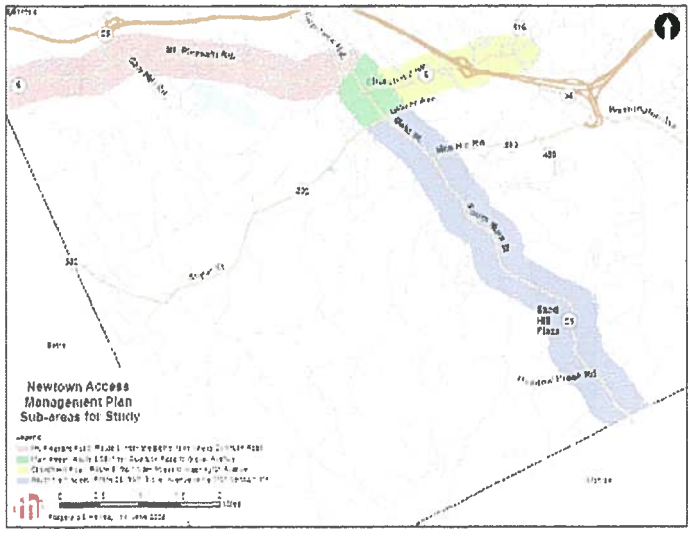
INTRODUCTION

Overview

This Access Management Plan for Routes 6, portions of Route 25 and Church Hill Road has been developed to offer access management tools to help preserve and enhance the character, capacity, and safety of travel along these major travel corridors in Newtown, Connecticut. The roadway corridors considered for this plan include:

- All of Routes 6 in Newtown, from the Bethel town line to the junction with I-84
- Route 25 from the Monroe town line to the junction with Route 6, and
- SR 816 (Church Hill Road) from the junction with Route 6 to the intersection with Washington Street.

A map of the study area addressed in this plan is shown on the following page.



This access management plan identifies opportunities to enhance existing access patterns as well as optimal locations for new access points to land along these corridors. The study process that led to this plan was comprised of four general components including:

1) Evaluation and analysis of existing and potential future access, roadway operations, and land use conditions along the study corridors
2) Analysis of existing Newtown land use policy, zoning regulations and driveway-related ordinances
3) Recommendations for access design criteria and modifications to strengthen access management in Newtown's land use regulations
4) Draft curb-cut improvement recommendations
5) Public involvement including work with a Technical Advisory Committee, general educational publicity and presentations at a community workshop and a public hearing

The outcome of this study process, this access management plan, has two basic components:

1. A set of recommended actions to enhance access on North Main Street through land use regulations and roadway improvements;
2. A Curb-Cut Plan with recommendations for enhancements to access locations and design when land use change takes place.

What is Access Management?

Access management is the process of overseeing access to land development while simultaneously preserving the flow of traffic on the surrounding roadway system in terms of safety and capacity. Its focus is on safety of travel and minimizing conflict points (locations where vehicles can cross paths) which in turn helps to maintain the smooth flow of traffic along a roadway. Maintaining smooth traffic flow can, in turn, reduce the need for roadway widening induced by growing congestion. Access design characteristics of a roadway that directly impact traffic flow and safety include the location, spacing, and design of access drives entering the roadway as well as location of signals, medians, and turn lanes. Planning and regulatory tools that can manage access to local roads include the plan of conservation and development, any transportation plans, zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, and specific local ordinances adopted to control driveway construction.

The benefits of utilizing access management in preserving and enhancing a roadway system are threefold. First, access management supports a safe and effective relationship between the local transportation system and land use. It can ensure that traffic can reach local development smoothly and safely and that traffic generated by local development will not create congestion or induce accidents. Second, access management promotes the goals and objectives of a local plan of development for the future of a community. For example, if the plan of development calls for economic development in the form of more retail business in specific locations, access management can help to ensure that access to local roads is maintained or improved to serve that economic growth. Third, access management can maintain the safety and capacity of roadways relative to the functions they are expected to serve. Most communities include in their plans of development a future roadway circulation plan indicating which roads should remain as quiet residential streets, which should be used to convey large volumes of traffic to businesses within the community, and which roadways should serve to convey traffic through the town on its way to other destinations. This future roadway circulation plan can be supported and promoted by effective access management.

Access management objectives can be achieved by the application of a comprehensive package of tools which include both physical design plans for improving a roadway and local planning programs and development regulations to control access to future development along a roadway system. The combination of physical design for access management (in the form of a curb-cut plan as defined below) coupled with planning programs and regulatory approaches for controlling access constitutes a local access management plan.

What Is Good Access Design?

The general guiding principles of good access design are to:

- Minimize conflict points or opportunities for vehicles to cross paths
- Provide safe, adequate spacing between driveways, between intersections, and between driveways and intersections;
- Maintain good sight-lines for all drivers

Performance criteria used to evaluate the existing access points and intersections on Routes 6, 25 and Church Hill Road and areas in need of improvement are as follows; to the extent feasible and practical:

1. Curb cuts and roadway intersections should meet at a 90° angle
2. Access drives should not be located within 150 feet (functional area) of an intersection
3. Access drives on the same side of the street should be separated as far apart as is practical, with a minimum separation of 60 feet for residential drives and 120 for commercial drives

4. Unobstructed sight distance from access drives and collector roads should be a minimum of 150 feet
5. All curb cuts and/or roadway intersections on opposite sides of the street should be aligned directly opposite one another
6. Internal circulation among adjoining properties should be provided when possible
7. Access drives should be provided to lower classification streets whenever possible. That is, access should be provided to collector or minor roads that connect with Routes 6, 25 and Church Hill Road rather than directly to these arterials streets, where that option exists
8. Properties with 100 feet or less frontage should have no more than one curb-cut
9. Where a property has more than 150 feet of frontage, two entrances/curb-cuts are acceptable, provided there is a minimum of 1/3 of the frontage area separating the two curb-cuts
10. Where a property has multiple curb-cuts, redundant access drives should be eliminated
11. Entrance drives should not be excessively wide (more than 25 feet for one-way access and 50 feet for a two way access)
12. Curb edges should be clearly defined with islands or landscaping

What Is A Curb-Cut Plan?

A Curb-Cut Plan is a specific concept for a roadway or roadway segment indicating the community's idea of the ideal layout for access points along that roadway. It is presented in a similar fashion to a site plan for future development. Generally, a Curb-Cut Plan is created for a roadway segment that has need for improved access design and/or is in an area where future development pressures are likely to increase. However, a Curb-Cut Plan also recognizes that opportunities to improve existing hazardous access arrangements will only occur at the time that a change in use or change in intensity of use is proposed for a currently developed parcel or parcels.

By specifying the preferred access locations and design for a roadway segment, a Curb-Cut Plan can help:

- Ensure that access remains safe and efficient as land uses change
- Prevent future unsafe access arrangements to and from land that is not yet developed.
- Ensure future opportunities to improve hazardous access arrangements are considered and implemented as land use proposals are brought before the Planning and Zoning Commission.
- Serve as a guide that can be shared with development applicants for use in site plan development

RECOMMENDATIONS - NEWTOWN POLICY AND REGULATORY DOCUMENTS

Access Management Framework

Regulatory approaches to access management can include language in the zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, and in driveway related ordinances such as Newtown's existing Roadway Ordinance. Such regulations should be linked to clear statements of policy for managing the character of development in the town. Newtown's Plan of Conservation and Development (2004) has established this sound foundation for access management regulations with the following policy statements (paraphrased):

- To protect and enhance Newtown's rural New England setting and attributes;
- Design of the town's roads and traffic patterns will enhance business development while minimizing traffic congestion
- Alleviate areas of congestion and address safety issues – includes strategy to adopt town-wide access management policy

Zoning approaches to access management can be grouped in two categories. The zoning regulations can establish a specific Access Management Overlay Zone or they can include additional language for access management applicable to all proposed development on all roads in the community and integrated throughout the regulations. Newtown's zoning and subdivision regulations currently contain some language that addresses access management.

An Access Management Overlay Zone is generally established as an amendment to the zoning regulations to cover a specific geographic area of the community within which specific access design criteria would apply. Such an overlay zone is beneficial where land use controls are desired just for the area covered by the zone and nowhere else in the community. The access design within such an Access Management Overlay Zone would be guided by the curb cut plan designed particularly for the zone as well as by specific access design standards such as are described below. Overlay zones generally require more complex administrative procedures to successfully implement them than single zones with associated development design criteria.

Zoning provisions can be either prescriptive (required) or recommended (guidelines). One approach to guidelines for access design as part of the regulatory process could be the development of an access design manual with a comprehensive listing of standards for access design based upon roadway function and the character of proposed development. Applicants for land use permits would not be required to meet the design standards in the manual, yet would be encouraged to do so. This approach is most successful when

there is a comprehensive pre-application review process wherein all projects that will come before the Planning and Zoning Commission are reviewed for completeness and soundness of design prior to formal submittal.

A combination of these approaches is recommended for Newtown. This is because Newtown has mostly residential or local streets with a limited number of arterial and collector roads. An access management overlay zone can stringently address access issues on Newtown's most heavily traveled streets while not imposing unnecessary regulatory requirements along quieter streets mostly populated with single-family homes. This is appropriate as access management generally has the most benefit where congestion and development pressures are likely to increase such as along major through streets that carry high volumes of traffic as well as serve as access to heavily visited commercial sites. The value of access management along predominantly residential streets tends to be more limited. Nonetheless, some general language in the regulations for access management may have beneficial applications in Newtown in mixed-use and commercial zones away from Routes 6 and 25 such as in Hawleyville Center. In these situations, it will be advantageous to have some overall criteria for access design to guide development applicants in site development planning.

General Recommendations

- Adopt the Newtown Curb-Cut Plan as an amendment to the Newtown Zoning Regulations and use as a reference tool
- Establish an Access Management Overlay Zone to encompass the area covered by the Curb-cut Plan
- Update the current language for access management in Newtown's zoning and subdivision regulations as well as in the Borough of Newtown zoning regulations to include a comprehensive set of access design guidelines
- Utilize a comprehensive pre-application review process to assess proposed access designs for new development as well as redevelopment
- Establish written policy for balancing access improvements with efforts to sustain the historic character of the town's special districts; the Borough of Newtown, South Main Street Design District, and Village District. There is some potential for redevelopment in Newtown's special districts to also offer opportunities for improving access patterns and driveways. Yet those improvements may require some modifications in the visual character of these districts such as creating new, shared driveways where numerous narrow driveways with poor sight distance now occur. An amendment to the Plan of Conservation and Development stating priorities and policy for these situations should be drafted. It can provide a framework for decision making by the Town and Borough zoning boards.

Detailed Recommendations

Relevant sections of the Newtown regulations are summarized below followed by recommendations for amendments to provide for enhanced access management. It is the intent of these recommendations, to suggest ways to strengthen the ability of the Planning and Zoning Commission to control the design and location of new or substantially altered access drives that provide direct access onto Mount Pleasant Road (Route 6), Church Hill Road, and South Main Street (Route 25). In addition, it is the intent of the recommendations is to ensure that the Planning and Zoning Commission, town planning professionals, and/or Town Engineer (and/or Traffic Engineer) each has an opportunity to review and comment on all proposed new or substantially altered access drives onto town roadways.

DOCUMENT – Relevant Section(s)	RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS
Newtown Roadway Ordinance	
Section 271A	• Incorporate a comprehensive set of access design guidelines for non-residential driveways – add other design components in addition to sight-lines • Require new/substantially altered single/two family residential driveways to include a turn-around to prevent backing onto any collector or arterial street
Newtown Zoning Regulations	
Article I – Section 2 - Definitions	• Add definitions of driveway, access, or other terms used to explain access design such as corner clearance
Article II – Section II – South Main Village Design District 2.02.400 Design Review Guidelines	• Cross-reference Article II - Access Management and make the provisions of each consistent with one another
Article IV – Business, Commercial, & Professional Uses	• State when and if drive-throughs are permitted and note that they can pose particular access issues and must conform to the requirements of the section on access management • Cross-reference Article II – Access Management and make the provisions of each consistent with one another
Article VII- Section 5 – Consolidated Lots	• Amend wording related to number of driveways to include consolidated lots that are combined for the purposes of mixed-residential uses or multi-family residential use

DOCUMENT – Relevant Section(s)	RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS
Article VIII - Section 2 – Access Management	• Combine this section with the one on driveways (Article VIII) for one comprehensive section on driveway design, location and spacing • Establish an access management overlay zone covering Routes 6, 25 and Church Hill Road. Include reference to the curb-cut plan along with a set of design criteria for all accessways. • Expand access design criteria for driveways to include orientation, spacing, number of driveways, as well as maximum width, OR refer to the updated design guidelines contained in the Roadway Ordinance • Consider including provisions clarifying when access design criteria apply so that minor changes to an existing use may be exempted from compliance with some access design requirements at the zoning commission's discretion • Include language to address what will happen when an applicant cannot meet access design criteria by virtue of site constraints • Require frontage landscaping or enhanced streetscape along any public street to clearly define access points/curbing (also refer to Article VIII-Section 4 on landscaping) • Modify language regarding shared driveways. State they are encouraged (rather than potentially mandated) along with internal connections among developments. • Provide incentives for beneficial access design such as flexibility in parking requirements, signage, or lot coverage • Provide driveway design criteria as a stand alone hand-out available for development applicants • Note that a traffic analysis may be required. Move this requirement to Article X on Site Development Plans which addresses information required of applicants for Commission decision making.

DRAFT

DOCUMENT – Relevant Section(s)	RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS
Article VIII - Section 3 –Parking, Driveway and Loading Standards	• Relocate all of the language relative to driveways to the Article II on access management and create one comprehensive section of the regulations addressing this topic
Article VIII – Section 4 – Landscape, Screening, and Buffer Requirements	• Add provisions to require landscaping along lot frontage with a public street to provide a visual buffer and for clear delineation of access drives
Article IX - Section 3- Nonconforming Use	• Add discussion of non-conforming driveways and state how these will be addressed in the course of development and redevelopment.
Article X – Site Development Plans	• Specify that information on adjacent parcels and their access configurations must be included on site plans, including any access points within influence area of subject site access • Include language to describe when the Commission may require a traffic analysis report associated with a proposed access design. A traffic analysis report may have variable levels of detail from a full traffic impact report to a less detailed engineering analysis of specific access features.
Newtown Borough Zoning Regulations	
Article 2 – Definition of Terms	• Add definitions of driveway, access, or other terms used to explain access design such as corner clearance

DRAFT

DOCUMENT – Relevant Section(s)	RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS
Article 7 – Section 7.03 – Driveways	• Expand access design criteria for driveways to include orientation, spacing, number of driveways, as well as maximum width, OR refer to the updated design guidelines contained in the Roadway Ordinance • Consider including provisions clarifying when access design criteria apply so that minor changes to an existing use may be exempted from compliance with some access design requirements at the zoning commission's discretion • Include language to address what will happen when an applicant cannot meet access design criteria by virtue of site constraints • Require frontage landscaping or enhanced streetscape along any public street to clearly define access points/curbing (also refer to Article 7 on landscaping) • Add language regarding shared driveways. State they are encouraged along with internal connections among developments. • Provide incentives for beneficial access design such as flexibility in parking requirements, signage, or lot coverage • Provide driveway design criteria as a stand alone hand-out available for development applicants • Note that a traffic analysis may be required. Move this requirement to Article 10 on Site Development Plans which addresses information required of applicants for Commission decision making.
Article 7 – Landscape and Sidewalk Requirements	• Require frontage landscaping to provide clear delineation of access drives along the street

DRAFT

DOCUMENT – Relevant Section(s)	RECOMMENDED MODIFICATIONS
Article 8 - Section 8.05 - Nonconforming Use	• Add discussion of non-conforming driveways and state how these will be addressed in the course of development and redevelopment
Article 10 – Site Development Plans	• Specify that information on adjacent parcels and their access configurations must be included on site plans, including any access points within the influence area of a subject site access • Modify language regarding traffic surveys to distinguish the level of analysis detail the Commission may require with a proposed access design. A traffic analysis report may have variable levels of detail from a full traffic impact report to a less detailed engineering analysis of specific access features.
Newtown Subdivision Regulations	
Article III - Subdivision Plans	• Consider increasing the extent of surrounding area that must be shown on site plans to up to 500 feet if needed to adequately reflect significant driveways affecting access to the subdivision • Include language to describe when the Commission may require a traffic analysis report associated with a proposed access design. A traffic analysis report may have variable levels of detail from a full traffic impact report to a less detailed engineering analysis of specific access features.
Article IV Substantive Provisions	• Cross-reference the zoning regulations for driveways and access management along with the Newtown Roadway Ordinance • Establish spacing standards for driveways for separation of a common driveway serving more than one rear lot to other driveways in the development

DRAFT