



I. INTRODUCTION

New Shoreham 2016 Draft Comprehensive Plan

OVERALL VISION

Through proactive planning and responsible stewardship, the residents and the Town of New Shoreham will ensure that growth and change on Block Island sustains the community we treasure and protects the resources on which it depends.

INTRODUCTION

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

A comprehensive plan is a policy document which sets forth a vision for what a community aspires to be in 20 or more years and lays out a framework to achieve that vision. Comprehensive plans provide direction to private development and encourage sustainable community growth. They act as a guide for local planners, public officials and other decision-makers to assist them in achieving the desired goals of the community.

Municipalities in Rhode Island are charged with preparing local comprehensive plans that meet the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act (RIGL 45-22) including consistency with the goals of the State.

Comprehensive planning by municipal government is necessary to form a rational basis for the long-term physical development of a municipality and to avoid conflicting requirements and reactive land use regulations and decisions. (RIGL 45-22)

The topics required to be addressed within a Comprehensive Plan include:

- NATURAL RESOURCES
- RECREATION
- HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
- HOUSING
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- AGRICULTURE
- SERVICES AND FACILITIES
- ENERGY
- WATER SUPPLY
- TRANSPORTATION
- NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE
- LAND USE

2016 NEW SHOREHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

The Comprehensive Plan that follows represents the work of the New Shoreham Planning Board, with review and input by all town departments, various boards and commissions, civic and environmental organizations, and the community at large.

During meetings beginning in 2013, the Planning Board reviewed and developed the plan components as a rewrite of the plan adopted on March 2, 2009. The work done builds on that of the earlier version of the Comprehensive Plan, supplemented by analyses of current data, consideration of recent growth and its impacts, and an assessment of existing and new issues facing the community. This major plan update and

process was completed in accordance with the requirements of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, as amended in 2011.

The New Shoreham Planning Board held a public hearing on **Month Day, 2016** and approved the plan on **Month Day, 2016**. This was followed by a public hearing held by the Town Council on **Month Day, 2016**. The New Shoreham Town Council adopted the New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan on **Month Day, 2016**.

AN OVERVIEW OF BLOCK ISLAND

By definition, Block Island is less than ten square miles of land surrounded by water, with the nearest mainland twelve miles away. The island's year-round population of just over 1,000 residents swells to over 20,000 during the island's busy summer tourist season. Pristine beaches, breathtaking bluffs, open space vistas lined with stonewalls, habitats of rare species, historic lighthouses and an 19th century village all combine to make Block Island the special place that it is.

The uniqueness of this special and beloved place mandates that we serve as responsible stewards and proactively plan for and protect its future.

Block Island's exceptionally beautiful natural and cultural landscapes are still remarkably intact after generations of use. The Nature Conservancy has recognized Block Island's uniqueness by naming it to its initial listing of the **"LAST GREAT PLACES"** referring to it as "New England's Island of Hope". This title reminds us that it is with a sense of urgency that we must plan and protect the island.

Those who call Block Island home understand that it is not only its exceptional natural environment, but also the remarkable social community that has evolved here, that makes it such a special place. The twelve miles of water that separates Block Island from the mainland give it its unique natural and social environment, and necessitate a high level of self-reliance by the community and cohesion among its residents.

What is also special about Block Island is what is not found here, such as franchise restaurants, chain stores and high rise hotels, and even a traffic light. Because cars cannot go very far or very fast, the roadway system is rural in nature, with many local access roads private and unpaved.

All these special qualities make Block Island an enormously popular destination for day trippers, boaters and vacationers, and as a result, a key resource in the State's tourism industry. The very reasons people love Block Island are the same reasons that make Block Island so different. Differences between Block Island and any other community in Rhode Island are not marginal, they are fundamental. Block Island must be considered one of the 39 cities and towns but its uniqueness must also be understood and respected by the State and its government.

POLICIES FOR BLOCK ISLAND'S FUTURE

To ensure the vision for Block Island's future, a number of overarching policies have been identified and described below. These policies guide those that are contained in the various chapters of this Comprehensive Plan.

A. EXERCISE RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP FOR THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES WHICH GIVE THE ISLAND ITS SPECIAL CHARACTER AND SIGNIFICANCE

Coastal features, fresh water resources, vistas and open spaces, archeological and historic elements, and critical habitat combine to make Block Island the distinctive place that it is. Block Island's unique natural and cultural assets create an exceptional stewardship responsibility for the community on behalf of all those, now and in the future, residents and visitors alike, for whom these resources are of immense importance.

B. ENSURE THAT FUTURE RESIDENTIAL GROWTH IS COMPATIBLE WITH THE ISLAND'S TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPE

Residential development, although inevitable, must nonetheless be done at an appropriate density and in a manner sensitive to the island's environment and history. This requires that Block Island continue in its efforts to protect valuable open space and habitat, while ensuring that the development that does occur is compatible in style and scale with the island's traditionally built environment.

C. ESTABLISH LAND USE REGULATIONS AND MANAGE PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS SO THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTES TO CREATING A MORE COMPACT, MIXED-USE, PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED COMMUNITY

Protecting the island's rural landscape goes hand in hand with encouraging growth and compactness in the village, which is the center for commercial and transportation activities. Maintaining and strengthening this landscape of a busy and compact village connecting two harbors and surrounded by low density development with large parcels of open space, requires that zoning and other regulations reflect desired uses and densities, and that future development be directed towards areas that are already served by public water and sewer.

D. MAINTAIN A VIBRANT YEAR-ROUND ISLAND COMMUNITY THAT MEETS RESIDENTS' ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS

Balancing the protection of natural and cultural resources with the accommodation of growth and economic opportunity must take place in the context of a desired year-round island community. In order to sustain a healthy year-round community, the following needs and services must be met:

- A STRONG PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM THAT FULFILLS THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN
- HIGH QUALITY COMMUNITY SERVICES, PARTICULARLY RELATING TO HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY
- A DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY THAT PROVIDES YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- ATTAINABLE YEAR-ROUND HOUSING DESIGNED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES WITH MODERATE INCOMES

E. STRENGTHEN THE COMMUNITY’S ABILITY TO MANAGE LOCAL AFFAIRS

Access to and from Block Island, the public utilities serving it, and other aspects of island life that are shaped and regulated elsewhere are of vital importance to island residents and officials, as they affect both daily life and the island’s future. Whether it involves moped licensing, ferry rates and schedules, moorings in the Great Salt Pond, affordable housing or off-shore wind energy production, having a strong local voice in their management is of prime importance. The New Shoreham Town Administration and Town Council, now and in the future, must maintain close lines of communication with state legislators and officials.

F. INCREASE RESILIENCY OF THE ISLAND TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEA LEVEL RISE IMPACTS BY IMPLEMENTING APPROPRIATE ADAPTATION MEASURES

Sea level rise has the potential to cause dramatic impacts to Block Island’s natural resources and infrastructure and as a result commerce and quality of life. With the likely potential of over six and a half feet of sea level rise by the end of this century, as predicted by NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), several roads on the island may be inundated twice daily and access to Sandy Point could be compromised. Block Island must continue to plan for and implement adaptation measures to lessen the impacts of climate change and sea level rise.

G. MOTIVATE AND ENABLE UPCOMING GENERATIONS TO BE A PART OF BLOCK ISLAND’S FUTURE, INCLUDING ITS TOWN GOVERNANCE, THROUGH EDUCATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING EFFORTS, AND BY ENCOURAGING EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS AND THE WORK OF LOCAL BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Block Island’s history and sense of community is strengthened by providing a future on-island to the children who have grown up, summered, or who have family roots here. Educational initiatives, expanding employment opportunities beyond the tourism industry, and attainable housing are necessary to provide a future for the island’s next generation. But this future also begins with town leaders facilitating an interest and active participation in town government by the island’s youth.

H. FOSTER BLOCK ISLAND’S STRONG COMMUNITY COHESION

Few places have as strong and inclusive a sense of community as Block Island. This clearly has much to do with a shared appreciation of and love for the island. It is critical that the other goals of the Comprehensive Plan and the policies supported and actions taken to achieve them be consistent with upholding this community cohesion.