



Gales Ferry Outreach to EDC

A NEW VILLAGE DISTRICT

EDC 1 — Framing the Issue

Village Districts provide a “missing link” in standard land use regulations

- Normal regulations are about establishing bulk requirements, height, setbacks, percentage of lot coverage, etc.
- Village Districts are specifically meant to control quality and maintain/ improve character.

Ledyard had them. Other towns in Connecticut use them. Existing examples:

- Norwich Village District
- Norwalk East Village District
- Old Greenwich Village District Overlay
- Poquetanuck Village District

Takeaway: Village Districts exist precisely because the State recognizes that good development within contextually sensitive areas can—and should—coexist.

EDC 2 — What we are Asking to Do

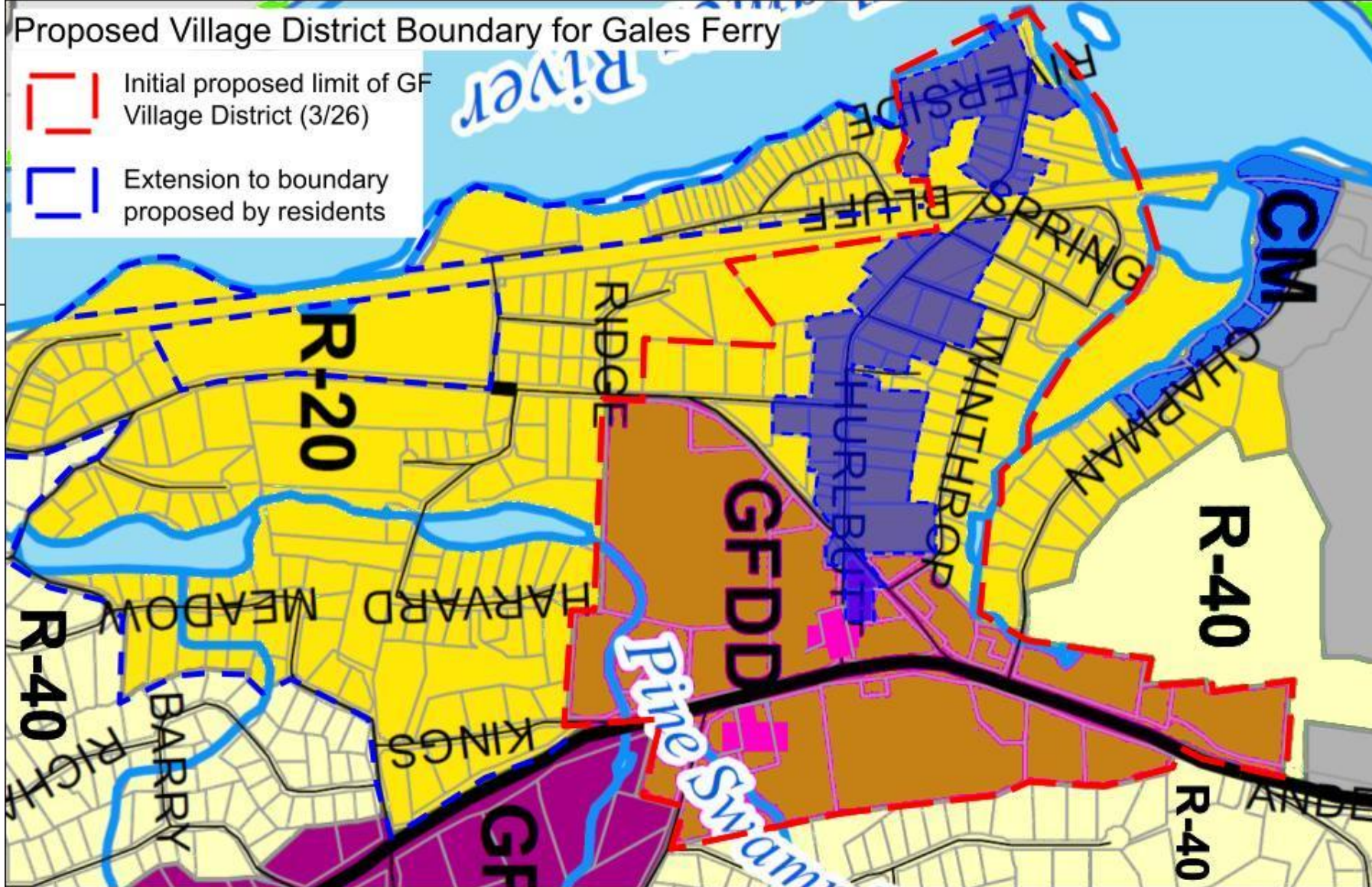
- A. **Reinstate Village Districts, as *overlays***, in Ledyard per CGS 8-2j(a), starting with Gales Ferry (to **establish a needed degree of protection** for the historical areas). The logic of using an overlay is so **existing land uses in the underlying zones are retained**, but they are **subject to uniform guidelines**.
- B. **Amend the POCD** to clearly **encourage Village Districts** in appropriate areas and to **include descriptive characteristics** that satisfy CGS 8-2j(b)
- C. Adopt **Design Guidelines** pursuant to Village District statutes 8-2j(b) and 8-2j(c) that also satisfy point B above.
- D. **Modify the application process** within the Village District overlay to accommodate the role of a **Village District Consultant** per 8-2j(d) or other recommendations per 8-2j(e).
- E. **Require special permits** for all new construction and substantial reconstruction within the Village District zone viewable from the public street, so **the Commission will have the ability to apply conditions of approval** pursuant to 8-2j(f) and (g) as necessary.

Gales Ferry Village District Goal

The Gales Ferry Village District overlay encompasses the **historic village core**, adjoining **commercial and mixed-use transition** areas, and **surrounding residential neighborhoods** that collectively define the broader village setting. The *historic village core* (R20 zone) provides the primary reference for scale, patterns, and visual character, while the adjoining *transition areas* (Development District zone)—many of which developed in the mid-to-late twentieth century with automobile-oriented layouts, larger building footprints, and prominent front-yard parking— are **intended to gradually evolve in a way that reinforces, rather than dominates, the historic village**. *Surrounding residential areas* (R20 and R40 zones), while more suburban in layout, contribute to the village's **distinctive landscape setting, contextual viewscape, and continuity of scale**, and shall be preserved accordingly. This approach ensures that **future development harmonizes with the village's defining character, allowing change** to occur **thoughtfully** while **preserving the qualities that make Gales Ferry distinct**.

Proposed Village District Boundary for Gales Ferry

-  Initial proposed limit of GF Village District (3/26)
-  Extension to boundary proposed by residents



- R-20 High density residential zone
- R-40 Medium density residential zone
- GFDD Gales Ferry Development District
- CM Commercial marine district

Color Key Within the Proposed Village District:

- Village District "Core" Areas
 -  Nationally registered Historic properties;
 -  Village District "Transition" Area

EDC 4 — What Village Districts Can Do (Very Effectively)

Village Districts can regulate:

- Building placement (closer to street vs. deep parking fronting road)
- Massing and facade design (relationship to historic scale and rhythm, architectural detailing)
- Parking location (side/rear instead of front)
- Screening and buffering
- Streetscape continuity
- Driveway placement
- Access consolidation
- Pedestrian connectivity

EDC 5 — Why Design Matters Economically

Businesses choose places that look and feel valuable

- Higher-quality environments attract more businesses: Restaurants, specialty retail, services
- Supports: Higher rents, Stronger margins, Longer tenant stability

Village Districts are an Economic Development Tool

- Not just about aesthetics - it's about **attracting investment, supporting businesses, and strengthening the tax base**
- The question is not “*design vs. growth*”, rather it’s “**what type of growth produces the best long-term value?**”

Key Point: Design Guidelines don't limit growth—they shift it toward higher-value growth

EDC 6 — Property Values & Investment

8-2j(a): “...Village districts shall protect the distinctive character, landscape and historic structures ...and may regulate, new construction, substantial reconstruction and rehabilitation....”

- Predictable development reduces risk for investors and businesses
- Strong visual identity increases desirability
- Attractive Village Districts:
 - Maintain value over time
 - Encourage reinvestment
 - Attract new, quality investment

Simple takeaway: People invest where outcomes are predictable and attractive

EDC 7 — Guiding Growth (Not Stopping It)

- Village Districts prevent strip-style, low-retention development
- Encourages:
 - Walkability/ Bikability
 - Coherent village centers
 - Business clustering

Economic effect:

- More foot traffic
- More cross-shopping
- Stronger local business ecosystem

EDC 8 — Local Examples (Townwide)

Under Village/Design Districts:

- Dime Bank
- Village Market + gas/car wash
- Ledyard Center School renovation as commercial space
- Rt 117 Streetscape + Town Green
- CVS (Gales Ferry)
- Riverside Mall improvements

After removal:

- Dollar General
- Bark & Barley
- Sweet Hill Farm (proposed)

Takeaway: Under Village Districts, growth and development never stopped. After they were removed **quality, disregard of scale & context significantly changed.**

EDC 9 — Addressing Town Policy (Rt 12 Corridor Study & POCD)

- One of Route 12 Corridor Study's key findings:
 - Specifically recommends strengthening Gales Ferry's **design** standards.
...**This is exactly what the design guidelines associated with Village Districts do.**
- POCD (p.53):
 - Gales Ferry is recognized as a key town asset to **promote and protect**
...**Protecting distinctive character is exactly what Village Districts do.**

Conclusion: Village Districts would directly implement recommended town policy.

EDC 10 — Market Reality (Rt 12 Corridor Study, cont'd)

Study outlines key positive existing metrics in Gales Ferry/ Ledyard:

- Stable population
- Higher-than-average incomes
- Educated workforce
- Access to major employers

This supports:

- Higher-end retail
- Dining/ Quality of life
- Services

Key Takeaway: An established market already exists

EDC 11 — Economic Strategy

Slogan: “Come spend a perfect day in Gales Ferry”

- Riverfront
- Recreation / regatta
- Restaurants
- Orchards
- Historic character
- Historic sites / museums

Comparable model: **Essex Village, CT**

Key strategy: Use Village Districts to **leverage identity** → which **attracts spending** → which **supports business growth**

EDC 12 — What Village Districts Essentially Do

- Protect the brand of the place
- Prevent value erosion from poor-fit development
- Align private development with public goals

Village Districts don't stop development—they prevent value-destroying development and brand-erosion.

EDC 13 — Parking and Village Districts

Similar to HB8002, CGS 8-2j is a state statute. That is legally significant:

- HB 8002 limits parking quantity discretion, but it does not eliminate site design authority. That's where Village Districts and *design guidelines* can play a big role.
- HB 8002 reduces the town's raw parking leverage. **Village Districts increase contextual design leverage.** Used properly, they **shift** the battlefield from “how many spaces” to “how is the site designed.”

Even if you cannot increase the number of parking spaces, you can **control how they function spatially and visually — by state statute — using Village Districts.**

EDC 14 — Parking and Village Districts (cont'd)

Large front-loaded parking lots have been **universally identified as a visual problem** in Gales Ferry.

Village District guidelines can:

- Push parking behind buildings.
- Break up large lots.
- Require landscaping.
- Limit curb cuts.
- Require shared access.

That mitigates safety and character impacts without touching the statutory cap.

EDC 15 — Village Districts & 8-30g

- Connecticut General Statute 8-30g allows developers to override certain local zoning requirements when providing affordable housing.
- Connecticut General Statute 8-2j establishes design-based standards to protect community character.

Key Point:

- Village District regulations:
 - Are grounded in state statute
 - Focus on design, scale, and context—not use or density
 - May provide a basis for requiring context-sensitive design, even in 8-30g applications

Takeaway: Village Districts can help communities **push back on poorly designed housing proposals** and strengthen the case for better housing project outcomes.

EDC 16 — Closing

If we don't guide growth:

- We get **short-term projects** that **disregard long-term impacts**.

If we do:

- We build a place **people choose to live and spend time in**
- We build a place that **businesses want to invest in**
- We maintain a place the town can **promote with confidence**

Final Word: Village Districts help guide economic growth.