

# TOWN OF NEW SHOREHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



*Southeast Light*

Photo: Malcolm Greenaway

Adopted by the New Shoreham Town Council March 4, 2002  
Updated by the New Shoreham Town Council March 2, 2009  
As prepared by the New Shoreham Planning Board  
Technical assistance by Herr Associates

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## PREAMBLE

Block Island is rapidly growing to a point where we believe we may soon exceed our ability to preserve the very features that brought so many to the Island.

The key question in drafting this updating of the Comprehensive Plan is:

- Do we do our best to accommodate further growth while leaving limits to be set by the marketplace, or;
- Do we endeavor to influence and control further change so as to preserve as much as possible of the qualities that give Block Island its unique character?

We have decided to take a stand in favor of the latter. A premise of the 2001 version of the *Comprehensive Plan* is that we can and should influence and manage growth adequately to preserve the community culture and character that has been the hallmark of Block Island for generations.

To accomplish that, in the early stages of implementation of this Plan we will need to address such questions as:

- Is there a point where the number of cars (and trucks) on our roads exceeds the capacity to, for example, park at the beaches or downtown, or safely share the roads with bicycles, mopeds and pedestrians?
- Is there a point at which there could be too many bikes on the roads at once, or too many walkers on the sidewalks?
- Is there a point where the number of day-trippers on our beaches, greenways, and walking paths compromises the experience of visiting Block Island?
- Is there a point at which the size of houses being built produces too many places that can be rented at double or triple a single family capacity?
- Is there a point where the inordinately high price of houses will distort the diversity of the Island and render the governing of the Island problematic?
- Is there a point where the number of recreational boats in the harbors exceeds the capacity to safely anchor?

- In the other direction, are there not numerous targets which, if achieved, will assure the viability and sustainability of the year round community?

If we can project reasonable limits at which growth should be regulated, can we realistically and legally do anything about it? We recognize that establishing pacing devices or setting limits or targets may require policy initiatives and/or legislation previously untried either here or elsewhere. But we know we are not alone. We expect to communicate with Nantucket, Jackson Hole, Aspen, Bolinas and other severely impacted communities in order to explore ideas wherever others are facing the same issues.

The bottom line of this updating of the Comprehensive Plan is this simple goal: we want to assure that further growth and change on Block Island do not exceed our ability to sustain the community we treasure and the resources on which it depends.

Achieving that goal requires understanding and respecting the uniqueness of this community. Differences between New Shoreham and any other community in Rhode Island are not marginal - they are fundamental. It is because of those differences that Block Island is able to contribute so powerfully to the richness of Rhode Island's appeal. Rhode Island would be diminished should Block Island be homogenized into being just another rural community. Accordingly, Rhode Island must understand that our uniqueness requires some departures from the way in which 38 other municipalities are managed.

Twelve miles of often-rough water are the beginning of the community's uniqueness. A singularly high level of self-reliance is made unavoidable by those twelve miles, which is both a handicap and a blessing. Those working on Block Island live on Block Island while doing so, with places of work and of living far more closely tied than anywhere else in the State. That means that Block Island's need for affordable housing has to be met on Block Island rather than relying on off-Island commuters. Having local jobs held by local people in turn contributes to the cohesive sense of community that is so vital to this special place. Emergency water supplies can't be obtained through a simple pipe connection to a neighbor, any more than mutual aid agreements can meet fire emergencies.

Cars can't go far or fast, so road standards from places where cars can do so fit this place uncomfortably. All the Island's electricity is generated locally, so Islanders feel ALL the impacts, giving different salience to alternative energy sources. All the Island's

water (except for a few gallons in boutique bottles) is withdrawn from the same aquifers that are potentially impacted by our disposal of sewage and other contaminants. Transporting everything consumed here but not grown or made here has a transportation penalty, just as making things here for use elsewhere is penalized by transport costs and availability.

Providing services to a small population under geographic circumstances hostile to regionalization inevitably means higher costs per capita. For the Town government, that is offset to some degree by the large number of tax-paying properties of high value that only seasonally demand most services, and make no demands on educational services. By conventional measures New Shoreham's fiscal position is almost embarrassingly favorable, but given the Town's unique circumstances, the Town is fiscally challenged, just as are others.

Toward all these objectives a first step for the Town Council will be to maintain close lines of communication with all levels of the Rhode Island Legislature and State Government.

The very reasons people love Block Island are the same reasons that make Block Island so different. By

definition Block Island is land surrounded by water on all sides, with the nearest mainland twelve miles away. Herein lies Block Island's differences from the other thirty-eight cities and towns of Rhode Island.

Block Island must be considered one of the 39 cities and towns but it also must be viewed by the State and the State government as a special and unique case: it is part of the whole of Rhode Island, but definitely having special circumstances that set it apart.

Calling it "New England's Island of Hope," The Nature Conservancy recognized Block Island's uniqueness in naming it to its initial listing of the "Last Great Places." Residents had recognized that uniqueness long before, based on many reasons in addition to or in spite of those cited above. Those reasons include both the extraordinary but fragile natural environment, and the remarkable social community that has evolved here. This extraordinary place needs and deserves extraordinary measures if it is to continue to successfully manage the pressures it is facing, and in doing so successfully, contributing both to this special place and to the State of which it is a part.



*Mansion Beach II*



*Bales of Hay*

## 1. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Block Island is small, fragile, isolated, subject to volatile change in weather and growth, beautiful, home to endangered species and an endangered lifestyle. No community ever had a stronger mandate to plan for its future than that. This *Plan* outlines the goals and objectives which New Shoreham's planning intends to pursue, and actions to implement those goals. It draws heavily on the 1994 version of the *Plan*, supplemented by updating information provided by local civic and Town organizations and officials, recent analyses of growth and its impacts, and discussions among the many who have been involved.

That work underscores the interdependency of all aspects of the Island. Ultimately everything local depends upon everything else local, in a tightly closed and sharply finite system. Protecting the integrity of that system pervades this *Plan*.

There is an urgency to this planning. Each unit of added development forecloses options for shaping the Town's growth, yet increases the importance of doing so. Each unit of added development, without the guidance that this *Plan* intends, threatens to further erode the qualities that the *Plan* promotes or protects.

Further, adequacy of many facilities is strained. Addressing facility inadequacy is confronted by lack of resources for expansion, and concern that the shape of those improvements will in turn shape development, so should be guided by more than simple response to potential customers. There is concern that the most powerful influences over the Island's development lie outside Town control. The regional economy and global climate change are clearly beyond Town control. For such things as the vital access between Island and mainland, the Town can now plead and cajole, but can not control. One of this *Plan*'s recurrent themes is that of expanding Island control over vital Island services.

Another recurrent theme is that of protecting the Island's extraordinary heritage for those who follow, seeking to reconcile opportunity for current benefit with consideration of the generations to follow. The analyses on which this *Plan* is based reach forward sixty years into the future: given the Island's circumstance, even that might be too short a view.

It has been commented that what is special about Block Island is what is not here, ranging from the obvious, such as franchise restaurants, to the less so, such as high rise hotels. Maintaining that special quality — which also makes Block Island a key resource in Rhode Island's tourism industry — is enormously difficult in a place attractive to more and more visitors, but is another of the important themes of the *Plan*.

## **BASIC PRINCIPLES**

In response to the concerns discussed above, these are a few over-arching principles that are reflected often in the specific elements of this *Comprehensive Plan*. Not everything in the *Plan* derives from these, but much of its direction does so.

### **A. Strengthen the ability of Islanders and Island agencies to manage their own community's affairs.**

The management of access to the Island and the utilities serving it are of huge importance in shaping Block Island's future, making an Island voice in that management of prime importance. Achieving stronger local voice in management will require impressing on the Rhode Island legislature as well as State agencies that the uniqueness that sets Block Island far apart from all other municipalities in the State requires treatment unlike that applicable elsewhere.

### **B. Exercise responsible stewardship for the natural and cultural resources which give the Island its special character and importance.**

Coastal features, fresh water resources, vistas and open spaces, archeological and historic elements, and critical habitats combine to make Block Island the special place that it is. That creates a special stewardship responsibility for the community on behalf of all those, now and in the future, residents and visitors alike, for whom those resources are of immense importance.

### **C. Assure that current growth does not exceed the sustainable limits of the Island.**

That requires improving understanding of what the real limits are, as well as adopting measures to assure respect for those limits.

### **D. Manage regulations and the pattern and capacity of Town services so that development compatibly contributes to building a more compact and pedestrian-oriented village center.**

Convenience, reduction of auto dependency, efficiency of service and resource use, land conservation, and development of visual coherence are all served well by encouraging future development to be compact. For Block Island, that requires major infrastructure investments and regulatory innovation.

### **E. Assure maintenance of Block Island's unusually strong community cohesion, with its inclusion of Islanders, cottagers, summer residents, people of wealth, people not of wealth, retirees, business people, and people in government.**

Few places have as strong and inclusive a sense of community as Block Island enjoys. It is critical that the actions being taken to achieve other goals be consistent with protecting that community cohesion.

### **F. Through thoughtful and directed education, economic development, and housing efforts, motivate and enable the upcoming generation to be a part of Block Island's future community, importantly including the core operations of town government, without reliance on off-island commuting.**

If the community were to lose more of its young people and if Town operations had to rely on off-Island staff, as is threatening as a result of housing costs, serious damage would be done to the Town's history and sense of community.

## **PLAN MECHANICS**

The structure of this document follows the outline of plan elements required by the State Comprehensive Planning Act. This document is backed by a range of others, specifically including the following. They are intended as parts of the Town's *Comprehensive Plan* upon its adoption.

"Growth and the Comprehensive Plan," Herr Associates, revised December 6, 2001.

"LAND Modeling for Block Island," revised December 6, 2001.

“Capital Improvement Program Budget FY02 – 07,”  
New Shoreham Town Council.

*Great Salt Pond Management Plan*, New Shoreham  
Town Council. Circa 1998.

*Historic and Architectural Resources of Block Island,  
Rhode Island*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission, 1991, together with “Errata Sheet”  
prepared by the Block Island Historical Society,  
September 1993.

*Guidelines for Building in the Historic District*, Block  
Island Historic District Commission, 1990.

*The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory: A Survey of  
the State’s Scenic Areas*. Rhode Island Department of  
Environmental Management, Division of Planning,  
January 1990.

*Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan*  
Adopted May 19, 1993; revised April 1994.

*Block Island Map Atlas*, May 17, 1994.

*Town of New Shoreham Emergency Management  
Plan*, submitted by David C. Holt, Town Manager,  
October 1993.

*Hydrogeology and Water Resources of Block Island,  
Rhode Island: Water Resources Investigations Report  
94-4096*. U. S. Geological Survey, 1994.

*Public Laws of the State of Rhode Island*, January  
Session, 1877, Chapter 617, “An Act Ceding to the  
Town of New Shoreham, the Great Salt Pond in said  
Town, and authorizing said Town to appropriate  
money for opening a way between said pond and the  
sea, etc.”

Town of New Shoreham, “On-Site Wastewater  
Management Plan,” August 9, 2000.

## **DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH**

Block Island’s history of growth is full of unexpected  
turns. The population grew to 700 persons in 1810,  
surged to over 1,200 persons twenty years later, then  
more or less stabilized until the turn of the century,  
before plummeting from 1,400 to fewer than 500  
winter residents in 1960<sup>1</sup>. Since then, winter popula-  
tion has rebounded, and summer population has

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<sup>1</sup> Data from U.S. Census of Population, various years.

exploded to more than 10,000 persons, including  
summer home residents, guests in inns and guest  
houses, and people staying on boats, but not including  
day-trippers. With that boom being the most recent  
occurrence, it is tempting to assume that it will  
continue, but the only thing assured of continuing is  
the uncertainty of growth in a small isolated com-  
munity.

Block Island’s recent growth has been fueled almost  
entirely by the ability and desire of families in the  
Northeast to buy summer homes.

Certainly continued demand for second homes in  
communities such as Block Island depends vitally  
upon those communities remaining pleasurable to be  
in, with costs (financial, access time, hassle, etc.) no  
more than commensurate with that pleasure. To  
assure continuation of such conditions on Block  
Island requires careful planning, because of very  
limited resources. Doing planning in the face of huge  
uncertainties about the future calls for special care.  
The **worst** outcome would occur if future demand  
were underestimated in the Town’s plans. At the same  
time, public commitments need to respect the possi-  
bility that future growth could be significantly slower  
than in the past.

Accordingly, we have made projections and analyses  
based on the premise that demand for location here  
will continue in relation to remaining resources much  
as it has in the past several decades, but the Plan’s  
proposals are designed to accept the possibility of  
lowered growth. Growth greatly in excess of past  
rates is unlikely given both reduced land availability  
and the near-certain unwillingness of the Town to  
accept it.

The analyses start with the land base of about 6,200  
acres of land, more or less depending on how it is  
measured (Table 1). About a fifth of that acreage is  
now available for development, the rest having  
already been developed, committed to development,  
or protected as open space by deed or by regulatory  
control, such as wetlands rules. The preponderance of  
land, both overall and that available for development,  
is zoned for three-acre residential lots (RA district),  
much of it subdivided under earlier and less demand-  
ing zoning rules.

The winter population of the Town is about 1,000  
persons, with more than 12,000 persons staying  
overnight in the summer, about a quarter of them on  
boats. The overnight population is joined by more  
than another 3,000 day visiting persons on a typical  
summer day (Table 2).

Our projections made in 1990, using a sophisticated computer model to extend past trends in conjunction with a diminishing land base, were almost exactly correct in the first decade of use, so continue to be relied upon as one basis for projections. Another is the more detailed projections made in 2005 for the Housing Element Supplement. The current projection indicates summer peak population growing from about 12,000 persons now to nearly 15,000 in 2020. The growing scarcity of development sites noted in earlier versions of the *Plan* are increasingly evident. Even Manhattan has some vacant land: Block Island's land will never run out, but as it diminishes the planning issues relating to land will change substantially.

Block Island employment is based on serving population. More than half of Island jobs are in retail trade and services, and virtually all the rest directly or indirectly depend on serving population or population growth (Table 3). Average annual employment grew by only a third as much in the nineties as it did in the eighties, and since then has grown even more slowly, as had earlier been projected to occur.

As shown in Table 4 and Chart 4, the escalation in single-family home prices has not moderated even in 2007, with the median well above \$1,000,000. The median will certainly drop in 2008 reflecting 20 West Side developments sales.



*Rainbows over the Spring House*

Table 1. **BLOCK ISLAND LAND USE HISTORY & PROJECTION**

Year	Acres of land				
	Developed	Available	Unblldble	Protected	Total
1960	286	5,079	557	266	6,188
1965	760	4,605	557	266	6,188
1970	893	4,470	557	268	6,188
1975	1,081	4,059	557	491	6,188
1980	1,283	3,832	557	516	6,188
1985	1,520	3,173	557	938	6,188
1990	1,610	2,849	557	1,172	6,188
1995	1,900	2,210	557	1,521	6,188
2000	2,100	1,660	557	1,871	6,188
2005	2,250	1,310	557	2,071	6,188
2010	2,360	1,001	557	2,270	6,188
2015	2,460	751	557	2,420	6,188
2020	2,540	561	557	2,530	6,188
2025	2,620	401	557	2,610	6,188
2030	2,690	271	557	2,670	6,188

Projection basis:

Housing units per table 2.

Max acres protected per year:

40

Acres developed per unit:

1.5

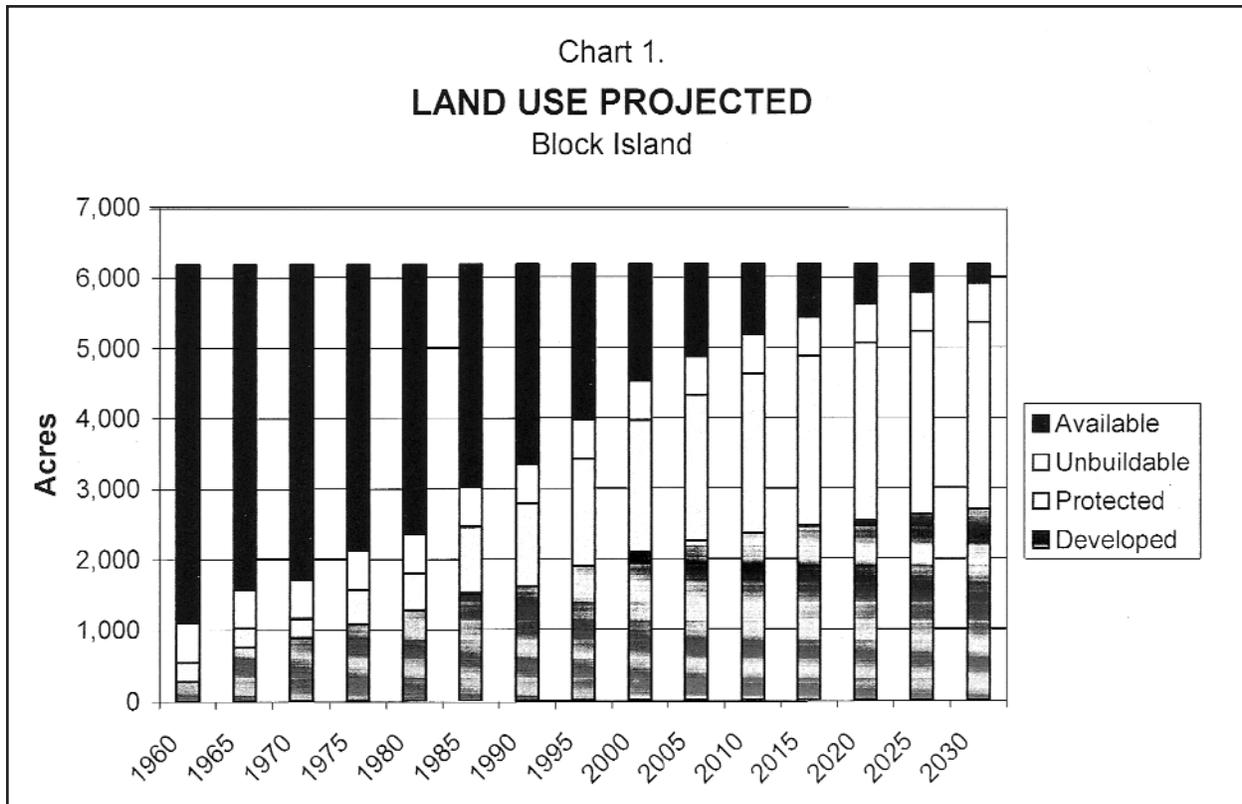


Table 2. **POPULATION AND VISITORS**

Revised 13 Mar 08

Category	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
<b>Housing units</b>						
Total	1,009	1,264	1,606	1,780	1,900	2,000
Year-round			497	550	590	620
<b>Developed acres</b>						
Total	1,283	1,610	2,100	2,360	2,540	2,620
Per dwelling unit	1.27	1.27	1.31	1.33	1.34	1.31
<b>Winter residents</b>						
US Census	620	836	1,010			
Groundhog Day Census		791	883			
RI Div of Planning			1,010	1,110	1,253	1,366
Planning figure	600	800	900	1,050	1,150	1,250
<b>Summer overnight</b>						
In dwellings		5,300	6,700	7,500	8,000	8,400
In inns, B & Bs, etc.		1,300	1,560	1,730	1,840	1,940
In other rooms		300	340	370	400	420
On boats		3,000	3,200	3,400	3,600	3,800
Summer overnight total	7,800	9,900	11,800	13,000	13,800	14,600
<b>Daytrippers</b>						
	2,000	2,500	2,900	3,400	3,700	3,900
<b>Typical summer total persons</b>						
	9,800	12,400	14,700	16,400	17,500	18,500

Sources: US Census, RI Division of Planning, Town records, Herr Associates analyses.

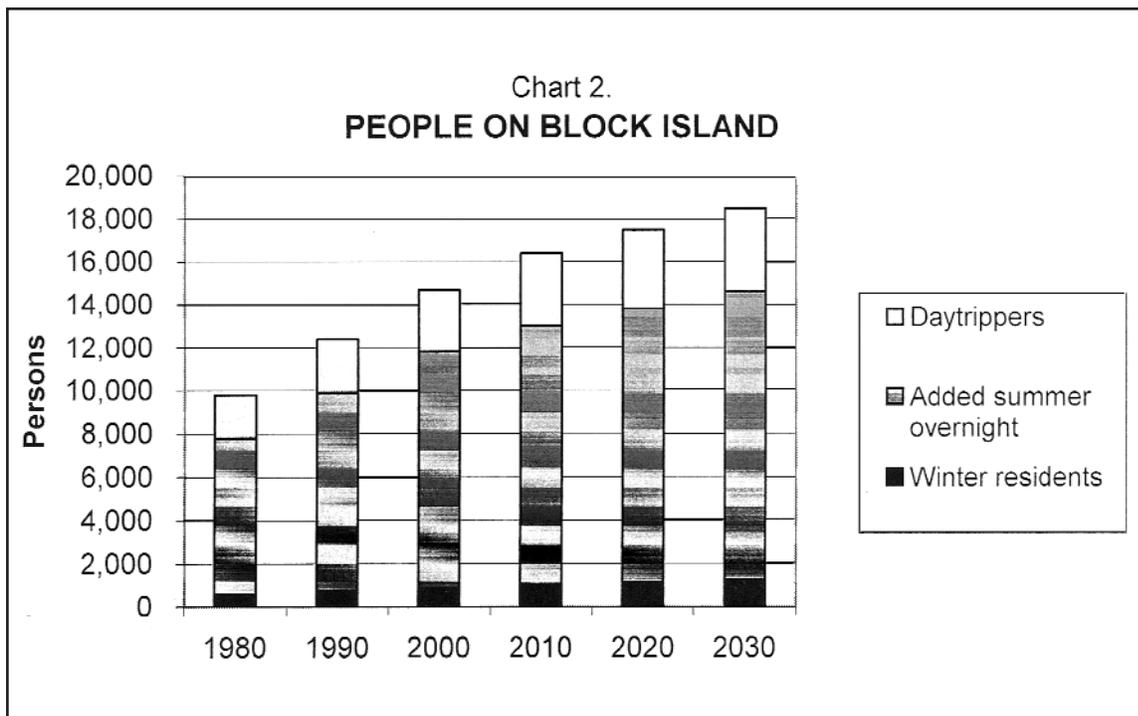


Table 3. **EMPLOYMENT IN NEW SHOREHAM**

INDUSTRY	NAICS Code	2002			2006			2007
		02 Qtr 1	02 Qtr 3	Year 02	06 Qtr 1	06 Qtr 3	Year 06	07 Qtr 1
Construction	23	76	75	79	88	97	92	94
Retail Trade	44-45	51	143	85	50	191	102	48
Accommodation & Food Services	72	55	820	367	65	813	356	73
Government		98	108	106	110	135	123	117
All other		112	272	182	122	293	194	119
<b>Total</b>		<b>392</b>	<b>1,418</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>1,529</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>451</b>

Source: RI Dept. of Labor & Training at: <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/es202/town.htm>

**Chart 3**  
**JOBS IN NEW SHOREHAM**  
2002 - 2007

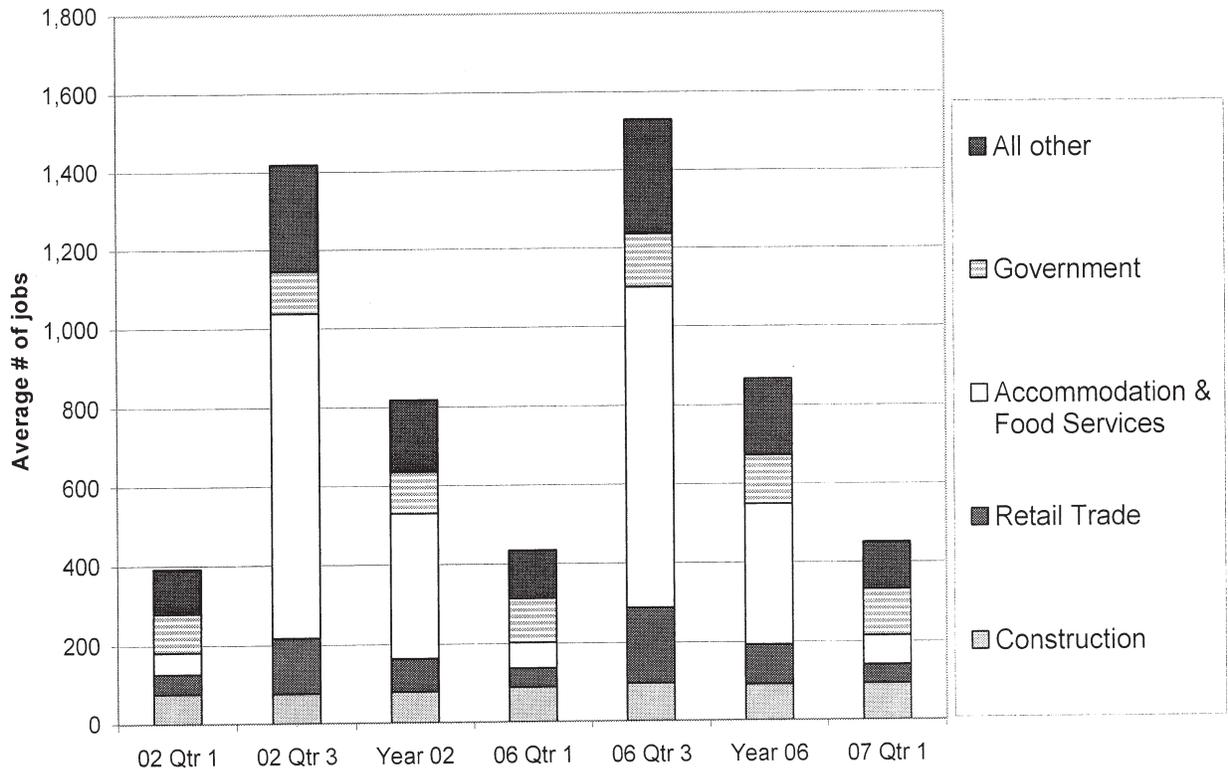


Table 3A. **LONG TERM JOBS SEASONALITY IN NEW SHOREHAM**

Season	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030
Winter	200	400	490	463	470	500	530
Summer	800	1300	1530	1489	1500	1600	1700
Ratio:summer/winter	4.0	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2

Source: History RI Dept. of Labor & Training, projections Herr Associates

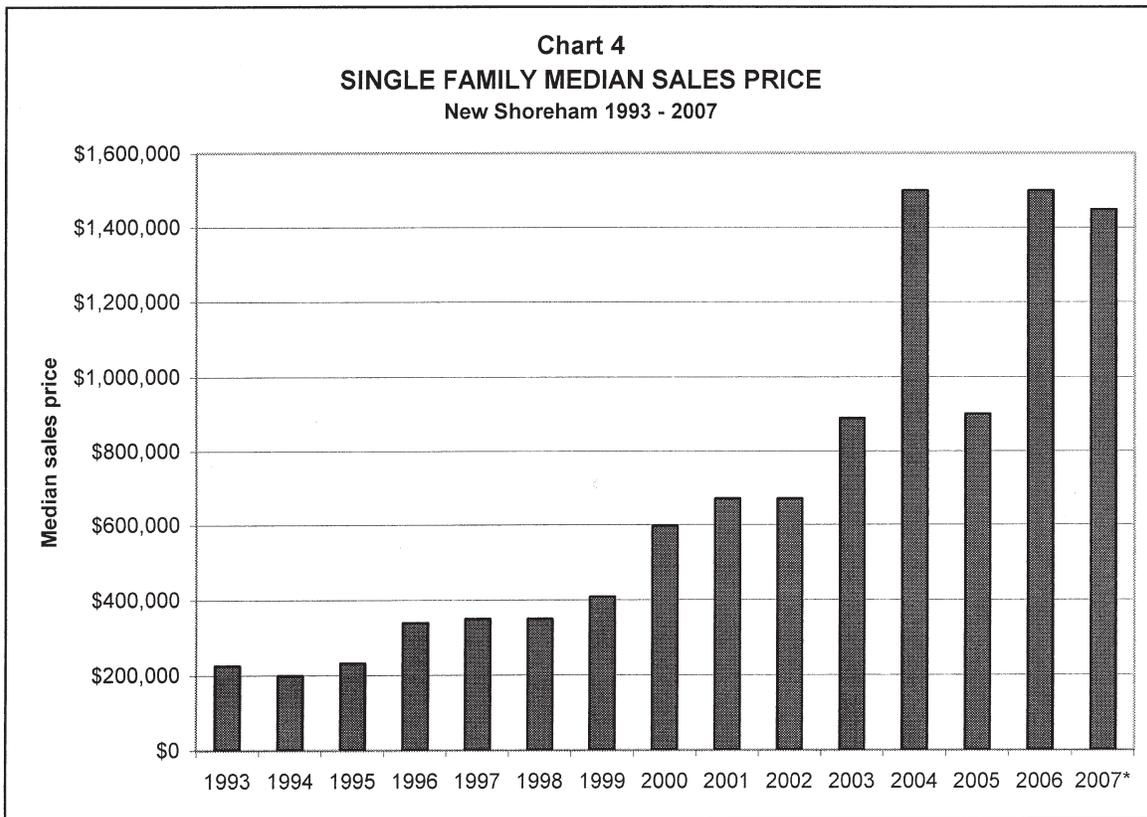
Table 4.  
**HOUSING SALES PRICES**  
 New Shoreham single-family homes

Year	Median sales price
1993	\$225,500
1994	\$200,000
1995	\$232,500
1996	\$339,875
1997	\$350,000
1998	\$350,000
1999	\$409,000
2000	\$597,500
2001	\$670,000
2002	\$670,000
2003	\$887,500
2004	\$1,500,000
2005	\$900,000
2006	\$1,500,000
2007*	\$1,450,000

\*Through November

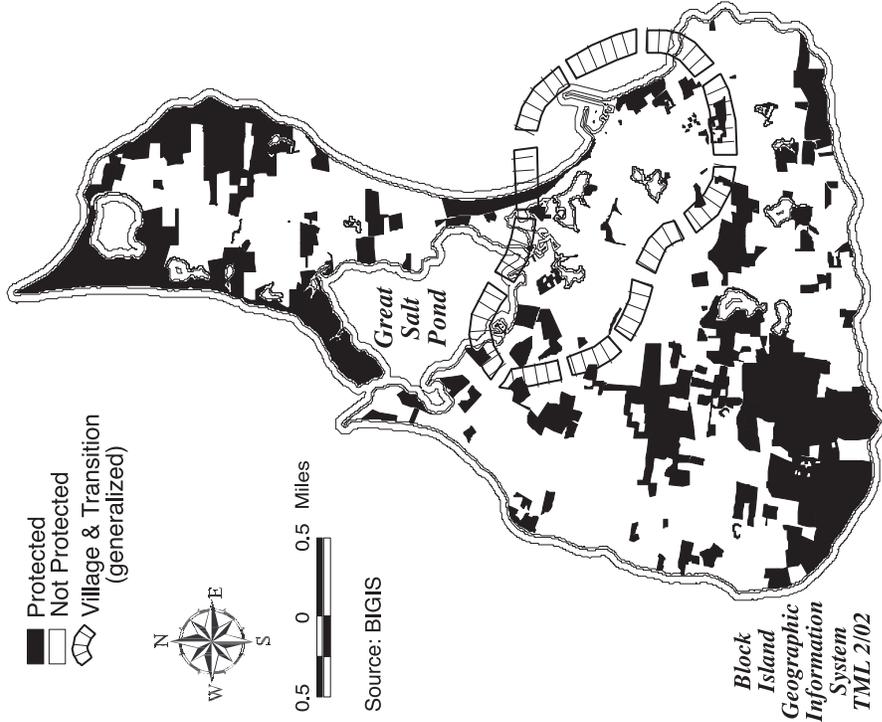
Source: The Warren Group website at: <http://rers.thewarrengroup.com>

Housing prices.xls

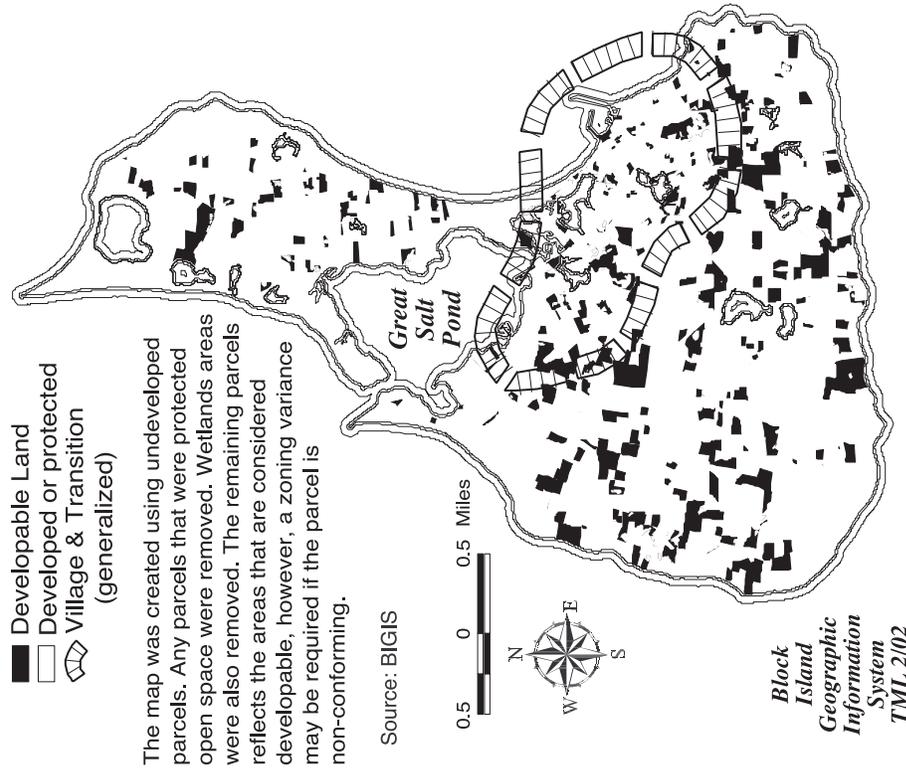


\* Through November

**Map 1**  
**PROTECTED OPEN SPACE, 2000**

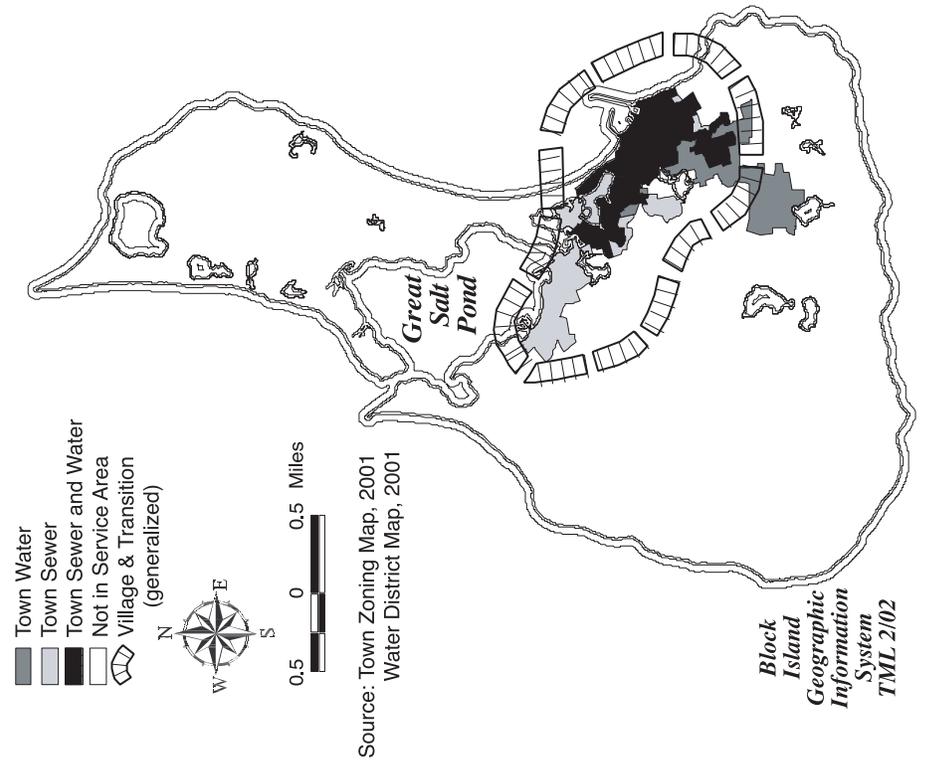


**Map 2**  
**DEVELOPABLE LAND, 1999**

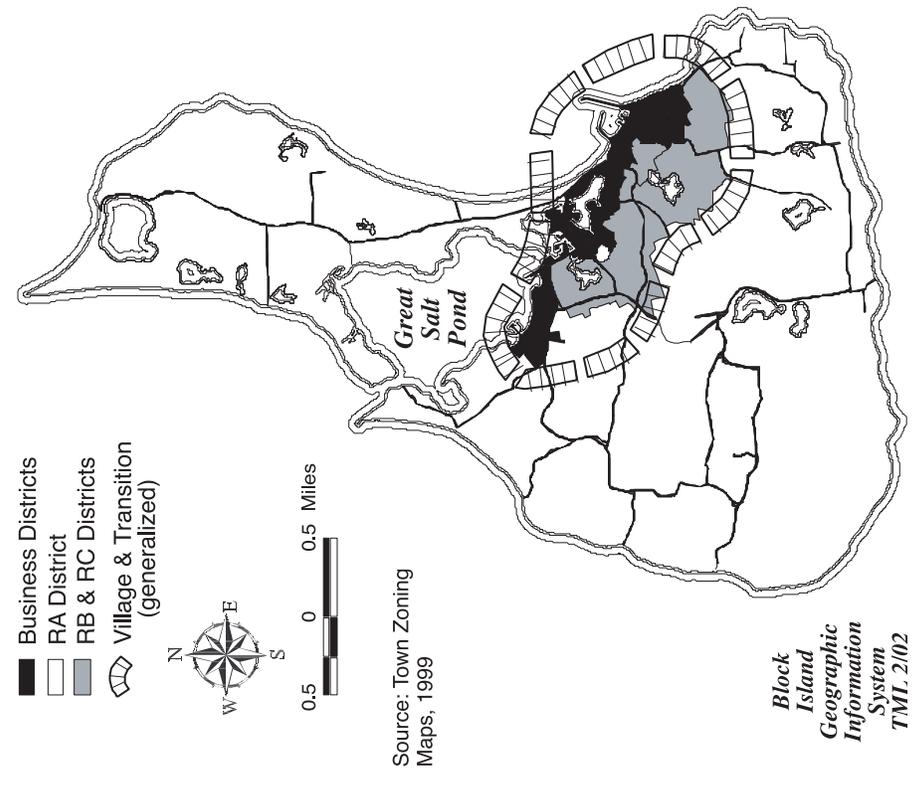


The map was created using undeveloped parcels. Any parcels that were protected open space were removed. Wetlands areas were also removed. The remaining parcels reflects the areas that are considered developable, however, a zoning variance may be required if the parcel is non-conforming.

**Map 4  
UTILITIES SERVICE**



**Map 3  
EXISTING ZONING**

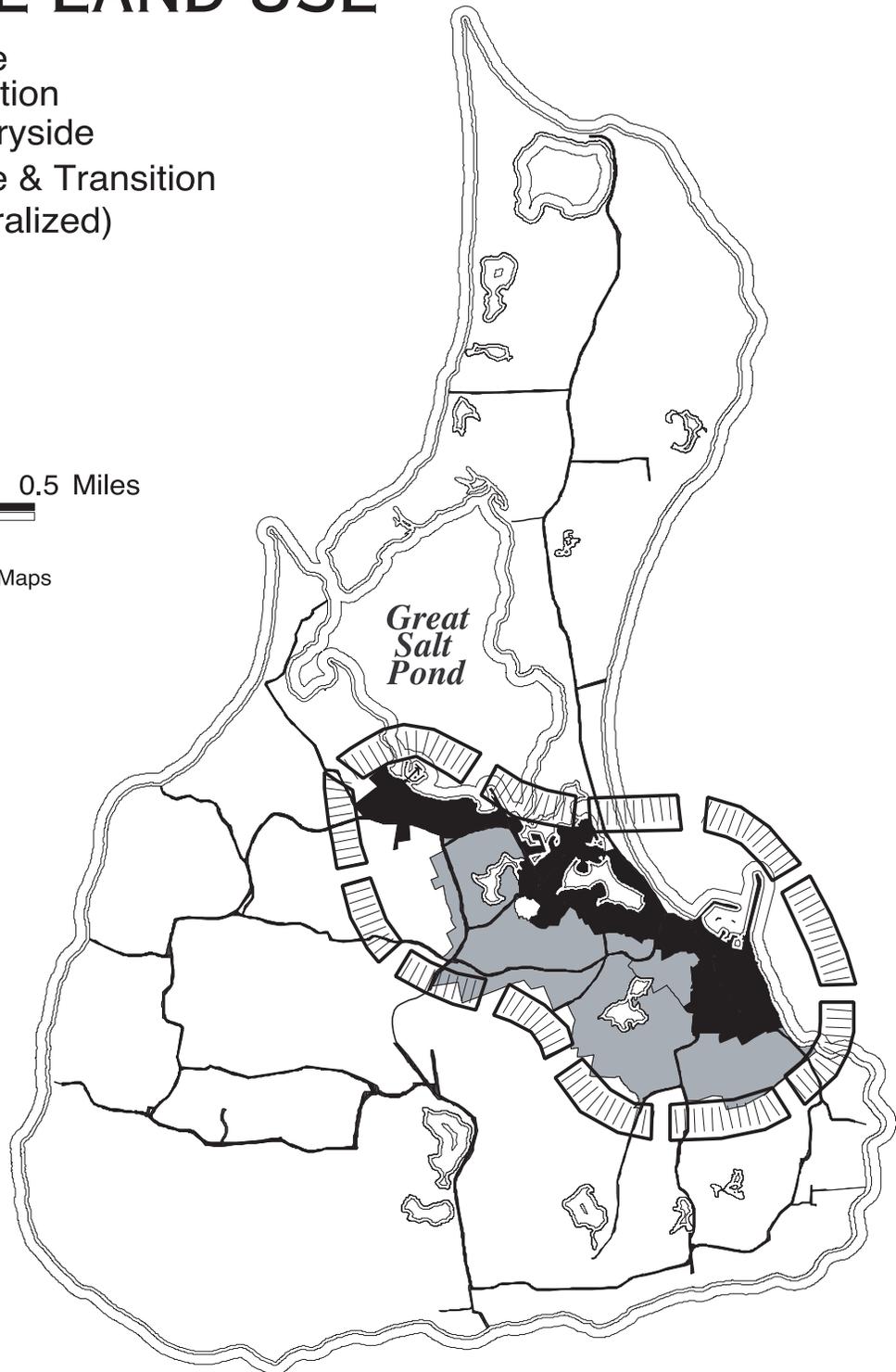


# Map 5 FUTURE LAND USE

-  Village
-  Transition
-  Countryside
-  Village & Transition (generalized)



Source: Town Zoning Maps



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*



*Block Island Aerial*

## 2. LAND USE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

### BACKGROUND

As noted previously, Block Island has just over 6,000 acres of land. The Island's future depends heavily on how that land is used and managed. More than a third of that land is now developed, and another 1,800 acres is committed to open space use. Almost 1,000 acres is effectively protected from development by wetland and coastal features controls. That leaves about 1,300 acres for future development, about half as much land as has been developed to date (see Table 1).

The Island's connections to the mainland plus most of its commerce, Town facilities, and higher density residential uses are in the "village" area near Old Harbor, New Harbor, and the Airport. That area, also interchangeably called "downtown" in this *Plan* is indicated, together with a transitional area, by a dotted line on many of the following maps. Across the rest of the Island, the pattern of development is almost uniformly scattered, with the imprint of development impacting virtually all areas, and with no other major concentrations of use. That scattering has resulted in a vacant land inventory of many small parcels, few large ones (see Map 2). A 1968 "Land Use Analysis" clearly evidences that the pattern is not a new one, but has been essentially committed for many years<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island Department of Community Affairs, Land Use Analysis, New Shoreham, Rhode Island, for the New Shoreham Planning Board, 1968.

Zoning reinforces that pattern, with business districts confined to the "downtown," and a uniform requirement for three-acre lots outside of that area. Under that zoning, given the extent of "grandfathered" lots, a reasonable allowance for accessory and "affordable bonus" units, and continuing open space acquisition, there is land potential to add another 600 or so single-family dwellings to the 1,600 now existing.

It may take only a decade for full development to be approached. The population that such development would accommodate can not be pinpointed, given possible changes in such things as family sizes between now and then. However, increasing of summer overnight population from the present 11,000 to almost 14,000 persons is potentially possible under current zoning, along with growth of winter population from 1,000 to about 1,400 persons.

Coastal sediment transport, beginning with erosion and ending in sedimentation, plus land subsidence and sea level rise, all combine in a dynamic which is difficult to predict. Block Island is clearly losing land to erosion. There now is wide agreement in the scientific community that the combination of subsidence and sea level rise in this region is likely to place water a foot or more higher relative to the land within projection periods shorter than the sixty years we have used. The impact of that geologic change on land use for Block Island is important, as underscored by "The Great Ocean Storm of 1991."

The total land area likely to be submerged as a result

of sea level rise within the next generation is not large, but other impacts of coastal change will be larger. The probability of storm flooding to any given elevation is greatly increased as the base sea level rises. As sea level rises, ground water levels are also likely to rise, given geology such as Block Island's, reducing the distance between existing sewage disposal facilities and groundwater, and precluding such facilities at some locations where they are now barely permissible. With Block Island's topography, the places where those impacts will be most sharply felt, unfortunately, is in flat low-lying areas, around which the most intensive present and planned development lies.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: LAND USE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

### A. Assuring Open Land.

The use of the Island's limited land resources should be balanced so that a substantial share of the Island's land, as much as half of it, will permanently remain in a natural state or in agricultural use.

More than 39% of the Island's land area is now protected from development, 30% by ownership or deeded restriction, and 9% by environmental regulation (see also pages 7, 34 and 35)<sup>3</sup>. Analysis has shown that raising that to half of the Island's area is consistent with needs for land for housing, services, and facilities, given any ultimate summer population up to 16,000 persons (compared with 11,000 now). It also is consistent with the extent of land protection that is vital for protection of critical resources, most importantly water supply, but also including areas of major habitat importance.

### B. Avoiding Over-development.

The ultimate amount of development, together with its location, qualities, and management, should be controlled so that no environmental or service system's fundamental carrying capacity or sustainability is threatened.

Accomplishing that requires a number of things: identifying the critical dimensions of sustainability; well-documented understanding of what the ultimate capacity limits really are under each dimension; and an established set of methods for managing development and change in relation to those limits.

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<sup>3</sup> As shown on BIGIS map titled "Town of New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan Protected Land Calculations," CPB, 9/01.

### C. Land Use Pattern.

The future land use pattern sought for Block Island will have three distinct areas (see Map 5):

- **Downtown:** a compact mixed-use area, including retail and other businesses, utilities, government, tourism facilities and accommodations including major hotels, inns and restaurants, and the two major harborfront areas, Old Harbor and New Harbor. Year-round apartments and rooms for summer help over stores are a desirable mixed use. Serviced with Town sewerage, and largely serviced with Town water.
- **Transition:** a "buffer" zone consisting primarily of single family homes, but also including some low-impact service establishments, smaller inns, and bed & breakfast's. Lower density than the Downtown, but still compactly arranged. Partially serviced with Town water.
- **Countryside:** the remainder of the Island, dominated by openness, interspersed with low-density residential uses, and with compatible economic activities including agriculture, home occupations and B&Bs, and other appropriate home-based activities and social service facilities such as day care and elder care. Of necessity, certain public facilities (airport, transfer facility, and water filtration plant) are located in this area. However, the outstanding characteristic of this portion of the Island is the extensive preserved open space and scenic values, which are critically important to the future of tourism. Generally not serviced with Town water or sewerage.

Land use location should be guided in these ways:

1. To the extent feasible, higher density building occurs within the compact and relatively well serviced Downtown and Transition areas, provided infrastructure is upgraded to keep pace.
2. Retailing and other services and housing for service people within the Downtown area are arranged for convenient pedestrian access.
3. Damage to environmentally sensitive or culturally important resources, especially water supply, is avoided.
4. Coastal resources are reserved for uses, such as fishing, marine industry, and aquaculture, which must rely upon them.

5. Access to marine resources is assured, adequate and appropriate, with the Old Harbor primarily serving commercial activity, and New Harbor primarily serving recreational activity. Appropriate facilities for locally based lobstering, shellfishing, and fin fishing should be assured.

Development now often violates some of these goals. For example, most new building is widely scattered, and new business uses seldom are sited and designed for pedestrian access. Not only do regulations powerfully resist building in outlying areas; they also make it extremely difficult to locate in central areas.

On the other hand, available land within the Downtown area, as here described, is very limited, limiting how much development, especially residential development, can actually occur there. Water system capacity poses a potential limit, and both natural resources and community character there are fragile. For those reasons, “compact” must involve only carefully guided and limited development.

As drawn, the Village area comprises almost the same area as is included in the Historic District, and is made up of the areas now zoned Old Harbor Commercial, New Harbor Commercial, Service Commercial, Mixed Use, and adjacent Coastal districts. The Transition area comprises areas now zoned RB or RC. The Countryside area comprises areas now zoned RA or Coastal district.

That allocation of space is not intended to suggest that no adjustments to Zoning district boundaries are to be made, but rather simply to indicate that the present general pattern of zoning and open space priorities is consistent with the policies of this Plan.

#### D. Water Use Pattern.

The future wellbeing of the Island depends as fully on wise use of its water surface resources as on use of its land resources. This has been the focus of substantial attention in the past, as reflected in successful efforts to upgrade local zoning controls and State water classifications in Great Salt Pond.

Basically, Old Harbor is best suited to serve as the Island’s transportation center with docks, parking and storage areas capable of serving large-capacity stern-loading ferries carrying passengers, freight and vehicles. Another area of the Old Harbor is best suited for commercial fishing and sportfishing craft. There is some potential for expansion that could accommodate other ferry operations and small cruise

vessels.

New Harbor (The Great Salt Pond) is the third most popular yacht harbor in the northeast (after Newport and Marblehead, MA). It is not uncommon for 1,000 visiting boats to be moored in the New Harbor on a typical summer weekend, or as many as 1,500 on special occasions such as holidays or Race Week. This represents a waterborne community of 3,000 to 6,000 visitors, and makes the New Harbor a major economic asset not only for the Town but also for Rhode Island tourism generally.

Accordingly, the intention of the Town has been and continues to be that New Harbor be committed to recreational boating use, commercial fishing and shell-fishing, and aquaculture but not to other commercial activities such as freight, ferries, major transportation and other uses that might conflict with those intended uses.

Addition of a Town-owned dock and dinghy landing at New Harbor, together with other public facilities needed by visiting boaters, is a priority need.

Development of facilities and harbor management plans should continue to reflect the clear distinction in appropriate uses between the two harbors.

### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: LAND USE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

LU 1. Develop a system for managing growth and change to assure that demands will not exceed either the Island’s short-term capacity to accommodate change or the Island’s long term limits of sustainability and Island quality of life. Explore programs and regulations for assuring that activity levels on the Island are not permitted to exceed those limits.

LU 2. Design and, once assured of adequate Town water supply to serve resulting development, adopt performance-based controls to guide development more strongly into the central Downtown area, and to assure that compactness does not result in loss of critical small town characteristics.

LU 3. Comprehensively review and frame revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and other Town regulations, designing those changes to facilitate residential and other development being more central and compact. Include in that exploration the transfer of development rights (“TDR”), a tool potentially useful in this and other ways.

LU 4. Seek better ways of discouraging houses that are commonly rented seasonally at double or triple single family capacity.

LU 5. Explore the possibility of granting a homestead tax reduction for those houses occupied or rented only on a year-round basis and not rented seasonally, as a means of encouraging reduced density of people on the Island in the high season.

LU 6. Prepare a physical design plan for the Downtown and the Old Harbor - New Harbor corridor, with the intent of integrating those areas, preserving and even promoting their diversity of functions, but promoting sidewalks among them.

LU 7. Support open space acquisition and protection towards the goals of protecting 50% of the Island's land area, and assuring open space continuity, reaching into the village center.

LU 8. Explore the possibilities for making the necessary investments in water, sewer, and access improvements to support the compact pattern proposed.

LU 9. Encourage owners to voluntarily keep land open, using among other tools "Preferential Taxation" to reduce tax burden on land held open, including small parcels under 10 acres at places which have been designated in these *Plan* documents as having special value as open space.

LU 10. Take every feasible opportunity to have utility wires placed underground, especially in the Downtown area where poles interfere with circulation, such as in conjunction with road reconstruction projects or when bikeways are being built.

LU 11. Prepare a Master Plan of Town-owned facilities Island-wide.



*Rosa Rugosa, Old Harbor*



*Two Doors*

### 3. HOUSING<sup>3</sup>

#### BACKGROUND

Housing questions are fundamentally different on Block Island.

To a far greater extent than elsewhere, non-resident demand for summer homes results in housing prices on Block Island inflated to levels difficult for year-round residents to afford. Except when involving public initiatives or funding or both, houses here now are rarely priced below a million dollars, and condominium sales prices, while lower, are still beyond the reach of most Island households. Potential seasonal rental levels prices make most rental units unaffordable for a twelve-month rental by islanders. That housing affordability mismatch is by far the worst in the state. That reflects the special problem of a dual housing market, with wealthy visitors from elsewhere bidding values up high relative to year-round residents' ability to pay.

<sup>3</sup> This element is supplemented by "Housing Element Supplement," March 19, 2008, which appears at the end of this *Plan*.

The pace of housing development over the last decade has slowed, with nearly all new units being built for second homes, except for those units that have been restricted for affordability through public and non-profit efforts. In addition, there have been numerous conversions of existing residences to larger, year-round houses, many occupied by the increasing number of former summer residents retiring and living on Block Island year-round. "Tear-downs" of modest existing dwellings to clear sites for larger new ones has, as earlier predicted, now reached Block Island. At present there are just over 1,700 dwelling units existing on the Island, and only enough buildable land for a potential 400 additional dwelling units under current zoning before all the land would be used up.

Part of that land potential, rather than going to create more housing, can be expected to be preserved as open space, through conservation acquisitions, open space easements by homeowners, and the fact that many potential lots are just additional acreage of existing properties which the owners have no intention of dividing. Thus, the realistic potential availability is for fewer than 300 additional dwelling units, exclusive of tear-down replacements.

In this dilemma Block Island is not alone: Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and Shelter Island face strikingly similar circumstances, and mainland resorts like Cape Cod and the Rockies are further examples of resort communities whose popularity has overwhelmed the ability of those who serve the seasonal community to afford to live there. None of those communities has as yet found a magic solution to the issue, although each has made efforts towards doing so.

On Block Island there have been productive efforts to address the problem. BIED's West Side development providing 20 below-market units, just now being occupied, is the largest single such development effort. Regulatory facilitation for such housing continues to be improved. A February 2007 publication by HUD's Regulatory Barriers Commission (RBC) focused on Block Island's efforts, including its density bonus for affordable housing and accessory dwelling provisions. More has been done since, including revision of rules for "detached multi-family dwellings" under Zoning's Section 403.

In total, about 60 homeowner or rental units have assured or shortly will have assured long-term affordability, counted towards and shortly to exceed the State's regulatory threshold of having 10% of year-round housing made affordable. Block Island is the first Rhode Island town to reach that level, a worthy achievement, but much more is necessary to meet the real needs.

On top of the need for year-round housing is the equally serious need for housing for seasonal employees of the inns and shops that serve the tourist industry. Many employers now provide housing for some of their employees, but many seasonal workers are adrift on the Island living in sub-standard conditions, often up to 4 to a room, and leading to a social environment that is not healthy. Given the huge gap between market prices for housing on Block Island and the prices that qualify as "affordable" under most public subsidy rules (annually costing less than about 30% of the income of a household at 80% of the regional median income) another category of below-market housing is useful to consider, that being "attainable" housing, which in this *Plan* is being defined as affordable at 140% of the regional median income<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> To be "counted" towards meeting the State's 10% affordability goal units must be affordable at no more than 120% of area median income, so some of these units might not be included in that tabulation, which is not serious since it is clear that the Town will continue to meet it even counting no "attainable" units.

It is worth noting that the housing concern is centrally about cost, not physically poor housing conditions. Remedying housing condition deficiencies is not a salient need. Because of its low population, no published data is available for Block Island, but interviews with the local Building Official indicate that the condition of the existing housing stock is remarkably good. The Town has used resources such as weatherization grants to help assure that sound conditions will continue in the future.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: HOUSING

If the market is left to deal with the Island's housing problem, in the foreseeable future there will be daily commuter ferries bringing craft workers, trades people, school teachers and the like from and to the mainland. Through its actions in the past, the community has chosen instead to intervene in the market and find ways to provide the needed housing so that the full spectrum of households that are part of its economy and community, from the resident physician to the bus boy, can be included.

### A. Maintaining diversity.

There should be assurance that lack of affordable and suitable housing will not limit the diversity of year-round population on the Island, or oblige seasonal workers to be housed in substandard conditions.

### B. A Clear Role for the Town.

It is appropriate for the Town to take an active role in helping with housing. The majority of the initiatives to address housing of the year-round population have been taken by the semi-private sector (e.g., BIED) with encouragement and support from the Town. The Town's role has grown increasingly clear since the creation of the Housing Board, so that all parties, public and private, can be increasingly clear about reasonable expectations and where responsibility lies for leading.

### C. Land Use Policy.

The housing cost problem is not a consequence of building costs, which average only 20% to 30% above the mainland due to the need to ship all materials to the Island. Rather, the cost problem is primarily the result of land prices. If land were free, a majority of year-round residents could afford to pay market prices for a house. Thus, any solution to the housing problem must begin with policies on land use, addressing such factors as using zoning to promote affordability, or creating a Town financed land bank

(acres, not just dollars) on which houses can be built for long-term leases, or stored prior to re-use after being saved from demolition.

#### D. Acting Incrementally.

Housing needs and opportunities are hugely complex and efforts to address them should rely on incremental rather than sweeping steps towards remedies, so that each step can be evaluated before the next is to be justified. Projects developed to meet housing needs preferably will be modest in scale, varied in location, and developed in series, not simultaneously. Regulatory change preferably will test changes first in limited areas and then more broadly, measured either geographically or by type of housing affected.

#### E. Coupling of Interests.

Wherever possible, actions to serve housing needs should be coupled with actions serving other interests at the same time, making the best use of resources, organizational efforts and opportunities. Thus, evolving housing policy should involve the business community, Land Trust, Conservancies, BIED and etc, with all parties committed to these goals and objectives.

### IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: HOUSING

H 1. Explore more requirements for employers—both businesses and public agencies such as the school and the Town itself—to meet the housing needs of their staff. [Long term – Housing Board]

H 2. Explore changes in land use to create more locations for affordable housing, especially where costs for access and services are least, such as the present RC/M, OHC, and SC zones. Seek means to assure the permanent affordability of units developed with density incentives under zoning, and means of assuring a stable supply of units for year-round occupancy. Explore increasing density in selected zones - e.g. Townhouses - with incentives to assure that a share of the units will be permanently affordable. [Long term – Housing Board]

H 3. Further explore provisions for “family compounds,” “granny flats,” or other means for families to accommodate the housing needs of the next generation in their own family on their own family land. [Near term].

H4. Explore alternatives for addressing the housing needs of Town or school employees otherwise unable to afford to live on the Island, whether through

housing subsidies for key employees or the acquisition of housing units to accommodate either or both year-round or seasonal staff housing needs. [Near term - Housing Board]

H 5. Study the potential impacts of revaluation upon housing affordability (and also on the need for open space protection). Explore steps the Town could take to mitigate any negative impacts of revaluation. In particular, explore petitioning the RI Legislature to enact authorization for Block Island to provide homestead tax exemption as has been done for Providence and Woonsocket, providing reduced property taxes for dwellings occupied as a principal residence by a registered voter, and without seasonal rental. Also consider other fiscal devices available or potentially available. Those include existing legislation such as Ch. 9-26-4.1 Homestead Estate Tax Exemption, Ch. 44-33.1 Historic Homeowner Assistance Act, Ch. 45-44 Homestead Program, or other possible new legislation. [Long term - Housing Board]

H 6. Explore how best to systematically assure that opportunities for partnership efforts serving both housing and other purposes such as economic development or open space protection are regularly considered in Town and civic actions, beyond simple exhortation in this *Plan*. [Long term - Housing Board]

H 7. Give consideration to the recommendations of the Land Use Density Discussion Panel, including lower densities in outlying areas coupled with higher densities where, such as Downtown, they are served with public utilities. [Near term – Housing Board]

H 8. Work with owners of accessory apartments to explore assuring their long-term affordability. [Near term – Housing Board]

H 9. Document assurance of long-term affordability for units now affordably priced as a result of employer or other contributions. [Ongoing – Housing Board]

H 10. Explore adaptive reuse of existing structures as a means of achieving affordable housing without creation of more units. [Long term – Housing Board].

H 11. Explore reuse of structures otherwise likely to be demolished on the sites they occupy, given a short respite by the Demolition Delay law. [Ongoing – Housing Board]

H 12. Working cooperatively with employers and the Town, promote the development of multi-unit employee housing. [Long Term – Housing Board]



*High and Dry, the Hogpen*

## 4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### BACKGROUND

The economy of Block Island is fundamentally shaped by its resort/vacation economy. A community of about 1,000 residents plays host for two months of the year to over 14,000 persons. There is little in the Island economy that is not directly or indirectly reliant on that seasonal activity for its financial base, with retirement (about 16% of the population indicated by the 1990 Groundhog Day survey) being the clearest exception. The Groundhog Day survey found fewer than 2% of the population working off-Island. A few others work on-Island but serve off-Island markets, another economic support not reliant on seasonal activity.

It is troubling that a major part of the Island economy depends on the *rate of increase* of seasonal activity, not just on its *level*. Construction and real estate jobs key closely to how fast the Island economy is growing. Those jobs hold a high level when growth is fast, but are lower when the economy stays stable, even if that stability is otherwise healthy, because there is then little need for new construction if relatively few new buildings are needed. With finite Island capacity for growth, there also may be eventual limits for construction, now supporting 28% of the winter population<sup>5</sup>.

The financing of Town government reflects that same economic reality. Costs for some public services, such as education, are made higher by the commu-

nity's small scale and access costs (said to add about 18% on average to the cost of living on Block Island). Costs for other services, such as public utilities, are made higher by the need to serve sharp seasonal peaks of demand far above annual norms. Comparing Block Island with other communities using "per capita" measures, as commonly done by State agencies, is distorted by those considerations.

For that and other reasons, fiscal conditions on Block Island are very different from other Rhode Island communities. New Shoreham consistently over the years has had and continues to have the lowest property tax rates in the State<sup>6</sup>. "Per capita" comparisons of New Shoreham with other communities are meaningless. "Per capita" does not reflect the summer population, which adds hugely to some public costs (for example, police and fire) and not at

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<sup>5</sup> Groundhog Day or Sam Peckham's survey, 1990. This survey, made locally at Sam Peckham's Tavern on Groundhog Day, probably better reflects the realities of Island employment than do State figures, especially when they have been neutralized into annual averages. The RI Department of Economic Development (RIDED) reports only 10% of average annual employment to be in construction, which reflects under-reporting of people working too informally to file papers with RIDED, plus dilution in the percentage by the huge number of temporary summer jobs reported.

<sup>6</sup> Fiscal year 2001 per State of RI Municipal Affairs Website updated 1/23/01.

all to others (education), but the non-resident owners of seasonal homes and tourism-related businesses pay a major portion of the tax revenues to support all of them.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ideally, the Block Island economy should meet the financial needs of residents, be reasonably stable, be supportive of the range of life styles chosen by Island residents, equitably support public services, and be consistent with the resource opportunities and limitations of this special place.

### A. Selective Promotion.

Given the special qualities of this place, economic promotion should be carefully selective, to assure net positive benefits. That suggests the following:

- Promote alternatives to tourism and tourism-based construction and real estate activities, in order to diversify the economic base.
- Promote off-peak activities for both the “shoulder” and mid-winter seasons, since in those periods a larger economy and resultant larger population would sustain social opportunities and services, such as adult education, otherwise unavailable to the community.
- Encourage improvement in the quality of peak season tourism offerings, making visits to Block Island more valuable than before for both visitors and the Island, but encouraging no more than modest growth in the numbers of peak season visitors, since serving them takes up resource capacity while adding little to diversity or off-peak economic opportunities.
- To the extent that tourism-related activity is encouraged, it should present Block Island as a destination for travel, not just a place for day visits. It should emphasize the “family-supportive” qualities of this destination, allowing other places to compete on the basis of having a more unrestrained antic partying character.
- Seek fiscal equity, assuring that the year-round taxpayer base of fewer than 1,000 persons does not bear an unreasonable proportion of the costs for services to the 11,000 persons staying overnight and the others visiting daily in the brief peak vacation season.

- Bigger is not better. Economic growth will best serve if it comes through small, rather than large, enterprises.
- Encourage business developments in which there is equity participation by Islanders, or even better, which are wholly Islander-owned.
- “Value-added agriculture,” where agricultural raw materials are made into consumer products, is a promising prospect. If attention is paid to organic processes, this can contribute to both the Island economy and environment. Examples are honey products, herb products and organic wine.

### B. Other “Good” Economic Development Qualities.

The **best** economic development, in addition to being consistent with the above, would ideally:

- Provide “good” jobs, with reasonable pay, good working conditions, and opportunities for personal growth;
- Be linked with other parts of the local economy, buying local products or serving local needs, so that dollars circulate on rather than leaking off the Island;
- Be environmentally sustainable, not selling off non-renewable parts of the Island, and using renewable resources no faster than they can be replenished;
- Have positive secondary impacts, in the way that farming keeps vistas open, and avoid having negative impacts, such as those resulting from disposal of contaminants.

Some businesses clearly can be consistent with these goals and objectives: agriculture, aquaculture, shell-fishing, finfishing, education, the electronic cottage, and “geography-free” businesses. All of those should be supported and pursued. Other businesses under no imaginable circumstances could be consistent. Commercial gambling is a clear example: it is categorically inappropriate.

Economic change in recent years only partially reflects these interests. While the seasonal peaking in jobs has declined from 2 1/2 times annual average employment to only double the annual average, the concentration of jobs in retailing and tourist-oriented services has increased. Many of the created jobs are not “good” jobs by the above measures.

Achieving other goals of this plan, particularly those relating to land use and growth management, natural and cultural resources, and open space and recreation are of vital importance in achieving these economic development goals, just as a healthy economy is necessary if those other goals are to be achieved.

In recent decades, job growth on Block Island has been supported by population growth, rather than the other way around as is true in most regional economies. Peak period population growth is near-certain to slow as land supplies dwindle and with it, jobs both year-round and seasonal will decline unless there is a surge in year-round population to add further support, and there is little likelihood of that. Accordingly, if jobs are well-related to the skills and interests of the population, the pressures for economic development are likely to diminish, and a slowing in job growth, would not mean anything wrong, but rather would suggest a community approaching balance.

#### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

E 1. While seeking economic diversification, it is still necessary to make the unglamorous but necessary investments to support the Island's basic industry of tourism: expanded toilets, restrooms and showers; storage lockers; boat launching and dinghy landing facilities at Old and New Harbors; and better informational materials and signage. These appropriately can be financed through the landing fee.

E 2. Explore greater use of user impact fees such as the landing fee to more equitably distribute the costs

of providing infrastructure and services to visitors over the brief peak summer period, including offsets for the wage premiums and housing support necessary to get summer-only staff. The Coast Guard facility now used has limited capacity and is in need of repairs.

E 3. Inventory existing studies of the Island and its economy, and develop a reference referral system for those and future studies, so that future efforts can build on past ones.

E 4. As discussed in Chapter 3, continue to aggressively address the need for affordable year-round housing to support a sound year-round economy and to support the special housing demands created for employees in the brief summer season.

E 5. Undertake a program to encourage and facilitate young people living on the Island to become part of the Island's future economy and government, by tying educational pursuits to jobs likely to be available on the Island, by offering professional and management development and training, and by moving people up from within.

E 6. Explore the potential for a nine-hole links-type golf course that would be environmentally friendly and non-exclusive while using land in an open state and enhancing the Island's attractiveness for economic development.

E 7. Revise zoning so that value-added agriculture is explicitly included a permitted agricultural use within reasonable limits.



*Holiday Season, Fountain Square*

## 5. NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

### BACKGROUND

Protection must be provided for the diverse heritage of natural and cultural resources with which the Island is endowed. Underscoring that, the Nature Conservancy has identified Block Island as “the most ecologically significant place in Rhode Island and one of the most ecologically important places in North America,” demonstrating its belief in that importance by funding a full-time bioscience manager for the Island.

Great Salt Pond, one of the most critical of the Island’s resources, has received special attention by the Town, including a *Strategies* study by graduate students at the University of Rhode Island (URI)<sup>7</sup> and the *Great Salt Pond Management Plan*, initially approved January 7, 1991. The *Harbor Management Plan* incorporates an

<sup>7</sup> Advanced Planning Studio, URI, Economic and Environmental Strategies for the Town of New Shoreham, for the Committee for the Great Salt Pond, Fall, 1990.

Ordinance allocating allowed uses for various portions of the Pond and establishing user fees, as well as outlining actions already taken or to later be taken, ranging from shellfish enhancement programs to public education. That *Plan* is recognized as a legitimate part of the New Shoreham *Comprehensive Plan*. The URI *Strategies* study underscored the importance of many of the *Harbor Management Plan*’s proposals, most of which are reflected in various elements of this *Comprehensive Plan*.

The importance of the Island’s cultural resources is also extraordinary. A report by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission lists nearly 150 buildings of historic significance<sup>8</sup>. The Block Island Historical Society lists even more<sup>9</sup> (see Map 6). Maniscean artifacts found here date to 500 BC,

<sup>8</sup> RI Historical Preservation Commission, Historic and Architectural Resources of Block Island, Rhode Island, Providence, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Block Island Historical Society, Names of the Owners of Houses and Hotels etc. Which Are Still Standing on Block Island, January 23, 1987.

indications of one of the earliest villages found in Southern New England. While much of the Island's critical natural features are protected through public or non-profit ownership, relatively few of its cultural assets are so protected. Similarly, powerful regulation effectively protects key natural features against willful damage regardless of location, but only a small part of the Island has Historic District protection, and even there, damage is possible.

Mapping done by the Block Island Geographic Information System (BIGIS) effort shows dramatically how only a minority of the structures of historic interest lie within the legally established Historic District (see Map 6). Structures of interest are found in all parts of the Island. That mapping also makes clear the density of structures of interest in the center of the Town. Any substantial change there, such as would be required for major traffic circulation changes, would place important structures at risk of loss of their context, of relocation, or even of demolition.

Effective protection is further complicated by the reality that the entire Island is of some ecological and cultural significance: there are no areas of "no concern." For example, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has classified the groundwater under all of Block Island as "GAA," the highest classification, in most communities limited to highly selective areas. Because of the scale and nature of the Island, the whole fabric must be managed: saving only parts cannot effect the job. Map 9, "Areas of Critical Habitat," based on habitat needs of rare and endangered species, indicates the extensiveness of priority needs just from that single consideration, to which must be added other concerns such as water resource protection, only coincidentally involving the same areas.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has mapped the most valuable scenic areas in the State, using a consistent objective methodology (Map 7)<sup>10</sup>. While 26% of the State is included in those areas, the identified sites cover more than half the land area of Block Island. An earlier survey by Searles and Searles (see Map 8) is similar in the extent of important viewsheds identified, though often differing in critical locations. Those inventories are more testimony to the extensiveness of critical areas from ecological, cultural, and visual perspectives.

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<sup>10</sup> RI Department of Environmental Management Division of Planning, The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory: A Survey of the State's Scenic Areas, January, 1990.

Block Island's freshwater ponds, as pointed out in the State's *Guide Plan*, are vital elements in the Island's environmental system. Two of them, Sands Pond and Fresh Pond, are parts of the community's sole source aquifer upon which both public and private water supplies depend, as well as providing high quality habitat areas. The other Island ponds offer pristine critical habitat areas (footnote: See Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program, *State Guide Plan Element 162: Rivers Policy and Classification Plan*, 1988.)

New Shoreham is steadily moving towards its objective of having half of the Island's land area permanently protected and managed as open space, whether by deed or regulation (element 7. Open Space, Recreation and Leisure). As a result, a major portion of the Island is assured of continuing to have a substantial tree cover.

Little of that treed area is categorized formally as "forest land." None shows as "Forested Lands" in the Statewide mapping of such areas (figure 4 in the States' "161 Forest Resources Management Plan"). None is classified as "Forest" under the State Farm, Forest and Open Space law that allows such land meeting certain standards to enjoy taxation based on use rather than potential value. 28 parcels, some of them wooded, do enjoy that status classified as "open space," which involves lesser management requirements.

However, preservation and sound management of such wooded areas, whether designated "forest" or not, in this community serve many of the same forestry goals as do more formally designated forest management efforts Statewide, as discussed below.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

A top priority must go to understanding, protecting, and staying within the limitations of the water resources of the Island. The Island's sole source aquifer is fragile but fundamentally important, and the water quality of both salt and fresh water bodies is critical to the quality of Island life and economy.

High priority also goes to protection of those special resources, both natural and cultural, which are unique to the Island or very rare elsewhere. Included among them are a number of archeological sites and historic places, as well as plants and animals found on the Island and seldom or not at all elsewhere.

Priority must also be given to fostering the development of individual responsibility towards wise and efficient use of resources. Protecting natural and cultural resources goes beyond the physical and tangible activities of acquisition, promotion and information gathering. It is important to build and maintain a thoughtful land use ethic and dedication to stewardship through both environmental education and exemplary actions. The application of the basic tenets of these philosophies is equally critical for fostering wise public decisions regarding natural and cultural resources and for guiding personal daily decisions about use of such resources.

In serving the above, it is important that forestry goals be served, as well, in order to protect the health of forested areas so that they in turn can contribute to the protection of water resource quality and sufficiency, support recreation and tourism objectives, and provide a resource for community education and information about forest and related resources and, where consistent with other values, support the contribution of forest products to the Island's economy.

#### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

NC 1. Continue to refine and expand the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS) as the informational center of the planning and protection efforts. Investment in the GIS system is paying dividends now that much of the initial groundwork has been completed. With addition of new staff and expanding capacities in all systems, the potential has never been as great, but more work is necessary to integrate that capacity into the work flow and decision-making approaches of the community.

NC 2. Develop a "Red Flag" system for alerting Town agencies when their permitting or other actions involve a parcel having critical natural or cultural resource elements. Such flagging can now be done relatively simply through the Town's well-developed computer systems, including those of the Assessors and the GIS system. The flagging would call attention to the need to exercise careful scrutiny to assure that no avoidable damage is being done to critical resources.

NC 3. Complete development of an inventory of "Sacred Places," and develop a program for their

protection. "Sacred Places" are those which are most important to the character and quality of life on Block Island. In some cases those places are of ecological or historic importance, but often they are not, so often they are vulnerable to inadvertent change. Beginnings of listings have been made. They should be formalized through wider involvement and discussions convened by the Historic District Commission, in collaboration with other Boards and Commissions.

NC 4. Pursue the recommendations of "An Activist Environmental Agenda," for protecting water sources, protecting wildlife and their habitats, protecting our beaches, protecting our access, protecting against overuse, protecting our beauty and serenity, hunting and fishing, and recycling and household hazardous wastes, as outlined by the Natural Resources Steering Committee to the Town Council. Carry out those efforts in concert with environmental groups and, where appropriate, with State and Federal agencies, including air quality efforts aimed at preventing degradation of surface water resources, and strengthening of efforts to assure the removal of potentially leaking underground storage tanks, as cited in the Services and Facilities element.

NC 5. Improve upon past efforts at working together with property owners and occupants regarding management actions, such as minimizing use of pesticides and herbicides, rather than relying only on land acquisition as a means of protecting resources.

NC 7. To ensure that the Island's forest resources, both public and private, are being managed in ways which are consistent with the goals cited above, conduct an annual assessment of accomplishments that have been made towards them, identifying any needed actions, and indicating who should take them.

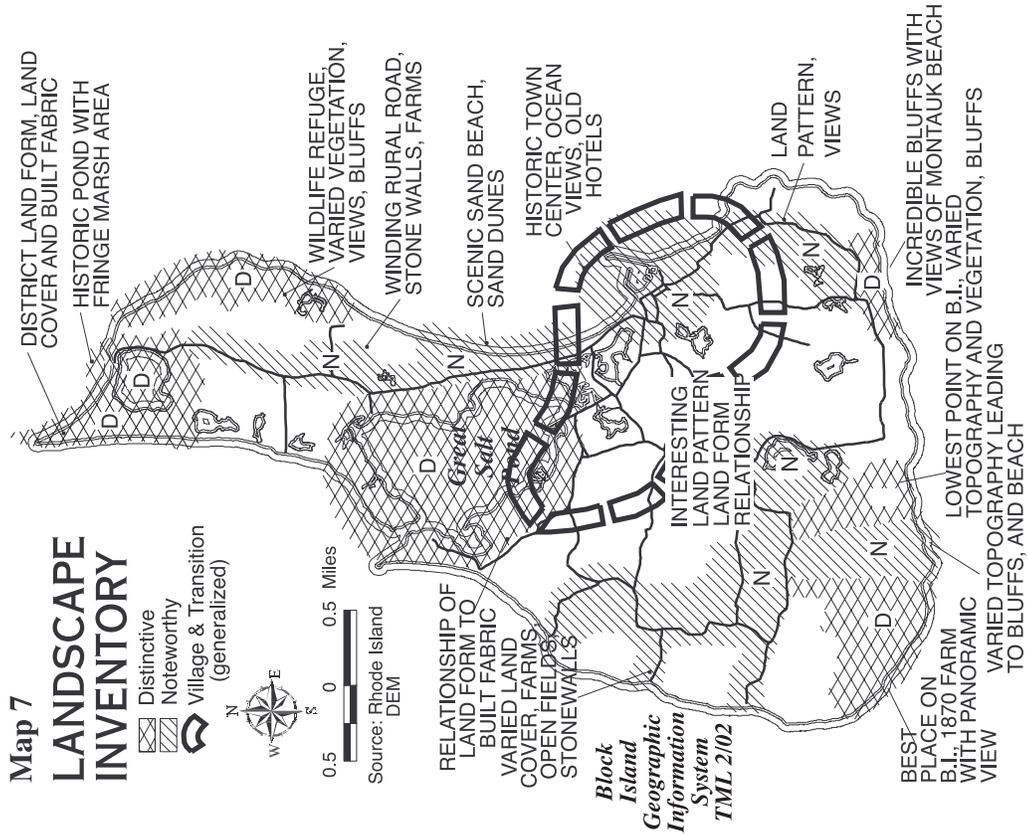
The assessment is to include reporting accomplishments that serve forest resources through such related actions in this *Plan* as OR 3 encouraging use of the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act to keep land open and forests well managed, LU 9 encouraging owners voluntarily keeping land open, NC 5 working together with property owners and occupants in the sensitive management of forest and other open lands, LU 7 supporting open space acquisition and thus reducing open space and forest fragmentation, and SF 3 promoting resource conservation.

**Map 7  
LANDSCAPE  
INVENTORY**

-  Distinctive
-  Noteworthy
-  Village & Transition (generalized)



Source: Rhode Island DEM



*Block Island Geographic Information System TML 2/02*

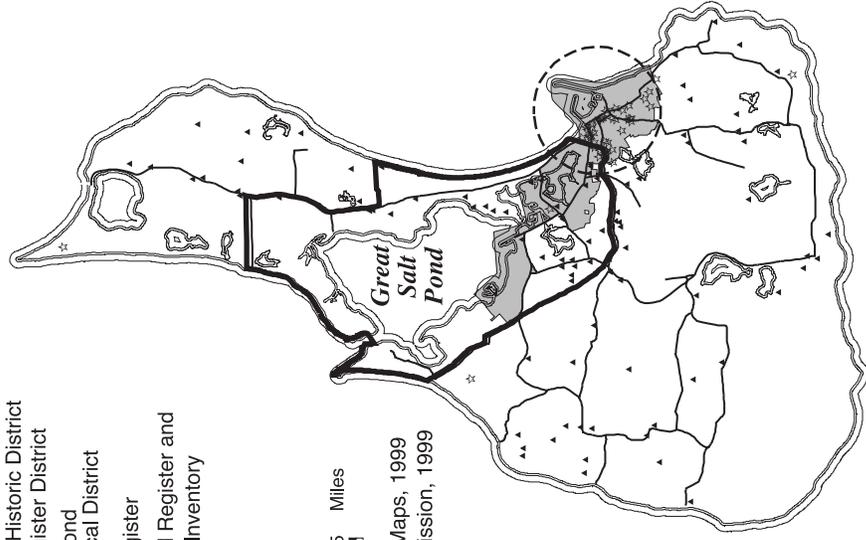
**Map 6  
CULTURAL RESOURCES**

-  Block Island Historic District
-  National Register District
-  Great Salt Pond Archaeological District
-  National Register
-  Rhode Island Register and Block Island Inventory



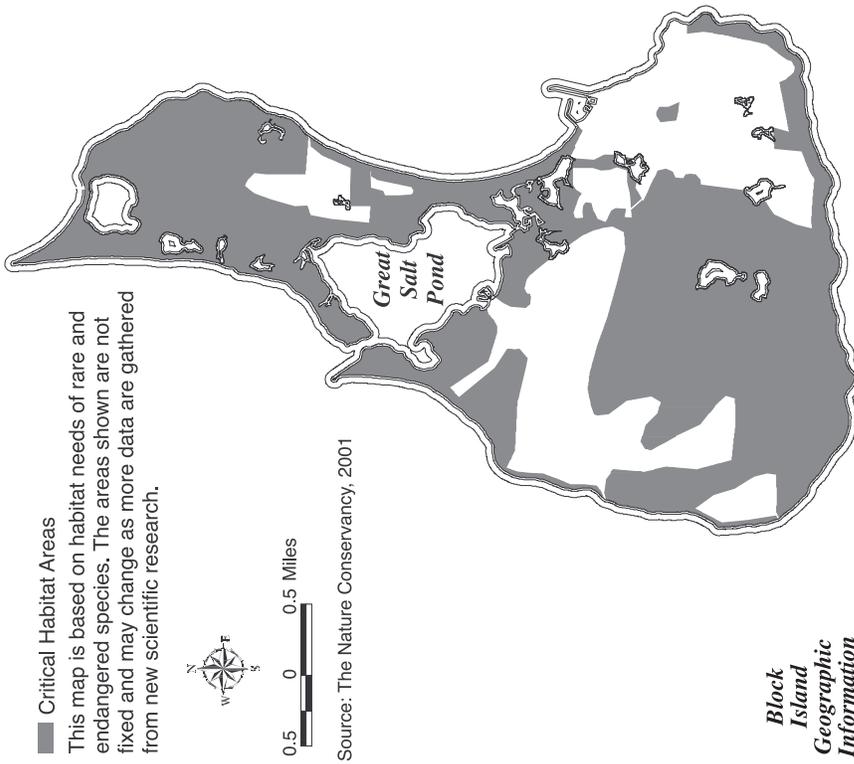
0.5 0 0.5 Miles

Source: Town Zoning Maps, 1999  
Historic District Commission, 1999  
BIGIS



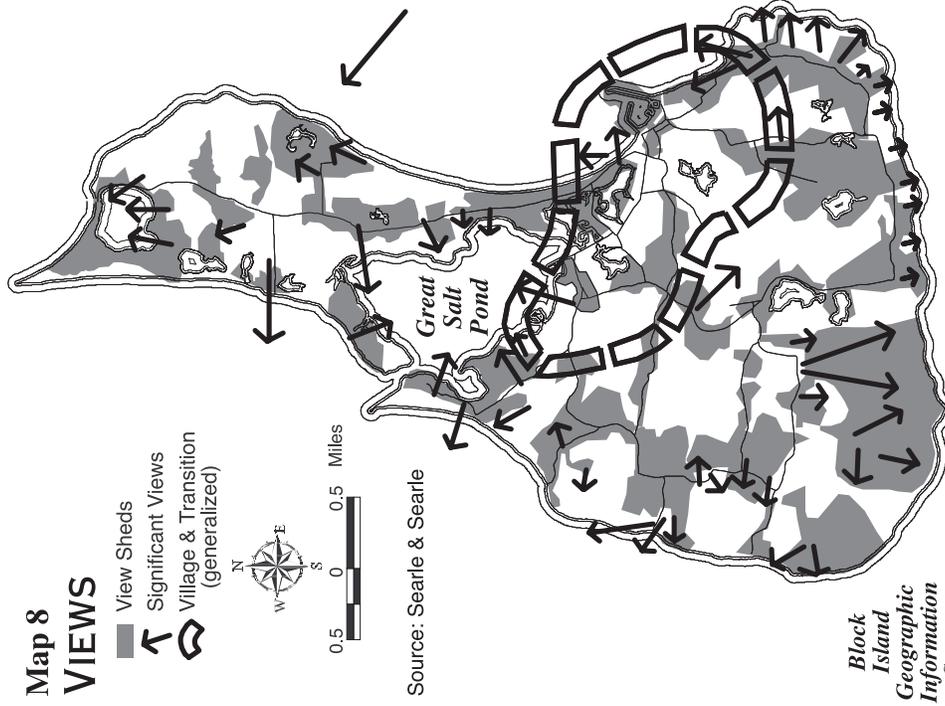
*Block Island Geographic Information System TML 2/02*

**Map 9**  
**AREAS OF CRITICAL HABITAT**



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*

**Map 8**  
**VIEWS**



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*



*Anna C - Delivering the Goods*

## **6. SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

### **BACKGROUND**

Sustainable growth depends upon and impacts an array of services and facilities, some provided by the Town, some privately provided. Open space and recreation and circulation are discussed in separate elements. Here, those other services and facilities that are most closely linked to growth are discussed, whether public or private.

Demands for services generally grow with the number of people on the Island, compounded by changes in demands per person over time, and complicated by shifts between individually-provided services and collectively-provided ones. For example, our basic projections assume no change in per capita water demand or volume of sewage disposal, but assure a small annual increase in auto trip-making per capita (unless actions are implemented to reduce traffic), and a substantial increase in electric peak demand per capita, in all cases essentially continuing past trends.

We have projected that a modestly growing share of the Island-wide water demand and sewage volume would be provided by or collected and treated by the Town's water and sewer facilities unless there is a major change in patterns of growth towards more Downtown concentration. Virtually the whole increase in electric demand would be served by the BI Power Company unless alternative generation becomes a larger factor.

For reference, the utilities service pattern is shown on Map 4, while the locations of other public facilities are shown on Map 10.

#### **A. Town Water**

Public water supply for the central area of Block Island was once provided by a private company which was acquired by the Town in 1984 and operated as a Town Department, and since 2000 has been operated through the Board of Water Commissioners. The configuration of the Water District and the area serviced by sewerage differ, with only a small area

served by both. The Water District extends beyond sewerage to the south, while sewerage extends further than the Water District to the north. Unlike the sewer the Water District does not service New Harbor (see Map 4).

In its short period of operations, the Commission has made many system improvements, including filtration plant rebuilding and capacity expansion, water main leak detection, and initiation of new metering.

During the 1990's the average yearly water supplied by the then Water Company varied slightly from year to year, remaining in the 16 million gallon range for the year with July and August peak loads of slightly over 3 million gallons per month. Daily usage now approaches 150,000 gallons per day on peak weekends. "Stand-by" service agreements with several large users utilizing private wells add substantially to potential demand. Storage capacity at the two water tanks is 300,000 gallons.

The Town's public water supply comes from wellfields adjacent to Sands Pond, with Fresh Pond as an emergency backup. At present the wellfield has six existing wells, each producing between 10 and 105 gpm, and can produce over 300,000 gpd. Three reverse osmosis ("RO") units and a chemical treatment unit provide 226,000 gpd filtration capacity.

State regulations require a backup emergency water supply plan. Unlike mainland towns, New Shoreham cannot tap into a neighbor in an emergency. At present Fresh Pond remains the only approved backup source. An alternative, use of a well at the Oceanview site, already tested for 75,000 gpd, remains unresolved between the Commission and the property owner, the Block Island Land Trust.

With further understanding of hydrogeologic resources and various system improvements, it now may be that the limiting factor in Town public water production is water treatment, and the ability to dispose of the by-product of the RO treatment (backwash), as well as the high cost of electricity needed to run the RO units.

Future demands on the water system will come from any of a number of sources. Further connections within the present District and requests for extension may be precipitated by State regulatory mandates. Future expansion of the distribution lines may extend to small lots adjacent to the Water District where groundwater supply may be unsustainable, where there may be an endangerment to the public water or where public health may be an issue.

Although 93% of the Island's structures use private wells, more than 25% of the Island's daily water consumption takes place within the Water District.

To protect the Island's sole source aquifer the Town continues with its program to remove underground petroleum storage that can decompose and pollute underground water resources without detection<sup>11</sup>.

Adequacy of water supply in the event of severe drought is a matter of public concern that goes beyond service to those connected to the Town system. It also includes those not so served, who occupy about 90% of the Island's structures and whose water consumption is about two-thirds of the Island total.

As described above, the Water District has planned carefully for emergencies, including drought, and has a well-considered system of primary sources with redundant back-up sources in the event of emergency need. When installed, the individual water supply systems distributed across the Island typically are designed with location and depth that should assure continued adequate supply even in droughts of historic severity provided that the pattern of human occupancy and resource management across the Island do not over time change the water balance that makes Island occupancy feasible.

Islanders have a keen awareness of the concern over water supply reliability, including under drought conditions. Over time that has led to a carefully designed relationship among the public water system, where it provides service and the sources of that supply, how land is used across the Island, including the design of zoning and other regulations to assure that the level of human occupancy will not, even in the long run, exceed the limits reflected in the sustainable capacity of the islands hydrogeology. It has led to nationally-recognized initiatives in resource management to assure that the management of on-site disposal systems, underground storage tanks, water use restrictions, and other measures that the Town has authority to take will fully protect against, among other things, any unserviceable needs in the event of severe drought.

Taken together, these efforts represent a robust approach that is fully consistent with the goals of the State's Element 724: *Drought Management Plan* in reducing the Island's vulnerability in periods of low

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<sup>11</sup> Atlantic States Rural Water Association in cooperation with the New Shoreham Water Department, "Source Water Protection Plan for the Town of New Shoreham," October 1998.

precipitation, and minimizing its effects on public health and safety, economic activity, and environmental resources.

## B. Town Sewerage

Since 1977 the award-winning New Shoreham Waste Management Facility consisting of several buildings off Spring Street has provided primary and secondary treatment for waste from its Downtown service area. That service area extends from the Block Island School and Spring House on the south through both Old and New Harbor Commercial districts and along Corn Neck to the Beachhead. The plant is designed to process more than 450,000 gpd, but is permitted by the State to process only up to 300,000 gpd of sewage. Exceeding 80% of permit capacity for 90 consecutive days would trigger demand for expansion of permitted capacity, but that limit has never been approached. The high quality effluent is pumped into the ocean from the outfall pipe in the jetty located on Spring Street.

In addition to processing most of the sewage from the Water District, the plant also processes waste from the hotels, marinas and public facilities at New Harbor, waste pumped by contractors from Individual Sewer Disposal Systems, and waste from the pump out boats that enabled the Great Salt Pond to be declared the first Federal no-discharge harbor in the U.S.

With planned extension of the outflow pipe further into the ocean and addition of pumping capacity, the permitted plant capacity could be increased by 50% and remain within the State limits. As the service area already encompasses almost 100% of the commercial zones in both harbors and between, only nominal growth in demand is expected in future years<sup>12</sup>.

The Town is also addressing installation and maintenance of Individual Sewage Disposal Systems (ISDS). In the late 1990's the Town adopted a Wastewater Management Act and Section 506 of the zoning ordinance. These two items, designed to regulate the installation of new ISDS systems and provide for maintenance and inspection of existing systems, together with an EPA grant to replace critical failing systems, are designed to protect the aquifer from pollution from individual systems<sup>13</sup>. A number of advanced technology treatment systems have recently

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<sup>12</sup> See Geremia and Travasses, "Town of New Shoreham Facilities Plan," 1994 and "Block Island Water Environmental Statement," December 1996 and July 1997.

been approved by the State to protect critical resources of the Island.

## C. Electric energy

In the past the privately owned Block Island Power Company (BIPCo) has serviced virtually all of the electric power demand of the Island, although there are increasing numbers of individual property owners using their own power generators, solar panels, and wind energy conversion systems (WECS). More are planned. A few individuals have never connected to the Company's lines, demonstrating that it is feasible to use solar panels and storage batteries with small engines for backup.

Growth in electric demand has far outstripped growth in population, as people make more use of electricity, despite its high cost here (reputedly the highest in the United States) and its occasional unreliability. Rented generating equipment is currently used to get through peak demand periods. If population and demand per capita both grow as they have in the past, the additional needs would be large, with peak demand projected to double in less than twenty years.

Recently, major changes to the Island's power system have been discussed in general terms in many forums, but the Town has historically played a relatively passive role in guiding energy change. Instead of guiding or controlling the direction of the future, the Town has monitored the initiatives under consideration by BIPCo. The Company has ceased to pursue some promising options because they seemed too difficult or did not fit the financial constraints of the Company.

In the future the Town and the management of the Island's electric power systems should work closely as partners. In order to meet the increasing demands for electric power in a way that maximizes cost-effective-

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<sup>13</sup> See "Block Island and Green Hill Pond Wakefield, RI, EPA National Community Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Demonstration Project," April 1 2000 to March 31, 2004; Town of New Shoreham, "On-Site Wastewater Management Plan," August 9, 2000; Kellogg, Joubert and Gold, "MANAGE: A Method for Assessment, Nutrient-loadings, And Geographic Evaluation of non-point Pollution, URI Cooperative extension, Department of Natural Sciences, URI, 1997; and Jauber, Kellogg, Gold and Mandeville, "Water Quality Impacts of Changing land use on Block Island, RI, URI Cooperative extension, 1996.

ness, minimizes pollution and noise, and is visually non-intrusive, there is now a need for the Town to take a proactive role in establishing energy goals and priorities, including not only in developing adequate generation and distribution facilities but also in conservation and demand management consideration.

#### D. The Block Island School

Over the past decade the number of children enrolled in the lower grade levels has continued to rise. More children in the upper grade levels are remaining on the Island in the upper grades. The school has made an “electronic” connection to the mainland through the Pic Tel videoconferencing equipment and instruction via the Internet in an effort to expand their course offerings. There is hope that this would continue to expand to allow for adult education.

The school is currently in the process of expanding- less to serve growth than to allow for much-needed improvements such as an adequate gymnasium, music room, and storage space. There is hope that an auditorium will be constructed in the near future.

Among the concerns are responsibility for the preschool and adequate housing for school staff. In the next ten years a good portion of the staff will become eligible for retirement and there is concern that there will be a very high turnover rate due to the new teachers being unable to obtain affordable long term year-round housing.

#### E. Senior Services

People aged 60 or older make up nearly a quarter of the entire Block Island population, a high share compared with the Rhode Island average. Our size and conditions present special challenges for seniors, but aggressive efforts are made to meet them. These are among those current Island efforts:

- Primary health care is provided by Block Island Health Services, Inc., including a full-time public health nurse and physician supported by a well-trained and well-equipped Rescue Squad. Long term care is available at nearby mainland facilities.
- Home care and assisted living are supported through volunteer agencies such as FISH and churches; financial support comes from the “Mary D. Fund”.
- Transportation for the handicapped is provided informally by a taxi licensee with a lift-equipped

van.

- A variety of recreation and social programs are available, including “Second Wind” lunches, and inexpensive off-island trips for shopping and shows. Seniors are actively involved in community and civic affairs.
- Less-than-market priced housing reserved for the elderly has been created.

#### F. Community Facilities

- As Block Island - especially the year-round community - has grown and prospered there has been increasing interest in having a range of community facilities that might be typical of a mainland town. These include:
  - Day care for young children, especially since most parents on Block Island are working to afford to stay on the Island.
  - A Senior Social Center where healthy elders can meet for activities and, typically, a noon meal.
  - A multi-purpose auditorium available for community meetings, off-season movies, school assemblies, etc.
  - An indoor pool for instruction, recreation and therapeutic use during long off-season months.
  - A new or expanded “recreation center” for social programs, athletics not available in the school gym (a fitness center, etc.) and including especially a “teen center” for young people after school, evenings and weekends.

At present some of these needs are being approached independently at scattered sites. There is an opportunity for a coordinated Master Plan that would particularly address whether it is better to concentrate many community facilities in one place (such as around the school) or at scattered locations such as downtown (on the BIED property) or Ball O’Brien etc. The need for an expanded or relocated Town Hall offers the potential to explore comprehensive longer-term options.

#### G. Other Essential Services

As expected in a growing community, there is a wide range of other facility needs that have been identified, exceeding the Town’s ability to pay. New fire equipment, Town Hall improvements and expansion, solid

waste disposal improvements, North Light restoration, New Harbor Marine Center, restoration of the Old Harbor docks, and more pump-out facilities are among them. A critical task over the next five years will be assigning priorities in light of continuing uncertainties about growth and available funding: clearly not all of those improvements can be accomplished within the next half-decade. Following are capsule discussions of facilities not covered more fully above, under Open Space and Recreation, Circulation, or elsewhere.

Police. Summer services demand a substantial addition to the four regular full time officers. The number of staff necessary may escalate as the Department continues to hire off-Island summer staff, but the dilemma is to avoid having more seasonal importation of police than the regular staff can comfortably oversee. Space for a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office would be desirable.

Harbors. Facilities planning in both Old and New Harbor should reflect the expanding needs of the Harbormaster's Office in effectively managing dockage, rental moorings, and other operations. There is a huge demand from residents for more moorings.

Fire. The department is fully volunteer. In these days of reduced open burning and smoke detectors it has fewer calls, but not a lesser need. The capital budget has a well-planned upgrade and replacement for equipment. The need for more volunteers and better training is always present.

Rescue. The rescue squad maintains its status as a volunteer organization with the exception of a twelve-week period in the summer when people are paid to be on call in order to avoid any serious lapse in caring for the community and its visitors. Charges are limited to costs for an ambulance trip to the mainland. The Rescue volunteers, together with the Fire Department and the Trustees of the Fire Barn, are beginning the process of enlarging their space.

Medical Center. The dream of a new fully equipped medical center, as envisioned in the 1986 *Comprehensive Plan*, has become a reality. Resident physicians and nurses staff it year-round, and it provides facilities for regular visits by ten or more visiting specialists and dentists. A largely unmet need is for such services to include help for the mentally ill, beyond referrals. While the community is supportive of the goals and policies of the RI Department of Mental Health Retardation and Hospitals the potential client population on the island is so small that

programs and services for Block Island clients must largely be served through off-island providers. The Center also serves as a focus for research on Lyme disease and Babesiosis. Several options are currently being evaluated for space to accommodate elderly programs, including property opposite the school that was acquired by the Town in 2001.

Solid Waste. At present 100% of the Island's solid waste is ferried and trucked off-Island. This costly and inefficient system should be supplemented with efforts, including the promotion and expansion of on-island recycling such as composting, that would provide for more on-Island disposal of some items, and a more efficient reduction of both recyclable and other items that must be transported to mainland landfills. A facility for hazardous waste disposal is also needed.

Library. The Island Free Library has just undergone extensive renovations and expansion, doubling its floor area, providing greatly expanded children's and juvenile areas, separate computer rooms for adults and children, and enlarged office space. The number of computers available to the public has risen from nine to fifteen, and the technology has been upgraded for updated access to the Internet and electronic mail.

While the building should be adequate for many years, the computer technology will require continual upgrading, and children's services, in compliance with State of Rhode island mandates, will gradually be expanded.

Town Hall. The 1986 *Comprehensive Plan* made reference to the poor workspace and conditions at this facility. The situation has only worsened since then. Expanded offices as well as a public meeting room (at Town Hall or elsewhere) are top priority items. A recent "programming report" on Town Hall requirements indicated a need for 5,500 square feet of space, compared with 2,100 square feet now existing.

Tourist Facilities. The landing fee gives the Island a much-needed resource for improving facilities for the Island's major industry: tourism. Facilities such as rest rooms, showers, beach facilities, public phones at remote attractions, and an improved "Esta's" park are among the many areas where these funds could be applied.

Post Office. While not a municipal facility, the Post Office and postal service are critical to public service. The recently developed facility lacks adequate parking in the peak season. Alternatives to simply expanding parking need to be studied.

Emergency Management. In common with other exposed coastal islands, Block Island has a need for a well-developed emergency management program, including planning, mitigation, protection and recovery. Those efforts are guided by the *Town of New Shoreham Emergency Management Plan*, revised October, 1993, which is maintained by the Emergency Management Director, the Town Manager, and others. Shelter capacity of about 1,400 persons has been identified, most importantly the Block Island School and the Medical Center. That capacity is more than adequate for off-season, when the likelihood of severe storms is highest, but is tight in the summer season, when as many as 10,000 persons might be on-Island in an emergency.

Public health. Island communities have no special immunity from public health concerns, but they do have special circumstances in attempting to address them. Alcoholism, drug abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases as well as stress, anxiety and depression have been identified as inadequately addressed problems in similar isolated Island communities, and are certainly also of concern for Block Island. On Block Island some regional health concerns are added to those, such as Babesiosis and Lyme disease<sup>14</sup>. Some classic public health concerns that are problematic in many communities are well addressed on Block Island, including protection for potable water supplies, sanitary waste disposal, sanitation in eating and drinking places, and structural soundness of housing.

The limited size of Block Island's population precludes having full-time professional support on-Island for individuals with such problems as substance abuse, or perhaps even for implementing such measures as a public health council. The difficulty of travel to places where such specialized services are available poses an inherent challenge for Block Island, just as it does for all small island communities.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

### **A. Growth and Services.**

Growth and services need to be carefully related in these and other ways.

- Conservation efforts deserve support so that

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<sup>14</sup> Block Island's exceptionally high per capita incidence, attributable to the island's deer population, has led to wide support for having a reduced herd but little public agreement on how to accomplish that.

demands on basic resources, services and facilities otherwise resulting from growth in population and jobs are at least reduced, if not fully offset.

- The amount, kind, timing and pattern of growth should be made reasonable in relation to the cost and feasibility of providing services.
- Decisions about service patterns and management should be made taking into account the impact of those services on the Island growth which is likely.

### **B. Service Pattern.**

The location of services and service districts should be used to support the land use objective of promoting a compact Town center. To the extent feasible, Town facilities should be located within that village area, and public water and sewerage facilities should serve that area fully, but not extend beyond it.

### **C. Facility Adequacy.**

Many service facilities are now at or near capacity. The necessary effort must be made to render those facilities reliably adequate for current demands, and to manage the pace of residential and business development within serviced areas so that the capacities of those service facilities and systems are not overburdened.

There should be continuing exploration of the question of ultimate capacity for some service systems, in particular the Island's aquifer resources. If it is demonstrated to be necessary, steps should be taken to assure that their sustainable capacity will at no time be overtaxed, and that remaining capacity will be apportioned equitably over space and over time.

### **D. The Post Office.**

The Post Office, its mode of operation, and its location are critical to the Island community. The Town should exercise a voice in decisions that impact that, for such decisions transcend service efficiency, and powerfully shape the Island way of life.

### **E. Education.**

"Knowledge industries" are a key to the selective economic development that we seek, and education clearly is critical to the Island's role in such industries. Tuning Block Island education to the singular opportunities of this special place in these changing

times should be pursued, just as proposed in the Economic Development Chapter.

#### F. Regionalism.

The potential for providing improved services and reducing the costs of their provision through regional approaches deserves cautious exploration. Education, tourism, and utilities all have apparent potential for efforts together with other communities, but Block Island's unique fiscal circumstances as well as its isolation from other communities make such arrangements difficult to fashion with equity.

#### G. Special Populations.

The Town's senior population, unusually large and likely to grow, has special needs to which Town actions should be responsive. So, too, do the youngest (aged 0 - 5) have special needs such as daycare and expanded preschool. The homeless, developmentally disabled and mentally ill are populations with special needs. While recognizing that their numbers may be limited, the community should be mindful of these populations and seek opportunities for assisting them.

### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

SF 1. Proceed with searching for a back-up source of water supply. This is an absolute necessity for *Plan* implementation.

SF 2. Given assurance of adequate water supplies to support a more compact form of development in the Village, continue to take necessary steps to assure the adequacy of the Town sewer system to also support that pattern.

SF 3. Promote resource conservation, targeting the summer visitors whose demands create the serious problems. Water conservation, energy conservation, and solid waste reduction must be aggressively promoted.

SF 4. Support compatible alternate energy sources and promote conservation as a means of reducing demands on the Power Company's strained capacity that is complementary to energy conservation efforts.

SF 5. Develop plans to efficiently handle solid waste, sludge, and recycling programs.

SF 6. Explore, as is being done, the means by which

the Block Island community can exercise a more effective voice in guiding the management of such critical services as electric power, ferry service, and air linkage to the mainland. Initiate formal discussions with organizations involved with Island access, including Interstate Navigation, the PUC, and the RI Airport Commission to explore how far clarification of Island interests can go towards achieving more appropriate service.

SF 7. Undertake careful study of future enrollment trends and mandated education reform initiatives to ensure that the Block Island School's physical plant can accommodate all of our students, personnel, and programs. This study and monitoring will be ongoing and will serve as the foundation for any periodic School Committee recommendations to maintain, expand, renovate or make alterations.

SF 8. Keep abreast of evolving distance learning technology with the goal of acquiring those components necessary to maintain our ability to offer students access to under-enrolled courses and programs. Current examples of the potential include instituting adult education courses both in the evening and via TV, Pic-Tel and the Internet.

SF 9. With the help of expert consultants as needed, undertake studies and adopt an updated Island energy plan as a future element of the *Comprehensive Plan*. Those studies should include analysis of all reasonable and available energy supply and conservation options. The resulting element should include appropriate future roles for energy conservation as a means of avoiding needless cost and demand on resources, the use of alternative energy sources including WECS, solar power, fuel cells, and others as well as possible extension of an electric cable to the mainland. In recognition of the public benefit to result, the fees to conduct such studies should be requested at Financial Town Meetings.

SF 10. Explore replacing the Island's above ground cable distribution system, removing telephone poles from Island view sheds and replacing them with underground cables (for electric power, telephone, television, and fiber optic lines).

SF 11. Work with the Post Office to resolve peak season congestion at the Post Office, including such possibilities as secondary distribution to remote sites in the summer months, longer hours, and remote mailboxes for mail drop-off.

SF 12. Encourage existing public and private groups (BIHS, BICEP, etc.) to assess public health concerns

on Block Island, to visit and meet with representatives from other island communities to learn how they are addressing public health needs, and to frame a recommended program for strengthening public health services for Block Islanders.

SF 13. Explore other feasible steps towards energy goals including use of the sewer plant's generators to provide power to Town facilities, distributed generation through many small sources, and use of "net

metering" as the basis for compensating small electric generators, rather than the less generous "avoided cost" basis.

SF 17 To assure a well-managed response to unanticipated levels of drought, develop and from time to time update a simple but well-considered Island Contingency Water Supply Plan, to be prepared with the involvement of both Town and private interests through discussion and joint resolution.



*Mansion Beach*

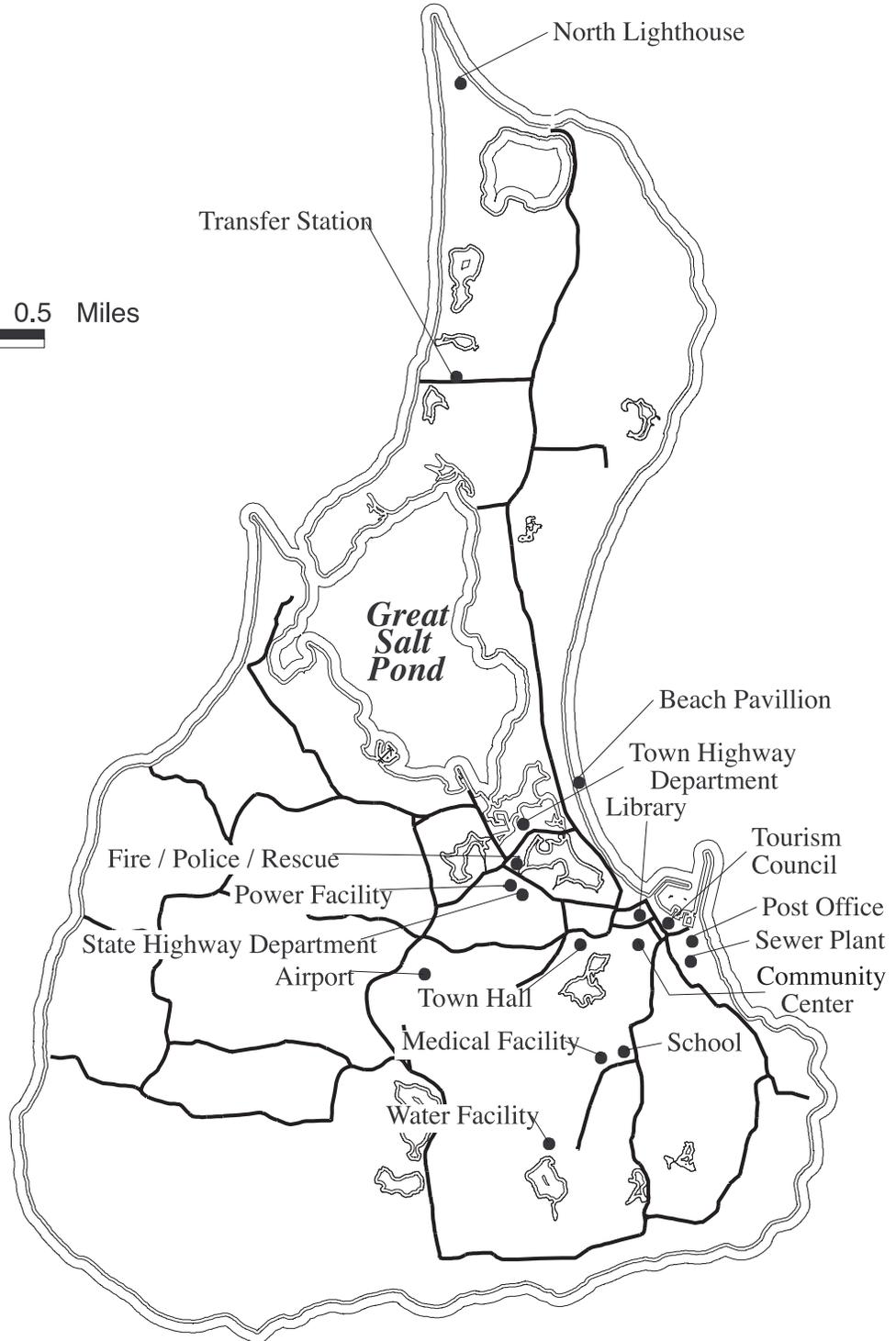
# Map 10 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

• Facility



0.5 0 0.5 Miles

Source: BIGIS



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*



*Cows on the Move, Lewis Farm*

## 7. OPEN SPACE, RECREATION AND LEISURE

### BACKGROUND

The viability of Block Island's economy depends upon its open space and recreation. The attraction of Block Island for visitors and for those who chose it as a residence typically is the quality of Island life, closely associated with its marine resources which support boating, swimming, and fishing, and the open qualities of its landscape. For Block Island, planning for open space and recreation is investment in managing a primary asset.

The Town has a Council-adopted Open Space and Recreation Plan, basically prepared in March 1988, most recently updated April 22, 1994<sup>15</sup>. That Plan is

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<sup>15</sup> Megan DiPrete, *Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan*, adopted by the Town Council May 19, 1993, revised April 1994.

incorporated into this one by reference. More importantly, the Town has been taking concrete actions both to preserve open space and to provide for recreation.

Seasonal public swimming is provided for at Mansion Beach, Crescent Beach, Sachem Pond, and Mohegan Bluffs. There are extensive boating facilities in New Harbor. However, much of those recreational boating opportunities are provided through private, not public, facilities. The *Great Salt Pond Management Plan* provides explicit policy and implementation guidance for that critical recreation and open space resource<sup>16</sup>.

The Island has only two ball fields: expansion is needed. There are a variety of provisions for other land-based sports and recreation publicly or privately provided for across the Island, but there are no public facilities for such popular sports as golf or tennis, year-round swimming, and no designated bike trails.

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<sup>16</sup> As adopted by the New Shoreham Town Council, January 7, 1991, with subsequent amendments.

Study funds for bikepaths have been committed for the Town, and construction funds have been assigned for implementation of the Plan, in both instances involving federal funds administered through RIDOT.

Approximately 1,871 of the Island's 6,188 acres are protected as open space through public or non-profit ownership. Another 557 acres are protected against development, being wetlands or waterbodies. On that basis, about 39 percent of the Island's land area is reasonably secure as open space of one type or another, 30% through deeded protection and 9% through firm regulation.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: OPEN SPACE, RECREATION AND LEISURE**

### **A. Basic Goal.**

There must be efforts to protect areas that are of special importance because of their natural, cultural, or visual qualities; where compatible with that, to provide for access to those resources; and to provide for the recreational and leisure interests of Islanders and visitors.

### **B. Priorities.**

Priority areas for protection through acquisition or easement are lands that:

- are most sensitive to development;
- are most valuable to wildlife and special vegetation;
- are most important for recreational use;
- are most important to historic or archeological resources;
- consolidate or protect existing open space holdings;
- provide public access to shoreland and other recreational resources;
- form "greenways" linking resources;
- protect fresh water resources;
- enhance scenic vistas and landscapes;
- help guide and shape the pattern of development;
- extend greenway trails on the Northwest and Southeast.

Among the specific types of areas included among the above are natural habitats, especially those of endangered species, farmland, fresh and saltwater wetlands, coastal areas, aquifer recharge areas, and natural and man-made scenic vistas and landscapes.

### **C. Means of Action.**

A wide range of means is to be used to accomplish those goals, including these:

- Programs to increase public awareness of recreation, conservation, and open space;
- Work in cooperation with private groups sharing the same interests, including the Block Island Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Block Island Conservancy, the North Light Commission, the Southeast Light Foundation, Inc., the Block Island Historical Society, the Committee for the Great Salt Pond, the Chamber of Commerce, the World Wildlife Fund/Conservation Foundation Fund, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and others;
- Efforts to qualify for and gain State and Federal grants and loans for acquisition and improvements;
- A coordinated land acquisition program, locally guided but involving all of the potentially related public and private organizations, and taking advantage of opportunities opened by State and Federal legislation;
- Creative use of regulation. That includes prohibition of development where that is fair, and simply guiding the nature of development where that is adequate. "Creative regulation" can include using compensatory incentives, such as provided by clustering and, over wider distances, transfer of development rights.
- Full-time staffing to coordinate regulatory reviews, land management, and acquisition efforts.

### **D. Extent of Protection.**

As much as half the land area of the Island should be permanently assured of retaining its natural qualities or agricultural use, whether through public ownership (and use control: airport land is not assured open space), easement, or solid regulatory assurance. This likely entails deed protection of another 667 acres and reliance on regulatory protection for other critical resources, such as wetlands. Of the Island's 6,188 acres, 30.2% are protected by deed, and 9% by regulations.

Currently protected acreage:  
Government, non-profit ..... 1,871  
Wetlands, waterbodies ..... 557

Acres to be protected: ..... 667

Total future protected land ..... 3,094  
Island land area ..... 6,188

E. Multi-Purpose Efforts.

Opportunities should be explored for serving multiple objectives - recreation, open space, housing, and economic development for example - through single actions. Development of a golf course or a swimming facility may be such an opportunity, so these possibilities are being explored. Similarly, Community Gardens can serve multiple purposes.

**IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION**

OR 1. A Recreation Department having been established, determine the direction it should take. Explore the appropriate role of the Town in providing for recreational demands and responsibility for the preschool.

OR 2. Inventory, document, and make accessible information on all public access to inland waters.

OR 3. Use the reduced assessments allowed under the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act to encourage land owners to voluntarily keep land open, especially parcels smaller than ten acres identified as being of resource interest in this *Plan* and the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*.

OR 4. Explore the feasibility of creating a year-round swimming facility, which is a means of providing winter recreation and health benefits as well as promotion of the Island's shoulder season attractiveness for visitors.

OR 5. Further explore the feasibility of creation of a links-type environmentally benign public golf course as an expansion of recreational opportunities on the Island, a means of preserving open space through economic activity, and promotion of the Island's shoulder season attractiveness for visitors.

OR 6. Pursue meeting needs for such recreational facilities as expansion of athletic fields and provision of a skate board park.



*Winter Sunset, Great Salt Pond*

# Map 11 PROTECTED OPEN SPACE AREAS, 2000

- Protected Open Space
- Easements
- Tax Parcel Boundaries
- ★ Beach Access Points



0.5 0 0.5 Miles



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*



*Sunday Morning, Old Harbor*

## 8. CIRCULATION

### BACKGROUND

Access between Block Island and the mainland is via privately operated ferries (to Point Judith year-round, seasonally to Montauk and New London), via individually owned boats of every description, via scheduled airline from Westerly, and by charter or individually owned airplane from a wide range of places. Nearly 5,000 persons arrive per summer day, two-thirds from Point Judith.

For individual boats the issue is mooring space. The *Great Salt Pond Management Plan* is clearly designed to protect resources against unreasonable encroachment. Without such encroachment, there is relatively little capacity for growth above the 2,000 or so boats now accommodated on the Island on peak weekend periods.

The State Airport, once the second busiest in Rhode Island, has declined in activity and standing since the mid-eighties. However, forecasts by others for aircraft activity are generally consistent with the growth forecasts of this *Plan*<sup>17</sup>. Whereas a few two scheduled airlines once served the Island, only one does so now. Loss or curtailment of that one service could be a very serious prospect.

Visitors coming to the Island by air leave their cars behind, making them especially welcome visitors. Once on-Island, circulation is almost exclusively via a

40-mile network of narrow roads, on which autos, buses, trucks, mopeds, bicycles, and pedestrians share the space. By our estimate, about 10,000 motor vehicle trips are made daily in August on-Island, and by RI DOT count, nearly 9,000 of those trips show up on Dodge Street (see Map 12, page 40). Growth could double that travel demand, but the roads could not possibly accommodate it without major change. Almost three-quarters of the Island's public road mileage is State-owned and controlled, leaving Town jurisdiction over only four miles of paved road and seven miles of unpaved road. Private roads and ways add unmeasured miles to the total.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: CIRCULATION

#### A. Basic Goal.

Block Island should have a circulation system that will move people and goods to, from, and around the Island in a way that is safe, convenient, reliable, economical, and consistent with the Island quality of life. Critical to accomplishing that is reduction in the number of motor vehicles on the Island, and greater community control in managing access to the Island.

#### B. Access to Block Island.

While the special quality of the Island is owed in large part to the difficulty of getting here, access deficiency should not be used as a means of constraining growth. Any constraints on growth that are desired should be achieved by more direct means.

At the same time, mainland access facility and management decisions, such as scheduling and fare

<sup>17</sup> Hoyle, Tanner & Associates, Inc., Block Island State Airport Master Plan Study, 1989, prepared for RIDOT.

structures, should help to encourage the kinds of visits most wanted: off-peak season, longer visits, auto-free visits. Such things as same-day round trip fare discounts do not do that. Making auto-free visits easier by coordinating boat and air schedules with rail and bus schedules would do so. Better, cheaper parking at Point Judith could be helpful.

The only Island-controlled access facilities are those for recreational boaters, guided among other ways by the *Great Salt Pond Management Plan* cited earlier. To accomplish the goals above, the Island needs to achieve a stronger voice in capacity, scheduling, fare structures, and other aspects of access management for the ferries and the airport.

#### C. Alternative Means of Travel.

Dependence upon private automobiles for access should be reduced, through support for alternative means of travel, including:

- promoting a pattern of development that makes it easier for people to walk between homes and jobs or stores and recreation or any of the other trips made in our daily lives;
- improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities: sidewalks installed in recent years with State DOT assistance, including those on Spring Street and Ocean Avenue and those planned for Bridgegate Square (Dodge Street and Old Town Road), are helpful steps, but much more is needed in future years.
- finding a way to make some form of intra-Island public transportation beyond school buses and taxicabs work for more people, especially in the winter season, and encouraging jitneys in the peak season;

#### D. Avoiding Need for Street “Improvements”.

Expansion of the width of roads devoted to autos and intersection redesign as means of coping with congestion should be avoided. Instead, alternatives should be explored, including:

- doing all the things discussed above to reduce auto dependency;
- managing the amount and location of development to be consistent with the capacity of roads as they exist, or as they can compatibly be altered;

- encouraging visitors to leave on the mainland all but absolutely necessary vehicles, through improved and economical mainland parking facilities, and ferry pricing and management decisions;
- strict control over egress onto roads from business parking areas, and encouraging both shared parking and shared egress;
- strict control over modes of transport which add to congestion and hazard out of proportion to their contribution to mobility, mopeds being the prime example.
- through appropriate fees and other charges, assuring that auto transport is not subsidized through reliance on general funds;
- providing visitors with better information before or just after they land, to reduce wandering and confusion.

### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS: CIRCULATION**

C 1. Initiate formal discussions with organizations involved with Island access, including Interstate Navigation, the PUC, and the RI Airport Commission to explore how far clarification of Island interests can go towards achieving more appropriate service.

C 2. Continue to explore creation of a port authority, transportation commission, or similar agency as a means of providing a voice for the Island in crucial sea, air, and related land access management decisions, such as but not limited to scheduling and fare structures, and providing a mechanism for potentially controlling the Old Harbor waterfront and gaining greater access to the New Harbor waterfront.

C 3. Make efforts to improve ease of access without an automobile, including provision of storage lockers and other amenities for such travelers, and better, more secure parking at Point Judith.

C 4. Explore better ways of serving travel demand along the Old Harbor-New Harbor-State Beach circuit, such as revised taxi operations or jitneys, and explore ways to provide Island-wide year-round transport for the elderly and handicapped.

C 5. Explore measures to better manage both parking and its impacts on land use, auto dependency, and other circulation modes. These are among the possible topics for study.

- Revising zoning to allow contributions to an access fund in lieu of on-site parking in all Village areas as a way of maintaining compactness and supporting shared parking areas, more convenient and attractive pedestrian facilities, and possible public transportation services.
- Examine Zoning's parking rules to assure that no more parking is required than is absolutely necessary. Consider adding **maximum** parking limits to supplement present minimums.
- As part of the plan for Downtown and the Old Harbor/New Harbor corridor cited earlier under "Land Use..." explore revisions to parking regulations and how parking is provided as a means of retaining physical compactness while still serving convenience.

C 6. Work with RIDOT through planning, design, and construction to develop a mutually agreed-upon system of alternatives to expanding auto capacity, building on what has been done, including further exploration of how to locate and design bike and pedestrian facilities serving circulation demands while respecting Island concerns about street appearance, safety, and residential privacy. Continuation of past DOT assistance (e.g. funds for Rebecca at the Well and S.E. Lighthouse rehabilitation as well as the cited sidewalk projects) is of critical importance in gaining resources for action.

C 7. Review the Airport Master Plan and its priorities, seeking near-term implementation of improvements serving Island interests, such as improved short

and long-term auto parking, reduced noise impacts, and enhanced safety. Seek a clearer Island voice in aircraft operations, parallel to the voice sought with regard to the ferries.

C 8. Implement a sidewalk development program, building on what has begun, beginning in the village business district and extending to all roadways leading thereto, with sidewalk construction and related pedestrian amenities, such as benches, planting, and lighting, being a responsibility of newly developed properties, just as is off-street parking.

C 9. Work with the Post Office to explore how best to relieve congestion at the new Post Office during summer, including such possibilities as secondary distribution to remote sites in the summer months, longer hours, and remote mailboxes for mail drop-off.

C 10. Resolve the present conflict between the vision of a compact pedestrian-oriented Downtown and parking regulations that, if rigidly administered, would make achievement of that vision infeasible. For a true pedestrian Downtown, there needs to be flexibility in how parking demands are met, and more fundamentally, reduced reliance on auto usage for all mobility needs in the peak season.

C 11. Involve the Planning Board more in actions and decisions to revise and/or improve Island roads, streets, sidewalks and other infrastructure of any sort.

C 12. Work with the State to gain approval for alternatives to steel guardrails, especially in important viewsheds.



*Cove by the Narragansett*

# Map 12

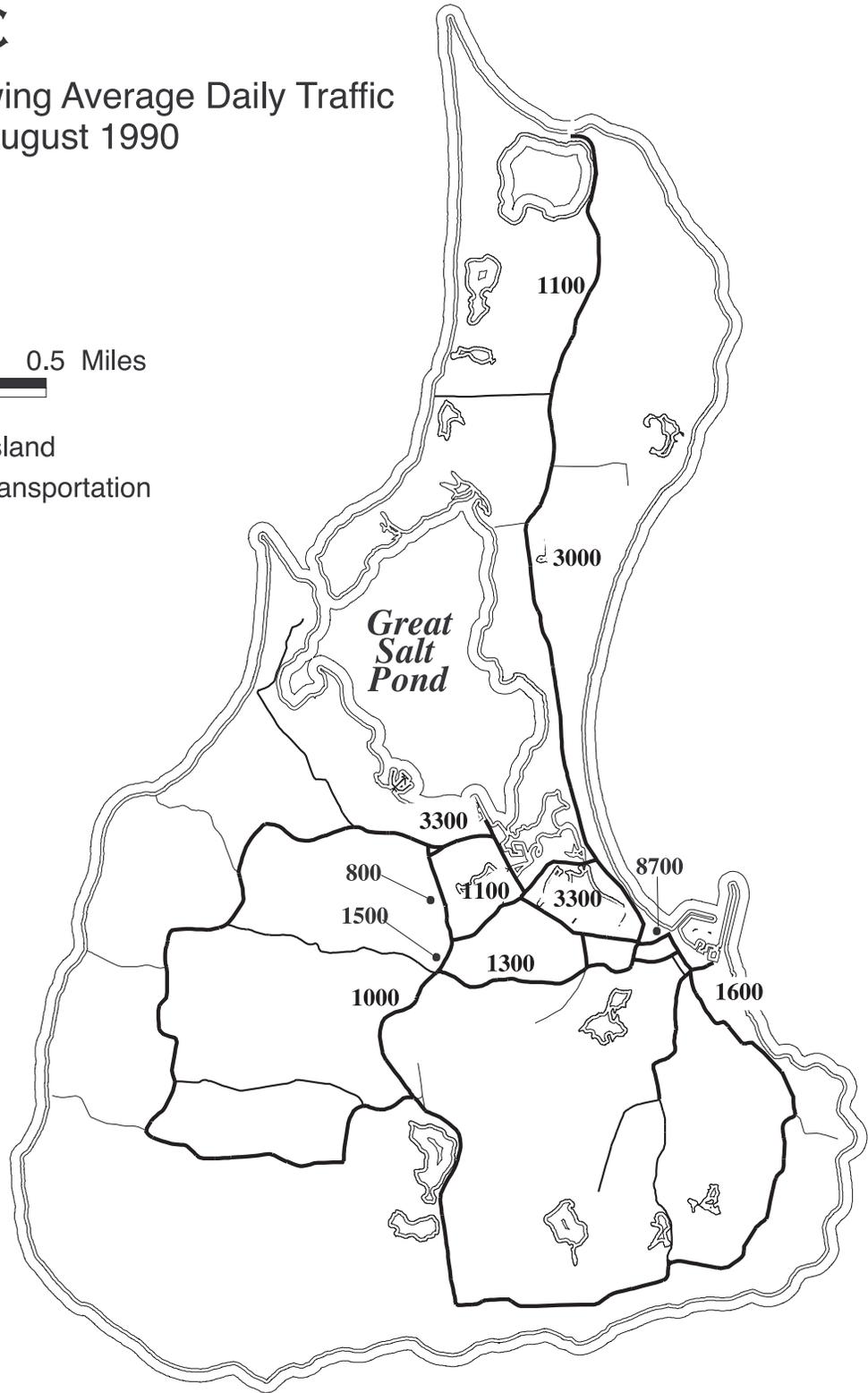
## TRAFFIC

Map Showing Average Daily Traffic Taken in August 1990



0.5 0 0.5 Miles

Source: Rhode Island Department of Transportation



*Block  
Island  
Geographic  
Information  
System  
TML 2/02*



*Green Heron*

## 9. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The *Comprehensive Plan* contains nearly 70 specific implementing actions, some that could lead to major future funding demands, many that require change in zoning regulations and procedures, and many that are highly complex. Accomplishing all of them within the next ten years or so will be challenging. Some are contingent on the outcome of things beyond local control, such as various studies or actions by State agencies, so that their accomplishment may or may not be feasible within that time frame.

Accordingly, following adoption of this *Plan* amendment an early step should be workshops and inter-agency meetings to set priorities for action. That should reflect a realistic evaluation of the people willing to ably fill committees and task forces, the political strain involved in reaching action, and the financial resources available both for facilities and for specialized expertise to study and draft proposals.

Concurrently, the Town Council should consider appointing Council members to task groups designated to address elements of the *Plan*. Having one Council member actively involved with major items as they move forward can lead to greatly improved understanding and more efficient decision making when it is time for the Council to act.

To help with such priority setting, the implementation proposals of the *Plan* are described below, organized by the element from which it was drawn. Each action is identified at its beginning with alphanumeric code initially parallel to the *Plan* text, then revised as edited here. For example, “OR 8” is the eighth implementing action listed under Open Space and Recreation in this amended compilation. Each action is identified at its end with an initial judgment on its timing. “Near term” means to be done within five years or so, “Long term” means likely to start later and finish later, and “Ongoing” means that it isn’t a discrete action, but more a policy or process that should continue over time. “Near term” items are boxed for emphasis.

## FINANCING THE PLAN

While the great majority of actions called for in this *Plan* will not require expenditures outside of normal budgets, achieving all the goals of the *Plan* would clearly have fiscal consequences. Some items involve some added costs affecting the annual budget, some items would affect the Town's long term capital improvements plan, and some items would result in additional Town revenues.

The *Comprehensive Plan* was developed in consideration of and is reflected in the Town's annual capital improvements planning. It would be beneficial to have an even broader fiscal context to assist the Council and the public to assess individual actions. That would entail projections over a period of a decade or more of the fiscal consequences for both costs and revenues of the actions proposed.

Accordingly, two further implementing actions are called for.

IMP 1. Carry out a detailed projection of the cost and revenue consequences of the *Comprehensive Plan* and its implementing actions for a period of at least ten years. In particular test the capacity of the Town to realistically carry out capital-intensive proposals.

IMP 2. In light of the above, engage a full- or part-time grant writer to solicit outside funding for planning studies and other tasks wherever grant funds can be found, for both capital items and others.

## 1. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GO 1. Give priority to ongoing efforts to maintain the Island's character as a small working community, addressing the scale of development, access to the Island, and keeping expectations reasonably related to island realities. [Ongoing - Town Council]

## 2. LAND USE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT

LU 1. Develop a system for managing growth and change to assure that demands will not exceed either the Island's short-term capacity to accommodate change or the Island's long term limits of sustainability and Island quality of life. Explore programs and regulations for assuring that activity levels on the Island are not permitted to exceed those limits. [Near term initial effort, then ongoing – Planning Board].

LU 2. Design and, once assured of adequate Town

water supply and sewerage capacity to serve resulting development, adopt performance-based controls to guide development more strongly into the central Downtown area, and to assure that compactness does not result in loss of critical small town characteristics. [Long term – Planning Board].

LU 3. Comprehensively review and frame revisions to the Zoning Ordinance and other Town regulations, designing those changes to facilitate residential and other development being more central and compact. Include in that exploration the transfer of development rights ("TDR"), a tool potentially useful in this and other ways. [Long term – Planning Board].

LU 4. Seek means of preventing seasonal overcrowding of dwellings through strict enforcement of occupancy and sanitary codes. [Near term – Planning Board].

LU 5. Explore the possibility of granting a homestead tax reduction for those houses occupied or rented only on a year-round basis and not rented seasonally, as a means of encouraging reduced density of people on the Island in the high season. [Near term – Town Council]

LU 6. Prepare a physical design plan for the Downtown and the Old Harbor – New Harbor corridor, with the intent of integrating those areas, preserving and even promoting their diversity of functions. [Long term – Planning Board]

LU 7. Support open space acquisition and protection towards the goals of protecting 50% of the Island's land area, and assuring open space continuity, reaching into the Downtown center. [Ongoing – Town Council]

LU 8. Explore the possibilities for making the necessary investments in water, sewer, and access improvements to support the compact pattern proposed, as discussed in various elements of this *Plan*. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

LU 9. Encourage owners to voluntarily keep land open, using among other tools "Preferential Taxation" to reduce tax burden on land held open, including small parcels under 10 acres at places which have been designated in these *Plan* documents as having special value as open space. [Ongoing – Conservation Commission]

LU 10. Take every feasible opportunity to have utility wires placed underground, especially in the Downtown area where poles interfere with circulation,

such as in conjunction with road reconstruction projects or when bikeways are being built. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

LU 11. Prepare a Master Plan of Town-owned facilities Island-wide. [Long term – Town Manager]

LU 12. Explore adopting tools for better managing the impacts of development upon the cultural landscape of the Island, including protection of viewsheds, addressing out-of-context large structures, and some form of architectural design guidance. [Near term – Planning Board]

LU 13. Actively support the objectives articulated in the Harbor Management Plan, including reconciliation of both resource protection and productive use, and both marine and land side interests, while maintaining the highest possible water standards, supporting aquaculture and shellfishing, promoting marine safety, and improving public access and facilities. [Ongoing – Town Council]

LU 14. Develop tools and a program to assure that development granted Comprehensive Permits under RIGL Chapter 45-53 does not depart from the basic land use policies of this *Plan*, especially given that those policies are so strongly consistent with *Land Use 2025*, the RI Land Use Policies and *Plan*. [Near term – Planning Board]

### 3. HOUSING

H 1. Explore more requirements for employers—both businesses and public agencies such as the school and the Town itself— to meet the housing needs of their staff. [Long term – Housing Board]

H 2. Explore changes in land use to create more locations for affordable housing, especially where costs for access and services are least, such as the present RC/M, OHC, and SC zones.

Seek means to assure the permanent affordability of units developed with density incentives under zoning, and means of assuring a stable supply of units for year-round occupancy.

Explore increasing density in selected zones - e.g. Townhouses - with incentives to assure that a share of the units will be permanently affordable. [Long term – Housing Board]

H 3. Further explore provisions for “family compounds,” “granny flats,” or other means for

families to accommodate the housing needs of the next generation in their own family on their own family land. [Short term].

H 4. Explore alternatives for addressing the housing needs of Town or school employees otherwise unable to afford to live on the Island, whether through housing subsidies for key employees or the acquisition of housing units to accommodate either or both year-round or seasonal staff housing needs. [Near term - Housing Board]

H 5. Study the potential impacts of revaluation upon housing affordability (and also on the need for open space protection). Explore steps the Town could take to mitigate any negative impacts of revaluation. In particular, explore petitioning the RI Legislature to enact authorization for Block Island to provide homestead tax exemption as has been done for Providence and Woonsocket, providing reduced property taxes for dwellings occupied as a principal residence by a registered voter, and without seasonal rental.

Also consider other fiscal devices available or potentially available. Those include existing legislation such as Ch. 9-26-4.1 Homestead Estate Tax Exemption, Ch. 44-33.1 Historic Homeowner Assistance Act, Ch. 45-44 Homestead Program, or other possible new legislation. [Long term - Housing Board]

H 6. Explore how best to systematically assure that opportunities for partnership efforts serving both housing and other purposes such as economic development or open space protection are regularly considered in Town and civic actions, beyond simple exhortation in this *Plan*. [Long term - Housing Board]

H 10. Give consideration to the recommendations of the Land Use Density Discussion Panel, including lower densities in outlying areas coupled with higher densities where, such as Downtown, they are served with public utilities. [Near term – Housing Board]

H 7. Work with owners of accessory apartments to explore assuring their long-term affordability. [Near term – Housing Board]

H 8. Document assurance of long-term affordability for units now affordably priced as a result of employer or other contributions. [Ongoing – Housing Board]

H 9 Explore adaptive reuse of existing structures as a means of achieving affordable housing without

creation of more units. [Long term – Housing Board].

H 10. Explore reuse of structures otherwise likely to be demolished on the sites they occupy, given a short respite by the Demolition Delay law. [Ongoing – Housing Board]

H 11. Working cooperatively with employers and the Town, promote the development of multi-unit employee housing. [Long Term – Housing Board]

#### 4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

E 1. While seeking economic diversification, it is still necessary to make the unglamorous but necessary investments to support the Island's basic industry of tourism: expanded toilets, restrooms and showers; storage lockers; boat launching and dinghy landing facilities at Old and New Harbors; and better informational materials and signage. These appropriately can be financed through the landing fee. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

E 2. Explore greater use of user fees such as the landing fee to more equitably distribute the costs of providing infrastructure and services to visitors over a brief peak summer period, including offsets for the wage premiums and housing support necessary to get summer-only staff. The Coast Guard facility now used has limited capacity and is in need of repairs. [Short term – Town Manager]

E 3. Inventory existing studies of the Island and its economy, and develop a reference referral system for those and future studies, so that future efforts can build on past ones. [Long term – Planning Board]

E 4. As discussed in Chapter 3, continue to aggressively address the need for affordable year-round housing to support a sound year-round economy and to support the special housing demands created for employees in the brief summer season. [Ongoing – Planning Board]

E5. Undertake a program to encourage and facilitate young people living on the Island to become part of the Island's future economy and government, by tying educational pursuits to jobs likely to be available on the Island, by offering professional and management development and training, and by moving people up from within. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

E 6. Revise zoning so that value-added agriculture is explicitly included a permitted agricultural use within reasonable limits. [Long term – Planning Board]

E 7. Support actions that can encourage and support aquaculture as a diversifying economic activity, [Ongoing – Town Council]

#### 5. NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

NC 1. Continue to refine and expand the Town's Geographic Information System (GIS) as the informational center of the planning and protection efforts. Investment in the GIS system is paying dividends now that much of the initial groundwork has been completed. With expanding capacities in all systems, the potential has never been as great, but more work is necessary to integrate that capacity into the work flow and decision-making approaches of the community. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

NC 2. Develop a "Red Flag" system for alerting Town agencies when their permitting or other actions involve a parcel having critical natural or cultural resource elements. Such flagging can now be done relatively simply through the Town's well-developed computer systems, including those of the Assessors and the GIS system. The flagging would call attention to the need to exercise careful scrutiny to assure that no avoidable damage is being done to critical resources. [Long term – Conservation Commission and Historic District Commission]

NC 3. Complete development of an inventory of "Sacred Places," and develop a program for their protection. "Sacred Places" are those which are most important to the character and quality of life on Block Island. In some cases those places are of ecological or historic importance, but often they are not, so often they are vulnerable to inadvertent change.

Beginnings of listings have been made. They should be formalized through wider involvement and discussions convened by the Historic District Commission, in collaboration with other Boards and Commissions. [Long term – Planning Board].

NC 4. Pursue an activist environmental agenda as outlined by the Natural Resources Steering Committee to the Town Council (4/6/96), in concert with environmental groups and, where appropriate, with State and Federal agencies, including management strategies to protect Block Island's rare and endangered species, protection of all areas of critical ecological importance, establish an enforce Best Management Practices for protection of rare and endangered species from insensitive land use and to protect the Island's sole source water supply, and air quality efforts aimed at preventing degradation of surface

water resources. [Ongoing – Conservation Commission]

NC 5. Strengthen efforts at working together with property owners and occupants regarding management actions, in particular including minimization of use of pesticides and herbicides, rather than relying only on land acquisition as a means of protecting resources. [Ongoing – Conservation Commission]

NC 6. Meet periodically with the Nature Conservancy and others to review the “Recommendations for Land Conservation and Protection of Endangered Species on Block Island,” as sent by TNC to the Planning Board March 25, 1991, to review progress and prospects with regard to those concerns. [Ongoing – Town Council]

NC 7. To ensure that the Island’s forest resources, both public and private, are being managed in ways which are consistent with the goals cited above, conduct an annual assessment of accomplishments that have been made towards the goals and objectives cited above, and identifying any needed actions. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

## 6. SERVICES AND FACILITIES

SF 1. Proceed with searching for a back-up source of water supply. This is an absolute necessity for *Plan* implementation. [Near term – Sewer and Water Commissions]

SF 2. Given assurance of adequate water supplies and sewerage capacity to support a more compact form of development in the Downtown, take necessary steps to assure the adequacy of the Town sewer system to also support that pattern. That is another absolute necessity for *Plan* implementation. [Near term – Sewer Commission]

SF 3. Promote resource conservation, targeting the summer visitors whose demands create the serious problems. Water conservation, energy conservation, and solid waste reduction must be aggressively promoted. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

SF 4. Support compatible alternate energy sources as a means of reducing demands on the Power Company’s strained capacity. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

SF 5. Develop plans to promote waste prevention and reuse and recycling and to efficiently handle processing and disposal of solid waste, sludge, and special

wastes including household hazardous waste, consistent with the RI Comprehensive Solid Waste Management Plan, with an objective of at least achieving the 20% recycling threshold to be eligible for State grants. [Ongoing - – Town Manager]

SF 6 & C1. Explore, as is being done, the means by which the Block Island community can exercise a more effective voice in guiding the management of such critical services as electric power, ferry service, and air linkage to the mainland.

Initiate formal discussions with organizations involved with Island access, including Interstate Navigation, the PUC, and the RI Airport Commission to explore how far clarification of Island interests can go towards achieving more appropriate service. The development of the new Airport facility has illustrated how that can work. [Ongoing – Town Council]

SF 7. Undertake careful study of future enrollment trends and mandated education reform initiatives to ensure that the Block Island School’s physical plant can accommodate all of our students, personnel, and programs. This study and monitoring will be ongoing, testing facility adequacy in light of recent school renovations and expansion. [Ongoing – School Committee].

SF 8. Keep abreast of evolving distance learning technology with the goal of acquiring those components necessary to maintain our ability to offer students access to under-enrolled courses and programs. Current examples of the potential include instituting adult education courses both in the evening and via TV, Pic-Tel and the Internet. [Ongoing – School Committee]

SF 9. [See SF 15 under Town Council]

SF10. Further explore replacing the Island’s above ground cable distribution system in the Downtown area, removing telephone poles and replacing them with underground cables (for electric power, telephone, television, and fiber optic lines). [Long term – Town Council].

SF11 & C9. Work with the Post Office to resolve peak season congestion at the Post Office, including such possibilities as secondary distribution to remote sites in the summer months, longer hours, and remote mailboxes for mail drop-off. [Ongoing – Town Manager].

SF 12. Encourage existing public and private groups (BIHS, BICEP, etc.) to assess public health concerns

on Block Island, to visit and meet with representatives from other island communities to learn how they are addressing public health needs, and to frame a recommended program for strengthening public health services for Block Islanders. [Near term – Town Manager]

SF 13. Explore means by which local expectations for services and amenities can be kept within the scale appropriate to a small self-dependent community ten miles out in the ocean. [Ongoing – Town Council]

SF 14. Follow through on the efforts to date in developing and adopting a strategic plan for energy conservation and achieving a green community, using expert consultant help as needed, with the aim of including such a plan as an element in this *Comprehensive Plan* and, in the process, perhaps starting Block Island into becoming a center for innovative thinking about eco-planning and development. Analysis should be made of all reasonable and available energy supply and conservation options. [Ongoing – Town Council] The resulting element should include appropriate future roles for energy conservation as a means of avoiding needless cost and demand on resources, the use of alternative energy sources including WECS, solar power, wave energy, fuel cells, and others as well as possible extension of an electric cable to the mainland. In recognition of the public benefit to result, the fees to conduct such studies should be requested at Financial Town Meetings.

SF 15. Explore the ongoing needs expressed for a multi-use recreation center, a senior center, and a community center, and develop a program, means of financing, and identification of potential site(s) for implementing a solution. [Long term – Town Manager]

SF 16. Carry out a program for increasing public awareness of the Town's Emergency Management Plan, the kinds of contingencies under which it might play a role, and how that might affect individual households. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

SF 17 To assure a well-managed response to any unanticipated level of drought, develop and from time to time update a simple but well-considered Island Contingency Water Supply Plan, to be prepared with the involvement of both Town and private interests through discussion and joint resolution. [Ongoing – Town Manager]

## 7. OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, AND LEISURE

OR 1. Explore reorganizing the Recreation Department to create a Parks & Recreation Department. . [Near term – Recreation Department]

OR 2. Inventory, document, and make accessible information on all public access to inland waters. [Long term – Conservation Commission].

OR 2A. Inventory, document and make accessible information on all traditional ways of access to the shoreline, both documented and undocumented. [Long term – Planning Board]

OR 3. Use the reduced assessments allowed under the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Act to encourage land owners to voluntarily keep land open, especially parcels smaller than ten acres identified as being of resource interest in this *Plan* and the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. [Ongoing - Assessors]

OR 4. Given the recreation facility improvements recently made, evaluate the demand and need for such things as a year-round swimming facility, a multi-use recreation facility, redevelopment of the Fred Benson Town Beach, expansion of athletic fields, playgrounds, basketball courts, and docking facilities.

Where demand is strong, explore the feasibility and means of developing and operating such improvements, whether through Town tax funds, use of impact fees or user fees, or support for privately developed facilities.

Where need and financial feasibility makes it appropriate, explore site locations for those improvements. [Long term – Recreation Department.]

OR 5. Explore how the Land Trust and the Recreation Department might work hand in hand for maintenance and management for acquisitions of the Land Trust. [Ongoing – Recreation Department]

OR 6. Identify parcels smaller than ten acres that the Town would like to be eligible for reduced tax assessments under the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act, so that they may be incorporated into the *Comprehensive Plan*, since without being specified in the *Plan* parcels of such size are not eligible for such assessments. [Near term – Conservation Commission]

## 8. CIRCULATION

C 1 & SF 6. Explore, as is being done, the means by which the Block Island community can exercise a more effective voice in guiding the management of such critical services as electric power, ferry service, and air linkage to the mainland.

Initiate formal discussions with organizations involved with Island access, including Interstate Navigation, the PUC, and the RI Airport Commission to explore how far clarification of Island interests can go towards achieving more appropriate service. The development of the new Airport facility has illustrated how that can work. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 2. With renewed resolve and, as needed, with professional assistance, explore creation of a port authority, transportation commission, or similar agency as a means of providing a voice for the Island in crucial access management decisions, such as but not limited to scheduling and fare structures, and providing a mechanism for potentially controlling the Old Harbor waterfront and gaining greater access to the New Harbor waterfront. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 3. Make efforts to improve ease of access without an automobile, including provision of storage lockers and other amenities for such travelers, and better, more secure parking at Point Judith. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 4. Explore better ways of serving travel demand along the Old Harbor-New Harbor-State Beach circuit, such as revised taxi operations or jitneys, and explore ways to provide Island-wide year-round transport for the elderly and handicapped. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 5. Explore measures to better manage both parking and its impacts on land use, auto dependency, and other circulation modes. These are among the possible topics for study.

- Revising zoning to allow contributions to an access fund or, in appropriate cases, leasing of underutilized off-site spaces, to serve in lieu of on-site parking in all Downtown areas as a way of maintaining compactness and supporting shared parking areas, more convenient and attractive pedestrian facilities, and possible public transportation services.
- Examine Zoning's parking rules to assure that no more parking is required than is absolutely neces-

sary. Consider adding **maximum** parking limits to supplement present minimums.

- As part of the plan for Downtown and the Old Harbor/New Harbor corridor cited earlier under "Land Use..." explore revisions to parking regulations and how parking is provided as a means of retaining physical compactness while still serving convenience. [Long term – Planning Board]

C 6. Continue to work with RIDOT through planning, design, and construction to develop a mutually agreed-upon system of alternatives to expanding auto capacity, including exploration of how to locate and design bike and pedestrian pathways serving circulation demands while respecting Island concerns about street appearance, safety, and residential privacy. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 7. Following completion of current airport improvements, continue to review the Airport Master Plan and its priorities, seeking near-term implementation of improvements serving Island interests, such as improved short and long-term auto parking, reduced noise impacts, and enhanced safety. Seek a clearer Island voice in aircraft operations, parallel to the voice sought with regard to the ferries. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 8. Continue to implement a sidewalk development program, beginning in the Downtown business district and extending to all roadways leading thereto, with sidewalk construction and related pedestrian amenities, such as benches, planting, and lighting, being a responsibility of newly developed properties, just as is off-street parking. [Ongoing – Town Council]

C 9, SF11. Work with the Post Office to resolve peak season congestion at the Post Office, including such possibilities as secondary distribution to remote sites in the summer months, longer hours, and remote mailboxes for mail drop-off. [Ongoing – Town Manager].

C 10. Resolve the present conflict between the vision of a compact pedestrian-oriented Downtown and parking regulations that, if rigidly administered, would make achievement of that vision infeasible. For a true pedestrian Downtown, there needs to be flexibility in how parking demands are met, and more fundamentally, reduced reliance on auto usage for all mobility needs in the peak season. [Near term – Town Council].

C 11. Involve the Planning Board more in actions and decisions to revise and/or improve Island roads,

streets, sidewalks and other infrastructure of any sort.  
[Ongoing– Town Council]

C 12. Work with the State to gain approval for alternatives to steel guardrails, especially in important viewsheds. [Ongoing – Planning Board]

C 13. Explore means of limiting parking allowable at seasonal rental units as a means of reducing auto dependency of visitors. [Long term – Town Manager]

## 9. IMPLEMENTATION

IMP 1. Carry out a detailed projection of the cost and revenue consequences of the *Comprehensive Plan* and its implementing actions for a period of at least ten years. In particular, test the capacity of the Town to realistically carry out capital-intensive proposals.  
[Near term – Town Manager]

IMP 2. In light of the above, engage a full- or part-time grant writer to solicit outside funding for planning studies and other tasks wherever grant funds can be found, for both capital items and others. [Near term – Town Manager].



*Wild Roses, Southeast Light*

# NEW SHOREHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN HOUSING ELEMENT SUPPLEMENT

Revised March 19, 2008



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## INTRODUCTION

The following supplements the “Housing” element of the *Town of New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan* draft of the same date. The supplement is intended to explicitly address all of the contents required when a comprehensive plan housing element is to be relied upon as an “affordable housing plan” in meeting the threshold requirements of the R.I. Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, RIGL 45-53<sup>18</sup>.

Preparing this supplement made even clearer than before how unique this community truly is. The *Comprehensive Plan* stated well the consequences of that uniqueness (at page 1):

“Differences between New Shoreham and any other community in Rhode Island are not marginal – they are fundamental. It is because of those differences that Block Island is able to contribute so powerfully to the richness of Rhode Island’s appeal. Rhode Island would be diminished should Block Island be homogenized into being just another rural community. Accordingly, Rhode Island must understand that our uniqueness requires some departures from the way in which 38 other municipalities are managed.”

Among the salient differences between New Shoreham and elsewhere in Rhode Island is that this is an island a dozen miles from the mainland, which makes provision of housing for all who service the community a necessity, not a choice. Achieving that has to face the reality that two-thirds of the housing on the Island is unavailable to year-round residents, since it is owned by second home owners. No other community in Rhode Island comes even close to that proportion of seasonal units, as shown in Table 2. The attraction of Block Island’s location for seasonal use results in market prices for homes and home sites far higher than anywhere else in the State, but those who live and work here don’t have incomes to match. The usual formulas for approaching housing won’t apply in this context. For example, the share of income commonly paid for housing is clearly higher here than anywhere else in the State. The common “affordable” housing rule is that such housing must cost no more than 30% of the income of a household at 80% of the area median income. Neither the norms

of the community nor the realities of incomes, housing prices, and conceivable strategies for managing both can support that notion on Block Island. That “gap” makes finding solutions daunting.

There are, however, communities somewhat parallel to Block Island, though they are in other states. Shelter Island, NY, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket are all islands having housing markets dominated by non-residents and spiraling housing costs, as shown in Table 4. None have “solved” their housing problem, but all have acted in ways that provide helpful parallels in considering a plan for Block Island.

The circumstances of being an island community means that its members are aware of the need for housing action, and they have been acting, chiefly using local resources to address the concern, doing so in a way that builds rather than invades community. There is concern that the advent of large projects brought to the island through an adversarial process would damage the prevailing sense of sharing in a common cause.

The material that follows deals with two categories of housing tenure, year-round occupied and seasonally occupied. There are very real housing concerns with regard to both. The material also deals with two levels of housing cost. “Affordable” units are those which are affordable at a cost level that would meet standards for housing receiving state or federal government subsidies. “Attainable” units are affordable to households having incomes too high to qualify for those subsidies, but too low to attain housing in the open market. The usual thresholds for those categories are at 80% of the area median income for “affordable” and 140% of the area median income for “attainable,” in both cases based upon no more than 30% of income being spent on housing.

Four types of units thus become the elements for consideration, as shown in the table below:

- Year-round affordable units;
- Year-round attainable units;
- Seasonal worker affordable units; and
- Seasonal worker attainable units.

The following table illustrates a “snapshot” of the Town’s 2010 housing provisions based upon the intentions and specifications of this *Plan*.

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<sup>18</sup> Based on R.I. State Planning Council Handbook Number 16, *Handbook on the Comprehensive Plan*, as updated 2003.

**BLOCK ISLAND SUBSIDIZED HOUSING UNITS 2010**

	Affordable units		Attainable units		Total units	
	Needed	Provided	Needed	Provided	Needed	Provided
Year-round	56	63	50	50	106	113
Seasonal	69	80	34	40	109	120
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>233</b>

RIGL 45-43	56	59
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Currently unmet housing needs exist in each of those four categories, but mechanisms now put in place make it appear that as soon as 2010 needs in all four of those categories could be met, and they can continue to be met all the way to build-out, the point at which Block Island’s land resources are fully utilized. In meeting those needs, the requirements of the R.I. Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, RIGL 45-53, would also be met.

**INVENTORY OF EXISTING STOCK**

“Table 1. Rhode Island Selected Housing Data – 2000 Census” (on pages 17 through 19, with parts A through I referenced below) provides an overview of New Shoreham’s existing housing stock, and provides comparisons with the State and with Washington County. That has been supplemented with additional housing information from the Statewide Planning Program’s *Housing Data Base*, updated July, 2003 by the RI State Planning Council. Caution should be exercised in using that data, since much of it depends upon only a sample of the population, and with numbers as small as those of Block Island, the reliability of the resulting figures, especially when they are small, is questionable.

The most striking single observation is that New Shoreham is unique relative to anywhere else in Rhode Island. The items in Table 1 that are most salient in understanding New Shoreham’s inventory are in the heavy boxed cells. The very first row of Table 1 (just above Part A) indicates a total of only 1,606 New Shoreham housing units in 2000. In all of Rhode Island only Foster has fewer units (see Table 2). In Part C Table 1 notes that in 2000 there were only 472 April-occupied housing units in New

Shoreham<sup>19</sup>, less than a third of the total of units in the Town, and far fewer than in any other municipality in the State (Foster, with the next smallest number, had more than three times as many occupied units). That alone sets New Shoreham apart, but so do many other things, as itemized below.

**Structure Age** (Table 1 Part A. Year Structure Built).

Block Island’s housing is relatively young, although there is a large component of historical structures that remain. A quarter of Block Island’s housing units found in 2000 were added post 1990, compared with fewer than 9% Statewide.

**Structure Condition.**

2000 Census information doesn’t report housing condition, but HUD has made estimates as reported in the *Housing Data Base* (page 2-25 of that report), indicating that only 1.4% of New Shoreham renter households live in housing likely to be substandard, lower than all but three of Rhode Island’s 39 municipalities<sup>20</sup>. That is consistent with the observations made in the *New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan* which notes that housing condition is not a major

<sup>19</sup> The terms “April-occupied housing” and “year-round housing” are often used synonymously, but they are different. See the Technical Appendix for a full explanation.

<sup>20</sup> And probably high, even at that, since the estimate is apparently based purely on the percent of renter-occupied households living in structures built before 1940, hardly an indicator of poor condition on Block Island.

concern, but that the Town has been addressing it in a number of ways.

**Structure Type** (Table 1 Part B. Units in Structure).

New Shoreham's housing is dominantly (88%) single-family detached structures, compared with 55% single family Statewide and 77% in Washington County.

**Housing Occupancy** (Table 1 Part C. Housing Occupancy and D. Income in 1999).

In April when the Census was taken less than 30% of New Shoreham's housing was found to be occupied. Had the Census been taken earlier in the year the percentage would have been even lower. The reason for that exceptionally low occupancy, of course, is the large share of units reserved as second homes, more than two-thirds of the island total. That stands in contrast with not only the 93% April occupancy Statewide and 83% occupancy in Washington County, but also with every other municipality in the State.

Table 2 "Rhode Island Housing Occupancy 2000" lists occupancy data for each municipality in the State, ranked from lowest (New Shoreham) to highest (Woonsocket) in percentage of housing units occupied in April. The closest other municipality to New Shoreham on this measure is Charlestown, but its occupancy rate is more than double New Shoreham's. This is the single most critical dimension to the existing housing inventory. Two-thirds of the island's housing doesn't serve basic shelter needs, it accommodates the leisure comfort of those who can support two houses. The Island has a dual housing market and dual needs, one for those whose year-round (or nearly year-round) home is Block Island, the other for those who only visit for part of the year. No other Rhode Island municipality has anywhere near that level of dominance by second homes.

While the market for Block Island's housing is extraordinary in its composition, the incomes available to local resident households are not unusual at all. The proportion of households at each income level on Block Island very closely parallels the norms indicated by Statewide and Washington County figures. Block Island's 1999 median income of \$44,800 was a little higher than the \$42,100 Statewide median but a little lower than the \$53,103 Washington County median.

**Housing Value and Rent** (Table 1 Parts E. Value through H. Gross rent as % of household income).

Block Island housing values, unlike incomes, tower

above regional and State-wide norms. The 2000 Census indicated a median value of \$479,300 on Block Island versus \$133,000 Statewide and \$156,000 for Washington County. Again, Block Island is widely separated from all other municipalities. The second highest median value in the 2000 Census was \$244,900 in East Greenwich, about half of the New Shoreham figure. The result on the household budgets of households having high house values but not high incomes is obvious (F. Monthly owner costs as % of income). Almost half of all resident homeowners on Block Island in 2000 spent more than 30% of their income on housing, twice the share spending that much Statewide. In order to compete with second home buyers, Islanders have been forced to devote an unusual share of their income on housing: doing so is the Island norm.

For the Island's handful of resident renters the picture is quite different. First, there is a large supply of unoccupied potentially rentable housing in the off-season, not uncommonly available to "house sitters" under a variety of financial arrangements (note the large percentage of households paying no cash rent). Median gross rent on the Island in April, 2000 was reported at \$610, half-way between the Statewide and Washington County figures, and not far from either, in sharp contrast to owner-occupied units.

There has been change since 2000. The Warren Group's website data indicates that in 2007 the median sales price for single-family homes in New Shoreham was \$1,450,000, double that of five years ago, requiring an annual income of about \$500,000 to support without excessive burden. Rents have also risen, though probably not to the extent that sale prices have risen. Official current rental data for very small communities, including Block Island, is not available from RI Housing. Based upon Census and 2003 RI Housing data for communities such as Charlestown and Narragansett<sup>21</sup>, observation of newspaper advertisements (when Block Island is specified), and anecdotal inputs a reasonable approximation for 2004 April rents (including all utilities) on Block Island would be in the vicinity of \$1,100 per month, affordable at 30% of a \$44,000 income if available year-round. Average annual rent would be much higher, as would the incomes necessary to support those rents. Incomes certainly have not kept pace with the appreciation in real estate values. The cost strain only gets worse.

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<sup>21</sup> RI Housing, "RI Housing Survey: Year-end 2003 vs. Year-end 2002," e-mail enclosure.

## Location.

Because Block Island is located 12 miles of the coast of Rhode Island and has enormous appeal as a summer resort, its problems are different from those of other towns in Rhode Island. Those twelve miles mean that unlike all other communities in Rhode Island it is essential for Block Island to have within it a housing stock capable of serving the full diversity of those who provide services to the community and its visitors, without reliance on commuting. It also means that providing housing for those who provide services must compete in the market with those seeking this place for leisure housing.

Housing located within the “Village and Transition” area of the community is generally well serviced not only with utilities and access but also has pedestrian proximity to a variety of other services, as well. Most of the Town’s land area and a large share of its housing are outside of that compact central area, and therefore are less fully serviced. 1990 Census data tabulated in the *Housing Data Base* indicates that fewer than a quarter of Block Island’s dwelling units are serviced with Town water or sewer, but the island’s hydrogeology is actually more supportive of that dispersed pattern than it would be of a more concentrated one reliant on public services, based upon extensive studies by the USGS and others.

## UNMET HOUSING NEEDS

Table 3 “Block Island Affordable Housing Needs” outlines an effort to broadly estimate housing needs now, in the near future, and at build-out. The Census indicated that Block Island had 1,606 total dwelling units in 2000, and careful build-out estimates made for the *Comprehensive Plan* indicated that about another 400 housing units might be expected to be added to that, given current zoning and trends in open space acquisition<sup>22</sup>. The actions intended under this *Plan* would increase that build-out by about 100 housing units, resulting in the estimate used anticipating 2,100 housing units on the Island at build-out, given this *Plan*.

As discussed above, in 2000 more than two-thirds of Block Island’s housing units were being reserved by

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<sup>22</sup> “Growth and the Comprehensive Plan,” Herr Associates, 2001, Table 1, page 9. The year 2060 is used as an approximation for “build-out,” since development never really ends, as evidenced by Manhattan and Hong Kong, but post-2060 growth is projected to be minimal unless something fundamentally changes.

their owners for seasonal use, so were not available for year-round occupancy. The share of Block Island housing reserved for seasonal use grew significantly between 1990 and 2000 both on Block Island<sup>23</sup> and in each of three somewhat similar islands studied (see Table 4, *Island Housing Occupancy Change 1990-2000*). Continuation of the year 2000 share of year round housing for estimates at build-out is probably, if anything, on the high side<sup>24</sup>. That continuation would result in 650 year-round housing units on the Island at build-out.

There are a number of bases for estimating the need for low and moderate income housing. The Rhode Island Low and Moderate Income Housing Act<sup>25</sup> calls for 10% of all housing to be made affordable through local, state, or federal subsidies. That calls for 50 subsidized units based on the year 2000 number of year-round housing units. At present, the Town has 36 such units, as determined by RI Housing, leaving a “gap” of 14 units<sup>26</sup>. The pending addition of the West Side units will more than cover that gap. Approximately 110 Block Island households in 2000 had incomes low enough to qualify for government subsidies and also were paying more than 35% of their income on rent, an alternative indicator of need. A survey undertaken by Block Island Housing Board in spring 2003 indicated a then-unfilled demand for about 50 affordable year-round housing units, supporting the reasonability of the number derived from Census figures<sup>27</sup>.

As discussed earlier, the high cost of New Shoreham’s housing coupled with resident incomes that are not unusually high means that there is a housing need here that extends beyond the income limits for state

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<sup>23</sup> The 1990-2000 apparent stability in the percentage of all units occupied year-round reflects a falling vacancy rate and rounding.

<sup>24</sup> See the Technical Appendix at the end of this document for a full analysis of seasonality of housing on Block Island and its impact on the future count of year-round housing units.

<sup>25</sup> RIGL Chapter 45-53, as amended in 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Documented in “Low and Moderate Income Housing by Community,” updated April, 2007, a tabulation provided by RI Housing.

<sup>27</sup> Block Island Housing Board, spring, 2003. The survey, unpublished, had a large response rate and also covered other topics.

and federal housing subsidies, perhaps all the way from the 80% of area median income limit for current government programs up to 140% of area median income. Based upon Census data, about another 45 households would be defined as having a need for such “attainable” housing in 2000, since they qualify in income and are now paying more than 35% of income on housing. At build-out, we estimate that attainable need to be about 60 units.

There also is a need for affordable housing for seasonal workers. The *Comprehensive Plan* indicates that there were about 1,500 employees on-Island in the summer of 2000, a growth of about 400 employees since 1980<sup>28</sup>. Reflecting on this and other studies, seasonal-only employment totaled about 1,000 workers in 2000 and will likely total about 1,400 employees at build-out.

In 2003 a locally conducted survey of employers and employees nicely illuminated needs for provisions for those employees<sup>29</sup>. Essentially all of those seasonal employees need housing, and most of them don’t earn enough to compete for housing against summer visitors. Over the years that need has been accommodated in a variety of ways, but with soaring housing prices and rising standards for what constitutes acceptable conditions the ability of traditional means to meet the need has declined, making seasonal employee housing a matter of real public concern. About 240 seasonal employees currently are provided with employer-supported housing. Employers cite need for accommodations to serve about another 90 workers at this point, indicating an overall need for supported housing for about a third of all summer-only employees.

Estimating the components of unmet need involves more uncertainty and unpredictable change over time. The 2003 Block Island Housing Board survey indicated that about 60% of the year-round resident housing need was for owner-occupied units, the rest for rental housing, which is not very different from the current occupancy split. Needs for rental housing are prominently illustrated by the difficulty for new young teachers to obtain housing. Rental units would especially well serve the needs not only of those without the means for market housing but also with circumstances making permanent housing commit-

ments. Since the market without incentives may fail to meet that need, it is one for which a target for efforts is appropriate, and that would be to maintain the historic 60/40 tenure split.

There has been relatively little interest over the years in housing reserved for seniors only. In the early 1990s when a project (Martin House) was to have been so-limited applicant interest was so low that the age limitation was dropped. The share of New Shoreham population over 65 has been steadily declining from 21% in 1980 to 17% in 2000, despite growth Statewide (from 13% to 15%). However, seniors continue to comprise a large share of the community’s lower-income households (see Table 7) and an even larger share of the households spending a high share of income (greater than 30%) on housing. Analysis of 2000 Census housing data by RI Housing shows that elderly households comprised 42% of the Block Island households having incomes below 80% of the area median and spending more than 30% of that income on housing. However, none of the affordable housing units on Block Island are counted by RI Housing as being committed to serving elderly households, instead being counted as serving only families<sup>30</sup>.

Just as is true nationally, large households are declining as a share of the Block Island population. Average household size for Block Island dropped from 3.6 persons per household in 1990 to 2.1 persons per household in 2000. Census tabulations indicate that contrary to past conditions, in 2000 large-household needs are, if anything, lower than those of smaller households (see Table 7). Special provisions for large households accordingly are not a priority.

Persons having some form of special needs are a substantial share of the total Block Island population. For example, about 250 residents or 28% of the population on Block Island over 5 years old was reported in the 2000 Census as having some form of disability, compared with 20% Statewide (Table 1.I). Four of the 5,700 emergency shelter clients in Rhode Island in 2003 reported New Shoreham as their place of last residence<sup>31</sup>, almost exactly the same proportion of the Rhode Island total as is the Town’s population.

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<sup>28</sup> Table 3, page 9 in Herr Associates, “Growth and the Comprehensive Plan,” revised December 5, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Block Island Housing Board, survey summer, 2003, tabulated 8/10/03.

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<sup>30</sup> Shown in a tabulation titled “RIH Analysis of New Shoreham’s LMI Housing Need by CHAS data (as of 2/8/2005).” Our own analysis corroborates the 42% figure.

<sup>31</sup> Data from “Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Annual Report,” January, 2004, Appendix page 22.

Assuring that housing development in future years will include units physically capable of serving those having special needs such as a vision or mobility disability can be and is being planned. However, the number of persons sharing any single special need, such as those with psychiatric disabilities or substance abuse problems, is so small that providing such services through a housing-based program is rarely if ever likely to be feasible on the Island.

## GOALS AND POLICIES

Nothing in this supplemental study effort suggests departure from the Housing Goals and Objectives as expressed in the *Comprehensive Plan* (page 18). In brief, they covered five topics:

- Maintaining population diversity and avoidance of substandard housing for seasonal workers;
- Defining an activist role for the Town in dealing with housing;
- Shaping land use policy to help meet housing needs;
- Acting incrementally, rather than through large-scale projects or sweeping but untested regulatory change;
- Coupling actions to serve housing needs with actions serving other interests at the same time.

In addressing those goals, State-defined goals will be served as well: deteriorating and substandard housing will be upgraded to the degree that it exists, new housing opportunities for all segments of the population will be provided, and the documented need for affordable and attainable housing opportunities will be pursued.

## RESOURCES AND ACTIONS

### Municipal Agencies

As is generally true in smaller communities, responsibility for housing is shared among a number of Town agencies. These are among them.

- The Town Council sets Town policy and is the ultimate authority on most matters, including housing;
- The Town Manager carries policy into action, including housing action;
- The Planning Board has taken leadership on long range planning for housing, including preparation of this supplement, and has a key administrative role in the handling of development applications;

- The Block Island Affordable Housing Board (also referred to as the Block Island Housing Trust), created in 2003 after authorization by the RI legislature on the request of the Town, is funded through a tax on summer rentals, and is charged with coordinating and advancing the Town's housing efforts.
- The Office of the Building Official plays a key role in administering housing-related construction codes and the State Minimum Housing code, which in light of the large number of rentals on the Island is of critical importance.

### Public and Private Resources

The resources available go beyond the listing of public agencies.

- The Block Island Economic Development Foundation ("BIED") has been a leader in the development of affordable housing units, including nine units at Old Harbor Meadows, and the 20-unit all-affordable project on West Side Road that will close the gap between the number of units counted by the State as "low/moderate income" and the number required to meet the State standard for having met housing needs in this decade for the purposes of the Low-Moderate Income Housing Act
- The Town itself has contributed sites for the development of affordable housing, for example four units at Ambrose Lane.
- Private citizens and organizations have contributed land or funding, for example ten units at Salt Pond Settlement which were sold at below-market prices as a result of Town zoning incentives.

It is striking that on Block Island addressing housing needs is not a compartmentalized activity engaged in by a few, but is rather a community effort involving a truly broad array of people and organizations.

### Sites for Housing Development and Conversion of Existing Structures

Map 2 of the *Comprehensive Plan* (page 10) illustrates how limited the supply of developable land is on the Island. Build-out studies prepared for the *Comprehensive Plan* indicate a potential growth of only about 300 dwelling units from 2007 to build-out, with the expectation that build-out would be reached

at a gradually slowing rate<sup>32</sup>. More recent building permit data is consistent with that projection (see Table 8).

Most of the remaining developable land lies outside of the well-serviced Village and transition area, and is in relatively small parcels. To explicitly identify sites in advance of fully developed proposals for action would, in this context, be counter-productive, but some locational preferences can be cited. Where possible, there is a preference for achieving affordability through creative reuse of sites already in use, exemplified by the Salt Pond Settlement, where below-market units have been created through adaptive reuse of an inn. There is preference for sites where services are good and auto dependence is smallest, which suggests the Village area. However, at the same time it is important that a diversity of housing opportunities be available in all areas of the Town, so that there is support for well-sited affordable efforts outside of that central area, as well. The Town must also be careful to protect the countryside views that bring tourists or those potential visitors will go to other areas that are easier to get to. Without tourists, Block Island loses its main industry, and the State loses tax revenue.

### Financial Strategies

The creation of the Block Island Housing Board provides an important new resource for housing finance. So, too, does the commitment of the Town Council to housing affordability. In tandem, there is much they can accomplish. For example, the Council has recently authorized a loan of up to approximately \$300,000 to the Housing Board, enabling it to have resources in anticipation of future seasonal rental tax revenues. Of even more importance is the continuation of the spirit of community and stewardship that in the past has made it possible for land to serve both housing and open space interests being acquired at below market cost using charitable contributions as well as public funding. There is a legitimate concern that the emergence of less public-interest oriented developments pressing forward despite widespread Island opposition, all in the name of creating affordability, could damage that rare community practice of property owners, the Town, charitable organizations, and sometimes the State working together to address the island's singular housing challenge.

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<sup>32</sup> See "Growth and the Comprehensive Plan," and "LAND Modeling for Block Island," both by Herr Associates 2001 for the New Shoreham Planning Board.

## HOUSING ACTION PLAN

The *Comprehensive Plan* in each of its iterations has indicated the Town's intention to pursue a number of means of achieving progress on affordable housing, many of which have now been taken. The proposed housing trust has been created, along with a tax on seasonal rental housing. Accessory dwelling regulations have been refined to encourage greater use of their provisions and to assure that the units created serve important housing needs. Town land has been provided for housing development. Planned Development legislation has been framed, adopted, and is being applied to support affordable housing development. Regulation for detached multi-family dwellings has been favorably amended. The needs for seasonal employee housing have been explored, and efforts are anticipated in the future to expand upon housing that is reserved at affordable cost for that use. The organizational, financial, and regulatory infrastructure for housing accomplishment is largely in place. It now simply needs time to carry out the program outlined. Table 5 "Filling Block Island Housing Needs" outlines the plan for doing so, and Table 6 "Filling Block Island Housing Needs Summary" provides an overview of the results.

As is common elsewhere, achieving production of affordable or attainable housing not only involves many separate actions but also most of the individual projects involve use of a number of tools and funding sources conjunctively. It is difficult to attribute unit production to types of action since they are joined. Because of such duplication, the total of units anticipated to be developed is smaller than the total of the estimates of frequency of use for various devices.

In considering numerical outcomes, it also is critical to understand the highly unpredictable nature of housing development and change in a community as small as Block Island, especially when speaking of categories of housing outside of the statutorily salient year-round affordable housing numbers. The Plan's intention is to achieve development over time so that will assure a sufficient number of low and moderate income subsidized units to meet the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act's 10% of year-round housing criterion not only based on the year 2010 decennial census but on the likely results of following censuses, as well, thus enabling the Town's housing efforts to proceed without the distractions of unplanned initiatives by others impairing sound achievements. The unit estimates for other housing types, seasonal and "attainable," are estimates of likely outcomes of the efforts being proposed, but are not hard commitments in the same sense as the

commitment to having 10% of year-round housing “counted” as affordable both in the near term and in the long term.

In order for housing units to be counted towards the Town’s meeting the standards of the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (“LMI units”) they must have been produced with the assistance of some form of public subsidy, whether local, state, or federal, and their continuing affordability must be assured for at least 30 years through land lease and/or deed restriction. Where references are made below to “documented affordability” or similar words the intention is that the units involved will be deed or lease restricted to assure long-term affordability and will be subsidized, whether through some form of public funding or through regulatory density bonuses, internal subsidies, or similar assistance consistent with RIGL 45-53-4(11).

In brief summary, here is how it is planned to achieve the 10% LMI housing unit goal.

**ACHIEVING THE 10% LMI GOAL**

**Short term actions**

The following are among the actions to be taken over the next year or so.

- Consideration of and decisions about the unimplemented recommendations of the Land Use Density Discussion Panel cited above, involving that Panel, the Planning Board, the Housing Board, and the Town Council, among others. Among the ideas raised are to encourage lower-density projects in outlying areas and higher densities where served with public utilities, such as Downtown; and to allow shared utilities.
- Working together with employers to identify means of assuring continuing affordability of existing employee housing and exploration of their willingness to participate in meeting the employee housing need that they have documented, with BIED and the Planning Board taking lead roles. Consideration will be given to the possibility of more formal provisions linking jobs and housing to assure adequacy and even-

Year	2005	2010	2020
<b>Total year-round units</b>			
Decennial census basis	497	540	600
Estimated actual	520	560	620
<b>Low Moderate Income Units counted</b>			
Existing 2007	36	36	36
New multi-unit project units counted		24	28
Accessory units counted		3	3
Total LMI counted units	36	63	67
<b>LMI counted % of year-round units</b>			
Based on decennial census units	7.24%	11.7%	11.2%
Based on actual year-round units	6.92%	11.3%	10.8%

Source: Tables 3 and 5 below.

handedness in responsibilities for making such accommodations.

- Working with owners of accessory apartments and with others to identify means of assuring continuing affordability of existing employee housing and exploration of regulatory change to assure affordability of at least some of the accessory units being created, and their possible inclusion in the RI Housing inventory of affordable housing, with the Planning Board taking the lead. As noted on the preceding page, inclusion requires that the units must have been built or rehabbed with the assistance of some form of local, state, or federal subsidy housing program, and that their continuing affordability must be assured for at least 30 years through land lease and/or deed restriction. Such units can well serve special cases, such as the elderly or handicapped, who may find them to be a beneficial alternative to either group living or total independence. Barnstable, MA, has pioneered a highly successful program that combines regulatory change with technical assistance and affordability requirements, serving this objective.

### Longer term actions

#### DOCUMENTING ASSURANCE OF LONG-TERM AFFORDABILITY FOR UNITS NOW AFFORDABLY PRICED.

Two quick examples illustrate what is involved. About 240 summer workers on the Island are now benefited by employer-supported housing at a price affordable to the worker. Those units don't appear in the State's inventory of subsidized housing because no government funds are involved and because there is no long-term assurance that the units will remain affordable. There also is a growing inventory of accessory housing units that are subject to deed restrictions limiting them to occupancy by year-round residents. By their nature those units are relatively inexpensive to the occupant, but there is no documented assurance that such affordability will always be provided. In those two examples plus others, affordable housing is actually being provided on Block Island, often in relatively "invisible" ways. Given the pressures of the marketplace, there is a benefit in gaining long-term assurance of affordability where it already exists, and perhaps obtaining it in some similar cases where it does not.

Responsible parties: Housing Board coordinating, with the Planning Board and Building Official.  
Resources: existing regulation, possible new regulatory incentives.

Unit production: no new units, affordability documented or created and documented for approximately 60 units by build-out.

#### FUNDING THROUGH THE HOUSING BOARD.

Since it is still new, it isn't yet clear how much funding will be available to the Housing Board through the summer rental tax revenue that is dedicated to it, but it is on the order of \$80,000 per year, enough if skillfully leveraged against other funds to give the Board a key role in initiating housing efforts. There are already three projects pending in which the Board is anticipated to be involved, and in each case, also involving other sources of support. In tabulations of efforts, we have attributed projects to this organization even when others are also contributing.

Responsible party: Housing Board.

Resources: revenue from tax on rentals.

Unit production: involved in approximately 55 units by build-out.

#### ADAPTIVE REUSE OF EXISTING STRUCTURES.

The Salt Pond Settlement development, involving adaptive reuse of an inn, exemplifies the type of development that can augment housing resources, including affordable housing, without involving land still in a natural state, and taking advantage of existing structural investment. Further opportunities of that sort are likely to occasionally occur in the future (one did so during the drafting of this material). Individual structures cannot now be identified, but in the majority of cases they would be located within the Village and Transitional areas, and as evidenced by community response to a recent adaptive reuse proposal, most appropriately when within the portions of those areas which are zoned for business, mixed use, or the highest-density residential district (RC).

Responsible parties: private parties initiating, authorized by action of the Town Council and Planning Board.

Resources: substantial inventory of large older structures, chiefly privately owned.

Unit production: perhaps 25 units by build-out.

#### REUSE OF STRUCTURES PRESERVED FROM OTHER SITES.

New Shoreham zoning provides for a delay process prior to demolition of a building, designed to allow alternatives to that action to be taken, including

relocation of the structure onto another site, where it may be one part of an affordable development effort. One of the three pending projects involves exactly this. A handful of units per decade is probably all that can be anticipated to find such use, but the benefits are not only affordability but also sustainability and protection of community character.

Responsible parties: private parties initiating, Building Official administration, sometimes Housing Board and/or Town Council for financing and sites.  
Resources: older homes of limited market value but real housing value, sometimes assistance from the Housing Board and Town land.  
Unit production: perhaps 15 units by build-out.

#### ACCESSORY UNITS.

There are now about twenty dwelling units developed under the Town's zoning provisions that provide for deeded restrictions to assure their use for year-round housing, while their nature (and in the future, perhaps deeded restrictions) assure that they will be relatively affordable. Their nature also assures that some share of them is likely to be occupied by seniors and by persons having disabilities. As cited above, Barnstable, MA has demonstrated the ability of a well-designed program to achieve voluntary commitment of units to long-term affordability. Again the numbers of units is not anticipated to be large, but it is steady and, unlike large development projects, relatively non-disturbing.

Responsible parties: private initiative, Building Official and Minimum Housing Inspector administration.  
Resources: existing regulation, large stock of units that could potentially comply.  
Unit production: 24 by build-out.

#### BRINGING AFFORDABILITY TO EXISTING UNITS.

There are many ways of reducing the price of a given housing unit and assuring that it stays that way. Communities like Block Island commonly use federal grants to help write down the unit price, and in return attach a deed restriction assuring that the initial level of affordability will be maintained over time and ownership change. Potential locations exist all over the Island. The units produced should include ones adapted to meet requirements for seniors and for households having special needs, such as special access or sensory requirements that can be met through adaptation of the housing unit.

Responsible parties: Housing Board coordinating,

with the Town Council, Planning Board and Building Official participating.

Resources: existing regulation, possible new regulatory incentives, Housing Board funding.  
Unit production: no new units, affordability created and documented for approximately 24 units by build-out.

#### MULTI-UNIT EMPLOYEE HOUSING.

Seasonal employee housing can be developed with relatively low construction cost per unit, initially building it only for seasonal occupancy, and taking advantage of the possibility of some sharing of facilities among units without losing their status as "dwelling units." Again, contributed land and even some minor funding from the Housing Board might be involved, along with community cooperation in developing and furnishing the units.

Responsible parties: initiative by the Housing Board, others to be determined, including possible private interests, BIED, and (for possible regulatory change) the Planning Board and Town Council.  
Resources: public and business recognition of the problem, possible assistance with land and funding through the Town Council and the Housing Board.  
Unit production: 30 units by build-out.

#### REGULATORY CHANGE.

Block Island has taken many steps over the years in its regulations to facilitate housing affordability, including the Planned Development zoning that has been instrumental in two recent developments. The Land Use Density Discussion Panel has suggested a number of innovations, including a provision allowing substantially greater density for affordable housing development based upon case-by-case plan review and a special-use permit process.

Responsible parties: Planning Board for development, Town Council for adoption.  
Resources: capacities of Town government.  
Unit production: involved in perhaps 60 units by build-out.

#### **Consistency of affordable unit projections with build-out studies and infrastructure.**

This *Plan* projects that at build-out there would be an increase of about 130 affordable or attainable housing units over the number that now exist, with just 31 of those being the affordable year-round units which are the focus of the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, the others all serving attainable and/or seasonal

housing needs. In many cases, as discussed above, that outcome would be achieved in part through bringing affordability to units that already exist. In other cases the units being counted would have been built in any event, but given these efforts would be affordable. The accessory units involve no land not otherwise developed. In some cases, however, implementing this *Plan* would entail raising densities above that which otherwise would exist. Careful review of the numbers indicates that the best estimate is that the build-out level would be increased by fewer than 100 housing units, no more than from 2,000 to 2,100 units, a 5% increase in the build-out total.

All things being equal, a 5% increase in housing units means a 5% increase in traffic, water consumption, nitrate loading on groundwater, school enrollments, and many other considerations of that kind. The *Comprehensive Plan* effort was underpinned by thorough study of build-out and related impacts<sup>33</sup>. In no case was there evidence that some resource capacity would be more limiting upon development than land at the densities allowed under then-current zoning, in fact to the contrary it was clear that with sound management land was, indeed, the most limiting factor, by a margin more substantial than a 5% increment to accommodate affordability. On that basis, these proposals are solidly consistent with the build-out.

## CONCLUSION

It appears that Block Island will readily reach and maintain consistency with the policy objective of the RI Low and Moderate Income Act, importantly because the housing effort entailed in doing so is one that the community would want to undertake in any event. Because of the Island's special circumstances, meeting the community's own definition of need is unusually demanding, for it involves serving not only year-round but also seasonal needs, and not only the needs of those at incomes substantially below the regional median, but also the needs of those whose incomes, although above that, are insufficient to compete for housing within the seasonal resident-driven market.

The breadth of concrete actions now underway within the Town and undertaken in recent years attest to the importance given by the Town to meeting housing needs for this community, and the approach of those actions, rooted in efforts both locally initiated and locally supported, suggests the approach that is likely to continue the Town's record of achievement.

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<sup>33</sup> Herr Associates, "LAND Modeling for Block Island," revised December 6, 2001.

Table 1. RHODE ISLAND SELECTED HOUSING DATA - 2000 US CENSUS

Subject	Number			Percentage		
	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.
<b>Total housing units</b>	439,837	56,816	1,606	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>A. YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT</b>						
1999 to March 2000	4,334	1,081	53	1.0%	1.9%	3.3%
1995 to 1998	13,645	3,538	122	3.1%	6.2%	7.6%
1990 to 1994	20,326	4,731	226	4.6%	8.3%	14.1%
1980 to 1989	50,618	10,269	266	11.5%	18.1%	16.6%
1970 to 1979	58,999	10,127	193	13.4%	17.8%	12.0%
1960 to 1969	56,989	7,459	184	13.0%	13.1%	11.5%
1940 to 1959	105,709	9,876	198	24.0%	17.4%	12.3%
1939 or earlier	129,217	9,735	364	29.4%	17.1%	22.7%
<b>B. UNITS IN STRUCTURE</b>						
1 unit, detached	241,202	43,804	1,416	54.8%	77.1%	88.2%
1 unit, attached	12,682	1,712	50	2.9%	3.0%	3.1%
2 units	54,226	4,040	90	12.3%	7.1%	5.6%
3 or 4 units	56,499	2,390	36	12.8%	4.2%	2.2%
5 to 9 units	22,808	1,338	10	5.2%	2.4%	0.6%
10 to 19 units	14,769	892	2	3.4%	1.6%	0.1%
20+ units	32,964	1,485	2	7.5%	2.6%	0.1%
Mobile home	4,563	1,088	0	1.0%	1.9%	0.0%
Boat, RV, etc.	124	67	0	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
<b>C. HOUSING OCCUPANCY</b>						
Total housing units	439,837	56,816	1,606	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Occupied housing units*	408,424	46,907	472*	92.9%	82.6%	29.4%
Owner-occupied	245,156	34,164	320	55.7%	60.1%	19.9%
Renter-occupied	163,268	12,743	152	37.1%	22.4%	9.5%
Family households	265,398	32,020	250	60.3%	56.4%	15.6%
Non-family households	143,026	14,887	222	32.5%	26.2%	13.8%
Vacant housing units	31,413	9,909	1,134	7.1%	17.4%	70.6%
For occasional use	12,988	8,157	1,109	3.0%	14.4%	69.1%
Homeowner vacancy rate (%)	1.0	0.9	0.6			
Rental vacancy rate (%)	5.0	4.8	4.4			
% of occupied housing units						
Owner-occupied				60.0%	72.8%	67.8%
Renter-occupied				40.0%	27.2%	32.2%
Family households				65.0%	68.3%	53.0%
Non-family households				35.0%	31.7%	47.0%

\* Note that "year-round" units equal occupied units plus vacant units not held for occasional use. See Technical Appendix for further explanation.

Table 1. RHODE ISLAND SELECTED HOUSING DATA - 2000 US CENSUS (continued)

Subject	Number			Percentage of households		
	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.
<b>D. INCOME IN 1999</b>						
<b>Households</b>	408,412	46,882	473	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<\$10,000	43,800	2,781	34	10.7%	5.9%	7.2%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	28,604	2,342	25	7.0%	5.0%	5.3%
\$15,000 to 24,999	50,524	4,455	66	12.4%	9.5%	14.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	48,428	5,134	62	11.9%	11.0%	13.1%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	64,068	6,952	70	15.7%	14.8%	14.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	82,350	10,784	89	20.2%	23.0%	18.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	43,623	6,589	65	10.7%	14.1%	13.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	31,162	5,314	35	7.6%	11.3%	7.4%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	7,914	1,303	13	1.9%	2.8%	2.7%
\$200,000 or more	7,939	1,228	14	1.9%	2.6%	3.0%
Median \$	\$42,090	\$53,103	\$44,779			
<b>Owner-occupied units (part)</b>	202,216	29,739	269	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>E. VALUE</b>						
Less than \$50,000	1,742	149	0	0.9%	0.5%	0.0%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	39,809	2,042	2	19.7%	6.9%	0.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	85,975	11,132	6	42.5%	37.4%	2.2%
\$150,000 to 199,999	37,675	7,312	7	18.6%	24.6%	2.6%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	23,885	5,979	25	11.8%	20.1%	9.3%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	9,547	2,222	110	4.7%	7.5%	40.9%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	2,893	699	101	1.4%	2.4%	37.5%
\$1,000,000 or more	690	204	18	0.3%	0.7%	6.7%
Median (dollars)	\$133,000	\$158,600	\$479,300			
<b>F. OWNER MONTHLY HOUSING COSTS AS % OF 1999 HOUSEHOLD INCOME</b>						
Less than 15.0%	60,992	8,951	59	30.2%	30.1%	21.9%
15.0 to 19.9%	36,833	5,655	31	18.2%	19.0%	11.5%
20.0 to 24.9%	31,187	4,932	34	15.4%	16.6%	12.6%
25.0 to 29.9%	22,512	3,401	20	11.1%	11.4%	7.4%
30.0 to 34.9%	14,859	2,011	39	7.3%	6.8%	14.5%
35 percent or more	34,615	4,659	86	17.1%	15.7%	32.0%
Not computed	1,218	130	0			
<b>Renter-occupied units (part)</b>	162,629	12,466	140	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>G. GROSS RENT</b>						
Less than \$200	15,195	683	2	9.3%	5.5%	1.4%
\$200 to \$299	10,184	718	8	6.3%	5.8%	5.7%
\$300 to \$499	36,730	1,610	26	22.6%	12.9%	18.6%
\$500 to \$749	62,681	4,691	46	38.5%	37.6%	32.9%
\$750 to \$999	20,921	2,598	30	12.9%	20.8%	21.4%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	7,820	1,248	4	4.8%	10.0%	2.9%
\$1,500 or more	2,697	207	0	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%
No cash rent	6,401	711	24	3.9%	5.7%	17.1%
Median (dollars)	\$553	\$645	\$610			

Table 1. RHODE ISLAND SELECTED HOUSING DATA - 2000 US CENSUS (continued)

Subject	Number			Percentage		
	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.	R.I.	Wash Cty	Block Is.
<b>H. GROSS RENT AS % OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN 1999</b>						
Less than 15.0%	30,363	2,091	37	18.7%	16.8%	26.4%
15.0 to 19.9%	22,445	1,873	4	13.8%	15.0%	2.9%
20.0 to 24.9%	20,708	1,651	23	12.7%	13.2%	16.4%
25.0 to 29.9%	19,116	1,388	13	11.8%	11.1%	9.3%
30.0 to 34.9%	12,442	867	11	7.7%	7.0%	7.9%
35% or more	47,025	3,635	25	28.9%	29.2%	17.9%
Not computed	10,530	961	27	6.5%	7.7%	19.3%
<b>I. DISABLED POPULATION</b>						
Population 5 -20 years	234,287	28,796	140	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
With a disability	21,713	2,405	12	9.3%	8.4%	8.6%
Population 21 - 64 years	589,705	71,443	629	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
With a disability	116,305	10,102	215	19.7%	14.1%	34.2%
Population 65 and older	143,565	14,849	176	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
With a disability	57,788	5,301	35	40.3%	35.7%	19.9%

Affordable\Census Data

Table 2. RHODE ISLAND HOUSING OCCUPANCY, 2000

Place	Number of housing units				% of total housing units		
	Total	Occupied	Vacant	Seasonal	Occupied	Vacant	Seasonal
Rhode Island	439,837	408,424	31,413	12,988	92.9%	7.1%	3.0%
<b>New Shoreham</b>	<b>1,606</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>1,134</b>	<b>1,109</b>	<b>29.4%</b>	<b>70.6%</b>	<b>69.1%</b>
Charlestown	4,797	3,178	1,619	1,479	66.2%	33.8%	30.8%
Little Compton	2,103	1,475	628	587	70.1%	29.9%	27.9%
Narragansett	9,159	6,846	2,313	2,035	74.7%	25.3%	22.2%
South Kingstown	11,291	9,268	2,023	1,726	82.1%	17.9%	15.3%
Westerly	11,292	9,402	1,890	1,404	83.3%	16.7%	12.4%
Jamestown	2,769	2,359	410	341	85.2%	14.8%	12.3%
Newport city	13,226	11,566	1,660	858	87.4%	12.6%	6.5%
Portsmouth	7,386	6,758	628	381	91.5%	8.5%	5.2%
Providence	67,915	62,389	5,526	343	91.9%	8.1%	0.5%
Middletown	7,603	6,993	610	193	92.0%	8.0%	2.5%
Central Falls	7,270	6,696	574	6	92.1%	7.9%	0.1%
Tiverton	6,474	6,077	397	191	93.9%	6.1%	3.0%
Glocester	3,786	3,559	227	142	94.0%	6.0%	3.8%
Pawtucket	31,819	30,047	1,772	71	94.4%	5.6%	0.2%
North Kingstown	10,743	10,154	589	266	94.5%	5.5%	2.5%
Warren	4,977	4,708	269	88	94.6%	5.4%	1.8%
Woonsocket	18,757	17,750	1,007	31	94.6%	5.4%	0.2%
West Warwick	13,186	12,498	688	71	94.8%	5.2%	0.5%
East Greenwich	5,226	4,960	266	44	94.9%	5.1%	0.8%
Exeter	2,196	2,085	111	38	94.9%	5.1%	1.7%
Hopkinton	3,112	2,965	147	72	95.3%	4.7%	2.3%
Burrillville	5,821	5,559	262	127	95.5%	4.5%	2.2%
Bristol	8,705	8,314	391	130	95.5%	4.5%	1.5%
Warwick	37,085	35,517	1,568	493	95.8%	4.2%	1.3%
East Providence	21,309	20,530	779	73	96.3%	3.7%	0.3%
Coventry	13,059	12,596	463	198	96.5%	3.5%	1.5%
Cranston	32,068	30,954	1,114	100	96.5%	3.5%	0.3%
North Providence	14,867	14,351	516	74	96.5%	3.5%	0.5%
West Greenwich	1,809	1,749	60	22	96.7%	3.3%	1.2%
Johnston	11,574	11,197	377	48	96.7%	3.3%	0.4%
Scituate	3,904	3,780	124	22	96.8%	3.2%	0.6%
Richmond	2,620	2,537	83	28	96.8%	3.2%	1.1%
Lincoln	8,508	8,243	265	36	96.9%	3.1%	0.4%
Barrington	6,199	6,011	188	62	97.0%	3.0%	1.0%
Cumberland	12,572	12,198	374	36	97.0%	3.0%	0.3%
North Smithfield	4,070	3,954	116	12	97.1%	2.9%	0.3%
Smithfield	7,396	7,194	202	42	97.3%	2.7%	0.6%
Foster	1,578	1,535	43	9	97.3%	2.7%	0.6%
Washington County	56,816	46,907	9,909	8,157	82.6%	17.4%	14.4%
Newport County	39,561	35,228	4,333	2,551	89.0%	11.0%	6.4%
Providence County	253,214	239,936	13,278	1,172	94.8%	5.2%	0.5%
Kent County	70,365	67,320	3,045	828	95.7%	4.3%	1.2%
Bristol County	19,881	19,033	848	280	95.7%	4.3%	1.4%

Source: US Census, 2000.

Data A\Demog-RI\Occupancy

Table 3. **BLOCK ISLAND HOUSING NEEDS**

Category of demand	2000	2005	2010	2020	2030	Build-out
<b>Year-round housing needs</b>						
Total housing units	1,610	1,706	1,800	1,900	2,000	2,100
<b>Year-round units</b>						
% of total	31%	31%	31%	31%	31%	31%
# year-round units	497	530	560	590	620	650
<b>"Affordable" needs</b>						
% of yr-round units	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
# affordable units needed	50	53	56	59	62	65
<b>"Attainable" needs</b>						
% of year-round units	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%
# attainable units needed	45	48	50	53	56	59
<b>Seasonal employee housing needs</b>						
Summer-only jobs	1,040	1,030	1,030	1,100	1,170	1,400
Workers with housing needs	310	310	310	330	350	420
Workers/unit	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Worker units needed</b>						
Affordable	69	69	69	73	78	93
Attainable	34	34	34	37	39	47

"Attainable" housing defined as affordable at 140% of area median income.  
 Seasonal worker units assumed to accommodate two workers on average.

1/26/2008

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**Table 4. ISLAND HOUSING OCCUPANCY CHANGE 1990 - 2000**

	Block Island	Martha's Vineyard	Nantucket	Shelter Island
<b>Total housing units</b>				
1990	1,264	11,604	7,021	2,148
2000	1,606	14,836	9,210	2,370
Growth #	342	3,232	2,189	222
Growth %	27.1%	27.9%	31.2%	10.3%
<b>April-occupied*</b>				
1990	361	5,003	2,597	1,017
2000	472	6,421	3,699	996
Growth #	111	1,418	1,102	-21
Growth %	30.7%	28.3%	42.4%	-2.1%
<b>% of total</b>				
1990	28.6%	43.1%	37.0%	47.3%
2000	29.4%	43.3%	40.2%	42.0%
<b>Held for seasonal use</b>				
1990	810	5,390	3,568	1,018
2000	1,109	7,995	5,170	1,307
Growth #	299	2,605	1,602	289
Growth %	36.9%	48.3%	44.9%	28.4%
<b>% of total</b>				
1990	64.1%	46.4%	50.8%	47.4%
2000	69.1%	53.9%	56.1%	55.1%
<b>Other vacant</b>				
1990	93	1,211	856	113
2000	24	420	341	67
Growth #	-69	-791	-515	-46
Growth %	-74.2%	-65.3%	-60.2%	-40.7%

Source: US decennial Census of Population & Housing, 1990 and 2000.

\* Note that "April-occupied" units includes no vacant units, whereas "Year-round" units includes "other vacant" units. See Technical Appendix for further explanation.

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Table 5. **FILLING BLOCK ISLAND HOUSING NEEDS**

Category of demand		2005	2010	2020	2030
<b>Filling year-round needs</b>					
<b>Affordable year-round units</b>					
	Existing units	36	36	36	36
	Current multi-unit projects		24	24	24
	Future multi-unit projects		0	4	8
	Added accessory units		3	3	3
	<b>Total yr-round affordable units</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Attainable year-round units</b>					
	Existing units	18	18	18	18
	Future multi-unit projects		20	23	26
	Added accessory units		12	14	16
	<b>Total yr-round attainable units</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Filling seasonal worker needs</b>					
<b>Affordable seasonal units</b>					
	Existing units	53	53	53	53
	Added in multi-unit bldings		15	20	25
	Added scattered site units		12	13	15
	<b>Total affordable units</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Attainable seasonal units</b>					
	Existing units	27	27	27	27
	Added in multi-unit bldings			2	5
	Added scattered site units		13	14	15
	<b>Total worker attainable units</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Total year-round and seasonal</b>					
<b>Affordable units</b>					
	Existing units	89	89	89	89
	<b>Planned total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Attainable units</b>					
	Existing units	45	45	45	45
	<b>Planned total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Total below-market</b>					
	Existing units	134	134	134	134
	<b>Planned total</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>271</b>

"Attainable" housing defined as affordable at 140% of area median income.  
 Seasonal worker units assumed to accommodate two workers on average.

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**Table 6. FILLING BLOCK ISLAND HOUSING NEEDS SUMMARY**

Category of demand		2005	2010	2020	2030
<b>Affordable units</b>					
Year-round					
	Need	53	56	59	62
	Provided	36	63	67	71
Seasonal					
	Need	69	69	73	78
	Provided	53	80	86	93
Total					
	Need	122	125	132	140
	Provided	89	143	153	164
<b>Attainable units</b>					
Year-round					
	Need	50	53	56	59
	Provided	18	50	55	60
Seasonal					
	Need	34	34	37	39
	Provided	27	40	43	47
Total					
	Need	84	87	93	97
	Provided	45	90	98	107
<b>% of needs met</b>					
Year-round					
	Affordable	68%	113%	114%	115%
	Attainable	38%	100%	104%	107%
Seasonal worker					
	Affordable	77%	116%	118%	119%
	Attainable	79%	117%	116%	122%
<b>RIGL 45-53 Low/Moderate Housing Act</b>					
	Affordable units required	53	56	59	62
	Affordable units provided	36	63	67	71
	% coverage	68%	113%	114%	115%

"Attainable" housing defined as affordable at 140% of area median income.  
 Seasonal worker units assumed to accommodate two workers on average.

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**Table 7. NEW SHOREHAM HOUSEHOLDS BY INCOME & TYPE, 2000**

Household size & type		% of regional median family income				Total
		<=30%	>30<=50%	>50<=80%	>80%	
		<b>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS</b>				
<b>Renters</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	12	4	8	0	24
	Small related (2-4 members)	8	4	10	24	46
	Large related (5+ members)	0	0	4	0	4
	Other	4	22	10	54	90
	<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Owners</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	20	16	35	54	125
	Small related (2-4 members)	8	8	16	103	135
	Large related (5+ members)	0	0	8	14	22
	Other	4	12	18	38	72
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>354</b>
<b>All households</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	32	20	43	54	149
	Small related (2-4 members)	16	12	26	127	181
	Large related (5+ members)	0	0	12	14	26
	Other	8	34	28	92	162
	<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>518</b>
		<b>PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS</b>				
<b>Renters</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	50%	13%	25%	0%	15%
	Small related (2-4 members)	33%	13%	31%	31%	28%
	Large related (5+ members)	0%	0%	13%	0%	2%
	Other	17%	73%	31%	69%	55%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Owners</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	63%	44%	45%	26%	35%
	Small related (2-4 members)	25%	22%	21%	49%	38%
	Large related (5+ members)	0%	0%	10%	7%	6%
	Other	13%	33%	23%	18%	20%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>All households</b>						
	Elderly (1 & 2 members)	57%	30%	39%	19%	29%
	Small related (2-4 members)	29%	18%	24%	44%	35%
	Large related (5+ members)	0%	0%	11%	5%	5%
	Other	14%	52%	26%	32%	31%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: US Census SOCDS CHAS Data

Note that data is based on a small sample of a small number of households.

19-Sep-04

BIAffordableHhold size

**Table 8. BUILDING PERMIT AUTHORIZATIONS**

Year	Housing un added by permits		Total housing units		Annual % increase in units		Cumulative % increase in units	
	Block Island	Rhode Island	Block Island	Rhode Island	Block Island	Rhode Island	Block Island	Rhode Island
1980	20	2,929	1,009	372,672	2.0%	0.8%	2.0%	0.8%
1981	16	3,155	1,029	375,601	1.6%	0.8%	3.6%	1.6%
1982	33	2,635	1,045	378,756	3.2%	0.7%	6.8%	2.3%
1983	22	3,787	1,078	381,391	2.0%	1.0%	9.0%	3.4%
1984	43	4,208	1,100	385,178	3.9%	1.1%	13.3%	4.5%
1985	41	5,439	1,143	389,386	3.6%	1.4%	17.3%	5.9%
1986	2	7,207	1,184	394,825	0.2%	1.8%	17.5%	7.9%
1987	27	7,285	1,186	402,032	2.3%	1.8%	20.2%	9.8%
1988	20	6,064	1,213	409,317	1.6%	1.5%	22.2%	11.5%
1989	103	3,865	1,233	415,381	8.4%	0.9%	32.4%	12.5%
1990	21	3,042	1,264	414,572	1.7%	0.7%	34.5%	13.3%
1991	11	2,377	1,285	417,614	0.9%	0.6%	35.6%	14.0%
1992	25	2,592	1,296	419,991	1.9%	0.6%	38.1%	14.6%
1993	17	2,579	1,321	422,583	1.3%	0.6%	39.7%	15.3%
1994	18	2,539	1,338	425,162	1.3%	0.6%	41.5%	16.0%
1995	23	2,331	1,356	427,701	1.7%	0.5%	43.8%	16.6%
1996	33	2,462	1,379	430,032	2.4%	0.6%	47.1%	17.3%
1997	25	2,672	1,412	432,494	1.8%	0.6%	49.6%	18.0%
1998	15	2,642	1,437	435,166	1.0%	0.6%	51.0%	18.7%
1999	19	3,414	1,452	437,808	1.3%	0.8%	52.9%	19.6%
2000	18	2,576	1,606	439,837	1.2%	0.6%	54.7%	20.3%
2001	22	2,407	1,624	442,413	1.4%	0.5%	56.9%	21.0%
2002	20	2,848	1,646	444,820	1.2%	0.6%	58.9%	21.7%
2003	24	2,286	1,666	447,668	1.4%	0.5%	61.2%	22.4%
2004	16	2,532	1,690	449,954	0.9%	0.6%	62.8%	23.0%
2005	10	2,836	1,706	452,486	0.6%	0.6%	63.8%	23.8%
2006	9	2,370	1,716	455,322	0.5%	0.5%	64.7%	24.4%
2007*	40	1,042	1,725	457,692	2.3%	0.2%	68.7%	24.7%

Sources: US Census (1980 & 90 totals, 1999 - 2004 annual) & RI Economic Development Corporation<sup>6</sup>

\* Through November for BI, June for RI.

Data\Permits

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## TECHNICAL APPENDIX

### CLARIFYING HOUSING SEASONALITY TERMS

The term “year-round housing unit” is critical to implementation of the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act (LMI Act), so it is important to be clear regarding its meaning. The total number of dwelling units (living quarters that include a kitchen and a bathroom, and are separable from any other part of the building) is enumerated for each municipality by the US Census as of April each ten years. The US Census further provides data regarding housing unit occupancy, resulting in this breakdown for Block Island in 2000:

Total Dwelling units .....	1,606
Occupied (equals the number of resident households) .....	472
Vacant .....	1,134
Held for occasional use (“seasonal units”) .....	1,109
Other vacant units .....	25

For purposes of the LMI Act, the number of “year round housing units” equals the number April-occupied units plus all vacant units that are not being held for occasional use. For Block Island, the 2000 US Census shows 472 households or April-occupied housing units, which is fewer than the 497 housing units considered to be “year round” for purposes of the LMI Act by the 25 vacant units not held for occasional use. The figure of 497 is that upon which the calculations of the 10% threshold of affordable housing units for satisfying the LMI Act are based, not the 472 units occupied in April. Thus, tables 1, 2, and 4 based upon US Census data show 472 **occupied housing units**, while tables 3, 5 and 6 show 497 **year-round housing units**.

### SEASONALITY TRENDS

Between 1990 and 2000 the share of total housing units on Block Island occupied in April grew more slowly than did the share held for occasional use, while the “other vacant” number declined by nearly 3/4ths. As a result, the share of all units on Block Island held for occasional use grew from 64% to 69% of the total housing stock. Similarly, the share of housing units held for seasonal use grew on Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket, MA and Shelter Island, NY (see table 4), as the dynamics of the real estate market consistently favored seasonal residence, as it generally has for a century in this region.

It appears that there has been little if any change in

the shares of total housing units that would be considered to be “year round” subsequent to the 2000 US Census. The source for that estimate is Block Island’s annual Groundhog Day Census. That Census is carried out annually by residents, determining the number of persons staying on the Island as of February 2. For purposes of this analysis, those returns were further analyzed to determine the number of households involved, using definitions consistent with those of the US Census. The accuracy of that enumeration is very high, since it is conducted by residents very familiar with their neighborhoods and the changes taking place. However, being a one-time snapshot it is subject to substantial variations based upon ephemera such as recent weather patterns, competing activities elsewhere, etc. Taken over a half-decade, however, the Groundhog Day census has proven to be a uniquely useful and reliable tool over time. The population results of that survey over the past five years are shown in Table 9 (next page), together with further elaboration by the survey’s organizer to produce estimates of the number of households on the Island on Groundhog Day 2000, 2004 and 2005. The year February 2000 Groundhog figure is quite credibly lower than the April 2000 US Census count of occupied housing units, reflecting as it does the likely lowest population point in the year. Working from that local source plus US Census reports of dwelling units created by year and also the year 2000 Census data, the rest of table 9 was created. It is assumed that over this short period the number of April-occupied housing units changed in proportion to the changes in the Groundhog Day household estimate. It was further assumed that the strikingly low year 2000 number of non-seasonal vacant units remained constant over the following five year period, since real estate demand was unabated and vacancies could hardly go lower. The rest is arithmetic.

The year-round units’ share of total housing stock declined from 36% of the total in 1990 to 31% in 2000. Figures for the following five years estimated in this way never depart from the 31% found in the year 2000 US Census by more than 1% upward or downward. Much of the decline of the past decade was the result of decline in “other vacant” units, which in 2000 were too few to decline that much again. Accordingly, it seems appropriate not to anticipate any lower share than the recent history of approximately 31% year-round units. Were the 1990-2000 decline to resume, the number of affordable housing units required in, say, 2010 in order to meet the standard of the LMI Housing Act would decline as well, by fewer than 2 units per percentage point decline in the year-round units share of the Town total.

There are no now-visible indicators that the year-round share of housing stock is likely to sharply increase in the future, nor are there reasons to anticipate that, but such an increase would be possible. If the entire 1990-2000 decline in the share of year-round housing were to be reversed in the next five years, it would mean a 36% year-round housing share in 2010. In that extreme event the number of affordable units required to meet the LMI Act standard would rise from 56 units as indicated in the basic analysis to 65 units, only 6 more affordable units than this action plan is projected to have produced by then. Should the annual Groundhog Day census in the next few years indicate the likelihood of a major increase in the share of housing that is year-round occupied then the efforts planned towards gaining units documented to be LMI Act “counted” should be adjusted marginally forward or upwards to avoid a period of vulnerability to regulatory exemptions under that Act.

Based upon that contingency analysis, we have projected the share of housing stock that will be year-round units as being stable at 31% of the total housing units on the Island. As indicated at page 15, the build-out total of housing units has been calculated at 2,000 housing units in earlier studies<sup>34</sup>. The strategies of this supplement, as noted at page 15, might increase that by some small amount, but not more than 100 units. We therefore used 2,100 as a conserv-

atively high figure for the build-out total of housing units in this analysis. The number used for 2010 (1,800 units) is a judgment for a figure intermediate between the 2004 Census and permit-based one and the build-out projection, relying upon the expectation that the annual rate of housing development will decline as land availability continues to decline. On that basis, the 2010 total housing projection is for 1,800 units. 31% of total housing being year-round units would mean 560 year-round units in 2010 and 650 units at build-out. Ten percent of those numbers to meet the LMI Housing Act would be 56 units in 2010 and 65 units at build-out.

It is important to recognize the large measure of uncertainty in all of these figures. Block Island once had about 40% more residents than it now has in the winter, but unanticipated change reduced that number by nearly two-thirds before the population began to rebound in the late 20th century. The Island economy and population rely almost entirely on a notoriously unstable base of preferences in leisure activities and locations. All of the numbers involved here are small, and therefore potentially volatile. What this analysis represents is a careful effort to quantify the most likely future, but planning should acknowledge that no amount of care can provide certainty in this context.

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<sup>34</sup> See especially Herr Associates “Growth and the Comprehensive Plan,” revised December 5, 2001. Those figures have been updated and incorporated into the *Town of New Shoreham Comprehensive Plan*, as adopted March 19, 2008.

Table 9. NEW SHOREHAM HOUSING SEASONALITY

		Calendar year					
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
February							
	Persons	883	896	935	963	904	1003
	Households	388	392	408	419	392	431
	Persons/household	2.28	2.28	2.29	2.30	2.31	2.33
	New units permitted	18	22	13	18	16	
	# of housing units (April)						
	Total	1606	1624	1646	1659	1677	1693
	"Year-round units"	497	502	521	535	502	549
	April occupied	472	477	496	510	477	524
	Other vacant	25	25	25	25	25	25
	"Seasonal units"	1109	1122	1125	1124	1175	1144
	% of housing units (April)						
	Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	"Year-round units"	31%	31%	32%	32%	30%	32%
	April occupied	29%	29%	30%	31%	28%	31%
	Other vacant	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%
	"Seasonal units"	69%	69%	68%	68%	70%	68%

Sources:

US Bureau of the Census: April housing unit #s, new units permitted.

Block Island Ground Hog Day Census: February data for 2000, 2003, 2004.

All other data calculated or interpolated by Herr Associates.

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