

4. NEWFIELD, TURN OF RIVER, WESTOVER

The central part of Stamford is mainly comprised of suburban single-family subdivisions, strip shopping districts, and office campuses. These largely date to the 1960's through the 1980's. Pursued by independent developers, this neighborhood grouping is characterized by the loop roads, cul-de-sacs, and groupings of like-sized homes typical of modern suburbs. While Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover represent the bulk of the neighborhood groupings, there are a number of smaller neighborhoods or sub-districts. These include Cedar Heights, the High Ridge corridor, the Long Ridge corridor, and Ridgeway.

The plan for this neighborhood grouping must above all else preserve a quality of life that is essentially suburban in character. Yet the plan can also incorporate new planning, design and traffic-management tools that can mitigate the impact of the automobile on traffic, safety, design and the landscape.

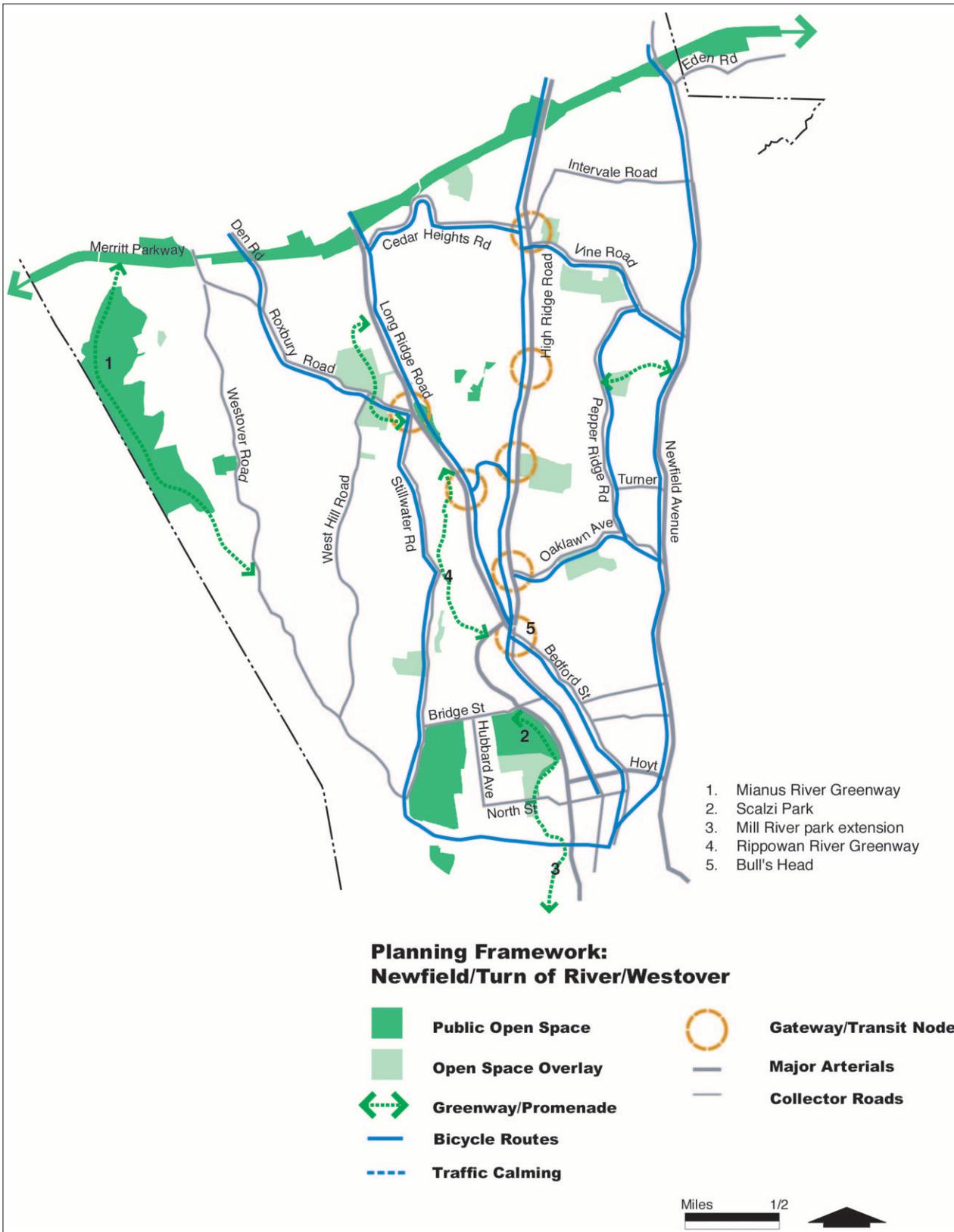
Goal A:

Maintain and celebrate the diversity of Stamford's population and employment.

Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover has a stable residential quality. The vast majority of residents are middle class; the vast majority of households consist of married couples; the vast majority of housing units are owner occupied; and the vast majority of housing units are single-family. These qualities express the abiding strength of this neighborhood grouping, and need to be protected in connection with any affordable housing strategy here. A citywide priority on promoting diversity should not be at the expense of the quality of life and self-image of these neighborhoods.

Strategies:

4A1. Apply inclusionary housing regulations to any large-scale residential subdivisions and development. Large-scale development will be rare – and rarer still if the Plan's environmental and open space recommendations are carried out. However, subdivisions and developments of ten or more homes should include a reasonable set-aside for affordable housing, as would be the case in all of the city's neighborhoods.



Goal B:

Pursue a new “City Beautiful” movement, celebrating and enhancing the city’s main corridors, greenways, waterfront, hills, historic buildings, gateways, and especially the unique qualities of Stamford’s neighborhoods.

Three interrelated features define the design quality of the Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover neighborhood grouping: small residential enclaves and freestanding commercial developments, divided by and unified by two arterial spines, with two rivers creating a further dividing/unifying element.

The mix of densities within the community ranges from one-unit-per-acre lots (in Newfield and Westover) to four- and five-units-per-acre lots (in Turn-of-River), to multifamily housing (closer to Downtown). However, the aggregate diversity of housing disguises the uniformity found within residential enclaves, which are often set apart by streams, hills, major arterials, and other natural and manmade features. Each of these residential areas has a unique character worthy of protection and enhancement.

High Ridge Road and Long Ridge Road (also referred to as the Ridge Roads) are characterized by high traffic volumes, and accommodate virtually all of the commercial development in the neighborhoods. They are also the arterial spines of the neighborhoods. The scenic, land use and traffic qualities of these arterials are central to the experience of these neighborhoods.

In contrast, the Mianus River and Rippowam/Mill River cut green swaths through the neighborhood. These are worthy of protection for scenic, environmental and community character reasons.

Strategies:

4B1. Promote contextual housing development. Wherever higher-density housing is built, it should be designed to be compatible with its environs, and consistent with design guidelines to be adopted by the Planning Board. The rules for small-scale development should promote: (1) reduced curb cuts, (2) meaningful landscaping, without asphalt in front, and (3) setbacks and scale consistent with those of adjoining development. The rules for large-scale development should promote: (1) alignments of new and existing streets, (2) building designs – especially on the perimeter – that appear to be part of the neighborhood, (3) continuous sidewalks with street trees and pedestrian-scaled lighting, (4) landscaped buffers and parking lots, and (5) greenway connections (if appropriate). In addition, the City should adopt an impervious materials ordinance to prevent extensive blacktopping. The City should also provide adequate parking requirements for multifamily development.

4B2. Create a Preservation and Design District (PDD) for the Long Ridge Road corridor. Long Ridge Road is lined primarily with large corporate campuses and moves much through-traffic. Here the goal is to create strategic gateways and

Opposite: Recommendations focus on reinforcing the residential quality of life, and coming to grips with traffic, land use and design issues along the Ridge Roads.

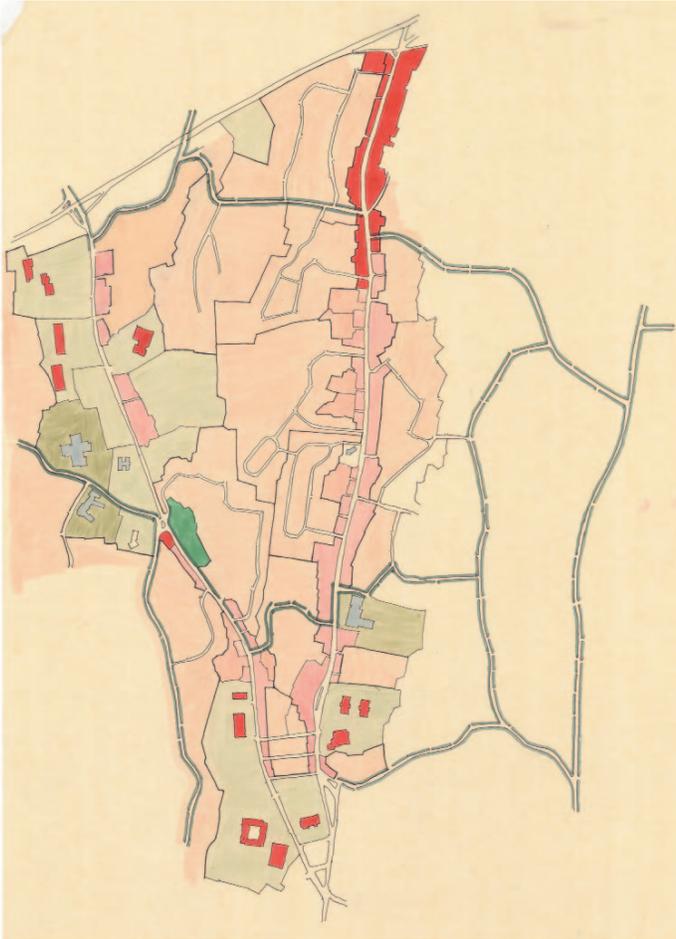
crossing points and to find ways for pedestrians and bicyclists to move off of the roadway in the proposed Mill River Greenway. Along the commercial portions of Long Ridge Road, the PDD should furthermore promote landscaping and setbacks that maintain the high-value, campus-like image and value of the corridor. Along the residential portions, the PDD should specifically promote (1) a landscaped boulevard, (2) fully marked entries to the sub-neighborhoods, featuring attractive landscaping (e.g., stone pillars), pedestrian crossings and traffic lights, and (3) streetscape improvements that buffer residential uses from traffic. Also along the residential areas, a landscaped center median should be considered; this would reduce the commercial appearance of the road and enhance the residential value of properties. Speed limits should be enforced, and reflected in the timing of traffic lights. Attractive bus shelters should be provided at locations convenient to major employers as well as entries into sub-neighborhoods. Overhead power lines should eventually be placed underground. Long Ridge Road should take on the character of a landscaped parkway that contributes to the green “connectivity” of the city. (The Urban Design report illustrates the types of design improvements called for; refer also to the Greenways Map in that report.)

4B3. Create a PDD (Preservation and Design District) for the High Ridge Road corridor. High Ridge Road, with its many houses, has the potential, and the need, to become a true neighborhood-friendly boulevard with its own comprehensive landscape and streetscape identity. Along the commercial areas of High Ridge Road, the PDD should promote cross-access agreements, reduced number of curb cuts, less obtrusive signage, buried power lines, and landscaping. Along the residential areas of High Ridge Road, the PDD should promote: (1) a landscaped boulevard, (2) entries to the sub-neighborhoods distinguished by attractive landscaping, pedestrian crossings and traffic lights, (3) maybe a landscaped center median, (4) attractive bus shelters at sub-neighborhood entries and at major shopping nodes, (5) buried power lines, and (6) speed limits and traffic light sequencing. Once the new standards are in place, tax incentives can be employed to promote renovations and improvements that bring existing property into greater design compliance. This is an especially useful tool in commercial districts, where there is a turnover of stores and businesses. (The Urban Design report illustrates the types of interventions called for.)

4B4. Target key nodes in the area between the Merritt Parkway and the Turnpike for streetscape and landscape improvements. Examples include the intersections at High Ridge Road at Cedar Heights and Vine Roads, Bulls Head, and Long Ridge Road at Roxbury Road. These key intersections and gateways have a disproportionate impact on the image of their neighborhoods. Most of the improvements should be conducted through small matching grants provided by the City to local civic and business groups.



New infill development should respect the current scale of development – to complete, not clash – with neighborhood context.

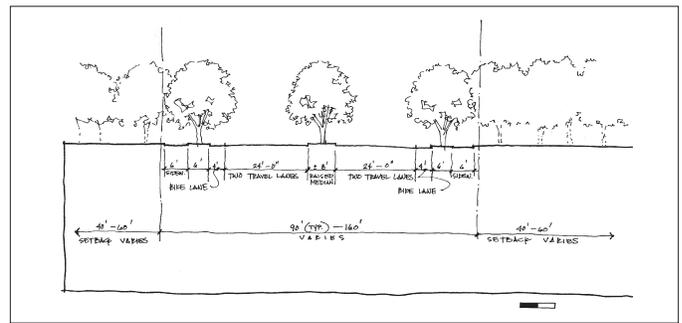
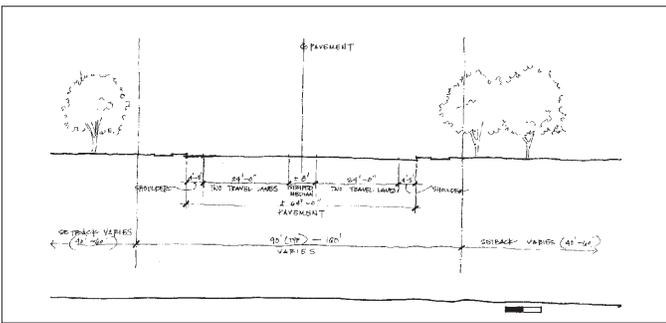
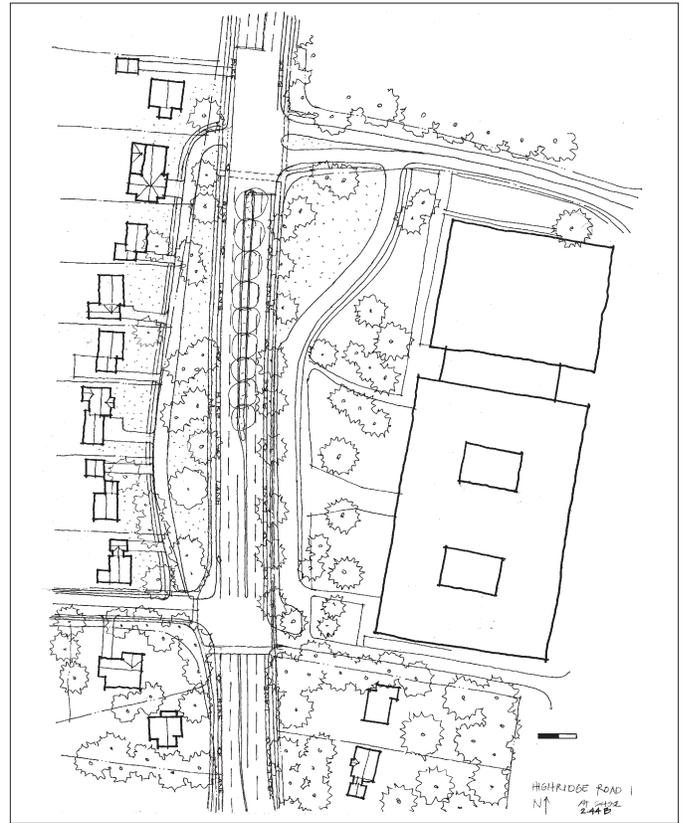
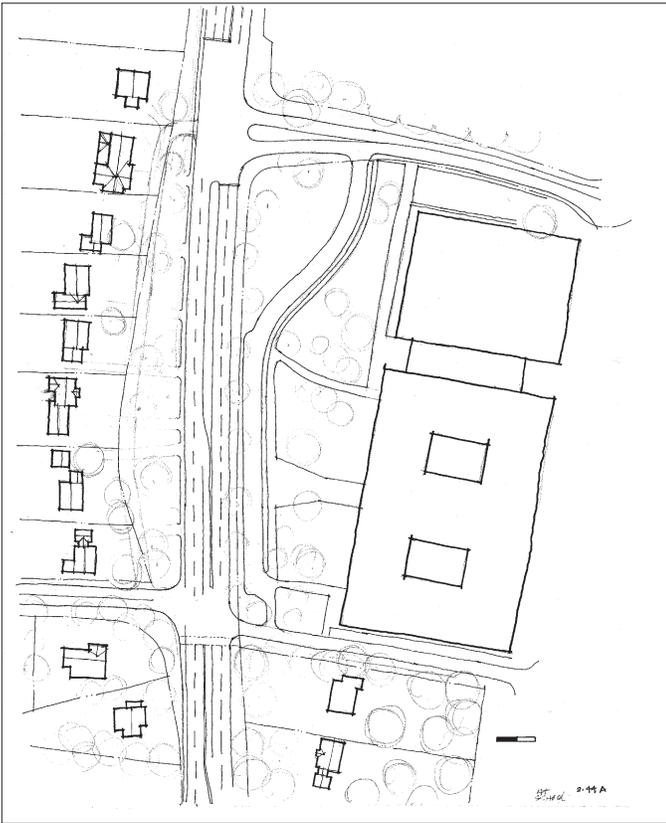


Urban design strategies would create more of a boulevard quality for Long Ridge and High Ridge Roads. (The top left map highlights retail and office uses. The top right map shows the built form. The renderings on the next two pages illustrate the design strategies).

4B5. Create greenways along the Mianus and Rippowam Rivers. A variety of strategies can be employed: public acquisition, deed restrictions, easements, dedications, cooperation with private land trusts, cooperation with Greenwich, use of incentives, and use of new State legislation allowing the City to receive land area equal to 10 percent of a property's value, in connection with redevelopment applications. As these open spaces are linked, the City should promote public access wherever practical, including signage and walking and jogging trails. The two river greenways should connect to another greenway along the Merritt Parkway, which has been designated as both a State Scenic Highway and National Scenic By-Way.

4B6. Designate large tracts of key open space as Open Space Overlay. The land to be targeted includes school grounds, land owned or protected by land trusts, land subject to tax relief under State Public Act 490, etc. Open Space Overlays would involve reduced theoretical development potential, consistent with the current use of such sites, and the fact that the overall density of the neighborhood is predi-

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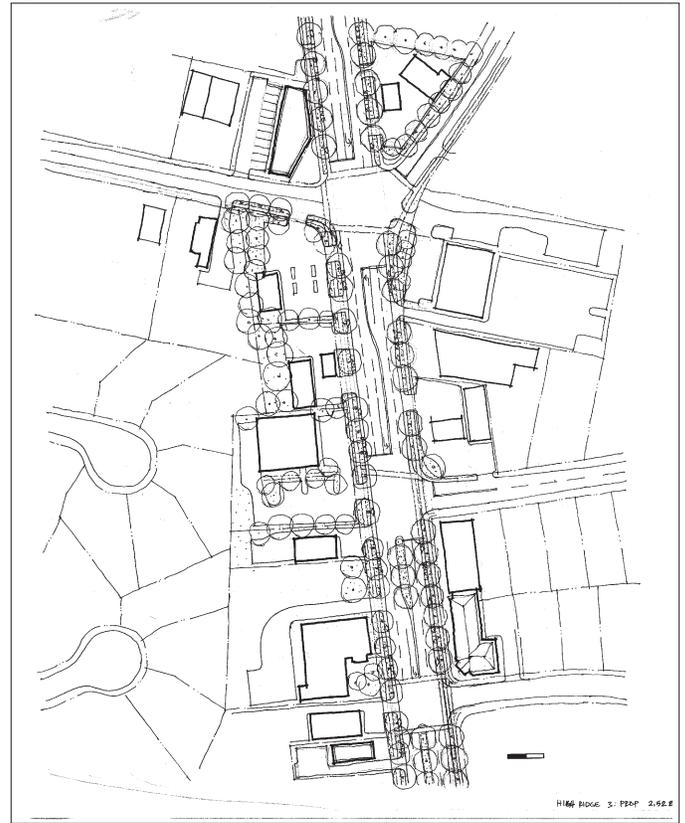
High Ridge Road – existing conditions.

High Ridge Road – plan.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS REPORT



High Ridge Road – existing conditions.



High Ridge Road – plan.

cated on the continued dedication of these large tracts primarily to open space and related, low-impact uses. Note that the underlying residential zoning, including its Special Exception rules, would still apply. Open Space Overlay designation is especially important in the central part of Stamford, where some public school grounds are all important in terms of meeting the recreation and open space needs of residents; these lands must be retained as parkland should schools be closed or sold. The Open Space Overlay also highlights the potential of these properties, even as they remain private, to play a role in the overall greenway and connectivity strategy by promoting access agreements. (This is described in the Greenway section of the Urban Design report.)

4B7. Strengthen the City's tools with regard to tree preservation. This could involve surveys and identification of key wooded properties and tree-lined streets for protection. It would include strengthening subdivision and other review procedures. It could involve a tree preservation ordinance. Tree preservation regulations vary widely—from regulations that protect the amount of land that is kept in natural vegetation to ordinances that promote the preservation of old-growth trees. The former is recommended for the low-density (RA) residential districts, mainly in North Stamford, Upper Newfield and Westover. It would be tied to preservation of the neighborhood's rural character and protection of wetlands, steep slopes, areas with sensitive soils, and natural woodlands. It would not, however, restrict the ability of property owners to remove selected trees.

4B8. Designate neighborhood roads as official Scenic Corridors. Many of the neighborhoods' roads – especially in Newfield and Westover – should be seriously considered for designation as Scenic Corridors. Further documentation would be needed – also to generate guidelines to protect woods, stone walls and other scenic features within the corridors; and to promote attractive features, such as wood-faced barriers (as along the Merritt Parkway). These roads should be targeted for buried power lines.



Greenways along the rivers and parkway would link key open space resources.



Goal C:

Protect and enhance the quality of life of Stamford's neighborhoods, addressing land use transitions, community resources, traffic, and environmental conditions.

Newfield, Turn-of-River and Westover together is the most populous of the six neighborhood groupings, with 24,700 people, representing one-fifth the city's total population. Over the past decades, the community's age profile has edged toward a disproportionate number of seniors, due to aging in place as residents choose to stay in their present homes as they grow older and their children move out. This means that the needs of older people require attention in planning for parks, community facilities, transit, etc. – every bit as much as the traditional family unit with children. For example, the growth in seniors provides added reason to provide greenways with trails suitable for walking and bicycling.

Traffic conditions along the Ridge Roads (High Ridge Road and Long Ridge Road) are the main source of complaint registered during the Master Plan process in these neighborhoods. Through-traffic is largely channeled to the Ridge Roads, which are able to accommodate the volumes with some nuisances to residents. Left turns onto these roads are often impossible, for example. Due to the lack of east-west through roads, many local roads are forced to handle undue amounts of traffic.

Strategies:

4C1. Explore the potential for additional parks, playground and ball fields in the central part of the city. The central part of the city offers the greatest convenience to the greatest number of people; no wonder that Scalzi Park is the second most frequented park in the city, and likely contains its most heavily used playfields; and that Rippowam Center and Turn of River Middle School were the most frequented school playfields and playgrounds. There is precious little land available for new parks, prompting creative solutions. As one example, the City could build playgrounds in presently passive woodlands, using Chestnut Hill Park as the model for design and community involvement. As another example, portions of the office campuses and few remaining large development sites along Long Ridge Road could accommodate private as well as public recreational use. "Out of the box" ideas will need to be surfaced in order to deal with the simple fact that the most heavily-used recreational facilities will be in the center of Stamford, where there is the greatest convenience to the greatest number of people.

4C2. Enhance existing parks and their connections to neighborhoods. The City should upgrade existing facilities. The City's *Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan* of 1997 put particular priority on pedestrian, playground and athletic field safety improvements.

4C3. Explore ways to extend the Mill River greenway north to Scalzi Park. This could involve a similar combination of park improvements, enabled by intensifi-

cation of development linked to incentive zoning as well as public acquisition. It should be noted that any redevelopment in this area should go forward mindful of floodplain conditions.

4C4. Incrementally use traffic calming to reduce traffic impacts on neighborhood roads. Residents participating in the workshops for the Master Plan highlighted problems on Intervale Road and Stillwater Road, as well as all of the east/west streets connecting the major north/south arterials. Further outreach should be conducted to clarify the issues on these and other neighborhood streets; and to arrive at technical solutions that will garner neighborhood support.

4C5. Promote bikeways. Bicycle paths would be especially desirable through the office campuses, City-owned land and large sites along Long Ridge Road, in connection with a Rippowam River greenway. A bike path should be provided in the shoulder of High Ridge Road if, as appears to be the case, the right-of-way is wide enough. Additional bike routes should be identified on parallel north-south roads and the connecting east-west roads. These bikeways would provide an amenity for local workers, as well as residents.

4C6. Promote employer-initiated programs to reduce single-occupancy driving in peak periods. These programs include: flex time work schedules, staggered work hours, fewer but longer work days, telecommuting, guaranteed ride home, transit fare discounts, carpool incentives, vanpools, and shuttle bus or van service to the Transportation Center timed to meet trains. The Long Ridge Road corridor has major employers who should be encouraged to institute common and shared programs.

4C7. Consider a bus route up Westover Road to Roxbury Road. Westover Road is a major road and the spine of its neighborhood.

4C8. Partially or totally deduct environmentally sensitive land from calculations of yield. While this would be a citywide rule, it is especially relevant in Newfield, Turn of River and Westover, where the terrain includes many wetlands, steep slopes and floodplains. As land becomes scarce and property values go up, land that is best kept natural for sound environmental and planning reasons will be eyed for development. This citywide rule would redress this problem.

Goal D:

Create a vibrant, seven-days-a-week, pedestrian-friendly Downtown focused both on the Transportation Center and the historic core area to its immediate north.

There is significant market support for office and retail development in these neighborhoods, owing to Long Ridge Road's and High Ridge Road's tremendous visibility and accessibility, especially proximate to the Merritt Parkway. Significant commercial development would, however, drain energy from Downtown; and it should generally be rejected. The only exceptions should be for in-fill office development, to accommodate existing single-tenant users on their campuses; and retail redevelopment that leads to improvements in the physical character of existing corridors without significant increases in the retail inventory.

Strategies:

4D1. Carefully control the potential expansion of offices on Long Ridge Road and High Ridge Road. Long Ridge Road and to a lesser extent High Ridge Road between Bulls Head and the Merritt Parkway are major corporate corridors, with as much as 2 million square feet of office development, and a potential for significant office development under present zoning. Large amounts of such development could overwhelm the road's traffic capacity, as well as absorb development better directed to Downtown. The zoning should be re-calibrated to allow limited expansion (by Special Exception) to keep single users – like GE Capital and Hyperion – content with their Stamford locations; as well as to condition new commercial development on Demand Management Measures (refer to the Traffic and Transit report). Recreational, open space, congregate care and housing are in fact preferred on the undeveloped property; this can be carried out through MOD (Mixed-Use Overlay District) designation. Such expansions should be linked to other public benefits, such as bicycle paths, riverfront greenways, etc.

