

2018 Comprehensive Plan: Executive Summary

Town of Westerly, Rhode Island

A Plan for Vitality and Sustainability

The 2018 Westerly Comprehensive Plan strives to achieve an appropriate balance between conservation and development. Managing growth and protecting cultural and natural resources are complex and delicate tasks. This Plan intends to help ensure that both are accomplished in a way that enhances the quality of life for all the citizens of Westerly. There is a continuity of vision and direction between the current Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2010, and the new Plan. Both focus on carefully-managed economic development, preserving the current zoning maps, redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial space, maintaining critical infrastructure, and taking actions to provide affordable housing for all sectors of the of the community. Based on public input, people love Westerly and do not want to see it change very much.

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.

The Plan is composed of three parts: the primary plan, Appendices I and II, and mapped figures. The primary plan provides a summary of ten planning areas such as housing, infrastructure, and natural resources with goals, policies, and actions for each that will help achieve the overall vision for the future. Appendix I provides background information including data on current conditions and some projections into the future. Appendix II summarizes public input on the Plan. The mapped figures identify land use, zoning areas and specific geographic features in the Town.

It is intended that the Comprehensive Plan will be the yard stick against which all future proposals and initiatives – whether for conservation, development or infrastructure uses – will be measured. Each proposal or initiative that comes before the Town Council, the Planning and Zoning Boards, and Town personnel should be evaluated based on whether that proposal advances the goals and objectives of the Plan and its vision for the future.

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, aquifers, 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 diverse 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.

Among the many actions to be undertaken within the 5-year, 10-year, and 20-year planning horizons of this Comprehensive Plan, there are 11 which are judged to be the most critically important and which should get immediate attention from the Town. Some of these can be implemented by Town officials and employees acting alone, others will require cooperation from State officials. Some are proactive actions intended to prevent future problems; others call for attention to maintaining the current status and preventing changes that would be detrimental to the goals of the plan. These important actions are:

Character and Heritage

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.

Energy Alternatives

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.

Transportation Assets

Work with RI, MA and CT state agencies and federal officials to support and encourage extension of commuter rail service in Westerly.

Sustainable Natural Resources

Relocate the Westerly Public Schools Bus Refueling Station as recommended in the GeoInsight Report, 2015.

Review the zoning ordinance with the intent of identifying and correcting incompatible uses in aquifer protection zones.

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.

Economic Vitality

Prohibit the expansion of commercial and industrial zoning districts (HC, GC, GI, LI, NB, SC-G, SC-WH, ORAT, P-15 and MC).

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.

Enact an ordinance which restricts the reactivation of existing, dormant quarries to ensure the existing quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods is not disrupted.

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.

Housing Opportunity

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.