

Town of Enfield, Connecticut
Plan of Conservation & Development

Draft

Chapter II:
A Sustainable and Resilient Enfield



March 5, 2021

Prepared by:
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March 5, 2021

Laurie P. Whitten, CZEO, AICP
Director of Development Services
Town of Enfield
820 Enfield Street,
Enfield, CT 06082

Re: POCD – Draft Chapter II – Sustainability and Resilience

Dear Director Whitten:

This document provides draft narrative for what is conceptualized as Chapter II of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The draft chapter is about explaining sustainability and resilience and providing a framework for incorporating these concepts into the POCD. Therefore, this chapter can be drafted without public outreach and Steering Committee discussion. However, the draft should be reviewed by staff and the Committee and can be discussed and revised if needed.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald J. Poland".

Donald J. Poland, PhD, AICP
Planning Consultant

A Sustainable and Resilient Enfield

The key to creating and maintaining Enfield’s character and quality of life is to create a sustainable and resilient Enfield. While the concepts of sustainability and resiliency may appear or feel a bit abstract and their goals far reaching and idealistic, sustainability and resiliency do provide a pragmatic framework for thinking about community planning and the desired outcomes planning for improvement. While possibly unattainable, sustainability and resiliency provide direction—outcomes to be continuously working toward. This chapter provide a means for Enfield to conceptualize and understand sustainability and resiliency, while providing a framework for working towards a more sustainable and resilient Enfield.

Sustainability

The concept of sustainability is embodied throughout this Plan. The widely accepted definition established by the United Nations 1987 Brundtland Report (World Commission on the Environment and Development) explains sustainability as follows:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Doing so must integrate and balance economic, environmental, and social goals.

Key to conceptualizing sustainability and for sustainable development to be achieved, it is important to recognize the symbiotic relationship of the three core elements: economic, environmental, and social. For a community to be sustainable—working towards sustainable outcomes—it cannot simply work at one or two of the core elements but must be working at all three. In addition, the core elements emphasize the importance of balance, that one outcome (i.e., environmental sustainability) cannot be achieved if the community is not also economically and socially sustainable. Exhibit 1 illustrates the interaction of these variables.

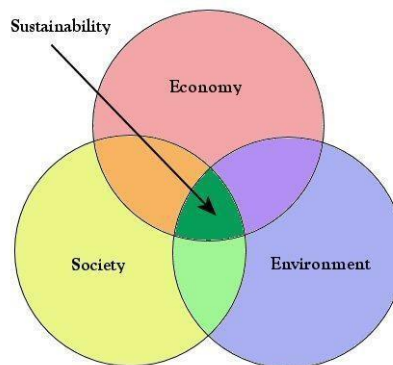


Exhibit 2-1
Sustainability Model Diagram

This Plan, as an overall outcome, seeks to create a dynamic balance between social wellbeing, economic prosperity, and environmental quality of the community within the context of the authority granted to the Planning and Zoning Commission under Connecticut State law. Although this Plan is divided into many individual chapters, to place emphasis on a thematic topic, in fact, no topic (or theme) may be thought of in isolation. Each thematic topic must be integrated into a framework where it may be evaluated and worked at in context with all planning topics which are discussed in this Plan.

Resiliency

Resilience is defined as the capacity (or capability) of a community to absorb disturbance (or change) and still retain its basic function and structure. In the context of community planning, resiliency shifts the focus from simply seeking to achieve the community's vision and goals (staying the intended course), to building capacity to adapt to and manage change. Communities (cities, towns, and metropolitan regions) are complex adaptive systems with multiple variable and forces at work. For example, as discussed above regarding sustainability, the multiple forces at work include economic, social, and environmental elements. These forces work at varying intensities, competing at times, and cooperating at other times. Together, with elements of spatial location and physical condition, these elements create the character of community—the kind of place that Enfield is—that is forever shifting and changing.

Key to resiliency—the capacity (or capability) of a community to absorb disturbance (or change) and still retain its basic function and structure—is diversity. Complex adaptive systems—a community—that is over reliant on a single industry (economic sector) or a certain type of housing (single-family homes) is less stable, more susceptible to disturbances, and at greater risk of losing their basic function and structure. Detroit, for example, being a community that was over reliant on the automobile industry, collapsed under the economic forces that reworked automotive manufacturing—economic forces that were beyond Detroit's control.

Planning, as a process and practice, is inherently a rigid top-down governance structure that assumes adequate knowledge of future change. In other words, planners (and planning commissions) assume a degree of confidence in what is right, or best, or what is to come and how-to best plan for what we need and want. However, resiliency and creating a resilient community is counter intuitive, and even at times contradictory to how communities conceptualize, understand, approach, and engage in the practice of planning, since the future is forever unknown and change inevitable. This does not mean we should not plan. What it does mean, is that if planning and municipal governance are to work toward resiliency, then they need to shift from a planning and governance approach that focuses mostly on vision and goals, to an approach that includes capacity building and management of the everyday.

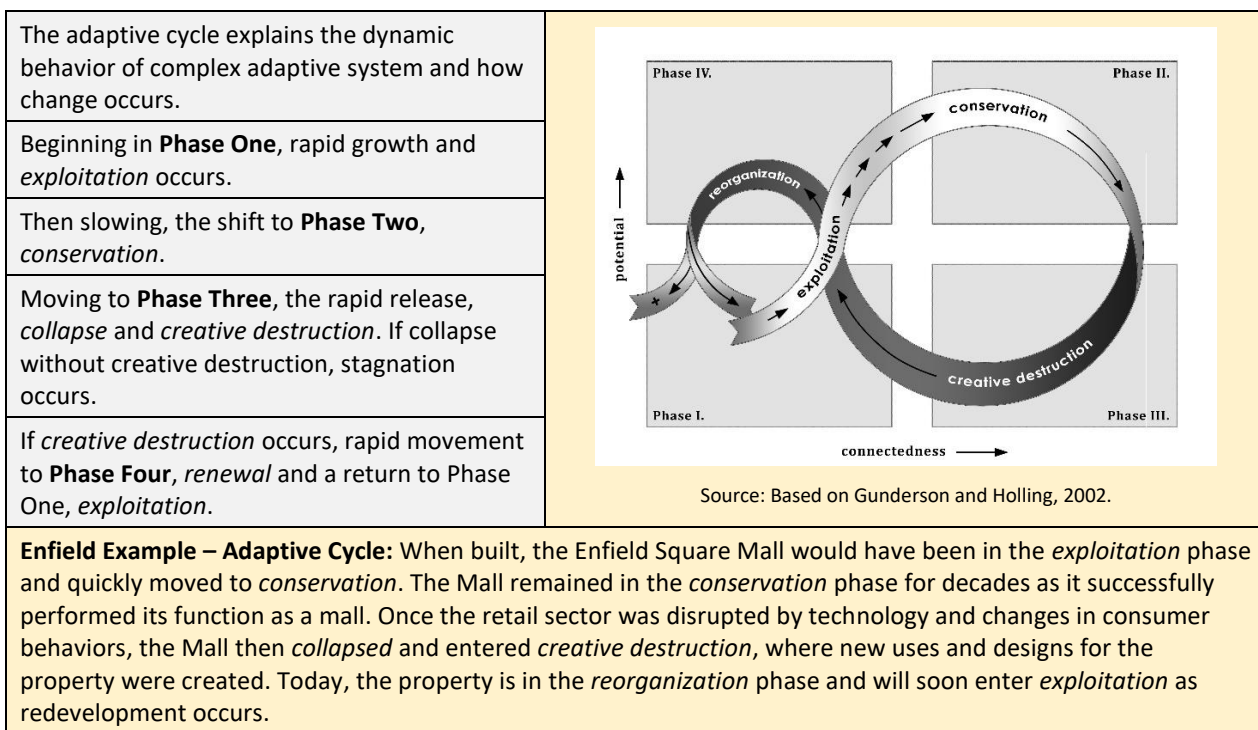
Such an approach to planning would:

- start with *embracing change* and the *simple notion that things change*,
- recognize that communities (municipalities) are *always shifting* around multiple equilibria and that change is *neither continuous and gradual nor chaotic*, but *episodic*,
- not *presume sufficient knowledge*, but the *recognition of our ignorance*.
- *keep options open*, fostering *novelty (innovation)* and *experimentation*, while embracing, not trying to resist or constrain *change*,
- *not assume that future events are expected*, but that they will be *unexpected*,

- *embrace diversity,*
- recognize the importance of and pay close attention to micro-practices and the *slow variables of change,*
- embrace and encourage *redundancies, overlapping responsibilities,* and incorporate both *top-down* and *bottom-up structures,*
- analysis, strategy development, and implementation would recognize the *regional context* and be scaled to fit the local context, and
- not focus on *capacities to predict or preordain the future,* but on the *capacity to devise systems that can absorb and accommodate future events in whatever unexpected form they may take.*

In this regard, *a resiliency approach to planning and governance is about Enfield having the capability and capacity to adapt to change.* This is about managing the everyday, doing the little things well, and not being afraid to embrace change.

Figure 2. The Adaptive Cycle



The Regulatory Framework

It can be argued that the current regulatory framework that Enfield (and all other Connecticut communities) follows (as prescribed by State law) sometimes forces the fragmentation of these issues (i.e., economic, social, and environmental). The preservation of wetlands, for example, is often analyzed without any analysis of social



or economic benefits. This Plan provides an opportunity to think about how conservation and development relate, and how compromise and balance must often be made to achieve what the Planning Commission concludes are the most important goals and outcomes. For example, sometimes the outcome of economic prosperity may be greater than the need of environmental conservation. Other times the outcome social justice may override the outcome economic prosperity. Therefore, the Commission and community must continuously work at balancing these different sustainability goals to achieve balance and the most desired outcome for the community.

Most Chapters of this Plan contain a discussion as to how its various components relate to the principles of sustainability and resiliency. Where appropriate, specific recommendations are made concerning regulatory changes which warrant further discussion to advance these principles.

In general, this Plan addresses Environmental Sustainability by:

- Recommending changes/refinements to existing regulations in the areas of floodplain protection, inland wetland protection, and aquifer protection.
- Recommending the adoption of regulations to manage stormwater in a more environmentally sensitive manner using a concept known as LID (Low Impact Development).
- Setting priorities for the acquisition/preservation of additional open space.
- Setting priorities for the management of existing open space assets and the construction of additional recreational trails.
- Recommending a reduction in the ratio of required parking to reduce impervious coverage.
- Creating opportunities for mixed-use developments that will allow residents to gain access to services, shopping, and recreation by walking and biking—reducing emissions.

Economic Sustainability by:

- Creating opportunities for commercial and industrial development that reflects the present and projected needs of the residents and businesses of Enfield.
- Carefully analyzing the community for innovative economic development opportunities.
- Recommending a reduction in the rate of required parking which will increase (re)development opportunities.
- Encouraging investments in land that will provide opportunities and potential for the expansion of Enfield Airport.
- Recommending a more user-friendly permitting process that is swift, simple, and certain—providing predictability and confidence in the commercial marketplace.
- Manage traffic and congestion along main arterials through roadway design and access management.

And Social Sustainability by:

- Creating additional opportunities for a broad range of housing that can meet the needs of both younger and older (a significant portion of Enfield's population)



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buyers and renters.

- Recommending ways to make Enfield more pedestrian and bike friendly by prioritizing locations for new sidewalk construction, the creation of bike lanes, and adding safer crosswalks.
- Encouraging the preservation of important historic structures which help define community character.

Collectively, the sustainability themes and outcomes above provide a resiliency framework, focused on the economic, social, and environmental forces that shape and create Enfield's character as a community. Working toward or implementing each of the items above and the other specific recommendations of this Plan will move Enfield toward being more sustainable and resilient. However, Enfield must not lose sight of the everyday, investing in itself, doing the little things well, building capacity, and managing well.