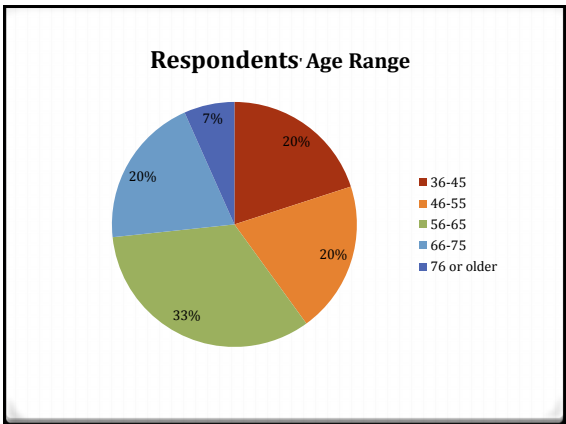
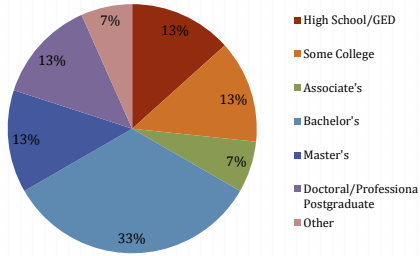


Respondents' Aggregate Profile

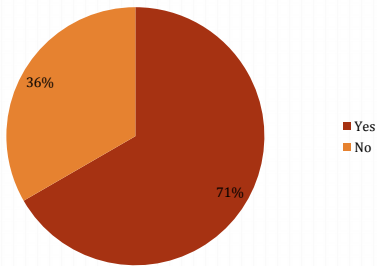
- o n=15 (spread across 5 towns)
- o Average length of service = 9.2 years
 - o Range: 1 to >20 years
- o Average length of residency in town served = 25 years
 - o Range: 3 to >55 years



Education Completed



Currently employed?



Interview Logistics

- o 30-60 minutes long
- o Mostly 1-on-1, except for one focus group
- o Took place in public libraries, town halls, front porches, kitchen tables, & decks.
- o Interview questions were revised and approved by members of our Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee (PZAC)
- o Topics included general insight into the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) culture/life, as well as more health-specific issues and their intersection with PZCs.
- o Digitally recorded and professionally transcribed by Verbal Ink

Data analysis

- ◊ Analysis with Nvivo 10.0
- ◊ Carianne Palumbo to help with second reading/coding (inter-rater reliability)
- ◊ More in-depth analysis and interpretation upon completion of data collection
- ◊ Possible manuscript publication

Perceived Responsibilities and Duties



- ◊ To make and enforce regulations
- ◊ To oversee the long-term development of the town, in line with the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)
- ◊ To shepherd the balance between facilitating economic growth and the desire to maintain a rural small town character
- ◊ (to protect and promote the safety and welfare of residents)

Motivation to serve



Motivation to serve and continue serving

- SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
 - Giving back to the community
 - Compelled to add his/her technical expertise to a group of lay volunteers
 - Hoping to make the process easier for residents
 - Providing positive public service experience to residents
 - ...no one else will run for office!
- PERSONAL INTEREST AND ENJOYMENT
 - To understand how P&Z decisions are made
 - Having a say in how the town develops
 - Political aspirations
 - Love for strategic planning
 - High levels of respect for colleagues and enjoying working with each other

◦ "I stay on the board because this is an amazing board. It's got engineers, architects, landscape architects, lawyers, people that have lived in their lifeline residences. It's got good staff. It's diversified – well, not that diversified in our age anymore, but we all want to get to the same result, but not all of us have the same path. But most of us – all of us here are willing to listen. We always learn from each other. [...] it makes doing what we have to do easier because of our understanding of what has to get done, and our understanding of how the town works. It's an incredible board and so that's why I stay."

o "And then, of course, when we get an application that we really like and that really - and then you go out and see it be built and drive by it. I feel that way every time I drive by [name of establishment]. That was something that we approved and we love it. The way it looks, it's an asset to the town. And those are the kinds of things if you drive by them, you think, "Well, [town name] is a nicer place," because we were able to help make that happen."

Perceived challenges



Challenges

- o Regulations are written in "legalese" and are hard to understand
- o Not familiar with Roberts Rules of Order and other important aspects of running public meetings and voting rules that could have legal repercussions (i.e. when to abstain)
- o Can lose sight of the long-term direction, when dealing with lots of day-to-day small fires
- o Time commitment as a volunteer
- o Turf issues
 - o Town Council
 - o State government
 - o Federal government
- o Lack of funding

"It's a very technical area and I certainly don't, by any means, understand it. The important thing is that when we were going through developing our regs we had a civil engineer as the Chair of Planning and Zoning and of course we have a Town Planner who weighed in on it. [...] So, not that I understand it, but at least I've got the gist of it, and I don't think it's my job to understand it. It's my job to say that's a great idea and I support it."

"75 to 90 percent of the time is spent dealing with the individual events. You know, enforcement actions, and we get involved because we're made aware of these kinds of things. I think that a commission - it would be nice if the Commission was more focused on actual planning-related activities. But you have the Town Planner. That's sort of her job to deal with those kinds of things."

o Interviewee: "The Feds came down with that initiative of walking to school and sidewalks everywhere."

o Interviewer: "Safe Routes to School?"

o Interviewee: "Yes, it's not going to work in [town name]. We have small, narrow, twisty roads and parents that don't want their kids to be out of their sight. [...] There are people who won't stop for buses, let alone kids walking along a sidewalk. We have had on the books for many years a plan for safe bike routes in [town name]. We need funding to enlarge the roads to do that. We're not getting state or local funding to really help with the roads, to make them wider. [...] We're still fighting the State Department of Transportation."



Helpful professional/personal background and traits

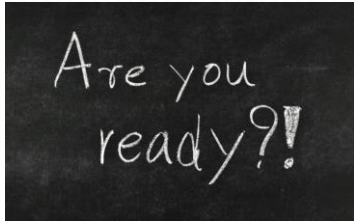
- o Patience
- o Communication skills
- o Ability to empathize with residents, while still being able to apply the regulations objectively
- o Ability to work within teams
- o Willingness to learn and acquire new training and information
- o Time and willingness to prepare for meetings ahead of time
- o Relevant technical expertise
- o Degree of comfort with technical/legal language and concepts
- o Love and concern for the town and the community

o "Patience, planning and zoning is this long process and as much as you want to speed up – like approvals, just a basic permit approval is a period of time and no matter how quickly you get through that process it's never quick enough for the people who are applying. And it's never quick enough for me sitting behind there, having to go through this whole process. But you have to have patience. There's a lot of reading. There's a lot of education. Every single issue, I'm learning new bits about the law, about past decisions made in Planning and Zoning, meetings or previous public meetings. So, you have to have a lot of ability to get educated quickly on an issue. You have to be able to communicate effectively. I'm the Chair and so you have to know all the procedures, which it took me six months to get comfortable with that"

o "They have to care about their community. If they don't care about their community, they shouldn't even consider it, or any other town office position for that matter.

It's better if they have some background at least in one degree or another in construction 'cause a lot of it does involve some of the details with that, to have an idea of at least some basic knowledge of conservation because that also a huge factor in regulation, especially in recent year. But all said and done, you really could come to it with no real knowledge, and at least here, we've been fortunate where people are very considerate of other people and help bring them up to speed and help teach them about the process as we go through it."

Valuable training/orientation for new PZC members



- o "What every Planning and Zoning Commissioner should know" handbook
- o How to conduct a public meeting
- o Legal training
- o Training on how to read a set of plans
- o Language about "plants, land forms, water, measurement"
- o Various trainings from State Dept of Environmental Protection, UCONN Department of Agriculture, Connecticut Bar Association
- o Town staff and fellow commissioners

o "So this board is fortunate 'cause we have that expertise. Other boards could use a whole lot of legal training. They could use training on reading a set of plans for crying out loud. They look at a set of plans and they don't even know what they're looking at. It looks like a bunch of lines on a piece of paper to them."

Town Staff Support



Town Support

- o Having a dedicated staff person is essential
- o Communication and availability are key
- o Town staff needs to know the ins and outs of regulations in such a technical field
 - o most PZC members do not and don't want to be bogged down with the legal details and technical intricacies
 - o Often helpful to have the town engineer present at meetings
- o Notice of training opportunities often come through the town planner's office and are often either free or paid for by the town

o "In our town, we are lucky to have a Planner, but she wears about ten different hats so her time is pretty consumed. I don't think all towns have a Planner. I don't think they have a dedicated staff person so I imagine their world is a lot different than ours. It probably makes them feel a lot more lost than we feel."

o "What a staff person has to do is the leg work and the research. I mean, I'm a retired person. I love my free time. I no longer want to sit as (town planner) has to do with the books and the statutes and the regulations. A staff person has to know the law and the regulations backwards and forwards. And he has to give you objective advice."

o "We have a Town Planner who is very willing to share information and that's very important. She has educated us over the years. [...] She's done it through sending us various articles off the listserv. She has made us aware of various classes that people can go to if they choose to. She has books in her office if people are interested. She has also printed off stuff that has been in our packets to read. She's been very informative over the years."

o "Knowing that you can make a call, write an e-mail, when you're reading stuff to prepare, let's say, the agenda or somebody's support paperwork for a particular application, and you're looking at it and saying, "I don't quite get this map," or, "I don't know what this is here, or why that isn't there." Their (town staff) accessibility, I think, is critical."

Resident Engagement with PZC



Resident engagement with PZC

- o Reactionary, rather than proactive in nature
- o Issue-driven
 - o about one's own property,
 - o that of a neighboring property, or
 - o a sweeping change that would affect the entire town
- o Mostly non-existent
 - o Lack of interest
 - o Lack of knowledge
 - o Strapped for time

o "it's amazing to me how apathetic the community can be but at other times, especially if it's in their backyard, they all of a sudden turn out."

o "We're not seeing the 30 and 40 year-olds. They're so wrapped up in both of them having full-time jobs. [...] We're not seeing the double earning family. They don't have the time and I begrudge them that they don't have the time. We're not seeing them participate in volunteer activities throughout town. We're not seeing them participate in running for office. We're not seeing them in church. We're not seeing them in a lot of places and that's because they're working Monday through Friday. Saturday is grocery shop, clean the house and Sunday is a day of rest. So, it's a shame. I think they still will coach their kids but they won't go beyond that. They won't go beyond that."

- *Interviewee:* Very few people show up.
- *Interviewer:* And when they show up it's because it's regarding their property.
- *Interviewee:* In their backyard and it's some concern. Exactly.
- *Interviewer:* Right, okay.
- *Interviewee:* Or we're discussing how many chickens you can have on an acre of land. That got a big turnout.

Role of PZC in influencing community health



Greatest perceived health issues tied to PZC responsibilities

- Water quality
- Sound pollution
- Sewage system and septic
- Traffic amount and safety
- (Trails)
- (Open space)

Active living = Parks &
Recreations domain

Healthy Food and Food
Security ≠ PZC domain

“You don’t think about
putting together public
health and planning and
zoning.”

- 10-year member of a local
Planning and Zoning
Commission.

Helpful tools and resources for
PZC to be able to increase
opportunities for active living



- o The "business case" for healthy design
- o How to fund these initiatives
- o How to deal with our unique topography
- o (Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper, and...Healthier approaches to Place Making)

o "A lot of us are active, so a lot of us think about these things but the primary motivator for development activity is development. So, that sort of puts interconnections and trails and healthy food options - all that stuff goes kind of on the backburner. So, anything you guys can do to help us especially get up to speed quickly or put the thought into our mind early, it will trickle into all the rest of the work that's done throughout the year."

o "I think understanding what grant opportunities there are. Because the reality is we want tons of active-related initiatives to proceed but we have no money to spend on any of it. We don't have a rec center here - we would love to have a rec center developed. The pathways things is huge. I would love to have pathways that could get us school to school, town center to the outlying communities. We have none of that so we can't ride our bikes anywhere in the community. You have to drive somewhere and then ride, which is sort of stupid. So, understanding what initiatives, grants, what programs there are would be huge for us because then we could apply for things and we could figure out how to do it."

Helpful tools and resources for PZC to be able to increase opportunities for healthy eating



o “understanding what ag use could be or could include or what you could do for farmers and for farm stands and for markets, etcetera, maybe that would be good to have a set of specific tools to tell you ‘this is how you encourage this activity.’ Because I think you should be encouraged but I guess what I’m saying is I don’t think we should get a toolkit saying this is how you discourage the negative – do you know what I’m saying? [...] I think the big thing is understanding what we can do to enable farm success and agriculture success.”

Important topics to include in toolkit

	n =15	%
Research supporting the connection between population health outcomes and the built environment	9	60%
The unique challenges and opportunities experienced by rural communities and potential solutions	11	73%
Overview of relevant planning/public health topics (i.e. “health in all policies”, complete streets, livability, playability, place making, walkability, bikeability, trail connectivity, health equity, equitable access to opportunities for active living and healthy eating, etc.)	13	87%
The economic development/business case for healthy community design	12	80%
Potential local partners	8	53%
Funding sources for relevant projects and initiatives	11	73%

o "I think the number one most useful thing would be... I think it's called Robert's Rules of Order. Some people are very familiar with it. A good portion of people at least have some knowledge of it. Some people have no idea; have never heard of it. I think that would be like the most crucial for any town office, really, because that's how it all operates for any public meeting.

Beyond that, I think it'd be great if a town had a shorter synopsis of the regulations that they'll be dealing with. Just to give them an abridged version so that they can kinda - something that you could read through that you don't have to sit there and take a month to read, but you could take time to read and put in more basic language so that people can retain it better. That way it gives them an opportunity to actually have at least a general basis of most of the regulations before actually breaking into the details."

Important elements to include in toolkit

	n =15	%
Real examples from similar communities	10	67%
Sample policies and templates from similar communities	12	80%
Examples of rural health and planning assessment tools (i.e. walkability audit, rural active living assessment tools, etc.)	11	73%
Glossary of key public health terms and concepts	7	47%
Glossary of key planning and zoning terms and concepts	9	60%
Pictures/photos illustrating some of the key planning concepts and terms	9	60%
Multimedia features such as hyperlinks, video clips, podcasts	6	40%
List of additional resources for further exploration of topics	5	33%
Other: Roberts Rules of Order/General PZC Introduction	2	13%

Preferred Format

- o Electronic format was preferred by many, though some clearly stated they would like access to a hard copy they could mark.
- o Elements of electronic format:
 - o Searchable
 - o Could be used on a smart phone or tablet
 - o A smart app would be great, especially when doing audits and assessments out in the field

◊ "I would suggest that if you do come up with a handbook for commissioners that it not be too technical but it give the overview of what responsibilities there are, how to be a participant in a public hearing. I think that's important but also other considerations of your town, like you want to get into food security and health issues and that kind of thing. [...] But if you make it a 100-page tome, nobody is going to read it."

Social Media Use



- ◊ Mostly not engaged with social media
- ◊ But when they are, they overwhelmingly prefer Facebook, followed by YouTube

Official charge to the PZC?

"It's in the annual report. [...] I haven't read it in a few years so I couldn't tell you what it says."

"I believe the mission of the Planning and Zoning Commission is that we guide the staff in the goals and objectives of the town with relation to the development, open space management, and the plan of conservation and development. We represent the residents and their wishes for how they want their community to develop over the next 20, 30, 40, 50 years."

"You know, I'm not really sure what the official charge is. I can say that we're here to make regulations that involve land use and to see that those land use regulations are carried out within the bounds of the law."



Miscellaneous Notes

- Most PZC members were very welcoming of the toolkit idea and offered to help with reviewing the draft and providing feedback
- Many expressed interest in a toolkit that goes beyond "health" and provides a general overview of what it means to be a PZC member, how to run a public meeting (i.e. Robert's Rules of Order), basic concepts and regulations, etc.
- There is an overwhelming sense for the need to involve the public in new and engaging ways, so that decisions are made more proactively and are owned by local residents throughout the development process.

Toolkit Outline

Informed by Planning and Zoning Advisory Committee (PZAC), Key Informant Interviews and Surveys, research done by EHHD staff, and insight from CHART membership at large.



What should be included?
