ON THE FALLS' PREMISES

The Social Ecology of a New England Mill Town

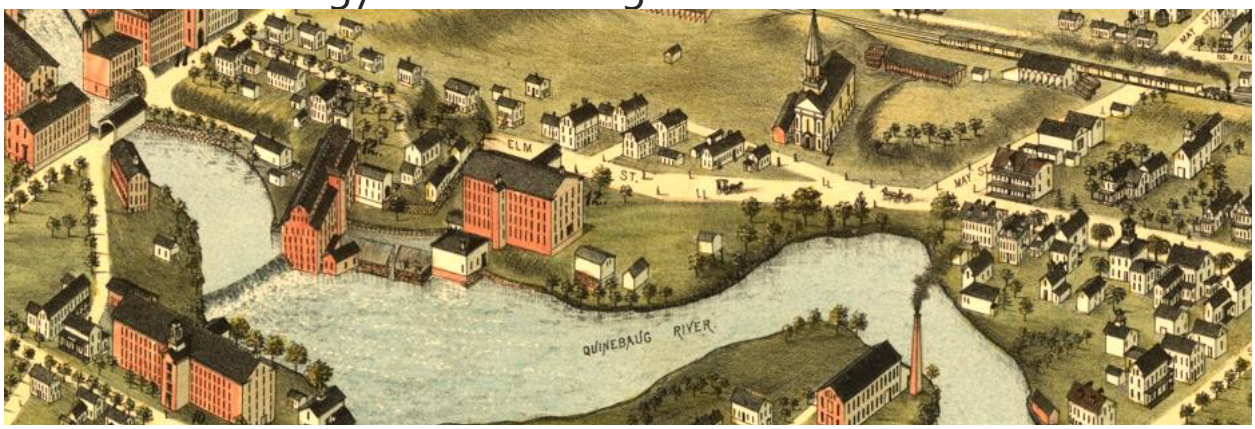

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Image: Lithographic map of Putnam, Connecticut (1877).

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Social Ecological Timeline

Putnam, CT 1800-1850

Outstanding Quinebaug flood

Summary: The mostly isolated, agriculturally dominant region of northeast Connecticut begins to industrialize when the Pomfret Woolen Company builds a mill and dam on the Quinebaug (1807). The increased concentration of wealth and labor yield higher populations, increasing demands on the local environment. Coal-burning steam engines bring trains through the region, carrying in slave –grown-and-picked cotton, spewing carbon-rich smoke into the air, and moving textile products to outside markets. The small region expands its geographic impact beyond state borders.

"The surface of the township is uneven, and diversified by hills and vales. The lands, though somewhat stony, are rich and productive. The soil is deep, strong and fertile, and admirably adapted to grazing. Butter, cheese and pork are the staple productions of the town. There is an extensive cotton factory at Pomfretville, a little village on the Quinnebaug [sic], at the northeastern corner of the town." –John Warner Barber, 1836

Feb. 1729; Feb. 1757; 1767.

1800

Mar. 1801

1800: Parent towns (Thompson, Pomfret, Killingly) combined population: **6,422**

1806: Connecticut bans deer hunting amid population decline

Jul. 1807: Wilkinson Mill (wooden) built (west bank, south privilege)

1807

1810

1810: Parent towns population: **6,884**

1813: Wild turkeys extirpated from Connecticut.

1818

1820

1820: Parent towns population: **7,773**

1826: Masonry dam built at central privilege.

Mar. 1828

1830

1830: Parent towns population: **8,615**

1830: Rhodes Mill built (east bank, central privilege).

1837

1840

1840: Norwich & Worcester Railroad begins operations

1840: Parent towns population: **9,088**

1841: Rhodes Mill burns down, rebuilt.

1846: Nightingale and Morse mills built (east and west banks respectively, central privilege).

1846: Ballou Mill built (west bank, northern privilege).

1849: Wilkinson mill burns down, rebuilt.

"Mid Century": Harris Mill built (eastern bank, southern privilege)

1850

1850: Parent towns population: **11,029**

Social Ecological Timeline

Putnam, CT 1860-1910

Outstanding Quinebaug flood

Summary: Booming populations prompt Putnam to incorporate from its parent towns (1855). Several more capitalists build industrial infrastructure along the river. The Putnam population doubles after the Civil War. Multiple mills experience their largest work force. Now enmeshed in national and global economies, Putnam contributes to broader environmental impacts, including global climate change. Industrial success leads to the town's redesignation as a city (1895). In response to industrial dominance, Americans begin to gain class and environmental consciousness, and agitate against the hegemony.

"Old landmarks have vanished, the forests are gone, the hills leveled or built up with houses... The roar of the Falls is drowned in the clatter of machinery and steam engine. The homes and workshops of an enterprising and varied population crowd the narrow vale, and stretch out over the hills on every side. Gradually and naturally the change has been effected." –Ellen D. Larned, 1880

May 1855: Putnam Incorporates from parent towns.

1860

1860: Putnam population: **2,208**

1860: New York & New England Railroad routes through Putnam.

C. 1860's: Monohansett canal built near Harris Mill (east bank, southern privilege)

1861: Concrete dam built at central privilege.

Mar. 1867

Oct. 1869

1868: Monohansett Mill built beside canal.

1870

1870: Putnam population: **4,912**

1870: Nightingale and Morse mills reach labor force peaks.

1872: Powhattan Mill built (east bank, northern privilege).

Mar. 1876

1880

1880: Putnam population: **5,827**

Feb. 1886

1889: Monohansett Mill reaches labor force peak.

1890

1890: Putnam population: **6,512**

1895: Putnam becomes a city.

1896: Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius links coal power to global warming.

1900

1900: Putnam population: **7,348**

1910

1910: Putnam population: **7,280**

1914: Beavers reintroduced to Connecticut

Social Ecological Timeline

Putnam, CT
1920-1970

Outstanding Quinebaug flood

Summary: Industrial production cools as the United States transitions into a consumer economy. Amid The Great Depression and World War II, Putnam finds its identity as a typical "American" town. as the whole nation restructures to accommodate the automobile, floods resulting from Hurricane Diane (1955) prompt Putnam town planners to restructure for the "Atomic Age". The American public pressures legislators to pass environmental protective regulations; state legislators follow suit.

"Putnam... Is a manufacturing center composed of narrow, winding streets and low buildings, on four small hills. Originally known as Pomfret Factory, *the city was chartered in 1895, and because of its situation at Cargill Falls on the Quinebaug, became an industrial center... Although it has suffered during the depression, Putnam is still a thriving little community."*
–Works Progress Admin., 1938

1920

1920: Putnam population: **8,397**

Nov. 1927

1929: US stock market crashes; global depression ensues.

1930

1930: Putnam population: **8,099**

Mar. 1936

1940

1940: Putnam population: **8,692**

1945: US drops atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war and ushering in the Atomic Age.

1950

1950: Putnam population: **9,304**

Aug. 1955

1955: Flooding alters Quinebaug Valley, forever closes NY & NE Railroad service to Putnam.

1956: Federal Highway Act spawns 41,000 miles of US interstate highways

1962: Rachel Carson publishes *Silent Spring*, popularizing the term "ecology".

1960

1960: Putnam population: **8,412**

1961: 15.1 acres of Putnam downtown leased for 99 years.

1963: Putnam renames Riverside Artery as "Kennedy Drive"

1965: West Thompson Flood Control Dam built.

1970: First annual Earth Day; National Environmental Protection Act establishes Environmental Protection Agency.

1970: Putnam population: **8,598**

1971: Connecticut establishes Department of Environmental Protection.

1970

1973: Putnam's Riverfront Commons shopping center completed.

1973: Connecticut Environmental Protection Act.

Social Ecological Timeline

Putnam, CT
1980-2020

Outstanding Quinebaug flood

Summary: Putnam follows the nation into a sustained period of tension between free-market financial desires and environmental protection needs. The West Thompson Dam prevents any outstanding floods during this period. Putnam publishes its first and second decennial plans of conservation and development (POCD).

1980

1977: CT 52-MA 52 Expressway (later I-395) completed.

1980: Putnam population: **8,580**

1990

1990: Putnam population: **9,031**

1994: US Congress designates Quinebaug-Shetucket valley regions as The Last Green Valley National Heritage Corridor.

1995: Connecticut Public Act 15-95 requires all towns to decennially publish a plan of conservation and development.

2000

2000: Putnam population: **9,002**

2005: Putnam adopts first POCD.

"As much as things seem to have changed, they have essentially stayed the same. Highway interchanges, not mills and railroad stations, now generate development. This is even true of residential development, for today's population is willing to accept commuting times measured in hours rather than minutes, and increasingly Putnam residents are working elsewhere."
–Putnam Plan of Conservation and Development, 2016

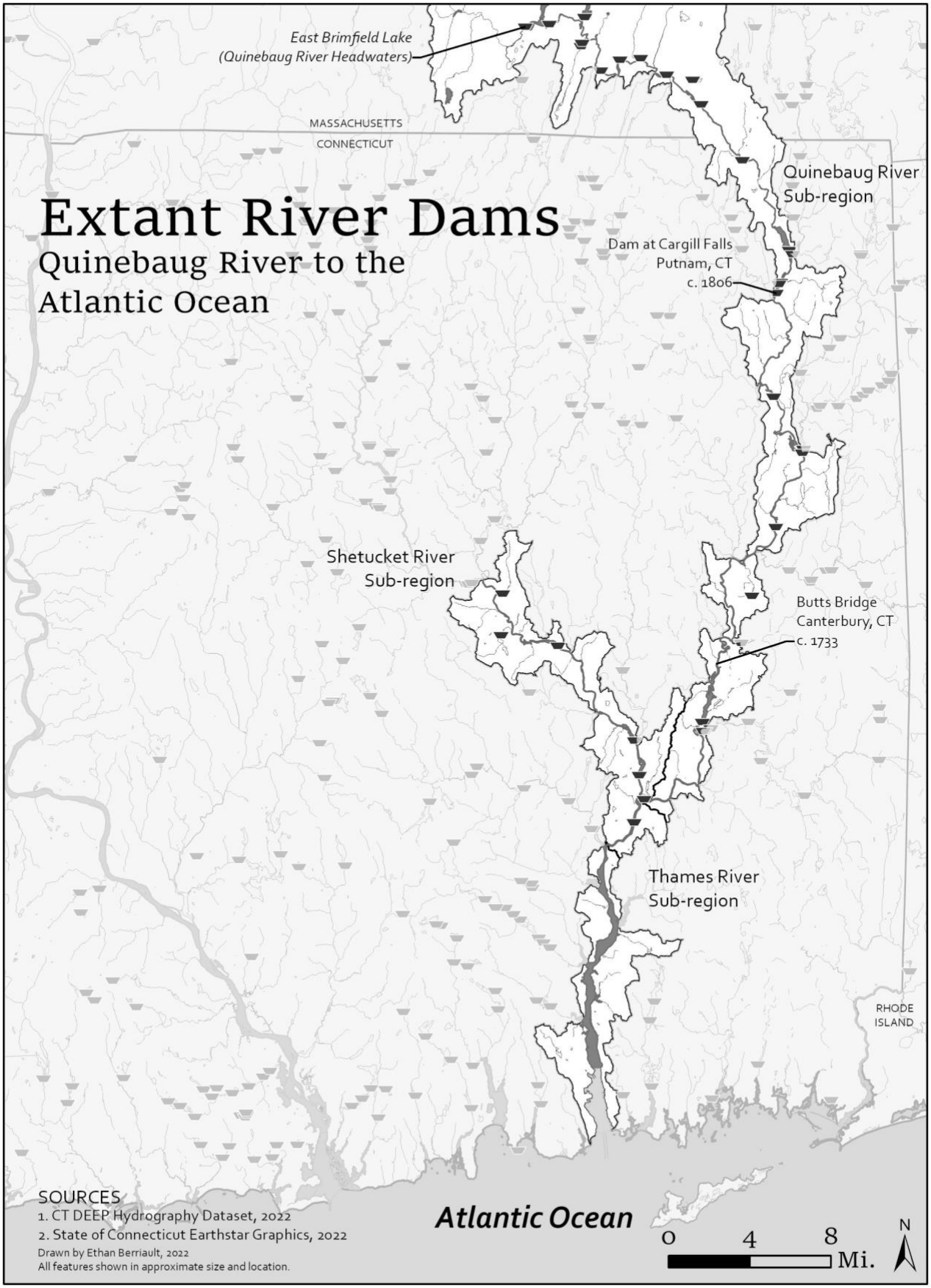
2010

2010: Putnam population: **9,584**

2016: Putnam adopts second POCD.

2020

2020: Putnam population: **9,224**


East Brimfield Lake
(Quinebaug River Headwaters)
MASSACHUSETTS
CONNECTICUT
Quinebaug River
Sub-region
Extant River Dams
Quinebaug River to the
Atlantic Ocean
Dam at Cargill Falls
Putnam, CT
c. 1806
Shetucket River
Sub-region
Butts Bridge
Canterbury, CT
c. 1733
Thames River
Sub-region
RHODE
ISLAND
SOURCES
1. CT DEEP Hydrography Dataset, 2022
2. State of Connecticut Earthstar Graphics, 2022
Drawn by Ethan Berriault, 2022
All features shown in approximate size and location.
Atlantic Ocean
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Introduction: Town As History

Natural Dialectics

The Quinebaug is alive. The river, named for the people named for the "long pond" situated within the river's valley, transcends the inanimacy of its translated namesake.[1] The river's value exceeds picturesqueness. More than displaying itself for our viewing pleasure, the Quinebaug reaches from its headwaters through town, country, and history to its confluence with the Thames that empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Before white settlement, when the Quinebaug marked the border between the Nipmuc and Narragansett tribal territories, the river used to flood every Spring, producing a wave that raised the water over its banks. The flood waves enriched the floodplains with nutrients and cut a new riverine course through the valley. Modern dams and infrastructure prevent the river from fully rejuvenating the valley as it once did. Back then, salmon inhabited the waters, drawing from cosmic references an instinct that would return them to their spawning grounds. Once born and raised, they swam downriver to form a migratory school with other Atlantic Salmon, travelling as far out as Greenland, circling the ocean until they matured, and finally muscled back upriver to the headwaters in southern Massachusetts to spawn.

The river itself still makes this migration to the ocean and back. The waters reach the ocean and then evaporate into gas, traveling along an atmospheric gradient that extends from the abyss to the ozone layer. After a lateral shift over the land, the waters condense into

droplets on their way back down to help replenish the river. It's an ecological sacrament that the salmon's ontogeny reflects the hydrologic cycle. Both amalgamate the river and the ocean. The river flows through the ocean, recycles its waters. It needs the ocean. It is the ocean. Or, rather, it is always becoming the ocean. This is the story about how a river became a town. This is natural dialectics in a droplet.

Natural dialectics means seeing a present biotic form as all of its potentialities. Conventional thinking isolates the river as a fixed entity, in many ways connected to the ocean but meaningfully seperate. In the way that a parent sees their child as a burgeoning adult and therefore parents with the consideration of future consequences, social ecology uses dialectics to behold the world as an interwoven set of potentialities. Everything is a process. While we observe a river through hydrographical, mechanical, biological, or even ecological lenses, none of these disciplines can describe a river in its essence. For humans derive from the world its sociological, political, and, with others, economic potentialities. A healthy river maximally realizes all of these potentialities. If the river is always becoming the ocean, if the ocean through its various cycles is always becoming the earth, and if we come from and return to the earth, then we derive our maximal potentialities from the healthiest realization of earth's systems. Subdued by years of damming and channelizing, the Quinebaug languishes in its full potential. So do we.

Project Scope

In 1760, Spring's freshet washed out a bridge that crossed the Quinebaug in Canterbury, Connecticut. The Canterbury residents had maintained the bridge since 1733. For a generation

it had served residents of Plainfield, Preston, and the surrounding towns. That year, however, they observed that a new corn mill dam had compounded the effects of the freshet and destroyed the bridge. This them to completely reconstruct the bridge. At the previous year's town meeting, the proposed mill had caused considerable controversy. "Anything that obstructed the annual ascent of salmon and shad on which they depended was most vigorously resisted by all the residents of the Quinebaug valley," says historian Ellen Larned.[2] Not everyone in the town thought the dam a good idea. Dams were known to flood farm fields, ruining whole crops. The wiping out of the bridge was the last straw. In 1761, floods destroyed the bridge again, this time along with the mill dam. It took two years of cajoling from the neighboring towns for the residents of Canterbury to rebuild the bridge.

In August, 1955, a hurricane pushed across New England. In the Quinebaug Valley, rains raised the water levels to flood heights. As happened in Canterbury in 1760, the flood wave hit the local dams and crashed out onto the surrounding landscape before continuing its ocean-bound course. The flood plains had been long occupied by supposedly permanent infrastructure, and the Valley residents had an entirely new relationship with the river. Factories, stores, houses, bridges, roads, railroads, and all of the human detritus contained therein stood in the river's way. The 1955 flood took automobiles, brick, asphalt, metal pipes, powerlines tumbling through the valley, crashing into the built landscape and destroying town infrastructure. In Putnam, everyone survived to watch their town destroy itself. Despite witnessing the carnage unique to their time and caused by their riverine encroachment, residents blamed the ancient river. The Town of Putnam called upon larger governments for support, and within a few years, built their town anew on the river.

When did Quinebaug residents begin to side with the corn mill guy? What kinds of social turns unfolded to transform Quinebaug Valley residents from river dependents to river exploiters? And at what costs?

In 2016, Putnam published a Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Since 1995, the state required its towns to decennially evaluate and plan its use of natural resources with the idea that they might push residents toward more sustainable lifeways. If these state mandated documents have accomplished anything, it's that they've gotten the towns to admit in writing that they operate unsustainably. Without a plan to change, we may not change, and find that we will have left our town in worse condition than we inherited it, and so will have damned future generations. And they will know that we have failed despite having declared our intention to change and achieve sustainability. According to Putnam's POCD, sustainability means "balancing the community's economic development with the means to achieve its social needs within the natural and built environment such that these existing and future needs will continually be met."[3] Throughout the POCD, Putnam attempts to further define its "needs", and from that, grope toward methods by which to achieve a "balance". It does this admirably by standards set by the American Planning Association and the Environmental Protection Agency, with information collected by the University of Connecticut, various government agencies, local regional planning commissions, and the town's own funded research, as well as by the various expertises of town officials. Even with all this help, it is evident by the POCD's contradictions (i.e. reducing greyfields while increasing downtown parking lots), speculative tone, and overall vagueness just how difficult the task of achieving balance has become in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps before the town can properly define its needs, it must better define itself. Convention defines a town by its geopolitical boundary, the geographic expanse throughout that the town government collects taxes and redistributes services. To the population of mostly commuters, the town is a gambling machine in that they purchase property (or as renters, pay toward someone else's property) and then hope meet their needs with affordable taxes, good schools for their children, and basic community amenities for recreation and commerce. The town conceived thusly, as a plane of exchange, loses its character. It could be any place with almost any needs and a population poorly equipped to voice them. Therefore, Putnam's primary, ongoing need is a sense of place. That's why it still distinguishes the small city center from the larger country expanse with a small "Special Services District" in the town's northeast corner. Why, even after the dissolution of the city government, did the town keep its city border? Why separate the city from the town in the first place? And what does the city within the town have to do with sustainability? In this history the town should find its definition—literally. According to the political philosophy of social ecology, a town is its history, "the cumulative development—or dialectic—of certain important social potentialities and of their phases of development, traditions, culture, and community features."[4] The town's further definitions of "balance" and "needs" one can find embedded within Putnam's mythopoeia, its accepted understanding of its own history and lore.

This project investigates the redevelopment of Putnam following the 1955 flood. This historic hinge point turned the town from one unsustainable social arrangement to a new, perhaps equally unsustainable arrangement. "The structures and patterns found within Putnam's present day downtown core area," says the 2016 POCD, "are daily reminders of the

1955 flood which caused destruction of or major damage to 477 dwelling units, 26 stores and offices, and all the industries along the Quinebaug River."[5] The POCD does not define geographically the "present day downtown core area." In its stead, I have taken it upon myself to draw what I call the town's "Historic Core." It encompasses the post-flood urban renewal area and extends to cover the extant mill buildings, significant portions of their former mill villages, the mill ponds, the railroads, and the downtown west of the railroads. Within these bounds, I mapped the site as it appeared in 1955 prior to the flood (see Map #) as well as its existing conditions circa 2022 (see Map #). The pair match in scale and orientation to illustrate the town's structural transitions. This narrative, in three parts, asks why the town came into each arrangement, what lifeways each arrangement sought to support, and what were the social ecological implications.

Putnam can trace the social origins of unsustainable development to the Quinebaug Valley's transition from agrarianism to industrialism. "Part I: Town as Machine" covers Putnam's evolution during the industrial and market revolutions. Over the course of the 19th century, the town shifted from an agrarian to an industrial social arrangement. In 1855, Putnam formally incorporated as an autonomous town from its parent towns of Pomfret, Killingly, and Thompson. By 1895, the Putnam's industrial core achieved city designation. The remaining 19th century infrastructure lends the town its current aesthetics, and hence, the period remains among the most celebrated of Putnam's history. The remaining mills, dams, housing, street names, and railways make the optimistic view of history readily accessible. But the seeming permanence of the early infrastructure erases much of the tension innate to the town's becoming. Many modern New England towns look something like Putnam. If region-wide social

and environmental conditions during the 19th century made industrialization inevitable, then opposition to industrialization was also inevitable. Putnam's initial town incorporation failed for several years before passing the vote. And the later city designation passed with only a little over half of the vote. In each instance, the result favored the town's wealthy classes. Part I examines the social ecological downsides to these changes and challenges the narrow definition of "progress" that set Putnam on a course to unsustainability.

By 1955 Putnam town planners lamented about being stuck in the age of the water wheel. "Part II: Town as Mall" reevaluates the town's planning choices and tests the mythopoeia of mid 20th century residents for social ecological sturdiness. What changed about prevailing opinions on society and nature between Putnam's industrial zenith and its burgeoning commercialization? How did the town respond to the flood, and what were the consequences? Whereas Part I covers an entire century, Part II delves into the planning documents produced in the half-decade following the flood. In this short period, planners were able to reduce the flood-threat level to almost non-existent in a process that saw little to no appreciable resistance. The population seems to have united around a singular vision of the future, or at least succeeded in silencing dissent. Their popular faith in business success built upon anti-communist hysteria made it so that the few to speak against the plans thought the designs were too tepid, and that the designs freed too much land from profit extraction. The only notable dissenter was a farmer who threatened violence to the US Army Corps of Engineers when they wanted to take her ancestral farm. Legend says she won. Legend is generous, and the farm, gone. Economic expedience ruled post-war America and left it less sustainable with no exception for the Quinebaug Valley region.

"Part III: Town as Ecosystem" is my fictional account that extends Putnam's town narrative to the year 2055. The various mathematical projections of economic growth and environmental sustainability—the type that allow us to classify flood vulnerability, for example—direct us toward change, but limit, perhaps too much, our ability to envision a better future. While abstracting the world into numerical values increases our capacity for study and manipulation, there are only so many classifications of land use, so many rates of population and economic growth, so many calipers and sensors and surveys that can elucidate our image of the world. Data mean nothing until we enfold them into narratives. The sustained valuation of the entire world into dollar values doubly troubles the goal of sustainability because it prices out of a better future. Words abstract the world into qualitative units. They connect numerical data to lived experiences, and form narratives that connect people to possibilities. I wrote Part III as my personal vision of how Putnam might achieve a sustainable culture and infrastructural base by 2055 and appended the text to the end of a separate document, *The Farm-City Vision: A Long-Range Social Ecological Plan for Putnam.* The whole document critiques modern conceptions of "natural resources", "progress", and "sustainability". It follows the simple philosophy that when it comes to town planning, we should be able to answer what, why, and how we should live before we go asking how much—how few trees, how many parking spaces, how low the water level, how high the mill rate? These latter questions anticipate immediate needs, but get asked within an outdated framework, a whitewashed conception of town origins, and they attempt to fit new ideas into old molds. Part III demonstrates, I hope, the potential power of community visioning. It asks what happens when we decide to think beyond the next ten years to the next seven generations.

The Nipmuc and Narragansett tribes throve along the Quinebaug, according to a Narragansett Sachem, since time immemorial.[6] Both tribes sustained significantly more than seven generations within the region through various social and ecological processes. Many of their lifeways have been erased from history, though many others have survived or been recovered. However, due to time constraints, I limited the bulk of my research to post-settlement history. However, I take from the indigenous' example proof that a people can lock themselves culturally into the river's biorhythms, possibly enhance the river itself, and receive the benefit of cultural longevity. I take an even deeper interest in the past settler societies that acted to shorten that longevity. Where did the settler's go wrong, and how are we still following their example?

Unsustainable Roots

In 1760, Benjamin Cargill purchased the Quinebaug mill privilege in the corner of Pomfret that would expand into the town of Putnam. Cargill leveraged his mill privilege to run a business for grinding, malting, and dyeing. Whether residents had at any point resisted the dam remains unknown. Regardless of the particulars Cargill's mill business throve, drawing in customers from the surrounding towns.[7] It is worth appreciating the process of hand-building a river dam, especially one desired by a true town majority. The privileged farmer was probably already in possession of the core lumber, stone, and time to build and operate the mill. He would barter with or outright pay his neighbors to assist throughout the build as needed. They began by building a coffer dam, a series of wooden baskets filled with stone and clay and successionally placed in the water just upstream from the mill dam to direct the river around

the build site. On the dry riverbed area they built a large wooden ramp frame, and within the frame, laid a stone ramp. When finished, they dissembled the coffer dam and rebuilt it on the other side so that they could extend the mill dam fully across the river. The ramp-like shape allowed the water to slide up and over and exert weight against the stones, holding the dam in place. Once completed, the dam powered mills for grinding, sawing, fulling, and other uses that extended the material values of their produce. [8] What most separated agrarian mills from industrial mills was neither the productive capacity nor the enterprise's organization. The town's collective right to the river, their flexibility to variously add and remove infrastructure depending on collective perceived benefit or detriment, and the belief that they could do so at will made agrarian mills social ecological assets. Even while allowing the mill owner to charge for access to the mill, the town retained ultimate rights to the river, and the privilege only needed to last until the next year's town meeting.

When in December 1787, it was proposed to lay out a new road from Pomfret's interior to Cargill's mills, "the town refused." Larned tells us neither why nor explains how, but in the Spring of that year, attitudes shifted. Trees came down, bridges were rebuilt, and the road was laid out, opening Cargill's falls opened to a whole new customer base.[9] Town priorities shifted. Old families were sitting on new wealth, and they invited wealthy outsiders to join them in the country. The town grew wealthy, and the wealthy found ways to influence local lifeways to their preferences. "The airs and graces of the assembled gentry, and the aristocratic assumption of some families, excited the ridicule of the country people," says Larned. Townfolk unofficially rechristened one stretch of mansions as "Pucker Street."[10] In 1796, the Pomfret built a house on the town commons to house the poor. Town leaders exempted a local doctor

from all taxes in exchange for tending to the poorhouse residents. Between 1797 and 1806, bylaws began prohibiting the grazing of horses, asses, mules, sheep, swine, and geese, on common pastures, leaving those lands only for cattle.[11] The same year, the state government proposed to build an interstate from Hartford to Boston through Pomfret. "Progressive spirits favored these enterprises," says Larned, but hungry as the farmers may have been for market access, they did not want it bad enough to pay the taxes. Still, the state and the market made sure that the road was in fact built, and that residents paid, without consent, three and a half cents each toward the project. This pattern would repeat through Pomfret history with the construction of other roads.

In 1798, Benjamin Cargill retired and sold his estate, along with the mill privileges. The new owners made several changes, including converting the butter churning mill into a distillery to meet the "increased demand for spiritous and distilled liquors." They also converted one of Cargill's old houses into a store, and built a sort of park between the Quinebaug and the Mill River (probably the modern day Little River). They kept the rest of Cargill's facilities operational. In a 1798 sales advertisement that Cargill had purchased in the Providence Gazette, he reports the many land alterations he had made to his 500 acres. Canals cut from the Quinebaug irrigated 60 acres of hayfields. The grist mills ground "nearly five hundred bushels" per day. He suggests expanding with a paper mill and an oil mill.[12] In contrast with the town meeting custom whereby the mill privilege would be exchanged as the result of a vote, this was a private business sale. And the privilege was sold to non-resident outsiders, including one future governor of Rhode Island. It should come as no surprise then that within a

decade, the newcomers resold this invaluable social-ecological complex to another, more industrious group of wealthy Rhode Islanders. I pick this narrative up again in Part I.

Toward Sustainable Roots

I wrote this project while living in Putnam. With a short walk through the woods behind my house I could reach Connecticut's Airline Trail, built on the abandoned bed of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford railroad. Since freed from its rails and ties, long overgrown with trees and brush, the path makes for an easy hike, one I made almost every day during my four years of residence. As the trail leads eastward closer to downtown Putnam, invasive bittersweet vines curl up out of the shade and caress tree trunks, defying my previous years of effort to uproot each one. Granted the time, the vines will choke the trees. There is no way to eradicate invasive bittersweet, and so it has to be watched and removed with regularity. Seeing the new vines shoot through during the months that I worked on this project reminded me that humans play destructive and constructive ecological roles, and the world looks better when we prioritize the latter. Monetization and commercialization force us into rigid patterns of destruction, and we lack the time, funding, motivation, organization, and agency to clean up our own messes. This project, although completed as a school assignment, should be viewed as the work of one of Putnam's townsfolk. As a Quinebaug Valley resident who pays taxes, votes, and disposes of waste here, works and learns and carouses here, I am biased in that I want future generations, regardless of socioeconomic class, to derive maximal fulfillment from our town landscapes. That is why I chose to put my time and energy into this project. Rather than waiting for the next

flood or depression or regular decay to destroy the town so that we might rebuild, I wanted to trace our problems to their historic roots so that we may free ourselves from their chokeholds.

Putnam takes its history from a few key sources. The first is Ellen Larned's *History of Windham County, Connecticut*. Larned came from one of Thompson, Connecticut's leading families. With her relative affluence, she lived her life as a genealogist, writer, and historian, and financed *History of Windham County*.[13] The tome spans two volumes comprising more than 1,200 pages, officially covering the years of 1600 to 1880. Within, she recounts the history as told by official town, church, and government records, historical society archives, private correspondences, and personal interviews.[14] It's an impressive work that includes minutia such as land transactions and town meeting disputes. In 1889, Richard M. Bayles, under Larned's editorship, plagiarized Larned's work and published it under the same title. Bayles's text fills in some of the blanks left by Larned. Together, the two authors seem to have improved upon Larned's original order of contents, making the history more readable. But Bayles makes his biggest contribution with his editorializing. In his account of the 1760 Canterbury corn mill controversy, Bayles lambasts the river as "a formidable and troublesome… rebellious stream." "The Quinebaug, which had given so much trouble to early settlers," he says, "was not yet reduced to proper subjection." [15] I see Larned and Bayles cited on popular websites, the kind that readily appear to anyone who desires a quick account of local history. I trust both Bayles and Larned as factual sources. However, from the distance of 150 years in the future, I fail to resonate with their faith in industrialism, and used this project to pull them back into a more rigorous historical conversation, adding modern knowledge and critical interpretations to the outdated texts.

For history following 1880, I relied mostly on primary sources. The *Putnam Patriot* and the *Windham County Observer* circulated through Putnam during the later periods of interest. Now committed to microfilm, their issues contain valuable information unavailable elsewhere. They chronicle the town's weekly happenings. In 1980, Margaret Weaver wrote her book *Perspectives of Putnam* using the same approach as I did for this project, drawing on Larned, Bayles, the *Putnam Patriot*, and other primary sources to extend her account into the twentieth century. Weaver's work pointed me toward some details I would have glossed over on my own, and her work deserves to circulate as broadly as Larned's and Bayles's. In Part II, I directly consult both written and cartographic primary documents that were made for post-flood redevelopment. Finally, I consider Larned, Bayles, and even Weaver as primary sources on the prevailing social attitudes of their own times.

For four months, over the course of the summer semester, I searched wide and dug deep through the historic record and have confined my reportage to what turned up during the latter. That is to say, I kept it local, confined geographically to the direct vicinity of Cargill Falls and temporally to our town's watershed moments, the exact historic periods when public and individual actors exerted significant change on the town. Regional, national, global, and biospheric factors exerted significant force on Putnam throughout its history to today. Various economic and environmental legislation, currents of thought, spiritualities, and natural events of outside origin influenced the actions of Putnam locals and shaped their sense of place. These I researched thoroughly through secondary sources. However, due to deadlines, I have mentioned these contextualizing factors in brief only where the added perspective was

necessary. My concern was less what those factors were and more with how the town opened itself to their influences.

No sane person would consider the impossible task of containing the ocean. Not even for the sake of preserving human life. The same does not apply to the ocean's veins and arteries. No matter how many tsunamis, shark attacks, and shipwrecks we endure, we continue to respect the open sea, even if we'd prefer otherwise, as a realm to visit and never to conquer. Attempts at localized containment such as walls and levees routinely fail such that we expect these infrastructures to dissolve rather than dissipate the consequences of our seaside settlement choices. In seeing the land as separate from the ocean, we likewise see the rivers as bound by yet disconnected from the land. We think of rivers as flowing through our domain, and so we embolden ourselves to dam, channelize, divert, and even dry them out. Only by seeing the river as becoming the ocean, becoming the land, becoming ourselves will we wake up and see that the harm that we cause to a single river damages the whole world. And the same goes for our town. We must see Putnam as a process, a spectrum. The town does not contain the river—it is the river, but our narrowly chosen heritage fails to support this. Wendell Berry, full time farmer and writer, put it best in his timeless book, *The Unsettling of America:*

"We have given up the understanding—dropped it out of our language and so out of our thought—that we and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies just as our bodies pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human and plant and animal, are part of one another, and so cannot possibly flourish alone; that, therefore, our culture must be our response to our place, our culture and

our place are images of each other and inseperable from each other, and so neither can be better than the other."[16]

A sustainable Putnam must drop its love affair with the "progress" of wealth and rekindle its love with the land. With an improved mythopoeia we might change our language and therefore change our town. Perhaps this project is the next step, although I'd be surprised to hear that this collection of text and maps reached more than the dozen folk who have already asked me to share. To those who do take the time to read it, thank you. If you want to act sustainably, beware the easy interpretations of our history and lend greater credence to the dissenting voices.

Part I: Town as Machine

The Village

The story of industrialization as it unfolded in the northeast corner of Pomfret, Connecticut, resembles in its broad strokes the story of industrialization throughout rural New England. Despite having distance from this past, with increased global awareness of the social and ecological consequences of industrialization, Putnam recalls its industrialization the way historians Ellen Larned and Richard Bayles wrote it in the 1880's. In 1980, Margaret Weaver of Putnam's Aspinock Historical Society cited both when she wrote that, "Under Wilkinson's firm supervision, the Pomfret Manufacturing Company and its village quickly blossomed." [17] Weaver's "blossom" metaphor conjures images of growth and beauty in a way that smooths over many historical wrinkles. Whereas blossoming describes an organic process in that a living organism achieves its fullest potential within an ecological niche, Wilkinson's mill village functioned as a near-mechanical extension of his factory. In its layout, the village of Pomfret Factory expanded to conform with Wilkinson's ideals of maximal efficiency, clanking and clacking as the laborers built it into a rigid form. This facilitated a change in lifeways from agrarianism to professional industrialism.

On behalf of the Pomfret Manufacturing Company, composed of Samuel Slater and several other wealthy Rhode Islanders, Wilkinson assumed responsibility for the new factory to be built at Cargill's falls. At the time of purchase in 1806, Wilkinson also acquired 1,000 acres of

the surrounding land, “a little mill village nestling between rocky hills, still covered with dense forests. ‘A wilderness’ indeed it looked in the eyes of the young Smith Wilkinson,” says Larned.[18] Wilkinson’s first task was to tame the wilderness. Wilkinson hired local laborers and set them off to extract timber and foundation stones, and by July 4, 1806, they raised the factory’s frame.[19] Of the 2,000 spectators who supposedly came out to witness the raising, few had probably ever seen anything like the factory. Once Wilkinson set to turning the tamed wilderness into profits, the inflow of extra cash to the community sustained the novelty for some time. Those who supported sustaining a permanent factory envisioned the future as a symbiosis between the capitalists and the town. Those who opposed it saw the beginning to the end of their lifeways, a regime that pushed production beyond the purpose of meeting personal, familial, and town needs. In the short term, both were right. In the long term, the relationship between the townsfolk and the factory capitalists turned into a codependence dominated by the wealthy and their profit drive, at ever heavier costs to the residents, the land, and the rivers.

The first mill operatives were a handful of male overseers and nine children, both boys and girls, to spin the cotton into yarn. They were shortly joined by a workforce of local women who sought the wages to supplement their family’s income or to increase their own wealth. Even the well-to-do women were known to seek mill work, sometimes at the cost of the position needed by their less fortunate neighbors. [20] Money began to replace land as the primary source of economic power. This turn extended empowered women, transients, non-landholders, and later, immigrants to purchase for themselves what previously they relied on others to purchase for them, or simply had to go without. For centuries, the farm and the

family had served as the primary and ultimate loci of economic production. Land, after a single exchange, came with nearly everything a family needed to be productive, and early worries over the decrease in available land, coupled with rising property costs, disempowered the many children birthed to work their parents' farms. Money, having to be exchanged continuously in order to empower both the payee and payer, hooked employees to employers and their profit drives. Wilkinson owned his land and money as well as control over the Pomfret Manufacturing Company's land and money. It turned Wilkinson into the village's de facto autocrat, its patriarch. The town was expected to devote its labor and resources to produce the company's profits, and only then could expect to be cared for, looked after, and shepherded. In Slater's paternalistic management style, operatives, their actual families, and other laborers such as mechanics and blacksmiths were to consider themselves—and hence, act—like Smith's children. All spaces, indoors and out around the village were tidied. The operatives received only the weekly sabbath day off from work, and Wilkinson expected them to spend the day in church. Children went to school or worked. At least once, he had his own actual relatives, along with some clerks and a minister's son, arrested and fined for playing stickball. "Everything went like clock-work," says Larned. "Accounts and morals were looked after with equally keen scrutiny." [21]

Pomfret Village grew slowly, and as it did, other capitalists began to buy up the surrounding mill privileges and build villages of their own. Wilkinson's mill sat alone at Cargill Falls until 1830, but the first expansion of manufacturing was to be his gain. James Rhodes, Wilkinson's partner in the Pomfret Manufacturing Company since the mid-1820's, purchased the mill privilege across the Quinebaug from Wilkinson's. Together, Wilkinson and Rhodes built

the new factory and its village, Rhodesville, grew like its predecessor. In 1839, the combined power of Wilkinson and Rhodes brought the Norwich and Worcester Railroad through the tri-town nexus. That year, they built the Pomfret Factory train station, and by the next year, trains were bringing in coal slave-picked cotton from the American south along with vagrant workers from around New England, and carrying out textiles and other market goods. Between then and 1850, various other capitalists acquired local mill privileges, and a total of six mills ran through this short section of the Quinebaug. Wilkinson shared the southern privilege with Harris; Rhodes, Nightingale, and Morse clustered about the central privilege; and Ballou occupied the northern privilege. Split as they were by the borders of three towns, the capitalists independently collected profits and paid taxes to their separate locales. This split their growing collective political power. Ideas to consolidate probably percolated since before the building of the Rhodes mill, and shortly, they would consolidate in the new town of Putnam.

The surrounding farmers saw that if the capitalists successfully incorporated their separate villages into a new town, the farmers would retain their market access but lose their voice on market matters. Perhaps regimentation can bring a thing to blossom. But regimes set limits, often harsh ones, that channel growth to the likings of their setters. Larned reports that even with Wilkinson hawking about, the town was a pleasant place to live, but she withholds her source on the opinion. Had things been so unbearable, the operatives were technically free to leave. But between 1807 and about 1850, most operatives were native-born Quinebaug residents.[22] They had nowhere to run except another mill village or, perhaps, to the wilderness reaches of farm fields and hunting grounds. But the new capitalist order was fast encroaching on their land and sovereignty. Whereas towns previously held the exact use of rivers to a vote,

"[the] river question," says Larned, "so perplexing in early times, was settled forever… Those 'tedious' and turbulent streams which had caused so much expense and contention, could be made to run mills instead of running off with bridges."[23] Convenience, water-power extraction, and labor extraction supplanted common deliberation and investment—common power. According to an 1811 excerpt of the *Windham Herald*, the number of operational cotton mills within a thirty mile radius of Providence (roughly to the Connecticut border) increased from 26 to 74 (about 185%), and the number of spindles from 20,000 to 51,545 (157%). "Are not the people running cotton-mill mad," they asked. [24]

The Town

Wilkinson, with his mounting wealth and power, variously acquired local land and donated it to the towns, usually for churches of varying denominations. In 1838, for example, he acquired the Mechanicsville Mill—and its village—in central Thompson. And so when talks began about incorporating a single town in the vicinity of Pomfret Factory, Wilkinson flexed. He and his son fought for Putnam, but the would-be parent towns resisted. According to one contemporary, the split over incorporation was primarily between local Democrats and Whigs. As to whom each party represented, common memory puts the farmers in favor of the Democrats and the wealthy in favor of the Whigs.[25] But that generalization glosses over too much history, and a proper investigation to the exact politics of local voters at the time exceeds the scope of this narrative. The more telling difference was over taxation, for "taxes would be increased enormously in both the old and new towns," as would property values.[26] This fared well for everyone who could afford taxes and land. But upon those who might still wish to

purchase land for their children, or to continue to afford to farm amidst rising market competition, the increase of taxes and land values sat as a burden. Bayles accuses the tax-based dissenters of being "miserly," and that at best suggests that the opposers included a number of wealthy residents, and at worst shows a clear disdain for the unwealthy. [27] "The old towns fought with great valor and persistency," Larned says, "but were forced to submit to the inevitable course of progress and 'manifest destiny'."[28] During the years from 1849, when the town was first officially proposed, to 1854, the area around Pomfret Factory, Wilkinsonville, Rhodesville, Ballou Village, Harrisville, and Morse Village went by the name of Quinebaug. In 1854, the capitalists changed their proposed town's name from the Algonquin "Quinebaug" to the decidedly American "Putnam", after the local wealthy farmer, national folk-hero, and General in George Washington's revolutionary cohort, Israel Putnam. And a fitting name it was. As a new competitor to the surrounding towns that were named for long forgotten places and persons, Putnam would seek national relevance.

Manifest destiny was spreading across the continent, and it had already found permanence on the east coast. Coined as a term in 1845, "manifest destiny" described the migration of white European descendents west across the continent past indigenous treaty lines to settle and build a nation for their Christian god, a divine mandate to establish transcontinental supremacy of the "American". Whatever heinous, negligent, or myopic acts settlers took to vanquish the indigenous "pagans" and their landscape of "wilderness", it was permissible by their religion and therefore righteous. At a national level, this meant ruthless land acquisition through mass murder and theft. In a more mundane sense, and to those who probably never even heard the term, manifest destiny meant fortifying hometowns for limitless

economic progress through extraction, production, and construction. What was good for America was good for Town of Putnam.

In Putnam, the built environment came to dominate the natural, as Larned observed from the town's industrial zenith in 1880. Deriding the town's oldest residents as "Sleepy Rip Van Winkles" for their dismay toward modern industry, she relays the extent to that the 19th century forever altered, or "progressed" the Putnam landscape:

> "Old landmarks have vanished, the forests are gone, the hills leveled or built up with houses…The roar of the Falls is drowned in the clatter of machinery and steam engine. The homes and workshops of an enterprising and varied population crowd the narrow vale, and stretch out over the hills on every side. Gradually and naturally the transformation has been effected."[29]

As the Quinebaug region traded its natural resources for abstract wealth, Putnam lost much of what gave it a sense of place. The incorporation of Putnam expedited its growing placelessness.

An 1877 map of Putnam (see Figure 1-1) shows a softened, even pleasanter vision of Putnam than Larned's. Captured at an oblique angle as if painted from a hot air balloon, the 1877 map lifts the viewers above Putnam's hills and mills, relieving the tension caused by any structural crowding. The Quinebaug reflects a milky blue sky that spans across the map's top quarter. On the far eastern horizon, the blue sky meets blue-green hills of mixed forest and pasture. Coming toward the viewer at the town's southwest edge, a smattering of houses leaves the distant hills behind. Sporadic residences become clustered residences become a full industrial township, recapitulating town's historic growth from separate mill villages into a

Figure 1-1: Lithographic map of Putnam, Connecticut (1877). Source: *UConn MAGIC Historical Map Collection (http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/historical_maps.htm*

proper municipality. Within the town, neatly arranged buildings line clear, earthen streets. Trees appear to have been planted or selected at equidistant intervals like fence posts. They provide shade and break up the built landscape while giving a sense of enclosure. They enclose neat expanses of grass—there's no wilderness here. Pedestrians and horse drawn carriages occupy the streets, keeping off the grass. All appears orderly and tame. Factory chimneys, like steeples and flagpoles, celebrate the dominion of human institutions over nature. A pair of trains, one northbound and the other southbound, rove like smoking caterpillars on faint tracks that lace the greenery. In the map's legend, grapevines and wildflowers grow behind the ornate typeface of the town's name. A fat, naked baby angel hovers around the P. In this version of Putnam, land improves from the presence of built infrastructure. Cartographic principles likely necessitated the artist to take some creative liberties—indeed, such lithographs were often commissioned by capitalists to capture the way they wished for the town to appear—and the message remains clear: obstructive river dams, gratuitous land grading, and black coal smoke show the capitalist social order as humanity in its most natural state, in a seat of rational control over nature.

The Slater system capitalized on more than the local landscape; it took preexisting agrarian lifeways and integrated them into the early mill system. Many early farmers, like Benjamin Cargill, did have a profit drive and desired to improve themselves by increasing their wealth and took up supplemental business endeavors to do so; early factories like Wilkinson's gave them new outlets to earn money as operatives, as hired hands, and maybe even as small mill owners themselves. Farmers conceived children for their labor power; industrial mills allowed poorer farmers to send their children to earn wages in the factories. Farmers felt

anxious about their children growing up and moving away, an all too common consequence of the rising cost of land; mill wages gave the towns staying power. Furthermore, mill villages attracted increasing populations and created produce markets. Between 1800 and 1850, the combined populations of Putnam's parent towns nearly doubled from 6,422 to 11,029.[30] Putnam incorporated with 2,319 residents, a little over 20% of the original parent town population. And the factories and mill village markets drew populations from the hinterlands to town centers such that about 75% of Putnam's initial population lived in the mill villages.[31] This new, agrarian adjacent population did initially increased local reliance on regional agriculture. But the railroad, with its cheapening effect on transportation, connected the Quinebaug Valley to western American farms that could produce in higher volumes and export their crops for higher profits. Now having to compete with these market forces, local farmers expanded the use of their land, turning timber reserves into monocultural crop fields. In this transformation we start to see the division of the region into two classes, the agrarians and the industrialists, or as local conventions termed them, the gods of hills and the gods of valleys.

As noted by other historians, the hill-mill dynamic functioned like a competitive symbiosis. Long term clashes between farmers and non-farmers were offset by mutual need. Capitalists significantly funded local schools, churches, shops, roads, and other infrastructure, and the local laborers found payment, knowledge, and a lasting legacy in their work. Farmers found increased demand for produce. In the valleys, with new shops and cheaper textiles available, residents were able to find and purchase previously unavailable goods that improved their ability to self-express. Larned notes that the early women laborers "could now afford many other comforts and luxuries" such as "pretty dresses and ornaments."[32] But as time went

on, the capitalists' desire for ever increasing profits—along with inventions like the steam engine that relieved capitalists from their dependence on waterfalls for standing up new factories and thus driving down production costs—skewed power in the mills favor. Whereas, since the dawn of agriculture, farmers had lived on seasonal timelines, marking a daily schedule based on sunrise, sunset, and what tasks the land required to remain productive, mill owners increasingly ran life by the clock. This is a little bit of an oversimplification as the exact arrangements between capitalists and laborers varied during the early 19th century. However, Pomfret Factory could be an exception. As accounting books thickened, railroad schedules tightened, and competition mounted, more forms of employment abounded inside and outside of the mills, and more employers adopted clockwork rhythmic rigidity that would have made Wilkinson proud. Local norms became regional norms, and local agrarianism, though still prevalent, began to rarify.

The City

In 1895, much the same forces spurred the Putnam city incorporation as had the town incorporation. The crowding population within Putnam's urbanizing industrial and commercial district desired infrastructural improvements one might expect in a city—better streets with better lighting, proper sewage, and police and fire organizations. So the town leaders commissioned a city charter. As the charter was being drafted, the *Putnam Patriot* asked its readers to suggest a name for the new city as was tradition at the time. These names were meant to be emblematic, rather than official, to market the town, such as Norwich's "Rose of New England", Willimantic's "Thread City", or Rockville's "City of the Loom". The suggestions

for Putnam's city designator came in—Cascade City, Thompson City, Wolf Den City, Patriot City.[33] "The right chord seems to have been struck at last," opined on resident, "'Patriot City,' as an emblematic name for the new municipality, is the best yet proposed."[34] Righteous as it may have sounded to a town pursuing manifest destiny, the vague moniker failed to stick.

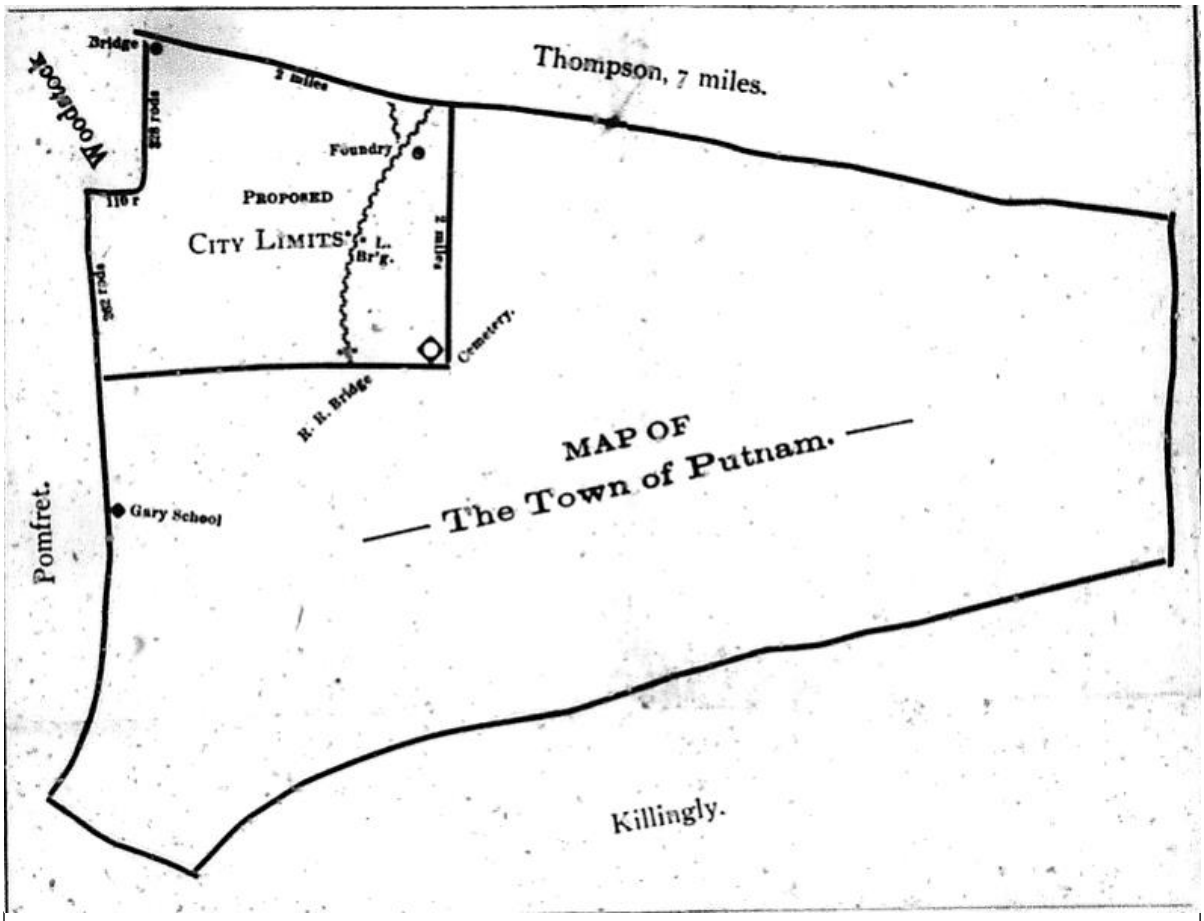

Figure 1-2: A speculative map drawn in 1895 for and printed in the Putnam Patriot to demonstrate the proposed city limits. The city was adopted that year and the boundary persists as the Town of Putnam's "Special Services District". Source: *Putnam Patriot*, *March 1, 1895.*

Overall enthusiasm for the city charter was limited. It was known that throughout the town, dissenters abounded, and editors lent the *Putnam Patriot* to the dissenters. Apparently, none took their offer. "The opposition cannot be answered unless they have some objection to offer," they wrote. Gossip had it that dissenters took issue with the term "city", and that the "large portion" of the city's opposition mistakenly believed that new boundary would require

paying for more governmental administration. [35] On the eve of the vote, editors published an anonymous column credited to "OPPOSITION". The supposed opposer pointed out that the City Carter committee was self-appointed and attempting to enrich themselves. The writer notes that the "Great Lord Mayor," according to Section 20 of the charter, would serve both town and city without a pay increase. The writer asks readers if they thought their mayor to be "so foolishly vain, so inanely fond of office and high sounding titles" to take on double duties without a pay raise. [36] The message was received, but not quite enough to turn the vote. Once counted, only 336 out of the 721 voters (47%) opposed city designation, a definitive but still troubling split if you believe that the opposition merely feared increased government. [37] Those in favor got their wish, and the City of Putnam incorporated.

The overtly conservative, pro-Charter editors of the *Putnam Patriot* clue us into whom they suspected to have voted against. The charter sought to increase infrastructural improvements denied to them by the state under a town designation. City advocates envisioned growing the population, increasing wealth, and "adding to the proud reputation" of what they saw as a primarily industrial town. In a column written by Charter Committee members, the advocates state that the town government lacked the power to provide "Established grades of car highways and streets; a more economical building and repair of highways; a fair system of sidewalks where travel demands it; macadamizing [paving] streets when necessary."[38] This, they assured readers, could be achieved over time with no tax increase. Furthermore, they would displace the $3800 spent in the previous year on "criminal costs" with a three-man police force to patrol the streets and "protect the good name of Putnam."[39] This appeal for better roads repeated throughout the season leading up to the vote.

In April, the editors wrote an editorial to appeal to Putnam's farmers. In the piece they quoted Edward "Colonel" Green, wealthy son and half-inheritor of Hetty Green's (the "Witch of Wallstreet) approximately $5 billion fortune, and his attempt to convince Massachusetts farmers of the profitability of paved roads.[40] The next week the editors answered their own editorial with an "anonymous" opinion piece lamenting the state of Windham County's roads. "We farmers," wrote the editors, "should be the ones most interested in the road question, as we are the ones who will most be benefitted by having good roads." They signed it, "FARMER."[41] By these clues, it appears as though a sizeable portion of the opposers was one again farmers unwilling to pay for new roads and who sought to avoid their own erasure.

Even after the vote passed, editors let local women publish the second annual women's edition of the *Putnam Patriot.* On the front page, Putnam women wrote what they saw as the city's most pressing needs. Of the eight opinions printed, five mention improvements to the towns to the town's circulatory system, the others envisioning better schools, better internal commerce, and intellectual advancement opportunities. While perhaps further thinking than their male counterparts, Putnam's women echo the prevailing attitudes of the time: increased production and personal improvement to facilitate national progress as manifest destiny. In this world, the social order had less to offer New England farmers. Local conceptions saw Putnam's history as a succession of factory installments and financial successes, as recounted by one anonymous letter to the editor (signed, "OLD TIMER"). The women's edition dedicated a full page to Putnam's notable historic places and people, penned by none other than Ellen Larned. "Putnam is 'essentially a modern product'," she writes. "Business facilities and manufacturing enterprise called it into being."[42] Her list of notable persons counts wealthy locals, capitalists,

and other professionals. She happens to mention a few farmers, as almost everybody farmed before and during the early 19th century, but only for their proto-industrial contributions. Putnam belonged to the industrialists and not the farmers, and hence, farmers would have had every reason to believe that the "improvements" of a city would hardly benefit them. Perhaps farmers deliberately littered the roads with "barks, sawdust… rotten potatoes, apples, and old paper," because they hardly depended on the roads as much as capitalists would have liked them to believe, or out of protest for being taxed for road construction and maintenance.[43]

The Flood

Between 1895 and 1955, Putnam changed more in shades than in shapes (see Map 2). In 1955, the town still had a warped grid layout, with new streets crossing around and between the old. More buildings, especially residential dwellings, encroached upon the river's flood plains. Both original railroads continued operations. The passenger depot grew into a proper downtown. The roads were paved and motor vehicles dominated where pedestrians, horse carriages, and for a short while, trollies once found safe passage. A few parking areas emerged between the retail stores and factories. The mills throve, although in increasingly competitive national and global markets, and the town's population rose from 6,512 in 1890 to 9,304 in 1950.[44] The gains came only with increased dependence on importation. Roads and railroads stretched out in every direction, forming what analysts have called the city's "tenticular [sic] radiation," a menacing, organic metaphor that would agree with the "blossom" metaphor, and therefor is insufficient.[45] Later planners would likewise envision Putnam's roadways, down to the tertiary streets, as a bodily circulatory system. From a step back, the roads appear to have

functioned then as they do today, less like veins and more like hydraulic pipes, disembodied from any lucid mind, automated to move economic materials from areas of high extraction to ones of high expenditure, and siphoning money away to larger, remoter reservoirs to be pumped back into extraction areas.

When the United States entered the Atomic Age, Putnam was still a mill town. In 1955, the *Putnam Patriot* ran as its banner, "1855-1955: 'A Great Past, Greater Future.'" The town's centennial year kicked off with a warning that at the year's town meeting, the mayor would call a vote to establish a new zoning committee. First on the City Engineer's zoning agenda would be an increase in the city's vehicle parking capacity. [46] The town approved the planning and zoning project, along with a city budget of $218,796,50, two-thirds of that would be raised through taxes. This set off months of debate over the mill rate. [47] The largest increase in budget expenditure went to the police department for the addition of two officers. To pay for this and other amenities meant primarily to benefit the city, they kept the city mill rate at 18 mills and raised the town from 30 to 33 mills. [48] The town received a Traffic Safety Award from the state for "no pedestrian deaths during 1954."[49] The reportage and editorializing in the *Putnam Patriot* affirm that, while structurally the city of Putnam felt old-fashioned, modern Americanist social sentiment proliferated through the town, and the mayor's push for zoning reflected a desire to match the physical layout to commercial desires.

In June, the *Putnam Patriot* celebrated the town centennial by running a supplemental issue containing four pages of articles about the town's history. The editors gave half of the page space to an essay on the veracity of a local legend concerning Israel Putnam and an encounter he had with a wolf in 1743. Legend says that, after waking up to find 70 of his sheep

slaughtered, Putnam roused his neighbors to hunt down and kill the last recorded wolf in Connecticut. Tellers have sensationalized the story since Putnam swaggered into the town tavern with the wolf on his shoulder. Locals have always favored it as their direct link to the nation's frontiersman heritage: "manifest destiny." In 1955, Putnam residents remembered the long period of pre-industrial agrarianism, the time of Israel Putnam, as a step toward industrial progress. They imagined early farmers as always dreaming of national greatness, as if the transition to industrialism was unanimously welcomed everywhere. One of the supplement's authors writes that the early farmers were attracted to Pomfret "by the fertile soils and water power possibilities on the Quinebaug." All that impeded their progress was "the lack of public roads." [50]

In August, 1955, when hurricane rains flooded the town and destroyed large portions of the City of Putnam, the people drew upon their sense of self, of town and national history, to plan for redevelopment. And they would do so much in the same manner as in 1855 and 1895, defining progress as pure economic increase through greater access—greater dependence on—external markets. They found themselves with the opportunity and the means to reconfigure the town's layout and infrastructure. Now that the Quinebaug posed a greater hindrance than help to local capital, planners sought to bring the river under complete control.

0 450 Feet

Historic Core Site Plan
1955 Historic (Pre-flood) Period: Putnam, CT

SOURCES
1. USGS Aerial Image, 1951
2. USGS Topographic Map, 1945 and 1955
3. Urban Renewal Area Chart, 1957
4. Field Review, August 2022

Drawn by Ethan Berriault, 2022
All features shown in approximate size and location.

- Historic Core Boundary
- Urban Renewal Boundary
- Building
- Road
- Parking (and misc. asphalt)
- Water
- Tree Canopy
- Brush
- Vertical Structure
- Railroad

- A Cargill Falls Mill (c. 1806)
- B Monohansett Mill (c. 1868)
- C Putnam Railroad Station (c. 1907)
- D Nightingale Mill (c. 1846)
- E Rhodes Mill (c. 1830)
- F Morse Mill (c. 1846)
- G Ballou Mill (c. 1847)
- H Belding Mill (c. 1872)

"The great flood of August 1955 was the final crashing blow which determined, actually or perhaps symbolically, the fate of those textile mills on the river which still precariously subsisted, for the flood finally destroyed or fatally damaged the very origin of their creation and existence, the availability of water power, a resource which had, in fact, long since become obsolete."

-M Rotival & Associates, 1958

N

0 450 Feet

Historic Core Site Plan

2022 Existing Conditions: Putnam, CT

SOURCES
1. USGS Orthoimagery, 2019
2. USGS Digital Elevation Model, 2020
3. Urban Renewal Plan Map, 1957
4. Field Review, August 2022

Drawn by Ethan Berriault, 2022
All features shown in approximate size and location

- Historic Core Boundary
- Urban Renewal Boundary
- Historic (pre-1900) Building
- Historic (1900-1955) Building
- Modern (post-flood) Building
- Building (n.d.)
- Road
- Parking / misc. asphalt
- Recreational Hardtop
- Water
- Tree Canopy
- Brush
- Vertical Structure
- Railroad
- Railroad Remnant
- Deciduous Tree
- Evergreen Tree

- A Lofts at Cargill Falls
- B Woodstock Line Co.
- C The Crossings Restaurant
- D Emsig Manufacturing Corp.
- E Former Rhodes Mill
- F Church Street Storage
- G Dalmik Well Drilling
- H Belding Mill Complex
- 1 Cargill Falls Hydropower
- 2 Putnam Hydropower
- 3 Toutant Hydropower

Part II: Town as Mall

Superfloods

The Aspinock Historical Society maintains a display that tells the story of the 1955 flood. Photographs, newspaper clippings, books, and even a short film document the flood story from the first hurricane warnings to personal recollections of the aftermath. People who have spent enough time in town know the basics of the story. The hurricane arrived and flooded the river, the river flooded the city and destroyed it, and the people rebuilt. The flood killed nobody. This last part perhaps matters most. It shows that floods confront us of our mortality and are therefore cultural events that belong to social history. For an example of the flood's social origins, consider that settlers initially built their houses, mills, and shops atop the steep bank west of Cargill Falls. Later, Wilkinson, Ballou, Nightingale, Morse, Rhodes, and other industrial capitalists expanded their mill villages to the flood-prone lowlands. In 1855, the town incorporated as "Putnam" after a local notable person and symbol of manifest destiny, the righteous conquering of the land for white, Christian men. Residents continued encroaching upon the river, crowding into the flood plain well into 1955. The flood "razed our factories, destroyed our homes," until the town was "cut in two," so goes our modern retelling.[51] We think of the residents as victims or unlucky bystanders rather than rational participants in making such a flood possible. Our flood story, from the coming of the hurricane to after the

rebuild period is vindicated by the 70 past floodless years and has long absolved us from enacting the kind of social change that would steer us onto a sustainable course.

Not all flood stories grant such absolution. A band of the Narragansett tribe gathered on a mountain for a bacchanal, or so starts one legend about a great Quinebaug flood. After four days of partying, the "Great Spirit" arrived and, angered by the display of human excess, flooded the mountain, killing all but one woman elder. Like all flood stories, this story is about destruction, death, and rebirth. It's an origin story. In this case, it accounts for the origin of Lake Mashapaug, a waterbody that drains into the Quinebaug River and that we now call Alexander Lake. White settlers might have made up the story to explain why they could supposedly spot the peaks of pine trees rising from the lake's depths. [52] Whether the story comes to us from settlers or the Narragansetts, the traveler and author John Warner Barber secured its place in Quinebaug social lore. This story and the Biblical flood story echo one another. Both chastise an ancient society for their excessive lifeways. Both climax when a divine spirit, the source of nature, unleashes its wrath, killing people and destroying the land, but also showing mercy by leaving survivors.

Meteorologic, hydrologic, and cultural conditions combine to produce floods of varying magnitude. We have 1-year floods (freshets), 10-year floods, and 100-year floods, the latter known in 1955 to the US Weather Bureau as a "superflood." [53] These designators describe not the frequency with which such floods occur, but the likelihood that each flood magnitude will occur in a given year. This means that in 1955, there was a one percent chance that a superflood would come through Putnam. What separates a freshet from a superflood? A river valley comprises a living system that, when properly respected by humans, self-rejuvenates

through the flooding process. Throughout the year, gravity pulls river waters toward the ocean. As it flows, the river pushes against the rugged northeast Connecticut terrain, and the terrain pushes back, twisting the river into a curvilinear sequence. Groundwater seepage, stream confluence, and regular rain keep the river flowing year-round. The river stays neatly within its banks, accepting all inflowing water so long as nothing impedes the outflow. In the American northeast, Springtime snowmelt and rainfall pour water into the valley, causing the banks to overflow, causing a freshet. The freshet wave peaks within a day or so. As it rolls downstream, the wave purges accumulated riverine soil onto the banks, thus maintaining the river's optimal depth. After the thaw ends, the wave lengthens and then settles. The river recedes into the banks, newly channelized, filtered, and prepared to accept the oncoming migratory salmon and shad. On the floodplains, new plants grow to catch rainfall and allow for evaporation. Roots drink up the water that transpires. The soil collects some water in depressions, facilitating evaporation. Uncompacted, porous soil spreads the water around—some water seeps back into the river, carrying soil with it. Taken together, these phenomena within the runoff cycle keep the river below its banks and comprise the valley's water storage capacity, "nature's flood control."[54]

It takes more to create a superflood. Two and a half centuries of settlement, industry, and development destined Putnam for the 1955 superflood. In earlier times, indigenous people and, later, settlers alike farmed the fertile flood plains from the year's freshet until either harvest or the first signs of late-season flooding when they packed up and abandoned riverine infrastructure and took to higher ground. By temporarily clearing the flood plains, they maintained the river's outflow path, harvesting fish and produce in a sustainable seasonal

rhythm. Agrarian dams did block the Quinebaug's outflow, but those dams often fell or could be removed at the town's will. It was the promise of increased individual wealth through industrial mill production that justified dam permanence. Riverside houses, stores, and civic architecture followed. Generations of tree clearing reduced the forest canopy, reducing evaporation and transpiration. Roads and railroads resulted in land grading and compaction; buildings and pavement rendered compact soil impervious. Despite these massive reductions in storage capacity, the Quinebaug River kept its rhythms. Whereas agrarian dams flooded farm fields, industrial dams flooded towns, causing infrastructural water damage. But the continued conversion of waterpower to mechanical, economical, and political power compensated the wealthy sufficiently to keep up the faith that townsfolk had in business, technology, and financial progress. The more the people encroached upon the river, and the more they relied on importation to meet their basic needs, the more disdain they accumulated for the nature. The town no longer had access to wild salmon, nor control over mill privileges, nor personal adherence to seasonal rhythms. They had instead the spoils of river exploitation and no expectation of encountering an equal and opposite force. The 1955 flood was the closest they came, and their solution to the superflood's destruction was to stiffen their disdain.

The Great Spirit left Loon Island to the Narragansetts as a reminder of the perils of human excess. In the Bible, God invented the rainbow as a promise to never flood the earth again. Aside from one faded placard at Rotary Park, the only landed reminders of the 1955 superflood are five flood control reservoirs several miles upstream from downtown Putnam. Starting immediately after the flood, the US Army Corps of Engineers set to controlling the river to protect downstream communities from future floods. Over the course of a decade they

installed five massive dams. The dams at East Brimfield and Westville Lake sit at the Quinebaug River headwaters while the Hodges Village Dam and Buffumville Lake hold up the French River. West Thompson Lake dams the confluence of the two rivers. These reservoirs artificially increase the valley's water storage capacity and concentrate it behind controllable dams. They subsidize the storage capacity that we surrender to soil compaction, vegetation reduction, impervious surface cover, and other human activities. During periods of high precipitation, the dams let through only as much water as the downstream channels can hold. When floods seem imminent, the Army can close the dams, accumulating hundreds of millions of gallons behind each, and then releasing the water slowly only when the flood threat settles. The Army has the power to reduce the effects of a 100-year flood to that of a 10-year flood. This instills confidence in business and real estate investors so that the reservoirs store as much economic value as they do water.

If only one person had survived the 1955 flood, it would have been Alice Ramsdell. The Army came by its reservoir properties through eminent domain, buying out and relocating the families that lived on the desired land so that they could dam it into a reservoir. As they began acquiring land for West Thompson Lake, the Army came to Ramsdell with their offer. She told the army no. Ramsdells had held the farm since 1825, and structures there dated back at least a further 90 years. The Army persisted, warning Ramsdell that her house would be in a flood zone. She believed her house to be safe, and told the Army that she was unwilling to take any further harassment, and also that she had a shotgun. The Army relented on the condition that Ramsdell acknowledge her risk and allowed her to rent the property until her death. And that's what she did until she passed away in 1995.[55] Although she triumphed in her own right, those

who recall Alice Ramsdell as the lady who beat the government do so only by taking a bit of creative liberty. She was, after all, a minority of one, representing her opposition to encroachment upon her personal land rather than a collective opposition to anything. Hers was a threat to the army's marketing narrative—"US Military forcibly removes elderly woman from ancestral farm amidst blasts of buckshot" might have drawn blowback and stall the project. But the farm is now gone. West Thompson Lake serves as a conservation area for migratory birds and other plants. Its 1,125 acres of forest host vital natural activity and its recreational facilities are a regional asset. But the dam, as a store of wealth, proliferates the disdain for nature that inspired the dam's construction in the first place. Though attitudes toward the natural world have softened, the infrastructure solidifies the old disdain.

We like the Ramsdell story because it is funny and unique. We call her a success only through the lens of individualism. Ramsdell stood on her own. She was one of the last of her kind. The riverside Quinebaug farmers with ancestral ties to the region have all but gone. They once formed whole communities throughout the region, sustaining themselves with the bounties of the river. Industry requisitioned the land and solidified new lifeways in concrete, brick, borders, money, and power. If national and global forces made industrialization inevitable, then they also made 20th century commercialization inevitable. With agricultural and industrial production leveled from their historic heights, Putnam's desire for continued economic growth could most expediently be fulfilled by drawing people in to spend money. Yet another reinterpretation of the past preceded the new, commercialized relationship between town and environment, altering for decades Putnam's social ecology.

The Regional Approach

In 1958, Rotival & Associates wrote and submitted to the Connecticut Development Commission a plan to socially reorder the Quinebaug Valley region. The *Action Plan for Quinebaug Valley* shows the firm's intelligent conception of how a diverse region can and should function. The planners still conceived of the human habitat in anthropocentric terms as a place for "full use without waste for profit and pleasure."[56] But they also shifted from old conceptions to newer, more holistic ones. Whereas industrialism created the hill-mill dichotomy that at best created mutuality on the capitalist's terms and at worst fostered competition between two unequal modes of living, the post-industrial stabilization of food-sourcing, along with the marketization of the remaining local farms, allowed Rotival & Associates to posit an interconnected regional system that connected the urbanized industrial centers to the outlying suburban and rural expanses. "For the Quinebaug Valley," they wrote, "like any human community, is like a living organism, composed of various organs and components… none has any meaning without the others."[57] The planners realized that each Quinebaug Valley town had its own economic base, and that through exchange they could support one another. However, their overall ideology remained fixed upon Americanized business worship. To the planners, Woodstock, Pomfret, Brooklyn, Canterbury, Moosup, and

Pachaug formed a base for "reproductive production" of what we might call renewable resources such as timber, agriculture, and "the products of the soil." Thompson, Dayville, Plainfield, and Wauregan served as centers for "transformative production," or manufacturing. And from the urban centers of Danielson, Jewett City, Norwich, and Putnam, the Quinebaug Valley would derive its core "service, social and governmental" functionalities.[58] The final planning choices would be left to each individual town, and their compliance to the regional design would vary.

The firm further diagrammed the Quinebaug Valley social order as a massive machine (see Figure 2-1). At the machine's top are the state legislative and executive branches, pictured as dark, cubed buildings situated behind the rest of the machinery, powerful, closed off, and

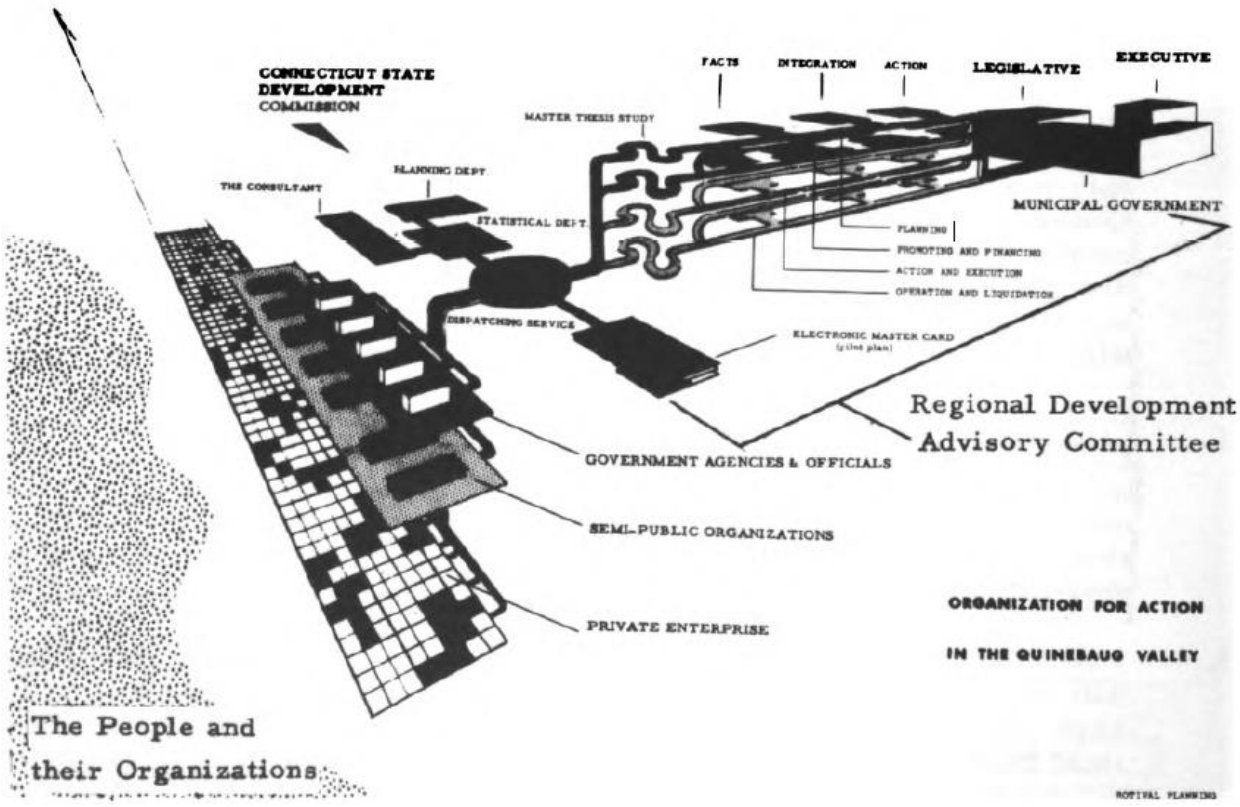

Figure 2-1: "Organization for Action in the Quinebaug Valley". Source: *Action for the Quinebaug Valley: a 1958 regional planning proposal*, p. 10.

therefore mandatorily trusted. The municipal governments sit directly beneath the state, helping to push the state's calls for action, its integrative plans, and "FACTS" through a vessel of a "MASTER THESIS STUDY" to statistical and planning departments. Toward the bottom, government agencies, semi-public organizations, and private enterprise receive direct lines to the outputs. Through these latter institutions the people interface with the higher forms of governance. A clean line separates the organic, wavy mass of "The people and their Organizations" from the machine, buffering the government and other institutions from potential popular dissent. This mechanizedl social order contrasts starkly the direct interaction once possible through village town meetings and neighborly cooperation. The planners estimate that the Quinebaug Valley could internally source one tenth of its required raw materials, making its survival fully reliant on external markets and landscapes.[59]

To justify their plan within a temporal context, the firm included a short regional history. Their account follows a scrubbed version of the frontiersman narrative. The white men encountered a "land of virgin forests" that had "emerged from upland swamps and lakes teeming with salmon and game, and flowed clear and clean."[60] The planners oversimplify indigenous presence. Yet instead of accusing the indigenous of being ignorant and in need of civilization and "progress," they claim that "the presence of mankind was scarcely evident. There was, at that time, complete equilibrium between man and the resources at his disposal."[61] The planners further claim that even in the presence of white settlers, the "Indian Period" of man's environmental equilibrium lasted until the Industrial Revolution. Then,

because of their "beautifully planned and designed" riverine infrastructure, industrialists achieved a new environmental equilibrium, one that improved upon the previous. The Great Depression of the 1930's shook this balance, and the flood of 1955 toppled it over. "It is clearly evident," they write, "that a new, third period is at hand, based on new concepts and a new balance of forces. The recent opening of two modern expressways is a major step in this direction."[62] With the valley providing no more than $40,000,000 of its $400,000,000 economy, it was lifeless without the external resources bought on premises of manifest destiny. To facilitate this exchange, Putnam's economic channels would have to flow free and clean on highways through towns protected from natural threats.

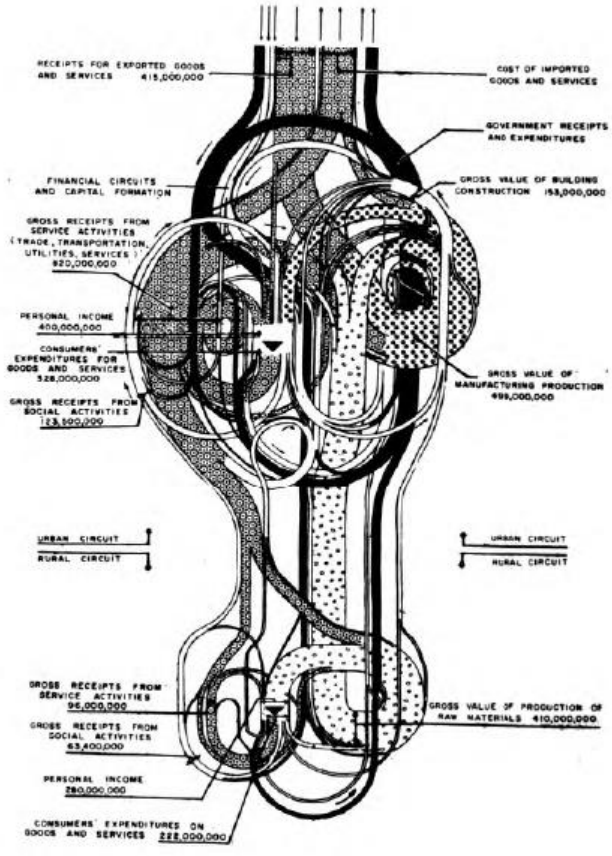

Figure 2-2: "Input-Output Diagram for the Quinebaug Valley". Source: *Action for the Quinebaug Valley: a 1958 regional planning proposal*, p. 14.

Zone X

It can seem impossible to quantify flood damage. Americans can and do put dollar amounts to everything, and the abstraction of daily life into numbers facilitates business as usual. Monetization alleviates society from critically evaluating its lifeways by reducing the struggle to evolve in step with the natural world mathematical calculation of how quickly infrastructure can be replaced.

Donations, grants, manhours, "affordable" housing, and even spatial data such as zones and lines of encroachment are all developmental shortcuts that point to a path of least resistance—the least dissent—for business as usual. But some flood damages translate poorly to numbers. How does one quantify the damages to one's identity incurred by unemployment and unhousing? How does one prove the value of crops lost prior to harvest? How much time and energy do folk have to put into forming and voicing their opinions on the rebuilding process?

In 1955, William G. Hoyt and Walter B. Langbein of the US Geological Survey published the book *Floods.* In their comprehensive description of floods as social events, they point out that while floods do destroy, they also provide value when so permitted by the social order. In the absence of dams, freshets recharge groundwater and clear the river of channel debris. Hoyt and Langbein also acknowledge that, when properly empowered, people gain a "psychological lift" following a destructive superflood.[63] Collective survival, clean-up efforts, and a sense of control over the future turn communities into coherent organisms that are fully realized in their symbiotic niche. When early Quinebaug agricultural communities accepted flooding as an annual occurrence—a resource, even—they also endeavored as a community during pre-flood evacuations and post-flood cleanups. Floods bound the community with common purpose. "One of the extraordinary highlights of the disaster situation," reported the *Putnam Patriot* in 1955, "has been the high morale of the citizenry. Not a single trace of panic has been detected within the city confines. An air of confidence in the future prevails. Volunteers multiply by the day to restore normalcy."[64] They laud community self-actualization as "extraordinary" on the return to "normalcy" rather than normalcy itself. When viewed this way, we see that the community, having veered from its "extraordinary past" when such efforts arose annually, has

normalized complacency. One cannot valuate that loss, though many would assume that it is worth the many gains.

An early estimate put Putnam's structural damage at about $8,600,000.[65] This estimate, combined with the town's future economic potential, influenced the amount of government relief entitled to the town. By the time Rotival & Associates submitted their regional plan to the state in 1958, Putnam had already progressed its plans further than the surrounding towns. The river had been dredged and channelized, the flood plains cleared of infrastructure, the new low-cost housing project nearly completed, and the Bridge Street bridge returned to full operation.

In 1957, Putnam's planning commission sent copies of *Rebirth of Putnam: The Master Plan for the Redevelopment of Putnam* to every town resident. It offered residents a peek at their town's potential future. "Putnam," they had already heard from Connecticut's governor, "through the flood has a great opportunity to become one of the leading communities, not only in the state and throughout New England, but the entire United States."[66] Strung together in a blue plastic comb binding, the small collection of text, maps, and conceptual artwork in *Rebirth of Putnam* met the town at this liminal threshold. The town's industrial peak loomed in the shadows of the recent past. The world war veterans were home having children. Lots of children. Residents fought the flood's battles and won. Spoils, in the form of government and

other outside funding, poured in. The Atomic Age arrived in Putnam and the Commission mailed their new vision in March 1957 like the Sears Christmas Catalog.

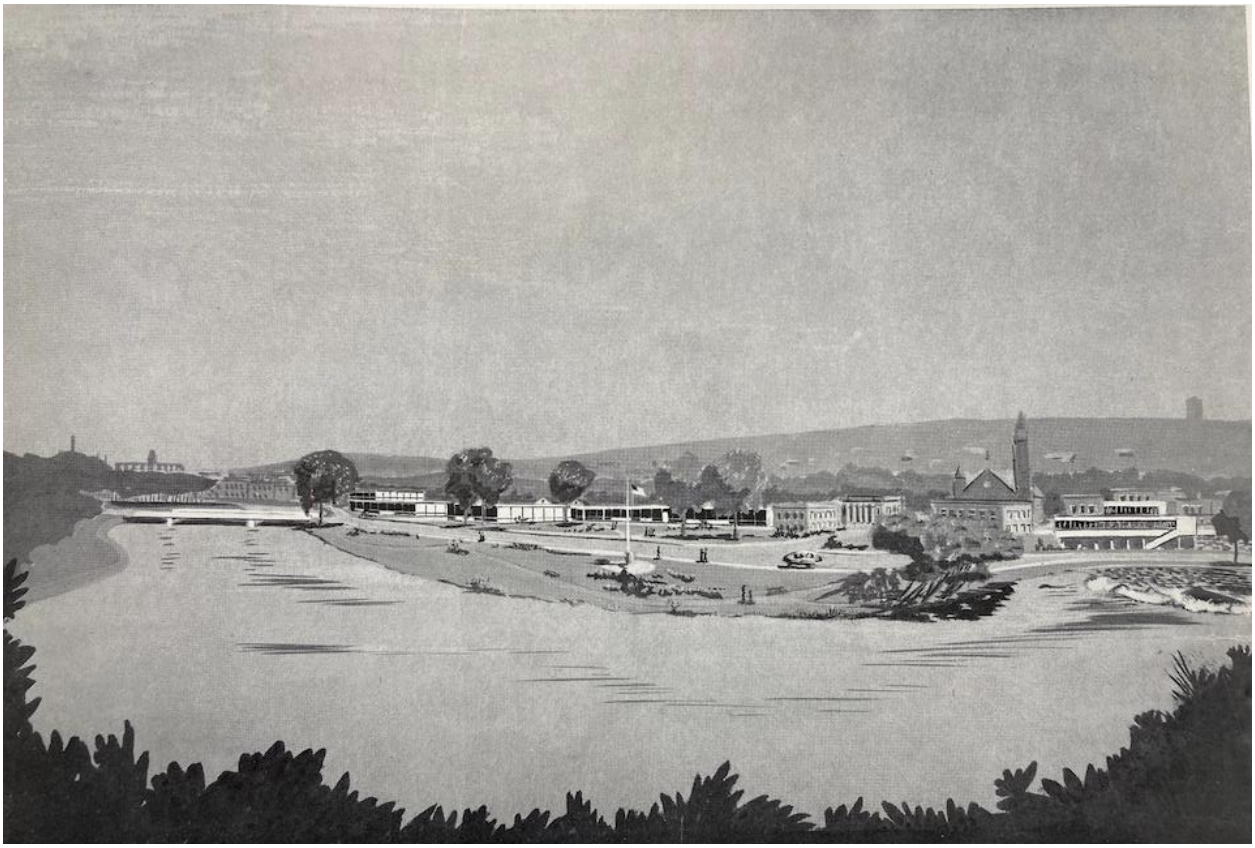

Figure 2-3: Putnam as envisioned for the Atomic Age, mostly river and sky with a slice of commerce. Source: *Rebirth of Putnam: Master Plan for the Redevelopment of Putnam*, 1957, no page.

The clearest visualization of the new Putnam vision appears as a full page, gray-scale painting (see Figure 2-3). The viewer peers upstream from above the bushes on the Quinebaug's southwestern bank. The sky consumes the view's upper half, the Quinebaug itself, the lower third. To the right, Cargill Falls splashes in a curve around stones, the dam invisible beneath. Across the river, a park directs pedestrians along the riverfront. There, a parent stoops over their child, a pair of adults embrace, a loner strolls by in peace. In the whole town, only a single, futuristic looking car runs along the new roadway, the roadway but a thin line softened

by edges of grass, hardly more imposing upon the landscape than the park's walking path. The old riverside houses have vanished without a trace, leaving nothing to remind pedestrians of Putnam's more hubristic past. Instead of houses, a lone American flag rises in the town's new center. To the right, old, familiar buildings—particularly the church's brick steeple—soak up the sunlight and melt into the distant hills. To their left, just beyond the flag and hence also centered in the picture, a single story shopping complex brandishes wide windows, the sunlit ones reflecting pure white, the shadowed ones, jet black. Large trees open their foliage before the shopping center, absorbing some of harshness. This vision required even more distortion than did the 1880 lithograph to portray the town as in harmony with nature. It also required obscuring several infrastructural changes to come.

Yet within its text, *Rebirth of Putnam*, also known as the general plan for its town-wide scope, explicated just about every major planning priority. At the top of the list was the issue of flood control. The Army would use federal funds to create the five new reservoirs. The Army would also use federal and state funds to "improve" the river channel through Putnam, including collapsible dams and a stop-log barrier. To clear the floodplains of residential buildings, the Putnam Redevelopment Agency would apply federal, state, and city grants to compensate property owners for their losses and sell the land "to private interests," bringing in tax dollars from the new shopping complex. In a multi-pronged approach to the housing problem, Putnam would build a low-rent housing project, regulate subdivisions, and zone the city to "protect property values." [67] As part of the zoning project, portions of the town would be segregated for industrial purposes, new roads would facilitate vehicular flow through the city, and parks would connect people to the land. A new school, a new community center, overhauls

in water and sewage lines, and a consolidated, "more efficient" government would attract new business and residents, reversing the 1895 city incorporation to achieve the same stated goals of incorporation. They planned to expand the town's population by 8,000, effectively doubling its tax base to lower costs while increasing revenue.[68] It was town planning by the "laws" of supply and demand.

In addition to the general plan, the planners composed separate Urban Renewal Plan. In it, they designated the water-level areas of the river's banks for urban renewal. They diagrammed the Urban Renewal area in a series of maps, each elucidating a layer of the town's physical and social characteristics. According to their plan, they would abandon most of the water, gas, and sewer mains that ran under the demolished residences and downtown sections. They took stock of every standing building and categorized it by its use (residential, commercial, etc.), differentiating even between single and multi-family residences. From the state of Connecticut they obtained the stream encroachment lines where, between those and the river's edge, no infrastructure were to be built (see Figure 2-4). These lines curve tight to the elevated landscape and then run jagged along the edges of the mill buildings that had proven resilient enough to withstand the worst flooding perhaps ever seen in the vicinity, and hence deserved to be considered topography.

Pictures from the front page of the *Putnam Patriot*, on exhibit at the Apsinock Historical Society, and in circulation during news-cycle lulls show flooding across the whole of downtown. The *Putnam Patriot* even reported that the "greatest mercantile damage" befell shops and houses all up and down the side streets along Main Street.[69] But with three out of the five flood control dams near completion, and the other two in the early planning or design phases, the

planners wrote out of their maps any possibility of a superflood in Putnam's downtown. They covered any flood risks with the provision that new developers shall build their first floor above the highest known flood crest, or to "the elevation to which that crest is or will be reduced by upstream flood control dams, or local flood protection works either constructed or under construction."[70] The planners did zone the widest non-encroachment areas for parks. High density residential zones that bordered the waterline were padded with existing industrial infrastructure. Otherwise, they retained the preexisting zoning. A National Flood Insurance Rate Map initiated in 1977 and effected in 1988 shows the Quinebaug just north of downtown to have 100-year flood vulnerability. The downtown itself, along with every space within the Historic Core, had been reduced to Zone X, "determined to be outside 500-year flood plain."[71] The Quinebaug was rendered inert on a semi-millennial timeline, protecting Putnam from all but the most anomalous conditions.

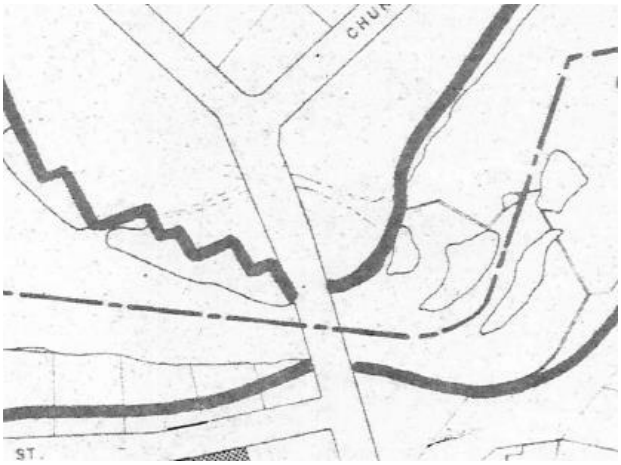

Figure 2-4: The line of encroachment (bold) runs smooth around Cargill Falls (right) and jagged around the mills (left). Source: Map R-312a – "Project Boundaries", May 1, 1957. Maurice E.H. Rotival.

The Rebirth of Putnam

The Urban Renewal Plan for the Quinebaug Urban Renewal Area (CONN R 12) in Putnam, Connecticut details the methods by which the town would prepare itself for sale to developers. With words, the document recreated the painting from *Rebirth of Putnam* and formalized it. The city would buy the flood prone lands and keep them as parks, although some

of the park space would be used for parking lots and other civic buildings. While the general plan touted the goodness of recreational facilities, the *Urban Renewal Plan* betrayed this guise, saying that the parks would "[enhance] the City's scenic assets to make it more attractive to new business and industry."[72] The rest of the land would go to commercial or industrial developers. The planners repeat several stipulations while describing the standards set for each renewal area. First, they describe the acceptable uses by subtype. The new industrial area between the old Monohansett Mill area and one of the new parks had to be "industries of a non-nuisance character," the types that don't create "noxious fumes and odors and produce objectionable noise."[73] Block G, in the heart of the downtown just below Main Street, would go to restaurants, bars, and relatively small shops, but would be considered to precious for gas stations or "heavy commercial stores."[74] Only the outer edges of Block K, on the north end of town near Providence Street, could be used for heavy commercial enterprises.[75] The Urban Renewal Plan's gem would go in parts of Blocks G, J, and K as a strip mall, although the planners called it a "unified retail commercial center," seen in the general plan painting.[76] Like every other development, the strip mall buildings would have to take a minimum square footage of flooring (100,000 square feet), keep their signs cropped close to the building and free of any flashing lights, provide pedestrian circulation (sidewalks) for "comfort and ease of movement," and of course, adequate parking. "The concept and design," the plan stipulated, "must reflect the most advanced architectural concepts and techniques so as to provide lasting interest and strength." It took six years from the flood for the Putnam Redevelopment Agency to find a buyer willing to meet these specifications. In 1961, the agency leased 15.7 acres to the newly

formed, New York based “Quinebaug Corporation”, giving them control of the land for 99 years.[77]

The renewed Putnam, according to the plan, would embody the best of the Atomic Age, neat and sleek in its looks, quiet toward the center and industrious through all hours. Park your car, park your keister, enjoy the riverside and spend some money. So important was this plan that, in its absence, Putnam would be “blighted in its center,” and the blight would spread outward. Therefore, renewal too had to begin at the center and radiate outwards. This required getting people and their vehicles into the town’s heart which, after the 1961 land sale, was a strip mall, eventually named “Riverfront Commons.” For access, they planned a new road, the “Riverside Artery.” Originally intended as a connector road from South Meadow Street to Water Street and the then northern terminus of Main Street, the Riverside Artery became much more. Widened and lengthened from its initial conception, the Riverside Artery as constructed was the culmination of 1950’s technological faith, commercial optimism, disregard for nature, and trust in government. Instead of utilizing the preexisting squared streets, the finished Riverside Artery ran a new course in step with the river, curving lazily along like the newly channelized mill pond. It cut through one of the new parks (now Simonzi Park), essentially reducing the useable park area by about one third. In fact, the road more closely follows the path of an unbuilt series of river dikes proposed by the state Water Resources Commission, defying any perceived threat from nature. In 1963, the town quickly and without opposition renamed it “Kennedy Drive” after the assinated president who had nothing to do with the town and possibly never even heard of it.[78]

Dissent during theis period was minimal. The townsfolk's biggest concerns tended to be less about the overall vision than the details of implementation. One dissenter, in a letter to the editor of the *Putnam Patriot*, lamented that the new riverside park spaces would go unutilized by merchants or producers and fail to produce enough profits for the town. A years-long struggle began for the restoration of passenger train service between Hartford and Boston.[79] Restoration never came. Concerns that the new shopping area would isolate the classic downtown and drive down business were allayed by assurances that the two would remain connected by Main Street.[80] Putnam was finally floodless as if the centuries of historical flooding had been a bug to work out of the system. The Quinebaug River was finally, as Richard Bayles had once put it, "reduced to proper subjection." [81] Unlike the river, Putnam's vehicular traffic was freed from its waterwheel-age designs. But the freedom of movement hardly liberated the town from the problems of traffic. The Urban Renewal Plan had explicitly claimed to "not solve the problems of congestion" that were easily foreseeable given the abundance of commercial parking lots. It relied instead on the state's plans to reroute Interstate Route 44—"Pomfret Street" in Putnam—south of the city while completing the new Route 12, our modern day Interstate 395, to facilitate traffic around the city. Kennedy Drive would make for clean passage through the city center. But the state never rerouted Route 44, and the massive Boomer generation practically grew up in their personal vehicles, preferring to drive themselves just about everywhere for everything and expecting storefront parking even in the crowded downtown areas. Today, the city regularly floods with vehicles (see Figure 2-#), but the town still struggles to devise new ways to generate revenue. The 1955 system works, but barely, and leaves little flexibility for change.

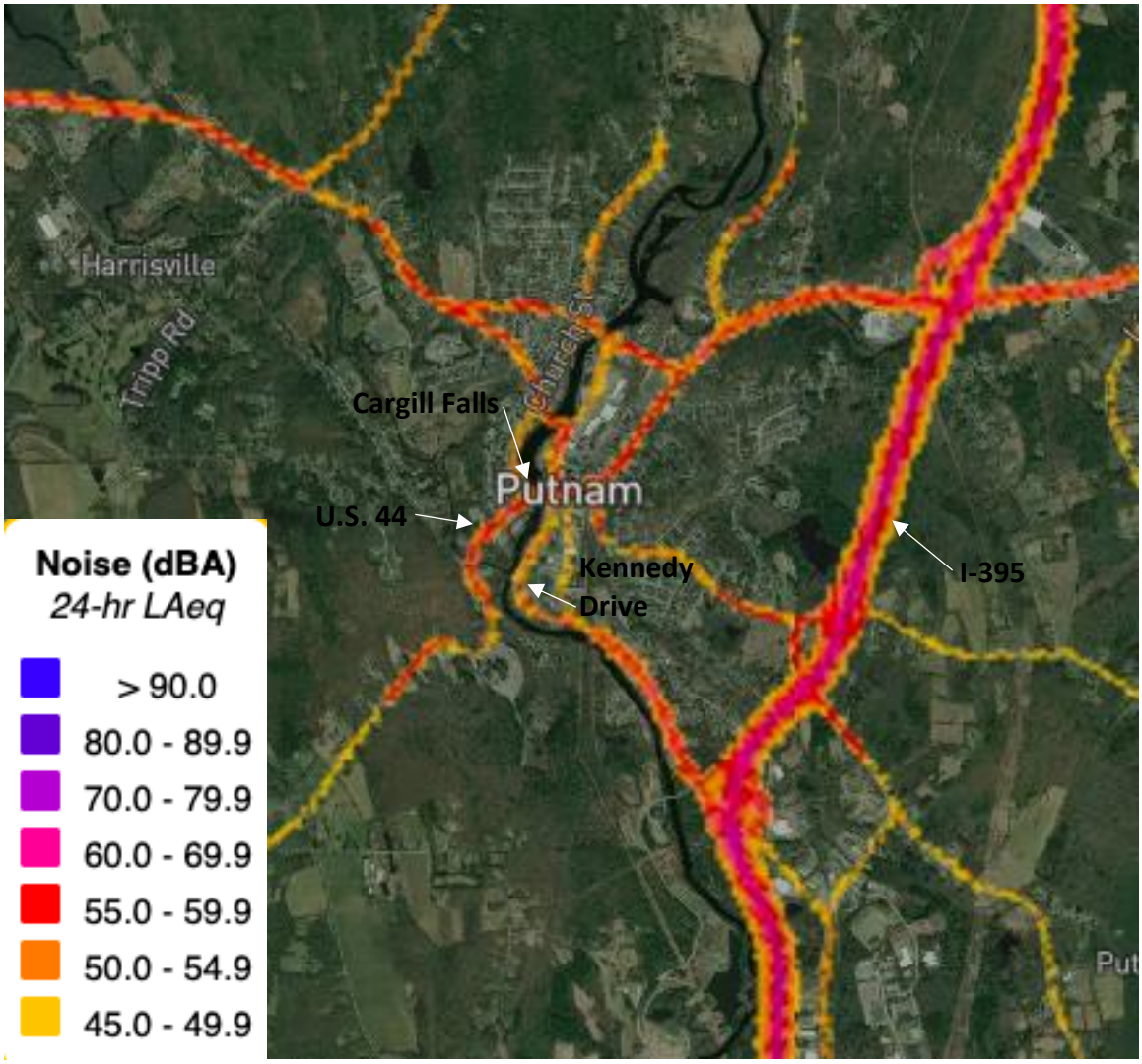

Figure 2-5: Aviation Road Noise Map of Putnam, 2018. This clip includes only road noise and excludes aviation and railroad noise. The data attempt to show noise levels over an average 24 hour period per location—including the extended periods of nighttime silence. (U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics, https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/568r-4fsv. Accessed July 10, 2022.)

Endnotes

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[3] Town of Putnam, CT, *Plan of Conservation and Development 2016*, (Putnam, CT: POCD Update Committee, 2016), 4.
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