

## CHAPTER 3

### LAND USE PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

#### Redding: From Wilderness to Present

The land that now comprises the Town of Redding was a densely forested wilderness until early in the eighteenth century, accessible only by rough trails connecting Native American settlements with long-established shoreline fishing grounds.

About 1640, however, the General court of the Colony of Connecticut granted to the Town of Fairfield a territory extending inland some fourteen miles to a boundary along what is now Cross Highway in Redding. North of this grant was a seventeen square mile area of unallocated land known as “The Oblong” which would later become the northern portion of Redding.

In 1670 the Town Proprietors of Fairfield secured the northerly six miles of their grant by formal purchase from a group of local Indian sachems, paying in produce and goods worth about 36 pounds, equivalent to \$ 10,340 in 2018 dollars. The following year, 1671, the town meeting of Fairfield adopted a plan to divide the unsettled lands of the interior, about seven miles wide by nearly ten miles in depth. Laid out from the southern to the northern boundary of these lands, nearly ten miles, were a central mile-wide common, thirteen “upright highways” and numerous “long lots” ranging from 50 to 1,150 feet wide, all parallel to the central common and to the easterly and westerly town bounds.

Long lot parcels of land were actively traded from an early date and by the early 1700s enterprising settlers were following Indian trails into the interior to claim the lands they had purchased or inherited. A cross-country path along the north boundary of the long lots, connecting the upper ends of the upright highways, was soon laid out as the “Cross Highway”; other segments of this ancient highway remain in place today, west to east, as Seventy Acres, Fox Run, Great Pasture, Church Hill and Uncle John’s Roads. Many portions of the original upright highways also survive in Redding; these include the parallel sections of Goodsell Hill, Dorethy, Dayton, Tudor, Sanfordtown, Greenbush, Turney and Sport Hill Roads, as well as Church Street along the Wilton line and North Park Avenue along the Easton line. Numerous fence lines and stone walls also align with the original “long lot” boundaries. The basic “layout plan” of the Town of Redding thus has its roots in the seventeenth century town plan of Fairfield - the first use of a gridded plan by which to implement the expansion of settlement in what would become the United States.

North of Cross Highway, the seventeen square mile “Oblong” of unallocated land attracted early speculation. Several grants for large tracts in this area were given by the General court in 1673, 1687, 1700 and 1706. A fortified Indian village was located on a high ridge near the center of this area. In 1714 an Indian patent for 500 nearby acres was secured from the local sachem by the Hon. John Read, Queen’s Attorney for the Connecticut Colony, who worded the patent to name his holding “Lonetown Manor” and himself as “Lord Justice” of the manor.

Settlers streamed into this wilderness during the first several decades of the eighteenth century, attracted by the broad and fertile ridges which dominate Redding’s landscape east (Sunset Hill and Redding Ridge), center (Lonetown and Redding Center) and west (Umpawaug, Windy Hill and Goodsell Hill). By 1723 some 15 inhabitants of the Oblong and 25 residents of the nearby long lots petitioned the General Court to be set apart from Fairfield as the parish of “Reading”, a name chosen in honor of John Read Esq. The

parish petition was granted in 1729, encompassing the seventeen square mile Oblong and a two-mile-deep portion of adjacent territory from the rear of the Fairfield long lots, totaling about 32 square miles.

The new community grew rapidly. A meetinghouse was erected in 1733 on Cross Highway by the northeast corner of the Mile of common, on the present Redding Center green, and the same year an Episcopal Church was erected beside Cross Highway at Chestnut Ridge (present Redding Ridge). A parish school was established in 1737, conducted in rude log schoolhouses part of the year in each of three localities: the Ridge, Lonetown and the west side. A saw and grist mill was in operation by 1737 on the Saugatuck River at Nob Crook Brook and a fulling mill nearby in 1743. Population had increased sufficiently by 1743 that three school districts were organized, each responsible for maintaining a master and a schoolhouse.

Committees began work in the 1730's to lay out needed highways. One of the earliest roads extended from John Read's manor to the meetinghouse; this exists in the present day as Lonetown Road. Several additional "cross highways" were laid out in the 1740s, including east-west segments of Peaceable Street, Redding Road, Giles Hill Road and Stepney Road. Other early roads appear to have evolved from Indian trails, following natural north-south routes along high ground, such as Umpawaug Road, Sunset Hill Road and Black Rock Turnpike. Nonetheless most roads at this time were ill-defined and all were simply trails or rutted cart paths.

By the 1750s the parish was settled in all sections with farms, dwellings, and mills on several streams. In 1750 a new Episcopal church was constructed to replace the earlier structure on the same site, and in 1753 a new and more spacious Congregational meetinghouse was erected on Cross Highway a half mile west of the original structure.

In 1767 the parish's second petition to the General Court for township privileges was granted, and the Town of Redding was officially incorporated – with a more phonetic spelling of its name. It is estimated the new town had between 800 and 1,000 inhabitants at the time. Town committees immediately set to work to lay out additional highways. A parade ground and town house site were laid out at the intersection of Cross Highway and Lonetown Road where the present green is located. In 1769 the first "Town House" was erected here, a few yards south of the present "Old Town House" which was built in 1834.

The high terrain of Redding, commanding views south to Long Island Sound and northward toward Danbury, assumed strategic importance during the Revolutionary War. In April 1777 the road over Redding Ridge and Sunset Hill was the invasion route used by British forces in their assault on Continental army provisions stored in Danbury. A year later, in 1778 and 1779, Putnam's division of Washington's army was in winter encampment at three key locations in Redding to protect the left flank of American forces then holding the Hudson Valley. Remains of the largest of these camp sites are now preserved by the state within Putnam Memorial State Park, which contains a colonial museum as well as a monument to the American troops.

By the 1780s much of the better land had been thoroughly cleared, stone fences marked property boundaries, and substantial houses and barns had been built in every section. The growing town's population reached 1,310 persons in 1782, as reported in the Connecticut Census that year. Families were large, often with eight to ten children, and a typical farm was likely to include an orchard, cropland, pasture, and domestic animals for the family's sustenance.

Numerous crafts, trades and specialized services had emerged to serve the needs of the growing community, and many farms were beginning to trade and export to distant markets. Records of the 1790s show that there were four grist mills and four saw mills operating on the several streams, also cider mills, a distillery and an iron works. The iron smelting and forging operation was located on the Little River at Sanfordtown, utilizing iron ore transported in large wagons from Brookfield and Roxbury. Also present in the growing town during this era were six stores, five taverns, two attorneys and two physicians. Tradesmen included tailors, blacksmiths, joiners, a shoemaker, a cooper, a weaver, a saddler, a tanner and wheelwright. By 1800 Redding had reached a population of 1,632 persons.

As the nineteenth century dawned, Redding's land was now thoroughly cleared and entirely allocated among self-sufficient family farms enclosed within stonewall-fenced fields. Produce being exported included apples, onions, potatoes, dairy products, wool, beef and pork, hauled regularly by wagon to such ports as Black Rock, Southport, Saugatuck and Norwalk for shipment to New York markets.

The roads of this period were little better than rocky, rutted paths, often mired in mud. A public outcry for better roads led the General Assembly in the 1790s to begin chartering private turnpike companies. One of the earliest of these companies was the Fairfield, Weston and Redding Turnpike, chartered in May 1797, which improved the old country road leading from Fairfield to Danbury via Redding Ridge (now Sunset Hill Road and Black Rock Turnpike). Other turnpikes chartered through Redding after 1800 included the Norwalk-Danbury Turnpike (through Georgetown and over Umpawaug Hill), the Simpaug Turnpike (through West Redding), the Norwalk-Newtown Turnpike (through Valley Forge, Sanfordtown and Hopewell Woods), and the Sherman Turnpike (through Sanfordtown, Redding Center and Lonetown).

Turnpikes were clearly superior to the old cart paths that they replaced, following in some locations the older highways but in others built on new, straighter and more level alignments. Bridges were used instead of fords for stream crossings on the turnpikes, and graded gravel surfaces made all-weather travel possible for the first time over long distances. It is important to remember that a turnpike company was a business venture and was given the right to charge a fee or toll to all of those who would be using the road. The toll rate was carefully controlled by the state legislature and was to be collected at tollgates placed at convenient locations along the road. The tollgate usually consisted of a small house in which the toll taker could take refuge in inclement weather, and a pike that could be rotated horizontally on a post. The word "turnpike" remains today as reference to the pike or long pole that was held across the road and was raised or turned aside only when the traveler had paid the toll.

Increased mobility not only aided Town agricultural and manufacturing prosperity but brought other improvements in town life. Early in the 1800s stagecoach lines began regular runs over several of the improved roads, stopping at taverns in the Boston district, in Redding Center and on Redding Ridge. In 1809 Congress granted the Town its first U.S. Post Office. Small neighborhood trades, such as button and comb making, expanded to full-time operations. Several private schools were founded. Population reached 1,717 persons in 1810.

As the century advanced, industry and production of goods for export assumed new importance in the Town's economy. Wagon and carriage manufacture began in Sanfordtown in 1800, at one point employing 30 persons, and continued for over half a

century. A woolen mill began operations on the Saugatuck in 1812, continuing successfully until destroyed by fire in 1843. Pins, iron carriage axles, and other metal goods continued to be produced in Sanfordtown for many years. One of the earliest limekilns in the State, located just north of Limekiln Road, was prospering by 1803 and continued for several generations. Hat making was another prominent industry of the era, in several locations; the largest shop, in Sanfordtown, employed from 25 to 30 persons. Buttons were manufactured at the same time in three shops along the gorge of the Aspetuck, employing 28 persons to produce three to four hundred gross of buttons per day. Bricks were manufactured on Redding Ridge and a successful shirt factory also operated nearby.

In 1818 a Georgetown tanner and currier invented a practical sieve made from animal hair and began production on the banks of the Norwalk River. By 1837 the new partnership of Gilbert and Bennett succeeded in devising a loom to weave fine steel wire into sieves, wire netting and fence wire. So successful was the enterprise that a half dozen mill buildings were in production by mid-century, surrounded by a growing village of two dozen buildings.

Another successful industry, the Sanford Iron Foundry, began operations in 1842 at a site on the Aspetuck River at Stepney Road. Its products included agricultural implements and a hay-cutting machine that had extensive sales throughout the country.

By mid-century (1845), Redding's farms were annually producing, mostly for export, large quantities of corn and oats (over 30,000 bushels), potatoes (12,000 bushels), butter and cheese (75,000 pounds), wood, apples, onions and other produce. From the remaining forest stands, over a million board feet of lumber was being harvested each year for the local wagon and cabinet shops and four or five local sawmills. Large amounts of wood were also being cut annually to supply charcoal for the iron, lime and brick industries in Town, as well as for domestic fuel.

Town population peaked at 1,754 persons in 1850. Two years later the Danbury and Norwalk Railroad line was completed through the west side of the Town with depots at Georgetown, Topstone and West Redding. By the 1850s and 1860s the Town's woodlands were badly depleted and some farmland was beginning to lie fallow as an increasing flood of lower priced western produce came to eastern markets. Not surprisingly, some Redding farmers emigrated to the new land opening up in Kansas and other Midwestern areas. This also was a period in which new steam powered factories were being built along main rail lines. Redding's small water powered industries could no longer compete and gradually began to cease operations. Only Gilbert and Bennett, with access to the new railroad for coal and raw materials, and for shipment of its finished wire goods, was able to survive in the new economy. An 1867 atlas map depicted a rural town with an extensive network of roads, the new railroad line, 341 dwellings, 10 district (one-room) schools, four churches, three post offices, six neighborhood stores, and 35 small mills, shops and factories still in existence. By 1870, however, the Town's population declined by 130, to 1,624 persons.

The next half-century was the quiet period of Redding's history. As the small water powered mills and industries disappeared and less-productive farmland was abandoned, population continued a steady decline. Farming, mostly producing dairy and other produce shipped daily to nearby centers, was now the mainstay of the Town's economy, and those families with the better farmland managed an adequate livelihood. Despite a disastrous fire in 1874, the Gilbert and Bennett Company rebuilt immediately on its site with modern buildings and machinery. The Company continued to prosper and expand thereafter, employing nearly 600 persons by the early 1900s. Consequently, the village of Georgetown

grew modestly during this period, adding new homes and streets while the countryside of Redding remained rural and pastoral.

Several noteworthy public gifts by Redding citizens occurred during this era. In 1878 a bequest established a public high school, the Hill Academy, in Redding Center. A few years later about 35 acres of land were donated to the State to establish the Israel Putnam Memorial Campground (now Putnam Park). Early in the 1900s a public school was presented to the Georgetown community by the Gilbert and Bennett Company.

During the 1890s Redding was “discovered” by prominent summer visitors from New York City and vicinity who were enchanted by the Town’s tranquil beauty. Within the next two decades several dozen old farms, colonial houses and woodland tracts had been purchased by distinguished writers, artists, business and professional people who established summer homes and country estates in Poverty Hollow, Redding Ridge, Sunset Hill, Sanfordtown, Redding Center, Diamond Hill, Umpawaug and other sections. By 1910 automobiles were frequently seen on Redding’s dirt roads, owned by the more adventuresome and affluent residents.

About 1909 one of the literary newcomers, Mark Twain, organized and donated a public library to the Town, which grateful townspeople promptly named for him. A few years later the Town had its first telephone exchange (located in a private dwelling on Cross Highway), with a small group of subscribers. Post offices continued to operate from private dwellings and country stores. After several disastrous fires, a volunteer fire company was organized at Redding Ridge around 1916, followed shortly by other fire companies at West Redding and Georgetown.

In 1916 the State of Connecticut embarked on an ambitious program to construct a network of trunk-line highways linking population centers and providing farm-to-market access for the rural towns. Construction of two-lane paved highways began shortly along the corridors of Route 7 and Route 58, the latter completed in 1921. Other state roads followed in the twenties and thirties, and Redding began a program of oil-surfacing the principal Town roads. By the mid-1930’s hard-surfaced roads reached every section along with telephone and electric lines, and the Town’s rural isolation passed into history.

While the rise of the automobile brought state-financed enlargement of some roads, the inability of automobiles to traverse the town’s more severe roads resulted in widespread abandonment of minor roads. Traces of these roads are still visible in areas of second-growth forest throughout the town. The development of the Bridgeport Hydraulic reservoir system in Redding during the 1930’s and 1940’s led to additional road abandonment. One of the ongoing tasks of the Planning Commission in the present time is to research these roads to assure that they have been properly discontinued from designation as public highways, while being documented and sustained in the town’s historical record. In some cases, discontinued roads have been put to new use either as private driveways or as public ways for passive recreation and other minor uses.

As farming declined and the land reverted to woodland or was absorbed into country estates, the Town’s population reached its lowest ebb since the first census in 1782, with only 1,315 persons counted in 1920. Despite this, new civic clubs and organizations were founded by newcomers and new homes and small wayside businesses such as tearooms and gasoline filling stations began to appear along the principal paved highways. By 1931-32 the Town had closed all of its one-room district schoolhouses and enlarged the former Hill Academy at Redding Center to four classrooms to serve the eight elementary grades.

Home building slowed but did not cease during the Great Depression years of the 1930s. About two dozen farms were still operating, although Redding's land had by now returned to approximately 70% forest and woodland. A major controversy raged during the 1930s over the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company's plan to flood the Saugatuck valley for a large new water supply reservoir, inundating the historic village of Valley Forge and much of Redding Glen. Opponents lost their appeals and the Saugatuck Reservoir was completed in 1942.

Redding continued to attract artistic and professional persons through the period; its population in 1940 stood at 1,758 persons, equaling its peak from 90 years earlier.

With the close of World War II and the beginning of the great postwar housing boom, new house construction in Redding commenced at a vigorous pace. Now within easy commuting distance of job centers in Bridgeport, Danbury and lower Fairfield County, Redding began to attract speculative developers and its citizens realized that a potential avalanche of development threatened the still-rural Town. Following a public referendum, zoning was established and the Town's first zoning regulations became effective in June 1950.

As the fifties began, the anticipated rush of new development became a reality. Several large tracts were subdivided into one-acre lots, new subdivision roads were built, and the school population began to spiral upward putting pressure on the combined facilities of the Hill School and the new eight room Redding Elementary School, completed in 1948. Responding to Town wide demand, in 1953 the Zoning Commission enacted two acre residential zoning all areas outside of Georgetown, which retained enclaves of multiple-family, ½ acre and 1 acre lot zoning.

Concern about the Town's future persisted, and in 1956 a town meeting authorized the establishment of a planning commission. Regulations to control the layout of subdivisions were swiftly prepared and adopted in February 1957. The construction rate for new dwellings was now about 40 per year, and the Town rushed to completion a new classroom wing at the elementary school, doubling its capacity. The same year, 1957, Redding and Easton referenda approved the formation of a regional school district, and a 35-acre site was purchased from a farm on Black Rock Turnpike for a school site. The new Joel Barlow High School, initially serving grades seven through twelve, opened for classes in the fall of 1959. The Town acted to create needed public office space by converting the Hill School into a Town Hall, and over the next twelve years the town also would acquire two modest wood-frame buildings and one historic dwelling adjacent to the Hill School site (these buildings are now the Town Hall Annex, the Police Department and the former Heritage House).

The buildings to house the Police Department and the Heritage House were purchased from the First Church of Christ Congregational, and this transaction represented a major shift in institutional ownership patterns in Redding Center. The First Church of Christ Congregational consolidated its facilities (church, church hall, and parsonage) on the Redding Green, in structures originally built as a distinguished private residence and as the town's Methodist church. In so doing the church vacated its historic parsonage of 150 years. The town government, in like manner, consolidated its facilities in structures originally built for other purposes (school, dentist office, parsonage, Sunday school) around the Redding Parade Ground (which had been itself originally a part of the farm lot of the Congregational parsonage). This rationalized the facilities of both institutions, and ironically it brought to Redding the simple image of a Connecticut town

centered on a green with a Congregational church and parsonage, while in reality Redding's physical, political and religious history had been somewhat more complex than this.

In 1960 the Planning Commission adopted a "Policy Plan" for the Town, which recommended preserving the low-density character of Redding and proposed an open space program for the Town. The Town's 1960 population was recorded at 3,359 persons, a 65% increase from its size ten years earlier. By the mid-sixties new residential construction was running at the rate of 60 to 70 units per year and the Town initiated planning for another school. John Read Middle School, located on a new site on Route 53, opened in early 1966.

1964 saw the official establishment of the Redding Conservation Commission and in 1965 a long and successful public-private partnership for land preservation was begun with the founding of the Redding Land Trust. The Land Trust, a private non-profit organization, was founded to encourage gifts of open space land, and it quickly became a groundbreaking model for such organizations, advancing Redding to the forefront as a model of grassroots creativity and a community-based vision. The Redding Land Trust has remained a key Town institution ever since that time.

In 1965, a town-wide survey undertaken by the Planning Commission showed that 73% of Town respondents favored spending tax money to buy open space land; the Commission adopted, as long-range policy, the goal of preserving one-fourth of the Town – 5,000 acres – as permanent open space. A town meeting on October 20, 1967 authorized using up to a total \$1.3 million of the Town's credit for purchase of open space land should opportunities arise. To assess the worth of this policy, the Town commissioned a study by an economic research firm. The study showed statistically that buying acreage for open space would be more beneficial to existing taxpayers than building houses on the land. The study demonstrated that tax revenues from new homes would not fully offset the added costs for schools and infrastructure that they would necessitate.

Private efforts, spearheaded by the Redding Land Trust, supplemented what the town could afford. Over the years the Land Trust has received more than 150 donations of land for open space, its ownership co-ownership and easements today encompassing approximately 1736 acres, an increase of approximately 230 acres over the last decade.

When the 412-acre estate of famed photographer Edward Steichen came on the market in 1970, a referendum approved its purchase for a Town park centered on the property's large pond. When a later referendum reversed that approval, members of the Planning Commission journeyed to Lincoln, Massachusetts to assess that community's use of joint public-private purchase of open space. The result was the creation by a group of citizens of Redding Open Lands Inc. As a not-for-profit development entity, ROLI borrowed enough to purchase more than a quarter of the Steichen tract (118 acres), reducing the Town's costs by a sufficient amount to gain voter approval. ROLI in turn donated 75 wetland acres within its acquisition to the Audubon Society, and divided the remaining 43 acres into ecologically laid-out lots of three to 10 acres each. ROLI was able to repay its bank loan with the proceeds from selling these lots for single-family house development.

Over the next ten years, using then-available Federal grants-in-aid, State matching funds, and Town funds in the amount of 1.18 million dollars, the Town purchased thirteen tracts of land totaling 1,256 acres. By 1979 a total of 2,627 acres had been acquired or reserved as permanent greenspace – 1,367 acres held by the Town, 737 acres in two State parks, 336 acres donated to the Redding Land Trust and 187 acres in two tracts owned respectively by the Connecticut Audubon Society and by the Nature Conservancy.

The "Race to Save Open Space" was timely and effective. Subdivision and new house construction continued at a fast pace through the sixties and seventies, increasing the Town's population by an additional two-thirds each decade. In 1980, only thirty years after the development boom began, Redding's population exceeded 7,200 persons and about 35% of its land area was developed, the great majority comprising newer single-family homes distributed throughout all sections of the Town. Although Federal and State open space grants essentially ceased after 1975, the open space network continued to grow through private donations and a newly enacted local requirement for open space set-aside in subdivisions. From all sources, Redding's open space resources reached 2,730 acres by 1984.

When the Town Plan was updated in 1984, it was expanded to incorporate a formal Open Space Plan. This document strongly reaffirmed the Town's commitment to the twin goals of preserving 25% of the Town's land area as permanent open space and maintaining the Town's "country atmosphere" of low density residential, rural roads, and protected water resources.

Town development slowed in the latter 1980s and early 1990s due to a lengthy real estate recession. At the same time Redding's land use regulations were comprehensively strengthened. Nevertheless, the Town registered a 1990 population of almost 8,000 persons. New plans and Town regulations were adopted for the village area of Georgetown in 1989. A special Town Plan supplement was prepared for Redding Center in 1992, and at mid-decade the Town undertook a comprehensive remodeling of the Town Hall consistent with preservation of the historic character of the area.

During the decade from 2008 through 2018, Town growth continued at a very modest rate, adding 97 new dwellings and approximately 860 new residents. Perhaps the two most significant land use developments during the decade, however, were the continued modest growth in permanently conserved open space land and the currently stalled plan for redevelopment of the former Gilbert & Bennett site in Georgetown, which awaits legal resolution. Georgetown is a complex land-use issue which requires its own separate chapter in this plan (See Chapter 10 for a detailed discussion).

Long threatened by potential sale for development, over 15,000 acres of watershed land held by the Aquarion Water Company – including more than 2,800 acres in Redding – were acquired in a collaborative venture between the State of Connecticut and The Nature Conservancy and is now the "Centennial Watershed State Forest". In a similar collaborative venture the Town of Redding partnered with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Redding Open Lands Inc. (ROLI) to purchase five large tracts, aggregating 332 acres for public open space. In 2016, the Town, in partnership with the State, the Redding Land Trust and Aquarion acquired the 30.7 acre Biehn property located centrally in Redding, now known as the Mary Anne Guitar Nature Preserve, in honor of the late former First Selectman and longtime president of the Redding Land Trust. Bordering the Saugatuck River, this key parcel links large contiguous tracts of open space on the east and west sides of Redding for the first time. By 2017, Town residents lived in the midst of more than 7,640 acres of greenspace - 37% of the Town's area - greatly surpassing the previous Town Plan's goal of 25% "forever green".

## **Present-day Land Use Picture**

Land use is the bedrock foundation of all Town planning, since the manner in which a community's land is used and conserved is a measure of both its current character and its future potential. The starting point, therefore, of this update of the Town Plan was preparation of a new and more accurate town base map, using digital "geographic information system" (GIS) technology.

The new base map, which is coordinated with previously prepared natural resource mapping of the town and with prior land use maps, shows all roads, streams, water bodies and lot lines. GIS mapping provides a base of improved accuracy for future data analysis.

Land use has been mapped to the end of 2018, and classified in accordance with seven major categories of Developed Land and six major categories of Undeveloped Land, as counted in acres and expressed in Table 3-A. Various symbols and facility names are used to identify significant uses.

Since 2008, land in the "Developed" and "Permanently Reserved (Open Space, Public; Open Space, Private; plus Conservation Easements)" categories has increased faster than Town population. The total of developed land has increased by a little over 1% from 9550 acres to 9,638 acres while privately owned land potentially available for development has declined by one-third, from 3,300 acres to 2,951 acres, a figure which includes substantial areas of unbuildable ledge outcrop or steep slopes, rendering the usable acreage to be much lower, (see Table 3-A). Due to the shrinkage of land available for development, it is now realistic to anticipate a maximum future Town population of between 10,900 and 11,500 persons, depending on such variables as family size, future development in the Georgetown area, likely quantities of dwelling units in Affordable Housing Developments, and Town land use policies.

As noted in the 2008 Town Plan, the R-2 Residential Zone at 97.4% of total Town area continues to experience most of the Town's new single-family residential growth. All but a handful of new homes built occurred in recent subdivisions within this "Rural Residential" Zone, throughout all sections of the Town. In addition to the 97 new single family dwellings counted an estimated 18 accessory residential apartments and 9 condominium apartments were created. Residential unit totals do not include the approximately 200 assisted-living units in the "Meadow Ridge" life-care community on Gilbert Hill.

At the last land use survey in 2006, Light Industry and Corporate Office categories were included to provide for undetermined future uses in the Georgetown area. In the 2006 land use table the former Gilbert and Bennett complex, now zoned Historic Mill Center (HMC), is classified as "Vacant." However, the underlying zone regulations in HMC provide for master plan-based development standards, and the now expired, but still relevant master plan and resulting form-based supplementary zoning for that site provide for potential light industry and research uses, so those use classifications appear in the 2018 land use table.

In the group of "Permanently Reserved"<sup>2</sup> lands there has been an increase, with the two largest being the 30.7 acre Biehn property, and the 13.1 acre donation to the Aspetuck Land Trust by Jerrold Fine.

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<sup>2</sup> Permanently Reserved lands are recorded on the Assessor's record as "Protected."  
Town of Redding

**Table 3-A**  
**EXISTING LAND USE (Rev. Dec. 2018)**  
**Part 1 - Developed Land**  
**In Acres - By Zone**

Note: All italicized figures are subtotals of category figures in bold just above.

CATEGORY	R-4	R-2	R-1	R-1/2	RV	HMC	SDD	NB	SB	BC	OR	Total
<b>Residential</b>	--	<b>8,119</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>22</b>	--	--	--	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	--	<b>8,270</b>
<i>Incentive housing*</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>0</i>
<b>Institutional</b>	--	<b>347</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	--	<b>58</b>	--	--	<b>2</b>	--	<b>413</b>
<i>Town Government</i>	--	<i>5</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>5</i>
<i>Public School</i>	--	<i>70</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>70</i>
<i>Recreation</i>	--	<i>211</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>211</i>
<i>Public Safety</i>	--	<i>6</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>1</i>	--	<i>7</i>
<i>Library/Museum</i>	--	<i>9</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>9</i>
<i>Life-care Facility</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	<b>58</b>	--	--	--	--	<i>58</i>
<i>Religious</i>	--	<i>33</i>	<i>1</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	--	--	--	--	<i>1</i>	--	<i>40</i>
<i>Cemetery</i>	--	<i>13</i>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<i>13</i>
<b>Commercial</b>	--	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	--	--	--	--	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>	--	<b>41</b>
<b>Light Industry</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	--	<b>7</b>
<b>Corporate Office</b>	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<b>0</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	--	<b>109</b>	--	--	--	<b>2</b>	--	--	--	--	--	<b>111</b>
<b>Roads &amp; Transportation</b>	--	<b>749</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	--	<b>796</b>
<b>TOTAL DEVELOPED</b>	--	<b>9,330</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	--	<b>9,638</b>

Legend:

- |                                      |                                    |                                     |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • R-4: Conservation Residential Zone | • HMC: Historic Mill Center Zone   | • OR: Office and Research Park Zone |
| • R-2: Rural Residential Zone        | • SDD: Special Developmt. District |                                     |
| • R-1: Low Density Residential Zone  | • NB: Neighborhood Business Zone   |                                     |
| • R-1/2: Suburban Residential Zone   | • SB: Service Business Zone        |                                     |
| • RV: Village Residential Zone       | • BC: Business Center Zone         |                                     |

\* Incentive Housing Zones are overlay zones superimposed on pre-existing Residential R-2 and Commercial SB and CB zones, effective July 30, 2014. As of December 2018, none of the three IH Zones had developed housing uses; existing uses in each IHZ are included in the underlying zone categories listed in the table.

NOTE: Part 2 of this table, Undeveloped Land and Water Area, including Vacant Land and Dedicated Open Space areas, continues on next page

**Table 3-A**  
**EXISTING LAND USE (Rev. Dec. 2018)**

**Part 2 - Undeveloped Land**  
**In Acres - By Zone**

Note: All italicized figures are subtotals of category figures in bold just above.

ZONES	R-4	R-2	R-1	R-1/2	RV	HMC	SD D	NB	SB	BC	OR	Town*
<b>ZONE AREA - in Acres</b>	--	20,006	150	46	30	58	137	14	60	34	--	<b>20,535</b>
Less <b>DEVELOPED LAND</b> (from Table 3A-part 1, above)	--	9,330	105	42	26	5	60	9	32	29	--	9,638
<b>Net UNDEVELOPED AREA</b>	--	10,675	45	4	4	54	77	5	28	5	--	<b>10,897</b>
<b>DEDICATED OPEN SPACE</b>												
<b>Open Space, Public – Total**</b>	--	5,451	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<b>5,451</b>
• <i>Town - Wholly Owned</i>	--	1,517	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1,517
• <i>Town &amp; Land Trust Jointly Owned</i>	--	363	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	332
• <i>State Park</i>	--	749	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	749
• <i>Centennial Watershed State Forest</i>	--	2,822	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2,824
<b>Open Space, Private</b>	--	1,362	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	<b>1,362</b>
<b>Conservation Easements</b>	--	659	--	--	--	--	77	--	--	--	--	<b>736</b>
Less <b>TOTAL DEDICATED OPEN SPACE</b>		7,472					77					7,549
<b>Net VACANT UNCOMMITTED PRIVATE LAND***</b>	--	3,203	45	4	4	54	0	5	28	5	0	<b>3,348</b>
<b>TOTAL - less water bodies</b>												<b>2,951</b>

\* Town totals may vary slightly from parenthetical subcategory totals due to figure rounding.

\*\* The town of Redding has collaborated with the Nature Conservancy and several other civic/conservation organizations to finance and acquire desirable land parcels as recommended in the Town's Open Space Plan. A determination of potential residential area within the RV, HMC, NB and SB zones will be made in future planning studies.

\*\*\* The vacant uncommitted private land above is not restricted by easements, dedication or common covenants is potentially available for development. Note that this acreage figure includes land unsuitable for development, including steep slopes, ledge, wetlands and approximately 391 acres of water bodies including the Saugatuck Reservoir, and approximately 100 small lakes and ponds.

## Conserving Open Space and Rural Character

The State-enabled Village District overlay zoning controls are being studied as a way of preventing unwanted degradation of the historic character for a number of sections in town. Areas discussed are the Georgetown area, West Redding center and Redding Ridge. This designation would give Town government, and by extension the residents of Redding, some control over the aesthetics of future development in key, historically sensitive areas of town.

For several decades a particularly effective program in maintaining Redding's rural character has been its reduction of property tax on sizable land holdings, authorized by C.G.S. Section 12-107a through 12-107c as amended and known as "Public Act 490". Under Public Act 490, property tax reduction is applied, at differing rates of reduction, to three categories of land:

- Forest land (minimum of 25 acres certified by a state forester),
- Farm Land,
- Open Space land.

Without Public Act 490 tax relief benefits, the financial burden on landholders would have resulted in a substantially larger quantity of residential development and a correspondingly smaller amount of land conservation during the recent ten-year period.

In Redding, by virtue of an amendment to the Town Plan of Development in 1970, contiguous land areas in excess of four acres under unified ownership are classified as Open Space by the Assessor. The resulting property tax savings to land owners are subject to proportional recapture if the designated land is sold during the first ten years after classification.

In 1981 land qualifying for Public Act 490 property tax reduction in Redding totaled 6,750 acres. By 2018, 37 years later, the amount of tax reduced acreage has declined to 5,329 acres - although this does not indicate a reduction in land conservation since many of the parcels removed from the Public Act 490 program have been purchased by the Town and/or The Nature Conservancy or have been donated to private land preservation bodies such as the Redding Land Trust. Aquarion Water Company land purchased by the State for the Centennial Watershed Forest has also been removed from this category. Per Town Assessor figures:

**Table 3-B**  
**Acres of Private Land, Tax-Reduced by P.A.490**

<b>Description</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2018</b>
Farm	255	211	312
Forest	3,881	1,135	3585
Open Space	1,868	1,553	1430
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,003</b>	<b>2,899</b>	<b>5,329</b>

Redding's use of the Public Act 490 program has been successful in its original mission of preserving farms, forest and open space land. Tax reduction on larger acreages continues, and this form of conservation remains as an essential ingredient in Redding's rural ambience. Some owners have been able to hold their land over many decades until a satisfactory final disposition could be achieved. Gratefully, the outcome on many parcels also has benefitted the Town and has aided in the protection of regional natural resources and water resources in harmony with the stated goals of the Town Plan of Conservation and Development. Without Public Act 490 many of Redding's preserved acres would have been developed long before they could have been considered for preservation.

**Table 3-C**  
**ANALYSIS OF TOWN DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL**  
 Vacant Land Suitable For Development, In Acres

(a)	(b)			(c)
ZONES (Total Acres of Private Vacant Land) (1)	Vacant Land Generally Not Suitable for Development			Suitable for Development
	Lake, Pond and Water Body (2)	Major Wetland and Flood Plain (3)	Steep Slope and Ledge (4)	Net Acres (5)
<b>RESIDENTIAL</b>				
R-2 (3,203)	54	623	317	2,209
R-1 (95)	2	15	9	69
R-1/2 (4)		1		3
RV (4)		2	2	0
<b>SPECIAL USE</b>				
HMC (59)	11	3		45
SDD (0)	1		6	0
<b>NONRESIDENTIAL</b>				
NB (5)		1		4
SB (28)		6	11	11
BC (5)		1	2	2

NOTES:

- (1) Vacant private land totals derived from Table 3-A (Part 2).
- (2) Surface water bodies only (excludes aquifers). Does not include water bodies within reservations or developed land.
- (3) From Town wetland, flood plain and natural resources mapping; minor wetlands and narrow stream corridors excluded, as these do not typically preclude site development.
- (4) From Town slope analysis mapping; slopes 20% and greater.
- (5) Land deemed suitable for development is the amount of vacant private acreage, Column (a), minus the sum of seriously constrained acreages within such land, Column (b).

## **Land Use Issues For The Future**

Since planning was initiated in Redding a little over sixty years ago, the Town's landscape has changed dramatically.

In the mid-1950s the 98% of Redding outside the village environs of Georgetown was essentially rural – characterized by widely spaced country homes, a dozen or more operating farms, and much open land in every section. Residential development at the time occupied about 10% of Redding's land area. All other developed and reserved land (including Georgetown, Bridgeport Hydraulic lands, and Putnam Park) occupied another 17% and nearly three-fourths of the Town area was developable land in private ownership.

Today nearly half of the land area of Redding, 47%, has been developed for active use and of this amount 86% is residential, mostly in single-family dwellings on two acre and larger lots. Of more than 160 Town roads, 81 have been created by subdivision of formerly-large tracts. As a result of the more than 7,495 acres of permanent open space set aside over the past half century, this impact from development is offset by establishing 36.7% of the Town's area as "forever green", exceeding the long-established goal of 25%. Privately owned developable land has declined to approximately 2,631 acres, or 13% of the Town's area, widely distributed across the Town.

But what of these 2,631 acres of land as yet uncommitted to future use? Herein lies a particular imperative for thoughtful evaluation of growth alternatives, as it is quite likely that serious development challenges will arise involving these lands during the years ahead. Longstanding land-use practice in Redding has mandated a high standard of environmental design, in part because of an overall orientation toward land conservation and in part because of the town's necessary role in protecting underlying public water supply resources. Some of the areas of concern for the upcoming ten-year period include the following:

- **High density affordable housing applications:** State law (General Statutes, 8-30g.) presently permits appeals of denied applications for Affordable Housing Developments, with the burden of proof falling upon the Town's Planning and Zoning Commissions (8-30g does not impact Inland Wetlands decisions) to prove that a health and safety issue is at stake that supersedes the established need for Affordable Housing. Such proof can be highly technical and difficult to sustain, and in both the language of the law and in case histories, it appears that Affordable Housing appeals have not adequately addressed the negative environmental impacts that can arise when dense multi-family projects proliferate in public water supply watershed areas. Due to this Redding is at particular risk of negative impacts from inappropriately sited Affordable Housing Developments, and the environmental risk involved has the potential to affect over 500,000 people regionally who depend upon reservoirs in Redding, as well as most of Redding's residents who obtain water from the same watershed through private wells. Given these circumstances Redding should advocate to amend Sec. 8-30g, in order to prohibit high-density zoning overrides for housing projects in public water supply watershed areas. At the same time, Redding is actively taking on the challenge of creating Town-owned Affordable Housing Developments on Town-owned land.

Redding has proactively begun the process of creating affordable housing in town. In 2013, Redding received a grant to study suitable locations in town for development of affordable housing. As a result, two sites were found that met the requirements for

both support of housing density and access to mass transportation, one on State owned land along Ethan Allen Highway, and one along Old Mill Road. An ad hoc committee was formed to guide the process further. The task of acquiring the right from the State to develop the Ethan Allen Highway site is being pursued, and the multi-ownership nature of the Old Mill Road site requires concerted and coordinated action on the part of those owners to be fully realized. Additional affordable units could be part of the Gilbert and Bennett site once its legal and financial disposition is known.

- Advancing technology in water supply and waste treatment: New techniques for wastewater purification, as well as for renovation of lower-quality drinking water sources, have begun to be available, and could eventually remove or diminish traditional barriers to more intensive development in water supply watersheds and to minimum lot sizes for on-site wells and septic systems. Questions have been raised, however, about the sustainability and utility of these technologies in actual practice, and expert sources such as the Nature Conservancy have recommended a moratorium on the use of such systems. At present Redding's regulatory environment does not prohibit or discourage the use of these systems. This policy our requires ongoing vigilance, and Redding should advocate on the state level for a moratorium on these technologies until they can be shown to be safe in real-world usage (see also Chapter 2, Natural Resources).
- Growing regional infrastructure and transportation needs: As population and congestion intensify in this northeast corridor there will be increasing pressure for new transportation facilities, institutional growth, expanded utility systems, senior and affordable housing, and other needs of an urbanizing area. Examples of regional growth that have recently had an impact on Redding include the highway upgrades of Route 7, plans for expanded Danbury branch rail service, and a potential new rail station at Georgetown. More are likely in the future due to Redding's location and accessibility, and in the absence of careful planning unnecessary impacts may occur. Town plans must carefully define, in concert with regional planning's agencies, where growth of regional facilities may be located to successfully coexist with the town's conservation and preservation needs. The Georgetown/Branchville area, straddling 4 towns, is in need of multi- town coordinated planning, perhaps under the auspices of WestCOG, to prevent excessive traffic congestion and overburdening of the resources, utilities and environment in the future.
- Special Treatment of Sensitive Lands: Redding's longstanding partnership with both public and private charitable institutions has been a key factor in sustaining both the desirable visual character of the town as well as the viability of the underlying public water supply watershed. Specific techniques such as conservation easements, open space purchases, bequest programs, and set-asides on development parcels have been effective in providing for sustainable development in sensitive areas. These techniques will be of particular importance as development pressure begins to be felt on the town's remaining large parcels.

As State and Regional Plans have evolved over the past several decades, the greater portions of Redding, Easton and Weston, as well as southern Danbury and Bethel, northern Ridgefield and southwestern Newtown have been recognized as an extensive greenbelt which separates urban centers and provides vital fresh air, water supply, recreational and environmental benefits to all of southwestern Connecticut. Special conservation studies

and coordinated acquisition efforts such as The Nature Conservancy’s “Saugatuck Forest Initiative,” the Norwalk River Valley Trail system and the Aspetuck Land Trust’s Green Corridor concept are currently underway for this area.

At the heart of this special area, Redding has a key role to play in conserving a sound environment for future generations who will inherit our region as their homes. The town's land use policies must reflect this mission.

## **Recommendations**

1. Purchase tracts of land as recommended by the Town Open Space Plan as they come on the market to protect the Town as a vital watershed, maintain its rural character, provide for active and passive recreation, and preserve an equitable tax base by minimizing costs of additional schools and services. Continue meetings of Redding’s seven-member Open Space Committee (consisting of two members from the Conservation Commission and Planning Commission, a representative of the Historical Society and the Redding Land Trust and the Land Use Coordinator) on an as-needed basis to review the status of available land and make acquisition recommendations to the Selectmen.
2. Pursue legislation to accomplish the recommendations of State and Regional Plans, including the State Plan of Conservation and Development, which recommend retention of a maximum density standard for population per unit of land. This is in direct opposition to the new 10% impervious cover standard which does not properly account for the effluent output and other burdens imposed on land arising from increased population concentration in multi-story dwellings that might otherwise meet a cover-based standard.
3. Protect the Town’s groundwater resources by enacting:
  - a) aquifer protection districts and regulations;
  - b) a Town health code with stricter standards in recognition of Redding’s special environmental issues including its presence on a public water supply watershed.
4. In order to preserve environmentally sensitive land, consider adoption of coordinated amendments to the Zoning Regulations and Subdivision Regulations to require that the countable portion of newly created lots in residential zones shall not include land comprised of wetlands, watercourses, 100-year floodplains or slopes of 20% or greater.
5. Support the considered limitation of the public water supply franchise area and sewer service area to higher-density areas, as delineated on the Town Plan, to avoid pressures for intensive development in outlying environmentally sensitive areas.
6. Utilize Incentive Housing Zones under the Connecticut Housing Program for Economic Growth in order to create Affordable Housing consistent with other planning priorities of the town. Examine the potential for non-profit development on Town-owned land in order to assure maximum affordability and minimum environmental risk (see also Chapter 9 – Housing and 10 – Georgetown).
7. In an effort to preserve the scenic character of the Town as well as its existing smaller homes, study ways to amend Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Regulations to

- provide clearer regulation of maximum building area. Investigate potential for using floor-area ratio as a further means of regulating building bulk.
8. Continue supporting Public Act 490 as a means of preserving Redding's farm, forest, and open space land. Study the potential impacts that would result if 490 tax reductions were expanded to include lands having permanent conservation easements upon them. Examine ways to strengthen 490 further by seeking strategies to incentivize prolonged maintenance of this status for these protected lands.
  9. Recognize that farming and animal husbandry are established elements in Redding's history and rural residential character and are therefore desirable to preserve insofar as they contribute to open space, food production and community values. Such activities, however, should not be conducted so as to cause injury to the health, safety or unduly affect property values of neighbors or the community.
  10. In reviewing Subdivision applications, encourage use of scenic and historic vistas, the "view from the road" and ridgelines as open space set asides to preserve the rural character along with the long-standing priority of land conservation. Study ways to amend the Subdivision Regulations and Zoning Regulations to protect scenic vistas and areas of unique environmental value.
  11. Continue to support the economic and cultural revitalization of central Georgetown including the Gilbert and Bennet site project and the Main Street/Old Mill Road enhancement. Coordinate with adjacent towns to study joint policies by which to affect the Georgetown community as a whole. As current development projects begin to reach completion and occupancy and new patterns emerge, plan a thorough review of the past 20-year planning effort for Georgetown and set new goals to assure a sustainable future for the community (See Chapter 10).
  12. Evaluate the viability of current Alternative Treatment System technology for on-site sewage disposal, and advocate on the state level for a moratorium on the use of such systems until they are proven from real-world testing to be environmentally safe (see also Chapter 2).
  13. Continue to develop the Town's GIS mapping management procedures to coordinate the needs of the Town's various departments and agencies, and to place responsibility for communicating with the town's GIS consultants into the hands of a single GIS Manager. As part of this, develop procedures for updating the Land Use map in a unified process whenever the Town Assessor's map is updated.