



# SUBASE Area Zoning and Market Study

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Prepared for the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments by:



Horsley Witten Group



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## Introduction

The Horsley Witten Group (HW) was engaged by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) in fall of 2018 to assist with the SUBASE New London Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) Implementation Project. The purpose of the study was to identify and plan for future demands across the region for housing and transportation related to expanded activities at Electric Boat and SUBASE New London.

## Aspects of the Study

There were two parts to the project:

**Economics & Zoning** - This component was focused locally on the Town of Groton, analyzing the local economic and market conditions and making associated recommendations for zoning changes in the immediate vicinity of SUBASE and in other key areas of town expected to help absorb demand for housing. The HW Team, including Camoin Associates (Camoin), focused on the Economics & Zoning piece, which is the subject of this report.

**Housing & Transportation** - This component was more regionally focused, analyzing the potential impacts on regional housing and transportation needs based on the anticipated expansion of submarine shipbuilding at Electric Boat and the SUBASE. This broader regional study was led by BFJ Planning in collaboration with Urbanomics, ASG Planning, and Tighe & Bond. More information on this part of the study may be found at: <https://www.subasenewlondonjlus.com/>

## Scope for Economics & Zoning

The HW Team was charged with studying the land use and economics of potential land uses in the areas directly abutting and surrounding the SUBASE. This included land along Route 12, Crystal Lake Road, and the land in which both the SUBASE and Navy housing is currently located. Project tasks included:

- Review of the existing Nautilus Memorial Design District (NMDD) zoning regulations and area.
- Review of the approvals and/or successful projects in the NMDD zone.
- Review of the current zone's compatibility with Navy goals.
- Consideration as to whether the zone should be split into 2 zones – Route 12 area and Crystal Lake Road area.
- Consideration as to whether the zone should be expanded along Route 12.
- Consideration as to whether the SUBASE and Crystal Lake Road should be rezoned; should a portion of Military Highway be included; should the federally owned housing property be included?
- Consideration of other zoning changes that might accommodate the demand for new housing and development spurred by expanded activities at Electric Boat and SUBASE New London.
- Examine market conditions for the zone/district area, especially for the purposes of understanding the local housing and other service needs for the Navy and Electric Boat.
- Public meeting attendance, including workshops and public hearings associated with the adoption of all necessary regulations.



*USS Nautilus. Submarine Force Museum.*

# Considerations from the Regional Housing & Transportation Study

The regional housing and transportation work included several findings that informed the local economic and zoning work. The most notable of these findings and their implications are summarized below.

## Findings

- The region (southeastern Connecticut) has been losing population and housing values have been falling since 2010.
- A net of 5,000 new employees are expected at Electric Boat over the next 30 years.
- These employees are expected to reverse the slump in population and help stabilize home values.
- Groton has an aging population – many would like to stay in Groton but have few options for downsizing.
- Many younger EB workers are attracted to living in mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods (like downtown New London), and could choose to live in Groton if that sort of neighborhood was available here.

## Implications

- There is a market demand for smaller units within walking distance of shops and services - both for downsizing seniors and younger professionals.
- Many military families continue to seek high-quality, off-base rental housing. In addition, there is a trend of younger adults and retirees choosing to rent rather than buy a home. All these factors combine to increase demand for more rental options.
- Zoning needs to ensure that there is space within the Town of Groton where such development is allowed an encouraged.



Existing Conditions: Route 12. Google Maps.



Main Gate: Naval Submarine Base.  
The Dolphin News.



Existing Conditions: Crystal Lake Road. Google Maps.

## Economic Studies

Part of this project involved analysis of the jobs and housing markets in and around Groton. These analyses can help drive long range zoning, land use, and transportation decisions that are positive for our local and regional economies. Camoin took the lead in research and writing of all economic related deliverables for this Groton-specific portion of the project:

**Economic & Market Profile** – Economic and market data on local conditions throughout the Town of Groton.

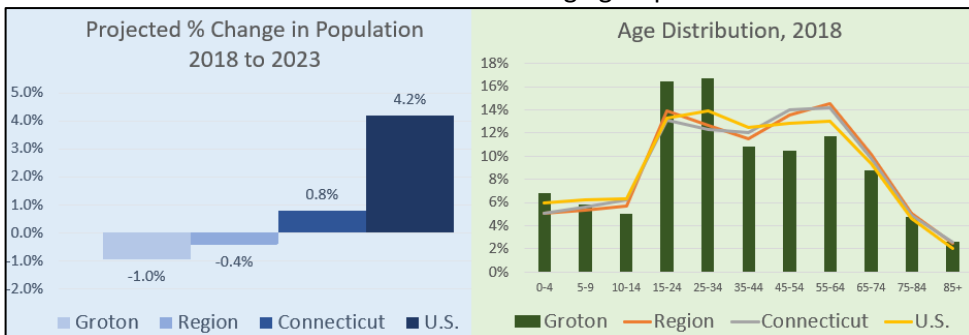
**Fiscal Impact Modeling** – An analysis of the fiscal impacts of different land use types within the areas of Town expected to absorb the most new housing and development.

## Economic & Market Profile

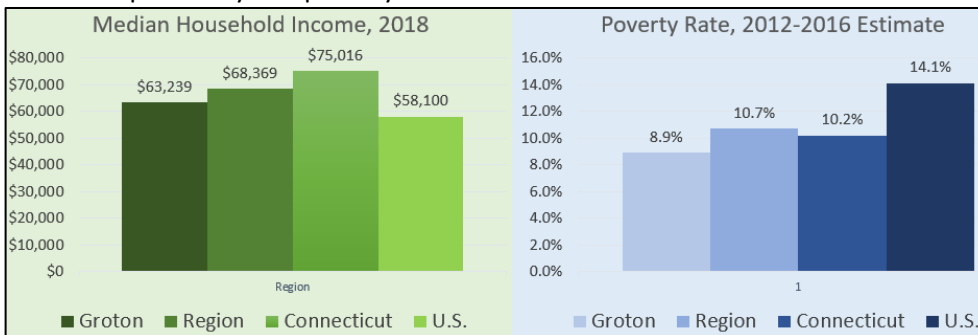
Camoin produced an Economic Profile for the Town of Groton, CT in March 2019. Below is a summary of the findings of this profile. Groton is home to the U.S. Navy Submarine Base, the General Dynamics/Electric Boat Corporation, and Pfizer Pharmaceutical. The town’s strengths lie in these large legacy companies and establishments that dominate its manufacturing industry, defense industry, and the biotech and life sciences industry. Referred to as the “Big 3”, these employers make up nearly 60% of the town’s workforce. When one of these Big 3 employers ramps up or down, a significant portion of the local economy is affected. Beyond the Big 3, Groton has a stable marine trade industry, and strong public and private historic/cultural and open space resources with a growing recreation and fitness-focused economic sector that offers opportunities for the future.

### Economic Profile - Demographics

- Status quo population trend – slight decline, *absent* expected job growth in the region.
- Groton is younger than the region and state.
- Concentration of residents in the 15-34 age group.

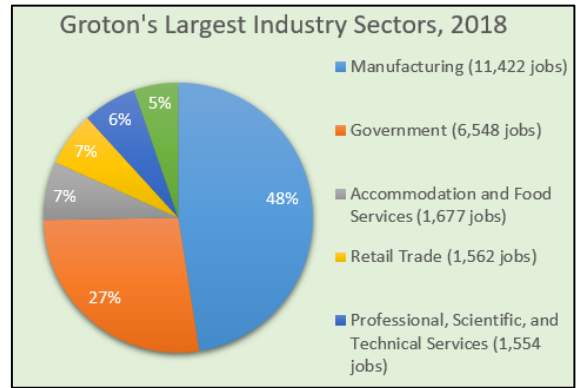


- Median household income of \$63K, lower than the region and state.
- 38% of Groton residents and 39% of Connecticut residents have at least a Bachelor’s degree.
- Comparatively low poverty rate

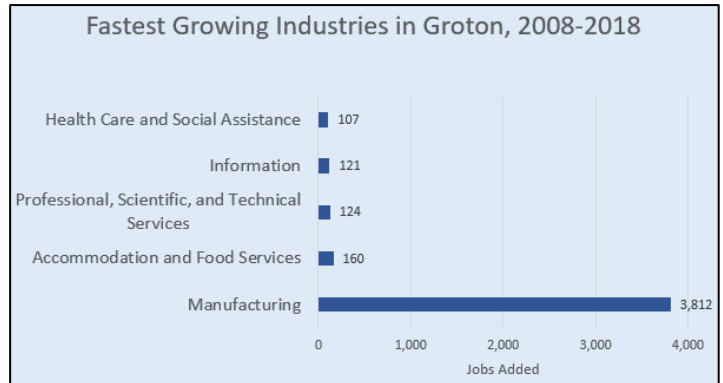


## Economic Profile - Industries

- 2018 job count = 26,399
- Manufacturing is the largest industry: 11,422 jobs and over 48% of employment.
- Large military presence contributes to Government's position as the second largest industry.

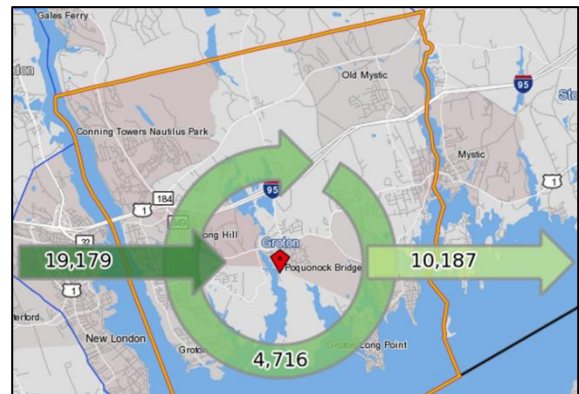


- Manufacturing is the fastest growing industry, adding 3,812 jobs in the past 10 years.
- Driven by ship and boat building
- Groton's economic region outperformed the state in Manufacturing
- Future Growth industries
  - Ship and Boat Building
  - Scientific Research and Development Service
  - Restaurants
  - Offices of Physicians



## Economic Profile – Commuting Patterns

- Groton is a net importer of labor.
- 4,716 residents hold jobs in the town.
- 19,179 workers commute from outside of Groton.
- In-commuters fill about 80% of the available jobs.
- Over 10,000 workers commute to other towns and cities for their primary jobs.



## Real Estate Market Profile – Residential

- Limited multifamily construction resulting in a lack of existing inventory.
- Expansion of Electric Boat will be a significant driver of residential demand in coming years.
  - 150 new households by 2025
- Growing cohorts: 35-44 and 85+
- Short to mid-term: need historically undersupplied housing that appeals to younger and older households.
  - Newer rental options will be in demand.
- Longer term (2025 and after): demand will shift towards single-family homes.

## Real Estate Market Profile – Commercial

- Retail
  - Updates to existing space needed
  - Investments in quality of place needed to make Groton a retail destination
- Office
  - Potential demand from EB and contractors
  - Growing demand for medical office
- Industrial/Flex
  - 30,000-50,000 SF blocks of space needed
  - Shovel-ready sites needed once market supports new construction

## Fiscal Impact Modeling

Camoin produced a report in October 2019 titled Fiscal Impact of Development Types: Model Framework for the Town of Groton, CT. Below is a summary of the findings of this profile.

A fiscal impact reference matrix was developed to help understand the extent to which potential proposed land uses will add net costs or generate net revenues for the Town of Groton. To do so, Camoin looked at the potential impact of the development of five land use types on Town of Groton services and the Town budget:

- Retail
- Office
- Single-family homes
- Townhouses
- Multifamily residential

Camoin then ran fiscal impact numbers for three areas of town where additional housing and development is desired and expected. All three areas have recent or pending zoning changes that would allow a mix of uses and housing types.

## Fiscal Impact by Use

Impacts of commercial space were calculated per 1,000 square feet of retail or office space.

The table below displays the unit size and bedroom count assumptions that were used for residential development. These assumptions are based on typical sizes for new housing units for the Northeast in 2017, as provided by the U.S. Census Survey of Construction.

## Residential Development Assumptions

	Average Bedrooms	Average Square Feet
Single-Family	3.25	2,500
Townhouse	2.25	1,500
Multifamily	1.50	1,000

The table below shows the net fiscal impact to the Town of the addition of 1,000 SF of retail or office space, or one new single-family home, townhouse, or multifamily unit. Commercial uses—retail and office—have the highest net positive impacts. Multifamily units are also positive, while townhouses are essentially revenue neutral, but still slightly positive. Single-family homes are the only uses to have a negative impact on the budget, at \$3,200 per unit.

### Net Fiscal Impact of Use Type, by Unit\*

Use Type	Total Expenses	Total Revenue	Net Fiscal Impact
Office	\$921	\$4,086	\$3,165
Retail	\$510	\$2,577	\$2,067
Multifamily Unit	\$2,442	\$3,558	\$1,115
Townhouse	\$3,578	\$4,363	\$785
Single-Family Home	\$13,083	\$9,883	\$(3,200)

\*Unit is equal to 1,000 SF of retail or office space, or one dwelling.

In general, across unit types, units with two bedrooms or fewer have neutral or positive net fiscal impacts. For units with three bedrooms or greater, net impacts are negative. It is important to note however that this is a high-level analysis based on averages and does not include the economic and intangible benefits of having more families with children in a community. Such benefits include, but are not limited to, increased household spending, balancing out the overall aging of the community, and increased civic and community engagement and volunteerism.

The net fiscal impact on a per-acre basis is shown in the table below. Uses that are fiscally net positive (commercial and multifamily) also tend to be higher density, so positive impacts are intensified on a per-acre basis.

Use Type	Net Fiscal Impact Per Unit	SF or Units per Acre	Net Fiscal Impact per Acre
Office	\$3,165	10,890	\$34,466
Retail	\$2,067	10,890	\$22,507
Multifamily Unit	\$1,115	22	\$24,539
Townhouse	\$785	10	\$7,853
Single-Family Home	\$(3,200)	2	\$(6,400)

It should be noted that this analysis should be used for planning purposes only. It is highly recommended that a detailed fiscal impact analysis be completed for any specific development proposals that come forward. Additionally, residential development decisions should be made in the context of how many more students the school district could accommodate without having to hire more staff or build more schools.

### Fiscal Impact by Development Area

Part of the impetus for this analysis was to determine the potential fiscal impacts of expanded job opportunities with the Navy and private employers such as Electric Boat over the next several years. Where is the Town of Groton likely to absorb demand for new housing and commercial development spurred by this job growth? What is that development likely to include at build out? Once those questions were answered, the fiscal impact per unit figures described above could be applied to different development scenarios to calculate the total fiscal impact of each potential development.

The Town opted to look at three areas where development is expected to accommodate new growth and housing needs to help offset the Electric Boat expansion. If these three areas are built out as expected, what would be the likely fiscal impacts for the Town?

**Mixed-Use Town Center (MTC)** – A new district in the Town’s recently updated Zoning Regulations that went into effect on October 1, 2019, the MTC is meant to encourage the redevelopment of existing strip malls and other single-story and single use buildings into mixed-use developments. The MTC district may accommodate a



mix of uses, including residential, and act as a destination for residents across and outside the Town, ultimately serving as a true Town Center and gathering spot with its own clear identity.

**Nautilus Memorial Design District (NMDD)** – A zoning district established in the 1980s that was recently eliminated by the Town’s Planning & Zoning Commission (effective January 15, 2020). The intent of this district was to permit and control development in such a way as to protect and enhance the primary entryway to the Nautilus Memorial, to service tourist-related and Navy needs, and to provide protection to adjacent residential areas.

**Mystic Education Center (MEC)** – This historic, state-owned property is in the process of being transferred for private development. While much remains uncertain, there is a strong expectation that mixed-use with a heavy residential component will be the most viable option for the site. The Town is currently working to develop new zoning for this site that would accommodate such redevelopment.

The table below summarizes the total expenses, total revenue, and net fiscal impact of each development area. The net fiscal impact of all three development areas is positive.

Scenario	Total Expenses	Total Revenue	Net Fiscal Impact
NMDD	\$2,072,979	\$3,536,382	\$1,463,402
MTC	\$8,521,931	\$13,637,278	\$5,115,347
MEC	\$3,107,919	\$3,439,959	\$332,040



*Naval Submarine Base New London (SUBASE) Kids Karnival. The Dolphin News.*

## Zoning Studies

The initial scope of this work focused primarily on the Nautilus Memorial Design District, a zoning district adjacent to the SUBASE, as well as land occupied by Navy-owned housing. However, as the project progressed, it became clear that other opportunities existed throughout Groton to accommodate the expected growth of housing and development in town. The zoning and planning related studies for this project ultimately included:

**Nautilus Memorial Design District (NMDD)** – The bulk of this work was focused on the NMDD but also looked at Navy-owned residential properties outside the NMDD.

**Mystic Education Center (MEC)** – The MEC represents a truly unique opportunity for reinvestment in a historic campus setting with a mix of housing opportunities and supporting commercial and recreational uses, not only for the site itself, but the community at large. As this site is currently zoned for rural residential uses, it was critical to explore zoning alternatives that would help accommodate some of the housing demand spurred by the Electric Boat expansion.

**Historic Institutional Reuse** – Updated zoning language that will provide clearer regulations for converting former institutional uses, such as excess public schools, into other uses, including multi-unit residential. This is another opportunity to make it easier for housing alternatives to be accommodated in existing residential areas, further helping absorb demand from Electric Boat.

**POCD** – Proposed updates to the POCD will help plan for future reuse of the MEC and other properties that may take advantage of the Historic Institutional Reuse provisions.

**Full Zoning Regulations Update** – The Town’s recently updated Zoning Regulations that went into effect on October 1, 2019 include a number of things designed to accommodate demand for housing alternatives and other development, such as: new mixed-use zoning districts and regulations for specific housing alternatives such as cottage communities and conversion of existing buildings into multi-unit residential. While not a part of this project, it is important to note that this enormous effort will play a significant role in meeting the objectives of this project.

## Nautilus Memorial Design District (NMDD)

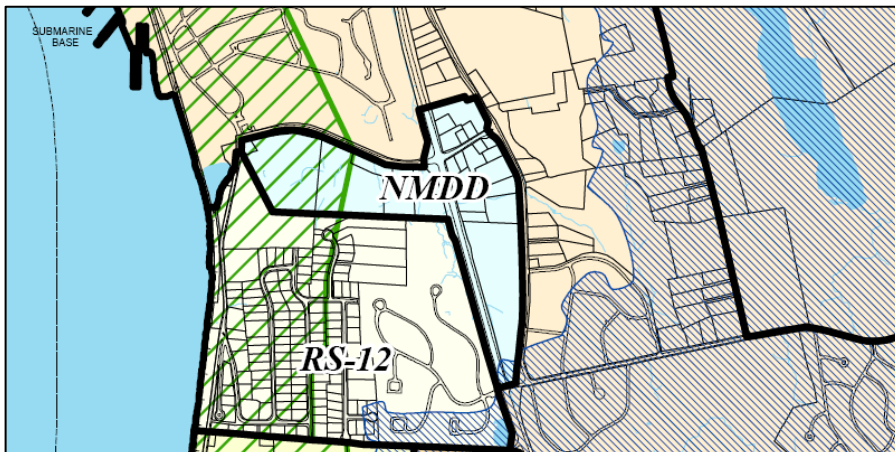
### Background

The NMDD has served as the “gateway” zone for the SUBASE since 1984. The stated purposes of the zone are:

- Protect and enhance the primary entryway to the Nautilus Memorial
- Service tourist-related and Navy needs
- Provide protection to adjacent residential areas

Development in the zone has been extremely limited. Over the past ten years there have been the following types of development constructed:

- Two site plans
- Two administrative site plans



Former NMDD Zoning District

## Vision of the NMDD

The Town's POCD and interviews with the Navy both lay out a vision for the NMDD.

**POCD** – Since development activity has been minimal, the purpose and requirements of the district should be reevaluated.

**Desires of the Navy** – In discussions with staff, the Navy expressed the following desires for zoning in and around their properties:

- Walkable mixed-use along both sides of Route 12 is acceptable
- Preference to minimize development along Crystal Lake Road
- Perhaps consider design standards for new development near the base that would limit visibility into the base from neighboring properties.

## Zoning Questions Considered for the NMDD

The Town's Planning Commission (and later the newly merged Planning & Zoning Commission) discussed the following issues to address with the NMDD.

### *Table of Permitted Uses*

The NMDD had not been listed in the Table of Permitted Uses. Instead, the text in the NMDD section laid out types of uses that would be preferred (retail that supports visiting tourists and base employees, hotels, restaurants, multi-unit homes, banks, day care, etc.). However, there was no guarantee that any of these uses would be approved, nor that other uses would NOT be approved. This lack of specificity was problematic for two major reasons: 1) It is quite probably illegal under current court interpretation of State law, and 2) It is difficult for property owners to determine how they can use their property, since any new use basically becomes a negotiation with the Town.

### *Special Permits*

A special permit had been required for most development in the NMDD. This adds to cost and unpredictability, and was also legally suspect (generally speaking, each zone should have at least *some* uses that can be developed by right). From a different perspective, the special permit does allow for more flexibility on the part of the reviewing authority. Once specific uses are listed in the Table of Permitted Uses, this provides an opportunity to identify uses that will be allowed by-right or as conditional uses. The Commission was asked to consider whether to continue to require special permits for all development or require them only for particular uses.

### *Boundaries*

The Commission was asked whether the current boundaries of the NMDD still made sense. What does the Town wish to occur in this area that is different from what would be allowed in other commercial or mixed-use zoning districts (such as the CN, CR or MVC)? Should another existing zoning district be applied to parcels in the NMDD that abut Route 12 or along the eastern portion of Crystal Lake Road? Should only the parcels along the western portion of Crystal Lake Road remain in the NMDD?

### *Overlay*

If the boundaries of the NMDD are reduced and there is a desire to see most development in that area go through the special permit process, it may make sense to rezone the entire area some other commercial or mixed-use zoning district and then establish an overlay district only over the parcels where there is a desire to have different standards and/or more scrutiny over development (such as the security standards potentially desired by the Navy).

### *Dimensional Standards*

The Commission was asked to consider whether the current dimensional standards were still appropriate. In particular, the minimum lot size of 200,000 SF for new lots was designed to encourage large-scale redevelopment, but in practice, this has not occurred. Would the Commission be comfortable with smaller dimensions that would allow for finer grained development?

### *Zoning Questions Considered for Military-Owned Properties*

Military-owned properties are located in several residential zoning districts, including R-12, RS-12, and RU-20. The military does not have to comply with local zoning. The existing housing on these properties, as a consequence, does not reflect the underlying zoning. In addition, the mix of housing types, ranging from single-family homes to attached homes of two to six units on the same lot, would not be allowed under any of the Town's current or proposed zoning districts.

The Planning Commission was asked to consider what the future of these areas should be if ever sold into the private sector, and how zoning may need to change to accommodate that vision. Some options included:

- Keep the zoning as-is for now and revisit the issue if/when the Navy chooses to sell off property into the private sector.
- Rezone the properties to whatever existing zoning district most closely matches what is built today.
- Consider a new zoning district that would allow the types of housing there today.

### *Directions for Changes to the NMDD and Military-Owned Properties*

Per the direction of the Planning Commission on the questions above, HW used the following points to guide the deliverables for these two areas:

#### *NMDD*

- Current NMDD parcels along Route 12 can be changed to the existing CN or CR zoning districts.
- Residential properties on the east end of Crystal Lake Road and along Pleasant Valley Road may be considered for a Residential zoning district.
- The three large parcels on the west side of Crystal Lake Road should remain NMDD or some other zoning district with an overlay that includes performance standards for the following:
  - Limits building height
  - Benefits the Base
  - Limits curb cuts
  - Provides driveway connections

#### *Military-Owned Properties*

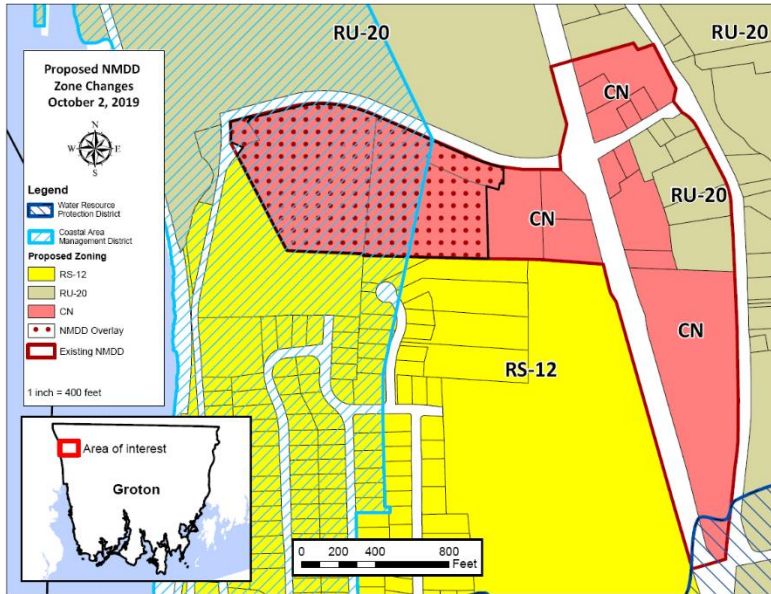
- The zoning for Navy housing will not be changed at this time.
- In interviews, the Navy had no preference either way, since any zoning will not apply while they control the properties.
- As the Navy has no imminent plans to sell these properties, the Planning & Zoning Commission saw no reason to change the zoning at this time.

### *Changes to the NMDD*

HW proposed a number of changes to the NMDD zoning district, which were refined by Town staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission and vetted through the public as described further below in the Public Engagement section. Below is a summary of the changes adopted by the Planning & Zoning Commission that will go into effect on January 15, 2020.

### Boundary Changes

The map and text below depict and describe the rationale for the zoning map changes.



**RU-20:** There are seven lots located along the south side of the far east end of Crystal Lake Road and south from there along Pleasant Valley Road that are occupied by one-unit dwellings. These properties were rezoned to the RU-20 district, to be consistent with the properties located on the east side of Pleasant Valley Road.

**CN:** All other lots east of Route 12 were changed to CN. This includes three lots that are occupied by one-unit dwellings, at least one of which appears to have been used for business purposes in the recent past. The one-unit dwelling on the south side of

Crystal Lake Road is quite exposed to the neighboring lot (which includes a liquor store). Including it in the CN district may help make redevelopment at that corner easier over time. The smaller lots on the west side of Route 12 and Crystal Lake Road were also changed to CN.

**CN/NMDD Overlay:** The remaining three larger lots on the far west end of Crystal Lake Road were also changed to CN but with an NMDD overlay. These lots are subject to additional standards described below. All these standards are located in a section of the Zoning Regulations that has replaced the old NMDD section.

### Changes to the Table of Permitted Uses

The NMDD Overlay allows the following uses. The NMDD Overlay section of the regulations makes it clear that these uses supersede the uses allowed in the underlying CN zoning district. Any use NOT listed here is prohibited. This list is meant to allow the types of uses that would most benefit the Base. A Special Permit is required where extra judgement may be needed to consider the impacts on the Base. The symbols in the table below have the following meanings:

- P = Permitted
- C = Permitted with Conditions
- SP = Permitted with Special Permit
- SP/C = Permitted with Special Permit and Conditions
- A = Permitted only as an accessory use to a permitted use in the underlying zone

AG., ANIMAL & NATURAL RESOURCES		RESTAURANT	
Community Garden	C	Restaurant, Mobile	C
Filling and Removing Earth Products	SP/C	Restaurant, Standard	P
CULTURAL, RECREATION & ENTERTAINMENT		RETAIL	
Art Gallery or Museum	P	Retail, Small-Scale	P
Club, Lodge or Association	SP	Retail, Medium-Scale	P
Commercial Recreation, Outdoor	C	SERVICES	
Conference/Exhibition Hall	SP	Churches/Other Places of Religious Worship	P
Library	P	Elementary and Secondary Schools, Colleges & Universities	SP

Public Recreation, Indoor or Outdoor	C	Personal Services	P
Temporary Events	C	Professional, Arts & Educational Schools and Studios, Non-Degree	SP
<b>Day Care</b>		Professional Offices	P
Adult Day Care Facility	SP/C	<b>SIGNS</b>	
Child Care Center	SP/C	On-Premise	A
Family Child Care Home	P	Temporary	C
Group Child Care Home	C	<b>TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION &amp; UTILITIES</b>	
<b>RESIDENTIAL</b>		Transit Stations & Hubs	P
<b>Residential, Household Living</b>		Utility Infrastructure	C
Dwelling, Multi-Unit	SP/C	<b>VEHICLE &amp; HEAVY EQUIPMENT</b>	
<b>Residential, Lodging</b>		Vehicle Repair & Service, Minor	C
Hotel/Motel	SP	Vehicle Washing Facility	C

*Performance and Special Dimensional Standards in the NMDD Overlay*

- Maximum Building Height: 30 feet (as opposed to 40 feet formerly and per the CN zoning district).
- Minimum Front Yard Setback: 50 feet (Same as old NMDD standard, but deeper than the CN standard of 30 feet).
- For any use other than a Multi-Unit Dwelling (including a mixed-use building with multi-unit dwellings), on-site access points must be provided between various lots and/or uses to allow off-street vehicle and/or pedestrian circulation.
- One curb cut per property is allowed along the portion of Crystal Lake Road abutting the lots included in the NMDD Overlay. The PZC may require driveway connections between properties. A driveway easement and maintenance agreement document(s) must be submitted for review and approval for any driveway connection.

*Dimensional Standards*

The CN dimensional standards apply to the lots in the NMDD Overlay, except for building height and minimum front yard setback (See Special Dimensional Standards above). This table compares the NMDD’s old standards with the standards for the CN district.

	<b>NMDD</b>	<b>CN</b>
<b>Minimum Lot Size (New Lot)</b>	200,000 SF (4 ½+ acres)	12,000 SF (1/4+ acres)
<b>Minimum Lot Width (New Lot)</b>	300 feet	80 feet
<b>Minimum Lot Size (Existing Lot)</b>	40,000 SF (< 1 acre)	Same as above
<b>Minimum Lot Width (Existing Lot)</b>	150 feet	Same as above
<b>Minimum Front Yard Setback</b>	50 feet	30 feet
<b>Minimum Rear Yard Setback</b>	30 feet	30 feet
<b>Minimum Side Yard Setback</b>	30 feet	12 feet
<b>Height</b>	40 feet	40 feet
<b>Coverage</b>	40%	30%
<b>Minimum Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit</b>	3,600 SF	2,000 SF

## Mystic Education Center

The expansion of Electric Boat and the Navy base will be impacting housing demand throughout the region and throughout the Town of Groton. While the initial zoning focus of this project was centered on the NMDD and surrounding navy properties, it became clear that additional zoning work in other parts of town would be needed, particularly since the capacity for new development in and around the NMDD is relatively limited. Zoning for the Mystic Education Center (MEC) is one such example.

## Background

The MEC, currently zoned RU-80, will be sold by the State in the near future to a preferred developer who plans to propose a mixed-use village style development that will provide high density housing and business opportunities of the type likely to support the projected employment growth in and near Groton. The existing RU-80 zoning does not allow for this type of redevelopment and will have to be changed if this vision is to be realized.

There are several potential ways to address the MEC redevelopment:

- New Mixed-Use Zone: The Town may consider creating a new, mixed-use zoning district specific to the MEC property that would allow for the types of uses described in the proposal. While this could be an efficient route, it is also potentially legally problematic, as it may be interpreted as spot zoning.
- Floating Zone Regulation: A floating zone could be applied in a similar fashion as the former “MX” zone in the Town’s old Zoning Regulations. Rather than fix a zone to a particular place, a property owner/developer could request the use of a mixed-use floating zone that would require proposals to meet detailed performance standards (such as roadway access improvements, buffers from neighbors, public open space minimums, etc., etc.). This approach has been controversial in other communities because of the uncertainty as to where it may be applied. While the “MX” district was part of Groton’s regulations for many years, it may not have caused controversy for the simple fact that it was never used.
- Revised Historic/Institutional Reuse Zoning Regulations: Due to time constraints, the Zoning Commission did not revise the Town’s existing regulations for managing the reuse of historic and institutional properties during the full zoning update. Such regulations could apply to many types of buildings other than the MEC, including schools, churches, fire stations, etc. A single set of standards could help make sure that *any* such reuse is economically viable while also being a good neighbor – particularly when located in a residential zoning district.

Whatever approach is used, it is very possible that the Town will want to amend its POCD to account for the redevelopment of the MEC. The POCD currently references the MEC only once: “The state is also in the process of divesting itself of the Mystic Education Center, which formerly housed the Parks and Recreation Department aquatics program. As appropriate, redevelopment of these sites could be a valuable economic development opportunity.” This redevelopment potential is not noted on the Future Land Use Plan, which marks the MEC property for “Institutional Use.” At a minimum, the Future Land Use Plan should be amended to reflect the desired mixed-use development.

## Current Status

This work is likely to continue after the close of this project. As of the writing of this report, the Town has opted to develop a floating zone for the MEC that will allow for the desired mix of uses, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, required roadway and utility improvements, and basic design standards desired for this site. A first draft of this proposed zoning text will be available as part of this project.

The Town is still considering whether this new zoning should apply strictly to the MEC or to other areas or uses. For example, the district may also be appropriate for one or more of the development “nodes” called out in the Town’s POCD or areas where Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is being considered.

HW has also provided to the Town a first draft of changes to the POCD that will help account for future mixed-use at this and potentially other sites. These proposed edits will need to be revisited once the Town decides where the new floating zone will be allowed.

## Historic Institutional Reuse

As noted above, expanding the existing Historic/Institutional Reuse regulations was one of the options for addressing the MEC property. While the Town did not choose to go this route, it did decide to update the Historic/Institutional Reuse regulations anyway, in order to make it easier and clearer to adaptively reuse excess schools and other local, State, and Federal properties.

## Current Historic/Institutional Reuse Regulations

The Town currently has a brief (one page) set of regulations for the reuse of historic and/or institutional buildings (see Sec. 6.2 Historic/Institutional Reuse). The purpose is to “provide reuse opportunities for existing buildings that have historic, architectural or aesthetic significance.” One of the most common examples of a building that would use such regulations is a public school that has been decommissioned. Schools are often located in residential neighborhoods with underlying zoning that only allows for one- or two-unit homes. The Town acknowledges the cultural and historic value of these old school buildings and wants to provide options for redevelopment beyond what would otherwise be allowed. Without such flexibility, the only option for many of these buildings would be to tear them down. The Town’s current regulations give the PZC a great deal of leeway in approving new uses for these buildings and in setting new bulk and density standards. Recent Connecticut court rulings have challenged municipalities to set more concrete standards for deviating from underlying zoning, in order to make sure that all applicants are treated the same. While the Town was aware of this issue during the recent zoning regulations update, other work took priority and Town staff and the Zoning Commission decided to address this issue after the zoning update was completed.

Many other communities in Connecticut have some mechanism for dealing with such buildings in their regulations. Generally they either 1) Establish a mixed-use zone that can be applied to specific historic and/or institutional properties, 2) Establish a floating mixed-use zone that can be applied to properties one by one as their ownership changes, 3) Establish performance standards for such reuse, much as Groton does today.

The PZC decided to stay the course with the performance standards option, but to explore ways to make the current standards more concrete.

## Applicability

Currently, the regulations only stipulate that the building needs to have been an “educational and/or other institutional use.” But what does this mean? Town staff would like to be as specific as possible. The following is a list of eligible uses in the current draft:

- Municipal buildings (including public schools)
- Post Offices
- Libraries
- Banks
- Hospitals
- Firehouses
- State and Federal Buildings



The types of buildings listed above are located all over Town in a variety of zoning districts. However, it is in the residential zoning districts, where the allowed uses are more limited than in the mixed-use and commercial districts, that historic institutional reuse regulations are most relevant.

The current regulations also require a two-acre minimum lot size and that the most recent property owner was the Town or some other “institutional user.” Many of these types of buildings could be located on lots smaller than two acres. Is this still an appropriate threshold? Should there be a more specific definition for “institutional user”? Should it matter who the owner is when the reuse is requested? It seems the Town is likely to eliminate the two-acre minimum, but these other questions are still being considered.

Applicability can also be considered for “historic” buildings or simply those over 50 years old.

### Process for Reuse

Currently, the regulations require a special permit for historic/institutional reuse. The Town is likely to maintain this requirement.

### What Types of Reuse should be Allowed?

Currently, the regulations allow for “residential, educational, cultural, community, and/or other similar uses deemed appropriate by the PZC.” While “other similar uses” would almost certainly not be interpreted as allowing, for example, an industrial warehouse, it *could* be interpreted broadly enough to allow for things that may not be compatible in a neighborhood setting. The PZC needs to decide whether it would like to maintain this flexibility of reuses or allow only a specific set of reuses depending on the underlying zoning and/or lot size.

Another serious consideration is the adequacy of utilities and roadways. What was adequate to support a church or a school, for example, in terms of traffic volume and sewer capacity, may not be adequate for a reuse with dozens of new apartment buildings. The PZC can consider tying approval not just to the types of uses, but to an “adequate public facilities” standard.

### Preserving the Existing Building

As noted above, one of the purposes of this regulation is to preserve historic buildings. However, the current regulations don’t define what historic means. Should the building *have* to be historic, however that’s defined? Or should that not matter so long as the building is institutional? A related consideration is whether the building has to remain and to what extent (if at all) it can be modified? The current regulations are silent on these points. For most communities with such regulations, most if not all of the existing building must be preserved. If a building is largely torn down, the argument goes, then why should reuse flexibility be granted? The current draft identifies “contributing structures” that have historic or cultural value and should be preserved. It then puts a cap on the amount of any contributing structure that can be demolished and has standards for preserving and respecting the design features that make these buildings special.

### What development standards should be used?

As noted, the current regulations give the PZC essentially free reign to set whatever dimensional and other development standards make the most sense. And indeed, many or even most of these buildings will not comply with the dimensional and development standards of the underlying zoning. Should density and setbacks be tied to the underlying zone? If so, existing buildings can be grandfathered, but any new construction would have to stay within the allowable dimensions. One thing to consider is allowing diversions from the dimensional standards for purposes of making a building ADA accessible.

Town staff will likely be presenting a draft of these provisions to the PZC for their consideration in early 2020.

## Public Engagement

Public engagement largely revolved around the public meetings and hearings of the Town's Planning Commission and the subsequent Planning & Zoning Commission (as of July 2019). HW staffed the following meetings and events:

**May 14:** Kick-off meeting with the Planning Commission. Introduction to the full SUBASE study, presentation of early economic/market research, and introduction of relevant zoning issues.

**June 25:** Follow-up meeting with the Planning Commission. Discussion of policy decision points for NMDD and Military-Owned Properties.

**August 27:** Public Site Walk. HW and the Town invited all NMDD property owners and abutters to a site walk of the NMDD area. This was intended to inform the public of the rationale for the proposed changes as well as to learn from the public if any adjustments needed to be made based on current conditions and uses.

**August 27:** Public Informational Meeting. All NMDD property owners and abutters and anyone else in the town were invited to attend a presentation and discussion. This presentation included information on the broader SUBASE study, the economic profile work of Camoin, and proposed changes to the NMDD. HW prepared a press release, flyer, and other marketing materials for these public events.

**August 27:** Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) Meeting. This meeting finalized the PZC's direction for the NMDD and opened discussion on the Historic Institutional Reuse provisions.

**December 10:** Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC) Hearing. The fall was spent finalizing the NMDD language and preparing it for public hearing as well as continue to work on the other zoning deliverables with staff. HW presented the final NMDD changes at this public hearing, at which the PZC approved the map and text amendments. Both go into effect on January 15, 2020.

**Website:** Finally, HW added a page to the Groton zoning project website dedicated to the SUBASE project. All updates to the NMDD were noted here, and the public had access to a form to sign up for e-mail alerts and ask questions.

<https://www.grotonctzoning.com/subase-study>



### SUBASE New London Joint Land Use Study Implementation Project

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) is conducting a study to identify and plan for future demands across the region for housing and transportation related to expanded activities at Electric Boat and SUBASE New London. [Click here to see a summary of the Project Scope.](#) *There are two parts to the project:*



1. **Economics & Zoning** - This component analyzes the local economic and market conditions and associated recommendations for zoning changes in the immediate vicinity of SUBASE. [Click here for information on the assessment of local economic conditions and zoning near the SUBASE.](#)
2. **Housing & Transportation** - This component analyzes the potential impacts on regional housing and transportation needs based on the anticipated expansion of submarine shipbuilding at Electric Boat and the SUBASE. [Visit the website for the housing and transportation component of the SCCOG study here.](#)