

OFFICE OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

2018 UPDATE

The following highlights key developments, projects and initiatives completed from January until December 2018.

Market Analysis and Regulatory Audit: The 2016 Market Analysis and Regulatory Audit continues to guide OPDS work in promoting economic development and improving Groton's sense of place. The following recommendations have resulted in a number of current projects:

- Establish Tax Increment Financing;
- Rewrite Zoning Regulations;
- Establish digital marketing and communication channels including a stand-alone economic development website;
- Increase collaboration, connectivity, and networking with a focus on high-quality development and business retention and expansion;
- Reinvigorate the built environment with a focus on quality; and
- Change perceptions - Re-define what it means to do business in Groton.

Listed below are numerous key projects that were directly recommended from these above two documents, and programs that will implement these recommendations.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF): Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a financing tool that can be used by municipalities to invest in economic development. It allows some or all of public and/or private costs associated with development to be financed over time by increases in the property tax revenues that are generated by the new development or redevelopment. Connecticut General Statute 15-57 authorizes municipalities in Connecticut to create Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts for the purposes of economic development. The OPDS has taken the lead on developing a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) policy and master plans to spur development in targeted areas of town. The Town Council adopted the TIF Policy in March of 2018. The City TIF Policy was adopted by the City Council on September 6, 2018 and was accepted by the Town Council on November 7, 2018. Working with developers and property owners, TIF Master Plans are being developed for three areas of town; Center Groton Village,

Downtown Groton, and the Five Corners/Thames Street area north of Electric Boat. The TIF Master Plan for Downtown Groton will be presented to the Town Council in early 2019 to begin the adoption process. Master plans for the other proposed TIF districts will be presented to the Town Council later in 2019.

Zoning Regulation Re-Write: The Zoning Regulations are being revised to be user-friendly, to simplify the approval process, to reduce the number of zoning districts, and to maximize economic development opportunities. With the assistance of a consulting firm, the Zoning Commission expects to have a final draft by April 2019. The public outreach, referral and hearing process, will take approximately 2 months. The project is expected to be finalized and adopted by the end of July 2019. Draft regulations and map can be found here: www.grotonctzoning.com

Economic Development Website: A key initiative recommended in the 2016 Market Analysis was to improve digital marketing and outreach, specifically through the creation of a stand-alone economic development website. The Town Council authorized funding in 2017 for a new dedicated Groton Economic Development website. The website developer “Golden Shovel” was selected to create the website which features a new promotional video developed by GMTV staff and a portal for realtors to list their properties. The new website was finalized and officially launched on December 4, 2017. It can be found at www.exploremoregroton.com. In 2018, the Economic Development Division has increased its presence on social media including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.



Branding and New Logo: The new logo and tagline has been fully integrated in all of Groton’s marketing materials. Groton’s marketing materials can be viewed at www.exploremoregroton.com. These materials are used to attract investors and promote Groton’s story to people primarily outside of southeastern CT.

Marketing of Town owned properties: Groton owns a number excess buildings and properties that are no longer needed for municipal use or that have been acquired through tax foreclosures. Economic Development staff has created a comprehensive marketing strategy for these properties. The general strategy is to sell municipal property through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process rather than through a simple real estate transaction. This process ensures that the property is actually redeveloped, thereby maximizing new tax dollar revenue. Staff has created marketing cut sheets, signs advertising the sale of the properties, as well as

on-line and trade publication advertisements. Key priority properties and their respective status include the following:

- Mystic Education Center: RFP issued, interviews held, working with a preferred developer. Once a contract is signed with the preferred developer, the public outreach, zoning, planning, and review process will begin for a future proposed development.
- 529 Gold Star Highway: RFP issued and discussions with a prospective developer are ongoing. The developer has been able to expand the project including intersection signalization and commitments for natural gas extension to the property.
- Groton Heights Elementary School: RFP issued, and the interviews held. The Town is working with a preferred developer and in close cooperation with the City. Once a contract is signed with the developer, a proposal for redevelopment will be submitted to the City Planning and Zoning Commission for review. Town staff recently applied for and was awarded \$150,000 from a DECD Brownfields Grant in December of 2018. This will assist in the cleanup and redevelopment of this property.
- Former Seely School: Town staff is working with the firm Goman & York to market the property and has met with numerous developers over the past few months with an interest in knocking down the school and utilizing the site for multi-family housing development options. A short list of preferred developers will be presented to the Town Council in March.

Economic Development Strategy: Town and City staff are jointly working with Camoin Associates on an Economic Development Strategy for Groton. This strategy will propose new initiatives to further Economic Development based on the Market Analysis and will promote all of Groton.

Improved Process, Incentives and Business Development

Doing Business in Groton Development Process Guide: Planning and Economic Development staff have been working on a guide to doing business in Groton for the past year. The guide is geared toward business development and expansion from small start-ups to large businesses. The Guide is in its final phase of development and a final draft of this document will be completed in January 2019.

Business Visitation: The Economic Development Commission (EDC), working with OPDS staff, has developed a business visitation program in order to help retain existing businesses and promote their growth. The EDC provides business owners with a postcard outlining available state and local business incentives and with staff contact information. The face-to-face contact

with business owners has proven to be an effective business retention and expansion tool.

Marketing: Staff participated at the ICSC Hartford “deal making” event in June 2018 with a Groton promotional table, the Boston ICSC event in July 2018, and the New York ICSC event in December 2018. Staff utilized the new marketing sheets, banners, and other materials at these events. The ICSC New York in December was the largest promotional “deal making” event attended this year. Staff participated in the Groton-New London Aviation Day event with a Groton promotional table in August attended by over 700 people. Staff participated in the Fall Festival in October at Poquonnock Plains Park and the Holiday Kickoff at the Senior Center as well as.

Economic Development Assistance Fund (EAF): Groton has funded an Economic Development Assistance program since 1996 which has been used to partially fund several projects. Currently, the fund balance exceeds \$600,000. The guidelines for use of these funds were revised last year. This year funds were used to partially fund infrastructure needs for a 19 unit residential development at 10 Fort Hill Road and for infrastructure for an athletic complex with supporting chiropractic offices at 90 Leonard Drive.

Tax Abatement Program: In 2018, staff worked to update the tax abatement program in coordination with the Tax Assessor and the Town Manager into a more formal process. The program will clearly outline goals, strategy, and process. The program will ultimately be presented to the Town Council in 2019 for approval. It contains a tiered tax benefit structure based upon project size and benefit to Groton.

Business Assistance and Attraction: Staff reacts to communications from businesses interested in relocating to Groton or expanding within Groton. These average 30+ per month. Real estate locations for new businesses are investigated and options provided. Staff serves as a primary “Point of Contact” for new business inquiries to assist with implementation. Staff has also proactively targeted select businesses to attract them to Groton.

Opportunity Zones: Staff received notification that the Governor’s Office selected one Groton census tract (8702) recommended for federal designation as an “Opportunity Zone” as per Groton’s request. This census tract is generally located between Route 12 and Gungywamp Road and between I-95 and the Ledyard town line. There were 286 eligible census tracts state wide and 72 were chosen. The Federal Opportunity Zone program offers significant capital gains benefits when property investments are made in an area. When finalized, such tracts will receive significant exposure from the development community. OPDS plans to use this designation as a marketing tool for properties located in the Opportunity Zone.

Enterprise Zone (EZ) Program: During the FY 2018 budget year, the State of CT initially indicated that they will not be funding the EZ Program tax reimbursement of 40% credit back to

municipalities. Ultimately, temporary funding was allocated by the state through special bond authorization. The temporary funding does not address the full 40% credit commitment back to Groton. Groton is now discussing and evaluating its options since future funding is not guaranteed. These options might include a locally managed program.

Grant Funded Initiatives

41.3058° N
TR
72.0774° W

Thames River Innovation Project (TRIP): The Thames River Innovation Project is designated as an Innovation Place and is one of only four areas in Connecticut that was selected. Funding was again allocated to TRIP from CT Next Innovation to support regional initiatives. Groton holds a seat on the TRIP Board of Advisors. There are several active TRIP projects including Community Concierge, Thames River Reconnection, Naval and Maritime Consortium, and Ignite. Groton staff has been most active with the Consortium project in helping with the hiring of the Consortium’s new Director. Groton also served as the conduit for state project funding. Staff serves on the Consortium’s Board of Advisors and assisted with the official project launch located at UConn – Avery Point. Additionally, Groton staff was involved in helping the Thames River Reconnection project focused on creating redevelopment opportunities on Thames Street in Groton and Hodges Square in New London. The selection of Ninigret Partners was a key accomplishment in driving focus towards determining future catalytic projects/properties on the waterfront.

2018 Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) (Competitive) and Housing Rehab Loan Program: The town in collaboration with Mystic River Homes (MRH) and Eastern Connecticut Housing Opportunities (ECHO) has been awarded an \$800,000 grant for rehabilitation of existing senior housing units. This is an \$800,000 grant with a match from MRH for \$163,000. The grant was awarded in August of 2017. The grant is administered through a three party relationship with the Town’s Economic and Community Development Division, MRH, and ECHO. A contract was generated and signed, bidding completed, a contractor selected and work is underway. The project is currently at 60% completion. The Town will be applying for a grant in 2019 for MRH Congregate. This will likely be an \$800,000 grant with a match provided by MRH. Over the past four years, the OPDS has received \$2,400,000 in CDBG funds for housing development in Groton. The Town’s Housing Rehabilitation Loan Program is also actively rehabilitating individual properties in Groton in conjunction with A & E Services Group LLC.

Joint Land Use Study: In 2017, the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), SUBASE New London, the City of Groton, the Town of Groton, Ledyard, Montville, New London, and Waterford worked together to prepare a Joint Land Use Study



(JLUS). The JLUS analyzed compatibility issues between the towns and the SUBASE and proposed strategies to address these issues in the areas of transportation, the Thames River, land use and development, and coordination and cost sharing. The JLUS report can be reviewed at the following website:

http://www.seccog.org/pdfs/SNL_JLUS_Final_2017-12-01_sm.pdf

A number of the JLUS recommendations are eligible for funding through the Department of Defense Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA). The SCCOG and the Towns applied for and received a grant from OEA in the amount of \$313,000 in July 2018. These funds will be used to study the impacts that the Subbase and General Dynamics have on housing and transportation and make recommendations on the needs for the region. Funds will also be used to analyze the Crystal Lake Road and Route 12 land uses. New zoning regulations will be developed to reflect the needs of the SUBASE and the Town of Groton. A public kickoff meeting is scheduled in January 2019.

Thames River Heritage Park (TRHP): The state bonding committee recently approved and allocated funding for a \$730,000 grant proposal written by OPDS Staff to extend the Nautilus Pier dock. This extension will serve as a stop for the Park's water taxi. Staff has participated with the "TRHP Team" with overall program planning, work that includes coordination with the Connecticut Port Authority regarding the U.S. Navy project budget and approach for the Nautilus dock project. The Authority granted approval of the submitted budget and other logistics in June. Approval from the Under Secretary of the Navy is now pending. Once approved work will begin on permitting and construction.

Community Rating System (CRS): The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments has hired a consultant to assist communities that want to enter the National Flood Insurance Program's Community Rating System (CRS) program and to develop a system to document yearly compliance. CRS is a voluntary program that recognizes floodplain management and outreach activities performed by a community that result in a reduction of the cost of flood insurance premiums. Staff and the consultant will estimate the amount of points the town could claim for work already being done before making a recommendation as to whether Groton should participate in the program. The Town's code enforcement officer/Planner 1 successfully completed FEMA's CRS Emergency Management Institute program in June.

Educational Development Projects

Merritt Conversion for Middle School Project: OPDS staff has been working for over two years to remove the development restrictions on the Merritt Property, located adjacent to Fitch High School, so that it can be developed as a new middle school. In exchange for releasing the development restrictions, the State has agreed to substitute property located off of Colver Avenue and a portion of the Kolnaski School property. The Boulder Heights property off Colver Avenue will be developed for recreational uses and a conservation easement will be placed on 36 acres of the Kolnaski School property. This conversion has been approved by DEEP and the State Attorney General's Office.

Ella T. Grasso Technical High School: A new building that will house the state technical high school is currently under construction in the parking lot of the existing state high school. The school entrance crosses the town-owned Sutton Park and OPDS staff has coordinated with state personnel to obtain local land use approvals for new signage and driveway reconstruction.

Groton Consolidated Middle School: For the past year, OPDS staff has provided input to the Middle School design team in order to make the land use approval process smooth. The project needed zoning variances, height approval, an inland wetland permit, and site plan approval from four different land use commissions. All approvals were granted over the course of two months and the plans should be filed in land records by February.

Day to Day OPDS Activities and Responsibilities

Staffing Boards and Commissions: A substantial amount of planning, economic development, and inspection services' staff time is spent supporting land use commissions including Conservation, Economic Development, Wetlands, Planning, Zoning, Historic District, Zoning Board of Appeals, Community Development Advisory, and Committee of Chairpersons. There are staff reports, agendas, meeting notices, minutes, and legal procedures and requirements that must be followed for many different application types. In addition, for every application there is a large amount of time spent on plan review, meetings with applicants, inspections, and paperwork that must be completed to bring each development project to a successful conclusion.

Planning staff is always available to the homeowner or business owner who has questions about flood zones, the new addition they're planning or about what their neighbor is up to. Cold calls or visits are part of everyday work.

Code Enforcement: The code enforcement office continues to work with the community in identifying and resolving blighted properties, removing junk vehicles from properties, and clearing out illegal signage from the rights-of-way. Code enforcement has also resolved

numerous rental housing code issues to insure that Groton's rental community continues to have safe housing.

Capital Improvement Plan (CIP): Every year the Office of Planning and Development Services coordinates the preparation of the Town's CIP for the long-term planning of large infrastructure and other municipal projects in town. This document takes a substantial amount of staff time, and is reviewed by the Planning Commission for consistency with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development. The 2020 document will be submitted to the Town Manager for review in January 2019 for the upcoming fiscal year.

Combined Planning and Zoning Commission: OPDS staff has been working with the Town Manger's office and the Town Council on the combination of the Planning and Zoning Commissions. The Town Council voted to combine the Planning and Zoning Commissions into a joint Planning and Zoning Commission effective July 31, 2019.

Middle and Long Range Planning and Community Development Projects

Community Wayfinding Signage: The BETA Group presented the wayfinding sign program to Town Council (COW) in November. The COW was supportive of the effort and sought partnerships for helping fund the effort's implementation. Budget requests for the implementation are being developed, but total project cost is estimated at about \$300,000. A master plan that identifies key locations and design has been completed and can be viewed at:

<http://www.exploremoregroton.com/doing-business/resources/p/item/6780/wayfinding-signage-masterplan>

Mystic Coastal Access: The Department began work with a local landscape architecture firm to develop a program to identify coastal access points. The work will focus on downtown Mystic and may involve a common landscape or architectural feature to link the points and create a coastal access trail.

Poquonnock Bridge Village Design Guidelines: Union Studio, a design architecture firm from Providence, RI, is working on design guidelines for the Poquonnock Bridge area. The guidelines will be incorporated into a new zoning district for the area that will reinforce the village structure of the area and will serve as a template for other village areas in town. OPDS hosted a well-attended public meeting for the Poquonnock Bridge Village Design Guidelines at the Groton Public Library. Over 50 residents, business owners, and interested citizens listened to a presentation by Union Studio regarding the goals of the project, inventory of structures, the existing uses, and possible district boundaries. The meeting concluded with a visual preference survey for the attendees. Generally, the audience preferred rural village scale development

patterns, traditional styles of architecture, and expressed a desire to minimize the visual impact of parking lots. The public was clear that they did not want the Village area to become a Mystic-like tourist destination. A public presentation of the design guidelines will be held in the spring of 2019.

Extreme Weather Events: Planning staff is participating in a multi-year project designed to help communities plan and adapt to future extreme weather events. The project is led by the UCONN Civil and Environmental Engineering Department and funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Groton and Stamford are the project’s municipal partners.



Sustainable CT: Planning staff served as co-chair for the Planning Working Group to develop a statewide voluntary sustainable community certification program. The project is coordinated by the Institute for Sustainable Energy and has just launched. Staff registered for participation in the Sustainable CT program and met with the Sustainable CT Fellow working at the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments. She will be helping us to evaluate current projects and programs to determine whether they meet some of the requirements of the program and to see what project can easily be accomplished to meet the remaining requirements. The department plans to submit an application in 2019.

Conservation Plan Update: The Conservation Plan, as prepared by the Conservation Commission, was last updated in 1990. This document inventories natural and cultural resources and identifies those that are worthy of protection. It is more detailed than the Conservation Theme of the Plan of Conservation and Development. The development of this plan is well underway and should be complete in 2019.

Blight Ordinance: The Department began a review of the Blight Ordinance in order to streamline enforcement and to refine the definition of blight. Working with the Town Attorney and the Town Council over a period of approximately 7 months, a revised ordinance was drafted for review and adoption. Over that time, the ordinance was refined, a public hearing was held, and the revised ordinance will be adopted in early 2019.

PROJECT CONSTRUCTION STATUS

Projects Completed in 2018

Gabriele’s Karate	1028 Poquonnock Road	Conversion of commercial space into 4 residential units
Savings Institute	996 Poquonnock Road	New bank building
Wal-Mart	150 Gold Star Highway	Interior Renovations
Barley Head Brewery	12 Water Street	New restaurant

Draw Bridge 24	24 West Main Street	New restaurant
Pet Smart	708 Long Hill Road	Relocation
Mint Leaf	770 Long Hill Road	New Restaurant
Dunkin Donuts	1064 Poquonnock Road	Interior Renovations
T-Mobile	700 Long Hill Road	Relocation
KFC	230 Route 12	Renovation
Olio Restaurant	33 Kings Highway	New enclosed patio
Argia Cruises	39-41 West Main Street	Offices
Andria Bird Bridal Salon	47 Water Street	Completed
Planet Fitness	656 Long Hill Road	7,800 sq. ft. addition – Including plaza façade improvements
Hampton Inn	300 Long Hill Road	Façade renovation
U-Haul Conditioned Self-Storage	187 Gold Star Highway	New 92,825 sq. ft. facility
Long Meadow Landings	45 South Road	22 apartment units
Office Space	479 Gold Star Highway	Conversion from retail to office space
Fieldcrest Water Storage Tank	115 Ann Avenue	New 250,000 gallon water tank
Chelsea Groton Bank	1319 Gold Star Highway	Renovation of branch and vestibule addition
Mystic River Ambulance	237 Sandy Hollow Road	756 sq. ft. meeting room addition
Mattress Firm	757 Long Hill Road	Renovations
Ju Sushi	1043 Poquonnock Road	New restaurant
Bow-Wow's Bluff Point Dog Wash & Retail	35 Fort Hill Road	Renovation for new business
Fort Hill Citgo	182 Fort Hill Road	New canopy and pump islands
Samurai Noodle Bar & Grill	27 West Main Street	New restaurant
The Kula Project Yoga Studio	37 Water Street	New yoga studio business
Corey's	208 Route 12	New tanks and pump islands
Groton Municipal Employees Federal Credit Union	84 Plaza Court	New bank location
Bagwell Academy of Martial Arts	774 Long Hill Road	New karate studio
Advantage Personal Training	2906 Gold Star Highway	2,040 sq. ft. addition
Binet Cuts Barber Shop	944 Poquonnock Road	New barber shop business
Groton Community Center (old Fitch Middle School)	61 Fort Hill Road	Phase II renovations
The Hurne Estate	215 Thomas Road	Seasonal outdoor venue
Core Plus Credit Union	441 Long Hill Road	Remodel
Wildflower Salon	21 Fort Hill Road	New business
Friar Tuck's Restaurant	12 Water Street	New restaurant
Sheer Friends Salon	566 Poquonnock Road	Remodel for new business
Tibetan Plateau Store	3 Pearl Street	
Aesthetics Ink Salon	1291 Gold Star Highway	New business

Projects Under Construction

Groton Multi-Family Apartments	Pleasant Valley Road North & Route 12	147 Units
Colonel Ledyard Estates Subdivision	Colonel Ledyard Highway	15 Single Family Lots
Central Hall Building	8-22 West Main Street	33,690 Sq. Ft., Mixed Use
Mystic Business Park	700 Flanders Road, Building #3 of 6 Buildings	Project of 6 buildings totaling 88,000 sq. ft.
Groton Utilities Water Filtration Upgrade	1268 Poquonnock Road	Major building expansion, new water tank, and significant technology upgrade
Mystic Shipyard	100 Essex Street	2,000 sq. ft. addition
Girard Nissan	425 Gold Star Highway	Multi-phase renovations
Walker Hill Water Storage Tank	105 Walker Hill Road	New water storage tank
Groton Village Condominiums	10 Fort Hill Road	9 new town homes, 19 units total
Beer'd Brewing & Mystic Cheese	225 Leonard Drive	New 10,500 sq. ft. building
Cross Fit Gym	90 Leonard Drive	New 9,900 sq. ft. building
Cook's Equipment	250 Leonard Drive	New 12,000 sq. ft. building
Sandbox Sports Volleyball	1500 Gold Star Highway	New 14,400 sq. ft. facility
Colonial Ledyard Estates	Colonial Ledyard Road	15 lot subdivision

Construction Anticipated 2019

Mystic Shipyard	100 Essex Street	35,000 sq. ft. storage and repair building
Luxury Cat Kennels	1352 North Road	New business
Bank of America	54 West Main Street	Reuse
EB Relocation into old Pfizer Cold Storage Building	Kings Highway	Next to old Caldor building
Sift Bake Shop	5 Water Street	Addition and renovations
Groton Consolidated Middle School	0 and 35 Groton Long Point Road	New 155,000 sq. ft. school
Crossroads Square	255 Route 12	New 20,660 sq. ft. commercial building
Big Y	995 Poquonnock Road	Interior Renovations
McDonald's	561 Long Hill Road	Interior Renovations
Hilton Garden Inn	224 Gold Star Highway	630 sq. ft. bar addition
New Restaurant	12 Water Street	New restaurant
Micro Apartments	12 Water Street	Factory Square
Bridgeview Subdivision	Grove Avenue	4 lot subdivision
Groton Bible Chapel addition	66 Tollgate Road	New Church building