

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
ANNUAL TOWN REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 2011/2012

The Conservation Commission's purpose is established by the CT General Statutes as "...the development, conservation, supervision and regulation of natural resources..." According to this legislation, the Conservation Commission must keep an index of all open areas, publicly or privately owned, including open marshlands, swamps and other wetlands, for the purpose of making the proper use of such areas; conduct research into the possible utilization of land areas of the municipality; and approve state grant-in-aid applications for programs to preserve or restrict the use of open space land to conservation or recreation purposes. In addition, the Conservation Commission may make recommendations on proposed land use changes to other municipal agencies (often by request of those agencies); recommend plans and programs for the development and use of all open areas; advertise, prepare and distribute booklets, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets for its purposes; inventory natural resources and formulate watershed management plans; acquire land and easements in the name of the municipality (in Old Saybrook, through the Land Acquisition Committee and with the approval of the townspeople); and manage municipally-owned open space property when the agency normally responsible for such duties (Parks & Recreation, by our Charter) delegates that power.

Old Saybrook's Plan of Conservation & Development incorporates the Conservation Commission's 2004 Plan of Conservation & Open Space. The plan's purposes and uses are many, including protecting the Town's natural resources, providing information to Land Use regulatory commissions as they process land use applications, and aiding the Town's Land Acquisition Committee in identifying properties of value to preserve for future generations. This document defines the ongoing work of the Conservation Commission. For the past decade, priorities have been placed on developing greenways and trail systems for passive recreation, a Stewardship Plan for town land, developing a Natural Heritage Tour showcasing the town's natural resources, completing an Oyster River fishway system, and attaining our 21% Open Space goal.

At the present time, open space totals approximately 20% of the Town's land area. With the Open Space Subdivision regulations passed by the Zoning Commission that require all large developments to set aside at least 30-50% of their land area in open space, it would appear that it is only a matter of time before approximately 25% of the land area of the Town is set aside as open space.

Looking forward, it is time to update the Plan of Conservation & Open Space. With the present concerns for sustainability, climate change and energy independence in this country, the new plan should address what we can do locally to help with these national and world efforts. At the very least, the plan should include a strong energy conservation program and a program of public education to encourage a stronger culture for environmental issues and a better understanding of what actions are most important for

the Town's sustainability. Of course the new plan should include continuing efforts for acquisition and stewardship of land for open space and the preservation of our natural resources and wildlife habitat.

In order to address this need for public outreach, the Conservation Commission has launched a new website, SustainableSaybrook.org. This website will be the vehicle used to solicit Old Saybrook citizens' input into all the priorities for the future of the Town. It will address not only Environmental issues, but also issues of Economics and Social Equity, as these are equally essential to the sustainability of our town.

The website will develop strategies and goals in each of these twelve areas: Access & Mobility, the Economy, the Environment, Education, Energy, Food, Identity & Culture, Health, Waste Management, Housing & Shelter, Social Equity, and Water. The goals will be established collaboratively with the town's citizens, community-based organizations, local government agencies, and business groups. Community partners are being sought and all are welcome.

For each of the twelve major areas, there is a brief "big picture" section describing the national and world issue. Then the issue is translated into its local impact, and local goals for addressing the issue are proposed for comment. Following that opening page in each area, articles concerning the local issue are included.

Please visit www.SustainableSaybrook.org for a look at this work in progress, and begin commenting on the goals for Old Saybrook.

Robert W. Fish, *Chairman*