



## Overview of Previous Plans and Role of this 2007 Plan

The 1994 plan of conservation and development was a strong document, outlining the possibilities and goals for the community. The plan emphasized the importance of preservation of our Villages and the historic gems of town. It valued our diversity and expressed the desire to create a vibrant City Center. It very successfully predicted many things, but looking ten years into the future is not an easy vision. Technology has changed greatly. With computers in every home, online shopping, and working, has become common. Cell phones have also changed how we do business and communicate. We use satellites to receive our radio and TV. The expansion and impact of these technologies would have been impossible to predict.

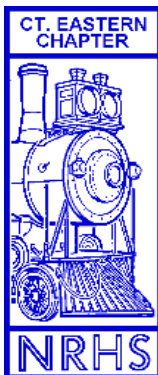
In the past twelve years, we have seen two of the largest casinos in the world built in our region. The impact of these is far reaching. We have lost long term businesses in town and welcomed newcomers. The Windham Mills was transformed into an industrial complex and has attracted new life to Windham. We created festivals, an arts magnet school, and a performance theater on Main Street. We added to our parks and trails with projects such as the Garden on the Bridge and the Veteran's Memorial Trail. All have had an impact on the community.



1994 Plan

This 2007 Plan replaces the

Town of Windham Connecticut,  
Plan of Development  
adopted June 27, 1994



There has been a spirit of change in Windham in the past 12 years. We have become very proactive in the pursuit of the vibrant, diverse community. In the past ten years we have grown to have festivals, theater, recreation, education and more. Many of these have been accomplished by grassroots support and efforts of citizens who care about and want to improve the place they live. The list is impressive:

- Thread City Crossing also known as Frog Bridge
- 3rdThursday Street Festival and Willimantic Renaissance Inc.
- Willimantic Whitewater Partnership
- New Middle school
- Expansion of Eastern CT State University
- Retail development in North Windham
- Connecticut Eastern Railroad Museum
- Restoration of our Footbridge
- Restoration and reuse of Windham Mills
- Shetucket Plains Park
- Acquired Noznick Property for future recreation use
- Artspace rehabilitation and reuse of abandoned Mill
- Windham Garden on the Bridge
- Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association
- Victorian Days Festival and home tour held annually
- Windham Area Arts Collaborative
- Thread City Development Inc.
- Windham Hospital expansion
- Chocolate Festival
- Burton Leavitt Theater
- Arts Magnet School
- Boom Box parade
- Design standards for our City Center
- Historic Main Street Signs
- Gateway signs
- Frogfest
- Riverfest
- Covenant Soup Kitchen Frog race
- Willimantic and Natchaug Rivers Greenway designation

## 2007 Windham POCD

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### Downtown Development

Windham is on the verge of a development that will shape the future of our Town and Region. Not since the redevelopment of the 1970s has the area seen a similar effort to re-energize our Downtown Business district. The town has named a preferred developer for a project involving three historic buildings in the center of our downtown. The town and developer will now need to work to balance the project's economic viability with the restoration of the historic buildings or their replication. The development will address not only the commercial and residential opportunities in the area, it will also address retail, restaurants, traffic, parking and commercial space.

### Re-emphasis on River and Bridges

There has been a reaffirmation of the great value of the Rivers that flow through our City as well. Willimantic Whitewater Partnership was formed in 2002 with the goal of reconnecting the town with the Willimantic River; it has found support locally, as well as at the State and Federal level. The Partnership, a non-profit organization, sees the river as an economic engine for the community, and is seeking to attract people through parks, trail and whitewater kayaking and rafting. They have already acquired a key parcel on the eastern side of Bridge Street, which they plan to develop into a park and trailhead. The Partnership was instrumental in the town receiving \$2 million in federal funds for over a mile of trails along the river from the Columbia town line to Bridge Street.

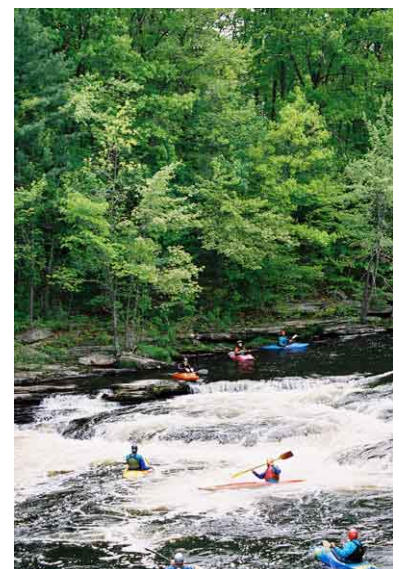
They are working to acquire recreational easements or purchase additional land on both sides of the river for more trails and parks. Several communities in western states have seen a very positive economic benefit from urban parks, especially when combined with a whitewater course. By reconfiguring dams created by the former mill industry, the town can once again use the power of the river. In 2012, migratory fish will once again be able to reach the Willimantic River when the Scotland Dam's fish passage ladder is complete. The reconfiguring of the Willimantic dams will enable these fish to then travel up stream as far as the Eagleville dam in Mansfield. The whitewater park, the only one planned in New England, will attract people, business and commerce. For four years the Chamber of Commerce has held Riverfest which has been well attended and will surely dovetail into the schedule of monthly events in town.

We have re-embraced our river with The Thread City Crossing Bridge, which connects our Downtown to the Pleasant Street Neighborhood, and beyond. The Bridge features four twenty-foot tall bronze Frogs sitting upon spools of thread to remind us from where we have come. The unique structure has become a tourist attraction and a point of reference for direction throughout the area.

We have taken back the 100+ year old stone arch Bridge, which was retired as the southern roadway to the downtown area, and developed it into the pedestrian Windham Garden on the Bridge. The gardens will not only beautify the lower Main Street area but it will add park space and enhance the quality of life for Windhamites and become a tourist destination.



Willimantic Victorian Neighborhood Association meetinghouse on Main St.



Willimantic River - Riverfest 2005

Meetings, Plans and Ideas

The Planning Commission read and took into consideration many plans including the Windham Regional Plan of Development, the State of Connecticut Plan of Development, the Downtown Advisory Committee Plan for Downtown Willimantic, and the 1994 Windham Plan of Development. There have been many well attended forums sponsored by Thread City Development, Windham Arts Collective, Windham Open Space Committee, University of Connecticut Landscape Architecture Classes, and Willimantic Whitewater Partnership to name a few. Each group focused on the betterment of Windham as a goal and, although each group adds different flavor to the overall plan, we all agree on similar goals.

Downtown, our city center has been a focus of many groups. The plan for creating a pedestrian-friendly, arts and entertainment district has been a common thread. The desire for restaurants, theater and unique shopping has been determined to be the goal. These groups have also stressed the consideration of green construction and environmental sensitivity. The emphasis on protecting our architecturally historic buildings has also been highlighted as a priority.

Economic development and smart growth are the economic engines which will shape the town's demographics, determine the amount of taxes we pay and ultimately change, or maintain, the quality of life. Attracting businesses which add to our employment levels and bring added taxes to Windham will always be a priority. A careful approach to the addition of "Big Box" development needs to be made. A study of impact on employment, taxes and the impact on existing business should be looked at. The support of local business should be a priority.

We should embrace the University community and weave their needs into our plans. The safety of our community needs to be better communicated to the students and faculty of the Universities. We need to break down the barriers and attract people to patronize businesses in town. We should work to create ways to make students want to stay in Windham, creating business and raising families.

Open space has been made a priority as well as the protection and access to our water. Subdivisions and residential development should be limited to in-fill areas with services. Development in areas outside the services area should be limited in size and impact. Open space to preserve natural resources, with or without public access, should also be acquired.

