

# **Voluntown, Connecticut**

## **Plan of Conservation and Development**

### **2020-2030**



Fourth Draft- For Discussion Only

September 11, 2019



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## **Voluntown Planning & Zoning Commission**

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<b>Members:</b>	Tracey Hanson	First Selectmen
	Ron Millovistch	Selectmen
	Mark "Skip" Oulton	Selectmen

## Table of Contents

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
Introduction	5
Voluntown Then and Now	7
Topics-Goals, Objectives and Actions	
A. Governance	15
B. Land Use	21
C. Housing	25
D. Economic Development	30
E. Natural Resources	34
F. Agriculture	40
G. Education	43
H. Transportation	47
I. Recreation	53
J. Culture and Historic Preservation	55
K. Health and Public Safety	58
Appendix A – Maps	61
Appendix B - Consistency with the State Plan of Conservation and Development	72
Appendix C - POCD Requirements	74

## Introduction

Section 8-23 of the Connecticut State Statutes requires that each municipality prepare a Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), and sets forth the requirements for such a plan. The plan is required to be updated every ten years, but may be amended or updated at any time. The Town of Voluntown last completed their POCD in 2010. The 2010 plan was to be “considered as an amendment to much of the information in the 2000 Plan.” The 2020 Plan is a comprehensive standalone plan that will consider the goals and objectives of both previous plans as well as define new goals and objectives for future consideration.

The overall objective of the 2020 POCD is to provide future guidance for the town in all aspects of government. How can government be more efficient and cost effective? Where should growth occur and what areas of town should be protected? How can quality of life and community character be improved and preserved?

These are all areas that can be influenced by the 2020 POCD.

In Connecticut, it is the Planning and Zoning Commission that is charged with the development and adoption of a plan of conservation and development. The planning process for the 2020 Voluntown POCD began in June of 2018. The Planning and Zoning Commission held bi-monthly workshops on a variety of topics included within the plan. The workshops were open to the public and representatives from all municipal Commissions were encouraged to attend. The plan is intended to reflect the priorities of the entire community in respect to growth and development of the Town.



The Plan is broken down into two sections: The first provides an overview of the town in terms of its historical and demographic composition; the second contains elements that address specific topics and includes issues, goals, objectives, and actions for each topic based on community review and discussions.

The plan elements include the Governance, Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Education, Transportation, Recreation, Cultural and Historic Preservation, and Health and Public Safety.

The POCD covers the time period of 2020 to 2030. The Plan reviews the State of Connecticut 2013 Plan of Conservation and Development as well as its six guiding growth management principals. The plan is intended to be an accurate reflection of where the town is and where the town would like to go. Although, a ten year timeframe is required by state statute the plan

should be reviewed periodically and amended as goals and objectives of the municipality changes.

## Voluntown Then and Now

Voluntown is located on the eastern border of Connecticut and Rhode Island and only twelve and a half miles north of Long Island Sound. Geographically it is 10.75 miles from the City of Norwich and 41 miles from Hartford but only 22 miles from Providence.

Incorporated in 1721 Voluntown was 67.1 square miles and included the present day town of Sterling to the north. In 1794 following approval of the Connecticut Assembly the town of Sterling was incorporated to give Voluntown its current configuration of 39.8 square miles.

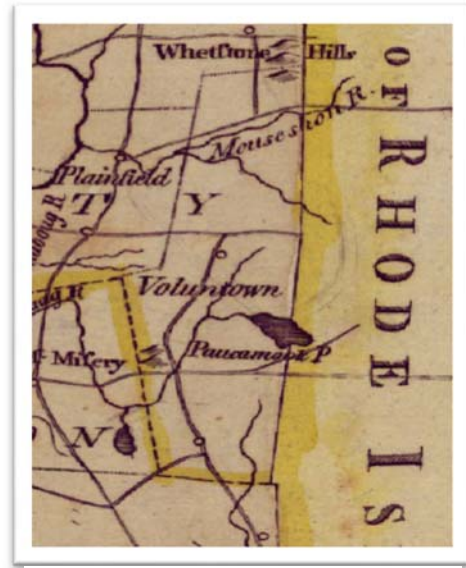
Originally part of Windham County (1726-1881) it is now the northeasterly corner of New London County.

The town was named for the English volunteers who fought in the Indian Wars of 1675 (King Phillips War). The 2016 population estimate according to Connecticut Department of Health (CT DPH) records is 2,565.<sup>1</sup> Voluntown is a very rural community with a population density of 66 pop/sq. mi. significantly lower than its surrounding neighbors and both Windham 229 pop/sq. mi. and New London County 410 pop/sq. mi. as well as the State of CT 742 pop/sq. mi.

Voluntown's rural character can be attributed to the significant amount of State land holdings including the Pachaug State Forest located within its borders. State forest and recreational land makes up approximately 66% percent of the town, leaving less than ten thousand acres for private and municipal development.

Prior to 1696 eastern Connecticut was primarily inhabited by various tribes of Indians who waged wars among themselves and with colonists from Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. The tribes that inhabited this area were the Pequots, Narragansetts, Mohegans, Wampanoags, Nipmunks and Pokanoets.

The death of Metacom, second son of Massasoit, (referred to as King Phillip) on August 12, 1676 ended the year long war known as King Phillips War between the colonists and the tribes. After the war, the Mohegans and Quinebaugs laid claim to the Voluntown area until 1705.<sup>2</sup>



Connecticut Dolittle 1795

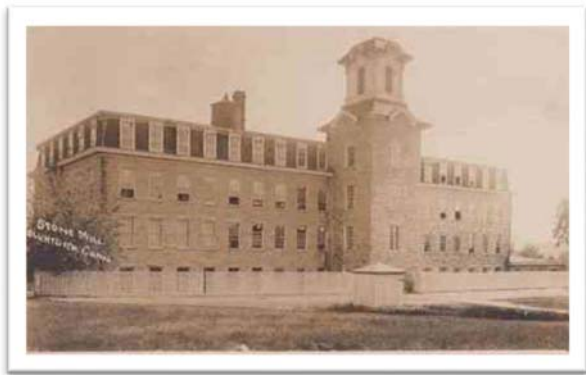
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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2016 Population Estimates

In 1696, Lt. Thomas Leffingwell of Norwich and Sgt. John Frink of Stonington petitioned the Assembly of New Haven for a Plantation for settlers who had fought against the Indians. A six mile square 160 lot plantation was granted - called Volunteer Town. Disputes over boundaries occurred for the next 16 years.

Early industry included farming and textile mills. The Briggs Manufacturing Company was the premier employer throughout the latter half of the 19th century. Briggs followed the lead of Samuel Slater in nearby Jewett City (which today is part of Griswold) to harness Voluntown's waterways to establish a cotton mill similar to many that started within the New England textile era.

Technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution provided many New England towns situated along waterways to establish textile mills throughout the 19th century. By the time the Briggs Manufacturing Company opened for business in 1856, many areas of Connecticut already hosted a thriving textile industry.



*Stone Mill, Voluntown CT*

Like many of its competitors, Briggs shared in the industry's prosperity for the better part of the century. By 1888, the company had assets of \$100,000 and operated approximately 15,000 spindles spread out over 3 different mills. Briggs boasted 200 employees who, combined, earned \$36,000 per year.

By the start of the 20th century, despite the proliferation of agriculture in Voluntown, Briggs remained the principle source of income for most local families. Unfortunately for these families, the manufacture of cotton in New England became less and less profitable, and the industry began to decline. Rising prices for raw cotton made the material increasingly difficult to obtain. In addition, rising wages in other industries increased pressure on cotton factories to keep pace—raising expenses even further. Many cotton manufacturers began curtailing production, operating for shorter periods of time, and even ceasing operations for months at a time to save costs.

In the 1920s, Briggs operated two mills in Voluntown and two in Jewett City, employing approximately 250 people. The decline of the cotton industry forced the company to cease operations at two of its plants in 1924 and operate the other two only 4 days per week. Two years later, "owing to the depression in the cotton industry," the directors at Briggs voted to cease operations altogether and sell the company's assets. Among the assets liquidated were 1,100 acres of property later reborn as part of Pachaug State Forest in 1928.

## Voluntown POCD 2020-2030

Pachaug State Forest is the largest state forest in Connecticut. Covering approximately 26,477 acres and includes land within Voluntown, Sterling, Plainfield, Griswold North Stonington and Preston.<sup>3</sup> The forest originally centered on the Pachaug River, which currently runs from Beach Pond to the Quinebaug River. The term “Pachaug” is of Native American derivation and researchers believe its meaning refers to a turn or a bend in the river.

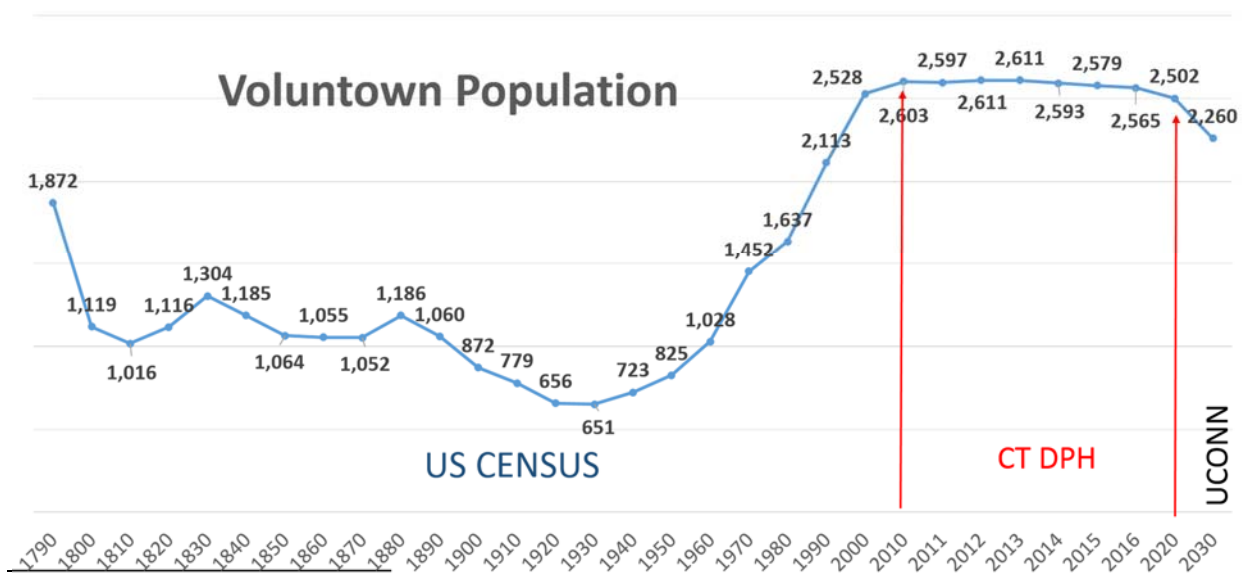
Over the next 10 years, numerous fundraising efforts expanded the area of the park to 12,000 acres. Additional acquisitions came through the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Fund—a state effort to acquire lands necessary for expanding Connecticut’s park system. Laborers from New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) turned these newly acquired lands into usable open space throughout much of the 1930s and into the ’40s.

The forest continued to grow throughout the 20th century, offering an increasingly diverse array of recreational opportunities to Connecticut residents, as well as abundant acres of pristine wilderness.

In 1973, the National Park Service designated 855 acres of the park (known as the Pachaug-Great Meadow Swamp) a National Natural Landmark, one of only eight designated sites in CT.

Today, the forest falls under the operations of Connecticut’s Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. Offering visitors activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, hunting, mountain biking and boating, Pachaug State Forest plays a significant part in forging Voluntown’s nature-friendly identity.

Source: U.S. Census, Connecticut Department of Health, and University of Connecticut

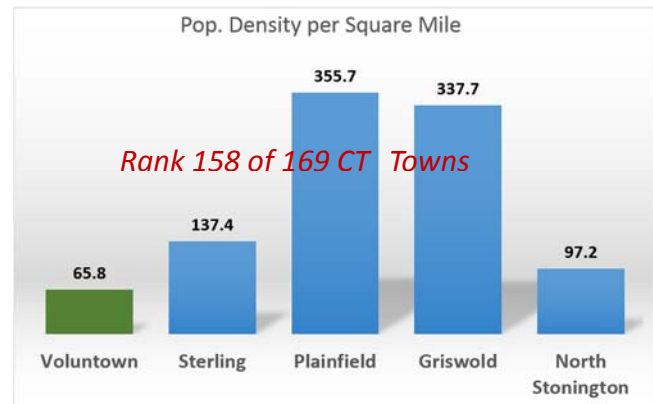


<sup>3</sup> [https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325068&deepNav\\_GID=1650](https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2716&q=325068&deepNav_GID=1650)

Although some large farms remain Voluntown is now a bedroom community for those working in larger cities and towns in New London and Windham Counties and beyond. Commercial development is limited to small local shops that do not require public sewer and water.

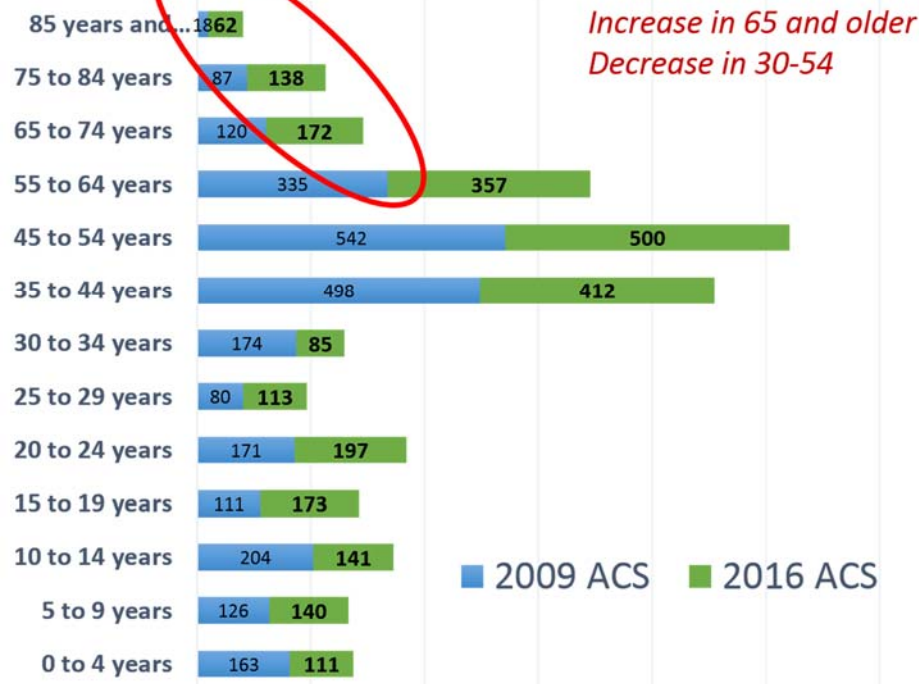
## Demographics/Fiscal Indicators

Based on the U.S Census the Voluntown population in 1800 was 1,119. The first U.S Census was conducted in 1790 at which time the population was 1,872. The loss of over 700 people can be attributed to the incorporation of the town of Sterling in 1794 decreasing Voluntown in both area and population. The lowest population count of 651 for Voluntown occurred in 1930 and has gradually increased to a high of 2,603 in 2010.<sup>4</sup> CT DPH estimates have shown that the population has leveled or decreased between 2011 (2,597) and 2016 (2,565). Voluntown's 2017 CT DPH estimate ranks 153<sup>rd</sup> of the 169 municipalities and 2<sup>nd</sup>



Source: CT OPM Municipal Fiscal Indicators 2017

## Age Cohort

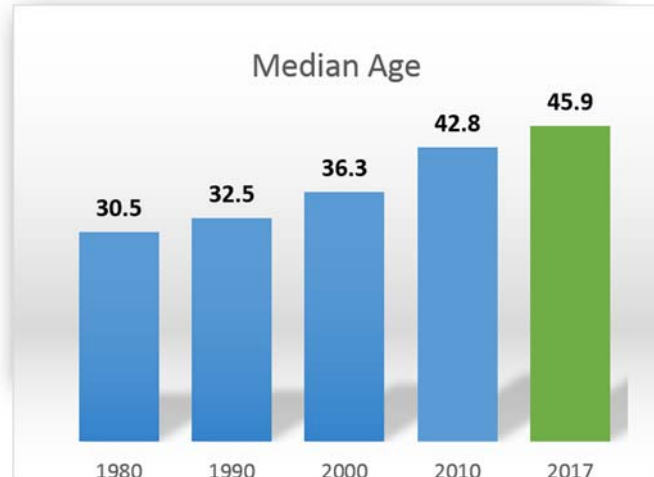


Source: U.S. Census 2009 and 2016 American Community Survey

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census

smallest in New London County.<sup>5</sup> The University of Connecticut projects a decrease in population to continue in 2020 (2,502) and 2030 (2,260). U.S.

CT DPH 2017 ranks Voluntown 158<sup>th</sup> in Population Density at 65.7 people per square mile. Only the towns of Eastford 60.7 and Union 29.1 rank lower in eastern Connecticut. All three municipalities contain large areas of State Forest and preserved open space.



Source: U.S Census and 2017 American Community Survey

The Voluntown population is 52.8% Female and 48.2% Male based on the U.S Census

American Community Survey 5 year Estimates. Voluntown has a Median Age of 45.9 for the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) an increase of 4.3 years from the 2010 ACS. Median age in CT 40.8 increased 1.3 years and New London County 1.2 years (41.0)<sup>6</sup>

Voluntown is 92.5% white alone and 3.5% Hispanic or Latino. CT is 68.1% white and 15.4% Hispanic or Latino.

Median House Hold Income according to the 2017 ACS for Voluntown is \$81,400 which ranks 103<sup>rd</sup> in the state and is 110% of the CT median income of \$73,781. Voluntown median income is greater than most of its neighbors Sterling \$ 75,574, Plainfield \$67,409, Griswold \$60,520 and comparable to North Stonington at \$84,833. Windham County is \$62,553 and New London is \$69,411.

Poverty Status in 2017 ACS was 6.4% up from 1.38% in the 2010 ACS but lower than CT at 10.06%. Children under 18 at or below the poverty level was 1.43%. Of the surrounding towns only North Stonington was lower at 2.93%.

Source: U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey

Voluntown's 2018 annual average unemployment rate according to the Connecticut Department of Labor (CT DOL) was 3.6%. This is lower than any of its surrounding towns except North Stonington at 3.2%. Connecticut was 4.1% while Windham County is 4.5% and New London County is 4.0%.<sup>7</sup> The largest number of commuters from Voluntown go to Norwich (162) and Groton (155) while (108) remain in Voluntown and (43) commute to Hartford.

Poverty	
2017	6.4%
2010	1.38%

<sup>5</sup> Connecticut Department of Public Health Population Estimates

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates

<sup>7</sup> Connecticut Department of Labor Statistics

CT Department of Economic Development (CT DECD) estimates that Voluntown has 1,147 housing units in 2017, an increase of 20 units since 2010.<sup>8</sup> ACS 2017 estimates that 8% are vacant, 95.3% of single family detached are 86% owner occupied and 14% renter occupied. 54% were built pre 1980. In 2010, of 989 housing units 83% were owner occupied while 6% renter occupied with 47.5 % pre 1980.

## Median Household Income

Location	2006-2010	2010-2014	2013-2017
Connecticut	67,740	69,899	73,781
Griswold	59,295	59,545	60,521
North Stonington	88,869	78,854	84,833
Plainfield	61,500	62,630	67,409
Sterling	64,500	71,696	75,574
Voluntown	73,980	75,086	81,400

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey

Median home value in Voluntown for ACS 2017 is \$227,400 which is higher than the surrounding towns of Sterling \$207,000, Plainfield \$ 171,300 and Griswold \$192,900 but lower than CT \$270,100 and North Stonington \$278,100. Home values in Voluntown are slowly rebounding from the housing market crash in the mid 2000's when median values were \$279,400.<sup>9</sup>

In 2010 32.1% percent of residents had completed high school while 24.9% had a bachelor's degree. 2017 ACS shows 40% with High school diploma, GED or Equivalent and 19.2% with a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Voluntown School Pre K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade October 1, 2017 enrollment consisted of 282 students which is down 6.6 % from 2015 (302) and 8.3 % (307) in 2010. Total number of students enrolled in both primary and secondary school in 2015 -2016 was 432. Total school enrollment in 2017-2018 was 396, 36 or 8.3% less within a two year span.<sup>10</sup>

Per pupil expenditures for the 2016-2017 school year according to numbers reported to the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (CT OPM) were \$17,805 an increase of \$3,610 or 22.8% from 2013-2014 and ranks 65<sup>th</sup> of 169 towns. 2009-2010 Per pupil was \$ 14,554 and Ranked 39<sup>th</sup>. Voluntown is higher than all of its neighbors Stonington \$15,794, Sterling \$14,279, Plainfield \$14,649 and Griswold \$ 14,691.<sup>11</sup>

Voluntown had a bonded debt per capita of \$103 which ranks 163<sup>rd</sup> of 169 municipalities in at Fiscal Year End (FYE) 2017. The state average bonded debt per capita is \$2,514. Net pension

<sup>8</sup> Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development Housing Estimates

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census American Community Survey 2017 5-Year Estimates

<sup>10</sup> Voluntown Board of Education Enrollment Report 6/3/2019

<sup>11</sup> Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Fiscal Indicators

liability per capita is \$0 and is tied with 37 other communities. Per capita income in 2017 ACS is \$34,042 and ranks 136<sup>th</sup> and is 82.3% of Connecticut. The 2017 Current Year adjusted Tax levy per capita ranks 134<sup>th</sup> \$2,213 and has increased from \$ 1,705 in 2010 when it ranked 147<sup>th</sup>. <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Fiscal

## Goals, Objective, and Actions

The goals, objectives, and actions of the Plan serve as guidelines and actions for directing future growth and planning in the Town. These guidelines are broad enough to cover all major planning areas, but are specific enough to guide and evaluate the progress of the plan.

- ✓ Goals are the outcomes that are deemed to preserve the positive aspects of the town and to improve areas considered deficient.
- ✓ Objectives are the short-term policies/actions which, if achieved, will serve to implement the long-term goals. Objectives are specific, measurable, achievable and politically, legally, and financially feasible.
- ✓ Actions describe how the desired outcome will be achieved. They correspond directly to the objective they serve.

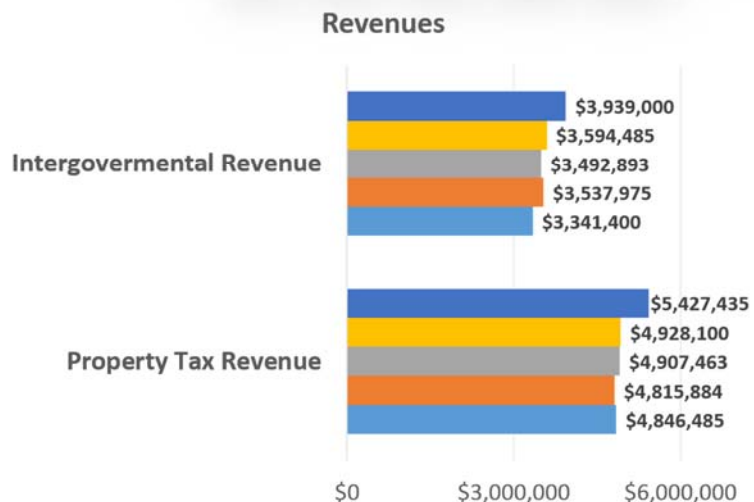
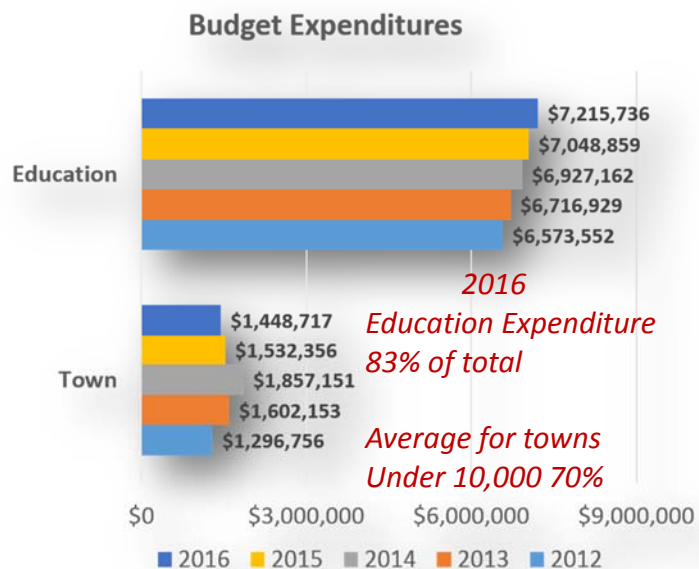
## Governance

The Town government of Voluntown provides a variety of functions and services in support of its residents. The primary purpose and function of the local government is to provide for the health and welfare of its residents while properly managing its revenues and expenditures. Voluntown operates under a town meeting form of government similar to most towns in Connecticut and New England. The Town Meeting votes on the budget, sets the tax rate, and approves bonding, purchasing or sale of real property as well as any changes in town government. All registered voters are members of the Town Meeting and United States Citizens assessed more than one-thousand dollars may vote on monetary issues.

All municipalities in Connecticut have the same basic responsibilities concerning governance no matter what their population or land area. Smaller communities such as Voluntown are still responsible to provide the same basic services required of larger municipalities. The 2018-2019 approved budget of 8.7 million dollars provides funding for both the General Government and Board of Education. Like many communities the majority of the budget is dedicated to the education side totaling \$6,788,981 or 79% in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Town revenue is compiled through a combination of local property taxes and a combination of State grants. The current mill rate is 28.92.

For Fiscal Year Ending (FYE) 2017 Voluntown ranks 19<sup>th</sup> of the 169 municipalities in Intergovernmental Revenues as a % of Total Revenues at 37.2 %. The state average for FYE 2017 was 26%. The percentage of Intergovernmental Revenue from

Source: CT OPM Municipal Fiscal Indicators

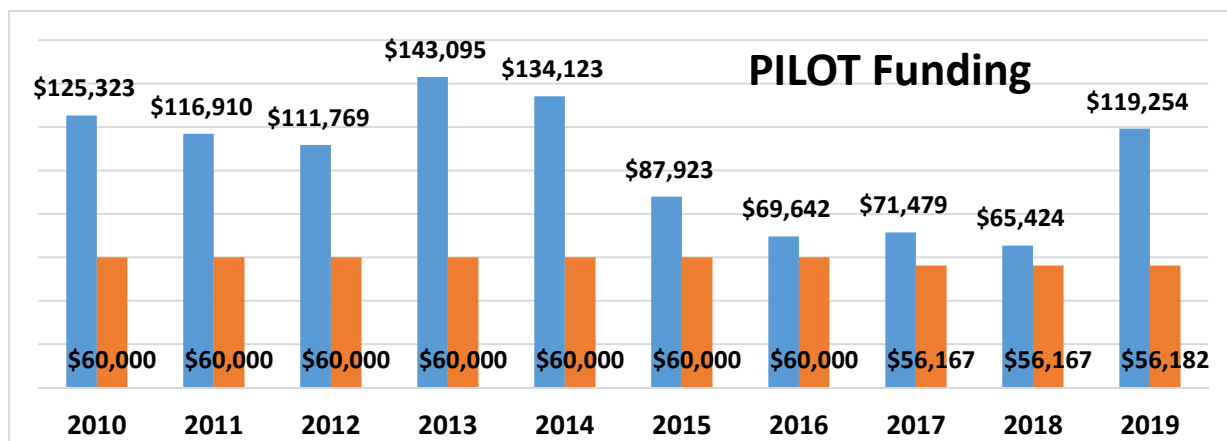


<sup>13</sup> Town of Voluntown, General Government and Board of Education Budget 2018-2019

State grants have decreased 4.2 % from FYE 2010 requiring the town cut budgets and services.

The largest of the State grants received by Voluntown is the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS). In October of 2017 the Connecticut General assembly passed a new ECS formula as part of the biennial budget for fiscal years 2018 and 2019. The new ECS formula is to be phased in/out over the next 10 years. The formula uses components that relate to the school district and student needs as well as community wealth and income numbers. Voluntown is projected to receive \$ 2,292,626 in FY 2019 and lose \$ 86,047 in FY 2020 and \$ 172,095 in FY 21 based on the FY 2020-2021 estimates. These are considerable amounts for a town to absorb with limited ability to increase revenue. <sup>14</sup>

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) Grants are another intergovernmental revenue source from the State of CT. Pilot funds are a form of reimbursement for state owned property that is exempt from the traditional taxation system. Voluntown is entitled to 100% of the lost revenue based on having 50% of the land in town being state owned, and receives an additional \$60,000 for state owned forest land per CGS 12-19(b). One issue with the structure of PILOT is that the law provides for proportional reductions if the states' annual appropriation is not enough to fund the full amount. Funds are also subject to mid-year adjustment with little to no warning. Public Act 18-81 provided for no reductions to be made to the FY 2019 statutory payment list to achieve budgeted General fund lapse savings. Fiscal Year 2020 amount is \$ 119,254.



Source: <https://data.ct.gov/Government/Mu 1>

Other State Grants include; Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Fund Grant in the amount of \$80,641 in 2019 a decrease of 25% from 2010, Town Aid Road (TAR) which is determined on a per mile of improved and unimproved roads, FY 2019 amount is \$ 172,987 an increase of 100% from FY 2010 & \$86,500, and Local Capital Improvement Project (LoCIP) provides reimbursement for specific capital projects approved by the CT Office of Policy and Management (CT OPM).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://ctschoolfinance.org/budget-analyses/fy20-21>

<sup>15</sup> FY 2017, FY2018 and FY 2019 Estimates of State Formula Aid to Municipalities, August 14,2018

The administration of town affairs starts and sometimes ends with the First Selectmen and the Board of Selectmen. They are responsible for insuring the town fulfils its obligations to its citizens as well as various state agencies. In Voluntown and some other small communities the Board of Selectmen also acts as the Board of Finance. Understanding the obligations of local government and the means by which to meet those obligations is essential. The challenge for small communities like Voluntown is balancing the municipal obligations with providing efficient government services often with reduced or part time staff.

The administration of town affairs lies with the three member Board of Selectmen serving two year terms with the First Selectman as the towns highest elected official and chief administrative officer. This is the person charged with the responsibility to manage, represent, and address the daily issues that confront Voluntown. Daily issues may include the operation of the town hall, public works and responding to citizen concerns as well as union negotiations and the administration of various grant applications. The staffing for the Selectmen's office includes an Executive Assistant. The First Selectman further coordinates and serves as an ex-officio non-voting member of all Town Boards and Commissions as well as the representative for regional, public and private institutions.

Other town offices include the Tax Collector, Assessor and Treasurer which are appointed positions, the Town Clerk is elected. Training and in some cases certification for these positions are provided by statewide associations. The powers and duties of these offices are provided in Connecticut General Statutes

### Offices and Functions:

- Selectmen's Office
- Tax Collector's Office
- Assessor's Office
- Treasurer's Office
- Land Use Office
  - Inland Wetlands Enforcement
  - ZEO
  - Building Official
- Registrar of Voters
- Town Clerk
- Public Works
- Public Library
- Public Safety
  - Fire marshal
  - Fire Protection
  - Beach Security
  - Emergency Responders

All statutory towns (such as Voluntown) are enabled and required to have municipal boards, commissions, and committees allowed under Connecticut General Statutes. One major challenge for all Towns is to recruit and retain interested, capable volunteers for municipal boards, commissions, and committees.

*Although Voluntary all  
require staff and resources  
provided by the town.*

In Voluntown boards and commissions are a mixture of elected and appointed positions and include;

- Board of Selectmen
- Board of Education
- Library Board of Trustees
- Recreation Commission
- Economic Development Commission
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission
- Elderly Commission
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Board of Assessment Appeals

Municipal departments and services include:

- Administrative functions, including, among others, the offices of the First Selectman, Town Clerk, Tax Assessor, Tax Collector, and Registrar of Voters.
- Enforcement of building, zoning, and wetlands codes.
- Public Works
- Transfer Station shared with Sterling
- Educational services
- Voluntown Housing Authority
- Uncas Health District
- Voluntown Volunteer Fire Company (Provides Basic Life Support)
- Animal Services (Provided by NECCOG)
- Police service is provided by the Connecticut State Police.



*Voluntown Town Hall and Library*

Municipal facilities include:

- Voluntown Town Hall
- Town Garage
- Voluntown Public Library
- Voluntown Elementary School
- Transfer Station
- Voluntown Fire Company NO. 1
- Finn Beach
- Greenwood Manor

## Issues and Concerns

- Boards and commissions, along with the fire department, face difficulty in recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers in sufficient numbers.
- Reliance on State funding and compliance with future mandates make year-to year budgeting difficult to predict; Education Cost Sharing (ECS), Payment in Lieu of Taxes, (PILOT), and others.
- Some town records, regulations, forms, and applications, are available in paper format only and cannot be obtained from the Internet.
- Citizen participation in governance needs to be encouraged.
- Staffing levels for departments, boards and commissions are not adequate or appropriate.
- Municipal/ Community space for youth and senior activities.
- Costs and feasibility of a municipal complex that includes town hall, library and community center.
- Declining student enrollment and increasing special education costs.
- Aging population requiring more services.

## Goal

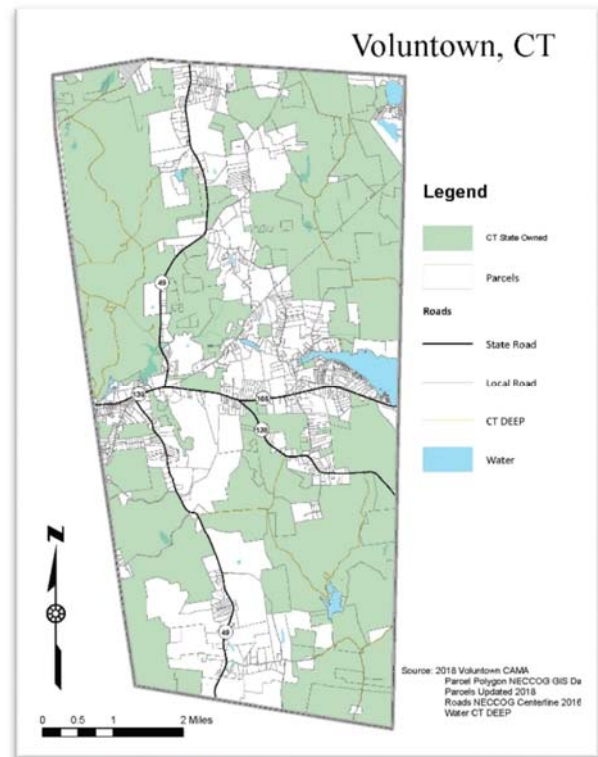
Provide the services and facilities necessary to conduct the business of the town and address the needs of its citizens efficiently and effectively.

## Objectives and Actions

1. Qualified staff and volunteer talent to serve the varied needs of the Town
  - a. Review staffing levels for each department, board and commission.
  - b. Complete Administrative Study
  - b. Provide assistance to land use commissioners attending education work shops
2. Reduce Town Operating Costs
  - a. Explore combining some governmental functions, especially back office functions and IT, with neighboring towns or school districts.
  - b. Digitize land use regulations, and forms and applications, and make them available online.
  - c. Explore options for shared services with surrounding towns or regional programs.
3. Make the Town Hall and Library a Functional, Code Compliant Structures.
  - a. Conduct an assessment of existing municipal buildings in terms of its accessibility and physical, structural needs and functional limitations.
4. Explore opportunities for expanded or new town services.
  - a. Review transfer station and municipal department office hours.
  - b. Town wide trash and/or recycling.

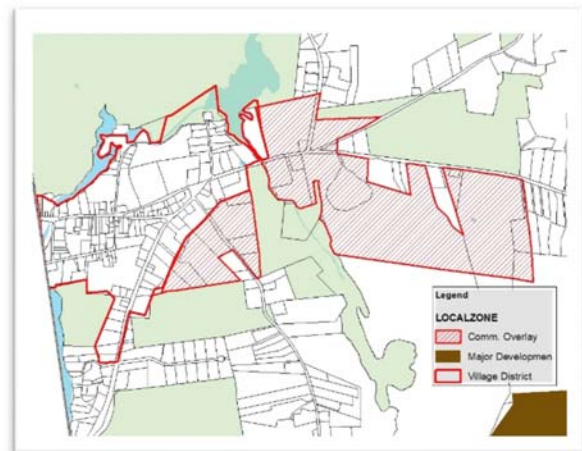
## Land Use

Voluntown is rural. The town contains approximately 25,170 acres. Voluntown's assessor records for 2018 include 1,491 parcels of which 146 are owned by the State of Connecticut and make up 16,540 acres in total or 66%. Land classified as State Forest PA 490 consists of 11,890 acres within the Pachaug and other state forests.<sup>16</sup> One positive result of the large amount of State land holdings are that remaining a rural community may not be as major of a concern for Voluntown as other communities under suburban pressure. The remaining land consists of the Village Center along Route 138, single family homes along RT 165 and RT 49. A mixture of large and small farms also still remain. Small cottages and large homes also line the shores of Beach Pond and Bailey Pond.



State Owned Land

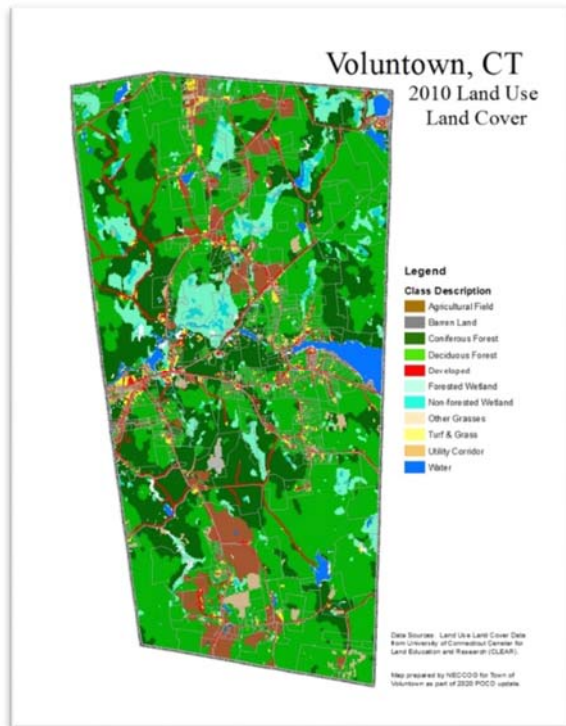
Voluntown has had zoning and subdivision regulations since 1972. The Zoning Regulations are designed to steer commercial development and residential higher density toward the Village District along RT 138. The Town is divided into four zones. The Village District allows residential and commercial uses on 30,000 to 40,000 square foot lots. Some mixed use is allowed by special permit. The Village Commercial Overlay district allows retail, personal and business services within areas along state roads adjacent to the Village District. The Rural district is for predominantly single-family homes and agricultural uses with limited commercial uses allowed by special permit. Minimum Lot size is 80,000 sq. feet. The Major Development District requires a minimum of 10 acres and allows commercial, retail and manufacturing uses.



Village District and Village Overlay

According to the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) at the University of Connecticut's Changing Landscape Project, the Town has experienced a .7% increase in developed lands (1,486 acres or 5.8%) between 1985 and 2015. Forest Land cover (20,678 acres or 81.2%) has

<sup>16</sup> Town of Voluntown Assessor Database June 2019



UConn Center for Land Use and Land Cover

computer programs and human expertise into land cover maps made up of many pieces, or pixels, of information that are 30 meters (or about 100 feet) square.<sup>43</sup>

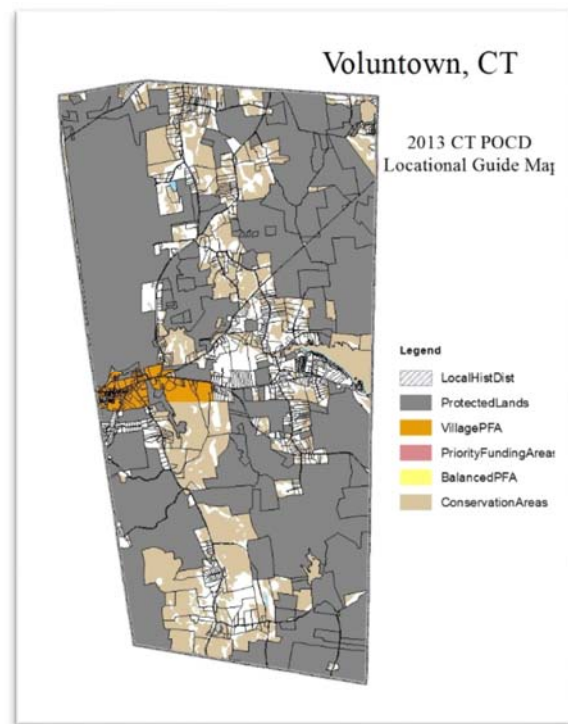
This translates to a net gain of 69.2 acres of developed lands during this period. The largest loss of land cover came as deciduous forest with 189 acres lost. The largest gain, 69.2 acres, occurred in turf and grass lands.

The revised Draft 2018-2023 Connecticut Plan of Conservation and Development (CT POCD) continues to show Voluntown to be a community dominated by Protected Open Space (Pachaug Forest). The eastern section of RT 138 is classified as a Village Priority Funding Area.<sup>18</sup>

In the state's more rural municipalities, traditional village centers are considered to be Village Priority Funding Areas. This Locational

decreased 2.8% and Turf and Grass (518 acres or 2 %) has increased 1.1%. The largest area of concentration of change in agricultural field loss was in the northern section of RT 49 near the Sterling Line.<sup>17</sup>

CLEAR's data is based on remote sensing using spatial imagery related to land cover change. "Land cover, as its name implies, shows the 'covering' of the land. This is to be distinguished from land use, which is what is permitted, practiced or intended for a given area. For example, a "forested" land cover area as detected by the satellite may appear as "rural residential" on your town's zoning map. CLEAR's land cover information comes from remotely sensed data from satellites, in this case several of the Landsat satellite series. Sensors aboard the satellite collect (sense) radiation in a number of different wavelengths that is reflected from the surface of the earth. The data are converted via



<sup>17</sup> University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research, 2015 Land Cover

<sup>18</sup> Connecticut Plan of Conservation and Development 2018-2023

Guide Map (LGM) classification is intended to recognize the unique characteristics and needs of these areas, in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 16a-35e. Village Priority Funding Areas were carried over from the 2005-2010 CT POCD Plan, and have been updated based on municipal input.

Voluntown is a rural town containing large amount of State Forest and undeveloped lands with a defined town center. It is not envisioned that Voluntown will see significant land use change or related growth, however with a limited amount of available land even a small change may have a significant impact on the rural quality of the town.

## **Issues**

- Zoning regulations need a significant update
- Affordability
- Economic Growth
- Maintaining Rural Character
- Limited land for development
- Lack of infrastructure (water, sewer, utilities)

## **Goal**

Manage growth in a proactive rather than reactive way that maintains the rural character and protects the natural resources of the Town by providing for a pattern of land uses that will complement the Town's physical and historic characteristics.

## **Objectives and Actions**

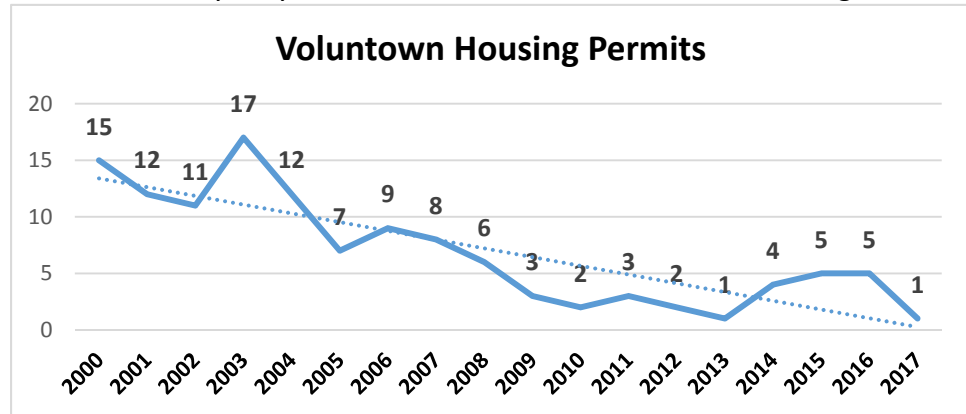
1. Promote a community comprised largely of single-family neighborhoods in an open and natural setting together with commercial areas that serve the local community
  - a. Conduct a complete overhaul of the Towns Zoning and Subdivision Regulations consistent with this plan of conservation and development
  - b. Coordinate planning with neighboring jurisdictions in order to ensure compatible land uses.
  - c. Maintain and support the use of Public Act 490
2. The continuation of production agriculture and forestry operations
3. Require development to achieve a high level of compatibility with neighboring uses and the rural character of the Town.

5. Regulate subdivision of land to promote efficient land uses.
6. Require best practices for safety and environmental protection as sites are developed or improved.
7. Promote preservation and usage of the Village Center to serve community needs through attractive redevelopment. Designate strategic locations in the Town Center as “Priority Development Focus Areas” where a combination of public and private investments serve to complete and integrate planned redevelopment projects thus creating vibrant and active pedestrian places.
8. Allow and encourage home-based businesses that are compatible with the Town’s rural character.
10. Balance development with limited infrastructure. Future development should be limited to levels that can be supported with new infrastructure improvements that would not be costly and/or disruptive.

## Housing

Voluntown according to the 2010 Census had 1,127 housing units. CT Housing Inventory Estimates produced by the Department of Economic and Community Development (CT DECD) show 20 new units built between 2011 and 2017. Permit activity has decreased by 78% in the years 2013-2017 from the number permits issued within 2000-2005.<sup>19</sup> The median value of a home in town based on the 2017 ACS is \$227,400 a decrease from \$ 279,400 in 2010 ACS. Median home values have decreased yearly since 2010 and is a reaction to the housing boom and subsequent collapse in 2008.<sup>20</sup>

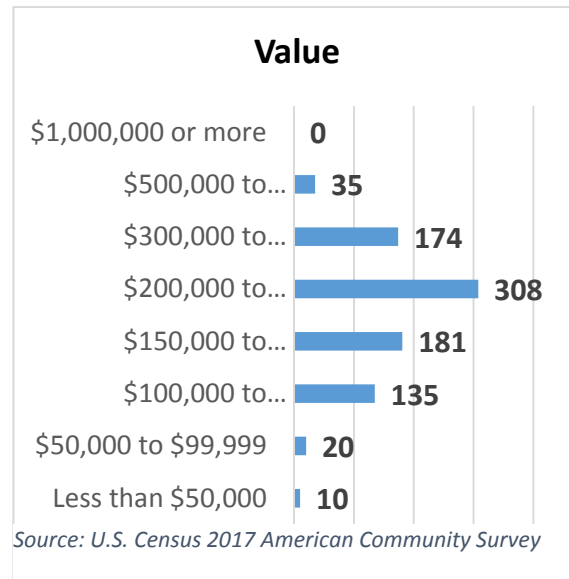
A total of 49 (or 4.3%) of Voluntown housing units were subsidized in 2017. CHFA/USDA Mortgages comprise 53% or 26 of the units while the remaining 23 are government assisted and rental assisted.



Source: CT DECD Housing Permit Data

Voluntown residential land uses are predominately single family detached residences at 94.8% up from 89.8% in 2010. Like many communities the largest increase in population occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1960-2000) when Voluntown grew 145% over 40 years or 1,500 persons. A result of this population boom is that 51.5% of the town's housing stock was built in this time period. The number of housing units built pre 1960 make up 34.2% of the housing stock. Only 14% of the housing stock is less than 20 years old.<sup>21</sup>

The householder lived alone in 20.7% of households up from 16.3% in 2010. Of these, 11% of householders were over the age of 65 years. According to 2017 ACS numbers 43.3% of households have one or more people 60 years or older compared to 29.1% in 2010. There are 28.4 % under the age of 18 in 2017 compared to 35% in 2010. The town's



Source: U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey

<sup>19</sup> Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development

<sup>20</sup> United State Census 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates

<sup>21</sup> United State Census 2017 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates

average household size has been reasonably constant, 2.66 persons in 2000 to 2.55 in 2017 ACS.

The State of Connecticut defines affordable housing as that which does not cost a family making 80% of the area median income more than 30 percent of its gross income. Once a family goes over that 30 percent threshold they often have difficulties paying other needed expenses.

Median Housing values within the Town are currently below that attainable for those making 80% of the median household income (\$81,400x.80=\$65,120) within the Town. This means that housing costing more than \$1,628 monthly would not be deemed affordable. The median home value of \$227,400 would require a mortgage of \$1,221. 2017 ACS shows 23% of housing units with a mortgage pay 30% or more.

	2012-16	2000	% Change
Population	2,586	2,528	2%
Households	971	952	2%
Average household Size	2.66	2.66	0%
Average Family Size	3.12	3.05	2%
Householders Living Alone	19.7%	19%	.7%
Residents living in Families	74%	74%	0%
Households with someone < 18	24%	40%	-16%
Households with someone > 65	10.1%	19%	-8.9%

Source: U.S Census 2017 American Community Survey

HUD:

*“Fair Market Rents (FMRs) are primarily used to determine payment standard amounts for the Housing Choice Voucher program, to determine initial renewal rents for some expiring project-based Section 8 contracts, to determine initial rents for housing assistance payment (HAP) contracts in the Moderate Rehabilitation Single Room Occupancy program (Mod Rehab), and to serve as a rent ceiling in the HOME rental assistance program.”*<sup>25</sup>

Based on the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data for 2019 Fair Market Rents for Voluntown are \$798 for an efficiency apartment, \$898 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$1,143 for a two bedroom apartment, \$1,503 for a three bedroom apartment and \$1,804 for a four-bedroom apartment. This results in increases ranging from 8%

for an efficiency to 30% for a four bedroom.<sup>22</sup> 2017 ACS numbers indicate that 77% of renters pay 30% or more in gross rent.

Connecticut has several laws that attempt to foster housing diversity. The basic enabling statute for zoning, Section 8-2 includes the following language:

*Such regulations shall also encourage the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region in which the municipality is located, as designated by the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management under section 16a-4a. Such regulations shall also promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate income households, and shall encourage the development of housing which will meet the housing needs identified in the housing plan prepared pursuant to section 8-37t and in the housing component and the other components of the state plan of conservation and development prepared pursuant to section 16a-26.*

## Affordable Housing Units

	Total	Gov Assist	Tenant Rental	CHFA/USD A	Deed Restricted	Total	
Voluntown	1,127	20	3	26	0	49	4.35%
Sterling	1,511	0	5	35	0	40	2.65%
N Stonington	2,306	0	1	28	6	35	1.52%
Plainfield	6,229	316	186	286	0	788	12.65%
Griswold	5,118	148	54	186	0	388	7.58%

Source: CT Department of Housing

In 1990 the Connecticut Affordable Housing Appeals Act (8-30g of the Connecticut General Statutes) was enacted that provides that a developer of “affordable housing” denied locally may appeal such ruling to the courts and have that denial overruled if such town contains less than 10 percent designated as “affordable.” Connecticut law places the burden on the local land use commission to justify an action that would deny the development of affordable housing. This law in effect can put aside the local land use rules if they interfere with the State

## Median Rent By Town

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey

Location	2006-2010	2007-2011	2008-2012	2009-2013	2010-2014	2011-2015	2012-2016
Griswold	804	853	893	918	965	949	967
North Stonington	959	1,574	1,231	1,417	1,180	1,118	1,110
Plainfield	899	904	993	971	924	799	787
Sterling	844	900	891	1,196	1,178	1,036	909
Voluntown	1,022	1,024	1,014	1,027	953	1,051	920

<sup>22</sup> United States Department of Housing and Urban Development FY 2019 Fair Market Rents

policy goal of providing affordable housing. The 2017 Affordable Housing Appeals Lists only 4.3% of Voluntown's housing units are dedicated as "affordable."<sup>23</sup>

Public Act 490, Connecticut General Statutes Sections 12-107a through 107-f, allows municipalities to assess farm, forest and open space land at its "fair market value" rather than the highest and best use. The intent is to allow farmers and landowners to be able to afford keeping their land open without added pressure of high taxation. The Town of Voluntown does not have an Open Space Land classification allowed by the act all PA 490 Land must be classified as Farm or Forest.

The Town's zoning and subdivision regulations are not structured to discourage affordable housing. Rather, they reflect the community's desire to maintain a rural setting. The regulations are also a reflection the local topography and lack of utilities. These realities do not lend themselves to smaller housing lots. While the Town's two acre minimum house lot may seem large it is generally a necessity for well and septic location. Additionally, the Town has little or no prospect for public water or sewer – the development of which would be in conflict with the State Plan of Conservation and Development.

## **Issues**

- Lack of housing diversity and needs for affordable housing.
- Perception that affordable housing is a net negative to the Town.
- Little opportunity to "downsize"
- No requirement for affordable deed-restricted units in new subdivisions
- Senior, Flexible and Family Housing opportunities such as "in-law apartments"

## **Goal**

Promote housing, both rental and home ownership, that is in an acceptable quantity, quality and diversity within the economic means of the town's population and encourage young families that maintains the rural character of Voluntown.

## **Objectives and Actions**

1. Residential development that maintains rural character.

- a. The Planning and Zoning Commission to review and revise as necessary, its regulations to promote a mixture of housing for all stages of life.

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<sup>23</sup> Connecticut Department of Housing 2017 Affordable Housing Appeals Listing

b. The Town will continue to ensure that all building, fire, and health codes are enforced.

c. Provide for the protection of home values.

2. Voluntown will abide by all applicable fair housing and affordable housing laws and regulations.

a. Town Regulations, Ordinances, and Policies will be reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that they are reflective of all Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity federal legislation as promulgated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, et al. and that they are in compliance with Connecticut General Statutes. (Particular attention should be given to family households' definitions, manufactured homes, group homes, housing unit square footage, acreage requirements vs. buildable area requirements, affordable housing requirements.)

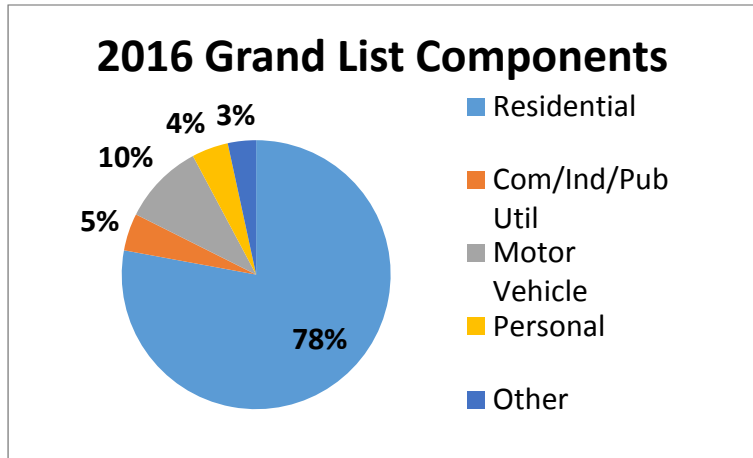
b. Town officials (Town Hall staff, First Selectman and Planning and zoning Commission) will be cognizant of the State's requirements on affordable housing (especially regarding manufactured homes, and of the affordable housing appeals procedures).

c. Town Hall (Selectman's Office) will have current information available on financing programs available at private lending institutions and through state and federal programs.

d. Increase affordable housing opportunities for all stages of life.

## Economic Development

Voluntown derives a majority of its local revenues from residential and motor vehicle taxes. Combined they account for more than 87% percent of revenues. Commercial activities account for just 4.5 % of the Grand List. Since 2010, the commercial portion of the Grand List has decreased by 2% while residential has remained steady at 77%. The classification for other has decreased 7.2% in the same time period. "Other" consists of vacant land, use assessment property and 10 mill forest land. So while Voluntown's per capita property taxes rank 134<sup>th</sup> in the state at \$2,213 its mill rate places the town slightly higher at 111<sup>th</sup> in 2017. Developing a strategic economic plan or strategy has become a critical element for the Town's future.<sup>24</sup>



Source: CT OPM Municipal Fiscal Indicators

Voluntown is a rural community with very limited employment opportunities. In 2017, 928 persons were employed in a wide range of occupations. However only 108 residents worked in Voluntown. A majority workers commute to Norwich or Groton. According to the CT Department of Labor, there were 47 employers in 2017 based in Voluntown. Major employers include the Town of Voluntown, Charles River Labs, Dunkin Donuts and Bronsons True Value.<sup>25</sup>

### Top Five Grand List (2016)

Charles River Labs	\$ 4,144,030
CT Light and Power	\$ 3,065,580
SDKB Enterprises LLC	\$ 1,196,010
Ten Rod Realty LLC	\$ 813,350
<u>Gallop, Byron</u>	<u>\$ 678,730</u>
Net Grand List (SFY 2015-2016)	\$ 201,730,728

Source: CERC Town Profiles 2018

Statistically, per capita income (2017) was \$34,042. This ranked 136<sup>th</sup> of the State's 169 towns and is 82.3% of the State's average. The median household income of \$81,400 was 110.3% of the State median and placed the Town at the 103 spot compared to all other towns.<sup>26</sup> Notably, Voluntown has very limited land for economic development. Access to utilities and major transportation routes insure that the town will not become a hub of retail activity. However the

<sup>24</sup> Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Fiscal Indicators 2013-2017

<sup>25</sup> Connecticut Economic Resource Center Town Profile 2018

<sup>26</sup> Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Fiscal Indicators 2013-2017

rural nature and significant amount of state forest land provides other opportunities for economic activity. The Economic Development Commission and town as a whole has started to look at recreational activities associated with the forest as possibilities to lure businesses and activities that would be accessory to those provided within the forest. Activities such as hiking, biking, camping and boating could provide a niche for development such as retail and services associated with outdoor recreational activities.

A significant part of the town's economic well-being depends on working lands (farm and forest production) and open space. The cost of providing town services is substantially less for these lands. Costs of Services studies published by the American Farmland Trust median cost for providing services for working lands is \$ 0.37 per \$1.00 of revenue compared to \$ 0.30 for commercial and \$1.16 for residential.<sup>27</sup>

*While it is true that an acre of land with a new house generates more need for town services than an acre of hay or corn, this tells us little about a community's bottom line. In areas where agriculture or forestry are major industries, it is especially important to consider the real property tax contribution of privately owned working lands. Working and other open lands may generate less revenue than residential, commercial or industrial properties, but they require little public infrastructure and few services."*

The 2010 POCD goals for Economic development were.

- Encourage opportunities for more Economic Development
- Avoid Strip Commercial Development along town Highways
- Confine major new economic development to lands directly accessible to state highways

The town will continue to consider the impact of the town's land use regulations on economic growth and identified factors that might impede development of businesses. Some of these factors are technical. For instance, the zoning regulations, which have been amended numerous times, are unclear and in some cases self-contradictory, and are in need of a complete overhaul. Some of the impediments are the result of changing economic times. The regulations were developed in a time of economic growth, when housing was being developed at a much faster rate.

As the "gig economy" takes hold, restrictions on businesses conducted from homes become more onerous, and the need for regulations that allow home-based businesses becomes more urgent. Finally, land use regulations need to support the kind of agriculture that has come to replace large-scale dairy farming--small farms producing food for local markets. This means clarifying the rights of farmers and their neighbor's alike, creating regulations that make disputes unlikely, and a way to resolve them when they arise.

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<sup>27</sup> American Farmland Trust Cost of Community Services Study September 2016

## **Issues**

- The Town needs business development to diversify its Grand List to off-set rising property taxes
- Zoning regulations are not business friendly
- Zoning regulations are outdated and disorganized
- Volatility of State Grants and revenues.

## **Goal**

A town that that embraces business of all types as part of the community's present and future.

## **Objectives and Actions**

1. Solidify connectivity to nearby Urban Areas, the State, the Region, Advocacy Groups and Higher Education

- a. Join and be active in the chambers of commerce.
- b. Be an active player in the development and maintenance of the Region's CEDS and related activities
- c. Establish and maintain relationships with State of CT Department of Economic and Community Development, Energy and Environmental Protection, Connecticut Business and Industry Association, Last green Valley and CT Farm Bureau, Friends of Pachaug Forest, Inc.
- e. Exploit the town's rural setting as an attractive alternative to suburban metro locations
- f. Modify the current zoning regulations to make them easily understood and attractive to small and home-based business development while protecting the town's rural character
- g. Work with DECD Tourism and Last Green Valley to ensure that the Town has a presence and that all activities are promoted
- h. Seek, to the degree possible, high quality communications infrastructure

3. Develop and maintain a listing of all businesses based in Voluntown

4. Embrace tourism as an economic driver for the Town as it relates to Pachaug Forest and outdoor activities.

5. Develop a marketing plan for the Town

## Natural Resources

Voluntown's natural resources (forest, waterbodies, open space, wetlands and soils) are invaluable components of the Town. The quality of natural resources impact property values, recreation, wildlife habitat and quality of life (including "rural character"). The Town's abundant natural resources and Pachaug Forest make it one of the least developed towns in the state; over two thirds of the town is state owned and highly forested. The land consists of rolling hills and river valleys. The lowest points being between 190-200 feet above sea level in the area of Doanville Pond and the Green Falls River. The Town's highest point is 630 feet above sea level, near Ekonk Hill along RT 49 on the border of Sterling. Pachaug Forest contains other significant land features such as Mount Misery, Green Falls and the Great Meadow Brook Marsh wildlife refuge.

The majority of Voluntown is forested, deciduous forest accounts for 49% of all land cover; coniferous forest accounts for 23.4% totaling 73%. The forests consist of oak, maple, white pine, red and white cedar, and eastern hemlock.<sup>28</sup> The forests provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife and include areas within the Pachaug Forest for hiking, camping, horseback riding, hunting, and other forms of outdoor recreation.



*Wetlands in Voluntown*

New London County is home to several state-listed threatened and special concern species. CT DEEP lists several species as endangered; two Amphibians the Blue-spotted salamander and the eastern spadefoot, Six types of birds; Common Moorhen, Grasshopper sparrow, Long-eared owl, Upland sandpiper, American bittern, Northern harrier, Sedge wren, Yellow breasted chat, Red headed woodpecker, King rail, Roscate tern and the Barn owl.

The only fish of Special Concern are the Banded Sunfish, Blueback Herring and the Bridle Shiner. Hodge Pond, Green Falls Reservoir and Peg Mill Brook support the banded sunfish. Banded sunfish distribution in Connecticut has been correlated with cold summer water temperatures, high water clarity (i.e. low turbidity) and abundant levels of aquatic plants. Endangered mammals and reptiles include the Eastern small-foot bat, little brown bat, Northern long eared bat and the Tri colored bat as well as the Timber rattlesnake. Several plants and invertebrates are also listed on the CT DEEP website.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> University of Connecticut Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) 2015 Land Cover

<sup>29</sup> Connecticut Department of Energy and environmental Protection (CT DEEP) Endangered Species

Voluntown also contains known locations of New England Cottontail rabbit - the only rabbit native to Connecticut. The New England Cottontail Rabbit, which settles in scrublands—areas dominated by grass, shrubs, and immature trees is now in decline.

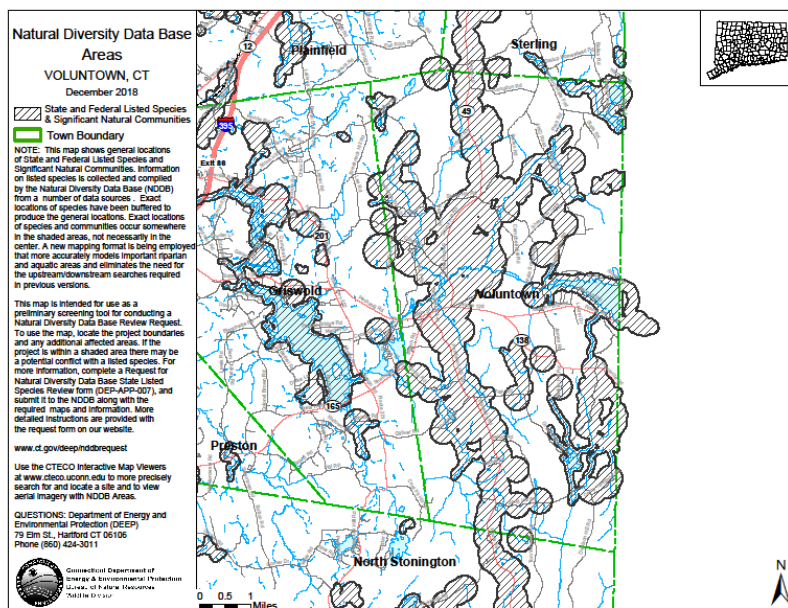
“In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) designated the New England cottontail as a candidate for threatened or endangered status due to the severe population decline and widespread habitat loss experienced since the 1960s. The species' range had been reduced by about 86%, with only 5 smaller populations remaining across New England and eastern New York.”



*Overlook in Pachaug Forest*

According to the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. “Biologists believe the reduced extent of young forest and shrub-land habitat is the primary reason for the decline in numbers and range of New England cottontails....To date, hundreds of acres of habitat on Connecticut’s public and private lands have been enhanced in patches ranging from 6 to 100 acres in size. These projects benefit not only the New England cottontail, but more than 50 species of greatest conservation need that depend on young forest habitat.”<sup>30</sup>

Source: CT DEEP Natural Diversity Database



Voluntown has many rivers, streams and brooks the largest of which is the Pachaug River. The Pachaug River runs east to west from Beach Pond on the Rhode Island Border to Saw Mill Pond. A majority of Voluntown is within the Thames River Basin watershed except for the north and southeastern sections that are part of the Pawcatuck River basin.

Beach Pond is the largest open body of water in

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2723&q=325996>

Voluntown and contains 393 acres split between Rhode Island and Connecticut. A majority of the pond is within Voluntown, 63%. Voluntown operates a public beach on the west shore for recreation. Bailey Pond, located in the northeast corner and Green Falls Pond in the Pachaug Forest also provided recreational opportunities.

Wetlands are valuable natural resources. Wetland soils are distributed in all sectors of the town. They serve important natural functions by helping to maintain water quality, by providing wildlife habitat, and by connecting other natural areas in an ecological network. Wetlands and Watercourses are regulated by State law and managed locally by the Town's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission. One significant wetland within the Pachaug forest is the Great Meadow Swamp, one of eight designated National Natural Landmarks in CT. The swamp is created by two large streams, the Pachaug River and the Great Meadow Brook. The swamp is considered the most extensive Atlantic White cedar swamp in CT.<sup>31</sup>

The National Diversity Database identifies several areas within Voluntown that are important wetland associated habitats such as the Atlantic White Cedar Swamp and Freshwater forest and shrub Wetlands. CT Deep maintains several marsh and wetlands sites within the forest for wildlife habitat, breeding and water quality.

All of Voluntown's water supply comes from groundwater. Deposits of stratified sand and gravel called aquifers provide groundwater storage capacity. Voluntown contains several aquifers classified as primary and secondary depending on the amounts of water that can be drawn per minute. The largest of the primary aquifers located outside of the Pachaug forest is within the Village area along RT 138 and up Route 49. Connecticut Water Company operates one community water system known as the SDC Water Company located near Beach pond. The system has two wells each capable of producing 65 gallons per minute while servicing 53 Homes on Tanglewood Lane, Valley Drive and Lakeside Terrace.<sup>32</sup>

Voluntown contains both Prime Farmland Soils and Statewide Important Farmland Soils. Prime and Statewide Important soils can typically be found in river valleys and are primarily concentrated within the south western quarter of the town. Active Agricultural fields make up 5% of the town or 1262 acres. Two farms have proactively participated in the CT Department of Agriculture's Farmland Preservation Program. The Palmer Farm on Sand Hill Rd preserved 149 acres in 1995 and the Gileau Farm on Campbell Mill Rd preserved 92 acres in 2005. Increased acquisition of farmland by CT DOAG and other groups benefit the town in keeping agriculture as a viable use. Participation in the State's Agricultural Preservation Program is one of the most effective ways of preserving farmland while promoting the continuation of farming as an industry.

The protection of natural resources forests, lakes, rivers and streams contribute to the overall rural character of Voluntown as well as its status as a destination for outdoor recreation. The

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nlandmarks/site.htm?Site=PAGR-CT>

<sup>32</sup> Voluntown Plan of Conservation and Development 2000-2010

fact that so much of the land is maintained by CT DEEP within Pachaug Forest has somewhat relieved the town of the concern for acquiring open space while providing recreational opportunities.

In 2017 CT DEEP released its forest Resource Management Plan for 2018-2027. The plan includes the forest blocks of Glasgo, Green Falls and Wickaboxet. The plan includes assessments and proposed activities related to the long range management of the individual forest blocks as well as maintenance of roads, impact of unauthorized trail development and illegal use.<sup>33</sup>

## **Issues**

- Planning & zoning regulations and policies related to appropriate development that keeps in mind inland wetlands protection.
- Communication and procedures between land use staff and regulatory commissions.

## **Goal**

Protect and sustainably manage the Town's natural resources

## **Objectives and Actions**

1. Preserve and protect the natural resources of the Town.
  - a. Explore the feasibility of participating in the joint State-Town Farmland Preservation Program of the State Department of Agriculture.
  - b. Apply for Federal and State Open Space grants, including the feasibility of being co-applicants with other entities.
  - c. Maintain the intent of the PA 490 by assisting farmers and large forest owners with understanding the process.
  - d. The Town, through the Tree Warden, will inventory "Street Trees" and develop a tree retention, maintenance, and replacement program
  - e. Maintain, through the Tree Warden, communications and cooperation with the Department of Transportation, Eversource since these two organizations have a direct impact on the health, condition, and number of trees along the roads.

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<sup>33</sup>

[http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/forestry/management\\_plans/pachaugsf\\_wick\\_gf\\_glasgo\\_plan\\_hartford.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/forestry/management_plans/pachaugsf_wick_gf_glasgo_plan_hartford.pdf)

2. Create an integrated system of trails throughout open spaces, but design them with sensitivity to natural systems and property rights
  - a. Create greenways of open space, and linkages between existing open space areas
  - d. Give priority consideration for the protection of stream and river corridors containing wild trout populations
3. Encourage natural resource based industries, such as agriculture and forestry that are compatible with, and foster open space preservation, natural resource habitat conservation and protection of rural character
5. Preserve agricultural heritage by protecting the most important and visible farmland and by enhancing commercially viable agricultural operations
  - a. Support state programs that assist local farmers in maintaining commercial viability. Incorporate measures in the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations that seek to create compatibility of new development with traditional agricultural activity.
6. Conserve productive forests in a way that protects native wildlife populations, supports the forest industry, preserves scenic rural character, and supports recreational opportunities
  - a. Foster viable forest management practices, and encourage major private landowners to manage their properties in accordance with forest management best management practices (BMPs).
7. Surface and groundwater resources in the Town will be protected, in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations through control of land uses and the storage and use of potentially harmful materials.
  - a. Land regulations will be carefully constructed to protect water quality of rivers, stream, and lakes, which are often more sensitive environments that may need different land use regulations than other areas in a town.
  - b. Town roadways will be designed and improved to protect water resource quality.
  - c. The Town will use the Stormwater Management Manual produced by DEEP
8. Sand, rock and gravel extraction activities will be conducted in a manner that mitigates impacts on the natural environment, surrounding neighborhoods and the community; that site reclamation will result in land use(s) which are beneficial to the Town; and that the extraction is in conformance with federal, state and Town regulations.

9. Protect and enhance wildlife habitat.

10. The preservation and protection of the wetlands and watercourses from random, unnecessary, undesirable and unregulated uses, disturbance or destruction

a. The Wetlands and Watercourses Commission will apply and enforce the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses regulations.

## Agriculture

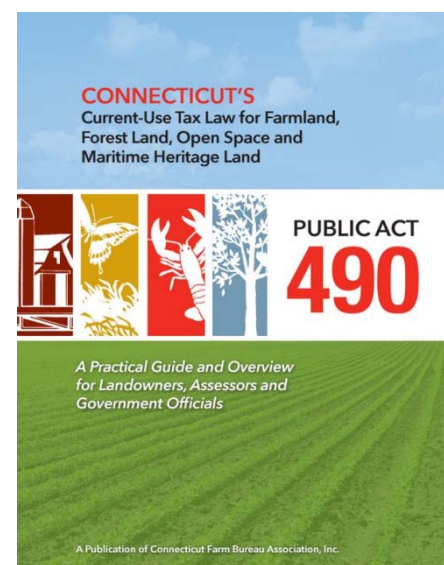
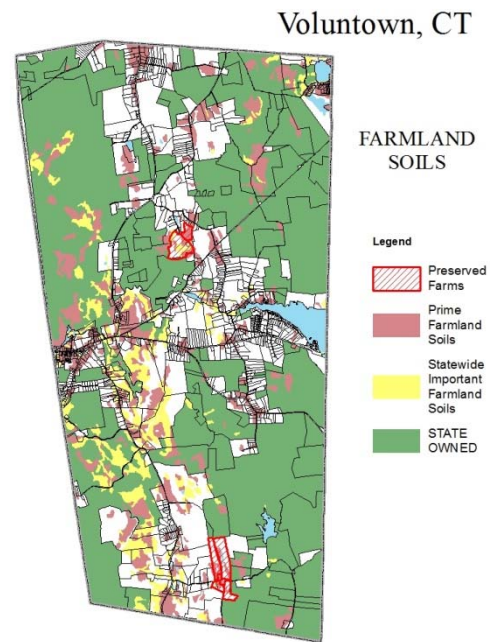
Voluntown has a long agricultural history, and the active agricultural lands contribute to the look and feel of the town's present day treasured rural character. While some of the old farm fields have turned to woods, agriculture remains a dominant feature of the landscape. Active farms include dairy, Christmas tree, and forestry. Many open fields continue to be used for crops.

In 2010, according to the University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education, 5% of Voluntown's land cover was classified as "agricultural field," while that number was 7.4% for Connecticut. Agricultural field land cover has remained steady since 1985.<sup>34</sup>

While most of the agricultural lands are dedicated to field crops, agricultural enterprise in Voluntown ranges from dairy, to honey, vegetables, meat, eggs and poultry, maple syrup, flowers and horse farms. Agriculture in Voluntown is varied. Farms range greatly in size. Some occupy the largest parcels in town, while others are small backyard enterprises run primarily for personal use.

The Town of Voluntown, like other towns in Connecticut, uses "Public Act 490" as a means to keep land in agriculture. This law, which enables farm, forest and open space lands to be taxed locally at their use value rather than their market value has been critical to the protection of these resources. The declaration of policy for this law is as follows:

*It is hereby declared (1) that it is **in the public interest** to encourage the **preservation of farm land, forest land, open space land** and maritime heritage land **in order to maintain a readily available source of food and farm products** close to the metropolitan areas of the state, to conserve the state's natural resources and to provide for the welfare and happiness of the inhabitants of the state, (2) **that it is in the public interest to prevent the forced conversion of farm land, forest land, open space land** and maritime heritage land to more intensive uses as the result of economic pressures caused by the assessment thereof for purposes of*



<sup>34</sup> University of Connecticut Center for Land Use education and Research Land Cover 1985-2015

*property taxation at values incompatible with their preservation as such farm land, forest land, open space land and maritime heritage land, ... is a **matter of legislative determination**.* (emphasis added) **Sec. 12-107a. Declaration of policy.**

The Voluntown EDC manages a weekly farmers market between July and August, at the town elementary school. The farmers' market takes place on Sundays, and consists of farmers and growers from town as well as neighboring communities. Remaining a farm-friendly community is a complex process. Traditional farming is becoming less profitable in New England, despite the efforts of local and state government. Concurrently, outward migration from cities, to rural towns, may create future conflicts between new residents and existing farmers.

Many communities have recently formed Agricultural Committees to serve as an advisory, non-regulatory commission made up of local farmers and those representing the interest of farmers and residents in general. The Committees help inform decisions made by the Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Selectmen, and other bodies, as they relate to agriculture, to ensure that policies formed by those boards and commissions do not harm farmers.

Agriculture is changing in New England. Many are finding that niche and specialty products and "agritourism" are gaining profitability as consumer interest rises in experiences over commodities. The new business models that grow from these demands, represent an opportunity for diversifying Voluntown's economic development opportunities. Policies should seek to allow for creativity in new types of agricultural operations while supporting the traditional farming operations.



*Voluntown Farmers Market*

## Goal

A vibrant agriculture; supported by the Town

## Objectives and Actions

1. Develop New, Farm-Friendly Policies
  - a. Revise zoning regulations to better support agriculture

b. Enact Tax Exemption for Farm Buildings (CGS Section 12-91-c) and a Property Tax Abatement (CGS § 12-81-m) to promote sustainability for current farmers and to also encourage new farmers to come into Voluntown.

c. Use the state definition of agriculture (C.G.S §1-1) in zoning regulations

d. Enact a Right to Farm Ordinance

e. Follow the legislative intent of PA 490 – to reduce the forced conversion of farm, forest and open space.

f. Enable, by ordinance and zoning regulation change, processing and production of agricultural products produced in Voluntown.

## 2. Increase the Acreage of Preserved Farm Land

a. Assist landowners in applying to the state's Farmland Preservation program and other similar programs

b. Prioritize unprotected parcels for future preservation

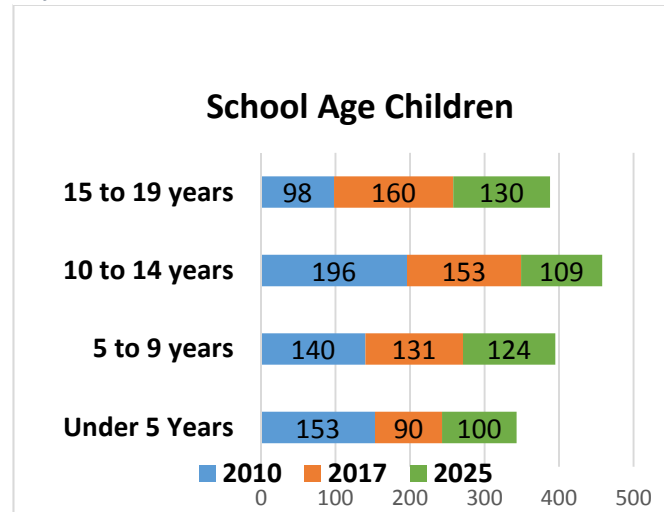
c. Promote the economic value of agriculture as an economic driver for the Town.

## Education

The Town is served by Voluntown Elementary School, which houses grades Pre-K - 8. Originally built in 1953, additional class rooms have been added over the years most recently in 2000 an early childhood and junior high school wing. Various capital improvements such as a new boiler have also been completed over the years.

2017 K-8 enrollment was 282 students with two classrooms per grades 1-4 and a teacher per core subject for grades 5-6 and 7-8. Full time kindergarten was established in 2007. The schools mission is;

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, UCONN Pop. Projections



“Our mission is based on the following beliefs/values:

- All students need to be valued and respected.
- All students are at a unique developmental stage and require a safe and nurturing learning environment appropriate to their particular emotional and cognitive needs.
- A comprehensive academic program must recognize the individual needs, interests, and learning styles of all students.
- An optimal curriculum addresses all facets of literacy and benchmark standards, teaching basic skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills in a variety of disciplines.
- A cooperative relationship with parents and community is vital in the education of children”

Source: CT Department of Education, Voluntown School Profile

Overall Expenditures: <sup>3</sup> 2016-17			
	Total (\$)	Per Pupil	
		District (\$)	State (\$)
Instructional Staff and Services	2,841,783	10,186	9,847
Instructional Supplies and Equipment	114,243	409	287
Improvement of Instruction and Educational Media Services	126,264	453	589
Student Support Services	424,794	1,523	1,120
Administration and Support Services	775,020	2,778	1,905
Plant Operation and Maintenance	368,193	1,320	1,648
Transportation	525,650	1,311	904
Costs of Students Tuitioned Out	633,617	N/A	N/A
Other	58,458	210	208
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,868,022</b>	<b>19,758</b>	<b>16,535</b>
Additional Expenditures			
Land, Buildings, and Debt Service	70,875	254	1,393

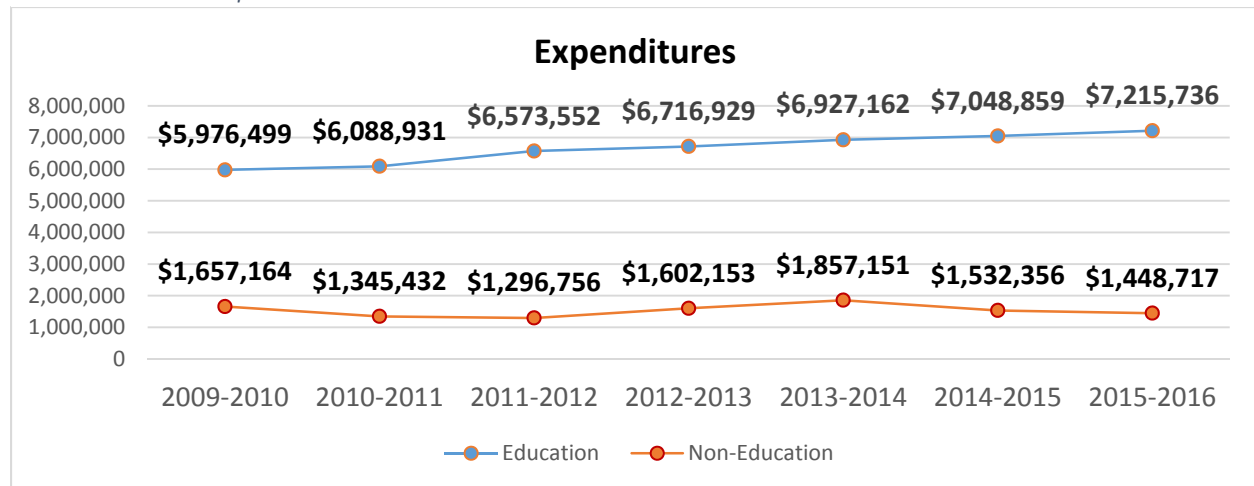
<sup>3</sup>Expenditures may be supported by local tax revenues, state grants, federal grants, municipal in-kind services, tuition and other sources.

Academically, the school performs above the state average based on the District performance index (DPI), Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) where a majority of students are performing at or above the goal.

Voluntown Elementary school's Strategic School Profile shows that the costs associated with student instruction is slightly higher than the state average (\$10,186 per pupil compared to \$ 9,847). The disparity in educational costs are clearly related to the administration of the school. In large part this is a function of providing required administrative services to schools significantly smaller than others in the region and state. Administrative costs per pupil are \$2,778 compared to \$ 1,648. Transportation costs in rural areas like Voluntown also contribute to the \$ 19,758 per pupil cost \$3,200 more than the state.<sup>35</sup>

Ninth grade students have the opportunity to choose one of seven available high school programs (Griswold High School, H. H. Ellis Technical High School, Killingly Agricultural Education Program, Marine Science Magnet High School, Norwich Free Academy, Norwich Technical High School, and Quinebaug Middle College) located throughout Eastern Connecticut.

Source: CT OPM Municipal Fiscal Indicators



It is very important to understand that while the POCD is the community's blueprint for the future, statutorily the board of education is responsible for education. The Voluntown Board of Education and administration in order to keep costs low participate in state consortiums to purchase supplies.

In terms of the POCD, the next ten years will present many challenges for education in Voluntown.

- Population projections, locally and statewide, indicate that student enrollment will stagnate at best and most likely decrease.

<sup>35</sup> Connecticut State Department of education Profile and Performance Reports 2017-2018

- The cost to educate students will most likely continue to increase.
- Addressing the financial issues without adversely impacting the academics

## Issues

- Cost to the community
- Sustaining quality educational outcomes
- Community understanding of the school system, especially for those without students in the system
- Maintaining school's physical plant in proper condition
- Safety for students, faculty and visitors
- Use of buildings and grounds

## Goal

Education plays a critical role in defining the quality of life in the community. Quality educational opportunities (pre, elementary, secondary and post) must be available to residents.

## Objectives and Actions

1. Maintain strong communication and cooperation between the Boards of Education. Town Hall and the general public.
  - a. The Boards of Education and Selectmen should meet jointly not less than twice a year to discuss, review the status of education.
  - b. The Town, through the Boards of Education and supported by the Boards of Selectmen, should encourage all residents and especially parents and/or legal guardians to be understanding of and active in the school system. Community engagement in the schools is crucial to maintaining continued success in academics, athletics and arts.
  - c. The Boards of Education and the Town will explore areas, such as back-office operations, health insurance and other large ticket cost items where efficiencies and cost savings may be gained through collaboration both intra town and regionally.
  - d. Investigate the Broadcasting, via social media, Board of Education meetings on the Town's website.
2. Encourage parents and other residents to be involved in educational matters to ensure community participation and support

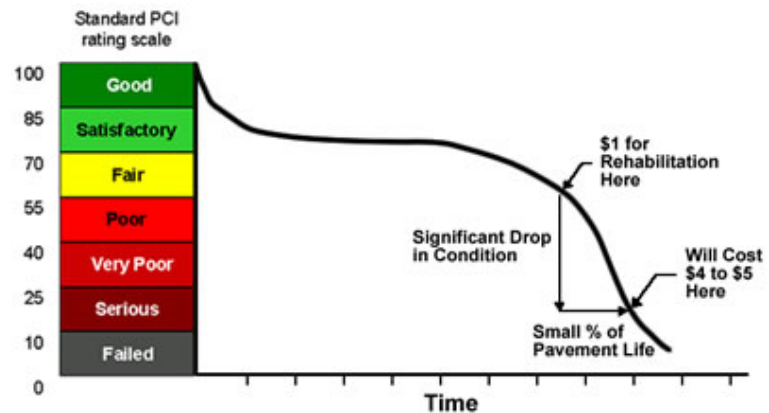
- a. The Town's school system should meet with local daycare providers to discuss curricula, benchmarks, and ways to transition to school.
  - b. The Town should assist in the dissemination and coordination of information about after-school opportunities available to youth, such as school-based or nonprofit programs, library-based, church-based, and volunteer and recreation programs.
  - c. The Town should be knowledgeable of programs including but not limited to Even Start, Head Start, Healthy Families, Family Resource Centers, Community Health and Home Care, and Birth to three as potentially valuable for residents and their children.
  - d. Adult education, continuing education and other similar programs should be supported by the Town and information concerning these programs should be available at the Town Hall.
3. The Boards of Education will continue to seek ways to reduce costs through cooperative purchasing and/or personnel arrangements.
4. Foster a safe school community that values diversity of all kinds while developing morals and character.
5. Promote adult and continuing educational programs

## Transportation

Transportation in Voluntown like most communities is by automobile. The transportation system is broken down into state and local roads connecting primarily single family residential properties to the larger state and federal network and commercial businesses. The Village Center is located at the convergence of these state roadways. Maintenance of the local road system as well as drainage, snow removal and other improvements are the responsibility of the town.

Voluntown has 48.2 miles of state and local roadway within its border. The State roads make up 38% of the road network totaling 18.3 miles. Voluntown maintains 29.9 miles of local roadway 93% of which is improved (paved) with 2.2 miles unimproved (dirt).<sup>36</sup>

Year-to-year, repairing, maintaining, and plowing roads typically represents Voluntown's largest non-educational expense. Accordingly, having in place a sound pavement management system saves money and enhances the safety as well as the longevity of roadways. The accompanying chart demonstrates the need to manage - not just maintain - pavement. As a rule, every dollar spent on maintaining a road now will save four to five dollars on repairing it later. It makes sense to invest in keeping roads in good condition and not wait until they fully deteriorate.



*Pavement Management*

Route 138 is the primary road classified as a rural minor arterial and runs east west from and Interstate 395 to Interstate 95 in Rhode Island. Interstate 395 which runs north and south through most of Eastern CT is approximately 5 miles from the Voluntown Border via RT 138. RT 95 is just under 7 miles. RT 49 travels north to south from Sterling to North Stonington and along with RT 165 is considered a Major Collector Road. RT 165 also runs in an East to west pattern from Griswold to Rhode Island.

Additions to the road network have been limited do to the lack of any large subdivisions requiring new roads. New road construction is regulated by both the Town Road Ordinance and the Voluntown subdivision Regulations. The two documents should be reviewed for consistency with each other as well as current standards and best practices.

<sup>36</sup> Connecticut Department of Transportation, Town Road List as of December 31,2018

The existing traffic within the village center, the area around the town hall, library, Church Street, Preston City Rd (Route 165) presents safety concerns for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. High speeds and increased truck traffic have created unsafe conditions, especially during peak hours. The town had invested in adding sidewalks from Carroll Row to the school on the north side of Main St. and along the south side of Church Street to provide safer access for pedestrians to municipal facilities and local business. Stamped and colored concrete sidewalks and crosswalks were added to reduce speeds within the village center. A narrow strip of sidewalk continues to Beach dale Ave. past Greenwood Manor.



Average Daily Traffic (ADT) counts for state roads in 2017 have fluctuated both up and down from the 2008 counts performed by CT DOT. RT 49 northeast of Wylie School Rd. at Station 32 increased 29% while Station 11 at the North Stonington town line decreased by 13%. The highest traffic continues to be on RT 138 between the Griswold town line to the RT 165, Station 10 with 6,000 and Station 8 with 7,700. The greatest percent of increase in traffic since 2008 occurs on RT 165 east of the split with RT 138 at Station 5 (16%), 30 (19%) and 15 (42%). This may indicate an increase of pass through traffic into Rhode Island that once used RT 138 as

Route	Station	Segment	2008	2017	%
<b>49</b>	31	At the Sterling TL	1400	1400	0%
	32	NE of Wylie School Road	1700	2200	29%
	20	SW of Wylie School Road	1900	1800	-5%
	7	North of Route 138	2200	2500	14%
	9	SE of Route 165	1700	1700	0%
	17	At North Stonington TL	1500	1300	-13%
<b>165</b>	29	SW of Route 49	3100	2700	-13%
	26	SW of Route 138 (W Jct)	3400	2200	-35%
	5	East of Route 138 (E Jct)	3700	4300	16%
	30	East of Forge Hill Road	3100	3700	19%
	15	At Rhode Island SL	2400	3400	42%
<b>138</b>	10	West of Route 165 (W Jct)	5700	6000	5%
	8	West of Route 49	7400	7700	4%
	14	East of Shetucket Turnpike	5200	5700	-10%
	6	SE of Route 165 (E Jct)	1800	1500	-17%
	16	At Rhode Island State Line	1200	1000	-17%

Source: CT DOT Traffic Count Data

Stations 6 and 16 have decreased by 17%.<sup>37</sup> There are also concerns regarding an increase in commercial truck traffic accessing Interstates 95 and 395 while avoiding tolls in neighboring Rhode Island.

The Town has no public transportation access for residents through Southeast Area Transit or Northeast Transit. Transportation for elderly and disabled adults for medical services is available through the Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium and the CT Department of Labor as long as

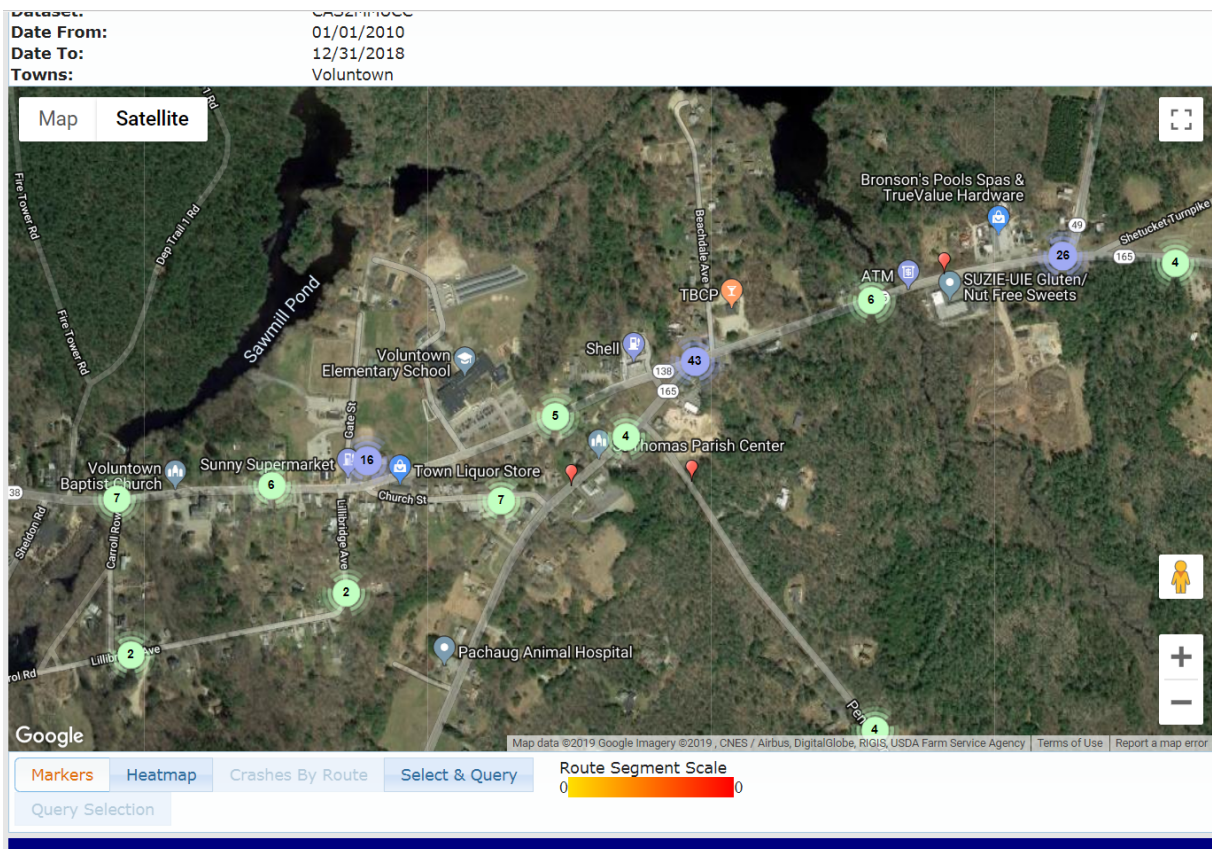
funding is available. The programs include the Eastern CT Travel Voucher, Northeast Senior

<sup>37</sup> Connecticut Department of Transportation, Traffic Monitoring Volume and Classification Information

Transportation and Rides for Jobs service. Each program varies in qualifications and services.<sup>38</sup> There is no commercial bus transportation available in Town. T.F. Green located in Warwick, Rhode Island is within 35 minutes of town and provides commercial service for both passengers and cargo.

Voluntown also benefits from numerous trail systems within the Pachaug Forest. The Voluntown Economic Development Commission published a Trail and Map Guide in 2017 that provides suggested trails for hiking as well as equestrian use. The guide also advertises local

### UCONN Crash DATA Repository



businesses as well as other activities within both the Pachaug Forest and Voluntown. Many northeast CT communities have also benefited by developing multi use trails that connect the downtown or village areas to points of interest and commercial centers. Long and short-range trail connections may increase the viability of alternative transportation modes and create additional recreational opportunities.

CT Crash Data from 2010 to 2018 for the town of Voluntown includes 354 accidents, 79% of them occurred on state roads with 69 on local roads. RT49 and 138 combined for 76% of crashes on state roads while RT 165 had 24%. Local roads with 10 or more accidents were Shetucket Turnpike (11), Wylie School Rd, (10), and Brown Rd (11). A majority of the accidents on local roads resulted in No Apparent Injuries 72%, with one suspected serious injury.

<sup>38</sup> Eastern Connecticut Transportation Consortium, Inc. Services Provided

Accidents on State roads resulted in Property Damage only 66% of the time with 32% resulting in possible or suspected injuries. There were four fatalities on State roads within Voluntown between 2010 and 2018. Accident frequency has varied from a low of 31 in 2013 to high of 47 in 2016. Since 2014 accident totals have all been within the range of 41-47 per year so a slight increasing trend is visible. Accidents on State Roads when compared to the 2010 POCD totals for 2004-2006 have increased in the most recent three year period of 2016-2018 by 15%. The highest frequency of accidents 22% continue to occur within the eastern stretch of RT 138 nearest the Village.<sup>39</sup>

One consideration the town may need to be aware of related to roads and infrastructure that may occur within the next 10 years is the CT DEEP municipal storm water program known as MS4.

MS4 is a:

*“General Permit for the Discharge of Stormwater from Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4 General Permit) is the product of a mandate by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) as part of its Stormwater Phase II rules in 1999. This general permit requires each municipality to take steps to keep the stormwater entering its storm sewer systems clean before that stormwater enters water bodies. One important element of this permit is the requirement that towns implement public education programs to make residents aware that stormwater pollutants emanate from many of their everyday living activities, and to inform them of steps they can take to reduce pollutants in stormwater runoff.”<sup>40</sup>*

Based on current discussions, MS4 compliance may be required for small municipalities by 2020 or 2021.

## Issues

- There are a number of pedestrian and traffic safety issues in and around the village center
- The repair and maintenance of Town roads and bridges.
- Funding for transportation improvements and basic maintenance
- Trails that could be improved and expanded
- Lack of adequate public transportation
- Compliance with MS-4 Stormwater Regulations
- Documentation of infrastructure improvements
- Public Works Department

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<sup>39</sup> University of Connecticut, Connecticut Crash Data Repository

<sup>40</sup>[https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2721&q=558562&deepNav\\_GID=1654](https://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2721&q=558562&deepNav_GID=1654)

## **Goal**

Voluntown's infrastructure will be compatible with the town's goals for responsible growth, consistent with its rural nature, citizen needs, and economic sustainability

## **Objectives and Actions**

1. A cooperative relationship with the State to make improvements to State Routes and Collectors necessary for safety and smooth traffic flow in a manner that minimizes the impact on the environment, residential areas, and the rural character.

a. All significant road projects will be reviewed by the Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands and Watercourses prior to Town sign-off.

b. Town roads that are used (by both residents and nonresident) as thru roads ("collectors") to locations outside of the town should be identified and assistance sought from the State and Federal governments to maintain, improve, and protect public safety.

c. Actively participate in the NECCOG transportation planning process.

2. A Town road system maintained in optimal condition and with respect for the character and natural resources of the Town.

a. Put in place and maintain a sound road management plan.

b. The Town will institute and maintain a prioritized system for road and bridge improvement projects based on the following:

- A pavement rating inventory and maintenance management system; culvert and drainage inventory program;
- Accident and traffic data from Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety
- Advice of the Town Engineer
- The improvements will be prioritized in the five-year capital improvements plan, based upon the condition and level of use of the road.

c. Review standards for town road configurations (new and existing) that are appropriate for the use and site conditions.

d. Identify areas of the Town where traffic calming techniques could be employed and apply such techniques as warranted.

- e. The Town will initiate a local road traffic count project as a means of better understanding the traffic use characteristics of its roads. The Town can request assistance with traffic counts from NECCOG.
  - f. The Board of Selectmen and the Planning and Zoning Commission to establish road standards consistent with the use of each road and the Town's Road ordinance and subdivision regulations.
  - g. Develop road management practices that include low impact designs that control and treat roadway runoff rather than draining quickly to the nearest watercourse.
  - h. While planning road drainage improvements, Voluntown will retrofit its existing stormwater drainage infrastructures to include features that will treat roadway runoff before discharging into receiving watercourses.
  - i. Whenever possible, major town road projects will be reviewed by a town consulting engineer.
3. A public transportation option for residents in need of access to services and basic needs
- a. Utilizing social media survey residents about their transportation needs.
4. Plan for Infrastructure that is supportive of Voluntown's Existing Rural Character
- a. Continue to repair and maintain streets in a way that does not cause the pavement to erode at edges
  - b. Allow for narrow and alternative (such as gravel) road design in new subdivisions
  - c. Implement a "best-first" approach to road reconstruction
5. Develop Municipal Stormwater Strategy consistent with future Department of Energy and Environmental Protection MS-4 guidelines.

## Recreation

The Voluntown Recreation Commission was established in 1996 and consists of a 7 member appointed board. The commission administers programs for both youth and adults that include basketball, volleyball, and softball. The Commission also manages the use and improvements at Constitution Field. The Recreation Commission also has a social media presence on Facebook where they advertise special events and inform citizens of upcoming programs.



Constitution field is a 5.9 acre multi-use field located between the town hall and elementary school. The property was provided to the town for recreational purposes by the CT DEEP. The property includes fields for softball and soccer as well as a basketball court and playground. Recent upgrades to the stairs leading from the school now provides handicap access. An adjacent 6.5 acre property houses a pavilion, gazebo, additional soccer field with walking track and access to sawmill pond for fishing, kayaking or hiking. Indoor activities utilize the elementary school gymnasium.

*Mission Statement: The purpose of the Voluntown Recreation Commission is to seek the development of recreational programs and enhancement of recreational facilities associated with sponsored Voluntown Day at the CT Tigers programs on various town owned lands, for the residents of Voluntown, without bias to race, income, age sex, or ability. The Commission shall be vested with the power, duties and obligations necessary to accomplish this purpose. They shall be charged with full responsibility for the recreation programs designated by the Commission.*

*Constitution Field in Voluntown*



The town also operates Finn Beach located on the western shore of Beach Pond along North Shore Road. Parking is located across the street on privately leased property. The beach is owned by CT DEEP but maintained by the town. The beach is open seasonally and requires a parking permit and fees are used to offset the cost of security.

The town supports other organizations to provide team activities such as youth soccer and little league baseball and softball.

Pachaug Forest provides miles of trails for hiking, biking, and equestrian use as well as opportunities for boating, fishing and camping. 58 miles of trails

for motorized sports such as dirt bikes and snowmobiles are also available. The Friends of Pachaug Forest Inc. and the Last Green Valley, Inc. promote and conduct recreational activities within the forest that are open to the public.<sup>41</sup>

## **Issues**

- Recreational space for indoor activities (gymnasium)
- Staffing levels for the Recreation Commission

## **Goals and Objectives**

Provide recreational opportunities for all ages

## **Actions**

1. Review space needs for both indoor and outdoor recreational activities
2. Continue to work with other towns and organizations to increase recreational opportunities.
3. Support town wide events such as fairs and festivals

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<sup>41</sup> Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, State Parks

## Cultural and Historic Preservation

Voluntown is rich in history from its pre-colonial days and involvement in the Native American wars to early industrial mills and the Civil Conservation Corps. Many historic buildings and structures can be found throughout Voluntown's landscape. The Voluntown Historical Society lists twenty-two sites of historical significance from 1600's to the 1800's within town.



*Wylie School House*

Three sites are listed on the Connecticut Register of Historic places. They are the Robbins Tavern located on Beach Pond Rd, Wylie Schoolhouse on Ekonk Hill Rd and the Voluntown Methodist Church on Main St. The Wylie Schoolhouse was built around 1850 and was in use up until 1939. It has remained and furnished with an old stove, desks, tables, chairs and artifacts which would have been typical of a one room's school.<sup>42</sup>

“Until well into the 20th century, small schools such as this represented the principal educational experience for many small town Connecticut residents. Many similar schools, like the Wylie School, dotted the landscape of Connecticut, but most have disappeared over time. Wylie School is one of a few that remain intact.”

“The parcel of land was given by Henry Wylie, who was a local farmer. He also contributed

*Old Meeting House on Church St,*



funds to the Congregational Church. Upon his death he left his entire estate to the church. Wylie School served as a school until 1939.”<sup>43</sup>

One of many storms in 2018 brought down a large pine tree near the building and caused other damage to the house which prompted the Historical Society and Board of Selectmen to create the Wylie School House Renovations Committee. The

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm>

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WME0YN\\_Wylie\\_School\\_Voluntown\\_CT](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WME0YN_Wylie_School_Voluntown_CT)

group has already secured grants from the Last Green Valley and Jewett City Savings Bank for work to the interior and exterior.

The second historical building threatened was the old meeting house on Church St. A special committee was charged with providing cost estimate for moving the structure to land behind the town hall. The committee provided three options for the structure the cheapest being demolition. The town voted against demolition costs but the structures future remains up in the air.

Historic buildings and sites provide the foreground to rural landscapes that define Voluntown's past and help shape its future. The need for a mixture of the old and the new is what keeps towns and villages vibrant and welcoming. Voluntown's commitment to preserving the past may bear fruit in attracting visitors to local museums and attractions while keeping the communities "rural character".

### **Issues:**

- Voluntown has been unable to keep Architectural resources in good condition
- Zoning and Subdivision regulations not adequate to protect cultural, historic and archaeological resources.

### **Goal**

Preservation and protection of historical buildings, sites, and artifacts of Voluntown that will make them available to future generations and viable assets.

### **Objectives and Actions**

1. Protection of the town's historically and architecturally significant resources, structures, and sites.
  - a. In conjunction with the Historical Society, the town will assist in protecting historic materials from damage and/or theft consideration should be given to archival space for historic materials and records.
  - b. The Town will encourage donations to the Voluntown Historical Society and will consider funding historic preservation projects to the degree that funds are available.
  - c. Encourage the inclusion of Voluntown's history and geography into the curriculum of the school system.
  - d. The Planning and Zoning Commission will utilize and make reference in their regulations to the State Historic Preservation Office "Archaeological Resource Protection Handbook."

- e. The planning and zoning commission will review the regulations as they pertain to the use of Section 8-2j Village District Act

## Health and Public Safety

The town does not have a local Police department but is covered by Connecticut State Police out of Montville, CT. Troop E in Montville is located on Interstate 395 and is 20 miles from the center of Voluntown. Voluntown's crime rate is low: 526 arrests per 100,000 people, in 2017. This is down from 2010 when 942 arrests per 100,000 people.<sup>44</sup> Town officials and residents report concerns regarding nuisance behavior during warmer months in isolated sections of the forest. CT DEEP staffing levels and the distance for State police response make enforcement of park rules difficult.

All municipalities in Connecticut are responsible for providing fire protection and basic life support (BLS)—or ambulance service.

Typically, this is done through one or more contracts with local fire departments, but may also be done through a municipally run fire department or through contracts with neighboring towns. Both fire

and ambulance in Voluntown are provided by a centrally located, volunteer, independent fire company with a strong relationship with the town. The Firehouse is located on Preston City Rd. (RT 165) Municipalities are also required to have mutual-aid agreements with surrounding towns to provide assistance in emergency calls. The department has one ambulance that was purchased in 2008. In 2017 and 2018 they responded to 193 and 179 calls. An additional emergency service provided is paramedic, or "advanced life support" (ALS), service. Paramedic service is provided through American Ambulance.<sup>45</sup>

Voluntown Fire Company Apparatus



Between 2012 and 2016 the fire department responded to 563 fire calls, including 15 building fires, 11 chimney fires, 40 motor vehicle accidents and 294 EMS calls in Voluntown.<sup>46</sup> The department provided mutual aid on 149 occasions, while receiving mutual aid on 30 occasions. The town currently provides reimbursements to volunteers based on rank, participation and activity.

In 2010 the department had 50 volunteers and currently has a 2 tanker trucks, pumper truck, forestry truck, Humvee, rescue boat. The fire house was built in late 1970's and added on to in 1980. In 2000 the town enacted a Public Safety Volunteer Reimbursement Ordinance that establishes annual reimbursement rates for expenses, training and response in hopes of

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<sup>44</sup> Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, [ata.ct.org](http://ata.ct.org)

<sup>45</sup> NECCOG, Pre-Hospital Emergency care Study Phase II

<sup>46</sup> National Fire Incident Reporting System

increasing participation and retention. The Ordinance was replaced in 2009 and updated in 2010.

The Town is an active participant in the Region IV Connecticut Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management program. The Emergency operations plan defines local, regional, and state contacts for disaster response as well as procedures for requesting assistance.

The Region's most recent Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan, in accordance with FEMA guidelines and regulations, is intended to reduce or mitigate the impacts of natural hazards on the Region, including Voluntown. The Plan identifies five mitigation actions for the Town addressing flooding issues and other natural hazards the two with the highest priority were Review and/or upgrade Emergency Shelter capacity and acquire an emergency generator for the Town Hall.<sup>47</sup>

## **Issues**

- Seasonal visitors associated with Pachaug Forest and need for services
- Voluntown will likely never have a municipal police force
- The Resident State Trooper program is financially infeasible
- Natural Hazard Vulnerability
- CT DEEP limited staffing for Environmental Conservation Officers

## **Goal**

A safe community with responsive emergency services for residents, businesses, and visitors.

### **Objectives and Actions**

#### **1. Increase Volunteerism**

- a. Fully support volunteer fire and emergency services
- b. The Town will help the Fire Department by assisting the fire department in recruiting new volunteers and providing needed equipment and training
- c. Communicate the community benefits of a reliable volunteer fire force
- d. Continue to provide, as needed, financial incentives to maintain adequate staffing

#### **2. Support Efforts for Police and Community Crime Protection**

- a. Advocate for regular State Trooper presence

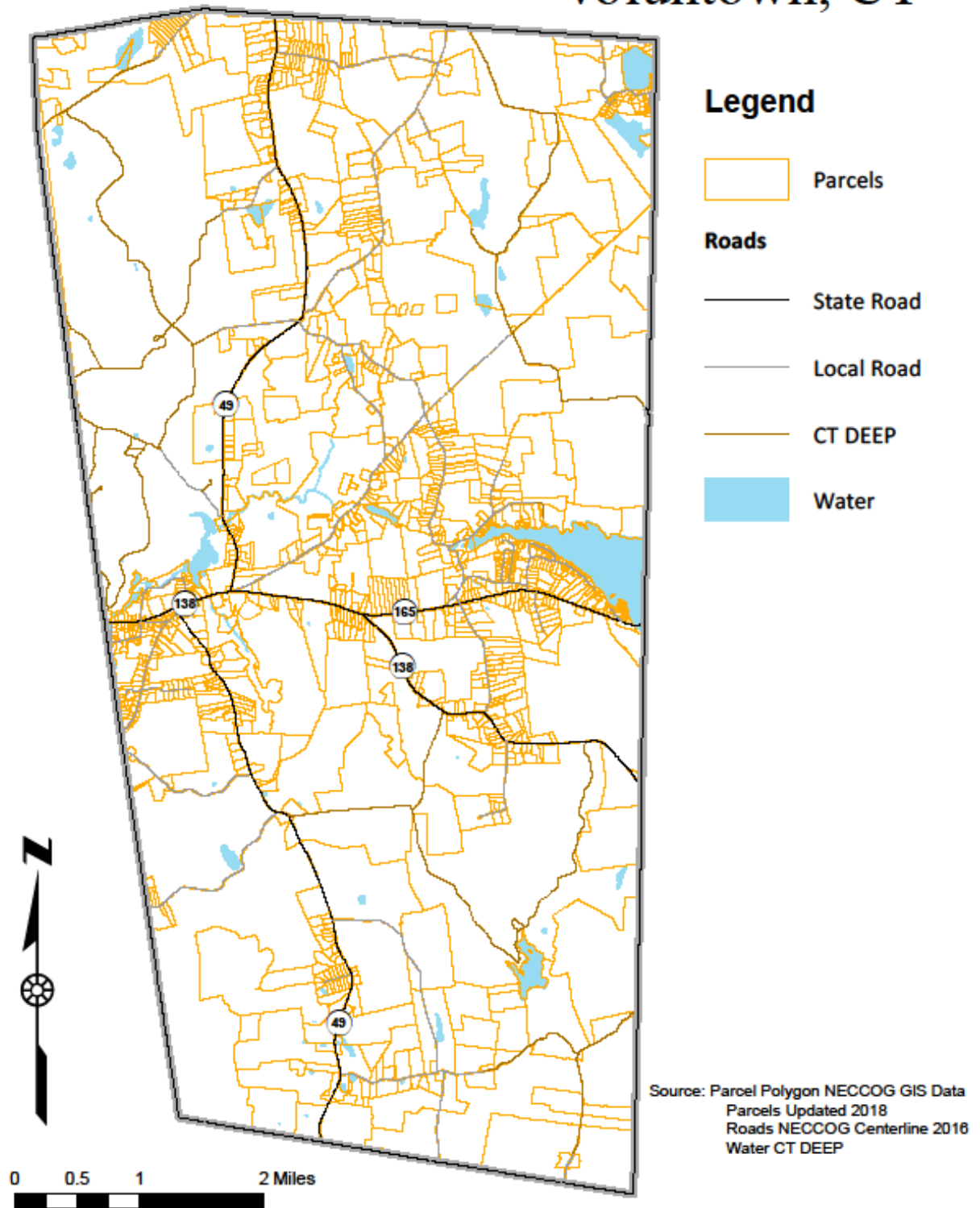
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<sup>47</sup> 2015 NECCOG Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan

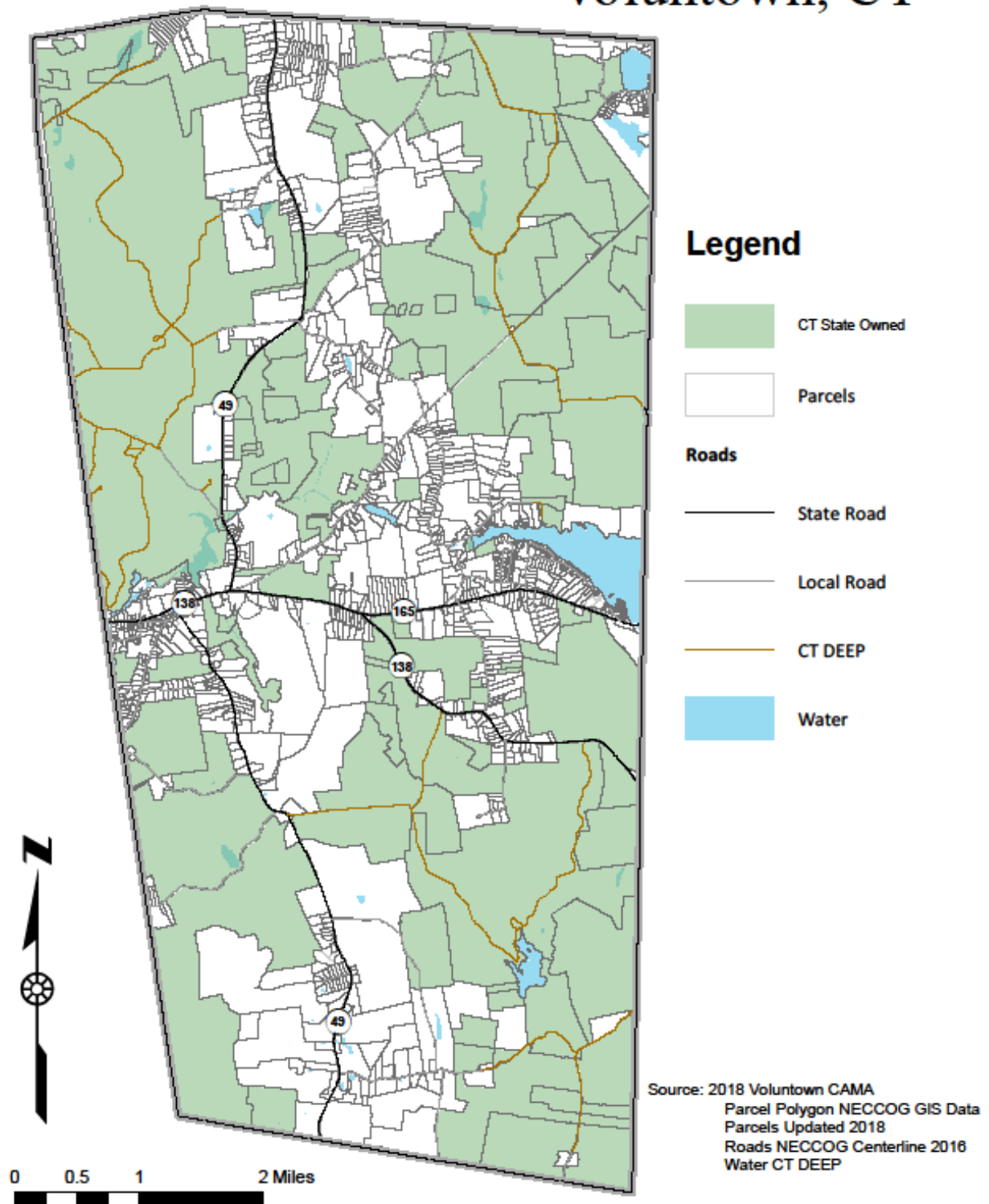
- b. Investigate the operations of the Neighborhood Crime Watch
  - c. The First Selectman will investigate a shared/Regional policing or State Troopers with adjacent towns or Region
- 3. Act on the Mitigation Items Identified in the Regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan
  - 4. Review recommendations of the NECCOG Pre-hospital Emergency Care Study Phase II

## **Appendix A**

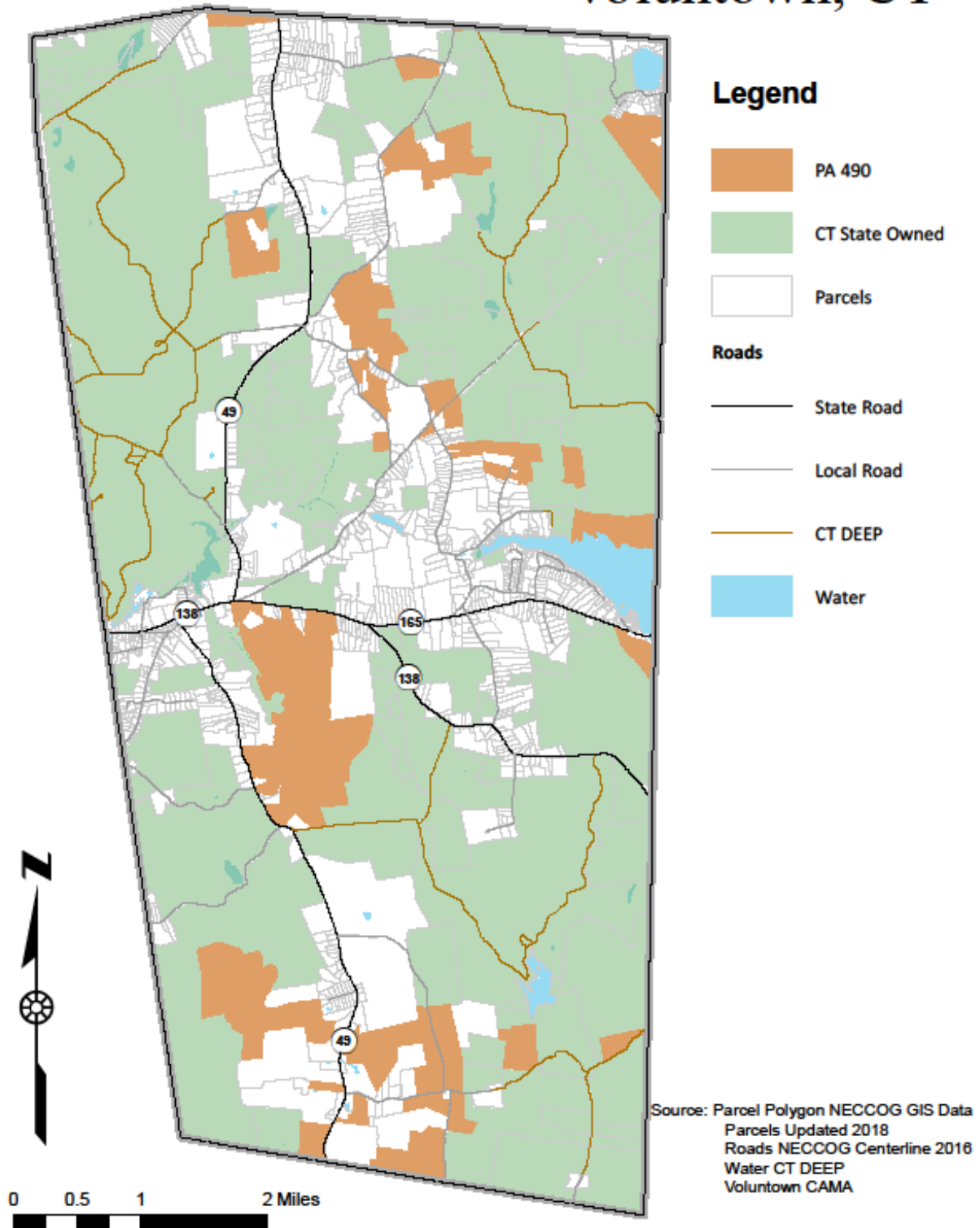
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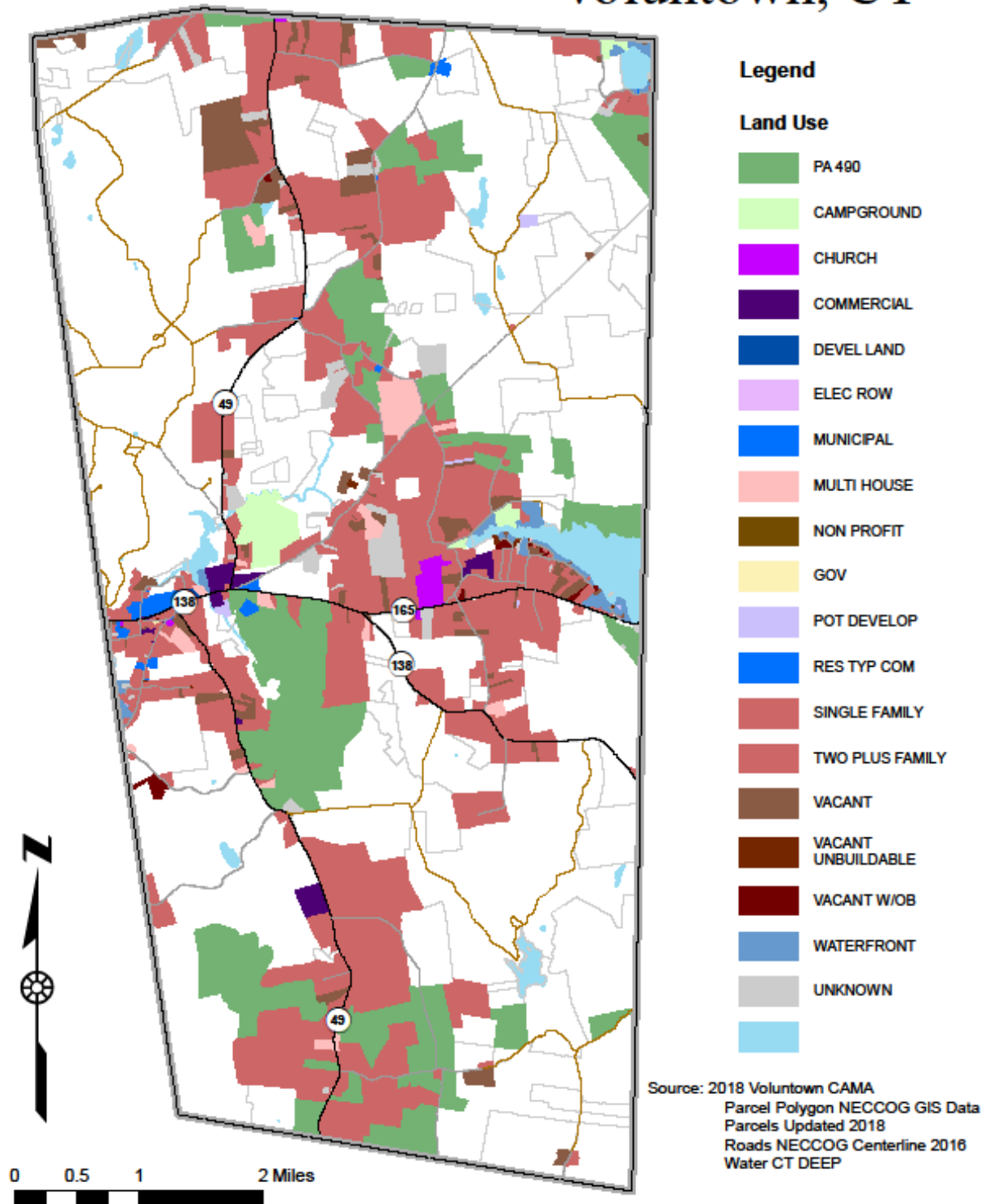
# Voluntown, CT



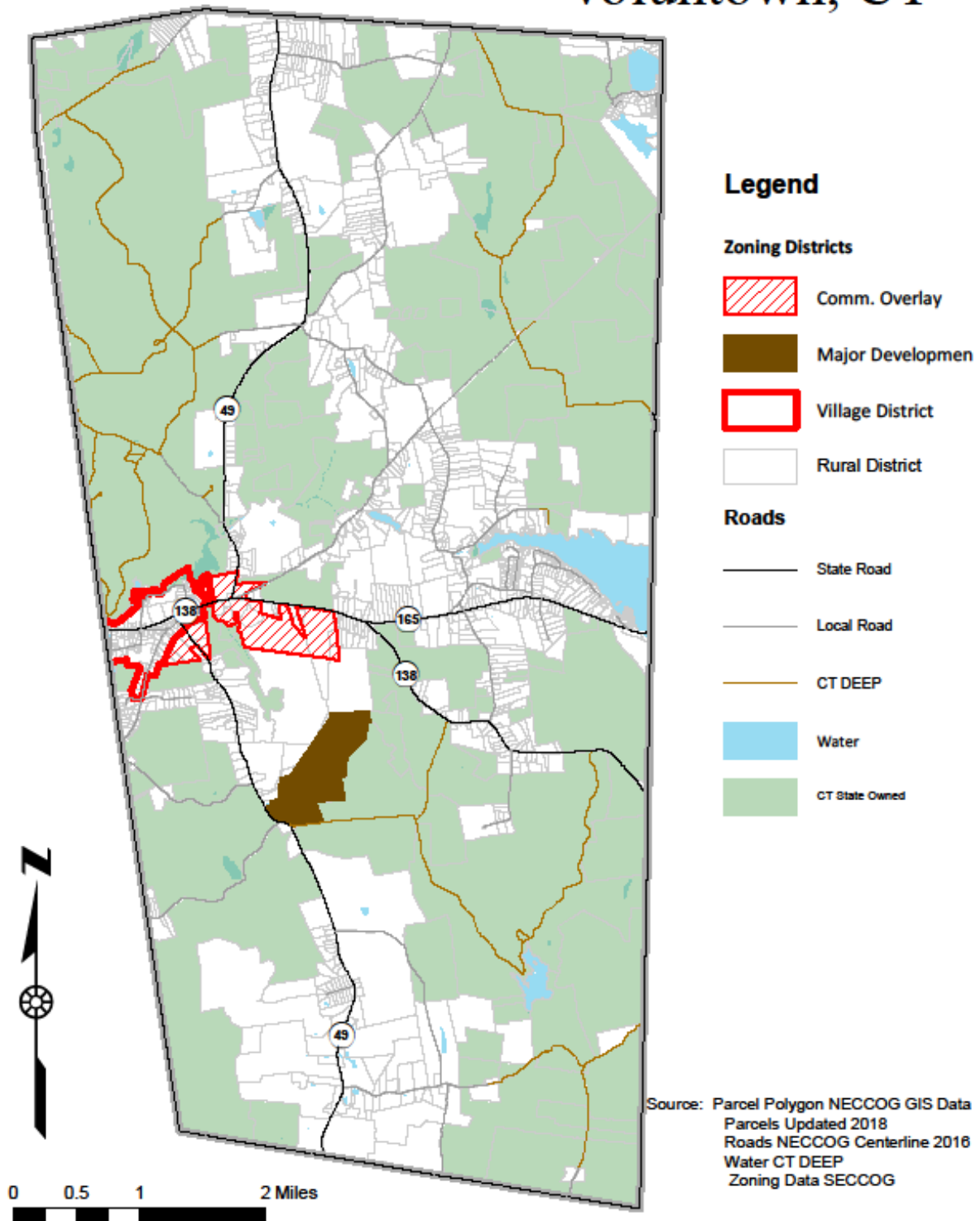
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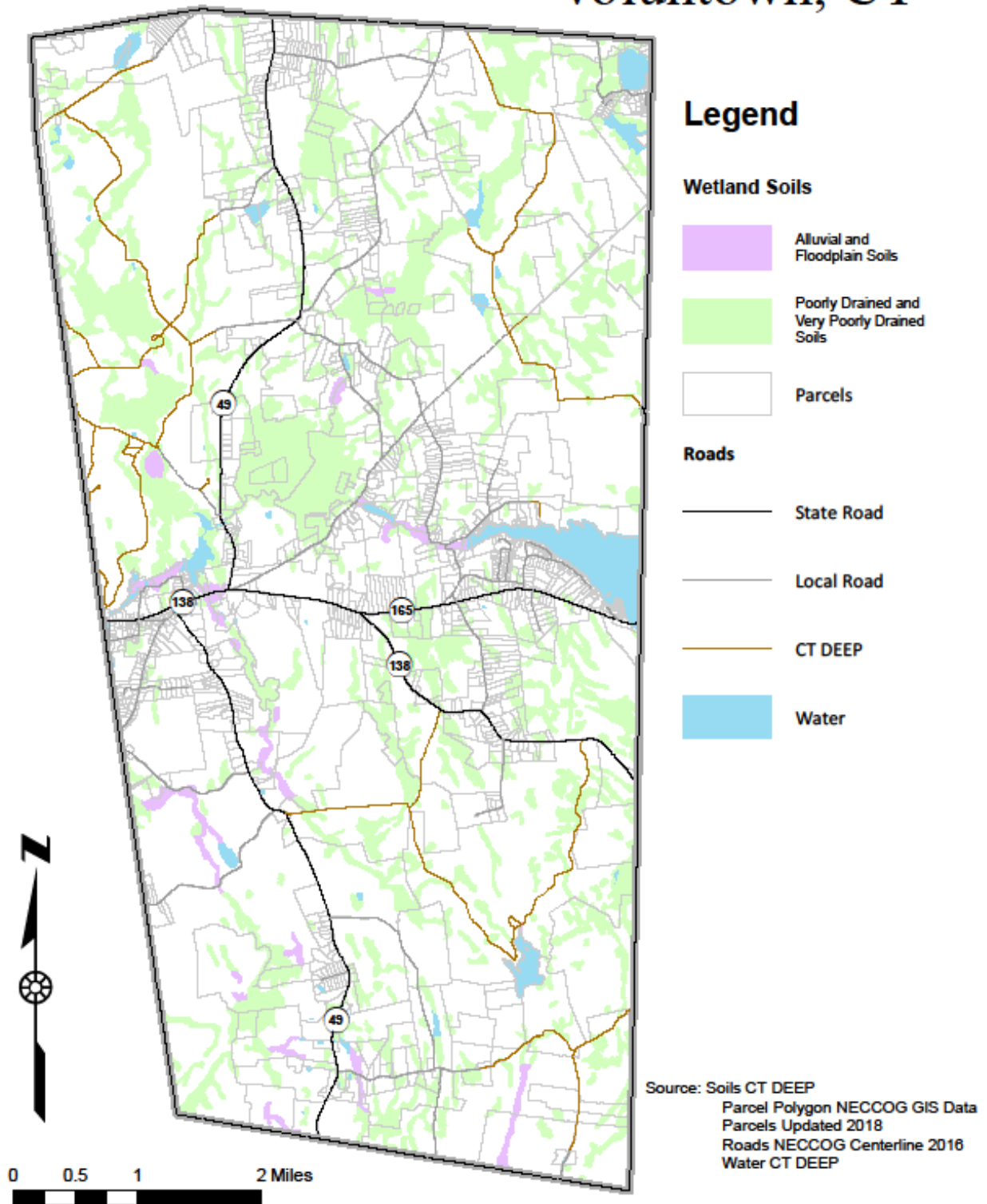
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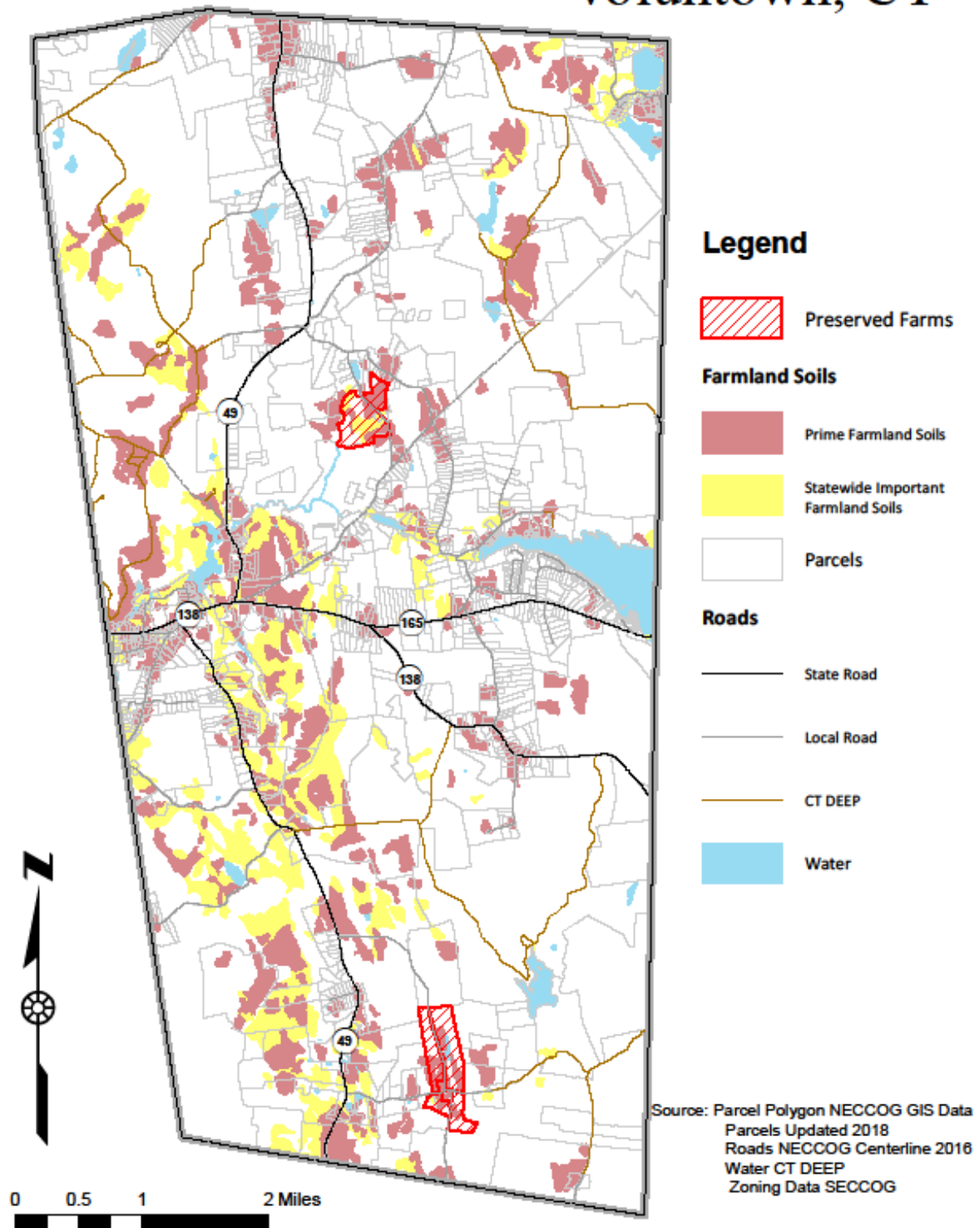
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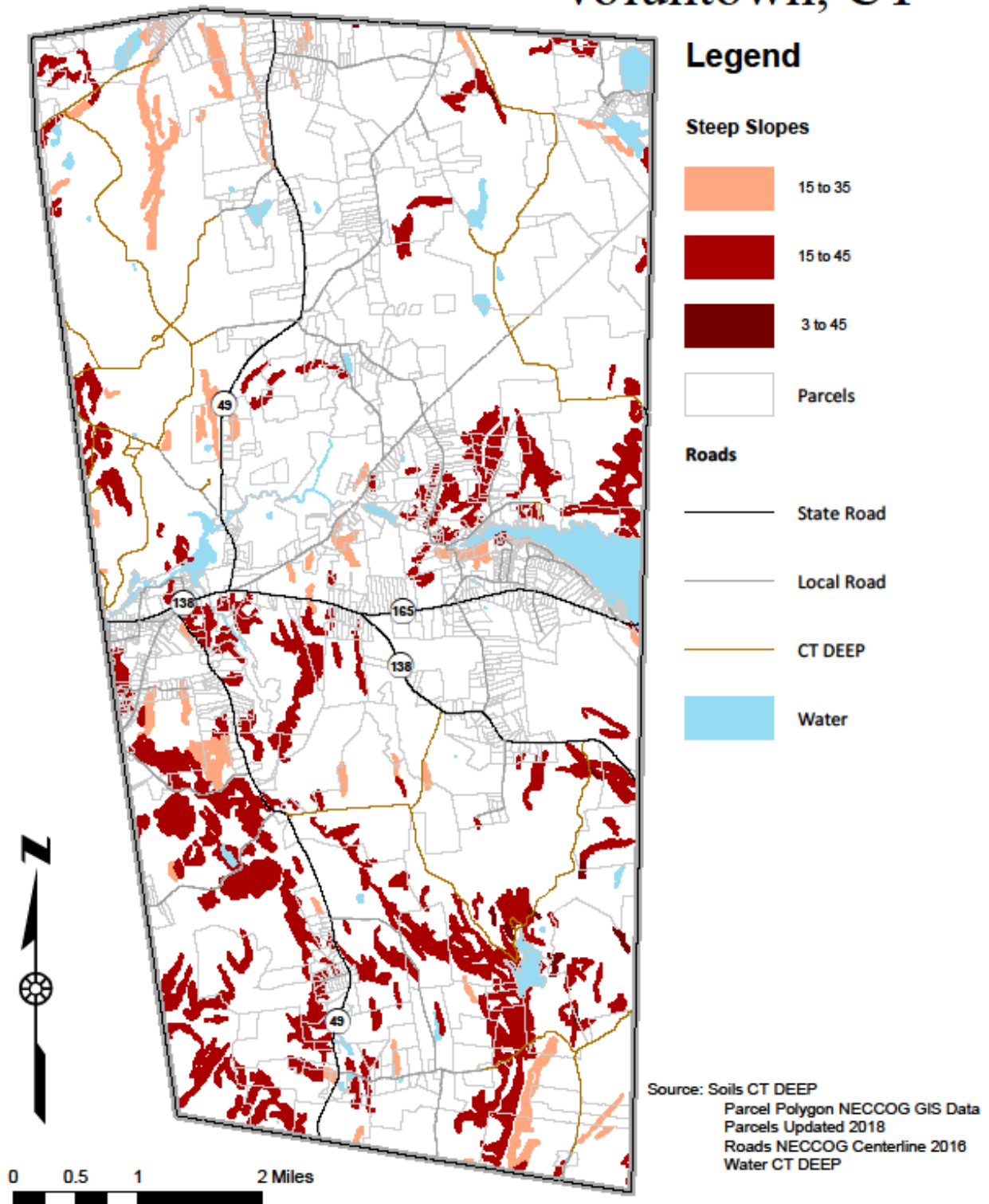
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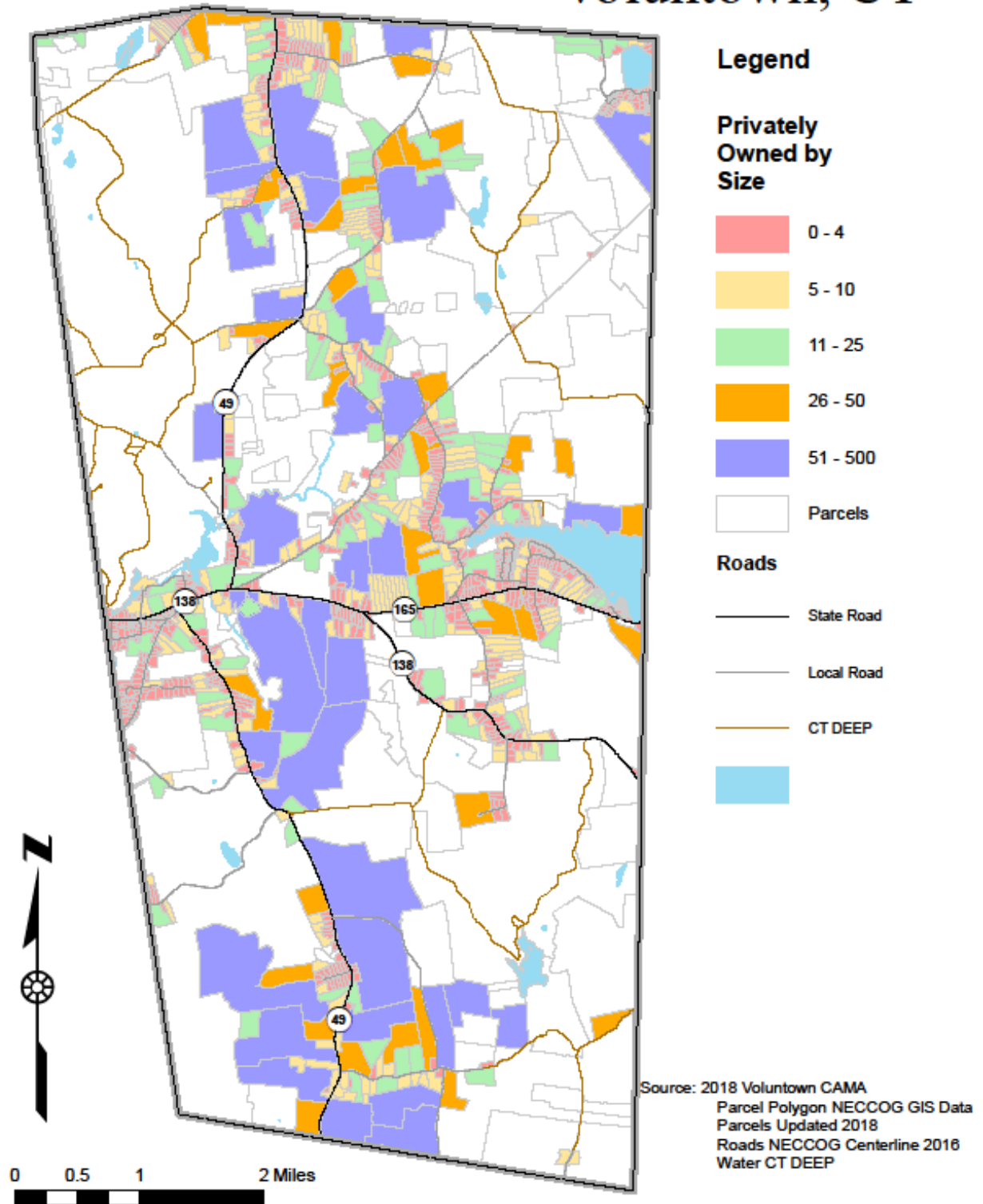
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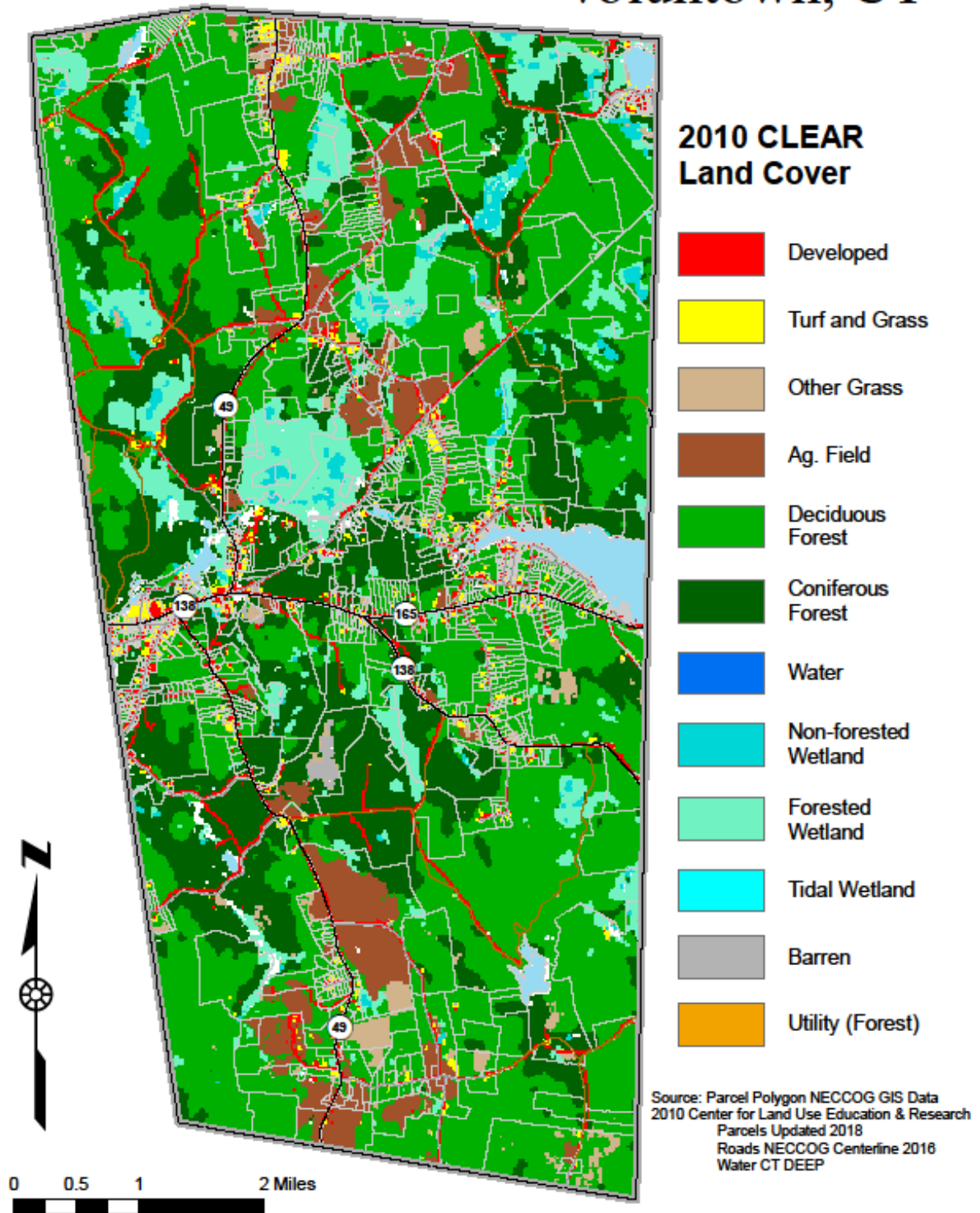
## Voluntown, CT



## Voluntown, CT



## Voluntown, CT



## **Appendix B**

### **Consistency with the Six Growth Management Principles of the State Plan of Conservation and Development**

#### **1. Redevelop and Revitalize Regional Centers and Areas with Existing or Currently Planned Physical Infrastructure**

Town POCD: The 2020 Voluntown POCD encourages growth around the existing Village Center along RT 138.

#### **2. Expand Housing Opportunities and Design Choices to Accommodate a Variety of Household Types and Needs**

Town POCD: The 2020 Voluntown POCD housing goals promote housing quality and diversity that attract young families and provides a mixture of housing for all stages of life.

#### **3. Concentrate Development around Transportation Nodes and Along Major Transportation Corridors to Support the Viability of Transportation Options**

Town POCD: The 2020 POCD encourages development along state roads and existing infrastructure that is compatible with the rural character of the town.

#### **4. Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Traditional Rural Lands.**

Town POCD: The POCD recommends working with the CT DEEP and others in protecting the State forest and working lands while promoting the recreational activities they provide.

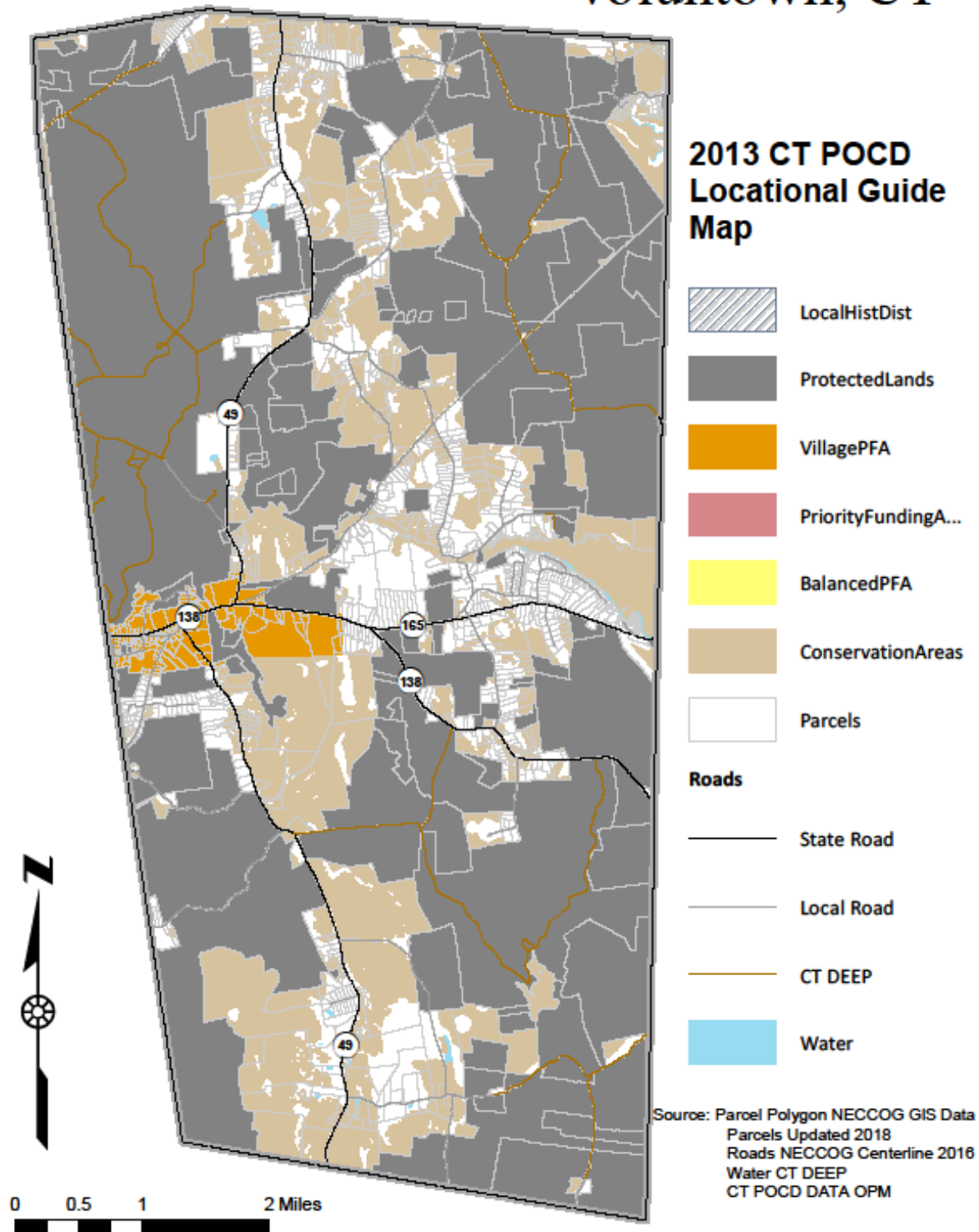
#### **5. Protect and Ensure the Integrity of Environmental Assets Critical to Public Health and Safety**

Town POCD: The Voluntown POCD continues to support local and regional and state emergency services as well as encourages the town's participation in the protection of local and state environmental assets.

#### **6. Promote Integrated Planning Across all Levels of Government to Address Issues on a Statewide, Regional and Local Basis.**

Town POCD: The 2020 POCD promotes coordination with all levels of government in addressing economic development needs as well as representation of small communities in regional and statewide decision making.

# Voluntown, CT



## Appendix-C

### Section 8-23 - Preparation, amendment or adoption of plan of conservation and development

a) (1) At least once every ten years, the commission shall prepare or amend and shall adopt a plan of conservation and development for the municipality. Following adoption, the commission shall regularly review and maintain such plan....

(b) On and after the first day of July following the adoption of the state Conservation and Development Policies Plan 2013-2018, in accordance with section 16a-30, **a municipality that fails to comply with the requirements of subdivisions (1) and (2) of subsection (a) of this section shall be ineligible for discretionary state funding** unless such prohibition is expressly waived by the secretary,...

(e) (1) *Such plan of conservation and development shall:*

(A) be a statement of policies, goals and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality,

(B) provide for a system of principal thoroughfares, parkways, bridges, streets, sidewalks, multipurpose trails and other public ways as appropriate,

(C) be designed to promote, with the greatest efficiency and economy, the coordinated development of the municipality and the general welfare and prosperity of its people and identify areas where it is feasible and prudent

(i) to have compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented mixed use development patterns and land reuse, and

(ii) to promote such development patterns and land reuse,

(D) recommend the most desirable use of land within the municipality for residential, recreational, commercial, industrial, conservation, agricultural and other purposes and include a map showing such proposed land uses,

(E) recommend the most desirable density of population in the several parts of the municipality,

(F) note any inconsistencies with the following growth management principles:

- (i) Redevelopment and revitalization of commercial centers and areas of mixed land uses with existing or planned physical infrastructure;
- (ii) expansion of housing opportunities and design choices to accommodate a variety of household types and needs;
- (iii) concentration of development around transportation nodes and along major transportation corridors to support the viability of transportation options and land reuse;
- (iv) conservation and restoration of the natural environment, cultural and historical resources and existing farmlands;
- (v) protection of environmental assets critical to public health and safety; and
- (vi) integration of planning across all levels of government to address issues on a local, regional and state-wide basis,

(G) make provision for the development of housing opportunities, including opportunities for multifamily dwellings, consistent with soil types, terrain and infrastructure capacity, for all residents of the municipality and the planning region in which the municipality is located, as designated by the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management under section 16a-4a,

(H) promote housing choice and economic diversity in housing, including housing for both low and moderate income households, and encourage the development of housing which will meet the housing needs identified in the state's consolidated plan for housing and community development prepared pursuant to section 8-37t and in the housing component and the other components of the state plan of conservation and development prepared pursuant to chapter 297.

*In preparing such plan the commission shall consider focusing development and revitalization in areas with existing or planned physical infrastructure.*

(f) Such plan may show the commission's and any special committee's recommendation for

- (1) conservation and preservation of traprock and other ridgelines,
- (2) airports, parks, playgrounds and other public grounds,
- (3) the general location, relocation and improvement of schools and other public buildings,
- (4) the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned, for water, sewerage, light, power, transit and other purposes,
- (5) the extent and location of public housing projects,
- (6) programs for the implementation of the plan, including
  - (A) a schedule,
  - (B) a budget for public capital projects,

- (C) a program for enactment and enforcement of zoning and subdivision controls, building and housing codes and safety regulations,
  - (D) plans for implementation of affordable housing,
  - (E) plans for open space acquisition and greenways protection and development, and
  - (F) plans for corridor management areas along limited access highways or rail lines, designated under section 16a-27,
- (7) proposed priority funding areas, and
- (8) any other recommendations as will, in the commission's or any special committee's judgment, be beneficial to the municipality. The plan may include any necessary and related maps, explanatory material, photographs, charts or other pertinent data and information relative to the past, present and future trends of the municipality