SUFFIELD
Connecticut

LA 606
Cultural Landscape Preservation Studio
Assist the community in defining its sense of place through revitalization of the downtown area.

- Safe, pedestrian-friendly access and connections
- Increased opportunities for economic revitalization
- Protect existing historic and cultural assets
- Offer suggestions to enhance human-scale amenities
Citizen visual preference surveys

“Smart Growth” Planning & Zoning Recommendations

Assessors maps

Heritage Committee Town Center Report

1999 GIS data layers

Historical archives

Area tours

Regional Development Issues Survey

(CRCG, 2001)
HARTFORD / SPRINGFIELD  15 – 20 miles away
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<th>11,427</th>
<th>1990</th>
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<td>14,454</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Area</td>
<td>42.22 sq. miles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ave. Household Income</td>
<td>$78,962</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade and services</td>
<td>56.2% of total business</td>
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HISTORY
Initially and on the surface, Suffield appeared to be your typical New England town, but as we rummaged around the attic a bit, the town began to come alive with history and culture.
Once peopled by native Americans of the Agawam tribe, the land was purchased from them in 1670 by John Pynchon, who would later found Springfield, Northampton and Hadley Massachusetts—and the town of Suffield was established.
In 1675, the thirty seven families that had settled in Suffield fled after conflicts with Native Americans in King Philips War left their homes and mills in ashes. Settlement resumed the following year, however, and Suffield steadily grew as mills along the brook, fishing in the Connecticut river and rich valley soil attracted more and more colonists.
Originally known as High Street, what is now main street was laid out in 1670 as the town’s main highway and has traditionally been seen as the center of town activity.
Around that same time, a patch of land along main street was set up as the village commons—which included land for grazing, a meeting house, and a school. The Common was converted to the town green, designed in 1858 by Suffield architect Henry Sykes. The green can still be seen today, although it’s design and function have changed.
Suffield Academy, a private high school founded in 1833 as the Baptist Literary Institution, graces the town green with its well-preserved federalist architecture.
Here is a picture of the green today—with Suffield Academy along the back and the war memorial in the foreground.
By the mid 1700’s, tobacco was becoming Suffield’s primary crop, and in 1810 the first cigar factory in the country was opened by Suffielder Simon Viets.
Veritable fortunes were made in the tobacco industry, that specialized in Broadleaf shade grown varieties used in cigar wrapping. Early townspeople included subsistence farmers, affluent second and third generation immigrants and entrepreneurs, and a significant slave population.
This is a view of a signature Connecticut tobacco farm.
Evidence of Suffield’s early wealth can still be seen in the magnificent homes along Main Street, including the King House. Built in 1764 by physician, farmer and prominent citizen, Alexander King, the house now serves as the Historical Society Museum.
Main Street has traditionally been considered the center of town activity, and this continued up through the early to mid 1900’s when stores, apartments, and offices faced all along the green.
However, redevelopment in the 1960’s caused drastic changes as all of these building were torn down to make way for the new library and current shopping center, which are admittedly much less pedestrian friendly.
Despite this loss, Suffield still retains much of its historic character, and there are ample opportunities to celebrate and preserve this history through landscape preservation and revitalization initiatives.
As a class we have looked at Suffield’s traditional architecture, town layout, and historic land uses, and have incorporated this information into our efforts to provide a sense of character, a pedestrian friendly environment, and a cohesive downtown environment.
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ASSESSMENT