

IV. ACHIEVING THE VISION

HOUSING

A. INTRODUCTION

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes establishes the requirements for the housing section of a municipal plan of conservation and development as follows: “Such plan shall make provision for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multi-family dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain, and infrastructure capacity, for all residents and the planning region in which the municipality is located.... Such plan shall also promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate-income households....” The type, condition, layout, cost of housing and future housing needs are factors that play an important role in determining the quality of life for Newtown residents. These considerations were examined in updating Newtown’s Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and a summary of the finding of this analysis follows. A full discussion of this topic is contained in Plan Memorandum #8, Housing.

B. EXISTING HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

The 2000 Census recorded 8,601 housing units in Newtown. Of these, 96.8% were occupied. The resulting vacancy rate of 3.2% is very low. Owner occupied housing units comprised 91.9% of Newtown’s total housing units and renter occupied units comprised the 8.1% balance in 2000. The 2000 Census counted 276 vacant housing units in Newtown, of which 37% were classified as seasonal, recreational or for occasional use.

- **Occupancy and Vacancy Characteristics:**

Table 4 describes the occupancy characteristics of Newtown’s housing stock compared to its neighboring communities, the Housatonic Valley Region and the State of Connecticut in 2000. Newtown’s vacancy rate of 3.2% was lower than that of the Housatonic Valley Region, at 5.1% and the State, at 6.1%. In comparison to surrounding communities, Newtown’s vacancy rate of 3.2% is lower than Bridgewater’s 9.8%, Brookfield’s 3.6%, Redding’s 5.4% and Southbury’s 7.4%. Newtown’s vacancy rate is higher than Bethel’s 2.2%, Easton’s 1.8%, Monroe’s 1.8% and Oxford’s 2.3%. As described in Table 4, all of the communities surrounding Newtown, with the exception of Bethel, have little in the way of rental housing, as recorded by the 2000 Census.

**Table 4
Housing Inventory Characteristics in 2000
Newtown, Adjacent Communities, the Region and the State**

	Total Housing Units	% Occupied	% Vacant		Total Occupied Units	% Owner Occupied	% Renter Occupied
NEWTOWN	8,601	96.8%	3.2%		8,325	91.9%	8.1%
Bethel	6,653	97.8%	2.2%		6,505	76.6%	23.4%
Bridgewater	779	90.2%	9.8%		703	90.0%	10.0%
Brookfield	5,781	96.4%	3.6%		5,572	89.0%	11.0%
Easton	2,511	98.2%	1.8%		2,465	94.3%	5.7%
Monroe	6,601	98.2%	1.8%		6,481	93.4%	6.6%

Oxford	3,420	97.7%	2.3%	3,343	91.0%	9.0%
Redding	8,287	94.6%	5.4%	2,918	90.1%	9.9%
Southbury	7,799	92.6%	7.4%	7,225	89.5%	10.5%
Housatonic Valley Region	79,760	94.9%	5.1%	75,729	75.7%	24.3%
Connecticut	1,385,975	93.9%	6.1%	1,301,670	66.8%	33.2%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials

• **Housing Inventory Characteristics**

According to the Census, 1,513 new housing units were added to Newtown's housing stock between 1990 and 2000. Of these, 89.3% (1,351) were single family detached homes, 7.9% (120) were single family attached homes and 2.8% (42) were located in buildings containing 5 to 9 units of housing. In addition to the new housing units added, Newtown lost 99 housing units for a net gain of 1,407 housing units between 1990 and 2000.

As described in Table 5, the characteristics of housing types found in Newtown are similar in composition to several adjacent communities, including Bridgewater, Easton, Oxford and Redding. The housing stock characteristics of the adjacent towns of Bethel and Southbury are quite dissimilar from Newtown's, with high proportions of housing categorized as single family attached, indicating the presence of condominium type housing.

Table 5
Housing Units by Structure Type in 2000
Newtown, Adjacent Communities and Connecticut

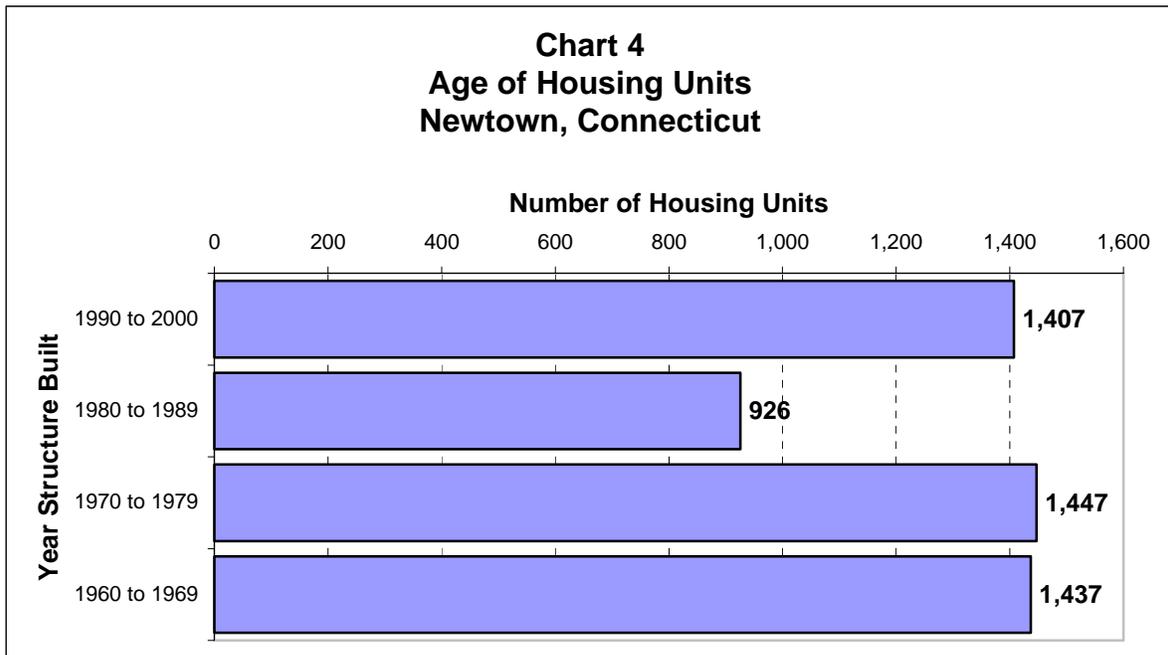
	Single Family Detached	% Single Family Detached	Single Family Attached & 2 to 4 Units	% Single Family Attached & 2 to 4 Units	Multi-Family (5 or More Units)	% Multi-Family (5 or More Units & Other)	Total Housing Units
NEWTOWN	7,979	92.8	459	5.3	163	1.9	8,601
Bethel	4435	66.7	1,635	24.6	583	8.8	6,653
Bridgewater	731	93.8	37	4.7	11	1.4	779
Brookfield	4,718	81.6	654	11.3	409	7.1	5,781
Easton	2,483	98.9	21	.08	7	0.3	2,511
Monroe	5,736	86.9	625	9.5	240	3.6	6,601
Oxford	3,169	92.7	199	5.8	52	1.5	3,420
Redding	2,945	95.4	115	3.7	26	0.8	3,086
Southbury	4,343	55.7	3,005	38.5	451	5.8	7,799
Danbury	12,653	44.4%	9,008	31.6%	6,858	24.0	28,519
Connecticut	816,706	58.9	317,802	22.9	251,467	18.2	1,385,975

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census; % may not add due to rounding

- **Housing Growth and Age**

To quantify the housing unit growth that occurred in the Town from 1990 through 2000, statistics from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development were used to determine housing construction authorizations by structure type, by year. During that time frame, Newtown consistently ranked as a top producer of housing. In fact, from 1992 through 1997, Newtown ranked between 2nd and 7th of Connecticut’s 169 cities and towns in housing unit development.

A potential indicator of housing condition in a community is the age of the housing stock. Sixty-one per cent of Newtown’s housing stock was constructed between 1960 and 2000. As shown in the chart below, with the exception of the 1980’s decade, Newtown has experienced a very constant rate of housing productivity of between 1,407 and 1,447 dwelling units per decade. Housing developed between 1980 and 2000 accounts for 27.1 % of Newtown’s housing stock, while 33.5 % of the Town’s housing was developed between 1960 and 1980. Even though the number of housing units developed during the past 20 years is less than the previous 20 years, the public perception that the rate of housing development within the community has increased during the past two decades is probably due to the “large lot” nature of development, which has resulted in an acceleration in the amount of land consumed by development.



- **Affordability of Housing**

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that a municipality “shall consider” the need for affordable housing in the preparation of a plan of conservation and development. Housing affordability is a many faceted issue. Some aspects of housing affordability are beyond the control of a local municipality, while others are directly affected by a municipalities land use policies and regulatory practices.

Housing costs are largely the result of the following factors: the demand for housing relative to the available supply; the location (time/distance) of housing relative to the sources of demand; the availability and cost of buildable land for the spectrum of market desired housing choices; labor and material costs; the age, quality and supply of existing housing inventory within the

competitive housing market area; the development of new housing product as it affects available inventory; and housing carrying costs, including mortgage interest rates, utilities and real estate taxes.

In their efforts to increase the production of housing that is affordable to the broad spectrum of society, local, state and federal government and non-profit organizations have created a variety of housing programs to reduce housing costs. One common characteristic among most of these programs is that they employ a form of financial subsidy to defray the cost of the units being produced, renovated, or occupied. While these programs serve to provide immediate solutions to the need for affordable housing, they do not address underlying economic factors that affect housing costs and therefore have a very limited effect on overall housing market conditions and affordability.



The Riverview

Multi-Family and Affordable Housing in Newtown: Multi-family affordable housing development (AHD) is permitted in Newtown, subject to the granting of a special exception, in Farming, R-1/2, R-1, R-2 and R-3 zones. The Riverview, located on Bryan Lane behind Sand Hill Plaza, is a 49 unit condominium project developed under the AHD provisions, containing 13 units of “set-aside,” owner occupied affordable housing. Multi-family housing is also permitted by special exception in the Fairfield Hills Adaptive Reuse zone, provided that 25% of the units are affordable housing units.

Age restricted multi-family housing (62 years of age or older, or 55 if the project meets defined requirements of the U.S. Code and Code of Federal Regulations) is permitted in the EH-10 zone, subject to the granting of a special exception. A maximum of 24 units of multi-family housing, associated with commercial uses, is permitted in the Hawleyville Center Design District-East (HCDD-E), subject to the granting of a special exception permit. The Sandy Hook Design District (SHDD) permits the development of up to three dwellings per lot when associated with commercial uses, subject to obtaining site development plan approval or a special exception permit. The special exception process plays an important role in that it allows the Town to maintain control over the siting of multi-family housing, which helps ensure that a proposed project will work well within the context of surrounding land uses. Accessory apartments are also permitted in owner occupied dwellings located in R-1 and larger residential zoning districts throughout the Town.



Walnut Tree Village- “EH-10”

• **Elderly Housing and Assisted Living Facilities**

As the median age of the population of Connecticut and Newtown continues to increase, housing for the elderly is a critical concern for most communities. As the population of a town ages, it is important that a community provide alternative living arrangements, from single-family detached homes to multi-unit communities, as options for seniors. This gives the elderly population opportunities to continue to reside within the community where they have spent the majority of their years and not be forced-out by escalating housing costs and limited housing choices. Housing product for the elderly spans a broad range of types and supporting services. From housing designed to promote mobility e.g., one-level, grab bars, ramps, etc., to provision of medical and support of daily living functions, there are many variations of elderly housing product. The main distinguishing characteristics of the housing types are the level of medical assistance and the extent of communal facilities provided. Newtown’s housing inventory provided the following types of housing for Newtown’s senior residents: Assisted Living Facilities, Congregate Living Facilities, Continuing Care Retirement Community, Government Assisted Independent Living Facility, Nursing Homes, Residential Care Homes, and Age Restricted Housing.



Nunnawauk Meadows – Senior Housing

The past decade saw the development of assisted living facilities and age restricted condominium housing in Newtown, as well as the expansion of skilled nursing home resources for the frail elderly. These housing resources are described in the following table.

Table 6
Age Restricted, Assisted Living, Elderly,
Affordable and Frail Elderly Housing Resources*
Newtown, Connecticut

Complex Name/Location	Number of Units	Type of Housing
Nunnawauk Meadows Newtown Housing for the Elderly	120 Units 14 Units	Age Restricted Independent Rentals Congregate housing
Ashlar of Newtown 139 Toddy Hill Road	156 Beds	Skilled Nursing Home
Lockwood Lodge at Ashlar 139 Toddy Hill Road	56 Units	Assisted Living
The Homesteads at Newtown 166 Mount Pleasant Road (Rt 6)	100 Units 46 Units 134 Units	Assisted Living Age Restricted Condominiums Age Restricted Congregate
Walnut Tree Village Walnut Tree Hill Road	190 Units	Age Restricted Condominiums
Liberty at Newtown* Mount Pleasant Road (Rte 6)	96 Units	Age Restricted Condominiums

Source: Newtown Land Use Office;

* Note: Numbers in the above table are for approved housing. The 14 units for congregating living at

Nunnawauk Village have not been constructed; only 11 condominium units at The Homesteads have been constructed and they remain vacant pending resolution of tax issues; none of the 134 approved congregate living units at The Homesteads have been constructed; approximately 100 condominium units at Walnut Tree Village have been constructed and occupied, with the balance currently under construction; and the 96 condominium units at the Liberty are scheduled for occupancy beginning in 2004.



Ashlar of Newtown- Frail Elderly Nursing Home



Ashlar Lockwood Lodge- Assisted Living

C. HOUSING: ISSUES, GOALS AND ACTION AGENDA

The following section identifies Newtown's key housing issues, community planning goals related to housing and makes recommendations for actions to achieve those goals.

ISSUE #1: HOUSING CHOICES

1. Newtown lacks a meaningful supply of housing for a broad spectrum of ages and incomes.
2. Many who work in Newtown do not have the opportunity to live in the community in which they work.
3. Due to the lack of affordable housing, some Newtown residents will not continue to reside in Town, as their personal circumstances, incomes and housing needs change over time.

Goal: Strive for a more balanced supply of housing types that will accommodate the housing needs of Newtown residents and those working in Newtown.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
HOUS1	1.	Encourage the Borough to permit the development of residential dwellings over ground floor retail businesses in the Village District, as recommended in the 1993 POCD.	BZC	BB		
HOUS1	2.	Continue to encourage the development of accessory apartments as a means to create affordable housing.	PZC	BZC		

Entity Abbreviations - BB- Borough Burgess; BE- Board of Education; BF – Board of Finance; BFC- Board of Fire Commissioners; BM- Board of Managers (Edmond Town Hall); BS- Board of Selectmen; BZC- Borough Zoning Commission; CC- Conservation Commission; CA- Commission on Aging; EDC- Economic Development Commission; LC- Legislative Council; OS- Open Space Committee; PBSC- Public Buildings and Site Commission; PC- Police Commission; PRC- Parks and Recreation Commission; PZC- Planning and Zoning Commission; TSB- Transportation Strategy Board; WPCA- Water Pollution Control Authority; YSB- Youth Service Board. **Section Abbreviations** - COCH- Community Character; CANR- Conservation and Natural Resources; OPSP- Open Space; TRAN- Transportation; HOUS- Housing; ECDE- Economic Development; COFA- Community Facilities. **Definition of Responsibilities** - Leader: Responsible to lead and coordinate the evaluation and, if justified, implementation of the strategy; Required Support: To accomplish the evaluation and/or implementation, this entity needs to provide support to the Leader.

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
HOUS1	3.	Identify incentives available to owners who impose affordable housing deed restrictions on their accessory apartments.	BS	BB		
HOUS1	4.	Identify appropriate areas for affordable housing.	PZC	BZC		
HOUS1	5.	Evaluate an integrated planned community design strategy that reinforces existing built-up, mixed-use areas of Town and creates new nodes of mixed-use development along Routes 6 and 25, and incorporate the historical pedestrian friendly development patterns traditional to New England communities.	PZC	BZC		

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ISSUE #2: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT, OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION, COMMUNITY CHARACTER

1. The development of housing within Newtown directly affects open space and community character issues.
2. The development of single-family detached housing in Newtown consumes open land at the rate of 4.5 acres per dwelling unit.

Goal: Manage residential development to enhance Newtown’s present community character.

Strategies:

Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
HOUS2	1.	Create land-use regulations that encourage “open space conservation” subdivision design standards without affecting the existing permitted density of development.	PZC	CC	OS	
HOUS2	2.	Implement the requirements that plans for residential-land subdivisions containing 6 lots or more be submitted both in the form of open-space conservation developments that preserve fifty percent or more of the land for open space and as conventional arrangements for the Planning and Zoning Commissioners to decide which represents the best utilization of the tract of land.	PZC	CC		

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Section/ Issue	No.	Strategy	Leader	Required Support	Required Support	Required Support
HOUS2	3.	Promote open-space conservation subdivisions as an alternative to conventional “large-lot” developments.	PZC			
HOUS2	4.	Establish a visual buffer from the public realm along the road and right of way for residential development fronting on rural roads.	PZC			
HOUS2	5.	Place stricter limits on the “buildable area” of new lots to exclude environmentally sensitive conditions.	PZC	CC		
HOUS2	6.	Support the efforts within the state to enact legislation for an Impact Fee for new development.	BS	LC		

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