



The Northwestern Connecticut
**REGIONAL PLANNING
COLLABORATIVE**

**Visualizing
Density**
A Workshop by
Julie Campoli



A summary of the May 15, 2009 workshop sponsored by the Partnership for Strong Communities, the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association, LISC, and others.

May 2009

WHY DENSITY?

Increased housing opportunity in our small communities will require consideration of higher density housing. Inaccurate perceptions of density as negative make this a difficult challenge.

The Partnership for Strong Communities (“Partnership”), recognizing this problem, organized a workshop entitled “Visualizing Density” to present a more accurate perspective on higher density housing development. The Incentive Housing Zone studies underway by the Northwestern Connecticut Regional Planning Collaborative are evaluating the feasibility of this type of housing in six northwestern Connecticut towns.

Northwestern Connecticut towns have recognized the need to promote housing opportunity, so there is no need to repeat the rationale for considering higher density options. However, some facts and figures prepared by the Partnership that emphasize the urgency of the problem are provided below.

DENSITY IS NOT CROWDING

Julie Campoli has written the book on housing density, illustrated with examples from all across the country that demonstrate how higher density housing can be effectively and appropriately integrated into communities. Julie’s principal point is that density is not crowding; density is a number, crowding is a subjective perception. Therefore, design is the challenge, not density. Julie illustrated the point with photos illustrating smart design, landscaping, detail, and amenities that result in

attractive higher density developments. All of the photos presented may be accessed through the [Partnership web site](#).

DENSITY IS NOT CLUSTER

Higher density housing to promote housing opportunity is also not cluster subdivision development. The primary goal of cluster, or conservation, subdivision designs is the preservation of open space.

While greenspace and landscaping are important considerations in designing density, preservation of large open space tracts is counterproductive to the goals of a higher density, workforce housing development.

DENSITY IN NORTHWEST CONNECTICUT

The presentation and interactive exercise at the May 15th workshop were interesting and helpful, identifying the qualities and characteristics that define reactions to density at various levels and different designs. Especially pertinent is the recognition of the importance of the overall context- how the development fits into the existing neighborhood.

This is relevant to our small communities, where higher density housing is most appropriate in existing village areas, where it already exists but is often not allowed under current zoning regulations.

Although the examples presented did not illustrate higher density housing in the small scale context that we experience in small communities, the principles are the same. Important considerations are such things as:

1) **greenspace;**



2) **design and architectural diversity;**



3) **proximity to village areas, shopping, and employment; and**
4) **walkability.**

FROM THE PARTNERSHIP WEBSITE:

41% - The percentage of Connecticut teachers 50+-years-old who will need to be replaced in the next decade.

17% - The projected decline in Connecticut public school enrollment from the 2004-'05 height through 2020-'21.

128 of 193 - The number of public school districts (66%) that between the 2006/7 and 2007/8 school years had no growth or falling enrollment in grades 1 to 12.

100+ - The number of Connecticut municipalities with volunteer fire departments.

\$3 to \$4 million - The approximate amount a typical town must spend to create a career fire department if it can't find volunteers.

31 of 169 - The number of Connecticut municipalities where 10% or more of the housing stock is considered affordable by the state.

13% - The increase in family homelessness in Connecticut in 2008.

30% - The approximate percentage of Connecticut households that rent.

24% - The percentage of renting households that earn less than 50% of median income and spend more than half of it on housing.

9.2% - The average decline in median sales prices of Connecticut homes in 2008.

60% - How much higher Connecticut housing costs are compared to the national average (7th highest median monthly rent payment [\$886] and the 5th highest median monthly mortgage payment [\$1,870]).

30.1% - Connecticut's highest-in-the-nation percentage loss of 25-34-year-olds between 1990 and 2006.

\$1,960 to \$11,554 - Local property taxes paid by a household in a new home, based on earnings and the home that household can afford.

Our challenge in Northwestern Connecticut is to apply these principles at the smaller scale of our rural villages, and that's exactly what our Incentive Housing Zone studies are doing. We look forward to working on this with you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Julie Campoli is a landscape architect associated with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. She co-authored the book *Visualizing Density* with Alex MacLean. The book may be purchased through the [Lincoln Institute web page](#), which also offers addition information on housing, including a tool kit on visualizing density.

All of the photos presented at the workshop may be accessed [here](#) through the Partnership web site.

Illustrations of examples of higher density housing developments in Connecticut may be found at the Partnership web site [here](#).

For More Information
Contact Collaborative Staff
www.nwctplanning.org

