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When A Plan Comes Together

An Exploration of City Planning in Torrington, CT



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Planning Players

Many entities, both governmental and not, have a hand in planning for Torrington, CT. Because Torrington is a relatively small city of roughly 35,000 people, there is plenty of overlap between boards/commissions and professional government departments. For instance, the wetlands enforcement officer is also the assistant planner in the Land Use department (City of Torrington, 2019h). What follows is my understanding of the structure of the professional and citizen planners in Torrington.

1. Professional Planners

- a. Land Use Department (City of Torrington, 2019i)
 - i. Regulates development, reviews proposed building and development;
 - ii. Provides support for: P&Z, Architectural Review Committee, Inland Wetlands Commission, Conservation Commission, Flood & Erosion Control Board, Zoning Board of Appeals;
 - iii. Enforces blight ordinances;
 - iv. Issues various permits, approvals and provides information regarding applications, regulations, zoning maps, etc.;
 - v. Four employees, including the City Planner, Assistant Planner/ Zoning & Wetlands Enforcement Officer, Blight Enforcement Officer, and staff;
- b. Public Works Department (City of Torrington, 2019k).
 - i. Plans, designs, builds, operates, manages, and maintains infrastructure systems.
 - ii. Water Pollution Control Authority (City of Torrington, 2019l).
 1. Sewers, connections, pumping stations, wastewater treatment facility;
 - iii. Engineering Department (City of Torrington, 2019f)
 1. Reviews design elements of proposals for projects, subdivisions, and developments;
 2. Inspects and monitors city construction projects;
 3. Maintains surveys and plans for past projects;
 4. Issues permits for work within streets.
- c. Economic Development Department (City of Torrington, 2019d)
 - i. Support businesses;
 - ii. Diversify city's tax base;
 - iii. Develop employment opportunities;
 - iv. Community contact for public, private, non-profit entities;
 - v. Only one position: Director of Economic Development.
- d. Planimetrics (Planimetrics, 2012)
 - i. Private consulting firm in Avon, CT;
 - ii. Contracted by the City of Torrington to aide in creating a complete and coherent POCD;

- iii. Designed the POCD to contain sections and chapters that can be changed as needed without reworking the entire plan.

2. Citizen Planners

- a. City Council (City of Torrington, 2019b)
 - i. City's legislative body;
 - ii. Make, alter, repeal, and enforce ordinances;
 - iii. Supervise all departments (minus Board of Ed.);
 - iv. 7 members.

- b. Planning & Zoning Commission (City of Torrington, 2015)
 - i. Planning-
 - 1. Prepares plans for the development of Torrington.
 - a. Identify appropriate land uses;
 - b. Recommends placement of roads, parks, other public improvements.
 - ii. Zoning-
 - 1. Regulates use and development of land;
 - 2. Height & setback of buildings, minimum lot and parking size, landscape requirements;
 - 3. Perform inspections for permits, enforces zoning regulations, issues certificates of compliance, approves certificates of occupancy
 - 4. Acts as arm of state in approving locations of automobile establishments such as car dealers & mechanics;
 - 5. 6 members plus:
 - 2 ex-officio (Mayor and Public Works Director);
 - 2 hearing officers;
 - 3 alternates.

- c. Architectural Review Committee (City of Torrington, 2019a)
 - i. Advises P&Z on aesthetic aspects of planning & design relating to physical appearance of site, neighborhood, and city;
 - ii. Reviews and makes recommendations on all proposed changes to non-residential building facades, site plans, and signage greater than 50 sq. ft.;
 - iii. 5 members, plus:
 - city planner & public works director;
 - 2 alternates;
 - iv. Meet as needed when applications are received.

- d. Inland Wetlands Commission (City of Torrington, 2019h)
 - i. Enforces regulations concerning wetland and watercourses;
 - ii. Issues licenses and permits for any activity on or around wetlands and watercourses;
 - iii. 7 members including one wetlands enforcement officer.

- e. Conservation Commission (City of Torrington, 2019c)
 - i. Advise P&Z on cultural and natural aspects of the city;
 - ii. Reviews planning and design of proposals as related to other protected space;
 - iii. Identify any features on land that should be preserved/protected;
 - iv. Maintains the Open Space Inventory for P&Z;
 - v. Assists updating POCD Open Space section;
 - vi. 6 members.

- f. Flood & Erosion Control Board (City of Torrington, 2019i)
 - i. Mentioned on the Land Use page but no page exists on the website for this board.

- g. Zoning Board of Appeals (City of Torrington, 2019m)
 - i. Hears and decides all requests for zoning regulation variances;
 - ii. Hears appeals of any official decision regarding enforcement of zoning regulations;
 - iii. 6 members, plus:
 - 1 alternate.

- h. Economic Development Commission (City of Torrington, 2019e)
 - i. No mission stated;
 - ii. 7 members; one spot currently vacant.

- i. Historic Properties Commission (City of Torrington, 2019g)
 - i. No mission stated;
 - ii. 5 members with 2 alternates.

3. **NGO's**

- a. Torrington Trails Network (Torrington Trails Network, n.d.)
 - i. Volunteers developing trail network throughout Torrington;
 - ii. Adhering to Open Space & Greenways chapter in Torrington POCD.

- b. Naugatuck River Greenway Steering Committee (Naugatuck River Greenway, 2019)
 - i. Attempting to link green spaces from Torrington south to Derby;
 - ii. Provide non-motorized transportation option;
 - iii. Boost tourism, economic development, and health of residents.
 - iv. Website is incomplete, it is unclear if the committee still exists;
 - v. No progress in Torrington yet.

Torrington's Plan

The latest Plan of Conservation and Development for Torrington, CT was written in 2009, and amended and enacted just recently, in August of 2019 (City of Torrington, 2019j). The plan lays out three broad themes to guide the future of the city: Conservation, Development, and Infrastructure; followed by a short section concerning sustainability. Within each theme, major categories are identified which are further broken down into specific areas with recommendations for action. A broad outline of the POCD follows:

- **Conservation**

- *Natural Resources*

- Address flood control;
- Restore rivers & streams:
- Secure watershed land to protect Torrington's water supply.

Strategies suggested to accomplish these goals include: improving water quality in the Housatonic and Farmington River watersheds by protecting the Naugatuck, Bantam, and Still Rivers; creating riparian buffers and forested canopies to create natural habitat along river edges; improving water quality in the stormwater collection system, and; using low impact development techniques such as bioswales, infiltrators, and rain gardens.

- *Open Space*

- Protection of open space;
- Develop trails;
- Improve parks.

To achieve these goals, Torrington should consider: Acquiring land & right of way and altering minimum lot size requirements in order to implement the Naugatuck River Greenway Plan; adopt the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, and; incorporate a new public park in the planned redevelopment of downtown, connecting the proposed Riverwalk to existing trail networks.

- *City Character*

- Preserve local farmland;
- Protect scenic ridgelines;
- Protect hay lots & meadows.

This can be done by: Assessing the impact to scenic areas when considering development proposals; enhance historic trails with signage and information; use the concept of an Agriculture Cluster to protect farms, and; incorporate hay lot preservation into subdivision regulations.

- **Development**

- *Downtown*

- Implement Downtown Municipal Development Plan (City of Torrington, 2009). This is a plan previously drawn up, and revised in 2009 detailing major changes to the downtown area;
 - Try to locate government facilities in the new Downtown District, which was created as part of the DMDP;
 - Promote cultural heritage tourism.

Steps toward these goals include: Infrastructure improvements including off-street parking to encourage private investment in downtown, sidewalks & safe pedestrian crossings; creating opportunities for in-fill development; incentives for renovation & occupancy of vacant spaces, and; working with the Torrington Historical Society to identify & preserve historic resources.

- *Business*

- Work to retain existing businesses;
 - Enact smart-growth measures;
 - Facilitate small-business expansion.

Suggested methods incorporate other areas, some previously mentioned, as ways to make Torrington a more desirable business environment, they include: Redeveloping downtown while maintaining heritage & character; ensure that infrastructure can handle future growth; remediate then redevelop brownfield sites; use modern technology to market Torrington to relocating companies; work with financial entities & NGOs to promote business start-ups; consider repurposing a vacant space into an “incubator space”, and; offer tax incentives for businesses.

- *Housing*

- Focus on developing housing in sustainable areas;
 - Address housing affordability;
 - Accommodate the community’s changing housing needs.

To improve housing, Torrington should: Prepare for the changing housing needs of the community, including allowing people to “age in place”; evaluate zoning requirements to facilitate the mobility of an aging population; help property owners rehabilitate homes through loans, affordable housing trusts, and education, and; allow mixed use and increased density in downtown area to encourage affordable housing.

- **Infrastructure**

- *Facilities*

- Update police headquarters;
 - Improve public safety;

- Work with other towns in the region to address needs for social programs.

Working toward these goals could include: Improving police communication technology, parking, and the floor plan at the police station; encouraging sprinkler systems in new developments, centralize emergency dispatch, and; building a new animal control center.

- *Utilities*
 - Maintain existing sewer service area;
 - Improve stormwater system;
 - Address long-term sewer needs.

These would include: Keeping rural areas using septic systems and off of the sewer system; replacing old sewer pipes; instituting a fee-based stormwater utility, and; removing sewer pipes that cross or lay in riverbeds.

- *Transportation*
 - Develop a comprehensive transportation system;
 - Manage road access to avoid chokepoints;
 - Provide safe routes for bicycles & pedestrians.

Contributing to these goals are: Continuing the pavement management plan; coordinating with utilities to avoid damaging newly paved roads; expand bus service to employment areas & the city center; create safe bicycle and pedestrian routes, and; consider consolidating driveways and parking lots to restrict road access points.

- **Overall Sustainability**

- Conserve energy;
- Conserve water;
- Promote green buildings and neighborhoods.

Sustainability goals are becoming more common, Torrington's plan calls for: conserving energy to optimize resources and reduce emissions; getting at least 20% of the city's energy from green sources; removing restrictions on the use and generation of clean energy; upgrading streetlights to more efficient LEDs; removing unnecessary parking lot & street lights, and; upgrading city vehicles to more efficient models.

A Description of Zoning in Torrington, Connecticut

Torrington, Connecticut is divided into 6 general zone categories: *Commercial/Industrial Restricted, Downtown District, Local Business, Industrial, Residential, and Watershed Protection*. Residential and industrial zones are further broken down into sub-zoning types. Industrial zones contain sub-zones labelled *Industrial* and *Industrial Park*. The Residential zone category is broken into nine sub-zone types differing in minimum lot size and whether multi-family dwellings are allowed or not. Those sub-zones are, *Restricted Residential Community, Residential 6,000 SF Lot, Residential 10,000 SF Lot, Residential 10,000 SF Lot – Single Family, Residential 15,000 SF Lot, Residential 15,000 SF Lot – Single Family, Residential 25,000 SF Lot, Residential 40,000 SF Lot, and Residential 60,000 SF Lot*. Additionally, there are two types of Overlay Zones: *Incentive Housing and Alternate Incarceration and Medical Marijuana Dispensary* (City of Torrington, 2018).

The *Downtown District* is the center of the city, although it is not the geographic center as it is situated near Torrington's southern border (City of Torrington, 2018). There is currently a Downtown Municipal Redevelopment Plan in place to revitalize the downtown area. The plan focuses first on making the area pedestrian and bicycle friendly and easing traffic flow. Future phases of the plan call for more affordable housing, mixed-use buildings, and historic architecture preservation. In-fill development will be particularly encouraged (City of Torrington, 2009). Within the *Downtown District* there are four *Incentive Housing* overlay zones (City of Torrington, 2018).

Surrounding the *Downtown District* is *Residential 6,000 SF Lot (R6)*. As the name implies, the minimum lot size to build a house is 6,000 square feet so this is the densest of Torrington's residential zones. This zone encompasses most of the lowest elevation areas of the city around the east and west branches of the Naugatuck River (City of Torrington, 2018). In practice, the R6 areas generally contain a mix of multi- and single-family houses rather than apartment buildings—although there are a few.

The *Industrial* and *Industrial Park* zones are primarily on the northern and southern edges of the city, along the major north/south routes in to and out of Torrington. One industrial park is closer to the denser portion of the city (City of Torrington, 2018). I think it is likely that it was originally on the outskirts, but residences have since encroached upon it. There are some smaller, older industrial areas scattered among the R6 zones. Many of the industrial buildings closer to downtown are vacant, the owners having abandoned them years ago.

Local Business zones hew closely to the main arteries through Torrington. Narrow strips along the sides of Route 202 as it climbs the eastern hills, Route 4 leaving town to the west, and north and south along Main Street are zoned to accommodate many types of businesses (City of Torrington, 2018). There are a small handful of shopping plaza areas but primarily the businesses are in small groups or stand-alone buildings; some are even in old houses that have been repurposed. Contrary to the name of the zone, not all the businesses are strictly "local". Many are regional or national chains including restaurants, auto parts stores, insurance agents, dry cleaners, supermarkets, home improvement stores, coffee shops, gas stations, and more.

Peppered around the edges of the R6 zones are half-a-dozen or so fairly small areas zoned R10, or *Residential 10,000 SF Lot* (City of Torrington, 2018). These zones appear to be no larger than individual neighborhoods and, seemingly, are randomly placed. There could be an historic reason why these R10

zones exist; perhaps early property owners in Torrington had larger lots and subsequent generations sought to keep those lots intact. Or maybe these lots were intended to host multi-family houses, possibly offering a more spacious option.

Larger areas zoned *Residential 10,000 SF Single-Family (R10S)* spread up the hills to the east and west of the Naugatuck River (City of Torrington, 2018). The big difference here is that only single-family houses are permitted (City of Torrington, 2019n). These areas tend to be a little quieter than the more interior zones, with narrower streets and decent sized yards around most of the houses. The heaviest grouping of *R10S* zones is on the east side, where Route 202 is a major route to all points east, eventually merging with Route 44 toward Hartford, which is where many Torrington residents work.

The next residential zone is *Residential 15,000 SF (R15)* (City of Torrington, 2018). As the name indicates, the minimum lot size here is 15,000 square feet (City of Torrington, 2019n). There are very few of these zones with the largest being about halfway up the (south)western hills. This large *R15* zone covers the area occupied by relatively recent sub-divisions, with modern houses, including duplexes, on small streets with plenty of dead-ends and loops.

Getting nearer the town borders we find the *Residential 15,000 SF, Single-Family (R15S)* zones (City of Torrington, 2018). There is a modest area of this zoning on the western hill, but the bulk is high on the northeastern and eastern sides. The area in the northeast is known as Toringford and was once the area where the factory owners and other influential (rich) citizens lived; to an extent it still is. It is denser now than it was even a generation or two past thanks to some of the larger lots being divided, however some of the larger ones persist as small farms or hay fields. The eastern area sits on Torrington's border with both New Hartford and Harwinton, which gives it a rural feel even though most of the lots are uniform size and the area is thoroughly developed (City of Torrington, 2018). Both of these zones are situated along a secondary north-south route (Route 183) that connects Torrington with Winsted, to the north (and Colebrook beyond that).

Before around 1997-98 Route 183 was a sleepy little back way around Torrington used primarily, in my recollection, for getting from Winsted to Grandma's house in Harwinton on Thanksgiving. Now, thanks to Home Depot having built the area's first big box store just across the town line in New Hartford (Torrington rejected it), the intersection of Routes 183 and 202 has become another, busier, city center with far less walkability. The area immediately surrounding that intersection is Torrington's only *Commercial/Industrial Restricted* zone (City of Torrington, 2018). It is home to WalMart, Target, Bed, Bath, and Beyond, Michael's, and dozens of smaller businesses like a Verizon store, drug stores, a grocery store, banks, numerous restaurants, and others. The area is always congested and the intersection itself has grown from only one lane in each direction with nothing more than a blinking yellow light, to three lanes on all sides. I don't know if the *Commercial/Industrial* zone was created just for this purpose, but it certainly appears to have been used to keep all of these large stores, with their parking lots and huge traffic volumes, all in one place.

Immediately east of Route 8 and west of Route 183 (though in spots Route 183, known as Toringford Street here, runs through it), in the far northern section of Torrington, is a small group of long, narrow housing lots designated as *Residential 25,000 SF (R25)* (City of Torrington, 2018). This is a quiet area with houses set among tall trees. It is fairly well developed but with the larger minimum lot size it has a rural feel. The houses here are large but not mansions, and I believe most are single-family despite there

being no such restriction in the zoning rules (City of Torrington, 2019n). It is close to the highway (Rt. 8) but the nearest on-ramp is miles away, so it feels like it is farther away from the city than it actually is.

On the other side of town, up on the wooded hillside, is a narrow strip of land that is the only *Residential 40,000 SF (R40)* zone. Torrington's zone map appears to show that most of the land here is in large lots, with just a few relatively smaller lots on the zone's western edge (City of Torrington, 2018). This area is mostly wooded and steep with fields on the flatter areas.

By far the largest zone in terms of area is *Residential 60,000 SF (R60)* (City of Torrington, 2018). Wide swaths of the western and northern sides of Torrington are zoned thus. Here you'll find mostly trees along with some farms (mostly hobby), and large, expensive houses set deep in the woods, with only the mouth of a driveway to indicate there is anything there at all.

On either side of Route 4, heading west toward Goshen, and along the northeastern border of Torrington, are residential zones that are also *Watershed Protection* areas (City of Torrington, 2018). Much of these areas are forest but residences are permitted here; although the minimum lot size is either 65,000 ft² or 87,000 ft², the latter without a sewer connection (City of Torrington, 2019n). The Torrington POCD sets forth a plan for conserving this land as it provides water to the city through the Torrington Water Company (City of Torrington, 2019j)

Additionally, there are four areas zoned *Restricted Residential Community* (City of Torrington, 2018). These zones are located along the western and northern sides of the city and appear to be lightly developed. One contains a public golf course, but no further information can be found except for a declaration in Torrington's Zoning Regulations that states no new such zones will be allowed (City of Torrington, 2019n).

Torrington also has two *Overlay Zones*. The first is the *Incentive Housing* zone and consists of four small sections of the *Downtown District* (City of Torrington, 2018). These areas are "...to encourage affordable housing in both residential and business districts that have the transportation connections, nearby access to amenities and services, and infrastructure necessary to support concentrations of development." (City of Torrington, 2019n, p. 33). The title of the second is as descriptive as it is unwieldy; it is the *Alternate Incarceration, Medical Marijuana Dispensary Overlay Zone* (City of Torrington, 2018). Three small areas are set aside within *Industrial* and *Local Business* zones in the northern part of Torrington. These are areas "...where alternate incarceration facilities and medical marijuana dispensaries can be located." (City of Torrington, 2019n, p. 42).

Siting a Six-Unit Apartment Building in Torrington, Connecticut

In its Downtown Municipal Development Plan, the City of Torrington details its desire to improve the downtown area (City of Torrington, 2009). Part of that improvement includes incentives for private investors to develop residential and mixed-use buildings in the designated areas. Phase I of that plan involves the immediate downtown area, including Franklin Street, which runs along the north bank of the Naugatuck River (City of Torrington, 2009). The Franklin Street area has been neglected for decades and has become a primary focus for redevelopment; in fact, the public portion of the town's plan is already in motion with infrastructure improvements well underway. It is with these realities in mind that I have chosen Franklin Street as the location for my new six-unit apartment building.

The location I have chosen falls within the *Incentive Housing* overlay zone (City of Torrington, 2018). An overlay zone meant for, "...encouraging a more vibrant residential component to business or mixed-use areas to sustain a lifestyle in which residents can walk or use public transportation to reach jobs, services, and recreational or cultural opportunities." (City of Torrington, 2019n p. 33). My project fits perfectly with that mission.

The underlying zone is designated *Downtown District* (City of Torrington, 2018). The *Downtown District* allows a maximum density of 15 units per acre, which can be increased to 18 units per acre if at least three of those units are affordable housing (City of Torrington, 2019n). Since I am proposing only six units my building will not run afoul of the lower density limit given that the lot is roughly .42 acres in area (New England Geosystems, 2019).

Zoning regulations in the *Downtown District* do not require any front set-back and require 20 foot set-backs for back and sides only when the property is adjacent to a residential lot—although it is unclear if these rules apply to residential buildings as well as the commercial buildings traditionally found in the area (City of Torrington, 2019n).

The average size of an apartment in the United States is 917ft², which equals a footprint of approximately 26' x 35' per unit (Freddie Mac, 2016). With two units per floor the building only needs to be three stories high to accommodate all six apartments, which will easily fall within the maximum building height of 60 feet (City of Torrington, 2019n).

Two units, side by side, give dimensions of 35' x 52'. The minimum width for stairways is 36 inches, but when moving furniture wider stairs are better, so I have added a full 5 feet for the stairway (International Code Council, 2016). That makes the total footprint for the building 40' x 52'. A building that size will fit easily on this lot where the shortest side is 108' (New England Geosystems, 2019). There will be ample space remaining for parking and a fire escape, and the unit size could potentially be larger.

Building a modestly sized apartment building in this location on Franklin Street will help Torrington to realize its goal of creating an inviting downtown with a community of residents who care about their neighborhood. There are ample benefits to draw residents to this area: it is within easy walking distance of a beautiful public park where arts performances are held during the warmer months, a shopping center, two banks, and grocery and clothing stores. It is also mere steps from several established restaurants and bars, local shops, and fine arts centers such as the Artwell Gallery and the historic

Warner Theater. And for those residents who work outside of Torrington, my apartment building will be only one block from Route 202 and is less than a mile from the entrance ramps to Route 8 (Figures 1,2).



Figure 1. (New England Geosystems, 2019).

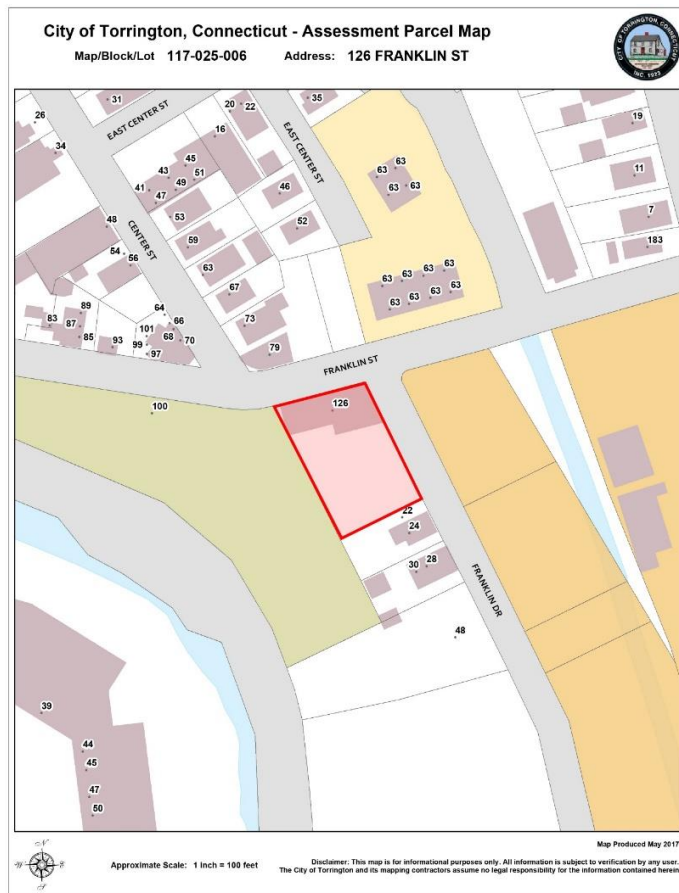


Figure 2. (New England Geosystems, 2017).

My Opinions on Planning in the City of Torrington, CT

Embarking on this project I was initially overwhelmed by the tangle of information related to planning in Torrington. The idea of pulling together so many different threads—departments, commissions, offices, regulations—had me wondering where I would begin. I had assumed that finding information on the city's website would be difficult at best, and probably impossible in some cases. However, I was pleasantly surprised that Torrington has relatively recently upgraded its website, which is both easy to use and contains comprehensive town information.

Finding the information was one thing, understanding it was quite another. Simply because of the number of bodies involved in planning and the complexity of zoning regulations, I found it difficult to keep straight all the pieces that needed consideration. Planning where to locate my fictitious apartment building was a particular challenge, as it must be for real developers (or their attorneys, at least). Various requirements must be satisfied, from environmental concerns to staircase width and railing height to parking solutions, making it quite easy to run afoul of one regulation while attempting to adhere to another. My suspicion is that Torrington is not unique in this regard. As is often the case, after spending some time with the information, I became familiar with the specifics of Torrington's planning process and I was able to organize the information I needed and to plan a structure in which I could tell a coherent story about planning in Torrington.

I believe public access to the kind of information I needed is as simple as it can be given its complexity. Certainly, for the average citizen wondering about building an addition or installing a wheelchair ramp, it would be easy to find out who to contact to get answers to those questions. Public participation, in my experience, is not actively encouraged by the city of Torrington. That is not to say that it is discouraged, just that beyond general calls to vote or to volunteer there is little attempt made to connect the dots between joining a board or commission and relevance in a person's life. That is to be expected, I think. The information is there if someone cares to look, but a person cannot be forced to care.

The question of whether Torrington's planning is effective or not at meeting the goals set forth in the city's Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) is difficult to answer. The downtown plan is proceeding, albeit slowly. I am inclined to believe that the recession of 2008-09 played a key role in slowing it down. The Downtown Municipal Development Plan was adopted in April of 2009, a time when there was not exactly a lot of money flowing into city coffers. In fact, the property tax rate in Torrington is one of the highest in the state, indicating that money continues to be a factor for all city projects. Downtown development is surely not exempt from those difficulties. This situation is unlikely to be resolved if common methods, such as tax incentives, are applied to lure businesses to the new downtown.

The Torrington Trails Network has also been inching forward. In particular, the greenway running between Torrington and Winsted (3 miles of which were built years ago and have proven to be quite popular) has seen some recent progress with a routing plan in place and grant money recently approved for at least part of the project. Further construction, however, is still years away because of the various studies and assessments necessary.

Some of those planning goals, however, seem a little problematic. For instance, the Torrington Water Company is a privately-owned company providing water to Torrington and some surrounding areas. In

Torrington's POCD a stated goal is for the town to purchase and protect land to safeguard the water supply (City of Torrington, 2019j). Water access is indeed important but, in this situation, taxpayer money will be spent to buy land on behalf of a private company which then sells its product—in this case water—back to the town. A better plan, in my opinion, would be to use that money to establish a public water company. Another example of official planning benefiting a few individuals is the idea that farmland in Torrington should be protected as part of the city's "character" (City of Torrington, 2019j). Although defining "character" is a decidedly subjective exercise and there are only a small number of farms in Torrington. Some grow corn, some raise a modest number of horses but, to my knowledge, none produce much of anything that supports the town or its economy. These "farms" are largely owned by a few wealthy families who inherited or bought large tracts of undeveloped land in the surrounding hills. Many of these same families also happen to be active in town government, sitting on the City Council, Planning & Zoning Commission, Conservation Commission, or one of the other bodies with a say in constructing Torrington's POCD. In effect, this small group has managed to use their town's planning document to reduce their personal tax burden while protecting their land from development, with no larger benefit for the community. This is at a time when property taxes for everyone else are increasing. In these examples, I see a clear relationship between planning and issues of social justice.

Budget issues, and the appearance of small-time corruption notwithstanding, the City of Torrington does appear to remain largely committed to reaching at least some of the planning goals it has set for itself. The success of the steps currently underway are largely depended on two factors as to how those goals are realized and whether the town continues to pursue them at all. First, the initial phase of the downtown plan is meant to broaden the tax base and thereby create the revenue needed to continue. It remains to be seen if the businesses will actually come. Second, if tangible progress is not made, and quickly, many of my neighbors will blame their high taxes on the development projects and feel no compunction about blaming the entire POCD plan, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The people in Torrington are not known for their patience and only time will tell.

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