

V. LAND USE STRATEGIES

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A. Preservation and Smart Growth

The construction of single-family homes is one of the primary driving forces generating the current increase in traffic during the peak summer season. The increase in new home construction permitted over a 10% or 23,000 person increase in year round and seasonal residents and guests during the same nine year period. In addition, the construction of over 500 houses per year represents thousands of jobs spread out to construction sites all over the South Fork. The increase in the number of homes built between 1991 and 2000 dramatically increased the number of jobs devoted to single-family home construction and increased the flow of traffic during the A.M. and P.M. peak hours. There is some evidence that as the number of houses being constructed fell off following 2000, that increases in A.M. and P.M. weekday peak hour of a traffic flow stabilized and possibly decreased temporarily, while total daily traffic flows continued to rise. **As these new single-family homes are occupied, they on average, generate 10 or more daily trips when in use. The residents generate trips to stores, schools, recreation and work activities. Service providers generate trips for fuel oil deliveries, landscaping, sanitation, cleaning services and others.** Many of these additional trips occur outside of the weekday A.M. and P.M. peak hours and thus, have contributed to the continuing increase in total daily traffic. In addition, the needs of the service industry for employees draw personnel from outside the South Fork because there is not a sufficient pool of employable personnel within the area, or housing costs in the vicinity are out of reach for such employable personnel.

A large portion of the commercial space constructed in the Town of Southampton only attracts trips created from the existing population and from the new population resulting from the construction of single-family houses. In other words more retail space, medical offices, business offices, and contractors facilities are necessary to serve the expanding year-round and seasonal population resulting from the expanding housing stock. These new commercial facilities are generally not attracting customers from outside the Southampton and East Hampton area but are primarily serving the ever-increasing residential population.

The expanding commercial properties do require additional employees and there is ample evidence that the expanding commercial activities must import labor from outside the South Fork to meet their workplace needs. These new employees then add to A.M. and P.M. weekday traffic flows.

Thus, the rate at which single-family homes are constructed has a substantial impact on the rate of traffic growth, particularly during peak summer conditions.

How the existing and expanding housing stock is occupied will additionally provide an increase in traffic growth outside the peak summer periods. As baby boomers retire, there is a possibility that many summer homes may become retirement homes or seasonal retirement homes. This trend would increase the off-season population in the area and

the need for additional off-season services both of which will lead to further off-season traffic increases and therefore year-round traffic congestion.

The Town of Southampton and its Villages, through the Community Preservation Program, have acquired many properties in order to protect environmentally sensitive land and reduce buildout. In addition, Suffolk County through the farmland preservation program has acquired the development rights to other properties in agricultural production assuring it will remain as such and not be subdivided into single-family home sites. The Town and County have also acquired some sites outright for parklands. All of these actions in the past and future will limit overall growth and suppresses the rate of single-family home construction. Thus, land acquisition and purchase of development right programs are a positive strategy in the attempt to limit traffic growth in Southampton Town.

Another strategy with respect to land use is “Smart Growth” wherein development is directed to existing hamlet centers and employment centers, and where transit facilities are readily available. Housing closer to employment or vice versa reduces traffic demands and concentrates both employment centers and housing near transit routes. It facilitates alternative modes of transportation to/from work and home to encourage people to forego use of their automobile. As noted in this report, there is a significant movement of traffic eastbound into eastern Southampton Town and East Hampton each morning as people from the west drive to employment in the east. Additional affordable housing east of the Shinnecock Canal would allow working class people to live closer to employment and reduce the lengthy commute through the Town.

Transportation mode choices are made based on convenience, time savings/delays and monetary costs. In Southampton Town, it is difficult to provide a convenient timely ride from most origins to most destinations. This is because the residential areas are spread out and not necessarily adjacent to the primary highway system that transportation providers use. Also with an economy based on the service and resort community, job locations are not clustered. There are major employment centers within the Town. In particular within the Village of Southampton; which has the Town Hall, Town Court facilities, Southampton Hospital, support businesses, a major commercial shopping district and a substantial industrial and commercial area on C.R. 39. Other employment centers include the other major commercial shopping district, hamlet centers and shopping center business districts within the Town, as well as, public schools, Southampton College, Suffolk County Community College and other major employers. A public transportation system that can adequately serve these employment centers should help to reduce auto trips.

The successfulness of public transportation is dependent on how accessible it is to employment centers and the residential housing the employees come from. In the Town of Southampton, the Town has placed a great effort on keeping the hamlet centers strong and not allowing business to spread out along major routes, as is typified in western Suffolk County. A secondary effect of this policy is that it helps concentrate jobs in the hamlet centers which can be served more readily by public transportation. Unfortunately, the hamlet centers are not always clustered around the rail road stations with the exception of Speonk and Hampton Bays where many businesses are within walking distance of the train station. In order to provide service to the train station, additional feeder bus lines must be added to circulate between the train stations and the hamlet centers such as in Westhampton Beach, Southampton Village and Bridgehampton. The Town should attempt to cluster commercial/industrial uses close to train stations or convenient to feeder bus service similar to the Smart Growth guidelines for orienting high density housing on proximity to public transit.

While it is desirable to concentrate employment near transit facilities, it is equally desirable to locate residents near the transit facilities and employment centers. The location of apartments above commercial properties within the hamlet centers not only locates residents within walking distance of employment opportunities but also places the residents closer to public transportation, shopping and the necessary services.

If the goal is a successful public transit system that is affordable and has the ability to relieve highway congestion, employees and jobs must be concentrated close to it for convenience and sustainability. Smart Growth techniques, however, tend to be contrary to current zoning practice that spreads dwelling units out onto bigger and bigger lots making the individual homes less accessible to public transportation systems. While increasing the overall density of housing in the Town is often viewed as undesirable, moving density away from outlying areas and redirecting growth into hamlet centers and concentrating it near public transportation facilities would be supportive of the public transportation system.

There are various land use strategies to manage growth and direct development into hamlet centers adjacent to public transit such as mandatory transfers of development right programs. Detailed analysis of these and other planning and zoning tools and the legal intricacies involved are outside the scope of this study. However, the SEEDS Study is expected to test these concepts.