

Town of Tolland, Connecticut

Plan of Conservation & Development – Zoning Implementation

POCD Recommendation Review and Discussion:
Tolland Village Area Zone



December 28, 2020

Prepared by:
Donald J. Poland, PhD, AICP
Managing Director, Urban Planning & Strategy
1137 Main Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
Phone: 860-655-6897
E-mail: dpoland@gomanyork.com
www.gomanyork.com



DONALD J. POLAND, PhD, AICP

MANAGING DIRECTOR & SVP, URBAN PLANNING

PHONE: 860.655.6897 – E-MAIL: dpoland@gomanyork.com

December 28, 2020

Andrew Powell, Chair
Planning & Zoning Commission
21 Tolland Green
Tolland, CT 06084

Re: Tolland Village Area

Dear Chairman Powell:

This document is a revised version of the November 24th document that provided a review of the POCD recommended changes to the Tolland Village Area (TVA) Zone. The intent of this document is to frame our discussion about changes to the TVA and prepare for our public meeting in January to receive input from the public as to potential changes to the TVA moving forward. Please note the changes in this document begin on Page three in the Framing the TVA Issues section. I provide, in italic text my perspectives on the questions I asked the Commission to consider in the prior document. I will address these in detail at our meeting tonight.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald J. Poland".

Donald J. Poland, PhD, AICP
Planning Consultant



Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD)

The POCD recognized the significance of the of the Route 195 corridor and the Tolland Village Area (TVA) in the context of overall economic development opportunities. For example, the Plan states “the largest, most predominant, and most visible area is the Route 195 corridor from the Tolland Village Area to Baxter Street. This corridor includes the TVA which is adjacent to Exit 68 and has good development potential, even though the area has floundered under the TVA zoning designation. With the development potential of the TVA comes community concerns of the area being proximity to the Tolland Green area, neighboring residences, and additional concerns as to the scale and intensity of development. Recognizing that those concerns need to be considered and mitigated, the Commission should also recognize that the TVA is already commercial in character and is logical area for further commercial, mixed-use, and higher density residential—this is based on the proximity to Exit 68, moderate level traffic counts, and the availability public water and public sewer to support such development.

The POCD specifically explains the following about the TVA:

The Commission recognizes that the TVA regulations, as currently written, are not resulting in the development initially envisioned. And with the current regulations and current and foreseeable economy, that is not likely to change. Consideration should be given to reverting this area to its previous zoning designation (Gateway Design District) or a similar designation, while keeping open the opportunity for a mixture of residential and business uses in the form of a revised / simplified version of the TVA allowing a hotel, residential, and mixed uses. In today’s development market, most of what is being developed is multi-family residential with smaller scale mixed-use restaurant and retail.

The TVA area is well-suited for a mix of small-scale retail/restaurant along the frontage and hotel, community scale office, and residential on the interior of the sites. The Planning and Zoning Commission should consider the Gateway Design District (GDD) along with TVA in the form a flexible Master Plan floating zone. This means property owners could develop under the GDD rules or choose to “land” the floating Master Plan zone onto their property, opening up greater opportunities but with higher development standards.

These remarks and recommendations from the POCD are still applicable today. During the POCD planning process, the Commission (and staff and the consultant) hosted two public work-sessions focused on the TVA zone and the consultant hosted a meeting with property and business owners within the TVA zone. The decision to recommend changes to the TVA results from market research on the economic and financial feasibility of TVA compliant development, public input and polarizing perspectives on the TVA, and existing regulation falling short of achieving its original aim (including the fact that TVA has placed existing property owners in development limbo—unable to design viable development options that are compliant with the requirements of the TVA regulation.



The recommendation that the “Planning and Zoning Commission should consider the Gateway Design District (GDD) along with TVA in the form a flexible Master Plan floating zone” still resonates as sound advice today. The Plan continues, this “means property owners could develop under the GDD rules or choose to “land” the floating Master Plan zone onto their property, opening up greater opportunities but with higher development standards.” As you may notice, the recommendation for the floating Master Plan zone is similar, if not the same, as the approach we are utilizing in the TCZ district. As I have stated previously, the Master Plan zone for the TCZ was drafted with an eye towards its potential utilization in the TVA district also. I believe this is a viable option.

Framing the TVA Issues

The following are a series of questions for the Commission to review and consider—to be prepared to discuss at the meeting—regarding the TVA and the need to make changes.

Questions:

- Is what we (Tolland) are doing now (in the TVA district) getting us what we want? What is working? What is not working? *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*
 - *Is the TVA getting Tolland what it wants? The answer to this is no. The TVA has underperformed and has not resulted in any meaningful new investment or development in the TVA.*
 - *What is working? Little is working regarding the TVA district. However, the area is working as general commercial district that provides commercial uses and amenities to both residents to travelers along I-84. Also working for the TVA is the availability of public infrastructure, public water and sewer to support higher density development. Based on research conducted as part of the POCD, we believe there is development potential in the TVA district, if zoning were more flexible and the permitting processes were more predictable.*
 - *What is not working? The TVA district itself if not working. It has not performed as desired and has not resulted in meaningful new investment and development. In addition, other than the addition of the Dunkin coffee shop, the existing development is aging reflects design and amenities of past eras—the area would benefit from updating. Furthermore, the TVA has limited investment and development opportunities for property owners within the district who want to invest in their properties and develop their sites.*
- What problem(s) are we trying to solve with making changes to the TVA district? *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*
 - *The primary problem Tolland is trying to solve is the fact that the TVA has underperformed and not produced the investment and development Tolland desired.*



- *A secondary problem Tolland is trying to solve is the desire and need for economic development—creating wealth and investment in the community. The TVA location is a prime location for development based on its location and access to I-84.*
- *Another problem Tolland is trying to solve is housing, specifically creating a diversity in housing stock—for Tolland diversity in housing mostly means allowing for multi-family housing. The TVA is an ideal location for multi-family housing.*
- What are the desired outcomes we seek to achieve by instituting such changes to the TVA district? *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*
 - *The ultimate desired outcome should be to create investment and wealth through new development in this area.*
 - *The key to creating investment and wealth through new development will be to balance this outcome with the many and diverse community perspectives and concerns.*
- What are changes (strategies) we can employ to achieve our desired outcomes—to get us (Tolland) what we want? *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*
 - *Make changes to the TVA zoning district that will better facilitate investment and development. There are many ways to accomplish this and the PZC should consider the following:*
 - *Repeal the TVA and return the area to the Gateway Design District (GDD) as recommended in the POCD.*
 - *Revise the TVA into a conventional zoning district with different uses than the Gateway Design District.*
 - *A hybrid approach using the Gateway Design District or revised TVA with a master plan overlay zone similar to what is being proposed for the TCZ district to encourage a flexible approach to zoning in the area.*
 - *Considerations:*
 - *Repealing the TVA and returning to the GDD mean that future development in this area will be similar to development in the GDD, in both use and bulk.*
 - *Revising the TVA to a conventional district with different uses and bulk requirements will allow the PZC to differentiate the TVA from the GDD as a unique district and area regarding use and bulk.*
 - *The hybrid approach with the master plan overlay zone will provide the greatest flexibility.*
- Are you (the PZC) comfortable with repealing the TVA and reverting to the GDD zone as the primary zoning for the area and then allowing for the MPOZ (or similar) regulation to be applied



to this area? If so, some adjustments or additions will need to be made to the MPOZ district for the TVA location. If not, is revising the TVA to a conventional zone more appealing? *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*

- *This is the primary consideration the PZC needs to make. Most important, of the PZC wants to this area to prosper and for whatever zoning designation and approach is chosen, the PZC must feel comfortable in the decision it makes.*
- Other considerations and concerns. *The following are my (the consultants) perspective:*
 - *The TVA has been a contentious and challenging zone and area. Community perspective is split with many opposed to new or different development in this area, while many are supportive of such changes.*
 - *This area has potential and could yield commercial, multi-family residential, and/or mixed-use development.*
 - *Concerns from areas and neighbors to the north and northeast need to be considered. That said, changes in elevation, break in development between the TVA and Tolland Village, and the commercial character of the existing area also needed to be recognized and considered. While the community may resist change and oppose new development, the PZC should be cognizant that this area is well-suited for development and greater density and that new development will likely be an improvement over the aging existing development.*

Questions for the Commission and Community

- What are your concerns?
- What are your non-negotiables?
- What are you willing to give, in order to get, what you want?

Workplan and Schedule

I recommend the following workplan and schedule:

- January 2021 – Advertised Public Work Session. I will present where we are with the TVA, the POCD recommendations for the TVA, and the changes related to the GDD and MPOZ for the TVA location. This will be followed by PZC member Q&A and public Q&A.
- February 2021 – Advertised Public Work Session. I will present the draft zoning amendments for the TVA/GDD change and the MPOZ (if applicable) for the TVA/GDD area.



DONALD J. POLAND, PhD, AICP

MANAGING DIRECTOR & SVP, URBAN PLANNING

PHONE: 860.655.6897 – E-MAIL: dpoland@gomanyork.com

- March 2021 – All the text amendments that we have created through our work on the commercial zoning districts will formally be presented to the PZC. This will include the Commercial Use Amendments, Site Plan and Special Permit Amendments, and the TCZ/TVA MPOZ Amendments. The PZC will consider scheduling public hearings.
- April 2021 – Public Hearings.