

# MEMO

APRIL 2025

TO: East Lyme Planning Commission

FROM: East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources (CCNR)

At the March 2025 meeting of the Conservation Commission (CCNR), members voted to convey their support for a plan to rezone areas of northern Flanders from a minimum of two acres to a larger minimum up to five acres, in order to better protect drinking water for current and future needs. This change is a recommendation in the 2020 POCD (see pages 62, 63 and 71). The recommendation for larger lot zoning/better aquifer protection with larger lots in the north end of town was also supported in previous POCD's, as far back as the early 1980's with the then newly formed Aquifer Protection Study Group chaired by the late Betty Murphy. The CCNR has investigated and reported on the many ways our aquifers can be contaminated (see 2020 POCD Appendix G: *Protecting Drinking Water*). Protecting the Four-Mile River aquifer is particularly important as it is the only new source of well water in the Town. Town data show that aquifers south of I-95 have increasing levels of sodium, some now above the 28ppm recommended by state standards for those on salt-restricted diets. Current protections, which amount to only "wellhead protection" not aquifer protection, are clearly not satisfactory. As more pavement and impervious areas are created with future development, road salting will continue to increase and more sodium will inevitably leach into our aquifers. This sodium chemically facilitates other pollutants that contaminate our drinking water (see accompanying *Report on Salt Contamination of East Lyme Drinking Water*).

The BEST way to protect our drinking water supply is to maintain as much of the natural vegetation cover as possible and, most importantly, limit impervious cover (e.g. roads, roofs, driveways, hardscaping) below 15%. Enlarging minimum parcel size in this most vulnerable part of town is an equitable method of achieving this goal. An important second step would be to rezone areas abutting the Niantic River tributaries from a minimum of one acre to a minimum of two acres as a transition buffer. This will help better protect the water that flows into the Niantic River. The Niantic River serves as an important attraction for residents and tourists alike, who spend money at local businesses and support the Town's economy. As an example of what can happen, we cite the solar field development project off Grassy Hill Road in 2011 which resulted in massive siltation of Cranberry Brook, Latimer Brook, Banning Cove and the Niantic River, even though silt fencing, hay rolls and a detention basin were in place.

This plan is not intended to limit affordable single and multi-family housing. Such development can be accommodated by careful positioning of housing in clusters and designating conservation easements to preserve groundwater integrity. **Clean drinking water is East Lyme's most important resource for all residents and a critical factor in home values. It must be protected.**