

# Booklet 2: Summary of Issues

## Overview

When updating a Plan of Conservation and Development it is important to first learn which issues and topics are most important to the community and should be addressed in the Plan. A number of techniques helped to solicit input from local officials and residents (see sidebar). This report first provides an overview of key issues that arose and then provides details from the public input workshop and on-line survey.

This report highlights key issues that might warrant attention in the updated Plan of Conservation and Development based upon the following community input:

- Community tour with the Planning and Zoning Commission (October 29, 2011)
- Questionnaires sent to local board and commission members and Department Heads (November, 2011)
- Issues Scoping meeting with the Planning & Zoning Commission (November 22, 2011)
- Public Workshop (November 30, 2011)
- On-line issues survey taken by 125 residents (December, 2011)



# Overview of Key Issues

This summary identifies key issues that arose during the input process. There are many additional issues (e.g., natural resource protection, farmland preservation, overall sustainability, access management, etc.) which also will be addressed in the plan.

## Conservation

“Conservation” focuses on what to protect in the community, such as natural resources, community character, open space, farmland and historic resources.

- **Strong Community Spirit / Pride – But Lack of Identity:** Residents expressed great pride in their community and often noted that it’s the people (their neighbors, town workers, local businesses) that all make South Windsor a special place and a great community to live in and raise children in. But they also think South Windsor is too much of a hidden secret and lacks a recognizable identity within the region or state.
- **Continue to Preserve Open Space and Better Manage What We Have:** Residents greatly appreciate South Windsor’s open space for its contributions to the overall character of the Town and the recreational opportunities provided by it. There was general agreement that the Town (and land preservation organizations) should continue to preserve open space. In addition, the Town could better maintain existing open space and determine what to do with smaller parcels acquired over time that require maintenance but do not contribute to the Town’s overall open space system.
- **Historic Main Street is a Treasure that Should Be Maintained:** The community appreciates their “historic Main Street” or “Old Main Street” and recognize that many of the large lots could be divided, possibly altering the historic landscape. The Plan should assess this potential and determine options to preserve historic Main Street.

## Development

“Development” includes how development is organized within the Town, economic development, residential development and housing needs.

- **Pleased with “Balance” of Development, but Beware of “Overdevelopment”:** Many residents and local officials lauded the “balance” of development in South Windsor. They felt there is a good mixture of businesses, industry, housing and open space. In other words, they like how South Windsor has developed to date. However, many feared the eventual “overdevelopment” – yet it is unclear what would constitute overdevelopment. For some, “overdevelopment” seemed to mean higher density housing while for others it seemed to mean businesses and industry too close to their neighborhood.
- **Lack of True Town Center:** Residents (particularly in the on-line survey) bemoaned the lack of a true town center with outdoor gathering areas and walkability.
- **Route 5 Corridor Overall:** Residents and officials agree that Route 5 should remain a business corridor, but expressed concerns over the appearance of buildings, unsightly vacant buildings and unkempt grounds, and identified some traffic concerns at intersections.
- **Vacant Buildings:** While this issue also applies to the Route 5 corridor, the presence of vacant buildings and buildings and grounds that are not maintained (such as on Sullivan Ave.) were a top concern by local officials and residents.

- **Lack of Agreement on Residential Development:** Some residents and local officials do not want to see additional planned developments, condominiums, age-restricted housing or apartments and feel that the Town provides enough opportunities. Others feel that there is a need for rentals and for more age-restricted housing. The POCD update process should examine demographic and housing trends. Discussions with real estate agents may also provide some insight into the demand side.

## Infrastructure

“Infrastructure” are those things needed to support the community such as community facilities, transportation, and utilities.

- **Community Facilities = High Quality of Life:** Parks, recreation programs and facilities, and the library were among the most cited “prouds.” Meanwhile the condition of schools, the senior center, and some athletic fields were top “sorrys”. Residents want to maintain (and in many cases expand) these amenities, but are also mindful of the need to keep taxes affordable. Residents and local officials noted the importance of growing the business tax base to support community facilities.
- **Being on the Forefront of Technology:** Many local officials noted the importance of the Town staying up-to-date on using technology to more efficiently operate town government. While South Windsor is ahead of many communities when it comes to using technology to communicate with residents, local officials felt that more can be done or improvements can be made.
- **Residents Want Walking and Biking to be Viable Transportation Options:** There was very strong feedback from residents and local officials that walking and biking are (or are perceived to be) unsafe in many parts of Town. Despite challenges (abutters who oppose sidewalks; narrow right-of-ways), residents would like to have walking and biking as transportation choices.
- **Traffic is a Nuisance but Did Not Rise to the Level of Other Issues:** Residents expressed concerns about congestion on certain roads or at particular intersections and caution that traffic should be carefully managed. However, traffic and congestion concerns did not rise to level of other issues.

# Details - Public Input

## Overview

At the public workshop, residents participated in four exercises prior to having a room-wide discussion:

- Attendees placed a blue dot on the map to indicate where they live.
- Attendees placed green dots on things they are “proud” of.
- Attendees placed orange dots on things they are “sorry” about.
- Attendees were given 50 “planning points” in different denominations (1 @ 20, 2 @ 10, 2 @ 5) and asked to place their planning points in different ballot boxes based on how important they felt that issue was for South Windsor to address as part of the planning process.

The on-line survey asked people to list 4 things or places they are proud of and sorry about. They also allocated planning points among the same topics as the public workshop. Mapping information was not collected via the on-line survey.

## Where Do You Live?





## What Are You Proud Of?

### Top “Prouds” at Workshop

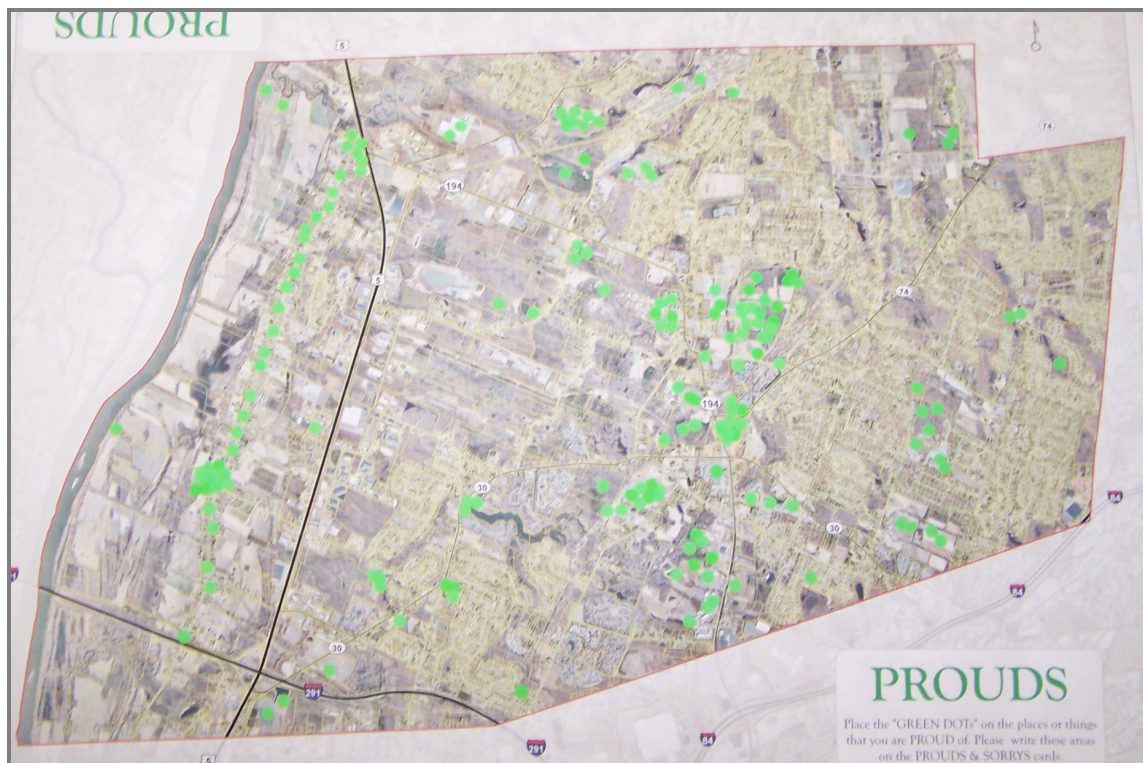
- Nevers Park (9 mentions)
- Main Street (9)
- Wood Library (9)
- Wapping Park (6)
- Open space and parks generally (6)
- Evergreen Walk (7)
- Schools (5)

### Top “Prouds” via On-Line Survey

- Schools (46 mentions)
- Open space and parks generally (41)
- Nevers Park (26)
- Evergreen Walk (25)
- Public Library (22)
- Veteran’s Memorial Park / Pool (20)
- Things related to Town’s character (19)
- Main Street (19)

### Sampling of other “Prouds” from Workshop and On-Line Survey

- Conservation-related: Farms, golf courses, trails, historic buildings
- Development-related: Specific businesses, taxes from economic development, access to stores/services
- Infrastructure-related: Boundless Playground, Town Hall, Community Center, athletic fields, bike lanes/paths



## What Are You Sorry About?

### Top “Sorrys” at Workshop

- Vacant / semi-vacant / appearance of shopping plazas on Sullivan Ave. (19 mentions)
- Route 5– appearance, vacant buildings, road surface (11)
- CT Studios – slow progress (4)

### Top “Sorrys” via On-Line Survey

- Lack of pedestrian facilities (17)
- Condition of or lack of recreation facilities (16)
- Too much development (14)
- School buildings (14)
- Vacant / semi-vacant / appearance of shopping plaza’s on Sullivan Ave. (13)

### Sampling of other “Sorrys” from Workshop and On-Line Survey

- Conservation-related: lack of use of Connecticut River, lack of “charm”
- Development-related: business-area lighting, Town Center, too much residential development
- Infrastructure-related: lack of indoor pool, specific intersections, lack of sidewalks, lack of public transportation



### Sampling of Comments from On-line Survey

"When we moved here 17 years ago I liked that [South Windsor] had a rural feel but was close enough to everything you needed without driving a half hour to get there. It's important to me to maintain that same feel for the town."

"...I'd like to see South Windsor keep its traditional "country atmosphere" while still having modern conveniences."

"Open spaces define us and give relaxing places to go. Agriculture is also important to make sure that our foods are grown locally, saving more resources."

"Keep South Windsor the charming town it is so future generations may experience this important historical value of the town."

"Creating a town center and developing a town character will make it a destination, a place people and businesses want to be."

"It would be nice if the town were more structured, but we have one small shopping area (Geislars) about 2 miles from the Town Hall and a major shopping area (Evergreen) about a half mile beyond that. If we can't have everything in one place, at least provide safe sidewalks and biking lanes to connect them all."

"The town needs more development. However it needs to be planned to benefit the community".

"I truly believe that South Windsor needs to concentrate on increasing business in the business areas, ie; Buckland Rd, Sullivan Ave, etc. and leave the rest of the town rural."

"Traffic and Water/Sewer/Utilities effect all residents on a daily basis. I hope we continue to leverage state/federal money to improve the infrastructure."

## Planning Points Summary - Public Workshop

	Issue #1 (20 pts)	Issue #2 (10 pts)	Issue #3 (5 pts)	Total Points
<b>Conservation Issues</b>				
Natural Resources	0	80	20	100
Open Space	240	150	50	440
Community Character	40	80	55	185
Agriculture	0	20	40	60
<i>Total Points for Conservation Issues</i>				785

# 1 issue

<b>Development Issues</b>				
Community Structure	0	20	30	50
Residential Development	0	0	0	0
Housing Needs	40	20	0	60
Business Development	140	80	45	265
<i>Total Points for Development Issues</i>				375

# 3 issue

<b>Infrastructure Issues</b>				
Community Facilities	80	70	50	200
Traffic and Circulation	60	30	20	110
Walking / Biking / Bus	120	130	40	290
Water / Sewers / Utilities	0	20	10	30
<i>Total Points for Infrastructure Issues</i>				630

# 2 issue



## Planning Points Summary - On-Line Survey

	Issue #1 (20 pts)	Issue #2 (10 pts)	Issue #3 (5 pts)	Total Points
<b>Conservation Issues</b>				
Natural Resources	100	170	95	365
Open Space	360	240	145	745
Community Character	180	240	110	530
Agriculture	80	90	85	255
<i>Total Points for Conservation Issues</i>				1,895

# 2 issue

<b>Development Issues</b>				
Community Structure	220	330	100	650
Residential Development	20	50	45	115
Housing Needs	20	40	20	80
Business Development	340	210	90	640
<i>Total Points for Development Issues</i>				1,485

<b>Infrastructure Issues</b>				
Community Facilities	340	270	130	740
Traffic and Circulation	0	150	45	195
Walking / Biking / Bus	440	280	75	795
Water / Sewers / Utilities	120	130	130	380
<i>Total Points for Infrastructure Issues</i>				2,110

# 3 issue

# 1 issue

## Reasons for Points on Top Issues (Workshop and On-line Survey)

### Open Space

- Urgency – undeveloped land is disappearing, need to act now to preserve additional open space and to control growth, some feel that more can be done
- Because of the benefits it provides:
  - Protects wildlife, preserves agricultural land, preserves rural character
  - Provides a living classrooms for students to learn about nature
  - Adds to overall quality of life and can attract new residents and businesses
  - Provides healthy outdoor activities
- Need to care for, maintain what we have
- Would like to see open space along Connecticut River
- How to preserve:
  - Town purchase
  - Collaboration with non-profit land protection organizations
  - Purchase development rights rather than out-right ownership
- Important to acquire meaningful open space, not just any parcel simply because it is available

### Business Development

- Why important:
  - Tax dollars to pay for the things the community wants and to keep residential taxes down (by far, the most frequently mentioned reason for business development)
  - Jobs
  - Goods and services
  - To make South Windsor a destination town like West Hartford, Glastonbury, Old Saybrook
- Issues:
  - Route 5 – appearance, traffic, road in bad shape, intersections, slow development, lack of architectural appeal, no cohesive plan for the corridors
  - Vacancies and appearance of commercial plazas on Sullivan Ave.
  - Evergreen Walk – concerns that quality of stores is sliding, mixed opinions about the approved residential component
  - Access issues – traffic makes it difficult to enter, exit some businesses
  - Lack of gas station in the center of town
  - Are we giving too much for incentives to entice businesses here
  - Truck traffic, particularly on Sullivan Ave.

- Desirable businesses: clean industry, non-chain restaurants, incubators, technology, need more office space, medical offices, businesses that produce things, small shops, mixed use, industrial
- Businesses to avoid: more services, large retail complexes
- Strategies:
  - Fill vacant buildings
  - Need a vision and plan for Route 5
  - Encourage more business development on Sullivan Ave., Buckland Road, Route 5, I-291 corridor
  - Showcase South Windsor to businesses (e.g., recent business expo)
  - Solve access issues, improve connectivity between businesses, allow to park once and walk (provide businesses with what they need to attract them)
  - Clear policies / criteria for business incentives – eligible businesses and type / amount of incentives
  - Need full time economic development staff
  - Maintain regulations that are flexible in terms of uses but prevent what we don't want
  - Need a strong image to attract businesses (branding)

## **Community Facilities**

- General:
  - Community facilities add to quality of life and thereby help South Windsor compete with other communities to attract businesses and residents
- Issues:
  - Elementary schools keep getting voted down (discussion about feeling that there is a lack of information about the subjects of referendums and that numerous projects should not be bundled, but State law limits what the Town can say about the subjects of referenda)
  - Lack of indoor pool
  - Demographic changes / trends and how will they affect key decisions about community facilities?
  - Shortage of sport fields
  - Many feel that more should be allocated to facilities and services for seniors, while others feel there is too much focus on seniors and not enough on families
- Strategies:
  - Seniors need their own center
  - Desire for indoor pool, additional recreational facilities
  - Partner with others, such as YMCA, for recreational facilities; town can't be all things to all people, look for grants also

## Walking / Biking / Bus

- Why:
  - Unsafe to ride a bike or walk in many places
  - Children cannot get around unless driven
  - Lack of transit opportunities, lack of user-friendly bus service, covered shelters with schedules, etc.
  - More environmentally sound to walk or bike
  - More sidewalks and bike paths adds to quality of life
  - People get to know one another better when they walk around their community
- Strategies:
  - Would like to be able to get around on foot or bike, be walking and bike friendly
  - Update sidewalk ordinance so that abutters are not responsible for cost of repairs
  - Sidewalks should be a community decision, not a neighborhood decision
  - Make sidewalks wide enough for multi-use
  - Sidewalks are not the only answer to being more pedestrian-friendly – roadside paths, trails and wide shoulders also help
  - Sidewalks should be attractive materials, e.g., brick
  - Sidewalks should be provided to bus stops
  - Think about alternative vehicles, like trikes for elderly
  - Compact growth patterns support walkability
  - Plan for and provide transportation choices in the future
  - Provide bike trail along Connecticut River
- Challenges:
  - Even with sidewalks, people need to feel safe
  - People say they want sidewalks but abutters oppose when proposed
  - Snow shoveling is only an issue a few months of the year - maybe there would be better reception to building sidewalks if they don't have to be shoveled
  - Paying for sidewalks
  - Not all road rights-of-way are wide enough to fit sidewalks
  - Is the demand there for sidewalks and bike paths? Most people are still wedded to their car.



### Other Issues that Received a High Level of Attention

- Lack of a true “Town Center” – this issue was especially prevalent in the on-line survey (it was the 4<sup>th</sup> top issue).
- Character:
  - While residents love the town’s character, they feel that South Windsor does not have a recognizable image or brand. As one on-line respondent stated, “Are you by the airport? No one understands what South Windsor is.”
  - Many want to see more community events and places for community gatherings.
- Agriculture – desire to preserve farmland for economic and aesthetic reasons and because farming is important to South Windsor’s heritage.
- Residential Development – opinions were very split with some identifying a need or desire for more elderly housing and / or rentals with others very firm in their opinion that additional apartments, planned developments, and age-restricted housing should be curbed.
- Traffic – many identified road maintenance as an issue.