

# Executive Summary

## Farmington Center Study



# Executive Summary

# Farmington Center Study

**Prepared for:**

*The Town of Farmington, Connecticut*

**Prepared by:**

Dodson & Flinker, Inc.

Mullin Associates, Inc.

*The Town of Farmington received support for this project from the State Historic Preservation Office of the Department of Economic and Community Development with funds from the Community Investment Act of the State of Connecticut*

## Introduction

The Town of Farmington faces a unique opportunity to play an active, leadership role in shaping the future of Farmington Center. The alternatives are clear: accept typical patterns of commercial strip development along the highway or create guidance and incentives to turn the area into a vibrant, prosperous, walkable town center. Unique circumstances create the conditions to shape the future of the study area: the potential availability of the Parson's Lot, the potential to work cooperatively with developers interested in a number of parcels susceptible to change and continued interaction with ConnDOT in the shaping of the roadway system, safety, and complete streets.

Over a period of three days (March 26th, 27th & 28th 2015), close to 500 Farmington residents participated in workshops to develop strategies and goals for addressing this challenge. Excellent work previously produced by the Town, Dodson & Flinker, Mullin Associates, and Town staff set the stage for residents and Town leaders to explore a range of options for guiding and leading the future evolution of the Farmington Center study area. The consultant team features the unique blend of Mullin Associates' policy, economic, and public participation expertise with Dodson & Flinker's team leadership, physical planning, and participatory design skills.

### Purpose

---

The purpose of this report is to summarize the results of a three-day set of workshops concerning the future development of the Farmington Gateway Study area. Driven by the town's desire to bolster the sense of place in Farmington and to create an attractive gateway into the town, the public was invited to participate in workshops designed to obtain the thoughts, concerns, and ideas of the citizens of Farmington, along with those of a professional team of planners and designers, and to synthesize them into a series of possible options that could serve as a guide to future actions in the area.



## Summary

---

The study area is bisected by CT RT 4. Over 28,000 cars per day pass through the area, and it is the most heavily utilized entry into the town. It is adjacent to the Farmington Gateway Historic District, including the campus of the internationally renowned Miss Porters School, the Hill-Stead Museum and grounds (a National Historic Landmark), the Stanley Whitman Museum (another National Historic Landmark) and the Farmington Country Club. The study area is bounded on the west by the Farmington River.

The primary area for future development on the north side of Route 4 includes seven (7) inventoried historic structures. Only two (2) of the structures are in the local historic district. The other five (5) inventoried historic buildings are unprotected. A plan for this area will acknowledge these structures and hopefully lead to adaptive reuse rather than demolition. Key structural features of the corridor are the Farmington Center Historic District, historically recognized structures, the Brickwalk Shops, Norton Lane properties and the sculptors located there, the Farmington Country Club and the Farmington Inn. The two most important natural features are the now vacant Parson's property at the top of a hill to the east and the Farmington River to the west.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis and Walkabout Findings Summary

---

On March 26th, 2015 Mullin Associates lead a lively SWOT Analysis of the study area with over 250 participants. On March 27th, 2015 Mullin Associates led a walking tour of the study area with over 60 participants. The findings from these two (2) days of workshops are as follows:

### I. Historic Character

The historic character of the area is highly valued by the residents. There is support for further protection of the historic buildings within the corridor by providing proper historic designation and strengthening regulations to

protect the milieu. This could include placing more buildings in the historic register, expanding the historic district, or even instituting design guidelines for new development. The surrounding museums are of great value and could be enhanced through better linkage to the area businesses and shared resources for marketing and branding. The historic buildings and museums are the foundation for new growth. Notable structures include the Country Club, Chuck's Tavern, the Farmington Inn, the museums, and the ensemble of Miss Porter's School. The Parson's property is a "gem" and will be the gateway to Farmington as one arrives to the community from I-84.



### II. Natural Beauty – The River and the Green

The river and the Town Green are seen as hidden treasures and underutilized assets. There is much potential to integrate the river into the gateway/corridor district. This includes improving view-sheds, creating a river walk or trails that enhance pedestrian activity and perhaps encouraging small-scale businesses close by.



Similarly the village green is underused, and its purpose is not clear. There is a desire for a green, but most want to see it more active. Some have expressed an interest in expanding it. Some have noted a possibility of moving it to Parson's. It needs to be better integrated into the fabric of the village. Increased street trees and open spaces along the entire corridor are desired. Design guidelines could include a landscape plan to encourage further cohesion along the corridor and to link both sides of the corridor through street furniture, decorative crosswalks, way-finding signs and landscaping. The Corridor should be linked with the regional trail network.

### III. Village Character

Properties along Norton Lane are another underutilized asset that has the opportunity to serve as a creative arts center. Sculptured works could be placed beyond its borders as part of a theme. There is a desire to integrate the old and new structures through architectural guidelines/standards or controls. Incentives such as density bonuses for more considerate design of new buildings may be supported. Above all, there is a desire to keep the historic character of the corridor intact, encourage new development to integrate with the existing historic structures, limit large-scale big-box retailers, chain stores and hard architecture.

There is a strong sentiment that the corridor be the gateway that announces this is Farmington. It should become a destination place rather than a transit passage. Residents are interested in recreating a sense of a village that reflects the historic nature of the town. The village should be a special place for local residents, with mixed uses, small shops, local restaurants, local artisans, and quality establishments that encourage the creative economy. The village should be people oriented, pedestrian friendly and ensure easy access for those with disabilities. Retail markets should be integrated with museum activities and tourism. The Village should be planned for the "16 hour" market.



### IV. Regulations

The participants are largely in favor of mixed uses but there are questions over "by-right" versus "special exception" approaches. Regulations should balance and reflect the need to address traffic impacts, environmental impacts, aesthetic impacts and the impacts on the current scale. There is strong support for design guidelines, standards or controls but the participants need to know more about what these regulations mean.

### V. Parking

Parking is an issue and options need to be explored and evaluated. Flexible parking, satellite lots coupled with rush hour commuter lots would be valuable. A parking deck in the Parson's lot, on-street parking on the "backage road", and small, scattered lots that fit the village scale should be explored. The "Park and Ride" and commuter bus service connections need to be improved. The parking issue will require extensive deliberations and may require the increased support of Farmington's large corporations and institutions.

## VI. Reconstruction of Route 4

Many of the participants believe political activism and proactive planning can impact the reconstruction of Route 4. There is little understanding of the role that DOT can play in any of the pedestrian related concerns with the movement of pedestrians parallel to the corridor and crossing the road. There is little understanding of the influence of the town on the backage road configuration through the Parson's property.

Given that the alignment is set, there is lack of clarity on what aesthetic features can be applied to reduce the impact of the road. Will the State allow underground conduits to enclose wires when construction begins? Will the State contribute to character lighting and other aesthetic improvements? Will pedestrian safety be enhanced thorough pedestrian activated, time sequenced crossing systems?

There is a strong desire that a "complete streets" program be adopted. This would include sidewalks that meet national, state and local ADA standards, traffic-calming techniques, appropriate lighting on both sides, aesthetically appropriate way-finding signs and landscaping be incorporated. Regular communications on the positions of the local government and DOT are in order.

## Model Workshop

### Purpose

---

Over 100 people participated in the model workshop. Dodson & Flinker prepared an orthophoto base map with existing conditions, property lines, historic district boundaries, property owners and proposed street improvements printed on the map. They then affixed scale models of existing buildings made out of Styrofoam and painted to describe existing buildings in the historic district, historic buildings outside the historic district, and other non-historic buildings.

Workshop participants were divided into 12 groups of 8 to 10 people each. Every group worked on a base map with existing buildings glued in place. Participants were provided with white building models to denote proposed buildings that could be developed in the study area. The proposed buildings could be placed on the plan and manipulated to create new development patterns. Parking areas, parks, sidewalks, greenways, landscaping, and other features could be drawn on the models with magic markers.

The participants spent over two action packed hours making models of their proposed recommendations for the future of Farmington Center. Photos of the finished models were taken by Nate Burgess and projected on a screen. A spokesperson for each table discussed the table's recommendations while a photo of the group's proposal was projected on the screen. The images (see appendix) became a record of the workshop's events. Dodson & Flinker took the images back to their office and grouped them into three categories based on the amount, type, and configuration of development and conservation proposed by the tables.

### Options

---

Dodson & Flinker has created three new models that synthesized the results of the model workshop conducted on Saturday, March 28th, 2015. Models created by the twelve teams were grouped into three categories with varying

amounts and densities of development, approaches to the Parson's Lot and varying strategies for other parcels, especially parcels susceptible to change.

The three synthesis option models portray varied approaches to the creation of a walkable, dynamic town center along Farmington Avenue. The synthesis options range from a relatively low density approach in Option 1 to a higher density solution in Option 3. Issues such as pedestrian amenities, crosswalks, sidewalks, new development and historic preservation were addressed. A recommended plan has been created incorporating and blending the best ideas and recommendations of the three options along with the expertise of the professional planners and designers.



### **Model Workshop Option 1 – Low Density**

This option is based on workshop groups 3, 7, 9 and 12 (see workshop results in the appendices). Option 1 is the lowest density option featuring a large park on the site of the former Parsons car dealership. It also includes moderate amounts of new development on the Chuck's Restaurant and

the 1 Waterville Road parcels. A new mixed-use structure is also proposed on the Udolph parcel which will strengthen the architectural definition of the street in this area while taking advantage of the construction of the proposed backage road. New parking lots at the edge of the proposed park and at the Chuck's and 1 Waterville Road sites will accommodate increased development and public usage of the Option 1 site. Removal of the Battison's Cleaners building will create open space that will enhance the Farmington River greenway. (See p. 6.)

### **Model Workshop Option 2 – Moderate Density**

This option is based on workshop groups 4, 8 and 10 (see workshop results in the appendices). Option 2 is a moderate density option featuring a mix of multi-use buildings and a smaller park on the site of the former Parsons car dealership. It also includes increased amounts of new development on the Chuck's Restaurant and the 1 Waterville Road parcels. The Chuck's parcel includes a larger residential complex as well as several multi-use buildings facing the Backage Road. This will strengthen the architectural definition of the Backage Road in this area. New parking lots at the edge of the proposed park and at the Chuck's and 1 Waterville Road sites will accommodate some but not all of the increased development and public usage of the Option 2 site. This option suffers from a deficit of parking which could be alleviated with a parking deck if this approach is taken in the preferred development option. (See p. 7.)











### **Model Workshop Option 3 – Gateway Village Density**

This option is based on workshop groups 1, 2, 5, 6 and 11 (see workshop results in the appendices). Option 3 is the highest density option produced by workshop participants and features techniques to calm traffic on the Backage Road designed by ConnDOT while enhancing pedestrian as well as vehicular connectivity. The Backage Road hook loop is replaced by a landscaped parking area servicing the proposed buildings and park. New signalization is proposed for the High Street/ Farmington Avenue intersection. (See p. 8.)





## OPTION 1: LOW DENSITY

-  Existing Buildings
-  Existing Buildings (Historic District)
-  Proposed Buildings
-  Parking (Existing)
-  Parking (Proposed)
-  Proposed Roads
-  Improved/Proposed Sidewalks
-  Improved/Proposed Crosswalks
-  Proposed Parks/Landscaped Areas
-  Street Trees









1. Connect Pedestrian Courtyards
2. Plant Street Trees – Tall Species Where Feasible
3. Connect Parking Lots
4. Farmington River Greenway
5. Green Gateway to Center
6. Park at Parsons Lot
7. Surface Parking for Park, Norton Lane
8. Chuck’s Site – Residential
9. Additional Surface Parking at Chuck’s
10. Link 2 Parking lots At Brick Walk

11. Bank of America Stays as is
12. Parking for Town Green
13. Renovation and Expansion 1 Waterville Road Area
14. Bury Overhead Utilities
15. Wide Crosswalks
16. Preserve and Renovate Historic Buildings
17. Backage Road Hook Stays
18. 763 Parsons Renovated in Place

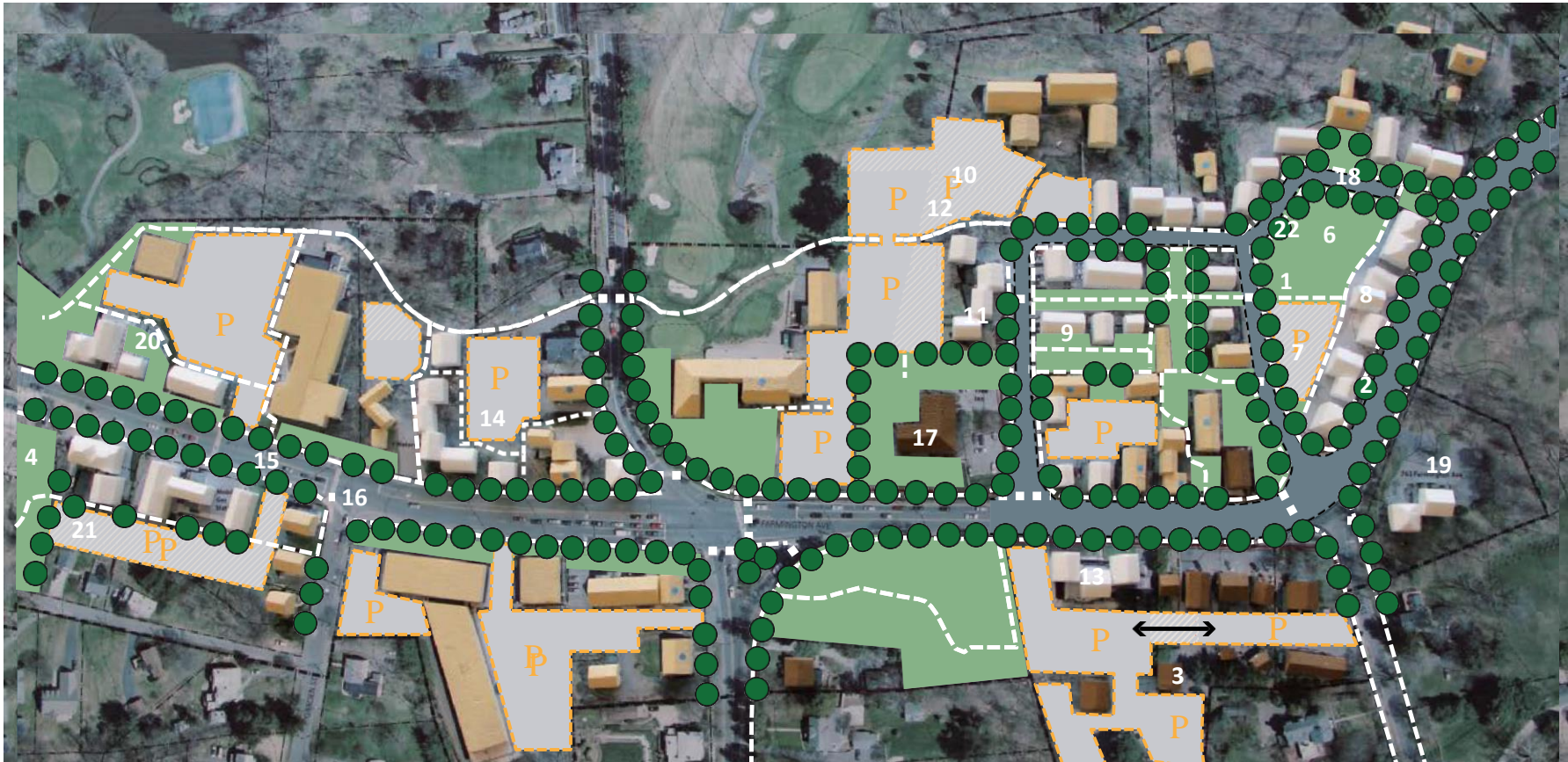





**OPTION 2: MODERATE DENSITY**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Existing Buildings</li> <li> Existing Buildings (Historic District)</li> <li> Proposed Buildings</li> <li> Parking (Existing)</li> <li> Parking (Proposed)</li> <li> Proposed Roads</li> <li> Improved/Proposed Sidewalks</li> <li> Improved/Proposed Crosswalks</li> <li> Proposed Parks/Landscaped Areas</li> <li> Street Trees</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1.</b> Connect Pedestrian Courtyards</li> <li><b>2.</b> Plant Street Trees – Tall Species Where Feasible</li> <li><b>3.</b> Connect Parking Lots</li> <li><b>4.</b> Farmington River Greenway</li> <li><b>5.</b> Low Density Mixed Use Gateway</li> <li><b>6.</b> Surface Parking Lot</li> <li><b>7.</b> Small Parks and Landscaping</li> <li><b>8.</b> Mix of Green and Architectural Gateway to Center</li> <li><b>9.</b> Limited Surface Parking for Park, Norton Lane</li> <li><b>10.</b> Parking Deficit Norton Lane</li> <li><b>11.</b> Chuck’s Site – Moderate Density Residential</li> <li><b>12.</b> Additional Surface Parking at Chuck’s</li> <li><b>13.</b> Link 2 Parking lots At Brick Walk</li> <li><b>14.</b> Bank of America Removed and Replaced</li> <li><b>15.</b> Additional Renovation/Expansion 1 Waterville</li> <li><b>16.</b> Bury Overhead Utilities</li> <li><b>17.</b> Wide Crosswalks</li> <li><b>18.</b> Preserve and Renovate Historic Buildings</li> <li><b>19.</b> Backage Road Hook Removed for Additional Parking</li> <li><b>20.</b> 763 Parsons Renovated in Place</li> </ul> |
|--|---|





**OPTION 3: GATEWAY VILLAGE DENSITY**

-  Existing Buildings
-  Existing Buildings (Historic District)
-  Proposed Buildings
-  Parking (Existing)
-  Parking (Proposed)
-  Proposed Roads
-  Improved/Proposed Sidewalks
-  Improved/Proposed Crosswalks
-  Proposed Parks/Landscaped Areas
-  Street Trees

1. Connect Pedestrian Courtyards
2. Plant Street Trees – Tall Species Where Feasible
3. Connect Parking Lots at Brickyard
4. Expanded River Greenway with Visitors Center
5. Underground Parking Garage (210 spaces)
6. Large Park Above Parking Garage
7. Parking Garage topped with surface parking
8. Commercial/Office/Residential
9. Higher Density Infill Mixed Use
10. Adequate Parking
11. Chuck’s Site – Highest Density Residential
12. Additional Surface Parking at Chuck’s

13. Bank of America Removed and Replaced
14. Extensive Renovation/Expansion in 1 Waterville Road Area
15. Bury Overhead Utilities
16. Wide Crosswalks
17. Preserve and Renovate Historic Buildings
18. Keep Backage Road Hook - No Connection to Route 4
19. 763 Farmington Renovated in Place or Moved to Parsons Park
20. Mobil Station Removed and Rebuilt for Commercial/Office
21. Shell Station Rebuilt as Commercial /Redesigned Gas Station.
22. Backage Road remains as currently aligned

## Consultant's Recommended Option

The option proposed by the consultant, based on what they learned during the workshops, provides a long term vision for the Town Center that proposes a walkable environment serviced by realistic amounts of parking around the edges of the pedestrian center. The option is based on the results of the model workshop as interpreted and elaborated on by the consultant team. The full build out of this option would occur incrementally over time. During the initial phases of this option some proposed development can be serviced by surface parking lots. In later phases a parking deck at the Parson's Lot would accommodate the additional new development recommended in this option. The first level of a parking deck at the Parson's lot would be located below grade. The upper level of the deck would be a surface lot at the grade of the surrounding buildings. All historic buildings are preserved in both of the consultant's recommended options.

The Recommended Option creates mixed use housing, a small park and surface parking at the Parson's Lot. The Norton Lane/backage road area is developed as a higher density, mixed use, walkable center. The Chuck's parcel is the site of a new housing development and the Bank of America building is rebuilt in a more architecturally compatible style. 763 Farmington Avenue is ideally preserved on its current site but can also be moved to the Parson's Lot. 1 Waterville Road becomes a mixed use development in an architecturally compatible style with a strong relationship to Farmington Avenue. The Battison's cleaners property becomes the site of a new mixed use building containing a greenway office and visitors center on the ground floor. The gas stations are converted to commercial or retail development as are portions of the epicure shopping center.

A series of detailed recommendations and an implementation schedule are presented in the full report. These recommendations are based on public participation element from the first two days of workshops and Mullin Associates extensive professional planning and economic development experience.

*Dark brown buildings = existing historic district buildings; tan buildings = existing buildings outside historic district; white buildings = proposed building*



**Consultant's Recommended Option - Perspective of Western Half**



Dark brown buildings = existing historic district buildings; tan buildings = existing buildings outside historic district; white buildings = proposed building



**Consultant's Recommended Option - Perspective of Eastern Half**



*Dark brown buildings = existing historic district buildings; tan buildings = existing buildings outside historic district; white buildings = proposed building*



**Consultant's Recommended Option - Plan**

## Summary Implementation Plan

The Farmington Gateway Committee shall continue to oversee the implementation of the project with regard to policy decisions. Much of the day to day work must be done at the staff level. It is essential that the Town Council, the Town Planning and Zoning Commission and Town Managers Office recognize the critical importance of this project and offer their full support in its implementation.

Proposal / Action	Lead Agency / Actor	Time Frame
Conduct Public workshops to understand public opinion for the corridor.	Farmington Gateway Committee	Complete
Present findings of workshops to public and town and state officials	Planning Consultant	Early summer 2015
Secure town ownership of the Parsons property when DOT project complete	Town Manager/ other town staff	On going
763 Main – begin discussions with developer/property owner and bank	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first month
Initiate discussions with Norton Lane Property LLC	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first month
Establish town staff working group regarding DOT project enhancements	Town Manager, Public Works Director/Town Engineer, Engineering staff, Town Planner	Within first month
Initiate discussions on redevelopment on Bank of America	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first 6 months
Riverfront – Acquire Battisons property	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first 6 months
Conduct Phase 1 environmental assessment on Battisons property	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first 6 months
Issue RFQ's for formal urban design plan and market study	Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Within first 3 months / completion December 2015

Lobby property owners of inventoried CT Register buildings for inclusion in Farmington Center Historic District	Farmington Center Historic District Commission, Town Historian, Preservation Now, Farmington Historical Society	Within 1 year
Utilize recently approved STEAP grant to design way-finding improvements.	Economic Development Director	Within 1 year
Adopt final urban design plan and market study as part of Plan of Conservation and Development	Planning and Zoning Commission, Town Planner	Within 2 years, prior to completion of DOT project
Amend and rezone entire corridor to Farmington Center / Village District Zone	Planning and Zoning Commission, Town Planner	Within 2 years, prior to completion of DOT project
Utilize recently approved STEAP grant to secure permitting and install way-finding improvements.	Engineering Division / Economic Development Director	Upon completion of DOT project.
Upon securing ownership of Parsons property issue an RFP for development of the property in a manner consistent with the urban design plan and the Farmington Center/Village District zoning.	Town Manager, Town Planner/Economic Development Director	Upon completion of DOT project.



## Design Guidelines

The following planning and design guidelines present recommendations for the layout, materials, configurations and types of physical improvements that could benefit the character and quality of Farmington Center. The guidelines are derived from successful comparable projects from other locations in Connecticut and throughout the United States.

### Pedestrian Friendly Centers



*Wide sidewalks, places to sit, storefronts, tall shade trees and quality building materials and construction create a pedestrian friendly setting.*

### Historic Preservation



*Historic Preservation of buildings & landscapes saves irreplaceable town character and street trees while creating lasting, meaningful and prosperous places high in quality of life.*

**Street Furniture**



**Street Trees**



**High Quality Materials**





## Street Lights



*Attractive street lights that minimize glare enhance town centers*

## Cross Walks



*Wide cross walks, clearly marked and built with durable, high quality and attractive materials enhances the safety as well as the character of town centers. Cross walk lights that reduce pedestrian waiting times to less than a minute and a half are also desirable.*



## Streetscapes



*Wide, accessible sidewalks, tall street trees, attractive store fronts and a strong and friendly architectural street edge create dynamic, walkable town centers.*



## Mixed Use Buildings



*Mixed use buildings with retail, restaurant and commercial on ground floors and residential above.*

## On Street Parking



## Residential Neighborhoods



*Residential Neighborhoods located near traffic calmed streets have high quality, accessible sidewalks, friendly porches and entrances, new street trees while presenting a strong, unified yet varied street façade.*

*Parallel parking along streets with 9' travel lanes enhances pedestrian safety, encourages drivers not to speed, creates a village scale and makes a town center feel active and lived in.*



## Farmington River Greenway



*A preserved, environmentally restored river with public access will continue to enhance the natural environment of the Farmington River while forming the western gateway to the town center.*

## Buried Overhead Utilities



*Burying overhead utility lines greatly enhances the aesthetics of town center streets and allows tall street trees to be planted.*

## Town Center Landscapes



*Tall street trees, urban scale landscape plantings and shrub and perennial beds. Create a welcoming, attractive and cared for town center.*

## Wayfinding and Signage



*Clear, attractive signage appropriate for an historic town center*