

Waterfront District Element

In 2003, the City of East Providence created and adopted the *East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan* to articulate and frame a plan, vision and strategies to transform over three hundred acres of the City's currently underutilized waterfront along the Providence and Seekonk Rivers to a mix of land uses, including: commercial; office; medium and high density residential; entertainment and hospitality; restaurants; marinas; civic, and recreational uses, particularly those oriented towards the water. The City's waterfront planning efforts have been on-going since the adoption of the City's *Comprehensive Plan* in 1992 and will continue into the future.

The East Providence waterfront is mostly vacant land formerly used for industrial or heavy commercial purposes. While these uses were actively operating, they generated revenues and employment opportunities to City residents and the region. However, dramatic changes in the United States economy over the last fifty years and a shift from industrial economies to a new service economy and information technologies have left behind unsightly vacant derelict structures and buildings, weed strewn fenced parcels of land, and, in many cases, environmental contamination on the East Providence waterfront. Reuse of this waterfront land has a direct bearing on the City's economic future. The potential redevelopment of the East Providence waterfront offers a unique opportunity to significantly expand the local tax base without comparable increase in the demand for City and school services. The positive effects of redevelopment reach far beyond the boundaries of the project area. The proposed new development along the waterfront will bring a distinctive and significant new identity to East Providence, as well as enhancing the economic and social climate of the City and also to Rhode Island.

The redevelopment envisioned for the waterfront in the Waterfront Plan entails a number of activities including: road construction and associated public improvements; extension of utilities; undergrounding utilities; acquisition of properties; parcel assembly; rehabilitation of structures; improvement, clearance, sale, lease, or other disposition, or any combination of these, of land, buildings, or other the provision of streets, utilities, recreational areas, and other open spaces consistent with the needs of sound community growth in accordance with the City's *Comprehensive Plan*; and carrying out plans for a program of voluntary repair and rehabilitation of buildings and other improvements.

The *Waterfront District Plan* lists the following goals for the waterfront. The City and the Waterfront District Commission has worked- and will continue to work- to implement these goals:

Expand the Tax Base- Waterfront development should provide positive fiscal impacts to the City while expanding the tax base and/or reduce the tax burden on residents.

- *Progress:* The 2008 *Tax Increment Financing Plan* proposes the use of tax increment financing to facilitate the implementation of public improvements in the Waterfront District. Tax increment financing (TIF) is the use of projected increased local tax revenues from an anticipated development to fund site and area improvements. TIF can be used as an incentive for developers who need an additional financing tool for projects within the Waterfront District, as well as

proving funding for updating and expanding public infrastructure and associated facilities such as water, sewer, and storm drainage systems.

Generate New Jobs- Implementation of waterfront development will generate a substantial number of new employment opportunities for the State's economy.

Progress: The Waterfront Commission approved two developments during the past year:

Baer Supply Co. has started construction on a seven-acre site with an industrial project consisting of 100,000 square feet of warehouse space for the distribution of wood products at 10 New Road, off of Pawtucket Ave. It is located next to the former Fram building that now houses Victoria Creations, Monarch Industries and Wood Precision Products. They will employ approximately eighteen workers at full build-out.

Village on the Waterfront LLC has entered into a cooperation agreement with Chevron to transform their former twenty-five acre site on Veteran's Memorial Parkway into a mixed-use community of approximately six hundred residential units with supporting commercial uses. Public amenities may include a fishing pier, a spur of the East Bay Bike Path, and a kayak beach. The development will create an estimated seventy-nine direct and indirect permanent jobs, not including construction jobs and associated industries.

Implement a Mixed-Use Vision and Sustainability- *Promote a mix of commercial, office, housing, institutional, civic, and recreational uses that will remain self-sustaining over time.*

Progress: The Waterfront Commission has approved design guidelines for every sub-district in the waterfront that call for a mix of commercial, residential and recreational uses along the waterfront, giving priority to public access and recreation, and water-related activities along the water's edge. These guidelines clearly state the types of development and urban design that the Commission feels best exemplifies the goal of sustainable mixed-use in the Waterfront District. The Village on the Waterfront project, for example, will have green roofs on several buildings, a "living wall" composed of green plants, "rain gardens" to treat stormwater through vegetative means, and a native plant conservation area. The development will also mitigate brownfield conditions of soil and groundwater contamination on the site.

Create a Regional Destination- *Encourage development that will create a "destination" for East Providence residents and that will draw visitors, businesses and investors from beyond East Providence.*

Progress: Due to the large scale of potential redevelopment and the scenic and recreational resources of these waterfront properties, the waterfront along the Providence and Seekonk Rivers holds the single greatest potential for East Providence for attracting new business and jobs, and creating new housing, recreational, civic and cultural opportunities.

Expand Opportunities Equally for all Persons- Assist in creating an environment of market-driven redevelopment opportunities that will create new opportunities for higher-wage employment, and for housing, recreational, cultural and waterfront public access opportunities for all persons, especially to those with low to moderate incomes and to minority populations.

Progress: Mixed-use developments over residential units must provide a minimum of ten percent of the total units for purchase or rent by persons of low-to moderate-incomes in the Waterfront District. This requirement may eventually be expanded to the rest of the City.

Other goals for the Waterfront District that the Waterfront Commission and staff continue to work towards include:

- Create safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle circulation-
- Assist private property owners in rehabilitating their existing commercial buildings
- Maintain and expand public access, recreational opportunities, and open space