

BROOKLYN'S PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

2011-2021



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HOUSING

Background / Status

Brooklyn is primarily a rural town, distinguished by single-family homes on lots over one acre in size, and includes historic colonials and capes, as well as traditional New England farmhouses and newer ranch houses. Multi-family housing is located primarily in the East Brooklyn area. Higher density is allowed in areas served by sewer and water, while the more rural areas have larger lots sizes required because of the lack of such facilities. Housing is regulated by subdivision and zoning regulations, wetlands regulations, health department regulations, and existing infrastructure.

Brooklyn's affordable housing stock has historically exceeded the State's 10% target to be exempt from the Affordable Housing Appeals Act (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-30g), though over the last decade the steady creation of traditional single-family subdivision residences has brought this number right to the threshold of ten percent. The 2008 Affordable Housing Appeals List put out by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development listed Brooklyn as having 285 total "assisted" units that qualify under Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-30g, which represented 10.52% of the housing stock. In the past, the town has pursued successful housing efforts with the Brooklyn Housing Authority and the Northeastern Connecticut Community Development Corporation/Rural Homes Limited. Quebec Square, Tiffany Square, and South Main Street rehabilitation projects have made effective use of Small Cities Community Development Block Grants in the East Brooklyn area. The town maintains a Fair Housing Plan. Approximately 31% of housing units are renter-occupied, and the town has a rental unit inspection program in force. Through its Fire Marshal, Building Inspector, Zoning Enforcement Officer, and the Northeast District Department of Health, the town oversees the safety of its housing and the welfare of its residents. Continued support for these types of housing initiatives and support for these organizations is needed to ensure that Brooklyn meets the housing needs of its residents.



HOUSING

Though the Town has been exempt from the Affordable Housing Appeals Act for the last decade, the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Plan of Conservation & Development Committee recognize that substantial planning efforts must be undertaken to assure that there is an adequate, sustainable mix of housing for all income levels in Brooklyn to continue healthy growth in Town. The town's current (2010) mix of 69% owner-occupied housing units/31% renter-occupied units is slightly higher than both Windham County and the State of Connecticut (both of which have a 63%/37% split), but this is not inconsistent with the small, residential-town character. The critical components moving forward will be to encourage both new development at various income levels and "green" development that has a small environmental footprint and uses sustainable practices and materials.



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Objectives & Relation to Key Priorities

- 1) To ensure that residents of the town have reasonable access to housing, while maintaining the historic and rural character of the town
- 2) To maintain existing housing stock in sound condition
- 3) To provide for housing development sensitive to the town's natural resources
- 4) To promote the revitalization of older neighborhoods

The Plan of Conservation & Development Committee identified Housing Initiatives and Green Concerns as key priorities of the 2011-2021 Plan, as well as placing a focus on balancing residential and commercial development for the Grand List. Housing development and availability interact closely with each of these priorities, making this one of the truly central issues for Brooklyn over the next ten years. The 2009 Residents Survey indicated that most were satisfied with housing conditions and opportunities in Brooklyn. The "Availability of Suitable Housing" question received a 3.85/5. For development of new housing opportunities, the respondents preferred "small neighborhoods with conserved lands" (3.85/5) and "single family dwellings on large lots" (3.69/5), as well as some "senior housing" (3.3/5) over "two-family or single family with accessory apartments" (2.31/5), "condominiums" (2.11/5) and "apartments" (1.96/5). This feedback seems to support the general status quo of housing development patterns, with a slightly increased emphasis on cluster- or conservation-type developments.

Recommendations

1. The Planning and Zoning Commission encourage cluster subdivisions in areas identified as hosting high-priority natural resources
2. The Board of Selectmen consider adding additional affordable housing, as the state mandated percentage goal exceeds the percentage of Brooklyn affordable housing already available
3. The Planning and Zoning Commission consider extension of the Village Center District concept to other areas of Town which contribute to the traditional character of Brooklyn
4. The Planning and Zoning Commission adopt regulations that require applicants to submit information relative to the potential natural, cultural, and historic resource impact of proposed development
5. Provide development incentives such as accelerated approvals and/or density bonuses for housing developments that incorporate “green” or sustainable building practices and materials
6. Pursue planning grants from HOME Connecticut program to explore the development of Incentive Housing Districts as described in Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 8-13m to 8-13x
7. Review zoning densities for areas served by public utilities and consider regulation modification accordingly
8. Pursue Community Development Block Grants and/or Small Cities Grants to encourage rehabilitation of older or blighted housing stock
9. Consider expanding opportunities for Accessory Apartments in zoning regulations
10. Identify regulatory changes or administrative incentives that promote development of housing for young professionals, first-time homebuyers, and critical sectors of the workforce.

