# HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

## CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A description of Charlestown's historic buildings, cultural sites and scenic landscapes, and recommendations to manage these resources to preserve the town's heritage and tourism based economy.

**<u>Map</u>**

**HC-1 Historic and Cultural Features**

Cover Photo: Frances Topping

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES CHAPTER

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# CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
# CHAPTER 4. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

*Planning Commission Final Draft; December 2019*

## INTRODUCTION

As described in the Land Use chapter, Charlestown is a rural community without an identifiable town center, but with a landscape which is still defined by its history of fishing, farming and textile manufacturing. Its beaches and salt ponds remain the critical resources that they have been for Charlestown's inhabitants since pre-colonial times. Its farms and narrow winding country roads still reflect its agrarian past. The historic villages of Carolina, Shannock and Kenyon retain the architecture and development patterns of a classic New England mill village. And no town in Rhode Island is more associated with the state's Native American history than Charlestown.

The town will always be about maintaining its rural character and sense of place, and along with protecting its natural resources this requires the preservation and enhancement of its cultural features and scenic landscapes. Charlestown's rich inventory of historic buildings, cultural sites and scenic corridors is the focus of this chapter, and the policies and goals for future land use, for the management and protection of its natural and recreational resources, and for economic opportunity based on tourism, all complement those that are needed to also preserve Charlestown's heritage.

As stated in the Statewide Planning Program's guidance handbook for historic and cultural resources planning:

> *An understanding of where a community came from – its heritage – is essential to plan for what it will become. The physical remnants that represent this heritage tell us a story about the way that people lived, their values, and how the built environment changed over time. These resources help foster a connection to the past and help to show our interconnectedness with other human beings, both past and present, and the environment. They also contribute to the character of a specific place and help determine its quality of life.*

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER CHAPTERS

### Natural Resources Chapter

Historic and cultural resources are inextricably linked with natural resources, especially as they relate to scenic areas and view corridors. The town recognizes that the efforts to protect natural resources need to be complemented by the same efforts to preserve historic and cultural resources.

**Economic Opportunity Chapter**

Charlestown's cultural history and wealth of historic resources are essential to its economy. Tourism, which is the main source of economic activity, is enhanced not just by the abundant recreational activities, but by cultural resources and landscapes which directly draw tourists. Adaptive reuse of older buildings and sensitive use of natural and scenic landscapes support the local economy.

**Land Use Chapter**

The Land Use chapter describes Charlestown's land uses and development patterns. It includes a proposed Future Land Use Map which reflects the need to protect both the town's rural density and its historic villages. An important land use policy is to preserve the visual qualities of the villages, historic areas and scenic roadways.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

### History of Charlestown

A brief history of Charlestown, by era, is described below. It includes descriptions on how the Native Americans, now the Narragansett and Niantic Indian Tribes, and the European settlers interacted throughout their shared history.

Prehistory

Charlestown's land form pre-history begins with the retreat of the Ice Age over the period some 20,000 to 11,000 years ago. Sea level was much lower, and the coastline was located many miles further south from current conditions. Any evidence of habitation is likely destroyed or not yet discovered. As the glaciers retreated vegetation slowly regrew and people, the Native Americans, moved into the area in more recent eras. Glacial remnants remain valuable scenic resources in the region.

Early Native Occupation and Settlement

The first inhabitants of the area now known as Charlestown were the ancestors of today's Narragansett and Niantic Tribes. Their history precedes all written documentaries but can be found on the faces of rock formations and has been carried forward through oral history. They developed a subsistence economy based on agriculture and the rich natural resources of the area. To the Native American, land productivity might have meant encouraging berry crops near their camps to draw in game or collecting nuts from trees. This was a different view of land utilization from

the incoming Europeans and became a cause of conflict between the Narragansett and other Native Americans and the Europeans.

Later, Native American sites in what is now Charlestown included permanent villages, seasonal and temporary campsites, fortified places and burial grounds. The Narragansett people were considered warriors within the region. They customarily offered protection to smaller tribes in the area. Certain Nipmuck bands, the Niantic, Wampanoag and Manissean all paid tribute to the Narragansetts. The first documented European contact with the Native Americans of Rhode Island took place in 1524 when Giovanni de Verrazano visited Narragansett Bay and described a large Indian population, living by agriculture and hunting, and organized under powerful "kings".

The Seventeenth Century

The seventeenth century saw the discovery of the area by Dutch explorers and traders and its settlement by English colonists. Although the seventeenth century was a period of development along the coastal plain, few European features still survive from this period. The English were frequently at war with other European interests and, although initially on good terms, eventually became belligerent with the tribes as well. In 1675, the Narragansetts allied themselves with King Philip, the Wampanoag Sachem, to support the Wampanoag Tribe's efforts to reclaim land in Massachusetts from the English. In the Great Swamp Massacre, a military force of Puritans from Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut massacred a group of Narragansetts, mostly women, children and elderly men, living at an Indian winter camp in the Great Swamp in present day South Kingstown.

After the massacre Ninigret, Sachem of the Niantic, was given large Narragansett land holdings in return for remaining neutral during the King Philip's War. Narragansett people who refused to be subjected to the authority of the United Colonies left the area or were hunted down and killed. Some were sold into slavery in the Caribbean, while others migrated away. Those who remained retreated deep into the forest and swamp lands of what is now Charlestown, remaining in the area that today makes up the Settlement Lands of the Narragansett Indian Tribe. Historic and archaeological remains from this period are located throughout the town.

The Eighteenth Century

Development of Charlestown in this period focused on agriculture and related activities. Farms sprang up along the coastal plain and inland, with those along the coast primarily developed on large tracts of lands as plantation-style farms similar to those in the south of the country. Inland farms tended to be smaller and were sited on hillier, rockier terrain. These were typically subsistence farms owned and operated by a single family. There are a few examples of eighteenth-century farm houses that still survive in the town, including Burdick Farm and the J.P. Green House on Biscuit City Road. Sheep farming was introduced at that location.

During the eighteenth century a road network developed to link the farms together, much of which was based on trails developed by Native Americans. This network formed the basis of the town's current day road pattern. Old Post Road, which was laid out in the area in 1703, became the region's most important highway, and remained as Charlestown's key transportation link until parts of it were bypassed by Route 95 in the twentieth century. Houses, stores, inns, schools and mills were all developed along the Old Post Road.

Development was also centered on water-powered mills which were being built at that time. The earliest mill, a grist mill, was owned and possibly built by Joseph Davill, as early as the late 1600s. In 1709, this mill was purchased by Joseph Cross (Cross' Mill). A grist and shingle mill was built on Narragansett land on the edge of Indian Cedar Swamp. Other mills were developed on the Pawcatuck River in the vicinity of present day Shannock, Kenyon and Carolina villages. In 1669 Charlestown, Westerly, Richmond and Hopkinton were incorporated as one town. In 1738, Charlestown broke away, and was incorporated and named for the English King, Charles II. Richmond became an independent incorporated town in 1747.

For the Narragansett, eighteenth century life was very harsh. The state abolished the position of the sachem, the traditional tribal leader, and set up a five-man council in 1792. The Narragansett people nonetheless continued to recognize the sachems and maintain their traditional leadership. As the number of colonists increased, the Narragansett's hunting and farming grounds were greatly diminished. Colonists also introduced hogs to the area and their feral hogs ravaged the shellfish beds that had been a traditional food source. In 1705, the Rhode Island government recorded 135,000 acres of land as belonging to Ninigret, the tribal sachem of the Narragansett. His grandson, Thomas, built King Tom Farm around 1750. However, land was frequently forfeited to offset debts incurred when Native Americans dealt with the European settlers. By the end of the 18th century, the area owned by the Narragansetts had been reduced to 15,000 acres. In 1790, the US Congress passed the Non-Intercourse Act (since amended several times) which prohibits the conveyance of any Native American land unless ratified by Congress, thereby precluding the taking of Narragansett land as payment for debts incurred.

The Nineteenth Century

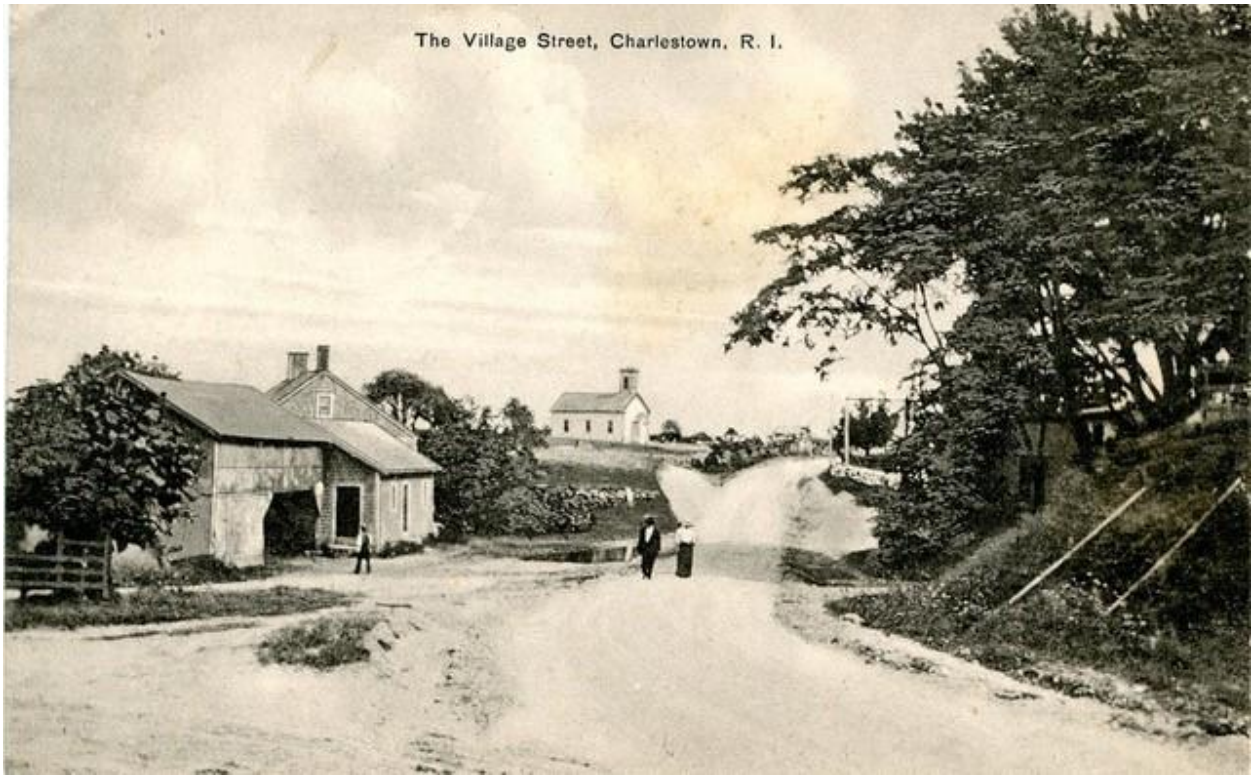
In the early part of the nineteenth century, the economy of the town was primarily agrarian. This declined and limited industrial and commercial development took its place. The stone walls speak to the European settlers' use of an agrarian model that cleared the land for what they saw as "productive" crops of vegetable or animals. Old cellar holes show where people lived in what is now full forested areas intersected by stone wall remnants.

Local inns provided resting points for travelers who seldom stayed long in the town. Eight public schools were built in the town, and mill and village development continued. Industrial villages grew up around four mills on the Pawcatuck River (Shannock, Carolina, Kenyon in Charlestown

and Burdickville in Hopkinton) and industrialization peaked in the 1840s. The Narragansetts continued to lose land as it was auctioned off in response to indebtedness, despite the requirements of the Non-Intercourse Act. This was during the period of "allotment" which gave ownership rights to individual Narragansett Indians rather than to the overall tribe. Beginning in 1799, a group of Narragansetts purchased land from the Oneida in northern New York (Stockbridge Indians). Many tracts of Narragansett lands were sold off between the 1830s and 1840s, and a group of Narragansetts moved to the Green Bay, Wisconsin area (Brotherton) where they lived with the Winnebago peoples.

The 1880s and 1890s brought the beginning of resort development, attracting tourists to the town's coastal areas, from Quonochontaug to Cross' Mill, where summer settlements sprang up. The first town meeting hall, Ward's Hall, and later called Ocean House on Town Dock Road, was built in 1848, and regattas were held on Ninigret (Charlestown) Pond. Although day trip activities from surrounding towns were popular, development of homes was slow due to the lack of public transportation. This period saw the beginning of the seasonal population swell which characterizes the town today.

Historic resources from this era include buildings in the villages of Carolina and Shannock, as well as other residences scattered throughout the town as described later in this chapter.



Twentieth Century

The population of the town fluctuated greatly in this century. The population declined between 1910 and 1920, but in the 1920s, it increased 47% (from 759 residents in 1920 to 1,118 in 1930). Growth then moderated substantially after the crash of 1929 and stayed low until the 1960s, when the population increased by 42%. By the end of the 1970s, the population had grown to around 4,800 people. With the increased use of the automobile, the town became more accessible, and access spurred recreational development. Forest camps and shore communities sprang up, and new businesses opened on Route 1 to serve the needs of tourists.

Development of seasonal homes began in earnest in the town in the early part of the century. Shortly after the turn of the century, Arnolda, a development of seasonal homes, was created along Ninigret Pond by Thomas Arnold. This encouraged the development of other summer homes on larger lots. The barrier beaches and the area just behind them (Charlestown Beach) were heavily developed along with other waterfront communities. Many of these homes along the shore were destroyed or damaged during the 1938 Hurricane and Hurricane Carol in 1954, and after Super Storm Sandy in 2012. After World War II, many of the remaining seasonal homes were winterized and used for year-round residences.

Charlestown also attracted residents to its inland hills and freshwater ponds. In 1915, Walter Kimball, a bird lover, purchased land on Watchaug Pond. After his death, the property was deeded to the Rhode Island Audubon Society and became the Kimball Wildlife Refuge, later transferred to the RI Department of Environmental Management. Several lodges, including Ninigret Lodge, were built on inland ponds. Ninigret Lodge, built in 1815 on Quacumpaug Pond (now Schoolhouse Pond), was the former Narragansett Indian schoolhouse. The original schoolhouse on this site was built by King Tom Ninigret, circa 1750. Three other sport lodges, of which one is in Camp Davis, were also built. A later (twentieth century) lodge, Nordic Lodge, and the nearby area that is South Farm Preserve, where an old sauna chimney remains, and Maple Lake cabins were owned by a contingent of families of Scandinavian heritage. South Farm was earlier farmed by the Card family, as is attested to by the historical cemetery on the farm property.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps were active in the area now known as Burlingame State Park, and through its efforts, developed camping facilities, shelters and recreation buildings.

Around 1942, the US government purchased 600 acres consisting of farm land and summer homes along the shore of Ninigret Pond for a naval air station where pilots were trained for night flights in World War II. The base later became the Charlestown Naval Auxiliary Landing Field, an adjunct to the Quonset Point Naval Air Station. In 1974 the field was closed and declared surplus property by the federal government. The site was considered for development as a nuclear power

plant, but this proposal was dropped after many years of significant local opposition and litigation. By 1979, following the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement, the General Services Administration (GSA) announced it would distribute the property to the Department of Interior, to be utilized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the national wildlife refuge system; and to the Environmental Protection Agency (who subsequently transferred title) for purposes of environmental research with holdings around Foster Cove. The remainder was awarded to the Town of Charlestown, for passive recreation and use compatible with the wildlife refuge.

Villages centered on mills became primarily residential in character after the mills ceased to function. Only Kenyon remains a functioning industrial village clustered around what is now Kenyon Industries. Land use trends in the later part of the century have seen subdivision development with year-round homes being built in the Charlestown woods, along the main roads, and adjacent to inland ponds. New subdivisions such as Watchaug Heights off Prosser Trail which was built in the 1970s indicated a departure from historic residential development patterns. Low density residential areas have replaced farms and forested areas.

In 1983 the Narragansett Indian Tribe was recognized by the US Department of the Interior as a sovereign entity, which provided the tribe with the equivalent of a government-to-government relationship with the United States (see Appendix LU-1).

Present Day

In the early 2000s a trend of seasonal residents retiring to Charlestown year-round and the conversion of small cottages to larger houses became increasingly evident. Development pressure continues to challenge the rural character of Charlestown, as it has with the neighboring communities. Locally some family farms are still operational, but the majority of residents have non-agrarian occupations frequently located in neighboring communities, upstate or in Connecticut.

In recent years efforts to correct past land abuses have been made by the town in cooperation with state and federal entities. Examples include removal of non-essential dams to restore migratory fish runs, the ending of the discharge of dye in the rivers from the mills, reduction in river siltation from plowed or overgrazed land, and the remediation of toxic dumps or their conversion to open space such as The Nature Conservancy's Francis C. Carter Preserve. These actions help to encourage respect for the land and its natural and historic and cultural resources.

The Francis C. Carter Preserve is on land formerly owned by United Nuclear Corporation, the operator of a nuclear fuels recovery plant, which in 1964 was the site of the only industrial death in the US from a nuclear accident. United Nuclear had owned 1,114 acres of which 12 acres were used for the recovery facility, but chemicals used to extract uranium from fuel rods contaminated

the groundwater through leakage from ponds and trenches used to hold liquid waste, with contaminants also reaching the Pawcatuck River. After closing in 1980, and following a years-long decontamination process, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission declared the site safe in 1995. In 2001 The Nature Conservancy (TNC) acquired 841 acres of the property. By 2011, based on long-term monitoring, it was determined that no further clean-up was required, and in 2014 TNC acquired the remaining acreage. TNC describes the preserve as follows: "*It is a special place in terms of its biodiversity and it is one of the largest and most beautiful protected areas in South County*." It is the second largest TNC property in Rhode Island. At one point, the land had been proposed for a large research and development complex with residences and golf course. Historically it is believed that the flat areas, now managed as grasslands, had been potato fields.

There have been other threats to the character of Charlestown over the years – the nuclear power plant proposed for the shore of Ninigret Pond on Navy surplus land; the threat of a casino on Narragansett Settlement Lands that would have impacted traffic, social services and police protection; and a potential rail bypass through the northern part of Charlestown for high speed rail lines which would cut across protected lands, dozens of homes, three historic mill villages and active and historic farms (see Natural Resources chapter). Fortunately, Charlestown officials and residents have strongly and effectively resisted these, but the future might hold similar challenges.

**Historic Resource Preservation Efforts**

The Town of Charlestown has made a number of efforts over the past few decades to protect its historic resources and cultural identity as described below.

<u>Planning and Zoning</u>

- A Historic Village Overlay District was implemented in 1999 as part of the zoning ordinance to protect, preserve and maintain the quality of the town's villages; to preserve the town's heritage, cultural and architectural qualities; to foster civic beauty; to strengthen the local economy; and to promote the use of such districts for the education, pleasure and welfare of the citizens of Charlestown.

- A mixed use / village zoning study for Shannock Village was completed in 2010 which included the development of design guidelines for building in the village. This project involved the villages on both the Charlestown and Richmond sides of the Pawcatuck River.

- A Mixed-Use Overlay Zone was implemented in 2004 to encourage small-scale business and residential uses consistent with the historic and pedestrian-scale characteristics that existed in the Cross Mills area to preserve this part of the town's heritage (the area is now mostly included in the Traditional Village District).

The Historic Village Overlay (see Land Use chapter) encompasses the village areas of Carolina and Shannock, and south of Old Post Road between Ninigret Park (and including all of Ninigret Park) east to the South Kingstown town line. It includes some prohibited uses, general building standards, and the application of stricter sign standards than other commercial areas of town. The Mixed Use Overlay has many of the same purposes as those of the Historic Village Overlay, but only applies to a few commercial parcels along Old Post Road and includes provisions for allowing residential and commercial uses in a single building or on one parcel.

Community

The working farms in town are complemented by a seasonal farmers' market sponsored by the Charlestown Land Trust which makes the products of these farms available to the public on a weekly basis, and increases awareness of the importance of local agriculture.

Preservation activities in the town are pursued by the Charlestown Historical Society, an independent non-profit organization, and the Citizens for the Preservation of Shannock Village. The Historical Society opened its building in 2013 adjacent to the Cross Mills Library, where it houses local artifacts and historic documents on display for public viewing and a research library. Also located on the property, moved there in 1972, is the 1838 District No. 2 Schoolhouse, one of eight of Charlestown's public schoolhouses built in the 1800s.

Jane Weidman Charlestown Historical Society Buildings in Cross Mills

**Historic Resources**

The Town of Charlestown is rich in resources from many historic periods. Historic resources are located throughout the town but a number are located in the southern area of Charlestown, along Old Post Road, and along the coast. These historic resources provide part of the rich cultural fabric of the town and could potentially be impacted by current and future development activities.

This section of the chapter includes the inventory of historic resources conducted and documented by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RI HPHC) in 1981[1]. For detailed information on local historic resources see the report of the HPHC referenced in the footnote below. Table HC-1 identifies all properties in Charlestown listed in the National Register of Historic Places (a national program administered by the National Park Service). The locations of these properties are also shown in Map HC-1, *Historic and Cultural Features*.

**Table HC-1**
**National Register of Historic Places in Charlestown**

| **National Register Property or Place** | **Date of Listing** |
|---|---|
| Carolina Village Historic District, following Route 112 from its intersection with Shannock Hill Road on the north (Richmond) to its intersection with Route 91 on the south (Charlestown) | 5/2/74 |
| Historic Village of the Narragansett Indians, contained within the area bounded by Route 91 on the north, Routes 2 and 112 on the east, Route 1 on the south and Kings Factory Road on the west | 5/7/73 |
| Shannock Village Historic District, village area on both sides of the Pawcatuck River, connected by North Shannock Road (Richmond) and Shannock Road (Charlestown) and including a portion of the Amtrak main line | 8/4/83 |
| Kenyon Arch Bridge, Sherman Avenue over the Pawcatuck River (Richmond and Charlestown) | 1/10/89 |
| Joseph Jeffrey House, Old Mill Road, off Route 112 | 3/8/78 |
| Indian Burial Ground, Narrow Lane | 4/28/70 |
| District Schoolhouse #2, Old Post Road (Cross Mills) | 1/4/80 |
| Fort Ninigret/The Niantic Fort, Fort Ninigret Road | 4/28/70 |
| Joseph Stanton House/Wilcox Tavern and General Stanton Monument, Old Post Road / Post Road | 1/11/80 |
| Babcock House, Sunset Drive (Quonochontaug) | 1/1/76 |
| Sheffield House, West Beach Road (Quonochontaug) | 1/1/76 |
| Foster Cove Archaeological Site (RI-CH-2), vicinity of Route 1 | 5/6/80 |

[1] *Historic and Architectural Resources of Charlestown, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report*, RI Historical Preservation Commission, June 1981.

In addition to the districts, structures and sites that have already been placed on the National Register, the 1981 RI HPHC Report identified several additional resources which deserve consideration for entry in the National Register. Over time this list has been altered and is summarized in Table HC-2; the locations of these properties are also shown on Map HC-1.

**Table HC-2**
**Potentially Register-Eligible Historic Properties in Charlestown**

| |
|---|
| Columbia Heights Historic District, Shannock Road and Columbia Heights Road *** |
| Arnolda Historic District, Arnolda Round and South Arnolda Roads, off Old Post Road ** |
| First Baptist Church of Cross Mills, Old Post Road ** |
| Coronation Rock (King Tom Farm), Old Post Road *** |
| Wilcox Farm, Post Road / Old Post Road *** |
| S.B. Hoxie House, Old Post Road / Klondike Road ** |

*** Review of preliminary materials by the State Review Board suggests property may be eligible for National Register
** Recommended for National Register consideration in the HPHC inventory

**Cultural Resources**

Cultural resources provide Charlestown residents and visitors with evidence of the past; the preservation of these resources allows current generations to learn from the past and appreciate nature and the work and accomplishments of earlier generations. Cultural resources include prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, historic standing structures, bridges, cemeteries, monuments and other important resources. Some other examples include:

- Native American graves and cultural items
- Shipwrecks and plane wrecks
- Museum collections
- Historical documents
- Religious sites and religious practices
- Cultural use of natural resources
- Folklife, tradition and other social institutions
- Theater and music groups, and other community cultural amenities
- Older properties with cultural value, not necessarily eligible for the National Register

The preservation and continuation of cultural resources and activities is based on the recognition of their social and economic importance. Tourism based on cultural activities, i.e. visiting any culture or community unlike one's own, is an important part of many economies, including Charlestown's. Cultural tourism can include farmers' markets, town fairs and festivals. Unique to Charlestown are the Charlestown Seafood Festival and the Rhythm and Roots Festival held annually at Ninigret Park; the Revolutionary War Encampment at the historic Amos Greene Farm sponsored by the Charlestown Historical Society; the Narragansett Indian Tribe's Pow Wow held every August on Settlement Lands; and art walks and outlets to showcase local artisans.

Jane Weidman Grand Entry Parade, Narragansett Indian Tribe Pow Wow

Historic Cemeteries

As inventoried by the Charlestown Historical Society and a state database, there are over one hundred historical cemeteries in Charlestown[2]. Locations of most of these cemeteries are also shown on Map HC-1.

The Narragansett Indian Tribe

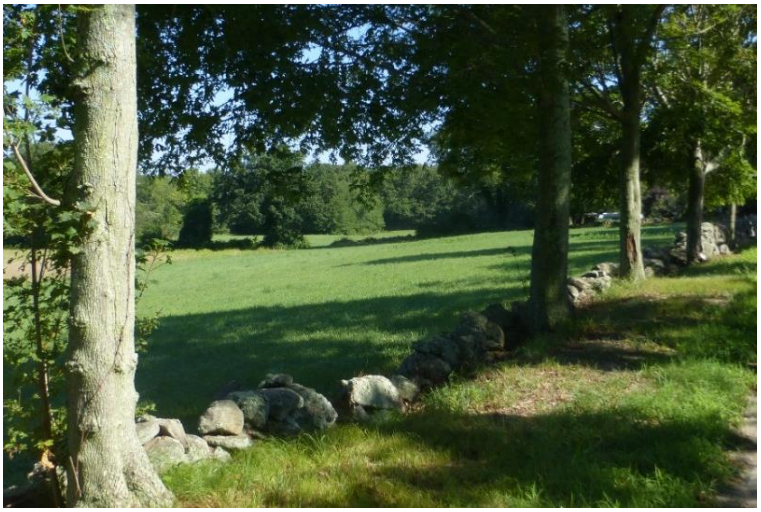
The richness and continuity of Charlestown's Native American heritage is unique in Rhode Island. The presence of the Narragansetts and their many cultural sites gives Charlestown a special and important place in the history and culture of the state. Over centuries the Narragansett people have maintained their traditional culture. Narragansett cultural values and traditions increase the

[2] http://rihistoriccemeteries.org/webdatabase.aspx

cultural diversity of Charlestown and offer an important alternative to the traditions and values of later immigrants. The tribe and the town share many common goals, including the protection of natural resources and the identification and protection of important cultural properties.

**Scenic Resources**

Charlestown is characterized by historic villages, scenic roads, coastal areas, inland ponds and woodlands. Stone walls, fields and historic cemeteries dot the landscape of much of the town, especially north of Route 1. This scenic rural character is one of the reasons why many people, both residents and visitors, are attracted to the town. It provides a sense of place which is unique to Charlestown. Glacial remnants such as the moraine and erratic boulders enhance the trails of some of the preserved areas such as the Francis C. Carter Memorial Preserve and the Moraine Preserve. Farm views reinforce the rural nature of the area. Historic Native American and early settlement trails are also found.



Frances Topping Field and Old Stone Wall

Surveys over the years have identified a number of scenic landscapes and areas in Charlestown. The original work of modern times was "*The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory*"[3] which was undertaken by the RI Department of Environmental Management nearly 30 years ago. The objective of this statewide inventory was to identify and evaluate landscapes of high scenic, historic and cultural value. Three categories of landscape were reviewed: the "physiogeographic" landscape characterized by natural scenic beauty; the created landscape; and the visual landscape.

One primary area in Charlestown included in the inventory is the Quonochontaug and Ninigret Ponds, described as scenic views across coastal ponds and barrier beach. Other sites on the inventory are Shannock and Carolina villages, both of which straddle the border with Richmond. These village areas are rated for their rolling topography, historic rural mill village character, and for views.

Earlier iterations of the comprehensive plan have identified the following areas as having high scenic, historic and cultural value, as listed in Table HC-3.

[3] *The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory: A Survey of the State's Scenic Areas*, R.I. Department of Environmental Management, Division of Planning and Development, January 1990.

## Table HC-3
## Major Scenic and Historic Resources of Charlestown

**Historic Areas**
Carolina Village
Shannock Village and Vicinity
Narragansett Tribal Land
Fort Ninigret
Cross Mills
Farms – Fenner, Luchka, Amos Greene, Holloway

**Important Structures**
Westerly Boundary Marker
Wilcox Tavern & General Stanton Monument
Babcock House
Sheffield House
S.B Hoxie House
Quonochontaug Grange
Cross Mills
- Ocean House on Dock Rd
- Hathaway Cottages
- Grist Mill
- General Store
- Old District School House
- Library
- Baptist Church

General Stanton Inn
4061 Old Post Road (1680)
4029 Old Post Road (1856)
Randall Realty Office
St James Chapel
Joseph Jeffrey House /Sawmill
Charlestown Town Hall

**Tribal Areas**
Narragansett Indian Church
Indian Longhouse
Royal Indian Burial Ground
Fort Ninigret
Indian Cedar Swamp
Curation Building
Health Center

**Scenic Roads**
Post Road
Old Post Road (Rt 1A) past Ningret Park and King Tom Road
Old Post Road (Rt 1A) through Cross Mills
Arnolda Rd / South Arnolda Rd
Kings Factory Road
Shumankanuc Road
Burdickville Road
Alton-Carolina Road (Rt 91)
Carolina Back Road (Rt 112)
Shannock Road
Biscuit City Road, (formerly Zachary Bridge Road)
Old Coach Road

**Scenic Views**
Views of Block Island Sound from Quononchotaug, East Beach and Charlestown Beach
Quononchotaug Pond and Breachway
Pawaget Park (Mud Cove)
Ninigret National Wildlife Refuge
Fort Ninigret
Charlestown Breachway
Ninigret Pond (Charlestown Town Beach boat launch)
Kettle Pond Ocean View Trail
Watchaug Pond (Sanctuary Rd)
Charlestown Moraine Preserve
Cross Mills Pond
Schoolhouse Pond
Horse farms and other farms
Stone walls
Shannock Falls (Horseshoe Falls)
Shannnock Fishing Falls (Richmond access)

**Unique Areas**
Foster Cove Archeological Site
Former Naval Auxiliary Landing Field at Ninigret Park
Frosty Drew Observatory at Ninigret Park
Fort Neck/Fort Ninigret
Summer Residence Areas:
- East, West and Central Beach
- Charlestown-by-the-Sea
- Sea Lea Colony and Ocean Ridge

Arnolda Colony
Springs at Mill Pond Preserve (former trout hatchery)
Former Klondike Stone Quarries
Waterholes on Kings Factory and Burdickville Roads
Glacial Remains / Cairns (Frances Carter Preserve)
Scandinavian History at South Farm, Maple Lake, and Nordic Lodge
Historic Trails e.g. Narrangansett Trail
Historic Cemeteries
Summer Camps e.g. Camp Davis

Scenic Roadways

Charlestown and neighboring Richmond have the distinction of sharing a road that was designated the first state scenic roadway in Rhode Island. In 1990, the two towns jointly applied to the Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RI DOT) for the designation of Shannock Road as a scenic roadway. The application was motivated in part by DOT's intended reconstruction of Shannock Road which proposed the removal of old trees and stone walls, road widening and the straightening of an S-curve. In 1991, the Rhode Island Scenic Roadway Board designated Shannock Road, a 1.7 mile stretch of rural road which runs between Route 112 and Route 2 in Charlestown, and crosses the Pawcatuck River into Richmond for a short distance, as a scenic road (see Transportation chapter).

The application was based on both the physical characteristics and the aesthetic qualities of the roadway. Criteria identified in support of this application included rolling terrain with marshes, woodlands, farms and historic homes, stone walls, and unique vistas of fields, kettle holes, historic bridges and dams, and natural views of the river.

In August of 2002, the 7-mile stretch of Route 1 (Post Road) in Charlestown between South Kingstown and Westerly was designated as a state scenic roadway. The application emphasized both the natural resources along Route 1 such as the Charlestown Moraine, and the historic buildings and cultural sites that developed along this historic transportation corridor. In May of 2008, the 11.8 mile stretch of Route 1 in neighboring South Kingstown was added, completing a long effort to assist in the preservation of the beauty and natural and cultural aspects of the Route 1 corridor.

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES: ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### National Register Designation

Certain resources in the town are recognized as significant through listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a record maintained by the United States Department of the Interior, which includes structures, sites, areas and objects significant in local, state or national history. The register constitutes an official inventory of historic resources that are considered worthy of preservation. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission nominates properties for inclusion on the register for review and approval by the Department of the Interior prior to their entry on the register. Resources that are listed on the National Register are also listed on the State Register of Historic Places.

At present there is no permanent protection in the town's local regulations for historic buildings, districts or scenic areas. National Register listing only regulates federal and state agency activities

or funding that may affect the integrity of these resources. There is no control over private property owners who may alter or even demolish historic structures or may disrupt unique landscapes with insensitive development.

**Cultural Resources Protection**

Buildings, objects, structures, districts and contributing elements with architectural, aesthetic, historic and cultural value are all non-renewable resources that once destroyed cannot be returned to their original state. Therefore, the activity of preserving and protecting historic cultural resources is critical to maintaining the character of the community.

Threats to cultural resources could include new development of a scale or style that is not compatible with the existing landscape. Development of agricultural land will inevitably change the rural character of town. Large-lot subdivisions in the vicinity of historic villages would change the nature and scale of the residential development pattern.

Cultural resource management refers to the processes and procedures used to manage, preserve, protect and conserve cultural resources. Archaeology provides a means of verifying and elaborating the past. An archeological site may be documented to prevent the loss of information in the event of a natural catastrophe. Other types of documentation can be used to preserve the information provided by architecture, landscapes, documents, photographs and even unique land formations.

Jane Weidman Mill Pond Trout Hatchery Remains

## Land Development Regulations

The zoning and subdivision regulations of the town determine the type and character of land use and development patterns. At present, frontage lots are easiest to develop since the approval process is simple. However, this type of development impacts the scenic quality of the rural landscape and creates the impression that the town is more densely developed than in reality.

Town agencies, boards and commissions should, and generally do, recognize the contribution of historic and cultural resources to the landscape and the effect development has on the value of these resources. A stronger regulatory model to provide protection to these resources should be considered. This includes the enhancement of the Historic Village Overlay District as it applies to Carolina, Shannock and Cross Mills to better govern the scale and design of new development in the villages and surrounding areas, and/or the adoption of an historic zoning district with specific standards applied to historic buildings and cemeteries, to be administered by a historic district commission. Such a commission could also provide a resource for education of property owners on appropriate techniques and methods of preservation of properties and sites and potentially assist with grant funding or other resources.

## Scenic and Rural Roadways and Historic Trails

As stated in the Transportation chapter, scenic quality is not limited to the state designated scenic roadways of Shannock Road and Post Road. The management of existing roads and the protection of the qualities that make them scenic – views, stone walls and vegetation – is necessary to ensure an important part of the town's cultural heritage. In 2004 a Stewardship Plan for Route 1 was prepared by the Charlestown Conservation Commission who relied on considerable public outreach and field studies. The objectives and goals of this plan (*Route 1 Scenic Roadway Stewardship Plan)* are still relevant and can be applied generally to Charlestown's scenic roads.

Infrastructure improvement or maintenance on state roads in the town can also threaten historic and cultural resources. It is important that the town stay involved in the process for the state's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to ensure that planning and engineering properly take local historic and cultural resources into account. As mentioned above, the state proposed improvement of Shannock Road would have adversely impacted the historic character of Shannock Village.

Historic trails go through many public and private areas, many of which are currently unprotected. Narragansett Trail, extending east-west across Charlestown, appears and reappears in several sections of town. Parts of the trail pass through preserved land or through private land; other parts are not found on available maps. To protect the historic integrity of known parts of the trail, there is a need to document the locations and conditions of the trail. Also of interest is identifying the original names of many local roadways, now known by other names.

## HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES: GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

### GOALS

**Goal 1** **Preserve and enhance Charlestown's historic and cultural resources, including historic villages and landscapes, historic buildings and cemeteries, and scenic views and corridors.**

**Goal 2** **Establish and maintain a collaboration with the Narragansett Indian Tribe to tell the Native American history of Charlestown and to protect artifacts and sites.**

### POLICIES AND ACTIONS

**Goal 1** **Preserve and enhance Charlestown's historic and cultural resources, including historic villages and landscapes, historic buildings and cemeteries, and scenic views and corridors.**

**Policy 1.1** **Protect historic and cultural resources through zoning and subdivision regulations and the development review process, using innovative techniques as they become available or feasible**.

As demand for new houses and commercial development takes place in Charlestown, as it invariably will, the town must work hard to ensure that future development does not diminish or detract from its architectural heritage and cultural landscape.

**Action 1** Recognize the contribution of historic and cultural resources and structures when reviewing land developments, subdivisions and other applications to ensure the preservation of important resources and the appropriate re-use of historic structures.

As a means to encourage the preservation or rehabilitation of historic buildings, the zoning ordinance must allow for flexibility of uses in those areas where there is a concentration of historic structures. This includes an emphasis on mixed uses.

**Action 2** Develop a database of significant historical and cultural resources to be used as a "red flag" in reviewing developments.

**Action 3** Review the zoning regulations for the mill villages and adopt standards governing building and parking placement, building form and design, and signage and site amenities, so as to protect and enhance traditional uses and development patterns, and the historic nature of the villages.

As stated in the Land Use chapter, Carolina, Shannock and the center of Cross Mills are designated as mixed-use village centers, and design guidelines developed for Shannock in 2010 should be used as a template for the other mill villages. A village center overlay district to govern the scale and design of new development and redevelopment in the village centers is proposed.

**Action 4** Consider the adoption of historic district zoning with review of building changes and new development in designated historic districts under the purview of a new historic district commission.

Under RIGL 45-24.1, Historical Area Zoning, municipalities have the authority to adopt historic districts. The town could initiate this by establishing an "historic and cultural commission" whose duties could include:

- Review the inventory of historic buildings and sites and identify individual buildings or structures and/or historic areas that are deemed to be of historic or cultural significance.

- Coordinate with the Town Council and the Planning Commission to ensure that local regulations are drafted, adopted and enforced.

**Policy 1.2 Preserve the visual qualities of Charlestown's historic areas and scenic roadways.**

The visual qualities of a cultural nature that particularly deserve protection include the summer cottages south of Route 1 that were developed during the period after World War II and which are a unique housing type important to Charlestown's history and heritage. They also include the state and local scenic roadways in town.

**Action 1** Develop context sensitive design guidelines for summer colonies to ensure that new construction, renovations and additions are compatible with the neighborhood.

**Action 2** Amend the zoning ordinance to facilitate the re-use of motels for low to moderate income housing, so that the summer colony character of these properties can be retained.

**Action 3** Continue Implementation of the *Route 1 Scenic Roadway Stewardship Plan.*

Implementation efforts of the plan include the establishment of scenic roadway design standards for new development and building improvements along Route 1, including signage, lighting and buffers between the roadway and structures, with consideration given to preservation of important views. These standards would be incorporated in the town zoning and subdivision regulations, to be applied when reviewing development proposals along the Route 1 corridor.

Charlestown's rural quality is reflected by views of woods and fields along its many miles of local roadways, particularly north of Route 1. Efforts are needed to preserve their scenic qualities as development pressures increase; the action items below are mirrored in the Transportation chapter:

**Action 4** Continue to implement the following policies when reviewing subdivisions and land developments along local and minor roadways, with amendments to land development regulations enacted as needed:

- Retention of stone walls.
- Maintenance of undisturbed natural landscape buffers, particularly significant trees and shrubs, to shield view of new construction from the road where the character of the roadway would be adversely changed by clearing.
- Locate new "curb cuts" (driveways) to town roadways so as to preserve existing stonewalls, natural buffers and the scenic qualities of these corridors. Encourage shared driveways to service new development unless there are safety or functional factors that preclude them.

**Action 5** Develop and implement a right of way vegetation management program for local roadways that uses low impact but effective methods to manage trees and other vegetation that is consistent with roadway safety standards.

**Policy 1.3 Maintain and expand public understanding of Charlestown's cultural and development history through research, public education and public events.**

**Action 1** Educate the public on Charlestown's history by developing and distributing informational brochures.

**Action 2** Support the activities of, and work in conjunction with, the Charlestown Historical Society to continue educational efforts and group activities that raise awareness of the significance of historical and cultural resources to both the community and the seasonal tourist economy.

**Action 3** Undertake field research to locate, and map, all historic trails and old road names.

**Action 4** Partner with the University of Rhode Island, Roger Williams University and other educational institutions on programs and projects documenting the historical and cultural assets of the community.

**Action 5** Educate residents on the benefits of National Register designation, including use of state and federal investment tax credits for restoration of historic structures.

**Action 6** Develop and distribute guidelines for restoration of historic properties for use by homeowners.

**Goal 2** **Establish and maintain a collaboration with the Narragansett Indian Tribe to tell the Native American history of Charlestown and to protect artifacts and sites.**

**Policy 2.1** **Work with the Narragansett Indian Tribe to delineate and protect shared historic and cultural resources.**

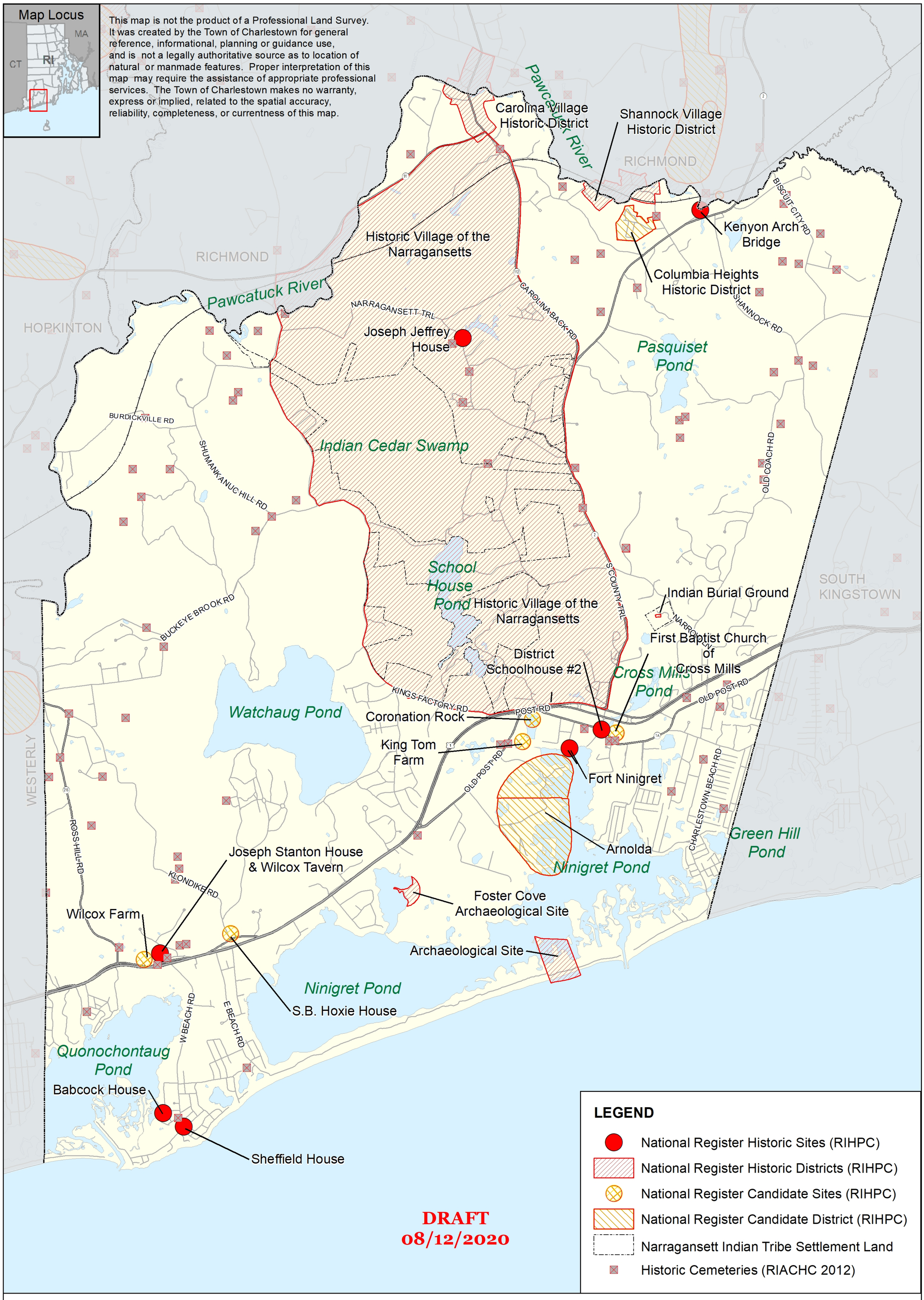
**Action 1** Establish an inventory of Native American heritage resources located outside of the Narragansett Settlement Lands.

**Action 2** Establish procedures that encourage review and input by the Narragansett Indian Tribe of proposed subdivisions and developments that may impact tribal resources.

**Policy 2.2** **Support the prehistoric and historic heritage of the Narragansett people**.

**Action 1** Include land that provides for the protection or enhancement of Native American cultural assets as an additional important criteria in consideration of parcels for open space acquisition.

**Action 2** Work with tribal representatives to educate the public on the history of the Narragansett, and to provide access to significant cultural resources, as determined by the tribe.




Map Sources:

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0 0.5 1 Kilometers

TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN
RHODE ISLAND

Prepared by:
Town of Charlestown

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, 2020

# HISTORIC AND CULTURAL FEATURES

**MAP HC-1**