

**DRAFT**

Comprehensive Plan: Primary Report  
Town of Westerly, Rhode Island



*A plan for vitality and  
sustainability*

# 2018 Comprehensive Plan: Primary Report Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

## *A Plan for Vitality and Sustainability*

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Welcome to the Primary Report of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan (Plan) for the Town of Westerly (Town). First and foremost, the purpose of this Plan is to strive for the achievement of an appropriate balance between conservation and development. Managing growth and protecting cultural and natural resources are complex and delicate tasks which this Plan intends to help ensure that both are accomplished in a way which enhances the quality of life for all citizens of Westerly. The Town encourages development which recognizes its assets and enhances economic opportunity while at the same time maintaining Westerly's unique characteristics. It is important to all residents that Town policies and actions address local needs while protecting and preserving the natural environment upon which the citizens and the local economy rely.

This Plan includes policies, goals, and specific actions which express the commitment of the Town of Westerly to these objectives. The Plan was developed by the Town of Westerly Planning Board, Department of Development Services (composed of the Building Office, Planning Office, Property Maintenance Code Office and Zoning Office) and the consulting firm of Mason & Associates, Inc. with the assistance of the Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Advisory Committee, public officials and local leaders. The Plan was the subject of a public hearing(s) held by the Planning Board on [date(s) of public hearing]. On [date], the Planning Board transmitted the Plan to the Town Council with its recommendation to adopt the Plan as an Ordinance of the Town. Following its public hearing on [date(s)], the Town Council took official action to incorporate this Plan into the Code of Ordinances.

### 1.1 Vision

This Plan envisions Westerly as a community which respects its history and traditions, values conservation and preservation and strives for a prosperous future for its citizens and businesses. The vision statement crafted for this Plan is as follows:

*The vision for the Town of Westerly is to preserve Westerly's quality of life for all generations as a safe and friendly community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and a vital economy with fiscally sound government.*

This Plan is the device by which all future proposals and initiatives – whether for conservation, development or infrastructure – shall be measured. Each proposal or initiative will be evaluated based on whether it advances the vision of the future as expressed in this Plan. The Plan itself is a document that changes only upon careful evaluation and with the deliberate intent to ensure that the needs and conditions which affect the public interest require adjustments in public policy. While the Plan is not a fluid document, the need for regular and disciplined evaluation of its progress and appropriateness is integral to realizing the vision for the future of Westerly.

The future vision for the Town of Westerly is entirely consistent with [Land Use 2025: Rhode Island State Land Use Policies and Plan \(Land Use 2025\)](#) which articulates a robust vision for the State of Rhode Island (State)'s future that includes a strong economy, a healthy environment and a rich quality of life. *Land Use 2025* is the guide to all planning and development in the State. In the fourth chapter of this Primary Report, *The Future*, the Town describes its long-term priorities and relates them directly to the goals of *Land Use 2025*.

## 1.2 Purpose and Intent of this Document

The [Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act](#) (Rhode Island General Law [RIGL] §45-22.2) requires that each municipality in the State adopt and maintain a Comprehensive Plan that provides the basis for rational decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality, avoiding conflicting requirements as well as reactive land use regulations and decisions. According to RIGL §45-22.2-5, all Cities and Towns must:

*“prepare, adopt, amend, and maintain comprehensive plans, including implementation programs, that relate development to land capacity, protect our natural resources, promote a balance of housing choices, encourage economic development, preserve and protect our open space, recreational, historic and cultural resources, provide for orderly provision of facilities and services and are consistent with the goals, findings, intent, and other provisions of this chapter and the laws of the state.”*

Further, RIGL §45-22.2-6 specifically states this Plan is to be *“internally consistent in its policies, forecasts, and standards and must include assessments and discussion in those planning areas enumerated in that same section.”* This Plan satisfies that State mandate.

This Plan is the most recent reiteration of comprehensive planning in the Town, which first began in the 1960s, and is the third to be adopted since passage of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act in 1988. The first Comprehensive Plan following the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act was adopted in 1992. The 1992 Comprehensive Plan was amended in January 2007 through an update of data, goals, policies and actions. The 1992 Plan was subsequently repealed and replaced upon the legislative adoption of a new Comprehensive Plan in February 2010. With the adoption of this Plan by the Town Council, the intent is to repeal the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and replace it with this updated twenty (20) year vision for the Town of Westerly. The 2018 Plan is intended to satisfy the requirements of the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act* as amended through 2011.

Through the Town Council’s incorporation of this Plan into the Code of Ordinances as Chapter 10 under Part I Administrative Legislation, the Plan becomes not only an official statement of Westerly’s future direction and guiding document but also legally binding on all future land-use decisions made within its jurisdiction. After approval by the Rhode Island Division of Planning for consistency with the goals, findings and intent of state land-use policy, other state agency activities and projects will also be required to adhere to the terms and conditions outlined in the Westerly Comprehensive Plan.

### 1.3 Summary of the Plan

The complete Comprehensive Plan ordinance for the Town of Westerly consists of three (3) components, as follows:

1. *The Primary Report*
2. *Appendices I & II*
3. *Mapped Figures*

This document, the **Primary Report**, is the pivotal component of this Plan and will guide the day-to-day implementation and use of the Plan itself. In addition to the introductory chapter, the Primary Report includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 2: Community Character – this chapter describes the make-up of the community, some of the concerns of its citizens, its history and diverse neighborhoods. With a focus on resiliency planning, this Chapter explains the importance of maintaining the distinct character of Westerly and the need for careful planning to allow Westerly to grow and prosper while preserving the quality of life that all enjoy.
- Chapter 3: Inventory Summary with Findings & Implications – This chapter provides a brief summary of each of ten (10) foundational planning components of the Plan and the associated findings and implications that shape the overall direction of the Plan. A complete inventory of current facts, figures and conditions related to those planning components as of [date of final draft] is provided in Appendix I to the Plan.
- Chapter 4: The Future – “Where do we want to be in 2038?” The answer to this question is provided in this chapter by way of a summary of local priorities in the context of *Land Use 2025*, a build-out analysis based on existing zoning, a Future Land Use Plan, and a discussion of the financial implications of implementing the Plan.
- Chapter 5: Implementation Plan – A plan is only as good as the quality of its implementation. This chapter details the goals, policies and specific actions necessary for successful implementation. It also includes responsibilities and timeframes to ensure clear accountability and tracking of progress over time.

**Appendices I and II** to the Comprehensive Plan contain important background information and documentation to support the priorities and policies within this Plan. Appendix I – Inventory (Inventory) is central to this Plan’s development and provides a detailed snapshot of Westerly’s “as-built” conditions and resources. It consists of the following ten (10) planning areas:

- Existing Land Use and Zoning
- Housing Opportunity
- Economic Vitality
- Natural Resources
- Infrastructure and Energy
- Services and Facilities
- Transportation Network
- Open Space and Recreation
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Natural Hazards and Resiliency

The Inventory documents local characteristics and trends regarding resident population composition, land use, housing, the natural environment, economic development and provision of services. It reveals future conservation, development, services and infrastructure needs and provides a comprehensive source of current information that can be used by the Town, its citizens and businesses in their daily activities. Empirical data required by State planning standards, including State planning guidance, are included in the Inventory. The Inventory is intended to meet the standards for Comprehensive Plans approved by the Rhode Island State Planning Council in January 2016.

During the initial stages of the 2018-2038 Plan’s development, a newly constituted Comprehensive Plan Citizens’ Advisory Committee (CPCAC), with the assistance of the Town’s Planning Office, created an initial work plan and schedule including target dates for public meetings of the CPCAC and its several subcommittees. Visioning sessions and policy discussions began when a consultant was retained. Town staff and the consultant prepared for and attended no fewer than twenty (20) public meetings, including four (4) public workshops with the full CPCAC, weekly and/or biweekly coordination meetings with topical subcommittees, Town staff and public officials, a day-long stakeholder’s review workshop and overview of the Comprehensive Plan, a stakeholder meeting specifically to discuss housing and social service needs of the community and a joint Town staff-public workshop addressing natural hazards. In August 2015, the CPCAC revised the goals, policies and actions contained in the 2010 Plan and began the consideration of new land policies in answer to the new expectations of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act and in anticipation of the release of Standards and Guidance from the Rhode Island Division of Planning. Public meetings resumed

in March 2016 following the reengagement of the planning consultant. Further discussion of public outreach including media involvement is described in Appendix II – Public Engagement.

The **Mapped Figures** are collected together and included at the end of this Plan with general descriptions of each map provided and referenced to the planning area in focus. While these maps may be used for information, guidance, and illustrative purposes, as noted on each map, no warranty can be made relating to their spatial accuracy, reliability or completeness as none were the product of a professional land survey. Similarly, each map is a contemporary visual which means it may become less current or accurate over time. A wide collection of datasets made available from various Town departments including the Engineering Division, Information Technology Department, Planning and Zoning Office and Tax Assessor's Office, were used to produce these maps, as well data obtained from the Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS). Datasets are layered and included within each map to create visualizations which can be relied on to make inferences. All maps included in this Plan meet the mapping standards for the Comprehensive Plan approved by the Rhode Island State Planning Council in January 2016, including titles, legends and distinguishable symbology.

### *Using the Plan*

The adoption of the Comprehensive Plan is a commitment to a coordinated and inspirational vision for the future of Westerly. The Plan's success will be measured through the committed use by elected officials, appointed boards and commissions, Town municipal staff, residents and businesses.

- Elected officials will use the Plan to align their priorities with the community's vision of the future as described in the Plan and should use this information in adopting local codes and ordinances that support the Plan's goals. The Plan provides both background information and leverage as elected officials fulfill their legislative responsibilities as well as dedicating financial and administrative support to implement the specific actions identified within the Plan.
- Local boards and commissions will assess the desirability of development applications by their conformity to the Plan, adopt policies and procedures that actively assist those initiatives in furtherance of the Plan's goals, and develop budgets and/or investment alternatives that are consistent with those described in the Plan.
- Municipal Staff will use the Plan when interpreting legislative mandates and regulations, making administrative decisions, enforcing development-related codes and establishing priorities for work efforts. The Plan provides an overarching framework for developing individual and team objectives, as well as a context for the many daily decisions that are made in providing services to the citizens of Westerly.
- Finally, local residents and businesses will use the plan as a reference when making residential or commercial location choices, supporting programs to preserve our cultural

and natural resources, appealing for financial or legislative support, and evaluating the effectiveness of local government and elected officials.

#### 1.4 A Final Word

The Comprehensive Plan represents the collaborative effort of professional and volunteer citizen planners, municipal staff, the Town’s planning consultant, and the citizens of Westerly. Guided by the CPCAC, the process has required an extraordinary commitment over time to complete a Plan for Westerly that is both practical and visionary. The contributions of all involved – their efforts, passion and thoughtfulness – are reflected in countless ways throughout this Plan and are very much appreciated.

##### Town Council

|                                   |                   |
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## **Chapter 2. Community Character**

Perhaps more than anything else, a Comprehensive Plan is intended to encourage the preservation of a municipality's unique values and existing character while setting forth the goals, objectives, policies and actions which will guide that municipality in shaping its future. This chapter addresses the makeup of the Town of Westerly, its history, the specific character of its different constituent neighborhoods and the concerns and aspirations of its citizens.

### **2.1 Community Make-up and Concerns**

Residents of Westerly have continually supported a strong affection for their Town. They see it as a special place with a character all its own. This character reflects its unique geography – its spectacular location along the Pawcatuck River and the Atlantic Ocean – as well as the charm and history of its active urban neighborhoods and tranquil rural areas.

Modern Westerly's land was first inhabited by members of the Mohegan, Narragansett and Pequot tribes and diversification of its population began in the seventeenth century with the arrival of English colonial settlers. Immigrant families who came to work in the town's mills and quarries during its industrial boom in the later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century further diversified the population. Many families who vacationed and summered along the shoreline also came to permanently take residence in the Town. Despite the range of its origins, the local citizenry remains united in the pride they feel for the elements which give the Town its special character.

There is universal appreciation of the architecturally and aesthetically significant downtown core. Centered around beautiful Wilcox Park, the Downtown is bounded by Broad Street, Canal Street and High Street – all with largely preserved 19th and early 20th century streetscapes and the ambiance of a small but prosperous community of an earlier age. Its sensitive renovation in the late 20th century has become a source of great civic pride. Westerly's shoreline communities, including magnificent beaches (the first open-ocean beaches along the New England coast as one travels east from New York) and marine waters are enjoyed by beachgoers as well as boaters and fishers. Together with their largely residential architectural treasures (which are another source of pleasure and pride for the residents of the Town), most Westerly residents speak of the Town as a place where they feel comfortable and safe. However, residents share great concern regarding over-development and climate changes which could erode the landscapes of our community and potentially threaten the overall quality of life in the Town.

The high cost of housing within the Town and the limited availability of high quality employment for area residents, particularly for the young of the community, continues to be a major concern. There is a recognition that commercial sprawl has turned a significant portion of Route 1, including Granite Street, Franklin Street and Post Road, into a generic commercial

arterial strip which lacks character. There is a strong desire to reverse this trend and refocus development which promotes a sense of place and a reflection of our small-town charm. Traffic and congestion during the summer months regularly clogs the gateways into the Town, and parking is an issue in Downtown and other popular destinations such as the commercial waterfronts along Bay Street in Watch Hill and Atlantic Avenue in Misquamicut. While Route 78 is advantageous to the mitigation of traffic congestion downtown during the summer season, it divides several of Westerly's neighborhoods and diverts commerce from downtown in the longer off-season.

Residential development, particularly in our shoreline communities, raises concerns about the loss of open space and scenic views, as well as the degradation of the salt ponds. There is concern that over-utilized and/or unregulated development will erode the character of the community and the residents of the Town have expressed widespread commitment for the preservation of open space and the protection of the Town's natural resources within these sensitive areas. Natural hazards continue to be a major concern for the Town of Westerly due to historical experience with significantly destructive hurricanes and tropical storms such as the Great Hurricane of 1938, Hurricane Carol in 1954, Hurricane Bob in 1991, and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Other major flooding events not associated with hurricanes or tropical storms have also substantially impacted the Town, such as the Great Rhode Island Flood of 2010.

## 2.2 History

Prior to English colonial settlement, the area of modern-day Westerly was within the territories of the Mohegan, Narragansett and Pequot tribes and was called Mishquamicuk (anglicized as Misquamicut), the Narragansett word meaning "land of red fish," referring to the salmon which today appear on the Town's seal (see Table 2-1). The first English settlers of the region arrived in 1648 and by 1660 the Native Americans had conveyed to the colonists a tract of land spanning twenty miles along the coast and ten miles deep into the interior which included what is now Westerly and parts of Charlestown, Hopkinton and Richmond. The Town of Westerly was later incorporated in 1669 with the current legal boundaries being established in 1757 (by which time Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton had separated from Westerly). The Town's boundaries include the Pawcatuck River (which separates Westerly from Connecticut to the west and from Hopkinton to the north), the Atlantic Ocean (Fisher's Island Sound and Block Island Sound) to the south, and the boundaries of the Town of Charlestown to the east.

Farming and fishing were the major occupations in the early days of Westerly. The Town's location along a navigable river and the coast also contributed to Westerly's significant maritime history. Shipbuilding industries thrived along the banks of the Pawcatuck River in the 1700s and 1800s and were soon followed by textile mills that were developed along the river in the early 19th century. By 1850 steamboats were being constructed and making runs between

Westerly Stonington and Groton, Connecticut. The completion of the Stonington and Providence Railroad in 1837 also provided Westerly with a rail connection between New York and Boston.

The discovery of world-class granite in the 1830s launched a new industry in Westerly. The fine-grained local granite was recognized to be of superior quality and was soon in great demand from all over the country and abroad. Westerly granite is featured in architectural elements of structures such as Westerly Town Hall, the War Memorial at Wilcox Park and the United States Post Office downtown and is prominently visible in various handsome buildings elsewhere within the Town and across the United States. The rise of industry was accompanied by an influx of immigrant workers, primarily from Ireland and later from southern Italy.

Westerly's future as a resort community also began in the 1830s with the building of the first of several grand hotels in Watch Hill. These attracted a clientele from as far away as the Midwest. Initially, these visitors arrived by train at Stonington and from there by ferry. By the early 1880s, when the first major farm tract in Watch Hill was subdivided for building sites, Westerly's transition to a location for summer homes began. At about the same time, a substantial summer community was established in Weekapaug and shortly thereafter, a simpler one was established at Pleasant View (today known as Misquamicut).

After World War II, development in Westerly, like many towns in Rhode Island and the rest of the country, expanded greatly. There was significant commercial expansion along Route 1 with construction of several strip malls. Large areas of farmland were developed for housing subdivisions, some of which include a substantial number of multi-family homes. Typically, the lots in these subdivisions are square or rectangular in shape and correspond to minimum zoning requirements. More recently, new residential developments consist primarily of single-family homes and several subdivisions have been constructed using cluster zoning.

### 2.3 Climate

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) places the Town of Westerly within the humid continental climate zone, described as having mild to warm summers and cold winters. Recorded temperatures are indicative of this, ranging from an average temperature of 32 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) in January 2016 to an average temperature of 73.8°F in July 2016. Likewise, accumulated precipitation in 2016 totaled 39.46 inches ([NOAA Online Weather Data](#)) While major storm events are not common to the area, Westerly has been impacted by several tropical cyclones, blizzards and nor'easters including the Hurricane of 1938, Blizzard of 1978, 2010 Nor'easter and Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

## 2.4 Westerly Neighborhoods

In addition to its notable Downtown, Westerly is comprised of several distinct communities each with its individual character and history. Several of these communities, such as downtown, are designated Historic Districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A number of these communities are also serviced by fire districts which provide local quasi-municipal functions funded by special district real estate property taxes. These communities take great pride in their individual character. For instance, the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation developed and successfully implemented a process of establishing a greenway around and leading to Weekapaug 20 years ago through the purchasing of land and development rights.

The **Neighborhoods Map (N-1)** is a record of Westerly's local neighborhoods as identified through the involvement of residents, neighborhood association representatives and Town Staff. Through this input process, a total of twenty-nine (29) neighborhoods have been recognized. Using available information through RIGIS, the Town's land evidence records and other maps and information, these neighborhoods evolved into the nineteen (19) areas indicated in the **Neighborhood Planning Areas Map (N-2)**. These neighborhood planning areas are used to facilitate the discussion of the Town's future land use.

### 2.4.1 Downtown Westerly

Downtown Westerly has developed as the commercial and civic center of the Town. This area is divided into four (4) neighborhoods which include Downtown and Main Street, Wilcox East, Granite Street and State Street, and the North End. The Downtown and Main Street area is anchored by a green core, Wilcox Park, and is defined by commercial streets (Broad Street, High Street and Main Street) and a residential roadway (Grove Avenue) that surround it. Along Broad Street are significant late 19th and early 20th century eclectic masonry structures, including Christ Church, Westerly Library, the Town Hall and Municipal Court House, a United States Post Office and the headquarters of the Washington Trust Company. The former Industrial Trust Bank building and the Ocean Community YMCA located on High Street, the United Theatre (currently undergoing restoration) and the Martin House (also known as the former Savoy Hotel) on Canal Street are also located in this area. Along High Street, two-story brick commercial buildings have storefronts with office and/or residential space above. Other significant structures downtown include the Westerly Armory and Westerly Train Station on Railroad Avenue. Main Street, which runs from Broad Street and the Pawcatuck River Bridge to Beach Street and Margin Street, is largely commercial; however, redevelopment of a significant portion of the area has been discussed in the past through such initiatives as the Westerly KeepSpace program. Wilcox East, located on Granite Hill, to the east of Wilcox Park, also contains a mix of professional and residential uses with an active neighborhood association.

Stately nineteenth-century houses primarily line both sides of Elm Street and include Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate and Second Empire structures. Similar styles of residential structures are also situated along Margin Street. Outside of these locations the area surrounding the central core of downtown, from the railroad on the north to Wells Street on the south and from the Pawcatuck River on the west to Granite Street on the east, is primarily nineteenth century and early twentieth century small lot, single and multi-family residential, identified by two- and three-story large frame structures. A significant number of the buildings are close to the street or infringe on standard setbacks and primarily zoned as high density residential. While the zoning district allows for a variety of housing types, some of the more traditional residential architecture in this area would not be allowed within the current zoning code because the existing development configurations exhibit setbacks that are smaller than the code allows. The street pattern in the core area generally consists of irregular grid arrangements.

Generally, north of the railroad is considered the North End, a late nineteenth century neighborhood which became the home of successive waves of European immigrants who came to Westerly to work in the textile mills and granite quarries. The former village of Stillmanville once extended over the Pawcatuck River (the Stillmanville Bridge still exists today) into the village of Pawcatuck, Connecticut. Today, its portion in Westerly has been largely supplanted by the North End, as well as the southern extent of the Potter Hill area. In recent years, the Town, together with multiple private and public funding sources, has made a concerted effort to revitalize the North End while preserving its historic character. These efforts are most visible on Pierce and Pond streets where there have been many restorations of buildings and landscapes.

#### **2.4.2 Mill Villages**

Along the northern bounds of Westerly, bounded by the Pawcatuck River as it flows west and south, are the mill villages which developed as distinct clusters of workforce housing, each with its own iconic mill – Bradford, Potter Hill and White Rock. Typical land uses in the mill villages include industrial, residential, open space, vacant land and undevelopable land. These areas have a significant number of nineteenth and early twentieth-century structures.

Most homes in these neighborhoods are two or two-and-a-half story single-family or duplex structures. Zoning in this district varies between low, medium and high density residential, industrial and open space/recreation. As in the downtown area, some of the existing traditional and residential architecture in this area would not be allowed by the current zoning code because existing development configurations exhibit setbacks that are smaller than the current code allows. The street pattern in this area includes concentrations of irregular grids surrounded and connected by winding roads. While not defined by its own mill, the

Boombidge neighborhood also shares some of these characteristics due to its location between White Rock and Potter Hill.

### **2.4.3 Shore Communities**

Along Route 1A are the coastal communities of Avondale, Chin Hill, Haversham, Misquamicut, Sea Glen, Shelter Harbor, Watch Hill, Weekapaug and Weekapaug Terrace. Each of these areas exhibits their own individual and distinctive character but all have the common element of seasonal and summer homes. Two of these areas, Watch Hill and Misquamicut, attract particularly large concentrations of summer visitors to their shoreline commercial areas. In recent years, large areas of farmland surrounding these communities have been preserved from subdivision and development by the Westerly Municipal Land Trust, as well as by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation and Westerly Land Trust.

Avondale, situated along the Pawcatuck River just north of Watch Hill, was primarily a fishing and boat-building village originally named Lotteryville. This area, which is predominantly residential with several interspersed boatyards and marinas, continues to retain its quaint waterfront character. To the west of Avondale lie the neighborhoods of Chin Hill and Sea Glen. Bounded by the southern extent of the Dunn's Corners area to the east, Chin Hill and Sea Glen are residential neighborhoods largely developed in the 1980s and 1990s with a small number of tourist and recreation-oriented businesses.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Watch Hill transformed itself first into a colony of grand hotels and, soon after, a community of large summer cottages, mostly in Shingle Style, Arts and Craft, and Colonial Revival. However, an eclectic mix of Norman, Mediterranean and even Bermudian designs are also interspersed throughout this area. Watch Hill's Bay Street has always been a vibrant commercial center along Watch Hill Cove at the estuary of the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay. Napatree Point, which extends westward from the village, is a 1.5-mile barrier beach containing the Napatree Point Conservation Area and is enjoyed by summer beach-goers and naturalists who know it as one of the prime shore bird and migratory bird preserves in the northeastern United States. Watch Hill's Flying Horse Carousel is arguably the oldest carousel in the nation and the Watch Hill Lighthouse has served as a beacon at Watch Hill Point since the colonial era.

Misquamicut, once known as Pleasant View, is located between Watch Hill and Weekapaug, and lies between the Atlantic Ocean and Winnapaug Pond. Its principal roadway, Atlantic Avenue, contains a mix of uses including residential, commercial and mixed developments and includes three (3) prominent beaches: Misquamicut State Beach, Wuskenau Beach, and Westerly Town Beach. Residential lots within Misquamicut are small, and many of its mid-20th century structures are generally modest in size. However, existing houses in this highly

desirable area are frequently being renovated or replaced. New or renovated structures are frequently constructed larger and completed for year-round occupancy. Many of these properties are in flood zones and are being built more resiliently to varying heights above base flood elevations.

Weekapaug and Shelter Harbor are primarily residential, with the exception of an inn located in each community. Haversham, which lies between Weekapaug and Shelter Harbor, is entirely residential. Weekapaug surrounds the western end of Quonochontaug Pond and fronts on the Atlantic Ocean at Weekapaug Point and along its barrier beach extending east towards Charlestown. Haversham and Shelter Harbor lie along the northern shore of Quonochontaug Pond. The predominant architectural character of the residential structures within Weekapaug is Shingle Style while the architecture of Shelter Harbor, which was developed in the early twentieth-century as a music colony, is more eclectic in character.

#### **2.4.4 Downtown Periphery**

To the east of Tower Street and Granite Street (Route 1) are the Boiling Springs, Indian Hills (not to be confused with the Indian Plantations development in the Dunn's Corners neighborhood) and Tower Street neighborhoods. These areas are all largely residential with businesses lining Post Road (Route 1). At the juncture of Granite Street and Franklin Street, the roadway becomes more intensely commercial with larger structures and developments. This commercial area, which includes small pockets of residential development, is bounded to the east by Airport Road (so named because it is adjacent to Westerly State Airport) and Route 78.

South of Granite Street and State Street are the neighborhoods of East Avenue, Riverbend and the Yacht Club. These areas lie between the Pawcatuck River and the Mastuxet Brook and have built environments which serve as a transition between the urban character of downtown and the more rural character of the shore communities.

The central portion of town (located north of Route 1 and east of Route 78) is a largely undeveloped area dominated by Chapman Pond and the Aguntaug, Chapman, and Crandall swamps with Chapman Swamp being one of the largest freshwater wetland complexes in Rhode Island. While the northern segment of Pound Road is lined by numerous homes, much of this centrally-located neighborhood is either preserved for habitat protection or impacted by wetlands that prohibit development. A small concentration of state and municipal facilities exists within the Transfer Station area to the northwest of Chapman Pond and at the foot of Exit 5 on Route 78.

#### **2.4.5 Dunn's Corners (Route 1 Corridor)**

North of Shore Road and many of the previously mentioned coastal neighborhoods, commercial strip development straddles the Post Road (Route 1) similar to the sprawl which has inundated

portions of other historic East Coast communities. Based on typical post-World War II development, this area does not exhibit characteristics of the rest of the Town. Typical land uses in the Route 1 corridor include commercial and residential uses interspersed with vacant properties. The area consists of residential subdivisions and small shopping centers, including several local and national retail stores, small businesses and motels. Residential structures consist of predominantly single-family and condominium development. Typical architectural styles of residential structures range from modern to post-modern to new urbanism styles. Commercial structures typically are consistent with national trademark forms commonly referred to as “box stores” and other typically associated with small scale strip developments.

Residential subdivision housing units are consistently set slightly back from the street. Commercial structures are typically set back a considerable distance from the street with large parking areas in front of the structure. Zoning in this area includes medium and high density residential and highway commercial. Road patterns in this area are winding and feature a substantial number of cul-de-sacs. Most minor roads are connected to Route 1 but do not have interconnectivity with other minor roads.

Along Dunn’s Corners-Bradford Road, one of only two major roads in this area leading to Bradford from Post Road, there are some sparse residential developments and the Town’s largest concentration of remaining working farmland. The other major road in this area is Route 91 (Westerly-Bradford Road) which connects downtown to the rural areas to the east. This entire area presents environmental challenges for development and has the lowest zoning density in Westerly. Neighborhoods in this area include McGowan Corners and Woody Hill.

## **2.5 Westerly Facts and Statistics**

Table 2-1, beginning on the next page, provides a basic summary for the Town of Westerly.

Table 2-1 Facts and Statistics

| Municipal Flag | Municipal Seal |
|----------------|----------------|
|----------------|----------------|



| Establishment | Form of Government |
|---------------|--------------------|
|---------------|--------------------|

Westerly was first inhabited by the Narragansett tribe as a fishing ground named Misquamicut (anglicized) for its salmon. Parts of Misquamicut later came under control of the Pequot tribe before English settlement began in 1661. The Town was incorporated on May 13, 1669 with its original land also including the present-day towns of Charlestown, Hopkinton and Richmond.

The Town Charter establishes a Council-Manager system of municipal governance. The Town Council, headed by a Council President, is comprised of seven elected members and regularly meets. The Town Manager is appointed by the Town Council and oversees administration of the Town's departments and execution of the Town's Charter and Code of Ordinances.

| Land and Water Resources |
|--------------------------|
|--------------------------|

Westerly is comprised of nearly 31.5 square miles of land and seven linear miles of beach along Block Island Sound. Water, including coastal ponds such as Winnapaug Pond and the portion of Quonochontaug west of the Charlestown-Westerly town line, account for slightly less than 4 percent of the total area. Efforts by the Town and others, both private and public, have protected over one-fifth of Westerly's land.

| Finances | Housing |
|----------|---------|
|----------|---------|

Moody's bond rating: Aa3  
 S&P bond rating: AA-  
 Property tax rate: \$11.19 per \$1,000 assessed value  
 Grand List: \$6,008,342,744  
 FY2017 Town budget: \$33,682,941  
 FY2017 School budget: \$54,781,801  
 FY2017 Enterprise funds: \$8,398,734

Total housing units: 12,320  
 Occupied housing units: 9,666  
 Owner-occupied: 65.4%  
 Renter-occupied: 34.6%  
 Single-family residences: 7,434  
 Median total assessed value: \$286,600  
 Average total assessed value: \$447,246.15

| Employment |
|------------|
|------------|

The three largest individual non-governmental employers in Westerly include Yale-New Haven Health Westerly Hospital, Washington Trust Company and Wal-Mart. Overall, annual employment is concentrated in

the accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance and retail trade industries.

| Education  |  | Population and Income                          |  |                           |
|--|--|--|--|---------------------------|
| High school enrollment: 823 students   |  | Total population: 22,787                       |  |                           |
| Middle school enrollment: 871 students   |  | Silent generation (70 years and over): 3,074   |  |                           |
| Elementary schools enrollment: 999 students  |  | Baby boomers (50 to 69 years): 6,204           |  |                           |
| Pre-Kindergarten enrollment: 100 students  |  | Generation X (35 to 49 years): 4,786           |  |                           |
| Educational attainment (25 years and older):   |  | Millennials (20 to 34 years): 3,517            |  |                           |
| High school diploma or equivalent: 28.3%   |  | Generation Z (19 years and under): 5,206       |  |                           |
| Some college or Associates degree: 28.2%   |  | Median age: 44.3 years                         |  |                           |
| Bachelor's degree: 19.6%   |  | Median household income: \$62,381              |  |                           |
| Master's degree or above: 12.3%  |  | Median family income: \$73,132                 |  |                           |
| Community Services   |  | Town Facilities                                |  |                           |
| Westerly Public Library: 44 Broad Street   |  | Town Hall and Municipal Court: 45 Broad Street |  |                           |
| Westerly Ambulance Corps: 30 Chestnut Street   |  | School Department: 15 Highland Avenue          |  |                           |
| Senior Center: 39 State Street   |  | Public Works Department: 35 Larry Hirsch Lane  |  |                           |
| YNNH Westerly Hospital: 25 Wells Street  |  | Utilities Division: 68 White Rock Road         |  |                           |
| YMCA: 95 High Street   |  | Police Department: 60 Airport Road             |  |                           |
| Bradford, Dunn's Corners, Misquamicut, Shelter Harbor, Weekapaug, Westerly and Watch Hill fire districts |  | Animal Shelter: 33 Larry Hirsch Lane           |  |                           |
|  |  | Transfer Station: 39 Larry Hirsch Lane         |  |                           |
| Transportation Services  |  | Geographic Proximity                           |  | Climate                   |
| RIPTA 95x and Rural 301 routes   |  | Providence: 38 mi                              |  | January average low: 20°F |
| Westerly Station (Amtrak)  |  | New Haven: 57 mi                               |  | July average high: 80°F   |
| Westerly Airport   |  | Worcester: 61 mi                               |  | Sunny days: 203           |
| T. F. Green Airport (regional hub)   |  | Boston: 79 mi                                  |  | Precipitation days: 117   |
| Roadways: 219.7 miles  |  | New York: 123 mi                               |  | Rainfall: 48.1 inches     |

Sources: RIHPC, 2010 US Census, 2010-14 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, RIDLT Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, RIGIS, Sterling's Best Places and Town of Westerly

## 2.6 Regional Considerations

This Comprehensive Plan encourages regional solutions that take advantage of opportunities to improve economic competitiveness, infrastructure, transportation, communications and emergency preparedness. To accomplish this requires collaboration and cooperation among all neighboring governments and Westerly. The Town desires to work in partnership and on a regional basis to coordinate future development efforts with existing infrastructure and ensure appropriate growth patterns which enhance the character of the region. The Town will support coordination of municipal services and departments on a staff level including the identification of areas where improved coordination between the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut will leverage state and federal funding opportunities. The Town should promote coordination with the Town of Stonington, Connecticut on issues of mutual interest, such as water quality concerns within the Pawcatuck River, downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck revitalization, shared water systems, the Westerly Train Station, emergency management, and economic development. The Town may identify resources that could be mutually shared and funded with neighboring Rhode Island communities such as what has been accomplished with use of the transfer station by both Westerly and Hopkinton.

## 2.7 Conclusions

Maintaining the character of Westerly is important to the future of this special place. The combination of features and characteristics of the various neighborhoods make Westerly unique from other towns, which is an important reason why people want to visit and reside here. Residents want to preserve the sense of place in Westerly, our open space, and our precious natural resources. They also recognize the importance of economic development and employment opportunities as well as housing for all income and age levels, all of this in an era when changes in climate bring additional challenges. The key to this is to balance potentially competing needs through careful planning for new residential and commercial development and redevelopment of underutilized areas while providing for public health, public safety, environmental resiliency and public well-being into the future. This would allow the Town to maintain the quality and vitality of locally-based businesses and provide housing that will allow residents to live, work, and retire in the community while preserving our small-town charm.

Westerly was originally formed around the first Pawcatuck River crossing, the first mills and the oceanfront. Citizens of the Town were once primarily employed by fishing and farming industries, shipbuilding and marine industries, textile mills, and granite quarries. These industries are still a part of the community, however Westerly today is also an important center in southwest Rhode Island for commercial and professional services, the arts and education. In addition to jobs in Town, some residents commute to New London, Groton or the metro-Providence area or use technology to become self-employed or to work remotely from their company's location. In the future, jobs that require advanced training and specialized skills are

likely to become a bigger share of the employment mix. To achieve continuing economic growth, Westerly will need to focus on providing quality education at all levels and actively encouraging companies with high-value jobs to locate here. Westerly will also need to work to improve commuting opportunities so that residents have access to employment located in other areas of Rhode Island and neighboring states.

The accommodation services industry will continue to be an important part of Westerly's economy. Visitors who come to enjoy beautiful beaches and other amenities bring an important source of jobs and income, and they also bring increased traffic and other stresses on the Town during the summer. Maintaining a balance among the competing needs of seasonal residents, year-round residents and short-term visitors will be an important key to continuing a high quality of life in Westerly.

The same river crossing location and ocean front that served modern Westerly's earliest residents today provide some of the biggest challenges to the sustainability and vitality of the quality of life developed here.

Building on the existing character and composition of the Town, the design for the future of Westerly should offer an organized, functional and attractive place to live, work, and visit. However, achieving this vision will require careful planning and decisions that reinforce the best aspects of the community's character to allow Westerly to grow and prosper while maintaining the quality of life that all enjoy.

## Chapter 3. Inventory Summary with Findings & Implications

A thorough understanding of Westerly's current status is a necessary basis for planning for the future. This chapter of the Primary Report consists of inventory summaries of current (2015) conditions and trends. The complete inventories, which contain additional information and analyses, are included in Appendix I of this Plan. This summary contains information of interest to Westerly residents, businesses, and Town government as well as providing documentation to support the Plan. The topics covered in this chapter are:

- Existing Land Use and Zoning
- Housing Opportunity
- Economic Vitality
- Natural Resources
- Infrastructure and Energy
- Services and Facilities
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation Network
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Natural Hazards and Resiliency

In addition to facts and figures, each of the inventories contains a set of findings and implications derived from the inventory process.

### 3.1 Existing Land Use & Zoning

Land use planning in the Town of Westerly is a deliberative process that requires collaboration between regulators (the Town and state agencies) and consumers (developers, businesses and residents). The land use planning process, in the spirit of serving the public interest, is guided by the goals, policies and actions of this Comprehensive Plan.

#### 3.1.1 Existing Land Cover

The current use of land in Westerly is illustrated in the **Land Cover 2011 Map (LC-1)**, so named for the year in which the orthophotography (from which this most recent land cover/land use dataset was derived) was captured. The land use classifications in the dataset were based on the same Anderson Level III coding as preceding datasets and indicate the most apparent use of property within the Town as identified from the 2011 orthophotography (visit the [RIGIS website](#) for a more in-depth description of this dataset or any other datasets made available).

Categorical uses shown on LC-1 are summarized in Table 3-1 below, as well as the total percent of area each category covers. Land cover is an oversimplification of categorical uses and not a true snapshot of actual physical occupation of land by use. However, the land cover analysis does provide an adequate view of the overall development pattern of the community.

**Table 3-1 Existing Land Cover, 2011**

| Land Cover  | Acreage  | Percent of Total |
|---|----------|------------------|
| <b>Agriculture</b> includes active farm lands (croplands, pastures and orchards) and idle farm lands (abandoned or inactive croplands, pastures and orchards)   | 656.4    | 3.4              |
| <b>Commercial</b> includes all commercial uses consisting of retail, services and professional uses   | 543.0    | 2.8              |
| <b>Community Facilities</b> include schools, places of religious worship, government buildings, community safety facilities, hospital, the airport, railroads, roadways, other transportation uses, public utilities and the transfer station | 641.8    | 3.3              |
| <b>Conservation, Recreation and Open Space</b> includes cemeteries, developed recreation uses, brushlands, deciduous, softwood and mixed forests and beaches  | 10,220.6 | 52.7             |
| <b>Industrial</b> includes manufacturing and quarrying operations   | 332.3    | 1.7              |
| <b>Residential</b> includes all residential uses  | 5,482.6  | 28.3             |
| <b>Vacant</b> includes vacant land, visible wetlands, sandy areas, rock outcrops and transitional (urban open) areas  | 1,020.9  | 5.3              |
| <b>Water</b> includes all open water bodies with the exceptions of Winnapaug and Quonochontaug ponds  | 483.7    | 2.5              |

Source: RIGIS Land Use Land Cover, 2011

### 3.1.2 State Land Use Policy

In April 2006, the Rhode Island Department of Administration completed a statewide land use plan titled [Land Use 2025](#). The goal of *Land Use 2025* is to eliminate sprawl and protect the natural resources of the state. This statewide plan encourages an urban/rural model that concentrates new development into established areas and other selective rural growth centers. It identifies urban service boundaries within which are areas that either provide public sewer and water or are planned to do so in the near future, and where higher density and infill development might be considered. The state plan encourages the conservation of natural resources through cluster development, conservation development, or transfer of development rights in areas that have development potential. In the next chapter of this Primary Report, the Town describes its long-term priorities and relates them directly to the goals of *Land Use 2025*.

### 3.1.3 Existing Zoning

The Town of Westerly last comprehensively updated its Zoning Ordinance in 1998, though numerous update, such as the Affordable Housing Amendment in 2007, have been adopted since. The Zoning Ordinance is a critical tool for controlling the type, density, and appearance of development within the Town. The Town implements the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan through the diligent application and enforcement of the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance, as adopted, codified and, from time-to-time, amended by the Westerly

Town Council, should be consulted for the permitted uses associated with each of the various zoning districts.

The official Zoning Map of the Town of Westerly, "Town of Westerly, R.I. — Official Zoning Key Map Sheets 1 - 188; Scale 1 inch equals 1,200 feet, Date: October 16, 1998, Cherenzia and Associates, LTD," shows the locations and boundaries of zoning districts as established within the Zoning Ordinance. It is filed in the Town Clerk's Office at the Town Hall and was established for purposes of determining the rights and interests of property owners. The official Zoning Map is to be used for all planning and zoning related reviews and approvals unless amended by official action of the Town Council or until it is replaced in accordance with the current provisions of the Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act of 1991.

For convenient reference in this Plan, datasets were provided by the Zoning Office to illustrate existing zoning districts and overlays on the **Zoning Map (Z-1)**. The following are general category descriptions for these zones:

- Residential districts make up 56.2% of the land area of the Town. The lowest density area is rural residential (RR-60) which maintains lot sizes of 60,000 square feet (about 1.4 acres) in an effort to reflect the rural atmosphere in which they reside and have neither public water nor public sewer access. The highest density areas (HDR-6, HDR-10 and HDR-15) with lot size requirements between 6,000 and 15,000 square feet are all served by public water with only HDR-6 and HDR-15 Zoning Districts being served by public sewers.
- Commercial districts make up 3.6% of the land area of the Town. Land uses in these areas include professional offices, downtown center, neighborhood business, highway commercial (along Route 1), general commercial, shore commercial, and marine commercial. Provisions within the Zoning Ordinance also allow for mixed commercial and residential developments.
- Industrial districts make up 6.2% of the Town's land area, however much of the land in these districts that is undeveloped is protected by conservation easements.
- Special districts protect parks and open space or areas dedicated for commercial recreation, such as golf courses. Over one-third of the Town's area falls into one of these zoning districts.

As noted above, soil constraints can often impact the development potential of a property. **The Soil Constraints to Development Map (SC-1)** offers a visualization of areas within Westerly where development may be constrained due to the type of soil present. Severe constraints, as indicated in SC-1, include hydric soils (soils which are permanently or seasonally saturated), subaqueous soils (soils under a permanently flooded area), bedrock and/or slopes (bedrock is rock lying below the land's surface while slopes are considered constraining if at a grade of

more than 15 percent) and others. As indicated on this map, all land within the Town has at least a moderate constraint to development.

### 3.1.4 Findings and Implications

- Industrial and commercial growth is limited to the areas in which these uses currently exist. Therefore, the town should focus on redevelopment of underutilized opportunities for commercial and industrial development as opposed to sprawling into other areas not currently used as such.
- Further residential development is restricted in areas developed beyond carrying capacity and limited in areas that support significant water resources. As the town is predicted to approach build-out within the twenty-year horizon of this Plan, a careful analysis of the town's future capacity for residential development must be undertaken to ensure that local needs for housing will be met while preserving Westerly's small-town character.
- Shore communities subject to catastrophic storm surges, an urbanized downtown located on a coastal estuary, and an inland river subject to flooding require this community to include resiliency planning as part of any future land use discussion.

### 3.2 Housing Opportunity

The availability and affordability of housing opportunities is a major factor in the livability and prosperity of the community. Select information about Westerly demographics and housing include the following:

- Westerly's senior population has been steadily growing since 1990 and is likely to continue, based on projected regional and statewide trends.
- Westerly's young adult and school-aged populations are both declining, with public school enrollment projected to continue falling until at least the 2025-2026 academic year.
- A significant seasonal population supported by 15.3% of Westerly's total housing stock (which accounts for 71.2% of the total vacant housing stock [as defined by the US Census Bureau]) in 2010 greatly increases Westerly's population in the summer months.
- Of occupied units in 2010, just under two-thirds were owner-occupied and more than one-third were occupied by renters.
- In total, there were 12,320 housing units in Westerly in 2010 with 21.5% identified by the US Census Bureau as being vacant (as defined by the US Census Bureau); however, as noted above, 71.2%, of vacant units are used seasonally.
- The Town adopted its affordable housing plan, *Affordable Housing Plan to Achieve 10 Percent Low & Moderate-Income Housing*, in 2004 with the intent to help meet the

housing needs of all Westerly residents by providing an adequate supply of diverse housing choices.

### 3.2.1 Demographics

The Town of Westerly had a year-round population of 22,787 in 2010. Although the 2010 population represents a 0.8% decrease from 2000, the population had grown by 6.3% between 1990 and 2000. According to [population projections prepared by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program](#), Westerly's population is expected to increase slowly but steadily through 2035 to 23,518, and projected to drop slightly to 23,466 in 2040. The projected 2040 population represents a 3.0% increase from 2010.

An important statistic for planning purposes is the age distribution of Westerly's residents. As Table 3-2 below illustrates, the percentage of the population 55 years old and over grew by 21.6% from 2000 and represented nearly a third of the total population in 2010. In contrast however, the Town's school-aged population has declined over the past 10 years. For example, public school enrollment dropped by 163 students from 3,071 in fiscal year (FY) 2012 to 2,908 in FY2016. Public school enrollment is projected to be 2,764 students in FY2026, which reflects a 5% decrease from FY2016.

**Table 3-2 General Demographics, 2000-2010**

| Population                                 | 2000   |         | 2010   |         |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|
|  | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total                                      | 22,966 | 100.0   | 22,787 | 100.0   |
| <b>Sex</b>                                 |        |         |        |         |
| Female                                     | 11,889 | 51.8    | 11,874 | 52.1    |
| Male                                       | 11,077 | 48.2    | 10,913 | 47.9    |
| <b>Age</b>                                 |        |         |        |         |
| Ages 17 years old and under                | 5,406  | 23.5    | 4,787  | 21.0    |
| Ages 18-34 years old                       | 4,543  | 19.8    | 3,936  | 17.3    |
| Ages 35-44 years old                       | 3,883  | 16.9    | 2,881  | 12.6    |
| Ages 45-54 years old                       | 3,043  | 13.3    | 3,777  | 16.6    |
| Ages 55 years old and over                 | 6,091  | 26.5    | 7,406  | 32.5    |
| <b>Race</b>                                |        |         |        |         |
| American Indian and Alaska Native          | 130    | 0.6     | 158    | 0.7     |
| Asian                                      | 457    | 2.0     | 567    | 2.5     |
| Black or African American                  | 164    | 0.7     | 222    | 1.0     |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 0      | 0.0     | 3      | 0.0     |
| White                                      | 21,857 | 95.2    | 21,171 | 92.9    |
| Some Other Race                            | 77     | 0.3     | 204    | 0.9     |
| Two or more races                          | 281    | 1.2     | 462    | 2.0     |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>                           |        |         |        |         |
| Hispanic or Latino (any race)              | 270    | 1.2     | 651    | 2.9     |

Sources: 2000 and 2010 US Censuses

### 3.2.3 Housing Characteristics

In 2010, there were 12,320 housing units in Westerly. Of these units, 9,666 (78.5%) were occupied (split between 6,322 [(65.4%)] owner-occupied units and 3,344 [(34.6%)] renter-occupied units) and 2,654 (21.5%) were vacant. Vacant housing units associated with seasonal, recreational or occasional use accounted for more than two-thirds (71.2%) of the total number of vacant units. Therefore, vacant units as traditionally understood compose approximately 6.0% of the total housing stock. More than 70% of the total housing units in Westerly between 2010-2014 were estimated to be in single-family attached or detached structures.

### 3.2.4 Westerly's Rental Housing

In the Town of Westerly, the phrase "meeting local housing needs" means a long-standing commitment to the preservation of its traditional rental housing stock. The number of year-round, renter-occupied housing units in the Town has been consistent from 2000 to 2014 at approximately 3,400 units, representing an average of 35.4% of its entire year-round housing stock. Income level statistics for renter-occupied units are available from the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2010-14 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates. Rentals in Westerly are also considered affordable. In 2000, 2,060 renters in Westerly were reported to be at or below 80% Area Median Income (AMI). That number increased during the 2010-14 period to 2,174 renters. Since 2000, renters at or below 80% AMI have made up 60 to 64% of renter-occupied units. Approximately 20% more of the available rental units are occupied by residents with incomes between 80 and 120% AMI.

According to the Town Assessor's Office, the median assessed value of single-family homes town-wide after the 2006 revaluation was \$336,700. The general economic downturn which began nationally in 2008 had an extended impact on the housing market throughout both Rhode Island and Westerly. The median single-family home value fell by -8.4% between the 2009 and 2012 property tax revaluations. However, more recent evidence has shown improvements. While RI Living reported Westerly's single-family home sale prices were at the same value between 2012 and 2015, the number of total annual sales increased 7.4% and the average number of days listed on the market fell from 147 to 111 (as compiled using information provided by State-wide Multiple Listing Service, Inc.). Between the 2012 and 2015 revaluations, the median single-family home value decreased by -3.3%, a smaller percent change than the decrease which occurred between the 2009 and 2012 revaluations.

### 3.2.5 Housing Conditions

The quality, safety and general state of housing units has significant impact on the well-being of residents, as well as on the livability and desirability of a community. Neglect, deterioration, and an aging housing stock represents issues related to housing conditions. The Town of Westerly should encourage improvements in the quality of housing conditions through

neighborhood plans and with the involvement of its housing partners. With the recent economic recession having taken its toll on the quality of the region's housing stock, it is time to focus attention on the upgrading and improvement of pre-1970 homes.

Homes in decline due to the age of their electrical and plumbing systems are significantly more likely to be converted to non-residential uses, become vacant or to be permanently lost from the inventory of housing options. With the local economy and housing market gradually recovering, investment in the Town's existing housing inventory should be encouraged. The Town of Westerly's focus on rehabilitation programs supported by a future revolving loan fund is well placed to be an integral part of a neighborhood revitalization effort. However, the Town of Westerly is in need of more tools to effectively address housing quality and to get ahead of such issues as aging plumbing and electrical systems, flood and wind damage and demolition due to neglect.

Older homeowners should have the ability to retrofit their homes to accommodate their future needs and potentially "age in place" as opposed to relocating. Households can increase their investment with environmentally sustainable improvements and property owners can reduce their insurance costs by utilizing new reconstruction techniques certified by the Insurance Institute of Business and Home Safety (IBHS).

### **3.2.6 Affordable Housing**

Elevated housing prices and rental rates reflect the desirability of Westerly as an attractive community for both year-round and seasonal residents; however, these prices have a direct impact on housing affordability. Affordable housing needs also stem from residents who pay more than 30% of their income for housing costs which causes a significant financial burden. Of the total households in Westerly, 41% are  $\leq$ 80% of the Housing Market Index (HMI) according to 2014 ACS 5-year estimates. This represents a number greater than the state's 10% threshold of the Town's year-round housing (1,043) and an indicator of a greater demand for affordable housing.

### **3.2.7 Low and Moderate-Income Housing**

The State of Rhode Island, through the [\*Rhode Island Consolidated Plan 2015-2019\*](#) (prepared by Rhode Island Housing through a process involving the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program which is, in part, meant to succeed the [\*Rhode Island Five-Year Strategic Housing Plan\*](#) of the State Guide Plan), defines the state's objective to have 10% low and moderate-income housing distributed among the State's 39 municipal jurisdictions. The term "low and moderate-income housing" is narrowly defined as subsidized units subject to resident income restrictions for at least 30 years. Through the 2004 amendments to the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (RI General Laws Title 45, Chapter 53), the Town of Westerly is required to develop a plan to produce certified low- and moderate-income housing at the rate of 10 percent of all year-round

housing within the jurisdiction. To accomplish this, the Town of Westerly proposes the following two (2) approaches to assisting the state in meeting housing needs.

### ***3.2.7.1 Providing Housing Opportunity through Affordable Rental Units***

The Town of Westerly is meeting housing needs through its substantial contribution to the rental market. The Town of Westerly has developed several programs and initiatives to ensure the preservation of its robust rental housing stock. The number of year-round renter-occupied housing units in the Town of Westerly has been consistent from 2000 to 2014 at approximately 3,400 units and an average of 35.4% of its entire year-round housing stock. In 2000, approximately 2,060 renter households in Westerly were reported to be at or below 80 percent HMI. That number increased in 2014 to 2,174 renter households. Since 2000, renter households at or below 80 percent HMI have made up 60 to 64% of total renter-occupied units. Approximately 20% more of the available rental units are occupied by residents with incomes between 80% HMI and 120% HMI. Of the 3,404 renter occupied units in Westerly only 13% are subsidized (Low- and Moderate-Income [LMI] qualified), allowing the local regulatory environment to provide more than 2,900 rental units without subsidy or income restrictions.

### ***3.2.7.2 Providing Housing Opportunity through LMI Units***

The Town of Westerly will continue to participate in state efforts to meet housing need through the adoption and implementation of a housing production plan for certified LMI housing units.

LMI housing amounts to 5.2% of Westerly's year-round housing stock. There was a total of 549 qualifying units in Westerly as of January 2016. This means that Westerly currently requires a production plan for an additional 499 LMI units to meet the state's objective. In its *Affordable Housing Plan*, the Town proposed several strategies to develop certified LMI units. With the assistance of the Affordable Housing Committee, the Town has adopted the following ordinances to implement that plan:

- Affordable Housing Ordinance (§260-50)
- Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance (§260-50.2)
- Comprehensive Permits (§260-50.3)
- Municipal Affordable Housing Fund (§260-50.4)
- Historic Mill Overlay District (§260-57)

Under these strategies, the Town has approved 140 LMI units, of which 63 have been constructed. These units include single-family homes, units in multi-family structures, and units for residents with special needs constructed by both for-profit and non-profit developers. These projects are listed in Table 2-15 of the Housing Opportunity chapter in Appendix I.

As part of the 2018 update of this Comprehensive Plan, the Town reviewed and revisited the success of its affordable housing strategies. The following list illustrates the changes made from the 2004 LMI production strategies to those adopted as part of the current LMI production plan:

- The Town's interest in establishing a revolving loan fund has advanced as a result of ongoing discussions with the Westerly Revolving Fund, a non-profit organization which has been successful in housing rehabilitation activity since its creation in 2013; Community Development Block Grants will be sought as primary seed money for the loan's future establishment.
- Modification of the Zoning Ordinance to allow accessory apartments in commercial zoning districts has been eliminated as a strategy due to the incompatibility of small-scale housing units within the context of large commercial structures.
- The establishment of an Affordable Housing Overlay District has been eliminated as a strategy in favor of pursuing affordable housing production incentives on a town-wide basis.

Some strategies proposed in 2004 have yet to be implemented and the Town will continue to move these forward as part of this Comprehensive Plan's affordable housing production plan. These strategies include:

- While all historic mills in the Town are currently occupied or in a state of significant disrepair, interest in the revitalization of these structures and the mill villages which surround them remain.
- Despite the decreased competitive edge of the local arts district due to tax incentives for the arts community being expanded state-wide, affordable housing for local artists continues to be in demand.

The 2018-2038 LMI production plan for the Town of Westerly is described in Section 2.7 of Chapter 2 in Appendix I. Table 2-19 demonstrates how the strategic implementation of the LMI production plan will assist in achieving the state's threshold 10% for certified LMI units.

### **3.2.8 Findings and Implications**

- Over half of the housing units in Westerly are more than 40 years old. This contributes to the character of the Town but also requires extensive upkeep and maintenance.
- The implications of the changing age demographics in Town will need to be addressed in the future.
- Since 2004, the Town has focused the development of affordable housing units through new construction, however the Town intends to refocus these efforts on the preservation of existing housing and neighborhood revitalization.

- The Town needs to refine current strategies to develop affordable housing and look to find new approaches that are in keeping with Town character and environmental constraints.
- The Town of Westerly is “meeting local housing needs” through its long-standing commitment to the preservation of its traditional rental housing stock. The Town should continue to seek legislative action that will exempt Westerly from the 10% mandate of the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act and allow the community to focus on the rental market as the vehicle to address the states need for affordable housing.

The Town of Westerly recognizes that Rhode Island has quantified the state need for subsidized, income restricted housing and has adopted a policy for the provision of certified LMI units. The Town provides a 10 percent LMI plan in this chapter and proposes strategies to achieve this state plan.

### **3.3 Economic Vitality**

#### **3.3.1 Economic Overview and Distinctions**

Westerly’s credit rating was enhanced in 2007 when the two largest and most prominent bond rating agencies in the United States (Moody’s and Standard and Poor [S&P]’s) raised the rating on the Town’s General Obligation (GO) debt to Aa3 and AA- ratings, respectively. While S&P’s rating has remained unchanged, Moody’s upgraded its rating once more before downgrading the rating in August 2016 as a result of its concern regarding a reduced financial position after consecutive deficits in recent fiscal years. A significant improvement in the Town’s fund balance and liquidity and material improvements in the wealth of residents were identified as the two major factors which would assist the Town in returning to the upgraded rating. Expanded discussion of municipal finances is included in the Economic Vitality chapter of Appendix I.

Westerly, as reported by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT), traditionally has had an unemployment rate approximately 20% lower than the statewide rate. For example, the average unemployment rate for Westerly in 2005 was 4.2% while Rhode Island’s average rate was 5.1%. However, during the economic downturn which corresponded and continued after the global recession of the late 2000s, local and state unemployment respectively grew to 11.4% and 11.2%. As of 2015, Westerly’s unemployment figure (7.4%) remained above the statewide rate (5.6%). Median household income for the 5-year period between 2010-2014 was estimated by the American Community Survey to be \$62,381.

Westerly and its surrounding area have achieved significant national and international distinctions:

- In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Westerly one of its 'Dozen Distinctive Destinations'
- In 2006, Money Magazine named South County, RI as one of the Top 12 Places to Vacation in North America (The Town of Westerly is part of Washington County, also commonly known as South County)
- More recently, on June 30, 2008, Forbes' online website named Washington County, RI as 12th on its list of Best Places in America to Raise a Family

### 3.3.2 Employment

Rhode Island-based employers of local significance include the State of Rhode Island, the University of Rhode Island, General Dynamics Electric Boat (Quonset Point) and a diversified group of employers in the health care, financial services, education, defense and manufacturing sectors. Due to its location, Westerly's economy is also vitally linked to southeastern Connecticut and significant employers at the US Naval Submarine Base, General Dynamics Electric Boat (Groton and New London), Pfizer, and Davis-Standard. These industries all provide high-value research and technical jobs as well as business for smaller companies in the area. The Westerly tourism industry is linked to numerous entertainment and visitor venues in southeastern Connecticut as well, including Mystic Aquarium, Mystic Seaport, Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun.

Westerly itself is primarily a town of small employers. Of Rhode Island's largest employers, there is only one with headquarters in Westerly – the Washington Trust Company. In addition to health care and finance, other sectors of significance to Westerly's economy include textiles, printing, and construction. The Town of Westerly serves as an important employer with 717 full-time equivalent positions (189 in municipal departments and 529 in the school department).

The travel and tourism sector is particularly important to Westerly. The tourism industry wages in Westerly in 2002 were seventh highest among the state's cities and towns, generating \$27.88 million in wages. Tourism is also a significant factor in the general local economy with estimates that every \$1 of wages generated by tourism equated \$3.64 in economic activity. Despite the global and national economic downturn, comparisons of actual state grant in aid for hotel and meal taxes since FY2009 has indicated a general growth of this sector in Westerly.

An important component not included in economic impact studies is the impact of second home and part-time residents. In Westerly, residents living in seasonal and beach properties (which accounted for \$600,754,900 in total assessed value, or 13.9% of total assessed residential property) in 2015 contributed about \$6.4 million to property tax revenue for

Westerly.<sup>1</sup> In addition to helping to increase the tax base of the community, seasonal residents actively participate with full-time residents in funding amenities such as the Westerly Library, Yale-New Haven Health Westerly Hospital and numerous charities and fundraisers. They also provide additional business for local retailers and restaurants, as well as for construction and skilled trades related to residential maintenance.

### **3.3.3 Economic Development Initiatives**

There are several economic development efforts underway in Westerly designed to attract new development and employment. These include the following:

- \$16 million in new residential construction and \$5.9 million in commercial construction was approved in 2015 and is now complete or is currently underway.
- The revitalization plan for the North End of Westerly provides for housing rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of existing commercial and industrial properties.
- Statewide tax exemptions exist for artists who live and work in the district or sell their original art in the district.

### **3.3.4 New Economies and Agriculture**

New economic strategies that are focused on helping locally-owned businesses prosper and encourage entrepreneurial activities are part of Westerly's future plans. A broader range of permitted uses may be necessary as customary home occupations and telecommuting opportunities become a larger portion of the economy and "new economies" are discovered. For example, aquaculture has become a growing part of the local economy. Three aquaculture farms and forty-seven (47) commercial fishers are currently located within the town.

While agriculture is not a significant employing industry in the local economy itself, the food system in Westerly is a critical component of the local quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors and its relation to accommodations and food services is important to recognize and support. According to a 2015 snapshot by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC) and Rhode Island Agricultural Partnership (RIAP), agricultural and related economic activities were identified within all four components of the food system, including production and harvesting, processing, distribution and consumption. In addition to supporting traditional agriculture, the Town should explore alternatives to traditional farming practices to produce and use plants for food, fuel, and fiber.

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<sup>1</sup> All calculations based on the total assessed values of single-family residences, two- to five-family residences, apartments, seasonal and beach property and residential vacant as recorded in the 2015 Grand List, pending certification as of June 7, 2016

### 3.3.5 Resort Community

Westerly is comprised of four key components which include seasonal homes and residents, a year-round residential community, a short-term tourist destination and a regional service and retail center. These elements are often in competition with each other and require that management between them is balanced. While Westerly embraces its past, its future as a resort community relies on better planning, growth management and encouraging positive visitor experiences. While making the opportunity to enjoy Westerly's attributes available to tourists and visitors, the Town must also protect the interests of local residents and taxpayers in preserving the community's natural and cultural resources for the benefit of all. Any strategy intended to extend the length of stay of vacationers and tourists (and thereby increasing their positive economic contribution to the community) must not result in negative impacts on infrastructure and municipal services. When encouraging an economy that appeals to a broad spectrum of seasonal visitors, Westerly must also provide a range of housing alternatives and value and help to maintain the significant seasonal resident tax base.

For several years, the Town of Westerly has struggled with the review and revision of ordinances and regulations that would promote longer stays by visitors and tourists while limiting impact on the environment and local neighborhoods. As seasonal tourism continues to be a major contributor to our vital economy, the discussion of an appropriate mix of uses and functional alternatives should continue.

The Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program, or STEP, is a suite of online tools established by Sustainable Travel International. STEP is composed of three steps which include an online self-assessment for businesses to identify and measure key impacts, receiving bronze certification by submitting an application with required documentation for assessment and receiving silver, gold and platinum certification through on-site assessments.<sup>2</sup> The Town should consider addressing sustainable tourism as an added benefit of doing business in the community while advancing its brand as a resort community at the same time.

### 3.3.6 Economic Resiliency

The Town's existing emergency permitting system goes a long way to ensure Town readiness and effective administration in the time period after a catastrophic event. However, a viable economy for Westerly requires robust economic resiliency to natural and man-made events. The Town will strive to anticipate the impact of catastrophic events on the local economy through study and strategic planning to reduce threats to public infrastructure, forecasted loss of property revenues, and mapping areas vulnerable to economic impacts. Alignment of town activities with the state strategic plan on the reduction of impact from climate change hazards will also help Westerly reduce fiduciary risks as well.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://sustainabletravelinternational.org/documents/sustainabletourismcertification\\_businesses.html](http://sustainabletravelinternational.org/documents/sustainabletourismcertification_businesses.html)

### 3.3.7 Findings and Implications

- Dependence on three major industries leaves the regional economy vulnerable to shifts in the pharmaceutical, defense, and hospitality and tourism industries.
- There has been limited to no systematic evaluations of accommodations available in Westerly to determine whether modern markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served.
- Sites for new businesses opportunities are needed; redevelopment of existing or vacant commercial areas can help with meeting much of this need.
- Westerly State Airport offers aviation maintenance, commercial passenger and charter service but not freight service. Any physical expansion or intensification of use present challenges because of the proximity to developed areas.
- Westerly has the opportunity to promote economic development based on features such as its prime regional location (midway between Boston and New York City) as well as proximity to leading academic institutions, and a train station with the potential for expansion of Amtrak and introduction of commuter rail services.
- New economies are limited but attractive to the community.
- A viable economy for Westerly requires a commitment to robust economic resiliency natural and man-made events.

## 3.4 Natural Resources

### 3.4.1 Overview of Natural Resources

Westerly's natural resources help to make this town a wonderful place to live and are critically important to the Town's future development. The Pawcatuck River, ocean beaches, coastal salt ponds, inland forests and abundant fresh water resources provide important ecosystem and habitat functions. They are an important factor in the quality of life for all residents and a prime recreational attraction for tourists. Westerly's groundwater resources exist within three aquifers which include the Ashaway, Bradford and Westerly Aquifers. These aquifers are located within the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, which is the sole source of drinking water for the town. Wetlands along rivers, streams, shorelines and salt ponds, remove nutrients, pollutants, and sediments from surface water runoff, recharge water supplies, reduce shoreline erosion, and minimize flood risks while also providing fish and wildlife habitat. Farmlands provide food and economic activity and, together with forest lands, provide important open space as well as wildlife habitat. The location of many of these natural features is illustrated on several of the maps described in the Appendices.

An overview of the current status of many of Westerly's natural resources, including potential issues and stressors, is provided in Table 3-3 below. This table is an abstract containing general

information and references to relevant laws, regulations and regulatory authorities of the natural resources which are discussed in detail in the Natural Resources chapter of Appendix I.

**Table 3-3 Summary of Water Quality, Management and Protection by Resource**

|                 | Resource   | Water Quality Status | Issues   | Stressors  | Organization(s)   |
|-----------------|--|----------------------|--|--|---|
| Coastal Ponds   | Maschaug Pond  | Unknown              | Unknown  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>• Salt Ponds Region SAMP</li> </ul>  |
|                 | Quonochontaug Pond                                     | Good                 | Increasing bacteria, Increasing nutrients, Low dissolved oxygen                                | Failing or substandard septic systems, Stormwater runoff, Development                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM</a></li> <li>• RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> <li>• <a href="#">Salt Ponds Coalition</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Town of Westerly</a></li> <li>• Onsite Wastewater Management Plan</li> </ul>   |
|                 | Winnapaug Pond   | Somewhat impaired    | High bacteria, Nitrate concentrations  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA</a></li> <li>• Federal Clean Water Act §303(d)</li> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIRC</a></li> <li>• River Policy and Classification Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">Pawcatuck River Estuary</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Little Narragansett Bay Management Interstate Management Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">WPWA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Salt Ponds Coalition</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nature Conservancy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">URI Watershed Watch Program</a></li> </ul> |
| Pawcatuck River | Lower (tidal) <sup>1</sup>                             | Impaired             | High lead levels, Heavy metal pollutants, High bacteria, Low dissolved oxygen, No shellfishing | Bradford Dye Sewage Treatment Facility, Stormwater and urban runoff, Failing septic systems, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA</a></li> <li>• Federal Clean Water Act §303(d)</li> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIRC</a></li> <li>• River Policy and Classification Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">Pawcatuck River Estuary</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Little Narragansett Bay Management Interstate Management Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">WPWA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Salt Ponds Coalition</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nature Conservancy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">URI Watershed Watch Program</a></li> </ul> |
|                 | Upper (from Meeting House Bridge upwards) <sup>2</sup> | Impaired             | High bacteria, Elevated lead, Nitrate concentrations   | Farms and wild animals,  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA</a></li> <li>• Federal Clean Water Act §303(d)</li> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• <a href="#">RIRC</a></li> <li>• River Policy and Classification Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">Pawcatuck River Estuary</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Little Narragansett Bay Management Interstate Management Plan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">WPWA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Salt Ponds Coalition</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Nature Conservancy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">URI Watershed Watch Program</a></li> </ul> |

|             |                  |         |  |  |  |
|-------------|------------------|---------|--|--|--|
| Wetlands    | All              | Unknown | Small wetland areas subject to encroachment by development                 | Stormwater runoff  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• 2006 List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• RI Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>• Salt Ponds Region SAMP</li> </ul>   |
|             | Ashaway Aquifer  | Good    |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems</li> <li>• RIDEM establishes footprint of groundwater reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas and WPAs</li> <li>• RI Wellhead Protection Program</li> <li>• <a href="#">RI Department of Health</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">EPA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Town of Westerly</a></li> <li>• Water Facilities Plan</li> <li>• Onsite Wastewater Management Plan</li> <li>• Water Supply System Management Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">URI Cooperative Extension</a></li> <li>• Westerly Source Water Assessment</li> </ul> |
| Groundwater | Bradford Aquifer | Good    | Localized contamination , Elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, Spills | Development in recharge zones, Failing septic systems, Road salt |  |
|             | Westerly Aquifer | Good    |  |  |  |
| Beaches     | All              | Unknown | Storm erosion, Flooding  | Population pressure, Major storms                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <a href="#">Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)</a></li> </ul>   |

<sup>1</sup> includes Little Narragansett Bay

<sup>2</sup> includes Chapman Pond

### 3.4.2 Findings and Implications

- The Comprehensive Plan recommends changes to the existing Zoning Ordinance and subdivision regulations to comply with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) which specifies

maximum development densities, establishes setbacks, buffers, and requirements for nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment and requires CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land-use regulatory review.

- Westerly has implemented a Phase II Storm Water Management Plan that places controls on land clearing and implements measures for the control of stormwater discharges to surface waters.
- Westerly continues to protect extensive tracts of important open space property. The acquisition of significant natural communities, habitats, and other highly vulnerable undeveloped areas by state, municipal and private groups is one of the most effective means of protecting their natural functions.
- Appropriate development and regulations can protect open space from fragmentation and reduce sprawl, both of which will prevent potential negative impacts on the aesthetic character of the Town and its natural resources.

## 3.5 Infrastructure and Energy

### 3.5.1 Water System

Westerly's municipal water system is owned by the Town and operated by the Water Department, a division of the Utilities Division. The budget for the Water Department is prepared as an enterprise fund which incorporates all department operating costs and establishes water rates so that users fund all activities of the department. There is a small portion of town (approximately 6 percent) that is not serviced by municipal water and is dependent on private wells.

The sources of Westerly's public water supply are wells which tap groundwater resources. The quality of the water is generally considered good and the Town previously implemented an updated and improved disinfection system. The Town undertook a comprehensive assessment of its groundwater resources that concluded its existing sites in White Rock, Bradford and Crandall Swamp provided sufficient capacity. To enhance the Town's reserves, however, a new well (Bradford IV) was developed and became operational in October 2013. To ensure the functionality of these wells, the Town also continues to acquire land for aquifer protection. As required by the State of Rhode Island, Westerly has prepared a plan for drought management that includes procedures for addressing sustained periods of dry weather.

The water distribution system in Westerly is well over a century old. Extensive investments have been and are continuing to be made to extend the system's useful life. Improvement projects recently completed include the construction of the new one (1) million-gallon storage tank in Winnapaug, permitting of a new pump station and well in Bradford, design of a new main extension on Westerly-Bradford Road, the Tower Street tank rehabilitation, and a new transmission main in White Rock. A major pipeline rehabilitation study is in progress.

### 3.5.2 Sanitary Sewer System

The Town of Westerly owns and operates a wastewater collection and treatment system that services approximately 45% of the Town with the remainder of development within the Town being served by individual wastewater treatment systems such as septic tanks with on-site infiltration. In terms of residential parcels only, 39% have connectivity to the public sewer system and 61% use individual septic systems. There are areas within the Westerly Sewer District to which sewer service has not been extended, these include residential developments in Avondale and Misquamicut, around Springbrook Elementary School, Apache Drive, Ledward Avenue and Winnapaug Road. Westerly has one wastewater treatment plant that discharges effluent into the Pawcatuck River as regulated by RIDEM and went through a major upgrade in its biological nutrient removal capability in 2003. The plant is near the threshold of its treatment capacity; however, it maintains capacity for all currently proposed and approved subdivisions. The Town is working to limit the amount of groundwater that infiltrates the system which will help to reduce the amount of water currently being treated. The plant has been designed to allow for capacity increases with the installation of additional components.

The Sewer and Water Service Area Map (SF-1) shows the municipal sewer lines and water lines existing in Westerly, as well as the service areas which delineate their expanses. The datasets were contributed to RIGIS by RIDEM, RIDOT and the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

### 3.5.3 Stormwater System

The Town of Westerly owns and maintains a stormwater drainage system flowing primarily into the Pawcatuck River and/or wetlands rather than directly into Block Island Sound. There are no combined sewer overflow connections between the sanitary sewer and storm sewer systems. There are several new residential and commercial developments that have created stormwater retention basins or ponds in order to comply with new State stormwater regulations. After these basins are privately installed, the Town usually assumes the responsibility for their maintenance thereafter.

The **Impervious Cover map (IC-1)** identifies all land in the community which is covered by impervious surfaces such as pavement. The inability for these surfaces to absorb precipitation results in overland stormwater flow which facilitates contaminant runoff and requires proper drainage to mitigate the potential for flooding.

The Town has an ongoing maintenance program for the stormwater system that includes cleaning catch basins and pipes and replacing aging pipes and structures. In 2007, the Town received approval from CRMC to install a municipal storm drainage collection and treatment system serving the Misquamicut area to address serious flooding problems during moderate to heavy storms. Phase I became operational in 2009 and Phase II became operational in 2010.

### **3.5.4 Electricity and Natural Gas**

Electric and natural gas services are provided privately by National Grid, which owns and maintains the electric lines, gas lines and utility poles throughout town. Gas service is available in some areas of town; however, the main transmission line is not adequate to provide town-wide service.

### **3.5.5 Alternative Energy Production**

In 2010, EA Engineering was contracted by the Town of Westerly to conduct a wind energy study, preliminary site screening and pre-feasibility assessment. The study was funded through a \$25,000 loan from the RI Economic Development Corporation (now the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation [Commerce RI]), and the consultant was selected by the Alternate Energy Study Committee (AESC). EA Engineering included several factors in a site analysis for wind turbine installation and identified seven potential locations. With the information collected in the study, EA Engineering then developed a score matrix which selected the top three sites. The second-highest ranked site, the transfer station on Larry Hirsch Lane, was ultimately selected the most advantageous due to its non-proximity to existing residences.

In autumn 2011, Westerly issued a public request for solar and/or wind energy proposals. Several responses were received and the proposal review committee selected rTerra to look at the former landfill site and 78 White Rock Road (next to the Utilities Division building) as possible locations for solar energy installation. Issues with both sites defeated any potential for use as an alternative energy generation facility.

Appendix I includes a discussion of recent efforts in promoting alternative energy generation in Westerly, including solar and wind energy proposals, and considers the potential future of those proposals for Westerly. This report provides goals, policies and recommended actions to assist the community in implementing renewable energy generation in the future. This section of the Comprehensive Plan, and the discussion of public facilities' energy efficiency, was funded by a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

### **3.5.6 Communications**

Several private telecommunications providers offer services to residents and visitors in Westerly which are generally considered to be provided in good quality. The Town and the School Department also intend to develop a fiber optic network (transmitting information as light impulses through optical fibers) across Westerly by installing the necessary supportive infrastructure.

### 3.5.7 Findings and Implications

- Water distribution deficiencies have caused use restrictions in the past. Ongoing improvement projects have mitigated this problem to a large extent, however, drought planning and water-supply protections remain as issues.
- The wastewater treatment plant in Westerly is nearing its capacity. Design plans for plant expansion exist, however funding and implementation of these designs have yet to be determined.

## 3.6 Services and Facilities

Since the adoption of its first Comprehensive Plan in 1992, the Town of Westerly has undertaken a concerted effort to upgrade and modernize its municipal services and facilities. Examples from the last decade include improvement of the water treatment and distribution system, construction of new facilities for the Police Department and Public Works Department, a new middle school, the establishment of a new community center (converted from an elementary school), and the renovation of the high school. In addition, there have been privately-funded renovations of Yale-New Haven Health Westerly Hospital (formerly known as L+M Westerly Hospital) and Westerly Library. Construction of a new Animal Shelter and headquarters for the Westerly Ambulance Corps have also taken place. Several private, public and quasi-public agencies are located in Westerly and provide social services to its residents.

The **Public Facilities Map (PF-1)** shows all structures which contribute to Westerly's ability to provide a broad range of services including emergency response, medical services, education, waste disposal, library services and social support. These facilities are gathered from several Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) datasets which have been modified to indicate their contemporary statuses.

### 3.6.1 Emergency Services

The Westerly Police Department has 55 staff members, 44 of whom are sworn officers. The new police headquarters on Airport Road houses all police operations and serves as a regional emergency operations center. The department has also recently been approved for funding necessary to update its dispatch center.

The Town of Westerly was divided into seven (7) fire districts as of June 2016 which include Bradford, Dunn's Corners, Misquamicut, Shelter Harbor, Watch Hill, Weekapaug, and Westerly. Each fire district is incorporated to provide services within its boundaries and has taxation powers, allowing for no reliance on appropriations from the Town. Their respective fire departments are staffed primarily by volunteers with the exception of one or two paid employees in the Dunn's Corners and Westerly Fire Departments. The departments have established working relationships that allow them to provide back-up support to each other as

needed. Bradford and Shelter Harbor have mutual aid agreements with Dunn's Corners and Weekapaug maintains a mutual aid agreement with Misquamicut.

The Westerly Ambulance Corps. is a private, non-profit organization that provides basic life support and advanced life support emergency medical services to Westerly and parts of Stonington, Connecticut including the village of Pawcatuck. Ambulance services are provided by paid staff (8 full-time employees) and volunteers (20 active). The all-volunteer Rescue Squad consists of between 20 and 30 active members and specializes in rescue from vehicles, water and ice.

Yale-New Haven Health System Westerly Hospital has been serving residents since 1925 and was acquired by the Lawrence + Memorial Medical Group in 2013. With a total active medical staff of over 130 personnel, the hospital provides medical and surgical care to a service area which includes Washington County in Rhode Island and New London County in Connecticut. Similar to other hospitals in the state, major issues impacting the hospital are uncompensated care and difficulties related to low reimbursement rates. During recent years, the hospital has battled with operating losses annually.

In addition to the hospital, Westerly is also served by South County Health through South County Home Health (formerly Visiting Nurse Services Home Health Services of Rhode Island) and its second Medical and Wellness Center in the state. The center provides several services and contains space for the Center for Women's Health. There are four (4) nursing homes located in Town which provide a total of 292 beds and one assisted living facility with a 75-person capacity.

### 3.6.2 Schools

The Westerly Public Schools system is composed of six school buildings which provide public education for pre-kindergarten and grades one (1) through twelve (12). The majority of Westerly's school-aged population (93.8%) is enrolled in the public school system. At the conclusion of the 2008-2009 academic year, Westerly Public Schools closed one (1) of its five (5) elementary schools and moved all fifth-grade students to Westerly Middle School due to a decade-long trend of declining enrollment. A second elementary school was closed following the end of the 2016-2017 academic year. May 2017 enrollment recorded a total of 2,793 students with 823 at Westerly High School, 871 at Westerly Middle School and 1,099 in the pre-kindergarten program and grades one through four (4).

According to the Rhode Island Department of Education, as reported through its [InfoWorks website](#), the school district had a classroom teacher-student ratio of 1:12, a 95% attendance rate and a 3.4% student drop-out rate in the 2015-2016 academic year. In the succeeding 2016-2017 academic year, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

(PARCC) was taken generally by students in grades three (3) through ten (10). The results of this statewide exam found that geometry was the only subject assessed in which a majority of students (51%) met or exceeded statewide expectations. The second-highest performance of meeting or exceeding statewide expectations was in third-grade students assessed on mathematics (44%). The lowest performance was found in eighth-grade students assessed on mathematics (15%). Greater details on PARCC and the school district's performance are available on the InfoWorks website.

### **3.6.3 Solid Waste Disposal**

The Town of Westerly owns and operates a solid waste transfer station which also contains a recycling facility. At the Transfer Station, the Town compacts, loads and hauls waste to the State's central landfill. The Town does not provide curbside pickup and residents may either bring their waste to the transfer station in specially designated bags sold by the Town or pay private haulers to pick up their waste for delivery to the Transfer Station. Information on the number of persons or households served is not currently available or tracked. In 2016, the Town recorded a 39.6% recycling rate and 42.2% overall diversion rate. This exceeded the State's 35% recycling rate and showed significant gains towards achieving the State's 50% overall diversion rate.

### **3.6.4 Westerly Library and Wilcox Park**

Westerly Library and Wilcox Park are located on approximately 14.7 acres in the core of downtown Westerly. Both the park and the library are owned and operated by the non-profit Memorial and Library Association of Westerly. In 2016, 61.9% of the library's funding came from non-public sources, 13.5% came from the State and 24.6% came from local sources (Westerly and Stonington, Connecticut). As of spring 2016, the library was beginning its most recent renovations with a new circulation desk with the help of a private foundation grant. The grant is also planned to fund a new space for teenagers, a modernized technology lab and a makerspace.

### **3.6.5 Social Services**

A survey conducted by the Basic Needs Network (BNN) of Washington County through its agency members in 2011 found 34% of agency clients were from Westerly. In the 2010-2014 period, the American Community Survey estimated Westerly has the lowest median household income and median family income of any town in Washington County. These and other statistics indicate many residents in Town experience personal financial and/or social struggles. Numerous agencies and programs have established a presence in Westerly as a result, offering a wide variety of services to individuals and families in need.

### 3.6.6 Energy

The Town of Westerly previously contracted Johnson Controls, Inc. (JCI) to conduct an energy audit of non-school municipal buildings which took place over a six-month period from May to October 2011. The audit involved an investigation of specific energy conservation measures. From these findings, JCI offered several recommendations which were projected to offer a 9.3% reduction in energy costs. In 2014, the Town of Westerly then contacted JCI to assist in decreasing the Town's energy costs over a twenty-year period to end in August 2034. Thirteen Town-owned buildings will be monitored over the next two (2) decades and annual reports will be issued analyzing the cost savings and increased efficiency achieved over time. In the first annual report issued, JCI identified a \$1,210 operations and maintenance cost avoidance and a \$54,458 utilities cost avoidance. Future years are targeted to achieve a fixed percentage increase to keep pace with inflation.

Appendix I includes a discussion of the results of energy audits of public buildings and facilities and the efforts the Town and School Department have made to reduce energy consumption through improvements to buildings, replacing lighting and making management and control changes to heating, air conditioning and ventilation (HVAC) systems.

### 3.6.7 Findings and Implications

- Emergency services in the town, both individually and in cooperation with others, are able to cooperate effectively and are supported by continued upgrades to their respective facilities, as needed
- Steady improvement in the healthcare sector and overall economy, in combination with certain demographics such as age, is resulting in an expansion of health, hygienic and well-being services provided throughout the town
- The Westerly Town Council and School Committee must continue to work together to develop and maintain appropriate school facilities for students and the community
- Significant improvement has been made towards achieving the 35% recycling rate and 50% overall diversion rate goals, with the reported recycling rate more than doubling in the past five (5) years
- A significant number of support agencies operate and/or are located in Westerly to serve a notably large population requiring financial and social assistance

## 3.7 Transportation Network

### 3.7.1 Roads and Motor Vehicles

The largest single commuter group in Westerly is composed of those driving a motor vehicle alone to work. As such, Westerly has seen motor vehicle ownership increase steadily since at least 2000. Traffic congestion is a notable problem in Westerly, especially in the summer when the population swells with seasonal residents and beachgoers. At times, traffic volume

approaches gridlock at the intersection of Airport Road and Winnapaug Road, a major intersection connecting Routes 1 and 78 to Atlantic Avenue. Periods of congestion also occur in the downtown area as well as the Granite Street segment of Route 1, which records some of the highest traffic volume in the Town. While some traffic safety statistics have slightly increased or remained unchanged, the number of vehicle collisions has declined in recent years and no vehicle-related fatalities occurred in fiscal year 2015.

### **3.7.2 Parking**

Parking is an important concern for many residents and visitors, particularly in the downtown and coastal areas. Strategies to decrease demand for on-street parking in the downtown area may include encouraging walking and bicycling and exploring opportunities for shuttle bus service and/or other alternative parking initiatives. As the downtown continues to be re-energized and its most vital areas increase in popularity, people may be more willing to walk longer distances – particularly when opportunities exist for engagement with passive activities such as window shopping along the way. Parking shortages in other areas of Town also include Misquamicut and Watch Hill.

### **3.7.3 Public Transportation**

The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) provides public transportation service throughout Rhode Island. Within Westerly however, service is limited with connections to Narragansett, Providence, Richmond and South Kingstown available through three (3) different routes, two (2) of which operate each weekday and none of which operate on weekends. ADA compliant service is also available by request. Westerly Station serves as the Park-n-Ride lot for the route to Providence.

Built in 1895 and renovated in 1999, Westerly Station provides Amtrak service and is being studied for potential commuter rail service through expansions of two separate lines – the Connecticut Department of Transportation’s Shore Line East and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s (MBTA) Providence line (operated by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation [RIDOT] south of Providence). Shore Line East currently extends as far east as New London, Connecticut and the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission (CPTC) officially recommended expansion to Westerly in its 2015 annual report. Discussions have also taken place between MBTA and Amtrak regarding expansion to Westerly Station. RIDOT previously determined that Westerly Station is in a walkable location, making it suitable as a commuter rail station. Additional shared vehicle parking spaces may also become available in other potential areas surrounding the downtown.

The rail line between New London and North Kingstown is the only segment of the Northeast Corridor between Boston and New York not used by commuter rail.

Residents who provided input to the development of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan through a survey agreed that commuter rail accessibility should be a high priority for transportation improvements within Westerly. This input was received again in the development of this plan as well as at a public hearing in May 2015 in Norwich, Connecticut. Community members and transportation agencies have also indicated that beyond commuting to and from work, commuter rail service would provide a convenient connection between Westerly and the InterLink at T. F. Green Airport.

#### **3.7.4 Pedestrians and Walkability**

While motor vehicle operation is the dominant means of travel in town, walking is steadily becoming a more viable option for residents as they seek a more active lifestyle and the Town seeks to build upon its strong pedestrian infrastructure established prior to the automobile. Downtown, Misquamicut and Watch Hill areas are arguably the most walkable neighborhoods in Westerly due to their historical development and roles within the community. Safety is a common concern which limits the number of people who can easily walk however, specifically those aided by wheelchairs and other wheeled mobility devices. Many sidewalks are narrow and in poor condition and the clearing of snow and ice accumulation in the winter months is often not sufficient. Continued enforcement of sidewalk clearing and funding for the maintenance and expansion of pedestrian infrastructure will be important aspects contributing to Westerly's progress towards being a walker-friendly community.

#### **3.7.5 Cycling and Bikability**

In an effort to promote biking (which also works to improve public health, reduce traffic congestion and subsequent air pollution) as a viable travel option, the Town has endorsed a regional approach to the construction and financing of a safe bike network that serves the recreational and transportation needs of residents and visitors. The Town has focused on the implementation of recommendations of the three (3) existing bike path studies for South County as a beginning. RIDOT has conducted studies of a shoreline bikeway that would include roadways within the towns of Charlestown and Westerly. The roadways would include signage to remind both drivers and cyclists that roadways are to be shared. This plan has not yet been implemented.

#### **3.7.6 Transportation Improvement Projects**

The Engineering Division has been proactive in designing and implementing programs for the rehabilitation and maintenance of local bridges, roadways and sidewalks. There is a comprehensive pavement management plan that determines specifically where money is to be used for resurfacing of roadways and there also is bond money available for roadway reconstruction, roadway drainage, and overall improvements to Town roads.

### 3.7.7 Water and Waterfront Access

Boats can be launched during the operating season at the Westerly marina, which is free to all Westerly residents and is operated under a lease agreement between the owners of the marina and the Town. Another free boat launch area with parking for boat trailers is the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management facility located on Main Street. There are several other marinas on the Pawcatuck River where boat ramps are available for a fee. Westerly has had a Harbor Management Plan under development for some time and its successful completion should help manage the growing activity within the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay.

### 3.7.8 Air Service

Westerly State Airport (WST) is state-owned and operated by the Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) to serve the aviation needs of Westerly and nearby communities. The airport serves private and corporate aircraft as well as New England Airlines, which provides important commercial passenger and cargo service between Westerly and Block Island. Recreational flying is the most frequent activity at the airport; however, corporate and business activity, training and flight instruction are also supported at the airport. In the summer, the airport serves seasonal residents and vacationing visitors in addition to its regular year-round commercial and general aviation traffic. The [\*Rhode Island Airport System Plan\*](#) defined Westerly Airport's future role as being of general aviation/commercial service and projected enplanements at WST to be between 11,536 (low-growth model) and 13,900 (high-growth model) in 2029.

### 3.7.9 Findings and Implications

- Innovative methods to address parking issues in Town are needed.
- Extension of commuter rail services to Westerly Station should be encouraged.
- Improvements to Westerly Station are part of state transportation plans. Additional parking is needed to support these plans.
- Continued improvements to and expansions of the existing walking and biking networks are needed.
- According to the *Rhode Island State Airport System Plan*, Westerly State Airport enplanements (the number of passengers boarding departing flights) are expected to increase by 2.5% per year through 2030. Therefore, it is important to the Town that actions, necessary to ensure continued safe and efficient airport operations, are weighed with consideration to how potential measures may disrupt neighboring properties.

The **Transportation map (T-1)** offers a visual overview of the many components which support the Town's circulation and mobility. These include boat launches and ramps, bike paths,

harbors, ports, public transit routes and stops, railroads, roadways (including evacuation routes, local roads and state roads) and transportation facilities (Westerly Airport and Westerly Station). Much of this information was contributed by datasets made available through RIGIS.

### 3.8 Open Space and Recreation

Open space and recreation resources play a critical role in the quality of life Westerly offers, serving as important natural resource protection areas and providing opportunities for leisure and exercise which contribute to good health and well-being.

Since the adoption of Westerly's first Comprehensive Plan, there have been many changes to the Town's open space and recreation resources. The following are selected highlights of accomplishments of the Town of Westerly:

- Acquisition and protection of several hundred acres town-wide by the Town and several non-profit organizations
- Purchase of an additional boat to patrol Westerly's shoreline and river
- Provision of picnic facilities at Cimalore Field, Gingerella Sports Complex and Craig Field
- Creations of Rotary Park, Wuskenau Beach and the Tower Street Community Center
- Clearing of hiking trails and installation of signage at the Town Forest
- Upgrades to school and Town playground facilities
- Establishment of the Recreation Department
- Expansion of the Westerly Senior Citizens Center
- Approval of a \$3 million Open Space Bond in 2006
- Approval of a \$1.3 million bond in 2014 for passive open space and recreation

#### 3.8.1 Open Space

In addition to the Town, a variety of public and private organizations preserve open space in Westerly. This combination of preservation efforts has resulted in the protection of over 4,600 acres of conservation land, translating into more than 23.1% of the Town. Approximately 78.3% of the Town's conservation lands have either full or limited public access. Major owners of conservation land in Westerly include the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, Nature Conservancy, Nopes Island Conservation Association, Shelter Harbor Fire District, State of Rhode Island, Town of Westerly (including the Westerly Municipal Land Trust), Watch Hill Conservancy, Watch Hill Fire District, Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation, Weekapaug Fire District, Westerly Land Trust and various foundations and private owners.

The **Conservation Land map (CON-1)** offers a visual overview of all conserved lands in the Town of Westerly by one (1) of two (2) RIGIS datasets contributed by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management which include non-state conservation lands and state conservation

lands. Non-State conservation lands include conservation by municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which permanently protect their lands through one or more processes. Some properties may be alternatively identified by such processes as protected by their owners against future development (known as ‘Conservation Intent’). Lands identified at the state-level have likewise been protected from future development through one of these processes except for conservation intents.

The largest concentration of open space is located in the northern and eastern portions of Westerly and includes the Town Forest, Woody Hill Management Area, the Bradford Preserve, the Lucey Property and the Grills Preserve. In the southern and southeastern portions, a substantial amount of open space is preserved by four (4) golf courses which include the Shelter Harbor Golf Club, the Misquamicut Club, the Weekapaug Golf Club and Winnapaug Country Club. Coastal open space includes Misquamicut State Beach, two (2) Town beaches, the Weekapaug Fishing Area, Napatree Point Conservation Area and several beaches owned by Fire Districts. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island and the Westerly Land Trust also maintain large areas of open space along Shore Road (Route 1A). Open spaces in the central portion of the Town include extensive wetland areas including Aguntaug Swamp (also known as Crandall Swamp) and the Newton Swamp Management Area.

### 3.8.2 Recreation

A variety of recreational opportunities exist in Westerly. Major water-based recreation includes the State and Town beaches, marinas and access points for launching boats and fishing. Non-water-based recreation facilities are additionally summarized in Table 3-4 below. In addition, recreational opportunities are available at nearby facilities just outside of Town.

**Table 3-4 Public and Private Recreation Facilities**

| Facility                                   | Location          | Description   |
|--|-------------------|---|
| Avondale Boat Yard                         | 47 Avondale Road  | Pawcatuck River   |
| Bradford Elementary School                 | 15 Church Street  | 1 basketball court, 1 gymnasium, 1 playground, 1 softball field and 2 tennis courts |
| Bradford Landing Fishing Area              | Bradford Road     | Pawcatuck River   |
| Bradford Preserve                          | Bradford Road     | 2 lacrosse fields and cross-country/hiking trails                                   |
| Bruce Ladd Memorial Dog Park               | Larry Hirsch Lane | 1 dog park  |
| Bowling Lane Playground                    | Bowling Lane      | 1 playground  |
| Camp Quequatuck<br>(Boy Scouts of America) | Boy Scout Drive   | 4.5 acres containing 3 camp sites and 1 general field                               |

|                                   |                                |   |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Chapman Pond                      | Larry Hirsch Lane              | Chapman Pond  |
| Cimalore Field                    | Wilson Street                  | 1 baseball field, 2 basketball courts, 1 playground and 4 softball fields               |
| Craig Field                       | Mountain Avenue                | 1 baseball field, 1 basketball court and 1 playground                                   |
| Dunes Park Beach                  | Atlantic Avenue                | Block Island Sound  |
| Dunn's Corners Elementary School  | 8.5 Plateau Road               | 1 basketball court, 1 general field, 1 gymnasium, 1 paved playing area and 1 playground |
| East Beach                        | Bluff Avenue                   | Block Island Sound  |
| Frank Hall Boat Yard              | 3 India Point Road             | Pawcatuck River   |
| Gingerella Sports Complex         | White Rock Road                | 1 basketball court, 1 playground, 1 skate park, 8 soccer fields and 1 tennis court      |
| Gray's Boat Yard                  | 91 Watch Hill Road             | Pawcatuck River   |
| Grills Preserve                   | 198 Bowling Lane               | 482 acres containing cross country path and walking trails                              |
| Lotteryville (Roger Hall) Marina  | 25 Avondale Road               | Pawcatuck River   |
| Maschaug Beach                    | Ocean View Highway             | Block Island Sound  |
| Misquamicut Club                  | 60 Ocean View Highway          | 1 golf course and 7 tennis courts   |
| Misquamicut State Beach           | 257 Atlantic Avenue            | Block Island Sound  |
| Napatree Beach and Napatree Point | Fort Road                      | Block Island Sound and Little Narragansett Bay  |
| Ocean Community YMCA (The Y)      | 95 High Street                 | 1 fitness center, 2 gymnasiums, 1 playground, 2 swimming pools and 1 tennis court       |
| Pond View Racquet Club            | 252 Shore Road                 | 5 tennis courts   |
| Quonochontaug Beach               | Sand Trail                     | Block Island Sound  |
| Recreation Department Office      | 93 Tower Street                | see Tower Street School Community Center  |
| Rotary Park                       | Airport Road                   | 2 playgrounds, 6 tennis courts and 2 volleyball courts                                  |
| Saint Pius X Regional Academy     | 32 Elm Street                  | 1 general field and 1 playground  |
| Sandy Point                       | Sandy Point                    | Little Narragansett Bay   |
| Shelter Harbor Golf Club          | 1 Golf Club Drive <sup>1</sup> | 1 golf course   |
| Shelter Harbor Inn                | 10 Wagner Road                 | Outdoor Paddle Club   |

|                                      |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Springbrook Elementary School        | 39 Springbrook Road                  | 1 basketball court, 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground                              |
| State Street Elementary School       | 35 State Street                      | 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground  |
| Tower Street School Community Center | 93 Tower Street                      | 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground (1 basketball court and 1 tennis court adjacent) |
| Trombino Sports Complex              | Moorehouse Road                      | 3 baseball fields and 2 softball fields  |
| Viking Marina                        | 19 Margin Street                     | Pawcatuck River  |
| Washington Trust Skating Center      | 61 Main Street                       | Skating rink in winter and sand court in summer  |
| Watch Hill Beach                     | 151 Bay Street                       | Block Island Sound   |
| Watch Hill Boat Yard                 | 13 Pasadena Avenue                   | Colonel Willie Cove  |
| Watch Hill Floating Docks            | Bay Street                           | Watch Hill Cove  |
| Watch Hill Yacht Club                | 21 Bay Street                        | Watch Hill Cove  |
| Weekapaug Breachway                  | Atlantic Avenue                      | Weekapaug Breachway  |
| Weekapaug Golf Club                  | 265 Shore Road                       | 1 golf course  |
| Weekapaug Tennis Club                | 24 Chapman Road                      | 8 tennis courts  |
| Weekapaug Yacht Club                 | 23 Spray Rock Road                   | Quonochontaug Pond   |
| Westerly Fishing Area                | 99 Main Street                       | Pawcatuck River  |
| Westerly High School                 | 23 Ward Avenue<br>15 Highland Avenue | 2 general fields, 2 gymnasiums, 1 multi-sport fields and 1 track                               |
| Westerly Marina                      | 23 Margin Street                     | Pawcatuck River  |
| Westerly Middle School               | 10 Sandy Hill Road                   | 1 baseball field, 1 gymnasium and 1 multi-sport field  |
| Westerly Senior Citizens Center      | 39 State Street                      | 12,500 square foot center containing activity room, cafeteria game room and lounge             |
| Westerly Town Beach                  | 365 Atlantic Avenue                  | Sand beach   |
| Westerly Yacht Club                  | 1 Watch Hill Road                    | Thompson Cove  |
| Westerly Youth Football Complex      | 60 Old Hopkinton Road                | 1 football field   |
| Wilcox Park                          | 44 Broad Street                      | Arboretum containing benches, a fountain, 5 monuments, a pond and walking paths                |
| Winnapaug Country Club               | 184 Shore Road                       | 1 golf course  |

Wuskenau Beach

311 Atlantic Avenue

Sand beach

Sources: Google Earth, Pond View Racquet Club, Ocean Community YMCA (The Y) and Town of Westerly

<sup>1</sup> Address located in Charlestown, Rhode Island

The **Recreation map (REC-1)**, like the Conservation Lands map, also shows conservation lands. In addition, however, it also includes boat launches and ramps, bike routes, hiking trails, recreation sites, and scenic landscapes and roadways. The recreation sites included are those on the most up-to-date State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) Inventory of Facilities, as contributed by RIDEM and include both water-based and non-water-based sites.

### 3.8.3 Findings and Implications

- A systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives, is needed for open space preservation.
- Both the State and the Town propose greenways that follow the Pawcatuck River and the Town's coastline.
- The public has long supported development of a bikeway system; however previous attempts to create one have been unsuccessful.
- Trails are the most clearly demanded recreation in state-wide surveys. It is necessary to identify trail needs in the Town and continue to develop interconnected pedestrian paths.
- 79% of respondents in the Westerly community survey agreed or strongly agreed that the riverfront should be preserved with more greenspace. This finding implies that one of the key recreation focuses should be on the development of greenspace along the Pawcatuck River.

## 3.9 Historic and Cultural Resources

Westerly was incorporated in 1669, following earlier settlement by the Native American tribes and English colonial settlers. In succeeding decades, particularly those surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, Westerly grew into its present role as hub of commerce and recreation in southern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. The abundance of historic resources has continually been a significant asset and, in 2002, the Town was designated as a Distinctive Destination by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

### 3.9.1 Historic Places

Westerly has a large collection of distinct neighborhoods, homes and structures which provide glimpses into the Town's historic past. Many of these are listed as historic districts and historic sites on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Babcock-Smith House, Bradford, Downtown, the Flying Horse Carousel, George Kent Performance Hall, Lewis-Card-Perry House, Main Street, the North End, Nursery Site RI-273, Ram Point, the US Post Office on High Street, Watch Hill, the Weekapaug Inn, Westerly Armory and Wilcox Park. Numerous other places

have also been identified by the Westerly Preservation Society, Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) and others.

The **Cultural Resources map (CR-1)** identifies all historic districts and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including the Perry Homestead which is pending register listing. In addition to these, the Cultural Resources Map also shows districts which have been determined to be eligible and were included in the Westerly Preservation Society's 2006 report, as well as 1992 candidate sites.

### 3.9.3 Regulatory and Administrative Programs

To support Westerly's wealth of nationally-recognized historic resources, RIHPHC and other local organizations have actively worked to ensure these places are recorded and preserved, and the Town has codified ordinances to support preservation efforts. In recent years, many private developers have successfully been awarded funding through numerous sources to rehabilitate historic structures throughout Town. The Town will continue to support the maintaining of these programs for future projects.

### 3.9.3 Cultural Resources

There are a variety of non-profit cultural institutions and events which are important to the community and its tourism industry. Performing arts include the Chorus of Westerly (which has programs year-round in its concert hall [George Kent Performance Hall, noted above], a Summer Pops concert in Wilcox Park, the Granite Theatre, and the Shakespeare-in-the-Park series of summer plays. The Westerly Armory houses the oldest civic band in the country. The Town contributes to several of these programs and sponsors other music programs in the summer both in the downtown and at its beaches in Misquamicut. Westerly is also home to many performing and visual artists who live and work in the state-designated Westerly Arts and Entertainment District overlaying downtown. Special benefits are provided to artists and art facilities at these specially designated areas of downtown Westerly.

The Memorial and Library Association of Westerly owns and operates the Westerly Library, itself built as a Civil War memorial, and the surrounding 14-acre Wilcox Park. Although Westerly is a considered a medium-sized community in the State, the Westerly Library's collection is one of the most actively used in the Ocean State Libraries system. Wilcox Park, originally designed in 1898 and expanded in two subsequent phases, is arguably the single most character-generating feature in Westerly's downtown and is the site of numerous community activities throughout the year.

### 3.9.3 Findings and Implications

- The Town is rich in historic buildings and districts that help to create its character. Opportunities exist for additional preservation and careful development of these districts and structures.
- The Town has successfully taken advantage of the Community Development Block Grant program to restore and enhance historic areas and sites. This approach could be more widely employed.
- Within Westerly is an Arts and Entertainment District that provides tax incentives for artists who live and work in Westerly and for gallery spaces in the District. Enhanced utilization of this program can support redevelopment.

### 3.10 Natural Hazards and Resiliency

Because of its geographic characteristics, extensive shoreline on Rhode Island Sound, and its location on the Pawcatuck River, Westerly is subject to a wide range of natural hazards with the potential to adversely affect public health and safety. Resiliency requires identifying all the hazards that potentially threaten Westerly and analyzing them individually to determine the degree of threat posed by each.

#### 3.10.1 Westerly's Hazard Mitigation Plan

Westerly has developed a Hazard Mitigation Plan to help allocate finite resources, determine what actions are feasible and appropriate to address local vulnerabilities and to enhance community resiliency. Analysis of these threats recognizes that some events, such as flash flooding, may occur more frequently, but may also have impacts which are less severe than events that occur infrequently, such as coastal storms and hurricanes. The appropriate mitigation actions to address these threats are then established based on the probability of events and of significant impacts. Addressing risk and vulnerability through hazard mitigation measures is an effective way to reduce societal, economic and environmental exposure to natural hazards impacts (Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, 2014).

As part of the Hazard Mitigation Plan, natural hazards have been classified and listed in order of frequency and impact. Results are shown in Table 3-5 with the most frequently occurring natural hazards, and those with the highest potential to result in adverse impacts listed first. A detailed description of each of these natural hazards can also be found in the Natural Hazards and Resiliency chapter of Appendix I.

**Table 3-5 Summary of Natural Hazards**

| Wind-related | Winter-related | Flood-related     | Geological-related | Others    |
|--------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Storm surge  | Snow           | Riverine flooding | Earthquakes        | Wildfires |

| Tropical Cyclones | Ice          | Flash flooding                    |  | Droughts     |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Tornadoes         | Extreme Cold | Coastal flooding                  |  | Extreme heat |
| High winds        |              | Climate change and sea level rise |  |              |
|                   |              | Coastal erosion                   |  |              |
|                   |              | Dam breaches                      |  |              |

As presented above, Westerly is particularly vulnerable to wind-related hazards, winter-related hazards and flooding. Several significant storm events have impacted Westerly and the region since the Comprehensive Plan was last updated. Most notable are major flooding (March 2010), Hurricane Irene (August 2011), blizzards (January 2011 and February 2013), and Hurricane Sandy (October 2012; sometimes referred to as Superstorm Sandy). These storms caused significant damage in Westerly, served as warnings to the community and have led to the establishment of goals and policies relative to natural hazards and resiliency.

### 3.10.2 Findings and Implications

- Emergency services in the Town, both individually and in cooperation with one another, are able to cooperate effectively and are supported by continued upgrades to their respective facilities as needed.

## Chapter 4.0 The Future

### 4.1 Vision and Values: Where do we want to be in 2038?

As stated in the first chapter, this Comprehensive Plan envisions Westerly as a friendly and safe community that has preserved its quality of life for all generations, protected its distinctive heritage and extraordinary cultural and natural resources and dedicated itself to fiscally sound government and a vital economy. Looking forward to 2038 evokes an image of what the future holds.

### A Vision for Westerly

- ❖ Westerly in 2038 will remain a unique and special place, retaining its distinctive neighborhoods, history, traditions and natural beauty, while growing in a way to meet its residents' needs for a vibrant place to live, raise and educate families, and work.
- ❖ Westerly will have contained sprawl, and the development of housing and commerce will have been thoughtfully managed to meet the needs of residents of all generations and to promote a prosperous economy.
- ❖ Downtown Westerly will be a premier center for people, culture and transportation, and will be well-connected to all neighborhoods through programs and services of community-wide interest.
- ❖ Westerly will have secured its water supply for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and carried out its extensive programs of infrastructure revitalization including water, sewer and stormwater management systems and upgrading of town facilities.
- ❖ The shoreline, Pawcatuck River, salt ponds and greenspace will remain Westerly's trademarks, carefully managed to sustain their uses while preserving their health and natural beauty for future generations to enjoy.
- ❖ Westerly will promote a condition of economic and physical resilience to natural and man-made events.

In developing this Comprehensive Plan, an important set of values evolved which guided the creation of the Plan and will shape the future landscape of Westerly. These values are described below to assist residents in understanding the Plan and to suggest what they should anticipate during its implementation.

1. *Protect the integrity of the town's existing zoning map with limited changes to density.* The current districts represent the actual development patterns in the community which the Plan intends to preserve.
2. *Focus on redevelopment/revitalization of commercial/industrial districts and traditional residential neighborhoods.* It is important to Westerly citizens to retain the town's traditional character and heritage while discouraging further commercial

sprawl.

3. *Preserve Westerly's sense of place, physical character, open space and natural resources.* Public meetings and surveys clearly indicate the highest priority of Westerly residents is protection of our waterfront, beaches, water quality, rivers, aquifer, surface waters, and environmentally-sensitive lands.
4. *Maintain critical infrastructure as a high priority, especially including our roads and our water and sewer systems.* Water supply protection and potential expansion of the town's wastewater treatment plant are highly important issues for future consideration.
5. *Limit automobile traffic through support of commuter rail service and establishment of local pedestrian and bicycle networks.* Westerly can take full advantage of its strategic location between Boston and New York, exceptional transportation assets, and extraordinary local recreational opportunities.
6. *Promote the quality and vitality of locally-owned businesses.* This includes enhancing the commercial diversity of the town and providing more local well-paying jobs for our residents.
7. *Encourage a range of viable housing options for all income and age groups.* It is to Westerly's advantage to retain younger professionals and families who represent our future and retiring seniors who have devoted their lives to the community as residents.
8. *Support critical institutions such as the school system, the hospital, the library and the strong volunteer spirit that exists in Westerly.* People choose to live where their children can receive a good education, where they have access to quality healthcare, and where they can participate in and contribute to community activities.
9. *Implement the Plan while maintaining the sound financial condition of the town.* We cannot fail to implement the Plan due to financial constraints but neither can we jeopardize the financial condition of our town.

This chapter of the Plan includes a discussion of the long-term priorities of our community and how they are supportive of and compatible with (1) *Land Use 2025*, (2) a Build-Out Analysis which describes the town's capacity for development under the existing zoning ordinance, (3) a Future Land Use Plan which demonstrates in text and graphic form the future strategy and land use policy of our town including patterns of development and conservation and (4) critical observations on the importance of financially supporting the Plan implementation and protecting the future integrity of the town's financial position.

## 4.2 Long-term Priorities

### 4.2.1 Introduction

This section discusses the Town’s longer-term priorities in the context of important historical accomplishments, and the compatibility of the Comprehensive Plan with *Land Use 2025*.

Westerly has been at the forefront of regulating land use and providing infrastructure to accommodate land development. In 1897, the Town of Westerly purchased the private Westerly Water Works to create its own municipal water system. By the mid-1920s, acting on authority from the Rhode Island General Assembly, the Town adopted a Zoning Ordinance. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, it substantially increased the area served by municipal sewer disposal and upgraded its treatment plant not only to increase its capacity but to enhance the level of treatment. In 1998, the Town has substantially revised its Zoning Ordinance and other land use regulations while acting flexibly to accommodate development it has deemed desirable. Throughout the public outreach activities conducted in support of this Plan, citizens overwhelmingly expressed love for Westerly while stressing the importance of continually improving its infrastructure and related public services. Consistent with these sentiments, this Plan’s vision for the future is grounded in respecting Westerly’s history and traditions, cherishing its natural resources and thoughtfully managing growth and development.

The four goals articulated in *Land Use 2025* provided a constant touch-point for development of this Comprehensive Plan and the longer-term view of Westerly’s future. These goals are:

- Goal 1: Build the Greenspace and Greenways System
- Goal 2: Achieve Excellence in Community Design
- Goal 3: Develop First-class Supporting Infrastructure
- Goal 4: Implement the Vision

### 4.2.2 Build the Greenspace and Greenways System

#### 4.2.2.1 Protect Open Space and Important Land Features

*Long-term Priority Continued from 2010 Plan*

The Town of Westerly must employ and support a full array of public, charitable, private and multi-sector strategies to acquire and/or otherwise protect areas of open space and important natural land features.

Since the adoption of Westerly’s Comprehensive Plan in 1992, substantial areas of open space have been acquired for preservation and recreation. Public/private and non-profit entities have

been active and successful in the purchase/dedication of lands for open space and, in some cases, the purchase of development rights.

Recent examples of the Town's efforts to acquire open space include the purchase of the Bradford Preserve and the Lucey properties, obtained through bond referendums. The Bradford Preserve Bond was passed in 2006, to acquire 57 acres for recreation and wellhead protection. In 2014 a second bond was passed to purchase an additional 433 acres (referred to as the Lucey properties) for passive recreation, open space and aquifer protection. These lands are contiguous with the state-owned Woody Hill Management Area (722 acres) and the non-profit Westerly Land Trust's Wahaneeta Preserve (72 acres), thus creating Westerly's first green belt – extending over 12,000 contiguous acres.

Additional efforts were made by the Town of Westerly in 2014 to purchase 41 acres on Springbrook Road within a wellhead protection area. This land is located within a wellhead protection area identified by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management as a zone in which special measures are advised to maintain the integrity of groundwater by reducing potential hazards and risks. This purchase was also associated with restrictions placed on the adjacent White Rock Quarry concerning mining practices so mining operations would not adversely affect the town's wellheads (located in close proximity to this land). This land purchase was funded through the Westerly Water Department, requiring a minor increase in town water fees.

The Town, private and non-profit organizations will continue to use traditional methods of property acquisition as well as other strategies/techniques to achieve its objectives without taxpayer dollars. Federal, state and local government contributions to future acquisitions are likely to be reduced or eliminated in the event of a slowing economy or unexpected economic downturns.

Other efforts of the Town of Westerly have contributed to a system of greenways including cluster and conservation subdivisions. The use of cluster subdivision regulations has been used to permit the same number of residential building lots on a site at a reduced size while protecting land along the Pawcatuck River in Bradford and land and the scenic vista across Spring Pond on Watch Hill Road. The use of the multifamily dwellings provision of the Zoning Ordinance by other developers, also in conjunction with the Westerly Land Trust, has significantly contributed to the Land Trust's land holdings on Mastuxet Brook.

Conservation subdivision regulations should be adopted as well as other smart-growth options. All Town entities involved in land use regulations and permitting should remain cognizant of newer land-use regulatory alternatives, consider their implementation and be flexible in their

use so the development which it authorizes also protects important greenspace and greenway systems. Proactive approaches at the earliest stages of the regulatory process, rather than reactive responses at later time, have been valuable in achieving the Town’s desired objectives.

*Additional Long-term Priority for 2018-2038*

The Town of Westerly must promote physical resiliency by conserving areas of open space and important natural land features.

While great achievements have been made in the acquisition of open spaces and natural resource areas of significant importance, it is equally imperative that these lands are conserved for years to come. Projections have become increasingly certain that Westerly, like nearly all other coastal communities world-wide, must be prepared for rising sea levels and more frequent and intense storm events. Maintaining undeveloped lands in their natural state will be one of the most effective actions for the Town to undertake and support over the next two decades.

*4.2.2.2 Connect Greenspace, Recreational Land and Commercial Areas by Means and Methods other than Automobiles*

As noted above, while more needs to be accomplished great strides have been achieved in the protection of open space and important land features. However, there has been little progress in access to these areas by means other than automobiles. If the last twenty years has created a culture of open space acquisition and protection, the challenge of the next twenty years is the creation of a greenspace system of connections and access other than by automobiles.

*Long-term Priority Continued from 2010 Plan*

The Town of Westerly must connect greenspace, recreational land and commercial areas by means and methods other than automobiles.

The public outreach which occurred in relation to the 2010 Comprehensive Plan indicated widespread support for the creation of biking and walking trails and paths. The State of Rhode Island’s initiatives to create such facilities for the East Bay and South Kingstown–Narragansett have been largely successful. While the 2010 Plan called for the establishment of such facilities generally, it prioritized the creation of a discrete specific scenic coastal loop. While a bike loop has not yet been completed at the time of this Plan’s approval, the Town is actively pursuing a coastal bike lane and eco-trail concept in Misquamicut and shoreline area.

### 4.2.3 Achieve Excellence in Community Design

The Zoning Ordinance adopted in 1998 to implement the 1992 Comprehensive Plan initiated Development Plan Review by the Planning Board for all uses other than one- and two-family homes. It also introduced General Development Standards and Development Standards for Particular Uses. Since then, refinements and additional provisions have been added.

Most significantly, in October 2006, development standards for the Shore Commercial-Watch Hill (SC-WH) zoning district were added. The entire area of that district is within the Watch Hill Historic District – listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Zoning Ordinance provides standards which are intended to reflect the character-generating elements of the particular historic district for the Planning Board to apply in its Development Plan Review of proposed development in the area.

#### *Long-term Priority Continued from 2010 Plan*

The Town of Westerly must make the Downtown, the traditional core of Westerly, the focus of its redevelopment and revitalization efforts.

The *Land Use 2025* plan encourages the identification of an urban services area in which higher density infill development and revitalization or retrofitting are encouraged. The 2010 Plan responded by identifying a Downtown Revitalization Area which principally encompasses the Downtown Center zoning districts and some surrounding high density residential zoning district land, including properties within and adjacent to the core of Westerly. The area is serviced by municipal water and sewer. Sidewalks in various conditions exist in most of the Downtown Revitalization Area, while streetscapes are less prevalent and spotty. Its entire western boundary is the Pawcatuck River. Wilcox Park is the most prominent greenspace feature in this area. The 2010 Plan committed to focus redevelopment, revitalization and growth initiatives in this historic urban center, while preserving the best attributes of the traditional core of Westerly that contains vital residential, municipal, commercial, institutional and school activities. The approximate area identified in this Comprehensive Plan update is not co-extensive with the entire area referenced in the state *Land Use 2025* plan because of the Town's commitment to preservation of the municipality's unique values and existing character of its different constituent neighborhoods and the importance of evaluating each neighborhood's specific needs before redevelopment and revitalization. In this update of the Comprehensive Plan the Town has maintained its commitment to this effort and in pursuit of its commitment to the revitalization of Downtown.

*Additional Long-term Priority for 2018-2038*

The Town of Westerly must preserve the unique character and existing values of its constituent neighborhoods and evaluate opportunity for redevelopment and revitalization.

Westerly contains six neighborhoods listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Excellence in design requires a study of each of these areas and the development and adoption of standards for redevelopment and revitalization. The character of Westerly is already substantially defined by existing structures and uses, many of which are facing challenges which require redevelopment, renovations and revitalization.

Again, recent experience should be a strong signal that Westerly officials appreciate both the values and challenges presented in neighborhood revitalization and will work cooperatively to achieve preservation of iconic places while using the means at their disposal to accommodate the financial challenges such undertakings present.

The Town Charter was also amended to establish an Architectural Review Board. The scope of its reach and the standards to be applied are yet to be fully determined by the Town Council. As in other first-time initiatives, the limits of public support and acceptance will be a challenge; however, the new provision offers a new opportunity to contribute to excellence in community design.

The successful revitalization of the historic Westerly downtown area and the enhanced development of the Downtown Revitalization Area which encompasses and surrounds it will require a spirit of cooperation, creativity and flexibility. Transforming the appearance of the Route 1 commercial corridor to a distinctive, inviting, safe, commercial, professional and residential area reflective of the Town's character. The preservation of the unique character of each planning area in the community and recognition of its distinct values requires thoughtful evaluation and community engagement to inform the Town's choices and efforts for redevelopment and revitalization.

#### **4.2.4 Maintain and Develop First-class Supporting Infrastructure**

Achieving the future vision of Westerly requires that the Town maintain and develop a first-class supporting infrastructure in critical areas such as water, sewer, stormwater and facilities. While outside of their direct control, municipal officials must also lead the coordination, planning and implementation of private utilities (electricity, telecommunications, gas, and alternative energy) with respect to capacity and supply, as the Town addresses its own infrastructure issues, including maintenance, repair and replacement. This effort also requires ongoing coordination with adjoining communities. The repair and extension of public sidewalks is also essential to connecting the areas of greenspace and greenways of the Town. Again, giving priority to the

Downtown Revitalization Area and its streetscapes (hardscapes and softscapes) is essential for achieving the future vision for this area but these same considerations must be made in other planning areas.

The 2010 Plan's priority of maintaining and developing high quality infrastructure and coordination of private utilities is still relevant to the 2018-2038 Plan. However, based on the Town's experience with natural hazards, storm surges and future conditions anticipated because of climate change, this priority has taken on even more significance.

*Long-term Priority Amended for 2018-2038 Plan*

The Town of Westerly must maintain and develop first-class supporting infrastructure that will be resilient when the community is faced with weather hazards, effects of climate change, and other catastrophic events.

#### *4.2.4.1 Water*

The availability of a high quality and abundant municipal water supply for industrial and domestic use and fire suppression is essential. This requires protection of our water supply sources. Continued concentration on the maintenance and enhancement of the water distribution systems is essential. The prioritized program of assessment and replacement of the mechanical and distribution elements of the system needs to remain at the forefront. The vulnerability of the municipal water supply and private wells to climate hazards must be part of any assessment. Point source and non-point sources pollutants must be identified and water quality issues reconciled.

#### *4.2.4.2 Sewer*

In addition to the public health aspects of the municipal sewer system, the availability of such a properly functioning system enables development to be concentrated and greenspace to be protected. For example, the amount of land preservation at Champlin Woods at Winnapaug Pond could not have been achieved without the availability of municipal sanitary sewers. If the Downtown Revitalization Area is to be a centerpiece of future development, adequate treatment capacity and transmission line integrity are necessary. Similarly, adequate sewer capacity is essential to economic development, redevelopment and retrofitting of underutilized structures and property throughout the community.

For Westerly, the first step toward achieving a first-class wastewater system is a firm commitment to eliminate the excessive stormwater and groundwater infiltration into the system. The certainty of future flooding and sea level rise makes it essential that the capacity of existing sewer treatment be evaluated to avert catastrophe. The construction of the

additional components of the plant to its design capacity and identification of areas of system expansion need to be part of a periodically updated facilities plan. This will enable the Town to be ready to obtain any and all federal, state and/or private funds available for such purposes. It will also allow these needs to be part of the Town's prioritized long-term capital investment program.

#### *4.2.4.3 Stormwater*

The stormwater collection system in the Downtown Revitalization Area has experienced several failures in the recent past. A study followed by a systematic prioritized program to address this issue is immediately necessary. Implementation of new federal mandates with respect to stormwater management and its costs need to be understood and planned for.

#### *4.2.4.4 Solid Waste Disposal*

Capacity at the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) facility in Johnston is limited and the State encourages cities and towns to reduce waste generation and recycle more to meet its 35% recycling rate and 50% overall diversion rate goals. Because municipalities are charged by the ton to dispose of municipal waste at the facility, reducing waste brought to the landfill saves the community money. Less waste in the landfill reduces the likelihood of environmental impacts such as groundwater contamination. Many of the everyday items that are thrown away from homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses can be recycled or reused, including product packaging, grass clippings, furniture, clothing, bottles, food scraps, newspapers, and appliances. The Town needs to reduce waste generation and increase recycling in not only municipal operations, but also among residents and businesses. Currently, the number of households that use the transfer station is not tracked and commercial and residential trash is collected in the same fashion. According to RIRRC, the actual total solid waste received from Westerly yielded a recycling rate of 39.6% (above the State goal) and an overall diversion rate (all items diverted from the landfill) of 42.2% (below the State goal) in 2016. Both rates were improvements from prior years.

#### *4.2.4.5 School Facilities*

Meeting all the public works and private utility infrastructure needs outlined above are necessary for the future vision of Westerly. However, if the town neglects to achieve a first-class educational system by providing adequate, clean and comfortable school facilities offering superior educational opportunities for each student, the vibrant place to live, work, raise and educate a family cannot be achieved. Current demographic data and projections suggest that the Town is at a unique time to reassess its student mix and needs, educational objectives and delivery systems. Several improvements to existing schools have been made over the last decade and one school, Tower Street Elementary School, has been converted to a community center as a result of declining enrollment. Renovations to Westerly High School (WHS) resulted

in several improvements including a new science and technology wing, new art classrooms, installation of Smart Boards and new flooring, windows and ceilings. The Westerly Middle School was completed in 2005. In June 2017, the Town also closed another elementary school as district-wide enrollment is projected to decline further over at least the next decade.

#### **4.2.4.6 Community Services**

Numerous community services are provided in addition to Tower Street School Community Center. Improvements continue to be made to Westerly Library, allowing it to expand beyond the traditional function of book loaning by improving its space, technology, diversity of materials and cultural and social contributions to Westerly. In the coming years, the community is also anticipated to become a more active location within the regional healthcare industry as new medical groups and programs expand in town to meet the needs of Westerly's projected future demographic profile. Currently, social and financial indicators already identify a large population which requires or can potentially require social assistance both in the short-term and for extended periods of time. Along with physical health and mental hygiene, social service agencies and programs operate actively in Westerly to advocate for and provide basic living needs, educational resources and transportation to those experiencing financial and/or social hardships.

#### **4.2.5 Implement the Vision**

In order for 2038 to sufficiently reflect the future set out by this Comprehensive Plan and the State Guide Plan – particularly *Land Use 2025* – the Town must:

- Develop thorough and current land-use information and technology systems (Tax Assessor Data, Land Evidence Records and GIS)
- Train and support municipal planning officials including administration, staff and boards
- Update existing zoning and subdivision regulations and other Town ordinances to implement this Comprehensive Plan' actions and encourage the pursuit of innovative and flexible land use planning tools.
- Commit Town resources and solicit financial assistance to accomplish plan objectives and achieve priorities of this plan in a fiscally responsible manner.

## 4.3 Build-out Analysis

### 4.3.1 Capacity Analysis

A capacity analysis estimates the amount of development that could occur based on a set of assumptions. This analysis is limited to the amount of new development that can occur on developable vacant and agricultural land and include the amount of development that would occur as a result of infill and redevelopment to the extent that parcels are not developed to full capacity based on zoning and to the extent that natural resource constraints are not present. For this plan, a potential capacity analysis was performed based on the current land cover (see section 3.1.1).

The analysis was performed using a Geographic Information System (GIS) program. The current zoning layer was combined with the land cover layer so that the resulting layer had attributes of both existing land use and existing zoning districts. A constraints layer was created consisting of existing developed land, wetlands, floodplain and all land under permanent conservation. A 50-foot buffer for wetlands, a 200-foot buffer from the shoreline and the Pawcatuck River and any applicable 100-foot or 200-foot riverbank wetland and areas with severely constrained soils were considered undevelopable and removed from the calculation. The constraints layer was combined with the zoning/land use layer and the constraint areas were removed. The GIS program calculated the areas of each polygon within this combined layer. The areas remaining are considered potentially developable and suitable for new development. At this point, the areas could be summarized by land cover and zoning district. Based on the zoning district, calculations were performed on the resulting areas to establish the potential number of residential units, commercial space and industrial space that could be developed. The districts Open Space/Recreation and Commercial Recreation are considered unavailable for future development and have been excluded from this analysis.

The methodology used for this analysis has limitations. The method does not account for the possibility of new residential development in non-residential zoning districts such as apartments on the second floor of businesses (so called mixed-use). The method assumes wetlands mapped by the state and federal government are accurate, even though actual wetland boundaries on a lot can only be determined through on-site investigation. It is assumed new development will occur at the maximum density allowed by zoning, although lower density development might occur in response to market needs. Despite these limitations, the method is considered suitable for estimating potential new development magnitude and location.

#### Residential Districts

Residential units are based on the minimum lot area per unit permitted in each of the residential zoning districts. The following calculations were used for residential districts:

| Residential Zone          | Description                | Density                         |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| RR-60                     | Rural Residential          | Area÷60,000 = Residential Units |
| LDR-43                    | Low Density Residential    | Area÷43,560 = Residential Units |
| LDR-40                    |                            | Area÷40,000 = Residential Units |
| MDR-30                    | Medium Density Residential | Area÷30,000 = Residential Units |
| MDR-20                    |                            | Area÷20,000 = Residential Units |
| HDR-15                    | High Density Residential   | Area÷15,000 = Residential Units |
| HDR-10                    |                            | Area÷10,000 = Residential Units |
| HDR-6                     |                            | Area÷6,000 = Residential Units  |
| Any District in CRMC SAMP |                            | Area÷87,120 = Residential Units |

### Commercial Districts

The commercial districts did not specify a floor area ratio or maximum building coverage. Maximum impervious surface was used to control the size of buildings. This analysis assumes that half of the impervious surface specified in the Westerly Zoning Ordinance is used for building and half for parking. The summarized areas were multiplied by half of the impervious surface percentage to get the amount of commercial space. The following calculations were used on commercial districts:

| Zoning District | Description                        | Commercial Space                |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| P-15            | Professional Offices               | (30.0%) Area = Commercial Space |
| NB              | Neighborhood Business              | (30.0%) Area = Commercial Space |
| HC              | Highway Commercial                 | (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space |
| DC              | Downtown Commercial I              | (50.0%) Area = Commercial Space |
| DCII            | Downtown Commercial II             | (25.0%) Area = Commercial Space |
| SC-G            | Shorefront Commercial - General    | (27.5%) Area = Commercial Space |
| SC-WH           | Shorefront Commercial - Watch Hill | (27.5%) Area = Commercial Space |
| MC              | Marine Commercial                  | (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space |
| GC              | General Commercial                 | (37.5%) Area = Commercial Space |

## Industrial Districts

Maximum impervious surface was used to control the size of buildings in the industrial districts. This analysis assumes that half of the impervious surface specified in the Westerly Zoning Ordinance is used for building and half for parking. The summarized areas were multiplied by half of the impervious surface percentage to get the amount of industrial space. The industrial space assumes only one floor of development. The following calculations were used on industrial districts:

| Zoning District | Description                     | Industrial Space                |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| GI              | General Industrial              | (35.0%) Area = Industrial Space |
| LI              | Light Industrial                | (25.0%) Area = Industrial Space |
| ORAT            | Office, Research and Technology | (32.5%) Area = Industrial Space |

The results of the capacity analysis are summarized in Table 4-1 below. The numbers presented are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

**Table 4-1 Capacity Analysis Results**

| Zone               | Undeveloped<br>"Suitable"<br>Area<br>(acres) | Residential<br>Units | Commercial<br>Space (square<br>feet) | Industrial<br>Space (square<br>feet) |
|--------------------|--|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| RR-60              | 912.91                                       | 487                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| LDR-43             | 92.69  | 46                   | -                                    | -                                    |
| LDR-40             | 344.84                                       | 275                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| MDR-30             | 733.39                                       | 395                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| MDR-20             | 248.26                                       | 171                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| HDR-15             | 113.52                                       | 196                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| HDR-10             | .01  | 0                    | -                                    | -                                    |
| HDR-6              | 61.90  | 298                  | -                                    | -                                    |
| <b>Residential</b> | <b>2,507.52</b>                              | <b>1,868</b>         | -                                    | -                                    |
| P-15               | 10.41  | -                    | 108,837                              | -                                    |
| NB                 | 2.31   | -                    | 24,164                               | -                                    |
| DC-1               | -  | -                    | -                                    | -                                    |
| DC-2               | -  | -                    | -                                    | -                                    |
| GC                 | 1.80   | -                    | 23,551                               | -                                    |
| HC                 | 21.34  | -                    | 278,854                              | -                                    |
| MC                 | .03  | -                    | 0                                    | -                                    |
| SC-G               | 3.82   | -                    | 36,576                               | -                                    |
| SC-WH              | -  | -                    | -                                    | -                                    |
| <b>Commercial</b>  | <b>39.72</b>                                 | -                    | <b>471,981</b>                       | -                                    |
| ORAT               | 0.64   | -                    | -                                    | 7,267                                |
| LI                 | 45.16  | -                    | -                                    | 393,399                              |
| GI                 | 223.94                                       | -                    | -                                    | 2,731,360                            |

|                   |        |   |   |           |
|-------------------|--------|---|---|-----------|
| <b>Industrial</b> | 312.43 | - | - | 3,132,026 |
|-------------------|--------|---|---|-----------|

Source: Mason & Associates

### 4.3.2 Build-out Analysis Implications

#### 4.3.2.1 Residential

The build-out analysis estimates that, under the existing Zoning Ordinance, approximately 1,868 additional residential dwelling units can be built in Westerly. With an average of 85 new dwelling units being constructed per year since 2000, it is estimated that the year by which residential build-out is likely to occur is 2038.

The 2010 Plan recommended that the residential zoning districts within the town remain essentially unchanged. This recommendation considered the rate of growth which has occurred in the ten-year period following the adoption of the current Zoning Ordinance map and text. During the decade from January 1, 1999 to December 31, 2008, 1,266 residential dwelling units were constructed. The ordinance marked a significant departure from prior ordinances which had allowed, as of right, duplex buildings including units with unlimited bedrooms, on lots which did not require twice the land area as required for a single-family home. There was significant community concern expressed with respect to these provisions. The ordinance responded with provisions which limit the districts in which duplex buildings are allowed; require a special use permit in the residential district in which they are allowed; and require twice the land area as necessary for a single-family home. The result is that, in the ten-year time period, only 31 duplex building (totaling 62 units) were built. During the decade from January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2015, 851 residential dwelling units were constructed including 29 duplex buildings (totaling 58 units).

Simultaneously, the 1998 Zoning Ordinance adopted new regulations with respect to multi-family dwellings. The regulations allow for the number of bedrooms in a multi-family complex to reflect the predicted number if the site were built out as single-family homes but limits each individual unit to two bedrooms. Studies suggested the number of school age children would be relatively small in such complexes. The number of two-bedroom units constructed in the decade from January 2006 to December 2015 was 208, or more than 24% of new housing.

Despite the increase of 858 dwelling units, the total public school population in the community has dropped from 3,436 in October 2006 to 2,908 in October 2015 – a 15.4% decline. Current and projected enrollment suggests this trend will continue, falling a further 7.3% between fiscal years 2012 and 2022. Beyond 2022 however, a comparison of fourth grade (the Class of 2024) and first grade (the Class of 2027) enrollments in the 2015-2016 academic year (217 students and 216 students, respectively) suggests enrollment may stabilize.

It is therefore deemed not necessary to further change the zoning districts or the regulations applicable within each district to control future growth. Comparison of the estimated additional residential unit capacity (1,868 units) and the historic building growth over the last ten years (858) demonstrates a relatively small capability for growth under the traditional subdivision development approach. This Plan's recommendation with respect to generally not increasing density is a deliberate attempt to responsibly limit such further development. However, the Plan encourages and provides accommodation for future growth including density intensification within the Downtown Revitalization Area, where public utilities and infrastructure are in place. Mixed-use and in-fill development at increased densities, together with revitalization and retrofitting of existing properties, are all strategies identified for use with the Neighborhood Plan application.

With school enrollment stable, and as new information becomes available and disaggregated, Town officials must address the future implications for services required by an overall aging population and concerned with the interaction of social and economic factors.

#### *4.3.2.2 Commercial*

The build-out analysis estimates a total of 471,981 square feet of commercial space over 39.72 acres can be added in the town. This includes commercial space with current land zoned neighborhood business (24,164 sq. ft.), Highway Commercial (278,854 sq. ft.) and professional (108,837 sq. ft.) and excludes Commercial Recreation and Shore Commercial - General. This Plan recognizes that Westerly has historically been the regional center for commercial and professional services. Sufficient area exists to continue in that role, though its notable decrease from the analysis used in the 2010 Plan should be considered.

This Plan specifically provides that no commercial zoning districts should be enlarged. The commercial areas are underutilized and in need of redevelopment. It is intended that a limit on the amount of commercial development and revised development standards for new commercial development on vacant property will control commercial sprawl. By such limitation, it is also intended that renewed interest in renovation, restoration and redevelopment of existing commercial properties will be achieved.

#### *4.3.2.3 Industrial*

Available industrial land is extremely limited. However, areas which have the infrastructure available for industrial development but which are also isolated enough to be compatible with existing residential development are not apparent. The lack of industrial land also means that Westerly must participate in regional economic development initiatives. This recognizes new job opportunities in the region not only provide job opportunities for Westerly residents but also for the larger regional population. Such opportunities contribute to the vibrant commercial and professional service sectors in Westerly. Town officials must therefore

encourage the reuse of underutilized industrial facilities provided that doing so is consistent with environmental considerations and quality of life for nearby residents and no expansion in the area of industrial zoning districts occurs.

The build-out analysis estimates a total of 3,132,026 square feet industrial space over 312.43 acres can be added in the town. This includes commercial space with current land zoned Light Industrial (393,399 sq. ft.), General Industrial (2,731,360 sq. ft.) and Office, Research, Assembly and Technology (7,267 sq. ft.).

## 4.4 Future Land Use Plan

### 4.4.1 Introduction

The key theme of this Plan is balance. The Plan recognizes the need for both preservation and development and the importance of establishing a balance between them. Included among its goals are maintaining Westerly's character and heritage and preserving open space and irreplaceable natural resources. The Plan also calls for increased economic vitality and for the maintenance of homes, jobs and services needed by current and future generations. It acknowledges the need for balance among the various aspects of Westerly which include a home to year-round and seasonal residents, a short-term tourist destination, and a regional service, transportation and retail center. The goals, objectives, and actions enumerated in the next chapter provide specific detail on how balance among these competing needs can be achieved through careful planning.

In this section, some of the major characteristics of the Comprehensive Plan are reviewed with an emphasis on how the goals, objectives, policies and actions will affect future land use, transportation, infrastructure, and services and with a focus on the first ten (10) years of this Comprehensive Plan's implementation. The Future Land Use Plan should be viewed because, taken together, its various elements reinforce each other and present a comprehensive and coherent view of Westerly's land use policy. After the priorities presented in the implementation plan are achieved, another group of actions will be developed for the next ten (10) years. In this way, Westerly will move steadily and incrementally towards achieving the long-term goals and objectives outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

The **Future Land Use map (FLU-1)** and its details are discussed in the following paragraphs.

### 4.4.2 Zoning Inconsistencies

Several inconsistencies between the current zoning ordinance and zoning map and the Future Land Use Plan require changes to current zoning districts, land use regulations and land use.

Changes in current zoning districts are proposed in the Future Land Use Plan. They include the following:

- Lands in several zoning districts are protected in perpetuity by conservation easements; therefore, these lands will be rezoned Open Space and Recreation.
- An Airport Protection Overlay District has been developed as required in RIGL § 1-3-5(1), which states that municipalities shall establish an airport hazard area to specify appropriate land uses with restricted heights for buildings and trees.
- Rezoning of Planned Unit Development to appropriate residential zoning districts, based off existing densities.

There will also be changes in land use regulations and land use. Changes under the scope of the Plan include the following:

- Current zoning allows growth in residential land use, as covered under the build-out analysis in the previous section of the Plan.
- This growth could result in the loss of some land that is used for agriculture or is currently open space (for example, forest land) because the underlying zoning allows for residential or commercial use.
- Modern development methods such as conservation development and cluster development should be used to protect the most valuable aspects of development sites. Additional increases in residential density may be allowed in certain specified areas (for example, the urban core) and as incentives for certain kinds of development (for example, affordable housing) except in these areas, intensification of residential zoning will not be allowed.
- Regulations required for the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) near the Salt Ponds will be included in the Westerly Zoning Ordinance.
- Redevelopment of existing commercial and residential areas is encouraged.
- Extension and/or expansion of commercial, industrial and professional zones will be prohibited.
- Zoning provisions in commercial and residential areas may be needed to encourage additional green space and improve aesthetics.

#### **4.4.3 Residential Density and Neighborhood Planning**

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the build-out analysis for Westerly under current zoning indicates a capacity of an additional 1,868 housing units and the town will approach residential build-out within the twenty-year time-period addressed in this Comprehensive Plan. The Town also recognizes the need to address residential density based on the unique qualities and needs of discreet planning areas. As a result, residential density shall be particularly addressed through the Town's neighborhood planning initiatives.

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan called for adoption of conservation development regulations for major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology. The recommendation was for all applications for major subdivisions be required to include cluster development, conservation development, and conventional subdivision as alternatives for consideration by the Planning Board. Conservation development in areas of low to moderate residential density is still considered an appropriate tool to provide an increase in residential density while continuing to preserve open space and natural resources. Inclusionary zoning must be part of this conversation.

A new zoning ordinance is called for to increase the zoning density for land that is within the Downtown Revitalization Area, which has both public water and sewer services. Other areas of Westerly outside the Downtown Revitalization Area where increased residential density could occur are areas currently zoned RR-60, which could be rezoned to LDR-40 if an extension of the municipal water system occurs. There can be no increase in zoning density in the RI Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) Salt Ponds Special Management Area. The 2010 Plan proposed an increase in urban and community green space through street trees, landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial, and multi-family developments, and selective park development. This could be accomplished through public and private projects and revised development standards.

#### *4.4.3.1 Affordable Housing*

The difficult economic conditions of the State and region impacted development in Westerly through 2012. In the 2010 Plan, projecting future housing development beyond five years was difficult because the speed of Rhode Island's economic recovery relied on many factors. Home sales remained low and unemployment rates high and the State continued to struggle with its budget. All these factors influenced overall public and private investment in the State and its communities, including the housing market. However, it was anticipated that the economy would eventually improve and development opportunities and interest in the region would increase.

In the planning period of this Comprehensive Plan, the future of residential development will require an increasingly robust review in support of affordable housing production as the Town approaches buildout (likely to occur in or about 2038). New homeowners of single-family houses will continue to take up residence in Westerly, taking advantage of new additions to the housing supply along with a loosening resale market. Multi-family development will also continue, spurred by an aging population less interested in or capable of maintaining their homes as well as a general decrease in interest amongst young adults in homeownership.

#### ***4.4.3.2 Rental Housing***

The stock of rental housing in Westerly often provides numerous residents a more affordable alternative to owning a home and is largely concentrated within the Town's urban services boundary. There are many assets as a result of this location, including its walkability to a major local employment center (Downtown), connection to municipal utilities and greater accessibility to social services. At the same time, however, there are also challenges due to an aging, and sometimes neglected, housing stock in this area. Likewise, household densities in some of these neighborhoods have grown to exceed the number of housing units originally constructed – resulting from the conversion of single-family homes into multi-family structures, sometimes without appropriate application to the Town for review and approval.

#### ***4.4.3.3 LMI Housing Production Plan***

The Town projected that, with the use of LMI production strategies set out in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, 528 units would be created by 2032. To date, however, the rate of production of affordable housing units for LMI occupants to achieve that goal has fallen short. Since 2012, there has been a net decrease of seven (7) affordable housing units in comparison to a projected increase of 99 units between 2012 and 2017 in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. A loss of deed-restricted affordable housing in Bradford and the prolonged impact of the Great Recession in the local and state economies are the primary factors of this disappointing number. With the review of strategies for LMI housing production undertaken as part of this Comprehensive Plan update, the Town expects additions to the affordable housing stock will be made at a stronger pace as the local and state economies continue to improve.

#### ***4.4.4 Commercial and Industrial***

The Plan prohibits the expansion of commercial and industrial zoning districts and encourages redevelopment of existing under-utilized commercial and industrial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor. The Plan also calls for the Town to work with existing commercial property owners in the Route 1 corridor to enhance landscaping and green space through incentives such as reductions in required parking area.

Reuse and revitalization of existing commercial and residential space as an alternative to new development is one of the themes of the Plan. For example, it calls for modification of zoning land use regulations to support adaptive reuse of vacant and underutilized industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas in town. The Plan envisions that the downtown area will continue to be a focal point for commercial, artistic and civic activities. Walking to and through downtown will be facilitated by providing good pedestrian connections through densely-built neighborhoods and non-residential districts through public projects with a goal of having a town-wide network of connected sidewalks and trails, a portion of which will be near downtown. The Plan also calls for obtaining financial support from multiple sources for

revitalization of downtown and its surrounding areas (zoning districts DC-1 and DC-2) and modification of land use regulations to complement this effort. The Plan calls for the town to promote the use of the Westerly Downtown Arts District tax benefits and encourages cultural and performing arts as bases for economic development. The Plan recognizes the need to coordinate with Stonington on issues of mutual interest which include Pawcatuck River quality and downtown Westerly-Pawcatuck revitalization.

Westerly has been a tourist destination for years and the Plan has several actions that will help sustain the tourism and hospitality industry. It calls for a program to proactively work with owners of existing lodging facilities to encourage rehabilitation and the updating of facilities to extend tourist use. There is also a need to evaluate the mix of accommodations in Westerly to determine whether the markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served. The Plan calls for an ordinance that accommodates the needs of hospitality and tourism industry employers to provide housing for their seasonal employees while not discouraging the hiring of local residents and protecting the interests of affected neighborhoods. The Plan asks for a review and revision of the planned resort development provision in the Westerly zoning ordinance as a strategy to promote longer stays by visitors while limiting impact on local neighborhoods. No changes to the existing industrial zones are proposed in the Plan except to encourage revitalization and reuse of existing industrial space.

#### **4.4.5 Natural Resource Protection, Open Space and Recreation**

Protecting and enhancing Westerly's natural resources and open space is an important goal of the Comprehensive Plan. Land that is currently protected open space will remain protected. The Plan calls for adding to existing open space through development of a systematic prioritized plan, including potential funding alternatives. The use of conservation development as described above under residential land use will also preserve some existing open space and important natural resources while allowing for additional housing units in Westerly. The Plan also contains several actions related to stormwater and sediment control and an action regarding the use of renewable energy, all of which will help to protect the environment.

An important plan recommendation regarding recreation is the construction of a safe bike path looping along Atlantic Avenue, Weekapaug Road, Shore Road and Winnapaug Road. This loop is envisioned as the first phase of a larger bike trail system with additional parts, such as a path in Watch Hill, to be designed in future years. The public outreach which occurred in relation to the 2010 Plan indicated widespread support for the creation of bike and walking trails and paths. The State of Rhode Island's initiatives to create such facilities for the East Bay and South Kingstown–Narragansett have been wildly successful. While the 2010 Plan called for the establishment of such facilities generally, it prioritized the creation of a discrete specific scenic

coastal loop. While a bike loop has not been completed, the Town is actively pursuing a coastal bike route and eco-trail concept in Misquamicut and shoreline area.

Two of the town's existing golf courses (Weekapaug Golf Club and Shelter Harbor Golf Club) are protected by conservation easements and will remain in the recreational land use category. The Misquamicut Club is not formally protected by easements but is expected to remain as a golf course for the foreseeable future. The Winnapaug Golf Club, the only public golf course in Westerly, is currently zoned commercial recreation which appropriately accommodates its current use.

#### 4.4.6 Agriculture

Agriculture as a category of land use will focus on farm production and agritourism. Farm production is dependent on site specific conditions. The most important factor for consideration is the suitability of the land for agricultural uses. In the inventory and assessment of natural resources, this Plan has identified important agricultural soils (see the Natural Resources chapter, which includes a description on the **Farm Soils map [FS-1]**). The locations of these soils were not limited to undeveloped areas as it possible new agricultural operations, such as farms, may be established in the future on land which may currently be used residentially. The map also shows lands actively used for agricultural activity through inclusion of RIGIS' land cover/land use dataset based on spring 2011 orthophotography. The most suitable types of land use are in areas accommodating agricultural activities, including proximity to housing, and water resources must also be considered. Farming operations can cause disturbances for abutting residences, even without farm retail, and agritourism commercializes agricultural uses even more. An assessment of the proximity and density of housing in relation to agricultural activities should be made in any assessment before "Agriculture" is introduced as its own land use category. With this assessment, the Town could incorporate agriculture into its pattern of future land uses more effectively.

#### 4.4.6 Special Districts

Another tool available to the Town to ensure adequate protection of its natural resources and open space is overlay zoning. Regarding the surface waters within its regulatory jurisdiction, the Town has two overlay zoning districts to manage development in proximity to its coastline, salt ponds and riverbank – the adopted Salt Ponds Overlay District and the reserved River Corridor Overlay District.

Salt Ponds Overlay District: The 2010 Plan called for adoption of the Salt Ponds Overlay District (SPOD) specified by the CRMC Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). Like the SAMP, the SPOD adopted in February 2011 is intended to protect the quality of water in the ponds which provide important habitat for fish and wildlife and are key natural features of Westerly's shoreline. The SPOD reflects the SAMP's maximum density, setbacks, buffers, requirements for

nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment, and provides for CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land-use regulatory review.

River Corridor Overlay District: The 2010 Plan called for development of an overlay district and zoning ordinance provisions that would provide protection to the Town's supply of drinking water, encourage appropriate redevelopment and economic growth and provide important recreational opportunities in town. Westerly needs a special river corridor overlay zoning district because the Pawcatuck River is vital to the continuing prosperity of the town. First, the river is connected to and provides water to the underground aquifer that is the primary source of water supply for Westerly. Second, land fronting on and near the Pawcatuck River in the downtown area will have an important role in continuing renovation and revitalization in Westerly. Third, the river provides important recreational opportunities for residents and tourists and affects the quality of habitat for fish, shellfish and other wildlife in the river and in Little Narragansett Bay. The proposed river corridor overlay district (illustrated on the **Overlay Zoning map [Z-2]**) is composed of three parts:

- Area for protection of drinking water: The upstream section of the proposed district extends along the river from the Westerly-Charlestown border to the Stillman Avenue Bridge in Westerly. The primary purpose of zoning in this section is to protect Westerly's water supply. Zoning for this district should be similar to or identical with zoning for aquifer protection areas. Industrial and commercial activities such as gas stations or industrial activity that uses chemicals that might get into the river in the case of a spill should not be allowed within a certain distance of the river's edge. The width of the overlay district in this area will be determined after appropriate topographical and geologic studies to delineate areas of overland and underground flow of water to the river.
- Area where redevelopment is encouraged for purposes of economic development: The middle section of the river in Westerly's downtown area, from the Stillman Avenue Bridge to Margin Street, is an area for potential redevelopment including enhanced use and access to the river. Development projects tied to enhanced use and access to the river are encouraged.
- Area where current use is preserved: The most downstream section of the district stretches from Margin Street to the northern boundary of the Shore Commercial – Watch Hill (SCWH) zoning district. Zoning in this area should stay as it currently is with residential property and marinas along the river and the commercial area in Watch Hill. Any intensification of use or increased development of this section should be discouraged.

Development Standards for Historic Districts: The 2010 Plan called for the Town to continue to enact development standards for historic districts that are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial - Watch Hill zoning district. Historic districts designated on the National Register of Historic Places include Bradford Village, Downtown, Main Street, North End, Perry Homestead, Watch Hill and Wilcox Park. These districts are shown on Map CR-1 and discussed in greater depth throughout Appendix I – particularly in the Housing Opportunities and Historic and Cultural Resources chapters.

#### **4.4.7 Transportation, Infrastructure and Services**

Since future land use is necessarily linked to transportation, infrastructure and services, major actions in the Plan related to these issues are included here for completeness.

An important set of recommendations in the Plan relate to improving the area around the train station and increasing its use. The Plan specifies increasing parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station. The Plan also calls for more daily stops by Amtrak at the Westerly station and support for commuter rail, both of which could improve rail connections for visitors and residents.

In regard to infrastructure, the Plan asks the town to pursue all available state and federal funding to enlarge the wastewater treatment plant capacity consistent within its existing design capacity. Within current capacity, the Plan specifies that any expansion of sewer service should be carefully prioritized based on environmental protection and economic development. The town has made significant improvements to the water distribution system in recent years; however, there is still a need to improve the security of the water system. The Plan also supports continuation of the program to meet other infrastructure needs such as roadway maintenance, sidewalk replacement, and stormwater control.

In recent years, Westerly has constructed a new middle school and renovated the high school. Plans for elementary school redesign and possible consolidation are currently underway and being considered. The importance of a strong school system to the Town is recognized by the Plan, which calls for an annual joint-public meeting of the Town Council and the School Committee to review progress in improving student performance. In regard to post-high school education, the 2010 Comprehensive Plan's call for recruiting the Community College of Rhode Island to establish a local presence was successfully achieved with the construction of the Westerly Education Center (WEC). WEC is a multi-institute academic and training facility currently used by all public colleges and universities in Rhode Island as well as the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Roger Williams University (RWU). Since its opening, WEC has offered post-secondary education classes and/or workforce training for General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB) to more than 1,000 individuals.

Economic development is an important goal of the Plan. A key mechanism to facilitate economic development in the Town is to make sure that someone is always paying attention and considering the effects of all Town decisions on Westerly's economic climate. The Plan calls for adopting an economic development strategy focused on job creation and preservation that provides for specific responsibility within the town government for implementation. The Plan also mandates an annual review of effectiveness as measured by types and numbers of jobs in Westerly.

Throughout its transportation system and within its infrastructure and services, there is an increasing importance for the Town to promote the use and consumption of renewable rather than finite energy sources. Actions undertaken in support of this shift in policy since the 2010 Comprehensive Plan have included a six-month energy consumption audit of municipal buildings performed in 2011, the purchase of more energy-efficient vehicles for Assessment and Development Services staff and, currently, the installation of solar panels on the Public Works facility on Larry Hirsch Lane. This Plan seeks to continue improvements by the Town while also calling for a review of ordinances to reflect advances in energy use available to residents and businesses and alleviate potentially burdensome regulations.

#### **4.5 Facing Challenges: Investing in our Future**

To achieve our vision for 2038, the Town must anticipate challenging issues related to sustainability and redevelopment and ensure the specific actions called for in the Comprehensive Plan are implemented to meet those challenges. While support from the State of Rhode Island is necessary, a disciplined local management approach and investment policy that recognizes the community's critical priorities will be essential to the success of this Plan. The Town's annual budgeting and capital improvement plans must direct appropriate financial resources, consistent with the Plan and the Town's overall needs, to the highest priority initiatives. The Town cannot fail to implement the Plan due to financial constraints but neither can the Town jeopardize its strong financial condition.

##### **4.5.1 Town Financial Position**

The Town of Westerly enjoys a very good financial rating by both national rating agencies, Moody's and Standard & Poor's. Currently, long-term debt is about \$80,000,000 which is comfortably within the limit specified by state statute and supported by Westerly's gross land assessment value. The debt repayment schedule is consistent for the Town's rating with 54% being retired over the next ten years. The Town's strong cash position of approximately 10% of its annual operational budget also supports this rating. By most indicators, Westerly is in a competitively advantageous financial position relative to the rest of the state.

One fundamental long-term consideration is the effect of the stability of real estate values on Westerly's bond rating which could reduce the debt capacity. There is also appropriate caution

about expanding future long-term obligations given the State's existing employment situation and Rhode Island's unfriendly tax structure. Like many other local and state governments, both Westerly and the State of Rhode Island need to upgrade local infrastructure, roads, bridges, and buildings, some of which have been neglected in prior years. Additionally, there is a potential need to upgrade and expand the Town's sewer capacity. Phase III of the school facilities renovation program is underway.

#### **4.5.2 Cost of Plan Implementation**

It is important that the necessary focus and resources be applied to implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. This should be considered in the context of contemporary Development Services staff priorities. A detailed examination of all recommended action items indicates that approximately four full-time equivalent (FTE) positions should be allocated over the initial five-year Plan period to spearhead the Plan implementation. This ongoing focus appropriately resides in the Department of Development Services and should be accommodated within the current scope of departmental duties. In addition to day-to-day activities, this effort would include the responsibility for reporting progress on individual action items to the Town Manager on a regular basis.

Funds are necessary to support analyses, research, technical studies and possibly expert consulting advice in areas needed to ensure successful implementation of the Plan. To that end, it is recommended that a specific line item for the Comprehensive Plan's implementation be incorporated in the municipal operating budget and funded in the amount of approximately \$49,600 annually to be deployed based on priorities identified during the annual budget process. This amount should be adjusted year-to-year depending on the priority of projects planned for each budget year.

Certain recommended actions will require major expenditures and capital investment and should also be included in the annual budgeting process. Examples of such actions would be: (1) planning and construction of the Westerly bike path, (2) expansion of parking and redevelopment at the train station, (3) continued funding for roadway drainage and sidewalk repair and (4) potential expansion of the wastewater treatment plant. Many of these initiatives that strengthen infrastructure may be candidates for grants which have the effect of increasing the value of the Town's investment.

To assist in the Plan's implementation effort, it is recommended that the Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Advisory Committee be established as a subcommittee of the Planning Board. The Advisory Committee should continue to meet at least twice a year to assess status of recommended actions, advise on priorities, and identify emerging issues and trends which may impact the Plan. The Planning Board should also consult the Advisory Committee prior to making recommendations for the Capital Improvement Program.

## Chapter 5.0 Implementation Plan

### 5.1 Introduction

The effectiveness of this Comprehensive Plan is dependent on the timeliness and quality of the Plan's implementation. The Plan is designed to be implemented over three main phases:

- **Short-term** -Some major actions will be accomplished in a relatively short period of time since they will signal early success and are critical to the overall implementation of the Plan;
- **Mid-term** - Many other actions will be implemented over the ten (10) year term of this Comprehensive Plan because they may require further study, coordination with others, or involve the commitment of financial resources beyond the time frame of the current capital improvement program and associated fiscal budgets;
- **Long-term** - A few actions are long-term in nature and will require continuous attention over the twenty (20) year horizon of this Plan but beyond the ten (10) year term of the Plan.

At the heart of this implementation is a well-defined structure of goals, objectives, policies and actions developed based on broad public input and a thorough inventory of the Town's assets and characteristics, overviewed in the third chapter of this Primary Report and further described in Appendix I. The various goals give clear direction as to the type and extent of conservation and development the community desires. The objectives further define the goals and provide the foundation for development of policies and actions required to realize the goals. Goals and objectives are long-term and may take a decade or more to achieve.

Specific actions have been developed to implement each policy and achieve associated goals. The actions are focused and measurable and are intended to be accomplished within five years, ten years, or monitored throughout the ten years of this plan and accomplished sometime within 20 years of the plan's adoption. Responsibilities and timeframes have been assigned to the actions to make it possible to track progress and determine the degree of completion, ensuring accountability for future success of the Plan. It is anticipated that new actions will be developed during the required five-year plan update to replace those which have been successfully implemented.

### 5.2 Goals, Policies and Actions

More than [number] Westerly residents provided their thoughts about Westerly and its future through the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee (CPCAC), public meetings, focus groups, letters and email messages. Citizen input during the 2018 update continued through

the involvement of the CPCAC, public workshops and website comments. Several points were very clear from this input. These points form the basis of the goals, policies and actions:

- People love Westerly. They describe it as a friendly and safe community and a good place to raise a family.
- People are concerned that Westerly's character is in danger of changing too quickly because of development pressure. They want some development but without urban and commercial sprawl.
- Westerly's natural resources are extremely important to its citizens. They say development should be planned to preserve the waterfront, beaches, aquifer and water quality, and to protect open space.
- Traffic and transportation issues need to be addressed. Citizens are concerned with the volume of traffic and traffic safety, the need for additional parking in town, and pedestrian safety. Residents want access to commuter rail service and more bike lanes and trails.
- Westerly must continue to maintain its infrastructure, including its water and sewer systems, roads, sidewalks and schools.
- The town should promote specific strategies for economic development, quality education and affordable housing for all ages and income levels.
- Westerly should continue to develop strategies to promote resiliency.

Discussing the goals of the State of Rhode Island as they relate to the Town of Westerly at once prompts a multi-faceted discussion of interrelated planning issues and solutions. For this reason, several key issues have been identified as priorities in Westerly over the next 20 years. The following is a report of the Town's goals and a series of public policy recommendations with implementation strategies for addressing them. The purpose of this section is to codify the Town of Westerly's statement of public policy and to direct the Town and all actors seeking Town permits or approvals towards conservation and development in a manner consistent with this Comprehensive Plan.

## Housing Opportunity

**GOAL:** *Provide a broad range of safe and affordable housing options that satisfy the needs of all income and age levels and allow citizens to live, work and retire in the community.*

- Policy 1.** Foster housing rehabilitation programs in combination with neighborhood revitalization including owner-occupied and renter-occupied property.
- Policy 2.** Continue support for initiatives providing housing for homeless and persons with special needs.
- Policy 3.** Encourage a broad range of housing options adequate to meet the needs of underserved middle and lower-income households and individuals.
- Policy 4.** Support the development of low- and moderate-income housing that meets local housing needs in a manner which is compatible with Westerly's neighborhoods and within the capacity of the natural environment.

## ACTIONS

- Action 1 Identify neighborhoods with high densities of substandard housing for revitalization and rehabilitation efforts through the development of neighborhood plans and link implementation with affordable housing strategies.
- Action 2 Establish a comprehensive approach for inspections and correction of minimum housing and building code violations for non-owner occupied rental housing to maintain and upgrade properties.
- Action 3 Coordinate with regional, state and federal agencies to leverage local resources by bringing outside expertise and funds to community initiatives that support affordable housing.
- Action 4 Develop management agreements for multi-family housing supported by public funds and/or operated by non-profits.
- Action 5 Re-establish the Westerly Affordable Housing Plan Committee.
- Action 6 Continue to promote the Westerly Revolving Fund and create additional support through public and private partnerships.
- Action 7 Coordinate with neighborhood associations on the type of activities best suited to repair and maintain the existing housing stock.
- Action 8 Determine the viability of a tax credit for property owners undertaking substantial rehabilitation of existing structures and accessory apartments.

- Action 9 Provide support and administrative assistance to those organizations which address the short-term needs of the homeless and provide temporary and/or transitional housing options for persons with special needs.
- Action 10 Review and revise zoning and subdivision regulations for multi-family housing in downtown redevelopment areas, as needed, with the intent of providing additional housing units in areas within walking distance of employment opportunities and transportation options.
- Action 11 Maintain existing qualified low- and moderate-income housing units and work with private, non-profit and/or public agencies in creating other affordable housing opportunities in Westerly and regionally at the municipal, state and federal levels to secure funding to create other affordable housing opportunities.
- Action 12 Review housing and demographic data every five (5) years to determine whether local housing needs are being met and prepare a report regarding the characteristics of the Town's rental housing base and an assessment of local housing needs for relevant State agencies.
- Action 13 Address the State requirement for affordable low- and moderate-income housing, as defined in RIGL §45-53, through a reasonable production plan by working with state legislators to revise the regulations set by the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act.
- Action 14 Evaluate and revise the Town's Affordable Housing Ordinance (§260-50), including inclusionary zoning and comprehensive permitting, to ensure neighborhoods are not impacted by density bonuses and environmental integrity is not compromised.
- Action 15 Seek grant funding for the creation and administration of a code enforcement program for housing, particularly rental housing.
- Action 16 Conduct a study of Bradford as a potential growth center with the potential for the construction and/or rehabilitation of affordable housing.

### **Economic Vitality**

**GOAL:** *A vital and sustainable economy focused on job creation and business recruitment.*

**Policy 1.** Enhance the local economy through the activities of the Economic Development Commission.

**Policy 2.** Foster adaptive re-use of existing underutilized structures and areas.

### **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Develop and adopt a comprehensive economic development program with the intent to recruit businesses and create local jobs. Begin with a fundamental understanding of the potential of redevelopment of areas such as the Route 1

corridor, Airport Industrial Park and Bradford Dye Associates (BDA) former site, and conclude with well-reasoned and community-supported actions for intelligent and sustainable economic growth.

- Action 2 Provide the Economic Development Commission (EDC) with the technology and technical assistance needed to effectively address local economic needs, including:
- the oversight of a comprehensive economic development program
  - continued interaction with higher education institutions and large employers
  - consulting with the Westerly Public Schools on the development of a diverse school curriculum to promote job training
  - the promotion of tax benefits and other financial incentives that encourage economic development.
- Action 3 Consider establishing a staff position for an economic development specialist to administer the economic development program, facilitate business development activities and assist the town's Economic Development Commission (EDC).
- Action 4 Investigate new zoning and regulatory tools to conform with existing neighborhoods and support adaptive reuse of vacant and underused industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas.
- Action 5 Enact an ordinance which restricts the reactivation of existing, dormant quarries to ensure the existing quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods is not disrupted.
- Action 6 Adopt an Extraction Ordinance applicable to all quarries to protect the aquifer, air quality and the environment, in general, and the quality of life for nearby residents. The ordinance should include acceptable development and operating requirements and enforcement thereof and be consistent with any federal and/or state regulations.
- Action 7 Inspect the White Rock quarry at least twice annually to ensure compliance with the existing land covenants with respect to any possible future purchase of the property by the Town for the purpose of wellhead protection.
- Action 8 Prohibit the expansion of commercial and industrial zoning districts (HC, GC, GI, LI NB, SC-G, SC-WH, ORAT, P-15 and MC).
- Action 9 Encourage the redevelopment of existing, underutilized commercial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor.
- Action 10 Encourage the redevelopment of existing, underutilized industrial space.
- Action 11 Support the continued operation of agricultural, aquacultural and silvicultural businesses and seek to expand such operations whenever possible, such as through the promotion of agritourism.

## New Economies

**GOAL:** *Promote new **economic** strategies that are focused on helping locally-owned businesses prosper and encourage entrepreneurial activities.*

**Policy 1** Support agriculture, aquaculture, hydroponics, aquaponic and similar principles and practices and explore alternatives to traditional farming practices.

**Policy 2** Encourage entrepreneurial activities and knowledge-based jobs in the community, consistent with existing zoning.

### ACTIONS

- Action 1 Review and revise the regulations of zoning districts as needed to better support the operations outlined in the first policy of New Economies above.
- Action 2 Review local permitting procedures and requirements, such as fees, parking regulations and signage restrictions, to determine if alterations can be made to better accommodate entrepreneurial activities in non-residential zoning districts.
- Action 3 Review zoning requirements to determine the best manner to support home businesses and live-work spaces in any revitalization zone including in the Downtown.

## Economic Resilience

**GOAL:** *Establish and sustain a condition of economic resilience to natural and man-made events.*

**Policy 1** Anticipate the impact of catastrophic events on the local economy.

### ACTIONS

- Action 1 Develop a strategic plan to reduce threats to infrastructure which determines appropriate development and construction methods for infrastructure adaptation, as well as resiliency, and includes a cost analysis for the upgrade of and maintenance for these systems.
- Action 2 Undertake a study to forecast the loss of property revenues due to sea-level rise and storm events and mitigate damages, including quantifying local revenue and cumulative value and creating an overlay map of areas vulnerable to economic impacts, and research incentives for businesses and residents to undertake adaptation and resiliency measures using information made available by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (RI CRMC).
- Action 3 Work with appropriate State agencies on shared objectives to reduce the impact from climate change hazards.

- Action 4 Continue to evaluate the Town's existing emergency permitting system to ensure Town readiness and effective administration.
- Action 5 Develop and implement a strategy which better utilizes the existing capacity of the Airport Industrial Park to enhance commercial business activity and increase job opportunities.

### **Sustainable Natural Resources**

**GOAL:** *Protect and enhance Westerly's natural resources including open space, the river and shoreline, wildlife habitat, and watershed, for purposes of future enjoyment, recreation, assurance of a sustainable water supply, and to mitigate the negative effects from natural hazards.*

- Policy 1** Protect and conserve the natural beauty of Westerly's setting and a quality natural environment.
- Policy 2** Promote land use decisions that encourage the protection and sustainable use of the town's natural resources.
- Policy 3** Foster awareness of and protect and develop appropriate access to the community's natural resources for enjoyment and recreation.
- Policy 4** Support a comprehensive groundwater protection strategy including conservation of Westerly's existing groundwater sources and investigation of future potential sources.

### **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Create new zoning and regulations with the intent of implementing the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (RI CRMC)'s Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) and increasing the natural resiliency of areas vulnerable to storm surge and sea-level rise.
- Action 2 Enact an ordinance which prevents any increase in zoning density except: (a) land within the downtown revitalization area which already has water and sewer service; and (b) areas outside the downtown revitalization area and the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (RI CRMC) Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) which could be rezoned from RR-60 to LDR-40, but only after the municipal water system is extended to those areas.
- Action 3 Consider conservation development subdivision regulations applicable to major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology, with the intent of protecting natural features and mitigate impacts from stormwater.

- Action 4 Coordinate efforts to control non-point source pollution, including enforcement of stormwater control and sediment-control ordinances; the extension of stormwater and sediment-control ordinances to include:
- single- and two-family houses as part of the building permit process
  - monitoring the effects of these steps
  - modifying pollution-prevention actions as necessary
- Action 5 Provide all local land-use decision makers at least one in-service program each year addressing new developments related to contemporary preservation and conservation issues for their consideration and possible implementation.
- Action 6 Secure funding for continued open space acquisition for water resource protection, habitat protection, farm and forest preservation and water-dependent recreation.
- Action 7 Review the Zoning Ordinance with the intent of identifying and correcting incompatible uses in the Aquifer Protection Overlay District.
- Action 8 Explore opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the Town of Westerly's conservation areas.
- Action 9 Re-establish access to and maintain rights-of-way designated by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (RI CRMC) to the shoreline and the Pawcatuck River.
- Action 10 Develop a River Corridor Overlay District and incorporate it in an updated Zoning Ordinance.
- Action 11 Update zoning for open space held as conservation land in perpetuity to reflect the actual status and the fact that it is preserved from development.
- Action 12 Take special considerations to further protect the areas within the community wellhead protection areas by strengthening land use regulations to minimize the risk of contamination; the GeoInsight Report, 2015 has recommended extending the Aquifer Protection Overlay District and has identified pre-existing, non-conforming uses.
- Action 13 Relocate the Westerly Public Schools Bus Refueling Station, as recommended in the GeoInsight Report, 2015.
- Action 14 Continue to preserve the Town's water rights on land in the neighboring Town of North Stonington in the State of Connecticut.

### **Safe Circulation**

**GOAL:** *Promote a variety of circulation strategies that ensure safe and efficient access within Westerly and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors.*

- Policy 1** Explore strategies that support access to the shoreline, river and local businesses.
- Policy 2** Provide safe alternatives that reduce dependency on motor vehicles and promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Policy 3** Ensure that traffic safety and safe, efficient access are necessary considerations in approval of any development plan.
- Policy 4** Prepare for occurrence of extreme weather events and develop mitigation policies and procedures which best reduce fiduciary risk.
- Policy 5** Ensure that roads, bridges and culverts are resilient and adequate to meet local transportation needs
- Policy 6** Promote bicycle transportation to reduce traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, and improve public health.

## **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Revise development standards to require safe pedestrian and non-vehicular access within new and redeveloped projects.
- Action 2 Improve the safety and traffic flow at problematic intersections such as Airport Road and Winnapaug Road and the intersection of Canal Street, Friendship Street and Industrial Drive.
- Action 3 Continue to fund a program of roadway drainage and sidewalk replacement and maintenance.
- Action 4 Identify densely-built neighborhoods and nonresidential districts experiencing high pedestrian traffic as priorities for installing sidewalks and trails.
- Action 5 Evaluate and improve evacuation routes, taking into consideration the location of stormwater outfalls.
- Action 6 Prioritize the replacement of outdated infrastructure, such as bridges, and design replacements with capacities to prevent road flooding and decrease washout potential through routine evaluations for safe circulation.
- Action 7 Evaluate hazardous trees and limbs overhanging public utilities and roadways and prepare a schedule to address such hazards as needed.
- Action 8 Maintain a multi-tool traffic calming program to target traffic safety concerns and modify this program as needed.
- Action 9 Begin considering the potentially transformative impact of advances in vehicle operation technology, such as autonomous vehicles, on traffic flow and safety.

## Transportation Assets

**GOAL:** *Pursue the development of Westerly’s strategic geographic location and extraordinary transportation assets– its rail station, airport and river – as focal points for revitalization and economic development, in balance with the needs of the affected neighborhoods.*

**Policy 1** Facilitate the ease of rail travel.

**Policy 2** Promote and enhance access to and use of waterways for recreation and transportation.

**Policy 3** Evaluate ways to maintain a balance between the needs of residents and the needs of Westerly State Airport within the airport’s historic configuration and without the airport’s intensification of use.

**Policy 4** Enhance the resiliency of Westerly’s transportation system by developing programs and projects that improve maintenance, protection and redundancy.

## ACTIONS

- Action 1 Work with state and federal officials to increase parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station.
- Action 2 Work with Amtrak and elected officials to increase the number of daily stops in Westerly during the summer months and publicize the availability of current Amtrak service.
- Action 3 Develop and implement a strategy which allows the Town to receive baseline data and routinely receive updated information regarding airport operations, use and configurations for routine tracking of said activities to monitor for any potential future intensification.
- Action 4 Work with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) and elected State officials to prevent intensification of the use of the airport.
- Action 5 Work with agencies of the State of Rhode Island, State of Connecticut and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as federal officials, to support and encourage the extension of commuter rail service to Westerly.
- Action 6 Adopt an Airport Hazard Overlay District to control potential airport hazards in the vicinity of the airport with minimal adverse effects on existing neighborhoods.
- Action 7 Work to develop transportation links between downtown, the railroad station, the beach and the airport.
- Action 8 Establish an off-street parking lot on Canal Street and parking/park/kayak launch plans.

## Community Wide Services

**GOAL:** *Ensure **community services** critical to Westerly's future growth, health, safety and prosperity are supported and sustained.*

- Policy 1** Recognize that Westerly's school system, its police and fire departments and its volunteer ambulance service are critical to Westerly's future.
- Policy 2** Ensure future school facility decisions are based on intensive student population forecasts and consideration of the capacity and condition of all current facilities, and operating costs.
- Policy 3** Support a quality public school system where enhanced performance by students is sought and monitored.
- Policy 4** Upgrade the town's technological capabilities across all school and municipal departments for greater employee productivity and public accessibility.

## ACTIONS

- Action 1 Support the delivery of training and technical advancement to Town officials and staff to further enhance Town services.
- Action 2 Continue to explore advances in technology which improve community services and attracts new investments within the community.
- Action 3 Complete a comprehensive review of all annual subsidies from the Town to ensure the funds are directed to institutions addressing the highest-priority needs.
- Action 4 Review progress annually in improving student performance and actions underway in the highest-performing school systems in Rhode Island and Connecticut to determine best practices which appear to be working elsewhere.
- Action 5 Ensure that public recycling opportunities are available.
- Action 6 Achieve 35 percent recycling and 50 percent diversion rates by reducing solid waste generation and increasing recycling and composting opportunities for municipal operations, residents, and businesses.

## Infrastructure

**GOAL:** *Support an **infrastructure** that balances growth and development with conservation, specifically as related to public wastewater treatment, public stormwater and potable water management, energy and communications.*

- Policy 1** Promote approaches to growth management to better conserve infrastructure, land and natural resources.

- Policy 2** Provide wastewater treatment to prevent unsanitary conditions and carefully prioritize expansion of the service area of the existing plant.
- Policy 3** Consider investment in all forms of infrastructure as a means to foster economic development.
- Policy 4** Match infrastructural demands associated with new development and redevelopment with available or planned capacity for which the new development or redevelopment's financing is certain.
- Policy 5** Maintain, update, or replace stormwater drainage, treatment and conveyance systems with priority given to those exceeding 50 years since installation.
- Policy 6** Enhance the resiliency of Westerly's infrastructure by developing programs and projects that improve maintenance, protection and redundancy.

## **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Ensure the Town's program to reduce groundwater infiltration into sewer lines is supported by testing sewer lines on annual basis.
- Action 2 Recognize that the existing wastewater treatment plant has a finite capacity and prioritize any sewer service expansion plans based on environmental protection and economic development, with full consideration of the limits of current capacity.
- Action 3 Pursue all available state and federal funding to improve the wastewater treatment system.
- Action 4 Review and revise local land use regulations for the long-term protection of water quality including Aquifer Protection Permits, zoning uses within recharge areas, Source Water Protection Map, and enforcement within the aquifer zone and take action on recommendations outlined in the approved GeoInsight Hydrology reports.
- Action 5 Develop and implement a plan to better protect all public well sites from the possibility of physical damage or contamination by leaks or accidental spills from motor vehicles or other sources from nearby areas.
- Action 6 Review the adequacy of security measures (including cameras, lighting, and information technology security) for the protection of well heads, pump stations, and water tanks and take appropriate actions.
- Action 7 Support the continued development and improvement of the Town's Geographic Information System data including stormwater, sewer and water services.
- Action 8 Continue annual mailings from the Water Department informing residents about actions they can take to improve their water quality.

- Action 9 Undertake a study to evaluate current stormwater system conditions, establish a replacement program and fund the appropriate line item(s) in the municipal budget for stormwater system upgrades with the intent to increase its capacity.
- Action 10 Work towards the elimination of unnecessary existing pavement, such as parking lots, and revise zoning to encourage the reduction of new impervious surfaces in new developments and redevelopments.
- Action 11 Explore mechanisms to reduce sodium levels in the municipal well system.
- Action 12 Establish a policy for the regular monitoring of wellheads.

### *Energy Alternatives*

**GOAL:** *Develop permanently sustainable energy resources that are environmentally benign and economically feasible.*

- Policy 1** The Town of Westerly will encourage development of renewable energy and promote policies to allow the town and residents' access to and the utilization of renewable energy.
- Policy 2** Decrease Westerly's dependence on petroleum-related energy sources through a municipal strategy of conservation and renewable energy generation.

### **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Encourage Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation to undertake a waste-to-energy program.
- Action 2 The Town shall exercise leadership by encouraging the use of renewable resources wherever possible and seeking partnerships that will facilitate renewable energy initiatives.
- Action 3 Consider reactivation of the Alternative Energy Study Committee (AESC) and continue to investigate opportunities and constraints to use renewable and sustainable energy for the town, such as researching cost-benefit data on renewable energy use in comparable municipalities nationwide.
- Action 4 Assist National Grid in identifying and replacing utility infrastructure which is determined to be vulnerable to natural hazards.
- Action 5 Adopt regulations allowing residential wind energy facilities and solar power systems and establishing standards for their design, installation, operation and maintenance to protect residents' quality of life, public health and safety and to preserve historic, natural and scenic resources.

Action 6 Monitor technological advances in the generation of electrical power for compatibility with the community for potential adoption and use locally.

### ***Energy Efficiencies***

**GOAL:** *Make more efficient use of energy to reduce energy costs and environmental impacts.*

**Policy 1** Implement an energy efficiency policy to guide municipal decision-making.

**Policy 2** Encourage the reduction of emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases in the community.

### **ACTIONS**

Action 1 All Town departments will continue to reduce energy consumption by applying sustainable measures in the management, operation, and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure consistent with the budget and mission requirements.

Action 2 The Town will continue to seek out renewable sources of energy for new and retrofitted municipal facilities.

Action 3 Require all future municipal building plans be Energy Star® rated, include efficient appliances, utilize water saving devices to the largest extent practical, and incorporate provisions for roof top solar panel installations, where possible.

Action 4 Consider fuel efficiency when purchasing municipal vehicles and equipment.

Action 5 Consider the carbon footprint of products procured by municipal and school operations when selecting vendors.

Action 6 Reduce energy consumption by promoting local agriculture and food availability.

Action 7 Protect carbon sinks, such as forests and fields, and require re-vegetation; specifically, the planting of trees in areas disturbed through site development.

Action 8 Adjust parking requirements and incorporate street trees and parking lot landscaping to reduce surface solar heat conduction and reduce wind velocities.

Action 9 Adopt a Strategic Energy Plan in accordance with Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank requirements with assistance from a qualified energy consultant.

### **Natural Hazards**

**GOAL:** *Be prepared for sea-level rise and natural hazards including those associated with climate change.*

**Objective:** *Minimize exposure of people, property and infrastructure to the effects of natural hazards.*

**Policy 1** Identify, prioritize and protect at-risk municipal properties.

**Policy 2** Plan for eventual retreat from coastal shorelines and riparian zones in especially vulnerable areas

## **ACTIONS**

- Action 1 Evaluate projected sea level rise, prepare for increased occurrence of extreme weather events and develop mitigation policies and procedures which best reduce fiduciary risk.
- Action 2 Determine how best to minimize opportunities for new development in vulnerable areas and amend the Zoning Ordinance and/or subdivision regulations, as needed.
- Action 3 Add natural hazards to criteria for open space acquisition with the intent of replanting vulnerable areas with native vegetation and managing vulnerable areas as wildlife and aquatic habitat.
- Action 4 Enforce existing relevant sections of building codes and the Zoning Ordinance which restrict development in hazard-prone areas and review building codes and the Zoning Ordinance to determine changes needed for better protection of the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) and areas under regulation by the Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan (SAMP).
- Action 5 Endorse the removal of the Potter Hill Dam on the Pawcatuck River for flood mitigation, as recommended by the USACOE and per recommendation of the [Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Flood Resiliency Management Plan](#).
- Action 6 Support the federal designation of the Pawcatuck River as a Wild and Scenic river.
- Action 7 Work with the Town of Stonington, the Town of North Stonington, the State of Connecticut, the State of Rhode Island and the US Army Corps of Engineers to re-engineer the Stillman Avenue and Boombridge Road bridges to prevent their potential failure in the event of a flood.
- Action 8 Require any new bridges and bridge replacements crossing the Pawcatuck River to span the river without structural supports placed in its course.
- Action 9 Encourage the protection and preservation of existing native vegetation in vulnerable areas.
- Action 10 Review studies and develop strategies to address sea-level rise, storm surge and other climate-change impacts on Westerly's infrastructure.
- Action 11 Assist National Grid in identifying and replacing utility infrastructure which is determined to be vulnerable to natural hazards.

## Character and Heritage

**GOAL:** *Preserve the **unique character and heritage** of Westerly, the diversity of its historic settlements, consistent with our history and culture.*

- Policy 1** Promote aesthetic qualities of residential and commercial development consistent with the town's history and culture.
- Policy 2** Ensure that Westerly's historic districts develop in accordance with superior design that reflects the historic character of each.
- Policy 3** Foster design principles that respect and support the special character of Westerly's constituent neighborhoods.
- Policy 4** Discourage commercial sprawl and promote redevelopment and adaptive re-use of existing property.
- Policy 5** Work with land owners and other stakeholders to identify and preserve, as appropriate, cultural, archeological, and historic resources.
- Policy 6** Promote the Town's historical and cultural assets.

## ACTIONS

- Action 1 Enact development standards for historic districts which are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial - Watch Hill Zoning District (§ 260-87.6[B][5]).
- Action 2 Protect the structures within existing federally-designated historic districts and other buildings on the National Register of Historic Places status with Zoning Ordinance language similar to that enacted for Watch Hill (§ 260-87.6[B][5]).
- Action 3 Work with existing commercial property owners along the Route 1 corridor to enhance the streetscape, such as by installing increased landscaping and green space, through incentives such as reductions in parking areas and enforcement of appropriate signage.
- Action 4 Develop standards for new commercial construction, including redevelopment and adaptive reuse, throughout the town which reduces the amount of parking required and increases the amount of greenspace.
- Action 5 Work with the Architectural Review Board to develop guidelines and strengthen review standards of commercial, professional and industrial structures, landscapes and appurtenances.

- Action 6 Increase and maintain green space in the urban areas of the town, particularly through street trees, landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial and multi-family developments as well as selective park development to be accomplished through public and private projects.
- Action 7 Encourage the development of events which showcase the downtown arts community, celebrate heritage and/or provide cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Action 8 Encourage the expansion of educational offerings and institutions throughout the town.

### 5.3 General Implementation Policies

In addition to the goals, policies and actions generated for each element of planning, the following general policies for the Comprehensive Plan guide the overall implementation. These are the recommended administrative and management guidelines necessary to facilitate the successful implementation of the Plan. General policies establish the governmental framework for the Plan's actions to be carried out.

- Policy 1** The Town's conservation, development, annual budgets and long-term financial decisions shall be guided by the basic principle of balancing economic prosperity for all its citizens and preserving its irreplaceable natural and cultural resources.
- Policy 2** The Town shall insure that land use regulations and decision making consider the implications and potential impacts upon year-round residents, seasonal residents, tourism, and commercial enterprise and upon Westerly's quality of life and economy.
- Policy 3** The Town's ordinances must clearly identify the specific responsibilities of the Town Planner, the Planning Board and the Town Council for developing, implementing and updating the Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 4** The Planning Board shall meet with members of the Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Advisory Committee at least twice annually to assess the status of recommended actions, advise on priorities and identify emerging issues and trends that may impact the Plan.
- Policy 5** The Town should continue to allocate adequate resources annually to maintain and improve the Town's GIS data and capabilities.

- Policy 6** There should be a person within the municipal government charged with executing an economic development strategy, leading an aggressive business development effort and acting as the single point of coordination for all economic development activities in Westerly.
- Policy 7** On an annual basis, the Planning Board should convene a meeting of officials of the fire districts located in the Town to discuss fire district issues and activities with implications for the Comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 8** Recognize that implementation of the Comprehensive Plan requires that the Town maintain a sound financial condition and that decisions regarding conservation, development, facility construction and maintenance, and infrastructure should always be evaluated for future financial impact.
- Policy 9** The Town should encourage recycling and the conservation of energy, water and other environmental resources on a continuing basis.

#### **5.4 Implementation Matrix**

The Plan's recommended actions are arranged in an Implementation Matrix organized according to each of the several planning categories. The matrix is intended as a tool to help manage the Plan implementation. It assigns primary responsibilities, supporting responsibilities, timeframes and, where appropriate, resources to accomplish the Plan's actions. Table 5-1 provides specific definitions of each of these terms. Table 5-2 is the Implementation Matrix itself.

Responsibilities indicated in the Implementation Matrix assume the existing organizational structure of Town government and management. Where multiple support committees are named, it is expected that they may be organized as a workgroup to provide advice to the primary responsible party. Where a new ordinance or a change to existing ordinances or funding is required, the Town Council is named as the primary responsible party. It is assumed that the Council will delegate much of the preparatory work to the support individuals or committees. Non-governmental organizations may be involved in implementing some actions; however, the primary and secondary responsible parties named in the matrix are primarily Town government entities or appointed boards, commissions and committees.

**Table 5-1 DEFINITIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION PLAN MATRIX TERMS**

| Responsibilities             |   |         |  |
|------------------------------|---|---------|--|
| Responsibility               | The “Responsibility” column indicates the position or agency (board, commission or committee) that has the lead responsibility for ensuring the action is carried out | Support | Most actions require the cooperation of and action by the Town Council, Town staff and other local boards and commissions for successful completion; the “Support” column defines those supporting, contributing or approving agencies |
| Timeframes                   |   |         |  |
| ST                           | Short-term (ST) indicates completion within years 1 to 5 after Plan approval  | ST&O    | Short-term and Ongoing (STO) indicates initial activity in years 1 to 3 of Plan approval and ongoing attention thereafter  |
| MT                           | Medium-term (MT) indicates completion within years 6 to 10 after Plan approval  | LT      | Long-term (LT) indicates completion beyond year 10 of Plan approval  |
| Responsibility/Support Codes |   |         |  |
| BCBA                         | Building Code Board of Appeals  | PB      | Planning Board   |
| BO                           | Building Office   | PD      | Police Department  |
| CC                           | Conservation Commission   | PMCO    | Property Maintenance Code Office   |
| DDS                          | Director of Development Services  | PO      | Planning Office  |
| DPW                          | Director of Public Works  | RB      | Recreation Board   |
| DPW-BGD                      | Buildings and Grounds Division  | RD      | Recreation Department  |
| DPW-ED                       | Engineering Division  | SC      | School Committee   |
| DPW-HD                       | Highways Division   | SD      | School Department  |
| DPW-SWD                      | Solid Waste Division  | SoS     | Superintendent of Schools  |
| DPW-UD                       | Utilities Division  | TA      | Town Assessor  |
| EDC                          | Economic Development Commission   | TC      | Town Council   |
| EDS                          | Economic Development Specialist   | TCI     | Town Clerk   |
| EMC                          | Emergency Management Coordinator  | TM      | Town Manager   |
| FD-PO                        | Purchasing Office   | WAHC    | Westerly Affordable Housing Committee  |
| FM                           | Fleet Manager   | WHA     | Westerly Housing Authority   |
| GC                           | Grants Coordinator  | WMLT    | Westerly Municipal Land Trust  |
| HR                           | Human Resources Department  | ZBR     | Zoning Board of Review   |
| IT                           | Information Technology Department   | ZO      | Zoning Office  |

Table 5-2 Implementation Plan Matrix

| HOUSING OPPORTUNITY |   |                |                 |           |
|---------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| No                  | Action  | Responsibility | Support         | Timeframe |
| 1                   | Identify neighborhoods with high densities of substandard housing for revitalization and rehabilitation efforts through the development of neighborhood plans and link implementation with affordable housing strategies.   | PO             | PMCO, ZO        | MT        |
| 2                   | Establish a comprehensive approach for inspections and correction of minimum housing and building code violations for non-owner occupied rental housing to maintain and upgrade properties.   | PMCO, BO       |                 | MT        |
| 3                   | Coordinate with regional, state and federal agencies to leverage local resources by bringing outside expertise and funds to community initiatives that support affordable housing.  | DDS            | PO              | MT        |
| 4                   | Develop management agreements for multi-family housing supported by public funds and/or operated by non-profits.  | WHA            | WAHC            | MT        |
| 5                   | Re-establish the Westerly Affordable Housing Plan Committee.  | TC             | TM, TCI         | ST        |
| 6                   | Continue to promote the Westerly Revolving Fund and create additional support through public and private partnerships.  | TM             | DDS, PO         | MT        |
| 7                   | Coordinate with neighborhood associations on the type of activities best suited to repair and maintenance of existing housing stock.  | TM             | BO, PMCO        | O         |
| 8                   | Determine viability of a tax credit for property owners undertaking substantial rehabilitation of existing structures and accessory apartments.   | TA             |                 | MT        |
| 9                   | Provide support and administrative assistance to those organizations that address the short-term needs of the homeless and provide temporary and/or transitional housing options for persons with special needs.  | TC             |                 | O         |
| 10                  | Review and revise zoning and subdivision regulations for multi-family housing in downtown redevelopment areas as needed with the intent of providing additional housing units in areas within walking distance of employment opportunities and transportation options.  | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | MT        |
| 11                  | Maintain existing qualified low and moderate-income housing units and work with private, non-profit and/or public agencies in creating other affordable housing opportunities in Westerly and regionally at the municipal, state and federal levels to secure funding to create other affordable housing opportunities. | WAHC           | PO              | MT        |
| 12                  | Review housing and demographic data every five (5) years to determine whether local   | PO             |                 | ST+O      |

|    |  |    |          |    |
|----|--|----|----------|----|
|    | housing needs are being met and prepare a report regarding the characteristics of the Town’s rental housing base and an assessment of local housing needs for relevant State agencies. |    |          |    |
| 13 | Address the State requirement for affordable low and moderate-income housing, as defined in RIGL 45-53, through a reasonable production plan.  | TC | PO, WAHC | ST |
| 14 | Evaluate and revise inclusionary and comprehensive permit ordinances to ensure neighborhoods are not impacted by density bonuses and environmental integrity is not compromised.       | TC | PB, PO   | ST |
| 15 | Seek grant funding for the creation and administration of a code enforcement program for housing, particularly rental housing.   |    |          |    |
| 16 | Conduct a study of Bradford as a potential growth center with the potential for the construction and/or rehabilitation of affordable housing.  |    |          |    |

ECONOMIC VITALITY

| No | Action  | Responsibility | Support      | Timeframe |
|----|---|----------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1  | Develop and adopt a comprehensive economic development program with the intent to recruit businesses and create local jobs. Begin with a fundamental understanding of the potential of redevelopment of areas such as the Route 1 corridor, Airport Industrial Park and Bradford Dye Associates former site, and conclude with well-reasoned and community supported actions for intelligent and sustainable economic growth.   | TM             | EDC, DDS, PO | MT        |
| 2  | Provide the Economic Development Commission with the technology and technical assistance needed to effectively address local economic needs, including: the oversight of a comprehensive economic development program; continued interaction with higher education institutions and large employers; consulting with the Westerly Public Schools on the development of a diverse school curriculum to promote job training; and the promotion of tax benefits and other financial incentives that encourage economic development. | DDS            | PO           | O         |
| 3  | Consider establishing a staff position for an economic development specialist to administer the economic development program, facilitate business development activities and assist the town’s Economic Development Commission.   | TM             | HR, DDS      | ST        |
| 4  | Investigate new zoning and regulatory tools to conform with existing neighborhoods and support adaptive reuse of vacant and underused industrial and commercial buildings and associated areas.   | PB, ZBR        | PO, ZO       | MT        |
| 5  | Enact an ordinance which restricts the reactivation of existing, dormant quarries to ensure   | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, | ST        |

|    |   |     |                    |      |
|----|---|-----|--------------------|------|
|    | the existing quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods is not disrupted.   |     | ZO                 |      |
| 6  | Adopt an Extraction Ordinance applicable to all quarries to protect the aquifer, air quality and the environment, in general, and the quality of life for nearby residents. The ordinance should include acceptable development and operating requirements and enforcement thereof and be consistent with any federal and/or state regulations. | TC  | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | ST   |
| 7  | Inspect the White Rock quarry at least twice annually to ensure compliance with the existing land covenants with respect to any possible future purchase of the property by the Town for the purpose of wellhead protection.  | TM  | DDS, ZO            | ST+O |
| 8  | Prohibit the expansion of commercial zoning districts (HC, GC, NB, SC-G, SC-WH, P-15, MC)   | TC  | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | ST+O |
| 9  | Encourage redevelopment of existing, underutilized commercial space, particularly in the Route 1 corridor.  | PB  | EDS, PO            | ST+O |
| 10 | Encourage redevelopment of existing, underutilized industrial space.  | EDS | PO                 | ST+O |
| 11 | Support the continued operation of agricultural, aquacultural and silvicultural businesses and seek to expand such operations whenever possible, such as through the promotion of agritourism.  | EDS |                    |      |

NEW ECONOMIES

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support            | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1  | Review and revise the regulations of zoning districts as needed to better support the operations outlined in Policy 1.   | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | MT        |
| 2  | Review local permitting procedures and requirements, such as fees, parking regulations and signage restrictions, to determine if alterations can be made to better accommodate entrepreneurial activities in non-residential zoning districts. | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | MT        |
| 3  | Review zoning requirements to determine the best manner to support home businesses and live-work spaces in any revitalization zone including in the Downtown.  | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | MT        |

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

| No | Action  | Responsibility | Support | Timeframe |
|----|---|----------------|---------|-----------|
| 1  | Develop a strategic plan to reduce threats to infrastructure that determines appropriate development and construction methods for infrastructure adaptation as well as resiliency, and includes a cost analysis for the upgrade and maintenance on these systems. | DPW            |         | MT        |
| 2  | Undertake a study that will forecast loss of property revenues due to sea-level rise and storm events and mitigate damages, including quantifying local revenue and cumulative  | PO             | EMC     | LT        |

|   |   |        |     |      |
|---|---|--------|-----|------|
|   | value, creating an overlay map of areas vulnerable to economic impacts; and research incentives for businesses and residents to undertake adaptation and resiliency measures using information made available by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council. |        |     |      |
| 3 | Work with appropriate State agencies on shared objectives to reduce the impact from climate change hazards.   | PO     | EMC | LT   |
| 4 | Continue to evaluate the Town’s existing emergency permitting system to ensure Town readiness and effective administration.   | BO, ZO | EMC | ST+O |
| 5 | Develop and implement a strategy that better utilizes the existing capacity of the Airport Industrial Park to enhance commercial business activity and increase job opportunities.  | TC     | EDS | MT   |

SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCES

| No | Action  | Responsibility | Support         | Timeframe |
|----|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1  | Create new zoning and regulations with the intent of implementing CRMC’s Salt Pond Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) and increasing the natural resiliency of areas vulnerable to storm surge and sea-level rise.   | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | ST        |
| 2  | Enact an ordinance that prevents any increase in zoning density except: (a) land within the downtown revitalization area that already has water and sewer service; and (b) areas outside the downtown revitalization area and also outside the CRMC Salt Pond Management Areas (SAMP) which could be rezoned from Zoning District RR-60 to LDR-40 but only after the municipal water system is extended to those areas. | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | ST        |
| 3  | Consider conservation development subdivision regulations applicable to major subdivisions as an alternative subdivision methodology, with the intent of protecting natural features and mitigate impacts from stormwater.  | PB             |                 | O         |
| 4  | Coordinate efforts to control non-point source pollution, including enforcement of stormwater control and sediment-control ordinances; the extension of stormwater and sediment-control ordinances to include single and two-family houses as part of the building permit prose; monitor the effects of these steps; and modify pollution-prevention actions as necessary.  | BO             |                 | O         |
| 5  | Provide all local land-use decision makers at least one in-service program each year addressing new developments related to contemporary preservation and conservation issues for their consideration and possible implementation.  | TM             |                 | ST+O      |
| 6  | Secure funding for continued open space acquisition for water resource protection, habitat protection, farm and forest preservation, and water-dependent recreation.  | TM             | GC              | O         |

|    |   |         |                 |      |
|----|---|---------|-----------------|------|
| 7  | Review the zoning ordinance with the intent of identifying and correcting incompatible uses in aquifer protection zones.  | PB, ZBR | PO, ZO          | ST   |
| 8  | Explore opportunities for the development of ecotourism in the Town of Westerly's conservation areas.   | EDC     | RB, RD, WMLT    | O    |
| 9  | Re-establish access to and maintain CRMC designated rights-of-way to the shoreline and the Pawcatuck River.   | CC      |                 | ST+O |
| 10 | Develop a River Corridor Overlay District and incorporate it in an updated Zoning Ordinance.  | TC      | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | ST   |
| 11 | Update zoning for open space held as conservation land in perpetuity to reflect the actual status and the fact that it is preserved from development.   | TC      | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | ST   |
| 12 | Special considerations should be taken to further protect the areas within the community wellhead protection areas by strengthening land use regulations to minimize the risk of contamination. The GeoInsight Report, 2015 has recommended extending the Aquifer Protection Overlay District and has identified pre-existing, non-conforming uses. | TC      | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | ST   |
| 13 | Relocate the Westerly Public Schools Bus Refueling Station as recommended in the GeoInsight reports.  | TC, SC  | TM, SoS, DPW    | ST   |
| 14 | Continue to preserve the Town's water rights on land in the neighboring Town of North Stonington in the State of Connecticut.   | DPW-UD  |                 |      |

SAFE CIRCULATION

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support         | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1  | Revise development standards to require safe pedestrian and non-vehicular access within new and redeveloped projects.  | PB             | PO              | MT        |
| 2  | Improve the safety and traffic flow at problematic intersections such as Airport Road and Winnapaug Road and the intersection of Canal Street, Friendship Street and Industrial Drive. | DPW-ED, PO     | PD, DPW-HD      | LT        |
| 3  | Continue to fund a program of roadway drainage and sidewalk replacement and maintenance.   | DPW-ED         | DPW-HD          | O         |
| 4  | Identify densely-built neighborhoods and nonresidential districts experiencing high pedestrian traffic as priorities for installing sidewalks and trails.                              | PO             | DPW-ED, PD      | MT        |
| 5  | Evaluate and improve evacuation routes, taking into consideration the location of stormwater outfalls.   | PD, EMC        | DPW-ED, DPW-HD  | MT        |
| 6  | Prioritize the replacement of outdated infrastructure, such as bridges, and design replacements with capacity to prevent road flooding and decrease washout potential                  | DPW-ED         | PD, EMC, DPW-HD | MT        |

|   |   |        |    |   |
|---|---|--------|----|---|
| 7 | through routine evaluations for safe circulation.<br>Evaluate hazardous trees and limbs overhanging public utilities and roadways and prepare a schedule to address such hazards as needed. | DPW-HD |    | O |
| 8 | Maintain a multi-tool traffic calming program to target traffic safety concerns and modify this program as needed.  | PD     |    |   |
| 9 | Begin considering the potentially transformative impact of advances in vehicle operation technology, such as autonomous vehicles, on traffic flow and safety.                               | PD     | PO |   |

TRANSPORTATION ASSESTS

| No | Action  | Responsibility         | Support           | Timeframe |
|----|---|------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| 1  | Work with state and federal officials to increase parking, safe access, and redevelopment planning at and near the railroad station.  | TC                     | TM, DDS, EDS      | ST+O      |
| 2  | Work with Amtrak and elected officials to increase the number of daily stops in Westerly during the summer months. Publicize the availability of current Amtrak service.  | TC                     | TM, DDS, EDS      | ST+O      |
| 3  | Develop and implement a strategy which allows the Town to receive baseline data and routinely receive updated information regarding airport operations, use and configurations for routine tracking of said activities to monitor for any potential future intensification. | TM                     | EDC, EDS          | ST+O      |
| 4  | Work with FAA, RIAC and elected State officials to prevent intensification of the use of the airport.   | TC                     | TM                | ST+O      |
| 5  | Work with RI, MA and CT state agencies and federal officials to support and encourage extension of commuter rail service in Westerly.   | TC                     | TM, DDS, EDS      | MT        |
| 6  | Adopt an Airport Hazard Overlay District to control potential airport hazards in the vicinity of the airport.   | TC                     | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO   | MT        |
| 7  | Work to develop transportation links between the downtown, railroad station, the beach and the airport.   | TM                     | EDC, DDS, PO, EDS | ST        |
| 8  | Establish off-street parking lots on Canal Street and parking/park/kayak launch plans.  | 116 Canal Street Board | DPW-HD            | MT        |

COMMUNITY WIDE SERVICES

| No | Action  | Responsibility | Support | Timeframe |
|----|---|----------------|---------|-----------|
| 1  | Support the delivery of training and technical advancement to town officials and staff to further enhance town services.      | TC             | TM, HR  | O         |
| 2  | Continue to explore advances in technology that improve community services and attracts new investments within the community. | TM             | IT, EDS | O         |

|   |  |         |     |   |
|---|--|---------|-----|---|
| 3 | Complete a comprehensive review of all town annual subsidies to ensure that the funds are directed to institutions that address the highest-priority needs.  |         |     | O |
| 4 | Review progress annually in improving student performance and actions underway in the highest-performing school systems in Rhode Island and Connecticut to determine best practices that appear to be working elsewhere. | SC      | SoS | O |
| 5 | Ensure that public recycling opportunities are available.  | RC      |     | O |
| 6 | Achieve 35 percent recycling and 50 percent diversion rates by reducing solid waste generation and increasing recycling and composting opportunities for municipal operations, residents, and businesses.                | DPW-SWD |     | O |

INFRASTRUCTURE

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support                | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|------------------------|-----------|
| 1  | Ensure the town’s program to reduce groundwater infiltration into sewer lines is supported by testing sewer lines on annual basis.   | TM             | DPW-ED, DPW-UD         | O         |
| 2  | Recognize that the existing wastewater treatment plant has a finite capacity and prioritize any sewer service expansion plans based on environmental protection and economic development, with full consideration of the limits of current capacity.   | TM             | PB, DPW-ED, DPW-UD, PO | O         |
| 3  | Pursue all available state and federal funding to improve the wastewater treatment system.   | TM             | GC, DPW-ED             | ST+O      |
| 4  | Review and revise local land use regulations for the long-term protection of water quality including Aquifer Protection Permits, zoning uses within recharge areas, Source Water Protection Map, and enforcement within the aquifer zone and take action on recommendations outlined in the approved GeoInsight Hydrology reports. | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO        | O         |
| 5  | Develop and implement a plan to better protect all public well sites from the possibility of physical damage or contamination by leaks or accidental spills from motor vehicles or other sources from nearby areas.  | DPW-UD         |                        | ST+O      |
| 6  | Review the adequacy of security measures (including cameras, lighting, and information technology security) for protection of well heads, pump stations, and water tanks and take appropriate actions.   | DPW-UD         |                        | ST+O      |
| 7  | Support the continued development and improvement of the Town's GIS data including stormwater, sewer and water services.   | IT             |                        | ST        |
| 8  | Continue annual mailings from Water Department informing residents about actions they can take to improve water quality.   | DPW-UD         |                        | O         |
| 9  | Undertake a study to evaluate current stormwater system conditions, establish replacement program and fund line item in the town budget for stormwater system upgrades with the  | DPW-ED         | DPW-UD                 | MT        |

|    |  |    |                    |      |
|----|--|----|--------------------|------|
|    | intent to increase capacity.   |    |                    |      |
| 10 | Work towards the elimination of unnecessary existing pavement, such as parking lots, and revise zoning to encourage reduction of new impervious surfaces in new developments and redevelopments. | TC | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | ST+O |
| 11 | Explore mechanisms to reduce sodium levels in the municipal well system.   |    |                    |      |
| 12 | Establish a policy for the regular monitoring of wellheads.  |    |                    |      |

ENERGY ALTERNATIVES

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support            | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1  | Encourage Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation to undertake a waste-to-energy program.   | TC             | TM, DPW-SWD        | ST        |
| 2  | The Town shall exercise leadership by encouraging the use of renewable resources wherever possible and seeking partnerships that will facilitate renewable energy initiatives.   | TC             | TM                 | ST+O      |
| 3  | Consider reactivation of the Alternative Energy Study Committee (AESC) and continue to investigate opportunities and constraints to use renewable and sustainable energy for the town, such as researching cost-benefit data on renewable energy use in comparable municipalities nationwide.      | TC             |                    | ST        |
| 4  | Assist National Grid in identifying and replacing utility infrastructure which is determined to be vulnerable to natural hazards.  | DPW-UD         | DPW-HD             | O         |
| 5  | Adopt regulations allowing residential wind energy facilities and solar power systems and establishing standards for their design, installation, operation and maintenance to protect residents' quality of life, public health and safety and to preserve historic, natural and scenic resources. | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO | ST        |
| 6  | Monitor technological advances in the generation of electrical power for compatibility with the community for potential adoption and use locally.  |                |                    |           |

ENERGY EFFICIENCIES

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|---------|-----------|
| 1  | All town departments will continue to reduce energy consumption by applying sustainable measures in the management, operation, and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure consistent with the budget and mission requirements. | TM             |         | O         |
| 2  | The Town will continue to seek out renewable sources of energy for new and retrofitted municipal facilities.   | TM             | DPW-BGD | O         |
| 3  | Require all future municipal building plans be Energy Star® rated, include efficient   | TM             | DPW-BGD | O         |

|   |   |         |                        |    |
|---|---|---------|------------------------|----|
|   | appliances, utilize water saving devices to the largest extent practical, and incorporate provisions for roof top solar panel installations where possible. |         |                        |    |
| 4 | Consider fuel efficiency when purchasing municipal vehicles and equipment.  | TM      | PD, DPW, SD, FM        | O  |
| 5 | Consider the carbon footprint of products procured by municipal and school operations when selecting vendors.   | TM      | PD, DPW, SD, FM, FD-PO | O  |
| 6 | Reduce energy consumption by promoting local agriculture and food availability.   | SD, HR  |                        | MT |
| 7 | Protect carbon sinks such as forests and fields and require re-vegetation, specifically the planting of trees, in areas disturbed through site development. | PB, ZBR | PO, ZO, RD, TA         | O  |
| 8 | Adjust parking requirements and incorporate street trees and parking lot landscaping to reduce surface solar heat conduction and reduce wind velocities.    | TC      | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO        | MT |
| 9 | Adopt a Strategic Energy Plan in accordance with Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank requirements with assistance from a qualified energy consultant.          |         |                        |    |

NATURAL HAZARDS

| No | Action  | Responsibility | Support         | Timeframe |
|----|---|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1  | Evaluate projected sea level rise, prepare for occurrence of extreme weather events and develop mitigation policies and procedures which best reduce fiduciary risk.  | TM             | PO, EMC         | O         |
| 2  | Determine how best to minimize opportunities for new development in vulnerable areas and amend zoning ordinances and/or subdivision regulations as needed.  | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO, ZO | MT        |
| 3  | Add natural hazards to criteria for open space acquisition with the intent of replanting vulnerable areas with native vegetation and managing vulnerable areas as wildlife and aquatic habitat.   | TC             | PO, WMLT, CC    | ST        |
| 4  | Enforce existing building and zoning codes that restrict development in hazard prone areas and review building and zoning codes to determine changes needed for better protection of the Special Flood Hazard Area and areas under regulation by the Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan. | BCBA, ZBR      | BO, ZO, PO      | MT        |
| 5  | Endorse the removal of the Potter Hill Dam on the Pawcatuck River for flood mitigation as recommended by the USACOE and per recommendation of the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Flood Resiliency Management Plan.  | TC             | PB, PO          | ST        |
| 6  | Support the federal designation of the Pawcatuck River as a Wild and Scenic river.  | TC             | PB              | ST        |
| 7  | Work with the Town of Stonington, Town of North Stonington, State of Connecticut, State of Rhode Island, and the US Army Corps of Engineers to re-engineer the Stillman Avenue and  | TM             | DPW-HD          | MT        |

|    |  |                   |             |    |
|----|--|-------------------|-------------|----|
|    | Boombridge Road bridges to prevent potential failure in the event of a flood.  |                   |             |    |
| 8  | Require any new bridges and bridge replacements crossing the Pawcatuck River to span the river without structural supports placed in its course. | TC                |             | MT |
| 9  | Encourage the protection and preservation of existing native vegetation in vulnerable areas.   | CC, WMLT          | RD, DPW-BGD | O  |
| 10 | Review studies and develop strategies to address sea-level rise, storm surge, and other climate-change impacts on Westerly's infrastructure.     | TM                | EMC, PO, PD | MT |
| 11 | Assist National Grid in identifying and replacing utility infrastructure which is determined to be vulnerable to natural hazards.                | DPW-UD,<br>DPW-HD |             | O  |

CHARACTER AND HERITAGE

| No | Action   | Responsibility | Support                        | Timeframe |
|----|--|----------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1  | Enact development standards for historic districts that are appropriate for each district, similar to what was adopted for the Shoreline Commercial Watch Hill zoning district (260-87.6(B)(5)).   | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO             | MT        |
| 2  | Protect the structures within existing federally-designated historic districts and other buildings with National Register of Historic Places status with zoning ordinance language similar to that enacted for Watch Hill (260-87.6(B)(5)).                              | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO             | MT        |
| 3  | Work with existing commercial property owners along the Route 1 corridor to enhance the streetscape, such as increased landscaping and green space, through incentives such as reduction in parking area and enforcement of appropriate signage.                         |                |                                | O         |
| 4  | Develop standards for new commercial construction, including redevelopment and adaptive reuse, throughout Town that reduces the amount of parking required and increases the amount of greenspace.   | TC             | PB, ZBR, PO,<br>ZO             | MT        |
| 5  | Work with the Architectural Review Board to develop guidelines and strengthen review standards of commercial, professional and industrial structures, landscapes and appurtenances.  | PB             | PO, ARB                        | O         |
| 6  | Increase and maintain green space in the urban areas of town, particularly through street trees; landscaping and buffers in commercial, industrial and multi-family developments; and selective park development to be accomplished through public and private projects. | TM             | DDS, PO,<br>DPW-HD,<br>DPW-BGD | O         |
| 7  | Encourage the development of events that showcase the downtown arts community, celebrate heritage or provide cultural and recreational opportunities.  | TC             |                                | O         |
| 8  | Encourage the expansion of educational offerings and institutions throughout Town.   | SC, TC         | SD                             | O         |

**DRAFT**

Comprehensive Plan: Appendix I  
Town of Westerly, Rhode Island



*A plan for vitality and  
sustainability*

## 1 Existing Land Use and Zoning

Land is a limited and precious resource. Land use planning and regulations seek to find an appropriate balance among the rights of property owners, their neighbors and protection of this valuable resource. Land use planning and regulations determine the appearance of a community, what uses will be allowed and how those uses will be arranged to best meet the needs of the community. This chapter examines the physical characteristics of the land in Westerly, how the land is currently being used, and the environmental qualities and constraints affecting the land. The analysis of existing conditions forms the basis for the future land use plan for the community, the goal of which is to strike the appropriate balance between conservation and development and focus on resiliency. Land policies that protect, preserve, rehabilitate and redevelop existing built resources will address the vision of this Comprehensive Plan while maintaining a friendly and safe community that has preserved its quality of life for all generations, protected its distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and dedicated itself to a vital economy.

This Comprehensive Plan seeks to maintain the distinctions between urban and rural development patterns within the town. To that end, growth is encouraged within the Town's urban service area which includes neighborhoods such as Downtown and the North End as well as Potter Hill, Watch Hill and others along the Pawcatuck River and Route 1. The Urban Service Area, as shown on the **Future Land Use Map (FLU-1)**, is characterized by having a full array of utilities, including public water and sanitary sewer systems. Higher density development is found within these areas. In areas outside of the urban services area, Westerly neighborhoods are distinctly rural. Neighborhoods including Bradford, much of Dunn's Corners, Haversham and Weekapaug rely on private wells and onsite wastewater treatment systems. Development at a much lower density is encouraged in these areas which are home to critical resources such as the Town's public drinking water supply.

In addition to local regulation, land use and development in substantial areas of Westerly is also subject to other state regulatory authorities (i.e., Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and Coastal Resources Management Council), as well as federal regulatory authorities such as the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA).

### 1.1 Existing Land Use

This existing land use inventory was completed using the Rhode Island Geographical Information System (RIGIS) dataset contributed by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), the Statewide Planning Program and Photo Science, Inc. and is visualized in the **Land Cover 2011 map (LC-1)**, so named for the year in which the orthophotography (from which this most recent land cover/land use dataset is rooted) was captured. The land covers in the dataset were based on the same Anderson Level III coding as preceding datasets and indicate the most apparent use of property within the Town of Westerly as identified from the 2011

orthophotography (a more in-depth description of this dataset is available on the RIGIS website and relevant metadata). This analysis combined the existing land uses in Westerly, as identified, into the following land use categories:

- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Community Facilities
- Conservation, Recreation and Open Space
- Industrial
- Residential
- Vacant
- Water

These categories combined contain an area of approximately 30.3 square miles (19,381.4 acres). Of this, 92.2% (17,876.7 acres) is categorized as agriculture, commercial, community facilities, conservation recreation and open space, industrial or residential. Land cover is an oversimplification of categories of uses and not a true snap shot of actual physical occupation of land by use. For example, the table does not include conservation lands acquired after 2011. The land cover analysis however does provide an adequate view of the overall development pattern of the community.

**Table 1-1 Existing Land Cover, 2011**

| Land Cover  | Acreage  | Percent of Total |
|---|----------|------------------|
| <b>Agriculture</b> includes active farm lands (croplands, pastures and orchards) and idle farm lands (abandoned or inactive croplands, pastures and orchards)   | 656.4    | 3.4              |
| <b>Commercial</b> includes all commercial uses consisting of retail, services and professional uses   | 543.0    | 2.8              |
| <b>Community Facilities</b> include schools, places of religious worship, government buildings, community safety facilities, hospital, the airport, railroads, roadways, other transportation uses, public utilities and the transfer station | 641.8    | 3.3              |
| <b>Conservation, Recreation and Open Space</b> includes cemeteries, developed recreation uses, brushlands, deciduous, softwood and mixed forests and beaches  | 10,220.6 | 52.7             |
| <b>Industrial</b> includes manufacturing and quarrying operations   | 332.3    | 1.7              |
| <b>Residential</b> includes all residential uses  | 5,482.6  | 28.3             |

|  |         |     |
|--|---------|-----|
| <b>Vacant</b> includes vacant land, visible wetlands, sandy areas, rock outcrops and transitional (urban open) areas | 1,020.9 | 5.3 |
| <b>Water</b> includes all open water bodies with the exceptions of Winnapaug and Quonochontaug ponds                 | 483.7   | 2.5 |

Source: RIGIS

The following discussion reflects the information presented in the table above.

*Agriculture*

The agricultural land cover category includes four (4) large and several small actively farmed lands within the town. Agricultural covers include croplands, pastures, vineyards, dairies and orchards. There are 608.6 acres of actively farmed land in Westerly, which accounts for 3.1% of the combined total area. The largest concentration of agricultural land is located along Dunn’s Corners-Bradford Road just east of the central portion of the town. There are also several areas of farmland along Shore Road and additional farmland can be found west of the airport. In the northern portion of the town, several smaller areas of land are currently used for agriculture. These areas could potentially be used for other purposes. Under Rhode Island’s land use policy however, the preservation of farmland is encouraged. About 129.6 acres of active farmland are being conserved through acquisition of development rights or conservation easements. Most of the farmland so preserved is in the southern portion of the town.

*Commercial*

Westerly has 543 acres of commercially developed land cover. Large scale development is located predominantly in two areas:

- a. Along the Route 1 corridor (Granite Street and Franklin Street) from Tower Street to Route 78 (Westerly Bypass or Veteran’s Way)
- b. Around the intersection of Route 1 (Post Road), Dunn’s Corners-Bradford Road and Langworthy Road

There is also a defined historic downtown area bounded by the Pawcatuck River and encompassing portions of Main Street, Broad Street, High Street, Canal Street and Railroad Avenue. Two other substantial mixed-use commercial areas exist along the shore; one is on Bay Street in the Watch Hill section and the other is on portions of Atlantic Avenue in the Misquamicut section. Smaller commercial areas are scattered throughout the town.

*Community Facilities*

Community facilities include schools, places of religious worship, government buildings and hospitals and areas dedicated to the transportation network, public utilities and landfills.

Altogether, these uses cover 641.8 acres, or 3.3% of the town's covered area. Westerly State Airport is the largest of these areas while other facilities of significance include the Westerly Transfer Station (located between Westerly Bypass [Route 78] and Chapman Pond), the Northeast Corridor rail line, Westerly Bypass itself and electrical transmission lines. Places of religious worship and schools exist throughout the town.

#### *Conservation, Recreation & Open Space*

This category includes cemeteries, developed recreation uses, brush lands, deciduous, forests and beaches. The largest single conservation area is the Woody Hill Wildlife Management Area. Other land has been acquired and preserved by the Westerly Municipal Land Trust and private conservation organizations. Beaches are located along most of the town's shoreline. There are four golf courses in town and all are located in the southerly portion. Eight (8) marinas and two (2) yacht clubs are located along the Pawcatuck River. The rest of the parks are located throughout the town. This land use category accounts for 10,220 acres of land or 52.7% of the town's area.

#### *Industrial*

Industrial uses include manufacturing establishments and quarrying operations. There are 332.3 acres of land dedicated to industrial uses in Westerly. The majority of this area is made up of quarrying operations. The largest of these areas are in White Rock and the lower portion of Potter Hill while additional operations are present in Bradford. Manufacturing operations are located in the Airport Industrial Park and Bradford and along Canal Street and Beach Street.

#### *Residential*

Residential land use occupies 5,482.6 acres of land representing 28.3% of the town's area. These uses are primarily concentrated in the western and southern portions of the town. There is also a pocket of residential development in Bradford. The highest densities of residential development are found south and west of Westerly Bypass, which developed as the historical town center. Along the southern shore area, much of the residential development is a combination of year-round and seasonal housing, with an increasing trend toward year-round use. The greatest density along the shore is located in Misquamicut, between Maschaug and Winnapaug ponds.

#### *Vacant*

Along with land classified as abandoned without use as another land use, this category also includes land that would be difficult to develop such as wetlands, inland sandy soils, and rock outcrops. Over five percent of the town, 1,020.9 acres, falls into this vacant category. Vacant land that is not preserved and has development potential is located north of White Rock and south of Bradford, surrounding the Woody Hill Management Area.

#### *Water*

Areas classified as water include open water bodies other than Quonochontaug and Winnapaug Ponds (the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are not included). These water bodies cover 483.7 acres within the town. The largest of these areas are the inland freshwater Chapman Pond with contiguous wetlands in Newton Marsh and Aguntaug Swamp and Maschaug Pond, saltwater body near the coastline.

#### **1.2 State Land Use Policy**

In April 2006, the Rhode Island Department of Administration completed a statewide land use plan titled [Land Use 2025](#). The goal of *Land Use 2025* is to eliminate sprawl and protect the natural resources of the state. The plan encourages an urban/rural model for the state that concentrates new development into established areas, together with some rural centers, and identifies urban service boundaries. Within the urban service boundaries are areas that either provide public sewer and water or are planned to do so in the near future, and where higher density and infill development might be considered. The Town of Westerly's existing land use pattern follows this core-periphery pattern encouraged by State policy, at a microscale.

*Land Use 2025* plan also designates centers throughout Rhode Island where concentrations of development, surrounded by rural areas, could be supported. Bradford was designated as one of these centers. The plan encourages the conservation of natural resources through cluster development, conservation development, or transfer of development rights in areas that have development potential.

The preservation and expansion of agriculture are goals of the State of Rhode Island. State guidance on agriculture as both a consumptive use of land and as a contributor to the local economy requires municipalities look at agriculture and the components that contribute to the agricultural system – production, processing, distribution, purchasing, marketing, retailing and agritourism. The goals and policies of the State support the importance of planning for, preserving, and supporting agricultural land and operations. Agriculture is an industry and a source of economic activity. Often, farmers supplement their income through on-farm activities that cause people to make a special trip to the property, adding farms to the state's robust inventory of places that visitors and tourists can experience.

*Land Use 2025* describes a future with efficient use of energy, the availability of energy-efficient transportation options and the development of sustainable energy resources. [Energy 2035](#), Rhode Island's state energy plan, looks to a future in which energy service improvements are found in the electrical, thermal and transportation sectors. The [Resilient Rhode Island Act of 2014](#) has set two carbon emission reduction goals for the state that are within this plan's twenty-

year timeframe – 90% of 1990 levels by the end of 2020 and 45% of 1990 levels by the end of 2035.

The current use of land in Westerly is illustrated in the **Land Cover 2011 map (LC-1)**, so named for the year in which the orthophotography (from which this most recent land cover/land use dataset is rooted) was captured. The land use classifications in the dataset were based on the same Anderson Level III coding as preceding datasets and indicate the most apparent use of property within the Town of Westerly as identified from the 2011 orthophotography (for a more in-depth description of this dataset or any other datasets please visit <http://www.rigis.org/>).

### 1.3 Existing Zoning

Westerly's last comprehensive update of its [Zoning Ordinance](#) was enacted in 1998. There have been multiple updates since, including the [Affordable Housing Amendment in 2007](#). The Zoning Ordinance establishes permitted uses, minimum lot sizes, minimum front, side and rear setbacks for principal and accessory buildings, maximum building heights, maximum building and lot coverage and minimum floor areas. The Zoning Ordinance is a critical tool for controlling the type, density and appearance of development within the town.

Westerly adopted its first Zoning Ordinance in 1925 after receiving authority to do so from the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1922. As its provisions evolved over the years, residential lot sizes increased. New minimum lot sizes and setbacks consistent with those lot sizes were provided even for already developed land. For example, residential properties in the Misquamicut area were allowed to be developed with predominant lot sizes of 6,000 square feet. Over time, the Zoning Ordinance increased the lot size to 10,000 square feet with required building setbacks appropriate to that size.

The result was the creation of substantial areas of predominately non-conforming lots and buildings. The Zoning Board was besieged by requests for those dimensional variances necessary to permit reasonable use of the land. The 1998 Zoning Ordinance addressed this issue by creating multiple residential zoning districts which reflect the development which occurred under earlier zoning ordinance provisions. It also provided lot sizes for areas not already developed which reflect the availability or lack of municipal water and/or sewer and natural constraints upon the land.

Similarly, there were only two commercial zoning districts prior to the 1998 Zoning Ordinance. This did not reflect the unique issues presented by commercial development in discrete areas of the town.

The 1998 Zoning Ordinance established a total of 22 districts which included eight (8) residential districts, nine (9) commercial districts, three (3) industrial districts and two (2) special districts.

In addition to these districts, there are nine (9) overlay districts (three [3] of which are reserved) created to protect resources, reduce hazards and permit certain types of prescribed developments which would otherwise not be allowed. The code also contains provisions for the establishment of planned developments (see subsection 1.3.5 Planned Developments).

The following table, generated using a Geographic Information System (GIS) program, presents a breakdown of the zoning districts by land area.

**Table 1-2 Zoning Districts, 2016**

| Zoning District                       | Acreage         | Percent of Total |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <b>Residential</b>                    | <b>9,822.4</b>  | <b>56.1</b>      |
| (RR-60) Rural Residential             | 2,634.2         | 15.0             |
| (LDR-43) Low Density Residential      | 686.5           | 3.9              |
| (LDR-40) Low Density Residential      | 798.5           | 4.6              |
| (MDR-30) Medium Density Residential   | 2,367.8         | 13.5             |
| (MDR-20) Medium Density Residential   | 1,306.5         | 7.5              |
| (HDR-15) High Density Residential     | 930.5           | 5.3              |
| (HDR-10) High Density Residential     | 330.4           | 1.9              |
| (HDR-6) High Density Residential      | 768.0           | 4.4              |
| <b>Commercial</b>                     | <b>628.4</b>    | <b>3.6</b>       |
| (P-15) Professional Office            | 117.1           | 0.7              |
| (DC-1) Downtown Center                | 33              | 0.2              |
| (DC-2) Downtown Center                | 30.6            | 0.2              |
| (NB) Neighborhood Business            | 32              | 0.2              |
| (HC) Highway Commercial               | 253.2           | 1.4              |
| (GC) General Commercial               | 60.8            | 0.3              |
| (SC-WH) Shore Commercial Watch Hill   | 29.3            | 0.2              |
| (SC-G) Shore Commercial General       | 64.5            | 0.4              |
| (MC) Marine Commercial                | 7.9             | 0.0              |
| <b>Industrial</b>                     | <b>1,079.3</b>  | <b>6.2</b>       |
| (GI) General Industrial               | 850.8           | 4.9              |
| (LI) Light Industrial                 | 208.3           | 1.2              |
| (ORAT) Office, Research, Assembly and | 20.3            | 0.1              |
| <b>Special</b>                        | <b>5,961.4</b>  | <b>34.0</b>      |
| (OS/R) Open Space and Recreation      | 5,707.5         | 32.6             |
| (CR) Commercial Recreation            | 253.9           | 1.4              |
| <b>Planned Development</b>            | <b>21.4</b>     | <b>0.1</b>       |
| Planned Unit Development              | 21.4            | 0.1              |
| <b>Other</b>                          | <b>3.4</b>      | <b>0.0</b>       |
| Not Available                         | 3.4             | 0.0              |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>17,516.3</b> | <b>100</b>       |

Source: Zoning Office, GIS information.

It should also be noted that zoning districts do not necessarily reflect current or future use. For example, there may be farmlands within the RR-60 zoning district that are restricted from being developed by a conservation easement.

### *1.3.1 Residential Districts*

Residential zoning districts make up 56.1% of the land area within the Town of Westerly. There are eight (8) defined residential districts ranging from rural low density (1 unit per a minimum 60,000 square foot lot size) to high density (1 unit per a minimum 6,000 square foot lot size) residential development. While these districts provide for uniform development throughout Town, increases to these specific density guidelines can be achieved through inclusionary zoning requirements, as well as the Comprehensive Permit process.

#### *Rural Residential-60 (RR-60)*

Rural Residential-60 Zoning Districts, requiring a minimum 60,000 square feet per lot, consists of approximately 2,634 acres (or 15% of the total land area in the Town) and are residential areas characterized by very low-density development and comprised mostly of land that is currently used for agriculture, contains wetlands other severe soil constraints, or maintains some other sensitive environmental characteristics. The rural residential districts are designed to protect many of the town's most valuable natural resources and preserve their rural characteristics. It is important to note that within the watershed of the salt ponds, a maximum density of one dwelling unit per two acres is required by the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Special Area Management Plan). Rural Residential-60 is designed for those areas which do not have access to municipal sewers or municipal water.

#### *Low Density Residential-43 (LDR-43)*

Low Density Residential-43 Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 687 acres (or 3.9% of the total land area in the Town), are residential areas in Watch Hill which are comprised predominantly of large single-family homes on large lots that are served by municipal water but not by municipal sewer systems. The 1-acre minimum (43,560 square foot) lot size is designed to preserve the existing character of the neighborhoods.

#### *Low Density Residential-40 (LDR-40)*

Low Density Residential-40 Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 799 acres (or 4.6% of the total land area in the Town), prescribes standards and densities that are intended to preserve the open character of the area and thereby to protect the business of agriculture. While the intent of the district is to protect

agriculture, very little of the zone is used for agriculture. Residential use in this district is restricted to a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet and much of the LDR-40 zone is located north of Route 1 (Post Road) and east and north of Route 78 (Westerly Bypass).

#### *Medium Density Residential-30 (MDR-30)*

Medium Density Residential-30 Zoning Districts, requiring a minimum 30,000 square feet per lot, consists of approximately 2,368 acres (or 13.5% of the total land area in the Town) and are generally intended for single-family neighborhoods adjacent to high-density areas. This zoning district is designed to conform to existing development patterns rather than encourage major expansion beyond defined neighborhoods. Most areas within this district are connected to municipal water but not to municipal sewers. Specific provision is provided for alternative residential development of certain property of substantial size in the MDR-30 Zoning District. While most of residential areas in Bradford are characterized by this Zoning District, the MDR-30 zone is also located mainly along Post Road (Route 1), Shore Road (Route 1A) and Watch Hill Road (also Route 1A).

#### *Medium Density Residential-20 (MDR-20)*

Like MDR-30, the Medium Density Residential-20 Zoning District, which consists of approximately 1,307 acres (or 7.5% of the total land area in the Town), is generally intended for single-family neighborhoods adjacent to high density areas and designed to conform to existing development patterns rather than encourage major expansion beyond defined neighborhoods. Most areas within this district are connected to municipal water but not to municipal sewers and carry a minimum lot size of 20,000 square feet. The largest areas zoned MDR-20 are located broadly around Dunn's Corners Elementary School and between Ashaway Road and Potter Hill Road. Other properties in the MDR-20 district exist in Avondale, Bradford and Shelter Harbor.

#### *High Density Residential-15 (HDR-15)*

High Density Residential-15 Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 931 acres (or 5.3% of the total land area within the Town), are intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. This zoning district is designed for areas where existing densities are moderately high and typically situated on the outer edges of the town center. The district permits a variety of housing types with a minimum lot area of 15,000 square feet per dwelling unit and are served by public water and sewer.

*High Density Residential-10 (HDR-10)*

High Density Residential-10 Zoning Districts, requiring a minimum 10,000 square feet per lot, consists of approximately 330 acres (or 1.9% of the total land area within the Town) and are also intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. This zoning district is designed for areas where existing densities are high, close to saturation, and include a variety of housing types. Primarily located in areas surrounding Winnapaug Pond (including Misquamicut), these areas are typically served by public water but not by sewer.

*High Density Residential-6 (HDR-6)*

High Density Residential-6 Zoning Districts, requiring a minimum 6,000 square feet per lot, consists of approximately 768 acres (or 4.4% of the total land area within the Town) and are also intended primarily for areas of existing residential development. These zoning districts are designed for areas where existing densities are high, at or near saturation, and include a variety of housing types. This zone covers established neighborhoods around the core of the Westerly's urban area which are serviced by public water and sewer.

**1.3.2 Commercial Districts**

There are nine (9) commercial zoning districts which collectively occupy 3.6% of the land area within the Town of Westerly. These districts vary by types of uses permitted, lot sizes and setback requirements and are also scattered through different areas of Town.

*Professional Office (P-15)*

Professional Office Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 117 acres (or 0.7% of the total land area within the town), are intended to establish areas within which the town encourages a concentration of professional office and related uses, as well as residential use and mixed-use developments. Property in this district often serves as a transitional area between more intensely developed districts and residential districts.

*Downtown Center-1 and -2 (DC-1, DC-2)*

DC-1 and DC-2 Downtown Center Zoning Districts, which consist of approximately 33 and 31 acres (0.2% and 0.2% of the total land area within the Town), respectively, are intended for areas comprising the downtown business core and immediately surrounding areas characterized by mixed-uses, high-density residential uses, and retail shops. The Downtown Center zones are intended to preserve the distinct character of the downtown, which has unique characteristics

related to its historic industrial origins, particularly in regard to the preservation of historic buildings and facades.

#### *Neighborhood Business (NB)*

Neighborhood Business Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 32 acres (or 0.2% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for areas characterized by small retail and personal service operations that are surrounded by residential areas. Properties in this district are small and the districts themselves are scattered around the Town, with most of them in the urban core.

#### *Highway Commercial (HC)*

Highway Commercial Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 253 acres (or 1.4% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for areas which are primarily motor vehicle-oriented due to their location along major roadways. An objective of this commercial zoning category is to address existing traffic safety problems associated with excessive curb cuts and to prevent further traffic problems from occurring with future development. This district is located along Route 1 (Franklin Street, Granite Street and Post Road).

#### *General Commercial (GC)*

General Commercial Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 61 acres (or 0.3% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for areas of historic commercial activity outside of the Downtown districts. Minimum lot sizes are smaller than the Highway Commercial District and the Downtown Center 2 District. These areas are located throughout the town.

#### *Shore Commercial-General (SC-G)*

Shore Commercial-General Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 65 acres (or 0.4% of the total land area within the Town), are intended to promote the use of waterfront locations for servicing local and seasonal businesses and water-related activities. The district also provides for both direct and indirect access to the water by the general public. The zone is intended to allow uses in a manner which limits their impact on abutting residential areas. Most of these areas are located along the coast between Misquamicut and Weekapaug. Some of these areas are not located on the water but on routes 1 and 1A.

#### *Shore Commercial- Watch Hill (SC-WH)*

Shore Commercial- Watch Hill Zoning District, which consists of approximately 29 acres (or 0.2% of the total land area within the Town), is intended to promote the use of waterfront locations for servicing local and tourist seasonal businesses and

water-related activities. The district also provides for both direct and indirect access to the water by the general public. The zone is intended to allow uses in a manner which limits their impact on abutting residential areas. There is one SC-WH District, which is located at the western end of the Watch Hill area, primarily along Bay Street. Since this district is located entirely within a historic district, any new development must undergo additional review to ensure it conforms in style and mass with existing structures surrounding it.

*Marine Commercial (MC)*

Marine Commercial Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately eight (8) acres (or less than 0.1% of the total land area within the Town), are intended to establish an area dedicated to marine (water-dependent) and marine-related uses. Uses proposed for the portion of the river designated as Class 3, High-Intensity Boating, in the Rhode Island CRMC Program, are consistent with that program. The district is located on the river side of Margin Street between Greenman Avenue and Clark Street.

**1.3.3 Industrial Districts**

Industrial districts make up 6.2% of the town's land area, and much of the land in these districts is protected by conservation easements. There are three industrial districts which vary in intensity and type of use:

*General Industrial (GI)*

General Industrial Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 851 acres (or 4.9% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for industrial and manufacturing uses which must be segregated because of their incompatibility with other land uses and is designed to provide for the infrastructure and operational requirements necessary for such uses. Stone quarries, landfills, the airport, and large factories are uses currently located in the GI zone.

*Light Industrial (LI)*

Light Industrial Zoning District, which consists of approximately 208 acres (or 1.2% of the total land area within the Town), are designed for areas which have historically been the location for industrial development in proximity to businesses and residences and which would be incompatible with more extensive industrial use. There are two LI locations in the urban core north of Railroad Avenue and Oak Street. Additional LI zones, including the largest tract, are located in Bradford.

*Office, Research, Assembly, and Technology (ORAT)*

Office, Research, Assembly and Technology Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 20 acres (or 0.1% of the total land area within the Town), are designed to provide for office research, assembly and technology uses that do not require extensive infrastructure, sewer, water or site development or present a threat to sensitive environmental resources. There are two ORAT districts; one located on Canal Street and the other west of Westerly Airport.

**1.3.4 Special Districts**

Special districts are those districts which do not fall into any of the previous categories. These districts protect areas for parks and open space or dedicate areas for commercial recreation. Over one third (34%) of the town's area falls into one of these zoning districts.

*Open Space and Recreation (OS/R)*

Open Space and Recreation Zoning Districts, which consists of approximately 5,708 acres (or 32.6% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for areas in use as open space and recreation. This district covers a variety of uses including the town's well fields, major parks and recreation areas, portions of the barrier beaches and cemeteries. These districts are scattered across the town. Aside from parks and cemeteries, nearly all of these land areas are protected through deed restrictions and/or conservation easements held by state, town and non-profit institutions.

*Commercial Recreation (CR)*

Commercial Recreation Zoning District, which consists of approximately 254 acres (or 1.4% of the total land area within the Town), are intended for areas that have historically been the location for commercial/recreational facilities, although adjacent to residential areas in order to allow their continued existence subject to reasonable regulations and limitations on future expansion. These areas include the three golf courses along Route 1A (including the portion of Post Road shared with Route 1), a fourth course on Ocean View Highway, Westerly Yacht Club and River Bend Cemetery.

**1.3.5 Planned Developments**

The [Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act of 1991](#) specifically permits modern zoning tools such as planned development. Planned development districts become mapped for a particular area of land by a zone change granted in conjunction with approval of a master plan of development for that particular area of land which includes requirements and regulations specific to that land. While Westerly once had a process for Planned Unit Development (PUD), it was repealed in 1998

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because of the mixed-use possibilities in such districts and political sensitivities at that time. The existing ordinance has a place reserved for such reintroduction. Such a provision could be the mechanism for development which implements the *Land Use 2025* plan, including its mixed-use elements if limited to areas within the urban services boundary. The planned developments that are identified on the existing zoning map are residential communities which were developed during the period that the PUD provision existed. Currently, approximately 21 acres (or 0.1% of the total land area within the Town), remain zoned as Planned Unit Development.

The current Zoning Ordinance also has an option for Planned Resort Facilities Development. The Planned Resort Facilities Area concept is intended to recognize the town as a tourist resort area and permit the growth of the industry, provided that such facilities are located on substantial tracts of land so as to minimize any impact on neighboring property. This type of planned development has not yet been used.

For convenient reference in this Plan, the dataset provided by the Zoning Office was used to illustrate existing zoning districts in the **Zoning map (Z-1)**.

## 2 Housing Opportunity

### 2.1 Overview

The availability, variety and affordability of housing is a major factor in the livability and prosperity of a community. The diversity of the housing stock in terms of the mix of unit types as well as ownership and rental opportunities are important factors that can help to identify problems and opportunities in the local housing market. These existing housing characteristics serve as a basis for recommendations to guide housing in the community over the planning horizon.

The Housing Chapter of the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, guided by State Guide Plan Element 421, provides a framework for developing the policies and implementation strategies to meet the requirements of the state while preserving and enhancing the quality of life for present and future residents of Westerly. This chapter provides an analysis of housing trends, and along with the other chapters of the Comprehensive Plan, helps to inform and define strategies to:

- Promote diversity of housing types and affordability
- Protect historic and other positive characteristics of neighborhoods
- Prevent displacement of residents that sometimes follows gentrification
- Promote sound water protection and watershed management
- Support the best use, maintenance and improvement of the housing stock
- Identify locations for new housing units
- Promote sensible neighborhood development and growth management.

The inventory and analysis included in this section is primarily based on [data from the 2010 US Census and 2011-2015 American Community Survey \(ACS\) 5-year estimates](#) with supplemental information from other sources. These include, but are not limited to, information supplied by the Town of Westerly and housing data collected by the federal and state government.

### 2.2 Population Size and Age Characteristics

The Town of Westerly had an estimated year-round population of 22,775 in 2015 (based on [2013 RI Statewide Planning projections](#)), which reflects an 0.8% loss in population from 2000 population estimates and a 0.1% loss from 2010. As indicated in Table 2-1, the town's population shrank at a slower rate than the state's population between 2000 and 2015. During this same time period, the population of Washington County grew by 2%.

**Table 2-1 Population Change, 2000-2015**

|                   | 1990      | 2000      | 2010      | 2015      |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Town of Westerly  | 21,605    | 22,966    | 22,787    | 22,775    |
| Washington County | 110,006   | 123,546   | 120,554   | 123,029   |
| Rhode Island      | 1,003,464 | 1,048,319 | 1,052,567 | 1,046,327 |

Sources: 1990 Census, 2000 Census, 2010 Census and RISPP 2013 projections

However, Westerly’s population is expected to increase slowly through 2035, according to the same population projection figures noted above. A 3.0% population increase is projected between 2015 and 2040 which would result in a population of 23,466 by 2040. The current and future rate of growth for the town is low which is predicted to continue. The 10-year 6.3% population increase between 1990-2000 reversed to a 0.8% population loss between 2000 and 2010 and is projected to increase just 0.4% from 2010 to 2020. During the period between 2010 and 2020, Washington County is expected to grow by 4.5% while the State’s overall population is expected to reduce by 0.3%.

Although population growth across the state as well as the northeast has slowed significantly over the last few decades, Rhode Island is the only state in New England estimated to have had less than a 2.5% change in population growth between 2000 and 2015 according to the US Census Bureau.

**Table 2-2 Population Projections, 2015-2040**

|                   | 2015      | 2020      | 2025      | 2030      | 2035      | 2040      |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Town of Westerly  | 22,775    | 22,876    | 23,186    | 23,417    | 23,518    | 23,466    |
| Washington County | 129,601   | 132,639   | 137,074   | 140,719   | 143,643   | 145,660   |
| Rhode Island      | 1,046,327 | 1,049,177 | 1,061,796 | 1,070,677 | 1,073,799 | 1,070,104 |

Source: RISPP 2013 projections

A statistic of at least equal and even possibly greater concern to the community than a declining/stagnant population may be the age distribution of its residents. As housing prices have risen in Westerly, so has the population aged. Most significantly, the proportion of the population over age 65 is growing which is predicted to comprise 19% of the town’s population in 2012. ACS 5-year estimates indicate this this population group reached 20.1% between 2011-2015. Likewise, the proportion of the population over 50 was predicted to comprise 39% of the total population in 2012 which actually increased to 43.5% between 2011-2015. This trend was similarly experienced in neighboring communities such as Charlestown, Hopkinton and Stonington, Connecticut. The growth of the senior and elderly population is contrasted with a

loss of population among younger persons as summarized in Table 2-3. Based on the numeric change from 2000 to 2010 (1,710), Westerly’s population over the age of 55 is estimated to be 38.1% of the total population by 2020. This growth can be contributed to several factors including greater life expectancy, the growing trend of aging-in-place and decreased family sizes.

**Table 2-3 Age Composition of Population 2000-2015**

|              | 2000          |       | 2010          |       | 2011-15       |       |
|--------------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| 0-19 years   | 5,902         | 25.7% | 5,206         | 22.8% | 4,867         | 21.5% |
| 20-34 years  | 4,047         | 17.6% | 3,517         | 15.4% | 3,983         | 17.6% |
| 35-44 years  | 3,883         | 16.9% | 2,881         | 12.6% | 2,473         | 10.9% |
| 45-54 years  | 3,043         | 13.3% | 3,777         | 16.6% | 3,237         | 14.3% |
| 55-64 years  | 2,176         | 9.5%  | 3,165         | 13.9% | 3,572         | 15.7% |
| 65-74 years  | 1,802         | 7.8%  | 2,035         | 8.9%  | 2,341         | 10.3% |
| 75-84 years  | 1,504         | 6.5%  | 1,401         | 6.1%  | 1,379         | 6.1%  |
| 85+ years    | 609           | 2.7%  | 805           | 3.5%  | 831           | 3.7%  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>22,966</b> |       | <b>22,787</b> |       | <b>22,683</b> |       |

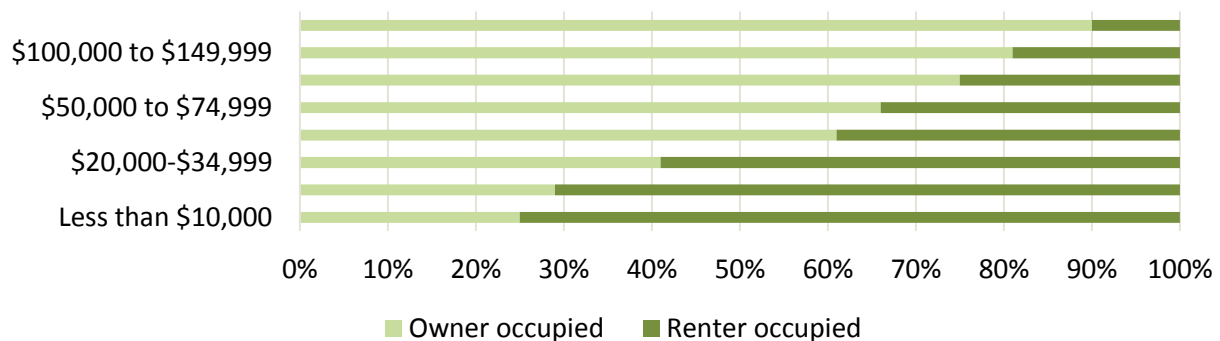
Sources: 2000 US Census, 2010 US Census and 2011-2015 ACS 5-year estimates

### 2.3 Household Characteristics

#### Median Incomes

Based on ACS information from 2006 to 2010, Westerly’s median household income was estimated to be \$57,462 compared to Washington County’s median household income of \$70,285. The elevated number of elderly persons living on fixed incomes contributes to Westerly’s lower median household income, for which the 2011-15 ACS estimate was \$61,500 (84.5% of Washington County’s median). Figure 2-1 indicates that households with higher incomes are disproportionately homeowners and those with lower incomes are primarily renters. Many of Westerly’s lower-income homeowners are elderly with limited incomes.

**Figure 2-1 Owner and Renter Households by Income, 2011-2015**



Source: 2011-15 ACS 5-year estimates

From the 2000 US Census to the 2010 US Census the average household size fell slightly from 2.4 to 2.33 persons, primarily due to an increase in one and two-person households. The number of non-family households (households which may have only one individual or two-or-more individuals who are not related) has grown from 3,272 (34.8%) in 2000 to 3,589 (37.1%) in 2010 while single-parent families increased from 23% to 25.9%.

### **2.4 Housing Availability**

Between 2000 and 2010 the number of total housing units in Westerly increased by 9.1%, slightly below Washington County's 9.5% increase, to 12,320 housing units. Of this total, 78.5% were occupied and 65.4% of all occupied housing units were owner-occupied. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of owner-occupied units in the town increased by 5.5%. In the same period, vacancy rates in Westerly for homeowners increased from 1.2% to 2.4%. Statewide, the homeowner vacancy rate increased from 1% to 2% within the same 2000-2010 period.

Between January 2006 and December 2015, 659 building permits for 871 new residential housing units were issued and of these, 592 were for single-family residences and 67 were for multi-family residences. At least 50 of these building permits were for low- and moderate-income (LMI) units.

#### **2.4.1 Year-Round Occupied Housing**

In 2010 the town had 2,654 vacant housing units of which 71.2% were seasonal. These seasonal housing units make-up 15.3% of the total 12,320 housing units within the town. It is important to note that most of these units are characterized as vacant since they are seasonal units occupied by owners for summer and/or year-round weekend/holiday activity. Therefore, they are not vacant as the term typically implies. "Vacant" in the traditional sense represents approximately 6.2% of total housing units within the town. Comparable towns in Washington County such as Charlestown and Narragansett also had significantly higher percentages of seasonal housing units than the State as a whole during this same time period (2010).

Using Westerly's 2010 average household size of 2.33 people and assuming all seasonal housing units are occupied, Westerly experiences an estimated seasonal population increase of 4,404 people each summer season. Based on the 2013 population projections mentioned above, this results in an estimated total peak population in 2015 of 27,179 people, an increase of 19.3% from the estimated 2015 year-round population.

#### **2.4.2 Units in Structure**

Approximately 31% of Westerly's households reside within multi-family structures, the highest proportion of this housing type found in any Washington County town. Of these existing multi-family units 3,097 (25.1%) are located within structures containing between 2 to 9 units. Approximately 69% of Westerly's households are either attached or detached single-family

## Chapter 2 – Housing Opportunity

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structures, with development and construction trends of the last ten (10) years favoring the latter.

**Table 2-4 Units in Structure by Structure Type, 2000-2015**

| Structure Type      | 2000          |       | 2011-15       |       |
|---------------------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| 1 unit, detached    | 7,269         | 64.4% | 8,037         | 64.9% |
| 1 unit, attached    | 338           | 3.0%  | 453           | 3.7%  |
| 2 units             | 1,698         | 15.0% | 1,679         | 13.6% |
| 3 or 4 units        | 1,045         | 9.3%  | 1,265         | 10.2% |
| 5 to 9 units        | 357           | 3.2%  | 281           | 2.3%  |
| 10 to 19 units      | 144           | 1.3%  | 135           | 1.1%  |
| 20 to 49 units      | 45            | 0.4%  | 65            | 0.5%  |
| 50 or more units    | 380           | 3.4%  | 440           | 3.6%  |
| Mobile home         | 16            | 0.1%  | 33            | 0.3%  |
| Boat, RV, van, etc. | 0             | 0.0%  | 0             | 0.0%  |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>11,292</b> |       | <b>12,388</b> |       |

Sources: 2000 Census and 2011-15 ACS 5-year estimates

As noted previously, Westerly issued 659 permits for new housing units between January 2006 and December 2015; however, all but 67 of these permits were for single-family homes.

**Table 2-5 Residential Building Permits, 2006-2015**

|              | 2006       | 2007       | 2008      | 2009      | 2010      | 2011      | 2012      | 2013      | 2014      | 2015      |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Single       | 77         | 89         | 52        | 46        | 51        | 57        | 48        | 73        | 56        | 43        |
| LMI          | n/a        | n/a        | n/a       | n/a       | 1         | 2         | 3         | 3         | 4         | 1         |
| Multi        | 27         | 22         | 3         | 0         | 1         | 3         | 1         | 5         | 1         | 4         |
| LMI          | 12         | 13         | 4         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 3         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>104</b> | <b>111</b> | <b>55</b> | <b>46</b> | <b>52</b> | <b>60</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>78</b> | <b>57</b> | <b>14</b> |

Source: Town of Westerly Department of Development Services

There is some interest in the development of new multi-family units, particularly for seniors. Existing multi-family units are composed disproportionately of Westerly's older housing stock with more than one-third (34.8%) built prior to 1940 and more than half (55.4%) built prior to 1960. Furthermore, the local construction market is fueled in part by demand for seasonally occupied second homes. For instance, in 2004 approximately 12.5% (1,468) of all housing units were second homes. In 2010, the number of housing units estimated to have been used seasonally, occasionally or for recreation, was 1,890 (15.3%), reflective of the town's continuing status as a shoreline resort community.

2.4.3 Rental Housing

**Table 2-6 Town of Westerly Renter-Occupied Housing Units, 2000-2015**

| Year    | Occupied units (#) | Renter-occupied units (#) | Renter-occupied units (%) |
|---------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2000    | 9,402              | 3,403                     | 36.2                      |
| 2010    | 9,666              | 3,344                     | 34.6                      |
| 2011-15 | 9,618              | 3,553                     | 36.9                      |

Sources: 2000 Census, 2010 Census and 2011-15 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Table 2-6 demonstrates that the number of year-round renter-occupied housing units in the Town of Westerly has been consistent from 2000 to 2015 at approximately 3,400 units which represents an average of 35.9% of its entire year-round housing stock.

Table 2-7 describes renter household incomes based on the low-income category of the HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI). In 2000 about 2,060 renter households in Westerly were reported to be at or below the 80% HAMFI threshold limit. That number increased in 2015 to approximately 2,235 renter households. Since 2000, renter households at or below 80% HAMFI have made up 60 to 63% of total renter-occupied units.

**Table 2-7 Town of Westerly Income of Renter-Occupied Housing Units, 2000-2015<sup>1</sup>**

|                      | 2000 <sup>2</sup> |         | 2011-2015 <sup>3</sup> |         |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
|                      | Units             | Percent | Units                  | Percent |
| Extremely Low HAMFI  | 842               | 24.7%   | 851                    | 24.0%   |
| Very Low (50%) HAMFI | 1,181             | 34.7%   | 1,735                  | 48.8%   |
| Low (80%) HAMFI      | 2,060             | 60.5%   | 2,235                  | 62.9%   |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>3,403</b>      |         | <b>3,553</b>           |         |

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census [sample data] and 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

<sup>1</sup> Units and percents are based on closest-fitting estimates

<sup>2</sup> 2000 Census household income data is for 1999 (1999 USD)

<sup>3</sup> 2011-2015 ACS household income data is in the past 12 months (2015 USD)

The Town of Westerly has developed several programs and initiatives to ensure the preservation of its robust rental housing stock:

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).** The Town has had a twenty-five (25) year history of housing rehabilitation financed by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in designated neighborhood revitalization target areas such as Bradford and the North End.
- **Westerly Revolving Fund.** In response to objectives outlined within the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, the Town’s 2015 CDBG application requested and received approval to establish a Town Housing Rehabilitation Revolving Loan Fund. As a result, in 2013 the

community based non-profit corporation known as the Westerly Revolving Fund (WRF) was established as a separate fund for housing rehabilitation for Westerly's historic multi-family neighborhoods. A majority of the town's rental housing is located in the older neighborhoods which surround the downtown and historic mills along the Pawcatuck River. The WRF provides advocacy, lending and technical assistance to property owners looking to renovate existing structures when they are not able to secure adequate funding from traditional sources. The WRF will help to address the significant need for housing rehabilitation now and in the future, the LMI status of low to moderate income households (50.8% of total households are  $\leq$ 80% HAMFI according to 2015 ACS 5-year estimates) and the difficulties faced by property owners when trying to obtain conventional rehabilitation loans. The Town program will offer rehabilitation loans, with repayment options suitable to LMI properties while making individual considerations of circumstances. The new program will aim to help with emergency repairs and upgrades of multi-family housing to keep properties financially viable and to preserve the Town's rental housing stock.

- **North End Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.** The *North End Neighborhood Revitalization Plan* was designed on key planning concepts which included recommendations for a range of affordable housing options, comprehensive code enforcement, improved neighborhood amenities and the integration of a broad array of social services to support the needs of North End residents. Through a series of neighborhood revitalization plans, the Town of Westerly intends to apply these same concepts to other areas of Town.

### 2.5 Housing Conditions

The quality, safety and general state of housing units has significant impact on the well-being of residents and on the livability and desirability of a community. Neglect, deterioration, abandonment and foreclosures represent issues related to housing conditions. Housing conditions can be addressed by neighborhood involvement and Neighborhood Plans.

#### 2.5.1 Age of Housing

In 2000 Westerly had a housing stock that was relatively newer than the state as a whole but older than that of Washington County and most other comparable towns. The median year for homes built in the town was 1965, compared to 1958 in the state and 1971 within Washington County. According to the 2011-15 ACS, 11.2% of total housing units to date were constructed after the year 2000.

**Table 2-8 Age of Housing, 2000-2015**

|                     | 2000          |       | 2011-15       |       |
|---------------------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| 1990 to most recent | 1,414         | 12.5% | 2,450         | 19.8% |
| 1980 to 1989        | 2,195         | 19.4% | 2,018         | 16.3% |
| 1970 to 1979        | 1,465         | 13.0% | 1,405         | 11.3% |
| 1960 to 1969        | 1,226         | 10.9% | 1,402         | 11.3% |
| 1950 to 1959        | 1,443         | 12.8% | 1,375         | 11.1% |
| 1940 to 1949        | 639           | 5.7%  | 637           | 5.1%  |
| 1939 or earlier     | 2,910         | 25.8% | 3,101         | 25.0% |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>11,292</b> |       | <b>12,388</b> |       |

Sources: 2000 Census and 2011-15 ACS 5-year estimates

**2.5.2 Condition of Housing Stock**

During the decades of a thriving construction market for new single-family homes and the subsequent decline in construction through the recent economic recession, there has been no measurable increase in home improvement spending. Having taken its toll on the quality of the region’s housing stock, it’s important for the town to focus attention on upgrading and improving the condition of pre-1970 homes. The Town of Westerly’s focus on a rehabilitation program supported by a revolving fund is well placed as an integral part of neighborhood revitalization efforts to help achieve this objective.

According to national trends, homes in decline due to the age of electrical and plumbing systems are significantly more likely to be converted to nonresidential uses, become vacant or be permanently lost from the inventory of housing options. Available home repair and improvement programs in the State include Rhode Island Housing home improvement loans and the 2-1-1 Infoline for home improvement program information and loan referrals. Rhode Island Affiliates of Habitat for Humanity are active in both new construction and substantial rehabilitation and Habitat for Humanity ReStores, located in Charlestown, provides discounted used and surplus furniture and building materials. Other organizations including Rebuilding Together, Inc., Veterans Affairs Regional Loan Center and USDA Rural Development Office assist local low-income, elderly and disabled homeowners.

With the local economy and housing market gradually recovering, investment in the town’s existing housing inventory should be encouraged. Older homeowners can retrofit their homes to accommodate their future needs and also allow residents to “age in place” as opposed to having to relocate in their senior years. Households can also increase their investment with environmentally sustainable improvements, as well as reducing their insurance costs by utilizing new reconstruction techniques certified by the Insurance Institute of Business and Home Safety (IBHS) FORTIFIED Home project.

The Town of Westerly is in need of more tools to effectively address housing quality and provide assistance to homeowners in regards to such issues as aging plumbing and electrical systems, flood and wind damage, and demolition due to neglect.

#### *2.5.3 Minimum Housing Enforcement*

The State Housing Maintenance and Occupancy Code establishes minimum standards governing utilities and facilities and other physical conditions essential to make dwellings safe, sanitary, and fit for human habitation. Enforcement of these conditions and proper maintenance of housing as a public health and safety matter is delegated to local government. In the Town of Westerly, the Property Maintenance Code Official (Code Enforcement Official) within the Department of Development Services is the Town's code enforcement officer. In order to ensure that no violations exist, routine inspections of suspect and blighted properties are made while new construction or renovation work is in progress. For existing structures, the Code Enforcement Official enforces State Codes designed to safeguard buildings and their contents from hazards. Between both 2015 and the 2017 year-to-date, most related code violations involved sanitation and an accumulation of rubbish or garbage.

In 2015, the Town received 125 complaints regarding property maintenance codes for non-commercial properties with 64 of those complaints (51.2%) associated with an owner whose address was not the same as the subject property. The majority of these locations belong to out-of-town property owners and a smaller percentage were associated with in-town property owners (those who own but do not reside at the subject property). In the first four (4) months of 2016 approximately 39% of received complaints regarding property maintenance were associated with non-owner occupied properties with approximately 47% of these being owned by out-of-town property owners.

The Certificate of Apartment Occupancy (CAO) is one tool that can be utilized for the code enforcement of non-owner occupied residential units, as used in the State of Connecticut. The main purpose of the CAO is to provide renters with the same protections as homebuyers by allowing for an inspection process that is municipally-sanctioned and which prohibits the renting of units which are found to be sub-standard. The CAO process requires that owners of rental units register each unit with the municipality, usually through the building or housing code office. As each unit is vacated, subsequent rental cannot occur until the unit is inspected and determined to be code compliant, safe and sanitary, which allows for identification and correction of any housing code violations. Upon confirmation of compliance, the CAO is issued and the unit may be rented, which ensures that the tenant is getting a unit that conforms to all state and local housing code requirements. Registration and inspection of each unit are subject to a fee to help offset the administrative cost to the municipality. However, the Town of Westerly

may need to seek legislative authority to enact a local ordinance and enforce a strategy such as this.

### 2.6 Affordable Housing Availability

There are many factors limiting affordable housing availability in Rhode Island, most if not all of which are pertinent within the Town of Westerly as well. The Town has been experiencing the following influences on this sector of the housing market.

- Limited land available and suitable for development
- High land and construction costs
- High sale prices
- Low vacancy rates
- Deterioration of older housing stock
- Elimination of year-round housing stock by conversion to seasonal or second homes
- Elimination of funding through federal and state housing programs

#### 2.6.1 Housing Costs

Through the early part of the previous decade (2000-2006), high and rising property values reflected the desirability of Westerly as an attractive community for both year-round and seasonal residents. Prior to the housing and credit market crashes around 2008, the housing market was characterized by vibrant construction activity in both new homes and renovations ,as well as strong appreciation of assessed home values which, combined with rising property taxes and energy costs, significantly impacted affordable housing availability.

With the economic downturn beginning in 2007, construction activity immediately began to fall in 2008 and has been focused almost entirely on single-family units since. According to the Statewide Multiple Listing Service (MLS) data provided by Rhode Island Living, single-family and multi-family median sale prices have also not yet recovered to pre-recession values despite a more recent upward trend. According to the [2016 HousingWorksRI Fact Book](#), the median monthly housing payment for a homeowner was \$1,863. The 2011-15 median owner-occupied household income identified by the ACS (\$77,906) was in excess of the income needed to afford the median home price (\$74,506) by \$3,400.

High and rising rent continues to be an issue impacting both the Town and the State. The Year End (YE) 2006 Rhode Island Rent Survey found the average monthly rents for a one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartment in Westerly were \$920, \$1,104 and \$1,306 per month, respectively.<sup>1</sup> All three averages were above their [2006 Westerly-Hopkinton-New](#)

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<sup>1</sup> 2006 Rhode Island Rent Survey, as compiled by Rhode Island Housing

[Shoreham, RI HUD Metro Fair Market Rent \(FMR\) Area](#) counterparts, which were \$650, \$760 and \$908 per month for a one-bedroom, two-bedroom and three-bedroom apartment, respectively.

Rents have continued to rise and the averages listed in the YE 2014 RI Rent Survey were \$955 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$1,167 for a two-bedroom apartment and \$1,451 for a three-bedroom apartment. Comparatively, these were \$245 more for a one-bedroom, \$207 more for a two-bedroom and \$243 more for a three-bedroom apartment than the [2014 HUD Area FMRs](#). Assuming no more than 30% of annual income was spent on rent and related expenses, a renter would have needed an annual income of \$46,680 to afford the average two-bedroom apartment. This figure was close to \$9,000 more than the 2010-14 ACS median renter-occupied household income. While the [YE 2016 RI Rent Survey](#) averages were \$1,062 for a one-bedroom, \$1,315 for a two-bedroom and \$1,606 for a three-bedroom unit, the [2016 HUD Area FMRs](#) indicate \$799 for a one-bedroom apartment, \$1,069 for a two-bedroom apartment and \$1,419 for a three-bedroom apartment. Respectively, for each apartment type the 2016 RI Rent Survey indicates rents are \$263, \$246 and \$187 higher than identified within the 2016 HUD Area FMRs.

*Home Values*

An analysis of housing in Westerly from the standpoint of its market value, as determined by the Westerly Tax Assessor’s Office through revaluations in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015, shows the volatility of property values in Westerly over the last decade. Table 2-9 below summarizes the 2000, 2003 and 2006 valuations for single-family homes in Westerly categorized by Fire District. Over these six (6) years, the value among the range of single-family homes located in Westerly increased from a town-wide average of \$150,600 in 2000 to more than \$335,000 in 2006, a 123.6% increase. The total valuation of homes within the Westerly Fire District increased 116% while homes in Weekapaug increased by 214.2%. Single-family homes in two (2) other fire districts, Watch Hill and Weekapaug, had averaged assessed values in excess of \$1.7 million. These outlying values were due to their districts’ characteristics as coastal villages with high numbers of second homes and seasonal populations. Most notably, the 2006 revaluation recorded a difference in value of more than \$1.6 million between the Fire Districts with the lowest (Bradford) and highest (Weekapaug) median values.

**Table 2-9 Property Revaluations, 2000-2006**

|                | 2000  |              | 2003  |              | 2006  |              |
|----------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|
|                | Homes | Median Value | Homes | Median Value | Homes | Median Value |
| Bradford       | 408   | \$110,300    | 425   | \$173,000    | 434   | \$244,300    |
| Dunn’s Corners | 1,567 | \$162,300    | 1,670 | \$266,450    | 1,723 | \$365,900    |
| Misquamicut    | 361   | \$203,500    | 536   | \$352,500    | 558   | \$499,800    |

|                |       |           |       |             |       |             |
|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| Shelter Harbor | 147   | \$283,900 | 151   | \$556,800   | 155   | \$713,200   |
| Watch Hill     | 195   | \$741,700 | 208   | \$1,249,100 | 210   | \$1,727,300 |
| Weekapaug      | 96    | \$607,500 | 112   | \$1,331,000 | 118   | \$1,908,800 |
| Westerly       | 3,725 | \$139,700 | 3,816 | \$220,600   | 3,899 | \$301,800   |
| Town-wide      | 6,499 | \$150,600 | 6,918 | \$248,050   | 7,097 | \$336,700   |

Source: Town of Westerly Assessment Department

In 2009, the Town of Westerly completed a full revaluation as required by State statute. This revaluation provided evidence that the general economic downturn which began in 2008 affected the overall value of housing in Westerly. For example, 57% of the houses sold in 2008 were sold for less than their assessed value and in the first half of 2009, 83% of houses sold for less than their assessed value. These housing transactions over this 19-month period approximately represent just 6% of the total number of single-family units in the town. The 2009 full revaluation documented the extent of the shift in median housing values as compared to 2006 levels.

The recent recession’s protracted effects in Westerly are evident in the overall decrease in average total property values as recorded within the 2012 revaluation. The 2006 revaluation, which was completed prior to the economic downturn, reflected a town-wide median total property value of \$336,700. In 2012, towards the end of the recession, the median value had fallen by 15.3% (\$51,600) to \$285,100. The most recent revaluation in 2015 shows a continued decrease in median total values across the Town’s seven fire districts, however these decreases have slowed and, in the case of the Watch Hill, returned to increasing in value.

Tables 2-10 and 2-11 summarize the 2009, 2012 and 2015 revaluations for single-family homes in Westerly by Fire District. Over nearly the last decade the median value of single-family homes located in Westerly reduced from \$336,700 in 2006 to \$275,600 in 2015, a decrease of about 18.1%.

**Table 2-10 Property Revaluations, 2009-2015**

|                   | 2009  |              | 2012  |              | 2015  |              |
|-------------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|--------------|
|                   | Homes | Median Value | Homes | Median Value | Homes | Median Value |
| Bradford          | 440   | \$232,750    | 475   | \$209,800    | 495   | \$204,900    |
| Dunn’s<br>Corners | 1,743 | \$340,500    | 1,758 | \$313,000    | 1,774 | \$305,300    |
| Misquamicut       | 565   | \$465,400    | 584   | \$432,950    | 583   | \$421,900    |
| Shelter<br>Harbor | 160   | \$657,050    | 162   | \$597,300    | 164   | \$585,900    |
| Watch Hill        | 217   | \$1,670,300  | 222   | \$1,597,300  | 222   | \$1,632,200  |
| Weekapaug         | 126   | \$1,700,500  | 131   | \$1,623,800  | 133   | \$1,452,700  |

|           |       |           |       |           |       |           |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| Westerly  | 3,931 | \$275,400 | 4,014 | \$251,100 | 4,063 | \$242,500 |
| Town-wide | 7,182 | \$311,150 | 7,346 | \$285,100 | 7,434 | \$275,600 |

Source: Town of Westerly Assessment Department

**Table 2-11 Change in Median Values, 2006-2015**

|                | 2009-2012 | 2012-2015 <sup>1</sup> | 2009-2015 | 2006-2015 |
|----------------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Bradford       | -9.9%     | -2.3%                  | -12.0%    | -16.1%    |
| Dunn’s Corners | -8.1%     | -2.5%                  | -10.3%    | -16.6%    |
| Misquamicut    | -7.0%     | -2.6%                  | -9.3%     | -15.6%    |
| Shelter Harbor | -9.1%     | -1.9%                  | -10.8%    | -17.8%    |
| Watch Hill     | -4.4%     | 2.2%                   | -2.3%     | -5.5%     |
| Weekapaug      | -4.5%     | -10.5%                 | -14.6%    | -23.9%    |
| Westerly       | -8.8%     | -3.4%                  | -11.9%    | -19.6%    |
| Town-wide      | -8.4%     | -3.3%                  | -11.4%    | -18.1%    |

Source: Town of Westerly Assessment Department

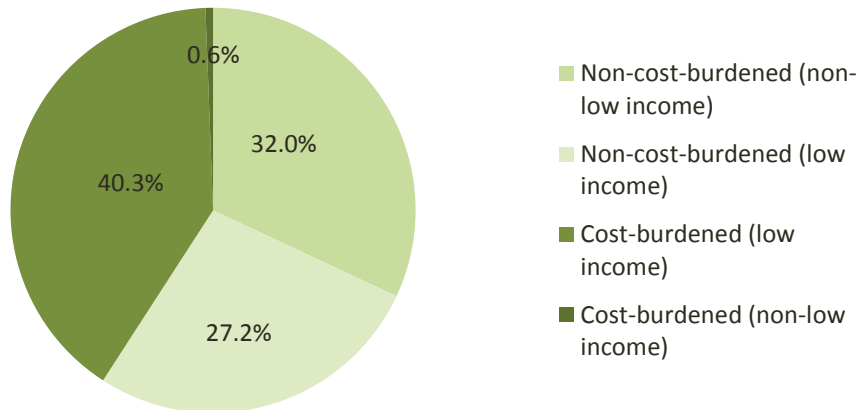
**2.6.2 Unmet Affordable Housing Needs**

Affordable housing needs are determined from demographic data available from a variety of sources which include the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) database, among other sources. The unmet need for affordable housing can be calculated based on the current number of LMI units and the demand for LMI units based on the data available. In addition to LMI production goals (to be discussed later which are based on current housing stock) the specific needs of the low and moderate-income populations are also evaluated based on the availability and distribution of the affordable housing types that should be targeted.

**Households with Rental Cost Burdens**

Figure 2-2 illustrates the extent to which housing cost burdens are felt by renter-occupied households in Westerly.

**Figure 2-2 Housing Cost Burden for Renter Households by Income, 2008-12**

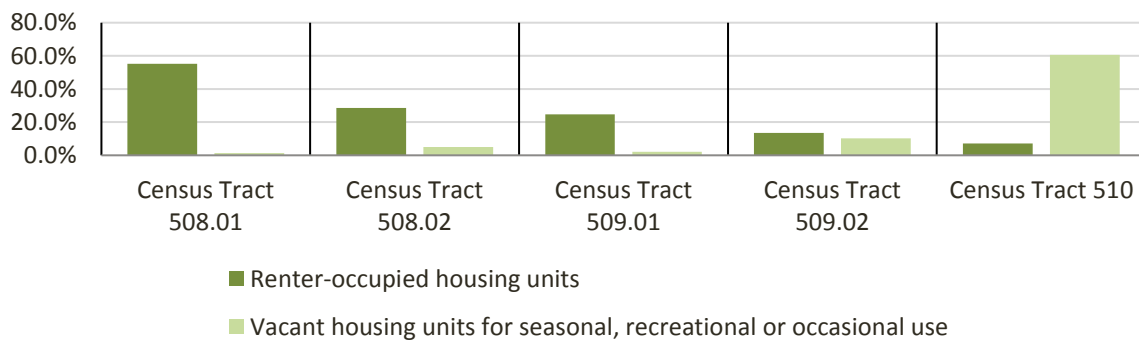


Source: HUD CHAS Data Query Tool, 2008-12 data

Approximately 40.3% (1,329) of Westerly’s 3,300 renter households earn 80% or less than the HUD Area Median Family Income (HAMFI) and spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs ([CHAS Data Query Tool](#), 2008-12).<sup>2</sup> As previously noted, average rents in Westerly (YE 2016) were \$1,062 for a one-bedroom apartment and \$1,315 and \$1,606 for two- and three-bedroom apartments, respectively. The minimum household income needed to afford a rent of \$1,315 is approximately \$52,600.<sup>3</sup>

Rental housing opportunities in Westerly are also constrained by the market demand for vacation homes, as shown in Figure 2-3 below.

**Figure 2-3 Select Occupancy Statuses as a % of Total Housing Units per Census Tract**



Source: 2010 Census

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp/CHAS/data\\_querytool\\_chas.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp/CHAS/data_querytool_chas.html)

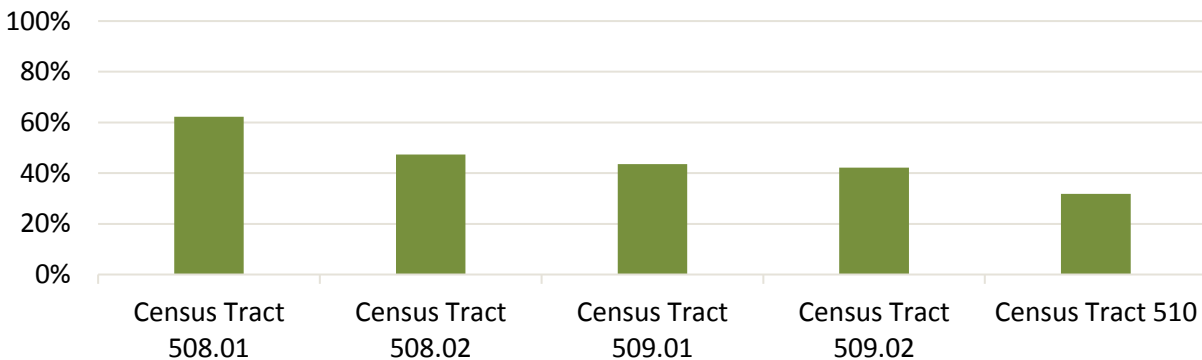
<sup>3</sup> HousingWorks RI Fact Sheets. <http://housingworksri.org/cities-towns/westerly> Obtained March 15, 2016.

Seasonal rentals contribute to the continued diminishment of the year-round stock of affordable homes and disruption of potential long-term rents as landlords often impose nine-month lease restrictions to allow for summertime rentals. Also, the high proportion of upper income (\$50,000 and above) renter-occupied households in Westerly is likely related to the desirability of its seaside location, regardless of the time of year, and/or its aging population which may be less interested or able to maintain a home.

Rental housing is most concentrated in Census Tract 508.01 where vacant seasonal housing is minimal (less than two percent). The percentage of renter-occupied housing units is further reduced outside of the town’s urban core. Overall there are positive correlations between the percentage of renter-occupied housing units and several characteristics common in urbanized areas, such as greater racial diversity and a larger young adult (18 to 34 years) population. The 2010 US Census data and ACS 2011-2015 estimates also support this conclusion which is experienced in Westerly as well.

Another correlation, as presented in Figure 2-4 below, is the cost burden of occupants. Census Tracts 508.01 and 508.02 together contain 1,248 cost burdened, renter-occupied households, which is 37.6% of all renter households with a rent and positive income (an income greater than \$0.00) in Westerly. In Census Tracts 508.02, 509.01, 509.02 and 510, economic data suggests that a majority of renter-occupied units are not cost burdened.

**Figure 2-4 Percent of Cost Burdened Renter-occupied Households by Census Tract, 2011-2015**



Source: 2011-15 ACS 5-year estimates

### *Households with Homeownership Cost Burdens*

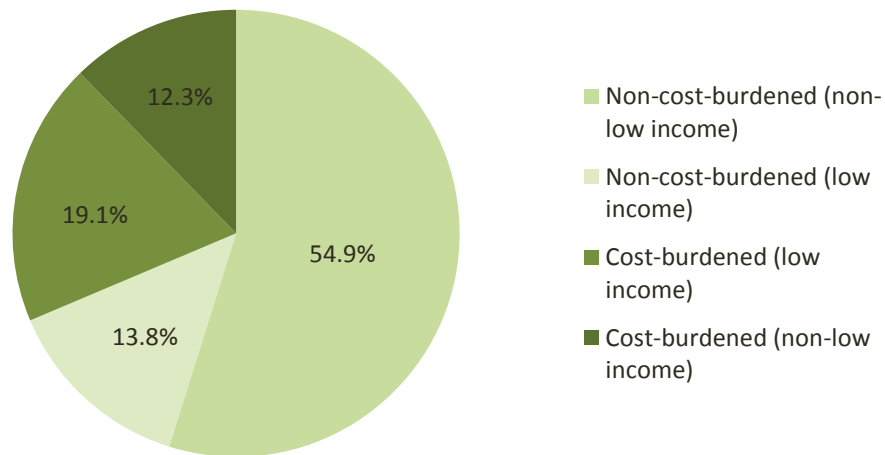
Using information from 2010, the [HousingWorksRI 2011 Fact Book](#) calculated the average homeowner would need to maintain an income of \$78,181 to afford the monthly costs (excluding maintenance, repair and utility costs) of a single-family home at the median sales price of

\$276,750.<sup>4</sup> Four years later, the 2015 Fact Book identified the median single-family home sale price to be \$282,000, increasing the required income by \$2,071 to a total of \$80,252.<sup>5</sup> This outpaced the \$1,037 increase in median owner-occupied household income in the past 12 months estimated by the 2006-10 (\$76,869) and 2011-15 (\$77,906) ACS. As of YE 2015, the median sales price was \$285,000 for a single-family home.

Sales of existing multi-family housing units have been stable following the 2008 economic downturn while the median sales price has experienced greater fluctuation. The median sale price of multi-family homes in Westerly increased 17.4% from \$187,450 in 2010 to \$220,000 in 2015 with growth remaining uninterrupted since 2012.

Figure 2-5 below illustrates cost burdens felt by owner households in Westerly. Approximately 19.1% (1,220) of Westerly’s 6,395 owner households earn 80% or less than the median household income and pay more than 30% of their incomes towards housing costs.

**Figure 2-5 Housing Cost Burden for Owner Households by Income, 2008-12**



Source: CHAS Data Query Tool, 2008-12 data

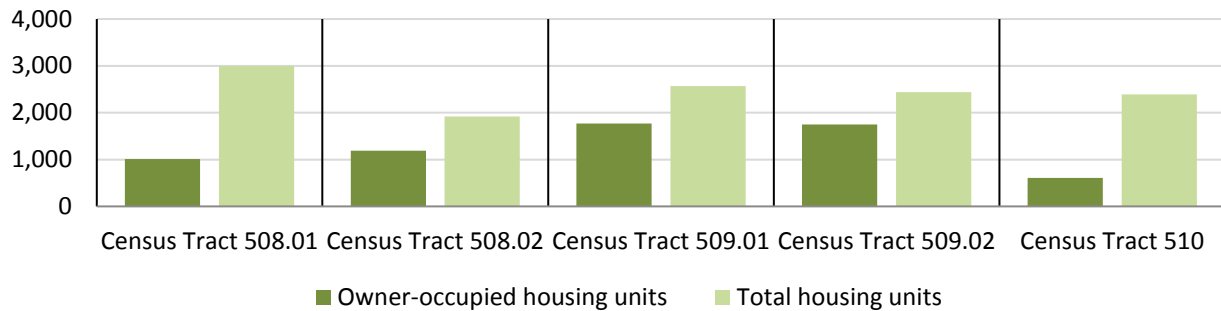
In contrast to renting, Figure 2-6 below shows the prevalence of owner-occupancy in Census Tracts 509.01 and 509.02. The comparably high portions of owner-occupied dwellings in these tracts may be influenced by the time period in which their general development occurred (mid-to late-twentieth century). As noted previously, the built environment of Census Tracts 508.01

<sup>4</sup> 2011 HousingWorksRI Fact Book, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> 2015 HousingWorksRI Fact Book, p. 59.

and 508.02 are more historic and urban while Census Tract 510 contains a high number of seasonal housing units due to its coastal location.

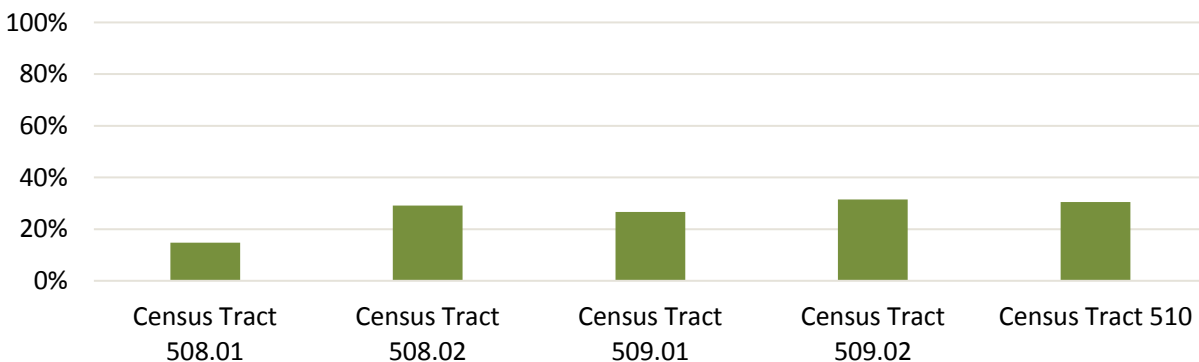
**Figure 2-6 Owner-Occupancy, 2010**



Source: 2010 Census

In contrast to renter-occupied households, no Census Tract contained a cost-burdened majority of its total owner-occupied units with a positive income. In fact, Census Tract 508.01, which contained the largest number and percentage of cost-burdened renters, contained the smallest number and percentage of total positive income cost-burdened owner-occupied homes in the Town. The largest numbers of cost-burdened owner households were located in Census Tracts 509.01 and 509.02 (443 and 493, respectively).

**Figure 2-7 Percent of Cost Burdened Owner-occupied Households by Census Tract, 2011-2015**



Source: 2011-2015 ACS 5-year estimates

**Population with Disabilities**

Disability is defined by federal law as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,” which may include “walking, talking, hearing, seeing, breathing, learning, performing manual tasks, and caring for oneself.”<sup>6</sup> In [a 2012 report on Americans with](#)

<sup>6</sup> [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/fair\\_housing\\_equal\\_opp/disabilities/inhousing](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/disabilities/inhousing)

disabilities, the US Census Bureau identified 8.7% of the 41.5 million people in the United States who had disabilities in the physical domain required wheelchairs and 28% required a cane, crutches or a walker in order to be mobile.<sup>7</sup> Based on this information, actual housing needs of persons with physical disabilities is significantly larger than the number dependent on wheelchairs, canes, crutches or walkers. Some individuals, for example, have physical disabilities which limit their ability to walk more than a quarter mile without resting (which is the Census Bureau’s definition of a mobility impairment) but are ambulatory and do not require wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

The 2000 Census collected a sample civilian non-institutionalized disabled population of 3,636. Estimates provided by the 2011-15 ACS indicate a decrease in this population by 26.7% to 2,665. Among the civilian non-institutionalized population 5 years of age and over there were 611 individuals with a hearing difficulty, 239 with a vision difficulty, 950 with a cognitive difficulty, 1,257 with an ambulatory difficulty and 520 individuals with a self-care difficulty. Those aged 65 years and over made up 46% of the total civilian non-institutionalized disabled population indicating that disabilities are a notable concern with aging.

The ACS provided economic data for the population with a disability status only at a national, state and county level. It is nonetheless reasonable, based on earnings and employment estimates which were available, to conclude persons with disabilities experience the same level of need for affordable housing as persons with no disabilities in Westerly. A 2014 report by the Technical Assistance Collaborative identified Rhode Island as having the fourteenth-highest percentage (92%) of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) needed for an efficiency apartment.<sup>8</sup>

As of 2017, Westerly Area Rest and Meals, Inc. (WARM [which will be discussed in greater detail later on]) currently provides housing for six (6) individuals and two (2) families with disabled adult individuals through its Supportive Homes program.<sup>9</sup>

In 2014, Operation Stand Down RI (OSDRI) completed its first housing project in Westerly, as well as in southern Rhode Island. Three (3) buildings on Pierce Street now contain a total of ten (10) apartments and fourteen (14) bedrooms for disabled, low-income veterans and their families in support of OSDRI’s mission to end homelessness among veterans in Rhode Island.<sup>10</sup>

### *Homeless Population*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tacinc.org/media/51752/Table%202.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [http://warmcenter.org/?page\\_id=26](http://warmcenter.org/?page_id=26) and confirmed 03/17/2016

<sup>10</sup> <http://osdri.org/housing/>

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The National Health Care for the Homeless Council notes there is no one legal definition for homelessness. In specifically discussing housing needs in Westerly however, this plan recognizes a portion of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition as being reflective of the most common forms of homelessness in the town. This include individuals “who [lack] a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence” and individuals and families “living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by Federal, State or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations, congregate shelters, and transitional housing).”<sup>11</sup>

The National Coalition for the Homeless and the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless (RICH) both identify a lack of affordable housing as a primary contributor to homelessness.<sup>12</sup> In 2014 RICH estimated that 4,067 individuals statewide were experiencing homelessness and, of this population, 84.1% were living in an emergency shelter.<sup>13</sup> The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Continuum of Care (CoC) Annual Progress Reports for 2015 and 2016 respectively identify that 142 and 163 individuals experienced homelessness in Westerly.

As noted in an earlier section, WARM and OSDRI have provided housing for several low-income and homeless individuals with disabilities. In addition to this the WARM Center, located on Spruce Street in Westerly since 1990, includes one of the three (3) emergency shelters in Washington County. As of 2017, the WARM Center was operating at full capacity and was sheltering approximately 80 individuals. The organization, however, was also aware of approximately 40 additional people experiencing homelessness outside the WARM shelter. To further assist individuals experiencing homelessness and/or a housing crisis, the WARM Shelter offers 19 beds (13 for males and 6 for females) and five (5) rooms of long-term transitional housing through its WARM-Up program with 13 families additionally being served by the Harvest Homes program.<sup>14</sup> WARM also offers supportive housing in its 811 Project completed in 2014 which include six (6) one-bedroom apartments located on Spruce Street and two (2) two-bedroom units provided on Pierce Street.

## 2.7 LMI Housing Production

### 2.7.1 Housing Production Requirements in Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Housing Production and Rehabilitation Act of 2004 ([General Laws 45-128-8.1](#)) and the Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Housing Act ([General Laws 45-53](#)) are the statutory origin of the requirement that 10% of each municipality’s year-round

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nhchc.org/faq/official-definition-homelessness/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.rhomeless.org/AboutHomelessness/Whyarepeoplehomeless/tabid/265/Default.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.rhomeless.org/AboutHomelessness/HomelessnessStatistics/tabid/248/Default.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> [http://warmcenter.org/?page\\_id=16](http://warmcenter.org/?page_id=16) and confirmed 03/17/2016

housing stock be "affordable" with the further provision that the units be subsidized (Federal/State/Local) and subject to other restrictions to assure they will remain affordable for a minimum of 30 years. The LMI Act also provides a process for the review and approval of eligible LMI housing developments known as a 'comprehensive permit'. In accordance with Statewide Planning policy, ten (10) communities are "exempt" from the comprehensive permit process. Five (5) communities are exempt because they currently have more than 10% Low and Moderate Income Housing (as defined by the Act) and have a plan to maintain that 10%, and another five (5) communities are "exempt" under an alternative calculation for municipalities having at least 5,000 occupied rental units where those units comprise 25% or more of all housing units also have at least 15% of their rental units affordable to persons of low and moderate income and are required to adopt a housing production plan that will maintain this type of rental housing stock. As of 2017, Westerly was not recognized as an "exempt" municipality.

#### 2.7.2 A Plan for Meeting Local Needs for Affordable Housing

All of Rhode Island's 39 municipalities are required to develop and adopt a production plan for low and moderate-income housing that would either reach or maintain the 10% threshold or alternatively, be comprised of 15% of a community's rental housing stock. An LMI production plan of this nature is one of the required elements of the local comprehensive community plan under RIGL §45-22.2-6(b)(6).

In accordance with the 2015 tabulation by Rhode Island Housing, the Town of Westerly currently meets its local housing needs by providing 544 units which qualify as LMI housing under the following definition:

*"Low or moderate income housing" means any housing whether built or operated by any public agency or any nonprofit organization or by any limited equity housing cooperative or any private developer, that is subsidized by a federal, state, or municipal government subsidy under any program to assist the construction or rehabilitation of housing affordable to low or moderate income households, as defined in the applicable federal or state statute, or local ordinance and that will remain affordable through a land lease and/or deed restriction for ninety-nine (99) years or such other period that is either agreed to by the applicant and town or prescribed by the federal, state, or municipal government subsidy program but that is not less than thirty (30) years from initial occupancy."* RIGL §45-53-3(9)

In accordance with Rhode Island Housing calculations, these LMI housing units amount to 5.22% of Westerly's year-round housing stock. The total number of qualifying units in Westerly was 549 as of January 2016. These are listed in the following table, Table 2-12.

**Table 2-12 Current LMI Inventory**

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| Population    | Development             | Tenure    | Location           | Total Units     |
|---------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Elderly       | Babcock Village         | Rental    | Cross Street       | 150             |
|               | Chestnut Court          | Rental    | Chestnut Street    | 50              |
|               | Merchant's Village      | Rental    | Clark Street       | 99              |
|               | Park View               | Rental    | Park Avenue        | 60              |
|               | Covington Court         | Ownership | Covington Court    | 4               |
| Family        | Arlington Street        | Rental    | Arlington Street   | 2               |
|               | Bowling Lane            | Ownership | Bowling Lane       | 1               |
|               | Fairview Drive          | Rental    | Fairview Drive     | 2               |
|               | Gardner Street          | Rental    | Gardner Street     | 1               |
|               | Grove Avenue            | Rental    | Grove Avenue       | 3               |
|               | Joseph Street           | Rental    | Joseph Street      | 2               |
|               | Kent Avenue             | Ownership | Kent Avenue        | 1               |
|               | Knight Street           | Ownership | Knight Street      | 1               |
|               | Knight Street           | Rental    | Knight Street      | 3               |
|               | Lewis Lane              | Rental    | Lewis Lane         | 4               |
|               | Lilac Street            | Ownership | Lilac Drive        | 1               |
|               | Lilac Street            | Rental    | Lilac Drive        | 1               |
|               | Merchant's Village      | Rental    | Clark Street       | 16              |
|               | Pierce Street           | Ownership | Pierce Street      | 2               |
|               | Pierce Street           | Ownership | Pierce Street      | 1               |
|               | Pierce Street           | Rental    | Pierce Street      | 1               |
|               | Pierce Street Habitat   | Ownership | Pierce Street      | 2               |
|               | Pierce Street North End | Ownership | Pierce Street      | 2               |
|               | Pierce Street North End | Rental    | Pierce Street      | 2               |
|               | Pond Street             | Ownership | Pond Street        | 1               |
|               | Pond Street             | Rental    | Pond Street        | 1               |
|               | Roma I                  | Rental    | Byron Drive        | 22              |
|               | State Street            | Rental    | State Street       | 2               |
|               | Summer Street           | Rental    | Summer Street      | 2               |
|               | Sunrise Drive           | Rental    | Sunrise Drive      | 2               |
|               | Thomas Lane             | Ownership | Thomas Lane        | 1               |
|               | Westminster Street      | Ownership | Westminster Street | 2               |
|               | Spinnaker Landing       | Ownership | Post Road          | 9               |
|               | North Glen Townhouses   | Ownership | Pierce Street      | 10              |
|               | Fieldstone Estates      | Ownership | Fieldstone Way     | 12 <sup>1</sup> |
| Special Needs | Group Home beds         | -         | -                  | 42              |
|               | Spruce Street           | Rental    | Spruce Street      | 5               |
|               | Westerly Courts         | Rental    | Beach Street       | 10              |
|               | Spruce Street 2013      | Rental    | Spruce Street      | 6               |
|               | Pierce Street OSDRI     | Rental    | Pierce Street      | 10              |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| <b>Total</b> | <b>549</b> |
|--------------|------------|

Source: Rhode Island Housing Tabulation as of 7/7/2015

<sup>1</sup> Revised by Westerly from 4 as of 3/17/2016

Westerly’s progress toward the State’s 10% threshold and LMI production strategies will address the affordable housing gap demonstrated in Table 2-13. The forecasted deficit of 652 LMI units is projected at buildout in the year 2038 when the total number of year-round housing units in the town is projected to be 14,188.

**Table 2-13 10% Threshold Assessment for Town of Westerly**

|   | Most Current Data  |
|---|--|
| Existing LMI housing units                      | 549  |
| Existing LMI housing units by population served | Family: 124 (22.6%)<br>Elderly: 359 (65.4%)<br>Special Needs: 73 (13.3%)                   |
| The 10% threshold                               | 1,043  |
| The existing deficit                            | 1,043 - 549 = 494  |
| The existing deficit, by population served      | Family: 494 x 22.6% ≈ 110<br>Elderly: 494 x 65.4% ≈ 322<br>Special Needs: 494 x 13.3% ≈ 62 |
| The forecasted 10% threshold                    | (14,188 [buildout] x 84.66% [% of year-round units] x 10% = 1,201                          |
| The forecasted deficit                          | 1,201 - 549 = 652  |

Sources: Rhode Island Housing Tabulation as of January 1, 2016; 2010 Census and the Buildout Analysis this Comprehensive Plan (+1,656 units)

### 2.7.3 Additional Affordable Units Projected

Table 2-14 lists projects that contain LMI units authorized by the town since 2004 as well as their current construction status. Between January 2006 and June 2015 140 LMI units were authorized and 63 were constructed, although 12 remain vacant as of 2017. Of the remaining units, 18 are in projects that have been abandoned, 33 are tied up on appeal to the State Housing Appeals Board (SHAB) and another 22 are expected to be constructed at some point.

**Table 2-14 Authorized LMI Units, January 2006 to June 2015**

| Development      | LMI Units Authorized | LMI Units Completed to date |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Westerly Court   | 10                   | 10 (remain vacant)          |
| 79 Pierce Street | 2                    | 2                           |
| 6 Lilac Drive    | 2                    | 2                           |
| 48 Pierce Street | 2                    | 2                           |
| 69 Pierce Street | 2                    | 2                           |
| 66 Pierce Street | 2                    | 2                           |
| 71 Pierce Street | 2                    | 2                           |

|                       |     |                        |
|-----------------------|-----|------------------------|
| North Glenn           | 10  | 10                     |
| Spinnaker Landing     | 10  | 9                      |
| Pleasant Street Court | 17  | 4                      |
| WARM Shelter          | 6   | 0                      |
| Napatree Point        | 2   | 0 (project abandoned)  |
| Fieldstone Estates    | 13  | 4                      |
| Iroquois Hills        | 33  | 0 (in appeal to SHAB)  |
| Luzzi                 | 2   | 2                      |
| Westerly Heights      | 4   | 0 (project bankrupted) |
| Brown Building        | 16  | 0 (project abandoned)  |
| White Rock Inn        | 4   | 4                      |
| Covington Court       | 4   | 4 (1 vacant)           |
|                       | 140 | 65                     |

Source: Rhode Island Housing and Town of Westerly Planning Office

#### 2.7.4 How Is the Town of Westerly Meeting Local Needs for Affordable Housing?

In conjunction with the 2017 update to the Town of Westerly’s Comprehensive Plan, the Town endeavors to address factually-supported estimates of housing needs based on actual market statistics unique to the Town. The Town of Westerly believes it exceeds the overall contribution of affordable housing anticipated under the Act through its robust stock of sustained year-round rental housing. The Town also recognizes that State approval of its plan is dependent upon its compliance with the mandate for a 10% LMI production plan. While the Town provides a 10% LMI plan in this chapter, it is also advancing its local cause for housing needs by pursuing a statutory alternative to the 10% requirement.

During the 2016 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly, the Town pursued legislative changes that would provide Westerly an exception to the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act as an “urban” community that is meeting affordable housing needs through its continued commitment to the provision of rental units for residents who earn less than or equal to 80% AMI. House bill No. 8014A and Senate bill No. 2876A was proposed to change the threshold requirement for low or moderate-income rental units in a community to 12% where there are at least three thousand (3,000) rental units occupied year-round. This proposed legislation did not garner support of the House of Representatives or the Senate and was postponed indefinitely in April 2016.

#### *Westerly’s 2010 Comprehensive Plan Housing Goals*

Westerly’s 2010 Comprehensive Plan was very clear about the need for affordable housing and not necessarily or exclusively meeting that demand through new single-family construction. The Town continues to aspire to strategies that preserve its existing housing stock as affordable.

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*“Action 5.5: Develop and implement a program to focus and coordinate affordable housing initiatives and funding as an integral part of Westerly’s efforts in neighborhood revitalization and rehabilitation with priority given to existing housing over new construction, and;*

*Action 5.16: Target neighborhoods for revitalization efforts through the development of neighborhood plans and link implementation with other affordable housing strategies.”*

In the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, the first action item towards the Town’s goal of maintaining a broad range of housing options stated *“Review housing and demographic data regularly to determine whether stated goals are being met and revise as necessary to achieve goals.”* In conjunction with the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, data collection has been completed to give the town a clear picture of the current affordable housing makeup in the town. This data analysis has assisted the Planning Board in its recommendations for housing and forms the basis for discussions and recommendations on planning issues such as residential density as well as services and facilities for Westerly’s neighborhoods and local villages.

Based on current zoning regulations, the Town of Westerly is projected to approach build-out in the year 2036. Overall, the remaining land available for development is scarce and generally has environmental constraints to its development. Increased housing density in established neighborhoods that are built-out is impractical and may adversely affect neighborhood character as well as environmental integrity. Compliance with parking requirements alone will result in increased impervious surfaces and an increase in surface water runoff resulting in the need for investment in improved drainage facilities.

New concepts for housing goals and policies discussed by the Planning Board include:

- Supporting the development of a variety of housing types so that residents can continue to live in Town even as their housing needs change.
- Planning all residential projects with the intent of preserving and improving the character of existing neighborhoods and well-integrated with neighborhood or district features.
- Establishing programs to assist low and moderate-income owner-occupants of residential properties to repair and maintain their houses so that they can continue to reside in their homes.
- Continuing a community-based housing rehabilitation program.

*Proportionality of Cost-Burdened Households*

The U.S. Census Bureau and HUD work together to make available data that tracks the extent of housing problems and housing needs in communities, particularly for low income households using Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) data. CHAS data for Westerly are provided in the table at the end of this chapter.

Unfortunately, these estimates have to be used with caution as most of the estimates have a margin of error greater than 25% as shown in the attached CHAS table in red. These tables include almost all of the data provided by the CHAS and, in many cases, the margin of error (MOE) is several times the estimate, as shown. Rhode Island Statewide Planning says of these estimates: *“An estimate with a margin of error greater than 25% of the estimate should be used only if there are no suitable alternatives, and with the understanding that its accuracy may be less than desired.”* The Town of Westerly will be seeking a more suitable alternative to the estimate of housing need provided by the CHAS most probably in the form of direct surveys to its residents. However, in the meantime, the discussion of housing need will proceed based on the information provided to the town.

According to CHAS data using the 2008-2012 ACS, Westerly had 1,034 households at or below 80% of the HAMFI with a severe housing cost burden (more than 50% of income spent on housing costs). Of these, 44.4% (459) were renters and 55.6% (575) were homeowners. This data indicates that there is a demand for more affordable housing, whether meeting the mandated definition or otherwise. The most consistent finding in Westerly’s CHAS data is that nearly one-third of households pay too large a percentage of their gross monthly income towards housing.

In terms of proportionality, as shown in Table 2-16 below, the CHAS indicates Westerly’s current foremost need is for single units targeted towards the family population with another third for residents in the category with special needs (i.e., single-bedroom elderly, living assistance, handicapped and communal living). The existing housing supply is providing much of the needed housing for seniors.

**Table 2-15 Housing Need by Household Type, 2015**

| Population    | Proportional Need<br>(All Low-Income<br>Owners and Renters) | Proportional Supply<br>at 10% Goal | Existing<br>Supply | Supply<br>needed |
|---------------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Elderly       | 40.8%   | 426                                | 359                | 67               |
| Families      | 35.8%   | 373                                | 112                | 261              |
| Special Needs | 23.4%   | 244                                | 73                 | 171              |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>   | <b>1,043</b>                       | <b>544</b>         | <b>499</b>       |

Source: RI Statewide Planning CHAS 2006-2010 Calculation

*Annual Affordable Housing Production Goals by Household Type*

An effective housing production plan for Westerly will ensure that the different types of residents with cost-burdened households are each provided a fair and representative proportion of affordable housing units to be constructed through 2038. It is the underserved segment of Westerly’s LMI households which must be targeted, including both family and other non-family households. Table 2-16 shows the number of units intended to serve each household type which should be constructed each five-year period between 2016 and 2036 in order to achieve a fair and appropriate demographic balance. Units approved since the implementation of the Affordable Housing Plan (AHP) of 2004 but not yet constructed is the starting point in 2018.

**Table 2-16 LMI Housing Goals by Household Type, 2018-2038**

| Population     | 2018      | 2023       | 2028       | 2033       | 2038      | Supply needed |
|----------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|---------------|
| Elderly        | 30        | 10         | 10         | 10         | 7         | 67            |
| Families       | 20        | 65         | 65         | 65         | 46        | 261           |
| Special Needs* | 5         | 40         | 50         | 50         | 26        | 171           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>55</b> | <b>115</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>125</b> | <b>79</b> | <b>499</b>    |

\*Special Needs population includes residents with and without disabilities in single-occupant households and other households with non-relatives.

**2.7.5 Affordable Housing Strategies Analysis and Status**

Municipal staff works with multiple local and state-level partners to implement affordable housing strategies identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

Strategy #1: Inclusionary Affordable Housing

This strategy relies on private sector development and affects single-family subdivisions, multi-family residential developments, and mixed-use projects. This market-based tool for producing affordable housing without using tax dollars has produced thousands of housing units across the United States. Its purpose is to integrate affordable housing in developments throughout communities by requiring developers to set aside a certain percentage of housing units which are affordable to residents with incomes up to 80% of the area’s median income.

Westerly’s approach is to use mandatory inclusionary zoning when for-profit developers propose market-rate housing in residential zoning districts. Mandatory inclusionary zoning also applies when for-profit, market-rate housing is proposed for mixed-use developments located in commercial or professional zoning districts, or when adaptive re-use of a historic mill contains market-rate housing. In all cases, the Town’s incentive-based approach will offer for-profit developers a density bonus for market rate units if they also agree to build a certain percentage of 30-year (minimum) deed-restricted units for low and moderate-income households earning

80% or less of median income. This strategy also applies to non-profit entities whose residential development projects contain market rate units.

*Strategy 1.1 Inclusionary Zoning* – To provide more affordable homeownership opportunities, the Town adopted an Inclusionary Zoning ordinance requiring all new developments with five (5) or more residential units in any zoning district to set aside 20% of the total units in the development as LMI restricted (Section 260-50.2). A density bonus equal to the percentage of qualified LMI units in the development is then also provided.

Density bonuses of any type are disallowed in developments which do not provide the requisite minimum number of qualifying LMI units under RIGL §45-53- 3, which stipulates a minimum 30-year commitment by the developer, enforced by deed restriction, that the units be sold or rented to low or moderate-income households.

For cases in which it may not be feasible to develop the affordable units on site, Section 260-50.4 as adopted allows the developer the option of paying a fee-in-lieu, which is deposited in the Town’s Municipal Affordable Housing Fund. Following a change in State law on the administration of the funds from the fee-in-lieu, the Town of Westerly must revisit this option.

Moving forward in this Plan, inclusionary zoning is still considered a productive strategy. The town’s inclusionary zoning provisions should be reviewed and revised to produce the type of housing for which there is the strongest need (*i.e.* family rental units and single-occupant households). The Planning Board should revisit the inclusionary zoning ordinance to evaluate the density bonuses offered and their impact on neighborhoods and environmentally sensitive sites.

There are approximately 2,105 buildable acres in the RR-60, LDR-40, MDR-30, and HDR-15 zoning districts of which [lower number] are undeveloped. The undeveloped land will support approximately 1,012 units under the current zoning requirements and inclusionary zoning ordinance. To account for land required for other strategies, it is assumed that 67% of the undeveloped buildable land remains in those residential zones. This strategy, based on these assumptions, may provide up to [number] LMI units.

*Strategy 1.2 Comprehensive Permit Ordinance* – The Town passed a Comprehensive Permit Ordinance (Section 260-50.3, Amended 9-24-2007 by Chapter 1616) in compliance with the State mandated “fast track” review and approval process developments that include affordable housing units. Local approvals are given to qualified projects contingent on State approvals and a substantial density bonus is provided.

Per the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (RIGL §45-53-4), comprehensive permits are only available for proposals in which at least 25% of the housing to be developed is deed-restricted

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for occupancy by low or moderate-income households. The Act also requires that all low and moderate-income housing units proposed are integrated throughout the development. As a state mandated housing production strategy, a comprehensive permit application must produce qualified LMI units, therefore the fee-in-lieu is not an option provided as a basis for a comprehensive permit application.

Examples of developments which have been approved through this process include:

- Westerly Courts, Beach Street – 10 units, all LMI (South County Mental Health)
- North Glen, Pierce Street – 10 units, all LMI (RI Housing and Washington County Community Development Corporation [WCCDC])
- Spinnaker Landing, 222 Post Road – 42 units, 10 LMI
- Pleasant Street Courts, Covington Court – 17 units, 4 LMI
- WARM Shelter, 54-56 Spruce Street – 6 units, all LMI
- Fieldstone Subdivision, Fieldstone Way – 52 units, 13 LMI
- Iroquois Hill, Iroquois Avenue – 86 units, 33 LMI (In appeal at SHAB)

In 2010 Comprehensive Plan, the Town identified the need to review the Comprehensive Permit ordinance. As with the inclusionary zoning ordinance, the Town was concerned that the number of density bonuses allowed will have adverse impacts pertaining to impervious lot coverages, design, and disturbance of the natural environment. An alternative to the current regulations would be to incorporate more appropriate guidelines to ensure quality development with minimal impacts on the community. The approval of projects before they have been reviewed by state or federal agencies, particularly considering the extra density allowed and development on environmentally sensitive land, continues to remain a concern. The Town does not consider this a desirable planning approach, particularly in the Pawcatuck River and Salt Pond Region Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) areas along the coastline which the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has determined is already “built beyond carrying capacity”. Areas within the RR-60 zoning district surrounding Newton Marsh, Chapman Pond and Aguntaug Swamp (all of which is protected land in an aquifer and is predominantly freshwater wetlands) also is of concern from these types of development.

The Town’s zoning ordinance not only adopts the comprehensive permitting process, it also provides for increased density intended to aid in the production of qualified low and moderate-income housing units as previously described. Density bonuses available to developers that apply under this ordinance range from 20% to 66%. However, concerns continue with applications for residential development at these rates. The density increases allowed by ordinance do not take

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into consideration the location or carrying capacity of a property for development. The relevant issues vary by zoning district and development site characteristics which are briefly discussed below:

**HDR-6 – 20% density bonus:** The HDR-6 zoning district is densely populated with some of its area in the Pawcatuck River special flood hazard area (flood zone), where historic settlement patterns used the river in a very different manner than we do today. This zone is also within the Urban Services Boundary, an area which is serviced by both public water and sewer, logical prerequisites to support additional residential development. The HDR-6 neighborhood is predominantly rental and small single-family residential on small lots. In many cases, increased density may require additional parking and/or pavement, setback encroachment, and/or loss of other green space or natural undeveloped areas.

There are approximately 62 total undeveloped buildable acres in the HDR-6 zoning district. This undeveloped, buildable land may support approximately 298 units under the current zoning requirements but the capacity for an increase in density through the comprehensive permit process appears limited by the size of the existing lots of record.

**HDR-10 – 66% density bonus:** This district is located within the Salt Pond Region Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) area which the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has determined to be already “built beyond carrying capacity” and where state regulations require 87,120 square feet per dwelling unit. The 2016 buildout analysis forecasts a maximum of six (6) units that can be developed in this entire district thereby making the comprehensive permit density bonus impractical for this shoreline community. This zoning district is serviced by public water and private septic systems and, with the continued threat of storm surge and sea level rise, additional residential development should be discouraged. There are 0.01 undeveloped buildable acres in the HDR-10 zoning district outside this SAMP area which cannot support any further additional residential development.

**HDR-15 – 50% density bonus:** These zoning districts are not contiguous and located in various areas spread out across the town, however they are primarily located in areas of existing development with relatively low constraints to development. This district can be found in areas as diverse as East Avenue, neighborhoods along the Pawcatuck River, Springbrook Road (abutting the White Rock Quarry) and Bowling Lane. In these districts, vacant land may likely be impacted by freshwater wetlands and any land suitable for development most likely represents limited lots for in-fill through rear-lot and minor

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subdivisions. This zoning district is serviced by both public water and sewer and is considered able to support some additional residential development in select areas.

There are approximately 113 total undeveloped buildable acres in the HDR-15 zoning district. To account for land required for other strategies, including inclusionary zoning, it is assumed that 30% of the undeveloped buildable land in this residential zone remains for this strategy. This undeveloped land may support approximately 197 units under the current zoning requirements with the available density bonus.

**MDR-20 – 33% density bonus:** These zoning districts are scattered across the town as well and are located in areas predominantly serviced by public water and private septic systems. With further study, the Town may be able to identify available sites appropriate for the development of affordable housing in select areas within this zone. Where this zoning occurs in an area of the SAMP, further study is needed to determine if this density bonus is practical given CRMC regulatory requirements in these areas.

There are approximately 248 total undeveloped buildable acres in the MDR-20 zoning district. This undeveloped land may support approximately 171 units under the current zoning requirements but the capacity for an increase in density through the comprehensive permit process appears limited by the carrying capacity of the built environment.

**MDR-30 – 50% density bonus:** These zoning districts are predominantly located within the neighborhoods of Avondale and Weekapaug and along Shore Road. With portions of these districts also within SAMP areas, these districts require further study to determine if a density bonus is practical. With the service of public water, appropriate sites for cluster development may be identified but these units may not be affordable to low and moderate-income residents due to market conditions to foster such development.

There are approximately 733 total undeveloped buildable acres in the MDR-30 zoning district. This undeveloped land may support approximately 395 units under the current zoning requirements but the capacity for an increase in density through the comprehensive permit process appears limited by the carrying capacity of the built environment also.

**LDR-40 – 33% density bonus:** These zoning districts are in areas located on both sides of Route 91 and at McGowan’s Corners, as well as in White Rock. Some areas in this zoning

district may be serviced by municipal water and other areas will require private wells, however there is no municipal sewer service in this zoning district, therefore new developments will require private septic systems.

There are approximately 345 total undeveloped buildable acres in the LDR-40 zoning district. To account for land required for other strategies, including inclusionary zoning, it is assumed that 30% of the undeveloped buildable land remains in this residential zone for this strategy. The undeveloped land will support approximately 172 units under the current zoning requirements and with the 33% density bonus credited to qualified applications.

**LDR-43 – 33% density bonus:** LDR-43 consists entirely of the Watch Hill area, a coastal neighborhood just outside the Pawcatuck River and Salt Pond Region SAMP areas. This district has been exempted from affordable housing under the ordinance even though a density bonus has been assigned to the district. LMI units in a remote part of town that lacks year-round services (a seasonal district) is not practical. There are approximately 93 total undeveloped buildable acres in the LDR-43 zoning district.

**RR-60 – 37% density bonus:** These zoning districts are somewhat scattered and located in the northeast (Bradford), northwest (Springbrook), and southeast (Haversham) parts of town. Some of these districts also include and surround Newton Marsh, Chapman Pond and Aguntaug Swamp, all of which is protected land in an aquifer and is predominantly freshwater wetlands. Increased residential development in an aquifer area and adjacent to ponds create negative impacts on water quality. The Haversham area has historically been farmland maintained by conservation easements. Haversham and those areas along Quonochontaug Pond zoned RR-60 are not appropriate for increased density as they are located in the Salt Pond Region SAMP and characterized as lands built beyond carrying capacity according to CRMC. In this zone, parcels will need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine if these areas can accommodate additional densities.

There are approximately 912 total undeveloped buildable acres within the RR-60 zoning district. To account for land required for other strategies, including inclusionary zoning, it is assumed that 30% of the undeveloped buildable land remains in this residential zone for this strategy. Therefore, the undeveloped land will support approximately 248 units under the current zoning requirements and with the 37% density bonus accredited to qualified applications.

This strategy, based on the assumptions discussed above, could provide up to 617 LMI units over the next 20 years.

Moving forward in this Plan, comprehensive permitting of qualified LMI units is still considered a productive strategy. The town should apply GIS and other planning tools to collect data and information on the overall potential for future residential development in the Town and identify parcels most suitable for development under comprehensive permits. The town should realign density bonuses with the prevailing need and encourage family rental units (of 1 to 3 bedrooms) designed in 2 to 4 unit structures. The town should consider changes to the comprehensive permit process that would facilitate efficient and effective reviews of these types of applications. Sometimes considered “friendly comprehensive permits,” a negotiated or collaborative process can be a vehicle to meeting local housing needs. This more flexible approach can ensure that all low- or moderate-income housing units are consistent in quality of construction and design with market rate units, have appropriate site plan design and reasonably address local impacts.

*Strategy 1.3 Mixed Residential & Commercial Use* – Westerly’s zoning permits mixed residential and commercial use in some non-residential zoning districts, including Neighborhood Business (NB), Highway Commercial (HC), General Commercial (GC), Professional Office (P-15), and Downtown Commercial (DC-1 & DC-2). This type of use is defined as:

“The use of any structure or group of structures on a single lot of record for both residential and commercial purposes... Residential uses shall not be permitted on the first floor and basement.” (Westerly Zoning Ordinance, Section 260-9)

This ordinance, however, has no maximum limit placed on the number of residential units allowed in such developments; rather, the upward limit is determined when the developer runs out of lot area or required parking areas. To remedy this weakness and promote affordable housing, the 2010 plan recommended several amendments to the zoning regulations, including the establishment of an Affordable Housing Overlay District.

In an effort to diversify the tax base and preserve employment opportunities, the 2010 Plan recommended housing should always be considered a secondary or ancillary use in Westerly’s commercial zoning districts. Therefore, a residential component would not be required for any proposed development comprised exclusively of commercial, retail or office uses currently permitted by zoning. It also recommended that the minimum 20% affordable housing component be mandatory if residential units are to be proposed as part of a commercial development (that is, meeting the zoning ordinances definition of mixed residential and commercial use).

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Further, it was recommended that a maximum net Floor Area Ratio (FAR) be established for mixed residential and commercial use, such that retail and commercial uses always remain paramount, and not placed in a secondary role to residential uses. Buildings in the Downtown Center zone would be allowed greater residential FARs because historically they have been built to greater heights which is reflection of the traditional characteristics represented within these zones (*i.e.*, 50 feet in DC-1 vs. 35 feet in HC).

In [year] the Town evaluated these mixed-use tools. The Planning Board found... The result was... The current recommendation is...

Moving forward in this Plan, mixed residential and commercial development is still considered a productive strategy [discuss how it will be used].

There are approximately 36 total buildable acres in the Neighborhood Business (NB), Highway Commercial (HC), General Commercial (GC), Professional Office (P-15), and Downtown Commercial (DC-1 & DC-2) zoning districts of which [number] are undeveloped. This undeveloped land will support approximately [number] units under the current zoning requirements and a residential component [number]. Based on these assumptions this strategy may provide up to [number] LMI units within mixed use developments on undeveloped acres.

The approximately 36 total buildable acres in these zoning districts also includes [lower number] subject to redevelopment. The redeveloped parcels will support approximately [number] units under the current zoning requirements and with a residential component of [number]. Based on these assumptions, this strategy may provide up to [number] LMI units in mixed use development on redeveloped parcels.

*Other Inclusionary Zoning Issues* – Issues related to the Comprehensive Permit process include the following:

- Qualifications of applicants for low- and moderate-income units, adjusting for different household sizes;
- Calculation of rent and sales prices for low- and moderate-income units;
- Controlling the resale of low- and moderate-income units over time to ensure conveyance to qualified households;
- Addressing the increase in a property's value and equity at the time low and moderate-income unit is sold or transferred; and,
- Environmental constraints of the property are considered with added density.

### *Strategy #2: Affordable Housing by Non-Profit & Public Agencies*

Non-profit organizations and public agencies are encouraged to pursue affordable housing as site-specific opportunities present themselves. Since 2004, the comprehensive permit process has been used successfully for the approval of LMI qualified housing by non-profit and public agencies.

Westerly works with this non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation for the purpose of creating affordable housing to meet regional needs. A board of directors with representation from each participating municipality to define programs and activities, and identify and secure funding resources. Creation of additional local CDCs specific to the geographic boundary of Westerly alone is not recommended since the town already hosts both the Westerly Housing Authority and the Greater North End Community Development.

The Town of Westerly will continue to work with non-profit organizations and public agencies to target housing to local needs of the population and to ensure consistency with the goals of this Plan. Since there are only limited amounts of state or federal financial subsidies available to non-profit and public housing agencies, a collaborative and negotiated process should be explored.

In such a collaboration, the Town will utilize, to the extent possible, either the inclusionary zoning ordinance or the comprehensive permit processes example of density bonus and incentives. In particular, there are [number] sites which the town has identified as potential for such collaboration. The [name] Plat x, Lot # [describe] lot/parcel size and numbers of units] of which 100% are to be LMI restricted. The [name] (Plat #, Lot #) [describe] lot/parcel size and numbers of units] of which 100% are to be LMI restricted. This strategy, based on these assumptions, may provide up to [number] LMI units.

### *Strategy #3: Historic Mill Adaptive Re-Use & Mill Village Revitalization*

This comprehensive strategy calls for adaptive re-use of historic mills for mixed-use or residential purposes, designating state-sanctioned growth centers to target infrastructure and redevelopment grant funding, and leveraging private-sector financing through use of historic preservation tax credits should the program become available again in the future.

*Strategy 3.1 Historic Mill Overlay District* – In 2011, the Town adopted its Historic Mill Overlay District which allows for the redevelopment of existing mills into multi-use structures and encourages renovation and adaptive re-use of historic mills. In addition to promoting affordable housing, these zones can also accommodate commercial, retail or office use where such mixed-use is deemed appropriate. One of the objectives is also to retain their historic architecture while adapting obsolete or underutilized structures to 21st century needs. Since 2011, ...

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Westerly has historic mills located in the North End, White Rock and Bradford and the land formerly occupied by the Potter Hill mill; the latter two fall within the Historic Mill Overlay District. Each mill is surrounded by residential dwellings of various densities, some of which were originally constructed to house mill employees. It is fair to say that the historical decline of the town's manufacturing base has led to a deterioration of these mills and the neighborhoods surrounding them as well.

In May 2003, the Town adopted a revitalization plan for the North End neighborhood titled the 'North End Revitalization Plan'. This plan encourages for-profit affordable housing development since it was expected that at least 80% of the units developed in this area would actually be sold to middle income households who must qualify for conventional mortgages. This expectation would allow for the reestablishment of a property-owning middle class community in a neighborhood currently dominated mostly by absentee landlords. It is believed that a similar strategy would also work in the White Rock, Potter Hill, and Bradford sections of town. To date, several goals of the North End Revitalization Plan have been met but the intent to reestablish increased property ownership remains unmet.

*Strategy 3.2 Locally Designated "Growth Centers"* – Mill villages are identified by the state as potential Growth Centers, which according to a report by the Governor's Growth Planning Council (August 2002), "...are dynamic and efficient centers for development that have a core of commercial and community services, residential development, and natural and built landmarks and boundaries that provide a sense of place." In an era of fiscal constraint, the state has targeted much of its infrastructure and redevelopment grant funding towards locally designated Growth Centers, which in turn, could help Westerly revitalize mill villages when targeted by affordable housing developers. Low and moderate-income housing development by non-profit organizations and public agencies also rely on state and federal financing which favor development within these locally-designated Growth Centers.

*Strategy #4: Downtown Arts District Affordable Housing Demonstration Project.* In Westerly, the term "struggling artist" is not an exaggeration. Many artists earn little income in the early stages of their career and finding affordable housing is one of the most serious problems they encounter. By developing a demonstration project providing affordable housing specifically geared toward low-income artists, Westerly has an opportunity to use the incentives provided by the General Assembly to attract artists into its downtown area. RIGL §44-18-30B allowed Downtown Westerly to be one of the first designated areas in the State to offer tax incentives for artists who live and work in specific districts. This law states:

*"The arts and culture are a significant asset for Rhode Island, one that generates revenue through increased tourism and economic activity; creates jobs and*

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*economic opportunities; revitalizes communities adding to quality of life and property values; and fosters creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship.”*

Two types of tax incentives target artist housing:

- (1) For artists who live and work within a specified district, any sale of work created within the district is exempt from state sales tax; and
- (2) For artists who live and work within a specified district, any income they receive from the sale of work they have created within the district is exempt from state personal income tax.

It is noteworthy that Westerly’s Downtown Arts District is contained fully within a State and National Register Historic District which, as noted above, offers additional state and federal tax credits for certified rehabilitation projects. Furthermore, Strategy #5 below outlines a proposed local rehabilitation tax credit which also could be used to assist this endeavor.

In early 2004 a group of artists, arts administrators, and housing professionals met to discuss affordable artist housing, particularly artist living/work exhibition/performance space, resulting in a coalition led by Rhode Island Citizens for the Arts, the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA), and the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI). The RI State Arts Council had made a three-year funding commitment to this effort by awarding \$15,000 annually to the Housing Network of Rhode Island for the purpose of hiring a consultant to manage this process, including developing an affordable artist housing demonstration project. This program has...

The ArtSpace project in Norwich, Connecticut and Hygienic Arts in New London could be models for inspiration and for the Town to approach the statewide artist’s housing coalition in search of opportunities that may exist in downtown Westerly’s Arts District, including available properties, grant funding and tax incentives focusing on potential living/work spaces over existing storefronts. The result was... The current recommendation is...

There are [number] acres in the Downtown Center zoning districts (DC-1 and DC-2) subject to redevelopment. The redeveloped parcels will support approximately [number] units under the current zoning requirements and with a residential component of not more than 25%. Based on these assumptions, this strategy may provide up to [number] LMI units in mixed use development on redeveloped parcels in this area.

*Strategy #5: Local Rehabilitation Tax Credits and Revolving Loan Fund* By bundling together two related programs, it is believed the incentive to individual property owners would be substantial enough to result in creation of additional affordable housing units.

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*Strategy 5.1 Local Rehabilitation Tax Credits* – In 2010, it was recommended that Westerly adopt a tax credit for property owners undertaking substantial rehabilitation of existing structures provided that they are willing to keep rehabilitated or new housing units affordable for at least 30 years for persons earning 80% or less than AMI. A recommended minimum threshold is an investment of at least \$20,000 in building code or safety improvements (including lead paint removal) for a resultant property tax credit for 20% of the cost of improvements up to a maximum of \$5,000 to be spread over a period of five years. If used in conjunction with other state or federal tax credits described above or with grants that may be available from RI Housing or the CDBG program, LMI qualifying units might be produced. Since affordable units created through this strategy are contained within existing structures they would not require additional infrastructure or zoning changes.

*Strategy 5.2 Revolving Fund* -- In conjunction with a tax credit, the Town considered establishing a revolving fund which would provide short-term, low interest loans for renovations. Upon repayment of the loan, the capital can then be loaned to another project. By targeting this effort in a concentrated area, such as the North End, a revolving fund can have a tangible and highly visible impact on neighborhood revitalization. This is consistent with the overall goal of the Comprehensive Plan to preserve existing historic apartment housing in the Town's traditional neighborhoods.

Many communities seed a revolving rehabilitation loan program with CDBG funds and use it to address a variety of housing improvements including heating systems, lead-based paint, and emergency repairs. The Town could design a program which focuses on low- and moderate-income home owners and tenants for rental properties. To target these neighborhoods, programs can prioritize multi-family and historic buildings and have affordable housing incentives and requirements.

The private Westerly Revolving Fund was incorporated in 2013 and was seeded by private donations and seeking to reproduce the success of the Providence Revolving Fund. The Town is now working with the Westerly Revolving Fund to assist with management and administration of the Town's CDBG rehabilitation program.

There are [number] of housing units inventoried by [name] in need of rehabilitation and eligible for revolving loan funds. The rehabilitation of these units with the associated LMI restrictions may provide up to [number] LMI units through this program.

#### *Strategy #6: Neighborhood Revitalization*

Westerly's traditional neighborhoods are Bradford, Downtown, North End, White Rock, Wilcox East and State Street. These neighborhoods contain an estimated 2,500 rental apartments which

have provided de facto (but not rent-controlled or deed restricted) affordable residences to the Town as well as Washington and New London counties. They are all serviced by public water with five of the neighborhoods serviced by public sewer. Built mostly between 1840 and 1917, these neighborhoods contain a variety of single- and multi-family housing options near commercial and industrial uses. They are also near community facilities and public amenities with infrastructure such as sidewalk networks.

Unfortunately, the well-integrated mixture of land uses and housing types may mask some of the problems facing these neighborhoods. It is well accepted that the overall financial strength of Westerly is based on property values within the beach areas. The households in these six traditional, multi-family neighborhoods have lower incomes and require additional social services. Westerly Public Schools reported in spring 2017 that more than half (53%) of the students enrolled at Springbrook Elementary School and more than one-third (38%) of the students enrolled at State Street Elementary School are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Other issues facing these neighborhoods include a large number of absentee landlords, some vacant underused commercial and professional units, and debris-strewn areas, all of which have led to deteriorating and blighted properties.

Neighborhood revitalization is a comprehensive approach that involves more than affordable housing and should include land use, infrastructure, urban design, and community building. Addressing each neighborhood with a Neighborhood Revitalization Plan can guide reinvestment and help to create affordable housing into these neighborhoods through the rehabilitation of existing structures and increase rental units for LMI eligible households.

To begin the revitalization process, the following could be explored:

- Develop incentives to target the development of LMI units in the Town’s traditional neighborhoods as rental units.
- Rehabilitate key landmark structures as important stabilizing factors for traditional neighborhoods and important additions to the LMI supply.
- Expand the role of the Westerly Housing Authority to oversee the development, ownership, and management of rehabilitated properties in traditional neighborhoods.
- Pool and coordinate housing funding from all appropriate sources including Comprehensive Permits and Inclusionary Zoning ordinances, Community Development Block Grant funds, Neighborhood Opportunities Program and Building Better Community funds, and HOME funds, as well as upcoming KeepSpace projects.
- Research the legislation and implementation of a registry of non-owner occupied rental housing units to create a local requirement that, as each unit is vacated, it cannot be

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rented again until it is inspected and given a Certificate of Apartment Occupancy. This will ensure such units are code compliant, safe and sanitary.

Neighborhood revitalization is linked with Strategy 5 to take advantage of the Revolving Loan Fund and other programs that support housing rehabilitation.

### Strategies Summary

Table 2-19 lists the projected number of affordable units that could be created by the Town’s proposed LMI housing strategies for the next twenty (20) years. The total projection of affordable units from these strategies over twenty (20) years is [#], exceeding the [#] required to meet the State’s 10% threshold.

**Table 2-17** Projected Number of LMI Units Created by Proposed Strategies, 2018-2038

|              | 2023 | 2028 | 2033 | 2038 | Beyond 2038  |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|--------------|
| Strategy 1.1 |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 1.2 |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 1.3 |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 2   | 0    |      |      | 0    | 0            |
| Strategy 3   | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0            |
| Strategy 4   |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 5.1 | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0    | 0            |
| Strategy 5.2 |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 5.3 |      |      |      |      |              |
| Strategy 6   | 0    |      |      |      |              |
|              |      |      |      |      |              |
|              |      |      |      |      |              |
|              |      |      |      |      |              |
| <b>Total</b> |      |      |      |      | At least 499 |

Source:

Other strategies the Town sees as viable over the next five-year period are rehabilitating multi-family buildings and focusing on targeted neighborhoods. These two approaches are related and it is expected that programs will be developed in the near term. Affordable units created under these approaches will be relatively small at first, but will increase as the programs grow. One to two affordable units per year for each of these programs are projected.

For strategies that are currently being used to develop affordable LMI-qualified units it is estimated that these rates will continue at near the same level. With the Town’s proposed revisions to the Inclusionary and Comprehensive Permit ordinances, projections are slightly lower

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for these strategies. Similarly, it is anticipated that non-profit and public agencies will continue to invest in the production of LMI qualified housing units in Westerly at a consistent rate.

The remaining strategies are not expected to begin at least until 2018. Mill redevelopment is estimated to create 28 LMI units over the full 20-year timeline. Interest in redevelopment of historic mills is greatly influenced on incentives offered both locally and statewide, and it is anticipated that these units could be available in five to ten years. The rate at which these units will be developed will vary but for the purpose of this plan it is assumed that they will be phased in by a developer, one mill project per five-year period. The Downtown Arts District is a demonstration project and would only be applicable to one five-year period (assumed 2012 to 2017). Small elderly housing complexes are proposed but until demand is quantified, it is expected that one project per five-year period will be proposed. Finally, a municipal tax credit program will be drafted in the next five years which could develop two LMI units per year, depending on the incentives offered. The Certificate of Apartment Occupancy initiative will need local, as well as legislative support, for enactment.

**Table 2-18 CHAS Data Table, 2006-10<sup>1</sup>**

| All Low Income (<80% HAMFI)       |                    |     |                  |     |                    |        |                  |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|--------------------|--------|------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|--|
|                                   | Renters            |     |                  |     |                    |        | Owners           |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |
|                                   | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |        | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     |  |
|                                   | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE    | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |  |
| All                               | 2,075              | 330 | 805              | 216 | 395                | 195    | 1,995            | 289 | 600                | 166 | 580              | 154 |  |
| Elderly Family                    | 120                | 77  | 10               | 180 | 35                 | 188    | 470              | 138 | 105                | 143 | 95               | 55  |  |
| Elderly Non-Family                | 480                | 129 | 195              | 87  | 75                 | 137    | 585              | 158 | 90                 | 53  | 170              | 88  |  |
| Small Family                      | 760                | 214 | 315              | 186 | 135                | 157    | 600              | 146 | 235                | 152 | 200              | 90  |  |
| Large Family                      | 40                 | 184 | 15               | 181 | 25                 | 183    | 55               | 48  | 15                 | 181 | 40               | 42  |  |
| Other                             | 670                | 180 | 270              | 128 | 125                | 147    | 280              | 119 | 155                | 96  | 75               | 41  |  |
| Extremely Low Income (<30% HAMFI) |                    |     |                  |     |                    |        |                  |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |
|                                   | Renters            |     |                  |     |                    |        | Owners           |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |
|                                   | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |        | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     |  |
|                                   | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE    | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |  |
| All                               | 720                | 200 | 170              | 102 | 335                | 138    | 375              | 150 | 30                 | 27  | 265              | 119 |  |
| Elderly Family                    | 65                 | 62  | 0                | 127 | 35                 | 54     | 20               | 25  | 0                  | 127 | 20               | 25  |  |
| Elderly Non-Family                | 210                | 85  | 75               | 49  | 65                 | 49     | 225              | 118 | 20                 | 23  | 125              | 81  |  |
| Small Family                      | 150                | 96  | 0                | 127 | 110                | 85     | 55               | 52  | 0                  | 127 | 55               | 52  |  |
| Large Family                      | 40                 | 39  | 15               | 25  | 25                 | 34     | 20               | 32  | 0                  | 127 | 20               | 32  |  |
| All Other                         | 255                | 110 | 80               | 83  | 100                | 69     | 55               | 38  | 10                 | 13  | 45               | 34  |  |
| Very Low Income (30-50% HAMFI)    |                    |     |                  |     |                    |        |                  |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |
| Renters                           |                    |     |                  |     |                    | Owners |                  |     |                    |     |                  |     |  |

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|  | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     |
|--|--------------------|-----|----------|-----|------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|----------|-----|------------------|-----|
|  | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |
|  | All                | 645 | 178      | 365 | 143              | 60  | 53                 | 550 | 124      | 155 | 87               | 135 |
| Elderly Family                             | 35                 | 36  | 10       | 14  | 0                | 127 | 200                | 83  | 70       | 59  | 25               | 30  |
| Elderly Non-Family                         | 155                | 69  | 45       | 32  | 10               | 18  | 180                | 72  | 50       | 42  | 30               | 27  |
| Small Family                               | 220                | 112 | 165      | 99  | 25               | 36  | 105                | 64  | 25       | 28  | 50               | 44  |
| Large Family                               | 0                  | 127 | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 | 10                 | 21  | 0        | 127 | 10               | 21  |
| Other                                      | 235                | 112 | 150      | 92  | 25               | 28  | 55                 | 48  | 10       | 21  | 20               | 18  |
| <b>Low Income (50-80% HAMFI)</b>           |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Renters            |     |          |     |                  |     | Owners             |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     |
|  | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |
| All  | 710                | 193 | 270      | 126 | 0                | 127 | 1,070              | 213 | 415      | 139 | 180              | 76  |
| Elderly Family                             | 20                 | 28  | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 | 250                | 108 | 35       | 31  | 50               | 39  |
| Elderly Non-Family                         | 115                | 69  | 75       | 64  | 0                | 127 | 180                | 76  | 20       | 23  | 15               | 23  |
| Small Family                               | 390                | 155 | 150      | 93  | 0                | 127 | 440                | 120 | 210      | 78  | 95               | 59  |
| Large Family                               | 0                  | 127 | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 | 25                 | 29  | 15       | 25  | 10               | 18  |
| Other                                      | 180                | 89  | 40       | 33  | 0                | 127 | 170                | 102 | 135      | 93  | 10               | 13  |
| <b>All Non Low-Income (&gt; 80% HAMFI)</b> |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Renters            |     |          |     |                  |     | Owners             |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     |
|  | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |
| All  | 965                | 239 | 10       | 128 | 10               | 129 | 4,460              | 302 | 245      | 105 | 35               | 31  |
| Elderly Family                             | 20                 | 25  | 0        | 180 | 0                | 180 | 835                | 135 | 30       | 33  | 20               | 25  |
| Elderly Non-Family                         | 155                | 106 | 10       | 128 | 10               | 129 | 285                | 105 | 40       | 39  | 10               | 17  |
| Small Family                               | 350                | 149 | 0        | 180 | 0                | 180 | 2,340              | 267 | 60       | 50  | 0                | 127 |
| Large Family                               | 40                 | 59  | 0        | 180 | 0                | 180 | 370                | 107 | 15       | 24  | 0                | 127 |
| Other                                      | 405                | 145 | 0        | 180 | 0                | 180 | 630                | 167 | 105      | 81  | 0                | 127 |
| <b>80-100% HAMFI</b>                       |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Renters            |     |          |     |                  |     | Owners             |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     |          |     | Cost burden >50% |     |
|  | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |
| All  |                    |     | 10       | 13  | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 355      | 101 | 80               | 45  |
| Elderly Family                             |                    |     | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 65       | 38  | 45               | 36  |
| Elderly Non-Family                         |                    |     | 10       | 13  | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 10       | 15  | 0                | 127 |
| Small Family                               |                    |     | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 165      | 73  | 10               | 16  |
| Large Family                               |                    |     | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 15       | 22  | 15               | 31  |
| Other                                      |                    |     | 0        | 127 | 0                | 127 |                    |     | 100      | 52  | 4                | 16  |
| <b>&gt;100% HAMFI</b>                      |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |                    |     |          |     |                  |     |
|  | Renters            |     |          |     |                  |     | Owners             |     |          |     |                  |     |

## Chapter 2 – Housing Opportunity

### 2017 Draft Comprehensive Plan

|                    | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     | Cost burden 30-50% |     | Cost burden >50% |     |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|
|                    | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE | Estimate           | MOE | Estimate         | MOE |
| All                | 0                  | 127 | 10               | 22  | 600                | 146 | 115              | 55  |
| Elderly Family     | 0                  | 127 | 0                | 127 | 95                 | 50  | 65               | 44  |
| Elderly Non-Family | 0                  | 127 | 10               | 22  | 50                 | 42  | 10               | 128 |
| Small Family       | 0                  | 127 | 0                | 127 | 225                | 88  | 10               | 128 |
| Large Family       | 0                  | 127 | 0                | 127 | 30                 | 33  | 15               | 131 |
| Other              | 0                  | 127 | 0                | 127 | 205                | 96  | 4                | 128 |

Source: 2006-10 ACS 5-year estimates

<sup>1</sup> Formatted by Statewide Planning in conjunction with RI Housing, accessible at <http://www.planning.ri.gov/geodeminfo/data/chas.php>

## 3 Economic Vitality

### 3.1 Introduction

The economic vitality of the Town of Westerly was greatly impacted by the global recession which took place in the latter part of the past decade and its prolonged effects on Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. A summary of current local and regional economic development initiatives, a local and regional employment overview, the size of the labor force, industries of employment and occupation types of residents, resident income and business activity are included in this section. The information serves as the foundation for identifying appropriate policies, programs and projects to foster continued economic development and growth.

### 3.2 Regional Economic Overview

#### *Rhode Island*

Likely a benefit of its geographic size, a majority (83.3%) of Rhode Island's largest employers identified by [Providence Business News](#) are headquartered within the state. Their range of primary activities often reflect the industries identified as state strengths in [Rhode Island Rising: A Plan for People, Places and Prosperity \(State Guide Plan - Economic Development Element, Report 121\)](#), which include agriculture and fishing, manufacturing, transportation, professional services, health care, food services and education. Along with the Westerly residents who are employed by these companies throughout Rhode Island, 50% of these largest employers also have some presence locally in town. Many of these businesses will be discussed for their local economic contributions later in this chapter.

Rhode Island earns its nickname the 'Ocean State' from its miles of coastline along Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. A [tourism satellite account \(TSA\) used by IHS, Inc. to overview Rhode Island's tourism in 2013](#) found just over 19 million visits were made to the state, of which nearly 9.2 million originated from more than 50 miles away. Tourism comprised 5.3% of the gross state product and generated 9.6% of total employment in Rhode Island in 2013.

One additional area of significance, particularly for southern Rhode Island (including Newport County), is defense. According to a [June 2014 report on the influence of the defense sector in Rhode Island's economy](#), 6.2% of the state's total employment and \$1.9 billion in its household incomes was attributable to the defense sector. Many of these employers contributing to this impact in the state are also present in New London County in neighboring Connecticut.

The [Resilient Rhode Island Act](#) was passed by the General Assembly in 2014 and is meant to ensure the state and its economy will be resilient in the face of the impacts brought about by climate change by offering a framework for planning for and managing such anticipated effects through adaptation, mitigation and institutional design. To do this, the act targets reductions in

greenhouse gas emissions from all economic sectors and authorizes the use of economic diversification, among other actions.

### *Southeastern Connecticut*

Westerly's economy is vitally linked to southeastern Connecticut through its local history and geographic location. The [2000 Census](#) estimated 39.1% (4,320) of all workers aged 16 and over in Westerly were working outside Rhode Island. While this fell to 33.6% (3,723), according to [2011-2015 five-year estimates by the American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#), Westerly continues to be one of only two (2) municipalities in Rhode Island falling outside the Providence-Warwick New England City and Town Area (NECTA). NECTAs are very similar to metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) but they are used only in New England and are geographically composed of municipalities rather than counties. Moody's estimated that in 2007 nearly 11% of Rhode Island's workforce (63,000 individuals) commuted to Connecticut for employment.

General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB), a subsidiary of General Dynamics Corporation, is a major defense contractor for the United States Navy through the design, construction and lifecycle support of submarines. Headquartered in Groton, Connecticut, GDEB also has in-state locations in Newport and North Kingstown (Quonset Point), as well as in New London, Connecticut. Along with the Virginia-class submarine program, for which it serves as the design yard and prime contractor, GDEB's involvement in the Ohio Replacement Program comes at a time of generational turnover for the company, resulting in projected employment peaks taking place in 2018 and 2027 (the company projects hiring several thousand new employees between 2016 and 2031 to keep pace). Recognizing Westerly as an important source of this future workforce, GDEB has also established a training facility at the Westerly Education Center, which contains 17 classroom spaces available for higher education opportunities and community meetings. Other employers related to the defense sector include the US Coast Guard and Navy themselves. The US Coast Guard Academy in New London and the Naval Submarine Base New London in Groton together employ over 11,000 people. The Naval Underwater Warfare Center in Newport also employs many civilian workers from the region.

Notable portions of Westerly's labor force are also employed at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Ledyard, Connecticut (420 employees), which is owned and operated by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, and Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut (employment data unavailable), which is owned and operated by the Mohegan Tribe. Both resorts feature several gaming, entertainment and hospitality facilities, as well as numerous retail shops and restaurants. Along with providing employment to Westerly residents, these casinos also support the town as a prime location for visitors. Other nearby attractions to Westerly include the Mystic Aquarium and Mystic Seaport in Mystic, Connecticut.

A research facility for Pfizer, Inc., located in Groton, is a major healthcare industry employer for the town's labor force. The facility employs workers from numerous communities and assists in the research and development of healthcare products, medicine, and treatments. Another notable employer, the New Haven, Connecticut-based Yale-New Haven Health System, now has a direct presence in Westerly and will be discussed further on.

Dependence on healthcare, defense and tourism leaves the regional economy somewhat vulnerable to volatility and shifts in these sectors.

### 3.3 Town Economic Overview

#### 3.3.1 *Financial Health and Economic Indicators*

Westerly's credit rating was enhanced in 2007 when the two largest and most prominent bond rating agencies in the United States raised the rating on the Town's General Obligation (GO) debt. On August 30, 2007, Moody's issued a decision raising the rating of Westerly's existing GO debt of \$69.3 million from A1 to Aa3 and at the same time assigned a rating of Aa3 to \$8 million in new bonded debt. Standard & Poor's (S&P) issued its AA- rating for the Town's new bonds and affirmed its AA- rating of the existing debt, characterizing the town's debt-worthiness as stable. The AA- rating is roughly analogous to the Aa3 rating. Moody's upgraded its rating once more to Aa2 before downgrading the rating to Aa3 again in August 2016. The downgrading was a result of the rating agency's concern of a reduced financial position after consecutive deficits in recent fiscal years. A significant improvement in the Town's fund balance and liquidity and material improvements in the wealth of residents were identified as the two major factors which would assist the Town in returning to an Aa2 rating.

#### 3.3.2 *Distinctions*

A 2012 report by the Economic Development Commission (EDC) recognized strong fiscal management as an asset of the town, along with other advantages including a low tax rate, diversification in the local economy and an active business community.

The Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce is a leading advocate for local businesses in promoting Westerly through numerous events and programs. Three (3) other active business associations are also active in town which include the Misquamicut Business Association (MBA), Watch Hill Business Association (WHBA) and Westerly-Pawcatuck Downtown Business Association (DBA; see the section on downtown revitalization below. The Greater North End Community Development, Inc. is currently seeking to establish a Westerly Historic North End Business Association as well.

Westerly and its surrounding area have achieved significant distinctions in past years, including:

- Designation by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of 132 Dozen Distinctive Destinations throughout the United States and the first to be designated in Rhode Island.
- Ranked in 2006 by *Money Magazine* (as part of South County [officially Washington County]) as one of the Top 12 Best Places to Vacation in North America.
- [Ranked in June 2008 by Forbes.com](#) (as part of Washington County) as the twelfth best place in America to raise a family.

### 3.3.3 Significant Local Sectors

Westerly is primarily a town of small business establishments with only one (1) employer among Rhode Island’s largest headquartered in town, The Washington Trust Company. However, there are a number of other significant sectors in the local economy which are summarized below.

#### *Health Care*

As it is in the state, health care and social assistance is also the largest industry employer in Westerly. Demographic trends, the growing elderly population in particular, will fuel strong growth in this industry until at least 2024 [according to Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training \(RIDLT\) projections](#), and likely well beyond this date.

Yale New Haven Health - Westerly Hospital (Westerly Hospital) is a major institution at the core of Westerly’s economy. Since its opening in 1925 the hospital has historically been a major local employer and was the largest single private employer in fiscal year (FY) 2014-2015 with 638 employees (130 of which are primary and specialty physicians). Westerly Hospital became a part of the Lawrence & Memorial Corporation in June 2013 through the L+M Medical Group and later in 2017 became part of the Yale New Haven Health System. The main building is a 125-bed acute care facility and additional services are based in Westerly and Hopkinton.

The second largest health care-related employer in town is AGFA HealthCare with 65 employees in FY2014-2015. AGFA is an autonomous business group within Agfa-Gevaert (both headquartered in Belgium) providing healthcare technology to 50% of hospitals globally.<sup>1</sup> AGFA HealthCare became part of the community following its acquisition of a local startup company in 2007.

The May 2016 opening of the South County Health Medical and Wellness Center in Westerly which has been marketed as a ‘one stop shop’ for medical needs, further indicates the strength of the local healthcare sector in Westerly and is staffs several dozen employees. For more information on the Medical and Wellness Center and Westerly Hospital please visit the chapter on Services and Facilities.

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.agfahealthcare.com/global/en/main/>

### *Finance*

The Washington Trust Company, the largest state-chartered bank in Rhode Island and the oldest community bank in the United States (established in 1800), is headquartered in Westerly's Downtown. It is a \$3.8 billion corporation owned by Washington Trust Bancorp, Inc. The bank employs 585 people company-wide with approximately 300 employees in Westerly. It is one of Rhode Island's top 100 employers and has been recognized by *Providence Business News* as one of the ["Best Places to Work"](#) in the State for five consecutive years. This institution has 21 branches (3 of which are located in Westerly and 20 within Rhode Island) and 26 office locations, including three offices in Connecticut and one in Massachusetts. Its extensive operations center is located in the Westerly Airport Industrial Park.

The Westerly Community Credit Union (WCCU), a full-service financial organization, has served over 17,000 members in Rhode Island and New London County since 1948. They employ over 65 employees and maintain four (4) branch offices located in Westerly, Richmond, and South Kingstown, Rhode Island, as well as a mortgage office in Newport. A non-profit corporation, the WCCU is a cooperatively-owned, state-chartered, federally-insured community financial organization whose field of membership includes all individuals who live or work in the State of Rhode Island or New London County. Recently awarded first place as the fastest-growing and most innovative company in Rhode Island by *Providence Business News*, the WCCU is also very active in the community it serves. Known for its commitment to youth and area schools, WCCU sponsors and runs several programs teaching financial literacy and have been an active school sports booster since 1984.

Other regional and national financial institutions have an established presence in Westerly, indicating confidence in the Town's economic vitality.

### *Westerly Airport and Airport Industrial Park*

Westerly Airport offers regularly scheduled commercial flights to and from Block Island Airport solely via New England Airlines. Airport tenants additionally include charter companies, aviation maintenance companies, and substantial private aircraft during the summer which is primarily connected to tourism. The [most recent economic impact study update for the airport](#) from 2006, estimated that the airport generated economic activities of approximately \$8.4 million.

An industrial park adjacent to the airport is serviced by municipal water and sewer, natural gas and large-capacity electrical service and has convenient access to Interstate 95 via Route 78. Expansion in the industrial park is limited due to the airport and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Within the industrial park 14 of the 15 existing parcels (90.5% of the park's 54.2 acres) are already developed.

### *Textiles*

Westerly has a long and significant history of textile manufacturing and finishing. Today, two of the once numerous textile facilities continue to operate. The Moore Company, established in 1909, is headquartered in Westerly and produces materials including performance fabrics and narrow elastic through its two subsidiaries, Darlington Fabrics and the George C. Moore Company. Griswold Textile Print, Inc. has also operated as a fully operational hand-printed fabric mill in the White Rock neighborhood since its establishment in 1937.

### *Printing*

The C. B. Cottrell & Sons Company, established in Westerly in 1855 as Cottrell & Babcock, was the second largest presswork in the United States at the turn of the twentieth-century.<sup>2</sup> The workforce expertise of the company spawned two local companies which are today located near the airport industrial park and manufacture and service the printing equipment industry which are the Maxson Automatic Machine Company and E.R. Smith Associates. *The Westerly Sun*, a seven-day daily newspaper founded in 1857, moved its operations from downtown Westerly to Pawcatuck and continues to cover local communities in Washington County, Rhode Island and New London County, Connecticut.

### *Construction*

United Builders Supply Co., Inc. (UBS) has its corporate headquarters and its retail, wholesale and fabrication facilities on Oak Street in Westerly. UBS is a regional supplier to the construction industry with two locations in southwestern Rhode Island and two in southeastern Connecticut. Cherenzia Excavation, Inc. operates two aggregate stone quarries in Westerly which serve the region.

### *Local Government*

The Town of Westerly, through its various municipal departments and its School Department, is a significant employer for the community and its neighbors. The approved FY2017 budget provided for 745.1 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions with 182.5 in non-school municipal departments and 562.6 in the School Department. Staffing is examined carefully during the annual budget process to ensure the Town maintains the capacity to deliver quality levels of service in key functional areas such as education, public works and utilities, public safety, finance and administration. School employment levels have increased slightly over the past several fiscal years arguably due to a growth in services provided to students. At the same time, non-school employment levels have fallen slightly due to the consolidation of certain departmental functions between the School and municipal departments. The Town also provides part-time seasonal

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/findaids/pdf/mss0093\\_0014.pdf](http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/findaids/pdf/mss0093_0014.pdf)

employment in support of recreational opportunities, maintenance of infrastructure and public safety.

### *Travel and Tourism*

Visitors, primarily from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and other northeast locations, are attracted to Westerly each summer to enjoy its seven miles of beaches in Misquamicut, Watch Hill and Weekapaug and to experience the numerous local attractions throughout town (for more information on these attractions, see the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter). WQ Economics reported in June 2015 about one million people visited beaches in Washington County.

The Rhode Island Travel and Tourism Research Report compiled in 2005 by the University of Rhode Island Office of Travel, Tourism and Recreation, found that Washington County collected 9% of the \$11.9 million generated by the state lodgings tax in 2004. Tourism industry wages in Westerly in 2002 were the seventh highest among the state's cities and towns, generating \$27.88 million in wages and \$101.54 million in economic impact. An indicator of the interdependence of tourism with the general local economy is the finding that for every one dollar of wages generated by tourism in Westerly \$3.64 in economic activity was generated. Despite the global economic downturn in the latter part of the last decade, comparisons of actual state grant in aid for hotel and meal taxes since FY2009 has indicated a general growth in this sector in Westerly.

### *Accommodations*

The Town of Westerly has been proactive in allowing the redevelopment of several major coastline properties to assist in growing local tourism which include the following.

- **Ocean House** – The single remaining Victorian-styled hotel is located in the village of Watch Hill, a historically affluent summer destination. At the request of Royce Funds (based in New York and headed by a part-time Westerly resident) the original 1868 structure was demolished and rebuilt in replication of the original with the approval of the Town Council and oversight by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) and other historic preservation groups. This resort is one of a small number worldwide with the combined designations of AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star hotel, restaurant and spa. Over \$1.1 million in tax revenue for the Town of Westerly was generated from the Ocean House in 2015.
- **Watch Hill Inn** – Established as the Narragansett Inn in 1845, the Watch Hill Inn was approved to be converted into spacious bay and ocean view residential units. An adjacent structure was also added providing motel accommodations.

- **Weekapaug Inn** –The renovation and restoration of this historic inn was completed in October 2014. In 2015, this Forbes Four Star hotel generated \$226,799 in tax revenues for the Town of Westerly.

Westerly also includes many other businesses catering to visitors and the seasonal economy, ranging from bed and breakfast establishments and other inns and hotels as shown in Table 3-1 below.

**Table 3-1 Accommodations in Westerly, 2016**

| Establishment                   | Rooms Available |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Aquastar Inn                    | 16              |
| Blue Whale Inn                  | 9               |
| Breezeway Inn                   | 55              |
| Langworthy Farm Bed & Breakfast | 6               |
| Ocean Club at Atlantic Beach    | 27              |
| Ocean House                     | 49              |
| Ocean View Motel                | 10              |
| Pleasant View Inn               | 100             |
| Point 1 Motel                   | 30              |
| Sand Dollar Inn                 | 33              |
| Sandcastle Beachfront Inn       | 26              |
| Sea Shell Motel                 | 10              |
| Shelter Harbor Inn              | 24              |
| The Villa Bed & Breakfast       | 8               |
| Watch Hill Court                | 8               |
| Watch Hill Harbour House Inn    | 10              |
| Watch Hill Inn                  | 18              |
| Weekapaug Inn                   | 31              |
| Winnapaug Inn                   | 47              |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>517</b>      |

Source: Visit Rhode Island - Official Rhode Island Tourism website

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan, referencing a past edition of the *Go Westerly* annual publication by the Chamber (at that time, the Greater Westerly-Pawcatuck Area Chamber of Commerce), stated approximately 600 guest rooms existed in the Westerly area which reflects loss of about 83 rooms. The Chamber, monitoring changes in room availability between 1996 and 2015, has recorded the closing of nineteen (19) establishments resulting in a total loss of 195 rooms and a net loss of 172 rooms. Some of these establishments were purchased to be used as housing for seasonal workers.

Although summary information has been compiled, there has been no systematic evaluation of the accommodations available in Westerly to determine whether modern markets for seasonal vacationers, year-round visitors, and business travelers are being adequately served. A hotel may be best discussed in conjunction with a much broader economic development program for the revitalization of the Route 1 corridor.

*Part-time/Seasonal Residences*

An important component not included in economic impact studies is the impact of second homes and part time residents. According to 2011-15 ACS estimates, Washington County maintains 58.8% of the statewide total of seasonal homes in Rhode Island. In Westerly, seasonal and beach property accounted for \$600,754,900 in total assessed value (or 13.9% of total assessed residential property) in 2015 and contributed about \$6.4 million to property tax revenue for Westerly.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to helping to increase the tax base of the community, seasonal residents actively participate with full-time residents in funding amenities such as the Westerly Library, Westerly Hospital and numerous charities. They also provide additional business for local retailers and restaurants, as well as for construction and skilled trades related to residential maintenance.

*Agriculture*

A [2015 update to a 2012 study commissioned by RIDEM](#) estimated that Rhode Island’s agricultural sector had a total economic impact of \$238.9 million and employs 2,563 people. According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in the state grew by 2% between [2007](#) and [2012](#) which is in contrast to the 4.3% loss in the national average rate of growth. The largest growth in farms was experienced on those less than ten (10) acres in size while growth was also recorded in farms 180 acres or larger.

While agriculture is not a significant employing industry in the local economy itself, the food system in Westerly is a critical component of the local quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors. According to a [2016 snapshot by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council \(RIFPC\) and Rhode Island Agricultural Partnership \(RIAP\)](#), agricultural and related economic activities were identified within all four components of the food system, including production and harvesting, processing, distribution and consumption. The following table overviews the most commonly recognized form of agriculture within Westerly by their products and forms of product distribution.

**Table 3-2 Farms by Products and Forms of Distributing**

| Farm | Product(s) | Distribution Form(s) |
|------|------------|----------------------|
|------|------------|----------------------|

<sup>3</sup> All calculations based on the total assessed values of single-family residences, two- to five-family residences, apartments, seasonal and beach property and residential vacant as recorded in the 2015 Grand List, pending certification as of June 7, 2016

|                         |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Everbreeze Farm         | Eggs, meat  | Farmers markets, farm stand                         |
| Hillandale Farm         | Vegetables, eggs, herbs   | Restaurants, schools, wholesale                     |
| Keena Farm              | Vegetables, herbs, eggs, flowers, specialty products and breeding stock   | Farm stand  |
| Langworthy Farm Winery  | Wine  | Restaurants, wholesale                              |
| Manfredi Farms          | Fruits, vegetables, herbs, honey, maple syrup, eggs, firewood, flowers, hay, specialty products and baked goods | Pick your own, wholesale                            |
| Ocean Breeze Dairy Farm | Milk, grains and feeds  | Wholesale   |
| Watch Hill Farms        | Vegetables, herbs, honey, eggs, lobsters, Christmas trees, flowers and honeycomb                                | Pickup, Farmers markets, farm stand and restaurants |

Source: [FarmFresh RI](#) (May 2016)

Along with these, RIDEM’s Division of Agriculture list of agricultural businesses in Westerly also includes Broadview Landscape and Garden Center, Pleasant Acres Nursery and the Westerly Packing Company. A community garden is also located on Main Street and was established following the property’s acquisition by the Westerly Land Trust through its Urban Program.

Three aquacultural farms and 47 commercial fishers are also present within the town, according to the RIFPC/RIAP snapshot (FarmFresh RI listed Watch Hill Farms and Watch Hill Oysters as two seafood producers as of May 2016), indicative of Westerly’s coastal location. Considering the 2013 estimated revenue for aquaculture in Rhode Island was \$24,838 per acre, it can be estimated the 12 acres under cultivation in Winnapaug Pond thus contribute \$298,056 annually to the local economy, as well as contributions to employment and local purchases of equipment and supplies. In 2015, Education Exchange, Inc., with ten partners including the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce and the Jonnycake Center of Westerly, applied for a Real Jobs Rhode Island grant for an Aquaculture Training Partnership (Real Jobs RI will be discussed in greater detail further in the chapter). Noting the rapid growth in revenue in recent years the partnership was awarded \$19,681 to develop a training program first for entry-level employees and then for intermediate positions.

Farmers markets and farm stands have grown in popularity in recent years, mirroring a national trend for seeking out local food sources. A seasonal (June to October) farmers market is organized on Main Street each week with several farms and artisanal producers from Westerly and neighboring communities taking part. Two additional farmer’s markets in Avondale and in Weekapaug are also held weekly (both between July and August). Several restaurants, the local

hospital and the local public school system have also sought to purchase local products for inclusion in their meal offerings. The town has an annual agricultural program known as Westerly Springs Green focused on local agriculture, sustainable living and family activities. Local experts provide information on composting, rain gathering, organic gardening, beekeeping, organic pest maintenance, and other topics. Participants can browse a farmer’s market, enter a raffle, bid on items in a silent auction or take a workshop. The event takes place in the United Theatre building and is free and open to the public. Two other artisanal producers are also located in Westerly.

In promoting agritourism, the Town may be interested in farm enterprises which are processes, activities or uses of a farm subordinate to and conducted in conjunction with an ongoing agricultural, horticultural or silvicultural operation. Farm tours, agricultural production and skills classes, interactions with farm animals, hayrides, annual festivals and horse and pony rides are examples of such enterprises.

### **3.4 Current Economic Development Initiatives and Organizations**

#### ***3.4.1 Approved Development Projects***

In 2007, nearly \$154 million in new residential construction projects were underway in Westerly. Townhomes, single-family, and hotel room upgrades were all part of the development mix. In addition to the Watch Hill Inn and Ocean House projects referenced above, there were also nearly \$42 million in new commercial development projects approved along US Route 1. New shopping centers, medical office buildings and restaurants, and adaptive reuse projects contributed to this development total.

In 2015, the amount of new residential construction had declined to just \$16 million. New commercial development was also declining with just under \$5.9 million in recorded value, but there appeared to be an increased interest in revitalization which had a recorded value of over \$23.6 million. One of these projects currently underway is the revitalization of the United Theatre, which will be an important cornerstone of downtown Westerly and a key attraction and economic driver. With both movies and live entertainment to be scheduled year-round, the United Theatre will generate frequent visits which may in turn provide downtown businesses with increased walk-in traffic. A variety of programming targeted to families, children and adults will provide many sustained opportunities for activity and contribute to the downtown revitalization.

Although the Town of Westerly has fostered mixed-use development since at least 1991, this concept has only born fruit in recent years. Mixed-use development done well blends residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, or industrial uses where they may be physically and functionally integrated. For example, the Lanphear Livery located at 1 Bay Street in Watch Hill is

a mixed-use, year-round structure which has been fully restored to its early twentieth-century time period but with all of the modern necessities. The Livery had been condemned and vacant for a number of years. This restoration helps to reinvigorate the northern portion of Bay Street with two retail spaces on the first floor and three apartments on the upper two floors. In addition to attracting seasonal visitors the Livery will be the new home of the Watch Hill Conservancy and have a gathering space for lectures and events for the greater Westerly area, as well as the location of a summer camp for young actors. The entire project was generously funded by a private local foundation, a private equity partner and utilized historic preservation tax credits.

#### ***3.4.3 Statewide Growth Center***

*Land Use 2025* identifies the urban core of Westerly as an area for potential growth and development. Concentration of growth in this area is intended to conserve state and municipal resources by making better use of the existing infrastructure, transportation choices and the ability of providing a variety of housing options. This area has a unique and historic character, significant existing infrastructure, walkability to and from a strong and active downtown, conveniently located near the Westerly Amtrak Station.

#### ***3.4.4 North End Revitalization Plan***

A 2003 Neighborhood Revitalization Plan for Westerly's North End supported three-year Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding requests to enable a cohesive approach to encourage both public and private reinvestment. Phased housing rehabilitation, the provision of four neighborhood gateways, a new neighborhood service building, adaptive reuse of the Providence Gas Company property on Canal Street and the designation of the North End as an official Rhode Island Enterprise Zone were all recommended as a part of the revitalization strategy (the State's Enterprise Zone program has been defunct since July 1, 2015). With the use of the Neighborhood Plan as a focus eleven (11) structures were rehabilitated to provide 23 dwelling units, an existing building was purchased for the establishment of a Neighborhood Community Center, a pocket park was developed and vehicle parking was expanded at the Jonnycake Center of Westerly to serve its patrons and clients as well the general public. Recognizing the accomplishments made through this plan an update is being sought as of spring 2018.

#### ***3.4.5 Downtown Revitalization***

Westerly's economy is enhanced by the charming, historic downtown which is active year-round for residents and visitors. Downtown Westerly is a substantial commercial, professional and financial hub and is also the civic and cultural center of the Town. In recognition of the importance of this area, the downtown has been the focus of numerous efforts to ensure that its vitality continues into the future. In 2008, as mentioned earlier, it was identified as one of four KeepSpace communities across the State and was the only community identified outside of

Providence County. KeepSpace brought together a number of state-level regulatory agencies, local organizations, planning grants and financing but has been inactive since 2013 due to budget cuts at Rhode Island Housing, the program’s administrator.

A smart growth initiative, KeepSpace intended to focus residential and commercial redevelopment in downtown Westerly while protecting and preserving natural spaces such as parks and the Pawcatuck River. A community garden on Main Street established by the Westerly Land Trust, the downtown façade improvement program promoted by the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce (under its previous name), the Westerly Regional Arts Partnership (WRAP), and the Westerly Revolving Fund are all results of the funding awarded to KeepSpace Westerly as well as the Westerly Preservation Society. Though no longer active, the vision of KeepSpace continues to have an impact on redevelopment and new development in and around downtown.

#### Westerly Land Trust

The Westerly Land Trust was founded in 1987 to preserve open space and natural resources in Westerly and the surrounding area and later expanded their mission in 2004 to assist in revitalizing culturally significant properties. In addition to the KeepSpace initiative discussed above, the WLT has worked independently and in partnership with others to acquire several properties through its Urban Program. One of these, 10 High Street (the Industrial Trust Building), hosts the offices of the Land Trust while its other five properties provide cultural and recreational activities for the community.

#### Westerly-Pawcatuck Downtown Business Association

The Westerly-Pawcatuck Downtown Business Association (DBA) has a stated focus to support a vibrant downtown for all to enjoy. Underlying this purpose is the belief that the downtown business district should emerge as a destination for shopping, dining, personal services and arts and entertainment. The DBA’s 46 members (as of June 2017) are kept informed of events, marketing and promotional efforts and political activities affecting the downtown as the DBA lobbies for legislation to sustain and improve the downtown economy. Its reach is furthered through connections with organizations such as the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce. The DBA also presents a unified voice for all concerns and plans for the downtown area in order to maintain the historical character and appeal of the area to residents and visitors alike.

#### Arts & Entertainment District

In 1998, the Rhode Island General Assembly designated a portion of Westerly’s Downtown as an Arts & Entertainment District (today one of only nine districts in Rhode Island), outlining special tax incentives for artists to live and work within its boundaries with the intent to spur the local creative economy. The sale of original works of art within the district’s galleries is also exempt

from state sales tax regardless of the location where the piece was created. While Westerly's district is arguably the least developed in the state, the local arts, entertainment and recreation industry has experienced notable growth in the last decade and Downtown is home to a number of artistic establishments and events (for more on these, see the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter).

### ***3.4.6 Real Jobs RI***

It was noted earlier in the chapter that an Aquaculture Training Partnership received a Real Jobs Rhode Island grant in 2015 to develop a job training program. Real Jobs RI is a flexible grant program initiative of RIDLT funded by the state and federal governments which awards up to \$25,000 to applications put forward as collaborative efforts by businesses and agencies involved in commerce, industry and professional activities seeking to provide skills to potential employees. Along with Aquaculture Training Partnership, a Real Jobs RI grant was also awarded in 2015 to the Westerly Regional Real Jobs Partnership. The application, a collaboration of 18 local employers and partners led by Westerly Public Schools and convened by the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, sought funding to gather information on local and regional employer needs through surveys and focus groups with the intent to develop a workforce training plan primarily focused on non-college bound students. In November 2015, the partnership was awarded a grant of \$16,355 and this program is currently ongoing.

## **3.5 Economic Data**

### ***3.5.1 Employment Rate Comparison***

According to RIDLT, the labor force consists of all residents 16 years and older who are employed or are seeking employment. The unemployment rate is the proportion of members of the labor force who are jobless, available, and looking for work. Westerly traditionally has had an unemployment rate between 15% to 20% lower than the statewide rate prior to the recession of 2008. Since 2010, the local unemployment rate has increased over the statewide rate. Westerly's unemployment rate was approximately 23% and 24% % higher than the unemployment rate for Rhode Island's [annual unemployment averages in 2014 and 2015](#), respectively. For example, in November 2014 the unadjusted statewide unemployment rate was 6.5% whereas Westerly's unadjusted unemployment rate was 8%.

### ***3.5.2 Westerly Industry Overview***

An examination of the industries and the types of occupations in which Westerly residents are employed as listed in Table 3-3 can provide an indication of the quality of jobs they hold. This also translates into their potential buying power, though it should be noted the buying power in the local economy is significantly affected by seasonal trends in tourism (including the number

of part-time workers) and residents who significantly increase the population in the summer months.

**Table 3-3 Annual Average of Employees by Industry, 2005-2015**

|   | 2005  | 2010  | 2015  | Percent Change,<br>2010-15 | Percent Change,<br>2005-15 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Accommodation and Food Services               | 1,353 | 1,417 | 1,627 | 14.8%                      | 20.3%                      |
| Administrative Support and Waste Management   | 178   | 154   | 193   | 25.3%                      | 8.4%                       |
| Agriculture                                   | 11    | ---   | ---   | ---                        | ---                        |
| Arts, Entertainment and Recreation            | 362   | 442   | 505   | 14.3%                      | 39.5%                      |
| Construction                                  | 338   | 211   | 291   | 37.9%                      | -13.9%                     |
| Education Services                            | 58    | 70    | 65    | -7.1%                      | 12.1%                      |
| Finance and Insurance                         | 321   | 326   | 329   | 0.9%                       | 2.5%                       |
| Government                                    | 1,047 | 1,060 | 1,066 | 0.6%                       | 1.8%                       |
| Health Care and Social Assistance             | 1,917 | 2,075 | 1,902 | -8.3%                      | -0.8%                      |
| Information                                   | 304   | 211   | 123   | -41.7%                     | -59.5%                     |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises       | 246   | ---   | ---   | ---                        | ---                        |
| Manufacturing                                 | 961   | 574   | 513   | -10.6%                     | -46.6%                     |
| Mining  | ---   | ---   | ---   | ---                        | ---                        |
| Other Services (except Public Administration) | 438   | 297   | 310   | 4.4%                       | -29.2%                     |
| Professional and Technical Services           | 217   | 224   | 276   | 23.2%                      | 27.2%                      |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing            | 105   | 83    | 71    | -14.5%                     | -32.4%                     |
| Retail Trade                                  | 2,255 | 2,004 | 1,897 | -5.4%                      | -15.9%                     |
| Transportation and Warehousing                | 47    | 36    | 62    | 72.2%                      | 31.9%                      |
| Utilities                                     | ---   | ---   | ---   | ---                        | ---                        |
| Wholesale Trade                               | 58    | 66    | 74    | 12.1%                      | 27.6%                      |

Source: [RIDLT Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages 2005, 2010 and 2015](#)

### 3.5.3 Number of Establishments 2005-2015

The number of businesses in the Town of Westerly has remained relatively stable over the past several years with a slight decrease which was likely the result of significant changes in the local and statewide economies.

**Table 3-4 Annual Average Establishments, 2005-2015**

|               | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | Percent Change,<br>2010-15 | Percent Change,<br>2005-15 |
|---------------|------|------|------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total Private | 845  | 852  | 835  | -2.0%                      | -1.2%                      |

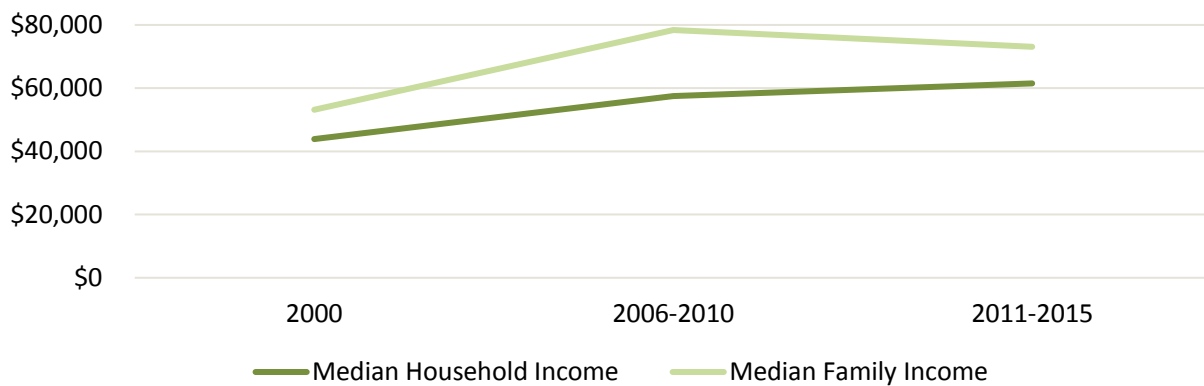
|                  |     |     |     |       |       |
|------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| Total Government | 20  | 19  | 19  | ---   | -5.0% |
| Total Combined   | 865 | 871 | 853 | -2.1% | -1.4% |

Source: RIDLT Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages 2005, 2010 and 2015

### 3.5.4 Income

While the US Census and the American Community Survey collect and report on incomes in several forms, the most commonly known and used statistics are median household income (MHI) and median family income (MFI). Households are defined as all housing units occupied by one or more people. Families, as briefly defined in the Housing Opportunities chapter, are a type of household where the housing unit is occupied by two or more people related by birth, marriage (including same-sex couples since 2014) or adoption. MFIs are often higher than MHIs due to the number of households with more than one income earner making up a larger portion of the total. From 2000 to 2015, median household income increased from approximately \$43,891 to \$61,500, an increase of 40.2%. Likewise, median family income increased at a similar rate (37.5%). The following table summarizes median incomes in Westerly from 2000 to 2015. When adjusting for inflation to 2017 dollars, both median household income and median family income have fallen slightly (-1.5% and -3.4%, respectively).

**Figure 3-1 Median Incomes, 2000-2015<sup>1</sup>**



Source: 2000 Census and 2006-2010 and 2011 -2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

<sup>1</sup> 2000 is for 1999 in 1999 dollars, 2006-2010 is for a twelve-month period in 2010 dollars and 2011-2015 is for a twelve-month period in 2015 dollars

### 3.5.5 Statewide Business Incentives

Like its New England neighbors and other northeastern states, Rhode Island suffers from a level of taxation that is recognized as being a hindrance to business. However, the state has recently created new programs, such as Real Jobs RI, focused on industry clusters to develop jobs and lure business to the state. Some additional programs also include:

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- **Research & Development (R&D) Tax Credit** – a 22.5% tax credit offered to qualifying companies for increases in qualified research expenses associated with research and development.
- **Qualified Jobs Incentive** – annual, redeemable tax credits for up to 10 years for companies expanding their workforce in the state (either through relocation or new hiring) by as few as 10 employees, dependent on the industry, company size, wage level of employees and other criteria.
- **Innovation Vouchers** – enterprises with fewer than 500 employees can receive grants (up to \$50,000) to fund R&D assistance from a university, research center or medical center in the state.
- **Small Business Assistance Program** – below-market rate loans of \$25,000 or more (microloans of less than \$25,000 are also available) and technical assistance for businesses with 200 or fewer employees.
- **Bond Financing** – offered by the Rhode Island Industrial Facilities Corporation to commercial and manufacturing enterprises.
- **Wavemaker Fellowship** – reimbursement of eligible higher education student loan debt expenses for up to 4 years available to any individual employed in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) field in Rhode Island with such expenses.
- **Small Business Capital Development** – tax deductions or modifications for investment, capital gain exclusions or wage credits available to qualifying business entities and certified venture capital partnerships as stipulated by General Law §44-43-2.

Historic preservation tax credits for rehabilitating land mark buildings and historic homeowner tax credits for exterior restoration work on qualified residences. The Rhode Island Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit Program has generated jobs, nearly \$2.5 billion in economic activity, and more than \$400 million dollars in additional tax revenues. To help close a budget gap the program was eliminated in 2008 except for projects already approved. As of 2016, in Westerly these included ongoing renovations to the United Theatre as well as rehabilitation efforts throughout downtown.

## 4 Natural Resources

### 4.1 Physical Setting

The meandering Pawcatuck River separates Westerly from Hopkinton and North Stonington, Connecticut to the north and Stonington, Connecticut to the west. Westerly's eastern border with Charlestown is a straight line running north/south for about 4.6 miles. The Town has a coastline on the Block Island Sound of the Atlantic Ocean for approximately nine (9) miles between Sandy Point (the westernmost point in Rhode Island) and the Charlestown border. The town's size is 31.5 square miles. Its southwestern maritime border, also the New York-Rhode Island state border, extends from Little Narragansett Bay into Block Island Sound.

The topography rises from sea level along the beaches to the town's highest elevation, Mount Moriah (249 feet), in the northwestern corner of the town. On the west side of the town, the elevation of downtown Westerly rises from approximately 10 feet along the river to 150 feet near Westerly High School. At the center of the town is a large wetland complex, including Aguntaug Swamp among the largest cedar swamps in Rhode Island, and Chapman Pond (33 acres of open water), which are between 30 and 40 feet above sea level. Woody Hill, in the east-central part of town, rises to 200 feet. The **Topography map (TOPO-1)** depicts the contour elevation lines within the town at measurements of 10 feet, 50 feet and 100 feet contour intervals (the distances between contour elevations lines).

### 4.2 Hydrology

#### 4.2.1 Watersheds

It is important to consider water resources and management from a watershed perspective as water or watersheds are not confined to political boundaries. The majority of Westerly's water supply comes from the Pawcatuck Watershed, also referred to as the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed. The Salt Pond Region in the southern section of Westerly contains three additional watersheds, one for each of the three major salt ponds in Westerly.

The Charlestown Moraine is the most significant geological structure in southern Rhode Island. The moraine travels west to east from Orient Point, Long Island, NY through Fisher's Island, NY and Westerly, RI and onto South Kingstown, RI. This elevated plateau was deposited 19,000 years ago as the glacial ice sheet retreated northward and acts as a local "continental divide" in southern RI, meaning that water falling to the south of the moraine drains into the salt ponds of Rhode Island while water falling to the north of the moraine drains into Wood-Pawcatuck water system and onto Little Narragansett Bay. This feature created the two entirely separate watersheds in Westerly and in southern Rhode Island. The well heads that supplies the public water for the Town of Westerly comes exclusively from the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed which

is a sole source aquifer, meaning the town has no other source (reservoirs) from which to obtain potable water.

The Pawcatuck Watershed encompasses approximately 300 square miles in southeastern Connecticut and southwestern Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> Within the watershed, seven major rivers and their tributaries drain to a common outlet – the Pawcatuck River and into Little Narragansett Bay. These rivers, along with lakes, ponds, wetlands and streams, serve as important wildlife habitats, recreational resources and water supplies for agricultural production. Significant groundwater resources underlie this watershed and are the sole source of drinking water for people within it. Groundwater and surface waters are interconnected and the watershed is noted for having some of the highest quality groundwater and surface water in the area.<sup>2</sup> Several organizations are active in the stewardship of the Pawcatuck Watershed which include the Nature Conservancy, the Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, the University of Rhode Island (URI) Watershed Watch Program and the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association.

The Salt Pond Region includes 45 square miles around the nine (9) coastal salt ponds of southern Rhode Island lying within portions of the towns of Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown and Narragansett. Maschaug, Winnapaug and Quonochontaug ponds are all coastal lagoons (shallow, productive embayments separated from the ocean by barrier spits) located wholly or partially within Westerly. They provide important ecosystem and habitat functions, are an important factor in the quality of life for local residents, and are a prime recreational attraction for both residents and visitors in the region.<sup>3</sup> The Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is responsible for the management, protection and enhancement of resources within the Salt Pond watersheds and along coastal waters. Other organizations are also active in the stewardship of the Salt Pond watersheds such as the non-profit Salt Ponds Coalition.

#### 4.2.2 Surface Water

Rivers, streams, fresh water ponds, fresh water and coastal wetlands, coastal waters and salt ponds make up the surface waters of the town. The Pawcatuck River flows along the entire northern and western boundaries of Westerly and other named streams include Aguntaug Brook, Mastuxet Brook, McGowan Brook and Perry Healy Brook. Chapman Pond, in the north central

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<sup>1</sup>The *Pawcatuck Watershed* encompasses approximately 300 square miles in southeastern Connecticut and southwestern Rhode Island. The portion of the watershed solely within Rhode Island is referred to, in Rhode Island state policy documents, as the *Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed*.

<sup>2</sup>Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, *The Pawcatuck Watershed Report*, p. 1

<sup>3</sup>...Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, *Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds)*, Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, pp. 1-2

section of Westerly, is the town’s largest freshwater pond and other named freshwater ponds include Dr. Lewis Pond, Long Pond, Spring Pond, No Bottom Pond and Mickill Pond. Freshwater wetlands are scattered throughout the town (a result of the area’s glacial past and resultant soils and topography) and along the Pawcatuck River. Crandall Swamp is one of the largest freshwater wetland systems in the state. Coastal wetlands include salt marshes and any contiguous freshwater or brackish wetlands. Coastal waters border the entire southern shoreline of the town and include the tidal portion of the Pawcatuck River. In addition to the salt ponds noted previously, there is also Little Maschaug Pond located immediately east of Maschaug Pond.

The **Surface Water map (SW-1)**, along with the lakes and ponds included in all mapped figures and the rivers, streams and wetlands included on nearly all maps, additionally indicates the cold water and warm water fisheries located within the town as well as the major watershed boundaries and the estuarine water quality standard boundaries (RIDEM identifies seawaters on a class system ranging from SA to SC). The five categories of water use as established by CRMC and the Special Resource Protection Waters (SRPWs) within the town are also shown.

#### **4.2.3 Groundwater**

Westerly’s groundwater resources exist within three aquifers: Westerly, Ashaway and Bradford. These aquifers are located within the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, which was designated a sole source aquifer system by the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1988. The sole source aquifer designation signifies an aquifer that supplies at least 50 percent of the drinking water to persons living over the aquifer where there can be no feasible alternate source of drinking water, such as surface water reservoirs. In the Pawcatuck River Aquifer Region, groundwater is recharged by rainfall within the watershed and is stored within aquifers as well as discharged into surface waters.

According to the Town’s [Water Supply System Management Plan \(WSSMP\)](#), the Westerly Water Department draws its water from these three major sand and gravel groundwater aquifers, all of which are located in the Lower Pawcatuck sub-basin. The Lower Pawcatuck Sub-basin is in the southwestern section of the Pawcatuck Basin and includes the towns of Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Westerly in Rhode Island and North Stonington, Stonington and Voluntown in Connecticut. The Green Fall River, Shunock River and Wyassup Brook flow southeasterly into the Pawcatuck River, which itself flows southwesterly into Little Narragansett Bay. The Town currently utilizes both the Westerly and Bradford aquifers to supply its municipal wells.

The Bradford groundwater reservoir and the majority of the Westerly reservoir are classified as GAA groundwater sources, meaning they are suitable for public drinking water use without treatment. The remaining portion of the Westerly reservoir is classified as GB, identifying it as a

source which may not be suitable for public or private drinking without treatment due to known or presumed degradation. The Groundwater Division of RIDEM has also delineated the critical portions of the groundwater recharge areas to these reservoirs.

There are, at present, a total of eleven (11) gravel-packed and gravel-developed wells and seven (7) well stations that comprise the source water supply portion of the Westerly water system. Overall, the operation and production capabilities of the system to meet the needs of the water service community have been relatively efficient and capable and the ability of the system to supply potable water of good quality to the service population has been readily maintained through system disinfection.

The **Groundwater map (GW-1)** identifies several features related to groundwater including public wells, community and non-community wellhead protection areas (portions of aquifers through which groundwater moves to a public community or non-community well), groundwater reservoirs (significant subsurface water sources defined by RIDEM) and groundwater recharge areas (areas intended to be protected drinking water sources). The Office of Water Resources, an office of RIDEM, contributed the datasets used to produce this map.

#### *4.2.4 Water Quality*

Preserving and improving water quality is vital to Westerly's natural resources. High-quality drinking water supplies are also critical for public health and well-being. Habitat areas are also essential to biological diversity which enhances water quality. As a practical matter, both drinking water supply and habitat quality depend on the maintenance of water quality at the highest possible level. Furthermore, good water quality is necessary for recreation, since contact with polluted waters is a health risk.<sup>4</sup>

Water quality is affected by both point and nonpoint pollution sources. Point source pollution originates from a specific place or location, such as a discharge pipe from a factory. Nonpoint source pollution originates over a widespread area of the landscape and may include malfunctioning septic systems, soil erosion, leaking underground fuel storage tanks, stormwater runoff, fertilizers, pesticides, agriculture and road salt. Unlike point source discharges, comprehensive management of nonpoint source discharges is beyond the authorities of the EPA, RIDEM and other federal and state agencies. Increasingly, these and other stakeholders believe

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<sup>4</sup> Rhode Island Rivers Council and State Planning Council, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, January 1998 (amended May 2004), Rivers Policy and Classification Plan, p. 1.1

many problems can and should be addressed locally through land use planning, education and, where appropriate, regulation.<sup>5</sup>

### 4.3. Stressors

#### *Domestic and Industrial Waste Water*

Domestic wastewater contains high levels of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, some synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals, all of which can affect aquatic habitat and groundwater quality. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus may stimulate growth of algae in coastal ponds and in the Pawcatuck River, leading eventually to declining levels of oxygen and adverse impacts on habitat. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association (WPWA) monitors dissolved oxygen levels in the rivers quarterly to evaluate these impacts. Synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals in waste water are toxic to humans and other organisms. Domestic wastewater also contains bacteria, viruses and medical/drug residue which may threaten human health if viable microorganisms enter drinking water. Industrial wastewater can have the same contaminants as domestic sewage; however, concentrations of synthetic organic chemicals and heavy metals may be much higher in industrial waste.

Westerly has a municipal sewage collection and treatment system that primarily serves the downtown area. The rest of the town is served by private onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), also known as septic systems. As of spring 2017, developed properties in Westerly that are not served by the sewer system rely on septic systems for wastewater disposal. Onsite wastewater treatment will continue to be the primary source of wastewater disposal for areas outside the current sewer district into the foreseeable future. Proper function and treatment of an onsite system depend on existing soil characteristics as well as on proper system maintenance. RIDEM regulates OWTS' and has established minimum standards for siting, design and installation of these systems (see the *Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems*).

The typical lifespan of a septic system is 20 years and many existing septic systems have outlived their ability to function effectively.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, many of these systems in Westerly, including cesspools (a type of wastewater treatment that RIDEM considers to be substandard) were installed prior to current RIDEM standards. Improperly designed or failing systems can contribute pollutants in the form of nitrates and fecal coliform bacteria to nearby surface waters or groundwater.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-11

<sup>6</sup> Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Office of Water Resources, February 2007, Summary of Municipal Onsite Wastewater Programs, p. 13.

The Rhode Island Cesspool Act of 2007 went into effect on June 1, 2008 and requires a phasing out of all cesspools that present the highest risks to public health and/or the environment. Primarily, cesspools located in close proximity to tidal water areas and public drinking waters were required to be removed by 2013. In Westerly, this act affects any cesspools located within 200 feet of the shore or within 200 feet of a public drinking water well. In 2014 the Town joined the Community Septic System Loan Program (CSSLP) which is administered by the Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank [RIIB]) and provides low interest loans to homeowners for septic system improvements to help homeowners address this mandate.

Once an OWTS is installed, regular maintenance is essential to ensure its proper function. Rhode Island municipalities are responsible for making sure these systems are properly maintained.<sup>7</sup> Westerly does not have a program to ensure routine inspection and maintenance of these systems is performed, although the development of such a program has been recommended in the Town's *Wastewater Facilities Plan* and the *Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan* (January 2005 and revised in 2007), as well as the *Wastewater Facilities Plan* (November 1998) prepared by BETA Group, Inc.

#### *Land Use Near Wellheads*

The primary issue facing the quality of Westerly's water supply is the lack of protective measures to ensure its integrity. Westerly's water supply comes primarily from groundwater wells located in White Rock, with additional capacity from wells in Bradford and Crandall Swamp. Westerly wells also provide water to 11 businesses and approximately 1,500 homes in Connecticut. Westerly's zoning code permits commercial, manufacturing and high density residential uses over much of the aquifer which could represent a substantial risk of contamination from exposure to potential hazardous waste spills, leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs) and road salt runoff.<sup>8</sup>

Protection of groundwater quality is facilitated through the protection of the source water supply. Source water protection areas such as wellhead protection areas and aquifer recharge areas have been identified by the state, however, protection strategies for the source water supply are accomplished through local plans, ordinances and development standards related to wellhead protection areas, aquifer recharge areas and other critical areas. Special considerations

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<sup>7</sup> University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, p. 69

<sup>8</sup> [GeolInsight Inc., \*Aquifer Protection Study Phase I – Westerly Aquifer, May 30, 2014 and Aquifer Protection Study Phase II – Bradford Aquifer, March 16, 2015\*](#)

should be taken to further protect the areas within the community wellhead protection areas by strengthening land use regulations to minimize the risk of contamination.

State agencies involved in the protection of groundwater and drinking water include RIDEM, the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the Water Resources Board. RIDEM administers the *Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality* which classifies the state's groundwater and established groundwater quality standards for each class. This regulation also includes the state's wellhead protection program. RIDOH is responsible for ensuring proper operation and maintenance of the public water systems to ensure a safe drinking water supply and is also responsible for the Source Water Assessment Program. The Water Resources Board is an executive board within the state government charged with managing the proper development, conservation and utilization of the state's water resources.

Groundwater reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas and wellhead protection areas are established by RIDEM and these areas are critical for the protection of drinking water quality. Groundwater reservoirs contain the highest potential yield of drinking water and recharge areas include those surface lands that drain into the groundwater reservoir. A wellhead protection area (WHPA) is the portion of an aquifer through which groundwater moves to a well. The town of Westerly operates 11 water supply wells at seven pumping stations which are located in three separate WHPAs: the Bradford and Crandall WHPAs, which are located entirely within Westerly, and the White Rock WHPA. RIDEM requires municipalities to develop management plans for wellhead protection areas, which are inspected in detail at least once every five years by RIDOH.

#### *Stormwater Management*

During a rain event, rainwater either soaks into the ground or runs across it. As areas become more developed, a larger amount of stormwater runs off paved surfaces, roofs, compacted soils and lawns, rather than soaking into the ground. As stormwater drains into local waterways, it carries with it sediment and pollutants including fertilizers, pesticides, road salt, oil, heavy metals, and pathogenic bacteria and viruses. Large stormwater flows within streams and creeks causes erosion and degradation of riparian habitats which is the reason Stormwater management can help reduce these effects.

Phases I and II of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), administered by the EPA, require the control of polluted discharges from large construction sites, certain industrial activities and operators of municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s). These requirements include the establishment of a stormwater management program that is intended to improve water bodies by reducing the quantity of pollutants that can enter storm sewer

systems during storm events. They also require the use of best management practices (BMPs) intended to reduce the negative impacts of stormwater. The RIDEM implements the NPDES requirements through the *Rhode Island Pollution Discharge Elimination System (RIPDES)*. In order to address requirements of RIPDES, as well as requirements of the NPDES Phase II permitting process, the Town of Westerly has implemented its *Phase II Storm Water Management Plan*. Implementation of the plan is a five-year process that began in 2004.

The Town of Westerly’s Code of Ordinances includes an Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance ([§260-89](#)) which requires installation and maintenance of control measures and BMPs to control erosion and sedimentation for land development and subdivision activities. In addition, the Town has enacted a Bioretention and Stormwater Management ordinance ([§A261-30.1](#)). This ordinance requires the construction of bioretention areas (including rain or recharge gardens and grass swales) in order to reduce the volume and velocity of stormwater runoff and increase pollutant filtering and groundwater recharge.

In addition to federal and state NPDES regulations, there are other management measures designed to reduce pollution threats from stormwater runoff. The Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP) administered by CRMC requires stormwater management plans and the use of BMPs for the reduction of pollutant loadings associated with development activities. CRMC, in partnership with RIDEM, implements the Rhode Island Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program. The Town of Westerly’s *Land Development and Subdivision Regulations* require the preparation of a soil erosion and sediment control plan, as well as stormwater management measures, for all major development.

### *Flooding*

Westerly is subject to damage from flooding of both inland surface waters and from coastal storm-surge. Development in and adjacent to wetlands and flood storage areas reduces the land’s natural ability to store floodwaters. Hurricanes, tidal flooding and nor’easters (which appear in the winter and spring more regularly than do hurricanes in summer and autumn) all cause severe coastal flooding and erosion. These hazards are thoroughly documented in the Town’s *Natural Hazard Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategy*. In October 2013, an amendment to Section 980 of the Salt Pond SAMP became effective which permits the use of experimental coastal erosion control methods within the Misquamicut Headland (these methods are also permitted within the Matunuck Headland in South Kingstown) until October 2019.

Westerly participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) by adopting and enforcing floodplain management ordinances to reduce future flood damage. As of August 2017, Westerly is also a participant in the Community Rating System (CRS). The CRS is a voluntary program that

recognizes and encourages a community's efforts to exceed the NFIP minimum requirements for floodplain management. The CRS program emphasizes three goals – the reduction of flood losses, facilitating accurate insurance rating, and promoting the awareness of flood insurance. By participating in the CRS program, communities can earn a discount for flood insurance premiums based upon the activities that reduce the risk of flooding within the community. In exchange, the NFIP makes federally-backed flood insurance available to homeowners, renters and business owners in these communities at a reduced rate. Currently, Westerly is a Level 8 community which provides all residents within the Town a 10% reduction in insurance premiums.

In addition to providing flood insurance and reducing flood damages through floodplain management regulations, the NFIP identifies and maps the nation's floodplains, otherwise known as Special Flood Hazard Areas, which are those areas with a one percent annual chance of flooding (more commonly known as the 100-year flood). Within Westerly, there are three general zones of high flood danger which include A and AE Zones that are primarily the result of riverine flooding events and VE Zones that are subject to wave velocity and action and storm surge. Flood insurance is mandated for any property located in a Special Flood Hazard Area that is backed by a federally insured mortgage. Areas that are particularly vulnerable to storm surge and coastal flooding include the Quonochontaug, Winnapaug and Maschaug Ponds and the lowlands around them, Napatree Beach, Sandy Point and the coves in Little Narragansett Bay.

#### *4.3.1 Quality of Surface Waters*

Water quality in the Pawcatuck Watershed, which includes a significant part of western Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut, is generally described as excellent, however, much of the Pawcatuck River located within Westerly is listed as being impaired. Water quality threats in the Pawcatuck Watershed are due chiefly to agricultural and nonpoint source pollution impacts.<sup>9</sup> In the Salt Pond Region, failing and substandard OWTs are the single most important nonpoint source of bacteria and nutritional contamination to the region's coastal waters.<sup>10</sup>

The federal Clean Water Act (§303[d]) requires states to prepare a list of water bodies that do not meet water quality standards for ensuring that water is healthy for such uses as fish and wildlife habitat, domestic and agricultural water supplies and recreation in and on the water. All water bodies identified on the list must attain water quality standards within a reasonable period, either through a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study (known as a water cleanup plan) or other pollution control mechanisms. Within the Westerly area, the Rhode Island List of Impaired Waters (Final 2014) included the Pawcatuck River and Tributaries (broken into three segments

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<sup>9</sup> Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 5

<sup>10</sup> Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, p. 3

including the Bradford Dyeing Association [BDA] WWTF discharge point to Meeting House Bridge [Route 3], Meeting House Bridge to Pawcatuck Bridge [Route 1] and Pawcatuck Bridge to Pawcatuck Rock [tidal]), Chapman Pond and the Perry Healy Brook and Tributaries. These resources have all remained on the List of Impaired Waters as of the 2015 draft TMDL study. TMDL studies and BMPs are used to return water bodies to healthy conditions. The Town of Westerly has been awarded a NEWIPCC Grant to create a TMDL Implementation Plan and a new watershed plan in conjunction with the Wood-Pawcatuck Flood Resiliency Study. When this plan is approved the Town will be eligible to apply for Clean Water Act 303(d) and 313(d) funding.

#### *Water Quality of Lakes and Freshwater Ponds*

Since 1988, the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association has sponsored volunteer monitoring of a significant number of water bodies in the watershed including Chapman Pond in Westerly, as part of the URI's Watershed Watch Program. Results of testing have shown that Chapman Pond has moderate to above average levels of phosphorus giving it a eutrophic classification.<sup>11</sup>

Chapman Pond was included on the List of Impaired Waters in 2014 (as well as the 2015 draft) due to Eurasian water milfoil (*myriophyllum spicatum*), lead and other non-native aquatic plants. The source of nutrients and other pollutants in Chapman Pond can generally be traced to the surrounding land uses including an adjacent road salt storage facility and the former town landfill which has been inactive since the 1990s. In June 2015 the Town received a grant to remove invasive species from Chapman Pond. Identified invaders included milfoil as well as American lotus, naiad and water chestnut and are scheduled for systematic removal. The Town will also be installing a boat washing station at the pond to prevent the spread of these species.

#### *Water Quality of Rivers and Streams*

The rivers and streams in the Pawcatuck watershed are now in generally good condition but there are threats actively eroding the environmental quality of the watershed. Recent monitoring on the Pawcatuck River and its tributaries suggests the river is threatened by elevated lead levels which may occasionally exceed the national EPA chronic aquatic life standards. Elevated nutrients, particularly nitrate levels, have also been measured in the Pawcatuck River. Fecal coliform bacteria is another important nonpoint source contaminant that originates from some agricultural land uses, wild animals and failing septic systems. Several measurements are routinely taken in the watershed to assess the health of aquatic communities. Results of the assessment tests indicate several rivers and streams within the watershed are stressed, including

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<sup>11</sup>Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 6

portions of the Pawcatuck River.<sup>12</sup> The Town has undertaken efforts to determine source locations of fecal coliform contamination found upon completion of the TMDL study completed in 2008 and has received funds to develop a TMDL implementation plan to address bacteria in the Pawcatuck River with help from Save the Bay and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB).

#### *Water Quality of Coastal Waters and Salt Ponds*

In the salt pond region, failing or sub-standard septic systems have been identified as the single most important nonpoint source of bacterial and nutrient contamination to coastal waters.<sup>13</sup> The tidal portions of the Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay are also listed as impaired water bodies in Connecticut as a result of elevated bacteria levels. Currently, the direct harvesting of shellfish is prohibited at all times in Little Narragansett Bay due to pollution closures.<sup>14</sup> Shellfishing is also not permitted in the tidal portions of the Pawcatuck River, from the Pawcatuck Bridge to the mouth of the river at Rhodes Point. This reach is assessed as partially supporting aquatic life.

Oxygen levels are very low because of nutrient over-enrichment. Metals and pathogens are also threats in the upper tidal reach. Much of the bottom of Little Narragansett Bay is now covered in a thick macroalgal mat (sometimes referred to as *black ooze* or *black mayonnaise*).<sup>15</sup> This blanket of algae gives off a foul odor when exposed to air and creates low-oxygen zones that suffocate eelgrass, oysters and scallops. In some places, this decaying organic matter is several feet thick and the mat appears to be spreading. The University of Connecticut (UConn) and URI have both been studying this algae formation which is thought to result from fertilization of coastal waters by runoff from the Pawcatuck Watershed. This outbreak has attracted the attention of Save the Bay and Rhode Island’s congressional delegation. The Westerly wastewater treatment facility (WWTF) is considered to be a relatively minor loading source in comparison to the nonpoint source inputs (urban runoff, storm sewers, etc.) along this stretch of shoreline.<sup>16</sup>

The salt ponds are considered valuable parts of the coastal wetlands. Of the three major coastal salt ponds within the Town of Westerly, Quonochontaug Pond (733 acres) is the largest salt pond, though only its western half is in Westerly as its eastern half is located within Charlestown. It is particularly sensitive to threats of nonpoint source pollution due to prevalent soil types that result in slow permeability and high runoff rates. Water quality in the eastern section is generally

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 5

<sup>13</sup> BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, pp. 1-6

<sup>14</sup> Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, May 2007, Quality Assurance Project Plan: Little Narragansett Bay and Pawcatuck River Bacteria Sampling Plan, p. 9

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ecori.org/narragansett-bay/2015/7/20/little-bay-faces-big-threats>

<sup>16</sup> Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 6

good. In the western end, restricted tidal flow can result in depleted oxygen levels and, in some restricted coves, higher bacteria levels.<sup>17</sup> Bacterial water quality surveys of the pond from 1977 to present indicate somewhat higher coliform counts adjacent to developed areas, although overall bacterial water quality remains good.<sup>18</sup> Although there is limited data, it appears the total average nitrogen concentration is increasing with time.<sup>19</sup> The most recent report from the Salt Ponds Coalition (2014) continues to show elevated levels of dissolved inorganic nitrogen in the Westerly's portion of the pond.<sup>20</sup>

The second largest of the Westerly ponds is Winnapaug Pond (446 acres), generally surrounded by the Misquamicut and Weekapaug neighborhoods. Dense development, in these two areas, has produced high runoff rates from these areas and, in some cases, stormwater drainage carries effluent from failing septic systems. Safe shell fishing limits for bacteria have been exceeded in the pond. The most recent report from the Salt Ponds Coalition (2014) indicates elevated concentrations of Chlorophyll-a and dissolved inorganic nitrogen in the southwest corner and elevated dissolved inorganic nitrogen in the East Basin.<sup>21</sup> The third and smallest of the three main saltwater ponds is Maschaug Pond (42 acres), unique as it is completely land-locked (between Misquamicut and Watch Hill), although major storm events periodically result in an influx of salt water.

#### *4.3.2 Quality of Groundwater*

The Town of Westerly withdraws water from the Bradford and Westerly aquifers through six large community supply wells: Bradford Wells II and III, the Crandall Well, and the three White Rock Wells. The total combined pumping capacity of these wells is 10.39 million gallons per day (MGD), with 7.56 MGD (72.8% of the total combined pumping capacity) coming from the White Rock Wells.

The quality of the Pawcatuck River Basin's groundwater is generally good to excellent and there are isolated sources of contamination. Hazardous waste spills have been documented in the Crandall and White Rock wellhead protection areas.<sup>22</sup> In a 2015 area study of the Town and surrounding area, Environmental Data Resources, Inc. (EDR) found 26 state Leaking Underground

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<sup>17</sup>[www.saltpondscoalition.org/quonny%20pond.html](http://www.saltpondscoalition.org/quonny%20pond.html), Pond Profiles: Quonochontaug Pond.

<sup>18</sup> BETA Group, Inc., January 2005 (Revised May 2007), Town of Westerly On-Site Wastewater Management Plan, p. 6

<sup>19</sup> Callender, Ted. October 2006, Water Quality and Nutrient Status of Quonochontaug Pond – May to October 2006, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.saltpondscoalition.org/PageQuonnie.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.saltpondscoalition.org/PageWinnapaug.html>

<sup>22</sup> University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, Appendix E, pp. 1-4 James J. Geremia & Associates, Inc., March 2001 (revised December 2001), Water Supply System Management Plan Update for Westerly Department of Public Works Water Supply Division: Volume I – (Part 1 of 2), p. 5-5

Storage Tank (LUST) sites in the study area, several of which were located within Westerly’s aquifer recharge and wellhead protection areas.

Elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, which can result from failing septic systems, have been detected in the water supply area.<sup>23</sup> Research at URI estimates septic systems account for more than 50 percent of all nitrogen entering the watershed as recharge groundwater.<sup>24</sup> The White Rock well-head protection area has experienced threats from chemical contamination events due to fuel spills in the neighboring village of Pawcatuck in the Town of Stonington.

### 4.4 Management and Protection of Surface Waters

#### 4.4.1 Watershed Level

Entities responsible for management and protection of surface waters include the RIDEM Office of Water Resources (responsible for groundwater quality, stormwater management, onsite wastewater and wetland regulations), CRMC (responsible for preservation, protection, development and restoration of coastal areas, including coastal wetlands) and the Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC; responsible for general oversight, planning and coordination).

RIRC has the authority to designate watershed councils and to create a *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* (RPCP). The Council’s functions are planning, coordination and empowerment and it is not a regulatory body. RIRC has designated the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association as the watershed council for the Pawcatuck Watershed. The Salt Ponds Coalition is the designated watershed council for the Salt Ponds watersheds.

The *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan* adopted in January 1998 and amended in May 2004 is a guide for action to protect and enhance the quality and the use of Rhode Island’s fresh and estuarine waters and their watersheds. It endeavors to integrate water quality planning with land use planning and with planning for activities such as recreation and habitat preservation. Its broad objectives are to protect drinking water supplies and pristine rivers, to encourage the recreational use of rivers, to foster the creation of greenways and to provide for the clean-up of rivers. Primary objectives for the Wood-Pawcatuck Sub-basin (the portion of the larger Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed that includes Westerly) include, in order of importance:

- Preservation of its quality as the state’s premier freshwater recreational resource
- Maintenance of wildlife habitat quality
- Keeping groundwater quality high

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<sup>23</sup> University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, pp. 2-6

<sup>24</sup> Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 13

- Preservation of agriculture

### **4.4.2 Coastal Waters and Salt Ponds**

CRMC is responsible for the management, protection and enhancement of coastal areas. The regulatory authority of the CRMC is generally defined as encompassing the areas extending from three miles offshore to 250 feet inland from any coastal feature. In addition, natural coastal features such as coastal beaches, dunes, barriers, coastal wetlands, bluffs and salt ponds all have an *extended* contiguous area of 200 feet from their inland borders under the authority of CRMC.

CRMC administers the CRMP, which includes specific regulatory requirements for buffers, setbacks, subdivisions, recreational docks, barrier beach development, beach replenishment and any other activities that occur within the CRMC’s jurisdiction.

CRMC, in partnership with RIDEM, is also responsible for implementing the Rhode Island Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program. Other management programs of the CRMC are the Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast (wetlands are discussed later in this chapter) and the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP). The SAMP is an ecosystem-based management strategy designed to address a diversity of issues on a watershed scale. The SAMP for the Salt Pond Region, *Rhode Island’s Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds)*, was the first SAMP developed by CRMC. The Salt Pond Region SAMP focuses on managing the potential development of the salt ponds watersheds and establishes regulatory standards to protect and improve saltwater pond water quality. It also identifies pollution sources, wildlife habitat and prudent development strategies to effectuate restoration and preservation of salt pond resources. The approved five-year update to the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan requires changes to the existing Zoning Ordinance and subdivision regulations to comply with the CRMC Salt Pond Region SAMP (maximum density, setbacks, buffers, requirements for nitrogen-reducing technologies for onsite wastewater treatment, and CRMC participation at an early stage of municipal land use regulatory review).

### **4.4.3 Non-Coastal Surface Waters**

The RIDEM Office of Water Resources is responsible for the protection of surface water quality inland of coastal areas. The department maintains regulations regarding groundwater quality (see next section), stormwater management (see Stormwater section), onsite wastewater treatment (see Onsite Sewage Disposal section), and wetlands (see Wetlands section).

WPWA is active in the stewardship of surface water in the Pawcatuck Watershed and developed the *Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Action Plan* in 2008. Some achievements of the WPWA include the identification and prioritization of opportunities to protect and restore riparian corridors and

participation in the development of the *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* (see Open Space and Conservation Land section of this report).

### 4.5 Management and Protection of Groundwater

#### 4.5.1 Source Water Protection Strategies

##### *Wellhead Protection Plan*

Management of wellhead protection areas (WHPAs) is facilitated through the *Rhode Island Wellhead Protection Program*, which requires municipalities and large water suppliers with a groundwater source(s) of supply to inventory potential pollution threats in the wellhead protection areas and develop a *Wellhead Protection Plan*. Wellhead Protection Plans must include, at minimum:

- a pollution threat assessment
- identification of protection strategies
- coordination with neighboring states, communities and water suppliers (where appropriate) a procedure for implementing the chosen strategies.<sup>25</sup>

One of the requirements was addressed through a joint effort between URI and RI Health. In 2003, URI and RI Health completed assessments of all public water supplies in the state, including the Town of Westerly Water District. Westerly's results were published in the report *Westerly Source Water Assessment* by the URI Cooperative Extension in cooperation with RI Health and is available for review at the Water Department office. A 2001 *Water Supply System Management Plan Update* assessment addressed the second requirement by identifying known and potential sources of pollution in drinking water supplies and ranking their susceptibility to future contamination. A more current version of this plan was completed in 2013.

General protection strategies have been identified in the *Westerly Source Water Assessment* report and protection strategies specific to Westerly are presented in the *Water Supply System Management Plan Update*. Recommendations focus on protection measures that can be implemented through local plans, ordinances and development standards because municipal decision makers have primary authority over land use and the responsibility to control associated impacts.<sup>26</sup> Protection strategies specific to Westerly, presented in the *Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)*, include the adoption of a wastewater management district, a public education program, land acquisitions along the Pawcatuck River and strengthening of

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<sup>25</sup> Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Office of Water Resources, March 2005, Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality, p. 32-34

<sup>26</sup> University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension, April 2003, Westerly Source Water Assessment, p. 51

Westerly’s aquifer protection ordinance to prohibit new underground storage tanks for either hazardous materials or home heating oil.

The final two requirements of a Wellhead Protection Plan still need to be completed by Westerly. These include the identification of which protection strategies will be implemented for the protection of the groundwater supply and the development of an implementation procedure for the chosen strategies, as well as the coordination with neighboring states, communities and water suppliers. In addition, changes to the zoning use table are also required.

#### *Inner Protective Radius Around Wells*

The Town of Westerly addresses RI Health’s requirement of an inner protective radius around public water supply wells in chapter 251-27 of the municipal code, entitled Protection of public water supply wells. The code defines a 400-foot radius around public water supply wells located in the town, in which any development that would change the state of the area (e.g. dwellings, barns, etc.) and/or the introduction or deposit of contaminating substances (e.g. liquid or solid waste, stormwater drainage, pesticides, etc.) are prohibited. Westerly’s *Water Supply System Management Plan Update (2001)* indicates that the Town owns and controls the land around each well head and that the Town has acquired land within the 400-foot radius.

#### *Aquifer Recharge Overlay District*

One source water protection tool is a groundwater zoning overlay district (aquifer recharge overlay zone). The value of such an overlay district depends on the permitted uses and performance standards required within the zone. Both Stonington, Connecticut, and Westerly have established groundwater zoning overlay districts in their zoning codes.

The Westerly Aquifer Protection Overlay District was designed to encompass the three WHPAs as well as the identified aquifer recharge areas within the town. However, the footprint of the overlay district does not fully correspond to the footprint of the current RIDEM WHPAs (see Map GW-1 Groundwater). By ordinance, Westerly prohibits some high-risk land uses within the overlay district, such as gas stations, dry cleaners and photo processing and requires an Aquifer Protection Permit for certain other land uses. The permit application requires more detailed information to be provided about the proposed project by the applicant. Westerly’s ordinance does not include performance measures. The Town of Stonington also has a Groundwater Protection Overlay District in its zoning code. The Stonington ordinance (2005) prohibits the siting of high-risk land uses and new underground storage tanks in groundwater protection areas. It also includes performance measures.

Acquisition of open space lands in the Town’s designated aquifer protection area began in 1989, with the acquisition of a 229-acre Town Forest. Since 1991, the Town’s Utilities Division has acquired several tracts in the vicinity of the Bradford wellfield. In 2004, the Westerly Land Trust purchased the 500-acre open space Grills Preserve, which is comprised almost entirely of stratified drift aquifer adjacent to the Pawcatuck River. Table 4-1 below provides a general overview of the information presented in sections 4.2 through 4.5.

**Table 4-1 Summary of Water Quality, Management and Protection by Resource**

|                 | Resource   | Water Quality Status | Issues   | Stressors  | Organization(s)  |
|-----------------|--|----------------------|--|--|--|
| Coastal Ponds   | Maschaug Pond  | Unknown              | Unknown  | Failing or substandard septic systems, Stormwater runoff, Development  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>CRMC</u></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>• Salt Ponds Region SAMP</li> <li>• <u>RIDEM</u></li> <li>• RI Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program</li> <li>• <u>Salt Ponds Coalition</u></li> <li>• <u>Town of Westerly</u></li> <li>• Onsite Wastewater Management Plan</li> </ul>  |
|                 | Quonochontaug Pond                                     | Good                 | Increasing bacteria, Increasing nutrients, Low dissolved oxygen                                |  |  |
|                 | Winnapaug Pond   | Somewhat impaired    | High bacteria, Nitrate concentrations  |  |  |
| Pawcatuck River | Lower (tidal) <sup>1</sup>                             | Impaired             | High lead levels, Heavy metal pollutants, High bacteria, Low dissolved oxygen, No shellfishing | Bradford Dye Sewage Treatment Facility, Stormwater and urban runoff, Failing septic systems, Farms and wild animals, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EPA</li> <li>• Federal Clean Water Act §303(d)</li> <li>• <u>CRMC</u></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <u>RIDEM Office of Water Resources</u></li> <li>• List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• <u>RIRC</u></li> <li>• River Policy and Classification Plan</li> <li>• <u>Pawcatuck River Estuary</u></li> <li>• <u>Little Narragansett Bay Management Interstate Management Plan</u></li> <li>• <u>WPWA</u></li> <li>• <u>Salt Ponds Coalition</u></li> <li>• <u>Nature Conservancy</u></li> <li>• <u>URI Watershed Watch Program</u></li> </ul> |
|                 | Upper (from Meeting House Bridge upwards) <sup>2</sup> | Impaired             | High bacteria, Elevated lead, Nitrate concentrations   |  |  |

## Chapter 4– Natural Resources

2016 Draft Comprehensive Plan

|             |                  |         |  |  |  |
|-------------|------------------|---------|--|--|--|
| Wetlands    | All              | Unknown | Small wetland areas subject to encroachment by development                 | Stormwater runoff  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• 2006 List of Impaired Waters</li> <li>• RI Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast</li> <li>• Salt Ponds Region SAMP</li> </ul>   |
|             | Ashaway Aquifer  | Good    |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">RIDEM Office of Water Resources</a></li> <li>• Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality</li> <li>• Rules and Regulations Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems</li> <li>• RIDEM establishes footprint of groundwater reservoirs, groundwater recharge areas and WPAs</li> <li>• RI Wellhead Protection Program</li> <li>• <a href="#">RI Department of Health</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">EPA</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Town of Westerly</a></li> <li>• Water Facilities Plan</li> <li>• Onsite Wastewater Management Plan</li> <li>• Water Supply System Management Plan</li> <li>• <a href="#">URI Cooperative Extension</a></li> <li>• Westerly Source Water Assessment</li> </ul> |
|             | Bradford Aquifer | Good    | Localized contamination , Elevated levels of nitrates and bacteria, Spills | Development in recharge zones, Failing septic systems, Road salt |  |
| Groundwater | Westerly Aquifer | Good    |  |  |  |
|             | All              | Unknown | Storm erosion, Flooding  | Population pressure, Major storms                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CRMC</a></li> <li>• CRMP</li> <li>• <a href="#">Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)</a></li> </ul>   |
| Beaches     |                  |         |  |  |  |

<sup>1</sup> includes Little Narragansett Bay

<sup>2</sup> includes Chapman Pond

### 4.6 Agriculture, Farmland, Aquaculture, Natural Vegetation and Habitats

#### 4.6.1 Agriculture and Farmland Soils

Agriculture in Westerly is valued for its provision of fresh food, economic contributions, contribution to the town’s rural character and its role in the maintenance and protection of open space. According to the Assessment Department, there are four large-scale working farms within the town – Everbreeze Farm, Hillandale Farms, Manfredi Farm and Ocean Breeze Farm. These farms raise horses and egg-producing chickens, cattle, cows, goats, swine, sheep and other livestock for meat, dairy and/or fiber, vegetables, corn, potatoes, apples, herbs, flowers, hay, compost and firewood for sale. Organic farming is increasing in popularity locally, as consumers demonstrate a willingness to pay increased prices to know where and how their food is grown. Many local farmers sell wholesale and local grocers, restaurants and florists have begun to work with local farmers in farm-to-table and farm-to-shop agreements that benefit both the farms and the retailers. More information on the economic impact of the local agricultural sector can be read in the Economic Vitality chapter.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) classifies soil within the US and compiles the information in Soil Surveys. The USDA Soil Survey identifies soil types considered *prime farmland* or *farmland of statewide importance*. Identification of prime and important farmland is useful to land use planning. When prime and important farmlands are lost to industrial and urban uses, agriculture becomes relegated to marginal lands that may be more erodible, more prone to drought, less productive, or less easily cultivated. Of the 65 soil types within the town, 18 types (2,212 acres, or 11 percent of the town) are considered *prime farmland*, as defined by the USDA. Additionally, 11 soil types (2,008 acres or 10 percent of the town) are considered *farmland of statewide importance*. The three large-scale working farms in Westerly are located on soils considered to be prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance. The **Farm Soils map (FS-1)** indicates all areas in town which contain prime farmland soils and soils of statewide importance as identified through soils data provided by Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS). The locations of these soils were not limited to undeveloped areas as it possible new agricultural operations, such as farms, may be established in the future on land which may currently be used residentially. The map also shows lands actively used for agricultural activity through inclusion of RIGIS’ land cover/land use dataset based on spring 2011 orthophotography. Rhode Island’s Farmland Preservation Act allows the state to identify and acquire development rights in order to maintain farming, productive open space, and groundwater recharge areas. Three of the farms in Westerly, Everbreeze Farm, Ocean Breeze Farm, and Hillandale Farm have been protected from future development through the purchase

of agricultural development rights. A fourth area, Silver Farm, is protected by agricultural development rights but is not in active farming use.

### 4.6.2 Aquaculture

. Aquaculture has been growing very rapidly in Rhode Island. According to RIDEM, aquaculture in the state has nearly doubled in the past few years and the south shore salt ponds have been one of the major focuses for this industry. Westerly's salt ponds are nearly ideal environments for shellfish cultivation, with Eastern Oyster being the largest cash crop. Watch Hill Oysters now has 12 acres of oysters under cultivation in Winnapaug Pond.

While aquaculture is a basic economic activity for the community (bringing dollars into the local economy) and aquaculture has favorable growth potential, the activity also has the potential to interfere with other uses of the salt ponds. Aquaculture tracts become off limits to recreational users and displace public uses of coastal pond waters. Westerly needs to evaluate the trade-offs associated with aquaculture expansion to balance the economic benefits of aquaculture against the potential recreational losses.

### 4.6.3 Wetlands

Wetlands perform valuable ecological functions. They remove nutrients, pollutants and sediments from surface water runoff, recharge water supplies, reduce shoreline erosion and flood risks and provide fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, aesthetic benefits, sites for research and education and commercial fishery benefits.

The Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) maintains a geographical database of wetlands in Rhode Island. These wetlands are classified according to the *US Fish and Wildlife Service's Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States*. Wetlands are classified based on their overall wetness and the characteristics of their soils and plants. The most abundant freshwater wetland type in the Town of Westerly, and also within the State, is forested wetlands dominated by the presence of woody vegetation 20 feet or taller in height. Westerly has approximately 2,905 acres of forested wetlands (approximately 15 percent of the town). Additionally, within Westerly, there are approximately 608 acres of scrub-shrub wetland (3 percent of the town), 151 acres of freshwater emergent wetlands (0.75 percent of the town), and 303 acres of estuarine emergent wetlands (1.5 percent of the town). The **Ecological Communities map (EC-1)** uses a dataset contributed by Photo Science, Inc. to RIGIS which, like many other maps included in this Plan, is based on orthophotography captured in spring 2011. The ecological communities shown on this map are classes (including wetland classes) introduced by the *Rhode Island Ecological Communities Classification* published in October 2011. RIECC is available to read at <http://www.rinhs.org/wp-content/uploads/ricommclass.pdf> and contains

simple descriptions of each community. Developed land classes were grouped together to better highlight non-developed ecological communities and are shown in greater detail in the **Land Cover 2011 map (LC-1)**.

Legislation to protect and regulate the use of wetlands exists at the federal and state levels of government. RIDEM regulates freshwater wetlands through the Rules and Regulations Governing the Administration and Enforcement of Fresh Water Wetlands Act. Coastal wetlands are regulated by the CRMC through the Rules and Regulations Governing the Protection and Management of Freshwater Wetlands in the Vicinity of the Coast, as well as through the CRMP and the Salt Pond Region SAMP. Freshwater wetlands include bogs, flood plains, ponds, marshes, riverbanks, rivers, streams and other areas as defined in the regulations. The CRMC addresses coastal wetlands including salt marshes and coastal freshwater or brackish wetlands contiguous to salt marshes. RIDEM and CRMC prohibit filling of, or other alterations, to wetlands. RIDEM and CRMC require permits for and evaluate all proposed projects that may alter the natural character of wetlands and their functions and/or values. Westerly does not have any additional wetland regulations or requirements besides those of RIDEM and CRMC.

In addition to government regulation, some of the best protection for wetlands has been provided through acquisition and conservation easements by private and public land protection programs.<sup>27</sup> Nearly all mapped figures, including those referenced in this chapter, show the location of wetlands. The **Conservation Land map (CON-1)** offers a visual overview of non-state conservation lands and state conservation lands in respect to wetlands. Approximately 1,356 acres, or 34 percent of the total wetlands in Westerly, fall within these conservation areas. These areas include state and town-owned land, and private and public land trust holdings. The purposes of the acquisitions include preservation of open spaces, habitat conservation, agricultural land preservation, recreation and well-head protection. Given these varied purposes, the location of a wetland within a conservation area doesn't guarantee its stewardship or the protection of wetland functions. The wetlands will still be affected by land use activities within the conservation land as well as by adjacent land uses.

In an effort to monitor and assess the ecological health of freshwater wetlands, RIDEM recently initiated the *Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*. The goal of the wetland monitoring and assessment is to improve wetland protection and management by understanding the cumulative impacts of human activities on wetland condition. This RIDEM

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<sup>27</sup> Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 3

program is in the development phase and the wetland monitoring and assessment activities will be phased in over the next five years.

#### 4.6.4 Buffer Zones

Buffer zones, or vegetated areas adjacent to rivers, streams, ponds, wetlands and coastal waters, are important landscape features that help to prevent erosion and control the transport of sediment into the adjacent wetlands and water bodies. Buffer zones are valuable for removing pollutants and excess nutrients from surface water runoff and, in some cases, from the underlying groundwater. They also provide valuable wildlife habitat. Residential and commercial development removes considerable areas of vegetation from the landscape and increases impervious areas. The cumulative effects of many individual non-vegetated areas can result in increased sedimentation to surface waters, and less removal of pollutants from surface and groundwater.<sup>28</sup> RIDEM and the CRMC have programs in place to protect riparian buffers. RIDEM wetlands include a 50-foot perimeter wetland area and 100- and 200-foot riverbank wetlands adjacent to rivers and streams depending on the width of the watercourse. For coastal areas, CRMC policy requires coastal buffer zones for certain new/improved residential development and proposed commercial and industrial development.

The Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC) published a report in January 2005 entitled *Establishment of Riparian and Shoreline Buffers and the Taxation of Property Included in the Buffers: A Report to the Governor, President of the Senate and Speaker of the House*. The report outlines a series of recommendations for the improved protection of riparian and shoreline buffers.

In September 2005 (and revised March 2006), RIDEM initiated a new effort to monitor and assess the ecological health of freshwater wetlands, *the Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*. to address some of the concerns outlined in RIRC’s buffer report. This RIDEM program is in the development phase and will hopefully contribute to the protection and restoration of riparian and shoreline buffers. The wetland monitoring and assessment activities will be phased in over the next five years.

#### 4.6.5 Terrestrial Habitat

Trees and woody shrubs are an essential component of wildlife habitat, producing vegetative materials in the form of nuts, seeds, fruits, twigs, buds and foliage for consumption by herbivorous wildlife. In addition, trees and shrubs themselves provide habitat for insects and other prey animals that are consumed by many other forms of wildlife. The diversity and pattern

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<sup>28</sup> Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island’s Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Chapter 8, p. 5

of forests is one of the primary factors determining which types and where wildlife live in a terrestrial environment. The structure and form of the vegetation in the forest and other early successional habitats is the critical component of habitat for wildlife. Few wildlife species live exclusively in terrestrial upland. Most utilize adjacent wetlands in some way that may include a source of drinking water, a travel corridor, or an escape cover when disturbed by predators.<sup>29</sup>

Forested conservation areas in Westerly include the Town Forest, Riverwood, Bradford Dye/Grills Preserve, Bradford Preserve, Newton Swamp Management Area and Woody Hill Management Area. Management and planning efforts for the conservation of terrestrial habitat include those discussed in the Wetlands and Open Space and Recreation sections of this Plan.

#### *4.6.6 Coastal Features*

##### *Barriers, Beaches and Dunes*

The southern coast of Westerly includes a string of salt ponds, wetlands, barrier beaches and dunes, rocky shores and bluffs. The barriers are narrow strips of land that occur parallel to the coastline and are separated from the mainland by a coastal salt pond or tidal wetland feature. They are comprised of unconsolidated materials, mostly sands and gravel, and contain a vegetated dune. These habitats are dynamic and change in shape and extent along with extremes in tides and catastrophic storm events. Vegetation is generally sparse and scattered along upper zones of the beach. Trapping of windblown sands by dune grass or artificial fencing contribute to the growth and development of dunes.<sup>30</sup> The Salt Pond SAMP explains that the natural cyclical patterns of sand placement, dune/beach shape and profile is dynamic and that it is not feasible, desirable nor appropriate to attempt to stabilize or fight the constantly changing barrier beach shoreline.<sup>31</sup> In December 2015, CRMC published the draft *Shoreline Change Special Area Management Plan* known colloquially as the “Beach SAMP”. The SAMP provides guidance and tools for state and local decision makers to plan for, prepare for, absorb, recover from, and successfully adapt to the impacts of coastal storms, erosion, and sea level rise. This Westerly Comprehensive Plan supports and reinforces the Beach SAMP by applying the research, tools and strategies presented in the SAMP to future coastal land use decisions in Westerly.

##### *Shoreline Change SAMP*

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<sup>29</sup> Ernst, Laura M., Laura K. Miguel, and Jeff Willis, April 1999, Rhode Island’s Salt Pond Region: A Special Area Management Plan (Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds), Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, Chapter 5, p. 25

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Chapter 5, p. 24

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Chapter 6, p. 6

Figure 4-6, Coastal Features, shows the location of these important coastal resources. Westerly’s beaches include:

- Sandy Point
- Napatree Point Conservation Area and Beach
- Watch Hill Bathing Beach
- East (Maschaug) Beach
- Misquamicut State Beach
- Town Beach
- Wuskenau Beach
- Dunes Park Beach
- Quonochontaug Beach
- Fenway Beach

Westerly’s coastal areas are highly prized for their recreational opportunities, as places to establish residences, and for the habitat functions they provide. These values are often conflicting, which presents challenges for the management and protection of these resources. The preservation of this land as public or private open space has the benefits of providing public recreation opportunities and protecting the visual character of the area for residents, while also conserving critical wildlife habitat and minimizing economic losses associated with storm damage. Barrier beaches, however, have proved difficult to police and maintain, and, with several notable exceptions, there have not been sufficient funds available for appropriate walkover structures, foredune zone management, beach replenishment and education.<sup>32</sup>

Sandy Point is a 35-acre barrier island, in Little Narragansett Bay, managed as a wildlife refuge by the Avalonia Land Conservancy and is accessible only by boat or kayak. Since 2015, Sandy Point is actively monitored by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of the National Refuge System. Napatree Point and Napatree Beach are managed as the Napatree Point Conservation Area by the Watch Hill Fire District and the Watch Hill Conservancy (co-owners) in cooperation with the USFWS for protection of the federally-threatened piping plover. Maschaug Beach, owned by the Misquamicut Club, is also managed in cooperation with USFWS for piping plover protection. Significant areas around Winnapaug Pond are held in public or private conservation – Lathrop Wildlife Refuge and Winnapaug Salt Marsh on the northern shore are managed by the Audubon Society of Rhode Island and Misquamicut State Beach and Westerly’s two town beaches are public beaches located on the heavily-developed barrier which forms the southern side of Winnapaug Pond. Dune Park and Watch Hill are also publicly accessible beaches. The Quonochontaug barrier within Westerly includes conservation areas managed by the Weekapaug

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Fire District, the Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation and the Nopes Island Conservation Association. Fenway Beach is managed by the Weekapaug Fire District.

### *Bluffs and Rocky Shores*

In addition to beaches and dunes, Westerly’s south shore is characterized by areas of coastal bluffs and rocky shores. Two areas of coastal bluffs include Watch Hill, where more than a mile of low profile bluffs extend east toward Maschaug Pond, and at Weekapaug Point (locally referred to as ‘the overlook’ or ‘the lookout’). Small areas of rocky shoreline occur at Napatree Point, Watch Hill Point and Weekapaug Point.

#### *4.6.1 Rare Species and Unique Habitats*

The Town of Westerly covers an area with many varied habitats ranging from barriers, salt water and brackish ponds, tidal marshes, freshwater wetlands, rivers and streams, upland fields and woodlands. A number of valuable water resources in the watershed provide unique habitats for numerous rare and endangered species. About 70% of Rhode Island’s globally rare species (generally found at fewer than 100 sites worldwide) and 63% of the state rare species and natural community occurrences (such as rare plants and animals) are found within the Pawcatuck Watershed.<sup>33</sup> RIDEM’s Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program (RINHP) tracks the state’s rare species and natural communities of conservation concern. The RINHP has developed lists of species, both plant and animal, considered to be endangered or threatened at the federal level, endangered or threatened at the state level or of special concern in the state. These data sources are used to prioritize land protection activities throughout the public and private sectors. The RINHP has identified several sites in Westerly that are natural communities of conservation concern and where rare species are known to exist.

The **Natural Heritage Areas map (NHA-1)** shows the statistically significant Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) which existed in Westerly as contributed to RIGIS by RIDEM in spring 2016. NHAs are areas where there have been a notably dense number of observations of a community or nesting site of rare or threatened species as listed by Rhode Island or the United States or of a species deemed noteworthy by Rhode Island.

### *Pawcatuck River*

The Pawcatuck River and its tributaries support 40 species of fish including freshwater, anadromous (live in salt water and enter fresh water to spawn) and catadromous (live in fresh water and enter salt water to spawn) species. These species include striped bass, white perch,

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<sup>33</sup> Pawcatuck Watershed Partnership, 1998, The Pawcatuck Watershed Report, p. 4

smelt, alewives, shad and salmon, and wild and stocked populations of brook trout. The anadromous Atlantic salmon is listed as a federal endangered species. Fish passage restoration projects and the removal of the Bradford and White Rock dams have restored anadromous alewife, American shad, sea-run brown trout and rainbow smelt to the river. Small returns of adult Atlantic salmon have also been achieved.<sup>34</sup> Phantom Bog, located along the north shore of the Pawcatuck River at the northeast corner of Westerly, is the site of several rare species and communities of special emphasis or concern in the region. In December 2014, the United States Congress passed the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Protection Act directing the National Park Service (NPS) to study seven rivers within the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed, including the Pawcatuck River, to determine their eligibility for designation as Wild and Scenic. Earlier in that year, NPS had preliminarily found the Pawcatuck Watershed to be likely eligible based on a reconnaissance survey. In spring 2015, NPS signed a cooperative agreement with WPWA to facilitate the three-year study of eligibility. A Wild and Scenic Study Committee to identify Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) was established by WPWA and began meeting in December 2015.

#### *Crandall Swamp*

Crandall Swamp is a major wetland complex dominated by Atlantic white cedar and red maple swamps, but it also contains marsh, bog and open water habitats. The boundary of Crandall Swamp includes Chapman Pond and adjacent wetlands, Phantom Bog, and adjoining portions of the Pawcatuck River. It is one of the largest freshwater wetlands in Rhode Island, about 2,000 acres in size, and contains one of the most extensive stands of Atlantic white cedar in the state, along with a great diversity of wetland vegetation. Unfortunately, Crandall Pond is also afflicted with invasive aquatic species including Spiny Naiad, American Lotus, Eurasian Milfoil, and Water Chestnut. Efforts at physical removal have proven largely ineffective at controlling these infestations and there is a need for more effective long-term strategies.

Crandall Swamp is also important as a groundwater resource and flood control area for the Pawcatuck River. A variety of mammals, amphibians, waterfowl and other waterbirds frequently utilize this pond and swamp complex including several rare species. Bird species nesting here include osprey, bitterns (state endangered and state threatened) and herons (state species of concern). The osprey population is of special significance.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dillingham, Timothy P., et al, July 1993, The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan, pp. 70-72

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp. 70-72

### *The Coastal Environment*

Salt ponds provide important ecosystem and habitat functions. These include prime habitat for commercial and recreational fin and shellfish, resting and feeding stops for waterfowl migrating along the Atlantic flyway and nursery areas for fish that spend the remainder of their life cycle at sea or in fresh waters. Many wildlife species found elsewhere in the state are present in the salt ponds region, in addition to the many species that are dependent upon the salt ponds' specialized habitats, such as salt marsh or brackish wetlands. Habitat fragmentation occurs within the salt pond watersheds and is impacting wildlife species.

There are over 100 species of finfish and shellfish that utilize the salt ponds at some stage of their life cycle. The most popular species, the quahogs, oysters and flounder, are all declining. The available information suggests that the habitat on which these fish and shellfish species depend is also declining.

The diversity of habitats found within the salt pond watersheds supports a variety of birds, both year-round residents and migratory species. Shorebirds are one group that depends significantly on the salt ponds habitats. The piping plover, which nests along the south shore barriers, is a federally threatened species. Documented nesting occurs at several sites along the south shore, including Maschaug Pond and Napatree Point. USFWS maintains lists of bird species classified as Nongame Migratory Bird Species of Management Concern in the continental United States. Species from this list occurring in the Salt Ponds Region include the Seaside Sparrow, Northern Harrier, American Bittern and Black Rail. The first three species are state listed rare species. Waterfowl (i.e., plovers, ducks and geese) are common inhabitants of the salt ponds and use the area most heavily during migration and wintering periods. The American Black Duck is considered a species of concern by USFWS. Numbers of waterfowl recorded during counts made within the past five years pale when compared to historical accounts made prior to man-made impacts, such as breachways, that have affected the food source for many of these birds.

Many mammal species can be found within the diverse habitats of the Salt Ponds Region. These include meadow voles, white-footed mice, rabbits, chipmunks, squirrels, skunks, bats, red and gray fox, raccoons, muskrat, minks, ermines, fisher, martin, river otters, white-tailed deer, coyotes and a small but increasing winter population of seals.<sup>36</sup>

#### *4.6.7 Habitat Protection*

The main threat to wildlife habitat is the development of land for human uses. Natural threats such as hurricanes and invasive species can also contribute to the loss of quality wildlife habitat.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid. Chapter 5, pp. 15-16

The clearing of land for construction and development destroys native vegetation and its natural moderating effects, resulting in increased velocity and quantity of water runoff. Wetland filling and alteration impacts the ecological function of the remaining wetlands. Constructions of breachways and associated dredging have changed the ecology, chemistry and biology of the salt ponds by increasing the rate at which sand accumulates within them and altering their salinity and flushing characteristics.

Numerous regulations and planning documents have been developed with the goal of protecting wildlife habitat. Many of these have already been discussed in previous sections of this Natural Resources chapter. Regulations at the state level include the RIDEM and CRMC wetlands regulations mentioned in the Wetlands section of this chapter. Regulations specific to the Westerly area include the CRMC's Salt Pond Region SAMP. Within the SAMP, policies to protect fish and wildlife habitat include prohibiting the disturbance of winter flounder spawning grounds during the spawning season (between the months from December through May) and prohibiting the alteration or disturbance of piping plover habitats during nesting. Planning efforts at the State and watershed level include the RIDEM's *Rhode Island Freshwater Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Plan*, the RIRC's *River Policy and Classification Plan*, and the *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy* (see Open Space and Conservation Land section of this Plan).

## 5 Infrastructure and Energy

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan contains a written inventory of existing and forecasted infrastructural needs for the public, including potable water, stormwater management, sanitary sewer system, telecommunications and energy. Three maps are also included in this Plan to provide visual references for the infrastructural components mentioned above and expounded upon in the subsequent sections of this chapter. The **Groundwater map (GW-1)** identifies several features related to groundwater including public wells, community and non-community wellhead protection areas (portions of aquifers through which groundwater moves to a public community or non-community well), groundwater reservoirs (significant subsurface water sources defined by the [Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management \(RIDEM\)](#)) and groundwater recharge areas (areas intended to be protected drinking water sources). The Office of Water Resources, an office of RIDEM, contributed the datasets used to produce this map. The **Sewer and Water Infrastructure map (SF-1)** shows several components of the infrastructure system existing in Westerly as well as the service areas which delineate their current expanses. The datasets were contributed by RIDEM, the [Rhode Island Department of Transportation \(RIDOT\)](#) and the [United States Geological Survey \(USGS\)](#). Along with roadways and rail lines, SF-1 also shows water supply and sewer lines, public water service districts, sewer service areas, public wells and wastewater discharges. These infrastructural components are concentrated primarily within the Urban Services Boundary identified by the state in [Land Use 2025](#). The **Impervious Cover map (IC-1)** shows all land in the community which was covered by impervious surface, such as pavement, as identified through orthophotography taken in spring 2011 and contributed by RIDEM and Photo Science, Inc. to the [Rhode Island Geographic Information System \(RIGIS\)](#). The inability for these human-created surfaces to allow for the permeation of water results in overland flow which requires proper drainage to mitigate the potential for flooding.

### 5.2 Water System

Westerly's water system is a self-sustaining enterprise fund owned by the Town and operated by the Public Works Department's Utilities Division. This system serves most of the Town of Westerly as well as a portion of the village of Pawcatuck in neighboring Stonington, Connecticut. Only a small portion of the Town (approximately 6% of users) is dependent on private wells due to the remote location of some residences. In May 2013 (final draft submitted in November 2014), C&E Engineering Partners, Inc. prepared the [Water Supply System Management Plan](#) which described existing conditions and included a long-range program to improve the quality and quantity of water.

Water studies are conducted on five-year cycles and results are submitted to both Rhode Island and Connecticut (each state's Department of Health) for evaluation. Along with the information

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provided below, a description of wellhead and aquifer protection can also be found in the Natural Resources chapter.

#### Water Source

Westerly's drinking water is obtained from wells which tap into the Bradford and Westerly groundwater reservoirs and pump from 11 supply wells at six pumping stations. Generators are provided at several wells to ensure a constant supply of water is available in the event of a power failure. Pumping stations each have their own chemical feed pits where potassium hydroxide (KOH) is added to the raw water to adjust the pH (a measurement of how acidic or basic water is). Water is stored in six storage facilities before being distributed for use. Generally, the quality of the water is good; however, in four separate past incidents (in 1994, 1998, 2000 and 2017) the water became contaminated with fecal coliform, prompting the state to mandate some form of disinfection.

The Town successfully completed a pilot program for a Mixed-Oxidants (MIOX) disinfection system and transitioned to full implementation in autumn 2009. Westerly was the first town in Rhode Island authorized to conduct a year-long, full system test on water supply using the MIOX technology.

#### Supply

The Town has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of its groundwater reserves. The conclusion has been that its existing sites at White Rock, Bradford II, Bradford III and Crandall Swamp provide sufficient capacity. To further enhance the Town's reserves however, Bradford IV was permitted in 2007 and became operational in October 2013 with a half-million gallons per day (mgd) capacity. The Town has implemented a program for hydraulic modeling which is used to ensure expected results are occurring within the water supply system. The volume of water the Town pumps into the system varies widely throughout the year due to seasonal requirements, residents and visitors. As reported by the Utilities Division, the Town pumps three mgd from November to March and increases this volume to between four and six mgd from April to October due to the influx of seasonal residents and visitors.

The Town has actively acquired land (specifically lots 1 and 5 on Assessor's plat 43, lot 1 on Assessor's plat 52 and lots 2, 7 and 7A on Assessor's plat 53) for aquifer protection with the acquisition funded most notably through the Rhode Island Water Resources Board Grant program. As noted previously, Westerly also provides some water service to the Town of Stonington. While this has generally been a mutually beneficial arrangement, the level of future demand from Stonington is unknown and could possibly pose significant future implications. Westerly also owns water rights on land in the Town of North Stonington in Connecticut with proven water capacity of about 1 mgd.

### Drought Management

The State Planning Council adopted [\*Rhode Island Water 2030\*](#) in 2012 which includes a drought management Plan addressing drought mitigation to establish coordinated procedures for a statewide response to severe drought episodes. It outlines the responsibility of federal, state and local entities and defines the roles these entities are to play in response to long-term drought conditions.

The drought management plan policies, goals and strategies should be viewed within the context of the four over-arching goals of the Town's *Water Supply Management Plan*, which seeks to assure:

- Protection of public health, safety and welfare
- Conservation of essential drinking water resources
- Reasonable allocation of water supply
- Support of essential and high priority water uses

One requirement of the Drought Management Plan is that water suppliers that obtain, transport, purchase, or sell more than 50 million gallons of water per year, such as Westerly, are classified as large water suppliers and must develop a Water Supply Systems Management Plan (WSSMP). Westerly's WSSMP is the previously mentioned study (*Water Supply Management Plan*) prepared by C&E Engineering.

This study functions as the master plan for the water system, addressing adequacy of water supply, the water distribution system, conservation measures, watershed protection, capital improvements and emergency preparedness. In the emergency operations management section of their WSSMP's, water suppliers are required to address drought contingencies and appropriate response. In addition, the Regulations of the Water Resources Board require that a WSSMP include an emergency component to assess system risks and response capabilities, and to describe a contingency plan for all foreseeable water supply emergencies. Suppliers are required to identify system risks, including droughts, that exceed the water supply system's design capacity. They are also required to identify their response to specific water supply emergencies.

Specific drought response activities described in Volume II of the Westerly WSSMP include procedures for the designation of a water supply alert followed by criteria and procedures for several drought phases including the following:

- Drought Watch/Advisory Phase
- Conservation Phase
- Expanded Restriction Phase.

#### Emergency Phase Distribution System

Domestic water within the Westerly Water District is pumped through an extensive network of pipes totaling approximately 207 miles in length. Pipe sizes range from 1.25 to 20 inches and all are maintained by the Town. Pipe materials vary by age and primarily include cast iron, ductile iron and polyvinyl chloride (PVC); small lengths of piping are also made of asbestos-cement and high-density polyethylene (HDPE). In 2009, a 20-inch water main was constructed over a 2.6-mile distance from the White Rock pumping station to Granite Street due to a previous inability of the Town to access the full capacity of the White Rock wells. The improvement added two mgd (a 33% increase to capacity) to the distribution system capacity. There were 921 public hydrants located throughout Westerly as of spring 2016, almost all of which have been replaced and upgraded over the past 30 years.

#### System Improvements

Some sections of the water distribution system in Westerly are well over a century old. Extensive investments have been made and continue to be made to extend the system's useful life. Improvements are funded in the Utilities Division's Capital Improvement Program (CIP), which is a list of all known upcoming capital improvements within a projected five-year period. Improvement projects have historically included the construction of a new one million gallon Winnapaug Tank, the Winnapaug Tank site lead remediation, addition of a new pump station and well in Bradford, design of a new main extension on Westerly-Bradford Road, the Tower Street Tank rehabilitation and lead soil remediation and the new White Rock Transmission Main. There was also a major pipeline evacuation study completed by C&E Engineering Partners, Inc. in May 2009, including a hydraulic analysis, to establish priorities for upgrading and establishing a long-term replacement schedule. Other completed projects have included:

- Exterior and interior painting of the Bradford tank in 2009
- A complete electrical upgrade and new standby gas generator for White Rock pump station 3 in May 2012
- Well redevelopment and inspections of wells 2B, 2D, 3, Bradford III and Crandall in 2012
- Power washing of the Winnapaug and Bradford tanks in November 2013
- Well redevelopment and inspections of wells 1A, 1B, 1D, 2A, 2C and Bradford II in 2013
- Masonry repairs to the Hinkley Hill tank's concrete structure in June 2014
- A new roof system for White Rock pump station 1 in September 2014
- Water main replacements on Bay Street, Oak Street and Watch Hill Road

In the fiscal year 2015-2016, the Utilities Division:

- Replaced 2,214 feet of water mains and 17 lead services

- Installed 800 feet of 8-inch water main to the Westerly Pee-Wee Football Complex and 16 new water services across the town
- Redeveloped wells 1A, 1B, 1D, 2A, 2C and Bradford II
- Started a Lead Soil Removal project for properties surrounding the Tower Street Tank
- Contracted with GeoInsight to complete [studies on the Bradford and Westerly aquifers](#)
- Added 823 meters to the Radio Read System
- Repaired 77 water breaks
- Completed two rounds of [Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule \(UCMR\)](#) testing for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Future projects include the continuation of the Town's water main replacement, hydrant replacement, water meter replacement and lead service line replacement program as well as interior water tank cleanings and exterior water tank painting. All of these projects ensure Westerly has an ample supply of high-quality water into the future.

### Services

There are approximately 14,500 service connections to the Westerly water system currently. Every residential, commercial, industrial and governmental service connection is metered and bills are sent out based on the volume of water used. The budget for the Utilities Division is prepared to incorporate all operating costs and the set water rates are calculated to ensure users pay for all department costs.

### 5.3 Sanitary Sewer System

Westerly, also through a self-sustaining enterprise fund, owns and operates a wastewater collection and treatment system which services approximately 45% of the Town's parcels. Of all residential parcels, approximately 40% use public sewers and about 60% use individual onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS). The Town has not extended sewer service in several years while some private developers have extended sewers in conjunction with completing related development projects.

The wastewater in areas not serviced by sewers has been accommodated in many ways, including cesspools and OWTS installed during time periods when no regulations existed or when there were minimal local regulations. Later systems were installed under regulations of Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) relating to Individual Septic Disposal Systems including the Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems.

Recommended improvements to the treatment plant and the existing collection system were completed in September 2008. Additionally, the Bradford Road pump station was replaced in

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2011. Westerly has one wastewater treatment plant which discharges effluent through a 24-inch diameter outfall pipe into the Pawcatuck River. The plant's discharge is regulated by RIDEM through its Rhode Island Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (RIPDES) program. Effluent standards are based on the water quality classification of the receiving water body (in this case, the Pawcatuck River) and are regulated by RIDEM's Water Quality Regulations. A *Wastewater Facilities Plan* was prepared for the Town in November 1998 and revised in December 1999 by BETA Engineering, Inc. (now BETA Group, Inc.). The plan addressed deficiencies within the existing sewer collection system and sewage treatment plant as well as any deficiencies or problems in areas of the community without public sewer.

#### Capacity

The wastewater treatment plant was built in 1920 and has had modifications and upgrades made in the late 1950s, 1979, 1986 and 1992. There was also a major upgrade in 2003 for biological nutrient removal and replacement of equipment dating from the 1970s.

The plant is currently designed to treat an average flow of 3.3 million gallons per day (mgd) and a peak hourly flow of 7.8 mgd. The plant is at 66.7% of capacity and averaged 2.2 mgd in fiscal year 2014. The plant currently has capacity for all currently proposed and approved subdivisions within the sewer district. The Town is also working to limit the amount of groundwater infiltration in the system. The Town has been using video cameras inserted into sewer pipes to look for broken pipe which are then lined, sealed or replaced to seal off inflow as needed.

There are nine active wastewater pumping stations in the Town. The four major sewer pump stations (one on Beach Street, one on Margin Street and two on Canal Street) have all been rebuilt since 2003 and each is capable of handling current incoming flows. The plant property has room to expand to about 4.4 mgd if the Town makes a decision to extend the sewer district boundaries.

#### On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems

On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS; formerly Individual Sewage Disposal Systems [ISDS]) will likely continue to play an important role in the future of wastewater treatment in Westerly due to the limitations of the Town's sewage treatment system. Unfortunately, negligence, improper operation or unsatisfactory site conditions can lead to failure of an OWTS which would be a potential threat to the health of residents because they contaminate groundwater and cause other environmental damage.

In addition to the regulations referenced above, wastewater systems may also be subject to RIDEM regulations for groundwater quality titled Rules and Regulations for Groundwater Quality; they are not regulated by the Town. These state regulations are designed to protect and restore groundwater resources for drinking water purposes and other beneficial uses and to assure protection of public health, welfare and the environment. BETA Engineering, Inc. prepared an

*On-Site Wastewater Management Plan* in January 2005 (revised in May 2007) which addresses many of the questions regarding OWTS. Additional information on this issue is available from the [New England Onsite Wastewater Training Program](#) at the University of Rhode Island main campus in South Kingstown.

OWTS can have a direct impact on the integrity of both groundwater and surface water sources. Improperly functioning systems can contribute pollutants to the Town's water resources. Therefore, proper septic system function and maintenance is of long term importance for Westerly. For a description on the relationship between OWTS and water quality, visit the Natural Resources chapter. Advances in relatively inexpensive treatment systems and effluent fields have made formerly undevelopable properties now potentially developable and properties of limited development capacity now capable of supporting greater development. Additionally, recent changes in state law have mandated the use of these technologies in vulnerable coastal areas.

### 5.4 Stormwater System

The Town of Westerly owns and maintains a stormwater drainage system with most of the system flowing into the Pawcatuck River or surrounding wetlands. There are no combined sewer overflow (CSO) connections between the sanitary sewer and stormwater drainage system. Most of the system flows by gravity with only a single pump station. There are several new developments in the Town which have created their own storm retention basins or ponds in order to comply with newer stormwater regulations. After a private developer constructs a basin associated with a public improvement, the Town may assume the responsibility for maintenance upon construction to Town design standards and Town acceptance. The Town has an ongoing maintenance program for the storm system which includes cleaning catch basins and pipes and replacing aging pipes and structures.

In 2007, the Town received approval from the [Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council \(CRMC\)](#) to install a municipal storm drainage collection and treatment system serving the Misquamicut area. This system is operational and successfully addressing serious flooding problems which occur during moderate and heavy rainfall.

#### Stormwater Pollution Prevention

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stormwater pollution regulations are applied locally through RIDEM. Communities which operate small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) as defined by population of the community were required in 2003 to obtain permits and establish storm water management programs which reduce the quantity of pollutants able to enter stormwater drainage systems during storm events. The permit, or Notice of Intent (NOI),

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must include a Storm Water Management Program Plan which describes the Best Management Practices (BMPs) for each of the following six measures:

- Public Education and Outreach
- Public Involvement/Participation
- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- Construction Site Runoff Control
- Post Construction Runoff Control
- Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping

Westerly has submitted its NOI to RIDEM for MS4 approval. There were major actions required for the permit – the Town had to map the storm water system and all outfall points, inspect and clean all catch basins and structural BMPs, schedule maintenance and repairs, sample all outfalls and identify and eliminate all illicit connections and discharges. Another stormwater pollution related study is the Phase II Storm Water Management Plan prepared by Fuss & O’Neill, Inc. in March 2004. The Town has received a grant from the [New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission \(NEIWPC\)](#) to establish best management practices which would reduce or eliminate known contaminants and establish recommendations to correct problems where high concentrations have been detected and documented. In this process, recommendations will be made to update the 2004 Phase II Storm Water Management Plan.

### 5.5 Electricity and Natural Gas

Both natural gas and electrical lines in Westerly are currently maintained, owned and provided by National Grid. There is interest among some residents to bury existing utility lines as has been done in certain recent developments. While the cost of doing so has restricted the Town’s ability to conduct such projects, some residents have funded such works in specific locations. An engineering study completed by Watch Hill Conservancy was prepared for the relocation of utility lines below ground along a one-mile segment of the commercial district on Bay Street. The project was nearly complete as of spring 2017, with only streetlight wiring remaining overhead. Bay Street and other roadways with on-street parking, such as those in Downtown, may also be ideal locations for installing electric charging stations to encourage the use of electric and hybrid vehicles.

In April 2015, the Town Council was presented a preliminary estimated savings by the Partnership for Rhode Island Streetlight Management (PRISM) of over \$5 million after a twenty-year period for the municipal purchase and collaborative maintenance of its approximately 3,100 streetlights. PRISM, parented by the Washington County Regional Planning Council (WCRPC), estimated the savings based on filings by the [Public Utilities Commission \(PUC\)](#) and previous experience in other

communities in comparison to the Town's annual payment mandated by the Rate Tariff set by PUC.

As of April 2016, following its joining PRISM, the Town received an updated estimate of between \$147,477 and \$395,600 in savings annually, which would be between \$2.9 and \$7.9 million in savings after twenty years. This was dependent on the purchase of streetlights, conversion from conventional lighting to light emitting diodes (LED) and the type of system the Town might choose to install.

While natural gas service is available in some portions of town, the main transmission line is not adequate to provide town-wide service. Lines run along many of the major roads and can be extended to meet demand. There is a major gate station along a large gas pipeline in Westerly that can supply a significant number of new services as the need arises. It was reported there are approximately 4,000 gas service connections in Westerly. National Grid continues to make routine improvements and upgrades to their distribution system within the Town.

## 5.5 Alternative Energy Production

### 5.5.1 Solar and Wind Proposals

Along with the goal of conserving energy, Westerly has also undertaken efforts to seek means of alternative energy generation. In early autumn 2011, Westerly issued a public request for solar and/or wind energy proposals. Several responses were received and a proposal review committee selected rTerra of Middletown, Rhode Island. Following the Town Council's approval of a contract with rTerra in November 2011, the company conducted feasibility studies on the former landfill site, now closed, and determined the landfill cover was not adequate to support a solar energy installation. At the Town's direction, rTerra then undertook site investigations at 78 White Rock Road, next to Town's Utilities Division building. In April 2012, rTerra submitted a Master Plan/Preliminary application for a one megawatt (MW), 5.5 acre, 4,000 panel solar photovoltaic (PV) system installation on that site. In May 2012, the Planning Board denied sending a favorable advisory to the Zoning Board of Review due to concerns regarding neighborhood integrity, the ease of transferring public land to private enterprises, potential impacts on public wells, potential impacts of high winds on the panels and whether the project was financially advantageous for the Town.

Westerly also pursued the alternative generation of energy through wind turbines. In 2010, the Town Council appointed an Alternate Energy Study Committee (AESC) with an initial charge to review sites feasible for installing a wind turbine, particularly the wastewater treatment plant site on Margin Street. The AESC was also asked to draft a wind turbine ordinance for commercial and residential properties in Westerly. Working with EA Engineering Science and Technology,

Inc. (EA Engineering), the AESC determined that a wind turbine at the wastewater treatment plant site would not be feasible due to interference with flight paths for Westerly Airport.

At the AESC's request, EA Engineering screened 151 Town-owned properties and conducted a fatal flaw analysis for suitable turbine sites. The analysis eliminated sites within extensive forest, wetlands, properties in close proximity to high density residential areas and local flight paths and ultimately identified 12 potentially feasible Town-owned properties. The AESC then sought and received funding from the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation (RIEDC; now the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation [Commerce RI]) to evaluate the sites. Based largely on funding constraints, the AESC chose to do a detailed study of the seven most promising sites:

- Site 1 – 78 White Rock Road (neighboring the Utilities Division building)
- Site 2 - 8 Springbrook Road (Transportation and Bus Garage)
- Site 3 - 49 White Rock Road (Gingerella Sports Complex)
- Site 4 - 20 White Rock Road (neighboring White Rock Pump Station I)
- Site 5 - Bradford Road (Bradford Preserve)
- Site 6 - 39 Westerly-Bradford Road (the Transfer Station, now 39 Larry Hirsch Lane)
- Site 7 - Atlantic Avenue

A more detailed feasibility study concluded Site 6, the existing transfer station, would provide the most advantageous location. The study concluded the wind resource was adequate and the location was well buffered from residential neighborhoods, close to a National Grid substation and favorable relative to the airport runways. The transfer station could also benefit from locally generated power.

### *5.5.2 Net Metering Project*

In March 2016, the Town issued a request for proposals (RFP) seeking to procure up to 100-percent of the 4,073,285 kilowatts per hour (kWh) of electricity used by the Town annually by contracting with a private renewable energy developer to provide electricity from the development of one or more renewable energy projects. The purpose of the RFP was to select a qualified third party renewable energy developer (“Developer”) who would successfully plan, permit, design, install, finance, operate and maintain one or more renewable energy projects at no cost to the Town to build, commission, operate and maintain (potentially excluding routine grounds maintenance).

The RFP was issued in recognition of the benefits and value of renewable energy projects as a means of stabilizing and reducing long-term electricity costs, reducing the Town's carbon footprint and its correlating impact on the environment and community and incorporating local economic development opportunities. The State of Rhode Island has made significant

improvements in the number and types of incentives and related policies which support the development of new renewable energy projects, particularly projects which benefit municipalities through public-private partnerships. Therefore, renewable energy technologies which will be considered in the future are those consistent with [Rhode Island General Law \(RIGL\) §39-26-5](#):

- Solar photovoltaic (PV) or concentrated solar power (CSP)
- Wind power
- Hydropower
- Biomass (in compliance with [RIGL §39-26-2\[6\]](#))
- Fuel cells (using resources listed above)
- Waste-to-energy (in compliance with [RIGL §39-26-2\[6\]](#))
- Geothermal

The location and/or site of proposed projects need not be within the Town, but a description of the proposed net metering (including virtual net metering through a municipal collaborative) must be provided. The net metering RFP is Westerly's effort to move forward with locally generated renewable energy.

### *5.5.3 Future Alternative Energy*

Westerly has made great strides in studying the feasibility of large scale wind and solar power. The community also has a significant potential to meet energy needs through adoption of small scale energy generation. Westerly's sea breezes and sunshine duration are well suited for wind and solar generation. Residents can additionally meet some or all of their energy needs through installation of small scale systems and public facilities can benefit from roof mounted wind and solar generators.

Recent technological advances in the generation of electricity through the use of tidal currents to turn turbines, sometimes built into bridge and breakwater structures, show considerable promise for future energy generation. In the future, tidal turbines associated with breachways and coastal waters may offer a way for Westerly and neighboring towns to generate electricity without the adverse effects associated with combustion. Similarly, new advances in the use of wave action to generate energy indicate there may be a potential for the Town to take advantage of its coastal location to help meet future energy needs. While these technologies are mostly in the prototyping phase in the United States, they are already in use in some foreign states for power generation.

### 5.6 Communications

There are a number of telecommunications providers in Westerly whose services include land line telephones, cellular and mobile phones and networking, including internet access. This is a dynamic market and new suppliers continue to be established at a rapid rate. Although no official survey has been conducted, cellular coverage is reported to be generally good, though some areas lack service depending on the individual provider and location. Most telecommunications infrastructure in Westerly is overhead and physical telephone lines are owned by Verizon Communications, Inc. The Town has also explored establishing a Municipal Broadband Infrastructure Upgrade and Expansion project, which would develop a fiber optic infrastructure enabling the ability to receive fiber optic connection across town (generally referred to as Fiber to the X [FTTx]).

## 6 Services & Facilities

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan's Appendix I contains an inventory of existing and forecasted needs for the public such as, and not limited to, community facilities, education and schools, healthcare, public safety, recycling and waste management and social services.

The **Public Facilities Map (PF-1)** shows all structures which contribute to Westerly's ability to provide a broad range of services including emergency response, medical services, education, waste disposal, library services and social support. Datasets for these facilities are made available to Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS) by several contributors and have been modified to indicate their current statuses. Some infrastructural components are also shown in this map, including public wells and electric transmission and gas lines.

### 6.2 Emergency Services

#### 6.2.1 Police

The Westerly Police Department (WPD) has 64 staff members (excluding constables and community service officers), 50 of whom are sworn officers. Its 27,763 square foot headquarters was completed in September 2007 at 60 Airport Road. The new facility houses all police operations including patrol, dispatch, investigations, detention of prisoners and administration. The facility also serves as a regional emergency operations center in the event of a disaster. In fiscal year (FY) 2016, WPD received 35,307 calls for service, a 14.1% increase from the previous fiscal year. The following categories accounted for the largest percentage of calls in FY 2016:

- Traffic warnings (9.4%)
- Traffic summons (5.4%)
- Criminal arrests (3.9%)
- Traffic collisions (2.4%)

Updates to equipment were anticipated in the 2010 Comprehensive Plan in order to keep pace with changes in technology and no additional facility increases were anticipated. Funding was made available in the approved FY2017 budget for the Police Department to update its existing dispatch center. The updated center includes a new console and new radios with access control not previously available. Training on how to use the dispatch equipment was also funded.

#### 6.2.2 Fire and Ambulance

##### Fire Protection Services

The Town of Westerly is divided into seven fire districts – Bradford (BFD), [Dunn's Corners \(DCFD\)](#), [Misquamicut \(MFD\)](#), Shelter Harbor (SHFD), [Watch Hill \(WHFD\)](#), Weekapaug (WKFD) and

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**Westerly (WFD).** Each fire district is incorporated to provide services within its boundaries and provide services, upon request, to neighboring districts with which it has a mutual aid agreement. Fire departments in Rhode Island have taxation powers and do not rely on appropriations from municipalities. Services provided by the departments include fire prevention and extinguishment, protection and preservation of life and property endangered by fire and related emergencies and maintenance of fire district property such as beaches and facilities. BFD and SHFD have contracted with DCFD and WKFD has contracted with MFD to provide fire protection services. Following the termination of the recently approved contract between BFD and DCFD, it is anticipated BFD will merge with DCFD. All fire departments within the Town provide ongoing training programs. Training standards are consistent within all the fire districts and meet National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) standards 1500 and 1501. The following table indicates the location and major characteristics of each fire department located in Westerly.

**Table 6-1: Town of Westerly Fire Departments**

| Department     | Station(s)                                   | Active Fleet   | Members <sup>1</sup> | Calls (2015) |
|----------------|--|--|----------------------|--------------|
| Dunn's Corners | 1 Langworthy Rd<br>5664 Post Rd <sup>2</sup> | 3 Engines, 1 Tower, 1 Tanker, 1 Brush, 1 Squad and 1 Bucket  | 42                   | 796          |
| Misquamicut    | 65 Crandall Ave                              | 2 Engines, 1 Unit and 1 Marine   | 20                   | 120          |
| Watch Hill     | 222 Watch Hill Rd                            | 3 Support trailers, 2 Engines, 2 Marines, 1 Ladder, 1 Truck, 1 Squad, 1 Traffic and 1 ATV          | -                    | 133          |
| Westerly       | 7 Union St<br>180 Beach St                   | 6 Engines, 1 Ladder, 1 Fire Alarm, 2 WTs, 1 Decontamination, 1 Bucket, 1 Special Hazards and 1 car | 87                   | 669          |

Sources: DCFD, MFD, WHFD, WKFD and WFD

<sup>1</sup> Seasonal members excluded; individuals may be members of more than one fire department

<sup>2</sup>Address is in Charlestown

The fire departments have developed strong working relationships which allow them to provide support as needed in the form of Mutual Aid. DCFD, MFD, WHFD and WFD have standing mutual aid agreements with all fire departments in Rhode Island utilizing the State of Rhode Island Mutual Aid Agreement as well as with all fire departments in New London County, Connecticut utilizing the New London County Chiefs' Association.

### Ambulance Services

The [Westerly Ambulance Corps](#), established in 1917, is a private, non-profit volunteer organization which provides basic life support (BLS) and advanced life support (ALS) emergency medical services to Westerly and portions of Stonington, Connecticut, including the village of Pawcatuck. Other services include routine medical transportation, a Rescue Squad, 911 dispatching services (upgraded and automated in 2009) and first aid training courses. Ambulance services are provided by 8 full-time paid staff and 20 active volunteer members. The volunteer Rescue Squad, composed of 20 to 30 active members, specializes in vehicle extrication, dive rescue, swift-water rescue, ice rescue, rope rescue and emergency scene lighting.

Headquarters are located at 30 Chestnut Street with its fleet of four Type III ambulances (an E-450 Lifeline, an E-450 Road Rescue, an F-450 Wheeled Coach and an International Horton) and two four-wheel drive rescue vehicles (a 1500 ALS Vehicle and an E-550 Support Vehicle) located on-site. Westerly Ambulance Corps. members are required to attend training programs and to keep their certifications up-to-date. The Rescue Squad attends training programs sponsored by the Rhode Island Fire Academy and private Rescue Teaching Corporations.

Mutual aid agreements for rescue services exist with Charlestown Ambulance Services and the Ashaway and Pawcatuck Fire Departments. Mutual aid agreements for ambulance services also exist with ambulance corporations in Charlestown (2 ambulances), Ashaway (2 ambulances), Stonington (2 ambulances), North Stonington (2 ambulances) and Hope Valley (3 ambulances).

### *6.2.3 Medical Facilities and Services*

#### Westerly Hospital

Westerly Hospital is located at 25 Wells Street. It has been serving residents since 1925 and was acquired by the L+M Healthcare in 2013, which merged into the Yale-New Haven Health System in 2016. With a total physician staff of over 130, the hospital provides medical and surgical care to a service area which includes Washington County and New London County in Connecticut. The licensed capacity is 125 beds with the staff capacity of 56-60 beds. In addition to 24-hour emergency services, the hospital provides inpatient and outpatient surgical services, diagnostic laboratory services, imaging services, a variety of therapeutic services and several support groups and educational programs. L+M Healthcare reported the hospital provided over \$3.7 million in community benefits in 2014 and the hospital received its most recent reaccreditation from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) in 2015.

#### South County Health

South County Home Health (SCHH) is a part of South County Health and provides visiting nurses, rehabilitation therapists and other home healthcare professionals to residents in southern Rhode Island. Licensed by the state and accredited by JCAHO, it is certified by Medicare and Medicaid

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and a member of the Visiting Nurse Associations of America and the National Association for Home Care. The main facility in the region is located at 14 Woodruff Avenue in Narragansett. In 2016, 842 patients in Westerly were served by SCCH’s staff members. Low levels of insurance reimbursement from Medicare and other insurance companies and increasing documentation requirements to receive those reimbursements are issues that this and other medical facilities are struggling to address.

In May 2016, South County Health expanded its services in Westerly with the opening of its second Medical and Wellness Center in the state. The center (15,600 square feet) offers numerous services including an anti-coagulation clinic, behavioral health specialist, cardiology, dermatology, diabetes care, diagnostic imaging, laboratory services, nutrition services, oncology and hematology, orthopedics, physical therapy, podiatry, primary care and family medicine, an Urgent/Walk-in Care, wound care and services provided by the Center for Women’s Health.

#### Wood River Health Services

Wood River Health Services (WRHS), a private non-profit Community Health Center, operates a satellite office at the Tower Street School Community Center (described later in this chapter) in addition to its main facility in the village of Hope Valley in Hopkinton. WRHS offers patients access to numerous services in several medical areas including family medicine, women’s health, dental care, behavioral health, care management and laboratory services.

#### Nursing Homes and Retirement/Assisted Living Facilities

Several nursing homes and retirement facilities are established in Westerly and summarized in the table below. An assisted living facility, The Elms, is also located at 22 Elm Street and has a capacity of 75 persons.

**Table 6-2: Nursing Homes in Westerly, 2016**

| Facility                         | Address            | Number of Beds |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Apple Rehab Clipper              | 161 Post Road      | 60             |
| Apple Rehab Watch Hill           | 79 Watch Hill Road | 60             |
| Westerly Health Center           | 280 High Street    | 106            |
| Royal of Westerly Nursing Center | 79 Beach Street    | 66             |

Sources: Apple Rehab, Westerly Health Center and Royal of Westerly Nursing Center

### 6.3.1 Public School Facilities

The Westerly Public School District operates a nine building system serving pre-kindergarten to grade twelve (12) students, a bus garage, and the Tower Street School Community Center. The six school buildings include two-building campus at Westerly High School (WHS; the Ward Building and Babcock Hall), Westerly Middle School (WMS), Springbrook Elementary School, State Street Elementary School and Dunn’s Corners Elementary School. Bradford Elementary

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School was closed as a school at the end of the 2016-17 academic year. Table 6-3 below shows the buildings which comprise the public school system.

Tower Street School Community Center, also a former elementary school, serves as home to the School Department’s before/after school programs, central registration, the WHS Cosmetology program, WHS Learning Academy, and a certified organic school garden. Tower Street School Community Center is also home to the Town’s Recreation Department, pre-school and adult education programs, as well as other community-based services, groups, and renters. Bradford Elementary School is intended to remain in the care and control of the Westerly School District until the completion of Phase 3 of the Long Range Facilities Plan (discussed below in subsection 6.3.3 Public School System Needs).

**Table 6-3: Public School Facilities Overview**

| School                              | Capacity RIDE's Model Program Standard | Grades      | Location            | Enrollment, 2017        | Year Built |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Bradford Elementary School          | -                                      | -           | 15 Church Street    | Closed 2016-17          | 1923       |
| Dunn’s Corners Elementary School    | 568                                    | K-4         | 8½ Plateau Road     | -                       | 1967       |
| Springbrook Elementary School       | 240                                    | K-4         | 39 Springbrook Road | -                       | 1995       |
| State Street Elementary School      | 278                                    | K-4         | 35 State Street     | -                       | 1955       |
| Westerly Middle School              | 823                                    | 5-8         | 10 Sandy Hill Road  | 871                     | 2005       |
| Westerly High School Ward Building  | 1115                                   | 9-12        | 23 Ward Avenue      | 823                     | 1923       |
| Westerly High School Babcock Hall   | -                                      | Pre-K, 9-12 | 15 Highland Avenue  | 100 (Pre-K), 823 (9-12) | 1920       |
| Central Administration Babcock Hall | -                                      | -           | 15 Highland Avenue  | -                       | 1920       |
| Tower St Community Center           | -                                      | -           | 93 Tower Street     | -                       | 1955       |
| Westerly Municipal Garage Annex     | -                                      | -           | 8 Springbrook Road  | -                       | 1979       |

### 6.3.2 Enrollment

The majority of the Town’s school children (93.8 percent) attend public school. Enrollment in the public schools for the 2016-2017 academic year was 2,793 in May 2017 and included 823 students attending Westerly High School, 871 students attending Westerly Middle School, and 1,099 enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten and grades 1-4 attending one of Westerly’s four elementary schools and a preschool program at Babcock Hall. Enrollment as of May 2017 is shown below in

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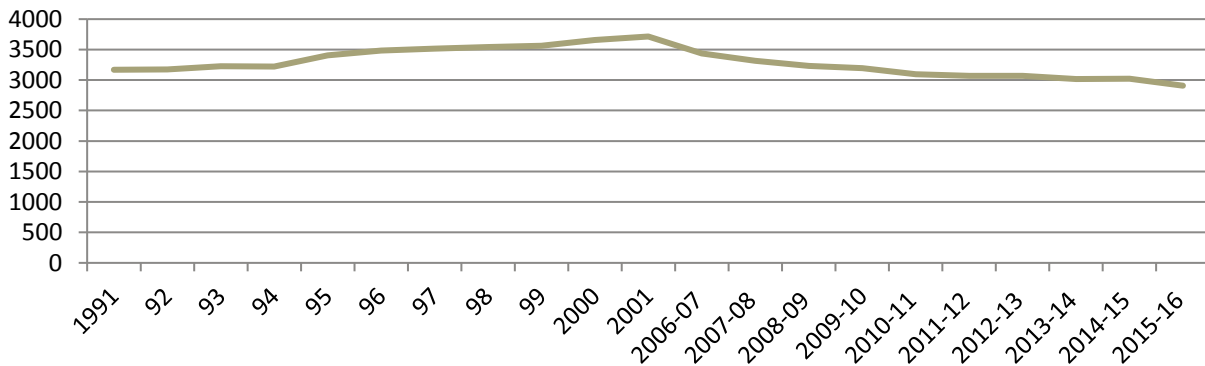
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Table 6-4 and actual enrollment numbers from 1991 to 2016 are shown in the following Figure 6-1.

**Table 6-4: Westerly Public Elementary School Student Enrollment, Academic Year 2016-2017**

| Elementary School             |          | Grade Level |      |      |      |      | Total        |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|------|------|------|------|--------------|
|                               |          | K           | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    |              |
| <b>Contractual Class Size</b> |          | 20          | 23   | 23   | 23   | 25   |              |
| Bradford                      | Students | 10          | 16   | 19   | 16   | 17   | 78           |
|                               | Teachers | 1           | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 5            |
|                               | Ratio    | 10          | 16   | 19   | 16   | 17   | 78           |
| Dunn's Corners                | Students | 52          | 47   | 60   | 56   | 55   | 270          |
|                               | Teachers | 3           | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 15           |
|                               | Ratio    | 17.3        | 15.7 | 20   | 18.7 | 18.3 |              |
| Springbrook                   | Students | 54          | 60   | 69   | 65   | 66   | 314          |
|                               | Teachers | 3           | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 15           |
|                               | Ratio    | 18          | 20   | 23   | 21.7 | 22   |              |
| State Street                  | Students | 71          | 59   | 64   | 72   | 68   | 334          |
|                               | Teachers | 4           | 4    | 3    | 4    | 3    | 18           |
|                               | Ratio    | 17.8        | 14.8 | 21.3 | 18   | 22.7 |              |
| <b>Middle School</b>          |          | 5           | 6    | 7    | 8    |      | <b>Total</b> |
| Westerly                      | Students | 220         | 209  | 233  | 212  |      | 875          |
| <b>High School</b>            |          | Pre-K       | 9    | 10   | 11   | 12   | <b>Total</b> |
| Westerly                      | Students | 103         | 219  | 213  | 185  | 207  | 824          |
| <b>District-wide</b>          |          |             |      |      |      |      | <b>Total</b> |
| Westerly                      | Students | -           | -    | -    | -    | -    | 2,797        |

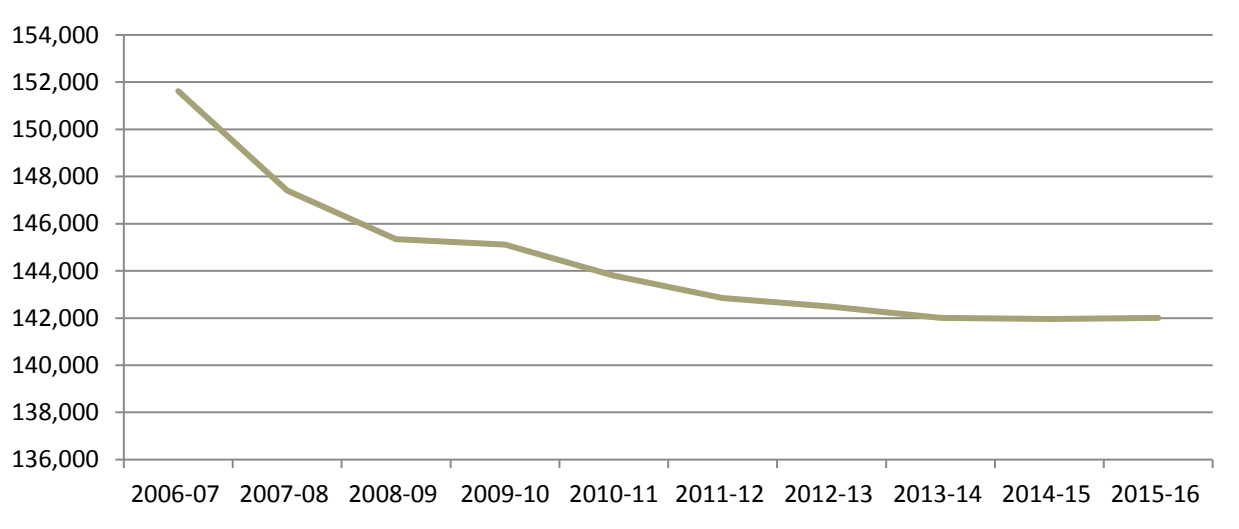
**Figure 6-1: Westerly Public Schools Student Enrollment, 1991-2016**



Enrollment figures for the School Department show a continued decline in student population which started around the 2002-2003 academic year. Current enrollment numbers and projected enrollment for 2018 have reached levels previously projected for 2024.

The Rhode Island Department of Education commissioned a [long-term demographic study](#) for the State in 2015. Westerly, like most other public school districts (Figure 6-2 below), is expected to see continued declines in student population and overall population.

**Figure 6-2: Statewide Public School Student Enrollment, Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12**



Source: McKibben Demographic Research, 2015

Declines in overall population in Westerly are generally attributed to an “aging in place” population and a stagnant economic climate in the state and mirror declines seen across the state in recent decades. Westerly is expected to see a continued decline in student population with periods of leveling off or occasional and slight increases as economic conditions improve and employment opportunities increase.

RIDE commissioned a [Facility Condition Assessment](#) of all the public school buildings in Rhode Island, including those of Westerly Public Schools, which provided an estimate of number of students each facility could ideally support based on current expectations for programs and safety standards called the RIDE Model Program Standard. The draft RIDE Model Program Standard for each of Westerly’s schools is provided in Table 6-5 below.

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**Table 6-5: Overview of RIDE Model Program Standard for Westerly Public Schools**

| School                           | Capacity RIDE's Model Program Standard | Grades            |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Dunn's Corners Elementary School | 568 <sup>1</sup>                       | K-4               |
| Springbrook Elementary School    | 240                                    | K-4               |
| State Street Elementary School   | 278                                    | K-4               |
| Westerly Middle School           | 823                                    | 5-8               |
| Westerly High School             | 1115                                   | 9-12 <sup>2</sup> |

<sup>1</sup> Under evaluation by RIDE

<sup>2</sup> Pre-kindergarten education also available

McKibben Demographic Research prepared [detailed enrollment projections](#) in December 2015 as part of the school district's 2014 application to the Rhode Island School Building Authority (RISBA; discussed below). District wide enrollment actuals and projections for the academic years 2015-16 to 2025-26 are provided in Table 6-6 below.

**Table 6-6: Westerly Public Schools Student Enrollment by Grade Level, 2015-2026**

| Grade Level       | 2015-16      | 2016-17      | 2017-18      | 2018-19      | 2019-20      | 2020-21      | 2021-22      | 2022-23      | 2023-24      | 2024-25      | 2025-26      |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Pre-K             | 92           | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          | 120          |
| Kindergarten      | 190          | 198          | 199          | 199          | 198          | 198          | 194          | 188          | 184          | 181          | 185          |
| 1                 | 216          | 201          | 203          | 204          | 204          | 203          | 201          | 197          | 191          | 187          | 184          |
| 2                 | 213          | 213          | 198          | 200          | 201          | 205          | 204          | 202          | 198          | 192          | 189          |
| 3                 | 225          | 211          | 212          | 197          | 199          | 202          | 207          | 207          | 205          | 201          | 194          |
| 4                 | 217          | 226          | 210          | 211          | 197          | 202          | 205          | 210          | 210          | 208          | 204          |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   | <b>1,153</b> | <b>1,169</b> | <b>1,142</b> | <b>1,131</b> | <b>1,119</b> | <b>1,130</b> | <b>1,131</b> | <b>1,124</b> | <b>1,108</b> | <b>1,089</b> | <b>1,076</b> |
| 5                 | 213          | 219          | 228          | 212          | 213          | 200          | 205          | 208          | 213          | 213          | 211          |
| 6                 | 232          | 214          | 220          | 229          | 213          | 215          | 202          | 207          | 210          | 215          | 215          |
| 7                 | 208          | 230          | 212          | 218          | 227          | 212          | 214          | 201          | 206          | 209          | 214          |
| 8                 | 214          | 209          | 231          | 213          | 219          | 229          | 214          | 216          | 203          | 208          | 211          |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   | <b>867</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>891</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>856</b>   | <b>835</b>   | <b>832</b>   | <b>832</b>   | <b>845</b>   | <b>851</b>   |
| 9                 | 227          | 217          | 212          | 234          | 216          | 224          | 235          | 219          | 221          | 208          | 213          |
| 10                | 201          | 212          | 203          | 198          | 219          | 202          | 209          | 220          | 205          | 207          | 194          |
| 11                | 206          | 192          | 202          | 194          | 189          | 209          | 193          | 200          | 210          | 196          | 198          |
| 12                | 218          | 204          | 191          | 201          | 193          | 188          | 208          | 192          | 199          | 209          | 195          |
| <b>Subtotal</b>   | <b>851</b>   | <b>825</b>   | <b>808</b>   | <b>827</b>   | <b>817</b>   | <b>823</b>   | <b>845</b>   | <b>831</b>   | <b>835</b>   | <b>820</b>   | <b>800</b>   |
| SE                | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           | 37           |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>2,908</b> | <b>2,903</b> | <b>2,878</b> | <b>2,867</b> | <b>2,845</b> | <b>2,846</b> | <b>2,848</b> | <b>2,824</b> | <b>2,812</b> | <b>2,791</b> | <b>2,764</b> |
| <b>Pre-K to 4</b> | <b>1,153</b> | <b>1,169</b> | <b>1,142</b> | <b>1,131</b> | <b>1,119</b> | <b>1,130</b> | <b>1,131</b> | <b>1,124</b> | <b>1,108</b> | <b>1,089</b> | <b>1,076</b> |
| Change            | -20          | 16           | -27          | -11          | -12          | 11           | 1            | -7           | -16          | -19          | -13          |
| Percent change    | -1.7%        | 1.4%         | -2.3%        | -1.0%        | -1.1%        | 1.0%         | 0.1%         | -0.6%        | -1.4%        | -1.7%        | -1.2%        |
| <b>5 to 8</b>     | <b>867</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>891</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>872</b>   | <b>856</b>   | <b>835</b>   | <b>832</b>   | <b>832</b>   | <b>845</b>   | <b>851</b>   |
| Change            | -15          | 5            | 19           | -19          | 0            | -16          | -21          | -3           | 0            | 13           | 6            |
| Percent change    | -1.7%        | 0.6%         | 2.2%         | -2.1%        | 0.0%         | -1.8%        | -2.5%        | -0.4%        | 0.0%         | 1.6%         | 0.7%         |
| <b>9 to 12</b>    | <b>851</b>   | <b>825</b>   | <b>808</b>   | <b>827</b>   | <b>817</b>   | <b>823</b>   | <b>845</b>   | <b>831</b>   | <b>835</b>   | <b>820</b>   | <b>800</b>   |
| Change            | -61          | -26          | -17          | 19           | -10          | 6            | 22           | -14          | 4            | -15          | -20          |

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|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Percent change | -6.7% | -3.1% | -2.1% | 2.4%  | -1.2% | 0.7%  | 2.7%  | -1.7% | 0.5%  | -1.8% | -2.5% |
| Total          | 2,908 | 2,903 | 2,878 | 2,867 | 2,845 | 2,846 | 2,848 | 2,824 | 2,812 | 2,791 | 2,764 |
| Change         | -114  | -5    | -25   | -11   | -22   | 1     | 2     | -24   | -12   | -21   | -27   |
| Percent change | -3.8% | -0.2% | -0.9% | -0.4% | -0.8% | 0.0%  | 0.1%  | -0.8% | -0.4% | -0.7% | -1.0% |

Source: McKibben Demographic Research, 2017

### 6.3.3 Public School System Needs

The citizens of Westerly have demonstrated the community's commitment to the school district's facilities through support of the *Vision 2020 Long Range Facilities Plan (Vision 2020)* for Westerly Public Schools published in December 2001. Phase 1 and Phase 2 of *Vision 2020* have been completed since the last update of the Comprehensive Plan. The community approved a \$40 million Phase 1 project to construct the Westerly Middle School, completed in 2005, and a \$30 million Phase 2 project to renovate WHS's Ward Building and Babcock Hall, completed in 2012. Phase 3 of *Vision 2020* recommended the renovation and expansion of elementary schools between 2005 and 2010.

The Westerly School Committee applied for a Necessity for School Construction Major Projects application from RIDE in 2014 to complete Phase 3 of the long-range plan. Westerly won approval from RISBA in May 2016 to fund the renovation and expansion of Springbrook, Dunn's Corners, and Bradford elementary schools. State Street Elementary School was to be closed at the end of the process. In November 2016, however, voters rejected a proposed \$38.5 bond for the project. A School Building Committee was then established in 2017 to complete Phase 3 of *Vision 2020*.

Additionally, the school's operational budget for the facilities maintenance and capital budgets have increased modestly over the last decade.

The RIDE Model Program Standards for school capacity shown in Table 6-5 are the ideal, based on current standards and not the requirement. Dunn's Corners Elementary School and State Street Elementary School have both supported larger enrollments than currently exists and Springbrook Elementary School may realistically be approaching its maximum enrollment; however, it currently does not represent a substandard environment in any way.

The elementary schools are at or above capacity according to the RIDE Model Program Standard; however, RIDE is reviewing the numbers in the draft report because the Dunn's Corners number was questioned by the district. A three-building elementary system was chosen as the preferred option during the 2015 planning sessions. Phase 3 of the long-range plan discussed below (8.4.a.iii) will address the specific ways in which the goal of equal access to a 21st century educational program can be achieved.

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WMS is at or slightly higher than the RIDE Model Program Standard and is likely to stay around the ideal enrollment for the next ten years. Consideration should be re-evaluating the use of space at WMS to increase the availability of programs to offer access to a 21st century curriculum to the Town's middle school students.

WHS is under capacity and is likely to remain that way for the next ten years. The two-building nature of the high school results in extra space based on the RI Model Program Standard. It is important to note the RIDE calculation does not include the use of Babcock Hall for Central Administration and preschool activities. Additionally, the extra space provides an opportunity to consolidate school programs from Tower Street School Community Center to Babcock Hall and increase the space dedicated to career or fine arts programs as the district continues to develop programs designed to prepare students for college and careers according to the [Westerly Public Schools District Strategic Plan 2016-2020](#).

*Vision 2020* is attached and outlined the facilities needs for the entire district until the year 2020. The work was to be completed in three phases. As noted in the discussion, tables and figures above, as of spring 2018, two phases had been successfully completed:

- **Phase 1 (completed 2005)**

Westerly Middle School (renamed from Babcock Middle School and previously located at Babcock Hall) was constructed and was in use for grades 6 through 8 since the 2005-2006 academic year. Fifth grade classes were relocated from their respective elementary schools to the middle school beginning in the 2009-2010 academic year.

Following the 2008-2009 academic year, Tower Street Elementary School was converted into a community center while its student population was reallocated among the remaining four elementary schools.

- **Phase 2 (completed 2012)**

The School District relocated its offices to the first floor of Babcock Hall while the second and third floors became classroom space for Westerly High School (redesigned as a campus). The building previously used for the district's offices was demolished and replaced by a bus loop and increased parking capacity for students and staff. Renovations to the Ward Building resulted in several improvements including a new science and technology wing, new art classrooms, installation of Smart Boards and new flooring, windows and ceilings.

- **Phase 3 Elementary Schools (ongoing)**

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The School Committee established a School Building Committee in the spring of 2017 with the intent of completing Phase 3 of the long-range plan. As noted previously, Phase 3 of the long-range plan was initiated in 2014. Through this process, the School Committee determined the optimal number of elementary schools required to meet the needs of the projected student population and best utilize or existing resources is three (3). Three buildings allow for an equitable distribution of resource and equal access to a twenty-first century educational program for elementary students. A three elementary school system results in what the community believes are the ideal size elementary schools of approximately 350 students. Voters rejected a proposed \$38.5 bond to fund the renovation and expansion of Springbrook, Dunn’s Corners, and Bradford elementary schools in November of 2016. State St was to be eliminated at the end of the process.

A School Building Committee was established in 2017 to complete Phase 3 of the Long Range Plan and a survey designed to determine why voters rejected the bond and assess the viability of another proposal was conducted in June 2017. Survey results are summarized in the attached Voter Survey Report.

Postcards directing voters to an online survey and locations with free computer access were mailed to all voters who cast a ballot in 2016. Six hundred and thirty-six (636) people responded to the survey and the portion of those who voted for or against the bond was similar to the election results. When asked “Do you believe the elementary schools need to be renovated?” 91.5% responded affirmatively. When asked if voters would support a tax increase to renovate the elementary schools, 78% said yes.

Three hundred and nine (309) people who voted to reject the bond took the survey and the top two reason they gave for rejecting the bond were “A school should be located in the most densely populated section of town” and “The three elementary schools (Bradford, Dunn’s Corners, Springbrook) intended to be renovated were a poor choice.” The School Committee has engaged an architectural and engineering consultant to begin the process anew and intends to submit an application to RIDE to begin Phase 3 of the long-range plan in October of 2017. In 2017 the Westerly School Committee voted to close Bradford Elementary School beginning the 2017-2018 academic year.

Space and programming standards have changed significantly over the past decade; the requirements for safe and secure learning and work environments are now more robust; and accessing and managing financial resources requires significant study. Detailed facility assessments were conducted as part of the 2014 SBA application process and are attached as Appendix 3. Along with RIDE’s *Facility Condition Assessment* of public school buildings, Westerly Public Schools also maintains a [five-year facilities plan](#). These documents provide detailed

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assessments of the condition of each of the school buildings and estimates to complete upgrades and regular systems maintenance over the next 5 to 20 years. Phase 3 of the long-range plan will address the specific ways in which equal access to a 21st century educational program can be achieved in Westerly's elementary schools and meet some of the facility needs outlined in the reports mentioned above. A significant investment of capital and operational investment is required to address the facility needs identified over the next ten years.

#### *6.3.4 Student Performance*

According to the Rhode Island Department of Education, as reported through its [InfoWorks website](#), the school district had a classroom teacher-student ratio of 1:12, a 95% attendance rate and a 3.4% student drop-out rate in the 2015-2016 academic year. In the succeeding 2016-2017 academic year, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) was taken generally by students in grades three (3) through ten (10). The results of this statewide exam found that geometry was the only subject assessed in which a majority of students (51%) met or exceeded statewide expectations. The second-highest performance of meeting or exceeding statewide expectations was in third-grade students assessed on mathematics (44%). The lowest performance was found in eighth-grade students assessed on mathematics (15%). Greater details on PARCC and the school district's performance are available on the InfoWorks website.

#### *6.3.5 Westerly Education Center*

Since its opening, the Westerly Education Center (WEC) has offered post-secondary education classes and/or workforce training for General Dynamics Electric Boat (GDEB) to more than 1,000 individuals. Additional educational institutions in Rhode Island may also offer learning opportunities in the future as the Westerly Education Center becomes more established. WEC is a multi-institute academic and training facility currently used by all public colleges and universities in Rhode Island as well as the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and Roger Williams University (RWU).

#### **6.4 Solid Waste Disposal**

Westerly owns and operates a solid waste transfer station located at 39 Larry Hirsch Lane. This facility is also available to residents of Hopkinton under an agreement between the two municipalities. The Town does not provide curbside pickup and sells trash bags (known locally as orange bags due to their distinct color) which residents fill and return to the transfer station on their own. Special charges may also be applied due to size.

There is also a recycling area for separation directly adjacent to the transfer station where residents bring recyclables at no charge. Residents can purchase blue and green recycling bins. This system has been in place for several years and in general works well since residents have an

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incentive to separate recyclables to save money. The Town collects the trash at the transfer station, loads and trucks it to the RI Resource and Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) facility in Johnston, Rhode Island where it is landfilled. There is an arrangement with Hopkinton to also receive that community's waste at the transfer station. If residents choose not to haul their trash, there are a number of licensed private haulers which will collect it for a fee. If residents use a private hauler, they are not required to use the specially designated bags. It is estimated that slightly more than half of the residents hire a private hauler.

Over the past several years, the Town has increased the types of materials which can be recycled at the facility to 25 categories. Items include, among others, propane tanks, electronics, scrap metal, used motor oil, automotive batteries and tires, oil filters, wood stove ashes, rubble, clothing and mattresses. The facility will also accept truck tires and refrigerators. Various fees are associated with these items, except for cooking oil, books, anti-freeze, bikes, scraps, paint, and rigid plastics, which are collected for free. Additionally, residents can also drop off leaves and grass at no charge and brush for a per-ton fee. All compost materials are currently sent to Earth Care in neighboring Charlestown.

Currently, the number of households which use the transfer station is not tracked and commercial and residential trash is collected in the same fashion. According to RICCC, the actual total solid waste received from Westerly in 2016 yielded a mandatory recycling rate of 39.6% and an overall diversion rate (all items diverted from the landfill) of 42.2%. These are strong improvements in comparison to the percentages reported for the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, (respectively 14% and 29%), and the mandatory recycling rate meets the 35% rate goal for municipalities set by the state (the state goal for overall diversion is a 50% rate). The Town has continually increased its recycling rate due in part to a mandatory commercial recycling ordinance, which is a component of the process for business licensing. It is the goal of the Solid Waste Division to continue improving recycling rates yearly.

#### 6.5 Westerly Library

The Westerly Library is located on an approximately 14.7-acre property, shared with Wilcox Park, at 44 Broad Street in the center of Downtown. The library, owned and operated by the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, is a participating member of the Ocean State Libraries network which allows its more than 17,400 cardholders (free to residents of all Rhode Island municipalities and the Town of Stonington, Connecticut as well as nonresident property owners in Rhode Island) to access the collections of all libraries throughout the State (Westerly's

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collection totals over 181,600). In FY2015, 29,831 items were circulated to other libraries while 29,215 items were borrowed from others.<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, 61.9% of the library’s funding came from nonpublic sources such as endowment, grants and community support, 13.5% came from the State and 24.6% came from local sources (Westerly and Stonington, Connecticut).

In addition to traditional books and periodicals, the library also offers visitors access to audiobooks, computers, e-books, films, twenty-six online databases, Wi-Fi and a busy calendar of programs including plays, concerts, lectures and civic discussions. At present, the library is ranked among Rhode Island’s ten libraries with the highest number of items in circulation, number of library visits, number of programs offered and program attendance. The table that follows presents selected library statistics for the most recent full five-year period.

**Table 6-7: Selected Library Statistics, 2011-2015**

|                        | 2011        | 2012        | 2013        | 2014        | 2015        |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Items circulated       | 195,111     | 220,149     | 208,911     | 213,956     | 208,808     |
| Size of collection     | 227,796     | 231,026     | 188,124     | 180,106     | 170,151     |
| Full-time employees    | 18          | 18          | 18          | 15          | 17          |
| Hours operated         | 3,063       | 2,929       | 2,929       | 2,906       | 2,906       |
| Patron visits          | 228,953     | 243,553     | 240,553     | 243,009     | 242,607     |
| Registered borrowers   | 16,853      | 16,848      | 17,400      | 17,690      | 17,424      |
| Computer log-ons       | 30,225      | 44,760      | 40,719      | 34,177      | 29,186      |
| Programs offered       | 430         | 381         | 372         | 461         | 636         |
| Attendance of programs | 27,584      | 29,259      | 28,603      | 28,681      | 31,424      |
| Annual budget          | \$1,833,859 | \$1,791,733 | \$1,983,134 | \$1,875,291 | \$1,987,233 |

Source: Westerly Library

The library has had three additions since it was first constructed in 1894, the most recent occurring in 1992, necessitated by expansions of services. In order to address that and other needs, the Library is conducting an \$8 million capital campaign. Roughly half of the hard construction costs will be provided by the Rhode Island Office of Library Services, which provides grants for library construction. Funds will be used for space reallocation in the library and renovations to the park. Interior renovations are expected to provide a 20% increase in floor space for each of the Library’s four floors without increasing the 50,000-square foot footprint. Most of the funds for this project are coming from private donations, but the project will require the combined efforts of federal, state, town, foundation, corporate and community supporters. Renovation work on the library structure was started in August 2009. In spring 2016, following

<sup>1</sup><http://westerlylibrary.org/support-westerly-library-and-wilcox-park>

the Library’s receipt of a grant provided by the Champlin Foundation, work was completed to update the library’s circulation desk, create a new space for teenagers and establish a modernized technology lab and makerspace.

**6.6 Social Service Agencies and Programs**

As indicated through data earlier in this chapter (and in other chapters as well), many of Westerly’s residents experience or will experience financial and social hardships which require some form of assistance to manage and overcome. Along with relevant services described above, there are a number of locally involved agencies and programs, shown in Table 6-8, that aim to provide needed assistance.

**Table 6-8: Descriptions of Select Social Services**

| Agency or Program   | Description   |
|---|---|
| Adult Day Center of Westerly  | 501(c)(3) organization, located in the former Police Department headquarters, providing daytime care for adults with cognitive, emotion and/or functional impairments   |
| Deborah K. Fallacaro Pregnancy Center of Westerly                             | Center located at Immaculate Conception Church providing Roman Catholic-based services and education at no cost for women who believe they may be pregnant  |
| Domestic Violence Resource Center of South County (DVRCS)                     | Non-profit agency dedicated to preventing and responding to domestic violence through offering safety, support, advocacy, education and services  |
| Jonnycake Center of Westerly  | 501(c)(3) organization serving 3,000 individuals through education, food pantry and social services programs  |
| Literacy Volunteers of Washington County                                      | ProLiteracy America accredited affiliate providing English as a second language (ESL) learning and preparation for citizenship and General Education Diplomas (GEDs), among other services  |
| Living Supplies Closet (LSC)  | Ministry of Christ Church providing personal hygiene products at no cost  |
| National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Westerly/Chariho                   | Local affiliate of NAMI, the largest grassroots organization in the United States dedicated to educating on, advocating for and listening to individuals with mental illnesses and their families                                   |
| Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center (PNC)   | Multi-purpose facility offering social, educational, health and human services programs to Westerly and southeastern Connecticut communities  |
| Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) | Program of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service offering grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non- |

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|  |  |
|--|--|
| Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) | breastfeeding postpartum women and to children five years old and younger found to be at nutritional risk<br>Program of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service offering financial assistance to eligible, low-income individuals   |
| St. Vincent de Paul Society                        | Organization of Roman Catholic lay people operating locally at Immaculate Conception Church providing temporary financial assistance and a food pantry for individuals experiencing emergency situations   |
| South County Community Action Agency (SCCAA)       | 501(c)(3) organization providing numerous financial, housing, learning and social services with offices in Westerly, Charlestown, North Kingstown and South Kingstown  |
| Tower Street School Community Center               | Westerly Public Schools facility, previously an elementary school, offering continuing education and learning programs for cost and for free through numerous partners and office space for the Town’s Recreation Department. Four organizations (Bradley School, Church at Westerly, Literacy Volunteers of Washington County and Wood River Health Services) are also tenants of the center. |
| Washington County Coalition for Children (WCCC)    | Coalition of social service agencies, healthcare providers and private and public individuals providing children’s advocacy  |
| Westerly Area Rest and Meals (WARM)                | 501(c)(3) organization providing an emergency shelter, soup kitchen, Attire for Hire clothing program, tax assistance and community outreach services  |
| Westerly Senior Citizens Center                    | 501(c)(3) organization providing social and transportation services and health programs to the senior and elderly population in Westerly and nearby communities  |

Sources: Adult Day Center of Westerly, Christ Church, DVRCS, Immaculate Conception Church, Jonnycake Center of Westerly, Literacy Volunteers of Washington County, NAMI Westerly/Chariho, PNC, SCCAA, SNAP, Tower Street School Community Center, WARM, WCCC, Westerly Senior Citizens Center AND WIC

Many of these agencies are involved in the Basic Needs Network of Washington County (BNN), a group of basic needs providers established in 1995. BNN conducted a Regional Needs Assessment in 2011 which focused on low-income individuals achieving economic independence. A survey of 292 low-income individuals was conducted which found respondents represented a broad range of work experiences and over one-third were from Westerly.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Regional Needs Assessment for Washington County, Rhode Island, 2011

6.7 Energy

6.7.1 Energy Conservation

Energy conservation and the efficient use of energy has long been a part of planning in Westerly. In 2008, the Town adopted a renewable energy policy that included a policy statement defining renewable energy as “any energy resource that is naturally regenerated over a short time scale and derived directly from the sun (such as thermal, photochemical, and photoelectric), indirectly from the sun (such as wind, hydropower, and photosynthetic energy stored in biomass) or from natural movement and mechanisms of the environment (such as geothermal, tidal and river flow energy).” The policy statement also included objectives such as obtaining at least 15% of the Town’s energy from renewable sources, partnering with the State of Rhode Island on renewable energy initiatives and reducing energy consumption by applying sustainable measures in the management, operation and maintenance of facilities and infrastructure.

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan also included measures proposed to conserve energy and seek alternative forms of energy production. Objective 4 of Goal 6 was to “decrease Westerly’s dependence on petroleum-related energy sources through a municipal strategy of conservation and renewable energy generation.” Action 6.3 called on the Town to “update land use regulations to address and encourage appropriate renewable energy opportunities.” Policy 9 stated “the Town shall encourage on a continuing basis the recycling and conservation of energy, water and other environmental resources.”

6.7.2 Energy Usage

In 2011, Johnson Controls, Inc. (JCI) conducted a six-month audit of energy consumption in public municipal buildings on behalf of the Town. The goal of the audit was to find ways to reduce energy costs, provide capital upgrades, increase the energy efficiency and the reliability of the Town’s mechanical and electrical systems and to maintain or improve occupant comfort and well-being. The results of the audit and subsequent recommendations were provided in the *Town of Westerly Detailed Energy Audit Report* prepared by JCI in 2012. Table 6-9 below shows a summary of audited energy usage in each of the Town’s non-school buildings. The findings included a total of over 4.9 million kilowatt-hours of electricity and range from 2.3 to 138.1 million British Thermal Units (BTUs) per square foot per year (MBTU/sf/year) of thermal energy used across Town buildings. For informational purposes, the therm (thm) is a measure of heat energy equal to 100,000 BTUs.

**Table 6-9: Energy Usage in Non-School Municipal Buildings, 2011<sup>1</sup>**

| Building             | Electric |        |            | Oil     |        |            | Gas |        |            |
|----------------------|----------|--------|------------|---------|--------|------------|-----|--------|------------|
|                      | kWh      | \$/kWh | MBtu/sf/yr | Gallons | \$/gal | MBtu/sf/yr | Thm | \$/thm | MBtu/sf/yr |
| Town Hall            | 297,620  | 0.11   | 38.2       | 10,645  | 3.33   | 55.5       | -   | -      | -          |
| Landfill Building #2 | 19,575   | 0.15   | 8.0        | -       | -      | -          | -   | -      | -          |

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|-------------------------------|-----------|------|-------|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Animal Control                | 136,857   | 0.12 | 72.4  | -      | -    | 5,331 | 1.6   | 82.6  |
| Armory                        | 11,778    | 0.18 | 2.4   | 2,778  | 3.33 | 22.9  | 1,687 | 10.0  |
| Wastewater Treatment Plant    | 2,275,524 | 0.15 | 215.8 | 15,568 | 3.33 | 60.0  | -     | -     |
| Police Station                | 665,900   | 0.14 | 53.5  | -      | -    | 8,307 | 1.6   | 19.5  |
| Beach Building #2             | 888       | 0.23 | 0.3   | -      | -    | -     | -     | -     |
| Water Dept. Building #1       | 791,900   | 0.13 | 180.8 | 5,193  | 3.33 | 48.2  | 348   | 2.3   |
| Water Dept. Building #2       | 482,750   | 0.13 | -     | -      | -    | 4,058 | 1.5   | 138.1 |
| Water Dept. Building #3       | 18,519    | 0.17 | 152.7 | -      | -    | 80    | 4.0   | 19.5  |
| DPW Highway                   | 97,000    | 0.13 | 21.6  | 1,735  | 3.33 | 15.7  | 2,428 | 15.8  |
| Bus Garage                    | -         | -    | -     | 1,126  | 3.33 | 21.9  | -     | -     |
| Senior Center                 | 128,960   | 0.12 | 30.5  | -      | -    | 8,562 | 1.5   | 59.3  |
| Adult Day Center <sup>2</sup> | 21,409    | 0.23 | 5.2   | -      | -    | 5,112 | 1.5   | 36.5  |

Source: *Town of Westerly Detailed Energy Audit Report, 2012*

<sup>1</sup> Text in red indicates the assumed numbers when billing history was not available

<sup>2</sup> The Adult Day Center was purchased from the Town of Westerly in 2013

The major findings of the Johnson audit included the following:

- There are many opportunities to reduce energy costs within the Town buildings. By implementing the recommendations outlined in the audit study, the Town of Westerly could reduce energy usage by 9.33% in Town buildings (3.10% electric and 21.34% thermal) based on the average utility data established as the baseline period.
- Equipment Conditions Improvement: Some of the mechanical and electrical systems are in poor condition, but are operated well, given current funding and staffing level constraints. Some of the Town buildings have programmable thermostats and the rest have pneumatic thermostats or electric dial gage thermostats. All remaining electric and pneumatic thermostats should be replaced by programmable thermostats with two set points (day and night) for occupied and unoccupied hours. The installation of a control system was proposed that would upgrade and connect all control systems in the Town Hall via the district Wide Area Network (WAN) to a front end/host computer, allowing facility personnel to access all building systems via the front end to make changes to optimize the space conditions and maximize energy savings.
- Heating System condition: The existing boilers in the buildings that are near the end of their useful life were recommended for replacement with high efficiency boilers that would provide the Town buildings with newer and more reliable equipment and contribute largely to energy savings.
- Operation and Maintenance: Several measures were recommended to reduce the demand for manual operations and labor to add to the Town Department's savings.

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- Occupants Comfort Improvement: The measures recommended were expected, at a minimum, to maintain and, in most cases, improve occupant comfort.

The facilities owned and operated by the Westerly School Department are public buildings and their operating costs are passed along to taxpayers. Any energy efficiencies that can be obtained from various measures proposed for other Town buildings could equally apply to school district facilities. JCI conducted a separate energy audit of Westerly Public Schools in 2011 with results made available in its *Westerly School District Preliminary Energy Audit Report*. The results are summarized in Table 6-10 below:

**Table 6-10: Energy Usage in Public School Buildings, 2011<sup>1</sup>**

| Building                             | Electric  |        |            | Oil      |        |            | Gas    |        |            |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------|------------|----------|--------|------------|--------|--------|------------|
|                                      | kWh       | \$/kWh | MBtu/sf/yr | Gallons  | \$/gal | MBtu/sf/yr | Thm    | \$/thm | MBtu/sf/yr |
| Bradford Elementary                  | 176,060   | 0.15   | 18.34      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 13,153 | 1.55   | 40.14      |
| Dunn's Corners Elementary            | 968,720   | 0.15   | 60.00      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 4,222  | 2.81   | 7.66       |
| Springbrook Elementary               | 274,305   | 0.15   | 21.54      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 20,304 | 1.54   | 46.71      |
| State Street Elementary              | 217,820   | 0.14   | 17.39      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 43,248 | 1.55   | 101.14     |
| Westerly Middle                      | 1,497,800 | 0.13   | 32.98      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 47,967 | 1.56   | 30.95      |
| Ward Building                        | 1,359,140 | 0.13   | 20.62      | 1,954.83 | 1.98   | 1.20       | 67,547 | 1.55   | 30.02      |
| Babcock Hall                         | 409,561   | 0.15   | 10.68      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 60,686 | 1.60   | 46.37      |
| Tower Street School Community Center | 205,240   | 0.14   | 18.04      | 0.00     |        | 0.00       | 39,299 | 1.53   | 101.23     |

Source: *Westerly School District Preliminary Energy Audit Report*

<sup>1</sup> Text in red indicates an assumed number or basis on assumed number from JCI's experience working on similar projects

From the audit, 19 energy conservation measures (ECMs) were formed and recommended for Westerly Public Schools. The major findings of the schools' audit were comparable to non-school municipal buildings. The Town recommends that the School Department use all necessary measures to ensure energy efficient operations.

### 6.7.3 Conservation Measures Evaluated

The Johnson Controls audit recommended eleven (11) energy saving improvements for Town buildings as follows:

#### Lighting – Fixture Retrofit and Fixture Controls

- Retrofit most existing T8 and T12 lamp fixtures with Super T8 lamps and replace standard power ballasts with low power electronic ballast
- Retrofit exterior lighting (Metal Halides and High-Pressure Sodium) with Induction/LED lights that have higher efficiency and longer life expectancy
- Add occupancy sensors to turn off lighting in storage rooms, mechanical rooms and offices when unoccupied

### **Building Envelope Improvements – Weatherization**

- Install caulking, weather-stripping and seal roof-wall joints to prevent air infiltration and improve insulating properties

### **Building Envelope Window Replacement**

- Replace existing windows with energy efficient windows that cut solar heat gain, provide more insulation and reduce infiltration

### **Building Controls – Temperature Setback**

- Adjust scheduling of the air handling equipment, fan-coil units, and unit ventilators to set back to a lower temperature during unoccupied hours

### **Heating System Upgrade**

- Replace existing boilers that are near the end of their useful life with high efficiency condensing boilers that provide increased reliability and significant energy savings
- Replace all existing steam traps (including Float and Thermostatic, Thermostatic and bucket types) with new steam traps to decrease losses in the heating system
- Install new insulation to decrease heat loss on all existing steam, hot water and domestic hot-water piping not already insulated.

### **Computer Management**

- Add computer management software that will automatically power down the school computers during unoccupied/low usage hours

### **Water Conservation**

- Replace existing high flow fixtures with new low flow toilets, low flow urinals, faucet aerators, and low flow shower heads

### **Rooftop Unit Rehabilitation**

- Repair dampers, controls, motors, air handling units, and exhaust fans that are non-functioning

### **Walk-in Freezer Controls**

- Provide new controls to optimize compressor and evaporator operation

### ***6.7.4 Anticipated Energy Savings***

Projected energy savings for Town facilities, excluding public schools, are presented in Table 6-9 and would total 5,524kWh/year of electricity and 1,556 MBTU/year of thermal energy. This reduction in energy consumption would also reduce carbon emissions, with the savings estimated to be the equivalent of total carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from burning 1,140 barrels

of oil or heating 45 homes for one year. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> have been implicated as a causative factor in the current pattern of global climate change.

To allow a comparison between buildings, an Energy Use Index (EUI) was calculated for each building. The EUI is calculated by converting annual consumption of all fuels to BTUs and then dividing that value by the area (in this case, gross square footage) of the building.

**Table 6-11: Energy Savings from Implementation of Recommended ECMs**

| Building                   | Electric Energy Usage (kWh/yr) |           | Thermal Energy Usage (MMBtu/yr) |       | EUI Electric |       | EUI Thermal |       | EUI Total |       |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                            | Before                         | After     | Before                          | After | Before       | After | Before      | After | Before    | After |
| Landfill #2                | 19,575                         | 14,051    | 0                               | 0     | 8            | 6     | 0           | 0     | 8         | 6     |
| Animal Control             | 136,857                        | 133,550   | 533                             | 367   | 72           | 71    | 83          | 57    | 155       | 128   |
| Armory                     | 11,778                         | 8,865     | 555                             | 389   | 2            | 2     | 33          | 23    | 35        | 25    |
| Wastewater Treatment Plant | 2,275,525                      | 2,263,242 | 2,164                           | 1,743 | 216          | 215   | 60          | 48    | 276       | 263   |
| Town Hall                  | 297,620                        | 256,146   | 1,480                           | 821   | 38           | 33    | 56          | 31    | 94        | 64    |
| Police Station             | 665,900                        | 639,449   | 831                             | 841   | 54           | 51    | 20          | 20    | 73        | 71    |
| Beach Building #2          | 888                            | 575       | 0                               | 0     | 0            | 0     | 0           | 0     | 0         | 0     |
| Adult Day Center           | 21,409                         | 15,330    | 511                             | 453   | 5            | 4     | 37          | 32    | 42        | 36    |
| Water Dept. Building #1    | 791,900                        | 782,760   | 757                             | 718   | 181          | 179   | 51          | 48    | 232       | 227   |
| Water Dept. Building #2    | 482,750                        | 479,976   | 406                             | 350   | 561          | 558   | 138         | 119   | 699       | 677   |
| Water Dept. Building #3    | 18,519                         | 18,421    | 8                               | 7     | 153          | 152   | 19          | 16    | 172       | 168   |
| DPW Highway                | 97,000                         | 89,571    | 484                             | 368   | 22           | 20    | 32          | 24    | 53        | 44    |
| Senior Center              | 128,960                        | 89,844    | 856                             | 703   | 30           | 21    | 59          | 49    | 90        | 70    |
| Bus Garage                 | 0                              | 0         | 157                             | 114   | 0            | 0     | 22          | 16    | 22        | 16    |

Source: Town of Westerly Detailed Energy Audit Report, 2012

### 6.7.5 Projected Costs

According to Johnson Controls estimates, application of the eleven recommended energy conservation measures to the Town buildings would cost an estimated \$1,463,649 and would yield an annual savings of \$69,650. With anticipated utility rebates and verification costs, the payback period for the eleven recommended energy savings was estimated at 24 years.

### 6.7. 6 Recommended Energy Conservation Measures

Subsequent to the Johnson Controls study, in January 2016, the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources and National Grid, acting on behalf of Westerly and other municipalities in the state, contracted with CHA Consulting to assist in Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank (RIIB) applications. In Westerly, this included completing Technical Energy Audit Reports for the police station and the Town Hall.

The audit report for the police station recommended three energy conservation measures: heating, venting and air conditioning (HVAC) control improvements, replacement of high-intensity discharge (HID) lighting with light-emitting diode (LED) lighting and replacement of

fluorescent lighting with LED lighting. These improvements were projected to cost approximately \$185,000 and to result in an annual energy savings of 299,954 kWh of energy, equating to \$33,746 annual savings and a payback of 5.5 years.

The audit report for the Town Hall recommended five energy conservation measures: Installation of attic insulation, improvements to the domestic hot water (DHW) system, replacing the dual temperature pump motor replacements with variable frequency drive pumps, exterior lighting replacement and general building lighting replacement. These energy conservation measures were predicted to cost approximately \$249,000 and would save 73,803 kW·h of electricity and 1,330 therms (or 133,000,000 BTUs) of natural gas for a total annual savings of \$10,187 and a payback of 24.4 years.

Westerly is now proceeding to prioritize energy conservation measures and is seeking funds from the state for low-interest financing for energy improvements. If approved for funding Westerly will refine the accuracy of the technical audit studies to an investment grade audit level, which will then be the basis for funding used by the state.

#### ***6.7.7 Carbon Reduction***

Reducing the Town's carbon footprint was part of the 2008 renewable energy policy. At the time, it was recommended that the Town develop a carbon reduction policy to guide municipal decision-making. The Town must consider fuel efficiency in purchases of municipal vehicles and consider the carbon footprint of products procured by municipal and school operations as a matter of course when selecting vendors. Reducing energy demands, through such measures as the use of EnergyStar efficient appliances in all Town installations, also reduces carbon dioxide emissions and decreases the size of the Town's carbon footprint.

The Westerly-Pawcatuck Farmers Market, community supported agriculture (CSA), farm share, and farm-to-table programs have increased the amount of locally grown food that is sold in town. Local food production shortens food transport distances, reducing energy usage and carbon emissions. The land trusts in Westerly have preserved significant tracts of forested land that are sequestering carbon. Westerly has strongly supported the Farm, Forest and Open Space tax reduction plan, which is typically applicable to managed forests. Many local residents heat their homes, or supplement home heat, with wood. Firewood is a carbon neutral fuel. Land preservation efforts in Westerly have also reduced the maximum build out population in the Town reducing energy demand for infrastructure and reducing energy demand for commuting to jobs in neighboring communities. Maintaining land as open space also reduces the mileage of roadways needed to be maintained and power lines extensions, contributing to a lower long-term total energy usage in the community.

## 7 Transportation Network

### 7.1 Overview

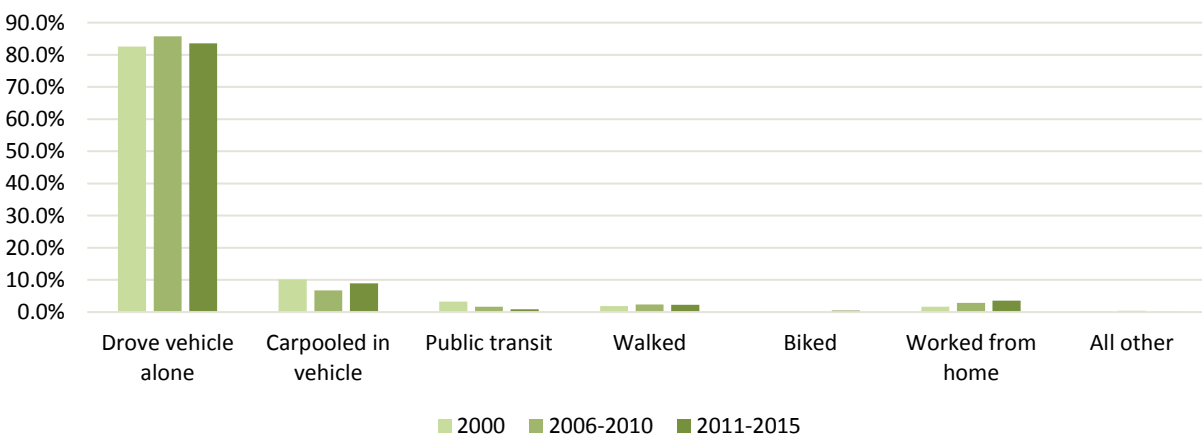
A transportation network has a major impact on the community it serves – defining community character, influencing affordability and affecting public health. More fundamentally, a transportation network determines the ability for people and goods to enter, exit and circulate within a city or town. This chapter covers the various elements contributing to Westerly’s transportation network, including roadways, sidewalks and crosswalks, bike paths and routes, air and rail services, accessible waters and public transportation. By reviewing these modes and providing for consistency with the direction for transportation policies and actions set by [Transportation 2035](#) and other elements of the State Guide Plan, this inventory complies with the objectives of the [Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users \(SAFETEA-LU\)](#).

The **Transportation map (TR-1)** offers a visual overview of the many components which support the town’s circulation and mobility. These include boat launches and ramps, bike paths, harbors, ports, public transit routes and stops, railroads, roadways (including evacuation routes, local roads and state roads) and transportation facilities (Westerly Airport and Westerly Station).

### 7.2 Roads and Motor Vehicles

Similar to most communities in the United States, the early development of the transportation network in Westerly considered several modes of travel including walking, biking and public transit. Through the twentieth-century, this original system was greatly transformed by the introduction and popularity of automobiles. As shown in Table 7-1 below, the popularity of and reliance on motor vehicles has continued into the new millennium.

**Figure 7-1 Means of Transportation to Work for Westerly Workers 16 years and over, 2000-2015**



Sources: [2000 Census, 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 American Community Survey \(ACS\) 5-year estimates](#)

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In addition to the dominance of driving to and from places of work, the prevalence of cars, trucks, vans and other vehicles is further indicated by the number of households with access to vehicles. Approximately 94% of households had access to a vehicle at the time of the 2000 Census, with 16.7% of households having three or more vehicles available. These percentages respectively increased to 97.8% and 34.2% in the period 2010 to 2014, according to American Community Survey five-year estimates. Likewise, the number of households with no vehicle access fell from 6.5% in 2000 to 2.2% in the period 2010 to 2014.

Vehicle operation is supported by a 219.7-mile network of public roadways maintained by the [Rhode Island Department of Transportation \(RIDOT\)](#) and the municipal [Public Works Department](#).

#### 7.2.1 Functional Classification

In Rhode Island, the functional classification system is prepared and maintained by the Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program in cooperation with RIDOT.

The [Federal Highway Administration \(FHWA\)](#) classifies roadways according to the function they provide and there are three major classifications of roadways and highways:

- [Locals](#) account for the majority of all roadways and limit vehicle traffic mobility to slower travelling speeds
- [Collectors](#) provide links between local roads and arterials as well as between different areas of a community, allowing vehicles comparatively greater accessibility and mobility than local roads; collectors are sub-classified as either major or minor
- [Arterials](#) provide the highest level of vehicle mobility due to high travelling speeds and larger traffic capacity meant for long distance, uninterrupted travel; arterials are also sub-classified as either principal (including interstate, other freeways and expressways and other principal arterials) or minor

In Westerly, there are 43.4 miles of arterials (6.2 miles of non-interstate freeways and expressways, 10.5 miles of principal arterial roads and 26.7 miles of minor arterials), 18.8 miles of collectors (16.3 miles of major collectors and 2.5 miles of minor collectors) and 157.5 miles of local roads. Roadways are also further categorized locally as urban or rural, generally corresponding with the urban services boundary and the local history of development.

Route 78, also known as Westerly Bypass and Veterans Way, serves as the longest arterial in Westerly. It essentially runs east-west (though a majority of its length is north-south) to connect Connecticut to Westerly's beaches and has come to somewhat define the northern and eastern extents of Westerly's denser and more urbanized area. Nearly all of Route 1, including Broad Street, Franklin Street, Granite Street, Post Road and Union Street, is a principal arterial which

provides service through the central-southern portion of town and generally runs east-west. The scenic alternative to Route 1, Route 1A, also traverses the town from east to west. It encompasses Beach Street, Elm Street, Shore Road, and Watch Hill Road and provides a collector route for traffic to and from the beaches and coastal neighborhoods. Other arterials in Westerly include Route 91 (Oak Street and Westerly-Bradford Road) and Route 216 (Church Street and portions of Ross Hill Road). Route 3 begins on Grove Avenue as a principal arterial through its segments on High Street and Ashaway Road.

#### **7.2.2 Traffic Volumes and Safety**

Input received from the Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Advisory Committee, public meetings and focus group sessions held in conjunction with the preparation of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update indicated there are areas of town which have been long-standing concerns for residents regarding vehicle congestion. This issue is concentrated in the summer months when the year-round traffic volume is combined with returning seasonal residents and daily influxes of visitors. Significant congestion is particularly concentrated along those roadways providing access to the shoreline (including [Westerly Town Beach](#), Wuskenau Beach, [Misquamicut State Beach](#) and other beaches) such as Airport Road, Atlantic Avenue, Route 78, Beach Street and Winnapaug Road. During summer weekends and holidays, a Community Service Officer of the [Westerly Police Department \(WPD\)](#) is commonly stationed at the intersection of Airport Road and Winnapaug Road to direct and manage traffic. Year-round, notable instances of traffic congestion may also be generated from downtown as well as the community's seven schools (six public and one private). New commercial developments such as Westerly Crossings, at the previously noted intersection of Airport Road and routes 1 and 78, also pose additional traffic volume concerns.

Traffic congestion issues were previously addressed statewide through a Congestion Management System (CMS) resulting from a 1997 plan. Routes 1 and 78 were both noted as part of the CMS and Route 1 was identified as experiencing congestion at the time. It was additionally forecasted to experience continued congestion as far out as 2025. Recommendations for improvements along Route 1 at that time included recommendations such as intersection improvements, signalization improvements and access management. Some of these recommendations were realized near the Charlestown-Westerly town line, with the installation of several traffic lights and turning lanes to enhance both traffic flow and safety. More recently, the Congestion Management Process (CMP) included as an appendix to *Transportation 2035* identified Westerly's segments of both Routes 1 and 78 as experiencing congestion in 2012 with congestion projected to continue until at least 2035.

Traffic volumes, as recorded in Table 7-1 below, are primarily sourced from the dominance of vehicle use in town. Additional causes may include accessibility management and a need for better linkages between Route 1 and the seashore and between I-95 and Westerly. The table

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below summarizes traffic counts shown in the 2009 RIDOT Traffic Flow Map and compares them with 2005 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volume count. In 2005 the traffic counts indicated that a section of Route 1 had an average daily volume of 21,300 vehicles. Similarly, Route 1A AADT volume between Winnapaug Road and Weekapaug Road was 4,500 in 2005 and was 3,800 in 2009.

**Table 7-1 Average Daily Vehicle Traffic Counts, 2005-2009**

| Roadway          | Segment   | 2005   | 2009 <sup>1</sup> |
|------------------|---|--------|-------------------|
| Route 1          | Granite Street and Route 78                       | 22,700 | 22,700            |
|                  | Route 78 (to junction w/Route 1A/Shore Road)      | 21,300 |                   |
|                  | West section and Town line                        | 13,500 |                   |
|                  | Route 78 and Route 1A/Shore Road                  | 9,500  |                   |
| Route 78         | Airport Road to Route 1                           | 8,100  |                   |
| Route 1A         | Watch Hill Road                                   | 5,800  | 4,400             |
|                  | Shore Road (Ocean View Highway to Winnapaug Road) | 5,100  | 4,100             |
|                  | Shore Road (Winnapaug Road to Weekapaug Road)     | 4,500  | 3,800             |
|                  | Shore Road (Noyes Neck Road to Route 1)           | 2,000  |                   |
|                  | Beach Street (East Avenue to Route 3)             | 7,700  | 7,600             |
| Route 3          | East Avenue at intersection with Beach Street     | 4,900  |                   |
|                  | Route 78 and High Street                          | 11,600 |                   |
| Route 91         | Post Road and Oak Street (northern portion)       | 6,400  |                   |
|                  | Eastern stretch near Bradford Road                | 4,800  |                   |
| Route 216        | Between Bradford and Ashaway-Bradford Road        | 7,300  |                   |
| Potter Hill Road |   | 600    | 1,000             |
| Canal Street     | Northern portion                                  | 1,800  |                   |

Sources: 2010 Comprehensive Plan and 2009 RIDOT Traffic Flow Map

<sup>1</sup> Annual 24-hour ADT collected between 2004 and 2008

From fiscal years 2013 to 2015, decreases in the number of motor vehicle verbal warnings (-37.9%), motor vehicle citations (-2.5%) and vehicle collisions (-3.7%) in Westerly were recorded by WPD. A decrease in vehicle operator and passenger deaths was also previously recorded from 2011 (three fatalities) to 2013 (one fatality); one fatality has occurred each year since 2013, resulting in a five-year annual average (2012-2016) of 1.2 fatalities. The Westerly Police Department has initiated a traffic calming program managed by a Patrol Corporal who is forwarded all traffic complaints and concerns and then develops a plan to address the issue. Directed patrol, speed signs, electronic message signs and public outreach are all utilized to achieve the desired results.

These improvements have been beneficial (as noted in the statistics above). Between 2013 and 2015, the number of individuals driving while intoxicated remained unchanged (ranging between 40 and 45) and increases were reported in the numbers of motor vehicle stops (28.7%) and erratic

drivers (19.1%). Route 1 is a roadway which has experienced numerous collisions. The impact of autonomous vehicles and other advances in vehicle technology is difficult to project, as self-driving cars themselves are in early stages of development and state legislation needed to allow their appropriate use in Rhode Island has not been adopted by the state as of spring 2017, several automotive manufacturers plan to have produced their first self-driving models well before 2023.

### 7.3 Parking

While most of the parking supply throughout Westerly is adequate for current and expected future needs, Watch Hill, Misquamicut and Downtown are areas of concern in regards to the availability of parking.

Currently, it can be estimated downtown is able to accommodate about 1,300 vehicles at any given time. This capacity is possible through a combination of on-street spaces, off-street lots and one three-floor parking garage. The largest suppliers of parking are Ocean Community YMCA, the Town of Westerly and the Washington Trust Company (Washington Trust is also the owner of the parking garage). A noteworthy amount of the off-street parking supply, however, is restricted for specific purposes. Following a successful petition in 2015 by the Downtown Business Association (DBA) and other businesses operating downtown, time restrictions for on-street parking and municipal lots were changed from a two-hour limit in place 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays to a three-hour limit in place 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. every day.

Exploring opportunities for shuttle bus service, alternative parking facilities, developing traffic management, calming and parking plans and encouraging the growing trend of walking and biking, as well as use of taxi services, are some strategies which may assist in decreasing the demand for parking downtown. One taxi service, Wright's Oceanview Taxi, was located in Westerly as of mid-2016 while additional taxi services and other ride sharing and networking services also operated in town at limited activity. Shared parking arrangements between day and evening uses and identifying properties which could provide additional parking would help to alleviate parking congestion. Autonomous vehicles may also come to alter current parking perceptions and configurations.

In a survey conducted as part of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan's public outreach, more than half of respondents indicated Misquamicut as another area where parking was an issue. While both Town beaches and Misquamicut State Beach provide on-site parking (the state beach alone has about 2,500 vehicle spaces), beachgoers often seek out parking at privately owned lots along Atlantic Avenue's commercial areas either due to cost or other lots being at full capacity. The primary cause for parking to be an issue in Watch Hill, like Downtown, is due to restrictions imposed on privately owned off-street lots. The area may thus benefit from the same strategies suggested for Downtown in the paragraph above.

7.4 Public Transportation

7.4.1 Bus Services

Public transportation is provided in Westerly through bus services operated by the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA). The first of these is a local route, the Westerly/Hope Valley Rural Ride Flex (301), which regularly operates each Friday and was established in November 2015. The 301 Flex route originates twice at Westerly Railroad Station and includes several stops in Westerly before continuing into neighboring Hopkinton and nearby Richmond. One additional trip originating in Richmond and terminating at Westerly Station is also scheduled. Table 7-2 overviews the stops included on this route, which takes a projected total of 78 minutes between Westerly Station and the Stilson Road/Stop & Shop stop in Richmond and has averaged about eight (8) monthly riders in the first four (4) months of 2016 (growing from 0 in January to 23 in April).

Table 7-2 Westerly/Hope Valley Rural Ride Flex Stops, 2016

|           | Stop                      | Street(s)                                  |
|-----------|---------------------------|--|
| Westerly  | Westerly Station          | Railroad Avenue                            |
|           | Downtown Westerly         | Intersections of Broad/Main,<br>Broad/High |
|           | Westerly Senior Center    | State Street                               |
|           | Franklin Shopping Plaza   | Franklin Street (Route 1)                  |
|           | Wal-Mart (Dunn’s Corners) | Post Road (Route 1)                        |
|           | Village/Main (Bradford)   | Intersection of North Main/Village         |
| Hopkinton | Main/Champlin (Ashaway)   | Intersection of Champlin/Main              |
|           | Saugatucket Springs       | Intersection of Clarke Falls/Main          |
|           | Wood River Health         | Main Street                                |
|           | Main/Spring (Hope Valley) | Intersection of Main/Spring                |
| Richmond  | Stilson Road/Stop & Shop  | Stilson Road                               |

Source: RIPTA

Westerly Flex (204) is a more regular route, operating Mondays through Fridays. As shown in Table 7-3, the 204 route originates at Westerly Station and terminates at Salt Pond Plaza in Narragansett, where riders may connect to the West Bay (14) and University of Rhode Island (URI) / Galilee (66) routes. Between January and April 2016, the route averaged 1,346 riders per month.

Table 7-3 Westerly Flex Stops, 2016

|          | Stop                | Street(s)           |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Westerly | Westerly Station    | Railroad Avenue     |
|          | Wal-Mart (Westerly) | Post Road (Route 1) |

|                 |                 |                   |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| South Kingstown | Stedman Center  | Tower Hill Road   |
| Narragansett    | Salt Pond Plaza | Point Judith Road |

Source: RIPTA

RIPTA also operates a commuter-oriented bus route, the Westerly Park & Ride (95x), between Westerly and Providence, the State’s capital and largest city. All buses used are equipped with bike racks to support multi-modal travel. Three morning trips, spaced 30 minutes apart, originate at Westerly Station and make several stops along Interstate 95 before terminating at the Turk’s Head building in Providence for a 75-minute projected duration. Three return trips are then operated in the late afternoon, with the same projected time duration. RIPTA has identified an average of 16 riders bound for Providence and 18 riders bound for Westerly each weekday. Table 7-4 overviews the stops included on the 95x route.

**Table 7-4 Westerly Park & Ride Stops, 2016**

|                | Stop                    | Street(s)                          |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Westerly       | Westerly Station        | Railroad Avenue                    |
| Hopkinton      | Ashaway Park & Ride     | Main Street                        |
| Richmond       | Wyoming Park & Ride     | Kingstown Road                     |
| West Greenwich | Exit 7   West Greenwich | New London Turnpike                |
|                | Exchange Terrace        | Exchange Terrace                   |
|                | RI Convention Center    | Sabin Street                       |
| Providence     | Empire & Westminster    | Intersection of Empire/Westminster |
|                | Weybosset & Eddy        | Intersection of Eddy/Weybosset     |
|                | Turk’s Head             | Weybosset Street                   |

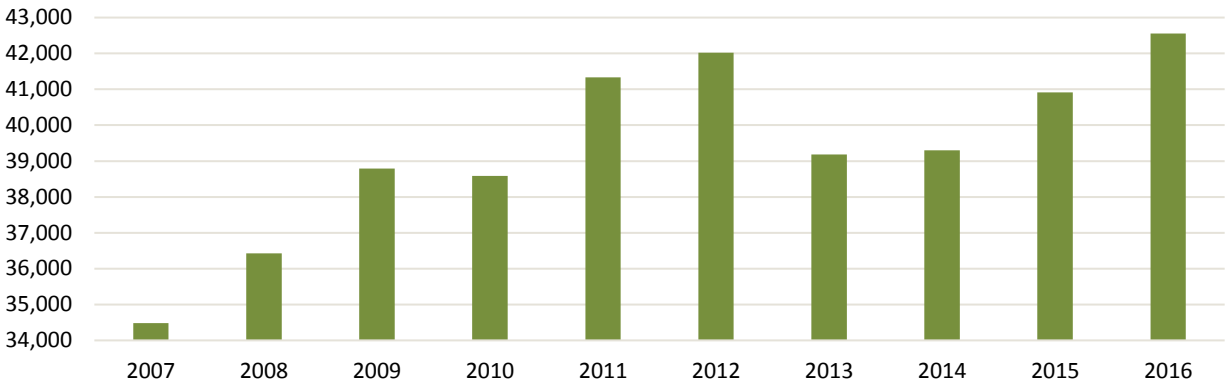
Source: RIPTA

Along with these two fixed routes, RIPTA also provides Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant paratransit through the Ride program. Reservations need to be made at least one day in advance and rides are made available through either a van or taxicab. In addition, van services are offered through Westerly Senior Center and Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center.

**7.4.2 Rail Services**

Westerly Station is located on Railroad Avenue between Downtown and the North End neighborhood. Built in 1912, it is today a stop on the most-heavily travelled railway line in the United States – the Northeast Corridor (NEC). Amtrak operates two services on the NEC, Northeast Regional and Acela Express and both offer passengers direct stops in major cities including Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington. Figure 7-2 below shows the numbers of unlinked (defined as separating roundtrips [including layovers]) Amtrak ridership departing from and arriving at Westerly Station from 2008 to 2016.

**Figure 7-2 Unlinked Ridership for Amtrak Services at Westerly Station, 2007-2016**



Source: [National Association of Railroad Passengers](#)

From 2007 to 2016, ridership at Westerly Station has increased by 23.4%, a rate significantly higher than Kingston Station (7.2%) in South Kingstown and only slightly less than Providence Station (27%). This general trend, even more impressive when considering the far greater number of trains which stop at both Kingston (159,800 rider in 2016) and Providence (709,300 riders in 2016) stations, supports a widely-held interest in town for the extension of the Shore Line East (SLE; operated by the [Connecticut Department of Transportation \[ConnDOT\]](#)) and Providence line (operated south of Providence by RIDOT and north by the [Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority \[MBTA\]](#)) commuter rail services. The 2010 Comprehensive Plan survey indicated that 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed access to commuter rail was a high priority.

Two ridership projections have been conducted for Westerly Station in regard to commuter rail service. In 1995, a Brown University study conducted with consultation from RIDOT anticipated 268 daily individual boardings at Westerly Station by 2000 (excluding leisure and weekend travel). The consultant for the 2010 Comprehensive Plan used 2000 US Census data to provide new projections which identified significant growth in potential ridership. Nearly 970 workers would commute from Westerly Station to one of five other Rhode Island communities while 640 workers from these five communities would commute to Westerly if commuter rail was available.

SLE service currently exists between New London and New Haven, Connecticut, where riders may then connect to New York via the New Haven Line of Metro-North Railroad, operated by the [Metropolitan Transportation Authority \(MTA\)](#). Recent growth in SLE ridership and public advocacy at a public hearing encouraged the Connecticut Public Transportation Commission to recommend service expansion to Westerly as soon as feasible in its [2015 Annual Report and Recommendations](#) and noted the expansion was not the primary focus for ConnDOT.

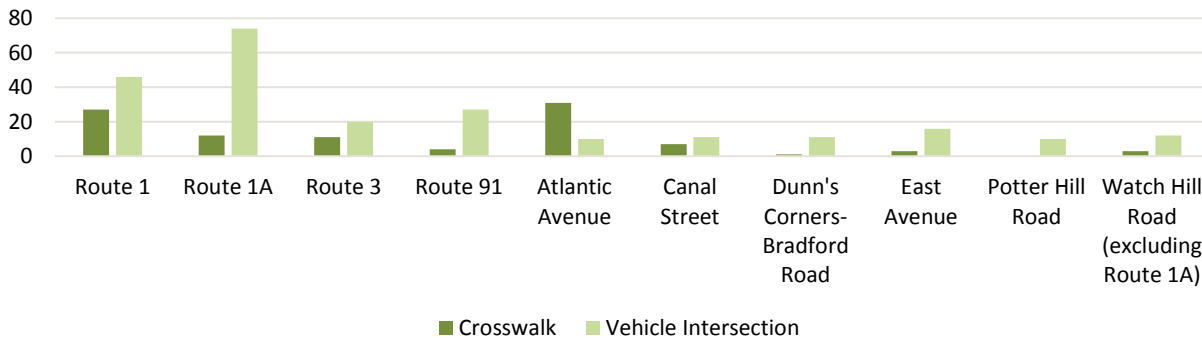
RIDOT has also identified Westerly Station as suitable for commuter rail service due to its walkability and surrounding high density. Several elements of the State Guide Plan, including [Land Use 2025](#), [Transportation 2035](#) and the [Rhode Island State Rail Plan 2014](#) cite Westerly as a community to consider for future expansion. This extension would allow Westerly to be a major commuter rail connection between New York and Boston, two of the country’s largest metropolitan regions.

Westerly Station has been an important component of the downtown revitalization project. However, currently (2018), the station is closed to ticket sales and services and the federal long-range plans for enhancement of high speed rail in the Northeast Corridor (NEC) may bypass Westerly Station altogether.

**7.5 Pedestrians and Walkability**

Pedestrian infrastructure in Westerly, while located throughout the community, is less extensive than its vehicular counterpart. Figure 7-3 below is evidential of this, showing a comparison between the number of marked crosswalks and vehicle intersections on major roadways throughout town.

**Figure 7-3 Marked Crosswalks and Vehicle Intersections on Select Roadways, 2016**



Source: Mason & Associates, Inc.

As an indication of their pre-automobile developments, a majority of sidewalks and marked crosswalks today are concentrated in historic areas of town such as Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods as well as Misquamicut and Watch Hill. These places share many of the characteristics often cited as contributing to a walkable environment, including a mix or close proximity of residential and commercial uses, greater density, shorter setbacks, hidden parking lots and aesthetic features which together allow shorter walking distances and more attractive areas to observe while walking.

The Town has adopted several ordinances to better ensure the safety of those who walk. Arguably the most prominent of these is the required removal of all snow and ice from sidewalks

within the first twenty-four hours following the end of any accumulation. In 2015, 115 code violations were recorded concerning inadequate sidewalk clearing by adjacent property owners. In winter 2017, the Town removed snow from sidewalks in the Downtown area to improve travel safety for pedestrians.

Several streets, and particularly those in the town’s urban areas, will be receiving improvements to their pedestrian infrastructure or streetscaping in the near future. These include Friendship Street, Industrial Drive, Pierce Street and a segment of Spruce Street. Improvements to the latter three will be funded through the Town’s approved 2015 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application. The projects were expected to begin in spring/summer 2018.

In May 2017, the Town was awarded a [Main Street Rhode Island Streetscape Improvement program](#) to rehabilitate deteriorated sidewalks and install crosswalk access points compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements along High Street, the main roadway in Downtown Westerly. One result from the funding award has been the elimination of parking spaces abutting marked crosswalks to provide motor vehicle operators greater visibility of pedestrians.

### 7.6 Cycling and Bikability

Rhode Island’s small size allows Westerly residents convenient access to the state’s eight off-street recreational bike paths, including the 7.8 mile [William C. O’Neill Bike Path](#) (more commonly known as the South County Bike Path) that extends from South Kingstown to Narragansett. Westerly currently shares a goal with South Kingstown and neighboring Charlestown for establishing a continuous bikeway which would become part of RIDOT’s bike network and may serve, in part, as a segment of the [East Coast Greenway](#), a planned bike interstate connecting Florida and Maine. Collaboration between the three towns, through their respective bike path committees, was underway as of mid-2016. Previously, cross-community collaboration occurred with a *Shoreline Bikeway Report* submitted by the Town of Charlestown to RIDOT as part of the 2003-2005 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) which proposed a signed bike route along four roadways between Charlestown and Westerly. Following this and other efforts, RIDOT established a signed on-street bike route system across southern Rhode Island which includes several roadways in the eastern portion of Westerly – Bradford Road, Church Street, Dunn’s Corners-Bradford Road, Langworthy Road and Ross Hill Road.

The July 2007 *Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Study and Development* prepared by Westerly and Charlestown noted a recommendation not to designate the segment of the proposed Shoreline Bikeway – Post Road (Route 1) from the Charlestown-Westerly town line to the intersection of Post Road and Shore Road and from that intersection to the intersection of Shore Road and Winnapaug Road – through the installation of signage. Experienced bicyclists had indicated they would not likely make efficient use of indirect paths and driving statistics collected for the study

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presented safety concerns. More recently however, Westerly’s Bike Path Study Committee has worked to establish a bike path generally aligning with Shore Road, Atlantic Avenue, Weekapaug Road and Winnapaug Road and kept physically separate from vehicle lanes by an open space or barrier. The Bike Path Study Committee, as of mid-2016, was seeking a decrease in the speed limit on Shore Road (from 40 miles per hour to 35 miles per hour) supported by the Town Council and Chief of Police.

In its [2015 report card](#), the League of American Bicyclists identified Rhode Island had accomplished five of the top ten signs of success towards a bike-friendly designation, most recently the introduction of a ‘Share the Road’ campaign. In 2016, the League of American Bicyclists also identified Rhode Island had adopted all four policy goals to improve bikability (decrease bike rider fatalities, increase biking, decrease bike rider injuries and increase physical activity). Bike parking has also become available in downtown through six bike racks located across the area – two at the Washington Trust Community Skating Center, one at Westerly Library, one at Wilcox Park’s Serpa Gate (the northwest entrance), one at the Ocean Community YMCA and one in front of Ray Willis Toys and Bicycles. Locations for expanding the availability of bike parking include Westerly Station, the Post Office and other key sites.

### 7.7 Transportation Improvement Projects

Transportation projects which seek federal funding are required to be included in the state’s Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which is adopted by the State Planning Council at a required minimum of every four years. The [TIP for federal fiscal years 2013 through 2016 \(FFY13-16 TIP\)](#) included seven projects for the Town of Westerly:

- Church Street sidewalk construction
- Bay Street pavement management program
- Canal Street/White Rock Road transportation alternative project
- Crandall Farm renovation transportation alternative project
- 2012 State Traffic Commission C-2 South 2013-CT-093 traffic safety program
- 2014 State Traffic Commission C-6 traffic safety program
- Atlantic Avenue reconstruction and bike path study and development

A status report submitted by RIDOT for the FFY13-16 TIP indicated that the 2012 State Traffic Commission C-2 South 2013-CT-093 traffic safety program was completed in 2014 and, as of November 2015, the Bay Street pavement management program was nearing completion. By this time, the Canal Street/White Rock Road project had evolved into the Bay Street program and the Crandall Farm renovation project was dropped due to insufficient funding. Amendment #7 to the TIP added two additional projects to be funded in fiscal year 2016 – the Chapman Pond railroad bridge (RI 78 West bypass at RI 91 Bradford Road and Amtrak) and the Varietyville Road

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bridge (RI 78 West bypass at Canal Street). Both projects were completed by spring 2017 and additional improvements to the Chapman Pond railroad bridge are expected by 2020.

The succeeding TIP, also referred to as STIP (State Transportation Improvement Program) is proposed to cover a longer timeframe, from fiscal years 2017 through 2025, to align the asset management based system to which the state is currently shifting. Along with the two bridge projects noted above, there were 19 other projects in Westerly requested for inclusion in the FFY17-25 TIP. Of these, ten were designated for funding in an April 2016 status report:

- Cross Street (Main Street to Granite Street) pavement capital program (FY 2017)
- Granite Quarry Bridge (Route 78 West bypass at Route 3) capital project (FY 2017)
- Guardrail and median improvements to Route 1 (FY 2017)
- High Street Railroad Bridge capital project (FY 2017)
- Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements for State Street Elementary School (FY 2017)
- Potter Hill Road (High Street to Hopkinton town line) pavement capital program (FY 2019)
- Bay Street streetscape improvements transportation alternatives program (FY 2022)
- Route 78 (Route 1 to Connecticut state line) pavement capital program (FY 2022)
- Route 1 (Robin Hollow Road to Prosser Terrace) pavement capital program (FY 2023)
- Route 1 (Tower Street to Route 78) pavement capital program (FY 2024)

Projects which were proposed but not included in the FFY17-25 TIP and not likely to be included in the TIP successor includes resurfacing of Canal Street, construction of a parking garage on Union Street, elevating and constructing a bike lane on Atlantic Avenue, reconstructing Friendship Street, improving drainage on and resurfacing Main Street and resurfacing Beach Street (Route 1A). Some of these projects, such as the reconstruction of Friendship Street, are now being alternatively funded.

The Engineering Division implements programs for the rehabilitation and maintenance of local roads and bridges which support the community's transportation network, including a Guardrail Replacement Program, Pavement Management Program, Street Improvement Program and Sidewalk Replacement Program. The Pavement Management Program was established to determine specifically where funding is to be used for performing resurfacing of roadways. During FY2006, the Engineering Division, working in conjunction with the Public Works Department, performed roadway overlay repairs throughout the town. In addition, the Engineering Division coordinated with RIDOT on several other road and bridge projects including the completion of reconstruction projects on High Street and East Avenue and design of the

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replacement of the Weekapaug Bridge.<sup>1</sup> A \$5 million bond referendum (\$3 million to be used for roadway reconstruction, including \$1.7 million to be used for asphalt overlay repair, and \$2 million to be used for roadway drainage) approved in autumn 2008 was used to facilitate improvements to roads across the town. A more recent bond was approved by voters in November 2014 and issued in July 2015. Along with CDBG and Rhode Island Local Equity Aid Program (RI-LEAP) funding received respectively towards the Downtown Culvert Replacement Project and the Cross Street Road Reconstruction Project, a spring 2016 memorandum from the Engineering Division stated the following projects (totaling over \$1.7 million) were expected to be done in and/or near to FY2017:

- Atlantic Avenue (Winnapaug Road to Benson Avenue) – sidewalk repairs
- Church Street – sidewalk repairs
- Happy Valley Road – drainage repairs
- High Street – sidewalk repairs
- Main Street (Broad Street to Cross Street) – milling and overlaying
- North Capalbo Drive – drainage repairs and paving
- Pondview Avenue – drainage repairs and paving
- South Fairway Avenue – drainage repairs and paving
- South Woody Hill Road (Post Road to Sandy Lane) – paving
- Springbrook Road – drainage repairs, road reprofiling and paving

In May 2017, the Town announced Main Street would be milled and repaved later in the year through the 2014 bond.

### 7.8 Water and Waterfront Access

The Pawcatuck River (which serves as the southernmost portion of the Connecticut-Rhode Island state boundary) and its estuary are designated as a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) under the jurisdiction of the [Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council \(CRMC\)](#). The current management plan for the Pawcatuck River SAMP, the [Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan](#), was adopted in July 1992 and developed to provide a consistent, ecologically-based policy framework for decisions involving the use of the estuary's resources.<sup>2</sup>

The State of Rhode Island provides access to the Pawcatuck River at four locations in Westerly, two of which are hand carry boat launches and two are boat ramps, which include Bradford

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<sup>1</sup> Town of Westerly website (accessed November 2007)

<sup>2</sup> *The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan*, July 1992

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Landing, Post Office Lane (near Potter Hill Dam), Main Street RIDEM ramp, and a CRMC designated right-of-way located off Avondale Road.

The Town has made many efforts to further connect its residents and visitors with its waters including the acquisition of 27 acres of tidal marsh adjoining Winnapaug Pond on the north side of Atlantic Avenue and a parcel on Main Street next to the sewer treatment plant. A third acquisition was a seven-acre parcel adjacent to land leased by the Town of Westerly to Westerly Marina. During the marina's operating season, the boats of town residents can be launched there under that lease agreement between the marina's owners and the Town of Westerly. In addition to river access, there is a boat ramp located across from the Town DPW facility on Chapman Pond.

In January 2016, a completed draft of the Town of Westerly's *Harbor Management Plan* was made available for review. The plan has been in development by the Westerly Harbor Management Planning Committee for an extended period of time and its successful adoption by the Town and CRMC would help manage the growing activity within the Pawcatuck River, its estuary and Little Narragansett Bay. Recommendations of the draft plan include the permanent establishment of a Harbor Commission and a Harbormaster whose duties would include administering designated mooring areas, issuing permits for all moorings and enforcing related ordinances and state boating laws, among others. The plan additionally identified 13 private sites (excluding Westerly Marina) providing water access, most often along the estuary of the Pawcatuck River. In total, there are 224 docks, 781 slips and 336 moorings located in Westerly.

### 7.9 Air Service

[Westerly State Airport \(WST\)](#), located on Airport Road, is operated by the [Rhode Island Airport Corporation \(RIAC\)](#) and serves corporate aviation and air passenger services as well as aircraft maintenance and repair. In addition to general aviation which includes recreational flight, corporate and business flight and flight instruction, WST serves as the mainland base for the only regularly scheduled commercial flights to Block Island via New England Airlines. WST is classified as a commercial service airport due to annual passenger numbers falling between 2,500 and 10,000 passengers. There is an average of about 53 flights per day for a total of 19,259 (personal communication from RIAC). The breakdown in terms of types of flights is 43% airline, 36% local general aviation, 19% transient general aviation, 2% air taxi, and less than 1% military. The [2013 Rhode Island Airport Land Use Compatibility Guidebook](#) cited 20,528 operations at WST in 2009—a 33.3% increase from the 2006 estimate (15,400)—and noted passenger boardings in certain years may be in excess of 10,000. Most private aircraft activity occurs throughout the summer months due to the seasonal increase in residents and visitors. While now a decade old, the most recent economic impact for the airport was \$8.4 million in 2005. The [Rhode Island Airport System Plan](#) for the future of the state airports was adopted by the State in September 2011 and

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addresses the six existing State airports within Rhode Island. The Plan defined Westerly Airport's future role as being general aviation/commercial service and projected total operations (the number of takeoffs and landings) to be between 18,500 and 29,700 in 2021, depending on the projection used for future growth. An issue regarding the future of the airport is the fact that the airport is almost completely surrounded by existing commercial and residential development which presents safety concerns. The plan proposed six goals for recommended facility and service improvements—obtaining easements and clearing obstructions, updating the Master Plan, improving security fencing and lighting, constructing an operations/maintenance building, providing T-hanger storage and providing corporate hanger storage—were included in the plan along with a separate goal to maintain commercial service between Westerly and Block Island. A sample survey of pilots using WST indicated the three primary needs at the airport included a restaurant, ground transportation, and a precision/instrument approach.

Recently (2016-present), residents living near the airport have expressed significant concern about the installation of new lighting and the perceived increase in operations at the airport. Residents' concerns have been communicated through letters to the local newspaper, statements at Town Council and other official Town meetings. The residents believe that their quality of life and property values are being negatively affected by airport operations at present and are concerned about potential intensification and eminent domain in future use. It is unclear what the Town of Westerly might be able to do about the impact of airport operations on private land uses surrounding the airport, should it choose to do anything, given that the airport is owned and operated by a quasi-state agency, RIAC. These issues are currently (2018) under consideration by the courts. The entire dispute is complicated by the fact that there are no authoritative data on historic or recent changes to airport infrastructure and use. The Town Council has established an Airport Advisory Committee.

## 8 Open Space & Recreation

### 8.1 Planning Context

This chapter provides an inventory of the town's existing open space and recreation resources. These resources play a critical role in the quality of life in Westerly, serving as important natural resource protection areas, providing opportunities for leisure and exercise, and helping to preserve the character of the town. Identifying existing open spaces, facilities and programs will help the town properly plan for future needs.

#### 8.1.1 Statewide Planning Context

This chapter is presented in the context of several plans of the State Guide Plan, including [Land Use 2025](#), [A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future](#) and [Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#).

With regard to open space and recreation, *Land Use 2025* poses a series of questions to be addressed when setting and implementing objectives and policies which specifically relate to open space and recreation). While *Land Use 2025* establishes a framework for open space and recreation planning, *A Greener Path* and *Ocean State Outdoors* assess more specific statewide needs and provide specific goals and policies which municipalities may address in their comprehensive plans. *A Greener Path* is reviewed and applied to Westerly in the Open Space section of this chapter, while *Ocean State Outdoors* is reviewed and applied to Westerly in the Recreation section of this chapter.

#### 8.1.2 Local Planning Context

Since Westerly's first Comprehensive Plan in 1966, many changes to the town's open space and recreation resources have occurred. Several selected accomplishments toward achieving the Plan's recommended actions for Open Space and Recreation include:

- Acquisition and protection of several hundred acres town-wide by the Town and several non-profit organizations including the Town Forest, the Lucey properties, properties located on Canal Street, Shetland Drive, and Harbor Drive.
- Purchase of an additional boat to patrol Westerly's shoreline and river
- Provision of picnic facilities at Cimalore Field, Gingerella Sports Complex and Craig Field
- Creations of Rotary Park, Wuskenau Beach and a community center
- Clearing of hiking trails and provision of signage at the Town Forest
- Upgrades to school and town playground facilities
- Establishment of the Recreation Department
- Expansion of the Westerly Senior Citizens Center

- Approval of a bond in 2006 (\$3 million) for the acquisition of Lucey properties for open space and recreation
- Approval of a bond in 2014 (\$1.3 million) for the acquisition of additional Lucey properties for open space and passive recreation

Continued open space preservation efforts and recreation facility improvements are encouraged and assisted by the [Recreation Department](#), the [Recreation Board](#), the [Westerly Municipal Land Trust](#) and the [Conservation Commission](#). The following two sections describe management resources, provide an inventory of existing conditions and describe how town resources fit into the regional context.

### 8.2 Open Space

Open space in Westerly is a part of the community character and is essential to the protection of natural sources and recreational facilities for residents and visitors. The Town has not had a consistent funding source for the purchase of open space and its recreational needs. It does have a municipal land trust (the Westerly Municipal Land Trust) and a Conservation Commission, both of which provide the Town Council with recommendations for conservation. The Westerly Municipal Land Trust has relied solely on the passage of municipal bonds for its funding. The following subsections provide an inventory of existing open space, regional conservation plans/strategies and available preservation tools which will assist in the management of these resources.

#### 8.2.1 Existing Open Space

In Westerly, there is a demonstrated need for balance between the protection of and provision for natural resources and development pressures. Responding to the Town's open space preservation needs are a variety of public and private organizations preserving open space in Westerly. The combination of preservation efforts in Westerly has protected over 4,600 acres of conservation land, translating into about 23.1% of the Town. Approximately 78.3% of the town's conservation land has some extent of public access. The **Conservation Lands map (CON-1)** includes all existing public and private conservation areas permanently protected, including local 'conservation intents' in which property owners have made efforts to protect their land from future development. Like Table 8-1 below, it illustrates the breakdown of the state protected lands (green lines facing diagonal left) and land protected by the Town and non-governmental organizations (green lines facing diagonal right). In addition to the 4,650.9 total acres provided through data from the [Rhode Island Geographic Information System \(RIGIS\)](#), the Town has also indicated an additional 493.0 acres as open space. These properties are also indicated within CON-1 as local conservation lands but are not labeled.

**Table 8-1 Conserved Lands in Westerly by Primary Owner**

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| Name   | Acreage         | Percent of Total | Acreage of Public and Limited Public Access |
|--|-----------------|------------------|---|
| State of Rhode Island <sup>1</sup>           | 953.46          | 20.50            | 953.46                                      |
| Town of Westerly                             | 854.36          | 18.37            | 854.36                                      |
| Shelter Harbor Fire District                 | 93.53           | 2.01             | 0.00  |
| Watch Hill Fire District                     | 64.26           | 1.38             | 0.00  |
| Weekapaug Fire District                      | 50.21           | 1.08             | 0.00  |
| Westerly Fire District                       | 1.69            | 0.04             | 0.00  |
| Audubon Society of Rhode Island              | 95.61           | 2.06             | 95.61                                       |
| Avalonia Land Conservancy                    | 37.15           | 0.80             | 37.15                                       |
| H. C. Moore Foundation                       | 31.32           | 0.67             | 31.32                                       |
| Memorial and Library Association of Westerly | 14.66           | 0.31             | 14.66                                       |
| Nature Conservancy                           | 118.58          | 2.55             | 118.58                                      |
| Nopes Island Conservation Association        | 4.16            | 0.09             | 0.00  |
| Watch Hill Conservancy                       | 4.57            | 0.10             | 0.00  |
| Weekapaug Foundation for Conservation        | 109.77          | 2.36             | 69.41                                       |
| Westerly Land Trust                          | 1,467.85        | 31.56            | 1,467.85                                    |
| Private (subtotal)                           | 749.73          | 16.12            | 0.00  |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>4,650.90</b> | <b>100.00</b>    | <b>3,642.40</b>                             |

Source: RIGIS

<sup>1</sup> Acreage excludes state conservation lands overlapping with local conservation lands

Of the fee simple owned properties in the table above, many have one or two easement owners. Many easements list more than one participant, reflecting funding and contingent succession of financial or operating responsibility. These documents are a matter of record.

### Location of Open Space in Westerly

Open space is scattered throughout the Town of Westerly, with its largest concentrations in the eastern and northern portions of town (including the Town Forest, the Woody Hill Management Area and the Grills Preserve). All these areas are accessible to the public. One of the largest contiguous open space land masses in Rhode Island, held in preservation by multiple organizations, is on the eastern border of Westerly: more than 1300 hundred acres of land acts as natural Greenway System for animal migration and/or habitat. The organizations that own the properties that create this greenway are:

| Owned by   | Area                                      | Acres |
|--|---|-------|
| State of Rhode Island                            | Woody Hill Management Area                | 819   |
| Westerly Land Trust                              | Wahaneeta Preserve                        | 72    |
| Town of Westerly (Westerly Municipal Land Trust) | Lucey Property Bond 1 (Bradford Preserve) | 57    |
| Town of Westerly (Westerly Municipal Land Trust) | Lucey Property Bond 2                     | 433   |

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Both parcels of land, purchased by the Town of Westerly, were acquired through the passage of bond referendums (the 57 acres and the 433-acre parcels). Both pieces of property were purchased from the Lucey farm located at McGowan's corner. The first bond was passed as an open space and recreation bond in 2006, passage of this bond led to the establishment of the Bradford Preserve. The second bond was passed as a passive recreation bond in 2014. Other lands that are contiguous with this Greenway System but not held in perpetuity as recreation or open space, include 61 acres owned by the Narragansett Indian Tribe

In the southern and southeastern portion of the Town, a substantial amount of open space exists on four golf courses: the Shelter Harbor Golf Club (closed membership and clubhouse located in Charlestown), the Misquamicut Club (closed membership), the Weekapaug Golf Club (semi-closed membership), and the Winnapaug Country Club (open membership). The Shelter Harbor Golf Club and Weekapaug Golf Club are both preserved through conservation easements.

Coastal open space, accessible to the public, includes the [Misquamicut State Beach](#), two town beaches, the Weekapaug Fishing Area, [Napatree Point Conservation Area](#) and several beaches owned by fire districts. The [Audubon Society of Rhode Island](#) and the [Westerly Land Trust](#) maintain large areas of open space along Route 1A on the northern shore of Winnapaug Pond, known, respectively, as the Lathrop Wildlife Refuge and the Winnapaug Pond Preserve. Just north of Route 1A is the Westerly Land Trust's Dr. John Champlin Glacier Park. These areas provide a large span of open space along Winnapaug Pond.

Open spaces in the central portion of the Town include swamp lands such as Crandall Swamp (also known as Aguntaug Swamp) and the Newton Swamp Management Area. Open spaces in the northern section of town include the purchase of approximately 57 acres on Route 91 known as Bradford Preserve.

#### Types of Protected Land

Open space preservation in Westerly has a variety of purposes, including agricultural land protection, water supply protection, habitat protection and recreation. The pie chart below illustrates the breakdown of different types of conservation land in Westerly. Most of Westerly's conservation land has been preserved for habitat protection with recreation as the second largest purpose for preservation.

#### Land Acquisition

Integral to ensuring continued open space protection in Westerly are land acquisitions. Acquisition types include fee simple, agricultural development rights, conservation easements and recreation easements. Property acquisitions have been proven to be an economic benefit

to local communities (recreation, tourism, reduction of costs associated with storm damage) and they also help preserve existing scenic resources.

The [Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council \(CRMC\)](#) is working with the South Shore Management Area Work Group (which includes representatives from Westerly), organized by the [Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management \(RIDEM\)](#)'s Land Conservation and Acquisition Program, to identify priority acquisitions along the south shore.

### *8.2.2 Regional Conservation Plans and Strategies*

As Westerly considers its future open space preservation needs, it is important to consider how these needs fit into the regional framework. In achieving regional goals for open space, there is a need to understand that there may be limiting factors such as road widths, traffic constraints, topography, existing environmentally sensitive areas and availability of funds. The local framework for Westerly includes *A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*. Five years after *A Greener Path* was adopted however, a 1999 joint study by the [Rhode Island Department of Transportation \(RIDOT\)](#) and Washington County Regional Planning Council (WCRPC) concluded that some components of *A Greener Path* were not environmentally or economically feasible and therefore could not be pursued. Following these findings, WCRPC worked with several partners to form a greenspace protection strategy. The strategy is included in the findings of the *South County Greenspace Project*, submitted in spring 2003 and discussed in the following section.

An existing on-street bike route follows a portion of routes 1 and 1A (both of which are state roads) in Westerly's northwest and has yet to be connected into a larger network. Efforts of several organizations and groups operating in town have successfully preserved portions of the Greenspace Resource Areas proposed for Westerly in *A Greener Path*.

In order for the Town to achieve what is proposed in the state's Greenspace and Greenways System, it needs to:

- Continue efforts to obtain open spaces along the Pawcatuck River
- Initiate a greenways project along the Town's coastal border
- Preserve greenspace along the coast and in the central portion of the Town

#### *South County Greenspace Protection Strategy*

In 2003, a report by RIDEM entitled *South County Greenspace Project* was provided to each town in Washington County with a series of maps and reports to assist in making changes to comprehensive plans and zoning and subdivision regulations for meaningful preservation of open space as development continues. The information includes a set of maps illustrating a comprehensive and up-to-date inventory of its natural, cultural and recreational resources

(with local protection priorities mapped and linked into a regional greenspace strategy), 26 maps (10 local resource and 16 regional) with underlying GIS data, and an audit and written report prepared for each community by Randall Arendt, a prominent conservation and landscape planner and advocate.

Priorities identified in the composite maps include: five primary destination points in Westerly (Bradford Landing, White Rock, Westerly Center, Watch Hill and Weekapaug), heritage areas along the Town’s coastal edge and along the Pawcatuck River, a large natural resource zone in the central portion of town and heritage areas within natural resource zones near White Rock, Bradford Landing, Weekapaug, Watch Hill and Chapman Pond. Other priorities identified on the Westerly maps include heritage corridors, natural resource corridors, bike trails, hiking trails and water trails.

Westerly has developed and currently uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping system. In GIS, spatial data can be combined or separated and subjected to a variety of analyses. For example, all the recreation facilities in town could be mapped, along with all of the school facilities, to show areas in which the Town and schools could coordinate in delivering recreation facilities.

**8.2.3 Preservation Tools**

Several tools are available to the Town to help it preserve and maintain open space as development occurs including the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act, funding sources and State/regional guides to development practices.

**Table 8-2 Preservation Tools for Open Space**

| Tool  | Description   |
|---|---|
| Farm, Forest and Open Space Act tax incentive program     | Helps preserve properties for farming, forested land or open space. As property owners face increasing economic pressures to convert to more profitable land uses, this program enables land owners to have their land assessment based on its current use, not its value for development. This is a tool that has been utilized in Westerly. In November 2007, there were 73 properties enrolled in the program. As of June 2016, this number had decreased slightly to 70 parcels. <sup>1</sup> |
| Funding Sources for land acquisition/protection           | Funding sources for land acquisitions are a critical tool for preservation. Funding sources include direct or matching funds from various programs of RIDEM, Champlin Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Forrest C. and Francis H. Lattner Foundation, Lattner Family Foundation, town open space bonds and others.   |
| Rhode Island Conservation Development Manual <sup>2</sup> | Provides a 10-step process for planning and design of creative development projects. The manual is in response to increasing development pressures and resulting suburban sprawl. Similar to the goals of cluster development, the manual utilizes conservation   |

South County  
Watersheds Technical  
Planning Assistance  
Project<sup>1</sup>

development as a technique to preserve open space in a community.

An effort by several groups, including RIDEM, Rhode Island Rural Lands Coalition and South County Planners, to prepare a comprehensive review of the best possible solutions nation-wide and show how they can be applied locally. The result of the project was several documents to help plan for growth, including South County Design Manual, model zoning ordinances, strategies to promote farming and forestry, a Transfer of Development Rights study and Development Site Assessment Guide.

<sup>1</sup>Town of Westerly Assessment Department

<sup>2</sup>it is important to note RIDEM provides several guides for more environmentally sensitive development

### 8.3 Recreation

While the Town does not yet have a master plan to help guide long-range recreation initiatives, the Recreation Department (established in 2001 as a result of a recommendation in the 1991 Comprehensive Plan), manages and administers improvements for the recreation facilities – including Westerly Town Beach and Wuskenau Beach Facility – and programs with the involvement of the Recreation Maintenance Division of the Public Works Department and the Board of Recreation. The seven-member Board meets once monthly and advises both the Planning Board and the Town Council on the planning, organization and promotion of recreational resources in Westerly. The Recreation Director reports to the Board on Town recreation matters and efforts.

Many of the Town’s existing recreational facilities and programs, including both non-water and water based, are included on the **Recreation map (REC-1)**. Like the Conservation Lands map, REC-1 also shows conservation lands and includes boat launches and ramps, bike routes, hiking trails, recreation sites, and scenic landscapes and roadways. The recreation sites included are those on the most up-to-date State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) Inventory of Facilities as contributed by RIDEM.

#### 8.3.1 Recreation Facilities and Programs

##### Non-Water Based Recreation Facilities

Recreation facilities for non-water based uses include municipal, public school, quasi-public, private and regional facilities. The following sections provide descriptions of these recreation facilities.

##### *Town Facilities*

There are several non-water-based outdoor Town recreational facilities which serve Westerly’s active recreation needs including the Bowling Lane Playground, Cimalore Field, Craig Field, Gingerella Sports Complex, Rotary Park and a basketball court and tennis court on Narragansett Avenue (see Tower Street School Community Center in Table 8-4). Additionally, the Town

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maintains the state-owned Airport Field and all public schools have outdoor recreational facilities available to the public during non-school hours. Generally, the Town’s recreation facilities are in fair condition, though there is a need for some utility poles, providing onsite lighting, to be replaced.

In addition to these facilities, it should also be noted the Town owns a 230.4-acre property along the Pawcatuck River known as the Town Forest. Although this property is categorized as habitat protection land, like many open spaces, it serves multiple uses. The Town Forest is available for public use as a passive recreation facility and contains approximately three miles of trails for nature walks and environmental education. The table below describes these town facilities.

**Table 8-3 Town of Westerly Recreation Facilities**

| Facility                        | Location              | Description   |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Bradford Preserve               | Bradford Road         | 2 lacrosse fields<br>Cross-country/Hiking Trails  |
| Bruce Ladd Memorial Dog Park    | Larry Hirsch Lane     | Dog Park  |
| Bowling Lane Playground         | Bowling Lane          | 1 playground  |
| Cimalore Field                  | Wilson Street         | 1 baseball field<br>2 basketball courts<br>1 playground<br>4 softball fields            |
| Craig Field                     | Mountain Avenue       | 1 baseball field<br>1 basketball court<br>1 playground                                  |
| Gingerella Sports Complex       | White Rock Road       | 1 basketball court<br>1 playground<br>1 skate park<br>8 soccer fields<br>1 tennis court |
| Westerly Youth Football Complex | 60 Old Hopkinton Road | 1 football field  |
| Rotary Park                     | Airport Road          | 2 playgrounds<br>6 tennis courts<br>2 volleyball courts                                 |
| Westerly Town Beach             | 365 Atlantic Avenue   | Sand beach  |
| Wuskenau Beach                  | 311 Atlantic Avenue   | Sand beach  |
| Department Office               | 93 Tower Street       | See 93 Tower Street (Table 6-6)   |

Source: Recreation Department, Town of Westerly

### *Public School Department Facilities*

The [Westerly School Department](#) works in conjunction with the Recreation Department to provide recreation opportunities for the entire Westerly community. The Town and the School

Department utilize each other’s facilities as needed to optimize the recreation resources available. All school facilities are available to the public while not in use by the schools. The following table details some information regarding the available recreation resources at the Westerly public schools.

**Table 8-4 Westerly Public School Department Recreation Facilities**

| Facility                             | Location                             | Description  |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Bradford Elementary School           | 15 Church Street                     | 1 basketball court, 1 gymnasium, 1 playground, 1 softball field and 2 tennis courts            |
| Dunn’s Corners Elementary School     | 8.5 Plateau Road                     | 1 basketball court, 1 general field, 1 gymnasium, 1 paved playing area and 1 playground        |
| Tower Street School Community Center | 93 Tower Street                      | 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground (1 basketball court and 1 tennis court adjacent) |
| Springbrook Elementary School        | 39 Springbrook Road                  | 1 basketball court, 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground                              |
| State Street Elementary School       | 35 State Street                      | 1 general field, 1 gymnasium and 1 playground  |
| Westerly High School                 | 23 Ward Avenue<br>15 Highland Avenue | 2 general fields, 2 gymnasiums, 1 multi-sport fields and 1 track                               |
| Westerly Middle School               | 10 Sandy Hill Road                   | 1 baseball field, 1 gymnasium and 1 multi-sport field  |

Source: School Department, Town of Westerly

Excluding the Transportation and Bus Garage, the seven public school facilities in Westerly are located on approximately 114.9 acres and include a variety of recreation facilities. Parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) and school principals facilitate the construction of new or updated playground facilities at the schools. At Bradford Elementary School, the PTO and principal worked to reclaim the elementary school’s two tennis courts that had become overgrown. Both courts were cleared and made usable for the 2008-2009 academic year and additional improvements continued in 2009. As the table above shows, each public school facility has at least one outdoor field and indoor gymnasium. While priority is given to school team sports, non-school youth and adult leagues also use school gyms. Demand for the gyms is primarily focused on the high school and middle school facilities.

*Quasi-Public Facilities*

Quasi-public facilities within Westerly include privately owned facilities available for public use. The most significant of these, [Wilcox Park](#), is open from dawn to 9:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST) and serves as a central feature in the heart of Downtown (for more information on

Wilcox Park, see the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter). Some of these facilities listed as quasi-public have user fees and are open to the public.

**Table 8-5 Quasi-Public Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

| Facility                                | Location         | Description  |
|---|------------------|--|
| Camp Quequatuck (Boy Scouts of America) | Boy Scout Drive  | 4.5 acres containing 3 camp sites and 1 general field                              |
| Grills Preserve                         | 198 Bowling Lane | 482 acres containing cross country path and walking trails                         |
| Ocean Community YMCA (The Y)            | 95 High Street   | 1 fitness center, 2 gymnasiums, 1 playground, 2 swimming pools and 1 tennis court  |
| Washington Trust Skating Center         | 61 Main Street   | Skating rink in winter and sand court in summer                                    |
| Westerly Senior Citizens Center         | 39 State Street  | 12,500 square foot center containing activity room, cafeteria game room and lounge |
| Wilcox Park                             | 44 Broad Street  | Arboretum containing benches, a fountain, 5 monuments, a pond and walking paths    |

Source: 2010 Comprehensive Plan

*Private Facilities*

There are a variety of private facilities providing recreational opportunities in Westerly. Several of these private facilities serve as home to several of Westerly’s Town sports groups such as the Paul E. Trombino Sports Complex, home to the Westerly National Little League, and the facility at 60 Hopkinton Road, home to pee wee football and cheerleading. Listed below are Westerly’s private recreation facilities.

**Table 8-6 Privately Owned Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

| Facility                      | Location                       | Description                             |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Misquamicut Club              | 60 Ocean View Highway          | 1 golf course and 7 tennis courts       |
| Pond View Racquet Club        | 252 Shore Road                 | 5 tennis courts                         |
| Saint Pius X Regional Academy | 32 Elm Street                  | 1 general field and 1 playground        |
| Shelter Harbor Golf Club      | 1 Golf Club Drive <sup>1</sup> | 1 golf course                           |
| Shelter Harbor Inn            | 10 Wagner Road                 | Outdoor Paddle Club                     |
| Trombino Sports Complex       | Moorehouse Road                | 3 baseball fields and 2 softball fields |
| Weekapaug Golf Club           | 265 Shore Road                 | 1 golf course                           |
| Weekapaug Tennis Club         | 24 Chapman Road                | 8 tennis courts                         |

|                        |                |               |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Winnapaug Country Club | 184 Shore Road | 1 golf course |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|

Source: 2010 Comprehensive Plan

<sup>1</sup> address in Charlestown, Rhode Island

*Regional Facilities*

An important consideration when addressing the recreation facilities in Westerly is identifying the surrounding recreation facilities which serve the region. The regional facilities surrounding Westerly include Barn Island Wildlife Management Area (Stonington, Connecticut), Burlingame State Park, Ninigret Park, Quonochontaug Breachway, a river/cultural corridor and a state bike route. Below are brief descriptions of these facilities.

*Barn Island Wildlife Management Area*

A 1,013-acre wildlife conservation area located in Stonington (directly across from Watch Hill Harbor on Little Narragansett Bay) managed by the State of Connecticut. The wildlife conservation area has the largest public boat launch on the Pawcatuck River/Little Narragansett Bay waterway.

*Burlingame State Park*

A state park located in Charlestown featuring 3,100 acres of rocky woodlands and 755 campsites surrounding Watchaug Pond.

*Ninigret Park*

A 227-acre public park in Charlestown, on Route 1A, with four tennis courts, a 0.9-mile bicycle course, basketball courts, a Kid’s Place Playground, Frisbee disc golf course, recreational fields, a beach, a spring fed pond and the Ninigret Park Frosty Drew Nature Center and Observatory.

*Quonochontaug Breachway*

A popular public boat launch and fishing area located in Charlestown.

*River/Heritage Corridor*

The state’s Greenways map identifies a River/Heritage Corridor along the Pawcatuck River north from Westerly’s downtown and continuing into Charlestown and Hopkinton.

*Southern RI Green Trail*

An on-street, state-designated bike route along Route 91 beginning in Bradford and continuing into Hopkinton, Richmond and Charlestown.

*Water-Based Recreation Facilities*

Westerly’s water-based recreation facilities are key features in the town’s recreation system. Bounded by water on three sides, the town has riverfront and coastal lands which serve as recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Waterfront facilities in Westerly include beaches, marinas and boat launches and are identified in Table 8-7.

**Table 8-7 Water-Based Recreation Facilities in Westerly**

| Facility                             | Location            | Water Feature(s)                               |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Dunes Park Beach                     | Atlantic Avenue     | Block Island Sound                             |
| East Beach                           | Bluff Avenue        | Block Island Sound                             |
| Maschaug Beach                       | Ocean View Highway  | Block Island Sound                             |
| Misquamicut State Beach              | 257 Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound                             |
| Napatree Beach and Napatree Point    | Fort Road           | Block Island Sound and Little Narragansett Bay |
| Quonochontaug Beach                  | Sand Trail          | Block Island Sound                             |
| Sandy Point                          | Sandy Point         | Little Narragansett Bay                        |
| Watch Hill Beach                     | 151 Bay Street      | Block Island Sound                             |
| Watch Hill Yacht Club                | 21 Bay Street       | Watch Hill Cove                                |
| Weekapaug Yacht Club                 | 23 Spray Rock Road  | Quonochontaug Pond                             |
| Westerly Yacht Club                  | 1 Watch Hill Road   | Thompson Cove                                  |
| Westerly Town Beach (Old Town Beach) | 365 Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound                             |
| Wuskenau Beach (New Town Beach)      | 311 Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound                             |

Source: 2010 Comprehensive Plan

In addition to the water-based recreation facilities listed in the table above, there are also restaurants and clubs on Atlantic Avenue which provide direct access to the beach. Accessibility may be limited to customers.

*Access Points for Boating and Fishing*

Other important water-based facilities are access points for boating and fishing. The following tables list the available water access points in Westerly (Table 8-8) and right-of-ways designated by CRMC which provide public access to the coast (Table 8-9).

**Table 8-8 Water Access Points for Boating and Fishing in Westerly**

| Facility                         | Location           | Water Feature       |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Avondale Boat Yard               | Bradford Road      | Pawcatuck River     |
| Bradford Landing Fishing Area*   |                    |                     |
| Chapman Pond*                    | Larry Hirsch Lane  | Chapman Pond        |
| Frank Hall Boat Yard             | 3 India Point Road | Pawcatuck River     |
| Gray’s Boat Yard                 | 91 Watch Hill Road | Pawcatuck River     |
| Main Street Boat Ramp*           | Main Street        | Pawcatuck River     |
| Lotteryville (Roger Hall) Marina | 25 Avondale Road   | Pawcatuck River     |
| Viking Marina                    | 19 Margin Street   | Pawcatuck River     |
| Watch Hill Boat Yard             | 13 Pasadena Avenue | Colonel Willie Cove |
| Watch Hill Floating Docks        | Bay Street         | Watch Hill Cove     |
| Weekapaug Breachway*             | Atlantic Avenue    | Weekapaug Breachway |
| Westerly Marina*                 | 23 Margin Street   | Pawcatuck River     |

Source: 2010 Comprehensive Plan

**Table 8-9 Right-of-Ways Designated by CRMC**

| CRMC Designation Number | Location        | Water Feature      |
|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| A-2                     | Bluff Avenue    | Block Island Sound |
| A-3                     | Manatuck Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-6                     | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-7                     | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-8                     | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-9                     | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-10                    | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-11                    | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-12                    | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-13                    | Atlantic Avenue | Block Island Sound |
| A-14                    | Avondale Road   | Pawcatuck River    |

Source: CRMC

*Recreation Department*

Most programs sponsored by the Recreation Department are seasonal events or classes. The Town also provides summer playground camps at several of the Town-owned playgrounds. Several programs, especially those requiring indoor recreation facilities, are sponsored in conjunction with private organizations to provide a wide variety of recreation options for residents. Most team sports are provided by private organizations and supported by the Town, with teams, such as the Westerly Soccer Association and the Connie Mack Baseball League, using town facilities. Further Town recreation programming information can be found on the Recreation Department’s website.

Participation numbers for Town programs have continued to increase since the Recreation Department was established in 2001 with thousands of residents now participating. One of the programs with the largest participation numbers is the Town’s Tunes on the Dunes program, offered in July and August and held at the Westerly Town Beach on Atlantic Avenue. The Blues on the Beach and Monday Night Jamz concerts have grown to between 2,000 and 3,000 attendees.

*Other Program Providers*

The Westerly School Department provides two key programs in Westerly – Westerly Community Education and Enrichment and After School Enrichment. Westerly Community Education and Enrichment provides a variety of adult classes such as educational, hobby, yoga and workforce training classes funded through tuition fees.

After School Enrichment, also tuition-based (except for students in the Free and Reduced-Priced Meals program who pay reduced tuition only for full-day programs), is offered mainly to elementary school students and runs twice a week, for five weeks, three to four times a year. The programs provide classes for students to learn special activities or skills ranging from martial arts to basket weaving and beach combing. During school recesses in February and

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April, the programs also provide extended full-day sessions. In addition to classes for elementary school students, there are also programs offered for older students including a program for high school students with the local radio station and a lacrosse program for middle school-aged students.

While it is not a public entity, [Ocean Community YMCA](#) provides additional recreation opportunities in Westerly (as well as in Wyoming in Richmond and Mystic in Stonington, Connecticut) for both members and non-members. Programs include aquatics, arts and enrichment, childcare, health and wellness classes, yoga programs, sports classes and teen programs. The YMCA also offers a center for teens to socialize after school and on weekends and an after-school program for Westerly's elementary school students which uses Westerly public school facilities.

The [Westerly Library](#) provides a multitude of community programs such as book discussions, art gallery receptions and various special events. Information on the library's services is located in the Services and Facilities chapter and its local significance is discussed in the Historic and Cultural Resources chapter.

## 9 Historic and Cultural Resources

### 9.1 Neighborhoods, Historic Districts, Structures and Sites

#### 9.1.1 Historic Districts

The area of modern-day Westerly was first settled by the Narragansett Tribe several centuries prior to the beginning of a documented history by European explorers in the 1630s. During this time, and until the 1660s, the area was called Misquamicut (though this is anglicized from its original Narragansett form) for its red fish, referring to the salmon which appear on the Town's seal.

Westerly was incorporated as a Town in 1669 and over the years has remained a hub of commerce and recreation in southern Rhode Island. The downtown of Westerly is bounded approximately by the Pawcatuck River on the west, Oak Street and Railroad Avenue on the north, Tower Street, Granite Street, and Franklin Street on the east and Wells Street on the south. Westerly also has a collection of distinct villages which provide glimpses into the Town's historic past, whether they are commercial centers, coastal communities or mill towns. These villages and districts include Avondale, Bradford, Misquamicut, Potter Hill, Shelter Harbor, Watch Hill, Weekapaug and White Rock.

There are also seven neighborhoods in the town listed as historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These are [Bradford Village](#), [Westerly Downtown](#) (including a later [amendment](#)), [Main Street](#), the [North End](#), [Perry Homestead](#), [Watch Hill](#) and [Wilcox Park](#). There are another 11 areas which have been either determined eligible for Historic District listing, or recommended for nomination or for further study by the responsible state agency, the [Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission \(RIHPHC\)](#).

RIHPHC provide municipalities with a variety of information on historic resources. In 1978, the Commission developed [Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report](#) in March 1978 as a tool to identify and record properties of historic and architectural significance in the town. In addition to this Town-specific survey, RIHPHC has prepared several state-wide surveys including a [historic landscapes survey](#), an [outdoor sculpture survey](#), a [historic bridges survey](#), an [engineering and industrial sites survey](#) and an [archeological survey](#). In each of these historic surveys, sites in Westerly have been identified. For a broader discussion of Westerly's historic neighborhoods, both listed and eligible for listing, see the [2006 Westerly Preservation Report](#) prepared for the Westerly Preservation Society.

#### 9.1.2 Historic Sites

Within each of the listed historic districts are structures and sites which are deemed to be "contributing" to the historic character of the particular district. These are identified in the various inventories prepared as part of the listing application process. In addition to the contributing structures and sites in historic



A marker installed by the Colonial Dames of Rhode Island identifies the historic significance of the Pawcatuck River.

districts, there are nine structures and sites in the town which have been listed individually on the National Register. These include the [Babcock-Smith House](#), [Flying Horse Carousel](#), [former Immaculate Conception Church](#) (now the George Kent Performance Hall of the Chorus of Westerly), [Lewis-Card-Perry House](#), Nursery Site RI-273, [U.S. Post Office](#) (Broad and High Streets), [Westerly Armory](#), [Weekapaug Inn](#) and [Ram Point](#).

There are many other structures and sites in the Town which have been identified as eligible for listing, or recommended for nomination or for further study by RIHPHC.

In addition to these, Westerly also includes two sites in the [Historic American Buildings Survey \(HABS\)](#) and two in the [Historic American Engineering Record \(HAER\)](#). Westerly Station and the Babcock-Smith House are both documented in the HABS and the HAER includes White Rock Bridge and the Northeast Corridor (NEC), a segment of which passes through the town. The documentation of Westerly's segment of the NEC includes Westerly Station and the railroad itself as well as the High Street bridge.

Protection for historical and archaeological burial sites is ensured through [Chapter 137 Historic Site Preservation](#) of the Town's Code of Ordinances. Under ordinance, any plan to alter a burial site may only be permitted by the Town Council following a public hearing and if any burial site is discovered in the process of a property being developed, the site must be reported to the Building Inspector and activity must cease until further notice is given.

The **Cultural Resources map (CR-1)** identifies all historic districts and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including those added after 1995 (the most recent year for which the RIGIS dataset includes information on). In addition to these, it also illustrates the districts determined eligible for listing on the NRHP included in the Westerly Preservation Society's 2006 report and candidate sites identified by RIHPHC in 1992.

### **9.1.3 Regulatory Protection**

Largely because the action has not been supported by community consensus, the Town has thus far not enacted historic district zoning. However, other means to protect the listed districts and the structures within them have been enacted by the Town Council.

The Zoning Ordinance standards governing Development Plan Review, to which all development except one and two-family structures is subject, requires:

"If the building is in a Historic District, the recommendations of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission shall be incorporated in the Administrative or Planning Board review."  
(See §260-45[F][1]) The definition of "Historic District" used in the ordinance includes a historic site or sites "registered or ... deemed eligible to be included, on the state register of historic places."  
(See §260-9[B])"

For the commercial area of the Watch Hill Historic District, along Bay Street, (the Shore Commercial - Watch Hill [SC-WH] zoning district), the Town Council in 2006 took another approach to preserving the character of the area. It enacted an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance proposed by the Watch Hill Conservancy, which established architectural design standards for construction there. These standards are applicable to the Development Plan Review of all applications in that zone and were most recently amended in July 2017.

In 2009, the Watch Hill Conservancy published a primer on the residential architectural history of Watch Hill, *Watch Hill Style*. With the visual appeal of its 200 full-color images of Watch Hill cottages, it is intended to influence those planning new construction in Watch Hill to emulate the architectural traditions of the community.

Supporting both the standards enacted for the SC-WH zone and the examples contained in *Watch Hill Style*, the Conservancy also provides initial free design services to those planning new construction in the Watch Hill Historic District.

Additionally, with respect to the large area of the Town within the jurisdiction of the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC), either due to its proximity to the coast or by virtue of being located within the Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs) for Winnapaug Pond or Quonochontaug Pond, additional protection also exists in the permitting process. CRMC's Section 220, Areas of Historic and Archaeological Significance, C. Policies states:

"The Council shall require modification of, or shall prohibit proposed actions, subject to its jurisdiction where it finds a reasonable probability of adverse impacts on properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Adverse impacts are those which can reasonably be expected to diminish or destroy those qualities of the property which make it eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Council shall solicit the recommendations of the Historical Preservation Commission regarding impacts on such properties."

"Prior to permitting actions subject to its jurisdiction on or adjacent to properties eligible for inclusion (but not actually listed in the National Register of Historic Places), and/or areas designated as historically or archaeologically sensitive by the Historical Preservation Commission as the result of their predictive model, the Council shall solicit the recommendations of the Commission regarding possible adverse impacts on these properties. The Council may, based on the Commission's recommendations and other evidence before it, including other priority uses of this Program, require modification of or may prohibit the proposed action where such adverse impacts are likely."

As an incentive for property owners to maintain the historic character of designated historic structures and to encourage the owners to obtain historic designation for structures not already so designated, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) exempts historic structures from floodplain management requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) as long as they maintain their historic structure designation

#### **9.1.4 Funding Assistance**

As of 2016, RIHPHC administers four programs to assist historic properties owners in meeting their maintenance costs. These include the [State Historic Tax Credit program](#), federal tax credits, the [Historic Preservation Loan Program](#) and a [Preservation Easement program](#). The 2010 Comprehensive Plan noted the success of the State's tax credit program prior to its elimination of funding in 2008 and recommended the Town should advocate for its restoration. The program was reopened in 2013 and presently offers credits of 25% (trade/businesses) and 20% (residential apartments/condominiums) of costs for approved rehabilitation of spaces. The program also now provides funding for the cost of maintaining their historic properties, and the rehabilitation of historic structures (both those within listed historic districts and those individually listed) has been supported by state (30 percent) and federal (20 percent) tax credit programs.

In 2011 however, the [Homeowner Tax Credit program](#) for the maintenance and repair of historic houses was suspended.

Since the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, RIHPHC has also been involved in two grant programs – Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief Grants for Historic Properties and State Preservation Grants. The first of these was a direct response to the destructive impact of Hurricane Sandy (also called Superstorm Sandy) in 2012. Grants were awarded to Lanphear Livery Stable (\$52,368) and Watch Hill Lighthouse (\$447,500), both in Watch Hill, as well as a multi-town (Charlestown, Narragansett and Westerly) survey of archaeological sites (\$477,847). All three projects received approval from the National Park Service (NPS). The 2015 State Preservation Grant program included two awards for Westerly properties in 2016, the Babcock-Smith House (\$11,734) and the Westerly Armory (\$24,750).

### *9.1.5 Historic Preservation Accomplishments and Opportunities*

Several preservation projects focusing on structures throughout the town have been successfully completed or are underway, strengthening Westerly’s historic character in recent years.

In 2005, the Victorian-era Ocean House resort hotel located in the Watch Hill Historic District in an area under CRMC jurisdiction was demolished as part of a plan approved by RIHPHC in conjunction with a panel of historic architectural consultants it convened. The Ocean House reopened in 2010 following a major replication project, which included rebuilding the hotel on the original structure’s footprint with the inclusion of over 5,000 salvaged artifacts and furnishings.

Lanphear Livery Stable in Watch Hill, an historical livery at 1 Bay Street, was completely renovated in 2016. The 21,000-square foot building was renovated over a three-year period. The building contains offices, apartments, a gallery and a boutique.

Adaptive restoration preserved the Dr. John Champlin House at 9 Granite Street, now used as an office building with a zoning variance granted to make such use possible, and the Old Town Hall, which may be reopened in the future as a museum. A museum is currently maintained by the Watch Hill Lighthouse Keepers in a renovated former service building on the property. Revitalization efforts for the Granite Theatre and George Kent Performance Hall, both former churches, now allow both buildings to provide enhanced theatrical and musical performance space.

It is expected that preservation efforts will continue into the future as well. The Westerly Land Trust has an urban initiative which has included the acquisition of properties on Canal Street, High Street, Main Street for renewal projects such as renovating the United Theatre (opened in 1926) and a portion of the adjacent property to include space for a cinema, live performances, offices, rehearsal rooms, event spaces and a public television station. The Westerly Revolving Fund has also purchased and rehabilitated an existing historic mixed-use structure at 6 Beach Street.

National Register listing and a grant under the federal Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), operated under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), have been used to rehabilitate low and moderate-income housing in the town’s North End.

### *9.1.6 Recognitions*

Westerly’s abundance of historic resources has not gone unnoticed. In 2002, the town was designated one of the “Dozen Distinctive Destinations” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Each year between 2000 and 2001, the Trust selected 12 “unique and lovingly preserved communities in the United

States as Distinctive Destinations. The designation recognizes the community's efforts to preserve the historic and scenic assets of Westerly, which the Trust calls a "quintessential New England beach town".

The town has also been designated a Preserve America Community under a White House initiative, which recognizes the town's appreciation of its heritage as an economic and educational asset and provides eligibility for Preserve America grants.

### **9.1.7 Historic Cemeteries**

There are many historic cemeteries in the town, a number of which have been registered to date and are listed on the [Rhode Island Cemeteries database](#), and many others are thought still to exist. There are also Native American burial sites, which are protected under state law.

The Town's Code of Ordinances, specifically §8-81 through, 88 provides protection of historical and archaeological burial sites. Article III. Preservation of Historical and Archaeological Burial Sites.

## **9.2 Cultural Resources**

Westerly's growth and development over the centuries, with support from a myriad of citizens and organizations, makes it a community of great cultural wealth for the benefit of its residents and enumerable visitors throughout the year.

This abundance is anchored primarily around Downtown, a product of the urbanization which took place at the turn of the twentieth century. Along with the high concentration of its historic, architecturally diverse structures and its mix of uses, Downtown is also the location of the Westerly Arts and Entertainment District. One of only nine districts in the State as of 2016, the designation given by the Rhode Island General Assembly offers eligibility for certain tax incentives (for more information, visit the [State Council on the Arts' website](#)) to artists living and working in the district who produce original and creative works in a broad range of forms including writings, paintings, sculptures, films and many others. The sales of original art pieces at galleries in the district are also exempt from the state sales tax.

At the municipal level, the Town has designated the Granite Street Overlay District (See §60-58, Code of Ordinances), comprised of properties with street frontage between Grove Avenue and Tower Street to allow artistic and photo studios (as well as professional offices) to be located in the residential district by special use permit.

In 2011, the Westerly Regional Arts Partnership (WRAP) was formed with the mission to provide arts advocacy and promote Westerly as a destination for the arts. WRAP states its membership is open to all workers in the creative economy, referring to the economic system culminating between the arts, business, culture and technology.

There exists a variety of non-profit cultural institutions and events which are important to the community and its tourist industry. The largest of the cultural non-profits include the Memorial and Library Association of Westerly, The Westerly Chorus, The Granite Theatre and The Westerly Land Trust (owner of the United Theatre).

The [Memorial and Library Association of Westerly](#) owns and operates the Westerly Library, itself built as a Civil War memorial, and the surrounding 14-acre Wilcox Park, the original portion of which was designed in 1898 by Warren Manning, a protégé of Frederick Law Olmsted. The park is perhaps the single most

character-generating feature of the town and is often referred to as a “jewel” of the town. Although Westerly is a medium-sized community, its Library collection is the second most actively used in the state.

The [Chorus of Westerly](#), located at the George Kent Performance Hall (the former Immaculate Conception Church registered on the NHRP), was established in 1959 and offers its patrons several events throughout its seasons while providing musical education programming throughout the year. The most popular of these events is the Summer Pops Concert, held annually in June in Wilcox Park since 1981.

The [Granite Theatre](#) (owned by Renaissance City Theatre) is a handsomely restored Greek Revival Church that sits at the foot of Granite Street in downtown Westerly. This renovated building began as a church which was originally organized in 1843 as the Christian Chapel in Westerly. An outdoor theatrical series, the Shakespeare Festival (more commonly known as Shakespeare in the Park) is put on annually between late July and early August. Year-round indoor productions offer local and regional theater-goers artistic entertainment.

The [United Theatre](#) in downtown Westerly has been undergoing extensive renovations for years. Upon completion, the United Theatre will include spaces for a cinema, live performances, offices, rehearsal rooms and events.

It should also be noted that the [Westerly Band](#), established in 1852, is the oldest continuously active civic band in the United States. It performs in several parades and at various venues throughout the year, including at Wilcox Park. The Westerly Armory is currently used by the Westerly Band for rehearsals.

## **10 Natural Hazards & Resiliency**

### **10.1 State Guidance**

Westerly's Comprehensive Plan, along with all other municipalities' comprehensive plans, must include an identification of areas that could be vulnerable to the effects of sea-level rise, flooding, storm damage, drought, or other natural hazards. Goals, policies, and implementation techniques must also identify what would help to avoid or minimize the effects that natural hazards pose to lives, infrastructure, and property.

### **10.2 Natural Hazards in Westerly**

The purpose of this section is to provide a comprehensive overview of how various natural hazards such as flooding, high wind and changes in the climate can impact Westerly. In this chapter, natural hazards will be ranked in order of priority based on the frequency of occurrence and area affected. The information provided also attempts to put the likelihood of an event occurring into perspective; recognizing that, although some events may occur more often, their impacts are less severe than events that may occur infrequently.

Identifying the risks and vulnerabilities of Westerly to natural hazards is the primary factor in determining how to allocate finite resources and to determine what actions are feasible and appropriate to address those vulnerabilities. The hazard analysis involves identifying all of the hazards that potentially threaten Westerly and then analyzing them individually to determine the degree of threat that is posed by each natural hazard. Addressing risks and vulnerabilities through hazard mitigation measures will reduce societal, economic and environmental exposure to natural hazards impacts ([Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency \[RIEMA\], 2014](#)).

The results of this analysis were used to develop a prioritized menu of recommended actions, policies, and goals that the Town can implement to help eliminate or minimize the negative effects of natural hazards.

### **10.3 Recent Significant Events**

There have been several significant storm events that have impacted Westerly and the region since the preceding Comprehensive Plan update. Most notable are major flooding events (March 2010), Hurricane Irene (August 2011), blizzards (January 2011 and February 2013) and Hurricane Sandy (October 2012; often referred to as Superstorm Sandy). Though it did not have a significant impact on Westerly, the Virginia Earthquake (August 2011) was also felt in the region.

## 10.4 Summary of Hazards

The Town of Westerly Hazard Mitigation Committee reviewed many hazards in this strategy. Hazards discussed in the Comprehensive and Hazard Mitigation plans were included for a variety of reasons including historical records of past events, repetitive losses, potential losses as identified by predictive models such as [Sea, Lake and Overland Surges from Hurricanes \(SLOSH\)](#) and [Flood Insurance Rate Maps \(FIRM\)](#) and expert knowledge.

Keeping in line with [Rhode Island State Hazard Mitigation Plan \(SHMP\)](#)'s risk assessment, the natural hazards have been grouped into categories and listed in order of frequency and impact (columns are listed from most frequent [left] to least frequent [right]) in Table 10-1 below.

**Table 10-1 Summary of Natural Hazards in Westerly**

| Wind-related      | Winter-related | Flood-related                     | Geological-related | Others       |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Storm surge       | Snow           | Riverine flooding                 | Earthquakes        | Wildfires    |
| Tropical cyclones | Ice            | Flash flooding                    |                    | Droughts     |
| Tornadoes         | Extreme Cold   | Coastal flooding                  |                    | Extreme heat |
| High winds        |                | Climate change and sea level rise |                    |              |
|                   |                | Coastal erosion                   |                    |              |
|                   |                | Dam breaches                      |                    |              |

The **Natural Hazards and Mitigation map (NH-1)** depicts several components of the Town's infrastructure, including dams, electric transmission lines, public facilities and other facilities related to emergency management and sewer pumping stations. It also shows these components in relation to those areas of the community which are at greatest risk of impact from a natural hazard, primarily a major storm or flooding event. These areas include the coastline of Block Island Sound, the banks of the Pawcatuck River and the wetlands within the center of town. Most of the information presented was made available by [Rhode Island Geographic Information System \(RIGIS\)](#) datasets contributed by several departments of the state, the [University of Rhode Island \(URI\)](#), the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) and the [United States Army Corps of Engineers \(USACE\)](#).

### 10.4.1 Storm Surge and Wind

The south shore of Rhode Island is susceptible to hurricanes, storm surges and wind-related damage (Town of Westerly, 2012). Due to Westerly's original settlement along the Pawcatuck River and the ocean front, much of the developed areas are susceptible to water and wind-related damage. Areas that have historically suffered damage from such storms include [Misquamicut State Beach](#) and Westerly's two town beaches which are located on the south shore of Westerly. Atlantic Avenue, a heavily developed commercial and residential road that runs parallel to Misquamicut State Beach, is also vulnerable to wind-driven water damage and sand deposition. Additionally, Watch Hill, located in the southwestern portion of the town, is

situated on an exposed peninsula bounded by the open ocean and Little Narragansett Bay. A particularly susceptible area of Watch Hill is the [Napatree Point Conservation Area](#), which is a sandy spit that extends westward from the Watch Hill business district. Other areas prone to wind damage include the communities of Weekapaug and Shelter Harbor.

Hurricane and gale force winds and storm surges can also cover roadways with debris, making them impassable to conventional vehicles. This presents a dangerous situation for anyone requiring immediate medical attention (RIEMA, 2014). This was the case on Atlantic Avenue after Hurricane Sandy hit Westerly. In addition to several homes and businesses along the road suffering massive damage or complete collapse, the road itself, which is located on a spit between Block Island Sound and the salt ponds, was covered in sand that measured up to six feet in depth in some areas (Goonan, October 30, 2012).

#### *10.4.2 Tropical Cyclones*

Tropical cyclones, a general term for tropical storms and hurricanes, are low pressure systems that usually form over the tropics. The Rhode Island shoreline faces south, so storms passing to the west raise the highest storm surges for Rhode Island. In addition, Little Narragansett Bay funnels the surge northward where decreasing surface area amplifies the surge height (Boothroyd, 2008). The 1938 Hurricane made landfall west of Rhode Island as a Category 3 hurricane with a forward speed in excess of 50 miles per hour. Because the center of the storm made landfall in Connecticut, the Rhode Island shoreline experienced the highest storm surge levels (RIEMA, 2014).

As a coastal community, the majority of Westerly is susceptible to the effects of hurricanes and tropical storms. Notable impact areas include the coastal barrier beaches that separate the Maschaug, Little Maschaug, Winnapaug and Quonochontaug Ponds from Block Island Sound and lands located immediately north of the northern shorelines of these salt ponds. These areas are all subject to inundation by the 1% annual-chance flood event as well as additional hazards associated with storm-induced waves and velocity wave action (FEMA, 2014). Other areas of concern include low-lying portions of Watch Hill, portions of Misquamicut located some distance inland from the ocean and a large number of properties located between the north side of the salt ponds and Shore Road (Route 1A).

The most recent hurricane to strike Westerly and much of the East Coast was Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. By the time Hurricane Sandy reached Rhode Island it had been reduced to Tropical Storm status, however Rhode Island still experienced a great deal of damage from the storm. Rhode Island sought and received a federal emergency declaration from President Barack Obama prior to the storm to ensure access to funds to assist in the recovery effort. This hurricane left over 122,000 people in Rhode Island without power. In total, Rhode Island

received \$39.4 million in support from federal disaster relief programs, a majority of which came from NFIP (\$31.1 million) (RIEMA, 2014). In Westerly, Hurricane Sandy destroyed many of the sand dunes along Misquamicut Beach and heavily damaged or destroyed many residences and businesses along Atlantic Avenue (Hanarhan, 2012). It also flooded the historic Watch Hill village.

### *10.4.3 Tornadoes*

A tornado is a violently rotating column of air in contact with and extending between a cloud and the surface of the earth. Winds in most tornadoes are 100 MPH or less, but in the most violent, and least frequent tornadoes, wind speeds can exceed 250 MPH. Tornadoes, typically track along the ground for a few miles or less and are less than 100 yards wide, though some can remain in contact with the earth for well over fifty miles and exceed one mile in width (RIEMA, 2014).

Tornado Alley, which extends from Texas to the Dakotas, receives the most tornado activity, and while Rhode Island falls well outside of that region, tornadoes may occur in Rhode Island at any time. This situation may be more dangerous than states in Tornado Alley because Rhode Island residents do not expect severe tornadoes and are ill-prepared to respond to a tornado strike. Tornadoes are considered to be low frequency, high-impact events. Eight reported tornadoes touched down in Rhode Island between 1950 and 1994, resulting in 23 injuries and nearly \$2 million in damage (Town of Westerly, 2012).

### *10.4.4 Thunderstorms*

Thunderstorms are formed when the right atmospheric conditions combine to provide moisture, lift, and warm unstable air that can rise rapidly. Thunderstorms occur any time of the day and in all months of the year, but are most common during summer afternoons and evenings and in conjunction with frontal boundaries. The National Weather Service (NWS) classifies a thunderstorm as severe if it produces hail at least one inch in diameter, winds of 58 MPH or greater, or a tornado. About 10% of the estimated 100,000 annual thunderstorms that occur nationwide are considered severe (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2010).

In general, buildings are more likely to be struck by lightning if they are located on high ground or if they have tall protrusions such as steeples or poles which the stepped leader can jump to. Electrical and communications utilities are also vulnerable to direct lightning strikes. Damage to these lines have the potential to cause power and communications outages for businesses, residences, and critical facilities.

#### *10.4.5 Winter-related Hazards*

A heavy snow is generally defined as having more than eight inches of accumulation in less than 24 hours. Heavy snow can bring the community to a standstill by inhibiting transportation, knocking down trees and utility lines, and by causing structural collapse in buildings not designed to withstand the weight of the snow.

The term “ice storm” is used to describe occasions when damaging accumulations of ice are expected during freezing rain situations. Ice storms result from the accumulation of freezing rain, which is rain that becomes super-cooled and freezes upon impact with cold surfaces. Freezing rain most commonly occurs in a narrow band within a winter storm that is also producing heavy amounts of snow and sleet in other locations.

Westerly lies outside the heavy snow regions of the northeast. Located along the southern New England coast, Westerly has a maritime climate that is cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter than many inland locations. As a result, Westerly experiences less snowfall, on average, than cities to the northwest. During an average year, coastal regions of Rhode Island receive nearly 36 inches of snow. Westerly is susceptible to heavy amounts of snowfall, which can restrict travel and damage power lines and trees, effectively paralyzing the region.

#### *10.4.6 Flood-related Hazards*

A flood can be slow or fast rising but generally develops over a period of days. Flood is defined by the [National Flood Insurance Program \(NFIP\)](#) as:

- A general and temporary condition of partial or complete inundation of two or more acres of normally dry land area or of two or more properties from: overflow of inland or tidal waters; unusual and rapid accumulation or runoff of surface waters from any source; or a mudflow; or
- The collapse or subsidence of land along the shore of a lake or similar body of water as a result of erosion or undermining caused by waves or currents of water exceeding anticipated cyclical levels that result in a flood as defined above.

By their very nature, floodplains are the low, flat, periodically flooded lands adjacent to rivers, lakes, and oceans, and are subject to geomorphic (land-shaping) and hydrologic (water flow) processes. It is only during and after major flood events that the connections between a river and its floodplain become more apparent. These areas form a complex physical and biological system that not only supports a variety of natural resources but also provides natural flood and erosion control. In addition, the floodplain represents a natural filtering system, with water percolating back into the ground and replenishing groundwater.

Within the established flood risk areas in Westerly, certain regions are more susceptible to damaging floods than others. In order to identify such regions, the Westerly flood risk areas can be prioritized based on the flood zones designations.

Zone VE designates areas along coasts subject to inundation by a 1-percent-annual-chance flood event in addition to storm-induced velocity wave action. Zone V designates areas along coastline subject to inundation by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood events with the additional hazards associated with storm-induced waves; however, unlike Zone VE no base flood elevations are described. Both Zones V and VE require mandatory flood insurance. Zones A, AE, AH and AO are also subject to inundation by the 1-percent-annual-chance flood event and also require mandatory flood insurance. However, regions in these zones are susceptible to shallow flooding from ponding and/or sloping terrain. The Zone X designation is given to those areas subject to flooding by severe, concentrated rainfall coupled with poor drainage systems (RIEMA, 2014).

While riverine flooding in Westerly is a typical by-product of coastal storms and hurricanes, it can also occur during late winter due to melting snow, ice and persistent spring rain. The effects of such flooding include retaining wall and building foundation damage, road damage, and ice or water-borne debris buildup against bridge structures.

The primary freshwater body in Westerly that is susceptible to flooding is the Pawcatuck River, whose watershed covers an area of 486 square kilometers, or 188 square miles (Dillingham, 1993). The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed extends north and east into Rhode Island and north into Connecticut, encompassing all or part of twelve different municipalities.

Flood hazard areas in Westerly include the coastal barrier beaches that separate the Maschaug, Little Maschaug, Winnapaug and Quonochontaug Ponds from Block Island Sound, which are designated V zones, as are lands located immediately north of the northern shorelines of these salt ponds. Other "V" zone locations include Napatree Point, Watch Hill Point, both sides of Atlantic Avenue in Misquamicut Beach, and portions of Weekapaug to the south of Wawaloam Drive and Ninigret Avenue. FEMA-designated "A" zones are much more expansive, and include low-lying portions of Watch Hill, portions of Misquamicut Beach located some distance inland from the ocean, and a large number of properties located between the north side of the salt ponds and Shore Road (Route 1A). (Compare with paragraph above. Revise for streamlining)

Flood conditions are exacerbated by constriction of river waters that can occur when large amounts of ice, debris, fallen trees, or tree limbs pile up behind low-lying bridge decks or narrow bridge spans. There are twelve bridges located on Westerly's section of the Pawcatuck River, several of which date to a period before structures were designed to pass floodwaters

from a 100-year storm event. The collapse of one of these structures could cause a downstream catastrophe, as a flood surge laden with trees or buildings piles up against the next dam or set of bridge abutments. For example, the Stillman Avenue Bridge is particularly vulnerable to flood events and debris buildup due to the supporting columns located in the middle of the river.

In 1978, 1982 and again in 2010, heavy rains caused the Pawcatuck River to overflow its banks. On March 30, 2010, these events caused road blockages along Route 91 between Westerly and Bradford, and along Canal Street, which included the complete failure of the National Grid substation that disabled power to the entire area, and Industrial Drive in the North End. Several businesses were flooded out and one building suffered a partial collapse. The Pawcatuck River reached a new flow record and was so severely impacted that it did not recede below flood stage until April 12, 2010. In Westerly, a mile of train track was inundated, resulting in a suspension of Amtrak services. In addition, the severity of flooding in the area of Chapman Pond effectively shut down Route 91 and Pound Road, causing a prolonged blocked access to an entire neighborhood (as described by the National Weather Service). Many inland areas of Westerly subject to riverine flooding are designated “A” zones, including low-lying areas along the Pawcatuck River (including portions of Downtown Westerly, the North End neighborhood, White Rock and Bradford), Mastuxet Brook, and Chapman Pond.

The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 and Hurricane Carol in 1954 were severely damaging hurricanes that caused extensive coastal flooding in southern New England (Vallee and Dion, 1998). Hurricane Carol produced a powerful storm surge of 14.4 feet in Narragansett Bay, which surpassed the surge created by the Hurricane of 1938 (Vallee and Dion, 1998). Flooding hastens coastal erosion, and areas such as Misquamicut Beach suffered erosion and sand dune damage after Hurricane Sandy (Goonan, October 20, 2012).

#### ***10.4.7 Coastal Erosion***

Coastal zones are dynamic areas that are constantly undergoing change in response to a multitude of factors, including Sea Level Rise (SLR), wave and current patterns, hurricanes, coastal flooding and human influences. High winds and associated marine flooding from storm events such as hurricanes, nor’easters, flooding, and sea level rise, increase the risk exposure along developed coastal lands. Storm impacts and long-term erosion threatens developed areas with potential loss of life and billions of dollars in property damage. In addition to the natural processes that cause erosion, human alterations are also affecting erosion rates (RIEMA, 2014).

The beaches, barrier spits and coastal bluffs of Rhode Island are vital economic, environmental, and cultural resources. A healthy, wide sandy beach provides protection against the effects of

storm surge, coastal flooding, and high surf impacts. The beach and barrier environment provide habitat for marine and terrestrial organisms with beach dependent life stages and are home to species of indigenous and endemic Rhode Island plants. Beaches, barrier spits, and coastal bluffs are also the basis for the tourism industry, exceeding by a factor of three (3) all other industries combined when providing direct income to the state.

The headlands and barrier beaches of the south shore, ranging from Watch Hill in Westerly to Point Judith in Narragansett, are generally eroding at a higher rate than other shorelines along the Rhode Island coast (RIEMA, 2014). Continuous erosion due to exposure to ocean forces and geologic setting and composition will decrease the coastal buffer making waterfront property more susceptible to storm surge.

Of the six shoreline types found in Rhode Island, beaches and barrier spits are the most susceptible to erosion. About seven of Westerly's nine miles of coastline are comprised of these unconsolidated sediments (exceptions are rocky headlands located at Watch Hill Point and Weekapaug Point).

Coastal erosion threatens both waterfront property and fragile shoreline habitats, and can affect Westerly's shoreline even during moderate coastal storms. In addition, the predicted increase in global sea-level rise will exacerbate coastal erosion as lower intensity storms cause greater amounts of damage and flooding than their historic counterparts ([Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management \[RIDEM\]](#)). Westerly is composed of headland beaches and barrier beaches, which experience erosion at different rates. Barrier beaches tend to be more dynamic, losing sand at times and then regaining it through natural processes, while headland beaches tend to only erode, resulting in lost beach area (Faulkner, Mar. 1, 2014).

The average coastal erosion rate is 1.6 feet per year in Rhode Island (Sullivan, August 30, 2012). Rhode Island's shoreline is naturally eroding and migrating over time ([Save the Bay](#), 2013). Based on measurements of the Newport tide gauge, sea level has risen approximately ten inches since 1930 and a full foot of sea level rise is expected by 2030 (Freedman, Jan. 13, 2013). Most of this erosion occurs during short term storm events such as hurricanes and nor'easters, although factors such as sea level rise and coastal armoring also contribute to erosion (Save the Bay, 2013). The vulnerability of many of Rhode Island's beaches and shoreline areas to coastal erosion and flooding tends to increase dramatically as manmade structures are allowed to be built along the shoreline thus impeding the natural, dynamic system of the beach. Coastal armoring and the construction of jetties and groins may save the beach for one private property owner, but it severely impacts sediment deposits from occurring down shore of the structure, thus accelerating erosion activity and negatively impacting property owners in these locations (Save the Bay, 2013).

Westerly has experienced both gradual shoreline erosion and more dramatic erosion from storms. During the period of October 28-31, 2012, Hurricane Sandy caused significant erosion along Misquamicut beach, in addition to several other areas of Rhode Island shoreline (USACE, Nov. 5, 2013). In 2013, with assistance from USACE the town began a project to repair the damage on the beach caused by the hurricane through a sand replacement project (USACE, Nov. 5, 2013). A significant portion of the sand has since washed out to sea.

Napatree Point is another area especially vulnerable to the effects of coastal erosion. The 1938 hurricane in addition to gradual erosion has caused the beach area of Napatree to recede 200 feet and caused the separation of Sandy Point from the mainland (Seaside Topics, 1938).

Over shorter periods of time, waves and storm events are the primary cause of changes in shoreline conditions. Sea level rise (SLR) is one of the long-term causes of shoreline erosion (RIEMA, 2014). SLR contributes to erosion by influencing and worsening on-going coastal processes, making coastal areas ever more vulnerable to extreme events. As SLR increases, storm surges and waves will extend further inland, flooding homes, businesses and roadways. In some areas of the Northeast, storm surges associated with future hurricanes could be two to four feet higher than present conditions. The potentially large effect of SLR on erosion rates must therefore be considered (RIEMA, 2014).

#### ***10.4.8 Dam Breaches***

Dam failures can result from natural events, human-induced events, or a combination of the two. Failures due to natural events such as prolonged periods of rainfall and flooding can result in overtopping, which is the most common cause of dam failure. Overtopping occurs when a dam's spillway capacity is exceeded and portions of the dam that are not designed to convey flow begin to pass water, erode, and ultimately fail. Other causes of dam failure include design flaws, foundation failure, internal soil erosion, inadequate maintenance, or misoperation. Complete failure occurs if internal erosion or overtopping results in a complete structural breach, releasing a high-velocity wall of debris-laden water that rushes downstream, damaging or destroying everything in its path. An additional hazard concern is the cascading effect of one dam failure causing multiple dam failures downstream due to the sudden release of flow (RIEMA, 2014).

Dams are classified by size and hazard ratings. The size classification, which provides a relative description of small, medium, or large, is based on the storage capacity and height of the impounded water (RIDEM, 2012). The hazard classification relates to the probable consequences of failure or misoperation of the dam; however, it does not relate to the current

condition or the likelihood of failure of the dam. The hazard classifications are defined in the Rhode Island Dam Safety Regulations as follows:

- High Hazard – means a dam where failure or misoperation will result in a probable loss of human life.
- Significant Hazard – means a dam where failure or misoperation results in no probable loss of human life but can cause major economic loss, disruption of lifeline facilities, or impact other concerns detrimental to the public’s health, safety, or welfare.
- Low Hazard – means a dam where failure or misoperation results in no probable loss of human life and low economic losses (RIDEM, 2012).

According to the [2009 Annual Report to the Governor on the Activities of the Dam Safety Program](#), all the dams within Westerly and those that are shared between Westerly and neighboring Connecticut are designated as low hazard dams, meaning that if the dam were to fail it would result in no probable loss of human life and low economic losses. As of 2015, dams within Westerly include Olaf Farm Pond dam (Dam No. 493) on Cedar Swamp Brook, Boiling Spring dam (Dam No. 752) on Mastuxet Brook, Woody Hill Reservoir Dam (Dam No. 454) on Perry Healy Brook and the Misquamicut Country Club Pond dam (Dam No. 547). The one dam shared with Connecticut along the Pawcatuck River, the Stillmanville Dam (Dam No. 256), is also designated as low hazard. Cite Potter Hill dam (w/ Dam ID No.)

The spring rains of 2010 breached Blue Pond Dam in Hopkinton and the Hewitt Farm Dam in North Stonington (Connecticut). This dam failure caused a surge of water that incapacitated the National Grid substation on Canal Street and flooded the Canal Street manufacturing district and the North End Neighborhood. Other dams that were closely monitored during the March 2010 flooding included the Alton Dam on the Wood River in neighboring Hopkinton. The Alton Dam was submerged by swiftly moving waters and the bridge spanning the river on Route 91 was left with a deep crevice (Benson, 2010). Additionally, the dam over the Pawcatuck River in the Bradford section of Westerly overtopped its embankment and flooded Route 216 and the Bradford Dyeing Association plant. Other flooded and damaged dams included dams on the Pawcatuck on Route 3 and Potter Hill Road (Benson, 2010) and the Hewitt Farm Dam (Souza, 2014). During the flooding, the Alton-Wood River Junction and the Bradford sections of Westerly and Hopkinton downstream of the dams were ordered to evacuate. However, while the flooding did put significant pressure of the dams they did not fail (Benson, 2010). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed the Bradford Dam and installed rock ramps in 2017.

#### **10.4.9 Wildfires**

Wildfires are fueled by natural cover, including native and non-native species of trees, brush and grasses, and crops along with weather conditions and topography. While available fuel,

topography, and weather provide the conditions that allow wildfires to spread, most wildfires are caused by people through criminal or accidental misuse of fire (RIEMA, 2014).

Westerly is a well-developed coastal town with large areas of open space that are mostly composed of beaches and wetlands. Fires can occur in these open spaces given the right conditions due to the grasses and underbrush found in these areas. Wildfires that occur in undeveloped, natural areas may be less accessible to fire protection services, thus further increasing the risk of wildfire.

The likelihood of fire varies based on a number of weather-related factors. Drought leads to increasing dryness, which affects how deep in the vegetation the fire will burn. Wind speed influences direction and speed of the spread of wildfire. Both temperature and humidity affect the likelihood of wildfire; warmer and dryer weather can result in increased fire danger. Locations in Westerly most vulnerable to wildfire include the Woody Hill Management Area and the Town Forest that are inaccessible to motor vehicles. Other critical areas are the coastal grasslands in vicinity of Avondale, Watch Hill and the salt ponds. While these grassland areas are relatively small in size, the real danger associated with wildfire is the potential for its spread to nearby structures. While coastal grasslands are generally accessible to fire apparatus, they may be located some distance from hydrants, necessitating the transport of water to burning vegetation.

#### ***10.4.10 Droughts and Extreme Heat***

Drought is characterized as a continuous period of time in which rainfall is significantly below the norm for a particular area. The American Meteorology Society defines drought as a period of abnormally dry weather sufficiently long enough to cause a serious hydrological imbalance. Drought evolves over months or even years and, while causing very little structural damage, unlike other natural hazards which typically occur suddenly. Drought can have profound economic, environmental, and social impacts (RIEMA, 2014).

Westerly's drinking water groundwater resources are drawn from three major sand and gravel aquifers all located within the Pawcatuck Basin designated in 1988 as a sole-source aquifer (Town of Westerly, 2013). The [Town of Westerly Department of Public Works](#) has the primary responsibility for managing the town's water supply distribution system, and for ensuring that it can provide sufficient water to meet public health and safety needs of its customers. The [Rhode Island Water Resources Board \(RIWRB\)](#) issues notices regarding drought conditions in the state, and [Rhode Island Water 2030](#) controls state policy relative to long-term drought response.

Westerly is on a Sole Source Aquifer ([Rhode Island Department of Health \[RIDOH\]](#), 2003). The White Rock Wellhead Protection Area draws water from the Westerly Sole Source Aquifer and accounts for approximately 70% of the town's average daily supply (RIDOH, 2003). The Pawcatuck River flows through the wellhead protection area providing recharge to groundwater during dry months. Land use activity in the White Rock wellhead protection area is a mix of medium to high-density residential development (380 acres) and agriculture (100 acres); institutional and recreational land uses account for an additional 106 acres (RIDOH, 2003). Industrial use is also present in the White Rock wellhead protection area.

The Town has the lead role in preparing for and managing all stages of drought at the community level. Drought preparedness measures are included in [Westerly's Water Supply Management Plan](#), which stress policies that promote water conservation wherever possible, including a provision for local ordinances to ensure that established regulations and procedures can respond (Town of Westerly, 2010). Westerly's water distribution deficiencies have caused water use restrictions in the past partly due to insufficient drought planning and water-supply protection (Town of Westerly, 2010).

#### ***10.4.11 Geological-related Hazards***

An earthquake is caused by a sudden displacement within the earth. Strong and destructive earthquakes usually result from the rupturing or breaking of great masses of rocks far beneath the surface of the earth. All earthquakes produce both vertical and horizontal ground shaking. This ground movement begins at the focus, or hypocenter, deep in the earth, and spreads in all directions. The felt motion is the result of several kinds of seismic vibrations. The primary, or P, waves are compressional. The secondary, or S, waves have a shear motion. These body waves radiate outward from the fault to the ground surfaces where they cause ground shaking (RIEMA, 2014).

Rhode Island is located in a region of the North American plate and falls within seismic zone 2A with 8-16% ground acceleration, which translates to a "moderate" seismic hazard (Petersen et al. 2008; US Seismic Zone Map). This means that people may experience moderate intensity shaking that can lead to slight damage during an earthquake event (FEMA Earthquake Hazard maps). There are no significant geologic fault lines in Rhode Island or New England, and the USGS Earthquake Hazards Program identifies all of Rhode Island as occurring in a low seismic risk area (<2%g peak acceleration). Earthquakes that occur in the northeast, which is considered an intraplate area, do not meet the assumptions of the plate tectonic theory since there is no obvious relationship between earthquake occurrence and fault lines in intraplate areas (Kafka, 2014).

European settlers in Rhode Island noted the effects of a number of earthquakes beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. Between 1776 and 2007, 38 earthquakes were recorded in Rhode Island, far fewer than any other New England state. Most of these earthquakes measured low on the intensity scale, and are believed to have originated elsewhere, some as far away as Quebec. In 1883, an earthquake believed to have been centered on Rhode Island was felt from Bristol to Block Island. On December 20 and 24 in 1940 there were strong earthquakes centered around Lake Ossipee in New Hampshire that caused some damage in the epicentral area and caused Intensity V effects on the MMI scale in Newport, Rhode Island (von Hake, 1976). The largest earthquake recorded in Rhode Island occurred on June 10, 1951 and was centered in Kingston with a 4.6 Richter Scale rating (RIEMA, 2014). The most recent earthquake to affect a portion of Connecticut and Rhode Island was a 3.3 magnitude quake that occurred on January 12, 2015 with an epicenter in Wauregan, Connecticut ([United States Geological Survey \[USGS\]](#), January 12, 2015). Effects of the quake were mostly felt along the Rhode Island and Connecticut border shared between Plainfield and Foster, although weak intensity effects were also reported in Westerly (USGS, January 12, 2015 and Algier, January 12, 2015).

#### *10.4.12 Climate Change*

Changes in the climate are considered hazards within themselves as well as exacerbating other naturally occurring events. Based on the [NOAA Technical Report NESDIS 142-1, Regional Climate Trends and Scenarios for the U.S. National Climate Assessment: Climate of the Northeast](#), two climate model simulations have been developed that project the effects of high and low greenhouse gas emission scenarios. Analyses of the simulated future climate are provided for the periods of 2021-2050, 2041-2070, and 2070-2099, with changes calculated with respect to a historical climate reference period (1971-1999, 1971-2000, or 1980-2000) ([National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \[NOAA\]](#) 142-1, 2013). The resulting climate change conditions are to be viewed as scenarios, not forecasts, and there are no explicit or implicit assumptions about the probability of either scenario (NOAA 142-1, 2013).

Key findings of the simulated climate models are as follows:

- Models indicate an increase in temperature for all three future periods, with little spatial variation. Changes along coastal areas, such as Westerly, are slightly smaller than inland areas.
- Simulated temperature changes are similar in value for the high and low emissions scenarios for the near future, whereas late in the twenty-first century the high emissions scenario indicates nearly twice the amount of warming.
- The range of model-simulated temperature changes is substantial, indicating substantial uncertainty in the magnitude of warming associated with each scenario.

However, in each scenario, the modeling is unequivocal and large compared to historic variations.

- Increases in the number of days with a maximum temperature above 95°F are simulated to occur throughout the northeast, with the largest increases occurring in the southern and western areas.
- Simulated decreases in the average annual number of days with a minimum temperature below 10°F are largest (21 days or more) in northern areas. Decreases in the number of days with a minimum temperature below 32°F are 20-23 days across most of the region.
- The freeze-free season is simulated to lengthen by at least 19 days across the region by the mid-twenty-first century. Simulated increases in most areas are 3-4 weeks.
- The far northern regions show the largest simulated increases in average annual precipitation, while southern and coastal areas show less of an increase. Models are mostly in agreement that precipitation will increase over the entire region under these scenarios. Simulated seasonal changes are mostly upward in winter, spring, and fall, and downward in summer.
- All areas see simulated increases in the number of days with precipitation totals exceeding 1 inch, with the greatest increases (up to 30%) occurring in parts of New York. The simulated increases are statistically significant in most northern areas.
- Most models do not indicate a statistically significant change in temperature (with respect to 2001-2010) for the near future; however, as the time period increases, a greater number of models simulate statistically significant temperature changes, with all being significant at the 95% confidence level by 2055 (for the high emission scenario).

These modeled scenarios of hotter weather and increased precipitation, along with current climate trends such as increased sea level rise will affect Westerly in the long term. Increased precipitation can lead to inland flooding and potentially cause issues, such as dam breach. Conversely, hotter weather can lead to drought-like conditions and strain Westerly's drinking water supply. The rise in sea level will intensify coastal erosion and damage vulnerable areas.

**DRAFT**

Comprehensive Plan: Appendix II  
Town of Westerly, Rhode Island



*A plan for vitality and  
sustainability*

## 1 Introduction

The preparation of this Comprehensive Plan included an active public participation and outreach program. The main purpose of the program was to provide opportunities for local residents to help shape the plan and ensure that it reflects their vision. Public participation also helped to build support for the plan among stakeholders and to foster an understanding of the Plan among local residents.

In its Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act, the state of Rhode Island encourages public input into the Comprehensive Plan. The only formal requirement for public input is that the Planning Board and the Town Council hold public hearings prior to the adoption of the Plan. In that respect, the Act leaves the design of public input programs to the discretion of communities. It provides a series of suggested public input techniques, but its concrete requirements are:

*In order to encourage citizen participation in the comprehensive planning process, planning boards, commissions, or committees are directed to adopt comprehensive plans only after soliciting and considering public input. Public hearings by the planning board, commission, or committee and the municipal legislative body are required to be held prior to the adoption of the comprehensive plan. Adoption of the comprehensive plan by a municipal legislative body is in the same manner provided for the adoption of ordinances in the manner provided for in the legislative or home rule charter of the municipality except that the plan need not be published in its entirety in a newspaper of general circulation.<sup>1</sup>*

For the Town of Westerly Comprehensive Plan, the public input program was designed to ensure residents and stakeholders were provided with multiple opportunities to participate in the planning process. The following elements were incorporated:

- Discussion Sessions – Discussion sessions were held with the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee (the Committee) at project kickoff and with the Town’s department heads shortly thereafter. These sessions were designed to give the groups the opportunity to identify what they perceived as strengths and weaknesses of the town and to express their visions of the future. In the case of the department heads, discussion focused on usefulness of the forthcoming plan and how it could best meet their needs.
- Interactive Public Workshops – Interactive public workshops were designed to allow the public to give individual input as well as to collaborate with other residents and participants. Three rounds of public workshops were held:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.planning.state.ri.us/comp/handbook16.pdf>

- Round One – The first round of workshops focused on the identification of local issues. It featured individual and group input, gave participants the opportunity to give their personal opinions about issues in the town as well as a collaborative group exercise in which participants located the issue areas on maps of the town. The purpose of the session was to educate and inform the public about the Plan and the process as well as to gather opinions and feedback. The mapping contributed by the groups was used directly in the creation of the Neighborhoods Map (N-1), Neighborhood Planning Areas (N-2), and the Future Land Use Map (FLU-1).
- Round Two – During the second round of workshops, the public was invited to develop goals, policies and actions for the major planning areas. Workshop participants were asked to identify goals they felt would be appropriate for the community and then help work out policies and actions to help Westerly achieve those goals. This discussion provided the basis for more detailed policy discussion and action choices.
- Round Three – During this round, participants were asked to review and comment on a complete draft of the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the information in the plan is accurate and that the plan adequately addresses the concerns and priorities of the community.
- Media – All public meetings, workshops and hearings were advertised in the Westerly Sun, a local newspaper of general circulation. Meetings were also posted on public bulletin boards in the Town Hall. The Planning Department staff also assisted by specifically inviting parties to whom the discussion topics would be of interest. The consultant’s project manager also participated in an on-air radio interview broadcast on radio station WBLQ 1230 AM to publicize the plan and discuss some of the goals for public consideration.
- Web Access – On [date], a complete draft of the 2018-2038 Comprehensive Plan was posted to the Town of Westerly Website.

The public input for this Plan also includes written correspondence and emails along with the records of discussion sessions and workshops. A number of interviews were held throughout the planning process with elected and appointed officials, citizens, state and local leaders and other interested parties to help inform the process.

## **2 Discussion Sessions**

The purpose of these sessions was to gather information, reflections and insights about Westerly and learn local perspectives on the unique challenges and opportunities facing the town. The information was used along with the other sources of public input to assist in the identification

of issues within the town. The opinions and views expressed during these and other public input sessions helped to lay the basis of the goals and objectives for the Plan and the vision of the future for the town of Westerly. These sessions also helped alert the consulting team to issues of special concern about which they might otherwise not have been aware. The discussions sessions were loosely formatted to provide for thoughtful conversations between the stakeholders, town staff, and the consultant. The object was to create an atmosphere where participants felt comfortable enough to discuss their areas of expertise and air their views and opinions with confidence.

### *Citizens Advisory Committee*

As part of the initial phase of the Comprehensive Plan preparation, a kickoff meeting was held with the Citizens Advisory Committee at the Committee's first meeting with the consultant. When asked to describe the character of the town of Westerly, committee members noted its small size, historic New England quality, its seaside location and its diversity in population, cultural activities and offerings, as well as its beautiful setting. Committee members described the town as family-oriented and its residents as caring and charitable.

When asked to articulate their visions of the future for the town, committee members wanted to see more employment opportunities to encourage young people to stay in Westerly or to move back and live there. Committee member's visions also included adequate and affordable housing, housing and services for senior citizens, natural resource protection and downtown restoration and revitalization. The Committee recognized the need for some growth, but would like to see character of the town preserved and important natural features protected. Improving the tax base and increasing resilience to natural disaster and the impacts of climate change and sea level rise were also mentioned. Finally, improved communications and broadband internet access were also mentioned as important future needs.

Other opportunities committee members cited included economic development potentials such as home-based businesses, light industrial, knowledge-based industry, health care and industrial development. Natural resources preservation, access and natural resources-based industry were also mentioned as potentials. Several committee members also saw potential in Westerly's location, highway, rail and air access.

Committee members discussed issues that should be considered in drafting the new Comprehensive Plan. A perceived lack of enforcement of zoning and excessive variance granting, growing financial pressures limiting access to funding for investment in infrastructure, and needs for education and economic development were noted. Other committee members noted a need for affordable housing, better beach access, and improved parking, possibly including seasonal off-site parking and beach shuttles.

### *Department Heads*

Meetings were held with the town department heads early in the process to identify self-perceived department strengths and weaknesses and learn each department's specific needs for the new Comprehensive Plan. Participants used terms like traditional, small town and historic to describe the character of Westerly. When asked to describe their visions of the future, most anticipated responsible development and planning, open space preservation, protection and enhancement of the character of Westerly, improved water, sewer and other infrastructure and sustainable economic revitalization to bring new jobs into the community.

When asked what the new Plan should do, participants named usefulness, user-friendliness and accessibility as specific qualities they would like in a new Plan. They expressed a desire to have the Plan fairly represent everyone in the community and be a tool to help guide land development, infrastructure improvements, and sustainable economic growth. The plan should help the town be more resilient to natural disaster, address the future impacts of global climate change, and prepare for the future impacts of sea level rise. Most of all, the Plan has to be implementable so that it will be useful.

### **3 Public Workshops**

Interactive public workshops were held at the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan process. Each workshop featured background information about the Plan and Plan process as well as an interactive portion. The interactive portion of the program encouraged both individual input as well as group consensus-building. The purpose of the meetings was to educate the public about the Plan and the importance of the Plan and to identify issues that should be addressed through the planning process. By using both individual and group input techniques, the workshop sought to encourage collaboration and cooperation in problem identification and solutions.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the town should preserve unique natural features and scenic areas to protect open space and encourage public access. Most agreed that Westerly needs more affordable housing although there was little support for state imposed affordable housing mandates. There was also some hostility to the affordable housing comprehensive permit process which is perceived as usurping local control and damaging neighborhoods without successfully increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Traffic volume and safety are on-going issues in the town of Westerly. There was general agreement on the need for an increase in available transportation modes such as better bus service, a possible beach shuttle, bike lanes, and parking and sidewalk improvements in Westerly. Availability of transport at the airport and the train station were also concerns.

Additional public workshops were held by the Advisory Committee upon the publication of the draft Plan. In July and August of 2016 the Advisory Committee facilitated [number] of workshops and received additional public input. A final report from the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, representing a diversity of interests in the community, was forwarded to the Planning Board in [month].

The Planning Board held a public workshop at which both Advisory Committee members and the public were invited.

#### **4 The Public Hearing Process**

The Planning Board conducted a public hearing...

The result of the Planning Board's deliberations on the Plan included the [date of meeting] endorsement of the final draft (dated [date]) to the Town Council for their consideration and adoption as ordinance of the Town of Westerly.

The Town Council [began/conducted] a public hearing on [date] during which they received the Planning Board's recommendation and entertained public testimony. All public comments and council discussion having been concluded, the Town Council voted on [date] to incorporate the Plan into the Code of Ordinances as Chapter 10. With the adoption of this Comprehensive Plan document by the Westerly Town Council, the 2010 Comprehensive Plan was repealed and replaced with this updated twenty-year vision for the Town of Westerly. Through its adoption the Plan becomes not only an official statement of Westerly's future direction and guiding document, but it is legally binding on all future land-use decisions made by the municipality.