

Colebrook, CT

Plan of Conservation and Development

2025



As approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission
June 16, 2025
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The Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development Committee

The Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development Committee is an ad hoc subcommittee of the Colebrook Planning and Zoning Commission and was created specifically to create the Town Plan. Our membership includes:

The Planning and Zoning Commission

Martha Neal
Kevin Robichaud
Edward Catto
John Fernandez
Dave Goulet
Todd Correll
Will Sweeney
Aden Ruwet

Beth Driscoll, Colebrook Consolidated School Principal

John Auclair, Norbrook Farm Brewery

Joyce Hemingson, Colebrook Conservation Commission

The Town Plan of Conservation and Development: Definition and Purpose

The Town Plan of Conservation and Development is a state-mandated document (CGS 8-23) that is to be used to guide the conservation, growth, land use policies, and development of a community. It is an advisory tool that identifies the community's goals and provides a framework of needs, actions, and priorities. Town boards should use the Plan as a guideline for the creation of policies and regulations that protect community values while balancing growth and preservation.

Consistency With State and Regional Plans

In accordance with Section 8-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development has been evaluated for consistency with the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan and the Regional Land Use Plan for the Northwest Hills Council of Governments (NHCOC). As part of this review, the Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development was found to be consistent with both the State Conservation and Development Policies Plan and the Regional Land Use Plan endorsed in 2017 by the NHCOC. The Town Plan is also consistent with the Town of Colebrook Housing Affordability Plan adopted on October 11, 2022.

Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development, 2025



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Part I

Natural Resources

Overview

Colebrook is one of several very rural communities in the Northwest Highlands, with a landscape of forest, brook, field, and pond. From the pristine wetlands of the Loon Brook basin and the scenic Still River Gorge, to the sunny meadows of Eno Hill and the forested expanse of Algonquin State Forest, Colebrook remains a place of stunning beauty and robust ecosystems. The town's natural resources are one of its most attractive qualities.

Colebrook Land Statistics

Size 32.9 square miles or 21,056 acres

Open Space in acres (as listed by the Colebrook Assessor's Office and Colebrook Land Conservancy's records, December 2024)

1. Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) = 3,941
2. State of Connecticut = 2,885
3. Owned by conservation organizations = 970
4. Conservation easements held by conservation organizations = 820
5. *Private associations and sportsmen's clubs = 900
6. *YCMA Camp Jewell = 527
7. *Town lands = 195
8. Eversource (Northeast Utilities) = 75
9. Army Corps of Engineers = 180
10. Cemeteries = 12
11. Known deed restrictions = 97

Total Open Space = 10,602 (50.3%)

Total Committed Open Space (considered permanently protected) = 8,980 (42.6%)

Total *Uncommitted Open Space = 1,622 (7.7%)

Open Space

The United States Forest Service defines open space as including "all unbuilt areas, whether publicly or privately owned, protected or unprotected. Open space includes forests and grasslands, farms, streams, rivers and parks. They provide ecosystem services, support agricultural and forest production, and offer opportunities for recreation." Happily, Colebrook has much land that can be characterized as open space, and we believe a town goal should be to maintain this important resource. Open space is important for the following reasons:



1. Open space conservation protects wildlife, but also our privacy, drinking water, recreation opportunities, views and our legacy for the future.
2. Colebrook's vast amount of open space is what differentiates it from the suburban sprawl that is slowly creeping in from the South and East. Colebrook's rural characteristic is a magnet for both its resident and nonresident populations. Roughly half of the property owners are either retired or have second homes here.
3. Open space requires little or no infrastructural services and thus costs the Town very little. In contrast, single-family homes often do not pay enough taxes to cover the costs of the public service they require, particularly for education. At the 2024 public hearing for the Town Budget, it was estimated that the cost per child per year is about \$26,000.

4. Another misconception is that all permanently protected lands are not taxed. While the land owned by land trusts and non-profits are not taxed, many permanently protected parcels are in private ownership by the use of conservation easements and by the sale or donation of development rights and remain on the tax rolls. Lands adjacent to protected areas have increased property values and correspondingly produce more tax revenue.
5. There are other benefits of open space, such as offering multiple opportunities for residents to connect with the natural world through outdoor recreation. Colebrook's beautiful countryside attracts a vibrant weekend and summer colony that contributes to the local economy and culture while requiring few town services. Protecting and adding to open space should continue to be a priority.

Areas of Concern

1. Wetlands

Colebrook's wetlands are important because they filter our drinking water, provide habitat for plant and animal life, purify surface water, control flooding, recharge the aquifers, and allow for education and recreation opportunities.

The West Branch of the Farmington River (including the Colebrook River Lake Reservoir and Goodwin Reservoir) and the Sandy Brook watersheds are the major hydrologic features of the town. The Sandy Brook watershed includes the Loon Brook and Center Brook subbasins and their associated springs and feeder brooks. Sandy Brook is an outstanding mountain stream that offers technical fishing and kayaking opportunities in a dramatic setting. There are numerous swimming holes as well. The 3-mile section of the Algonquin State Forest along Sandy Brook Road has been designated a State Natural Area Preserve, which provides permanent protection. With its steep slopes, cascading feeder streams, spectacular wildlife, and location within one of the largest state forests, Sandy Brook merits the town's attention and careful stewardship.



Loon Brook is another defining wetland ecosystem. Its terminal basin near Colebrook Center supports songbirds, wading birds and other wildlife over a series of old and new beaver dams. From the shrub swamp on Rockwell Road to the crossing at Little Kingdom on Phelps Road, to the dramatic headwaters march on Shantry Road, the Loon Brook watershed is a robust aquatic ecosystem that is largely intact and deserving of protection.

The Colebrook River Lake Reservoir and West Branch Reservoir are large bodies of water that attract many species of birds, especially during migration periods. This area has become known as a birding "hot spot." The Colebrook River Lake Reservoir area provides recreational boating, fishing and passive recreation through the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) and the US Army Corps of Engineers. The State stocks fish there each year. In 2023, the CT Department of Public Health approved an application by the MDC to abandon its drinking water rights for the Colebrook River Lake Reservoir. A conservation easement on 4,300 acres that surround the reservoirs in several towns will be held by the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy. Protecting these forested areas around the reservoirs will keep the water quality high. New public access to the land is planned to allow for passive recreation.

In addition to large watersheds, there are many riparian buffers of significance throughout our town that are worthy of protection. Riparian buffers are undisturbed areas of vegetation that provide protection for streams and brooks. These buffers help diminish the effects of disturbance to land from development and road system management. In doing so, they protect the quality of wetlands and well water and therefore the health of our rural community.

Vernal pools are another important wetland resource in Colebrook. Also known as spring ponds or ephemeral wetland, vernal pools are temporary wetland that fill with water between fall and spring and are usually dry by late summer. Vernal pools are essential for the life cycle of many invertebrates and amphibians. Salamanders and wood frogs start life there as egg and young before moving into the surrounding forest. They later return as adults to mate and lay eggs, beginning the cycle again.

2. Woodlands

Colebrook's woodlands are perhaps its defining landscape feature. Our forests provide environmental, ecological and economic values. Undisturbed forestlands deliver clean water, wildlife, rural aesthetics as well as forest products. Protecting our forests should be one of Colebrook's top priorities, which can be accomplished through a number of means, including the encouragement of conservation easements and the acquisition of additional open space.



3. Aquifer Recharge Zones

All Colebrook residents obtain drinking water from underground sources. It is therefore vital to protect the groundwater resource for our community and for those using the same aquifer in surrounding towns. The most important aquifer recharge sites include the Algonquin/Sandy Brook aquifer in the vicinity of the Algonquin State Forest on Sandy Brook Road, the Robertsville aquifer near the confluence of Sandy Brook and the Still River, the Phelps Corner aquifer long Phelps Flat Road, and the Millbrook aquifer. Development in these areas should be limited, and should not result in the pollution of ground or surface waters, or cause a reduction in water supply.

4. Scenic Roads, View and Resources

Colebrook's roadways are both a source of pride and concern. They carry us on our daily travels, bring us into spectacular places, and make our town a destination for leaf peepers during the fall foliage season. Development proposals should not degrade the scenic quality of our roads and roadsides. Stonewalls are important historical artifacts and a visual reminder of our agricultural past. The town should protect all stonewalls in the public right-of-way, especially as they become an economic commodity. Revisions to the town's land use regulations can take the form of including stone in the list of planning elements that must be considered in the routine zoning and environmental assessments conducted prior to development. Pisgah Mountain Road is the only designated Scenic Road, approved by a Town ordinance in 1989.

5. Farms and Meadows

Farms and meadows are an important part of Colebrook's history and present landscape. They provide unique early succession wildlife habitat, have a local economic contribution, and harbor much of our most productive agricultural soils. Proposed development should minimize disruption to the scenic quality of the site, and retain the maximum possible meadowland for future use.

6. Special Natural and Agricultural Areas

The areas listed below are important and unique. They are some of Colebrook's most defining natural and man-made ecosystems. Effort should be made to protect and preserve these areas in regards to current/future land use and development.

- a. Sandy Brook and environs
- b. Loon Brook Basin (from Colebrook Center to the Norfolk town line, especially headwaters)
- c. Colebrook River Lake Reservoir, West Branch Reservoir and surrounding watershed
- d. Center Brook and environs
- e. Beech Hill Brook and woodland environs

- f. Farms on Smith Hill Road, Stillman Hill Road, Rt. 183 in North Colebrook, Shantry Road, Sandy Brook Road, Pinney Street, Phelps Road, Beech Hill Road
- g. Lake Triangle at Camp Jewell
- h. Eno Hill Meadows at Charlie Arnold Recreation Area
- i. Algonquin State Forest, Tunxis State Forest
- j. Kitchel Wilderness Preserve
- k. Panorama Hill
- l. Phelps Pond
- m. Aton Forest
- n. Doolittle Lake Brook watershed
- o. Others

7. Invasive Species

Non-native invasive species are an increasing threat to the biodiversity of our forests, fields, and wetlands. They are defined as any plant or animal introduced to an area where its density or dispersal threatens ecosystem stability or economics. Invasives spread, taking habitat away from native species and decreasing biodiversity. See Plant list in the Natural Resources Inventory for invasive species in Colebrook. Eliminating them from your property is easier to do when the problem is first noticed and the numbers are small. Mowing equipment can spread the seeds of invasive plants in agricultural fields or along the road shoulders.

8. Wind Turbines

There are two wind turbines located on Flagg Hill Road. Currently there are no applications for any additional turbines. New petitions for wind turbines would be governed by the Wind Regulations written by the Connecticut Siting Council and approved by the Regulations Review Committee of the CT State Legislature in 2014.

9. Low Impact Development

The Town of Colebrook has implemented Low Impact Development (LID) standards and regulations. The objective of this process was to revise existing land use regulations and municipal ordinances to not only encourage and promote LID practices and techniques but to require said practices and techniques resulting not only in maintenance of but improvement to the overall health of the Farmington River Watershed. These include:

- a. Revised inland wetlands regulations incorporating language for LID practices consistent with the model regulations recommended by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.
- b. Revisions to this 2025 Town Plan of Conservation and Development to show consistency with the approved changes to all of the land use regulations and municipal ordinances.

Recommendations

For many of Colebrook's residents, the Town's natural resources are one of their highest community values. They are what make Colebrook different from many parts of the state, what draws us to live here. Implementing policy to protect our unique and extensive natural resources without impeding on private property rights and imposing an excessive public tax burden will be challenging. It is the recommendation of this plan to consider the following:



1. Planning and Zoning regulation should continue to consider the preservation and protection of Colebrook's ecosystems and natural resources, such as street trees, scenic roads, view sheds, ridgelines, brooks, streams, water bodies, vernal pools, rock outcrops, farms, farmlands, forests, forest resources, agricultural soils, realized and potential aquifers, public water supply lands, wetland soils, open meadows, riparian buffers, and stone walls. Regulations should also promote types of development that do not degrade the defining characteristic of our unique natural resources.
2. Because wetlands embody a multitude of ecological values, afford wetlands the maximum practical protection. Also, wetland crossings and their consequent hydrological shift should be minimized. Use of elevated spans is encouraged when possible.
3. Consider permanent protection status for Town-owned open space, such as the Ralph G. Cooper and Dorothy B. Cooper Memorial Forest adjacent to the Colebrook Recreation Area on Cooper Lane.
4. Assign responsibility for the Charlie Arnold Recreation Area on Eno Hill to one or more town commissions and develop a management plan. It includes a State Critical Habitat (see Map 18: Critical Habitats & Vernal Pools)
5. Encourage landowners to place conservation easements on their lands to gain permanent protection of natural resources.
6. Over the past ten years, the Conservation Commission has worked to increase public awareness to the growing threat of invasive species. It should continue to do so. In addition, the Conservation Commission should work with the Board of Selectmen, Public Works Department and CT Department of Transportation to address invasive species found along our roadsides and on town property. Species such as Japanese Knotweed and Bittersweet are becoming out of control in several areas.

Part II Economic Development

Overview

Despite its prominent role in the early stages of metalworking industry in the 18th and early 19th Centuries, modern Colebrook is one of the most rural communities in Connecticut. It has virtually no manufacturing or industrial operations,

a very limited retail presence and an overwhelming proportion of its year-round residents pursue occupations beyond the borders of the town. US census data for 2020 show a labor force of 820, up 6.3% from 769 in 2010. The unemployment rate is 2.3%, which is well below the state average of 3.4%. Only 4.4% of Colebrook's work force works at home, according to census data; however, anecdotal evidence, including that related to home businesses, suggests that the self-employed segment is substantially higher. Farming, which at one time dominated the local economy, is much diminished. Few commercial farming operations remain, although they are still part of the economy, and farmland persists as an integral element in the Colebrook landscape.

Data from AdvanceCT (2025 profile), show that Colebrook has a median household income of \$114,904, which is above the median of \$93,780 for the state. The greater part of commercial activity is confined in two business zones currently designated within the town, along Routes 8 and 44. For the most part, businesses located in these zones are limited to small, individually owned service and retail establishments. The business zones, lack in large measure, the infrastructure factors to support substantial industrial and retail development. These factors include a central location, high traffic flow, a large and diversified population base and, most importantly, public utilities-water-sewer-to support their physical operation. Moreover, these same factors, together with an inventory of unused industrial space, are abundantly available in Winsted and other nearby communities. Any consideration of economic development must recognize these salient limitations. That being said, we have had moderate inquiries and proposals for new small business development in these areas.

Economic Development Goals

The keynote of the overall town plan is to maintain and foster the rural character of Colebrook. We broadly define economic development as the fostering of activities that bring, directly or indirectly, more tax revenues to the town than they require in municipal services through the creation of job opportunities, the encouragement of commercial development, and a general improvement in the local economy. The ultimate goals are to relieve the undue dependence upon residential tax revenues, to ensure the provision of necessary services and to enhance the economic livelihood of residents of the town. Accordingly, any initiatives should be consistent with the preservation and nurturing of its local character. They should also reflect the limitations of its infrastructure capacity, its water resources, and road and utility systems. Perhaps the best example of this effort is displayed in the success of the *Norbrook Farm Brewery*, which has adhered to the principles defined above while, providing new tax revenue, jobs for local residents, and maintaining the integrity of rural Colebrook. In addition, the advent of biking trails, hiking trails and frisbee golf has created a tourist destination celebrated by all New Englanders.



Issues and Challenges

1. General Business Zones

The designated business zones within Colebrook consist of 500' wide strips, measured from the road centerline, along two state highways, Routes 8 and 44. The nature and designation of each of these two zones is problematical. Both lack any public utility service for water and sewer. Past initiatives, focused on the southeast corner of Route 8, to explore the

feasibility of extending lines from Winsted, have determined that such an effort would not be cost effective in the absence of any likely substantial commercial tenant and in view of the availability of feasible alternative sites in Winsted.

Soil conditions also pose a challenge. An analysis of soil types within both zones has determined substantial limitations for extensive commercial development. Route 8 abuts the Metropolitan Water District, containing the Goodwin and Colebrook Reservoirs that provide current use and reserve water for the metropolitan Hartford area. U.S. Soil Conservation Service data classifies large segments of this zone as unsuitable for septic waste disposal and vulnerable to ground water pollution. Route 44 commercial corridor is somewhat better suited for development, but here, as well, large segments are rated low for septic disposal. Further, the southerly side of Route 44 is bordered by a large inland wetland and in some areas rises so steeply from the highway as to be unfeasible for new construction. These factors combine to severely limit the available land for new commercial development in either zone.

The narrow boundaries of each of the General Business Zones, further diminished highway rights of way, encourage a continuation of the “strip development” that already characterizes much of the Route 8 zone, and under present regulations virtually ensure that future development further detracts from the rural nature of the town

2. Home Business

The “home business,” broadly defined to include home office activities and other larger enterprises that include outside employees, may present the most promising and most source of economic activity within the Colebrook community. Reliable statistics are not available, owing to the largely unrecorded nature of many such operations, but they abound including financial and other professional consultancies, personal services, agricultural production and retail sales, food processing, handicrafts, woodworking and small-scale construction. Spurred in part by advances in technology-the continuing improvement and proliferation of electronic communication and computer applications-and the resultant ability to locate away from large population centers, the climate for expansion of these activities is extremely favorable. However, regulation of these activities is complex. The business may be wholly unobtrusive, invisibly housed within a residential dwelling and attracting a minimum of vehicular traffic. It can also, by its nature, produce noise and other forms of pollution, cause heavy traffic flow, create visual unsightliness, or violate regulatory zoning footprints. Where the business is located in a residential zone, the manifest challenge is to balance the needs of the home business operator with the rights of the residential homeowner. Regulation of these activities is defined by Section 5.B of the Colebrook Planning and Zoning Regulations, which approve home business as a special exception, based upon the impact they will have on the residential character of the neighborhood.

2. 3.The Town Center

The Town Center is Colebrook’s “jewel” and has been maintained in its present state through a combination of strict zoning regulations and oversight by the Historic District Commission. Within the historic district itself, the old town hall, also known as the Seymour Inn, continues to be maintained by the Town, and the Colebrook Store which has undergone renovation is now managed by a local not-for-profit.

Each building is of historic and aesthetic value, and each contributes to the unique composition of the town center historic district in which, apart from the long established non-conforming usage of the Colebrook Store, all commercial activities are strictly prohibited by both regulation and custom. As recommended in the existing Town Plan, the Town has established a Village District pursuant to Section 8-2j of the Connecticut General Statutes, thereby providing the Planning and Zoning Commission with additional tools to protect the existing distinctive character, landscape and historic structures within the Town Center and regulating new construction, substantial reconstruction and rehabilitation of properties within the Town Center in the future.

The pros and cons of joining Colebrook Consolidated School in with Norfolk’s Botelle School due to declining enrollment are yet again under consideration for a meaningful merger.

3. 4.Tourism

Colebrook’s physical assets, including its historical town center and colonial architecture, its rural character and its abundance of natural resources, parklands, forest, hills, hiking trails, and waterways, are of special value but in economic terms largely unexploited. Overnight accommodations are minimal, Bed and Breakfast establishments as well as the Letting of Rooms, and other forms of short-term rentals are allowed. The present economic benefits provided from

tourism, including retail sales and full-time or part-time employment opportunities are very modest, again the successful efforts of the *Norbrook Farm Brewery* inspire the potential for future growth in other areas.

Recommendations

Economic development in the town should continue to be implemented within the framework of respecting and enhancing the town's unique rural character. This can be accomplished through regulation of the visual aspects of such development—signage, setback requirements, exterior lighting, landscaping, scale, etc.—and sensitivity for the quality of residential neighborhoods, as well as for key environmental factors, in particular the preservation of ground water supplies. Successful fostering of development will require a certain flexibility in zoning regulations, a willingness to revise standards, and continued extensive use of the special use and public hearing processes to evaluate and approve applications and requests which offer opportunities for sustaining operations and intelligent growth. To that end with the use of the Special Exception with a “lighter hand” approach to managing the business opportunities without sacrificing the character of Colebrook or its environment, appears to be one positive approach.

1. General Business Zones

Consideration should be given to reconfiguring, with professional planning assistance, each of the two existing business zones, and revising the standards that dictate development therein. In each instance wetlands and ground water resources for the town may be imperiled by further development. Adherence to the newly configured planning and zoning regulations, given the narrow dimensions of the zones, almost force strip development, preventing visually preferable set-backs more appropriate for the town's rural character. It may in fact be possible and desirable, where water supply and other environmental factors permit, to deepen zone boundaries.



Such a change would permit increased setbacks, landscaped buffers, and other improved site design elements, and could result in a modest expansion of potential business sites where ground water issues had already posed a limiting factor. There has been success on this front with the advent of 320 SPICE. Prepared foods and other delights that have become available to the Colebrook community. As stated in the Housing Affordability Plan, accessory dwelling units, conversion to multi-family units, and mixed-use buildings are allowed with a Special Permit approval, and encouraged by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Recently the Town Planning and Zoning Commission has accepted a Text Amendment to Colebrook Zoning Regulations. The amendments will add to the following uses by Special Exception in the General Business Zone:

Motor Vehicle, Boat and Equipment Sales, Rental, and Service. With the advent of this change the opportunity for businesses to develop in the General Business Zone in auto sales and repair has been positively encouraged.

2. Home Businesses

Home businesses are a very significant and growing element in the town's economy, generating not only economic benefits to their owners but offering employment and local service income opportunities. It is suggested that, in view of widely differing characteristics, and the need to protect the rights and benefits of residential owners, zoning approval procedures should be designed to be as flexible as possible, making use of special exception and public hearing procedures to enable compatible additions to the town's economic life.

3. Tourism

While there are potential hazards and challenges, we suggest that by working with regional organizations, such as the Litchfield Hills Tourism Council, and by promoting local attractions, such as the Colebrook Store, the Colebrook Historical Society (Seymour Inn), and the Colebrook Land Conservancy, with outdoor offerings of hiking trails. Other outdoor opportunities exist in fishing, canoeing the local waterways, preservation of the town's rural character and increasing the Town's economic base will be possible.

4. Agricultural Activity

In keeping with the important role of agriculture in the history of Colebrook, the current zoning regulations and the state and local tax provisions for open land are supporting of all forms of agricultural activity. The support should continue and "locally grown" markets should be encouraged. An example of this success are the efforts of small farms making efforts to expand their offerings in many other entrepreneurial directions. Colebrook residents also have the wherewithal to support farm to table growers, an excellent opportunity exists in this realm.



Part III

HOUSING

Overview

Colebrook is a classic Connecticut small town, ranking 164th in population with 1368 residents as of the 2020 federal census. We are a residential community of primarily middle-class people who have chosen to live somewhat off the beaten path, at least in comparison to most of the citizens of our state. Clean air, cool forests, and scenic vistas define our homeland, instead of the seas of subdivisions, strip malls, and big-box retail outlets that have come to define the towns to the south and east of us. We are a town of independent, self-reliant people who care about each other and serve the community well.

The community fell in population by 117 people (-7.8%) during the 2010s, down from 1.0% growth in the 2000s. About 91.8% are 18 years or older and we are blessed with the fellowship and wisdom of about 524 elders. Over 90% of Colebrook residents are high school graduates, while 30% have bachelor's or graduate degrees. Just over 70% of the population are in the workforce, with a median household income of just under \$115,000 (higher than both State and County median incomes). The Colebrook Senior Center provides many services to increase the quality of life for our wisest citizens and we are all well-served by supporting it. The Colebrook Associates and the Colebrook Lions Club provide valuable charitable assistance to the community.

There are 694 housing units in town according to the 2023 American Community Survey; 93% of the housing units are owner occupied and 7% are renter occupied. There are approximately 70 homes dedicated to seasonal, recreational or occasional use. Ninety seven percent of the housing units are single family homes with a median value of \$307,000, up 11% from 2010. Home and rental vacancy rates are very low and there is no public housing in town. Many of us use sustainable energy in the form of cordwood to heat our homes in winter. There are more than a few homes with alternative energy systems in operation.

The Challenge

Many New England towns have experienced rapid development over the last 40 years. Most of these towns have lost their unique character and now bear little resemblance to their historical and cultural past. Colebrook has not yet fallen to the forces of homogenization that make every place like every other place. We live in a unique town and our connection to the past strong. For instance, our town center is almost unchanged after more than 200 years!

The reasons for this historic and cultural stability are many. Our geographic location is beyond the tolerance of many commuters; state forests and public water supply lands occupy a large proportion of the town's area; large property owners are not uncommon; the interstate highway system does not run through town; and the state roads with the highest traffic density are located outside of the heart of Colebrook. The absence of a rail line and the 'disappearance' of Colebrook River were certainly important historical influences.

Housing and the patterns of residential development are among the elements that define a community. We want safe and affordable housing for present and future residents at a density and distribution that maintains the historic, cultural, rural and environmental qualities that make Colebrook a most special place. No one wants unconstrained, unregulated growth, especially in their own neighborhood; thus, we have created and empowered land use boards to protect our collective vision and community values.

The growth of the town's housing stock is a private-sector enterprise that has the potential to impact us all. More often than not, new home construction leads to increased tax burden for existing residents due to increased demands for town services. As certain thresholds are reached, large capital projects become necessary to meet demand and result in large increases in taxes. The economic implications for working families and especially the elders are profound.

There are other reasons to be concerned about sprawl. Without proper controls, development fragments or destroys intact habitats, degrades viewsheds, pollutes water supplies, increases traffic loads, and erodes the social environment of towns. The challenge lies in balancing community needs with private property rights.

Our town is almost wholly dependent on residential taxes. There are few available options to increase the revenue stream because there are few businesses and little land to accommodate new businesses. We cannot expand the tax base via new development because it carries the threat of increased taxes. We should not undertake expensive projects with limited return such as bridge replacements that are out of scale with the surrounding environment. We should not engage in tradeoffs that diminish or destroy the character of the town. Our challenge is to provide needed services within the limits of the tax revenue base.

Housing Affordability

Housing is considered affordable if costs are no more than 30% of the household's income. When households spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs there is typically not enough remaining to pay for other needs including food, gas, clothing, healthcare, childcare, etc. The median household income in the most recent AdvanceCT profile is slightly under \$115,000. Based on the Town of Colebrook Housing Affordability Plan adopted in October of 2022, 96 households are spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs.

Finding and keeping housing that is affordable is the challenge for the households earning under the 80% Litchfield County median income. In the 2022 Colebrook Housing Affordability Plan, citing the State Affordable Housing Appeals List (2021), there were 9 homes dedicated to remaining affordable, which is approximately 1.25% of the housing stock in Colebrook.

Several issues hamper the town's affordable housing stock, this is not unique to Colebrook, but is county wide. These include demographic changes (a population decrease of approximately 8% based on 2020 Census), fewer households with children, limited diversity of housing stock including older homes, and a slow rate of new home development. Colebrook lacks public transportation. However, there is a dial-a-ride service for senior citizens.

There is no sewer or water infrastructure in Colebrook. This continues to hamper housing and commercial development. The Housing Affordability Plan does though suggest strategies to create additional housing opportunities for both affordable and senior housing. This could be accomplished through a non-profit (501c3) organization that would oversee the expansion for housing options.

Goals and Recommendations

The following housing goals, framed within the realms of serving the residents and protecting the rural way of life, are suggested to guide Colebrook's residential development:

1. To encourage safe, decent, affordable, and suitable housing for all of Colebrook's residents.

Based on the Housing Affordability Plan (2022), continue on a long-term goal toward increasing more affordable housing units.

2. To conserve and protect the quality of existing residential neighborhoods.
3. To renew or rehabilitate obsolete and deteriorating dwelling units.
4. To encourage new dwelling designs that are compatible with existing neighborhoods.
5. To modify the current zoning regulations to accommodate the special housing needs of multi-generational families.
6. To encourage energy conservation and the use of sustainable energy sources in residences.
7. To discourage large-scale housing developments in outlying areas.
8. To consider allowing conversion of large houses to apartments or condominiums when adequate water and sewage disposal capacity are available on site and when other zoning requirements can be satisfied.
9. In an effort to preserve the maximum amount of open space possible, to direct large-scale residential growth away from prime agricultural and open space areas and encourage it to cluster in only one portion of the total developable area.
10. To give protection to the native dark sky conditions that are an important part of the rural aesthetic in Northwestern Connecticut. The practical elements of dark-sky protections include shade design considerations, bright-light curfews, and street light restrictions. Such protection would maintain our privacy, conserve energy, benefit nature, and preserve our view of the heavens. One testimony to the excellence of our night sky is the fact that Colebrook has long been the site of the annual Connecticut Star Party that draws hundreds of attendees every September.



Part IV

Transportation and Roads

Overview

The character of a town is linked to its roads. Colebrook's highways and byways thread across a unique New England landscape and are strongly influenced by features such as the Loon Brook basin, Stillman Hill and Smith Hill, the Algonquin and Sandy Brook, and the West Branch of the Farmington River. Their location and characteristics are rooted in the history and prehistory of our town, and thus, they remain a daily and visible link to the past. Our sense of place – our perception of Colebrook's rural character – is strongly influenced by the roads that carry us across the landscape. As such, our roadways should be maintained, enhanced, or constructed to protect their rural, aesthetic, and environmental qualities while still being cost-effective and supporting safe traffic circulation and access for emergency vehicles.

Road Network

This network of state- and town-owned roads has proven to meet the current circulation needs of our residents and tourists who reside in Colebrook. Due to the small population of the town of Colebrook, the financial cost of maintaining town-owned roads places a financial strain on the town budget. The Capital Improvement Plan and the Selectman's budget allocate funds for road maintenance and repair; however, the rising costs for maintenance easily outstrips these budget allocations. To ensure cost-effective and efficient maintenance, the town must continue implementing long-range road improvement, maintenance, and planning to ensure an effective program remains in place.



Colebrook has about 41 miles of roads comprised of approximately 34.5 miles of paved roads and 6.4 miles of unpaved roads in the following categories:

Arterial Roads – between towns such as Routes 8, 44, 182, 182A and 183.

Collector Roads – major roads such as Riverton Road.

Local Roads – Town roads such as Deer Hill, Smith Hill and Cobb City roads.

Unimproved Roads – dirt roads such as Pisgah Mountain Road and Losaw Road.

Senior Transit

Colebrook has a “dial a ride” service for our senior citizens that is coordinated through the Senior Center in collaboration with the Selectman's office. The service's intention is to provide seniors with rides to medical appointments and community enrichment opportunities. A town vehicle is available for longer trips, as well as a bus for larger group functions or for those citizens requiring the use of a handicap-assessable lift. The selectman are currently in the process of replacing the bus to ensure a reliable, safe option remains available.

Long-Range Planning for Road Maintenance and Improvements

The Town Plan committee recommends that the selectmen create an evolving, Long-Range, Comprehensive Road-Improvement Plan. The plan would identify the location, type, and cost of all major road improvements. It would also

rank and schedule the improvements according to need and cost-effectiveness. The Road Maintenance supervisor should work in coordination with the Selectman in making recommendations to improve, replace, or expand the current Town garage facility. Improvements should ensure the facility meets the needs of the crew and offers a safe, effective, and efficient workspace to provide the best possible outcomes for the citizens of Colebrook.

Roadway maintenance technology has undergone a significant evolution in the past few years, especially within the realms of stormwater control, dirt road management, river crossings, and other challenges. The incorporation of state-of-the-art techniques in roadway management into our highway crew's process and procedural milieu can yield cost-effective outcomes while preserving aesthetic and environmental values that have long been sacrificed on a nationwide scale.

Colebrook is fortunate to have a competent and resourceful highway department. Because of their interest in evolving road management techniques, the town should foster continuing education via seminars, regional roundtables, formal coursework, and the creation of a reference library. Programs are offered by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the Connecticut Department of Energy Environmental Protection, the Northwest Conservation District, and the various regional planning agencies and councils of elected officials. The committee recommends that the town support continuing education for the highway crew because of the simultaneous benefits of improved infrastructural durability, financial efficiency, and environmental quality.

Bridge Improvements, Replacement, and Construction

Bridges are an important part of Colebrook's rural landscape. They span the rivers that traverse the town and provide scenic lookouts and fishing spots. To retain the town's rural character, replacement bridges should be designed with their ultimate location in mind: they should complement the visual landscape.

The Capital Improvement Program

Committee outlines projected bridge and road improvements over 5- and 10-year periods and the one-year plan, which is updated annually by the Board of Selectmen. This program can be a subset of the Long-Range Comprehensive Road Improvement Plan to foster an integrative road network program.



Several bridge improvements and replacements have occurred in the last few years. New bridges were erected on:

Campbell Road, Millbrook Road, Old Creamery Road, Pinney Street, Sandy Brook Road



Scenic Roads and Gravel Roads

Colebrook has two Scenic Roads. One is Pisgah Mountain Road, a one-mile-long unpaved road that runs along Center Brook; it is protected by an ordinance that applies to it alone. The other is approximately three miles of Route 183, from Hale's Corner to North Colebrook, which is classified as a State Scenic Road. These designations have protected both roads from the forces of change. In recognition of the community's desire to maintain Colebrook's rural and natural landscape, the committee has identified the state scenic road statutes as an initial legal mechanism to perpetuate the legacy.

Unpaved gravel roads are a unique attribute of rural New England towns. Residents are often passionate about such roads, even though they are narrow, often winding, and subject to surface irregularities such as wash boarding. Since they are valued by the community, all the gravel roads in town should

be considered for scenic road designation because they are vulnerable to permanent change in the form of widening and paving without public input.

It is recommended that the following roads be considered for town or state scenic road designation through the town meeting process:

1. State Roads

Route 182A from Route 183 to Route 182 (Rockwell Road through the Loon Brook Basin)

Route 182 from Route 183 to Route 182A (Stillman Hill viewshed)

Route 8 from Sandy Brook Road to the Massachusetts line (Colebrook River Road along the West Branch)



2. Town Roads

Unpaved:

Phelps Flat Road (Sandy Brook Road to Route 183 through mature pine stands and along forested wetlands)

Beech Hill Road (Chapin Road to Route 8 with historic and viewshed elements)

Campbell Road (Sandy Brook Road to Beech Hill with historic and aesthetic characteristics)

Wheeler Road (Old Colebrook Road to Rt. 183 with an expansive view of Hale's Corner and Stillman Hill)

Bricklemeier Road (from Smith Hill to Old North Road under a forest canopy)

McClave Road (Silhouette Drive to the Massachusetts line with historic and natural elements)

Losaw Road (from Old North Road to the Winsted line under forest canopy)

Paved:

Sandy Brook Road (Route 8 to Pisgah Mountain Road, including the DEEP Natural Area)

Phelps Road (Route 182 to Bunnell Street through historic/pastoral areas and Little Kingdom)

Smith Hill Road (Route 183 to Old North Road, including the Green and hilltop vistas to the east)

Old Roads

Old roads are road segments that do not appear on the State Road Aid List and are not maintained by the town. These town-owned roads and rights-of-way are unsuitable for passenger vehicles, although they may have non-motorized recreational uses such as walking, skiing, or possibly horseback riding.

The committee has learned that the old roads have no special planning value for future roadway connections or to improve circulation of traffic and emergency vehicles. These old roads do, however, represent a potential financial liability. The town stopped maintaining these roads because they were laid out over difficult terrain with numerous stream crossings, steep slopes, and rocky areas. The cost to construct a modern roadbed over this type of substrate is very high. Yet a property owner with land adjacent to such roads can ask the town to open and improve the road for public travel. By

formally abandoning the old roads (which is accomplished by a majority vote at a town meeting), the town avoids significant future liability for construction and maintenance.

We recommend the following old roads for abandonment:

1. Northern unpaved segment of Simons Pond Road from Cobb City Road to MA line.
2. Chapin Road beyond the current paved terminus (January 2002).
3. Moses Road beyond the current paved terminus (January 2002).

Low Impact Development

As part of the Low Impact Development process, previously noted, additional revisions were made to municipal land use regulations and municipal ordinances. Those that impact roads include:

1. A revised and properly adopted municipal ordinance entitled “Ordinance concerning the construction and acceptance of streets in the Town of Colebrook” incorporating language for LID techniques in all new road construction.
2. Revised and properly adopted planning/subdivision regulations incorporating language for LID techniques as part of approval of all new subdivision roads and individual residential site development.
3. Revised and properly adopted amendments to the zoning regulations incorporating language for LID practices as part of any residential and commercial land development.

Riparian Buffers

Colebrook has several roads that parallel or cross streams, rivers, and wetlands. Numerous research studies have shown that roads in riparian areas can be major agents of environmental degradation. To counter these impacts, road management must be conducted in a manner that preserves both the wetland/watercourse and its associated riparian buffer.

1. Protecting Riparian Buffers

Roadway management can have a significant impact on the health of Colebrook’s surface and ground waters. Construction activity, stormwater management, and longstanding infrastructural problems all contribute to resource damage. Road construction projects should always include a restoration plan that serves to restabilize the site in the most ecologically sound and cost-effective manner.

2. Protecting Vegetation

Every effort should be made to avoid vegetation removals along roads in the buffer areas, subject to the priority given to public safety. Maintaining an intact turf or shrub layer prevents erosion and inhibits the recruitment of tree species in places where they are not desired. Roadside vegetation management should never degrade the roadsides and riparian buffers; it should always seek to enhance their quality.



Part V

Colebrook Consolidated School

As would be expected in the small, charming town of Colebrook, there is a high-quality elementary school with a dedicated staff and strong support from parents. Children in Grades Kindergarten through Six at Colebrook Consolidated School are challenged by current curricula in the subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. High State Standardized Test Scores confirm the success of the school's academic program.



The school is also invested in the social emotional well-being of our students ranging from morning meetings, school-wide positive behavior support system and weekly classroom lessons delivered by trained clinicians. Students attend weekly classes in music, physical education, art education and library. Instrumental and vocal music opportunities are provided to children in Grades 3-6.

The school library and classroom library collections contain current titles and award-winning books. All students have access to individual Chromebooks. Several times each year, innovative enrichment opportunities are designed by staff (with the help of volunteer community members) and made available to students in a

multi-age, choice/interest-based format.

Colebrook Consolidated School benefits from the generosity of local organizations and works closely with these local organizations and other civic groups to further provide children with enriching opportunities and experiences. The children of Colebrook continue their education attending Northwestern Regional Middle and High Schools (NWR7).

A strong academic program and many enrichment opportunities are available through the school program and after-school clubs and sporting teams. Northwestern Regional High School was awarded the National Blue Ribbon Award in 2021.

Part VI

Colebrook Fire Department

Volunteerism is a defining feature of our town.

Colebrook's two fire companies contribute thousands of hours every year and provide a variety of services. These services include but are not limited to; motor vehicle accidents, ice/water and rope rescues, missing persons, automobile and structure fires. The department strives to invest in quality affordable equipment and keep its member up to date on the latest training. The department consist of two Fire Stations; Center Fire house is located on Bunnel St. close to the town center, Forge is located on Colebrook River Rd. on the eastside of town. The services these fully volunteer staff provide is priceless when one of are our fellow residents is in need.



The Fire Department should be invested in to continue to provide this high level of service to Colebrook Citizens.

Part VII

Implementing the Plan

Fu

Future Land Use Plans

As stated earlier, the Colebrook Plan of Conservation and Development is consistent with both the State and Regional Policy Plans. The Town of Colebrook recognizes the need for continued discretionary state funding, including for the town village center as well as the business zones along Route 44 and Route 8. State identified Priority Funding Areas include these sections of town. Colebrook has historically encouraged proposals in these areas and will continue to develop small scale projects that are environmentally sustainable and infrastructure efficient. A perfect example of this is the new town village well installation which supplies potable water to five private and public buildings in the center. The next phase of this project will support a water treatment facility.

Implementation

The main and essential purpose of the planning process is to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Conservation and Development. The responsibility of promoting the implementation is primarily overseen by the Planning and Zoning Commission but also requires cooperation with local boards and commissions such as the Board of Selectman, the Conservation Commission, Inland Wetlands Agency, as well as others. More importantly the Plan should be endorsed by the residents of Colebrook. The Plan will then serve as a usable guide for owners, agencies, businesses, developers, and individuals interested in the orderly conservation and development of Colebrook.

A successful implementation plan or program should encourage continued coordinating workshops which could include: Semi-annual or annual meetings of all municipal boards and commissions where priorities for POCD implementation are discussed and strategies to accomplish them are identified. The Planning and Zoning Commission could then update the Zoning Regulations to implement POCD recommendations.

Encourage consistency between the long-term goals of the POCD and the annual operating budget as well as the capital budget. This would be in concert with the Board of Selectman, as well as the Board of Finance and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Seek ways to enhance revenue sources, including payments in lieu of taxes from local non-profits, or provisions for tangible municipal benefits. At the same time seek ways to reduce expenditures including education. This could be implemented with the help of NHCOC working with the Boards of Selectmen, Finance, and Education.

Continuing establishment of a geographic information system (GIS) to allow data to be shared among town departments and town organizations.

Colebrook Town Plan of Conservation and Development

Appendices

- I. Two Vignettes by Robert Grigg
 - II. CT DEEP Sandy Brook Natural Area Preserve Information
 - III. Colebrook Natural Resources Inventory
-

Appendix I (a.) (Reprinted from 2014 POCD)

Colebrook History at a glance

Today we find ourselves over a decade into a new century. What is it that makes this town “special”; why did you come here to live, either full or part time? This question can be asked equally of a new resident from an adjacent town or someone from New York City, and in all likelihood, the replies would be similar.

We have been blessed with what amounts to a virtual wall-to-wall carpet of mature forest growing on the southern reaches of a range of hills known as The Foothills of the Berkshires. In Colebrook, the highest elevation, 1552 feet, is reached by Pond Mountain; the lowest, 510 feet, occurs on the surface of Still River as it exits town into Barkhamsted. The Berkshires in western Massachusetts are the southern extension of two mountain systems, the Taconics and the Green Mountains. All are part of the Northern Appalachians.

At the heart of our highway system are two state roads: Conn. Route 8 running north-south on the eastern side of town and Conn. Route 183, running northwest-southeast from the Winchester town line to the extreme northwest corner almost at the Massachusetts state line. The topography is such that with few exceptions, it is not possible to have a straight road going very far in any direction. Scattered about town there are several locations that lend themselves to a neighborhood environment. Initially, these were agricultural sites; flat land alongside rivers or the bottoms of what had long before had been glacial lakebeds, now covered with rich, dark loam. District names such as North Colebrook, Colebrook Center, Robertsville, Colebrook River and Millbrook mark these locations. The road network connecting these neighborhoods looks like a tortured spider web as it negotiates our geological obstacles.

The work parties sent into the virgin forest in the mid eighteenth century to create roads and begin initial land clearing in what was to be Colebrook found not one lake or other body of standing water. There was an adequate supply of waterpower however in Sandy Brook, running diagonally across town from northwest to southeast, the West Branch of the Farmington River, Center Brook/Loon Brook (originally named Mill Brook throughout its entire length), and Still River tucked into the southeast corner of the township. Of all the rivers having potential to power waterwheels, none exceeded Still River. The original owners of Colebrook were a group from Windsor, Connecticut, known as The Proprietors. These men were charged by the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut with preparing the area for colonization. The first task was to create roads, and the men who made them had to be paid; therefore, the real estate considered the most valuable was set aside to be sold to the highest bidder for this purpose. Still River, beginning with the falls eventually known as Tunxis, containing three other major mill sites in just over a quarter mile, was chosen for this purpose.

The first industrial use at this site was a complex consisting of 11 buildings centered on an iron forge in 1770. All throughout the War of Independence, this facility turned out not only iron products, but also high quality steel. Chief among the steel products were bits with which the cannon manufactured in Salisbury, Conn, were bored. The steel products produced in Robertsville were truly of inestimable value to Washington’s military campaigns.

Contemporary to this were two other sites in Colebrook with major forges; the industrial site on Center Brook owned by the Rockwell family, and another on the Colebrook-Norfolk town line owned in part by the Phelps family. These two

families, the Rockwells and the Phelps, remained the dominant political and commercial powers throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and indeed remain town benefactors to this day.

After the War of 1812, iron never regained its former importance and was replaced by lumbering and animal husbandry such as Merino sheep and cattle for beef and cheese. One major exception to this was a cotton mill that operated in Colebrook River from 1840 - 1890. It averaged 100 employees, and was thus the largest employer the town has ever had.

A railroad came to Winsted in 1841, effectively curtailing further industrial development in Colebrook, as well as eventually forcing existing businesses such as the cotton mill to close down.

In 1871 a railroad was created reaching from Hartford to the Hudson River Valley, which passed through Winsted and Norfolk. This route, while never being very lucrative, never-the-less allowed business men with offices in New York City to come here for summers or even relaxing weekends. Land prices were depressed around here following the Civil War, and former farm land,

for the most part denuded of trees, much of it used for charcoal making, but as a consequence affording spectacular views, could be picked up for a song. Thus, the role of the “summer people” was established, one which is more prevalent now than at any previous period.

The most dramatic event that has ever taken place in Colebrook was the creation of two dams and reservoirs on the West Branch of the Farmington River by the Metropolitan District Commission. This took place over a period of years beginning in the 1930's and culminating with the completion of the Colebrook River Dam in 1964. Below the waters of Colebrook River Lake lie the foundation stones of nearly 100 dwellings, shops and mills.

Today urban sprawl, industrialization and the general rigors of late 20th and early 21st century living have left vast areas of the northeast, in particular the New York Metropolitan Area and the so-called Northeast Corridor, devoid of clean, verdant quietude. Something in the human soul yearns for open space, whether it is on the prairies, in the mountains, or just a piece of land where he and his neighbor need not live in each other's hip pocket. All the many years that Colebrook languished in the backwaters, consisting of land considered all but useless, and which could be picked up for \$1.00 an acre, has, in the 21st century, found herself in the most admirable of positions. We have something that cannot be manufactured by man; we have unspoiled natural beauty, and we have it in easy commuting distance from centers of high-tech employment such as New York and the Connecticut River Valley. Having recognized that, it should be obvious that all of us have an obligation to retain and protect those attributes that make this the wonderful place to live that it is.

Appendix I (b.)

Sandy Brook

Sandy Brook arises at York Lake, at an elevation of 1550 feet, in the township of Sandisfield, Massachusetts. It flows 5 miles southeastward through Massachusetts, traverses ½ mile of the northeastern corner of the township of Norfolk, Connecticut and merges 7 ½ miles later into Still River in southeastern Colebrook. During this short 13mile stretch, it drops some 1,015 feet, 662 of them in Colebrook.

There are three principal watercourses within Colebrook that divide the landscape into separate watersheds. The greatest volume belongs to the West Branch of the Farmington River as it flows southward from Massachusetts through the northeastern section of Colebrook enroute to its ultimate conjunction with the Connecticut River at Windsor. The largest geographical watershed in town belongs to Sandy Brook, which, while carrying less water than the West Branch of the Farmington, drains a larger area due in part to its northwest-southeast orientation through the center of the township.

The third, and smallest watershed is that of Mill Brook, which rises in Norfolk, courses through southwest Colebrook and eventually joins Mad River in Winchester. All three of these systems eventually merge into the Farmington River, which then, as previously stated, joins the Connecticut River and flows into Long Island Sound.

The uplands that give birth to Sandy Brook are near the southern end of Massachusetts's Berkshire Mountains. These highlands are considered to be Connecticut's most rugged and picturesque region.

The most recognizable characteristic feature of this region are high, steep-sided plateaus, topped by streamlined hills and bedrock knobs, a gift of the Wisconsin Glaciation. This event began in what is now New England some 85,000 years ago, peaked 20-25,000 years ago and began receding some 16,000 years ago. Reforestation followed closely on the heels of the retreating ice, and by 9,000 to 6,000 years ago, paleo-Indians were hunting in what is now Colebrook.

Although the world is today believed to be approximately 4.6 billion years old, realistically for us in Colebrook at least, it need not go back further than 500 million, or 179th of the total. The world at that time consisted of several continent-sized land masses with many smaller groups of islands scattered over its surface. Slowly geologic forces within the planet moved these landmasses about, until eventually they coalesced into one huge supercontinent. What was to become Connecticut was somewhere in its interior, subjected to intense pressure by the colliding continents which caused our pre-existing stone to become squeezed, subjected to intense heat and elevated.

200 million years ago, the continuing geologic engines within the Earth began breaking up this supercontinent. Future Connecticut found herself on the edge of what would become North America. Our corner of northwestern Connecticut is the only part within the state that consists of the original, or Proto-North America geologic formations. Because of the cataclysmic events it had been subjected to, our basic stone became what is today defined as metamorphic, or altered, with some consisting of minerals which are harder than others and more resistant to erosion, while other, softer areas erode more rapidly.

In all the Earth's history, the one constant is the force called erosion; it is never ceasing, constantly wearing down anything that gained elevation over the surrounding terrain. Because of this, we can today state that the surface which we call home, and which seems to us to be forever unchanged, has in reality had 5 to 7 miles of material removed over the past 250 million years. In light of this, we must conclude that there is today no correlation between the present courses of rivers and those from which they are descended.

Colebrook does not contain any sedimentary rock, such as bracket us to the west by the marbles of the Housatonic River Valley, or easterly by the sandstones of the Connecticut River Valley. Because of the soft nature of these rocks, water action rapidly wears them downward. Rivers such as the Farmington and Sandy Brook have established courses dictated by the differences in hardness of various rock masses.

There was good reason why Colebrook and Barkhamsted comprise the last land in the state previously uninhabited. The original owners, called Proprietors, were from Windsor, and for the most part considered themselves to be farmers, or tradesmen supporting the farming industry.

Because of the inherent difficulties imposed by the north-south ridges with then-steep, rocky sides, our land surface was not pioneered until all other acreage was utilized. Once the virgin forest, or some of it at least, had been removed and a rudimentary road system established, streams with the potential of producing water power could be harnessed. Sandy Brook, with 7 ½ miles lying within the boundaries of Colebrook, and with a drop of some 662 feet, provided some 10 mill sites, with several others on tributaries.

Historically, man's association with Sandy Brook can be traced to early Colonial times. A Boston merchant by the name of Sandie, or Sandy, had a contract with the British army to supply hay to their cavalry. He decided to utilize a large open area within the virgin forest in what is now western Massachusetts. This so-called interval land had been created by the Native Americans as an area which would encourage animals and birds in their food chain, thus making hunting a much more manageable task. This particular open land had been created around a series of quite powerful and unfluctuating springs, thus Sandie, the first European to utilize the hay produced by the native grasses, had his name applied to the map in the form of "Sandie's Field" and "Sandie's Brook", which have since acquired modern spellings.

In the waning years of the 20th century, evidence was uncovered near the banks of Sandy Brook indicating that a Paleo-Indian ceremonial site existed perhaps as early as 6,000 years before the present. This site, seen by, but not as yet investigated by the state archeologist, holds promise to be the largest pristine site within the state. In order to prevent contamination, its exact location must not be revealed until after a scientific investigation has been conducted.

As we embark upon the 21st century, Sandy Brook remains as she always has - providing a flow of unpolluted water for

fishing, white water kayaking and other forms of recreation, as well as providing esthetically one of the premier streams within the entire region.

Robert Grigg, In memoriam 1932-2016

Town of Colebrook, Conn.

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

Appendix II

SANDY BROOK NATURAL AREA PRESERVE DESCRIPTION

The Preserve, lying astride the Northwest Highlands and the Northwest Uplands Ecoregions, consists of those portions of Sandy Brook and the adjacent uplands of the Algonquin State Forest lying with 100 feet of Sandy Brook in the town of Colebrook. The uplands, encompassing 43 acres, protect the adjacent salmon and native Brook trout fishery, create a scenic corridor and provide habitat and a migration corridor for upland wildlife. Sandy Brook is considered the highest-ranking Atlantic salmon restoration stream in the Farmington River Basin. The excellent aquatic habitat within the watercourse supports a diverse and abundant benthic macroinvertebrate community and a diverse number of native fish including:

<u>Scientific Name</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<i>Anguilla rostrata</i>	<i>Salvelinus fontinalis</i>
<i>Catostomus commersoni</i>	American eel
<i>Etherostoma olmstedii</i>	White sucker
<i>Lepomis gibbosus</i>	Tessellated darter
<i>Micropterus salmoides</i>	Pumpkinseed
<i>Notropis bifrenatus</i>	Largemouth bass
<i>Rhinichthys atratula</i>	Bridled shiner
<i>Rhinichthys cataractae</i>	Blacknose dace
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Longnose dace
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Atlantic salmon
	Brown trout
	Brook trout

In addition to its value as an aquatic habitat, this is also a very scenic watercourse, featuring cascades and pools interspersed among large boulders and bedrock outcrops, stepping down along an extensive rocky streamcourse. The adjacent steep slopes are heavily forested, serving to shade the stream and provide habitat for upland wildlife. Major portions of Sandy Brook lie within the Kitchel Wilderness Preserve; the preserve designation complements the state's efforts to provide more protection to this outstanding natural watercourse.

Protected Resources within the proposed Preserve include the following state-listed species and significant natural communities and features:

Scientific Name Common Name 1998 State Last Date of Status Observation

Plants

Corallorhiza trifida Early coralroot Threatened 1995 *Ribes glandulosum* Skunk currant Endangered 1995

Animals

Ambystoma Jefferson salamander Special Concern 1982 *jeffersonianum*

Natural Communities and Features

Forested Ravine Habitat

Diverse Aquatic Habitats

Diverse Aquatic Animal Community

Natural Resources Inventory 2024 Colebrook, Connecticut

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Colebrook Conservation Commission is deeply grateful to the Farmington River Coordinating Committee for its grant supporting the Natural Resources Inventory. Commission members and alternates who worked on the inventory over the past two years were Linda Bickford, Michael Corbin, Joyce Hemingson, Kim Janak, Roberta Lawton, Jane McAndrew, Elizabeth Norman, Edna Travis, Shayne Young, and Duncan Wilber.

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We also appreciate the Colebrook photographers, young and older, who submitted images taken in our town to the Natural Resources Inventory Photo Contest. Their photos have enlivened these pages, and some can be viewed in the Natural Resources Inventory Photo Gallery on the town website.

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INTRODUCTION

Each town is mandated to update its Town Plan of Conservation and Development every ten years. The Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) is part of that plan, and its goal is to create a baseline inventory of the town's natural resources to be used as a tool in land use and open space planning activities, supporting the goals of natural resource conservation and economic development.

The 2024 NRI was made possible by a grant from the [Farmington River Coordinating Committee](#), whose support is greatly appreciated. This is the first time that the Colebrook Conservation Commission solicited field surveys and created lists to highlight and celebrate the biodiversity that is in Colebrook's 32.9 square miles. The number of maps was expanded to 19, and information on geology, soils, birds, lichens, insects, mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians, plants, and historic resources is new. Climate and fungi deserve to be added in the future.

The 2024 NRI lists are a beginning to what could be found. The Colebrook Conservation Commission hopes they will add to the appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world around us, which is one of the benefits of living in our rural town. We hope it will also encourage those growing up here to explore and be inspired by those who have already done so and left a record of what they have seen and what has been conserved.

Previous Natural Resource Inventories

The Farmington River Watershed Association ([FRWA](#)) worked with the Town of Colebrook on the 2004 and 2014 NRIs. In 2014 it helped with new data and provided information about critical habitats and potential vernal pools that was originally prepared for the Farmington River Coordination Committee Management Plan.

In 1991, the first Plan of Conservation and Development for the Town of Colebrook noted that the town is "fortunate to enjoy extensive natural resource areas in an unspoiled and protected condition." That Town Plan encouraged the improvement of the local economy, job opportunities, and tax base "in a form that is compatible with the Town's rural character, its water resources and the limitations of its road and utility systems." The 2004 Town Plan surveyed local residents and found that they "ranked the quality of the town's natural environment as one of their highest community values." The Plan recommended: "Economic development in the town should continue to be implemented within the framework of respecting and enhancing the town's unique rural character."

Project Overview

A very difficult question facing local communities today is how best to direct growth and development in a way that is compatible with protecting a community's natural resources. The first step in any effort to address such an issue is to understand the current status of natural resources and land use in an area.

The Natural Resources Inventory is a summarization, in map, report and list form, of Colebrook's natural resources and the current natural resource management structure. The maps express the existing state of a community's natural resource base, and help identify areas that are of critical concern for natural resource conservation, as well as areas that are most appropriate for development. The resource inventory is completed is a Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

environment. GIS assembles, stores, and manipulates geographic (spatial) data and can analyze the data for conservation and planning purposes. Municipalities and natural resource conservation groups are increasingly turning to GIS as the tool for developing resource studies because of its flexibility and power in adding, manipulating and analyzing data.

It is important to reiterate that NRI can be used not only to identify appropriate areas for protection in a community, but also appropriate areas for development based on their natural resource features. The purpose of the process is to establish an information baseline that can empower local decision makers with the data they need to make informed decisions regarding development and natural resource management issues.

Note:

Data Accuracy: The GIS data used in this report comes from many different sources and therefore has different levels of accuracy. It should be considered appropriate for town level planning exercises, but may not be adequate for parcel level analysis. Some of the data is general in nature, and some provides significant detail. It will be important to field verify any information used in an actual decision making process. As the availability of GIS data grows and improves it will be a relatively simple process to update and improve this document.

Map Descriptions

1) Locator: Farmington River Watershed & Colebrook

This map shows the extent of the Farmington River and its watershed, the route of the Farmington River through Massachusetts and Connecticut, and the location of the Town of Colebrook. The watershed is 609 square miles total, and Colebrook is about 33 square miles of that. Sandy Brook and the Still River are the two most significant tributaries of the Farmington River that flow through Colebrook.

2) Aerial Imagery

Data Source: State of Connecticut Aerial Imagery (Spring 2024)

3) Topographic Map

Colebrook lies in the western highlands of Connecticut, an area that has the highest elevations in the state (the highest point being roughly 2,100ft at Bear Mtn in Salisbury). The highest point in Colebrook is 1,552ft at an unnamed peak near McClaveville. Longtime residents know this area of the Litchfield hills was called the “icebox of Connecticut” for good reason. The microclimate caused by elevation and atmospheric moisture can produce hot, humid summers, sometimes with very violent thunderstorms (even tornadoes), and cold winters with heavy snowfall or icestorms. However, in recent years Connecticut has experienced warmer temperatures year round. The topography also makes this part of the state very beautiful, and holds an interesting array of plant and animal life. Data Source: National Geographic Society, i-cub.

4) Parcels and Zoning

The Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations specify districts and zones within the town. The two Historic Districts were established by the Colebrook Historic District Commission in 1963.

The R-1 Village District is the area in and near Colebrook’s historic village center where special provisions are established in order to maintain and protect the distinctive character, landscape, and historic value identified in the Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

The R-2 Residential District comprises most of the town and is for rural, agricultural, and/or residential uses appropriate to the environmental characteristics of the land (such as soil types, terrain, and infrastructure capacity).

The General Business (GB) District designates areas for business uses appropriate to the environmental characteristics of the land (such as soil types, terrain, and infrastructure capacity).

As authorized by CGS Section 8-2j, the Village District Overlay Zone is established in the Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations Section 4.A in certain areas in order to encourage development consistent with the village aspects of Colebrook and to help preserve and enhance the distinctive character, landscape, and historic structures.

The Flood Hazard Area Overlay Zone is established in the Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations Section 4.B to implement the provisions of the National Flood Insurance Program. See Map 4, Areas of Special Flood Hazard.

Data Sources: Colebrook Assessor (2024); Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations (2021); Connecticut Statewide LiDAR (2016).

5) Subwatershed Basins

There are five subwatershed basins in Colebrook: Farmington River, Mad River, Sandy Brook, Slocum Brook, and Still River. Within each of these five subwatersheds are sub-basins, shown by their boundaries to be of various size and shape.

Based on topography, the water from these sub-basins drains from spring, creeks, ponds, and wetlands into the larger tributaries. Data Source: Connecticut DEEP (2023)

6) Wetlands Soils

In Connecticut, wetlands are officially designated by soil type. The Connecticut Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act, Connecticut General Statutes Section 22a-38, defines wetland soils to include "Any of the soil types designated as poorly drained, very poorly drained, alluvial, and floodplain by the National Cooperative Soil Survey". This map shows the general location of soils that are defined as Inland Wetlands and may be subject to regulation. It is useful for planning purposes, but "does not eliminate the need for onsite sampling, testing, and detailed study of specific sites for intensive uses" (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service).

Data Sources: Wetland Soils: CT DEEP, USGS SSURGO (2024), Watercourses & Waterbodies: USGS NHD 2.0 (2024)

7) Water Quality

This map shows information related to the quality of Colebrook's surface and groundwater features. Data includes:

- a. **Water Quality Classification**—Section 303 of the Federal Clean Water Act requires states to adopt water quality standards and classifications for both surface and groundwater. Each classification is based on certain standards and the water bodies' ability to support certain uses such as drinking, boating and swimming. Water Quality Standards set an overall policy for DEEP in accordance with Section 22a-426 of the General Statutes. The [Water Quality Standards and Classification Fact Sheet](#) is available on the DEEP website. Source: Connecticut DEEP (2023)
- b. **Dams and Sewage Treatment Plant**—While dams can be beneficial for flood control and hydropower productions they also can limit fish and energy passage up and down river and stream systems. The CT DEEP lists 18 dams present in the town of Colebrook. Further study should be done to assess the impacts and utility of the dams to determine if opportunities exist to improve aquatic habitat. Appendix III provides a list of the dams. The treatment plant shown near the outflow of Lake Triangle is under the jurisdiction of DEEP. Source: Connecticut DEEP (2023)
- c. **US Geological Survey (USGS) Stream Gage**—Colebrook has one USGS stream gage on the Still River in the Robertsville section of town. Since 1951 the gage has provided ongoing data regarding stream flow in the Still River. This information is extremely important for many reasons, including flood warnings, diversion and discharge permitting and establishing baseline data for comparison use with other streams of similar characteristics. The latest information of the gage can be found at hydrograph and station description for [01186500 on the USGS website](https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/01186500/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D&showMedian=false) <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/monitoring-location/01186500/#parameterCode=00065&period=P7D&showMedian=false>

Data Sources: CT DEEP (2023); USGS NHD 2.0 (2024)

8) Drinking Water Resources

Potential groundwater supply refers to areas of surficial materials that show characteristics of supplying groundwater. These areas are deposits of stratified drift left by the last glacial period, which ended roughly 12,000 years ago. These deposits are of various sized clay, silt, sand and gravel, which allows for groundwater recharge through the increase pore space in the materials. They also can play an important role in providing surface water flow. In general, the courser the material, the greater ability the material has to store groundwater. The lowest yield areas are sand, while the highest yield areas are the much coarser grained gravel, which has larger pore space and can hold and transmit water at higher volumes. Colebrook possesses several areas of surficial materials that have an established groundwater source potential, or a possible future groundwater source potential for public water supply needs. Such availability of ground water for drinking water supply must be assessed in the context of the impacts to hydrologically connected and surface water areas. Any such proposed withdrawals are regulated under Connecticut General State Diversion Law.

Data Sources: Connecticut DEEP (2010, 2024)

9) Areas of Special Flood Hazard

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) works with communities across the country to help them understand and prepare for emergencies, such as floods. The agency produces the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM), the official map of a community which delineates both the special flood hazard areas and the insurance risk premium zones applicable to a community. The Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations effective July 11, 2021, Section 4.B, pages 36-56 state the purpose and objectives for the Flood Hazard Area Overlay District: "The Town of Colebrook has voluntarily participated in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) since August 3, 1981. The NFIP is founded on a mutual agreement between the federal government and each participating community. Local, state, and federal governments must share roles and responsibilities to meet the goals and objectives of the NFIP. The community's role is

of paramount importance. Property owners are able to receive federally-subsidized flood insurance only if the community enacts and enforces the minimum floodplain regulations required for participation in the NFIP.”

Data Sources: FEMA (2024); Town of Colebrook Planning & Zoning Regulations (2021)

10) Road Salt Permeability

This map shows soil water potential, which is a measure of whether soil water will move and how much water is available for biological processes. Soil with high water potential is the best, because road salt can move through it quicker and less is retained, which is good for plants and organisms living in the soil. At the other end of the scale, soil with low water potential does not move road salt well, and the salt is likely to accumulate there, leading to problems in the soil.

We depend on road salt to keep roads safe when there is ice and snow, however according to the [United States Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) the benefits come with opportunities for improvement: “Road salt can contaminate drinking water, kill or endanger wildlife, increase soil erosion, and damage private and public property. Alternative methods are needed to mitigate these drawbacks.”

DEEP has a road salt FAQ online

<https://portal.ct.gov/deep/remediation--site-clean-up/road-salt/road-salt-faqs>

and a potable water program page about steps to take for concerns with well water:

<https://portal.ct.gov/deep/remediation--site-clean-up/road-salt/salt-investigations>

Data Sources: Natural Resources Conservation Service NRCS; Connecticut DEEP (2024); USGS NHD 2.0 (2024); EPA (2024)

11) Bedrock Geology

This map from shows the types of bedrock that underlie the town and the fault lines where the different types meet. These rocks are among the oldest in the state, formed under great pressure as pieces of the continental crust collided. Much later (20,000 to 30,000 years ago) the last glacier slowly travelled through Colebrook in a south-southeast direction, eroding the bedrock, carving valleys, rounding hilltops, and depositing debris as boulders, gravel, sand and mud. See **Appendix III** for Randolph Steinen’s full report, *Topographic and Geological Resources of Colebrook*.

Data Sources: Rodgers Bedrock Geology of CT, CT DEEP (1985); Connecticut DEEP (2024); USGS NHD 2.0 (2024)

12) Surficial Materials

This map shows the deposits that are over the town’s bedrock but beneath the organic soil layer. Surficial material ranges from very small in size, such as sand, up to gravel and till and then boulders. It may be a mix of those. Swamps and artificial fill are other categories, as is allium — deposits from lakes and streams that is over sand and gravel.

Data Sources: Connecticut DEEP (1985, 2024)

13) Farmland Soils

This map indicates soils that are prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and farmland of local importance. These categories are based on soil type, following the Code of Federal Regulations, CFR Title 7, part 657. It identifies the location and extent of the most suitable land that is available for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.

Data Sources: Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA); CT DEEP (2024); USGS NHD 2.0 (2024)

14) Land Use

The land use information on this map is from the most recent valuation of Colebrook properties by the Assessor’s office. Land use is broken down into the categories of Single Family; Multi-family; Church; Commercial; Forest; Industrial; Municipal; Public Service; Vacant Land; Tillable C/D; Permanently Protected Land (Committed); Uncommitted Open Space (land that has historically been open space but is not guaranteed to remain so); Utility/Water Company; and Camp Jewell (YMCA). Sources: Land Use, Town of Colebrook (2023); Parcel Boundaries, Town of Colebrook Assessor (2024)

15) Forest Resources

This map shows Core Forest Habitat in Colebrook and the percentage of protection that it has. The term Core Forest means a forest surrounded by other forests, and in Connecticut, it is defined as being relatively far (more than 300 feet) from the forest-nonforest boundary, such as a road. Colebrook has many acres of Core Forest Habitat comprised of oak, hickory, beech, maple, birch and hemlock that provide a stable space for many species of wildlife that cannot tolerate significant disturbance.

The goal of Connecticut’s [2020 Forest Action Plan](#) is “Keeping forest as forest.” Since 1985, our state has lost more than 15% of its Core Forest. The loss diminishes water purification and habitat values, and could result in heavier runoff,

which might lead to poorer water quality and impaired habitat. Data Sources: DEEP (2024), Colebrook Land Conservancy (2024), Litchfield Hills Greenprint (2024), Housatonic Valley Association (2024), The Nature Conservancy (2024)

16) Open Space and Permanently Protected Lands

Open space lands make up approximately 50.3% of Colebrook. The two primary owners of this open space are the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) with 3,941 acres and the State of Connecticut with 2,885 acres, totaling almost two-thirds of the 10,602 acres of open space. The Division of Forestry of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) manages the Algonquin and Tunxis State Forest parcels in Colebrook. Other owners of open space include the Town of Colebrook, the YMCA, non-profit land conservation groups, private sportsman's clubs, and private associations. Colebrook's open space is also categorized as "committed" and "uncommitted." "Committed" open space is described as land that is permanently protected, either by outright ownership or through conservation easements. "Uncommitted" open space is land that historically has been open space, but is not guaranteed to remain so, such as sportsman's clubs.

Data Sources: Town of Colebrook Assessor (2024), The Colebrook Land Conservancy (2024), Litchfield Hills Greenprint (2024).

17) Development Constraints

This map provides an indication of where future development is limited and where it may be possible in town. Specific site investigations will be needed to confirm or deny the actual conditions on the ground. Areas shown with limited future development include Class I or II water utility land, state forest land, other committed open space, steep slopes (15% or greater), wetlands, or water bodies. Most of the constraints are due to the large MDC and state forest holdings.

Data Sources: Town of Colebrook Assessor (2024); Connecticut Statewide LiDAR (2016).

18) Critical Habitats and Vernal Pools

This map shows the DEEP's Critical Habitats, which are rare and specialized habitats that may in turn be home to rare wildlife. They are identified in the [CT State Wildlife Action Plan \(SWAP\)](#), currently being revised and formerly called the [CT Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy of 2015](#). Colebrook has a critical habitat called Dry Subacidic Forest, defined as "slow-growing forests, primarily on or near the summit of basalt or other mafic rocks; often dominated by white ash, hickories and hophornbeam, with few shrubs and an open grassy ground cover." The town-owned Charles Arnold Recreation Area has such a forest summit, characterized by oak, hickory and hophornbeam with a Pennsylvania sedge ground cover.

The potential vernal pools were derived from aerial photo interpretation through a project funded by the Farmington River Coordinating Committee in 2011. Some pools were verified through that project.

Data Sources: CT DEEP (June 2024); Farmington River Coordinating Committee report (2011); Homeowner on Pinney Street (2024)

19) Natural Diversity Data Base Areas

The Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) maps show approximate locations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species and important natural communities in Connecticut. The locations shown on the maps are based on information collected over the years by DEEP staff, scientists, and others. In some cases, an occurrence is from a historic record. The maps are intended to be a tool to show potential impacts to state-listed species. They are also used by groups wishing to find areas of potential conservation concern. The maps are updated periodically and new information is continually added to the data base. It is important to always use the most current version. Lichens are not presently included in the data base. Data Sources: NDDB, Connecticut DEEP (June 2024); USGS NHD 2.0 (2024).

????CLICK ON THE EACH LINK BELOW TO SEE THESE TOPICS:’
or should maps only be included in this document?

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