



3. COVENTRY VILLAGE TODAY

3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

The many different aspects that contribute to the character of the Village today must be understood and evaluated to plan intelligently for the future. This section of the report examines the Village in the framework of the following topics:

- The natural environment
- The built environment
- Public infrastructure
- Economic conditions
- Citizen participation in Village life

The Town of Coventry covers about 38 square miles, most of which is farmland or undeveloped, and it has a population estimated to be 9,700 as of 1989. It lies 18 miles east of Hartford, just beyond the end of Interstate 384, in a location that is attractive for growth as a commuter suburb of the capital city. The University of Connecticut, a few miles to the east, is another major presence affecting the town's future; it can be expected to generate new housing and economic development in Coventry, particularly along Route 44 and in the vicinity of Coventry Village (see Fig. B).

B. THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Assets

The key natural feature of the Village, and perhaps the most important factor in its historical development, is Mill Brook. While no longer playing the traditional role of power source, the brook's winding, rock-laden course, picturesque falls and ponds, and plentiful stone retaining walls and ruins

associated with the 19th-century industries, are a strong visual element. The significance of Mill Brook may be the Village's best-kept secret, since passersby on Main Street are afforded only occasional and fleeting glimpses of the brook, the surrounding wetlands, and the extant mill buildings. From Mason Street, Bradbury Lane, and the other roads traversing the stream, its impact and high visual qualities are clear.

With the exception of the mills themselves and the remnants of their power systems, the wetlands along Mill Brook have acted to limit development in most places close to the stream. Some of the old retention ponds survive, although many that were drained have filled in with natural growth. This continuous, albeit fragile, system of undeveloped open space is a significant asset to the Village, aesthetically, recreationally, and environmentally through natural drainage and replenishment of ground water. State statutes call wetlands such as these "an indispensable and irreplaceable but fragile natural resource...essential to an adequate supply of surface and underground water; to hydrological stability and control of flooding and erosion; to the recharging and purification of the ground water; and to the existence of many forms of animal, aquatic, and plant life."

The topography is an important part of the environment. The sharp descent and curve in Main Street near the Deknatel facilities create a dramatic entrance to the Village. On the side streets to the north and south, the hilly terrain encloses the Village, giving it an unusual sense of cohesion and offering scenic vistas from many points.

Coventry Village is fortunate in the amount of fields and woodland that survive in and around the Village center. This open space, coursed with old stone walls and, according to Nicholas Bellantoni, the state archaeologist, the possible repository of notable archaeological resources, is a crucial part of the historic visual character of Coventry Village. Much of the open land remains in private hands in the form of large holdings. The development of these properties would mark a major, and certainly to some extent adverse, change in the ambience of the area. The plan of Millbrook Associates to develop a residential and commercial complex on Main Street at Armstrong Road is an example, and a precursor of the future.

Large parcels of property are also in public hands, including Patriots Park, the adjacent state boat launching site, the 822-acre Nathan Hale State Forest, the 7-acre Nathan Hale Cemetery, the 3 1/2-acre Town Garage site, the Village fire station, and the Green. Utility rights-of-way cross the study area in several places, assuring the long-term preservation of large, otherwise undeveloped, tracts that have recreational potential for passive purposes.

2. Problems

Coventry Village's natural assets are not adequately protected from encroachment and adverse change. Public regulatory mechanisms that exist, while effective in many respects, have certain limitations. For example, the town's Planning and Zoning Commission is charged with regulating activities within wetlands, but much of the Mill Brook stream bed falls outside this category. The integrity of the stream and its surroundings, therefore, is not protected to the extent desirable.

The open lands in the Village are candidates for development that may seriously alter their visual characteristics and restrict their public benefit and recreational potential. The new "Ridge Pines" subdivision at Main Street and Snake Hill Road will create large-lot housing and, more completely than heretofore, cut off Mill Brook from public access and enjoyment. The Millbrook Associates plan nearby may have a similar impact. In each case, conservation easements that have been offered the town along Mill Brook have drawbacks as to public access, size, and location. Each of these proposals also exhibits, to varying degrees, one of the most significant problems of conventional zoning: the creation of a small number of housing units in relation to the amount of land involved. The public aesthetic and environmental benefits of open land in its natural state, even though privately owned, are lost when development occurs in this form. The implications for Coventry Village, given the importance of open land as an asset and the expectation of its "privatization" over time, should be clear.

Some town-owned lands are not realizing their full potential for public benefit and use. Patriots Park, occupying an excellent lakefront location, offers residents only limited recreational opportunities. The Town Garage property on Bradbury Lane represents the under-utilization of an attractive site next to Mill Brook.

Hazardous waste drainage and ground water pollution are problems of unknown extent affecting the Mill Brook generally and some sites in particular. Efforts now being pursued to reuse the Kenyon Mill have run into this problem, and drainage of oil wastes is polluting Mill Brook near the Town Garage, according to town officials. The expansion of the sewer system has lessened the threat of diminished water quality from this source, but any Village growth and development must address the threat of pollution.

3. Issues

The key issues affecting the quality of Coventry Village's natural environment, therefore, may be summarized as follows:

- Protecting and enhancing the Mill Brook and surrounding wetlands for public benefit, which might include public access and limited recreational use;
- Conserving adequate open space to maintain the Village's well-preserved historic character;
- Improving use of town-owned properties for recreational purposes;
- Identifying and preserving scenic vistas, the Village topography, and stone walls;
- Defining opportunities for using utility rights-of-way for public enjoyment; and
- Confronting the problems of hazardous wastes and water pollution.

C. THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

1. Assets

Coventry Village's major asset is the continued existence of most of its historic architectural heritage, still in relatively good condition and in the original context of a compact, intimate village setting (see Fig A). The importance of the area has long been recognized. The Capron-Phillips House (c. 1864) is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the Village was recommended for local designation as a historic district in 1974. That proposal was defeated in public referendum, in part because of public misconceptions about the economic advantages of such a designation.

The strongest sense of Coventry Village's historic character comes from the integrity of Main Street. For much of its history, this thoroughfare has been the commercial, economic and social hub of the surrounding rural area. Buildings are clustered closely together at the sidewalk line for easy access by pedestrians. Today, Main Street is still a diverse mix of uses and styles ranging in age from the mid-1700s to the early-20th century, with relatively few modern commercial structures.

Prospect and Wall streets, paralleling and overlooking Main Street, are remarkable in the integrity of their 19th-century residences. Hardly a 20th-century exception breaks the continuity from one end to the other. The undeveloped slope down to Mill Brook offers a direct visual connection to the stream and Main Street, enhanced by stone walls, remnants of mill ponds and natural vegetation. Expanses of woodland in and around the Village contribute to the 19th-century atmosphere.

Both sites take advantage of existing sewer capacity and occupy areas relatively free of steep slopes and wetlands. This would allow population expansion in the Village without visually impacting on its historic character.

D. EXAMPLES OF HISTORIC MILL REVITALIZATIONS

(SEE ILLUSTRATIONS ON FOLLOWING PAGES)

E. ENHANCE SIGNIFICANT NATURAL RESOURCES

Coventry Village can be appropriately described as a rural center, having relatively low density in a small town setting with much open space and original vegetation. The challenge before the Town of Coventry is to maintain the Village's scenic beauty and historic character while encouraging increased use. The first step is to protect these resources from unplanned development and the second is to make the public more aware of the natural assets available to them.

A Presidential Commission study in 1987 showed that natural beauty is the most important criteria people use in choosing recreation areas and optional travel routes, because it gives pleasure, reduces stress and promotes mental health. Half of those surveyed considered walking for pleasure, picnicking and sightseeing to be major recreational activities, with jogging cited by almost a third. Coventry Village's natural resources could be developed to serve these needs.



1. A Linear Park Along Mill Brook

The town has an unusual opportunity to capitalize on the existence in its natural state of almost the full length of Mill Brook. It is one of the most important features in the Village historically, although visually it has not been as prominent in recent years as the auto-oriented town turned its focus toward Main Street. The existing mills are the strongest visual reminder of the brook's existence; the stretches between them, while highly scenic and unspoiled, have not been recognized or treated as an asset. The wetlands area between the Village and the Willimantic River is unused and unappreciated because of inaccessibility.

An interpretive linear park along the full length of Mill Brook would highlight these natural features as a scenic, recreational and educational asset to the Village, the town and visiting tourists (see Figs. C and D). The historic features from the Village's industrial past should be highlighted and the ponds, dams and remnants of previous mill sites should be restored. A pathway, along the banks of the brook, elevated above the wetlands in some

places and lighted for evening use and safety, would be a central feature. Benches would mark rest and observation points, and exercise stations could be included. Connecting paths to Main Street and Prospect and Wall Streets would link the park with the Village's architectural and commercial highlights. Interpretive signage or displays would be an attractive way to focus on the stream's industrial heritage. Ideally, the mill ponds should be restored, at least to a shallow depth, to recreate the historic ambience; environmental hazards unfortunately may prevent this from occurring (see Fig. 24).

Such a plan would depend on ensuring public pedestrian access within a buffer zone of 30 to 50 feet from the brook. This could be implemented by acquisition of conservation easements allowing public access, which would avoid further privatization and uncoordinated development, and would assure preservation of the natural character of the brook's course and wetlands.

For added protection, a buffer zone of 150 feet on either side of the brook is recommended in which any building activity would be subject to a special permit review for its compatibility with the linear park. The Town of Mansfield, for example, imposes a similar review process on all development within 150 feet of the outer edge of wetlands.

Stowe Village in Vermont has had experience with a longer but similar walkway. The people of the Village were involved from the beginning in raising money, helping with the construction, and sponsoring segments or special features along its route, such as plantings or rest areas. Civic groups, school children and town organizations in Coventry could be similarly involved, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership.

Two examples of park planning in Connecticut are particularly instructive as to technique and funding. Based on its Open Space Plan, which has been a part of both its 1972 and 1982 master plans of development, the Town of Mansfield has pursued a 20-year effort to expand its parks system. 7 grants from the state's Outdoor Recreation Fund have covered up to 75% of the costs of park land purchases, and have helped create a trail system along the Fenton River and other streams over a combination of town-owned land and conservation easements. Keys to this successful effort have included a staged program of moderate funding requests to the state and extensive citizen volunteer involvement.

Since 1984, Mansfield has regulated all development within 150 feet of the edges of wetlands. On at least 10 occasions, the town has also commissioned advisory reports from the the Eastern Connecticut Environmental Review Team. During the fall of 1990, Mansfield plans to seek voter approval of a \$1-2 million bonding authorization for further open space acquisitions. (For more information, see the Appendix.)

Several lower Connecticut towns are cooperating in plans to create a recreational greenway along the path of the historic Farmington Canal, which ran northeastward from New Haven. The greenway is being put together through a combination of fee simple purchases and easements, with funding from state, town, and non-profit entities. Two grants from the National Endowment from the Arts have helped pay for the design of paths and a pedestrian bridge.

2. Recreation Resources

The linear park should be anchored at either end by recreational facilities, with Patriots Park at one end and an area along the Willimantic river near Depot Road developed at the other. The latter would be an appropriate eastern terminus of the linear park and would link it to the proposed Heritage Corridor being studied by the National Park Service. A parks design study should be undertaken to recommend improvements to Patriots Park, including better parking, signage, and active recreational facilities, and to suggest design concepts for a Willimantic River park, in which the focus would be more passive uses such as picknicking.

The utility rights-of-way which cross the study area in several places should be explored as a resource for passive recreation. The utility companies should be contacted for information regarding access and acceptable uses.

3. Enact an Archeological Protection Ordinance

The presence of important archaeological resources in the survey area, related to its mill heritage and pre-European inhabitants, should be safeguarded through the enactment of a protective ordinance. This legislation should require that, within the survey area, an investigative report be prepared in the case of any application for subdivision or site plan approval, or in the case of any building construction and/or site improvements involving ground disturbance. The report would research and evaluate the impact of the proposed work on archaeological resources, and would recommend measures to mitigate adverse impacts.

Administration of this ordinance could be the responsibility of an existing town commission, such as the Planning and Zoning Commission or the Conservation Commission. If the Village is designated a local historic district, then the historic district commission appointed to administer the district might be charged with this responsibility. Ideally, a professional archaeologist would be appointed to the appropriate municipal commission or board. The Eastern Connecticut Environmental Review Team would be a candidate for assisting the town with compliance review.

A number of other Connecticut communities, such as Westport, have set up some form of archaeological review similar to the one proposed for Coventry. Helpful resources in setting up a protection program are two publications of the Connecticut Historical Commission, the *Archaeological Resource Protection Handbook* and *Environmental Review Primer for Connecticut's Archaeological Resources*, which contains a set of professional standards for archeological surveys and research. Excerpts from the *Archaeological Resource Protection Handbook* are contained in the Appendix.

4. Preserve Open Space Through Zoning Allowances and Easements

Open space designation for zoning purposes and conservation easements are two techniques that Coventry should utilize to ensure the preservation of a desirable amount of land as open space and/or woodland in the survey area. Other techniques are available, but these are two of the most effective, and they offer important tax benefits to the owners of the affected properties.

Using the authority of Connecticut Public Act 490, Coventry should, if possible, designate key properties as "open space." The parcels thereafter are taxed based on their current use, rather than the customary "highest and best use," which is an important benefit to the owners and an incentive to retention in their undeveloped state. The designation is for a period of 10 years, and penalties apply if the owners sell the properties before the end of the period.

As an alternative, owners should be encouraged to donate conservation easements on their properties, either to the town or to a suitable non-profit recipient, such as the Joshua's Tract Conservation Trust, the regional land trust. Conservation easements place long-term restrictions on development; if they are written in perpetuity, owners may receive significant federal tax benefits, along with the concomitant property tax reductions because development is limited.

The Preservation Plan identifies two places within the project area that should be targeted for open space protection because of their critical locations and scenic value: the large parcels that extend in a curve northeastward from Lake Street to Wall Street, and the large properties just northwest of the intersection of Depot Road and Main Street (see Fig. D). Other places within the project area also have high scenic and aesthetic value; in many cases, their preservation will be encouraged by the implementation of other recommendations in the report.

SAVING THE MILL BROOK



Coventry Village Improvement Society
Patricia Pelkey, Chairperson

Series originally appeared in Coventry Historical
Society Newsletter, "The Signpost"
September, 1994

heels of the Great Depression, served the death knell for village industries as many factories closed after severe flooding. By 1930, the entire town's population had fallen to 1552, fewer than the total in 1756. Since that time the village has never recovered its industrial base."

Coventry Village Today

"Coventry Village today is an area of impressive architectural and natural beauty, retaining, to a high degree, the significant cultural assets associated with its 18th- and 19th-century life as an industrial mill village. A few woodframed 19th-century mills still stand along Mill Brook's banks, while the stone foundations of others are scattered nearby. Mill ponds with stone dams offer additional physical evidence of the area's once vital economic base. The old homes and buildings lining Main Street and side lanes help preserve the ambiance of the community's past, and their high architectural quality suggests the Village's prominence and prosperity."

"The landscape features of the area around Mill Brook also contribute in good measure to its significance. The rolling, even hilly, terrain is dramatic, descending into extensive wetlands and crisscrossed by old stone walls. With the exception of the mills themselves and remnants of their power systems, the wetlands along the Mill Brook have acted to limit development in most places close to the stream. This continuous, albeit fragile, system of underdeveloped open space is a significant asset to the village, aesthetically, recreationally, and environmentally through natural drainage and replenishment of ground water. Taken together, these built and natural elements form a highly significant interlocking environment that is worthy of preservation and careful planning for the future."

Recommendations for the Future

"The town has an unusual opportunity to capitalize on the existence, in its natural state, of almost the full length of the Mill Brook. The

existing mills are the strongest visual reminder of the Brook's existence; the stretches between them, while highly scenic and unspoiled, have not been recognized or treated as an asset. The wetlands area between the village and the Willimantic River is unused and unappreciated because of inaccessibility. The Mill Brook is Coventry's best kept secret."

"An interpretive linear park along the full length of the Mill Brook would highlight these natural features as a scenic, recreational and educational asset to the village, the town and visiting tourists. The historic features from the village's industrial past should be highlighted and the ponds, dams and remnants of previous mill sites should be restored. A pathway, along the banks of the brook, elevated above the wetlands in some places and lighted for evening use and safety, would be a control feature. Connecting paths to Main Street and Prospect and Wall Streets would link the park with the village's architectural and commercial highlights."

"Stowe Village in Vermont has had experience with a longer but similar walkway. The people of the Village were involved from the beginning in raising money, helping with construction, and sponsoring segments or special features along its route, such as plantings or rest areas. Civic groups, school children and town organizations in Coventry could be similarly involved, resulting in a sense of pride and ownership."

A copy of this comprehensive, award winning 80+ page preservation plan for Coventry Village is available at the Booth and Dimock Library.

SAVING THE MILL BROOK, PART III

Sources for this article include the Mill Brook Heritage Study, the Village Preservation Plan and interviews with Fred Yates, Plant Manager at Deknatel and Chuck Conkling, Facility Maintenance Foreman for the Town of Coventry.

Deknatel takes the lead in Preservation/Beautification Effort

The second mill privilege along the Mill Brook is the Porter Grist Mill now owned by Deknatel. This was the earliest mill in Coventry, established in 1714 when the town granted 50 acres to a millwright by the name of Hartshaw to erect a grist mill. Later he sold the mill to the Porter family and it became known as the T. E. Porter Grist Mill. By 1869, when Daniel Green operated a shoddy mill on the site, a portion of the mill remained in operation as a grist mill.

Deknatel, under private ownership, began producing surgical thread at this location in 1936. The company was sold to the Pfizer Corporation in 1978 and in November 1991, it returned to private ownership. At that time, it was obvious to an enlightened management that a major cleanup effort was needed. Believing that a business is judged by its outward appearance, Plant Manager, Fred Yates, went about the ambitious task of transforming this neglected, overgrown eyesore into an attractive area for his employees and the community to enjoy. Although he had no knowledge of the Mill Brook Heritage Park Study or the Village Preservation Plan, he did have a strong desire to improve the Company's community image. Brush and trash were hauled away; the Mill Brook was cleaned out and restored; the entire area was graded and landscaped; buildings were painted and repaired and extensive interior improvements were made.

At the upper parking lot on Main Street, the Mill Pond spills over into the Mill Brook forming about 10 foot waterfalls. Further down the driveway, a wooden walking bridge crosses the brook providing a breathtaking view. A picnic area for employees overlooks the Mill Brook which rushes through the property, running under a portion of the main building and Monument Hill Road, resurfacing on the other side.

Completing their work during the summer of 1992, Yates indicates that he found the town officials and the Planning and Zoning Commission to be very cooperative. However, the second

phase of the project was yet to be done. He wanted to extend the cleanup effort to the adjacent town owned property that Deknatel is renting. Working closely with Chuck Conkling, Facility Maintenance Foreman, the next section of the Mill Brook was cleaned out and restored and additional grading and landscaping work was completed. Most significant was the removal of the Town sandpile to a more appropriate location. In its place a small, inviting public park area was developed. While Deknatel provided a large portion of the funding for these improvements, Chuck Conkling was able to secure an "America the Beautiful" federal grant through the State D.E.P. and a smaller grant for the purchase of trees from Connecticut Light and Power. This phase of the project was completed during the summer of 1993. The public is welcome to tour both sections of the property which has been further enhanced this season by the planting of 500 daffodil bulbs.

SAVING THE MILL BROOK, PART IV

Sources for this article include the Historical and Architectural Resources Survey of Coventry (July 1990) and the National Register of Historic Places Brochure.

A major component in saving the Mill Brook occurred on May 6, 1991 when the South Coventry Historic District was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Within this district 182 contributing resources were cited, including all of the surviving mill buildings.

It was noted in the nomination that Coventry Village, known historically as South Coventry, was one of the first areas of settlement within the Town of Coventry, and during the 19th Century it developed as an industrial center because of the water power of the Mill Brook.

"Some of the earliest structures are located around the green at Lake and High Streets, where settlement first occurred, and the 19th-Century industrial era is reflected in the mills along the Mill Brook and the residential,

commercial, and the institutional buildings on Main Street and the roads off of it to the north and south. The village architecture is also significant because of the fine examples present of several distinct architectural styles, ranging from the 18th-Century Colonial to the 20th-Century Georgian Revival."

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. It was authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service.

National Recognition is an honor and should be a source of pride for our community. Historic properties are tangible links to our past and help to provide a sense of community identity and stability. The National Register listing has helped many to appreciate the richness and variety of their heritage.

Listing in the National Register has the following results which assist in preserving historic properties:

- 1) Recognition that a property is of significance to the Nation, the State and the Community;
- 2) Consideration in the planning for federal or federally assisted projects;
- 3) Eligibility for federal tax benefits;
- 4) Qualification for federal assistance for historic preservation, if funds are available.

SAVING THE MILL BROOK, PART V

The Village Improvement Society is a private, grassroots group of Coventry residents who formed in March 1993 to advocate for the preservation, protection and enhancement of the village and to create an awareness of the uniqueness of the area and its status as a National Historic District.

One of the priorities over the past 15 months has been to educate our boards, commissions, town personnel and the community about the Preservation Plan for Coventry Village (Preservation Planning Associates, July 1990). Part of this plan relates to the Mill Brook and its important place in the history of Coventry. The group has also been in the trenches, literally, cleaning out the brook at the Bidwell Tavern. From there, they undertook the major, ongoing task of cleaning up the Tracy Shoddy Mill ruins located behind the fire station. This spring, two large informational display boards, relating to Coventry's history and current tourist attractions, were placed in the windows at the Coventry Book Shop.

The Village Improvement Society continues to sponsor the Daffodil Project which resulted, last fall, in the planting of approximately 12,000 bulbs around stonewalls, fences and front yards throughout Coventry. The group was recognized recently for this effort by being awarded first place in the Northeast Connecticut Visitors District, Pride in the Quiet Corner contest.

Local participation and support is welcomed and absolutely essential as we know that nothing will be accomplished in our community if we do not become involved ourselves. The group meets the last Wednesday of every month at 7:30 at the town hall. For more information call Pat Pelkey, 742-7847.

July 1994

SAVING THE MILL BROOK, PART I

The following is a brief overview of a Master's project entitled Mill Brook Heritage Park done in 1989 by Albert Jacob, University of Massachusetts Department of Landscape Architecture.

While passing through Coventry Village there is presently no indication that water mills ever played a significant part in the town's history. Running parallel to Main Street, however seemingly forgotten and unattended, the Mill Brook flows along a two-mile stretch from Coventry Lake to the Willimantic River, dropping a total of 270 feet along the way. Seventeen water mills once operated using water power from the brook to generate mechanical power. No where else in New England is there such a concentration of water mills and landscape elements in such a short distance.

While the Mill Brook itself continues to flow by the sheer force of gravity, the landscape elements which surround it such as lakes, dams, waterfalls, water channels and raceways have deteriorated by 50% as have the mills which created them. This unique landscape is as important historically as the water mills themselves. This historic landscape is the link between the lake and the river and should be restored and preserved as a whole.

These landscape elements should be saved not only for historical reasons, but as a living example of the heritage of this country and the town of Coventry. Today this area lies in decay and will continue to rapidly deteriorate if this unique historic phenomenon continues to be ignored.

With the help of state funding, the town could take the first step by working with the Historical Society to earmark the Mill Brook for restoration. Along with the landscape restoration plan, the town in its own interest could propose a pathway starting at the Tracy Shoddy Mill making its way along the Mill Brook from mill

to mill, skirting the lakes and ending on Route 31 between the Huntington Silk Mill and the Rawitzer Brothers Mill. The concept of a *Mill Brook Heritage Park* which would provide low impact recreational opportunities and areas of historical and cultural interest for the town's people could help ensure that part of Coventry's rich historic past is not lost forever.

SAVING THE MILL BROOK, PART II

The following is a partial summary of the Preservation Plan for Coventry Village as it relates to the Mill Brook. This plan was prepared for the town of Coventry by Preservation Planning Associates in July 1990 through a grant from the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Historic Heritage

"The Mill Brook has been a main focus of Coventry Village's development since the first settlers built their homes near the Village Green on Lake Street in 1712. During the 19th century it became the centerpiece of one of the most vital small mill districts in New England. Unlike many New England communities of the time, Coventry was not dominated by a single major manufacturer or industrial product. Among the industrial uses were grist mills, carding mills, and textile mills producing cotton, silk and woolens. Other successful ventures manufactured paper, cartridges, boxes, windmills and wagons."

"Contributing to the village's industrial growth in the late 19th century was the arrival of the railroad around 1850, which gave manufacturing a more efficient means of transportation production, thus expanding their market. Combined with the abundant waterpower along the Mill Brook. The rail connection allowed the industry of the second half of the 19th century to develop on a larger scale than was previously possible."

"The village's growth peaked around the turn of the century, after which the number of enterprises and their output stabilized and then declined. The 1938 Hurricane, arriving on the

IX. COVENTRY VILLAGE (Memorandum 10 & 13)

Coventry Village has been the traditional social and economic center of the Town, but certain factors and trends over the past two decades have diminished its role and economic function. One factor is that the Village is not centrally located in Coventry. Much of the recent residential growth has occurred in northern Coventry.

Residents there have shorter or comparable travel times to commercial areas in nearby communities which offer a greater range of services. Similarly, the increased mobility of residents throughout the Town have enabled them to travel relatively easily to shopping centers with a greater variety of stores in Willimantic, Manchester, Mansfield and other nearby communities.

Another factor has been that Coventry Village has not been able to respond to these market forces because of its layout and configuration. Most of the property is in small lots, which are not conducive to large or moderate scale commercial development. Assemblage of properties would be necessary for this type of commercial development, which is logistically difficult and probably not economically feasible for private interests. In addition, the area has some environmental constraints, such as Mill Brook.

The positive aspects of the lack of commercial redevelopment in Coventry Village is that many of the older buildings have remained intact. Consequently, the Village retains its historical character, which was analyzed in the "Preservation Plan for Coventry Village". The general orientation of the "Preservation Plan for Coventry Village", as its name implies, was the historical preservation and adaptive reuse of historical buildings, but it recognized the need for economic activity in the Village and its interrelationship with other factors. As the village contains many cultural assets associated with 18th and 19th century industrial mill village, it is of significant importance to maintain these sites in conjunction with the expansion and development of the village to accommodate new commercial businesses and to maintain the ambiance of the residences in the area.

The economic role of Coventry Village must change in order for revitalization to occur. The opportunities for revitalization have been enhanced by the installation of sanitary sewers which is removing a constraint to development.

A. Recommendations

1. Preserve the Village's Historical and Architectural Resources:
 - a. Create a local historic district and create historic zoning district;
 - b. Conduct site plan review of all land use proposals;
 - c. Create a revitalization loan and grant program;
 - d. Encourage stronger advocacy for historic preservation by existing groups or creation of a new organization.

2. Increase Economic and Functional Vitality:
 - a. Selectively promote more intensive and appropriate uses in the Village, both commercial and residential;

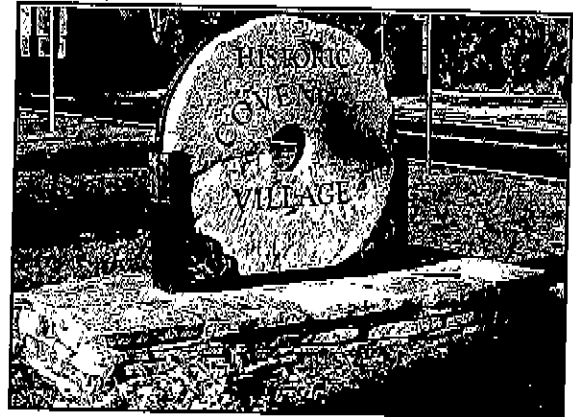
- b. Plan a careful strategy to combine new uses, including services, especially retail starter businesses, clustered housing on the Village edges, and infill commercial development along Main Street;
 - c. Target new uses that will have a regional market, including those that will be attractive to the University of Connecticut;
 - d. Develop the Village's tourist potential in tandem with the Hale Homestead, Caprilands and Coventry Lake and Historical Society Sites, Coventry's significant tourist draws;
 - e. Participate actively in the National Park Service's Heritage Corridor planning along the Quinebaug and Shetucket rivers.
3. Adaptively Reuse Coventry Village's Historic Mills and Under Utilized Properties:
- a. Encourage revitalization of the mills as new centers for commercial growth, each mill perhaps to serve as a different thematic center or for housing although the appropriate flexibility of land scale must be allowed.
4. Enhance Significant Natural Resources:
- * a. Develop a linear park hike/bike trail along Millbrook between the lake and the Willimantic River, with public access and open space linkages to Main Street. Restore the old mill ponds and dams where feasible, and create a protective zone around the park with heightened planning review powers;
 - b. Study and implement a plan for improved recreational opportunities at Patriots Park and at the other end of the linear park at the Willimantic River.
 - c. Enact an archaeological protection ordinance;
 - d. Encourage open space preservation through incentive zoning and conservation easements;
 - e. Designate roads which might be considered under the Scenic Roads ordinance.
5. Initiate Public Actions and Improvements:
- a. Relocate the Town Garage and Volunteer Fire Department, making these buildings available for commercial use;
 - b. Improve traffic control;

10 COVENTRY VILLAGE

Coventry Village was the traditional social and economic center of South Coventry until the 1970's when economic and demographic factors diminished its role and function. Residential growth shifted to northern Coventry. Reduced dining and shopping added to its decline.

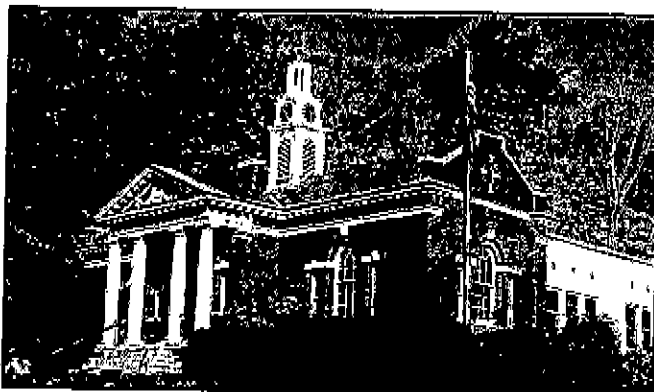
The Village layout of small lots and underused mill sites, is not conducive to large scale development, and the 40 year-old zoning regulations made creative development difficult. Traffic on Main Street, a state road, remains an issue as vehicles tend to exceed the speed limit the majority of the time, thereby limiting the enjoyment of the Village.

In 1990, a Plan of Preservation and Development was commissioned, and its recommendations, which still apply today, have been actively pursued by municipal and private entities. The aforementioned plan says: "Coventry Village remains an area of impressive architectural and natural beauty, retaining the significant cultural assets associated with its 18th and 19th century life as an industrial mill village.... The landscape features of the area around the Mill Brook contribute to its significance and beauty."



The 1990 Plan called for a new beginning. Driving development in the Village since then has been an awareness of its basic qualities of small scale, dense development patterns, multi-use buildings and shared parking. Most of the Village is served by public water and sewer, which fits the infrastructure well and enhances smart-growth principles. Zoning changes facilitated this new approach.

The Village Today



As recommended by the 1990 plan, improvements have occurred in the Village. A seven-acre tract has been preserved as open space and named the Mill Brook Park. The new regulations also include design guidelines to help preserve the character of the area. The long-envisioned Mill Brook walkway has been implemented from the lake to Mason Street or about one fifth of its goal to parallel the entire brook.



In recent years, grant money has been used to greatly improve the facades of some twelve buildings, and it has encouraged private investment totaling an amount greater than the grant funding. Another grant allowed the placement of fifteen interpretive historic signs in the Village as an educational and recreational asset.

Two major residential projects, including active adult condominiums and a significant redevelopment of the old Kenyon Mill to condominiums have added to the residential base. The Village now includes an eclectic mix of shops, personal care options, a general store and several dining establishments in addition to the existing post office, bank, library and the Congregational church.

While there has been significant revitalization progress made in the past eight years, continuing effort is required to realize the opportunities to improve the quality of life of the residents and visitors to the Village.

Goal: Preserve the historical and architectural resources in Coventry Village in addition to increasing its economic and functional vitality.

Recommendations- (Action items include the responsible party, in brackets)

1. Continue to preserve the Village's Architectural and Historical Resources. [Planning & Zoning, Economic Development Commission, Land use staff, Village Improvement Society]

- Conduct a thorough site plan review of all land use proposals and employ the new design guidelines to their fullest extent.
- Create and/or administer a revitalization loan and grant program.
- Encourage strong advocacy for historic preservation by existing or new groups. The Village is on the National Register of Historic Places.

2. Increase Economic and Functional Vitality. [Planning & Zoning, Economic Development, Land use staff]

- Selectively promote intensive and appropriate residential and commercial uses.
- Install sidewalks, on Main Street and Lake Street where possible, to specifically connect available parking and commerce.
- Continue working with the state Department of Transportation on their planned contextual reconstruction of a portion of Main Street that will include sidewalks and streetscapes, and demand that traffic calming measures are included.
- Plan a careful strategy to combine new uses, including services, retail starter businesses, clustered housing on the Village edges, and infill commercial development along Main Street.
- Target new uses that will have regional attraction, including those associated with local universities.

- Develop the Village's tourist potential in tandem with Coventry's significant tourist draws; the Hale Homestead, Coventry Lake, Historical Society Sites and the Farmers Market.
- Participate actively in planning with "The Last Green Valley" Heritage Corridor.

3. Adaptively Reuse Coventry Village's Historic Mills and Under Utilized Properties. [Planning & Zoning, Economic Development Commission, Land use staff, Town Council]

- Develop adaptive re-use plans for the mills as new centers for commercial growth, each mill may serve as a different thematic center or for housing although the appropriate flexibility of land scale must be allowed. Target the two mills on Mason Street, the Tracy Mill on Main Street and the potential availability of the Town garage site on Bradbury Lane.



- Develop and promote a plan for the following properties: Woodland Road lakeside parcel, the old building at 44 Lake Street in combination with the Lakeview Restaurant, potential commercial use of the front lot across from 1159 Main Street, potential commercial use of the buildings at 1340 Main Street, 41 Stonehouse Road and the corner of Main and Paden Roads.
- Continue working with the Teleflex Corp. for potential expansion adjacent to their present facilities, and assist in maintaining their presence in the Village.

4. Enhance Significant Natural Resources. [Planning & Zoning, Conservation Commission, Public Works, Land use staff]

- * Continue the development of a linear park hike/bike trail along Millbrook between the lake and the Willimantic River, with public access and open space linkages to Main Street. Restore the old mill ponds and dams where feasible, and create a protective zone around the park with heightened planning review powers.
- Study and implement a plan for improved recreational opportunities at Patriots Park and at the linear park near the Willimantic River.
- Enact an archaeological protection ordinance.
- Encourage open space preservation through such processes such as incentive zoning, conservation easements, outright purchase and other techniques.
- Designate roads that might be considered under the Scenic Roads ordinance.

5. Initiate Public Actions and Improvements. [Town Council, Public Works, Town Engineer]

- Relocate the Town Garage, making the site available for reuse.
- Improve traffic control and monitor its progress on Main Street in conjunction with the Route 31 curve realignment project. Implement traffic calming measures.
- Design and implement and maintain, in conjunction with the Route 31 curve realignment project, a program of coordinated parking facilities and new sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting, street furniture, signage, and landscaping in the Village Center. Develop a comprehensive streetscape plan, with indigenous plants, which includes sidewalks on the southerly side of Main Street from Post Office area to Armstrong Road.

6. Establish Financial Incentives and a Revitalization Strategy. [Town Council, Economic Development Commission, Town Staff]

- Implement the existing property tax incentives for economic development, and consider same for historic restoration.
- Create a revitalization loan and grant program, with public and private funding and participation.
- Provide for an economic development director to coordinate projects and citizens groups' activities that support the Village and the town.

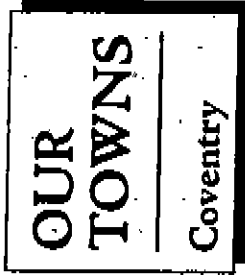
7. Explore the potential of financing public improvements that may include the creation of a special assessment district, tax increment financing and Community Development Block Grants. [Town Council, Manager and Staff]

8. Work to create a pedestrian link from the post office to the high school and from the Bidwell Village Condominiums to Main Street. [Public Works, Town Council and Staff]

9. Review and strengthen, as necessary with experience, the special zoning district which considers factors such as pre-existing structures, parking and setback constraints, and existing geographic features. Special attention should be made to design criteria, including strict standards for signs. [Planning & Zoning, Economic Development Commission, Town Staff]

Historical Coventry Jan. 25, 1995 (EDITORIAL)

Trail proposal offers an opportunity



A proposed recreation trail through a historic section of Coventry would be more than just a place for exercising and enjoying the outdoors. It would be a good way to promote the town's history and its present-day village charm.

The hiking and biking trail would lead from the state boat launch at Mill Brook to the Coventry Village business district. Officials are applying for a federal transportation grant to pay 80 percent of the cost of about \$300,000. The town is responsible for the rest.

Whether or not town officials get a federal grant to pay for the project, residents should support the idea and help make it happen.

The path would go past seven sites where industrial mills once stood. Some structures still exist; Mill Brook once had 17 mills on its banks. If

properly developed, this fine piece of state history could draw tourists who would stay to shop and explore more of the town.

The trail could become a central component of a network connecting other sections of Coventry. Officials are talking about adding branches that might lead to the Booth & Dimock Memorial Library and major streets, an advantage for residents and businesses. Several spots are being considered for a skating pond or Victorian gardens. Both ideas could attract people to town and boost the economy. Sidewalks at Coventry Village should be part of the plan, too.

Eventually, families could have daylong outings: boating on the water, eating at a quaint restaurant and learning some history on the trail.

Townpeople have a chance to influence how the project will unfold. When they hear ideas they like or have some of their own, they should speak out and volunteer their time to turn the proposals into reality.

■ COVENTRY

Officials want residents' feedback on proposed trail

By PETER BUTTRESS
Courant Correspondent

COVENTRY — Three large posters featuring drawings of a proposed hiking and biking trail are catching people's eye at town hall these days.

The town has received a \$280,000 federal grant to build the three-quarters-of-a-mile trail, called Millbrook Greenway, and town officials have put up the posters to inform residents and get their opinions.

The total cost is estimated to be \$350,000; the town is responsible for the \$70,000 balance, some of which could be covered by in-kind services such as volunteer work.

The proposed trail would begin at the Wangumbaug Lake boat launch and continue on Lake Street, Monument Hill Road and Main Street. It would loop back by way of Mason and Wall streets, going past historic former mill sites and a portion of Coventry's old trolley line.

Above each drawing at town hall, prepared by Landscape Architecture Design Associates of Simsbury, officials have mounted a photograph of the section of the trail as it looks today.

In one drawing, bicyclists are riding past a historic house on Lake Street. Today, the lawn at the front

of the house extends down to the road. But in the artist's rendering, a fieldstone wall would be built across the lawn with steps leading to the house. In front of the wall, a paved path, 8- to 10-foot wide, would be constructed with a low wooden fence on one side to protect pedestrians and bicyclists from traffic.

Eric M. Trott, director of planning and development for the town, said the main purpose is to create a trail

work."

Not everyone is enthusiastic. Some residents are concerned about the pathway's crossing their property. For instance, Ted Szeluga said that the concept is great, but that he is concerned about where the trail will go.

"What they propose is going to be a hardship for me," Szeluga said. "Because of a right-of-way to my property, there'll be a conflict between me and the bikers."

that is safe for the public. Pedestrians and bicyclists now must walk or ride on roads, which in some sections are heavily traveled and dangerous.

Trott said final design should be completed by the end of the summer, with construction planned for next year.

"I think it's wonderful," resident Rose Marie Fowler said. "This is the point in time when everyone has to get together to make the bike trail

Coventry trail proposed to offer economic boost

By ERIC FERRERI
Coventry Correspondent

COVENTRY — Town officials are hoping a proposed hiking and biking trail running from Coventry Lake to Coventry Village will help bolster the local economy.

Dubbed the Millbrook Greenway, the proposed half-mile trail would begin at the state-owned boat launch on Cross Street and end at the remains of the Tracy Shoddy Mill, located between Wall and Main streets. Connecting the lake with the downtown area will give residents and visitors another option when lounging on the lake, said Eric Troit, the town's director of planning and development.

"Conceivably, someone could get off their boat at the launch, and then walk downtown and have lunch," Troit said.

The town will hold an informational meeting on the proposal July 31 at 7 p.m. in the Patriot's Park Community Center.

A federal grant will pay for 80 percent of the \$329,000 project. The town would pay the rest. The project must still receive approval

from the state Department of Transportation and the town's planning and zoning commission and inland wetlands agency.

Most of the 10-foot-wide, paved trail would parallel local roads. From the launch, it would cross Cross Street and cut through the town green. It would then follow Lake Street, turn right onto Monument Hill Road, and follow that road past Wall Street. The trail would then turn right before reaching Main Street, ending at the remains of the mill.

Plans for the trail originated with the town's 1990 Village Improvement Plan, created to preserve and enhance the village area. Officials at the time hoped the trail would give pedestrians a safe place to walk.

Now, officials view the trail as a way to get shoppers to the handful of restaurants, barber shops and antique shops in the village.

"I think anything the town can provide to enable folks from town or out of town to come to the area is good," said Sondra Astor Stave, chairwoman of the economic development commission.

Developers face question in South Windsor

By ERIC FERRERI
Coventry Correspondent

Developers looking to divide off Avery Street were taken by an unlikely critic.

At a nearly two-hour planning and public hearing on the proposal, Thuroit peered over the podium from Mannarino Builders Inc. to

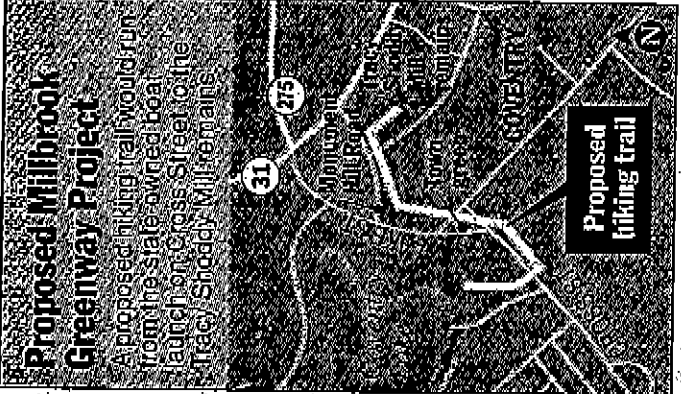
ask, "Would you like to do something for the town? Just for money?" Thuroit asked, drawing laughs from the roughly 20

people. Developers could answer, commission

cal matters with the developer. Mannarino's engineers presented their plan, detailing sightline measurements and the slopes of the roads around the development.

And officials from the town's planning department voiced their concerns about portions of the proposal. Marcia Banach, director of planning, and Jerry Iazzetta, the town engineer, told the commission they weren't comfortable with the sightlines — the distances motorists can see from specific points — from the intersection with Avery Street that the development would create.

Iazzetta also questioned a proposed island that would divide entering and exiting traffic in the road entering the subdivision. Iazzetta said he was con-



The Hartford Courant

East Hartford to ban baggy pants

By VAN ALDEN FERGUSON
Coventry Staff Writer

EAST HARTFORD — School officials have decided that a recently adopted rule prohibiting middle school students from wearing excessively baggy pants should apply to the high school as well.

A committee of parents and teachers, headed by former middle school Principal Linda Iverson, last month completed a policy banning baggy, low-riding pants at the middle school.

Superintendent of Schools George B. Drumm then sent a memo with the policy to all principals, asking them to include it in student handbooks.

Drumm had previously intended that a similar dress code for the high school would be put together for the school year beginning in September 1998.

But high school officials decided to incorporate the new policy into their handbooks for the coming school year, Drumm said.

"The more we discussed it, the

more we felt it inappropriate was appropriate. Drumm said sense to do it.

The baggy school continued started last year dress at all had encourag tors at the e consider schc

The past s test of unifor tary School, a code at La School.

Langford p continue the for the combin at Norris an tary schools

Ultimately council of p and students for requiring both schools,

Vernon accepts builder's land donation

By STEPHANIE REITZ
Coventry Staff Writer

VERNON — The town council accepted the donation of land at Warren Avenue and Tunnel Road on Wednesday, the first step toward a possible improvement of the forked intersection.

Countor Development Inc., which is building a 15-lot subdivision nearby, offered the land to satisfy a condition of approval by the planning and zoning commission.

Town road-design specialists have hoped for years to improve the oddly angled intersection, making it a safer, T-shaped intersection. Its current configuration can be difficult for drivers who want to turn from Warren Avenue onto Tunnel

it accepts the donation. "What we do with it after the

The council also voted on Countor's donation of a strip of land along the western edge of the area, called a conservation area, which would remain undeveloped.

"It's an area where town residents could potentially be along the river for a longer, open Knapp, an attorney for Countor

The subdivision, which will have 14 new single-family homes on Tunnel Road. The planning and zoning commission will protect earlier this month.

■ COVENTRY

Residents back plan for hiking, biking trail

1-18-95

By LAURA UNGAR
Coventry Staff Writer

COVENTRY — Creating a hiking and biking trail through historic Coventry Village would enhance the area, boost property values and help revive the region's small businesses, residents told the town council Tuesday.

More than 45 people filled the town hall board room, most to support a federal grant proposal that calls for installing the mile-long paved trail southwest of Route 31, starting at the state boat launch.

The project would cost about \$300,000, and the federal govern-

ment would pay 80 percent. Town Planner Eric Troit said. The town would be responsible for the rest of the money, but some could be covered by in-kind services, such as volunteer work.

The town is competing with other towns for Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act grants.

"Whatever amount of money we put in is going to be returned to us many-fold," said Bill Kelleher of North River Road. "Everyone's going to benefit because all our properties are going to be worth more." Patricia Pelkey of Bishop Lane,

chairwoman of the Village Improvement Society, said her group has been working for such a project since it was formed. Jon Brynga of Wall Street said the bikeway/walkway will bring people into town and bring business to local shops.

In response to some residents' questions, Town Manager John Gessner said town officials do not envision using the town's power of condemnation to acquire private land for the project. Resident Rose Marie Fowler suggested a show of hands to find out who was in favor of the proposal. Every hand went up.

Coventry residents back proposed bike path

By JAMES MOORE
Chronicle Staff Writer
April 1955

COVENTRY — The town is going to ask the federal government to "pour some iced tea" on the village section in the interest of making it greener and more hospitable.

After 46 residents expressed their support for applying for a grant to build a mile-long bike path connecting the boat launching area on Coventry Lake with Bradbury Lane, the town council voted unanimously Tuesday night to proceed with the grant application and negotiations with property owners who own the land slated to be beautified.

The federal government's Intermodal Surface Transportation

Act, or ISTEA (pronounced "iced tea") is designed to provide funding for this type of improvements.

The grant, if awarded, would fund 80 percent of the cost of building a 10-foot wide bike path and making associated improvements, said Town Manager John Elsesser.

The town's end of the total project bill would amount to between \$40,000 and \$65,000, with "at least \$20,000 of that in the form of in-kind contributions," Elsesser said.

Donations of time, labor and property from residents and town employees would count towards the in-kind contribution, he explained.

"Everyone is going to benefit because all of our properties

are going to be worth more," said Bill Kelleher of North River Road, one of many residents to speak out in favor of the project. "It's just a matter of putting our minds to it. I'm for it."

Several other residents also spoke in favor of the proposed project. When Rose Fowler of Wall Street later requested an informal vote from the townspeople, each of the 46 present raised their hand in favor of pursuing the federal grant.

While the town could legally force residents to sell the property needed to build the greenway and bike path which will follow Mill Brook for much of its one-mile journey, Elsesser said that won't be the approach taken if the money comes in.

"The only way to make something successful is to work out something that everybody could live with," Elsesser said.

The town will also need to obtain approval for the project from the planning and zoning commission, "just like everybody else" has to, Elsesser said.

Elsesser said the grant money will be the subject of intense competition between area towns, which is why a 10-foot-wide bike path is the only viable option.

The town could also apply for a grant to fund a walkway or another type of path, but that wouldn't be as likely to succeed once it was sent off to Washington, D.C.