

Executive Summary

**City of East Providence, RI
Comprehensive Plan Update
Executive Summary**



INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The 1994 State-certified East Providence Comprehensive Plan (“Plan”) and the Plan’s 2004 State-certified Update were prepared to guide development and redevelopment of the City of East Providence to the year 2010 and to preserve and enhance the qualities of the City that residents value. All provisions, sections and data of these earlier adopted and certified plans, and all subsequent amendments thereto, shall remain in full force and effect. The 2009 Update of the Plan will guide the City’s land use actions through the year 2015. It was this information together with citizen input that guided the goals, policies and action items in this Update. The Plan was developed within the framework established by the Rhode Island General Laws Title 45, Chapter 22.2 (Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act).

The East Providence Comprehensive Plan 2010 seeks to ensure that East Providence’s growth is balanced with preservation and that quality of life is protected and enhanced as the City grows, with an emphasis on neighborhood preservation, a vital and welcoming business climate for small and large businesses, ample parks and recreation, improved mobility for all modes of transportation, and the protection of the City and the region’s natural resources. The Plan was prepared to provide a better understanding of the overall Comprehensive Plan as a basis for land use decisions, grant and funding priorities, and as a tool for preserving quality of life.

The Plan serves as the policy framework for a wide range of decisions concerning land use, development, design, programs, and public investment priorities. Public input, in combination with technical studies, changes to the economy, fiscal constraints, prior actions and even global changes, were taken into account in the Update of the Plan. All East Providence land use decisions must be consistent with this Plan. As with all plans, this Plan is subject to amendment as conditions, public and private resources, and preferences evolve over time.

The City began public meetings regarding the Plan update in early 2009. A Kick-Off Meeting was held on February 2, 2009 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the East Providence Senior Center Campus at 610 Waterman Avenue. A press release for this event was issued on January 15, 2009, and notification to the public and city officials was widespread, which resulted in good participation. Following a brief Power Point presentation about the Comprehensive Plan and the Update, attendees of this meeting were able to provide input at several different tables, each representing a plan element and each led by a member of the Planning and Community Development staff. Citizens talked about the future of the City and ideas for attaining that future. The citizens at this meeting offered many positive comments about the city and offered constructive

comments for improvement. A second meeting was held on May 20, 2009 with limited attendance but relevant comments were received. An overview of the public comments is offered at the conclusion of this section. Planning staff also met individually with stakeholders from the development and non-profit communities to elicit comments.

The Planning Board held a Public Hearing on the Plan on November 16, 2009 and offered an advisory recommendation to the City Council that the Plan be adopted. The City Council also held a Public Hearing on the East Providence Comprehensive Plan 2010 Update on December 15, 2009 and closed the hearing that evening. The City Council adopted the Plan Update at their next subsequent meeting, January 5, 2010.

The goals, objectives and action programs of this Plan reflect the input of East Providence residents and its business community, civic organizations, and environmental groups. It should be noted that the April 1, 2010 United States Census is too distant in its execution for use in the preparation of this Update. The U.S. Census Bureau compiles the data which it collects and releases it over time, beginning with the one-hundred percent data, i.e. those questions asked of everyone, and later, releases of sample data from questions asked of a random percentage of the population. Staff has used other reliable data and estimates where available to estimate the population and demographics of the residents of East Providence, and the number of businesses and daytime workforce population of the City.

This Executive Summary of the East Providence Comprehensive Plan was prepared to provide a better understanding of the overall Comprehensive Plan as a basis for land use decisions, grant and funding priorities, and as a tool for preserving quality of life.

This Executive Summary is organized as follows:

- Intent and Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan
- Organization of the Comprehensive Plan
- Overview of Present Conditions
- Summary of the Comprehensive Plan
- Accomplishments Since the 2004 Update of the Plan

The process of adoption of a Comprehensive Plan or an Update of a Plan requires that the Planning Board review the draft and make an advisory recommendation to the City Council. The Final Draft Comprehensive Plan was heard by the Planning Board at a public hearing held November 16, 2009 and the Planning Board made an advisory recommendation to the City Council to approve the Plan as proposed by staff subject to comments and revisions provided by the Planning Board. The City Council held a public hearing on the draft Plan Update on December 15, 2009, and as the legislative body for the City, adopted the Comprehensive Plan Update on January 5, 2010. The State of Rhode Island, Division of Planning, Office of Statewide Planning, must review and certify the City's Plan or any updates or amendments.

INTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

With the exception of the waterfront special development districts, which were in large part mostly used for the storage of petroleum, oils and chemical storage or heavy industrial use, the City is mostly built-out with a mix of densities and types of land use.

The East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan was adopted by the City Council on December 2, 2003. This was followed by the City Council's rezoning of the land in the waterfront district on March 2, 2004 for redevelopment with a mix of uses including residential, commercial, office, and retail. The challenge for the City is to ensure quality development of the remaining undeveloped lands and the re-development of land for new uses, such as land in the waterfront districts, while protecting the quality of the life for residents, protecting the natural resources of the City, and creating an environment that can promote a favorable economic climate.

This Comprehensive Plan is a guide for development, conservation and preservation of the City's resources, and a guide for the efficient and economical provision of long-range service needs. These resources include the developable land, existing housing, commercial and industrial properties, natural resources such as ponds, rivers, wetlands, and shorelines, parks and recreation facilities, as well as community facilities and services including schools, police and fire service, sewer and water service, and human services. Linking everything together is the circulation system including roadways, walkways, bicycle paths, pedestrian paths, and transit facilities.

This document provides the vantage of a citywide assessment and seeks to foster a balanced and sustainable community as defined by input from a cross section of residents and interest groups. This Comprehensive Plan is intended to result in public and private actions that will:

- promote orderly development that protects the public health, safety and welfare;
- ensure adequate provision of public facilities and services;
- enhance the economic climate and vitality of the City;
- ensure an efficient, effective, convenient and safe transportation system; and
- promote high quality housing and neighborhood infill development while retaining the character of existing neighborhoods.

The East Providence Comprehensive Plan is a regulatory document adopted by the City Council. The Plan addresses issues that are much broader than physical design of the City. Decisions relating to planning and development are long range in their effect, frequently affect the entire community or a large segment of the community, and are somewhat irreversible in a physical sense, at least in the near-term. For those reasons, day-to-day decisions must fit into a framework for the future. This Comprehensive Plan for the City of East Providence is intended to provide the guidance upon which decisions are made that reflect consistency with the Plan and further its implementation. Land use actions and decisions must be made only when a finding of consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is found. It is meant to assist the City, the residents, the developer, business owners and others in conceptualizing plans, making investment decisions and the delivery and use of public services.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The East Providence Comprehensive Plan provides an overview of the existing conditions in the City, the plan elements, and the policies, goals and implementation schedule. State Law requires each community to touch upon seven issues as follows: land use, housing, economic development, natural/cultural resources, community services and facilities, open space/recreation, and circulation. This Update is based on

these basic elements (as done in earlier plans) and a new element on Community Sustainability is proposed. Sustainability and “green “actions will also be an overarching framework for all the elements of the Plan.

OVERVIEW OF PRESENT CONDITIONS

By reference, the technical information and conditions provided in the 1994 State Certified Comprehensive Plan and 2004 State Certified Update unless specifically amended are included in the present Plan Update (2009) as applicable and remain in full force and effect. The United States Census Bureau “2006 Quick Facts” estimates the 2006 population of East Providence at 49,123 persons, a slight increase from the 2000 U.S. Census total population of East Providence of 48,688 persons. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the City’s total population is estimated to have grown slightly by 0.9 percent from the year 2000 to July 1, 2006, with the State of Rhode Island as a whole growing an estimated 1.8 percent in the same period (U.S. Census Quick Facts, 2006).

Total Population

Year	East Providence Total Number of Persons
2000	48,688
2006 (Estimate)	49,123
	+ 435 persons or .9%

Source: U.S. Census Quickfacts.census.gov (2006)

East Providence consists of approximately thirteen (13) square miles, with a density of approximately 3,630 persons per square mile. The Census Bureau notes that persons per household in East Providence in the year 2000 was 2.33, less than the State of Rhode Island as a whole in the year 2000 with 2.47 persons per household. National trends and anecdotal data appear to indicate that the persons per household for East Providence has increased since the 2000 U.S. Census due to very poor economic conditions, particularly double-digit unemployment rates, with many homes now housing multiple generations of family.

The percentage of citizens over the age of 65 has remained at approximately nineteen percent (19%) of the total population. Nearly every year for the past two decades, the deaths of East Providence residents has outpaced the births to women residing in the city, so there has been no natural increase in the population. For the present, with the resident population in decline, if the in-migration of persons to the City is limited, the total population of the City will not grow, or will grow only by slight increases.

This Executive Summary of the Comprehensive Plan highlights some goals and action items of each of the Plan Elements. The complete listing of goals, objectives and action items are detailed in each respective Element.

SUMMARY OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Land Use and Sustainability Plan Element

The Land Use Plan Element can be considered the cornerstone of the Plan, as it establishes the desired pattern of land use throughout the City. In this Update it includes sustainability goals and objectives, and there is a separate plan element entitled "Community Sustainability". The following are highlights of the Land Use Plan Element.

- Preserve the densities of existing residential neighborhoods
- Preserve the character of existing "downtown" type commercial corridors, e.g. Taunton Avenue, Warren Avenue and Riverside Square, utilizing build-to lines and locating off-street parking to the rear of structures
- Continue to implement the East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan (adopted by the East Providence City Council on December 2, 2003) requiring mixed use redevelopment with various residential, commercial, office, retail, hospitality, and light manufacturing uses in the northern and southern districts.
- Utilize green building guidelines in the review and permitting of development to include environmental considerations in every aspect of the review process, including lot development, design, construction, and the development and/or structures impact on the environment,
- Continue to implement the Critical Area Specific Plans
- Develop community indicators to ensure that development is meeting community goals.

Housing Plan Element

- Continue to maintain at least ten percent (10%) of the City's total housing stock as affordable in a range of housing options, both ownership and rental, and increase that percentage as necessary to meet needs.
- Continue to provide affordable housing units for low and moderate-income households in order to ensure safe, decent, and affordable housing to families, seniors, and people with special needs.
- Promote and enforce maintenance of existing housing stock and maintain densities in existing neighborhoods
- Continue to require a minimum of ten percent (10%) affordable units in developments in the Waterfront Districts and expand this requirement elsewhere in the City where possible, and seek voluntary inclusion of affordable units in developments

- Promote the retrofitting of buildings and new construction to include “green” building standards resulting in structures that are energy and resource efficient

Economic Development Plan Element

- Continue the commercial loan programs in support of small and large business operation and growth in the City, including the 2 + 2 Façade Improvement Program, Enterprise Zone tax credit, and the Tax Stabilization program
- Maintain close working relationship with RIEDC and the East Providence Chamber of Commerce
- Regularly update the computerized inventory of commercial and industrial sites developed by the Planning Department
- Identify and seek emerging business and business clusters to locate in East Providence
- Target capital improvements to support economic development by maintaining infrastructure and utilities

Historical and Cultural Resources Plan Element

- Implement the Historical District Overlay District at Hunts Mills in Rumford.
- Support cultural heritage days of the varied ethnicities and races of the citizens of East Providence.
- Support historic tax credit programs that preserve historic structures in the city through adaptive re-use. Historic tax credits were part of the budget for the re-development of the former Rumford Baking Powder site.



Community Services and Facilities Plan Element

- Maintain City facilities and continue to provide needed community services, such as emergency services, libraries, recreation, parks and playgrounds, senior services, sanitary sewer and water, stormwater management, and refuse collection and recycling.
- Retrofit City facilities to incorporate “green” building standards which utilize sustainable and renewable energy and result in energy and resource efficiency

- Implement City studies and plans relating to infrastructure, stormwater management, and floodplain management,

Recreation, Conservation and Natural/Open Space Plan Element

- Continue to maintain and enhance City parks, playgrounds and open space properties
- Continue to accept donations of property where circumstances and due diligence permit and where critical habitats would be preserved.
- Continued to acquire land through land donation along the Runnins River to establish an uninterrupted greenway.
- Construct sidewalk and dedicated pedestrian and bicycle paths where feasible to connect to and expand the existing network, including connections to adjoining communities and create Class 3 bicycle lanes where feasible
- Require dedication of recreation, open space and waterfront access as part of new development where appropriate and feasible
- Preserve and utilize natural water and drainage features and utilize low-impact development (LID) techniques for stormwater management such as rain gardens, minimizing impervious surfaces and increasing the use of porous materials so that pollutants carried by stormwater are filtered by percolation through soil.



Circulation Plan Element

- Work with the Rhode Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) to provide a good transit system for residents and work to establish a RIPTA hub that provides comfort and convenience for RIPTA riders and encourage RIPTA to inventory existing bus shelters, bus stop signage and amenities, and upgrade facilities as needed.
- Continue to work with RIDOT and their consultants on the design and construction of Waterfront Drive from its current terminus at Warren Avenue northerly to Dexter Road in Phase 2 and northerly to Phillipsdale in Phase 3.
- Continue to develop a program of roadway rehabilitation including inventory, improvements, and funding sources.
- Work with RIDOT on Waterfront Drive, the Interstate 195 interchange at Taunton Avenue and Veteran's Memorial Parkway to enhance the entrance to the City.

- Continue to work with RIDOT to identify appropriate intersection improvements at arterial street intersections (turn lanes, signals, etc.) along Pawtucket Avenue, Warren Avenue, Taunton Avenue, Newport Avenue, Waterman Avenue, and North Broadway.
- Work with RIDOT to develop strategies for restoring the historic former rail river crossing at Crook Point via the Seekonk River lift bridge connecting East Providence north of the Washington Bridge to the East Side of Providence through the existing underground tunnel for a rubber tire shuttle.

Community Sustainability Plan Element

- Require new development to utilize Low Impact Development (LID) techniques such as green roofs, rain gardens and reducing impervious coverage
- Retrofit City facilities to incorporate “green” building standards which utilize sustainable and renewable energy and result in energy and resource efficiency
- Utilize green building guidelines in the review and permitting of development to include environmental considerations in every aspect of the review process, including lot development, design, construction, and the development and/or structures impact on the environment,
- Continue to offer rehabilitation loans that incorporate construction techniques and equipment that follow the green building principal and that utilize renewable energy and promote energy efficiency
- Continue to incorporate LID techniques for stormwater management and reduce natural hazards through floodplain management in land development projects and subdivisions.

Major Changes Summary

The following is an overview of some of the major accomplishments and studies since the 2004 Update of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. Each plan element in the updated plan will include all the significant actions and accomplishments in greater detail.

Waterfront Special Development District Plan Adopted

Upon its adoption December 2, 2003, the East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan replaced the former Strategic Waterfront Plan, and ushered in a future for the waterfront as a place where people could live, work and recreate. The Waterfront Special Development District Plan is part of the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The first development to be permitted and constructed in the waterfront district was the 54-unit Rossccommons condominium development on Roger Williams Avenue in Phillipsdale. Tockwotton Home, a 148-unit continuing care facility currently in Providence received approval for the construction of a \$40 million dollar facility which will be located on Waterfront Drive. Village on the Waterfront, a 600-unit development, with 40,000 square feet of commercial space (mixed use) was approved by the Waterfront Commission in 2009.

Waterfront Drive

The Waterfront Drive/ Warren Avenue Connector was constructed and opened in 2006. The recommendations associated with this segment of Waterfront Drive and further construction of Waterfront Drive northerly are detailed within the City's Waterfront Special Development District Plan. This plan calls for mixed use along the waterfront including residences, offices, light industry, commercial space, and public access.

Warren Avenue Enhancement

A Warren Avenue study was completed by Pare Corporation and the first phase of the Warren Avenue Enhancement Project was completed, including a monument dedicated to the late Councilman Norman Miranda for his tireless efforts to improve the Warren Avenue corridor.

Interstate-195/Waterfront Interchange Study

An Environmental Assessment was completed by GRA Inc. on a new Interchange of Interstate 195 for improved waterfront access and the study resulted in a Finding of No Significant Impact. The interchange would greatly improve access into and out of the waterfront south of I-195 and would permit entrances and exits for both eastbound and westbound traffic from the new interchange.

New Businesses

Aspen Aerogels, a manufacturer of high tech insulation materials, completed its \$30 million dollar renovation of a 145,000 square foot manufacturing facility on Dexter Road and became fully operational in 2008. The Aspen Aerogels facility has brought dozens of high paying jobs to East Providence and was recently named the "Emerging Company of the Year" by the New England Clean Energy Council.

A private developer, Adele Beck, has developed a seven-acre site in Rumford consisting of 100,000 square feet of distribution/warehouse space that will be occupied by the industrial laminate company Baer Supply. The building will be located next to the former Fram building that now houses Victoria Creations, Monarch Industries and Wood Precision and will add approximately 25 jobs when it becomes fully operational.

Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan

The City adopted a Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan which pre-plans actions to be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural hazards, e.g. snow and ice storms, hurricanes, flooding, and high wind events. Such actions may include reducing power outages by conducting selective tree trimming to keep tree limbs away from power lines. This plan will be updated in 2010.

Parks and Recreation Development/Conservation Actions

Land was acquired that was slated to be developed as residential housing and was combined with the existing park to create Rose Larisa Memorial Park. Rose Larisa

Memorial Park is located on Bullocks Point Avenue opposite the Loeff Carousel and is the venue for a highly popular outdoor music program in the summer.

The Turner Reservoir Walking Path and Raised Walkway were constructed.

The City accepted donations of property along the Runnins River.

Plans/Studies/Reports

The Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) completed a number of studies for the City of East Providence including one for the Runnins River Watershed, one for the Central Pond/Turner Reservoir, and one for the Southeast Drainage District.

2004 Taunton Avenue Revitalization Plan (completed by Gates, Leighton in partnership with Vanasse, Hangen and Brustlin Inc.)

Urban Land Institute Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) for Taunton Avenue/Bomes Theatre was completed in 2007.

2000 Profile*
City of East Providence, Rhode Island

Location: Located at the head of Narragansett Bay on the east bank of the Providence River. East Providence is bounded by Pawtucket on the north, Barrington on the south, Seekonk, Massachusetts on the east and the City of Providence on the west.

Area of the City Total: 16.5 square miles
Land Area: 13.3 square miles
Inland Water Area: 3.2 square miles
Shoreline: 14.4 miles

Population 48,688 (2000 U.S. Census) (ranks 5th in RI cities and towns)

Population Density Approximately 3,700 persons per square mile

Number of Housing Units: 21,309

Age 65 years and over 18.9 % (9,203 persons)
(U.S. Census) Race alone or in combination with one or more races:
White 89.2 %
Black or African American 6.9 %
Some other race: 5.3 %

Median Household Income \$ 39,108 (from 2000 U.S. Census)

Major Private Employment Sectors – Service industries; manufacturing; retail trade; finance, insurance and real estate; and wholesale trade

Miles of Paved Streets City-owned approx. 160 miles
State-owned approx. 30 miles

* Source of Demographics 2000 United States Census

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Positives

1. Strong family ties/multi-generational community
2. Good schools
3. Good neighborhoods near schools
4. Second generation returning to live in home they grew up in
5. Small-town feel
6. Neighborhood branch libraries
7. Good variety of housing types at good densities
8. Proximity to Upper Narragansett Bay and rivers and ponds
9. East Bay Bicycle Path
10. Philharmonic School in East Providence – possibilities for cultural programs, events
11. Lakeside Square – good selection of neighborhood businesses
12. Live close to work (some stated they work and live in East Providence)
13. Some good local restaurants
14. Heritage Days
15. Loeff Carousel and Outdoor Summer Concerts at Rose Larisa Memorial Park
16. Comedy Club

Issues Impacting Quality of Life and Areas in Need of Improvement

1. Forced to drive (rather than walk) to retail
2. Cannot walk because of concerns for safety
3. High volumes of traffic and traffic congestion
4. No sidewalks in many areas – pedestrians feel unsafe
5. Loss of Bomes Theatre to demolition (want site re-used for a cultural use)
6. Concern over losing public access to the waterfront
7. Lack of parking at public access points to the water
8. Loss of larger specialty stores (which are now in other communities)
9. Need to buy things outside of the City, like clothing
10. Little formal fine dining opportunities
11. Need to leave City for live events and cultural events (e.g. to PPAC or Trinity Repertory)
12. Not enough public transportation
13. Look for ways to consolidate and expedite development permitting
14. There is a need for more north/south road connections in the City
15. Stormwater drainage issues are important and must be addressed