

Rural Land Planning
Top 'Ten' Issues and Challenges in Rural and Small Town

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Rural Land Planning
Issues and Challenges of Rural and Small Towns

- **Question:** What do you think are the top five issues and challenges facing small and rural towns in CT?
 1. ?
 2. ?
 3. ?
 4. ?
 5. ?

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- **Question:** I ask the planners on the CT Planners List Serve what they thought were the 'Top Ten' issues and challenges facing CT rural and small towns.
- I made it clear that I was not defining what is rural or what is a small town—that I would leave that up to the individual judgments of those who wanted to respond—do they feel their town is rural or small?
- The following are some of the comments that occurred as a result of my question:

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- "To me, the number one issue for rural communities is land preservation. (The rural communities may not put that first on their list, though!) Land preservation is the principle way smart growth is applied in rural areas. People need to learn about the ecology of the landscape and their impact on it. That means understanding that preserving undeveloped land in rural areas is critical to everyone."
- "How to manage the tax base and maintain rural character –i.e. 93% of the land is zoned for single family residential use, 7% for non-residential, everyone wants good quality schools, and moves here to buy into the rural character and charm and take advantage of the schools but does not like the spiraling tax increases that is driven from residential development, yet does not want intensive non-residential development at the same time, and the opportunities for such are limited.

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- “Having watched for now 40 years a small, rural town become a commuter bedroom community, lose/drive out its local businesses and now starve for revenue, I would only add Sustainability. Only in this small part of recent history - maybe the last half of the last century, have unsustainable bedroom communities come into being. Previously towns always contained the services (and therefore jobs) that the residents needed - the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. Indeed, folks settled near one another so they could resource one another, not pass in the night like strangers.”
- “Increased population as the result of new housing stock means new residents that have come from someplace else and who are not vested in the community.”
- “I don't see much difference between small town and our large town issues, other than those related to agriculture.”
- “I do sense, however, that a lot of “smart growth” planning seems to promote turning small towns into cities, or letting them dry up and fly away.”

Rural Land Planning Preservation

- **Preservation:** The protection of undeveloped land from the perspective of conservation and sustainability. In this context, preservation is a means of natural resource protection and conservation.
 - **Agriculture:** a means of land stewardship, food production, and economic development.
 - **Open Space:** a means of land stewardship, protection against development, and environmental quality.
 - **Natural Resources:** a means of protecting the natural environment (water quality, prime agricultural soils, wild life, eco-systems, etc.).
 - **Critical Habitat:** The protection of wildlife, biodiversity, and ecosystems.

Rural Land Planning Aesthetic Preservation

- **Aesthetic Preservation:** In this context, aesthetic preservation is the protection of ‘rural character’ and the rural qualities of a community.
 - **Scenic Views:** The protection and preservation of aesthetically pleasing rural views. This can be farmlands, valleys, hills, ridgelines, stone walls, etc.
 - **Historic Sites:** The preservation of significant sites related to community history and ‘community character’.
 - **Commercial Development:** Preserving small town character in the context of small town businesses—Main Street. Mom and Pop (locally owned) shops versus national chains.
 - **See above:** Each of the topics above (agriculture, open space, natural resources, and critical habitat) can be included as part of aesthetic preservation.

Rural Land Planning Growth and Development

- **Growth and Development:** Growth and development in rural and small towns can be both positive and negative.
- **Agricultural Uses:** Preserving and protecting agriculture uses—farms and farming. Managing conflicts between existing agricultural uses and (new) residential development. Zoning for land uses in small towns.
- **Residential Development:** Managing growth and development. Conflicts with the preservation and conservation agenda. Associated cost of services—real or perceived.
 - **Cluster (open-space) Development:** Reducing land consumption, preserving open space and maintaining rural character—providing higher density residential development on less land.
 - **Zoning:** Dealing with large lots and rural needs.
 - **Soils:** Ability to support well and septic.

Rural Land Planning **Growth and Development**

- **Affordable Housing:** The need for affordable housing and resistance to affordable housing.
- **Population Growth:** Increases in population, being a bedroom community, and related services/costs.
- **Property Taxes/Budgets:** Increases in property taxes related to increases in demand for services.
- **Economic Development:** Economic, cultural, and sustainability of village centers. The economic viability of farming. A limited or lack of non-residential tax base. Pressure to grow the grand list (tax base). The lack of or limited access to highway system. Town center revitalization and town center creation.
- **Civic Engagement:** Lack of volunteers to serve on boards, commission, and volunteer fire departments.
- **Infrastructure:** Lack of public sewer and water to facilitate higher density (cluster/open space) development in specific areas. Regulatory barriers to package (onsite) waste treatment facilities. Lack of highway access. Increased traffic.

Rural Land Planning **Other Issues and Challenges**

- **Other Issues and Challenges:** The follow are a number of other issues and challenges in rural and small towns:
 - **Regional Development:** The role of rural towns in the regional context.
 - **External Pressures:** Pressures town resources, facilities, and development patterns – towns that are too attractive and "livable" for their own good.
 - **State Funding:** Education, STEAP, "priority funding area" competition and application of "growth management principles"—conflicts.
 - **Medical Services and Facilities:** Lack of and lack of access to such facilities and service.
 - **Long Term Planning:** Lack of understanding of and the need for planning and long term planning.
 - **Governance:** Ethics, influence, Planning and plans, state agencies DEP, DPH, DOT
 - **Quality of Life:** Pros and cons.
 - **ATV's:** Noise.