

# CONSERVATION ISSUES

# 3

## Overview

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Conservation issues addressed in the Plan of Conservation & Development include:

- Natural Resources
- Open Space
- Historic Resources
- Community Character

## *Conservation Goals*

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*Protect Natural Resources . . .*

*Preserve Open Space . . .*

*Protect Historic Resources . . .*

*Enhance Community Character. . .*

**Caroline Street**



**Birmingham Green**



**Sterling Opera House**



## Protect Natural Resources

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Protection of natural resources is important in terms of preserving environmental functions, protecting community character, and enhancing quality of life. The following table identifies the environmental resources where conservation efforts should be focused in Derby:

Conservation Summary Table		
Category	Definition	Proposed Criteria
<b>Significant Conservation Areas</b>	Very sensitive lands worthy of preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watercourses and waterbodies</li> <li>• Poorly drained soils (wetlands)</li> <li>• Floodplain (100-year, 1.0% probability)</li> <li>• Any slope in excess of 25%</li> </ul>
<b>Important Conservation Areas</b>	Sensitive lands worthy of conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public water supply watershed areas</li> <li>• Aquifers and recharge areas</li> <li>• Unique or special habitat areas</li> <li>• Floodplain (500-year, 0.2% probability)</li> </ul>

Derby is doing a good job protecting most significant conservation areas:

- The Inland Wetlands Commission regulates activities in wetland and watercourse areas and recently revised its regulations to include 50 foot buffer areas. The Commission does field inspections on every application they review to determine the character of the land and the precise location of wetland soils and watercourses.
- The Planning & Zoning Commission oversees any activity within the 100-year flood plain.

Derby should consider adopting regulations related to development activities on steep slopes and important conservation areas (public water supply watershed areas, aquifers and recharge areas, unique or special habitat areas, and 500-year floodplain areas).

## Water Quality

Water quality protection is the most important natural resource protection priority. While most water pollution was once thought to come from industrial discharges, significant progress has been made in limiting this type of pollution. At the present time, most water pollution comes from drainage water picking up contaminants as it drains over roads, parking lots, lawns, agricultural fields and other areas (called non-point sources since there is no specific discharge point). Common contaminants can be salt/sand from roads, oil/gas from gas stations and roads, agricultural chemicals from farmlands, and nutrient and toxic material from lawns. Polluted runoff is largely a result of how land is developed and used. As more impervious surfaces are built, less water percolates into the soil and more runoff flows into streams and rivers

As development increases, it should be a goal of the community to protect water quality in the future by identifying and analyzing land use that impacts water quality. When projecting future land and redevelopment, consideration should be given to the fact that:

- commercial and industrial development can generate 70%-90% impervious surfaces and
- residential areas can range from 15% ( 1-acre zoning) to 65 % (1/8-acre zoning), depending on density allowed.

The following elements should be included in land use regulations and site review standards to minimize runoff, and protect watershed lands:

- Limiting clearing and grading of sites so as to minimize the impact on natural drainage patterns.
- Emphasizing the economic and environmental benefits of natural drainage systems (such as grassed swales, vegetative filters and porous pavement materials) over piped systems.
- Enforcing wetland and riparian buffers to filter pollutants and protect them from direct receipt of runoff.
- Emphasizing preservation of open space and landscaped areas as a tool to filter polluted runoff from adjacent impervious areas.
- Encouraging site design that minimizes imperviousness of streets, parking lots, driveways, and structures.

## Definition of Open Space

The Plan recommends that Derby define open space as land that is permanently preserved for, or dedicated to, open space uses.

The Plan also recommends that Derby establish local criteria regarding the definition of “open space uses”. In some communities, this definition includes:

- parks,
- land trust properties,
- agriculture or horticulture land,
- “passive” recreation land,
- active recreation land,
- state forests, and
- similar uses.

## **Preserve Open Space**

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Open space, in adequate quantities and appropriate locations, can help conserve important natural resources, protect community character, provide fiscal and economic benefits, enhance the quality of life, and shape development patterns. Most people think of “open space” as land that is not built upon (i.e. it is perceived as open space). However, much of that land is actually privately owned land that is presently vacant and may be developed in the future.

### **Priorities For Open Space Preservation**

While the amount of open space in a community is important, the utility of open space may be more important. Open space preservation efforts in Derby should be targeted towards protecting important resources and maximizing recreational benefits to the community:

- *Provide for contiguous open space “greenbelts” in order to enhance the overall open space system* - If open space can be interconnected in Derby with a system of greenbelts and trails, the value of open space to the community will grow exponentially. A system of open spaces interconnected with trails (such as along the Naugatuck and Housatonic Rivers connecting Osbornedale State Park, Witek Park, and O’Sullivan’s Island) would make Derby the envy of surrounding communities and result in increased community character, spirit, and property values. While such a system may take years to complete, there is no reason that this effort could not begin immediately.
- *Protect important natural resources* - Important natural resources such as hilltops, streams, forests, water bodies and significant wetland features such as swamps and bogs can be targeted as important areas to preserve. Although much of Derby is developed there are areas such as Telescope Mountain that residents want to see preserved.
- *Establish and maintain “pocket greens” to enhance community character* - Investment in small public parks can enhance and revitalize urban areas and become neighborhood focal points. Redevelopment efforts in the City could focus around such small parks because they can improve land values and enhance the quality of life for residents.

### **Open Space Plan**

The most effective tool a community can have to preserve open space is a well thought out Open Space Plan. In Derby, such a plan should identify all existing open space and vacant land in the city and identify desirable locations for open space and necessary connections. Strategies should also be identified to obtain open space by purchase, donation, and obtaining rights of ways or easements. Small lots the City may already own should be examined to determine if they are possible locations for “pocket parks”.

Such a plan can also help resolve other issues. For example, there has been a debate in Derby about whether Witek Park should accommodate recreation fields and facilities. The most promising way to resolve issues like these is to undertake a master planning process for *all open space and recreational facilities* in Derby. While some facilities may be entirely dedicated to active sports, other areas might be dedicated to passive activities, and still other areas might be appropriate for both. The Derby Open Space Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission should coordinate this effort to ensure the community has adequate recreation facilities and preserves desired open space. These do not have to be mutually exclusive goals.

There are also regional organizations, led by the State Department of Environmental Protection working to establish river greenways, which follow both the Naugatuck and Housatonic Rivers. Derby should continue to work with these agencies to connect any local greenway or parks as part of a regional and even statewide system.

### **Open Space Preservation Tools**

*Regulatory Measures* - The Subdivision Regulations allow the Planning and Zoning Commission to require land for parks, recreation, and open space areas in new subdivisions. Since this type of regulation can result in small pieces of open space that have little utility or benefit to the community, the Regulations should also allow for a fee-in-lieu-of open space. The Open Space Commission should be asked for a report on each subdivision and whether the land or the fee-in-lieu-of open space should be required.

*Open Space Fund* - An open space fund should be established by the City for open space preservation. Funds would come from a line item in the budget, donations, and fee-in-lieu-of open space payments. The fund will allow Derby to purchase open space where it really wants open space.

*Lands Trusts and Open Space Organizations* - There are many private organizations which purchase and hold open space on behalf of the public. Some of the larger trusts and conservation organizations in the state (such as the Nature Conservancy or the Trust For Public Land) could be approached about working with Derby to achieve open space goals.

*State Funding Assistance* - The State of Connecticut has grant programs to help communities preserve open space and preserve agricultural lands. With the completed Open Space Plan, a strong application can be submitted for funding.

*Brownfield Sites* - The establishment of the Brownfield Remediation Program in the Valley Region may allow for the clean-up and clearing of contaminated sites, which could be possible open space or recreation sites of the future.

### **Open Space Needs**

There is no standard of how much open space a community needs and there are too many variables to define such a standard. Each community is different both in terms of physical features and resident's perceptions of what is appropriate.

Only Derby's residents can determine the appropriate amount of open space the community should have.

At a public meeting conducted as part of this planning process, Derby residents identified open space as a top priority.

The recently formed Open Space Commission is the first step in establishing a City wide focus on open space preservation. The Commission should:

- Identify the most important open space areas for Derby
- Promote the use of open space preservation tools
- Lead the community in efforts to preserve open space

## National Register Listings

In Derby, the following properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

1. Birmingham Green  
Historic District
2. Howe House  
213 Caroline Street
3. Kraus Corset Factory  
Roosevelt Dr
4. Osbornedale  
500 Hawthorne Ave.
5. Sterling Opera House  
4<sup>th</sup> and Elizabeth Streets
6. Harcourt Mem. Library  
313 Elizabeth Street

## Preserve Historic Resources

Since historic resources significantly contribute to community character and quality of life, historic preservation efforts should be directed towards three main objectives:

- *Identification* - Historic resource surveys identify important resources and provide recent information on which to base historic preservation efforts.
- *Resources* - Local individuals and organizations (such as a local Historical Society, a local Historic District Commission, and a Municipal Historian) help coordinate historical documentation and preservation efforts.
- *Programs* - A Cultural Resource Preservation Plan identifies specific actions for preserving identified historic resources and can include them as part of a larger arts and community spirit program for a community.

At this time, Derby has six properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places and another listing on the State Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) recognizes places that have national significance in architecture, archaeology, culture, and American history. The State Register of Historic Places (SRHP) recognizes places significant to the history of Connecticut. Properties on the National Register are now automatically listed on the State Register. The properties included on the National Register are found in the side bar on this page. The other State Register property is listed with no address, but is defined as a Victorian, brick, commercial and bank building built in 1880, most likely the Birmingham National Bank building.

It is important for communities to realize that listing on the National Register or State Register is based only on historic significance and that such designation provides little regulation or protection. On the other hand, local historic districts are established by municipal ordinance to protect designated areas. A Certificate of Appropriateness must be obtained from a local Historic District Commission prior to commencing a regulated activity (such as exterior renovations). If historic resources are to be protected, local historic districts are the most effective regulatory tool. There are no local historic districts in Derby.

There are other historic buildings in Derby and many of these were identified in the 1980 publication “Valley Downtown’s: A Historical Perspective”, prepared by the Valley Regional Planning Agency. While Downtown redevelopment plans call for historic buildings on South Main Street to be maintained, as practical, and for the Sterling Opera house to be preserved, without strong, organized interest in the community however, Derby is at risk of losing historic resources.

## Conservation Map

## **Enhance Community Character & Spirit**

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Derby residents are concerned about the character of their community. With economic and transportation changes, Derby has become less of a focal point in the region and investment elsewhere has hurt community character and community spirit. Community character and community spirit are important elements that must be considered as cities change.

<b>Physical Character</b>	<b>Downtown</b>	A strong and attractive downtown area is a source of pride for local residents.
	<b>Local Community Facilities</b>	City Hall, Recreation Center, and the Library enhance character.
	<b>State Facilities</b>	State Parks and other State facilities enhance character.
	<b>Natural Resources &amp; Open Space</b>	Natural features and open space contribute to community character.
	<b>Ridgelines and Scenic Views</b>	Ridgelines and panoramic views enhance scenic character.
	<b>Vegetation/Landscaping</b>	Vegetation is another important aspect of community character.
	<b>Scenic Roads</b>	Scenic roads contribute to character. (see CGS 13b-31 and CGS 7-149a).
	<b>Architectural Characteristics</b>	Building architecture contributes to overall community character.
	<b>Historic Resources</b>	Historical and archeological resources contribute to character.
<b>Community Spirit</b>	<b>Local Programs Or Events</b>	Community events (festivals, fireworks, and concerts) add to community spirit.
	<b>Local Organizations</b>	Organizations where people help their community help build community spirit.
	<b>Volunteer Contributions</b>	Volunteer contributions have a lot to do with what makes Derby special.
	<b>Local Recognition</b>	Community spirit is enhanced by positive publicity of local events and activities.

In Derby, community character and spirit may also be enhanced by Physical attributes includes all of the items listed in the chart above, but in Derby also must also include redevelopment and restoration of areas where housing or business structures are deteriorated. Maintaining important historic, natural and scenic resources, while making appropriate change can help promote community character and spirit. Every change must be viewed in terms of what it says about Derby. Good communities are made, they don't just happen. More organized community input is needed to ensure that changes proposed for Derby will enhance community character and spirit.

## **Conservation Strategies For Discussion**

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### **Natural Resources**

1. Continue to protect watercourses, waterbodies, wetlands, floodplains, vernal pools, and other important water resources in order to maintain water quality, wildlife habitats, water supply, and ecological balance.
2. Continue to require buffer zones to protect important water resources.
3. Consider regulations to protect slopes in excess of 25%.
4. Continue to acquire land around aquifers and public water supply watersheds to aid in their protection.
5. Seek to reduce the amount of impervious surface in Derby and by promoting less density in future development and redevelopment efforts.
6. Require alternatives to paving entire parking lots and driveways and encourage natural drainage systems.
7. Identify local animal habitats and protect them at the time of development.

### **Open Space**

1. Seek City funds to prepare an Open Space Plan overseen by the Derby Open Space Commission, with recommendations made to the Derby Board of Aldermen.
2. Interconnect open space and recreational areas in Derby through a system of greenbelt trails.
3. Establish small parks and recreation areas in all redevelopment efforts and examine all vacant parcels of land owned by the city, as possible locations for well landscaped “pocket parks”.
4. Require that open space or fees-in-lieu-of open space be a part of every new development or redevelopment effort in Derby.
5. Establish a Land Acquisition Fund, as authorized by the CT General Statutes, and strive to set aside funds from the annual municipal budget for open space acquisition.
6. Pursue state funding, rights of first refusals, rights-of-ways or easements and other methods of obtaining desired open space.
7. Make preservation of farmland a priority and seek to preserve remaining farms.

## **Main Street Program**

The Main Street Program, promoted by the National Trust For Historic Preservation, has been successful nationwide in building strong downtown areas.

The program is based on recognizing and enhancing a community's natural assets:

- Rich architecture
- Small businesses
- Connection with the past
- Sense of place

Such a program would help to build and maintain a strong downtown in Derby.

## **Historic Resources**

1. The Derby Historical Society should seek to identify what municipal efforts are needed to protect important historic resources and ensure historic character is considered in all land use decisions.
2. Update the inventory of important historic resources in Derby.
3. Identify historical resources with signage, plaques and other designations to enhance community awareness of the most significant historic resources.
4. Promote awareness of state and local programs that provide tax incentives and credits for the rehabilitation of historic buildings and provide code relief for the most significant buildings.

## **Community Character & Spirit**

### *Revitalize Downtown*

1. Recognize the importance of the Downtown Area to community character by establishing a "Main Street Program" with assistance from the Connecticut Main Street Program, administered by Northeast Utilities
2. Ensure any redevelopment plans for downtown provide visible parking and pedestrian friendly streetscape improvements to encourage residents to use the downtown.
3. Emphasize reuse of existing buildings in downtown where possible and ensure that if new buildings are needed they are of the scale and style that enhance the historical character of the area.
4. In key retail areas, only allow retail uses on the first floor.
5. Encourage mixed uses where possible by requiring multiple floors with different uses on each floor.
6. Plan community events that bring residents downtown to celebrate the heritage of Derby.

### *Enhance the appearance of Derby*

1. Use codes enforcement, the City's blight ordinance, and redevelopment plans to improve the appearance of housing in Derby.
2. Provide well landscaped "greens" and "pocket parks" in Derby to enhance the city visually and lessen the impact of dense development.
3. Request that the State designate qualifying sections of Route 34 as a scenic highway.
4. Enhance "gateway" entrances to the City by paying close attention to landscaping, signage, viewscape and the condition of properties in these areas.
5. Plan a beautification program that emphasizes landscaping and façade improvements in commercial areas in Derby.