

# **DARIEN** Plan of Conservation & Development **2026**

**DRAFT Chapters 1-5**

**April 23, 2026**

Temporary Cover



▲ Showdown at the Sound 2025 at Weed Beach (photo courtesy of Global Extreme)

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

A Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is a guidance document that presents a long-term vision for the future of a community and identifies goals, policies, and recommendations in line with the vision and in accordance with State statutes. These statutes require a municipality's Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z Commission) to adopt a new or amended POCD at least every 10 years.<sup>1</sup>

A decade has passed since the Town of Darien's 2016 POCD was adopted. This 2026 Town of Darien POCD, which replaces the 2016 POCD, highlights significant changes in the town and the region since the adoption of the prior POCD. It identifies needs, principles, and priorities that emerged from community engagement and presents goals, policies, and recommendations within four core chapters:

- ★ ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY
- ★ TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY
- ★ COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICES
- ★ THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The recommendations in these chapters are intended to guide the appropriate Town departments, boards, commissions, and committees. Community organizations, institutions, and property owners may implement aspects of the plan in coordination with or independent from the Town. While the POCD is an advisory document, implementation of some of the strategies by the Town may lead to the drafting and adoption of new or revised regulations.

The Planning & Zoning Commission prepared the 2026 POCD with assistance from the Planning & Zoning Department and a community planning consultant. The content of this POCD is a product of many conversations with new residents, long-time residents, community organizations, and Town boards, commissions, committees, staff, and elected officials.

This POCD serves a number of specific purposes for the following entities:

## 1. Board of Selectman & Other Town Bodies

The POCD provides guidance to the Board of Selectman and other Town bodies for identifying priorities and making policy decisions, regulatory changes, and capital investments on POCD topics.

## 2. P&Z Commission and Applicants

The POCD serves as a reference for applicants (developers and/or property-owners) to consult when seeking to modify, expand, or develop/redevelop their properties and for the Planning & Zoning Commission to consider when reviewing applications. Furthermore, State statutes require that all zoning map and zoning regulation amendments, in addition to substantial improvements to Town properties, have a finding from the Planning & Zoning Commission on consistency with the POCD.

## 3. Town Departments, Commissions, Committees

The POCD identifies actions that should be evaluated by commissions and committees and referred to the appropriate Town departments and other Town bodies for funding and implementation.

## 4. Institutions & Community Organizations

The POCD indicates where institutions and community organizations could contribute their expertise and abilities to the implementation of certain actions.

## 5. Residents

The POCD presents intentions for Darien's future, topics that residents identified as priorities, and recommendations for action on a wide range of topics. It also identifies ways for residents to be involved in the implementation of the recommendations through a board, commission, committee, or other means.

Figure 1-1. Four Hundred Years in the Evolution of Darien

Icon									
Place Type	Native Settlements & Wilderness	Land Purchase	First Roads	Formation of a Parish	Establishment of a Town	Creation of a Railroad Suburb	Arrival of the First Thruway	Prosperous Bedroom & Coastal Community	Prosperous Bedroom & Coastal Community with Redeveloping Center
Time Period	Pre-1640	1640-1700	1700-1737	1737-1820	1820-1848	1848-1938	1938-1970	1970-2015	2015-2025
Name	n/a	Stamford	Stamford	Middlesex	Darien	Darien	Darien	Darien	Darien
Approx. Population	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,000	1,500	1,700-7,000	9,000-20,000	20,000-21,000	21,000-22,000
Inhabitants	Siwanoy	Early Dutch and English Settlers "First Planters"	English	English	Darien Natives	Darien Natives, Surrounding Connecticut Residents, New Yorkers	Darien Natives, People From All Over the Northeast & the Country	Darien Natives, People From All Over the Country & the World	Darien Natives, People From All Over the Country & the World
Housing Types	Wigwam	Cottages (Stone or Wood)	Simple Houses	Saltbox Houses	Georgian Houses	Single Family Homes	Single Family Homes	Single Family Homes, Townhouses	Apartments, Single Family Homes, Townhouses
Local Economy	Subsistence Fishing, Hunting, Farming	Subsistence Fishing, Hunting, Farming	Farming & Fishing	Farming & Fishing	Farming, Fishing, Local Craftsmen and Merchants	Commuter Income, Farming, Fishing, Summer Tourism	Commuter Income, Retail, Office Work, Summer Tourism	Commuter Income, Retail, Restaurants, Office Work, Home-Based Businesses	Commuter Income, Retail, Restaurants, Office Work, Home-Based Businesses

Figure 1-1 depicts and summarizes the evolution of what we know today as the Town of Darien, based on the narrative version of Darien’s history in Chapter 2 of the 2016 POCD. Each column represents an important event that shaped development patterns in the area.

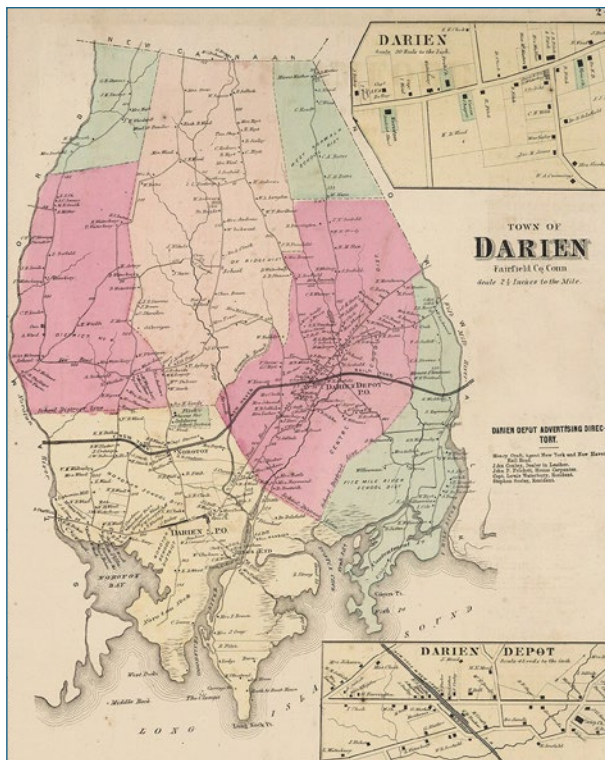


Figure 1-2. A map of Darien from 1867, well before I-95 was constructed.

**Chapter 1 Endnotes**  
 1 Connecticut General Statutes §8-23

# 2. DARIEN TODAY

The Town of Darien is a suburban community located in Southwestern Connecticut along the Long Island Sound. As far back as 1737, it was a rural part of Stamford called Middlesex Parish, until the area now known as Darien was incorporated as a separate town in 1820. This area grew slowly, maintaining its farming roots until the early 1900s.

## The Place

Today, Darien is primarily a residential community, home to approximately 22,528 people.<sup>1</sup> Water features comprise most of Darien’s boundaries, with the Noroton River forming its western boundary with the City of Stamford and the File Mile River forming part of its eastern boundary with the City of Norwalk. The northern boundary with the Town of New Canaan is over dry land and located a quarter to a half mile south of the Merritt Parkway. Within these boundaries, the topography slopes down gradually from higher inland areas toward the coastline. Stream valleys, wetlands, and small coves cut through the landscape, creating a mix of wooded uplands, tidal marshes, and coastal lowlands. The highest point, located in the northwestern corner of town, is approximately 280 feet above sea level.

The overall physical structure of the town has been shaped by the railroad tracks, major State roadways, and I-95.

The overall physical structure of the town (see Figure 2-1 on page 4) has been shaped by the railroad tracks, major State roadways, and Interstate 95 (I-95). The railroad tracks, which were constructed in the mid-1800s, weave through the approximate middle of town, dividing it in half. U.S. Route 1 (Boston Post Road) slices through town, passing under I-95 and the tracks. First called the Connecticut Turnpike, Boston Post Road was chartered in the 1800s as a toll road that connected New York and New Haven. In 1848, passenger rail service started between New York and New Haven with a station in Darien off of Boston Post Road, around which Downtown would develop. Boston Post Road would become U.S. Route 1 in 1926.

Mansfield Avenue (Route 124) is the primary north-south arterial. It begins at Boston Post Road near the geographic center of town and continues into New Canaan, connecting to the Merritt Parkway and points

farther north. Mansfield Avenue provides access to residential neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks, while Tokeneke Road (Route 136) provides access to neighborhoods in the southeastern part of town. Boston Post Road provides access to neighborhoods in the southwestern part of town. Hoyt Street (Route 106) provides access to neighborhoods along the western part of town. It continues into New Canaan and the Merritt Parkway to the north and into Stamford to the south.

I-95, which was constructed in the 1950s, also cuts through the middle of town. Its on- and off-ramps are located at Noroton Avenue, Ledge Road, Boston Post Road, and Tokeneke Road. There are also on-ramps on Old King’s Highway North and at Hecker Avenue. Hollow Tree Ridge Road and Noroton Avenue both cross over I-95 and the railroad tracks, connecting the north and south parts of town. Several streets such as Old King’s Highway South and Tokeneke Road pass underneath I-95.

This layout of railroad and interstate highway infrastructure created a narrow patchwork of land that contains the most active parts of Darien. Darien’s traditional downtown and the Darien Train Station are located along Boston Post Road between Leroy Avenue and Sedgwick Avenue. The Noroton Heights Train Station is located 1.5 miles to the west of Downtown along Heights Road. Along the north side of Heights Road are a number of commercial and mixed-use developments. Both train stations are on the New Haven line of Metro-North Railroad. In between and around these areas, particularly along Boston Post





▲ *Heights Crossing, a transit-oriented development*



▲ *The Corbin District (Phase 1) in Downtown*

Road, are many different types of commercial enterprises in addition to several multifamily residential developments and historic churches.

These areas near the two train stations are the places where the most change is currently happening. Re-development of older buildings and properties, as envisioned in the 2016 POCD, has started to transform this area. One of the first and most prominent projects is The Corbin District, a walkable, mixed-use development with new residential units, retail and office space, and public plazas that will encompass seven acres in Downtown. The first phase was completed in 2023, with the second phase expected to be completed in 2027. In total, the project will consist of 11 buildings with approximately 78,000 square feet of retail space, 106,000 square feet of office space, and 116 new on-site units.

One of the primary drivers of housing demand is Darien's high-performing public school district, which is ranked in the top three in the state.

Across from the Noroton Heights Train Station along Heights Road is another prominent project, Darien Commons, which is a mixed use development. Completed in 2024, the project contains ground floor retail and commercial space, 122 apartments on upper floors, and a parking structure. Sixteen of the apartments are designated affordable for 40 years, as required by Darien's inclusionary zoning regulations. A block to the west of Darien Commons is Heights Crossing, which features two mixed use buildings with ground floor retail and restaurants, and 65 apartments on two upper floors. Ten of the apartments are designated affordable. Several other redevelopment

projects in Noroton Heights on Heights Road are under construction or in the permitting stages.

Darien's residential neighborhoods contain detached, single-family houses built on partially wooded lots along quiet, narrow streets and cul de sacs. Housing types range from historic waterfront estates and spacious manors in the lower density R-1 and R-2 zoning districts, to modest Colonial, Craftsman, and Cape Cod style houses in the higher density residential zoning districts (R-1/2, R-1/3 and R-1/5). With a median home

value of \$1,728,400 in 2023, according to the ACS and the monthly median sale price reaching up to \$2.5 million in 2025, Darien's housing market commands some of the

highest prices in Connecticut.

One of the primary drivers of housing demand, along with proximity to New York City and the Long Island Sound, is the town's high-performing public school district, which is ranked in the top three in the state along with neighbors New Canaan and Westport.<sup>2</sup> Darien Public Schools has seven schools—five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school—all located within residential neighborhoods. The district has approximately 4,500 students. Darien has many public parks and recreation facilities, starting with its crown jewels: Weed Beach, Pear Tree Point Beach, and, most recently, Great Island. Purchased in the 19th century by the founder of Royal Baking Powder Company, the 60-acre Great Island was acquired by the town in 2023 from descendants

## 2. DARIEN TODAY



▲ Pear Tree Point Beach (photo courtesy of the Town of Darien)

of the family and is now guided by a master plan for its future. This master plan reflects the Town's commitment to thoughtfully evaluating a range of potential public uses, including both open space preservation and active and passive recreational opportunities, to ensure that the property serves the long-term needs of the community.

Darien also has many private recreation facilities, including three country clubs each with their own 18-hole golf course, swimming pool, clubhouses, and tennis courts; an equestrian club with paddle tennis courts; a beach club; a yacht club; swim and tennis club; a community ice rink; a commercial tennis center; and a YMCA. The country clubs are two of the largest employers in Darien, next to the Town itself.



▲ The pool at the Darien YMCA (photo by Darien YMCA)

## DRAFT

## The People

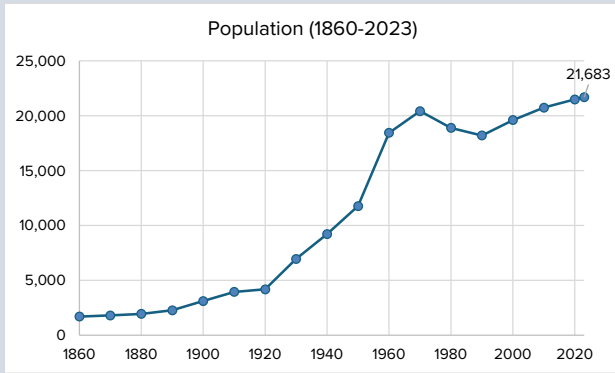
The residents of Darien are typically highly educated, gainfully employed, family oriented, and involved in their community. Nearly every student at Darien High School graduates and approximately 95% of graduates express intent to continue on to higher education. Approximately 85% of town residents have completed a bachelor's degree or higher and more than one third of employed residents work in the Finance and Insurance sector. The median household income is more than \$250,000. Approximately 83% of housing units in town are owner-occupied, with 17% being renter-occupied.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these statistics, some Darien households face financial challenges. For example, 29% of households are considered cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their total income on housing costs. Also, Darien has a 6% poverty rate, which means that approximately 1,300 residents have incomes below Federal thresholds for poverty.

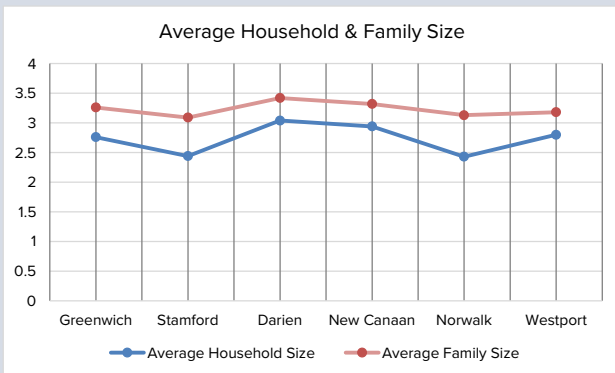
Darien's population has become more diverse over the past decade. In 2013, approximately 92% of residents were White, according to the American Community Survey (ACS). The 2023 ACS data indicates that approximately 83% of residents are White, 7% of residents are Asian, 5% are Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% of residents are Black. More than 11% of Darien residents were born in another country, with the highest percentages being from Asia and Europe, and 13% speak a language other than English at home.

With respect to household composition, more than 62% of households are occupied by married couple families and 45% of households have one or more children under the age of 18.<sup>4</sup> The average household size is 3.04 and average family size is 3.42, both figures being the highest among Darien and its neighbors.<sup>5</sup> Approximately 6% of households are non-family households and 5% are single resident households, a figure that will likely increase over time due to the construction of new apartments.

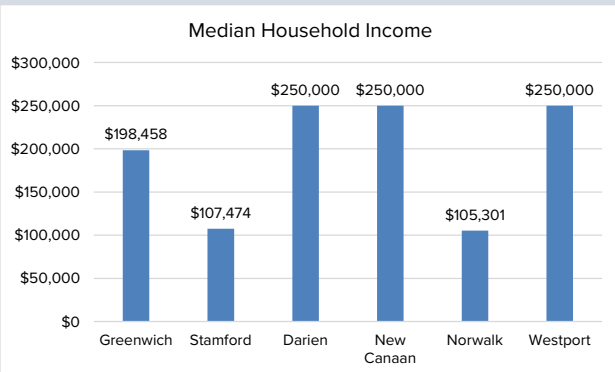
# Demographic Data Snapshots



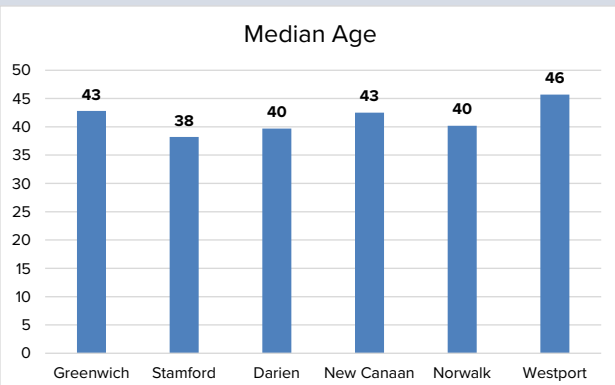
▲ Darien is growing at a rate of 1.5% annually. The population has increased by 5% since the 2020 U.S. Census.



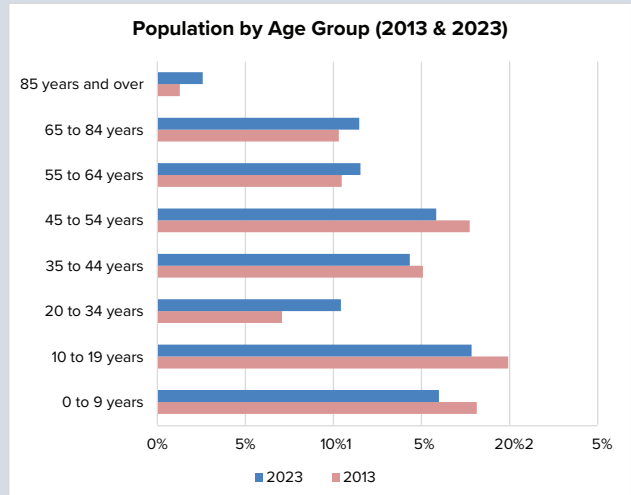
▲ Darien has the highest average household and average family size among neighboring municipalities.



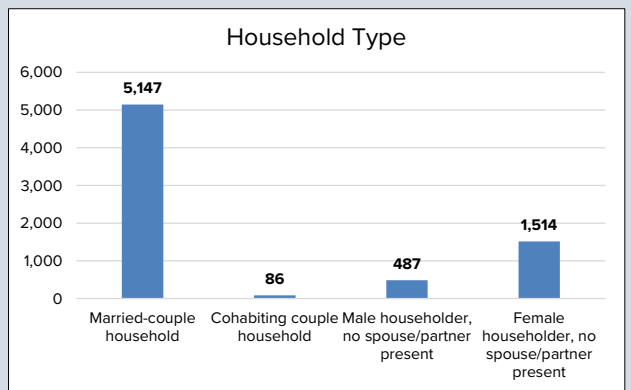
▲ Darien, New Canaan, and Westport all have median household incomes of more than \$250,000.



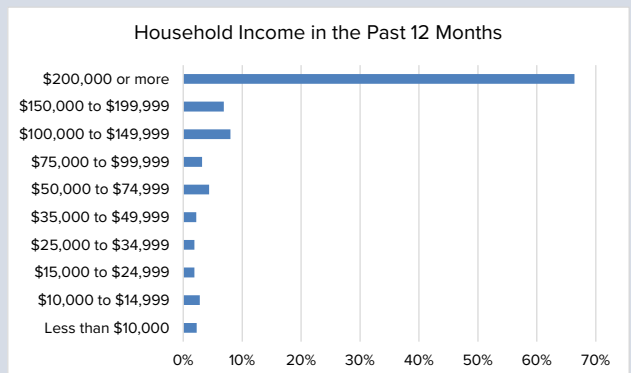
▲ Westport has the highest median age, while Stamford has the lowest.



▲ Between 2013 and 2023, Darien's population aged, with growth in residents between ages 55 and 85+ and a decline in residents age 19 or younger. The largest gain in population was in the 20-34 age bracket, which might reflect adult children living with their parents due to high costs of living.



▲ The majority of households in Darien are married-couple family households, 39% of which have children. Most of Darien's housing stock consists of single family homes.



▲ The majority of households earn \$200,000 or more. With a median home value of more than \$1.7 million, high incomes are needed to afford a house in Darien.



▲ Ox Ridge Elementary School



▲ Gorham's Pond in winter (photo by David Kanigan)

On the whole, people enjoy living in Darien. The Town-Wide Survey, administered in the summer of 2025 as part of this POCD process, received 1,189 responses, which represents 8% of the adult population. The first question of the survey asked residents to identify what they like most about Darien. The following are descriptions of some of the most frequent responses:

### Excellent Schools

The quality of the public school district is frequently cited as a major positive aspect of Darien, with mentions of high standards, favorable student-to-teacher ratios, and the school district's positive impact on property values. Many survey respondents see the public school system as key to Darien's desirability to families with school-aged children.

### Access to Water and Beaches

Most respondents enjoy easy access to beaches, the Long Island Sound, and waterfront activities. Many appreciate the natural beauty, peacefulness, and recreational opportunities these community assets provide.

### Natural Beauty and Green Spaces

Many respondents mention Darien's aesthetic beauty, including parks, landscaping, tree-lined streets, preserved natural areas, and the coast.

### Strong Sense of Community

Respondents repeatedly mention a close-knit, friendly, and supportive community. There is a strong emphasis on community spirit, volunteerism, and a sense of belonging, with people describing Darien as family-oriented, caring, and safe.

### Small-Town Feel with Urban Access

Many respondents value Darien's "small-town feel," charm, and environment, while also appreciating being close to New York City.

### Convenience and Location

Respondents appreciate Darien's central location, proximity to highways and train lines, and the ease of accessing amenities, shops, restaurants, and services. Respondents describe everything as being within a short distance, making daily life convenient.

### Safety and Cleanliness

Safety is a recurring theme, with respondents feeling secure and noting low crime rates. Darien is also described as clean, well-maintained, and peaceful.

### Amenities and Town Resources

Darien's amenities, such as the library, YMCA, parks, recreational programs, and local events, are highly appreciated by respondents. Many respondents mention the variety and quality of activities for children and families.

Another question on the survey asked residents to identify their favorite places in town. Survey respondents resoundingly enjoy Darien's beaches: Weed Beach and Pear Tree Point Beach. Other top places include Great Island and Cherry Lawn Park, followed by Downtown and the Darien Library.

## The Government

Darien has a Representative Town Meeting (RTM) form of government. The legislative powers of the Town are vested in the RTM, which is composed of 100 members representing the Town's six districts.

### Board of Selectman

The Board of Selectmen is the main policy-setting and executive board. It includes the First Selectman, who is the presiding officer and Chief Executive Officer of the Town, and four other Selectmen. The Board oversees municipal operations, sets priorities, guides the budget, and appoints members to many boards and commissions.

### Representative Town Meeting

The Representative Town Meeting (RTM) is Darien's legislative body. It is comprised of 100 members elected from the Town's six districts. It approves budgets, major appropriations, ordinances, bonding, town purchases, and certain appointments.

### Board of Finance

The Board of Finance is an independent fiscal authority. It reviews, adjusts, and approves the budgets of the Town and the Board of Education before they go to the RTM. It also sets the mill rate for taxation purposes and monitors financial policies and oversees long-range financial planning, including the financing of capital improvements. Ultimately, it ensures that the Town stays financially healthy, plans responsibly for the future, and remains transparent and accountable to residents.

### Planning & Zoning Commission

The Planning & Zoning Commission guides the town's long-term physical development by overseeing land use and zoning, reviewing subdivisions and site plans, and managing special permits. It is also responsible for creating and implementing the POCD.

### Boards, Commissions & Committees

Darien has more than 30 boards, commissions, and committees, many of which were consulted during the process of developing this POCD. A board is typically a body of elected or appointed officials that makes



▲ *Town Hall, which formerly served as Darien High School*

high-level policy decisions. A commission is a group that regulates a specific area or carries out a specific public task. A committee is usually a smaller group, sometimes established by a board or commission, to perform a specific function or advise on a specific topic. Boards and commissions typically have more formal authority than committees.

Committees are advisory bodies that focus on specific issues to conduct research, formulate recommendations, and provide expertise. They facilitate communication between residents and the government, help with the planning and development of projects, and ensure that, in the case of Darien, the Board of Selectmen, the RTM, and various boards and commissions have in-depth information before making final decisions. Committees allow for research into complex topics, from land use to budgets, and can involve community members with relevant knowledge.

### Town Administrator

Darien has a Town Administrator, a professional manager who supports the Board of Selectman in daily operations, human resources, budgeting, and project management.

### Board of Education

Darien Public Schools is governed by a Board of Education consisting of nine members and two student representatives. One of its main roles is to approve and adopt an annual budget.

## 2. DARIEN TODAY

# The Institutions & Organizations

Darien has strong institutions and organizations that support and enrich the lives of Darien residents of all ages. While the POCD does not have authority over these entities, there may be opportunities to collaborate on topics of shared interest or concern. Furthermore, some of these entities could, through their own actions, assist the Town in achieving POCD goals or implementing specific recommendations.

### Darien Public Schools

This is the largest of the institutions. It has seven schools, an administration building, an early learning preschool program housed within one of its elementary schools, and an alternative high school program located at Thorndale Circle. School facilities, including classrooms, auditoriums, and recreation fields, are available for use by the community for a rental fee. Safe transportation to and from school, whether by foot, bicycle, e-scooter, e-bike, car, or bus is very important to the Board of Education.

### Darien Library

Located on Boston Post Road approximately half a mile east of Town Hall and half a mile southwest of Downtown, the Darien Library is a partnership between the Friends of the Library and the Town. An annual grant from the Board of Selectmen funds the majority of staff salaries, benefits, and essential building operations such as utilities and maintenance. The 56,000 square foot building was constructed in 2009 and achieved Gold LEED certification. Its parking area features natural-based stormwater systems that could be examples for other developments in town.

### Darien Land Trust

The Darien Land Trust preserves natural spaces, connects the community with nature, and promotes conservation awareness to protect land now and into the future. The organization owns or has conservation easements on more than 230 acres of land in Darien. It often works with partner organizations, Darien Pollinator Pathway, Darien Green Wave, and the Garden Club of Darien.

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▲ Darien Library (photo courtesy Planning & Zoning)

### Darien Chamber of Commerce

This is a membership-based organization that promotes member businesses and encourages residents and visitors to shop local. The Darien Sidewalk Sale, held in the summer, is one of its most important and successful events, especially for independent business members.

### Volunteer Fire Departments & EMS

Darien is unique among towns in Southwestern Connecticut for being served by three volunteer fire departments: Darien, Noroton, and Noroton Heights. They provide fire protection, emergency response, and community safety services. The volunteer Darien EMS Post 53 is staffed by Darien High School students and adult volunteers, supplemented by paid paramedics. Together, these departments work to safeguard people and property, relying on trained volunteers who respond to a wide range of emergencies.

### Religious Institutions

Darien is home to more than 10 religious institutions that play an important role in the town's social fabric, community life, and cultural identity. Many of them host preschools, charity drives, youth programs, and interfaith events. The oldest church in town, the First Congregational Church of Darien (UCC) was founded in 1730. It once served as a meetinghouse and civic center for Middlesex Parish.



▲ A sign indicating the presence of a Darien Land Trust owned and managed nature preserve (photo by the Connecticut Land Conservation Council)

### Foundations, Agencies & Non-Profit Organizations

Darien has a number of foundations and nonprofit organizations that support social services, youth and senior programs, the arts, environmental conservation, and community wellbeing.

The Community Fund of Darien provides grants to local and regional nonprofits addressing housing, food security, healthcare access, employment skills, youth development, and emergency services.

The Darien Foundation provides grants for technology and capital initiatives that create opportunities for youth, support safety and security, and enhance the overall quality of life in Darien.

The Darien Nature Center, located in Cherry Lawn Park, inspires passion and respect for the natural world through nature education, hands-on experiences with nature, and environmental action and stewardship.

At Home In Darien focuses on helping seniors to remain independent and connected in the community through transportation services.

The Depot Youth Center offers after-school programs, social connections, and volunteer opportunities.

The Darien Arts Center enriches community life through arts and education. It provides visual and performing arts programming and classes for people of all ages.



▲ The Chamber of Commerce's annual Sidewalk Sale (photo courtesy of the Darien Chamber of Commerce)



▲ First Congregational Church of Darien (photo by FCCD)



▲ Museum of Darien (photo by Museum of Darien)



▲ The Mather Homestead and Gardens

## 2. DARIEN TODAY

The Museum of Darien, formerly known as the Darien Historical Society, maintains, collects, preserves, and exhibits materials of local historic value and educates the community about its heritage.

The Mather Homestead is Darien's only Registered National Historic Landmark. It was built in 1778 by Deacon Joseph Mather. The Homestead was later the home of Stephen Tyng Mather, the first director of the National Park Service. In 2017, Mather descendants donated the Homestead to a newly created foundation to be operated as a museum.

The Darien Men's Association was established in 1977. Its mission is to provide a forum in which retired and semi-retired men can find good fellowship, friendship, and fun amidst a range of activities designed to nourish both body and mind while promoting a sense of community.

The Darien Woman's Club initially started in the 1970s to advocate for a local public library. Today, the club is a diverse group of women interested in connecting with the community and each other through service, friendship, social activities, and educational endeavors.

Darien Athletic Foundation (DAF) celebrates and supports all youth and high school athletics of Darien. DAF supports by endeavoring to ensure that the athletic infrastructure, broadly defined, of Darien is competitive and meeting the needs of our youth and high school athletes. DAF celebrates through its contribution to the community of photography and broadcasting. DAF Media live streams sports, arts and community events. Broadcasts are produced by a volunteer staff of students and adults who are using cutting edge technology.

Post 6933 Darien VFW supports local veterans in need and provide a safe space at our post for them. It is a group of combat veterans ranging from WWII to current conflicts throughout the globe, with the newest members being Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.



▲ Darien Woman's Club members at the July 2025 Summer Concert (photo by Darien Woman's Club)



▲ Darien High School boys' hockey (photo by Darien Athletic Foundation)

### Chapter 2 Endnotes

- 1 "Estimated Populations in Connecticut as of July 1, 2024," CT Department of Public Health
- 2 "2026 Best School Districts in Connecticut," Niche.com Inc. (accessed from [www.niche.com/k12/search/best-school-districts/s/connecticut/](http://www.niche.com/k12/search/best-school-districts/s/connecticut/) on January 22, 2025)
- 3 2023 American Community Survey (ACS)
- 4 2023 ACS
- 5 A "household" includes all persons occupying a housing unit, while a "family" requires two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

### 3. DARIEN TOMORROW

The Darien of tomorrow has been emerging and taking shape over the past decade. New buildings with new businesses and new apartments are being constructed in Downtown and in Noroton Heights. People are moving in—thirtysomething newcomers to start jobs in the region, retirees to be close to family members living in Darien, native Darienites looking to return to town, and current residents downsizing from their house to an apartment.

New restaurants, cafés, studios, shops, boutiques, and services—both national brands and independents—are opening their doors. And several other redevelopment projects are planned, approved, or underway. The forces driving these changes in Darien and the region include high land costs and household incomes, aging and obsolete buildings, strong demand for housing, and supportive land use policy and zoning. Darien's 2016 POCD presented a transit-oriented development vision and recommendations for guiding revitalization in Downtown and Noroton Heights.

Change is also happening in Darien's residential neighborhoods, but more gradually. High land values are prompting some owners to demolish established houses to make way for new, larger houses. Between 2022 and 2025, approximately 56 such new houses were constructed, at a rate of approximately 14 per year.<sup>1</sup> Also, since the adoption of new regulations in 2024, homeowners are now allowed to submit applications for constructing accessory dwelling units (ADUs). A total of 15 ADUs have been approved so far.<sup>2</sup>

Changes can be experienced along Darien's roadways, especially on major roadways. Darien is located between Stamford and Norwalk, two cities that have been experiencing significant redevelopment and growth. Growing regional travel demand and development in these cities have increased traffic congestion along I-95 and Boston Post Road, which impacts traffic in Darien. Traffic volumes on I-95 in Southwestern Connecticut have started to surpass pre-pandemic levels, with average annual daily traffic reaching more than 150,000 vehicles.

A warming climate is impacting Darien and every other community across the country. Weather patterns are changing, producing stronger storms, creating more severe flooding, and increasing temperatures.

Sea levels are projected to rise locally by approximately 1.6 feet higher than the national tidal datum in the Long Island Sound by 2050 and will continue to increase thereafter.<sup>3</sup>

#### Taking Stock: Community Engagement

Understanding residents' responses to these and other changes they have and continue to experience in Darien was an important part of the community engagement process for this POCD. The results of the Town-Wide Survey captured these sentiments. A total of 1,189 Darien residents completed the survey, which represents approximately 8% of the adult population of Darien.

#### Gauging Levels of Satisfaction & Dissatisfaction

The purpose of the first part of the survey was to understand the aspects of town that residents believe are working well and those aspects that they believe need improvement. The survey asked residents to rate their levels of satisfaction on a wide range of topics, which were organized into four categories:

The responses to the Town-Wide Survey revealed the highest degrees of satisfaction with the public school system, the transfer station, and parks and recreation facilities. The topics that respondents ranked with the highest degree of dissatisfaction are biking, multifamily residential development, and stormwater management (see Figure 3-1 on page 15).

The survey also gave residents the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback about each of the topics to explain their ratings. Many respondents provided specific recommendations for improving the topics that scored highest, which suggests that aspects of

## TOWN-WIDE SURVEY CATEGORIES & TOPICS

### Transportation & Infrastructure Topics

- Public Transportation
- Driving
- Parking
- Biking
- Walking
- Climate Adaptation
- Stormwater Management

### Conservation Topics

- Coastal Resources
- Historic Preservation
- Land Preservation & Conservation
- Natural Resources

### Built Environment Topics

- Single Family Homes
- Community Character
- Commercial & Mixed-Use Development
- Sustainable Buildings
- Multifamily Residential Development

### Community Amenities, Facilities & Services

- Transfer Station
- Public Schools
- Parks & Recreation
- Business & Economic Development

Darien that are working well also need continual attention, planning, and investment. The high quality of the public school system is a primary reason why families chose to move to Darien and also an important factor in maintaining property values.

For the topics that scored the lowest, residents offered both broad commentary and specific suggestions. For example, with respect to biking, respondents noted the lack of any on- or off-road bicycle facilities and amenities such as signs and racks. However, they recognize that many of Darien's streets are narrow, curvy, and busy, which can make biking unsafe. They are also concerned about the proliferation of e-bikes, which travel at faster speeds than traditional bicycles, and their use among adolescents.

With respect to stormwater management, respondents cited too many new houses and large buildings replacing permeable surfaces; insufficient upgrades to drainage and stormwater infrastructure to match new construction; and loss of trees and natural buffers, which previously helped to absorb and filter runoff. Respondents also identified frequent flooding hotspots and recognized recent improvements made by the Town to upgrade infrastructure.

## What Concerns You Most About the Future?

The responses to this question reveal that one of the main concerns among respondents is the redevelopment taking place in town, especially multifamily residential development. The following are the categories of responses to this question:

1. **Overdevelopment and Loss of Small-Town Character**
2. **Traffic, Congestion & Parking**
3. **Strain on Schools & Town Infrastructure**
4. **Environmental Concerns**
5. **Affordability, Diversity & Housing Options**
6. **Governance, Planning, and Fiscal Management**

Concerns 1 through 5 in the list above pertain to the development that is taking place and approved in Downtown, Noroton Heights, and along the Boston Post Road corridor in other locations in town. Many residents are concerned about the fast pace, scale, and program of redevelopment activity. They feel that the resulting buildings are eroding Darien's traditional "small town charm" and are making the town feel more like neighboring cities.

Despite these negative sentiments about redevelopment, almost 60% of survey respondents report being

Figure 3-1. The table on this page lists the weighted average of each topic. A 5 was assigned to the response *Very Satisfied*, a 4 to *Satisfied*, a 3 to *Neutral*, a 2 to *Dissatisfied or Concerned* and a 1 to *Very Dissatisfied or Very Concerned*. *No Opinion* was also an option, but it was not assigned a number.

Category	Topic	Weighted Avge
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	<b>Public Schools</b> (facilities)	<b>3.97</b>
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	<b>Transfer Station</b> (trash, recycling, swap shop)	<b>3.97</b>
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	<b>Parks &amp; Recreation</b> (park and beach facilities)	<b>3.78</b>
The Built Environment	<b>Single Family Homes</b>	<b>3.72</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Public Transportation</b> (rail, rail stations, bus)	<b>3.65</b>
Conservation	<b>Coastal Resources</b> (habitat, marine life, water quality, access)	<b>3.46</b>
Conservation	<b>Historic Preservation</b> (of buildings, landscapes)	<b>3.42</b>
The Built Environment	<b>Community Character</b> (overall scale, form, feel)	<b>3.41</b>
Conservation	<b>Land Preservation &amp; Conservation</b> (open spaces, habitats)	<b>3.37</b>
Conservation	<b>Natural Resources</b> (water, soil quality; protection of trees, native plants, wildlife, pollinators)	<b>3.21</b>
Community Amenities, Facilities & Services	<b>Business &amp; Economic Development</b> (permitting, regulations OR business mix, quality)	<b>3.20</b>
The Built Environment	<b>Commercial &amp; Mixed Use Development</b> (Downtown, Noroton Heights, Boston Post Road)	<b>3.13</b>
The Built Environment	<b>Sustainable Buildings</b> (greener buildings and houses)	<b>3.08</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Driving</b> (traffic, signals, signs, safety)	<b>3.01</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Parking</b> (Downtown, train stations)	<b>2.93</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Walking</b> (sidewalks, signals, crossings, lighting, safety)	<b>2.91</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Climate Adaptation</b> (to stronger storms, inland and coastal flooding, heat)	<b>2.88</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Stormwater Management</b> (drainage)	<b>2.85</b>
The Built Environment	<b>Multifamily Residential Development</b> (apartments, condos)	<b>2.58</b>
Transportation & Infrastructure	<b>Biking</b> (on- and off-road paths, racks)	<b>2.43</b>

“very satisfied” or “satisfied” with Community Character. Furthermore, almost 45% of respondents are “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with Commercial & Mixed-Use Development and approximately 20% are “neutral.”

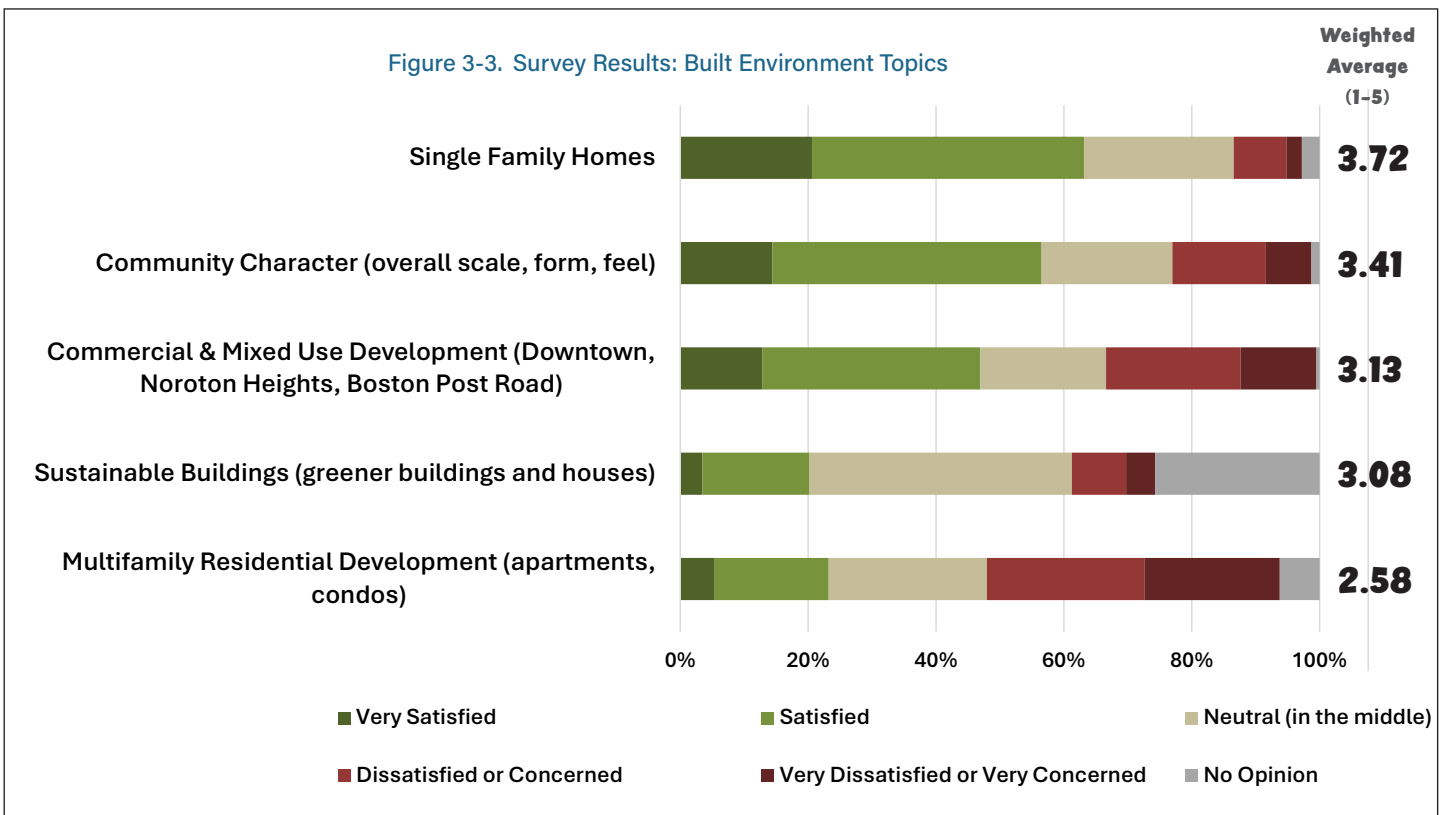
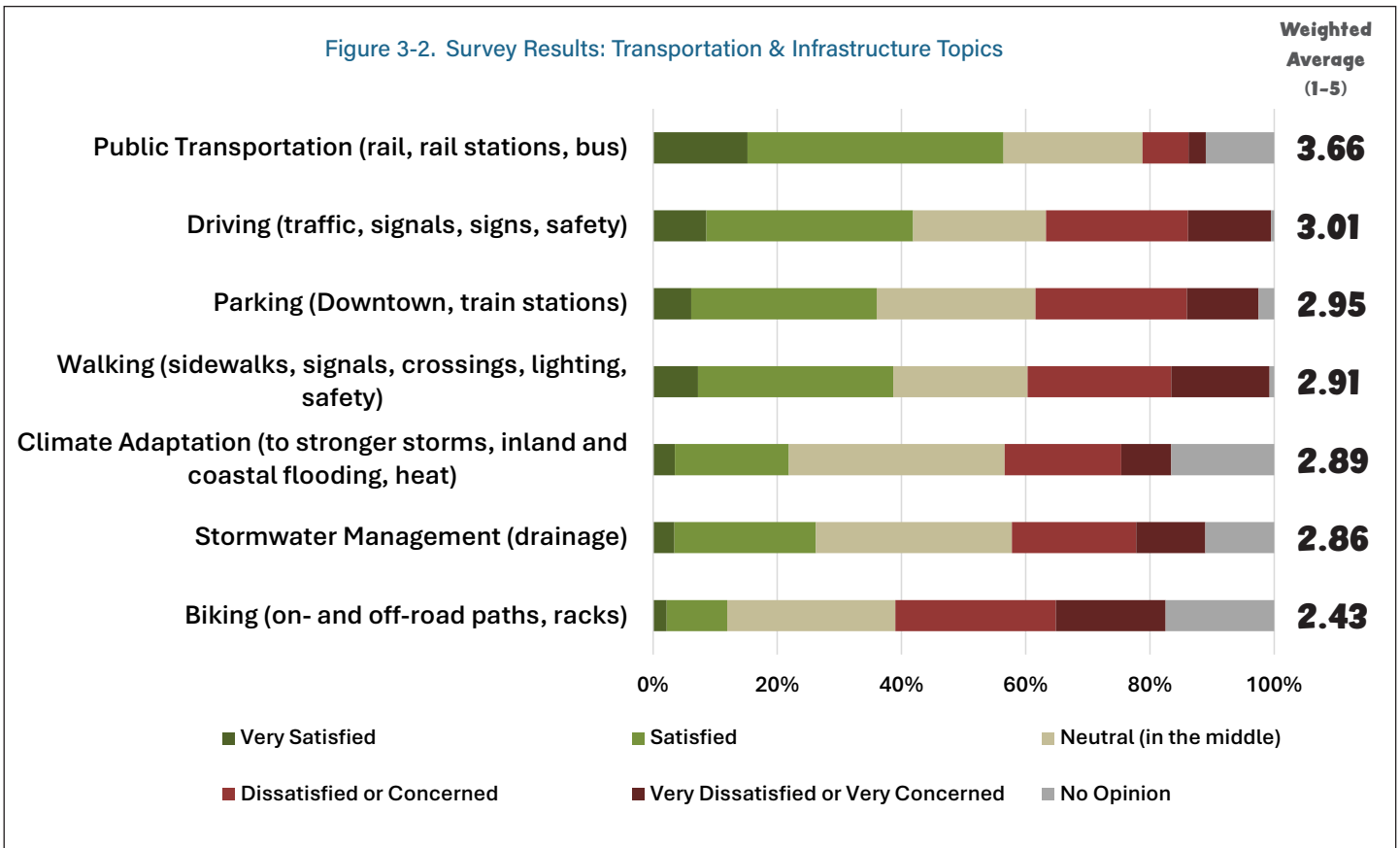
However, when the topic shifts to multifamily residential development, which happens to be a component of mixed-use development, the majority of respondents are “dissatisfied or concerned” and “very dissatisfied or very concerned.” Many respondents are not pleased to see the addition of rental apartments to Darien, a town that has traditionally been a community of single-family homes. Some respondents are concerned that a high proportion of rental units will lead to a more transient population, undermining long-term community bonds and engagement. Furthermore, they are concerned about multifamily development taxing Darien’s infrastructure and public schools. Some respondents would prefer to see townhouses and condos rather than rental apartments, especially for downsizing seniors.

### Apartment Residents Survey

A survey was also distributed to residents of Darien’s apartment buildings to learn more about what brought them to Darien and their opinions about the town and its future. Forty-five completed responses were received, which is not sufficient to reach any broad conclusions about apartment residents. The majority of survey respondents are single individuals or “empty nester” couples. Family ties are important to many of the respondents, having moved to Darien to be close to family members already living in town. A number of respondents cited the need to improve walkability and, in terms of Darien’s future, are concerned about increasing traffic congestion and the rising cost of housing.

The survey asked people to rank each topic from a scale of one to five as follows:

5 = Very Satisfied; 4 = Satisfied; 3 = Neutral; 2 = Dissatisfied; 1 = Very Dissatisfied; 0 = No Opinion



## Cross Tabulating the Results

The Town-Wide Survey asked residents two demographic questions: 1) How long have you lived in Darien and 2) In which decade were you born? The purpose of these questions is to showcase the distribution of the age of respondents and how long they've lived in Darien. The other purpose is to cross tabulate the results to analyze the degree to which the results of the survey vary by these two variables. The results of all of the topics in each of the four categories were examined, and the only category that contains topics that demonstrate any distinguishable pattern is The Built Environment.

With respect to the topics of community character, commercial & mixed-use development, and multifamily residential development, the results show that, in general, the younger the respondent, the higher the levels of satisfaction, while the longer the respondent has lived in Darien, the higher the levels of dissatisfaction (see Figure 3-4). This is an important finding to keep in mind because this POCD is planning for Darien's future for the next ten years. Can the Town meet the needs and preferences of both the younger and newer-in-town residents and the older and longer-time residents with respect to these three topics?

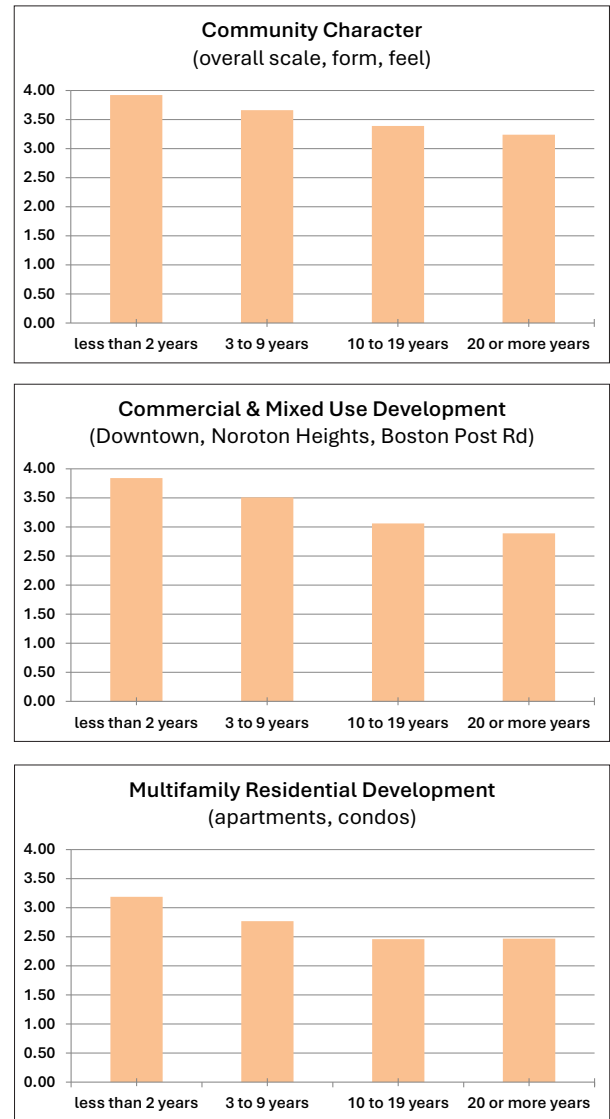


Figure 3-4. Charts showing that the longer the survey respondent has lived in Darien, the lower the satisfaction rating for three topics within The Built Environment category.



▲ The shopping center along Heights Road in 2016, where Heights Crossing now stands, had a generic 1970s strip retail character and was car-centric.

## Identifying & Tabulating Priorities: The Town Planning Workshop

While every topic listed in the Town-Wide Survey is important for Darien's future, which topics rise to the top in terms of priority for residents? The focus of the Town Planning Workshop, which took place several months after the Town-Wide Survey Results were released, was to evaluate and assign levels of priority to each topic in the survey. The 40 workshop participants worked together in nine small discussion groups. The following is a consolidated tally of the outcomes ranked from highest to lowest.

Climate adaptation topped the list of priorities, with stormwater management—which could be considered a component of climate adaptation—coming in second, and walking coming in third. Despite being the topic with the highest level of dissatisfaction in the Town-Wide Survey, biking placed sixth in terms of priority. Parks & recreation placed seventh. In the Town-Wide Survey, this topic placed in the top three in terms of satisfaction. This means that workshop participants and survey respondents are generally pleased with the state of the town's parks and recreation facilities as compared to other topics. Public transportation finished last because workshop groups recognize that the town has limited control over this topic, which is under the purview of Metro-North Railroad, CTDOT, and CTtransit. Nonetheless, there are aspects of public transportation that Darien residents would like to see improved.

### Priority Rankings for Conservation & Environmental Protection

1. Land Preservation & Conservation (open spaces, habitats)
2. Natural Resources (water and soil quality, protection of trees, native plants, wildlife, pollinators)
3. Coastal Resources (habitat, marine life, water quality, access)
4. Historic Preservation (of buildings, landscapes)

Participants reported that the topics in the

### Priority Rankings for Transportation, Infrastructure & Community Facilities

1. Climate Adaptation (to stronger storms, inland and coastal flooding, heat)
2. Stormwater Management (drainage)
3. Walking (sidewalks, signals, crossings, lighting, safety)
4. Driving (traffic, signals, signs, safety)
5. Parking (Downtown, train stations)
6. Biking (on- and off-road paths, racks)
7. Parks & Recreation (park and beach facilities)
8. Public Transportation (rail, rail stations, bus)

Conservation & Environmental Protection category were difficult to prioritize because most of them are connected. For example, several groups commented that Coastal Resources are a part of Natural Resources. The topics in this category were intended to follow the chapter structure of the 2016 POCD. Therefore, for this POCD, the first three topics are consolidated into Chapter 6. Natural Resources and historic preservation is placed within Chapter 9. The Built Environment.

### Questions about The Built Environment

Given that one of the core purposes of a POCD is to guide where development and conservation should occur, the Built Environment is already a priority subject. Therefore, workshop participants were asked two questions:

*How could have or can new mixed-use development (e.g. Darien Commons, Heights Crossing, The Corbin District) better fit your ideas of the Town's character(s) in terms of scale, aesthetics, and other factors?*

Much like the survey respondents, groups expressed concern about the loss of the town's character due to the new development but provided more specific details. They were concerned about the height and scale of new developments and the lack of green spaces and trees. Groups were also concerned about the growing number of rental apartments and the potential impact on the town's community feel, with some questioning whether rental development trends in adjacent towns were studied before allowing such developments. Several groups noted that they would

prefer for-sale condominiums instead of rental apartments, which Connecticut municipalities can incentivize, but not mandate. As was the case with the survey respondents, groups were also concerned about increasing traffic congestion.

*What positive outcomes has mixed-use development brought to Darien? What about negative outcomes? Do any people in your group shop and/or live in any of these new developments.*

Some groups noted that the new developments have added variety to housing options in town, improved shopping and dining choices, and helped facilitate population diversity. However, a number of groups believe that the pace of development needs to be slowed. Other concerns expressed about the new development include: the lack of shade and green spaces, the belief that they are attracting crime due to the proximity to the I-95 corridor, the impacts on traffic congestion, and the potential reduction in property values. Most of these concerns are reflected in the results of the Town-Wide Survey.



▲ A group engaged in a discussion at the Town Planning Workshop

## Meetings with Town Entities, Organizations & Institutions

The consultants met with the following Town Commissions, Committees, Departments, organizations, and institutions to discuss challenges and accomplishments since the 2016 POCD in addition to planned investments recommendations to consider for the 2026 POCD.

### Town Boards, Commissions, Committees & Departments

- Parks & Rec Commission
- RTM - Public Works
- Commission on Aging
- Advisory Committee on Sustainability
- Beautification Commission
- Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters
- RTM - Planning, Zoning & Housing
- Architectural Review Board
- Sewer Commission
- Environmental Protection Commission
- Darien Board of Education
- Darien Housing Authority
- At Home in Darien
- Department of Public Works, Sewer Services Director and Assistant Director

### Organizations & Institutions

- Darien Chamber of Commerce
- Darien Land Trust
- Darien Green Wave
- Darien Pollinator Pathway
- Neuro-Inclusive Housing
- Baywater Properties (developer)
- V20 Group (developer)

## POCD Community Engagement Summary: Elements of the Vision

The following statements, organized by topic, summarize the results of the community engagement process, represent key elements of the overall vision for Darien, and set the stage for the substantive chapters of this POCD that contain recommendations:

### Environment, Climate & Sustainability

- Protect and enhance natural resources on public and private lands.
- Prepare plans, adopt policies, and invest in infrastructure to protect residents, public and private properties, and natural resources from the impacts of a warming climate.
- Continue to preserve, manage, and improve the ecological value of open spaces.
- Upgrade and maintain sewer and stormwater management infrastructure to reduce flooding and protect water quality.
- Encourage, incentivize, and/or require sustainable building and green stormwater management practices.

### Transportation & Mobility

- Improve infrastructure and accommodations for walking and biking to support overall mobility and connectivity in town and as a means to reduce car trips and parking demand.
- Investigate solutions to reduce traffic congestion, better manage traffic flow, and promote safe driving. Improve enforcement of traffic laws.
- Build a new train station at Norton Heights and continue to improve multimodal access to the station.

### Community Facilities & Services

- Maintain high-quality Town services and fiscal stability.
- Invest in parks and recreation facilities to maintain their high quality, protect them from the impacts of a warming climate, and meet community needs.

### The Built Environment

- Maintain the form and scale of residential neighborhoods and yards. Limit the size of larger, new houses.
- Slow the pace of redevelopment activity. Re-examine the regulations and guidelines that control building form and scale, public plazas, and trees/landscaping of commercial, mixed use, and multifamily development.
- Promote more ownership options such as condos and townhouses in redevelopment projects.
- Monitor the impacts of redevelopment projects on infrastructure, traffic, student enrollment, and fiscal matters.
- Consider housing options that would be affordable to seniors, “empty nesters,” and young adults.

## Board of Selectmen's Updated Town Plan Vision Statement

*The Board of Selectmen's Town Plan Vision Statement was updated in February 2026.*

This Town Plan serves as a flexible blueprint for the continuing development of our community. It identifies enhancements and additions to our infrastructure and provides a framework for maintaining our existing resources.

- Darien remains predominantly a New England-style community of single-family homes, while also welcoming thoughtfully designed multi-family and other housing types, where appropriate, that fit our traditional scale, look, and character.
- The Town Plan must balance growth and development with preservation and protection of the natural resources on which our future depends: open space; Long Island Sound and coastal habitat; and our streams, ponds, and wetlands.
- Downtown and traditional neighborhood commercial centers and corridors should, through appropriate scale, character, and density, create a strong sense of place for living, shopping, and dining and add to the vitality of our community.
- A pedestrian-friendly streetscape—especially safe crossings and a connected sidewalk network—should complement the character of our town.
- Strong volunteer engagement—through elected and appointed service, and through our sports organizations, nonprofits, houses of worship, and philanthropic groups—is critical to our success as a town. We should do all we can to engage and encourage our volunteers.

To turn this vision into results, the Town will pursue high-quality public policies and investments that strengthen long-term vitality, resilient infrastructure, sound land-use decisions, and responsible fiscal stewardship. We will track progress, adjust as conditions change, and rely on steady, collaborative leadership and broad community engagement to keep this Town Plan a practical guide for action.

### Chapter 3 Endnotes

1 Department of Planning & Zoning

2 Department of Planning & Zoning

3 O'Donnell, James, "Sea Level Rise in Connecticut - Final Report," February 2019, UCONN Dept of Marine Sciences and Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation



▲ photo by flickr user Decaseconds, licensed by CC BY-NC 4.0, cropped

# 4. THE STATE POCD & LEGISLATION

While many people might believe Connecticut that operates under “home rule” whereby municipalities have local autonomy, they actually “are creatures of the state and have only those powers provided them by the state through the General Assembly.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter highlights several state plans and statutes that impact municipal planning.

Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-23 states that municipalities “shall consider the State Plan of Conservation and Development.” Also, within 60 days of adoption of a POCD, municipalities must notify the Connecticut Office of Policy & Management (OPM) and identify any inconsistencies with the State Plan. The latest State Plan, the *2025-2030 Connecticut Conservation & Development Policies Plan*, prepared by OPM, was adopted in 2025 by the Connecticut General Assembly. In addition, since Darien adopted its 2016 POCD, the State of Connecticut has updated the statutes that govern POCDs and passed significant new housing and land use policies and regulations.

## 2025-2030 Connecticut Conservation & Development Policies Plan

Prepared every five years, this is the state’s comprehensive strategies plan for land and water resource conservation, preservation, and development. It establishes priorities affecting the future of the state’s shared natural, built, cultural, and social environments. These priorities, expressed as “visions,” are intended to guide state agencies as they work individually and collaboratively to advance the state’s goals:

1. **A Thriving Economy.** Connecticut will have a flourishing and diverse economy that leverages our strategic location, existing infrastructure, and natural and cultural assets.
2. **Housing for Current and Future Residents.** Connecticut will have a variety of housing types in vibrant, diverse communities across the state that are able to meet residents’ needs and are affordable at all income levels and all stages of life.
3. **Stewardship of Resources.** Connecticut’s natural, cultural, and historic resources will be carefully

and responsibly used and managed to bolster their ability to withstand disruptions and ensure their long-term quality and viability.

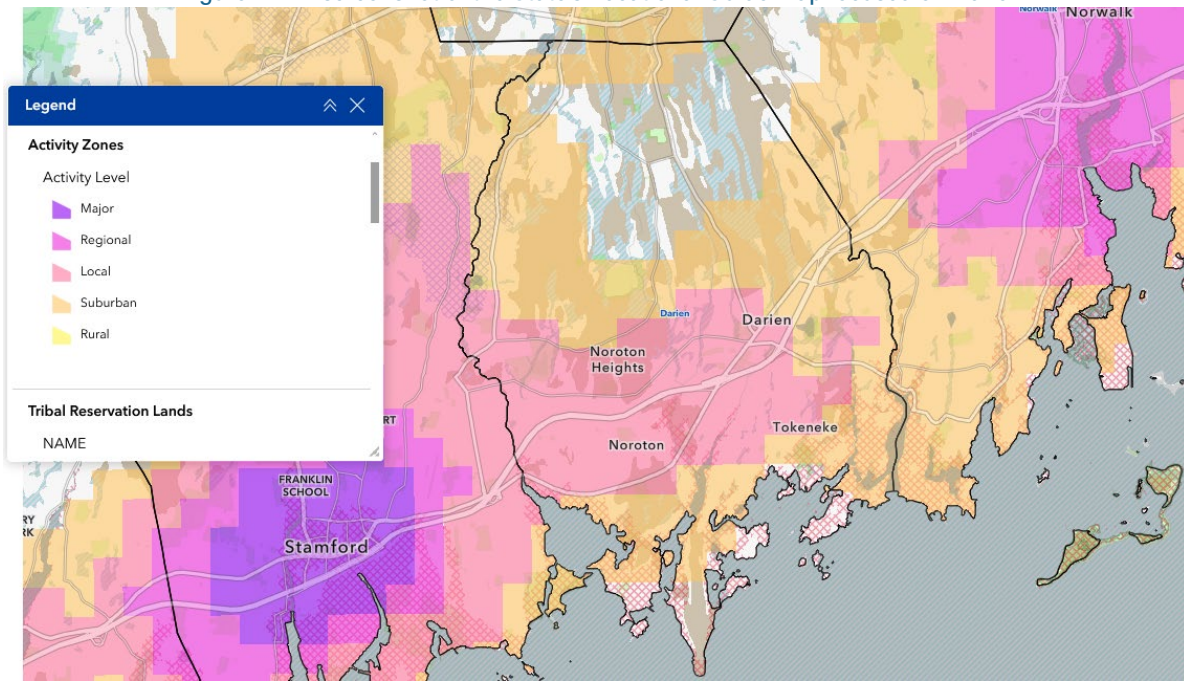
4. **Healthy People and Places.** Connecticut will offer communities that enable the health and physical, social, and mental wellbeing of residents of all incomes, races, genders, ethnicities, abilities, and ages.
5. **Connected and Inclusive Communities.** Connecticut will foster and support unique, diverse, and inclusive communities that are well-connected with each other and greater Northeast mega region.

## The State’s Locational Guide Map

The State Plan presents a new methodology for preparing a Locational Guide Map (LGM) for considering local and regional factors in establishing statewide conservation and development priorities. It may be important to monitor how this methodology evolves and how it is applied.

Section 297a of the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) requires OPM to create boundaries for Priority Funding Areas based on consideration of the LGM to direct agencies’ investments in “growth-related projects.” Growth-related projects are defined as any of the following state agency actions when the costs exceed \$200,000: land acquisition (not for conservation), development or improvement of property, acquisition of public transportation equipment, and awarding of a grant to conduct any of the preceding actions. The new LGM is intended to depict current conditions and not to prescribe future conditions. It classifies and maps “activity zones” in the state as Major, Regional, Local, Suburban, and Rural. Conservation factors are also included in the LGM to depict the location of valuable natural and environmental resources. The activity zones are overlaid on the conservation factors.

Figure 4-1. A screenshot of the State's Locational Guide Map focused on Darien.



Much of the I-95 and Boston Post Road corridors are mapped as Regional while most of Darien’s residential areas are mapped as Suburban. A large section of the northeast part of Darien centered around Ox Ridge Elementary School and that contains the Darien Country Club are not designated as any activity zone.

**Consistency Statement with 2025-2030 CT Conservation & Development Policies Plan**

See Appendix X.

**CT General Statutes Section 8-23: Updated POCD Requirements**

The following are some of the changes that have been made to CGS Section 8-23. In the preparation of a POCD, committees or commissions must now also consider:

- Sea level change scenarios published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Technical Report OAR CPO-1.
- The need for technology infrastructure in a municipality. While “technology infrastructure” is not defined, it could mean broadband availability, cellular coverage and 5G readiness, cybersecurity, and “smart city” technologies.

The following are also new provisions:

- In consideration of housing for older adults and persons with a disability, plans may permit home sharing, permit accessory apartments, and expand the definition of “family”.
- POCDs must identify the general location of and the extent of areas served by existing sewer systems, areas where sewer systems are planned, and areas where sewers are to be avoided.

## Housing & Land Use Legislation Adopted by the State Legislature

### Connecticut House Bill 8002: An Act Concerning Housing Growth (2025) / November Special Session Public Act 25-1

This legislation contains many provisions, but the following are brief descriptions of provisions that might be most relevant to Darien:

- **Minimum Parking Requirements Applicability.** Prohibits towns from enforcing minimum parking requirements for residential developments with less than 16 dwelling units. For residential development with more than 16 units, applicants must adhere to a defined parking ratio established by the State or submit a parking needs assessment that defines a need-based parking ratio. Whichever is less may be used by the applicant.
- **Conservation and Traffic Mitigation Districts.** A municipality may create up to two conservation and traffic mitigation districts in which parking minimums can be extended to development of less than 16 units. These districts may cover a combined total of no more than 8% of the municipality's land area.
- **Middle Housing Development As of Right.** "Middle housing" developments, which are comprised of 2 to 9 units, are allowed by summary review process—which is similar to as of right approval—on any area zoned for commercial or mixed-use developments. Towns may also opt-in to allow middle housing by summary review process in any area zoned for residential use for points towards their 8-30g moratorium.

### CGS Section 8-30g Updates

Darien is subject to CGS Section 8-30g because it does not meet the state threshold of 10% deed-restricted affordable housing and does not have an active moratorium under the statute. This means that developers can appeal denials of applications when the proposal includes a minimum of 30% affordable housing. Recent changes to CGS 8-30g include:

- Towns will have an easier path to an 8-30g moratorium if they zone for additional 8-30g-eligible housing units by creating "priority housing development zones," which require as-of-right construction. The threshold to achieve a moratorium is reduced from 2% (75 points) to the greater of 1.75% (65 points) of the town's housing stock. Towns can also gain additional ¼ unit points toward an 8-30g moratorium by allowing housing authorities of neighboring municipalities to build within their boundaries.
- Clarifies the applicability of the 1/4 housing unit equivalent (HUE) moratorium point incentive for middle housing built through a process of summary review in transit communities.
- Initiates a study to evaluate other state methodologies for calculating exemptions under CGS 8-30g in place of the current 10% standard.

### Public Act No. 21-29 (2021)

Several provisions address housing opportunities in municipalities that exercise zoning authority under the statutes.

- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).** Establishes default provisions that allow construction of ADUs on lots accompanying single-family homes, unless a municipality opts-out through planning and zoning commission and governing body votes. The law prohibits municipalities from requiring more than one parking space for each studio or one-bedroom dwelling or more than two parking spaces for dwellings with two or more bedrooms. One study reports that 54 municipalities, or 32%, did not opt-out and are subject to the ADU provision.<sup>2</sup> Darien opted out, but prepared its own accessory dwelling regulations. Stamford, Norwalk, and New Canaan took the same approach.
- **Affordable Housing Plan Requirement.** Each municipality shall prepare, amend, or adopt an affordable housing plan for the municipality no later than June 1, 2022, and at least once every five years thereafter. Darien prepared an affordable housing plan in accordance with this provision. This has since been superseded by H.B. 8002.

Other Legislation

- **Regulation of Short-Term Rental Properties (2024, Public Act No. 24-143, Section 7).** Authorized municipalities, by vote of their legislative bodies, to adopt ordinances regulating the operation and use of short-term rental properties and requiring their licensure.
- **Connecticut Municipal Redevelopment Authority (MRDA) (2023, Public Act No. 23-205, Section 92).** Created a quasi-public agency to stimulate economic and transit-oriented development. Its purpose is expanded to include providing financial support and technical assistance to municipalities to develop “housing growth zones,” or areas around a central business district or transit station in which local zoning regulations facilitate substantial new housing development.

**Accessory Dwelling Units in Darien**

In 2024, Darien amended its zoning regulations to permit the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in the R-2, R-1, R-1/2, R-1/3, and R-1/5 zones, which contain only one single-family dwelling. ADUs can be a maximum of 700 square feet if attached to or part of the principal dwelling or 1,000 square feet a detached structure. The ADU must be less than 30% of the total finished area of the principal dwelling including the ADU. On-site parking is required for both the primary dwelling and the ADU. Two parking spaces for the principal dwelling, plus one additional space for a studio or one bedroom ADU and then one additional parking space for each additional ADU bedroom. Parking spaces are not allowed to be in the required front yard or side yard setbacks. Furthermore, short-term rentals of less than 90 days are not permitted and the unit cannot be sold separately from the principal dwelling.

Figure 4-2. Illustration depicting different types of accessory dwelling units (by Cole Jackson, licensed by CC BY 1.0)

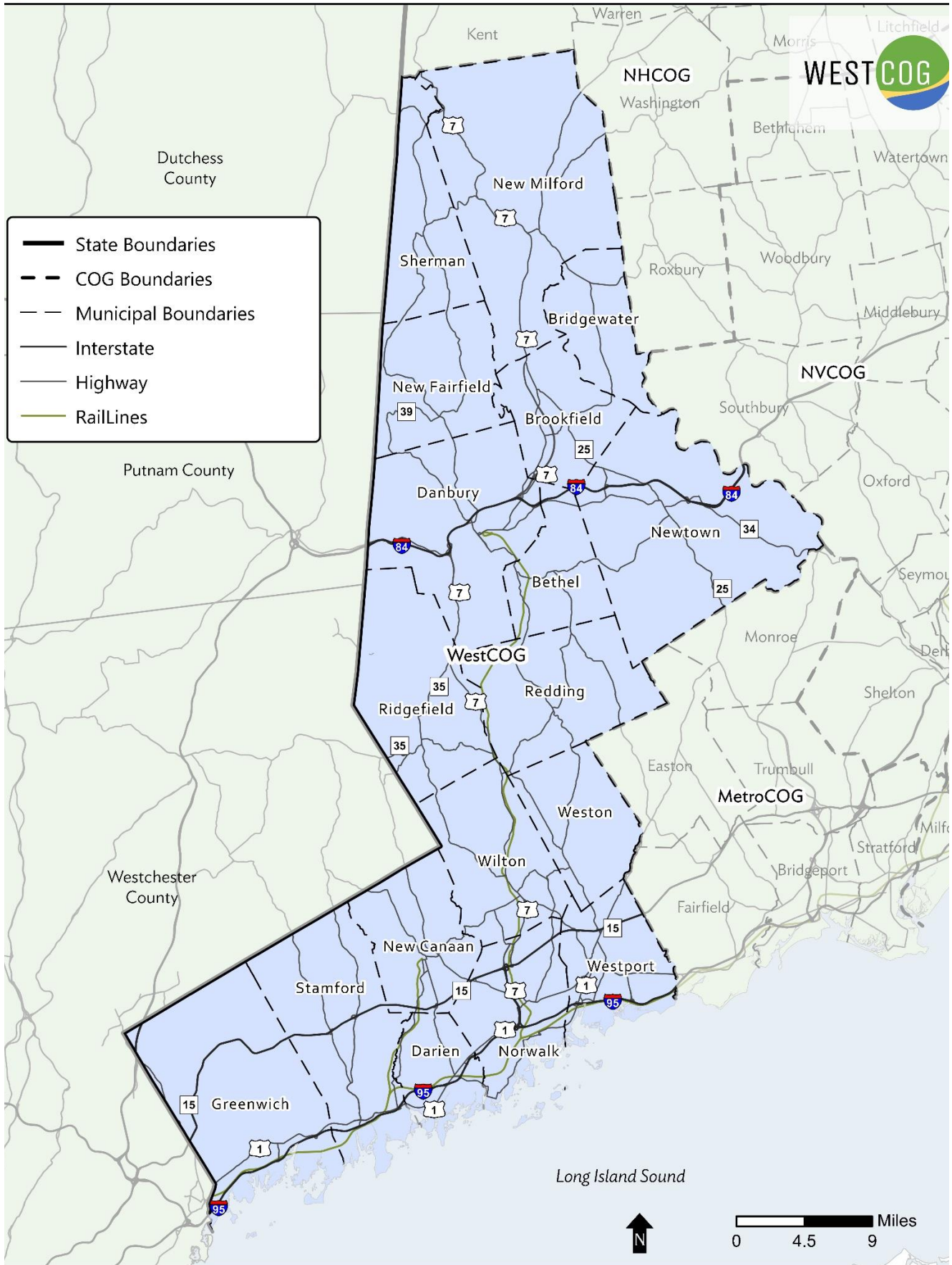


**Chapter 4 Endnotes**

- 1 “Home Rule and Local Control in Connecticut,” CT Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, January 2022.
- 2 “Public Act 21-29 Initial Findings,” Desegregate CT, September 2023.



Figure 5-2. Map highlighting municipalities that are members of WestCOG



- Economic Development
- Historic Preservation & Tourism
- Water Supplies
- Protected Open Space & Forests
- Air Quality
- Agricultural Resources

While WestCOG has primary responsibilities for the implementation of the goals and policies of the Regional Plan, municipalities have secondary responsibilities. Darien will be required to submit this 2026 POCD to WestCOG for comment prior to holding a public hearing.

The Consistency Statement with respect to the *2020-2023 Regional POCD* is in Appendix X.

## Other Relevant WestCOG Plans & Guidance

WestCOG has prepared many other plans and guidance documents that are relevant to Darien. Several of them are focused on or include specific recommendations for Darien.

### 2023 Regional Bicycle Plan

One of the concepts presented in this regional bicycle plan is a New Canaan/Darien Bike Loop.

### 2021-2026 Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan Update – Municipal Annex for Darien, CT

Provides a detailed picture of Darien's vulnerability to natural hazards and identifies mitigation strategies and actions.

### 2018 Noroton Heights Station Area Study

Recommends physical and operational improvements in and around the station to address deficiencies and meet projected traffic demand from future growth and redevelopment. Darien has implemented several of the recommendations in the plan, including constructing new and upgraded ADA-compliant sidewalks connecting residential and commercial areas to the train station.

WestCOG also provides guidance to municipalities. The following are some of the resources that could inform recommendations in this POCD:

### 2026 Traffic Calming and Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox

To be completed in early 2026, this guide will present planning principles and Complete Streets concepts for residential streets and lower-speed local roads based on consideration of safety and mobility of all users.

### 2025 Webinar Presentation: Flooding in Connecticut Through the Lens of Land Use & Zoning

Provides practical suggestions for standards related to base flood elevation, impervious coverage, floodplains, and septic systems.

### 2022 Western Region Affordable Housing Toolbox

Identifies zoning strategies such as inclusionary zoning, accessory apartments, and transit-oriented development and techniques to increase affordable housing by reducing the overall cost of building and maintaining a home. Darien has already implemented some of these zoning strategies.

### 2021 The Case for Riparian Corridor Protections

Provides model regulations for three zoning techniques that can reduce the quantity of nutrients and other pollutants entering rivers that discharge into the Long Island Sound.

### 2021 Flooding in Connecticut: A Status Report on Municipal Flood Prevention Standards

Reviews all municipal flood prevention regulations in Connecticut to identify best practices and areas where municipal regulations have failed to keep pace with rapidly changing meteorological and climate change conditions.

## Other Regional Entities

Darien’s location along the Long Island Sound puts it in the company of many other communities in Connecticut and New York. The Long Island Sound Partnership was formed in 1985 by the U.S. EPA, New York, and Connecticut as a bi-state partnership consisting of federal and state agencies, user groups, concerned organizations, and individuals dedicated to restoring and protecting the Sound. Long Island Sound Partnership’s Management Conference produced a new Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan in 2025. This plan is a blueprint for collaboration and establishes goals, objectives, and actions for the next 10 years to further restore and protect the Sound.

### Save the Sound

Save the Sound is a non-profit organization that aims to protect and improve the land, air, and water of the Long Island Sound region encompassing both New York and Connecticut. This organization releases an annual *Long Island Sound Report Card* and *Long Island Sound Beach Report* and undertakes a wide range of advocacy, planning, and implementation for climate and resiliency, healthy waters, protected lands, and ecological restoration.

### The Regional Plan Association

The Regional Plan Association is a century-old, independent non-profit organization that conducts research on the environment, land use, and good governance. It advises cities, communities, and public agencies in the tri-state New York Metropolitan Region. It has produced several reports promoting affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and accessory dwelling units in Fairfield County.

DRAFT

## Darien’s Neighbors: Stamford, Norwalk & New Canaan

Darien is nestled between Stamford, which has a population of 136,000 at 3,620 people per square mile and Norwalk, which has a population of 92,000 at 4,040 people per square mile, according to the 2023 American Community Survey. Darien, which has a population of 21,700 people at 1,714 people per square mile, has a very different form and character than its neighbors to the west and east, largely because of the historical evolution of this area (see Chapter 2). The Town also has worked to maintain its form and New England small town character through its prior POCDs

in 1966, 1984, 1995, and 2006 and through its zoning regulations, which are amended periodically. Prior POCDs have consistently called for any higher density development to be focused around the town’s two train stations and commercial areas, while the remainder of the town—

which is comprised mostly of single-family houses—should remain zoned for lower density development.

The City of Stamford recently adopted its *2035 Comprehensive Plan: A City that Works for All*. The plan guides growth to areas with transit access and infrastructure while preserving lower-density neighborhoods. To promote a greater variety of housing types, the plan introduces a new future land use category that envisions a broader mix of housing types in detached, single-family residential areas that could also include townhomes, duplexes, and garden apartments.

The City of Norwalk’s *2019-2029 Plan of Conservation and Development* supports concentrated growth in its downtown, South Norwalk, and transit-served areas, reinforcing Norwalk’s role as a regional employment, housing, and service center.

Current and future redevelopment activity in both of these cities has and will continue to impact Darien through changes in housing demand, commuting

Current and future redevelopment activity in Stamford and Norwalk has and will continue to impact Darien through changes in housing demand, commuting patterns and traffic, train station access, and broader environmental impacts.

patterns and traffic, train station access, and broader environmental impacts.

Darien bears more resemblance to its neighbor to the north, the Town of New Canaan, which has a population of just over 20,000 at 933 persons per square mile (see Figure 5-3). New Canaan has a traditional downtown in which mixed-use and multifamily residential redevelopment is taking place. New Canaan’s 2024 Plan of Conservation & Development focuses on preserving its low-density, residential character while directing most change in downtown and near the New Canaan train station.

Figure 5-3 compares the population density of Darien and neighboring communities based on the CT Department of Public Health’s 2024 population estimates. Figure 5-4 compares the change in population density of Darien and neighboring communities between 1980 (based on Census data) and 2024.

Figure 5-3. Population density of Darien and its neighbors

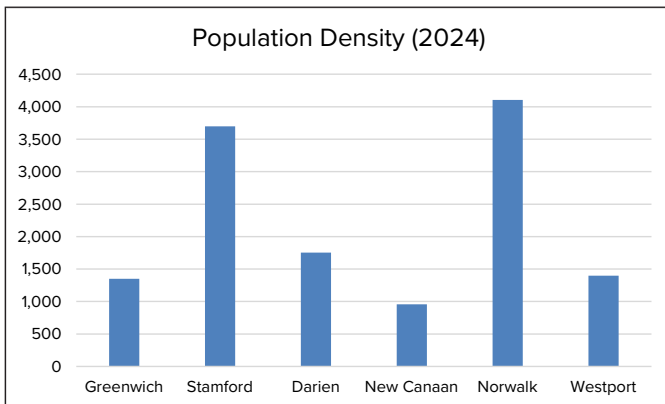
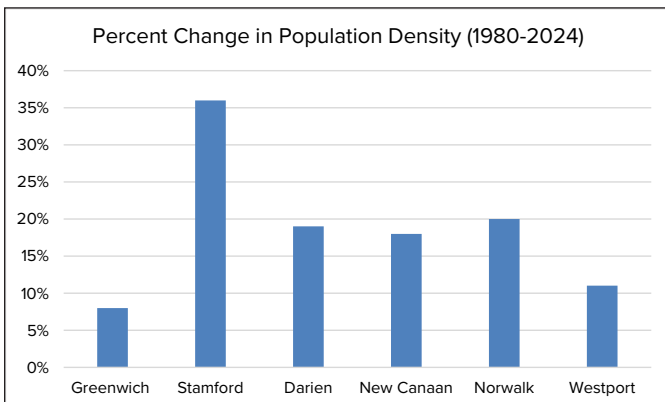


Figure 5-4. Change in population density of Darien and its neighbors



▲ New Canaan is Darien’s neighbor to the north (photo by Troy Construction, licensed by CC BY-NC 4.0)



▲ Stamford is Darien’s much more urban neighbor to the west (photo by William Pitt Real Estate LLC, licensed by CC BY-NC 4.0)



▲ Norwalk is Darien’s historic neighbor to the east