

## A Community Discussion – Please Join In

The Board of Selectmen has agreed to organize a series of facilitated meetings that are designed to promote a healthy discussion regarding our town vision – a plan for growth that fulfills our needs yet protects our town character and heritage. There are several important parcels of land yet to be developed in town, notably on the north and south ends of Main Street. There are numerous other properties that are equally important to our community and economic vitality. As we defend lawsuits on rejected applications and entertain new proposals, it is critical that we learn about best practices and tools that may help us reach a modicum of community consensus.

Our first meeting was held on October 28<sup>th</sup> by David Fink, Policy Director for the Partnership for Strong Communities who described the HOMEConnecticut program, Housing for Economic Growth. The program provides incentives to develop affordable workforce housing. The State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management has offered “no strings attached” technical assistance grants to municipalities to study whether or not the program would work for the Town of Durham. I am working with our town planner in writing that grant application and will attend a workshop on how other communities are taking advantage of this new legislation on November 7<sup>th</sup>. For more information about HomeConnecticut visit [www.homeconnecticut.org](http://www.homeconnecticut.org).

The second meeting will take place on December 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm on the topic of Smart Growth. Our speaker will be Heidi Green, President of the non-profit group 1000 Friends of Connecticut whose mission is to promote and shape growth to ensure a prosperous economy, a healthy environment, and distinctive, integrated and attractive communities while promoting opportunities in education, housing, transportation and employment for ourselves and future generations. I will attend a conference, sponsored by the same organization on November 13<sup>th</sup>. For more information about 1000 Friends of Connecticut please visit [www.1000friends-ct.org](http://www.1000friends-ct.org).

The third meeting will be a workshop titled “Planning for Agriculture” hosted by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. CCM will roll out a new publication, *“Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities”*, a joint venture of CCM and the American Farmland Trust (ATF) which was funded in part by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. It is a tool to assist local governments in preserving and protecting agriculture in Connecticut as part of our landscape, our economy, our heritage and our natural resources.

The workshop will expand on the information provided in the 62-page guide (which is divided into six simple yet informative sections, meant to help the interested parties fully understand the issues facing agriculture in Connecticut, what it means to an individual municipality, and what steps can be taken to support agriculture in our state and help participants begin these important discussions on a local level. The guide can be downloaded at [www.ctplanningforagriculture](http://www.ctplanningforagriculture).

It is important to note that we do have a Plan of Conservation and Development that our Planning & Zoning Commission updates every ten years as prescribed by State Statute. The POCD is created to guide our P&Z Commissioners’ decisions as they are called to write and enforce our zoning regulations. Our document can be viewed online at as part of the Planning & Zoning section of Boards and Commission or in the Town Clerk’s office. Next year, the commission will develop the schedule for our next update which is due in 2013 and will involve numerous public hearings.

Please join in the conversation. I promise it will be an interesting and rewarding experience!