

DARIEN Plan of Conservation & Development 2026

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WARBY PARKER
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2026 PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

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

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.[1]

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 Darien 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, AMENITIES & 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 extensive 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 is 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, staffing, and implementation. Furthermore, many State grants require that projects are aligned with a community's POCD.

4. Institutions & Community Organizations

The POCD indicates where institutions and community organizations could contribute their expertise to the evaluation and/or 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**	**Bedroom & Coastal Community**	**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	Siwanoys	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.

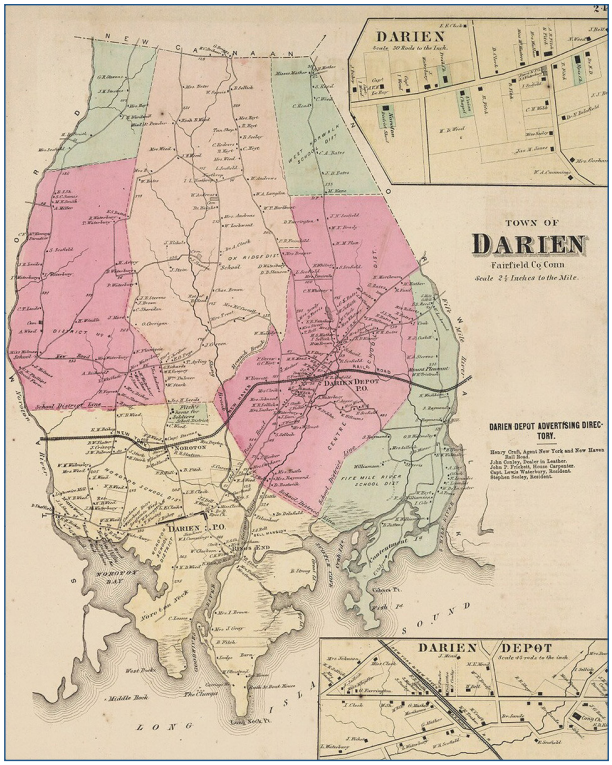


Figure 1-2. A map of Darien from 1867, well before I-95 was constructed.

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 an estimated 22,528 people.[1] Water features comprise most of Darien's boundaries, with the Noroton River forming its western boundary with the City of Stamford and the Five 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 (State Route 15). 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.

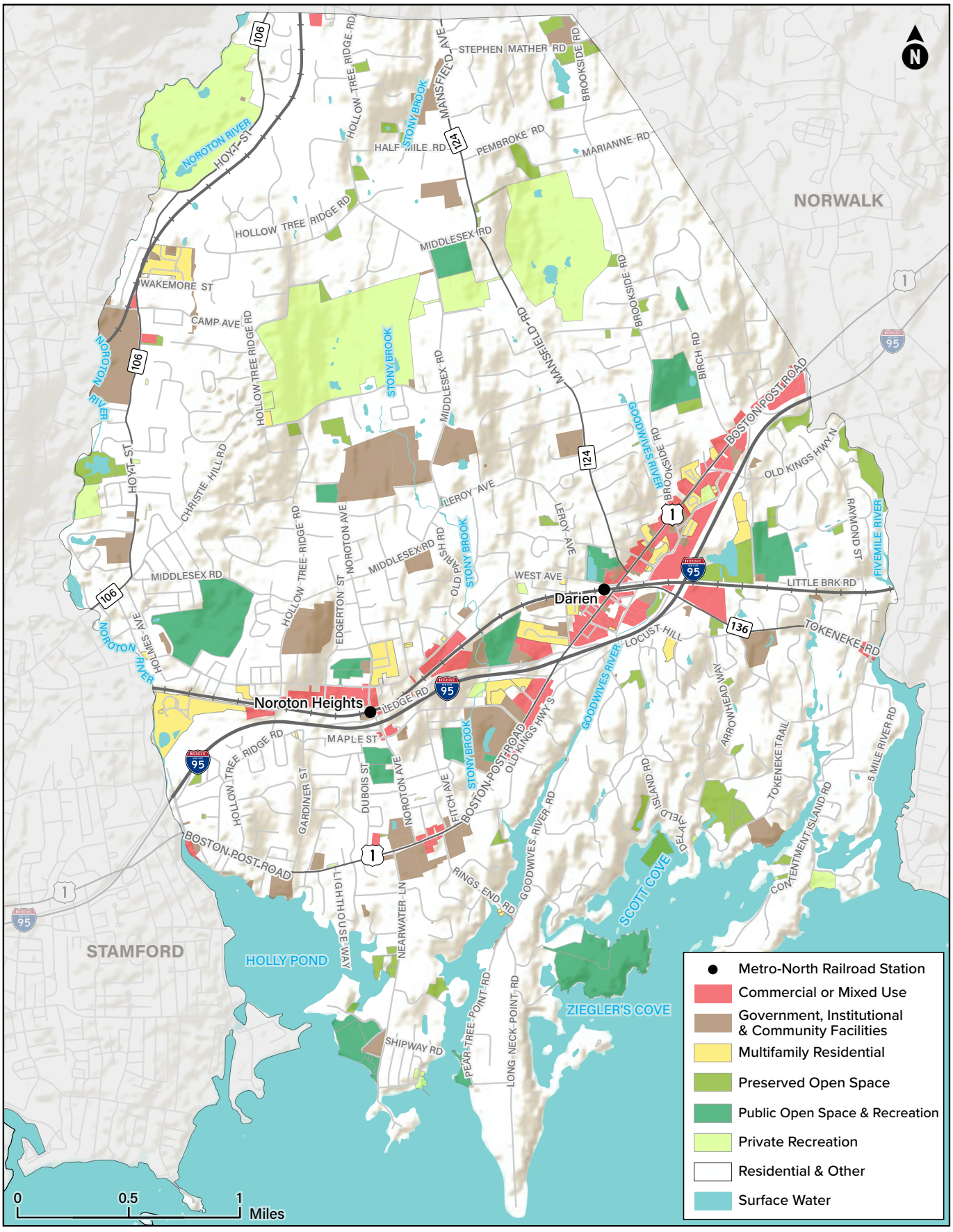
The overall physical structure of the town (see Figure 2-1 on page 4) has been shaped by the railroad tracks, major State roadways, and Interstate 95 (I-95). The railroad tracks, which were constructed in the mid-1800s, weave through the approximate middle of town, dividing it in half. U.S. Route 1 (Boston 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 (State 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 (State 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 (State 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

Figure 2-1. Map depicting the "structure" of the Town of Darien, which is comprised of topography, water features, roadways and railroad tracks, open spaces that frame the land uses.





▲ *Heights Crossing, a transit-oriented development*



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

between and around these areas, particularly along Boston Post 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. Redevelopment 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.

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 $1,822,400 in 2024, 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 is Darien's high-performing public school district, which is ranked in the top three in the state.

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.[2] 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, open spaces, 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



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

of Royal Baking Powder Company, the 60-acre Great Island was acquired by the town in 2023 from descendants 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 several private clubs and 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)

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. According to the 2024 American Community Survey, (ACS), approximately 86% 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 82% of housing units in town are owner-occupied, with 18% being renter-occupied.[3]

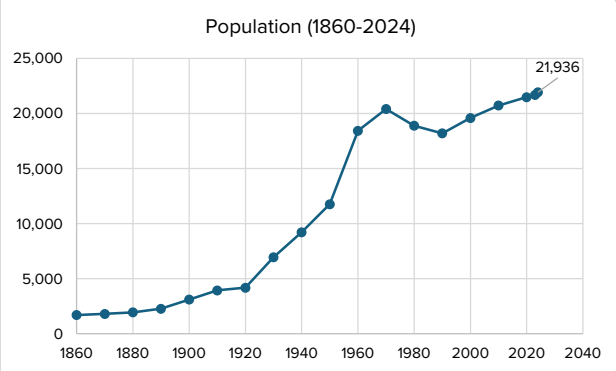
Despite these statistics, some Darien households face financial challenges. For example, 29% of households are considered cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their total income on housing costs.[4] Also, Darien has a 6% poverty rate, which means that approximately 1,300 residents have incomes below Federal thresholds for poverty.

Darien's population has become more diverse over the past decade. According to the 2013 ACS, approximately 92% of residents were White, 3% Asian, 3% Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% Black. Approximately 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.

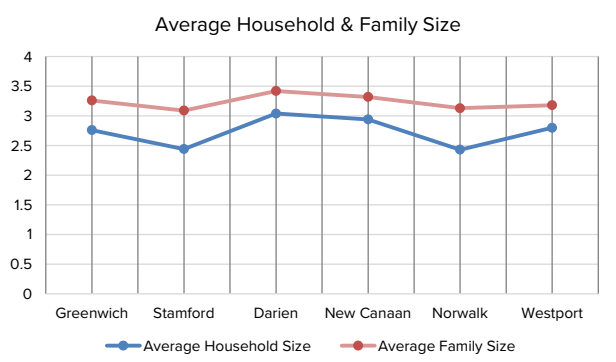
The 2024 ACS data indicates that approximately 81% of residents are White, 7% Asian, 6% Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% Black. More than 12% of Darien residents were born in another country, with the highest percentages being from Asia and Europe, and 12% speak a language other than English at home.

With respect to household composition, more than 65% of households are occupied by married couple families and 43% of households have one or more children under the age of 18.[5] The average household size is 3.02 and average family size is 3.4, both figures being the highest among Darien and its neighboring municipalities.[6] Approximately 5% of households are

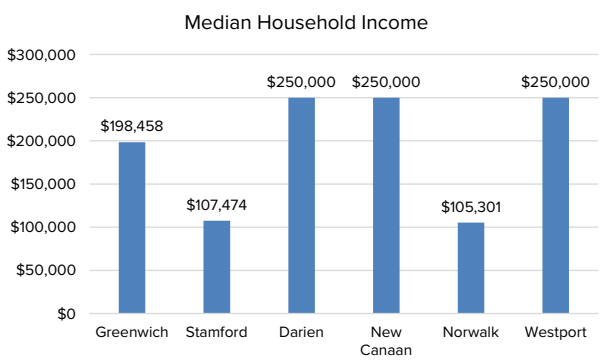
Demographic Data Snapshots from the 2024 ACS



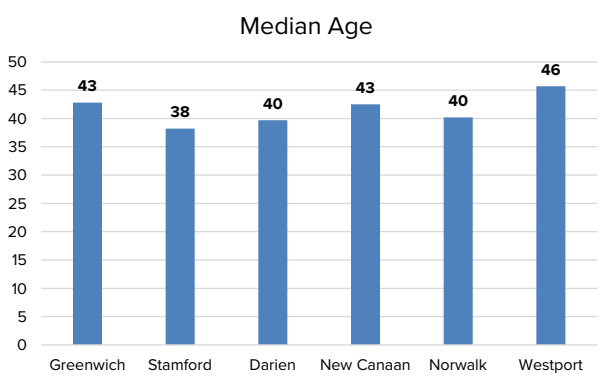
Darien is growing at a rate of 1.5% annually. The population has increased by 2% since the 2020 U.S. Census.



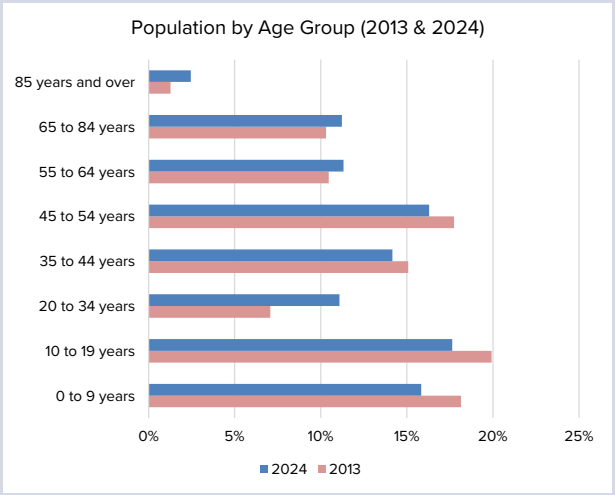
Darien has the highest average household and average family size among neighboring municipalities.



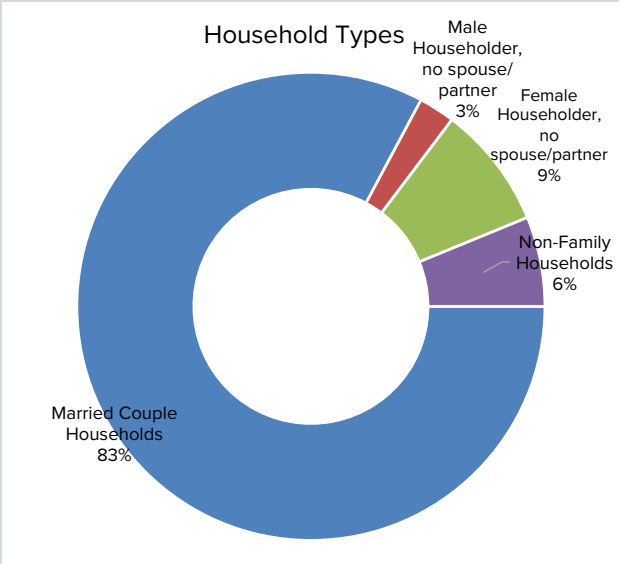
Darien, New Canaan, and Westport all have median household incomes of more than $250,000.



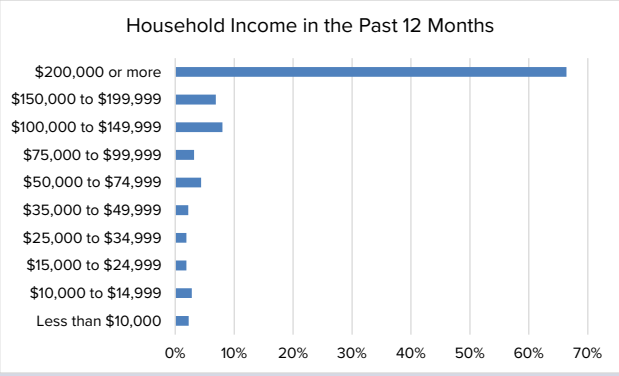
Westport has the highest median age, while Stamford has the lowest.



Between 2013 and 2024, 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)*

non-family households and 18% are single resident households, a figure that will likely increase over time due to the construction of new apartments.

On the whole, people enjoy living in Darien. The first question of the Town-Wide Survey, administered in the summer of 2025 as part of this POCD process, 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 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 & 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 & 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 & 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 & 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 favorite 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. It approves budgets, major appropriations, ordinances, bonding, town purchases, and certain appointments.

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.

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.

Board of Education

Darien Public Schools is governed by a Board of Education consisting of nine members and two student representatives. Among its roles are to develop the district's policies, manage the annual budget, and hire and evaluate the superintendent.

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, which the RTM approves or reduces. The BOF 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.



Town Hall, which formerly served as Darien High School

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 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.

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. It often works with partners Darien Pollinator Pathway, Darien Green Wave, and the Garden Club of Darien.



Darien Library (photo courtesy of the Department of 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. This is not an exhaustive list.

The **Darien Community Association** provides need-based college scholarships, operates a local thrift shop, maintains a bird sanctuary, and hosts classes and events at its historic home.

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 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

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 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.

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.

Darien Post 6933 VFW supports local veterans in need and provides a safe space 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.



A ballet class at the Darien Arts Center (photo by Darien Arts Center)

Person to Person (P2P) supports families and individuals as they move toward stability with healthy food, clothing, housing assistance, and a path to economic opportunity. P2P helps people in lower Fairfield County, primarily in Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, Westport, and Wilton. However, anyone in Connecticut who needs food can get help from P2P.

A Better Chance provides scholarships to high-achieving young women of color, supporting and encouraging them to realize their academic and leadership potential while living in Darien and attending Darien High School.

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/ on January 22, 2025

3 2024 American Community Survey (ACS)

4 2024 Housing Profiles - Darien, Partnership for Strong Communities

5 2024 ACS

6 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. 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 63 such new houses were constructed, at a rate of approximately 14 per year.[1] Also, since the adoption of new regulations in 2024, homeowners are now allowed to submit applications for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). A total of 20 ADUs have been approved so far.[2]

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, among other factors, have increased traffic congestion along I-95, the Merritt Parkway, 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 up to 150,000 vehicles in 2023.[3]

A changing 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.[4]

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.

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: Transportation & Infrastructure; Conservation; Built Environment; and Community Amenities, Facilities, and Services

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 Darien that are working well also need continual

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

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 and Noroton Heights. 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 "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with Community

Figure 3-1. The table lists the average of each topic on a 1 to 5 scale. 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 an option, but it was not assigned a number. The higher the average of the responses to each topic, the greater the level of satisfaction.

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

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 in 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 "empty nesters" and seniors.

Apartment Residents Survey

A survey was also distributed to residents of some of Darien's newer 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

Figure 3-2. Survey Results: Transportation & Infrastructure Topics

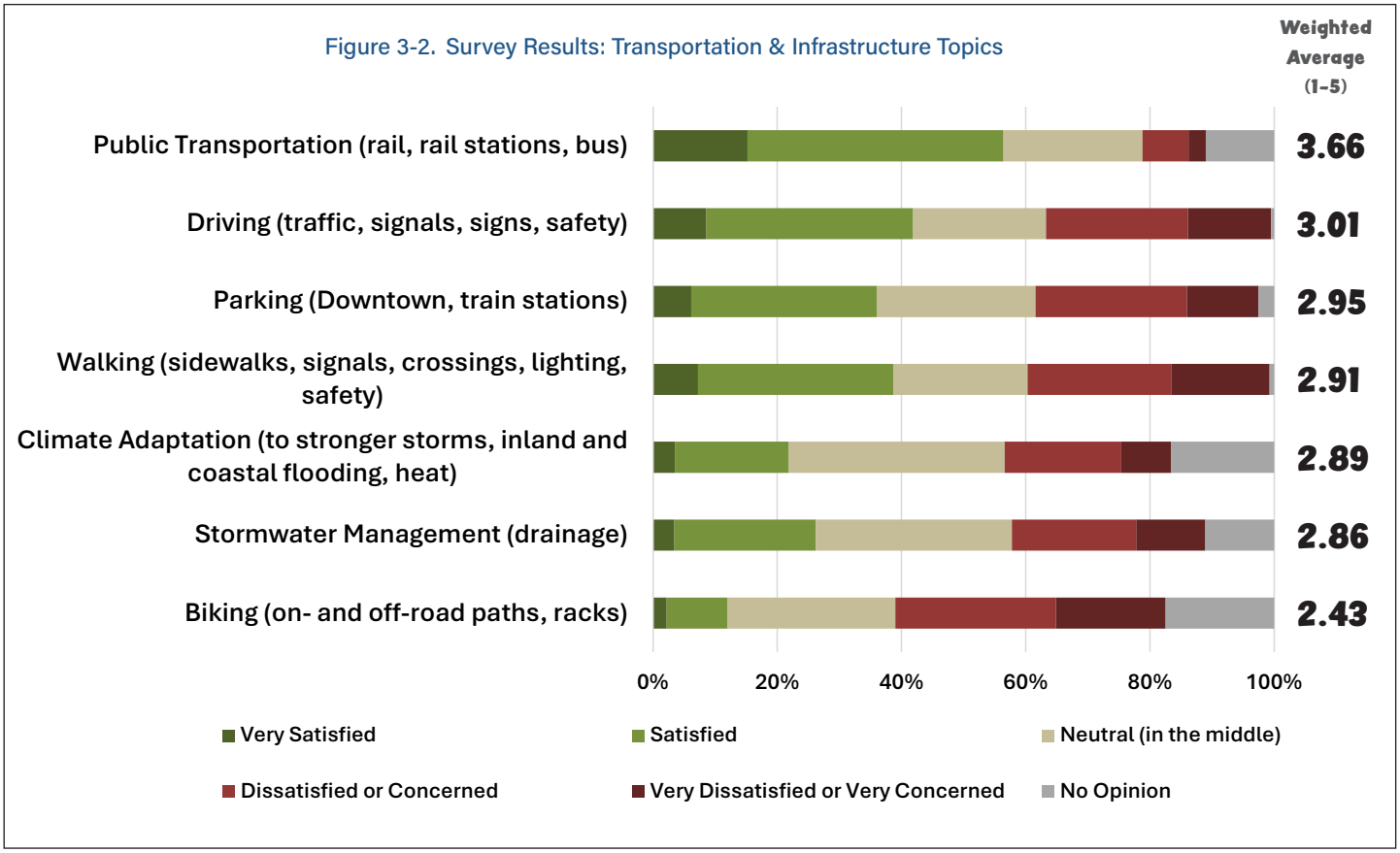
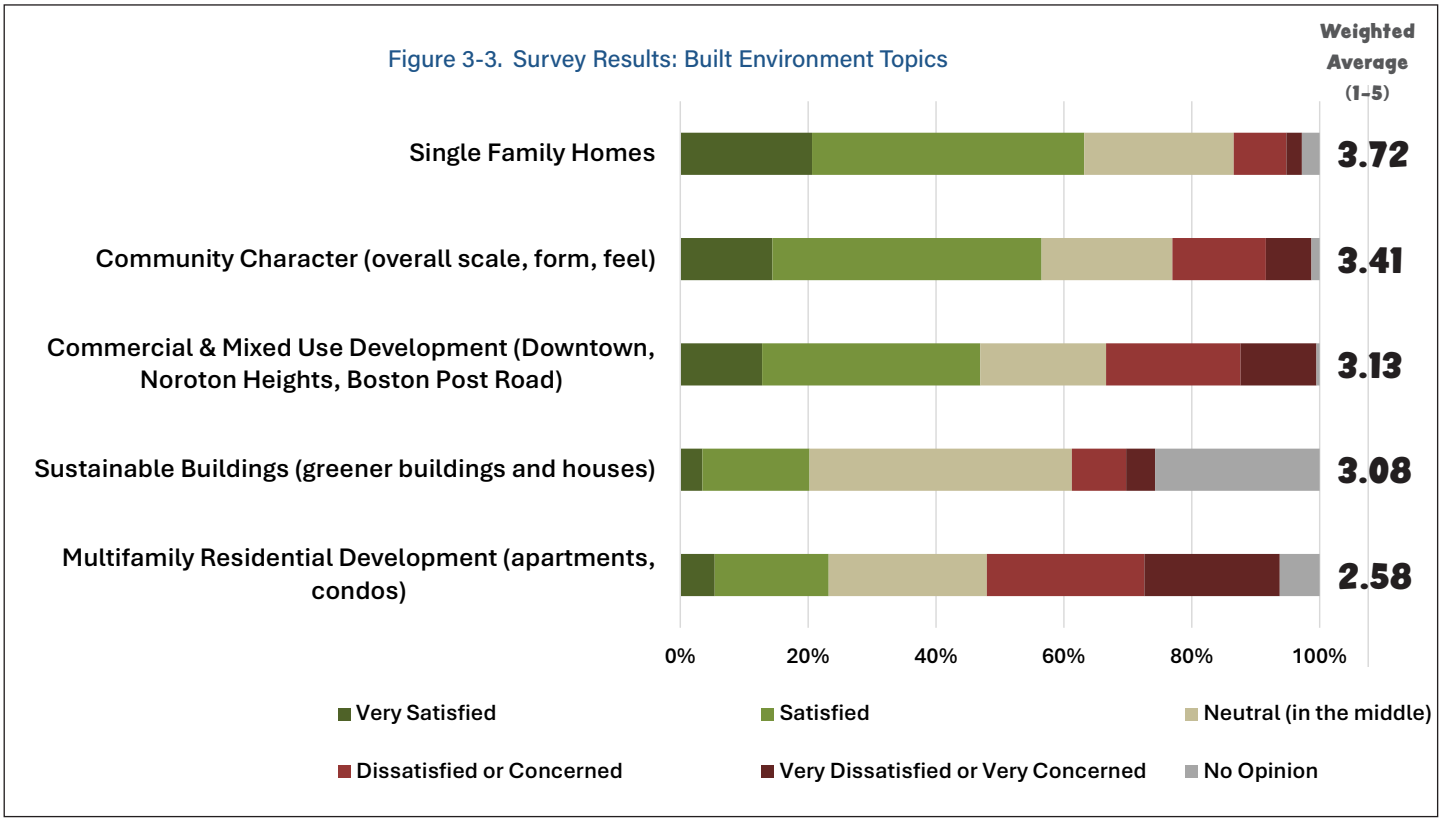


Figure 3-3. Survey Results: Built Environment Topics



Cross-Referencing 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?

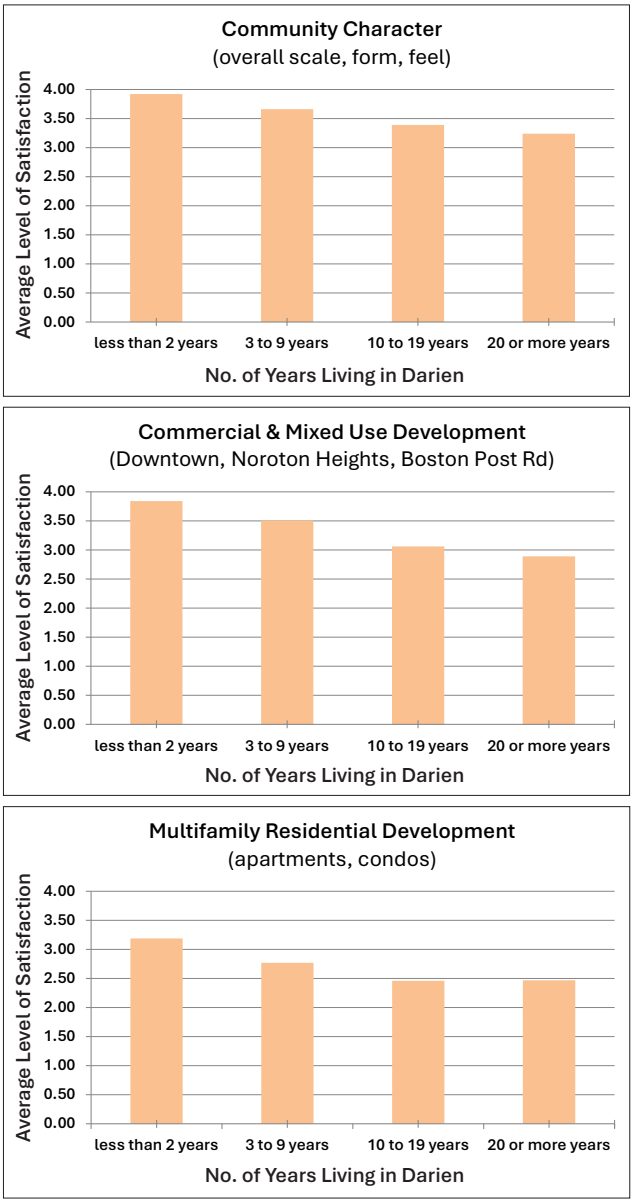


Figure 3-4. The charts show that the longer the survey respondent has lived in Darien, the lower the satisfaction rating for three topics in The Built Environment category.



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

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 scored the highest in terms of priorities among the groups present, 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.

Workshop Participants' Priorities

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)**

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)**

Participants reported that the topics in the 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. Environment, Climate & Sustainability** 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 & Recreation 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

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 Noroton 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 the local workforce, 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 CTDOT Traffic Monitoring Station Viewer

4 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

4. THE STATE POCD & LEGISLATION

While many people might believe that Connecticut 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."[1] This chapter highlights several state plans and statutes that impact municipal planning.

Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S) 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, the State POCD 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 the greater Northeast mega region.

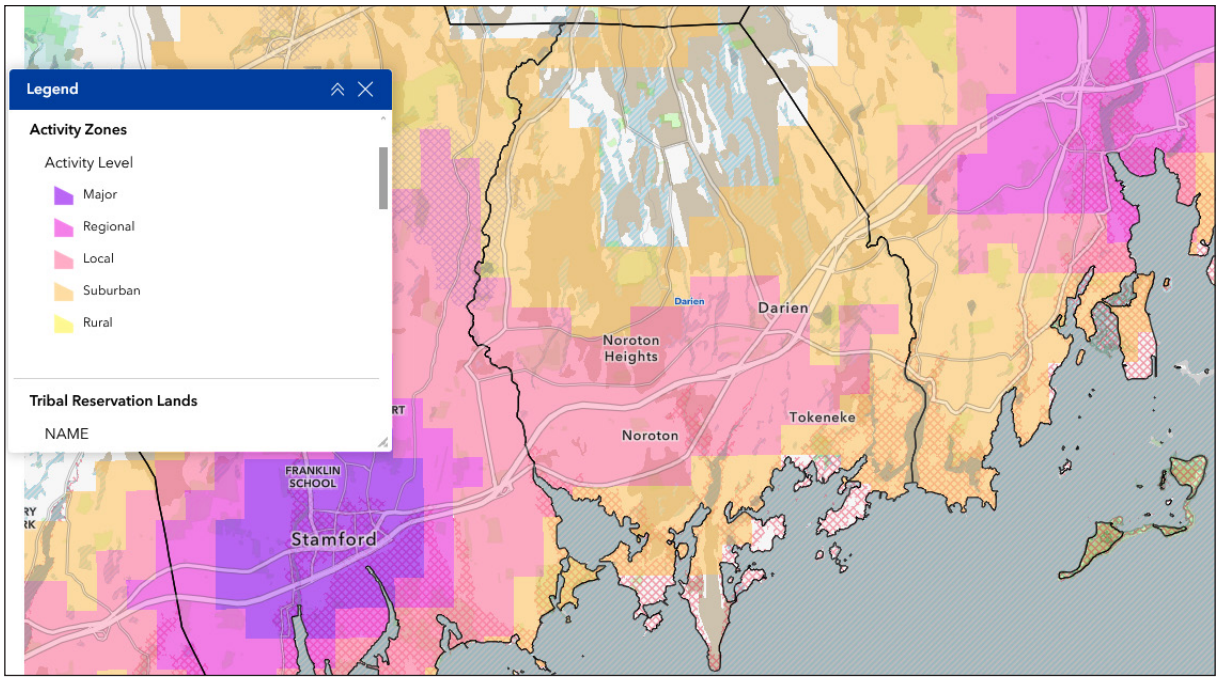
The State's Locational Guide Map

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.

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

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



valuable natural and environmental resources. The activity zones are overlaid on the conservation factors.

Much of the I-95 and Boston Post Road corridors are mapped as Local. As Darien is experiencing significant redevelopment in this area, LGM classifications may change along with Priority Funding Area designations.

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 Country Club of Darien are not designated as any activity zone.

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

See the Appendix.

CT General Statutes Section 8-23: Updated POCD Requirements

The following are some of the changes that have been made to C.G.S. 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 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

As of 2025, Darien's percentage of affordable units is 4.32.[2] As the Town does not meet the state threshold of 10% deed-restricted affordable housing and does not have an active moratorium under the statute, it is subject to C.G.S. Section 8-30g. This means that developers can appeal denials of applications when the proposal includes a minimum of 30% affordable housing. Recent changes to C.G.S. 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 in this legislation 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 (32%) did not opt-out and are subject to the ADU provision.[3] 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 adopted 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 if 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 are required for the principal dwelling, plus one additional space for a studio or one-bedroom ADU. One additional parking space is required 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.

See **Chapter 9. The Built Environment** for more details about ADUs in Darien.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

1 "Home Rule and Local Control in Connecticut," CT Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, January 2022.

2 "2025 Affordable Housing Appeals List," CT Department of Housing

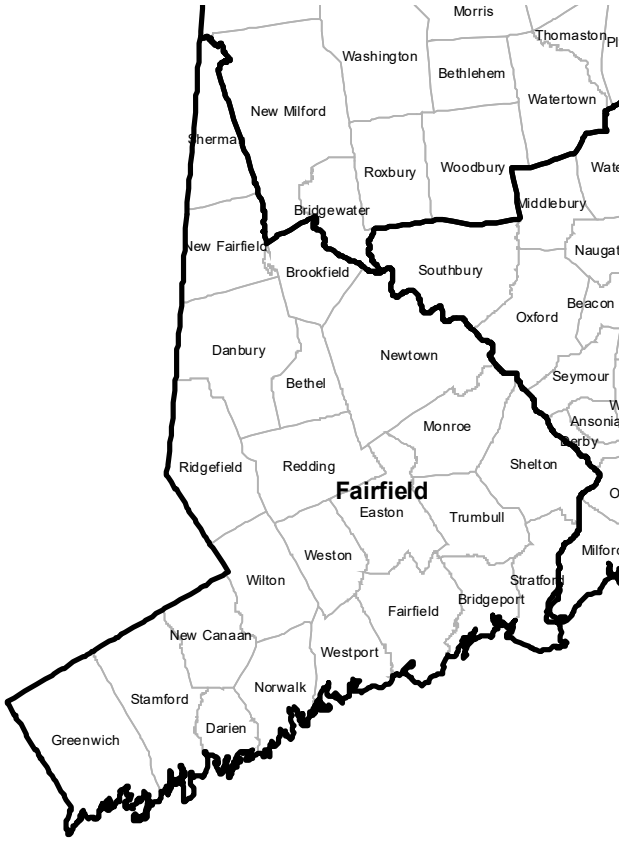
3 "Public Act 21-29 Initial Findings," Desegregate CT, September 2023.

5. DARIEN & THE REGION

Darien is part of several regions that vary in purpose and scale. Economically, Darien is located within the New York City Metropolitan Region, a vast area encompassing 31 counties in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, that are linked by economic and transportation connections to the anchor: New York City. Fairfield County, New Haven County, and Litchfield County are included in this region.

More than 18% of employed Darien residents work in New York City,[1] utilizing the New Haven Line of Metro-North Railroad to commute to and from Grand Central Terminal. The commute time is just under an hour. Geographically, Darien is located in Fairfield County, which includes 23 towns in southwestern Connecticut. While county governments were abolished in 1960, the eight county names and boundaries are still utilized. The Fairfield County name and boundaries are still applied to economic development, real estate, tourism, philanthropic, and media purposes (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1. Map of Fairfield County



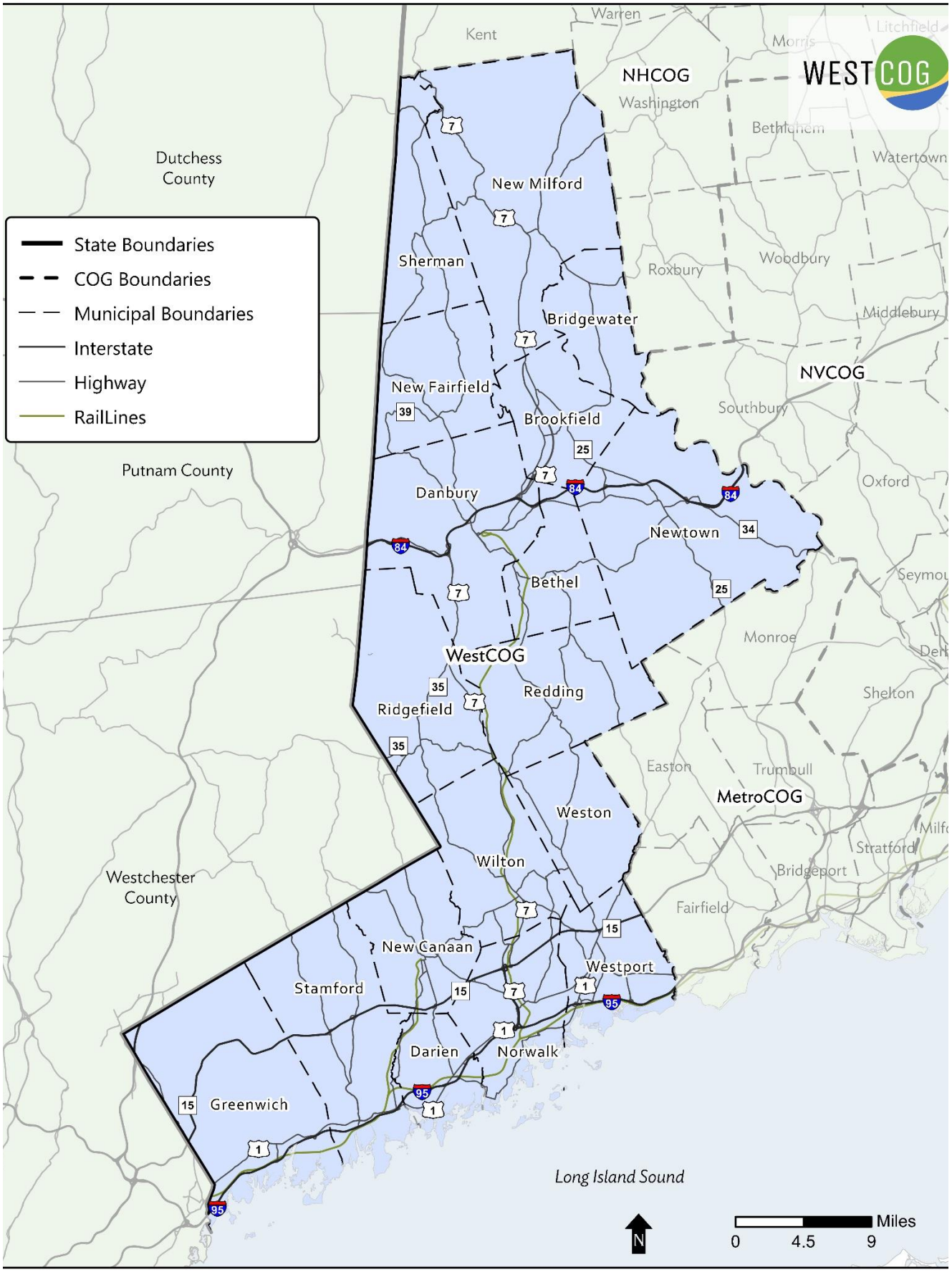
Administratively, Darien is a member of the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG), which consists of 18 member municipalities located in the southwestern part of the state (see Figure 5-2 on page 27). WestCOG promotes cooperation among municipalities and advises the region on land use, economic, emergency, and environmental planning. It also supports the region's two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which are federally-designated bodies responsible for transportation planning. Darien is part of the South Western Region MPO.

WestCOG 2020-2030 Regional Plan of Conservation & Development

In Connecticut, Councils of Governments (COGs) are required by State statutes to prepare a Regional Plan of Conservation & Development every ten years. WestCOG's 2020-2030 Regional Plan of Conservation & Development is an advisory document for regional-level decisionmaking that can be incorporated into planning processes at both the state and local level. The 2020-2030 Regional POCD identifies trends impacting the region, showcases and compares demographic data from each town, and depicts spatial variation of various attributes through maps. The 2020-2030 Regional POCD is organized into the following chapters: Infrastructure, Housing, Economy, Community Character, Water Supplies & Natural Resources, Air Quality, and Agricultural Resources. The plan's 63 goals and policies are organized into the following categories:

- Stormwater Management
- Floodplain Management
- Riparian Corridors
- Communication Infrastructure
- Transportation Infrastructure
- Sewer Avoidance
- Renewable Energy Infrastructure
- Affordable Housing

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



- Transit-Oriented Housing
- 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 2020-2030 Regional POCD is in the Appendix.

Other Relevant WestCOG Plans & Guidance

WestCOG has prepared other plans and guidance documents that are relevant to Darien. These plans can be downloaded from www.westcog.org. The following are focused on Darien or include specific recommendations for Darien.

2024 Noise Abatement Study

Investigates options to ensure safety while reducing train horn noise at 11 at-grade rail crossings along the New Canaan Branch Line. The study recommends improvements at two crossings in Darien: Camp Avenue and Hoyt Street. WestCOG plans to continue coordination with the City of Norwalk, Town of New Canaan, and Town of Darien to explore funding opportunities and pursue next steps.

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.

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 recommendations from the plan, including constructing new sidewalks and upgrading ADA-compliant sidewalks connecting residential and commercial areas to the 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

This guide presents 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 Connecticut Regional 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 nonprofit 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.

Darien's Neighbors: Stamford, Norwalk & New Canaan

Darien is nestled between Stamford, which has a population of 139,134 at 3,696 people per square mile and Norwalk, which has a population of 93,661 at 4,106 people per square mile, according to the CT Department of Public Health's 2024 population estimates. Darien, which has a population of 22,528 people at 1,752 people per square mile,[2] 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 several of 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.

> 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.

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 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 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 21,160 at 953 persons per square mile (see Figure 5-3).[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 the Department of Public Health's 2024 population estimates.

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

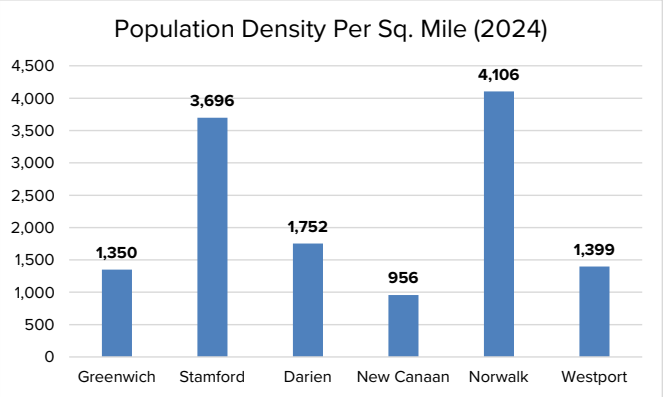
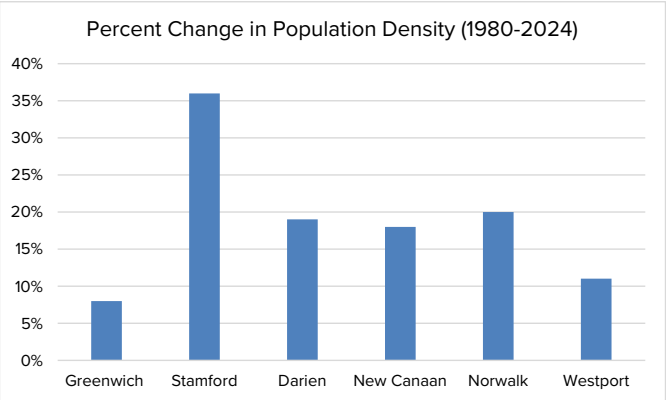


Figure 5-4. Change in population density of Darien and its neighbors





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, maritime-rich neighbor to the east

Chapter 5 Endnotes

1 OnTheMap, U.S. Census Bureau, 2022

2 Based on population data from the 2023 American Community Survey

3 Based on population data from 2023 American Community Survey



A majestic bald eagle perched on a pine tree in Darien (photo by David Kanigan)

6. ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE & SUSTAINABILITY

Darien's natural environment is an essential part of its infrastructure, just as important as its engineered counterparts. The community engagement process revealed that many participating residents recognize the benefits that natural resources such as trees, forest cover, and wetlands provide for stormwater management, flood mitigation, water quality, habitat support, climate resilience, and overall environmental health. They also consider the natural environment a part of the Town's character.

The **Environmental Quality & Protection** section of this chapter describes aspects of Darien's natural environment and the Town's progress towards protecting them.

A changing climate is altering weather patterns, raising sea levels, and stressing Darien's natural systems. Darien has experienced more severe and more frequent flooding. In 2021, Hurricane Ida damaged more than 200 homes and 24 businesses in town.[1] That same year, UCONN researchers observed that, of all communities in Fairfield County, Darien experienced the most warming, with a small patch in the northeast part of town warming on average 8 degrees over 20 years.[2] In the Northeast, the number of extreme precipitation days, or the top 1% of heaviest precipitation events, increased by approximately 60%.[3] During the Town Planning Workshop, climate adaptation was identified as the topic with the highest priority. The **Climate Change, Risk & Adaptation** section of this chapter highlights climate change projections, their likely impacts on Darien, and potential adaptation strategies.

Many municipalities are also committing to sustainability through comprehensive actions to improve public health, adopt environmental sustainable practices, and build community. This can mean operating public facilities and maintaining parks and grounds more sustainably, encouraging propertyowners to adopt sustainable actions, and tracking changes in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) resulting from sustainable actions. Darien participates in Sustainable CT, a voluntary certification program that provides best practices to follow. The **Sustainability** section of this chapter highlights some of Darien's accomplishments through Sustainable CT.

2017-2026 HIGHLIGHTS

State Legislation

- **2025. Public Act 25-33/SB 9. An Act Concerning the Environment, Climate ... and ... the Use of Neonicotinoids.** Bans most uses of neonicotinoid pesticides on lawns and turf grass (starts 2027). Coastal projects in high-risk flood zones require CTDEEP review.
- **2018. Public Act 18-82. An Act Concerning Climate Change Resiliency & Planning**. POCDs must consider the latest sea level change scenario by UCONN.

Plans & Studies

State

- 2025-2035 Wildlife Action Plan, CTDEEP
- 2025 Neonicotinoids in Connecticut Waters, UCONN Center for Env. Sciences & Engineering
- 2025 Connecticut Stormwater Quality Manual
- 2024 A Study on Understanding and Addressing the Occurrence of Local Flooding in Connecticut, CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM)
- 2019 Connecticut State Water Plan, Connecticut Water Planning Council

Region

- 2026 Local Zoning Innovations for Coastal Flood Resilience, WestCOG
- 2026 Long Island Sound Report Card, Save the Sound
- 2025 Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation & Mgmt. Plan, Long Island Sound Study
- 2025 Flooding in Connecticut Through the Lens of Land Use & Zoning, WestCOG
- 2025 Regional Agricultural Viability Study, WestCOG
- 2024 A Guide to Resilience Planning for Long Island Sound Communities. Long Island Sound Study
- 2024 Southwest CT Climate Action Plan
- 2023 An Investigation of Inland Wetlands Commission Practices in Connecticut, WestCOG
- 2021 Flooding in Connecticut: A Status Report on Municipal Flood Prevention Standards, WestCOG

→

- 2021 Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, Municipal Annex for Darien, CT, WestCOG (The 2026 Update is currently in progress)
- 2021 The Case for Riparian Corridor Protections, WestCOG
- 2018 Regional Tree Canopy Analysis, WestCOG (an update will be available in 2027)

Town

- 2025 Stormwater Management Manual
- 2025 Draft Annual Stormwater Mgmt. Report
- 2023 Tilley Pond, Salt Box Lane, Bailey Ave Drainage Studies
- 2021 Minimizing Impervious Cover: A Homeowner's Guide
- 2019 Noroton Heights Flood Mitigation Project

Town Projects

- 2026. Pear Tree Beach Improvement Project.
- 2026. Tilley Pond and Cherry Lawn Park Pond Dredging. To improve water quality.
- 2025. Sustainable CT. Darien certified Silver (also in 2022). In 2019, Darien was certified Bronze.
- 2025. Sanitary Sewer System Rehabilitation
- 2024. Salt Box Lane Drainage. Replace undersized pipes with a box culvert to handle more water.
- 2023. Great Island Soil Remediation. Contamination due to pesticides used on orchards 100 years ago.
- 2020. Inflow & Infiltration Study & Sewer System Evaluation Survey. Identified illegal storm connections, groundwater infiltration, and other deficiencies to guide work.

Property Acquisitions

- 2023. Great Island. Waterfront open space/estate.
- 2022. 27 Crimmins Rd. House demolished; now a natural flood plain.
- 2018. 41 Hecker Ave. Open space, walking path.
- 2017. Highland Farm (formerly the Ox Ridge parcel). Athletic fields and open space.

Darien Land Trust Projects

- 2025. Olson Woods & Piacentini Preserve Access Initiative, Darien Land Trust (DLT)
- 2024. Climate Smart Forestry Plan. A forest management plan for Olson Woods & Piacentini Preserve.
- 2018. Fish Passage Improvement Project. Save the Sound and DLT restored access on the Norton River to 7 miles of upstream habitat blocked by an I-95 culvert.

Environmental Quality & Protection

Water Quality

The community engagement process for this POCD revealed that many residents are concerned about water quality in the Long Island Sound, rivers, ponds, and at local beaches. Issues residents cited in the Town-Wide Survey include pollution, floating trash, algae, toxins, sewage spills, dog waste, and runoff from the application of fertilizers and pesticides by property owners.

Water Quality Monitoring & Discoveries

Darien participates in Save the Sound's Unified Water Study: Long Island Sound Embayment Research, which was initiated in 2017 as a water quality monitoring protocol for helping various groups collect comparable data on the health of the Sound's bays and harbors. Darien's Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters manages the Town's participation along with volunteers. The Town monitors Darien Harbor, Cove Harbor, Scott's Cove, and Ziegler's Cove. Data collected includes dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll a, water clarity/turbidity, and macrophytes (e.g., seaweed).

In 2018, Save the Sound identified overflows from Darien's sewage collection system, including a release of approximately 600,000 gallons that could have been detrimental to public health and the ecology of the Sound due to nitrogen and other pollutants. In 2020, the Town and Save the Sound reached an agreement to further evaluate the sewer system, make necessary repairs, and create a maintenance program. The Town completed an Inflow and Infiltration Analysis Study in 2020 and submitted a draft Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Survey and Preliminary Remediation Plan in 2022. Sewer rehabilitation and maintenance work is ongoing.

Harbor Watch collected E. coli samples in the Goodwives River in 2019 to track a potential discharge. The source was isolated to a stormwater outfall near 30 and 33 Goodwives River Road. A video of the outfall's contributing pipe network showed to the

east a blind connection, which means it was lacking a proper access point such as a manhole to connect to the main line. The Town installed a catch basin over the blind connection.

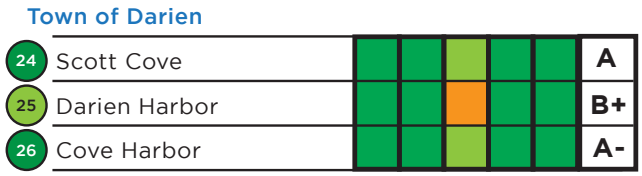
The Town, through its Public Works Department and Sewer Commission, continues to work toward eliminating groundwater and stormwater from entering its sanitary sewer system (see Figure 6-2 on page 36). To locate non-wastewater connections or defects in pipes, the Town hired a contractor in 2023 to clean and internally scan its sanitary sewer system and to repair pipes found to have defects.

This is important because the Town estimated that 58% of the wastewater sent to the treatment facility in Stamford was due to inflow and infiltration as opposed to household and business effluent.[4] More than half of the Town's $3.5 million in annual fees were going toward treating stormwater and groundwater that did not need treatment. In 2026, Darien adopted a sump pump ordinance to preserve its sanitary sewer system by identifying and eliminating illicit sump pump discharges, which can overwhelm treatment plants and increase the Town's payments to the City of Stamford for treatment of groundwater. Property owners served by Town sanitary sewers were mailed a Sump Pump Compliance Statement to complete and return to the Department of Public Works.

Save the Sound releases a biennial report card that reviews water quality findings throughout the Sound. According to the 2026 Long Island Sound Report Card, the Eastern Narrows received a B (84%), which is the same as in 2023. However, the 18-year trend shows improvement. Dissolved oxygen received a C (76%), an increase from 2023 (62%). Dissolved oxygen and water clarity are variable over the long-term trend. Dissolved organic carbon and chlorophyll a continue to improve.

Figure 6-1 shows overall bay grades for Darien, with the columns representing, from left to right: oxygen saturation, chlorophyll a, water clarity, seaweed, and dissolved oxygen. The grades have improved for each bay. In 2024, the grades were B, B, and B-, respectively.

Figure 6-1. Overall bay grades for Darien from the 2026 Long Island Sound Report Card



Testing for concentrations of indicator bacteria is another way to evaluate water quality. CTDEEP has established indicator bacteria standards to ensure waters are safe for recreation and shellfishing. Although the indicator bacteria themselves are usually not harmful, elevated concentrations can indicate the presence of sewage, which can contain harmful pathogens.

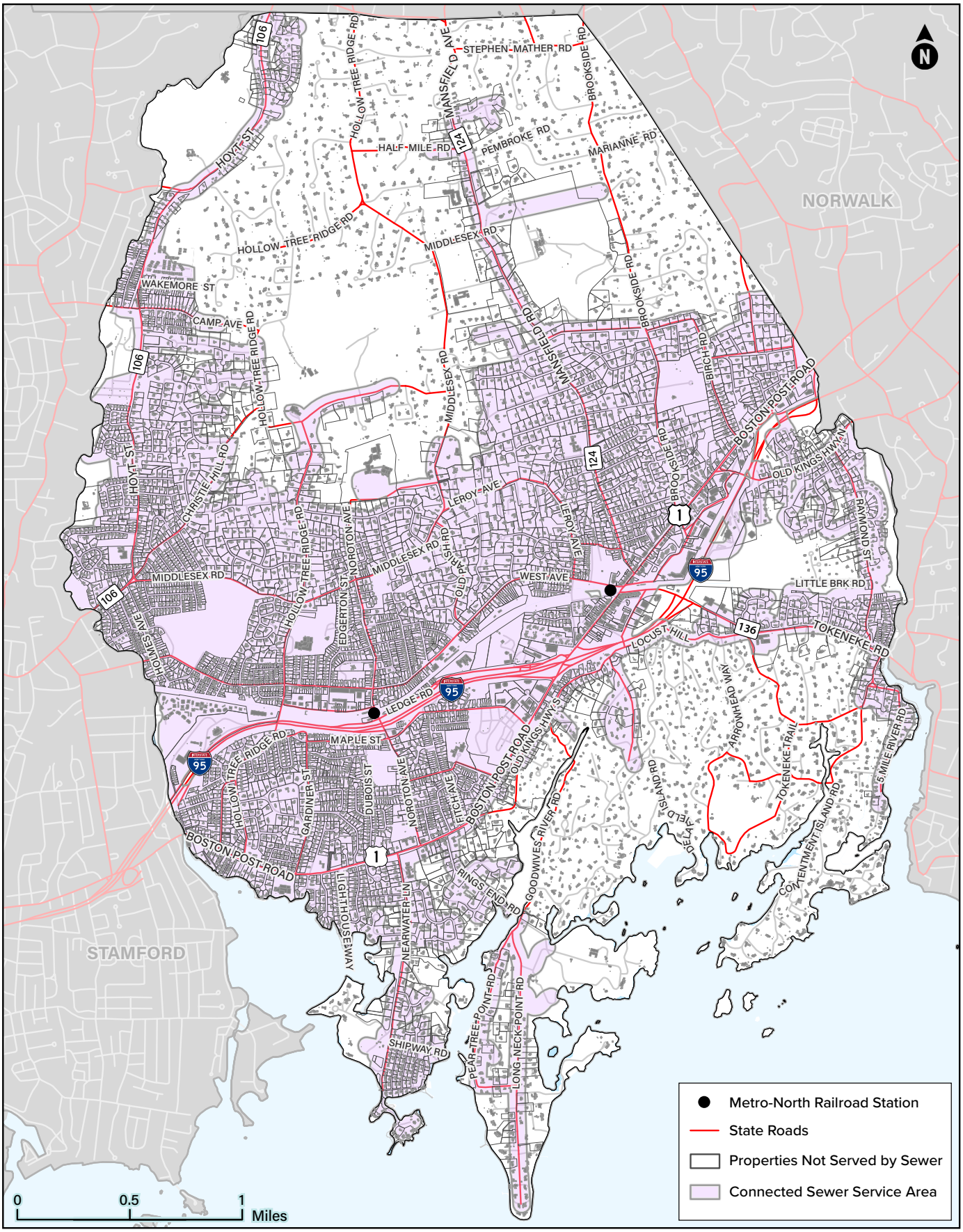
> Darien's Health Department found that in 2025, 15 weeks of water quality testing in the harbors showed no elevated bacteria levels.

The 2025 Long Island Sound Beach Report, which analyzes data from 2022–2024, found that while a majority of Sound beaches received high marks, those in the western Sound, including parts of Connecticut, suffered from increased bacteria levels, particularly following heavy rainfall. In Darien, Pear Tree Point Beach received a B-grade and Weed Beach received a C-. The grades are based on how often water was identified as unsafe for swimming and how high the level of contamination was on the worst sampling day of the season.

Fortunately, Darien's Health Department found that in 2025, 15 weeks of water quality testing in the harbors showed no elevated bacteria levels.[5]

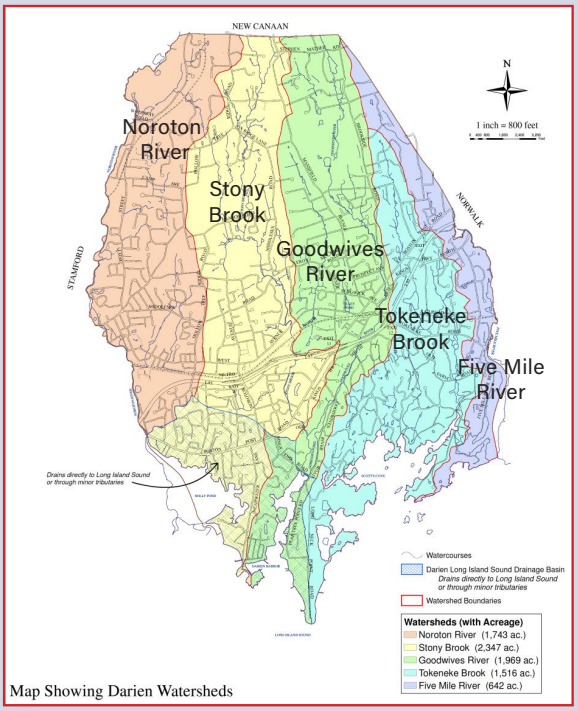
Pesticides are another source of water quality problems. Neonics are a class of synthetic, neurotoxic insecticides that are used on agricultural crops, lawns, gardens, golf courses, and in flea and tick pet treatments. A 2025 report by UCONN researchers noted widespread contamination of the state's surface and groundwater from neonicotinoids.[6] Analyses of the 56 samples collected from streams and rivers adjacent to large expanses of manicured turfgrass,

Figure 6-2. Map of properties served and not served by the sewer system



DARIEN'S WATERSHEDS

A watershed is an area of land that drains water into a waterbody such as a lake, river, or ocean. As rain or melted snow flows downhill within the watershed, it collects and transports sediment and pollutants, which can contain natural materials and chemicals such as pollen, leaves, fertilizer, motor oil, and road salt, into the waterbody. While watersheds often encompass multiple municipalities, they are a logical geographical framework for water quality testing and planning. Darien is located within five watersheds:



Map Showing Darien Watersheds

- **Noroton River Watershed**. Forms the western boundary with the City of Stamford, flowing south from its headwaters in the Town of New Canaan to Holly Pond.
- **Stony Brook Watershed**. Centered on Stony Brook Park on Ledge Road, with the watershed encompassing a significant portion of central Darien.
- **Goodwives River Watershed**. Located in the center of town, flowing south from the Town of New Canaan border into Gorham's Pond. Most of the redevelopment activity in Darien is located within this watershed.
- **Tokeneke Brook Watershed**. Located in between the Goodwives River and Five Mile watersheds, this watershed drains through several ponds before reaching Contentment Island Cove.
- **Five Mile River Watershed**. Forms the eastern border with the City of Norwalk. Starts in the Town of Lewisboro, NY and flows through the Towns of New Canaan and Darien, and the City of Norwalk before draining into the Long Island Sound.

The map, created by the Planning & Zoning Department, identifies these watersheds. The South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), prior to its consolidation into the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) used a watershed- based approach to prepare the 2012 Five Mile River Watershed Based Plan, which identifies management goals, strategies, and actions for improving water quality. The City of Norwalk and Town of Darien operate a joint Five Mile River Commission that regulates navigation and conservation.

such as near golf courses, in southwestern Connecticut detected the presence of imidacloprid, a neonicotinoid pesticide, in more than half of the samples. Imidacloprid was detected in two samples at levels above the EPA acute benchmark in the Goodwives River in Darien in 2024.

Soils, Groundwater & Drinking Water

In Darien, gently rolling terrain and varied soils influence drainage patterns, plants, and development suitability. Upland soils are generally well-drained sandy and loamy tills, with pockets of poorly-drained silt, clay, and organic soils in low-lying coastal areas, wetlands, and rivers. Darien has a significant amount of prime farmland soils.[7] Darien permits farming as an accessory use in all residential districts. Among the recommendations in WestCOG's 2025 Regional Agriculture Viability Study is that Darien amend the definition of "farming" in its zoning regulations to include farm stands and to allow certain types of farming as a primary and accessory use in all zoning districts.

Darien's drinking water comes from either private wells or piped municipal water from reservoirs in Stamford and Fairfield. Aquarion Water Company (AWC) is the Town's water supply provider. Its 2023 report states that Darien's drinking water complies with state and federal health standards. While Per- and

polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) levels are below state action limits, the utility is planning infrastructure upgrades to meet stricter national standards by 2029. Much of Connecticut has recently experienced drought conditions. AWC reports that this year, despite significant snowfall, the Eastern Fairfield County reservoir system has a rainfall deficit of 13 inches over the past year.[8] It is instituting voluntary conservation measures.

The Town's Planning & Zoning Commission serves as the Aquifer Protection Agency. It adopted regulations to minimize the risk of groundwater contamination from hazardous materials, particularly in designated Aquifer Protection Areas (see Figure 6-3).

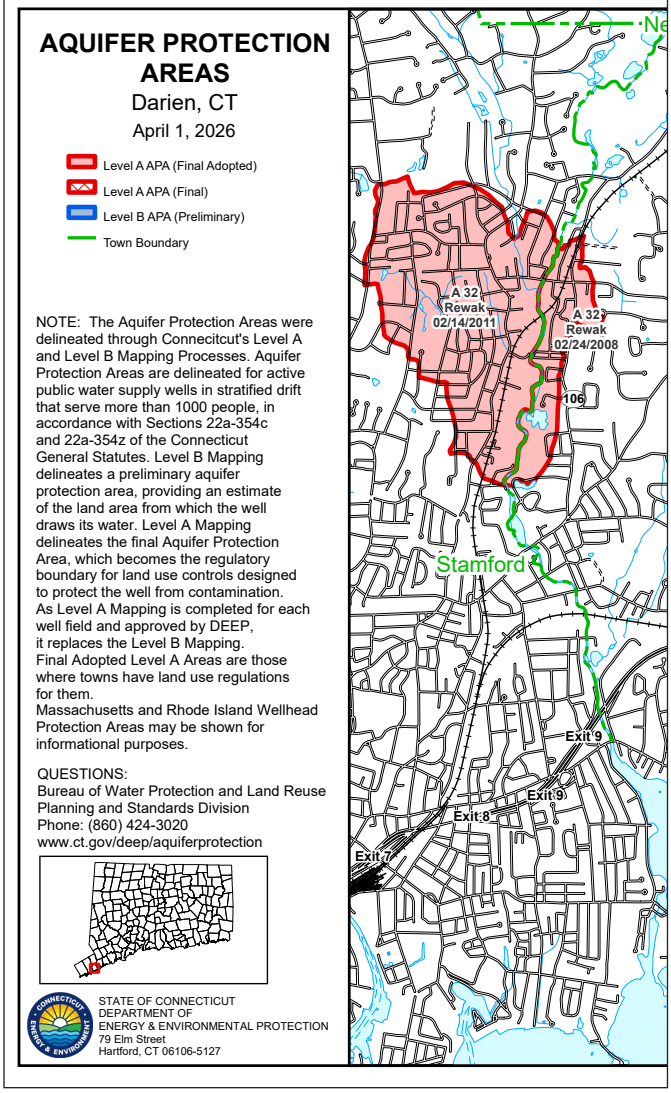
Private well owners are responsible for testing the quality of their drinking water and maintaining their wells. The water is typically tested when a house is being sold or an addition is being constructed. Darien encourages annual basic testing for total coliform, nitrate, nitrite, sodium, chloride, iron, manganese, hardness, turbidity, pH, sulfate, apparent color and odor.[9] The Town also recommends testing for arsenic, uranium, and radon and secondary testing of fluoride, lead, volatile organic compounds, and pesticides.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CTDPH) is responsible for drinking water, including for private wells. If natural contamination is discovered in a private well, the CTDPH Private Well Program will work with the homeowner to resolve the issue. When contamination is present in drinking water as a result of human activity, the CTDEEP Remediation Division's Potable Water Program can investigate the source.

Impervious Surfaces & Stormwater Runoff

Impervious surfaces are hard, non-porous surfaces through which water cannot pass. When it rains, water runs across these surfaces and picks up trash, pollutants, and sediment, and enters storm drains and nearby waterways. Darien has the third highest impervious surface coverage in the WestCOG region, at 22%, behind Stamford and Norwalk.[10] More recent land cover data from Connecticut Environmental Conditions Online (CT ECO) derived from satellite imagery

Figure 6-3. Map showing the aquifer protection areas in the northwestern part of Darien



indicates that impervious coverage in Darien has increased by almost 14% between 1985 and 2023, from 1,007 acres to 1,145 acres. Currently, 14.1% of Darien's land cover is impervious surface. Research in Connecticut indicates that aquatic life can be harmed when the impervious coverage within a watershed exceeds 12%.[11] In Darien, certain sub-basins, particularly within the Five Mile River watershed, have already surpassed 20% impervious coverage, leading to more instances of downstream flooding and pollutant transport into the Long Island Sound. Darien also contains significant transportation infrastructure, including I-95 and Metro-North Railroad, which increases its proportion of impervious coverage. Furthermore, given its coastal location and geography, Darien receives stormwater runoff from upstream towns.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management has evolved since the Town adopted its first stormwater management manual in 2003. The Town adopted its 2025 Stormwater Management Manual to guide development and redevelopment consistent with current stormwater management practices, changes in the Town's stormwater management regulations, and to align with the 2024 Connecticut Stormwater Quality Manual. The Town's new manual reduces the threshold that triggers stormwater management plans from 1,000 square feet to 400. It requires the prioritization of stormwater design to encourage low impact development practices (LID), an approach that manages stormwater runoff as close to its source as possible by using natural, landscape-based features such as bioswales, rain gardens, green roofs, and permeable pavements to infiltrate, filter, store, and evaporate runoff. By prioritizing the disconnection of impervious surfaces from the municipal storm sewer system, the Town aims to restore natural infiltration and protect the ecological health of its waterways.

Wetlands & Watercourses

Wetlands and watercourses are essential to an adequate supply of surface and underground water; to hydrological stability and control of flooding and erosion; to the recharging and purification of groundwater; and to the existence of many forms of animal, aquatic and plant life.[12] Inland wetlands, such as marshes, bogs, and swamps, primarily receive water from streams. Tidal wetlands are flat, vegetated areas subject to regular flooding by the tides. Tidal wetlands are a critical part of the Long Island Sound ecosystem, providing wildlife habitat, filtering pollution, buffering storms, and storing floodwater. Sea level rise is known to be causing tidal wetland loss, but recent published research led by a UCONN scientist finds that extreme weather events accelerate tidal wetland loss 1.4 more times than chronic stressors such as sea level rise.[13]

Darien's Environmental Protection Commission serves as the Inland Wetlands Commission, reviewing applications for any regulated activity in or abutting

2025 LONG ISLAND SOUND COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Long Island Sound Partnership involves federal, state, interstate, and local government agencies, Tribes and Nations, non-government organizations, industries, universities, and community groups to restore and care for the Sound. Clean water is a centerpiece of the organization's 2025 Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. The four components are Clean Waters, Thriving Habitats, Sustainable Communities, and Public Engagement. This plan is very relevant to Darien and other municipalities because it determines how federal and state funding will be prioritized for local infrastructure and environmental protection through 2035.



Green stormwater infrastructure in the parking lot of Ox Ridge Elementary School in the form of a rain garden



An example of a green roof (photo by Arlington County, VA, licensed by CC BY-SA 2.0)

wetlands or watercourses. This includes building activity, paving, installation of pools, and planting or removal of trees and other vegetation. A permit is required for any regulated activities within 50 feet of inland wetlands or within 100 feet of Holly Pond or Gorham's Pond; the mean high water line of the Noroton, Five Mile, and Goodwives Rivers; and the Tokeneke and Stony Brooks.

Plant & Animal Life

Trees

Many residents value the Town's trees and forested areas for the environmental, aesthetic, and community benefits they provide, including shade (i.e., cooler temperatures), habitat for wildlife, stormwater management and erosion control, water filtration, carbon storage, and the preservation of neighborhood character. A number of residents reported through the Town-Wide Survey ongoing concern with the removal of mature and old-growth trees by developers and public entities (e.g., Town, Eversource, Metro-North Railroad) without proper replacement.

Darien has a tree warden who is responsible for the care, maintenance, and removal of trees and shrubs on Town-owned property—not including parks—and within public rights-of-way. The tree warden assesses tree health, manages safety hazards, and conducts public hearings for tree removal. Norwalk, Westport, and Darien have the lowest tree cover canopy coverage among WestCOG municipalities, based on the 2018 Tree Canopy Analysis for the Western Connecticut Region. Darien's canopy coverage was 48%, with the highest being Redding, a less developed community, at 78%. More recent land cover data from CT ECO derived from satellite imagery indicates that forest coverage in Darien decreased by 8% between 1985 and 2023, from 895 acres to 824 acres.[14]

Native & Invasive Plant Species

Native plantings create habitat for pollinators and require no synthetic chemicals. Most have deep root systems that help aerate and stabilize the soil, increasing their capacity to absorb, filter, and retain water while reducing runoff and erosion.

INVASIVE SPECIES & TICKS

According to the report cited below, removing invasive Japanese barberry infestations can reduce the number of black legged ticks infected with the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, by 60%. Reducing the risk of exposure to Lyme Disease would benefit human and pet health and encourage more passive outdoor recreational activities such as hiking and bird watching. Darien Land Trust received funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service to remove Japanese barberry and other invasive plants on three properties.

Source: Williams SC, Ward JS. Effects of Japanese barberry (Ranunculales: Berberidaceae) removal and resulting microclimatic changes on Ixodes scapularis (Acari: Ixodidae) abundances in Connecticut, USA. Environ Entomol. 2010 Dec;39(6):1911-21. doi: 10.1603/EN10131. PMID: 22182557.



Milkweed is a native species and a host of monarch butterfly caterpillers (photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Mountain Prairie, licensed by CC BY 2.0)



Japanese barberry is an invasive species commonly seen in Darien (photo by Matthew Beziat, licensed by CC BY-NC 2.0)

Invasive species are non-native species that grow aggressively and can out-compete and displace native species. The Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality states in a 2022 update of the 2002 report Great Infestations: "invasive species affect all of the state's land forms and ecosystems, from its waterways to its natural lands and also its working lands and developed landscapes. The ecological, economic and human health costs of unchecked invasive species can be high."

Volunteer groups have undertaken projects to manage invasive plants on Town-owned lands and in waterways. Projects have targeted known invasive species (e.g., Japanese knotweed, mugwort, phragmites, tree-of-heaven, bittersweet, porcelain berry, etc.) at multiple locations, including Cherry Lawn Park, Weed Beach, the Darien Railroad berm (Squab Lane), Tilley Pond Park, Town Hall (Habitat Hill), Noroton Heights Train Station, and other locations.

The Darien Beautification Commission creates and maintains gardens throughout Darien using predominantly native plants, trees and shrubs. The Commission aims to remove invasive plants before working in any area. Nonetheless, invasive species are difficult to eradicate. They can produce large quantities of seeds that rest in the soil for years before germinating and they also can appear after seeds are dropped by birds or carried by wind.



Butterflies are prolific pollinators, moving from flower to flower (photo by Amy Lynn Grover)

Pollinators & Pollinator Pathways

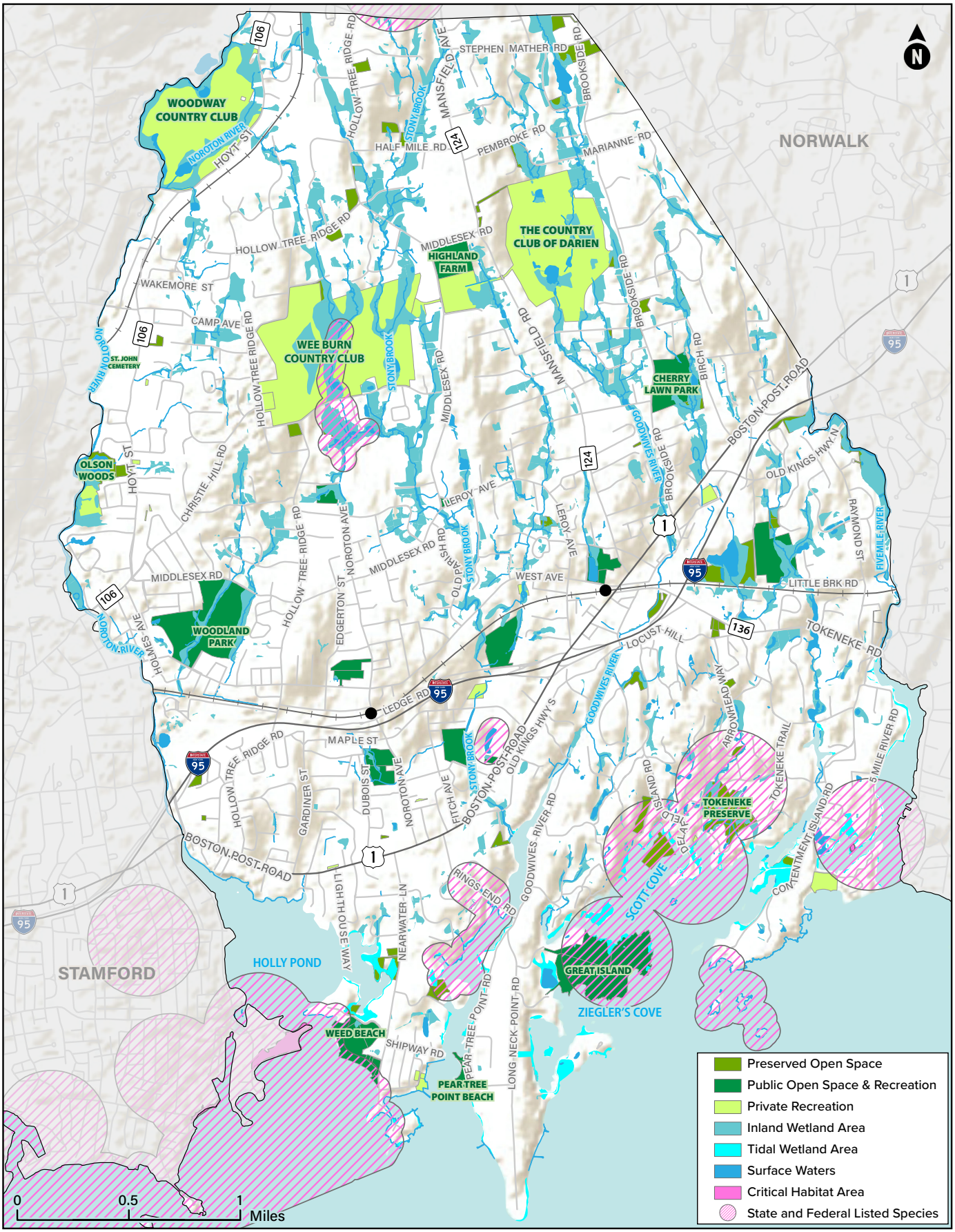
Pollinators help move pollen from one part of a flower to another, which fertilizes a plant and helps make seeds, fruits, and new plants. Some plants can pollinate themselves while others use wind or water to move their pollen. Many plants need help from pollinator insects and animals such as bees, butterflies, birds, and bats. However, pollinator populations are declining because of the use of pesticides and the overall loss of habitat. One study found that of approximately 1,600 species of vertebrate and insect pollinators in North America north of Mexico, more than one in five species is at risk of extinction.[15] This includes bees, bats, butterflies, and hummingbirds.

A pollinator pathway is a pesticide-free corridor of native plants, shrubs, and trees that provides essential food and habitat for bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other pollinators. Most native bees have a range of 50 feet to half a mile, so the goal is to connect properties that are no farther apart than half a mile.[16] The Darien Pollinator Pathway aims to create a corridor of adjacent properties—both private properties and public spaces—that provide safe habitat for pollinators. The goal is to make Darien a pollinator pathway with private residential properties; commercial properties; and municipal spaces being pesticide free and hosting native plants. Darien borders Stamford, New Canaan, Norwalk and the Long Island Sound, making it a potential source of connectivity to neighboring pathways and the Atlantic flyway, a bird migration route.

Conservation of Species

Connecticut's 2025 Wildlife Action Plan identifies species of greatest conservation need, their affiliated habitats, and the threats they face. The plan prioritizes conservation actions and research needs to address problems facing these species and habitats. Tracking and mapping actions helps conservation organizations work together, share information, and gain visibility for their work. The plan identifies more than 1,000 species categorized into two main priority groups:

Figure 6-4. Map of environmental features



- **Species of Greatest Conservation Need**. 573 species (including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates, and plants) that are currently declining or vulnerable.
- **State Assessment Priority Species**. 515 species that require more research and data to determine their conservation status.

There are approximately 20-30 species in Darien that carry legal status—Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern. Because all state-listed species are automatically "Species of Greatest Conservation Need," these are the high-priority targets.

Air Quality

According to the American Lung Association's 2023 State of the Air Report, Fairfield County has the worst ozone pollution in the New York-Newark Metropolitan area, earning an "F" for ozone pollution for an average of almost 18 unhealthy days per year. Ozone and particle pollution can cause premature death and other serious health effects such as asthma attacks, heart attacks, strokes, preterm births and impaired cognitive functioning later in life. Particle pollution can also cause lung cancer and other respiratory diseases.

Ozone is a secondary pollutant formed by chemical reactions between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight. Precursors to ozone are produced by gasoline and diesel fueled vehicles, industrial processes, and the burning of fossil fuels. A major contributor to local air quality issues is emissions from traffic on I-95 and the Merritt Parkway. The burning of fossil fuels (oil and gas) for space and water heating in buildings and houses is also a source of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter. A significant amount of ozone and its precursors are carried in from other areas and become trapped close to the ground due to local atmospheric conditions.

A 2023 University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine study found that when neighborhoods increased their number of zero-emissions vehicles between 2019 and 2023, they also experienced a reduction in air pollution. For every 200 zero-emission vehicles added, nitrogen dioxide levels dropped 1.1%.[17] While the continued replacement of gas-fueled vehicles with electric vehicles (EVs) may help improve air quality in Darien, the total lifecycle impact depends on where and how the electricity is generated in the first place. EV purchases, which include all-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles, are expected to continue to grow. More than half of all EVs purchased between 2015 and 2025 were purchased in the past 3 years.

A source of localized air pollution, particularly in suburban communities, are gasoline-powered lawn and garden equipment. An article by The Institute for Exposomic Research at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai reports that gas-powered leaf blowers are very inefficient, with 30% of the gas and oil they use remaining unburned and released into the air.[18] Emissions include carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, benzene, nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons, and particulate matter. The article cites a California Air Resources Board estimate that operating a gas leaf blower for one hour releases emissions equivalent to driving a car for 15 hours or 1100 miles.[19] Gas-powered lawn equipment also emit substantial noise, exposing users to sound of more than 100 decibels and penetrate windows and walls.

Connecticut State legislators have been exploring methods to regulate gas-powered lawn equipment, but legislation has yet to be adopted. Several neighboring municipalities, including Greenwich, Stamford, New Canaan, Norwalk, and Westport, have enacted ordinances relating to gas-powered leaf blowers. Restrictions vary but all include seasonal limits on use. Most include time of day restrictions and prohibit their use on Sundays/holidays. Darien currently relies on the State's noise regulations, which exempt the operation of engine-powered lawn care equipment from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Land Preservation & Stewardship

Land preservation and stewardship benefit all aspects of environmental quality. The Darien Land Trust (DLT) preserves natural areas, fosters connections between the Darien community and the natural environment, and promotes conservation awareness to protect local land for current and future generations. DLT has permanently protected diverse natural environments



Olson Woods (photo by Connecticut Land Conservation Council)



DLT Volunteers (photo by Darien Land Trust)



Trail repair in Olson Woods (photo by Darien Land Trust)

such as wetlands along the Five Mile River, tidal salt marshes at Holly Pond and Scott's Cove, upland forests in Dunlap Woods, and meadow habitats at Mather Meadows, Fox Run, and Brendan's Meadow. The Land Trust owns or has conservation easements totaling 230+ acres in Darien, with 197 acres being owned by DLT and 33 acres being protected by conservation easements. Protecting land can yield many environmental benefits such as providing habitat for native plants and animals, absorbing and filtering water, maintaining trees and other natural cover that sequesters carbon and keeps communities cool during warm months. The DLT typically conducts inspections of its properties in the spring to monitor conditions, ensure proper stewardship, and address any maintenance or conservation needs.

Climate Change: Risk, Adaptation & Resilience

Climate change presents risks to Darien's natural environment, built environment, infrastructure, economy, and quality of life. As a coastal community, Darien is vulnerable to sea level rise, coastal erosion, storm surges, and more intense storms that can overwhelm drainage systems and increase inland flooding. Rising temperatures—and unusually cold temperatures—can impact residents' health, strain energy systems, and stress the natural environment. These impacts are expected to intensify over time, underscoring the importance of proactive planning to reduce vulnerability and adapt. In doing so, municipalities can limit public and private property losses, reduce expenditures of public funds for flood relief, and minimize prolonged governmental and business interruptions.

The risks and challenges presented by climate change, do not stop at municipal boundaries. Therefore, collaboration at the local, regional, and state levels is critical when planning for climate change. This includes collaborating with neighboring municipalities, nonprofits such as Save the Sound, WestCOG, institutions such as UCONN's CIRCA, and various state agencies.

Flooding

The draft of CT DEEP's 2026 Connecticut's Climate Progress report states that the August 2024 flooding was one of the costliest disasters in Connecticut since Superstorm Sandy in 2012, causing significant damage to roads and bridges, homes, and businesses.[20] The State estimated in its disaster assistance request to FEMA that the initial damage cost to transportation and other infrastructure amounted to $206 million.

In 2021, two severe weather events caused significant flooding, property damage, and infrastructure issues in the region. In July, the remnants of Hurricane Elsa produced almost seven inches of rain during a 24-hour period. In September 2021, Hurricane Ida produced another seven inches of rain in a 24-hour period. Despite their similar rain totals, the intensity of Ida overwhelmed Darien and many of its systems. Darien received more than three inches of rain in an hour and almost five inches of rain in two hours—both of which were considered "500-year events," meaning they had a 0.2% chance of happening in a given year.[21]

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities conducted a study to better understand the increased frequency and severity of flooding (coastal, riverine, and drainage related flooding) and the associated challenges municipalities face in addressing flooding.[22] This could be broadened to include undertaking climate adaptation actions:

- Drainage-related flooding was cited as the most common type of flooding, with damage to roads and homes being the most urgent impacts.
- Inadequate municipal funding is the top challenge. Access to grant funding programs and a lack of staff dedicated to flood risk management were also frequently cited as top concerns.
- Many municipalities don't have the administrative capacity to manage state and federal grants, especially multiple grants with significant reporting and administrative or management requirements.
- State agencies and municipalities consistently point to the need for increased staff capacity to effectively address flooding.



Flooding at Pear Tree Beach in December 2018 (photo courtesy of John Merritt)

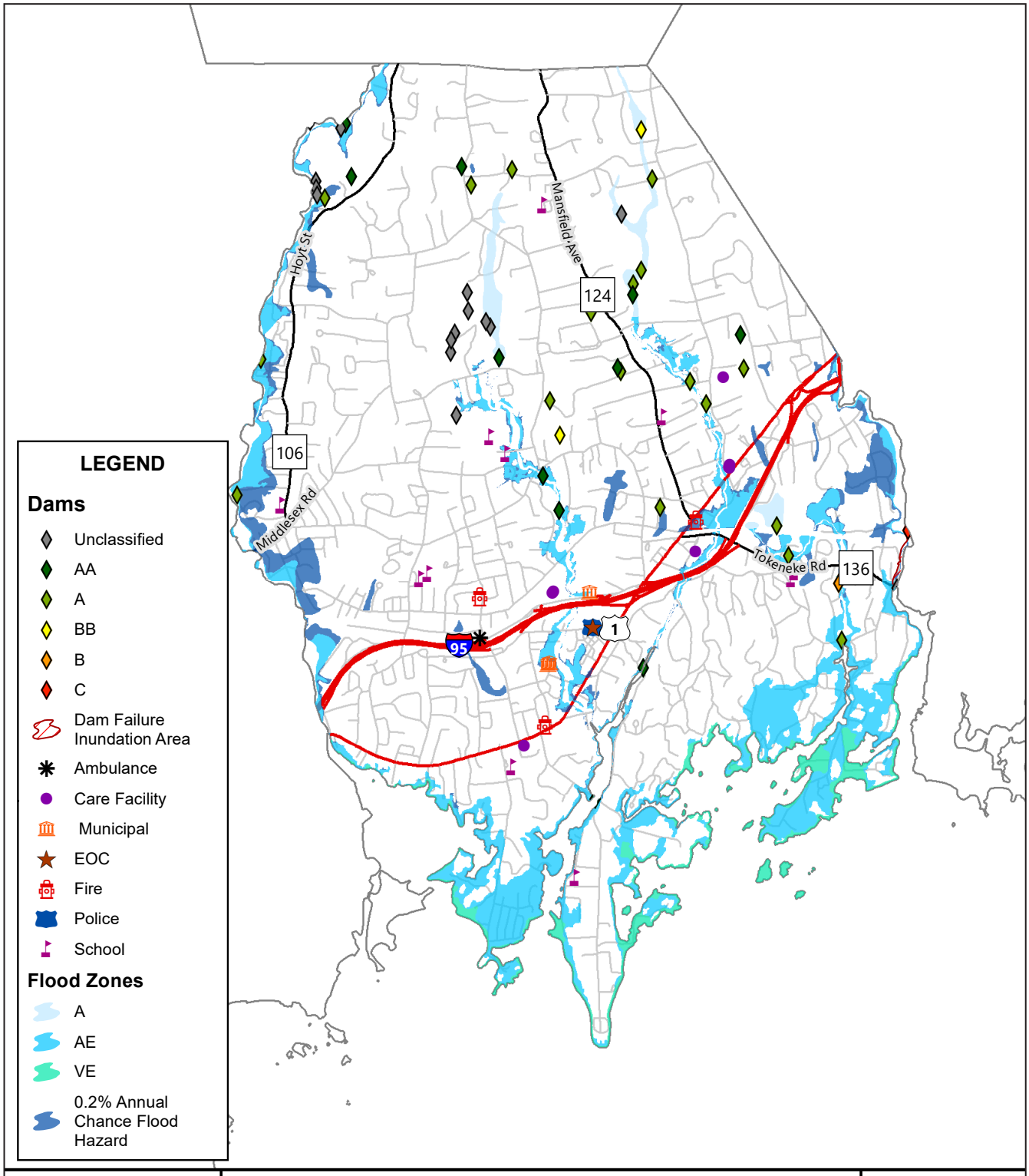
The webinar titled "Flooding in Connecticut Through the Lens of Land Use & Zoning" hosted by WestCOG emphasizes that flooding across Connecticut, in certain cases, may be exacerbated by land use decisions by the expansion of impervious surfaces, encroachment on floodplains, and the presence of undersized drainage infrastructure.[23] The webinar made the case for municipalities to integrate climate-adjusted rainfall projections and sea level rise into zoning and capital planning, to reduce runoff through green infrastructure and lower lot coverages, to protect and restore wetlands and natural flood storage areas, and to retrofit existing development rather than focusing only on new construction. Flood resilience should be embedded into land use policy, zoning regulations, and infrastructure investment to proactively reduce future risk rather than reacting to repeated damage (see Figure 6-5 on page 46).

Sea Level Rise

Average sea level rise in Long Island Sound is projected to be up to 20 inches above the National Tidal Datum Epoch (1983-2001) by 2050.[24] The projected rise in sea level will substantially amplify the frequency and magnitude of coastal flooding in Connecticut, making storms that currently result in low-level coastal flooding significantly more impactful. Sea levels are expected to continue rising after 2050, with projections suggesting a rise of just under 7 feet by 2100 if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced.[25]

The overall extent of coastal areas subject to tidal flood risks, including those in FEMA designated flood zones,

Figure 6-5. Map locating critical facilities and flood zones (from the 2021-2026 WestCOG Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, Municipal Annex - Town of Darien)



will not expand by much in most areas. This is due to Connecticut's unique glaciated coastal topography. However, 20 inches of sea level rise could increase the coastal flood frequency risk by a factor of 5 to 10, with no change in storm conditions. This means less intense events will cause more significant flooding. As a result, major coastal flooding levels—similar to those that occurred during Superstorm Sandy in 2012—could be expected every 5 to 10 years by mid-century.



▲ *UCONN CIRCA's Connecticut Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge Viewer shows that Tokeneke Park is likely to be inundated in 2050 due to sea level rise.*

Temperature Extremes

According to a 2019 Connecticut Physical Climate Science Assessment Report, average temperatures in Connecticut could increase by 5 degrees Fahrenheit (F) by 2050 compared to the 1970-1999 baseline.[26] Connecticut's temperature has already risen more than the global average in part because temperature changes tend to increase at a faster rate in middle and high latitudes. As a result, a 2 degree Celsius (C) target for global average temperature increase would result in a higher average temperature (more than 2 degrees C) in Connecticut.

All indices of hot weather are expected to shift toward more frequent and higher temperature events. For example, by mid-century, the number of days per year with temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius) could increase. Statewide, from 1970 to 1999, the average number of days per year above 90 degrees Fahrenheit in Connecticut was 5. This is projected to increase to an average of 25 days per year above 90 degrees Fahrenheit between 2040 and 2069.[27] The number of days per year with frost could decrease from 124 to 85.[28]

Significant increases in daily minimum temperatures indicate that less heat might dissipate during nighttime, resulting in higher air conditioning and electricity use during hot summers. In addition, increasing daily minimum temperatures could also increase humidity, which contributes to heat stress.

Drought & Wildfires

The 2019 Connecticut Physical Climate Assessment Report also projects drought risk to increase. The probability of unusual events (extremely low annual and summer water availability, and extremely high 1-day and 5-day precipitation) are projected to increase by a factor of between 2 and 4 by mid-century.[29]

Darien is generally considered a moderate risk area for small wildfires, but a low-risk area for large wildfires.[30] Outlying areas without public water service and areas with poor access for fire-fighting equipment are susceptible. In Darien, these areas are limited to the northern parts of the Town, where public water supply is generally unavailable.

Adaptation & Resilience

The words "adaptation" and "resilience" are frequently used alongside "climate." The Global Center for Adaptation defines adaptation as "taking action to prepare for and adjust to the current and projected impacts of climate change."

Climate resilience is more comprehensive, representing the ability of interconnected ecological, social, and economic systems to anticipate, adapt, withstand, respond, and thrive in the face of current and future conditions and disasters made worse by climate change.[31] This definition recognizes that ecological systems—from tree cover to tidal marshes—are an intrinsic part of buffering a community against the aforementioned impacts of climate change. Therefore, protecting and enhancing "green infrastructure" is just as important as investing in "gray infrastructure."

Sustainability

Darien participates in Sustainable CT, a voluntary certification program that recognizes municipalities for excellence in environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Sustainable CT makes annual updates to its listed actions, based on feedback from municipalities and ongoing research of best practices. In addition to certification, participating municipalities can apply for the Climate Leader Designation, which recognizes municipalities that are reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing their communities for the impacts of climate change, while saving money, improving public health, and building community. Darien received a Bronze certification in 2019 and a Silver certification in 2022 and 2025. The following are some of its accomplishments by category:

Inclusive and Equitable Community Impacts

Optimize for Equity: The Town applied the Sustainable CT Equity Toolkit to the Swap Shop. Accessibility was analyzed for financially at-risk families (2019) and Darien seniors (2025) to ensure the program is inclusive.

Thriving Local Economies

Inventory and Promote Local Products: The Darien Chamber of Commerce developed a comprehensive "Buy Local" campaign featuring a digital directory and social media spotlights on independent businesses.

Vibrant and Creative Cultural Ecosystems

Map Tourism and Cultural Assets: Darien created an interactive Cultural Asset Map that identifies historical sites, public art installations, and performance spaces to boost local tourism and community identity.

Benchmark Energy Use: Darien utilized ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager in 2022 to track and report the energy performance of all municipal buildings. Four buildings (Darien Town Hall, Middlesex Middle School, Royle Elementary, Holmes Elementary) demonstrated that they operated more efficiently than at least 75% of similar buildings nationwide, earning ENERGY STAR Certification by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Strategic Materials Management

Food Scrap Recycling: Darien maintains a successful residential food scrap drop-off programs, diverting more then 40 tons of organic waste from the waste stream annually.

Effective, Compassionate Homelessness Prevention

Municipal Liaison Training: Serving as the liaison to the regional Coordinated Access Network (CAN), Darien's Human Services Director tracks individuals and families at risk of experiencing homelessness and provides emergency financial support as needed.

Sustainability in the Private Sector

Several businesses in Darien have incorporated sustainability into their operations. Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) is a Connecticut Green Bank program that provides long-term, low-interest financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades in commercial, industrial, non-profit, and multifamily buildings. It allows propertyowners to finance 100% of improvements—such as solar or HVAC—and repay through a voluntary assessment on their property tax bill, which often results in immediate positive cash flow. The Corbin District development in Darien is the first project in the state to fund stormwater management measures through C-PACE. It incorporated best management practices for stormwater management, including the installation of 20,000 square feet of porous asphalt and permeable pavers to manage 652,000 gallons of stormwater annually.

The project also includes sustainable measures that contribute to the modeled 12% decreased energy use over a *2021 International Energy Conservation Code* compliant design with utility savings of more than $2 million.[32] Contributors to this savings include heat pumps, air-cooled condensing units, building envelope upgrades, LED lighting, and low-flow water fixtures. These measures contribute to the project's carbon reduction goals, estimated at more than 266 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO2e) of avoided emissions in the first year alone.

Other businesses in Darien have received recognition for their sustainability accomplishments:

- The Gardener's Center & Florist received a Chamber of Commerce Green Business Award. The company is a NOFA-accredited organic business that has replaced 1,000 square feet of turf with native sedge grasses and converted their entire facility to LED lighting.
- HAYVN is the first Certified B Corp co-working space in Connecticut. This certification recognizes high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. The facility is designed with solar power and has a zero-waste policy.
- Palmer's Market received a Chamber of Commerce Green Choice Award for its transition to energy-efficient LED lighting, upgraded refrigeration with "night shades" to conserve energy, and initiatives to provide reusable materials for employees.

DIVERTING FOOD WASTE

Darien's residential food scrap recycling program was launched in October 2018, the first such program in lower Fairfield County. The Department of Public Works reports that within six months more than 16 tons of food scraps had been diverted from the waste stream. By the close of FY2026, the total exceeded 300 tons. All food scraps can be recycled, including meat and bones, which are typically difficult to compost at home. Drop-off bins are located at the Darien Recycling Center.

Darien's municipal solid waste (MSW), is trucked to the WIN Waste Bridgeport facility and incinerated. Collected food scraps are diverted to a commercial composting facility where they are transformed into nutrient-rich compost that is sold to farmers, landscapers, and garden centers.

Most MSW in Connecticut is incinerated in-state at one of four remaining waste-to-energy facilities, such as the one in Bridgeport. However, this infrastructure is aging and 40% of MSW is exported to out-of-state landfills.

Food is the single largest component of MSW, estimated at more than 22% by the CT DEEP. It is also wet and heavy, requiring that incinerators burn hotter and longer. Diverting food from MSW enables these facilities to operate more efficiently, resulting in fewer toxic emissions and a decreased volume of residual ash. It also reduces the tonnage of MSW going to landfills, where decomposing food releases methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Recommendations

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & PROTECTION

6-1. Prepare an Open Space Plan

This plan would guide the conservation, maintenance, and enhancement of the Town's natural resources and public open spaces. It would also recommend management and funding strategies. In conjunction with or separate from the plan, map the conservation easements in Town.

6-2. Consider a Tree Protection Ordinance

a. Prepare standards for protecting prominent trees on public property and consider voluntary provisions for trees on private property.

b. Evaluate the creation of a Tree Maintenance and Acquisition Fund to support tree planting, care, and canopy restoration.

6-3. Prepare an Invasive Species Communications & Management Plan

a. Improve awareness among residents about invasive plant species, their negative impacts on the Town, and proper removal and disposal.

b. Identify priority areas for invasive species management and coordinate actions among Town staff, conservation groups, and residents.

c. Increase awareness among residents of native plants and the Darien Beautification Commission's work installing native plant gardens on municipal property.

CLIMATE CHANGE: RISK, ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE

6-4. Consider Preparing a Climate Resilience Plan

a. Evaluate local flood risks, develop shovel ready projects that align with regional plans, and establish funding and permitting pathways to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

b. Consider an initial focus on protecting public properties and infrastructure, such as sanitary sewer pump stations, underground sanitary sewer lines, and park structures.

c. Identify natural resources that should be protected and/or enhanced for climate adaptation and resilience.

d. Use the latest WestCOG guidance and UCONN/CIRCA sea-level rise projections to evaluate updates to Darien's flood zone maps and base flood elevation and building height standards in the Coastal Area Management (CAM) zone.

6-5. Evaluate the Acquisition of Properties in High-Risk Zones

Consider prioritizing properties that could provide opportunities for floodwater storage, wetland and stream corridor restoration, coastal habitat protection, passive recreation, or other public benefits.

6-6. Incorporate Additional Flood Protection and Resilience Standards into Zoning Regulations

Revise Section 820 of the Zoning Regulations: Flood Damage Prevention. Clarify and strengthen the application of specific regulatory requirements in floodplains including:

a. Sea level rise and impact standards for the floodplain and regulatory floodway.

b. Design standards for fully enclosed areas below the design flood elevation.

c. Flood safety requirements for properties subject to subdivision/resubdivision.

d. Discourage the use of fill in floodplains, unless it will not exacerbate flooding and/or if it is used for mitigation projects.

SUSTAINABILITY

6-7. Encourage the Installation of EV Charging Stations

Research state programs and incentives for installing charging infrastructure on public and private properties. Coordinate with the State to explore its program to install charging stations on utility poles and lampposts.

6-8. Consider Expanding Food Scrap Collection to Schools

Work with the Board of Education and Department of Public Works to explore expanding food scrap collection to schools. The State's Commercial Organics Recycling Law (PA 24-45) has been expanded to include individual school buildings.

6-9. Encourage Sustainable/Green Buildings in Zoning Districts that Permit Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Development

Encourage energy-efficient and sustainable construction in zoning districts permitting multifamily and mixed-use development where the anticipated benefits justify the cost. High-performance standards and certifications can be used as a guide.

Implementation Strategy

Legend

Phase	Lead & Support Entities	Potential Cost / Investment
Priority = Priority (start within 6 months from now) **Short** = Short-Term (start bet. 6 months and 2 yrs. from now) **Mid** = Mid-Term (start within 2-4 yrs. from now) **Long** = Long-Term (start 4 yrs. or later from now)	**Gov** = Board of Selectmen **Dep** = Town Departments **Com** = Boards, Commissions, Committees **Org** = Local & Regional Organizations **Agn**= External Agencies **Oth** = Other	**$** = $150,000 or less **$$** = $150,000 to $500,000 **$$$** = $500,000 to $1 million **$$$$** = > $1 million

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Impl. Cost Funding Source
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & PROTECTION				
6-1	**Prepare an Open Space Plan**	Short	**Department of Planning & Zoning, Department of Parks & Recreation** **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission, Environmental Protection Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission, Advisory Conservation Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners **Agn**: Eversource, Aquarion, CTDOT	$ $$$$ CTDEEP Grants Capital Budget
6-2	**Consider a Tree Protection Ordinance**	Mid	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works, Dept. of Parks & Recreation **Com**: Conservation Commission, Environmental Protection Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners **Agn**: Eversource, Aquarion Water Company, CTDOT	n/a
6-3	**Prepare an Invasive Species Communications & Management Plan**	Mid	**Department of Public Works, Department of Parks & Recreation** **Com**: Advisory Conservation Commission, Environmental Protection Commission, Parks & Recreation Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners, Save the Sound	$ $$ Oper. Budget
CLIMATE CHANGE: RISK, ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE				
6-4	**Consider Preparing a Climate Resilience Plan**	Short	**Board of Selectman** **Dep**: Dept. of Public Works, Dept. of Parks & Recreation, Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Advisory Conservation Commission, Advisory Commission on Coastal Waters, Planning & Zoning Commission, RTM Public Works Committee, Sewer Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners, Save the Sound, WestCOG, The Nature Conservancy **Agn**: CTDEEP, CTDOT, Aquarion Water Company **Oth**: UCONN CIRCA, City of Norwalk, City of Stamford	$$ $$$$ CTDEEP Grants Capital Budget

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Impl. Cost Funding Source
6-5	**Evaluate the Acquisition of Properties in High-Risk Zones**	Ongoing	**Board of Selectmen** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Parks & Recreation **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners	$ $$$$ Capital Budget
6-6	**Incorporate Additional Flood Protection and Resilience Standards into Zoning Regulations**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works **Com**: Environmental Protection Commission	n/a
SUSTAINABILITY				
6-7	**Encourage EV Charging Stations**	Short	**Department of Public Works, Department of Planning & Zoning** **Com**: Advisory Committee on Sustainability, Planning & Zoning Commission	n/a $ Vendor(s)
6-8	**Consider Expanding Food Scrap Collection to Schools**	Long	**Board of Education, Department of Public Works** **Com**: Advisory Committee on Sustainability	$ $$ Board of Education
6-9	**Encourage Sustainable/Green Buildings in Zoning Districts that Permit Multi-Family and Mixed-Use Development**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works **Com**: Advisory Committee on Sustainability, Architectural Review Board	n/a

Chapter 6 Endnotes

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7. TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, transportation planning plays a fundamental role in a state, region, or community's vision for its future. Transportation is one of the fastest evolving aspects of life in towns and cities, with ridesharing, microtransit, e-bikes, and e-scooters providing people of all ages with more transportation options.

New technologies for traffic data collection, management, and enforcement provide municipalities with additional tools for improving congestion and safety. The growing number of electric vehicles on the roads—more than 1,100 of which are registered in Darien—has increased demand for convenient electric charging stations, while at the same time, the number of "traditional" gas stations in Darien has decreased.[1] The last gas station to be constructed in Darien was more than 30 years ago in 1995. While many Darien residents take advantage of these new transportation options, their primary aspirations for transportation and mobility include more facilities and accommodations for safe walking and biking and less traffic congestion. Some residents are optimistic that people deciding to walk or bike to destinations instead of driving could help reduce both traffic congestion and demand for parking in town.

Driving

The Roadway Network

Darien's roadway network includes a limited number of principal arterials, a network of collector roads that connect neighborhoods to activity centers, and a network of local residential streets. Interstate 95 (I-95) is the dominant roadway, running east–west through the southern portion of town and carrying substantial regional and interstate traffic. U.S. Route 1 (Boston Post Road) functions as Darien's primary surface arterial, providing access to retail, civic uses, and neighboring communities, while also accommodating regional travel (see Figure 7-1 on page 57).

Mansfield Avenue (State Route 124) is the primary north-south arterial and provides access to residential neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks. It begins at Boston Post Road near the geographic center of town and continues into New Canaan, connecting to

2017-2026 HIGHLIGHTS

State Legislation

- **2025**. **Public Act No. 25-69**. E-bike and helmet safety laws updated. See Figure 7-7 on page 65.
- **2023**. **Public Act No. 23-116**. Allows municipalities to authorize automated traffic enforcement safety devices in school zones, pedestrian safety zones, and intersections under state guidelines
- **2021**. **Public Act No. 21-28**. Pedestrian & Vulnerable Road User Safety. Established Vision Zero Council to eliminate transportation-related fatalities and severe injuries for all road users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.

Plans & Studies

CTDOT

- 2018 Darien Route 1 Road Safety Audit

WestCOG

- 2026 Traffic Calming & Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox
- 2023 Regional Bicycle Plan
- 2021 Regional Transportation Safety Plan
- 2018 Noroton Heights Station Area Study

Town Projects

- **Intersection Improvements**
  - » Signal Improvements at West Avenue at Hollow Tree Ridge Road and at Noroton Avenue. Adjusted traffic signal timings to improve traffic flow.
  - » Noroton Avenue & West Avenue Intersection Improvements. To improve traffic flow, added left-turn lanes, new traffic signals, and updated crosswalks and pavement markings.
  - » Sedgwick Avenue & Boston Post Road Improvements. Pavement markings updated on Sedgwick Avenue to create a new right-turn lane, improving traffic flow and intersection operations.
  - » Road Widening at Ledge Road at Noroton Avenue. Will provide an additional lane at this intersection and reduce queuing on Ledge Road. Received a grant. Project to start in 2026.

- **Sidewalk Construction & Replacement**
  - » Formed an Advisory Sidewalk Committee[9]
  - » New concrete sidewalk on Heights Road near Noroton Heights Station.
  - » New concrete sidewalk connecting Hollow Tree Ridge Road and Ledge Road to the northbound platform at Noroton Heights Station on the south side of the tracks. Includes ADA-compliant curb ramps and crosswalks.
  - » Asphalt sidewalk replacement on Leroy Avenue (West Avenue to Highfield Lane)
- **Bridges & Dams**
  - » Rings End Road Bridge Design/Repair. Maintenance and structural preservation of this bridge, constructed in 1930.
  - » Hanson Road Bridge Repair. Full replacement of this structure built in 1936.
  - » Gorham's Pond Dam Repair & Bridge Work. Restoration and stabilization of the structure, which was damaged by impacts from storms.

CTDOT Projects

- I-95 Bridge Culvert Rehabilitation. Culvert relining with a new arch structure.
- Darien Train Station Accessibility Improvements. Platform and accessibility upgrades and circulation modifications that affect adjacent road access and pedestrian coordination.



Boston Post Road in Downtown during an off-peak hour

the Merritt Parkway and points farther north. Tokeneke Road (State Route 136) provides access to neighborhoods in the southeastern part of town, with links to Rowayton and the City of Norwalk. Hoyt Street (State 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. West Avenue is a minor arterial that connects Stamford, Noroton Heights, and Downtown Darien. In all, Darien has approximately 81 miles of public roads and 31 miles of private roads, according to the Department of Public Works. Private roads provide local access, primarily in older neighborhoods along the shoreline, such as Noroton Bay, Salem Straits, and Tokeneke. Maintenance of private roads is the responsibility of homeowners' associations and/or private owners.

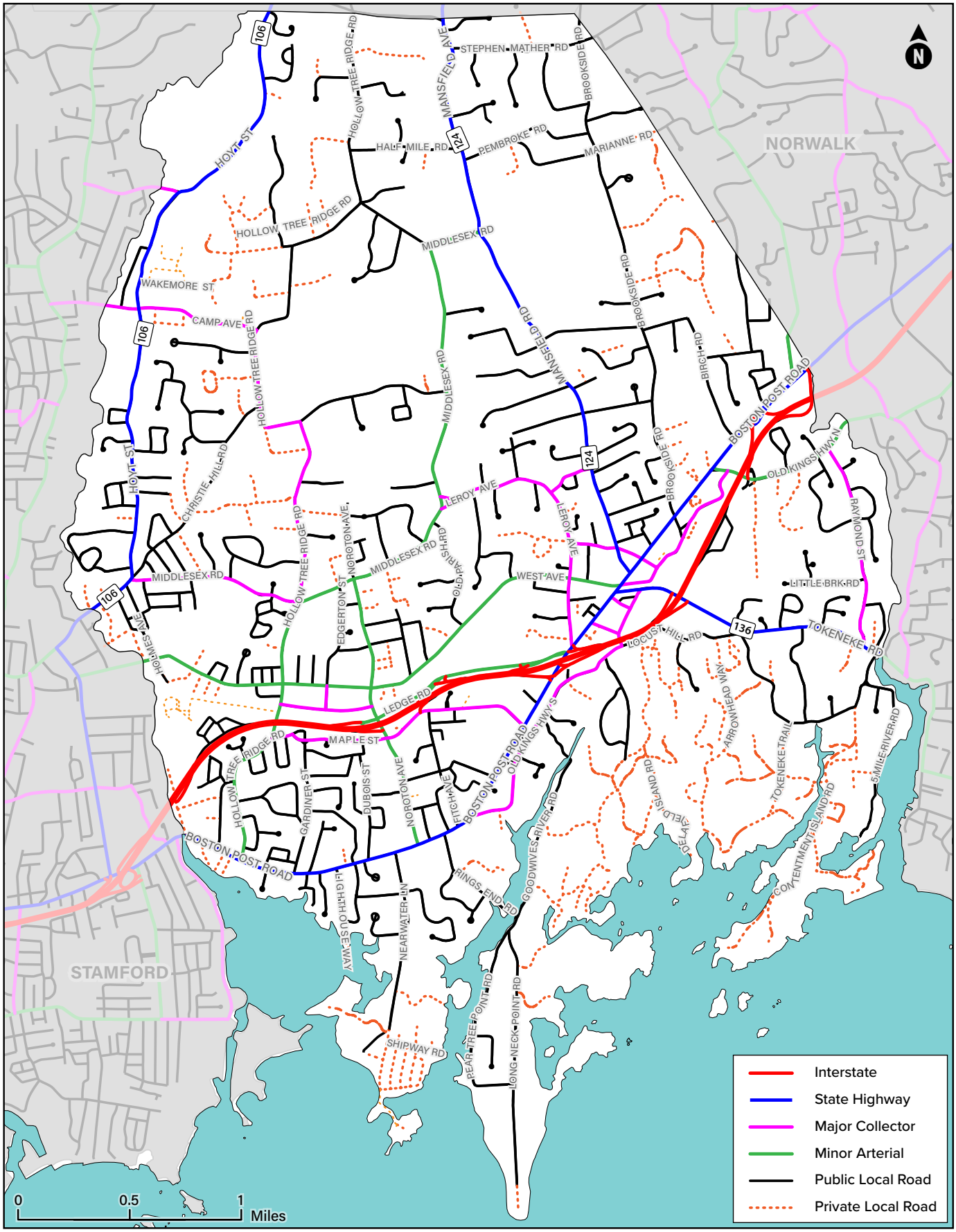
Traffic Volumes & Congestion

Darien has experienced traffic congestion since the 1950s, which is when I-95 was constructed, given its location along the Eastern Seaboard between New York City and Boston. Today, traffic congestion in Darien is most pronounced during weekday morning and evening peak hours and is closely tied to regional commuting patterns and congestion near schools before arrival and dismissal. Congestion regularly occurs at I-95 interchanges, especially Exits 10 and 11, along Boston Post Road near commercial centers and signalized intersections, and on key collector roads during the morning and evening rush hours. Congestion also increases noticeably during Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays in both the summer and on holiday weekends.

Traffic frequently spills over onto local streets due to incidents on I-95 as motorists seek alternate routes, often aided by on-board navigation, temporarily impacting local roads that were not designed for high traffic volumes. This diverted traffic adds congestion to Boston Post Road. Another location with significant congestion is Ledge Road on Saturday mornings as a result of residents traveling to and from I-95, Whole Foods, and the Town's Transfer Station.

Traffic from Stamford and Norwalk also contribute to

Figure 7-1. Roadway Classification Map



congestion on Darien's roadways. As both cities add housing, office, and retail space, motorists in Darien experience more peak-hour bottlenecks at interchanges, increased spillover traffic on Boston Post Road, and greater variability in travel times—even though most of the traffic neither originates nor ends in Darien.

Many residents commented through the Town-Wide Survey that traffic is congested in Downtown, especially along Boston Post Road and in Noroton Heights. They attribute this congestion to the new redevelopment projects. However, there are many contributing factors leading to congestion during peak periods: I-95 being one of the only routes for travel into the rest of New England, regional traffic diversions, development in Stamford and Norwalk, the increase in freight activity and package delivery, the lack of a street grid in Darien that can disperse traffic and provide alternate routes, and the shift toward children being transported to and from schools by their parents instead of riding the school bus.

Despite the sense among many residents that traffic has been increasing, CTDOT data, the latest of which is from 2023, shows that traffic volumes have generally decreased over time along Post Road.[2] Figure 7-2 shows the gradual decrease in traffic volumes (in Average Annual Daily Traffic - AADT) along a part of Boston Post Road.[3] Figure 7-3 shows traffic increasing along a part of Heights Road before a steep decline in 2017.[4] Traffic volumes along both sections of roads were the lowest during the pandemic (2020-2021), but started to recover by 2023. Volumes for 2024 and 2025 are not yet available from CTDOT. Given the level of redevelopment activity in Stamford, Darien, and Norwalk, data from 2024 and 2025 could reveal an increase in traffic volumes.

However, traffic volume, which is the number of cars passing a point in a 24-hour period (i.e. average annual daily traffic, or AADT) is different from traffic congestion, which is the length of time it takes a motorist to travel through an area. Residents are likely encountering more traffic congestion during peak hours. Even if the total traffic volume has decreased, more residents may be traveling on a particular road at the same

Figure 7-2. CTDOT Traffic Volumes along Boston Post Road

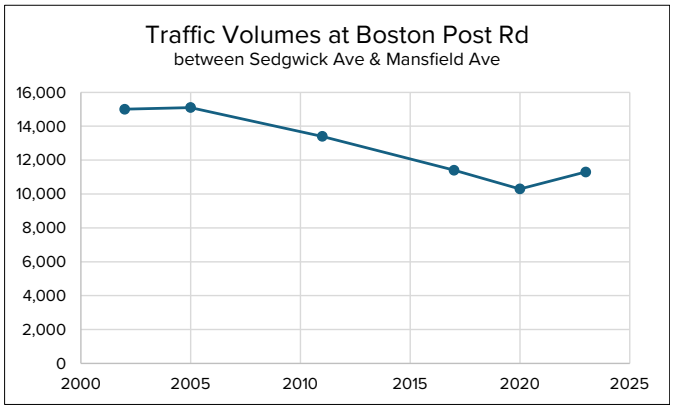
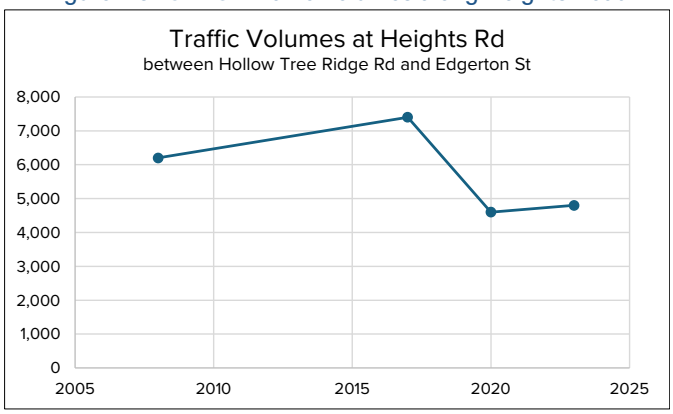


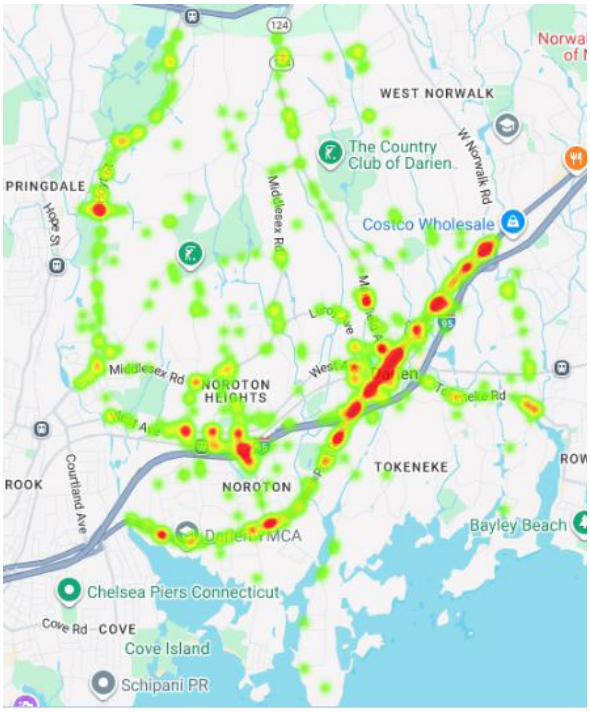
Figure 7-3. CTDOT Traffic Volumes along Heights Road



Studying the Boston Post Road

The Boston Post Road (Route 1) corridor in Darien has been the subject of several past studies. SWRPA's *2013 Route 1 Corridor Study* recommended a "road diet" to reduce the cross section of the northern and southern sections of the road from four lanes to two, but the concept was not approved due to concerns about traffic congestion and pushing overflow traffic into surrounding residential streets. After several years of consideration, CTDOT adopted a "road diet" for Boston Post Road in Noroton Heights and west of Corbin Drive to the Exit 13 interchange at I-95. A *2018 Roadway Safety Audit for Route 1* identified key safety issues, leading to recommendations focused on pedestrian safety, bus stop relocation, flooding and drainage at the railroad bridge, and traffic calming. To the west, in the City of Norwalk, WestCOG published the *2026 Norwalk Route 1 Corridor Master Plan Study for Connecticut Avenue & Van Buren Avenue*, which provides recommendations on enhancing mobility, safety, and accessibility on the corridor. Regionally, the *2016 Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study* explored bus rapid transit (BRT) along Route 1 from Greenwich to New Haven. The concept is being implemented in New Haven and West Haven.

Figure 7-4. Crash Location Heat Map[10]



time, making the road more congested. Residents also might be experiencing more congestion due to traffic signals that accommodate pedestrian crossings, which can lead to longer waiting times at intersections, even when fewer cars are present.

Crash History & Safety

Vehicular crashes in Darien are concentrated along its major regional corridors, where high traffic volumes, congestion, and complex access points increase conflicts. According to CTDOT, the highest number of crashes occur on I-95, especially near interchanges with Route 136 (Tokeneke Road), Noroton Avenue, and Brookside Road, where there is heavy merging and weaving activity. Crashes occur on Boston Post Road due to frequent driveways, limited sight distances, signalized intersections, and mixed local and through traffic. In Figure 7-4, red areas correspond with more crashes.

In recent years, the Planning & Zoning Commission (P&Z Commission) has required builders and developers to eliminate back-out parking in commercial and mixed-use developments along Heights Road and Boston Post Road. In several key locations, the P&Z Commission, working closely with the Local Traffic Authority (the Darien Police Commission), has required consolidation of curb cuts and "right turn only" treatment on curb cuts on Boston Post Road. This also helps minimize traffic conflicts and improves traffic flow.

School Transportation & Traffic

All Darien Public Schools students, other than those qualifying for transportation under an individualized education program (IEP), are required to meet transportation policy eligibility for bus transportation. Only one bus per student is assigned. These distances are as follows:

- Kindergarten through 5th grade > 0.5 mile
- 6th grade through 8th grade > 1 mile
- 9th grade through 12th grade > 2 miles

Morning arrival and afternoon dismissal periods are peak times for traffic around Darien's schools. During school hours, all school frontages and primary approach routes are designated by the Town as reduced-speed zones. These areas are marked with flashing beacons, pavement markings, and prominent signs. Darien Police deploy targeted speed enforcement during arrival and dismissal, especially at locations where speeding concerns have been reported.

Schools have coordinated circulation plans and staggered dismissal procedures. Police presence is occasionally deployed at peak times or during the early weeks of the school year to support smooth operations and reinforce safe behaviors. A recent "right-turn only" curb cut out from Hindley School directly to Boston Post Road, created as part of its renovation in 2025-2026, helps reduce traffic at the Nearwater Lane and Boston Post Road intersection. Nonetheless, queuing of vehicles on Hollow Tree Ridge Road continues to be an issue, causing congestion on local roads during arrival and dismissal times.

A number of residents reported through the Town-Wide Survey that speeding is a major concern near schools and several residential streets and suggested that the Town install speed cameras, speed bumps, and high-visibility crosswalks.

Trucks, Deliveries & Last-Mile Delivery

Truck traffic and last-mile delivery activity in Darien have increased, reflecting regional freight growth along I-95, the expansion of e-commerce, and higher demand for residential and commercial deliveries. While tractor trailers primarily use state highways, delivery vehicles such as box trucks and vans access local streets, sometimes contributing to curbside conflicts, congestion, and safety concerns. Bridge strikes at Boston Post Road and the railroad bridge trestle have been an ongoing concern, but the frequency has been reduced with CTDOT having installed "Low Bridge" warning signs on I-95 (Exits 11, 12, and 13) and painted warnings directly on exit ramps to alert drivers before they reach Downtown. The possibility of installing an over-height vehicle detection system has been discussed but not implemented.

Electric Vehicles (EVs)

Not including the charging stations at the two I-95 rest stops, there are four public charging locations in Darien:

- Old King's Market (EVgo Fast Charger): 1 port
- Heights Crossing Garage (ChargePoint Level 2): 5 ports
- Whole Foods Market (Level 1): 4 ports
- Equinox Darien (ChargePoint Level 2): 1 port

Tesla has received local approvals to install 12 additional charging stations at Old King's Market. Corbin District Phase II will include 24 EV charging stations, a mix of 16 Level 2 chargers, and eight Level 3 chargers. The Level 2 chargers will be located in the underground garage and the Level 3 chargers will be in a surface parking lot near I-95. There is room to install 28 more Level 2 chargers in the future.[5] Phase 1 of the Corbin District project has 12 charging stations in private garages set aside for residents.

There are more than 72,000 EVs registered in the state as of the end of 2025.[6] This includes all-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. The State Council on Environmental Quality anticipates this number increasing by more than 550,000 vehicles over the next ten years.[7]

Parking for Downtown Patrons

Parking in Downtown consists of on-street municipal spaces and off-street private and municipal lots. All on-street parking is free, but limited to 1-2 hours. On-street parking supports short-term customer turnover, while public lots accommodate a mix of short and longer stays for shoppers, commuters, and employees. Some municipal lots are designated only for commuters, while others are designated for shoppers and/or tenants/employees. Downtown customers are allowed to park at the Darien train station for free in the evenings and on weekends.

The privately-owned lots in Downtown serve on-site tenants and customers; they are not available for the general public or for long-term parking, which limits the perceived availability of parking.

> The goal is to encourage Downtown customers to "Park Once & Walk," or to park their cars only once and access multiple businesses on foot.

Several residents commented through the Town-Wide Survey that some privately-owned lots have spaces reserved for specific businesses, but those spaces are often empty, leaving fewer spaces for the public. Some residents noted a lack of parking near popular destinations and that signs are often confusing.

Zoning incentives exist to encourage Downtown businesses to cede their lots to the Town so that it can consolidate municipal parking and examine shared parking strategies. This would also allow the Town to reconfigure the design of the lots to improve pedestrian safety and access to businesses. The goal is to encourage Downtown customers to park only once and access multiple businesses on foot.

The completion of The Corbin District development might impact parking and traffic dynamics in Downtown. While the project is creating more than 800 on-site parking spaces through a combination of surface and structured parking, it will likely increase the number of visitors to Downtown and could increase traffic congestion and parking demand. Employees and residents will park in the parking garage while customers will park in the surface lot.

The Corbin District had floated parking demand and traffic congestion management concepts, including, for example, the idea to reimburse visitors during the December holiday shopping season for using a rideshare provider to get from home to Downtown if a certain amount of money is spent at stores.

Taking the Train

Darien residents rely heavily upon Metro-North Railroad, which provides commuter access to New York City, with some describing it through the Town-Wide Survey as reliable and essential for commuting. Darien's two Metro-North Railroad stations on the New Haven Line—in addition to the Glenbrook and Talmadge Hill stations on the New Canaan Branch—are important parts of life for many residents who work outside of home either every day or most days and/or spend time in New York City during the weekends. Frequent and reliable train service is one of the reasons people move to Darien. According to Metro-North Railroad's 2024 Annual Ridership Report, ridership on the New Haven Line increased 12% from 2023's figures to 32 million. Weekend ridership also increased by 20%, but overall ridership on the New Haven Line is still short of its pre-pandemic peak of 35 million in 2018.

People arrive at the two train stations by all modes of transportation: car, motorcycle, moped, e-bike, e-scooter, bicycle, and foot. Those that drive to the Darien train station can park at one of ten lots with designated permit spaces for daily commuters. Overall, there are 954 spaces available. Those that drive to the Noroton Heights train station can park in one of three lots that, in total, contain 765 spaces (323 daily pay station spaces and 442 permit spaces). There are also eight 15 minute spaces. Parking is also available at Hollow Tree Self Storage, where the developer was required to provide dedicated parking spaces for commuters.

The wait list for permits at the Leroy West lot is more than 500 and at the Noroton Heights lots is more than 800, although some people put their names on both lists. Others who may no longer commute daily often continue to hold onto their permits for fear of not being able to get their permits back once they lose them. Construction at the Darien train station has caused the wait list to grow longer.

The lot at the Noroton Heights train station is operated by the Town of Darien, but it is owned by the State of Connecticut and, therefore, non-residents can hold a permit. The Leroy West Lot at the Darien Train Station is owned by the Town of Darien and only Darien residents can hold permits for this lot. The Mechanic Street parking is also owned by the State, so non-residents can receive a parking permit.

HOW DARIENITES GET TO WORK

According to the 2023 American Community Survey:

- **44% Residents Drive to Work**
- **21% Take Public Transportation**
- **32% Work from Home**
- **2% Walk**
- **1% Take Taxi, Motorcycle, or Other**

The 2019 ACS reported that 31% of Darien residents took public transportation and 9% worked from home.

Parking at the Darien and Noroton Heights train stations is free evenings and weekends. During weekday business hours, a permit or hourly payment via pay stations is required. Racks are available at both train stations for bicycles and scooters.

In 2025, Darien purchased the parking lot near the Darien train station at 37 West Avenue from a private owner. Called the Koons Parking Lot, it contains approximately 300 parking spaces. This purchase ensures that the lot will continue to be used for commuters—both regular commuters and daily commuters who might only need to park there on occasion. The Town will continue to operate it as a parking lot, but might consider other ideas in the future, such as building a parking garage for commuters and Downtown employees.[8]

Both the 344 and 341 CTtransit buses drop off and pick up within one block of both the Darien and Noroton Heights train stations.

Train Station Improvements

Darien Train Station

CTDOT has been undertaking improvements to the station as part of a broader effort to modernize the State's rail network and to enhance the overall passenger experience. The $33 million project is currently underway. Improvements include heated platforms, new speakers for train announcements, improved lighting, public information display boards, new elevators, ADA-compliant ramps and sidewalks, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.



The Darien train station

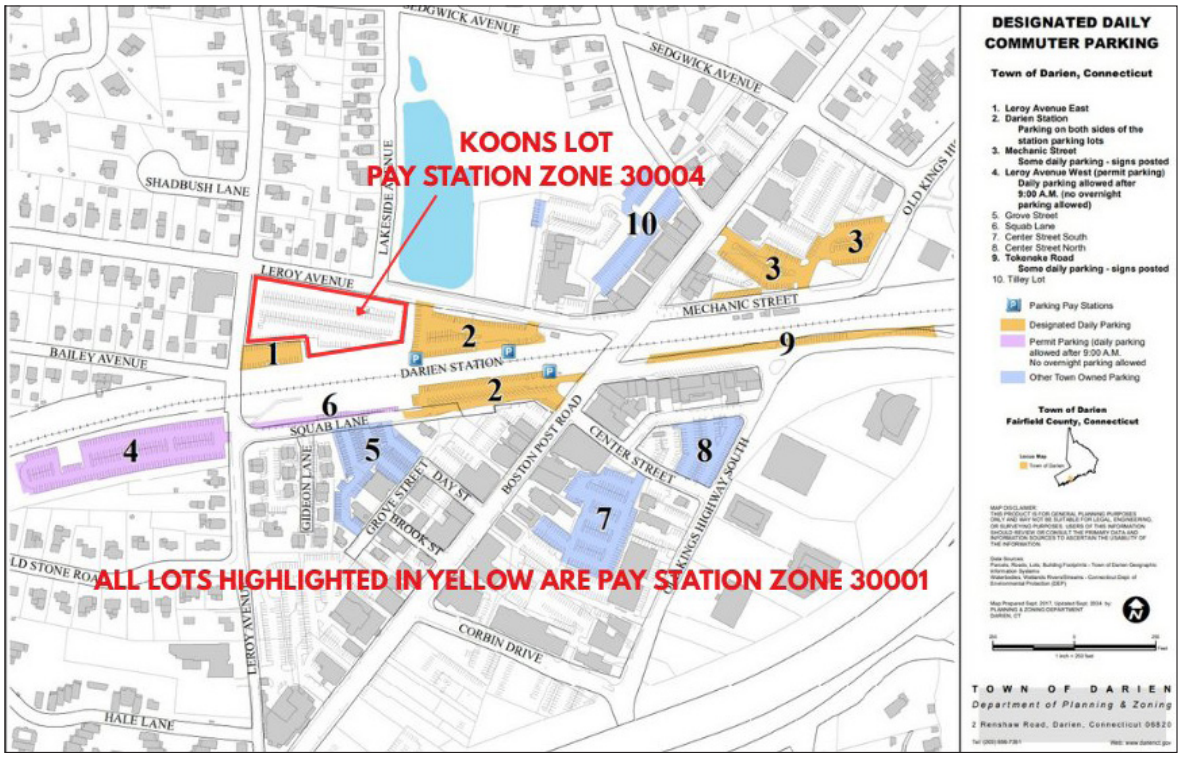
Noroton Heights Train Station

Through the Town-Wide Survey many residents lamented the condition of the Noroton Heights train station, describing it as unattractive, outdated, and run down. WestCOG's 2018 Noroton Heights Station Area Study identified improvements that should be made to the station and surrounding areas. Prior to this study, CTDOT had replaced the platforms. Various upgrades are in CTDOT's plans for 2030, and there may be an opportunity for public-private partnership between the Town and CTDOT to ensure that necessary improvements are completed in a timely manner.



The Noroton Heights train station

Figure 7-5. Designated commuter parking map for Darien train station



NOROTON HEIGHTS STATION AREA STUDY

This 2018 WestCOG study envisions the long-term transformation of the Noroton Heights rail station and immediate surroundings. It recommends improving pedestrian safety and access to the station, modernizing and managing parking more efficiently, improving multi-modal access through bicycle accommodations and safer drop-off areas, and coordinating station improvements with adjacent redevelopment projects. The study also recommends reconfiguring and redesigning aspects of the existing station building, including possible changes to the location and design of the station building to improve access, capacity, and functionality. The study depicts several concepts for a new or expanded station building footprint, ranging from expanding the current structure to relocating it.

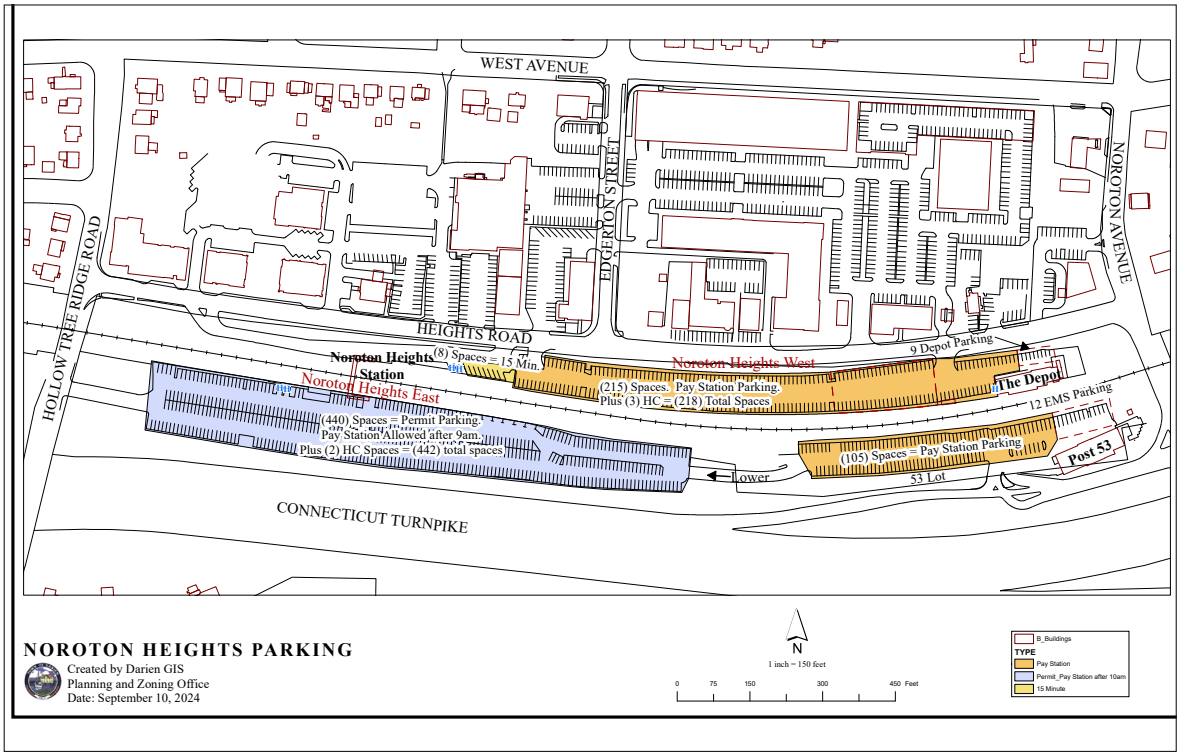
Implementation will require funding and coordination with CTDOT. To date, the Town has implemented the recommendation to replace the sidewalk on the south side of the railroad tracks. In addition, a concrete sidewalk has been constructed to connect Hollow Tree Ridge Road and Ledge Road to the northbound railroad platform on the south side of the tracks. This connection includes ADA-compliant curb ramps and marked crosswalks to improve pedestrian accessibility.

Riding the Bus

Bus service in Darien is provided primarily by CTtransit, with Route 341 connecting Norwalk and Stamford along Route 1, serving destinations in Darien and providing connections to the Metro-North Railroad at the Darien and Noroton Heights stations. This service connects residents to employment centers, shopping areas, and regional transit connections. The Norwalk Transit District also provides regional bus services in Norwalk and Westport. For residents with disabilities who cannot use regular fixed-route transit, ADA paratransit service is available within a 3/4 mile radius of operating CTtransit bus routes in Darien.

Regionally, the 2017 Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study explored bus rapid transit (BRT) along Route 1 from Greenwich to New Haven. BRT is currently in the concept development stage in New Haven and West Haven under the name "MOVE New Haven Bus Rapid Transit Project."[11] The project is listed in the South Western Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2023-2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan for its potential to improve mobility and reduce congestion in the region.

Figure 7-6. Designated Commuter Parking Map for Noroton Heights train station



Transportation for Seniors & People with Disabilities

The organization At Home in Darien coordinates transportation for Darien residents to anywhere within the towns of Darien, Stamford, Norwalk, and New Canaan, for those residents ages 60 and above and ages 18 and above who are physically disabled. The fleet includes a Chrysler sedan and a handicap-accessible Toyota minivan. Both volunteer and paid drivers are used. The organization provided more than 5,000 one-way rides to Stamford and Norwalk in 2025. Fifty percent of the rides are to medical appointments. The Town insures the vehicles. If someone needs a ride during the weekend or to the airport, the organization provides a taxi voucher for 50% off. At Home in Darien operates Monday to Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. For the organization, mobility is not just about covering physical distances, but about overcoming the emotional distances that isolation can bring.12

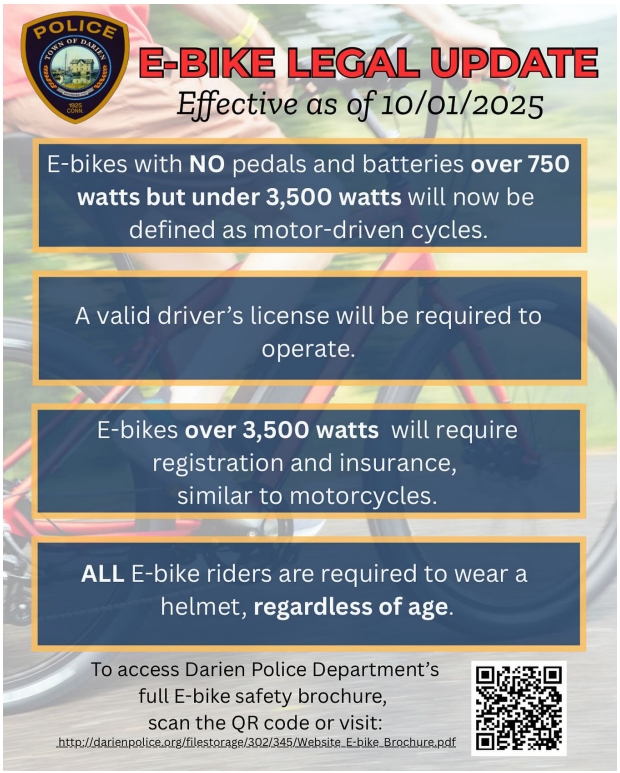
Biking

The Town-Wide Survey Results revealed strong interest in biking in Darien among respondents. There are very few bicycle facilities and accommodations in town. In Darien, challenges to creating on-road bicycle facilities include narrow roadways, limited rights-of-way, and CTDOT ownership of key roadways. SWRPA's 2013 Route 1 Corridor Study recommended a "road diet" to reduce the lane widths in the southern part of the corridor to create a 5-foot striped shoulder that could accommodate bicycles. WestCOG's 2023 Regional Bicycle Plan includes a concept for a Darien/New Canaan Bike Route (see Figure 7-8 on page 65). The preliminary route extends from northern New Canaan through both downtown areas and south to Darien's beaches. The route would connect schools, parks, local businesses, and transit stations. This concept turned into a pilot project through the Department of Public Health. In consultation with Darien and New Canaan, a concept for a 25-mile route was developed that included various types of bicycle facilities including sharrows, bike lanes, and buffered bike lanes. Figure 7-8 on page 65 shows the alignment of the bicycle route and the corresponding facility type.

The Norwalk Bike Walk Commission (NBWC) imagines a future where Norwalk, Darien, Stamford, and Greenwich residents can safely walk, bike, and move freely across borders. The NBWC collaborated on an application for a grant to fund the planning and design of a multi-use path connecting Norwalk and Darien.[16] The East Coast Greenway, a multi-use trail that aims to connect communities from Maine to Florida, passes through Darien along Boston Post Road, Old Kings Highway South and Tokeneke Road.

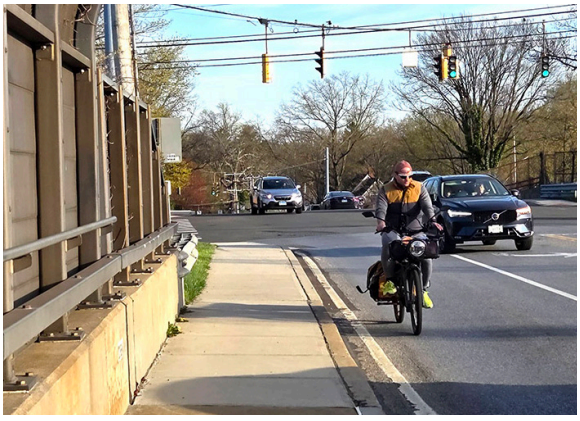
E-bikes have become more common in Darien, especially among teenagers. The State adopted laws regulating e-bikes and e-scooters in 2025 that require a driver's license and/or insurance for certain types of e-bikes. All e-bike riders must wear a helmet, regardless of age. E-scooter riders under the age of 18 must wear a helmet. The Darien Police Department has been communicating about and enforcing these rules and safe riding in the community (see Figure 7-7).

Figure 7-7. A Darien Police Department social media post about the new e-bike laws



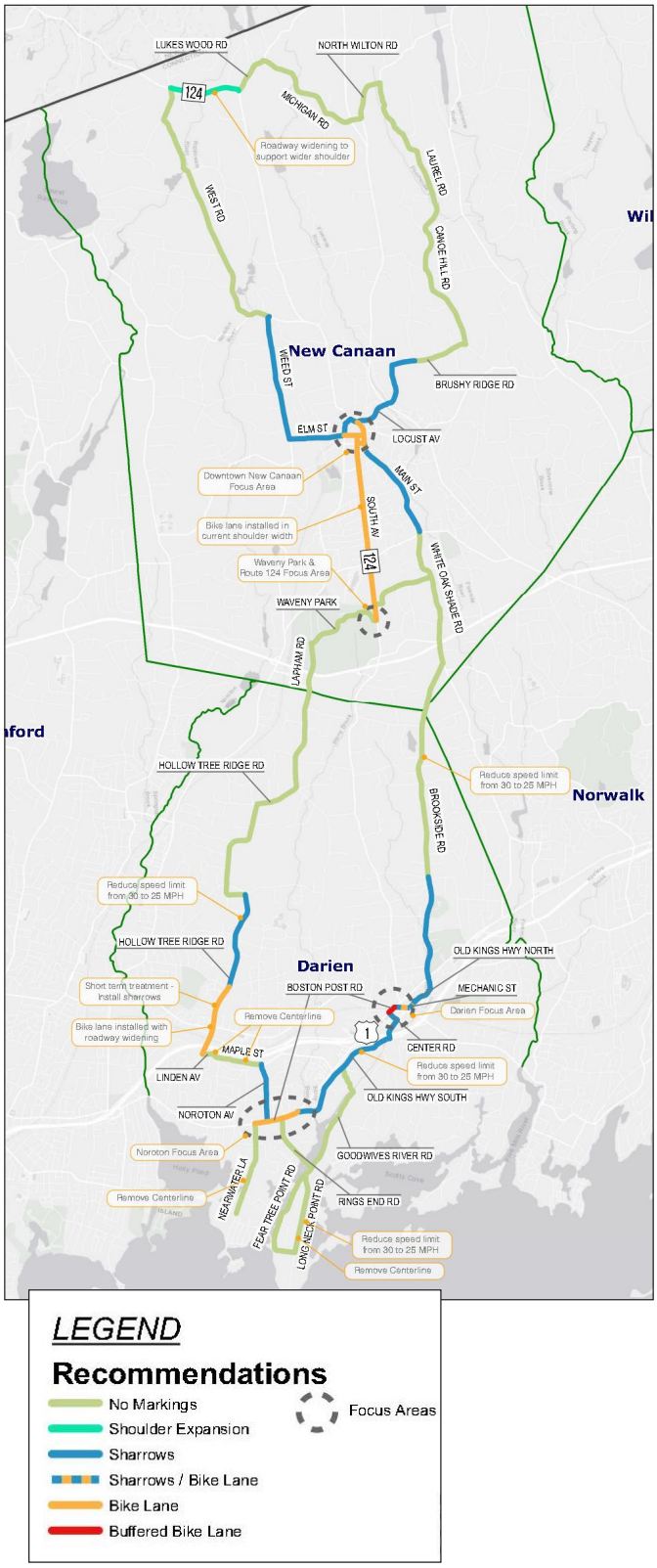


▲ *A bicyclist rides east along Heights Road*



▲ *A bicyclist rides north along Noroton Avenue*

Figure 7-8. The New Canaan / Darien Bike Loop Concept Map from WestCOG's *2023 Regional Bike Plan*



Walking

The 2016 POCD reported "growing interest in walking and pedestrianism in Darien." It includes a map that highlights possible sidewalk focus areas that should serve as a guide for sidewalk investments.[13] This interest continues to grow, and the Town has responded through investments in pedestrian infrastructure. The Town had established a Pedestrian Infrastructure Advisory Committee in 2015 that culminated in a presentation that identified 10 key areas where improvements should be made first: areas within a half-mile of schools and near four train stations, including the Talmadge Hill and Rowayton train stations just beyond Darien's borders, in the Town of New Canaan and City of Norwalk, respectively.[14] Many of the recommendations for crosswalks were not approved by the Local Traffic Authority (LTA).

The Town-Wide Survey Results indicate that residents recognize and appreciate recent sidewalk improvements and repairs, while also expressing a strong desire for continued enhancements. Frequently mentioned areas in need of attention include the Ox Ridge School vicinity, Mansfield Avenue, Hoyt Street, Middlesex Road, Hollow Tree Ridge Road, Old King's Highway South, Nearwater Lane, Edgerton Street, Brookside Road, Tokeneke Road, and Pear Tree Point Road. Walking was ranked as the highest priority among transportation topics in the Town Planning Workshop. Beyond its obvious mobility purposes, At Home in Darien noted the health benefits of walking and the importance of walkability and public spaces to alleviate isolation and loneliness.[15]

Sidewalks, of course, are a key element of pedestrian infrastructure. Others include curbs, curb ramps, crosswalks, pedestrian-actuated signals, lighting, and traffic calming. All of these are important for creating a safe environment for walking. However, several factors impact the feasibility of adding new sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure in certain locations, such as limited right-of-way and the presence of stone walls, trees, underground utilities, and slopes. Furthermore, new sidewalks must meet ADA accessibility requirements, which include requirements for width, surface, slope, and curb ramps. State roads are under the jurisdiction of CTDOT, which requires coordination with the agency.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) has gradually been undertaking sidewalk rehabilitation and construction projects. Since 2016, DPW has rehabilitated approximately 30,000 linear feet of sidewalk and constructed 3,000 linear feet of new sidewalk. Today, there are approximately 25 miles of sidewalks in town.

Since 2016, DPW has rehabilitated 30,000 linear feet of sidewalk and constructed 3,000 linear feet of new sidewalk. Today, there are approximately 25 miles of sidewalks in town.

Darien's Six-Year Capital Plan allocates funding for DPW to continue repairing uneven and deteriorated sidewalks. The Town hired a sidewalk consultant in 2025 and is planning for the systematic rehabilitation of sidewalks adjacent to Town roads and State highways. DPW evaluates sidewalks based on a list of various criteria, which is updated annually, and a list of handicap ramps due for inspection. DPW also will be addressing ADA compliance throughout town, as required by the State. WestCOG completed a project evaluating ADA accessibility in its member communities.

Furthermore, Darien recently created an Advisory Sidewalk Committee to evaluate and recommend where the Town should extend existing sidewalks and/or add new sidewalk segments to improve pedestrian safety, connectivity, and access to key destinations. The Committee will work with the Town's consultant to develop and present a scored and prioritized list of sidewalk opportunities for consideration as part of the Town's capital planning and budgeting process.



A photo of a sharrow, or shared lane marking, which reminds drivers to share the road with bicyclists (photo by Erica Fisher, licensed by CC BY 2.0)

Chapter 7 Endnotes

1 CT Department of Motor Vehicles, last updated in February 2025

2 CTDOT Traffic Monitoring Station Viewer

3 CTDOT Traffic Monitoring Station Viewer

4 CTDOT Traffic Monitoring Station Viewer

5 Personal communication with David Genovese of Baywater Properties.

6 EvaluateCT, accessible at https://atlaspolicy.com/public/evaluatect

7 State Council on Environmental Quality. Accessed from https://portal.ct.gov/ceq/ar-23-gold/2023-ceq-annual-report-ebook/personal-impact---waste-diversion/transportation on January 28, 2026.

8 Kaufman, Richard, "Darien Issues Update On Newly-Acquired Koons Parking Lot," Patch, January 6, 2026.

9 See Darien Advisory Sidewalk Committee Public Hearing Presentation, September 12, 2026

10 UCONN Crash Data Repository

11 See CTDOT MOVE New Haven BRT Project, accessible at https://portal.ct.gov/dot/projects/new-haven-brt

12 Out & About. At Home in Darien, Winter 2024, 16:1.

13 2016 POCD, page 137.

14 Gurliacci, David, "Town Panel Recommends Long List of Safety Improvements for Walkers, Cyclists," Darienite.com, December 15, 2015.

15 Personal communication with Executive Director Chris Jones.

16 Letter by Emily Burnaman, Chair, Norwalk Bike Walk Commission, posted on Facebook on May 5, 2025.

Recommendations

7-1. Encourage Road & Intersection Improvements that Enhance Public Safety

a. Continue to coordinate with CTDOT and Darien Police to minimize bridge strikes at the railroad trestle across Boston Post Road.

b. Coordinate with CTDOT to optimize signal timing and lane configurations at I-95 interchanges to reduce traffic congestion and backups that stretch onto I-95.

c. Continue to require the elimination of back-out parking onto Heights Road and Boston Post Road as properties with this feature are redeveloped.

d. Evaluate the need for traffic calming along roadways and intersections. This could include reducing speed limits, installing neighborhood traffic circles at certain intersections, or other interventions. Consult WestCOG's 2026 Traffic Calming and Complete Streets Best Practices Toolbox.

7-2. Reduce Traffic Congestion

a. Prepare a post-redevelopment traffic study in Downtown and Noroton Heights that examines the accuracy of developer traffic study projections, provides an overall analysis of post-redevelopment traffic volumes and levels of service, and recommends congestion reduction measures.

b. Prepare a Safe Routes to School Plan and a School Access & Parking Study for each school. Continue to upgrade signs, crossings, and drop-off/pick-up procedures near schools to reduce conflicts and improve safety.

c. In school renovation, expansion, and reconstruction projects, evaluate and design treatments to improve traffic flow on and adjacent to school properties, provide adequate on-site parking, and improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

d. Evaluate creating a connection between Old Kings Highway North and South. This would be a capital-intensive project requiring coordination with and approval from CTDOT, Metro-North Railroad, and other agencies. The project would involve constructing a tunnel beneath the railroad tracks.



An example of a neighborhood traffic circle (photo by Richard Drdul, licensed by CC BY-SA 2.0)

7-3. Expand the Network of Facilities & Accommodations for Pedestrians

a. Consider the recommendations of the Advisory Sidewalk Committee when establishing priorities for completing and expanding the Town's sidewalk network. Evaluate opportunities for additional crosswalks at streets and ramps intersecting Boston Post Road, subject to safety, traffic engineering review, Local Traffic Authority jurisdiction, and CTDOT approval.

b. Consider other pedestrian safety features such as crosswalks, signals, clear sight-lines, and planted buffers.

7-4. Encourage Facilities & Accommodations for Safe Biking throughout Town

a. Develop a Bicycle Plan.

   i. The plan should identify investments in bicycling facilities, safety, and accommodations. It typically would include a proposed on-street and off-street bikeway network, design guidelines, policy recommendations, and implementation strategies.

ii. Reexamine the Darien/New Canaan Loop concept from WestCOG's *2023 Regional Bike Plan*. Consider options along the East Coast Greenway.

iii. Evaluate parking needs and policies for pedal bicycles, e-bikes, and e-scooters at parks and beaches.

b. Continue to evaluate sidewalks, pedestrian access, bicycle parking and storage, and related accommodations during the site plan and Special Permit review process.

c. Consider amending the zoning regulations to:

i. Require new commercial, mixed-use, and multi-family development to provide pedestrian and bicycle facilities and connections.

ii. Include requirements for bicycle racks and bicycle parking/storage in multi-family development.

7-5. Improve Multimodal Access to the Train Stations

a. Continue to ensure sufficient, convenient parking for commuters.

b. Evaluate ways to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, bus, and vehicular access to the Darien and Noroton Heights Stations through safer crossings, improved circulation, better directional signs, coordinated parking and drop-off management, protected bicycle storage, bus shelters, etc.



▲ *The Noroton Heights train station building in 2026. An ADA-compliant handicap ramp was added in 2018 as part of a broader CTDOT platform replacement project.*

c. Continue to collaborate with CTDOT to implement recommendations from the *2018 Noroton Heights Station Area Study*, including the concept of building a new station.

d. Monitor potential plans to implement bus rapid transit (BRT) as first explored in CTDOT's 2017 Route 1 Bus Rapid Transit Feasibility Study. Consult with WestCOG.

7-6. Update and Modernize the Vehicular Wayfinding Sign System

a. Create a coordinated vehicular wayfinding system that guides residents and visitors to key destinations, including Downtown, Noroton Heights, beaches, parks, train stations, parking areas, recreation facilities, historic sites, and civic institutions.

b. Consider design concepts for gateway treatments at points of entry into Darien from Stamford, Norwalk, and New Canaan.

c. Develop a system to help motorists locate and understand rules for parking areas in Downtown. Clear signs can identify public parking areas and rules and also strategically direct motorists to under-utilized parking areas. Real-time availability and information could be provided through social media or an app.

7-7. Continue to Plan for Increased Delivery Vehicles and Last-Mile Delivery Activity

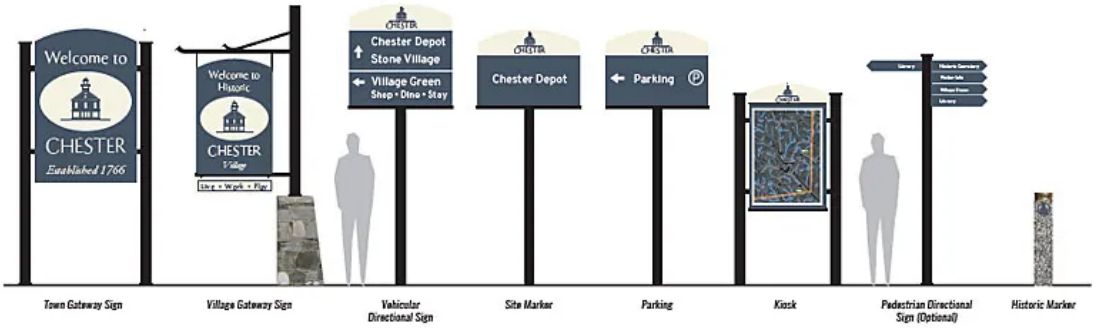
a. Reexamine and update curb management, loading zones, and delivery practices—especially in Downtown and Noroton Heights—to reduce conflicts with pedestrians, cyclists, rideshare vehicles, and local traffic, while also supporting business needs.

b. Modify zoning regulations for multifamily and mixed-use projects to accommodate or require rideshare drop-off/pickup areas, loading areas for delivery and moving vehicles, bicycle racks and bicycle storage, and areas for trash storage and pickup.

c. Incorporate delivery vehicle (e.g, FedEx, Amazon, UPS) circulation into the site plan review of multifamily projects to minimize double parking on streets and to ensure traffic and pedestrian safety.

7-8. Continue to Manage Commercial Parking to Maximize Visibility & Availability

Continue to ensure on-street spaces are available for customers. Certain parking spaces within municipal lots should be clearly signed for Downtown employees, who might otherwise park in on-street spaces. Consider collaborations with owners of private lots to share parking on certain days and time periods for Downtown customers.



An example of a wayfinding system (montage and sign design by SE Group)

Implementation Strategy

Legend

Phase	Lead & Support Entities	Potential Cost / Investment
Priority = Priority (start within 6 months from now) **Short** = Short-Term (start bet. 6 months and 2 yrs. from now) **Mid** = Mid-Term (start within 2-4 yrs. from now) **Long** = Long-Term (start 4 yrs. or later from now)	**Gov** = Board of Selectmen **Dep** = Town Departments **Com** = Boards, Commissions, Committees **Org** = Local & Regional Organizations **Agn**= External Agencies **Oth** = Other	**$** = $150,000 or less **$$** = $150,000 to $500,000 **$$$** = $500,000 to $1 million **$$$$** = > $1 million

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Impl. Cost Funding Source
7-1	**Encourage Roadway & Intersection Improvements that Enhance Public Safety**	Short	**Department of Public Works, Police Department (LTA), Board of Education** **Com**: Advisory Sidewalk Committee **Org:** WestCOG **Agn**: CTDOT	$ $$$$ CTDOT, Capital Budget
7-2	**Reduce Traffic Congestion**	Short	**Department of Public Works, Police Department (LTA), Board of Education** **Com**: Advisory Sidewalk Committee **Agn**: CTDOT	$ $$$ CTDOT, Capital Budget
7-3	**Expand the Network of Facilities & Accommodations for Pedestrians**	Priority	**Department of Public Works** **Dep:** Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Advisory Sidewalk Committee, Planning & Zoning Commission **Agn**: CTDOT	$ $$$$ CTDOT, Capital Budget
7-4	**Encourage Accommodations for Safe Biking throughout Town**	Mid	**Department of Public Works, Planning & Zoning Department** **Com:** Parks & Recreation Commission **Org:** WestCOG, East Coast Greenway **Agn**: CTDOT **Oth**: City of Norwalk, Town of New Canaan, City of Stamford	$ $$ CTDOT, Capital Budget
7-5	**Improve Multimodal Access to the Train Station**	Short to Long	**Department of Public Works** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Org**: WestCOG **Agn**: CTDOT, CTtransit	$$ $$$$ CTDOT, Capital Budget
7-6	**Update and Modernize the Vehicular Wayfinding System**	Mid	**Department of Public Works** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Parks & Recreation **Oth**: Local Institutions (e.g., Darien Library)	$ $$ Capital Budget, Local Institutions
7-7	**Continue to Plan for Increased Delivery Vehicles and Last-Mile Delivery Activity**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works	n/a
7-8	**Continue to Manage Commercial Parking to Maximize Customer Convenience**	Priority	**Department of Public Works** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission	$ $$ Oper. Budget


DARIEN HIGH SCHOOL

8. COMMUNITY FACILITIES, AMENITIES & SERVICES

Darien offers exemplary community facilities, amenities, and services for its residents. Among those enjoyed by many residents are its parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities; school facilities and fields; the transfer station; and the library. Darien offers many other services that are vital for the health and safety of the public—like emergency services—that residents may not interact with regularly.

This chapter reviews the following community facilities, amenities, and services:

- Parks & Recreation Facilities
- Open Spaces
- Town Hall
- Senior Services
- The Transfer Station
- Fire
- Police
- EMS
- Library
- Public Schools

The Darien Library and Darien Public Schools are governed and managed separately from the Town.

Parks & Recreation

The Parks & Recreation Department maintains approximately 220 acres of land, including 212 acres of parkland, open spaces, and several other Town properties. The properties/facilities include the following.

- Weed Beach
- Pear Tree Point Beach
- Cherry Lawn Park
- McGuane Park
- Baker Park
- Frate Park
- Selleck's Woods Nature Preserve (+ friends group)
- Woodland Park Nature Preserve (+ friends group)
- Holahan Field and Fields at Town Hall
- Tilley Pond Park
- Diller Property
- Highland Farm (formerly the Ox Ridge Parcel)
- Stony Brook Park

2017-2026 HIGHLIGHTS

State Legislation

- **2025**. License Fee Elimination (Public Act 25-105). The state eliminated paramedic licensure fees to lower the barrier for entry into the profession.
- **2024**. Municipal Park Protections (2024). Senate Bill 294 significantly strengthened laws protecting parkland. If a town "converts or repurposes" parkland for another use (like a building or parking lot), it is now legally required to replace it with land of equal or greater value and size.
- **2020**. Police Accountability Act (Public Act 20-1). Requires body and dashboard cameras for all officers.

Plans & Studies

Town

- 2025 Great Island Master Plan
- 2025 ADA Access Audit & Transition Plan
- 2023 Emergency Services Analysis Report
- 2022 Street Light Policy
- 2022 Parks & Recreation Commission Standards of Care
- 2018 Parks & Recreation Master Plan



Baker Park

Current Trends

The Parks & Recreation Commission reports the following trends:

- Darien's parks and recreation facilities are well-utilized by residents, even in cold weather.
- Playground projects have been extremely successful in regard to usage.
- Pickleball has become an increasingly popular active recreational activity.
- Recreational activities for youth are seeing high levels of activity. Registration for certain recreational opportunities are selling out very fast.
- There is high demand for tennis lessons.
- Park accessibility and connectivity need to be improved both to get to parks and within parks.



Walking the dogs at Highland Farm, which is maintained by the Department of Parks & Recreation



Playing pickleball (photo by Department of Parks & Recreation)

Figure 8-1. Parks & Recreation Projects

Park/Area	Date/Status	Key Features & Improvements
Highland Farm	2020	Conversion of 31-acre portion of the former Ox Ridge property into passive recreation with a walking loop and 2 parking areas. This was a Board of Selectmen project that is under the Board's jurisdiction and maintained by the Department of Parks & Recreation.
Diller Property	2020	Constructed a path that connects to a larger path around the Darien High School property.
Cherry Lawn Park	2020-2026	Renovated the basketball court and tennis courts and created four new pickleball courts. Replaced playground and safety surfacing. Dredging of pond likely to occur in late 2026.
Weed Beach Infrastructure	2022-2025	Added 6th paddle tennis court. Repainted tennis courts. Added new "Pickleroll" court to paddle court 1 on a seasonal basis.
McGuane Park	2023	Full replacement of playground equipment and safety surfacing. Added shade trees and landscaping.
Tilley Pond Park	2023-2026	Widened and replaced asphalt pathways. Dredged the sediment pond for water quality. Both ponds were dredged in 2026.
Weed Beach Improvements	2024-2026	Continue to remove invasive plants.
Baker Park	2025	Installation of a new playground, surface material, and accessible walkway, with some plantings.
Pear Tree Point Beach	2026	Completed parking lot elevation for flood mitigation; boat ramp reconstruction; new sidewalks; dredging, wetlands restoration; planting of trees and grasses; and an accessible picnic area.

Planned Projects

- **ADA Phased Improvements.** The Parks and Recreation Department has proposed a multi-year phased approach to bring all parks up to current ADA standards, with Cherry Lawn Park, McGuane Park, and Holahan Field identified as the first priorities.
- **Cherry Lawn Bathhouse Renovation**. A budget request was approved to include a full ADA-compliant renovation of the existing bathhouse facilities.
- **PickleRoll Court at Weed Beach**. Funding has been approved for an additional, seasonal Pickle Roll pickleball court at Weed Beach.



The playground at McGuane Park (photo by Darien Parks & Recreation Department)

Public Works

The Department of Public Works (DPW) manages essential Town infrastructure, including 81 miles of roads, sidewalks, 33 bridges, storm drainage, and sanitary sewers. DPW manages the following facilities and activities:

Recycling and Refuse Center (a.k.a. Transfer Station)

DPW manages solid waste disposal, single stream recycling collection, and yard waste composting. It also monitors licensed waste haulers and resident permitholders and operates the commercial scale weigh station for billing commercial clients. The Town pays for tonnage-based disposal charges for hauling and disposal of waste. The Town no longer generates revenue from its recycling program, but it receives a rebate for the cost of hauling recyclables. Paint and mattress recycling continues.

The Swap Shop, which started in 2010, was created to divert items from the waste stream that still have a useful life. Residents with a dump sticker can take items at the Swap Shop for free. In 2025, the Swap Shop partnered with At Home in Darien to dedicate a morning once a month to give seniors the chance to visit when the dump is less crowded. The Swap Shop, which is a popular destination, is run by a dedicated group of volunteers. The weight of waste has continued to increase as haulers are having difficulty finding local places to dispose of their waste. The Town's new contract with Win Waste includes a fee for handling and disposal of single stream recycling. The food waste composting program has been in service for more than five years and still shows slight increases in participation every month.

The transfer station is showing an increase in municipal solid waste and a recent decrease in single stream recycling. In 2022, the Town began charging commercial companies for disposal of single stream recycling. With an increase in cost of recyclables, some of the incentives for haulers to recycle has decreased.

Great Island Master Plan

Completed in 2025 following four public workshops, three community surveys and nearly 5,200 survey responses, the Great Island Master Plan provides a long-term vision for the Town's 60-acre coastal property. Its central goal is to create meaningful public access that respects the ecology of the island. The plan calls for safe and convenient public access, expanded walking trails, protection of the coastline and sensitive ecological areas, preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures, and recreational, educational and community uses. It recommends that improvements be made incrementally, with the Town leading capital projects and long-term stewardship. Implementation is underway. The Town completed the new two-way access road in 2026. Design work is now progressing on on-site parking and related infrastructure. The project remains subject to cost review, required land-use approvals, and Town funding decisions.

Public Buildings Maintenance

DPW maintains Town Hall (including Mather Center), the Police Station, the Public Works Garage, two train stations, pump stations, and assists on an as-needed basis on structures at Town parks and beaches.

The DPW Garage at 126 Ledge Road was expanded and upgraded in the 2010s. It now houses both equipment and space for DPW, Board of Education, and the Parks & Recreation Department. Recent upgrades include a generator, connection to natural gas, and solar panels on the roof of the building.

Town-Owned Open Space

DPW manages the infrastructure and public access projects for Great Island and projects on Highland Farm.

Roadway and Sidewalk Maintenance

DPW is responsible for maintaining 81 miles of roads, 25 miles of sidewalks, and 13 signalized intersections. Darien's 31 miles of private roads are not maintained by DPW.

Infrastructure Improvements

DPW has been focusing on upgrading sewer infrastructure (see Chapter 6: Environment, Climate & Sustainability for more details). The Town does not have any designated sewer expansion or avoidance areas.

Snow Removal

DPW has 22 vehicles involved in snow removal and manages plow routes along local roads. CTDOT manages plowing on state roads.

Permitting

Issues Street Excavation Permits and Sewer Connection Permits.

Waste Management

Handles Town-wide leaf pick-up, Christmas tree pick-up, and spring bulk waste pickup.

Engineering

Provides in-house engineering, including topography maps and public sewer mapping. Residents can submit service requests for issues like potholes, broken signs, or tree issues via the Citizen Service Request Form.



▲ *The DPW Garage (photo courtesy of the Department of Public Works)*



▲ *A volunteer helps out at the Swap Shop (photo by Darien Recycling Center)*



▲ *Darien Town Hall (photo courtesy of the Department of Planning & Zoning)*

Town Hall

The current Darien Town Hall, located at 2 Renshaw Road, opened in 1984, and is the renovation of the former Mather Junior High School building. Originally constructed in 1910, the building now serves as offices for the Town and provides space for the Darien-New Canaan Probate Court, the Mather Center, and At Home in Darien. Some areas within the building are leased to the Darien Arts Center. The walls on the first and second floor contain a number of murals painted during the Great Depression as part of the federal government's support for artists under the Public Works of Art Project when Town Hall was Mather Junior High School. The murals showcase Darien's history, including scenes of Colonial life. A group of artists worked on the murals.

Planned Projects

Interior Facilities

- **Gymnasium Improvements**. Targeted replacement of the "small gym" roof section to address aging and leaks, a rolling plan to resurface or replace the gym floor to maintain safety for sports and community events, and structural repairs to the bridge/walkway leading to the gym entrance.
- **Electrical Panel Upgrades**. Modernizing the electrical panels to support increased digital demands.

Technology & Operations

- **Computer Replacement Cycle**. The Town is in a four-year rolling technology replacement plan, which includes new staff computers to ensure municipal services remain productive and secure.

Exterior & Site Work

- **Front Slope Landscaping**. Landscaping the front grass slope of the Town Hall property to improve curb appeal and prevent erosion.

HVAC

- Replacement/installation of two rooftop AC units.

Figure 8-2. Town Hall Projects

Project	Date/Status	Key Features & Improvements
Front Entrance Reconstruction	2018	Rebuilt the front entry. This project included new interior and exterior handicap accessible ramps and a modernized front circle.
Staircase & Walkway Upgrades	2021-2022	A new concrete staircase was constructed to improve pedestrian flow from the lower parking lot to the front of the building. Adjacent to that staircase was the planting of a pollinator garden area.
Gymnasium Window Replacement	2022-2025	To improve energy efficiency and reduce the "greenhouse effect" in the gym, the north-side windows were replaced, along with east-side windows.
Solar Panel Installation	2017-2019	Solar arrays were installed on the roof to reduce long-term electric costs for the town, a project that provides measurable annual savings.
COVID-19 Safety Retrofitting	2020-2021	While a temporary necessity, the Town made modifications permanent to various office counters and public interaction points, including glass barriers and airflow adjustments, to ensure long-term public health safety.
Heating & HVAC Controls	2022-2023	The Town upgraded the heating control system to move away from outdated, manual-heavy operations to a more automated, energy-efficient model.
Digital Infrastructure	2025	Town Hall has transitioned toward a uniform digital payment system for a smoother experience for residents. Previously, different departments had fragmented payment methods. The Town's Internet firewall was replaced in September 2025. The equipment keeps the entire network safe and secure. Due to multiple failures and outages, the firewall was relocated to Town Hall for better stability and cost savings.
Security Enhancements	2025	Following the broader national trend for municipal buildings, the Town updated vault security for the Town Clerk and added security cameras for the Registrars of Voters to protect sensitive documents and election integrity.
Mather Center	2017-2025	Interior refurbishments and improved connectivity between the Mather Center and the main administrative offices.

Senior Services

Darien Senior Programs nurtures physical, intellectual, and social well-being of the senior community age 55 or older by providing a comprehensive and coordinated system of services, programs, and activities. Programs enhance individuals' lives and promote well-being, dignity, and independence throughout the aging process. Members are integrated into the community by collaborating with other agencies and organizations that provide support programs and social services, thereby enhancing independence and a wholesome lifestyle for seniors in Darien.

The programs take place in the Mather Center, which is part of Town Hall. The Mather Center has a full-time staff of two and a number of volunteers. Programs include daily lunches, education classes such as foreign languages, arts and crafts, games, and health and wellness seminars. Nonresidents can pay an annual membership fee to participate in these programs.

At Home In Darien, a nonprofit organization, helps Darien seniors live independently, comfortably, and with dignity in their own homes. The organization arranges transportation for residents age 60—and 18 and above, if physically disabled—from anywhere within Darien, Stamford, Norwalk, and New Canaan. The fleet includes a Chrysler sedan and a handicap-accessible Toyota minivan, both of which are insured by the Town. Both volunteer and paid drivers are used. The organization has provided more than 5,000 one-way rides, approximately half of which are for medical appointments. At Home in Darien has a small office space in the first floor of Town Hall by the gym.

The organization also provides raking and shoveling, grocery shopping,and handyman services. Its Out & About Eats program brings seniors together over specially priced meals at local Darien restaurants.



Seniors enjoying lunch at the Convent of St. Birgitta, organized by At Home in Darien (photo courtesy of Chris Jones)



Young volunteers doing yard work through At Home in Darien (photo courtesy of Chris Jones)



The Police Department building (photo courtesy of the Department of Planning & Zoning)

Police

The Darien Police Department maintains overall order and public safety for residents and visitors in Darien and works under the authority of a three-member civilian Police Commission. The department has 53 sworn officers and 20 civilian staff. The divisions of the department are overseen by either the Administrative Services Bureau or the Field Services Bureau.

The department is responsible for all emergency communications for police and initial intake of all calls for fire and emergency medical services. It has transitioned to a civilian dispatch model for day and evening shifts and continues to staff the Communications Center with civilian dispatchers, which eliminates the need to assign a police officer to desk duty.

Headquartered at 25 Hecker Avenue, the department is housed in a 37,000 square foot building that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The building has experienced HVAC, structural and environmental issues requiring continued attention. The Town recently completed an expansion and renovation of the female locker room to provide additional lockers and better accommodate the Department's staffing needs. Solar panels were placed on the roof of the building within the past 10 years.

The department has a fleet of approximately 25 vehicles, including patrol cars, pick-up trucks, and motorcycles. It has a preventative maintenance program to address problems with emergency response vehicles before breakdowns occur.

The department appointed a new traffic officer and acquired a new motorcycle dedicated to traffic enforcement and citizen complaints and requests. The department oversees school crossing guards and coordinates closely with Darien Public School's security officers.

The K-9 Unit assists the Field Services Bureau in preventing and detecting crime. It has two human K-9 officers and two canine K-9 officers, including one trained in narcotics detection and another trained in tracking and narcotics detection.

The department upgraded its wireless radios for internal wireless networking. The Aruba 3 series radios were replaced by high end 5 series radios, which provide higher speeds and more stability.

Planned Projects

The following initiatives will guide departmental priorities over the next several years:

- Continue efforts to ameliorate ongoing issues with the building. Many issues have been addressed, but due diligence must continue to address concerns raised by CIRMA and OSHA inspections.
- Continue examining potential reorganization and staffing needs with the potential for additional sworn staff due to the development of additional housing and commercial space.



▲ *Darien Police officers pose for a photo in front of headquarters (photo by Darien Police Department)*



▲ *K-9 Officer Argo (photo by Darien Police Department)*

Fire

Darien has three separate fire departments that coordinate for mutual aid purposes. As recommended in the 2023 Emergency Service Analysis Report, a part-time Fire Services Administrator position was hired in 2026 to oversee certain administrative functions for all three volunteer fire departments.

Darien Fire Department

A charitable, social welfare organization—a 501 (c)(4)—the Darien Fire Department is an all-volunteer department with 75 firefighters covering the eastern portion of town. This includes the commercial areas along Boston Post Road and a portion of I-95 that handles 120,000 vehicles each day. The department works closely with the two other volunteer fire companies in Darien and provides mutual aid assistance to Norwalk, Rowayton, Stamford, and New Canaan.

Planned Projects

- New roof for firehouse.
- Repave firehouse parking lot.
- Upgrade firehouse radio & speaker system for more effective dispatch communications.
- Standardize FLIR Thermal Imaging Cameras to one system.
- Replace boiler unit in firehouse.

Noroton Fire Department

The Noroton Fire Department is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is also all-volunteer, with 40-50 members. It provides high-quality fire and rescue services while remaining fiscally responsible to taxpayers. The Noroton Fire Department provides an array of fire-rescue services. In addition to the traditional fire department responsibilities of structural firefighting, Noroton responds to marine emergencies on the Long Island Sound, motor vehicle accidents, gas leaks, and numerous other types of emergencies. Marine 34 is its marine firefighting unit, responding to maritime emergencies in the western Connecticut waters of Long Island Sound.

Planned Projects

- Continue to update and improve equipment on apparatus, specifically radios, scuba, power tool equipment, stabilization and extraction equipment, and replacing supply and attack fire hoses.
- Continue to improve the year-round presence of the Marine Division on the Long Island Sound. Boaters are on the water all year, including duck hunters and commercial outfits. It also supports on-shore fire operations.

Noroton Heights Fire Department

The Noroton Heights Fire Department is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides fire protection to the Noroton Heights area of Darien and responds to alarms throughout town. It is entirely volunteer, with a staff of 40 with advanced apparatus outfitted with cutting-edge tools and technology. Members are paged for every call, leaving their residences or places of business to respond 24/7 a the full range of calls, from simple alarms and major fires, to hazmat, heavy rescue, cold water rescues, and mass-casualty incidents. All three firehouses have been upgraded with faster connections to Town Hall through managed fiber service. The existing fiber lines were replaced, increasing connection speeds by a factor of five.

A new classroom at the drill tower property at 126 Ledge Road will give firefighters from all three volunteer departments a dedicated space for training.

In 2023, the parking lot pavement started caving in and a wall started to collapse. The wall must be rebuilt. The new wall will retain soil and the weight of vehicles parked adjacent to the wall and to act as a building foundation wall if the building is expanded. The wall will also be built with reinforced concrete and a chain-link fence anchored to the top. A vehicular barrier will be anchored in front of the wall to prevent vehicles from driving over the edge.[1]

Planned Projects

Additions to the firehouse might be needed to create more space and possibly to create a room for volunteers to sleep and/or live at the facility or nearby.

Emergency Medical Services

Darien EMS – Post 53 is a private, non-profit, volunteer emergency medical service that provides 24/7 ambulance transport and pre-hospital care to the Town. Founded in 1970 by John E. "Bud" Doble, it is uniquely operated by a team of highly-trained Darien High School students working alongside adult volunteer advisors.

The Town also contracts for paramedic services for more advanced calls based on dispatch protocols and call taker screening. Darien EMS has three fully equipped, staffed ambulances that run 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and two flycars. It responds to more than 1,600 calls a year. More than 1,000 Darien High School students have served as members of Post 53 since its inception.



▲ *Noroton Heights Fire Department firefighters at work (photo by Noroton Heights Fire Department)*

The organization operates under the strict medical direction and oversight of Stamford Hospital, whose doctors help train Post 53 members. All calls are reviewed by the EMS Quality Assurance Director at Stamford Hospital, which includes patient care and response and on-scene times.

The Town uses a tiered response system that starts with the Police Department and one of the three fire departments, when necessary. They are quickly followed by the dispatch of an adult supervisor EMT, the ambulance, and, when necessary, Stamford EMS paramedics based at 701 Boston Post Road.

2023 Emergency Services Analysis

In 2023, Darien hired a firm to analyze the Town's emergency services, which includes the three volunteer fire departments, the Fire Marshal's Office, Emergency Management, and 911 dispatch services. The report found that they provide outstanding services. It included several recommendations. Among them are:

- Create a Town Fire Commission made up of Town residents to provide fiscal and other administrative oversight of the volunteer fire departments.
- Create a full-time Emergency Manager position.
- Consider appointing a Fire Services Administrator (either full-time or part-time) to oversee certain administrative functions for all three volunteer fire departments.

Stamford EMS has been providing paramedic intercept services for Darien residents since 1995. The paramedics who cover Darien are selected based on their medical excellence and their ability to work with the adults and young adults of Post 53.

Library

Darien Library is supported by a public-private partnership between the Town and the Friends of Darien Library. 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 current building was constructed in 2009 and is 56,000 square feet. This replaced the previous building at 35 Leroy Avenue, which was about half the size.



The Café at Darien Library (photo by Darien Library)

Since 2018, the Darien Library has focused on evolving into a multi-generational community hub, specifically prioritizing digital accessibility, inclusive social spaces, and expanded lifelong learning. The Library's 2023–2028 Strategic Plan focuses on three pillars:

- **Cultivating Readers**. New community-wide reading challenges and early literacy support for children under five.
- **Fostering Creativity**. A shift toward critical thinking workshops and high-level tech classes.
- **Combating Loneliness**. New programs specifically designed for empty-nesters and newcomers to help build social ties.

The Darien Library experiences parking issues, particularly during popular events when the main lot fills up. If the main lot is full in the evening hours, parking is available at Thorndal Circle, which is connected to the library by a walking path. Library patrons are prohibited from parking in the nearby Nielsen's Florist & Garden Shop or Michael Joseph's lots, and violators may be towed. Parking is not allowed on Hecker Avenue or on Boston Post Road, and the Police Headquarters parking lots also are not available for library use. Scheduling of library programs continues to be carefully managed to ensure that staff and patrons are able to park on-site.

2018-2026 Projects

- **The Library Café by Abilis**. This is a major addition to the library's social atmosphere. The café is a partnership with Abilis, an organization that provides services for people with disabilities. It serves as both a community gathering space and a vocational training site for adults with developmental disabilities.
- **Tween & Teen Center**. This new amenity will feature reading nooks, collaborative study areas, a programming lounge, computer and homework stations, and a media and gaming space. The Riley Family Foundation Innovation Lab makerspace will provide access to and offer training on an array of technical, digital, and analog hands-on creation tools and gadgets.

- **Sustainable Building**. The LEED Gold Certified library has continuously upgraded to LED lighting and multi-level controls to reduce its carbon footprint and operational costs.
- **Automated Book Sorter**. To handle the high volume of returns, the library utilizes an automated system that returns materials to the shelves much faster than manual sorting.
- **Mental Health and Wellness Wall**. A dedicated area on the second level provides curated health pamphlets, local help resources, and programming for the mental health of young people.

Public Schools

The Board of Education governs Darien Public Schools (DPS). Among its responsibilities is to adopt an annual budget that includes, but is not limited to, curriculum, facilities, furnishings, staff, materials and equipment needed to carry out educational programs. Education is the largest single expenditure in the Town; the 2026-2027 Board of Education/Public Schools budget is approximately $130 million.

Total enrollment from K through 12 in the 2025-2026 school year is 4,477. Enrollment growth increased in the 1990s and early 2000s until it crested in 2014-2015 at 4,850, steadily decreasing since then. Enrollment has been decreasing despite the many new multifamily developments in town. The report estimates that pending development will generate 49 new students.

DPS' 2025 Enrollment Trends & Projections notes a significant increase in births over the last seven years, up to 266 in 2022. Over the last three years, births have averaged 245 annually. Furthermore, housing turnover has slowed significantly. In 2023 and 2024, sales reached low levels of 184 in 2024. However, in 2025-26, the school district had a net out-migration of -1.34%, which is the highest rate of out-migration since 2009-10. Based on this and other data, the report projects the following:

- Over the next five years, elementary school enrollment will increase by almost 8% and middle and high school enrollment will decrease by 5.5%
- Beyond five years, the total enrollment is projected to grow by almost 3.5% over the second half of the projections.
- Elementary enrollment is projected to stabilize at about 2,275 students.
- Middle school enrollment is projected to increase modestly, averaging about 1,100 students.
- High school enrollment is projected to rebound and average about 1,285 students as larger cohorts begin matriculating up.

2018-2026 Projects

The Strategic Plan 2021-2026 includes Goal #6: Improving School Facilities for Student Safety & Access to Learning to ensure that the configuration and condition of the District's physical facilities provide secure and supportive environments for teaching and learning student activities.

- **High School Athletic Improvements**. Installed permanent stadium lights and resurfaced athletic tracks and tennis courts.
- **Ox Ridge Elementary School Reconstruction**. A $63 million project that replaced the old school with a new 110,000 square-foot facility.
- **Hindley, Holmes, and Royle (HHR) Renovation Project**. A simultaneous renovation and additions at three elementary schools at a cost of more than $100 million.
- **Middlesex Middle School Facilities Study**. To evaluate the entire facility for upcoming major renovations, potentially including a new auditorium and science labs.
- **Special Education Transportation**. Establishing a district-run transportation department, which included the purchase of nine dedicated vehicles in 2024.

Planned Projects

- Facilities Master Plan. A new master plan will be prepared to understand the physical needs of the buildings. Key components of the plan include examining more closely the spatial needs of the Early Learning Program based on enrollment projections and the indoor air quality rules that require all HVAC systems to be fully rebalanced over the next five years.[2]
- **Bus Depot**. DPS continues to explore long-term solutions for a dedicated bus depot. In 2024, the P&Z Commission granted a special permit to park up to five Type II school buses and two wheelchair vans at 16 Thorndal Circle. The yellow, full-size school buses provided by First Student typically park in Stamford.

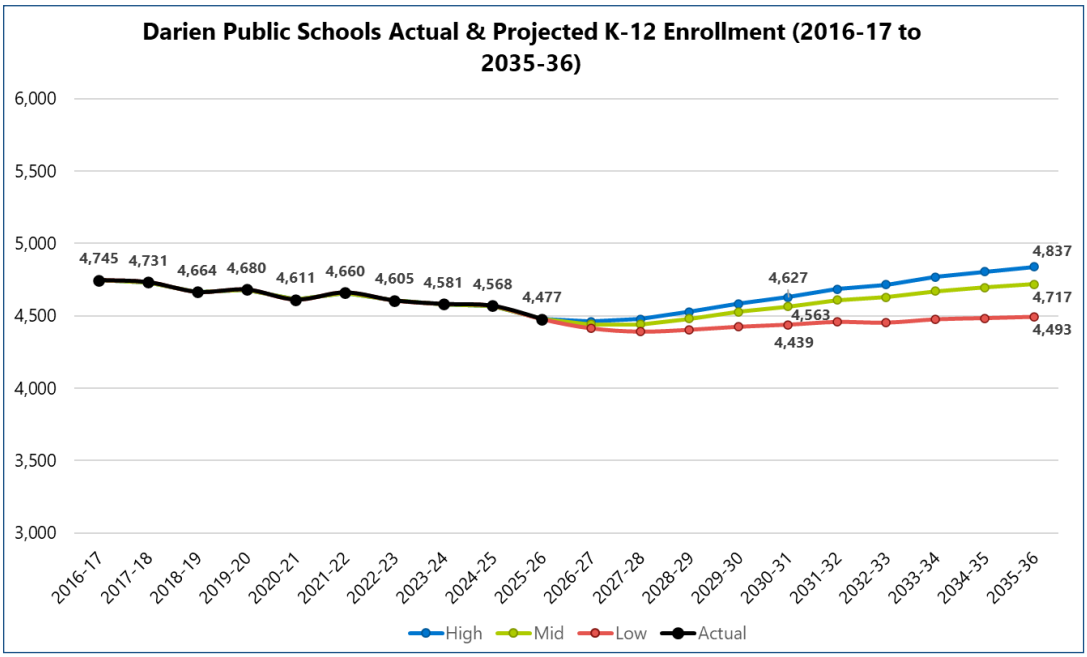


Hindley Elementary School, located near the intersection of Boston Post Road and Nearwater Lane



Middlesex Middle School, located along Hollow Tree Road north of the Noroton Heights train station

Figure 8-1. Enrollment projections from the 2025 Enrollment Trends & Projects report



Recommendations

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

8-1. Consider an Environmentally Sustainable Municipal Fleet Policy

a. Consider policies that encourage the full use of existing vehicles, such as redeploying police vehicles to other departments.

b. Research current federal and state incentives for municipalities to procure hybrid or electric vehicles and investigate lifecycle costs. Consider policies that encourage departments to replace gasoline-fueled vehicles with hybrid or electric vehicles where financially and logistically feasible.

8-2. Consider a Municipal Green Buildings Policy

Consider policies that encourage building reuse (e.g. adaptive reuse) in addition to policies that encourage environmentally sustainable features in new buildings and additions, where financially and logistically feasible. Use green building standards as a guide or pursue certification.

8-3. Monitor Properties for Potential Future Town Needs

If property becomes available, evaluate whether acquisition would serve the Town's needs and be a wise use of funds.

8-4. Ensure that Emergency Planning Incorporates the Needs of Town Residents.

This includes planning for medical equipment, extra medication, transportation for evacuation, backup power, etc.

8-5. Consider the Need for Technology Infrastructure[3]

Consider the need for—and assess the costs and benefits of—technology infrastructure to support and enhance Town services.

PARKS & RECREATION

8-6. Update the Parks & Recreation Master Plan

An updated master plan will address aging facilities; safety and accessibility improvements; meet evolving community needs; and include planning for green infrastructure, climate adaptation, and sustainability.

a. Continue to protect natural resources in balance with providing safe and accessible recreational opportunities.

b. Consider the adequacy of parking and circulation within parks.

c. Gauge the adequacy of recreational facilities in meeting residents demands for passive and active activities and determine the need for investment in new facilities.

Also see Recommendation #8-20 under **Public Schools**.

PUBLIC WORKS

8-7. Create an Implementation Plan for the Drainage Study Findings

Formally incorporate the results of the Town-wide drainage studies into long-term capital planning.

8-8. Protect Facilities from Flooding and Other Weather Events

Evaluate physical upgrades to critical public facilities to ensure they remain operational during extreme weather events.

8-9. Consider an On-Site Parking Plan for Great Island

Consider a plan to create on-site parking for Great Island to allow for enhanced public access and enjoyment.

TOWN HALL

8-10. Continue to Monitor Space Needs and Existing Leases

Consider relocating the New Canaan-Darien Probate Court to free up space on the second floor for another Town office and/or meeting space.

SENIOR SERVICES

8-11. Continue to Support The Mather Center and At Home in Darien

The social, educational and other programs and services provided by the Town through The Mather Center and the non-profit organization At Home in Darien are important for ensuring that Darien seniors have a good quality of life.

POLICE

8-12. Address Ongoing Police Department Building Issues

Ensure that the building continues to safely accommodate 24/7 operations and meets requirements.

FIRE

8-13. Implement Recommendations of the 2025 Study of the Noroton Heights Fire Station

Implement recommendations of the station's *2025 Architectural & Safety Needs Assessment*.

8-14. Support the Creation of Live-In Facilities or Nearby Residential Options for Volunteers

The Noroton Fire Department, for example, purchased 1921 Boston Post Road to house three volunteers.

8-15. Encourage Aquarion to Update & Improve their Infrastructure to Enhance Fire Protection

Encourage Aquarion to increase the sizes of their water mains throughout town and to provide public water and fire hydrants in areas that are not currently serviced by them.

EMS

8-16. Consider Building Upgrades and/or Relocation of Current Building

The building at 701 Boston Post Road, constructed circa 1840, serves as the paramedic's station. It is located within the Boston Post Road Historic District. The paramedic's vehicle typically requires a permanent facility where it can be properly garaged and connected to power when not in use.

LIBRARY

8-17. Explore Methods for Creating Additional On-Site or Adjacent Parking

Besides existing arrangements for sharing parking with adjacent property owners, consider creating parallel parking on Hecker Avenue.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

8-18. Continue to Collaborate on Safe, Multimodal Access to and from Schools

See Chapter 7. Transportation & Mobility.

8-19. Evaluate Locations and Financing Strategies for a Bus Depot

DPS currently contracts with First Student for student transportation, which has a bus yard at 124 Selleck Street in Stamford. Depending on the potential operational and financial performance, the Town may choose to acquire land and have bus service providers submit competitive bids.

8-20. Consider Illuminating Additional Sports Fields & Expand the Use of Existing Lighting

There continues to be high demand for field and other outdoor recreational space in town. The only lighted fields are at Darien High School, with temporary seasonal lighting approved at Holahan Field behind Town Hall for the Darien Junior Football League. Given these constraints, it is important to make the most efficient use of the limited recreation space available. The need for additional lighted fields and/or courts, which should be examined in coordination with the Parks & Recreation Department, must be carefully balanced against potential disturbances to adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Chapter 8 Endnotes

1 Kaufman, Richard, "Noroton Heights Fire Department Seeks to Fix its Retaining Wall," Patch, February 28, 2025.

2 Byrne, Eric Dr., "10-Year Facility Study," Darien Public Schools Memorandum," May 7, 2026.

3 C.G.S. 8-23 states that municipalities "shall consider the need for .... technology infrastructure in the municipality," but does not define the term nor provide any guidance.

Implementation Strategy

Legend

Phase	Lead & Support Entities	Potential Cost / Investment
Priority = Priority (start within 6 months from now) **Short** = Short-Term (start bet. 6 months and 2 yrs. from now) **Mid** = Mid-Term (start within 2-4 yrs. from now) **Long** = Long-Term (start 4 yrs. or later from now)	**Gov** = Board of Selectmen **Dep** = Town Departments **Com** = Boards, Commissions, Committees **Org** = Local & Regional Organizations **Agn**= External Agencies **Oth** = Other	**$** = $150,000 or less **$$** = $150,000 to $500,000 **$$$** = $500,000 to $1 million **$$$$** = > $1 million

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Potential Impl. Cost Funding Source
OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS				
8-1	**Consider an Environmentally Sustainable Municipal Fleet Policy**	Mid	**Board of Selectmen, Board of Education** **Dep**: Dept. of Public Works, Police Dept., Fire Dept. **Com**: Advisory Committee on Sustainability, Police Commission, Fire Commission	n/a
8-2	**Consider a Municipal Green Buildings Policy**	Short	**Department of Public Works** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Advisory Committee on Sustainability, Planning & Zoning Commission	n/a
8-3	**Consider Acquiring Available Property for Potential Expansion Needs.**	Ongoing	**Board of Selectmen** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission	n/a $$$$ Capital Budget
8-4	**Ensure that Emergency Planning Incorporates the Needs of Town Residents**	Short	Fire Marshal, Emergency Management	n/a $ Oper. Budget
8-5	**Consider the Need for Technology Infrastructure**	Ongoing	**Board of Selectmen** Dept: All	Varies
PARKS & RECREATION				
8-6	**Update the Parks & Recreation Master Plan**	Short	**Department of Parks & Recreation** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works **Com**: Parks & Recreation Commission **Org**: Darien Land Trust & Partners	$ $$$ Capital Budget
PUBLIC WORKS				
8-7	**Create an Implementation Plan for the Drainage Study Findings**	Short	**Department of Public Works** **Com**: Sewer Commission	n/a $$$$ Capital Budget
8-8	**Protect Facilities from Flooding and Other Weather Events**	Short	**Board of Selectmen, Department of Public Works**	$ $$$$ Capital Budget
8-9	**Consider an On-Site Parking Plan for Great Island**	Priority	**Department of Public Works** **Com**: Great Island Advisory Committee	$ $$$ Capital Budget

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Potential Impl. Cost Funding Source
TOWN HALL				
8-10	**Continue to Monitor Space Needs & Existing Leases**	Ongoing	**Town Administrator**	n/a
8-11	**Continue to Support the Mather Center and At Home in Darien**	Ongoing	**Town Administrator**	n/a $ Oper. Budget
POLICE				
8-12	**Address Police Department Building Needs**	Short	**Police Commission** **Dep**: Police Department	n/a $$ Capital Budget
FIRE				
8-13	**Implement Recommendations of the 2025 Study of the Noroton Heights Fire Station**	Short	**Noroton Heights Fire Department** **Com**: Fire Commission	n/a $$ Capital Budget
8-14	**Support the Creation of Live-In Facilities or Nearby Residential Options for Volunteers**	Ongoing	**Fire Departments** **Gov:** Board of Selectmen **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Fire Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission	$ $$$ Capital Budget
8-15	**Encourage Aquarion Water Company to Update & Improve their Infrastructure to Enhance Fire Protection**	Short	**Board of Selectmen** **Dep**: Fire Departments, Dept. of Public Works **Com**: Fire Commission **Agn**: Aquarion Water Company	n/a
EMS				
8-16	**Consider Building Upgrades and/or Relocation of Current Building**	Short	**Post 53 EMS** **Gov**: Board of Selectmen **Dep**: Fire Commission	$ $$$$ Capital Budget
LIBRARY				
8-17	**Explore Methods to Create Additional On-Site or Adjacent Parking**	Priority	**Darien Library** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Dept. of Public Works	n/a $ Library
PUBLIC SCHOOLS				
8-18	**Continue to Collaborate on Safe, Multimodal Access to and from Schools**	Ongoing	**Board of Education** **Dep**: Police Dept., Dept. of Public Works	$ $$$ Shared
8-19	**Evaluate Locations and Financing Strategies for a Bus Depot**	Short	**Board of Education, Board of Selectmen** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission	n/a $$$$ Board of Ed
8-20	**Consider Illuminating Additional Sports Fields and Expanding Use of Existing Lighting**	Mid	**Board of Education, Department of Parks & Recreation, Department of Public Works** **Com:** Parks & Recreation Commission	$ $$$ Board of Ed, Capital Budget



An aerial view of a residential section of Darien (image from Google Earth)

9. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Darien's built environment was shaped by many factors, among them economics; industry; the railroad; roadways such as I-95; architecture; and local zoning, subdivision, and wetlands regulations. Among the most influential forces shaping Darien's built environment today are State legislation and policy and local zoning regulations.

More recent State legislation has focused on encouraging municipalities to facilitate the creation of more housing including, but not limited to, affordable housing. The State also has been encouraging and providing incentives for municipalities with transit service to focus higher intensity residential development around rail and bus stations.

Darien's zoning map and zoning regulations have been and continue to be blueprints for its built environment. After the 2016 POCD was adopted, Darien made a number of changes to its zoning regulations to allow for more diverse housing types and to facilitate transit-oriented development.

This chapter starts by presenting an updated land use map and reviewing the zoning districts on the zoning map. It then focuses on changes in two aspects of Darien's built environment—residential development and the ongoing commercial and mixed-use redevelopment in Downtown and Noroton Heights.

2017-2026 HIGHLIGHTS

State Legislation

- **2025. PA No. 25-1 (see page 95)**
- **2021. PA No. 21-29 (see Chapter 4)**

Plans & Studies

State

- 2025 Connecticut Fair Share Housing Study, Connecticut Office of Policy & Management
- 2023 Housing Needs Assessment, Connecticut Housing Finance Agency
- 2023 Public Act 21-29 Initial Findings, Desegregate CT
- 2022 Affordable Housing Near Transit in CT, Partnership for Strong Communities

Region

- 2025 Homes on Track: Analysis of Existing Conditions for Transit-Oriented Communities in Connecticut, Regional Plan Association
- 2022 Western CT Regional Affordable Housing Toolbox, WestCOG
- 2021 Fairfield County Housing Assessment, Regional Plan Association
- 2021 Be My Neighbor in Fairfield County (ADUs), Regional Plan Association

Town of Darien

- 2024 Darien, CT Neuroinclusive Housing Assessment (non-Town product)
- 2022 Town of Darien Affordable Housing Plan, adopted by the Darien Planning & Zoning Commission.
- 2020 Town of Darien Multi-Family & Affordable Housing Inventory

Land Uses & Building Forms

The land use map shows all the types of land uses present in Darien and how they are distributed throughout town (see Figure 9-1 on page 93). The following are descriptions of the land uses and the typical types of building and site arrangements.

Single Family Residential

Most of Darien's land area is comprised of detached single-family houses on lots ranging from 0.2 to 2+ acres.

2-4 Family Residential

These are typically one- or two-story buildings located within residential neighborhoods. Many of these pre-date current zoning.

Multi-Family Residential

The redevelopment activity over the past 25 years has increased the number of multi-family residential land uses, which include apartment buildings ranging from 2-3 stories. Apartments located on the upper floors of

Housing Data Snapshots

7,234
NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS

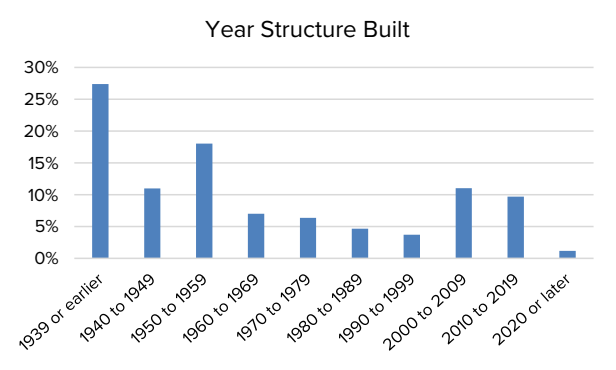
7,675
NO. OF HOUSING UNITS

82%
OF HOUSING UNITS ARE OWNER-OCCUPIED

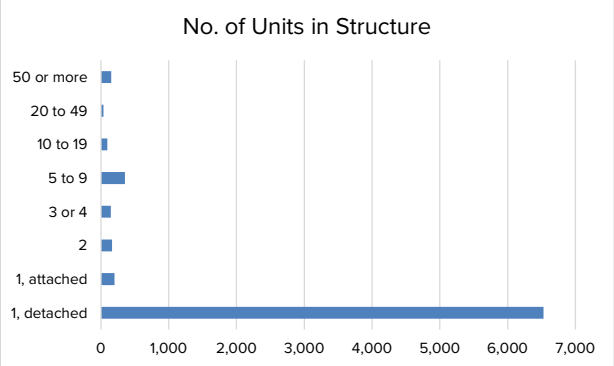
4%
OF HOUSING UNITS ARE DESIGNATED AFFORDABLE

$1,822,400
MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS

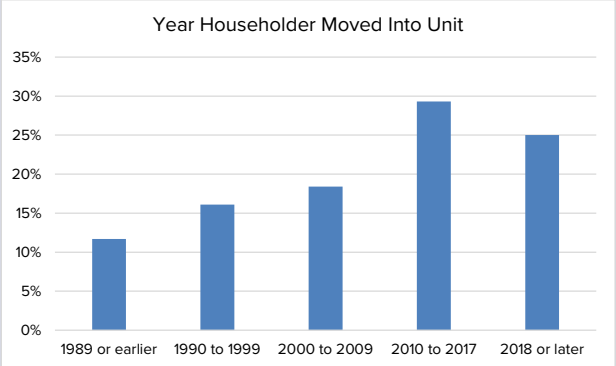
Data source: 2024 American Community Survey (ACS)



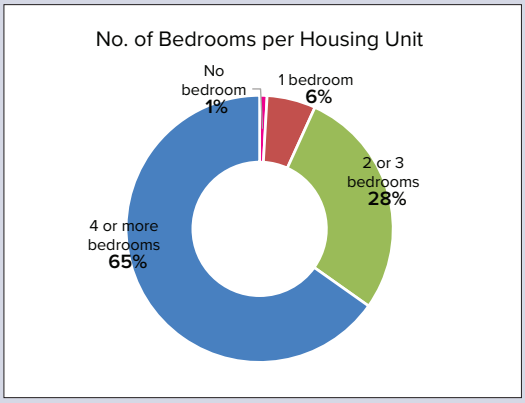
More than 25% of Darien's housing stock was constructed in 1939 or earlier.



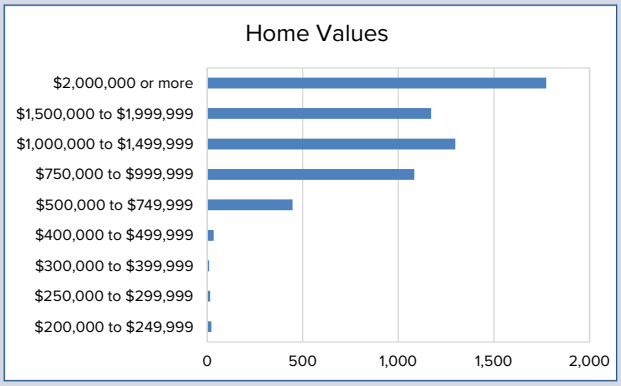
Most of Darien's housing stock consists of single-family houses.



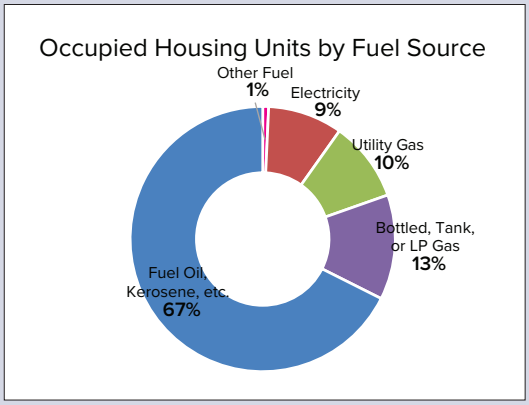
Most householders moved in after 2010, which suggests turnover as empty-nesters downsize or move out and new families move in.



The majority of housing units in Darien are large, consisting of 4 or more bedrooms

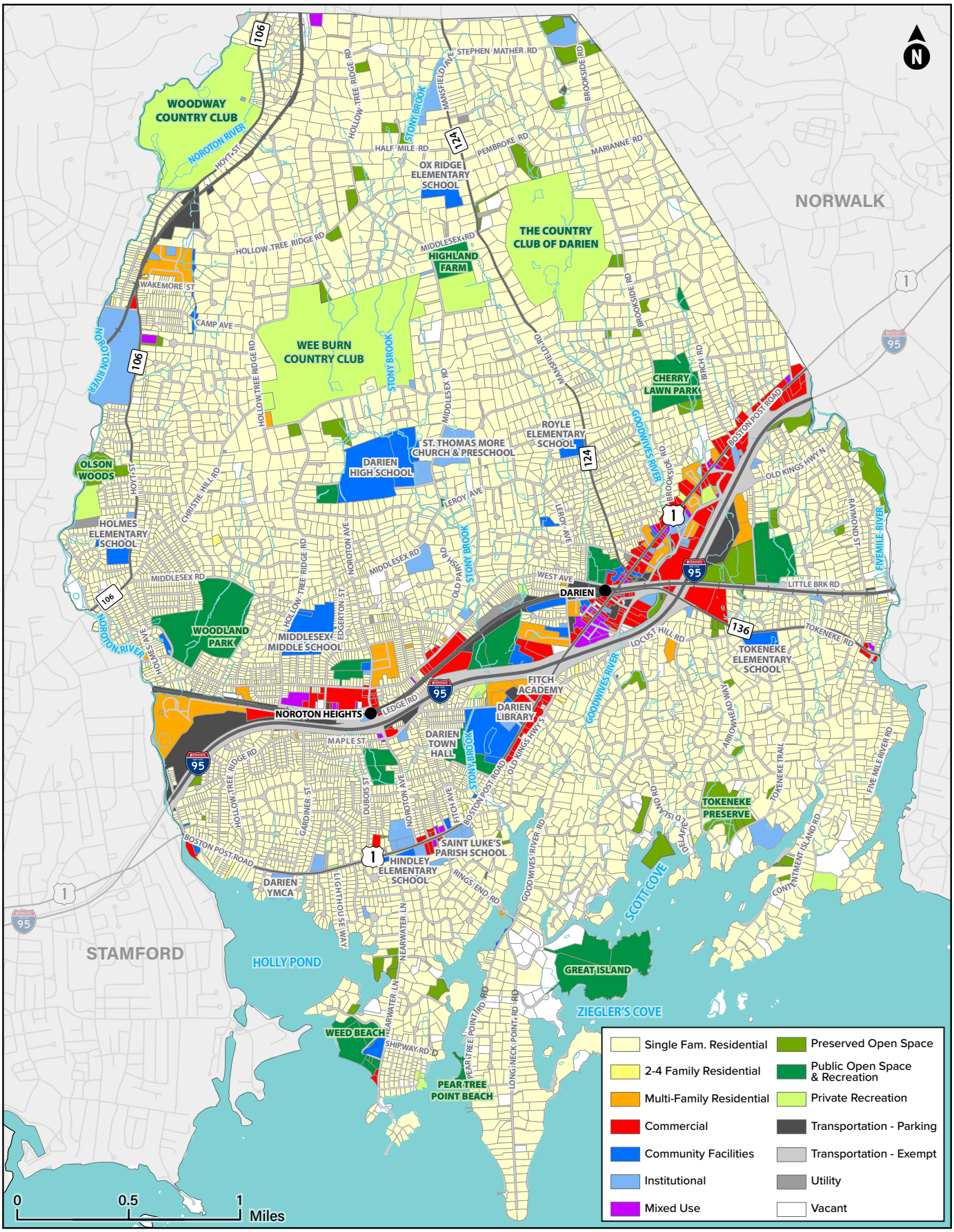


Many houses in Darien are valued at more than $2 million.



The majority of housing units in Darien still burn fuel oil for energy

Figure 9-1. Land Use Map[1]



buildings with ground floor commercial/office space are assigned the Mixed-Use land use designation.

Commercial

Commercial properties are primarily concentrated in Downtown and Noroton Heights. These are typically detached one- or two-story buildings. Within Downtown, the buildings are generally attached.

Mixed-Use

Mixed-uses are located along Boston Post Road in Downtown and along Heights Road near the Noroton Heights train station. Buildings are typically three stories in most of Downtown and Noroton Heights, and up to 4 and 5 stories in the Corbin District and consist of ground floor commercial/office uses and apartments or condominiums on upper floors.

Community Facilities

Community facilities, which include Darien's eight schools, are distributed throughout town. Community facilities also include a variety of non-profit and membership-based organizations, such as local clubs and civic associations, but not country clubs.

Institutional

Institutional uses consist primarily of religious and faith-based establishments, including churches and other houses of worship. These uses are distributed throughout the town.

Dedicated Open Space

Dedicated open space consists of lands that are permanently preserved for conservation, passive recreation, and environmental protection purposes. It includes publicly accessible parks and conservation areas that are protected from residential or commercial development. These lands are owned and maintained either by the Town or by private nonprofit conservation organizations such as the Darien Land Trust.

Managed Open Space

Managed open space consists primarily of large, privately owned properties that are maintained as recreational environments rather than developed for residential or commercial building purposes. The majority of these areas are private country clubs that include facilities such as golf courses, tennis courts, and related recreational amenities.

Figure 9-2. Land Use Composition[2]

Land Use	Approx. Percentage of Land in Darien
Single Family Residential	72%
Private Open Space	7%
Public Open Space	4%
Vacant	3%
Community Facilities	3%
Preserved Open Space (DLT)	2%
Commercial	2%
Institutional	2%
Transportation & Parking	2%
Multifamily	2%
Mixed-Use	1%
2-4 Unit Residential	0.2%
Utility	0.2%

Transportation/Parking

This includes the infrastructure that supports the movement of people and goods throughout the Town. It includes major regional corridors such as Interstate 95, which serves as the primary limited-access highway traversing town, along with all other public and private roadways, including arterial roads, collector streets, and local residential streets. This category also includes public parking facilities such as municipal lots, commuter parking areas associated with rail stations, and other designated off-street parking areas intended to serve commercial districts.

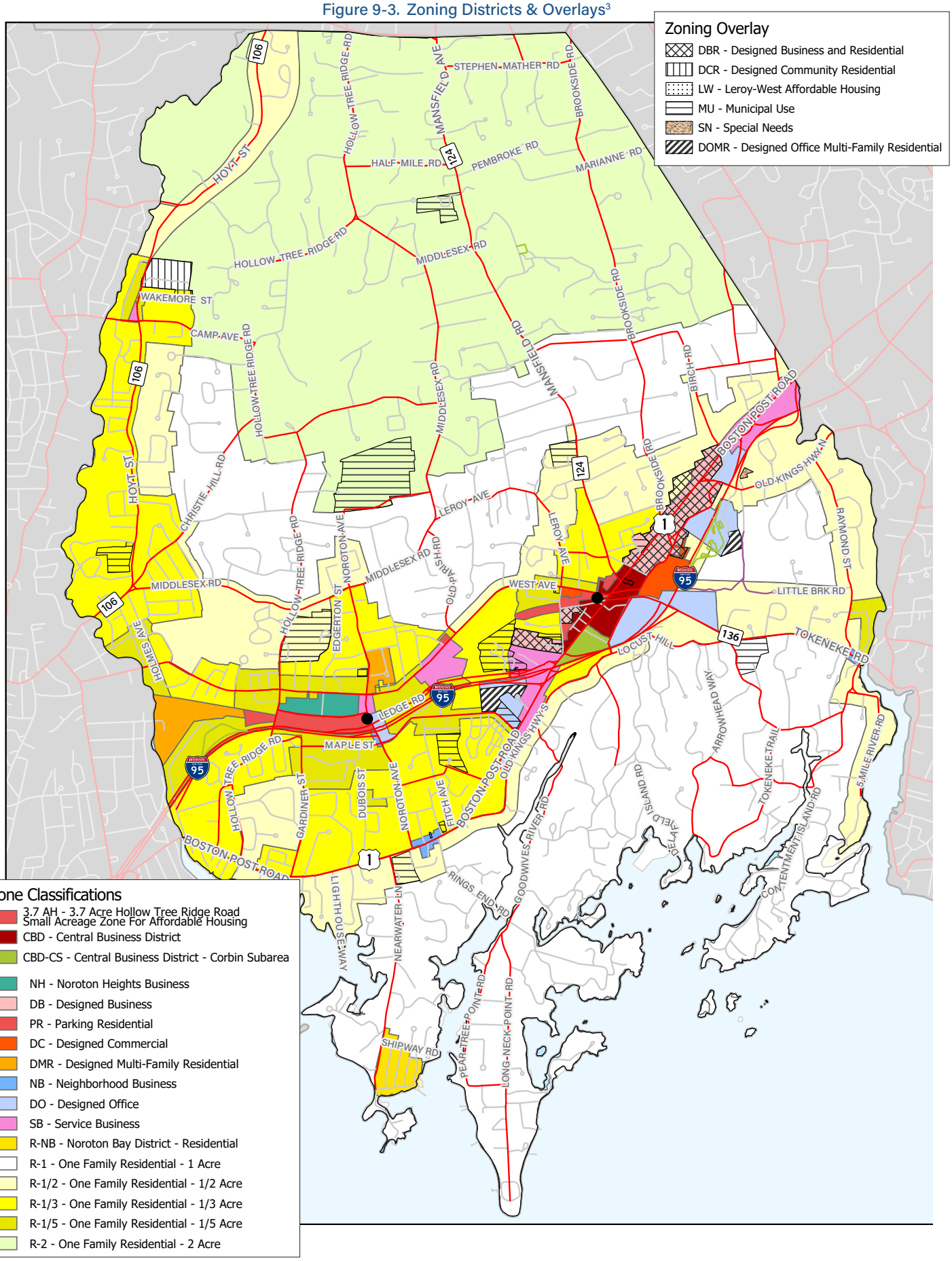
Utility

These land uses are primarily concentrated along the Metro-North Railroad corridor and include facilities and equipment necessary for the provision and maintenance of essential public services such as electric power distribution, natural gas, telecommunications, water supply, and sewer.

Vacant

Darien is nearly fully developed, but there are a few vacant parcels scattered throughout town.

Figure 9-3. Zoning Districts & Overlays[3]



Zoning Districts & Development

Figure 9-3 on page 95 maps out all of the zoning districts and overlays in Darien. Zoning regulations dictate the types of land uses permitted along with site and building dimensional standards. Zoning overlays are supplementary regulations applied to a specific geographic area atop an existing zoning district. An overlay typically adds permitted uses and requirements without changing the underlying zoning. The following are brief descriptions of each of the major zoning districts and examples of buildings that are located within them:



Buildings in the Central Business District (CBD) zone along Boston Post Road

Central Business District Zone (CBD)

This zone is located along Boston Post Road between Leroy Avenue and Sedgwick Avenue, which is Darien's traditional Downtown. The CBD currently allows a maximum of three stories. This zone is designed for commercial and mixed-use development, with strict limits on first floor uses.



A medical office building in the Designed Business (DB) zone along Boston Post Road

Central Business District – Corbin Subarea (CBD-CS)

This zone is located between Corbin Avenue, Boston Post Road and I-95. The Corbin District will contain the tallest building in town at five stories.

Noroton Heights Business Zone (NH)

This zone includes the blocks north of the Noroton Heights train station along Heights Road. Its intent is to encourage the development of a variety of business uses and upper floor dwelling units, including affordable units, in a pedestrian friendly and transit-oriented area. The Heights Crossing and Darien Commons projects are located in this zone.



The new Heights Crossing development is located in the Noroton Heights Business (NH) zone along Heights Road

Designed Business Zone (DB)

Most of this zone is applied to Boston Post Road between Sedgwick Avenue and Birch Road. It consists of detached commercial structures. Much of this zone is within the Boston Post Road Historic District. This zone is a transition between the CBD, the SB to the east, and residential districts to the north. It allows residential dwellings; multi-family housing is permitted. Sedgwick Village is located in this zone.

Parking Residential Zone (PR)

This zone is intended for motor vehicle parking and public transportation facilities in certain, appropriate locations adjacent to residential and business zones. The parking lots around the two Metro-North train stations are located within this district.

Designed Commercial Zone (DC)

This zone is located near Sedgwick Avenue and Old King's Highway North and includes Goodwives Shopping Center. The district is intended to provide for community-serving retail uses. Within this zone, there is less emphasis on walkability than in the Central Business District.



Old King's Market is located in the Designed Commercial (DC) zone

Designed Multi-Family Residential Zone (DMR)

This zone is located in two locations. The first is to the northeast of the NH zone, where The Heights at Darien is located. The second is off of Hollow Tree Road where the Everly Darien townhouses are located. Both of those projects provide multi-family housing.



The Heights at Darien is located in the Designed Multi-Family Residential (DMR) zone

Neighborhood Business Zone (NB)

This zone is intended to provide local neighborhoods with conveniently-located commercial sales and services. It is located in three areas: Noroton Avenue near the I-95 exit ramp, Boston Post Road in Noroton, and on Tokeneke Road near the Norwalk Town Line.

Designed Office Zone (DO)

This zone is intended to create a variety of office uses and, in certain locations, senior living facilities and other lower intensity and transitional uses.



A medical office building in the Designed Office (DO) zone on Old King's Highway North

Service Business Zone (SB)

This zone is intended to provide for auto-related businesses (e.g., car dealership, car wash, gas station), or commercial sales and service uses that generally require external storage or activity (e.g. lumberyard, florist, garden center). It is applied in four areas, with the largest of those being along Boston Post Road from Birch Road to the eastern border of town.

Municipal Use Overlay Zone (MU)

This zone is intended for municipal uses or uses that

are generally provided by the Town to serve a public purpose and provide additional flexibility in setbacks and building heights for these unique uses. Town Hall, the Public Works Garage, the Police Department and the Fire Stations are in the MU overlay zone.

Designed Business & Residential Overlay Zone (DBR)

This zone is located along Boston Post Road just east of the Central Business District and extends up to Birch Road. This zone permits multi-family housing and, specifically, senior and moderate-income housing. The Royle at Darien is located in this zone.

Designed Community Residential Overlay Zone (DCR)

This zone, located north of Wakemore Street, permits multi-family uses subject to special provisions that expand options for housing by bridging the gap between large single-family residences and small in-town condominiums. The Kensett Lane townhouses in the northwest part of town are located in this zone.

Designed Office Multi-Family Residential Overlay Zone (DOMR)

This zone is intended to allow for the conversion or redevelopment of suburban office campuses, or portions thereof, in the Designed Office (DO) Zone into multi-family units for rental or sale. This zone includes the Thorndal Circle development and the 3 Parklands Drive project, which are currently being redeveloped from office buildings to multi-family housing.

Special Needs Housing Overlay (SN)

This zone allows for housing for people with special needs. It applies to a 0.91-acre property at 26 East Lane, where special needs housing has been constructed.

Single-Family Residential Zones (R-2, R-1, R-1/2, R-1/3, R-1/5, R-NBD)

These are a series of single-family residential zones categorized by lot size. The two-acre zone (R-2) is located in the northern part of town. Generally, the denser residential zones are closer to Downtown, Noroton Heights, and the train stations.



The Noroton Heights Fire Department is located in a Municipal Use Overlay (MU) zone



Townhouses along Kensett Lane within the Designed Commercial Residential (DCR) zone.



The Royle at Darien, a 55+ affordable housing development, is located in the Designed Business & Residential (DBR) Overlay zone (photo by Crosskey Architects)

The State of Housing

National estimates of the housing shortage range from 1.5 million to 7.3 million housing units,[4] which the U.S. Chamber of Commerce attributes to underbuilding after the 2007-2009 recession and surging demand from millennials, which has contributed toward higher prices and reduced affordability.[5]

The Connecticut Housing Finance Agency (CHFA) reports that between 1990 and 2005, Connecticut municipalities issued an annual average of 9,500 permits for new, privately-owned housing. After 2005, the average decreased by more than half to 5,400. While homebuilding decreased, housing demand started to increase. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 61,000 single-family homes (1 to 4 units) were sold in Connecticut, the most since the recession started in 2007. In the early days of the pandemic, in March 2020, approximately 20% of home listings sold above their original asking price on average across all counties. CHFA reports that during the pandemic, that figure increased to 50% on average, with some markets reaching higher than 70%, depending on the month. Between 2019 and 2022, the median sale price increased by 32%, from $234,500 to $310,000.

> The State of Connecticut estimates a shortage of between 120,000 and 380,000 housing units.

In 2024, the State's Office of Policy & Management (OPM) commissioned a study that calculated a shortage of between 120,000 and 380,000 housing units.[6] The study also calculated the number of housing units each municipality needs to construct based on the "fair share" concept borrowed from the State of New Jersey's affordable housing framework. The high numbers shocked many municipalities. According to the study, Darien would need to add between 1,200 to 2,000 housing units. For reference, there are approximately 7,100 housing units currently in town. These estimates or the requirement to plan for and build these units have not been incorporated into any new legislation.

Connecticut Housing Legislation

Connecticut already has laws on the books promoting the establishment of deed-restricted affordable housing. In 1990, the State passed Section 8-30g, the Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals Act, which set a 10% target for affordable housing in every municipality. As of June 2026, Darien is at 4.32%.[7] One of the challenges with achieving 10% or more of housing units to be designated affordable is that even when affordable units are created through inclusionary zoning in new mixed use or multifamily developments, the total number of housing units (i.e. the denominator) increases and the percentage of affordable housing decreases.

Developers can bypass local zoning regulations if a town has lower than the 10% threshold of affordable housing and construct a project with at least 30% of units dedicated as affordable housing for 40 years. If an 8-30g application is denied, the burden of proof shifts to the municipality to demonstrate that the denial was necessary to protect substantial public interests such as public health and safety, which must outweigh the need for affordable housing. Section 8-30g was later amended to allow communities to apply for 8-30g moratoria from the State Department of Housing. Darien is one of the few communities in the State to achieve two moratoria—one in 2010 and one in 2016. A one-year construction moratorium was put in place in 2026 for multifamily housing developments with 25 units or more.

In November 2025, the State Legislature adopted Public Act No. 25-1, a significant set of housing rules that municipalities are continuing to interpret and respond to. It will likely be followed by additional housing legislation. As of the writing of this POCD in 2026, several additional housing bills have advanced beyond initial discussion in the General Assembly's Housing Committee, including the holding of public hearings with a number of measures being voted out

of committee. These bills are now under consideration by the full General Assembly, including both the House and Senate. The following are key provisions of PA No. 25-1:

- **Fair Rent Commissions**. Municipalities with a population of 15,000 or more must establish or join a Municipal Fair Rent Commission or a Joint Fair Rent Commission (2+ contiguous municipalities), or a Regional Fair Rent Commission established by a Council of Government (in Darien's case, that would be WestCOG).
- **Summary Review for Middle Housing**. Zoning regulations must allow for residential buildings with two to nine units on any lot zoned for commercial or mixed-use development by "summary review" (i.e., non-discretionary review).
- **New Parking Requirements for Residential Developments**. Municipalities cannot require parking minimums for new residential developments of 16 or fewer units, unless within a traffic mitigation zone. For new residential projects with more than 16 units, municipalities must allow applicants to submit a parking needs assessment. Municipalities can also designate up to two conservation and traffic mitigation districts covering up to 8% of the town's land area where parking minimums can be set for smaller residential developments, subject to the same caps and assessments required for larger residential projects.
- **Promoting Transit Oriented Development**. Allows municipalities to establish priority housing development zones and transit-oriented districts/communities. These zones must allow as-of-right multi-family or "middle-density" housing at reasonable densities while tailoring standards such as height, parking, and lot coverage.
- **Regional Housing**. With the assistance of the COGs, municipalities must prepare a Housing Growth Plan every five years that aligns with local plans of conservation and development and regional and statewide goals. WestCOG is currently developing a Regional Housing Growth Plan in partnership with member municipalities.

Housing & Residential Development

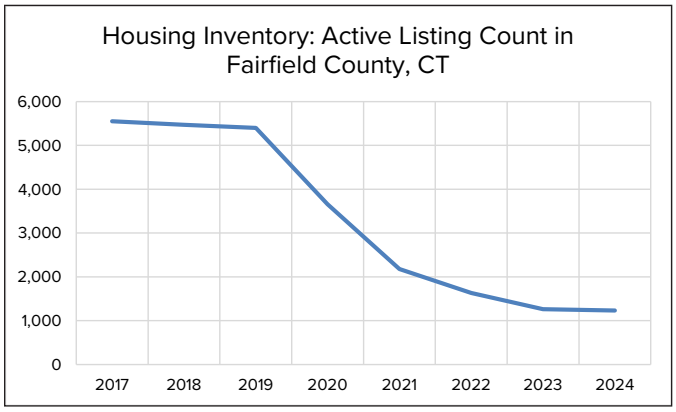
The Housing Data Snapshots at the beginning of this chapter presents an overall picture of Darien's housing stock. Darien has 7,234 households, of which 82% are homeowner households and 18% renter households. Single-family houses predominate; of Darien's 7,675 housing units 88 percent are single-family houses, and 12 percent are multifamily buildings.[8] Over the past 20 years, the percentage of multi-family units has increased and is expected to increase over the next ten years.

One of the common characteristics of Darien's homes is their size and age. More than 65% of housing units have four or more bedrooms and 28% have two or three bedrooms.[9] Forty percent of houses were built before 1950, making them at least 75 years old.

Regional & Local Housing Market Trends

During the pandemic, rising sale prices and rents were the trend in towns and cities of all sizes and in all states, although the housing market has cooled down in some areas due to higher interest rates. However, the housing market has remained strong in many areas of the country such as Fairfield County, which means low inventory, high demand, multiple offers on listings, and sales prices often exceeding list prices. Figure 9-4 from the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED) shows the change in housing inventory in Fairfield County from 2018 to 2024.

Figure 9-4. Fairfield County housing inventory data from the Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED)



According to the 2021 American Community Survey, 30% of housing units in Darien have a value of $2 million or more. Current data from Zillow indicates a typical home value of more than $2.2 million as of the end of February 2026, an increase of more than 12% over 2025. The average rent in Darien as of February 2026 was $4,814 per month.

The following are additional trends in Darien's housing market.

- **Smaller Housing Types for an Aging Population**. Darien's houses are generally large, so there are not many options for older residents to downsize within town, unless they rent an apartment. Through the Town-Wide Survey and Town Planning Workshop, residents expressed the desire for more compact housing types such as condominiums and townhouses for purchase.
- **Teardowns Reducing Darien's Stock of "Starter" Homes**. Darien's smaller, relatively less expensive houses, which could be considered starter homes for young couples or families, are gradually being converted into larger, more expensive houses.
- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) Offering New Options**. Another change in Darien's residential neighborhoods is the approval and construction of accessory dwelling units. The Town modified its zoning regulations in 2024 to allow ADUs.
- **Apartment Development**. The mixed use and multi-family developments in Downtown and Noroton Heights have created hundreds of new rental apartments, including a portion designated affordable through inclusionary zoning.
- **Development of Age-Restricted & Senior Housing**. Age-restricted and senior housing, in addition to assisted living facilities, have been constructed in Darien. Among them are The Royle at Darien, Knobel Hill/Settlers Trail, and Atria Darien.

New Housing Development & Demolitions

Between 2017 and 2024, Darien granted 421 housing permits. Among neighboring communities, only New Canaan granted fewer permits at 238 (see Figure 9-5). Stamford granted the most followed by Norwalk, Fairfield, and Westport. In terms of demolitions, Westport led at 404. Darien and New Canaan had the lowest number of demolitions at 165 and 108, respectively (see Figure 9-6).

Darien's inventory of smaller, "starter" houses is gradually diminishing. According to the 2021 ACS, 25% of Darien's houses are valued between $500,000 and $1 million, with few housing units valued at less than $500,000. Between 2022 and 2025, 40 houses were demolished to make room for what is typically a larger house. Most redevelopment in Darien comes via demolition and rebuilding on the same lot rather than construction of single-family residences on vacant lots.

Figure 9-5. A comparison of house permits among towns (data from CT DCED)

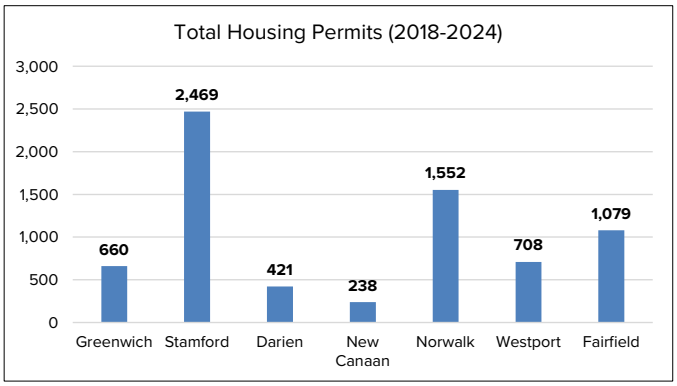
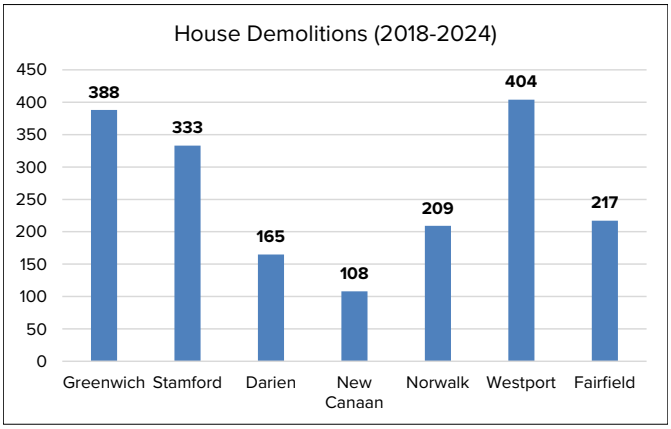


Figure 9-6. A comparison of house demolitions among towns (data from CT DCED)



Affordability & Affordable Housing

Partnership for Strong Communities' 2026 The State of Housing in Connecticut notes that approximately 11% of homes built through federal programs like the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) are at risk of losing their affordability restrictions. None of Darien's federally-assisted housing units are at risk in the next five years. However, 8-30g developments include deed-restrictions that last 30 or 40 years, and the deed restrictions of some of these affordable units constructed in Darien since 2000 will expire over the next ten years and revert to market-rate housing.

In 2009, the Town adopted inclusionary zoning ordinance in place that required 12% of units in new developments with four or more residential units to be designated deed-restricted affordable housing. In 2021, the requirement was increased to 14%.

The Darien Housing Authority operates two large affordable housing developments. The Heights at Darien is a federally-assisted affordable apartment community that was built in 2014. Located on more than 10 acres, The Heights has 106 rental apartments and townhouses—a mix of income-restricted one, two, and three-bedroom units—along with a small community building that includes a business center, on-site management offices, and a gathering/entertainment area.

The Royle at Darien is an affordable housing complex consisting of 55 units for seniors age 55 and older located at 719 Boston Post Road. Of the 55 units, 27 are limited to residents with incomes at or below 60% of the area median income (AMI), 17 are at 50% of AMI, and 9 are at 30% of AMI, and 2 are at 25% of AMI. The AMI for Darien is $104,230 for a single person.

Darien has an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to create, preserve, and rehabilitate affordable housing units in town. It can act as gap financing to make projects that contain a significant amount of affordable housing economically viable. It provides flexible financing for the Town to support housing projects that meet state affordability standards. It is funded primarily by inclusionary zoning fees. Developers may be required to either include affordable units in their projects or make a fee-in-lieu payment to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The details and functions of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Commission is outlined within the Town's Code of Ordinances.

However, affordable housing production is especially challenging in the WestCOG region due to the high cost of materials, labor, and land in the New York City Metropolitan Region.

Cost Burden

Federal housing policies typically call housing "affordable" if it costs no more than 30% of family income. The term "cost burden" is used to refer to households that pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs, while "severely cost burdened" refers to those that spend more than 50% of their income on housing costs. Data Haven reports that 29% of households in Darien are cost-burdened. Among renter households in Darien, 55% are cost-burdened, compared to 21% of owner households. Fifteen percent of all households are severely cost-burdened.

The Centers for Housing Opportunity has calculated that to afford a 2-bedroom apartment in Darien requires an annual income of least $105,000. Based on the organization's figures, to purchase a "starter" house in Darien, which costs at least $1.2 million, a family needs to earn at least $365,000 a year.

Employer-Assisted Housing

In employer-assisted housing, employers help employees with rental costs or provide housing as a benefit to improve employee retention. Such initiatives are typically created for moderate-income workers in high-cost communities as a means to reduce commuting distances and make employment more attractive to candidates. Some examples in Darien include the following:

- The Noroton Fire Department created housing for volunteer firefighters by converting an existing building at 1921 Boston Post Road into a three-bedroom house to be rented to three individuals who are fire volunteers. This initiative

supports the department's volunteer force.

- The Country Club of Darien built a staff house near the paddle courts that replaced an older building that was there when the property was a farm.

Section 405e of Darien's Zoning Regulations allows, as an accessory use, requiring a special permit, "living accommodations and/dwelling units in conjunction with a special permit use where the applicant clearly demonstrates a reasonable safety, security, or similar need to have an employee or specified number of employees reside on the premises." This provision, which has been on the books since 1957, has been used to construct housing for workers at the three local country clubs, the Noroton Yacht Club, several local churches, and for other special permit uses such as the Darien Community Association. The housing consists of apartments over existing buildings, dormitory style housing with a shared kitchen, and single-family residences. They are all considered "affordable" units because the organizations do not charge rent, but they are not affordable housing under Section 8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes. Over the next ten years, the various clubs in town will continue to need employee housing on or near their properties.

Senior Housing/Independent & Assisted Living

Darien has several other senior housing options. The Residence at Selleck's Woods, Atria Darien, and Maplewood at Darien each provide various levels of care such as independent living, assisted living, and memory care. The organization At Home in Darien assists residents age 60 and above stay in their houses by providing transportation services and volunteer services, including raking leaves and shoveling snow.

Housing for Special Needs: Intellectually & Developmentally Disabled and Neurodiverse Individuals

People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities who do not or cannot live with their parents need housing and special services. There are 18 housing units in Darien designated for adults with developmental disabilities located at 24 and 26 East Lane and at The Cottage at Edgerton Street. The Cottage at Edgerton Street is a 6-unit residential facility designed for mentally disabled young adults, providing a safe, supported, and secure community environment. Baywater Properties, the developer of The Corbin District, used an inclusionary zoning requirement to create a home on East Lane for developmentally disabled adults. The 12-unit, two building project was approved in 2018.

> As of July 2026, 20 ADUs have been approved since the zoning regulations were amended in 2024 to allow them.[11]

While intellectual disability is a type of neurodivergence, many neurodiverse people do not have an intellectual disability. The brains of people who are neurodivergent function, learn, and process information in ways that are not considered typical. Examples include autism spectrum disorders and dyslexia. Housing needs for the neurodiverse include sensory-friendly design, support services, and community connection to prevent isolation and facilitate independent living. Accessory dwelling units could present opportunities for neurodiverse adults to live separately but very close to their parents or, at a minimum, in the community.

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

An ADU is a separate living space with cooking facilities, either attached or detached from the principal dwelling, located on the same property as a larger single-family home (see Figure 9-7 on page 104). ADUs are often referred to as "granny flats" or "in-law suites" because they traditionally housed an elderly parent or in-law of the homeowner. Today, these units are also being rented out to existing or new residents and to adult children.

The State of Connecticut recently adopted new laws for ADUs to increase the supply of smaller, more affordable housing units. ADUs can be detached, attached to the main house, or integrated into the house. Private homeowners pay for their development costs, which can be recouped over time by renting them out. Development costs for an ADU in Connecticut range from $225 to $600 per square foot, depending on ADU type, size, layout, and finishing.[10] According to these figures, a 700 square foot detached ADU could cost at least $250,000 to build. An ADU can take approximately 6 to 9 months to build. Although not all banks in CT offer ADU-specific loans, financing is available through home equity lines of credit and other sources.

According to the Department of Planning & Zoning, as of July 2026, 20 ADUs have been approved in Darien since the zoning regulations were amended in June 2024 to allow them. Sixteen of them are one-bedroom units, three are studios, and one is a two-bedroom unit—within a mix of detached and attached units. Each single-family residential zone in Darien has at least one approved ADU, with the exception of the R-NBD Zone, where ADUs are not currently permitted. ADUs on properties one acre or larger are handled administratively at the staff level, while those on less than one acre require site plan review by the Planning & Zoning Commission. Zoning and building permits are required for all ADUs. Further reviews and approvals may be required if the ADU is in a flood zone or coastal area; if there is excavation/filling/regrading involved; or if it is within an Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) regulated area. In Darien, accessory dwelling units (ADUs) are subject to different maximum size limits depending on whether they are attached or detached. Attached ADUs are permitted up to a maximum of 700 square feet, while detached ADUs may be permitted up to a maximum of 1,000 square feet.

Blight Prevention

The Town adopted a blight prevention ordinance in 2017 that established a Blight Review Board composed of five members appointed by the P&Z Commission, the Board of Selectmen, the Human Service Council, the Commission on Aging, and the Representative Town Meeting. The ordinance defines blight conditions, provides a process for issuing blight citations, and enforces the ordinance through fines and other mechanisms. The Town employs a part-time Blight Prevention Officer. The blight ordinance was originally limited to residential properties, but was expanded in 2023 to include commercial properties.

Since the adoption of the ordinance, the Blight Review Board has responded to more than 20 complaints of blight. It has issued citations and imposed fines, some of which have been collected and the balance of which remains as a lien on blighted properties.

The Blight Review Board has requested the Board of Selectmen to allow it to pursue foreclosure of liens on five properties. The Blight Review Board expects that as awareness of the blight prevention process increases in Darien, the need for enforcement will decrease.

Figure 9-7. Illustration depicting different types of accessory dwelling units (by Cole Jackson, licensed by CC BY 1.0)



Commercial & Mixed-Use Development

The Darien of the future has been emerging building-by-building in Noroton Heights and in the Downtown. Since the 2016 POCD, 20 redevelopment projects have been constructed, are under construction, or are approved and ready to be constructed. When completed, the projects will add approximately 700 multi-family housing units, including more than 70 affordable units, and 500,000 square feet of commercial space, including Class A office space. There will be more than 80 new restaurants, retailers, and service businesses in town after all of the approved projects are completed.

The largest projects include the Corbin District, which is being developed in two phases, Heights Crossing, and Darien Commons. They represent very different architecture, building forms, and experiences than the developments that had preceded them. These new projects are designed with attention to Coastal Connecticut architectural details, high-quality landscape finishings, accommodations for pedestrians, public spaces, and structured parking.

These three projects are transit-oriented developments located adjacent to, or within walking distance of, transit stations. The State of Connecticut has encouraged municipalities served by bus and rail transit to support and facilitate this type of development. The State defines transit-oriented development (TOD) as the development of residential, commercial, mixed-use, and employment centers within 0.5 miles or within walking distance of public transportation facilities, including rail and bus rapid transit. The benefits of TOD include increasing access to public transit and jobs in the region, enhancing transit ridership, and reducing the need for driving. TOD is the opposite of sprawling, car-dependent development.

Responses to the Redevelopment

The Town-Wide Survey and Town Planning Workshop revealed mixed opinions about the new projects, with some residents expressing concern about the fast pace of development and their potentially negative impacts on the town's character, traffic, and the school district, while the majority appreciate the new housing and retail offerings.



Down Memory Lane: the old Noroton Heights Shopping Center (photo courtesy of the Planning & Zoning Department)



Down Memory Lane: the old "Fairbanks Block," or the south side of Boston Post Road between Exit 11 and Corbin Drive (photo courtesy of the Planning & Zoning Department)

Impact on Character

In the Town-Wide Survey, a frequently repeated comment was that Darien is losing its small-town character. The new buildings are generally taller and wider than the buildings that they replaced and their overall scale is larger than Darien's older building stock. The Town's Commercial Design Guidelines, which the Architectural Review Board (ARB) utilizes in their review of applications, were tailored for Darien's traditional building stock in Downtown. They do not offer substantive guidance on new construction and the types and designs of redevelopment that are common in the region today. The ARB recommends

Redevelopment in Darien (2017-2027)



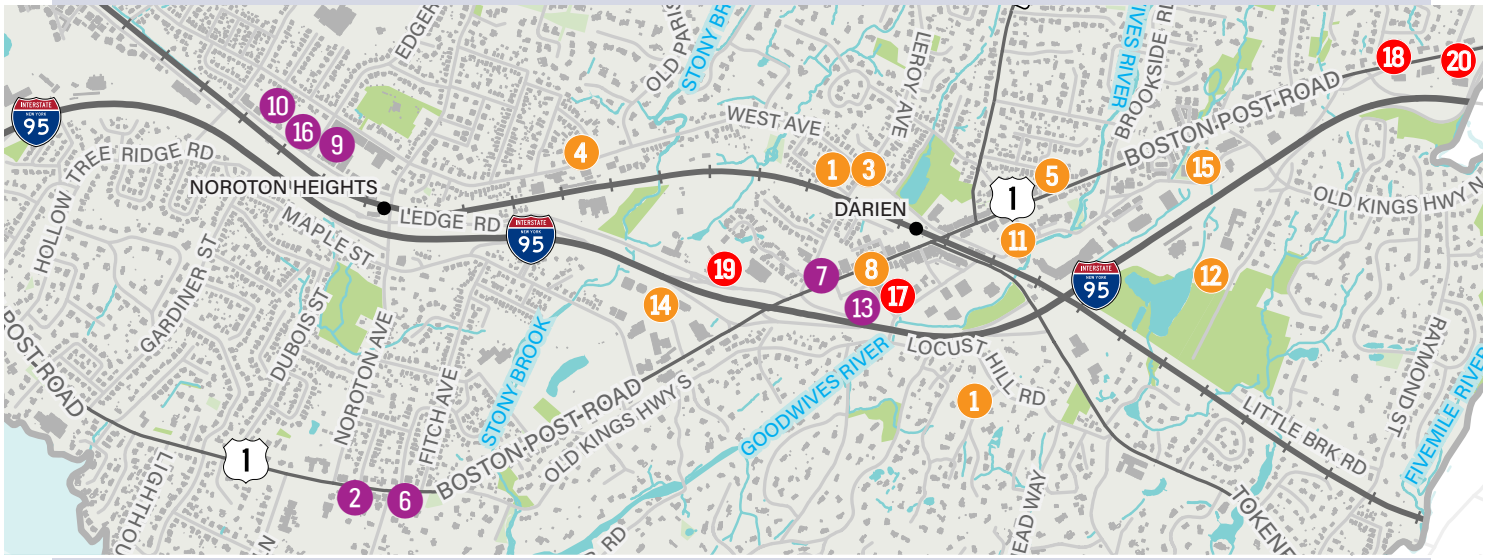


















LEGEND: Mixed-Use Commercial Multifamily

No.	Project Name	Year Completed	Type	Uses	No. of Residential Units	No. of Affordable Units	Commercial Square Footage
1	Knobel Hill	2017	Multifamily	Condominiums	8	2	
2	Village on Post	2018	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail	8	0	14,000
3	Pemberton 16	2018	Multifamily	Condominiums	16	5	
4	168 West Avenue Apartments	2019	Multifamily	Apartments	4	0	
5	The Royle at Darien	2020	Multifamily	Apartments	55	55	
6	Landing on Post	2022	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail	5	1	11,000
7	Darien Place	2022	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail	4	0	21,000
8	Corbin District Phase 1	2023	Multifamily	Apartments	12	12	
9	Darien Commons	2023	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail	122	16	351,000
10	Heights Crossing	2025	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail	65	10	108,000
11	Sedgwick Lofts	2026	Multifamily	Condominiums	18	0	
12	3 Parklands Drive	2027	Multifamily	Apartments	57	6	
13	The Corbin Phase 2	2027	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Office, Retail	78	2	250,000
14	Thorndal Circle	2027	Multifamily	Apartments	175	25	
15	Shay	2027	Multifamily	Apartments	8	0	
16	Heights Corner	2027	Mixed-Use	Apartments, Retail, Office	20	0	51,000
COMMERCIAL REDEVELOPMENT							
17	34 Old Kings Highway South	2023	Commercial	Office	N/A	N/A	5,625
18	Birdcode Restaurant	2024	Commercial	Restaurant	N/A	N/A	3,500
19	BMW of Darien	2025	Commercial	Automotive	N/A	N/A	34,470
20	Cloud 10 Carwash	2026	Commercial	Automotive	N/A	N/A	5,150

updating the *Commercial Design Guidelines* with more guidance to be able to shape contemporary redevelopment. Some of this guidance also could be incorporated into the regulations within certain zones.

Impact on Darien Public Schools

Through the Town-Wide Survey many residents expressed concern that the new development would burden the school system with new students. The latest school enrollment study reports that this is not the case. The *2025 Enrollment Projections Update* for Darien Public Schools calculated that the redevelopment projects completed so far have added approximately 50 students, with an approximately even split among the elementary schools, middle school, and high school. While the students living in the new developments contribute to the district's total enrollment, the report indicates that housing turnover and birth rates are the main drivers of enrollment in Darien. Birth rates have been relatively high, which is a primary reason the enrollment projection model's "medium" scenario shows 8% growth in elementary enrollment over the next five years. The migration of new families into existing homes still contributes more students than the new developments. The report concludes that K–12 enrollment will likely remain relatively stable, with the modest gains in elementary schools being offset by a projected 6% decline at the high school level as larger graduating classes are replaced by slightly smaller incoming cohorts. Chapter 8. Community Facilities, Amenities & Services contains more details on enrollment projections.

Impact on Traffic

As mentioned in Chapter 7, traffic volumes along Boston Post Road have generally been decreasing gradually over the past two decades. However, the latest CTDOT traffic data is from 2023, so it doesn't capture the changes that have taken place in Darien over the past three years. Furthermore, average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes do not convey the level of traffic congestion during peak hours that residents are experiencing or increases due to regional traffic going through Darien. Cut-through traffic contributes to higher volumes, when navigation apps reroute regional commuters onto Darien's streets. Furthermore, shoppers traveling to large retailers in Stamford and Norwalk (e.g. Costco, Wegman's, Target, Home Depot) near the Darien border along Boston Post Road impact traffic in Darien. Conversely, Trader Joe's along Boston Post Road in Darien attracts shoppers living both within and outside Darien.

Historic Preservation

Darien has several legal and community-based tools to protect its historic resources:

Demolition Delay Ordinance

This ordinance provides for up to a 90-day waiting period for the demolition of older structures. This delay allows the Town Historian and the Museum of Darien time to document the building or explore alternatives like relocation.

Protected Town Landmarks

The P&Z Commission can designate specific structures as Protected Town Landmarks, enabling it to waive certain standards to preserve the site and its surrounding values.

Protected Heritage Trees

In 1979, the town designated six specific "Heritage Trees" as Protected Town Landmarks, including the notable beech tree on Allen-O'Neill Drive.

National Designations

The following sites are listed on the National Register of Historic Places which provides recognition and some protection from federal or state-funded projects, as well as eligibility for certain preservation grant.

- **Boston Post Road Historic District**. Encompasses 58 contributing buildings near the Noroton River bridge.
- **Stephen Tyng Mather House (Mather Homestead)**. Home of the first director of the National Park Service.
- **Pond-Weed House**. Built circa 1694, it is considered the oldest house in town.
- **DCA Meadowlands**. The headquarters of the Darien Community Association.

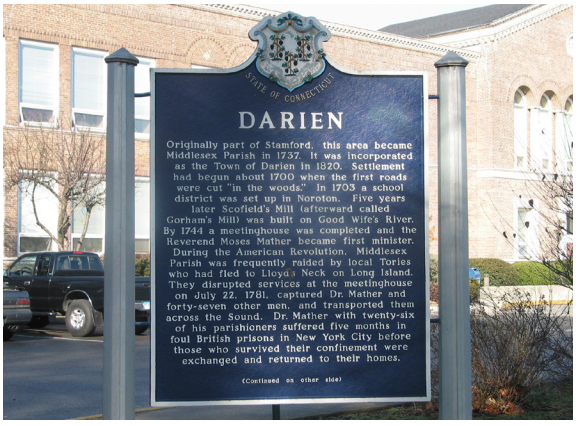
Within the Town there are several cemeteries and ancient burial grounds. Some of these are privately owned and several are Town-owned. Others are small, scattered, and on private property. Some of these are not visible from a street and might be out of general sight, so it is important to clarify who is responsible for their maintenance.

Scenic Road Designations

Section 7-149a of the Connecticut General Statutes specifically authorizes communities to designate scenic roads. This designation can regulate future changes such as widening, removal of stone walls, and tree cutting. Examples of roads that might be appropriate for scenic roads designation include Hollow Tree Ridge Road, Old King's Highway South, Stephen Mather Road, Brookside Road, and Ring's End Road.



The Pond-Weed House, located at the corner of Boston Post Road and Hollow Tree Ridge Road, was built circa 1700 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places



A historic marker describing Darien's history is located outside of Town Hall

Recommendations

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

9-1. Review and Update the ADU Provisions in the Zoning Regulations

Evaluate newly-constructed ADUs and identify potential procedural, policy, and/or zoning changes. Consider methods to facilitate the creation of ADUs, such as preapproving plans for ADUs and/or preparing a toolkit similar to the New Haven ADU Toolkit.

9-2. Explore Instituting Developed Site Area Limits in Certain Residential Districts

Developed site area limits currently exist in certain commercial zones, but not in single-family residential zones. Consider establishing a maximum developed site area in residential zones, which would include building coverage in addition to the area covered by driveways, parking areas, terraces and patios.

9-3. Consider Rezoning Residential Areas Containing Non-Conforming Properties

Some residential areas contain one-acre properties that are located in districts zoned for two acres. Study the possibility of rezoning these properties to reduce the need for variances when making certain changes. Determine the potential for rezoning to lead to additional development. Solicit public input.

MARKET RATE HOUSING

9-4. Encourage a Variety of Housing Choices

Work with developers to encourage condominiums and other for-sale multifamily housing that broadens opportunities for residents, including those age 55 and older seeking to downsize, to purchase a home in Darien. Continue to recognize the role of rental housing in meeting the Town's overall housing needs.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

9-5. Encourage and Support the Development of Affordable Housing in Appropriate Locations

a. Encourage the development of workforce housing, which is 60% to 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), with AMI being $148,900 in Fairfield County for a family of four. Also encourage the development of housing for special needs, including for the intellectually and/or developmentally disabled and for the neurodiverse.

b. Consider creating a new overlay or floating affordable housing zone, which could be modeled after the Special Needs Housing Overlay Zone and Active Senior Residential Overlay Zone. It would include criteria and incentives for affordable housing developments (e.g., proximate to rail and/or bus transit, served by public water and sewer, etc.)

9-6. Evaluate the Purchase or Long-Term Lease of Surplus Utility Land for Affordable Housing

This includes the properties of CTDOT, Eversource/Connecticut Light & Power, Aquarion Water Company, and any other utilities.

9-7. Explore Additional Funding Sources for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund

The fund should continue to receive payments from developers that do not provide the required 14% affordable residential units under the inclusionary zoning regulations.

9-8. Continue to Support the Creation of Employer-Assisted & Volunteer Housing

This should be considered when renovating or expanding the three existing fire department buildings. The general form of any additions or new buildings containing housing should be consistent with that of the neighborhood in which it is located.

STATE REQUIREMENTS

9-9. Revise the Zoning Regulations to Comply with State Requirements

a. Revise parking regulations to meet State requirements. Municipalities cannot reject an application solely for failing to conform with any requirement of off-street parking spaces for any residential development. However, for developments with more than 16 units, a municipality can require off-street parking but must allow developer to submit a parking needs assessment proving less parking is required. For developments with less than 16 units, municipalities can only require off-street parking if in a Conservation and Traffic Mitigation District and must allow the developer to submit a Parking Needs Assessment proving less parking is required.

b. Revise zoning to allow subject only to summary review, middle housing in commercial or mixed-use districts. Middle housing is a residential building containing 2-9 units including, but not limited to, townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, perfect sixes, and cottage clusters.

BUILDING FORM & HEIGHT

9-10. Evaluate the Application of Historic Preservation, Zoning, and Village District Tools in Downtown

a. Consider establishing a Village District if an appropriate location is identified.

b. Promote the "protected town landmarks" designation and consider designating certain trees as landmark and adding protections.

c. Maintain the two-story height limit in the Central Business District (CBD) and Designed Business Zone (DB).

d. Remove the incentive of a third story in exchange for a public plaza in those zones where it exists. Update the public plaza requirement to yield more open space relative to the size of building and to yield better functionality, design, and sustainability outcomes.

e. Boston Post Road between Leroy Avenue and Spring Grove Cemetery should remain commercial and buildings should continue to be limited to a maximum of two stories.

9-11. Reexamine the Definition and Calculation of Building Height in Residential Districts

The definition and calculation of building height should be reexamined to reduce unintended outcomes and obstacles to desirable investment.

9-12. Review and Update the Commercial Design Guidelines

The Commercial Design Guidelines, originally prepared by the ARB in 2009 and updated in 2021, should be kept updated to be responsive to trends. The includes, but is not limited to, the following:

a. Include design guidance for new development, especially large projects.

b. Include acceptable and unacceptable materials.

c. Require a sign, lighting, and landscape plan for large projects.

d. Include photos of examples from other places that demonstrate specific design intents and attributes.

e. Model block specifications should continue to be used in Downtown and Noroton Heights. These include details on sidewalks, benches, and lampposts, and result in a consistent look and feel.

f. Update the list of street trees to reflect changes to invasive plant laws and to include native species.

g. Consider developing a streetscape component of the guidelines.

9-13. Update the Lighting Regulations

Determine an illumination standard in lumens or kelvins for signs and incorporate Dark Sky provisions to reduce light pollution. Consult the 2024 Model Outdoor Lighting Regulations for Connecticut.[12]

9-14. Evaluate New Uses for Potential inclusion in Commercial and/or Mixed-Use Zones

a. Consider including hotels, motels, and inns—with a limit of 3 stories—in the SB Zone as principal uses.

b. Research trends and types of contemporary medical spas and clinics and evaluate their appropriateness for inclusion in certain commercial and/or mixed-use zones.

9-15. Simplify the Special Permit Process

Shift minor activities to Administrative Review and replace subjective criteria with quantifiable standards.

FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT

9-16. Consider Rezoning Properties on the South/East Side of Old King's Highway South from Designed Office (DO) to Central Business District (CBD)

This zoning change would add depth to Downtown from its current linear pattern along Boston Post Road. Redevelopment could lead to a more active, walkable street grid along Center Street and Old King's Highway South that connects to Corbin Drive.



Aerial photo from the Town's MapGeo showing properties forming the block around Boston Post Road, Old King's Highway South, Center Street, and Corbin Drive

Village Districts

As specifically authorized by State statutes, a municipality can create Village Districts as part of their zoning regulations. Such districts must be located in areas of distinctive character, landscape, or historic value that are specifically identified in the POCD. The regulations establishing Village Districts must protect the distinctive character, landscape and historic structures within such districts and can regulate new construction, substantial reconstruction and rehabilitation of properties within such districts and in view from public roadways, including, but not limited to the design and placement of buildings, the maintenance of public views, the design, paving materials and placement of public roadways, and other elements that the commission deems appropriate to maintain and protect the character of the Village District. New Canaan and Westport have adopted Village Districts.

All development in a Village District must be designed to achieve various compatibility objectives:

- The building and layout of buildings and included site improvements shall reinforce existing buildings and streetscape patterns and the placement of buildings and included site improvements shall assure there is no adverse impact on the district.
- Proposed streets shall be connected to the existing district road network, wherever possible.
- Open spaces within the proposed development shall reinforce open space patterns of the district, in form and siting.
- Locally significant features of the site such as distinctive buildings or sight lines of vistas from within the district, shall be integrated into the site design.
- The landscape design shall complement the district's landscape patterns.
- The exterior signs, site lighting and accessory structures shall support a uniform architectural theme if such a theme exists and be compatible with their surroundings.
- The scale, proportions, massing and detailing of any proposed building shall be in proportion to the scale, proportion, massing and detailing in the district.

The Commercial Design Guidelines, which are advisory, have some content that is similar to Village Districts that can apply where the Village District does not cover.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

9-17. Consider Updating the 1980 Natural and Architectural Preservation Survey (NAPS)

An updated NAPS would identify new town landmarks, enhance the protection of historic resources, and leverage GIS to document changes since the original study. An updated survey would strengthen local preservation efforts and ensure that relevant structures are protected.

9-18. Support Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures

Create incentives and/or zoning regulations that encourage the adaptive reuse of historic structures to meet modern housing and/or commercial needs.

9-19. Strengthen the Demolition Delay Ordinance

Consider extending the demolition-delay period up to 180 days for designated historic structures, structures listed on the State or National Registers, or buildings more than 100 years old.

GREAT ISLAND

9-20. Consider a Zoning Change to Great Island

Great Island is currently zoned R-1, a single-family residential district. The Great Island Master Plan envisions conservation, historic preservation, and adaptive reuse, but not residential development. As the plan is implemented, the zoning governing Great Island may need to be changed to support aspects of the vision involving the built environment and preservation.



▲ The 1927 Darien Playhouse at 1077 Boston Post Road was an adaptive reuse project that repurposed the structure as a mixed-use property (photo by V20 Group, LLC)

Chapter 9 Endnotes

1 This map was created based on parcel data provided by the Planning & Zoning Department. Consult the Assessor's Office or the Town's online property records map to determine official land use designations.

2 The percentages were calculated based on parcel data provided by the Planning & Zoning Department.

3 This is not the official Zoning Map of the Town. The latest official map can be downloaded from the Town's website.

4 McHue, Daniel and Sophie Huang, "Estimating the National Housing Shortfall," Harvard University Joint Center for Housing Studies. Accessed at www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/estimating-national-housing-shortfall on March 21, 2026.

5 Hoover, Makinzi and Isabella Lucy, "The State of Housing in America," U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Accessed at www.uschamber.com/economy/the-state-of-housing-in-america on March 21, 2026.

6 Connecticut Fair Share Housing Study, 2025. CT Office of Policy & Management.

7 "2025 Affordable Housing Appeals List," CT Dept. of Housing

8 "Darien 2025 Equity Report," DataHaven.

9 2024 ACS.

10 Pergallo Construction

11 Department of Planning & Zoning

12 "Model Outdoor Lighting Regulations for Connecticut," Menunkatuck Audobon Society, 2024.

Implementation Strategy

Legend

Phase	Lead & Support Entities	Potential Cost / Investment
Priority = Priority (start within 6 months from now) **Short** = Short-Term (start bet. 6 months and 2 yrs. from now) **Mid** = Mid-Term (start within 2-4 yrs. from now) **Long** = Long-Term (start 4 yrs. or later from now)	**Gov** = Board of Selectmen **Dep** = Town Departments **Com** = Boards, Commissions, Committees **Org** = Local & Regional Organizations **Agn**= External Agencies **Oth** = Other	**$** = $150,000 or less **$$** = $150,000 to $500,000 **$$$** = $500,000 to $1 million **$$$$** = > $1 million

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Potential Impl. Cost Funding Source
SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL				
9-1	**Review and Update the ADU Provisions in the Zoning Regulations.**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
9-2	**Consider Reducing Maximum Building Coverage in Certain Residential Districts**	Mid	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
9-3	**Consider Rezoning Residential Areas Containing Non-Conforming Properties**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
MARKET RATE HOUSING				
9-4	**Encourage a Variety of Housing Choices**	Priority	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
AFFORDABLE HOUSING				
9-5	**Encourage and Support the Development of Affordable Housing in Appropriate Locations**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Housing Authority	n/a
9-6	**Evaluate the Purchase or Long-Term Lease of Surplus Utility Land for Affordable Housing**	Mid	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Housing Authority	$ $$$$ Capital Budget
9-7	**Explore Additional Funding Sources for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund**	Short	**Affordable Housing Trust Fund** **Dep:** Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: RTM Planning, Zoning & Housing Committee, Planning & Zoning Commission, Housing Authority	n/a
9-8	**Continue to Support the Creation of Employer-Assisted & Volunteer Housing**	Ongoing	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning, Fire Dept., Post EMS-Post 53, Police Dept.	n/a
STATE REQUIREMENTS				
9-9	**Revise the Zoning Regulations to Comply with State Requirements**	Priority	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
BUILDING FORM, HEIGHT & USES				
9-10	**Evaluate the Application of Historic Preservation, Village District, and Zoning Tools in Downtown**	Mid	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Architectural Review Board	$ n/a Oper. Budget

#	Recommendation	Phase	Lead Entity Support Entities	Planning Cost Potential Impl. Cost Funding Source
9-11	**Review and Update the Commercial Design Guidelines**	Short	**Architectural Review Board** **Dep:** Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Planning & Zoning Commission	$ n/a Oper. Budget
9-12	**Reexamine the Definition and Calculation of Building Height in Residential Districts**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
9-13	**Update the Lighting Regulations**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Architectural Review Board	$ n/a Oper. Budget
9-14	**Evaluate New Land Uses for Potential inclusion in Commercial and/or Mixed-Use Zones**	Ongoing	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
9-15	**Simplify the Special Permit Process**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT				
9-16	**Consider Rezoning Properties on the South/East Side of Old King's Highway South from Designed Office (DO) to Central Business District (CBD)**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
HISTORIC PRESERVATION				
9-17	**Consider Updating the 1980 Natural and Architectural Preservation Survey (NAPS)**	Mid	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	$ n/a Oper. Budget
9-18	**Support Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures**	Ongoing	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
9-19	**Strengthen the Demolition Delay Ordinance**	Short	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning	n/a
GREAT ISLAND				
9-20	**Consider a Zoning Change to Great Island**	Priority	**Planning & Zoning Commission** **Gov**: Board of Selectmen **Dep**: Dept. of Planning & Zoning **Com**: Great Island Advisory Committee	$ n/a Oper. Budget


ARMY-COAST GUARD-AIR FORCE

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APPENDIX

Consistency with Regional & State Plans

2020-2030 Western Connecticut Regional Plan of Conservation & Development

In accordance with C.G.S. § 8-23, the Town of Darien Planning & Zoning Commission has evaluated the *2026 Darien Plan of Conservation and Development* (POCD) against the goals, policies, and land use strategies outlined in the 2020-2030 Western Connecticut Regional Plan of Conservation and Development adopted by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG).

The P&Z Commission finds that the *2026 Darien POCD* is substantially consistent with the regional plan. The local plan is consistent with the region's core emphasis on balancing targeted economic growth, infrastructural capacity, and transit-oriented housing choices with proactive environmental conservation and coastal resiliency.

Growth Management & Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

The regional plan promotes focusing dense development into established centers with robust infrastructure. The *2026 Darien POCD* plan aligns with this through its support of transformative mixed-use nodes in parts of Downtown and in Noroton Heights. These projects focus housing, retail, and office space within walking distance of the Town's two Metro-North commuter rail stations.

Infrastructure & Resource Capacity

The regional plan prioritizes matching growth with structural capabilities. The *2026 Darien POCD* incorporates management of its utilities, asset tracking, and sewer service capacities to ensure that local infrastructure expands sustainably alongside private real estate investments.

Environmental Conservation & Coastal Resiliency

As a Long Island Sound coastal community, Darien's plan places vital emphasis on open space preservation, native ecosystem support, and flood mitigation. These policies map onto WestCOG's regional environmental frameworks and climate adaptation priorities.

Housing Diversity

The local plan actively addresses changing demographics and workforce housing needs, utilizing regional data indicators to align Darien's local housing policies with WestCOG's regional baseline assessments.

Connecticut Conservation & Development Policies Plan 2025-2030

Pursuant to C.G.S. § 8-23, the Town of Darien Planning & Zoning Commission has evaluated *the 2026 Darien Plan of Conservation and Development* (POCD) to ensure consistency with the Conservation and Development Policies Plan for Connecticut.

The P&Z Commission finds that the *2026 Darien POCD* is substantially consistent with the growth management principles, land use strategies, and environmental policies established by the State of Connecticut. The local plan supports the state's overarching vision of compact, sustainable growth centered around existing infrastructure, while protecting critical natural and coastal resources.

The *2026 Darien POCD* aligns with the state's six core planning mandates:

GMP 1: Redevelop and Revitalize Regional Centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure.

The *2026 Darien POCD* focuses commercial and multifamily residential growth within the Town's established commercial districts and transit corridors, where municipal sewer, water, and road systems are already present.

GMP 2: Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs.

The *2026 Darien POCD* addresses changing local and statewide demographics by encouraging a broader mix of housing choices. Through incentives for mixed-use development and targeted transit-oriented zoning, the plan supports the expansion of diverse housing types—including multifamily, downsized, and workforce housing options.

GMP 3: Concentrate Development Around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options.

Central to the *2026 Darien POCD* is its focus on transit-oriented development (TOD). The plan heavily promotes walkable, high-density residential and retail options centered directly around the Darien and Noroton Heights Metro-North rail stations, thereby minimizing single-occupancy vehicle trips and maximizing public transit utility.

GMP 4: Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands.

The plan prioritizes the strict preservation of Darien's open spaces, wetlands, and coastal zones. It contains strong recommendations for native ecosystem protections, the implementation of low-impact development (LID) standards, and the preservation of historic streetscapes and neighborhood characters that form the fabric of the community.

GMP 5: Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets and Critical Habitats and Sustain the Operation of Public Water Supply, Energy, and Transportation Infrastructure.

The *2026 Darien POCD* integrates climate resiliency and flood mitigation strategies along its waterfront and major drainage basins. Furthermore, the plan enforces close management of its sewer service areas and coordinates with regional utility providers to safeguard watershed areas and public drinking water infrastructure.

GMP 6: Promote Integrated Planning Across All Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional, and Local Basis.

The preparation of the *2026 Darien POCD* involved coordination with regional data baselines from the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) and adherence to State of Connecticut statutory planning requirements, ensuring Darien's local policies directly advance broader state infrastructure and economic goals.