

Plan of Conservation

Town of Ellington, Connecticut



Ellington Conservation Commission

Adopted 2006, Revised 2014

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Recognizing the current and potential future impact of growth, the Ellington Conservation Commission has created a Plan of Conservation that consists of an inventory of preserved land and town open space assets, preservation goals, and initiatives to enhance and protect our remaining land.	
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The first inventory of preserved or town open space lands is graphically represented and tabulated as a current snapshot of the town. The graphic representation illustrates areas already preserved and areas subject to development if not preserved.	
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OVERVIEW 1

Since 2000, the Town of Ellington has been the fourth fastest growing town in the 30 town Capital Region. Growth and development are changing Ellington from a predominately rural and agricultural town to a more suburban community.



Recognizing this current and potential growth, the Ellington Conservation Commission and the Ellington Planning Department updated the Plan of Conservation to help balance the pressures of development with the need for clean air, clean water and protected natural areas. It is intended to assist in planning for growth and to ensure that future generations can enjoy many of the features that make Ellington our choice of residence.

This plan incorporates the conservation recommendations of the Ellington Build-Out Analysis Ad-Hoc Subcommittee's final report and is consistent with Open Space Plans of surrounding towns, the Capitol Region Council of Government's Regional Plan, and the State's Plan of Conservation and Development.

A major premise of the Plan is that conservation and development should complement rather than compete with one another.

The Plan of Conservation consists of the following sections:

- 1. An inventory of existing protected land.**
- 2. Town-wide conservation goals.**
- 3. Conservation Focus Areas.**
- 4. Implementation strategies.**

PROTECTED LAND INVENTORY 2

The total area of Ellington is approximately 22,138 acres. Approximately 16% of this area is currently protected. Through “*The Green Plan: Guiding Land Acquisition and Protection in Connecticut 2007-2012*”, the State of Connecticut has established a statutory goal of protecting 21% of Connecticut land area as open space by 2023. Of this, 10% is to be acquired by the state and the remaining 11% is to be acquired by municipalities, land trust, and other conservation organizations. These goals exclude farmland that is protected only by conservation easements since public access is not allowed.



As of early 2014, the state has reached 88% of their goal in Ellington, but only 58% of the municipality’s goal has been achieved. The town’s land protection program is way behind schedule. More than 125 acres per year will have to be protected if Ellington is to meet the 2023 goal. If Ellington is to retain its rural character, a much larger area must be protected. The map in **Figure 1** shows the location of the most significant areas of protected open space in Ellington (NOTE: An electronic version of the **Figure 1** map can be located at: <http://www.mapgeo.com/ellingtonct/> or by typing in “mapgeo ellington ct” in almost any internet browser). An inventory is summarized in **Table 1**.

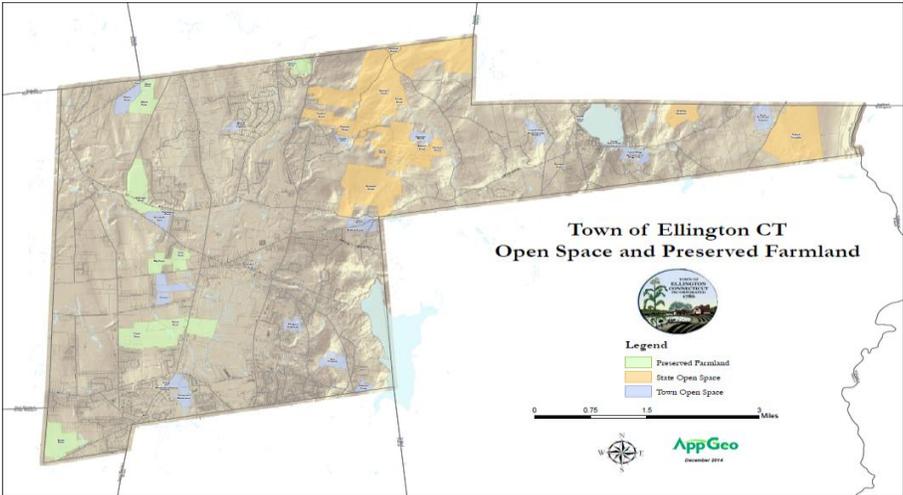


Figure 1 - Protected open space

Table 1 - Significant areas of open space and recreational assets in Ellington.

INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL ASSETS		
<small>(NOT INCLUDING GOLF COURSES AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS)</small>		
DESCRIPTION	OWNER	AREA (ac.)
Pinney and Windermere (Including Pinney Street Fields)	Town	67.71
Carriage Hill Open Space	Town	18.51
Crystal Ridge Estates Open Space	Town	47.89
Crystal View	Town	35.3
Ellington Highlands Open Space	Town	29.5
Rising Acres II Open Space	Town	8.3
Tripp Road Open Space	Town	8
Mosley Plains Open Space	Town	4.62
High Ridge Open Space	Town	3.46
Hatheway Road	Town	3.18
Sunset Hill - Town Access	Town	1.6
Batz Properties	Town	44.86
Kimball Forest	Town	55.61
Meadow Brook Estates Open Space	Town	15.26
Metcalf Nature Preserve	Town	15.63
Stagecoach Crossing Open Space	Town	6.64
"T" Properties	Town	73.32
Arbor Park	Town	3.3
Brookside Park	Town	41.42
Sandy Beach	Town	7.23
Crystal Lake Memorial Park	Town	0.24
Porter Road Highlands	Town	3.16
Other Town Unimproved Open Lands	Town	19.18
Properties Taken In Lieu of Taxes	Town	8.55
Subtotal		522.47
Sunset Hill	Land Trust	14
Swann Farm	Land Trust	56.01
Joy Property	Land Trust	6.86
Shenipsit Woods	Land Trust	30
Ernie Boothroyd Preserve	Land Trust	58
Bird Sanctuary	Audubon	6.67
Subtotal		171.54
Way Farm	PDR	68.6
Culbro Farm	PDR	171.09
Burke Farm	PDR	119
Pinney Farm	PDR	5
Myers Farm*	PDR/Land Trust	70.59
Dzen Farm	PDR	22.25
Silverhurst/Foster Farm	PDR	97.32
Silverhurst/Foster/Thrall Farm	PDR	20.57
Charter Farm	PDR	43.39
Pease Farm	PDR	20.79
McKnight Farm	PDR	124.429
Subtotal		763.029
Shenipsit State Forest	State	1396.92
Nye Holman State Forest	State	361.21
Bradway Reservoir	State	87.93
Boat Launch, Crystal Lake	State	4.69
Subtotal		1850.75
Crystal Lake		175.51
Shenipsit Lake		170.91
Subtotal		346.42
TOTAL =		3654.209

*Included in open space totals

PRESERVATION GOALS

3

Community input during the Build-Out Analysis revealed a strong emphasis on preserving Ellington's community character. The primary element of community character is Ellington's rural quality. The overriding goal of the Plan of Conservation is to help preserve the rural and historic character of Ellington as the town continues to grow. The following town-wide goals have been established to support this:



1) **Preserve Our Working Farms**

Ellington has been an agricultural community since the first settlers arrived, and that character is an important part of the Town's physical, economic, cultural, and social identity. Ellington is fortunate to have large areas of prime agricultural soils as shown on the map in Appendix A. Farmland preservation and the protection of working farms is a major goal of this Plan.

2) **Protect Ellington's Natural Resources and Provide Natural Linkages**

In addition to prime agricultural soils, Ellington's natural resources include watercourses, the forests of the Eastern Highlands, watersheds, wetlands, broad vistas, extensive ridgelines, and unique geological features. The scenic ridgeline east of Route 83 is threatened with development because of the beautiful views. Our lakes, streams and wetlands are an important source of drinking water, recreation, and wildlife habitat. Expanded protection is needed to preserve and improve the water quality and to protect our natural resources. An overall objective of this plan is to link existing parcels of open space. Linkage provides potential for wildlife corridors, opportunities for passive recreation, and can provide buffers through developed areas.

3) **Preserve and Enhance Recreational Assets**

For families of Ellington, life has always included an appreciation for recreation, whether hunting, fishing, hiking, biking or more organized activities such as youth sports. With its tremendous and unique natural assets, Ellington should preserve and enhance its recreational assets in order to accommodate the needs of its growing population.

CONSERVATION FOCUS AREAS 4

The analysis of the natural resources of our town has resulted in the identification of areas with exceptional value as open space. These regions have been designated as conservation focus areas in order to give special emphasis to their preservation.



The focus areas are intended to identify the regions of town with the highest priority for conservation, but inclusion in a focus area does not provide any special protection for a property. It is up to those implementing the plan to work toward the goal of conservation, property by property. It is our intent that all transactions to protect these properties will be voluntary on the part of the landowner.

Some properties, not located in the focus areas, will also have features that make them priority candidates for preservation and will be included in implementation plans for open space protection. The selection of priority properties will be based on a ranking of features that contribute to their value as open space.

In addition to the focus areas of conservation interest, other unique sections of town deserve special protection. The historic town center is an important part of the character of our town and should be preserved by careful planning, zoning, and design review. The Great Marsh is a sensitive wetland that should be carefully controlled by the Inland Wetlands Agency.

Five areas of town, as shown in **Figure 2**, have been designated as focus areas:

- **Western Farm Belt**
- **Shenipsit Lake and Forest**
- **Crystal Lake Watershed**
- **Eastern Panhandle**
- **Hockanum River Linear Park**

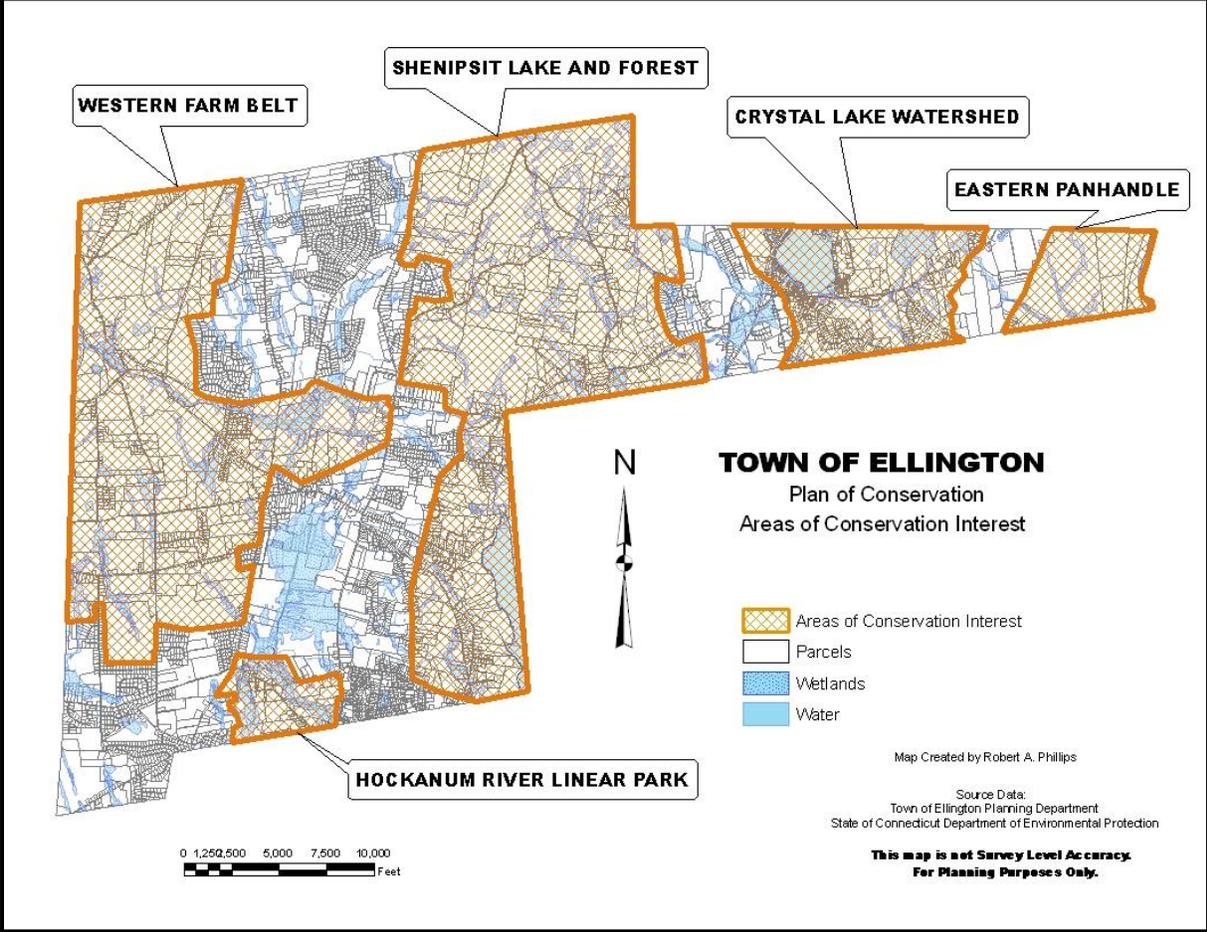


Figure 2 Conservation Focus Areas

Western Farm Belt

Ellington's working farms are an integral part of the rural character of our town. Farming is important to the town's physical, economic, cultural, and social identity. Farmland is under extensive pressure from developers since it generally consists of well drained gently rolling land that is relatively easy to subdivide and develop.

If Ellington is to retain its character as a farming community, we need to provide an environment that encourages the continued operation of our working farms and we need to protect our prime agricultural soils from development. Farmland preservation can be achieved through the purchase of development rights (PDR) or the purchase of properties that are threatened with development. The town should continue to work with the State and Federal Governments to protect Ellington farmland.

An environment favorable to farming is important so that families will continue to operate their farms. Reduced property taxes through the PA 490 program provide a significant benefit but should be supplemented by other special tax and economic incentives provided by the town. Farmland preservation loses its meaning if there is no one willing to farm the protected land.

Objectives:

- 1) Preserve farmland.
- 2) Encourage the continued operation of Ellington's working farms.

Strategies:

- 1) Encourage Ellington farm families to take advantage of the State's PDR program.
- 2) If farms are offered for sale, work with the State Department of Agriculture and the Federal Department of Agriculture to protect farms from development.
- 3) Support other initiatives to strengthen the farm economy and agribusinesses.



Shenipsit Lake Watershed and Forest

This is an area of special conservation interest because it includes the following features:

1) Watershed for the Shenipsit Lake public water supply. Charter's Brook, which drains a large part of this area, is a major source of recharge water for the Shenipsit Lake Reservoir.

2) The eastern highlands ridgeline. This scenic ridgeline runs parallel to and just east of Route 83. It can be seen from many parts of the Connecticut River valley. Southern portions have been scarred by development.

3) Extensive areas of upland forest. This large forest area includes more than 1,200 acres of Shenipsit State Forest and provides a major wildlife corridor that extends north through Somers and Stafford, through central Massachusetts and into northern New England.

4) Trails for passive recreation. Part of the State's Blue Dot Trail System is located in this area. This and many other connecting trails are used by hikers, bikers, snowmobiles, and hunters.



Objectives:

- 1) Protect as much of the forest and Shenipsit watershed as possible.
- 2) Protect the eastern highlands ridgeline from development.
- 3) Limit development near Shenipsit Lake.

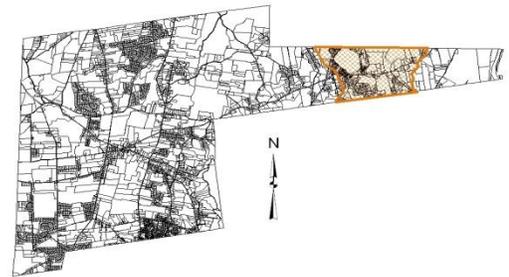
Strategies:

- 1) Work with the DEEP and Northern CT Land Trust to acquire land adjacent to the Shenipsit State Forest.
- 2) Work with the Connecticut Water Company to protect the public water supply and increase recreational opportunities adjacent to Shenipsit Lake.
- 3) Advocate zoning changes and other measures to protect this area from inappropriate development.
- 4) Educate the public concerning the impact and ultimate destination of uncontrolled non-point pollution. (i.e. pesticides, fertilizers, trash, oils, and other chemicals.)



Crystal Lake Watershed

The Crystal Lake watershed has been identified as a conservation focus area because it is an important resource of recreation and because it contains sensitive environmental areas. Crystal Lake is used extensively by swimmers, boaters, fishermen, and ice skaters. Water quality must be carefully controlled if the lake is to remain attractive for recreation. In addition, the watershed includes areas identified on the DEEP's Natural Diversity Data Base as containing species needing special protection. The white cedar swamp, approximately one mile east of the lake, provides a unique biological environment.



Objectives:

- 1) Protect and improve the water quality of the lake.
- 2) Create and enhance opportunities for recreation.
- 3) Protect environmentally sensitive areas.

Strategies:

- 1) Monitor and address water quality issues, including invasive species, sedimentation, untreated runoff and other concerns.
- 2) Educate the public concerning the impact and ultimate destination of uncontrolled non-point pollution. (i.e. pesticides, fertilizers, trash, oils, and other chemicals.)
- 3) Work with the DEEP and other regulatory agencies to promote safe and environmentally sound practices for boaters and other users.
- 4) Discourage in-water placement of structures, shoreline retaining walls and other features that detract from the natural functions of the lake.
- 5) Acquire key properties to preserve water quality, protect biological diversity and provide recreational opportunities.



Eastern Panhandle

This section of town has been selected as a conservation focus area because it includes the Nye-Holman State Forest, the Willimantic River Greenway and biologically sensitive areas adjacent to the Willimantic River.

Towns along the Willimantic River corridor have formed the Willimantic River Alliance and through their efforts, this corridor has been adopted as an official state greenway. The Ellington Board of Selectmen adopted Willimantic River corridor protection as a conservation objective at their January 13, 2003 meeting and directed that the Plan of Conservation and Development include this greenway as a component.



Objectives:

- 1) Connect with the Willimantic River Greenway to the north and south.
- 2) Develop a trail system connecting with trails in Stafford and Tolland.
- 3) Expand open space adjacent to the Nye-Holman State Forest.

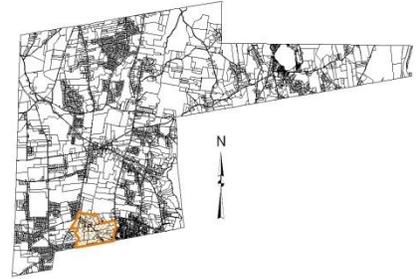


Strategies:

- 1) Acquire key properties to extend the greenway through Ellington and expand the state park.
- 2) Develop the connecting trail system.

Hockanum River Linear Park

Towns along the Hockanum River have formed an alliance to develop a linear park along the river from its Shenipsit Lake source to its merger with the Connecticut River in East Hartford. The towns of Vernon, Manchester, and East Hartford have developed an extensive and popular trail system through this linear park. Because the Hockanum River flows through the southern part of Ellington, this section has been identified as an area of conservation interest.



Objectives:

- 1) Enhance and maintain the Ellington section of the Hockanum Linear Park to offer access to the river for boating, fishing and hiking.
- 2) Expand hiking trails to connect with Vernon's Hockanum River trail system.

Strategies:

- 1) Acquire selected properties or easements to permit public access to the river.
- 2) Support the Hockanum River Watershed Association in developing and enhancing hiking trails adjacent to the river.



PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

5

Successful implementation of the Plan of Conservation requires financial resources, a dedicated organization, and support of the community and the town government.

Financial Resources

As of 2014, funding for conservation has been established and is sufficient for current needs. Funds for farmland preservation are available from the State Department of Agricultural and from the \$2 million Farmland Preservation Bond approved by referendum in 2007. Funds for open space protection are available in the Town's Open Space Trust Fund that receives fee-in-lieu payments from developers.



Dedicated Organization

The Conservation Commission, with the strong support of the Town Planning Department, is responsible for implementing the Plan of Conservation. They are assisted by the Hockanum River Linear Park Association and the Northern Connecticut Land Trust.

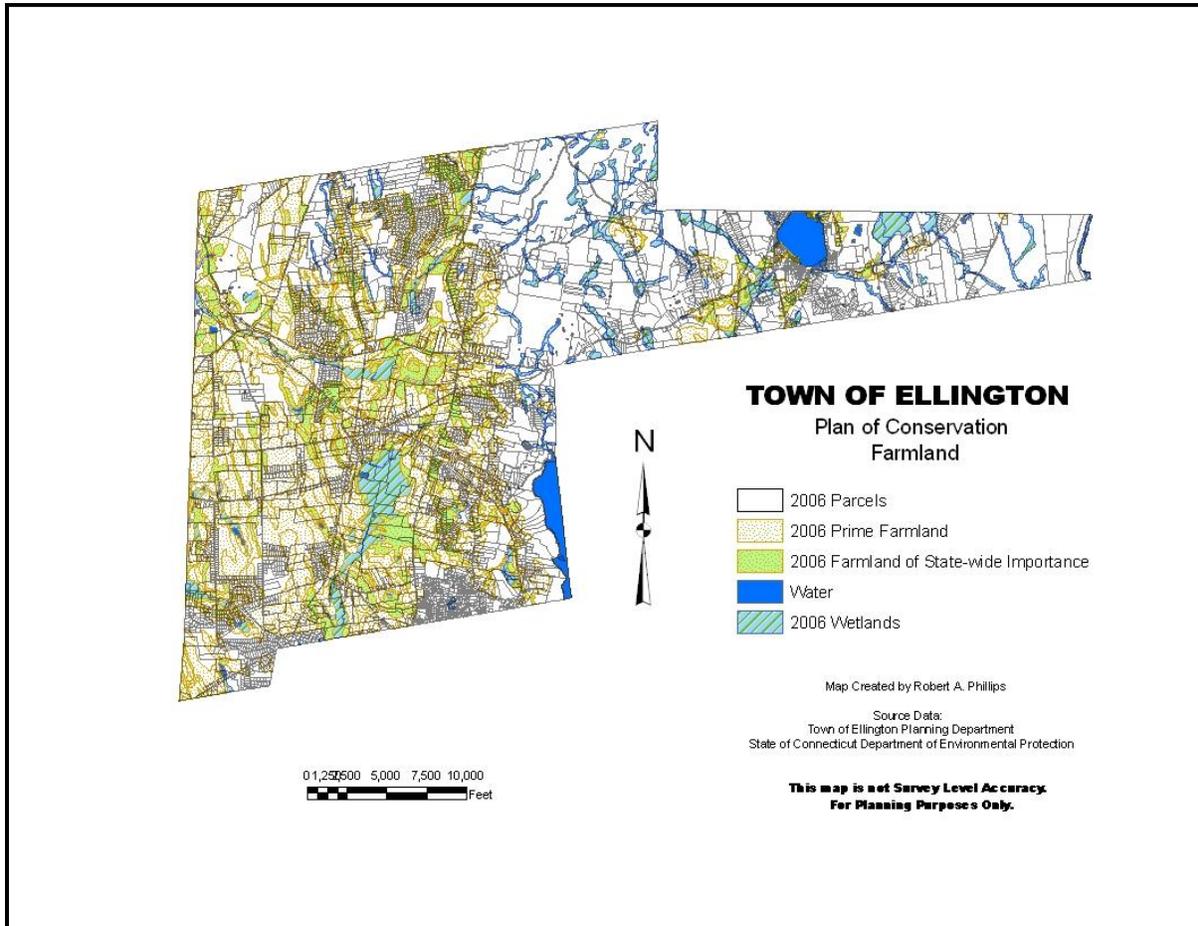
Community and Town Government Support

The community has shown strong support for preserving open space and farmland. The Farmland Preservation Bond referendum passed with 80% voting in favor. Successful implementation of the open space section of the Plan of Conservation will require increased support for the Board of Selectmen.

It is beneficial to the whole community if our natural resources are protected and our farmland and farms are preserved. Conserving land, land which filters the water we drink, produces the food we eat, protects the wildlife we love and uplifts our spirits through natural beauty, is one of the smartest investments we can make. Our quality of life is enhanced by the existence of natural areas and there are real economic reasons to protect the community's landscape. Natural resources lost to development will never be recovered.

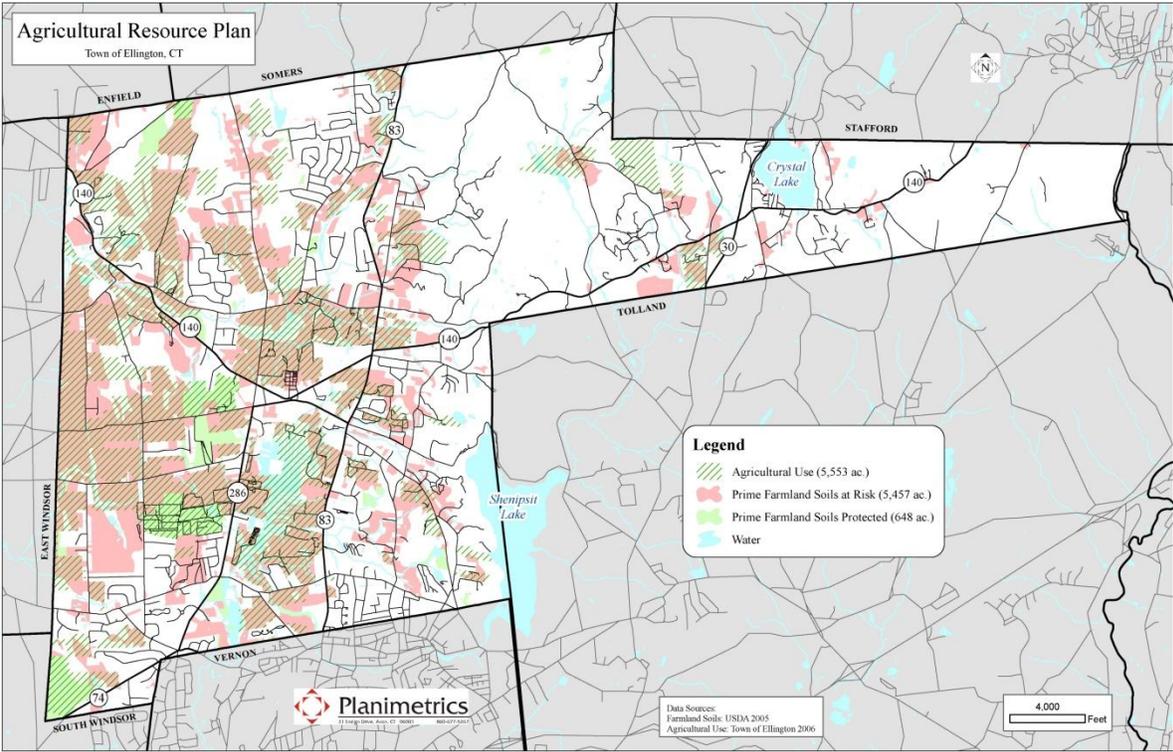
Appendix A

Prime Agricultural Soils and Soils of State-wide Importance



Appendix B

Agricultural Resources



Acknowledgements

This plan would not be possible without the input, guidance, and assistance from the following:

The Ellington Conservation Commission:

Rebecca Quarno, Chairman
Dave Bidwell, Vice Chairman
George Nickerson, member
Sean Dwyer, member
James Gage, member
Walter Moody, member
Ann Harford, member

Ellington Town Staff:

Lisa M. Houlihan, Town Planner
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Troy Ciesco, Land Use Technician

The citizens of Ellington are commended for their wisdom and foresight in creating the Conservation Commission. It is the Commission's sincere hope that its efforts will help maintain and enhance Ellington's quality of life for present and future citizens.

