

PLANNING ISSUES IN DARIEN

3

Overview

The 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development for Darien is being updated by the Planning and Zoning Commission. A Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is a document which lays out the long-term vision for the physical, economic, and social development of a community.

This booklet summarizes results from some introductory exercises which were conducted to set the stage for the POCD update. These exercises included:

- A discussion of issues with the Planning and Zoning Commission,
- Responses to a survey of Town department heads,
- Field trips around Darien,
- Responses to an on-line survey, and
- A public meeting devoted to hearing from Darien residents.

Much of the discussion in this booklet is organized around the three main thematic elements of a Plan of Conservation and Development:

- What Darien may want to protect (conservation strategies),
- How Darien may want to guide future growth and change (development strategies),
- What Darien may want or need to support its overall vision (infrastructure strategies).

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret Wheatley
Writer

Conservation-Related
Strategies



Development-Related
Strategies



Infrastructure-Related
Strategies



PZC Kick-Off Meeting (September 2014)

On September 9, 2014, the Planning and Zoning Commission met with their consultant to discuss the 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development, the anticipated process for updating the POCD, and community issues. That discussion and additional discussions from the consultant selection process are summarized below:

Overall Comments

1. POCD Format –

- PZC feels 2006 POCD addressed issues at that time
- The inclusion of the “appendix” as part of each topic made the POCD appear larger and seem more intimidating
- In some ways, the story almost feels “backwards” because the data and logic follow the policies
- PZC likes having the background information there
- Maybe policies are too brief and policies plus appendix is too long – is there a middle ground?

2. Level Of Detail -

- PZC feels 2006 POCD may have been too specific for some properties
- Focus of this POCD should be strategic
- This POCD should consider performance objectives
- POCD could use graphics and small area plans to illustrate concepts

3. Technical Studies -

- Technical studies may be desirable in certain areas
 - Traffic
 - Parking structures / train station parking (a parking consultant is being retained by the Town) due to the limited land area to address all desired uses
 - Downtown “charrette” / master plan
 - Noroton Heights “charrette” / master plan
- This needs to be considered for inclusion in 2015-16 budget

Conservation-Related Topics (things we may want to protect)

1. **Overall Assets** -

- Main assets which make Darien desirable include:
 - Coastline / beaches
 - Mail-line rail service to New York City
 - Schools
 - Country clubs
- Darien is 98% developed so need to focus on managing what we have

2. **Coastal Areas** -

- Entire shoreline is zoned residential and is developed
- There are few opportunities to obtain public access unless expand existing beaches or acquire residential property

3. **Sustainability / Resiliency** –

- PZC feels sustainability and resilience needs to be considered and addressed as part of this POCD
- PZC feels the following communities have done some creative thinking in this area (Greenwich, Guilford, Groton)

Development-Related Topics (how we may want to guide change)

1. **Downtown / Noroton Heights** -

- Encouraging and supporting the appropriate development and redevelopment of downtown is important
- Encouraging and supporting the appropriate development and redevelopment of Noroton Heights is also important
- 2006 POCD had design guidelines / principles
- The intensity/height of buildings in the downtown is a topic of discussion and the POCD might want to weigh in and what is appropriate and what is not appropriate
- A “charrette” with a visual preference survey and 3-D modelling might make some sense to consider

2. **Residential Development** -

- Building coverage / bulk is becoming a concern
- Especially in smaller lot size areas (such as 1/5 zone)
- Maybe it is time to revisit “developed site area” or consider how to change components of coverage to get at building size and bulk
- Can Darien be “greener” in this area?

Infrastructure-Related Topics (facilities we may want or need)

1. **Drainage** -
 - Drainage and stormwater management issues are important
 - We are at the bottom of the watershed and get flooding from upstream development
 - Darien is getting rain gardens as part of new development but do not have “low impact development” (LID) requirements – do have drainage requirements

2. **Community Facilities** -
 - We may need more sports fields or figure out how to make better use of the fields we have
 - Local sports participation is high and so fields are stressed
 - Would be nice to expand town beaches

3. **Traffic / Transportation** -
 - Congestion is considered to be an issue around town
 - Railroad parking is considered to be an issue

Implementation-Related Topics (how we may want to make it happen)

(no topics raised)

Community Meeting (October 2014)

A community workshop meeting was held at the Darien Library on June 16 to get input from Darien residents. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting and many participated in the exercises described below.

Where People Live

People attending the meeting were asked to place a “blue dot” on a map to illustrate where they live.

The distribution of dots seems to indicate that residents came from different parts of Darien and that there did not seem to be a geographic bias which might have skewed the results of the meeting.



Prouds

People attending the meeting were asked to place a “green dot” on a map to identify things in Darien they were proud of. They were also asked to write these “prouds” on a card and submit it at the meeting. The themes which emerged from this exercise included:

- **Community Facilities** – participants indicated they were proud of the beaches, library, schools and other facilities and services that meet community needs
- **Community Character** – participants indicated they were proud of the overall character of the community (people, places, events) that contributed to their quality of life
- **Open Space** – participants indicated they were proud of the open spaces and parks in Darien

Tabulation of Prouds

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|----|
| Community Facilities | 63 | Beaches | 22 |
| | | Library | 12 |
| | | Schools | 5 |
| | | Mather Center / Senior center | 4 |
| | | Darien High School | 4 |
| | | Other facilities | 16 |
| Community Character | 18 | Ambience / Scenery | 10 |
| | | Organizations | 8 |
| Open Space | 16 | Parks (general) | 7 |
| | | Land Trust | 5 |
| | | Cherry Lawn Park | 4 |
| Downtown | 12 | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Map of Prouds



Sorrys

People attending the meeting were then asked to place a “red dot” on a map to identify things in Darien they were sorry about. They were also asked to write these “sorrys” on a card and submit it at the meeting. The themes that received the most mention included:

- **Community Character** – participants indicated they were sorry about things they felt detracted from the overall character of Darien
- **Development** – participants indicated they were sorry about overbuilding (residential and business)
- **Natural Resources** – participants indicated they were sorry about threats to natural resources

Tabulation of Sorrys

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---|--|
| Community Character | 22 | Threats to character (McMansions, litter, hedges blocking views, tree cutting, politics. Noise, lighting, etc.) | |
| Vehicular Transportation | 18 | Traffic congestion, downtown traffic, specific intersections, I-95, etc. | |
| Community Facilities | 16 | Old Senior Center, Old Library, Other | |
| Other Transportation | 15 | Lack of railroad parking, Noroton Height station, lack of sidewalks, lack of parking | |

Map of Sorrys



Planning Points

People attending the meeting were given 50 “planning points” to allocate among 12 boxes representing topics typically addressed as part of a Plan of Conservation and Development. Residents were asked to allocate the planning points (one @ 20 points, two @ 10 points each, and two @ 5 points each) in the boxes to reflect what they felt was important for the community to address as part of the planning process.

The results are presented below. These results were presented at the meeting and the remainder of the meeting was devoted to discussing the topics that got the most points.

| | 20 points | 10 points | 5 points | Total Points |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Conservation Issues | 260 | 280 | 150 | 690 |
| Natural Resources | 0 | 90 | 40 | 130 |
| Open Space | 160 | 100 | 65 | 325 |
| Historic Resources | | 20 | 5 | 25 |
| Community Character | 100 | 70 | 40 | 210 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Development Issues | 140 | 210 | 115 | 465 |
| Downtown / Nodes | 40 | 80 | 30 | 150 |
| Business Development | 40 | 60 | 30 | 130 |
| Residential Development | 20 | 50 | 10 | 80 |
| Housing Diversity | 40 | 20 | 45 | 105 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Infrastructure Issues | 380 | 280 | 130 | 790 |
| Community Facilities | 100 | 50 | 45 | 195 |
| Traffic and Circulation | 200 | 100 | 30 | 330 |
| Walking / Biking / Bus / Train | 60 | 60 | 30 | 150 |
| Water/ Sewer / Utilities | 20 | 70 | 25 | 115 |

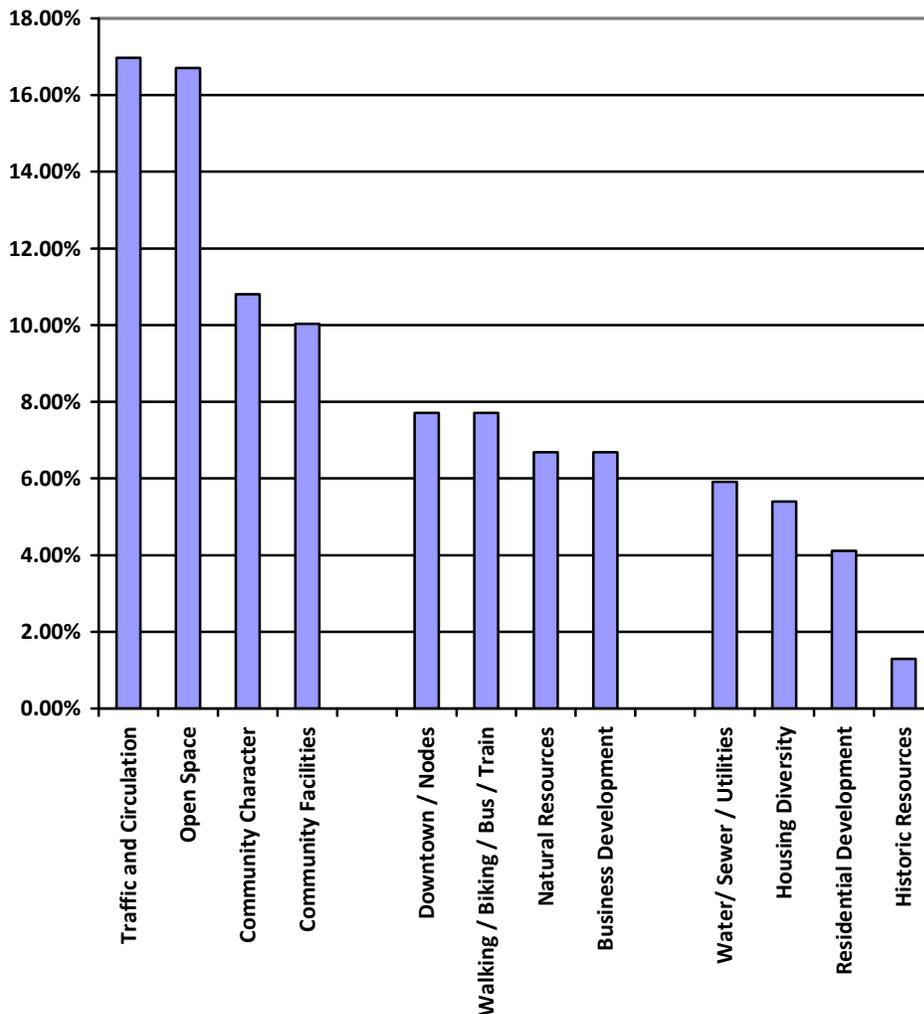
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|--|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| | 780 | 770 | 395 | 1,945 |
|--|------------|------------|------------|--------------|

Approximately 39 people participated in the planning points exercise.

On a thematic basis, infrastructure issues received the most planning points (790 points = about 41 percent of all planning points allocated). This was primarily due to the importance placed on traffic / circulation and on community facilities. The conservation theme received 690 planning points (about 35 percent of all planning points allocated) and the development theme received 465 planning points about 24 percent of all planning points allocated).

On a topical basis, traffic and circulation received the most planning points (330 points = about 17 percent of all planning points allocated). This was closely followed by open space (325 points = about 17 percent of all planning points allocated). As can be seen from the chart below, these two topics were considered significantly more important than other topics.

Planning Point Results By Topic



TRAFFIC / CIRCULATION

Possible Goal? BETTER MANAGE Traffic and Circulation

- Traffic is a problem particularly at
 - Rush hour
 - School arrival and dismissal times
- There are a small number of choke points:
 - Along Route 1
 - Crossing railroad tracks
 - Crossing 95
- Can these be addressed/be alleviated?
- People need to be able to move around

- I-95 dramatically affects our traffic
- GPS is allowing people to get off 95 and onto local streets
- Need to look at how traffic flows across borders

- Parents are driving kids to school
- Parents feel it is not safe for kids to walk, so parents drive
- People could use buses to get to school but bus routes are seen as inefficient

- Problem areas can affect people's shopping choices
- People sometimes avoid downtown

- Traffic also influences air quality/environment

- Some traffic lights could be retimed / timing at several lights is very poor
- Driver behavior is bad as well (i.e. - Ledge Road @ I-95 where cars "block the box")
- A lot of areas don't allow left turn lanes
- A lot of traffic issues are on State roads
- Can we influence CTDOT? Will they focus on these issues?
- Can we take a leadership role and do preliminary design?

- Traffic issues are made worse because pedestrian/bike infrastructure is bad
- Hoyt street because there is no pedestrian route, results in vehicular traffic
- We underutilize Talmadge Station

- Maybe we need to change traffic patterns, calm traffic
- We should look at other forms of transportation
- Take a look at jitney or similar bus/light transit
- Road widening where possible

OPEN SPACE

Possible Goal? PRESERVE Open Space

- Does Darien have enough open space?
- Do we have the least amount of open space/capita in CT?
- Seems we are passive
- If we want it, need to be proactive

- The 3 golf courses in Darien are big part of open space
- Have managed the relationship well and we need to continue this
- These lands are an important part of the community

- Don't always focus on big open spaces
- Look at little open spaces also
- We can create small "parklets" in downtown/other areas

- Access to open space is also key
- Seeing it is nice
- Would be better if we can access/use it

- All open space is related to community character
 - We should embrace antique graveyards
 - Can we consider this as part of strategy?
- Also refers to what open space does for the community
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Recreate/walk

- We need to educate residents about privately protecting open space

- Current POCD is strong about open space
- Implementation is weak. What can we do?
- Be proactive if we want to preserve

- Maintenance of open space is important
- Clear the woods
- Management plans

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Possible Goal? MAINTAIN / ENHANCE Community Character

- Darien should retain a predominantly single family character
- Need to maintain a tax base also

- Challenge for PZC is to maintain character while growth occurs
- We need to have minimum requirements for zoning changes
- POCD could identify locations where zoning changes might be guided

- Overall openness is part of our character
- Higher density housing is changing the character

- Should our regulations do more to address lighting?

- Leaf blower wars"- need a noise ordinance of some sort
- Some trash pickups occur at 4:30 a.m.!
- There is no stipulation that prevents this
- Consider a noise ordinance?

- Eyesores/blight:
- Opposite Queens Lane
- Blight ordinance (2007)
- We need to do something about this

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Possible Goal? MAINTAIN / ENHANCE Community Facilities

- Need to continue to invest in community facilities
- Need to make efficient use of the spaces we have
- Need to keep schools up-to-date

- Where to draw the line between public/private
- POCD should recommend coordination
- Not all strategies should be public. Are private solutions available?
- Need to consider both/need a balance

- Darien High School has grown to also become a community center
- Has affected traffic/safety
- Schools/temporary structures need to be looked at

- Having an outdoor public pool would be nice

DOWNTOWN / NODES

Possible Goal? MAINTAIN / ENHANCE Downtown

- Have had successful revitalization
- Still more to do

- Downtown has a lot to do with character also
- Downtown needs to be inviting
- Pedestrian/sidewalks are key
- Connect the north side/south side better
- Pedestrians

- There is a downtown traffic study
- Revisit structured parking in downtown
- Have to get rid of “backout” parking in Corbin area

- Remain vigilant over architecture/signage

- Should consider Norton Heights as a downtown area also
- Need to consider Noroton Heights as similar to downtown
- Should get the same attention
- Signage/pedestrian access. Etc.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Train / Bus

- Train stations are an asset / a huge part of our character
- Need to have them continue to work well

- Metro North service needs to be improved
- More frequent/better service
- Work with State to get higher priority
- Elevate urgency

- Have 3 train stations (Talmadge Hill is almost in Darien)
- 7-10 year wait for a train station permit
- Voucher people are parking in wrong areas
- How does this work? Should Darien study this?

- There is a lease for railroad station property
- Figure out when lease is up so RTM can figure out what to ask for

- Need to understand degree to which RR stations/roads are regional resources

OPEN DISCUSSION (continued)

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Walking / Biking</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need a plan for pedestrian network • We have no vision • Just replace the sidewalks we have • Need a vision for entire town • Bike lanes- should be a consideration in the POCD |
| <p>Natural Resources</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impervious surface/storm drainage is an issue • Some piping is inadequate and get flooding • What should we do? • Are there areas on septic? • WQ impacts on Long Island Sound |
| <p>Coastal Resources</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coastal access is key to character • We need to be proactive of issues that affect Long Island Sound • Consider entire Long Island Sound watershed • Many coastal areas are silting up |
| <p>Housing Diversity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should strive for diversity/housing choices to meet housing needs of the future |
| <p>Business Development</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redo all commercial Zoning Regulations • Pretty antiquated • A lot of things are done by variance • Is the ZBA doing what the town wants? |
| <p>Water/ Sewer / Utilities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any development north of I-95 needs to figure out how water will go under RR/I-95 • Coordinate with RR track work/road work if need drainage • Look at sewage capacity • Are there constraints in certain areas • Can we get natural gas lines on all major roads in town at least? |
| <p>Other</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we collaborate with state agencies, nearby towns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public safety ○ Hazard mitigation |

On-Line Survey (November / December 2014)

For about four weeks during November and December 2014, an on-line survey was conducted to allow Darien residents to provide additional input to the POCD update process. At the conclusion of this period, 847 responses were received.

The availability of the survey was publicized as follows:

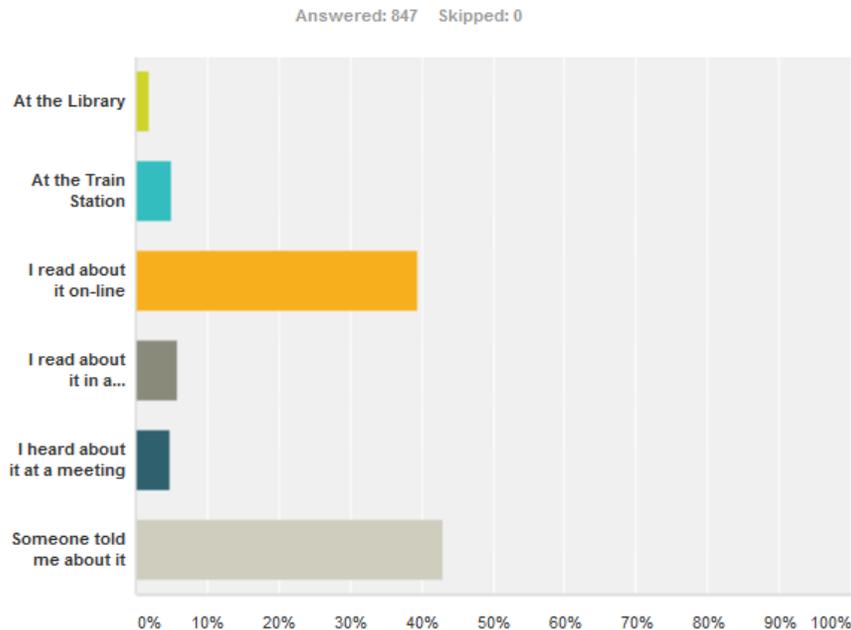
- Press release in November (385 people)
 - Printed newspaper (50 people)
 - On-line source (335 people)
- Handouts at the train stations on one morning in November (42 people)
- Handouts at the library on two days in November (16 people)

In addition to these primary sources, a number of people found about the survey through a secondary source:

- Someone told me about it (364 people)
- Heard about it at a meeting (40 people)

The responses to the questions asked are summarized below.

Q1 How did you learn about this on-line survey?



Q2 Please list up to 4 things in Darien that you are proud of (places or things).

A “key word” analysis offered up the following words and phrases as being mentioned a number of times.

First Response

YMCA_{High Quality} Community_{Safety} Parks_{Waterfront}
Darien_{Club} Beach_{DHS} Schools
Sports_{Library} Land_{Town} Center_{Downtown}
Education

Second Response

YMCA_{Programs} Public_{Safety} Quality_{Foods} Town
Pond_{Parks} Club_{Schools} Center
Beaches_{Police} Library_{Pear Tree Point}
Downtown_{Land} Community_{Waterfront}
Restaurants_{Shopping} Sports

Third Response

Cherry Lawn_{Safety} NYC_{Zoning} Low_{Access}
Community_{Land} Town_{McGuane} Library
Quality_{Schools} YMCA_{Beaches} DHS
Downtown_{Club} Darien_{Youth} Parks
Pear Tree_{Beautiful} Location_{Sports} Restaurants

An appendix (Q2 Prouds) is available which allows for a reading of all 574 responses submitted to this question.

Q3 Please list up to 4 things in Darien that you are sorry about of (places or things).

A “key word” analysis offered up the following words and phrases as being mentioned a number of times.

First Response

Lights at DHS High Taxes Center Board Sidewalks
Facilities Downtown Sports Train Station
Development Town Darien School
Stadium Lights Traffic Shuffle Parking
Special Fields Open Space Housing Community
Beach Noroton Heights Shopping Area Public Pool

Second Response

Taxes Expensive Beach I95 Housing Board Road
Open Space Downtown
Noroton Heights Shopping Traffic
Noroton Heights Train Station Parking
Restaurants School DHS Town Bike
Pool Shuffle Fields Development Sidewalks

An appendix (Q3 Sorrys) is available which allows for a reading of all 559 responses submitted to this question.

Q4 The following topics are typically found in a Plan of Conservation and Development. You have 50 Planning "Points" to allocate (one 20-point bill, two 10 point bills, and two 5 point bills). Use your planning points to indicate your priorities for Darien.

| | 20 points | 10 points | 5 points | Total Points |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Conservation Issues | 3,300 | 3,470 | 2,080 | 8,850 |
| Natural Resources | 440 | 460 | 280 | 1,180 |
| Open Space | 1,220 | 1,010 | 575 | 2,805 |
| Historic Resources | 740 | 890 | 495 | 2,125 |
| Community Character | 900 | 1,110 | 730 | 2,740 |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Development Issues | 3,420 | 2,800 | 1,375 | 7,595 |
| Downtown / Nodes | 2,240 | 1,410 | 435 | 4,085 |
| Business Development | 440 | 430 | 450 | 1,320 |
| Residential Development | 300 | 280 | 195 | 775 |
| Housing Diversity / Needs | 440 | 680 | 295 | 1,415 |

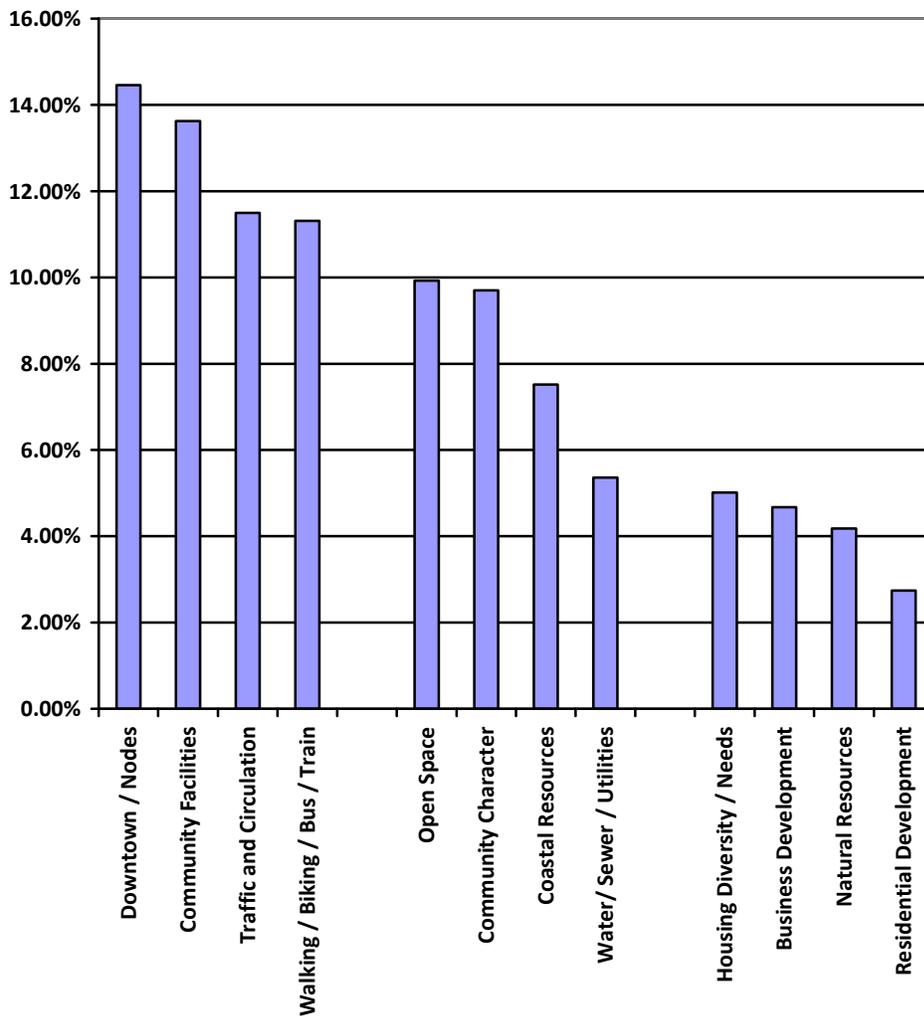
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|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Infrastructure Issues | 5,640 | 4,500 | 1,670 | 11,810 |
| Community Facilities | 2,140 | 1,300 | 410 | 3,850 |
| Traffic and Circulation | 1,340 | 1,440 | 470 | 3,250 |
| Walking / Biking / Bus / Train | 1,620 | 1,080 | 495 | 3,195 |
| Water/ Sewer / Utilities | 540 | 680 | 295 | 1,515 |

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| 12,360 | 10,770 | 5,125 | 28,255 |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|

On a thematic basis, infrastructure issues received the most planning points (11,810 points = about 42 percent of all planning points allocated). This was primarily due to the importance placed on community facilities and on traffic / circulation. The conservation theme received 8,850 planning points (about 31 percent of all planning points allocated) and the development theme received 7,595 planning points about 27 percent of all planning points allocated).

On a topical basis, downtown received the most planning points (4,085 points = about 15 percent of all planning points allocated) in the on-line survey. This was closely followed by community facilities (3,850 points = about 14 percent of all planning points allocated).

Planning Point Results By Topic



Q5 Briefly tell us why you allocated your planning points to those topics.

A “key word” analysis offered up the following words and phrases as being mentioned a number of times.



| Key Word or Phrase | Number | Percent |
|-----------------------|--------|---------|
| Open Space | 60 | 15.83 |
| Sidewalks | 45 | 11.87 |
| Issues | 44 | 11.61 |
| Important | 38 | 10.03 |
| Town Pool | 30 | 7.92 |
| Train Station | 27 | 7.12 |
| Affordable Housing | 16 | 4.22 |
| Fields | 14 | 3.69 |
| Natural Gas | 13 | 3.43 |
| Neighboring | 9 | 2.37 |
| High School | 8 | 2.11 |
| Property Values | 7 | 1.85 |
| Place to Live | 7 | 1.85 |
| Public Transportation | 7 | 1.85 |
| Focus | 7 | 1.85 |
| Able | 6 | 1.58 |
| Daily | 5 | 1.32 |
| Density | 5 | 1.32 |
| Destination | 3 | 0.79 |
| Destroying | 3 | 0.79 |
| Property Owners | 2 | 0.53 |

An appendix (Q5 Why Allocate) is available which allows for a reading of all 379 responses submitted to this question.

Q6 Are there any other comments you would like to submit?

A “key word” analysis offered up the following words and phrases as being mentioned a number of times.

Open Space Input Noroton Heights Private Associations
Plan Wish Town Pool Survey Traffic Protect
Lights New Canaan Darien Character
School Big Parking Lines Housing I-95
Think Town Hall Sidewalks Department Taxes Responsibility
Weed Beach

An appendix (Q6 Other Comments) is available which allows for a reading of all 185 responses submitted to this question.

BOS Town Plan Vision Statement (November 2014)

In November 2014, the Board of Selectmen provided the following vision statement for consideration for inclusion as part of the POCD update:

The Town Plan serves as a flexible blueprint for the continuing development of our community. It identifies enhancements and additions to our infrastructure and provides the basis for maintenance of our existing resources.

- *Darien continues to be primarily a New England style, single-family dwelling community.*
- *The Town Plan must balance growth and development with preservation and protection of the existing ecosystem on which our future depends, i.e. open space, the Long Island Sound, coastal habitat, our streams, ponds and wetlands.*
- *Downtown and traditional neighborhood commercial centers or corridors, through scale, character and density should create a strong sense of place for living, shopping and dining and add to the vitality of our community.*
- *Multi-modal transportation and pedestrian-friendly streetscape should be complimentary to the character of our town.*
- *Total citizen involvement, including our elected, appointed and volunteer groups, are critical to effective planning and successful implementation.*

The town must adopt and implement high quality public policies promoting long-term growth, development and infrastructure improvements. Thoughtful, dynamic leadership continues to be necessary to ensure our community implements the blueprint provided by this Town Plan.

Open House / Community Tour Comments

In the Fall of 2014, Planimetrics participated in two separate community tours and at “open house” meetings at the Darien Library and the Sugar Bowl Restaurant. Comments from these activities are included below.

Conservation-Related Topics (things we may want to protect)

1. **Natural Resources** -

- There may be some interest in protecting trees
 - Character value
 - Runoff protection value
- Some lots have been clear-cut and neighborhoods complained
- A lot of regrading / filling goes on as part of new development but Town feels policies in place work well
- Drainage review is triggered by:
 - Any new construction
 - Any application to a land use board
 - 1000 SF or more of new impervious coverage
- We need to continue to educate residents about the value of environmental protection, especially water quality
- Should we require property owners to mark the edge of wetlands and regulated areas as part of granting permits?

2. **Character** -

- People are building retaining walls, stone walls and fences in the ROW even though it is not permitted
- Western part of Route 1 is basically residential (a rarity along Route 1) and the philosophy has been to keep this intact
- Darien has an Architectural Review Board (ARB) and this process has helped address design issues before applicants get before PZC
- Have a Beautification Committee which has coordinated flower baskets, tree planting, etc.
- Town indicates they have flexible regulations to help preserve historic resources but still lose some to development
- Darien does not have any local historic districts but there is a National Register district on the Boston Post Rad near Brookside Place
- Have some “protected landmark properties” which get zoning flexibility as long as the structure is preserved

3. **Coastal Areas** -

- Have two boat clubs (Darien Boat Club, Noroton Yacht Club)
- Homeowners are putting lawn all the way to the water and this may be having environmental impacts - any way to manage this?
- Mean high water is increasing
 - 3.xx feet in 1995
 - 4.30 feet in 2014
- Can we find ways to increase public access to Long Island Sound?
- Should we require property owners to mark the edge of coastal wetlands and regulated areas as part of granting permits?

4. **Open Space** -

- Town has provided a lower assessment to some large properties when a right-of-first-refusal was granted (like PA-490 OS program?)

5. **Sustainability / Resiliency** –

- Had some flooding as a result of Storm Sandy
- Homes in some areas (such as Noroton Bay neighborhood) now being raised to comply with new standards
- Several areas get cut off due to flooding and people cannot get in or out
- Issues of coastal adaptation / retreat are not being discussed locally
- While Storm Sandy raised awareness of storm potential, it has not resulted in changed behaviors
- With property values, what is the Town's role in this?

Development-Related Topics (how we may want to guide change)

1. **Downtown** -

- Downtown has been revitalized over the past 10 years or so
- Parking areas are being consolidated into municipal lots – Town exempts buildings from parking requirements if parking area is deeded to the Town
- This has helped support redevelopment since parking is no longer a constraint but Town still has to manage parking adequacy
- Some properties have not participated and this has created some inefficiencies
- Will hopefully work itself out over time
- Some properties between I-95 and RR tracks are not in CBD zone and it may make sense to consolidate these areas into one zone
- There appears to be demand in downtown for restaurant, retail, some Class A office, housing
- Darien allows outdoor dining with no additional parking required if 16 seats or less
- Railroad underpass creates a problem on Route 1 due to dip in the road (drainage, trucks, etc.)
- People are likely to say there is a parking problem downtown
- People are likely to say there is a traffic congestion problem downtown
- Downtown does not have a good system of downtown crosswalks
- What is the sequence for expansion / redevelopment of downtown?
- Goodwines River and floodplain may affect development potential in parts of the downtown
- Some areas of downtown are not as pedestrian-friendly as others – this may be an impediment to making all parts of the downtown work together
- If the parking standard for downtown is the same as elsewhere, does this discourage appropriate development and redevelopment of the center? Otherwise force everyone to get a variance?
- Don't let parking spaces conflict with space for vehicles to sneak by left turning cars if this can be done (especially at peak hours)

2. **Noroton Heights** -

- Two major redevelopments may be contemplated
 - Federal Realty
 - Palmer
- Property ownership patterns are complicated
- Noroton Heights is expected to lose its post office

3. **Residential Development** -

- Has been some abuse of regulatory provision that allows a historic home to be rebuilt if it is preserved
- Affordable housing has become an issue locally
- Town has been very active in addressing housing
- Town and Housing Authority recently completed the Alan O’Neill homes on Noroton Avenue where increased the number of units
- Are filing for a second moratorium under CGS 8-30g due to production by Town and private developers
- Market for some office space has been decreasing – does it make sense to repurpose some of these for residential?
- Some houses being built in small lot areas are seen as out-of-scale
- The scale issue may be related to coverage / height / etc.,
- All zones allow for 20% building coverage at present but perhaps a sliding scale would be useful to consider.
- Nobody is bumping up against coverage limits at present time in 1-acre or 2-acre zones – just the smaller zones
- As part of POCD, it might make sense to plot building footprint by lot size by zoning district to see patterns / issues
- There are no limitations on impervious coverage at the present time.
- Should there be limits in order to implement LID?
- All zones allow for 30’ building height at present
- Have no regulation for maximum total building height so could have a 60’ high A-frame building
- Building height definition (highest eave to highest ridge) discourages or prevents dormers
- Town has allowed worker housing at country clubs as an accessory use to help address the need for housing (does not count to CGS 8-30g – could it be deed-restricted to count?)

4. **Business Development** -

- Neighborhood Business (NB) zones abut residential zones and some properties are split by the zone boundary – what to do in the POCD?
- Should zone lines follow property lines? What is the logic behind their location?
- Are the requirements for the neighborhood business zone (height, setbacks, etc.) appropriate?
- Darien has several “service business” zones to provide for uses needed in the community but not wanted in the downtown or elsewhere
- What should the setbacks be in the business zones? What type of environment are we trying to create?
- Have 5 food markets in town! (2@ Stop & Shop, Trader Joes, Whole Foods, Palmers)
- We need to find the right balance between “mo and pop” stores and national retailers – can this be regulated or managed?

5. **Other Considerations** -

- Churches and other institutional uses can push the envelope in residential zones – how should these be treated in the POCD?
- Some properties in sensitive locations are non-conforming and are currently managed by the variance process or other means – it may make sense for Darien to consider allowing expansion on non-conforming uses by Special Permit or regulating through a “planned development district” approach
- Is the hierarchy of business zones appropriate for Darien or are we micro-managing too many things?

6. **Key Areas** -

- Ziegler property on Long Neck Point Road is predominantly undeveloped and has an incredible location – should the Town seek to acquire this if it becomes available? What should the POCD say about this?
- Ledge Road connects from Exit 13 to Noroton Heights and is located between I-95 and rail line – this area has potential to address a number of community needs

Infrastructure-Related Topics (facilities we may want or need)

1. **Community Facilities** -

- Built new senior center at Town Hall (Mather Center)
- Still some controversy over re-use of old library for BOE offices rather than affordable housing
- Weed Beach was recently upgraded – Town hoping to do the same at Pear Tree Point Beach
- There is a Youth Center in Noroton Heights
- EMS staffing includes students from Darien High School
- Public works facility is cramped but site may have room for expansion
- Town Hall is getting cramped – what to do here?
- Have three fire departments all staffed by volunteers
- Field upgrades and other improvements have been completed at Darien High School – now looking for lights for night games
- There are capacity issues at some elementary schools and this has resulted in the use of portable classrooms
- An enrollment study is currently being conducted (Milone & MacBroom)
- The former Senior Center next to Middlesex Middle School is no longer being used and could be converted to housing, / recreation fields

2. **Traffic / Transportation** -

- There are many walkers along Nearwater Lane and Long Neck Point Road – are pavement markings needed?
- Roads in some areas (Noroton Bay and Tokeneke areas) are private and maintained by associations
- The SWRPA Route 1 Study recommended converting the western part of Route 1 from 4-lanes to 3-lanes
- Hollow Tree Ridge is a key road on the western side of Darien which crosses I-95 and provides access to Noroton Heights train station
- What should the Town vision / policy be on sidewalks and extensions?
- Is there a way to simplify circulation in the Noroton Heights area?
- People want more parking at the train stations
- Darien has some of the least expensive train station parking along the Metro-North line (if you can get a permit)
- Train station parking is a very sensitive issue (especially to commuters)
- Town is considering adding more spaces at the Leroy Avenue West parking area although sight lines are terrible due to RR underpass
- Grove Street parking lot is a mish-mash of policies related to train station, downtown, etc.
- Lack of Roads crossing I-95 and RR tracks causes congestion on other roads
- CT Transit has 2 routes in Darien (Route 1 and West Street)

3. **Utility Infrastructure -**

- Sewers have been extended into the 1-acre zone
- Has not been a policy issue since Darien has significant sewage treatment capacity reserved at the Stamford treatment plant
- Used LID at Library – great project for people to see how it works
- Darien feels they have adequate water supply from Aquarion
- There is not good cell phone service in northern parts of Darien
- In terms of tree trimming, Town tries to balance character with electrical reliability
- Look at the WPCA Master Plan for sewer avoidance areas

Implementation-Related Topics (how we may want to make it happen)

(no topics raised)

Department Head Responses

In the fall of 2014, a survey was circulated to Town of Darien department heads. *Some of those responses* are summarized below:

Conditions And Trends - (how we are growing and changing)

1. **Changing Demographics** - Darien should:
 - a. Consider the financial consequences from the influx of younger families with children replacing seniors.
 - b. Consider the aging population and their needs.
 - c. Strive for a healthy socio-economic balance.
 - d. See seniors as an asset to the Town as their tax cost is moderate.
2. **Tax Base / Taxes / Spending** - Darien should:
 - a. Maintain a balance between town services and rising taxes.
 - b. Hold the line on increasing Board of Education spending.
 - c. Try to avoid one group taking precedence over another (i.e. - services for school age children supported over senior citizens)
 - d. Take advantage of all state/federal grants that may help to meet town goals or support town projects.
 - e. Find someone whose sole job is to get more grant monies.

Conservation-Related Topics (things we may want to protect)

3. **Open Space** - Darien should:
 - a. Buy any property that can be maintained as open space

Development-Related Topics (how we may want to guide change)

4. **Downtown** – Darien should:
 - a. Look at structured parking in the downtown area.
 - b. Look at trolley service on Post Road that would allow extension of the commercial area towards Renshaw Road, and east.
5. **Business Development** – Darien should:
 - a. Discourage individual commercial development that stresses existing services such as parking, and which does not add a positive experience to the Town
 - b. Support and encourage a diverse business culture.
 - c. Encourage more retail shopping
 - d. Increase the downtown area to include south of I-95
 - e. Discourage “big box” developments
 - f. Encourage rooftop dining, waterfront dining, and sidewalk dining.
 - g. Seek more flexibility in regulations / procedures to help encourage new businesses.

6. **Residential Development** – Darien should:
- a. Discourage overbuilding – negative for the environment, traffic and in times of emergencies.
 - b. Affordable housing:
 - Increase affordable housing.
 - Encourage and support contractors to include affordable housing in every possible development.
 - The Town should buy any property that can be ... appropriate for building affordable housing.
 - Seek a balance of reasonable entry level and senior housing which will be a challenge for Darien.
 - Seek more flexibility in regulations / procedures that discourage diverse housing options.
 - c. Senior housing:
 - Encourage the construction of market valued housing for seniors to stop the loss of seniors due to lack of housing alternatives.
 - Address the need for affordable housing for seniors.
 - d. In-law apartments:
 - Allow for in-law type housing-build actual affordable housing designated for seniors - more options for downsizing.
 - Allow “real” in-law apartments and auxiliary apartments.
 - Change the zoning rules on in-law and auxiliary apartments to help disabled adults and seniors to live more independently with support from family, produce more rental options for people who work in Darien, offer an option for young adults who grew up in town to come back, and offer seniors and others who are struggling to stay in their homes an additional income.
7. **Overall** – Darien should:
- a. Continue to use overlay zones since they help manage direct and indirect influences to abutting parcels and have been used with great sensitivity.

Infrastructure-Related Topics (facilities we may want or need)

8. **Community Facilities (General)** - Darien should:

a. Overall:

- Review, repair, update and maintain town properties and buildings. This has been historically neglected and it appears that adequate monies have not been set aside.
- Review and maintain safety and security at all town buildings, parks, beaches and properties.

b. Town Hall:

- Update Town Hall with more comprehensive enforced safety security protocols and elevators which are updated and operational.
- The Town Hall needs to be updated and better maintained. It is a fantastic historical space but needs many updates. It is a facility that represents the town and is home to many services and events. It is our community's center. It needs to be fully generated, it needs to be ADA compliant at the back door, maintained on a regular basis and money set aside for important updates and fixes. The offices have not been painted in years, rugs need replacing. Some things are expensive and others not but even those go unattended to for years. Some progress has been made in the last couple of years but more would be better.
- Additional space for Town Offices, the current Town Hall was designed over 30 years ago; we have had growth in personnel as well as technology.

c. DPW Garage:

- Upgrade the combined public works garage and transfer station complex.
- Include sleeping/resting area for DPW workers on snow removal duties during severe storms

d. Library:

- Provide for more parking at the Library since it overflows 3 or 4 times a week.

e. Programs:

- Provide more senior programs that address quality of life issues, caregiving and activities that keep seniors connected to the community happenings.
- Purchase Ox Ridge Hunt Club and/or the Ziegler property develop a town recreational complex and playing fields.

9. **Transportation** - Darien should:

- a. Address traffic issues since it is one of the greatest challenges or needs facing Darien in the next 10 to 20 years - I-95 traffic continues to grow and travelers are continually seeking alternate routes, clogging the town's roads especially when an incident on I-95 causes traffic to divert.
- b. Improve traffic; make diversionary routes and traffic lights better functioning.
- c. Recognize that traffic control will be an on-gong issue for Darien.
- d. Address traffic congestions since seniors very concerned about increased traffic through-out Town-especially in shopping areas
- e. Build and maintain safe walking and biking lanes wherever possible.
- f. Encourage sidewalks in the future - not just in the downtown area but on many of the busy streets that cross through Darien.
- g. Solve the parking problems at the train stations and downtown.
- h. Address parking.

10. **Utilities** - Darien should:

- a. Maintain and strengthen infrastructure systems by moving all power, phone, cable and other lines underground.
- b. Deal with flooding issues.
- c. Enhance fire protection by improving water flow capabilities for the large homes that continue to be built in town.

11. **Other** - Darien should:

- a. Focus on finding the best solution to local problems – not just the cheapest solution - since it may make more sense in the long run.

Implementation-Related Topics (how we may want to make it happen)

12. **Management** – Darien should:

- a. Change the image of Town departments from being obstructive and nitpicky to one of being encouraging and helpful.
- b. Avoid intolerance of the thoughts or ideas of other people.
- c. Seek to adapt to new approaches and stop doing things the way we always have if new ideas make sense

