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VIA EMAIL TO: [landuse@salisburyct.us](mailto:landuse@salisburyct.us)

Michael W. Klemens, Ph.D., Chair  
SALISBURY PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION  
TOWN OF SALISBURY  
27 Main Street  
Salisbury, Connecticut 06068

RE: 2024 Draft Plan of Conservation and Development

Dear Dr. Klemens and Members of the Commission:

This office represents the Salisbury Village Improvement Coalition, Inc., ("SVIC"), a Connecticut 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation that supports awareness of key issues affecting quality of life issues for residents and families of the Town of Salisbury and Litchfield County. Its interests include the environment, housing, responsible growth, community events, and governmental functions. Several citizens of Salisbury who share the goals of SVIC have written thoughtful letters to the Salisbury Planning and Zoning Commission in response to its invitation to provide comments and questions relating to the ongoing effort to revise, restate, or otherwise amend the Salisbury Plan of Conservation and Development of 2012 (the "POCD"). The SVIC associates itself with the sentiments that have been expressed and the suggestions that have been made in those letters.

The POCD amendment exercise is required to be conducted by Connecticut municipalities at least every ten years in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §8-23. Optimally, creation of a decennial plan affords an opportunity for community building and engagement through various methods of public outreach, convening, and participation. It is disappointing to note that the draft 2024 Salisbury Plan of Conservation and Development, while plainly acknowledging that it is only an "advisory document" (Plan at 1),<sup>1</sup> and not a regulatory document, immediately asserts that "[i]ts purpose is to

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<sup>1</sup> A recommendation in the plan of development, pursuant to General Statutes §8-23, designating appropriate uses for various areas in the town is merely advisory and does not bind the zoning commission. State Nat. Bank of Conn. v. Plan. & Zoning Comm'n of Town of Trumbull, 156 Conn. 99, 105, 239 A.2d 528, 532 (1968), citing, Dooley v. Town Plan & Zoning Commission, 154 Conn. 470, 473, 226 A.2d 509.

*establish* a community vision," a top-down concept, rather than stating that its purpose is to *reflect* a community vision, achieved as the result of a bottom-up, inclusive, collaborative process that reflects not only the goals and policies of the Town but also the interests and aspirations of its stakeholders, the citizens of Salisbury.

The POCD is a "high" level plan in that it identifies the key issues facing the Town and reflects a "vision" of what the community should look like in the future and how to achieve that vision. On the other hand, the POCD is not a detailed approach to solving problems; that requires specific planning efforts of which there are many that are being or that have been conducted through the same time period in Salisbury. Those include, but are not limited to, the work of the Affordable Housing Committee, the Pope Land Design Committee, the Salisbury Village Center Plan, and other Collier's studies including the Lakeville Village Planning Study and the Salisbury Open Space & Recreation Plan. The results of those studies provide background, context, and substance to the diverse subject matter of the POCD, although they are generally top-down documents as well. We respect the generosity, commitment, and professionalism of the participants in all of those efforts. At the same time, a more decentralized public engagement process, a wider net if you will, in the development of the POCD would have been useful in dispelling a concern that the POCD will not ultimately be used as the tail wagging the dog. Zoning changes that search for consistency with the POCD must truly be made for the betterment of the community as a whole and not represent parochial, individual interests.

The draft Plan says: "The POCD is the result of collaboration, consultation, and cross acceptance between elected/appointed boards (for the purposes of this document the term "boards" encompasses commissions and committees,) Town officials, and professional staff." (Plan at 2). The Plan references a 2021 Salisbury Community Survey<sup>2</sup> during the height of Covid (Plan at 2). According to the POCD, there were 681 responses to the survey. "Approximately 20% of the adult population (over 18 years of age) responded to the POCD survey." (Plan at 5). This may be a fine response to an internet survey, but it leaves out the voices of 80% of Salisbury's population, perhaps until now for some. Nor did the survey address more recent issues of widespread community concern, such as opening the Rail Trail to multimodal transportation, i.e., the two-way automobile traffic. The sentiments of exclusion and selectivity of the questions are reflected in several posted comments in the online survey results at the website.

Appreciating the logistical difficulties of public engagement, it is nonetheless regrettable that a more robust effort was not conducted to meet the public where it is in order to have a vision that truly reflects the diverse stakeholders in Salisbury. Ideally, there will still be opportunity to fold in more public process to overcome the perception that critical decisions are being formulated by a few that have widespread impacts on the entire Town. It is possible to reconcile the interest in promoting and creating housing and economic development with protection of the abundant natural resources in Salisbury, preservation of Salisbury's Historic District, and traffic and safety concerns. These issues can also be addressed by implementing current best practices with respect to the design, distribution, and scale of affordable housing development.

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<sup>2</sup> The PowerPoint of survey results on the Commission's webpage is dated 2022.

As a vision document, the draft 2024 POCD appears generally consistent with the statutory checklist of required content and the process for its adoption. From SVIC's perspective, and in order to achieve a sustainable and resilient Salisbury during the next ten years and beyond, all efforts at Plan implementation in every case must begin with study of the land and its resources to assess and understand its ability to support whatever development is deemed desirable while preserving ecological function and values upon which Salisbury's sense of place relies. Going forward, the Town must ensure that the citizenry is advised of specific efforts to implement the Plan so that broader participation is the standard.

We appreciate your consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marjorie Shansky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marjorie" and the last name "Shansky" clearly distinguishable.

Marjorie Shansky

Cc: Salisbury Village Improvement Coalition, Inc.