

RIDGEFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

WORKING PAPERS 1, 2, & 3

Submitted April 14th, 2014

to the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission



Kevin Dwarka LLC
Land Use & Economic Consulting

RIDGEFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

WORKING PAPER 1: EXISTING CONDITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Document

This document compiles census data to provide a demographic and economic baseline as a tool for establishing the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission's strategic plan over the next 24 months. A second working paper summarizes prior planning studies. A third working paper will lay out an economic development strategy based upon the first two working papers as well as input from key stakeholders in Ridgefield's economic development community.

Geographic Scope of Analysis

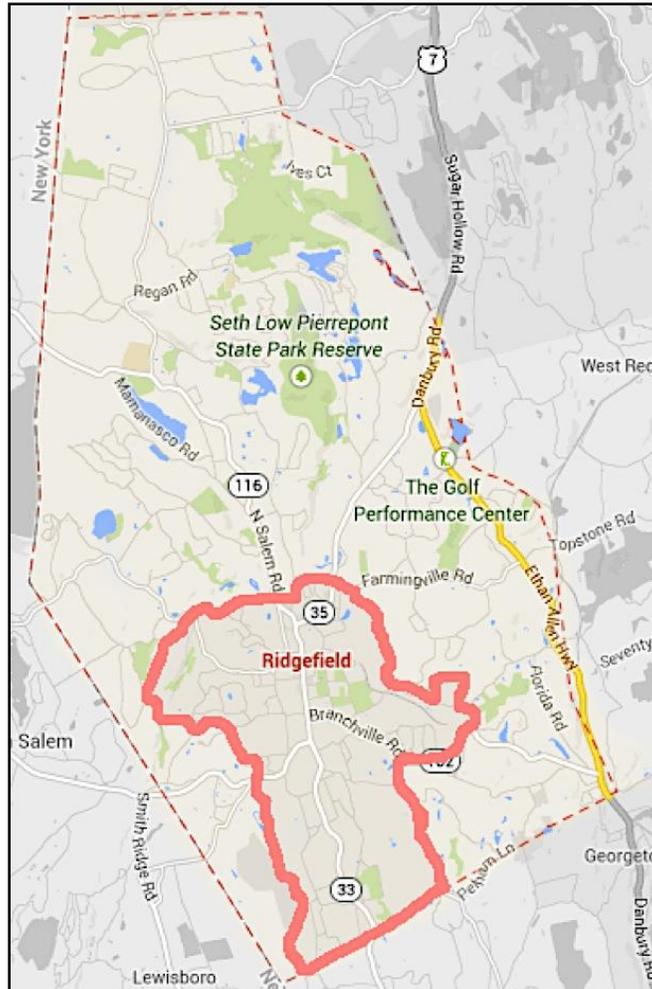
The Town of Ridgefield is located within Fairfield County and in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains. The Town has a total area of 35 square miles and is bordered by Danbury to the north, Wilton to the south, North Salem and Lewisboro to the west, and Redding to the east. Branchville is a section of the southeast corner of the Town of Ridgefield and anchored by a Metro North railroad station.

This document presents census data at the level of the town. However, much of the spatial analysis in this document focuses on conditions within the town's Census Designated Place ("CDP"), comprised of the town center as depicted below within the solid red border in the map below. The CDP is approximately 6.5 square miles. The CDP was chosen as the focus area for mapping for two key reasons. First, census data at the town level has been previously gathered and appears in other documents such as the Ridgefield Town Profile prepared by CERC.¹ Providing information at the level of the CDP therefore offers a finer grain approach compared with other documentation of existing conditions. Secondly, there is a high degree of importance in prioritizing economic development strategies within the town center and so a more focused documentation will be useful for future planning and market analyses.

Also presented in this document is data disaggregated at the level of Census Block Groups (CBG). The CBG includes areas within the CDP as well some neighboring areas outside of Ridgefield because CBGs do not perfectly align with the CDP area. Nonetheless, the disaggregation of data at the CBG level is useful because it reveals economic variations within the CDP.

¹ See Ridgefield, Connecticut Town Profile: <http://www.cerc.com/TownProfiles/Custom-Images/ridgefield.pdf>

FIGURE 1: BOUNDARIES OF THE TOWN OF RIDGEFIELD AND ITS CENSUS DESIGNATED PLACE



Source of Base Map: Google Maps

SECTION I: DEMOGRAPHICS

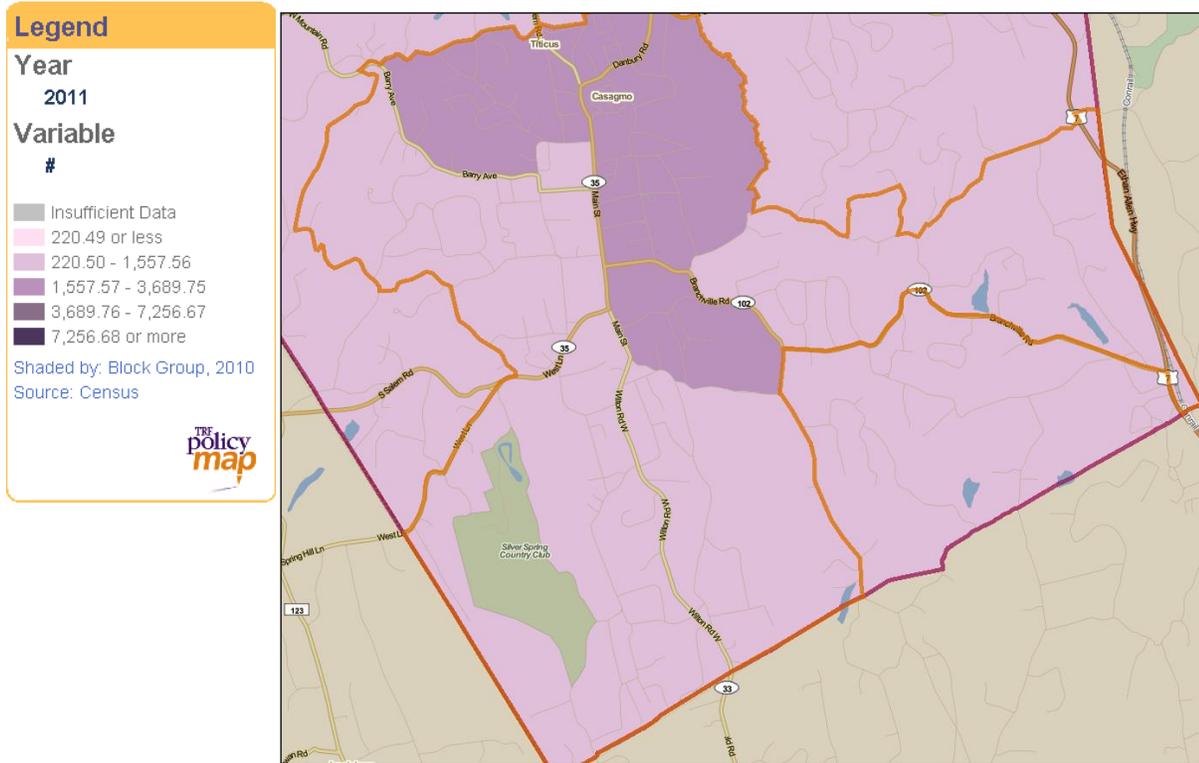
Population Estimates

According to the Decennial Census data, the total population for the Town of Ridgefield was calculated as 24,638 in 2010. Population growth in recent years has ranged from 1% to 7% annually. As noted in the Ridgefield Plan of Conservation and Development, the major growth in the Town of Ridgefield occurred during the 1950s (87%) and 1960s (123%).

The total population within the CDP in 2010 was 7,645, a 5.3% increase since the 2000 Census. Additionally, the estimated American Community Survey (2007-2011) data suggest continued growth up to 7,961 for the center, a 4.1% increase. However, given the different methodology of the 2011 data, this information likely overestimates the true growth in population.

Census data confirms that much of Ridgefield’s population is concentrated in the town center, and specifically into the region bounded to the west by Barry Avenue and Main Street, to the east by the Ridgefield Brook, and to the south by Whipstick Road.

FIGURE 2: POPULATION LEVELS IN THE RIDGEFIELD CDP BY CENSUS BLOCK GROUP



Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Population Forecast

According to the UCONN State Data Center, the population of the Town of Ridgefield is expected to climb from 25,169 in 2010 to 26,728 in 2020 to 27,974 in 2030.²

Racial and Ethnic Demographics

Comparisons for racial demographics were made between the Ridgefield CDP and the greater Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk metropolitan statistical area in Connecticut. Numbers for the “Hispanic” group include both non-white and white Hispanics. Based on the data, the Ridgefield CDP seems to be more racially homogeneous than the surrounding MSA.

² See data published by Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials in the 2009 Housing Market Assessment: http://www.hvceo.org/housing_market_assessment.pdf

FIGURE 3: RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS WITHIN THE RIDGEFIELD CDP AND MSA

Race	Ridgefield CDP	Metropolitan Statistical Area
White	92.92%	72.62%
Asian	4.36%	4.56%
Hispanic (All)	4.11%	16.45%
African-American	0.2%	10.65%

Source: American Community Survey Data

Age

The population within the CDP seems to be younger than the surrounding regions. Within the Ridgefield CDP the median age is 40 compared to 42 for the city as a whole, with the densest block group also having the lowest median age (36).

FIGURE 4: COMPARISON OF AGE DISTRIBUTION: CDP VS. MSA

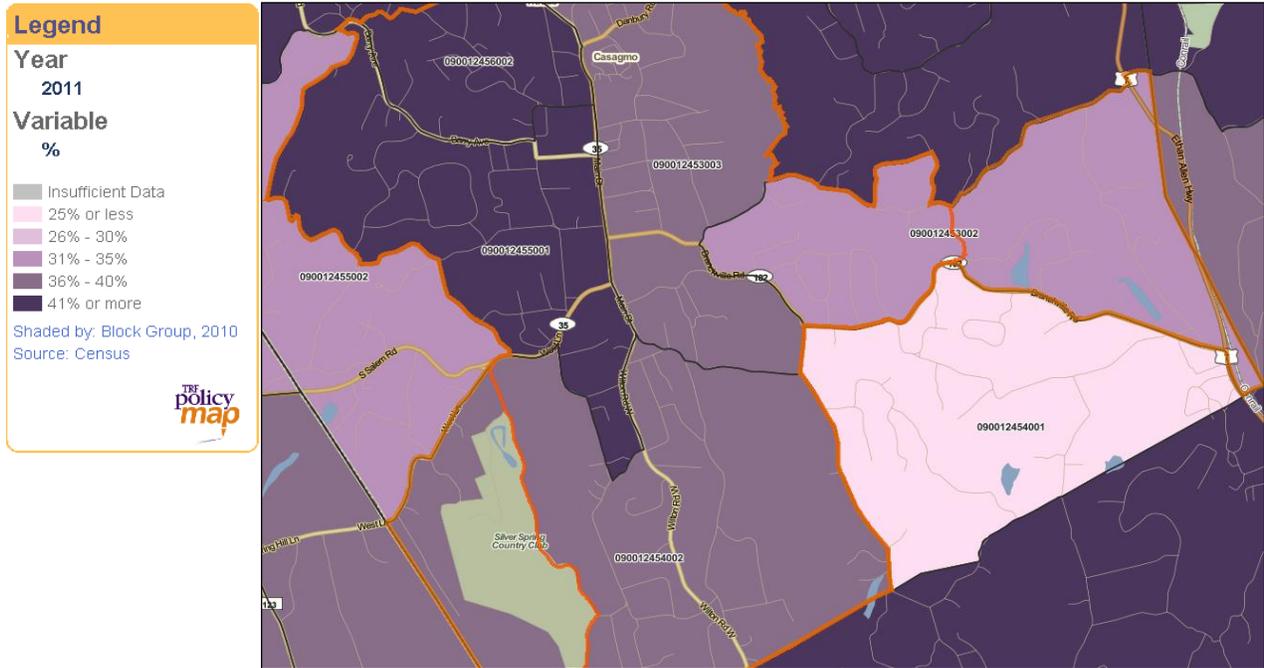
Age Interval	Ridgefield CDP	Metropolitan Statistical Area
Under 5	5.94%	6.28%
5-17	23.28%	18.63%
Working Age (18-64)	55.11%	61.64%
Over 65	15.67%	13.45%

Source: American Community Survey Data

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment within the Ridgefield CDP area is significantly higher than the surrounding area, with 41.1% of the CDP having attained at least a Bachelor’s degree, as compared to 24.91% for the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk MSA.

FIGURE 5: ATTAINMENT OF BACHELOR'S DEGREE

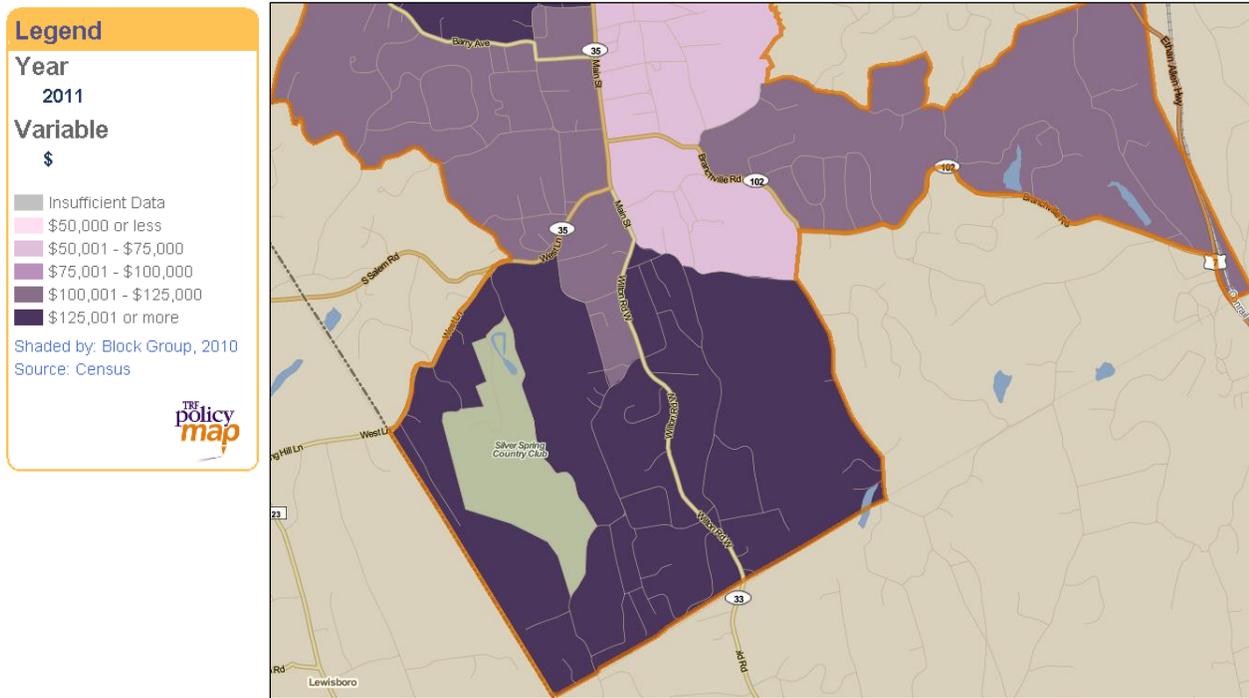


Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Income

For Ridgefield as a whole, the estimated median household income of \$145,000 was significantly larger than the surrounding region, which was \$82,558 for the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk MSA and \$69,243 for Connecticut at large. However, of note, the median household income within the CDP was only \$109,744, due to the disparity of incomes within the block group. As shown below, one of the block groups shown to be one of the most dense in terms of population also had the lowest median income: \$72,077.

FIGURE 6: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY CENSUS BLOCK GROUP



Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Family Structure

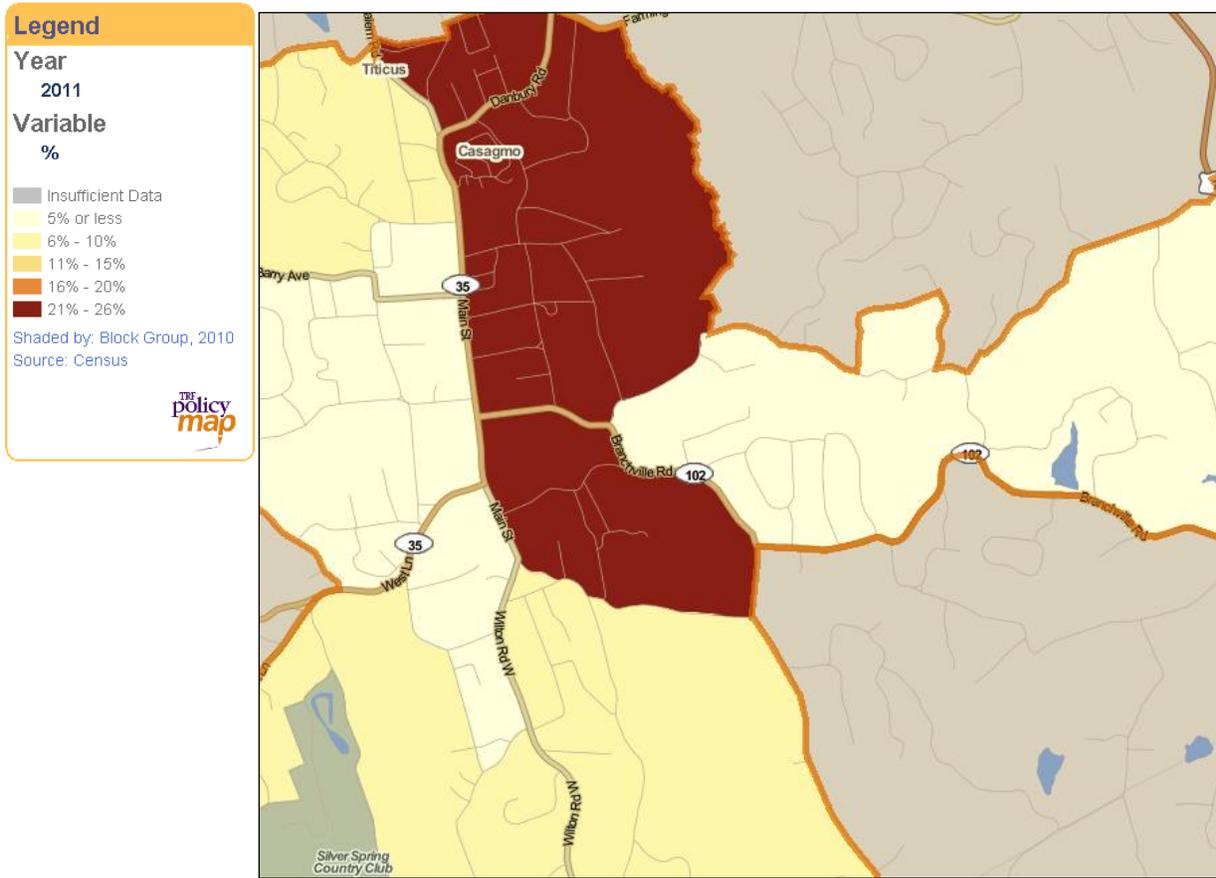
In general, Ridgefield has a larger population married and with children when compared to both the Metropolitan Area and to Connecticut at large. However, as far as single families with children, Ridgefield has comparable statistics to the MSA and Connecticut. However, single families with children within the CDP were estimated to disproportionately (almost entirely) headed by females. Additionally, the block group with the lowest median income seems to contain a significantly higher percentage of single female headed families with children (25.68%).

FIGURE 7: FAMILY TYPE

	Ridgefield CDP	Metro Area	Connecticut
Total Families	2,031	229,222	908,824
Married with Children	47.07%	38.01%	32.61%
Single with Children	11.32%	11.16%	13.6%
Single Female with Children	11.32%	9.14%	10.92%
Other Families	41.61%	50.84%	53.79%

Source: American Community Survey Data

FIGURE 8: SINGLE FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES BY BLOCK GROUP



Source: Policy Map based on American Community Survey Data

SECTION II: ECONOMIC PROFILE

Unemployment Rate

More granular unemployment data is not available for the Town of Ridgefield from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 2012, Fairfield County had a lower unemployment rate of 7.8% than Connecticut at large, 8.4%. Data was not available for the MSA.

Sources of Employment

In general, data for sources of employment for the CDP are similar to that of the metropolitan area, as well as for the state of Connecticut. However, a few industries that stood out are Finance & Insurance, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Manufacturing, where Ridgefield has a significantly smaller proportion of employees. By contrast, Ridgefield has significantly more employees in Educational Services and Retail Trade.

FIGURE 9: SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT

	Ridgefield CDP	Metropolitan Statistical Area	Connecticut
Accommodation and Food Services	8.06%	6.03%	6.79%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management Services	4.2%	5.86%	5.05%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Farming	0.02%	0.07%	0.28%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	3.9%	2.18%	2.57%
Construction	1.59%	2.91%	3.2%
Educational Services	23.73%	9.89%	11.4%
Finance & Insurance	4.16%	9.52%	7.36%
Health Care & Social Assistance	8.19%	14.75%	16.44%
Information	2.93%	2.93%	2.26%
Manufacturing	1.34%	9.54%	10.68%
Management of Companies	0.34%	3.3%	1.92%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	6.19%	7.54%	5.58%
Real Estate & Rental and Leasing	1.55%	1.35%	1.2%
Retail Trade	15.48%	11.28%	10.84%
Transportation and Warehousing	1.48%	2.17%	2.5%
Wholesale Trade	3.56%	4%	4.08%

Source: Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Data (2011)

Major Employers in the Area

According to the 2012 CERC Town Profile for Ridgefield, the town’s five major employers in 2006 were:

- Boehringer-Ingelheim
- Schlumberger Doll Research (has since moved out of the town)
- Town of Ridgefield
- Adam Boderick Salon & Spa
- Laurel Ridge Health Care Center

Tax Revenue Sources

According to the 2012 CERC Town Profile for Ridgefield, the town’s major sources of tax revenue on the Grand List in 2009 were Boehringer Ingelheim, Ridgefield Properties, and Ridgefield Professional Office.

Sales Tax Revenue

According to the 2012 CERC Town Profile for Ridgefield, retail sales in 2007 totaled \$353.2 million.

SECTION III: HOUSING CONDITIONS

Total Number of Housing Units

There are 3,369 housing units within the CDP, and 8,948 within Ridgefield as a whole, as estimated for 2007-2011 American Community Survey.

Housing Type

Although the composition of housing in the area of analysis is for the most part equivalent to the surround Metro Area and to Connecticut, one notable difference is the proportion of units in large apartment buildings (defined as buildings with 20 or more units).

FIGURE 10: HOUSING TYPE

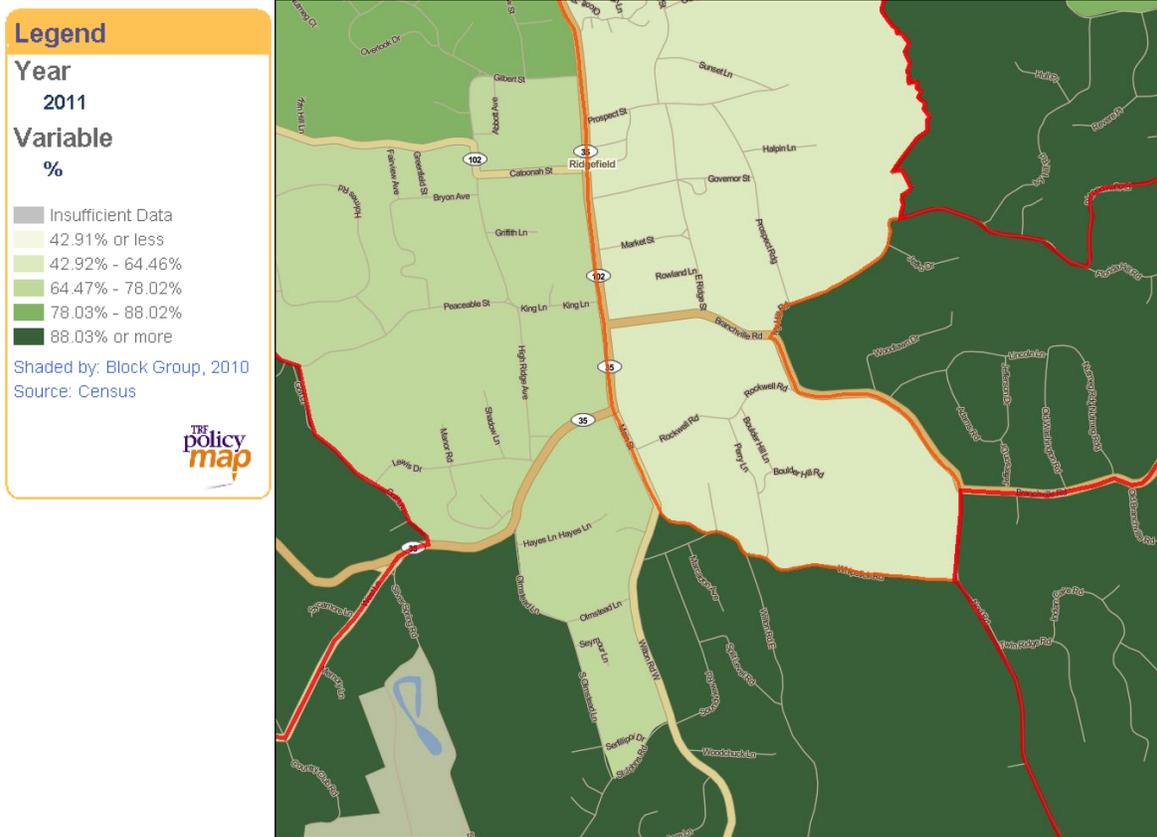
Housing Type	Ridgefield CDP	Metro Area	Connecticut
Single family detached homes	66.84%	58.01%	59.31%
Single family attached homes	5.79%	6.23%	5.21%
2-unit homes and duplexes	5.16%	8.47%	8.05%
Units in small apt buildings	18.25%	17.11%	18.08%
Units in large apt buildings	3.95%	9.82%	8.48%

Source: American Community Survey Data

Housing Tenure

Within the CDP, approximately 72.37% of households were estimated to be occupied by the owners from 2007 to 2011, according to the American Community Survey. This percentage is roughly equal to that proportion across the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT Metro Area (70.36%) and Connecticut (68.92%). However, at the Census Block Group level, the same block group as above with the highest proportion of single female headed households also shows the lowest home ownership rate (51.27%).

FIGURE 11: HOME OWNERSHIP



Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Average Household Size

The average household size for Ridgefield is roughly equivalent to the surrounding region.

FIGURE 12: HOME OWNERSHIP

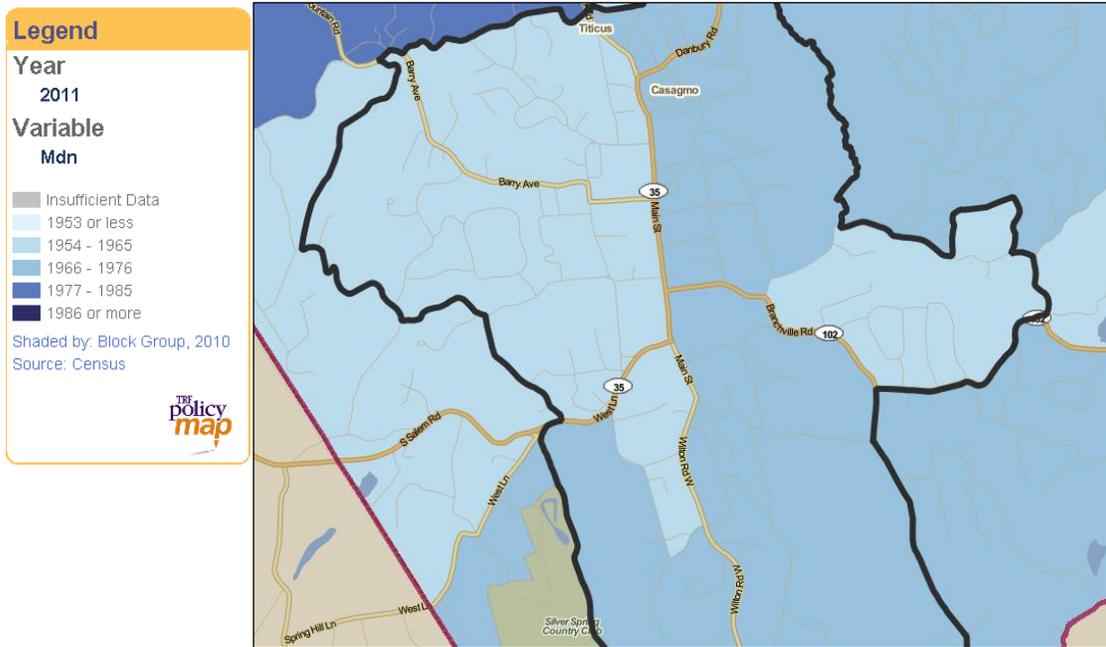
Ridgefield CDP	Metropolitan Statistical Area	Connecticut
2.57	2.68	2.53

Source: American Community Survey Data

Age of Housing Units

The median age of construction for a housing unit within the city of Ridgefield is 1968, compared to 1962 and 1964 in the Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk MSA and Connecticut, respectively.

FIGURE 13: MEDIAN AGE OF HOUSING UNIT BY CENSUS BLOCK GROUP

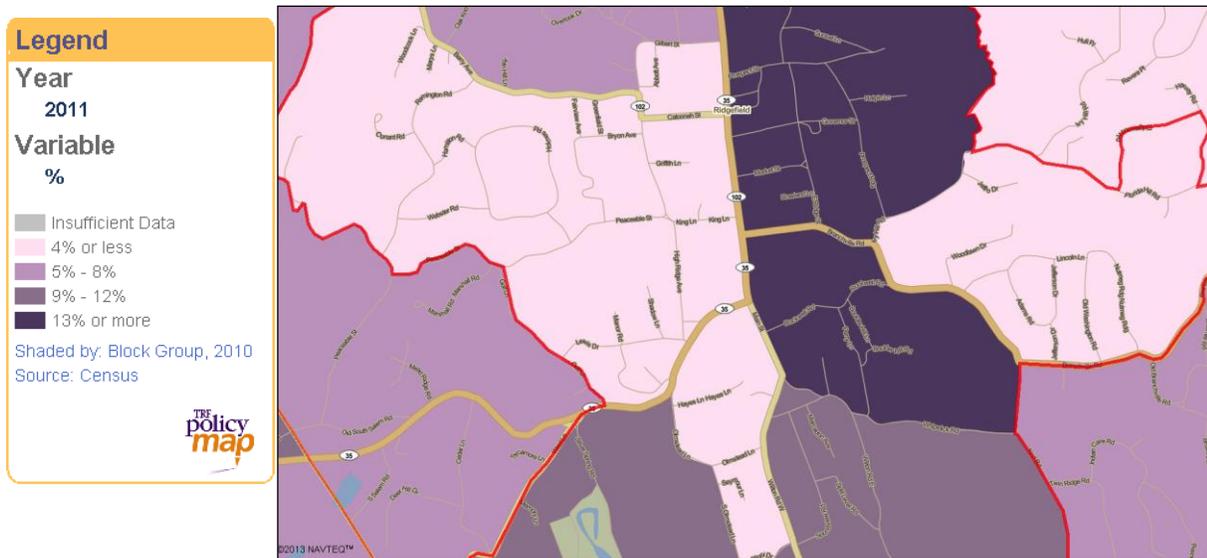


Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Housing Vacancies

Based upon American Community Survey data, 8.16% of the total number of housing units in the CDP are vacant compared with only 7.71% for the MSA and 8.27% for Connecticut. However, the map below indicates a high concentration of vacancies within the above-referenced Census Block Group (12.48%).

FIGURE 14: HOUSING VACANCIES

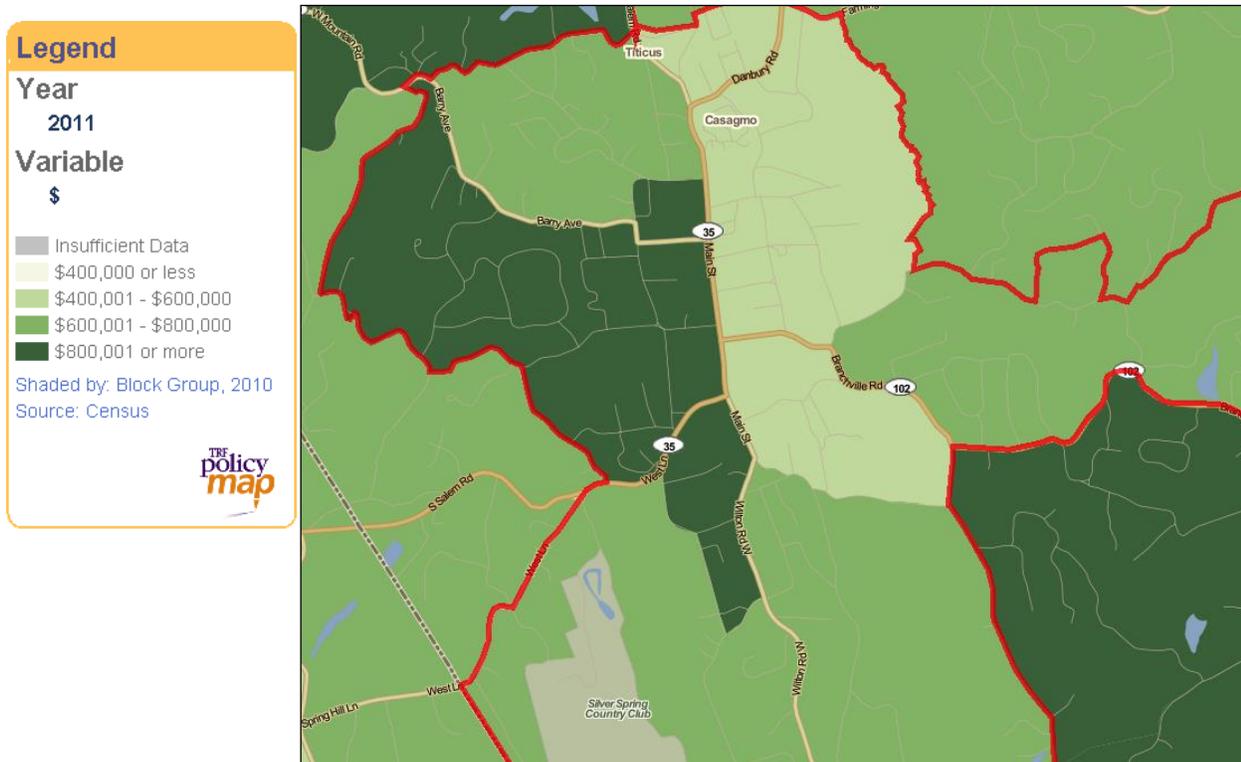


Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Median Housing Value

Based upon American Community Survey data, the median housing value for the CDP was estimated to be \$706,000 between 2007 and 2011, which is substantially higher than that of the Metro Area (\$466,700) and Connecticut (\$293,100). However, the map below demonstrates the disparity in median housing value within the CDP, particularly for the same Census Block Group (\$476,000).

FIGURE 15: MEDIAN HOUSING VALUE BY CENSUS BLOCK GROUP



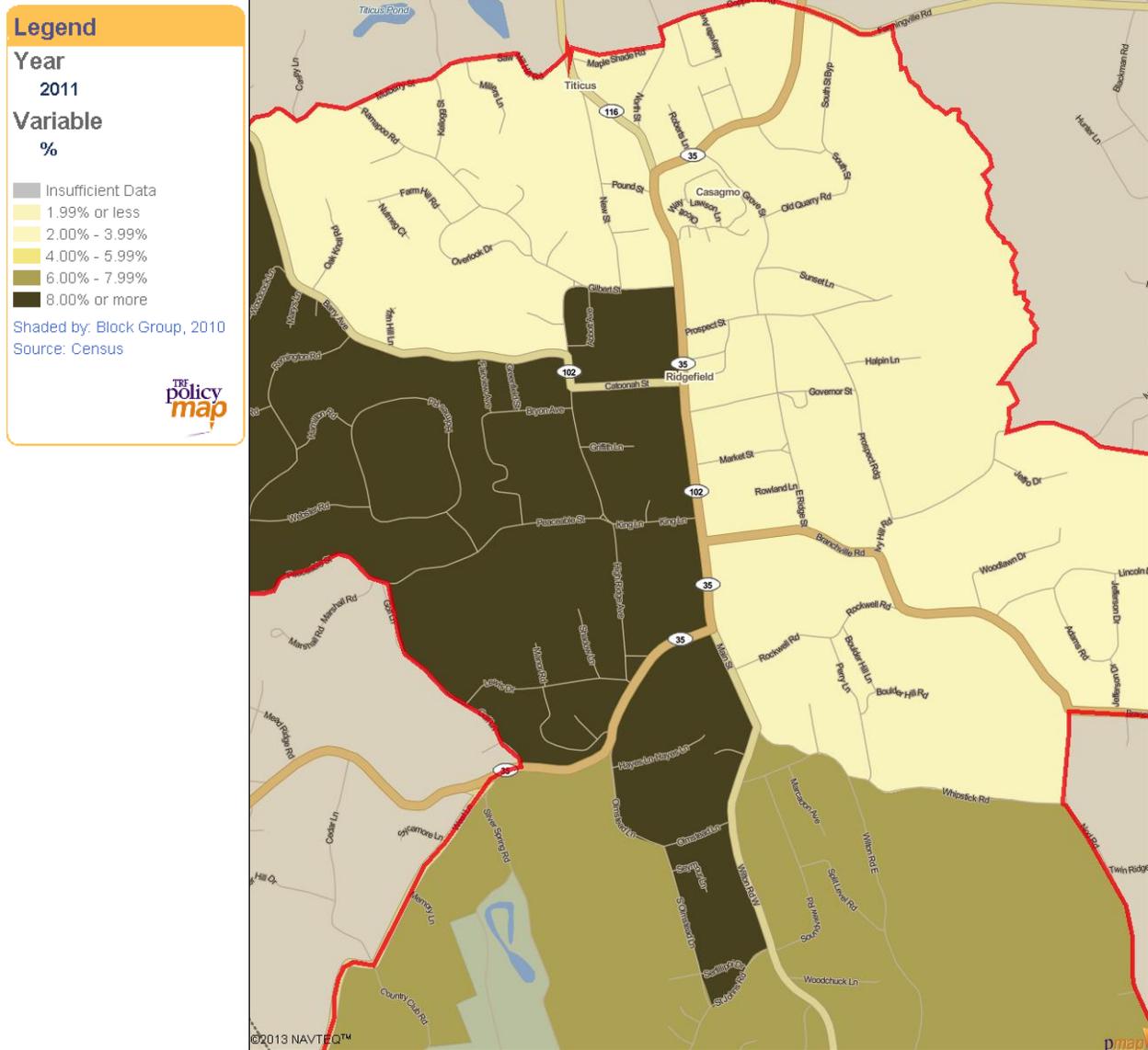
Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

SECTION IV: TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS

Transit Access

Approximately 4.43% of workers in the CDP utilize public transportation to commute to work, compared to 9.12% for the metropolitan area. Moreover, within the CDP, there is a disparate use of public transportation, as indicated by the map area.

FIGURE 16: PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS USING PUBLIC TRANSIT



Source: PolicyMap based on American Community Survey Data

Mean Travel Time

According to American Community Survey Data (2007-2011), the mean commuting time for residents in the CDP is 32.7 minutes compared to 24.7 minutes for all residents of Connecticut.

RIDGEFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

WORKING PAPER 2: PRIOR STUDIES

Submitted April 14th, 2014

to the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Document

This document provides a summary of the key planning studies and economic analyses prepared for the Town of Ridgefield. As the second working paper in the Ridgefield Economic Development Strategic Plan, this document is designed to help the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission establish a policy agenda for the next 24 months.

Next Steps

The contents of this document along with the data compiled in Working Paper 1 and input collected from Ridgefield's Economic Development community will be used to prepare an Economic Development Strategic Plan to guide the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission's public policy agenda over the next 24 months.

SECTION I: PLANNING STUDIES

Ridgefield Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), 2010

Between March 2009 and the Plan's adoption on June 29, 2010, the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) conducted a number of public meetings, hearings, and surveys which resulted in this document.

Primary Concerns

- Maintain and preserve Ridgefield's character, historic and natural resources, and open space
- Address the need to provide housing for changing demographics, and
- Expand the commercial tax base within areas already zoned for business use.

Conditions and Trends

- Ridgefield experienced explosive growth in the 1950's (87%) and 1960's (123%) and slower growth until a slight resurgence in the 1990's (13%).
- Current growth ranges from 1% to 7% annually for the foreseeable future.
- Demographic projections anticipate a large increase in the percentage of residents over the age of 65 by 2030.

Demographics

- Ridgefield has higher average income and educational attainment than most of the surrounding towns.
- Ridgefield has been primarily attracting families with children.
- The Plan suggests the possibility of attracting a younger demographic.

Economy

While Ridgefield's residents are wealthier compared to neighboring communities, the average wages for jobs in Ridgefield tend to be lower.

- In 2000, 30% of Ridgefield's labor force worked in Ridgefield.

- More residents now work from home.
 - The Town recently passed zoning regulations to ease restrictions on low-impact home occupations.
- Top employment sectors for Ridgefield residents (2000) include:
 - Professional, scientific, management administrative, and waste management services,
 - Educational, health and social services, and
 - Finance, insurance, real estate, rental, and leasing
- Ridgefield has had consistent job growth in the past decades; however, the jobs created are amongst the lowest wages in the Bridgeport-Stamford Labor Market Area.
- In 2008, Ridgefield's largest employer, pharmaceutical company Boehringer-Ingelheim, employed more people (3,025) than the next 8 large employers combined (945).
 - This over-reliance on one employer poses a financial risk to the Town in the event that there is a downturn in the pharmaceuticals industry.

Town Revenues

The "Grand List" is a document that describes the different sources of tax revenue for the Town. Components include: Residential, Apartments, Commercial & Industrial, Vacant, Use Assessment, Motor Vehicles and Personal Property.

- The 1999 Plan proposed maintaining the non-residential tax base between 15 to 25 percent of the Grand list; however,
 - The non-residential component on the Grand List has decreased from 16% (1999) to 13% (2010).
- Striving for the 25% goal of 1999 may not be feasible because:
 - Preliminary data indicates ongoing loss of commercial and industrial tax revenue.
 - Achieving the goal might change the residential character of Ridgefield.
- The portion of Ridgefield's revenue from residential taxes (86% in 2007) is among the highest in the state.

Land Use and Existing Zoning

- Approximately 87% of the total land area within Ridgefield is "developed" and "committed".
- Ridgefield has nine residential zones, totaling about 20,000 acres, and five business zones, totaling about 1200 acres. Most of the residentially zoned land is designated for lower density development with a minimum lot area of at least 2 acres.
- The following pages include copies of land use and zoning maps and tables from the Plan.

Figure 1: Land Uses in Ridgefield

Land Uses in Ridgefield			
Use	Acres	% of Developed & Committed Land	% of Total Land Area
Residential	11,212	58%	50%
Single Family Development	11,045		
Multi-family Development	167		
Commercial / Industrial	533	3%	2%
Commercial	475		
Industrial	42		
Mixed Use	16		
Open Space *	5,757	30%	26%
Dedicated Open Space	4,987		
Managed Open Space	763		
Community Facilities / Institutional	434	2%	2%
Community Facilities	358		
Institutional	76		
Other	1,444	7%	7%
Right of Way, Water Features	1,444		
Total Developed & Committed	19,373		87%
Vacant	2,962	--	13%
Total	22,335		100%

*Open Space totals may differ slightly in Chapter 7, Open Space, since not all open space is linked to the Town's GIS and the calculations in this table are based solely on GIS data.

FIGURE 2: EXISTING LAND USES

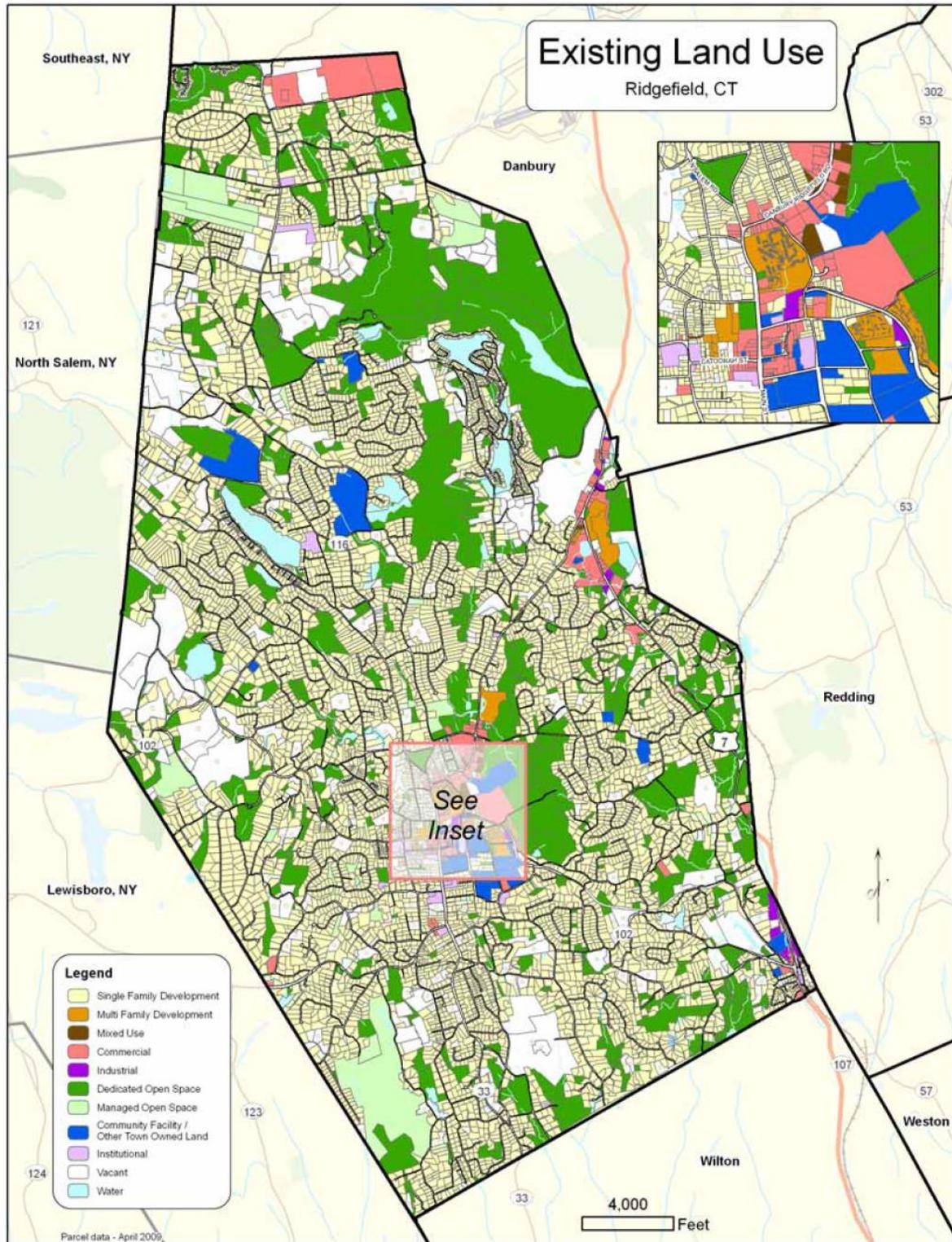
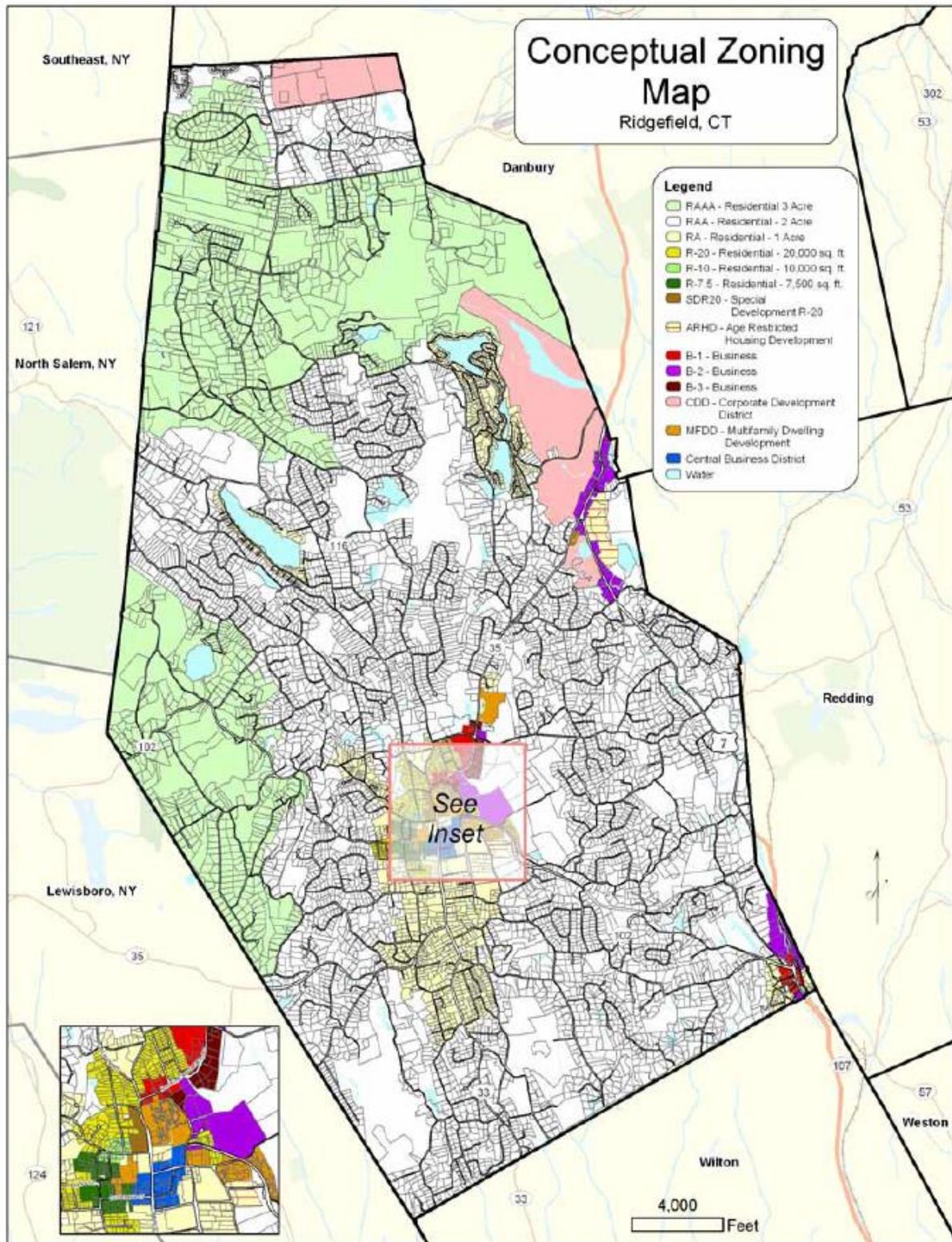


FIGURE 3: ZONING DISTRICTS TABLE

Zoning Districts (Conceptual)		
Zone	Acres	% of Land
Residential	19,676	88%
RAAA - Residential 3 Acre	5,396	
RAA - Residential 2 Acre	12,680	
RA - Residential 1 Acre	1,220	
R-20 - Residential 20,000 sq. ft.	133	
R-10 - Residential 10,000 sq. ft.	10	
R-7.5 - Residential 7,500 sq. ft.	39	
SDR20 - Special Development R-20	12	
ARHD - Age Restricted Housing Development	72	
MFDD - Multi-family Dwelling Development	115	
Business Zones	1,215	5%
B-1 - Business	60	
B-2 - Business	194	
B-3 - Business	28	
CDD - Corporate Development District	898	
Village District	35	
Other - Right of Way, Water Features	1,444	7%
Total	22,335	100%

FIGURE 4: CONCEPTUAL ZONING MAP



Conservation and Resource Protection Strategies

Environmental Sustainability

Ridgefield has put extensive effort into supporting environmental sustainability. The Town:

- In 2007:
 - Joined ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) in 2007.
 - Formed Ridgefield Action Committee for the Environment (RACE) to encourage and promote sustainability.
- In 2010:
 - Became a Connecticut “Clean Energy Community”.
- Currently:
 - Monitors its carbon footprint.
 - Actively pursues energy reduction, incorporating energy efficiency and green building standards as appropriate when new facilities are built, renovated or expanded.
 - Manages a successful recycling program.

Because a large percentage of Ridgefield’s water needs are met from local area wells, water management, greenway and open space preservation take on a high level of significance.

The following principles will guide the Conservation and Resource Protection Strategies:

- Preserve sensitive areas as open space, and require planning and mitigation where preservation is not possible.
- Use the Natural Resources Inventory to aid in land use planning.
- Preserve Greenways.

Water Management

Almost 14,000 acres of Ridgefield drains into public water supply reservoirs for the Town and its neighbors. Its wetlands, swamps and vernal pools help ensure proper recharge of the local aquifer as well as ensuring water quality. These resources need protection to ensure future water supplies.

Some possible options include:

- Increase on-site storm water infiltration and retention
- Preserve wetlands
- Monitor well permit data and water levels in wells
- Minimize disturbance to steep slopes
- Minimize the clearing of vegetation.

Open Space Preservation

The Town currently uses Planned Residential Development (PRD) provisions in the code to relax certain requirements in return for open space preservation.

- The Town should consider expanding the use of PRDs in more zones.

- The Town should also consider providing density bonuses to encourage open space preservation.

Greenway Preservation

Greenways connect open spaces and destinations, support water management goals, preserve the rural character, and provide a valuable amenity.

- Previous POCDs have supported the Sugar Hollow Greenway, which roughly corresponds to the rejected “Super 7 Expressway” corridor.
- In 2009, representatives from Ridgefield, Redding, Wilton, Weston and Norwalk started working together to develop the Norwalk River Valley Trail within this greenway.
- Public Act 490 allows local assessors to reduce taxes on land that is “perceived” as open space. This tool is used to diminish the tax burden on large land-holdings and ease development pressure.

Historic Preservation

Resources

Numerous resources exist to help preserve Ridgefield’s extensive history, including:

- Ridgefield Historic Architectural Resources Survey (1979, updated in 2006),
- The Ridgefield Historic Society,
- The Historic District Commission, and
- The Town Historian.

Regulations

- Current zoning allows adaptive reuse along Route 7 and North Main Street.
 - The Town should consider expanding permissions for adaptive reuse as well as other incentives and zoning relief to owners of historic buildings.
 - Expansion of adaptive reuse can help to maintain the non-residential tax base.
- A “Demolition Delay”, which can require a waiting period of up to 180 days before tearing down a historic resource, could allow for preservation alternatives to be explored.
 - Ridgefield has not adopted such a policy.

Housing Strategies

The document focuses on retaining the “predominantly single-family residential character” of the Town while encouraging appropriately higher densities and multi-family developments. To facilitate this, the Plan sets out criteria for identifying and approving higher residential densities, including:

- Must be sited in areas with adequate municipal infrastructure (water, sewerage, power, gas, roadways, and walkways) to ensure safety and health.
- Multi-family development should be townhouse and garden-style near shopping and community facilities and be designed within the architectural context of the surrounding areas.

Housing

- Approximately 89% of the housing stock is owner-occupied.
- The housing growth rate has decreased each decade since 1960.
 - From 2000 to 2008, there was a net increase of around 340 units, putting the first decade of the 21st century on track for one of the lowest growth rates.
 - During this time period, there was a substantial growth in demolitions as earlier housing stock was torn down for newer, and often larger, homes.
- These developments to date are at odds with the projected demographic changes and housing needs.

Affordable Housing

While the POCD indicates concerns about the Town's ability to achieve either the 10% requirement set out by CGS 8-30, or the 1,100 additional affordable housing units suggested in the 2009 *Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) Housing Market Assessment*, the document does provide two strategies to encourage the development of affordable housing:

- Ensure a regulatory environment that supports the creation of diverse housing types, and
- Take the lead in creating housing opportunities.

Regulatory approaches

The Town has updated its regulations to expand housing opportunities by creating zones for multi-family development, age restricted housing, adopting Housing Opportunity Development (HOD) regulations, and allowing mixed uses for Ridgefield Center. The Plan goes on to outline additional available tools, including:

- Density Bonuses
 - Ridgefield's Housing Opportunity Development (HOD) regulations provide density bonuses if at least 30% of the housing units are designated as affordable for at least 40 years. The HOD regulations were created by Shipman and Goodwin in conjunction with the approval of two separate 8-30g developments on Route 7 and Bennetts Farm Road. The regulations reflect the numbers of units that were approved for those two designated properties.
 - The bonuses available under HOD are too low to enable Ridgefield to benefit from State payments under the "Incentive Housing Zones" (IHZ) program. The regulations were developed prior to the creation of the IHZ regulations in the State statutes.
- Inclusionary Zoning
 - Ridgefield might consider establishing inclusionary zoning and a housing trust fund to encourage developers to make available a percentage of housing units in new developments for low and moderate income households.

Community Driven Housing Development (CDHD)

Ridgefield has had success with the “community-driven approach” in which the municipality is directly involved with the development. Currently, Ridgefield Housing Authority operates three housing developments, all of which have waiting lists.

Aspects of the CDHD approach include:

- Allowing the municipality to determine types of units created, income levels, and location.
- Creating opportunities to leverage municipally-owned land, expedited permitting and specialized financing to keep the costs of housing down.

Business Development

This section will deal with both general and area considerations related to attracting new business development to Ridgefield in each of the current business zones:

- Downtown Ridgefield
- Branchville
- Intersection of Routes 7 and 35
- Large Office Parks

General considerations

- The Town should pursue a strong non-residential tax base in areas where appropriate zoning and infrastructure already exist. The Town should also resist re-zoning business land to residential uses.
- The Commission should require façade improvements when businesses located at gateways request changes under Special Permit and Site Plan application.
- The Town should pay special attention to curb cuts, pedestrian and cycling amenities, and handicap access.
- Economic Development Commission, Chamber of Commerce and other business-related organizations should help local businesses identify funding for building appearance improvements as well as attracting and maintaining corporate headquarters.
- “Adaptive reuse” allows for utilizing existing buildings for a purpose other than that for which they were originally built.
 - The Town has successfully allowed reuse for the Route 7 corridor and a small portion of Main Street near Route 116.
 - The Town should continue to allow and expand adaptive reuse.

Area Considerations

- Big box retail is undesirable.
- Consider revisions to zoning that promote appropriate use of property and control scale and size of development.
- Consider expanding adaptive reuse regulations.

Downtown Ridgefield

Central Business District (CBD) allows business, retail, service and restaurant uses. The “Character” of the CBD is protected through implementation of Village District regulations.

- Opinions vary as to the nature and solutions of the problems. The Town should actively consider:
 - Zoning modifications to preserve downtown for retail, small office and service-oriented businesses and entertainment
 - Support for downtown property owners and the EDC in creating a “Business Improvement District” to coordinate and maintain parking and pedestrian improvements.
 - Continuing to work with ConnDOT on traffic circulation improvements.

Branchville

This area is recognized as a second “village” of Ridgefield, as well as an important “gateway” to Ridgefield. Its growth is limited by a number of factors, including:

- lack of municipal sewers,
- the Norwalk River flood plain, and
- high traffic congestion during commute.

In spite of these limitations, opportunities exist for Transit Oriented Development. The Town should:

- Adopt a special district, such as “Village District, for Branchville.
- Continue to implement recommendations from the *2002 Branchville Village Plan*.
- Revise zoning to allow mixed-use and provide guidance on size, density and scale.
- Examine opportunities for inter-municipal sewer service.
- Support a program for low-interest façade improvement loans to improve the appearance of buildings in this gateway.

Routes 7 and 35

- Route 7 and 35 (Danbury Road) need renewed attention because:
 - There are many non-conforming uses.
 - There are questions as to whether the retail restrictions unnecessarily hinder business and development opportunities.
- The Town should conduct a study which will:
 - Examine the vacant land and development potential,
 - Look at ownership of parcels in the corridor,
 - Determine highest and best uses, and
 - Make appropriate zoning recommendations.

Large Office Parks

- The Town should continue promoting corporate park development to attract and maintain corporate headquarters. The Economic Development Commission and other local officials will play a critical role.

Community Services

Changes since the 1999 Plan include:

- Need to be prepared for demographic changes.
- Need to make town facilities handicapped accessible.
- Desire to make buildings more sustainable (“green”).

Municipal services are currently spread across two buildings. The Plan speculates on opportunities for consolidation which include:

- State consolidation of probate courts freeing up space
- Non-renewal of leases in Venus Municipal Center to enable additional space recovery

Public Safety

- Co-locating the Police and Fire Department into one building, centrally located in Ridgefield, could provide economic redevelopment opportunity, improved service and reduced costs.
 - The Town should conduct a cost-benefit analysis of this idea.

Police

- In 2007, PZC approved plans to add 7,200 square feet to address space shortages, but voters would not fund the expansion.

Fire and Ambulance

As a result of Ridgefield’s growth, the Fire Department identified the following issues and concerns:

- Potential demands due to an aging population
- Congestion at Station 1 due to size of site, narrow streets and level of traffic.
- Need for dormitory space at Station 2
- Need for continued improvements to hydrant and non-hydrant water supply

Public Works

The Public Services Department’s facilities are located on South Street.

- The site is compatible with surrounding uses and has enough storage for current and future needs.
- The department has identified the need for larger office space and sleeping quarters.

Facilities

Recreation Facilities

Ridgefield has an abundance of recreational facilities including gyms, pools, athletic fields, tennis and basketball courts, golf course, dog park and campgrounds.

- The Department of Parks and Recreation has identified the following needs:
 - Improved parking and access at many of its facilities over the next 10 years.
 - A potential shortage of athletic fields
- Currently, there are many private and nonprofit groups operating recreational facilities. These partnerships should be encouraged as a way to reduce the Town's costs.

Social and Cultural Facilities

- In 2000, the library acquired the adjacent Old Ridgefield Playhouse, and developed a master plan for expansion to include the Playhouse.
- The Ridgefield Library expects to open in the spring of 2014, in their newly expanded building

Other facilities

Other facilities which are of benefit to Ridgefield residents and businesses include:

- Senior Center and "The Barn" (teen center)
- Many non-profit community facilities include:
 - The Lounsbury House (Ridgefield Community Center). Town-owned, non-profit run.
 - Ridgefield Playhouse for Moves and the Performing Arts (opened in 2000). Located in the Venus Municipal Building
 - Ridgefield Music and Arts Center, art venue for teenagers. Currently raising funds renovate the old Railroad Station as a permanent venue.
 - Halpin Lane Arts and Cultural Area
 - Several museums

Education Facilities

- All schools have the capacity to handle current and projected enrollment, according to studies recently conducted for the Board of Education.
- Enrollments are currently projected to decline.
 - The Board of Education is considering options for reconfiguring and redistricting as needed.
 - Should any school not be needed over the next 10 to 20 years, it should be retained for the future. Finding new land within the Town of Ridgefield will be very difficult.

Infrastructure

Transportation

Transportation concerns focus around alleviating congestion and improving safety. The Plan recommends restricting traffic by restricting traffic-generating land uses and developing an active Transportation Demand Management program.

Improved public transit, pedestrian and bicycle accessibility are important to enable more people to access Ridgefield without creating greater congestion and safety hazards.

Initiatives

As of 2010, several transportation studies and initiatives are underway.

- The State is currently widening portions of Route 7. When construction is complete, the Town should examine new traffic counts to assess road capacity issues.
- Two plans were developed to enhance safety and reduce congestion on Routes 7 and 35 (1996, Route 7 and 2005, Route 35 Driveway and Curb Cut Management Plan).
 - The Town should utilize principles from the two plans.
- As of 2009, Ridgefield Center traffic circulation improvements are underway.
- Additional concerns:
 - Ability of Ridgefield Center to effectively manage additional traffic.
 - Modern roadway standards should not interfere with Ridgefield's character, and require a balance between safety and roadway aesthetics.
 - No new roads are proposed.
 - Formerly proposed "Super 7" highway is "inappropriate" for Ridgefield.

Road Maintenance

- Repairs
 - Due to budget constraints, the Town has reduced maintenance levels from 10 miles per year to approximately 5.
 - The Town should consider adopting a pavement management system that helps to ensure the most cost-effective road management.

Public Transit

Public transit in Ridgefield includes:

- Commuter rail,
- Bus and shuttle service, and
- Paratransit service.

Ridgefield does not have direct control over most public transit services.

- Commuter Rail
 - Commuter rail service is available to Danbury, Norwalk, Stamford and NYC. Ridgefield residents also use stations in New York State.

- Three key strategies to encourage greater transit utilization:
 - Retaining train service in Branchville: A new commuter rail station has been proposed nearby in Redding. This could lead to a reduction of service (or closing) at the Branchville station. The Town must work with the State to maintain a commitment to keeping the railway station open.
 - Improving train service: currently studies are underway. Resolution is years away and beyond the Town’s scope of influence. Metro North has recently improved train service schedules.
 - Improving access to the Branchville Station: A study is underway to assess the feasibility of creating a public transit center and improving parking at the Branchville Station. Options for getting to the station without driving should also be pursued, as discussed under “Bus and Shuttle Service”, below.
- Paratransit
 - Housatonic Area Rapid Transit (HART) currently provides eligible Ridgefield residents (elderly and disabled) with weekday door-to-door transit service.
 - As the percentage of older residents increases, it is likely that the program will need to increase.
 - The program should be expanded to provide more vehicles and reach more groups (residents, workers, commuters and other age groups).
- Bus and Shuttle Service
 - All services should be continued and expanded as needed.
 - Currently, HART Provides:
 - Weekday service along Route 7 corridor, including Branchville.
 - Weekday shuttle service from Ridgefield Center to Katonah train station.
 - Part-time bus service connecting to Boehringer-Ingelheim
 - The Town should explore options for creating transit connections from Ridgefield Center to other destinations.

Pedestrian and Bike Access

Pedestrian and Bike access provides an important cornerstone of Traffic Demand Management as well as contributing to health and wellness of community residents.

Landowners and developers should be encouraged to include bike and pedestrian access when planning new developments (bike/pedestrian connections between properties, benches, bike racks, etc...)

Whether planning for roads, train and bus service, or pedestrian and bicycle networks, many transportation decisions that affect Ridgefield are made by or funded by others. The Town should continue to work with HVCEO, Metro- North, and ConnDOT on transportation issues and improvements.

- To encourage bicycle use:
 - Develop connections between higher density residential areas and centers for local activity.
 - Ensure bicycle accessibility on new road construction.

- Provide bike route marking and use greenways to help connect major activity centers.
- Parks and Recreation Department is currently developing bike paths to the Recreation Center.
- To encourage pedestrian activity:
 - Develop pedestrian trails in areas where adding sidewalks is not feasible.
 - Expand and enhance the sidewalk network in Ridgefield Center, Branchville, and Copsps Hill area.

Utilities

Public Water Supply

Because a significant amount of the drinking water in Ridgefield comes from groundwater, strategies to protect water resources are very important.

Areas not served by water companies use private wells. The 4 water companies serving Ridgefield are:

- Aquarion Water Company (8,100 customers)
- Rural Water Company (1,450 customers)
- Topstone Hydraulic Company (970 customers)
- Brookview Water Company (50 customers)

State's Water Utility Coordinating committee granted Aquarion the rights to provide water in areas in Ridgefield that are no currently served.

Since 1999, water mains have been extended from Wilton to Branchville and Ridgefield center.

- By 2050, water demand increase could exceed the "margin of safety" required to ensure adequate supply to businesses and residences not on private wells.
 - If these projections are accurate, solutions might require additional infrastructure.

Public Sewer Service

Sewers should be extended in conjunction with land use goals.

Water Pollution Control Authority determines possible sewer extensions and must be consistent with the State's "Plan of Conservation and Development".

Water Pollution Control Authority has identified projects to undertake as funding becomes available:

- Rehabilitate the existing system
- Continue to investigate infiltration/inflow problems
- Rehab and upgrade pump stations
- Update the facilities plan for the South Street and Route7 wastewater treatment facilities

Ability to manage sewerage at Routes 7/35 is limited by Norwalk River capacity. Connections should occur in limited situations where well-defined economic development goals will be advanced.

Electrical Service

Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P) is the provider in Ridgefield. Existing substation and distribution is adequate beyond 2020.

Natural Gas

Yankee Gas provides service throughout Ridgefield and expects to have adequate supplies to meet future demands in Ridgefield.

Communications

No major issues on landline telephone service or cable television. The Town is working with providers to address areas with gaps in wireless coverage.

Implementation

The final chapter of this report has a table which assigns primary responsibilities for various commissions and entities. The table below highlights any areas where the Economic Development Commission (EDC) was identified as a responsible party.

FIGURE 5: TASKS ASSIGNED IN THE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Tasks	Responsible Parties	Time Frame (Progress)
Enhance Key Gateways		
For the Route 7 and South Salem Road gateways, encourage landowners to improve the appearance of buildings and properties.	Town - PZC - AAC - EDC	
Maintain A Strong Non-Residential Tax Base		
Continue to increase the business/commercial component of the tax base.	PZC - BOS - Town - EDC	
Promote business development in areas already zoned for business use.	PZC - EDC	
As appropriate, evaluate the potential for municipally-owned property for economic development.	BOS - PZC - Town - EDC	
Consider Zoning Updates		
Conduct a zoning study for the Route 7 corridor.	PZC - EDC	2 yrs.
Additional Strategies		
Encourage building owners to enhance the appearance of their properties in key Route 7 gateways.	Town - EDC - AAC	
Continue to promote the concept of corporate parks.	Town - EDC	
Encourage new buildings to be energy efficient and encourage existing businesses to make appropriate upgrades.	PZC - Town- EDC	
Enhance Ridgefield Center		
Implement the <i>Ridgefield Center Study</i> .	PZC - BOS - EDC	
Ensure that Sewer Extensions Reflect Land Use Goals		
Determine if sewers should be extended to Branchville from neighboring communities to achieve land use goals for the area.	PZC - BOS - WPCA - EDC	2 yrs.

Ridgefield Center Study, Milone and MacBroom (2009)

This planning study seeks to describe and analyze the Town Center’s circulation system including the impacts of land use on traffic levels and parking pressures. This study made the following key findings:

General Land Use Conditions

- The Town Center is comprised of 45 acres; 69 buildings; 465,000 square feet of commercial space; and 23 residences in 11 buildings.
- Retail, banking, and service uses comprise 233,000 square feet (or 51%) of the commercial square footage in the Town Center
- Offices use 190,000 square feet (or 42%) of the commercial square footage in the Town Center
- Restaurant uses occupy 31,000 square feet (or 7%) of the commercial space in the Town Center.

Parking Demand

- On-site parking is available on most streets. There is an opportunity to better organize the parking supply in the Town Center and also improve the circulation system.
- Parking demand as well as pedestrian activity in the Town Center is mainly related to the retail uses.
- There are currently 1,501 parking spaces in the Town Center, exceeding the amount required under zoning by 200 spaces.
- Parking utilization analysis reveals that “the actual parking problem in the Town Center is not a shortage in the total number of spaces but the distribution of spaces”. The data shows that overall peak occupancy of parking in the Town Center is 75% on Friday and 60% on Saturday.

Traffic Volumes

- The highest traffic volumes occur during weekday afternoons. Vehicular queuing occurs Main Street, side streets, and Catoonah Street.
- Between 2004 and 2006, 99 accidents occurred on Main Street Route 35. The highest number of accidents occurred on the segment of Main Street between Bailey Avenue and Gilbert Street.
- The Ridgefield Zoning Regulations reduce the parking requirement for developments in the Town Center to 60% of the parking standard.

Pedestrian Circulation

- Pedestrian circulation is impeded by physical barriers, alleyways that allow cars, and lack of signage.

Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study: Recommended Transportation and Land Use Plan, Fitzgerald and Halliday (2011)

This summary reviews the Land Use Study and Recommendations for the Route 7 area undertaken by Fitzgerald & Halliday, a planning and environmental analysis firm. The study was sponsored by the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), in conjunction with the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO). The SWRPA is a governmental agency focusing on economic development entity for eight municipalities, including Norwalk. The HVCEO is a “regional coordinating body” covering 10 different municipalities, including Ridgefield.

The documents reviewed include a focus group presentation released in 2010 and the final Route 7 Study and Recommendations released in 2011. As a note, the SWRPA is currently in talks to merge with the HVCEO, as a result of a state push to reduce the number of individual transportation and economic planning agencies. Finally, in addition to these studies, articles pertaining to the Route 7 area from local press sources and the Ridgefield Press were reviewed.

Three main areas issues are addressed in the Route 7 Study: (1) the need for transit and traffic alternatives, (2) unmet demand for local goods, and (3) linear sprawl along the highway.

Need for Transit and Traffic Alternatives

One of the most often-cited considerations for any potential development is its impact on transit. Specifically, the zoning plans may impact already extreme traffic conditions on Route 7, which would greatly affect residents of Ridgefield who heavily rely on this route. As it stands, the corridor is used almost to capacity

Peak traffic conditions exist for about two hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon; however, volumes remain high for much of the day in both the northernmost and southernmost portions of the corridor where the more intense development patterns exist. In these areas, commuter traffic mixes with shopping and other trip purposes to create sustained traffic levels. Highway capacity will eventually be reached, and in some areas it already has, with limited opportunity for significant increases in the future.

This reality is reflected in the town's hesitance (or resistance) to zone for retail around the corridor, which would increase "curb cuts" and potentially exacerbate current traffic conditions. Moreover, a cursory news search shows that the most frequent news pertaining to Route 7 in Ridgefield are traffic accident reports. Indeed, an opinion column confirms this observation with statistics from the Ridgefield Police Department claiming that there is an accident on or near the intersection of Route 7 and I-84 every two weeks.

The study and subsequent proposal therefore address the lack of coordination on other alternatives to transportation, including a dearth of pedestrian and biking options, as well as a lack of coordination with public transportation options to divert flow from vehicular traffic to the existing train lines that serve the community (including the Branchville station.) Specifically, coordination between bus and rail is not optimal, and parking spots at the Branchville Metro-North station are at capacity. These factors may be dissuading potential commuters from utilizing the rail system rather than driving and contributing to traffic.

Unmet Demand for Local Goods and Services

In addition to the transportation system, the current land use and zoning of the study area suggests potential for improvement. Proponents cite the unmet demand for local goods and services that filter into other nearby towns and shopping centers. These establishments could range from beauty salons and pharmacies to specialty foods and auto parts. As such, current zoning laws may not be maximizing commerce and local taxes.

Many of the primary proponents for the plan are the affected property owners, a majority of which could benefit from the added flexibility that would allow the sale of products. One article claimed that there was potentially \$1 million in demand not being met by the town (presumably per year). On the other hand, opponents argue that the new retail spaces would divert business from existing locations on Main Street and in Downtown Ridgefield.

In order to curb these concerns, planners are considering limiting stores to 8,000 sq. ft., with groups of stores smaller than 20,000 sq. ft. in order to proscribe any retail chains from coming in. Moreover, given the proximity to the Route 7 Corridor, well-placed and well-designed retail might import demand from outside of Ridgefield.

Currently, much of this area in Ridgefield is zoned for commercial/office space, but with a high vacancy rate of 13% suggesting that office space is oversupplied.

In addition to goods and services, the study highlights a few other needs that must be addressed, including a need for multi-family housing and senior rental housing.

Linear Sprawl/Low Density

Likely due to both zoning within the town and clustered use patterns, there are areas of low density that could be optimized along the road. However, one of the strongest forces against rezoning and developing these areas for Ridgefield is the desire to preserve the “rural” character of the town.

The focus group conducted by Fitzgerald and Halliday in 2010 seems to suggest that the residents are open to mixed-use zoning that would allow for walkable, pedestrian-friendly retail, in conjunction with improved transit infrastructure. Balancing these goals with other low-density rural areas remains a challenge.

One separate but related factor to consider is current interest in CT Statute 8-30g, which was intended to promote affordable housing but now places the burden on the town in order to reject development proposals. Ridgefield in particular is seeing an overwhelming use of the statute, and using sewage issues as grounds for dismissing proposals. However, this strategy may be indiscriminate and short-lived given current plans to upgrade the town’s sewer system.

Reinventing Branchville & Georgetown Study (2011)¹

In August 2011, the Towns of Ridgefield and Redding announced their commitment to pursuing a joint planning study that would revitalize and connect both Branchville and Georgetown. The two towns jointly applied for a \$325,000 planning grant from state Office of Policy and Management. Key aspects of the vision include:

- Converting the 56-acre Gilbert and Bennett wire factory site in Georgetown to a mixed use residential project anchored by a new Metro North Station

¹ For an article describing the vision for the Reinventing Branchville and Georgetown Study, see “Branchville and Georgetown planning together” (August 12, 2011): <http://www.newstimes.com/local/article/Branchville-and-Georgetown-planning-together-1923621.php;%20>

- Intensification of land uses around the Branchville Metro North Station through the development of apartments, shops, and restaurants
- Connection of Branchville and Georgetown through new pedestrian infrastructure
- Creation of a multi-modal transportation hub at Branchville Metro North Station.

SECTION II: ECONOMIC AND MARKET STUDIES

Ridgefield Connecticut Economic Action Plan, Garnet Consulting Services (2010)

Economic Development Goals

The Economic Action Plan (“EAP”) identifies eight primary and interrelated economic development goals for the period between 2010 and 2013-2015. These goals include:

- Maintaining an adequate business portion of the Town’s Grand List
- Providing adequate locations for future business development (particularly along appropriate portions of the Route 7 and Route 35 corridors)
- Improvement of Ridgefield’s gateways
- Maintenance of the economic vitality of the Town’s villages, in particular, Downtown Ridgefield and Branchville
- Business Retention, expansion, and replacement
- Creation of an arts cluster and district
- External and internal marketing
- Enhancement of Ridgefield’s economic development team

The Action Plan notes that the EDC established a goal of maintaining the business portion of the Grand list in the range of 13% to 18%.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The table below summarizes Ridgefield’s strengths and weaknesses as a location for business as identified in the EAP.

FIGURE 6: RIDGEFIELD'S STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AS A LOCATION FOR BUSINESS

Strengths	Weaknesses
▪ Attractiveness and character of the community	▪ Isolated location
▪ Desirable quality of life	▪ Infrastructure needs (roads and utilities)
▪ Quality of school system	▪ Limitations (zoning and infrastructure) on new locations for business development
▪ Proximity to Gold Coast and NYC	▪ High cost of living and doing business
	▪ Difficult regulatory environment
	▪ Unsightly entrance routes
	▪ Lack of a plan or team for economic development

Related Initiatives

The EAP identified several ongoing initiatives relevant to the town’s economic development:

1. Reuse of the Shlumberger property
2. Increased occupancy of the Pond’s edge property (NOTE: The property has since been rezoned to B2 to allow a greater range of uses on the site).
3. Creation of an arts and culture cluster and district
4. Continuing attention to the economic health of Downtown Ridgefield, including economic health of downtown Ridgefield
5. Stimulation of business growth in Branchville
6. Assistance to a developer of a “Sustainable Design Center”
7. Installation and support of a vigorous Economic Development Commission
8. Improvement to Town’s economic development website
9. Creation of a Ridgefield Brand

Six Initiatives

The EAP recommends six key initiatives as summarized in the table below:

FIGURE 7: RECOMMENDED ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN INITIATIVES

	Initiative	Specific Proposals
1	Investment Attraction and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a business incentive policy prior to entering into negotiations with specific projects ▪ Establish a rapid response team to insure the reoccupation of vacant commercial properties ▪ Improve communication between EDC and existing businesses ▪ Develop a business ambassadors program and speakers bureau to convey the Town’s business recruitment and retention message.
2	Route 7 Developability Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Form an interagency town group that collaboratively identifies sites for development, areas suitable for development, types of uses that would best match with land characteristics, calculate maximum development potential; and evaluate the suitability of current zoning for accommodating development potential.
3	Retail Leakage Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quantify the loss of aggregate disposable income to retail businesses in other communities
4	Downtown Development Blueprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Form a downtown coordinating group comprised of merchants, businesses, property owners, town government, and others to develop a shared vision for a future Downtown Ridgefield ▪ Consider appointment of a downtown coordinator ▪ Resolve confusion about Special Service Districts through information gathering and dissemination in order to determine whether such a district should be created for the downtown.
5	Development Process Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a development sector task force to identify regulatory issues impeding the Town’s economic development ▪ Make the development process more understandable by creating flowcharts and/or manuals to make process easier to understand ▪ Consider the creation of more detailed design guidelines and formation of a development advisory committee
6	Incubator With or Without Walls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a full-fledged business incubator or an incubator without walls

Retail Leakage Study, Bartram and Cochran (2013)

A retail leakage analysis evaluates the gaps between the retail goods and services demanded in a trade area and the actual retail goods and supply that are provided in a particular community. The market area defined for each studied community is measured by either by a fixed radial physical distance or a commuting distance measured in time or sometimes comprised of carefully selected areas adjoining the studied community. If the studied community is capturing retail demand beyond its boundaries and into the larger trade area, then it is providing a *surplus* of retail. But if a studied community is purchasing its goods and services not from its local businesses but from the competing retail centers beyond its borders in other parts of the trade area, then the studied community is experiencing a retail *leakage*. The existence of a surplus or leakage varies for different goods and services.

The retail leakage analysis conducted for Ridgefield assessed the degree to which Ridgefield residents were going outside of their community in order to purchase goods and services. The study analyzed retail competition internal to the Town and its three commercial areas: Downtown, Branchville, and Gateway. The analysis defined the market areas based upon a 5 and 10 minute drive radius from Town Hall 400 Main Street, 720 Branchville, and 975 Ethan Allen Highway to respectively study retail patterns for daily errands and 20 minute drive radius from Downtown, Branchville, and Gateway.

The table below summarizes whether or not there is a surplus or leakage for particular goods and services for each of the three market areas. A surplus is indicated by a (“+”) sign and leakage is indicated by a (“-“) sign.

FIGURE 8: SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM LEAKAGE STUDY

Industry Sub-Sector	Downtown (400 Main Street)	Branchville (720 Branchville Road)	Gateway (975 Ethan Allen Highway)
Motor Vehicles and Parts Dealers	-	+	+
Furniture and Home Furnishing Stores	-	-	-
Electronic and Appliance Stores	+	-	-
Building Materials, Garden Equipment, and Supply Stores	-	-	-
Food and Beverage Stores	+	+	+
Health and Personal Care Stores	-	-	-
Gasoline Stations	-	-	-
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	-	-	-
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, and Music Stores	-	-	-
General Merchandise Stores	-	-	-
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	-	-	-
Nonstore Retailers	-	+	+
Food service and Drinking Places	-	-	-

Greater Danbury Housing Market Assessment, Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (2009)

This report compiles demographic and economic trend and forecast data to assess the types of housing needed within the Housatonic Valley region including the Town of Ridgefield. Much of the report uses census data from 2000 and so is no longer relevant. The report includes a series of recommendations at both the regional and local scale. These recommendations are summarized below.

Regional Recommendations

- Regionally coordinate payments in lieu of affordable units
- Strengthen transportation and housing linkages
- Increase use of inclusionary zoning within the region
- Maximize regional information sharing for affordable housing initiatives

Local Recommendations

- Make use of estimates of housing need by municipality
- Establish local strategies through community's zoning and subdivision regulations
- Apply for technical assistance grants from the State of Connecticut's Office of Policy and Management
- Utilize conservation subdivision techniques to protect open space while developing affordable units
- Increase accessory apartments in the region emphasize and encourage neighborhood center/local route small-scale development
- Utilize the strategic placement of mixed use developments to develop affordable housing
- Encourage apartments over ground floor retail/office space in more urbanized areas
- Use density bonuses to encourage affordable housing development
- Employ transit-oriented development (TOD) as a means of addressing affordable housing needs
- Create unique property tax credit programs to encourage deed restrictions
- Utilize existing home ownership programs and financing options to develop affordable units that are counted under 8-30g

Comprehensive Annual Financial Report of the Town Of Ridgefield, Connecticut (2012)

The financial report includes a section on factors affecting the Town's financial conditions. Many of these factors are related to the Town's approach to economic development:

- Boehringer – Ingelheim owns 250 acres in the Town and has 875,000 square feet of commercial space. The company has initiated a multi-million dollar expansion plan and will receive seven years of tax abatements.
- New commercial development along Route 35 and elsewhere is occurring as a result of new construction as well as the conversion of existing dwellings to commercial use.
- Residential construction for adult communities (i.e. seniors) has increased in recent years.

SECTION III: OTHER STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS

Downtown Ridgefield: Tools for Prosperity, Hilary Atzrott (2013)

This report presents best practices for downtown revitalization through examples from around the United States and focused case study analysis of initiatives in Greenville, South Carolina and Simsbury, Connecticut. The report identifies the following best practices:

- Creation of an artist overlay district to allow artists to live and work above retail spaces
- Adoption of zoning laws that enable higher density housing downtown
- Integration of bus and rail systems to help promote economic development in downtowns as well as outlying areas
- Adoption of complete streets policies to create more pedestrian friendly downtowns
- Using signage to improve access to parking
- Creation of a Bike Master Plan
- Moving parking off of Main Street
- Promotion and marketing of downtowns through websites and social media
- Orchestration of cultural activities including concert series, charity events, antique shows
- Attracting new businesses through the formation of Business Improvement Districts and Tax Incentives
- Dissemination of better information about landlord and tenant relationships
- Collection of comprehensive data on downtown business activity

Business Incentive Ideas for Attracting New Ventures to Ridgefield, Economic Development Commission (2013)

This memorandum provides suggestions for incentive packages to draw potential businesses to Ridgefield, especially to tenant the vacant spaces along Main Street and in other retail districts such as Cobb Hill. Suggestions identified include:

- Provision of free or discounted rents by landlord to new tenants in order to reduce the start-up costs for new businesses.
- Provision of banks of interest free or deferred loans for inventory in exchange for borrower using the bank for all banking needs.
- Commercial and personal tax abatements to (1) attract businesses to the Route 7 corridor; (2) incentivize real property improvements; and (3) support businesses owned by Ridgefield residents.
- Providing businesses with a free page of advertising in Destination Ridgefield and discounted advertising in the Ridgefield Press
- Free memberships, passes, or subscriptions to the Chamber of Commerce, Ridgefield Symphony of Orchestra, Recreation Center, Ridgefield Golf Course, town's museum, the Playhouse

- Free business advice and support through Incubator Without Walls.²

² In July 2010, the Ridgefield Board of Selectman approved \$5,000 from its discretionary fund to support the Incubator Without Walls Program. See Ridgefield Patch (July 2010): <http://ridgefield.patch.com/groups/politics-and-elections/p/funding-approved-for-incubator-without-walls>

RIDGEFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN 2014

WORKING PAPER 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted April 14th, 2014

to the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission



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INTRODUCTION

This draft working paper represents the third and final deliverable for the Ridgefield Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP). The purpose of the paper is to provide the Ridgefield Economic Development Commission (EDC) with a strategic course of direction for the next 24 months. The document is divided into two sections. Section I provides a list of the key recommendations. Section II explains the rationale behind the recommendations through a discussion of the planning and policy issues undergirding them. Section III presents the comments on the recommendations that were provided by a group of economic development stakeholders that convened on March 10, 2014.

The recommendations were informed by several key sources. First, demographic and economic data was marshalled and used as a quantitative basis for policy analysis. This data was summarized in the first working paper completed as part of the EDS. Second, prior policy and planning documents prepared over the last 10 years were compiled, reviewed, and synthesized in the EDS' second working paper. Finally, extensive input was collected from stakeholder interviews as well as from a full meeting of the EDC and representatives from other town agencies. This input was used to collect anecdotal information about development conditions in Ridgefield and triangulate the information discerned from the data collection and document review.

This document essentially serves as an update to the Ridgefield Economic Action Plan, completed by Garnet Consulting Services in January 2010. That document provided a highly detailed action plan for implementing six key initiatives. Included in the 2010 Action Plan were specific implementation steps tied to a fixed schedule and performance measures. This document does not aim to provide that level of detail. Rather than an action plan, the intent of this document is simply to define the key issues and help the EDC decide upon their strategy for the next two years.

SECTION I: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This section offers a summary view of the key strategies that the Ridgefield EDC is advised to pursue over the next 24 months.

- 1. Market Analysis:** Conduct a market analysis that (a) interprets the outcomes of the linkage study; (b) surveys residents of their retail preferences; (c) analyzes local and regional housing demand; (d) evaluates the effectiveness of historical efforts to attract and retain businesses.
- 2. Marketing Ridgefield:** Maintain the Chamber of Commerce as the key entity charged with marketing Ridgefield to prospective businesses, investors, and visitors.
- 3. Affordable Housing Plan:** Proactively identify areas in the town that are suitable for affordable housing development and market those areas to affordable housing developers.

4. **Downtown Revitalization Plan:** Establish a long-term plan for the use, scale, design, and intensity for all downtown land uses including (a) affordable housing (b) retail (c) office (d) public space including the street and (e) parking.
5. **Gateway Zoning:** Regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit regarding the northern Route 7 rezoning, develop a strategic land use and urban design plan for Route 7 that tiers from a town-wide development strategy.
6. **Land Use Decision Process:** Establish a clearer, more transparent land use decision process that promotes interagency coordination and may include the formation of a Coordinating Council.
7. **Town Visioning Charette:** Establish a 1-2 day charette, sponsored jointly by the Board of Selectmen, P&Z, and EDC focused on (a) a Town-wide Development Strategy (b) Affordable Housing Plan and (c) Land Use Decision Process .

SECTION II: ISSUES ANALYSIS

1. Market Analysis

- **Recommendation: Conduct a market analysis that (a) interprets the outcomes of the linkage study; (b) surveys residents of their retail preferences; (c) analyzes local and regional housing demand; (d) evaluates the effectiveness of historical efforts to attract and retain businesses.**

As part of the Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study, a market analysis was conducted by the real estate consulting firm Bartram and Cochran, in order to gauge the viability of retail uses along Route 7. In March 2013, the consultant prepared a retail leakage study for the purpose of defining the competition for retail within the town as well as in its three commercial areas (Downtown, Gateway, and Branchville).

Although this study is based on recent retail sales data from ESRI, the EDC would benefit from a market analysis that went beyond data collection and provided a more robust assessment of the types of retail, businesses, and housing for which there is a market in Ridgefield. In particular, this market study would provide the EDC with the following additional information:

Interpretation of the Retail Leakage Study

The retail study from Bartram and Cochran mainly provides data output with only limited explanations of the data's implications or causation. The retail study offers some brief speculations as to the reason behind certain outcomes. For example, the conclusions suggest that the leakage of family restaurants may be occurring because the floor plans and parking required for certain types of eateries may not be suitable for a historic downtown. However, the conclusions are relatively brief, thinly discussed, and disconnected from a detailed analysis of the town's existing land use and development policies. This is

not a flaw of the study itself. A more interpretive market assessment was clearly beyond the scope of the retail leakage study, which was mainly focused on data output.

The EDC needs to better understand what the retail study's various graphs and data actually mean in lay terms that can be easily digested by all town officials, current residents, and prospective businesses. Moreover, the EDC needs a sharper understanding of the specific types and examples of retail businesses that are flourishing outside of the town alongside an inventory of the specific businesses currently flourishing in the town. This type of assessment requires a more qualitative approach that pinpoints the key retail demand generators and ascertains whether or not it is feasible for the town to capture some of the that demand within Ridgefield given its current zoning, land use, design regulations, and architectural guidelines.

Retail Preference Survey

The interpretation of findings from the retail market study should be triangulated with the results from a retail preference survey. The value of this type of individually collected information is that it helps provide a greater level of specificity of the particular kinds of goods and service demanded by Ridgefield residents than what can be gleaned from the leakage study in which retail goods are categorized by broad NAICS codes whose meaning are of limited value to prospective businesses. Moreover, the retail preference survey would also help ascertain what are the community preferences for which types of retail establishments that would harmonize with the town's existing character.

Housing Demand Analysis

One of the key issues for debate in the town is the appropriate supply and location of affordable housing. The level of demand for affordable housing within Ridgefield is especially important to the EDC because of the role that affordable housing supply has in (1) attracting businesses to locate within the town and (2) expanding the consumer market especially in downtown and a future TOD anchored around the Branchville train station.

In 1999, the Ridgefield Affordable Housing Committee prepared a housing needs study that documented the perception of housing needs, inventoried existing housing units, and provided recommendations for creating a diversity of housing options. This document, however, did not provide a formal housing supply and demand analysis at the local and regional scale in order to determine the number of new housing units that could be absorbed in the Ridgefield market. Moreover, the document was prepared 15 years ago. The EDC could benefit from a new housing demand study that focused especially on the marketability of new housing units in the downtown and in the Branchville TOD area.

Evaluation of Business Retention / Attraction Efforts

Ridgefield's Chamber of Commerce has long engaged with prospective investors and businesses contemplating location within Ridgefield. However, the nature of this engagement or its consequences is not broadly understood by all members of the EDC. As part of a market study, the EDC should formally document and evaluate the effectiveness of historical business retention and attraction efforts by the Chamber of Commerce and also the Board of Selectmen. Currently, this information is only

anecdotal, unwritten, and inaccessible. A formal evaluation of business retention programs would have three benefits:

- Educate new members of the EDC on the types of businesses that have historically engaged the Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Selectmen for advice regarding business location.
- Help the EDC better understand the combination of qualitative and quantitative factors affecting a business' decision to locate or not locate in Ridgefield.
- Provide the EDC with a richer empirical basis for justifying business incentive programs and estimating their fiscal impacts.

2. Marketing Ridgefield

- **Recommendation: Maintain the Chamber of Commerce as the key entity charged with the task of marketing Ridgefield.**

The 2010 Action Plan proposed a variety of strategies for marketing the town to prospective businesses. These ideas included the EDC's formation of a business ambassadors program and a speakers bureau to disseminate the town's business recruitment and retention message. While these ideas sound good in principal, the reality is that the town's Chambers of Commerce already provides a valuable resource to prospective business owners. Part of its effectiveness is due to its centralization. Additionally, the Destination Ridgefield project sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, offers an excellent campaign to inspire visitation. Parallel marketing efforts conducted by the EDC not only would be duplicative but potentially confusing to a prospective business. While the EDC should help the Chamber of Commerce better understand the town's economic development goals, the Chamber of Commerce should continue to take the lead in the actual marketing and branding of the town.

3. Affordable Housing Plan

- **Recommendation: Identify areas in the town that are suitable for affordable housing development and market those areas to affordable housing developers.**

Under Connecticut General Statute § 8-30g, affordable housing developers are permitted to override local zoning codes in towns where less than the 10% of their total housing stock is deemed affordable. Under this regulation, the developer is able to build at a higher density than would otherwise have been permissible under the zoning regulation. The local jurisdiction can only circumvent the statute if it can prove that the proposed housing constitutes a threat to health and safety.

In Ridgefield, only 2.34% of the housing stock is deed-restricted as affordable. Affordable housing projects proposed in Ridgefield have resulted in considerable opposition and placed the town's Planning and Zoning Department in the position of having to navigate a complicated and expensive legal process. This level of administrative burden in tandem with limited human resources has also constrained the department's capacity to conduct long-term strategic planning.

The EDC could take a more proactive role in addressing the ongoing controversies surrounding affordable housing. The reason for doing so is that, as noted above, the supply of affordable housing does affect the town's ability to meet economic development goals including business retention and downtown revitalization.

One strategy worth considering would be for the EDC to work with the Planning and Zoning Department to identify areas within Ridgefield where it would be appropriate to build affordable housing. By proactively defining areas of the town suitable for affordable housing and marketing them aggressively to prospective developers, the town may be able to circumvent some of the administrative costs of 8-30g compliance, come closer to reaching the 10% affordable housing threshold, and also meet a legitimate need of many town residents for affordable housing.

4. Downtown Revitalization Plan

- **Establish a long-term plan for the use, scale, design, and intensity for all land uses downtown including (a) affordable housing (b) retail (c) offices (d) public space including the street and (e) parking.**

The 2010 Economic Action Plan called for the creation of a downtown development blueprint that would be undertaken by the EDC. The blueprint would help bring together different downtown stakeholders including the business community in order to resolve ongoing questions such as the appropriate supply and location of parking, the optimal mix of land uses on downtown properties, and the best allocation for ground floor retail space.

Although commercial vacancies are relatively minimal downtown (under 5% according to anecdotal evidence), the idea for some sort of downtown blueprint is still relevant. There is still ongoing debate about parking policy and land use as well as continuing questions about architectural design guidelines and policies regarding use conversion. Moreover, the emergence of the Gateway Rezoning and the Branchville TOD planning initiative has raised concerns that the downtown may be facing competition while it continues to rebound from the recession.

The problem with the proposal for a downtown blueprint in the 2010 Action Plan was that responsibility was not assigned to an entity with the human and financial resources to perform a useful plan. Without a paid staff member, it would be difficult for the EDC to conduct the type of land use and zoning analysis required for any sort of technically sophisticated revitalization plan. The shortage of staffing in the Planning and Zoning Department also restricts that agency from being able to lead this task. The best resolution is for the EDC and the Planning and Zoning Department to jointly sponsor a downtown revitalization plan that is managed by an outside consultant charged with developing a long-term land use, economic development, and urban design strategy. However, this strategy should not occur in a vacuum but should tier from a larger town development plan (See Strategy #7: Town Visioning Charette).

5. Gateway Zoning

- **Recommendation: Regardless of the outcome of lawsuit, develop a strategic land use and urban design plan for Route 7 that tiers from a town-wide development strategy.**

One of the most controversial issues (if not the most controversial issue) in Ridgefield's land use politics is the rezoning of the Gateway Area along northern Route 7. Adopted by the Planning Commission in May 2013, the rezoning allows for a limited retail component capped at 8,000 square feet per tenant and 20,000 square feet per lot. The allowance of new retail uses along the northern Route 7 corridor would serve the travelling public as well as residents of eastern Ridgefield. The rezoning has resulted in a lawsuit against the town on the alleged basis that the rezoning was hastily adopted with insufficient public input and underestimation of the rezoning's environmental effects.

Regardless of the outcome of the lawsuit, it would be worthwhile for the EDC to analyze the development potential along Route 7 as part of a broader town-wide development strategy. While the rezoning took place just a few years after the town had adopted a comprehensive plan, the town does not have a formal redevelopment strategy that establishes priority sites for new development or guidance on how these priority sites interact with each other as well as the town as a whole.

6. Land Use Decision Process

- **Recommendation: Establish a clearer, more transparent land use decision process that may include the formation of a Coordinating Council.**

The town's system of land use governance is not consistently viewed as clear and therefore open to community complaints and even litigation due to the perceived lack of transparency.

Meanwhile, the town's key administrative entities dealing with land use including the Board of Selectmen, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the Inland Wetlands Commission are advised by independent bodies such as the EDC, the Architectural Advisory Committee, and the Conservation Commission. However, the communication linkages and coordination between all of these various bodies could be improved. For example, the EDC does not meet regularly with either the Board of Selectmen or the Planning and Zoning Commission. Moreover, there is not a forum where all of these bodies meet together and work collaboratively on the town's long term development vision.

The EDC should help facilitate, with the Planning and Zoning Commission, a more unified system of land use governance in which various entities work cooperatively, avoid situations of unexpected conflict, and maximize opportunities for interagency communication. As a first step, the EDC needs to document the purpose, purview, and protocols of each agency and committee that deals with issues related to land use and economic development. Then, the EDC should develop potential strategies including the formation of a Coordination Council that would improve the dissemination of land use information and facilitate inter-agency collaboration.

7. Town Visioning Charette

- **Establish a 1-2 day charette, sponsored jointly by the Board of Selectmen, P&Z, and EDC focused on (1) a Town-wide Development Strategy (2) Affordable Housing and (3) Land Use Decision Process**

While it is true that the town updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2010, as noted above, it does not have a formal redevelopment strategy that clearly defines priority development districts that complement the town's character and long-term sustainability goals. What has resulted since the adoption of the comprehensive plan are tensions between the development opportunities in the downtown, the Gateway area along northern Route 7, and the Branchville Station Area. Rather than these development districts emerging as a discrete parts of a unifying development vision, they have become competing in the eyes of some residents and so controversy provoking.

Many local governments are able to reduce community tensions by establishing a unified development vision. Charettes are one of the most effective formats for this type of visioning process. In a charette, the public-at-large works in a concentrated fashion over a compressed period of time to develop a long-term vision for their community. They establish goals, review existing conditions, define scenarios for development, and study the interactions between different types of development proposals. The result is a specific direction for the town's land use program. Whereas the outreach for the comprehensive plan helps inform residents of the key issues in their community, the town visioning charette would help define a more specific approach to land use development.

The EDC, in partnership with the Board of Selectmen and P&Z, should explore the possibility of jointly sponsoring and funding a town visioning charette with the support of all the committees dealing with land use and fully open to the public. In addition to defining the town's long-term development plan, the charette would also be an excellent opportunity to achieve community consensus on the optimal location for affordable housing and an improved system of land use governance. The charette would be more focused on specific land use and development issues than were public workshops held during the formation of the comprehensive plan.

SECTION III: COMMENTS FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAKEHOLDERS

On March 10th, 2014, a group of economic development stakeholders assembled to review the recommendations from the Ridgefield Economic Development Strategy. The meeting began with a brief presentation of the draft recommendations. Participants then divided into groups of two and were asked to discuss two questions over four rounds of one-on-one discussion.

- "Of the various strategies presented in the Economic Development Strategic Plan, which one do you think is most important and why?"

- “How can you personally be more proactively engaged with other departments and decision-makers involved with the town’s economic development?”

Attendees

The following individuals were invited to attend the meeting.

- Rudy Marconi, Board of Selectmen
- Betty Brosius, Planning Department
- Matthew Hicks, Parking Authority
- Al Garzi, Assessor
- Rebecca Muchetti, Planning and Zoning Commission
- Alison Greeley, Ridgefield Arts Council
- Charles Fisher, Town Engineer
- Susan Baker, Ridgefield Conservation Commission
- Joanne Search, Affordable Housing Committee
- Dave Goldenberg, Affordable Housing Committee
- Susan Dighton Ahlstrom, Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce
- John Kinnear, Architect
- Arnold Light, Ridgefield Economic Development Commission
- Jessica Bacher, Ridgefield Economic Development Commission
- Tiffany Zezula, Land use Law Center
- Kevin Dwarka, Land Use and Economic Consultant

Summary of Meeting Response

Question 1: “Of the various strategies presented in the EDS, which one do you think is most important and why?”

The two most important strategies for Ridgefield’s economic development are (1) the Town Visioning Charette and (2) the Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Participants felt that the Charette would offer an opportunity to bring different factions within the town together to discuss concerns and voice differing opinions. The number of factions, or interest groups, in Ridgefield and their lack of communication is a major concern of many participants.

The group also sees the Charette as a crucial step to developing a grand and strategic plan of action and that this must precede all other economic development strategies.

However, there were several members who believe the Downtown Revitalization Plan was most time sensitive and that this would result in immediate action.

Also, several members mentioned that the unbiased data from a market analysis is key and having this data available at the Charette would be very helpful. Additionally, many members also stated the importance of implementation strategy, as there seem to be many plans that never go anywhere.

Transcript of Responses

- *“Town visioning charette is important. Need the various boards/committees to talk to each other. Get rid of silos. Sit together and take a global look. Charette would help start the dialogue. Tonight is a good start.”*
- *“Market analysis. Know from dispassionate, analytical point of view. Not sure you can separate Market analysis and town visioning charette. Amount of time spent is a lot and then special interest group comes alive and you learn something new. Need market data before you can do charette.”*
- *“Downtown revitalization plan (is my) first choice but then switched to town visioning charette. Prior studies need to “get going” with something. Town visioning charette needs to precede downtown revitalization plan. Get everybody committed to plan of action with a timetable.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. Charette brings in leadership areas and different concerns of the town. Provides opportunity to bring conclusions to decision making.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. Tough to get groups to talk with each other. Not coordinated. Charette brings people together.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. Charette with a plan coming out to move initiatives forward. So many hours being spent and not everyone on same page. Not a clear vision to articulate. If (we get together) maybe (it will be) more productive. Need the right data so market analysis also important.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. Build foundation to get ideas of what people want. Bring everyone in. Boards commissions/committees don’t collaborate. (Need) more interaction.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. 3 boards mentioned. 3 (geographic) areas of development. Review of how they should change.”*
- *“Downtown revitalization. Different areas not speaking. We should be (working) as one. All merchants should get together and help each other. But different areas (of town) should help each other out. Maybe come up with a plan. More town visioning charette.”*
- *“Downtown revitalization. As resident, frustrated by lack of planning. Too many studies that call for more studies. When so we have a plan? Town visioning charette gets people together. But downtown revitalization plan we need to kickstart. We need a plan but I’d like to see town vision charette but with a plan and a timeline. Plan has to include everything. New Canaan is a successful downtown.”*

- *“Downtown revitalization. So many factions vying for a voice. A lot of self-serving interests. Little interest in fellow merchants. No thought to consequences of various businesses. (pizza place, parking).”*
- *“Downtown revitalization.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. Incorporates all the others. Lack of planning in town. No time to implement plan and create a singular vision. A lot of plans sitting on shelves. Until we do there is no point in doing the other ones.”*
- *“Market analysis.”*
- *“Too much planning/no implementation.”*
- *“Town visioning charette. A) Different groups B) 3 (development) areas all need attention C) Charette lends opportunity to address all (the other proposed strategies).”*
- *“Market analysis. Charette has led to special interests. Community thoughts. Market Analysis and town visioning charette.”*
- *“Market analysis. Tax break for businesses. No continuity between groups. Properly done, with input from all groups. Consensus needed.”*
- *“Market analysis. Supplies “unbiased data” basis for more productive charette. More hard data and info on 3 development locations. Help to understand what people really want. Have to represent what people want. Rely more on commercial tax base to prosper and survive- needs more commercial.”*

Question 2: “How can you personally be more proactively engaged with other departments and decision-makers involved with the town’s economic development?”

In response to Question 2, the overwhelming majority of the Coordinating Council stressed improved communications as necessary to economic development. There should be more interaction between different groups in terms of communication, collaboration, and shared information.

There is also a concern that some voices (self-interests) are being expressed more than others. There also needs to be more transparency from agencies to the public.

Several members also mentioned more accurate tax assessment and the need to work closer with the assessor’s office.

Transcript of Responses

- *“Encourage the merchants to think of big picture, not individual need. Work to help BOS and P&Z to understand AHC mission. Think mission is misunderstood. Don’t think name of committee helps - change name of committee.”*
- *“Professionals lead through strategy. Variety of groups not always communicating. New developments in town- incredible connections. Fortifying through process. Third party (is needed) to lead the different groups. We seldom get together as one. Value in working together.”*
- *“Request a meeting- phone, in person, EDC keeps it within - doesn’t always reach out. Limited funds. Goals in right direction. 15/85 commercial/residential services- change tax basis. Communication is key.”*
- *“Assessor- value of property- highest and best use. How to properly assess it. Good to get most value, most tax revenue. Same values and goals to bring higher revenue for town.”*
- *“Tough for other groups to talk with each other. Not coordinated.”*
- *“Working together. Not (enough) dialogue about affordable housing plan – (this is a) difficult decision. Looking to what others think.”*
- *“We can’t talk (together) except in public hearings. We should have big issue discussions, especially housing, parking. We spend time discussing issues- people are not aware of what we’re doing.”*
- *“EDC mission is to change tax base. Promised 15% commercial. We have to open communications before they become issues like the doctor’s proposed (development).”*
- *“Connect to work together.”*
- *“There are too many self-serving factions in town. This happens again and again. People get away with it.”*
- *“So many factions vying for a voice. Unwilling to hear the other groups.”*
- *“More involved in genuine discussions, coordinating people. Ability to get a monthly get together. EDC agendas- lets talk about it. Break down the silos. Get people talking to each other. Data could be shared.”*
- *“Let’s start organizing implementation.”*

- *“Reach out to various commissions, large conversation. Clear definition of interest for towns.”*
- *“As a private citizen, lots of talk and studies but not a lot of action- why not? You need a plan. Need a person to manage plan. Add his voice to pushing to get plan in place and advocate.”*
- *“Getting involved and inviting conversation and collaboration. Mutual understanding. Having common goals and bridging adversity proactively. Consistent message and shared information.”*
- *“Getting involved. Help produce a unified voice. Working more closely with the chamber. Helping to be the voice for the arts constituency around. Bring in info back the other way.”*



BIOGRAPHY OF KEVIN DWARKA, JD, PHD

Kevin Dwarka JD, PhD is a land use lawyer and economic consultant specializing in the revitalization of urban neighborhoods. Headquartered on Wall Street, Kevin's firm provides legal guidance and quantitative analysis to real estate developers, municipalities, housing authorities, community development corporations, transit agencies, law firms, architects, and building contractors. He also serves as a Senior Fellow at Pace Land Use Law Center. Prior to forming his consultancy, he held senior positions at the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, New York City Transit, and Nelson Nygaard Consulting Associates.

Land use services include zoning analysis, site selection, development approvals, environmental review, and right-way acquisition for transit infrastructure projects. Versed in all aspects of the New York City land use approvals process, Kevin helps builders navigate the complex web of land use regulations enforced by the New York City Department of City Planning, Board of Standards and Appeals, the Department of Buildings, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

Economic consulting services include real estate market analysis, affordable housing finance, infrastructure cost benefit analysis, financial feasibility analysis for redevelopment projects, and economic impact studies. Current projects include the Newburgh Broadway Corridor Access Plan, the Newburgh Land Use and Market Analysis, the Newburgh Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan, the Poughkeepsie City Center Revitalization Plan, and the Ridgefield Economic Development Strategic Plan.

His consultancy also provides a full suite of litigation support services including expert testimony, real property valuation, and technical analysis of land use, traffic, and environmental impact documents.

Since 2010, he has served as an Adjunct Professor at Baruch College, where he has taught land use, urban economic development, and environmental policy. He also teaches Israeli Politics at Yeshiva University. His dissertation at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, examined the use of global capital and public private partnerships for financing light rail projects in Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He received his BA from Columbia University, JD from Pace Law School, MCP from UC Berkeley, and PhD from Hebrew University. Kevin is admitted to practice before the New York State Bar and serves on the New York City Bar Association's Housing and Urban Development Committee. He also on the board of the New York chapter of the Congress for New Urbanism.