# *Colchester Town Center:*

## A Cultural Resources Development and Heritage Tourism Plan


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September 1995

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Colchester Town Center Plan was funded with the assistance of a matching grant-in-aid from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, through the Connecticut Historical Commission, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Plan was commissioned and partly funded by the Town of Colchester.

Betty Ann Johnston Possidento, former Chair of both the Colchester Economic Development and Historic District commissions, capably oversaw the project on behalf of the Board of Selectmen and Jenny Contois, First Selectman. Betty Ann and the members of the Colchester Code Administration Department (Tom Gilligan, Town Planner; Alicia Lathrop, Zoning Enforcement Officer; and Sal Tassone, Town Engineer) were the chief contacts among town staff; for their generous guidance and readiness to meet informational needs, the consultants wish to express deep appreciation. Other town staff members whose beneficial input must be acknowledged include Wendy Rubin, Parks and Recreation Director; Mark Decker, Public Works Director; and Laurie Ann Johnson, Director of the Youth Services Bureau. Members of many town commissions offered valuable observations; the support and advice of Brad Wheeler, Economic Development Commission, and Bob Weeks, Chair of the Zoning and Planning Commission, is especially appreciated.

Among many individuals and organizations in Colchester who took constructive interest in the Town Center Plan, Stanley Moroch, Colchester's Municipal Historian, stands out. His generously offered insights about town history and assistance with access to Bacon Academy and Day Hall were invaluable. Others to whom the consultants extend particular thanks are Loren Marvin, former First Selectman; Debra Carrier-Perry and Siobhan M. Grogan, Co-Directors of the Cragin Memorial Library; Greg Barden of the Regional Standard and chair of the Colchester Business Association; and numerous members of the business community.

The consultants received important assistance from a number of sources outside Colchester, especially Dick Guggenheim of the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency and staff of the Connecticut Department of Economic Development. We wish also to thank J. Paul Loether, Certified Local Government Coordinator of the Connecticut Historical Commission, for his ready advice and cooperation in planning and execution of the project.

While the consultants gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by a variety of sources, the Colchester Town Center Plan is the sole responsibility of Preservation Planning Associates. Any errors or omissions are ours alone.

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September 1995

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# 1. Introduction And Summary Of Recommendations

## 1.1 Introduction

The town of Colchester has a history typical of many communities outside Connecticut's urban centers. It began as a community of small-scale subsistence farming clusters. During the 18th century, it also enjoyed some commercial advantage because trade routes linking Hartford, Norwich, New London, Middletown, and New Haven converged in the town center. Compared to many communities, its 19th-century industry was limited; the prosperous Hayward Rubber Company (1847), however, brought renewed economic vitality and further commercial expansion.

When the rubber company closed in the 1890s, Colchester's fortunes plummeted. The influx of Jewish settlers in the early part of this century, however, followed by many other Eastern European immigrants, transformed the town both economically and culturally. Dairy farming and summer resorts became significant economic factors, and the town's function as a regional marketplace continued. After World War II, resorts declined in importance, and in recent years farming has also. The late 20th century has brought the town new opportunities and growth based on automobile accessibility from Route 2.

The town center of Colchester today reflects all of these periods in its physical and built features, including buildings ranging from earliest settlement to the present and in the historic town green. The significance of the area is confirmed by listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Around the green are venerable buildings, chief among them Bacon Academy, which encapsulates the community's history and whose importance in the history of Connecticut education is one of the town's glories. Altogether, the town center represents a highly significant cultural resource that is worthy of careful planning for preservation.

Because of its fortuitous location on Route 2, Colchester has begun to experience significant growth in the last few years. Commercial expansion and new residential subdivisions are changing the face of the community, with the prospect of more to come. Development threatens the continued existence of the community's cultural resources, especially in the town center.

These pressures come at a time when the town government is exploring ways to expand the tax base and manage growth so as not to threaten its historic heritage. The commissioning of the Town Center Plan represents the town's commitment to the goal of balancing growth with historic preservation.

## 1.2 Objectives and Approach

The central objective of this report as defined by the town government is to create a plan in which the preservation and enhancement of the town center's historic character, and economic development, are integrated and mutually reinforcing. This objective may be further articulated as the following set of goals:

1. Encourage new development in the town center (both location and kind) that strengthens its current central economic role
2. Protect the historic buildings and ambience, and ensure that future construction and alterations to existing buildings are sensitive to the center's historic character
3. Enhance the center's appearance through improvements to the green and center streetscapes that present a more unified and attractive image
4. Create marketing and tourism programs that build upon historic assets and economic strengths to heighten the center's appeal.

The number and variety of historic resources in Colchester's town center are most impressive. Rather than take the more traditional approach in preservation planning of focusing on the town's architecture, the consultants elected to take a more comprehensive and integrated approach. This plan, therefore, addresses all of the center's historic *cultural resources*, defined as those elements of historic significance that have modified, or been added to, the natural landscape by the activities of people over time.

Meeting the plan objectives involved the analysis of existing conditions and resources. The first step was study of economic character, past and present, followed by review of prior documentation of the center's historic resources. Town ordinances, regulations and a wealth of other documents concerning growth and planning were also reviewed. The consultants interviewed many officials and interested citizens, including Town staff and commission members, local business people, residents, and staff of the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency and Southeastern Connecticut Tourism District. Throughout the planning process, legal, financial, and administrative tools were evaluated for inclusion in the report.

The outcome is the set of goals and recommendations that form the Town Center Plan. It is important to note that the Plan constitutes a non-binding agenda; its implementation depends on the commitment of Town government and all relevant parties.

# 1.3 Summary of Recommendations

## A. Adopt a Town Center Growth Policy

- Amend the Colchester Plan of Development to include a strong commitment to the protection and enhancement of the historic town center and its resources.
- Integrate town center considerations more fully into town decisions.
- Improve coordination among relevant town commissions on town center issues.
- Designate a Town Center Development Coordinator.
- Participate in the Connecticut Main Street Program.

## B. Economic Growth: Develop a More Dynamic Town Center, with Historic Buildings as the Centerpiece

- Create a Town Center Zone with protective design review.
- Improve the commercial offerings.
- Exploit the potential of coordinated new development around Merchants' Row and Cragin Library.
- Retain and expand important civic functions to increase town center use.
- Revitalize the Lebanon Avenue/Mill Street area as a more viable retail district.
- Find appropriate uses for endangered significant buildings.
- Improve circulation and parking.
- Explore the potential of undeveloped parcels.

## C. Aesthetics: Improve the Town Center's Appearance, with the Town Green as Centerpiece

- Enhance the town green through site improvements and a management plan.
- Install uniform streetscape improvements on major streets.
- Enhance Bacon Academy, Day Hall, and the historic cemetery as a focal point through landscaping and circulation improvements.
- Reduce the impact of parking on streetscape integrity.
- Revise the town signage regulations.
- Reduce the maze of street signs and utility wires.
- Create a landscaped focal point at the historic Lebanon Avenue railroad depot.
- Implement unused design review in zoning regulations.
- Explore expansion of the locally designated Colchester Historic District.

## D. Preservation and Enhancement Tools

Improvements to Existing Properties

- Grant property tax relief.
- Establish a community reinvestment fund.
- Create a loan/grant program for property improvements.
- Help owners of National Register-listed properties obtain tax credits for rehabilitation work.
- Offer building permit incentives and code compliance assistance.

New Construction

- Encourage new residential developments in or near the town center.
- Strengthen cultural resource protection in the subdivision plan review process.
- Discourage commercial strip development.

## E. Heritage Tourism: Exploit The Town Center's Significant Resources and Expand Public Awareness

- Develop a town center theme as centerpiece of a marketing strategy.
- Enhance Bacon Academy and its surroundings as Colchester's major tourist attraction.
- Establish a visitors' center.
- Promote town center commerce more aggressively.
- Offer a wider range of activities.
- Publicize the town center more effectively.
- Offer more educational programs to the public.
- Create attractive signage to further the theme and marketing strategy.
- Explore opportunities for inter-town tourism efforts.

# 2. Evaluation Of Resources

## 2.1 Historical Overview

Quote from Michael Taintor (1652-1731), first Town Clerk, Records of Colchester:

"How little do we consider how largely we are indebted to our worthy progenitors for the inheritance of these beautiful towns and cities, and the whole surrounding country, adorned and beautiful as it is, and rendered so attractive by the marks of cultivation, with our school houses, meeting-houses and high seminaries of learning, wise, humane and equal laws and the ordered industry, general intelligence and virtue which characterizes the whole population."

### A. Physical Conditions

"The surface of New England is generally made up of inequalities," said Timothy White, an early geographer, in 1821. This description fits Colchester well, and sets the stage for its history. It was not easily conducive to settlement, even among native tribes who don't seem to have left evidence of village sites.

The area is underlain by metamorphic bedrock which surfaces as evenly eroded knobs interspersed by glacial drumlins. The result is land too steep and mixed with wetlands to rival the best valley farmland, although the scattered glacial till is rich. The area is not crossed by any major waterways, its streams draining into two different watersheds, the Connecticut River via the Salmon and the Thames River via the Yantic.

These undifferentiated uplands were the hunting grounds of various nomadic natives who roamed the area for 9,000 years after the last glacial retreat, their travel routes passing through the thickly forested hills between villages in the Connecticut and Thames valleys. Native knowledge of the complex geography gave them guerilla-like dominance over the area and kept fearful Europeans clinging to their more easily defended valley villages during early years of settlement.

It was the combination of crowding in the valleys and along the shoreline, the virtual massacre of the Pequots in 1637 by John Mason, and finally King Philip's War in the 1670s, that led to exploration of the upland hills for settlement. Colchester is typical of the hilltop towns that grew up in

scattered fashion throughout the area, such as Lebanon, Franklin and Hebron, but it is still distinguished as in pre-settlement days by its location at the crossroads of several travel routes through the hills.

## B. Patterns of Development

Having no major river valleys for either significant mills or large-scale farming, the town began and continued for 150 years as a community of small farms and supporting services. The original claim to the land was negotiated from the Mohegan sachem Owaneco by a group of Hartford county investors, with Nathaniel Foote of Wethersfield as their agent. The General Court in 1698 granted them "libertye for plantation... upon the road to New London," which was then considered a part of Hartford County. By 1699, it had been incorporated into New London County and named after the English town near Foote's original home.

Early settlement incentives, such as grants of land and water privileges, led to pockets of growth throughout the town, but it was the location of the church that soon defined the religious, political and cultural center of the community. Organized in 1703, it was first located near Broadway and Old Hebron Road, but in 1714 the second church was built near the current site on the green where the major travel and trade routes crossed. The earliest homes were also erected in this "healthy and elevated situation," including Nathaniel Foote's dwelling (1702). While not now on its original site, it is still the oldest extant building in Colchester.

The 18th-century town was geographically larger than today, accounting for the fact that population peaked at 3,800 in the 1780s when parts of Salem, Lyme, Montville and Marlborough were still within its boundaries. The economy was agricultural with supporting mills, many of the farmers being wealthy enough to own a few slaves as was common practice in New England of the 1700s. There were 200 slaves out of a town census total of 3,285 in 1774, the year in which slave importation was outlawed in Connecticut and many were being set free. By the early 1800s, as westward migration and industrial expansion along the rivers increased, the total population of Colchester fell to 2,000.

Two events in the 19th century changed the course of Colchester's history: the construction of Bacon Academy in 1803, and the founding of the Hayward Rubber Company in 1847.

Scattered school districts had provided education to the town since the early 1700s, the first classes having taken place in the Congregational Church. Bacon Academy, financed by the bequest of Pierpont Bacon, a prosperous farmer and reputed miser, added free college preparatory education for boys and greatly enhanced Colchester's reputation. Of the first 206 students, 63 were from out of town, bringing about an exchange of ideas

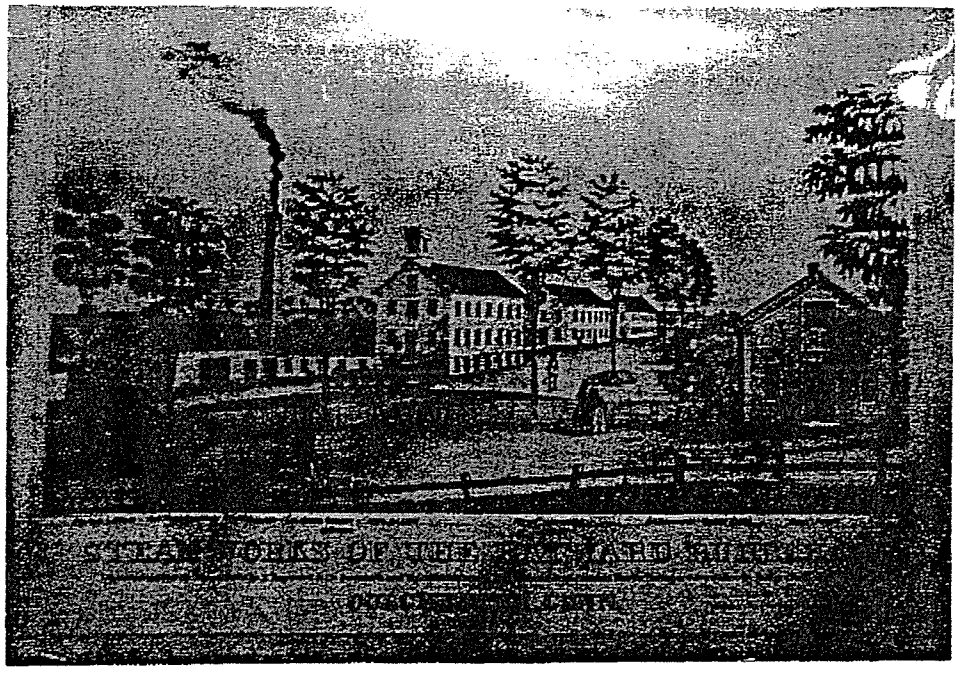
and backgrounds that expanded the community's cultural sophistication. Noah Webster counted it "among the academies of the first reputation." Graduates of note included Steven Austin, founder of Texas, two governors of Connecticut and one each from Illinois and New York, a Supreme Court Chief Justice, educators, and prominent businessmen. While it declined in prominence by mid-century because of proliferating competition, the Academy was restructured as a high school for the town in 1890, and the building continued in school use until 1962.

*Bacon Academy at the turn of the century, framed by a majestic row of elm trees.*

As significant as the founding of the Academy was the establishment of a school for "persons of color" at the same time. A 1797 law provided for manumission of all slave children by the age of 21, raising the prospect of a free but uneducated population. The Bacon Academy fund and bylaws, therefore, provided for teaching of these children in the existing district school building, which was relocated from the site of the new Academy to an area behind the Congregational Church. As the only school of its kind in the state at the time, it drew out-of-town students and well-qualified Black teachers, such as local stonemason James Quash and Prince Saunders, who later graduated from Dartmouth. It closed in 1848, partly as a result of state legal action against Prudence Crandall's school for Black girls in Canterbury. The Colchester school educated several generations of Black students, some of whom went on to study at Bacon Academy.

At mid-century the economic focus of the town and its center changed when Nathaniel Hayward started his rubber shoe and boot company on Lebanon Avenue, featuring the production of the Colchester Spading Boot. His earlier discovery of the vulcanization process had been sold to Charles Goodyear at a time of personal financial stress, and was ultimately credited

to him instead of to Hayward. Location of the factory in Colchester was due to the determination of his partner's wife, daughter of Ralph Isham, to remain in her native town. Her husband purchased the family's Hayward Avenue home and the land behind it, on which the factory was eventually built.



*A 19th-century lithograph of the Hayward Rubber Company plant, which stood on Lebanon Avenue east of Mill Street.*

The dramatic success of the venture led to the establishment of local banks, a library, a volunteer fire department, gas lighting on new streets, new churches, hotels, a growing population of German and Irish immigrants, and a thriving commercial center, soon to be known as Merchants' Row. A spur of track, along with passenger and freight depots, was built to connect with the Air Line Railroad four miles away, which facilitated both the marketing of rubber goods and the importation of cheap fuel and western grain that began to undercut the local market. By the time the rubber plant was sold to U.S. Rubber and moved in 1893, Colchester had become a one-business town that couldn't easily survive its departure.

The early years of the 20th century were dominated by the settlement here of a large Jewish community as a result of the efforts of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society and the Baron de Hirsch Fund. In response to New York City's unsanitary congestion, these organizations encouraged settlement in rural areas of eastern Connecticut. Colchester's farms were an obvious choice, having been recently abandoned after the departure of the Hayward Rubber Company and several subsequent unsuccessful manufacturing attempts. As a result, the 1900 population of 1,991, its lowest level since the early 18th century, rose slightly and stabilized at about 2,000 in the next decade, and the economic decline was arrested.

The restoration of Colchester's agricultural economy led to the town's being considered "one of the two or three most noteworthy Jewish efforts to build a farming community in America." At one time the state federation of Jewish farm associations was headquartered here. Soon, however, as some of the inexperienced urban newcomers grew frustrated with the difficulties of farming, they created successful small manufacturing concerns, such as clothing and leatherworking.

Probably the most significant contribution of the Jewish community to Colchester's economy was the development of the resort industry, which reached its peak in the mid-1920s, and led to this area being called the "Catskills of Connecticut." The number of schools, synagogues and businesses, particularly along Merchants' Row, expanded to serve the thriving Jewish community, which had reached 50% of the population by 1915. This period is notable for its freedom from bigotry and anti-Semitism, and the harmonious cooperation of all town groups in education, government and civic affairs.

*On Broadway is one of the few surviving resort hotels that made Colchester capital of the "Catskills of Connecticut."*

As Jewish farmers left the land, their places were taken by immigrants from eastern Europe who changed the focus to dairying and poultry farming, thus reviving the agricultural economy once more. By 1940, Poles and Slavs made up 45% of the 3,000 residents and had added their cultural institutions to the town. The Jewish population had now fallen to 25% as the resort industry moved elsewhere in Connecticut after the Depression.

Since World War II and the proliferation of highways and automobiles, Colchester's growth has once again derived from its advantageous location at the region's crossroads. Its emerging role as a suburban bedroom community

has led to its greatest growth. The town now has a regional town economy, and newer residents are less dependent on local businesses for either employment or goods and services.

## 2.2 1995 Town Profile and Projections

### A. The Present

Colchester is a town of 48.7 square miles with an estimated 1995 population of 13,290 (Source: Office of Policy and Management, State of Connecticut). It enjoys an excellent location on Route 2, which offers convenient access to the major population areas of Hartford, Norwich and New London, all within a 1/2-hour drive. While rail service is no longer available, Connecticut Transit buses connect the town to Hartford. Agriculture, retail services, and small manufacturing comprise the largest components of the town's economy. Farming, the town's most historic economic activity, remains important, and the manufacturing sector, while not large, is stable and growing (leather goods, arts/crafts, metal fabrication, plastics and clothing). Colchester's 91 retail facilities (1987) are a disproportionately important element; the town serves a regional market, in part because of the much smaller towns nearby, the resort areas in and around Colchester, and several shops with statewide reputations.

Colchester has experienced significant growth and change in recent years. The town's convenience to larger job markets in the Hartford area and along the shore has drawn commuters as residents. 82% of the town workers are employed elsewhere. The population has grown more than 50% since the 1980 census, dramatically outpacing the state. Colchester is one of Connecticut's fastest growing towns, and after Salem has experienced the most growth in New London County during that period. The 52.1% rise in housing units is the highest in southeastern Connecticut. In 1994 alone, the Town issued 256 building permits, the second highest number in the state. Residential subdivisions have claimed substantial tracts of land.

The town has a predominantly middle class population, as shown by several indicators. Per capita income ($17,143 in 1989) compares favorably to other towns in the region, though lower than the state's, and the 1990 mean house sale price ($159,246) is one of the highest in the area. Housing is predominantly single-family (74% in 1990, higher than the 63% figure for the region), and the percentage of apartments is lower than in most towns around. Colchester also has a good-sized stock of housing affordable for modest incomes.

Colchester's commercial center has also continued to spread out. Supporting growth are public water and sewer systems covering the entire historic borough area. Development has been most intensive along Route 85

(South Main Street). In the past few years, the new Edwards supermarket has spurred construction along Linwood Avenue, and Old Hartford Road and the Upton Road industrial park have also experienced commercial growth. Closer to the center, some old homes on South Main Street, Broadway, and Norwich Avenue have been transformed into commercial uses, with varying degrees of success and sensitivity (see more specifics on town center under "Economic Resources" in section 2.3). Manufacturing expansion has not kept pace with retail, and agricultural uses continue to decline as profitability falls and the demand for residential use grows.

There are several drawbacks to this rapid growth. Traffic congestion, a problem for decades that was alleviated by the construction of Route 2, is again worsening. The town must make an increasing investment in infrastructure (e.g., roads, utilities, schools, and other public services) and raise greater revenues through taxes. The tax burden on residential properties has increased disproportionately since the commercial and industrial sector has experienced less growth. Among towns of similar size and situation, Colchester's per capita tax burden of $821 (state fiscal year 1990-91) is on the high side (Coventry is $797, Killingly is $649), as is the equalized mill rate. Colchester, for these reasons, must make every effort to strengthen and expand its commercial base.

Tourism, which in recent years has assumed a much larger role in the state's economic life, has had little impact in Colchester. According to state figures, the town earned $4.6 million in tourism-related revenues in 1993. Nearby towns with historic sites and cultural attractions have fared considerably better (East Haddam: $15.34 million; Lebanon: $12.88 million), even though much smaller in population and shopping opportunities. The existence of only one place of accommodation, the Hayward House bed & breakfast, is an obvious shortcoming.

Colchester's strong growth in recent years has occurred despite the state's deep recession since 1989, which is a measure of the town's relative economic health. Interestingly, the Foxwoods Resort Casino, which is transforming the economy of southeastern Connecticut, has had little direct positive impact on Colchester, even though the town is located on Route 2, a major access road.

## B. The Future

In large part because of its locational advantages, Colchester should enjoy sustained growth over the next 10-15 years. Population projections by the town and state both show continued increases. Much of this change, however large, will represent the ongoing suburbanization of Colchester and expansion of its role as a bedroom community for those with jobs elsewhere.

The demand for housing will continue, especially among the market of families with young children. Colchester's population has one of the highest percentages regionally of children and young people/workers aged 1-24, bucking somewhat the general decline in this segment of the population. The growing numbers of retired and elderly, too, will require more housing tailored to their needs. The town's extensive developable land makes growth and change inevitable.

More commercial and retail construction is also sure to occur, with serious implications for the historic town center. The success of the new Edwards supermarket is a sign of things to come, and the growing population alone will fuel expansion. Under current zoning and land development patterns, growth will be oriented toward automobile and highway access, which indicates continued strip development along South Main Street and Parum Road, Old Hartford Road, and Linwood Avenue. Development, in fact, may well leapfrog open land on the center's outskirts to locations closest to the highway. The current trend toward larger stores, such as Edwards and WalMart, promises to dwarf existing facilities.

Predictions as to the state's economic future have clear implications for Colchester. In the anticipated gradual recovery from the recession, the Connecticut Economic Conference Board has identified tourism and biomedical technology as the most promising sectors for growth and jobs. The figures for tourism are impressive: tourists spent $3.6 billion during 1993 in Connecticut, up 10% over 1992 despite the recession. According to the state Department of Economic Development, this growth has greatly outpaced all other economic activity.

The overall impact of tourism is pervasive and critical, and Colchester should take note. It supports 106,000 jobs and generates $2.1 billion in wages, $508 million in state taxes, and $141 million in local taxes. Pleasure travelers comprised 61.5% of commercial lodging visitors in 1993, and pleasure travel to hotels, motels and resorts ("HMRs") increased 61.5% in the same year. Surveys show that almost 70% of visitors to HMR accommodations are from out-of-state, with most coming from the New York metropolitan area, followed by New England.

Estimates of strong future growth in the services sector statewide also bode well for Colchester. Between 1992 and 2000, 65,000 new jobs are projected. Connecticut's "post-manufacturing" economy, however, is expected to shed an additional 10,000 manufacturing jobs.

# 2.3 Town Center Resources: An Evaluation

With the historical overview and town profile in earlier sections as context, significant resources of the town center are here evaluated. Strengths that distinguish the center are identified, as well as problems that can be resolved with thoughtful planning. The wise use of these resources will determine how Colchester is perceived by residents and visitors, which can translate into economic progress and improved quality of life.

## A. Economic Resources: Assets

### *Location*

Historically the town center has derived great economic benefit from its location at the crossroads of routes linking it to other communities. The names of thoroughfares radiating from the green reflect these historic and ongoing geographic connections: Hartford, Middletown, Norwich, New London, Windham, Lebanon, Amston. It is the town's proximity to Route 2, however, that is the critical factor today in any evaluation of economic condition and prospects.

The most dramatic growth in the town's history has occurred as a result of easy access to job markets via Route 2. In the trend toward suburbanization of areas east of the river, Colchester has maintained one of the most consistent population growth rates. So far it is not crowded and has the land to absorb anticipated housing demand and increased school population without difficulty.

Proximity to Route 2 also means convenient access for outside visitors and consumers to Colchester's commercial facilities and distinctive resources. The five exits into town represent major opportunities for growth, with some larger stores already expressing interest in locating here; Edwards supermarket exemplifies this potential. In relation to nearby smaller towns, Colchester retains the market advantages of size, continued growth, easy access and its traditional image as a regional center.

The Connecticut Economy, a University of Connecticut publication, uses this location on Route 2 as one of its five indicators of tourism traffic volume, thus confirming its importance. Some of the measured increase in traffic here since 1991 (5.3% in 1992 statewide) can be attributed to Foxwoods Resort Casino, although this facility does not seem to have had a major economic impact on the town so far, according to local merchants. Increasing tourist traffic, however, remains an important factor in marketing Colchester's commercial and cultural resources.

The town is also well served by local roads, with easy access from all directions and concentrated flow through the center, representing potential consumers. Its proximity to several small lakes and campgrounds with

sizable summer populations has made it the commercial center for this seasonal, family-oriented market.

### *Goods and Services*

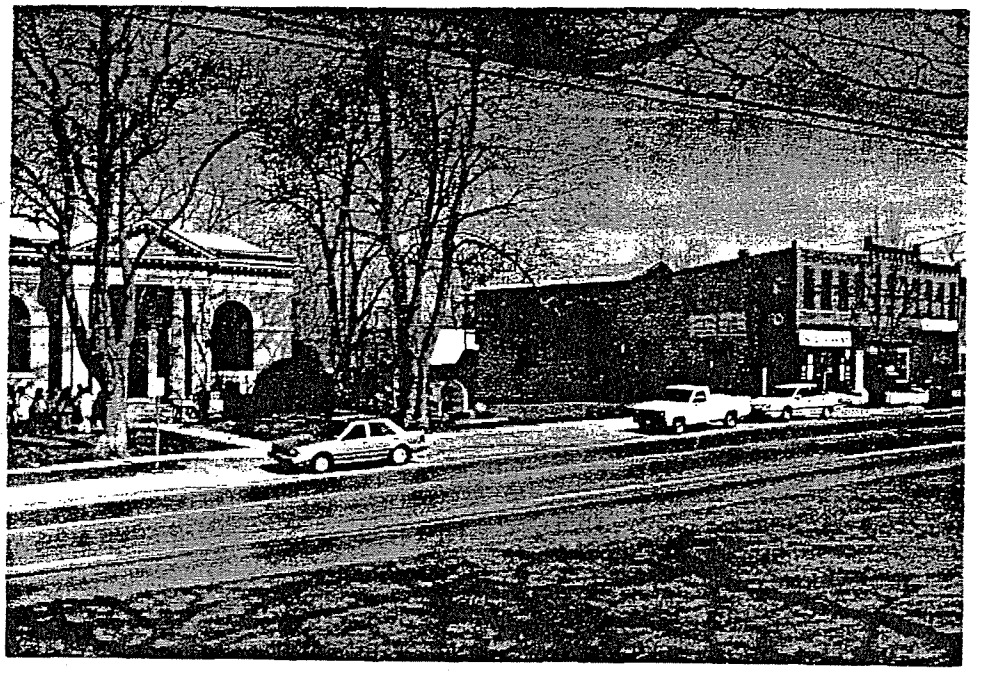
Colchester currently offers a range of goods and services, mostly on a small scale and oriented to a local market. The shops that have succeeded best, such as Tri-Town Foods, Noel's, and Plotkin's Jewelers, are characterized as user-friendly, knowing their customers personally and giving individualized service, having particular specialties or still operating at a manageable scale -- all of these perceived as assets by users who chose them over the more impersonal chain stores. New uses, such as the wallpaper store and sports consignment shop on Norwich Avenue, are expanding the range of services available to local consumers.

The town is widely known for a dozen or so regional draws in the central area, such as the Colchester Bakery, N. Liverant & Son antiques, Harry's drive-in, World Wide Games plant & outlet, Levine & Levine clothing outlet, the two fabric outlets, Wild Geese gift shop, Colchester Coal & Stove, Hayward House bed & breakfast, and now Edwards supermarket. Most visitors from out of town come seeking one of these specific shopping destinations, rather than to browse or explore. The strengths of most of these stores, among Colchester's great assets, are their long tradition of service to the area and their strong pattern of multi-generational family ownership.

Another pattern typical of the town's economic history is the concentration of retail outlets. Earlier in the century Colchester boasted a number of manufacturers and outlets for clothing distributed to New York markets, establishing the town as a mecca for cost-conscious shoppers.

*Levine and Levine (left) and Colchester Bakery (right) on Lebanon Avenue are retail assets with statewide recognition.*

The blocks adjoining the green still serve as Colchester's commercial and civic core. The Merchants' Row complex has changed over the years with fire, modernization and new uses, but has retained its 19th-century character, small-scale, and strong architectural identity as the town's historic "Main Street." Most local traffic through Colchester passes this Row, making its high visibility a marketing asset. The nearby Cragin Library, an architectural gem, and the U.S. post office reinforce this continuing sense of cohesive town center.



*Cragin Library (left) and Merchants' Row (right) are a strong presence at the green's northern edge.*

The streets radiating from the green represent a variety of shopping experiences. Lebanon Avenue, which developed intensively earlier than the others, still has an important concentration of small operations. While many shops have come and gone, Colchester Bakery and Levine's have been durable and successful, establishing a strong anchor for this corridor. Broadway and Old Hartford Road have attracted recent retail and office growth in their role as the business connector from Exit 17, but much of their original 19th-century character remains. Similarly, Linwood Avenue is an obvious automobile gateway with much potential for commercial expansion.

South Main Street is the most heavily used of the radial routes and has the strongest commercial identity. While many fine buildings have been demolished for new uses, the attractive commercial conversion of historic houses by Beazley Realty and Liberty Bank clearly demonstrates the potential for adaptive reuse without loss of visual integrity. The traffic generated by newer facilities south of the Colchester Historic District represents a market that can be tapped for other activities in the center.

*Adaptive reuse of the building on the left helps heep South Main Street economically viable.*

Norwich Avenue has already evolved from residential to mainly new office use. Its importance stems not from architectural or historic character, but from the presence of major civic and institutional functions: the Municipal Office Complex, the schools, the teen and senior centers, and St. Andrew's Church.

### *Cohesive Center*

The old borough with the green at its heart is still the area most critical to Colchester's sense of identity. Fortunately, most new retail and office development has remained contiguous to this core, creating a fairly compact center that sprawl has not yet totally dissipated, as is happening in many towns. Most residents identify strongly with the town center and perceive its several parts as a whole. Whether or not they use it regularly, they are familiar with its general character and many activities that take place there. It creates, therefore, a community focus even for geographically scattered residents, many of whom are new to town and lack ties to its history.

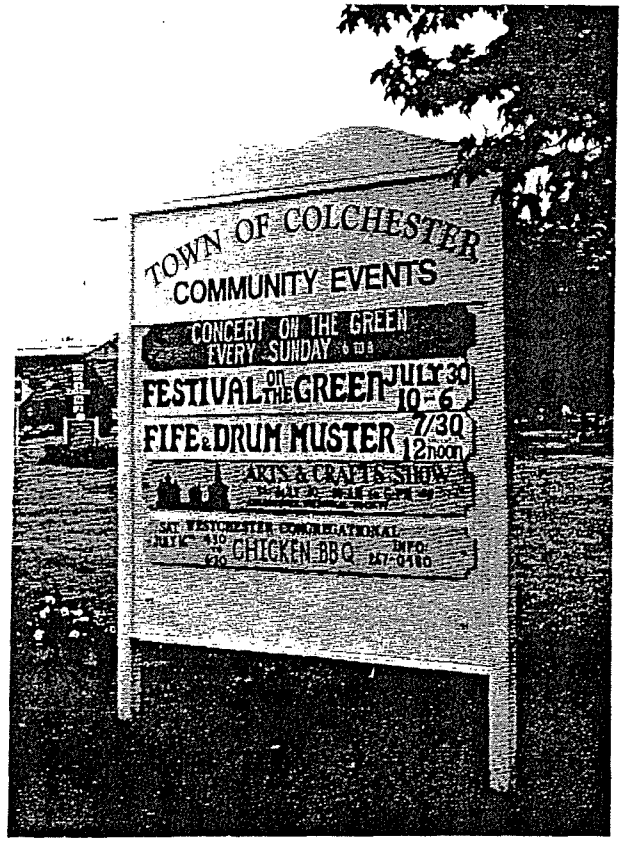
The infrastructure now in place -- water, sewers, utilities, street pattern, lighting, pedestrian amenities -- is conducive to maintaining compact and efficient growth in the town center.

### *Community Involvement*

Colchester is fortunate to have commissions and civic organizations that are familiar with the issues relating to both preservation and development and the desirability of making them work together. People in

both the public and private spheres are assuming more leadership in determining how the market develops. The public in general seems ready to support initiatives to enhance the town center.

The Colchester Business Association (CBA) is broadly representative and includes a sizable membership. CBA sponsors a range of activities promoting its membership and increased used of the town center, such as the annual tag sale on the green, the Candle Walk in December, and many musical events, including in July 1995 the first Concert-on-the-Green with the Hartford Symphony Pops. CBA is to be commended for publishing the town guide and erecting entry signs featuring the town's motto at major entry points, demonstrating the organization's interest in boosting the town. Recently CBA has taken a more aggressive role with the creation of the Retail Roundtable Committee to survey businesses in an effort to better inform customers about local resources. Their financial support for the renovation of the historic cemetery behind Bacon Academy can ultimately have economic as well as aesthetic advantages by promoting increased visitation.




*The town green's diverse events help keep it a vital place.*

Members of the Economic Development Commission (EDC) have taken initiatives on several fronts. Being aware of the advantages of location along Route 2 and the resulting retail growth potential, they are actively seeking interested developers, having specifically explored ideas for projects on

Lebanon Avenue. They have published a pamphlet promoting the town and a Land Use Manual to ease businesses through the town's construction approval process, while also taking the initiative to set up a coordinating committee among commissions dealing with land use issues. Showing an understanding of how mixed uses can enhance each other, they have promoted the Rails-to-Trails greenway at the Lebanon Avenue depot.

Another economic asset worth emphasizing is aesthetics. Programs that improve building design and maintenance, such as the federal Small Cities grants for housing rehabilitation now being used in Colchester, also make valuable contributions to the town's economic health.

## B. Economic Resources: Problems

### *Location*

The negative side of Colchester's proximity to Route 2 is the ease with which local residents can meet retail and service needs elsewhere. New suburbanites lack ties and loyalty to town resources, often maintaining previous shopping patterns, using facilities near their jobs, or responding to aggressively marketed new centers.

### *Definition of Goals*

While there appears to be growing support for a strong town center, as evidenced in part by the commissioning of this report, commitment of the town government and commissions to the center's preservation and efficient development has not been emphatically articulated. The result is that individual land owners and developers with independent objectives act without a sense of common purpose, and often make land use decisions in isolation from one another. The several organizations that can have an impact on town center issues, such as the Economic Development Commission, Colchester Business Association, Colchester Historical Society and the Historic District Commission, need both policy direction from the town government and more interaction with each other to avoid promoting conflicting paths to the future.

### *Marketing Strategy*

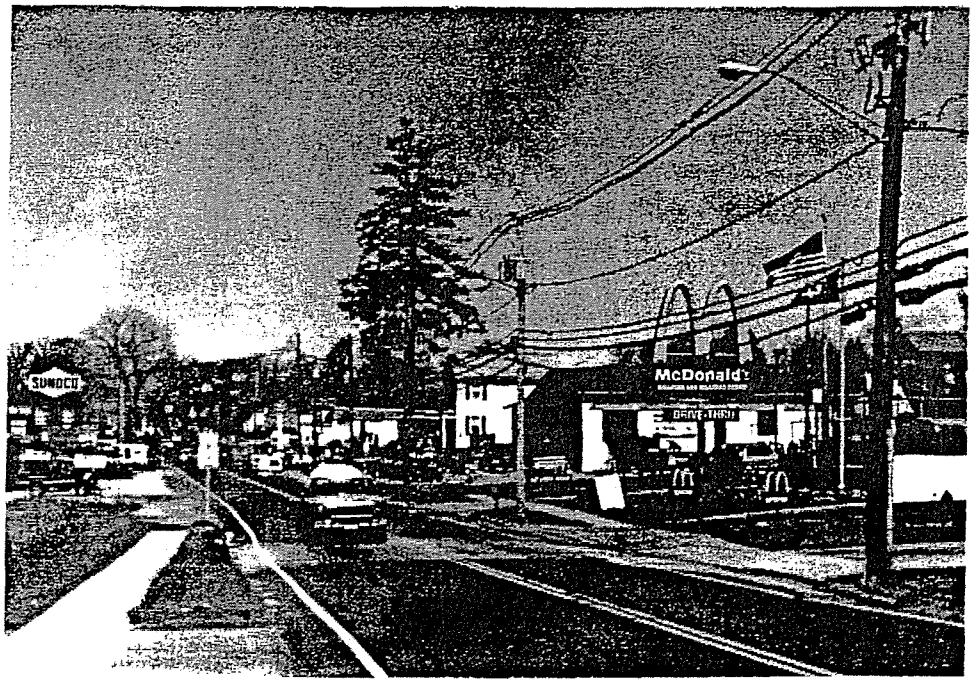
The town and local organizations have not thus far taken the aggressive steps necessary to protect the viability of central businesses or those compatible with historic village scale. Outside retailers, especially large superstores, are making determined and well-financed efforts to attract the same customers. In order to compete effectively, market realities require a more clearly defined sense of image and direction, analysis of gaps in the current commercial mix, more cooperation among retailers and stronger promotion. Specific gaps, and ones frequently mentioned by shoppers and

retailers interviewed in preparing this Plan, include quality family restaurants, theater or entertainment options, a bookstore, a delicatessen, and overnight accommodations.

Such a strategy should encourage more intensive use of the town center's underdeveloped sites and buildings than has been the case so far. To facilitate this objective, the review process for new uses and conversions would benefit from streamlining and a clear policy standard against which to measure new proposals.

### *Fragmentation and Deterioration*

The drawbacks of traditional market-based laissez-faire growth are becoming evident in Colchester. The town center, as it expands outward, is less efficient, weakened by pockets of wasteful deterioration, lacking a strong identity and without visual or functional cohesion. The chief culprit is strip development. It promotes multi-stop, single-purpose car use, creates large and unsightly parking areas, projects anonymous character unrelated to its location in Colchester, and detracts from a sense of community since people on different errands do not cross paths. Current zoning is conducive to a continuation of this pattern.




*Strip development on lower South Main Street robs Colchester of historic character and increases traffic problems.*

At the same time, the historic commercial center around the green has declined. Lebanon Avenue in particular is suffering from abandonment, disinvestment and competition at other locations, while the potential inherent in Merchants' Row is not being met. Elsewhere around the green, fine buildings that are becoming obsolete as single-family residences because

of size, location and expensive upkeep are suffering from deferred maintenance and deterioration.

### *Impact of the Automobile*

Besides zoning, perhaps the greatest catalyst for present growth patterns and resulting alteration of historic character is the automobile. Three aspects of this issue must dominate any discussion of preserving historic character and making the town center efficiently user-friendly: circulation patterns, parking patterns, and impact on pedestrian use.

Much of the present circulation pattern has been determined by Route 2 and the five exits into Colchester. Heavy traffic flows on the north/south axis of Old Hartford Road, Broadway and South Main Street, crossing Route 16 traffic from Exit 18. This pattern increases congestion at the most visually critical and central intersection. The old street pattern doesn't serve this volume of traffic well, causing confusion and a plethora of unsightly signs and lights at decision points, and creating major barriers to comfortable pedestrian use.

Parking patterns, too, have had a tremendous visual impact on the character of the central area. While there appears to be a generally sufficient amount of parking, except perhaps right around the green, it is inefficient and visually intrusive. The short-term needs of residents for quick stops and those of longer-term, multi-destination parkers should be more clearly defined. The current pattern creates too many curb cuts, lack of definition between street and off-street uses, unattractive paved front yards, and often a redundancy of spaces for adjoining uses, as is the case for the small shops along Lebanon Avenue.

*Front-yard parking on South Main Street creates a traffic hazard and visual blight.*

Pedestrian amenities and safety have not been given enough consideration. Major streets are now barriers to walking, and crosswalks aren't necessarily located where use dictates. The walk from the green to Merchants' Row, for example, is intimidating and inconvenient. Parking patterns don't encourage one stop for several trips, and it isn't easy or pleasant to walk between shopping areas. The bus stop on the green does not have a safe, direct pedestrian approach from Merchants' Row, and is at an awkward location too close to a major intersection.

## C. Cultural Resources: Assets

Cultural resources are those elements modifying or added to the natural landscape by the activities of people who have lived there over time. Their significance for this discussion is in the historical and physical manifestations still present -- the buildings, landscapes and the events that have shaped them. In evaluating their role in historic preservation, it is important to look at what they tell us about the past, how they can contribute to the economic health of the town, and how they can improve its quality of life.

### *Positive Perception*

It is critical to note that most people who live in Colchester, as well as those who chose to visit or shop here, appreciate it for the historic charm embodied in its town center. The recent town survey of local opinion strongly confirms this conclusion. The classic green surrounded by architecturally distinguished buildings creates a small-town scale that is reminiscent of a simpler lifestyle than experienced today in many cities and modern towns. This perception has impact not only for aesthetic reasons, but because it has market value that translates into growth, shopping dollars and return visits.

People can experience this sense of history both from the car as they pass through town or to a destination, or on foot as they use the green and areas close by. Thus not only are the buildings themselves important to their perceptions, but the views and panoramas leave lasting historic and aesthetic impressions.

### *Town Green*

The green is clearly the heart of Colchester. It is distinctive for the fact that its size, character and physical condition are generally intact and its surroundings are still compatible with its 19th-century origins. The north part (over one-half) of the green, now town property, was donated by Nathaniel Hayward in 1850, while the southern part belongs to the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees. Yet historically the entire green has been developed and used as a single space.

During the 19th-century, mature trees lined the perimeter and walks of this approximately 4-acre area. Some of these trees still stand, creating a sense of lanes and edges. For a time a wooden rail fence defined the border, creating a now-lost feeling of enclosure. The gazebo, while having been rebuilt with more durable materials, retains its original location and overall character, and is still the visual and activity focus. The Civil War monument and the veterans' memorials invest the northern portions of the green with particular definition and significance.

As mentioned above, the views onto and from the green define most people's perception of Colchester. As it comes into view from any direction, there is the feeling of having arrived at an important place. This makes each of the radiating roads a significant gateway. Most traffic through this part of Colchester passes by here, experiencing either consciously or peripherally this view of the heart of town.

*The Colchester town green is one of the largest in Connecticut and a defining presence in the town center.*

The green is truly a vital place, with the potential to absorb even more activity and be a stronger visual asset. There are probably few townspeople who haven't been involved in one of the many activities occurring here.

### *Significant Buildings*

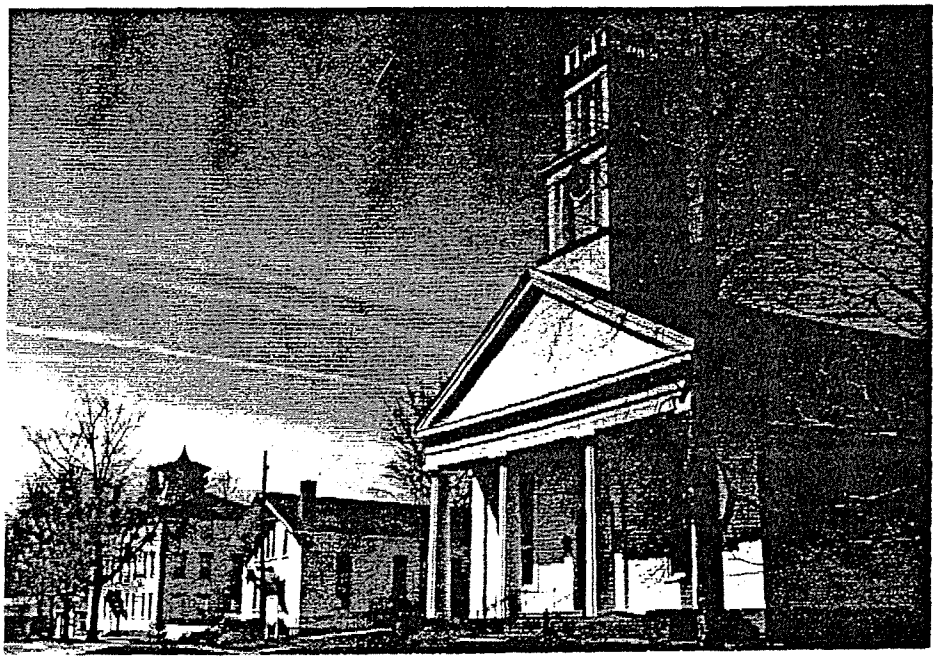
Colchester's historic town center possesses considerable historic and architectural importance, as confirmed by the National Register of Historic Places listing of Bacon Academy, Day Hall, the Old Town Hall (Wheeler Block), and Nathaniel Hayward House, together with a National Register

historic district covering the entire central area. Fine architecture lines Broadway and South Main Street. These areas plus all the buildings visible from the green represent critical masses that are important for the fabric and overall 19th-century impression they create.

The following buildings or areas stand out:

* **Bacon Academy** (1803) is definitely the most significant structure in Colchester and one which is worthy of wider recognition. Both its brick exterior, unusual in Colchester, and its interior are in sound structural condition and basically authentic to their original design, creating impressive continuity with history. It currently houses extensive collections of the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees and the Colchester Historical Society (CHS) depicting the histories of the school and the town. The setting of the Academy is dramatic, terminating vistas on all major streets around it.

The construction of Bacon Academy led to the creation of one of the most distinctive institutions in Colchester's history, the only school for black students in Connecticut at the time of its founding. While the building itself no longer stands, its history is unique and powerful, worthy of being prominently featured as a vital part of Connecticut's black heritage.

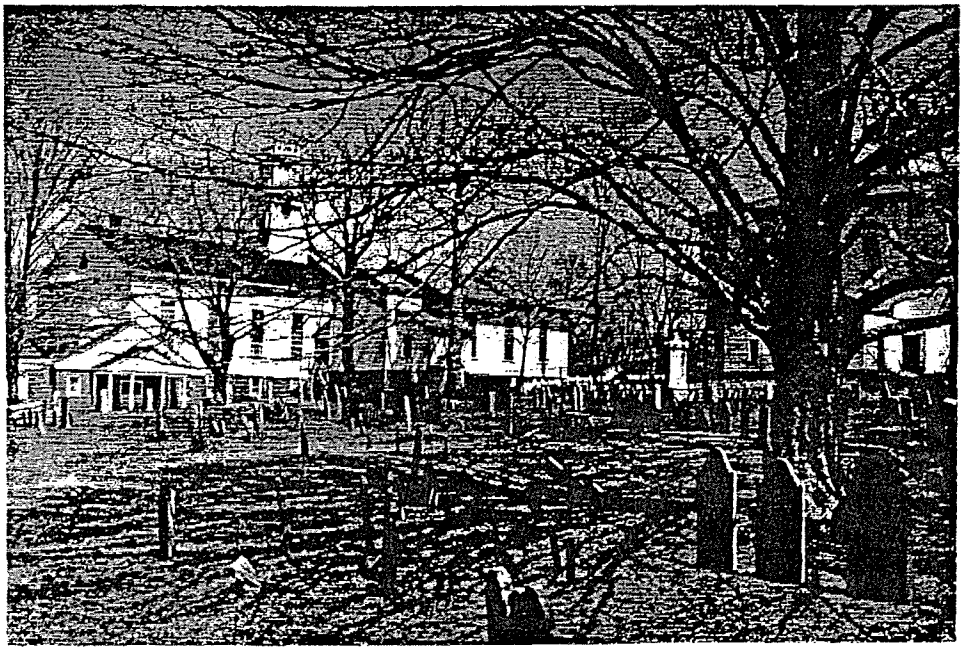


*Bacon Academy, Day Hall and Federated Church (left to right) embody town history, and each is significant architecturally.*

* **Day Hall** (1858), in the Italianate style, originally served as the conference house of the Federated Church, but was donated by Edward Day to Bacon Academy in 1929. Under the management of the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, it now functions as a day care center. The interior, designed for public assembly and stage presentations, is in good condition.

* **The Federated Church** (1841), built in Greek Revival style, is the third erected by the town's oldest congregation, and the second on this site. It is the only church left facing the green, the Methodist Church on Norwich Avenue, and the Episcopal Church at Hayward and Norwich avenues having been demolished earlier in the century.

* **The historic cemetery** behind Bacon Academy is the burial place of most of Colchester's settlers and early residents. Its grave markers, in several kinds of stone, display the work of skilled stonecutters and are excellent examples of early American art. Possible grave sites of early slaves are currently being investigated by archaeologists. The burying ground is now being renovated to showpiece condition. A grant from CBA plus private money from in and out of town is financing this work, with the participation of local experts on historic cemetery research and management.



*Nestled behind Bacon Academy is the town's old cemetery, one of its most historic sites.*

* **Old Town Hall** (1872), in the Second Empire style, was built to house a store and meeting rooms for the Colchester Masons. Next it served as a school, later as Town Hall, and now as a teen recreation center. Several additions, while incompatible, do not severely compromise its architectural importance.

* **Merchants' Row,** the focus of commercial activity since its mid-19th century construction, is still the perceived center of town. Old photographs show a more unified and complete row of storefronts, but two buildings, the Worthington Block and 44-48 Main Street, still set the tone for architectural character. This highly visible row, with its strong relationship to the green and the library, is critical to the image and scale of the town center and as such deserves to be a major focus of revitalization efforts.

* **Cragin Library** (1905) is a Neo-Classical Revival gem in a vital location, an asset to the green that draws residents to the center from throughout the town. Its directors are committed to its role as a repository for historic information and resources. The existing building cannot meet demand, and a major expansion on site or elsewhere is under consideration.

* **The Foote House** (1702), built (but never lived in) by founding father Nathaniel Foote, is the oldest building in Colchester. Deeded to Bacon Academy in 1962 when the DAR disbanded, and still frequently called the DAR House, it is now partly maintained by the CHS. The site on Norwich Avenue is not the original one. For 100 years the building stood on Old Hebron Road, after which it was moved to Hartford Turnpike and Broadway, where it served successively as a post office and granary, before arriving at Norwich Avenue.

* **Other fine buildings around the green** include the Nathaniel Hayward House (1767) with its Carriage House and granary (c. 1858), and four architecturally significant 19th-century homes with ties to Colchester's social history: the Erastus Day House (c.1850) at 63 Norwich Avenue, the Ralph Isham House (1820) at 11 Hayward Avenue and the Horace Smith House (c.1840) at 12 Broadway (both at the corner of Lebanon Avenue), and the former Baptist parsonage (c.1840) at 24 Linwood Avenue next to Cragin Library. The loss of any of these would severely compromise the character of the green.

*The Ralph Isham House (1820) and barn are essential parts of the center's historic ambience.*

* **South Main Street** presents some of the finest residential architecture in town and is notable for its largely intact historic landscape at the northern end. The extended entry experience culminating in Bacon Academy and the green is a welcome antidote to the anonymous commercial

strip to the south. The loss of several prominent and distinguished buildings near the Norwich Avenue intersection is regrettable.

* **Broadway**'s fine residential buildings offer a similar gateway experience from the north. While new institutional and retail buildings have intruded into the historic streetscape, the general feeling of a 19th-century residential area is still intact and worthy of protection.

* **The railroad depot** and freight building on Lebanon Avenue are a dramatic visual terminus to a street traditionally oriented first to factory and then to business use. These structures represent the commitment of local investors in 1877 to bring a spur of the Air Line Railroad to the village and its main industry, the Hayward Rubber Company. The depot and freight building are the most concrete reminders of this vital part of Colchester's economic history. The three-way intersection where Windham Avenue forks off forms a clear entry point from the east.

### *Cultural Heritage*

Even more than its exemplary architecture, Colchester's cultural heritage puts the town on the map. The highlights of its distinctive history are the early commitment to education of both white and black children, a varied and harmonious ethnic population (especially the deliberate Jewish settlement and resulting resort activity), and its unsung place in the evolution of the rubber industry. The many families still here today whose ancestors have experienced this history are another vital part of Colchester's heritage and as such are a cultural asset.

*The family names of Bacon Academy graduates illustrate the ethnic diversity that distinguishes Colchester.*

BACON ACADEMY CLASS OF 1944
Bottom Row L-R: Robert Miller, Gloria Carli-Sypher, Hans Hirschman, Mildred Kashkin, Harold Goldberg, Renee Weiner-Schuman, Herbert Clark, Helen Tarasevich, Marion Naumowitz
Middle Row L-R: Melvin Scott, Beatrice Schuster-Simon, Ida Balaban, Rose Marie Fuchs, Katherine Tandysh, Mrs. Bartman, Cecelia Wasniewski-Schaffauser, Margaret Fuchs, Judith Dember-Schneider, Bella Katz-Schumann, Emil Mikolajcik
Top Row L-R: Chester Derda, Helen Nelkin-Brown, Michael Trigo, Dorothy Churney-Huron, George Bengston, Betty Jones O'Donnell, Eugene Goldberg, Abraham Epstein, George Mackas

Colchester was also an important center of Masonic activity from the founding of the first lodge here in 1781. Hayward House's surviving, specially built convertible ballroom on the second floor, Breed's Tavern, and the custom-designed third floor of the Old Town Hall were centers of early Masonic activity, all worthy of notice by historians of this organization.

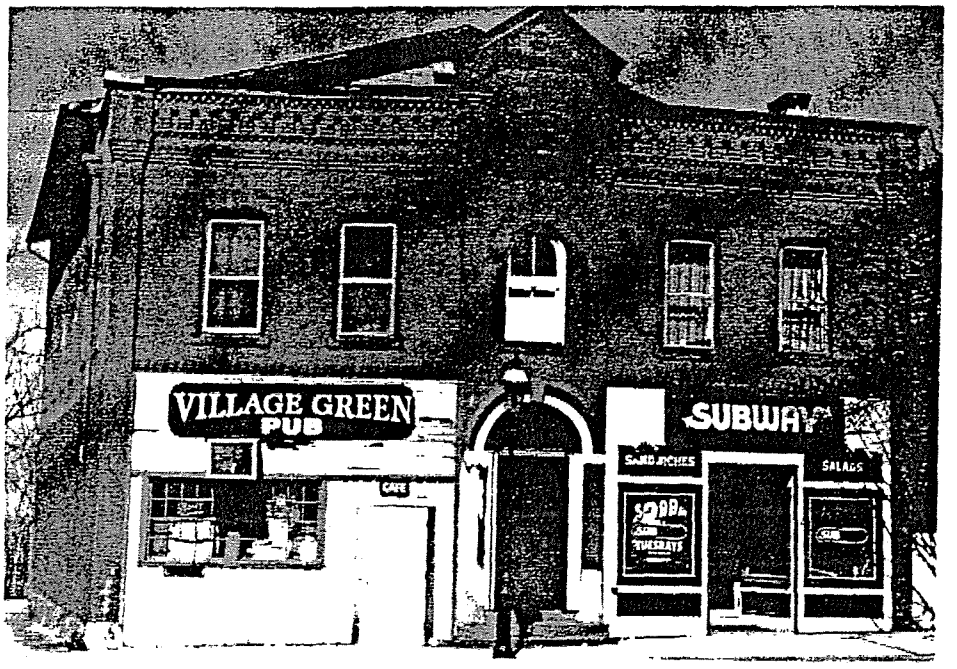
Taken together, Colchester's unique history and its intact village character represent tourism potential that could be a strong contributor to the local economy. There are groups in place to develop and promote its advantages, with the library and Bacon Academy already holding historic resources, and civic organizations well qualified to pursue economic goals.

## D. Cultural Resources: Problems

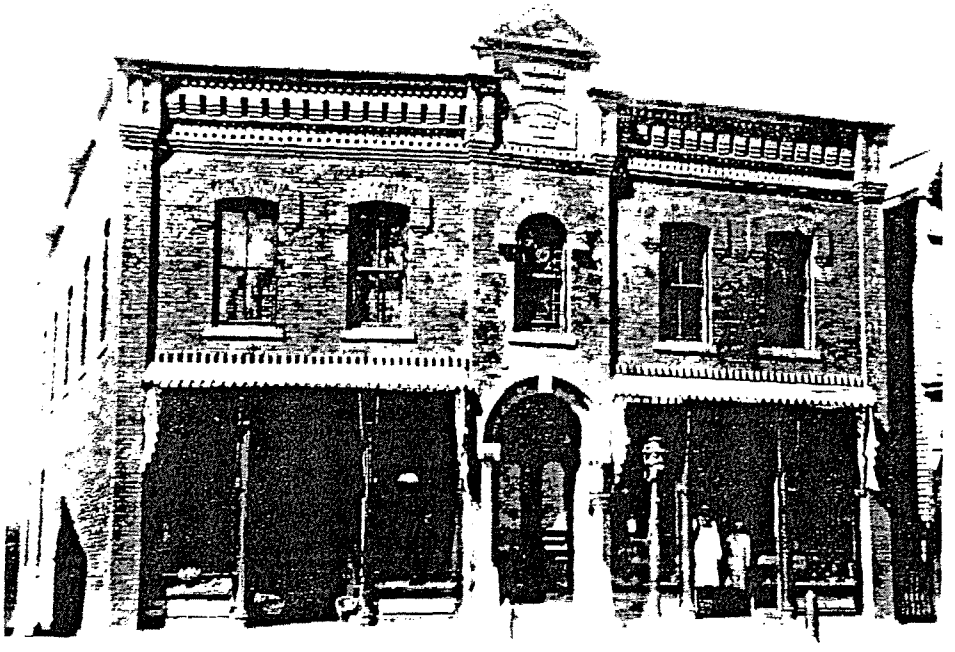
The prospect of new development is a threat because the great value of historic resources in Colchester is not fully appreciated. This means maintenance is often deferred, especially for buildings that are functionally obsolete as residences, enhancement is not a priority, and insensitive changes and demolition are occurring. Only a small part of the town center is protected in a local historic district, and several important buildings outside the district are now in danger of demolition, including the Day House and old Baptist parsonage.

Traffic, parking and circulation are all major detriments to historic character. Heavy traffic and inadequate pedestrian connections between shopping areas discourage visitors. Haphazard parking patterns limit efficient pedestrian use and appreciation of central areas. The historic landscape is being compromised through front yard parking, frequent curb cuts and lack of a cohesive visual character. The negative impact of utility poles and lines, as well as traffic signs on historic views and streetscapes cannot be overemphasized.

Roads leading to the green are in danger of losing their historic character, especially South Main Street and Broadway, as new uses create pressure to replace or simply demolish older buildings. Norwich Avenue has little of its fine architecture left, and Lebanon Avenue has been so altered as to reflect little of its original character. New developments and conversions often show inadequate attention to compatibility with each other or historic neighbors, either functionally or aesthetically.




*Modern alterations (above) to the historic Worthington Block in Merchants' Row detract from the original appearance (below).*



## *Town Green*

The great potential of this space remains unrealized. Edges of the green are being eroded by poor definition and perimeter parking. Utility lines serving the gazebo and adjacent streets are visually blighting and in general interfere with views both in and out of the green. Patterns of pedestrian use are not clearly articulated, with only remnants of historic paths and inconvenient connections to crosswalks. Plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers do not reflect a consistent plan or strong identity as was

*Much of the green's historic character is lost: compare these views from c. 1890 (above) and 1995 (below) near the corner of Norwich and Hayward avenues.*

evident in earlier stages of the green's history. Many trees were lost in the 1938 hurricane or to Dutch Elm Disease and have not been replaced.

### *Buildings*

Several showpiece buildings are being underutilized and need immediate maintenance and repair, or both: Bacon Academy, the Foote House, and the Old Town Hall. Overall objectives for their use have not been well defined or coordinated. Some existing uses are not as well known or as

well publicized as they deserve; e.g. most townspeople don't know about the Academy's extensive exhibits and have never been in the building. Neither car nor pedestrian access and circulation is adequate for optimum use of these facilities.

*Colchester's oldest building, the Foote House (c. 1702), is unknown to most townspeople.*

### *Cultural Heritage*

Colchester's rich and distinctive history in education, cultural diversity, resorts, and the rubber industry, is not adequately known or celebrated. Tourism is not a top objective of town policy or private business efforts, although sponsorship of this Plan foretells a change in priorities.

The town's dilemma is dramatized by its coverage in state and regional guide books, where it is often limited to the edge of the page or falls between focus areas. In promotional material for the region, tourism organizations don't feature Colchester either as a destination or as part of touring routes.

# 2.4 Evaluation of Bacon Academy, Day Hall and Old Town Hall (Wheeler Block)

As groundwork for the Plan recommendations and at the town government's request, the consultants evaluated three significant buildings in the town center: the old Bacon Academy building, Day Hall, and the Old Town Hall (Wheeler Block). The analysis included a detailed examination of their features and condition, and an evaluation of repair/rehabilitation costs and appropriate future uses. This analysis was carried out by Gregory E. Andrews of Preservation Planning Associates and architect James Vance of James Vance and Associates, Hartford. Measured drawings of the buildings were prepared by American Measuring Service, Inc., of Springfield, Massachusetts, and submitted to the Town.

The documentation for the listing of these buildings on the National Register of Historic Places is on file at the Municipal Office Complex and in Cragin Library (note: Day Hall is included in the listing for Bacon Academy).

## A. Bacon Academy (1803), Main Street

The building is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and located in the locally designated Colchester Historic District.

### *Architectural Description*

The following writeup supplements, and makes any necessary corrections to, the 1979 National Register documentation for Bacon Academy.

a. *Exterior*

The windows have brownstone lintels (splayed) and sills. Over the front entrance is a rectangular marble block with the inscription "Bacon Academy." The building foundation is smooth brownstone ashlar. Inside the present cupola is an earlier one, perhaps the original, with eight classically inspired columns surrounding the bell. The bell is inscribed "Fecit 1830 For Ward Bartholomew and Brainard Doolittle Hartford."

b. *Interior*

The basement floor is dirt south of the main stairway and poured concrete to the north. Two load-bearing brick walls, 12-14 inches thick, run east/west. Visible rough-hewn wood framing includes large 8-inch square posts and joists. Reinforcing the structure north of the stairway are steel I beams running south/north and steel posts. The old fireplace bases appear to be encased in concrete. A hatchway provides access to the exterior on the south elevation. The mechanical systems are concentrated in the north section of the basement (see architect's evaluation).

The first floor has been divided up to some extent with non-original fiberboard partitions. The doors are non-original, with windows. Exterior windows are recessed, with storm panels (most are fixed in place), and the wainscotting is beaded flushboards. The old walls are plaster, and the old ceilings (in some places, observed to be paneled tin with classical cornices) are obscured by lowered ceiling panels of acoustical tiles. Modern fluorescent fixtures provide lighting, and there are electric baseboard heating units. All fireplaces are removed, but concrete "hearths" survive. Utility pipes are exposed at ceiling level. A glass-and-wood-partition-enclosed stairway, with linoleum floor covering, leads to the upper floors.

The second and third floors differ from the first in few respects. Non-original doors on the west elevation exit onto a metal fire escape. On the second, the floors appear to be a combination of burly maple and oak. The north room, used by the Cragin Library for storage, displays a tapered column in the center and a blackboard on the south wall.

On the third floor, the north room displays a beaded, boxed center column, and bookcases and corner cabinets. The south room is used for historical society storage. Two non-original windows and two doors appear in the wall between the hallway and the south room. The hallway features a linoleum floor, high wainscotting and old coat hooks. In the building's attic are found wide-board floors, non-original dimensioned roof rafters, and large rough-hewn framing (braced).

The ell, containing bathrooms, has linoleum floors, brick walls, white tile wainscotting, translucent metal-frame windows with imbedded wire mesh, and dimensioned rafters supporting the flat roof. There are large bathrooms for boys and girls (each containing four stalls and two sinks), and two smaller bathrooms for staff.

### *Present Use*

The Bacon Academy Board of Trustees has historical exhibits mounted in both of the first floor's main rooms, and the Colchester Historical Society maintain a historical exhibit in the south classroom on the second floor. Other rooms are either empty or used for storage.

James
and Vance
Associates
Architects

57 Gillett Street Hartford Connecticut 06105-2602

# BACON ACADEMY - ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

## Architectural/Structural

The building is three stories plus basement, attic and wood frame cupola atop the roof. A one story addition containing toilets is on the west side. Construction is of brick exterior and interior bearing walls, with wood framed floor and roof systems and stud and plaster walls serving as secondary partitions. Interior wood columns and beams have been supplemented with a steel lally column and I-beam structural system continuous from concrete footings in the basement to the third floor. This system does not extend through the third floor to the attic. The foundations are a combination of brick and brownstone with large concrete buttresses added to support masonry chimney structures, although the two rear (west) chimneys have been removed. Original columns and beams are rough or unhewn wood, some still with bark. Columns rest on flagstone bases. Wood is punky for about the first 1/2" but sound further in. Some of the original beams are rotted where they are pocketed into the foundation wall. These conditions have been partially corrected by added supports, but additional work is needed. Serious exfoliation can be observed in some of the brick foundation walls, and, while there is little danger of structural failure, some reconstruction of these walls is needed. Remedial structural work in the basement could run between $10,000 and $15,000.

The building's exterior envelope is in fair to good condition. Brick walls have several coats of paint and show some signs of cracking. However, there is severe erosion of brick and mortar on the southwest corner due to a missing rain leader. This area needs to be cleaned, patched and repointed. Budget between $1,000 and $2,000 for this work.

The roof is hipped and has asphalt or fiberglass shingles installed in 1994. The cupola appears to be structurally sound. The roof of the one story toilet wing has a tar and gravel built-up roof which appears near the end of its useful life. Coping and flashing in this area has failed in many places. Removal and replacement of this roof including new insulation and coping repair should be budgeted at about $5,000 to $7,000.

The three main floors of the building are accessed off an enclosed central staircase with emergency exits provided by two steel fire escapes on the west side of the building. The enclosure of the central stair does not technically meet current codes, but may be acceptable as historic construction.



(203) 247-0617 FAX (203) 247-4690

## Mechanical/Electrical

The building has no working furnace or boiler of any kind. Heating is provided by electric resistance heaters. There is no hot water. The original coal-fired boiler, later converted to oil, is still in the basement, but is out of service. Water from the Town main enters the building, is metered and distributed through copper pipes, and then is piped to Day Hall next door without additional metering. The Academy is protected throughout with a dry sprinkler system. If expanded use of the building is planned, a new oil or gas fired hydronic heating system should be installed. The cost of this work should be budgeted at between $40,000 and $60,000.

Electrical service to the building is 400 amp, 240 volt, three phase and comes off a transformer on a pole just in front of the building. Large, unsightly wires enter through a weatherhead near the front door. This service entrance wiring, as well as telephone and TV cable, should be re-routed underground to the building. The electrical panel and some of the distribution appears to have been replaced in the last 10 to 15 years.

## Restoration Recommendations

The Bacon Academy has seen a number of uses in its long life and has undergone some inappropriate renovations. Some architectural/structural remedial work as described in the previous sections is required and should be planned and scheduled. If renovations should be undertaken for the new or expanded uses recommended by the Plan, care should be taken to preserve and restore original building elements to the degree practicable. This might include removal of flush doors and replacement with panel doors close to the original design, removal of suspended ceilings and restoration of tin ceilings and features and replacement of aluminum storm windows with wood interior sash. Research should be done to determine and reinstate original paint colors.

## Future Use Considerations

When the corrective work described above has been completed, the Academy should be able to handle the increased occupancy which the proposed expanded uses would generate. However, detailed structural analysis should be made prior to finalization of re-use plans.

## Code Compliance

Life safety issues involving fire ratings of exits, smoke and fire detection and alarm will have to be addressed, especially in view of the building's change of use from office to museum/meeting space (public assembly) as recommended by this Plan. A "reasonable accommodation" of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements may be met by three actions: 1) by providing handicapped accessibility to the first floor only, which can be relatively easily achieved by ramping to one of the rear side doorways; 2) by adding an accessible toilet on this level; and 3) by taking certain program accessibility measures such as video presentations. This work, the ramp and accessible toilet, can be constructed for about $8,000 to $12,000. Because of the building's historic status and small floor size (under 3000 sf), accessibility to upper levels is not required.

It is recommended that all code issues be discussed with the Colchester Building Official and Fire Marshal in an effort to identify options that may be available to preserve the building without compromising public safety. Section 513 of the Building Code provides a mechanism for this in its provisions for Special Historic Buildings and Districts. It is further recommended that any proposals in this regard be submitted to the State Building Official and the State Fire Marshal as well as State Department of Protection and Advocacy for approval prior to implementation.

## B. Day Hall (1858), Main Street

The building is a contributing resource in the listing for Bacon Academy on the National Register of Historic Places, and it is located in the locally designated Colchester Historic District.

### *Architectural Description*

The following writeup supplements, and makes any necessary corrections to, the 1979 National Register documentation for Bacon Academy.

a. *Exterior*

The building has a quarry-dressed granite ashlar and fieldstone foundation that extends two bays deep under the main block, and a brick foundation to the rear. Piercing the north slope of the gable-front roof is a tall brick chimney (note: old photographs show a cupola, which is no longer extant). Above the front entrance is a round arched fanlight with radial glazing, and centered above the entrance are paired round-arched sash windows with 6-over-4 glazing. Projecting from the rear (west) elevation is a 1-bay-deep gable-roofed ell, slightly lower in height than the main block, with lower shed-roofed wings on the north and south elevations. The ell and wings are sheathed with flushboarding. On the rear elevation of the northern wing is a door that is reached by a wood-framed stairway; the ell and wings windows are either 6-over-6 or 8-over-8 sash and appear singly or in bands (at the lower level).

b. *Interior*

The lower level has linoleum floor covering and plaster walls and ceilings. One room is fitted with some kitchen appliances and cabinets.

Features of the main room include linoleum floor covering, plaster walls with wide flushboard wainscotting, and a metal chandelier pierced with quatrefoils. A large proscenium arch surrounds the stage, which has narrow fir flooring. The main space is filled with nursery-related equipment, but the nursery does not appear to have made any structural changes. A steep stairway with a railing of turned balusters leads to the shallow loft above the front doorway. The loft has fir flooring and a beaded and molded balustrade.

### *Present Use*

The main floor, consisting of one large room with stage and several small storage rooms, is occupied by the Colchester Co-operative Nursery School. The lower level contains rooms used by the Bacon Academy Board of Trustees for meetings, offices, and storage. Other organizations that hold meetings in the lower level include the Girl Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Colchester Historical Society.

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# DAY HALL - ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

## Architectural/Structural

Day Hall is a one story assembly hall with a finished basement and a small loft which overlooks the main hall. The building is of frame construction with a clear-span wood truss gabled roof and a brownstone and granite foundation. Exterior siding is horizontal shiplapped wood with no reveal, presenting a monolithic appearance. The loft is above the front door and is suspended on steel rods from the roof trusses. A low stage with proscenium arch occupies the west end of the main floor along with toilets, storage and a stair to the basement.

The south and west portions of the basement contain offices, meeting rooms, a kitchen and a toilet. The north portion is a mechanical room which is separated from the south portion by a longitudinal masonry bearing wall supporting the main floor framing at approximately mid-span. The building is in fair to good condition but shows evidence of water penetration into the basement floor. The exterior wood siding and trim needs some minor repair, and the entire building needs to be prepped and painted. The condition of the roof could not be observed.

## Mechanical/Electrical

The building is heated by an old oil fired boiler and cast iron radiators. The boiler must be close to the end of its useful life, though it was operational at the time of inspection. There is a partially modernized electrical system supplying 100 amp service through a plug-fused panel, and there is a smoke detection system that appears to be less than five years old.

## Restoration Recommendations

Day Hall has been well maintained, and much of its original fabric appears to be intact. Continued conscientious maintenance is required. If long term continued use of the building is anticipated, which it should be, the mechanical and electrical systems will need upgrading. $15,000 to $20,000 should be budgeted for this. Exterior repairs to wood trim and siding and a new paint job in original colors should also be planned. This could cost between $12,000 and $18,000.

## Future Use Considerations

The clear-spanned hall and the stage present unique opportunities for meetings, receptions or performing arts. Though actual load capacities should be verified by structural analysis, no questionable structural conditions were observed, making assembly use appear quite feasible.



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## Code Compliance

Life safety requirements for the uses of Day Hall recommended in the Plan are substantially addressed in the existing building, with the possible exception of a more sophisticated fire alarm system. Handicapped accessibility to the main floor could be gained through a ramp along the north side of the building to an entrance in the rear. An accessible toilet could be created out of the existing toilet in the southwest corner and this would satisfy code and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements regarding accessibility. About $8,000 to $12,000 should be budgeted for this work.

It is recommended that all code issues be discussed with the Colchester Building Official and Fire Marshal in an effort to identify options that may be available to preserve the building without compromising public safety. Section 513 of the Building Code provides a mechanism for this in its provisions for Special Historic Buildings and Districts. It is further recommended that any proposals in this regard be submitted to the State Building Official and the State Fire Marshal as well as State Department of Protection and Advocacy for approval prior to implementation.

## C. Old Town Hall (Wheeler Block) (1858), Norwich Avenue

The building is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is located in the locally designated Colchester Historic District.

### *Architectural Description*

The following writeup supplements, and makes any necessary corrections to, the 1992 National Register documentation for Old Town Hall.

a. *Exterior*
See National Register documentation.

b. *Interior*
The walls, for the most part, and the ceilings are plaster, with fluorescent ceiling lighting fixtures. Some of the walls are painted with murals. Many original paneled doors (on the first floor, a few have windows) survive; others are modern hollow core. The vault projecting from the east elevation has a linoleum floor, plaster walls and acoustical tile ceiling. A row of large posts (steel or wood construction) separates the front and rear sections of the left half of the first floor. The right front room of the first floor has pine paneled walls and interior storm window panels. The southwest rear corner room has bookcases. The wing containing the first- and second-floor bathrooms has sheetrock partitions and acoustical tile ceilings.

On the second floor, the ceilings are masonite panels with batten boards covering the joints (third floor is similar). The walls are pine paneled except for a band of masonite panels just below the ceilings. Two non-original fire escape doors display paneling and eight-light windows. The room at the southwest corner contains old kitchen appliances, a window exhaust fan, walls and lower cabinets of unpainted beaded boarding, and painted upper cabinets.

The floors on the third floor are carpeted or linoleum tile. The walls display beaded fir wainscotting and, above, masonite paneling with batten joint boards. The fluorescent light fixtures here are old, and there are several space heaters. At the back, the fire escape door is non-original and has three windows over three panels.

The basement crawl space displays load-bearing posts of steel or wood, insulated air conditioning ducts, a sump pump and dehumidifier.

### *Present Use*

The first floor is being used for teenage recreational activities by the Colchester Youth Services Bureau. The second and third floors are mostly unoccupied, although recently a new theater group in Colchester has held meetings and rehearsals on the second floor.

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# OLD TOWN HALL - ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

## Architectural/Structural

The Old Town Hall is a three story, mostly frame building with a full basement under the main portion of the building. There is a one story vault (c. 1920) on the south side of the building and another newer one story vault (c 1965) of red brick on the east side. Additional newer construction containing a stairway and toilets is also on the east side. The building's wood superstructure, which rests on a brownstone and granite foundation, has been augmented with steel lally columns, some of which support new wood beams apparently intended to reduce the spans of the original beams. Overall, the building is in fair condition with some deterioration noted at the uppermost cornice above the mansard and at some of the ornate wood trim, cornerboards and brackets.

## Mechanical/Electrical

The building has a 100 amp electrical panel on the first floor, but it could not be determined if this is the extent of service to the building. The basement, which has a concrete floor, contains a very old boiler with an oil burner. Heat is distributed through iron pipes to cast iron radiators throughout the building. Some attempt has been made to insulate the first floor from the basement. The existing boiler, while appearing to be functional now, should be replaced in the next five years. Between $8,000 and $12,000 should be budgeted for this.

## Restoration Recommendations

The building is badly in need of a new exterior paint job which should follow the wood repairs mentioned above. Important to the success of re-painting old wood is the proper cleaning, scraping and priming in preparation for the application of finish coats. Some research into the building's original colors should be done prior to color selection. Repair and repainting could cost between $10,000 and $15,000.

The red brick vault is a particularly inappropriate addition, and, while it should probably be demolished, its appearance could be vastly improved by painting it to match the main building and hiding it with plantings.

The interior spaces and finishes have been substantially altered over time and, short of a carefully researched, full-blown restoration project, will not be historically accurate. Interior work should be tailored to support the intended use of the building and could include re-installing an interior stair connecting the 1st and 2nd floors. It is likely that such a stair was removed from the building at some point in its life. It could be replaced for $5,000 to $8,000.



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## Future Use Considerations

Expanding the use of the existing teen center to the second floor has been recommended and appears to be an appropriate use. However, the structural modifications which have been made over the years cast suspicion on the actual load carrying capacity of the floors. Before any expanded use of the building is implemented, a thorough structural analysis should be performed by a qualified engineer.

## Code Compliance

Use of non-sprinklered frame buildings over one story high as a place of assembly, such as a teen center, is not permitted by the Building Code. Adding a sprinkler system would allow one additional story to be used for assembly, but the third floor would have to be isolated by a fire rated floor/ceiling assembly and would be limited to business use. Perhaps an easier approach would be to post the building for a maximum occupancy of 49 persons per floor which would drop it out of the Public Assembly category. This should be done through the local Fire Marshal. A sprinkler system would still be required for use of all three stories. The cost of this could run between $12,000 and $16,000.

Most of the exiting capacity of the second and third floors is by way of the steel fire escapes at the rear of the building. Though not legal in new construction, these may remain in use if properly maintained. Handicapped accessibility to the first floor is provided by a ramp, but the existing toilets are not accessible. Some work, in the range of $5,000 to $10,000 is required to achieve minimum accessibility to the first floor which, because of the building's size and historic status, is all that would be required by code.

It is recommended that all code issues be discussed with the Colchester Building Official and Fire Marshal in an effort to identify options that may be available to preserve the building without compromising public safety. Section 513 of the Building Code provides a mechanism for this in its provisions for Special Historic Buildings and Districts. It is further recommended that any proposals in this regard be submitted to the State Building Official and the State Fire Marshal as well as State Department of Protection and Advocacy for approval prior to implementation.

# 3. A Vision For Colchester

Colchester is on the brink of great change as a result of its favorable location and ensuing population growth. While the outlying areas can absorb these changes, the impact on the town center may be dramatic. The decisions made now will determine the effect of growth on existing resources. In this regard, community leaders from both the public and private spheres play a critical role in decision-making. They can exert considerable influence over the kind, location, density, design, and economic attractiveness of new development. The challenge is to identify and focus on the best opportunities, to coordinate controls and measures within the power of town government and private community, and to motivate both investment and adherence to the goals of this Plan. Especially important to the achievement of this particular goal is the enhancement of tourism as a component of Colchester's economic health.

Colchester is fortunate to have a relatively unspoiled central area focused on the green and surrounding 19th-century architecture of high quality, all enhanced by a fascinating social history. The decisions and actions of nearly three centuries of residents who shared this same location have determined in large part the appearance and distinctive identity of Colchester today, leaving as evidence its cultural resources.

Future town center growth, if it follows policies and regulations now in place, may cause the loss of these invaluable resources. On the other hand, experience nationwide indicates that these resources, revitalized as focal points for development, can play a highly constructive and dynamic role in the town's future economic picture, and yield potentially substantial savings in public expenditures for town improvements.

Colchester's heritage, if respected and used effectively, can be a critical element in shaping a more dynamic and economically vibrant Colchester than ever before.

## A. The Economic Value of Preservation

Continuity with the past is vital in defining and distinguishing who we are today. A shared heritage, particularly the public spaces and experiences such as the green, central shopping and civic areas, and familiarity with their history, gives common reference points to people of varied backgrounds who happen to share the same geography. It describes "home" in a way that much of our modern architecture -- supermarkets, strip

development, housing subdivisions -- cannot. As such this cultural heritage assumes the same importance as family heirlooms that are cherished because they have survived generations of use and cannot be duplicated or replaced.

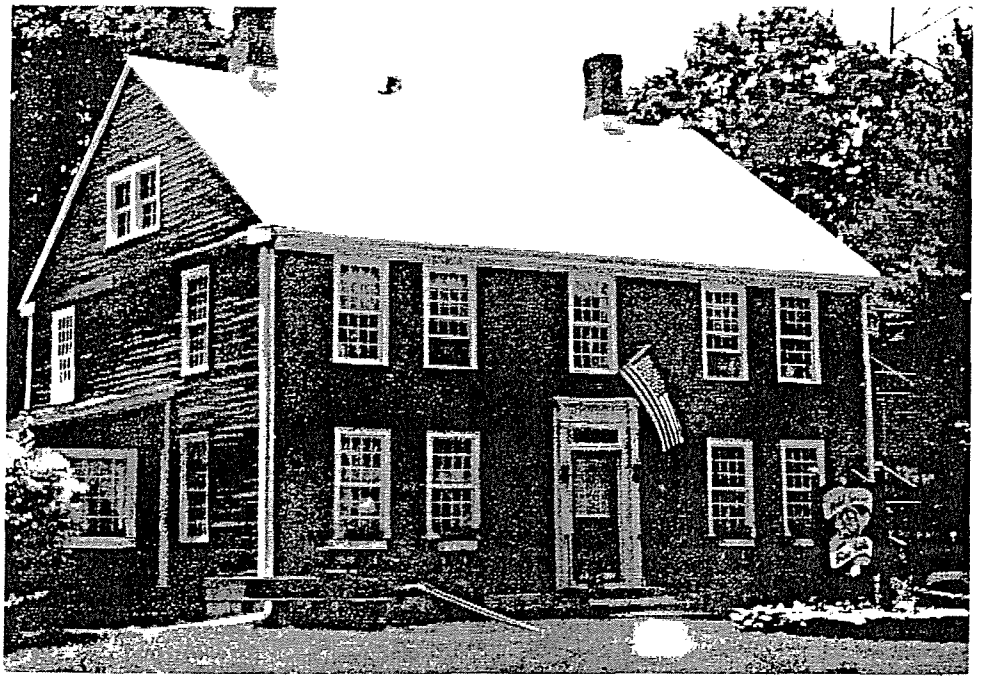
The word economy comes from the roots for "house" and "managing" and is defined as the careful management of wealth or resources, avoidance of waste by careful planning and thrifty use. The definition of preservation is "to keep from spoiling and prepare for future use." These definitions together indicate that the physical preservation of existing resources for continuing usefulness is an economically wise investment in the future.

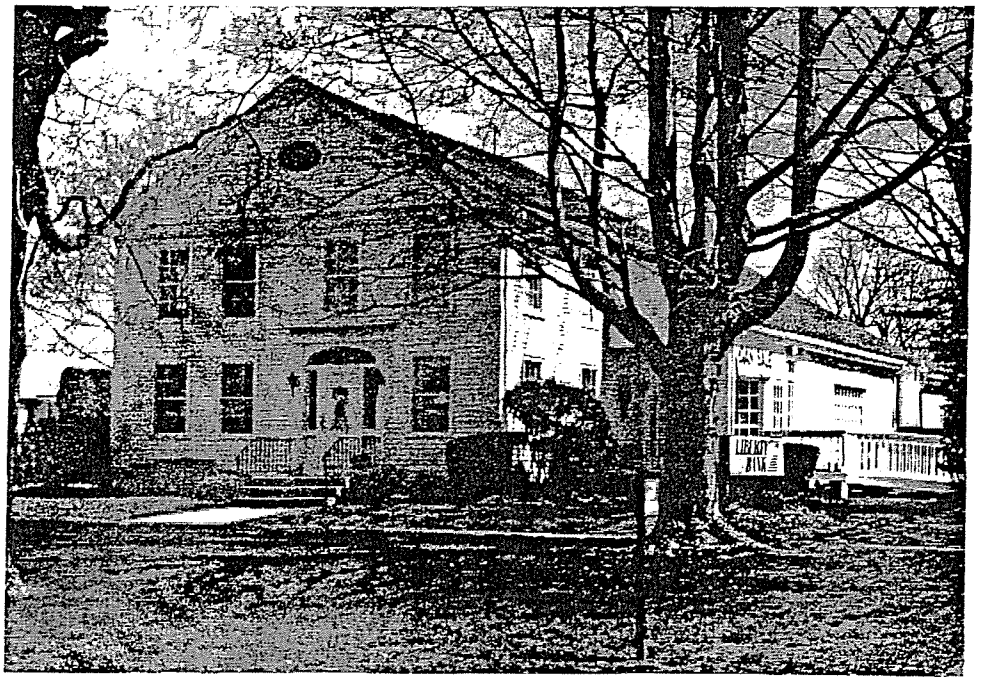
Studies demonstrate that preservation can be an engine for economic growth. The President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation identified some of the community benefits in a 1979 study of deteriorating districts where successful revitalization had been based on preservation. Its findings have been borne out in dozens of experiences all over the country in the years since. The list of tangible long-term benefits included:

- New businesses formed and jobs created;
- Stronger commercial and retail trade in areas where it had been declining;
- Increased property values and tax receipts;
- Greater compatibility of land use patterns and new construction design;
- Enhanced quality of life and community pride;
- Stimulation of tourism activity.

The number and kinds of jobs generated by preservation tend to have a greater impact on local economies than the introduction of large-scale, high-profile businesses controlled by outside investors. Rehabilitation is an activity that is labor intensive: such projects devote 60-70% of their costs to labor, which is likely to be hired locally, while only half of new construction costs go toward labor. These jobs result in higher local household income, with merchants benefitting from increased retail sales as a result.

Over the last decade, more than 85% of all new jobs nationwide were generated by small businesses. U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor project that of the 20 types of businesses that will have the fastest growth rate in the next 20 years, 90 percent employ fewer than 20 people. Colchester is fortunate to have many buildings suitable for adaptation to this kind of small business reuse, good examples of which are Liberty Bank, Wild Geese gift shop, and several real estate offices. The incremental growth of new activities in old buildings has a stabilizing influence on the economy in contrast to the "quick fix" approach of large new developments that compete with or eliminate established businesses, often with net job loss. Consider the fact that the store Cakes and More, a small locally run operation, closed its doors soon after Edwards opened on Linwood Avenue.





*The Wild Geese shop (above) and Liberty Bank (below) show that careful adaptive reuse can help guarantee the town center's economic future.*

The tools and strategies developed by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation have spurred the revitalization of small commercial centers across the country. For example, working with the National Main Street Center during 1980-83, 30 towns in a 6-state effort invested $64 million in rehabilitating 650 facades and nearly 600 buildings, spent $84 million in new construction, and witnessed the creation of 1,050 new businesses. Overall, the program has generated $25 in private investment for every dollar invested by the public sector.

Beginning this year, Connecticut Light and Power Company (CL&P) is sponsoring a Connecticut Main Street Program to benefit towns like Colchester. CL&P has explicitly recognized that successful programs such as this are in its own best interest and that of the state as a whole. Five towns each year will be selected to participate and will receive extensive technical and professional support. Whether or not Colchester becomes a full participant in the Connecticut Main Street Program, it can benefit: the same philosophy, and some of the same strategies, are at the core of the Town Center Plan.

The cost effectiveness of conserving existing investment in buildings and infrastructure is a compelling argument for preservation. Colchester's historic resources are of high-quality design and materials, and often the expense to maintain them is significantly less than the cost in time, materials and infrastructure of new construction. They are also concentrated in the Town Center where public utilities are already in place, transportation patterns exist to serve the market, and historic character is consistent. The energy already committed to creating these resources should not be squandered.

It is important to address the impact of historic preservation on property values. Repeated studies have shown that not only does preservation reverse declining values in marginal areas, but often the biggest increase in property values, both residential and commercial, occurs in historic districts. A study of the Old Wethersfield Historic District by the town assessor shows that the homes in the district appreciated at a rate 11% higher than those outside the area over a 14-year period.

Restoration and maintenance of existing resources is, therefore, a consistent catalyst for increased investment. The healthy appearance of a community's assets is perceived as a direct reflection of the quality of institutional leadership, both public and private. This evidence of the town's pride is a strong signal of confidence to local and regional users, new investors and potential residents.

### B. Who Benefits from Enhancement of Cultural Resources?

The beneficiaries of an improved town center fall into two basic categories. The first and closest market is the local residents who have enjoyed living here because of the quality of life and the village character. Town survey results show that they value the center's aesthetic quality, and most are aware of recurring community events.

Since Colchester's growth is among the fastest in the state, the needs of local residents should be considered carefully. Newcomers are basically middle-class, predominantly families (as evidenced by prospective school enrollment) and highly mobile so they are not dependent on meeting their

shopping and entertainment needs locally. This makes it incumbent on the town to identify their market desires and to provide them competitively, or to create distinctive shops and activities that will keep them "at home." A prime objective for planners and decision makers should be to explore these desires further in order to keep Colchester shoppers in Colchester.

The second market to target is the regional traveler who will come to Colchester with a specific objective in mind, a destination or "niche" shopper seeking either specific goods or events. Colchester has a tradition and a continuing pattern of drawing visitors and shoppers from the region. Currently there are a dozen or so activities known widely outside the town and strongly identified with it that draw a regional market. Its location on Route 2, the quality and charm of its green and architecture, its unusual history of educational leadership and harmonious ethnic diversity, and the number of surrounding resorts together create the potential for additional ongoing successful tourist activity.

Tourism has been one of the strongest parts of the state's economy during recent years, accounting for 7% of the gross domestic product in Connecticut and $3.66 billion of spending in 1991. One component of a Travel and Tourism Index as reported in The Connecticut Economy, a University of Connecticut quarterly review, measures vehicular tourist traffic by monitoring five sites, including Route 2 in Colchester. The results show an increase of 2.3% in 1993, a pattern which is expected to continue.

A prime attraction for tourists in choosing a destination is aesthetic quality. New England is known world-wide for its picturesque villages, handsome architecture, pleasant rural lanes and village landscapes. "Living history" museums such as Mystic Seaport, the Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe houses, Plymouth Plantation and Sturbridge Village, together with town greens and villages such as Litchfield, Essex and Stonington, have enduring appeal, reminding visitors of the variety, the simplicity, the creativity and the beauty that are part of the region's history. According to a 1986 survey by the President's Commission of Americans Outdoors, scenic beauty is the most important criterion for choosing where to spend leisure time. It not only gives people pleasure, but also reduces stress and promotes mental health. The implications of these trends are important for Colchester to consider.

The main reasons visitors come and return to a destination can be summarized in an acronym, the SEEDS of tourism success. They come to Shop, Eat, Experience, Do and Sleep. If Colchester is to maximize its potential as a tourist attraction, it will need to develop each of these components. The locational, aesthetic and historic assets exist on which to build a successful program of sustainable economic development.

## C. Colchester at the Crossroads

Colchester is at a critical point in its development history. Much of its appeal is intact and appreciated by the residents. Certainly no one if asked would choose to see a gas station or fast food store replace the fine architecture on the green, but it will take deliberate action to keep it from happening. Much of the town's rich heritage has already been lost, and unless this trend is checked, demolition will continue to erode it.

The challenge before the town is how to give visible and economic meaning to its slogan: "Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow." The elements of its Tradition to hold onto are principally:

- Small town character
- Distinguished architecture and cultural history
- Services and goods meeting local and regional demand
- Sense of community represented by shared activities and heritage
- Confidence in the town's future

The point at which these assets "meet" the future is in the decision-making arena controlled by town government and the private sector. The tools they wield include public expenditures, zoning controls and administration of regulations, private investment, and leadership. The use of these tools should be governed by a vision of Colchester as a small town with a highly distinctive character and an effectively crafted program of attractions and services to meet the needs of residents and tourists alike in an aesthetically pleasing setting.

Growth and change will occur whether planned for or not. Continued undirected growth can lead to inefficient strip development, possible superstores and resultant sprawl on the outskirts of town with subsequent damaging impact on shops in the center, greater reliance on the automobile, higher or wasted infrastructure costs, loss of underutilized historic buildings, in short: homogenizing suburbanization and loss of the character that makes Colchester the special place it is.

Colchester is fortunate that it has choices ahead that can make its vision a reality. Its cultural assets are intact, it has shown the determination to respect their future role by commissioning this study, and the trend toward sprawl has not yet engulfed it. As towns everywhere are recognizing the economic value of accessible scale, a rich mix of uses, aesthetic unity and a strong identity, Colchester can be a model leading the way to this goal.

# 4. Goals And Recommendations

## 4.1 Introduction: The Issues for Colchester

From the evaluation of Colchester's resources in Section 2 of the Plan and the Vision in Section 3, the following issues emerge if Colchester intends to grow in a way that balances its historic heritage and development needs:

1. **Economic Growth: how can historic resources be enhanced by, and contribute to, a stronger town center? What kind of growth will most effectively promote historic character and economic development, and where will it occur?**
2. **Aesthetics: What physical improvements will best respect historic character and unify the town center for economic advantage?**
3. **Preservation Tools and Strategies: What tools and strategies, particularly financial and land use, should be used to accomplish the town's growth and preservation goals?**
4. **Tourism: how can the town center's historic and economic assets be combined best to make Colchester a destination for shoppers and tourists, whether town residents or visitors?**

The issues are the basis for five goals, each of which is accompanied by a related set of recommendations that are organized in descending order of priority.

## 4.2 Adopt a Town Center Growth Policy

A town center growth policy will be a clear commitment by the townspeople of Colchester to the area's importance. The policy will help ensure that the center receives priority attention in future town actions and decisions. It will also be the justification and framework for the adoption of the recommendations contained in the Plan.

*Recommendations:*

**A. Amend the Colchester Plan of Development to include a strong commitment to the protection and enhancement of the historic town center and its resources**

The policy should articulate several points:

**1.** The town recognizes the high significance of the center as the historic civic, cultural, and economic heart of Colchester, as embodied especially in its beautiful landscape features, wealth of culturally important buildings and sites, and many important civic and commercial institutions;

**2.** The town is committed to preserving and enhancing the stature of the town center, and the town encourages the adaptive reuse of historic buildings and new construction that is in harmony with the old; and

**3.** All future town decisions, especially those concerning growth and development, should seek to accomplish that goal.

To facilitate the implementation of the Plan, the policy should expressly commit the townspeople, at least *in concept*, to its key goals.

**B. Integrate town center considerations more fully into town decisions**

Colchester's commitment to the town center must inform and influence town priorities and actions on many issues, in addition to those addressed specifically in the Plan. The town government must be ready to give the area priority. It must also commit itself to consistency in the host of future decisions that will affect the success of the Plan, ranging from infrastructure improvements to the location of town facilities.

**C. Improve coordination among relevant town commissions on town center issues**

Issues affecting the town center that require municipal approval are numerous; they range from building permits to street lighting. Town commissions having a role, either regulatory or advisory, include the Zoning and Planning, Economic Development, Historic District, Parks and Recreation, Conservation, and Utilities commissions, together with the Board of Selectmen.

Issues may well be multi-disciplinary in nature, requiring review by several commissions. Perhaps as often, however, commissions with relevant expertise are not included in the process. A proposed subdivision of property in the town center, for example, falls within the jurisdiction of the Zoning and Planning Commission, but the input of the Historic District, Economic

Development, and Conservation commissions should also be gathered even if not required.

To make the Town Center Plan effective on a daily basis, town commissions must be fully committed and involved, and decisions must be coordinated among them in a clear and effective manner, with the assistance of Town staff. The periodic meetings that have occurred in the past few years of representatives from several commissions are worthwhile and should continue.

The Town of Colchester should take these additional steps:

**1.** Have each relevant commission adopt a statement of purpose clearly articulating its function and commitment to town center revitalization. Commissions should share their purpose statements to ensure that each understands the role of others in town center issues. Commissions should occasionally hold joint informational meetings to discuss roles and perspectives, both of a general and a project-specific nature.

**2.** Require the Zoning and Planning Commission to refer town center-related issues to other appropriate commissions, particularly the Economic Development, Historic District, and Conservation commissions, for comment. If practicable, this process should be implemented across the board by each agency with primary responsibility for reviewing a matter affecting the center.

**3.** Consider expediting the town review of land development proposals by adopting a new administrative framework. Land development proposals customarily require multiple approvals, and the process, as in most communities, may be time-consuming. Some Connecticut communities have established a central processing person or staff charged with coordinating the separate reviews within a strict time frame, with the result being a streamlined, "one-stop" process. Concurrent review by different commissions, where practicable, should also be part of this process.

**4.** Designate the Town Building Department to process Certificates of Appropriateness for the Colchester Historic District. This action will ensure more consistency in decision-making, improve coordination among commissions on projects, and provide staff support for the Historic District Commission.

## D. Designate a Town Center Development Coordinator

The Plan is an ambitious concept that will take considerable time and effort to implement. If the Town government commits itself, then a staff person who is focused entirely on this project may be desirable. Despite the staffing cost, the benefits of the Plan, in both economic and historic preservation terms, would make it worthwhile and justifiable.

### E. Participate in the Connecticut Main Street Program

Set up in 1995 under the sponsorship of Connecticut Light & Power Company, the Connecticut Main Street Program is an affiliate of the National Main Street Program of The National Trust for Historic Preservation. The goals and techniques of the program are broadly similar to those articulated in the Plan. By applying for and receiving designation as a Main Street participant, Colchester would have access to invaluable technical advice, materials and support that would greatly assist Plan implementation.

## 4.3 Goal for Economic Growth: Develop a More Dynamic Town Center, with Historic Buildings as the Centerpiece

The town center's essential economic and civic functions should be maintained, and strengthened, if the area is to survive. The town government and business community should take the initiative to encourage growth here. To that end, the stock of historically and architecturally significant buildings can play a vital role. Measures must be taken to retain the present uses of historic buildings, if viable, or to encourage their adaptive reuse. To safeguard these buildings, design review of proposed alterations should be implemented. New development and related facilities, if sensitively designed, should also be encouraged.

***Recommendations:***

### A. Create a Town Center Zone with Protective Design Review

The new zone would merge much of the present Commercial and R30A zones into one commercial zone (see map on following page). Allowable uses would be those found in the present commercial zone, with the exception of those clearly incompatible with the town center's old buildings and historic character, such as gasoline stations. The center and its buildings would also be protected through three features:

**1.** Design and site plan review of built and landscape elements (including signage), using a set of design standards (see Appendix A for suggested standards in preliminary form);

**2.** Lot coverage, setback, and parking requirements that respect historic character and street-front integrity, i.e. by establishing a building line that conforms to the historic facades and by requiring that all parking be located behind buildings (flexibility should also be allowed in meeting standard parking requirements);

**3.** Landscaping and buffer standards that encourage good lot design. Residential and mixed commercial/residential uses would both be allowed, although residential uses would be non-conforming. Mixed uses by right would increase the viability of many older buildings, for example, by encouraging commercial use of the first floor and residential units above.

The benefits of this new zone in promoting the viability of the town center would be numerous. By allowing wider commercial and mixed use of the center's buildings, it would be a strong inducement, together with the other incentives described in this Plan, to commercial growth here rather than in unattractive commercial strips on the outskirts. The significant old buildings can accept a variety of uses and contribute to a dynamic town center, provided that their features are protected, as the zone would do. The physical appearance of the center would also be enhanced through two other key tools: design review of new construction and higher landscaping standards.

As an alternative to creation of a new zone, the town could retain the existing zoning and require design review, as specified above, in the town center area. Creation of an entirely new zone, however, would be a clearer and more effective statement of the town's desire to promote the center.

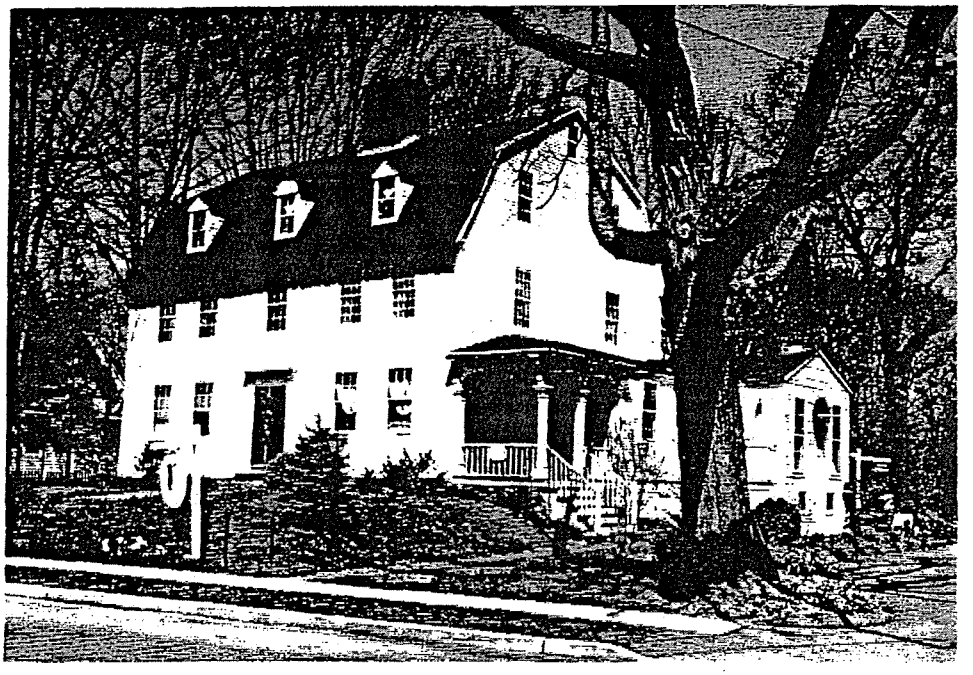
Design review could be administered either by the Colchester Zoning and Planning Commission or by a separate board. Review standards must be clear and objective, and they should be reinforced by adoption of a strong complementary statement in the town Plan of Development (see recommendation in section 4.2). Town zoning regulations, furthermore, already provide for a separate Architectural Review Board, which has never been created; the recommendation of this section, together with the geographically broader and looser design review discussed in section 4.4, could come under its jurisdiction.

## B. Improve the Commercial Offerings

Town officials and the Colchester Business Association should work together to create the most effective and well balanced mix possible of shops and services. In the preparation of this Plan, most center establishments were visited, and retailers and the general public were informally interviewed. Based on this survey, which should be supplemented with more extensive analysis, several kinds of shops and services are recommended as priorities:

**1.** Restaurants: the town is underserved here. More facilities of medium to high quality and diversity, ranging from those for family meals to deli and coffee shops, are essential. Given the town's expected growth, and the importance of dining to attracting consumers and tourists, more establishments should be a very high priority.

**2.** Accommodations: the town is seriously underserved here, too, especially if it hopes to attract out-of-town visitors. There are no hotels or motels, and only one bed & breakfast. At least one hotel/motel should be built, and two sites west of South Main Street stand out: the area north of Doctor Foote Road, and the parcel south of the Chestnut Lodge. Each offers good convenience to both the town center and Route 2. Some historic houses, furthermore, would make attractive bed & breakfasts, and this use should be encouraged.



*The Nathaniel Hayward House (1767), now a bed-and-breakfast inn, is a fine marriage of historic preservation and economic development.*

**3.** Strong niche retailers, i.e. those with special/unusual appeal to tourists and casual shoppers (e.g., gifts, kitchenware, books, domestic items [bed/bath], candles, crafts, consignments, children's toys, and fabrics).

**4.** Entertainment, especially family- or child-oriented. This would include children's and teen's entertainment and sports facilities, and, if possible, a movie theater.

**5.** Discount and outlet stores, which form a fast expanding segment of the retail market. While the Lebanon Avenue proposal (see section 4.2.E, page 57) has this market segment as its focus, more such stores would be welcome elsewhere.

### C. Exploit the Potential of Coordinated New Development Around Merchants' Row and Cragin Library

The town center could reap dramatic benefits if Cragin Library and the owners of Merchants' Row and Noel's Plaza work together to redesign and enlarge their facilities. Cragin Library seeks to meet increasing public demand, and the owners of the adjacent properties have indicated interest in

*Artist's conception of proposed new development behind Merchants' Row and Noel's Plaza, looking west from beside Noel's. Note attractive rear entrances to Merchants' Row buildings (left), expanded landscaped parking, and new shops (at right).*

improving and expanding their stores. A new commercial and civic complex, with each use strengthened by the presence of the other, would be the result.

Fortunately, the sizes of the properties appear to offer the opportunity for creative planning. A recommended scheme would involve a library addition and a new set of shops behind Noel's that would open onto an attractive parking area serving the new buildings, Merchants' Row, and Noel's (see conceptual design). Ideally, the sloping site would allow construction of a two-level building, with either parking or shops entered at grade from Cragin Court, and shops above entered at grade from the Noel's side. Merchants' Row would be strengthened through infill retail construction beside Gung Ho Restaurant, and the rear entrances of Row shops would be upgraded to open onto the new parking area. Cars would enter from Cragin Court and Broadway, with a landscaped pedestrian entrance from Main Street next to the library. Another entrance would be possible from Clark Lane, linking this site to Colchester Mill Fabric Outlet.

This concept has already been discussed in a preliminary way. It would be a significant boost to town center revitalization, besides helping to ensure the preservation of several notable buildings.

### D. Retain and Expand Important Civic Functions

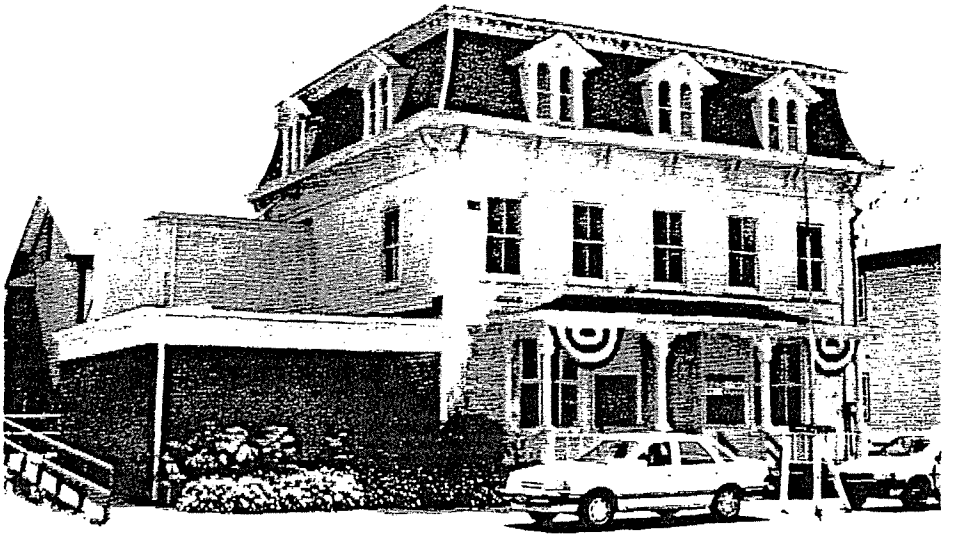
The center must remain the functional and symbolic heart of the community. Several steps should be taken to strengthen this role and increase public use:

1. Encourage expansion of Cragin Library and the U.S. Post Office at their present locations or in the vicinity.

2. Old Town Hall: This building should be used more effectively and completely as a youth or community facility. The Youth Services Bureau's programs now held here serve a real need and deserve expansion. In the near term, the Bureau could use the first two floors, and the third could be rented as offices for youth and family-related professionals; numerous inquiries about rental space already indicate demand.

The town government's interest in obtaining funds to repair and restore the building are strongly supported, and social service use should increase funding availability. Recommendations for restoration work are contained in section 2.4.

If a community use does not continue, the building would be attractive for shops on the first floor, which would reinforce others nearby, and offices above.



*The Old Town Hall (1872) should be the centerpiece of planning along the green's south side.*

3. Day Hall (owned by Bacon Academy Board of Trustees): a children's day care facility is the present occupant, paying minimal rent. To support ongoing building maintenance, and also to help defray repair and restoration costs of the historic Bacon Academy building, a market rent at Day Hall is advisable.

While day care is a worthwhile use that is sensitive to the building, Day Hall could serve the community effectively, and contribute more to town center revitalization, as a meeting hall, which is also closer to its original use. The building would be an attractive venue for meetings of many community organizations. Its size, architectural distinction, and central location would also make it an ideal setting for concerts (especially chamber music), wedding receptions (the Federated Church is next door), and theatrical events (particularly those of Colchester-based groups).

Day Hall is in generally good condition, requiring no major improvements, other than ordinary maintenance, for its present or recommended uses (see architect's analysis in section 2.4.B, page 36).

## E. Revitalize the Lebanon Avenue/Mill Street Area as a More Viable Retail District

This underutilized area, now experiencing some deterioration, has significant potential for commercial development. Growth here offers the critical advantages of strengthening the town center, using existing infrastructure rather than building new, and several prosperous businesses with statewide recognition to anchor the revitalization. Vacant parcels on the street offer excellent opportunities for commercial development.

Town government should adopt a development strategy, actively pursued in cooperation with the Colchester Business Association and Lebanon Avenue property owners, that includes these elements:

**1.** A strong, well focused retail theme, with a clear marketing image to make the area a cohesive retail corridor. Based on the town's strong growth projections and estimated demographic composition, a theme and target population of children and families would be a solid choice. Goods and services offered would include clothes, sports equipment, games, hobbies, and various forms of entertainment, etc. Kidsports in Windsor, a new facility that offers a wide range of sports and entertainment activities for children and adults, is a model for the kind of emerging commercial concept that Colchester should pursue.

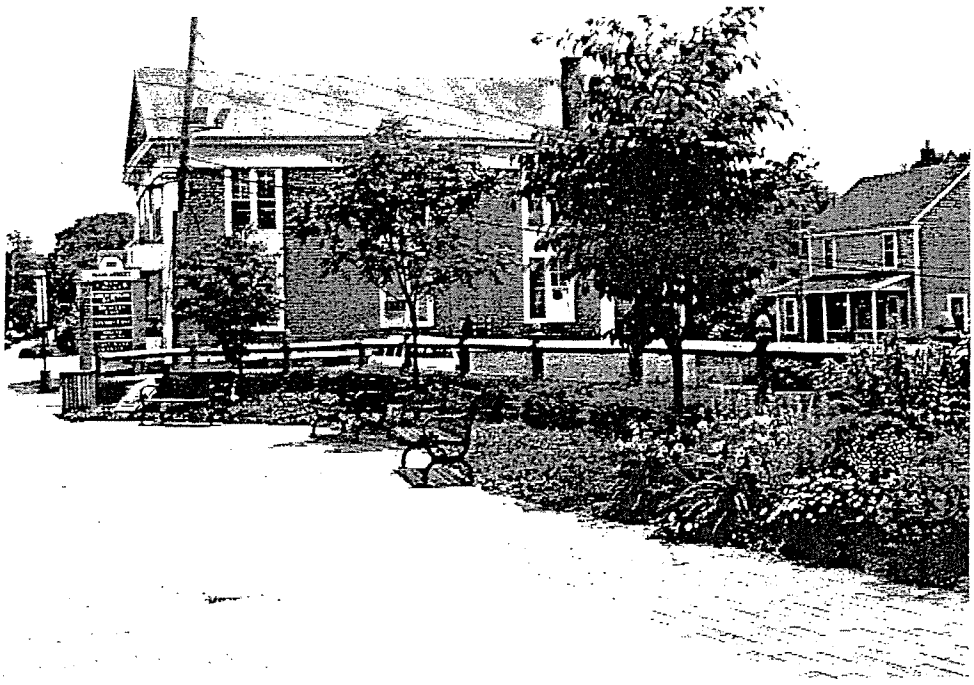
*Family-oriented retail ventures in Colchester, similar to Windsor's Kidsports, could have strong regional appeal.*

A discount retail and outlet focus should be considered as part of the Lebanon Avenue plan. Cost-conscious consumers have made outlets the latest trend in retailing, and Colchester's existing outlets form a base on which to build.

Another key element is a name for the scheme. Historic associations with the railroad and Hayward Rubber Company are strong and suggest the name "Hayward Depot."

**2.** Improvements to the street and buildings (new and old) in a carefully coordinated effort. Design review, under the new Town Center Zone, would ensure their good appearance (see section 4.3.A , page 52, on design review). The attractive and commercially successful streetscapes of Main Street, Glastonbury (page 60) and Old Avon Village (page 63), while ambitious, are models for design. Landscaping improvements, consisting of trees and street furnishings (sidewalk paving, lighting, benches, and waste receptacles) should be consistent with those recommended in section 4.4 for the green and other thoroughfares.

*Lebanon Avenue at Mill Street can become an attractive commercial focus with enhancement of existing uses by unified streetscape treatment and new development that reflects the character of the original Hayward Rubber Company buildings.*



*Attractive landscaping and street furniture on Main Street, Glastonbury, are models for transforming Lebanon Avenue.*

**3.** Use of existing buildings to the extent feasible, with their improvement, rehabilitation, and/or adaptive reuse as appropriate. Owners would be assisted through funding under the facade improvement and revolving loan/grant programs that are described in section 4.5. Historic buildings should be preserved, while others could be maintained, carefully altered, or replaced with new buildings that fit the neighborhood in size, scale, and proportions.

**4.** New retail construction on vacant lots to create a larger, more viable complex of shops. The key opportunity would be the undeveloped S&S frontage on Lebanon Avenue at Mill Street. This site ideally would become a new anchor, offering several shops or perhaps one large one, and parking. The participation of S&S in the Lebanon Avenue plan, therefore, should be strongly encouraged. Several other underutilized parcels on both sides of the avenue should also be developed. (see conceptual design of Lebanon Avenue on previous page, and related discussion in section 4.3.H, page 64).

**5.** Property tax incentives that would phase-in any increase in taxes resulting from building rehabilitation or new construction. These are described in section 4.5. While these incentives could assist the entire downtown area, they should be offered first on Lebanon Avenue.

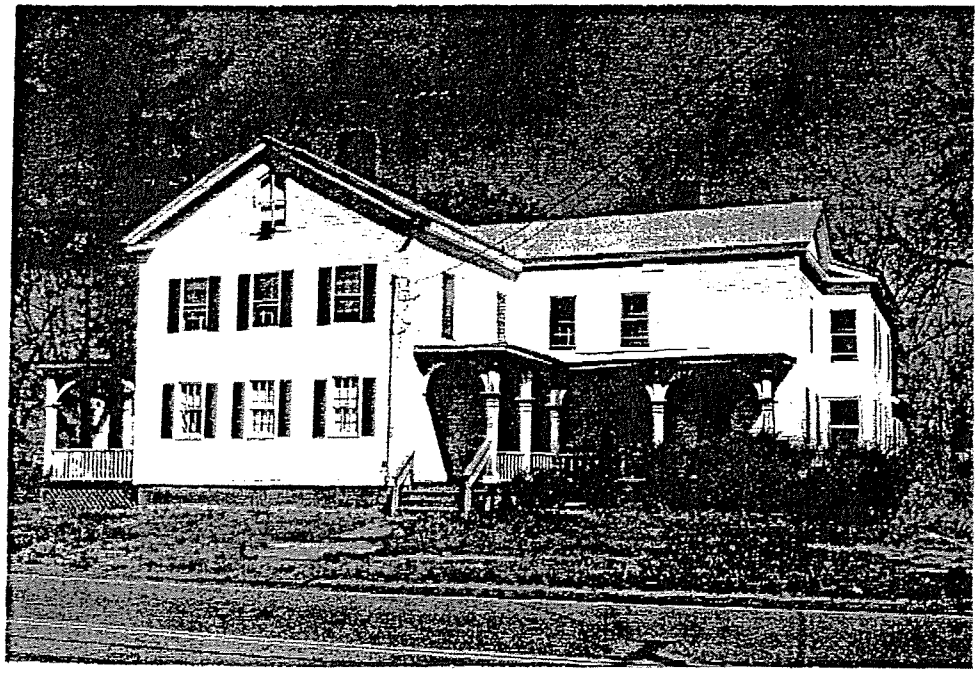
**6.** More parking, through expanded and connected rear lot parking areas (see additional discussion in section 4.3.G, page 62). This should make it possible to reduce or eliminate front yard spaces, which detract immeasurably from the street's appearance. Parallel street parking would still be available.

**7.** Creation of a visual and recreational focal point around the railroad depot. Historic photographs show a manicured lawn with fine plantings framing the buildings. Restoration would create a strong visual terminus for the Lebanon Avenue improvements. The proposed greenway trail on the railroad right-of-way would be an important recreational asset contributing to the success of the Lebanon Avenue plan. Greenway proponents are now seeking state and federal (ISTEA) funding, which should, if possible, be supplemented with town support.

If the Lebanon Avenue plan is successfully implemented, then redevelopment of Hammond Court should be considered. The historic mill houses, particularly the row along the western entrance of the court, could become a quaint venue for small shops and boutiques. To address the inevitable traffic circulation problems on this narrow street, there are two options: provide new automobile access from Harrington Court, with part of Hammond Court turned into a landscaped pedestrian walk, or make Hammond Court one-way. To meet parking needs, the town or neighborhood shop owners could create a lot on the parcel between Harrington and Hammond courts, or on undeveloped properties off Hammond Court.

## F. Find Appropriate Uses for Endangered Significant Buildings

Threats to the existence of significant old buildings are an ongoing problem and must be addressed. The town center cannot afford to lose many more without its historic character being severely compromised. Loss of the Erastus Day House on Norwich Avenue, for example, would be devastating.



*The fine architecture, historic importance and prominent location of the Erastus Day House, threatened with demolition, argue strongly for its preservation.*

To that end, a cooperative effort among the Historic District and Economic Development commissions, town staff, and the Colchester Business Association is urgently recommended. Present and prospective owners should be contacted, and economic potential and possible alternate uses investigated. If a demolition permit is sought, then the town government and other concerned groups can use the required waiting period before demolition to seek alternatives.

## G. Improve Circulation and Parking

Despite street improvements within the past year, additional work is needed to make the town center a convenient place to navigate, park, and shop. Any changes, furthermore, must seek to improve popular perceptions of the center's convenience, which is as crucial as the reality. Recommended work is as follows:

**1.** Seek more public and private parking, which should be strategically located to reinforce shopping and tourism opportunities. A priority must be to serve properties with development potential but limited on-site parking. Good signage must be installed to make the parking obvious and welcoming.

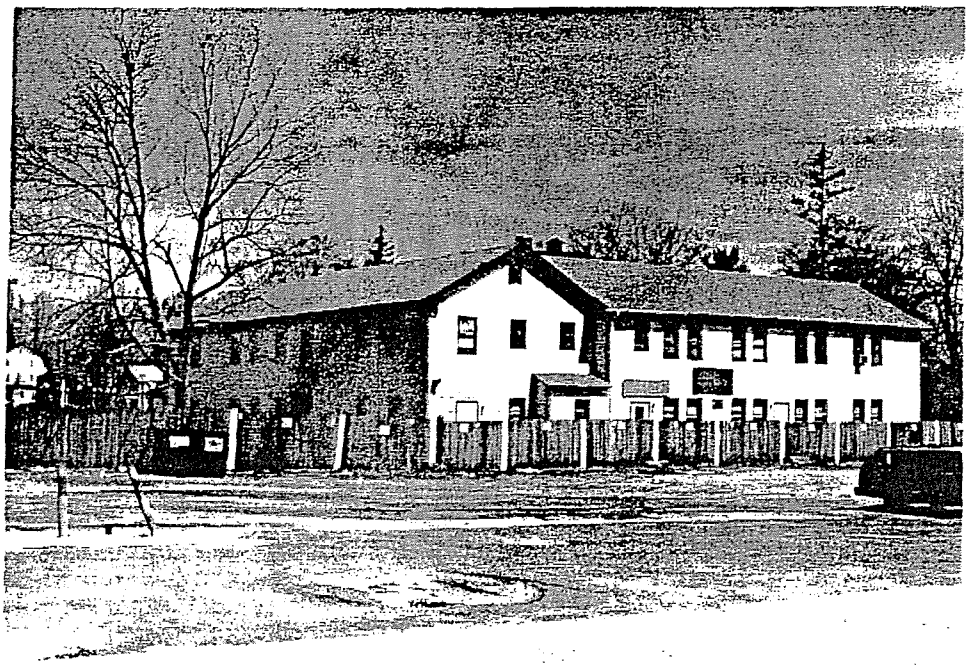
Excellent sites for additional parking, to be created through public acquisition or private efforts, are:

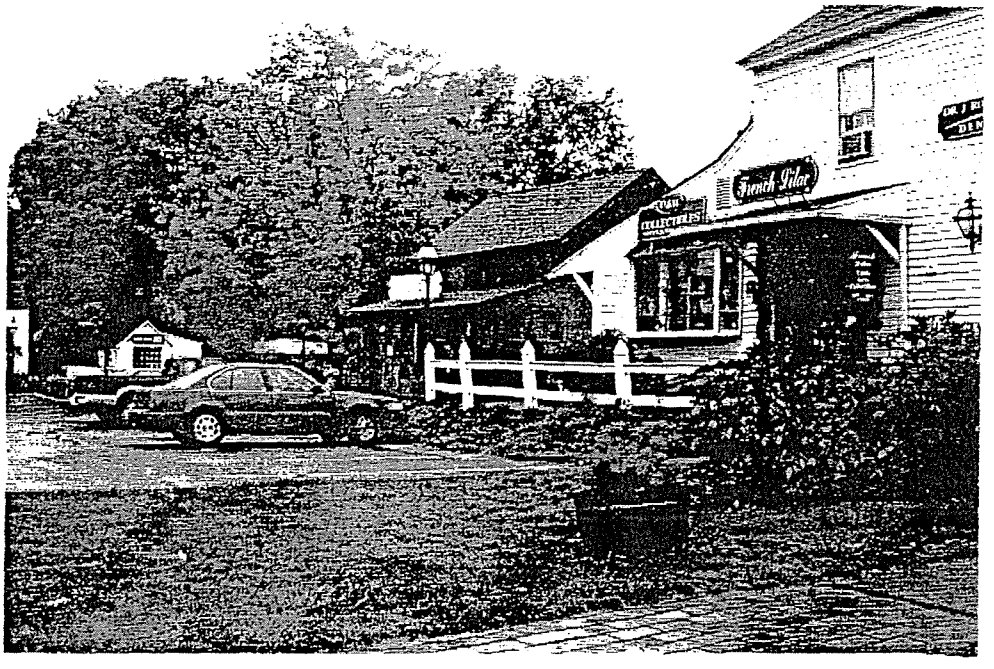
- Areas behind Merchants' Row, Day Hall and the Federated Church (also see section 4.4.C. discussion, page 69).
- West of South Main Street (see discussion in section 4.3.H, page 64).
- The northeast corner of Norwich and Hayward avenues.
- The open property between Harrington and Hammond courts.

**2.** Link rear parking areas on adjoining commercial properties, such as behind buildings on South Main Street and Lebanon Avenue (north side). A model is Simsbury, Connecticut, where cross easements between property owners have increased parking options and improved traffic circulation.

**3.** Create direct pedestrian and automobile access between adjacent Norwich Avenue and South Main Street commercial properties by the following steps:

- Remove barrier fencing between properties and make streetscape improvements (sidewalks, lighting, signage, etc.) to encourage pedestrian traffic.
- Allow parking for Norwich Avenue shops in South Main Street lots.
- Create attractive rear entrances to Norwich Avenue buildings, which will offer improved access to shoppers and a more attractive backdrop to South Main Street shops.






*The rear side of this Norwich Avenue building (above) is a significant lost opportunity. Removal of the fence, attractive shop entrances and landscaping, and parking shared with adjacent buildings could create much stronger commercial potential, similar to Old Avon Village (below).*

The advantages should be clear: all merchants will benefit from improved traffic flow, easier access for shoppers (in car or on foot), and more attractive settings.

4. Install more crosswalks and more sidewalks. Pedestrian safety is critical, and the town must overcome the public reluctance to walk. Despite perceptions to the contrary, walking across the green from one shop to another is probably not farther than the distances people travel on foot at a mall.

5. Pursue realignment of the Lebanon Avenue's Broadway intersection to make the streets meet at a 90-degree angle. A Noel Plaza entrance would be moved to meet the intersection. This change, first proposed in a 1985 traffic study by the Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency, would improve traffic flow and safety by greatly reducing current turning problems. It would require the limited reduction in size of the "veterans' green" but add land to the main green. The section of Broadway on the east side of "veterans' green" then could become single lane with parallel parking for the large houses in that block, which would increase their viability.

The Town staff wisely has begun efforts to obtain state and federal funding for this realignment, through the Surface Transportation Program using federal ISTEA funds.

### H. Explore the Potential of Undeveloped Parcels

Several undeveloped or underdeveloped properties, a few quite large, exist in the town center area. Their use for either commercial or residential purposes makes great sense because of location and the availability of public water and sewer service. Besides strengthening the center, development would help relieve pressure for commercial and residential growth farther out and reduce the loss of open space. These areas should be targeted by town staff:

1. Between South Main Street and Route 2, to the north and south of Doctor Foote Road. Because of wetlands, the development potential must be carefully evaluated. However, the area south of the Breed's Tavern residential project is well situated for either commercial or residential uses, offering proximity to the town center and excellent highway visibility. As mentioned above in Section 4.3.B, page 53, motel/hotel accommodations would be a good future use.

Any development here should provide, if possible, direct access to South Main Street to reinforce the town center, e.g. with automobile entrances/exits and pedestrian walkways, perhaps on rights-of-way between existing buildings. Design review, in more flexible form than recommended for the town center, should be considered to promote aesthetic compatibility. Similarly, the landscaping and furnishings (signage, lighting, etc.) of new construction should be related to those elsewhere.

2. The interior of the block bounded by Norwich Avenue, South Main Street, Hall's Hill Road, and Pleasant Street. Despite some wetlands problems, a large tract could be assembled from several lots and rear portions of oversized residential lots on Pleasant Street. The area would be suitable for residential development; convenient auto and pedestrian access should be a priority to increase its residential appeal and benefits for town center shops.

3. The large interior parcel between Hayward House and the Municipal Office Complex (MOC), together with the adjacent large rear yard of the Ralph Isham House at 11 Hayward Avenue. Development of these lots should be targeted as part of the Lebanon Avenue revitalization plan (see section 4.3.E, page 57). Either residential or commercial use of the interior lot would be suitable, while the Lebanon Avenue frontage would be more appropriate for a commercial purpose. A new street or right-of-way from Lebanon Avenue could provide access, connected to the MOC and Hayward Carriage House parking areas for convenient circulation, both vehicular and pedestrian. The commercial advantages of this site, in linking the town green area and MOC, are evident. A model for small-scale, carefully landscaped and attractive development is Old Avon Village (see photograph on page 63).

*The undeveloped land between the Municipal Office Complex and Hayward Avenue has definite commercial potential and is centrally located.*

## 4.4 Goal for Aesthetics: Improve the Town Center's Appearance, with the Town Green as Centerpiece

A good physical appearance is critical to maintaining Colchester town center's historic character and enhancing its economic vitality. The following recommendations will upgrade the aesthetic appeal and sense of unity through improvements to specific sites and to the entire area. Supplementing these tools is the design review component of the recommended Town Center Zone (see section 4.3.A, page 52).

***Recommendations:***

**A. Enhance the Town Green through site improvements and a management plan.**

The Town Green is a powerful presence that must receive highest priority. Improvements to the green will send a clear signal to surrounding property owners and all residents that the town government recognizes its critical aesthetic and economic importance. A management plan should guide ongoing care, accompanied by program of site improvements that carefully respects historic appearance.

1. Goals and Considerations for a Management Plan:

- Identify major resource management issues and opportunities, and respond: identify and correct any existing problems (e.g., drainage, circulation, pruning) and establish a program of ongoing maintenance.
- Ensure that all maintenance, improvements and plans respect historic use, character, and physical features; restore lost elements where appropriate.
- Facilitate public use and appreciation.
- Seek public financial support.
- Ensure that physical responsibility for the green is clearly established, and provide a mechanism for all appropriate organizations (public and private) to have input in green management.

To maintain the green properly as the centerpiece of Colchester, it must receive a high level of maintenance. The town should consider hiring an additional staffperson with responsibility only for the green. Public support should also be encouraged. A "Friends of the Colchester Town Green" non-profit group, modeled on those in many other communities, would be an ideal advocate for appropriate care. Civic groups should be encouraged to contribute time and financial support to green maintenance. An "adopt a tree" program is another popular vehicle for public involvement;

townspeople and groups would adopt specific trees and support their care. This initiative, once begun, could be expanded to cover existing trees on nearby streets (South Main Street in particular) and to support a tree-planting effort throughout the town center.

2. Recommended Improvements to the Green

A model for these recommendations is the town green in Litchfield, Connecticut, which is one of the state's most historic and beautiful communities. The Litchfield green is similar in its semi-rural character and surrounding mixture of land uses.

*The Litchfield green and surroundings, which bear many similarities to Colchester, are enhanced by extensive tree cover, period lighting and attractive benches.*

The following improvements are recommended (see plan following page 68):

- Trees: large native shade trees should be planted to fill gaps in existing rows to frame views to and from the green around the perimeter, and to replace dead trees. The historic tree cover of the green is the basis for this recommendation.
- Walks: improved walks, closely following the existing well-worn dirt paths, should be established to facilitate year-round use and pedestrian circulation through the green and town center. A width of 4-5 feet is

sufficient for pedestrian, bicycle, and baby carriage use. Asphalt-paved walks are recommended; while stone dust surfaces are more desirable, their expense and difficulty in maintenance militate against their choice.

- Furnishings: to maintain visual restraint, benches and trash receptacles should be similar in design, color, and material. Benches should have a back height of 15-17 inches, seat depth of 14-16 inches, and a length of 6 feet. Benches should be fastened to walks to provide stability for the elderly and disabled.
- Lighting: install lighting to encourage safe nighttime use of the green, but at a moderately low level of illumination. Light posts should match the overall dimensions of those installed at Merchants' Row, with the glass globe replicating the design of the historic glass lamp in the Bacon Academy exhibits.
- Visitors' Center: see recommendation in section 4.6.C, page 78, regarding relocation of the Foote House to the green for this purpose.
- Signage: attractive signs, used sparingly, should be installed to direct visitors to key places. Realign the present community calendar sign to improve its visibility from Norwich Avenue and Main Street, and place the town historical sign near the Foote House (if moved here as suggested).
- Curbing: granite curbs should be placed around the border to define the green's edge and prevent erosion, especially from car parking.
- Parking: retain along the green's perimeter, but define the spaces better to increase use and protect the green.
- Grass: Bare spots should have topsoil applied and be reseeded. The entire lawn should be aerated and de-thatched.
- Existing Gazebo: maintain it as a focal point, which will be assisted by the placement of the walks.
- Ballfield: retain and improve, given its long history and extensive use. Regrade to correct drainage problems.
- Veteran's memorial park area: treat as an integral part of the larger green, installing similar improvements.
- Ornamental plantings: shrubs and small trees should be kept to a minimum since they are not historically part of most New England town greens. Wooden tub planters in limited quantity, however, could be placed at important entrances to the green.

The town should aggressively seek federal funding for part of these costs under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), which awards matching grants for transportation-related improvements. The town green could qualify as part of a more extensive package of circulation and streetscape improvements to the town center.

Connecticut Light and Power Company has sponsored tree planting in many communities, and the company should be approached for assistance with tree work on the green and on other streets.

### B. Install uniform streetscape improvements on major streets

Broadway, Lebanon Avenue, Norwich Avenue, South Main Street, and Linwood Avenue leading outward from the green for several blocks should receive streetscape amenities. These improvements, such as new shade trees, floral planters, lighting, decorative sidewalk paving, and street furnishings (benches, trash receptacles, etc.), should be identical to those provided on the green. This step will unify and enhance the town center's physical appearance and bring back a strong pedestrian scale. As part of this effort, the new traffic island at the Linwood Avenue/Main Street intersection should be attractively landscaped to soften its harsh appearance.

As discussed in the previous section, federal funds may be available to assist with this project. Town government must work with the Connecticut Department of Transportation on implementation because state routes are involved. As with the green, civic groups should be solicited to maintain the sidewalk planters.

### C. Enhance Bacon Academy, Day Hall, and the historic cemetery as a focal point through landscaping and circulation improvements

As one of the first sights for travelers approaching the green on Linwood Avenue from Route 2, the greenspace behind Federated Church and Day Hall must offer a strong positive impression of Colchester. Recommended improvements include new lighting, a few benches like those proposed for the green, and shade trees. Better traffic circulation and additional parking here for Bacon Academy, Day Hall, and the Federated Church should also be created, particularly to accommodate the proposed more active uses for Bacon Academy and Day Hall. The existing roadway running east/west could be carefully widened for more parking, while maintaining an appropriate greenspace. With more parking thereby available, the Main Street frontages of Day Hall and Bacon Academy could be greatly enhanced with landscaping and reduction of the unattractive curb cuts and parking areas (See conceptual plan of proposed improvements on following page).

The empty lot next to the police station on South Main Street offers another excellent opportunity. Through appropriate landscaping, it can become an attractive small park that offers a second entrance to the cemetery and improves the appearance of the town center. The proposal by the Colchester Historical Society to make this into a park in honor of Nathaniel Hayward is a fine one and should be pursued.

As discussed in section 4.6.B, on page 76, town government and other interested groups should actively consider the reconstruction, behind Federated Church, of the historic colored school that once stood near here.

### D. Reduce the impact of parking on streetscape integrity

Too many beautiful streetscapes in Colchester and other communities have been undermined by excessive asphalt paving for parking. Town parking requirements can be satisfied, as discussed in section 4.3.G, page 62, through rear and side yard spaces, and through joint parking areas serving more than one property.

Landscaping standards in Colchester's commercial zones should be revised to require 18 square feet for each parking space, which must be in islands within the parking area. A 4-foot-wide landscaped divider should also be mandated between every other row of parking spaces.

### E. Revise the town signage regulations.

The following revisions of section 15 (signs) of the Colchester Zoning Regulations are based in part on the signage regulations of Simsbury and Glastonbury:

- Height limit (section 15.1.5): maximum of 20 feet for all signs.
- Illumination (15.1.4): allowed, but use of internal illumination reduces the total sign area allowed by one-third.
- In residential districts (15.2): limit of one sign, not over 12 square feet in size, for non-residential uses.
- In non-residential districts (15.3):
    a. Total for all signs on property (a new section): 1 square foot for each linear foot of building frontage, with a maximum allowable of 100 square feet.
    b. Free-standing signs (15.3.3): limit of 36 square feet in size, but up to 50 square feet in size allowed if sign covers more than one use; and only one sign per property.
    c. Section 15.3.6: revise to allow signs to project not more than 6 feet horizontally from a building.

### F. Reduce the maze of street signs and utility wires

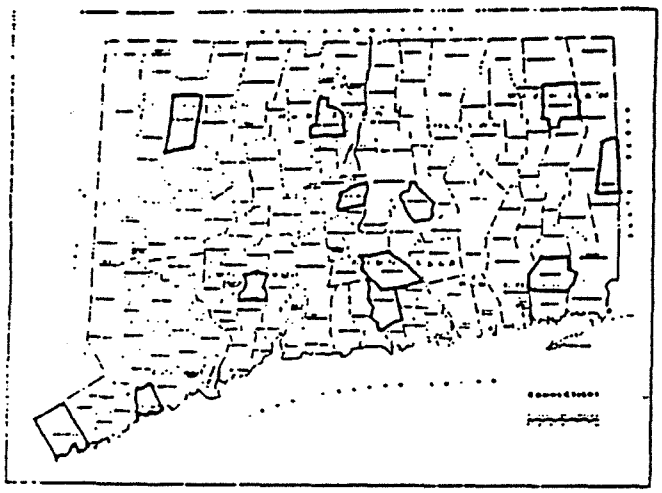
Colchester, like all modern communities, suffers from visual pollution. Excessive and unattractive signs and utility wires are prime culprits. Several initiatives should be taken. Some street poles and traffic control equipment can be moved to be less intrusive. The expense and difficulty of placing wires underground should be investigated. Any major road work by the town or state government may be an occasion for removing above-ground wires.

# APPENDIX B

Town of Ledyard, Subdivision Regulations (See below)

# Digging In

News from the Office of State Archaeology & the CT Historical Commission



CONNECTICUT TOWNS PROTECT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Twelve Connecticut communities share a common purpose with the state's Native Americans, professional archaeologists and historic preservationists. Following the pioneering lead of Greenwich and Westport, ten towns have adopted revisions to local subdivision regulations and/or local review procedures in order to specifically identify and protect significant archaeological and historic sites as part of planned community growth. Through exact language and approach varies, all twelve towns emphasize the avoidance and preservation of important cultural resources and burial areas as a local preference.

In June 1991, the Ledyard Planning Commission became the most recent local government to amend its subdivision regulations to explicitly protect historic sites, archaeological resources and human burials. Ledyard's regulations are particularly noteworthy for their clarity and direction to would-be-developers and their advocacy of in situ preservation wheresoever possible. The Ledyard Department of Planning consulted with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, the Office of State Archaeology, the State Historic Preservation Office, and local residents and developers in order to draft a carefully balanced, workable local review process. The town's revised subdivision regulations should strengthen and improve the partnership between Ledyard's Department of Planning and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Council to identify and preserve previously unmarked Native American burials and cemeteries.

A key provision of Ledyard's revised regulations provides for requesting the technical expertise of the Office of State Archaeology and/or State Historic Preservation Office in the identification and evaluation of historic and archaeological properties. The Archaeological Resource Protection Handbook previously distributed by the State Historic Preservation Office to all 169 Connecticut towns, provides further guidance and advice on the range of preservation alternatives available to local governments to preserve archaeological sites.

The Office of State Archaeology, State Historic Preservation Office and the Ledyard Department of Planning (William R. Haase) should be further consulted for assistance in designing local mechanisms for protecting historic and archaeological properties. All Connecticut towns possess the legal authority and responsibility to take affirmative action to conserve their irreplaceable cultural heritage.

TOWN OF LEDYARD - SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

Section 2.0: General Definitions

Cultural Resources:

Consists of historic and prehistoric archaeological sites and standing structures; cemeteries, human burials, human skeletal remains, and associated funerary objects; and distributions of cultural remains and artifacts.

**5. Trees**

Trees form an important natural feature of the environment, and in many instances the older ones have historical significance as well in marking property boundaries or shielding now-gone historic dwellings from wind and weather. Old trees, therefore, should be preserved if at all possible.

**6. Parking layouts and paving materials**

Large areas of pavement surrounding 18th- and 19th-century buildings remove the structures from their historical context and detract from the visual integrity of the architecture. Parking areas should be located at the rear of buildings, if possible, with provisions made for handicapped or special needs as necessary. Avoid large unrelieved areas of asphalt paving through landscaping, screening or terracing. Though access from the rear of buildings to parking lots may be required, main entrances in most cases should continue to be located in the front of buildings. If a rear parking lot is not possible, parking areas should be located on the sides of buildings, with proper landscaping and screening. Alternatives to asphalt paving, such as stone pavers, can be used effectively in parking areas and on walks.

**F. Signage**

Signs play an important role in defining the character of architecture and are especially important in commercial buildings which rely on their signs as a means to locate and advertise for business.

Signs should relate to the pedestrian scale of their surroundings in Colchester. They should be compatible with the building's style and materials; lettering and composition should relate to the architectural style. Avoid using a Colonial-style hanging sign, for example, in front of a late 19th-century Victorian building.

Signs should be scaled and locate to complement the building's composition and architectural detail; avoid covering or obscuring significant architectural detail or features. They should consist of materials and colors appropriate and compatible with the facade design and materials. The removal of signs whose designs are inappropriate to the architecture can dramatically improve the appearance of a building.

Retain and restore older signs of historic or artistic value. This can include a range of styles and types, including signs painted on buildings, early advertisements, and early-20th-century neon signs.

c. Door and window trim: try to retain and repair lintels, sills, and other door and window trim, especially if it is ornamental; if possible, restore it to its original form. Avoid covering them with non-original siding of any kind.

d. Shutters: try to retain and repair shutters if they appear original or are appropriate for the period of the building; if not, try to replace them with ones that are appropriate in form and material. Avoid installing pre-fabricated or mass-produced shutters of materials such as aluminum or vinyl.

**9. Garages, Carriage Houses, Barns, and other Outbuildings** These structures often are significant historically or architecturally in themselves. Therefore, try to treat them with the same respect as the main building on the site, following all the guidelines set forth above. Try to retain and repair those buildings that are significant; when modifications are required, such as new garage doors, try to select a design and materials that match the original. If possible, the design of new outbuildings should match that of the main building on the site.

## E. Site Considerations

### 1. Topography

Respect the existing topographical features of the site and avoid changes.

### 2. Stone Walls and Fences

a. Stone walls are a feature of Colchester's landscape outside the town center. They appear in many forms, including ones defining old fields and property lines, and retaining walls. Therefore, stone walls should be maintained and repaired, when necessary, with the same kinds of stone in a similar arrangement. Avoid creating breeches in existing walls.

b. Fencing was used historically in Colchester's town center, as old photographs show. Ornamental metal fencing was placed along the street in front of the grander 19th-century houses, while picket fencing was used elsewhere. Little of this old fencing exists; where it does, it should be maintained and repaired. Try to introduce new fencing only where it was used historically and, in those cases, try to match the original design and materials. Otherwise, new fencing should respect the scale and proportions of surrounding materials and landscape features.

### 3. Old Wells

Some properties in Colchester have old wells on site that may have archaeological importance; they should be preserved and their features maintained intact if possible. If, for reasons of safety, the wells must be altered, try to preserve the original appearance and materials as much as possible.

### 4. Streams and Wetlands

Watercourses in Colchester form an essential part of the environment, and they should be preserved and maintained. Changes over time that have insensitively altered their appearance or course should be reversed if possible.

b. Storm doors: choose ones that compete as little as possible with the design of the main door, with particular concern for the material, color, arrangement of lights, and decorative features.

**4. Windows**

a. Try to retain and repair the original windows whenever possible. If replacement must occur, try to duplicate the original in form (e.g., the size and arrangement of lights) and materials. Avoid creating new windows, especially in the front elevation, and avoid adding dormers that vary in materials and proportions from those of the building.

b. Storm windows: choose ones that compete as little as possible with the design of the existing windows.

**5. Roofs**

a. Form and materials: try to retain and repair the original roof form and features (e.g., gable or hipped roof, overhanging eaves, brackets, cupola, etc.). Avoid introducing elements that are inappropriate, such as skylights, especially in the front elevation. Use new roofing materials that match the existing in composition, texture, color, size, and shape.

b. Gutters and downspouts: try to retain and repair the existing gutters and downspouts. New ones should match the existing in form and color. Avoid placing downspouts in locations that detract from the original form or detailing of the building, such as in the front elevation.

c. Roof-top equipment: try to place TV antennas, air conditioners, fans, solar equipment, and the like, in places that are not visible from the street. If solar collectors must be in view for an efficient location, try to make them as inconspicuous as possible.

**6. Chimneys**

Try to retain and repair the original height, form, number, and location of chimney(s); avoid adding new chimneys.

**7. Porches and Steps**

Try to retain original porch features and steps. Repair deterioration if possible; if not, replace components with new materials that duplicate the old as much as possible. Avoid removing individual porch features, such as railings, columns, and decorative detailing. Recognize that some porches, even if not original, have acquired their own architectural importance and should not be removed in the name of "authenticity."

**8. Building Trim and Decorative Features**

a. Ornamental woodwork: columns or posts, brackets, cornices, and other ornamental features are often essential parts of a building's character; try to retain them and repair if at all possible. If replacement is required, try to duplicate their appearance and materials. Avoid covering them with non-original siding of any kind.

b. Ornamental metal work: try to repair and maintain railings, fences, and other metal work. Clean rusty areas on iron work and halt further deterioration by repainting to match the original color. Avoid painting non-ferrous metals such as brass and copper. Brass should be cleaned of oxidation when possible, and copper should be allowed to oxidize naturally.

of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications of features, substantiated by historic, physical, or pictorial evidence, rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other buildings or structures.

7. The surface cleaning of structures shall be undertaken with the gentlest means possible. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that will damage the historic building materials shall not be undertaken.

8. Every reasonable effort shall be made to protect and preserve archeological resources affected by, or adjacent to, any project.

9. Contemporary design for alterations and additions to existing properties shall not be discouraged when such alterations and additions do not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material, and such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material, and character of the property, neighborhood or environment.

10. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to structures shall be done in such a manner that if such additions or alterations were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the structure would be unimpaired.

## C. Overall Design Considerations

1. For new construction: try to keep it consistent with the scale, proportions, character, and ambience of the surroundings.

2. For rehabilitation, restoration, and maintenance: try to reuse original materials whenever possible, and avoid using new materials that are out of scale, proportion, character, and mood with the original building.

## D. Exterior Architectural Features

### 1. Foundations

Try to maintain the original materials and appearance of the foundation.

### 2. Walls

a. Frame: try to retain and restore original materials.

b. Masonry: try to retain the original masonry and mortar without the application of surface treatment.

c. Low maintenance siding: since it is not typical of the period when most town buildings were erected, it is historically inappropriate and to be avoided whenever possible.

d. Sandblasting: avoid this treatment whenever possible because it may seriously damage siding and other architectural features.

### 3. Doors

a. Try to retain the original design of doors, including panels, lights, and hardware; repair whenever possible. If replacement must occur, try to duplicate the original style, sash design, and materials. Avoid creating new doors, especially in the front elevation.

# APPENDIX A

**Design Guidelines for Buildings and Sites: New Construction, Exterior Alterations, and Maintenance; Site Improvements**

## A. Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish a framework of reasonable standards within which changes to buildings and sites in Colchester may occur. The guidelines are presented here as suggested review standards for use in implementing the Town Center Zone discussed in Section 4.3.A of the Plan. The guidelines are worded as recommendations because aesthetic guidelines of this sort are not, and cannot be, cast in stone; they must be flexible in order to treat each situation individually, while at the same time maintaining objectivity and fairness. Illustrations should be added to help explain the guidelines and indicate what changes are inappropriate.

**NOTE:** The text below covers guidelines for alterations to existing buildings and sites. For new construction, Colchester should closely model its guidelines on the Simsbury, Connecticut Design Guidelines (1994), a copy of which is attached in Appendix C.

## B. U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The following standards should be adopted as a framework for the specific design guidelines that are set forth in this section of the report:

1. Every reasonable effort shall be made to provide a compatible use for a property which requires minimal alteration of the building, structure, or site and its environment, or to use a property for its originally intended purpose.
2. The distinguishing original qualities or character of a building, structure, or site and its environment shall not be destroyed. The removal or alteration of any historic material or distinctive architectural features should be avoided when possible.
3. All buildings, structures, and sites shall be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations that have no historical basis and which seek to create an earlier appearance shall be discouraged.
4. Changes which may have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history and development of a building, structure, or site and its environment. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right, and this significance shall be recognized and respected.
5. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize a building, structure, or site shall be treated with sensitivity.
6. Deteriorated architectural features shall be repaired rather than replaced wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement

**5.** Heritage Tourism

a. Publicize the town center more effectively. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

b. Offer more educational programs to the public. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, Parks and Recreation Director, MH, CBA, CHS, Cragin Library.

## C. Third Priorities

**1.** Aesthetics

a. Reduce the maze of street signs and utilities wires. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, Town Planner, Public Works Director, CBA.

b. Create a landscaped focal point at the Lebanon Avenue railroad depot. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, Public Works Director, CBA, property owners.

c. Implement unused design review in zoning regulations. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, ZPC, Town Planner.

d. Explore expansion of the locally designated Colchester Historic District. *Responsibility*: HDC, EDC, Town Planner, MH, CBA, CHS.

**2.** Preservation and Enhancement Tools

a. Offer building permit incentives and code compliance assistance. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, Town Planner.

**3.** Heritage Tourism

a. Create attractive signage. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, CBA.

b. Explore opportunities for inter-town tourism efforts. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

## B. Second Priorities

**1.** Town Center Policy

a. Participate in the Connecticut Main Street Program. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

**2.** Economic Growth

a. Revitalize the Lebanon Avenue/Mill Street area. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, Town Planner, Public Works Director, CBA, property owners.

b. Find appropriate uses for endangered significant buildings. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, CBA.

c. Improve circulation and parking. *Responsibility*: EDC, ZPC, Town Planner, Public Works Director, CBA.

d. Explore the development potential of undeveloped parcels. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

**3.** Aesthetics

a. Reduce the impact of parking on streetscape integrity. *Responsibility*: ZPC, EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

b. Revise the town signage regulations. *Responsibility*: ZPC, EDC, HDC, Town Planner.

**4.** Preservation and Enhancement Tools

a. Encourage new residential developments in or near the town center. *Responsibility*: EDC, ZPC, Town Planner, CBA.

b. Strengthen cultural resource protection in subdivision plan review process. *Responsibility*: ZPC, HDC, Town Planner.

c. Discourage strip development. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

d. Help owners of National Register-listed properties obtain tax credits for rehabilitation work. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, CBA.

Board of Selectmen, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, Town Planner, Public Works Director, CHS, Federated Church.

**4.** Preservation and Enhancement Tools

a. Grant property tax relief in the Lebanon Avenue revitalization area. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

b. Create a loan/grant program for property improvements on Lebanon Avenue. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, Town Planner, CBA.

c. Establish a community reinvestment fund. *Responsibility*: EDC, Town Planner, CBA and local banks.

**5.** Heritage Tourism

a. Develop a town center theme. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, CBA, and property owners.

b. Enhance Bacon Academy and its surroundings as Colchester's major tourist attraction. *Responsibility*: Town Planner, Public Works Director, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, CHS, CBA, MH.

c. Establish a visitors' information center. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, Public Works Director, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, CBA.

d. Promote town center commerce more aggressively. *Responsibility*: EDC, CBA.

e. Offer a wider range of activities and events. *Responsibility*: EDC, HDC, Town Planner, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, CBA, MH, CHS.

**6.** Implementation: Create an organization to take the lead. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, HDC, Town Planner, CBA, MH, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, CHS.

## A. First Priorities

**1.** Town Center Policy

a. Amend the Plan of Development to adopt a town center policy statement. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, ZPC, HDC, EDC, Town Planner, MH.

b. Improve commitment to, and coordination among, relevant commissions on town center policy; each commission adopts a mission statement that addresses the policy, and that adopts priorities for implementation. *Responsibility*: ZPC, EDC, CC, HDC, Town Manager and staff.

c. Integrate town center considerations more fully into town decisions. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, EDC, ZPC, HDC, Town Planner.

d. Designate a Cultural Resources Coordinator. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, ZPC, Town Planner.

**2.** Economic Growth

a. Create a Town Center Zone with Protective Design Review. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, ZPC, EDC, HDC, Town Planner.

b. Begin work on improving the commercial offerings in the town center. *Responsibility*: EDC, CBA, Town Planner.

c. Exploit the development potential around Merchants' Row and Cragin Library. *Responsibility*: EDC, CBA, Town Planner and appropriate property owners.

d. Retain and expand important civic functions in town center. *Responsibility*: Town Planner, EDC, CBA, Cragin Library.

**3.** Aesthetics

a. Enhance the Town Green. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectmen, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, Town Planner, and Directors of Public Works and Parks and Recreation.

b. Install streetscape improvements on major streets. *Responsibility*: Board of Selectman, EDC, HDC, Town Planner, Director of Public Works, and private property owners.

c. Enhance Bacon Academy, Day Hall, and the historic cemetery through coordinated parking and landscape improvements. *Responsibility*:

# 5. NEXT STEPS: A TOWN CENTER GROWTH STRATEGY

The success of the Plan will require strong leadership and an effective strategy. Implementation will take time, and will depend on the cooperation and commitment of many groups in Colchester. The purpose of this section is, first, to suggest an organizational strategy and, second, to prioritize the Plan recommendations.

## 5.1 Organizational Leadership

A new organization should be created, perhaps called the Town Center Growth Council, to assume overall responsibility for implementing the Plan. The recommendations are many, the process complex, and the interests involved are varied; no one existing group should take on this project alone. Membership on the council should broadly represent most, if not all, of the key players in the town center, both public and private. Leadership must be strong, and participation must be active to ensure ownership and action by the various members.

## 5.2 Priorities for the Town Center Plan

Abbreviations:

(CBA) - Colchester Business Association

(CCC) - Colchester Conservation Commission(

CHS) - Colchester Historical Society

(EDC) - Economic Development Commission

(HDC) - Historic District Commission

(MH) - Municipal Historian

(ZPC) - Zoning and Planning Commission

Several of these activities could be offered as part of larger town center events, such as the Candle Walk and the summer arts and crafts show of the Colchester Historical Society.

### H. Create attractive signage to further the theme and marketing strategy

The signs should display a common overall design and point out important sites and directions. Their number and locations must be chosen carefully to avoid visual intrusion. Attractive informational and historic signs are always eye-catching. Their design and creation would be an excellent special project to heighten interest among townspeople in Colchester's cultural resources.

### I. Explore opportunities for inter-town tourism efforts.

By working together on a tourism campaign, Colchester and neighboring towns with complementary resources might achieve good results. Because the Southeastern Tourism District of which it is a member is focused on coastal attractions, Colchester has every incentive to explore other ventures. Obvious allies for Colchester would be East Haddam and Lebanon. With varied histories, patterns of development, and attractions, the towns present a microcosm of several themes that are important in Connecticut history. Colchester also offers the most extensive shopping opportunities. Tours could be arranged to sites in all three towns, with a series of related activities and events. This package would lend itself to day trips and several-day excursions, which are growing in popularity. Inter-town transportation is recommended, which could tie into the proposed Southeastern Connecticut trolley and light rail network and link these communities with the tourist attractions along the shore.

4. Attract more athletic and recreation-related events, and involve the town center facilities and merchants. The 2-day state Class S wrestling tournament at the new Bacon Academy in February, 1995, which drew 3000, is an example. For such tournaments in the future, an evening festivity could be planned (even if just a supper for the visitors, held at Day Hall), with the Academy opened for a tour. Tee shirts and other gift items with town center or Academy logos would be available for sale; at the 1994 tournament in Colchester, 250 shirts were sold at $10 each for fun and profit.

**F. Publicize the town center more effectively.**

Marketing the center through the media is essential. The fine brochure published by the Economic Development Commission should be updated, revised and expanded. Semi-annual or periodic editions of the brochure are recommended to cover events throughout the year. Some consideration should also be given to publishing separate editions of the brochure for town shopping and cultural sites, thereby giving more space for graphics and text.

Colchester's attractions and events must receive appropriate mention in tourism publications and publicity at the regional and state levels. Improved contacts with the regional tourism district and with the state Department of Economic Development's tourism office are critical.

**G. Offer more educational programs to the public.**

The success of the Plan ultimately depends on the support of the people of Colchester, who must be better informed about town history in order to appreciate its cultural and economic value. Visitors to town must likewise be made aware if they are to be the consumers the town wants to attract. Many organizations have a role in this endeavor and are strongly encouraged to participate and to work together: Cragin Library, Bacon Academy Board of Trustees, Colchester Historical Society, Bacon Academy and other town schools, town government, and town civic organizations, among others.

Implementation of this goal would include the following steps, in addition to those discussed in section 4.6.B, page 76, (enhanced museum exhibits at old Bacon Academy):

1. Establish a wider ands more regular range of lectures, exhibits, and activities on town history, with special effort to capitalize on ethnic history and the town's distinguished place in the history of Connecticut education.

2. Expand programs for schoolchildren, including a town history day modeled on the Connecticut History Day (sponsored by Connecticut Historical Society) and more regular visits to old Bacon Academy for educational programs (e.g., teaching units on town history).

# Avon Day festivities draw record crowd

By RITA A. NIRO
*Courant Staff Writer*

AVON — The 13th annual Avon Day festival attracted a record number of people last weekend, and organizers will consider maintaining some of the changes that contributed past four years.

The nonprofit organizations that participate put up booths and hold fund-raisers at the festival.

For example, for the second year in a row, area restaurants participated in A Taste of Avon. The restaurants raised $4,227 — more than

"It's a great help," said Alan Rosenberg, director of the town's social services. Rosenberg said money from the special needs fund helps all kinds of families, including those headed by a single parent, those that are intact but whose traditional breadwinner is under-employed or unemployed and senior citizens.

The special needs fund helps those families pay for such things as food, prescriptions and utility bills.

Rosenberg said requests for assistance have grown over the past five years.

# Canton gearing up for first Sam Collins Day

By RITA A. NIRO
*Courant Staff Writer*

CANTON — With booth space sold out for this weekend's inaugural Sam Collins Day, organizers are busy with the last-minute preparations, such as compiling a directory of booths and getting badges for volunteers.

Rain or shine, on Saturday the town will hold its first community-wide celebration, highlighting local businesses, nonprofit groups, art galleries, churches, the Farmington River and more.

"It's been fantastic," said Mary Tomolonius, publicity chairwoman for the event. "A year ago nobody knew what it was. Now everybody seems to know."

events and demonstrations that Tomolonius said could easily expand into a weekend of events in the future.

The main site on Canton Springs Road will feature a business expo, booths run by nonprofit organizations, children's activities and entertainment.

"There'll be all sorts of food for people to try [from] all the great little restaurants we have in town," Tomolonius said. The cost of each food item will not exceed $2, she said.

The first event of the day is the Canton Lions Club pancake breakfast at 7 a.m. at the volunteer firehouse on Canton Spring Road. The breakfast is $3 for adults, $2 for

breakfast runs until 10:30 a.m.

A mountain-bike and canoe biathlon is scheduled off site. Registration starts at 7:30 a.m. at Collinsville Canoe and Kayak's boat landing at Route 179. The cost is $10 in advance, $12 on Saturday. Collinsville Canoe and Kayak will be renting canoes and kayaks for the race for $5, Tomolonius said. For more information, call 693-6977.

Participants also may choose to compete in just the bike race.

The Canton Historical Museum, on Front Street, will be offering free admission beginning at 10 a.m.

Free tours of artists' studios will be given at 11 a.m. and at 1 p.m. in the Collins Co. buildings in Collinsville. Those interested should meet

From 2 to 4 p.m., Canton Benefit Productions will give a free cabaret performance at the Sam Collins Gallery.

Churches in town will offer brief tours between 2 and 4:45 p.m., to be followed by a free concert at 5 p.m. at the First Congregational Church on South Street.

At 8 p.m., the Canton Youth Soccer Association will hold a fund-raiser featuring food and dancing at La Trattoria on Route 44. Tickets cost $25, and proceeds will pay for field maintenance. For tickets, call Tomolonius at 693-0368.

A free shuttle bus will run between the main site, Canton High School parking lot and the town hall parking lot, with intermittent stops

*Annual town festivals have proliferated in recent years, often focused on town history and important personages, such as Sam Collins Day in Collinsville.*

3. Special events at Bacon Academy and Day Hall. These two facilities, because of their significance, location, and suitability, would be excellent meeting spaces. In section 2.4, the Plan recommends a program of needed maintenance, improvements, and expanded use; at present, the buildings could be used on an infrequent basis if certain precautions are taken and the town fire department cooperates.

One highly appropriate event would be an annual conference, sponsored jointly by the modern Bacon Academy high school and the Academy Board of Trustees, on contemporary educational issues related to the Academy's own significant history (e.g., cultural diversity, ethnic history, and the modern role of independent schools). Most conference sessions would occur at the modern school building, and the old Academy and Day Hall could be sites for selected events (e.g., open and closing ceremonies in Day Hall).

The possibilities for cooperative events are many. Present-day Bacon Academy should consider reviving the tradition, held historically at the end of each school year for the benefit of the entire community, of an "exhibition day" of student works in many disciplines. In the 19th century, this event involved presentation of student compositions in literature, music and drama; today, it could be much broader. Both the old and new school facilities would make excellent venues for the activity.

historic Foote House here as the information center would make a highly appropriate use of this underutilized building while not comprising its historic integrity (its present site is not the original one). Alternatively, the town should erect a small visitors' building on the green (see Litchfield model in photograph, page 67) or use the Foote House at its present site for the purpose.

### D. Promote town center commerce more aggressively

The Colchester Business Association has many achievements to its credit. Building upon that record, Colchester's merchants need to follow the example of successful town centers (e.g., West Hartford) and shopping malls by cooperating more effectively and aggressively. Coordination should occur as to hours of operation, sales events, advertising and other techniques for sales promotions (special events and participation in more comprehensive town center activities). This ongoing campaign should be organized to complement and be integrated carefully with the cultural attractions and activities/events described in subsection E below.

### E. Offer a wider range of activities and events

These activities should, to the extent possible, build upon the marketing theme adopted for the town center and the key elements of Colchester's cultural significance. Critical to success will be the involvement of shops, cultural attractions, and community and civic organizations. A carefully planned year-'round program of events should be the goal, with activities that will appeal to all ages and interests.

Recommendations include:

**1.** More special events like the Candle Walk, at which many of the key town center players are actively represented. The commercial and cultural aspects of the Candle Walk have not been fully exploited. Holidays, dates of historical significance to Colchester, and seasonal themes are obvious candidates for other events. New occasions might include "A Taste of Colchester," a dining extravaganza bringing together area restaurants and community groups, and modeled on similar successful events elsewhere (Portland held its first such event in June, 1995). "First Night Colchester" on New Year's Eve would be another good choice, starting on a small scale.

**2.** An annual town festival, which is a wonderful way to bring together the entire town. Simsbury's annual Septemberfest, which offers a wide range of events for all ages, draws 30,000 over its three days. Festivals such as this are popular and very successful throughout Connecticut. Colchester should explore tying this event to an expanded program of Bacon Academy reunions, and use the reunions as a fundraiser for Academy repairs and museum development.

*Artist's rendering of a proposed visitors' center facing Merchants' Row and Linwood Avenue.*

Involving town residents as volunteers in the project would be financially wise, and would help increase public awareness and enthusiasm for Bacon Academy. Townspeople could help develop exhibits, for example, and serve as docents; their involvement could take a multitude of forms.

*Bacon Academy contains extensive displays on town and academy history.*

**2.** The site near the Federated Church of Colchester's colored school (1803), the first in the state, should be highlighted. A proposed state Freedom Trail of African-American history will include the site, and the school should be studied by Colchester children during Black History Month. The feasibility of rebuilding the school as a museum of town African-American history (linked to the Bacon Academy exhibits) should also be seriously considered. The other major tourism component in the cluster is the ancient cemetery behind Bacon Academy. Its restoration is nearly complete, and the wholly private effort bodes well for other preservation causes.

This notable group of resources should be linked together better visually; section 4.4.C, page 69, offers recommendations for improved circulation and parking, and a new landscaped entrance to the cemetery from Main Street.

## C. Establish a town visitors' center

A centrally located building should offer information and hospitality to residents and visitors alike. The green would be the ideal site for a visitors' center with information about town historic sites, events, and shopping opportunities, and serving as headquarters for special events. The present location of the bus shelter, at the head of Linwood Avenue, is a dramatic entry point to the town center and the best spot for this purpose. Moving the

A museum with this potential would draw townspeople and, if marketed effectively, could draw visitors from throughout the state and beyond.

Several recommendations for enhancement of the museum's content are offered:

- The separate exhibits on Academy and town history should be coordinated more directly and perhaps integrated.
- Expanded exhibits are deserved, with particular attention to the town's significant ethnic heritage and the Academy's distinguished history and many notable graduates. Colchester's historic summer resorts and African-American story, for example, deserve appropriate coverage.
- Oral history tapes of town and Academy history should be installed, and re-creation of a historic classroom considered.

Based on the architect's analysis in section 2.4, the Academy building appears to be structurally suitable for this expanded, more intensive use. A professional engineer, however, should be retained to inspect the building.

The costs to implement these recommendations, together with building maintenance and repair, may be considerable. As the architect's analysis points out, however, ways to control costs are available. It may well be possible, for example, to satisfy the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with construction of a handicapped outside ramp (at a side or rear entrance) and first-floor handicapped bathroom, rather than more extensive changes. As a National Register building, the Academy also qualifies for waivers of some building and fire code requirements.

A multi-pronged funding plan could make the improvements feasible:

- All work could be scheduled in stages over a reasonable time period and prioritized, with structural and code issues receiving first attention.
- The Academy trustees and town could work together to investigate and seek all possible outside funding. Grants may be available from the federal and state governments; e.g., state Tourism Challenge Grants are targeted specifically to this kind of resource. The Connecticut Humanities Council awards grants for museum program development.
- Proposed higher rents from Day Hall could assist Bacon Academy.
- One or two rooms in Bacon Academy could be made available, at a fee, for meetings and/or office space of community groups (note: office use by such groups should not endanger the "education only" requirement for the building, especially since the rest of the building would clearly qualify).
- Lastly, a general fundraising campaign should be mounted among townspeople and Bacon Academy alumni and friends. Some annual events on the green, augmented by special events, should be dedicated to this cause.

## 4.6 Goal for Heritage Tourism: Exploit Colchester's Significant Resources and Expand Public Awareness

Colchester's tourism potential, if realistically assessed and vigorously pursued, can yield real economic benefits. A successful heritage tourism plan will involve many components, including those set forth below and the related recommendations in other sections of the Plan. A key for Colchester is the recognition that its tourist audience consists of both residents and out-of-towners; the measure of success will be the economic benefits the town derives.

To this end, the town should formulate a marketing and resource development strategy. These recommendations, while listed by priority, are all critical to making the tourism strategy work.

***Recommendations:***

**A. Develop a town center theme as centerpiece of a marketing strategy.**

Selection of the theme and related components (e.g., slogan and logo), should draw on the town center's significant history (e.g., cultural and economic), physical features (particularly the green), and buildings. Colchester's rich educational history and tradition of cultural diversity stand out as the appropriate bases for a theme; old Bacon Academy, which more than any other building or site epitomizes Colchester's past, would be a highly appropriate visual centerpiece for the theme and the entire town center plan.

To the extent possible, the theme should be used in all cultural and commercial marketing aspects of the tourism initiative. It should be seen and displayed widely, and a set of gift items bearing the theme, and having broad consumer appeal (tee shirts, mugs, etc.) would effectively promote it.

**B. Enhance Bacon Academy and its surroundings as Colchester's major tourist attraction.**

A cluster of sites around Bacon Academy have the town's strongest tourism potential. Recommendations for two of them, Day Hall and a tourism center, appear elsewhere (sections 2.4.A on page 31, 4.3.D on page 56, and 4.6.C on page 80); the others follow:

**1.** The historic Bacon Academy building is Colchester's jewel. Its fine exhibits, unknown to many town residents, should be expanded to tell Colchester's fascinating history as completely and dramatically as possible.

**2.** Strengthen cultural resource protection in the subdivision plan review process.The subdivision of land is often the last opportunity for public officials, by means of the required public review and approval of subdivision plans, to safeguard cultural resources on the property and to reserve part of it as public open space. At risk are cultural resources such as archaeological sites, historic cemeteries and old stone walls. To protect these resources, Colchester should take the following steps:

- Town subdivision regulations should be revised to make protection for cultural resources broader and more explicit. Since the land within the town center is mostly developed, revised regulations would mostly affect areas on the edges and elsewhere.
- In protecting open space, town officials should place greater emphasis on establishing linkages among dedicated spaces, with the goal of creating both interconnected public greenways and trails, and nature preserves.
- Colchester should follow the model of towns such as Simsbury, whose regulations specify that a subdivision's percentage of dedicated open space consisting of wetlands may, at the town's discretion, be no greater than that of the entire subdivision. This will avoid the temptation among developers to offer only unbuildable wetlands to the town in satisfaction of the open space requirement.

A model is the Ledyard, Connecticut regulations, which were updated in 1991 (a copy is found in Appendix B). Here, "cultural resources" is defined to include historic and prehistoric archaeological sites, cemeteries, human burials, and distributions of cultural remains and artifacts. Ledyard requires that all subdivisions be laid out to preserve significant cultural resources. In reviewing proposed subdivisions, the town may require a professional archaeological assessment and resources management plan, paid for by the developer. If a historic cemetery is affected, the town may take ownership and specify a 20-foot undeveloped buffer around the borders to protect burials that are sometimes found just outside.

Colchester's regulations should include the Historic District Commission and Municipal Historian as part of the review process if cultural resources are affected, and provide that the Connecticut Historical Commission (CHC) and Office of State Archaeologist are consulted if the property has archaeological potential.

**3.** Discourage commercial strip development along routes 85 and 16. Zone changes of property to allow such higher density use should be discouraged. Developers should be directed to areas targeted for development in the Plan.

and extremely positive, providing a ready psychological boost that creates momentum.

Models for Colchester are many and nearby. The City of Norwich, Connecticut, uses HUD funds to make facade grants of up to $30,000 for improvements to downtown commercial facades. West Hartford and Hartford successfully upgraded the languishing Park Road/Park Street commercial corridor through a loan/grant package using HUD dollars. The Stamford Historic Area Rehabilitation Program (SHARP), which was recently phased out, won much recognition for the positive impact of its grant/loan assistance program in revitalizing the city's historic downtown area.

4. Help owners of National Register-listed properties to obtain tax credits for rehabilitation work. Owners of income-producing buildings that are individually listed on the National Register, or are "contributing resources" in a National Register historic district, can earn 20% federal tax credits for rehabilitation work meeting federal preservation standards. This advantageous tax shelter could benefit many Colchester property owners in the town center, which is a National Register historic district .

5. Offer building permit incentives and code compliance assistance. The town should look into waiving or reducing permit fees. Such a step could have crucial value symbolically, even if the financial effect were small. Town building officials should also work with owners, where appropriate, to investigate the use of Article 513 of the state building code, which offers possible flexibility for historic buildings in meeting code requirements. These two incentives should be offered first to Lebanon Avenue properties.

## B. New Construction

1. Encourage new residential developments in or near the town center. Two purposes are served if the town actively pursues this goal:
1) strengthening patronage of center shops/services through a larger market of convenient consumers, which may also slow down commercial strip development, and 2) reducing residential development pressures in more rural areas, which will help preserve open space. Available tracts should be identified and promoted (see discussion in section 4.3.H, page 64).

For the same purposes, and to the extent consistent with present and contemplated town sewers and infrastructure, the town should create higher density residential zones. The present R-30 single-family zoning (30,000 square-foot minimum lots) could be changed to R-15 (15,000 square-foot lots) or R-12 zoning; attractive residential neighborhoods, similar to those found in towns such as Wethersfield and West Hartford with smaller lot zoning, could be the result.

# 4.5 Preservation and Enhancement Tools

The land use planning and financial tools in this section are key elements of the Plan's town center strategy. Several are strategies employed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program, which has worked successfully to stabilize and rejuvenate small commercial centers nationwide. The tools succeed by offering direct financial benefits to property owners. An economic incentive, therefore, is the kind of tangible inducement that historic preservation alone may not be. Most of these tools should be offered first in a Lebanon Avenue revitalization program in order to help it gain momentum and succeed.

***Recommendations:***

**A. Improvements to Existing Properties**

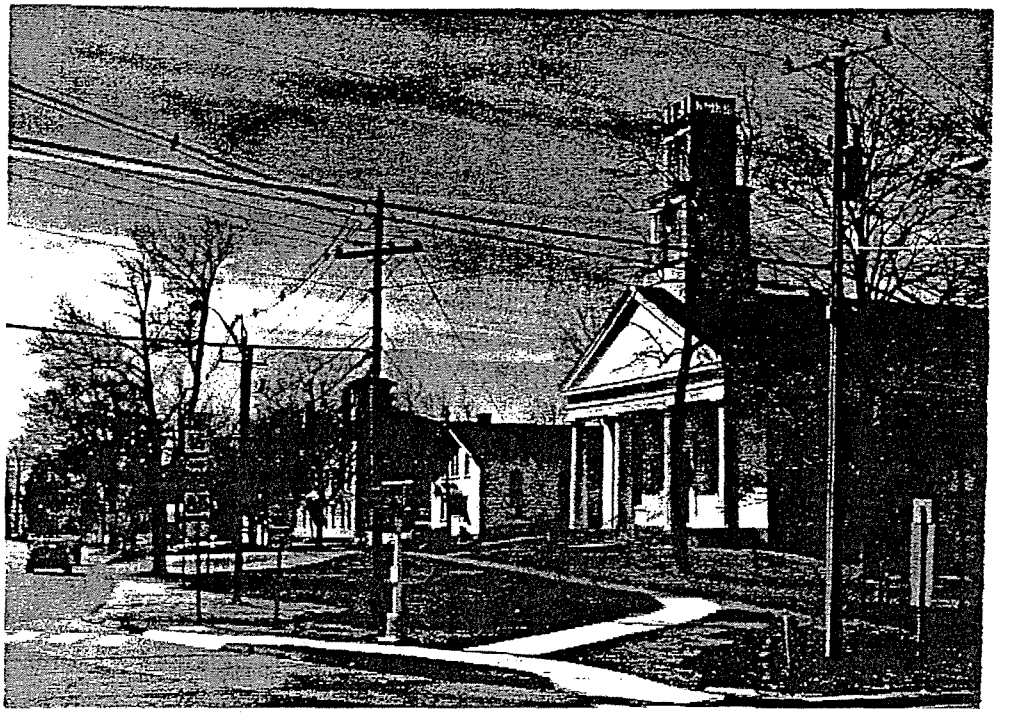
**1.** Grant property tax relief through phase-in of increased assessments arising from rehabilitation of town center buildings. Sections 12-65c to 12-65f of the Connecticut General Statutes provide authorization for the program, and other Connecticut towns have used it with success, such as Stamford, Torrington, and Danbury. Putnam recently enacted similar tax relief.

Mitigation of taxes could be a crucial incentive to owners of historic buildings. While the program produces a short-term deferral in tax revenue, potential for long-term gain, both economic and otherwise, is great.

**2.** Establish a community reinvestment fund organized by local banks to underwrite more substantial business and physical reinvestment than covered in 1. above. Ideally, this money would be available at favorable below-market rates. This tool also helps banks to fulfill their Community Reinvestment Act responsibilities.

**3.** Create a loan/grant program for property improvements. The town should seek funding, through the Small Cities Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for a matching loan/grant program to assist property owners with exterior facade improvements and building code compliance costs. These funds should be targeted to the Lebanon Avenue project; if possible, funding should then be used for improvements elsewhere in the town center. Loans would be forgiven if the buildings are rehabilitated and maintained for a given period, such as ten years, to the level of U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.

The purpose of this program is two-fold: to handle basic structural problems, and to change public perceptions through a rapid upgrade of building exteriors in an entire neighborhood. Its impact can be immediate



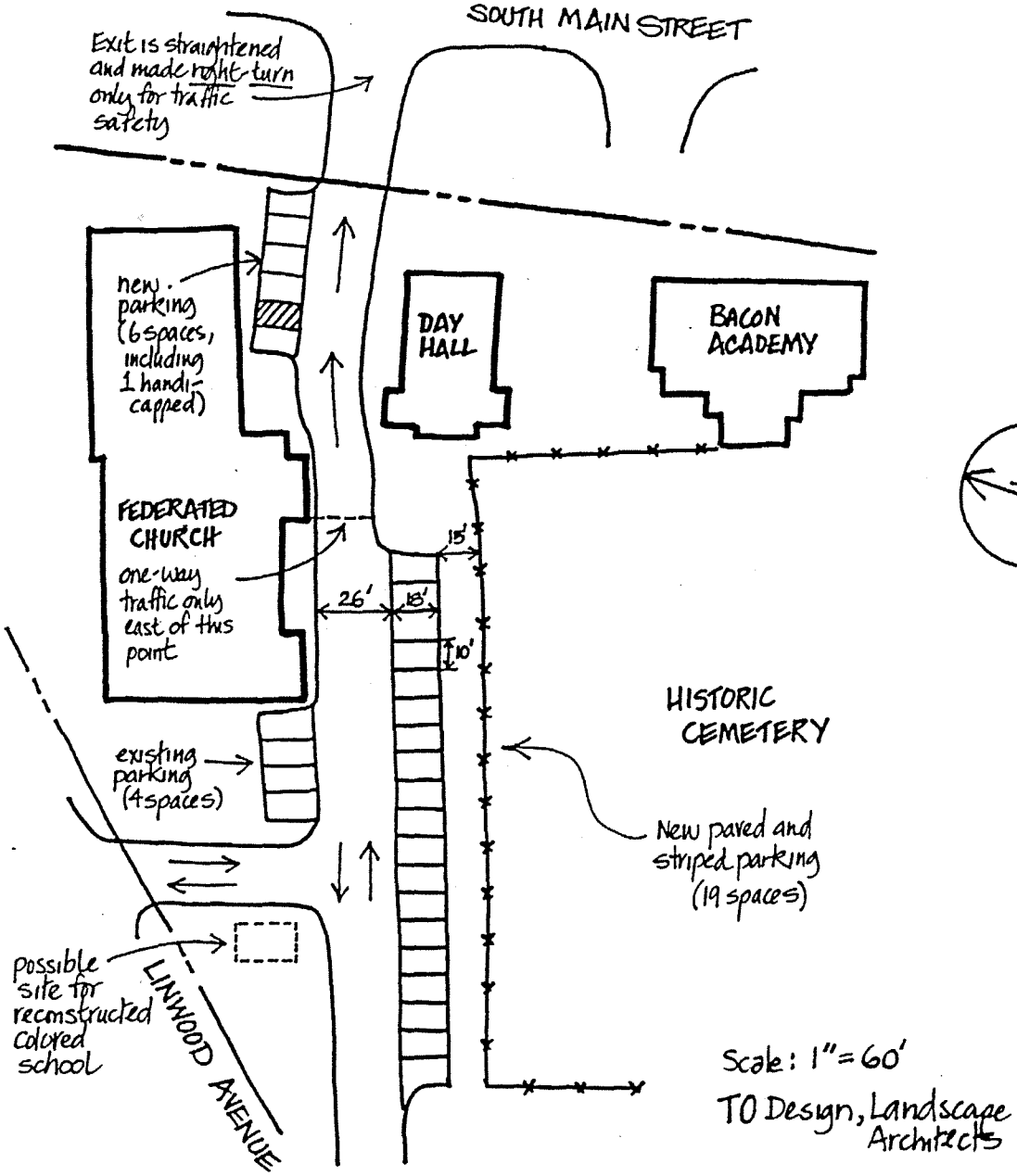
*Utility wire and street signs are an unattractive presence on Colchester's streets.*

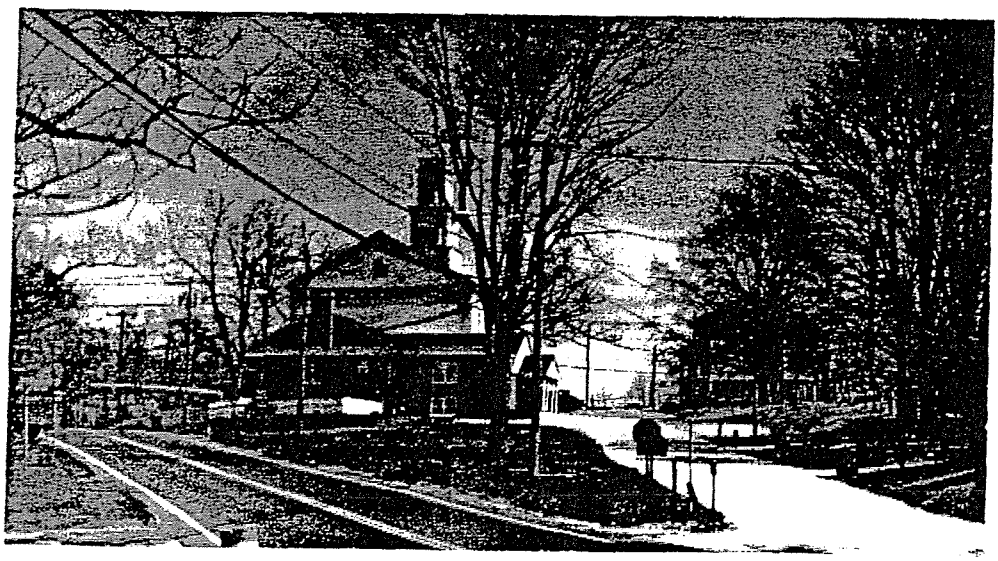
## G. Implement unused design review in zoning regulations

The site plan review currently required in section 12 of the Colchester zoning regulations for most commercial or multi-unit residential uses includes review of proposed building improvements to ensure "substantial design conformity with the surrounding area." The section, enacted in 1987, provides for the creation of an Architectural Review Board to handle building reviews. This provision has never been implemented; it should be used outside the proposed new Town Center Zone and amended to require "reasonable design conformity" (i.e., less demanding than the standard in the Town Center Zone). To ensure legality, this design review should be explained with its own set of objective design guidelines, which need not be so detailed as those in the Town Center Zone.

## H. Explore expansion of the locally designated Colchester Historic District.

The present local historic district covers much less of the town center than is justified based on historic and architectural merit. Through reasoned discussion of the implications of this designation, it may be possible to expand the district.



*The plan above shows how circulation and parking can be improved behind the Federated Church and Day Hall. This area, shown in the photo below, can be a focal point of Colchester's Heritage Tourism Plan, as both an entry experience and possible location of a rebuilt Colored School.*

# Illustrative Town Green Plan

## LEGEND

- Existing Tree
- Proposed Tree
- Existing Dirt Path
- Proposed Paved Path
- Utility Pole
- Property Line
- Light Standard
- Bench
- Waste Receptacle
- Curbing
- Grass
- Fire Hydrant
- Water Fountain

## Description of Recommended Improvements

(With Symbols or Numbers Shown on Map, as Appropriate)

**New Tree Plantings** - Frame the Green and walks, replace dead trees, and fill in gaps. Select native deciduous shade trees. Locate according to historic, spatial and environmental factors.

**Walks**- Paved paths will facilitate all season use of the green. Number & width to be kept to a minimum.

**Furnishings** - Benches and trash receptacles to be of a uniform style, color and material. Keep quantity to a minimum.

**Lighting** - Light type to match existing light standards on Merchants' Row and in Bacon Academy exhibit, 10' - 15' height. Size fixtures to provide a light level of 1 foot candle.

**Grass** - Repair bare spots, aerate and reseed as necessary.

**Curbing** - Granite curbing to protect the green from encroachment and erosion of the edge.

1 **Gazebo** - Maintain as focal point with appropriate plantings.

2 **Relocated Foote House** - Provides new visitors center.

3 **Ballfield** - Regrade to correct drainage problems.

4 **Veterans Green** - Provide similar treatments as main green.

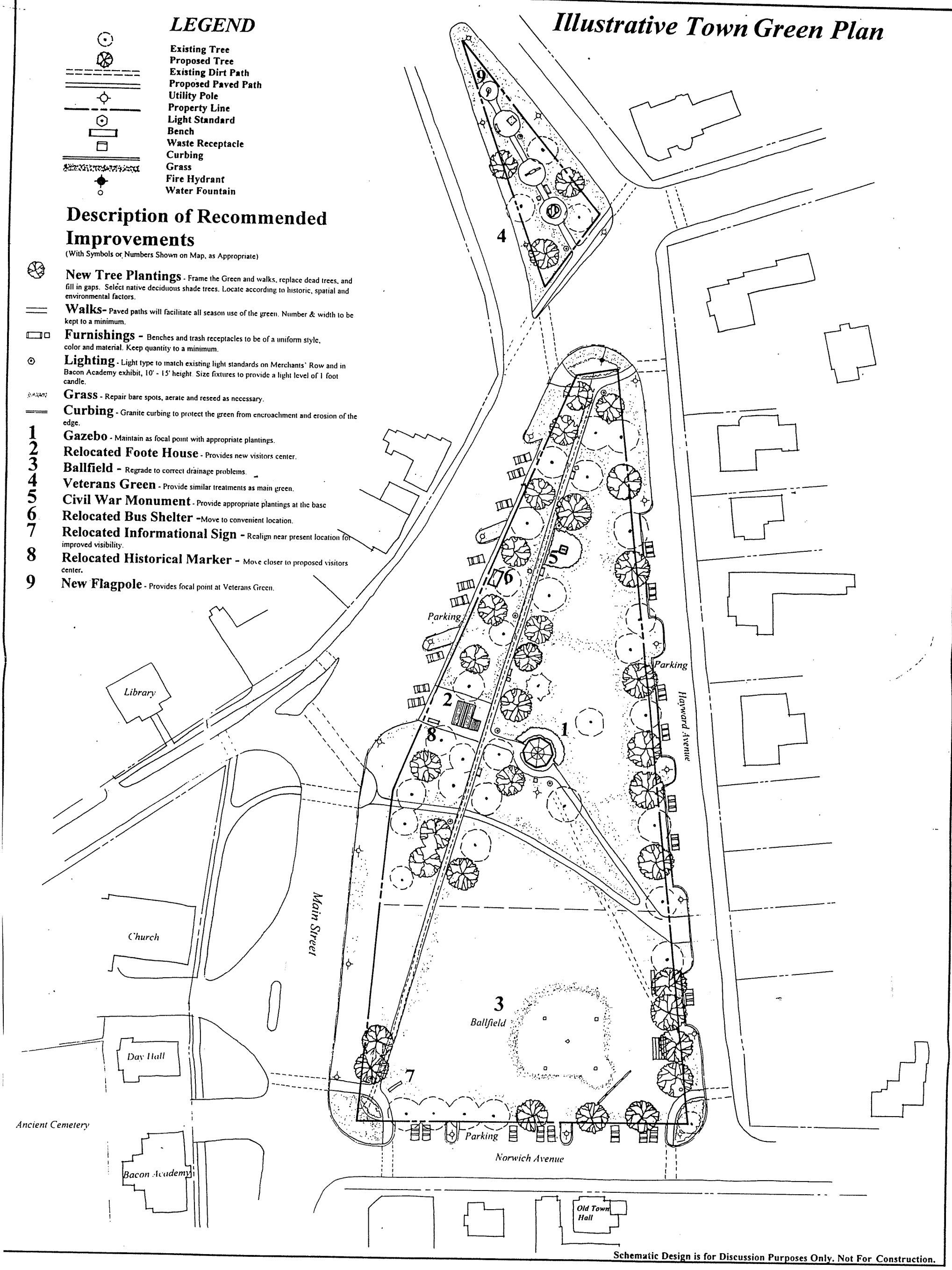
5 **Civil War Monument** - Provide appropriate plantings at the base

6 **Relocated Bus Shelter** -Move to convenient location.

7 **Relocated Informational Sign** - Realign near present location for improved visibility.

8 **Relocated Historical Marker** - Move closer to proposed visitors center.

9 **New Flagpole** - Provides focal point at Veterans Green.




Schematic Design is for Discussion Purposes Only. Not For Construction.

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# COLCHESTER TOWN CENTER

Cultural Resources Development & Heritage Tourism Plan

# Proposed Conditions

Old Hartford Road
Amston Road
Windham Road
Park Avenue
Broadway
Fernwood Drive
Harrington Court
Lebanon Avenue
Mill Street
Clark Lane
Craig Court
Hayward Avenue
Norwich Avenue
Linwood Avenue
South Main Street
Pleasant Street
Halls Hill Road
Doctor Foote Road
Route 2

## LEGEND

- Streetscape Improvements
- New Town Center Zone
- *Airline Railroad Greenway*
- Areas of Significant Development Opportunities (See Schematic Illustration's In Plan)
- Proposed Parking
- Proposed Land Uses :
  - Commercial / Residential
  - Residential Area

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# COLCHESTER TOWN CENTER

## Cultural Resources Development & Heritage Tourism Plan