



The Northwestern Connecticut  
**REGIONAL PLANNING  
COLLABORATIVE**

## Village District Regulations



A case study containing information and resources on protecting and enhancing village centers.

February 2009

### OVERVIEW

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Most Litchfield County Towns enjoy and appreciate a village area that helps define the community and serves as a center for community and commercial activities. Connecticut zoning law allows towns to recognize and enhance such assets by the creation of Village Districts.

Village Districts may be established in “areas of distinctive character, landscape or historic value” as defined in the town’s Plan of Conservation and Development. Regulations may address the design and placement of buildings, maintenance of public views, design of public roads, and other elements necessary to maintain and protect village character. Standard zoning regulations do not generally address aesthetic and design issues in such detail.

Village District reviews and permitting are in addition to any required other zoning, building, or Historic District permits. Village Districts may overlap Historic Districts, but Village District standards may regulate more than just the visible exterior of buildings.

Many Connecticut towns, including Kent, Ridgefield, and Farmington have adopted Village District regulations. Such regulations afford towns considerable flexibility in promoting economic, cultural, and social vitality, while preserving the defining characteristics of the community center

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[www.nwctplanning.org](http://www.nwctplanning.org)

- **Benefits:** Ensuring that new development and major renovations are compatible with existing village character.
- **Challenges:** Defining distinctive characteristics and establishing efficient review procedures, including development of design guidelines, to enhance appropriate development.

### KEY ISSUES TO CONSIDER

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#### 1. Distinctive Characteristics

The standards must be consistent with distinctive characteristics, such as architectural style, building materials, or building size, identified in the Town Plan, or with the Connecticut Historical Commission Guidelines. To reflect local conditions and priorities, towns are better served by identifying such characteristics in their Town Plan.

#### 2. Compatibility Objectives

The standards should promote the compatibility of development with such existing characteristics as building and streetscape patterns; road network and open space patterns, distinctive buildings and sight line vistas, and other objectives specified in the statutes. Many towns have specifically identified through the development of design guidelines.

## KEY ISSUES (CONTINUED)

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### 3. Village District Consultant

Village District applications must be reviewed by a Village District Consultant, which may be a town-established design review board or an outside consultant.

### 4. Application Review

Determining the extent of necessary review for every construction and rehabilitation project that occurs in the village center could be overwhelming for a commission. The authorizing statutes simply state that any “new construction, substantial reconstruction, and rehabilitation of properties” can be reviewed for compatibility with village district characteristics. Therefore, regulations can also include pre-application reviews and presentations, to determine whether village district review will be necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### 5. Criteria

Because the statutes require that zoning denials cite specific regulations under which an application is denied, local regulations should include specific standards and criteria by which such decisions may be guided.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

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As noted, the preferred method for establishing and defining a Village District is through the Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The POCD would consider the following issues:

- **District Boundaries:** The planning process typically engages the residents and business owners in the community and seeks input to such significant considerations as creating new zones, including Village Districts.
- **Design Guidelines:** Planning may include at least preliminary identification of the physical aspects (building layout, streetscapes, traffic patterns, etc.) and architectural character (e.g., building styles, roof types, building materials) of existing development for the purposes of defining compatibility in any regulations. Planning research would identify patterns in the existing built environment that should be considered in design guidelines. Such guidelines may be illustrated by photographs or sketches of existing or preferred structural features, streetscapes, landscaping, and other features.
- **Site Development:** Planning identifies site layout criteria to ensure development compatibility and to further objectives pertaining to pedestrian access, traffic and parking, low impact stormwater management, and other development mitigation.
- **Open Space/Scenic Vistas:** Town Plans typically identify open space priorities, including vistas, which would provide guidance to the maintenance of public views and preservation of village character.

## RESOURCES

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### [Northwestern Connecticut Regional Planning Collaborative](#)

Find a copy of this case study, example regulations, and other links on the “Resources” page of our website.

### **Connecticut General Statutes**

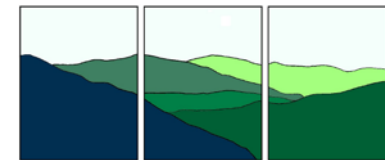
Review the authorizing statutes for Village Districts. CGS [Section 8-2j](#)

### [Secretary of the Interior Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings](#)

These Guidelines are referenced in the Village District Statutes as an alternative to the definition of distinctive character in the Town Plan.

### **Sample Regulations/Design Guidelines**

- **Ridgefield, Connecticut** [Village District Regulations and Design Guidelines](#)
- **Ledyard, Connecticut** [Ledyard Village District Design Manual](#)



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