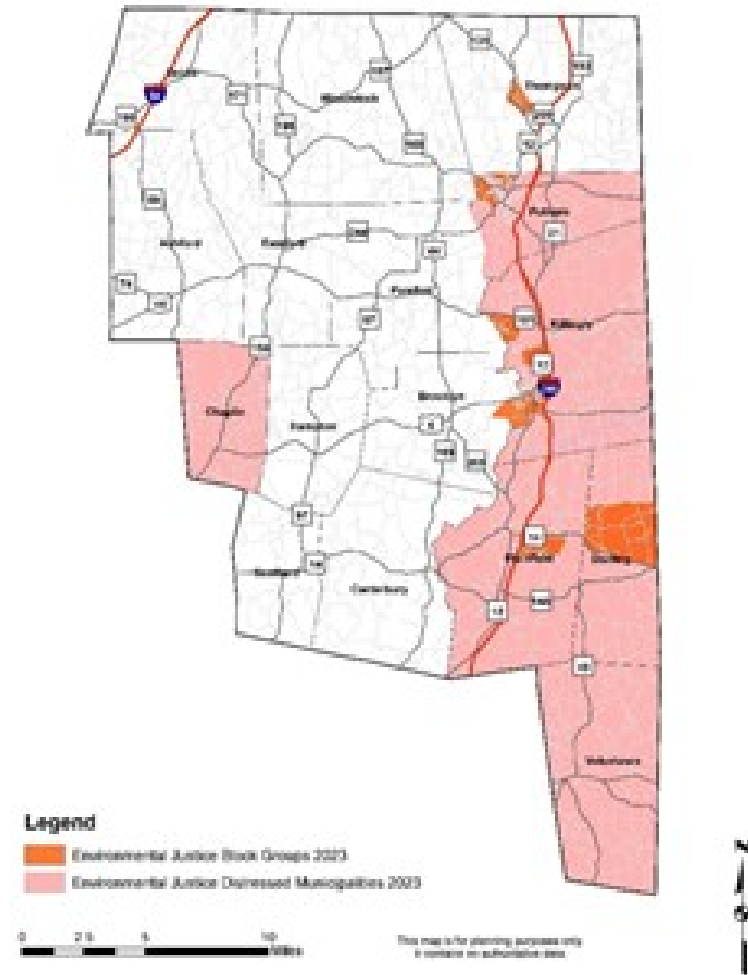
Goal 5: Introduce career fields and opportunities to middle and high school students in order to introduce different career options and the relevancy to school subjects being taught.

Action Item 1. Increase youth job fairs and job shadow opportunities for high school students.

Action Item 2. Starting at the middle school level, invite speakers from various career fields throughout the year.

7. Health & Well-being

Identifying environmental justice communities within the region can point to which communities are considered distressed. An Environmental Justice Community is defined by the Connecticut General Statutes as a distressed municipality (as designated by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, or DECD), or defined census block



groups where 30% of the population is living below 200% of the federal poverty level.²⁶ Updated annually, the Distressed Municipalities lists identify the state’s most fiscally and economically distressed municipalities utilizing statistic indicators that measure the fiscal capacity of each municipality—tax base, personal income of residents, and the resident’s need for public services.²⁷ As displayed in the map above, Chaplin, Putnam, Sterling, and Voluntown are considered distressed municipalities. Killingly and Plainfield are formerly distressed municipalities with grant funding eligibility until 2025 and 2028 respectively. Environmental Justice block groups highlight pockets of rural poverty in the region that exist in Sterling, Killingly, Putnam, Plainfield, and Thompson. In the future, these communities especially will be targeted for funds for needs such as housing, insurance, open space, brownfield remediation and economic development programs, and so on.

Public Safety

The current system of volunteer fire and EMS services is not sustainable for small towns and requires reform. NECCOG would like the opportunity to pilot the consolidation of multiple small fire/EMS services into a subregional service with back-office support through the COG. This effort may be reached through RPIP or may require legislation. A law passed in session year 2021 required the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management to conduct a study in 2022 regarding the obstacles to merging or consolidating the fire districts or fire

²⁶ <portal.ct.gov/deep/environmental-justice/05-learn-more-about-environmental-justice-communities>.

²⁷ < [Distressed Municipalities \(ct.gov\)](https://portal.ct.gov/deep/environmental-justice/05-learn-more-about-environmental-justice-communities)>.

departments of two or more municipalities. This report states that, “If consolidation is a viable option, it needs to be openly accepted as possibly the best alternative. However, the fear of a department losing its autonomy or identity must be addressed early and throughout the process.”²⁸

Healthcare

In the primary regional survey on economic development conducted by NECCOG, only 15.6% of respondents ranked access to healthcare within their top five areas that best characterize the economic strength of the NECCOG region. The following comments were collected from the survey:

- ***“Public transportation could increase labor “shortages” and ensure all have access to healthcare services- or have a mobile healthcare bus to get to people who have no transportation.”***
- ***“The region needs youth programs, programs that deal with mental health issues and senior health issues.”***

Food Insecurity

CT Mirror published a “Food Deserts in CT” article in which the following region’s towns were identified as food deserts: Thompson, Plainfield, Canterbury, and Sterling. Food deserts are defined according to a classification system by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in which the agency considers food

²⁸ State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management. Report to the Connecticut General Assembly Planning and Development Committee. 2022. < <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/IGPP-Data-Grants-Mgmt/SA-21-12-Final-Report-to-PD-Committee-12022.pdf>>.

deserts as census tracts classified as low-income and low access areas, meaning that a significant part of the population may not be able to afford sufficient groceries, may live far from a grocery store and experience transportation challenges.²⁹ Access Community Action Agency has three community nutrition programs. The program is CACFP, which stands for the Child Adult Care Food Program. This is a federally funded program, or a reimbursement-based program. People who have home-based care, whether it be child or adult, are reimbursed for providing nutritious meals in their homes. The second community nutrition program that Access has is WIC (Women, Infants, and Children). This program is a voucher-based system. Enrolled participants receive an EBT-based card that helps them to purchase designated foods, nutritionally defined foods, thereby shifting dollars out of their own income that they might be able to use for some other economic reason. There is also a food pantry program which is two-fold, with two sight-based programs, one in Willimantic and one in Danielson. These deliver to thirteen food insecure communities, neighborhoods, in the 28-town region.

Vision: Promote the importance of effective, equitable and affordable access to healthcare and mental health services within the region as they are foundational to the well-being of the northeast's residents.

²⁹ CT Mirror. Where are CT's food deserts located?. 2023. <<https://ctmirror.org/2023/06/09/ct-food-deserts-census-grocery-stores-low-income/>>.

Goal 1: Connect with local school administrations on their efforts in providing youth prevention programs to students.

Goal 2: Aim to improve equitable health care access through schools/employers.

Objective 2a. Support efforts in expanding and strengthening health care transportation throughout the region.

Goal 3: Support the expansion of adult mental health services and providers within the region.

Action Item 1. Utilize regional data to identify which groups and which geographic areas residents are struggling with accessing the services that they need.

8. Housing Stock

As part of the CEDS drafting process, Delia Fey, AICP, NECCOG's Senior Regional Planner composed a document titled, "Housing Regulation Updates: Guide for Vibrant Communities" which serves to demonstrate the impact of zoning on economic development and can be found in Appendix 8. This document provides the origins and evolution of zoning, as well as its challenges and obstacles to creating vibrant communities.

Challenges with Zoning and Obstacles to Vibrancy

Despite more than a century of zoning history, communities, including those in northeastern Connecticut, find that zoning regulations don't always achieve intended outcomes. Zoning allows for various land uses, but factors such as funding, market demand, and developer willingness play a crucial role in development. Some land use regulations make a desirable development difficult to implement via complex regulations or processes, and lack of familiarity with multi-family housing types (e.g. duplexes, or 3-4 family units) contribute to challenges in attaining more affordable housing. Thoughtful zoning practices and streamlined regulations can promote economic vibrancy and better meet community needs. One can find the region's household related statistics within this document in Appendix 7.

Vision: Support the need for development of affordable and market rate units and work to update Zoning Regulations within municipalities to facilitate the development of the following housing types: accessory apartments, duplexes, 3-4 family homes and mixed-use development.

Goal 1: Aid municipalities in pursuing the creation of a Regional Housing Feasibility Plan, in order to provide data on housing demand and illustrate a need for housing in the region to would-be developers.

Goal 2: Emphasize that Zoning Regulations within the region include various housing types allowed based on the neighborhood type and level of public infrastructure available.

Objective 2a. Work towards the goal of having housing that is available in various sizes and with accessible accommodations for the needs of modern households, including residents of all ages, of diverse household composition, and a range of financial capabilities.

Objective 2b. Work towards the goal that the greatest additional density is allowed within residential and mixed-use zones that are served by public sewer and water, have sidewalks and are walkable from residential areas to service and business areas.

Objective 2c. Zoning changes that can allow for new housing opportunities can include: creating or expanding mixed-use zones that allow for residential on the same lot and/or in the same building with non-residential uses, reuse larger underutilized former commercial buildings and mills to include residential uses, infill (re)development where outdated and oversized parking lots exist;

Objective 2d. Increase opportunities for attainable housing through the development of small-scale multi-family housing (2-4 units per property) as a way to add affordable housing to communities without the overwhelming scale often associated with "affordable housing" which often carries a negative connotation. These housing types represent an investment opportunity for property owners to invest in their communities. If the small-scale multi-family housing is owner occupied, they can represent a great opportunity to build wealth and equity in addition to making their own housing affordable –in a way that is unrelated to their employment.

Goal 3: Aid residential property owners in having access to funding for needed renovations, thereby improving the quality of housing, including rental units within the region.

Action Item 1. Encourage municipalities to inspect apartments between rentals to ensure that residential units meet building codes.

Action Item 2. Support applications for CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funding or new funding from other sources that facilitates the renovations and improvements to existing housing.

Goal 4: Encourage the redevelopment and renovation of existing older homes that are structurally sound and lack serious problems in order to reduce the environmental impacts of building a similarly sized new home.

Goal 5: Provide potential buyers with up-to-date information on available mortgage and lending options to help potential buyers increase their access to home ownership.

9. Childcare

Access to childcare has never been more imperative to one's participation and productivity within the workforce. Insufficient childcare creates economic impacts for parents, employers, and taxpayers, as detailed within the 2023 Connecticut's Blue-Ribbon Panel on Childcare Report:

“Early investments for Connecticut’s youngest residents bring a 7-13 percent return on that investment. This matters to taxpayers who underwrite additional educational, social

services, and health costs – all costs which have been proven to decrease with proactive early investments in children. This is also a significant productivity and workforce issue for businesses, in part reflecting the gender gap in workforce participation for parents of young children. It is estimated that Connecticut loses \$1.5 billion per year due to the lack of infant and toddler care alone.”

Childcare recommendations and solutions proposed within northeastern Connecticut must center on increasing **equitable access** to these services for our region's families. NECCOG met with members of the Northeast Early Childhood Council (NECC) to discuss the state of childcare in northeastern Connecticut and strategies being implemented or proposed throughout the state that allow for the creation of a greater variety of childcare options. NECC, whose member towns are comprised of Brooklyn, Canterbury, Killingly, Plainfield, Putnam, Sterling, and Thompson, conducted a survey of families in their towns, asking them to answer questions on their thoughts on childcare in northeastern Connecticut- this survey gathered 75 responses. Most families in northeastern CT prefer a childcare environment in which they know that the staff are reliable, attentive, First Aid & CPR certified, and educated on early child development best practices.

Vision: Promote additional childcare businesses of various types, such as small household daycares or early childhood

centers to respond to the increased need of quality and affordable childcare within the region.³⁰

Childcare Availability by Town and Age Group

Town	Infant (0-17m)	Toddler (C) 18m-3y	School Age (5y - 12y)	Preschool (C) 3y-5y, (H) 18m-5y
Ashford	1/4	N/A	1/5	1/8
Brooklyn	4/14	2/12	19/74	12/44
Canterbury	0/8	0/8	0/14	0/18
Chaplin	0/10	0/9	0/3	0/35
Eastford	0/0	0/0	0/20	0/10
Hampton	1/3	0/0	0/2	17/42
Killingly	8/48	8/58	29/94	70/317
Plainfield	17/51	14/55	12/48	23/163
Pomfret	3/17	2/14	2/9	4/43
Putnam	8/37	7/30	3/42	8/76
Scotland	0/2	0/0	0/0	7/36
Sterling	1/4	0/0	9/52	14/86
Thompson	2/27	3/23	6/31	22/128
Union	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
Voluntown	3/5	0/0	3/7	4/12
Woodstock	4/22	5/37	11/63	10/68

Some values reflect combined numbers for Child Care Centers and Family Child Care Homes, unless otherwise noted. Values for individual childcare types can be filtered at <https://resources.211childcare.org/map/>. One can also view the legally authorized capacity of the childcare options, which is often more than the spots provided.

³⁰Blue Ribbon Panel on Childcare, “2023 Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care Report,” 8.

Goal 1: Emphasize the need for a greater variety of childcare options that are reliable, affordable, and safe within the northeast region.

Objective 1a. Connect with local community colleges to discuss the prospects of providing programs for childcare licensure.

Action Item 1: Discuss the prospects of the QVCC early childhood program could add a degree or certificate program covering the requirements for how to open and manage a childcare business.

Objective 1b: Promote the need for childcare workers in an effort to increase licensure rates and options for parents.

Goal 2: Examine zoning regulations to ensure that childcare centers are allowed within downtown and village areas.

10. Adult & Senior Care

Preparing for an ageing population is vital within the northeastern region. As voiced by Alison Dvorak, the Executive Director of Senior Resources Agency on Aging, programs that help people as they age to stay living in their community are important (Appendix 3). The Senior Resources Agency on Aging manage various programs related to economic concerns- there are chronic disease self-management education programs for

those of any age, with the idea being that when people can manage their health issues better, they are living a healthier and more productive life. The Older Americans act was created in 1965 to address the fact that older adults need to have a safety net to be able to continue to live in their community.

Vision: Promote the creation of accessible adult care services for those with special needs and/or senior adult day care.

Goal 1: Promote the availability of increased housing options for seniors, that are designed to accommodate increased mobility needs, financial constraints, and transportation needs.

Action Item 1: Allow zoning that permits housing options in different densities, as well as accessory dwelling units for the purpose of those aging out of their home.

Action Item 2: Expand transit via the 'Elderly-Disabled Direct Service' through the Northeastern Connecticut Transit District to reduce isolation. This transit service can be promoted to seniors via the region's towns' senior centers, senior housing, and the Quinebaug Valley Senior Center in Brooklyn.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

NECCOG has chosen the following performance measures to evaluate the progress of the region’s economic development priority areas identified in the Regional SWOT Survey and Strategic Direction & Action Plan. Each framework directly relates to a goal or objective located in the Strategic Direction & Action Plan and is indicated for each.

Tracking the unemployment rate over time in the region can provide valuable insights into the economic development status of a region for several reasons:

- 1. Economic Health Indicator.** A declining unemployment rate often signals economic growth or business expansion, overall contributing to economic development.
- 2. Consumer Spending.** Employed individuals may be more likely to have disposable income and increase their spending, in turn stimulating product and service demand for businesses in the area.
- 3. Government Revenue.** Higher employment rates may lead to increased tax revenues for governments to reinvest into the regional economy through infrastructure projects, education, or other public services.

4. Social stability. Lower unemployment rates reduce poverty and inequality, enhancing the overall quality of life within the region and creating a more stable environment for economic activities.³¹

Unemployment Comparison within NECCOG Region

Town	2022 Unemployment Rate	2023 Unemployment Rate	2023 Employed	2023 Unemployed
Ashford	3.70%	3.26%	2,481	81
Brooklyn	4.30%	3.99%	3,963	158
Canterbury	3.90%	3.56%	2,754	98
Chaplin	4.00%	3.85%	1,194	46
Eastford	3.70%	3.24%	956	31
Hampton	3.50%	3.32%	995	33
Killingly	4.10%	4.12%	9,193	379
Plainfield	3.90%	3.95%	8,210	324
Pomfret	2.80%	2.96%	2,431	72
Putnam	4.60%	4.20%	4,595	193
Scotland	3.40%	2.94%	919	27
Sterling	4.70%	4.47%	1,922	86
Thompson	4.10%	4%	5,067	203
Union	3.80%	3.31%	453	15
Voluntown	4.40%	3.57%	1,373	49
Woodstock	4.30%	3.79%	4,008	152

AdvanceCT & CTData Town Profiles: CT DOL, 2023CT OPM Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2017-21 Edition, B-18

³¹ Smart Capital Mind. What is the Relationship between Economic Growth and Unemployment? 2024. <smartcapitalmind.com/what-is-the-relationship-between-economic-growth-and-unemployment.htm>.

5. Productivity. When businesses are financially stable, they are more likely to become more innovative and invest in new technologies and processes, thus driving further economic development. A stable labor market also suggests a reliable workforce, contributing to overall productivity and innovation.³²

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development, Business Assistance, Public Infrastructure

Tracking mill rates for personal and motor vehicle property types can provide insights into the economic status of the region for several reasons, including but not limited to:

1. Revenue Needs. Mill rates are set by local governments to meet their revenue needs and may be an indication of local government efficiency. Higher mill rates may indicate that a municipality requires more funds for public services, infrastructure, or debt repayment, reflecting the economic challenges of a municipality.³³ Within the region, Woodstock and Putnam have the lowest recently recorded mill rates by property type, while Scotland and Chaplin have among the highest.

2. Property Values. Fluctuations in property values impact mill rates: if property values increase, mill rates may be adjusted to maintain a stable revenue stream, and if they decrease, they

may be raised to compensate for lower assessed values. Ashford and Woodstock experienced a considerable decrease in its real, personal, and motor vehicle mill rates from FY '21-

Mill Rates by Property Type

Town	Real & Personal (FY '21-'22)	Motor Vehicle (FY '21-'22)	Real & Personal (FY '22-'23)	Motor Vehicle (FY '22-'23)
Ashford	36.37	36.37	32.27	32.27
Brooklyn	26.42	26.42	27.48	27.48
Canterbury	23.72	23.72	23	23
Chaplin	32.5	32.5	34.5	32.46
Eastford	26	26	26.25	26.25
Hampton	23.77	23.77	22.49	22.49
Killingly	25.14	25.14	23.22	23.22
Plainfield	23.88	23.88	28.03	28.03
Pomfret	25.73	25.73	25.92	25.92
Putnam	20.84	20.84	21.19	21.19
Scotland	39	38	39	32.46
Sterling	31.94	31.94	31.94	31.94
Thompson	24.95	24.95	25.02	25.02
Union	28.6	28.6	27.85	27.85
Voluntown	28.08	28.08	27.77	27.77
Woodstock	25.5	25.5	20.85	20.85

Taken from AdavanceCT 2024 Connecticut Town Profile Reports

³² Congressional Research Service. Introduction to U.S. Economy: Unemployment. 2022. <crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/OF/IF10443>.

³³ Investopedia. What is a Mill Rate, and How are Property Taxes Calculated? 2024. <Investopedia.com/terms/m/millrate.asp>.

'22 to FY '22-'23, while Plainfield experienced a considerable increase.

Furthermore, municipalities should track mill rates by property type from year to year since a stable or decreasing mill rate over time most likely suggests an economic environment in which property values are rising and local governments can maintain or lower tax rates.³⁴

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Public Infrastructure, Housing Stock

Municipalities may consider comparing their total expenditures versus educational expenditures from year-to-year to gauge the overall economic health of the town. For example, increased spending may indicate economic growth and higher municipal revenue, while cuts could suggest financial constraints. However, high educational expenditures could also suggest less aid from the state level and reflect a financial burden put onto the towns. Tracking these expenditures may also demonstrate how a municipality responds to economic changes. For instance, during economic downturns, municipalities may reallocate funds from education to other urgent needs, reflecting their adaptive strategies³⁵

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development

Municipal Expenditures State FY 2020-21

Town	Total Expenditure	Educational	Other
Ashford	\$16,080,982.00	\$12,755,373	\$3,325,609
Brooklyn	\$26,025,609.00	\$21,453,833	\$4,571,776
Canterbury	\$15,106,638.00	\$12,562,792	\$2,543,846
Chaplin	\$9,470,374.00	\$7,444,616	\$2,025,758
Eastford	\$6,395,108.00	\$4,834,616	\$1,560,492
Hampton	\$5,615,810.00	\$3,516,571	\$2,099,239
Killingly	\$60,853,933.00	\$45,850,564	\$15,003,369
Plainfield	\$50,715,195.00	\$38,787,994	\$11,927,201
Pomfret	\$13,785,131.00	\$11,475,049	\$2,310,082
Putnam	\$29,419,758.00	\$21,773,053	\$7,646,705
Scotland	\$6,867,444.00	\$5,029,819	\$1,837,625
Sterling	\$11,476,252.00	\$9,023,585	\$2,452,667
Thompson	\$27,604,197.00	\$20,894,442	\$6,709,755
Union	\$5,364,758.00	\$2,079,261	\$3,285,497
Voluntown	\$10,212,377.00	\$8,218,677	\$1,993,700
Woodstock	\$26,392,861.00	\$21,217,932	\$5,174,929

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³⁴ FasterCapital. Mill Rate: Decoding Mill Rates: Understanding Property Tax Calculations. <fastercapital.com/content/Mill-Rate—Decoding-Mill-Rates—Understanding-Property-Tax-Calculations.html>.

³⁵ The National League of Cities. City Fiscal Conditions: How Municipal Expenditures Changed in the Post-Pandemic Era. 2024. <nlc.org/article/2024/04/10/city-fiscal-conditions-how-municipal-expenditures-changed-in-the-post-pandemic-era/>.

Municipal Revenue & Grand List State FY 2020-21

Town	Total Municipal Revenue	Property Tax Revenue	per capita	Intergovernmental Revenue	Revenue to Expenditure Ratio	Equalized Net Grand List	Commerical/ Industrial Share of Net Grand List	Actual Mill Rate	Equalized Mill Rate
Ashford	\$16,616,695	\$11,361,665	\$2,708	\$4,762,116	103%	\$502,174,333	5%	36.84	22.58
Brooklyn	\$27,229,239	\$16,837,605	\$1,970	\$9,493,263	105%	\$963,304,463	10%	28.92	17.36
Canterbury	\$16,025,423	\$10,006,944	\$1,962	\$5,515,648	106%	\$614,712,895	5%	26.4	16.15
Chaplin	\$10,477,411	\$7,075,340	\$3,270	\$3,123,212	111%	\$321,658,803	4%	32.5	21.78
Eastford	\$6,659,163	\$4,020,085	\$2,434	\$2,408,444	104%	\$261,088,420	6%	25.61	15.48
Hampton	\$6,182,978	\$3,983,845	\$2,214	\$1,934,934	110%	\$243,848,959	2%	25.5	15.69
Killingly	\$64,420,547	\$36,752,330	\$2,055	\$23,314,073	106%	\$2,009,698,025	26%	24.64	18.15
Plainfield	\$51,430,602	\$29,066,850	\$1,928	\$20,925,517	101%	\$1,658,021,168	18%	28.33	17.4
Pomfret	\$14,113,533	\$9,775,696	\$2,280	\$3,983,978	102%	\$561,859,679	7%	26.76	17.33
Putnam	\$30,052,279	\$15,414,898	\$1,659	\$11,459,141	102%	\$1,046,182,269	22%	20.84	14.63
Scotland	\$6,623,814	\$4,692,017	\$3,016	\$1,668,598	96%	\$169,044,963	2%	38	27.98
Sterling	\$12,959,598	\$7,732,142	\$2,143	\$4,987,270	113%	\$391,017,107	5%	31.94	19.61
Thompson	\$28,370,694	\$17,526,707	\$1,854	\$9,876,657	103%	\$1,011,830,428	5%	24.23	16.91
Union	\$3,362,769	\$2,712,488	\$3,476	\$594,794	63%	\$142,597,226	3%	28.99	19.04
Voluntown	\$10,538,726	\$6,178,165	\$2,388	\$4,113,199	103%	\$341,960,406	4%	29.21	17.83
Woodstock	\$25,742,925	\$18,064,996	\$2,197	\$6,911,642	98%	\$1,188,106,507	5%	24.5	15.2

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An Equalized Net Grand List (or ENGL) is a measure of the total market value of all taxable property within a municipality, adjusted to reflect current market values.³⁶

An increasing ENGL suggests rising property values, which may indicate economic growth and development. Additionally, a higher ENGL means a larger tax base, providing a municipality

³⁶ State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management. Equalized Net Grand List by Municipality. <portal.ct.gov/opm/igpp/publications/equalized-net-grand-list-by-town>.

with more revenue to invest in public services, infrastructure, and community development, further stimulating economic growth.³⁷ A declining ENGL may indicate economic challenges such as a downturn in the real estate market or a decrease in population.

The commercial/industrial share of each town’s net grand list is also indicated above. These figures may be important to tracking economic development within the region for the following reasons:

1. A higher commercial or industrial share indicates a diversified economy, which can be more resilient to economic downturns since a town is not overly reliant on residential property taxes.³⁸
2. Commercial and industrial sectors are significant sources of employment in the region. A growing share in these sectors can signal job creation and economic opportunities for residents.
3. Commercial and industrial properties often generate higher tax revenues compared to residential properties. This

Per Capita and Median Household Income-Poverty Rate

Town	Per Capita Income	% of State-wide PCI	Median Household Income	% of State Median	Poverty Rate
Ashford	\$48,171	100.6	\$94,778	105.06	4%
Brooklyn	\$33,804	70.6	\$84,816	94.02	6%
Canterbury	\$44,648	93.3	\$96,121	106.55	5%
Chaplin	\$36,572	76.4	\$83,750	92.84	8%
Eastford	\$41,563	86.8	\$100,673	111.59	6%
Hampton	\$48,267	100.8	\$107,109	118.73	6%
Killingly	\$33,798	70.6	\$76,552	84.86	14%
Plainfield	\$33,354	69.7	\$68,651	76.1	12%
Pomfret	\$49,127	102.6	\$98,750	109.46	6%
Putnam	\$32,118	67.1	\$63,721	70.63	10%
Scotland	\$36,975	77.2	\$90,317	100.12	2%
Sterling	\$32,310	67.5	\$82,703	91.68	20%
Thompson	\$39,730	83	\$95,905	106.31	6%
Union	\$48,763	101.9	\$100,547	111.46	4%
Voluntown	\$39,822	83.2	\$84,250	93.39	8%
Woodstock	\$51,698	108	\$101,496	112.51	4%

Taken from AdavanceCT 2024 Connecticut Town Profile

additional revenue can stimulate economic growth if utilized to improve public services and infrastructure.³⁹

³⁷ CT DATA. Public Investment Community Index. <data.ct.gov/Local-Government/Public-Investment-Community-Index-t8hb-sagg/data>.

³⁸ Connecticut Economic Resource Center. Fundamentals of Municipal Economic Development. 2018.

³⁹ The town of Ledyard Connecticut. Economic Development. <ledyardct.org/65/Economic-Development>.

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Public Infrastructure, Business Assistance

Per Capita Income

Per capita income measures the average income earned per person in a given area, reflecting the overall economic output and standard of living. Higher per capita income generally indicates a more prosperous economy.⁴⁰

Median Household Income

This metric represents the income of the median household, demonstrating the economic health of the middle class in a town. A higher median household income indicates that a significant portion of the population is experiencing economic stability and growth. Additionally, tracking the median household income points to economic equality within a given area and identifies income disparities. If the median household income is significantly lower than the state's, it may indicate income inequality.⁴¹

Poverty Rate

The poverty rate measures the percentage of the population living below the poverty line. Thus, a lower poverty rate indicates higher economic well-being and access to resources.

⁴⁰ United States Census Bureau. Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020. 2021. <[census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html)>.

⁴¹ FRED Economic Data. Real Median Household Income in the United States. <fred.stlouisfed.org/graph/?g=mYUr>.

High poverty rates can lead to social instability and increased public spending on social services.⁴²

Median Household Income, % of State Median and Poverty Rate figures are the most recent data taken from AdvanceCT 2024 Town Profiles. They gathered this data from the 2018-2022 American Community Survey data. The most recent Median Household Income for the State of CT is \$90,213, taken from ACS 2018-2022 data. Per Capita Income and % of State-wide PCI figures are taken from OPM's Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2017-21 Edition.

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Health & Well-being⁴

⁴² United States Census Bureau. Income and Poverty in the United States:2020. 2021. <[census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html](https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html)>.

New business registrations contribute to the tax base, providing revenue for public services and infrastructure development. Increased registrations also lead to job creation and may reduce unemployment rates and increase household incomes. A high number of new business registrations suggests a vibrant entrepreneurial environment and may lead to a more diversified economy that is more resilient to economic shocks.⁴³ New business registrations in the NECCOG region may be greater facilitated through streamlined land use and development processes and increased availability of business assistance programs.

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Land Use & Development Process, Business Assistance, Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development

New Business Registrations in NECCOG Region by Year

Town	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total Active Businesses
Ashford	14	30	23	35	33	243
Brooklyn	53	36	40	62	57	395
Canterbury	36	42	32	25	48	282
Chaplin	9	20	12	18	17	130
Eastford	11	10	16	16	15	136
Hampton	16	11	12	14	25	133
Killingly	75	97	103	121	135	866
Plainfield	53	74	91	108	101	696
Pomfret	21	24	45	38	32	298
Putnam	50	60	76	97	87	682
Scotland	2	6	4	8	8	62
Sterling	16	12	25	22	23	171
Thompson	28	39	63	52	72	453
Union	4	3	7	6	5	54
Voluntown	11	20	20	20	26	157
Woodstock	48	48	61	62	70	527

Taken from Secretary of the State, Business Registrations, March 202

⁴³ Springer Link. New firm registration and the business cycle. 2014. <link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11365-014-0345-0>.

Student Absenteeism

the 2019-20 school year, chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020.

Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Ashford School District	29 (8.3%)	33 (9.6%)	112 (32.7%)	N/A
Brooklyn Elementary	47 (10.3)	30 (7.1%)	109 (24.4%)	186 (42.8%)
Brooklyn Middle	15 (4.5%)	32 (9.5%)	78 (22.8%)	47 (13.2%)
Canterbury Elementary	9 (3.7%)	23 (10.5%)	24 (10.8%)	17 (7.6%)
Dr. Helen Baldwin MS	11 (6.1%)	18 (9.6%)	12 (6.1%)	11 (5.6%)
Chaplin Elementary	7	N/A	23	18 (3.6%)
Eastford Elementary	9 (7.1%)	12	N/A	N/A
Hampton Elementary	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Killingly Central School	51 (14.2%)	95 (29%)	83 (24.4%)	82 (25.3%)
Killingly High School	151 (19.8%)	191 (25%)	237 (33%)	259 (34%)
Killingly Intermediate School	81 (12.6%)	287 (45.4%)	160 (24.9%)	206 (31.5%)
Killingly Memorial School	46 (8.9%)	141 (28.2%)	99 (19.3%)	90 (17.1%)
Moosup Elementary	45 (14.5%)	57 (20%)	51 (18.8%)	72 (23.6%)
Plainfield Central School	67 (13%)	158 (33.3%)	81 (17.5%)	88 (20.3%)
Plainfield High School	130 (22.5%)	165 (29.7%)	165 (32.1%)	162 (31.2%)
Plainfield Memorial School	N/A	58 (20.1%)	57 (18.6%)	52 (18.1%)
Shepard Hill Elementary School	54 (18.2%)	93 (31.6%)	79 (27.5%)	69 (23.2%)

Year	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Pomfret Community School	N/A	11 (3.3%)	56 (16%)	51
Putnam Elementary	67 (12.8%)	110 (22%)	177 (37.8%)	99 (21.2%)
Putnam HS	29 (12.1%)	81 (32.5%)	86 (35.8%)	83 (32.3%)
Putnam MS	48 (17%)	113 (42%)	107 (32.2%)	75 (22.5%)
Scotland Elementary	N/A	9 (11%)	N/A	14 (17.9%)
Sterling Community School	N/A	N/A	116 (37.7%)	61 (20.9%)
Mary R. Fisher Elementary (Thompson)	64 (16.8%)	43 (11.7%)	131 (36.4%)	56 (16.3%)
Thompson MS	58 (18%)	111 (37.2%)	115 (39.7%)	59 (20.7%)
Tourtellotte Memorial HS	37 (17.1%)	106 (45.7%)	84 (39.3%)	72 (32.7%)
Union School	N/A	N/A	6 (13.6%)	8 (16.7%)
Voluntown Elementary	N/A	N/A	13 (6.2%)	N/A
Woodstock Elementary	72 (16.9%)	28 (6.9%)	55 (13%)	56 (14%)
Woodstock MS	23 (6.3%)	11 (3%)	N/A	39 (11.2%)
Parish Hill HS (Chaplin, Hampton, Scotland)	N/A	22 (10.7%)	N/A	N/A
Woodstock Academy	119 (10.7%)	219 (20.9%)	213 (20.1%)	205 (19.8%)
Regional School District 19	55 (5%)	59 (5.3%)	194 (17.3%)	183 (16.7%)

Chronic absenteeism negatively affects academic performance. Poor academic performance and lower graduation rates result in a less educated workforce, limiting the availability of skilled labor, which is crucial for economic growth. Higher dropout

rates and lower educational attainment can lead to increased economic costs that include higher unemployment rates, lower lifetime earnings, and greater reliance on social services.⁴⁴

Four-Year Graduation Rates by Year in NECCOG Region

Year	Killingly HS	Plainfield HS	Putnam HS	Thompson HS	Regional School District 19
2017-18	85.5	84.3	88.7	82.4	92.2
2018-19	83.2	79.5	91.3	83.3	92.1
2019-20	84.3	86.3	93.7	85.4	93.6
2020-21	87.6	88.2	85.5	78.6	92.8
2021-22	78.5	81.8	88.1	79.4	92.3

Taken from: CT.gov EdSight, Chronic Absenteeism Dashboard & Four-Year Graduation Rates D

Relevant Strategic Direction & Action Plan Topics: Educational Opportunities & Workforce Development, Health & Well-being

⁴⁴ National Conference of State Legislatures. Student Absenteeism. 2024. <nctl.org/education/student-absenteeism>.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY SCORECARD FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Evaluating municipalities and their projects based on economic resiliency is crucial for building sustainable and adaptive communities. NECCOG recommends that the following scorecard be used as a tool for municipalities in the region to analyze their capacity to recover from disruptions, adapt and prepare for economic shocks, diversify their economic base, conduct risk assessment and planning, and create strong community networks to enhance economic resilience. This scorecard is taken from the 2007 Smart Growth America’s, “Smart Growth Project Scorecard,” the 2013 Vermont Natural Resources Council’s, “Resilient Communities Scorecard; A Tool for Assessing Your Community,” and the 2024 Federal Transit Administration’s, “Transit Resilience Guidebook,” and is adapted for the northeastern region. The scorecard is broken into different topics within the economic development sphere.

Business and Housing Development

- A. What statement best describes the desired pattern of development outlined in your town’s Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)?
 - i. The town POCD describes a desired pattern of development that includes one or more town centers, with compact development adjacent to the

- town center, and very low average densities beyond.....○ 3
- ii. The town POCD is not specific on the desired pattern of development.....○ 2
- iii. The POCD calls for growth distributed throughout the municipality; or there is no POCD.....○ 1
- B. Do your municipality’s regulations create a distinct land use pattern with a compact town center surrounded by lower densities, working lands, and conserved natural areas?
 - i. Yes.....○ 3
 - ii. There is a defined town center (or centers), but it is not compact, and/or it encompasses undeveloped land that extends the town center in a linear fashion along major road.....○ 2
 - iii. No. There is no town center, and minimum lot sizes are similar throughout all districts in the town; or they are mixed in size throughout all areas of town.....○ 1
- C. Does your municipality have a state designated downtown, village center, or opportunity zone?
 - i. Yes.....○ 3
 - ii. No, but we are interested or in the process of applying.....○ 2
 - iii. No.....○ 1
- D. When business development occurs, where is it located?
 - i. Predominantly within the town center, and/or in a state designated downtown, village center, or opportunity zone.....○ 3

- ii. Both in and outside these spaces.....○ 2
 - iii. Outside these areas, in strips along highways and/or on large lots.....○ 1
- E. When new residential development occurs, where is it located?
- i. Within or immediately adjacent to the town center, and/or in a state designated downtown, village center, or opportunity zone.....○ 3
 - ii. Partly within these areas and partly in outlying areas, often in clustered or conservation developments.....○ 2
 - iii. Mostly in areas outside compact town centers, on large lots.....○ 1
- F. Where are your town's public buildings (schools, town offices, police, and fire stations) located, and where are future public buildings planned?
- i. Most existing and planned public buildings are located within the town's center.....○ 3
 - ii. Most existing public buildings are in the town center, but some planned buildings would be located outside the center.....○ 2
 - iii. Most existing and planned public buildings are outside the town center.....○ 1
- G. Where are businesses and residential uses located in relation to each other?
- i. The town center fosters a mix of uses.....○ 3
 - ii. There are areas where uses are mixed, but they are scattered around town.....○ 2
 - iii. No mixed uses are permitted, business and residential uses are segregated.....○ 1
- H. In your town's center, how do newer lots (those created within the past 20 years) compare to the typical sizes of older lots in the same area?
- i. Most newer lots in the town center are similar in size to, or smaller than older lots in similar locations, and continue the pattern of a compact town center.....○ 3
 - ii. Lot sizes are a distinct mix. Some newer lots are similar to older lots; some are larger.....○ 2
 - iii. Most newer lots are larger than older lots in similar locations.....○ 1
- I. If your municipality has public sewer and/or water, how are these line extensions managed?
- i. The sewer and water service area are defined and consistent with the town's boundaries. Line extensions outside of the town are prohibited.....○ 3
 - ii. The sewer and water service area are defined and consistent with the town's boundaries- but some extensions are approved outside of this area, or the town does not have public sewer and/or water, but are conducting capital planning for a system.....○ 2
 - iii. The sewer and water service area are not defined and expands as lines are extended.....○ 1
- J. What scale of business growth is permitted?

- i. The town limits the size of new buildings to fit community character and local consumer needs.. 3
 - ii. The town limits the size of new buildings in the town center, but not outside..... 2
 - iii. The town does not limit the size of buildings anywhere..... 1
- K. Does your municipality promote infill development, or the reuse of vacant/underutilized properties, particularly in town centers?
- i. Yes, the town facilitates environmental testing and redevelopment of properties such as brownfields, and/or help property owners access tax incentives for redevelopment..... 3
 - ii. The town’s POCD discusses infill development but does not have specific policies on how to do so. Town staff do not take an active role in promoting infill development..... 2
 - iii. The town's POCD does not address infill..... 1

Total Score: _____

Score
28 –33 Resilient Development
24 –32 In Transition
< 23 Needs Attention

Transit Vulnerability Assessment

- A. How has your town planned for future streets, paths, or sidewalks?
- i. The town has a transportation plan or has provided input for the region’s Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), that encompasses future streets, bike paths, and/or pedestrian paths..... 3
 - ii. The municipality has begun working on a plan for future roads and/or paths..... 2
 - iii. There is no plan for roads and/or paths..... 3
- B. Has your municipality conducted an inventory of transit related assets (linear assets ex. Tracks, bridges tunnels; rolling stock ex. Buses, vans, railcars; facilities ex. Bus shelters, electric vehicle charging stations; power supplies ex. Communication systems) by compiling relevant data such as asset location, elevation information, condition and age of asset, level of use (ridership counts), replacement costs, or maintenance schedule and costs?
- i. The town has compiled all the relevant data mentioned above..... 3
 - ii. Town is in the process of compiling transit asset-related data..... 2
 - iii. Town has not begun the process of compiling this data..... 1
- C. Has your town selected natural hazards and climate stressors to consider when assessing the resiliency of transportation and its related infrastructure development?

Natural hazards/climate stressors may include flooding and erosion, severe winter storms, extreme heat, drought, etc.

- i. Existing hazards and climate data related to transit assets in town have been collected..... 3
- ii. Town is in the process of collecting data on existing hazards and climate stressors to transit assets.. 2
- iii. Town has not collected data on existing hazards and climate stressors..... 1

D. Has your town used the data mentioned above to identify and evaluate transit assets or systems' exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity to determine vulnerability?

and has used it to plan resiliency for future municipal projects..... 3

- ii. The town is in the process of composing a written evaluation of the resiliency of transit assets by utilizing the criteria above and plans to use this to inform resiliency measures taken in future municipal projects..... 2
- iii. The town has not composed a written evaluation that measures the resiliency of its transit assets against the criteria..... 1

Total Score: _____

Exposure is the presence of assets in places where hazards could harm them. Vulnerability assessments should consider exposure under expected future climate conditions.

Sensitivity is the degree to which an asset may be affected by exposure. An asset is considered sensitive if it could be greatly impacted by a hazard.

Adaptive Capacity refers to design elements of an asset that can help it adjust to a hazard. Ex. Organizational preparedness such as alternate schedules to a bus route.

Criteria are taken from the Federal Transit Administration's, "Transit Resilience Guidebook"

- i. The town has composed a written evaluation of the resiliency of transit assets by utilizing the criteria above

Score
11-12 Resilient Community
7-10 In Transition
< 6 Needs Attention

Preserving Historic Features and Public Access to Open Space

- A. Do town residents have easy walking access to public parks and playgrounds?

- i. Yes. Parks and playgrounds are available in larger neighborhoods and can easily be reached by walking from other parts of town..... 3
 - ii. Town has some parks and playgrounds, but they cannot be easily reached by walking from all parts of town..... 2
 - iii. No, the town has very few parks and playgrounds 1
- B. Do town residents have local access to open space for hiking, hunting, fishing, etc.?
- i. Yes, most large parcels of open space are either publicly owned, or privately owned but open to public use..... 3
 - ii. Most large open parcels are privately owned, but some are open to public use..... 2
 - iii. No. Most or all open parcels are privately owned and closed to the public..... 1
- C. Has the town planned for future access to parks and/or open space?
- i. Yes, the town's pertinent planning staff and/or commissions have plans for expanding existing parks and open space, acquiring more, and/or connecting them..... 3
 - ii. The town's pertinent planning staff and/or commissions outline the importance of parks and open spaces but are not specific about how to acquire, improve, or retain them..... 2
 - iii. No, the town has not addressed this..... 1

- D. In terms of new developments, how do local regulations account for open space and continued access to existing trailheads and public spaces?
- i. New developments must conform to the town's open space plan (either creating open space or preserving existing open space), and continued access to existing trailheads and public spaces is not impeded..... 3
 - ii. Larger developments must provide accessible, open spaces, but regulations do not specify the types and locations of these open spaces..... 2
 - iii. There are no provisions for open space with new developments..... 1
- E. Which of these options best describes the condition of historic buildings in your municipality?
- i. Most are well-maintained (whether by paid staff or volunteers) and are in regular use..... 3
 - ii. Most are in poor condition but are in use..... 2
 - iii. Most historic buildings are vacant..... 1
- F. What actions does your town take to protect historic buildings, or other features?
- i. The town has a Historic Society/District Commission that has created guidelines for development within the historic district. The commission and/or town has (or is in the process of) applying for rehabilitation tax credits for certified historic structures..... 3

- ii. The town and/or pertinent commission have highlighted the importance of historic buildings and other features, but there are no specific strategies to maintain or enhance them.....○ 2
- iii. The town does little to maintain and promote its historic buildings and features.....○ 1

Total Score: _____

Score
11-12 Resilient Community
7-10 In Transition
>6 Needs Attention

Farm & Forestry

- A. Does your town’s POCD have strategies for keeping farms and forestland in productive use (ex. Residential & Agriculture and/or forestry districts, purchase of development rights, map of agricultural soils)?
 - i. Yes, the town POCD has a set of strategies and policies that address land use and economic development as they relate to agriculture and forestry. These strategies and policies are currently being implemented.....○ 3

- ii. The POCD has some specific strategies that the town is working towards implementing.....○ 2
- iii. The POCD has no strategies for farms or forest..○ 1
- B. Do your town’s regulations ensure that farm and forest land is kept in productive use?
 - i. There are zoning districts promoting agriculture and forestry uses. These districts have low densities, new residences are either not permitted or are a conditional use that must meet strict standards, and there are incentives or different standards of review for subdivisions and other development.....○ 3
 - ii. There are special districts that promote agriculture and forestry by regulating density and making housing a conditional use, but no special subdivision or development review standards.....○ 2
 - iii. The town does not have special agriculture or forestry districts, or any kind of zoning.....○ 1
- C. What densities of development does zoning allow on farms and forestland?
 - i. Low average densities with provisions or requirements for small lots.....○ 3
 - ii. Low densities, but without provisions for small lots; or high densities.....○ 2
 - iii. High densities, with no provisions to protect farmland or forestland.....○ 1

- D. How does the town enable and support the production, processing, and sale of local foods?
- i. The P&Z Commission in town permits many agritourism endeavors that local farmers wish to pursue.....○ 3
 - ii. P&Z does not address these endeavors or is restrictive when a farmer wishes to expand business operations.....○ 2
 - iii. P&Z prohibits some or all agritourism uses, or the town does not have zoning.....○ 1
- E. Is there town support for farming and/or forestry through tax reduction programs (ex. Property tax abatement)?
- i. Yes, the town offers tax abatements or a dedicated fund.....○ 3
 - ii. The town is working on a plan to offer tax abatements and/or create a dedicated fund.....○ 2
 - iii. No, the town does not pursue these approaches..○ 1
- F. Is your town supporting conservation and/or land trust activity through a dedicated town fund to help purchase or protect prime working land?
- i. Yes, there is a line item for conservation in the town budget.....○ 3
 - ii. There is not a regular town funding source, but the town encourages land trust activity and the POCD touches upon the value of conservation.....○ 2
 - iii. No, the town does not actively promote conservation or land trust activity.....○ 1

Total Score: _____

Score
15-18 Resilient Community
9-14 In Transition
<11 Needs Attention

Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy Development

- A. Does your town plan for clean energy investments or energy reduction measures in the capital budget or annual budget?
- i. Yes, there is a line item to cover the costs of anticipated energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.....○ 3
 - ii. Money has not been spent on energy projects and improvements, but the municipality plans to within the next year.....○ 2
 - iii. No.....○ 1
- B. Have energy audits and improvements been undertaken on all municipal buildings and facilities?
- i. Yes, almost all improvements have been implemented.....○ 3
 - ii. Some buildings and facilities have been audited, but only improvements have been made.....○ 2
 - iii. No audits or improvements have been made...○ 1

- C. Has your town addressed the efficiency of municipal and school lighting?
 - i. Yes, efficiency of lighting has been improved in one or more of the municipal or school buildings.....○ 3
 - ii. The town has examined and is on the way to implementing changes to indoor or outdoor municipal lighting.....○ 2
 - iii. The town has not examined municipal lighting....○ 1
- D. Has your town conducted a carbon inventory for electrical, heating, and transportation uses, and included it in the town plan?
 - i. Yes.....○ 3
 - ii. A carbon inventory has only been conducted for some categories.....○ 2
 - iii. No.....○ 1
- E. Has your town implemented energy efficiency measures at your local wastewater facility?
 - i. Yes.....○ 3
 - ii. A few steps have been taken.....○ 2
 - iii. No.....○ 1
- F. Has your town identified areas where it would like to see more community-based renewable energy development?
 - i. Yes, the town has identified and mapped areas for community-based renewable energy development.....○ 3
 - ii. The town has begun efforts to identify areas for community-based renewable energy efforts.....○ 2

- iii. The town has not identified or mapped these areas.....○ 1
- G. Has your town amended zoning to allow for solar power development (ex. Solar access/site orientation, roof load capacity)?
 - i. Yes.....○ 3
 - ii. Solar standards are encouraged during the review process, but not required.....○ 2
 - iii. No.....○ 1
- H. Has your town developed clear policies for commercial-scale renewable development?
 - i. Yes, the town has identified and mapped areas to promote or discourage commercial renewable projects (such as wind, solar or biomass) based on community goals and natural resource considerations. Policies based on community goals have been created.....○ 3
 - ii. Areas that are and are not viable for commercial renewable development have been identified, however no mapping or policies have been created.....○ 2
 - iii. The town has not developed maps or policies related to commercial-scale renewable energy development.....○ 1

Total Score: _____

Score
21-24 Resilient Community
17-20 In Transition
< 17 Needs Attention

TOWN PROFILES

The following CEDS Town Profiles were crafted to display what each municipality in the NECCOG region has done or is doing in economic development. The Town Profiles list a town's development goals such as current infrastructure plans, land use changes, popular businesses and tourist attractions, public outreach and engagement, and other economic development efforts.



1 Downtown Putnam



Historic Mural in Downtown Danielson



2 Thompson River Mill

ASHFORD

The following is a summary of Ashford’s principal objectives from the town’s 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)⁴⁵:

Objective 1: Supporting Existing Businesses

- Maintain dialogue with the business community to understand their needs and concerns.
- Review regulations and suggest business-friendly adjustments.
- Identify local needs and encourage businesses that serve those needs.
- Assist home-based businesses in relocating if they outgrow residential use.

Objective 2: Proactive Economic Development

- Be the first point of contact for businesses interested in locating in Ashford.
- Conduct a SWOT assessment for economic development.
- Develop an overarching plan for town-wide economic growth, including home-based and agricultural businesses.
- Seek state and federal grants for economic development plans.

Objective 3: Reuse and Redevelopment

⁴⁵ Town of Ashford. Ashford Plan of Conservation and Development. 2015. <ashfordtownhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ashford-POCD-2015-Final-11116.pdf>.



Pith Product Stores - Dick Williams

Top Industries

Lightcast, 2022 (2 and 3 digit NAICS)	Jobs	Share of Industry
1 Accommodation and Food Services <i>Food Services and Drinking Places</i>	156	93%
2 Construction <i>Specialty Trade Contractors</i>	147	49%
3 Government <i>State Government</i>	95	43%
4 Other Services (except Public Admin) <i>Private Households</i>	72	74%
5 Admin and Support and Waste Mgt <i>Administrative and Support Services</i>	62	87%
Total Jobs, All Industries	795	

- Prioritize derelict and vacant sites for reuse or development.
- Maintain a list of rental commercial properties.
- Inventory potential sites and structures for commercial or industrial use.

- Investigate options for properties in targeted development areas.

The following chart, taken from the 2024 AdvanceCT Town Profiles, displays Ashford’s top industries by the amount of jobs produced and relative share of the industry.

The following is a summary of Ashford’s housing issues and objectives, as of the town’s 2015 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).

Housing Issues:

- Limited Development Space: Environmental constraints, septic and well requirements, and land use regulations limit new development.
- Financially Motivated Developers

Land Use Objectives:

- Scenic Preservation: Use subdivision regulations to protect Ashford’s rural character.
 - Consider shielding new subdivisions from street view.
 - Continue requiring set-aside open space within subdivisions.
- Lake Chaffee and Ashford Lake Lots:
 - Consider zoning regulation changes to create more appropriate zoning districts for these communities.

Housing Diversity:

- Maintain a variety of housing options
 - Continue permitting accessory apartments, two-family homes, and boarding, rooming, or lodging quarters in the Residential-Agricultural zone.
 - Consider requiring a number of housing units to be set aside and deed-restricted to remain affordable in combination with industrial/office spaces in the Technology Development zoning district.
 - Assess future needs for apartment-style housing and update zoning regulations accordingly, while protecting natural resources.
 - Explore the need for supportive housing to aid homeless or disabled adults.



Pompey Hollow Senior Housing

BROOKLYN

June 20th, 2024

Respondents: First Selectman Austin Tanner, Joe Bellavance, Economic Development Committee Chairman & Lisa Lindia, Economic Development Committee Vice Chairperson

Brooklyn is a community-oriented small town that is currently trying to balance its historic appeal and modern Route 6 commercial area development. Brooklyn has a rich agricultural history, as it is home to America's oldest continuously operating agricultural fair, the Brooklyn Fair. The fair has been held annually since 1809 and was originally organized by the



⁴⁶ Photo of the Brooklyn Fair. Brooklyn Fair Photo Gallery. <https://brooklynfair.org/photo-gallery/>.

⁴⁷ AdvanceCT. 2024 Brooklyn Town Profile Report. <s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/cerc-pdfs/2024/Brooklyn.pdf>.

Windham County Agricultural Society to celebrate farming and domestic life during the harvest season.⁴⁶ While textile centers were emerging in nearby towns, agriculture remained dominant in Brooklyn's local economy. Brooklyn currently seeks to grow both small and large business development opportunities while preserving the town's rural character.

Brooklyn residents take pride in their school system. The town's primary and middle school rank better than the state average on the Smarter Balanced Assessments for the 2022-23 school year- statewide, 42% of students met or exceeded expectations for the Math portion, and 48% of students met or exceeded expectations on the ELA portion of the assessment. In the Brooklyn School District, 45% of students met or exceeded expectations on the Math portion, while 53% of students met or exceeded expectations on the ELA portion.⁴⁷ Respondents note that once students leave the town to attend high school, it is difficult to maintain the community cohesiveness amongst these students and would like to see this community maintained.

81% of homes are owner-occupied in Brooklyn, compared to the state average of 66%. The commercial/industrial share of the town's Net Grand List is only 10%, demonstrating how reliant Brooklyn is on property tax.⁴⁸ As home prices increase in surrounding cities, Brooklyn is becoming a more desirable and

⁴⁸ AdvanceCT. 2024 Brooklyn Town Profile Report. <s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/cerc-pdfs/2024/Brooklyn.pdf>.

affordable place to live. A challenge of this potential migration is the prospect of rising home prices and the strain it will put on the community's education system. It is with this future in mind that Brooklyn seeks new industry development to alleviate the burden that the town's residents may face from rising property taxes.

Brooklyn Business Association

This year, the Brooklyn Business Association (BBA) has made a conscious effort to grow its membership and become a more productive association: there are currently 53 members. The BBA hosts monthly meetings at Creamery Brook Retirement Village and has seen increased numbers of business owners at each. Their redesigned website has made applying to become a member of the BBA more accessible. Each month the BBA invites speakers for their meetings that can offer business support tools. The BBA has voiced how the process to open a business in town is quite cumbersome, and it has become the Economic Development Committee's goal to streamline the process so that it is clarified further for the public. As stated in AdvanceCT's 2024 Brooklyn Town Profile report, 15% of residents within Brooklyn are self-employed, as compared to 10% of residents within the state.⁴⁹ The BBA and town of Brooklyn seek ways to support both commercial and

agricultural growth and are working on opportunities for establishing infrastructure that supports both.

Tentative/Needed Infrastructure Updates

- Public sewer and water lines must be addressed- the wastewater sewer treatment plant is at capacity for Brooklyn and Killingly.
- In the long term, the town hall and library will need updates. Respondents would like to see a town complex in which all town services- such as the town offices, the library, emergency medical and fire and perhaps a recreation center- are located within one complex.
- The construction of 180 apartments has been proposed on Tiffany Street.
- The Housing Commission is in the process of finding partners to create paths and make outdoor spaces for East Brooklyn. The commission would like to develop the area so that it is more energy efficient.
 - Overall, the Commission is working towards providing more affordable housing to residents.
- 12% of Brooklyn's population has no internet access, as compared to the state average of 8% of the population.⁵⁰ The town is aspiring towards increasing rural internet access in the community, especially since

⁴⁹ AdvanceCT. 2024 Brooklyn Town Profile Report. <s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/cerc-pdfs/2024/Brooklyn.pdf>.

⁵⁰ AdvanceCT. 2024 Brooklyn Town Profile Report. <s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/cerc-pdfs/2024/Brooklyn.pdf>.

the town has such a large base of at-home businesses that they would like to help expand.

Zoning Changes

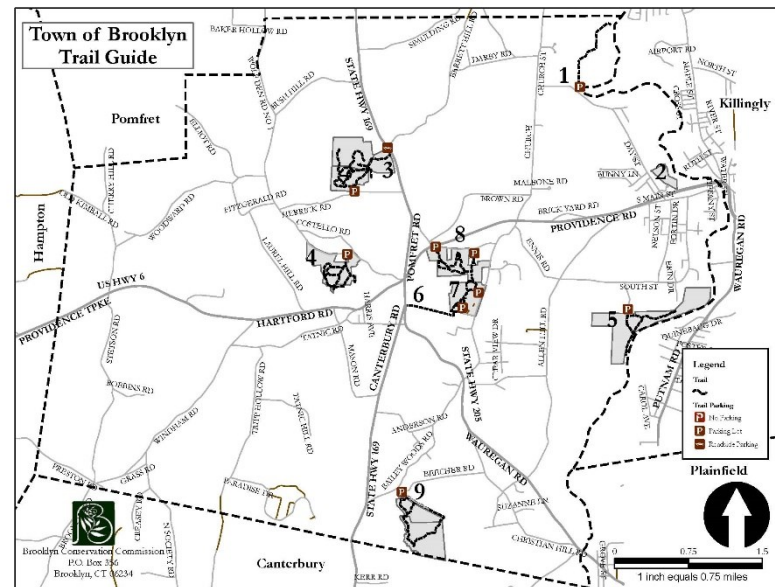
Brooklyn has recently changed zoning that impacted several parcels within town- what once used to be residential and agricultural can now be used for glamping with restrictions. The business that has advocated for glamping (Little Dipper Farm) has turned over 260 acres of Brooklyn land to a conservation trust. The town will continuously support efforts to preserve open space.

Outdoor Recreation

Brooklyn has a considerable network of hiking trails as well as a disc golf course that contributes greatly to the town's outdoor appeal. The following inventory of trails is maintained by Brooklyn's Conservation Commission and can be found on the town's website.

1. Quinebaug River Trail- Northeast Utilities
2. Maury Bowen Complex- Town of Brooklyn
3. Williams/Ferguson Sanctuary- Wolf Den Land Trust
4. Mito Appley Conservation Showcase- Eastern CT Conservation District
5. Davis Forest and Disc Golf Course- Town of Brooklyn

6. Creamery Brook Trail- Town of Brooklyn
7. Carol Randall Memorial Nature Trail- Town of Brooklyn
8. Donald Francis Recreation Park Trail- Town of Brooklyn
9. Blackwell Brook Trail- Town of Brooklyn



CANTERBURY

May 31st, 2023

Respondent: First Selectman Christopher Lippke

Canterbury has traditionally been a rural community with an economy consisting of agricultural activities, small businesses, and a predominantly residential tax base. The town of Canterbury is chiefly undeveloped, as vacant, and underdeveloped land makes up about 80% of its area.^[1]

The town does not have tentative plans for infrastructure updates within the next five years, and its Capital Plan, which is in limited use, is solely reserved for maintenance and equipment repairs. While there are no definite future development or redevelopment plans, some of Canterbury's residents have expressed interest in the creation of a senior housing development for those over the age of 55 looking to downsize their single-family homes. Canterbury residents indicated that the best economic development strategies should focus on ways to increase tax revenue.^[2] There are many small or home-based cottage businesses that produce unique goods.

Business Promotion Strategies

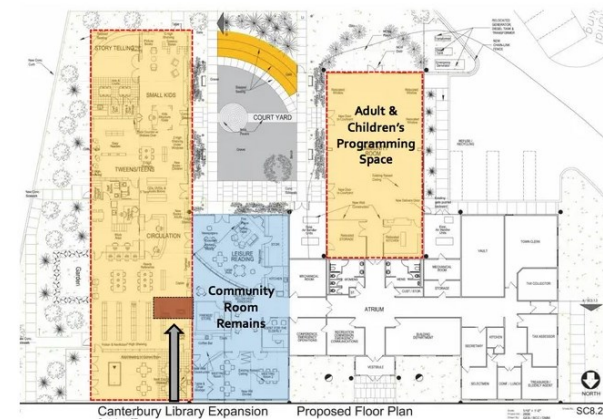
There is an active "Canterbury Business Directory" that has been migrated to the town website and is useful for identifying and promoting all business types in Canterbury. Another

⁵¹ The Repository. Canterbury library expansion includes corridor linking old, new buildings.

initiative to promote businesses in Canterbury has been the "Business Wayfinding Sign Program," which has installed signs identifying local businesses along town roads. This program's intent is to direct motorists travelling along the major roads and provide additional visibility for smaller operations.

Future Plans for Development

Canterbury promotes business retention through the Business Directory and sign programs and assists local businesses by maintaining a low tax rate. The town is working to identify the economic development opportunities in the southeastern Canterbury Packer Road area. Furthermore, the town is currently expanding its public library, adding a 1,200 ft² early childhood development center for learning and play. An image of these expansion plans is found above.⁵¹



^[1] From *Canterbury Plan of Conservation and Development, 2022*, (p. 17).

^[2] From *Canterbury Plan of Conservation and Development, 2022*, (p. 72).

<https://www.cantonrep.com/story/news/politics/county/2016/07/03/canterbury-library-expansion-includes-corridor/27547316007/>.

CHAPLIN

August 1st, 2023

Respondent: First Selectman Juan Roman III

Chaplin is a distressed municipality that is struggling to grow. The State of CT Department of Economic and Community Development has identified the state's most fiscally and economically distressed municipalities through indicators such as the tax base, personal income of residents, and the residents' need for public service. Chaplin is ranked #21 on DECD's list of 2023 Distressed Municipalities.^[1] The town is focusing on changing the zoning regulations of the business corridor to streamline the process of opening a business and encourage new development.

Land Use Changes

Chaplin's POCD states that, "Almost all commercial development in Chaplin is in the western Route 6 corridor with clusters of businesses from the Route 198 intersection to the Windham town line" (POCD, p.1). Chaplin is about to change business corridor zoning to commercial zoning. Current business zoning extends 50ft from the edge of the road that a property is on. Chaplin is looking to amend this so that the zone ends at the end of the property line, thus extending the business corridor and allowing residents the chance to sell their land for business development. There is a light industrial zone off Route 6 that could possibly be utilized for warehouse development. Residents love the look of the \



Images taken from Chaplin's 2021 POCD Update

town and do not want taxes to go up, but most support the idea of Route 6 being developed as a business area.

Future & Current Development Plans

- England Road bridge starts construction.
- Pumpkin Hill has a bridge that needs funding for repair and reinforcement.
- Major bridges are being replaced/updated.
 - a) South Bear Hill Rd- has to be replaced (needs funding)
- Most drainage infrastructure (all culverts around town) in Chaplin is from the early 1900s and has not been updated- would like to use TRIP funding to address this need.
- The town would like to construct a walking trail from the senior center to the town hall, and then from the town hall to the park.

- The First Selectmen has proposed that the town’s historic museum be placed next to the town library as a meeting space for when the library holds events.

Funding

The town has applied for funds from the Community Connectivity Grant Program and the Community Infrastructure Fund. Overall, the matching components of grant funding is what prevents the town from pursuing more grants.

Recreation & Tourism

- Garrison field
- Chaplin Bicentennial Arboretum, one of the only municipally owned arboretums
- Public access to Natchaug Forest
- Diana’s Pool

A 2023 article posted by Family Destination Guide titled, “150 Towns On ‘America’s Favorite Small Towns to Visit’ List names Chaplin: “No. 115 on the list of best American small towns to visit is **Chaplin**, in Windham County. You can add whitewater boating to the list of family activities here, as the Natchaug River winds through a huge network of trails and fishing spots and swimming holes. The state calls Diana's Pool, a state-designated water access and fishing area along the river in Chaplin, "a romantic mix of local legends and clear waters with short trails and a splash of old mill ruins." Back in civilization,

the Chaplin Historic District is soaking in early 19th Century architectural jewels inspired by the Federal or Greek Revival styles.” ^[2]



Image of Diana’s Pool taken from newenglandwaterfalls.com.

^[1] Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. Distressed Municipalities. < [Distressed Municipalities \(ct.gov\)](https://www.ct.gov/decd/pressroom/2018/01/18/011818-01)>

^[2] <https://familydestinationsguide.com/>

EASTFORD

May 13th, 2024

Respondent: First Selectman Deborah Richards

Eastford is a rural, close-knit community that enjoys the current composition of the town and its offerings. There is no strong support for zoning amongst residents, and most of Eastford's offerings are standing businesses that have been in town for decades. Currently, housing units are beginning to transform the makeup of the town. Eastford is a mix of residents looking to retire in new units built in town, young families looking to move to town, and adults who grew up in town looking to move back.

Future Infrastructure Plans

- There are two bridges that qualified for funding through the CTDOT Local Bridge Program and will be rebuilt.
- Old Colony Road is a minor collector for the region and needs to be repaved. The town will reapply for Transportation Rural Improvement Program (TRIP) funds when they become available.

Other Possible Development/Redevelopment Plans

Neither an Agricultural Commission nor an Economic Development Commission exist within the town of Eastford. Reinstating these commissions may be the next step in terms of discussing the town's development future and implementing the following project:

As Eastford is composed of mostly detached dwellings, there are no community meeting spaces for the town. Funding for the Union Society Building could be increased to create a meeting space that would be especially beneficial for senior residents within town, however the cost would be over \$500,000.



Image of the Union Society of Phoenixville House, a historic landmark in Eastford that is now closed. Image taken from historicbuildingsct.com

Possible Land Use Changes

Richards said she is working towards limited land use within Eastford, but it is a steep hill to climb. She would like to shift her focus to preserving land, waterways, and forests, possibly through implementing a limited land use proposal. There is a great interest in town to preserve open space and those who moved to Eastford are now realizing the burden of their

properties- as owners age out, there is no one to take the land. If owners of property end up passing on before their land is preserved as open space, developers are likely to come in and take it over. Eastford's Conservation Committee aims to address this issue by establishing and maintaining communication with those who may find themselves aging out of their land. The committee's efforts have included approaching landowners and sending letters to those who may be interested in preserving their land. Possible strategies discussed by the committee to preserve this land for open space have included using bonds to for purchase and preservation or selling the rights to the land to local land trusts. In terms of preserving Eastford's waterways, Richards has explained that while unlicensed businesses need to be inspected for their waterway use, this process is difficult to pursue without the existence of town enforcement or state support (DMV inspections).

Grants

Eastford hopes to support grant applications for agricultural business growth and development and generally pursue grants achievable in funding matches and can help the town.

Local Businesses

- Eastford Building Supply was founded in 1950 and provides services and home building materials to Northeastern

Connecticut and other parts of the state, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts.

- 48forty Solutions is a national pallet company with an Eastford facility. This facility is strategically located off US-44, which allows the company to easily provide service within 100 miles of any direction.
- Charlie Brown Campground, Peppertree Campground,
- Eastford Fire and Rescue sales provide service and maintenance on emergency vehicles and conduct vehicle sales.
- Bowen's Garage, which was founded in 1922, provides car maintenance services and sells used and new cars. The business also participates in Ellis Technical Highschool's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program by hiring student apprentices from the school.
- Pursuit Aerospace, formerly known as Whitcraft LLC, engages in parts and defense manufacturing. This company was started as a small local business by someone that lived in town and has since evolved- they have an internship workforce program that is in collaboration with QVCC's manufacturing program.

Local Attractions

- Buell’s Orchard is the town’s biggest economic driver, offering produce, locally sourced products, and large



seasonal events such as a harvest festival or trunk or treat.

- Eastford has a hydroponic farm, named D&G AGTEK, as well as Eastford Farm which sells dairy and meat products.
- Eastford has a lot of home-based businesses (ex. people grow vegetables out of their homes and sell them). Thus, the cottage industry, or industry where businesses operate out of their homes, has created its own market niche within Eastford.
- Crystal Pond Park is a popular destination that is jointly owned by Eastford and Woodstock. It is an outdoor camp with a large, renovated dining hall, disc golf course, and new gazebo suitable for weddings or celebrations.
- Yale Forest holds a research center that provides educational programming on agriculture and forestry.

- Natchaug State Forest is also very popular for its outdoor recreational offerings. Three campgrounds border the Natchaug River and are very popular seasonally.

Relevant Data

According to a 2022 article published by CT Insider, “Eastford led all Connecticut cities and towns for gains in house sales...Forty Eastford homes got new owners last year for a 90 percent increase from sales in 2021.”^[1] There is currently a developer in Eastford who is building small unit-type homes.

About 46% of the town’s total land area is tracts of protected forest land. Natchaug State Forest accounts for 5,920 acres of land, while Yale Forest accounts for 2,448 acres of land.^[2] All state forest property is exempt from taxes and thus the town has a limited area open for future development that could provide a suitable tax base.

^[1] Soule, “This small CT town led state’s single-family home sales gains in 2022,” 1, <https://www.ctinsider.com/business/article/CT-home-real-estate-eastford-windham-litchfield-17707330.php>

^[2] “Eastford Plan of Conservation and Development, 2016-2026,” 40, <https://eastfordct.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Eastford-2016-POCD-Approved-May-10-2016.pdf>



historic agricultural properties for contemporary purposes.

- Enhance Agricultural Contributions: Review zoning regulations to enhance the economic contribution of agriculture and value-added agricultural products.
- Improve Business Zone Appearance: Collaborate with the Board of Selectmen and Planning & Zoning Commission to enhance the appearance of businesses zones along Route 6
- Market Local Enterprises: Promote Hampton’s commercial enterprises, including using the town’s website to support local businesses, including agriculture.

- Highlight Amenities: Market Hampton’s scenic, historic, agricultural, and cultural resources to attract visitors and businesses.
- Evaluate Parcel Utilization: Assess existing business-zoned parcels for optimal economic development and adjust zoning regulations as needed.⁵²

Top Industries

Lightcast, 2022 (2 and 3 digit NAICS)		Jobs	Share of Industry
1	Government <i>Local Government</i>	205	77%
2	Health Care and Social Assistance <i>Social Assistance</i>	155	53%
3	Construction <i>Specialty Trade Contractors</i>	64	65%
4	Other Services (except Public Admin) <i>Private Households</i>	53	40%
5	Agriculture, Forestry & Hunting <i>Crop Production</i>	52	54%
Total Jobs, All Industries		696	

Hampton’s top industries as of 2022, taken from AdvanceCT’s 2024 Town Profiles.

⁵² Town of Hampton. Plan of Conservation & Development 2016-2026. https://www.hamptonct.org/resources/hampton_pocd_2016-2026.pdf.

Killingly

April 22nd, 2024

Respondents: Jill St. Clair, Economic Development Director, Mary Calorio, Town Manager & Jonathan Blake, Planner/Zoning Enforcement Officer

Killingly is recognized as an innovation corridor for New England that is grounded in history- the town is rooted in manufacturing endeavors while maintaining a balance of natural and cultural assets. The town's representatives believe that efforts to maintain conservation, open space, and innovation do not need to be mutually exclusive.

Killingly's economic drivers are mainly comprised of industrial manufacturing companies and small mom-and-pop shops. On the other hand, one would be remiss in failing to acknowledge Killingly's recreational offerings which spur economic growth as well. Owen Bell, at 540 Hartford Pike, is the town's gem of a park featuring sports fields, basketball & tennis courts, splash pad, skate park, 1-mile wooded trail and a running track. The park also has playground equipment & swings for all ages, a small pond, and areas for biking and hiking.^[1] Additionally, under Killingly's ownership, Quandoc Conservation Area is a vast nature preserve that spans 125 acres and is protected by the Conservation Commission's conservation easement. Located at 246 Brickhouse Road, the conservation area is open for passive recreation, environmental education, and wildlife habitat and ecosystem protection: hiking and cross-country skiing, fishing, hunting by permit, and other activities are



Photo of Downtown Danielson taken from Google Maps. Danielson is a borough in Killingly.

allowed.^[2] Other outdoor attractions within Killingly include the River Trail, Cat Hallow, Mason Hill, and the East Coast Greenway.

Past & Current Infrastructure Plans

- There are continuous updates to road infrastructure: the town performs street scans once every three years to evaluate the condition of roads. The town would like to write a Road Maintenance and Management Plan to leverage within Community Investment Fund (CIF) grant applications and other road infrastructure support funding.
- The town is currently implementing their MS4 program, which is a multi-year storm monitoring water program.
- Killingly has received funding commitments under the new bridge program for four town projects.
 - Bridge #04700 - Peep Toad Rd over Whetstone

- Bridge #05361 - Wright Rd over Quanduck Brook
- Bridge#04703 - Cotton Bridge Rd over Quinebaug
- Bridge #04711 - North Rd over Five Mile
- Evaluation and expansion of the regional wastewater facility.
 - In process: Submittal of congressional designation funds have been supported and moved forward by two state representatives. Next steps for this project include creating the design for future expansion of the facility.
 - Plans to upgrade sewer will include connecting the business park on Westcott Road to existing sewer and water infrastructure.
- The town is working through grants for the Quinebaug River Trail to expand the rail and its access points.

Other Tentative/Needed Infrastructure Plans

- There is a need for sidewalks from Route 6 to Route 101 to link the schools, Quinebaug Valley Community College, and the town center for increased connectivity and walkability.
- Need for enhanced transportation alternatives
 - The Industrial Park has noticed the lack of transportation options within the region- many entry level employees face challenges getting to their positions.
 - A hyperscale data center named the “NE Edge Data Campus” is to be built to meet current and future demands of consumers, commerce, and regulators.

This facility would have a low demand on municipal resources and provide further opportunity for commercial growth within the community.^[3]

- The town would like to utilize the ongoing development at 140 Main to create an incubator space that can offer courses in manufacturing or vocational training for startups. This space would be open to the public for community development.

Other Development/Redevelopment Plans

- Brownfield remediation
 - Data gap investigation-at 444 Hartford Pike
 - Remediation at 125 Alexander Park Way
 - Borough treatment at 31 Wauregan Road
 - Some brownfields are being converted for commercial use
 - Work is being done to rid contaminants during the removal of underground gas station tanks
- Developable land
 - Mixed-use interchange at Exit 43
 - General Commercial land at Exit 41
 - Business Park District at Exit 38

Forms of Public Engagement

- The town is working with UConn to use a citizen engagement platform on a designated UConn TAB page to easily solicit resident feedback on areas such as town project design and development, business needs, etc.

- Killingly is promoting an app called SeeClickFix which can be downloaded from the town website. If someone sees an issue within town, whether it be trash on the River Trail or an unfixed pothole, they can take a photo and submit the complaint through the app.
- A new permitting software by the company MyGov is being rolled out on the town website for contractors.
- The town Facebook page is utilized quite frequently for outreach.
- Jill St. Clair, the Economic Development Director for Killingly, attends regional tradeshows to display samples of products that manufacturers within town have made, ranging from cosmetic components to cases to chip bags.
 - Killingly participates in meeting events and groups related to the topic of economic development within Connecticut. Examples of events attended have included meet and greets for industry specific members hosted by the Northeast Commercial Industrial Development Realtor’s Group, as well as Eastern Regional Tourism District meetings.
- Killingly hosts a Small Business Academy that is usually eight weeks long and is catered toward those wanting to start their own small business. Anyone can participate in the academy- there have been 12 applicants in town that are ready to open businesses, either on a smaller scale or home occupation level. For example, applicants for new businesses can gain valuable insight on ways to access funding, HR support, etc.

Possible Land Use Changes

- Business-related zoning
 - The Killingly Planning and Zoning Commission approved on November 20, 2023 (effective December 18, 2023) a text amendment to the Business Park District, removing restrictive language that has previously hindered activation of that district.
 - Killingly conducted web-based surveys and hosted a charrette to obtain feedback on the most recent POCD, a process which will be consistently conducted over a long period of time. Feedback to note from these methods was that a few businesses in the industrial park wanted to add solar panels, but this was not in the zoning. These desires were relayed to the Zoning Commission, thus establishing a line of communication between town residents and the commission.
 - The Town is reviewing existing zones to identify opportunities for rezoning based on the POCD and what is best for Killingly. An example being the Professional Business Office District which only exists on one parcel; rezoning to an make the abutting zone (General Commercial).
- Housing-related zoning
 - The Town is continuing to work to increase housing opportunities. An Affordable Housing Plan was adopted

by the Killingly Town Council in May of 2022. *“Housing in both quantity and quality, available for the full range of income levels, which would complement the positive natural and cultural characteristics of the Town”* (2020-2030 Killingly POCD, Section 3.4 Housing, Page 28).

- Killingly is in the process of a full rewrite of the existing Town of Killingly Zoning Regulations and Borough of Danielson Zoning Regulations. Finishing efforts to merge the documents while maintaining the distinct characteristics of each zone and allowing for increased opportunities both in housing, development and conservation.

Interest in Other Plans

The respondents expressed the need for a Comprehensive Housing Feasibility Study for Windham County, with the intent of relaying housing rates and trends, age data, etc. to demonstrate the region’s housing demand to financing and development agencies. Creating a housing feasibility study would, for example, directly benefit the manufacturing sector within the northeastern region. Many manufacturing companies have expressed that they face difficulties finding and retaining employees if the commute is too far. Thus, by quantitatively indicating a need for housing for manufacturing sector employees, the region is more likely to attract developers and spur economic growth.

Another suggestion is the creation of a Forest Management Plan starting with Chase Reservoir and Quandoc Conservation

Area, in order to attract foresters to these properties. Unfortunately, the Chase Reservoir property has been hit by an invasive species that has diseased the trees, and forestry may aid in mitigating this problem.

Diversifying the Town’s Employer Base

Killingly makes conscious efforts to regularly touch-base with its local major stakeholders in order to ensure that their employee base sufficiently meets their needs. This touchpoint process occurs multiple times throughout the year and focuses on learning about a businesses’ possible retention and expansion needs, while acting as a conduit for the state. One of the more helpful touchpoints for small businesses had involved connecting them to DECD resources such as the CT Small Business Boost Fund, which provides working capital loans and support from community lenders and technical assistance providers.^[4] Additionally, Killingly’s Planning and Zoning Commission will revisit their zoning regulations as new industry needs come to the forefront, such as recent interest in the cannabis industry.

^[1] From *Killingly Conservation Commission*, 2023

^[2] From *Killingly Conservation Commission*, 2023

^[3] From *NE Edge LLC, Killingly Data Center Campus – Presentation*, 2023

^[4] From *Connecticut Small Business Boost Fund*, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, 2023. <

https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Business-Development/05_Funding_Opportunities/Connecticut-Small-Business-Boost-Fund>

PLAINFIELD

May 7, 2024

Respondents: Shannon Fagan, Grant Writer/Economic Development, Ryan Brais, Town Planner, and Kevin Cunningham, First Selectman

With its substantial amount of undeveloped land adjacent to I-395, the town of Plainfield is advantageous for economic development. Plainfield would like to center development around residential needs as well as appealing destinations for those visiting casinos to the south of town. Thus, promoting both agriculture and tourism are important drivers for Plainfield's economic growth.

Promoting Agriculture

- The Economic Action Plan will outline action steps to highlight agriculture as an economic driver within Plainfield. Ran by the Agricultural Commission, one of the more successful agricultural events is the town's annual winter market, which is comprised of 40-50 vendors: proceeds from this market are contributed towards college scholarships for students.
- The Agricultural Commission would like to be as self-promoting as possible and endorse their agricultural offerings through their website and Facebook page.
- Plainfield will be compiling a list of businesses in preparation for the State of Connecticut's Agritourism

Marketing Team's efforts to publicize agricultural businesses.

- To promote more connectivity between businesses, respondents proposed the creation of an Eastern CT Farm Trail. It would be useful to have more effective promotions for all of the town's farmer's markets, including an updated schedule with their locations and running times.

Promoting Tourism

- Through a CT Tourism Grant, Plainfield has been able to design a brochure highlighting the town's recreational opportunities, Historic Places/Sites/Districts, accommodations, and businesses to visit. Collaborating with the ERTB, we have distributed these brochures at places and events such as the Big E, The Last Green Valley, etc.
- The town has continued collaboration with its Recreation workers to expand on recreational offerings.
- The Economic Development Commission will partner with the Recreation Department to host community events.

Respondents believe that it is of note to mention that Plainfield's population has not increased- in fact, according to a CT DataHaven Equity Profile on Plainfield, "the town's population has decreased by 3 percent since 2010 (CT DataHaven, 2023, p. 2). The population is aging, and the number of school-aged children is dropping within the town. From 2010 to 2020, the number of children aged 0-17 within

Plainfield decreased by 12.2%.^[1] An increasingly aging population is now facing challenges finding housing units to downsize.

Past & Current Infrastructure Plans

- A 4-million-dollar bond project was approved for the town to conduct equipment updates.
 - Town Hall sewer project- new clarifiers to be built on site (Completed), upgrading some of the substations with monitoring systems (Pending).
 - Upgrading generator at the North Plant (Completed).
 - Town hall- upgrade the electric to handle a larger capacity load- HVAC systems in the auditorium/in office spaces (Completed).
 - Replacing windows downstairs (Completed).
 - Removing radiators downstairs (Completed).
- Replacing the Dow Row Bridge – Project has been designed and is in the permitting phase.
- Lion’s Park is within phase one of an improvement project.
 - A new playground has been installed.
 - The pending projects include installing outdoor fitness equipment, a basketball court, and benches.
- Plainfield is working with DOT on the Quinebaug River connector to the Moosup Trail, which is part of the East Coast Greenway. The town is currently collaborating with State officials on a plan.



Photo of the Moosup Trail in Plainfield. Taken from CT Parks.

- Connecticut Water is doing water pipe upgrades from Town Hall to Blueberry Lane and three upgrades off Cemetery Road (Completed).
- Connecticut Water is doing upgrades on water pipes within the Sunnybrook area.
- The construction of an Amazon facility is still committed to Plainfield and may generate between 400-600 jobs.
- Plainfield is creating a community-wide needs assessment and master plan for recreation.
 - This plan includes Lion’s Park, the pool, and the Recreation building.
- The Board of Education completed a feasibility assessment study.
 - The schools are at 56% capacity, and the feasibility assessment provided the advantages of closing the Early Childhood Center (ECC) building.

- Replacing the old annex building with an open community space.
 - Demolition of the old annex is complete.
 - A grant has been awarded, and the town is in the design/build stage for a Farmer’s Market Pavilion.
- Uline will be constructing a regional distribution facility at 14a Plainfield Pike Road. This company could possibly generate 400+ jobs. Construction is set to begin in spring of 2024.
- A brownfield grant is being utilized in collaboration with a private partner to create a mixed-use residential, sports complex, and retail site at the abandoned InterRoyal Site at 20 Reservoir St.

Other Tentative Plans

- Plainfield conducted a town-wide survey about the Kate Downing Road open space and its potential to have multi-use trails on its 162 acres.
 - A company has guaranteed covering tree-clearing costs if development is pursued.
- Address remediation abatement and clean-up.
- Eastern CT Land Bank has applied for and been awarded funding for the Kaman property, Keystone Cleaners, and ancillary properties.
 - The state has finalized the 501C agreement and will be putting it out to bid.
- Plainfield is pursuing Central Village and Wauregan sidewalk projects to increase community

connectivity/walkability. Phase 1 (Shepard Hill Elementary to Charlotte Dr.) has been completed. Phase 1A (Charlotte Dr. to Route 12) is in the design/permitting phase.

- Lathrop Road sidewalk project from CVS to Big Y is in the final permitting stage and is
- scheduled to begin summer of 2024.
- The town is currently doing a Conditions Assessment on the Plainfield Town Hall. The goal is to apply for SHPO’s Historical Restoration Fund grant to improve the structure as well as ADA Compliancy

Public Outreach/Involvement

- Plainfield’s Economic Development Commission updated its Economic Action Plan. One process of soliciting public input for this plan, named “Village Visioning Sessions,” has allowed for town residents and business owners to convene for forums. These forums have been advertised on local radio and in local publications (Turnpike Buyer, WINY Radio, etc.).
- Plainfield’s Economic Development Commission will have a table promoting town/community events at all Plainfield Events. At these events, the Commission can receive input from the public about what they envision for the town.
- There is an active group within town called “Mission Moosup” that discusses topics related to community activities, public art, and revitalizing Plainfield’s public spaces. The group has hosted events such as an engineering

firm talk by DOT consultants on the Moosup Valley State Trail.

- Plainfield’s Economic Development Commission, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, and Agricultural Commission are becoming more active and growing.
- The town has partnered with The Last Green Valley on youth engagement efforts for annual town clean-up events on Earth Day.
- Plainfield Rotary Club has partnered with the town, PBA, and Mission Moosup to create a park in Moosup where all are welcome to congregate. Work is currently underway.

Land Use Changes

- Plainfield has reviewed and changed some zoning regulation amendments regarding affordable housing. Now, the Zoning Commission is allowed to require a minimum of 10% of new housing development to be dedicated as affordable housing units.
- Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Regulations have been loosened to allow for more flexibility in creating units.
- Cannabis regulations have been adopted. Retail, growing, and the manufacturing or production of cannabis products is allowed.

Youth Employment Initiatives

- Plainfield High School partners with the Eastern Workforce Investment Board (EWIB), utilizing its Youth (MPI), which allows for skilled manufacturing exposure and training for local students. This program helps place students into many local manufacturing businesses.
- Additionally, the town works with EWIB to implement the Summer Youth Employment Program. This program offers job experience to eligible youth between the ages of 14-21 in positions such as Social & Community Service Assistants, Store Clerks, Library and Museum Aides, etc.^[2]

^[1] From *Plainfield 2023 Equity Profile*, CT DataHaven, 2023, p. 6, https://www.ctdatahaven.org/sites/ctdatahaven/files/plainfield_equity_2023.pdf.

^[2] From < <https://www.ewib.org/summer>, 2023.

POMFRET

June 7th, 2023

Respondent: Charles E. Tracy, Chairman of the Economic Planning & Development Commission

In 2021, the town of Pomfret created a Branding Strategy that identified four special qualities of the town:

- **Beauty.** Many express great pride and appreciation for the town's architectural features and its inherent natural, historic, architectural, and cultural beauty. It is widely believed that the town must work to protect the natural features and resources of Pomfret as well.
- **Charm.** Pomfret's Branding Strategy utilized a quote from Atlanta Magazine in which they found proper to convey their meaning of charm: "Small towns of charm tend to share a handful of qualities, such as embracing local traditions, committing to maintaining long-standing structures and landmarks; and a genuine affection of local characters. It's these charms, along with a slower pace, a welcoming air, and an abiding sense of familiarity that draw visitors to the storied small towns."^[1]
- **History.** Pomfret will continue to celebrate, preserve, and economically expand upon its more than 350 years of history.
- **Proximity.** Pomfret is in close proximity to major employment centers.^[2]

Quality of life in Pomfret is essential; the town does not have a lot of services, so in lieu of this, the town is focusing on its

school system. Another focus for Pomfret is to become a climate leader recognized by Sustainable CT- the town has received a Bronze Certification and is working towards a Silver Certification.

Past & Current Infrastructure Plans

- The town has drawn up plans for a transfer station for general waste and hazardous waste.
 - The Economic Planning and Development Commission is looking into methods of recycling food waste.
 - The Chairman stated that, "22% of everything that goes to a landfill is recyclable food waste."
 - The Commission is going to be looking into how other areas handle their food waste to inform their possible solutions for handling the issue.

Other Tentative/Needed Infrastructure Plans

- Expansion of recreation fields
- Pomfret is involved in the Eastern Regional Tourism District (ERTD). As the area increases in visibility, there is more of a concerted effort to start promoting the region for tourism. What is done with this opportunity is left to be developed, however residents are happy with Pomfret being the way it is.

Grants

- The town is always searching for and pursuing funding for the Air Line State Park Trail.
- The town may pursue Small Town Economic Assistance Program or STEAP funding to develop the recreational fields/ facilities.
 - Pomfret recreation disc golf course could theoretically be a part of a disc golf tournament that travels through some of the towns in northeastern CT.



Image of the Vanilla Bean Café from Trip Advisor.

Land Use Changes

- Land across from the town hall has been approved for businesses such as Water Cure Distillery to expand their services.
- There is potential for a new town hall.
- The town views their Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) as a living document and regularly edits its objectives.
- The town updated/expanded on their open space strategy.

- Amendments in zoning regulations to allow for ADU's.

Businesses & Attractions

- Air Line State Park Trail
- The New England Mountain Biking Association (NEMBA) has done work in Pomfret Forest to create a new multi-use trail system that can be used by mountain bikers of all abilities.
- Water Cure Distillery, with land use changes, can now have functions with up to 100 people and are expanding their menu offerings.
- Sharpe Hill Vineyard
- The Vanilla Bean Café
- The town is tentatively working on self-guided cemetery tours at the Old Abington Burial Grounds (these kinds of tours also exist in Woodstock and Thompson)
- The town is making a greater effort to tell more inclusive stories, such as ones about the slave population in Pomfret.
- According to the Chairman, Mashamoquet Brook State Park is ranked #2 for stargazing.
There are a lot of offerings that can be expanded without sacrificing Pomfret's identity and without becoming urban sprawl.

Housing Needs

The town is trying to create a reality based on the need for an increase in rental housing and starter homes for young adults. Additionally, those who consider themselves part of the aging population in Pomfret would prefer to age in place- the creation of more accessory dwelling units may be the solution for this. The Chairman is interested in considering solutions for the homeless population in town, as physical restrictions such as the lack of mass transit or direct access to necessities create barriers to exiting homelessness. Most likely these solutions would result from private funds. The Pomfret Community Center currently is used for food collection and distribution for town residents.

Agriculture

- Currently an Agricultural Commission in Pomfret exists.
- The town tries to regularly promote farmers markets.
- The town has tried to promote farm-to-table dinners with mixed results.
- There is a growing interest in the creation of community and pollinator gardens.
- Pomfret, through The Green Team, is selling composter containers distributed through the town hall.

^[1] Atlanta Magazine. "Letter from the Editor: Small-town charm." 2017. <[Letter from the Editor: Small-town charm - Atlanta Magazine](#)>

^[2] Pomfret, Connecticut Branding Strategy. <[Pomfret, Connecticut - Branding Strategy - Final 2 \(pomfretct.gov\)](#)>

PUTNAM

May 8th, 2024

Respondents: First Selectman Barney Seney, Elaine Sistare, Town Administrator, and Mary Ann Chinatti, ECD/Redevelopment Director

Putnam identifies as a mix of agricultural and urban characteristics supported by both farmland and a downtown.

Infrastructure Updates

Putnam has had a major focus on its infrastructure as of late in terms of roads programs—finishing sidewalks on School Street, the renovation of Danco bridge, and an expansion of the Kennedy Drive Municipal parking lot. Putnam’s Capital Improvement Funds show a focus on infrastructure with \$350,000 set aside for a streambank stabilization project along Simonzi Park. A renovation of Cargill Falls Mill has been done and there is an impending renovation of Belding Mill. The town has also created a brownfield catalog.

Other Future Development/Redevelopment Plans

- Street improvements to Providence St.
- Expansion of Kennedy Drive Parking Lot
- Simonzi Park Streambank Stabilization
- Continued work in the Technology Park

- Construction on Belding Mill

Putnam’s town website has a slideshow that changes monthly and features available commercial properties to make it easy for businesses to locate or expand in Putnam.

Grants

- Audubon’s in Lieu Fee (ILF) program for funding for the Streambank Stabilization Project.
- Recreational Trails Grant – Air Line Trail Connection Project (Putnam to Thompson)
- Community Connectivity Grant – same as above
- Brownfield Municipal Grant Program to perform assessment of three properties in close proximity.
- The town has requested federal funding to rehabilitate/make improvements to its EMS facility for the short term and will be applying for CIF 2030 funds to build a new facility with attached Emergency Management storage space.

Training Ideas

Putnam has a sound Affordable Housing Plan but is looking to establish educational programming for its Planning and Zoning Commission members. Other programming ideas mentioned include creating regional classes for small business training and technology- classes taught could include how to establish an online storefront.

Housing

We use the CDBG program that is able to help older adults age in place. For the past three years, this program has moved to only support housing authority projects. The Town would strongly urge NECCOG to voice this change as being detrimental to upgrading aging housing stock. This program has been essential to individuals—especially for lead abatement. We utilize the Town of Killingly as a consultant for the program, they wholeheartedly agree with the Town of Putnam’s sentiments about this program.

Tourism

- The town currently has a strong focus on its arts community that they are trying to evolve with participation from stakeholders. Putnam’s Art Council is working on creating its own public art plan.
- Putnam is bringing more visibility to its outdoor/recreational offerings, making it easier for visitors to find public parking and facilities. These efforts are a part of the Economic Development Commission’s strategic plan.
- The Director of Economic and Community Development is continuously brainstorming events that the town can host in order to increase visibility for the region and ensure that tourists return.
 - Putnam hosted its first Fine Arts and Crafts Festival which saw fantastic feedback. They have picked out a date for next year.

- The Bradley Playhouse is highlighted as a principal nonprofit in the arts for Putnam that can be supported.
- Putnam is continuing to do public art installations along the trails and other public spaces. The town is trying to establish an “instagrammable” aesthetic and appeal to a younger audience of tourists.



MLK Mural the Hale YMCA taken from the Northeast Art Guild.

Workforce Development

Putnam has created a “Job Resource Center” on the EDC website with local job listings. It also links out to job opportunities in the area. They have scheduled tours of all industrial park properties and urged them to utilize local resources like QVCC and the surrounding tech schools. Many of them already do. Possible education-related efforts may include:

- Pull in regional professionals to present to students on different job opportunities that are available.
- Meet with the town’s Board of Eds to discuss employability initiatives and possible programming.
- Learn about the employability class at Putnam High School and how it can be replicated elsewhere.
- Open house for the industrial park in the fall
- Look into if transit district/EASTCONN can provide students with transportation to their job placements.

Childcare

The Putnam Family Resources center plays a large role in providing mental healthcare for children. In terms of childcare, the town takes pride in the fact that their summer programs are extremely affordable for their community members.

SCOTLAND

May 16th, 2024

Respondent: Dana Barrow Jr., First Selectman

Scotland is a rural town with a close, small-knit community, where people look out for each other. The town hosts community events and residents stay connected through a private resident Facebook page. Scotland is proud of its rural nature and history. The town hosts town-wide clean-up days beginning from the town hall and ending with prizes for residents. Additionally, Scotland acknowledges the Samuel Huntington homestead and its contribution to the town's historical appeal: Huntington was elected to represent Connecticut as a delegate to the Continental Congress, in which the American colonial governments coordinated their resistance to British rule.^[1] Currently, the homestead is a museum and is utilized for Civil War encampment reenactments. The town's biggest employer is Scotland Hardwoods. There are residents in Scotland who prefer the development of mom-and-pop businesses rather than large chains to serve the local people and improve the tax base.

Infrastructure Updates

- Scotland's town hall was constructed in 1894 to serve as a consolidated school and was converted to a town hall in 1964.^[2] Scotland is currently underway planning renovations for the town hall, with the intent to keep its historical character.

- This past year has proved challenging for Scotland's infrastructure, as the town has experienced two 25-year floods and one 100-year flood. The town is funding the construction of four bridges through the CT DOT Local Bridge Program and is looking to pursue state funding for two more. Additionally, the town is remediating and increasing the size of their washed-out culverts.



Temporary ramp installed over washed out bridge in Scotland, 2023. Image taken from NBC CT.

Other Future Development Plans

Scotland is hiring a grant writer to pursue funding for the following ideas:

- Making the Grange Hall handicap accessible

- Solar panels in different public locations, such as the school, public safety building & community center, and town hall parking lot
- Making public works trucks greener by utilizing propane fuel instead of diesel fuel
- Replacing the town gazebo

Land Use Changes

Scotland has made changes in zoning to encourage affordable housing. Because of location and lack of services there are not many developers interested. Also, there is a subcommittee on zoning to modify current zoning regulations to make them easily understood and attractive to small and home-based business development.

Relevant Data

“The majority of Scotland is forested, with several large unfragmented forested blocks- deciduous forest accounts for 64% of all land cover; coniferous forest accounts for 5%.”^[3] Admittedly, the large amount of forest cover within town does slow down development. No apartment complexes – a lot of senior population retiring on fixed income. The town would like to develop senior housing.

Businesses & Attractions

- Scotland Hardwoods
- Twin Hill Farm

- The Vineyard at Hillyland, a family-owned winery offering a signature selection of wines.
- Highland Campground, a campground with 116 sites and planned activities.
- Scotland Hill Stable, a facility that specializes in horse training using the natural horsemanship method.

Collaboration

Scotland is a member of the Windham Transit District and Dial-A-Ride, and donates to Meals on Wheels in Norwich, the Eastern Highland Health District, United Services, The Last Green Valley, ACCESS Agency, and the Sexual Assault Crisis Center.

Scotland is looking to restart its Economic Development Commission.

^[1] U.S. Office of the Historian, “Continental Congress, 1774-1781.” <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/continental-congress>>

^[2] Town of Scotland, “Plan of Conservation and Development, 2017-2027,” 13. <https://municipal-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/scotland-ct/planning-zoning-commission/resources/files/294/scotland_pocd_final_copy.pdf>

^[3] Town of Scotland, “Plan of Conservation and Development, 2017-2027,” 21. <https://municipal-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/scotland-ct/planning-zoning-commission/resources/files/294/scotland_pocd_final_copy.pdf>

STERLING

May 24th, 2023

Respondents: Lincoln Cooper, First Selectman & Economic Development Committee Coordinator, Renee M. Bein

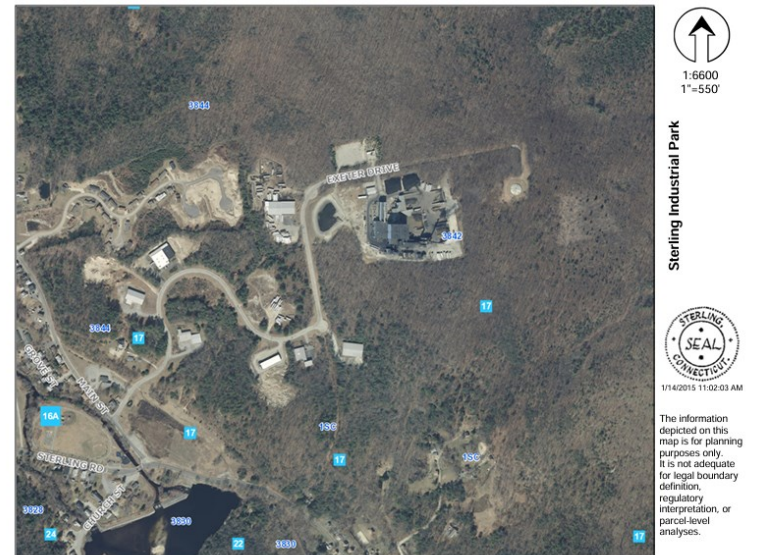
Sterling is a small town that is extremely independent in nature. Residents of Sterling express that maintaining the integrity of residential neighborhoods, protecting natural resources, and preserving open space and community character are their top priorities.^[1] The town has been an agricultural town with an industrial park- most development has been centered around the Industrial Park, which contains about 8 or 9 businesses and is thus opportune for more commercial development that can serve residential needs. Community participation is found largely on the town committees, and increased collaboration between the Planning & Zoning Commission and Economic Development Commission provides an opportunity for growth within the town.

Tentative Development Plans

- A restaurant on the outskirts of Oneco that may have future plans to move to the center of town.
- Establishing greenways for pedestrians and bicyclists along the Moosup-Valley River Trail.
- Enhancing the Town's two historic mill villages in Oneco and Sterling.
- Managing growth throughout the town while encouraging commercial entities that will serve an

emerging residential population to locate within or in close proximity to the villages.^[2]

Public Safety Needs



Aerial view of the Sterling Industrial Park, taken from the town of Sterling

Located within the town of Sterling is the Sterling Fire District, which includes the Sterling Fire Department and Oneco Fire Department. The Economic Development Committee Coordinator has identified both departments as important assets to the town as they are crucial to the well-being of the community.

"The Sterling Volunteer Fire Department serves approximately 3,800 residents in the Town of

Sterling...We protect an area that includes a mix of residential, industrial, and agricultural uses and operate four pieces of apparatus out of one station” (Fire Departments, Town of Sterling, CT, 2023).

“The Oneco Fire Company operates out of one station to protect a primarily residential area. We service an area of about twenty-eight square miles with a population of approximately three thousand people” (Fire Departments, Town of Sterling, CT, 2023).

Both fire companies have recognized the following challenges to normal operations:

- Funding for effective grant writing
- Outdated equipment
- Budgets based on fundraising
- Recruitment and retention

Sterling emphasizes the need to support their local fire district in their pursuit of funding to expand operations, modernize supplies and maintain its needed services.

^[1] From *Sterling Plan of Conservation and Development, 2022*, (p. i-a).

^[2] From *Sterling Plan of Conservation and Development, 2022*, (p. i-a).

THOMPSON

June 15th, 2023

Respondents: Tyra Penn-Gesek, Director of Planning & Development, and Amy St. Onge, First Selectman

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many experienced a shift in attitude about their work and the value of commuting to a job, when the same tasks could be completed remotely or in a hybrid form. “As companies shift to permanent remote work for their office staff, communities like Thompson, with their relatively low real estate costs, become more desirable alternatives” (Thompson Plan of Conservation and Development, 2022, p. 7). Thompson has been facing an increased housing demand from people outside of the state, especially from Worcester County, and is navigating balancing the needs and limitations of its rural districts with the development of its industrial core in proceeding with town projects.

The town’s agricultural and industrial history provides two distinct pathways to economic opportunity. Thompson’s POCD acknowledges the various challenges involved with pursuing vocational agriculture and wishes to encourage flexibility in agricultural enterprises as well as collaboration between entities such as the Killingly Vocational-Agricultural High School and the UConn School of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources to create programming for agricultural professionals.^[1] Thompson is home to 14 working farms and the town will continue to support agriculture and its

contributions to a resilient food system. The remains of Thompson’s textile mills offer significant opportunity for reinvigorating and reuse, and the town actively pursues Brownfield Grant funding for this purpose.

According to Thompson’s Trail Town Action Plan, “The median age of Thompson residents is 41, with the largest age cohort between the ages of 45-66 (approximately 34% of the population). There is a relatively low number of individuals between the ages of 15 - 20 (approximately 10%). There is an implication that households in Thompson are aging without being replaced by a younger generation in sufficient numbers to maintain population levels. The percentage of families and households with children decreased at rates greater than the population growth over the last ten years (-4% and -9%, respectively).^[2]” Thompson will be exploring strategies to mitigate the effects of an older population on the community’s tax base.

Past & Current Infrastructure Plans

- Devoted a portion of ARPA funding to upgrade the Thompson Wastewater treatment plant
- Route 12 sidewalks have been redone
- Clean up at the River Mill brownfield site
- Re-roofing of the library
- Upgrades to Veteran Memorial Parks

Other Development/Redevelopment Plans

- Thompson is planning to launch a municipal small business support center within the Town-owned building located at 65 Main Street.
- A year-long, grant-funded community planning workshop will guide the business and curriculum plans for the facility. They will center at least some programming around food system and agricultural start-ups, food security gaps, and other entrepreneurial opportunities that may not necessarily require a college degree, in order to increase accessibility to residents of all educational backgrounds.
- The participants in the community workshop will also spend time assessing the needs of existing small businesses within the town.
- The planning project also includes the development of a design for a public food forest planted using permaculture principles.
- Continue the development of a commemorative park related to the Great East Thompson Train Wreck, including a re-creation of the historic railroad turntable.
- Full reconstruction of Main Street road surface and sidewalks.

Land Use Changes

- Completed an overhaul for zoning codes in 2020, with an ongoing commitment to annual updates, to increase



Image of the Thompson Speedway Motorsports Park, taken from Visit CT.

the responsiveness of the Zoning Regulations to community needs.

- Subdivision Regulations were completely overhauled in 2023.
- Created a rehabilitation district- tax incentive for construction or renovation of multifamily properties in the Downtown Mill Rehabilitation District.

Places/Attractions to Note

- Thompson has been working to promote and develop **the Airline State Park Trail**, including the commemorative park for the Great East Thompson Train Wreck. Objectives for promoting the trail can be found within the Thompson Trail Town Action Plan.
- Owned by Kristin Orr, **Fort Hill Farms** is open every season and features gardens, a corn maze, and milking cows, whose dairy is used in Cabot Cheese and The Farmer's Cow milk and ice cream.^[3] The experience at Fort Hill Farms offers an educational experience in sustainability and local farming.

- **Morning Beckons Farm** collaborates with Tufts School of Veterinary Medicine and Dr. Purdy of the Nunuo Project to offer timely information on alpaca care and educate prospective buyers as well as farmers on maintaining a healthy herd. The farm also offers support to other smaller farms in the region by sharing their buying power for hay, grain, or medical supplies, and are willing to help others plan their paddocks and pastures.^[4]
- **Thompson Speedway** is a motorsports park and was the first asphalt-paved racing oval track in the United States.^[5] The speedway has month-by-month events and are also diversifying their offerings with a golf course, restaurant and special events programming—such as a large rock music festival that was hosted in July 2023.
- The **West Thompson Lake** in North Grosvenordale is owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers and offers recreation areas, one of note being the **West Thompson Dam Recreation Area**. The dam offers sightseers and photographers a panoramic view of the area, while other amenities at the lake include a campground, hiking trails, the Quinebaug River Water Trail, boat launches, a disc golf course, picnic shelters, and hunting and fishing.^[6]
- **Thompson’s Historical Cemeteries:** The town has a goal to develop programs featuring Thompson’s cemeteries. In 2023, the town’s Historical Society and Conservation Commission partnered with the Eastern

Regional Tourism District (ERTD) on a grant to establish self-guided cemetery tours. A document detailing the various cemeteries within Thompson can be found at the Thompson Historical Society’s website.

^[1] From *Thompson Plan of Conservation and Development*, 2022, p. 75

^[2] From *Thompson 2022 Housing Data Profiles*, Partnership for Strong Communities, 2022. <https://housing-profiles-2022.s3.amazonaws.com/2022/Thompson.pdf>

^[3] From <https://forthillfarms.com/about-us/>, 2019.

^[4] From <https://www.morningbeckons.com/>, 2023.

^[5] From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thompson_Speedway_Motorsports_Park, 2023.

^[6] From <https://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/Recreation/West-Thompson-Lake/>, 2023.

UNION

May 31st, 2023

Respondent: First Selectman David Eaton

Residents of Union enjoy its rural nature and the privacy that the town has to offer them. Union has a population of 932 residents and covers an area of approximately 29.9 square miles- it is Connecticut's smallest town population-wise.^[1]

Infrastructure Updates

Union has an ongoing capital improvement plan that mainly pertains to equipment used by the town. Usually, the main municipal projects are road improvements.

Future Development Goals

Residents can agree that they would like to keep the town the way it is without major development, however there is a need for some type of business development to offset the cost of taxes. Eaton notes that the town is always looking for funding to incentivize business development for entrepreneurs, however the town is limited without public transportation, water or sewer, or tracts of land located close to the highway.

Grants

The town will be pursuing Transportation Rural Improvement Program (TRIP) funding in an effort to executive infrastructure improvements of its roads, along with STEAP funding that can

be utilized for economic development, community conservation and quality-of-life capital projects.

Land Use

The Zoning Commission is in the process of updating regulations, however, there have not been discussions about changing zones. The town has granted some special permits; however, the projects have never materialized because funding has fallen through. There have been requests for special development zones that may be considered in the future.



The Traveler Restaurant. Image taken from Tripadvisor

Businesses & Attractions

- Bigelow Hollow State Park offers hiking, boating, and fishing. The park is 516 acres and lies within the Breakneck Block of Nipmuck State Forest, which is 3,400 acres. The park also contains 419 acres of open water including the secluded 97-acre Breakneck Pond and the natural 25-acre Bigelow Pond, whose waters steam from Mashapaug Lake.^[2]

- The Traveler Restaurant in Union provides an unforgettable dining experience, as every meal comes with free books. Visitors can also purchase books from the library that is downstairs.

^[1] Town of Union. About Us. <www.unionconnecticut.org/about/>

^[2] CTPARKS. Bigelow Hollow State Park. <ctparks.com/parks/Bigelow-hollow-state-park>

Voluntown

May 23rd, 2023

Respondent: Tracey Hanson, First Selectman & Vice-Chairperson of the Economic Development Commission

Voluntown recognizes its rural character which, "...can be attributed to the significant amount of state land holdings including the Pachaug State Forest located within its borders. State forest and recreational land make up approximately 66% of the town, leaving less than ten thousand acres for private and municipal development" (Voluntown Plan of Conservation and Development, 2020, p. 7). In terms of economic development, Voluntown emphasizes its focus on outdoor recreation development, including the creation of a mountain bike trail and supporting existing amenities such as hiking trails, horseback riding, and campgrounds.

The Economic Development Commission wishes to support agricultural growth through new business ventures and public agricultural forums. Currently, the town is supporting the construction of a new brewery. Additionally, the EDC would like to explore new channels of agriculture such as hemp farming.

Forms of Public Engagement

This year, in conjunction with the town of Sterling, Voluntown hosted an Agricultural Summit that invited speakers.



Pachaug State Forest Green Falls Area. Image taken from CT.gov.

Future Infrastructure Plans

- Updating water infrastructure in the main downtown area to appropriately support the redevelopment of properties.
- Redeveloping neglected properties on Church Street for combination housing and new business use.
- Revitalizing and expanding existing sidewalks to connect the downtown area for improved walkability.
 - Improved walkability is especially important for making work and school safely accessible to residents.

Other Tentative Infrastructure Plans

- Revitalizing the outdoor recreation complex to hold events and make the area a community hotspot.
 - The recreation complex could have a dog park, pickleball court, and connect to the tentative mountain bike trail.

Overall Development Goals

- Support outdoor/recreational activities as a means of revenue.
- Limit the amount of large manufacturing or technology businesses that are constructed.
- Support local small, independent, and family-owned businesses and encourage their creation to be geared towards serving residents' needs.
- Limit the amount of big retail businesses opened to prevent a homogenous business environment.

WOODSTOCK

May 7th, 2024

Respondents: Woodstock Economic Development Commission Members

Woodstock has a strong sense of community. Most residents still see the town as a rural enclave and agricultural community, even those who have been here long enough to see the suburbanization occurring. Most share the values of frugality, compassion, generosity, and even volunteerism. Woodstock has a healthy and diverse mix of residents from different economic classes, political views, religious beliefs, careers, and ages. The congregation of people from multiple backgrounds and viewpoints offers a balance to the town and allows for multiple values that come together to form a quaint, successful, and old-fashioned small-town feel. Woodstock residents know each other, have grown up together, and even if they leave, they tend to migrate back for the serenity and open-minded atmosphere. Through the town's holiday community gatherings, art shows, farmers markets and special events such as the marathon, residents come together to celebrate each other. There are many new people coming to town with new ideas and expectations, and there are positive changes happening such as growth in the recreation department and political parties in agreement on certain issues- this translates to being hopeful in the future.

Infrastructure Updates

- Bridges
- Road maintenance
- Aiming to establish a town-run visitors center and are currently running fiber internet through the town.
- Considering expanding the town sewer system using ARPA funding in an effort to help local businesses expand and encourage housing development.
- EDC hopes to work with the Zoning Committee to establish a path of sidewalks through the central areas to allow for safer pedestrian traffic, linking local businesses and landmarks.

“Many citizens would like to see some infrastructure updates. The struggle is how to do so in a way that prevents someone taking advantage of the systems and overbuilding. Most citizens want the town to continue to look and feel pastoral. However, infrastructure improvements are necessary in order to make the town affordable to more people, especially the elderly and the newly independent.”

Overall Future Development/Redevelopment Plans

- Expand Fire and EMS services to support the needs of residents. There are issues with keeping these services fully staffed and paid well.
- The Open-Space and Farmland Preservation Committee will continue to advocate for and assist in permanently protecting farmland for sustainable agriculture, and open-spaces for public passive recreation. We recognize that both objectives are not only important to the general well-

being of all communities, but they are also critical to maintaining the rural qualities Woodstock residents repeatedly say they value. And they help stabilize community costs by subsidizing tax income. \$1 of residential taxes = \$1.23 - \$1.34 of community costs. \$1 of open-space taxes ESPECIALLY FARMLAND = \$0.34 to \$0.60 of community costs according to the Chair of Open Space Committee.

- EDC is working with Planning & Zoning to allow existing businesses to expand on their current properties, to promote “controlled business development.”
 - EDC would like to encourage business development in buildings in town that already exist and could be refreshed and used in modern ways, while still having facades that complement the town’s aesthetic.
- Open artist maker spaces and town managed coworking spaces to promote the growth of small business and attract and retain younger residents.
- Business development and accommodation could be geared towards Woodstock Academy students and visiting families to benefit the town.
- There could be more development in town to support wedding business spill out from Roseland Park.

Transportation Goals & Ideas

- Creating a “hayride” style tour of the town that would depart from the future visitors center and stop at the town’s central small businesses.

- Creating an Uber-like service specifically for Seniors (using a town-paid van) to transport them to local medical appointments, grocery shopping trips, etc.

Grants

Woodstock continues to work with state and federal funding partners to acquire and protect open space and working lands. The firehouses in town already regularly apply for grants, as do the schools.

Land Use

The idea of floating business zones (zoning that is simply written as an amendment in regulations) on state roads was mentioned to P&Z in relation to cannabis regulations but could be further explored for all business applications.

Businesses & Attractions

Some key employers in Woodstock include the farm stands (Woodstock Creamery, Farm to Table, Vinal’s on Senexet, Woodstock Orchard and Bakery), florists, restaurants (Woodstock Trading Post, Woodstock Grill, The Mansion at Bald Hill) Roseland Cottage, Roseland Park, Taylor Brooke Winery, Echo Farm, The Black Walnut, the arboretum, Bucks Ice Cream and Soleil Bakery.

- Woodstock has 3 large annual festivals- the Woodstock Fair, The Roseland Cottage Craft Fair, and the Winter Festival
- There are open studio arts weekend

- Taylor Brooke Winery is part of the CT Wine Trail. A stakeholder interview with Co-Founder of the winery, Linda Auger, can be found in Appendix 3.
- Woodstock hosts four annual running events; the Winter Fun Run, Jog for Judy, Memorial Day Race, and the Woodstock Marathon.
- The mansion at Bald Hill and the Woodstock Inn in conjunction with the Beeches Wellness Collective can provide a restful visit.
- Music and entertainment at the Loos Center for the Arts located at Woodstock Academy.

Sustaining Active Agriculture and Business

Woodstock is sustaining active agriculture and promoting the growth of community-compatible small businesses through social media and working with the Agriculture Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission, Building Dept. and ZEO. By participating in the purchase of development rights of working lands, Woodstock helps to make land available to current and future farmers. By educating landowners about the value of selling and conveying development rights, Woodstock helps them understand that there are economically viable options to residential or commercial development of their lands, especially their working lands. The Senexet Grange has developed a Locally Grown Day. They invite all the town's farms to participate in their own way- this will be the 3rd year.

Woodstock during COVID

Many of the residents found that their continuous needs for local produce and meat products were met by the local farmers. The EDC does not believe that the town experienced supply chain shortages. The town did not shut down but rather migrated to digital services as much as possible to allow for continued interaction between the town and its residents.



Image of the Senexet Grange taken from CT State Grange.

Appendix 1- Flyer Advertising the General Economic Development Survey and Public Kickoff Meetings



We need your help!

NECCOG is updating its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) to address social equity issues within the northeast region.

Take our survey on economic development if you live or work in the region!

Or follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NECCOGCEDs>

NECCOG will be hosting hybrid kickoff meetings to present the survey results and gain public input:

- Wednesday, October 12th at 6:30- lower meeting room at Ashford Town Hall
- Monday, October 17th at 6:30- community room at Canterbury Town Hall
- Tuesday, October 18th at 6:30- room 109 at Putnam Town Hall

Scan the QR code



Zoom links will be made available before the start of each meeting on the NECCOG website: <https://necog.org/>

Please feel free to attend whichever meeting works best for your schedule.

We look forward to hearing from you! Contact our regional planner, Anna Shugrue, with any questions: (860) 774-1253 ext.18 or anna.shugrue@necog.org

Appendix 2- Public Comment from the Economic Development Kickoff Meetings

Economic Development Kickoff Meetings

Putnam Public Comment

During presentation

- Who is aware that the opportunity zone in Putnam exists and can be utilized?
 - o The economic development committee in Putnam should know about it
 - o It is frustrating unless you come to meetings and are in in these things you don't know about it. No offense to any town officials, but they do not always know anything, and they come to the people on the commissions for the information- and if you don't know about it, then having open meetings and stuff is the only way to go.
- There are economic development locators or something in different sectors of the state and it showed this section as having no one. Are you saying that NECCOG is a place that someone from Brooklyn can go to and say, "I don't know what I'm doing."?

Discussion of strengths

- 395 corridor helps to bring in some business
- Railroad going through Putnam, Killingly, and Plainfield
- Housing that can be rehabilitated, including mill properties (Caroline Sloat)
- High unemployment creates opportunity? Means that more jobs are available to be filled?
- The community college- QVCC

Discussion of weaknesses

- In 1988 when zoning was changed drastically- increased the required lot size for nonconformities from 2,000 to 10,000 square feet
 - o Reactive changes in land use
- Education- why do we have 25% less children now in school than we did 10 years ago?

- High population of people that have not received a high school diploma
- Exclusionary zoning is a weakness in terms of expanding opportunity (Caroline Sloat)
- Is it in the survey anywhere regarding a high amount of people dependent on social services? (Sally White)
- Not enough affordable housing stock- rental costs are up significantly
- Not sufficient representation for the region- representatives are Republicans in a Democratic state
- Local leadership seems to be much more concerned with implementing political views than with advancing economic and social development for everyone
 - o Local budgets are constrained
- PA-490 is not getting the same “push” within every town
 - o Not every town shares the same views Delia said that bridging gaps in communication and taking a more regional based approach could be an opportunity
- Hard to get people involved/get buy in for public matters
- Sally White- not recognizing strengths, one of the gentlemen mentioned the railroad. And two things come to mind, 100 years ago my grandparents would bring produce from their farm into Woodstock into Putnam to be shipped to Providence. 15 years ago, I met with the representative of the Providence-Worcester railroad. Thompson was willing to redo the sidings for free and it fell through. A weakness is not recognizing the resources we have and not making use of them. Working with the railroads and the businesses, that’s a scarce resource. And the rail lines are thriving and its ridiculous that we are not making use of the ones traveling through Thompson and Putnam and the towns south of here. And I’m sure CSX and P&W would be glad to work with people.
- Fundamentally, how does low-income housing increase the grand list and contribute to the betterment of the community? Wouldn’t large numbers of single-family, high value homes increase our tax base, intellectual capital that goes with it, and ultimately reduce the tax burden on the remaining citizens- because there is less per capita consumption. Fewer students, fewer demands of social services
- The northeastern region is not represented in Hartford at all- from the \$3.7 billion dollars we’re not going to get a penny. We’re voting people by popularity, and they don’t know a damn thing about the towns, or they don’t care
- How can the region address the skilled workforce gap?

- o Sally White- perhaps the region needs more technical schools. It used to be years ago that each high school offered other technical alternatives

Why aren't the local representatives here?

- Audience member had a tour at QVCC manufacturing- the head of the program said that they constantly get calls from employers asking for people that they could potentially hire
- How can the region address the skilled workforce gap?
 - o One of the things that really concerns me when looking at this is that besides from the technical schools, you said that these kids don't have basic math skills for employers? That is absolutely ridiculous. Why? Do we need to look at these teachers, curriculum? This needs to be looked at. That is basic and it is really bothersome, and somebody needs to answer to that. To me it's just astounding, I can't believe that.
- We need to work with local employers to encourage students to increase their skills
- What services are needed to address the needs of an aging population?
 - o There needs to be busses, although the area is rural so there is not much for them to get around to
 - o Need safe sidewalks and stopping crosswalks
 - o Need outreach programs for those who are homebound and do not get social interaction anymore

Canterbury Public Comment

Discussion of strengths

- Regionally, one area that we probably excel the most is our proximity to two of the largest urban centers in the U.S. as well as a robust transportation network (rail, access to port in New London, 395, airport at Bradley)
- Quality of life- they call this the quiet corner
- Good education in most of our towns, good educational opportunities
 - o We've been building out our manufacturing training programs
 - o Trade schools

- Regional cost of living
- Reasonable costs to live here and to set up a business
- The pandemic pushed a lot of people from some of the urban areas over to the northeastern region
- Number of building permits and real estate transactions went up in Canterbury
- We are a bedroom community
 - o Fairly laid-back lifestyle
- Fairly good entertainment with the casino, they also employ a lot of people
- Young kids in the region from Eastern and UConn

Discussion of weaknesses

- 16 towns with 16 different visions when it comes to long-term, overall economic development for the region
 - o Plainfield gets a large amazon distribution warehouse center; we will see the positive effects of that in Canterbury
 - o Need to make decisions where we all win together
- Route 14 is one of the most heavily traveled roads in the region
 - o You must be careful getting out of your driveway
- Plainfield expand their infrastructure to take care of Lowe's, Canterbury got a pump station in Packerville, underground, basically pumping water from all the way over there to cool the plant
 - o The parochial attitude when it comes to infrastructure
 - o Killingly does its water plant
- Lost a lot of farmers
 - o Reduction in crop growing and dairy farming
 - o Agriculture is a low return business, economically

- o A lot of the larger dairy farm operations are being replaced by small, niche operations
- Going to have a problem with airplane mechanics

Discussion on questions at the end of the presentation

- What can be done to attract younger renters/buyers to the northeast region?
 - o Nobody wants to really work anymore anyways, you're living in mom and dad's basement and get handouts from the government
 - o Those who participate in outdoor recreation are those who can afford to participate in it
 - § Canterbury has some of the best fields for growing marijuana
 - o This region may not be one where young people want to stay or live in
 - o I guarantee there are not a lot of kids who are graduating college and want to come back to see the bright lights of Canterbury after several years
 - o A young person needs a vibrant region that will provide them the entertainment they need and the lifestyle that they are looking for
 - o we are not appealing to the strata below the college education strata
 - o kids that have higher paying jobs are getting jobs and coming back to northeastern ct to build homes and pay lower taxes
- What services are needed to address the needs of an aging population?
 - o Most important thing is access to quality medical care
 - § We have that
 - o We don't have robust public transportation
 - o Social services in place
 - o In Canterbury, we do different programs through Access Agency
 - § Trying to expand on programs that provide food assistance to those that need it

-on the micro level it is very difficult to connect between towns

- How can the region make business development an easier process?
 - o You gotta reinvigorate or populate the economic development commissions
 - o Reach out to younger people who you know are still in town that might have interest in it
 - o It would be nice to have each town's economic development commission or director be in contact with each other
 - o On a municipal end, it doesn't take a long time to get applications through for development
 - § In the smaller towns, you can speak right to the decision maker and the process can be streamlined (Canterbury first selectman)
 - o Compare and contrast where students end up from graduating from either a traditional or technical high school

Ashford Public Comment

Discussion of strengths

Discussion of weaknesses

Discussion on actual survey results

- Mark- access to public transportation and housing go hand in hand. If you don't have public transportation, it makes it harder for residents to get to a job. I would say that public transportation must come first, because there would be no point in producing affordable housing if someone could not travel between home and work.
- Friend of Sally White- I would say that lack of development is a strength. If you have low population density you cannot support public transportation. So, are you going to play to the strengths that people want, or are you going to play to the weakness and ruin the low population density?
- Sally White- There are people moving to this area because they are drawn by its rural nature. I think the people that want that, you can't do a blanket statement, those people are going to be higher income and often retired people are comfortable people. They're

not going to be a drag on the local economy. These people are drawn to the areas where there are less so-called government services. That in itself can be an attraction, depending on what you want to attract. 60-70 years ago, there was far more public transportation with busses and trains.

- o Is there a market demand for more affordable housing? Is this a natural demand or is it artificial?

- Mark- I'm on Ashford P&Z, so I am aware that the driving force behind the statute (for affordable housing?) was the southwest corner not the northeast corner of the state. So I understand why we have to build the plans, but listening to the conversation, it also appears that those lower income towns are also those towns that come close or meet the current 10% of affordable housing. Meanwhile Ashford does not, so there's certainly a need for affordable housing in those lower income towns. Unless we create more job opportunities and public transportation, it won't matter if we can build more affordable housing. We need more employers within the northeast corner of the state, and we also need more public transportation to supply the workers for those employers. They all go hand in hand, so if you're only focusing on the affordable housing piece, 1.) developers aren't gonna build it if there's not a demand for it, and 2.) people aren't gonna move into it if they can't find a job in the northeast corner. I was also thinking that between high school and less than high school in the northeast corner, we forget that there are many highly paid people that only went to high school and went into a trade. If someone has received advanced training for a trade, this is different than just graduating high school.

- Sally White- I'm a little puzzled here, because in some respects it seems like there is an attempt to fix something that isn't broken. If someone is interested in living in Ashford, then why would there be some anxiety about trying to bring affordable housing.

- o It seems like there's an effort to change housing when it does not seem like there is a natural demand for that change

- Mark- on attracting businesses, one thing that does seem to be lacking in the northeast corner is that many towns do not have a lot of land allotted for industrial or commercial development. If I look at Ashford and the P&Z, (audio cuts out)

Appendix 3- Stakeholder Interviews

Interview with Carol LaBelle, Sr. Director of Programs and Special Projects at EWIB

1. *Are there any recent partnerships or coordinated efforts that your organization has been focusing on recently?*

If you look at our American job centers- the department of labor, social services, maturity works- their focus is about employment, training, and adult ed. QVCCA in Montville office and EASTCONN also specialize in adult ed. We all have the same mission, which is to serve people, and provide adult ed.

2. *What workforce challenges would you say are arising within the northeast region of Connecticut?*

Finding people to find employer needs, all over in Connecticut- the unemployment rate is so low, meaning everyone is already working. Places are trying to recruit people that are already working. You cannot create more people, the only thing that we can do is to work with employers, helping them to fill their needs and helping them tap into the nontraditional workforce. This is not a unique situation; we are seeing a job seeker's market. A "nontraditional workforce" includes those with disabilities, ex-offenders, single parents that are receiving state cash assistance, or high school youth. Groups such as EWIB may focus on children that are not planning to go to college and could work with the schools to tap into this future employee pool.

3. *Could you tell me more about the Eastern Connecticut Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative? How many schools are involved? What grades is this program offered to?*

The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) is noted as a program that has been expanded to about 17 of the high schools in the area and around Connecticut. The program is something that EWIB is working to develop in all schools, however it is up to the schools to decide how big the program is, and how quickly they would like it to grow. Some high schools have a full manufacturing program (a program with a complete curriculum), while others only have a partial program. Thompson has a partial program that EWIB has been working with to build, as well as Putnam High School, Woodstock Academy and Plainfield High School. Whether a school has a full or partial program depends upon the facilities available at a school for training teachers, and staff availability. EWIB will provide a school with the actual curriculum for the MPI, as well as staff support and ongoing technical assistance. Therefore, the number one challenge with developing this program in the schools is finding a devoted instructor who will steer the growth of the program and serve as a centralized point of contact. We must acknowledge the fact that the pandemic changed things for employers and employees. The pandemic did a lot of damage, as teaching virtually caused some teachers to leave their schools or retire. Before the pandemic, there were many schools that were working towards getting a fully developed program. When you lose a passionate teacher, you lose the

momentum in the program. Thus, you need to have consistency with staff regarding these manufacturing programs because they are so small and focused. For example, the lead teacher of the Killingly High School MPI left the school, forcing the program to rebuild. This year EWIB is working with schools to elevate their program development and is also in the process of bringing the program to Plainfield and Canterbury middle schools, so that students are provided with a career pathway earlier in their education.

4. What kind of assistance does EWIB provide to employers looking to fill vacant positions?

Employers in a tight market may need to hire people that might not have all the skills necessary for a job, or people that may not have the best habits. If an employer must hire a candidate that is not fully qualified for a job, EWIB will reimburse the wages to an employer during the period that they are training the new employee.

5. What is parent/employer receptiveness to the MPI?

There is always a certain percentage of kids that are deemed for college- 30% of children have their career path and know that they are going to college with parental support. There are also many students that are floundering, and they may not know what they want to do with their careers. Employment conditions for young professionals also depends on the economy- five years ago students may not have had easier access to jobs as they do now, making it more difficult to choose a line of work. The MPI could provide students with an established career pathway, which they could continue at QVCC or Three Rivers, both post-secondary institutions that provide manufacturing training.

Now and days, recent high school graduates are also competing with unemployed adults for job opportunities. Thus, the focus in these programs on technology and healthcare industries can help establish relevant and necessary connections to employers for students. Employers need to be more cognizant of what technical skills students are learning within these programs as well as try to create connections with their potential employee base, students. In addition to this, it would be useful if employers made themselves more visible to those who are unemployed- for example, SPIROL could visit a school's MPI class and explain to students what they are doing and their employment opportunities.

6. Could you tell me more about your organization's role in policy development under the federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act?

EWIB at the federal level has been asked to provide input when the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is under authorization: congressman Joe Courtney is a great partner within eastern CT and with the workforce board, and he has been instrumental in helping to get funding for future programs within the MPI program.

7. What specific deficiencies do applicants have that have not gone through the programs? Or what are the skills that employers need but cannot find in local applicants?

Currently, employers say that they cannot be as selective from their applicant pool, nonetheless they are looking for people who have an established set of soft skills. The actual skills of the job can be taught; however, communication skills, professional etiquette and customer service competencies are something that a job candidate must learn themselves. During the pandemic, many students fell through the cracks and were not getting enough focused attention from teachers due to virtual learning, which may be an explanation for why younger generations are facing challenges with their work ethic. The pandemic also created feelings of anxiety and stress for students, which may have stunted the development of the soft skills that employers are seeking. Schools are recognizing that they need to do a better job at exposing students to a variety of professional programming. EWIB has worked hard to establish an understanding with employers that if someone has gone through very specific training but does not have experience in that field of work, they need to be hired so that they can get a start on establishing and practicing these skills.

Interview with Lois Bruinooge, Executive Director of The Last Green Valley & Fran Kefalas, Assistant Director

1. How does your organization's/institution's mission contribute to the economic well-being of the NECCOG region?

We are a nonprofit management entity for the national heritage corner that covers 26 towns in eastern Connecticut along the watershed boundaries. We were designated back in 1994, and our broad mission is to connect people to the cultural and heritage resources of the region. One of the major programs that we run is a cooperative called Walktober. We have been doing it for thirty-two years and started with one weekend- now it stretches over about six weeks, with over 200 unique events hosted by many vendors throughout the Last Green Valley. We know that pre-Covid, we had more than 100,000 participants in Walktober, and we are hoping to reach those numbers this year. Walktober includes everything from corn mazes, to walks, to things like the Rosalyn Cottage arts and crafts fair. It is a way to take all these small events and package them into something much bigger on a regional level. Actually, a

lot of these small events, including the corn mazes, began because of Walktober- Walktober predates many of them. So, these events have become major economic drivers for our partners in terms of attracting visitors. We also have an “Explore Guide” to the region of which we print 25,000 copies. For Walktober we have an online guide, but we do print about 15,000 copies of those. We paid CTM to distribute these beyond the borders to Rhode Island, all throughout Connecticut, and towards Fairfield County, and then through Massachusetts from south central Mass towards Worcester, then east back towards Boston. There is a lot of emphasis on outdoor activities, like paddling, hiking on outdoor trails, as well as a lot of content, like a tour down Route 169, and the Rochambeau Route, and information on business partners. The online component of the Walktober Guide and the Explore Guide connects the local businesses to the events. So, if you click on an event, what you will see are the partners around, so then you can go and participate in whatever they’re up to. One of the things we have done periodically is call around to the attractions in the area to try to get visitor numbers- including Massachusetts areas and dozens of Connecticut Last Green Valley organizations such as the Woodstock Fair, Nathan Hale Museum, or corn mazes like the one at Fort Hill Farms. Pre-COVID, we were getting 2 million people for our visitor numbers, including the Bloomfield Fair, Lebanon Fair, Brooklyn Fair, Woodstock Fair, and the smaller house museums and Walktober. We undercount experiences because we don’t have state park visitor numbers- Bigelow Hollow is unbelievably crowded in the summer. We had an economic analysis done by the park service for us back in 2016, just looking at those 2 million visitors. It’s a big region, and what we don’t have are those numbers of visitors coming from the outside for things like the pumpkin festival in Putnam. We know from the Walktober sign in sheets we get people from Rhode Island, Fairfield County, California, and even international visitors. The northeast seems to be people’s reason to come and do their “fall foliage” fun. A lot of the people that are doing Walktober may move around the region, for instance someone from Norwich may come up to Putnam for the Pumpkin Festival. One of the other things that we have been able to do in recent years is harness some of Connecticut’s tourism dollars through the grant program the Eastern Regional Tourism District does for the entire region. What we are trying to do is wrap our heads around the data and make it more concrete. But what we have seen is a significant increase in website traffic from Boston and New York because we’ve been trying to convince them that this is the area that they want to come and spend their weekend. We have gotten a couple of grants from Eastern Regional Tourism District to do the social media marketing particularly for Walktober and other things outdoors.

2. Is there enough lodging when people come to the area for these events?

Although Airbnb may provide some lodging, there is not enough traditional lodging. There are far fewer bed and breakfasts than there used to be. There are few quality hotel rooms as well. We have quite a few campgrounds in the region, but they are packed as far as we know. You have to book at the Corps of Engineers at West Thompson Lake pretty early or you will not be able to get in- they seem to be doing well but the season seems to end around Columbus Day/Indigenous People’s Day Weekend and a few are done by

Halloween weekend. We extend towards Coventry and Mansfield, so when UConn is having a big event like graduation, that brings people in from out of state, there is not enough lodging.

3. Have you seen your work change over time with regional changes?

Certainly, the pandemic changed everything, this is a more desirable place to live when people can work remotely and not have to commute to Hartford, Providence, or Worcester. We are still seeing high demand for housing even though the past twenty years have been quiet in terms of subdivisions or multifamily housing, but this may mean that there will be potential for more development in the future. We have been asked by more and more people to weigh in on larger projects, even though we do not have any authority to do those things. We are hearing from people that are concerned about the region changing. It is like death by a thousand paper cuts sort of feeling. You know, we are 84% forest and farmland, that is what makes this region special, but are we going to be that way in ten years? In terms of it changing our work, we cannot and don't have the authority to work with 35 municipal boards. In Brooklyn last night, P&Z had a meeting to review an application on "glamping" and all of the residential agriculture zoning in town. All I heard from WINY is that they spent three hours talking about it and it has continued for three weeks.

There is definitely a concern about the need to balance. We all need a vital economy, but our hope is that as we grow as an organization, is that somehow through partnerships with organizations like NECCOG, we can help educate people so that we are evolving the way we want to. There is a challenge, and as planners you all hear this and see this- we are all facing the challenge of those people who do not want change. It would be nice if we could figure out how to revitalize the old mills one at a time. There is a lot of structures around these mill villages that have a lot of potential.

4. The update of the region's CEDS will have a strong emphasis on improving the social, gender and racial equity in the region - both in the workplace and in the community. What steps/changes, if any, do you think need to take place to improve the current situation in terms of equity improvement?

We recognize that as a heritage corridor, we have an obligation to do a much better job of telling more diverse and inclusive stories than had been done in the past. We just finished a three-year project with some of the land trusts, focused on conversations to become more welcoming and more inclusive in the way that they approach their land and open spaces. We fully support any efforts you make; we would be happy to try to assist in that way. For the land trusts, they have never translated any of their materials into other languages. We just put some money in our budget this year that was approved to spend some money on our website for language translations. Signage on properties is important as well. Some of the land trusts do not make it accessible or easy to navigate hiking trails. There are over 500 miles of trails, and yet so many people do not know they exist. If you are not an experienced outdoors

person, you cannot navigate the area well. We have done quite a few kids programs to get them outdoors. We also have equipment- it is a buggy with a computer, and we have a team of volunteers that assess trails for mobility issues. The software is called HETAP (High Efficiency Trail Assessment Process), and we have the results of their work on our website. What is interesting about a lot of the trails, is that even though a trail can be relatively flat and accessible, if you are in a wheelchair, you'll never get onto the trail because of the gates that are there. You may be able to pull up to a handicap parking space and you may be able to use the trail, but you cannot get past the two boulders surrounding the entrance. The work on accessibility mostly pertains to the Airline Trail and the Putnam River Trail.

5. What are the region's two greatest strengths?

Natural resources meaning trails, farms, local farm food. There is only three days of fresh food available east of the Tappan Zee Bridge. There is a real attempt on a lot of the farm's ends to diversify their offerings, one example being with microgreens.

6. What are the region's two greatest weaknesses?

We are all these little towns that are not necessarily conversing together. I recall Putnam trying to pull together other towns to do a joint tech park. That was a horrible process for that town. Transportation is also certainly an issue- when you have rural communities, you need cars. Finding that right balance between rural roads and character, and sidewalks and public transportation is definitely a challenge. Another thing is that there is plenty of spots that could be redeveloped if the redevelopment were not so massive. We have these mills and instead of tearing down trees, we need to figure out a way as a region that we could make it work. There is plenty of space for economic development, but somebody is going to have to get in there and be willing to clean up those spots.

7. What is your opinion on zoning practices within the northeast region?

Zoning is a useful tool, but then again all of these different towns have different levels of regulation, some have planners and others do not, some work with ZEO's. So, I think what we see is a huge array of expertise within local land use commissions. I think that the best zoning in the world might fall victim to not having the expertise behind it to implement it. Let's look at Walmart on Route 6 in Brooklyn- that parking lot is never close to capacity and there is a lot of space in which more businesses could be built on.

8. What are the region's two greatest opportunities?

Heritage tourism is an area that Connecticut is missing out on. I sit in on the Eastern Regional Tourism District Board and I think that could be a fantastic economic driver for the region. It means no more housing, and yet there are people in the restaurants drinking

local wines or beers. I do think that is a viable model because of the wide-open spaces that we have between Boston and New York. Also, the region has a national heritage corridor which is a special designation.

9. What are the region's two greatest threats?

A threat is continuing development that could be anywhere in USA. We are small town New England; you can still have character and a feel that is different when it comes to development. On a smaller scale we should keep some of the distinguishing character of our area within business creation. Affordable housing is also an issue- we should rethink the model of what an affordable housing experience looks like so that people can afford to live in the area and still have money to spend and contribute to the local economy.

10. How has the Last Green Valley/Quinebaug Corridor Changed? Have you done a side-by-side comparison over the years?

Yes, and we have seen that light pollution is problematic, but it should be an easy fix from a planning perspective. It gets back to those zoning regulations. We think that we can be helpful and have an impact and would like to work with NECCOG more closely to determine if light pollution measures are being considered within zoning regulations in NECCOG towns. We have not had the capacity to work with individual towns, but we have been working with Sustainable CT on criteria for light pollution. It is a great pitch- it is good for the environment and it's cheaper overall to implement.

Interview with Elsa Núñez, President of Eastern Connecticut State University

1. How does your organization's/institution's mission contribute to the economic well-being of the NECCOG region?

Eastern has existed for over 125 years in the same location, but we have expanded our campus, our footprint is much bigger than what it was. So, we have about 250 acres in the Willimantic area and that includes athletic fields in Mansfield. Eastern is a liberal arts, public, residential college- 97% of the students live on campus. Eastern is not a commuter school, as students come from all over the state. We have 6,000 students and they shop on Main Street, they get their nails done, they shop in the grocery store, they go to Walmart, they eat pizza, they spend a lot of money. About 12 years ago I did a study when we had what was called a Cat Card which was a little machine in businesses, and we had it connected to our ID card and they would swipe it and I would know how much money the students had spent in Main Street. In those years about twelve or thirteen years ago, they were spending about \$250,000 on Main Street, just on CVS and other stuff there. We don't have that system anymore, and the businesses don't have the machines, but we know from surveys that they spend a lot of money on the Main Street (main stretch of businesses). There are also 1,300 employees who probably would not be employed if it were not for Eastern since there are not that many easily available jobs in eastern

Connecticut. Many of the employees are local people who live east of the river, and they spend money, have homes, or they rent. The university's purchasing power also contributes to the local economy because we purchase from the local car dealers (machines, trucks, tires), and from the local stores.

2. Is there any current development on Main Street (main strip of businesses)?

There has been development, pre-COVID it started to get hot, and people bought buildings and they started to renovate, but because of COVID I think things stopped. I do not know if the people who were investing in those buildings and sites have gone away, or if they are coming back but pre-COVID you saw a lot of activity on Main Street. The more you renovate on Main Street, the more shops there are, clothing shops, funky clothes for kids, they love jewelry stores, so the more of a college town feel you have the more spending you will have.

3. Why did businesses end the Cat Card program?

The businesses did not want to pay for the machine. They felt it was not worth it to rent them or buy them or pay the fee. They would rather take the kid's credit cards. I believe they lost business because of this- I imagine now it would have been even faster to use this system. The students have said that when their parents put money on their card at Eastern, their parents do not know what they are spending the money on. So, they would rather spend money using their Eastern card because there is no tracking of what they spent. They used the card in the dining hall and snack bars as well.

4. Is Eastern investing in any projects? Is the campus expanding at all?

Well, we wanted to buy the building in the middle of campus, and we were in the process of doing this, but then the governor stopped the purchase because he said there was too much to be repaired. We would love to revisit this project because that had started pre-COVID, and it is in the middle of campus on Prospect Street. If we purchased this building, we would landscape it, renovate the outside, and as the economy got better would renovate the interior.

5. You mentioned that most of your employees are local- what kind of jobs do they have at Eastern?

There are categories of jobs- the first is a faculty job (those with Doctorate degrees), who teach at the university which are positions that are very competitive to get. We have 220 faculty members. Then there are staff jobs (ex. advisor, admissions, finance, student affairs, counselors, activities coordinators) with hundreds of people filling those positions, either with a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. The third tier are the maintainer positions who do not need a degree and do cleaning, landscaping, or work at internal auto

or electric shops. Most of the staff and maintenance workers are those who live in the area, while those who are faculty often wish to live in Mansfield.

6. What is the composition of the student body at the school?

15% of our students are out-of-state while 85% of our students are in-state. We have students from Georgia, Missouri, Virginia, Vermont, all over. Most of our students come from western Connecticut, because the students from the eastern side of the state usually want to leave the area. So, we have a lot of students from western and central Connecticut.

7. The update of the region's CEDS will have a strong emphasis on improving the social, gender and racial equity in the region - both in the workplace and in the community. What steps/changes, if any, do you think need to take place to improve the current situation in terms of equity improvement?

You have a predominantly white community in the suburbs of eastern Connecticut and the rural areas and as you get into Willimantic it is more Hispanic or African American. There is a lot of hate, people need to come together and come to understand each other. There is a lot of racism in eastern Connecticut and it's just that people have not been exposed to other cultures. If you have events where people can come together, not for political reasons because I think that does not work, this could help. The school brings more diversity to eastern Connecticut because of the variety of areas in which students are from. I think eastern Connecticut must work on bringing people together so that they respect each other and understand that for the most part we all want the same things- freedom and security. I think it is a very big agenda to talk about equity and diversity as an abstract. I think people really must sit down and think about how do you make it possible for people to work together in a civil, respectful manner? My father was in the American army, but he was an immigrant, and you could not say a bad word about this country in our house. He said that he came here poor and became part of the middle class and that could not happen anywhere else in the world.

8. Does ESCU have any programs specifically for first generation college students?

We just celebrated a national day called First Gen Day and the students had a ceremony. I think we have 11 different programs that focus on students from modest backgrounds. People from modest backgrounds generally do not have parents that went to college, so we focus on these kinds of students. We have students from rural, eastern Connecticut, that fall in that category that we target for this.

9. Do you have any certificate programs related to this topic?

We have been thinking about that, we do not have any certificate programs that break into this area. We are doing a big campaign on cannabis because of how many jobs there are in that industry. The first thing will be a certificate to show that students have some group of courses to show that they got training within the cannabis industry. We cannot step on QVCC's toes because they offer various certificates themselves.

10. Have you noticed any skill gaps in the incoming freshman class at Eastern? And if so, how could high schools better prepare their students?

Yes, there are skill gaps, kids coming from the urban or rural centers will generally have poorer skill sets in reading, writing and mathematics because the high schools are not as strong in these areas. The students that are from suburban high schools come in much more prepared in comparison. I think it is really important for schools to see what we require in English and mathematics, and then prepare students for this entry level work. In other words, it is not a mystery that in English they have to write essay after essay as well as take Math 100. We are seeing that the students from the urban areas cannot get into Math 100, so they are starting at the lower level and working their way up. If the teachers were preparing them for Math 100 and requiring that they could not graduate unless they got into Math 100, they would not be wasting their time and money on courses that prepare them for the college level ones. The same thing for English, we want them to be able to write a coherent essay that is at least 3-4 paragraphs that is put together well and shows some analytical thinking. They can't do that; they are not strong writers. I think that we have wonderful teachers in eastern Connecticut, but the issue is matching the high school curricula to skills required in college. There is always someone who will come in and try to match the curriculum, but it is uneven, or there is not representation from each school. We need all the schools together on this effort. You need English teachers with English professors and math teachers with math professors. It is hard for teachers to find time for meetings. Our faculty would make the time, but it is hard to align schedules. But I think it would be a wonderful thing to do that.

11. Could you comment on the school's retention rate? What statistics do you have on this that could explain this?

I have been president for 17 years, and I said we always had to improve our retention rate to at least 80%. We are ranked in U.S. News and World Report in our category at number 19- one of the reasons we are ranked so highly is because of our retention rate and graduation rate. This year for the first time in our history we hit 83%. So, we have no problem enrolling students and saying, 'come to Eastern you're going to graduate in four years,' because it happens. Unlike Western, Southern, and Central, where they have challenges with retention because they are commuter schools. 97% of our students live on campus so they go for tutoring,

supplemental instruction, and they engage in student activities which really helps with retention. We have the highest retention and graduation rate of any public institution in the state.

12. In your opinion, how well does ECSU prepare its students for employment after graduation?

I would love for my people to talk to your people about our Employability Initiative. We tell prospective students that when they come to Eastern, they are going to graduate in four years. In addition to that you will have a four-year plan written based on your major. They also have an employability plan. In our LAC, which is our liberal arts core, there are clearly defined outcomes for each class that students are taking. Our outcomes are critical thinking, ethics, analytical reasoning, communication and one other. So those are the skills that we say a student needs to graduate. Employers have told me that even though Eastern has been working on these skills with students, the students were not able to clearly articulate how those skills are connected to the job. Now on the top of the syllabus for each class, there are clearly defined objectives and skills that will be learned. In interviews the students now clearly explain how a critical skill learned in class relates to an open job position. You do not necessarily have to know the job, but you do have to have the soft skills developed beforehand. Besides this, we offer internships for credits, co-ops which are paid and volunteer opportunities. We have a center for community engagement and hundreds of students volunteer to be tutors or mentors for students in the local middle or high schools. They are trained to tutor, and they put it on their resume. If they do an internship or co-op, they are also able to write that into their resume and connect it to the employability skills. So, what we have now is an emphasis that when you graduate from Eastern, you can go to graduate school, or you can get a job. If you want to go to graduate school, we can help you get into graduate school- we have small class sizes and the professors can write letters of recommendation, not some TA. So, those letters are very strong and well written. But there are these parents of students who ask me during their freshman year if their son or daughter is going to get a job going to a liberal arts college; and we say that the best education you can get in this country is a liberal arts education because it will prepare you for not one job but a multitude of jobs. So, we collect data on where students are employed after graduation, and some examples of where they go include Traveler's, Aetna, small startups, tech companies etc. The two biggest majors at Eastern are Health Sciences and Psychology. Our Psychology program is more focused on the science of the mind, so most students within this program wish to attend grad school, which is unlike Health Sciences where they usually all go right to work. The career center at Eastern has a big room of clothes for kids to borrow for interviews. The center offers resume development, how to interview, and headshots for the performing arts students.

13. Do students who graduate with employment end up working in the NECCOG region? Is there a resource that you have that provides post-graduation statistics?

Students usually move to Hartford and other parts of the state. Something to note is that a graduate from Eastern owns the Willimantic Brewing Company on the main street and has successfully run that business. Someone else has a limousine business in the area. There are not enough jobs in eastern Connecticut for a large number of students to stay in the area post-graduation. I would recommend you to Jennifer Brown, the Dean of Analytics and to visit the career center. brownj@easternct.edu

14. What are the region's two greatest strengths?

UConn, Eastern, and the hospital. If you ever lost any one of us, there are not any big corporations out here, so these are the three entities that provide the most jobs. The hospital has lost ground unfortunately, but at one time they were even a bit bigger than Eastern and employed more people.

15. What are the region's two greatest weaknesses?

Transportation is horrible, you cannot get anywhere. I fight with the bus companies all the time because they want us to charge students for a pass and then give it to the state transportation authority. There is only one bus that comes twice a day from Hartford. A person who wants to work in Danielson cannot get to Willimantic- we need transportation to get around to get to jobs. We have a shuttle bus that takes students around on the weekend to places like Walmart. The second weakness I would say is the unattractiveness of Main Street. I want it to be funky but not ugly. I think there is no investment from people into rehabbing their store fronts. There need to be more partnerships and a sense of pride in ownership of businesses in this area.

16. What are the region's two greatest opportunities?

There is a huge opportunity to make Willimantic a more expansive college town. If you had a really good main street students would come from UConn and be shopping and spending money. UConn students go out of the area to buy things when we could have it all here. The second opportunity is in volume- you have thousands of people at Eastern and at the hospitals (Day Kimball and Hartford Healthcare), as well as all the UConn people. There is so much opportunity to get people to spend money in eastern Connecticut, but we have to know what they want to spend money on.

17. What are the region's two greatest threats?

Politics, that people get politically aligned to one thing and they cannot hear the other side- I see it in town. The other thing I would say is investment. People do not create investment plans, and very few are tailored to the needs of eastern Connecticut. The little towns cannot do it on their own unless you raise taxes and people balk at that.

Interview with Barry Jessurun, Green Valley Hospitality

1. How does your organization's/institution's mission contribute to the economic well-being of the NECCOG region?

I have four restaurants in the northeastern part of Connecticut, the oldest one the Vanilla Bean Café, opened in 1989 and is 33 years old. It has contributed extensively to the economic well-being of the area- it is on the tourist stop and has drawn people from an hour, hour and a half, sometimes two hours away to come to northeastern Connecticut. 85 Main is about 17 years old at this point and has done exceedingly well. We were allowed by the town to open a patio and outdoor parking spaces which has fundamentally changed Putnam. Being able to add additional parking and patio space allowed restaurants to do the same thing and also encouraged other restaurants to come to the area and create more of a tourism destination. The business association got a restart in the basement of 85 Main, their first meetings were there after we opened. The other restaurant, Dog Lane Café, is over by the University of Connecticut and has been a part of Storrs Center for ten years, bringing more business to the area. The last one, Fenton River Grill, is a little over four years old and is in the Big Y Plaza in Mansfield. It is doing very well; business has almost doubled since it opened. It has become a hub for the community and is a draw for people who are both southeast and west of the area. Restaurants in their nature, tend to be good community partners and can help raise rent in certain areas since they can usually afford to pay higher rents than retail entities. We do have a fifth business which is a parent company to the restaurants and acts as a marketing and finance arm. We handle the payroll, taxes, maintain websites, and are centralizing human resources. It is not a business that helps in economic growth, but it does support the other business functions.

2. When you were first starting off what were different ways in which you promoted your business?

Well, the first thing we did was put a sign up and have everyone park their vehicles as close the road as possible- we just made it look like it was busy, that was like the first low budget marketing move that we did. Other than that, our main marketing focus was providing high-quality, hand prepared, locally sourced food when we can. We did locally sourced food before it was cool because that is just what you did- support the people around you, you know. Word of mouth was really helping us grow because there were not any

restaurants doing what we were doing. We had outdoor seating, outdoor grill, and outdoor cooking. We did a lot a lot of things differently and happened to be in a very bucolic area of the state. The Vanilla Bean fit well in the area and became iconic for that. In 2011 Yankee Magazine called the Vanilla Bean the best country café in Connecticut. Music started because we had friends that came to play. We did our first open mic, called Java Jive in our small room- when we expanded the seating area in less than a year from when we opened, we made it so that we could have local bands and benefit concerts. Music is and has been one of our main marketing pieces. We do not make money off of the admission charge, but we do get marketing from the musician. All of the people reading the papers or listening to the radio about what is happening in the area hear our name.

3. Could you go into more detail about locally sourcing food and how you established these relationships with farmers in the area?

When we opened the orchards and other smaller farms were around- the organic farming movement had already happened on the west coast in California, and people were doing it around here. Because we lived in the area, we already knew some farmers, so we reached out to them or in some cases they reached out to us. Local food is only part of the menu so that prices can remain reasonable, and because it is not available year-round. We always feature the local food on our specials board and list the farm that the food is from. The few products that we get year-round are local hamburger, honey, and maple syrup. Usually in the growing months we are taking what we can. There was a CSA farm for a while that was doing very well, and we would buy whatever was leftover, which helped them to move some product that did not sell as quickly.

4. What advice would you give to those looking to pursue opening their own business in the northeast region?

Get as much help as you can- talk to different business owners and find out what they are doing and how they are doing it. If you have not worked for anyone in the northeast, do a job shadow. You have to learn as much as you can. It is easy these days to do market studies and figure out where the traffic is and what the demographics are. You have to design an offer for the demographic that exists here or that travels here. It comes down to knowing your market and finding a good location, depending on the type of business you are trying to do. But, in terms of resources out here there is the Putnam Business Association, there is the Chamber of Commerce, and the state of Connecticut has funding available for different groups. We have also utilized the students in the MBA program at the University of Connecticut to do a market study of the study body before opening Dog Lane Café. We actually changed our menu approach a bit because of what they were able to find about the student body at the time.

5. Were there barriers that made it difficult for you to open any of your restaurants?

You know, I was 27, we were just thinking there is a hole in the marketplace let us go fill it. We were already in an existing commercial space so there was no problem there. The idea behind zoning is to help the people living there maintain it and offer some kind of

economic growth. It is not easy because there is some balancing that they're trying to do. When we did the 85 Main patio, the zoning did not allow for it. By the time we got through that first commission, the chair of the zoning came to me and said that they were going to change the regulations. So, in that case, they helped make it happen because they saw that it fit within the town's ten-year plan of development and then actively changed the zoning regulations to make it possible. When we opened Dog Lane, the town of Mansfield had very strict zoning regulations. The project started around 2000, 2001, and I joined the downtown partnership in 2003. By 2008 I negotiated the letter of intent, in 2011 I signed a lease before there was even a building, and then I opened in 2012. The town of Mansfield started to become receptive to the business only when the State began to intervene. UConn recognized that they needed some sort of center/town to be on the national level of public universities, and the town wanted to control this development. They were concerned about a parking shortage in downtown Mansfield, as it was a contentious topic discussed at almost every meeting. Another concern was about how the cafe would look and fit into the character of Mansfield. It was not in the zoning that you could have patio lights, so I had to go through something that was nonconforming and pay, and then notify all of the property abutters that I was putting up four strings of patio lights. Then I had to have the building inspector and the fire marshal inspect two electrical outlets. Once it was approved, I had to pay a filing fee and then they approved it. We got through things a lot easier when building Fenton River Grill because the town had already seen us build and operate Dog Lane Café. They trusted us and recognized that all the same workers were working on our building with the same contractor. The town quickly passed a request for an outdoor patio at the restaurant.

6. What strategies did you use to lessen the effects of the pandemic on your businesses?

One thing that was really cool was that the community did not want restaurants to die; and even people who would not want to go out that often would still get takeout. It spoke well to the community that we are in, it helped keep us open and helped keep the story alive. Adversity from COVID-19 brought us down to the core group of employees that cared. Those were the ones we invested in opening back up again. They are the ones that really helped us and helped trained other hires. That was great, you get to know, and you really learn your core group of employees as they are crucial to the business. The pandemic did change how we did to-go orders, even at 85 Main there is still a section of the bar closed so that we can have a to-go order window. Other than that, we just learned how to do things with a little less time and a little less staff. We did pay our employees more and people got more tips during COVID.

I think since a lot of people were told that they were not essential workers, it is the reason why so many jobs go unfilled now. A lot of people moved in the direction where they decided they did not want to work a job anymore and figured out other ways in which to make money.

7. Are you having issues with staffing your restaurants?

At 85 Main and Fenton we are having trouble finding dish washers and cooks. At Dog Lane we need full-time, year-round cooks. Vanilla Bean is short staffed, and we are receiving less applications. Dog Lane has lots of applicants, but they are students so they cannot be year-round cooks. The restaurant industry in general is known for hiring unskilled workers. Many have personal difficulties or drug problems, and yet restaurants still work with these kids to help them have an anchor and help them become better for the community. We bring in people who do not have skills because for some of them this is their first job. Our job, as a restaurant, is to train them. Being happy is the hardest skill to teach. These workers are easy to train and educate, but some only want to work short shifts (5-6 hours, or a 3-4-day week). So, the restaurants that we have more employees now than they did before in order to fill the schedule, because we have a lot more people now only working three or four days a week. Now this happens normally in restaurants because a lot of the time our employees are single moms, or they are students working second jobs. That is not uncommon, so we only need a few full timers- about 20-25% of the employees in a restaurant are full time.

8. What are the region's two greatest strengths?

That we are near the 395 Corridor through the northeast that brings traffic and manufacturing jobs because they can have easy access for getting their goods out to the market. I think another one is that the rural location is attractive to tourism.

9. What are the region's two greatest weaknesses?

From a tourism side, there is no cohesive marketing for this area. There used to be, and then the state broke up the area and made all these districts a part of something else. The story about northeastern Connecticut is not a strong story that is told on the state level, and hence on the media level. For manufacturing and higher paying jobs, one of the things against it is that the area is too rural. None of the big players want to come in because of the area and because there is not a big enough population.

10. What are the region's two greatest opportunities?

I think solar farms and working from home are the greatest opportunities. They are putting more fiber and being able to do more from an internet standpoint. Server farms I think are more possible now than they have been because of the internet that has been able to come through. And I think we still have some business lots available in the business parks.

11. What are the region's two greatest threats?

The state of Connecticut is not a business-friendly state- the taxes are high, there is a scheduling mandate that they are trying to pass and a rapid rise of the minimum wage and that can cause its own little bubble of inflation. Businesses are not going to look at the state of Connecticut, and many are going to try to get out. The other is that towns are in their own way of development. They want economic development but then they get in the way of it.

Would you be interested in doing a workshop?

He indicated interest

Interview with Karen Hynick, Chief Executive Officer of QVCC

1. How does your institution's mission contribute to the economic well-being of the NECCOG region?

Quinebaug Valley Community College is the only post-secondary education institution in Danielson, CT and we are the only post-secondary institution granting an associate degree in northeastern Connecticut. Our mission is around workforce development, helping families and students to get higher wage jobs, and helping to give an opportunity to students wishing to transfer to a four-year institution while getting their first two years of gen eds done at the community college level. We offer pathways in everything from healthcare, to manufacturing, to IT, to the arts, to business and STEM.

2. Can you tell us more about some of your more popular degrees or certificate programs?

I would say our top five degrees include the liberal arts piece, which is our associate of arts, helping students to complete their gen eds and then continue at UConn or Eastern for a four-year degree. We have a very robust business program where people can earn their associates in business and a number of certificates including applied management which could be for people wanting to be a shift supervisor, or assistant manager. We have a strong early childhood education program for people who want to work in the childcare or early childhood ed center. We also have a strong program for medical lab technicians and in medical assisting- we are the only ones in the state with this program. There is also a very strong program in manufacturing which is NIMS certified (a certification that the industry is very well aware of), offering several certifications in that area as well.

We train people to do all types of manufacturing, so everything from plastics manufacturing to mechatronics. As you may know, manufacturing is certifications based, so we do offer certificate programs as well as associate degrees. We work with both EWIB and

EMA in northeastern Connecticut. We are part of the youth manufacturing pipeline as well as the adult pipeline. Most people are coming through our program or through Three Rivers. A certification in manufacturing can lead directly to employment, in as little as a seven-week training program. Obviously, the more credentialing you get the better jobs you get, but you can work in manufacturing and earn up to \$70,000 out the gate. Occupations such as quality assurance inspectors make up to \$140,000 a year. You see a ton of medical equipment being made in this area as well as parts. Quality assurance is making sure the parts are actually working well.

3. Can you tell us more about your short-term, job-focused training courses?

We have a non-credit branch that is our workforce development branch. Those are things like nurse's aide, phlebotomy, some short-term certificates in manufacturing, or real estate. They are short-term classes, which are not a full semester and are not eligible for financial aid but offer real-world qualifications.

4. Are there any recent partnerships or coordinated efforts that your institution has been working on recently within the surrounding community?

With the youth manufacturing pipeline initiative, we work with all of the local high schools as well as with EWIB and EMA to help students get access to training in advanced manufacturing. The training comes through our institution and could include learning how to do blueprint reading or manufacturing hands-on work that leads to certifications. Then we connect back with employers to work on placement. We work with the chamber and EWIB on those initiatives. We have a strong partnership with medical assisting in our area, as providers help with clinical placements as well.

5. Can you tell us more about how QVCC works with employers?

Sure, I will use manufacturing as an example. Our director in manufacturing oftentimes will know about student's needs for jobs, and employers needs in placement, and he works to help connect the two. There is a very strong job placement piece that happens through that program.

6. Does QVCC ever reach out to new/small businesses to see if they would be interested in participating in job placement efforts?

We do, but most of the time we are working through existing agencies like EWIB and EMA versus directly cold-calling businesses. But our faculty all do have regional advisory boards that work with local companies that they are aware of to ensure that our curriculum is meeting industry standards and that we are helping to see what the outcomes are. This process is kind of like a feedback loop- the companies help review our curriculum before it is approved and that way, we are ensuring that the skill sets we are teaching are what

the industry needs. This process serves as a check and balance because we meet regularly with them. If our students are not doing well in something, or if something is changing in the industry, then we make those adaptations through our curriculum process.

7. Have you noticed any patterns regarding certain areas that students are not doing well in?

Not in particular, I am not at the level of those conversations within the manufacturing meetings with employers. I have not heard anyone say anything in particular about what is not going well or if something needs to be changed. Prior to COVID, we have heard a lot about 21st century work skills which is making sure that people know how to show up to work on time, know how to advocate for themselves, and know how to follow through on what their employer is looking for. I would be happy to reach out to other staff and ask if they are hearing anything in particular from employers about things that are missing in the training that students are receiving. Those who are getting certifications and are training for careers are typically being trained in math, communications, and other similar areas.

8. Do you think high schools within the northeast region could do anything to better prepare their students so that they are not facing skill gaps when they begin college?

As a former high school teacher and administrator, the teachers are really trying to align their curriculum with college. I think the biggest gap is showing students and families what jobs are out there. So many people are caught up in the name game of where they send their kid to school versus understanding that this is not the most important part of college. It is more important to know about the jobs that are going to pay the bills long term. I do not think people understand the jobs that are out there today- this may mean helping parents understand that manufacturing is actually a very clean job and removing the stigma around this. Or in healthcare, all of the opportunities that you have to start out, and how they build on each other to establish a career pathway. The job shadowing options, and the mentorship options are missing, but would help students to know that there are other jobs out there that they have not even thought about. If people never have the opportunity to find out what their passion is, then they may get stuck.

9. The update of the region's CEDS will have a strong emphasis on improving the social, gender and racial equity in the region- both in the workplace and in the community. What steps/changes, if any, do you think need to take place to improve the current situation in terms of equity?

Our campus is one that is very much interested in ensuring equitable outcomes of all students. We just joined a race, equity, and justice institute where we work with achieving DREAM, so we are doing a lot of training with our faculty and staff around diversity, equity and inclusion concepts and also understanding microaggressions and bias. I think the most important thing to do is actually look at your data first, to see where your gaps in opportunities are and then try to plan based on that. We did our first equity audit

this year, and that was very eye opening for us because we did see that there are populations that are not achieving at the same level as other populations.

We run a very popular ESL program in Willimantic but what we have seen is that the outcomes are not as strong as we want them to be. The indicators we look at is how many students complete college level English in the first year of their enrollment. How many students also complete college level math in their first year? What we saw in our equity audit was a particular gap for our Latino students, most of whom are enrolled in ESL. I think this kind of goes back to those multiple layers of developmental, so if you ever got to college level that we really have to take a look at that because if none of them took that class, they cannot meet the metric. We are going to be looking at how we do ESL, and how could we make it better so that the outcomes are different.

10. Have you noticed any skill gaps with students entering the school? And if so, how can high schools within the northeast region better prepare their students for college?

As you know, a community college is open access, so we are not based on SAT scores or how many AP classes a student has taken, etc. We are open to everyone. We do placement testing on students, but we have also done a lot of renovation on our developmental programs just because of the research that has been done within the last decade on developmental ed. Usually this involves immersing a student in a college level class that they need to start, and then providing support during that class. They can take an extra support class, but they do not need to go through developmental classes sequentially to get to the college level class. For instance, if a student is starting in a freshman English comp class and are struggling, they are also taking a three-hour lab class to help support them that is taught by the same instructor. This is bound to be more successful in higher ed than multiple layers of developmental ed.

11. What are the region's two greatest strengths?

I think in sectors, our two greatest strengths are probably within manufacturing and healthcare. One of the things that is amazing about northeast Connecticut is the fact that we have so many generous people. As an example, although we are one of the smallest campuses in the state, we have one of the largest foundations. We have a lot of generous, philanthropic folks in the area, which gives us opportunities to come up with more ideas. Another key resource in this area is QV, Eastern and UConn- I think we are all close enough that we could really benefit from partnerships between the three.

12. Region's two greatest weaknesses

Transportation is number one in this area. We do not have a strong regional transportation opportunity, and it is difficult for people to find bussing or Uber. This really limits people's access to opportunities whether it is education, or jobs. A second is really around making sure the public is aware of the educational opportunities that are available to them. We have a high percentage of working-aged adults who do not have some type of post-secondary degree. Research shows that if you have some type of professional certificate, even a one-year certificate, it can make a big economic difference for your family. I do not think people are aware of things like PACT, where if you graduated from a Connecticut high school, you could go to community college for free. A lack of information causes people to cycle within the same roles and they fail to improve their economic trajectory. If someone understood the investment of what six months or a year of their time would be, the rate of adults without a post-secondary education degree would be lower. This information is also missing within the conversations at home, just because people have not been exposed to all the different kinds of options. I do not think we help people tap into their aptitudes enough, some people are geared into programs where they are really not a great fit. We should do more aptitude testing both in high schools and in colleges.

13. What kind of outreach does QVCC do to make others aware of educational opportunities that are available?

We do a lot of outreach with our local high schools, and we get involved with the guidance counselors so that they are aware we have our recruiters talking about PACT. It is also about making parents aware that they can go back to school as well. Some people do not realize that college is not the same as high school, it is not five days a week, and it's not fifty-minute periods in which people are lecturing to you. There is more hands-on instruction, and you can concentrate on the things that you would actually like to learn about.

14. Region's two greatest opportunities

I think the opportunity is within working together to message which jobs are going to be here in the future and making sure that families and students know those opportunities so that they can begin to think of themselves in different roles and envision their economic trajectory. To me, the opportunity is to inspire families to think differently about how they can improve their lives, knowing that there is going to be better jobs here in the future. Another opportunity is rethinking how we connect employers and students' longer term, within the middle school, high school, and collegiate levels.

15. Region's two greatest threats

I think that if we do not connect the dots, we're going to stay as we've always been. Sticking to the status quo will not help people in this area move out of poverty. The other threat is making sure we get more people into better educational opportunities along with fixing the transportation system so that everyone can have access to these options.

Interview with Alison Dvorak, Senior Resources Agency on Aging

January 26th, 2023, 2:00pm

Interview with Alison Dvorak, Executive Director of Senior Resources Agency on Aging

1. How does your organization's mission contribute to the economic well-being of Connecticut?

Our mission is to provide access to information and services to empower adults to live with dignity. A lot of what we do is for older adults- we're the Agency on Aging and the main population of adults that we serve are 60 and older. Through the Older Americans Act we manage the paths through funding for a lot of federal and state programs that relate to that, such as the Senior Nutrition Program, National Family/Caregiver Support Program, Alzheimer's Respite, and the resident services care programs. All of these programs help people as they age to stay living in their community, and we're practicing nursing home prevention by providing care in their home. Another part to this is helping to manage caregiver's stress. There are a lot of programs that could relate to economic concerns- we do a lot of chronic disease self-management education programs for people of any age and the idea is that when people can manage their health issues better, they are living a healthier and more productive life. The Older Americans act was created in 1965 to address the fact that older adults need to have some kind of safety net to be able to continue to live in their community. So, the Medicare aspect of it brought about that healthcare coverage for them- a lot of what we do is Medicare counseling which involves helping people figure out the logistics of getting on Medicare, finding drug plans at the lowest cost, maximizing their use of the program, and helping to prevent fraud and abuse. The Older Americans Act is up for review every once and a while with Congress. The act is not income-based; it is age-based. The thought is that people 60 or over should be able to access services that help them to stay in their communities. The Senior Nutrition Program for example is age-based, and the meals are planned to meet the dietary guidelines for older Americans (i.e., low in sodium). Although donations are accepted, those participating in this program do not have to pay for the meal. This program encourages people to go to community locations such as senior centers or churches, keeping them in-touch with current information and engaged in the community.

2. Are most of your programs income-based or age-based?

Our programs are mostly age-based but we do have some income-based. We help with benefits screening and access helping people figure out what they might qualify for. There are tiers of what people may qualify for based on their income. For example, Medicaid addresses some of the lowest income levels.

3. Which community-based locations are utilized the most for your services?

It really varies, in a general term we probably work most closely with senior centers. However, up in the northeast, there aren't a whole lot of senior centers that are really involved, but that's growing. The Quinebaug Valley Senior Center in Brooklyn and the new Putnam one are lovely, but there are the smaller ones that are up there that may not meet as often. I made a nice connection with the Eastford senior group, and they meet in a church every once in a while. So, we have a lot of people that connect with us such as municipal agents for the elderly who may have questions, and we do a lot of Medicare training or "Choices Training." When people want to be choices counselors, they come and do that training with us- we've had some people from TEEG become choices counselors and work with us on that. So, there's a connected network that we foster more so than a physical location.

4. Have you faced any barriers in networking with senior centers?

It's never all that easy because sometimes staff changes. There's the regional centers and the smaller ones, and sometimes the smaller ones only meet on certain days making it difficult to keep up with everyone's schedule. Some of more of what we do is provide funding for the programs that some of those smaller locations can run, such as a Thai Chi or footcare. There are some places where our relationship runs in peaks and valleys, but we always want to support them because there is never any way that we could replace what they do- that local connection is so important. One of the big things that we help to fund is transportation in a lot of the areas for seniors.

5. The update of our plan will have a strong emphasis on improving social, gender and racial equity in the region. What changes do you think need to take place in Connecticut to improve the current situation in terms of equity in our communities?

We are making the awareness that we serve everybody- that is what our training is about and that is what we do. Of course, we need to make sure we're doing everything we can to make everyone feel comfortable in connecting with us and also that all of the areas we work in are also that open to serving everybody. Some of this is written into our rules of providing funding on how you're supposed

to do this. One of our intake forms, Form 5, was just revamped to include different self-identifying options to become more inclusive. I feel like this is definitely something we still have to work on and encourage. It's part of how we are allowed to do the job that we do, it's working on how we are able to reach the populations we have not yet gotten to. In a lot of ways these unreachable populations are not the ones that come to the senior center. With this area being so rural, you still need to let people know how to connect when they need it.

6. What are your ideas about reaching these populations and making them aware of your services?

We're trying to look at ways to have an in on some groups. We are trying to expand our social media presence and have that grow into other focal groups. We work with a lot of people who speak other languages to try to break into groups this way. Something under consideration is a mobile lunch component more geared towards lesbian and gay residents. It is a travel group that other states have been implementing with their aging residents and it has been very successful.

7. What is your most utilized program? Can you describe it in detail?

The Senior Nutrition Program certainly utilizes a significant amount of funding and serves a significant amount of people. Not all of the senior center locations where people are eating are open five days a week, rather they are open three to four days per week. In person, one can get about four meals per week and for home delivery someone can receive five. So, the cost for funding this program adds up pretty quickly as you can imagine. The other program that we get a lot of volume of people seeking our assistance is probably Choices, the Medicare information and counseling. I say this with a broad stroke because the Medicare information and counseling almost always leads to benefits screening as well. If we're talking with the person and providing individualized support and we see that we can get them into other programs as well, we're going to do this- this may entail heating assistance, caregiver support, or transportation needs.

8. What does the intake process look like?

Someone would just call our office and ask for a Choices Counselor. If someone were available, they could just talk to them then and there. A lot of times, during open enrollment in the fall, if someone is not new to Medicare then they are just looking into revamping their program for the next year. Usually someone will need an appointment, which can be conducted in-person, over the phone, or through a video conference format. Since COVID its been an interesting format for appointments. We have Choices Counselors that work at all of those other locations throughout the community and sometimes we'll have a focus day where we conduct several appointments at a location closest to clients within a day.

9. Would you say that COVID had a large impact on your work?

Yes, it had a large impact on our work. For the meal programs, people couldn't get together at any of the locations, so we went back to making home deliveries. Where we used to meet people in a live format we couldn't, so we went to technology. All of the training that went into getting other people to learn how to use technology and join a call was difficult. I'm a dietician and I hosted a virtual cooking class over Zoom which was awesome, but it was challenging to talk to everyone over Zoom. Thankfully, there was this increased need, and there was a lot of money coming through ARPA funds and everything else to help cover that need. Now we're dealing with the reduction of this funding, which means we need to scale back a bit with what we're providing. We're trying to work with the legislators to express that maybe the need is not as big as it was at the peak of COVID, but it's bigger than before. Those who faced declines during COVID aren't going to be exactly where they were before three years ago. We're coming out of COVID and it's never going to be the same normal that it was before. I think we're more capable now since COVID, as we're more capable of having people work remotely and be able to connect with people in different ways. For example, our meal provider had to shut down because they had COVID in their facility and couldn't serve meals at all for a week. So, we did a grocery program which entailed talking to people over the phone, getting their order, and putting it into Instacart for them to get delivered to their home.

10. Are there any barriers you have faced in regard to providing these services effectively presently?

Staffing shortages and providing in-home care has been a major issue for us. The home care agencies have had tremendous issues with employees getting back to them, which makes it difficult for us to create home care plans for our clients. Not that staffing hasn't been an issue before, but it's never been this bad, and now the need has increased for these services. Additionally, the rising cost of everything (such as heat or food) and no increase in allocated funding to meet these needs has been a huge challenge as well.

11. How urgent is the need for more support when it comes to assisting older individuals or those with disabilities?

I think it's pretty serious, because there are a lot of people in need and we're not able to meet all of their needs. We do a lot of evidence-based work, that's the focus of everything we do, and with that we prevent hospitalization, nursing home placement, caregiver burnout, and poor diabetes management. All of these are great things, but we need to figure out how to keep things going strong and serve the people that we are not serving.

12. Who are the actors that need to be pulled in to provide this support?

We are doing a lot to reach out to the legislation to make sure that state and federal funds are appropriated appropriately, so that they are allocated the right way in our opinion. As we touched on before, keeping that communication with the towns and with the

other groups/people working with other residents is important. Unfortunately, as a nonprofit we don't have the kind of money to put towards splashy ads, so people don't know about what we are doing. I'd like to explore more collaborative efforts. I don't think we have a regular presence at NECCOG even, but we do at the Southeastern Council of Governments through their human services component. I work closely with Health Quest, the Northeast District Department of Health, and their whole collaborative. We participate in the Eastern Connecticut Health Collaborative, which is like Uncas District, Hartford Healthcare, and all of those groups. Since we also cover Middlesex County, we also like to be involved in some collaboratives there.

13. What are the two greatest economic strengths?

One strength is probably the long-term residency in the northeast. There are a lot of families after families after families that love being there. Another strength is that the northeast is not far reach from Worcester, Boston, or Providence. Not that you want your strength to be to get out of town, but it's on the path.

14. What are the two greatest economic weaknesses?

Something that the Agencies on Aging have been working on together is that Medicaid income eligibility limits are low- they should probably bring them up so that more people can qualify for Medicaid, and the same thing with the asset limits. We have a no asset test Medicare savings program, but if people have an income that is slightly higher, then they have a real challenge meeting the spend-down in order to be eligible for Medicaid. We've been working at a state-level to see if we can change those asset and income qualifying components for Medicaid. Another weakness, especially in the northeast, is transportation and accessibility. If you think about all of the hills, or roads without sidewalks, it makes it difficult for those in a wheelchair or with a cane to get around. Another weakness is decent, accessible, and affordable housing.

15. What are the state's two greatest economic opportunities?

I think the northeast is an untapped gem of an area. There's a lot of beautiful things to do there that would draw people to live in the area. There are a lot of things there, such as the mills or schools, that could be renovated into something charming to look at. Another strength is that it doesn't seem that people are opposed to the hubs that already exist, so you don't have to have everything replicated in every town. People that live in the small towns because they have chosen to are not opposed to getting to a hub location.

16. What are the state's two greatest economic threats?

There's always the threat of people who are afraid of change, so if you're trying to propose something you may be met with a lot of opposition. Another threat that I hear about is that the northeastern corner of the state feels unheard. In the state in general, it seems as if the northeast is left out.

17. Does your organization publish research studies?

We just did a recent study statewide called, "The Big Ask" which was asking seniors different things on where they would go for information. We also do a lot of data collection with our intake form that we maintain for everyone participating in our programs. It's a four-page form that goes over daily living, access to things, eating habits, etc. Some of the highlights of our statewide study would be found on agingct.org.

- a. People that are afraid of change
- b. Northeast feels unheard
- c. do a lot of data collection through intake forms

Interview with Bryan Hurlburt, CT Commissioner of Agriculture

March 7th, 2023, 11:00am

1. How does the Dept of Agriculture's mission and its development programs contribute to the economic well-being of the state?

Our mission is to foster a healthy environment for agriculture in the state. Our job is to foster a healthy economic, environmental, and social climate for agriculture, by developing and regulating agricultural businesses and protecting agricultural and aquacultural resources. Those tie directly in with the question- our grant programs are used to invest in farms and the development of farms, in nonprofits that support increasing access to markets or profitability of farms. Over the years we've been tweaking those programs directly to make sure that we are being more responsive to the needs of the industry. We've created a new and beginning farmer microgrant program, we've expressly included urban agriculture as a component of what we can fund, we've included food access and food systems work as priority areas, and then lastly, we had launched the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) working group within the department (agency wide and industry wide) about a year and a half ago.

2. What does the Department of Agriculture have to offer to those seeking agricultural business development support?

If you go check out our Ag Transition or Ag Viability grants, both have details about the priority areas and what would be eligible. Our New and Beginning Farmer Microgrant program is a \$5,000 grant program and is designed for those new entrants into agriculture. So, folks that have spent a bit of their own money but aren't ready for a USDA or commercial loan, not for a large grant program that maxes out at about \$50,000 per award. So, these smaller applications just got consumed because we had these larger applications. By parading its own lane for these new and beginning farmers, we're able to make sure that they get more of those dollars. This is the third year that we've launched it, and every year since we've had the New and Beginning Farmers grant program, we've seen an increase in the number of awards and dollars spent on new and beginning farmers, and this is really for those folks who are still trying to grow their business. It could be a nineteen-year-old whose moved from an FFA project or an agriscience school, or it could be a forty-nine-year-old, someone who wants to make agriculture a profession. It's not really based on age; it's based on years of experience.

1. How have you seen the Department's work or focus shift over time with changes in agriculture?

We've definitely tried to keep up with what's happening in the field. Last year we announced a seven-million-dollar Climate Smart Ag and Forestry Grant Program, and the applications were open December through January. We had seven million dollars available for funding and we received fifty-five million dollars in potential awards. So, including urban agriculture and new farmers, we're trying to pull different people into the industry than we've seen before, we're trying to help offset the cost of implementing climate smart technology in the field (recognizing that requires an investment that you usually can't get a loan to do or dedicate your own funds to) in an effort to transition agriculture into new techniques, new technologies, and a different space.

2. Are there more or less conflicts with non-farmers and do zoning rules impede ag development?

Zoning rules have been a challenge for quite some time. We just had an established farm in Shelton that does some processing in commercial kitchen, and they do a great job of value-added, they do a number of CSAs, and they were looking to expand. The Planning and Zoning Commission denied their ability to expand and would not change the regulations that would allow their farm store to be the size it needed to be viable. As we talk about agriculture and agritourism, you think about your craft breweries and farm wineries. Those are places where farms aren't necessarily located in the commercial district. And so, when you're bringing people to the farm and you're doing events on the farm, that requires some work with Planning and Zoning. I think everybody wants to have a robust and viable agricultural community in the state, but we have to understand that that means something different than it did 70, 80, 100 years ago.

We've been working closely with Treehouse Brewery which is a great example. They purchased a protected farm that had some customer activity, and they want to do something different that's going to require a bit of flexibility in Woodstock to accommodate that. But you look at Taylor Brook Farm Winery and you know they were able to get it done and are successful.

3. What can be done to encourage continued ag use of PDR land?

We work with the Connecticut Farmland Trust. We have the Farm Link Program that connects potential farmers with landowners and landowners with farmers. I think that raising awareness of that program is helpful. Going back to the zoning component, we need to give people the opportunity to look at that farmland and say, 'Okay, here's my business model, here's how this works,' and asking the legislature for approval to do subdivisions on PDR lands. In the northeast corner, communities have done a great job at preserving farmland, but have done it in block of 300, 400, or 500 acres, you know? A lot of that land was previously dairy land, but not everybody wants to start a dairy farm. But if you had 25 acres you could have a very successful diversified operation with some nursery product, greenhouses, fruits, and vegetables through the course of the summer and pumpkins in the fall or Christmas trees in the winter- you could really make that a profitable venture. Purchasing 400 or 300 acres that you are only going to use a tiny fraction of does not make economic sense. In the future as we close on farmland preservation projects, we want a clause in there that says you can break the land into smaller farms of a minimum size to make it more accessible because if even with the PR and the easement on that land, the average cost per acre could be \$12,000 and this brings it down to \$7,000. That's a tremendous savings, but over 300 acres you're still looking at a \$2,000,000 property. There may be a way to cash flow that, but you also have to buy equipment, hire staff, and there are startup costs that involve a lot of investment, that you may need an operating loan for that you wouldn't be eligible for when you have a mortgage that size on the land. So, these are the sort of things that we're looking at from a policy lens. In order to ensure that, we're not only protecting the land from development, but we're protecting it and preserving it for agricultural use.

4. What kind of assistance can be provided to towns to ensure their zoning regulations do not unduly negatively impact agriculture?

The Connecticut Farm Bureau has created a municipal guide for agriculture and if you go to their website, you can pull that down. I think that's a great resource that should be shared.

5. *Do you have any advice on what NECCOG can do to support the development of farms in our region?*

Well, I think that NECCOG holds a terrific space and weight to be an area expert on this. A lot of towns are involved with NECCOG, and I think they respect the opinion of NECCOG's leadership. If NECCOG could host events or work to get more agricultural commissions started or publicize why those sorts of activities or organizations are important, then I think that would be a great space for NECCOG to continue to foster that awareness and that assistance.

I think that the northeast corner has a lot of cultural activities. Between the quiet corner, the antiques, Putnam and rails to trails, natural parks and other things, there's a destination that could be created for the northeast corner that includes agritourism and the support of agriculture. If you look at somebody like CLiCK in Windham, creating a commercial kitchen space to help small entrepreneurs and farmers do value added processing is not a small organization, not a small investment. But you know, they've made an impact on those sorts of activities in the northeast corner. So, things that that are really helpful because it takes a long time and a lot of support in order to get those sorts of things up and running.

6. *A separate task in our grant deals with women and minority farmers and how we can address the barriers they may face. What kind of resources can we offer them?*

A successful business needs a market and the easiest thing we can do, the lowest hanging fruit, is to go and support these businesses and purchase their goods. That's a pretty low hanging fruit but pretty important for their businesses and a way that we can promote agriculture in the state. We ran the Connecticut Grown campaign last month and had 1000,000 impressions on our efforts. We need to generate more media attention like that. We need local farm maps, and we've used some of our grant programs to support those sorts of activities at the local level. We have a ctgrown.org website that people can access to find farms in the state. You could use this if you're going out to the northeast corner for a weekend, and you want to find out where a local winery or a farm or brewery is.

I mentioned earlier our DEI working group has a number of recommendations that will be released in the near future which talk about how we as an agency and as an agricultural community can do a better job to conduct outreach, engage, support, and launch a more diverse agricultural community in the state. Governor Lamont has talked about on a number of occasions the need of having a state government that reflects our state's population, and a need for our programs to mirror that. So, we are working towards that end. We're also working and have had success with the Women's Business Development Council, who have done a number of investments into female-owned farm operations to give them some much needed capital in order to take the next step in their farm business.

7. *What are the state's two greatest economic strengths in regard to agriculture?*

One is that we have a lot of land. Granted, we don't have as much land as say, Nebraska, but we still have 370,000 acres across the state in production. So, that's important you have that available. The other piece of the market is that we are located between Boston and New York with the opportunity of a large number of consumers with available dollars. They have resources to purchase locally grown products and goods. Location is the prime retail component, and although a farm may be located on a back road, there's over 100 farmers markets in the state of Connecticut. You also have access to the farmers markets in Boston, Rhode Island, and New York and we do have farmers that are every successful selling their products at those markets. You have restaurants that are very interested in purchasing locally grown products. We launched the Farm to School Program, the connected Run for Connecticut Kids Program and we're going more farm products into school cafeterias, classrooms, and initiating those sorts of relationships. So, I would think that those are two of the top items that any industry needs to look for when they're looking to be successful.

8. *What are the state's two greatest economic weaknesses in regard to agriculture?*

The workforce- this isn't limited to Connecticut; this is really for the industry across the nation. You can't grow a business if you can't hire people. I think everybody everywhere, Connecticut included, needs to be thinking about how we're cultivating the next generation or bringing somebody from a non-ag career into agriculture and helping them see that transition and understand that that could be a great career for them. Agriculture can include logistics, computer sciences, engineering, welding equipment operators, you know all of those things that you need. I think we need to do a better job of developing more workers, which starts at a younger age and with partnerships in the College of Health and Natural Resources at UConn. But we also need to have people think about how they could transition into a career in agriculture using a skill set that they developed in a non-ag field.

The other challenge that I think we have is the cost of production- it is high. We don't have the same economies of scale that New York or Pennsylvania even have. And so, shipping as much product as we do to support our production does involve an increased cost along with our land being some of the most expensive in the nation. And that's again why we need to be finding ways to make it more affordable and more accessible. You know, our labor costs are higher, the general cost of living in Connecticut is higher and so those are sorts of things that I think create challenges for us. And as I say that we've got thousands of farms that are very successful that have managed through those challenges, some for a couple of years. There are new farms, and some have existed for many generations- this speaks to another strength that we have in agriculture, is the entrepreneurial spirit that every farmer has in order to be successful.

9. *What are the state's two greatest economic opportunities in regard to agriculture?*

I would say that location has to be one of them again, having access to the market is so important for any business to be successful. Not only do we have access to the market for our fresh products and our green bedding plants and nursery products, but we also have opportunities to develop processed foods and do value added production. The market continues to grow, and people are more and more interested in agriculture and supporting the local farms. One of the greatest highlights of the COVID situation that we saw in agriculture was that more people went to more farms. We saw and heard from farms across the state that some of their best years ever were during the pandemic. So the opportunity lies in our community, not only do we have the marketplace, but the marketplace is really interested in supporting Connecticut's farmers.

10. *What are the state's two greatest economic threats in regard to agriculture?*

I would go back to what was said for weaknesses, the cost of production and the workforce development. You can't own a farm without people. The supply chain is a big concern of ours. Not everybody tends to think about this, but the Hudson River is still only crossed by a certain number of bridges. If anything happens there, we've got a problem getting the types of products that we need in the state, not only to support our farmers, but to support the food needs of our state's residents. Being on the end of the supply chain, if anything happens all the way up the supply chain, we're the ones who will feel it the most. A great example of this was what we saw during the pandemic with our grocery stores, they didn't have some available products. The supply chain was so upside down inside out that it really made the point of how much we rely on workers- not only in grocery stores but workers at trucking operations, workers at packing operations, workers at sorting operations, all through the food system. That's why it's important for us to highlight and maintain a robust food system locally in Connecticut so that we can weather and manage some of those whipsaw effects that we saw during the pandemic with the national and international supply chain.

Interview with Linda Auger, Co-Founding Owner of Taylor Brooke Winery

Friday, August 4th, 2023

Our mission has always been to grow as much as we can on the land that we have, or to purchase from other local growers. We have helped start other wineries with other farmers. Right from the beginning, we felt it was important for everything sold other than the wine to be sourced from Connecticut. We were among the first to carry specialty food items grown or produced in the state. We have supported other businesses by using products local to Woodstock, and in surrounding areas. The facilities built have employed a lot of people. We are working on finishing the winery

pavilion enclosure- the builders for this project are Muddy Brook builders from Woodstock. I feel strongly that we were trying to give our business to and help promote other local businesses before it became a thing. There's Grace Gourmet who did some pop-up food at the brewery, and dinners in the winter- she does farm to table dinners that are being sourced from the local farms. Sip and shop in the winter involves local artisans. The business welcomes local artisans without storefronts, or bakeries to come to the winery, and does not charge them to sell their products, as it is a mutually exclusive dealing. Or they could be showing things that they make and have a pottery wheel set up. Some artisans walk away with commissions- one jewelry maker was booked to make the jewelry for a wedding. This is an opportunity for artisans to present their product to a range of people. Particularly in northeastern CT, the economy is all connected. So, if you're bringing people from the farmer's market and introducing them to other products, then you're allowing them to have a well-rounded experience. The winery had a psychic fair. Most of the vendors from the fair had never been to the winery before, so that was also good to draw people. All the little opportunities build a business and a community of businesses. Everyone changed their habits during COVID, and it impacted business. It changed the expectation of having entertainment all the time- as in food and music, and it is now a part of the experience.

Passport to CT Farm Wineries

The State of CT applied for a grant to create the winery passport, which was a novel idea and great tourism marketing piece since initial marketing efforts just used to be done through print advertising in the Turnpike Buyer. The passport was crucial to business exposure, as people were visiting places in the state that they had never been to before. The passport incentivizes people to buy products, since they are entered into raffles for prizes- there are about \$11,000 worth of prizes. The winery is also a part of the CT Vineyard and Winery association.

Opening a Business in Northeastern Connecticut

When asked about barriers that were faced when opening the winery, Auger replied, "Any region- do your homework- I can't tell you how many businesses have come and gone in three months- you always have to prepare to not take a salary home for five years." Auger recommends that if you do not know the area, drive around and get to know the surroundings. Look at resources such as population demographics and surrounding businesses that already exist to determine if there is a market for your idea.

Impact of COVID

The winery was only open for eight months until the pandemic hit. The winery had an online storefront using a website used primarily by restaurants that had an online ordering module, that they gave to the wineries for free. A lot of other wineries were late coming to the table in terms of opening online store fronts. The winery further adapted to the pandemic by consolidating their products at the brewery and offering curbside pick-up, which is still offered now.

Economic Development Strengths of the Northeast Region

From a tourism standpoint, Auger believes that the Last Green Valley is a strength of the northeastern region. Auger's business promotes what they are a part of, what it means, and what they are protecting. The natural resources, open space, and agriculture make this area beautiful. Another strength is the Northeastern CT Chamber of Commerce, which has membership of over 530 businesses that extend into Windham County and beyond. The Chamber is a valuable resource for access to the CT Legislature and they also host monthly networking opportunities called, "Business After Hours." Auger believes that if you're a new business, you should always join the town's small business group: "It's important for all of us as businesses to know each other and support each other."

Economic Development Weaknesses

Auger does not think that the region is working together. Economic development is not partisan- towns should be on the same schedule and on the same page with things. The fragmentation between towns is more obvious to Auger because the northeast's towns are so small. We need to function in a more connected manner and piggyback off each other's events. We must stop thinking so close to home, how can we work with or off other towns' successes?

Economic Development Opportunities

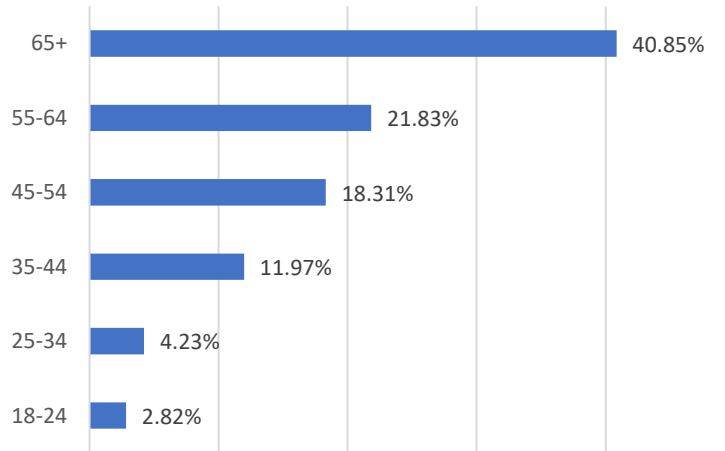
There is an opportunity to bring in customers from surrounding towns through marketing agritourism. There is a larger opportunity available through marketing to people within the cities. Visiting the area can be branded as a countryside getaway- people love that kind of experience. Auger further stated that an opportunity lies in bringing together the towns' Agriculture Commissions and EDC's to make a stronger presence in front of P&Z Commissions.

Economic Development Threats

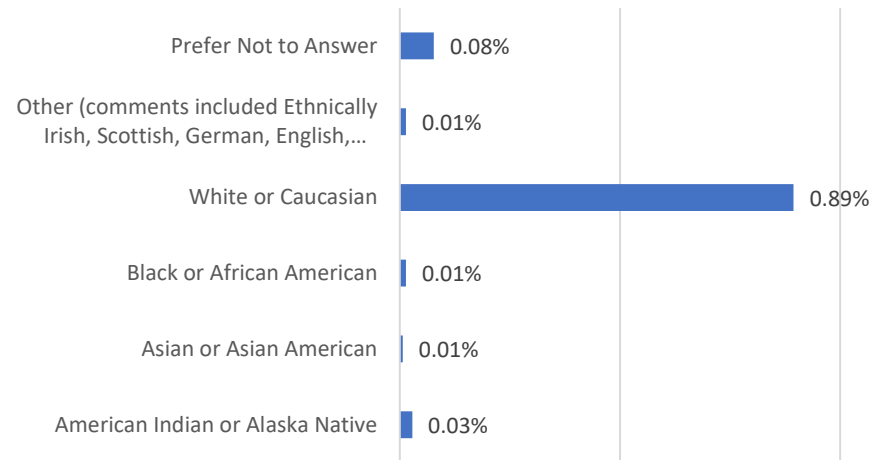
While regulations are necessary, there are some regulations that get too much into the nitty gritty of opening a business and hinder growth.

Appendix 4- Economic Development Survey Results

Survey Respondents: Age Group

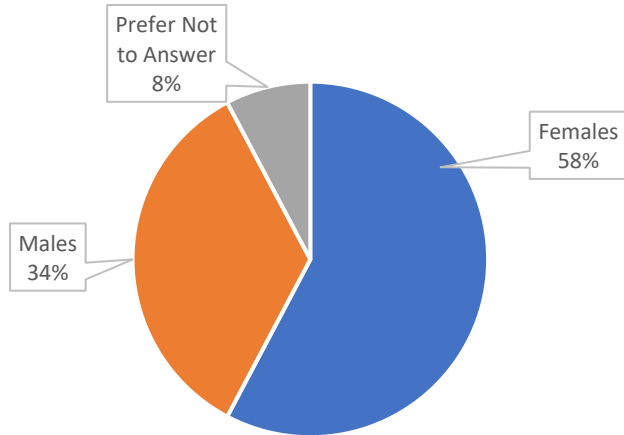


Survey Respondents: Race

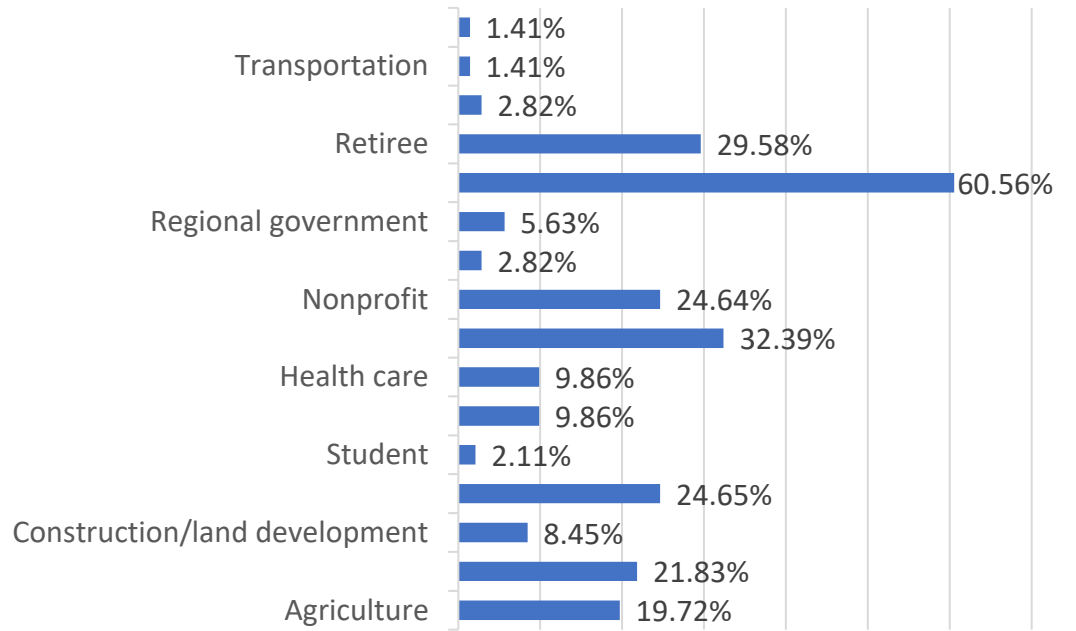


Survey Respondents: Discrimination Experienced Within the Region	
Race-Based Discrimination	34.51%
Gender-Based Discrimination	19.01%
Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation	22.54%
Age-Related Discrimination	16.90%
Disability Related Discrimination	13.38%
Religious Discrimination	9.15%
Discrimination Relating to Parental Status	2.11%
Pregnancy-Related Discrimination	1.41%
No experience of discrimination within the Region	54.93%

Survey Respondents: Gender

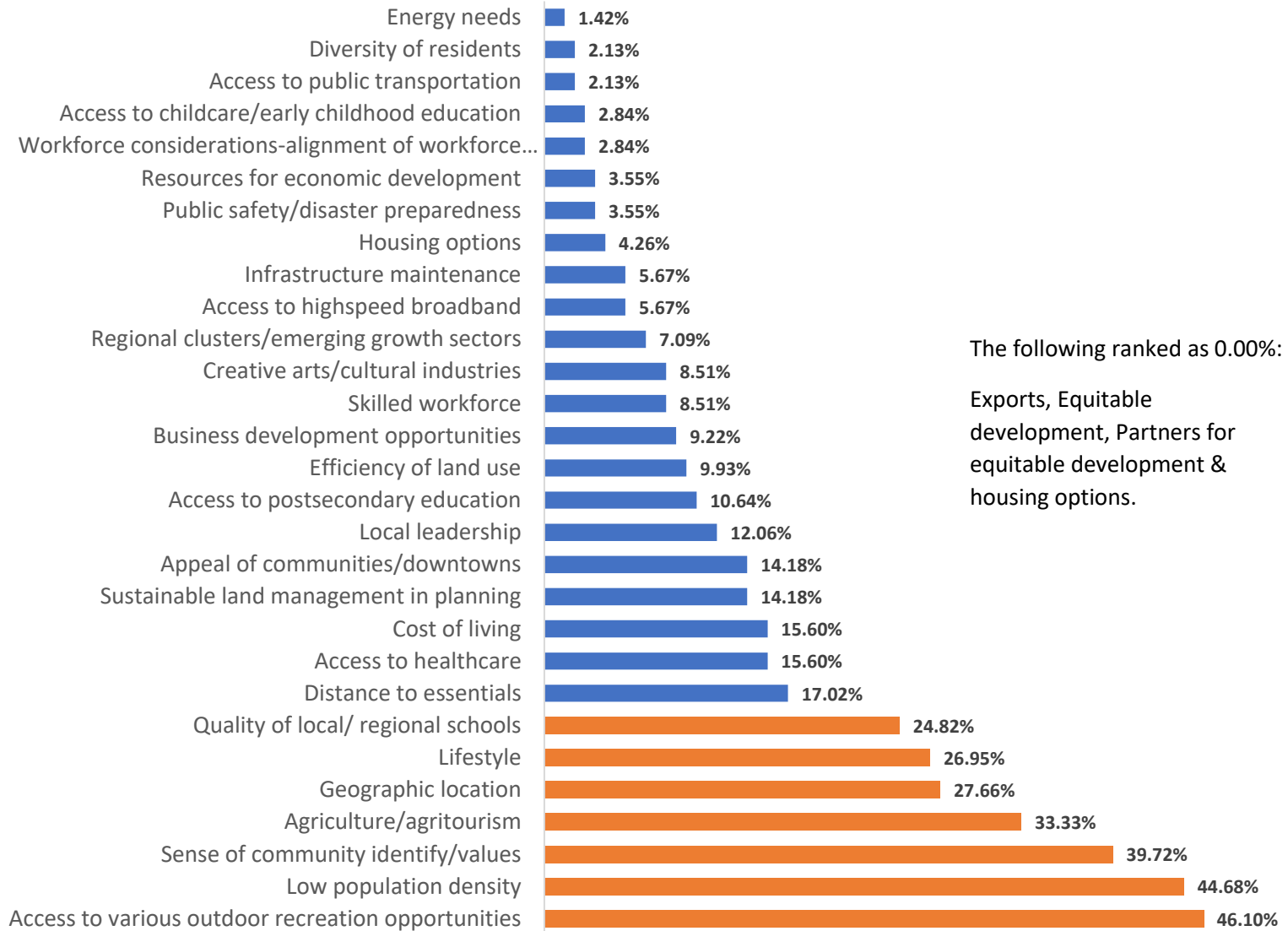


Respondents Identify Most With These Groups



Responses included the following comment: I am a biological woman. It is a matter of science (not how one "identifies") and I'm pleased with how I was designed in the womb."

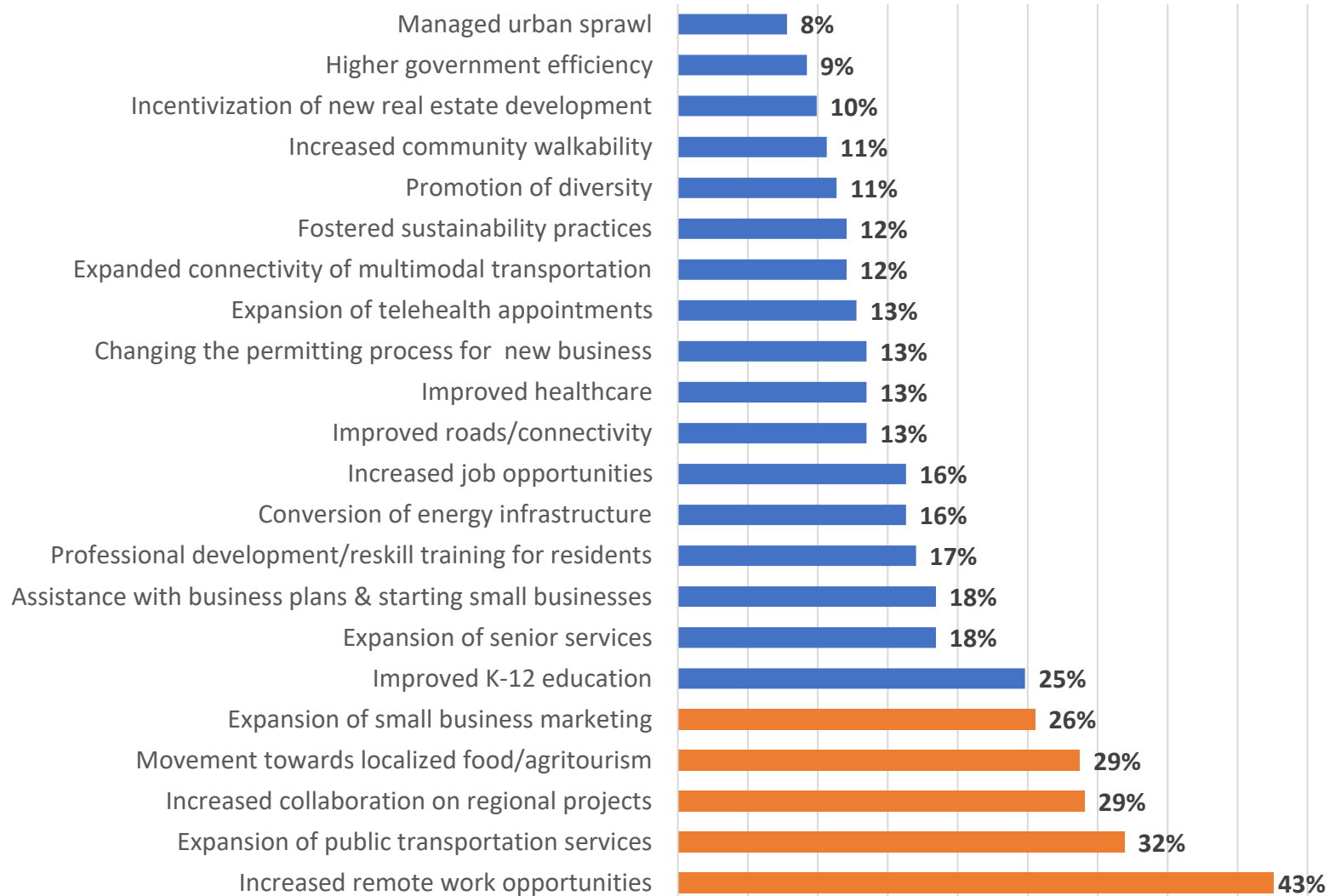
% Respondents' Top 5 Economic Strengths of NECCOG Region



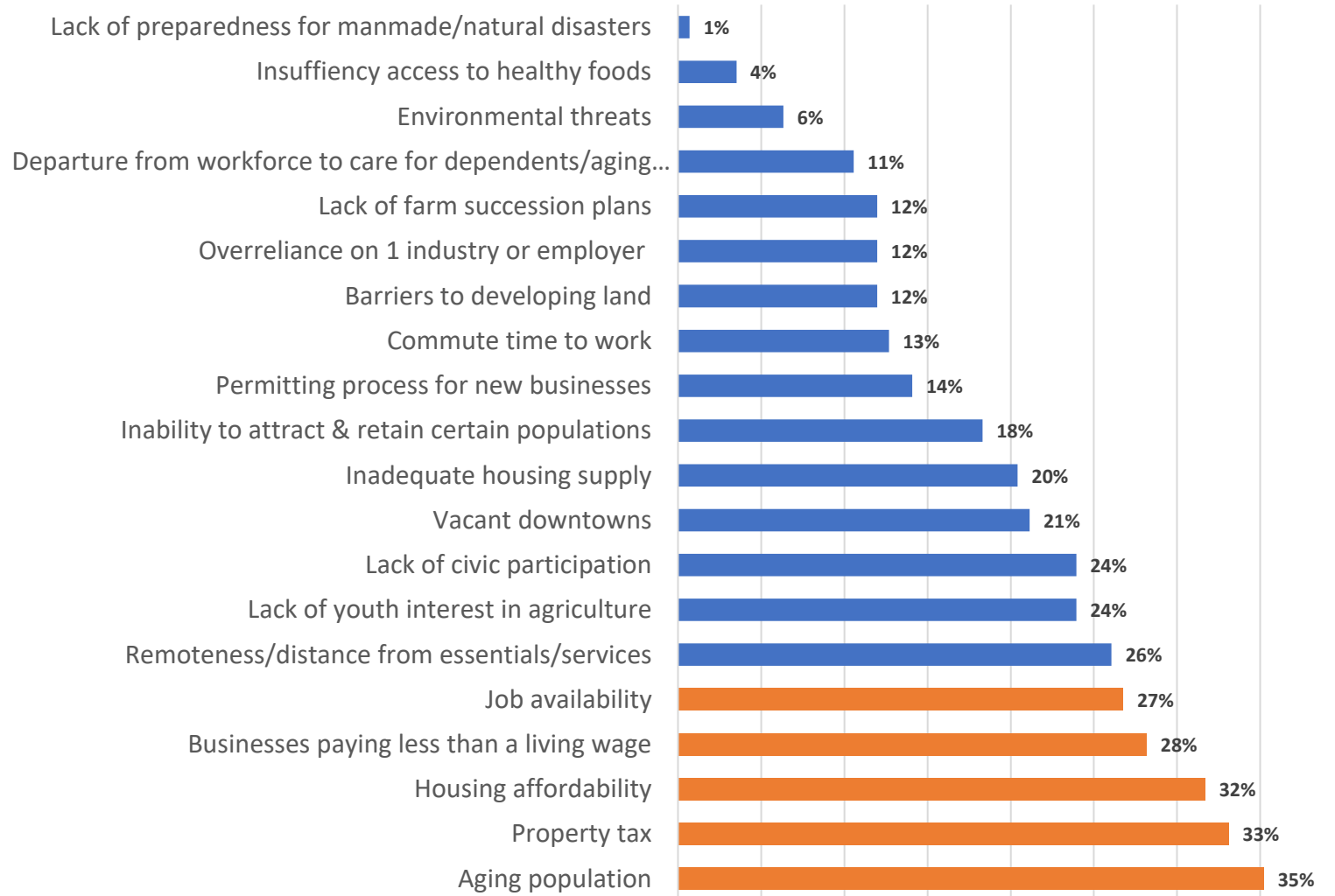
% Respondents' Top 5 Economic Weaknesses of NECCOG Region



% Respondents' Top 5 Opportunities for Economic Development Within NECCOG Region

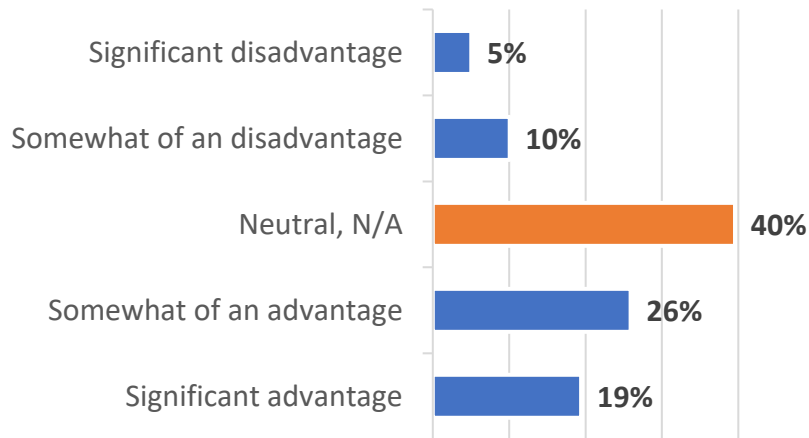


% Respondents' Top 5 Threats for Economic Development Within NECCOG Region

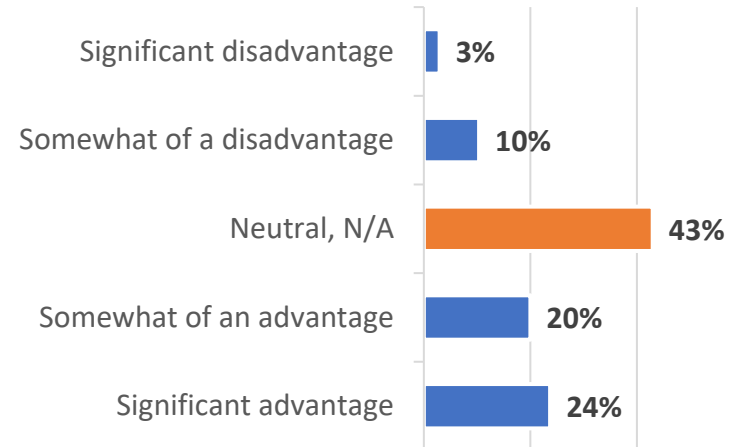


Types of infrastructure impact economic development in the NECCOG region:

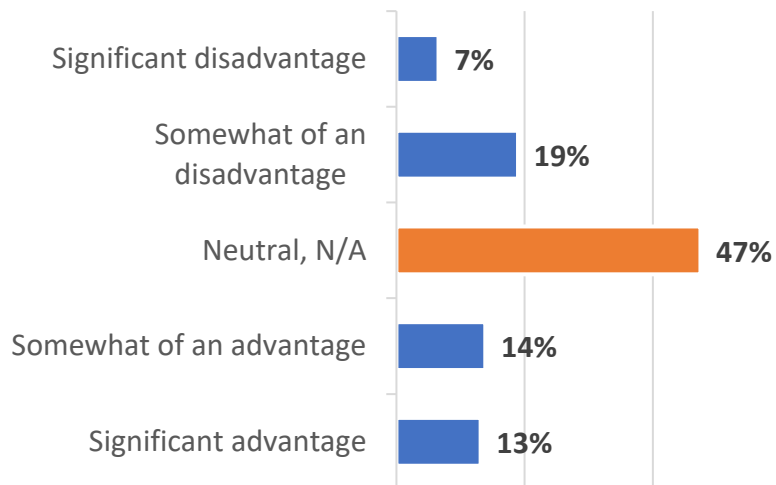
Infrastructure Impact: Road/highway System



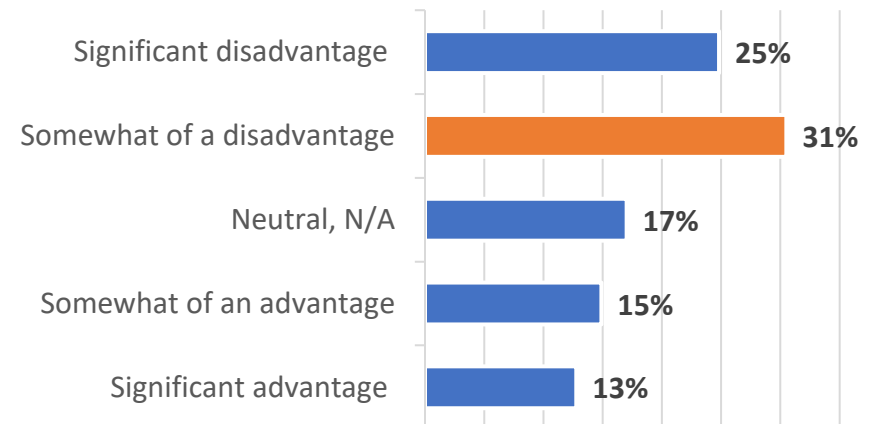
Infrastructure Impacts: Water



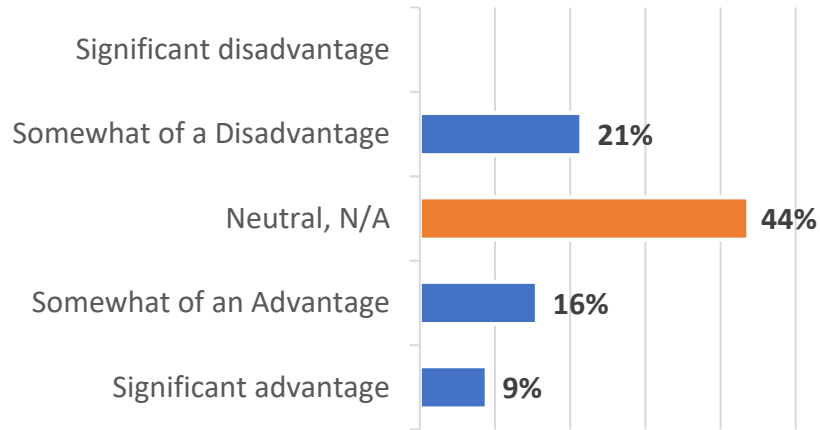
Infrastructure Impact: Sewer



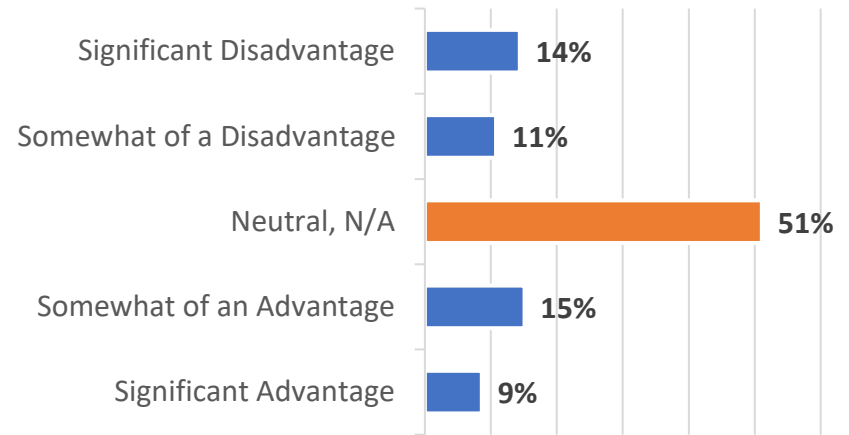
Infrastructure Impact: Public Transportation



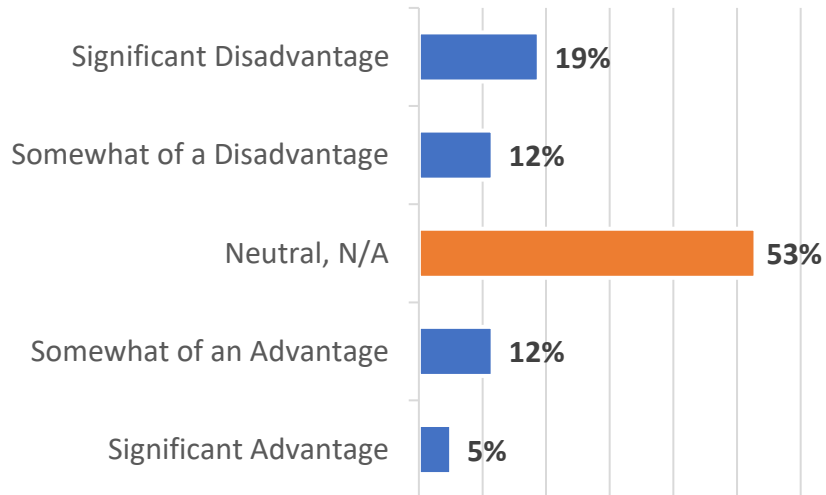
Infraqstructure Impact: Pedestrian/Bicycle Route



Infrastructure Impact: Railroad

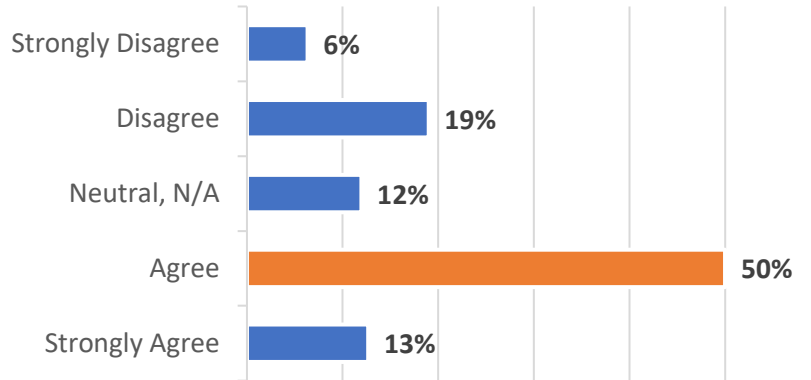


Infrastructure Impact: Airports

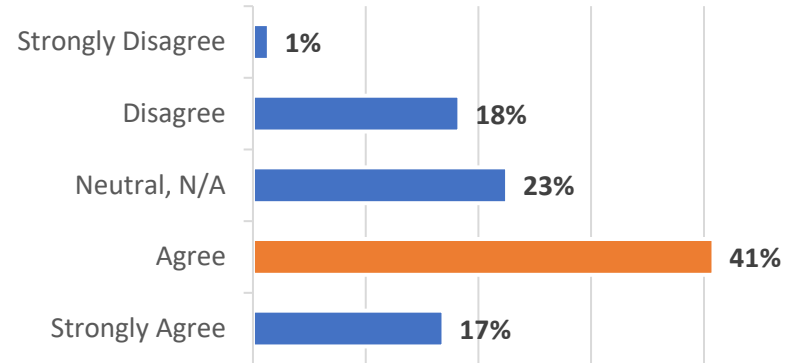


Feeling thermometer on statements having to do with the region

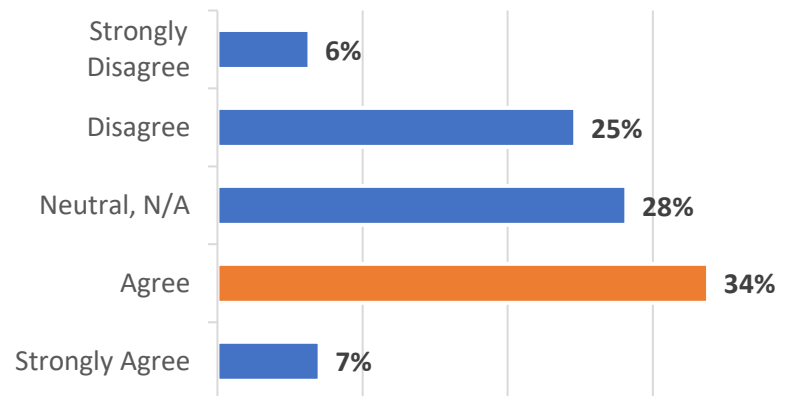
"I Can Easily Find Out What's Going on in My Region"



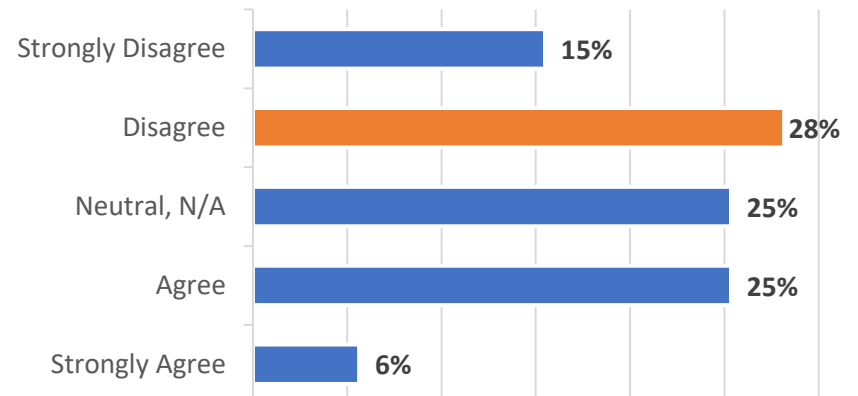
"The Region is an Attractive Tourist Destination"



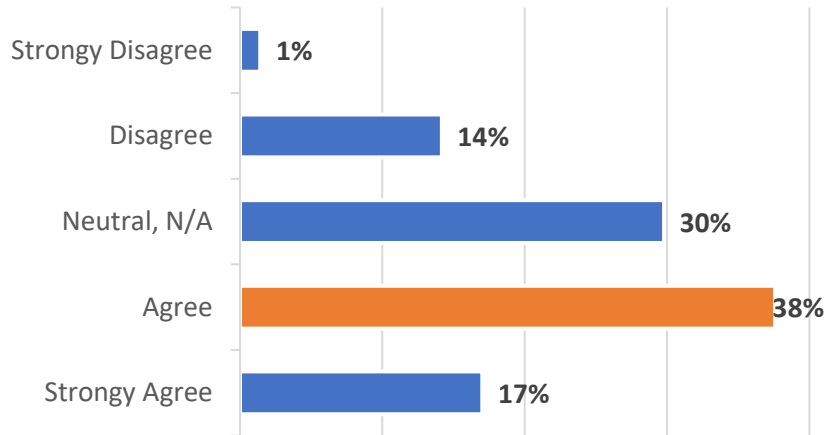
"My Community is Welcoming to Diverse Groups of People"



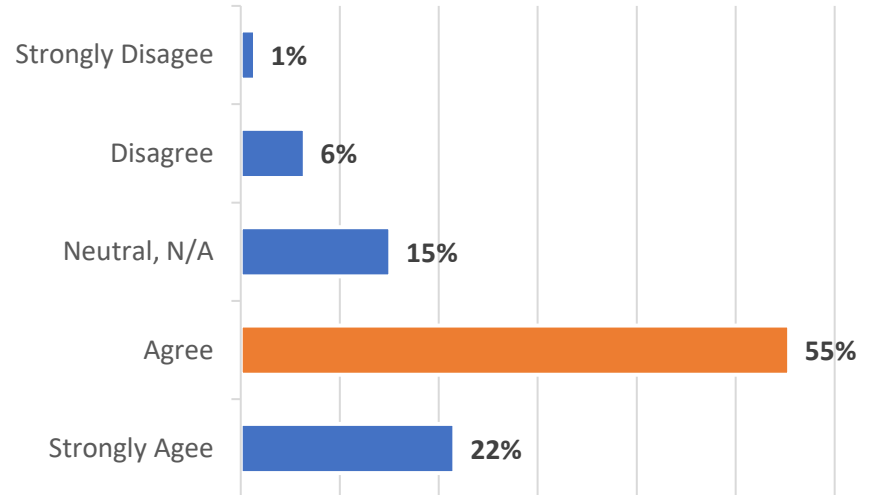
"The Leadership of Our Communities Represents Diverse Perspectives"



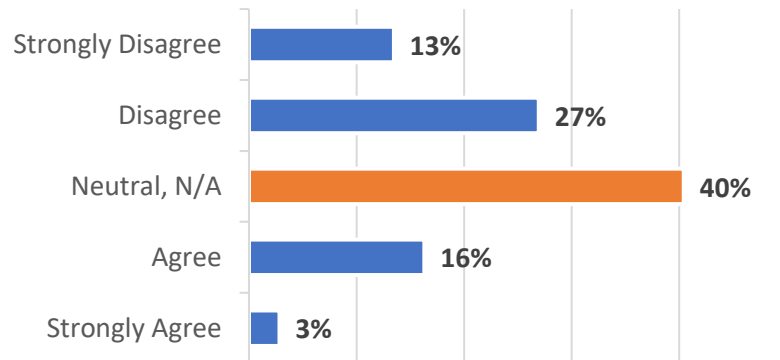
"Arts and Culture are an Important Part of My Community"



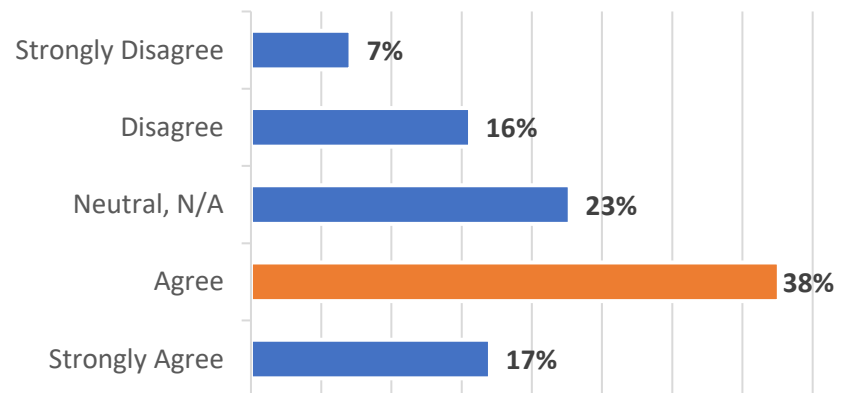
"Our Region Protects its Natural Resources"



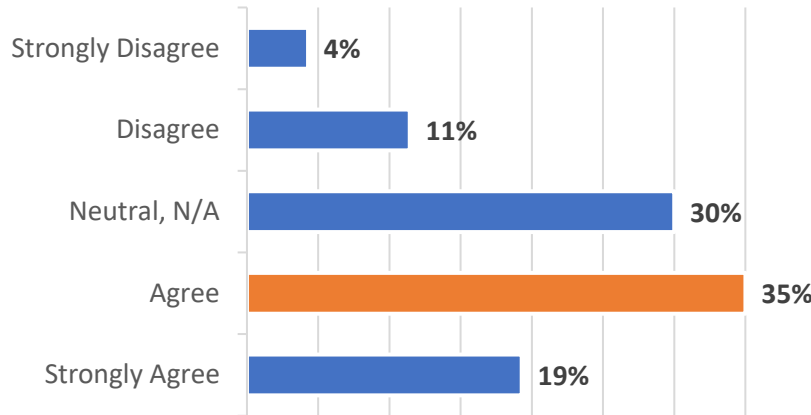
"Community Needs are Met in Regard to Access to Mental, Behavioral, and Addiction Services"



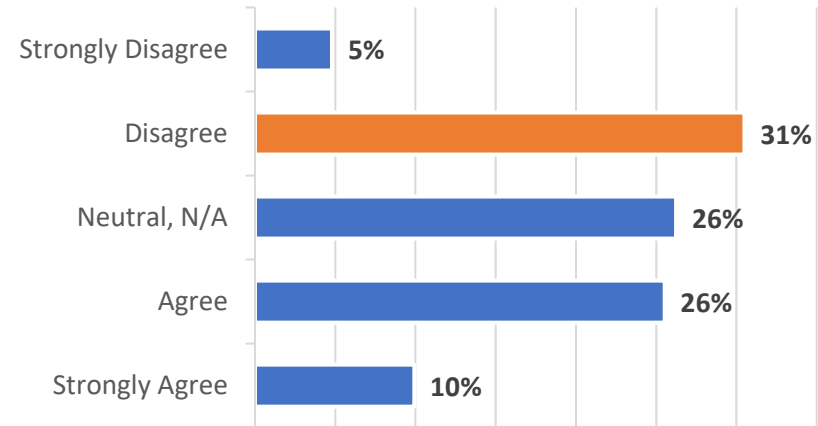
"My Community has High Quality K-12 Schools"



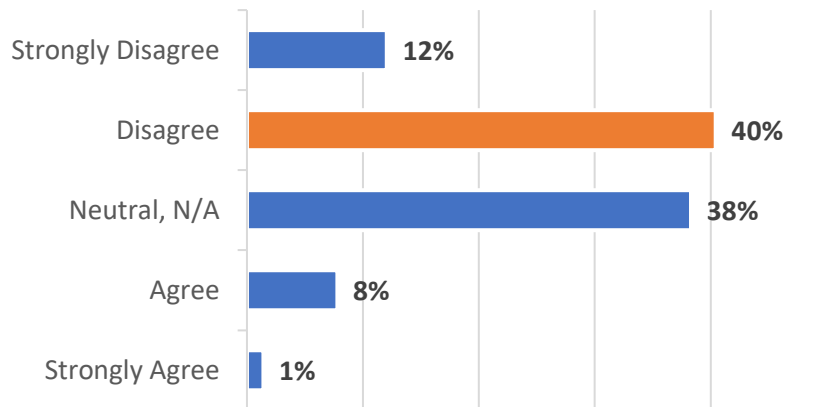
"My Community has High Quality Secondary/Higher Education Options"



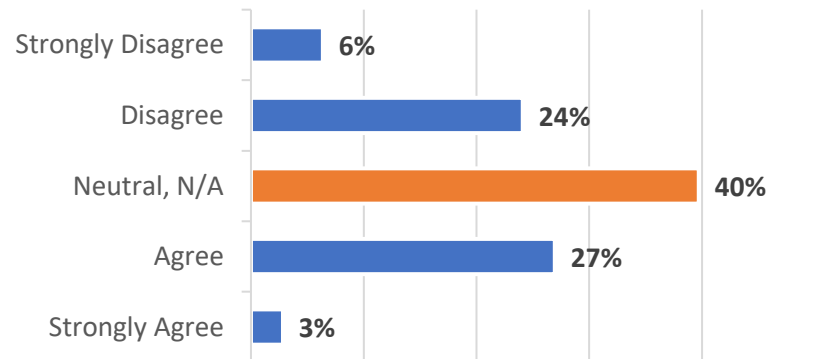
"I know of Many Jobs Available in My Community"



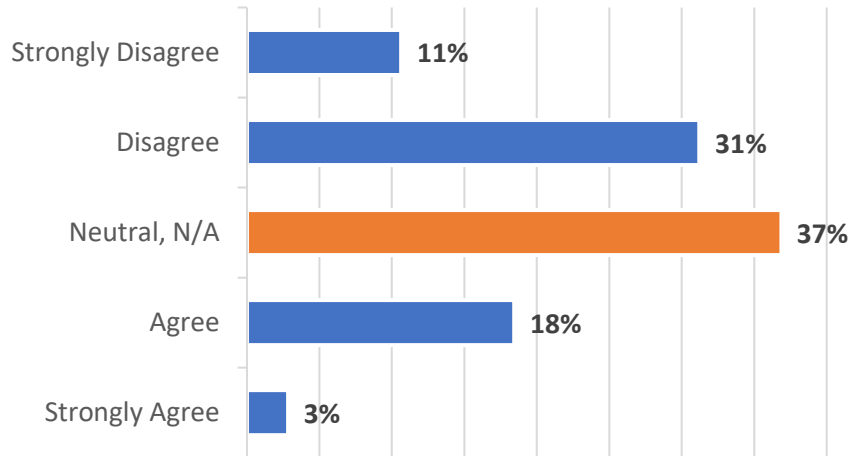
"The Jobs in My Community are of High Quality"



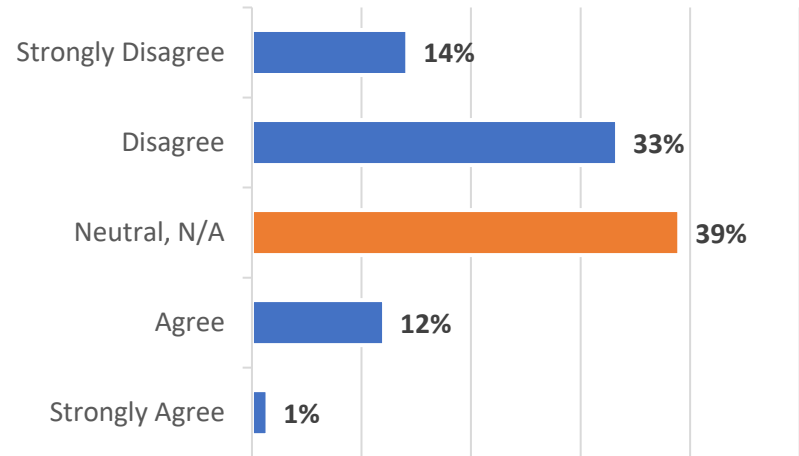
"A Variety of Job Training and Educational Opportunities are Offered to Improve Job Skills"



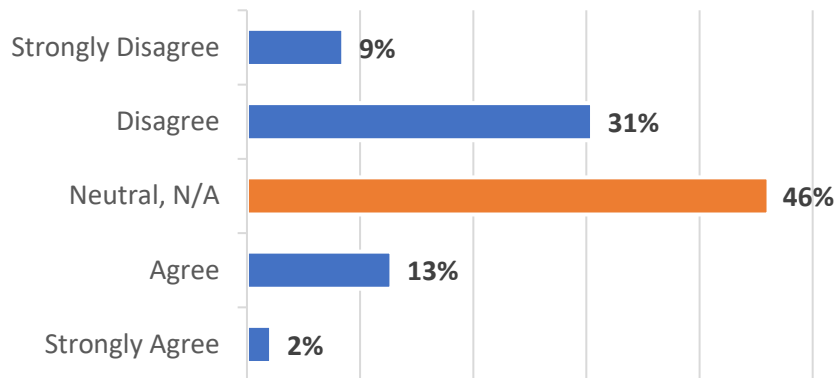
"Employers Have Access to a Skilled Labor Force"



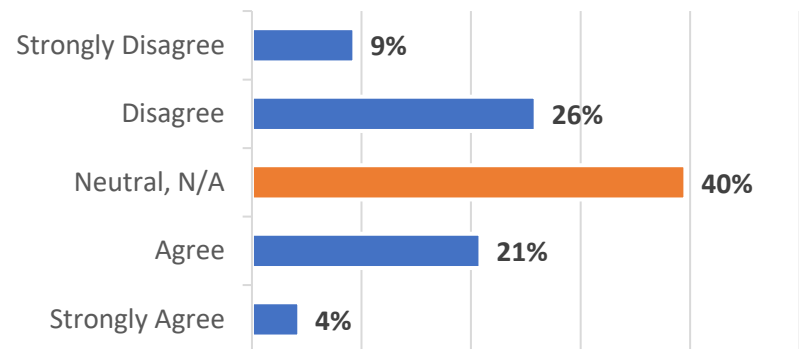
"Our Community Attracts Workers Aged 25-40"



"There is Quality Childcare Available for Those Who Work"

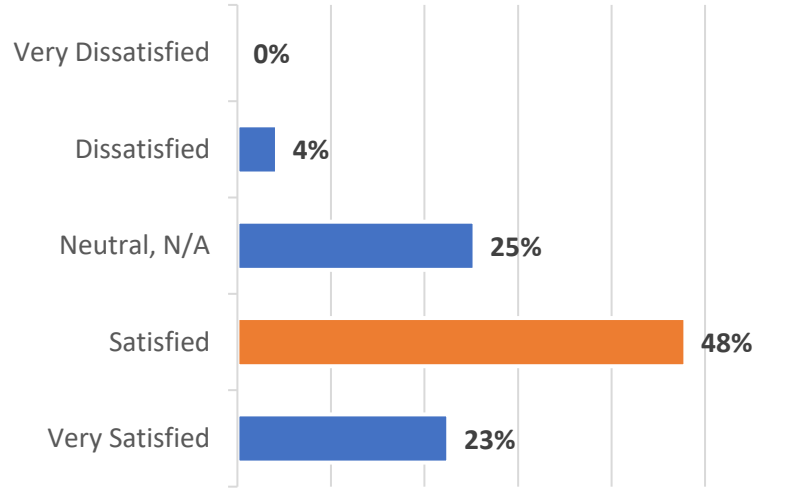


"My Community Helps Small Businesses Address Challenges Created by the Pandemic"

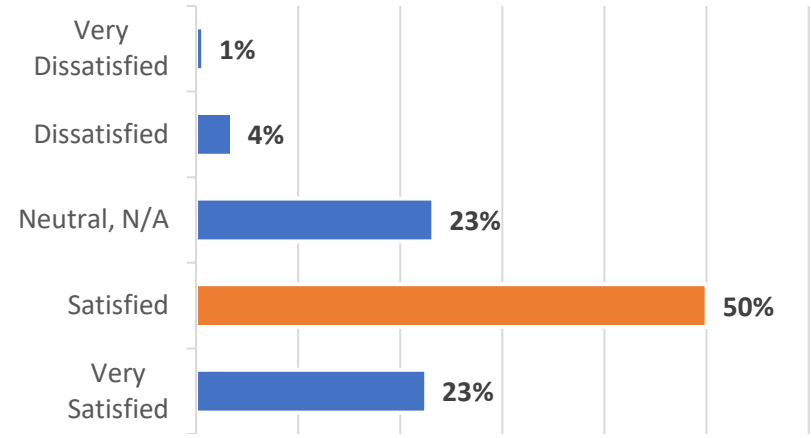


Satisfaction scale within the region

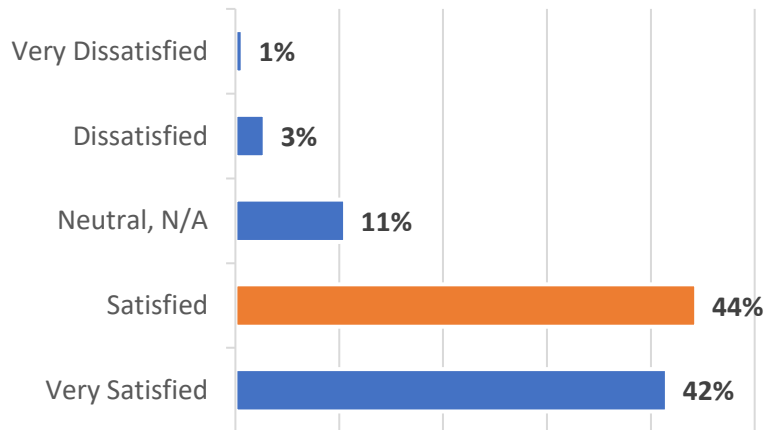
Family Friendliness



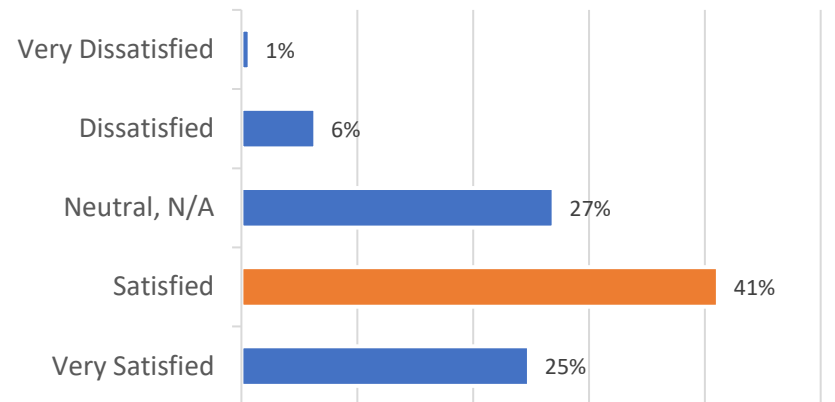
Climate



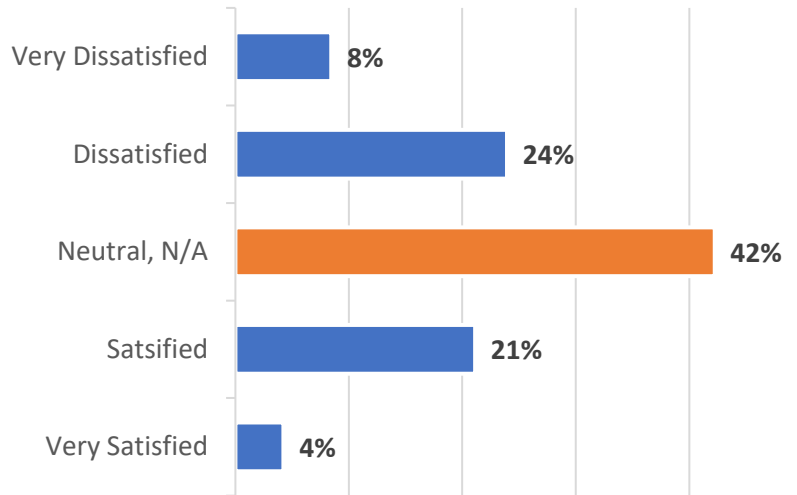
Natural Environment



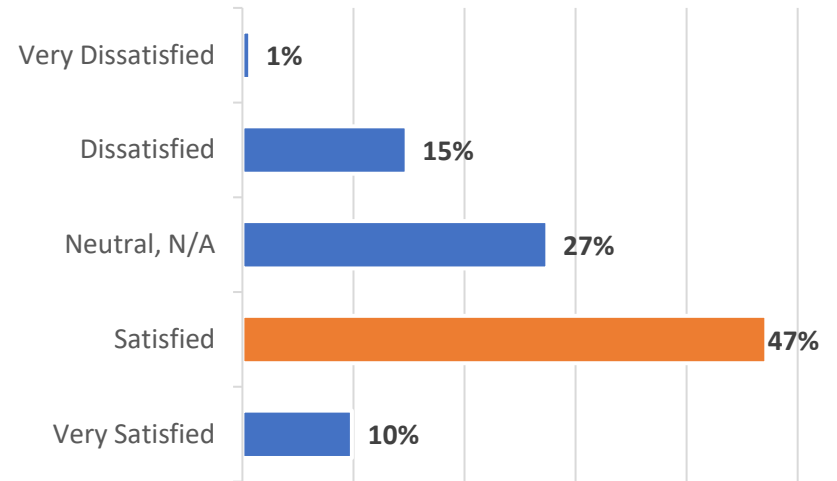
Volunteer Opportunities



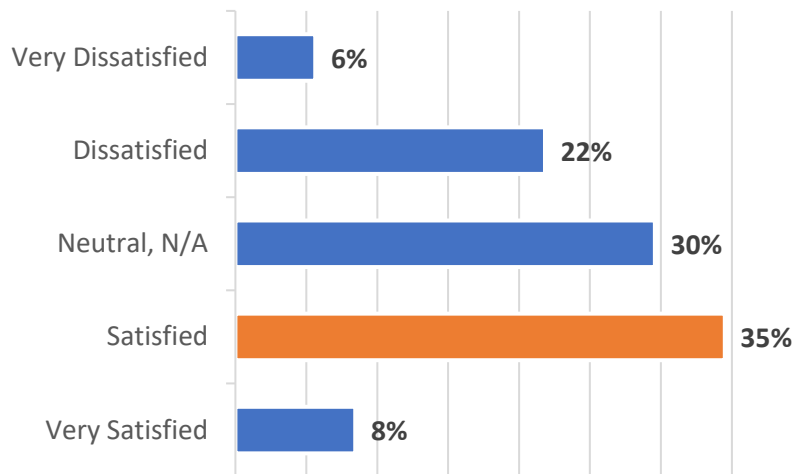
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



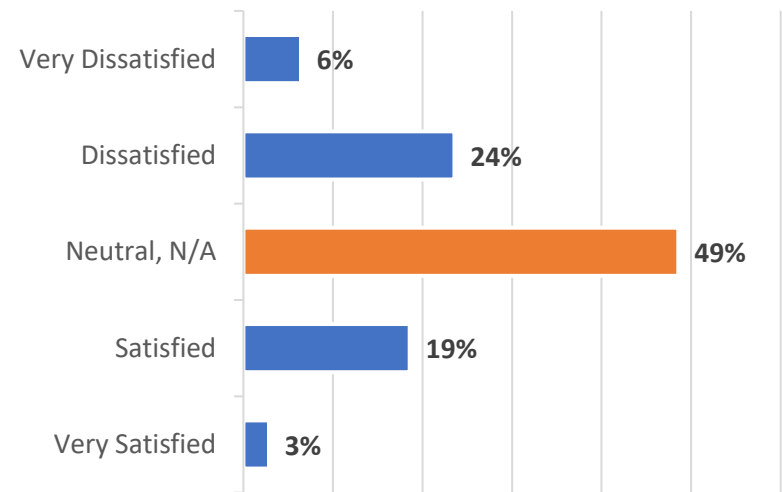
Entertainment/Recreation



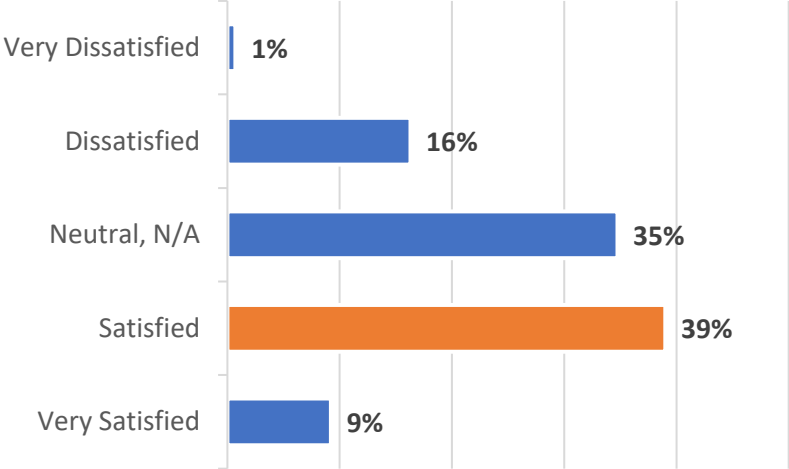
Retail



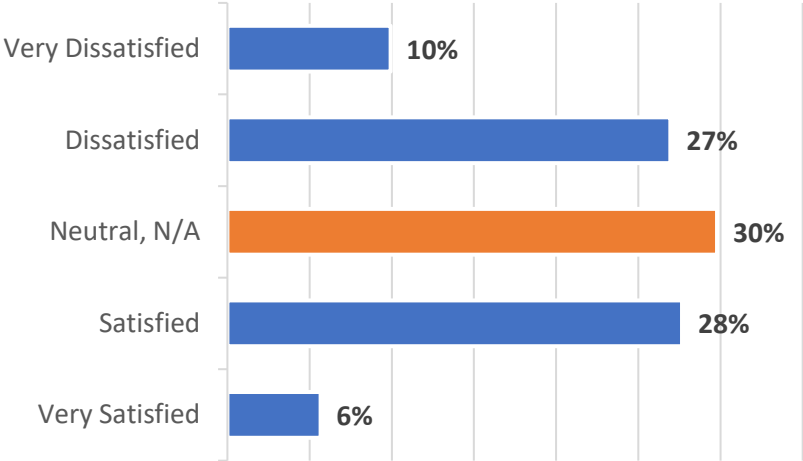
Salary



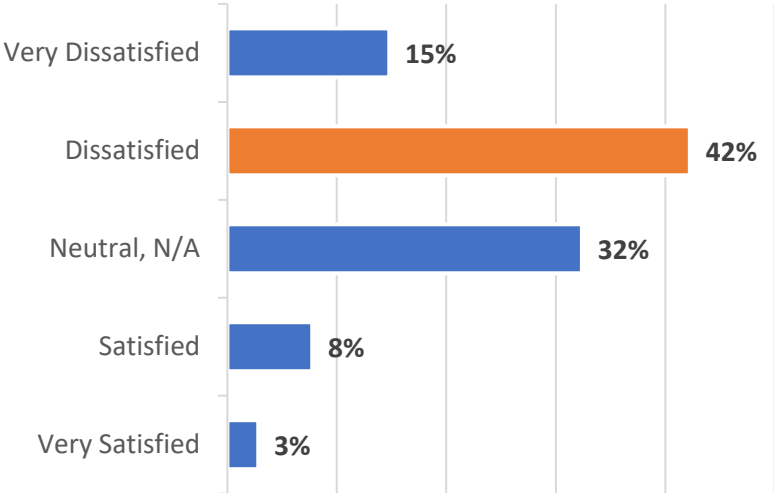
Arts & Culture



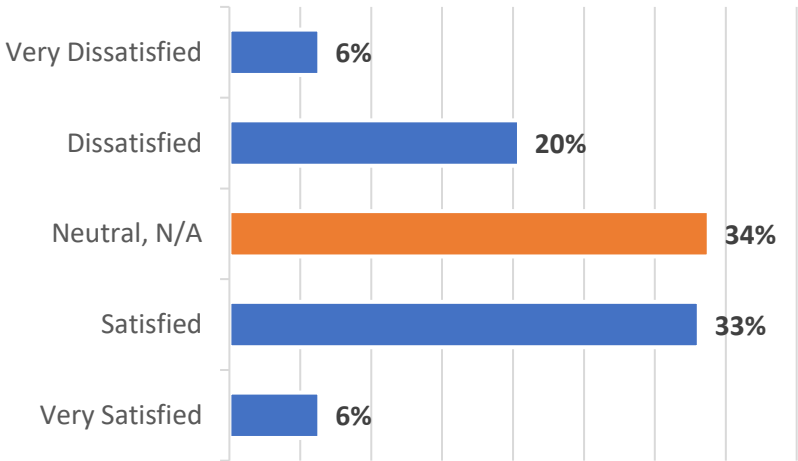
Cost of Living



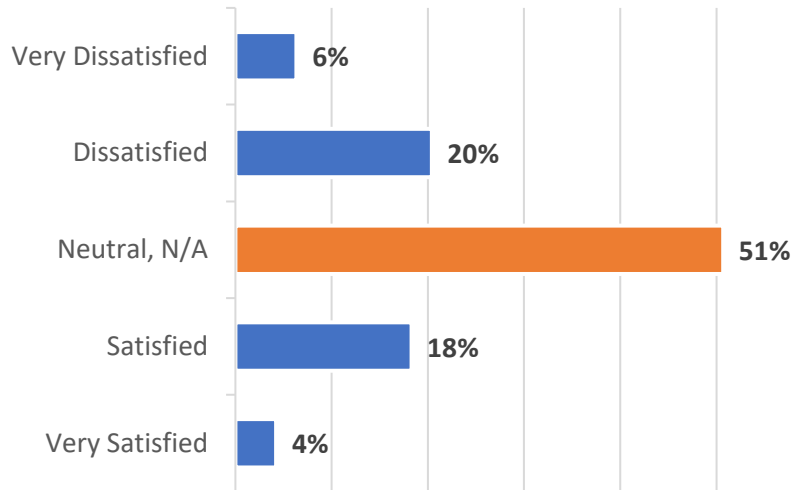
Appeal to Young Professionals



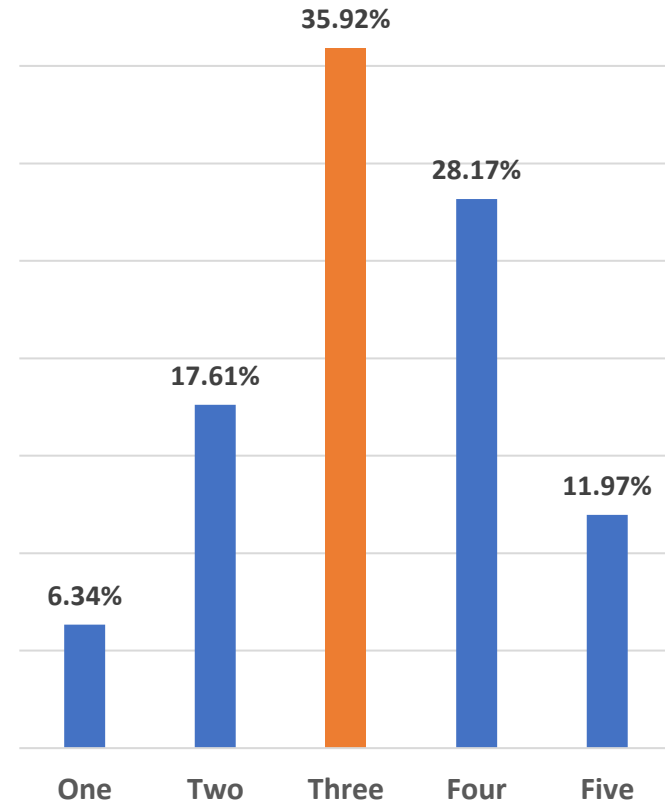
Local & Regional Leadership



Economic Growth Management



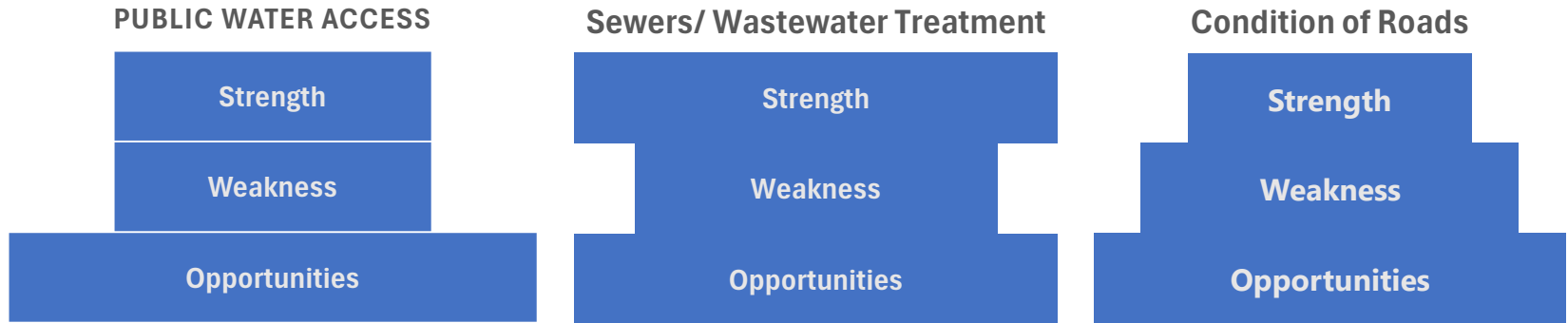
Northeast Region's Economic Resiliency Through the Pandemic on a Scale of 1 Bad to 5 Good



Appendix 5 – SWOT Survey Conducted amongst CEDS Oversight Committee

Feedback from the Survey

Up-to-date Infrastructure



- ❖ Most of the region is on wells
- ❖ Not certain how much of the area has access
- ❖ Access to public water is important if you don't have your own well. Private wells shouldn't be drained for additional housing in rural areas. Those should have public water access.

- ❖ Not sure how much of the area has access
- ❖ Taking advantage of Federal and State grants to upgrade the infrastructure, which otherwise would be a tax burden on municipal taxpayers.

- ❖ Increased funding has been dedicated to roads
- ❖ Many manufacturing companies have expressed this is a reason they do not settle in the region. Poor access to highways but potholes and narrow roads elsewhere. Makes it difficult on vehicles and creates costly repairs.
- ❖ Road maintenance is very expensive for smaller towns, resulting in many roads that are riddled with problems.

Electricity



- ❖ Expense and outages
- ❖ Costly delivery charges. Limited grid capability to accommodate solar or battery storage.
- ❖ Encouraged underground placement in all r construction and long-term revision to keep area looking natural
- ❖ Eversource has increased electric rates to price gouge customers, as they incentivize t installation of EV charging stations with gra that have come from its customers being ov charged for electricity.

Natural Gas



- ❖ Lack of infrastructure
- ❖ More consistent availability throughout region without passing cost of construction to customers. Would be advantageous for restaurants in particular.
- ❖ Expand network to include more customers.

High Speed Broadband



- ❖ Very unreliable. Slow during high usage. Many dead spots. Very costly for small This would be very helpful
- ❖ Probably the easiest service to upgrade
- ❖ Frontier is improving availability of internet service to the area. Some rural areas have limited highspeed access.
- ❖ businesses.

Transportation

Transfer of Manufactured Goods



- ❖ Geographic location is good
- ❖ Lack of quick and easy highway accessibility is major obstacle in Windham County. We are far from the highway, costly to transport, takes more time.
- ❖ Current rail infrastructure could be an ongoing opportunity- although it's been discussed for many years and nothing changes.

For Small Businesses



- ❖ State roads and proximity to them for many village centers/downtowns is a boon
- ❖ Again, no quick access to highway so getting products and deliveries take extra time and money. Delivery services such as food or groceries do not deliver to rural areas.
- ❖ Increasing walkability

Accessibility to the Public



- ❖ Customers without vehicles or with disabilities cannot get to store or services easily or affordably. Many restrictions on who public transportation or private companies will transport because of insurance coverage.
- ❖ Without a car a person is very limited in this region. Public transportation does not have enough stops or times to make it readily available.
- ❖ Limited public transportation lines
- ❖ Need for more public transit. Rail?
- ❖ People have moved to the Quiet Corner because they want to live in a rural area, not for public transportation. Public transportation is subsidized and a tax burden.

Utilization of Other Platforms ie, Lyft, Uber



- ❖ Not enough services available. Not enough cab services. Licenses are often used in more dense population areas and not in the towns they were meant for.
- ❖ Not many drivers.
- ❖ Individuals should use transportation options that are readily available.

Predictable and Efficient Land Use Permitting Process

For all of these there is no coherent training and planning for the region. The towns may have borders, but wetlands and natural corridors do not, and this will impact the character of the region over the long-term. What is loved about this area today may not be here tomorrow as towns slice and dice while only thinking of their boundaries.

This comment goes for all of the sections below. Commissions are mostly made up of volunteers who join because they have a personal reason. Often, they are against development and almost always have no real training or experience with economic development or the needs of the community/businesses. I have been to so many of these meetings where Commissioners have vested interests. Or they cannot hide their biases based on personal relationships and unless it is obvious, they do not recuse themselves. Probably the biggest weakness of all.

Inland Wetlands



- ❖ Usually driven by local engineers

Planning Commissions



- ❖ Many communities do not follow their POCD
- ❖ Too fragmented and frustrating for applicants.
- ❖ Difficulty internally

Zoning Permits



- ❖ Zoning Permits
- ❖ Each municipality should base zoning on what is appropriate for as an individual municipality and not what is dictated by the State. One size does not fit all.
- ❖ Difficulty internally
- ❖ Difficulty internally, lack of education for commission members

Building Permits

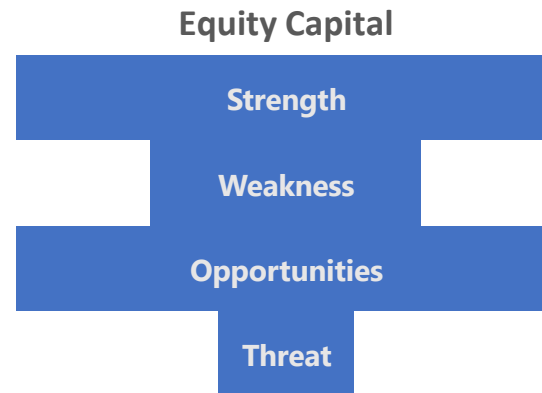


- ❖ Difficulty internally
- ❖ Not consistently enforced. Some towns require a permit for anything done. Need to review old regulations and update them.
- ❖ Understaffed building depts

Capital Structure for Developers/Entrepreneurs



- ❖ Some small business would disagree because they are startups or have no credit, but it is available.



- ❖ Supportive local banks
- ❖ There is more risk involved. A combination of both debt and equity capital is a wiser choice and the longer-term investment in a high-risk investing climate.

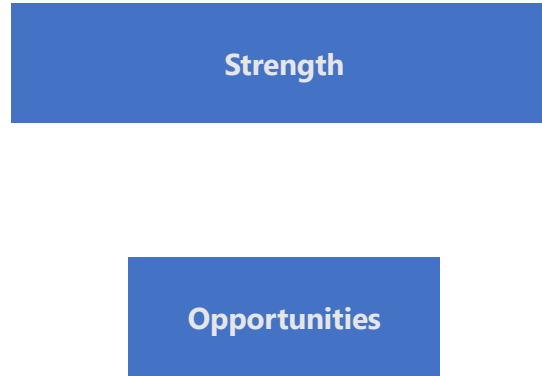
Business Assistance

Educational Resources



❖ Help through QVCC

Regional Business Associations



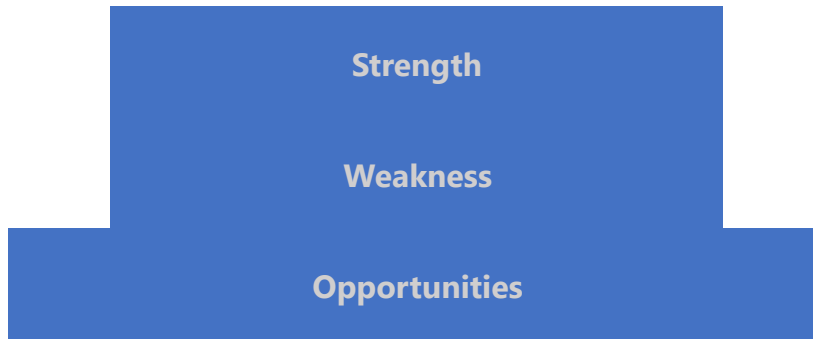
❖ We have soo many resources

Emphasis on Regional Business Clusters



❖ There could be more collaboration between groups to strengthen the clusters. however, many rely on funding and that makes them competitive under the surface.

Resources Specifically for Small Businesses



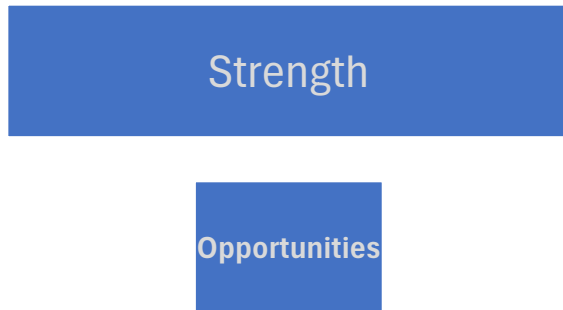
Resources for Women and Minority Entrepreneurs



- ❖ Again, there is the misconception that there is free money for these types of businesses just because they are woman or minority owned. There is plenty of assistance and programs to help them start up and grow. just no free money.
- ❖ Every individual or group should be given an equal opportunity. It should not be based on gender or race

Tourism

HERITAGE/HISTORICAL



- ❖ It is a strength that we have so many assets but all of them struggle with funding and volunteers to the point where they are no longer open to the public regularly and programming as well as restoration and maintenance of buildings has now made this a weakness. The operating funds made available during the pandemic were a godsend.
- ❖ NECCOG is a small slice of a National Heritage Corridor and many of the towns work diligently to ensure ERTD is also aware of the region

Creative



- ❖ Most of the cultural and art assets fund themselves with events and we still have not recovered from people's fear of attending events. So many of our artists and art groups have closed or reduce hours because they cannot raise dollars. There are less quality art events because the events need the attendees to cover costs-and costs have gone way up.
- ❖ Cultural Coalition has expanded its services to the region and that will be important.

Scenic Beauty and Recreation



- ❖ Last Green Valley is a remarkable organization that we are so lucky to have. They have been able to share our beauty with guests.
- ❖ NECCOG is a small slice of a National Heritage Corridor and many of the towns work diligently to ensure ERTD is also aware of the region

Education

Alignment of High School Curriculum with Employer/College Needs



- ❖ A high school with a vocational agricultural program and technical high school increases career opportunities to align with employer and college needs.
- ❖ Too many schools push for liberal arts degrees and not for trades, service, manufacturing or even the military. Not only can employers not find employees, but we have so many young people leave in search of careers that are not available in our region
- ❖ How about letting students decide what they want to become instead of “filling” quotas? I think this type of mindset kills the opportunities for kids to explore their full potential.

Workforce Alignment and preparation ie, Pipeline Initiatives



- ❖ Manufacturing pipeline is excellent
- ❖ This is only relevant if other opportunities aren't taken off the curriculum. This is why I don't support datamining in our schools.
- ❖ Instead of pushing college, the technical high school and its programs should be expanded

Training Opportunities to Keep Skills Up to Date.



- ❖ Training Opportunities to Keep Skills Up to Date
- ❖ There are plenty of programs, but they are not convenient or accessible. Employers cannot afford to let their staff leave for training during the workday especially when they are ALL shorthanded.

Healthcare and Mental Health Services

Youth Prevention Programs



- ❖ There are many but they are not necessarily effective. There is no ROI or evaluation on effectiveness. Just have a poster contest and say you did it.
- ❖ What happened in Killingly is all too possible elsewhere
- ❖ A municipality and it's [sic] taxpayers should not be responsible for these services. The cost should not be based on per Capita [sic] when only a few individuals [sic] use these services.

Equitable Access through Schools/Employers



- ❖ The current waiting time for an annual physical is 10 months to a year. There is a shortage of health care professionals in the region, especially mental health. If you can only get an appointment with your psychologist every 6 weeks, it will not be effective. Medicaid pays so poorly that most providers are not taking that insurance. The most in need, with the least ability to pay are being left out. Employers cannot afford to provide healthcare any longer because plans are too expensive, the state requires too many "services to be covered" and there are no longer any discounts for being healthy.
- ❖ We are becoming a mental health crisis as a country. It's ridiculous at this point. Mental health needs to be left to the experts.
- ❖ Racism is a big problem in the region.
- ❖ Again, this is not a municipality's responsibility.

Adult Mental Health Support



- ❖ This is atrocious. Providers do not take Medicaid or insurance at all. Many providers are overloaded and not taking any more patients. Patients can't get transportation to their appointments. The usual schedule is now an appointment every 4-6 weeks. Very ineffective. No groups available outside of health facilities and transportation is not covered for most of them that are available. We are also not "making" those that need it the most get help. For example, once they are sober, they just walk out of the ER to return to the streets and addiction.
- ❖ Again, threat to tax payers. They should not have to contribute to these services.

Housing Stock

Small Housing Units for Single and Retirees



- ❖ There is about a year wait for most of these, with some towns having several years or not taking anyone on the waiting list because it is so long. We lose our young people out of college or graduating high school, which means we have few to start businesses or go into the trades. Seniors struggle every day
- ❖ It depends upon what is being considered a small housing unit.

Availability of Affordable Renter Options



- ❖ Many homes and apartments rented by students at the universities. They can only afford it with several roommates. Single family housing very expensive for a young family that has to pay the entire rent themselves.
- ❖ Affordable housing is subsidized housing. This does not bring prosperity to a small or distressed municipality. How are they adding to the municipalities [sic] tax base?

Availability of Multi Family Options



- ❖ No inventory, poor condition of the few that are here.
- ❖ Multi-family housing doesn't fit everywhere. Not all towns can handle large multi families due to their infrastructure which by the way, should be local decision making if they choose to increase capacity, bring in public water if they only have wells. This push is destroying small towns so we must be careful what we wish for.
- ❖ People are moving to the community because they want to get away from urban and suburban life.

Overall Quality of Existing Housing Stock



- ❖ We want to keep the municipality as it is. We are looking for limited growth and sustainable industry to keep the mill rate stable.
- ❖ Not enough. Much of what is available needs many repairs which eliminates the Fanny Mae or VA loans and others like that.
- ❖ The housing stock is aging
- ❖ There are so many old mills and empty businesses that could be turned into housing. I don't think we need to start building more houses. I think we need to remediate what we already have.

Childcare



- ❖ I think the cost of childcare is outrageous. Maybe since CT wants to give our money away, they could subsidize daycare a bit more.
- ❖ Unless it is subsidized it is very expensive. Leaves one parent in the home.
- ❖ There are multiple childcare facilities in the area, however it is not the municipalities [sic] responsibility.

- ❖ Increased density and low-income housing increases crime, thus decreasing the safety of the community.

Appendix 6—The Best Practices & Recommendations for Land Use in Northeastern Connecticut

Economic Development is only possible if the new construction projects and new businesses comply with the Zoning Regulations, therefore it is important in determining how to encourage economic growth and in devising recommendations for how to bring about new opportunities, that we seek input from those who are most familiar with the land use regulations and processes in the region. The ***Regional Land Use Survey for Northeastern Connecticut***, i.e.: “the Survey” is the outreach method used to obtain the input from the specific people who have the most involvement in the land use process from the beginning stages through to approval throughout the region.

The Survey was sent to 39 people that either work as land use staff for a town within the 16-towns that comprise the NECCOG (Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments) region or prepare the land use applications such as the CT Licensed Surveyors and civil engineers and developers/builders that have worked in these towns using these regulations. Of the 39 people who were invited to take the survey, 25 responded.

Please note, the survey results reflect the input of the 25 respondents and does not necessarily represent the opinions of NECCOG or NECCOG staff. The best practices and recommendations were derived following a review of the survey results in combination with the professional experience of NECCOG land use planners.

Note: This document, complete with the results of the survey, can be accessed via the following link:

<https://necceda.s3.amazonaws.com/Best+Practices+and+Recommendations+in+Land+Use+Survey+Results+FINAL+6-21-24.pdf>

Appendix 7 – Housing Regulations Update: A Guide for Vibrant Communities

The Guide includes a discussion of the history of housing development that led to the current pattern of historically higher density homes in older communities with predominantly single-family residential development in surrounding areas. The Guide includes how the influence of zoning on a community is significant and how it can be updated to allow for new housing opportunities to meet the growing need for smaller and more affordable housing.

This document, can be accessed via the following link:

https://neccogeda.s3.amazonaws.com/Vibrant+Community+Housing+Recommendations_Land+Use_6-27-24.pdf