

LAND USE DEPARTMENT

The Land Use Department conducts planning of the Town's land in corresponding strategies – the first being *long-range planning* via implementation of the municipal improvements, programs and standards recommended in the Town's Plan of Conservation & Development (“proactive” to municipal needs) and the second being *current planning* via regulation of property owners' site-specific initiatives (“reactive” to market forces).

The Department administers the business of the Town's land use agencies, including the Architectural Review Board, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Zoning Commission. This year, we assisted in creating the newly State-mandated Aquifer Protection Agency, which was absorbed as an essential function of the Zoning Commission, to further protect the Saybrook and Holbrook wells.

The Department is open to the public daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Carol Suits, Administrative Assistant, supports the day-to-day functions of the Department. Chris Costa, Enforcement Officer, maintains regular office hours daily from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Christine Nelson, Town Planner, is available by appointment Monday through Thursday. And, most often we can be found at the regularly-scheduled public meetings of these land use agencies throughout the evenings of each month. We welcome Kelly Volansky, who fills the part-time position of Environmental Planner; this position fulfills the essential functions of inland wetlands enforcement and Geographic Information System analysis. Ms. Volansky is available for consultation on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings.

This year, the Department officially launched an *interactive map* through the Town's website depicting cultural, natural, economic, recreational, and public health/safety resources of the town, as well as the fundamental *property assessment information* for individual properties in conjunction with the Assessor's Office. This application marks a big step forward in terms of the Town's continuing initiative to make more resources available through its website. Additionally this year, we posted up-to-date editions of the regulations of each land use agency and many of the forms to apply for various permits. Patrons of the Department and the land use agencies – applicants, attorneys, civil engineers, land surveyors, property owners, the press and appointed/elected officials themselves – save time and expense in preparing materials prior to meeting with staff, presenting at public meetings or making decisions. Despite everyone's desire to evolve into a “paperless society”, this year we needed to make time to overhaul and reorganize the Master Permit File room in order to accommodate the ever-growing public records associated with each parcel of land and its improvements in Old Saybrook, which was a very satisfying work flow enhancement.

Although the market began to soften this year, we found relief from the past few years' onslaught of regulatory work to focus most fruitfully on Town-initiated projects, including the Architectural Review Board's *Design Excellence Awards*, the Council on Environmental Quality's *Indicators of Sustainability*, the Founders Memorial Park Committee's construction of the park, the Conservation Commission's *Natural Heritage Tour* brochure, a series of wayside interpretive signs (coined “*Education Stations*”), another round of *vernal pool confirmations* for a joint project of the Conservation and Inland Wetland & Watercourses Commissions, some retroactive marking of *Open Space easement boundaries* established by the Planning Commission, an *administrative exemption process* for improvements not subject to review by the Historic District Commission, a critical analysis of the *Locational Guide Map* of the State's Plan of Conservation & Development, as well as some house-keeping of Department-administered permitting procedures and updates to Zoning Regulations to clarify inconsistencies. The Department provided intensive staff assistance to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in updating its flood hazard maps and subsequently adopting the modernized maps and ordinance to comply with the federal mandate to mitigate such natural hazards on a nation-wide basis. Ms. Costa organized extensive outreach to residents. We assisted the Board of Selectmen in its endeavors with HOPE Partnership, a local non-profit community developer, to plan for more attainable and affordable housing alternatives throughout town. We will continue to take advantage of this time to help the boards and commissions update and implement their many plans for improvement of Old Saybrook.

Christine Nelson, AICP, Director of Land Use