

DRAFT

Woodbridge Board of Selectmen
11 Meetinghouse Lane
Woodbridge, CT 06525
Via Email: avalsamis@woodbridgect.org
Sun, Sep. 3, 2025

Re: Feedback and recommendations for the Draft 2025 POCD

Dear First Selectman Cardozo and Members of the Board of Selectmen:

The Conservation Commission reviewed the draft 2025 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). We find that the draft does not reflect the values, priorities, or responsibilities of the Town of Woodbridge. In addition, it conflicts with key goals outlined in the State's 2025 Conservation and Development Policies Plan. We believe the issues are substantial enough that they cannot be fixed by written feedback. Addressing the deficiencies in the document will require collaborative discussion by a wider set of stakeholders and refocusing and rethinking many parts of the plan. We urge the Board to use all available means to pause adoption and suggest that TPZ initiate a comprehensive, integrated revision.

1. The draft ignores what makes Woodbridge unique

The POCD should begin by emphasizing what makes the town unique and its defining assets: our extensive open space, vital water resources, and proximity to cultural and economic opportunities in New Haven. These aspects of the town's character, in addition to the community priorities outlined below, should provide the necessary background, context, and motivation for the vision and goals presented in the remainder of the document. The draft plan currently either de-emphasizes these important aspects of the town's character or excludes them entirely.

2. The draft disregards community priorities

Survey results show that residents value open **space and schools** most highly (Fig. 1). Yet the draft centers on regional housing issues instead. For example, although the amount of open space is a unique aspect of the town and residents ranked it as the most special aspect of Woodbridge, the first chapter of the plan focuses on housing. In contrast, natural resources and sustainability are addressed last. The State Plan emphasizes the importance of **meaningful stakeholder engagement** and the need for

plans to strike a balance between visions when priorities conflict. The draft plan itself also states that it should have “**broad public consensus**” (p. 4), yet appears to ignore its own advice in the remainder of the document. By failing to highlight resident priorities, the draft undermines local trust and confidence.

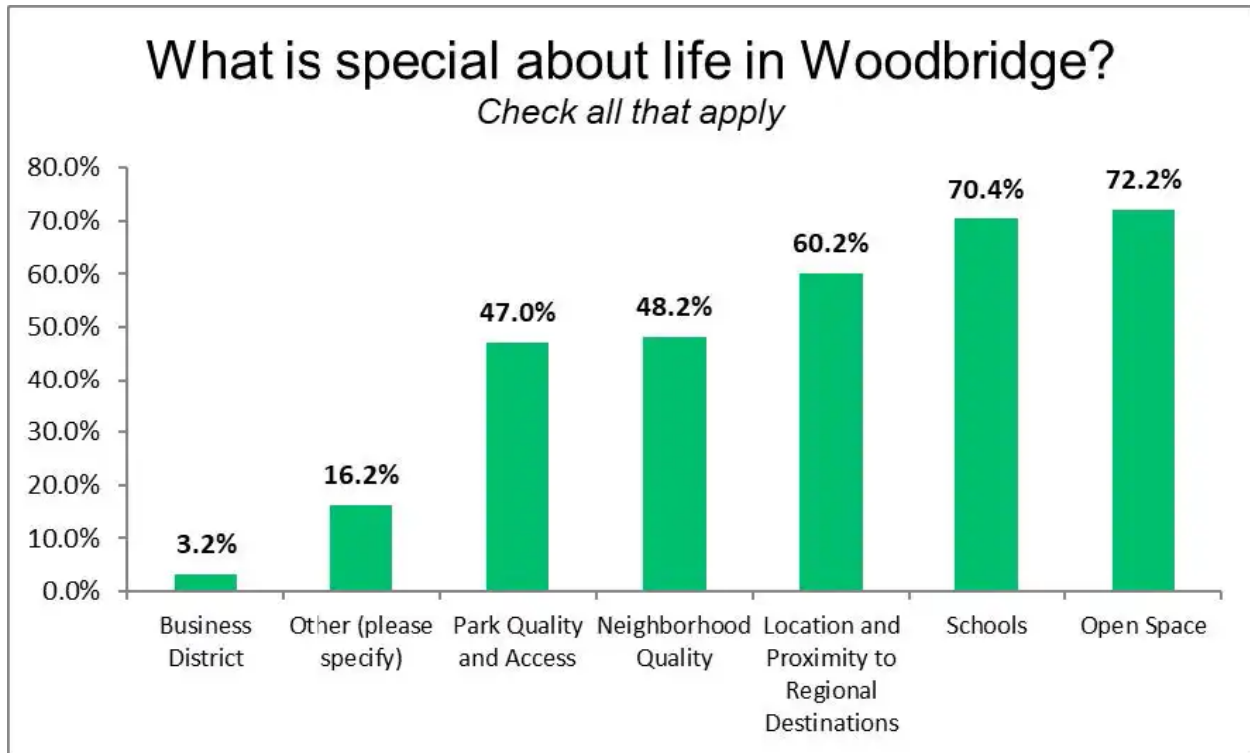


Figure 1. Reproduced from *Community Survey Results, Plan of Conservation & Development Update, Figure 2.*

3. The plan misses an opportunity to promote our natural resources

The forests, open space, and hiking trails of Woodbridge are not only beneficial to the town, but are important to nearby towns and to the wider region. For example, the town’s forest cleans New Haven’s water, sequesters its carbon emissions, and provides its residents with hiking and biking trails. The State Plan’s **Stewardship of Resources** requires towns to conserve drinking water supplies, protect biodiversity, and invest in open space to meet climate resilience goals. Some towns, like Woodbridge, must take on a larger share of these actions to compensate for cities that no longer have sufficient natural resources. The plan should highlight and emphasize the importance of Woodbridge’s natural resources to the surrounding region.

4. The focus on regional housing is misaligned

We recognize the importance of addressing affordable housing shortages. However, the State Plan acknowledges the need to balance housing development with conservation of core forests, farmland, and watersheds. Rather than focusing on new development, which will likely be 90% market-rate units, our housing policies should emphasize repurposing existing structures, low-density housing, accessory dwelling units, infill within already developed areas, and context-appropriate growth that protects ecological services.

5. The draft fails to integrate themes

The draft is overburdened with conflicting goals. It advances new housing without addressing impacts on water, biodiversity, or climate. The State Plan warns that such conflicts must be resolved through **holistic, cross-sector planning**. Housing, economic, and community development goals should flow from Woodbridge's natural resources and community priorities discussed above. For example:

- Housing goals should be met while protecting watershed health and core forests.
- Economic development could leverage eco-tourism and recreation.
- Welcoming Community goals could improve accessibility to trails and cultural resources, helping members of our community, as well as others, feel at home.

6. The process excluded conservation voices while emphasizing housing

In nearly all meetings in which TPZ developed the draft POCD, the head of the housing committee was present, actively participated in discussions, and provided verbal and written feedback to the consultants. In contrast, no other commission was afforded this opportunity, including the conservation commission. The conservation commission was not allowed to meet with TPZ or even speak to its members. The State Plan emphasizes **equitable and inclusive stakeholder engagement** across sectors. The exclusion of conservation perspectives explains why the draft fails to integrate development with appropriate stewardship of the town's natural resources and open space, and instead highlights housing.

7. Risks of adopting the draft as written

If adopted, the draft could authorize high-density housing throughout town, since its goals promote such developments wherever water and sewer are available, while at the same time expanding water and sewer services. Such actions would quickly destroy natural resources and undermine regional ecological services. This outcome would contradict both resident priorities and the State Plan's clear direction to avoid development in prime farmland soils, core forests, and drinking water watersheds.

8. Recommendations

We feel that the flaws in this draft are too significant for TPZ to fix by simply supplying written suggestions. Therefore, we recommend that BOS suggest that TPZ collaborate with additional stakeholders, particularly those involved in conservation. These additional voices can help create a more balanced plan that accurately reflects the importance of protecting the town's environmental assets and the wishes of the townspeople. Here are two suggested options:

1. Form a steering committee with diverse representation, including members of TPZ, Conservation, and other stakeholders. Branford took this approach to developing their POCD.
2. Request that TPZ collaborate with Conservation to jointly prepare a new draft.

Conclusion

Woodbridge's residents overwhelmingly support preserving open space, strengthening schools, and promoting sustainable economic growth. Our natural assets benefit the entire region. The State's 2025 C&D Plan reinforces these priorities and requires us to balance development with conservation. We ask the Board to reject the current draft and initiate a serious rewrite that aligns with both community input and state policy.

Sincerely,

The Woodbridge Conservation Commission

Sharon de Kadt (co-chair)
Diana McCarthy-Bercury (co-chair)
Ben Carlson
Barbara Hagan-Smith
Rachel Guerra
Valerie King

Detailed Feedback

TBD: Include detailed feedback here