

# PLANNING ISSUES IN BRISTOL

## 1. Overview

The Planning Commission is updating the 2000 Plan of Conservation and Development for Bristol. A Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is a document which lays out the long-term vision for the physical, economic, and social development of a community.

This booklet summarizes results from some introductory exercises which were conducted to set the stage for the POCD update. These exercises included:

- A discussion of issues with the Planning Commission,
- Input from members of other boards and commissions,
- Input from Town department heads, and
- A public meeting devoted to hearing from Bristol residents.

Much of the discussion in this booklet is organized around the three main thematic elements of a Plan of Conservation and Development:

- What Bristol may want to protect (conservation strategies),
- How Bristol may want to guide future growth and change (development strategies),
- What Bristol may want or need to support its overall vision (infrastructure strategies).

*“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”*

Margaret Wheatley  
Writer

Conservation



Development



Infrastructure



## 2. Planning Commission Discussion

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On May 19, 2014, the Planning Commission discussed the 2000 Plan and community issues. That discussion is summarized below:

### General Thoughts

- The Planning Commission refers to the 2000 POCD on a regular basis
- The Commission feels the information is well organized
- The Commission feels that the current layout of topical chapters works well
  
- The Commission feels the POCD is user-friendly
- The Commission feels that the level of detail in the current POCD is good – the Plan gives an overall view and some detail where needed
  
- Some sense that the overall vision for Bristol may not be apparent
- People’s perception of the POCD is sometimes confusing
- Some people want conservation, some people want development and they don’t always refer to the other parts of the POCD
- Maybe an Executive Summary up front would help to get people to see the overall vision
- Identify the overall vision and the key goals then people can look up more information if needed
  
- The Commission likes the format of the individual chapters in terms of:
  - Background
  - Goal
  - Policies
  - Action Steps
  
- The POCD should be set up to be a living process
  - Easy to maintain
  - Easy to update
- An on-line document (or a “loose-leaf” document) which can be regularly updated by replacing Chapters or adding appendices/references might be a good format to consider

## Conservation-Related Topics

### Conservation – Natural Resources / Open Space / Farming

- (not discussed)

### Conservation – Community Character

- Blight is considered an issue in some parts of the City
- Lack of maintenance and/or abandonment of structures
- If the building is torn down. What happens to the vacant parcel?
  
- What defines the overall “quality of life” in Bristol?
- What does the City want to be?
- Can we be different things for different ages?
- Can we attract / retain different age groups?

## Development-Related Topics

### Development – Downtown

- The future of the downtown is a key issue for the POCD
- This is more than just “Renaissance Downtown” and their project
- It is about the long-term big picture for the entire downtown area
- Some of the businesses are struggling
- Need to attract more people
- Development like Renaissance could be good since would help bring people downtown (residents and visitors)
  
- Memorial School has been a hot issue recently
- How this building is used could also help the downtown
- An arts center/cultural center/theater/business incubator could attract people and produce spill-over benefits to downtown
- Muzzy Field and Rockwell Park are key amenities near the downtown
  
- We should try to figure out the ***key roles for the downtown*** and then seek to attract the things that will bring people to the downtown and ensure its long-term success
  
- We have to figure out what our “anchors” are or will be in downtown
- We need anchors!



### **Development – Residential Development**

- Some concern that the cost of housing (heating, electricity, taxes) may become more of an issue over time
- As the population ages, will there be increasing migration?
- Who are we attracting / losing?

### **Development – Business Development**

- Our economy has changed a lot over the years
- Have transitioned from agriculture to industry to retail / service
- ESPN has been good especially with end of New Departure
- How do we diversify our economy to ensure our long-term success?

### **Development – Overall**

- What is Bristol's "brand"?
- Attracting sports events / tournaments to Muzzy Field and elsewhere would bring people to Bristol
- It may not produce spill-over to downtown but would be a draw and enhance our "brand"
- What are the principles that make "great places" work?
- Can we bring these principles and apply them to make Bristol a "great place"?
- Include the findings / recommendations of the West End Study
- Include the findings / recommendations of the Forestville Study



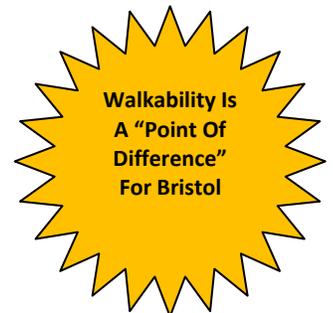
## **Infrastructure-Related Topics**

### **Infrastructure – Community Facilities**

- We have to figure out what to do with excess municipal facilities
- Memorial School, Bingham School, O’Connell School are just most current examples
- We need a process
  
- Residents are proud of the parks and recreation facilities in Bristol
- Is the distribution of parks reasonable / equitable?

### **Infrastructure – Transportation**

- Transportation is a key issue for the POCD
- It can be hard for people outside Bristol to figure out how to get here
- Route 6 is considered to be a problem area for some people
- There is a particular perception of a problem getting into the downtown
- People sense a real sense of friction about getting here from other towns and this deters people from coming to local restaurants and other businesses
- Rt 72 extension has helped facilitate access to the downtown area but people have already formed opinions
  
- High walkability in the downtown area
- Enhancing this (attractiveness, pedestrian interest, destinations) is important
- Looking at the walkability index for Bristol could be helpful
  
- There used to be transit in Bristol
- Bristol is now very auto-centric
  - Need to have a car to meet basic needs (groceries, jobs, etc.)
  - Need to provide large parking areas



### **Infrastructure – Utilities**

- (not discussed)

### 3. Board / Department Questionnaire

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During May and June, members of local boards and commissions and Town department heads were given the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire seeking their input on issues in Bristol. Some of the issues raised are presented below.

**1. What do you see as the GREATEST CHALLENGES OR NEEDS facing Bristol in the next 10 to 20 years?**

Overall Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision for the city - what do we want the city to be - how to get there</li> <li>• Decreasing tax base</li> <li>• Rising minority population</li> </ul>
Conservation-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>(none mentioned)</i></li> </ul>
Development-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown redevelopment</li> <li>• The revitalization of Bristol’s downtown is one of the challenges facing the City. The type of development that occurs will be a key component in the future of the City.</li> <li>• Bringing people to Bristol to shop, eat, recreation</li> <li>• Attracting tourists - promotion of Bristol highlights, museums, etc.</li> <li>• Lack of commercial development in major corridors occupied by residential living units (Example areas; route 6, route 72 extension, Broad, Emmett and Pine Streets)</li> <li>• Employment opportunities that create the need for services and vibrancy.</li> <li>• Grand list growth in a commercial environment will be lacking.</li> <li>• Major highway corridors need to attract new types of commercial development. Bristol residents are attracted to areas such as Plainville, Southington, West Hartford, Canton, Farmington, Avon and Simsbury to visit the national chain retail and food service industry that could be supported by Bristol population. Our high volume corridors could support such development with a boulevard-type pattern while maintaining a walkable downtown.</li> </ul>
Infrastructure-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highway access</li> <li>• Accessible and affordable transportation for seniors who do not drive and need to get to appointments both in Bristol and outside of Bristol.</li> </ul>

**2. What types of things should Bristol ENCOURAGE in the future?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor events appealing to all ages.</li> <li>• Bringing the community together.</li> <li>• Make Route 6 and Route 72 more presentable - these are the access roads and should present a clean, neat picture of the city to visitors/tourists. City has a drab, tired look.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Conservation-Type Issues</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown redevelopment</li> <li>• Bristol should require strict adherence to zoning regulations when developing downtown. The streetscape or street level development should be encouraged in the downtown area.</li> <li>• The concept of a piazza or open air space in downtown should be explored</li> <li>• Curb cuts (driveways for businesses) should be limited in the downtown area.</li> <li>• The downtown revitalization should be mixed use with moderate density (2, 3 or 4 story buildings maximum). It should include a combination of residential and retail buildings. The residential component should appeal to middle class or young urban professionals with apartment offerings that include at least 1,000 – 1,200 sq.ft. of living space and 2 bedrooms. There is currently an office component in downtown which should remain.</li> <li>• Professional office development in the bio zone district, box retail, franchise restaurant development and hydroponics / organic produce development incentives.</li> <li>• Retail development</li> <li>• It is useful to have less dense housing – more R-25 and R-40 zones.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Development-Type Issues</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widen Route 6 entire length through Bristol - have consistent lanes through the city</li> <li>• Promote local public transportation system and transportation to Hartford and neighboring cities</li> <li>• Corridor widening along entire route 6 span from route 69 intersection through Farmington Town Line reducing the number of entrance/exit road cuts.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Infrastructure-Type Issues</b></p>

**3. What types of things should Bristol DISCOURAGE in the future?**

Conservation-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative attitudes. We should try to put a positive spin on this town. We need to find what we do well and promote it.</li> </ul>
Development-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too many fast food chains - need more upscale restaurants if want to attract people to come here.</li> <li>Too many “dollar” stores - gives image as low value place to shop</li> <li>Hotel development</li> <li>Bristol should <i>discourage</i> high density development within the City, particularly the downtown area. New housing stock that should be limited includes studio apartments, 55 and over developments, large condominium developments.</li> <li>Residential overlap in commercial districts inhibits commercial redevelopment / new development limiting grand list growth</li> </ul>
Infrastructure-Type Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>(none mentioned)</i></li> </ul>

**4. As you think about all Town departments, what do you feel is the MAJOR COMMUNITY FACILITY NEED in Bristol during the next 10 years?**

- A new or renovated City Hall is needed for the efficient operation of the government offices.
- A single place for obtaining municipal services including police, fire, health and Board of Education administration.
- City services should be accessible via the internet linked to the parcel address. (Example; click on or search your parcel and be able to pay for your yard waste barrel, apply for a building permit, pay your taxes, look at your assessment record, title search owner records, create abutters lists.. etc.)
- There is a need at City Hall for more space, more storage space, and space for modern technology. This need will only increase in the future.
- New parking lot with better outside lighting for the senior center
- Turf field with lights, bleachers, and plenty of parking.
- Another indoor pool.
- Transportation for seniors. We have a growing senior population, and need to be prepared to meet their needs.
- The former Memorial Boulevard Middle School should be developed with a community component in mind. It should remain publicly owned and be developed as a focal point for downtown.
- The war monument in the center of the road on Memorial Boulevard might be relocated to a green area on Memorial Boulevard where it can be safely viewed by the public. Also, relocating it would allow for safer vehicular traffic on the Boulevard. Some veterans do not advocate moving the monument.
- Funding

## 4. Community Meeting

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A community workshop meeting was held at the Bristol Library on June 16 to get input from Bristol residents. Approximately 20 people participated in the exercises described below.

### Where People Live

People attending the meeting were asked to place a “blue dot” on a map to illustrate where they live.

The distribution of dots seems to indicate that residents came from different parts of Bristol and that there did not seem to be a geographic bias which might have skewed the results of the meeting.



## Prouds

People attending the meeting were asked to place a “green dot” on a map to identify things in Bristol they were proud of. They were also asked to write these “prouds” on a card and submit it at the meeting.

The themes which emerged from this exercise included:

- **Special Places** – participants recognized the special places / destinations that Bristol has
- **Open Space** – participants were proud of the parks and open spaces in Bristol
- **Community Facilities** – participants were proud of the schools and other facilities and services that meet community needs



### Tabulation of Prouds

<b>Special Places</b>	<b>20</b>	Muzzy Field	5
		Lake Compounce	4
		Clock Museum	4
		Giamatti Little League Complex	2
		Carousel Museum	1
		Barnes Nature Center	1
		Environmental Learning Center	1
		Memorial Boulevard	1
		St Gregory / St Paul	1
<b>Open Space</b>	<b>9</b>	Rockwell Park	4
		Page Park	4
		Open Space	1
<b>Community Facilities</b>	<b>8</b>	Library	2
		Community Facilities	1
		Police / Fire	1
		New Schools	1
		West Bristol School	1
		Bristol Central High School	1
		Bristol Eastern High School	1
<b>Business Development</b>	<b>7</b>	ESPN	4
		Business Start-ups	1
		Low Mill Rate	1
		Pine Street Plaza	1
<b>Other</b>	<b>4</b>	Miner Farm	1
		My house	1
		Depot Square Development	1
		No public debt signs	1

## Sorrys

People attending the meeting were then asked to place a “red dot” on a map to identify things in Bristol they were sorry about. They were also asked to write these “sorrys” on a card and submit it at the meeting.

The three themes that received the most mention included:

- **Community Character** – participants identified places or things they felt did not contribute to the overall character of Bristol
- **Downtown** – participants expressed concern about the Depot Square Development (or the recent changes to the development program) and about current conditions in downtown
- **Transportation** – participants were unhappy with the character of Route 6 and traffic patterns along it as well as some other transportation issues



### Tabulation of Sorrys

<b>Community Character</b>	<b>11</b>	West End	4
		Blight / Graffiti	3
		Park Street (Route 72)	1
		Summer Street	1
		Crime	1
		Politicians	1
<b>Downtown</b>	<b>9</b>	Depot Square Development	6
		Downtown	2
		Courthouse Downtown	1
<b>Transportation</b>	<b>9</b>	Route 6	6
		Potholes	1
		No late bus service	1
		No trains	1
<b>Other</b>	<b>8</b>	Utility Building / Service	3
		No quality restaurants	1
		Lack of Business Variety / Quality	1
		Bingham School	1
		No DMV Office	1
		Lack of decent condos for young professionals	1

## Planning Points

People attending the meeting were given 50 “planning points” to allocate among 12 boxes representing topics typically addressed as part of a Plan of Conservation and Development. Residents were asked to allocate the planning points (one @ 20 points, two @ 10 points each, and two @ 5 points each) in the boxes to reflect what they felt was important for the community to address as part of the planning process.

The results are presented below. These results were presented at the meeting and the remainder of the meeting was devoted to discussing the topics that got the most points. For each topic, people shared some of their thoughts and, at the end of the discussion, agreed on a “verb” to characterize their desire in terms of future strategies related to the topic.

	20 points	10 points	5 points	Total Points
<b>Conservation Issues</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>230</b>
Natural Resources	0	20	10	30
Open Space	40	10	15	65
Historic Resources	0	30	0	30
Community Character	60	30	15	105

<b>Development Issues</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>240</b>
Community Structure	20	40	5	65
Business Development	100	50	15	165
Residential Development	0	0	5	5
Housing Diversity	0	0	5	5

<b>Infrastructure Issues</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>180</b>
Community Facilities	0	40	5	45
Traffic and Circulation	0	20	20	40
Walking / Biking / Bus / Train	40	0	30	70
Water/ Sewer / Utilities	0	20	5	25

	<b>260</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>650</b>
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## **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business development is important to Bristol because it:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Raises the tax base</li><li>○ Provides jobs</li><li>○ Brings money in from outsiders</li><li>○ Makes goods and services available</li></ul></li><li>• Overall, jobs and the wages they pay really drive the local economy and support the community</li><li>• Maybe Bristol should use “special development districts” like West Hartford to manage development</li><li>• Route 6 does not create a community environment<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ We get congestions because the roadway capacity is exceeded</li><li>○ It evolved this way, it was not planned this way</li><li>○ We need to manage access (especially east of Stafford Avenue):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Limit curb cuts</li><li>▪ share driveways</li><li>▪ reduce “conflict points”</li><li>▪ connect / combine parking lots</li></ul></li><li>○ Provide for sidewalks</li><li>○ Maybe change from one-lane to two-lane roadways</li><li>○ We may not have the ROW to fix this</li></ul></li><li>• We need to create “feet on the street” where we can</li><li>• This will help create a sense of community</li></ul>	<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <p><b>PROMOTE</b> Business Development</p>
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## **COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many people are not aware of the character / assets/ activities Bristol has</li><li>• Many people think Bristol is all about Route 6</li><li>• We should improve character of business areas<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Facade improvement program (fix up existing buildings)</li><li>○ Design review (guide new buildings)</li><li>○ Promote property consolidation to encourage developers to acquire and improve larger areas</li><li>○ “Special development districts” may also help promote flexibility</li></ul></li><li>• Bristol should promote itself as a sports-oriented community<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Home of ESPN</li><li>○ Home of Giamatti Little League Complex</li></ul></li></ul>	<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <p><b>ENHANCE</b> Community Character</p>
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### WALKING / BIKING / BUS

<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <p><b>ENCOURAGE</b> Other Transportation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would be nice if better transit was available within Bristol and to surrounding areas</li><li>• There are rush hour busses to Hartford but not always convenient</li><li>• Only two commuter lots in Bristol</li><li>• Even when connect to Fasttrack, service may not be what is desired</li><li>• Bristol should strive to get a good connection to the FastTrack (busway) service between Hartford - New Britain</li> <li>• Downtown area is good for walking</li><li>• Outside of that area, not so good for walking</li><li>• Especially on some of the major streets</li> <li>• Biking is mostly for recreation</li> <li>• People feel not a lot can be done in Bristol, especially along Route 6</li></ul>
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### OPEN SPACE

<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Open Space</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People like the open space we have, want more</li><li>• People want to be able to see / hear / smell / feel / nature</li><li>• People are afraid we may lose it</li><li>• People are not sure if we have enough open space in Bristol</li> <li>• No clear sense of the definition of open space</li> <li>• Some difficulty arriving at a “verb”<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Define?</li><li>○ Improve?</li><li>○ Secure?</li><li>○ Maintain?</li></ul></li></ul>
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## COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People want a stronger downtown in Bristol</li><li>• People are concerned about the use of taxpayer funds at Depot Square</li><li>• It would be nice to have a place where the community can gather</li> <li>• We have a variety of neighborhoods in Bristol</li><li>• But overall, we do not have a clear structure</li><li>• If we could have a clear structure, it might make Bristol more cohesive, contribute to a “sense of place”</li><li>• How should we define ourselves as a community?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Downtown</li><li>○ Forestville</li><li>○ Industrial Park</li></ul></li></ul>	<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <p><b>PROMOTE</b> Business Development</p>
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## OTHER TOPICS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In terms of housing, we need to be a complete community with all the steps on the housing ladder:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Young people</li><li>○ Middle age</li><li>○ Seniors</li><li>○ Affordable</li><li>○ Middle class</li><li>○ Move-up housing</li></ul></li> <li>• How can we keep / attract seniors?</li><li>• Other communities have people move out after their kids are done with school – can we attract these people to Bristol?</li></ul>	<p><b>GOAL:</b></p>
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