

Morris Town Clerk
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Town of Morris

2009 Town Plan of Conservation and Development

Morris Planning and Zoning Commission

ADOPTED BY THE MORRIS PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
ON APRIL 13, 2009
EFFECTIVE DATE _____

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This plan was prepared by the Morris Planning and Zoning Commission
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Introduction

There are two basic reasons Connecticut towns prepare and update a town plan. First of all it's the law. More important a good town plan provides a community with the agreed upon guidelines it needs to move forward. It has been demonstrated time and again successful communities have a sound plan; they use it and keep it up to date.

Connecticut requires that towns update their Town Plan of Conservation and Development ("town plan") every 10 years. Recently Connecticut statutes were revised to provide that towns that do not have up-to-date town plans can be penalized when seeking certain State grants.

Updating the Morris town plan has been a thorough and lengthy process. This has permitted many citizens to become involved and contribute to the formulation of the plan. The Morris planning process has allowed citizens and town boards and commissions the opportunity to:

- focus on the long term 'big picture',
- identify core values and a vision for the future,
- define goals, objectives and specific strategies that will move the town toward its vision of the future.
- assign responsibilities for various elements of the plan and coordinate town efforts to achieve its goals and to produce consistent results.

Morris, like all towns, is always in the process of evolving and it is very important to "take stock" and revisit the town plan every ten years. The Planning and Zoning Commission has strived to produce an updated Plan of Conservation and Development that reflects on past town plans, assesses current conditions and incorporates the wishes of its citizens for the future.

It is the Commission's hope that town leaders and its citizens will use this plan as a guide to be followed in order to enhance the quality of life and the community character of Morris.

Morris – Brief Overview

Morris lies south of Litchfield and is bounded by Thomaston on the east, Watertown and Bethlehem on the south and Washington on the west. With the exception of the south west border with Washington, the Town is almost rectangular in shape and is about 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles east to west and 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles north to south. The Town's total area is about 18.8 square miles or 12,736 acres of land.

The Town government consists of a Board of three selectmen and many primarily volunteer Boards and Commissions. The chief decision making body remains the Town Meeting.

The new town hall was built in 1935 and includes the James Morris Museum and Aline Brothier Reading Room. The Morris library finally established a permanent location in the Town Hall as part of a 1986 renovation program.

The Morris Fire Department is a volunteer organization much like the Town Government. It was started in 1942 and operated out of the old town hall until 1959 when a new fire house was built directly across the road. Alterations needed for new equipment were made in 1987/88 giving Morris space for an emergency vehicle and volunteers to answer 911 calls. Recently, due to the difficulty in finding volunteers during daytime hours the Emergency Medical Service was contracted to a private company.

Just west of the Morris center lies Bantam Lake, the State of Connecticut's largest natural lake. About 675 acres or three quarters of the area of the Lake is in the Town of Morris and much of it is surrounded and protected under the holdings of the White Memorial Foundation. White Memorial owns 4,000 acres and maintains 35 miles of woodland trails open to the public.

Of the Town's 12,736 acres over 10,000 are taxable with several large areas available for recreational activities including White Memorial Foundation, Mt. Tom State Park and the State owned Camp Columbia. Additionally, the Morris Town Beach and Ball Fields, and the State of Connecticut launching ramp located in South Bay of Bantam Lake provide public access to swimming, boating, skating, fishing and other water activities.

Mt. Tom State Park in the northwest corner consists of 223 acres about ¼ of which are located in Morris; this includes the Mt. Tom stone lookout tower on the top of the 1,300 ft. peak. Camp Columbia property consists of approximately 588 acres situated mostly in the Town of Morris. Purchased by the State of Connecticut as part of the State Park and Forest system, Camp Columbia was formally the training camp for the Columbia football team and was used for field work by the Columbia Engineering School.

Large privately owned tracts of land include the water supply reservoir watershed lands owned by the City of Waterbury and the Episcopal Diocese Camp. Permanently preserved farmlands include the Aurell Farm with 51.64 acres and the Anderson Farm with 238.93 acres.

2008 Town Plan

This Town Plan, an update of the 1992 Town Plan, was prepared under a four step process.

First Step - Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory

Morris Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory. In the late 1990's in preparation for the revision to the Town Plan a group of concerned citizens formed and came to be recognized as Subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission on "Land Use and Open Space Preservation". The product of the subcommittee's intensive six years of

work the “*Morris Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory*” is a comprehensive document including 14 digital maps detailing the Town’s natural and cultural resources. This “inventory” is really a blue print for the preservation of Morris’s landscape. It has been formally recognized by the Planning and Zoning Commission as a resource document the Commission will use for town planning purposes. The Natural Resource Inventory provided a sound basis for the natural resource and open space sections of the 2008 Town Plan. **Thanks to the hard work of the many “NRI” volunteers!**

NOTE: Additional information on the Town of Morris’ natural and cultural resources can be found in **Morris Natural and Cultural Resources Inventory** a copy of which is on file in the Town Hall.

Second Step – Assess Existing Conditions and Trends in Population, Economic Base, Budget and Taxes, Housing and Property Values

This section of the town plan is designed to provide relevant context regarding the trends and patterns affecting the town to assist in its planning process. It is organized in the five sections:

- **Population**
- **Economic Base**
- **Budget and Taxes**
- **Housing and Property Values**
- **Morris in Context**

Population

Year-Round and Total Population Facts and Trends. Based on US Census data, the year-round population of Morris increased by an average of 26 persons per year in the decade from 1990 to 2000. As a result, the town’s population rose from a total of 2,039 in 1990 to 2,301 people in 2000.

But the Census does not count Morris’s seasonal or “weekend” residents. Therefore, to get the true measure of the town’s population we need to add in this category. Assuming that the town’s 225 seasonally-occupied housing units had about the same average household size as the year-round stock, these seasonal units would add another 659 people, bringing the town’s total or “weekend” population to about 2,960 persons, or just under 3,000.

The seasonal population of Morris appears to be declining slowly, based on Census data that shows the number of seasonally-occupied units falling from 257 in 1990 to 225 in 2000

It is estimated that at the beginning of 2008 the year-round population of Morris was about 2,500 people and its total, or “weekend” population was about 3,200 people.

Age Characteristics. Census data provide detailed information only for the year-round population. They show that in the 1990 – 2000 decade:

- Morris showed growth in each of its major age categories except the 25-34 year old group. This category of younger adults fell by one-fourth, indicating a significant out-migration pattern.

- The fastest rate of growth was in the 35-44 year age group, which rose by 28%. This increase was probably linked to a substantial increase in public school enrollment during the decade.
- The town's elderly population, aged 65 and older, rose by 16% during the decade.
- In the four year period 1998-2002 annual births in Morris ranged from 17 to 36, or an average of about 26 births per year.

School Enrollment. From 1990 to 2000 there was an increase in public school enrollment from 301 to 378 pupils. In the subsequent four years, enrollment stabilized at about the same level as in 2000. The recent stability in public school enrollment in Morris may be a reflection of the 1990-2000 decline in numbers of the 25-34 age group and may foreshadow a decline in school enrollment in future years.

Selected Other Population Characteristics:

- Persons per household were 2.56 in 1990 and changed slightly to 2.52 by 2000.
- 2000 Census population of Morris was evenly balanced between male and female.
- The median age of the town's population rose from 38.4 in 1990 to 41 in 2000, continuing the pattern seen in earlier years.
- Of the year 2000 adult population, 85% were high school graduates and 25% had earned college degrees or more.
- Morris is stable: 74% of the town's population lived in the same house in 2000 as they had ten years earlier.

Economic Base

Income. Per capita (or *average*) income in Morris was \$29,233 per person in 1999. This was 58% higher than in 1989. Morris's per capita income in 1999 was slightly higher (101.6%) than that of the state of Connecticut as a whole (\$28,766).

Median household income in Morris in 1999 was \$58,050; this was 39% higher than it had been a decade earlier. The town's median income was substantially higher (107.6%) than the \$53,935 figure for the state as a whole. (*Median* means that half of all households had more income, half less.)

Occupations of Morris Residents (in round numbers):

- 37% worked in management, professional or related occupations
- 21% held sales or office jobs
- 15% were in construction or related jobs
- 14% worked in services (such as education or government)
- 13% worked in production, transportation or similar occupations.
- And less than 1% held jobs in farming, forestry or fishing

Travel to Work.

The principal places Morris residents traveled to work were:

Morris, 189 persons

Litchfield, 145

Waterbury, 121

Torrington, 101
Watertown, 73
Washington, 54
All other locations involved less than 50 persons.

Jobs in Morris. Based on the CT Labor Department's unemployment insurance data, there were 310 persons employed and working in Morris in 2000. About 50 persons were employed in manufacturing jobs and another 210 in services. (This data does not include jobs in agriculture).

Budget and Taxes

As of fiscal year 2004-05, the latest year for which data is currently available from the CT Office of Policy and Management (OPM), the budget of the Town of Morris was \$6.9 million. The bulk of budget expenditures were spent on education: \$5 million or 72% of the total. The remaining \$1.9 million went to support a broad range of other expenditures, including the town's governmental departments.

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| The Morris budget was up by 18% over the five-year period 2001-05, or about 3% per year. |
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Most of the revenues used to support the town's budget came from local property taxes: \$6.2 million or 90% of the total were from the levy on real property (mostly houses) and personal property (mostly motor vehicles). State aid amounted to only about \$700,000, or 10% of the budget. The State of Connecticut provides a lower level of financial assistance to its municipalities than any other state in the nation.

To place Morris's property tax rate in context, it can be noted that in the same year the average equalized mill rate in FY 2004-05 for *all* towns in Connecticut with fewer than 10,000 residents was 13.88, or about 7% higher than the Morris rate.

Housing and Property Values

Of Morris' 939 housing units occupied year-round in 2000, 714 (78%) were owner-occupied and 198 (22%) were rented. In addition, there were 225 seasonally-occupied, or "weekender" housing units.

The Warren Group, a firm that publishes real estate data, estimates that the median sales price of houses in Morris was \$126,000 in 1995, rising to \$185,000 in 2000 and to \$342,000 in 2005, a near-tripling in a decade. This pattern of sharply rising house prices is also reflected in tax assessment data for Morris over the 2001-05 period.

The most dramatic increases and a major reason for the increase in median housing sales in Morris has been the sales prices for properties surrounding Bantam Lake where many topped 1 million dollars. Compared to other towns in the Litchfield Hills Region, in 2005, Morris had the second highest median housing sales.

The fact of the matter remains that the rapid increase in property values during the 1990's and early 2000's was not an unalloyed positive for Morris or other communities in the Northwest Connecticut. It has made it very difficult for young people with moderate incomes to buy or rent adequate housing. This has been reflected in the loss of younger families from the state and region.

Morris In Context

Morris borders directly on four towns: Litchfield, Watertown, Bethlehem and Washington. It differs in some significant ways from each of its neighbors. Clearly, Morris shares some population and other characteristics with the neighboring communities. Just as clearly, it differs from them as well. It has a significantly smaller population than the neighboring communities and also has a tax rate lower than most of the others (but not nearly as low as that of the much wealthier town of Washington).

Morris is not on a major commuting route, nor is it connected by major roads to any of the rapidly growing towns in its general vicinity, such as New Milford. Nevertheless, Morris has grown by about 1% per year since the 2000 Census. At that rate, its year-round population would reach about 2,600 by the year 2010 and its total population, including weekenders, would be about 3,350 that year.

This puts enormous pressure on small towns like Morris. The rapidly escalated land values make properties once affordable for people on fixed incomes unaffordable. It prices people of modest incomes out of residency. These are principally the Town's younger and older citizens.

The facts back up the fears Morris residents expressed at the Town Plan forum that Morris can not afford to lose its young people to the extent that it has been experiencing. One of the highest ranked issues by Morris citizens was the need for the plan to focus on how more can be done to help both its young and elderly residents to remain in Morris.

Continuation of these housing and population trends would change Morris in a way that conflicts with the vision its townspeople have for the future. It can:

- Rob the Town of its traditional population mix - an important element of its historic rural character.
- Diminish the pool of younger persons needed to replenish the Town's aging corps of fire and ambulatory services volunteers
- Constrain the number of citizens available to sustain Morris's almost all-volunteer form of board and commission government.
- Force the Town to pay for services previously staffed by volunteers further straining the budget of the town.

Third Step – Process of Defining Themes and Priority Goals To Guide Future Conservation and Development in Morris

The Planning and Zoning Commission and its appointed town plan committees have worked very hard for a long time to prepare a plan update that reflects the consensus wishes of the community. In some cases Morris residents have strongly held differing viewpoints. Recognizing how important it is to strive for a consensus the Planning and Zoning Commission has made an extra effort to reach out and involve its citizens in the planning process.

This was done in a variety of ways over a long time period:

- The Land Use and Open Space Preservation subcommittee held many public participation educational and participation events which helped guide the preparation of the recommendations in this important report which was completed in 2005.
- In 2006 this subcommittee of the Planning and Zoning Commission completed another report “Recommendations for the Preservation of the Rural Character of the Town of Morris”.
- The Planning and Zoning Commission completed a draft of the Town Plan in 2007 and held a public hearing on draft in November, 2007. As a result of the many comments and recommendations at the hearing the Commission gathered much more information and made plans to conduct a town wide forum on the town plan.
- In June, 2008 the Commission conducted a widely advertised and well attended public forum. Held at the Morris center school and attended by 60 residents this forum presented updated findings and information and every citizen told the Commission in small group sessions what they felt was most important to include in the Town Plan.
- Finally considering all these factors the Commission prepared the following set of overall themes and goals for the 2008 Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

Town Plan Themes and Goals

Guiding Themes: The following “guiding themes” emerged from the many meetings and discussions held over the past three years.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retain Town’s Rural Scenic Quality and Village centers within this context:• Expand Tax Base and business opportunities• Improve opportunities for housing for young adults and elderly• Protect water resources for drinking water and recreational values |
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Town Plan Goals: Reflecting on these themes, the goals of the 1992 Town Plan and especially the results of the Town Plan forum, the following priority goals were formulated for the 2008 Town Plan.

Housing - Maintain Morris as a Community with Opportunities for Both the Young and Elderly.

Create a public – private partnership and take a broad range of actions needed to create more moderate cost and affordable housing. Focus on providing housing opportunities for Morris's elderly and its young adults, especially local emergency volunteers, teachers and others who provide valued services to townspeople.

Protect Water and Natural Resources and Preserve Rural Character

Protect Morris's vital water resources – its wetlands, streams, ponds, aquifer areas and especially its public water supply watersheds, groundwater supplies and Bantam Lake. Conserve Morris's valued scenic natural resources, especially farmland, views and vistas and other features that define its beautiful rural landscape along its road system. Insure that the zoning lot area and subdivision requirements are sufficient to protect ground and drinking water supplies and to avoid the need for public sewers. Adopt land use options that encourage subdivision designs that protect the rural landscape.

Morris Town Center – Traditional New England Village Center

Maintain Morris center at a defined size and scale as a traditional and historic New England village center and center of town government. Permit a mix of uses, preserve its historic quality, protect its key open spaces and encourage development compatible its existing structures and landscape.

Economic Development

Improve opportunities for new business uses compatible with the Morris rural landscape including business uses in village centers, home based businesses, and planned development opportunities primarily on major highways.

Infrastructure: Sewers, Roads, Circulation and Public Safety

To support and maintain a public sewer program serving the Bantam Lake area which eliminates septic sewage pollution, limits the expansion of the sewer lines to a defined area and preserves available treatment capacity for future failing septic systems. To maintain a hierarchy of State, Town and Local residential roads which permit a safe and convenient system of traffic circulation, especially for emergency vehicles and to encourage road design and location which will enhance the Town's rural appearance.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE STATE AND REGIONAL PLANS OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

This plan in its findings and recommendations is consistent with the “Regional Growth Policy Map” adopted by the LHCEO, the “Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut, 2005-2010” and the six growth management principles contained in the State Plan which are as follows.

Growth Management Principles:

1. Redevelop and Revitalize Regional Centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure
2. Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices To Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs (see especially Housing recommendations)
3. Concentrate Development Around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options (see especially Morris Town Center recommendations and Sewer, Road and Circulation recommendations)
4. Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands (see especially Protect Water and Natural Resources and Preserve Rural Character recommendations)
5. Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets Critical to Public Health and Safety (see especially Protect Water and Natural Resources and Preserve Rural Character recommendations)
6. Promote Integrated Planning Across All Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional and Local Basis

Fourth Step – Town Plan Objectives and Recommendations

Once the broad goals are established specific objectives and recommendation were developed for each goal to give detailed direction to the work of carrying out the plan. Recommendations wherever necessary assign tasks to the logical implementing board, commission or local group. Many recommendations leave room for defining the steps needed for accomplishment.

A large share but by far not all recommendations will be the responsibility of the Planning and Zoning Commission. The town plan is a plan for all boards, commissions and local groups involved in the future of Morris. An effective plan requires on-going support and participation of local boards and commissions and other local groups involved in the future of Morris.

To ensure the plan is implemented the Planning and Zoning Commission will need to monitor and report annually on the progress of implementing the plan. As necessary the plan can be amended to respond to unexpected changes or opportunities. Always however the main goals of the plan should remain in focus.

GOAL #1 Of all the issues of concern to Morris residents the one that ranked highest was the concern over the loss of its young adults and need for alternative housing opportunities for its elderly citizens who wish to stay in Morris.

GOAL #1: Housing - Maintain Morris as a Community with Housing Opportunities for Young Adults and Elderly.

Create a public – private partnership and take a broad range of actions needed to create more moderate cost and affordable housing. Focus on providing opportunities for Morris’s greatest housing needs – housing for elderly and young adults, especially local emergency volunteers, for teachers and others who provide valued services to townspeople.

Key Reason for loss of young adults – high cost of housing in Morris:

- Average housing costs in Morris:
- \$126,000 in 1995
- \$185,000 in 2000
- \$342,000 in 2005

This is a 2 ³/₄ increase in the cost of housing in Morris over 10 years.

Continuation of the documented housing and population trends will change Morris in a way that conflicts with the vision its townspeople have for the future. It can:

- Rob the Town of its traditional population mix - an important element of its historic rural character.
- Constrain the number of citizens available to sustain Morris’s almost all-volunteer form of board and commission government.
- Force the Town to pay for emergency services previously staffed by volunteers further straining the budget of the town.
- Diminish the pool of younger persons needed to replenish the Town’s aging corps of fire and ambulatory services volunteers. This is a serious issue.

Here are the facts:

The average EMS volunteer in Morris is over 50.

Training requirements for EMS volunteers have doubled since last town plan.

Pool of volunteers declining – loss of daytime volunteers requires 2 paid day paramedics

Growing and aging population is increasing EMS demands

These are the reasons Morris citizens are concerned and have ranked moderate and affordable housing high on the town plan “to do” list.

Another reason is the “affordable housing” mandate legislated for all towns in Connecticut. Connecticut law provides a penalty to any town in the State that does not have a minimum of 10% of its total housing units meeting the State definition of “affordable” housing. In towns such as Morris that do not meet the 10% goal a housing development proposing 30% or more units of affordable housing is effectively exempt from the town Zoning and Subdivision regulations.

Currently, Morris has 21 units that meet the State definition of affordable. This is well below the 10% requirement. Morris and most other Towns in NW Connecticut have not had housing applications where 30% or more of the units are affordable housing. A primary reason is that this type of development typically is served by a public sewer system and many other towns in this rural region do not have a public sewer system. Where there are public sewers they are typically very small and serve only the rural village center areas. Morris has sewer service but it is limited to the sewer problem areas along Bantam Lake. The sewer lines in Morris are connected to the Litchfield sewer treatment plant and the volume of sewer service provided for Morris from Litchfield is very limited.

The State has recently approved a new program offering significant incentives to communities that establish special affordable housing zones. The State offers to assist in the cost of establishing such zones and reimbursement for a portion of school costs and other costs attributed to permitting affordable housing. However again the minimum housing density requirements the State has established for such affordable zones are not realistic in communities such as Morris with no public water system and a very limited sewer service system.

Accordingly Morris must look to other locally designed means of providing the moderate and affordable housing it needs for its residents. If even 5 of these housing units could be created each year over the next 10 years this would be a very significant improvement in Morris.

Objective: Moderate and Affordable Cost Housing

To explore and enact all reasonable means of improving the stock of housing and aim to provide 5 housing units a year of moderate or affordable housing over the next 10 years. The focus shall be on providing housing for young adults, its elderly and its critical service providers including those involved in volunteer fire and emergency services, Morris schools and other valued services.

Action Recommendations:

1. Accessory Apartment Regulations – Planning and Zoning Commission

The Morris Zoning Regulations allow a homeowner to construct an Accessory Apartment in a single family home or in an accessory building on a lot with a single family home as a Special Exception. Since the adoption of this permission 15 years ago 24 Accessory Apartments have been established in Morris.

Undoubtedly there are other apartments either created before zoning or without the benefit of a permit. These 24 approved apartments represent almost 2% of the total housing units in Morris in 2004. Most of these apartments are rented are at a moderate rate. If additional home based apartments can be constructed it would be a big help in filling Morris's wish to have more housing options for the young adults and elderly segments of the town population.

The following recommendations should be considered to encourage more accessory apartments in Morris:

- a. Currently all accessory apartment applications require a Special Permit which requires the Planning and Zoning Commission to hold a public hearing. It is recommended that the Zoning Regulations be amended to permit an accessory apartment *within a single family residence* allowed as “by right” use with no hearing required. Experience shows an apartment in a home does not cause conflict in residential neighborhoods. The regulation can also be revised to reduce the information required with this application. A home and apartment floor plan and a plan showing any exterior changes, including parking is sufficient to make a decision on this type of application.
- b. The Zoning regulations allow accessory apartments in commercial districts but require that the store owner live on the property. In the few instances in Morris where an accessory apartment could be created over a business building it should be allowed without requiring that the land owner be resident on the property.
- c. The Volunteer Fire Department and Emergency Services corps could actively support creation of accessory apartments by residents to help retain more young volunteer firemen and EMS volunteers.
- d. The Zoning Enforcement Officer can assist residents interested in establishing an accessory apartment by creating a hand out on “Steps Required by the Town of Morris to Create an Accessory Apartment”. This would list each step an applicant needs to take, the information required and the name and phone number of all town officials involved in the zoning, building permit and health permit process.
- e. The Town could consider reducing the added tax associated with an accessory apartment where the rental rates qualify as “affordable” under State criteria and for units rented to local VFD, EMS or teachers.

2. Morris Housing Authority.

Currently the Housing Authority primarily oversees the Town’s Eldridge elderly housing development which has been very successful and much appreciated in Town. Under its charter the Housing Authority has substantial authority to encourage and provide more moderate and affordable housing in the community. Accordingly the following recommendations are offered:

- a. Support the Morris Housing Authority to take an even greater role in providing more housing for the elderly and young adults and others.
- b. Encourage preparation of feasibility assessment and preliminary plans for expansion of Eldridge.
- c. Encourage the Housing Authority to conduct a survey and assessment of other possible feasible locations for a second elderly or mix of elderly and young adult housing. Identifying locations early and securing land for a future site is critical to providing an additional housing.
- d. The Zoning Regulations allow a Special Exception for “Town Sponsored Multifamily Housing and Community Facilities” in all residential zones except the R-160. The Town should be prepared to partner with a non profit housing trust to expand these needed facilities in Morris. For this purpose the zoning regulations should be clarified to

provide that the town or the Housing Authority can co-sponsor an application with a non profit housing trust.

3. Active Adult Housing.

Across the country the private sector has been constructing “active adult or over 55 housing” with great success. These units are feasible primarily on a site with access to public sewer service which as noted above limits the potential for active adult housing in Morris. Nevertheless this type of housing would provide a much needed option to the growing number of Morris residents who wish to remain in town but do not want to continue to maintain a large single family residence on a large lot.

a. The Planning and Zoning Commission should consider amending its regulation to include a special regulation allowing active adult housing in appropriate locations and with design requirements and a density compatible with Morris.

4. Affordable Housing Lot. Several communities in the area have amended their zoning regulations to permit a lot that is smaller than the minimum requirement if the lot is dedicated to an affordable home. This option can encourage a land owner to offer to gift or sell a small parcel to a local housing trust for construction of an affordable house.

a. The Planning and Zoning Commission should amend its regulations to permit a Special Exception for an affordable housing lot provided the lot has a size and dimensions sufficient to provide safe margins for location and operation of septic system, driveway and home construction.

5. “Free Cut” for Affordable Housing Lot.

Recently the Connecticut General Statutes were amended to allow a town by local ordinance to permit the split of a lot from a parcel of land without the requirement to seek approval of a subdivision plan. Once a parcel of land has been divided into three or more lots any future division of the land for a house lot requires the owner to submit a subdivision application.

If this ordinance was adopted in Morris it would make it easier and less costly for a landowner gift or sell one lot for affordable housing.

a. It is recommended that the Town adopt a “free split for affordable housing lot ordinance” to lower the cost of a land division for affordable housing purposes and encourage more affordable housing.

6. Encourage Formation of a local non profit Housing Trust.

Communities here and in rural areas around the country are making much more progress providing affordable housing through local non profit organizations than by any other means. For example in the Town of Cornwall the Cornwall Housing Trust has a successful affordable housing program called the “parcel program”. Under this program the housing trust encourages landowners to donate land for affordable housing and a number have done so allowing the trust to construct more affordable units.

Land is the greatest single part of the cost of creating affordable housing. Local non profit housing trusts once given a parcel are much more likely to be able to secure the funds needed to build an affordable house.

Local housing trusts such as Litchfield's have constructed affordable housing using a variety of means including converting existing structures, under housing grants, with private donations and by re-habilitation of town owned buildings and property.

a. The Town should encourage and support formation of a local non profit Morris Housing Trust and work with the trust in partnership where it benefits providing the affordable and moderate housing that Morris needs.

Goal #2: A program of economic development fitting Morris's rural goals and objectives will provide job market benefits and help relieve the local property tax burden on residential property owners. Along with providing housing opportunities providing more local job opportunities also will help keep more of Morris's young adults in the Town.

GOAL #2: Economic Development

Improve opportunities for new business uses compatible with the Morris rural landscape including business uses in village centers, home based businesses, and planned development opportunities.

Facts about non residential development and tax base in Morris:

- 90% of tax revenue is from real property and personal property (mostly vehicles),
- 10% of revenue comes to the town in the form of State aid
- Prior to the Winvian Farm development only 1.06% of Morris land area was zoned for commercial, industrial or related uses. Accordingly the great majority of tax revenue in Morris is from tax revenue on residential homes and property.

The potential in Morris for major new commercial development is limited because the town has a small total population, small town center with few businesses, no sewer system (except as reserved from the Litchfield sewer system for the Bantam Lake area), and no direct access to a major highway.

However there are commercial opportunities in Morris that are compatible with the goal of retaining the town's rural character. Winvian Farm development has proven once again that the town's rural character and quality of life is attractive to weekend and tourist related businesses. Winvian was designed to fit in with the town's rural character and it has boosted the town's tax base and provided local jobs.

The Winvian Farm development was possible because Morris Zoning Regulation have long permitted proposals to create a new Planned Development District provided the plan meets criteria that protect residential neighborhoods and fit with the town's rural character.

1. Continue to Use and Improve the Option for Planned Development Districts.

Morris can continue to use and improve the PPD regulations to meet the goals of the Town plan and provide opportunities for new development that improves the town tax base.

2. Protection of Bantam Lake's Water Quality and Property Values Enhances the Town Tax Base.

Throughout Morris's modern history Bantam Lake has been a pillar of the town's tax and job base. Today Bantam Lake remains the most important natural resource, recreational resource and tax base resource in Morris. Around the lake the seasonal population is declining and the year around population is increasing. At the same time property values on the lake have increased at a greater rate than the rest of the town.

It makes economic development and tax base sense to implement the recommendations of the town plan that aim to preserve the water quality and quality of life for residents on and visitors to Bantam Lake.

3. Continue to Provide for Development and Use of Home Based Businesses.

Home based businesses are an essential part of the rural character of Morris and its economic base. Many of these businesses provide needed services to residential property owners and most important the opportunity for Morris's young adults to work at home and stay in Morris.

Home businesses have become a viable and necessary option in the business world of today, especially in rural areas. The communication advantages of the internet and mobile devices allow work at home even for the employee of a large corporation in a distant location. Home based businesses are more attractive today than ever with the rising cost of fuel needed for transportation to out of town work locations.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should continually monitor the evolution of viable home based business use and support these uses as potential forerunners or "incubators" of a larger more successful business. The Commission should modify the Zoning Regulation as needed to insure that the zoning approval process is not a barrier to the creation and maintenance of any type of home based business that can be conducted without harming neighboring property values.

4. Encourage Other Positive Tax Base Business Compatible with Morris Town Plan Goals.

Morris is an attractive location for many types of uses that could benefit the town tax base and be compatible with its rural environment. Life care facilities are a good example. This type of use provides housing for active elder adults and on the same campus provides assisted living, nursing and even hospital type facilities. A life care facility requires little in the way of local tax supported services and contributes

handsomely in tax payments to a Town. While there is no pressing need to recommend expansion of the existing industrial zones if a desirable industrial use proposes an expansion requiring additional industrial zone area the Commission should give such a proposal careful consideration. A specific proposed plan of industrial zone expansion that adds to the tax base provides additional job opportunities and provides safeguards that respect the surrounding residential area may be considered favorably by the Commission.

5. Morris Center - Create a Village District Zone and Plan for Morris Center.

Under the new legislation approved by the State towns can now create “village districts” around existing village centers. It permits retaining the traditional mix of uses in town centers under guidelines that sustain a rural New England village appearance.

This legislation was designed to assist maintaining a New England village center such as Morris. The Town has already begun a village center improvement program with its Town Center study. This study led to securing a grant and donations to make many beautification and practical improvements to the Morris Community Center town hall property.

The landscape, parking and other improvements made to the Morris town hall should serve as a model for future site improvements of commercial and town uses in the center.

Creation of a village district zone will carry forward the recommendations of the 1992 town plan. The boundaries of the zone should encompass the homes and business in and close to center, the visually sensitive land along the scenic roads entering the center and the historic buildings and structures that contribute to the rural character of the center.

The guidelines for site review in the village district can be readily drawn from the simple design principles for building, landscaping, parking, pedestrian access, traffic circulation and signage recommended in the 2002 Town Center study and implemented in the extensive and attractive improvements made on town Morris Community Hall property and at the Routes 109 and 63 intersection.

The historic buildings and scenic road entryways in the Center area have been documented in a report by the Subcommittee on the Town Center Study and can be utilized in creation of the village district area.

Implementation of a village district plan will build upon and extend the good work and accomplishments of the many citizens and local officials who developed the Town Center Study and oversaw the improvements to the center area.

Goal #3: Morris citizens feel very strongly that the Town needs to retain its rural character, protect open spaces and avoid “suburbia” trends. This is a major theme of the 2008 Town Plan.

GOAL #3: Protect Water and Natural Resources

Protect Morris’s vital water resources – its wetlands, streams, ponds, aquifer areas and especially its public water supply watersheds, groundwater supplies and Bantam Lake. Conserve Morris’s other valued natural resources, especially farmland. Insure that the zoning lot area and subdivision requirements are sufficient to protect ground and drinking water supplies and to avoid the need for public sewers. .

How much of Morris’s land area should be protected? Depending on how you define “permanent” only 7% of Morris land area is considered truly “permanently protected”. This is a very low percentage compared to other towns in the area and argues for an aggressive program of land preservation. However the answer to this question in Morris is complicated because large areas are owned by White Memorial Foundation and the City of Waterbury water supply system which are considered open space but do not meet the strict definition of *permanently* protected land.

White Memorial Foundation. Morris’s environment benefits greatly by the presence of the White Memorial Foundation which owns 1,995 acres in Morris. The Foundation has always carefully maintained its open land in a natural state. And according to the Foundation President White Memorial intends to continue to protect and preserve its holdings and where advantageous add to the Foundation’s holdings. But White Memorial Foundation is not a land trust and as a private foundation it can and has transferred land for development uses.

However it is important to note these transfers have provided needed land for important public purposes, such as the area headquarters of the Connecticut State Police. There is no suggestion or indication that the Foundation would transfer land for non-public development purposes and every reason to believe that it will continue to preserve the lands it holds and perhaps even add to its open space holdings.

If White Memorial’s land is considered permanently protected almost 23% of Morris’s land area would be in the “permanently protected” open space category. At this level instead of being at the low end Morris’s ranking in open space protection moves up to the mid range among all towns in the area.

Waterbury Water Company Land. Land owned by the City of Waterbury around its water reservoirs in Morris totals 1,123 acres. Like White Memorial but for different reasons it can be said that this land is not “permanently” protected.

Almost all Waterbury water company land in Morris is critical to maintaining the quality of the water in its water reservoirs. Accordingly under State law this land is classified as “Class 1 and Class 2” land and it can not be developed and must remain open as long as these reservoirs are in use for drinking water supplies.

The State Plan of Conservation and Development treats Class 1 land as “Existing Open Space” and classifies Class 2 land as a “Conservation Area”.

The water company’s land in Morris represents 8.8% of the Town’s land area. If this water company land and White Memorial land are considered permanently protected Morris has 31.5% of its land area classified “permanently” protected. At this level Morris is in the top tier of towns in this area in terms of permanently protected open space land.

High quality drinking water supplies will continue to become more valuable over time. The water in the Waterbury reservoirs serves not only the City of Waterbury but other communities near it that need drinking water and purchase it from the Waterbury system.

On this basis it is expected that the City of Waterbury reservoirs and its reservoir related land in Morris will continue to supply drinking water. However recently there have been efforts in other communities to urge the legislature to permit construction type uses on water reservoir classified lands. The Town would be wise to monitor any proposed changes in the State system for classification of protected land in drinking water reservoirs.

Even if we assume that both the White Memorial land and the Waterbury water company land will remain as open space over the next 10 years Morris would be wise to strive to protect and support all efforts to preserve land that helps fulfill the natural resource and rural character goals and objectives the Town Plan.

Morris is endowed with many valuable natural resources. Establishing and maintaining a strong resource protection program for such an extensive array of resources is a tall task. Fortunately the Natural Resources Inventory provides the information and suggestions needed to set priorities and recommendations in the town plan.

Tied into natural resource protection is the wish among townspeople to preserve the town’s “rural character”. What is rural character and how does a town preserve this quality?

When asked to define rural character residents tells us many different things – scenic farmlands, the small rural village center, the fact that homes are not close together and spread along scenic rural roadways, the views and vistas both near and far along the road ways. All of these are important elements of the town vision of “rural character”.

This goal covers a wide range of subjects and requires numerous specific objectives and recommendations. The most important is protection of drinking water supplies.

Objective: Public Drinking Water Supplies

On an ongoing basis educate Morris citizens on the importance of Morris's drinking water resources and the care homeowners must take to insure that these water supplies remain pristine (Conservation Commission and Land Trust). Take the local land use regulatory and land preservation actions in the next year needed to insure that in the long term these water resources will not be jeopardized. (Planning and Zoning Commission and Inland Wetland Commission).

It is important for Morris residents to understand just how critical Morris's water resources are to its citizens, present and future, and to hundreds of thousands of other Connecticut citizens and businesses.

All but a small area of south central Morris protects the water quality of several major existing and one proposed public drinking water source. The State Plan of Conservation and Development classifies these watershed lands and therefore almost all of Morris as a "Conservation Area". Under the State Plan Conservation Areas are to be protected and regulated to preserve the quality of the drinking water resources they serve. And Connecticut's General Statutes require that Morris in its town plan and land use regulations take measures to protect the drinking water supplies.

There are three Waterbury water supply reservoirs with watershed land located in eastern Morris - the Pitch Reservoir, Morris Reservoir and Wigwam Reservoir. These reservoirs serve Waterbury residents and business as well as other communities that purchase water from the Waterbury systems.

In 1973 the State Plan classified the Shepaug River and its watershed as a proposed public drinking water supply. Most of western and central Morris is located in the Shepaug River watershed. According to the State plan water could be diverted from the Shepaug before it empties into the Housatonic River and piped to southwestern Connecticut to provide drinking water for its growing population. However under current State requirements this could not happen unless the sewage treatment plant discharge to the Bantam River in Litchfield was removed from the Shepaug watershed.

Action Recommendations

1. Establish a Public Drinking Water Supply Overlay Zone.

Amend the Zoning Regulations to create a new overlay zone titled "Drinking Water Supply Overlay Zone". This zone should overlay all the existing and proposed drinking water supply watersheds in Morris.

The Waterbury water supply plan reported that in the five towns with land in its water supply watersheds most have a 2 acre minimum lot size and as a result septic system failures have been minimal. Portions of the land in Morris in the Waterbury water supply watershed are zoned for less than 1 acre (40,000 sq. ft.) and *Morris is the only town of the*

five in the Waterbury water supply watersheds with a lot size requirement as low as 40,000 sq. ft.

Subdivisions with lots of 40,000 square feet without provisions that discount land that is not suitable for septic systems (inland wetlands, slopes, and ledge) are much more likely over time to result in septic failures than a subdivision consisting of lots of 2 acres or more. The State Department of Environmental Protection long ago reported that in rural areas that rely on septic systems for sewage treatment in order to protect ground water and surface water these towns should in residential zones require a minimum lot area of two acres not including inland wetlands and watercourses.

2. Minimum Lot Size.

As recommended in the 1992 Morris Town Plan it is again recommended that within the Public Drinking Water Supply Overlay Zones that:

- the minimum lot size requirement should be 80,000 square feet, and
- the current lot area requirement which states:

“The area consisting of ponds, lakes, swamps or marshes shall not be used for compliance with more than 25% of the minimum lot area requirements” should be revised to read:

“The area consisting of inland wetlands and watercourses as defined and regulated by the Morris Inland Wetland Commission shall not be used in the computation of the minimum lot area requirement.”

(Note: The current regulation can not be effectively enforced because of the difficulty of determining what constitutes a “swamp or marsh”.)

If this amendment is adopted each land owner in the overlay zone with less than 2 acres (not including inland wetlands) will be “grandfathered” and will retain the permanent right to build or add to existing homes or outbuildings based on the pre-existing zoning lot area requirements.

3. Residential Best Management Practices.

Educate and encourage homeowners in the water supply watershed overlay zones, particularly near major inland wetland systems and stratified drift aquifer areas, to use residential best management practices that minimize the use of hazardous materials of generation of hazardous waste in the watershed.

4. Minimize Road Salt and Herbicide Use.

The Town of Morris should monitor and minimize the use of road salt and herbicides along the roads in the overlay zones and address potential for hazardous material spills resulting from vehicular accidents.

5. Amend the Zoning Regulation Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations to treat and control the negative impacts of storm water runoff to lakes, ponds, wetlands and groundwater, especially aquifer areas.

- a. Include in the Site Plan section under “Duties of the Commission” the requirement “to provide for the protection of “ground water supplies, especially aquifer areas and surface water supplies”. A number of areas in the Town have been identified as potential aquifers and areas with significant potential to provide groundwater for drinking water purposes. These areas are shown on Figure 4 Water Resources Map in the Natural Resources Inventory.
- b. Revise the Subdivision Regulations and add a new section to the Zoning Regulations on “Storm Water Drainage Control”. These regulations need to ensure that proper provision is made to control storm water runoff originating from development sites involving a disturbed area of more than one acre (other than single family residential development) or where ever specifically required in the Zoning Regulations.
- c. Require that low impact development standards and methods be used to control, treat and minimize the negative impact of storm water runoff on surface and ground water aquifer areas and wetlands, including the following:
 - to maintain or restore pre-development vegetation, to minimize creation of steep slopes, to avoid use of culverts, storm water piping systems,
 - to favor use of vegetated swales, buffers, filter strips and level spreaders, bio-retention structures such as rain gardens, rain barrels, detention ponds, groundwater infiltration systems (curtain drains, dry wells, galleries, etc.)
 - to reduce impervious surface area on site and disconnect flows from multiple impervious surfaces and to favor use of permeable pavement choices.
 - the Planning and Zoning Commission should consider revising the regulations concerning fuel storage tanks for residences, businesses and other entities not covered by State regulations, so that underground fuel storage is prohibited.

Objective: Bantam Lake

Bantam Lake is the State’s largest natural lake, a major regional and State recreational resource and a very important part of the Bantam community and its tax base.

Protection of these values requires that Morris in cooperation with Litchfield, the State and the local non profit organizations must continue to work to manage the lake to protect its water quality and protect the lake against invasive weeds.

Citizens at the town plan forum ranked protection of Bantam Lake at the top of the list of natural resources that need to be protected in Morris.

Bantam Lake is recognized as an outstanding natural resource locally and at the State and federal levels. The State legislature designated Bantam Lake as a Connecticut “Heritage Lake” in recognition of it water and recreational values. Bantam Lake and the Bantam River many years ago was studied and qualified as a “recreational” river by the US Department of Interior under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers program.

The 916 acre lake is the largest natural lake in Connecticut. It shares its shoreline and the responsibility to support preservation of its water quality with Litchfield. However most of the Lake (675 acres) is in Morris. While the lake is by far the Town's most important water feature it is shallow and prone to excessive algae growth that clouds the lake. In recent years invasive aquatic weeds have appeared posing a threat to lake recreational uses and property values. Microscopic plants (algae) and weed growth in a lake is fortified by excessive inflow of phosphorous - a natural nutrient that supports plant growth.

Excessive phosphorous in the lake is primarily the result of development and man's activity in the lake watershed (the area that drains rain water into the lake). Activities that increase nutrient input include agricultural uses, storm water runoff from roads and other paved or impervious surfaces, lawn and garden fertilizers, faulty septic systems, washing in or near the lake, erosion into the lake, dumping leaves in or near a lake, and even duck, geese and other animal droppings.

Over the past 30 years Bantam's appearance has improved as a result of lake restoration and management action by the two lake towns with assistance from the State and water related organizations. The installation of sewers on the west shore of the lake and the replacement of many faulty septic systems has had a very positive effect on lake water quality. Shallow portions of the lake were dredged removing much sediment and shallow water plant habitat.

Invasive plants found now in Bantam Lake and the Bantam River include Eurasian milfoil, water chestnut and fanwort. These aggressively growing plants can over come native plants and choke shorelines even to depths of 20 feet!

Over the past three years a costly herbicide program has greatly helped reduce and control infestations of Eurasian Water Milfoil. In the summer of 2008 another program was instituted using hydro suction equipment to "vacuum" invasive fanwort plants out of the Bantam River. But it is very difficult to fully eradicate these invasive plants and a long term and determined effort will be needed to ensure that these plants do not re-immerge to threaten the lake. A comprehensive lake management program is recommended.

Action Recommendations

1. Lake Management Plan and Program

Protecting Bantam Lake's water quality and clarity will require that the lake towns, lake related non profit organizations and lake residents work together to continue to build and support a long term lake management program. A great deal of what is needed for a comprehensive lake management program is already in place. The Bantam Lake Protective Association, the Lake Authority, the White Memorial Foundation and other organizations are all contributing to the effort to improve conditions at Bantam Lake. The existing efforts need to be better coordinated, funded and other program elements

added to sustain progress in restoring and maintaining water quality and water clarity at Bantam Lake.

This long term plan will need substantial financial support to insure the capacity to conduct:

- An ongoing and coordinated educational program for shoreline landowners who need training in proper septic system management and use of “best water quality management practices” on their property.
- An on-going professional lake water quality and invasive plant monitoring program.
- Professional monitoring of basic water quality parameters at least monthly during the spring, summer and fall. This is essential to track the progress in improving water quality and clarity and to focus future improvement projects.
- Lake and river shoreline surveys during the growing season for new invasive plants and to chart the movement of existing invasive plants.
- A local “weed watchers” program to train lake land owners and lake users to identify invasive weeds, who to contact to verify the identification and proper methods of removing invasive plants.
- An educational program for boaters who need to be certain that their boats, motors and trailers are clean of all plants before entering the lake. Even a small segment of a live invasive plant has the potential to root and begin an infestation in the lake.
- A boat inspection and educational program at the State park boat launch and at other public boat launches on the lake. Boats are the main source of new weed introduction into a lake. Once boats are inspected and if weeds are present prevented from launching boaters will soon learn they must come to Bantam Lake with a clean boat, trailer and motor.
- A “Rapid Response” program to permit lake managers to act quickly if another invasive weed is identified or a new site of Fanwort or E. Milfoil is discovered in Bantam Lake or Bantam River. The investment in a modest “rapid response” fund will save money compared to the more expensive cost to remove a well established invasive plant.

2. Explore Creating a Bantam Lake Watershed Zone.

Most of the area of the Bantam Lake Watershed is in Litchfield. But the extensive lake shoreline area in Morris is the lake’s “epidermis”. How the near lake land is developed and managed are most critical to the health of the lake.

A Bantam Lake Overlay Zone can include provisions that will help protect the lake shore area from excessive untreated storm water runoff and erosion. It can encourage better management of the lake shoreline and preservation of native vegetation and other measures that will help protect against the excessive nutrient loading that feed algae and weed growth.

3. Impervious Surfaces and Storm Water Management.

Perhaps the single greatest impact on Bantam Lake's water quality is untreated storm water runoff. It has been demonstrated that where more than 10% of a lake watershed is covered with impervious surfaces there will be negative impacts on the lake's water quality. Watersheds with 30% or more impervious surfaces typically experience significant water degradation.

It is recommended that on a lot in the lake watershed with a total impervious surface greater than 10% proposals for additional impervious surface should require a Storm Water Management plan (same as required in Public Water Supply Overlay Zones).

4. Low Impact Development Techniques.

In the Bantam Lake watershed the zoning regulations should require that wherever possible low impact development should be used to handle and treat storm water runoff. This includes: vegetated swales, buffers, filter strips and level spreaders, bio-retention structures such as rain gardens, rain barrels, detention ponds, groundwater infiltration systems (curtain drains, dry wells, galleries, etc.).

5. Inland Wetland Commission – Lake Education and Regulation.

The Morris Inlands Wetlands and Conservation Commission should educate waterfront property owners to discourage excessively cultivated landscapes on Bantam Lake and in the shoreline areas of all rivers, brooks, lakes and ponds. The Commission should specify that:

- a. Wetlands and regulated buffer areas are off limits for use of fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides.
- b. Farmers in the Bantam Lake and Water Supply Watershed Overlay zones should use agricultural Best Management Practices to limit impacts to watercourses.
- c. Access of livestock to wetlands and watercourses must be strictly limited.

Objective: Farming and Farmers

Rank the existing working farmland in Morris in a priority for preservation and focus on protection of major areas of viable farmland. Over the next 10 years add at least 800 acres of protected farmland to the 300 already protected.

Morris is endowed with a very high percentage of prime farmland soils with 4,230 acres or 35.3% of the town's land area. Altogether the prime farmland in Morris and other non prime farmland in active farm use total over 5,000 acres of Morris land. This is almost 42% of the town's land area and is more than most towns in northwest Connecticut. But only approximately 300 acres of working farmland in Morris is permanently protected.

Farmland and farming are one of the most cherished land features and elements of the Morris landscape. When citizens talk about protecting “open space” it is generally the open farm fields seen from town roads they are holding in mind.

Farming has historically been at the core of Morris’s town life. While this is much less so today the fact remains that there is still a great deal of working farmland in the town. According to the assessor there are 1,964 acres under a 490 classification in Morris. Much of that land is active farmland. The Greenprint land survey, which is not limited to 490 classified lands, found that all the land maintained in open fields and active farmlands totals 2,797 acres.

The State Plan of Conservation and Development classifies prime farm soils as a “Conservation Area” and recommends protection of this resource. Morris is located in the heart of one of six areas identified in the State Plan as an “Important Agricultural Area”.

Protecting farm land and adopting measures that will encourage local farming is good for the town in many ways – it protects open space, preserves “rural character” and supports the local economy. It is the combination of these factors that pushes preservation of farming and farmers up the priority scale.

Action Recommendations

1. Right to Farm Ordinance.

The Town should adopt a local right to farm ordinance, a policy statement noting public interest and concern for the preservation of working farms and prime and important agricultural soils and support for large and small-scale farm enterprises.

2. Rank Key Farmlands.

The Board of Selectmen, Land Trust and Planning and Zoning Commission and should work with other town commissions and the Board of Selectman to rank the most important farmlands to protect in Morris with an focus on protecting active working farms and farmland.

3 Assist Farmland Owners.

These same groups should assist farmland owners with applications to the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program, State Open Space grant program, USDA Farm and Ranch Act grant program. The Land Trust should make preservation of productive and scenic farmlands a priority for preservation by purchase and donations of farmland, bargain sale purchase, purchase of agricultural conservation restrictions and other available preservation techniques.

4. Committee to Preserve Farmers and Farmland.

Town officials should consider establishing a panel of farmers and other interested Morris citizens to: develop strategies for retention of agricultural lands by forming associations with State and Federal farm agencies; seek funding for farm operations; become better educated about new farm technologies and farm product development; provide guidance on financial and estate planning to assure long-term continuation of farming operations and lobby for the protection of farming rights.

5. Review Land Use Regulations.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should review all land use regulation relating to farm use and make any changes that improve the opportunity for a farmer to market locally grown produce on the farm and to conduct other farm related enterprises that will assist in sustaining the economic viability of farming in Morris.

6. Continue 490 Farmland.

The town should continue tax relief for agricultural lands under Public Act 490.

7. Farmland and Open Space in Subdivisions.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should amend the Subdivision Regulation requirements for open space to emphasize protection of working farmland and prime and important farm soils and to require greater setbacks adjoining working farmland.

8. Land Use Incentives to Save Farmland.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should provide incentives in the Zoning Regulations that will encourage the protection of open farm fields and prime farm soils. One option is to require clustering subdivision designs in key farming areas of the town. And to provide a density benefit for subdivision designs that save key farm and open space areas.

9. Land Use Policy.

The Planning and Development Commission should encourage municipal development policies and facilitate plans that direct development away from key agricultural areas and that lessen developmental pressures on such areas.

Objective: Wetlands and Streambelts

Protect the remaining inland wetlands, watercourses and water bodies in Morris with priority on creating protected wetland and streambelt corridors along watercourses and water bodies, especially in public water supply watersheds, Bantam River and Bantam Lake watershed and on other major streams in Morris.

Marshes, swamps, bogs and areas of standing water are obvious wetlands. But in Connecticut the inland wetland state law defines wetlands by soil type which is a broader definition such that State classified inland wetlands do not appear as such to the untrained eye. Soils that are saturated with water at or near the surface for two or more months of the year are considered inland wetlands in Connecticut. Morris has 2,140 acres of soils (17 percent of total Morris acreage) classified as wetlands soil types.

The Morris Conservation and Inland Wetland and Watercourses Commission are charged with protecting the town's inland wetlands. This Commission must adhere to the model requirements for wetland protection set forth by the State of Connecticut.

Wetlands perform many valuable functions and all wetlands should be monitored and protected. They act as a natural catch basin in which water is captured, filtered, purified and slowly released. Wetlands mitigate downstream flooding by holding storm water runoff. They improve water quality through nutrient cycling and entrapment/filtering of pollutants and sediment. And wetlands are a natural habitat for many types of valuable flora and fauna.

Action Recommendations**1. Wetlands and Streambelts.**

The 1992 town plan defined a streambelt as a "continuous corridor of land along a perennial stream consisting of soils which if developed could have an adverse impact on stream water quality." Streambelts are composed primarily of inland wetland soils. Other soils included in a streambelt are highly erosive, shallow to bedrock, or soils with other severe development limitations. Streambelts are important because they provide a connecting corridor of land along a stream that protects stream water quality, protects against erosion, preserves critical habitat and provides a natural corridor for animal movement. These corridors are wonderful linked lands for hiking and nature observation.

The following streambelts should have the highest priority for protection:

- Bantam Lake and Whittlesey Brook streambelt flowing into Bantam Lake at its southern tip.
- Bantam River and its feeder stream which rises in the area of Camp Columbia and includes Jones Pond.
- All streambelts within the City of Waterbury watershed area, including Pitch Brook, Slab Meadow Brook and East Morris Brook.

- Streambelt and associated wetlands running south from Morris center in the upper reach of the watershed serving the Bronson Lockwood Reservoir which is located in Bethlehem.

2. Review and Revise the Inland Wetland Regulated Upland Review Buffer Area.

The Inland Wetland Commission has the authority to regulate development of land adjacent to inland wetlands and watercourses where it determines that any activity may potentially harm the inland wetland or watercourse. These adjacent “upland” review buffer areas help protect the wetland or watercourse.

Based on review of the Morris Streambelt Map, The Inlands Wetlands Commission should identify, regulate and enforce the protection of upland review areas especially within the above priority streambelts.

The depth of the upland review area for the priority streambelts should be reviewed and where appropriate increased. The review area should be not less than 50 feet and in some cases could be much more – up to 200’ depending on the characteristics of the land adjacent to the watercourse. For example, if the adjacent upland review area is steep and rocky the depth of the review area should be greater.

Objective: Wildlife Resources

Morris has a wide diversity of robust plant and animal habitats providing refuge for many important species. Open space priorities need to consider wildlife values and land use planning and regulation must aim to manage development to avoid doing harm to sensitive wildlife resources.

Around the globe rare and vulnerable plants and animals and the natural communities in which they are sustained are disappearing. Morris needs to do its part to preserve important habitats and manage development to avoid doing harm to sensitive wildlife resources. The Town is indeed fortunate to have so much of its land under the care of the White Memorial Foundation. The foundation property includes “Important Bird Areas” designated by Audubon.

Important wildlife areas in Morris include any flora or fauna habitat identified by the State Department of Environmental Protection as Endangered, Threatened or Species of Special Concern. Currently there are seven such habitat sites in Morris recognized by the DEP.

Valuable habitat areas are often in natural areas with a diversity of vegetation and terrain including wetlands, areas of ledge, boulders and ridges, old-growth or mature forest or a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees.

Action Recommendations

1. Maintain Records.

The Conservation and Inland/Wetlands and Planning & Zoning Commissions should maintain up-to-date records of DEP designated Endangered, Threatened or Of Special Concern species within Morris.

2. Subdivision Checklist.

The Planning & Zoning Commission should establish a checklist for the review of subdivision applications. One of the checklist steps should be to consult the DEP list of unique and fragile features. The DEP should be contacted where there is any question that a proposed development could have an effect on one of these sites. When considering subdivision applications, land use commissions should refer to the Natural Resource Inventory, Figure 9, and “Critical Habitats in Morris”. If development is proposed in or bordering on one of these seven areas, the Commission should request DEP review.

3. Identify Wildlife Corridors.

Wildlife corridors in Morris and crossing into adjacent towns, should be located, described, protected and mapped by the Conservation Commission with the assistance of the DEP and other conservation organizations. The subdivision regulation open space section should be amended to include among the purposes for open space - “protection of unique and fragile areas, important habitats and wildlife corridors”.

4. Connected Open Spaces.

The Morris Land Trust, other conservation groups and the Town of Morris should focus on protecting by acquisition; easement or other action lands that link existing open spaces to provide continuous wildlife corridors and habitats.

Objective: Greenways

The Conservation Commission and the Land Trust should seize every opportunity to create links in that extend and improve trail systems, and connections between existing open spaces to create corridors of green spaces to benefit wildlife and for passive recreational uses.

Greenways are lineal corridors of open space designed to provide opportunities for public passive recreation including walking, hiking, biking and nature observation. Greenways are being developed throughout Connecticut to enhance quality of life, protect open space and provide natural recreational experiences for residents young and old.

Major hiking trails in Morris included the blue-blazed Mattatuck Trail, formal trails on White Memorial Foundation land and informal trails on city of Waterbury reservoir property.

Action Recommendations

1. Morris Rails to Trails.

An abandoned railroad line runs through northwestern Morris, along the Bantam River and near Mount Tom, for about 2 miles. Communities throughout the country have converted abandoned rail lines into wonderful greenway walking, hiking and biking corridors. This old railroad line sometimes called the Shepaug Valley rail bed is now mostly privately owned which would make converting it into a public trail difficult. However the rail line is on flat land and continues into Washington to the west and Litchfield to the east/north. Perhaps Morris and its neighboring communities working together and with permission from property owners could create a recreation trail on at least parts of this old rail bed.

2. Greenway Opportunities.

The Town should identify relatively flat corridors to establish paved or gravel greenways in locations that would be attractive to senior citizens, families with young children, bicyclists, in-line skaters and others. In recent years grant funds have been available to assist with the cost of acquiring and developing greenway trails and the Town would be wise to identify suitable locations in anticipation of new grant funds.

3. Hiking Trail Improvements at Camp Columbia

Town officials should encourage the State to create hiking trails on the former Camp Columbia property in south-central Morris.

4. Connecting the Open Spaces

Morris has a wealth of privately and publicly-owned open space and looking at the location of these open spaces it is not hard to imagine acquiring land to connect these spaces for passive recreation and/or wildlife corridors.

A priority for open space protection in Morris should be to protect connecting corridors between existing open space including: White Memorial Foundation, city of Waterbury reservoir lands and State holdings - Camp Columbia and Mount Tom State Park, the farms owned by the Woodbury/Southbury Rod & Gun Club and Aurell Family where the development rights have been purchased by the state.

5. Inter-Town Greenway Connections.

The Town should also be open to the opportunity to work with neighboring towns and the State to connect open space and recreational trails in Morris with open spaces in other towns. Possibilities for extension and connections of existing open space near the Morris town boarder include: White Memorial Foundation land, Topsmead State Forest, Mount Tom State Park, in Litchfield; Steep Rock Association land in Washington, and Black Rock State Park in Watertown

6. Open Space in Subdivision.

The subdivision regulations permit the Planning and Zoning Commission to require up to 15% of the subdivision land area to be set aside as open space. This section should be revised to:

- specify the most important areas of the town for open space protection as recommended in the town plan and as determined by the Commission,
- to expand on the options for preservation of open space,
- to stress the importance of creating connected corridors of open space, and
- to include the option for a fee in lieu of open space as authorized by the Connecticut General Statutes.

Goal #4 Preservation of Morris's rural character has been a basic part of every Morris Town Plan. Morris citizens cherish the rural landscape and its small town sense of place. This goal and its objectives seek to highlight the key features of Morris's rural character and offer recommendations to retain these assets and values.

Goal#4: Rural Character

The key physical elements of Morris's rural character are the views and vistas of open farmland, water bodies, ridgelines and historic centers especially as seen from the town's scenic roads. These rural features characterize are found throughout Morris and while it will not be possible to protect all of these areas the plan should identify and focus on protection of the key rural features.

Objective: Scenic Roads

Almost all roads in Morris are scenic but some have outstanding scenic characteristics and are especially deserving of protection. Citizens and town officials should aim to gain approval of at least 10 miles of scenic roads in Morris over the next 10 years.

The Subcommittee for Land Use and Open Space Preservation identified the town and State roads it considered that best represent its rural character. For selection of town roads the subcommittee followed the scenic road criteria as set forth in Section 7-149a of Connecticut General Statutes (CGS). It provides that local highways or portions of highways may be designated by municipal ordinance as scenic roads, providing owners of a majority of lot frontage abutting the highway or portion of the highway agree to the

designation. To be designated as a scenic road, a road or portion of a road must be free of intensive commercial development and intensive vehicular traffic and must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- it is unpaved;
- it is bordered by mature trees or stone walls;
- the traveled portion is no more than twenty feet in width;
- it offers scenic views;
- it blends naturally into the surrounding terrain; or
- it parallels or crosses over brooks, streams, lakes or ponds.

Action Recommendations

1. Town Scenic Road Ordinance.

The Board of Selectman should initiate a Town Meeting to present to the citizens of Morris a Scenic Road Ordinance, which, if adopted, would enable property owners who live along a scenic road segment to petition for scenic road designation.

It is recommended that landowners on these town scenic roads consider petitioning for designation of these town roads and road segments as town scenic roads.

2. Town Roads with Scenic Road Qualifications.

The following roads have the necessary features to qualify as a town scenic road. A majority of landowners on other roads in Morris may present documentation and seek designation of other roads or road segments provided that meet the essential scenic road criteria.

a. Paved Town Roads.

Alain White Road from Morris/Litchfield Town Line, bisecting White Memorial Foundation forested land, past stonewalls, two manmade ponds, two 18th century homes and two 19th century homes to Route 61. Anderson Road bisecting Anderson Farm past pastures 19th century home and view of ridgeline. Benton Road from Morris/Bethlehem Town Line, past Anderson Farm (Woodbury/Southbury Rod and Gun Club Property), eastern vistas, 18th century home, 19th century home and stonewalls to intersection of Higbie Road. Higbie Road from intersection of Benton Road past three 19th century homes, meadows, pond, eastern vistas, ridgeline, stonewalls and old schoolhouse to Route 109. Benton Road from Higbie Road intersection, west past cornfield, 18th century home and old Center Schoolhouse to Route 109. Kenyon Road past stonewalls, Camp Washington, Keilty Farm, 18th century home and two 19th century homes. John Weik Road from Route 109 with view across Jones Pond, past Lakeville Cemetery and site of old mill, and two 19th century homes to Todd Hill Road. West Morris Road from Morris/Litchfield Town Line to Route 109, past 19th century home, across Bantam River, stonewalls, distant views to the east, Stone/Brown farm, Doyle Farm, Winsome Farm, cows at pasture, old barns, three 18th century homes and six 19th century homes.

Smokey Hollow Road tree-lined to view of Bantam River and of 19th century Burgess home (site of 1877 Burgess General Store, Post Office and Telegraph Station), past site of Shepaug Railroad Tracks to Morris/Washington Town Line, ponds and stonewalls. Curtiss Hill Road from West Morris Road to Burgess Road, undeveloped rural road, tree-lined, views of meadow and pond. Stoddard Road, tree-lined south of Benedict Road, then with view northwest of distant mountains, bordering Aurell Farm, past 18th century home and two 19th century homes. Benedict Road past 19th century farmhouse, barns and fields. Looking Glass Hill Road, tree-lined and scenic from Morris/Litchfield Town Line west of Bantam River past 18th century home to about one-half mile before intersection with Route 202.

b. Dirt/Gravel Town Roads.

Coe Road past ponds and woods. Evergreen Passway through woods. Munger Lane through woods. Esthers Lane through woods and past 18th century home, White Flower Farm property and White Flower Pond.

A map and photos of these roads are provided in the Natural Resource Inventory.

3. State Roads with Scenic Road Qualifications.

State roads may also be designated as “scenic” by the State Department of Transportation. The criteria for state road scenic designation are(as defined in Connecticut Public Act No. 87-280) “any state highway or portion thereof that (1) passes through agricultural land or abuts land on which is located an historic building or structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places or the State Register of Historic Places, compiled pursuant to CGS Section 10-321, or (2) affords vistas of marshes, shoreline, forests with mature trees or notable geologic or other natural features”.

Any municipality may submit a request to the Commission, Department of Transportation for designation of a state highway as a scenic road. The proposed scenic road must be a minimum of 1 mile in length. Any development along the proposed scenic road must be compatible with its surroundings and must not detract from the scenic, natural character and visual quality of the highway area.

The following State road and road segments are recommended for State Scenic Road designation. It is recommended that the Conservation Commission or some other interested town board prepare a proposal to the State for designation of these roads as State Scenic Roads.

Route 109 from Morris/Washington Town Line past Coe Farm, old Lakeside Post Office (Advent Chapel), Jones (Throop’s/Mill) Pond, Lakeside (Footville) Cemetery, Camp Columbia State Park, forested areas, vistas towards Bantam Lake, corn stands, Morris Town Center, Post Office, Town Hall, Town Green, Congregational Church, James Morris Elementary School, Farband and Morris Cemeteries, barn at intersection of Route 63, and beginning again about one half mile past the intersection at Hickory Hurst Farm,

Jets Meadow Farm, original site of Mill Schoolhouse, eleven 18th century homes, twelve 19th century homes, Sunnicroft Farm, entrance to the Mattatuck Trail and view of Pitch Reservoir to the Morris/Litchfield Town Line.

Route 63 from Morris/Watertown Town Line past a barn and views of pastures to the intersection of Route 109, and beginning again about one half mile past the intersection where there is an 18th century home, vistas to the west, stone walls, White Flower Farm, manmade ponds, forested White Memorial Foundation land to Morris/Litchfield Town Line.

Route 61 from Route 63, bordered by White Memorial Foundation forested property, past two 19th century homes and Far Meadow Farms horse farm to Route 109 in Morris Center.

Route 209 only where it borders the South Bay of Bantam Lake and passes two 18th century homes.

4. Subdivision Regulations – Open Space on Scenic Roads.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should amend the open space section of the subdivision regulations to place a priority on protection of open space along the frontage of town and State designated scenic roads.

5. Private Road subdivisions.

Many towns in the region have a provision in the land use regulation to permit a small subdivision (4 to 6 lots) to be served by a private road and allow the private road to be narrower than a town road and in some cases to be a gravel surface. Usually this permission is conditioned on a subdivision design that preserves valued scenic features or roadside views. The regulation must include safeguards that will keep the road privately maintained and not the responsibility of the town. This type of subdivision design fits the rural character of Morris and should be considered.

6. Setbacks on Major Town and State Scenic Roads.

Currently a house must setback from a road by a minimum of 50 feet from the road right-of-way. Typically town road right-of-ways are 50 to 66 feet in width but often the road itself is not in the center of the right-of-way. In order to maintain a consistent minimum green space buffer along main town roads and State highways the land use regulation could be amended to require that a house must setback 50 feet from the road right-of-way or 75 feet from the road pavement whichever is greater.

7. Blight Issues.

Residents at the public forum and local officials have registered concerned that “blight” related issues are negatively impacting property values and residential neighborhoods.

Outside storage of junk is a primary concern as are highly deteriorated buildings in view from the road.

These problems can be addressed in town ordinances. An ordinance can be drafted to specifically regulate and prevent the accumulation of junk cars and related materials in residential zones. Also an ordinance can be created setting forth steps that define and require improvements to buildings that have long deteriorated in the soundness of structure and appearance.

Objective: Protect Steep Slopes and Ridgelines

Land use regulations should encourage careful development and management of land with steep slopes and the highest ridgelines to avoid excessive erosion and sedimentation and the negative visual and wildlife impacts associated with excessive vegetation clearing.

The high areas on the near horizon viewed from the State roads and major town roads are local ridgelines most of which are either forested or open and free of development. Homes placed on large cleared open land on these ridgeline peaks if not carefully placed in the landscape are visible from great distances and detract from the town's rural character.

Some ridgelines in town have been built on over the years, but most of these blend into the surrounding treed landscape and remain in harmony with surrounding scenic quality. But significant development leading up to or on ridgelines along slopes over 20% requires extensive clearing. A new road or driveway constructed into a hill side requires a wide clearing and excavation to create a safe grade and turning radius. Steep slope development greatly increases the risk of erosion and sedimentation and requires systems to insure that storm water will not wash out the driveway and result in sedimentation of wetlands and water bodies.

Action Recommendations

1. Subdivision Regulation General Standards.

Planning and Zoning Subdivision Regulation 6.1 should be revised to read: "In order to serve the purposes of subdivision regulations as set forth in Chapter 126 of the General Statutes, especially to insure proper provision for protection of irreplaceable resources, unique and fragile features of value to the Town of Morris and the State of Connecticut, applicants are required to design subdivisions to avoid development of land for the house sites, septic fields, driveways, streets or other development improvements on the land defined below and to protect these lands from harmful effects."

2. Slopes over 20%.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should consider changing the wording in Subdivision Regulations, Section 6.1.5 to restrict development on “Land with a slope of 20 percent or greater.”

(Note: NRI Map Figure 5, “Slopes”, describes the degree of slopes for particular soil types throughout Morris.)

3. Regulation of Development on Ridgelines.

Before considering any regulation of development on ridgelines for visual or esthetic purposes the Planning and Zoning Commission should conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of the existing ridgelines. This study should first precisely define what constitutes a “ridgeline” in Morris. It needs to identify ridgelines with the highest priority for protection and clearly define the need and benefits of such protection. With this information and documentation the Planning and Zoning Commission can consider options for land use regulation.

Objective: Bantam Lake and Bantam River

Protect important segments of scenic views of the Lake from the surrounding roads and manage the development of private docks and floats to balance the rights of private shore land owners and the safety and enjoyment of public recreational users of the lake.

The views and vistas of Bantam Lake as seen from surrounding public roads are an important local and state visual assets worth of protection. Bantam Lake is the State’s largest natural lake in surface area. The growth of boating traffic introduces the risk of increased recreational conflicts between boaters, swimmers, fishing and sailing. These issues can only be addressed by balancing the rights of lake land owners and the goal of preserving the public scenic and recreational values the lake provides.

Action Recommendations

1. Fence Height Limits and Lake Views.

The Planning and Zoning Commission in cooperation with the Bantam Lake Protective Association should consider amending the Zoning Regulation to set a reasonable fence, berm or visual barrier limit along the public road frontage on the lake shore to protect against blocking road side views of the lake while providing for landowner need for safety and privacy.

2. Docks and Floats.

Recently a dock regulation has been addressed under the Inland Wetland Regulations but these rules are limited to the impact of docks on the ecology of the water body.

The Planning and Zoning Commission in cooperation with the Bantam Lake Protective Association and the Bantam Lake Authority should consider establishing total length and surface area limits and a dock numbering and registration system. These rules need to balance the property rights of lake land owners for adequate and safe boat docking and access to the lake. This right must not however compromise public recreational safety, protection of the lake's ecology and visual quality. Other lake communities have established a town ordinance or zoning regulations with limitations on dock size and length. These rules have focused on the protecting against the proliferation of excessively large or long docks that interfere with safe boating, cause unnecessary disturbance to the lake shore and lake bottom and disturb the visual quality of the lake.

3. Shepaug Bantam River Commission.

Morris should refer to and support the recommendations of the "Shepaug-Bantam River Protection Commission Management Plan Executive Summary" including the recommendation for towns along the Bantam River to "explore the potential for recreational access to the Bantam River."

4. Lighting and Dark Sky.

At the town plan forum, especially as it related to protection of Bantam Lake, there was support expressed in protecting against outdoor lighting that floods neighboring properties and obscures the night time views of the stars and constellations. Excessive and poorly placed and designed outdoor lighting on a property can also create unwelcome glare and intrude on the privacy of neighbors.

It is recommended that neighborhood associations on Bantam Lake, the Lake Protective Association and others provide educational materials and encourage residents to create lighting plans for their property that do not disturb neighbors. Down lighting and careful selection of lighting fixtures and locations allows for needed safe lighting on a property while avoiding the "wash over" effect on neighbors.

The Morris Zoning Regulations have no standards or requirements for lighting. It is recommended that the regulation be amended under the Site Plan section to include standards for lighting for business, industrial and special exception uses. Lighting fixtures should be full cutoff or fully shielded types that cast no light above the horizontal plane and of a source that cannot be seen by someone standing to the side.

Objective: Cultural and Archaeological Resources

Morris has over eighty homes dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as numerous historic landmarks and archaeological sites. These structures are an important part of the Town's rural character and should be wherever possible preserved and protected.

Much of the early homes have been well maintained and reflects a variety of architectural styles. These homes and other cultural resources in their rural settings,

especially in the village center, are an important part of Morris's sense of place. Morris citizens expressed a strong sentiment for preserving these historic resources.

Buildings and structures considered historic are those that are over 50 years old including derelict barns, agricultural outbuildings, dams and bridges, fieldstone walls and boundary markers; rural roads bounded by fieldstone walls and/or mature trees; marked and unmarked cemeteries and burial grounds; buildings or sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and/or Connecticut's State Register of Historic Places; historic archaeological sites including fieldstone foundations, root cellars, cow pens, mill sites and factory ruins, breached dams, abandoned roads and cart ways; and prehistoric archaeological sites.

Action Recommendations

1. Site Plan and Architectural Requirements.

Zoning Regulations for commercial buildings and other non residential structures proposed in view from town roads, especially in the village centers, should encourage buildings of a size, scale and style compatible with the Town's rural New England character.

2. Subdivision and Site Plans.

Requirements for information on subdivision plans and site plans should include identifying archeological, historic or cultural resource within the property to be subdivided. Applicants should be required to show sites and structures documented in the NRI Historic and Cultural Resources report (maps 11, 12 and 13 and tables 10 and 11) or other authoritative source. Subdivision and site plan designs should show how the resources have been considered and wherever possible preserved.

3. Archeological Resources.

Where a site proposed for development has a documented potential for features or artifacts of archeological significance the regulations should provide that the State Archaeologist can perform an on-site archaeological assessment of the impact of proposed development.

Objective: Population Density

To retain a population density that is characteristic of a rural community, avoids "suburbanization" of Morris and protects ground and surface water quality.

In addition to protection of important rural features through conservation and preservation actions the goal of preserving Morris's rural character also must address the question of the future density of housing and population in Morris. The key factor

influencing population density is the Zoning Regulation requirements for minimum lot size. This has been an issue of considerable debate in the Town.

To address this issue the Planning and Zoning Commission commissioned a detailed study of the potential future “build out” of the town based on the existing zoning regulations. This study prepared by the planning firm of HMA looked at the existing zoning requirements and projected what the density of housing would be if the entire town were “built out” according to the existing lot size and other alternative lot sizes.

| Additional Housing Development Projected Under Existing Zoning | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Existing Residential Zones | Vacant acres of “Buildable” Land | Potential Additional New Dwellings |
| R-160 (@4 acs.) | 14 | 2 |
| R-80 (@ 2 acs.) | 640 | 258 |
| R-60 (@ 1.5 acs.) | 1745 | 1003 |
| R-40 (@ 1 ac.) | 219 | 187 |
| Lake Residential | 2 | 0 |
| Deer Island District | 0.2 | 0 |
| Totals | 2,620.2 acres | 1,444 units |
| <u>Projected Population at Build Out:</u> At the current (2000 US Census) average family size this number of additional housing units would add 3,638 people to the town population and bring the total “build out” population under existing zoning requirements to 6,838. | | |

Several factors are worth noting in review of this projection.

1. First and most important in determining a future “build-out” lot HMA first removed all inland wetlands and watercourses, all slopes greater than 15% and areas with bedrock at or near the surface.

So the projection of new lots under a the existing lot area requirements and for different zoning scenarios each projected “build-out” lot must meet the minimum lot requirement (40,000 or 60,000 square feet, 2, 3 or 5 acre) with good or “buildable” land, this is land that is not inland wetlands, watercourses, slopes over 15%, or bedrock.

It should be noted that existing zoning allows slopes of any steepness to be included in determining minimum lot size. The Morris Zoning Regulations now states that “ponds, lakes, swamps or marshes shall not be used for compliance with more than 25% of the minimum lot area requirement”. This means that most inland wetland soils can count as part of the minimum lot requirement under current regulations. On this basis the actual potential for new lots in Morris under the current regulations is higher than the HMA study projection of 1,444 lots.

Also in calculating future build-out lots HMA deducted 10% for the interior roads in a new subdivision. Finally HMA did not calculate development potential for all the land

owned by the White Memorial Foundation land and permanently protected land such as Camp Columbia.

2. HMA projected only 2 new dwellings in the R-160 zone because this land is primarily land owned by White Memorial Foundation and it was assumed that this land will not be developed for housing.

3. The R-80 zone comprises a much smaller land area than the R-60 zone land area. It is located mostly in the northwest corner of the town where there is a high percentage of land with slopes over 15% and inland wetlands. The projection of new lots in this zone is 258 housing units.

4. The R-60 zone is the largest zone in total area and in terms of “buildable” vacant land (1,745 acres). Thus the projection of new lots and dwellings in this zone produces by far the greatest number of housing units - 1,003. All the other zoning districts taken together produce only 441 new housing units.

5. The R-40 zone produces 187 new housing units from 219 buildable acres. This is by far the highest conversion rate (vacant land to units produced) at 85%.

Compare this to the Projected Housing and Population at “Buildout” under Different Zoning Scenarios.

Housing Build-Out. Build-out under existing zoning produced a total of 1,444 new dwelling units. HMA also compared this to alternative lot size requirements with the following results:

| |
|--|
| Entire town re-zoned to 2 acre lots - a total of 1,081 new dwellings could be built. Entire town re-zoned to 3 acre lots - a total of 699 new dwellings could be built. Entire town re-zoned to 5 acre lots – a total of 353 new dwellings could be built. |
|--|

Population at Build-Out. What would be the additional and projected total population under each of these scenarios? For this projection we assume that each housing unit will have a family at the same average family size as reported for Morris in the 2000 US Census (2.52 persons per household).

| |
|--|
| 2 acre zoning would yield an additional population of 2,724 and bring the total population to 5,924. 3 acre zoning would yield an additional population of 1,761 and bring the total population to 4,961. 5 acre zoning would yield an additional population of 890 and bring the total population to 4,090. |
|--|

At what total population and housing density will Morris lose its rural character and scenic quality? Morris unquestionably will be most changed under a build out

based the existing lot area requirements. This would more than double the town's population. If the R-40 zone is fully built out under the current zoning requirements when septic systems fail (they do not last forever) many lots will not have the space to permit construction of a replacement septic system. If this happens and Morris is forced to extend sewer lines to these areas this will likely lead to a dramatic change to the rural character of the town.

Of the various lot size scenarios the most reasonable is to change the current R-60 zone and the R-40 zone to R-80. This along with the requirement that the minimum lot area can not include inland wetlands, watercourses and steep slopes would produce a projected future "build-out" population of just under 6,000. This is not quite double (1.8 times) the current population and if absorbed gradually under sound zoning and subdivision design requirements it will protect against the threat of sewers and retain the town's rural appearance.

Action Recommendations

1. Establish an 80,000 square foot Minimum Lot Size in Morris with the requirement that the minimum lot area can not include inland wetlands, watercourses and steep slopes.

This appears to be the best option for Morris for a host of reasons. It will:

- Insure all new lots will have sufficient area for long term septic system sewer disposal.
- Eliminate the R-40 (40,000 square foot) lot size zoning in the existing drinking water supply areas which is consistent with State recommendations that show this is too small a lot size to insure protection of water quality at build-out.
- Increase the R-60 (60,000 square feet) minimum lot size area by only 20,000 square feet and bring this very large central area of the town up to a safe minimum for both water quality protection and to preserve rural character.
- Provide for a variety of lot sizes based on soil type and terrain because areas with substantial inland wetlands or steep slopes will produce lots of varying sizes.
- By eliminating steep slopes from the calculation of minimum lot size each lot will be more likely to have sufficient low or moderate sloped land for driveways, house and septic sites. This will help avoid construction on steep erosion prone sites, reduce regarding of land and the excessive removal of trees and native vegetation required to develop on steep slopes.

2. Protect Existing Residential Lot Owners. In making a change to R-80 existing lot owners in the R-60 and R-40 zones must be protected. The Zoning Regulations must state that under the law all existing lots of less than 80,000 square feet are "grandfathered" and protected and can be built out under the existing R-60 or R-40 lot size regulations.

Many Morris landowners indicate that they have long planned on creating another lot for a child, for college costs or retirement based on existing zoning requirements. It is recommended the Planning and Zoning Commission also consider preserving this option. In making the change to the new minimum R-80 zone the Commission can expressly

permit each existing lot owner in the R-60 and R-40 zones to create one additional lot under R-40 or R-60 lot size requirements. This option if enacted will not compromise the goal of protecting water quality or rural character.

Goal # 5: Infrastructure: Sewers, Roads and Community Facilities

To support and maintain a public sewer program serving the Bantam Lake area which eliminates septic sewage pollution, limit the expansion of the sewer lines to a defined area and preserves available treatment capacity for future failing septic systems.

To maintain a hierarchy of State, Town and Local residential roads which permit a safe and convenient system of traffic circulation, especially for emergency vehicles and to encourage road design and location which will enhance the Town's rural appearance.

Roads and Community Facilities

This section addresses the Town of Morris' road system, which includes all public and private roads. The primary objective for the town road system is to provide for safe and efficient traffic circulation. In a rural town such as the Morris an important objective is to design and layout new roads and maintain existing roads in a manner that supports the Town Plan land use policies and preserves the Town's rural scenic quality (Natural Resource Inventory, Scenic Road Inventory and Map, Figure 14, Scenic Roads, pp. 45-46.).

Town Road System

The Town of Morris maintained system of roads is identified on the State of Connecticut Road Aid List for the Town of Morris. Roads, road segments or road rights of way which don't appear on the State of Connecticut road aid list are either privately owned or town owned rights of way which are no longer maintained by the Town of Morris.

There are numerous private roads in the Town of Morris, especially in the Bantam Lake area such as the privately maintained roads serving Deer Island, which were not designed or constructed in compliance with the requirements of the Subdivision Regulation standards for road construction. The Planning and Zoning Commission has amended its regulations to discourage additional development of new lots on these private roads.

The road system in Morris is served by state highways that are the backbone of it's the Town road system. These are:

- Route 63 which runs north-south from Litchfield to Watertown.
- Route 109 which runs east-west from the Town of Thomaston on the east to the Town of Washington on the west. Rt. 109 passes through the Town's all the village centers - East Morris, Morris and Lakeside.
- Route 61 which runs north from Bethlehem to Morris center. The Fire House is on Route 61 and the Community Hall is on the corner of Route 61 and Route 109.

- Route 209 is another north-south state highway which begins at Route 109 and runs north along the west shore of Bantam Lake north to the Borough of Bantam.

Action Recommendations

1. It is recommended the following major town or collector roads be maintained at a standard of improvement that will permit safe traffic carrying capacity.

The primary collector roads are:

- Alain White Road - used to access White Memorial Foundation property and to Litchfield and Wamogo Regional High School.
- West Morris Road connects to State Rt. 202 and the Borough of Bantam.

Other roads that collect traffic on a lesser scale include:

- Benton Road and Anderson Road connector road from the center of town to Route 63.
- Higbie Road and Benton Road for connections to travel to Bethlehem, Woodbury and Route 6.
- Todd Hill Road for traffic Bethlehem and Woodbury.

2. Setbacks on Major Roads.

The Planning and Zoning Commission should consider increasing the front yard setback on major town roads to provide the necessary additional setback space to accommodate future needed widening of these more heavily traveled roads. Currently the front yard setback from the street property line is 35 feet in all major residential zones (not Deer Island District). It is recommended that the setback for new homes fronting on major town roads in these residential districts be increased to 50 feet at a minimum.

3. Volunteer Fire Department

The Town of Morris is fortunate to have a Volunteer Fire Department on South Street. The fire house consists of a six bay garage to support the storage of the Fire Trucks and equipment; there are bathroom facilities.

4. Fire Ponds and In Ground Fire Water Storage Tanks.

The Subdivision Regulations permit the Planning and Zoning Commission to require a fire pond to be constructed where needed for fire protection purposes. These regulations should be amended to include the option to require installation of an in-ground water storage tank for fire protection purposes. The Volunteer Fire Department and Fire Marshall must be given the authority to inspect these installations and owners of lots in the subdivision must be responsible for replacement of such in-ground tanks as needed.

5. Emergency Ambulance and 911 Service.

Until recently Morris's emergency ambulance and 911 services had been a volunteer operation. But the number of people available in town during daytime hours has declined to the point where there were not sufficient day time volunteers. As a result 911 services are now run at town expense by a private vendor that employs two daytime paramedics to operate the ambulance for emergency service during daytime hours. After hours, this is still managed by a volunteer staff. The town needs to consider all avenues for retaining emergency services volunteer including supporting accessory apartments and other affordable and moderate cost housing initiatives.

6. Update of the Subdivision Regulations

The Subdivision Regulations have not been updated since 1987. All sections of these regulations should be reviewed and updated to current State requirements for procedures. At the same time the standards and requirements for design and construction of roads, driveways, drainage, fire protection, open space and all other public related improvements should be reviewed and updated. Revisions should consider:

- stronger encouragement for submission of a preliminary subdivision plan,
- providing options for alternative subdivision designs including private road subdivisions, cluster or open space subdivisions and density bonus considerations for protection of open farm fields, ridgeline protection and provision for affordable housing,
- revised section on open space requirements including fee in lieu of open space,
- encouraging interior lots where the subdivision design will protect a valued natural or cultural resource feature,
- possible reduction in required road pavement width for dead end streets, and
- revision to the drainage section to encourage Low Impact Development drainage catchment and treatment systems.

Sewers

The 1960 Town Plan recognized the developing sewage disposal problem in the west shore area of Bantam Lake. The western Bantam Lake shoreline area along Route 209 from the Town of Litchfield line to just south of Deer Island is intensively developed with houses on small lots. As warned in the 1960 plan the conversion of summer cottages to year-round housing placed a strain on the septic systems designed for summer use.

By 1965 serious septic problems were being recorded in the west shore area of Bantam Lake. These problems became increasingly more serious over the next decade as many small lots had no area suitable for re-placement septic fields. Many lots on the west shore were developed before zoning on small lots of 10,000 square feet.

Compounding this problem soils in the west shore are generally not well suited for septic use. Finally in 1979, the State of Connecticut issued an order to the Town of Morris to install a public sewer system to correct the pollution caused by failed septic systems in this area.

In 1983, the Town responded by approving funds for construction of a sewer line from the Litchfield Sewage Treatment Plant to the west shore area in the Town of Morris. An engineering consulting firm designed and oversaw the sewer line installation. They prepared a map titled “Bantam Lake Area Sewer Project”, showing the total drainage area for Morris sewer service lines. It encompasses 386 acres from south of Deer Island north along Route 209 to North Shore Road in the Town of Litchfield.

In 1983 the engineers estimated that “approximately 50% of the land in this (sewer) drainage area had been developed. They determined an additional 32% or 123 acres was potentially suitable for development, with the remaining 18% (70 acres) wetlands.

The following is the zoning break down of the 123 acres suitable for development.

Zoning of 123 acres of developable land in drainage area.

| <u>Acreage</u> | <u>Percentage</u> | <u>Zone</u> |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 38 | 32 | Lake Commercial |
| 60 | 48 | Light Industrial |
| 25 | 20 | Residential |

Under an Inter-Town agreement the Town of Morris compensates the Town of Litchfield for the right to discharge 75,000 gallons of sewage per day to the Litchfield Sewage Treatment Plant. The agreement allows the Town of Morris some flexibility to exceed the 75,000 gallon per day limit; however, the Town of Morris must pay a higher rate for the volume over 75,000.

Unfortunately Morris and Litchfield have not agreed on the sewer volume flowing to the Litchfield treatment plant from Morris. This disagreement involves questions on the impact of storm water infiltrations into the sewer system and questions over the reading of the meter that monitors the sewer flow.

In order to avoid the need for a sewer treatment plant in Morris a more aggressive sewer avoidance program should be adopted.

Action Recommendations

1. Sewer Avoidance.

Previous town plans, Morris Water Pollution Control Agency (Sewer Commission) and the Planning and Zoning Commission agree that sewers should be avoided outside of the west shore area of Bantam Lake. To some degree local commissions are practicing

“sewer avoidance” techniques. However a more aggressive proactive program is needed and recommended. The elements of this program should include:

- The identification of the areas of special concern for potential septic system failure in the Bantam Lake area by the WPCA.
- Conducting inspections of septic systems by the WPCA or the Health Department in areas of special concern for septic failures at least one every three years.
- Adopting a town ordinance that requires pump out of septic systems in areas of special concern at least once every three years and more if required based upon inspection findings.
- Increasing minimum lot size requirements to two acres not including inland wetlands and steep slopes is a key part of a town wide sewer avoidance program.

Other communities in Connecticut have found that this type of sewer avoidance program works. It catches failing system early when remedial action can avoid complete failure. Lake towns such as New Fairfield on Candlewood Lake have avoided installing sewers through a similar sewer avoidance inspection and required pump out program for its small lake shore lots.

2. Establish a Sewer District – WPCA/Sewer Commission.

In the next year the WPCA/Sewer Commission should identify and formally adopt a map showing the boundaries of the Morris Sewer Service Area. The town plan supports limiting the area to be served by sewers in Morris to the west shore of Bantam Lake as needed to prevent pollution caused by septic failures. The WPCA Sewer Service Area map should also be formally incorporated into the town plan.

3. Revise Section 67 of the Zoning Regulation - Update the Requirements on Hazardous Materials.

The Planning and Zoning Commission can use the model Aquifer Protection Regulations as guidance in revision of this section of the Zoning Regulations.

LAND USE PLAN MAP

The map title “Town of Morris Location Guide and Land Use Plan Map” is hereby made a part of this Plan of Conservation and Development. This map shows the general pattern of future land use in the Town of Morris. Detailed information on future land use is provided in the text of this plan.

