

CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



*PLANNING COMMISSION DRAFT
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The Town of Charlestown, Rhode Island

CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Draft; September 2020

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION
Planning Commission Final Draft: September 2020

BACKGROUND

The comprehensive plan that follows is the work of the Charlestown Planning Commission and the Charlestown Planning Department, with review and input by all town departments, various boards and commissions, civic and environmental organizations and the community at large.

During many meetings that were held starting in 2014, the Planning Commission reviewed, revised, rewrote and drafted all of the comprehensive plan components. The work originally began as a rewrite of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update, which was an update of the comprehensive plan originally prepared in 1991, but eventually became the development of a new comprehensive plan, supplemented by updated Census and other data, recent analyses of growth and its impacts, and a presentation of issues that are current to 2019.

This update is done according to the requirements of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, as amended. The plan identifies the current status, issues and opportunities and goals for each component, the policies which the Town of Charlestown intends to pursue, and the actions needed to implement those goals and policies over a twenty year time frame.

The Planning Commission and the Town Council adopted the Charlestown Comprehensive Plan at a joint public hearing held on *Month Day, Year*.

CHARLESTOWN: A “South County” Treasure

Charlestown today represents over 10,000 years of history and culture in a scenic, rural and coastal setting. This history includes glacial, Native American and Colonial, through the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries to the present day. Route 1, the historic travel corridor known as Post Road which connects New York City and Boston, divides the northern more topographically diverse and less dense part of town from the southern coastal pond region. The landscape throughout Charlestown has remnants of its farming, fishing and textile manufacturing past, with historic homes, inns and mill villages.

The Charlestown Comprehensive Plan, while based on the past, incorporates a vision for the future. It focuses on the environment, community vitality and history, infrastructure, education, social issues, public health and safety, the economy, housing and more.

Charlestown will continue to protect its natural and cultural resources which provide a rural character and healthy living environment that its residents value and its visitors and tourists seek. Charlestown has characteristics of the countryside and the small town, including the use of private and community wells and on-site septic systems rather than municipal water and sewer, and limited commercial activity. It is outside the Urban Services Boundary, as defined in the RI State Guide Plan. Many commercial facilities are accessible in adjacent communities such as Westerly, South Kingstown and Richmond. This enables Charlestown to remain a less developed and active community, a characteristic that its residents seek to maintain.

Its rural character, particularly in the area north of Route 1 is reflected by the following:

- low density of housing
- relatively narrow winding roads without sidewalks
- stone walls indicative of past farming practices and the stony nature of the soil
- native vegetation along the roads and shielding some of the development that has occurred
- views of farmland that has been in agriculture for generations
- Large and small tracts of land preserved in perpetuity providing recreational possibilities while preserving wildlife habitat, protecting the water supply and acting as a carbon sink

In the south of Charlestown, its small town character is revealed in summer colony cottages, dense neighborhoods and small businesses serving primarily local needs. The geography is dominated by the salt ponds and the barrier beaches, which have served as a draw for tourists and second homes owners.

Community surveys have consistently shown that residents favor limited, sensitive development and maintaining the rural character of the town. Many different entities have helped to preserve much of the land: the Town of Charlestown and the Charlestown Land Trust, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon, and significantly, large numbers of residents that place their land in conservation easements. Local farmers' markets and farm stands, especially honor ones, reflect this feeling. Community events such as art and Christmas walks, a New Year's Eve bonfire, Halloween activities, and a variety of recreational and educational programs, all help bring residents together and promote common values. The town newsletter, the Pipeline, helps distribute important information to all. This is important in a town where there are several distinct areas separated by the Narragansett Indian Tribe Settlement Lands.

The community spirit has been evident when large numbers of residents have engaged to prevent a nuclear power plant from being built, or a new high speed rail from disrupting historic villages, farmland and preserved areas, or to prevent large volumes of water from being transported out of the community to cool a power plant in northern Rhode Island. The designation of Route 1 as a

Scenic Highway and the Wood Pawcatuck River as a Wild and Scenic River resulted from the dedicated actions of numerous volunteers in the community to preserve these features.

THE CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The goals, policies and recommendations of this comprehensive plan are designed to:

- Provide residents with a high quality of life
- Protect the natural and cultural resources through preservation, maintenance, knowledge and legislation
- Provide active and passive recreational opportunities for all ages
- Maintain town-owned facilities to ensure that they are useful for a long time
- Provide a broad base of services that support the needs of businesses and residents
- Maintain a healthy environment to ensure safe drinking water and high air quality
- Support sustainable development and the use of alternative energy sources
- Address the need for resiliency in the face of natural hazards and climate change
- Provide alternative transportation opportunities such as bikeways
- Create positive interaction with the Narragansett Indian Tribe and its lands
- Maintain dark skies through education and legislation
- Support local businesses in a highly seasonal environment
- Encourage housing that is affordable for a wide range of incomes
- Address new technology and development in a sensitive way that does not detract from the town's character and natural environment

To maintain what residents desire and tourists seek, namely relatively quiet and undeveloped beaches, open spaces to walk, hunt or watch birds, and clean waterways to canoe and kayak or fish, vigilance is needed in terms of future development and actions. Growth that happens must be sensitive to the character of Charlestown and preserve the environment on which the quality of life of residents depends.

VISION STATEMENT

Charlestown will be a community united by its desire to provide a healthy, high quality of life which depends upon the protection of its natural, cultural and historic resources. These resources also protect wildlife and mitigate future climate change, and provide economic benefits in terms of tourism.

Limited facilities and service demands keep our property taxes low and thoughtful land stewardship and careful land regulation will ensure the same quality of life and experiences for future generations.