

Public Workshop #2

April 2, 2025 | 7:00-8:30 PM

High Plains Community Center Cafeteria, 525 Orange Center Rd, Orange, CT 06477



Introduction

The second Public Workshop for the Town of Orange Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) Update was held on April 2, 2025 at the High Plains Community Center. Approximately 20 members of the public attended. Oscar Parente, Chair of the Town of Orange Plan and Zoning Commission (P&Z) introduced the Special Meeting and fellow Commission members. Representatives of BFJ Planning then gave a presentation on the POCD process and draft recommendations, followed by roundtable discussions.

Presentation

Frank Fish of BFJ Planning began the presentation by introducing the project team. He then gave an overview of the public meeting agenda, explaining that after the presentation, attendees will be invited to participate in roundtable discussions to give feedback on draft recommendations.

What is a POCD?

Mr. Fish explained that State law requires municipalities to update POCDs at least every 10 years. POCDs set the stage for future decisions on the zoning code, capital budget, and general policy.

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Town of Orange

Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

Project Overview: POCD Timeline

Mr. Fish gave an overview of the project timeline, highlighting the Public Hearing planned for September, following the State's 65-day review period. The Final Plan is expected to be adopted by October 2025.

Proposed POCD Plan Chapters

Mr. Fish presented the POCD chapters for which a draft has been completed:

1. Introduction, Vision, and Goals
2. Demographics
3. Housing and Neighborhoods
4. Land Use and Zoning
5. Economic Development
6. Transportation and Mobility
7. Open Space, Historic, and Community Facilities
8. Infrastructure

The final and ninth chapter, "Future Land Use Plan and Implementation," will be completed using feedback received at the Public Workshop.

Summary of Public Survey Results

Suzanne Goldberg of BFJ Planning presented an overview of findings from the public survey. The survey was available online from January 7th to February 17th, 2025 and received 228 responses. Ms. Goldberg shared the following highlights:

- Top strengths: schools, quality of life (cleanliness, safety, access to nature, sense of community, etc.), location, and parks and open space.
- Biggest concerns: affordable cost of living, taxes, and public services (trash pickup, snow plowing, etc.).
- High priority: preserving residential neighborhoods.
- Most respondents believe that Orange has the right amount and mix of housing types.
- Around 55% of respondents stated they experience traffic/congestion regularly, 53% encounter speeding, and 43% reported issues of bicycling safety.
- Around 68% of respondents feel uncomfortable walking and think that sidewalks are inadequate.

A full summary of survey results can be found on the Town's website.

Preliminary Plan Vision & Recommendations

Ms. Goldberg introduced next section, which consisted of a high-level summary of recommendations proposed in each of the draft chapters. The full chapters can be accessed at bit.ly/orange2025pocd. The first chapter, "Introduction, Vision, and Goals," outlines the following draft vision for the 2025 POCD.

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Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

The Town of Orange strives to:

- Preserve existing neighborhoods.
- Enhance environmental and open space preservation.
- Support local businesses and commercial areas.
- Maintain and improve community infrastructure—including facilities, utilities, and roads.

Ms. Goldberg then presented a summary of the “Demographics” chapter. Michelle Gilman of BFJ Planning presented an overview of the “Housing and Neighborhoods” and “Land Use and Zoning” chapters. Mr. Fish highlighted key points from the “Economic Development” chapter, and Mark Freker of BFJ Planning followed up with an overview of “Transportation and Mobility.” Lastly, Ms. Goldberg summarized recommendations from the “Open Space, Historic, and Community Facilities” and “Infrastructure” chapters.

Roundtable Discussions

Mr. Fish introduced the breakout table discussion exercise, inviting attendees to join a breakout table. A subject matter expert from the BFJ Planning team, specializing in Land Use and Zoning, Sustainability and Infrastructure, or Transportation, was seated at each table to facilitate the discussion and take notes. Following the roundtable exercise, a spokesperson for each group reported back on key points from the discussion. A selection of topics discussed at the tables can be found below.

Open Space and Sustainability

- Participants suggested a greater description of Public Act 490 and its value for Orange’s agricultural resources.
- Participants recommended encouraging native species plantings in new development.
- Group members asked for the Lesniack Property and “Clark Forest” to be added to open space descriptions.

Transportation and Mobility

- Participants voiced that congestion is not a major issue in Orange.
- Attendees were interested in discussing examples traffic calming.
- There was strong support for connections to Orange Center through a sidewalk path.

Land Use, Zoning, and Economic Development

- Participants shared that Orange Center presents an opportunity for revitalization.
- Members of the group discussed the pros and cons of expanding elderly-housing conversions and accessory units.