

INTRODUCTION



City of New Haven
John DeStefano, Jr., Mayor

LEGAL STANDING

This plan is prepared and approved as New Haven's Comprehensive Plan, in accordance with the CGS, Section 295-302, An Act Creating a City Plan Commission in the City of New Haven. As stated in Section 296, it is the duty of the City Plan Commission to "prepare a comprehensive plan for the systematic and harmonious development of the city". This duty is codified in the Charter of the City of New Haven, Section 179 (c).

In addition, the plan is prepared in a manner consistent with Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) Section 8.23. The plan also takes into account the State of Connecticut's Plan of Conservation and Development, pursuant to Chapter 297. To that end, the plan shows the Commission's most desirable use of land within the City of New Haven for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation and other purposes and for the most desirable density of population in the city.

Relationship to Other Plans

This plan supercedes and replaces the Workable Program of 1957, as amended.

Process for Amendments

Proposed amendments to this document shall be submitted to the City Plan Department for administrative processing. The Executive Director of the City Plan Department may submit an amendment on behalf of the Commission or on behalf of the City Plan Department. The Executive Director shall forward all proposed amendments to the City Plan Commission for consideration in accordance with state and local law and the Commission's rules and regulations. The Executive Director may submit an analysis and advice on any proposed amendment.

Proposed amendments to the New Haven Zoning Ordinance, the New Haven Coastal Program, active and proposed Redevelopment Plans, active and proposed Municipal Development Plans, and all other development plans prepared or reviewed by the City Plan Commission shall be reviewed for their consistency with this document.

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PLANNING HISTORY

The City of New Haven is generally recognized as the first colonial American city to plan for land use development. In 1639, Surveyor John Brockett laid out a grid of nine blocks, organized around a central common block. The so-called “Nine Square Plan” is an early example of the grid patterns later used in Philadelphia (1682), Detroit (1700), New Orleans (1718) and Savannah (1733). The New Haven Green is now a National Historic Landmark and the Nine Square Plan is recognized by the American Institute of Certified Planners as a National Historic Planning Landmark.

The grid pattern, however, is not pervasive in New Haven. Instead, as the city developed, a series of roads radiated away from the nine squares to points north, east and west. In the colonial era, New Haven grew slowly with very little expansion outside of the original squares. A map dated 1748 shows moderate expansion along Water Street and the harbor area, but rural and agriculture lands to the north.



Figure 1.1. Nine Square Plan, 1639

The New Haven Colony extended from the Housatonic River to the Hammonasset River and even onto Long Island. Soon after the Revolutionary War, New Haven reorganized as a City. The modern city boundary began to take shape as the inner suburbs (Hamden, West Haven, East Haven, North Haven and Woodbridge) incorporated as separate towns.

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At the turn of the 20th century, during a period of dramatic growth and industrialization, the City of New Haven began to formalize and codify its land use regulations. A Board of Health and a Building Inspector's Office were established early in the century. As the City Beautiful movement swept the nation, the New Haven Civic Improvement Committee was formed in 1907. Cass Gilbert and Frederick Law Olmsted prepared the first modern city plan and presented it to the committee in 1910. The plan was the city's first documented attempt to accommodate dramatic population growth and improve the quality of life in the city by advancing transportation, aesthetic and environmental improvements.



Figure 1.2. Gilbert /Olmsted Plan, 1910

In 1913, the State of Connecticut enabled and the City of New Haven established one of the nation's first City Plan Commissions. In 1925, the State enabled and the City later established zoning districts. These actions are the foundation for land use planning and the roles and responsibilities of the City Plan Commission to the present day.

In 1942, consultant Maurice E.H. Rotival prepared a comprehensive plan for the City Plan Commission. The plan, coming at the start of World War II and additional industrial expansion in the City, advocated economic development east toward the Harbor and attractive residential development to the west of downtown. In addition, Rotival recommended extensive expansion of the transportation system, including an enhanced cross-town road system and port access up the Quinnipiac River.

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Perhaps Rotival's most important contribution to the city's planning history is his appreciation of New Haven as the central city of the region:

It is obvious that this role cannot be maintained or increased but by enhancing existing assets and re-establishing others which have completely disappeared like, for instance, the contact of the city with its natural waterfront.

The city's next comprehensive plan, the Short Approach Master Plan of 1953, was strategically focused on transportation issues. Short Approach identified a preferred location for the Interstate highway system and the redesign of present-day I-91, moving the line to the east side of Wooster Square.

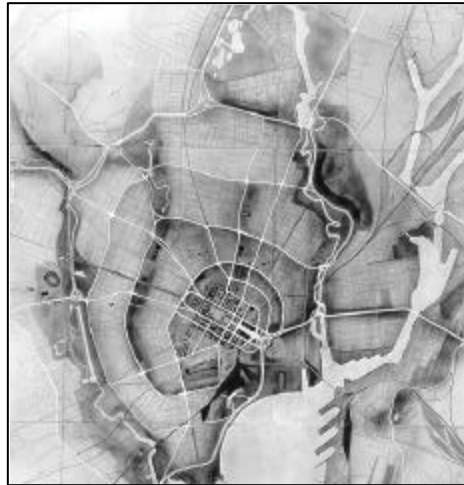


Figure 1.3. Rotival Plan, 1942

In 1957, Land Use, Thoroughfare and Community Facility Plans (later known collectively as the "Workable Program") replaced Short Approach as the City's comprehensive plan. The Workable Program was updated and revised periodically during the 1960s.

In many ways, the Workable Program coincided with a shift in land use planning from a comprehensive to a more project-specific approach. As federal and state funding sources mandated strategic project plans in target areas, a wave of Redevelopment (and later Municipal Development Plans) were prepared and approved by the City Plan Commission.

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These plans, which were prepared by the New Haven Redevelopment Agency and/or the New Haven Development Commission, focused on strategic improvements in specific target areas. Redevelopment, in particular, has made a lasting impression on the city's physical environment and on the modern transportation system. During the tenure of then Mayor Richard Lee, the City of New Haven was recognized nationally for its redevelopment efforts.

The following are among the plans adopted in the later half 20th century:

- 1955 Oak Street Redevelopment Plan
- 1958 Wooster Square Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
Long Wharf Redevelopment Plan
- 1959 Middle Ground Program (Newhallville, Dwight, Fair Haven and Hill)
- 1960 Dixwell Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
- 1963 Hill High School Redevelopment Plan
Dwight Renewal and Redevelopment Plan
Community Renewal Program
- 1966 Temple – George Redevelopment Plan
- 1968 State Street Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
Newhallville Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
- 1969 Fair Haven Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
- 1973 Hill Redevelopment and Renewal Plan
- 1975 Taft – Adams Housing Site Development Plan
- 1979 Orange Street Municipal Development Plan
- 1980 Quinnipiac River Municipal Development Plan
- 1981 Science Park Municipal Development Plan
- 1987 Mill River Municipal Development Plan
- 1995 Downtown Municipal Development Plan
- 2002 River Street Municipal Development Plan

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In addition to these plans, recent planning efforts have focused on historic preservation, coastal management and community services. The Historic District Ordinance (part of the New Haven Zoning Ordinance) and the Historic District Commission were established in 1970.

The city's first local historic district, Wooster Square, was established the following year. In 1980, then Mayor Biagio Dileto established a coastal planning steering committee. The committee, working with the Office of Downtown and Harbor Development, advanced the New Haven Coastal Program, which is considered an additional element of the comprehensive plan, and Coastal Site Plan Review, which is now part of the New Haven Zoning Ordinance.

Community services planning coincides with the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, now in year 29. The Department of Housing and Urban Development administers CDBG and a number of other federal grant programs. As an "entitlement" community, the City prepares a Consolidated Plan every five years and a strategic plan every year. The Consolidated Plan addresses the City of New Haven's planning and administration of CDBG and three other HUD programs.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In preparing this plan, the City Plan Commission hosted a series of four community meetings (total attendance of approximately 160) at the New Haven Free Public Library. In addition, City Plan provided information and solicited citizen input at each of the Mayor's Nights Out in 2001 and 2002 and direct mailed to each of the city's Community Management Teams. Internal briefings were provided to the staff of the Livable City Initiative, the Environmental Advisory Council and the Economic Development Department.

External briefings were held for the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce and the Greater New Haven Board of Realtors, Commercial Property Division.

A public hearing was held by the Joint Community Development and Legislation Committee of the Board of Aldermen on Thursday, August 14, 2003. The City Plan Commission held a public hearing on October 1, 2003.

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A section of the City of New Haven's web site was dedicated to the plan and included contact information, the New Haven Data Book, copies of community presentations and the public draft of June 27, 2003.

The Commission appreciates these contributions as well as the input of other city department heads and of the Board of Aldermen, who routinely contribute to the dialogue on land use matters. At the community meetings, certain issues and directions are noteworthy for near consensus agreement. These directions include:

- Neighborhoods. City neighborhoods are a unique resource, with quality housing and neighborhood commercial districts. There is a sense of proximity between the neighborhoods and downtown/other larger destinations. Preservation of neighborhood character is at risk from inappropriate physical design, site planning, transportation issues and deteriorating buildings. Adding density should be balanced by amenities and open space.

- Transportation. Transportation and mobility are major issues. In spite of the city's highways, commuter rail and public bus systems, there is a sense of congestion, lack of connectivity and incomplete bicycle and pedestrian access. This belies the proximity between residential areas and destinations. Trail, bike and pedestrian improvements were mentioned frequently. Completion of the Farmington Canal Line was mentioned in each meeting.

- Downtown. There is an excitement about the direction of downtown, both from a commercial and residential perspective. A downtown supermarket, more general retail, Ninth Square improvements and transportation / mobility enhancements all were mentioned.

- Environment. Environmental protection and sustainability matters are gaining support. In all three meetings, there was a sense that the city's environment contributes to special quality of life (waterfront, rivers/watersheds, parks, community gardens and views all mentioned). These resources can be enhanced with more sustainable policies: pedestrian-orientation, air quality/alternative energy, historic preservation, community gardens, open space protection, trails – especially waterfront trails – and brownfield remediation/reuse all mentioned.

- Harbor Area. Harbor and waterfront planning are hot topics. Support for Harborside trail, waterfront housing and “compatible” development.

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Figure 1.4. Planning Workshop, 2003